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The People

The people of Sri Lanka are divided into four ethnic groups. These are the Sinhalese, the Tamils, the Muslims, and the Burghers. According to a data collected in 2001 the population percentage in Sri Lanka is: Sinhalese 73.8%, Sri Lankan Moors 7.2%, Indian Tamil 4.6%, Sri Lankan Tamil 3.9%, other 0.5%, unspecified 10%. Two chief characteristics that mark a person's ethnic heritage are language and religion. The Sinhalese are the largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka. Historians have concluded that groups from north India who migrated to the island around 500BC were later known as the Sinhalese. Most Sinhalese are the followers of Buddhism.

Buddhist monasteries are the centres of cultural life for the Sinhalese. Forefathers of the Tamils migrated to Sri Lanka from southern India particularly Tamil Nadu. Most Tamils in Sri Lanka are Hindus. Lankan Tamils are united by their common religious beliefs, and the Tamil language and culture. As for the Lankan Muslims they have separate places of worship, religious and cultural heroes, ways of society, and even languages. Lankan Muslim community can be segregated into three main sections: the Sri Lankan Moors, the Indian Moors, and the Malays, each with its own history and rituals.

Religion

Most inhabitants of Sri Lanka are the followers of Buddhism, most of them from Sinhala community. Then come the people who have embraced Islam as their religion. Most Tamil people in Sri Lanka follow Hinduism. Then comes the Christian community. According to 2001 census the percentage of the followers of various religions in Sri Lanka is as follows: Buddhist 70%, Islam 8%, Hindu 7%, Christian 6%

Education

Traditionally people were given only religious education. Among the Sinhalese learning was the job of Buddhist monks. They used to teach privileged students in the monasteries. The Sinhala alphabet and Buddhist literature were taught to the students. As for the Tamil they took temples in village temples run by Brahmins. Professional training was limited to particular castes or families. It was imparted to the students of the arts like architecture or sculpture, for engineers, who applied geometrical knowledge to problems of irrigation and for craftsmen in various trades. European rulers introduced Western education in Sri Lanka.



The Dutch in particular set up a well-organised system of schools which provided elementary education. Later part of the 19th century saw several steps regarding education in the country. Many medical and law colleges were established. Private institutions were encouraged to adopt government policies. Traditional schools taught in Sinhala and Tamil, while private imparted English education. English education became the way to get administrative educations. However it was limited to elite section in the society. Common people continued to take education in native languages. According to data collected in 2003, the literacy rate in Sri Lanka is 92%.