Malays of Sri Lanka

In year 2001 census, the total number of Malays in Sri Lanka was 47,558 amounting to 0.28 percent of the entire population. Most often the Malays are classified together with the Moors, the Borahs and the Memons under the title Sri Lankan "Muslims", resulting in confusion to the true identity of the Malays. The Sri Lankan Malays with regard to ancestry have a greater claim to being called "Indonesians" or "Javanese" than "Malay" or "Malaysians". Sri Lankan Malays are descendants of those exiles and other recruits brought to Sri Lanka during the Dutch period.

Who are the Malays of Sri Lanka? How did they come to be a part of this country? What is their role in present society? These are some of the questions I hope to verify in this study.

As much as do not like to admit, there are many things our fellow countrymen do not know about the Sri Lankan Malays. Most often than not the Malays are classified together with our co-religionists the Moors and other sub-minorities such as the Borahs and Memons under the title "Muslims", thereby resulting in confusion as to the true identity and individuality of the Malays. Unlike other marginal populations, Malays are still identified as a distinct statistical category in official government documents, whilst other minorities are classified simply as "others". The provincial figures released by the Department of Census and Statistics on the census of Population and Housing 2001 gives the total number of Malays in Sri Lanka as 47,558 amounting to 0.28 percent of the entire population. Malays are mostly concentrated in the Colombo, Gampaha, Hambantota, Kandy, Badulla, Kurunegala and Nuwaraeliya districts. The percentage of Malays in the above mentioned districts are,

Colombo 19,421 0.87%
Gampaha 12,333 0.60%
Hambantota 7,385 0.41%
Kandy 2,210 0.17%
Badulla 1390 0.19%
Kurunegala 1223 0.08%
Nuwaraeliya 600 0.09%

Malays belong to the 7.5 percent of the Muslim population among whom the Moors are the majority and Malays, Borahs and Memons form a minority.

The people living in the Malaysian peninsula and adjoining areas in the Indonesian archipelago are named 'Malays'. The Sri Lankan Malays with regard to ancestry however, have a greater claim to being called "Indonesians" or "Javanese" than "Malay" or "Malaysians". In Sri Lanka this term was commonly applied to those who originated from the eastern archipelago as well as the Malay Peninsula . (Hussainmiya: 1990). Sri Lankan Malays are known as "Ja Minissu " by the Sinhalese, as "Java Manusar" by the Tamils and " Malai karar " (Malay people) by the Moors. The Malays refer to themselves as "Orang Java " (people of Java) and "Orang Melayu" (The Malay people).

It is traditionally accepted that the present day Sri Lankan Malays are descendants of those exiles and other recruits brought to Sri Lanka during the Dutch period. The earliest known Malay settlements in Sri Lanka took place around the mid 17 th century following Dutch rule in the coastal area of the Island in 1640. Having expelled the Portuguese the Dutch took over their possessions, the British replaced them in 1796. It was during these one and half centuries of
Dutch rule that the Malays of the East Indian archipelago were brought to the Island. It should be mentioned that at this time Indonesia was under Dutch rule and the regional headquarters of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was situated in Batavia, which is present day Jakarta.

Prof. Paranavitana in his publication "Ceylon and Malaysia" goes to great lengths to prove that strong ties existed between Sri Lanka and the Malay region during ancient times. It should be mentioned however that the present day Malays of Sri Lanka are descendants of the early Malays brought to the island from Indonesian islands and Malaya during the reign of the Dutch and subsequently the British, and cannot trace their lineage beyond this period.

This study hopes to trace early Malay contacts with Sri Lanka using archaeological and historical evidence, as well as the history of the Malays during the colonial era to the present. It is hoped that the reader may obtain an insight into the life and history of a people who have been a part of this rich and beautiful land since time immemorial.

Early Malay contacts with Sri Lanka

The study of the origins of the present day Malays of Sri Lanka has to begin with the advent of the Dutch rule in the Island in 1640, as the documentary and other evidence available for such a study date only from that period. Yet this does not mean that the Malay people have not been in contact with Sri Lanka during the pre-colonization period.

When studying the local historical sources it is evident that the chroniclers gave more prominence to the Indo-Sri Lankan relations and almost if not completely failed to mention her relations with the Malaysian-Indonesian archipelago and other Southeast Asian countries. This is to be expected as India played a prominent role in the religion, society and culture of Sri Lanka. The chroniclers of the main literary and historical sources such as the Mahavamsa and Culavamsa were Buddhist monks who concerned themselves mostly with India, the birthplace of the Lord Buddha and Buddhism. Similarly at the other end of the spectrum, hardly any literary or archaeological evidence with regard to such early contact is found in the Malay-Indonesian region.

Another factor pertaining to this problem is the fact that the whole of this region referred to in the ancient literature of India and Sri Lanka, have not yet been accurately identified. Therefore one cannot depend solely on local literary sources to determine the extent of contact between these two regions in the early period. However based on archaeological and other evidence scholars suggest a strong possibility that during ancient times Sri Lanka and the Malay-Indonesian archipelago had significant economic, religious and cultural relations.

Sri Lanka is situated in the southwest corner of the Bay of Bengal, the shores of the Malay Peninsula and the northern half of the Island of Sumatra is situated on its eastern side. Should one sail directly east wards from a seaport on the eastern shoreline of Sri Lanka the first land that one would meet after passing the Andaman Islands would be the Malay Peninsula. Similarly those who set sail from the Malay Peninsula and western coast of Sumatra would touch land on the eastern or southern coast of Sri Lanka. Therefore ties between these two lands would have not only been natural, but inevitable, especially if they were seafarers. Such maritime contacts by the Malay/Indonesian sailors would have given rise to the port settlement of Hambantota in the southern coast of Sri Lanka. Hambantota is clearly a derivation of the Malay word for boat, i.e. sampan (a word of Chinese origin) and tota for port.
Perhaps the Malay sampans frequented this place in the ancient and medieval times for stocks of food and water, when they were plying the spice trade between the Far East Africa and Madagascar. Therefore Sampan tota of the ancient times came to be known as Hambantota. (In the Sinhala language the phoneme sa and ha are interchangeable)

The relations between Sri Lanka and the Malay region were not confined to only trade purposes. The chronicles such as the Mahavamsa, Culavamsa, Pujavali, Rajavali and epigraphic evidence indicate that there had been close relations between the royal houses of Sri Lanka and Sri Vijaya. The empire of Sri Vijaya has been identified as modern day southern Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, southern Philippines, the numerous Islands in the Pacific and the South China seas. This ancient empire flourished for nearly a millennium, until the advent of the Arabs to the Indian Ocean during the fourteenth century. This resulted in the subsequent conversion of the Malay Buddhists and Hindus to Islam.

Matrimonial, as well as political and military alliances were made between the royal houses of Sri Lanka and the Sri Vijaya Empire. King Mahinda IV, son of King Sena II of Sri Lanka married the Malay Princess Sundari. The Rambéva inscription of the first year of Mahinda IV rule, records a grant of immunities to an extensive estate assigned to a Kalinga queen and her descendents (Kilingu-vasa vat hämbu) Prof. Paranavitana (1966) states that it is quite probable that the Kalinga of Mahinda IV consort was in the Malay Peninsula rather than eastern India, considering the close relationship between the two empires. This princess has been identified as Princess Sundari, who was a Princess of the Javanese royal family.

King Vijayabahu, the grandson of King Kasyapa, married the Malay princess Tilokasundari, daughter of the Maharaja of Sumatra and great-granddaughter of the Queen Sundari, consort of King Mahinda IV. This princess is referred to as the 'charming young princess of the royal family of Kalinga' in the Culavamsa (chap.60 vv.36 ff.) It was this matrimonial alliance which led to the occupation of the throne of the Polonnaruva Kingdom by the rulers of the Kalingavamsa. Princess Tilokasundari had two children, Vickramabahu and Ratnavali. Vickramabahu became the ruler of Polonnaruva after the death of his father King Vijayabahu and Ratnavali was the mother of King Parakramabahu the Great.

After the demise of Parakramabahu I his son Vijayabahu II ruled Sri Lanka. Afterwards the Kingdom passed onto Prince Nissankamalla who was married to Princess Subadhra, daughter of Parakramabahu the Great. Nissankamalla ruled as King from 1187 to 1196. In his numerous inscriptions Nissankamalla has referred to his birthplace as Simhapura, which is stated to have been in Kalingu-rata. Prof. Paranavitana (ibid 1966 pp. 104) states that it is quite probable that this Simhapura was situated in the Malay Peninsula.

It is stated in the Culavamsa that the eleven years and six months after the death of King Nissankamalla up to the invasion of Magha in 1215 BC Sri Lanka was ruled by the Kalingas (Sri Vijaya), and for seven years and seven months by those of Pandya origin. The rivalry between the Kalingas and Pandyas to maintain sovereignty over the Polonnaruva Kingdom reaches its zenith when the Sri Vijaya rulers sent Magha with a powerful force of Malay soldiers to regain control of the Kingdom in 1215 BC. It is popularly believed that Magha was a South Indian prince, yet Prof. Paranavitana (ibid 1966 pp 73) is of the opinion that the Kalinga referred to in the chronicles belonged to a region in Malaysia. He states that Magha "was a direct descendent on the male line, of Gunarnnava (A Javanese King of the Sri Vijayan Empire) and KassapaV. He had therefore as good a claim to be considered the descendent of Vijaya as any other prince who occupied the Sinhalese throne."
It is also interesting to consider here Prof. Paranavitana's controversial interlinear inscriptions. He says (ibid 1966 pp. vi) "In a document called the Magharajavrttanta, Which Parakramabahu VI caused to be indicted between the lines of the original inscriptions, on several stones, it is stated that Magha came from Suvarnnapura to the Pundra country (Malabar) and married the daughter, named Pancandi (Pancali), of the king of that country.

Chandrabhanu was the son of this Malayalee princess; following the matrilineal line of descent, he is referred to as of the Pancanda-vamsa. Magha it is said in this document, captured Polonnaru with the help of forces supplied by his father-in-law, the Pundra king. In the course of his reign, he led an expedition to Tambralinga, and established his son Chandrabhanu in independent authority over that territory. Later, he went to Suvarnnapura and had Chandrabhanu installed as the Maharaja."

However his interlinear inscriptions have caused great uproar among the archaeological and historical circles and earned him a lot of scholarly criticisms. Dr B.A Hussainmiya an eminent figure in the research of the Sri Lankan Malays has stated "Having made a detailed study of these criticisms, the writer also believes there is no sound basis for Professor Paranavitana's ideas." (Orang Regimen: The Malays of the Ceylon Rifle Regiment 1990 pp.34)

It is popularly believed that the advent of the first Malays to Sri Lanka took place in the middle of the thirteenth century with the invasion of Chandrabhanu, the Buddhist King of Nakhon Sri Tammarat in the Isthmus of Kra of the Malay Peninsula (presently Southern Thailand). He landed during the eleventh year of Parakramabahu II (AD 1236-1270). The Culavamsa states:

When the eleventh year of the reign of this King Parakramabahu II had arrived, a king of the Javakas known by the name of Chandrabhanu landed with a terrible Javaka army under the treacherous pretext that they too were followers of the Buddha. All these wicked Javaka soldiers who invaded every landing place and who with their poisoned arrows, like (sic) to terrible snakes, without ceasing harassed the people whomever they caught sight of, laid waste, raging in their fury, all Lanka. (Culavamsa LXXXIII, 36-51)

The Javaka mentioned in this source refers to the Malays of the Peninsula. Chandrabhanu's first invasion did not succeed and he tried a second time to attack the Sinhalese Kingdom with mercenaries from South India. This second campaign failed and resulted in the death of this king.

It is interesting to note the mention of "like (sic) to terrible snakes", this could be a reference to the Kris (Keris), a Malay dagger carried by the warriors of the Malay-Indonesian region. It has a wavy blade with multiple curves like that of a snake in mid strike. The size of the blade, and to what degree it was embellished with intricate design work, dictated their status in the old Malay hierarchy. Malay krises have been found in many parts of the island and are now in possession of the Colombo Dutch Museum, the Kandy Museum, the Galle Museum and the Ratnapura Museum. (Some very fine specimens of Javanese Keris are on display at the Kandyan gallery of the Colombo National Museum, in Colombo 7 which was opened to the public on 9th Nov 2005.

Sources state that during the intermediate period between these two invasions, the Malay King appears to have gained control of the northern part of Sri Lanka and became the ruler of Jaffna. The Javaka King of Sri Lanka who is mentioned in the inscriptions of the South Indian Pandyan King, Jatavarman Vira Pandyan (AD 1235-1275) has been identified as Chandrabhanu (Sirisena
Reference has been found in the Kudumiyamalai Prasasti with regard to a son of a Malay King (Tamil: Cavakan maindan) who had been disobedient for some time, made his submission to Vira Pandya, received rewards, and was restored to the Kingdom of Sri Lanka.

The association of the Malays with the northern part of Sri Lanka is further established by place names such as Jaffna (Yapa-patuna) derived from Java-Patnam and in Sinhalese as "Ja-pane", Chavakaccheri from Javakaceri (Javaka settlements), Chavakottai from Java Fort. Prof. Paranavitana (ibid 1966 pp.118) also refers to Kadayim-pota (Boundary Book), which gives the territorial divisions of the three kingdoms or Tri-Sinhala of ancient Sri Lanka. This includes Javagama as part of Pihiti-rata or Rajarata.

There have been many suggestions as to the identity of Chandrabhanu and his region of origin. Some scholars took him to be the King of Java, others a Pandyan prince, Dutch scholars thought of him as a ruler from the Sri Vijaya empire. Monsieur Georges Coedes put to rest all these theories when he published the text of the Sanskrit inscription found in Vat Hya Vian, Jaiya in the Malay Peninsula, popularly known as the Jaiya Inscription. This inscription dates to the Kaliyuga year 4332 (1230 AD), and belongs to a King with the epithet Chandrabhanu, he is extolled as samrupena hi Chandrabhanu Madanah. There is no doubt that this is the Javaka King Chandrabhanu who invaded Sri Lanka during the reign of Parakramabahu II in 1234 AD. This inscription tells us that Chandrabhanu was the King of Sri Dhramaraja (Nagara Sri Dharmaraja, the modern Nakhon Si Thammarat or Ligor, which was formerly part of northern Malaysia). Chandrabhanu is also described as 'the Lord of Tambralinga'. The Hatthatvanagalla-vihara-vamsa also states that Chandrabhanu came from Tambalinga country. This can be identified with Nakhon Si Thammarat, now Ligor, in Thailand.

Although it has been established that contact between Sri Lanka and the Malay-Indonesian region existed during ancient times, there appears to be no connection between the Malays of present day Sri Lanka and those who came here during the pre-colonial era. The number of Malay people who settled in Sri Lanka before the colonial era cannot be determined. Their numbers would have been too few to remain a distinct ethnic group, and would have therefore been absorbed into the predominant Sinhala or Tamil populations.

Dr. Nanadadeva Wijesekara (1949: 45) has pointed out the presence of Mongoloid facial features in Sri Lanka's population. He considers this to have originated from the Indonesian/Malay islands. Yet he is cautious when classifying a population into racial units, which is still a delicate and difficult problem.

Cultural elements that indicate Malay-Indonesian influence in Sri Lanka should also be taken into consideration. For instance the out-rigger canoe popular as a fishing vessel among the Sinhalese as the 'Oruva' seems to have been derived from the Malay-Polynesian 'oru-u'. Dr. Nandadeva Wijesekara also suggests Indonesian influences in Sri Lankan masks, the mode of wearing the lower garment i.e. a sarong over the trousers which was prevalent amongst the Sinhalese until the late 1950's. (Incidentally the Sinhalese term Sarama is derived from the Malay word Sarong).

Another factor to be taken into consideration is that the present day Malays, who came to the Island with the Dutch, were adherents of Islam. The pre-colonial Malays who came to the island were not Muslims (Islam spread to the Malay-Indonesian archipelago during the fourteenth century). They were most probably either Buddhist or Hindus. They would therefore have been easily absorbed into the other religious groups of the island. The few Malay writings in existence
in the present day make no mention about Malay ancestors of a pre-colonial period. They all maintain that the first Malays to arrive in Sri Lanka were those who arrived with the Dutch.

 Origins of the Present Day Malay Community

The Dutch and the Malays:

The earliest known Malay settlements in Sri Lanka took place during the 1640's when the Dutch took control of the coastal areas of the island. The Dutch expelled their predecessors the Portuguese and managed to take over their possessions and ruled until they themselves were ousted by the British in 1796. It was during these one and a half centuries of Dutch occupation that Malays from the entire Malay and Indonesian region were brought to the island. However there have been speculations with regard to Malays being brought to the island during the Portuguese period. This hypothesis cannot be ruled out altogether as the Portuguese were in control of the State of Malacca in Malaysia and the maritime region of Sri Lanka around the same period in history in 1505. Therefore it is possible that the Portuguese employed Malays in order to man the forts in their newly conquered territory of Ceylon. Malaccan Malays would also have arrived to the island as sailors or traders during this period. However due to the lack of evidence these theories cannot be easily supported. Therefore it has been concluded that the ancestors of the present day Malays are to be found among those who arrived during and after the establishment of Dutch governorship in the island in the mid 17th century. However, the Dept of National Museums in Colombo has confirmed that they have traced Malay daggers (Kris knives) dating back to the Portuguese period.

The Malays brought to Sri Lanka can be divided into two categories:

Indonesian Political exiles, referred to as Staatsbannelingen in the Dutch documents, other deportees banished by the Batavian government.

All other categories of Malays, who came to the island in order to serve in various fields, especially the military establishment.

Due to the fact they were all east islanders the Dutch referred them to collectively as 'Oosterlingen' or easterners.

Political exiles:

The Dutch habitually banished rebellious rulers, princes, chiefs and dignitaries from the East Indies or Netherlands East Indies, as it was known at that time. Sri Lanka and the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa were the principle centres of banishment. It seems that they preferred Sri Lanka to the Cape due to its close proximity, which resulted in lower transportation costs. The hardcore criminals were however banished to the Cape. There were so many Indonesian political exiles & that to be banished was referred to as 'Disailankan' in Indonesian.

Some of these political exiles came from the Moluccas and other Lesser Sunda Islands. As a result of their involvement in the war of succession which began in the late 17th century several Javanese princes were exiled to Sri Lanka. (Hussainmiya: Orang Regimen pp. 38) One of the most famous of these exiles could be considered as Pangearan Adipati Amangkurat III also known as 'Susunan Mas'. It is said that forty Javanese princely exiles arrived in Sri Lanka. Apart from these Javanese nobles there were also eastern kings, princes and aristocrats.
A Dutch document from 1788 provides us with information with regard to these exiles.

Selliya, widow of the Temengong sawangalie Sosorongora
Raja Bagoes Abdeolla, Prince of Bantan
Raja Oesman, King of Gowa
Pangerang Menan Ratoe Maharaja Moeda, the Crown Prince of Tidor
Dinajoe Slaje, widow of Pangerang Boeminata of Java
Temengong Sosora Widjojo of Java
Raden Ariappen Panoelear, Prince of Madura
Raden Pantje Soerinata (A brother-in-law of the above)
Temengong Soetanagara, son of the 1st regent of Palembang
Raden Pantje Weira Diningrad (Java)
Pater Alam (Sultan of Tidor)
Prince Major Batjan Sadoe Alam, Prince of Batjan
Poegoe Kitjil Naimoedin, 2nd prince of Batjan
Carol Boni, King of Kupang
Pangerang Soerija die Koesoema (of Java)
Panglima Raja Johansa, King of Padang
Pangerang Adipati Amangkoerat (of Java)
Widow of the Regent Ranka Marta Widjojo (of Java)

Most of these nobles arrived with members of their family & many of the younger members of these families were born on the island. Most of these exiles lived in the four main coastal towns under Dutch governorship, namely Colombo, Galle, Trincomalee and Jaffna. The part of Hulftsdorf in Colombo where they used to live is still referred to as Kampung Pangeran amongst the Malays. These exiles often resided inside the Dutch forts; the more important exiles were assigned their own sentries. The exiles were also debarrred from communicating with their colleagues. However to the end of this period the exiles were able to interact closely with each other. Batara Gowa Amas Madina II the former King of Gowa, in Macasarr, Indonesia was said to have married a Malay lady named Habiba. Their daughter Sitti Hawang married a Javanese prince, Pangeran Adipati Amangkurat. There appears to have been at least 200 members of the Eastern nobility residing in Sri Lanka toward the latter part of the 18th century, & this was a significant number considering that the Malay population as a whole was not more than 2000.

Although the Malays went through several hardships they did not have to live in total isolation since they interacted with the Moors. The fact that there was a Muslim community in Sri Lanka made the lives of Indonesian political prisoners easier, especially by facilitating their religious and cultural pursuits.

Convicts:

Apart from these princely exiles there were also petty local chieftains and commoners who were convicted and sent to Sri Lanka as deportees. The hardcore criminals were kept chained whilst the others were confined to their prison cells. These deportees performed hard labour for the Dutch East India Company. There were yet another group who were allowed to remain free and earn their living by performing services to the company or engaging in some method of handicraft.
The exact number of such convicts is not certain however they did indeed form a small part of the early Malay population. In 1782 for example the Dutch issued an edict that those deportees who had been taken into the service of the company should remain in Sri Lanka.

In that same year it was further stated that apart from the branded criminals all other deportees should be enlisted in the native army to prepare for war against the Kandyan Kingdom. This gave most of these convicts a chance to interact more freely with their fellow countrymen. They also went onto raise families and were thus integrated into the local Malay population.

**Soldiers:**

The soldiers who served in the Dutch garrisons constituted the largest group in the Malay population. This was due to the fact that the Batavian government dispatched contingents of troops to the island annually. Troops were also sent during periods of emergency or war.

The Malays played a key role in the Dutch attacks against the Portuguese. Malay troops were part of the raiding party which took part in the storming of the Galle fort by Admiral Coster in 1640 and during the siege of Colombo during the period of 1655 to 1656. In 1657 a force of Malays captained by the Malay Prince Raja Talella accompanied Governor Rycklof Van Goens in the Dutch expedition against the Portuguese strongholds in the Coast of Malabar and subsequently took part in the capture of Mannar and Jaffna in 1658. Malay soldiers were also mentioned here that there were Malays who fought as mercenaries for the Kandyan kings as well. This continued until the British took control of the whole island in 1815.

The Malay soldiers were made up of Javanese, Amboinese, Bandanese, Balinese, Buginese, Madurese, Sumanapers and Malays themselves from Malacca, Singapore, Keddah and Penang. Christopher Schweitzer a German employee of the VOC who visited the island in 1680 states that the Amboinese soldiers were part of the Dutch garrison in the Sitawaka fort.

In 1737 three companies of Balinese troops were despatched from Batavia to Sri Lanka upon the request of Governor Van Imhoff to prepare for war against the Kandyans. Malays and Buginese were sent as reinforcements to Sri Lanka in 1761 and in 1788, Madurese and Sumanapers were sent to garrison Mullaitivu on the eastern coast.

According to Schweitzer's report the wives of the Amboinese soldiers lived together with their husbands in the vicinity of the Sitawaka garrison. They were even said to have followed their men-folk to the battlefronts. He further states that "these soldiers wear musquets and short swords" an apparent reference to the Malay kris. The eastern islanders were skilled fighters, and had a penchant for hand to hand combat with their deadly poisoned krises. They were more suited to fight the Sinhalese militia in jungle warfare due to similar climatic conditions and terrain in Sri Lanka and the Malay/Indonesian archipelago.

After the mid 18 th century there was an increase in the population of Free Malays. These free Malays or 'Free Javanese' as the Dutch knew them were former soldiers who were on discharge and others who engaged themselves in non-government occupations. The latter category also included many descendents of the political exiles. Some of these Malays engaged in non-military occupations such as rattan weaving, gardening, petty trade etc. These Free Javanese like the Moors and Chetties who as members of foreign communities, were compelled to perform Uliyam services for the government. The political exiles and Malay soldiers however were
exempted from this service. The former because they were royalty, and the latter due to their position as servants of the Dutch East India Company. (Hussanmiya: 1990)

The British began attacking Dutch military positions during the end of the 18th century. According to the figures given by Colonel Stuart, the British commander who led the main attacks, there were probably around 1400 Malays serving under the Dutch. Taking into mind that almost half of them had their families with them, we could estimate that there were about 2200 Malays, with around 200 members from the exiled royal and noble families. Therefore we could estimate that the approximate population of Malays in Sri Lanka was around 2400.

At this point of time it is important to consider at which stage the real Sri Lankan Malay community emerged from this mixture of races from the East Indian Archipelago, and how they came to be known as Malays. As stated earlier the Dutch used the term 'Oosterlingen', which meant Easterner, to identify the Malays. In the Sri Lankan context the Dutch used this term to identify anyone from the Malay-Indonesian region. Another term used by the Dutch to identify this group of people (not only those from Java), particularly after the 18th century was 'Jaavans' (Javanese).

This gives us the impression that the other ethnic communities were absorbed into the greater Javanese community. However this still does not enlighten us as to why the British kept referring them to as 'Malays' when they first came across them in 1795.

According to De Haan (1922) the wide-ranging communities from the East Indies such as the Amboinese, Bugis, Javanese and others who were brought to Sri Lanka did not come directly from the different geographic regions as their names suggested. Since the establishment of the Dutch fort in Batavia in 1619, most of these people settled in and around the Batavian fort. They each had their own kampungs or villages and separate places of worship. Each was also headed by its own chieftain.

As the Dutch centre of command in the East was in Batavia, when mass recruitment needs arose, the Malays who had settled in Batavia proved to be an ideal source for recruits. Therefore it is highly probable that the majority of Malays brought to serve in the garrisons had Batavia as their point of origin. If this theory is accepted these Malays already had a common group identity among them, which only strengthened when they were brought to a foreign land such as Sri Lanka. One of the key factors that helped these Malays form a common identity was the simplified Malay language they used, which can be termed as Batavian Malay. Therefore we could assume that the Malay that is spoken on the island today has its origins in this so called Batavian Malay. Therefore it was possible for the other communities such as the Madurese and Sumanapers who arrived in the island in about 1782 to incorporate themselves into this community of "Ceylon Malays" without much difficulty.

The community the British came across in 1795 in Ceylon therefore was a much more stabilized and identifiable group of people who had developed a self-identity as members of a "Malay speaking community". Therefore the British termed them as "Malays", with regard to the linguistic unity of these people rather than their ethnic or racial origins. This term became more meaningful after the Malays of the Malay Peninsula that was under British control, settled here during the 19th century and were integrated into the well-established community of 'Malays' in Sri Lanka. (Hussainmiya: 1990)
Apart from this common linguistic factor a large majority of these eastern islanders were followers of Islam. However there was also a considerable number of Ambonese who were Christians, whilst most of the Balinese were either Hindus or Buddhists. Yet due to the majority of these people being Muslims, in the metamorphic process of the Sri Lankan Malay community these non-Muslim easterners dropped out, therefore the term Malay not only referred to the language of these people but also came to mean Muslim 'Malays'. As stated earlier the large Moor community with which the Malays identified with due to their common religion was another factor that helped these people to protect their religious identity.

The British and the Malays:

With the establishment of British rule in the coastal region of Sri Lanka in 1796, there was a new addition to the population of 'Malays' from the Malayan Peninsula. Although the British agreed to send the Malay/Javanese soldiers and their families inherited from the Dutch back to their countries of origin, they realized that it was more advantageous to retain the services of these soldiers, for their own military expeditions. The British offered attractive terms for the Malays to settle in Sri Lanka which persuaded most of these soldiers to stay back and others to be recruited to the Ceylon Malay Rifle Regiment.

Governor Frederick North (1796-1805) the first British Governor of Sri Lanka took great interest in the community and took steps to bring the Malay Regiment on par with the Sepoy troops in India.

North's successor Governor Maitland however was not well disposed toward the Malays and even took steps to dismantle the Malay regiment. He was instrumental in sending back the cream of the Malay population; the princely exiles back to Batavia. A small number of royal exiles seemed to have stayed behind.

However with the British takeover of the entire Island in 1815, the fate of the Sri Lankan Malay was sealed; to be a steady source of military manpower to police the island on behalf of their new colonial masters.

The numbers of the local Malay community further increased by the arrival of a fairly large group of men and women from Madura and Java between 1810-1820. Governor Brownrigg who consolidated the whole of Sri Lanka under British rule arranged to bring a large number of recruits from Indonesia to Sri Lanka. In 1813 therefore, more than 400 men from Madura (an island east of Java), accompanied by their women and children arrived in Sri Lanka to join the Ceylon Malay Rifle Regiment. They were followed by a further 228 Javanese soldiers and their families in 1816. It should be mentioned here that there were no Indonesian recruits after 1816, as the Dutch government in Indonesia did not want their subjects to join their British adversaries.

This proved to be a blow to British recruiting strategies. They had to only depend on recruits from the British controlled Straits Settlements of Malacca, Singapore and Penang. The recruitment missions however were not always successful. In 1830 the recruitment mission led by Capt. Thomas Skinner only managed to obtain 10 recruits. In 1834 another mission headed by a Sri Lankan born Malay Subedar (Capt.) Boreham was more successful and managed to recruit 100 Malays.

In 1840 the recruiting office from Penang was shifted to Singapore, as this was made the administrative capital of the Straits Settlements. The recruiting mission however proved futile as
well as costly. By 1842, the recruiting mission in Singapore was abandoned. Subsequent recruiting missions proved to be just as unsuccessful. After 1860, rarely any foreign Malay recruit joined the Ceylon Rifle Regiment, which was finally disbanded in 1873.

Not all the Malay immigrants who arrived in Sri Lanka as military recruits stayed back permanently. Some of them are known to have returned home when their contract of service with the British ended. Yet in reality only a small number of these immigrants wanted to go back to their country of origin. Many of them stayed since they had raised families in Sri Lanka and their kinship ties were not easy to be broken. It is said that some of those who wanted to return changed their minds at the eleventh hour and decided to remain in their new homeland. (Hussainmiya: 1990).

By the year 1870 the Malays played a dominant role in the Ceylon Police department, the fire brigade and the prisons dept. The Malays were also in demand in the newly opened sugar and coffee plantations. Between January and June in the year 1873 nearly 300 Malays joined the Police department most of them as constables. Almost all of them were former soldiers of the disbanded Malay Rifle Regiment. Malays were also in demand in supervisory grades in the newly opened tea plantations in Sri Lanka. They also joined civilian government departments and private business establishments.

Literature, Arts & Culture:

The Malays have contributed a great deal to enhance the local arts and culture of Sri Lanka. Introduction of Batik making, weaving of rattan baskets, preparation of Malay delicacies such as Nasi Goreng (fried rice), Dodol, Watalappan (Sirkaya) and Malay Pickle are a few. Incidentally the word 'rattan' is derived from the Malay word 'rotan'. Similarly the term rambutan (jungle hair), duriyan (thorny fruit), Nannas (Annasi), Papaya (Pepol) are terms used in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. A type of martial arts known as "Umpath pojor" or "Kong hatara" in Sinhalese, the game of 'raga' (Sepak Takraw) which is played with a rattan ball and cock fighting were introduced by the Malays to the island. Likewise the Sinhala terms "Kirichchiya" & "Kinissa" are derivatives of the Malay word "Kris".

On his research trips to Sri Lanka Dr. Hussainmiya came across numerous Malay manuscripts, pamphlets and newspapers written in Jawi or the Gundul script (Malay written in Arabic script.)

His study of this ancient Malay literature revealed that contrary to popular belief the Sri Lankan Malays shared a common literary tradition with the Malay literatures of Singapore, Penang and Batavia.

Alamat Langkapuri and Wajah Selong, newspapers written in the vernacular were two important Malay sources discovered in Sri Lanka. An eminent Malay literary savant Baba Ounus Saldin published both these newspapers. These newspapers provide an insight into the social dynamics of the Malay community at that time, and also information with regard to life inside the kampong Kertel which was the mainstay of the regimental Malays. Wajah Selong brought to light the changing era of the Malay community after the disbandment of the Regiment.
Malays of the Present:

According to the census report of 2001 the present day Malays amount to about 0.28 percent of the population of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Malays are a peaceful race and live harmoniously with their fellow countrymen. As a minority race however the Malays of Sri Lanka are beset by several problems. The chief of which is the struggle to preserve their cultural identity.

Another burning problem faced by the Malays of today is the gradual extinction of the Sri Lankan Malay dialect. According to an article by the Venerable Thapovanaye Suthadara Thero, which appeared in the "Basha" newsletter of 1994, children who do not use English, Sinhala or Tamil as their mother tongue are compelled to put more effort into studying in the mediums of the aforementioned languages. In such situations Malay children have to compete with other students who use the above languages as their mother tongue rendering them at a serious disadvantage. This results in most Malay students curtailing their education. The frequent use of Sinhala, English or Tamil as the medium of communication results in the gradual disuse of Malay. Therefore the Sri Lankan Malay dialect maybe on the verge of extinction in the coming years. However at present a conscious effort is being carried out by the Malaysian High Commission in Sri Lanka to teach Standard Malay to members of the various Malay organizations in Sri Lanka.

Except for a few place names such as Malay Street, Java Lane, Kompanniveediya (Street of companies (of soldiers), Jawatte, Ja-ela and Cassimgama, there is no apparent evidence of the rich contribution made by the Malays to this country.

It is hoped that this outline of the past and present of the Malays of Sri Lanka will provide the reader with an insight into the workings of the Malay community.

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Department of Archaeology
(This is a summarised copy of an assignment done by the writer for the Faculty of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka)