

Bridging Diversity Through Shared Histories: Literature Review

The project ‘Bridging Diversity Through Shared Histories’ sought to explore the rich heritage and the enduring spirit that characterises Negombo’s community. Through an immersive exhibition, the initiative highlighted Negombo's rich history of oceanic trade, its diverse historic communities, religious landscape, the significance of the Fort and Canal, the town's bazaars, and the role of food in bridging historical narratives. It also shed light on the contributions of women fishers and Negombo's enduring identity as a safe haven. This literature review explores the history of various communities, tracing their origins from early settlements through migrations in the early Common Era, colonial encounters, and post-independence migration patterns. It will also examine oceanic trade, the evolving religious landscape from historical to contemporary contexts, the significance of the Negombo Fort and canal, and the role of food as a cultural bridge.

The research and data collection process for this project primarily covers academic research but also encompasses a range of other sources, ministry and UN publications, blogs written by academic researchers, and even oral histories. The diverse range of sources utilized in this project stems from the limited availability of academic scholarship on certain aspects of the material. This necessity, however, provided an opportunity to incorporate a broader spectrum of information—sources that are often excluded from traditional academic discourse, enriching the research with varied perspectives and insights.

Early Settlements and Trade (2nd century BCE - 1200 CE)

Sri Lanka has had a continuous record of human settlement that dates back two millennia. Historical records dissect prehistoric settlements followed by early settlements that are traced back to 5th century BCE which saw the ancestors of the Sinhalese who were speakers of Indo-Aryan languages, migrate from Northern India (Singh et al, 2023). The Tamils were later immigrants spanning the period from 3rd century BCE to 1200 CE, hailing from areas of central, eastern and southern India where Dravidian languages were spoken (Arasaratnam, 2019). Historically, migrant communities in Sri Lanka have settled primarily for two key reasons: trade and colonial expansion (Brown, 2011). While these appear to be distinct categories, the boundaries between these classifications are not as clear-cut as they may seem, as there are numerous instances where trade and colonialism intersected, leading to overlapping motivations and patterns of migration.

Historical sources and archaeological evidence prove that Sri Lanka was a prominent hub for trade due to its strategic position at the centre of the maritime silk route from China to Europe. Cosmas Indicopleustes, a 6th century (CE) traveller and merchant from Alexandria in Egypt, recognising Sri Lanka’s central position for international trade, described the island as a “mediatrix” between the countries of Eastern and Western Asia, as early as 6th century AD (Bopearachchi, 2002). Extensive evidence shows that Sri Lanka engaged in trade as early as the 2nd century BCE (De Saxcé, 2016; Bopearachchi, 2004; Dayalan, 2019). Sri Lanka's coastline

was dotted with ancient ports and harbours, many of which were renowned across different historical periods. These harbour towns frequently appeared on early world maps and maps of Ceylon, highlighting their lasting significance in global trade and navigation (Eliseeff, 2000).

Mahatittha port, located in the Mannar district, is recognized by historians as one of Sri Lanka's primary seaports in ancient times. For over 1,500 years, through the early and mediaeval periods, it served as a popular and safe anchorage for ships travelling along the Silk Route (Bohingamuwa, n.d.). In addition to Mahatittha, Jambukolapattana port and Uratota port in the Jaffna peninsula, Gokkana port in Trincomalee were prominent ancient ports in the North Eastern region (Sudharmawathei, 2017). Of the South and South Western ports, the Port of Galle, Weligama and Beruwala were particularly significant after international centres shifted to the South Western region of the island (Perera, 1951; Siriweera, 2003). Later, Colombo, Halawatha or Chilaw, Wattala, Negombo and Panadura were also important landing places from the 13th Century onwards (Sudharmawathei, 2017).

Archeological excavations done at old harbour towns and ancient ports evidence the enduring nature of foreign trade in Sri Lanka, and, by extension, provide a glimpse into early migrant communities. Brahmi rock inscriptions in Sri Lanka, which date back to 3rd century BC are written in Persian, Chinese and Tamil letters, indicating multinational trade at certain ancient Sri Lankan ports. Similarly, excavations in the South East region of Sri Lanka provide evidence of ancient international trade in the form of foreign coins from ancient Rome, Greece, China, India, Afghanistan and Persia. Jewellery and textiles too were a major source of trade from the Ancient to modern era. Sri Lanka exported cotton cloth from areas close to the Manthai port. Beads found in ancient burial sites can be traced back to Deccan India and Persia (Lakdiva, Organisation, 2011). Sri Lanka was trading products of high export value, such as precious stones, pearls, ivory, tortoise shells, elephants, valuable woods, textiles and especially spices— Cloves, pepper and cinnamon (Bopearachchi, 2002). In addition to these, different coloured cloths including velvets, silks, cotton, ceramics, porcelain, drugs of various kinds, opium, camphor, tobacco, musk, agarwood were imported to Sri Lanka (Lakdiva Organisation, 2011).

Migrant Communities in the Early Common Era (8th century CE - 1505 CE)

Migration patterns into historic Sri Lanka in the Common Era, were largely influenced by 2 factors; trade and colonial expansion (Brown, 2011). Before the arrival of the European colonists, Negombo was a prominent trading hub largely known for its cinnamon trade, making it an attraction to seafarers and trading colonies, who were also drawn to the spices, herbs, gems and other local products the island had to offer (Rifai, 2021).

Moors

Negombo attracted Arab traders as early as the 8th century. This early migration laid the foundation for the Moorish community that still exists today. The spread of Islam eastward into

South and Southeast Asia can be dated back to as early as the 8th century (Wahab-Salman, 2016). According to Janet Abu Lughod, the Indian subcontinent lay “on the road to everywhere” (Abu-Lughod, 1991) – an argument that can be extended to explain the rich historical and geographical linkages among Sri Lankan Moors. In a publication by the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (1830), records that the first Muslims to settle in Sri Lanka were from the House of Hashim, the clan of the Prophet Muhammad. They were driven out of Arabia in the early 8th century by the Umayyad Caliph Abd-al Malik bin Marwan. After leaving Arabia, they moved south from the Euphrates and settled in various places, including the western coast of India, Sri Lanka, and Malacca. It also states that in Sri Lanka, they established eight major settlements along the northeastern, northern, and western coasts, in locations like Trincomalee, Jaffna, Mannar, Puttalam, Colombo, Beruwala, and Galle.¹

While both, “Moor” and “Muslim” are used interchangeably to refer to indigenous Tamil-speaking Muslim Sri Lankans, most of whom are members of the Shafi’i school of Muslim Jurisprudence and identify as Sunni (McGilvray, 1998). The Moors, as per the 1911 census, have since been distinguished as ‘Ceylon Moors’ and ‘Indian/Coastal Moors’ (Ramanathan, 1888). The Ceylon Moors were the earliest class of settlers, whose ancestry is traced back to the Arab traders. These Arab traders became powerful merchants by the 10th century working as gem traders and small time shop owners. They also dominated the cinnamon monopoly in Ceylon for a very long time. The Ceylon Moors actively asserted their native birth and original Arab descent upon Sri Lanka on both academic and political levels (Wahab-Salman, 2016) and thus they are also credited for introducing Islam to Sri Lanka. McGilvray (1998) also distinguishes between the urban trading elites who predominantly settled along the coasts, and the rural Muslim agrarian population. The Coastal Moors were those who arrived from India for the purposes of trade or plantation work and who then returned home. The Moors’ both, Ceylon and Coastal, were identified as *Marakkala* to associate them with the sea (Rifai, 2021).

The Indian Ocean region had deep economic and cultural connections, linked by trade and cultural exchanges with flexible boundaries. Arab seafarers and trading communities around the Indian Ocean had strong ties dating back to pre colonial antiquity (Wahab-Salman, 2016). To put this into context, Sri Lanka was known to the Arab world even before the rise of Islam. After Islam's spread, the annual Hajj pilgrimage became a key vehicle in connecting people across the Indian Ocean, fostering transnational interactions in religion, economy, and culture during the pre-colonial period, and thus the ports of Sri Lanka facilitated the movement of pilgrims moving from Sri Lanka to Bombay and onward to the Hejaz through the port of Jeddah.

Between 1870 and 1945, as the world moved into modernity, communication and transportation developed and expanded rapidly facilitating a movement of ideas, language, cultural diffusions, migration and mercantile activity, among other things (Rosenburg, 2012). Educated

¹ To identify an a precise time period in which a group of people acquired a certain identity is futile as identities do not proclaim themselves as much as they evolve over time

and urban Moors attempted to redefine their identity and religion of Islam to be compatible with modern political and economic systems imported to Sri Lanka by way of the British Empire.

With this came shifts in transmissions of literature and language, as the Arabised Cosmopolis broke into the modern era of journalism in the Tamil Language. M.C Siddi Lebbe was central to this process in Sri Lanka. Arabic-Tamil, or Arwi was the oral and written medium of communication among the Ceylon Moors prior to Tamil. It was a hybrid language where spoken Tamil was written using the Arabic alphabet and it also included Arabic words that were deemed too spiritual in meaning to be translated (Wahab-Salman, 2017). It was recognised that speakers of the language shared deep connections with Muslims of South India, particularly Kilakkari and Kayalpattinam (Ricci, 2001). According to Rifai (2021), Arabic-Tamil facilitated the trade and personal relationships between Arab traders and Tamil speaking muslims of Tamil Nadu and Ceylon. It was said to have originated in the South West Coast of Ceylon and South East Coast of India. Arabic-Tamil saw its decline in the 19th century due to the rise of English and the printed press, which was unavailable in the hybrid language and was instead dependent on Tamil script distilled from scribes. Despite its decline it played a crucial role in the identity and unity among Tamil speaking Muslims.

According to a 2018 profile done on the Muslim's in Sri Lanka, today, the Moors make up the larger majority of Muslims in Sri Lanka – most of whom live in the east, where they constitute more than a third of the population.

Karavas

There are more than four thousand years of history that can be attributed to the Karava caste, known originally in Sanskrit as “Kaurava” (Dharmabandu, 1962). According to Gamage and Pabsara (2023), Kauravas are descendants of the Kuru dynasty – a vedic indo-aryan tribal union historically located in northwestern India. The caste's history is linked to the Kuru-Pandava war, after which some clans migrated to regions including Java, Sumatra, South India and Sri Lanka (Gamage & Pabsara, 2023). Further, Dharmabandu (1962) states that the Karava caste's migration to Sri Lanka is believed to have occurred through the Coromandel region of South India, aligning with historical references to "Karawe Mandal."

Much of the historical origins of the Karava caste in Sri Lanka is traced back to legend and lore, due to this there is some ambiguity surrounding the exact timeline in which they migrated to Sri Lanka. It is however linked to the Kuru-Pandava War and the legendary Rama-Ravana war (Gamage & Pabsara, 2023; Dharmabandu 1962), which suggest that the migration likely occurred several centuries ago, possibly during the early historical or medieval period. The reference to their movement through the Coromandel region of South India and eventual settlement in Sri Lanka indicates a gradual migration over time, potentially spanning from the early centuries CE to the medieval period.

Sri Lankan legends suggest that the Kuru princes settled in areas now known as Satarakoralaya, Aluthkuru Korale, and Paranakuru Korale (Obeysekara, 2012, as cited in Gamage & Pabsara, 2023). The Karava, believed to descend from the Kshatriya and Brahmin clans, gained prominence as warriors and loyal supporters of Lankan kings, often rewarded with land and positions (Dharmabandu, 1962). Apart from protecting the Western coastal areas of Sri Lanka, these Karava warriors turned to fishing as a hobby, however, due to anarchy that arose in the country, they lost their income and were relegated to fishing as their life's profession (Gamage & Pabsara, 2023) – thus arose the integral linkage between the Karava warrior caste and fishing.

According to journalist Asiff Hussein (n.d.) the Karavas seem to have originally settled in Negombo and later dispersed to other areas. Hussein attributes this to families of Karava descent who occupy factions of Negombo; “Grand Street area occupied by the Kurukula Suriya, Sea Street occupied by the Varnakula Suriya and the peninsula of Duwa occupied by the Mihindukula Suriya, all strategically located and distributed as the guardians of the port of Negombo.” On the same vein, Sri Lankan legends too state that the Kings, for whom the Karava warriors fought, granted them hereditary lands which were said to have been in modern day Negombo (Raghavan & Fürer-Haimendorf, 1961). Building on their early strategic settlement in Negombo, where Karava families played crucial roles as guardians of the port, the community's influence continued to evolve under Portuguese rule. Karavas along the coast were converted to Catholicism – conversions that many Karava scholars believe were made more compelling by the parallels missionaries drew between Hinduism and Catholicism; Vishnu ‘the Lord of the Sea’ and Saint Peter the fisherman and Pattini ‘the chaste goddess’ with Mary, the mother of Christ (Hussein, n.d.).

Originally Tamil speakers, the Karavas swiftly integrated into both Sinhalese and Tamil societies, adapting to the predominant language of their respective settlements based on their linguistic affiliations (Hussein, n.d.; Raghavan & Fürer-Haimendorf, 1961). While many Karavas in the southern coast adopted Sinhala, those in Negombo and Chilaw embraced bilingualism, becoming fluent in both Tamil and Sinhala. This bilingualism is exemplified by the Negombo Fishermen's Tamil (NFT) dialect, a linguistic blend spoken by the Karava caste along the west coast (Karunakaran, 2018).

NFT has undergone significant grammatical changes due to contact with Sinhala, marking an unusual case where a Dravidian language (NFT) has been influenced by an Indo-Aryan language (Sinhala), unlike other documented cases where Dravidian languages have influenced Indo-Aryan ones. According to Bonta (2010; 2008) this change is likely recent, given historical evidence of the Dravidianization of Sinhala since at least the first millennium AD. The number of NFT speakers is difficult to determine since they are often classified as Sinhalese in Sri Lankan censuses, but estimates suggest there are several tens of thousands, possibly as many as 50,000 (Bonta, 2010).

Malays

Following the Moors, the next to arrive were the Malays, who now form a major ethnic group in contemporary Sri Lanka as per the 2012 Census of Population and Housing (DCS, 2012). Academic Dr Tuan Zameer Careem (n.d.), notes that the Malay community came to be known as Malays during the British colonial rule in Sri Lanka. Prior to this categorisation, Malays comprised all major ethnic groups from the Eastern Archipelago, by origin including the Javanese, Sundanese, Achenese, Amboinese, Balinese, Tidorese, Banjarese, Madurese and Maleiers (Malays) (Hussainmiya, 1974). In the Dutch records they are collectively referred to as 'Oosterlingen' which simply meant 'the Easterners' (Ricci, 2016). According to Hussainmiya (2001), there is evidence of seafaring activities by the Malays in the early Christian era, whose ancestors ventured as far west as Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. Given Sri Lanka's strategic position along the sea routes connecting the East and West, it is plausible that these early navigators also made landfall on the island's southern coast (Hussainmiya, 2001).

During the Common Era, however, Malays were said to have originally arrived in Sri Lanka during the invasion of the Javavaka king Chandrabhanu in 1247 CE (Karunathilake, 2008). According to Sewwandi (2018), while the motives driving the invasion are empirically inconclusive, it is likely that Chandrabhanu captured Chawakachcheri and Jawaka Kotte areas in northern Sri Lanka before the second invasion in Yapahuwa. Evidence of historical links between Sri Lanka and the Malay peninsular is evident in the artistic work found from the period in which Yapahuwa was the centre of power (Sewwandi, 2018).

The Temple of the Tooth Relic and the Royal Palace in Yapahuwa particularly evidence these claims, where the stairway to enter the palace is steep with narrow, closely spaced steps and short side walls adorned with sculptures of heads, eastern lions, and various animals – these designs are linked to Bmar Pyramids in Cambodia (Sewwandi, 2018), however Paranavithana (1972), analyzing this further, attributes the Cambodian artistic influences to two historical factors: (1) Yapahuwa's capture by Chandrabhanu's son during his reign, and (2) the presence of Rev. Maha Thero Dhammakeerthi, who had travelled from Ligor in the Malay Peninsula during the time of King Buwanekabahu I. The *Pujavaliya* corroborates these connections, noting Chandrabhanu's second invasion and the arrival of Dharmakeerthi Thero from Thraamalinga (Sewwandi, 2018). Thus, while there is insubstantial evidence to ascertain whether communities from the Malay peninsular settled in Sri Lanka, there is comprehensive evidence to support their presence in the island long before formal records of migration or settlement were established.

Later, the Malays were enlisted to serve the needs of the European colonial rulers. They were brought to Sri Lanka by the Dutch in the 16th century to fight their wars, including people of various social strata such as soldiers, kings, political exiles and members of high nobility (Hussainmiya, 1974). They were recognised as a loyal race and were soon recruited by the Dutch and then the British military to fight their wars in the island – subsequently they were recognised

as a ‘martial’ race (Ray, 2013). However, it was not just the colonial rulers who employed the Malays as soldiers, as it was found that an estimated 300 Malays were employed under the Kandyan King’s army (Hussainmiya, 1974).

In the early 19th century, during the period of British colonisation in Sri Lanka, Frederic North (1798-1805), the first British Governor took special initiative to expand the Malay Regiment by encouraging Malays to migrate to the island, offering various incentives such as bounty money, education and other facilities for the children of immigrants’ (Hussainmiya 1974; Hussainmiya, 1990; Ricci; 2016). Hussainmiya (1990) highlights the close connection between life in the Malay Regiment and Malay literary culture as an evolving sphere in colonial Ceylon. Regiment members not only copied classical Malay works but also created their own literature, including *pantun* and *syair*. They played a key role in promoting literacy by teaching Malay children to read and write in Jawi script. Additionally, soldiers on assignments to Malaya and Singapore facilitated an exchange of ideas, texts, and people, strengthening ties between the Malay community in Ceylon and larger Malay cultural centers in the region.

This ultimately led to a developing of a Malay-based contact language known as Sri Lankan Malay Creole, which evolved from early Malay vernaculars and *lingua francas* influenced by local languages like Tamil, especially the variety spoken by Muslim Moors (Hussainmiya, 1974; de Silva-Jayasuriya, 2002). The discovery of Malay manuscripts in 1974 highlighted the literary achievements of the community, which had also contributed to the world’s first Malay newspaper, *Alamat Langkapuri*, published in Colombo in 1869 by Baba Ounus Saldin. Intellectual exchanges between local and Archipelagic Malays further enriched this tradition (Hussainmiya, 1974). However, Malay literary culture declined in the early 20th century due to a lack of patronage and a shift to Romanized script, and now survives primarily as a spoken dialect, with linguists classifying it as endangered due to decreasing use among younger generations (Hussainmiya, 1974).

Their enduring influence on Sri Lankan culture is noteworthy as it was this group of people who introduced the sarong, instruments like the *rabanna*, in rattan weaving, *beeralu* lace making, batik printing and many others, most of which are now cornerstones of tradition and culture in the country. Further, Malay’s are credited for various culinary contributions which are staples in the Sri Lankan diet. Malay pickle, otherwise known as *Achcharu*, *wattalapam* which is considered to be the most renowned Malay contribution to Sri Lankan cuisine, and *dodol* (Mowlana, 2023).

Paravars/Bharathas

The Paravar community (later known as Bharathas in Sri Lanka) are an Indian caste group, who are said to have arrived in Sri Lanka somewhere between the 1300s and the late 1500s from Tamil Nadu (D’Almeida, 2023; Roberts, 2020; Gunarathne, 2014). According to a publication by the Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages, supported by UNDP (2017), from the 12th to the early 15th century, the Paravar seafarers were recruited by the Sri

Lankan coastal kings to strengthen their armies and, many as a result settled along the coast of Sri Lanka. The Paravars were highly regarded as shipbuilders – their catamarans (in Tamil *kattu* is “to tie” and *maram* is “wood, tree”) were the first ship with two hulls, an innovation that was the first of its kind in the seventeenth century (Roberts, 2021).

Paravars were naturally involved in the deep sea navigation, fishing, and most importantly, in pearl harvesting – a trade that was dominated by the Arabs² in Puttalam, before control of the monopoly was wrested by the Paravars (Roberts, 2021). Many Portuguese records highlight the significance of pearl fisheries to this community with some documents stating that the pearl fishery in the Gulf of Mannar was one of the two major pearl fisheries in the world at the time (De Silva, 1978; Flores, 1995; Roberts, 2020). Historical Portuguese records pertaining to the region also highlight the Paravar community's exceptional seafaring skills, with one such document expressing gratitude to a Paravar convert, Duarte de Miranda, for his assistance in navigating the waters off the southern coast of India (de Silva, 2022; Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages, 2017).

According to Abraham (2018), around the early 16th century, Paravars were being threatened and subjugated by the Arab traders as well as the high caste Hindus, for their control of the fisheries and the coast. This led to Paravars seeking protection from the Portuguese explorers who were gaining control and were rising as a powerful force in the region. Protection was granted under the condition that they adopt the Roman Catholic faith (Beaglehole, 1967; D’Almeida, 2023) and over time, Paravars became staunch supporters of missionaries and Catholicism (Bayly, 1989; de Silva, 2022).³ Soon, the key elements of their Hindu heritage were soon interwoven into their new religious practices, with one notable aspect being a profound devotion to Mother Mary, revered as Mariya Amma (D’Almeida, 2023). This mass conversion saw baptised Paravars arriving in Sri Lanka to spread the mission.

Evidently, the Bharathas in Sri Lanka can be broadly categorized into two groups: those who settled on the island prior to European colonization and those who arrived during the colonial era as part of the migrations and activities associated with European trading, administrative, or labor systems. The missionaries who travelled to the South Eastern coast to baptise the Bharathas, had settled in villages along the coast of Sri Lanka. This mass conversion is attributed to the origins of famous catholic surnames, such as Fernando, Cross, de Silva (Roberts, 2020) and Perera, d’Almeida, Fernandez, Peiris, etc (d’Almeida, 2023).

² It cannot be accurately concluded as to who arrived first, between the Bharathas and the Arabs. While there is a clear timeline for Arab migration, there is some discrepancy as to when the Bharathas arrived on the island, with some scholars dating their arrival back to the Pollonnaruwa era.

³ It must be acknowledged that protection from the Portuguese did not grant them immunity to the severe economic exploitation and social upheaval, with long-term consequences for their community, under the Portuguese occupation.

Their settlements were primarily along the coast of Sri Lanka, particularly Colombo, Chillaw, Mannar, Puttalam, Panadura, Batticaloa, Galle, and a significant presence in Negombo, where a town named *Ettukal* is known as the “stronghold of Bharathas” with 99% of its residents being Catholic Bharathas (Roberts, 2020). With the arrival of the British in the Indian Subcontinent, the Paravars, who were then known as Bharathas, transitioned into administrative and commercial ventures within the island, soon becoming successful business people, primarily functioning in major cities along the western coast (D’Almeida, 2023). In Negombo, they were particularly active in philanthropy, donating land for schools in the city, including for the construction of Maris Stella College (Roberts, 2020). Maris Stella College derives its name from the Latin term “Star of the Sea,” reflecting the Bharatha community’s deep reverence for Mother Mary, who they believe safeguarded them during their sea journeys. It was members of the Bharatha community who also donated land for the Negombo-Colombo railway line (Roberts, 2020). The Negombo Bharatha’s Association is also located in Negombo, with a history spanning over 75 years (The Island, 2024). The Bhāratha community also has a notable presence in Kotahena and the villages of Ettukal and Vankali, where they maintain exclusive Catholic worship and burial sites (Roberts, 2020).

The first national census was conducted in 1871 and Silva (2007) notes that from 1871 to 1901, censuses primarily categorised groups based on nationalities and races. During this period, 78 nationalities and 24 races were recognised for census purposes. Today, the primary category used for identifying demographic groups in national censuses is ethnicity.⁴ According to Silva (20027) between the 1981 census and the 2001 census, there were 2 minority ethnic groups that were added as census categories; the Sri Lanka Chetty and Bharatha. This was primarily on account of both groups requesting to be represented in an appeal to President J. R. Jayawardene. While both groups, demographically, are miniscule, their economic and cultural significance were heralded as sufficient rationales to grant them census categories. Today, the Bharatha people are primarily located in the Western coast of Sri Lanka, in the cities of Colombo, Negombo and Mannar (Social Scientists Association of Sri Lanka, 1984).

Colonial Encounters and Migration Movements (1505 CE - Independence in 1948)

The European colonial era marked a shift in migration and cultural transformation in Sri Lanka and was shaped by successive Portuguese, Dutch and British powers, each motivated by the island’s strategic location and its abundant resources, including spices, gems and other valuable commodities. These conquests, while fundamentally about domination and profit, also influenced

⁴ Distinguishing categories like race, ethnicity and nationality were more clearly and consistently applied after the 18th century. From 1911 to 1963, ‘nationality’ was replaced with ‘race’ in all censuses. This led to the 78 identified nationalities thus being reduced to 7 races; Europeans, Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors, Malays, Veddhas and Other.

migration patterns, social structures, and cultural practices. While European conquests are a vast topic – the details of which span trade, culture and religion among other things– the following section covers the expansion of trade under these colonial powers, European influence on Sri Lankan culture and, how European colonisation influenced migration patterns and the establishment of settler communities in Sri Lanka.

Portuguese

According to Sir Emerson Tennent, by the time of the Portuguese arrival in 1505, the maritime trade across the Asian seas was largely controlled by Muslim traders, whose networks spanned from the Arabian seas to China (1860). Sri Lanka's coastal regions, akin to Gujarat, Malabar, Coromandel, and Bengal, were vibrant hubs of Muslim maritime commerce, hosting significant Muslim populations and, these communities maintained close ties with local rulers, ensuring their commercial interests were deeply interwoven with the region's political and economic dynamics (Tennent, 1860). Key coastal towns such as Kalpitiya, Puttalam, Salavata Kammala, Negombo, Colombo, Kalutara, Beruwala, and Galle served as thriving centers of Muslim trade, underscoring their dominant presence in the island's commercial landscape (Farmer, 1963). In addition to Arab traders, Indians, Malays and Chinese merchants, too, were integral players in the trade landscape, transporting cargo from spices to elephants (Hancock, 2022)

The Portuguese were the first nation to enforce armed conflict into the arena of trade and commerce– particularly oceanic trade (Farmer, 1963). This was done in colonial Ceylon to dismantle primarily the Arab monopoly on cinnamon by establishing a Portuguese monopoly by way of an oceanic empire that extended from Hormuz to Malacca (Farmer, 1963). According to Pieris and Naish (1999), Sri Lanka was divided into three kingdoms at this time; Kotte in the southwest ruled by Vijayabahu VI (1445-1521), Kandy in the west ruled by Sēnasammata Vikramabāhu (1469-1511), and Jaffna in the northeast ruled by Jayabahu II (1469-1511). The Muslims, seen as adversaries by the Europeans and at great risk of their violent conduct, were forced to flee to central regions of the country, thus depriving them of their connections to the greater Arab world and India, as well as their previously flourishing Maktabas and Madrasas (Anuzsiya, 2004). Thus, the Portuguese with their control of the coastal regions, expanded their control to Negombo too.

The Portuguese were able to obtain control of the coasts of Sri Lanka and as mentioned above, while they were the first colonial entity to enforce armed conflict, there also were many non-violent means through which they were able to establish control. Some of these means, according to Pieris and Naish (1999) were through diplomatic alliances, trade agreements and fortification construction such as forts. Many of these means were employed within the Kingdom of Kotte – where the Portuguese initially established contact, forged a strategic alliance with its king and secured favorable trade concessions in 1518. They also constructed a fort for the king in his capital, Colombo, solidifying their presence within the kingdom (Hancock, 2022).

Religious conversion too was another integral form of non-violent coercion, one that changed the fabric of Sri Lanka's society significantly. The Portuguese actively promoted Christianity by the Franciscan order of the Roman Catholic Church, converting large segments of the local population, particularly in coastal areas (Hancock, 2022); this is mentioned in above, particularly with the Bharatha community. This religious influence not only aligned local communities with Portuguese interests but also helped to undermine the traditional authority of Buddhist and Hindu leaders.

In 1672, Baldaeus observed that in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), both the Sinhalese (Cinghalesche) and Tamil (Malabaarsche) languages were spoken. Sinhalese was prevalent from Negombo to areas like Colombo, Galle, and Matara, while Tamil dominated regions near the Coromandel coast. He noted that the Jaffna inhabitants often claimed their ancestors originated from the Coromandel coast, which likely explains the prevalence of Tamil in that area. Conversely, in the island's interior, including places like Kandy, Sinhalese was the primary language. In addition to this, when the Dutch arrived in Sri Lanka in 1658, the Portuguese language, in its form as a creole was also recognised as an official language.

Sri Lanka Portuguese Creole, a variant of Indo-Portuguese Creole, evolved as a lingua franca in Sri Lanka from interactions between Portuguese settlers and local Sri Lankan communities, providing a practical means of communication across diverse linguistic and cultural groups (Cardoso et al., 2019; Jayasuriya, 2000). The creole is characterized by the incorporation of Portuguese-derived nouns, reflecting the introduction of new concepts and objects by the Portuguese, such as *bayinettu* (from Portuguese *baioneta*, "bayonet") and *bastama* (from Portuguese *bastão*, "walking stick") (Jayasuriya, 2000).

Sri Lanka Portuguese Creole played a central role as a lingua franca from the 16th to the mid-19th century, serving as a contact language that bridged cultural and linguistic divides, particularly in the east coast of Sri Lanka where it was spoken by about 2500 people (Hume & Tserdanelis, 2002). Although its use has declined, the creole's cultural significance persists among the Burgher and Kaffir communities, where it continues to serve as an important marker of identity, preserved through traditions and practices (Jayasuriya, 2000).

The influence of Portuguese colonisation extends beyond religion and language to modern day Sri Lankan culinary traditions, where it is most notable that the introduction of Portuguese food and cooking techniques significantly transformed the local cuisine. Weerasekara et al (2018), on the ways in which the Sri Lankan diet has been simplified following the colonial occupations of the Portuguese, Dutch and British, writes about the varieties of food that were introduced by the Portuguese and Dutch. They assert that the Portuguese primarily introduced varieties of fruit such as Amberella (native to Polynesia), Soursop (native to the West Indies), and pineapple (native to tropical America). Other food types included cassava manioc (native to Mexico, Guatemala and North Eastern Brazil), Chilli and capsicum (native to central and south America).

It was during the Portuguese conquest that adding red chilli into dishes gained popularity as it was not a characteristic of native food preparation. Prior to this, the people would often add in varieties of local or wild chillies. Balachander (2023), writes that bread, in its Western form, was also introduced to Sri Lanka by the Portuguese in the 16th century. In a paper titled *The Portuguese Cultural Imprint on Sri Lanka*, the author writes: “The Portuguese have left their stamp on Sri Lankan social administration, society, fine arts and language” (p. 257), and among the Portuguese words adopted by both Sinhala and Tamil, she says, is *pān*, derived from *pão* (Balachander, 2023). According to a blog post that examines the influence of Portuguese gastronomy on Sri Lankan cuisine, the Portuguese are also credited with introducing various cooking techniques such as baking, roasting and devilling (SocialStar, 2023). Further, dishes such as the sour fish curry *ambulthiyal* and even piri piri chicken (SocialStar, 2023).

Bibikkan (known then as *bibica/bebinca*) – the rich moist cake made with coconut and jaggery, which is traditionally eaten during the Sinhala and Tamil new year, too is said to have been introduced by the Portuguese (Weerasekara et al, 2018; Attygalle, 2018). Moreover, *Konda Kevum*, according to Attygalle (2018), is another sweet delicacy traditionally consumed during the Sinhala and Tamil new year. The preparation of *Konda Kevum*, is believed to have origins linked to Portuguese influence. The term “*konde*,” referring to the bun hairstyle of Indo-European women in the former Dutch East Indies, has been incorporated into modern Dutch as “*kondee*.” This fusion of cultural elements led to the creation of *Konda Kevum* by combining the traditional *peti kevu* with this stylistic feature (Attygalle, 2018). Further, *Aluva*, made from roasted rice flour with boiled treacle, cashew nuts and cardamom and is served in a flat cookie-like form, is another staple at the Sri Lankan new year that traces its roots back to the Portuguese (Attygalle, 2018)

Dutch

While the Portuguese were initially interested in establishing and controlling their own trade monopoly, they subsequently got involved in the ruling of the country (Low, 2023). In 1602 however, half a century before the official Dutch conquest of Ceylon, admiral Joris van Spilbergen, the first Dutch envoy to contact the rulers of Ceylon at Kandy, established cordial relations with King Vimaladharmasuriya I, who sought Dutch naval support against the Portuguese (Hancock, 2022). Later, in 1637 King Rajasinha II allied with Admiral Adam Westerwolt (Hancock, 2022).

According to Hancock (2022) the Dutch and Kandyan forces successfully captured key Portuguese strongholds. The Kandyan Treaty of 1638 was signed, granting the Dutch trade monopolies in return for military support. This alliance led to further victories, including the capture of Trincomalee in May 1639, Negombo in February 1640, among others, and by 1658, the Portuguese, accepting defeat, finally surrendered. The Dutch elevated the Portuguese focus on trade, extracting Sri Lankan resources and selling it to the world economy, making it a period of significant economic development for the island.

It was during the Dutch rule over Sri Lanka that the first industrial revolution took place (Dewanarayana & Wilmalarathane, 2023). Sri Lanka's export trade flourished with commodities like cinnamon, betel, pearls, gemstones, spices, coconut oil, lacquer, coconut fiber ropes, sea products, and elephants (Bandarage, 2023). Further, coffee and tobacco emerged as key cash crops exported to Europe, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent (Dewasiri, 2007). All of these exports took place under the Dutch East India Company (VOC) – founded in the Dutch Republic in 1602, for the sole purpose of protecting Dutch Trade in the Indian Ocean (Martins & Mulder, 2023). Martins and Mulder (2023) write that the VOC employed a ‘trade-by-arms’ policy in order to expand their operations and capitalise on the cashflow, and so, when it was dissolved in 1799, the VOC had a monopoly on spices that was developed upon an extensive intra-Asian trading network that spanned Ceylon, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, India, Vietnam, among many others.

According to Dewanarayana & Wilmalarathane (2023), the Dutch, through the VOC, significantly boosted trade by developing infrastructure, including three canal systems connecting Colombo, Kalpitiya, Bentota, Batticaloa, Samanturai, Matara, and Weligama. Alongside these advancements, major courts of justice were established in Colombo, Galle, and Jaffna, and Roman-Dutch law was introduced, leading to significant social changes in the 18th century. The Dutch, unlike their predecessors, were ardently Protestant and in the early days of their rule significant attempts were made to curtail the missionary activities of the Roman Catholic clergy in favour of spreading a Reformed church (Lyna & Bulten, 2021).

While the Dutch were responsible for developing trade, introducing religion and building infrastructure among other things, they were also instrumental in influencing Sri Lankan cuisine. They, as described by Weerasekara et al (2018) are credited for the introduction of the *Lamprais* – an alternative version to the traditional rice and curry, where the rice is boiled in stock and is accompanied by *sambols*. They also introduced *bathala* (sweet potato) as was endemic to central america, *gadu guda* – a type of fruit native to South Asia, as well as *bada iringu* (corn, maiza) as was native to South America. Various cakes that incorporate plums and sultanas and even *kokis* (from the Dutch *koekje*)– a crispy savoury treat made from rice flour and coconut milk traditionally eaten to celebrate the Sinhala and the Tamil New Year, too were introduced by the Dutch (Weerasekara et al, 2018). Hussein (2017) adds that *Sukiri* (sugar lumps), *Kaju Koradiyal* (nut toffee) and *Ismoru* (beef curry), too, are credited to the Dutch.

British

After the Dutch were defeated in the war against the French Republic in 1793, Britain seized Batavian shipping and declared war on the Batavian Republic in 1795. British forces, led by Colonel James Stuart and supported by Rear-Admiral Peter Rainier, invaded Ceylon, capturing key ports including Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Mullaitivu, and Mannar. In early 1796, Stuart's forces landed at Negombo and marched to Colombo, where the Batavian governor surrendered without resistance (Hancock, 2022). By 1802, Ceylon was officially made a British

crown colony. The British consolidated their control by eventually annexing the Kingdom of Kandy in 1815, marking the end of Sri Lanka's indigenous monarchy (Sivasundaram, 2010).

Under British rule, significant economic and infrastructural changes occurred. The period between 1800-1830s was driven by a continuation of the trading of cinnamon and other commodity exchanges as was carried out by the Portuguese and Dutch, and then in the mid 1830s began the plantation phase (Wickramasinghe & Cameron, 2004). The British expanded plantations in tea, coffee, and rubber, transforming the island's economy (Hancock, 2022; Wickramasinghe & Cameron, 2004). As Wickramasinghe and Cameron (2004) put it, "The British colonial state and associated coffee and later tea plantation system was the origin of capitalism in the Sri Lankan social formation" (p. 2). In addition to plantations, they also developed transportation networks, including roads and railways, to facilitate trade (Hancock, 2022). British colonial policies introduced new administrative systems and legal frameworks, including the Roman-Dutch law.

Colonial rule also led to significant social and cultural changes, including the introduction of Western education and the English language. Christian missionary activity started to rise again with missionary schools being established across the country (Hancock, 2022). Ultimately, the British rule faced resistance, leading to various uprisings, most notably the Uva Rebellion in 1818 and the Matale Rebellion in 1848 (Dep, 1984). Sri Lanka gained independence from British rule on February 4, 1948.

Fort and canal

While the Portuguese, Dutch and British conquests were concentrated across and around the island, Negombo (situated then, within the Kingdom of Kotte) became a significant location. In 'An Account of the Island of Ceylon' by Robert Percival (1805), the following was written

"Nigumbo is very advantageously situated for carrying on inland trade, particularly with Columbo and its neighbourhood, as a branch of the Mulivaddy here runs into the sea. At the mouth of it is a small harbour, where sloops and other small vessels often put in and land their cargoes, which are afterwards conveyed up the Mulivaddy, and then, by canals which communicate with it, to the lake which skirts the town of Columbo. The country through which this communication is carried on is perfectly flat for a great way in every direction, and abounds with considerable lakes and rivers, which give the greatest facility to forming canals." (p 110).

In Negombo, the Portuguese established a presence 1588 by constructing a small fort to safeguard their interests in the cinnamon trade. According to the International Heritage Cooperation (n.d.), this fort was later replaced by the Dutch between 1644 and 1678 with a pentagonal structure featuring a dry moat and a drawbridge-accessible gate. Negombo Fort held strategic importance alongside forts in Colombo, Jaffna, and Galle during Dutch rule. After the British took control in 1796, much of the fort's original structure was repurposed for a courthouse, Anglican Church, and prisons. Today, the Negombo Fort gateway lies in ruins, but significant

portions of its brick masonry remain intact, along with the British-era clock tower, offering a glimpse of its former grandeur. The central court within the fort is now occupied by the Department of Prisons, and the site is designated as an Archaeological Protected Site (International Heritage Cooperation, n.d.).

Similarly, as mentioned by Percival (1805), the canals of Negombo too, play a significant role in sustaining livelihoods and ecosystems. Emphasis is placed on the Hamilton Canal, also known as the Dutch Canal, which is a 14.5-km man made waterway connecting Puttalam to Colombo via Negombo. According to a research study done by Fernando, Wijesundara and Perera (2019) on the Hamilton canal's contribution to the tourism industry in Negombo, it's origins date back to the Kotte Kingdom under Veera Parakramabahu VIII, who initially constructed it for transporting goods like arecanuts and spices to Negombo, a major seaport. During Dutch rule, they expanded the canal system to drain salt water from marshlands for agriculture and transport cinnamon. The British later named it after Gavin Hamilton, who oversaw its final construction to manage saltwater drainage in the Muthurajawela marshes, with the canal ultimately discharging into the Kelani River near Mattakuliya. Today, the waterway is significant for a range of different reasons, including tourism, ecological importance and connectivity with the local community and culture (Wijesundara & Perera, 2019).

Migrant Communities During Colonial Rule and Post-Independence

Kaffirs

The Sri Lankan Kaffirs, known in Sinhala as Kapiri and in Tamil as Kapili, are an ethnic group who have been in Sri Lanka for over four hundred years (Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages, 2017). The Kaffir community's origins are traced back to the slave labour brought into the country from Africa (East Africa, Madagascar, Mascarene Islands) during the colonial period (Kopinath & Herath, 2005). While there exists considerable focus on the transatlantic slave trade, the migrations of Africans to Asia has long been overlooked. The first Kaffirs were brought to Sri Lanka by the Portuguese, who primarily used them as mariners in maritime trading enterprises, mercenaries and musicians (de Silva Jayasuriya, 2007). In later colonial periods⁵, they made up the naval force, soldiers, commanders, administrators, bodyguards, merchants, domestic workers, plantation workers, concubines, nurses, etc (Kopinath & Herath, 2005).

According to de Silva Jayasuriya (2007), Africans (Kaffirs) served in the 3rd and 4th Ceylon Regiments of the British militia, crucial for British efforts to control Sri Lanka. Initially,

⁵ Sir Alexander Johnstone, Chief Justice of Ceylon, implemented reforms to elevate the political, moral, and intellectual status of the population, including granting all Sri Lankans the right to serve on juries. In return for this privilege, he advocated for the abolition of domestic slavery. On August 12, 1816, slavery was officially abolished in the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka, with slaveholders required to register children born to their slaves from that date onward.

the British held only coastal areas inherited from the Dutch but sought to conquer the entire island, achieving this in 1815 after two failed wars against the Kandyan kingdom. By the mid-19th century, maintaining garrisons became too costly, leading to the disbanding of an African garrison at Puttalama fortress in 1865. This disbandment contributed to the formation of a significant Afro-Sri Lankan community in Sirambiyadiya, with smaller groups spread throughout the Puttalama district and other provinces.

Although numerically, the Kaffirs make up a small group, their contributions to the culture of Sri Lanka have been immense. Primarily, it is music and dance that highlight the Kaffirs today. According to de Silva Jayasuriya (2007), the Afro-Sri Lankans in Sirambiyadiya perform traditional songs called *manhas*, passed down orally without new compositions. These songs often blend storytelling with homophonic multipart singing, where all singers follow the same rhythm at different pitches. Some songs, like *Senhor San Antoni*, are entirely in Portuguese. This speaks to a longstanding linguistic history between the Portuguese and the Kaffirs, with the Kaffirs being one of the main communities to preserve the Sri Lankan Portuguese Creole (Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages, 2017). Although *manhas* do not reflect African religious beliefs, they drive a sense of collective identity. Performers use mostly homemade instruments, with a few traditional Sri Lankan drums, and are accompanied by clapping and dancing.

Baila and *Kaffrinha*, are another strong contribution by the Kaffirs to wider Sri Lankan culture. *Kaffrinha* originated as Afro-Portuguese songs recorded in the late 19th century (de Silva Jayasuriya, 2014; de Silva Jayasuriya, 2007). *Baila* today is a blend of African, European, and Asian influences. Despite common misconceptions, the Afro-Sri Lankan community in Sirambiyadiya, Puttalama, is not familiar with *Kaffrinha* songs. *Kaffrinha* was noted by Sri Lankan surveyor R. L. Brohier in the early 20th century in the nearby village of Sellan Kandel (de Silva Jayasuriya, 2014; de Silva Jayasuriya, 2007).

Nattukottai Chettiars

The Naragathars, also known as the Nattukottai Chettiars who were a South Asian community from Chettinad in Tamil Nadu, were renowned for their business acumen and indigenous banking ability. They were an upper caste people who began their business activities as salt traders and money lenders in the seventeenth century, which then developed into a fully fledged banking system by the nineteenth century (Subramaniam & Athiyamman, 2016). Their business prowess grew in South India and soon expanded to other parts of Southeast Asia including Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Java, and Sri Lanka, among others (Rudner, 2022). Several authors also state that the Chettiars were diametrically responsible for the development of various industries in the countries in which they operated, such as, rice in Burma and tea in Sri Lanka (Weerasooria, 1973; Subramaniam & Athiyaman, 2016; Rudner, 2022).

While there is no consensus on the exact time period in which the Nattukottai Chettians began migrating to Sri Lanka, according to Subramaniam and Athiyaman (2016), they were trading in Ceylon prior to the Dutch conquest in 1656, and were identified as the “only bankers in Ceylon.” During the Dutch rule (1656-1796), their trade was restricted, but the arrival of the British in 1796 marked a golden period, as they were able to act as the middle man when indigenous banking systems were disrupted in favour of a colonial system, despite losing their dominance in the sector (Subramaniam and Athiyaman, 2016). By the mid-19th century, Chettians dominated trade between India and Ceylon, serving as key bankers in the absence of formal banking institutions until the establishment of the Bank of Ceylon in 1841 (Subramaniam, 2016; Subramaniam & Athiyaman, 2016). They diversified their activities, becoming prominent money lenders, pawn brokers, merchants, and rice importers, addressing Ceylon's rice shortage caused by a shift to commercial crop cultivation. They also used the Hundi system⁶ for fund transfers and trade financing between Colombo and Madras.

By 1916, there were estimated to be 700 Chettian firms operating across the island, many of which were concentrated across Colombo and Negombo. According to a Pathmanathan (2018), a majority of the Nattukottai Chettian community left Sri Lanka during the 1950s, but evidence of their assimilation and contributions to culture outside of their financial dealings, lie in the temples built by them. The Sri Muthumariamman Kovil in Negombo is one such example, dedicated to Mariamman – the Hindu Goddess of rain and fertility. The land was said to have originally been part of a paddy field but was then gifted for the purpose of establishing a place of worship in 1852.

Goans

Goans began arriving in Sri Lanka in the 16th century during Portuguese rule. According to Bhat and Rao (2013) it is approximated that Goa, a state on the southwestern coast of India within the Konkan region, was part of the Mauryan Empire in the third or fourth century AD. When this empire declined it was taken over by a series of regional Hindu dynasties, held by either Hindu or Muslim empires until they were conquered by the Portuguese in the early 16th century. The Portuguese, during this time, introduced Catholicism to their colonies, which, in Ceylon, included extensive and large-scale conversions in the Portuguese controlled Coastal regions of the country (Vanniarachchy, 2022). Goans, who had been converted to Catholicism in their homeland, began arriving in Sri Lanka in the 16th century as part of Portuguese administration and clergy (Županov, 2006).

Within the colonial administration, they played a crucial role in spreading Catholicism in Sri Lanka, particularly during the Oratorian Mission from 1687-1857, and according to Županov (2006), this was a mission that was operated clandestinely due to the anti-Catholic policies introduced by the Dutch. Županov (2006) adds that the Oratorian missionaries in Sri Lanka

⁶ Hundi was a type of bill of exchange or written order (Rudner, 2022)

skillfully navigated their similarities and differences with the local population, leveraging factors like skin color and language proficiency. José Vaz, a 17th-century Catholic priest and missionary from Goa, upon receiving two fellow Oratorians in 1697, assigned them based on their ability to blend with the locals. José de Meneses, with lighter skin, was stationed in the lowlands, while José Carvalho, with darker skin, accompanied Vaz to Kandy. Language proficiency was crucial, as the missionaries had to learn Tamil and Sinhalese. Unlike Jesuits, who often saw learning local languages as a spiritual challenge, the Oratorians viewed it as a practical necessity for their mission.

They used private houses for Mass and established permanent missions in areas under the protection of the Kandyan King. When the first missionaries arrived from Goa in 1697, they were sent to Puttalam which soon became a Catholic stronghold. From there, missionaries moved southward to Negombo which became a significant centre for apostolic work. They then moved to Kandy which became a refuge for missionaries. These missionaries, according to Županov (2006) played a crucial role in developing a Catholic presence in the island where Negombo and Puttalam became focal points in missionary activities.

According to Vanniarachchy (2022), the Goan Oratorian churches in Sri Lanka which were built throughout the colonial period, stand out for their unique architectural and artistic characteristics, which blend Portuguese and local influences. They feature simplistic designs, focusing on functionality and adaptability to local conditions. A prominent feature of these churches is the use of wooden columns, which not only support the structures but also reflect the influence of local Hindu architecture, particularly in Northern Sri Lanka. These columns are distinctive in widening the internal spaces of the churches and are often regarded as a hallmark of Oratorian architectural experimentation. The altars in these churches are another highlight, showcasing Portuguese artistic influence. Vanniarachchy (2022) adds that typically, the altars are decorated with multiple levels and niches framed by round arches, containing three-dimensional images of saints. Many of these churches are still standing in the Jaffna and Mannar districts (Vanniarachchy, 2022).

Chinese

The Chinese community in Sri Lanka has a long history, dating back to pre colonial trade. These traders referred to Sri Lanka as *Shih-tzu-kuo* and initially used the Silk Route, which facilitated the exchange of goods like silk, earthenware, and minerals such as jade (Lahiri, 1974). Chinese Buddhist monk Fa-hsien's visit to Sri Lanka in 412-414 AD is significant in the historical context, as he gathered valuable information about the country. The community's early presence is also noted in the writings of other Chinese monks, like Hyun Tsang, though his account was based on second-hand information (Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages, 2017; Lahiri, 1974).

The Chinese arrived in Sri Lanka, with their migration beginning during the Dutch colonial period in the 17th and 18th centuries. As Jayakody (2022) explains, the Dutch East India Company had previously deported unemployed or undocumented Chinese migrants from Batavia (modern-day Jakarta) to Sri Lanka to labor on cinnamon plantations. By July 1740, plans for the mass deportation of Chinese to the island were formalized. This trend continued under British rule in the 19th century, with the British importing Chinese labor for agricultural work in regions such as Galle, Trincomalee, and the Negombo lagoon.

The next wave of Chinese migrants arrived in Ceylon in the early 19th century, under British rule, where a small number of migrants settled. According to Anthony Bertolacci's 'A view of the agricultural, commercial and financial interests of Ceylon' in 1816, there were an estimated 80-100 Chinese who had arrived in Ceylon by the early 1800s, many of these married Ceylonese women (Bertolacci, 1983). The British imported these migrant workers primarily for agricultural work near Galle and Trincomalee and for work in the Negombo lagoon (Jayakody, 2022). Bertolacci (1983) also observed that, despite British efforts to encourage Chinese settlement, these migrants did not exhibit the industry and ingenuity characteristic of their homeland. Instead, they became known for gambling and other dissipations, often renting gaming houses and cockfighting pits, which the government profited from by selling exclusive rights to operate them. Notably, these Chinese settlers formed relationships with local Ceylonese women, as they did not bring their families with them.

Then, in the period between 1920-1950, many people from the Shandong and Hubei provinces fled the Chinese civil war and the Second World War, arrived in Ceylon and started businesses in dentistry, textiles and restaurants (Pathirana & Peiris, 2015). According to Jayakody (2022) today, Sri Lanka's Chinese community has significantly dwindled, largely due to political instability and the challenges of statelessness. In 1881, Lee's *General Report and Statements and Tables of the Census of Ceylon* classified seven main ethnic groups, including Sinhalese, Tamils, Moormen, Malays, Veddas, Europeans, and Burghers. The Chinese were listed among the 72 races within the population. At that time, there were 49 Chinese recorded in Ceylon, with small populations distributed across Colombo, Negombo, Kandy, Badulla, Jaffna, and Galle. Despite their economic and social contributions, many were classified as "XXX" on official documents, highlighting their uncertain legal status.

The Chinese community's contribution to Sri Lankan culture has been immense. According to the Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages (2017), the Chinese community from the past are now t mainly engaged in dental technology, textile trade, and acupuncture. Dental technology, introduced by Chinese nationals, remains a significant profession, with "Chinese dental specialists" continuing their work in major cities. Weaving silk, another Chinese tradition, was historically practiced by Chinese traders who would travel between villages, and today, Chinese textiles are sold in shops across the country.

Chinese acupuncture, an ancient form of medicine, is now widely practiced in Sri Lanka's hospitals and Ayurvedic centers. Despite the small size of the Chinese community, they have contributed to sports, excelling in soccer, volleyball, swimming, gymnastics, and other activities. Further, Chinese restaurants and food businesses are widespread, with Chinese cuisine included in many hotel menus. The community is also involved in import and export trade, specializing in products like medical equipment, vehicles, and agricultural machinery, as well as cutlery, ornaments, and electrical goods (Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages, 2017).

Ahmadi

There is a significant gap in scholarship on the Ahmadis in Ceylon, much of the information on this community derives from Wettimuny and Gunatilleke's (2022) research done on the orthodoxy and denial of religious liberty to Ahmadis in colonial Ceylon. The Ahmadiyya movement was founded in 1889 in Punjab, by Hazrat Mirza Gulam Ahmad and was a movement rooted in the belief that the second coming of Christ will coincide with the arrival of the Mehdi, a messianic figure (Wettimuny & Gunatilleke, 2022). The Ahmadiyya migration to Sri Lanka began in around 1915, when missionaries from the movement from India, arrived with the goal of spreading their interpretation of Islam. Sri Lanka was an attractive destination for Ahmadiyya missionaries due to its religious diversity and relatively open society under British colonial rule. Wettimuny & Gunatilleke (2022) also note that unlike other 19th century religious movements, the Ahmadis supported the British Empire as they believed that the British conquest brought peace to India.

The Ahmadiyya missionaries set up their first mission in Colombo, and then began organising. Over time, the Ahmadiyya community established mosques and centres across the island, but presently there only exist 2 Ahmadi mosques within the country, in Colombo and in Negombo. The community is relatively small compared to other Muslim groups in Sri Lanka, but it has had a visible presence. Interestingly, the common consensus among Moor's in Ceylon during British rule is that the Ahmadiyya philosophy is fundamentally unorthodox, and so the Ahmadis had difficulty establishing a legitimate Muslim community. In addition to this, causes for tension between the Ahmadis and other Muslim factions in Ceylon were attributed to: perceptions of heresy, religious competition and an anti-moor pogrom instigated by Sinhalese (Wettimuny & Gunatilleke, 2022).

Religious Structures

While ethno-religious tensions simmer beneath the surface, the country's religious landscape as reflected in the places of worship, highlight a profound capacity for harmony and co-existence. This is especially prevalent in Negombo, given its rich history and the diverse communities that nurture its enduring peace.

The St Mary's church

The St Mary's church, located on Grand Street is one of the oldest churches and most popular churches in the city (Tales of Ceylon, n.d.). Considered to be the main Catholic church in Negombo, locals refer to it as *Maha Veediya Palliya* – which in Sinhalese means the Church on Grand Street (Joseph, 2021). The long-standing Catholic influence, upon which the legacy of this church rests, began with the Portuguese arrival in 1505. The early Franciscan missionaries and the ministry of Saint Joseph Vaz played pivotal roles in embedding Catholicism within the local fishing communities (Joseph, 2021).

The Church was built until 1811, when marshy land was granted for its construction during the British colonial period, under Governor Sir Thomas Maitland (Joseph, 2021). It underwent significant expansion and was completed in 1922 under the guidance of Italian priest Fr. J.B. Vistarini, who dedicated 38 years to the parish. Fr. Vistarini not only oversaw the physical development of the church but also established St. Mary's College, contributing to the community's educational and spiritual life (Joseph, 2021).

According to Joseph (2021), the church features alabaster paintings by N.S. Godamanne, a Buddhist artist, who illustrates Biblical narratives and symbolises the religious coexistence in Negombo. Today, St. Mary's Church continues to play a central role in the spiritual life of Negombo, catering to diverse congregations and offering various social and educational services. The church's annual feast, held in honor of Our Lady, remains a major religious event, drawing participants from across the island.

The Sri Muthumariamman Temple

The Sri Muthumariamman Kovil, dedicated to Mariamman, the Hindu Goddess of rain and fertility, holds significant cultural and religious importance. Originally part of a paddy field, the land was gifted for the establishment of the temple in 1852, funded by the Nattukottai Chettiar community. Shortly after the Kovil's construction, a Buddhist temple was also established nearby with the community's support, highlighting their role in fostering religious harmony.

Renowned for its distinctive Dravidian architecture and intricate granite engravings, the Sri Muthumariamman Temple is a major landmark for the Tamil community. The temple is celebrated as a potent spiritual site where rituals and offerings are believed to yield considerable benefits for devotees. Upon entering, worshippers are greeted by the idol of Mariamman, the primary deity, and participate in rituals such as pujas, abhishekam (anointment), and sangaabhishekham (sacred bath). The temple also enshrines idols of other significant deities, including Lord Vairava, Lord Ganesh, Kali Amma, and Lord Murugan, each housed in separate sanctums, underscoring its comprehensive spiritual offerings.

Udayar Thoppuwa Mosque

According to Sri Lanka Moor Family Genealogy (n.d.), the Udayar Thoppuwa Mosque, locally known as the Ambalanthadi Mosque, was established in 1846 by Mathicham Saleem Lebbe Muhammedh Thamby Vidane. Situated in Thambiliwatte near a popular Ambalama frequented by travelers, pilgrims, and traders of all faiths, the mosque provided shelter and refuge for Muslims relocating to Negombo from the interior.

After Muhammedh Vidane's passing in 1879, his son, Muhammedh Thamby Samsudheen Vidane Arachchi, also known as Dheen Arachchi, became the sole trustee. He stipulated that the trusteeship would remain with his direct male descendants, following seniority, a tradition that persists today. The mosque continues to serve as a cherished place of worship and a hub for community activities and social services in Negombo.

The Angurukaramulla Temple

The Angurukaramulla Temple, also known as Bodhirajarama Viharaya, in Negombo is steeped in rich history and architectural significance. According to Manuja (2022), the temple was established in 1868 with land donated to Kirimetiya Thera, and is renowned for its impressive six-meter-tall Buddha statue and a distinctive dragon-head sculpture at the entrance, believed to ward off evil spirits. The temple's roots are believed to trace back to the reign of King Devanampiyatissa in the 3rd century BCE.

Inside, the temple houses the ruins of a 300-year-old library, once filled with holy scriptures and literary texts, and boasts one of the longest reclining Buddha statues in Sri Lanka (Manuja, 2022). The image house is adorned with centuries-old paintings, sculptures, and murals, depicting the Buddha's journey to enlightenment and the legends of ancient rulers as recounted in the *Mahavamsa*.

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This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Negombo's rich and multifaceted history by drawing on a diverse array of sources. By drawing together academic scholarship, institutional publications, and personal narratives, the review not only addresses the gaps in traditional academic research but also expands the discourse. Further, it serves as a repository for the extensive sources that provided the material for this exhibition. This research along with the oral histories and interviews, underscores the complexity of Negombo's identity, highlighting its historical role as a safe haven and a vibrant hub of cultural and economic exchange. Through this exploration, the project seeks to deepen the appreciation of Negombo's enduring legacy and position it as a model of resilience, illustrating how its people have navigated a backdrop of ethnic and religious tensions, conflicts, and violence that have marked Sri Lanka's history.

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