



among the languages of the world, owing to its rich history, unique script, and remarkable capacity to preserve and transmit complex philosophical thought. Recognized as an official language of Sri Lanka, Sinhala is not only a means of communication but also a repository of the island's cultural, religious, and intellectual heritage.

Sinhala is an Indo-Aryan language that originated from early Prakrit forms brought to Sri Lanka by settlers from North India around the 5th century BCE, traditionally associated with Prince Vijaya. Over time, it evolved independently, influenced by Pali, Sanskrit, and indigenous elements. Early inscriptions written in Brahmi script mark its development, and by the medieval period, Sinhala had emerged as a distinct language with its own script and literary tradition.

One of the most striking features of Sinhala is its script, which has evolved over more than two millennia. Derived from the ancient Brahmi script, Sinhala developed its own rounded and aesthetically pleasing letter forms, influenced in part by the use of palm leaves as a writing medium. Unlike many languages that rely on borrowed scripts, Sinhala has a fully developed writing system of sixty letters, reflecting its independent linguistic identity. Sinhala differs from all other Indo-Aryan languages in that it contains a pair of vowel letters representing two distinct sounds—ae (අඞ) and æ (අඞ)—which are absent in other Indian languages.

A key aspect of Sinhala's uniqueness lies in its historical role in preserving the teachings of the Buddha. Although the canonical Buddhist texts are primarily recorded in Pali, Sinhala has played a crucial role in interpreting, translating, and transmitting these teachings over centuries. The Sinhala script has been used extensively to write commentaries (*Aṭṭhakathā*), and various

religious texts, ensuring that the philosophical depth and doctrinal nuances of Buddhism are accurately conveyed.

Buddhism, which has existed on the island for more than two millennia, has influenced every aspect of the Sinhala language: its sounds, words, compounds, phrases, and meanings. Buddhist teachings and culture introduced a substantial vocabulary of Pali and Sanskrit origin into Sinhala, enriching the language significantly. This has made Sinhala an indispensable medium for Buddhist scholarship and education in Sri Lanka.

In the global linguistic landscape, Sinhala is an Indian Ocean language of South Asia, yet it stands apart due to its long and continuous literary tradition within a relatively small geographic area. While many languages have undergone significant disruption or transformation, Sinhala has maintained a remarkable continuity, supported by a strong literary culture and institutional patronage throughout history.

Over the last century, Sinhala has developed into a modern language through standardization, vocabulary expansion, and the creation of technical terminology. Supported by education, print culture, and digital technology, it now effectively serves the needs of communication, administration, and scholarship in contemporary Sri Lanka. Its resilience and adaptability, combined with its historical depth and unique script, secure its place as one of the world's linguistically significant languages.

For more information on the history of the Sinhala script, *see Sandagomi Coperahewa, Sinhala Akuru Purāṇaya* : Sarasavi Publishers, Nugegoda 2018.

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