



**Bio- Cultural Aspect of Kaffir People Living in Sirambiadiya
Puttalam District Sri Lanka**

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Abstract

Kaffir people have been living in Sri Lanka for about five centuries. They were Portuguese *negro* slaves trained in war that was brought to Sri Lanka from Mozambique via Goa. After the abolition of the slave trade by English in the year 1845 many went back to their own countries but few settled in Puttalam, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Colombo districts. At present two main Kaffir communities can be seen in Sri Lanka one in Batticaloa, Trincomalee Districts and the second group in Puttalam district. Puttalam Kaffirs can be found in Sirambiadiya village. To get to the place they live, one has to go 3km in the Puttalam Anuradhapura main road and turn left at the 3rd mile post to the St. Thrithvaye Mawatha. There are 73 Kaffir people living in Sirambiadiya, consisting of 21 families, they are represented by four generations. Out of this, 60% represent females and 40% represent males.

Most of the Kaffir people living in Puttalam had assimilated into Sinhalese community by intermarriages. As a result their typical Kaffir (African) characteristics, such as dark black (ebony colour) skin colour, wide nose, large protruding lips, high forehead and curly hair are not so prominent in children born to the parents of mixed marriages

Majority of the families belong to a very low income category. Seventy three percent of the families receive a monthly income of less than 10,000 rupees, only 60% of the adults are working. Most of them work as daily paid laborers or as helpers in near by houses or shops and in Puttalam town. Calculated BMI values showed that, all the children below 12 years are under weight, eight are in the normal weight range to their age and sex and

one child was in the obese range. BMI values in 60% of the Kaffir adults, were in normal range. Twenty five percent were in the under weight category and 15% were in the over weight range. Other than their physical features, the study did not reveal any unique cultural traditions that show an African influence. They have incorporated many cultural practices from the Sinhalese ethnic group.

No African influence can be seen in their clothing, language or food. The food prepared for special occasions such as weddings and Christmas represent an admixture of foods from different ethnic groups. They prepare authentic Sri Lankan sweets mainly made by Sinhalese and Tamil communities for their cultural festivals. Some of the most common diseases of Kaffirs are high blood pressure, diabetes and asthma. Cholesterol, gastritis, kidney diseases and eye diseases are recorded in low frequency. Most of their rites of passage are performed according to Roman Catholic traditions and some integration of Sinhalese traditions can be seen in puberty and funeral rituals. The Kaffir people being Roman Catholics, celebrate Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Christmas and village church festival. All the people are fluent in Sinhalese language since it is their learning and working medium of language. However, only a handful of people from the older generation can speak the language of their ancestors; the Sri Lankan Portuguese Creole. The Kaffir people are famous for their unique songs and dance style commonly known as *baila or kaffrinha*. Nonetheless the Kaffirs in Sirambiadiya call their music as *manja*. Unlike *baila or kaffrinha*, these songs have few lyrics, just five to six lines or less that they repeat over and over again. They start the songs with slow beat and increase it gradually and at the later stages increased to a high tempo. They use very simple musical instruments such as drums and tambourine-like rabana, and common house hold items

like polished coconut shells, a bottle and some coins. The Kaffir people in Sirambiadiya do not have the ways or the means to preserve their unique language that is currently spoken only by them and few Portuguese Burghers in Batticaloa and their music. Therefore the government should take steps to preserve this valuable diminishing culture and their language by recording them in a systematic way and also by encouraging the scholars to research more about the language and their songs. Also they should make arrangements and provide facilities for the younger generation to learn old creole based Portuguese language and keep it alive as a part of their culture.

Introduction

Who are the Kaffirs?

Sri Lanka is famous for its diverse multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious communities. Apart from the four main ethnic communities, the Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors and Burghers, there are numerous smaller ethnic communities such as the indigenous inland and coastal Veddhas, Bora, upcountry Tamils, Colombo Chetti and many other communities of Indian origin that came from India at different times. The Portuguese Burghers in Batticaloa and Vahacotte and numerous others also add to the diversity of the country's ethnic diversity (Gankanda, 2007). Also among this diverse community is the Kaffir population known as the "Ceylon Kaffirs" that has been living in Sri Lanka for about six centuries.

There are different descriptions of the term "Kaffir". In general, the term "Kaffir" was used to address African people. The English term Kaffir came from the Portuguese word *Cafre*. According to the online Etymology Dictionary, Kaffir came from the Arabic word *Kafir*, meaning "unbeliever" (de Silva Jayasuriya, 2008).

According to Encyclopedia Britannica and the American Encyclopedia, Kaffir means a member of a group of southern African Bantu-speaking people. In the Sinhalese encyclopedia, Kaffir means not one tribe but a combination of several tribes. The Oxford Encyclopedia states Kaffir as black African people. The Malalasekara Dictionary refers to a Kaffir as a South African person who speaks the Xhosa language (Gankanda, 2007). The word Kaffir is specially used to describe the South African "ngnni" tribe, however most of the African tribes were commonly known as Kaffirs. According to Chandra

Richard de Silva (1972, p 188), Kaffirs were Portuguese *negro* slaves trained in war and brought to Sri Lanka from Mozambique via Goa.

Kaffir people were first brought to Sri Lanka in 1630 by the Portuguese occupying the country at that time. They appeared in the Portuguese army only in late 1631. By 1634 only 280 Kaffirs were left (de Silva, 1972, p 188). The Kaffirs were taken by the Dutch after the defeat of the Portuguese in 1658. During the Dutch and English occupation they were mainly brought to Sri Lanka as slaves and soldiers. After the abolition of the slave trade by the English in 1945, many went back to their own countries but a few settled in Puttalam, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Colombo districts.

The present day Kaffir people in Puttalam are the descendents of these people. In Puttalam, the majority of the Kaffir people are stationed in the Sirambiadiya village.

At present there are about a thousand Kaffir people with a scattered distribution in various parts of the country. The majority of them can be found in Puttalam and few families can still be found in Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Negambo, Anuradhapura and Colombo districts. Because of the small number, they seem to be unintentionally forgotten by the other major ethnic communities and by the government as well. Other than the occasional public display of their dances in some of the cultural shows and exhibitions, the majority of Sri Lankans do not know about their existence and know very little about their culture. Currently most of these people are integrated into the major ethnic groups by intermarriages. For example, most of the people living in Puttalam have assimilated to the Sinhalese community living there, while the people in Batticalore and Trincomalee have assimilated with the Tamil community. As a result their typical Kaffir (African) characteristics as well as other cultural practices are disappearing or becoming

incorporated into cultures of other ethnic origin. In other words, their once unique culture is diminishing rapidly.

Up to now only a handful of studies have been done on the Kaffir people and most are descriptive in nature, mainly based on their distribution, population numbers, and their language. The present study too looked into the socio-cultural aspect of the Kaffir community but also included a Bio-Anthropological component, i.e. looked into their morphological characters, physical measurements, and nutritional condition as well.

Therefore, the main objective of this research is to analyze the physical characteristics and socio-cultural aspects of the Kaffir community living in Sirambiadiya. Some of the specific objectives are to observe their cultural practices and their rites of passage, to find out to what extent have they preserved their old traditions and the language that they inherited from their forefathers, to determine the extent of integration into mainstream society and to find out their economical and nutritional status. Finally I give recommendations to responsible governing bodies for how to preserve this unique diminishing community.

History of Kaffirs in Sri Lanka

It seems appropriate, at this stage to append a brief history of the movement of Africans to the Indian Ocean Region leading up to the time that the Kaffirs first made their appearance in Sri Lanka. Jayasuriya and Pankhurst (2003), in their edited book “The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean” gives a detailed description of the history of the African people in the Indian Ocean region.

The movement of African people to non – African lands especially to the Indian Ocean region either forcibly or by their free - will has a long history and was not merely a consequence of the slave trade. From the 13th century onward Africans have come to India as policemen, traders, bureaucrats, clerics, body guards, soldiers, servants and sailors (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst, 2003, p 7).

Ethiopians and other African people were generally referred to by three names in Asia. Particularly, in India they are known as the *Habshi*, *Sidi* or *Kaffir*. Habshi was a corruption of Habash the Arabic term for Abyssinia and is believed to derive from Habashat, a group of Semitic people that lived in northern Tegray in present day Ethiopia (Abyssinians). They were considered to be brave soldiers, loyal servants, beautiful wives and concubines. The term Sidi is derived from the Arabic ‘Saiyid’ or “master”. However in India it was used as a designation for African slaves (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst, 2003, p 8).

The term Kaffir, sometimes is also spelt in English *Caffer* or *Caffree* was a rendering of the Arabic Kaffir or Infidel. The word was used by the Arabs and Portuguese to mean a Pagan or Black. Sometimes it is used for slaves irrespective of their colour or race and for anyone not of the Muslim faith (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst, 2003, p 8).

By the 4th century, the entire African Region had become a major source of slaves for markets from Europe to China. Until the 8th century the slave trade appeared to be both small and intermittent but came to a peak during the Arab empire from the 9th to 11th centuries. European involvement in the slave trade was intermittent with occasional Portuguese vessels carrying slaves from the Mozambique coast to south Asia, Brazil and Portugal. In the Portuguese sea borne empire which developed in the 16th century, slavery was the solution to the manpower shortage (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst, 2003, p 9).

In the 16th century when the Portuguese develop political economic control over the west coast of India many African slaves were imported from Mozambique. Slaves from the eastern and southern coasts of Africa were taken mainly to the Indian Ocean Region and were used as servants and bodyguards. However slavery is not the only way that Africans came to Sri Lanka. Africans have been trading in Sri Lanka from as early as the 5th century and as warriors in the 13th century (Jayasuriya and Pankhurst, 2003, p 14). During the early Portuguese time in Sri Lanka, Kaffirs were brought as slaves mainly to act as body guards or servants. There were several incidents mentioning this in Sri Lankan history.

In 1620, de Oliveira; a Portuguese captain major operated in Jaffna was recorded to have employed a Kaffir as one of his bodyguards during his battles with Tamils in Nallur (Pieris, 1983, p 135). Again in 1625, in Colombo, a Kaffir slave had been employed to slaughter cattle according to Moorish rites for the wedding of the daughter of a Moorish tailor named Balala (Pieris, 1983, p 169).

Kaffirs in Foreign Armies

The records indicate that after 1630's Kaffirs were brought to Sri Lanka as Portuguese negro slaves trained in war and a Kaffir contingent in the Portuguese army appeared after 1631 (de Silva, 1972, p 232). By 1634 only 280 Kaffirs were left. According to the annual expenditure of Kotte during 1617 – 1638, there was a fixed amount of money allocated for Kaffirs. They were allowed a rice ration of two measures a day and a payment of eighteen xerafims (old currency in Portuguese India and Orient) a year and were also had allowed a certain amount of cloth for their use.

Below is a section taken from annual expenditure of Kotte during 1617 – 1618, showing the allocation for Kaffir expenditure.

“The fixed annual expenditure of Kotte 1617 – 1638

The salary of 280 kaffirs at a <i>fanam</i> a day	- 1,708 xerafims
The rice allowance for 280 kaffirs at 2 measures a day (de Silva, 1972, p 232)	- 2, 800 xerafims”

The Portuguese had used Kaffirs in many of their battles against the Sri Lankan Kings from time to time to overcome the shortage of human power. They became good soldiers because of their bravery, with their physique being tall and strong and their ability to withstand many harsh environmental conditions. The Kaffirs introduce a new weapon to Ceylon- *the assegai* – a short wooden spear with a metal point (de Silva, 1972, p 188).



Figure 1: Assegai (1966.1.114); <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/weapons/index.php/tour-by-region/africa/africa/arms-and-armour-africa-39/index.html>

Arms and Armour Selected objects from the upper gallery
Pitt Rivers Museum(Anthropology and World Archaeology)

There were many records through out the history stating the number of Kaffirs participated in various battles. The Portuguese officials used many strategies to suppress the Sinhalese rebels, and one way was to use Kaffirs to terrorize the Sri Lankan people. One such incidence was when Miguel Ferrao de Castelbranco was appointed as captain major of the field, he led an army composed of 1000 lascarins, 1200 Kaffirs and Canarese and 1000 Portuguese from Colombo on the 5th of January 1632 and entered the four Korales. In Malwana, to make terror among Sinhalese people, had delivered one of the surrendered Sinhalese to the Kaffirs, who cut him up and ate him in the presence of his wife and children and the rest of the surrendered people were given over as slaves to the Portuguese captains (de Silva, 1972, 134p, Pieris, 1983, 191p).

At the end of 1633, Diogo de Mello de Castro, during his search of Maha Asthana who was at Ganetenna had used Kaffirs and Portuguese to scale the few remains of the wall that the Sinhalese had left standing at Menikkadawara. His army composed of 700 Portuguese, 5000 Lscarins and 1000 Kaffirs and Canares had moved in three divisions to impress the Sinhalese (Pieris, 1983, 195p).

In 23 – 24th March 1638, under Fernando de Mendoca Furtado, 900 Portuguese, 5000 lascrins, Topasses, Canarese and Kaffirs participated in the fight in Gannoruwa “Parangi hatana” (Pieris, 1983, 203p).

When the Portuguese needed more man power for the battles with the Sinhalese as well as with Dutch they imported soldiers from India, on the 4th of October 1638, seven galleons had arrived from India to Colombo carrying 300 Portuguese soldiers, 200 Lascarins and 100 Kaffirs (Pieris, 1983, 256p).

In 1640, during the battles between the Portuguese and Dutch in Galle, 323 Portuguese, 1600 Lascarins and 100 Kaffirs with bows and arrows had marched to Galle from Colombo, under the commander of the captain major Francisco de Mendonca Manual (Pieris, 1983, 269p). Captain Manuel Braz had brought another three companies of Portuguese, 80 Kaffirs and 300 Lascarins from Matara (Pieris, 1983, 272p). The Portuguese were defeated by Dutch at that time and the Kaffirs and Canarese in the Portuguese army were taken by Dutch to their side (Pieris, 1983, 280p).

After the Portuguese rule, Sri Lanka was dominated by the Dutch East India Company, The Vereenidge Oost-Indische Company (VOC) for about 150 years from 1658 to 1796. During their ruling period they form the Kaffirs who had been left adrift after Portuguese defeat, into a Labour pool to build their fortresses and some were trained to work in hospitals and other public institutes. The rest worked in rice fields and in houses as domestic helpers. The Dutch too brought Kaffirs from the Cape of Good Hope at different times. They speak Portugal language and most of them were Roman Catholics. They had thick lips, high cheek bones and curly hair. They seldom intermarry with persons of other tribes (Selkirk, 1993, p 75).

They continued to be mentioned with the Dutch forces in the 17th century. In 3rd March 1640, when the Dutch finally captured Galle Fort from the Portuguese, they kept the Kaffirs as slaves to rebuild the town and the fort (Pieris, 1973, p 77). The Kaffirs were taken as slaves or used as soldiers in series of battles between Dutch and Portuguese during the course of time in different places; such as in 5th July 1644 in Negambo under captain Pieter Vinckbooms (Pieris, 1973, p 105), and in 6th July 1658 at Jaffnapatum under commissary Ryckloff van Goens (Pieris, 1973, p 248).

In 1766, some armed Kaffirs in Batticaloa, Tampalakamam had escaped from French and for a long time pillaged and murdered through the district and whole villages were abandoned at the approach of these reputed black cannibals (Pieris, 1995, p 99).

According to the Dutch governor, Van Goens, Jr. around 4,000 Kaffirs were in Colombo in the late 1600s and they helped to build the Dutch fortress in Colombo (Brohier, 2002, p 46). Bertolacci's writing in 1817's calls that it is an interesting fact that about 9000 Kaffirs were imported to Ceylon at different times by the Dutch government (Fernando, 1894). During the early 18th century, the Kaffirs staged an insurrection within the rampart citadel and murdered the Fiscal and his wife. After that incident all the Kaffirs working in the citadel during the day time were ferried across the Beira Lake into a jagged peninsula. They were accommodated there at night in lines and shanties; this place was later come to known as the "Slave Island" (Brohier, 2002, p 47).

With the beginning of the British rule of Sri Lanka in 1766, they too continue to use Kaffirs as soldiers. After the death of king Rajadhi Raja Singhe in August 1798, the *Maha Adigar* (Chief Minister); Pilima Talauve appointed Sri Wikrama Raja Singhe as the next king, However he was disappointed with the king and arranged a secret meeting with the then English governor Frederick North (1798 – 1820) and called English to invade the kingdom. North arranged to purchase Kaffir slaves from Mozambique and Goa as soldiers and wrote to Hobart stating that Kaffirs were expected to be effective in striking terror into the minds of Sinhalese army. Below are the expenses in the purchase of Kaffirs at Goa and then transport from there to Colombo.

"John Wilson, colonel, 4th Ceylon regiment to Bathurat, dated 4th March 1815

70 men at average price of about rxd 175 per man = 13,070
and 8 women at rxd 150 per each

provisions previous to embarkation	=	820
Freight from Goa to Colombo and Insurance	=	3,500
Commission and provisions	=	2,564
		19,954 ”

(Appendix F, Pieris, 1995, p 173 -174)

According to the historian Cordinor’s writing of early British ruling in Ceylon, in 1807 there had been a regiment of 700 Kaffirs in Colombo and their medical records indicating that they had a high mortality rate from consumption and suffered much from “pocky itch” (Brohier, 2002, p 47). In the early decades of the 19th century, the British military service had four regiments in the country and was known as the Ceylon Rifle Regiments. Out of this four, the 3rd Ceylon Regiment which had been doing garrison service at Puttalam was mainly composed of Africans, majority of whom were Kaffirs. With the government’s decision to reduce the Regiment, the majority of the soldiers and camp followers opted to settle at Puttalam with their families. The more energetic people found manual employment in the salt pans as watchers and the others choose to do farming in these harsh environmental conditions (Brohier, 2002, p 40; MLR, 1895, p155).Slavery was abolished in Ceylon in1845.

Kaffirs in Kandyan Army

The Kaffirs were used as slaves or soldiers in the last dynasty of Sinhalese kings as well. From the mid seventeenth century, Asian and African troops deserting from the European armies or forced into service after capture formed the largest contingent of foreign troops in the Kandyan army (Army belong to the King that ruled the Kingdom of Kandy) . In July 1602, when the Dutch envoy, General Van Spilbergen visited Kandy (Yogasundram, 2006, p 165), he had seen number of foreign troops such as Turks, Moors and Kaffirs in

the Kandyan army. Kaffirs serving in the Kandyan forces may have taken refuge with the Kandyans or taken by force from Portuguese when they were defeated at different times (Ferguson, 1927, p 381; Wickremesekara, 2004, p 62). When Prince Vijayapala defected to the Portuguese in 1640, 50 Africans were reported to accompany him (Wickremesekara, 2004, p 62). The war poem “Ingirisi Hatana” written in the 19th century indicated that the African soldiers in the Kandyan army were commanded by the Kandyan noble Vattawe Dissawa (Wickremesekara, 2004, p 60). During the Dutch rule as well, large number of Kaffir deserters had joined the Kandyan army. Robert Knox in his records indicated that the Africans had become trusted body guards of the Kadyan King. In addition, about 80 Kaffirs had taken part in the army that surrounded the retreating British force in 1803 and in 1810 about 200 Kaffirs were reported to be serving in the Kandyan force, some of them were assigned to the task of butchering the British captives in 1803 (Wickremesekara, 2004, p 63).

The Music of Kaffirs

The songs of Kaffirs are commonly known as “*baila*”, the word “*Kafferinhoe*” is another term synonymously used with the term *baila* (the word was spelled as *Cafferina* by Fernanado, 1894, but it was corrected as *Cafferinhoe* by the MLR in 1895). However, the terms “*baile*”, “*bail*” and “*bayle*” are used in Spanish, Mexican, Italian and Portuguese languages to denote a type of dance and not of music. In Sri Lanka it is used to denote a particular type of music, which was brought to Sri Lanka with the Portuguese. According to Ariyaratna, (1985), the term *baila* is used to call a type of dance and the word *kaffreinhoe* is used to call a type of music, thus according to him the *kafferinhoes*

are the songs the Portuguese sang when they danced *baila*. In another study conducted by Jackson, (1975, p 17), showed that many verses sung to these dance tunes, known as “*baila*” are derived from the sixteenth century Portuguese *romanceiros* and *cancioneiros*, which are collections of ballad verses and songs. The *romanceiro* material was spread by the Portuguese throughout their overseas contacts including Asia. The creole verses in east coast Ceylonese communities are derived both from the oral tradition of the *romanceiro* brought by the Portuguese and from religious poetry and Church rites. Fernando (1894) states, *kafferinhoes* used today were recognized and created by three groups of people during the Portuguese time, one group was the Portuguese mechanics; generally applied to a class that was almost exclusively devoted to the lower crafts or artisanship. They were usually shoemakers, tailors or blacksmiths. The descendents of these people can be still seen in Batticaloa and known as Batticaloa Burghers. Their age old *baila* tradition is still restored by Portuguese in order to signify their national cultural identity (Ariyaratna, 1985, p 113). The second group was the Kaffirs, soldiers employed by the Portuguese and Dutch. They have associated closely with the mechanics by being Roman Catholics and speaking the same Portuguese language (MLR, 1895, p 133). The descendents of these people can be still seen in Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Puttalam. The third group was the less educated, low income Sinhalese or Tamil people who were associated with the mechanics by marriage.

Apart from *baila* and *kafferinhoe* tradition extant among Kaffirs, there is a another tradition known as “*manja*”. Especially the Kaffirs in Puttalam called their music as *manja*. According to M.H. Goonetilleke, this is a special type of Portuguese songs which were sung during weddings and known in the modern Portuguese language by the term

“*marchas*” (Goonetilleke, 1983, p 13, cited in Ariyaratne, 1985, p 29). During Kaffir weddings in addition to cakes and vine, manja is an essential part of the wedding ceremony. Unlike *baila or kaffreinhoes*, *manja* songs have few lyrics, just five to six lines or less that they repeat over and over again.

The preference of mechanics to marry Sinhalese women can be clearly seen in one of their *kaffreinhoes* song entitled “*Cingalee Nona*”

Cingalee Nona! Cingalee Nona!
Eu kere kasa,
Porta ninkere, orta ninkere,
Figa namas da,
Figa namas da, none,
Figa namas da

(Fernando, 1894, p 186)

Sinhalese lady! Sinhalese lady!
I wish to marry,
Your home I want not, your lands I want not,
Only your daughter give,
Only your daughter give, lady
Only your daughter give.

(Fernando, 1894, p 187)

By designating the term *kaffreinhoes* to these songs, imply that the Kaffirs had contributed much to the origin and spread of these songs in Sri Lanka than the other two groups. Devar Surya Sena’s (1961, p 23) indication that Kaffirs were the majority of the mechanics who sung and danced to the tunes of *kaffreinhoes* give further evidence to this. The *Kaffreinhoes* and *baila* are still immensely popular and sung and danced by Sinhalese at parties, where Sinhalese words are composed extempore and sung to the *baila* tunes (Surya Sena, 1961, p 23).

Sunanda Mahendra, in his resume “An inquiry into Baila and Kafferinna” to the book by Ariyaratne, (1985) gives a detailed description of *baila* and *kafferinhoe*. He surmised that with the gradual waning off the elders of the *kaffir* and Portuguese community, these musical traditions will also undergo a natural death. This is due to the fact, that the *baila and kafferinhoe* music form extant among the Portuguese and Kaffir communities have been regarded as debased and steps have not been taken to resuscitate or preserve them. According to him, one of the reasons for the debasement of *baila and kafferinhoe* could be that from the very beginning it did not gain recognition from the intellectuals, but only among Portuguese soldiers, *Kaffirs* who were associated with slavery and military services and illiterate local and foreign masses (Ariyaratna, 1985, p 114).

As a result of this, the lyrical tradition of *baila and kafferinhoe* did not develop as a literary form. Secondly as it is developed only within a 6/8 tempo, the very form stagnated. Hence it is confined to mere festivities of merriment. The disinterest of the popular *baila* singers to develop their lyrical composition and the rejection on the part of the elite masses also contributed to the stagnation of this musical form (Ariyaratna, 1985, p 114).

Though the *Baila, kafferinhoe* is a lighter form of musical type, it embraces a host of musical traditions. Primarily it includes the elements of Portuguese music which is vastly influenced by the Spanish music. Furthermore, the Asian musical elements that came via North Africa which is present in Spanish music could be seen in *baila and kaffereinhoe* as well (Ariyaratna, 1985, p 115).

Some of the musical instruments used as accompaniments for old *baila* songs were violin, Spanish guitar/ tenor violin, mandoline and rabana drum. The older people used the term

“*ravikinna*” for violin and “*banderinha*” for mandoline (Fernando, 1894, p199; Ariyaratna, 1985, p 116). The term “*viaule*” was commonly used to denote Spanish guitar by the local elders at the time. At present Oregon, electric guitar, trumpet, Saxophone, tamerine and drum sets are used for *baila and kaffereinhoe* (Ariyaratna, 1985, p 116).

Methodology

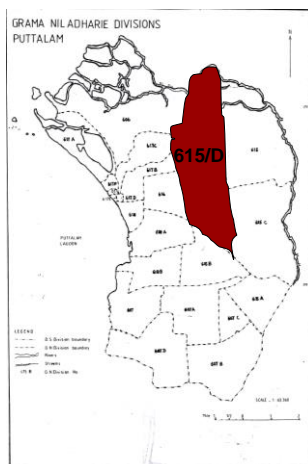
This study is limited to the Kaffir people living in Sirambiadiya area where a significant number of Kaffir people are segregated into this single location. In Sri Lanka Kaffirs are distributed mainly among three districts; Puttlam, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. However their numbers are quite few, amounting to little over a thousand in the whole country. They are more or less scattered in each district except in Puttlam, Sirambiadiya. This was the main reason to select this as the study area.

Study area

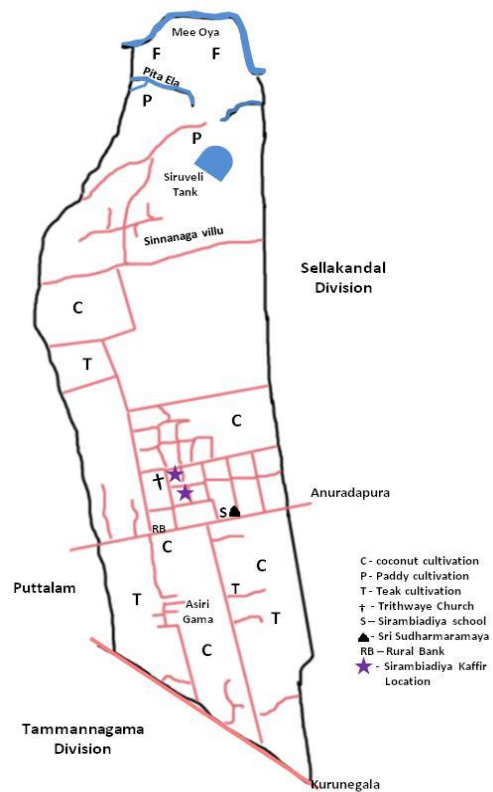
Sirambiadiya village is located in the North Western Province, in Puttlam District (N 08.03907⁰ and E 079.87247⁰). It belongs to the Puttlam secretariat division and 615/D Grama Niladari Division (Sirambiadiya) (Fig. 2).



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 2: Puttalam District map (a), Puttalam GN divisions (b) and Sirambiadiya Division (c). (red lines roads).

To get to the place where they live, one has to go 3km on the Puttalam Anuradhapura main road and turn left at the 3rd mile post to St. Thrithvaye Mawatha near St. Mary's statue (Fig. 3) and walk about 100m.



Figure 3: Landmarks to find the Kaffir residences

The total population of the Sirambiadiya GN division consists of 1,960 people belonging to 495 families. Out of this 62 (3%) people are of Kaffir origin (Fig. 4).

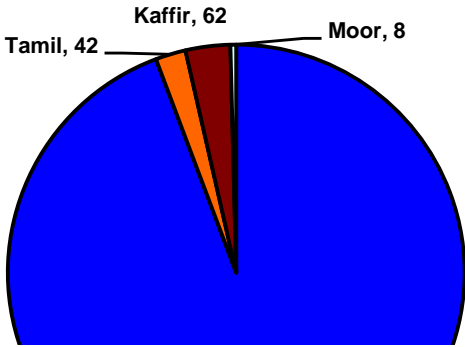


Figure 4: Population of Sirambiadiya by ethnicity

Sample size

Fifteen families with original Kaffir people are living in two adjacent lands in the Sirambiadiya village. Nine families are living in one land compound and six families in the adjacent area (Fig. 2c). Some of the older children were married and living with the parents making the total number of families 21. Some children who get married have gone to live in other areas of the country and are not included in the study. Therefore the main 15 families including the children were selected as sample size to get information for the questionnaires.

Data collection

Primary data

Primary data for cultural practices and economic status were collected using a questionnaire. We used these fifteen families (one member of each family) to gather information for the questionnaires. Information was always collected from the person of Kaffir origin of the family. In depth interviews were done with three people to get more data on their cultural practices and language. Biometrics were taken from individuals, measuring height, weight and mid-arm circumferences. Height and mid-arm circumference were taken using a standard measuring tape, weight was measured using a weighing scale. Physical measurements were taken from sixteen children (9 girls and 7 boys; ages ranging from two years to 16 years) and from twenty adults (15 females and 5 males; ages ranging from 19 to 80 years). Morphological characteristics noted down from the adults and children of unmixed and mixed marriages were skin colour, hair form, nose and lips shape.

Secondary data

Essential secondary data to the study was collected from Puttalam Divisional Secretariat (Puttalam GN Divisions map and demographic data) and Sirambiadiya Grama Niladari Office (Sirambiadiya divisional map and Sirambiadiya population data). Historical data about the Kaffir people were collected from published history books, research articles and from online data bases.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire data and body measurement data were entered separately into Excel sheets and analyzed separately for each question, calculating percentages and averages accordingly. This analyzed data was used to prepare graphs and tables that were included in the text.

Results

Family information

At present there are four generations of Kaffir people living in Sirambiadiya. The oldest person being eighty years and two others over seventy years of age. One of these woman was married to a Burgher male and two to Kaffir males. The second generation (children of the first generation) being in their forties and fifties , consisted of twelve people, with seven females married to Sinhalese males and two males married to Sinhalese females, one female married to a Tamil male and two females married to two Kaffir males. Except for the two Kaffir families, all the second generation marriages were mixed marriages and the majority were with Sinhalese people. The third generation (children of second generation) consists of children and young adults with ages ranging from two years to thirty one years (twenty seven people). Out of this, ten were married and of them eight were married to Sinhalese people and two were married to Kaffir males. However one family is living in United Kingdom now and another family is living in Colombo permanently; therefore their numbers were not included in the head count. The fourth generation (children of the older third generation) consists of 13 children (eight girls and four boys).

In total, there are 73 people living in Sirambiadiya at present, Out of this 60% represent females and 40% represent males consisting of 21 families.

a) First Generation Kaffir People



**Marcus Jerom
Emaliyana**

Mary Elizabeth

Joseph Elias

b) Second Generation Kaffir People



Jenni Florence

Jessi

Juliet Josephine

Mary Jenet



Shelin Korati

Elizabeth Joice

Mari Jesintha

Sherin Alex

Lina Regina



Justin Sevier

Peter Louise

c) Third Generation Kaffir People



d) Fourth Generation Kaffir People



Figure 5: Morphological variation among different Kaffir generations

Morphological characters

The typical Kaffir morphological characters that can be identified are dark black (ebony) skin colour, wide nose, large protruding lips, high forehead and curly/ kinky hair. However, not all the Kaffir people show all of the characteristics. The characteristics appeared in varies degrees in people due to their assimilation with other ethnic groups by intermarriage.

The first generation Kaffir people show all of the above mentioned characteristics. The second generation Kaffir people too retained most of the characteristics. However most of the third generation children except for the children whose both parents are Kaffirs, shows mixed characters. The children of Kaffir parents still retain most of the Kaffir characteristics. However there are only two such families with six children. All the other third generation children show mix characteristics. The children of the fourth generation from mixed marriages hardly show any Kaffir characteristics except for the hair. In these families, one parent is partly Kaffir in origin and they are all married to non Kaffir (Sinhalese) partners. The children where both parents are Kaffirs (even though the parents have a mixed origin) show some degree of Kaffir characteristics (Fig. 5d). This results in the children having less Kaffir characteristics. Thus the majority of third generation children and most of the fourth generation children have, light skin, not so curly hair and narrow noses (Fig. 5 c and d). When taken into account there are only about twenty people which show typical Kaffir characteristics and they are mainly adults.

Average number of children, age at menarche and inter birth interval

Of the twenty one families that live in Sirambiadiya, the average number of children per family is 2.09. However the number of children in a family ranges from one to four. The majority of families (ten families) have two children in them and only one family has four children.

The average age at menarche for the Kaffir women is 12.8 years. Nonetheless, the age at menarche ranges from 11 to 15 years. When consider the inter-birth interval, the inter-birth interval between the first and second child ranges from one to ten years. A ten year inter birth interval was recorded only from one female. Hence without her the average inter birth interval between the first and second child is 2.9 years. The inter-birth interval between the second and third child ranges from five to eight years and between the third and forth child is three years.

Education level

Eight of the adults have attended school up to Grade 10 (Ordinary level). Five have gone up to Grade 8 and two have gone up to Grade 5. Only two have gone up to Advanced level. All the children of school going age in the third and fourth generation are going to their village school - The Sirambiadiya Vidyalaya . None of the children in the Sirambiadiya so far have been able to acquire enough marks to get selected for higher education (university degrees).

Occupation and Monthly Income

Only 60% of the adults are working in Sirambiadiya village. Most of them, from both sexes, work as daily paid laborers or as helpers in nearby houses or shops and in

Puttalam town. All are receiving very low wages. Some are receiving as little as 250 rupees per day, and according to them the jobs are not regular.

Among the regular job holders, four are teaching, doing carpentry, masonry or selling lottery tickets, which generate a considerable more income than the rest. Four families receive “Samurdhi”, a monthly subsidy given by the government to low income families. Others, mainly housewives, maintain home vegetable gardens to supply the daily food needs of the family. Two families maintain a small scale chicken farm to supply their own meat requirements and sell the excess. Another family sells coconuts to generate income.

The majority of families belong to the very low income category. Seventy three percent of the families receive a monthly income of less than 10,000 rupees. Thirteen percent receive between 10,000 to 20,000 rupees and seven percent receive 20,000 to 30,000 rupees. And another seven percent receive a monthly income of more than 30,000 rupees.

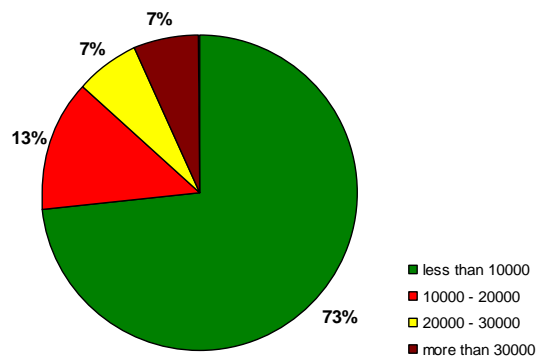
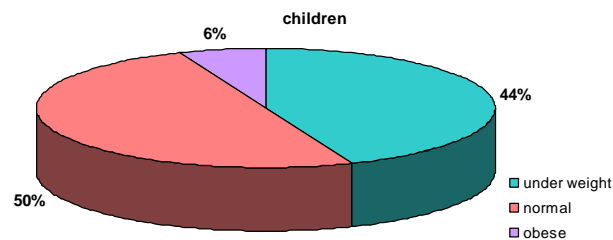


Figure 6: Monthly income of the families

Body Mass Index

Height and weight were measured from eighteen children (8 boys and 10 girls) between two to sixteen years of age and from twenty adults (5 males and 15 females) between 19 to 73 years of age, to calculate the Body Mass Index (BMI) of each individual. In children below 18 years of age, BMI was calculated individually to their specific age and sex, but in people over 18 years, a general formula was used. Calculated BMI values showed that, all the children below 12 years are under weight (4 girls and 3 boys), 8 are in the normal weight range for their age and sex (5 girls and 3 boys) and 1 child were in the obese range.

Among adults, BMI values under 18.5 is indicated as under weight, values between 18.5 – 24.9 as normal, values 25.0 – 29.9 were indicated as over weight and values over 30.0 enter the obese category. The average BMI of Kaffir females was $21.75 \pm 3.95 \text{ kgm}^{-2}$ and the adult males was $21.08 \pm 2.08 \text{ kgm}^{-2}$. Sixty percent of Kaffir adults measured were of normal weight range. Twenty five percent were in the under weight category and 15% were in the over weight range. In the under weight category except one male all were females. In the over weight category all the individuals were females.



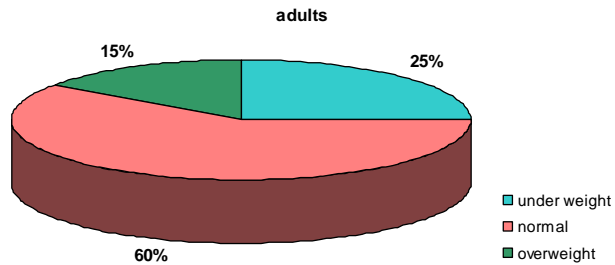


Figure 7: Percentage distribution of BMI in children and adults

Food habits of the Kaffir

African influences cannot be seen in their food habits. They do not have special types of food that are unique only to them, instead they tend to use the same types of food for their main meals and for special occasions as the rest of the people in the country.

According to the data, 73% of the families mainly eat rice and curry for breakfast, and others in addition to rice, eat bread, string hoppers, hoppers, pittu or roti. However all families eat only rice and curry for lunch and dinner.

For special occasions, being Roman Catholic they prepare traditional foods of the Roman Catholics. However due to their intermixing with other ethnic groups, especially Sinhalese and Tamils, the food prepared for special occasions such as weddings, funerals and Christmas, represent an admixture of foods from different ethnic groups.

For weddings and Christmas, the wedding cake and the Christmas cake are their special food. In addition, they prepare authentic Sri Lankan sweets mainly made by Sinhalese and Tamil communities for their cultural festivals (Fig. 8). These foods are not very popular in typical Roman Catholic weddings or during Christmas in other parts of the country. Some of these foods are Konda Kavum (oil cake) made out of rice flour,

coconut syrup (honey) and a few other ingredients. Kokis, deep fried batter of flour and coconut milk. Aluwa made of rice, sugar, milk, butter, spices (cardamom, cloves). It has the form of diamond shaped pieces. Mung kavum (green gram cake) made out of rice flour, mung flour, treacle, ghee, spices. Dodol made out of coconut milk, red rice flour, jaggery and cashew nuts.



Figure 8: Traditional sweets of Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic communities

Main dishes prepared for lunch and dinner during special occasions are fried rice, or special rice cooked with coconut milk with chicken and vegetable curries. Food items prepared for funerals usually are rice cooked with dried fish and pumpkin curry, a common type of meal prepared by most of the ethnic groups in the country.

Common diseases

According to the informants, the most common diseases they acquire are mumps and chicken pox. They are hesitant to say the names of these diseases and just referred to them as “*deiyange leda*” (diseases caused by gods). The next most common diseases are high blood pressure, diabetes and asthma. Cholesterol, gastritis, kidney diseases and eye diseases are recorded in low frequency. One person informed us of having a thyroid deficiency.

Self-medication for common illnesses

In any ethnic community it is common practice to use self medication to treat common ailments. People in Sirambiadiya too use plant products that could be obtained from their surrounding environment to treat self-diagnosed disorders or symptoms. However none of these methods used by the Kaffir community are unique for them; people from other ethnic communities are using these as well.

For mumps and chicken pox, they let the person sleep on neem leaves (*Azadirachta indica*) during the period of the disease. Also they pray to St. Sebastian for seven or eight days for quick recovery from the diseases. And they do not bring meat to the house for the entire time period. Neighbors are informed of the disease by hanging a branch of neem on the gate.

For high blood pressure, they prepare the juice from crushed curry leaves (*Murraya koenigii*) and heat it slightly before drinking. In addition they eat mallum made from swamp pea (Kathurumurunga - *Sesbania grandiflora*), and passion fruit (*Passiflora edulis*). Also porridge (*kanda*) is prepared from the leaves of balloon vine (*velpenela-Cardiospermum halicacabum*), sessile joy weed (*mukunuwenna - Alternanthera sessilis*) and Indian sarsaparilla (*iramusu - Hemidesmus indicus*).

For asthma, the person inhales the steam coming from boiling coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), Malabar nut (Ada thoda - *Adhatoda zeylanica*) and paspanguwa (mixture of five herbal remedies- ginger, veniwegeta, pathapadagam, long pepper, galengo, black pepper, the roots of elabatu) together.

For headaches coconut oil heated is applied with turmeric (*Curcuma longa*), curry leaves, garlic and neem to the head. For stomach aches in children, pulp from the

rhizome of sweet flag (wada kaha- *Acorus calamus*) is prepared with water and drunk. Or a mixture of crushed ginger and black pepper with honey is given. For diarrhea roasted cumin seeds are boiled with water and the liquid is given with honey.

Rites of Passage

Birth and Naming Ceremony

People over the age of 50 were typically born at home. While all the people younger than that were born in hospitals. Naming of the new born child is done according to the Roman Catholic religion. In earlier days the names were given by the priest in the church and he mostly used names taken from the Bible, or according to the month they were born. They were mainly given English names. Nowadays, newborn infants have to get registered at the hospital before being discharged, therefore they were named earlier. Infants are baptized on the seventh day after birth; this is done by the priest at church. Usually two people are selected as god-parents at this time. Now, since most of the Kaffir people are married to Sinhalese people, most of the third and fourth generation children have Sinhalese names (eg. Chamara Madhushanka, Nirmala Kumari, Bagya Lakmali, Dulan Mihiranga). However children whose parents are both Kaffirs still use English names (Oliable Susan, Moksha Gabriel). In the older generation, naming was different and they typically used the father's first name as the children's surname. For example the son of Peter Anton Sarath is Dulan Peter Anton, his daughters are Lakshmi Peter Anton and Dilki Peter Anton. However in families where a Kaffir woman is married to a Sinhalese man, the children too take the father's surname. George Maria Jesintha is

married to Marumestany Fernando Warnakula, and for example, the names of their children are, Nirosan Sandaruwan Warnakula and Niranjala Sandamali Warnakula.

Puberty Rituals

Different puberty rituals are practiced according to the family, i.e. whether both parents are of Kaffir origin or mixed by marriages. The families of mixed marriages have incorporated Sinhalese rituals to their traditional way. In families where both parents were Kaffirs, the child was asked to have a bath the first moment they came to know about it. Four families were informed that they are not concerned about auspicious times to give the first bath but keep the child seven days in a room. The majority of families informed us that they keep the child inside a room for seven days and bath him/her at an auspicious time given by an astrologer. These are parents from mixed marriages. During these seven days they were always with an adult and were not left alone by themselves. They were kept from being seen by males including his/her own father.

In earlier times the first bath was given by a Dhobi woman (redhi nanda - a woman belonging to a group of people who are specialized in washing cloths). This was done according to an auspicious time before dawn. Since it is difficult to find women of this profession nowadays, usually the mother or an aunt gives the first bath outside the house. After being bathed, the child is taken inside the house facing the east, and before entering inside, a coconut is broken at the entrance of the door. Afterwards a small party is given to the relatives and neighbors. Some families invite their non-Kaffir neighbors during the daytime and invite their Kaffir relatives at night.

During the first seven days while the child is kept inside the room, she/he was given special food. Meat is not given, mainly rice and vegetables. Other than these items, raw eggs with sesame oil, jaggery, special sugar cubes called sukiri and lots of fruits are given.

Marriage

Most of the marriages were decided by the young couples themselves, and not by the parents. There were only two arranged marriages in the village by proposals. Since there are few Kaffir males in the second generation, most Kaffir females married Sinhalese males. Being Roman Catholics the marriage ceremony was always performed at the church. Once the couple decides to get married, they give their names to the priest in the church and within three months the marriage takes place. Before the marriage, the church, where the couple has to attend, conducted a few classes for them. In case of mixed marriages, there is a form to sign at the church where the couple agrees to baptize the children. The children take the father's surname in mixed marriages.

The marriage ceremony is performed at the church; the attire for the bride varies according to the personal preference of the bride and groom. In earlier marriages they wore a long dress or a maxi, at present some wear sarees as well. However, the colour is always white.

After the wedding ceremony, the couple and the relatives go to the bride's house for the reception. There they cut the wedding cake and talk to relatives. Lunch is arranged at the bride's house. Kaffir people do not hold the reception at the hotels or restaurants, only at home.

In case of mixed marriages, the two families perform the marriage ceremony twice, according to their respected ethnic traditions. Once at church according to Catholic tradition and then again at home according to Sinhalese tradition.

Afterwards, the newly married couple visits relatives of both sides to pay their respect. During these visits the couple is welcomed warmly and receive gifts as well.

Funeral tradition

In earlier times, the deceased person was buried on the same day. Therefore embalming was not necessary. At present, the body is kept in the house for about two to three days and so needs to be embalmed first. The deceased person is dressed in clothing selected by the family, mostly long sleeved shirts or long skirts and blouses. A religious object is usually placed in the hands of the deceased person. A priest comes every day to pray when the body was at home. The funeral rituals (burial) are not carried out on Tuesdays and Fridays. On the way to the cemetery, bells and flags are carried in front of the cortege.

Food is not cooked at the house while the body remains at home. Neighbors provide food for the family. After the deceased is buried in the cemetery, the family invites relatives and friends to the home and a simple meal is provided. This meal is called “mala batha”, where rice is served with dry fish and pumpkin curry. Mala batha is first offered to the people who dug the grave, as a token of appreciation for their hard work.

On the third day after the person was deceased an alms giving called “*kanda dane*” consisting of porridge with honey, milk rice and banana was offered to beggars and widows. Again on the 8th day, 3rd month and after one year the family members visit the

cemetery and light candles and pray. Afterwards alms were given to poor people, beggars and people with small children.

Religious festivals

The Kaffir people being Roman Catholics, celebrate all the main Christian festivals. One such festival is Good Friday, which falls on the 6th of April. This marks the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and his death at the Calvary. This is followed by Easter Sunday on the 8th of April, when they celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his crucifixion at the Calvary. The other main festival is Christmas. For all these three main festivals they go to the main Church they in Puttalam town for the morning services. Usually they wear new cloths to these occasions.

The other main festival is the village church festival, which starts around mid-May. At this time, the whole village is divided into five sections and the statue of St. Mary is taken to each and every house for blessing. The main festival is held on the 3rd of June.

Apart from these, the Kaffir people go to church every Sunday morning for the service and there is Sunday school for the children to learn about their religion.

The other important aspect of the church is that each family has their own coconut tree in the yard, where they have planted it and continue to take care of it themselves.



Figure 9: Village church (St. Thrithvaye church) and the coconut trees

Language and Music

All of the people are fluent in the Sinhalese language. The medium of language at school and in church is Sinhalese. The older people, especially the first and second generation, can speak in English and know a bit of their unique Portuguese language. A seventy-three year old woman was fluent in all four languages (Sinhalese, Tamil, English and Portuguese). Eighty percent of the first and second generation adults can use at least three languages including Portuguese.

The Kaffirs, having been associated with the Portuguese for long time, have adopted many aspects of Portuguese culture and speak a Sri Lankan version of Creole based on Portuguese, which is different from the modern Portuguese language. Only the first and second generation Kaffir people know this language, and even they cannot maintain a long time conservation, only short sentences. Many know only some words. None of them know the grammar nor do they have an alphabet with which to write it with. The younger generation does not speak the language and what ever remains of the language

might become extinct with the passing out of older generation. Their language is similar to the old Portuguese language use by the Batticaloa Burghers.

Some of the Portuguese words they use can be seen below.

Portuguese word	English Meaning
<i>argu</i>	water
<i>kume</i>	eat
<i>arose</i>	rice
<i>arose kume</i>	eating rice
<i>Bathika kanda</i>	Coming to the shop
<i>vigirinna</i>	Girl
<i>rapan</i>	Boy
<i>Kiri aansa</i>	small boy
<i>Kiri aansa noma</i>	Carry the small boy
<i>buupura</i>	Buffalo
<i>gali</i>	Chicken
<i>Bon anusi</i>	Good night
<i>anivi</i>	Come here
<i>Awu pai</i>	Grand mother
<i>Awu mai</i>	Grand father

The Kaffirs perform African songs in a creolized Portuguese version. The Kaffir people in Sri Lanka are famous for their unique songs and dance style commonly known as *baila or kaffrinha*. However the Kaffirs in Sirambiadiya call their music as *manja*.

Unlike *baila or kaffrinha*, these songs have few lyrics, just five to six lines or less that they repeat over and over again. They start the songs with a slow beat and increase it gradually, while at the later stages it is increased to a high tempo. When it reaches to the climax, most of the Kaffirs come to the center of the floor and start dancing.



Figure 10: The Kaffir singing and dancing

They use very simple musical instruments such as drums and the tambourine-like rabana, or common household items like polished coconut shells, a bottle and some coins. Both men and women play these instruments and they take turns when others dance during the latter part of the song. The songs are mainly sung during weddings or when they gather for occasions such as birthday parties or Christmas.



Figure 11: Musical Instruments used by the Kaffirs

However as a special ethnic group in Sri Lanka, these Kaffir people get invited to perform at various exhibitions and many cultural events in the country. Other than that they get invited to perform at hotels as a tourist attraction and in various other institutions like universities. They have formed a music band called “*Kaffir Manja*” with about ten members to stage their songs in these special occasions. Recently, the group Kaffir Manja released their maiden musical album called “*Kaffir Sthrela*” which is sponsored by the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), created by Thidora. These activities provide an additional income for these low income families.

Discussion

Movement of Africans from their native land is not always by force or/and against their will. Presence of people of African descent has been reported from many parts of the Asian region as far back as the 1st century. Abyssinians have been trading in South Asia from the 1st century onward indicating free movement of Africans in Asia. It was reported that during the 5th century Abyssinians had trade relationships with Sri Lanka mainly on the Western coast in *Matota* (de Silva Jayasuriya, 2008. p 02). However archaeological and genetic evidences indicated even earlier dispersions dating back to 40,000 to 50,000 years where African people began migrating across the Middle East and South Asia to populate Eurasia (Ali, 2011). Even before the western invasions, Arabs have been engaging in the slave trade in different parts in Africa and sold Africans for different types of work such as servants, nurses, body guards, soldiers etc... The western invasion to Africa and Asia with commercial intentions changed the existing social, cultural and economic settings of most countries in these two continents. It was the time when the Africans were taken in large numbers as slaves to Atlantic as well as Indian Ocean regions. As a result, the Africans have been integrating with different kinds of foreign communities such as Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and people from other western countries who joined the Portuguese, Dutch and English armies as soldiers, and many other Asian people during their numerous journeys as slaves or soldiers across Asia. These conditions paved the way for them to incorporate new cultural practices into their own. As the case in Sri Lanka some such notable additions to the Kaffirs are Roman

Catholicism and the Creole based Portuguese language. With time, it became a part of their culture, as can be seen in the Kaffirs and Portuguese Burghers of Sri Lanka.

The Africans were moved from the African continent not only to the Middle East and South Asia but to South East Asia, Japan and China as well (de Silva Jayasuriya, 2008. p 02). It was estimated that during the 300-year period between 1600 to 1900 about 5,510,000 slaves were taken from the African continent to the Indian Ocean region (Collins, 2008, p 59).

As a result, the Africans were called by different names in different countries over time across the Asian region. In medieval Arabic sources, all the inhabitants of tropical Africa belong to the *Sudan*, the *Habasha*, *Zandj* or the *Nuba* groups. The term *Sudan* referred to all people who are black irrespective of their place of origin. The Ethiopians were known as *Habasha*, and *Zandj* mostly referred to people from East Africa. Africans in Muscat were known as *Habshees*. In the Middle East too they were known by different names. In Arabia they were known as the *Ahabish* or *Takruuni*, in Southern Oman as the *Sambo*, and in Qatar as the *Abid*. In South Asian countries such as Pakistan they were known as *Sidi*, *Sindri*, *Shidi*, *Baluchi*, *Makrani*, *Syah*, *Dada*, *Gulam* or *Zangibari*, in India as *Sidi*, *Habshi*, *Kaffir* and *Chaush*, in Sri Lanka as *Kaffir*, *Kapiri* or *Kapili* and the Maldives as *Boburu*. In South East Asian countries such as Indonesia they were referred to as *Orang Belanda Hitam* – Black Dutchman, and in China as *K'unlun* (de Silva Jayasuriya, 2008. p 13 – 27). Where ever they were taken, the Africans were neither completely isolated from the main society, nor did they completely merge with the local population. According to Basu (2008, p 224), wherever the *Sidi* are settled, they seem to have acquired the local language, local forms of social classification and/or religious practices, while at the same

time retaining a social image of their community as being African and therefore doing things differently from their neighbors. They were regarded as low and it was not required to treat them respectfully (Basu, 2008. p 224). This is true to some degree for the Sri Lankan Kaffirs too.

Kaffir people have been living in Sri Lanka for about five centuries; however they have never received recognition as being a part of Sri Lanka's ethnic community. This could be mainly due to the fact that the Kaffir people are not natives, like the indigenous Veddha community of Sri Lanka. Also it is not the Sri Lankan government that was responsible for bringing this small minority to the country. Thus they remain as a forgotten minority community. After the abolition of slavery in 1845, many Kaffir people who worked for the British went back to their own countries, however a few opted to stay in Sri Lanka and settled down in different places in the country.

At present two main Kaffir communities can be seen in Sri Lanka, one each in the Batticaloa and Trincomalee Districts and the second group in the Puttalam district. Puttalam Kaffirs can be found in Sirambiadiya village. The Kaffirs in Trincomalee and Batticaloa Districts speak mainly the Tamil language and have assimilated more with the Tamil community there. This can be seen in the Portuguese Burghers as well, they too are fluent in Tamil. However the Kaffir people in Puttalam are different. The Puttalam Kaffirs have assimilated more with the Sinhalese community by intermarrying with the Sinhalese. Yet this is different from the earlier records, which say that they had seldom intermarried with other communities (MLR, 1894, p 133; Selkirk, 1993). However at present more than 90% of the marriages are with people outside of their community. According to Sherin Alex, in Siambiadiya from the second generation onwards very few

males were born into the families and most of the children were females. As a result they had no option but to marry people from outside their community. One of the disadvantages of this is due to the intermixing with the other communities, the younger Kaffir generations are losing their typical African morphological characteristics as can be clearly seen in the fourth generation. The Kaffirs are proud of their African ancestry and are trying hard to keep what ever that is left of it. At present only the first and second generation Kaffir people show the typical African characters. At this rate in another three to four generations time the African characters could totally disappear from these people.

In addition, older Kaffir generations had their own language that they commonly shared with the Portuguese Burghers; which is a version of Creole based Portuguese. When they were first brought to the country by the Portuguese as slaves or soldiers in the early 17th century they did not have much contact with the native people in the country, but mainly remained with other Portuguese soldiers and as a result they learned the language the Portuguese used at that time. Portuguese must have been the mode of communication between the captive Kaffirs and Portuguese officials during their long ocean voyages and their stay in the country. With time when they were absorbed into the main society, they stopped using Portuguese and began to use either Sinhalese or Tamil, according to the place in the country where they lived. It might have been more advantageous to learn the language of the local majority, Sinhalese or Tamil, for communication in their day-to-day life. In addition, because of their small numbers they could only keep their native language active among themselves. Its usage further became limited when they started using Sinhalese or Tamil medium at schools and at work. Moreover, the language was kept as an oral tradition that was passed from one generation to another and lacked an

alphabet for writing or proper grammar. Since the majority of the older Kaffirs were illiterate and worked mainly as soldiers or slaves they had no means or an interest to preserve the language and started to use the languages that are common in the country. As a result only the older generation of Kaffirs or Portuguese Burghers can speak their native language. They too cannot maintain a conversation in that language alone. Most are limited to words or phrases and many are included in their songs. However they have realized the importance of the language and their songs and are now trying to keep it alive among themselves. They are very protective of their language and songs and hardly let anyone outside their community get detail information. When asked, they replied that this was due to some past bad experiences where outsiders have come and gathered information and used it for their own financial purposes, neglecting the needs of the Kaffirs. According to Pinto (2008, p 150), the Sidds of East African origin living in India too have not been able to retain their original culture or language –Swahili. Non of the Sidds in India today speak Swahili but use the local dialects like Urdu, Konkani or Kannada, according to the place where they live.

At present there are only about a little over 1000 Kaffirs in Sri Lanka. During the Portuguese time only small numbers were brought and they were scattered across the country. So at any one time there were not many Kaffirs in one place other than during the Dutch and British period. Unlike other countries in South Asia, the records about Kaffir people are few and almost no records on their cultural or religious practices exist. Because of their small numbers, the Kaffirs did not have the chance or the means to establish their own culture in Sri Lanka, but instead they assimilated into the prevailing cultures in the Island. During earlier times local people were afraid of the Africans as

they were known for cannibalism. However with time they had connections with low income Portuguese mechanics and illiterate Sinhalese and Tamil people by marriage which paved the way for the introduction of a special type of music and dancing they called as *Baila* and *kaffreinhoe*. *Kaffreinhoe* has a few similarities with the Goan dance. One common feature is that the men use a brightly colored handkerchief. This element can even be seen today in the “Mandoas” performed by the upper class Northern Mozambicans. The percussion instruments used in Goa, Sri Lanka and by Mozambicans today are somewhat similar, even though they all use drums, the making of them has differences (de Silva Jayasuriya, 2008. p 258 – 259).

Kaffir people had been converted to Roman Catholicism upon their arrival to Sri Lanka and even at present all the Kaffirs in Sirambiadiya and other parts of the country are Roman Catholics in spite of their marriages to Sinhalese or Tamil spouses. They all follow Roman Catholicism and its related festivals/practices, the same as the other non Kaffir Roman Catholics in the country. The Kaffirs in Sri Lanka do not have any of their own African saints, like the African pir Bava Gor in Gujerat, the most revered Sufi among people of African descent in South Asia. Bava Gor, originally claimed that Siddi Mubarak Nob, came from East Africa during the 14th century and made Ratanpur, in Gujarat, his home (Ali, 2011, p 22). At present Bava Gor shrines are visited not only by Muslims but also by Zoroastrians, Christians, and Hindus (Ali, 2011, p 23).

The situation was different for the Africans in other South Asian countries. For example Pakistan has the most number of African descendants in South Asia, about 250,000 people living in the Makran Coast, claim to be of East African descent. In

modern day Pakistan, predominantly Afro-Pakistani communities can be found in “Mombasa St.” and Seedi Village” in Karachi (Ali, 2011. p 19). Out of all the South Asian countries, India has the best written records of the Africans. Africans in other countries were mainly used as laborers, however in India with the existing cast system, there were people to do labor work therefore the Africans “Sidi” were mainly used for security jobs as soldiers or palace guards, and some attained high military powers and even ruled some parts of India from time to time. A Moroccan jurist and explorer Iban Batuta during his stay in India (1333 to 1343) has stated that an African Named Badr was the governor of Allahpur (north of Delhi) at that time (Ali, 2011, p 21). In Bengal in 1490, King Habesh Khan, was overthrown by one of his African guardsmen, Sidi Badr, who seized the throne and ruled for three years as Shams-ud-din Abu Nasr Musaffar Shah (Ali, 2011, p 23). Malik Ambar, was the most famous of the Africans who seized power in India. He was born in southern Ethiopia in the mid-16th century, and was taken to Mocha in Yemen as a slave, where he was converted to Islam. After arriving in Central India to Deccan, he served under the minister of the king of Ahmadnagar, and commanded both Indian and Habshi soldiers. At the end of the 17th century, he rebelled and formed his own army of 150 men, which eventually grew to 10,000 cavalry and infantrymen, many of whom were Africans. When the Habshi ruler died in 1626, he left one of the most impressive legacies of any ruler in the Deccan (Ali, 2011. p 24 -25). Similar to Malik Ambar, there were many Africans throughout Indian history in many parts of India like Goa and Hyderabad that served as military officials in the army (Ali, 2011, p 26 -27).

At present, the number of Sidis in India, to which include Muslims, Hindus and Christians, is estimated to be over 50,000. The largest concentration is in the state of Karnataka in the southwest. There are an estimated 18,000 Sidis living in the district—mostly descendants of maroons (runaway slaves) from Goa beginning in the 16th century and continuing through the 19th century. About 12,000 Sidis live in Andhra Pradesh (southeast), mostly in the predominantly Muslim city of Hyderabad. Gujarat (northwest) is home to 10,000 Sidis; and smaller communities also exist in the states of Maharashtra (west), Madhya Pradesh (central), Uttar Pradesh (north), and Tamil Nadu (south) (Ali, 2011, p 27).

Like most Africans in other parts of the world, the majority of Kaffir people in Sri Lanka too are poor with a very low monthly income of less than 10,000 rupees. Many are daily paid laborers without a regular income. The harsh environmental condition in the area they live prevents them from doing any small scale vegetable farming in their own home gardens. During the study period they were experiencing a severe drought period of over seven months without rain and most of the coconut trees and other plants in their gardens had died out, cutting out the small income they made by selling excess coconuts. Their low income hinders many activities including children's health and education. About 45% of the children under 12 years are underweight indicating malnutrition. This in turn interferes with their growth and brain development which indirectly affects their education as well. However the average adult BMI for men and women are in the normal range. According to the study conducted by Katulanda et al (2010), the average BMI for Sri Lankan males and females are 21.1 kgm⁻² and 22.3 kgm⁻², respectively. The young parents have understood the importance of education and they are sending their children

to schools. As a result all the third and fourth generation children of school going age are attending school. However they have yet to gain entry into higher education institutions such as the university. Only one indigenous Veddha had accomplished this.

Africans, after being brought to a country always seem to get converted to the main religions of that country, i.e. most of the Africans in Pakistan, Maldives and some in India have been converted to Islam and some in India to Hindism. However none of the Kaffirs in Sri Lanka have been converted to the main religions prevailing in the country at that time, i.e. Buddisim, Hinduism or Islam. They all became Roman Catholics. This clearly reflects the Portuguese influence on them. Even at present all of the Kaffirs practice Roman Catholicism and its associated rituals. However these rituals have undergone changes and are different from the typical ones. Owing to their assimilation with the main ethnic communities, especially the Sinhalese and Tamils, the Kaffirs have incorporated some of the Sinhalese and Tamil traditions into their Roman Catholic cultural practices. When considering the naming practices of a child, Sri Lanka being a multi ethnic country, one can know the ethnicity of a person just by asking his name. Each community has different sets of names that distinguish it from another communities. The older Kaffir people being Roman Catholics used to name their children with names taken from the Bible. Hence they got English names that are different from the typical Sinhalese or Tamil ones. However, with the occurrence of intermarriages mainly with the Sinhalese community, the children of younger generations now have more Sinhalese names. This is similar in puberty rituals as well. Roman Catholics do not believe in auspicious times for the child to have her first bath, or getting the services of “*redi nanda*”, however most families in Sirambiadiya perform the puberty rituals according to

auspicious times and they have incorporated other events like breaking the coconut before entering the house which cannot be seen in typical Roman Catholic house. This clearly indicates the incorporation of Sinhalese and Tamil customs into their practices. Another feature is the types of food they prepare for special occasions, for example they prepare traditional authentic Sri Lankan sweets like *kavum*, *kokis*, *aluwa* etc... for Christmas and weddings. These foods are typically eaten during Sinhalese and Tamil cultural festivals and not for Roman Catholics. The funeral rites too show features that can be seen in other cultures like the type of food they prepare, however they perform the funeral service according to Roman Catholic practice.

In summary the Kaffirs in Sirambiadiya has been living with the main society for over five centuries and they have incorporated many cultural and religious practices into their Roman Catholic culture. Upon their arrival in Sri Lanka in the beginning of the 17th century they had been converted to Roman Catholicism and its customs. However one might wonder if they had practiced some of their African customs during the early years of their arrival. Nevertheless, due to the paucity of historical records of them other than the Kaffir numbers and the type of work they did, it is difficult to understand the cultural changes they underwent since their arrival. Therefore at present we can observe only two characteristics to be of African origin. One is their typical African morphology such as black skin, thick lips, broad noses and curly hair. However, now due to the increasing number of mixed marriages taking place, the young Kaffirs are losing their typical African traits. At present only the older generation shows these typical African characters. The other character is their unique dancing, similar to some of the African dances along with their *manja* songs. The language the older Africans used was also a Creole version

of Portuguese, not typical African languages and this too shows the amount of Portuguese influence on these African slaves in earlier times. On the other hand, one could argue that these Africans were not always brought from one place in Africa but from various places and this took place over a long period of time. Therefore they might not have been speaking the same tribal languages and had to adopt a common language that was used at that time and place. However, the language the older people speak will disappear with the passing away of their generation if steps were not taken to preserve it. The Kaffir people in Sirambiadiya do not have the ways or the means to preserve this unique language that is spoken only by them in the world. Therefore it is essential that the government (Ministry of Cultural Affairs) take steps to preserve it by recording them in a systematic way and also by encouraging scholars to research more about the language and their songs. Out of all the Kaffirs in Sri Lanka only the people at Sirambiadiya try to keep up the traditions they have, and this is a way help them economically as well. They perform at various public exhibitions and hotels for local and tourist attractions and divide the money among themselves. As a result, local people are more aware of them than before, the media has also played a major role in this. The government should also make arrangements and provide facilities for the younger generation Kaffirs to learn the language and keep it as a part of their culture. In addition, with the help of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs they should prepare awareness programmes and documentaries not only about this community but also of other minor communities for the general public to be aware of the rich cultural heritage we possess. Another way is to introduce these topics into the school and university curricular for the children to gain knowledge about

the different cultures in Sri Lanka. All these steps will help to protect and preserve these unique diminishing cultures in Sri Lanka.

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