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Portuguese Language Impact on Sri Lankan Society: A Historical and Linguistic Analysis

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Historians identify Sri Lanka as a colonial country from 16th century to mid 20th century. Sri Lankan history is traced back to the Portuguese as the first European colonizer beginning from 16th century (1505) to the end of the seventeenth century. During this period, the establishment of Portuguese rule was consolidated in most parts of the coastal area of the island. That was the radical transition in the history of Sri Lanka.

At the same time, Portuguese language and culture also influenced and interfered in the native languages through rule and administration, economic activities, religious and social interaction, architecture and household materials, clothes and dressing and folk tales. From that time, there are many Portuguese vocabales used in the native languages (Sinhala and Tamil). Nowadays those words are nativized (Sinhalized or Tamilized) without any sense of this Portuguese language and the native speakers think that these words are Sinhala or Tamil words.

The aim of this research is to focus on the Portuguese language influence in the native languages (Sinhala and Tamil). To find out the objective of this study, historical approach and linguistic theories are applied. These analyses will help to understand contemporary social history of Sri Lanka. The impact of Portuguese language has a long lasting influence and the present generation among the Sinhalese and Tamils still use these terms without knowing their origin. These terms have become part and parcel of both these cultures and languages. This study will unfold a number of Portuguese influences in the languages and cultures of Sri Lanka.