

Country Profile
Sri Lanka (The Republic of Sri Lanka)
(Great and Beautiful Island)
Formerly Ceylon

Demographics

Population

19,238,575 to 19,504,000 (2000 est.) 297 persons per sq/km

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

Age structure

:

0-14 years: 26% (male 2,605,251; female 2,490,416)

15-64 years: 67% (male 6,285,118; female 6,606,196)

65 years and over: 7% (male 602,470; female 649,124) (2000 est.)

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

Land

Total area: 65,610 sq km

Land area: 64,740 sq km

Water area: 870 sq km

Location

Southern Asian island in the Indian Ocean lying about 20 miles (32 kilometers) off the southeast coast of India. <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

Sri Lanka is in a strategic location near major Indian Ocean sea-lanes.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

Climate

Tropical monsoon; northeast monsoon (December to March); southwest monsoon (June to October)

Terrain

Mostly low, flat to rolling plains; mountains in south-central interior

lowest point: Indian Ocean 0 m

highest point: Pidurutalagala 2,524m <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

Topography

An irregular, divided, central massif dominates the south. The highest elevation is Pidurutalagala (2,524 meters), but Adam's Peak (2,243 meters) is better known because it is the

destination of interfaith pilgrimages. The coastal belt (less than 100 meters elevation) extends from the seashore to the foothills of the central massif.

In the north, isolated ridges break up rolling plains. Rivers extend radially from the central mountains. About 40% of the island is forested. The coastline has numerous lagoons and is marked by sandy beaches. <http://www.loc.gov/>

Economy

GDP: \$50.5 billion (1999 est.)

GDP - per capita: purchasing power parity - \$2,600 (1999 est.)

Population below poverty line: 22% (1997 est.)

Unemployment rate: 9.5% (1998 est.)

External Debt: \$8.4 billion (1998)

Economic aid - recipient: \$577 million (1998)

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

Exchange rate: Sri Lankan rupees (SLRe) per US\$1 – 90.211(July 18, 2001)

<http://www.lankalibrary.com/>

Currency: 1 Sri Lankan rupee (SLRe) = 100 cents

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

Government

Government type: Republic

Constitution: adopted August 16, 1978

Legal system: highly complex mixture of English common law, Roman-Dutch, Muslim, Sinhalese, and customary law; has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Govt>

Executive branch

Head of government/Chief of state: In Sri Lanka the president is considered to be both the chief of state and the head of the government. This is in contrast to the more common practice of dividing the roles between the president and the prime minister when both offices exist.

Prime minister: appointed by president

Cabinet: appointed by the president in consultation with the prime minister

Elections: president is elected by popular vote for a six-year term. **World Book 2001 Deluxe**

Legislative branch

The Unicameral (single house) Parliament has 225 seats. Members elected by popular vote and serve six-year terms.

Judicial branch

The president appoints the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals judges.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

Sri Lanka's highest court is the Supreme Court. The type of law used in private Sri Lankan court cases, such as divorce, depends on the religion of the people involved in the cases. For example, Islamic law applies to Muslims.

Sri Lanka is divided into 9 provinces, which--in turn--are divided into 25 districts. The districts are the country's basic units of local government. Each district is headed by a district minister, who is appointed by the president from among the members of Parliament.

Society

Sri Lanka is heavily influenced by the Hindu *caste* (social class) system because of their proximity to India. Castes are ranked social classes that are based upon hereditary rank, profession, and/or wealth. Within a caste, most people share the same culture or occupation, belong to the same religious sect (group), or enjoy the same level of wealth. For example, farmers have their own caste, fishermen have another, and priests have yet another. Children are automatically included in their parents' caste at birth and are required to marry within their caste. Members of a highly ranked caste generally attempt to avoid contact with members of lower castes, for fear of being spiritually polluted by them. The largest caste among the Sinhalese is the farming caste, whose members number about one-half of the total Sinhalese population. The caste system is strong among both Sinhalese and Tamils.

http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code5/1719.html

Women are either housewives or work in services, trade, and factories. Marriages are not arranged, and the average family size is 4. <http://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.asp?loc=ct&ct=LKA>

Literacy

definition: age 15 and over can read and write

total population: 90.2%

male: 93.4%

female: 87.2% (1995 est.) <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#People>

Languages

Both Sinhala and Tamil are official languages of Sri Lanka. Moorish Tamil is spoken in the mosques, while English is the language used most often in educational settings.

http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code/844.html

ENGLISH

97,000 first language speakers in Sri Lanka (1962). <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/sril.html>

English is commonly used in government and is spoken competently by about 10% of the population <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

PALI

Literary language of the Buddhist scriptures. Extinct. <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/sril.html>

SINHALA (*SINHALESE, SINGHALESE, SINGHALA, CINGALESE*)

13,190,000 in Sri Lanka, 72% of the population (1993). It is spoken in all parts of Sri Lanka, except certain Tamil districts in the north, east, and center. Dialect: RODIYA. Sinhalese script. There is a great difference between the literary and the colloquial language. The Rodiya dialect is spoken by low caste Rodiya people. <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/sril.html>

Update: 74% of population speaks Sinhala (official and national language)
<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

SRI LANKAN CREOLE MALAY (*SRI LANKAN MALAY, MELAYU BAHASA*)

50,000 speakers, .29% of the population (1986 Hussainmiya; Prentice 1994:411). Most speakers in major cities of Colombo, Kandy, Badulla, Hambantota. [Creole](#), Malay based. Malay vocabulary with grammatical structure based on Sri Lankan Moor Tamil. Not intelligible with standard Malay because of phonological and syntactic differences, and strong influence from Tamil. The Creole is widely used at home with all ages and among friends.
<http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/sril.html>

SRI LANKAN SIGN LANGUAGE

12,800 deaf persons; 1986 Gallaudet Univ. 14 deaf schools. Several sign languages used by different schools. British English fingerspelling is also used.
<http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/sril.html>

TAMIL

3,000,000 in Sri Lanka (1993). North and northeast coasts, a few pockets in the south.
<http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/sril.html>
Tamil (national language) 18% <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

VEDDAH (*VEDDHA, VEDA, WEDA, WEDDO, BEDA, BEDDA, VAEDDA*)

300 (1993 Johnstone). All may not be speakers. Eastern mountains, Badulla and Polonnaruwa districts. Sinhalese is replacing the language. <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/sril.html>

Urbanization

Colombo (pop. >1,000,000?) is the capital, a major seaport on the west coast, and the largest city of Sri Lanka. Most of Sri Lanka's foreign trade is routed through Colombo (particularly tea, coconut, and cotton), and has also been an important fueling station for ships that pass through the Suez Canal.

Only 23% of Sri Lanka's population live in urban communities. Other important urban areas that are the rapidly expanding are: Dehiwala-Mount Lavinia, a suburb of Colombo; the seaport of Jaffna; Sri Jayawardenepura, the administrative capital; the ancient capital city of Kandy; and the tea-producing community of Galle.

Religion

Buddhist 70%, Hindu 15%, Christian 8%, Muslim 7% (1999)

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

The Hindu population is concentrated in the North while the Christian segment is mainly in the West. The South is predominantly Buddhist. The Constitution gives Buddhism the foremost position but also provides for followers of other faiths to practice them freely. Major festivals of all faiths are celebrated as national holidays.

<http://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.asp?loc=ct&ct=LKA&view=&page=kb&id=5692>

Buddhism

Buddhism was declared the state religion in the 1972 Constitution. Most Sinhalese are Theravada Buddhists and account for about 70% of the population. However, in rural areas many Sinhalese follow Hindu and Shaman beliefs as well. For example, Buddhism is unconcerned with the millions of Hindu gods, but rural Sinhalese worship Hindu deities that they believe control daily life. Rural Sinhalese also believe in demons, which they must appease through rituals conducted by exorcists, or shamans. http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code5/1719.html;

A number of Buddhist organizations have been creating a modern renewal movement. Besides purifying Buddhism in rural areas, which is progressing slowly, they want to bring back Buddhism's privileged and unique position of ancient times. This movement is centered on 3 principal organizations: *The Naha Bodhi Society of Ceylon* (founded 1891); *Colombo Young Men's Association* (founded 1898); and the *All Ceylon Buddhist Congress* (founded 1918). This Buddhist movement has anti-Christian feelings and has taken over a large number of public schools that were formerly Christian. The schools are now providing Buddhist religious education. Because of this movement, the most active and astute Buddhist missionary societies are in Sri Lanka. Numerous missionaries and some of the best exegetes of the Pali Canon are from Sri Lanka. **World Christian Enc.**

Hinduism

Hinduism is declining steadily and found mostly among Tamils, who constitute about 11% of the population.¹

Christianity

¹ This data is inconsistent with other sources. For example, the CIA website states Tamils make up 18% of the population. Also, both CIA and Worldbook state Hindus make up 15% of population.

Traditionally, the Apostle Thomas is said to have evangelized Sri Lanka in the early Christian days. In AD. 537, there were reports of a Nestorian Christian presence.

The Portuguese introduced Catholicism to Sri Lanka in the early 1500's, the Dutch introduced Reformed Christianity in the mid 1600's, and the British brought in Anglicanism in the 1800's.

Most Christians live on the west coast and make up 30% of Colombo's population. The Burghers are almost entirely Christian, but are decreasing in number because of emigration. Of the over 1.7 million numbered as Christians, 72% are Catholic. The second largest group is Anglican. Conversions to the churches are almost non-existent.

Protestants have decreased from 424,000 in 1722 to 1,000 in 1995, and continue to decrease due to emigration.² The churches that exist are weak and most depend on outside financial assistance. Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and Anglicans are currently negotiating towards a united Church of Lanka. The united church was almost a reality in 1975, but was stopped by a Supreme Court ruling. There are few Pentecostal churches, but there have long been dissident or independent evangelical bodies in Sri Lanka.

Johnstone gives these reasons for the decline of Christianity: nominalism, Western worship patterns with European languages in church services, and the renaissance of indigenous cultures and religions. **Johnstone: Operation World**

A Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal in the 1990's spread rapidly across older churches, and numbered over 400,000 (13% Pentecostal, 9% Charismatic, 78% Independent).

There are some Christian interdenominational organizations in Sri Lanka, such as *The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka*, but there is a lack of activities and activism.

Various extremist Buddhist groups are attempting to draw up a new constitution, which would prohibit religious conversions on a national level. At the local level they incite mobs to attack churches and claim Christians have converted people unethically. Many Christians have been persecuted and many pastors have been killed. There is little freedom to evangelize openly. The most successful methods of evangelism are currently compassion ministries and friendship evangelism. A list of recent anti-Christian acts are listed here:

<http://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.asp?loc=ct&ct=LKA&view=&page=kb&id=5692>

Islam

Islam is the religion of 9% of the population³, and is found mostly among the Moors and Malays of the coast, with pockets in the interior in the Kandy region. Two major

² Johnstone gives this statistic in *Operation World*: in 1722, 21% of population was Christian; in 1985, only 7.4% was Christian.

³ The CIA website states Muslims are 7% of the population, and WorldBook says they are 8%.

organizations are the *Sri Lanka Assembly of Muslim Youth* in Colombo and the *Islamic Study Circle of Bandarawela*.

Adams Peak is a mountain in southern Sri Lanka, east of Colombo. The 2243-m (7360-ft) summit contains a depression about 5 ft long by about 30 in wide shaped like a human footprint. The footprint's origin is explained in various ways, depending on religious and cultural tradition. Muslim tradition holds the summit was the scene of Adam's penance (after his expulsion from Paradise), during which he stood on one foot for a thousand years. To Buddhists the foot-like depression is the sacred footmark left by Buddha on his departure from Sri Lanka. The Hindus claim it is the footprint of the god Shiva. **Encarta Deluxe 99**

Historical Aspects

The Great Chronicle

The Buddhist tradition of chronicling events has aided the verification of historical figures. <http://www.loc.gov/> The *Mahavamsa* (Pali for "Great Chronicle") is an historical chronology of Ceylon written in the 5th or 6th century, probably by the Buddhist monk Mahanama. It deals more with the history of Buddhism and the dynastic succession in Ceylon than with political or social history and covers the period from about the 6th century BC to the early 4th century AD.

The text--written in Pali, the sacred language of Buddhism--is considered to be based on two main sources: the *Dipavamsa*, a similar but cruder 4th-century chronicle, and oral tradition handed down by Buddhist monks. Large portions of the *Mahavamsa* text are of dubious historicity because of mythical and/or supernatural inclusions. A sequel to the *Mahavamsa*, known as the *Culavamsa*, continues the history of Ceylon to the 16th century.

According to the *Mahavamsa*, the earliest inhabitants of the island were tribal peoples called the Yaksa and the Naga. The Nagas were cobra worshippers and the Yakkas were demon worshippers. The former were confined to the coastal belt while the latter lived in the interior jungles. <http://www.lankalibrary.com/>

In the 5th century BC, a banished prince from the kingdom of Sinhapura in northern India, Vijaya, led 700 followers to Ceylon. They landed on the west coast supposedly on the same day as Buddha's death, or nirvana. Vijaya and his men forced the native inhabitants, whom they called *yaksas* (or demons), into the interior. Vijaya established a new kingdom with the help of Kuveni, a local demon-worshipping princess. Kuveni bore Vijaya two sons, but was then banished from the new kingdom. Having no heir, Vijaya's nephew, Panduyasudeva, came to the island and succeeded the throne at Upatissagama.

Although based on legend, some scholars believe the chronicles of Vijaya provide insight into the early settlement of Sri Lanka <http://www.loc.gov/>

Buddhism in Ceylon

Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the third century B.C. from India, where Siddhartha Gautama had established it three centuries earlier. The powerful Indian monarch Asoka converted to Buddhism and elevated it from a minor sect to an official religion. Asoka's empire, which extended over most of India, supported one of the most vigorous Buddhist missionary enterprises in history.

The first important Buddhist figure in Sri Lanka was King Devanampiya Tissa (250-c. 207 B.C.). According to the *Mahavamsa*, Mahinda (Asoka's son and emissary to Sri Lanka) introduced the monarch to Buddhism. Devanampiya Tissa became a patron of Buddhism and established the monastery of Mahavihara, which became the historic center of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka. <http://www.loc.gov/>

Tamils in Ceylon

Little is known as to when the first Tamil settlements were established in Sri Lanka. Tamil literary sources speak of trading centers in southern India as early as the third century B.C. It is probable these centers had some contact with settlements in northern Sri Lanka. <http://www.loc.gov/>

Political Instability on Ceylon

The peace and stability of the island were significantly affected around 237 B.C. when two men from southern India, Sena and Guttika, usurped the Sinhalese throne at Anuradhapura. Their combined twenty-two-year rule marked the first time Sri Lanka was ruled by Tamils. The two were subsequently murdered, and the Sinhalese royal dynasty was restored. In 145 B.C., a Tamil general named Elara took over the throne at Anuradhapura and ruled for forty-four years. A Sinhalese king, Dutthagamani waged a fifteen-year campaign against the Tamil monarch and finally deposed him. As a result of Dutthagamani's victory, Anuradhapura became the locus of power on the island. One Sri Lankan historian suggests the conflict recorded in the *Mahavamsa* marked the beginning of Sinhalese nationalism and that Dutthagamani's victory is commonly interpreted as a confirmation that the island was a preserve for the Sinhalese and Buddhism. The historian maintains the story is still capable of stirring the religio-communal passions of the Sinhalese. <http://www.loc.gov/>

The Vijaya dynasty of kings continued until AD 65, when Vasabha founded the Lambakanna dynasty. The Lambakannas ruled for about four centuries; their most noteworthy king was [Mahasena](#) (reigned 276-303), who constructed many major irrigation systems and championed heterodox Buddhist sects. A Pandyan invasion from southern India put an end to this dynasty and, briefly, to Sinhalese rule in 432. Dhatusena (reigned 459-477) defeated the Pandyas and reestablished Sinhalese rule with a line of Moriya kings. His son Kasyapa I reigned from 477-495.

The Tamil threat had become more significant in the fifth and sixth centuries. Three Hindu empires in southern India--the Panda, Palava, and Chula-- were becoming more assertive. The Sinhalese perception of this threat intensified because in India Buddhism had already receded due to pressure and absorption by the Hindu religion. <http://www.loc.gov/>

From the 7th century on there was an increase in the involvement of South Indian powers in the island. Sinhalese kings were drawn into the dynastic battles between the Pandyas, Pallavas, and Colas. Invasions from and retaliatory raids to South India were a recurrent phenomenon. There was a constant tug of war between Sri Lanka and South India. The 10th century saw a weakening of the island's political and military power. The Colas, hostile because of a Sinhalese alliance with Pandya, took advantage, attacked, and occupied the kingdom in 993, and annexed Rajarata as a province of the Cola empire. The conquest was completed in 1017 when the Colas seized the southern province of Ruhuna. <http://www.loc.gov/>

King Vijayabahu I drove the Cola out of Sri Lanka in A.D. 1070, and is considered by many as the author of Sinhalese freedom. During his forty-year reign, Vijayabahu I (A.D. 1070-1110) moved the capital to Polonnaruwa and restored the Buddhist temples and monasteries that had been neglected during Cola rule. After his death civil war broke out until the rise of King Parakramabahu I (A.D. 1153-86), known as The Great. Parakramabahu reorganized the *sangha* (community of monks), built remarkable irrigation works in keeping with legendary Sinhalese hydraulic engineering, and turned Polonnaruwa into one of the most magnificent cities of the time.

A decade of peace followed Parakramabahu's death during the reign of King Nissankamalla (A.D. 1187-97). During Nissankamalla's rule, the Brahmanic legal system came to regulate the Sinhalese caste system. It was also during this brief period that it became mandatory for the Sinhalese king to be a Buddhist. <http://www.loc.gov/>

After 1196, the Polonnaruwa kingdom was weakened by a succession of ineffective rulers. Non-Sinhalese factions such as the Kalingas and Pandyas gained power in Sri Lanka as a result of dynastic marriages with South Indian royalty; conflict between these factions was common. Polonnaruwa fell into the hands of non-Sinhalese elements, each vying with the others for power and office.

The Sinhalese gravitated south to different centers of power located away from the reach of Polonnaruwa. These centers were each governed by separate rulers in strategic terrain defensible from attack. Some gained power, and even ruled the entire island for a while, but no ruling power lasted very long. Generally, the effective control of the Sinhalese kings from 1200 to 1505 did not extend far beyond their capital cities, although their locations were moved often. One Sinhalese kingdom was able to expel the Kalingas from the island with Pandyan help. The Sinhalese also repelled an invasion from the Malay Peninsula with the help of the Ming dynasty Chinese. <http://www.loc.gov/>

A South Indian dynasty called the Arya Chakaravartis took advantage of the collapse of the Polonnaruwa kingdom and of the drift of Sinhalese political authority to the southwest and seized power in the north. By the beginning of the 14th century it had founded a Tamil kingdom with its capital at Nallur in the Jaffna Peninsula. The kingdom of Jaffnapatnam soon expanded southward, initiating a tradition of conflict with the Sinhalese. Rajarata, a largely depopulated country by this time, served as a buffer between the Tamils and the Sinhalese.

Foreign trade became of increasing importance to the Sinhalese kings. Cinnamon was in great demand by Europeans and became a prime export commodity. Because of the value of

cinnamon, the city of Kotte on the west coast (near modern Colombo) became the nominal capital of the Sinhalese kingdom in the mid-fifteenth century. Still, the Sinhalese kingdom remained divided into numerous competing petty principalities. <http://www.loc.gov/>

The Portuguese in Ceylon

At the onset of the Portuguese period in Sri Lanka there were three centers of political power: the two Sinhalese kingdoms of Kotte and Kandy, and the Tamil kingdom at Jaffna. Kotte was the principal seat of Sinhalese power, but none of the three kingdoms had the strength to assert itself over the other two. <http://www.loc.gov/>

The Portuguese arrived in what is now Colombo Harbor in 1505. King Parakramabahu VIII of Kotte (1484-1508) offered gifts of cinnamon and elephants to the Portuguese and also gave them permission to build a residence in Colombo for trade purposes. The Portuguese gradually gained manipulative control of the island's major coastal areas. In 1597, the Portuguese emissary took formal possession of the Kingdom of Kotte. After the annexation of the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna in 1619, only the central highland Kingdom of Kandy--the last remnant of Buddhist Sinhalese power-- remained independent of Portuguese control. <http://www.loc.gov/>

The Portuguese did not try to alter the existing basic structure of native administration. Portuguese governors were put in charge of each province, but the customary hierarchy, determined by caste and land ownership, remained unchanged. Traditional Sinhalese institutions were maintained and placed at the service of the new rulers.

One of the most durable legacies of the Portuguese was the conversion of a large number of Sinhalese and Tamils to Roman Catholicism. Franciscans established religious centers in the country from 1543 onward, and Jesuits were active in the north. Dominicans and Augustinians arrived toward the end of the century. Prince Dharmapala who ruled Kotte during the mid and late 1500's, was educated by Franciscans. In 1557, he converted to Catholicism and much of the nobility followed.

In order to convert the masses, mission schools were opened, with instruction in Portuguese and Sinhalese or Tamil. Also, the Portuguese discriminated against other religions, destroyed Buddhist and Hindu temples, and gave the temple lands to Roman Catholic religious orders. Buddhist monks fled to Kandy, which became a refuge for people dissatisfied with colonial rule. Although small pockets of Nestorian Christianity had existed in Sri Lanka, the Portuguese were the first to propagate Christianity on a mass scale. <http://www.loc.gov/>;

The Dutch in Ceylon

The Dutch began negotiations with King Rajasinha II of Kandy in 1638. A treaty assured the king assistance in his war against the Portuguese in exchange for a monopoly of the island's major trade goods, particularly cinnamon. Rajasinha also promised to pay the Dutch's war-related expenses. The Portuguese resisted the Dutch and the Kandyans but were finally expelled from their last stronghold in Jaffna in 1658. The Dutch then claimed they had not been reimbursed for their military expenditures and presented the king of Kandy a bill he couldn't

pay. This pretext allowed the Dutch to control the island's richest cinnamon lands. <http://www.loc.gov/> ;

The Kandyan king tried to ally himself with the British, but failed. Eventually the Dutch gained control the entire perimeter of the island, thus preventing Kandy of contact with the outside world. The Dutch did not try to further subdue the Kingdom of Kandy; however, Kandyans provoked riots in the lowlands, which led the Dutch to launch an expedition in 1765/6 that forced Kandy to sign a treaty giving the Dutch sovereignty over the lowlands.

The Dutch tried to supplant Roman Catholicism with Protestantism, but Catholicism was too deeply rooted. The Dutch were more tolerant of the indigenous religions than the Portuguese; they prohibited open Buddhist and Hindu religious observance in urban areas, but did not interfere with these practices in rural areas. The Dutch banned Roman Catholic practices, however. They regarded Portuguese power and Catholicism as mutually interdependent and strove to safeguard against the reemergence of the former by persecuting the latter. They harassed Catholics and constructed Protestant chapels on confiscated church property. <http://www.loc.gov/>

Attempts to lure Dutch of the upper class to Ceylon were unsuccessful. Lower-ranking military recruits, however, responded to the incentive of free land. Their marriages to local women added another group to the island's already small but established population of Eurasians--the Portuguese Burghers. The Dutch Burghers formed a separate and privileged ethnic group on the island in the twentieth century.

Social differences between lowland and highland Sinhalese deepened, forming two distinct groups. Western customs and laws increasingly influenced the lowland Sinhalese, who generally enjoyed a higher standard of living and greater literacy. Despite their economic and political decline, the highland Sinhalese were proud to have retained their political independence from the Europeans and thus considered themselves superior to the lowland Sinhalese. <http://www.loc.gov/>

British in Ceylon

In time the British gained interest in the harbor at Trincomalee. The Dutch refused to grant the British permission to dock, urging the British into action. After skirmishing with both the Dutch and French, the British took Trincomalee in 1796, and proceeded to expel the Dutch from the island. The Dutch formally ceded the island to the British in the 1801 Peace of Amiens, and Ceylon became Britain's first crown colony. <http://www.loc.gov/>

In 1815, Kandyan rebels invited the British to intervene in Kandy's political matters. The island's governor quickly responded by sending a well-prepared force to Kandy; the king fled with hardly a shot fired. Kandyan headmen and the British signed a treaty in March 1815. It allowed the Kandyan system of government to continue under British sovereignty. However, differences in principles between the British administration and the Kandyan hierarchy meant the Kandyan system's future was bleak. <http://www.loc.gov/>

A popular and widespread rebellion followed, but was suppressed by 1818. The British issued a proclamation that brought the Kandyan provinces under closer control. The British also reduced

the institutional privileges accorded Buddhism, placing the religion on equal footing with other religions. With the final British consolidation over Kandy, the country was once again under the control of a single power since the twelfth-century. <http://www.loc.gov/>

Complete British Rule

British rule turned Ceylon's economy capitalistic. Coffee and rubber exports in the 19th century improved the economy and also helped unify the island. The British brought Tamils from South India to help work in the fields since they worked for lesser wages than the Sinhalese living in Ceylon. <http://www.loc.gov/>

The development of a capitalist economy forced the traditional elite--the chiefs and headmen--to compete with new groups for the favors of the British. These upwardly mobile, primarily urban, professionals formed a new class that transcended race and caste. This class was immersed in Western culture and ideology. They had conservative political leanings, were loyal to the government, and resembled the British so much in outlook and social customs that its members were sometimes called "brown sahibs." (*Sahib* means "sir" or "master" and was used particularly by natives in former British India when speaking to or of a European.)

Beginning around the middle of the nineteenth century, the Buddhist clergy attempted to reform the *sangha* (religious community), and started a Buddhist revival. They recruited the help of American Colonel Henry Steele Olcott in the 1870s. <http://www.loc.gov/>

The Nationalist Movement

Archaeological finds and rediscovery of old Buddhist texts rekindled a popular interest in Ceylon's past and national pride. In the 1880s, a Buddhist-inspired temperance movement was initiated to fight drunkenness, and the *Ceylon Social Reform Society* was founded in 1905, to combat other temptations associated with Westernization. Sri Lankans petitioned the colonial government for representation in the Executive Council and expanded regional representation in the Legislative Council. In 1910, the colonial government allowed a small electorate of Sri Lankans to send one of their members to the Legislative Council. Other seats held by Sri Lankans retained the old practice of communal representation. <http://www.loc.gov/>

Independence

In 1915, communal rioting broke out between the Sinhalese and Muslims on the west coast. The British arrested many Sinhalese and put down the unrest with excessive force. These events marked the turning point in the Sri Lankan nationalist movement. <http://www.loc.gov/>

The colony gradually gained self-government during the rest of the 1900's, and became the independent nation of Ceylon on Feb. 4, 1948. The country adopted a parliamentary form of government headed by a prime minister.

Key Happenings Since 1948

S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike became prime minister in 1956. His government passed a law that made Sinhala the country's only official language. The Tamils resented this action, and clashes broke out between Tamils and Sinhalese. Compromises were made to provide for the use of Tamil in many areas. In 1972, the name of Ceylon was changed to Sri Lanka, which means *Resplendent Land or great and beautiful island*.

The chief issue in Sri Lanka today is the relationship between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The Sinhalese have controlled the country's government since independence. Tamils believe the Sinhalese-dominated government has limited their opportunities for education and jobs. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is an insurgent organization fighting for a separate state for the Tamil (and mainly Hindu) minority. The conflict is mainly with the national government, but members of all religious groups have been victims of LTTE violence at one time or another. In 1983, violence broke out between Tamil guerrillas and Sinhalese government troops in the north. Thousands of people were killed and many Tamils fled to India. In July 1987, the Sri Lankan government and India worked out a peace plan. Some Tamil guerrillas agreed to the plan, but others did not. Fighting broke out again in the fall. A cease-fire was implemented in 1989. Sinhalese nationalists who opposed any compromises between the government and the Tamils killed many government officials and government supporters. In 1990, fighting resumed between Tamil rebels and government troops. Thousands have been killed in the violence.

People Groups

Ethnic groups

Sinhalese 74%, Tamil 18%, Moor 7%, Burgher, Malay, Vedda, and others 1%
<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ce.html#Intro>

The Sinhalese

The Sinhalese, who make up about 74% of the population, are descendents from northern India. Their language is called Sinhala and most of them are Buddhists. This dominant ethnic group lives mainly in the central and southwestern portions of the island. The Sinhalese are divided into two major groups. The first, the mountain-dwelling Kandyan Sinhalese, is known as a more traditional, conservative people. The second group, the Low Country Sinhalese, live in the coastal lowlands and is more cosmopolitan and progressive. The Sinhalese speak an Indo-European language called Sinhala.

Most of the Sinhalese belong to the Theravada branch of Buddhism, although they follow Hindu beliefs as well. For example, Buddhism is unconcerned with the millions of Hindu gods, but the Sinhalese worship Hindu deities they believe control daily life. In addition to gods, the Sinhalese believe in demons, which they must appease through rituals conducted by exorcists or shamans.
http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code5/1719.html;

The Tamils

The Tamils, who make up about 18% of the population, descended from peoples from southern India. They speak Tamil, and most are Hindu. Most Tamils live in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

The Tamils are divided into *Sri Lankan Tamils*, who have been on the island since early historic times, and *Indian Tamils*, who were brought in by the British as plantation laborers in the nineteenth century. Sri Lankan Tamils account for slightly more than one-eighth of the total Tamil population. <http://www.loc.gov/>;

The Moors (Muslims)

Muslims, who trace their origin to Arab traders in the 8th century, account for 7 to 7.5% of the population, thus forming Sri Lanka's third largest ethnic group. The Moors speak Tamil.

The Burghers

The Burghers make up <1% of the population and are descendants of European settlers who intermarried with Sri Lankans.

The Parsis

Parsis immigrated from western India and makeup <1% of the population. The Parsis, also spelled PARSEES, is of a group of followers of the Iranian prophet Zoroaster in India. The **Parsis**, whose name means "Persians," are descendants from Persian Zoroastrians that immigrated to India to avoid religious persecution by the Muslims. They live chiefly in Bombay and in a few towns and villages mostly to the north of Bombay, but also at Karachi (Pakistan) and Bangalore (Karnataka, India). A small number of Parsis reside in Sri Lanka. Although they are not strictly speaking a caste, since they are not Hindus, they form a well-defined community.

The Parsees found their values on showing mercy and doing good to all. Parsees rarely concern themselves with issues like "salvation" or "life after death." In general, they believe in the righteousness of works. However, a Parsee's zeal for doing good is not motivated by fear of God or earning His favor.

Their religion teaches the principles of "Good thoughts, good words, and good deeds." This phrase is found frequently on Parsee tee-shirts and/or refrigerators, but, again, this religious teaching rarely drives a Parsee. <http://www.calebproject.org/parsee.htm>

The Malay (Creole)

The Malay Creoles make up <1% of the population. Most Malay Creoles are concentrated in major cities such as Colombo, Kandy, and Badulla, but are also scattered across the island.

In the early 1700's, the Dutch brought the Malays from the Indonesian island of Java, a Dutch colony, to Sri Lanka. While the Dutch proceeded to colonize the majority of the islands of Southern Asia, the Malays served as a defense for the island of Sri Lanka. As time passed, they intermarried with other inhabitants of the island. Eventually they lost their distinctive mongoloid features, and their language became a mixture of Tamil and Malay. Most Malays speak Malay Creole (or Java Jati) at home.

Practically all of the Malay Creoles are professing Shafiite Muslims. They do not adhere to the strictest form of Islam; however, they incorporate Islamic practices into their own beliefs in spirits and ghosts. http://www.bethany.com/profiles/p_code/844.html

The Veddahs

The Veddahs make up <1% of the population and are descendants of Sri Lanka's first known residents, which were native tribal peoples called the Yaksa and the Naga.

The term Veddha comes from the Sanskrit Vyadha meaning *hunter with bow and arrow*. Pure Veddhas are related to the Austro-Asiatic peoples scattered in many parts of southern Asia. Features are a dark, chocolate brown complexion, long head, broad nose, heavy brow-ridges, wavy hair and a pronounced jaw. <http://www.lankalibrary.com/>

Pure Veddhas in Sri Lanka number a few hundred at most. The 1953 census showed a total of 803 Veddhas. (Although, other sources say there are as many as 5,000 scattered around the island but these people may not be "pure Veddhas. Until recently, Veddha settlements were found scattered in the Uva, Sabaragamuva, North-Central and Eastern Provinces. Linguistic assimilation and intermarriage with the Sinhalese have contributed to the decline of the Veddhas as a distinct people. Dambana, a Veddha settlement about six miles from Mahiyangana, is the last community of Veddha culture. <http://www.lankalibrary.com/>

Christianity in Sri Lanka

Historical Overview

As mentioned above, there were reports of a Nestorian Christian presence in 537. The Portuguese introduced Catholicism to Sri Lanka in the early 1500's, the Dutch introduced Reformed Christianity in the mid 1600's, and the British brought in Anglicanism in the 1800's. Influences on Christianity: • Government policy, which favors Buddhism; Nationalism and desire for Buddhist revival, which are almost synonymous; Extremists who are against western ideas, which includes Christianity; Buddhist extremists' threats and attacks; The caste social system

Christianity's Position in Sri Lanka

Areas under the rule of the Europeans became capitalistic and western in nature over time. The Portuguese forced Catholicism upon Ceylon, the Dutch forced Protestantism, and the British made all religions equal, including Anglicanism and Buddhism.

Today, conversions to churches are almost non-existent.

Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Anglicans are currently negotiating towards a united Church of Lanka. The united church was almost a reality in 1975, but was stopped by a Supreme Court ruling. Some Christian interdenominational organizations, such as *The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka* exist, but there is a lack of activities and activism.

The Dutch Reformed, Protestant Church. Dates back to 1642 with a membership primarily of Burghers. Its membership which once numbered 20 000 families decreased from 424,000 members in 1722 to 3000 in 1970 and to around 1,000 in 1995. The membership continues to decrease due to emigration. The churches that exist are weak and most depend on outside financial assistance.

Baptist missionary work began around 1804 under the auspices of the Baptist Missionary Society due to the influence of William Carey. The churches continue with a membership of 1622 in several weak and dependent congregations.

British Methodists entered Sri Lanka in 1814 and started a Church that became independent in 1964. The 141 congregations reported a membership of around 14227. Growth has not kept up with decline over the last years.

American Congregationalists opened work among the Tamils on the Jaffna peninsula in 1816. The work consisted of an educational effort culminated in the founding of Jaffna College in 1823 (this school was the first in Asia to offer modern higher education in English). Some 31 congregations reported 5525 members in 1995.

Anglicans began work in Ceylon in 1796. The Church Missionary Society sent missionaries in 1818. Many formerly in the Dutch Reformed Church became members of the Anglican Church group. Educational institutions became a part of early Anglican work, Anglicans have grown more than other protestant groups and, now known as the Church of Ceylon, exists in two dioceses over 155 congregations and 30,500 members.

A Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal arose in the 1990's and spread rapidly across older churches, but the numbers of church members are still in decline. Several pentecostal groups have begun work. The Ceylon Pentecostal Mission reports some 53 congregations and around 5000 members and the United Pentecostal Church has around 400 members.

If 8% of Sri Lanka's population is Christian, then of the est. 19,504,000 Sri Lankans approximately 1,560,320 are Christian. An estimate by NSM Research numbers Christians in Sri Lanka at 1,430,850. <http://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.asp?loc=ct&letter=S&sort>

Christian Groups/Organizations (from <http://www.strategicnetwork.org>)

[Assemblies of God, General Council Division of Foreign Missions](#)

HQ Colombo. Begun from India 1925. Schools.

[Baptist Bible Fellowship International](#)

Begun 1989.

[Christian Reformed World Missions](#)

With Dutch Reformed Church of Ceylon.

[Evangelical Alliance Mission, The \(TEAM\)](#)

Church planting: Ev Alliance Church. Begun 1955.

[HOPE International Development Agency](#)

Education and training.

[TEAM - The Evangelical Alliance Mission \(HQ\)](#)

[Trans World Radio](#)

Transmitter station.

Missiological Implications

1. The history of Christianity in Sri Lanka demonstrates the harm of a divided and contending expression of Christianity. The Portuguese Catholics, the Dutch protestants, and the English Anglicans revealed more a political agenda than a religious one.
2. The churches in Sri Lanka should seek a more contextualized format that would emphasize a more Sri Lankan nature. The churches have maintained a decidedly foreign flavor with memberships from persons who eventually emigrated from Sri Lanka thus adding to the significant decline in numbers of persons following Christianity in recent decades.
3. Christians and churches in Sri Lanka should demonstrate a more basic form of Christianity that eschews materialism and possessions. Christians and Christian groups must bridge the Culture Gap and aid Sri Lankans to make Christianity *their* religion. If a missionary *does* make the long-term commitment to Sri Lanka but *does not* bridge the culture gap, his effort will be almost useless. The missionary must take ownership of the Sri Lankan culture. He/she must become absorbed into the culture and lifestyle to avoid the conception on the part of Sri Lankans that Christianity is a foreign religion and therefore to be rejected. (See: "Proceed With Caution by Frank L. Roy Mission Frontiers (Jan.-Feb. 1977).
<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/1997/0102/jf9711.htm>
4. In keeping with the suggestion above, Sri Lankan Christians and missionaries who seek to aid them in evangelism need to adopt a simpler lifestyle. Probably the biggest obstacle for the missionary to become integrated into the un-reached culture is the desire to bring a bubble of western culture to live in. That is natural, of course! We enjoy our lifestyle, and are comfortable in it. The western bubble reminds us of home, makes us feel more comfortable. But bringing a western bubble, even if it is only in the missionary's home, will alienate the

missionary from the people, and thus render the missions' efforts unfruitful. The missionary must adapt and become part of the culture he is trying to reach. Material possessions] should never be allowed to impinge upon Christian witness. Roger Greenway, a missionary to Sri Lanka says, "When Christian people whose basic needs have been met continue to accumulate possessions and add to their physical comforts and pleasures in sight of people who are suffering and in need, they are making a statement. They are communicating a message about their values, priorities, and the deep affections of their hearts. And that message contradicts the gospel." <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/1992/0304/ma925.htm> (from **Eighteen Barrels And Two Big Crates**:How and why our "stuff" gets in the way of our witness).

5. Christian witness in Sri Lanka should seek out points of contact between Sri Lankan culture and the Christian gospel. For example, 70% of Sri Lanka is Theravada Buddhist. Theravada Buddhism emphasizes Buddha as a historical figure, the virtues of the monastic life, and the authority of the *Tripitaka*. Buddhists, mostly Sinhalese, are therefore familiar with a religious, historical figure, a written authority, and virtuous living. Christianity is similar. Jesus is a historical figure, virtuous living is standard with true commitment, and the Bible is the infallible, written Word of God. The major differences lie in that Theravada Buddhism teaches that Buddha was not, and is not, a god, and one must *work* towards nirvana, or freedom from suffering. Christ is both God and the Son of God, and offers the free gift of salvation, which ceases spiritual suffering. A points of contact approach would help the Sinhalese must realize that peace and freedom from suffering, or nirvana, cannot be obtained through virtuous living, only with Jesus.
6. The struggle between the Tamils and Sinhalese may be an open door to share the gospel as Christians could show how Christianity could ease the tensions between the groups.
7. The methods of mass attempts at evangelism, have not proved effective, should be replaced by friendship or relationship evangelism. Different sources indicate that the most effective method of evangelism in Sri Lanka have been compassion ministries and friendship evangelism. This type of missions requires a long-term commitment in order to develop meaningful and influential relationships. A long-term commitment will give the missionary the opportunity to influence his surrounding community by living out Christ's love. Over time, when familiarity and confidence has been gained, friends and neighbors will more readily accept the missionary's witness and testimony. "Atul Aghamkar, an expert in urban ministries, stated that: "The model of Westerners with big budgets and 'prepared material' coming to India to organize a 'crusade' or evangelistic campaign, and returning home with glorious reports must be stopped. The Western 'crusade' is not relevant in India, with its emphasis upon immediate response and decision, and its total lack of follow-up training. The Indian people are not conditioned to make 'individual' decisions. Decisions, particularly religious decisions, are made by the elderly and within the context of the group, caste and family.""

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/1997/0102/jf9711.htm>

Joseph DeSouza, Executive Director of OM India, suggests avoiding this pitfall: "A confrontationalist, apologetic approach to sharing the love of Christ with both Hindus

and Muslims is largely unacceptable. Bridge building and contextualization are essential if the majority of the Indian communities are to come to know the love of Christ. The propagandist approach to evangelism and publicity of the religious needs of Indian society is causing more harm than good to the cause of the Gospel and for those who live and serve as missionaries in India.””

<http://www.missionfrontiers.org/1997/0102/jf9711.htm>

From **“Proceed With Caution Part 1”**

--by Frank L. Roy

(Frank L. Roy is the pen name for a Western missionary who currently works in South Asia.)

from *Mission Frontiers*, January - February 1997

8. Christianity needs to be shown and understood as an viable part of Sri Lankan life. Sri Lankans are proud of their heritage. Extremists persecute Western ideas, especially Christianity. They need to see that a relationship with Christ is personal, and that it is not a western idea, but a divine one. One way to do that may be to let local Christians make a difference by getting out of their way, and find other, creative ways other than finances to empower them.
9. The Christian movement must exercise caution in introducing foreign funding into the churches and Christian ministries of Sri Lanka. As much as western Christians believe sending money to Sri Lankan ministries and churches the practice is actually hurting the ministry in different ways. For one, many Sri Lankans (and others in this part of the world) feel that Western people are trying to invade, conquer, and destroy their belief system, culture, and way of life. Western financial support, believe it or not, adds to this negative sentiment. If Sri Lankans are ever going to make Christianity (a relationship with Christ), their own, it will not come about by imposing western culture on Sri Lankan. Financial support of Christianity seems to many Sri Lankans as exactly this attempt.. The people want to keep their identity, and in their eyes outside financial support steals the opportunity for them to make Christianity purely their own. Other negative side effects are that local mission churches feel as though they cannot exist without outside financial support. That in turn can lead to lesser levels of giving and creating ways to meet financial responsibilities. The money being sent to these types of churches could be used in areas where there is no ministry, if these churches were not dependent upon outside financial help. One writer put it, “Perhaps supporting existing national churches has diverted efforts away from going where the church is not.” www.missionfrontiers.org/1997/0102/jf9711.htm
The bottom line: efforts should be made to “wean” existing churches from outside financial assistance, and then use the surplus to start new churches/ministries where there are none. Below are three examples of the negative impact of outside financial support:

“One small house church in South Asia lost its sense of community and family fellowship when it became an "institution" after a Western donor provided funds for the construction of a church building. Once the church was built, they began to do the formalities that come with a church building. The people lost the motivation to give, as well as their sense of ownership. Furthermore, the new

large building confirmed to the observing neighbors that this is a Western-funded religion.”

“Good-intentioned, hard-working, zealous Koreans are going to other countries and "helping churches" and at the same time expanding their denomination. They are locating small, independent, indigenous churches; hiring the South Asian pastor, changing worship to a Korean pattern and making them part of their denomination. This leaves the church with the impression it can not grow without foreign support.”

“When the pastor receives his income from the West his church may lose its desire to give. The pastor also is more independent and less accountable to the church and may live a notch above others. This may send a signal that this is a lucrative career and attracting people for the wrong reasons.”

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