

The Afrikan Sri Lankans: Culture, Community and Continuity

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The Afrikans* currently living in Sri Lanka are a diverse group. Some are students, some are members of diplomatic missions and embassies. Most of these Afrikans intend to return to their home countries once they have attained their goals in Sri Lanka. Those Afrikans who have lived in Sri Lanka for most if not all of their lives have a different and fascinating history. It starts with their origins, which are often unclear. It continues with the name used to classify them- 'Kaffir' (Kapiri in Sinhala)- which is a derogatory term. This history includes the capture, forced migration, and enslavement of their ancestors by Afrikan, Arab, Portuguese, Dutch, and British profiteers and by wealthy Sri Lankan and Indian royalty, merchants, and landholders. It continues with success in surviving and prospering in a foreign land amidst differing cultures, languages, and holding a different status within the caste systems in Sri Lanka. And as we view the Afrikan Sri Lankans today, we see them in communities in various parts of Sri Lanka. They are continuing to assimilate successfully into the larger society while, in many cases, retaining distinctive Afrikan physical features and cultural forms. This presentation discusses the Afrikan Sri Lankans through an Afrikan-centered lens that focuses on their history, present situations, and futures from their own perspective. Afrikan-centered theory uses Afrikan values as theoretical and experiential frameworks through which to understand the trials and triumphs of Afrikan peoples wherever they are found. Photos of members of the various communities will be used to illustrate aspects of the assimilation and acculturation processes in which they are engaged. Questions that remain unanswered regarding their past will be raised and discussed.

*The spelling of 'Afrikans' with a 'k' rather than with a 'c' as in 'Africans' is purposely done. Its use is explained in the paper.

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