Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, has, within a compact size of 25,000 square miles, a plethora of languages. Sinhala and Tamil are the indigenous languages spoken by the people of Sri Lanka. English is the language of the elite, as in many other Asian countries; it is also a language perceived and handled by substantial number of Sri Lankans. Sanskrit and Pali are the sacred languages of Hinduism and Buddhism respectively and are thus cultivated by the priestly classes of these religions. Both Sanskrit and Pali are, studied also by many laypersons of these religions. Latin plays an equal role among the Christians of Sri Lanka particularly among the Roman Catholic clergy, both regular and secular.

The Muslims of Sri Lanka, for their part, do not suffer from a scarcity of languages. Apart from Sinhala, Tamil and English, in which they participate along with other communities, they are heir to several languages. While the mother tongue of the Moors (i.e. those who claim descent from Arab settlers) is Tamil, that of Malays (i.e. those who claim descent from settlers from the region at present known as Indonesia and Malaysia) is Malay. The Tamil of Sri Lankan Muslims, while being in the mainstream of classical Tamil, has much in common with the Tamil language of the Muslims of South India, specially in the field of Islamic Tamil literature. Sri Lankan Malay language has been classified as a Batavian dialect. Spoken by less than fifty thousand persons, it is now in the process of being revived.

Arabic, as with all Muslims the world over, is the language in essence of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. However, various reasons have conspired to keep the Arabic language from becoming available to the mass of the Muslims. One reason was the four and a half centuries of European rule over Sri Lanka. Another reason is the outmoded technique used for teaching Arabic in Sri Lanka. Urdu is spoken by very small communities among the Muslims. However, the cultural elite of Sri Lanka have some knowledge...
of the culture of the northern Indian sub-continent and consequently of Urdu; Urdu film music has considerable attraction for the ordinary Sri Lankan.15

Persian has somewhat similar role. The only native speakers of Persian could be said to be the very small Parsi community in Sri Lanka.16 The purpose of this article is to assess the historical role of Persian in Sri Lanka and sketch its impact on the Muslims and others.

PERSIAN IN SRI LANKAN HISTORY

The strategic position of Sri Lanka on the world trade routes as well as its own resources had given it an economic importance far greater than its size. The Persians too participated in this trade. The standard history of Sri Lanka encapsulates the historical situation. It says:

Cosmas Indicopleustes, writing about Ceylon at the beginning of the sixth century, says: “As its position is central, the Island is a great resort of ships from all parts of India and from Persia and Ethiopia, and in like manner it despatches many of its own to foreign ports. And from the inner countries, China and other marts in that direction, it receives silks, aloes, clovewood, sandalwood and their other products and these it passes again to the outer ports, Malabar, Kalliana [near Bombay], Sindh, Persia and the Homerite country and to Adule in the Red Sea. Receiving in return the traffic of these marts and transmitting it to the inner ports, the Island exports to each of these at the same time her own products . . . it thus becomes a great emporium.”17

Merchants had an important place in the economy of the Sri Lanka state in the earliest times too. Even the town-planning of those times took merchants into cognizance. Pandukabaya, the king who ruled Sri Lanka between BCE 377–307, laid out the suburbs of Anuradhapura, his capital city, reserving among other things “the ground set apart for the Yoruis . . . all these he laid out near the west gate”.18 (Perhaps the term yonā includes Persians among the foreign merchants in Sri Lanka, of that period.) At that time Persia, too, had not embraced Islam. Hence the standard history continues:

Cosmas Indicopleustes states that in the sixth century there was in Ceylon a church of Persian Christians who had settled here with a presbyter appointed from Persia and all the apparatus of public worship.19
After their conversion to Islam, it is probable that Persians would have merged with the Arab settlers in Ceylon.

Extended trade between Ceylon and Persia had the expected spinoffs.

Among the coins of foreign countries that have found their way to Ceylon in the course of trade or due to diplomatic missions are the silver larins of fish-hook coins of Persia, the gold seraphins ofOrmuz on the Persian Gulf.20

These exercises connoted the coming into use in Ceylon a useful list of Persian words, especially in the carrying trade and the trade of luxury articles.

Persian influenced the linguistic scene of Ceylon in a different methodology. This was principally through the role of Muslim men of devotion (known in Sri Lanka as saints) who elected to spend their days of contemplation in the several caves that dotted Ceylon. Ibn Baṭṭūṭah, the Moroccan jurist and traveller who visited Ceylon perhaps in 1344, had an eye for extensive detail. Ibn Baṭṭūṭah noted many tombs of holy men from Persia. In Kurunegala (in today's North-Western Province) he saw the mosque-timb of Shaykh 'Uthmān al-Shirāz known as the “Shahwush”.21 Ibn Baṭṭūṭah recalls that the king and the inhabitants of that region visited the tomb in reverence and the Shaykh was the guide to the Adams Peak.22

Ibn Baṭṭūṭah also recounts that it were the great achievements of the Shaykh which called forth great popular respect.23 The linguistic influence of Persian could not have been negligible because Ibn Baṭṭūṭah repeatedly confounds Ceylonese names with Persian equivalents. For instance, the town of Devendura in the southern seaboard of Sri Lanka is called by him ‘Dinawar’ which is properly “the name of a medieval town . . . north-east of Kirmanshah”.24 Apparently, Ibn Baṭṭūṭah spoke to a local king in Ceylon, in Persian. He noted, too, that in Mangalore in South India, “most of the merchants from fars and Yemen disembark”.25

With the occupation of the maritime provinces of Ceylon from 1505 onwards, first by the Portuguese, then by the Dutch and then again by the British, the influence of Persian, along with Arabic, steadily declined.26 This decline, commencing in 1505 was never to stabilize itself. Persian, again together with Arabic, came to be associated with the Muslims whom the Portuguese and the Dutch considered their commercial and religious rivals. Equally, the Muslims of Ceylon, adopting a low-profile, were not inclined to assert Arabic or Persian. Persian became associated with peripheral or exotic articles or words. For instance, the British East Indies Company, in 1664, sent to the ruling prince of central Ceylon, Rajasingha II, presents
During the British period, connection with Persia was not close as Britain and Ceylon became intimate commercial partners.  

**PERSIAN AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE**  
Linguistically speaking, Persian and Sinhala (the language of the majority community in Sri Lanka) are not strangers. They both belong to the Indo-Aryan languages, defined as "the group of Indo-European languages comprising Sanskrit and its modern descendants". The modern descendants of Sanskrit are, technically, Modern Indian Aryan Vernaculars (MIAV), of which Sinhala is one, along with Marathi, Hindi, Bengali etc. Persian is of the Iranian sub-group (of Indo-European languages including Persian, Pashto, Avestah and Kurdish).  

The writer of a standard grammar of Sinhala states:  

As to the linguistic character of Sinhalese it is now generally admitted by scientists that it is one of the Indo-Aryan vernaculars like Marathi, Bengali, Hindi etc.  

The study of Indo-Aryan languages was thus a necessary corollary of the study of the Sinhala language in Ceylon.  

Indo-Aryan, in consequence, had been an integral part of the faculty of oriental studies in the university college in Colombo which was affiliated to the University of London. However, when the University College was created an autonomous University of Ceylon in 1942, the study of Indo-Aryan seems to have been phased out. The last graduate to offer Indo-Aryan went down in 1945. From then on, more and more attention was given to individual subjects such as Sinhala, Pali and Sanskrit.  

Even during those times when Indo-Aryan lay on the syllabus, nearly all of its students did not make the step to concentrate or even study Persian. The reasons appear to be two. Persian was looked upon as a subject for Muslims only, while those who took Indo-Aryan were indeed, all non-Muslims, mainly Buddhists and Hindus interested in Pali or Sanskrit. Even some of them who wished to take a hobbyist interest in Persian were forestalled by its (Persic) script.  

The University College and its successor, the University of Ceylon, had provided a Department of Arabic studies. This Department offered subsidiary courses, general degrees and special degrees (Honours school)
Those who offered Arabic in the University were extremely few in number; this was because those who offered Arabic in the schools in the pre-University classes (Preliminary Examination) were even fewer.\textsuperscript{38}

Persian came under the aegis of the Department of Arabic in the University. It was, perhaps, meant as an emergency measure. (No school in Ceylon was likely to teach Persian, for economic reasons.) Hence, Persian was not on the list of subjects for the Preliminary Examination.\textsuperscript{39} But, Persian was an acquired taste. It could be read at the University. Undergraduates who wished to follow a general degree for the B.A. had to offer three subjects at the General Arts Qualifying Examination (First Year) and the General Arts Examination (Finals). Persian occurred in this list. This list comprised groups of allied subjects. Persian came in Group I(a); Group II(b); Group IV(b); and Group V(a).\textsuperscript{40}

There was, of course, no obligation to have the subject taught unless there were sufficient candidates. University Regulation 4 (i) took care of that.\textsuperscript{41} From the details of the courses in University Persian, it is clear that, these were tailored for the few who took Arabic. Indeed, if at all, Persian was the handmaiden of Arabic in the University.

The scope of the syllabus for the General Arts Qualifying Examination (i.e. First year) in Persian was as follows.

Paper I: Prescribed texts, with questions on their language, subject-matter, cultural background, and the literature of the period.

Paper II: Unspecified texts, grammar and prose composition. Outline of the history of Persian literature.\textsuperscript{42}

The Finals were divided into two parts, the second part being taken a year after the first part. These were called the General Arts Examination, Part I and II respectively. The syllabus of Persian for the General Arts Examination, Part I was:

Paper I: Prescribed texts, with questions on their language, subject-matter, cultural background and the literature of the period.

Paper II: Unspecified texts, grammar, rhetorics and composition. An outline of the history of Persia, from the period of the Samanids to the beginning of the Mughal period (CE 874–1202).\textsuperscript{43}
The syllabus of Persian for General Arts Examination, Part II merely extended the historical scope. The syllabus stated:

**Paper I:** Prescribed texts, with questions on their language, subject-matter, cultural background, and the literature of the period.

**Paper II:** Unspecified texts, grammar and rhetorics, prosody, and composition. An outline of the history of Persia, from the Mughal period to the beginning of the Safavid period (CE 1202–1510).

It should be remembered that Persian was only one of the three subjects of the General Arts Examination. There never was a Honours school in Persian in Ceylon.

The syllabi of all these courses fall easily into two divisions; one, the linguistic material and the other, the historical and cultural material. The linguistic part was compact and limited. The grammar was confined to certain set limits. The unseens were subject-targetted; hence the vocabulary was limited and most vague words (that is, to the student) could be correctly guessed at. (Generally, final year students at the University of Ceylon specializing in, say, physics or chemistry, did unseens in German or French, many of them depending on their knowledge of their subjects to ‘decipher’ the unseens.)

The historical and cultural part was even more user-friendly. It could be answered in English (a facility which the University gave to all Eastern languages including Sanskrit, Pali, Arabic, Sinhala and Tamil). Quite a lot of books on Persian history and culture were available in Ceylon, in English. Even dipping into extended works, not Persian-oriented, such as *Cambridge Medieval History. Cambridge Modern History* gave a background knowledge that was useful.

Because Persian did not have a base in schools in Ceylon, Persian at the University was a fugitive discipline. When the Preliminary Examination was replaced in schools in Ceylon by the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) (GCE/AL) Examination, Persian was admitted as a subject (along with Malay, Chinese, Japanese etc.).

The syllabus of Persian for the GCE (AL) had something in common with Persian in the University. The GCE (AL) syllabus said:

(I) Translation into English from prescribed texts and unseens; answering questions on context.
The prescribed texts were

Sa'di, Bustān, ed. Furnghi, Ist ed. (Tehran, 1937) (or any suitable edition), chapter II.47

Some of the factors which prevent the interested educated amateur from picking up Persian, have been indicated above. One of them is the Persic script with its lack of diacritical marks. Though some Sri Lankans, either for work or pleasure, have picked up foreign scripts such as the Greek, the Devanagari, the (Russion) Cyrillic, the Chinese (ideograms) and the Japanese katagana and hiragana, Persian was not so easily available to those outside Colombo, the metropolis of Ceylon.48 The lack of primers in English was another drawback. Supportive literature, such as the equivalents of the Penguin Books of Spanish Verse etc. (with plain prose translations) were and remain unavailable. Indeed, Persian books are rarely to be found in Sri Lankan bookshops. On the other hand serious works and coffee-table books on Persian art and culture are freely available. This factor might have also militated against serious students taking up Persian.

Some books which treated of Persian (Iranian) history, artefacts or cultural matters were used in the academic circles of Sri Lanka.49 Some of these books were used in economics and sociology courses as illustrative of development economics and Middle-East sociology. Several of them were useful in courses of Islamic philosophy and Islamic art.50 A few were important for literature study, particularly English. (Matthew Arnold’s Sohrab and Rustam is fully explicable only with a modicum of Persian history. Even, Shelley’s Ozymandias has overtones of pre-Islamic Persia.) University students of Western Classics came to know a lot of ancient Persian history indirectly.51 But the most important Persian work known and applied in Sri Lanka is the Rubā‘iyāt of Omar Khayyam in excellent translations or in renderings durem, insipidem, infantilem. (Since the influence of the Rubā‘iyāt transcends the academic world in Sri Lanka, it will be discussed later.

PERSIAN IN THE SRI LANKAN DIMENSION

Persian words entered the vocabularies of the indigenous languages of Sri Lanka, mainly through trade and administration. There is a grey area. Since Persian and Sinhala are of the same extended language group, many words
have a common sound pattern. For instance the Persian *stān* (as in *Gulistan*) sounds same as the Sinhala *sīhanaya*. The Sinhala form is derived from the Sanskrit *Sīhāna*. And since Tamil (a Dravidian language) derives many of its word-stock from Sanskrit, the same word is found in Tamil, too.\(^2\)

One of the crucial Persian words in use for a long time was *shāh-Bandar*, originally meaning a king’s officer in charge of a port and subsequently enlarged to denote a governor of a district. This word continued to be used even during the Dutch time in the 1660s.\(^3\) Persians were not infrequent visitors to Ceylon during Dutch times. A modern writer commenting on a work of a Dutchman of those times, says:

> A Dutch Serjeant took on the job of escorting some Persian VIPs from Matara to ‘Adams Peak’; it cost them 12 rix-dollars a day for him, 8 for his corporal, and 6 for each of the ten soldiers, of whom Parthy (i.e. the Dutch writer) was one, plus rations.\(^4\)

Persian had some revival in Sri Lanka when it came under the purview of the British East India Company, between 1796 and 1801. The British East India Company had become a sort of residuary legatee of the Mughal Empire in India. And since Persian was the language in which the Mughal Empire conducted its affairs, the Company’s officials had more than a passing knowledge of Persian. And even when government actually passed into the hands of the British in India, Persian continued to be the medium of polite speech. The British administration in Ceylon, though not scholarly in Persian, were receptive to that language.\(^5\)

Meanwhile Persian works had become influential in Britain, particularly among the men-of-letters. Edward FitzGerald contributed much to this situation.

The study of Persian led FitzGerald to begin a version of *Salaman and Absal* of Jami and in 1862 he completed *A Bird’s Eye View of Farid-Uddin Attar’s Bird Parliament*. These, however, were mere experiments. The true kindling of his genius came when he read the *Rubaiyat* or aphoristic quatrains of Omar Khayyam, the astronomer-poet of Persia. Over these he brooded with delight and then produced in 1859 what is in effect, an English poem of seventy-five quatrains based upon selections and combinations of the original stanzas.\(^6\)

Nonetheless, a sense of Persian life and culture comes through FitzGerald’s translation.

Omar Khayyam’s sentiments as transmitted by FitzGerald must have
accorded with the sentiments of the people of Sri Lanka for he has been widely translated into the indigenous languages whether as monographs or excerpts. Omar Khayyam is also famous in other ways.\textsuperscript{57} The English-language press frequently cites him in editorial and feature articles; English language books often mention him. There are some other translations in English besides FitzGerald’s but they have not attained similar popularity.\textsuperscript{58}

The English-educated public in Sri Lanka has some knowledge of Firdausi, Jâmi and Mavânâ Rûmi but not to the extent of saturation as in the case of Omar Khayyam. Because of the existence in Sri Lanka of colleges of fine and applied arts, even the indigenous-languages-educated in Sri Lanka are acquainted with some aspects of Persian achievements in the fields of architecture, metalwork, carpets, textiles, painting, arts of the book, ceramics, lacquer work, tile-work, calligraphy and glass.

**PERSIAN AND THE MUSLIMS OF SRI LANKA**

Persian, both as cultural system and language, has had a deeper influence on the Muslims of Sri Lanka. A number of Muslims in the past must have been Persian or Persian-speaking. Past inscriptions attest this fact.

Another inscription which also yields some information of early Muslims is the Galle Tri-lingual Slab Inscription which records the offerings made by the Chinese Emperor Yung-Lo to the shrine at Devinuwara. This inscription is dated 1410 A.D. and is inscribed in Chinese, Tamil and Persian.

The Persian epigraph records the donations made to a Muslim shrine which gives an indication of the influence of the Muslims during this time.\textsuperscript{59}

During the centuries, the Muslims of Sri Lanka continued to be interested in Persia and the Persians. Some trade between these two countries as well as the Persians who came to visit Adam’s Peak were the main agencies of contact between the Muslims of Persia and Sri Lanka. During the occupation by the Portuguese and the Dutch, the low-profile adopted by the Muslims of Ceylon was not conducive to any increase of the relationships between Persians and Ceylon Muslims.

However, when in the last phase of the nineteenth century, the Muslim leaders were busy scouting for modernist examples in Islamic countries to show their Muslim countrymen that English education could be accepted while being perfectly committed to Islam, Persia was a clear example in hand. I.L.M. Abdul Aziz, one of the younger Muslim leaders of that period,
for instance, wrote an admiring profile of the Sultan of Persia, Shāh Muḥammad ‘Alī Mirzā. In it he wrote:

In the time of the late Shah, Nasruddin Shah, a college was established in Tehran in the manner of a French lyceé, which taught Western sciences and languages. The teachers for both the civil and military sides were from Europe. The Government of Persia spends a great deal of money for this purpose, including food and clothes for the students. An equivalent college was opened at Tabriz. . . . The upper-class of Persia collected public subscriptions and through these set up many schools in Tehran in 1898. A year later, these schools were administered by the Ministry of education. The number of students in these schools were between 1000 and 1400.60

While the example of Persia was instructive, the language continued to be intractable to the Muslims of Sri Lanka. That the Muslims of Sri Lanka were not well-informed about Arabic as a language was a further factor which prevented their acquirement of Persian.

This is not to say, that Persian literature had had no impact on the Muslims of Sri Lanka. It is quite the reverse. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century till today, books, periodicals, newspapers, sound and vision broadcasting in Sri Lanka give some exposure to Persian literature and Persian writers.61 This exposure has largely been effectuated in the Tamil language, the language of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. The sources of these exercises are mainly English translations of Persian texts. Apart from Omar Khayyam, some Jāmī and Sa’dī have been translated into Tamil. The Persian poems of Iqbal (Pakistan) have also been translated into Tamil. A favourite Persian author among the Muslims of Sri Lanka, in particular, is Mavlānā Rūmī. His mystical, epigrammatic, tales with conundrums built into them, are popular.62

The Muslims of Sri Lanka have a stock of words (used in their daily discourse in Tamil) that is recognisably Persian. Some words are connected directly with Islamic practice and rituals.

The Persian word, kanduri, although it is obsolete in the Persian language of today, is still used in Sri Lanka to refer to religious feasts, held in mosques especially. The Persian for Azan is bangu and this word is also in common use in this country and is also used in other countries such as Indonesia.63

Some other words refer to articles perhaps imported from Persia, exclusively. One word is kalkandū, (sugar candy).64 The suffixed honorific yār applied
to the first four Caliphs of Islam is of Persian derivation too. The Tamil colloquial *Paravā illai* (never mind) is composed of the Persian *paravā* and the Tamil *illai* (no). A few Tamil verbs in current use are Persian derivatives.

Other stocks of Persian words in use in Sri Lanka seem to fall easily into specific groups. Some are concerned with sports (e.g. *pahelvān*, ‘champion, wrestler’); some with edibles, particularly sweets (for example *guāltbāhn*); flowers, too (for example *yāsmin*). Some words such as *purdah* have been absorbed into Tamil. So are administrative words such as *jilla/zilla* (district), *bandobast* (arrangements), *kabar dār* (precaution), *kaband* (‘caretaker’, ‘temporary’).

The Appendix gives a sample-list of Persian words used in Sri Lanka, subject to the rider that some of these words might be Arabic words acclimatized into Persian and words which sometimes be derived from Sanskritic forms, either peripherally shortened or syncopated.

The most striking influence of Persian on the Muslims of Sri Lanka is that it furnishes a central treasury of names for boys and girls. Sri Lankans always give their children pure Arabo-Persic names. Recently there has been a tendency to choose more and more names from Persian. Observers have noted that the prevalence of a large number of liquid sounds in Persian is the main cause. Obviously, some of these names are after famous men. Rūmī, Jāmī, Sa‘dī, Firdausī fall into this group. Some have the ending *zād* (as in *Shamzād/Naushād*) or the *īn*, mīn (as in *Shīrīn, Shāzmīn*) which are pleasing to the average Sri Lankan Muslim ear. Some names are indubitably names of Persian cities such as *Isfahan, Shiraz*. Going on the same musicality-of-sound-principle, it is noticed that some perfectly nice Persian words such as *khush* are avoided because they sound same as unacceptable words in the indigenous languages of Sri Lanka. It has also been noticed that Persian words such as *dil* are given suffixes (unacceptable in Persian) but ring joyously in the Sri Lankan ear.

In brief, the Persian language, never spoken by substantial number of people in Sri Lanka, has had a fair influence on the cultural and language structures of Sri Lanka partly because of its closeness to the language of the majority community; cultural and trade relationships and the presence of the Muslim community in Sri Lanka.
APPENDIX

PERSIAN AND PROTO-PERSIAN WORDS IN USE IN SRI LANKA MAINLY AMONG MUSLIMS (Sample List)

1. Āzād/Āzādi (free/freedom).
2. Sipāhi (soldier).
3. Tayyār (ready).
5. Dil (heart/fondness).
7. Zinda (auspicious as in name Zinda Madār).
8. Zindābād (benediction).
12. Shāh (king).
13. Pādshāh/Paṭhushah (king).
15. Paygāmbar (term for Muhammad (peace be upon him)).
16. Dastagīr (name) (and also other names ending in ġīr).
17. Gulistān (rose garden/pleasure garden).
18. Mīr (lord).
22. Mullā (religious leader).
23. Gulām (servant).
24. Purdah (seclusion).
25. Turban (headgear).
26. Ḥuzūr (vocative of respect).
27. Gulāb jāhn (sprinkler/sweet).
28. Khāges (paper).
29. Mā'rīfat (exotic knowledge).
32. Ghānā (music).
33. Khwāja (respected).
34. Naqqash (intricate).
35. Aryawa (aristocratic).
37. Maznavi (verse form).
38. Kalendar (hermit).
39. Attar (perfume).
Names of Muslim Children

40. Azrath
41. Baba Ján.
42. Dhanesh.
43. Gul Badan.
44. Fairoz
45. Farâz.
46. Fairuz.
47. Faviz.
49. Jamshed.
50. Jehângir.
51. Humayun.
52. Kamrun.
53. Ghaznavî.
54. Nargis.
55. Kirmân.
56. Pervez.
57. Rûmi.
58. Ruzbehan.
59. Riswâna.
60. Rizwina.
61. Rizmina.
63. Rustham.
64. Rizvy.
65. Razvy.
66. Suraya.
67. Shîrîn.
68. Shahnâz.
69. Shaibân.
70. Shakavat.
71. Sharmil.
72. Safavî.
73. Navavi.
74. Tabriz.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Sri Lanka was called Ceylon till 1972 when it became a republic. (In this article, both terms are used according to context.) Sri Lanka as a land is multi-linguistic (Sinhala, Tamil, English), multi-ethnic (Sinhala, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers), and multi-religious (Buddhist,
Hindu, Islamic, Christian). According to the Census of 1981, of the total population of Sri Lanka, Buddhists are 69.31%; Hindus, 14.46%; Muslims, 7.40%; and Christians (of all denominations) 7.40%. Total population was 14,988,000 (Statistical Pocketbook of Sri Lanka for 1982, Department of Census and Statistics, p. 12.) The ethnic composition is Sinhalese (mainly Buddhist), Tamils (largely Hindu) and Muslims (Islam). Some Sinhalese and some Tamils are Christians. For ethnic groups, see, N.D. Wijeyesekera, The People of Ceylon (Colombo, 1949). For Muslims, see, M.M.M. Mahroof and M. Azeez (compilers), An Ethnological Survey of the Muslims of Sri Lanka (ESMSL) (Colombo: Sir Razik Fareed Foundation, 1986) p. 262, pages, maps. bibl.

2. Most Muslims are fluent in Sinhala and Tamil and some in English as well.

3. Buddhist Bhikshus (clergy) have special educational institutes for their education. It is understood that Brahmin boys interested in becoming temple priests are taught in priestly (vedagama) schools sponsored by the Siva Brahm Association.

4. Most universities in Sri Lanka provide courses in Sanskrit and Pali. There is a Pali Pirivena University in Colombo.

5. There are Roman Catholic seminaries in Sri Lanka; further studies are provided by the higher educational institutes of particular Orders or at Rome. For the Protestants, there is a Union Theological Institute in Pilimatalawe (in central Sri Lanka).


10. Mahroof, "Malay Language in Sri Lanka".

11. The term ‘Muslims of Sri Lanka’ comprises the Moors, Malays and other Islamic sub-communities.


15. Ibid.

16. The Parsis of Sri Lanka are a very small community, mainly found in Colombo. Originally inhabitants of Persia, they came to Surat and Bombay, whence some of them came to Sri Lanka as merchants (R.L. Brohier, Changing Face of Colombo (Colombo, 1984) p. 56). Names such as Jilla, Rustomjee, Dadaboy, Billimoria, Choksy, Nanji, Captain, are frequent among the Parsis of Sri Lanka.


18. W. Geiger and M.H. Bode (trans. and ed.), The Mahavamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon (Colombo, 1950 reprint of original 1912 edition, p. 74). Mahavamsa was written in Pali in the sixth century CE.


20. Ibid. p. 322.


22. Ibid. Adam’s Peak is a mountain in Sri Lanka widely believed to have the footprints of
Prophet Adam.

24. Ibid. p. 365.
25. Ibid. p. 233.
26. The Portuguese ruled the maritime provinces of Ceylon from 1505 to 1656; their successors were the Dutch, ruling from 1656 to 1796, when they were displaced by the British. The British, by annexing the indigenous principality of Kandy in 1815, ruled over the entirety of Ceylon till 1948 when Ceylon became independent. See, S.G. Perera SJ, A History of Ceylon for Schools (Colombo, 1948) Pt I (Protuguese and Dutch periods); Pt II (British Period), passim. H.W. Codrington, A Short History of Ceylon (London, 1938).
32. Geiger (1938), Preface, p. VI.
33. "The University of Ceylon was established by the Ceylon University Ordinance (no. 20 of 1942)..." (The Calendar of the University of Ceylon for the Session 1955–56 [Colombo: University of Ceylon, p. 28]. Cited hereafter as University Calendar).
34. Perhaps it was thought better to concentrate on Pali and Sanskrit as distinct disciplines rather than to diffuse attention on the wider field of Indo-Aryan.
35. University Calendar, p. 426. He took a First.
36. Today, there are nine universities, including the Open University established in 1980. But Arabic is taught only in two universities.
37. University Calendar, p. 274 seq.
38. When the medium of pre-university classes was confined to English, only one school taught Arabic in its senior forms. That was Zahira College, Colombo which celebrated its centenary in 1992.
41. Ibid. p. 273.
42. Ibid. p. 276.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Edward Granville Browne’s was the standard text. This could be supplemented by such sources as the Encyclopædia Britannica. Chapters on Persian/Muslim art in such works as Helen Gardner, The Story of Art (London, 1945) gave a feel of Persian culture (A modern development of these works are such books as R.W. Ferrier (ed), The Arts of Persia (London, 1990).
47. Ibid. The number of candidates offering Persian in the GCE (AL) Examination is very few. For this reason, the question papers are not printed but mimeographed.
48. The embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran holds classes in Persian.
49. Arberry and Reynold Nicholson touched on some aspects of persian thought and culture. So did several others including, Ann K.S. Lambton, Anna-Marie Schmill, Henri Corbin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Those who wrote on Persian artefacts included C. Adle and A.S. Melikian Chirvani. Some of their writings were available in Sri Lanka.
50. Before faculties of aesthetic studies came to be established in Sri Lankan universities, art (painting and drawing) was taught in the Government Art school in Colombo, commonly called Heywood from the name of the house in which it was lodged. Persian art, as a form of Islamic art, was looked at mainly from the point of view of design.
51. The foreground of the ancient Greek writers and statesmen was the continual confrontation
of the Greek states with the Persian Empires, as evidenced by say, Plutarch's Parallel Lives.

52. Curiously, the suffix inche (generally having the sense of 'diminutive') is duplicated by the Sinhala adjective, pānchi having the same meaning.

53. Sophia Pietersz (trans. and ed.), Instructions from the governor-General and the Council of India to the Governor of Ceylon, 1656–1665 (Colombo, 1908), p. 89.

54. R. Raven-Hart, Ceylon-History in Stone (Colombo, 1973), p. 131, citing Parthy, Burghers in Frankenburg (Nuremberg, 1698). As it turned out, the sergeant cheated the Persian visitors by taking them to a nearby place through a circuitous route.

55. Sri Lankan orientalists, whether indigenous or foreigners based in Sri Lanka, specialized in Sanskrit, Pali and Sinhala languages and literatures.


57. Many Muslims have been named after him. Several shops, restaurants and offices bear his name.

58. For instance, Swami Gobind Tirtha's Nectar of Grace (Hyderabad, 1949) is a careful rendering and interpretation of the Rubā'īyat.


60. I.L.M. Abdul Aziz's article "The Persian Sovereign—Shah Muhammad Ali Mirza" in Muslim Guardian (English/Tamil periodical) (Colombo), vol. 6, no. 3 (May, 1907), p. 91. The article is in Tamil.

61. The Muslim Service of the state Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation gives wide exposure to Islamic culture, including Persian arts and culture. So do the Muslim feature programmes in the state. Sri Lanka Rupavahini (Television) corporation.

62. For instance, A. Iqbal, Mavlana Rumi Chinibatanikal (Thoughts of Mavlana Rumi) (Colombo, 1970). This book is in Tamil. There is in existence a stock of Tamil translations of classical Persian works such as Amir Hamza Jang and the Chār Faqir Kissa (the Story of the four Faqirs).


64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.