

# Sinhala Buddhists



## Quick Facts

**Population:** 14,500,000

Sri Lanka: 14,300,000

Thailand: 62,000

Malaysia: 22,000

Singapore: 15,000

**Religion:** Theravada Buddhism

**Believers:** 0.41% (BBB)

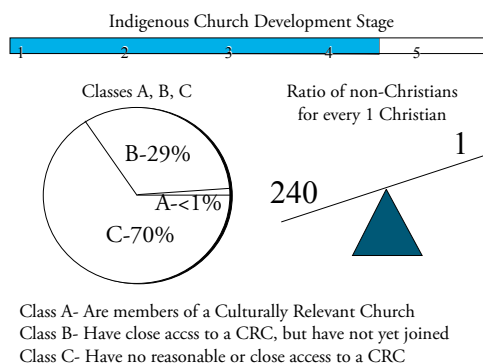
**Scriptures:** NT, OT

**Ministry Tools:** JRGT

**Church Status:** 4

**Mission Status:** 4

**MS Subgroups:** 50+



**Identity:** The Sinhalese are an Aryan speaking people with disputed ethnic origin. According to their traditions, they are a non-Dravidian people, and pride themselves on this. However, genetic tests suggest either descent from or considerable mixing with the Tamil. Their language shares similarities with Gujarati and Sindhi (West India), but their origin legends claim descent from Orissa and Bengal (East India).

**Lifestyle:** Most of the Sinhalese population is rural (70%), and make their living as plantation workers or in processing plants for tea, rubber, coconut and tobacco products. The textile industry is the fastest growing and now accounts for over 63% of exports. The ongoing civil war with Tamil separatists continues to cast a shadow over the economy.

**Customs:** The Sinhala practiced a feudal caste system, once called *rajakariya*, or the king's work. Families were

grouped into occupational hereditary castes, such as barbers, fisherman, herdsman and farmers. Although, this system was largely broken up by the Dutch, caste-allegiance is still very strong. The largest, Govigama, or former plantation worker caste, continues to dominate in elections, and the higher castes continue to dominate in business.

**Religion:** The Sinhalese consider themselves to be the perservers of Theravada Buddhism, the earliest and second largest branch of Buddhism, which the Sinhalese spread all throughout SE Asia. The arrival of Catholic and Protestant colonial missionaries, provoked a strong reaction by the Buddhist establishment. They adopted the missionary's methods of education, printing materials, and polemics. This reaction has become known as Protestant Buddhism.

**Christian Outreach:** It is illegal to attempt to convert a Buddhist to Christianity in Sri Lanka. The last decade has

seen an increase in church burnings, public beatings, persecution and intimidation. The "colonial churches" established in Sri Lanka have become virtual separate communities, with little cultural connection to the Buddhist majority. However, evangelicalism is growing among these communities, resulting in increased missionary effort.

## How to Pray:

☞ Pray that every segment of Sinhala society would be impacted by the gospel, especially the educated elite and higher castes which are the least-reached.

☞ Over 20,000 Sinhala villages are without a disciple-making fellowship. Pray for the recruitment, training and deployment of thousands of church planters.

☞ Pray for the removal of all anti-conversion and anti-Christian legislation.

☞ Over 1 million Sri Lankans have been displaced due to the ongoing 25 year old civil war. Pray for specialized and effective ministry among them.

☞ Pray for revival and spiritual awakening among the traditional Christian communities in Sri Lanka.

**Every year 130,000  
Sinhala die  
without Christ.**