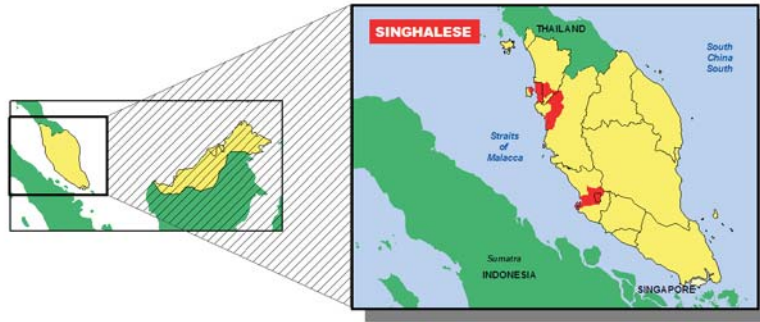


SINGHALESE



Population	Major Religion	Language
5,000	Theravada Buddhist	Singhalese

Who are the Singhalese?

Singhalese are believed to be of Aryan descent. They migrated from India (Bengal, Orissa, and Gujarat) to Sri Lanka as early as the 6th century B.C. where they were known as Singhalese. The Singhalese King, court, and people converted to Indian Buddhism in the 2nd century B.C.

Singhalese, mainly jewel merchants, began migrating to Malaysia as early as 1890. Many of these early Singhalese immigrants returned to Sri Lanka after earning enough money. The Singhalese consider themselves Indians. There are no distinct physical features that set the Singhalese apart from other Indians.

What are their lives like?

In the early 20th century, Singhalese youth migrated to Malaysia with intentions of settling down permanently. Unlike the Sri Lankan Tamil, these Singhalese youth had no family or friends already settled in Malaysia to assist them. However, with the growth of Malaysia's rubber plantations and tin industries, there was an increasing demand for railroad transport providing a major source of employment to migrants from Sri Lanka. The Singhalese primarily settled in the Kuala Lumpur and Taiping where they work as drivers, security guards, bus ticket inspectors, and later on as station masters. Those with an excellent command of English work as government employees. On the rubber plantations, they held positions such as conductors, bookkeepers, clerks, and hospital assistants. There were a few Singhalese craftsmen and surveyors.

Today, there are less than 800 families bearing Singhalese names living in Malaysia. With the number of mix marriages with Indians and other Malaysian communities, the number of Singhalese continues

to decrease in Malaysia. The majority of Singhalese prefer to use English and Malay despite efforts of the older generation in trying to maintain their mother tongue. Western clothing is becoming the norm among Singhalese in Malaysia, with the exception of ceremonial functions. Many Singhalese practices such as burial rites have strong Indian influences.

What do they believe?

The majority of Singhalese in Malaysia are Theravada Buddhist and the temple is the focal point of their activities. Minorities of Christian Singhalese maintain their ties through the church. Besides the religious Wesak day (a Buddhists celebration of Buddha's enlightenment), the Singhalese Buddhist community also celebrates the New Year usually on 14th April. New Year's Day begins with lighting a lamp and placing it in a prominent position in the house and it is believed to drive away evil spirits. Certain foods are required, and it is believed that eating these foods on an auspicious day will bring one good fortune throughout the year. This custom is still practiced despite disbelief among people in their community today.

What are their needs?

Though they are proud of their heritage, this small Singhalese community continues to struggle to preserve its cultural distinction as they blend more with the mainstream Malaysian society. As they integrate into the society, pray that they will be open to Indian believers and see the Truth in their lives. Pray that local believers will relate and respond to the unique needs of the Singhalese.