

Malay Contacts with Sri Lanka

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South Asia

The Malays have always been intrepid sailors, travelling westwards as far as Madagascar. Sailing westward from a port in the Malay Peninsula or from Western Sumatra, one was likely to disembark on the eastern and southern coasts of Sri Lanka (Paranavitana, 1959): it is therefore not surprising that the Malays made contact with Sri Lankans. Evidence of early contact between Sri Lankans and Malays lies in Sinhala literary works from the Polonnaruwa Period (1098-1234) and the Dambadeniya Period (1220-1293).

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Historical evidence also confirms that there was a Malay presence in Sri Lanka in the thirteenth century. In 1247, Chandrabhanu, the Buddhist Malay King in the Malay Peninsula, attempted to invade Sri Lanka. Sinhala literary works record that Chandrabhanu's mission was supported by Malay (*Javaka* or *Malala*) soldiers. He was determined to possess the Buddha's tooth relics, which were sacrosanct to the Sinhalese, and which were in the possession of the Sinhalese monarch.

In contemporary Sri Lanka, there are about 46,000 Sri Lankan Malays. They form 0.31 per cent of the population. Their ancestry can be traced back to the Dutch Era (1656-1796) and the British Era (1796-1948). The Dutch referred to the Sri Lankan Malays as 'Javanese' because they were recruited in Batavia (the Dutch appellation for Jakarta). The

British referred to the Sri Lankan Malays as 'Malays' as they spoke Batavian Malay, known today as Betawi or Jakarta Malay. The British also transported Indonesians from the Malay Peninsula (Penang, Malacca, Singapore, Pahang, Trengganu, Kelantan), Java, Madura, and North Borneo to Sri Lanka. The Indonesian soldiers in Sri Lanka were recruited from Jakarta in Java and therefore had a common 'geographical identity'. Though ethnic groups from various parts of the Indonesian Archipelago lived in distinct parts of Jakarta, they spoke a common *lingua franca*, either Batavian Malay (Omong Jakarta, a creole) or Low Malay/Trade Malay/Bazaar Malay (a pidgin). The Sinhalese have given the appellation *Jaminissu* (people from Java) to all Sri Lankan Malays, regardless of whether they are from Indonesian or Malay descent.

Some of the earliest Malay political exiles came to Sri Lanka from the

Moluccas and the Lesser Sunda Islands. From 1708 onwards, Javanese princes were exiled to Sri Lanka. According to Dutch documents, these Indonesian aristocrats were mainly from Java, but others came from Bacan, Sumatra, Macassar, Tidore, and Timor. The Dutch also exiled the King of Java, Susana Mangkurat Mas, to Sri Lanka, together with his retinue: in 1723, he was followed by 44 Javanese princes and noblemen who had surrendered at the battle of Batavia. At the other end of the social spectrum, there was a steady influx of Indonesian convicts, who came from all walks of life. However, no specific information is known about their ethnic background. The Dutch also brought Javanese men to be employed in several capacities in Sri Lanka, but the largest group of Indonesians were the soldiers who served in the Dutch garrison in Sri Lanka. They came from the Ambon, Banda, Bali,

Java, Madura, Buginese, and Malay areas. Most Malay slaves sent to Sri Lanka originated from the Moluccas and the Lesser Sunda Islands.

During the Dutch period and in the early British period, the Malays formed most of the Sri Lankan army, enlisted in the Ceylon Rifle regiments. The last regiment was disbanded in 1873 and the Malay soldiers joined the Police force. Malays were, thereafter, employed in the Sri Lankan military, police, fire brigade, prisons, plantation sector, and in salterns. Sri Lankan Malays have blended into multi-ethnic Sri Lanka but have retained their 'Malay' ethnic consciousness, their mother tongue, Sri Lankan Malay Creole, uniting, binding, and defining them. Sri Lankan Malay Creole is a contact language. When people who do not speak a common language come into prolonged contact with one another, a verbal means of communication becomes necessary, and contact lan-

guages (pidgins and creoles) evolve to fill this need. A creole, unlike a pidgin, is the mother tongue of a speech community. Most of the vocabulary of Sri Lankan Malay Creole originates in the base language, Malay, as is typical of contact languages.

Many linguistic constructions (see examples in the sidebar) illustrate Sinhala influence on Sri Lankan Malay Creole. With Sinhala as the language for inter-ethnic communication in multi-ethnic Sri Lanka, bilingualism among the Sri Lankan Malays must have introduced Sinhala grammatical features into Sri Lankan Malay Creole. Sri Lanka Portuguese Creole, the Portuguese-based contact language, has also been influenced by Sinhala (De Silva Jayasuriya, 1999). Malay, in all its diverse forms, is the most important native language of Southeast Asia. Malay in Sri Lanka is distinct from all the other Malay languages. The part

played by Sinhala (the language of 74 per cent of Sri Lankans today) in influencing Sri Lankan Malay Creole is a fruitful avenue for further research. <

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Sri Lankan Malay Creole Constructions

Saldin (1996) states that some SLMC constructions are amusing to Indonesians and Malaysians. I have added in the Sinhala (SIN) equivalents of these sentences:

SLMC	Se	buk	baca	baca	kapan	duduk	seppe	temanya	datang
SIN	Mama	pothak	bala	bala		inna-kote	mage	yahaluva	av- a
	I	book	read	read	when	sit	when	my	friend come TNS

Literally: While I was reading the book and sitting my friend came!

Meaning: While I was reading the book my friend came

In **Standard Malay** it would be:

	Kawan	saya	datang	se masa	saya	membaca	buku
	Friend	I	come	while	I	read	book

SLMC	Se	lari	lari	kapan	duduk	ujang	su	datang
SIN	Mama	duwa	duwa		inna-kote	vessa		av- a
	I	run	run	when	sit	when	rain	TNS come TNS

Literally: While I was running and sitting the rain came down!

Meaning: While I was running it rained.

In **Standard Malay** it would be:

	Se masa	saya	berlari	kujan	turun
	While	I	run	rain	come down