Diminishing Cultures of Bhutan: Costume of Merag Community

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SAARC Culture is an annual research journal of the SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo. It seeks to provide a platform to the academics, practitioners, policy makers and other stakeholders of various dimensions of culture of the South Asian region (including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) to present their research findings and to debate on issues of mutual and common interests.

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From the Editor's Desk

At the outset I would like to thank all our readers and well-wishers for their very encouraging and appreciative reception to the Inaugural Issue of our annual research journal – the *SAARC Culture*.

South Asia is a region where diverse ethnic, religious and social groups exist. The need to acknowledge the profound cultural continuum of South Asia as a historical basis for sustaining harmonious relations among the peoples of the region is well recognised. At the same time it is also generally accepted that cultures are prone to change and cultures that have adaptive or assimilative traits are more likely to withstand vagaries of change. In the present globalised and highly market-oriented world dominated by neo-liberal ideologies, every living or non-living entity, genetic material and even the water we drink is increasingly getting commercialised. In such circumstances, cultures, especially those of the smaller social groups, or those that are less attractive and have little or no 'market value', run the risk of being subsumed by more dominant, multinational and transnational corporations to serve their profit-enhancement goals.

With a view to addressing the challenges threatening the traditional cultures in South Asia, the SAARC Cultural Centre has undertaken a research project on Diminishing Cultures in South Asia. This Issue of the *SAARC Culture* includes ten papers by experts from the SAARC region, that were presented at a three day Seminar on 'Diminishing Cultures of South Asia' that was held in Kandy, Sri Lanka from 19 to 21 July 2011, which also marked the first phase of the research project undertaken by the SAARC Cultural Centre. These papers focus

on a number of indigenous communities – from Merags of Bhutan to Rodiyas and Veddas of Sri Lanka – and discuss various aspects of their diminishing cultures. Based on the recommendations of the experts gathered in this Seminar, the SAARC Cultural Centre has awarded eight research projects the results of which will be shared in due course in specific publications of the SAARC Cultural Centre.

Meanwhile, we hope that this issue of the journal would also enjoy the same encouraging response from various stakeholders as its Inaugural issue. The first two issues of our journal were thematic in nature, but from the next issue (Vol. 3: 2012) we will have papers on diverse topics encompassing various dimensions and aspects of South Asian culture. I look forward for your valuable contributions for the same.

G.L.W. Samarasinghe
General Editor, *SAARC Culture* &
Director, SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo.

The Art of Filigree in Dhaka: An Example of Diminishing Tangible Culture

Firoz Mahmud

Abstract

Dhaka was a great centre of the art of filigree in both gold and silver, especially in silver, during the Mughal period (1608-1764). The use of filigree was widespread and at its peak in Dhaka during the reign of Emperor Jahangir (1605-27). As the Mughals were particularly fond of Persian jewelry in filigree, Persian designs were common in Dhaka filigree during the Mughal period. Dhaka was conquered by the British in 1764. Because of the overthrow of 'the most notable patrons' from power in a brutal way the aristocratic families, many of whom became pensioners, were no longer in a position to afford the luxury of supporting the art of filigree in Dhaka. As a result, this art virtually came to a halt. Dhaka again attained prominence for gold and silver filigree-work in the nineteenth century. The art of filigree was revived in Dhaka in 1816. In the early nineteenth century Dhaka was still in a state of economic stagnation. The circumstances that made its revival possible after a lapse of about half a century were not discussed in the available literature. The present writer thinks that the key to the revival of Dhaka filigree was the Permanent Settlement which gave rise to the new landed aristocracy. The new zamindars were the patrons of gold and silver filigree. In the 1880s there were sixty-five workshops in the city, each employing three to six men. In this period of revival Dhaka filigree-work did accomplish a high degree of excellence, but it never attained the standard of the Mughal period. What the Mughal ruling class could afford to pay for was generally beyond the reach of the

> *landed aristocracy of the nineteenth century. Even in the early twentieth century Dhaka was a prolific centre of filigree-work, producing a wide range of articles—ornaments, decorative items, and household utensils, though the diminishing state of this art was quite visible. Dhaka filigree again came to a halt soon after the partition of British India into two countries, India and Pakistan, in 1947, as the filigree-smiths, all of whom were Hindus, left for West Bengal. Even though Dhaka filigree came into life once again after the emergence of Bangladesh, it remains in its diminishing state. The diminishing state of Dhaka filigree is a good example of how an element of tangible culture can be affected politically. It is very difficult for the new filigree-smiths to restore the old splendor of Dhaka filigree unless the art is patronized by the wealthy, the museums, and, above all, the entrepreneurs of Dhaka.*

Filigree, as the current literal meaning goes, is a kind of decorative work of great refinement, delicacy, and often virtuosic complexity with a variety of fine wires or threads usually of gold or silver, which are soldered either in patterns on a background or in openwork patterns without a background to create not only purely functional objects but also items like jewelry to delight the eye (Glassie and Firoz 2007: 324).

Two powers, the Mughals and the British, contributed significantly to the development of the art of filigree in Dhaka. The coming of the Mughals (a Muslim dynasty of Central Asian origin) in the early sixteenth century gave rise to the most extraordinary transformation of the art of Dhaka filigree in line with the characteristics of Persian filigree. By the eighteenth century, however, the Mughal Empire was in the process of collapsing until overtaken completely by the growing power of the British, who had established their political base in Murshidabad in 1757 and in Dhaka in 1764. In the light of this

historical background the art of filigree, as practised in Dhaka before 1947, needs to be studied first.

Cuttack in Orissa was the greatest centre of filigree-work in the Indian subcontinent. Filigree-work was diffused into Dhaka from Cuttack. As a result, the process of manufacture of filigree in both Cuttack and Dhaka had been identical. It may be mentioned here that Indian filigree-work was a specialty of Dhaka in East Bengal (now Bangladesh), Cuttack in Orissa and Karimnagar in Andhra Pradesh. It reached a peak in excellence in Dhaka during the Mughal period (1608-1764) because of the patronage of the Mughal Emperors and Subahdars. Dhaka, or Jahangirnagar, as it was officially called or alternatively known, attained eminence as a prosperous city in the seventeenth century. Contemporary descriptions give a vivid impression of the splendor of this city, much of whose wealth was based on trade and the influx of gold and silver. Fray Sebastien Manrique, who was at Dhaka in 1640, described it as a „Gangetic emporium", with a population of over two hundred thousand (Manrique 1927: 45). Greatly impressed by the city"s wealth, he wrote, "Many strange nations resort to this city on account of its vast trade and commerce in a great variety of commodities, which are produced in profusion in the rich and fertile lands of this region." (Manrique 1927: 44). Becoming a „Gangetic emporium," Dhaka was the most affluent city in the east in the seventeenth century. The city had a significant share of the influx of precious metals. Because of the abundance of gold and silver in Dhaka the Mughals and the wealthy developed a voracious appetite for jewelry and luxurious items in gold and silver. As a result, Dhaka became a great centre of gold-and silverwork in Mughal India in the seventeenth century. Newly-founded political stability and consequent economic prosperity, combined with the cosmopolitan nature of the Mughal ruling

class (who attracted craftsmen from the Muslim world, especially from Persia), produced jewelry and other decorative objects of an incredibly high standard. Consequently, the use of filigree was widespread and at its peak in Dhaka during the Mughal period, especially during the reign of Emperor Jahangir (1605-1627) (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1: A specimen of filigree-work on the Persian model in Dhaka during the Mughal period

The spirit of the Mughal culture was largely the spirit of the Persian culture. The Mughals were particularly fond of Persian jewelry in filigree. It is very likely that ornaments in imitation of Persian jewelry were produced in Dhaka just as in the case of the *jamdani* (a type of figured muslin) where Persian designs were common during the Mughal period. A Report on „Dacca filigree work", published in 1886, provides a valuable insight

into the excellent workmanship that Dhaka attained in filigree and the extent of patronage that the craftsmen received from the Mughals in this art. The Report (1886: 97) says:

> ...it is a well known fact that there existed in Dacca in the time of Emperor Jahangir a sort of filigree work of a superior quality called *Mandila*. This was heavier than the present filigree work and made of silver wire as fine as human hair, broken into pieces and fixed together in patterns. It is said to have disappeared shortly after the arrival of the English in that part of India, owing most probably to its heavy price. The Muhammedan rulers of the country had patronized this industry to a considerable extent, but it has not been possible to procure any of the original Mandila work for the Exhibition.

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Mughal Empire declined much in power. Bengal, though it remained theoretically a province of the Mughal Empire, took full advantage of the weakness of the central authority and remained virtually autonomous. Furthermore, the governorship became hereditary, as the governor was no longer appointed from Delhi. During the Mughal period Europeans saw Bengal as one of the richest prizes in the world. An early English visitor described it as a wonderful land, whose „richness and abundance neither war, or pestilence, nor oppression could destroy." In the early eighteenth century the steady collapse of the Mughal Empire enticed the British to take a more direct involvement in the politics of Bengal. Robert Clive, an adventurous young official of the English East India Company, through the treachery of Mir Jafar and others, defeated Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah, the last independent Nawab of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, at the battle of Plassy in 1757.

Dhaka was conquered by the British in 1764. According to Sharif uddin Ahmed (1986: 90), "The subsequent replacement of the old Mughal administrative cadre by a new body of government servants caused the city to lose the most notable patrons of its valuable manufactures." It appears that because of the overthrow of „the most notable patrons" from power in a brutal way the aristocratic families, many of whom became pensioners, were no longer in a position to afford the luxury of supporting the art of filigree in Dhaka. The decay caused by the fall of the Mughals was made almost complete by the Industrial Revolution in England (Ahmed 1986: 91), and Dhaka of the 1790s was only a shadow of the past.

Dhaka again attained prominence for gold and silver filigree-work in the nineteenth century. As the report on „Dacca Filigree Work" reveals, the art of filigree was revived in Dhaka in 1816.[1] The production of *mandila* was, however, never again attempted. Curiously enough, the report is absolutely silent concerning the circumstances that made its revival possible after a lapse of about half a century. In the early nineteenth century Dhaka was still in a state of economic stagnation. The production and export of cotton piece-goods, which had actually accounted for Dhaka"s commercial prosperity, were on the ebb (Ahmed 1986: 91). For example, the export of Dhaka muslins to England was declining so fast that it came down in value from 30 lakhs of rupees in 1787 to only eight and a half lakhs in 1807, and in 1817 the export virtually came to a halt (Taylor

[1]The Report (p. 97) says that "The silver filigree work now in vogue is said to have been introduced into Dacca only seventy years ago,…" Since it also refers to the filigree-work that was prevalent in Dhaka in the Mughal period, it would be more correct to say that filigree-work was revived than introduced.

1840: 365). What was then the key to the revival of filigree-work in the period of commercial stagnation? That the revival took place soon after the permanent settlement of 1793 is significant. It appears that the revival was brought about by the new class of *zamindars* that the permanent settlement had brought in. "In consequence of the general commercial stagnation many of Dacca"s leading Armenian, Greek, Kashmiri and local merchants gave up trade and invested their capital in land, buying *zamindaries* and other properties," says Ahmed (1986: 91). These new *zamindars* were the patrons of gold and silver filigree. In the 1880s there were sixty-five workshops in the city, each employing three to six men (Stronge 1979: 71). In this period of revival Dhaka filigree-work did accomplish a high degree of excellence, but it never attained the standard of the Mughal period. What the Mughal ruling class could afford to pay for was generally beyond the reach of the landed aristocracy of the nineteenth century.

That Dhaka was a major centre of gold and silver filigree in British India throughout the nineteenth century is evident from the descriptions given by James Taylor (1840: 179), Ramani Mohan Chatterjee (1924: 75-8), W.W. Hunter (1877: 111), and George C.M. Birdwood (1880: 150). During the British period filigree-work was patronized by Nawabs and Rajas, who encouraged the industry to expand to encompass foreign trade, often giving filigree objects to visiting foreign dignitaries. What was the process of manufacture of filigree in Dhaka in the nineteenth century? This is a pertinent question in our study. The Report on Dacca filigree work (1886: 97) gives a fairly good account of the process of manufacture of nineteenth-century Dhaka filigree. This account runs as follows:

> A caste called Swarnabinikya [Swarnabanikya] who live in Nababgunge [Nawabganj] and Chowdhury Bazar, obtain

> pure silver from old ornaments and by washing the ashes of the furnaces of silversmiths. The pure silver is prepared by them in small bars which are beaten and made round and then drawn through holes perforated in a piece of flat steel called *Jantri*, till silver wire of the regulated thickness is obtained. The wire is fine or coarse, in accordance with the design to be made. These wires are then passed into the hands of the Karmakar class, who are the gold and silversmiths of India. In Dacca, the s*hankhari* (shell cutter), and *janti* (weaver) castes also work at this trade, but the articles turned out by the *shankharis* are, as a rule, inferior in workmanship and quality. The design is drawn out on paper by the Karmakar. It is said that the old designs were better than those now used, but that they have died out and now seldom or never seen.

A frame work of silver wire is made according to the popular design to serve as a support for the finer work. The leaves, flowers, stems, etc., are made separately by twisting their wires together and beating or pressing them into the required shape. The leaves, etc. &c. have then to be soldered to the frame work. The process of soldering is as follows:-A solution of borax and water is placed in a vessel over a fire and boiled till only finely powdered borax remains. Silver strips, having 3/16 to 5/16 of alloy (copper and zinc or tin), are then placed in a separate vessel and covered with the powdered borax, The silver flowers, etc.&c. are steeped in a borax solution. The frame work is then taken, the alloy silver strips are placed on those parts of the frame work to which the silver flowers are to be attached, and the silver flowers are placed on the alloy silver strips. The frame work with the strips and leaves in position is then heated over a small furnace and the soldering is completed. The finishing touches are put with pincers, wire nippers, etc.

The number of workmen employed on the manufacture of filigree work is about 80, while about 15 men prepare the pure silver bars. The workers are generally paid by monthly wages, varying from Rs. 5 to Rs. 20 a month, but sometimes piece work is given out. Advances are generally made on account of monthly pay or piece work. This fact confirms the district officer‟s report that the principals are well off while their workmen are in poor circumstances. The price of the finished work is about Rs. 2 a tolah. The Shankhari caste do inferior work at from Rs. 1 to Rs. 1/3 a tolah. The annual out-turn is estimated at about 2,000 tolahs, and it is stated that the industry has increased of late years proportionally to the increased demand for filigree work. Some of the specimens shown at the Exhibition are gilt. Gilding is said to have first been applied in the reign of Jehangir to the Mandila work. The process is as follows—Gold leaf is cut into the required sizes, the part to which gilding is to be applied is heated, the leaf is laid on, and heat is again applied until the leaf is smoothly and firmly fixed. There are said to be only five men in Dacca who do this work. Gold filigree work is also made. The same system as to manufacture and payment are in force as for silver filigree work.

The best workmen are said to be Jagobandhu Karmakar, Krishna Chandra Karmakar, and Ananda Hari Karmakar. They are all members of one family. The following are the instruments used in the preparation of the filigree work:-*Batul*, a spindle; *Charkhi*, a winder made of wood for winding wire; *Chanki*, an anvil; *Chhani*, a chisel; *Hatur*, a hammer; *Jantri*, a flat piece of steel pierced with holes for drawing wire; *Kasalla*, a bell metal mould for moulding hemispheres; a mould for shaping wire; *Ret*, a file; *Sharaish*, pincers; *Shon*, tweezers; *Tokna*, a pestle. Even in the early twentieth century Dhaka was

a prolific centre of filigree-work, producing a wide range of articles—ornaments, decorative items, and household utensils.

The samples of filigree most worthy of mention were a *pandan* (box for keeping betel leaves) made by Nitai Charan Karmakar and Jagobandhu Karmakar of Dhaka, a chandelier consisting of a *pandan,* an *atardan* and a *golap-pash* (rose water sprinkler) made by Bhairab Charan Karmakar of Dhaka (Ahmad 1982: 123),[2] an elephant-formed *atardan* (perfume container) made by Krishna Chandra Karmakar of Dhaka (Watt 1903: 39),[3] and a *pandan* in the shape of Taj Mahal, a replica of Husaini Dalan and two replicas of Ahsan Manzil made by Ananda Hari Karmakar of Dhaka (**Figure 2**).

The process of manufacture of filigree in Dhaka, as practiced until 1947, was more or less the same as before. The filigree-smiths were part of a commercial system involving investments, markets, reasonable financial returns and a number of ancillary industries, notably those of wire drawing and annealing, whose contribution to filigree-work was absolutely fundamental. Dhaka filigree came to a halt soon after the partition of British India into two countries, India and Pakistan, in 1947, as the filigree-smiths, all of whom were Hindus, left for West Bengal.

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[2]Tofail Ahmad, who derived his information from the *Official Report of the Calcutta International Exhibition,* 1883-84, refers to Nitai Charan Karmakar as Nitai Charan and Jagobandhu Karmakar as Jagobandhu Basak. The report on „Dacca Filigree Work" (Report 1886: 97) refers to Jagobandhu as Jagobandhu Karmakar. We think that the last name of both Nitai Charan and Jagobandhu was Karmakar, for the surname Karmakar designates a member of the craft-caste of the workers in metal.

[3]Krishna Chandra Karmakar"s middle name appears as Charan in the *Indian Art at Delhi, 1903*, the Official Catalogue of the Delhi Exhibition, 1902-1903. The report on „Dacca Filigree Work"refers to him as Krishna Chandra Karmakar (1886: 97).

Figure 2: A filigree model in gold of Ahsan Manzil by Ananda Hari Karmakar, who produced it in 1905 (during the British period)

Thanks to the entrepreneurship of some silversmiths, Dhaka filigree came into life once again after the emergence of Bangladesh. In the present time filigree is used as a decorative treatment for silver jewelry, which has become a fashion with women in view of price escalation of gold jewelry. A small replica of Taj Mahal, illustrated in Henry Glassie‟s admirable book (1997: 146), proves beyond doubt that filigree is used for other ornamental work as well in Dhaka. We saw it in a jewelry store at Islampur a few years ago. Unfortunately it is of crude

workmanship. Filigree continues to play an important role in modern Dhaka, but frankly the items produced today do not compare with those of the past. On the contrary, the modern specimens of Dhaka filigree, even when lavishly produced, are of only limited artistic interest. Since 1992 *pandans* and *atardans* of excellent workmanship have been occasionally on sale in jewelry stores at Islampur and Tantibazar in Dhaka. These items in Dhaka‟s markets are from Cuttack. It may be mentioned here that Vinayaklal & Company, located at Naya Sarak in Cuttack, is the pioneer in the art of filigree and the first company to launch the manufacture of filigree articles on a large scale and in a wide variety in modern India. This company, by using the artistic talent of the filigree-smiths in Orissa, has made the city of Cuttack famous in the international field of handicrafts. This company makes items like chariots, bowls, *atardans*, lockets, money-purses, etc., all of which are excellent examples. These filigree articles are made of silver drawn into thin wires and foils artistically molded with technical skills and joined together in a framework with lustrous texture finish of sterilized silver with extremely fascinating and enchanting designs. Vinayaklal & Company markets its products in India‟s major cities. As the company claims, it is exporting its products to Israel, Japan Italy, Spain, the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirate, and England. While Cuttack continues to retain its dominance in the art of filigree, Dhaka has lost its dominant position because of the political upheaval of 1947 that forced the filigree-smiths of Dhaka to leave for West Bengal, India.

The diminishing state of Dhaka filigree is a good example of how an element of tangible culture can be affected politically. Even though there are attempts to revive the art the result is not yet satisfactory. In 2005 the National Craft Council of

Bangladesh (NCCB) awarded Ganesh Karmakar the best award for his filigree-work. Ganesh, who hails from Keraniganj, Dhaka, received this award at the age of 26. He had learnt the art of filigree from his Guru Madan Pal. Ganesh gives an account of his work in these words:

> Filigree is a very delicate type of work with twisted gold or silver as the base. Wires are drawn from these two precious metals and pressed into different shapes. The metal is beaten on an anvil and lengthened into long wires, which are then twisted and flattened to make various designs and shapes. In the larger pieces, small components are first made and then joined together with interlacing tendrils to create an immensely elegant piece of ornament.

Delicacy and intricacy, refinement and gracefulness, and exquisiteness and virtuosity are the hallmarks of the art of filigree. It is, therefore, very difficult for the new filigree-smiths to restore the old splendor of Dhaka filigree. Moreover, patronage on a massive scale is the real key to the revival of the art in its former glory. The diminishing state of Dhaka filigree will continue unless the art is patronized by the wealthy, the museums, and above all, the entrepreneurs.

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Diminishing Cultures of Bhutan: Costume of Merag Community

Gengop Karchung

Abstract

Preservation and promotion of culture is one of the pillars of Bhutan's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness. Besides, the Constitution of Kingdom of Bhutan enshrines a separate article on culture preservation. Hence, the culture has an outstanding recognition in the kingdom of Bhutan, which has been through generations intact. However, with the contemporary developments, such as economic development, information and communication technology, modernisation, regionalisation and also the so called globalisation, poses a great threat. The question arises that whether the tradition and culture of Bhutan or local communities can thrive in the years to come. Thus, this study, carried out based on secondary sources, interviews, and other oral history, brings out Bhutanese diminishing cultures in general and the costume of the Merag Community in particular,with a dawn of an each new day. As such, to address diminishing local heritages, the local indigenous groups should be given special attention through incentives to protect, preserve and promote their culture and should also be made aware of the importance of their indigenous heritage through education. So that, with the changing time, the degradation and dilution of some forms and values of such cultures are inevitable, its pace can be slowed down. Whereby, it provides time for research and documentation for the future generation, in case of its disappearance. Consequently, despite being deprived of living-culture, the identity, essence of the culture is and will be retained.

Introduction

Bhutan, sandwiched between the Himalayan giants, has an approximate area of 38,394 sq. km holding an estimated population of 695,822 (2010). As a result of continental collision between the Indo-Australian Plate and Eurasian Plate, uneven and harsh physical topography evolved, isolating one place from another by valleys, hills, passes and mountains. So, the settlement came along in patches, confined to a single facet of a mountain or a valley, detaching one settlement from another, giving birth to so many indigenous groups in this small kingdom.

By the nature of its separation, inhabitants developed their own lifestyles, dialect, customs, tradition and costume. However, their culture, more or less, rested upon their beliefs, a spiritual solace that they obtained from. So, since the *Bon*, a shamanistic practice, was believed to have been prevailing in Bhutan before the advent of Buddhism, some components of the culture could have been derived from it, playing a common platform amidst diverse differences.

However, with the arrival of Padmasambhava, popularly known as Guru Rinpoche in 7th century, Buddhism provided a common ground for diverse cultures of different factions of the society, as the integration of existing culture took place. Consequently, Buddhism laid the foundation of Bhutan‟s unique cultural heritage, pertaining to arts, architecture, literature, social structure, and its institution. This distinct inheritance through generations has dived into contemporary world with all its forms and value still intact, which acknowledged Bhutan‟s sovereignty and independence, and also demonstrating its richness in cultural heritage.

Figure 1: Merag Village located at an altitude of 3,520m above sea level.

The essence of Bhutanese culture is rooted in Buddhism as Bhutanese culture pursues the Buddhist principles of *lha-choegewachu* (Ten Devine Virtues) and *mi-choetsang-ma chu-drug* (Sixteen Human Principles). The *driglamnamzha*, traditional etiquette, an integral part of culture is also founded on the above precepts. Hence, Bhutan has Buddhist majority that has a direct and unblemished correlation with the culture of its inhabitants.

Integration of various cultures and beliefs took place when the settlements expanded and central administration was formed. Moreover, when the modern developments commenced, the

isolation began to ease with road connections and other facilities. So the modern development not only posed a great challenge to the local culture and traditions but also threw an exigent battle even threatening the mainstream culture.

Nevertheless, Bhutan came up with Gross National Happiness (GNH), a guiding developmental philosophy devised to equilibrate aged-old culture and tradition with the modern development. The developmental philosophy asserts that GNH is more important than Gross National Product (GNP), which precisely stress that material development alone cannot justify the happiness of the people but need to balance the material and spiritual development holistically. So, preservation and promotion of culture was incorporated as one of the four pillars of GNH.

The Constitution of Kingdom of Bhutan also enshrines separate article on culture, emphasising preservation, protection, and promotion of cultural heritage of the country–including monuments, places and objects of artistic or historic interest, *Dzongs* (Fortresses), *Lhakhangs* (Temples), *Goendeys* (Monasteries), *Tensum* (Sacred relics), *Nyes* (Sacred sites), language, literature, music, visual arts and religion–to enrich society and the cultural life of the citizens.

Today, the main functioning body for framing and implementing cultural policies of Bhutan is Department of Culture under the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, supported by ten divisions, namely: Royal Academy of Performing Arts, Division for Conservation of Architectural Heritage, National Library & Archives, National Museum (Paro), Division for Cultural Properties, Research and Media Division, Division of Driglam Namzha (National Etiquette), Textiles Museum, the Folk Heritage Museum, Watch Tower

Museum (Trongsa). Besides, Dzongkha Development Commission, Institute of Traditional Arts and Crafts (*Zorig Chusum* or the Thirteen Arts and Crafts of Bhutan), Institute for Language and Cultural Studies, Institute of Traditional Medicine, monastic institutions, and other related organisations. Consequently, it has not only helped in safeguarding Bhutanese cultures against modern influences but also being strengthened.

Culture and its Significance

Culture is defined as "the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought" according to the www.thefreedictionary.com. In Bhutanese context, culture may be equated to term „*ɟam-sol*", which precisely expounds the above definition though current focus is more on the traditional values that are at stake in this contemporary age. So, term „*ɟam-lug-sol*" is more appropriate which literally means culture and tradition. Sometimes, we also use „*ŋgar-sol lam-lug*" that is also equivalent to the traditional system or culture. Likewise, „*sol-chun*" or „*sol-jun*" is also used to denote heritage.

Culture is lifeline of Bhutanese identity. This is why it has gained separate space in the constitution of kingdom of Bhutan, and included as one of the four pillars of Gross National Happiness, as stated earlier. Despite Bhutan being geographically very tiny, it has remained independent throughout its history, though the bordering giant countries no longer withstood the foreign occupations. This is because Bhutan not only maintained good diplomatic relations with the neighbouring countries but also preserved its unique tradition and culture which differentiated from rest of the world.

Today, looking at any aspects of life in Bhutan, the totality of Bhutan"s value is its rich culture and tradition. Therefore, any new developmental activities, plans and programs have to harmonise with Bhutanese culture and tradition, so as to yield sustainable outcomes for the happiness of the people. Nonetheless, this tradition and culture is not an alienated concept but derived from the Buddhist texts and practices. So, due to such profound and philosophical association and importance, the culture is regarded as very significant subject for preservation and promotion in the Buddhist society for aeons to come.

Diminishing Cultures of Bhutan

Despite repeated efforts in preservation and promotion, some of the cultures and traditions are at stake due to global influences. So, this paper will attempt to give an overview of some of the diminishing cultures of Bhutan which are under great threat, though it will not be able to highlight and justify the entire spectrum of diminishing cultures of Bhutan.

1. Local Costumes

Like any other countries, Bhutan also has diverse social groups who invented their own lifestyle and costumes mainly based on geographical adaptability. Bhutan has few groups with unique costumes and of these, attires worn in Merag and Sakteng in Trashigang, Laya in Gasa, and Lhop in Samtse are the most distinct folks existing today. Highlights on the costume of Merag will be presented later in the paper.

Laya community is located in Gasa Dzongkhag, northwestern part of Bhutan. People of Laya are known as *layaps*, and the community hosts very unique attires, extracted

its material from highland domestic animals such as yak and sheep, and woven into cloth pieces, which is then stitched into their costumes. Their attires are black in colour but it is only worn by women where the male dress is no longer worn, which is a true sign that even the women"s dress will disappear down the line. The black woollen dress is worn right down to the ankles. And they also wear conical pointed hat made up of bamboo adorned with beads of jewellery. These people are exclusively dependent on their domestic animals. So, part of their household moves with animals from one place to others in the mountains, herding their animals. Not only it is unique in their lifestyle and attires but they also speak different language which has close connection with *dzongkha* (national language of Bhutan). Hence, it is one of the rarest cultural groups in the country. Though the community has got rich invaluable cultural and traditional heritage, less and less people are interested to track their older generations, partly due to modern developmental facilities at their disposal but also due to globalisation. So, besides their livelihood and language, their attire is under great threat of extinction down the line.

Similarly, in the south-western Bhutan, Dorokha Drungkhag in Samtse has *lhops*, who are also one of the indigenous groups in Bhutan. Besides having their own customs, tradition and language, they also wear distinct dress. It is white in colour made of cotton. The dress worn by men is called *rah-em* and female dress is called *guih-em*. And *pungop* (shirt) over their shoulder is worn by both *lhop* males and females. However, they have gradually abandoned their attires since the beginning of the 1990s and now it is on the verge of extinction and even the cotton plantation for the garments are also disappearing from their fields. Before this, wild nettle plants were used to extract fibre for their dress (Dorji 2009). This is

because cheaper and easy materials are available in the markets. And moreover, people felt backward wearing their indigenous dress, which compelled them to follow the suit of the majority such as wearing *gho* and *kira* and also pants and shirts. So, this phenomenon of disappearing indigenous attires is not a new trend in Bhutan. It has happened and is aware to everyone, but there lacked counter actions by the Bhutanese – be it government or community itself.

2. Local Dialects

As in the case of costumes, different local dialects for different sections of the society are prevalent, but it has been observed that it is also disappearing at an alarming pace in this contemporary age. Bhutan has nineteen spoken languages, out of which four are spoken widely; *dzongkha, sharchop* or *tshanglalo, Lhotshamkha* (Nepali) and *khengkha* amongst other. However, the minorities are vulnerable to extinction such as the local dialect of *brokkat* (Bumthang Dur), *chalikha* (Mongar Chali), *'olekha* (Mangde, Trongsa), *dakpakha* (east), *gongdukha* (Kheng Gongdu in Mongar), and even *Lhops* and *Merag-Saktengpas* dialect are also in the decline, where some minor dialects must have been at the verge of extinction which requires immediate attention.

3. Marriage Customs

Marriage is an integral part of life and with no exception there are few indigenous traditions that were practised in some pockets of Bhutan. Generally, couples get married based on love or parent‟s choice, but in eastern Bhutan, lower Kheng in Zhemgang, and in Merag and Sakteng communities, they have uncommon tradition of tying their knots at their early age.

Sharchops or easterners do cross cousin marriage. In lower Kheng, Zhemgang, though it is based on cross cousin marriage, it involves childhood engagement. As a result the marriage becomes a complicated one. Once old enough, the groom has to contribute three years labour service to his bride‟s household, where his in-laws assess his capability as a husband. In the end, if approved, groom‟s parents have to supply plenty of drinks and meat for a wedding banquet. Similarly, cross cousin or outside kinship marriage of Merag and Sakteng is a tradition passed down from *Khamsang Ama Jomo*, the female deity of Merag valley, where the wedding ceremony lasts at least for three days.

However, these traditions were challenged when more and more people prefer the idea of love and romance. Besides, cross cousin marriage is forbidden by the law. So, as the marriage became simple, easy, and less expensive, the relation between the husband and wife was also seen less committed and does not last long, where elderly lots feel that social cohesion, ceremonial values, and beliefs are on a declining trend.

4. Oral Traditions

Oral tradition is also part and parcel of Bhutan‟s culture and tradition. Oral transmission such as storytelling, folklore, legends, proverbs, and even history are passed down from one generation to another. Though some transmissions were able to document in writing, the illiterate lots hanged on to this tradition, thereby giving ground for those lost manuscripts. With the modern facilities for documenting and storing data and younger generations attending school, the tradition of oral tradition has come to a halt thereby impacting largely on the sustainability of this tradition. Besides, television and internet has occupied the room for storytelling and folklore.

5. Traditional Etiquette

Driglamnamzhag (traditional etiquette) is considered one of the most important elements of life as a Bhutanese. Without this, it is considered as unmannered and uncivilised individual. These traditional etiquette exhibit the art of dressing, art of looking, art of eating, and art of sitting. In nut shell, it is all about inculcating good behaviour, forming a foundation of peace and stability, as it is absolutely based on hierarchical order. Today, the concept of *driglamnamzhag* is becoming more of an obligation and theory, due to decadence, pressure and negligence especially in urban towns.

6. Traditional Songs and Music

Songs and music are essential ingredients of culture, where Bhutanese traditional songs such as *zhungdra* and *boedra* have the potential even to trace our history, culture and religion of the time. These songs were eulogies in honour of great religious or political figures. Additionally, it also gives vivid accounts of religious sites, structures and its significance.Yet, since it is monotonous and complex by nature, younger generations turn deaf ear to it leading to a gradual decline. Similarly, traditional music comes from handful numbers of instruments, confining the enthusiast music lover for any further options to explore, thereby inclining their interest to foreign music that provides variety of choices.

7. Traditional Games and Sports

Similarly, the traditional games and sports are also sharing the unpleasant time to revive its popularity in this modern time. This is because access to the games and sports are the main driving force here. And another thing could be the popularity of

the games. Games and sports such as footfall have seen no limit even in the remote rural areas because of its popularity and easy access to the game. So, when traditional games and sports require a wide range of equipments and moreover, the fact that when it is played only in one society, the popularity is nominal. So, the chances of promoting and popularising the games and sports are very slim. Thus, there is a declining trend in losing the indigenous games in favour of the foreign games and sports.

8. Bhutanese Architecture

To cope with the developing pace around the globe, Bhutan too did not fail in picking up the pace when it comes to architectural design of the buildings or structures, thus degrading its own aged-old architectural designs. So, the unique and majestic views of Bhutanese architecture are now glued only to the historical monuments such as *dzongs, lhakhangs, gonpas, and chortens* (Stupas). With the construction booming in Bhutan, less and less people stick to the original architecture and more and more import foreign ideas and designs, though there is some blend of architectural designs in the Bhutanese buildings.

9. Thirteen Traditional Arts and Crafts

The story of traditional arts and crafts dates back as far as fifteenth century when *Terton* Pema Lingpa introduced his artistic skills in Bhutan. And in the seventeenth century *Desi* Tenzin Rabgye codified the artistic skills under *zorigchusum*, the thirteen arts and crafts. These are *shingzo* (woodworks), *dozo* (stone carving), *parzo* (carving), *lhazo* (painting), *jimzo* (clay arts), *lugzo* (metal casting), *shagzo* (wood-turning), *garzo* (blacksmithing), *troezo* (gold and silver works), *tshazo* (basketry), *dezo* (paper-making), *tshemzo* (needlework), and

thagzo (weaving). Products of these artistic works are ubiquitous in Bhutan. Sadly, due to similar easy and cheaper substitutes available, people do not prefer the traditional ones. Consequently, people give up the trade of above arts resulting in gradual decline of people with such artistic skills.

10. Local Festivals

As part of intangible cultural heritage, local festivals, mostly performing arts are lifeline of the indigenous local cultures that are unique even from the mainstream culture. When the local community is small, then the chances of disappearing the tradition and culture is high. To point out an example, the performing art called *lhacham* at Sumthrang in Bumthang Ura was not been able to perform it for the last one decade. The only expert person is an old man. Likewise, there must be even more to add on to the lists that are at the verge of extinction unless appropriate safeguarding measures such as inventories, research, and documentation are done on time.

Besides above extremely ten important areas that have been identified, there are other rich and exotic local traditions and customs that are in the line of disappearance. The “reception and see-off culture” of Merag community is amongst one. This tradition involves lots of beliefs and practices. Forget about someone leaving to a long journey involving time and distance, but even for one to two days journey, their belief compels them to follow their tradition. However, with changing time, these beliefs, practices, and tradition are gradually dying away from the face of local culture.

Figure 2: Yak Cham (Dance), Merag.

Costume of Merag Community

The Merag are an indigenous people inhabiting in the high mountains of eastern Bhutan in the village of Merag and Gengo, in the Trashigang district. Located at an altitude of 3,520m above sea level, they live on herding highland domestic animals such as yak, sheep, *dzo* and *dzomo*, cattle and horses. It is two days away from nearest motorable road head. In fact they were known as *drogpa*, highlander, but due to inaccuracy pronunciation they are called *brokpa* by the Bhutanese, a condescending term. The land area spreads to 867.7 sq. km mostly pasture land for their animals with a population of 1957. Ethnically related to the Tibetans, they speak a Tibeto-Burman language called *drogkad*. In *dzongkha* the language is called

bjokha, however, since this language is spoken only in Merag and Sakteng communities, the language is also called *merag-sakteng-kha*, the language of Merag and Sakteng.

The costume of Merag is unique though the same is worn in Sakteng community and similar one in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh in India. However, there are minor differences both in the garments used and style of wearing. To introduce the costumes of Merag; firstly, the community has four different types of outfits dressed differently–lama, *gomchen*, male and female lots. Secondly, males appear in five different attires and females in two types, though lama and *gomchen* dress similar to those in other parts of the country.

Generally, the main garment of men resembles jacket that is tied with a belt (*kera*) is called *chuba*. The five attires of men are *tsho-khamchuba* (red woollen), *puichuba* (black from yak hair), *rigu* (gray woollen), *paba* (tanned leather), and *pak-tsa* (tanned leather with hair, usually the skin of wild goat, antelope, baby yak, and calf). These attires are all worn not below mid-thigh length. The difference in the colour and material has also got significance, where red denotes formal and black informal. However, *rigu* is worn mostly by the herders especially during damp weather. Whereas, *paba* is worn by the herders especially during late autumn, winter and early spring when herders have to climb trees to trim off its branches for cattle feeds. On the other hand, *paktsa* is worn at any time, but mostly during chilly hours. However, during rainy time, it is worn exhibiting the hair side out and leather side is displayed outside when dry.

Kang-go resembling half pant covers hip to knee. It is connected at the hip with a pair of leather stocking-like *pe-shub*. The *pu-lham* (woolen boot) or *pag-lham* (leather boot) is used as footwear depending on time and place. The *pag-lham* is used

only as casual footwear though now both the footwears were used only during winter, when there is snow and frost. The hat called *tsid-paizhamu* is worn by both genders; however, *ching-zha* is used by men especially animal herders, which has less formal values. *Tsid-paizhamu* is black in colour with five finger-like protrusions from its edges with the length of 15 to 20 centimetres.The colour of the *ching-zha* varies, mostly black and brown, resembling to that of cowboy hat. Besides these distinct and locally manufactured attires, there were other features such as *kubtan* (seating mat) dangling behind and *dri* (knife) tied horizontally on the left hip of men. *Khab-shub* (needle case) suspended from the right hip in the case of women and men in their *chuba* pouch. *Nyug-dri [nga-zor*or *barey]* (small knife) is also included in women‟s item by hanging along with the *khab-shub.*Women also wear beads of jewellery around their neck composed of precious stones such as turquoise, coral, shell, onyx, and many more depending on how wealthy the person is. Likewise, one significant feature is that both male and female use earrings.

Figure 3: Male Attire made from wool, Merag

Similarly, women also wear equally distinct apparels. As a main garment, they wore *ngui-shing* made from wool but now white or red with white striped silk *shingkha* is worn. It's like a long skirt. Anyway, to make it more formal, it is worn both at a time appending white *shingkha* from within, making its edges visible. The *shingkha* is fastened at the waist with a belt, lifting it to shin, assembling three or more folds in the front depending on the size of the *shingkha*. But before fastening it with the belt, *mey-kem*, a black rectangular woollen piece of cloth is attached behind to a knee high.

Figure 4: Female Dress, Merag

Then plain white or red with flower patterns of waist-high *to-dung* with full sleeve is worn. The material of the *to-dung* varies from cotton to silk. Additionally, *ba-todung*, a woollen jacket is developed in similar pattern and size. Besides this,

lhen-ba which is red and made from wool is worn at the back just enough to cover from shoulder till the waist. As in the case of men, they also have similar designed footwear called *nem-builham* though the colour differs slightly. Since the footwears were as high as edge of knee, it is being fastened slightly below knee by a small belt called *lham-rogkera*. With this outfits, the men and women make perfect distinct.

Material of the Costume

Unlike any other sections of the society, people of Merag community lived on producing their own clothing. These clothing were extracted from the domestic animals they raise– wool from sheep and three types of hairs from yak. The black wool is used for the similar colour of clothing and white is used for various other colours, using dye depending upon the pattern of the garment, predominantly red. Similarly, the hairs of yak were also used in similar purposes. The wool from sheep was sheared four times a year in olden days when there were plenty of grasses to feed on. But now, it is sheared thrice a year. The timing for the shearing of wool was done before or right next morning after arrival to Merag from the highland in the ninth month of Bhutanese calendar to avoid autumnal dry thrones and rubbish, as the wool of that period was considered as the best one. Thereafter, it was done after every four months.

Conversely, in the case of yak, it is quite different. Yak produces three types of hair called *pu, tsid-pa*, and *nga-ma*. *Pu* is the softest of the three, which is pulled out from the either side of the yak‟s body and is eventually used for inner clothing or for blankets. Whereas, *tsid-pa* which is little coarse and hard is sheared from dewlap till lower abdomen. The *tsid-pa* of male yak is used for producing various items such as tents, rain-proof,

and sacks. However, the *tsid-pa* of female yak or male yak under three years of age were used exclusively for hat, while the *tsid-pa* sheared in the first year is called *drab* which is used for developing *kud-pa* (thread) and *nun-da* (rope). *Nga-ma* is the longest and roughest of the hairs which grows on the tail and are used for developing bags–*pha-chung*.

Figure 5: Milking a Yak, the main source of livelihood, Merag.

With the limited natural colour of the hairs, various other means to colouring were practised. For natural dyeing, dye is collected from different plants for specific colours. *Tsod* plant for red colour, indigo (*ja*ཇ) plant for blue colour, leafs of *zhung-gen shing* for yellow, and *dam-nag* (black mud) is used for black colour. However, *tshur* (rock salt) and sour fruit from *u-shukyur-moshing* is used to hold the colour on the woollen cloth pieces. Each of this colouring requires slightly different process. But with the introduction of chemical dye and easy process and methods, this indigenous knowledge of dying and obtaining dye is also on the decline, which is also a concern for the community and government, as it is also part and parcel of intangible cultural heritage of that community. Such processes, methods, and skills not only make them self-sufficient and independent but also provide them with business opportunities. Besides, they can also keep the dying culture alive.

Art of Weaving and Stitching

Once the wool and hair is extracted from the sheep and yak, then it is being segregated into different sections depending upon their colour and texture from dust and other sticky dry plants. Then it is being dried and carded using Hand Cards, after which it is being made into thread by spinning both by men and women. They even spin while walking. Then threads are wound in the warping place [board], which involves another art in allocating required size and pattern, when finally set in the loom. It is then woven for weeks. After the weaving is done, it is then soaked into hot water and being softened by creasing with the help of two legs. After hours, then the coarse surface hides itself into the furry fleece, which shows that it is finally developed into fine woollen cloth piece for further development into required cloths and garments. It was then washed and dried.

In case, if we require different colour for white woollen cloth piece, it is then processed further for colouring (dying).

With this fine piece of woollen cloth, it is then cut into various pieces and sizes depending on the various types of garment. It is then stitched for days involving different technique of stitching to last for years without tearing it. And the stitching lines were never seen torn though the garments are filled with patches after many years. Not all the people are equipped with the skills to stitch especially when it comes to garments of all sorts including *chuba* and *lham,* and likewise, not all female are adequately skilful enough in warping and weaving. So, very few lots are proficient in these arts, where it requires lots of patience, care, technique, time, and skills. The finest and softest pieces of cloth are used for *khan-jor* (shirt), *chu-ba*, *kang-go*, *dor-ma*, and in some parts of *lham*. Others are used for developing blankets, carpets, cushions, and pillows. *Tsho-khamchuba*, *rigu,* and *nem-builham* are made from wool and *puichuba* and *pu-lham* are developed from yak's *pu* but the process of developing it into final cloth pieces are as same as the woollen cloth pieces.

Since the art of weaving and stitching requires lots of skills, the profession is not welcomed by most which ultimately leads to decline of this art. As a part of intangible aspect of culture, it should also be addressed before it is too late.

Importance of the Costume

Looking at the above stories on its costumes, material used, and the process of making garments, it is clear that the community had not depended on any other external sources in making it into final products. Be it hat, *khan-jor, chuba*, pant, *kang-go*, *shing-kha* [*ngui-shing*], footwear, and other necessary belonging were

crafted, woven, and produced by their own, without having to buy from external sources. Therefore, it clearly signifies that this community was self-sufficient in olden times. Moreover, it proves that people of that time were so skilful and hardworking, and innovative too. But now, with the globalisation in the process, every individual becomes dependent as substitutes of all items were made cheaper and easily available, which was not the case then.

Remaining isolated gave them platform to be independent and maintain their own identity by wearing their own set of attires, which is a matter of pride that should carry in every *meraps*' blood. But looking at the current pace of degradation in its tradition and culture, and particularly in its costumes, it is of great embarrassment even to say that someone belong to that community. It is due to sheer ignorance that, little by little the identity, coupled with many other cultures of the society within and beyond Bhutan, aggravated its gradual disappearance. So, we can hardly say what people or society do those people belong to–dressed in pant and shirt, mixed language of Dzongkha, English, Hindi, Mon-ked, and their own language, and contending for wealth and power creating chaos in the community. Therefore, it is even hard to say that this is a beautiful and peaceful community of Merag, compared to a decade ago.

According to some texts, it is said that *tsid-paizhamu* symbolises head of black bird, where *ba-todung* and *todung* with different colours signify hanging sleeves (*phoi-ka*) worn by descendants of the bird. Similarly, *lhem-ba* represents wings of the bird and *kang-go* symbolises tail of the bird, whereas, the *lham* stands for its webbed feet. This derivation was based on

the theme that people of Merag were descended from *jachung* [garuda], mythical bird.

Additionally, besides the costume, there are other aspects of culture and tradition that are at stake, which are very unique. These includes the way of life or lifestyle, beliefs, religion, language, festivals, and the most interesting part is its female deity called Khamsang Ama Jomo, residing on the highest mountain of the valley overlooking Merag community, which has very rich legends along with various forms and imprints left on the stones. So, these are also of a concern to the community and government for further research and documentation, neglecting which will cause irreversible catastrophe.

Preservation Policy and Present Position

Ever since His Majesty the 4th King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck propounded the phrase "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross Domestic Product" in 1972, the developmental plans and programmes were framed based on the GNH principles. As culture being one of the four pillars of the principle, it has gained attention in all aspects of programmes– be it in planning, law making, discussion, conference and even in the education system of Bhutan, which is the most important and influential of all.

In 2010, Ministry of Education launched formal website on "Educating for GNH" providing separate platform for imparting and disseminating the subject to the future citizens of Bhutan which was already incorporated in the education system. Besides sustainable economic development, preservation of environment, and good governance, preservation and promotion of culture is the most applicable to the students. Students of all sections are taught values of culture based on *driglamnamzha*–

being responsible, respecting elders and younger, rendering helping hand for the needy ones, and so on. The value education has reciprocated its results within few months of its implementation bringing harmony and self-consciousness amongst the students. As a result, the youth and everyone are very much aware of the importance of the subject and the state of various diminishing cultures as listed above.

Nonetheless, even after their studies, cultural orientation is given annually to the university graduates to prepare them to serve the nation with loyalty and dedication and also to brief them about the importance and diversity of indigenous cultures prevailing in the nooks and corners of the country, as they may be posted anywhere else in the country. Likewise, even after getting into the job, time and again, the public servants are briefed and trained on the cultural values and its significance in today‟s world particularly on *driglamnamzha*. Furthermore, even at the grassroots level of the society, people are very much cognisant of government‟s effort in retaining and promoting local culture and traditions.

Similarly, the costumes of Merag community are also promoted in various ways. To promote the indigenous attires, government had accepted the dress in all the government offices and even the school uniform of that community is in their own local costumes. Similarly, Royal Academy of Performing Arts uses the costumes of Merag community while performing songs and dances in various national and international functions in and abroad.

Challenges

Having presented the ground realities of diminishing cultures of Bhutan particularly the costumes of Merag community, there are

couples of difficulties confronting the sustainability of the culture and traditions. No matter what plans and policies are framed and in place, gradually we do see the downward trend in every bits of culture. These challenges were attributed mainly to globalisation and modernisation process taking place around the globe. The global village formed by globalisation not only allows platform for wide varieties of choices over the goods and services from varied sources but also due to the inevitable phenomenon of modernisation or westernisation provides multifaceted fashion, culture, religion, beliefs and lifestyles. The intensity is aggravated by receiving western or foreign education to the coming generations. As a result, younger generation prefer city life coalesced to hybrid culture with modern amenities.

Modern facilities such as road, electricity, office centres, internet, telecommunication, television, and so on retain people in the city and even the rural folks are coaxed to migrate to experience the exuberant and better life, leaving behind their rich and invaluable culture and traditions. Besides, cultural dilution is also from the fact that internet and television serve as a medium to propagate newer fashions or styles based on foreign themes, thereby affecting the culture and traditions that are in practice.

Since conventional items are based on handmade that entail lots of time and energy, usually products are overpriced. Moreover, lack of varied sizes, patterns, and qualities are common as it is manually produced. As a result, customers fall for the substitute goods that are easily available at all range of size, patterns, and even prices. Therefore, even in the case of costumes of Merag community, similar practicality is pursued to reduce the excessive burden of cost of production of the attires,

and simply people go for the diverse substitutions available in the market, which led them to dress in pants and shirt, merging themselves into the mainstream global culture.

It is the phase of time where local aboriginal culture and traditions are amalgamating with the mainstream culture, and even beyond with the global culture. Consequently, minority who are left with conventional lifestyles are impelled to give up their original lifestyles. Taking into consideration the attire, we find that when one or few dresses that are distinct from the other commonly accepted attires, they become the centre of attention with various remarks. No one knows when someone might abuse them of their backwardness. Moreover, when others bother so much about that distinctness, the minority or that person might feel humiliated and embarrassed, resulting in psychological mayhem. As a result, the minority is compelled to disrobe their distinct attire in other majority due to inadvertent abuse, harassment, and humiliation. Slowly, they trend to adopt borrowing others‟ (majority‟s) attire and gradually, vanishing the minority which is a realistic fact. This is the greatest challenge of all, when someone has to deal with the psychological state of other people.

Conclusion

With this identification on diminishing cultures of Bhutan specifically pertaining to the costume of Merag community, it is obvious that some recommendations and proposals are very much required to create conducive environment for sustainable culture and traditions. So it is apparent that culture plays a significant role in the society and happiness of the people. The essence of the culture is the identity it exhibits. A single cultural entity displays its own values and significance, forming distinct

identity. Ultimately, independence and sovereignty is the singular substance of the culture that guarantees harmony and stability at the various social levels.

In view of the above realities and facts, the only possible solution at hand is to educate the people particularly aboriginal groups on values and importance of traditional cultural heritage. With the awareness in place, less and less majority group (mainstream group) bothers about the minority, thereby brushing off the social stigma of backwardness.

The sustainability of indigenous culture and traditions can be prolonged bestowing special attention through guidance, support, and incentives in their daily lives–providing training and resources for weaving in the case of costume of Merag community. Furthermore, giving them chance to interact with other indigenous groups will also at least help to relieve from their social stigmas.

Lastly, SAARC cultural networking of this kind is very important not only to share the unique practices in the region, but also provides platform to brainstorm on the given subject to devise better and refined solutions for the diminishing cultures. In order to enhance its coverage and productivity, setting up of „field office" in every member state is an utmost importance, so as to safeguard intangible and tangible cultural heritage of the Himalayas through inventorying, research and documentation.

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Performing Arts and Traditions of the Nomadic (Gypsy) Tribe of Bazigars

Surjeet Singh

Abstract

It is a well-known fact that the fertile land of Punjab has been the abode of many nomadic tribes and gypsies but there is not much information available about these communities. Bazigars, one of the major nomadic tribes, settled down recently on the outskirts of the villages and towns of Punjab is one such community. The Bazigar men are known for their acrobatics and the women for dance and singing, while Bazigar women are famous for their dances, which are completely different from the dances of Punjabi women in terms of body movements, rhythmic and in terms of form and content and praxis of the total composition. With the forces of industrialization, modernization and globalisation, the Bazigars like other tribes of the region, are rapidly losing their lifestyles, their ways of living and their art forms are fast vanishing. This paper focuses on the process of their assimilation in the main society and their strategies to maintain their distinct cultural identity.

> Among India"s many gifts to the world we must include the gypsies, who, with their music and dancing, have formed a romantic and colorful element in European life for over five centuries.[1]

The holding of this SAARC conference on Diminishing Cultures in South Asia comes at a time when native traditions of art and culture in South Asia are struggling to survive under the impact of industrialization and globalisation. During these times of great cultural turmoil, multinational corporations are

mercilessly exploiting the material world and the land to generate more and more markets leading to relentless displacement of people, their traditions, their beliefs and their values.[2] This paper and the accompanying documentary film is part of a nomination dossier prepared for UNESCO's project, The Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of humanity, prepared under the auspices of North Zone Cultural Centre (Ministry of Culture, Government of India), Patiala.[3] To begin with, a socio-cultural profile of the Bazigars is prepared with their acrobatics, their dances and songs, their ceremonies and rituals, their myths and narratives and their indigenous knowledge systems. The socio-cultural profile of the Bazigars will serve as a pilot study for the comprehensive project of documenting the vanishing traditions of art and culture in North India.

The land of Punjab watered by the great river system of Indus has been the cradle of earliest civilization, popularly known as Indus Valley Civilization. It was the river system of Indus which gave its name to India. A.L. Basham whose classic work on the history and culture of ancient Indian subcontinent continues to be an excellent source material to understand the glory of ancient India, observes, "More than two thousand years before Christ the fertile plain of the Panjab („Five Rivers"), watered by the great tributaries of the Indus – the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Satlaj – had a high culture, which spread as far as the sea and along the western seaboard at least as far as Gujarat[4]." Describing the land, terrain and routes which demarcate and connect Punjab with Iran and Central Asia, Buddha Prakash in his seminal study in *Glimpses of Ancient Panjab*, presents a most lucid and vivid picture of the region with its ever-flourishing socio-ethnic diversity, "The socio-ethnic formation of the Indo-Iranian borderlands reveals a

bewildering variety in accordance with geographical diversity. Here we find nomads and peasants, traders and pedlars, robbers and highwaymen of various races, cultures and dialects[5]." It is a well known fact that the land of ancient Punjab has been the abode of many nomadic tribes and gypsies. As the British started documenting Indian society, Denzil Ibbetson's Report on the „Races, castes and tribes of Punjab"[6] and subsequently H.A. Ros"s 'Glossary" of the tribes and castes of the Panjab and North-West Frontier Province"[7] (based on Ibbetson"s Report) for the first time fondly talks about the gypsy tribe of Bazigars known for their acrobatics, dance and song. Denzil Ibbetson ruefully regrets about the lack of information about these fascinating communities of professional entertainers like the Bazigars, the Nats and some others who live in the forest. On the basis of information about these people available at that time, Denzil Ibbetson classifies these tribes in to two categories i.e. hunting tribes who sustain their living primarily by hunting wild animals and occasionally resort to burglary. (The Sansis of Punjab were categorized as belonging to criminal tribes by the British). The second category of tribes constitutes communities of professional entertainers who earn their living by entertaining people with their performing arts, dance and song.

The Bazigars no longer live in the forest; no longer raise their cattle in the green pastures and meadows as the sacred woods which have been nourishing man and animals for thousands of years have been wiped out. The Bazigars are the most prominent and colorful people among the many tribes which have settled down in the recent past. Besides Punjab, the Bazigars are scattered all over Haryana, Eastern Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu region of Jammu & Kashmir. During the British rule in India, there are references to their

presence in the Malwa region of Punjab and also in areas of Lahore, Rawalpindi, Jhelum, Multan, and Jhang[8]. After partition of Punjab in 1947, they are mainly settled in the villages of Ferozepur, Sangrur, Sunam, Dhuri, Sanaur, Batala and Jalandhar. In Haryana, they are mainly concentrated around Fatehbad, Ratiya, Kurukshetra and Karnal. Some pockets of Bazigars are also found in lower regions of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu region of Jammu & Kashmir. Like other castes of India, they are further subdivided on the basis of sub-castes. There are nine sub-castes among the Bazigars.

During their nomadic life, in their wanderings from place to place in search of livelihood, the Bazigars lived in temporary huts called *Sirkian*. A *Sirki* is a hut like structure made of reed, straw and wood. Those huts were constructed by elderly Bazigar women with great art and skill. They also make special arrangements for storage of food grains and cereals. The Bazigar women are known for their arts and crafts. With keen sense of observation and sharp perception, the Bazigar women fully understand their environment and ransack their surroundings to create objects of daily use with great functional utility and aesthetics. The Bazigar women are great masters in the art of sewing with hands for they do not possess sewing machines. From the rags they pick, women prepare colorful handmade carpets to spread on the ground to sleep at night. On one side of the entrance to the hut, they set up on open hearth protected by small mud walls decorated with floral designs and motifs of animals and birds. All the utensils, pitcher for carrying water and the cooking utensils are prepared from clay. A broken piece of pitcher is used to cook *chapaties* on fire. Meat is cooked in pots made of clay. The Bazigar women are great masters in the

art of preserving fire for fire is extremely important for the life of the community.

As the process of settling down of nomadic tribes got initiated as a consequence of wide spread economic and social transformation in the society, the Bazigars started living in mud houses like other poor sections of the society. With the passage of time, by doing physical hard work and labour, some of the Bazigars have built *Pakka* houses (brick houses) constructed with bricks and cement.

Like most of the other tribes of this region, the Bazigars also relate themselves to the Rajput rulers of Rajasthan. According to the most prevalent narrative about their origin, a Mughal king expressed his desire to marry Das Maluki, the beautiful daughter of their chief Balu Ram but according to their custom a Rajput will not ever give his daughter in marriage to a Muslim king. The king was infuriated at the refusal of Balu Ram to offer his daughter in marriage to the king. Balu Ram, fearing harm to his tribe, went hiding into the dense forest. To conceal their true identity, Balu Ram and his tribe changed their dress and their language. According to another myth, they are forbidden to sleep under a permanent roof. They are cursed to move from place to place and live in temporary makeshift huts (*Sirki*) of weed. Following the myth, they took all kinds of meta-physical precautions as the clan started settling down in small mud settlements (*Bastis*) on the periphery of the villages. The Bazigars like other tribes of the region were living a nomadic life just a couple of decades back.

The word „Bazigar" is derived from Persian language literally meaning „one who performs *Bazi*", a spectacular form of acrobatics. The Bazigars are a community of professional entertainers who earn their living by performing acrobatics. As

an ancestral profession, every male child in the community is trained by the elders in the art of acrobatics. Ritually, every male child is initiated in the art of acrobatics even today. There was complete network of communication and understanding among the various groups of Bazigars inhabiting a certain territory. In other words, an area of certain villages was marked as a domain belonging to a particular performing group. As such there were personal, stable relationships between the Bazigars and the village community. Sometimes, there were incidents of misunderstanding and disputes but they were resolved amicably. Depending upon the cycle of seasons and the cycle of crops, the best times for the performance were after harvesting of the crops and the long winter after the sowing season. It is important to understand that professional entertainers were an integral part of the well-knit traditional peasant societies.

Bazigar women are highly accomplished in the art of dancing and singing. Bazigar women are extremely beautiful with bright black eyes, colorfully dressed in *Kurti* (top) studded with beads, sea-shells and heavily embroidered *Gunia* (lower). They are extremely fond of dark, bright colors mostly black, red and semitic green. Bazigar men also like bright colors mostly black and semitic green.

As the lifestyle of the community is changing, Bazigar women dress up like Punjabi women in *Salwaar kameez*. But there are differential features in the design and color of their garments which mark them as belonging to the Bazigar community. The women wear silver jewellery mostly in the ears, nose, around neck, on the arms and a silver chain in the pig tail of their long thick black hair. They are extremely fond of tattoos on prominent features of the body, the forehead, arms, on legs and so on. There is invariably a tattoo of the crescent moon

with a star on the forehead of every Bazigar woman. Men are equally fond of tattoos. We have prepared a full glossary of the motifs, of the tattoos made on the various parts of the male and female bodies. There are motifs common to both men and women but some of the motifs are exclusive to a particular gender as there are motifs of fairies on the chest of men. The women are great masters in the art of sewing with hands for they do not possess any sewing machines. From the rags they pick, women prepare colorful handmade carpets to spread on the ground to sleep at night. The selling of toys for small kids, *charmakhs* for spinning wheel and sewing needles to the village women is one of the occupations of Bazigar women. By the side of the entrance to the hut, they set up an open hearth protected by small mud walls decorated with floral designs and motifs of animals and birds. All the utensils, pitcher for carrying and storing water and the cooking utensils are prepared from clay and cooked in fire. A broken piece of pitcher is used to cook *chapattis* on fire. Meat is cooked in pots made of clay. The Bazigar women are great masters in the art of preserving fire for fire is extremely important for the life of the community.

As the process of settling down of nomadic tribes began as a consequence of widespread economic and social transformations in the society, the Bazigars started living in mud houses like the Harijans and other poor sections of Indian society. With the passage of time, by dint of hard work and labor, some of the Bazigars have built *pakka* houses.

Performing Arts

Bazi is a Persian word for a very special kind of acrobatic performance that involves severe physical risks and mental strength. The performers of *Bazi* are known as Bazigars. The

performance of *Bazi* takes place during the lean season especially after harvesting of crops when the peasants are relatively free from the fields. In an agricultural society, the fairs and festivals, events of public entertainment like the performance of Bazi and balladeers singing ballads of heroism, chivalry and romance are regulated by the cycle of sowing and harvesting of crops. Every group of Bazigars is patronized by certain villages thus establishing a long-term stable relationship between the performers and the community. In traditional well-knit communities this kind of assured support and recognition to the performers is very essential for the development of art, the artist and the continuation of a tradition.

The performance of Bazi is a great event of public entertainment and celebration in the life of the village community. People of the village, the young and the old, men and women and small kids gather in large numbers to witness the performance. The venue of the performance is an open space on the periphery of the village community.

The major components of the performance are:

a. Acrobatics

b. *Nakal* (a form of folk theatre)

c. Music of the *Dhol* (drum)

With permission from the village elders, the performance begins with invocation to God Hanuman, for they believe that they learnt the art of acrobatics from Hanuman. In traditional communities, arts and crafts are completely integrated with religion and belief systems of the people signifying a harmonious life of body and mind, matter and spirit and of man and God. The performers are male members of the Bazigar

community, ranging from small kids to elderly people, though the star performers are agile young men with shining serpentine bodies. The leader of the group conducts the performance in a highly professional manner with remarkable oratorical skill and control over diction. The *Dholi* (drummer) and the music of the drum play very important role in the performance for the whole event takes place amidst the overwhelming music of the drum. The form and the range of the acrobatics varies from simple to complex, finally leading to dangerous dare-devil exercises which demand perfect control over mind and body. Risks are very high and the Bazigars really live dangerously!

Intercepted in between the series of events of acrobatics, a group of talented actors from the community presents interludes of *Nakal* for humour and comic relief. *Nakal* is a developed satirical form of folk theatre which exposes the foibles and follies of men and women, high and low. At the conclusion of the event, the performers are amply rewarded in kind and cash by the village community.

Vanishing Traditions of Art and Culture

With the forces of industrialization, technology, modernization and globalisation, the Bazigars like other tribes of the region, are rapidly losing their lifestyles and their traditions of culture are fast vanishing. Unlike the past when professional entertainers were an integral component of the society, today art and culture has become a commodity to make money in the market. The Bazigars can no longer survive on the basis of their performing arts. They are basically landless, poor people. It is their sheer fascination for art which is keeping the tradition alive. Bazigar women do still earn some money by entertaining people on the occasion of festivals, fairs and happy occasions of celebration.

The birth of a male child is a great event of celebration in North India. Bazigar women are highly talented in the art of singing lullabies (*lorian*) and a very special type of wedding songs (*ghorian*) sung on the occasion of wedding of a boy. They are supposed to possess magical powers. As such people, believe that they can protect the newly born child from evil spirits. With the changing panorama of seasons and the cycle of crops, there is a whole chain of festivals and fairs when people sing, dance and celebrate. On the occasion of these festivals especially *Lohri* and *Diwali*, Bazigar women go to the villages and small towns to congratulate people by singing and dancing.

As already mentioned, Bazigar women are famous for dance and song and men for acrobatics. It is this image of the community which has been projected in Indian films and literature. But not a single film or a literary work has presented even a sketchy version of full performance of Bazi, nor of *Gidha* (dance) of Bazigar women which is entirely different from Punjabi women's dances in terms of body movements, rhythmics and in terms of form and content and praxis of the total composition.

It is a well known fact that the gypsies have produced best singers, dancers and men and women in music. Therefore, it is not surprising that all the *Dhol is* (the Bhangra drummers) come from Bazigar community. They have produced legendary drummers like Bhanna Ram, Mangat Rai, Biru Ram and Garib Das. The Bazigars are professional entertainers: men perform acrobatics and women are known for dance and song. Keeping in view their family tradition of acrobatics, dance and music, they can easily be trained to excel in the field of sports especially gymnastics, and music, dance and song.

As the traditional communities, which supported and sustained them, are breaking down, the Bazigars are becoming pop singers, dancers and drum players. The *Dhol* (drum) occupies central position in the folk music of Punjab and all the *Dholis* (the Bhangra drummers) come from this community.

During this period of great cultural turmoil when folk traditions of smaller, marginalized communities are threatened by the forces of industrialization and commercialization, the Bazigars are looking for other avenues of employment and survival.

Most of them, men and women, are working in the fields as farm labourers. Paddy plantation is mainly done by Bazigar women. Settled in villages and on the periphery of towns, some of them are raising cattle, cows and buffaloes, and selling milk on bicycles as milk vendors. Some of them are involved in the collection of scrap material.

The holding of youth festivals at the school, college and university level has really provided them new fields to show their talent and to earn their living. They are acting as instructors and coaches to train boys and girls in song and dance especially Bhangra. North Zone Cultural Centre, Patiala has selected number of talented Bazigar performers and singers, who are training young students from the schools and colleges in folk dances of Punjab especially Bhangra and the dances of women.

It is very essential that some responsible agency should take upon itself the responsibility to preserve this art form of Bazigars and help them train their next generation to keep this tradition alive. Bazigars do not have any school or college or established institutions which teach them this tradition. They are basically poor people. It is their zeal to keep the tradition alive

and fortunately the North Zone Cultural Centre (NZCC), Patiala after its establishment in 1985 was in a position to provide adequate assistance by showcasing their performances in Punjab and all over India and even abroad in the most popular fairs and festivals.

As a result of aforementioned efforts, the youngsters of the community have started taking keen interest to continue the tradition. They have become aware of the cultural significance of their art form and with the assistance of North Zone Cultural Centre, it is hoped that they will be able to preserve and perpetuate their cultural heritage.

The performing arts of the gypsy tribe of the Bazigars are a cultural asset of the region. In India, gypsy tribes and village communities have been surviving over thousands of years.

In the process of actual living, these small communities have developed their ways of living, their indigenous knowledge systems and their world view which is entirely different from the world-view of our so called main society. More and more scholars are coming to realize that we, the moderns, have whole world to learn to improve the quality of our life from these so called „traditional" communities.

Notes and References

1. Basham, A.L., *The Wonder That was India*, First published in 1954 (rep., Delhi, 1981), p. 514.

2. For a thorough exploration of the predicament of native traditions in the "turbulent Context" (in Said's striking phrase) of globalisation see part 3, Orientalism Now, in his book, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, (rep., London, 1995), p. 255.

Following the ideas about the general relationship between culture and empire, as a developed in this study mainly dealing with the Middle East, Edward W. Said goes ahead in his words, "to describe a more general pattern of relationship between the modern metropolitan West and its overseas territories" in his fascinating study *Culture and Imperialism*, (rep., London, 1995).

3. The author prepared a nomination dossier including a documentary film for inscription on the Representative List of The Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) under the UNESCO Convention on Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) 2010.

4. Basham, *op. cit*., p.1.

5. Prakash, Buddha, *Glimpses of Ancient Panjab*, (Patiala, 1983).

6. Ibbetson, Denzil, *The Races, Castes and Tribes of the people* in the Report on the Census of the Panjab, published in 1883 (Rep., 1995), Language Department, Punjab, Patiala.

7. Rose, H.A., *A Glossary of the Tribes and castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province*, Published in 1892 (Rep., 1990), Language Department, Punjab, Patiala.

8. Ibbetson, *op. cit*., pp.271-72.

Diminishing Culture of the Tribes of Andaman Islands: Bio-Cultural Perspectives

B.N. Sarkar

Abstract

A population may be subjected to a condition of being in danger because of unknown, unexpected operation of human and other biotic and/ or abiotic factors, or by conscious human activities. The most extreme state of endangerment is a threat to 'survival' of biological, demographic or cultural dimensions, which may be real or perceived. The Andaman Islanders (except the Great Andamanese) are still considered to be the remnant of true 'Negrito' population in South-East Asia. They have dwindled to a size where the chance of extinction is very real. The study on such population would provide a unique opportunity to understand the evolutionary history of mankind. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the ramification of such 'endangerment' as experienced by the tribes of Andaman Islands in recent past.

Introduction

The Indian sub-continent is an abode of all major ethnic groups with their rich bio-cultural heritage in diverse physical, cultural, linguistic, biological, genetic and environmental characteristics. Much of this variability is indigenous. However, a considerable fraction of its variability has also been introduced through large scale immigrations into India from time immemorial. A country as big as India with regions differing widely in soil, in historical growth and in the ethnic elements is bound to show differences in behavioural patterns, dress, food habit, material culture, house

type, kinship system, marriage pattern and language, but this variability cannot be explained as merely regional. India‘s ecology and geography had a considerable role in shaping these diversities. Her mosaic ecological zones were the abode of early hominids and prehistoric human as could be visualized from the fossil finds.

Prehistoric India owes a rare distinction of being the paradise as cultural development which did not unilinearly occurred here. At a given point of time an urban culture, a rural system, a Neolithic settlement, Mesolithic hunting-gathering cave culture, or a nomadic way of life could be easily appraised (Sankalia 1974).

The aboriginal elements in the population of India are grouped on the basis of tribes which are composed of a large number of clans or septs, totemistic or territorial groups. They differ from the caste structure in their territorial affiliation, and in their freedom from economic interdependence. They are spread over the sub-continent, but instead of amalgamating with others to make bigger groups, each retain its separateness.

The tribes are by no means homogeneous either in their history, language, livelihood pattern, or social organization. There were some 700 tribes in India (Census 1981). The population size of these tribes varies enormously, from a mere fifty individuals among the Andamanese to about five million among the Gonds and the Bhils in Central India (Census 2001). There are matrilineal tribes as the Khasis of Meghalaya, or patrilineal as Ho of Bihar. Some tribes are true hunter-gatherers like the Jarawa, Onge and Sentinelese of Andaman Islands, others are pastoralists like the Todas of Nilgiris, or shifting cultivators as Mizos, or settled cultivators as the Mundas, and

nomadic as the Birhors of Jharkhand and Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh.

A population may be subjected to a condition of being in danger because of unknown, unexpected operation of human and other biotic/or abiotic factors or by constant human activities. In a population the most extreme state of ‗endangerment' is a threat to ‗survival' of biological, demographic, or cultural dimensions, which may be real or perceive. Until recently, over one hundreds tribes around the world prefer to refuse contact with outsiders, including the Jarawas and the Sentenelese of Andaman Islands. They are the most vulnerable people on the earth. Over the decades, a number of research efforts were conducted on a number of hunting gathering groups all over the world through multidisciplinary researches including ecological, demographic, biomedical, socio-cultural, genetic and behavioral studies. The overall goal of such multidisciplinary approach has been an explorative paradigm, particularly with respect to understand the adaptive strategies make use of by the hunter-gatherer. However, precise estimates for the total population of the world's ‗endangered' human populations are very difficult to compile due to difficulties in identification and variances and inadequacies of available data. Most of these groups are now very small in size. In human history a basic ecological process of the transition was from nomadic hunter-gatherer life to sedentary life of food producers, which began about ten thousand years ago.

The Andaman Islands are the homeland of four inbreed-groups namely the Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa and the Sentinelese. They differed from each other in their culture, dialect and life-style. Several scholars studied the Andaman islanders since the late part of the nineteenth century. Man

(1883) and Portman (1899) documented ethnographic details among the various tribes of Andaman Islands. Radcliffe-Brown (1922) in his outstanding publication *The Andaman Islanders* reported the results of his in depth studies on the ethnography of the Andamanese. The Onge of Little Andaman was also studied by Cipriani (1955). Until recently, the Jarawas were one of the least known tribes of Andaman Islands. However, the Sentinelese are still beyond the scope of any study due to their unfriendliness. Besides, numerous articles covering various aspects of the culture of the tribes of the region have been published by different scholars (among others see Pandit 1976; Danda 1987, Basu 1990; Chakraborty 1990; Sarkar 1990; Pandya 1993; Reddy et al., 1993 Basu and Sarkar 1994). The above studies contain extremely valuable information on lifestyles, material culture, kinship organization, religion, folk-lore etc., of the tribes of the region. The above studies were conducted within the framework of ethnography. However, most of the above studies do provide a valuable base line data on which to build upon analytical studies.

In the present endeavor the author briefly indicates the nature and extent of endangerment of the tribes of Andaman Islands and their probable cause of depopulation and diminishing their culture. The present study is based on the materials collected by the author through field investigations carried out during the year 1984-86 among the Onge and 1998 – 2002 among the Jarawas of Andaman Islands.

Physical Settings of Andamans

The Andaman groups of islands are situated in the south-eastern portion of the Bay of with a chain of some 257 large and small islands stretching about 353 km long (from Landfall Island in

the North to Little Andaman in the South). Of which only 26 islands are inhabited in Andaman Islands. The Andaman Islands are divided into two main groups of islands viz., Great Andaman and Little Andaman. Great Andaman is further sub-divided into three separate groups — North Andaman, Middle Andaman and South Andaman. Total land area of the Andamans is estimated about 6408km. The island inhabited by the Onge, called the Little Andaman, is the southern most island of the Andaman group. The geographical affinity between the Bay Islands and the Arakan Yoma Range in Burma and its geological age from early Miocene to Pleistocene has been suggested by Tipper (1911) and Srinivasan (1969). The climate of the island is tropical. It is characterized by warm and humid weather with two well-marked seasons, viz., wet and dry. In wet season, the south-west monsoon rain lasts from May to December with intermittent breaks while the remaining period of the year is dry. The annual normal rainfall is 3180.59 mm.

Flora: There are four important natural ecosystems in this island viz., the forest ecosystem, the marine ecosystem and the inter phase between the two, the mangrove ecosystem. The tribes of Andaman Islands have not only made the forest their home but they cannot survive without it. The vegetation of Little Andaman can be divided into two broad categories viz., littoral and non-littoral. The littoral coastal forest is characterized by abundance of mangrove swamps (*Rhizophora conjugata*) near the estuaries of the indented creeks and by the pandanus, nipa palm etc. The coconut and casuarina are also the characteristic littoral flora of Little Andaman in recent times. Until recently, the whole of the island except the sandy shores are covered by exceedingly dense tropical growths of the evergreen and deciduous types. Paduk (*Pterocarpus dalbergioides*) is the

principal tree of deciduous variety which included Dhup (*Canarium euphyllum*), Didu (*Bombax insigne*), Black chuglam (*Terminalia bialata*), and Badam (*Termanalia procera*). The evergreen type includes, among others, Gurjan (*Dipterocarpus*), Nutmeg (*Myritsica irva*), Lalhini (*Calophyllum spectabile*) etc. The present state of knowledge of the flora of the Andaman Islands indicates that there are about 144 species endemic to this island. They occur in limited localities and habitats in small populations. This makes them extremely vulnerable to extinction as a result of recent human activities. It is also interesting to note that about 40% of the flora of these islands are absent on the main land in India being Southeast Asian species distributed in Burma, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia (Balakrishnan 1989).

Fauna: Among the large mammals, only pig (*Sus andamanesis*) is found in the island. Dog is not the native mammal, but have been introduced and the only animal domesticated by the Onge with great love and care. Venomous snakes, leech, tick and other harmful insects are abundant. There are many kinds of birds and lizards, including monitor lizard (varanus). In spite of the ideal habitat, ferocious animals as well as larger games are so far conspicuously absent. The island can be considered as the treasure house of several important species of marine fauna. This includes turtle, dugong (*Dugong dugong*) and an enormous variety of different types of fishes.

Historical Background of the Area

In reality, there was no authentic history of the Andaman Islands till the British came into contact with the islanders in 1788. Some knowledge about the existence of the Andaman Islands dates back to the second century when Cladius Ptolemy, (a

Roman geographer, first published an annotated atlas describing places as far east as Borneo (Sen 1962; Dutta 1978). However, the islands were known to the sailors and travellers become evident from the accounts of the Chinese in seventh century, Arabs in ninth century and Europeans in thirteenth century. Pirates operating in those parts used to capture the islanders and sell them as slaves in those countries (Portman 1899).

Nonetheless, the historical phases of these islands can be broadly divided into four main periods. These are: a) The period of seclusion and piratical disturbances (upto - 1788), b) The British regime - a period of foreign intrusion and settlement (1788 - 1941), c) The Japanese regime (1942 - 1945), and d) The post-Independence period - attempt of all round regional development and welfare of the Islands and the settlement of the refugees mainly from erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), since 15th August, 1947 (Sen 1962).

Peopling of Andaman Islands

There is no definite knowledge about the time when the Andaman Islands were peopled first. The earliest evidence of human habitation in the Islands was available in forms of small stone tools, bone and shell artefacts, and potsherds deposited in mounds that are known as kitchen middens. Using the method of relative dating, Dutta (1978) suggested that the mesolithic culture ~~h~~ave possibly arrived in the Andaman Islands sometimes around the beginning of the Christian era". However, Radio Carbon dating, which gives us absolute dates, ranges between 1400 ±100 years B.P. for Beehive Island and 2280 ±90 years B.P. for Chauldari, South Andamans (Cooper 1990).

The scattered groups of ‗pygmies' found in the Andaman Islands, Philippine Islands and Malaya Peninsula are now considered as Asiatic Pygmies. They were approximately 35,000 in strength in South-East Asia including the Andamanese, the Aetas of the Philippine and the Semang of Malaysia (Hartt 1990). The region from where the Andaman Islanders arrived and the route of their migration are matters of great controversy. Linguistic affinity between the Andaman tribes and the collective similar groups of South-East Asia is yet to be established. According to Radcliffe Brown (1922) the Andaman Islands were peopled either by land or by sea route from the Arakan region of lower Burma. Melengraaf (1921) believed, during the quaternary age there was a fall of 300 mts in the sea level, which established direct contact with Burma and facilitated movement of the Negritoes into the islands.

Based on certain classical genetic markers, Nei and Ray Choudhury (1982) and Omoto (1984), suggested a close affinity between the Philippine Negritoes and their neighboring population of South-East Asia than the African pygmies. Biological affinities between the Onges, Jarawas of Andaman Islands and the Semangs of Malaysia and the Aetas of Philippines have also been suggested with regard to anthropometric (Guha 1954; Sarkar 1989) and dermatoglyphic (Sarkar 1987) characteristics. More recently, the improved mtDNA haplogroup M31‗32 based on whole genome sequence has permitted the evaluation of hypothesis for the peopling of Andaman Islands (Thangraj et al. 2003, 2005; Kashyap et al. 2003; Barik et al. 2008 and others) suggested that the inhabitants of Andaman Islands are direct descendants of the settlers of the southeast Asia. Haplogroup 31a1b is exclusively present among the Jarawa and the Onge, whereas the spectrum

of haplogroup M31a1a is found among the Great Andamanese only. Thus the recent studies on the mtDNA lineages suggest that the genetic pool of the Andamanese is likely to be a product of random genetic drift due to constant relatively small population size and physical isolation of the islands from time immemorial. The Andaman tribes are thought to have lived on the Andaman Islands for about 55 kya. The Jarawa and the Onges are still considered to be the most ancient population groups in India.

The aborigines of the Andaman Island are divided into two main divisions, the Great Andamanese and the Onge-Jarawa-Sentinelese division. These two divisions show many a differences with regards to language and material culture (Radcliffe-Brown 1922). The ten dialectical groups- Cari, Kora, Jero, Bo, Keda, Kol, Juwari, Pucikwar or Bajigyab, Bea, and Balawa of Great Andaman which once constituted the Great Andamanese division now comprise only 55 survivors of a hybrid generation (2001). At present they have been settled in Strait Island off the east coast of Middle Andamans since 1970. Of the tribes belonging to the other division, the Jarawa live in the western part of South Andaman Island and Middle Andaman. The name Jarawa meaning ‗the other people' or ‗strangers' seems to have been given by the Great Andamanese. They called themselves as *Ang*. The North Sentinel Island off the west coast of South Andaman is exclusively inhabited by the Sentinelese (**Figure 1**).

With the British occupation of these islands and the settlement of the penal settlement, the ethnic situation has changed. A large number of populations were brought and settled in the Andamans during this period.

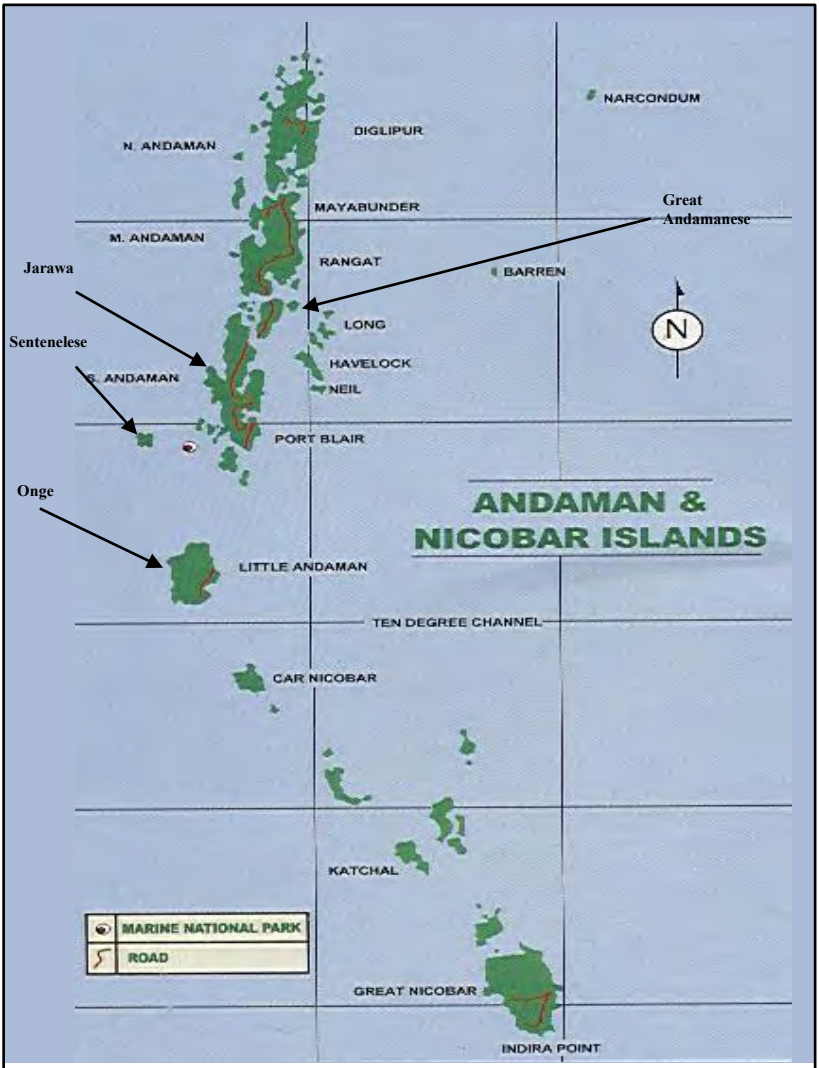

Figure 1: Map showing the present distribution of the Andaman Tribes

This process of even more extenuated after Independence when there was a greater inflow of settlers to these islands from other parts of India - refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and settlers from Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Jharkahand (the then Bihar) and Karnataka (for further details see Singh et al.,1994).

Language

The language of the Andamanese form one family viz., Andamanese family and is believed that their may be some linguistic affinities with the Semang of Malay Peninsula and the Aeta of the Philippines (Radcliffe-Brown 1922; Pandit 1976). But there is little information available to establish such affinities. In recent times, the Great Andamanese, Onge and a few of males and females of the Jarawas have learned to speak Hindi due to their contact with the settlers. They have their own dialect but without any scripts. Recently, the changing of Onge personal names (anthroponomy) has been reported by Sreenath (1995).

Population of Andaman Islanders

The population of ‗Negrito' islanders was estimated to be around 10,000 in 1779 for the first time, which sharply declined to less than half of it by 1858 (Dutta 1978). By 1981, their strength sharply reduced to some 400 and odd. The trend of rapid decline of the four Andamanese Negritos can be established from the population figures available for the period 1858-2001 (**Figure 2**).

It indicates that the Great Andamanese are the worst affected population among the Andaman Negritos, whose numbers dwindled from 625 in 1901 to mere 28 at the end of 1987. Two specific reasons have been put forward for explaining the decay of the Great Andamanese population. One is attributed to the warfare and the other is ravages from contagious diseases like syphilis, tuberculosis, measles etc., during the year following 1870 (Man 1932; Portman 1899).

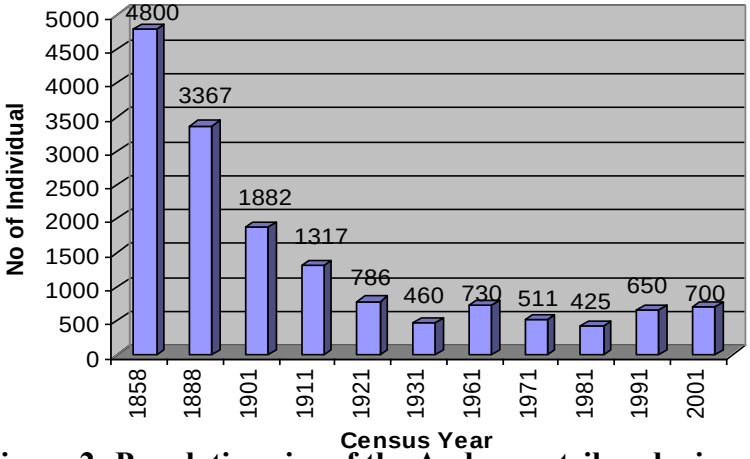

Figure 2: Population size of the Andaman tribes during the period 1858-2001

Although the distribution of population of the Andaman ‗Negritos' show a declining trend for the period 1858-2001, the overall growth of the population of Andaman Islands however, depicting a contrasting picture during the same period 1881-2001 (**Figure 3**).

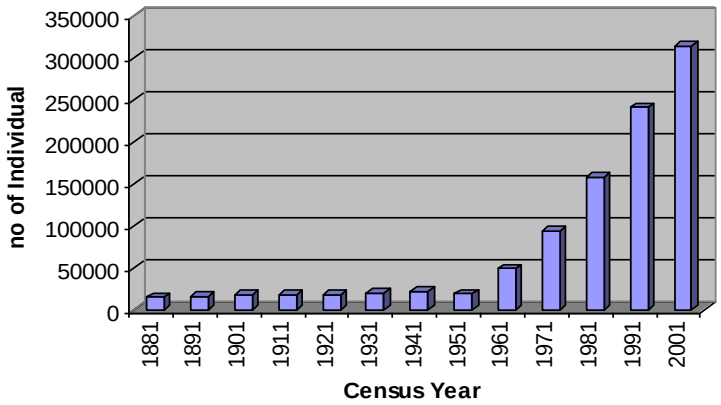

Figure 3: Population growth of Andaman Islands during the period 1881 -2001

The island population recorded a decreasing trend between 1901 and 1911(-2.74%) as well as between 1941 and 1951 (-11.05%), but after the independence of India, the island population started increasing. It is estimated that the magnitude of growth rates of the overall population of this island have been recorded higher during the post-independent period than that of the British colonial period. The maximum decadal growth has been recorded between 1951 and 1961, this rate of increase was as high as 158.35%. This was due to the heavy influx of refugee population, who migrated from the erst while East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and other areas. This trend of increasing population continued for at least two decades.

Sex-Ratio

The population of Andaman Islands also show a peculiar trend in the sex-ratio. Abnormally high sex-ratio (fewer females than

males) is an important characteristic feature of these islands. This is because of the fact that during the post-independence period, mainly male convicts and freedom fighters were brought to the island. The proportion of the female increased only when the Bengalee population were settled in this island.

Ethnographic account and Social Structure

The tribes of Andaman Islands received a considerable attention by both cultural and biological anthropologists in the past as mentioned above. These studies contain extremely valuable information on genesis of unfriendliness, lifestyles, material culture, kinship organization, religion, folk-lore etc., of the tribes of the region.

The Jarawas and the Onges have their well-defined society. They are endogamous people, who are not ready to consider possibilities of violating this rule of marriage till date. The smallest social unit among them is family; members of a family are husband, wife, and their young children.

Settlement Pattern

Prior to 1950, the Onge lived in small local groups consisting of several families scattered all over the Little Andaman Island, while the Jarawas confined to the western coast of South and Middle Andamans. With regard to settlement pattern we observed certain basic similarities between the Onges and the Jarawas. On the basis of their relationship with the resources they classified in two broad categories: Forest dwellers and Coastal dwellers.

The next larger social group is the territorial division; there can be several local groups in one such division. Traditionally

the Onge habitat was divided into three geographical regions namely, *Giremekaya* (the Northern and Eastern coast), *Gireraratwaye* (the Southern and Western coast) and *Engakwaleye* (thickly forested interior part). Each region was inhabited by a number of local groups or bands of the Onge called *Beyra* and the Jarawas called *Chaddas*. Altogether twenty-two such *Beyras* were identified by the present author in 1985 among the Onges of Little Andaman.

Similarly it is observed that the Jarawas also divide the area under their occupation into three territorial divisions. The northernmost part located on Middle Andaman Island is called *Tanmad*, the southernmost territory is called *Boiab*, and the land lying in between the two is called *Thidong*. In 2002 altogether fifty such local groups affiliated with *Chaddas* were identified in three territorial divisions (nineteen in Boiab, fifteen in Thidong and sixteen in Tanmad) among the Jarawas. Most members of a local group are related to each other either through consanguineal or affinal relations. This communal hut was the central pivot of the Onge social structure (Cipriani 1966). The communal huts were usually circular beehive shaped structure and were mostly inhabited by them during the rainy season. At other times they used to put up temporary lean-to-type huts in the forest during their individual expeditions to hunt and gather food. This tradition still continues among the Jarawas.

Economy

The economic activities of the tribes of Andamans are limited to food gathering, hunting and fishing. They do not have any knowledge of agriculture and domestication of animals. The vast resources provided by the forest and the sea have been the source of food for their subsistence. Their economic activities

are to some extent guided by the climatic condition of the island. The division of labour is very strongly emphasized among these people.

The Andaman Islanders in general and the Jarawas in particular are primarily depending on animal resources for their sustenance. The forests in Andaman harbour some 35 species of terrestrial mammals, of them Jarawas consume only the wild pigs (*Sus scrofa andamanensis)* as food. The wild pig is their most preferred animal food item, but there is a selection on the rate of hunting of this animal at different seasons of the year. The frequency of wild pig hunting was maximum during the post-monsoon period (December) and minimum in the dry season (April-May). Apart from this wild pig they also consumed monitor lizard (*Varanus salvator andamanensis),* Turtle (*Chelonia mydas and Lepidochelys olivacea*) and various kinds of fishes and prawn (*Panulirus versicolor, Palaemon debilis etc.*) and a wide spectrum of mollaces *(Trochus niloticus, Turbo brunneus, Turbo cinereus, etc.).* Until recently, turtle and dugong hunting were among the adventurous and skillful economic pursuits among the coast dwelling Onge. Among both the Onges and the Jarawas the men catch fish with bow and specially made fishing arrows where as the women catch small fish and prawn in the streams and creeks with hand nets. They have recently learnt from the recent settlers the use of line hooks for fishing. The honey collection is exclusively a man‘s job. There are two varieties of bees in the island, producing two types of honey, one is dark and the other is golden-yellow in colour. The golden honey is considered the best quality available only in the month of February and March.

This animal food is supplemented by a wide variety of plant-based foods that provide reasonable quantity of

carbohydrates and vitamins. It was observed that the edible plant species are available in various forest types, right from Mangrove Forest to Andaman Semi-Evergreen Forest. Jarawas use fruits (*Baccaurea sapida, Mimusops littoralis* (Sea mohua), *Elaeagnus latifolia* (Khata phal), nuts, seeds (*Cycas rumphii)*, tubers and roots of different plants (*Diascoria sp.* (Yam/ Jungli aloo) some are eaten raw and some are processed before eating. Most of these seeds and tubers are gathered and transported to the camp by women. Recently, some Jarawas were observed to chew tobacco leaves and wild areca nut, a habit acquired or learnt from the settlers. Apart from these, there have been a series of changes in the subsistence pattern and activities of the Andamanese following their contact with the settlers.

Food habits

The traditional food consumed by the Onge is mainly pork, turtle, dugong, fish, lobsters, huge crabs, molasses etc., besides various roots, tubers, fruits and honey. Bose (1964) also reported that on an average about three-fourth of the annual food requirement of the Onge was gathered from the forest, while the rest was procured from the sea. However, welfare scheme of the government, executed among the Onge, have brought some radical change to their food since 1977. Under the distribution system of free rations, the Onge are provided with wheat, rice, sugar, pulses, saturated oil, milk powder, spices, tea leaves etc. They, however, consume liquor of tea as well as the milk of coconut. Earlier cooking among the Onge was limited to simple roasting or boiling of the food items without spices and salt. The Onge have now learnt to prepare rice and *chappaties* (a kind of hand made bread prepaed from wheat), as the food items are now provided by the local administration.

Relationship between behavioural patterns and physiological plasticity

The traditional patterns of hunting gathering subsistence of the Andaman tribes can be interpreted as an adaptive response to various socio-cultural, economic, demographic, morphological, physical and genetical characteristics. They have a wide spectrum of resources which they procure from both the terrestrial and marine resources (**Figure 4**).

The subsistence patterns of the Andaman tribes are still limited to food gathering, hunting and fishing, particularly among the Jarawas, Sentenelese and the Onges (**Figure 5**).

The ‗earth-oven cooking technique' (*alav*) of the Jarawa is considered to be one of the oldest techniques for baking food (**Figure 6**). Such ovens are mostly used to cook pork and jackfruit. After three to four hours the cooked food is taken out for consumption. Nowadays, they boil pork and other items of food.

More than 95% of mankind's history has been as hunter-gatherers. Accumulating evidence suggests that the genetic make-up of the hunter-gatherers remained primarily unchanged. Untill 500 generations ago, all humans consumed only wild and unprocessed food foraged and hunted from their immediate environment which provided a diet high in protein with polyunsaturated fats (especially omega-3 fatty acids) monosaturated fats, fibres, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and other phytochemicals. Anthropological and historical studies show that hunter-gatheres generally to be healthy, fit, and largely free of the degenerative cardiovascular diseases common in modern societies.

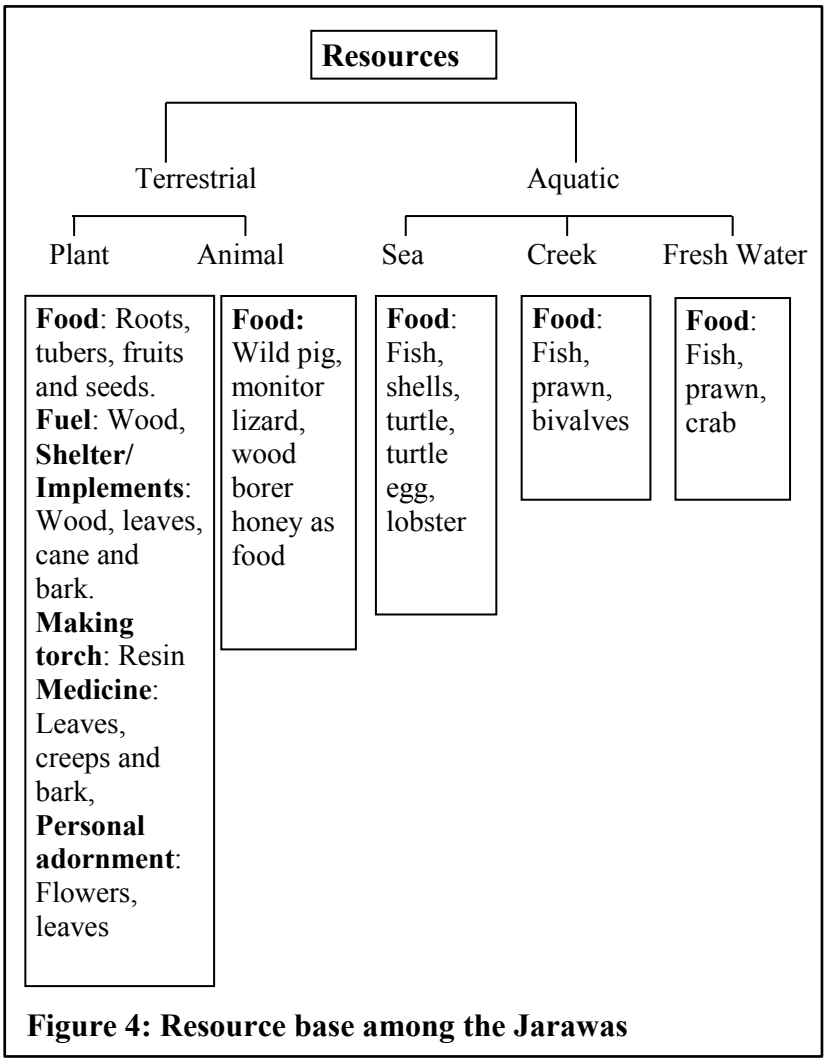

Figure 4: Resource base among the Jarawas

Figure 5: A group of Great Andamanese (By courtesy Anthropological Survey of India)

Figure 6: Traditional Earth-oven cooking technique of the Jarawa

In this regard, it is to be mentioned that the Jarawas and the Onges are still remained largely distinct culturally and genetically. They have certain unique attributes of biomedical phenomna that directly related to their cultural practices. Some physiological and disease patterns are also to be considered as an important selective factors of the population of Andaman. It is interesting to mention that very low blood pressure (hypotensive) and lack of elevation of blood pressure over the age is a unique feature among the Jarawas as evident in many African tribes like Zulus, Masais (Scotch and Geiger, 1963). On the contrary, in the recent past there is considerable increase in the blood pressure among the Onges of Little Andaman perhaps due to their changing pattern of life-style and food habits (Kumar and Sarkar, 1987). Besides, an extremely low levels of total cholesterol (in spite of high consumption of protein and fat in their diet), rare incidence of anaemia and hypovitaminosis and low level of immunoglobulin profile are considered to be some significant adaptive responses of this true hunter-gatherer tribes particularly the Jarawas of Andaman Island.

The Jarawas are maintaining their health and nutritional status without the consumption of green leafy vegetables and milk and milk products, suggesting that the various food items consumed by Jarawas constitute a balanced diet for them. The micronutrients, namely, vitamin C, carotene, vitamin K, folic acid, calcium, sodium, iron, Zinc etc., of leafy vegetables and calcium and phosphorus and protein of milk and milk products are possibly compensated by various animal food and wild fruits consumed abundantly by Jarawas. Until recently, both the Jarawas and the Onges were not found to be using salt, sugar, oil, spices and condiments with their raw or cooked food.

In spite of high intake of the animal fat intake for most of the Jarawas, the lipid profile and other serum parameters remained within normal limits, which signifies that Jarawas might have a better fat metabolizing capacity. Blood glucose levels from random blood samples were also in the normal range for most of them, indicating that Jarawas did not have any diabetic problem.

Besides, the natural selection has operated on their body size as estimates the low SA/ wt ratio among the Jarawas and the Onges who have evolved in this climatic stress of tropical rain forest in Andaman Islands over the hundreds of generations. Among the Jarawas and the Onges of Andaman Islands the Body Surface Area (m^2)/Body mass (weight in kg.) ratio were estimated to be around 0.032 m^2/kg, which is most suitable for the high-humid climate. Shvartz et.al., (1973) predicted that the rate of heat storage was negatively related to SA/ Wt ratio in hot-wet condition. They tested the men whose Body Surface Area/ Body mass ratio ranged from 0.0232 to 0.0307 m^2/ kg under the hot-dry and hot-wet climatic condition.

Although, the Onges (who came into direct contact with the outside world since 1960s) has remained largely unchanged genetically, but their diet and life style have become progressively more divergent from their ancestor in the recent past. These maladaptative changes began with the deforestation and rehabilitation programme since 1967 and have been accelerating in recent times. On the contrary the Jarawas are still maintaining their traditional way of life in spite of many changes in their surroundings in the recent years. In view of the facts mentioned some demographic, physiological and genetic attributes of the Onge and the Jarawas are presented. The detailed demographic profile of the Onge and the Jarawa is

beyond the scope of this paper. However, a comparative evaluation of certain demographic profiles between the Jarawas and the Onges are presented in **Table 1** and **Table 2**. It reveals that the high proportion of young individuals, a reasonable balanced sex ratio, higher proportion of fertile women and of prospective mothers suggest a progressive trend of population expansion of the present day Jarawas of Andaman Islands in contrast to a marked decline trend of the Onge population of Little Andaman, who came in contact with the outside world earlier (Sarkar 2009). Any other alien food, if consumed by them regularly, may change their food habit and may affect their health adversely as they may not be used to them physiologically.

Population	***< 15 yrs***	***15 – 49 yrs***	***50 yrs and above***
Jarawas	47.74	49.68	2.58
Onges	23.96	60.41	15.63

Table 1: Population distribution (in percentage) among the Jarawas and the Onges according to age categories

Population	***Average family size***	***Surviving children per mother***	***Net reproductive index***
Jarawa	4.84	3.43	1.11
Onge	2.74	1.59	0.65

Table 2: Comparative demographic features among the Jarawas and the Onges

It reveals that the high proportion of young individuals, a reasonable balanced sex ratio, higher proportion of fertile

women and of prospective mothers suggest a progressive trend of population expansion of the present day Jarawas of Andaman Islands in contrast to a marked decline trend of the Onge population of Little Andaman, who came in contact with the outside world earlier (Sarkar 2009). Any other alien food, if consumed by them regularly, may change their food habit and may affect their health adversely as they may not be used to them physiologically.

Impact of Development

Contact with the Onges

Till 1967 the Little Andaman Island was exclusively inhabited by the Onges. In 1967-68 the government of India undertook a massive development programme for the Little Andaman. The total population of the little Andaman according to 1981 census was 7214. The 98 Onge individuals constitute only 1.36% of this Island, the remaining population were made up of settlers from mainland India such as displaced Bengali population from erstwhile East Pakistan, and the Nicobarese- a tribal population from the Car Nicobar Island. For this rehabilitation vast areas have been deforested. As a result of the massive inflow of settlers, the Onge now have to interact constantly with the settlers. Besides, the Forest and Plantation Development Corporation took up their forest activities in Little Andaman since 1977. Saldanha (1989) reported the rate of extraction from the reserve forest area in Little Andaman, which may not be sustainable. Of late, the Government of India, through the Andaman Adim Jan Jati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS), with the intention of protecting the tribe, has set up a permanent jetty, two settlements for the Onge, one at Dugong Creek and the other at South Bay in Little Andaman (AAJVS, 1977). At

settlement sites the AAJVS maintains a supply of food and certain commodities such as clothes, utensils, foods etc. Besides, a health center has also been established in 1977 comprising patients wards with five beds and maternity facilities. At the time of investigation, one doctor, one auxiliary nurse cum midwife, one ward boy was in position at Dugong Creek.

History of Contact with the Jarawas

The unfriendliness of the Jarawas was the major constrain for such contact until 1974, when some friendly contact could be established with some Jarawas in Middle Andaman. In 1956, the government notified areas for protection of the _aboriginal tribes' of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Since 1974, the Andaman Administration organized contact expeditions once in every month particularly in the full moon day from sea coast, when the Jarawas were mostly confined to the sea shore for foraging activities. Sarkar (1990) reported most of the information collected in those years. In October 1997, the major shift in the situation took place when a group of Jarawa came out of their habitat to visit settlement areas of Middle Andaman Island in broad daylight. During this period the Jaraws learnt a little bit of others language mostly the Hindi and Bengali and started taking banana, biscuit and junk food including tobacco that are available from the road side as well as wearing cloths and keeping pets. Nonetheless, it is to be mentioned that the Jarawa social organization has not undergone any perceptible changes in the recent years like the drastic change already took place among the Great Anadamanese as well as among the Onges of Little Andaman. The interaction between indigenous and non-indigenous societies through history has been a

complex one, ranging from outright conflict to some degree of mutual benefit and culture transfer.

Trends related to endangerment

The history of colonialism in the Andaman Islands and the differing interactions between tribal groups and the colonial settlers are highly relevant for the depopulation of this small inbreed population groups. By the mid 1870s the British had befriended the majority of the Great Andamanese, with the notable exception of the Onge and the Jarawas. During the last 150 years or so their population has been dwindling and the cause for which is not fully understood, though some causal factors have been identified by many scholars in the recent times. The overall population size of the Andaman Islanders was estimated around 10,000 in 1779 (Dutta 1978), which sharply declined to less than half of it by 1858, which is further declined to about 650 and odd (Great Andamanese (50), Onge (98), Jarawa (365) and estimated population of the Senteneles (~150).

The World War II brought another series of changes in the life and culture of Andamans. During the war, the Japanese occupied Andamans on 21st March, 1942 and kept the region under their control till 1945. The world war-II has also been considered as one of the major factors for the decline in these small communities like the Great Andamanese and the Jarawas. Following the great mass destruction during the colonial period, in the form of punitive expedition against these tribal groups further threaten their survival. The information regarding the number of such incidences was reported elsewhere (Mukhopadhyay 2002). It is believed that the small population size of hunting-gathering communities is intended for the extinction which appears to be too simplistic as natural

phenomena. However, there are certain contrary instances like Pitcarian Islands who continue to exist into a large population from a small inbreed founder group (Cipriani 1966). This example simply ruled out the general hypothesis that recurring inbreeding in small population leads to decline of their population.

The first anthropological study that draws our attention to the problems of extinction of small populations was carried out by Cappieri (1953) on the Andamanese followed by Basu (1969) on the Pahira. Cappieri (1974) suggested that diseases and epidemics like pulmonary infection, syphilis, measles etc., some of which were imported by settlers from the mainland, India have played havoc on these ‗virgin' population of Andaman Islands. In this context it is mentioned here that the penetrating account of disappearance of the Tasmanian aborigines (Bonwick 1884) following arrival of the European settlers may find a close parallel in India particularly among the Andaman aborigines during the early colonial period.

In the late 1860s the Andaman Home was founded by the administrator at Port Blair during the colonial period had also been curved out as an institution of tribal dissolution. During that time the inter community interaction resulted in addiction to opium, tobacco and liquor, apart from sex exploitation and introduction of new pathogens of deadly diseases like pneumonia, syphilis, measles and influenza and of late tuberculosis among the Great Andamanese. Between 1877 - 1880, a measles epidemic caused very high rates of mortality among the Andamanese population. By 1900 the Great Andamanese population had declined to about 600 and continued to decline to a low of 19 souls by 1960s. Now they registered an increase thereafter to the present population of 50

by 2011 due to close monitoring and modern medical intervention as and when required in recent time.

The practice of incompatible marriage age among the Great Andamaneses and the Onges, like old men marrying young women or vice-versa, such incompatible marriages also lead to low fecundity and consequent decline in these populations.

The subsistence strategy of the Andaman islanders was based on the exploitation of a variety of marine resources, roots, fruits and honey from the forest and the communal hunting of wild pigs and turtle. An extensive area with sufficient resource base is considered to be an essential requirement for a hunter-gatherer nomadic tribe for their subsistence. In 2001 the size of the Jarawa population was around 276 and they were living in an area of about 638 sq. km. which is increased to 365 souls in 2011. Therefore, it reveals that the resource base available to the Jarawas was apparently quite sufficient. But in a changing scenario, with increasing contact with exogenous people, the Jarawas were ought to acquire some ailments/ diseases, which had no occurrence earlier in their community. However, there is a considerable reduction in the consumption of specific micro nutrients such as vitamin A, iron, calcium etc., following the transition which caused some health problems. These historical processes resulted in differences in nutrition, epidemics, mortality rates among the different tribes had a long-term negative influences on the overall population growth.

Emerging threat to Survival

Very little is known about the health problems and disease patterns of the Andaman tribes, only one can infer that their population was flourishing in their early eco-cultural system.

Prior to the initial limited contact with the sea farers and travellers, the immigration of mainland Indians and Karen (Burmese) settlers, bringing about two century ago, accelerated the magnitude of contact and dislocation of their settlements. The ATR (Andaman Trunk Road) cuts through the Jarawa reserve bringing poachers, settlers and more recently the tourists. All these recent contacts remain extremely vulnerable due to the risk of diseases and sudden exposure to the various kinds of new pathogens, to which they have no immunity. As a result in 1999 and 2006, the Jarawa suffered an outbreak of measles- a disease that had wiped out many souls among the Great Andamanese following the contact with the outsiders as reported by . However there were no reported deaths. The biological miscegenation is not a new phenomenon among the Great Andamanese. There are quite a few instances where the Andamanese women married the Burmese and the tribal groups of Chhotanagpur who settled in Anadaman Island since the colonial period.

The disease introduced into the small isolated communities like the tribes of Andaman Islands following physical contact with outsiders would devastate their population especially when such diseases are epidemic in nature. The first anthropological study focussing on the problem of extinction of small populations was reported by Cappieri (1953), who showed how total populations in time series of the Great Andamanese indicate a virtual lack of the potentiality for healthy population growth and chances of total extinction. Cappieri suggested that diseases and epidemics like pulmonary infection, syphilis, measles etc., have played havoc on these virgin populations which has a very low level of immunity to this new pathogens. However, the mechanism of such extinction has hardly been

understood satisfactorily yet. The confrontation of technologically more advanced settlers from the mainland, these small indigenous populations had also experienced a psychological setback. This penetrating account of disappearance of the Tasmanian aborigines, following arrival of the European settlers, may find a close parallel in the Andaman Islands during the early colonial period (Bonwick 1884). Among many others, similar situation had also been accounted among the Pahiras – a food gathering community of Eastern India by Basu (1971). Rivers (1922) had explained the similar factors as how new diseases patterns among the Melanesians to wipe them out as the major forces for depopulation. Not much is known about the patterns of diseases among the Onges and the Jarawas, if any, the cultural voidance created due to sudden and far reaching changes in the way of life from hunting-gathering pattern to sedentary life style. In 1980s the majority of the deaths were reported to be of tuberculosis, respiratory infections, diarrhoeal disorders accidents and anemia among the Onges of Little Andaman (Verma 1989). The major threat of diseases among the Jarawas is upper respiratory infection followed by fever and cough (Mukhopadhyay and Sarkar, 2002).

Though the Jarawas continue to practice their indigenous system of medicine, utilizing on plant and animal products, in many cases in the recent times they are asking for modern medical assistance from the non-Jarawas. However, they have not asked for any assistance from the outsiders for any obstetrics and gynaecological problem. They prefer to treat the newborns and their mothers with their indigenous system of medicine.

Negative secular trends have been identified among some populations in Africa, Papua New Guinea, and Central and Latin

America. These are usually seen as outcomes of environmental, social, or political deterioration. The mapping by historians of social, economic, and political factors onto such secular trends forms the basis of the discipline of anthropometric history.

Although some sporadic data on population size, density, fertility and mortality etc., are available among the Great Anadamanese, Onge and of late the Jarawas of Anadaman Islands but a comprehensive review of this account is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, the real threat for biological survival of these small tribes are: high infant mortality, rapid changes in the morbidity and disease pattern, introduction of new disease pathogens, low profile of immunity and chances of malnutrition. The impact of psycho-social stress in a community of 98 individuals of the Onge and 365 souls of the Jarawas would be considered as a real devastating thread.

During this interface, every effort to be made to protect the cultural expression of the Andaman tribes and to provide medical intervention to this vulnerable populations in order to reduce the mortality and to check the epidemic of some communicable diseases by reducing the harmful effects of sudden exposure. In this regard we urgently require a stringent policy of maximum autonomy for their cultural expression with minimum interference to safeguard these most vulnerable diminishing tribal populations of Andaman Islands, as per the guidelines of the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity (2005), which remains as a real challenge.

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Why Indigenous Cultures Diminish or Face a Danger of Extinction? Local Politics and the Role of Globalisation

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Abstract

Indigenous cultures, not only in South Asia but also in other parts of the globe, are on the verge of disappearance. We cannot afford these indigenous communities extinct for the simple reason that they were our cultural ancestors. This, therefore, calls for an immediate solution. The two oppressive political mechanisms in operation against the indigenous communities are the role of the politics of the countries of respective indigenous communities and the globalisation process of the imperialists. It is the responsibility of mankind to safeguard these extinct-or disappearance bound communities against these political predators. In order to terminate the disintegration of the indigenous communities and protect their global cultural diversity it is imperative to work out a permanent universal political solution.

Introduction

Most indigenous cultures, not only in South Asia but also in other parts of the globe, are on the verge of disappearance due to a plethora of reasons, while a few others have been even exposed to the danger of extinction. This situation has created a grave problem, and therefore, demands for an immediate solution however hard and difficult to achieve it. While thinking of protecting and preserving these cultures and working towards promoting cultural diversity, as the SAARC Cultural Centre

envisages, it is indispensable to understand clearly, and in detail, the exact causes and sources underlying the diminishing processes of the indigenous cultures. Just because we are living in a scientifically and technologically sophisticated world we cannot afford to let these unfortunate exotic communities to disintegrate or extinct, as each one of them is unique in their own way and integral to our cultural heritage. It is our responsibility, therefore, both for cultural and ethical reasons, to safeguard these dying communities at any cost, and to engage in it without any further delay.

In order to meet this objective it is imperative to find, if possible, a permanent solution to put an end to the disintegration process. If this cannot be achieved for some reason then it becomes imperative to look for the next best, namely, protecting at any expense the global cultural diversity. Finding an everlasting answer or a permanent remedy to the problem is an impossible target to achieve. It would be a great achievement, of course, if could be accomplished, but looks at it from realist point of view it seen doubtful because the globalisation-juggernaut marches forward crushing everything it finds on its way without sparing even the innocent indigenous communities.

But if a serious discourse on the matter could be launched, as the SAARC Cultural Centre has done, and is doing, it would not be difficult to retard the phase of disintegration, or defer the extinction process at least for another two or three decades. However, we need to be a bit cautious as of Charles Darwin has observed as follows. “The stronger (in this case the oppressor) survives, while the weaker (in this case the indigenous communities faces extinction”. As Darwin‟s above observation has not been disproved to this date a permanent remedy or even a partial recovery to the problem at hand seems to be a distant

reality. Nevertheless, taken into account the gravity of the problem one could at least work towards achieving the second, namely a partial recovery. To meet this objective one must, as a temporary measure, abandon writing and reading ethnographies and genealogies of these marginalised and oppressed communities and pay attention to understand the role of contemporary politics which is responsible for the plight of the indigenous communities. This emphasis does not mean that writing ethnography and straightening historical records of these communities, for example, of the Veddas in Sri Lanka, or the aborigines of Australia, or the Maurians of New Zealand, or of any other, is of no value. The contributions made by Seligman, James Brow, Nandadeva Wijeyesekere, and the recent work by Gananath Obeyesekere, and the role played in this regard by the Non Government Organizations such as The Cultural Survival of Sri Lanka, and other organizations, in this regard cannot be undermined or belittled. What is stressed here is that, while engaged in updating our knowledge of facts and figures and the cultural traits of these communities, priority should be given to the understanding of oppressive mechanisms currently practised by the capitalist and imperialist regimes, because, they, along with their local adherents, are solely responsible for dismantling and disorienting the structures of indigenous cultures. Writing ethnographic accounts of indigenous communities is one thing and fighting and safeguarding the rights and their cultural diversity is another. First is fundamentally academic while the second is essentially political. What most scholars prefer to do is to write ethnographies and historical accounts of their chosen communities. These ventures are not entirely fruitless as they disclose the structures of their social organization and their unspoiled cultural heritage. However, writing ethnography, being an academic exercise in its objective, cannot redeem the

indigenous communities from their oppression and marginalisation.

A number of oppressive mechanisms are in operation at present against the indigenous communities but the present paper would refer only to the role of local politics and the globalisation process.

The Role of Local Politics: Sri Lanka and Australia as Case Examples

Politics has played a decisive role in marginalising indigenous communities. This is a universal phenomenon. It has happened in the past and it is happening even now. Although numerous examples could be cited the paper will only refer to the Vedda community in Sri Lanka to demonstrate how they were ill-treated by Sri Lankan politicians since 1970s.

The Sri Lankans know very well how successive governments in the past few decades treated our indigenous community, the Veddas. A few historical land-marks of their pathetic plight deserve attention.

The successive governments since 1974 have promised the distribution of 1500 acres of land amongst the Vedda-community. However, this promise was confined only to the paper as not a single perch of land been given to the Veddas. A few weeks ago the government took steps to distribute some hectares of lands among them but the time prove whether the step taken was a genuine act or another farce.

In 1983 a number of Vedda families were uprooted from their natural habitat by force and settled in Zone (C) of the Mahaweli Project. They never consented to be colonised in the Mahaweli scheme because they never wanted to experience a

mechanical way of life. They were happy with what they had in their forests. This is a strategic manipulation on the part of the government. The plan was to expel them from their lands in the name of the development only to open those forests for timber poachers who used to threaten the Vedda community since 2009. Settling them by force in places where they never wanted to be not merely a physical colonisation but at the same time it is a psychological colonisation as well.

The politicians established a Trust with a view to protect the Veddas and their culture. It was named as Waniettho Trust, but not a single Vedda individual has been benefited by this Trust.

Intending to harm the Vedda community the politicians used two ignoble and discriminatory tactics in the years 2006 and 2007.

a. In 2006- The Vedda community was targeted again for ecological conversion, that is, to uproot them from their birth land and settle them in other areas of the District.

b. The government took steps to keep track of their whereabouts. This is obviously an encroachment into their personal territories, which act is undoubtedly and unarguably unethical.

The NGO named Cultural Survival of Sri Lanka has repeatedly requested (rather pleaded) the government not to harass the Veddas but the politicians never heard these pleas. The Cultural Survival of Sri Lanka with utter disappointment finally concluded thus; “The bureaucratic foot dragging has left the Vedda in ever deepening dilemma”.

The fate of the aborigines in Australia has not been any better. They were also manipulated by the politicians from the nineteenth century onwards. The aborigines were oppressed, alienated, marginalised, exploited and even killed in thousands. Prior to the invasion the aborigine population was over three hundred thousand. According to the Census taken in 1930s aborigine population has decreased to 70,000 due to periodic killings in thousands. Such acts of violence depict clearly how the lives of aborigines were valued by politically and economically motivated British imperialists.

Another important issue which cannot be overlooked when attempting to understand the causes underlying diminishing cultures is the most dangerous, most venomous and most detrimental phenomenon called Globalisation.

The Impact of Globalisation on Indigenous Cultures

In order to rescue the indigenous communities from disintegration and contemplating seriously of a viable modus-operandi to protect their cultural diversity, no alternative is left with us but to study in depth the globalisation process and its impact on the indigenous cultures.

One of the main objectives of globalisation is the creation of a new and an identifiable class of persons who belong to an emergent global culture, which threatens the national and/ indigenous cultures, resulting in their eventual obsolescence or even extinction.

It is a truism that the entire world today is surrounded and hence affected by the globalisation project. The concept of globalisation is very complex and indefinable as its underlying logic is in flux. On the other hand the four major manifestations

of globalisation, namely, economic, political, cultural and ideological have also made any attempt at its definition a bit difficult as they are inseparable and more often than not work in unison. But what is globalisation anyway? Although a plethora of definitions is available, the present paper will focus on few major ones, which would benefit the purpose at hand.

"Globalisation compresses the time and space aspects of social relations"

(Mittelman quoted in Steger 2009: 15)

"Globalisation as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole"

(Robertson 1992: 8)

"The concept of globalisation reflects the sense of an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as of the horizon of a world market, both of which seem far more tangible and immediate than in earlier stages of modernity"

(Jameson and Miyoshi 2003: xi)

These definitions and many more would confuse not merely the laymen but even eminent scholars and academics. But to simplify the complexity of the globalisation process;

1. One world, One Language (say English)
2. One world, One thirst (say Coca Cola)
3. One world, One food, (say McDonald fried chicken)
4. One world, One state (say Liberalist)

5. One World, One worldview (Borderless World View, meaning, removing all types of borders- cultural, economic, political, and ideological)

Globalisation in a word is compression meaning, „squeezing together everything" or „condensing everything" and most definitions of globalisation use the word compression to highlight this process. If the globalisation means compression then what is the fate of cultural diversity? What life the concept of cultural diversity has and how long it can survive for in the face of compression? This exactly is the reason why it is important to have a clear idea about globalisation before we deal with the main issue of diminishing cultures. Two options could be seen in the debate.

1. Whether to safeguard the indigenous communities and secure their cultural diversity at any cost

   or

2. Whether to allow the globalisation to compress cultural diversity?

While the domination of the second and the imposition of its power on the under dogs cannot be allowed the first obviously is the option available namely, safeguarding the indigenous communities and secure their cultural diversity at any cost, because the globalisation is a threat not only to the indigenous communities worldwide, but it is a menace to humanity in general. Globalisation is the direct opposite of cultural diversity and hence is detrimental to the very concept of cultural diversity itself. Globalisation is not moving towards a cultural rainbow that reflects diversity of the world's existing

cultures; rather it witnesses the rise of an increasingly homogenised popular culture (= Global Culture). This is the threat of globalisation or „The Global Threat" on national indigenous cultures because the plan and the intent of the theoreticians and advocates of globalisation is to establish a global culture. Therefore, they cannot afford to allow any community to have its own autonomy, cultural, political, economic, ideological or otherwise. A prominent (progressive) sociologist Anthony Giddens in his definition of globalisation highlights this danger:

> Globalisation can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa: (Giddens 1990: 64).

Unless a project is devised and launched to face the challenge of globalisation it will be impossible to meet the prime objective of protecting indigenous communities and their cultural properties. It should not be forgotten that globalisation is an uneven process. People living in various parts of the world are affected very differently by this gigantic transformation of social structures and cultural zones. Thus the maximum advantage should be taken out of this inherent weakness of globalisation. For that these communities should be provided with necessary assistance to preserve their cultures while working towards bringing to a halt the danger of extinction they are confronted with. At the same time, a universal political action is needed to completely eradicate the sources and the causes of capitalism-cum-imperialism, which is the underlying ideology of globalisation.

Without realising the gravity of globalisation American liberal theorist Francis Fukuyama explicitly welcomes the global spread of Anglo-American values and lifestyles equating the Americanisation of the world with the expansion of democracy and free markets. Fukuyama, like his liberal capitalist colleagues, has been insensitive to human culture. He never understood how Americanisation would affect the national cultures of other countries. Fukuyama‟s ideals are, therefore, against those who promote cultural diversity and those who put in operation their intellectual and physical labour to secure the cultural diversity and lifestyles of the indigenous communities.

Conclusion

The important and the immediate task in hand is to find a way out of the problem and try to do everything possible to save these communities along with their unique cultures as they possess good human values compared to culturally spoilt and commercially oriented the so called modern, or in fact, the post-modern individuals.

As such the aim and objective of the project of the SAARC Cultural Centre is to work out a plan to protect indigenous cultures from both the domestic political exploiters and the global capitalist and imperialist predators. This objective cannot be met if we ignore the two root-causes highlighted above, namely, the internal political manipulations through which the threats are periodically unleashed on natives „the specific‟ and the external threats come from the globalisation political manoeuvrings „the universal‟. These two factors play the decisive role in the diminishing processes of indigenous cultures.

Today, the „specific" and the „universal" are increasingly coming closer as never before to the point of merging them as one force, which in turn would make our task doubly difficult. The „specific" and the „universal" both need to be understood, not in isolation but by taking them together for the obvious reason that they both work in unison and with one prime objective of eliminating the indigenous communities from the planet and utilize their lands as profit-dispensing centres. The protecting and safeguarding of indigenous cultures, therefore, would, in the final analysis, turn out to be a political matter (or political praxis) rather than mere philanthropic enterprise.

We must look for the devil where he is present and not where he is absent.

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Globalisation, Marginality and Cultural Challenges of the Rodiyas Communities in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Rodiyas are considered the lowest of the Sinhalese castes. Moreover, their numbers are small and the communities are dispersed in various demarcated settlements (known as kuppayamas) in relatively remote areas of the country. As customary beggars dependent on others for their survival, they held a subaltern position in the Sinhala society. Yet they possessed a distinctive subculture of their own, which included a distinctive Sinhala dialect, distinctive folk tales and art forms as well as knowledge of hereditary crafts such as making of whisks (chamara) and brooms, and secret knowledge pertaining to the art of fortune telling, black magic and casting of spells. From the colonial era they have been subjected to a process of deculturation through transition from hereditary caste occupations to wage labour and commercial activities, competition in the market place from mass production of commodities and the effort on their part to escape the indignities imposed by the caste system. On the other hand, the globalsation process has also resulted in the resurgence of their distinctive caste identity as a means of articulating secret knowledge and related occult practices as a remedy and marketable service increasingly advertised through electronic and printed media for countering the ills of globalisation, including migration, break up of families, business failures and litigation. The paper brings out the strategies and pathways and contradictions involved in the process of liberation and liberalization pursued by the Rodiyas in modern Sri Lanka and their related challenges for preserving their distinctive

identity and distinctive subculture without taking on a subaltern position.

Introduction

The Rodiyas constitute the lowest caste in Sri Lanka. There has been considerable debate regarding their identity, various authors identifying them as a race, tribe, caste and an ethnic group (Neville 1887; Raghavan 1957; Weeratunga 1988). They constitute a small segment of Sinhala society and they are dispersed in small isolated communities in various parts of Sri Lanka (Silva, Sivaprgasam and Thanges 2009). They are one of the most widely studied of the Sinhala caste groups given their lowest position in the Sinhala caste hierarchy and reported untouchability and backwardness of the community. Following some of the earlier authors, Raghavan (1950) argued that the Rodiyas were a former tribal group later incorporated into Sinhala Vanni region as direct heirs to the original tribal group and Rodiyas in Kandyan regions as heirs to the feudal incorporation of the community. In considering the Rodiyas as a semi-tribal group the location of *kuppayama* (the name of a crowded Rodiya settlement contact with which were traditionally avoided by those of higher castes) in the periphery of Sinhala settlements in proximity to the jungles, the reliance of Rodiya on forest products in some of their traditional crafts, identification of a separate Rodiya language or dialect and distinct folk tales and art forms of Rodiya received scholarly attention. Ratnavali story popular among the Rodiyas trace their origin to Ratnavali, the pretty daughter of the king Parakaramabahu, who was given in marriage to a Vedda by her furious father, following the discovery of her developing a taste for human flesh. This origin story established a royal origin of the caste group and at the same time descent from a union

between a sinful daughter of a royal family and a Vedda providing a historical and ideological charter for the low dignity conferred on the caste group (**See Annexure 1**). Traditionally they have been engaged in various caste occupations of a degrading nature including begging, black magic, removal and disposing of dead animals, making of brooms and drums, making of mortars and cleaning of streets after religious celebrations like annual *perehera* (procession) in *devale* (deity shrines). All these occupations have an aura of disgrace and ritual impurity about them. Many of the traditional occupations of Rodiya have been of diminishing significance for the community and society at large due to a combination of factors including reluctance of the Rodiyas to continue these occupation due to the stigma attached to them, expansion of the neoliberal open economy in which mass produced commodities such as brooms, food processing machines, drums and other musical instruments have gradually replaced the artifacts of the Rodiyas creating limited demand for certain crafts of the Rodiyas.

Using available ethnographic reports on the Rodiyas and the findings of a recent survey conducted by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) on the larger issue of social integration of marginalized communities including Rodiyas, the present paper examines how far and in what ways elements of the Rodiya culture have disappeared, survived or even reinforced given the low dignity traditionally accorded to the group, processes of social and cultural change including population dynamics, social mobility, globalisation and assimilation to the mainstream culture.

Population Dynamics

The population censuses conducted in British Ceylon in 1901 and 1911 enumerated the Rodiyas as a separate population group but counting the Rodiyas as a distinct population group was abandoned in subsequent censuses claiming that the Rodiyas were "regarded as a caste of the Sinhalese and not as a separate racial group" (Ranasinghe 1946) and they were not separately enumerated on account of the policy of the government to avoid distinction between the Rodiyas and others (Dunham 1912). The Rodiya populations enumerated in 1901 and 1911 censuses are given in **Table 1**.

Province	***1901 census***	***%***	***1911 census***	***%***
Sabaragamuwa Province	438	30.0	479	30.4
Central Province	241	16.5	411	26.1
North WesternProvince	376	25.7	391	25.7
Uva Province	367	25.0	269	17.1
Southern Province	42	2.9	22	1.4
Total	1464	100.0	1572	100.0

Table 1: Distribution of Rodiyas by Province 1901 and 1911
Source: Quoted in Raghavan 1958.

Thus Rodiyas have always been a smaller segment of the total Sinhala population in Sri Lanka. The Rodiya population showed an upward tendency between the two censuses. In all

Provinces other than North Western and the Southern Provinces the size of the Rodiya population showed an upward trend.

Raghavan who visited all the Rodiya communities in Sri Lanka in 1951 in an effort to document their demographic and socio-cultural profile noted that the "Rodiya statistics have suffered from a gross under-estimation in the past" (1957: 5).

Province	***Number of Kuppayama***	***Total Population***
Sabaragamuwa	32	1137
Central Province	8	350
North WesternProvince	12	476
Uva	19	1000
Western	1	110
Southern Province	1	22
Total	73	3095

Table 2: Number of Rodiya Villages and Population in Selected Provinces, 1951
Source: Raghavan 1958

This gives a mean population size of 42.4 per Rodiya community in 1951. Raghavan noted that a high birth rate prevailed in the Rodiya families at the time implying a possible increase in the Rodiya population in time to come. Brice Ryan who conducted his research on caste a few years after Raghavan estimated that the total Rodiya population in the country remains

at 3000. Weeratunga (1988) who conducted ethnographic research in a Rodiya resettlement community in the Kurunagala District estimated that the total population in this community to be around 600 and judging by her evidence the Rodiya population in this community has increased substantially since it was established in the early 1950s.

However it is not clear whether this reported population increase is due to natural increase or waves of in-migration of the Rodiyas from other communities under resettlement programs. The ICES survey in 2011 identified three Rodiya villages with varying population sizes.

Name of Village	***Divisional Secretariat Division***	***Number of families***	***Estimated Population***
Walibissa	Haldummulla	8	40
Hatapma	Haliela	20	100
Kurulubedda	Polpitigama	80	335
Mean		36	158

Table 3: Population in Selected Rodi Villages, 2011
Source: ICES Survey 2011

Thus while many of the Rodi villages were of relatively small size, there were some villages with considerably larger populations particularly in the Kurunagala district. In Walibissa village economically better off educated members of the community had moved out to urban areas resulting in a gradual decline in the population. Contrary to Weeratunga (2008), the ICES survey in 2011 pointed to a gradual decrease in the

number of families and population in some of the Rodiya villages. This in turn may be seen as a manifestation of diminishing of the population that identify themselves as the Rodiyas due to social mobility and related outmigration from such communities.

Occupational and Identity Shifts

Livelihoods and occupations of the Rodiya sare of two kinds, namely, hereditary caste occupations and non-caste specific modern occupations. Hereditary caste occupations include begging considered as a hereditary right and privilege of the Rodiyas, certain handicrafts like making and selling of *chamara* (whisks) and palm reading. Theoretically non-hereditary and non caste specific occupations are of many kinds but wage labour, farming and trade appear to be the most significant among them.The gradual decline of caste occupations and their replacement by non caste specific non distinctive employment such as wage labour appear to be at the crux of social and economic change undergone by the Rodiyas. This, in turn, may be seen as a larger deculturalization process common to most caste groups in Sinhala and Tamil societies whereby their distinctive caste identity and related hereditary occupations gradually disappear and they turn into wage earners or income earners in a rapidly globalising and depersonalizing employment market. This is indeed the larger social and cultural process addressed in this essay.

Distinctive Rodiya Caste Occupations

Distinctive Rodiya caste occupations affirm their distinctive identity and organic link and position within the larger caste hierarchy of Sinhala society, within a caste congruent pattern of

division of labor as elaborated in the theory of caste developed by Leach (1960).

Begging

Whatever the significance of begging within the livelihood economy of the Rodiyas, it was of central symbolic and cultural significance to the caste group as captured in Raghavans conception of „Handsome Beggars". He found that the Rodiyas had developed distinctive „begging techniques", distinctive ways of appealing to higher caste donors using a distinctive language and modes of address (e.g. *Deiyo Buduwanta Hamuduruwane*, *Pinati Hamuduruwane*), ability to resort to curse and charms against households hesitant or unwilling to cooperate with their appeals, begging rounds and seasons that coincided with the harvesting season of the farmers and a wide range of paraphernalia needed for begging such as pingo (*kada*) loaded at one end only for carrying paddy collected in begging referred to as „a badge of the tribe" (Raghavan 1950: 21), and a distinctive begging bowl (*kolapotha*) made from dried arecanut leaves and used specifically by female Rodiya beggars. In the words of "begging with Rodiyas was an art" (Raghavan 1950: 16).The Rodiyas made a distinction between begging by ordinary desperate beggars *hinganawa* (lit. pleading for arms), *hingakanawa* (lit. eat by pleading) and Rodiya practice or right of *Illankanawa* (lit. demand and eat) (Ragavan 1958: 42). That is why they felt that they could resort to cursing (*paligahanawa*) and embarrassing the persons concerned where they were denied alms. Raghavan argued that there was a culture of charity as well as a notion of honour and dignity in society at large that the Rodiyas exploited to the maximum for the success of their livelihood. In his words "True to the precepts of Buddha

Dharma, public charity is the foremost of social services in Ceylon" (Raghavan 1958: 40). It is reported "that the existence of Rodiya is assured, since it is considered a disgrace to refuse alms to a Rodiya (Raghavan 1958: 40). Further referring to Rodiya, Raghavan claimed that "In the past he was considered to have been as much a thief as a beggar, his doles being even being interpreted to have been something in the nature of a tribute customarily paid to him, so as to safeguard the crops being stolen by him (Raghavan 1950:17). Raghavan in fact observed how Rodiyas collected their share of harvest from householders immediately after harvest, using *ambalama* as their resting place and the place for storing their share of paddy before being taken to their villages in a traditional wicker basket called *katpettiya* carried in one sided pingos.

The Rodiya communities experienced a decline of the importance of begging as a livelihood. Already in the 1950s Raghavan stated the following:

> The self-respecting Rodiya youth disdains to beg and proudly tells you that he does not beg.However much it may have been conditioned by the circumstances of a bygone age, begging as the main business of life has its limits, and that limit has been reached today. (1958: 40, 41).

Ryan (1993) found that among the Rodiyas begging was fundamentally a seasonal occupation although it was practiced intermittently at any time of need.

In the ICES survey it was found that begging was reportedly not at all practiced in two of the Rodi villages studied and in the other village too only old age women occasionally went for begging for want of other sources of livelihood. In Kurulubadda educated youth in the community had initiated a campaign against begging and any other hereditary Rodi

occupation of low dignity in an attempt to purge the caste of social and cultural markers indicative of traditional Rodi identity.

On the whole two sets of factors have contributed to the declining importance of begging as a Rodiya trade. The first is an increased tendency among the upper caste people to donate money and goods to the Rodiyas in the traditional fashion due to the penetration of market forces where only services delivered are remunerated and goods received are paid, treating the Rodiya requests for donations as unjustified and unacceptable to the extent they do not provide anything in return. In the new market economy non-working Rodiyas are seen as loafers with no useful contribution to the production process.The second set of factors has to do with reluctance of the new generation of the Rodiyas to continue a hereditary practice that is considered to be demeaning and stigmatizing. This idea is widespread in the younger generations of the Rodiyas as clearly articulated in the social movement among them in Kurulubedda.

Rodiya Crafts

Traditionally and historically the Rodiyas were famous for a number of hereditary crafts they practice. "The Rodiya is first and foremost a craftsman" (Raghavan 1950: 23). In the Kandyan period they produced *gasmanda* (a trap or noose made from wild thongs for the purpose of catching wild elephants for the ruling establishment), that in turn was considered a *rajakariya* (royal service) performed by the Rodiya and their chiefs for the benefit of royal establishment.They also produced ropes for various purposes using the fibre of local plants known to them. Other craft products of the Rodiyas included brooms, fly whisks (*chamara*) made from the fibre of locally available *hana* plants,

various types of drums (e.g. *tammatam, dolakki, udekki* and *rabana*) and other musical instruments, mortars (*vangedi*), combs and many other products requiring a traditional knowledge base, basic tools as well as raw materials mostly available in jungle areas, in close proximity to which the Rodiyas lived particularly in Vanni and Kandyan areas.The art of manufacturing these crafts was transmitted from father to son and mother to daughter (e.g. method of turning out combs).

These Rodiya crafts have more or less disappeared over time due to a combination of factors, including loss of knowledge with the demise of knowledgeable people in older generations, loss of raw material due to deforestation, market competition from mass produced goods such as brooms, combs and musical instruments, legal restrictions imposed by the state (for instance against cutting of timber needed for manufacture of mortars and drums) and an overall decline of craft occupations in the face of market competitions. As of 2011 only a few households in each Rodi village visited was engaged in any craft occupations and they too repeatedly mentioned many difficulties in continuing these hereditary livelihoods (Silva, Herath, Wickramasinghe and Wijepala 2011).

Non Caste Specific Occupations

As noted earlier, the gradual decline of caste specific occupations has been associated with the increasing involvement in non caste specific occupations. Two contrasting processes are evident here. On the one hand, some upwardly mobile people in these communities have made advances through education, government employment and long distant trade. For instance, one family in Welibissa did well in education overcoming disadvantages they had in local schools and had acquired

government employment like nursing jobs and teaching and moved to Colombo escaping Rodi identity in the process. On a less ambitious scale many of the sanitary workers in local government entities in Badulla and some other districts came from the local Rodiya caste communities showing a degree of continuity with traditional Rodiya association with dirt and cleaning. On the other hand, in a number of Rodi communities including Kurulubedda, some families had become rich through long distance trade in specific commodities like mattresses, carpets, and tents acquiring major capital assets like trucks and sales outlets for this long distant trade which appears to be a path of advancement built around traditional caste practices involving mobility and linkages with outside world. These traders however did not permanently move out of their villages even though they too were inclined to acquire caste neutral names and related identity shifts.

A majority of people in Rodiya communities, however, remain in abject poverty. Some of them had joined the ranks of wage labour in farm and off-farm operations. For instance, this was the case of most Rodi people in Welibissa, Hatapma and Kurulubedda. Often they did not have regular employment and their livelihood depended on unstable demand for wage labour in their areas. They also manifested some social problems and a tendency to engage in illegal activities like prostitution and alcohol trade. In Kurulubedda some 15 individuals, mostly girls, had joined a local garment factory where they earned a regular monthly salary of a moderate nature.

Art and Culture

In the anthropological accounts of Rodiyas they are credited with artistic skills and traditional knowledge of various kinds

including palm reading, occult practices and charms (Silva, Sivaprgasam and Thanges 2009). Apart from widely held legendary tales mostly revolving around Ratnavali story, the Rodiyas reportedly had their own folk songs, own dance traditions and own forms of entertainment including rhythmic spinning of *rabana* (Raghavan 1950, 1958). Young Rodiya women were sometimes referred to as „*ṇattukkari*" because they performed using *rabana* and other musical instruments. Men performed a genre of folk drama known as *sokari* as a form of entertainment. With the exception of instances where these art forms have been appropriated and adapted by higher level artists in their performing arts, the traditional Rodiya art forms too have more or less disappeared due to loss of knowledge, loss of crafts that contributed to these art forms like drum making, competition from more professional performing arts popular in the middle classes and increased social marginalization of the Rodiyas as a depressed caste group. Similarly a distinctive dialect and a distinctive dress code attributed to the Rodiyas have also gradually become extinct due to opposition from younger generations and their tendency towards assimilation with mainstream society.

Occult Practices

In sharp contrast to the pattern of declining caste occupations noted above, one seemingly hereditary caste occupation of Rodiyas has grown in importance in recent years. This has to do with charms, spells and occult practices. Both Hugh Neville (1887) and Raghavan (1950, 1958) reported about Rodiya command over *bali, tovil*, love philters (*inabehet*) and black magic in general. These skills gave Rodiyas a kind of spiritual power which in turn was used as a weapon of the weak against possible neglect, abuse and exploitation by those above them in

the caste hierarchy. These caste-based occult practices appear to have received a new lease of life in the modern era due to a combination of factors including war, population mobility, growing importance of love marriage as against arranged marriage and related instabilities in marital relations and increased risks related to certain types of employment including overseas labor migration.

A few families engaged in occult practices (broadly referred to as *yantra, mantra, anavina, gurukam*) were reported in all three Rodiya villages covered in the 2011 study.

There was an aura of secrecy about these people and their occult practices. On the other hand weekend Sinhala popular press was full of advertisements by potential providers of such occult services that often identified themselves as Rodi persons. As an example given below is one of over 10 such advertisements published in a local newspaper.

In form and content this is similar to many other advertisements about occult practices appearing in the same newspaper and many other Sinhala newspapers in Sri Lanka. The Rodiya identity is affirmed in this advertisement in its title, the term *mahahulavali* which is the designation of a hereditary Rodiya chief and the place name mentioned at the bottom of the advertisement referring to a famous Rodi village near Manikhinna town. In other advertisements in the same newspaper the Rodiya identity of the occult practitioner is explicitly identified through caste specific personal names such as NavaratnaValliya and ChandrikaValli, Valliya and Valli being conventional male and female forms respectively of Rodiya personal names.

In a context where caste identity is never publicly proclaimed except perhaps in the case of anonymous marriage proposals (Silva, Sivapragasam and Thanges, 2009), these advertisements are unusual in claiming the lowly Rodi caste identity for making a knowledge claim about the effectiveness and validity of occult practices advertised.

Charms of the Lowest Caste (Nichakula Vashigurukam)

We possess potent charms and spells inherited from past generations.
We bring back the lover who abandoned you within 7 days.

To help and bless your children who are abroad.

- Progress in the family and household
- Protection (arakshava) of wealth and property
- Business success
- Retaliations for harm done to you
- Succeed in competitive examinations
- Infertility and legal cases (naduhaba)
- Counter sorcery (anavinakodivinakapima)
- Stop alcohol addiction

Maha Hulavali ------
No. Kuragandeniya, Menikhinna
Contact: Two mobile phone numbers given

Ref: *Daily Lankadipa* (in Sinhala), (Sunday, 17 July 2011).

It is also interesting to note here that the Rodi occult practices are advertised as a remedy for many ills in modern society including business problems, legal disputes, problems arising from overseas labor migration, alcoholism, infertility,

disputes within the family and lack of well being in general. Also advertisements are in modern mass media and advances in ICT including mobile phones are used to promote and disseminate occult practices. How far these advertisements are heeded to and what types of persons go to the relevant occult practitioners for what purposes are not clearly established through empirical research but one can assume that these advertisements will not be put by the relevant persons in such a prominent way incurring high costs unless they attract a reasonable number of clients for these occult practitioners.

Globalisation, Identity Crisis and Culture

In conclusion this paper pointed to two contrasting ways in which globalisation processes impact on the culture of subaltern groups in South Asia including the lowly Rodiyas in Sri Lanka. On the one hand much of the rich Rodiya culture documented by ethnographers and cultural historians has eroded due to factors stemming from the globalisation processes and related identity dynamics. On the other hand, occult practices identified as a hereditary Rodiya practice and related knowledge claims have acquired a heightened significance due to the need for such knowledge as a remedy for certain social and economic ills generated by globalisation processes. Let us now try to further analyze these paradoxical developments.

A distinctive Rodiya culture or subculture was possible in the past due to their spatial and social isolation and clearly subaltern position in society. The art of begging, a range of hereditary crafts that relied on traditional knowledge, technology and raw materials that were often forest products from local areas and a compendium of traditional art forms preserved as family traditions constituted the core of that

subculture.These ingredients of the Rodiya subculture have been eroded in a non reversible manner due to reluctance of new generations of the Rodiyas to continue them considering them as badges of indignity (*balduweda*) and related loss of the knowledge base on the one hand and market processes emanating from globalisation such as competition from mass products of a commercial nature, deforestation affecting the supply of relevant raw materials, decreased demand from higher castes for many of the Rodiya craft product sand deculturation of the Rodiya following their entry into trade and wage labor.The growing view among the higher castes that the Rodiya beggars should not be provided with free donations and charity simply because they are of the lowest caste also mark the erosion of a particular culture of charity and its replacement by a certain notion of work as productive work of a particular kind bought and sold in the market and a new notion of charity as a support for those unable to sell their labor in the market because of old age, disability and one or other form of destitution.

In this context it is indeed paradoxical that the Rodiya occult practices have emerged as a marketable remedy for ills of globalisation including migration, break up of families, lack of social support, educational failures, business failures and litigation. Through occult practices the Rodiya have been able to identify and develop a niche for them within the globalising context also using agents of globalisation such as newspaper advertisements, mobile phones and even websites in some instances. This is however by no means an effective mechanism for prevention of the erosion of the wider Rodiya subculture as an outcome of globalisation processes but rather a fragmented effort to survive as a distinct cultural group with a traditional knowledge base of a secret nature against an overall tide of

deculturation where many bearers of distinct cultures of a subaltern character sink rather than swim and stay afloat.

Culture is by no means an undisputed concept and in discussing diminishing cultures of South Asia we need to bear in mind that hereditary caste and gender inequalities are also important manifestations of traditional cultures. How to eliminate or at least minimize such inequalities must remain an important concern within the overall effort at preservation and conservation of traditional cultures within a context of globalisation. The story of Rodiyas illustrates the complexities involved in the effort at conservation and preservation of cultures within the context of globalisation where some new forms of inequalities may exist side by side with remnants of older forms of inequalities such as caste adding to the problems of subaltern populations in particular. Finally further research is necessary for understanding the implications of latest dynamics in the narrowing down of remaining Rodiya culture to occult practices publicly advertized for a consumer society.

Annexure 1

Origin Tales of Rodiyas

According to Robert Knox (quoted in Raghavan 1958) the origin tale of Rodiyas is as follows:

The Predecessors of these People, from whom they sprang, were Dodda, Vaddahs, which signifies Hunters: to whom it did belong to catch and bring Venison for the King‟s Table. But instead of Venison they brought Man‟s flesh, unknown; which the King Liking so Well, commanded to bring him more of the same sort of Venison. The King‟s Barbar chanced to know what

flesh it was and discovered it to him. At which the King was so inraged, that he accounted death too good for them; and to punish only those that had so offended, not a sufficient recompence for so great an Affront and Injury as he had sustained by them. Forthwith therefore he established a Decree, that all both great and small, that were of that Rank or Tribe, should be expelled from dwelling among the Inhabitants of the Land, and not to be admitted to use or enjoy the benefit of any means, or ways, or callings whatsoever, to provide themselves sustinence; but that they should beg from Generation to Generation, from Door to Door, thro the Kingdom; and to be looked upon and esteemed by all People to be so base and odious, as not possibly to be more.

And they are to this day so detestable to the People, that they are not permitted to fetch water out of their wells; but do take their water out of Holes or Rivers. Neither will any touch them, lest they should be defiled.

Many times when the King cuts off Great and Noble Men, against whom he is highly incensed, he will deliver their Daughters and Wives unto this sort of People, reckoning it as they also account it, to be far worse Punishment than any kind of Death. This kind of Punishment being accounted such horrible Cruelty, the King doth usually of his Clemency shew them some kind of mercy, and pittying their Distress, Commands to carry them to a River side, and there to deliver them into the hands of those who are far worse than Executioners of Death: from whom, if these Ladies please to free themselves, they are permitted to leap into the River and be drowned; the which some sometimes will choose to do, rather than to consort with them.

The Barbar‟s information having been the occasion of all this misery upon this People, they in revenge thereof adhor to

eat what is dressed in the Barbar‟s House to this day. The tradition is in accord with the Rodiyas‟ own account of their degradation, which is given by Hugh Nevill quoted in Denham 1912.

At Parakrama Bahu‟s court the venison was provided by a certain Vaedda archer, who, during a scarcity of game, substituted the flesh of a boy he met in the jungle, and provided it as venison for the Royal Household. NavaratnaValli, the beautiful daughter of the King, discovered the deception, and fascinated by a sudden longing for human flesh ordered the hunter to bring this flesh daily. The Vaedda accordingly waylaid youths in the woods, and disposed of their flesh to the royal kitchen. The whole country was terrified by the constant disappearance of youth and maidens. It happened that a barber who came to the Palace to complain of the disappearance of his only son while waiting was given, by the royal scullery, a leaf of rice and venison curry. Just as he was about to eat he noticed on his leaf the deformed knuckle of the little finger of a boy. Recognizing it by the deformity as that of his son, he fled from the palace and spread the alarm that the king was killing and eating the youths of the city. The facts then came to light, and the king, stripping of her ornaments, and calling up a scavenger then sweeping out a neighbouring yard, gave her him as wife, and out to earn her living in her husband‟s class. The princess and the scavenger fled from the town, and as night came on asked for shelter from a Kinnara, but were angrily repulsed.

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Diminishing or Struggle for Survival: Case of Veddas' Culture in Sri Lanka

Premakumara De Silva

Abstract

Veddas, an aboriginal group of Sri Lanka have survived for several millennia by adapting and coping with external stresses imposed on them. They were inhabitating the island long before the arrival of Aryans and had spread all over the island. Currently they are facing stresses that threaten to modernize them which could easily result in vanishing them as cultural group. They have been struggling for the survival of their 'traditional lifestyles' which is threatened by of hegemonic Sinahala, Tamil and Muslim communities of the country as well as the process of globalisation.

This paper focusses on the current status of Vedda community particularly their socio-cultural life. Adopting qualitative and quantitative analysis on the nature of use and disuse of cultural activities of the Vaddas, the paper concludes that unless speedy holistic action is not taken, there is always a chance for the Vedda as a community to become only an episode of the history within a generation or two.

> "The *Veddas* were numerically small people verging on extinction, and so affected by contact with Tamils and Sinhalese". (Seligman 1911: vi).

Veddas of Sri Lanka, an aboriginal group have survived for several millennia through adapting and coping with external and internal stresses imposed on them. They were inhabitating the island long before the arrival of Aryans and had spread all over the island and later confined themselves only to *Vedi rata*

(Vedda‟s country) or *Maha Vedi rata* (great land of the Veddas) consisting of areas from Hunnasgiriya hills and lowlands up to the sea in the east (**Figure 1**).

Currently they are as a community is facing stresses that threaten to modernize them which could easily result in vanishing them as cultural group. While certain aspects of the Vedda culture has come to near complete disuse, the assimilation of the Veddas with mainstream Sinhalese and Tamils has resulted in Veddas of Sri Lanka being confined to small scattered communities in the Eastern, Uva and North Central Province of the country. Veddas over the years under many stresses have approached into their present state where there is a need to preserve their way of life, culture and their traditional homelands. There have been many research projects on the indigenous communities of Sri Lanka in general and on the Veddas in particular a comprehensive socio-anthropological study of this nature on the Veddas has not taken place since the Seligmann‟s in 1911.

Wejesekaera (1964), Brow (1978), Dharmadasa and Samarasinghe (1990), Jon Dart (1990), Thangaraja (1995) and more recently by Obeyesekere (2002). Therefore, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs supported the University of Colombo to conduct a „Socio Anthropological Research Project on the Veddas of Sri Lanka‟ to identify the present situation of this community. This paper is based on the outcome of this project.

In total there are Vedda settlements in Dambana, Rathugala, Pollebedda, Dalukana, Henanigala, Vakarai, Muttur, Anuradhapura and Panama (**Figure 2**). For our research project, only the first six settlements excluding Anuradhapura, Muttur and Panama were considered due to resource constraints.

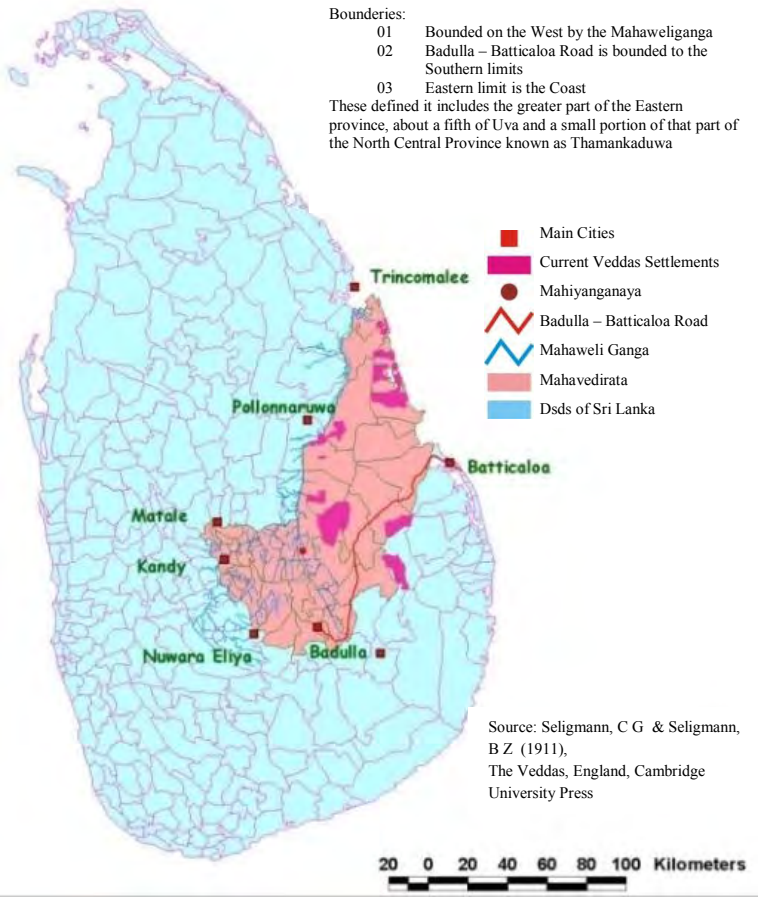
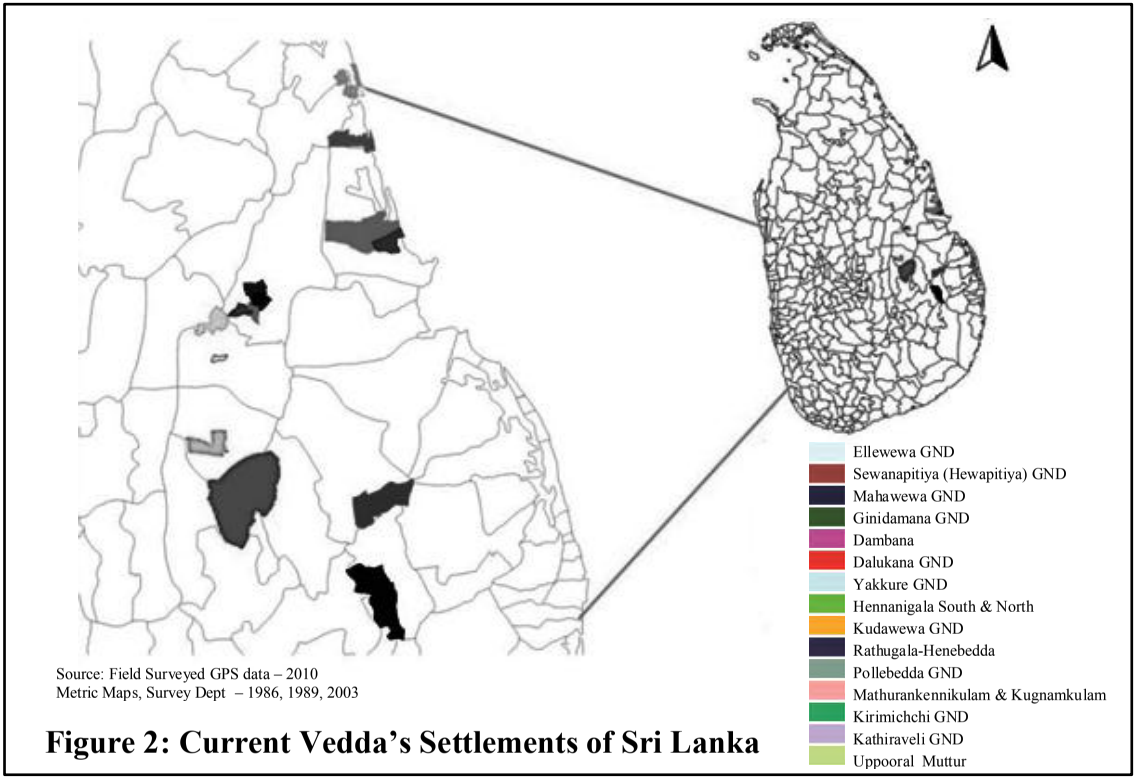


Figure 1: Mahavedirata (The Vedda Country): According to the Seligmann, C.G. & Seligmann B.Z. (1911).



Source: Field Surveyed GPS data – 2010
Metric Maps, Survey Dept – 1986, 1989, 2003

Figure 2: Current Vedda's Settlements of Sri Lanka

The research was conducted within a continuous period of ten months in 2010 and included data gathering, mapping, analysis and documenting. The study was based on qualitative interactive interviews, collecting life histories and field observation, supplemented by questionnaire based survey research covering of 1,327 Vedda households. In addition to that GIS mapping of Vedda settlements and published materials on the Vedda community were documented through the library research. Further, this project has taken into consideration the different aspects of the Vedda community mainly socio-cultural and economic aspects.

This presentation will deal with those aspects of the Vedda community briefly and discuss the current status of them. Before that let me focus on the very important question raised on the Vedda‟s historical assimilation by Gananth Obeysekere.

Historical Assimilation: 'Where have all the Veddas gone'?

According to Obeyesekere (2002: 18) the Veddas have not been seen as an inferior group by Buddhists but they were feared and respected even if they were outside the pale of Buddhist civilization. He writes:

> There is no doubt that that civilization was a hegemonic one but not necessarily an intolerant one, as far as the *Veddas* were concerned. The kings were Buddhist and defenders of the Buddhist faith. But there has been no instance, as far as I know, of "internal colonization" through violence, or a forcible absorption of *Vedda* communalities into the Buddhist polity.

But the question remains that even if the Veddas have been assimilated into Sinhala and Buddhism why the drastic reduction in numbers in the 19th and 20th centuries? When the

British came on the scene the so-called wild Veddas or those who lived mostly by hunting and gathering were confined for the most part to the *palu rata* or „desolate lands", the plains of the *Vanni,* the *Bintanna.* Many had been physically decimated by an epidemic of fever (perhaps the flu) around 1809, according to oral histories. And after the rebellion of 1818 those Sinhalas and Veddas living in the vast area known as the *Vadi Rata* and *Maha Vadi Rata* died during the resistance or fled elsewhere, some to the hills and others to the Eastern province where many of them became absorbed into the Tamil communities in that area[1].The colonial coffee plantation and later tea took over the wild country where many Veddas lived. During the Colonial and post independence eras, or in short, during the past 500-600 years, fragmentation of the Vedda communities seem to have occurred making it difficult to generate new knowledge for self evolution of the Vedda culture. This scenario had also made a sizable impact on the overall degradation of the Vedda traditions and the culture in general. As explain later, the present generation of the Veddas are neither conversant with their cultural practices nor are they fluent in their language, hence, making them rapidly Sinhalised just as the Veddas in the other parts of the country that are rapidly Tamilised. Parallel to the Sinhalisation and Tamilisation, Buddhicisation and Hinducisation of the Veddas too have occurred respectively with time, influencing the Veddas to follow typical indicators of religious civilization set by the mainstream.

The historical cultural interchanges facilitated movement from the Vedda to Buddhist as well as Hindus paralleling the movement from hunting to agriculture, as well as the other way around. This form of hybridity does not abolish the distinction

between the Vedda and Buddhist even Tamil Hindus; only that at a particular historical conjuncture, the distinction becomes fuzzy such that Buddhist informants living in what was historically the Vedda country even now proudly affirm their Vedda ancestry (Brow 1996). As Obeysekere (2002) points out the Sri Lankan historical conjuncture is but a phase in a larger movement from the Vedda to Buddhist, accelerated in our own times where the dominance and new hegemonic intolerance of Buddhism cannot be gainsaid, quite unlike in the past where Buddhists also could become Veddas.

Moving from this theoretical argument, the present story of the remaining „Veddas" in the country is as follows.The present state of the existence of the Veddas in a nutshell could be described as a group of people Sri Lanka with indigenous ancestry, confined to isolated pockets extending from the eastern and north eastern slopes of the hill country to the Eastern and North Central parts of the country. The cultural identity is rapidly diminishing from the present generations and the Veddas are increasingly stressed to accept the forces of Sinhalisation and Tamilisation within the respective geographical localities they live in, acquiring Buddhist, Hindu and more recently Christian evangelical values rather than their own following the footpath directing towards accelerated modernization which leaves little room for survival of their cultural identity.

Demographic Features

As mentioned before the Vedda settlements in Sri Lanka can be seen mainly in the Eastern, Uva and North Central provinces of Sri Lanka covering the Districts of Ampara, Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura, Badulla and Moneragala. Although spread in a few districts, Vedda

population is confined to a few villages surrounded and influenced by majority Sinhala and Tamil populations. Before the analysis of the current state of the Veddas, it is important to visualize how the Vedda settlements have increasingly become bounded making them a vulnerable group. It is even more important to identify the current population sizes at each location.

There are a total of 2,272 families of the Veddas in the project area. Considering the population data, the Vedda population in the project area is between 7,350- 7,500 and the total Vedda population including the areas not considered in the project could not be in excess of 10,000 but a thorough census needs to be conducted to identify the exact numbers from areas such as Muttur, Panama, Wilachchiya and Anuradhapura.

The basis on which the individuals were identified and considered for the research was merely through asking whether they consider themselves as the Veddas by which anyone who acknowledged him/ herself to be a Vedda were considered a Vedda. In other words we considered James Brow‟s definition (1978) on the Veddas "all those who identified themselves as such who are so described by their neighbors regardless of their actual racial origin".

The survey data shows that 79% of the Veddas had both paternal and maternal genetic descent whereas out of remaining 21%, 83% had maternal descent. In the current context, over 91% of the Vakarai Vedda community has maternal and paternal genetic descents of the Veddas followed by Henanigala Veddas who have over 79%. Assimilation seems to be highest in Dimbulagala, Pollebedda and Rathugala where a significant proportion of the Veddas are fathered by Sinhalese.

It is important to understand the family sizes of the Veddas and family wise mosaics that could lead to revealing many aspects of the future. For this, the family members in a household and the families by age level were taken into consideration.

There were 5,124 Veddas representing 1,375 households, which means that there are around 4 members in average at each household. The Vedda families are generally male headed but females too involve in decision making, mainly pertaining to education of children more than the males. Considering that they have used to living in small shelters, extended families seems to have been a rare case. Accommodation of parents and other relatives is highest in Henanigala and Dimbulagala which are becoming predominantly agricultural communities. Further, the same communities have the fairly large number of children in comparison to the other Vedda communities. It indicates the transformation of the Veddas who have been resettled and are hence becoming detached from the traditional way of life of the Veddas.

The population figures as elaborated in **Table 1**, indicates that the child population of the Veddas is 39% of the total population and 52% fall between the ages of 19 and 55. National figures for Sri Lanka (UNICEF 2008) suggest that 29% of the population is below the age of 18. It indicates that the ageing of the population is not a major scenario among the Veddas.

When considering Vedda‟s migration patterns, over the years, Veddas have made regional migrations as well as migrations within different parts of the same Vedda communities. While most of the Vedda populations and families have been in their current locations for the past few generations, have migrated to other areas.

Age group	*< 5*	*5-12*	*13 - 18*	*19 - 35*	*36 - 55*	*56 - 70*	*>70*	*Total*
Percent of population	9%	15%	16%	32%	20%	6%	2%	100%

Table 1: Population according to age group

Among Tamil speaking Veddas in Vakarai, a different scenario is observed where only 12% of the population reside in their original village and a majority of the population has been displaced once or have experienced multiple displacement during their lives. This is due to the post tsunami resettlement programmes and also influenced highly by the unsettled security situation in the area inducing repeated displacement during the past two decades. Kilimichchi, Kunnankulam and Palachchenai and Kattamurigu have been the main original locations from which the Veddas in Vakarai have migrated to their current locations.

Although most of the other Vedda populations have remained in their original villages for a few generations, there is a significant population that had migrated from Dambana to other Vedda communities, mainly to Henanigala, Dalukana and Pollebedda. 21% of the Veddas in other areas have migrated from Dambana. Dambana has also been a popular destination for Veddas migrating from other Vedda communities. 45% of the Dambana Veddas have immigrated to Dambana during the last generation.

In Rathugala, there had been a regional migration where many families have come from Danigala to Rathugala mainly in

the early 1940s due to an epidemic which they call "thun da una" or three day fever once infected a majority die.

Therefore, the main relocation and displacement patterns seen among the recent generations of Veddas are influenced by conflict, natural disaster and mainly due to state driven development schemes. However, historically, displacement of the Vedda community has led to fragmentation of their natural habitats and eventual assimilation process that was inevitable due to the rural expansion, agricultural extension and urbanisation phases.

Economic life

Traditionally the Veddas have been mainly hunters and gathers who have also performed chena cultivation for the sustenance of their lives. Sustaining their lives and communities did not require highly vibrant and diversified consumption patterns. Hence a perfect symbiosis with the environment and the other human populations was sufficient to lead an un-indebted lifestyle.

At recent times, lifestyles of the Veddas and their communities as a whole have become more complex and consumption patterns too have increased and diversified with increased dependence on external sources. Hence, economic activities of the Vedds have become highly diversified with increased complexities in life requiring them to become dependent more and more on the availability of finances and financial dealings for survival as well as for development as portrayed by the mainstream population and popular media.

Economic transformation of the Veddas has driven them towards diversity and is as complex as in other non Vedda

villages in the peripheries of the country. As it is easier and cheaper to obtain the less educated Vedda people for labour work, business people engaged in the agriculture and construction industries have also seen this an opportunity. With the resettlement programmes encouraging formal agriculture in the dry zone of the country highly dependent on the cascade irrigation system, Veddas were exposed to both paddy cultivation and inland fishing. Their Eastern counterparts were mainly used as coastal fishing labourers by the bigger businessmen in the fishing industry.

During this transformation of the Veddas from a predominantly a wilderness based setting towards a modernised setting, Veddas economic activities too are in transition.

However, as **Table 2** shows the main occupations that the Veddas engage in are paddy cultivation (37%), chena cultivation (22%), working as manual workers (19%), engaging in fishing (6%) and working in the Army or Police (5%). It is interesting to see how the avenues of economic activity of Veddas are highly diversified. As far as the place of performing economic activities is concerned, most of the Veddas (82%) operate within the native village 6% work within the DS Division area. 11% work out of the DS Division whereas 1% has gained foreign employment. While some remain farmers engaging in formal paddy cultivation some revert to *chena* cultivation.

It is interesting to see how many from Vedda villages prefer to migrate to other areas of the country for employment rather than to work in their native village. While remaining in the village for economic benefit has been demoted under the present system, there are many economic attractions out of the village.

Main Occupation	***Rathugala***	***Pollebedda***	***Dimbulagala***	***Vakarai***	***Hennanigala***	***Dambana***	***Total***
Paddy farming	5	24	317	123	197	35	**701**
Chena cultivation	81	122	20	13	3	174	**413**
Animal husbandry	--	--	1	1	1	1	**4**
Labourer	3	33	107	83	102	32	**360**
Hunting	--	--	--	13	--	1	**14**
Honey cutting	3	1	--	2	--	4	**10**
Army/Police/ Home guard	11	19	42	--	20	4	**96**
Fishing	--	--	4	88	26	2	**120**
Businessman	1	2	8	1	7	8	**27**
Self employed	--	--	1	5	3	18	**27**
Teaching	1	2	1	1	--	1	**6**
Clerk	--	--	3	--	--	1	**4**
Minor employer		1	4	1	2	3	**11**
Skilled labourer	1	3	4	2	4	7	**21**
Tourism	--	--	--	1	--	4	**5**
Foreign employment	--	--	10	1	--	2	**13**
Other	5	9	14	14	26	20	**88**
Total	111	216	536	349	391	317	**1,920**

Table 2: Economic activities

Lack of economic opportunity and incentive is one of the main reasons for them to migrate out of the village. However, there many males that are engaged in seasonal farming and seasonal labour work. While they work as farmers during the harvesting and cultivating seasons, they work as manual labourers in *chena* cultivation in the village or in other villages in close proximity. Some engage in manual labour work in construction sites in Colombo and other urban areas of the country.

It is the youth that migrate mostly, males as labourers in construction industry and women in the garment industry. They are easily attracted by the industrial sector as they demand less and are not aware about employer rights and minimum wages.

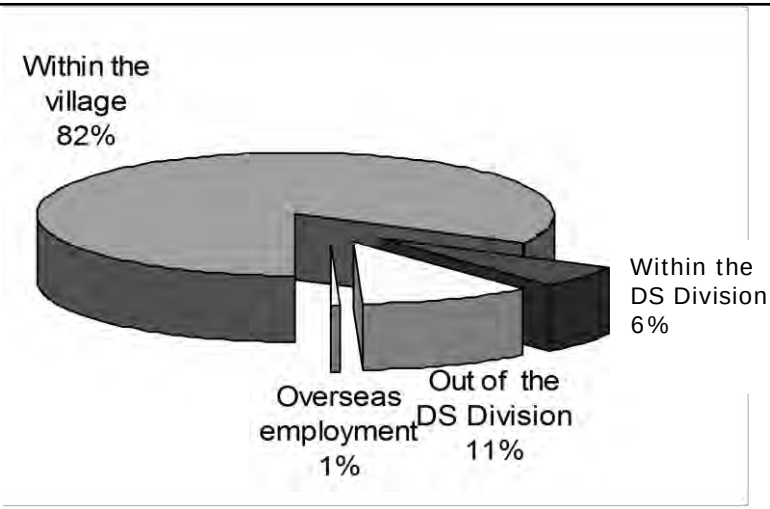


Figure 3: Distance to main occupation

When considering the major economic and income avenues, they are still dominated by males, but, not by far. More males (39%) engage in paddy farming than females (30%), but when it comes to *chena* cultivation, more women (24%) engage than males (21%). More women (19%) make their primary livelihood by providing manual labour in comparison to males (18%). More men (7%) engage in fishing than women (3.5%) but when it comes to informal sector, women (9%) outnumber men (3%). However above data are based on the „main occupation".

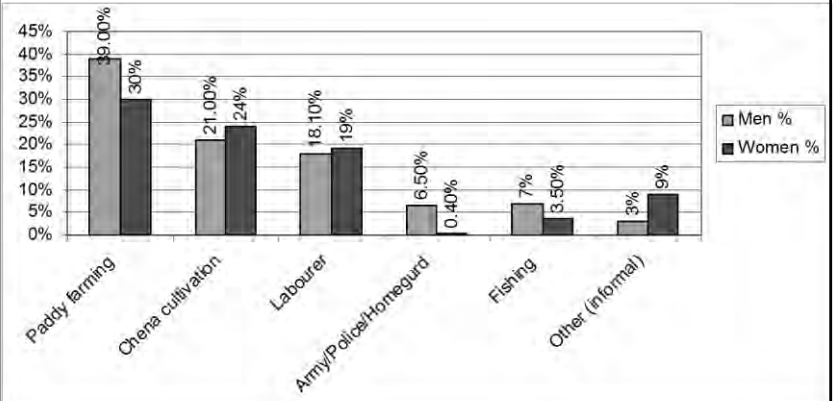


Figure 4: Main economic activities by gender (major economic activities)

There is no life without money. We need money for everything. If we go to the forest, its money. If we go fishing, we can earn about Rs. 1000 a day. If we go to the forest we can earn even more. We also earn a living through paddy cultivation and harvesting. During off season, I go to Colombo to engage in construction work. I was in Colombo (Wellawatte) at a construction site where I was a concrete mixer. About 50-60 boys from the village

went with me and returned during the harvesting season- Uru Varige Jeevan of Henanigala.

More than the females, males tend to engage in multiple economic activities. However, when considering the less popular occupations, women are more active compared to males as described in **Figure 5**.

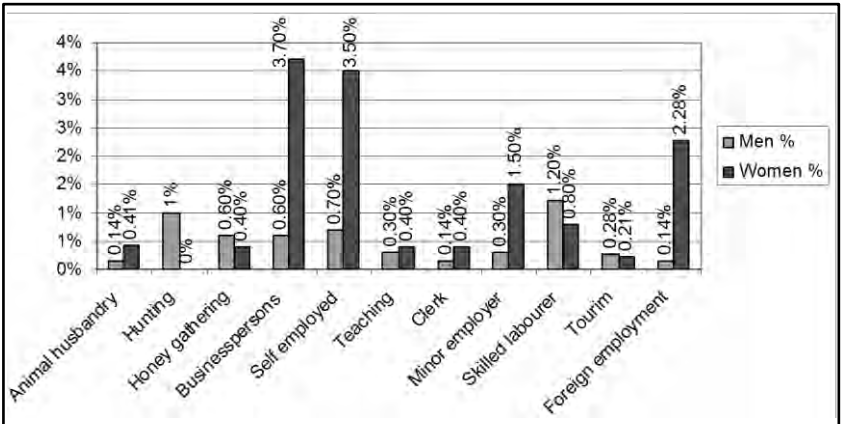


Figure 5: Minor economic activities by gender

Apart from hunting, honey gathering and skilled labour which are dominated by males, all the other sectors are dominated by females. For example, businesses such as shops and self employment are managed mostly by women. From the Dimbulagala community, 9 women have gone for foreign employment which is significant. Informal sector is also dominated by women. As seen in **Figure 5**, males tend to confine themselves to conventional forms of economic activities whereas the women have explored for diverse economic activities that have come alongside modernisation. This could

also be a reflection of how women are compelled to fend for themselves and care for their children.

Due to the complex economic concerns and entrenched poverty and deprivation, women are compelled to become breadwinners and hence become victims of organised and disorganized sex trade. There are instances where women and children are alleged to have become in situ and ex situ sex workers. This is merely because there is a high demand from one side pulling women into the trade and push factors led by extreme economic deprivation. There are also children and women who are coerced, procured and trafficked to be employed as domestic workers.

> *There are many cases of miscarriages and induced abortions reported in the village. There are many who go as domestic workers or to work in garment factories and eventually become pregnant and abort. Abortions among the unmarried is high"*- Public Health midwife, Pollebedda

Even though the Veddas have become a tourist attraction, the proportion of the community engaged in tourism is relatively low (0.2%) as explained in **Figure 5**. This indicates the discrepancies in trickling down of substantial monetary earnings from the tourism as an industry into the community. It may be due to the tourism being opened and confined to only a few influential persons among the the Vedda community.

If practical approaches to ensure the survival of the Veddas and their culture are sought, feasible programme designs needs to be drafted with appropriate consideration given to the Veddas themselves so that it would protect their economic interests as well as cultural treasures.

Indebtness has become one of the main drawbacks of the the Veddas making them more and more vulnerable and dependent. Through half way into modernisation, they have become formal and informal agriculture sector workers, mainly as labourers. In areas such as Henanigala and Dimbulagala where they have been relocated due to development programmes, the second and third generations have become landless. It was a too rapid process of formalising their accustomed way of life.

> *They have pawned or have given the land to someone else for half share and are continuing with their honey gathering and hunting in the forest.* Millane Siriyalankara Thero, Dalukana.

They are compelled to obtain cash loans from local informal lenders at high interest rates as they are unable to access formal banking and finance systems due to their lack of knowledge and due to not fulfilling the background requirements to obtain financial services.

> *I pawned the 2 ½ acres of paddy land and the two sons in the army are settling the debt and are also building a house*- Seetha, Millana, Dalukana.

> *Most of the paddy fields had to be pawned to pay fines to avoid imprisonment due to the charges against us for infringement of wild life laws. We are strangled from all sides* - Uru Varige Sudu Banda, Henanigala.

However, qualitative information in this study reveals that the indebtness of the Vedda population is substantial and repayment could be in the form of cash, kind and labour.

When considering ownership of the land most of the Veddas (55%) currently live in crown land handed over to them

with land permits and deeds. 18% of them live in properties that were inherited from parents which are most probably crown land handed over to their parents a generation or two ago. Purchased lands and lands that the Veddas use on the half share basis remain relatively low.

Over 20% of the Veddas live in state land as encroaches, and 55% of agricultural lands and 46% of home lands are given by the government to the Veddas through issuing land permits. However the definition of the term „encroachment" from the perspective of the Veddas would be „the land that are used by all other people in the country excluding the Veddas" which indicates the extent of mariginalisation that the Veddas have faced amidst the hands of mainstream population and laws.

Ownership	***Ratugala***	***Pollebedda***	***Dimbulagala***	***Vakarai***	***Dambana***	***Hennanigala***	***Total***
Self owned	40%	28%	7%	42%	2%	3%	**17%**
Owned by other private owner	6%	9%	12%	2%	1%	2%	**5%**
State land (land permit)	35%	29%	62%	35%	31%	71%	**46%**
State land (land deed)	5%	17%	15%	8%	14%	9	**12%**
State land (unauthorized)	14%	17%	4%	13%	52%	15%	**20%**

Table 3: Number of families by Ownership of Land

This issue is quite evident in the second and third generations of settlers of the Vedda communities in agricultural extension programmes land scattering is evident and encroachment is also increasing for which sustainable solutions are yet to be brought up.

> *Land scarcity is evident. We were given ½ an acre of land and there are about 3-4 families living in separate houses in these lands. This has resulted in disputes and sometimes people to move out of the owned land and squat in state land* - Handage Amarasinghe Aththo, Dalukana.

Housing

One such diversification and change that had occurred is with relation to the status of housing of the Veddas. A generation ago, there were no permanent structures within the Vedda settlements, but currently alongside modernisation, there is an increased tendency shown by the Veddas to follow common patterns shown by the Sinhalese and the Tamils to construct permanent houses.

Apart from Vakarai, most Veddas still live in temporary or semi permanent houses that are mostly between 101-500 square feet in size that have a single room or two. These houses are mostly built with clay or bricks. Use of bark or wood as housing (wall) material is not at all common currently. Using bricks to construct walls is increasingly becoming popular among the Veddas.

Cow dung and clay mixture or pure cow dung is being applied on floor for the semi permanent and temporary houses. While a significant number have started to shift from clay/cow dung to cement floors there is still a lot of houses that have bare soil as the flooring material. Even in Vakarai where there are

permanent houses, there is a considerable (18%) of the people using sand as the flooring material. It is evident that the housing material and the condition of housing are in the process of modernization.

The diversity and frequency of the Vedda using movable properties can be interpreted in terms of modernisation. Using a torch by 42% of families indicate the need for basic facility. Use of chairs (59%), tables (33%), beds (24%) and almirah (15%) signifies upgrading of basic lifestyle whereas using a radio (40%), television (25%), mobile phones (18%) and land phones (7%) indicate the diversification of long distance communication and transmission and opening out into the outside world.

For example, mobile phones are used by many youth. In general 18% of the families have access to a mobile phone in their household. Mainly the youth engaged in agriculture and in the construction industry as seasonal migrant workers use latest designs of phones and there seems to be a competition among the youth to be in possession of the most modern phone. It is interesting to see how they learn how to use novel technology that requires knowledge of English, even though most of them lack basic education and literacy. In Vakarai, youth that have got used to the mobile phones have to send their phones to adjacent villages to charge their mobile phones as the native villages lack electricity.

However, amidst modernisation, there is a significant proportion of the Vedda that cannot afford even chairs tables or even a torch which may be a reflection of their state of immense economic poverty.

In relation to motarability, bicycles are used in 41% of the homes followed by 6% motor cycles and 1.3% three wheelers and also indications of using cars and vans which indicate the extent of intra village and extra village travelling.

Household appliances too reflect their entry into modernisation. Amidst being absorbed by the mainstream lifestyle and economic diversity, there are still Veddas who try their best to remain within the old form of economic activities that include chena farming coupled with hunting and gathering.

Social Life

Most of the Veddas live as nucleus families and rarely as extended families. Families are mostly male headed due to dominance, masculinity and the responsibility borne by the male to protect and feed the family members. Considering the fact that the males are busy on livelihood activities, an informal leadership is also vested on the mother as she is responsible for caring and nurturing of the children.

> *Most men do not care for their families. Most men and women have multiple marriages. Polygamy and polyandry are also practiced, but in hiding.* – Public Health Midwife of Dalukana.

It is observed that many fathers do disengage from their primary responsibilities of providing protection and food security for the family members. This has led to mothers becoming compelled to find income avenues, hence neglecting the children. Therefore, family ties are often loose and neither the mothers nor the fathers take appropriate care about their children and children become independent from an immature age. As elaborated in **Figure 6**, over 60% of the females get

married before they turn 18 whereas the figure is 15% for males. 39% of the females get married between the ages of 19 and 35. In comparison, most men (over 82%) of males get married within the ages of 19 and 35.

> *Even though they are modernizing, some of their social norms have remained. Most of the girls marry at the age of 13-14. Most of the young age marriages break. Most people do not possess birth certificates, identity cards or marriage certificates* - D.M. Siripala Dissanayake, Dalukana.

Earlier, the marriages were given blessings by the parents if they find a partner from the same Varige or clan, later with interactions more and more Sinhala and Tamil people they tend to married people from the Vedda community. Considering this issue, marrying from another Vedda Varige was preferred over marrying with a different ethnic group. However, this trend of marrying from the Sinhala and Tamil communities is increasing.

> *People are not bothered about marrying people from other varige and even Sinhala. People going for work out of the village and even as far as Colombo get married to Sinhalese people and settle down in those areas. There are some people who have migrated to Dambana from other parts of the country after their marriages* - Gunawardena of Dambana.

The shift from the preferred endogamic to exogamic marriages could also be partly due to the increased interactions with other villages as described before. It could also be the economic and educational achievements that mixed families have achieved which encourage more people to marry non *Veddas*.

With increased interactions of women with the outside world, the *Vedda* communities assimilating with the adjoining

Sinhala and Tamil villages are likely to increase. Every facet of the *Veddas* way of life has been influenced by the external factors. Family lives are transforming fast and are adopting Sinhala and Tamil cultures.

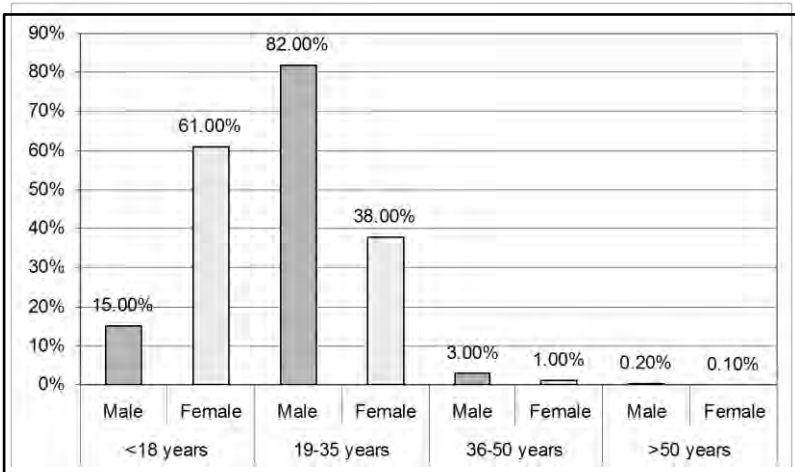


Figure 6: Percent of family members by age at marriage

Education

There are many ways by which people acquire skills and knowledge. Although formal education is a relatively new phenomenon for the Veddas who are in the process of modernisation also fall under the compulsory education law of the country, hence limiting other traditional avenues of knowledge acquisition. However, for the purpose of the study, only formal education that is offered through the schooling system will be discussed in this section.

Although formal education structure has been in place for about half a century even among the Vedda settlements of the

country, most of the facilities that are available in the townships are not yet available in the schools situated in Vedda settlements. According to most teachers and principals in the schools in the Vedda settlements, there are major issues that hinder education and issues that discourage children from the Vedda community to participate in formal schooling. It is still seen that the Veddas are not yet prepared for education under the prevailing educational system that is not suited for special education or education with special consideration.

According to the survey data eight persons from the Vedda community have obtained degree level qualifications out of which 3 are from Dambana, 2 each from Pollebedda and Dimbulagala and one from Vakarai. As a percentage, only 1% of the children qualify in their G.C.E Advanced Level exam and 2% get through to the G.C.E Ordinary Level Exam. However, 21% of the children remain without any schooling whereas 40% drop out during primary education. 36% drop out during secondary education. But a gradual increase is seen in schooling within the past half a century. **Figure 7** indicates the gradual increase in secondary education from 5.3% to 76.3% over the years.

However, illiteracy is still high among the Vedda children and has relatively low educational attainment, mainly in comparison with children that come from the neighboring non Vedda villages and the children that represent mixed parents.

> *Our people must get educated if they want to improve. We got ourselves educated amidst all problems. I passed my G.C.E Ordinary Level exam. I had to take the O/L exam thrice till I passed. There were no facilities in schools those days. We use to assemble under trees to conduct classes. There were only five teachers. Now there are about 20*

teachers and classes are held till O/L exam, there are laboratories and computers. Our children do not get the use of these facilities. When all the Sinhalese children go to school, only a few of our children go to school - Sarath Senawardena, Pollebedda.

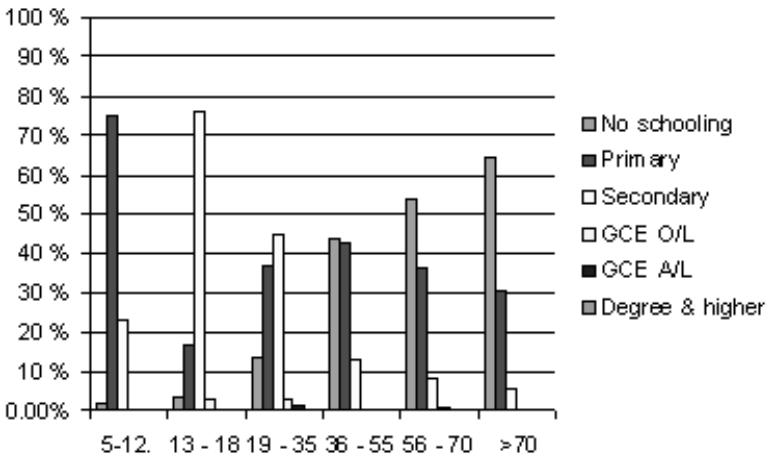


Figure 7: Education attainment of Veddas according to age category

There are some distinct features that have prevented people from the Vedda communities to access formal schooling and free education as citizens of Sri Lanka. Most schools are under staffed and under equipped and even the ones that have some facilities have been improved during recent times.

Adi Vasi children fear teachers. They fear the Sinhala children. They are reluctant to come forward. There are occasions where the Sinhala children corner and isolate these children. Due to this, they become increasingly backward. There is clear polarization of children in school.

> *Due to the lack of cleanliness, neatness of clothing they are automatically rejected by the ones who dress well and neat. There are 29 children in the class and 9 do not come to school regularly, and those 9 are from the Vedda community* - A.M. Meththananda, Teacher, Pollebedda School.

There are other instruments in the UN that have specifically focused on formal education and cultural education of the indigenous people. According to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indegenous People,

> Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination[2].

However, there seems to be no mechanism available even at the discussion level to provide children of these communities with formal education that are tailored for the purpose of educating children belonging to the Vedda community.

Impact of Modern Development Projects

The impacts of development projects on the Vedda communities and their culture are tremendously important to understand present status of Vedda. The major development projects that have taken place can be taken as Mahaveli irrigation and agricultural extension project, post Tsunami development projects, post conflict development projects, Ramba Ken Oya irrigation project, tourism projects, road development projects, and electricity projects.

As described in the historic context of the Veddas, the Mahaveli development project resulted in fragmentation of the Vedda settlements leading to complete alteration of the culture,

traditions, livelihoods and way of life of the resettled communities, mainly in the Dimbulagala and Henanigala areas. Land fragmentation led to the Veddas having to depend on commercial agriculture for survival.

> *I was in Kandeganwila, Dambana, never liked to come here, but the Minister and officers promised to build a tank and allow us to use forest resources. Now we are losing those. Thisahami did not like to come and said you will not be cared for by these people, you will lose this status, you will lose your relations, finally you will also lose your women. He said that we will disuse our traditional ancestral worship. He was right. Now those traditions are not practiced* - Uru Varige Sudu Banda, Henanigala

Another Vedda voiced out.

> *There were 33 tanks but after the Mahaveli programme they were neglected. There are only 6 medium sized tanks now. They are also neglected. Our people catch fish in all these tanks. Now the villagers have established fisheries societies and we are not allowed to go fishing. They have introduced fish given by the government* - Kandaiya, Kolakanavadiya, Dalukana.

However the areas that were converted into agricultural lands under the Mahaveli and other irrigation schemes resulted in aiding the food security aspect of the Veddas although it was a replacement of food patterns and altered culture.

Post Tsunami and post conflict development projects were only evident in the Vakarai area with significant amount of monetary and material inputs within a relatively short period of time. The reconstruction of houses did not consider the cultural aspects or the possibilities of detrimental effects on the local culture. The livelihood projects too did not consider or give

thought to the Vedda community from a cultural rights perspective and have conducted their activities uniformly. These projects have made the Veddas more vulnerable to food security once the project interventions cease to exist. The Veddas in the East are increasingly detaching from self sufficiency and are compelled to follow guidance and direction recommended by the development project implementers. Infrastructure improvements have increased accessibility to the Vedda communities. Furthermore, it has given opportunity for Veddas to freely associate people outside the Vedda villages, and availability of electricity has given access to communication and technology resulted Vedda culture being further exposed to forces of modernization.

Cultural Life of the Veddas

Veddas have over the years sustained their lives with the forest environment and their food, shelter, movements, communication; rituals were simple and evolved along with the requirements of the day. Although they were living in isolation, there have been external influences from time to time which have in a way enriched the cultural diversity of the Veddas.

Some of the cultural practices not being performed as they used to has resulted in producing chain reaction filled with detrimental cultural impacts. For example, current law of the state prohibiting acquisition of forest resources and also the reduced availability of forest resources result in reduced food availability where the Veddas are compelled to transform themselves from hunting and gathering to nomadic to agricultural societies within a generation. A closer look at this form of chain reactions is evident in their present cultural practices. In this section, such areas like language, hunting,

gathering and fishing, clothing and appearance, rituals are considered. The gradual degradation of the cultural practices within a few generations is elaborated with the interpretation of findings of the research which was based on three previous generations of the present day Veddas and a breakdown of the present day Vedda‟s cultural skills according to age category.

Language Use

Language can be considered as the most important aspect of identity of Vedda culture. It is generally understood that an extinction of a language increases the chances of the race and the culture becoming extinct. It is clearly evident that language of the Veddas is fast disappearing. Urbanisation and increased interaction and assimilation with the other communities and also fragmentation of Vedda settlements have resulted in disusing Vedda language. While the Veddas in the Sinhala speaking areas of the island use one common dialect of the Vedda language which seems to have been greatly influenced by the Sinhala language whereas the East coast Vedda use a different dialect which is similarly influenced by the Tamil language. However, there are certain words common to all groups of Veddas which is evidence for links in lineage.

Figure 8 stresses the fact that the Vedda language is fast diminishing from generation to generation.Currently, only 11% of the Veddas in Sri Lanka are conversant in their own language in comparison to 85% of the Veddas who are not conversant in their traditional language. A majority of the Veddas that are fluent with their language skills represent the over 70 years of age category and the 56-70 category which can also be a reason for alarms of possibility of extinction of the language of the Veddas.

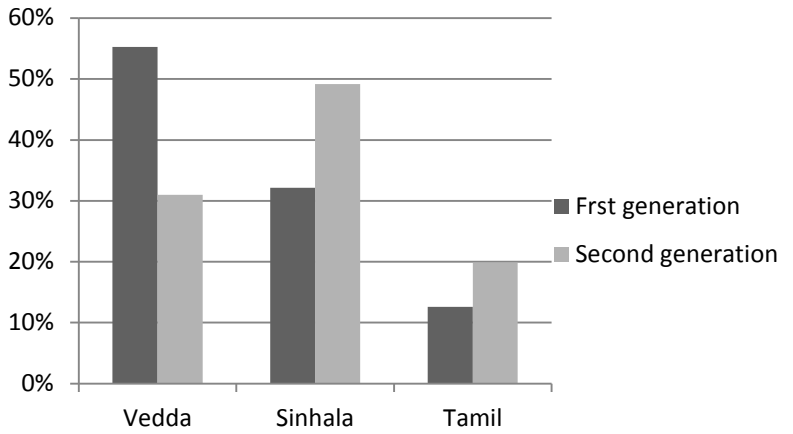


Figure 8: Transformation of language use/ disuse within a generation

The gradual disuse of the Vedda language from generation to generation is further elaborated in **Figure 9** and **Figure 10**. The language skills have come to near extinction considering the language abilities of the 5-18 year olds among the Veddas who are not at all conversant in the Vedda language. There are no specific criteria to identify the extent of fluency and use of the Vedda language by the persons who mentioned that they are fluent in the language.

It was observed during the research that persons including the most senior ones that are seen using only the Vedda language outdoors and during associations are merely using Sinhala at their homes. Although there are Veddas who could converse well in the Vedda language, their day to day language has become Sinhalese or Tamil, making the native language a second language.

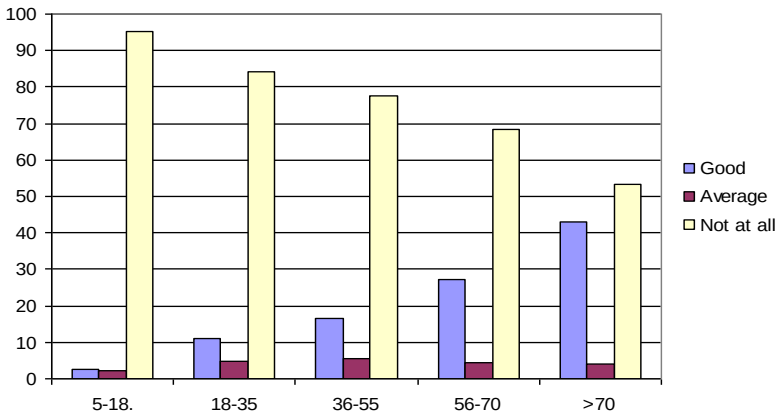


Figure 9: Percent of population according to indigenous language skills and age group

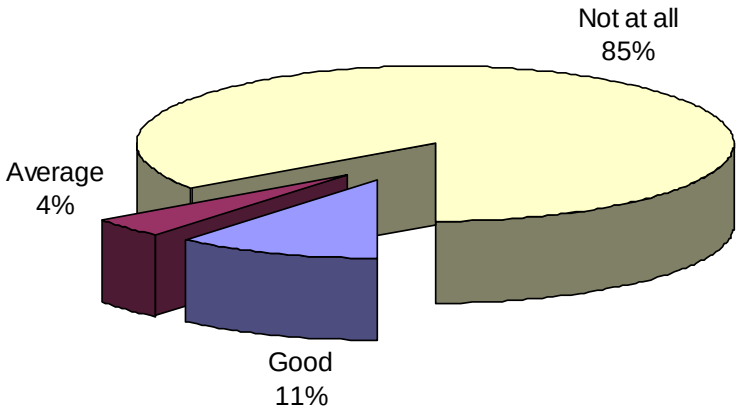


Figure 10: Population breakdown by indigenous language skill

Unlike the Dambana Veddas in the areas that are not considered as tourist destinations, such as Vakarai, Pollebedda, Dimbulagala and Rathugala, the Vedda language is diminishing faster as there is no monetary value given for the use of language.

Dress code and Appearance

Anthropologists and historians have depicted the Veddas as primitive human beings who stereotypically had long hair, long beards and wore loin cloths and kept their upper body naked. Women‟s attire has been described as simple and photos and paintings show that the women covered their bodies with a piece of cloth while some kept the upper body naked. Their dress patterns and appearance have altered immensely within the past few decades. Currently, there are many women who wear skirts and blouses, saris and even trousers and T shirts which describe rapid Sinhalisation and Tamilisation in a generation and eventual Westernisation. Similarly, popular men‟s clothing patterns have changed from loin cloth to sarong in a generation. The young generation mostly wear the sarong just like a typical Sinhalese or a Tamil and it is also observed that they even wear trousers and shirts or T- shirts in public.

The recent civilization processes, mainly the introduction of formal schooling to the Veddas after the 1940s might have influenced them to alter their attire and appearance so that they are better accepted by the society. While some of them remained typical Veddas the others metamorphosed with conditional self primitivisation. Some wear the typical Vedda attire for ceremonial purposes only. This is significantly evident in Dambana area where looking like a typical Vedda is a highly profitable value added industry. Most of the Veddas however

neither grow long hair nor they have long beards or even mustaches. Most women wear the cloth and the jacket, but the younger generation wear frocks or skirts and blouse and on rare occasions, trousers. This form of modernisation of clothing is seen mainly among the young boys and girls who go for work in garment factories and other industries in the townships.

Change of Personal Names

Another interesting tendency among present Vedda community is that increasingly use of Sinhala and Tamil names instead of using their „traditional personal names". The giving of Sinhala name is quite popular among present generation of parent living in the Sinhala dominated areas. Similarly, it is also evident among the Vedda in the Tamil dominated areas too. This can be seen as part of Sinhalisation and Tamilisation of the Vedda in the country.

Skills of Hunting, Fishing and Gathering

A few generations ago, the Veddas seem to have used the bow and arrow as one of the main instruments for hunting. The other methods of hunting include using spears, setting traps, digging deadly trenches. This was also complemented by collecting bee honey, wasp honey and yams rich in carbohydrates and gathering fruits and diverse variety of greenery.

The **Figure 11** clearly shows how the use of the bow and arrow has become disused within the past generation. In the present day, it is difficult to find a Vedda who could use the bow and arrow effectively. However, as **Figure 12** and **13** indicate the Veddas continue to engage in hunting, but using novel techniques such as shooting, setting traps and using dogs for ambushing prey.

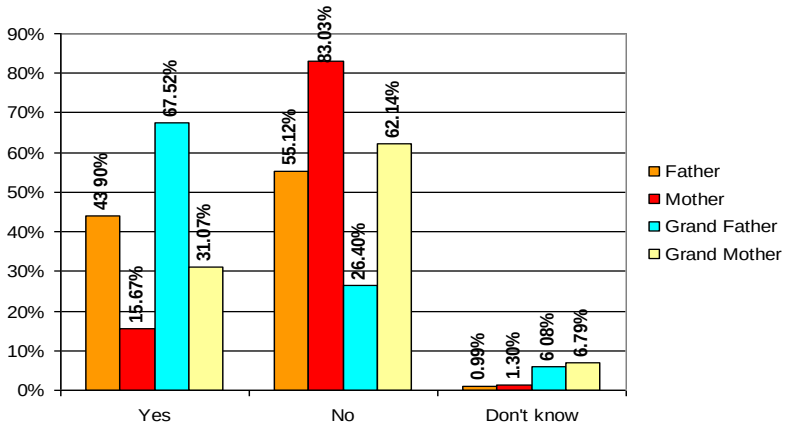


Figure 11: Change of skill to use the bow and arrow within a generation

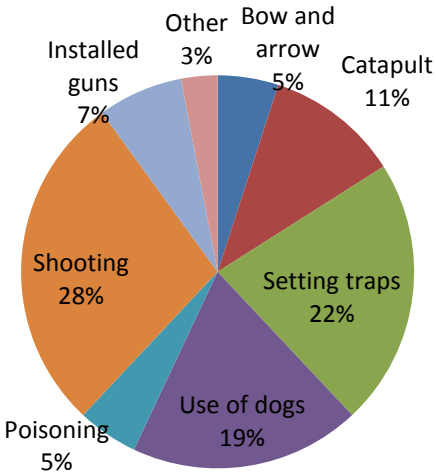


Figure 12: Mode of hunting

There are people from all the Vedda communities who have seen their ancestors‟ using bows and arrows except in Tamil speaking Vedda in Vakarai. However, currently there is only a very few from the *Vedda* community who could use the bow and arrow effectively.

As **Figure 13** shows that only a mere 33% of the population is engaged in hunting compare to 54% engage in fishing. The actual percentage could be higher as under reporting by respondents is possible in this case because the particular question is legally sensitive. The actual consumers of hunted meat could be greater than 33%.

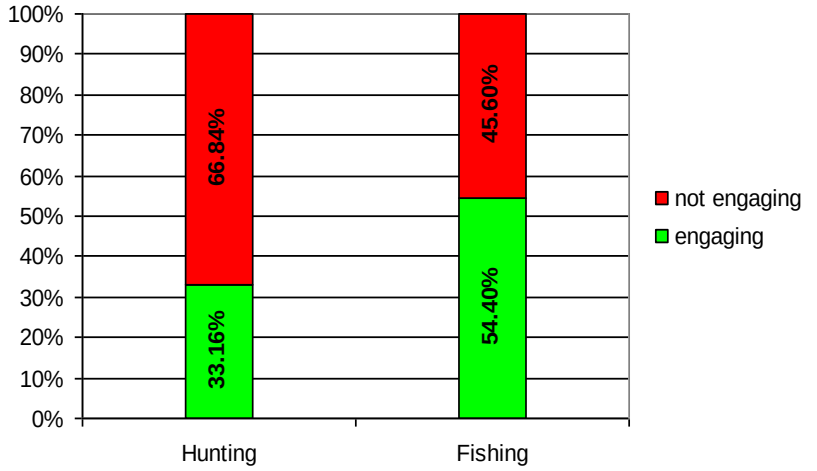


Figure 13: Percentage of Veddas currently engaged in hunting and fishing

Currently there is a severe shortage of wild animals, mainly after the introduction of the guns during British regime and later during the past three decades after the introduction of automatic

weapons and locally manufactured "gal katas" type of guns and installed guns and the restriction imposed by the Wildlife department and general law of the country.

Fishing Skills

Fishing is done by over 54% of the Vedda for living. Fishing accounts for inland fishing as well as coastal fishing even though the coastal fishing can be considered as traditional fishing practices, fishing in irrigation tanks by the recently resettled populations under the Mahaveli Development Programmes can be seen as a compelled alteration to ensure food security considering that those populations have become landless and have become villanised for using forest resources under the current legislations.

Traditional techniques of fishing seem to have been replaced by fishing nets which has become the most common mode of fishing **(Figure 14)**. This might have been influenced by a majority of the Vakarai Veddas who were engaging in fishing traditionally being provided with modern fishing gear by various organisations post Tsunami and post conflict. Furthermore, the people engaged in inland fishing too have got used to fishing nets designed to yield better harvests for commercial purposes. Fishing rods have remained popular among the fishing Veddas and over 34% of the Veddas engaged in fishing use rods to harvest fish. However, this method can be considered as a means of collecting food for self consumption rather than for commercial purposes.

Even though the Veddas seem to be still substantially engaged in hunting and fishing, their traditional means and rituals surrounding to them, seemed to have been altered during recent times. There were a few factors leading to the disuse of

the bow and arrow and other traditional methods of hunting and fishing. Simply it was a mere replacement of the old weapon by user friendly and effective weaponry such as the installed gun, cap gun, using dogs for hunting, using catapults, and in the case of fishing, using of spears, manually catching fish being replaced by rods and fishing nets for larger harvests. Furthermore, with the increased complexity of lifestyles along with modernisation; comodification of wild meat (*dadamas*) came into the scene with upward demand which resulted in over harvesting.

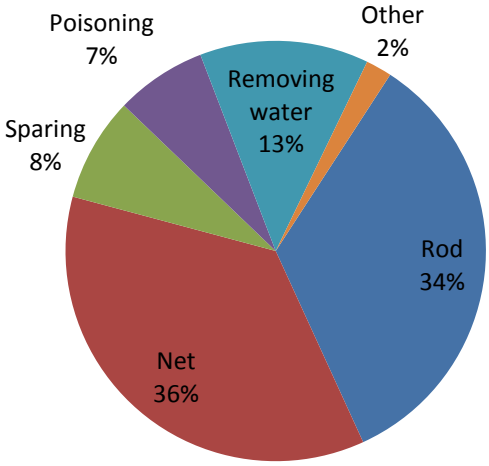


Figure 14 : Fishing methods used

At times, the Veddas have to compete with the other villagers with Sinhala or Tamil origins for forest resources, meat in particular and the competition was unfavorable to the Veddas as the other villagers had access to more sophisticated fire arms.

In the peripheral Sri Lanka, after the eruption of the conflict spanning for thirty years, fire arms and bullets became commonplace contributing towards the speedy reduction of mega fauna density. A major grievance of the Veddas on the reduction of the wild life is the organized poaching of wild animals that is taking place with the knowledge of responsible government officers and politicians.

While the above scenario can be observed among the original Vedda settlements, the newly resettled Vedda communities in the Henanigala and Dalukana areas as well as Pollebedda have literarily completely disengaged from traditional hunting methods and have been compelled to metamorphose into traditional paddy farming and chena cultivation.

The situation is different in the Eastern Province where the Veddas in Vakarai area were compelled to struggle for their survival within the extreme conflict situation creating them a number of challenges to live with. While displacement was a key reason impacting their traditional food patterns, converting them from self sustaining to a highly dependant group surviving on donated food rations.

Urbanisation of the country amidst trade liberalisation processes too resulted in people with the Vedda origins being hired as construction workers and service providers and eventually becoming city dwellers who migrate from literarily the wild to the townships at which they acquire lifestyles of the city and even if they return to the native places, they continue to lead the life that they have recently acquired which require no hunting or fishing skills at all.

Religious Belief and Practice

Veddas are known to practitioners in the past where they worship and seek protection and advantages from souls and spirits of their ancestors whom they believe have become deities and devils after death. This scenario is commonly called as ancestral worship known as „*Naa Yakku*", but some of them are deities and some are *yakkas*. While some of their *yakkas* and deities are common to all communities, some differ or at least the nomenclature differs. The *Naa Yakku* of the Veddas are categorized under *yakku, yakinniyo, kiri amma* (milk mothers), Bandara deities, and others female deities such as *maha lokuvo, Kuveni* and *Valli Amma*. Analysis of some of the names used to describe some of the Naa yakas such as Bandara *Deviyo*, associations that the Veddas had with the Sinhalese, at least during the Kandyan period is evident (Seligmans 1911; Wejesekera 1964: 147-164; Obeyesekere 1974: 201-225, 2002: 1-19; Meegaskumbura 1990: 98-140).

This transformation from worshipping Yakkas in the olden days to acquiring deities and other newer versions of *Naa Yakku* could have been due to the increased interaction with the mainstream that has been evident during the past.

However, our data show that currently, the ancestor worship of their culture is being influenced by popular Buddhism, Hinduism as well as Christianity. The Veddas according to religious beliefs gives a clear idea of the extent of Buddhicisation and Hinducisation of the religious life. Currently as **Figure 15** indicates 74% of the Veddas call themselves Buddhists whereas 18% call themselves Hindus. Only 2.75% of the Veddas currently worship and believe in their traditional deities and ancestors and have not acquired Buddhism,

Hinduism, Christianity or Catholicism. Nearly 2.0% worship and believe in the traditional deities while following Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Catholic faiths. However, only 2.5% have adopted Christianity and Catholicism.

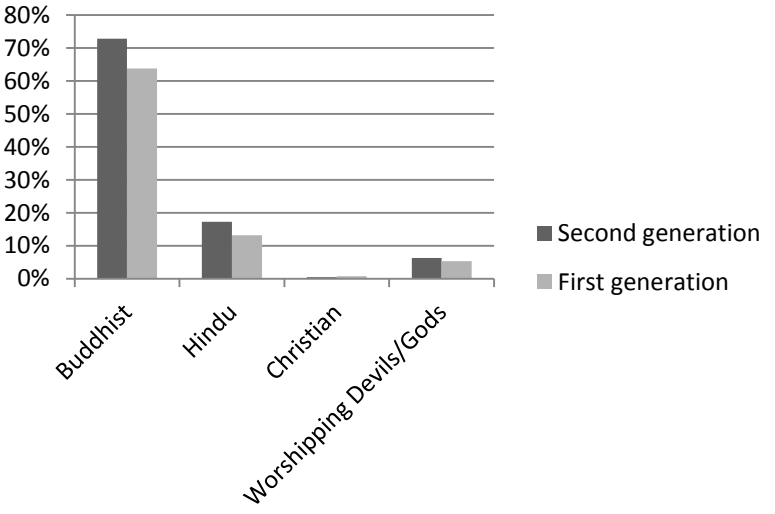


Figure 15: Vedda's Religious Identity

Acquisition of Buddhism by over 91% of the populations of the Veddas is seen excluding in Vakarai where 74% have acquired Hinduism. Converting to Christianity is mostly seen in Vakarai (7.9%) followed by Rathugala (4.6%). This is mainly due to the Evangelical Christian cults that are active in the region. However, ancestral worship is most common in Vakarai (13.3%) and in Pollebedda (5.4%). Worshipping traditional deities and ancestors are heading towards extinction in Dimbulagala and is in the verge of extinction in Henanigala, and Rathugala. The scenarios in Henanigala and Dimbulagala seem

to have been greatly influenced by the strong leadership given by the Buddhist temples and priests within the past half a century and more adopting them into the life of settled agriculture. In parallel to becoming Buddhicised and Hinducised, assimilation of the Veddas into the mainstream communities is also seen. As described in **Figure 16**, significant Buddhicisation and Hinducisation had occurred with the last century or so at an alarming phase whereas the popularity of ancestral worship has drastically reduced or incorporated into the current belief systems.

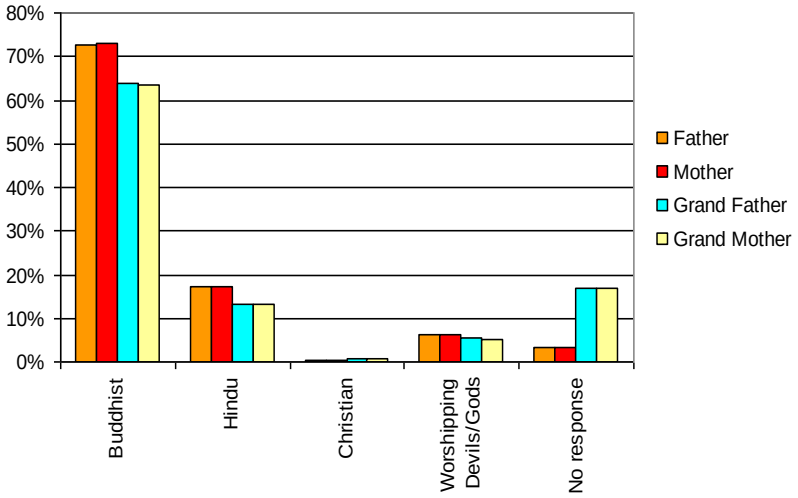


Figure 16: Transformation of religious beliefs within a generation

In our investigations we found some rituals which have not been recorded earlier and, while there are new accretions, some of the early rituals are no longer practiced. Although not directly

considered as a means of traditional medicine, *mantra, yadini* and ritual dances and rites have been used to cure illnesses, procure food, avoid black magic and bring prosperity whereby making them categorized under the Vedda‟s traditional belief system.Though the Vedda still believe in and rely on such rituals in order to making the life more comfortable these rituals are now carry more of a showy and entertainment value than curative and protective value.

Most of the traditional music, songs, *mantra, yadini,* and rituals including Kiri Koraha and Hathme distinct to the Veddas are still performed by a minority of Veddas. Apart from the above popular rituals that are still performed by the Veddas, mainly in the month of September, there are other rituals that the Veddas perform. For example, there are hunting rituals that are unique to them where a portion of the offering is presented to the *Na yakku* (souls of the dead relatives) as alms before consuming. The Veddas believe that they are being protected by the spirits of the dead (*Na Yakku*) and if the dead are neglected they would cause trouble, lead to inauspicious accidents and events. Even though the worship of *Na Yakku* forms the striking features of the ancestor religion of these Veddas, the Sinhalas occupying the same ecological zone as the Veddas also have a Na *Yakku* cult but with some important differences. This indicates once again the blurring of distinctions between Vedda and Sinhala, yet at the time forces us to recognize differences (cf. Obeyesekere 2002: 7).

Diminishing or Survival?

Today the demand from at least a section of the Vedda community is that they be left alone to enjoy their traditional pattern of life without interference from the state or other

communities. It is the move away from the forest that they see as the cause of the destruction of not only their livelihood, but also of their deities and culture. At the same time, while many among younger Vedda would prefer to forget their Vedda identity, there are other young Veddas who see the value of preserving the Vedda identity as for its value to the outside world.

> "*Why should one hide ones birth?*" said one young *Vedda* of 24 years. "*I was born a Vedda and am proud to be so.*"

However, the research shows that there are regional differences among the Veddas from the perspective of whether they prefer to live like Veddas. While most communities have opted to live with Veddas identity, a majority of the Veddas in Dimbulagala and Vakarai would prefer to forget their Vedda past.

When analyzing the **Figure 17**, it is evident that there is a variance of negative 15-20% in every location which indicates the actual willingness to forget their Vedda identity and assimilate into main stream societies: Tamil or Sinhala. The total percentage of such Veddas is high as 36% of the total sample. This also indicates the requirement for investments in mobilising the communities to enhance the knowledge of their own culture and the value of the preserving of their culture as mean of livelihood in the highly globalised world.

However, there is a large proportion of the Vedda population (64%) who are currently willing to live with Vedda identity. The main reasons given by them for wanting to live with Vedda identity included the sense of responsibility to protect their own culture (37% out of the 64%), and others like to retaining the Vedda identity (33% out of the 64%) which is a

good sign to indicate that there could be much hope to survival of the Vedda community in the country. Complementing to the value of retaining identity of Vedda themselves and to raise voices against their cultural concerns, the Sinhalese and the Tamil speaking majority have not shown their will or the vision to preserve the needs of the Vedda communities who are struggling to survive against the forces of modernization.

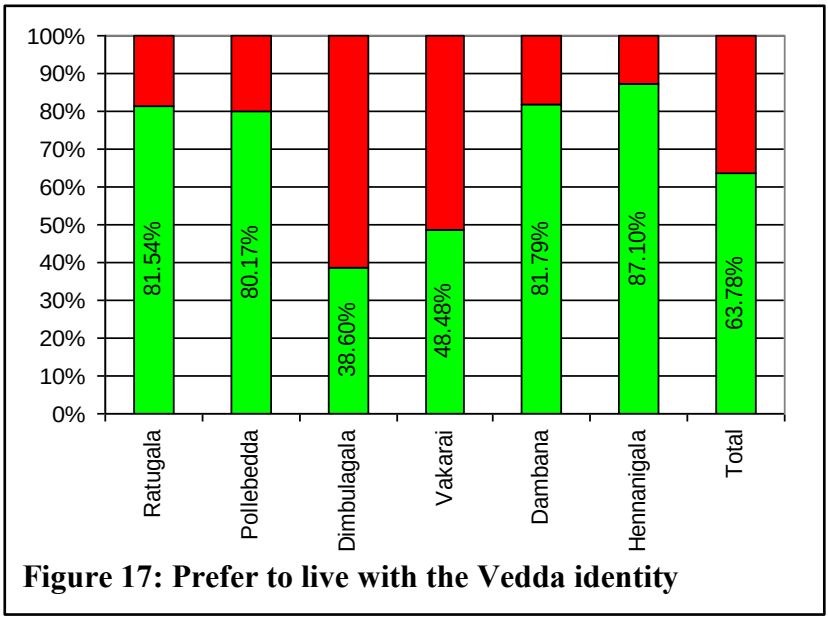


Figure 17: Prefer to live with the Vedda identity

As a concluding remark verbatim of young Vedda is quoted here:

> *We will be respected only if we remain as Veddas. If we become identical to the common Sinhalese, we will lose the pride of being Veddas. Therefore, we prefer to carry on our ancestry.We do not want to cause any trouble for anyone in*

the country, but we would value any help that would enable us to practice our liberty. - T.B Gunawardena, Pollebedda.

Conclusion

Critical analysis of the current state of the Veddas of Sri Lanka suggests the need to look into the multiple facets impacting on their culture. In order to successfully address the prevailing issues and to see an improvement of the state of the Vedda population and also to „preserve" their culture the speedy holistic action is required. The findings of socio-cultural aspects have suggested a mixed bag that includes optimistic and pessimistic versions on the possible interventions. However, if the ongoing Buddhicisation and Hinducisation of the Vedda culture is further advanced with the process of globalisation there is always a chance for the Vedda as a community to become only an episode of the history within a generation or two.

Notes:

1. The Veddas currently living in the northern part of the Eastern Province, or more specifically, in Muttur and Vakarai areas have also evolved in the jungles in particular areas but still show many cultural similarities with the Veddas in other parts of the country. The oldest Veddas in the Eastern province still converse well in Sinhalese and are capable of performing typical Vedda rituals and cultural folk songs.
2. Clause 2, Article 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by General Assembly Resolution 61/295 on 13 September 2007. http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html

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The Puberty Ritual of the Veddas

Yasanjali Devika Jayatilleke

Abstract

One of the earliest aboriginal group of Sri Lanka, the Veddas has long aroused world-wide interest. The reason for this lies perhaps in the fact that in spite of tumultuous social changes, they have survived as one of the last of Sri Lanka's earliest inhabitants. Though much has been discussed about the Veddas, there is a dearth of information about the Vedda women, their rites of passage and the changes occurring in their rituals along with the social change. In this paper, the puberty ritual of Vedda women folk, are explained according to the order of the ritual. A comparison between puberty ritual of the Veddas and the Sinhalese are discussed to find out the influences of both the cultures. Finally the meaning of all the steps of the ritual is highlighted.

In this study, interview method, case studies, and participant observation method were employed for collecting primary data. Simple random sample method was used to identify the sample for the study. The empirical research was conducted from 1994-98.

Introduction

A Vedda girl approaching her puberty period is socialized in this aspect in advance by her mother. She is advised to go under a milking-tree close to her hut, stand in opposite direction to the West, facing the East and to tap on the tree with a splinter of wood, loud enough for others to hear. She is requested to carry out this procedure no sooner than she (the girl) observes a mark of blood on the dress she was wearing at that time. In general, a

Vedda girl attains puberty around the age of about 11-14 years. There is a belief among the Vedda community that, in cases where a Vedda girl is influenced by evil effects she is supposed to attain puberty at a later period than is usual.

A girl who attains her first menses, thus goes under a milking-tree as has been instructed. The mother, who then understands her behavior, approaches her immediately and covers the daughter with a veil. A sickle is then handed over to the girl, and makes the latter tap on the tree in order that the girl is able to see the oozing of milky stuff from the tree. Subsequently the mother makes the girl say the following verse so that all ill effects on her are dispelled:

Ammita appita vas nethiyo
Meeyan daluwata vas palayo
Mamee muththata vas nethiyo
Meeyan daluwata vas palayo
Aiyya akkata vas nethiyo
Meeyan daluwata vas palayo
Nena massinata vas nethiyo
Meeyan daluwata vas palayo.

The translation to the verse is as follows:

Let the evil on the mother and father be dispelled
Let that evil be resided on the tree giving forth honey
Let the evil on the uncle and great grandfather be dispelled
Let that evil be resided on the tree giving forth honey
Let the evil on the brother and sister be dispelled
Let that evil be resided the tree giving forth honey

Let the evil on the cross-cousin sister and the cross-cousin brother be dispelled

Let that evil be resided on the tree giving forth honey.

According to the belief of the Veddas, if the girl happened to be evil-influenced, then either the milking-tree would wither and die or the cross-cousin sister of the aunt who dispelled the evil would succumb to a calamity. If not, some close relative would have to face such negative circumstances. On such an occasion the shaman who understands the situation would perform a *Baliya* (a ritual of exorcism using an image, made out of clay) and thus dispel the evil from the person concerned. After dispelling such evil, the mother of the girl would call forth the cross-cousin sister of the latter. This person would then come and perform the custom of the '*Vas Kalaya*' or the '*Vas Labba*' (It is the shell of a gourd that is dried used as the '*Vas Kalaya*' or pot. Some people use an earthen pot for this purpose) as it is called. The cross cousin sister throws the '*Vas Labba*' in a manner that it strikes the milking-tree. In this case, the gourd shell shatters into pieces and falls at the feet of the girl. According to the nature in which the gourd shell is shattered, they render their versions of the good and evil. If the gourd shell was shattered in only two, then it is believed that the girl and members of her family would have to undergo various forms of misfortune. In such an instance, the gourd shell lies on the ground and it is made to be trampled by the girl herself so that it is reduced to small fragments. However, unshattered gourd portends the misfortune that awaits the girl. The Veddas firmly believe that, if this custom was to be performed either by the cross-cousin sister or the girl's aunt, then the evil effects, lie in store for the person who so performs it. On the day the custom of the '*Vas Labba*' is performed, milk-rice is prepared and the girl partakes of it.

Subsequently the mother of the girl calls the cross-cousin brother. On his arrival, he constructs the *Kili pela* (The hut considered to be defiled due to the presence of attained or menstruated girl) close to the hut of the girl with branches of Indi (Suyry, chros neis- Vomica L.-*Loganiaceae Phoenex Zelanica*) or any other suitable type of branches. Just as much as the cross-cousin sister performs the custom of the *Vas Kalaya*, it is the role of the cross-cousin brother to put up the *Kili pela*. The Veddas believe that the father or a brother erecting this hut would bring ill-effects upon them. While the roof of the *Kili pela* is thatched with *Iluk* branches, some others plant a *Rambuk* (*Mm uisa acuminala-blusa balbisiana*) tree infront of the *Kili pela*. The girl is kept in isolation in the *Kili pela* for a period of nine days. The reason for keeping the girl in seclusion in this manner is to safeguard her from the evil eye of the demons. The Veddas say that the odour of a girl who has attained puberty goes to demons even across the oceans. Since the *Yak Pettiya* (literally, Devil-box) is found in the majority of Vedda homes, it has to be protected from the *killa* (defilement) or pollution. If the *Yak Pettiya* was polluted, the demons would go into a rage and cause serious adversities to occur in the life of the person who succumbed to the kills. Therefore, they follow special protection methods to protect the girl who is isolated in the *Kili pela* on her attainment, from such calamities. These protective measures are as follows. For this purpose, a Vedda shaman collects some ash from the hearth together with a few pebbles in a coconut shell and begins to chant *manthrams* (incantations). The ash is strewn right round the *Kili pela* and also round the mat on which the girl sleeps. A little bit of ash is tied in a knot from the part of the cloth the girl is wearing. This they call the *Alu Weli Arakshawa*. Other than this, precautions are taken so as not to leave the girl in total solitude. For her safety, it is said that

in the past, for the purpose of protection, the cross-cousin brother who erected the *Kili pela* used to sleep outside it all throughout the nine days.

Figure 1: The attained Vedda girl in the confinement of *Kili Pela*.
Photograph: by author

No taboos in relation to eatables are issued to a Vedda girl who attains puberty. During the aforementioned period of time, any form of food that is cooked within the house is given for her to eat. Among food items that are most popular are hunted flesh, bee-honey, *Kurakkan* and porridge made out of maize. However, from modern times, they are treated with rice and vegetables. Whatever variety the meals happened to be, the

meals are supplied right up to her doorstep at the *Kili pela*. Though no food taboos were in operation, steps are taken to keep a Vedda girl who had attained puberty away from all other social transactions.

Accordingly, the little volume of water brought to the *Kili pela* is given to her to perform her ablutions. After a lapse of three days, however, some others would bring water in which leaves found in the jungle, such as Pavatta (*Vaasica Nees Acanthacea*), Adhatoda (*Indica L. Runiacea*), Kohomba (*Azadirachta indica A. Juss Meliaceae*), and Endaru (*Ricinus Comunis*) have been boiled, with which she is cleansed. This washing of the girl's body is done by the girl's cross-cousin sister or aunt. It is still the forest that is used as the toilet. During the period of girl's isolation, speaking in a loud voice and laughing is prohibited. While she is totally kept away from male-folk, she is to strictly adhere to the taboos in maintaining them. The girl who is kept inside the *Kili pela* for nine days is finally given a bath as soon as the ninth day comes to a close. This activity too is performed by her cross-cousin sister. The water required for this purpose is supplied right into the *Kili pela*. After the bath, the girl is dressed with fresh clothing. All the clothing which has been worn during the nine days period is then bundled up and is deposited in the *Kili pela*, subsequent to which the cross-cousin brother or the cross-cousin sister sets fire to the hut. If there happened to be any fancy ornaments that she was wearing, these items then becomes the possession of the cross cousin sister.

It is believed that once the *Kili pela* is set fire to in this fashion, any evil influences that had been remaining also would be dispelled. Subsequently, according to the financial means, a small treat is given to the visitors present.

The girl who is bathed and escorted back home is given advice by the elders. From here onwards, until at least another three months passes, the girl is socialized and advised not to travel about alone and not to go looking for firewood or in search of water. If the need really arises, she is at least to be accompanied by a younger girl. The Vedda community believes that a girl, who has attained puberty; if she were to go about alone, would be subjected to supernatural influences. For purposes of evading such incidents occurring, these folk adopt such measures. The information regarding the percentages of those who perform the various steps involved in the puberty rites and those who do not perform them and also the reasons for not performing those steps are given below in the **Table 1**.

Age of mother	***Number of daughters***	***Puberty ritual performed***	***Puberty ritual not performed***	***Reasons for not conducting ritual***
65	03	03		
40	01	01		
44	-	-		
50	04	04		
45	03	03	-	-
35	04	01	03	Not yet attained puberty
56	05	05	-	-
65	05	05	-	
38	06	02	04	Employed as servants
54	04	01	03	Employed as servants
36	02	01	01	Not yet attained puberty

60	04	04	-	-
70	04	04	-	-
53	04	04	-	-
35	03	03	-	-
61	06	04	02	Employed as servants
55	03	03	-	
43	03	01	02	Not yet attained puberty
50	04	01	03	Not yet attained puberty and employed as servants
45	01	01	-	-
35	01	01		-
75	06	06	-	
35	03	02	01	Not yet attained puberty
65	04	04	-	-
75	04	04	-	-
35	07	05	02	Not yet attained puberty
46	02	02	-	
Total	**96**	**75**	**21**	

Table 1: The puberty ritual of the Vedda community – 1996 Henanigala and Dambana combined

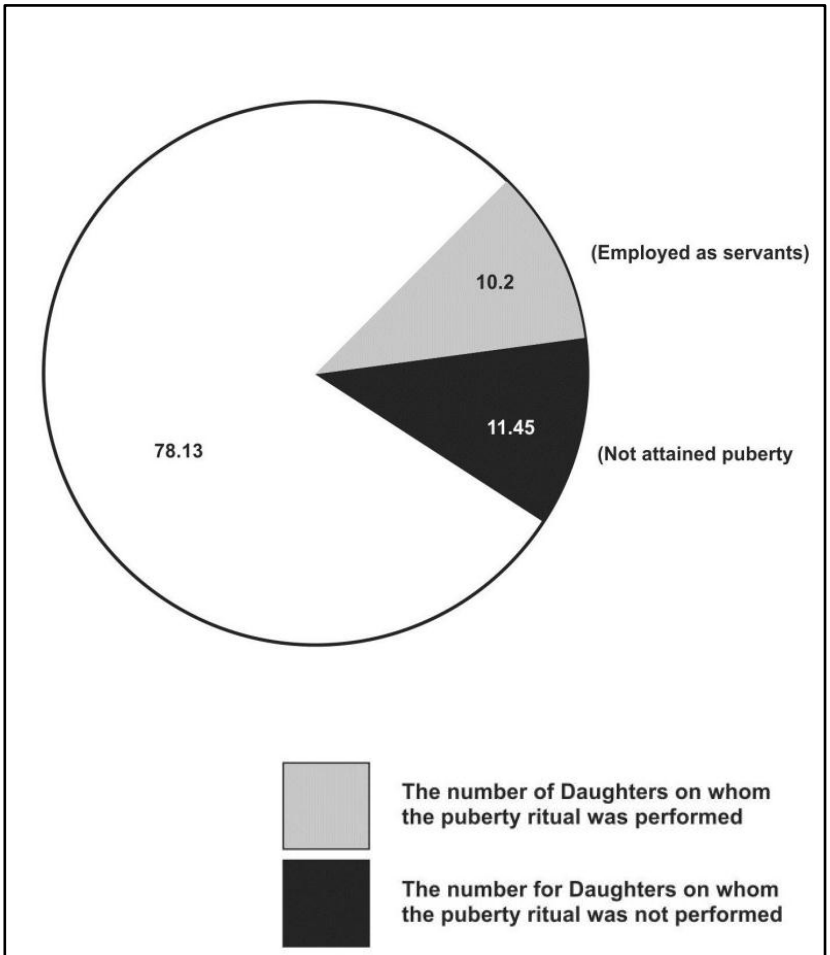

Figure 1: The puberty ritual of the Dambana Vedda - 1995

If the above-mentioned custom is not followed in the case of a girl who had achieved puberty, the Veddas believe that the girl would not enter into marriage at the appropriate period in her life. Further, that even if a girl who attained age were to marry, and this custom had not been followed, then her family-life would be inharmonious, and one full of sorrow. Therefore, the Vedda community does not forget to follow this ritual of puberty in the case of every girl. The **Figure 1** and the **Table 1** give details of the practice of puberty ritual among the Veddas at Dambana and Henanigala.

Steps or procedure followed in performing the puberty ritual	***Percentage of girls for whom the particular step was performed***	***Percentage of girls for whom the particular step was not performed***	***The reason for deviation***
Whether the girl was pre-informed about her first menstruation.	92.7%	7.3 %	Employed as servants
Girl approaching a milk-tree and tapping with a splinter.	92.7%	7.3%	-do-
Girl being covered from head to toe by a cloth.	95.1%	4.9%	-do-
Cross-cousin sister being summoned for the above purpose.	70.7%	29.3%	Instead of mother and aunt have performed this step.
Performing the *vas kalaya*.	97.6%	2.4%	Employed as servants.

Erection of the *kili pela*.	85.4%	14.6%	A partition in the house itself.
Cross-cousin brother being summoned for the above purpose.	61%	39%	Sister-in-law or brother-in-law of girl's performing the above role.
Procedure of not leaving the girl in solitude.	97.6%	2.4%	Employed as servants.
No taboos in relation to meals.	80.5%	19.5%	Due to influence of Sinhalese neighbours.
Isolating the girl inside the *kili pela* for nine days.	90.2%	9.8%	Employed as servants or isolated at home.
Bathing the girl for the second time.	97.6%	2.4%	Employed as servants.
Cross-cousin sister perform the above step.	65.9%	34.1%	Mother or aunt or elder sister of girl who attained puberty perform this step.
Setting fire to the *kili pela*	87.8%	122%	Employed as servants or isolated at home.
Cross-cousins act of' setting fire to the *kili pela*.	31.7%	68.3%	Mother and aunt of the Girl who attained Puberty performing This step.
Giving advice and guidance to the girl.	97.6%	2.4%	Employed as servants.
Celebration in the house.	65.9%	34.1%	Employed as servants or due to poverty.

Table 2: The manner in which the Vedda community conducts the puberty ritual and its deviation–1996 Henanigala and Dambana combined

An Overview of the Puberty Ritual of the Veddas

In the process of this study we were able to derive an understanding as to how this cultural aspect which is in operation among them from time immemorial has come into being; how it has changed and the present position. Though many a studies have been made about the Veddas during the past decade and also many things have been written in relation to them, only nominal mention had been made about the Vedda woman and the customs that have been built around her. Not only ancient writers, but even contemporary writers have neglected this point.

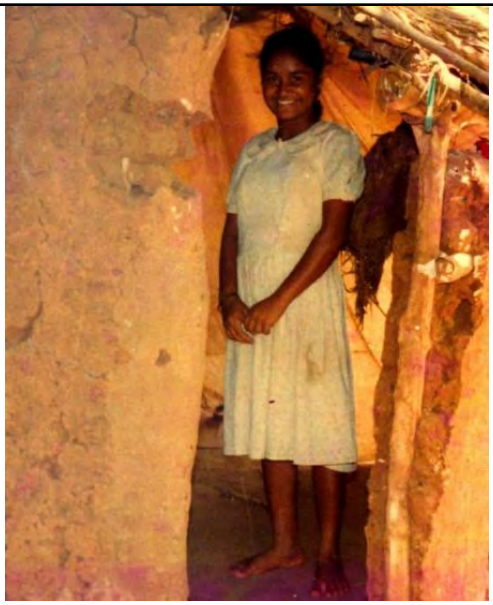

Figure 2: The girl confined in *Kili Pela* during menstruation.
Photograph: by author

The first piece of information about puberty and menstruation of the Vedda female is brought to us through the ethnographic study done on this community in 1911 by Seligmann. According to Seligmann (1969: 94-5) on the Vedda girl's puberty custom and menstruation is as follows:

> There are no puberty ceremonies for either sex, except among certain Veddas who had been much influenced by Tamils or Sinhalese, among whom the girls are isolated for a short time at puberty. Thus although the following ceremony is observed at puberty by the Uniche Veddas, there is no doubt that it has been borrowed from the local Sinhalese who have a similar ceremony, though according to our information the latter people do not break the pot. When a girl becomes unwell for the first time, one of her *naena* places a pot of water on her head and goes with her to some place where there is a *Nuga* tree. Here the *naena* takes the pot from the girl's head and dashes it on the ground so that the pot breaks. The girl is then secluded in a specially built shelter in which she stays until the end of the period, when she washes and returns to her parents' house. During her seclusion, she is attended by a girl, always one of her *naena* who brings her food in a vessel set apart for this purpose but which is not cooked at a special fire. Among the wilder Veddas no special measures are taken when a woman menstruates. She is allowed to eat the ordinary food, and to sleep in the cave as usual. But among all the village Veddas, and most of those who have mixed at all with the Sinhalese, the menstruous women are strictly isolated, a little shelter being built for them a few paces from the family hut. At Bendiyagalge, where the Henebedda and Kolombedda people were staying at the time of our visit, menstruous women stayed apart at one corner of the cave, they were fed from the pot in which the food for the community was cooked, but we do not think

> they would touch it or assist in check any way in the cooking. At Omuni, a menstruous woman is isolated under a rough shelter where she is waited upon by a younger unmarried sister or cousin who, it was stated, should not herself have attained puberty. During her seclusion she may eat any food cooked at the ordinary fire, but a special platter is kept for her use. The girls who look, after her suffer no restrictions. This happens every time a girl or woman menstruates.

Since the above-mentioned exposition by Seligmann, this subject has been touched once again only two decades later.

Byron Joseph's description of the puberty custom of the Veddas is as follows:

> As regards puberty, the same ideas as those concerning contamination of the hut prevail. At the first onset of menses, the girl is therefore similarly isolated for three days in a crude hut away from the living hut. No one save her mother is allowed to visit her during this period. On the third day at noon the girl is bathed and is then allowed to resume her normal life. No rejoicing attends this event, and the dire poverty of the Vedda forbids even the provision of new apparel for the girl. (1933: 393).

Subsequently, the following very brief description about menstruation in relation to Vedda girls appears in an article written by M.D. Raghavan in 1953:

> A woman in menses is taboo and observes isolation for three or four days, when she stays in a separate adjacent shed, the *kilige* or the House of Pollution (1953: 57).

Other than this, Nandadeva Wijesekera (1964) expresses the following observations with regard to the puberty of the girl:

> In the case of a girl, the attainment of puberty was noted and carefully observed with special ceremony and ritual. At the time of the first menstruation she was isolated in a hut specially built near the house or adjoining the house. An old woman usually kept her company until she bathed and was again considered clean to resume normal family activities. Thereafter she had to spend the period of her monthly course in the isolation hut. Nowadays the menstruating woman is cloistered in a part of the rear portion of the house itself or in an adjunct to it. One rarely sees an isolation hut away from the house. The Vedda girls and boys reach adolescence comparatively earlier than those of other racial groups, particularly their neighbours. By that time they have acquired a grounding in the essential ways of life of the Veddas so as to understand the significance of adolescence (1964: 99-100).

Though much of literature, articles and books about the Vedda community have been written within three decades after the publication of the above-mentioned description of Nandadeva Wijesekera, a very brief quote about their puberty custom appears only in the article written in 1990 by John Dart. This too refers only to the Veddas of the coastal area. In the description, Dart writing about the practices of these Veddas of the coastal region, reveals a brief point regarding the custom of puberty thus:

> They observe life-cycle events (i.e.- marriages, girls' puberty ceremonies and funerals) according to their means, but none of them are able to have ceremonies as elaborate as those performed by the more affluent Tamils (1990: 71).

Once more, if we were to take into consideration the description given by Seligmann, the above quotation appears to give a contradictory view. On this occasion, Seligmann who

remarks that there is no doubt that this custom was something that the Veddas have borrowed from the Sinhalese, goes on to draw attention to the fact that the pot with which the Vedda girl is bathed, is finally dashed on the ground, thus explicitly mentions that this custom is not at all in operation among the Sinhalese community. Even then, we do find that the act of dashing the pot has been operating among the entire Sinhalese community as a main aspect of the custom of puberty continuously. Even today, whole of the Sinhalese community follow this custom without any distinction in relation to their province, whatever it may be. Seligmann may have made such a statement as result of an error he had committed during the process of collecting his data. If we were to accept that Seligmann's observations were accurate; it is pertinent to enquire as to how a custom observed only by the Veddas happened to become a common custom among the Sinhalese.

In such a case, if we were to accept that Seligmann's statement is correct, it is important to know as to how a certain custom which spread among the Veddas came to operate among the Sinhalese. If Seligmann is of the view that the Veddas borrowed the custom of puberty from the Sinhalese, it should be accepted that the Sinhalese too had borrowed some customs from the Veddas. We having observed the manner in which the cololonies of the Veddas had scattered in the early days, there is plenty of evidence to prove that they had been scattered all over the country. As such, we are justified in concluding that both the Veddas and the Sinhalese have followed this custom in accordance with each other's cultural inheritances in days gone by; that the Vedda community who gradually became subjected to Sinhalisation as a consequence of the influence trusted upon secondary society by mass society, had absorbed the customs of mass Society by logical order into their own customs, and that

this mass society had emerged more powerfully during, this acculturation. As such, it may be deemed correct that the Sinhalese community too has accepted certain customs coming down from the Veddas during this exchange of culture. However, as Seligmann explainss, if the Veddas have taken over this custom from the Sinhalese, the statement that this custom of dashing the pot operated only among the Veddas, and not among the Sinhalese is open to debate.

Further, as Seligmann mentions, though the Veddas who maintained interrelationships with the Sinhalese and Tamil communities had followed this custom of puberty, where the wilder Veddas are concerned, there are no special customs that seem to operate in relation to puberty. They had simply allowed the girl who had attained puberty to partake of the usual routine food and let her sleep in the cave. Even though Seligmann has expressed his opinion in the above manner, he goes on to say that he has observed that Vedda women undergoing the menstrual period and living in Henebedda and Kolombedda within the area of Bendiyagalge were resting in a corner of a cave and that they eat food cooked by the others, and that he believes that these women gave no support or help in cooking the food. Accordingly there are some contradictions regarding the behavior patterns during menstruation in Seligmann's study. We can rely more on his observations than his conclusions. That is we can accept his observations of some Vedda women being isolated in their caves during menstruation. This may be due to the fact that they did not use loin clothes and therefore they had to adopt some sort of practical measure (the easiest being isolation in the caves) during this period, irrespective of being 'wild' or 'village Veddas'. Also by this time the village Veddas had been cultivating *chena* (slash and burn cultivation), 'migrating' from one *chena* to the other and had begun to live in

huts of a very simple style. If this had been the case, what Seligmann had seen as those who were cooking their food and had made the caves their place of dwelling had been partly at least a group of the wilder Veddas.

The main obstacle faced in getting at the origin of the custom of puberty of the Veddas during the present study was the lack of sufficient documentary evidence. But general feeling among the Vedda is that this was a custom which has been in operation from time immemorial. The then Vedda chieftain Tissahamy was believed by the villagers to be more than a hundred years old. He is supposed have come to know that this custom had been carried out on his great-grandmother too at time she attained puberty. When considering this information, this custom had apparently been in progress among the Vedda community for close upon three centuries. If so, they have been successful in maintaining this custom for some three hundred years or even a longer period of time. Tissahamy's contemporaries have provided evidence to this opinion as well as for the information supplied by Seligmann. In short, what they say is that their ancestors have told them that even during the time when the former were living in rock caves, a girl who had achieved puberty was left secluded in an isolated cave.

Thus, one could clearly understand how a conflict has arisen here over the original statement made by Seligmann and facts revealed from the analysis conducted. If what Seligmann has unraveled and the information supplied by the elderly Veddas of Dambana accepted to be correct; and that if this custom was carried out from the remote time the Veddas were living in caves and were passing through a more wilder age of their existence, when they did not have inter-relationships with the Sinhalese - how justified is it to simply brush it aside as

saying it is only something which had been 'borrowed' from the Sinhalese?

It was previously mentioned that Robert Knox, in the seventeenth century had categorized Vedda people into two groups such as the 'tame' and the 'wild.' The evidence we possess is sufficient enough to make things clear that the tame Veddas who mixed about with the Sinhalese had practiced the above custom in a continuing process over the years. But it would not be justified to say that the 'wild Veddas' have not practiced any type of custom at that time and therefore to ignore them by classifying them as the 'wild Veddas' for this reason. Knox explains in the following manner how the 'wild Veddas' followed their religion:

> The wilder and tamer sort of them do both observe a religion. They have a God peculiar to themselves. The tamer do build temples, the wild only bring their sacrifice under trees, and while it is offering, dance round it, both men and women (1958:100).

What we can assess from this is that, though these 'wild Veddas' did not erect temples unlike the tame Veddas, they did not forget to worship their religion in accordance with their own living pattern. Can we debate that as much as the religion itself, that these wild Veddas did not possess their own customs? However, after a period of time, the wild Veddas gradually became extinct. If not, they had gradually become 'Village Veddas'. In this manner, they began to mix with the Sinhalese community more and more, and were thereby influenced in their culture. From among the rites of passage, the Veddas would have considered the custom of puberty which is the event that is more closely connected to socialization on a personal level as a special phenomenon from time immemorial. It may be for this

reason that a girl who attained puberty was left in solitude within the precincts of a cave even from the olden days. At the time when Seligmann met the Veddas during the first quarter of the twentieth century, there were not many wild Veddas about whom Knox had spoken of. Though there were some partially wild Veddas who were unmixed and living in main solitary areas, they were entering into the village social stream. At that time Seligmann identified the Dambana Vedda community as the 'Show Vedda' (1969:49-50). According to Seligmann, even by that time the Veddas of Dambana had already succumbed much corruption. The Vedda folk whom Seligmann identified as unmixed Veddas, at later time began to join into the main social stream in a rapid way. If not for this, these people who could not safeguard their state of being unmixed would have gone extinct within mass society. Dr. R.L. Spittle has made mention of this in his book Vanished Trails (1944: 15). But today we are left with only some members of those whom Seligmann identified as 'Show Veddas' and another few only. As such, it is not possible to detect 'pure' and 'original custom' from a community of people who have undergone considerable change in this manner. For the very reason that the Vedda folk considered a girl attaining puberty as a significant occasion from the distant past itself, during the process of intermingling with the Sinhalese, the customs etc., of the latter may have been speedily absorbed by the Vedda community. Even then, it is clearly observed that instead of assimilating those customs without inquisition, they have strived to adjust them to suit themselves. On enquiring further into the customs followed by the Veddas, we could confirm this opinion even better.

Unlike the Sinhalese community, it is noted that the Vedda parents give the necessary guidelines to their daughters well in advance of their puberty. And also unlike the Sinhalese

community, the Vedda were not used to a domestic form of living in the past. Vedda elders, who go in search of food, sometimes are compelled to spend days on end within the jungles. On some such occasions it is only their children who spend the time inside the house. In such instances, it is the girl who had still not attained puberty who undertakes the responsibility of looking after her younger brothers and sisters. On the other hand, a community who made slash and burn cultivation their mode of income from the distant past, were compelled to shift their huts from one chena to the other when changing their location. In this manner, they were used to a migratory form of life more than a sedentary one. Spittle records that on most occasions when he went in search of the Veddas, he had been unable to locate them at their normal abodes. As is thus seen, a community who lived in a migratory form of living is not possible to devote their entire attention on their off-spring. However, in respect of the customs that portray special events in a person's life, their pattern of life needs not be a barrier. Therefore, unlike the Sinhalese, they guided the girl in relation to the aforementioned phenomenon and they further instructed her as to how the elders should be informed about that 'special moment' (i.e. to go under a milking-tree and to make a sound by tapping on it with a splinter of wood). Because of this, even if the girl's mother was not present in the house at that time, either the aunt or some other elderly person in the house could attend to the customs relevant to the moment. It is in this manner that they adjusted their migratory system of living so that those would be no barrier to carry on with the above-quoted custom. In this way, it is seen that the act of guiding the girl in advance of her puberty did operate among the Sinhalese community in the province of Uva. There was not much of a great difference between the living patterns of the ancient Sinhalese of the Uva

province and the Vedda folk. In fact, the forest did supply them with the most important part of their necessities where their daily living was concerned. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that both these parties who made *chena* cultivation foremost mode of living and lived a jungle-life was called upon to dismiss customs of the common Sinhalese community and adjust it to suit them.

While the Sinhalese community warranted the services of the washerwoman with regard to the '*Vas Kalaya*' custom, the Vedda community bestowed this duty on their aunt or cross-cousin sister so that it suits their social organization. Though this custom was picked up through the influence of the Sinhalese, it is clearly seen how the difference in the two structures of the two social organizations have had its impact on the custom in a direct sense. We have already mentioned that though the Sinhalese society has been organized according to a caste hierarchy, there is no such hierarchy or role designation to be observed within the Vedda community. Yet, the Vedda folk who have not decided upon a role differentiation according to birth are expected to follow the aforementioned custom. What is expected in such a case is to adjust it to suit their own social organization. In this way, this role and responsibility has been allotted to the girl's aunt or cross-cousin sister by the Vedda society. Through this procedure, no harm has been done to the original 'connotation' of the custom; a further value has been added to the custom through the cross-cousin marriages. Since the responsibility of the future partner of one's brother or son is held in high esteem the aunt and cross-cousin sister, it is in like manner that the Sinhalese modified their custom to harmonize with their own society.

By adding another feature to the cross-cousin relationship, the Vedda community bestowed the role of erecting the *Kili hut*, protecting it and finally burning it down by the future partner of the girl, her cross-cousin. It is mentioned that this custom was performed by whoever elder who was there in the house, within the Sinhalese community. What is noted here is how the Vedda customs were not subjected totally to the Sinhalese way and instead have taken on social characteristics prevalent within their society into their own customs. Though marriages took place in the Sinhalese community between a girl and her cross-cousin brother, it does not hold much significance as it functions in the Vedda community. In the past, about forty to fifty years ago, the Veddas showed a preference for endogamous marriages. While there was a better tendency for marriages consumed within tribe at that time, it was very important that a partner from one's own tribe was sought for a girl who had attained puberty. This custom operated within a limited population, and most eligible among them for such a purpose were the cross-cousin brother and the girl's cross-cousin sister. As such, in order to pursue the tribal marriage system in a more fruitful manner, the cross-cousin brother was responsible in handling a significant part of the responsibilities in relation to the custom of the *Kili hut*, but in a manner different from that he Sinhalese. Therefore, the Vedda folk made an unconcealed request from the cross-cousin brother to take the hand of the girl who was his cross-cousin sister. The above message and responsibility is even further confirmed when one notices how the cross-cousin brother would keep vigil outside the *Kili hut*, protecting the solitary girl staying there for nine days.

The Vedda girl who has attained age and spends her solitude within the *kili hut* is subjected to food taboos contrary to that which is seen among the Sinhalese. One can read this in

the description of Seligmann's (1969: 95) too. The Sinhalese have attempted to build up a discipline through such customary taboos of this kind and thereby teach the girl about the modesty expected of her. But the Veddas on the other hand attached no importance to this custom because of the fact that they led a very difficult life accompanied with so much economic hardships. For this community which faces immense adversities due to climatic conditions, finances and the means to live, the most important problem has been food. To a community who goes into the jungle to procure some food can never inquire into the state of food they so secure. On the other hand, can these people who secure one meal per day and stay on for days end in hunger attempt to classify what they procure as food? There is trustworthy connection between food taboos and the Vedda folk because of the difficult living conditions they are subjected to. It is for this reason that they are compelled to accept anything that they find and depend on it without enquiring into its good or bad; its benefits or otherwise. We cannot expect such customs as the ones mentioned formerly from an ethnic group of people. Further, not only in the past, but even in the present, the Veddas live in a 'simple' and not so 'complex' society when compared in a parallel level with the Sinhalese. They live a life which is further from external social attachments. Added reasons for this have been their poverty, illiteracy and the lack of experience. As a consequence of this, there have been no conflicts as is evidenced in the case of the Sinhalese people. Therefore, it is not necessary to inject strict control and regulations on a Vedda girl in order instill a powerful morality or character as in the Sinhalese. As such, there is no fruitful result they could reap in imposing taboos in relation to food etc.

The soothsayer gives his forecast about the gir's education, the good and the evil that would befall the parents, brothers and

sisters, the matrimonial life and the rest of her future through the *Malwara Nekatha* (Auspicious moment when puberty has taken place).But none of these things have been of any importance to the Veddas because they have so far not faced the competitive world seen in the complex society today. Curiosity builds up in correspondence to the number of aspirations for the future. When aspirations and hopes are limited so does the curiosity diminish? Since the Vedda community and its members have still not encountered such an impact, the soothsayer is of no significance to them. As a result, though the soothsayer forms an important role of duties over the custom of puberty of the Sinhalese, the Vedda people have not absorbed it into their custom of puberty.

The Sinhalese community indulges in a number of colourful customs with the objective of implanting a fresh identity on the event of the puberty of the girl and the role of duties that is built on it plus the responsibility carried with it. For example, it is the *Mal Vila* (A vessel consist of white coloured flowers, small mirror, and water) that the girl who steps into the house at the auspicious hour after the puberty sees initially.

On seeing her countenance from the mirror embedded in the *Mal Vila*, the girl is made to remind the new identity bestowed on her. It is the same purpose that is achieved through the exercise performed in the North-Central province by jumping over the stilt (fence).The girl who jumps over the stilt made of '*Pengiri*' (*Cumbopogan nardus*) outside the house, then sets her eyes on a milking tree, at which moment her mother comes and rests the pot of water on the former's lap. The Sinhalese symbolize the transition that occurs from the period of childhood up to youth in a girl by this custom of jumping the

stilt. On the other hand, subsequent to this important landmark, there is something of value with regard to the new status she is bestowed upon and the role allotted to it, which needs mention. The adolescent who now has assumed the qualification of a mother, housewife and a number of other serious host of duties on puberty, is expected by the society to act as an efficient woman henceforth in the future. The Sinhalese people follow these customs with a view of directing her into a suitable position with this purpose in mind by giving her the necessary pertaining in this manner. On the contrary, the Vedda folk do not show interest about these customs. The message about the new identity and the role of duties that accompany the puberty is not something that needs to be explained afresh to the Vedda girls unlike in the case of the Sinhalese. In actual fact, the Vedda girls receive an understanding about their mother's role of duties at the tender age of 6-7 years. When the mother leaves to the jungle or for labour - work, it is the elder daughter of the age of 6-7 who still has not attained her puberty who is called upon to play the role of the guardian to the younger brothers and sisters, apart from the duties of the kitchen. On the other hand, these girls who work as servants in houses in the city at that young age are forced to behave more grown up and do many forms of household duties. In such a case, what use is there for the Veddas to adhere to Sinhalese customs that give training about the new identity, status or the role of duties assigned with the onset of puberty. These communities who have understood this have not blindly accepted what is not relevant to their context of living.

When one considers the utensils used to perform the custom of puberty, the *kulla* (winnowing-fan) assumes a distinct position in the puberty custom of the Sinhalese.When preparing the *Kotahalu Goda*, (Ritual objects) *Kevum* (oily cake), *Kokis*

and other items of food are deposited within the winnowing-fan. The ancients who considered paddy as a *Buddha Bogha* (Produce kept separate in veneration of the Buddha) also displayed a great respect for it. Since the staple food of the Sinhalese happens to be rice; the winnowing-fan has been given a special status. Utensils such as the winnowing-fan have been held in esteem within the Sinhalese community because they represent fertility and prosperity in customs such as this. However, the staple diet of the ancient Veddas had not been rice. For them, the main form of food at that time had been bee-honey, *kurakkan* millet and maize rice became their food item only in very recent times. Therefore, the winnowing-fan is not something which was a symbol of prosperity to them. Naturally, for this reason they did not utilise the winnowing-fan unlike the Sinhalese. What we observed from this is that we have to dismiss the simple attitude that the Veddas have not borrowed the custom of puberty from the Sinhalese.

Though there is an anthropological significance in conducting ceremonies on the occasion of a girl's puberty with relatives and friends being invited, unlike the Sinhalese the Veddas do not indulge in such festivity on such occasions. Certain sections of the Sinhalese community are known to engage in beating the Rabana (traditional flat circular drum played on most festive occasions in Sri Lanka) and in lighting fire crackers at the moment when the girl is accompanied back home. While all these operate as means of communication tools; through such procedures the society is made aware of a maiden of marriageable status. The responsibility of seeking a suitable partner of equal status or even higher status for the daughter who has achieved puberty and is a member of mass society is nevertheless a demanding challenge for her parents. The more aggravating the challenge becomes, the cleverer become the

strategies employed to face it. Therefore, essentially the Sinhalese urban community considers the puberty of a girl as a ceremonious occasion and strives to broadcast this message to other members of the society. But even then, the duty of seeking a suitable partner for marriage to their daughter in a 'simple' society where competition and social status has become something of no value is not a difficult task for the parents. It takes place on mutual consent alone. In this context, is there a message to hold a ceremony and so broadcast it? The Vedda girls inevitably always maintain social relationships devoid of any male-female distinction within their tribe. As a result, they are familiar with each other. They do not require new introductions based on the fresh identity that occurs on puberty. On the other hand as Byron Josef has pointed out, the fact that this community is in dire straits of poverty has prevented them from indulging in such festivities.

In relation to the above-mentioned facts, what we can observe is, that though the Veddas have absorbed the custom of puberty from the Sinhalese community; nevertheless it cannot be simply brushed aside as a custom which has been borrowed, as Seligmann interprets it. Leach (1963: 69) also says that customs are quite distinct between Sinhalese and the 'village Veddas' who were mixed with the Sinhalese. From the above remark of Leach we can conclude that either Veddas had their own customs or they adapted the Sinhalese customs to their own needs. In reality, we do not possess sufficient evidence to distinguish whether the custom of puberty of the Veddas is something which they practice as a result of the influence of the Sinhalese or whether it originated within the community of the Veddas itself. Since features of the custom of puberty of the Sinhalese have been noticed within the procedure of the custom of puberty conducted by the Veddas, we have to infer that this

was something which the Veddas assimilated from the Sinhalese during the process of their inter-communication with the latter. But, it should not be forgotten that they have acknowledged only the features which were applicable to them, and discarded whatever was deemed irrelevant for their own purpose.

The Vedda Puberty Ritual in Changing Society

No society can avoid change. In this regard the tribal societies are no exception. Vedda society in Sri Lanka is undergoing tremendous change. By closely studying the culture of a society we can understand and explain the changes of that society. Puberty ritual is an important event of the Vedda culture. A thorough survey on the changes which had undergone by the Vedda puberty ritual over the last half century reveals that how far the interaction of the Vedda society with the mainstream contributed to its change.

For example, it has been observed how the *kili pela* came into operation in order to seclude the girl who attained puberty and how the *kili pela* gradually went into oblivion with social change. This reveals the impact of the changing Vedda society on their socio-cultural formations.

Transition of the Vedda life style	***Usage of the kili pela in the corresponding life styles***
i. Sedentary life in caves	Not used
ii. Nomadic life with no permanent habitats.	Used.
iii.Sedentary life in permanent houses	Not used.

Table 3: The usage of the '*kili pela*' in the corresponding life styles

As shown in the above table Vedda lived in caves about a century ago. During that period when the main subsistence was hunting and gathering, the Vedda men roamed in the forest in search of hunt and returned to their caves. They lived in those caves for a major part of their lives or even for the entire life-spans thereby leading a sedentary life. Gradually slash and burn or *chena* cultivation became their main subsistence. That prompted them to move in search of suitable lands for *chena* cultivation, transforming them into nomadic life style. During this period hunting became a secondary livelihood. In a particular season Veddas prepare the field by slashing and burning that portion of the forest. Then he cultivates it with various seeds. In order to look after the cultivated field and to stay in with his family he puts up a hut adjoining the field. After one or two seasons he leaves that field and goes in search of another fertile land which was in abundance. The next hut would be erected as in the earlier case. It is interesting to see how their customs changed with the transition from sedentary life to nomadic life.

It is evident from Seligman's (1911) description that Vedda women too lived in the caves during their puberty and menstruation periods when Veddas were living in caves. Seligman says (1969: 94-5) that he himself saw such women living in separated portions of the caves. The custom of strict isolation was not necessary since they led a sedentary life. But the beginning of a new life based on agriculture left them with no permanent dwellings. Thus the important of a *Kili Pela* was greatly felt. *Kili Pela* served many purposes. Their temporarily dwellings were very small in size. Therefore during this period of impurity (*Kili Kalaya*) it was practically a hazard for all in the family to live together. On the other hand in the jungles they had the blessings of the devils for protection. Worshipers of devils

protect themselves from this kind of impurity (*Killa*) in order to escape from the devil's wrath. Therefore it was more sensible to keep her away from the rest of the family during this period. They achieved this by keeping her in a separate hut away from their houses. Many early writers have recorded that when Veddas dwelt in caves they led their lives in groups and had an extended family system. (Seligman 1969: 94-5). Females were quite safe in these groups. But with the emergence of the life style based more on agriculture this group system gave way to a family centered life (nuclear family). In nuclear family system safety of women was inadequate. The importance of familiarizing women to the ferocity of jungles was greatly felt. Loneliness, darkness and animals are common attributes in jungle and to live in it these is no alternative other than being familiar with them. Therefore the Vedda community isolated their females who attained adolescence (puberty) in a hut built 20 - 100 yards away from their homes for nine days. She did not have any company for loneliness. The importance of this exercise was that it trains them to live safely in isolation during their puberty and monthly menstruation process. Thus she was isolated during the period of impurity and by that she spontaneously received the above training. There is another factor that is responsible for the coming up of *Kili Pela* during their agricultural life. Veddas began their agricultural life style half a century ago as a result the influence they had in the company of neighbouring Sinhalese. In fact the Sinhalese life style was somewhat similar to this, Sinhalese who lived by *chena* cultivation went to the interiors of the jungles and as a result Veddas mingled with Sinhalese very easily. The needs of these two communities who lived by the same livelihood were probably similar. Veddas imbibed the Sinhalese practices very easily and they surely have felt the practical importance of them.

Therefore some customs that were in practice among the Sinhalese villagers spread easily among Vedda's.

Two decades later Veddas returned to a sedentary life style. Jungles were cleaned for roads. Villages gradually became crowded. Travelling in and out of villages happened frequently. Forest coverage became less and less owing to new development projects. Veddas who found it impossible to move into the jungle interiors for *chena* cultivation settled permanently in jungle strips by the sides of the roads. Government policies that later came into implementation also restricted their jungle territory. Thus their life styles and customs and practices based on them gradually became extinct. As a result *Kili pela* bore no practical importance and at the same time it was difficult to adhere to that custom. Hence during the past two decades that custom gradually died away. Thus not only the Veddas but also the Sinhalese abandoned that custom. Thus it is clear that in the face of social change how the *Kili pela* became a necessity at a certain stage and was neglected in a subsequent stage. In other words *Kili pela* was not in use in the distant past when Veddas led a sedentary life in caves engaging in hunting and gathering and it came into usage when they adopted a nomadic life style due to their change over to *chena* (slash and burn) cultivation. But the *Kili pela* went into oblivion when the Veddas subsequently returned to sedentary life by settling in houses. Therefore we can infer that *Kili pela* came into usage as a necessity of the nomadic life style.

Colonization that began two to three decades ago heightened intermixing the Sinhalese and the Veddas. As a result Sinhalese customs and practices entered into Vedda way of life. In effect today the Sinhalese life and the Vedda life are hardly distinguishable from one another. At present the Vedda

puberty rituals encompass many of Sinhala customs. Instead of the shell of a gourd (*Labu Katta*) used by Veddas in bathing the newly attained girl for the first time after her period of seclusion, they now use a clay pot for this purpose just as the Sinhalese. The Veddas who in the past completely isolated their girls who attained puberty today take care not to isolate them completely in keeping with the Sinhalese custom. Excepting few, most of the Veddas separate their newly attained girls in their houses like the Sinhalese. Those days the Veddas did not perform the various tasks pertaining to the puberty ritual according to auspicious times. But at present some of them also go to the astrologer as the Sinhalese for instructions regarding the important events of the puberty ritual. They no longer go in search of lakes and water falls for bathing the newly attained girls. The girl is bathed at the auspicious time with the water brought to the house. Following Sinhalese they too get the child, who emerge from her seclusion period having been bathed at the auspicious time, to crack coconuts and to perform some rituals in front of ritual objects (*Kotahalu goda*).Those days Veddas did not enforce any food restrictions on the girl who attained of age. But today with the Sinhalese influence they restrict their newly attained girls from certain food and prescribe certain special dishes. The Sinhalese influence is such that, Veddas even go to the extent of throwing small parties in celebration of attainment of age of their daughters according to their financial status. Like the present Sinhalese, among Veddas too celebrations have overtaken the customs and rituals.

Our study was revealed the importance and responsibility of the cross cousin in the Vedda puberty ritual. Child marriages had been common among Veddas since fifty years ago. Then the responsibilities entrusted upon the cross cousins were even more. That was mainly because of the fact that mostly Vedda

girls attained puberty in their husband's huts. Then Vedda marriages took place between the cross cousins. Therefore all puberty rites were performed by the mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and her husband (cross-cousin brother). Now child marriages are extinct in the Vedda society. But cross cousin marriages took place until recent times. Even then the blood relations fulfilled their responsibilities in the performance of her puberty rites. Gradually the concept of cross-cousin marriages has died away from Vedda community. As a result the importance and responsibility borne by the cross cousins too dwindled. Today even the few *Kili pelas* constructed are not built by cross- cousin brothers. That too has to be done either by her parents or her sister's husband. Those duties that were then performed by the cross-cousin sister or the mother-in-law are now performed by her own mother or brother's wife. It is thus clear that marriage system of Veddas have changed they have accordingly adjusted the customs of puberty.

But even in these modern changes their past can be discerned. The burning of *Illuk* leaves taken from the roof where the newly attained girl was isolated, symbolizes the burning down of *Kili pela* in the past. Some Veddas still continue to burn the dress in which she attained age. Even though certain rites and rituals parted from them as a result if social change, still they retain some aspects of those rites in various forms. It is thus clear that though people undergo speedy change in their dress, food and other material means, it takes a much longer time to change their mental habits.

On the other hand the puberty rituals were interwoven with their life style but with the destruction of that life style these customs have become redundant for modern society, for today it is not pragmatic to isolate a woman in a *Kili pela* which is about

twenty to hundred yards away from their homes since the safety of women cannot be assumed in modern day society as was in the past. As discussed earlier puberty rites of Vedda girls, those who serve as servants, are done according to the wishes of their mistresses often and they are asked to bathe after a short period of isolation without performing any special rites. What could such girls offer their own children as customs to follow in such situations?.

Even at present economically the Veddas are far worse off than the Sinhalese are. With cultural imitations certain changes and omissions are inevitable. As a result there is no order or unity in such rituals among Veddas. They follow them according to their own tastes and abilities. Certain Veddas follow no rites of puberty because of their extreme poverty. The modern Vedda society oscillates precariously between their traditional and the neighbouring village life styles. They belong to neither of these two streams. The injustice of this condition is that it is something that is forced upon them by various social forces and social changes. Vedda puberty rituals no longer belong neither to the Vedda past nor to the Sinhalese present but area set of rites alien to both.

Conclusion

The attaining of puberty can be considered as a marginal or a boundary situation in life of that individual. Mary Douglas (1966) points out that the boundaries of the classification systems generate feelings of awe, danger, and potency. To make her point she expands on van Gennep (1960) imagery of society as a house, with rooms being well defined status categories and corridors being transitional zones that are filled with fear and danger. But she argues along with margins power also resides in

a well-structured social system. As Douglas suggests, the margins of social life create a variety of experiences. Large breaks in continuity of social reality, like death, are filled with dread and horror. Small gaps like attaining of puberty crest feelings of anomie or identity crisis. There is also a certain ecstasy that can be experienced during temporary breakdowns in social reality, a very minor loss of self that is not significant enough to create the negative feelings of severe anomie, but out of the ordinary enough to create a momentary sense of danger and excitement. Ecstasy, argues Berger (1967:43), involves a sensation of 'standing or stepping outside reality as commonly defined'. This is like anomie, but not quite as severe. It is as if one is at the edge of organized reality and can feel the anomie terror of uncertainty and confusion, but if taken in mild proportions, this can be experienced as ecstasy rather than anomie. Too much of a break terrifying, just a little bit is exciting and ecstatic and sometimes dangerous and frightening within the framework developed by Mary Douglas dawn and dusk and similarly the attaining of puberty can be treated as in-between times. The experience of awe or ecstasy that is generated is a mild form of anomie, a loss of self that is not as traumatic as falling though larger cracks in social reality. At these in-between times people experience the break of crack between the socially constructed cosmologies. The point here is the one Douglas makes about the corridors between the rooms being filled with a sense of danger and dread. There is no way of going from one room to the other without passing through the corridor and experiencing the mild fright and anomie of this in-between time. Danger lies in transitional states; simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others.

Therefore it is necessary to separate the newly attained girl during puberty which is a transitional state. The puberty ritual plays the vital role of shaping the reality construction during this temporary breakdown of in social reality. That is why Mary Douglas views ritual as a necessary component of reality construction.

Accordingly we have seen how the puberty ritual is being performed by the Vedda community in spite of the enormous difficulties they face in the midst of the drastic social changes. As mentioned earlier, the only rituals that are still being performed by the Veddas are the rituals pertaining to puberty and religion. At present the Vedda community is vaguely bounded and has weak ties among its members. As such there is little external social reality to reaffirm. Therefore this weak group-weak grid category has the least ritualistic cosmology. It is clear that the Veddas belong to weak group-weak grid category, the scheme which Mary Douglas devises to analyze this situation. From Douglas's point of view social relations are like clay. We mold them this way as we make, or shape, our society, social order, class structure, livelihood, etc. But whatever the shape, however redistributed the rights, power, there is still some kind of social order - still some clay and the clay is reaffirmed and reproduced by ritual. That is why in the midst of drastic social change the Veddas have managed to keep rituals of puberty and religion with appropriate modifications.

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Ancestral Worship among the Muslim Community in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Certain aspects of the ancient culture of Sri Lanka such as ancestral worship have remained even though assimilation with mainstream population consisting of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslims that makes up over 95 percent of the land's population. Some of the original Veddas, the aboriginal people of Sri Lanka have still reverted to ancestral worship amidst Sinhalisation and Tamilisation. However, very little is known about the process of converting Veddas into Islam particularly about the ancestral worship among a faction of the Muslims in Sri Lanka.

Therefore, key informant interviews were conducted within Muslim community members in Sri Lanka to broaden the understanding on the above phenomenon. Results show that the practice is wide spread and that they are treated as a lower caste. Some of the areas where this practice is seen were once inhabited by the Veddas. While some Veddas flee to other parts of the island along with the fall of the Kandyan kingdom some could have stayed on, but converted to Islam to disguise themselves from the British or were converted.

Introduction

Commemoration of deceased family members is considered as a practice of the present day society. Veneration of the deceased surpassing commemoration is seen as the phenomenon of ancestral worship (Kopytof 1997). *The Oxford English*

Dictionary describes Ancestor worship as the „feeling or the expression of reverence and adoration for a deity". In most communities where ancestral worship is practised, veneration is done with the belief that the souls of the deceased have a continual existence and that they possess power to influence the fortune of the living (Davidson and Gitlitz 2002). There are many societies in which ancestral worshipping is regarded as a regulation and part of the widespread religions. However in the Sri Lankan context, worshipping of the dead as deities has eventually been replaced by conventional Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

At present ancestral worship in Sri Lanka is not at all a common feature among the major ethnicities, i.e. Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, Burgher and Malay. Nevertheless, it has knowingly or unknowingly been absorbed into the cultures that have spread in Sri Lanka in later episodes of the history. It is well known that the majority of the present-day Sinhalese and the Tamils who are descendants of the pioneering Sri Lankan populations have retained ancestral worshipping. However, it is less known that ancestral worshipping was common among the Moors in Sri Lanka who seem purely followers of Islam. In spite of traditional worshipping of the dead among the Moors being a relatively hidden phenomenon, it is still widespread in Sri Lanka.

Direct or indirect practice of ancestral worship is still evident among the majority of the population of Sri Lanka and this closely resembles the ancient indigenous practice. Millions of people going on pilgrimage to Kataragama could be seen as one good example of how a dead human has become a venerable god attracting the Hindus as well as the Buddhists in numbers. „*Kiri Amma daane*" (alms-giving for women that have breast

fed) is a common ritual that is practised by the majority of the population to obtain blessings for infants and toddlers which has resemblances of the native practice of worshipping the dead to obtain blessings and how a dead human has become a venerable godess after her death. Another group that still practises ancestral worshipping is the Veddas or the indigenous community of Sri Lanka where they believe in „Bandara Deviyos" (Bandara gods) and „*Kiri Ammas*" (literal meaning „milk mothers") who are commonly known as „Naa Yakku" (relation devils) who are believed by the Veddas to be their ancestors with significance who happen to have the power to influence and protect the living. Some refer to certain practices of common religions of the world such as making pilgrimages to ancestral shrines as remaining rituals of ancestral worship. For example, Jewish and Muslim pilgrimages to the tombs of Abraham and Sarah in the Cave of Machpelah and Adam"s Peak in Sri Lanka where Adam and Eve are believed to have been expelled from paradise (Davidson and Gitlitz 2002).

Since there is insufficient evidence to suggest that the ancestral worship was accommodated by the Veddas from the major religions of the country, it is highly probable that the practice has been there for millennia. This in turn indicates a common ancestry of the Veddas with the pioneers of the land, the Yakshas, Nagas and the Devas who are believed to have been inhabitants of the island of Sri Lanka even before the arrival of King Vijaya. It is stated in historic chronicles that the natives in Sri Lanka before the introduction of Buddhist civilisation worshipped the dead and natural resources such as trees and land mark rocks.

Although this practice is becoming disused by the generation along with modernisation and assimilation into the

mainstream society, minority of the Veddas are still practising ancestral worship (De.Silva and Punchihewa 2011). According to the 1921 census, the Veddas were counted separately on the basis of ancestral worship and practice of hunting using traditional methods (Brow 1978). It is known that hunting has become highly disused recently but ancestral worship still remains a part of their culture. While this practice can be considered as an indicator to segregate the Veddas from the other major ethnic groups of the country, this practice is still visible in the Vedda and Sinhala communities as well as in the Tamil dominated regions of the country. It is clearly seen that the Veddas or the ancestors of present day Veddas have become assimilated with the mainstream Sinhala and Tamil populations along with other groups of pioneer dwellers in Sri Lanka, but the assimilation with the Muslim community has hardly been researched.

In this pursuit, this paper attempts to identify the prevalent areas in which ancestral worship is still seen among the Muslim community in Sri Lanka, and thereby to correlate and interpret ancestral worship among the Muslims in terms of assimilation of the Veddas into the mainstream Muslim communities.

Methodology

Since there is no concrete evidence-based maps, population or densities, a snowballing sample was considered to gather primary data consisting of basic information on the practice of ancestral worship among the Muslim community through conducting informal discussions with Muslim practitioners and non-practitioners of ancestral worship. Twenty such informal discussions were held in the Districts of Ampara (Eastern Province), Kalutara (Western Province), Matale (Central

Province), Ratnapura (Sabaragamuwa Province) districts to identify the nature of ancestor worship practice, discrimination and hierarchical system qualification as well as the spread were investigated.

Key findings

History

Although the Muslims are unaware about the history of their tradition of ancestral worship, they continue to perform it generation after generation. The practitioners of ancestral worship in the sample do not have an accurate idea as to how and from where the practice has originated. However, some believe that their tradition of ancestral worship came from India but still are not certain about a specific area from which the practice has come. They could be descendants of the migrant Muslims from the Tamil Nadu during the 14-15 centuries as it is not a tradition brought by the Arab traders who came from the Mid-Eastern countries. Super-imposition of the high density area map of the grave worshipers on the "*Maha Vedi Rata*" as described by Seligmans in 1911 do provide justifiable ground on which an argument could be made as to whether the grave worshipers are actually ancestors of the Veddas and in fact cousins of their counterparts in areas like Vakarai, Dambana, Lahugala and Anuradhapura who have become Muslims just as they have become assimilated with the Sinhala and Tamil people in other parts of the country.

Obeysekere (2002) describes how the Veddas of Sri Lanka associated with the Sinhala kings and that process encouraged assimilation process as well as the formal incorporation of the Veddas into the Govigama caste of Sri Lanka. It was mainly during the era where the Western colonialists and conquistadors

influenced Sri Lanka‟s socio-political context. During the 1500-1950 Sri Lankan kings were highly dependent on whatever resources that they could use to fight against the armed enemies. Therefore, the Kandyan kings obviously spotted the Veddas as most suitable to be absorbed into the army, due to their abilities to survive and maneuver better in the jungles and the capacity to become archers (De Silva and Punchihewa, 2011). Some won the battles and became heroes and were then presented with lands and honorary titles.

Evidence still exists (De Silva and Punchihewa 2011) of the archers with Vedda origins who fled past Moneragala into Danigala area. The Vedda community in Rathugala is one such community in which the surnames are „Danigala Maha Bandaralage‟ and „Thala Bandaralage‟ that are obvious signs of Kandyan influence and presented honorary titles. Therefore, obviously, the Veddas that worked for the Sinhala kings fled towards the South-Eastern region of the country. The relatively small community with Vedda origins in Panama is the furthest they have moved. Veddas in Anuradhapura that are dispersed in a vast area could also be such people who fled amidst Western military offensives. Although Matale and Rathnapura are known to have been strongholds of the Veddas and later on were deployed by the Sinhala army little is known about what happened to them subsequent to the Western military offensives. Just as the people with Vedda origins who fled to the Sinhala dominated areas eventually became Sinhalised, it is likely that the ones that fled to the Muslim dominated areas of the country became Muslimised. The practice of ancestor worship among the Muslims in Sri Lanka could provide sufficient ground to assume that the Veddas that withdrew from their original

localities joined the Muslim communities to disguise themselves from the alien armies or were eventually converted into Islam.

The Vedda community in Vakarai, which is showing rapid change of its original cultural values, still has glimpses of ancestral worship, which is unique to the Veddas amidst influence of the Hindu culture. If Seligmanns and other researchers did not write about the coastal Veddas, they could easily have been generalised as Hindus and Tamils as they are practitioners of Hinduism on the surface and speak the Tamil language. Ancestral worship of the Muslims could also have gone unnoticed and undocumented.

Geographical Spread

The Muslims are not confined to just a small area and are spread all over the country, but in a relatively small number. Grave worshipping is seen throughout the Eastern Province including Kinniya (Trincomalee District) down to Pottuvil, passing Akkaraipattu along the coastal belt. Matara, Galle, Kalutara and Colombo along the Western coastal belt too have grave worshipping Muslim communities. There are few distinct areas such as Jeilani in Balangoda, Varakamura in Matale and Rambukkana in the central and Sabaragamuwa highlands in which grave worshipping among the Muslims is commonly practiced.

Qualification

The Muslim ancestral worshippers are commonly referred to as „Musrik" by the other, majority Muslim community. They are also called as *tharisippavar* (grave worshippers). However, *tharisippavar* is often used interchangeably to refer to those who engage in witchcraft among Muslims. The conventional

Muslims or the followers of Islam follow the Quran (the word of Allah) and „Hadis" (traditions, particularly with regard to the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad) whereas the grave worshipers practice ancestral worship parallel with conventional Islam.

Therefore they qualify themselves, or rather the majority of sole followers of Islam discriminate the grave worshipers as a lower caste. Although they all go to the same mosques, they generally do not marry from the other caste and tend to live segregated from the other Muslims who worship Allah solely. They are generally less influential and are economically backward. Opportunities that they get to participate in politics is low as it is difficult to promote their image locally to obtain significant number of votes to get into a local council or beyond.

There is no clearly defined way of qualifying an ancestral worshipper Muslim from a conventional Muslim, but there are a few ancestral worshipers in the Eastern Province who tie a rope kind of thread around their neck.

Socio-economic context

They are typically poor and their primary economic activities depend on understandably the areas they live in. However, begging for food, clothing and money is common among them.

Rituals

According to their belief system, an ancestor once dead referred to as „Awliyas", and are, probably due to the influence of the Islam culture, „Awliyas" are considered by them to be messengers or mediators between the all mighty Allah and humans. Therefore, the ancestral worshipers do not directly

worship Allah, but rely on the dead ancestors to communicate with the God.

> *Awliyas are like lawyers. In a court we cannot directly go to the judge, instead we hire a lawyer to convince the judge*- Mohamed Arshad (58), Akkaraipattu.

Distinct rituals take place in the month of April and they sing and beat drums during the rituals. The rituals are strictly confined only to the members of their community and even a conventional Muslim is not accommodated in those rituals. They raise a flag in their mosque during the ritual.

According to some practitioners of ancestral worship, the central Mosque in Dharga Town in Kalutara District is one of the main places in which such rituals are performed. The word „Dharga" is used to describe a dead person. From Colombo, Davata Gaha Mosque is one that accommodates a lot of ancestor worshipers.

Rituals that are practised too have regional differences. In the Western Province, candles are lit by ancestral worshipers to commemorate a soul of a significant person from the particular community whereas in the Eastern Province the commemoration includes presenting meat of a freshly killed animal to the ancestor. In the Central parts of the country, a mixture of both above practises can be observed.

Other rituals include:

Kandoori (*Kanikkai* in Tamil) - Alms giving to public after offering fresh meat to the ancestor. This is practised mainly by the Eastern counterparts of the Muslim communities in which ancestral worship is seen, but by no means confined to the Eastern part of the island.

Neththi Kanakki - *Neththi* is believed to be a virtual agreement with Allah and the combined term *neththi kanakki* refers to offerings presents to persons that manage graves for charitable activities in the name of the deceased person.

Conclusion

Only a very little is known about the grave worshiper Muslims in Sri Lanka. Due to their lower caste, having a relatively small population, that too scattered and disorganised, and the lack of influencing capacity further aggravated by the extent of poverty, their representation at any level of administration or governance is weak, hence making them eternally deprived of having equitable access to developmental resources or the liberties to practise their culture with dignity. Further, lack of convincing and influencing capacity seems to have made an impact on the visible poor educational attainment among the children of this caste of Muslims in almost all the regions. Lack of recognition given on the cultural practices and the lack of the grave worshipers to understand their niche in the society could well lead to deterioration of their unique cultural practices and possibly extinction.

Therefore, there is a definite need to further in-depth research on this micro culture, so as to revive and provide ground to practise such culture freely with dignity.

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Portuguese Community in Batticaloa – Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Portuguese Burghers living in Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts are the descendents of the Portuguese people that came to Sri Lanka in 1505. At present about 2,415 Portuguese live near Kalladi Bridge, DutchBar, Sinnauppadi, Kalawaddi. Mamangam, Akkareipatthu, Walachchenei in Batticaloa District. The interactions between the Portuguese and Sri Lankans has led to an evolution of a new language; the Sri Lankan Portuguese Creole, which is spoken even today by some of their senior citizens. Today, the majority of the Burghers are able craftsmen, and are as skillful as their forefathers. They excel as carpenters, blacksmiths, tailors, painters and mechanics. Women are skillful seamstresses. Almost all the burghers are devoted Christians. Portuguese people are famous for their kaffringha/ baila music and Lancers dancing.

Introduction

For its small size Sri Lanka is proud of its long history and its cultural diversity. Diverse ethnic groups that inhabit the country are responsible for its rich multi cultural background. The island‟s major ethnic groups are represented by its indigenous population; the Vedda people, Sinhalese, Tamils, Moors and Burghers (Portuguese and Dutch). However there are diverse minority groups, which help us to boast of our cultural diversity that includes Kaffirs, Malays, Colombo Chettis, Boras, Rodiyas, Ceylon Jews, etc.This article is about the Portuguese burghers

that are living in Batticaloa, in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka. The historical information of the Burgher people was taken from the books and articles published by various authors and other information by interviewing the burgher people living in the Panichchiadi area in Batticaloa.

Batticaloa is one of the twenty five districts in Sri Lanka and is situated in the Eastern Province bordering the East Coast. It has many historical events associated to its name. Even today Batticaloa is famous for its Burgher community, who are the descendents from the Portuguese people that came to the island in 1505. However, Portuguese occupied Batticaloa only in 1622.

Their history begins in November 1505, when a Portuguese captain Lourenco de Almeida and his fleet, on their way to Maldives, were driven by adverse winds to the Western coast of Sri Lanka near Galle (Pieris 1986; Yogasundrum 2006). At this time Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon and was famous for its spices, gems and elephants. After the Portuguese replenished their stocks of water and fuel they set sail to *Kolon Tota* (Colombo). On the 15 November 1505, the first fleet anchored off Colombo and later signed a treaty with the ruling that time; King Dharma Parakramabahu IX, allowing them to have 400 *bahars* (a bahar was approximately 176.25 kilos) of cinnamon a year on condition of them protecting the coast from external attacks (Pieris 1986). During the sixteenth century, the Portuguese came along their own masons, shoemakers, carpenters, bakers, blacksmiths and the like because such skilled crafts were not known here, or the numbers of such craftsmen were insignificant (Leonard 2005). The indigenous people often learned the occupation of these „pioneers". The ancestors of these people who came with the Portuguese from all over Europe, learned the Portuguese tongue and thus were referred to

as Portuguese descendants. They have names like Barthelot (French), Baltharza (German) then there are names of Spanish, Italian, English, Scandinavian and from other European origin (Leonard 2005). Most common names used are De Lima, Ragel, Barthelot, Starrack, Outschoorn, Sellar, Andrado, Simmons, Wandalin, Felthma, Vincent and Pietersz (Leonard 2005).

Present Distribution

At present, the Portuguese Burghers live near Kalladi Bridge, Dutch Bar, Sinnauppadi, Kalawaddi. Mamangam, Akkareipatthu, Walachchenei all in Batticaloa district and in Trincomalee. According to the 2007 census, 2,412 Burghers were living in these areas, representing about 0.5% of the total population in the Batticaloa district (**Table 1**).

Division	***No. of People***
Koralai Pattu West (Oddamavadi)	03
Koralai Pattu (Valachchenai)	40
Eravur Pattu	58
Eravur Town	76
Manmunai North	2,197
Manmunai Pattu (Araipattai)	01
Manmunai Pattu and Eruvil Pattu	01
Koralai Pattu Central	36
Total	2311

Table 1: **Burgher Population in different Divisional Secretariat Divisions of the Batticaloa District, 2007.**

In Trincomalee district, there were 967 Burgher people representing 0.3% of the district population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2007).

Language

The interactions between Portuguese and Sri Lankans led to an evolution of a new language; the Sri Lankan Portuguese Creole, which flourished in Sri Lanka as a lingua franca from sixteenth century to mid nineteenth century.These contact languages; Pidgin and Creole, evolve as a result of the interaction of two groups who do not speak the same mother- tongue. Pidgin is short lived and used mainly in business, However Creole is a Pidgin which become the mother-tongue of this community. Sri Lankan Portuguese Creole, a subset of Indo-Portuguese is used by the Burghers (People of Portuguese and Dutch descends) in the Eastern province (Batticaloa and Trincomalee) and the Kaffirs (people of African origin) in the North-Western Province (Jayasuriya 2000: 253).

The Portuguese Creole brought by these people in the early sixteenth century is spoken even today by some of their senior citizens. They bear no written Portuguese literature and according to some experts, the Creole Portuguese that some senior citizens speak is very similar to the Portuguese spoken in medieval times.

Many Portuguese words have been absorbed into the Sinhalese and Tamil languages, such as ‚*almariya*‟ (wardrobe), ‚*naambiliya*‟ (clay pot), ‚*hodi*‟ (curry), (Angle: personal communication).

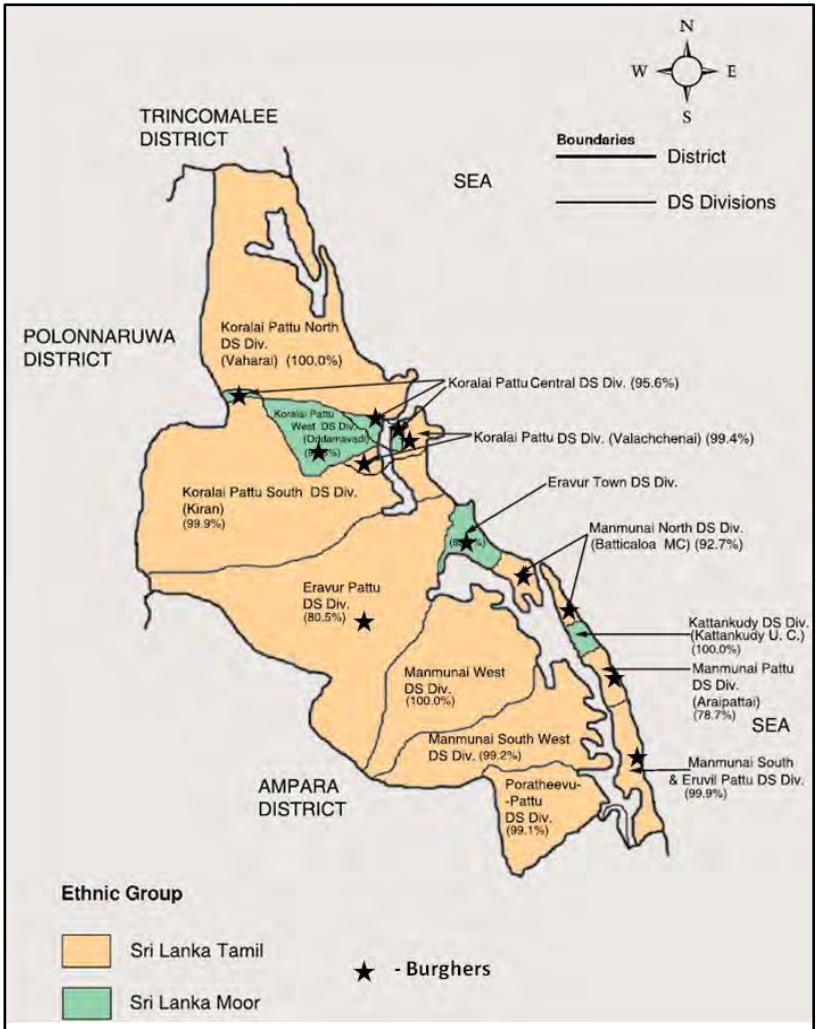

Figure 1: Major ethnic groups in different Divisional Secretariats of the Batticaloa District

Even today Portuguese surnames are used by people who are not burghers. Portuguese being the first builders of modern dwellings in Sri Lanka contributed most of the words associated with the building craft to Sinhalese language (De Silva 1981:129).

Portuguese Creole is spoken mainly by the elderly citizens at homes when they get together and at special occasions like weddings.Their main language of communication is Tamil. In Batticaloa, majority of schools use Tamil medium for teaching. Very few people, who had gone to Sinhala Maha Vidyalaya in Batticaloa can speak in Sinhalese as well. According to some informants earlier many had used Portuguese as a communication mode at home but later had change to Tamil because children had difficulties in learning Tamil language at school while speaking Portuguese at home (Evanjaline, Nelson: personal communication). At the moment very few elderly people are able to speak in Portuguese language and none of the young people use it. As a result, the language that had been with them for centuries is diminishing fast due to the recent changes in their society. Sri Lankan Portuguese Creole (SLPC) is spoken only in Sri Lanka and very different from the modern Portuguese which had evolved over time, whereas the SLPC has not changed over the centuries.

In addition there are programmes carried out by the Burgher Union; a society which help Burgher people in the area, to teach the modern Portuguese language to children in Batticaloa. All these factors may contribute to the disappearing of this very important Portuguese Creole. The remnants of their culture, dance and language are in living form, and it is the duty of anthropologists and government to implement programs to

protect and preserve this language and this unique culture before it is too late.

Occupation

During the Portuguese and Dutch periods they worked as interpreters. Regardless of the arrival of the Dutch and the British, most Burghers preferred to retain their Portuguese cultural roots. The community also thrived under British rule as most Burghers were educated and fluent in English. Burgher engineers, doctors and other professionals played a key role in managing Sri Lankan railways. However, the situation changed after Sri Lanka's independence in 1948. The new government gave prominence to the Sinhala language. As the Burghers did not speak Sinhalese, there were few job opportunities for them and many of them went abroad. "The mass migration split families. Due to the subsequent socio-political changes Burghers were slowly marginalized in Sri Lanka". (Anbarasan 2005).

Today, the majority of the Burghers are able craftsmen. They are as skillful as their forefathers. They excel as carpenters, blacksmiths, tailors, painters and mechanics. Their products range from parts of heavy machinery to kitchen knives. In carpentry too the Burghers lead even today. The Burgher carpenter is often called upon to construct the roofs of houses, doors and windows. They produce work that cannot be matched by others. There were also gun smiths. They were much sought after for repairs of guns and other firearms. With the withdrawal of fire arms from the people, the gunsmiths were thrown out of employment (Batticaloa- Culture, online). Portuguese women are skillful seamstresses. Earlier women did not go out to work, currently they are working in schools, banks, government and private offices.

Portuguese Rites of Passage

Birth

After the new baby is born, the parents and relatives get together and name the baby. Father‟s surname is taken as the family name. In the birth certificate race is entered as Sri Lankan Burgher (Mignon: personal communication).

Marriage

Most of the marriages are arrange marriages and the groom stay in the bride‟s house after marriage. Dowry was not required at the wedding and no caste system was seen. Marriage ceremony takes place in the church and mainly in the evening. The weddings are special occasions where western traditions were maintained. The couple wear western attire, the groom a suit, a tie and shoes, the bride long white dress, and shoes, slippers are not allowed for wedding (Personal communication, Mignon Hardy) (**Figure 2**). The bride‟s maids, best men, page boys and flower girls are part of the wedding group. After the service, the invitees proceed to bride‟s home for reception, but now a day‟s reception hall is rented for this purpose. There is a special dance before the dinner; the first dance is performed by the bride groom and bride, bride‟s maid, best man and the couple‟s parents. During the special dinner or lunch it is customary to speak in Creole Portuguese. The traditional food items such as pork curry, mustard, pickle, mango sambol and beef soup are mandatory. Liquor bar is freely available. People of mixed marriages cannot participate in the dance or to the special dinner table afterwards. On the second day morning, the couple is greeted by a musical group, at that time the bride present a bottle of wine to her parents and the groom a bottle of liquor and get

blessing of the parents. On the following day the bridegroom provides lunch. On the third day after morning service the bride and bridegroom are received at the bridegroom's house for lunch (Angle, Evanjaline, Nelson, personal communication).

Figure 2: Wedding dance
(Source:
http://www.batticaloamc.com/page/Batticaloa/Culture.htm)

Funerals

The body is kept in the house for two days in a coffin after embalming. However, some prefer to perform the funeral on the same day. Cooking was not done at the house on the first day, and the neighbours provide food for the family. In addition, people collect money from the village and donate it to the deceased member‟s family. After the burial an alms giving is performed first for the beggars and then to the relatives and

neighbours. Thereafter alms are given on the 8th, 32nd days and after one year.

Religion, Music and Dancing

Almost all the burghers are devoted Christians. Over 96% (Batticaloa Municipal Council Home Page http://batticaloamc.com/page/Batticaloa%20-%20Culture.htm) of the families are Roman Catholics. They celebrate Christmas and other Christian festivals.

Portuguese in Sri Lanka are famous for their *kaffringha/ baila* music and Lancers dancing. Weddings and birthdays are the special occasions where everyone takes part in these cultural activities. They are very protective of their music and believe that they should preserve this unique set of songs as a part of their culture. They are hesitant to teach the songs they know to outsiders. Currently it is believed that about fifty baila songs are used by the burghers and each person knows a maximum of about ten songs (Ariyaratne 2007: 61). At first they start with their own baila songs and towards the end they incorporate popular Sinhalese and Tamil baila songs to their singing as well. The musical instruments they use are guitars, pianos, drums and mandolins. Lancers is a popular dance among Batticaloa burghers. This is performed by four couples to kaffringha music. Sometimes the music used to this dance is also called as Lancers.

In addition to burghers, the kaffir people too use baila as their traditional songs. When Portuguese colonizers arrived in the mid 15th century, in addition to music, they brought with them cantigaballads, ukuleles and guitars; as well as descendants of Africa (*kaffirs*).The people of these two regions, and the

musical traditions they brought with them, served to contribute further to the diverse musical roots of modern Sri Lankan music.

Natural Disasters

Batticaloa burghers are peaceful fun loving people who do not like to engage in disputes and keeps to themselves. Moreover, they are not actively engaged in parliamentary political matters as well. They prefer to remain in their own enclaves - hardly making any contacts with the „affluent" English-speaking Burghers in Colombo.

However on the 26 December 2004, they too were hard hit by the Tsunami that killed many people and destroyed properties in the Southern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka. A large number of Burgher families that lived as closely knit community three kilometers to the south of the Batticaloa town along the sea beach called „Dutch Bar' on the Kalladi beach, was adversely effected by the Tsunami. The tidal waves struck Dutch Bar with such ferocity that the families lost their homes and their properties. In Dutch bar and surrounding areas, 290 burgher families were affected by tsunami, 157 Burghers lost their lives and 220 families lost their houses (Municipal Council of Batticoloa Official Website) Currently these people are relocated to Panichchiadi area, away from the beach.(site visit, 2010). One good thing that came out of tsunami was that the Burgher people of Colombo and Batticaloa were united and they are getting help even today from the Burghers migrated to overseas long time back.

Portuguese Burghers play an important role in maintaining the cultural diversity in Sri Lanka. However their language; Protuguese Creole and other customs and traditions are fading fast because especially the younger generation is adapting to the

new trends of there societies. This is a problem in other main cultures as well. The old traditions are maintained only by the elders in the society, which would be lost after their generation. Therefore it is necessary to preserve these unique traditions and customs by making people aware especially the younger generation of its importance and value.

Acknowledgement

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Book Reviews

Deconstructing Everyday Reality

Anamika

Bhog and Other Stories by Ankur Betageri, 2010, Bengaluru: Pilli Books, p.107, INR 260/-

Earnest confessions and restive moral enquiries underline almost all first books, but this one chooses to be quieter and subtler, a little subdued and oblique – painted in grey, resisting shocking pinks and electric blues.

„Bhog" is a multi-layered word with multiple cultural connotations. „Bhog" means offerings to gods and dead dears through a fire-ritual. As a binary to „yog" it is the hungry carnal consumption of earthly delights (refer to Charvaka"s „Loka-yat": „*yawat jeevet sukhen jeevet, wrinam hritwa ghritam peevet*": „eat, drink and be merry/ buy, borrow, have it all.") Stoic acceptance of sufferings or sufferings both as the „prasad" of God and the bearings of sin (wittingly or unwittingly) committed in past lives is also referred to as „bhog." On the whole, the word flashes in the Indian psyche as a state of „being" on its way to „becoming." Dispassionate offerings both of the „anna-brahma" and the fruits of karma in the fire of non-

complaining, stoical (*stithapragna*) sufferings can be a gateway to salvation, so says the poetical Indian theology, replete with metaphors, allegories, symbols and motifs.

We suffer and we rise. We consume and then are consumed: „*Bhujyate iti bhogah*" (whatever you consume, consumes you) till there comes an awareness to view it all with objectivity (non-attachment). That is the state that ignites our insight (a tear within the heart of things). This is what drives us on to „seeing" and „being."

This writer, still in his twenties, names his well-produced first book after this complex cultural ritual of gradual purification. *Bhog and Other Stories* stages moments of complex inner transformations, internal rigidities, and resistance blowing high and low, like flames, around them. Ankur is a trained psychologist. Internalizing things and nothings, events and non-events before breaking them open is in-built in his grain.

„*Bhoga hua yathartha*," the experiential range of reality was the clarion call of both the Realist and Modernist fictions. Ankur is closer to the Woolfian and the Joycean models in some of the stories. „Bhog," for instance, internalizes the whole process of the slow slashing down and splintering of a dead tree and then, with a dramatic turn, the Bhog-fire turns into a funeral pyre for the dead pet. The situational irony subtly plays upon the semiotic underpinning of wood-and-fire inbuilt in Indian mythology:

> „The tree seemed to have lost some of its grace which the sweating, stooping figure of the old man had seemingly acquired…. The old man's second daughter stood at a distance, her face lit orange and her eyes illuminated by the

> blaze. And as she gazed intently, lost in the ferocity of fire, a yellow leaf plopped on her coffee-brown hair, like a balm.‟

The gutsy old man has a grain both of King Lear and the protagonist in *The Old Man and the Sea*. This slow and painful transfer of grace from the tree that gives way to the toiling man is subtle and complex, so is the transmission of the blaze. This blaze would turn into a definite burn. It will travel through generations (from the old man to the youngest daughter). Nature takes its toll but it also heals, becomes a balm on your burns.

Ankur describes what he sees and detects with accuracy (almost a heroic honesty) but he is interested more in the mind than in manners. Sometimes he dematerializes situations by allowing into them dreams, symbols, ideas of an out-of-place, disinherited mind. Defamiliarization of everyday reality by breaking it into micro-moments of non-happenings seems to be his patent technique especially the stories where he delicately handles post-modern techniques of deconstructing diary-entries (… Aftermath of a Broken Love Affair), confessions and mood-swings (Malavika), dialogues and reflections (A Conversation: Story Written in the Manner of a Movie Script).

In some of the more reflective, unrealistic flights he talks through inanimate objects: „The Armour‟, „The Big Bicycle‟, „Big Bear Remembers Kako‟, „The City of Walls‟ and „God‟s Flower‟. And here his prose reads sometimes like poetry and sometimes like a fairytale:

> „There are iron armours lined up inside the prison. They are youth, madness, sickness, beauty, rage and silence. Once entered we‟re warriors, fated to die in them… Being, then, is the battlefield.‟

***

„The Big Bear had stepped over a honey-comb that had made its feet sticky, but the cubs, unaware of this, were left wondering when they found that the leaves didn‟t stick to their feet.‟

***

„My house, which was always smart and gaudy, looked innocent in the tender light… The stupefied roses and the weak-winged crows flew towards the horizon even as they saw all these.‟

***

„Once God hit upon the idea of creating this flower… Then he made it bright by adding light from the shimmering horizon, and made it fervid with passion by suffusing it with the blood of a longing dove.‟

***

„Been to a village yesterday. Saw only darkness in the night and in the hearts of men. Superior men are not born, nor are they made, they become because they can‟t help it.‟

Events unfold very slowly, almost in slow motion, as if a computer has refused to take the load or a machine is running on low-voltage but this is basically a technique to create situations of „stand and stare.‟ Stand-stills like these, almost like soliloquies in a play, offer us moments to ponder and analyze, view and review.

That this boy has got the makings of a philosopher is evident from the reflective mode of the stories; and at times one marvels at the crystals he carves:

> „I beg your pardon. I think I have read enough about the blindness of knowledge, the ever-flowing dynamic nature of existence and stuff like that. I can only say that these lamps which flicker in the remote corner of the huge dark room have saved me from the terrible ghosts of despair. I have woken up at midnight, as if from a fever, and cowering under the crumpled bedsheet, I have blinked in the great darkness of the night."

This hints at the existential angst every young mind suffers:

> „The horror of not knowing what to want is greater than the tragedy of not having what you want. Girls, poems, movies, books, friends, family, college, career… everything disgusts me… I don"t think I can create what I so desperately need… It is something concrete; something which is either had or not; something whose loss can"t be substituted – even symbolically – with words and phrases…."

This tendency to live through proxy, not being able to love and accept, the tendency to sit upon judgement, „the deficiency love", has constantly been critiqued: „Everything in which the Spirit can"t stay I call junk. Modern world worships this. It tries to force the Spirit on this junk by all kinds of yelling and bellowing, and thus ends up creating even an artificial Spirit. This plastic yuga is so dehumanized that even monsters are afraid to live in it… "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards,"" thus speaks the young philosopher, and we agree with a smile.

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Anamika is a Delhi-based poet who writes in Hindi. A Reader at the Department of English at Satyawati College, Delhi, she has five collections of poetry to her credit. Over the years she has won numerous accolades for her literary work, including the Bharat Bhushan Award for Poetry (1996), the Girija Mathur Samman (1998), the Sahityakar Samman (1998), the Parampara Samman (2001) and the Sahityasetu Samman (2004). In addition to poetry, she has authored volumes of fiction, memoir and criticism, and undertaken translations of the works of Octavio Paz, Rilke, Rabindranath Tagore and Girish Karnad.

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Guidelines for Contributors

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1. Submissions should contain:
    a. Author‟s name, affiliation, postal address, e-mail, phone numbers;
    b. Brief biographical entry, in c. 100 words;
    c. Abstract/ Summary (for articles only), in c. 100-150 words;
    d. Keywords (articles only), up to five keywords, for indexing and abstracting;
    e. Title and the text (based on the given guidelines);
    f. Acknowledgements (if applicable);
    g. Endnotes (if any);
    h. References (Bibliography, film, videography, etc).

2. Manuscript would be accepted for publication on the understanding that these are original unpublished contributions. For this purpose, a declaration (in the format given below) should accompany each contribution.

    “I, ……. declare that the article/ book review has not been previously published or has been

submitted/ accepted for publication in any other publication."

Signature……..…..

Date……..

3. Articles should be typed on one side of the paper (preferably A4) and double-spaced throughout (not only the text but also displayed quotations, notes, references and all other matter). Please provide one hard copy and an exact electronic copy in MS Word, preferably as an e-mail attachment or on a CD/ DVD.

4. Please use English spellings throughout; universal „s" in „-ise" and „-isation" words.

5. Normally all abbreviations should be expanded in the text, e.g. „Department" and not „Deptt.". For specific nomenclatures to be used frequently in the text full version may be given at the first appearance with an indication of the abbreviation used subsequently, e.g. „South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (henceforth SAARC)."

6. All non-English terms may be italicised. Please use standard fonts only. For ascertaining the non-English words please refer to The Oxford English Dictionary. All italicised words can have diacritics as required. For Arabo-Persian vocabulary, please follow F. Steingass, A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary. For Dravidian languages, the Madras University Tamil Lexicon, or some standard equivalent, may be used. For other languages, the system used should be clearly specified early in the paper. Where

diacritical marks are not used, the word should be spelt phonetically, e.g., Badshah and not Baadshah or Baadshaah (unless in a quotation, where the original spelling should be used).

7. English translation of all non-English terms used in the text must be given in brackets immediately after the word, e.g. „Faujdari Adalat (Court of Criminal Justice)." If the number of non-English terms exceeds 20 a Glossary may be appended with the article.

8. Full details of work cited in the text should appear in„References."(Please see number 9 below). Only the author"s name, year of publication and page number should appear in the main body text, viz.:

   a. If the author"s name is part of the sentence:
      As Ranabir Samaddar (2010) points out ...

   b. If the author"s name is mentioned at the end of the sentence:
      (Samaddar 2010: 110-12).

   c. If a study is referred to in the text:
      A recent study (Samaddar 2010: 95-100) in South Asia demonstratesthat …

   d. If more than two authors:
      (Perera, et al 2007: 34).

9. A consolidated alphabetical list of all books, articles, essays and theses referred to (including any referred to in the tables and figures) should be provided. It should be typed in double-spacing and printed at the end of the article. All articles, books and theses should be listed in alphabetical

order of author, giving the author‟s surname first followed by the first name or initials. If more than one publication by the same author is listed, the items should be given in chronological order. Newspapers and unpublished manuscripts (including working papers and research papers) should not be listed. Detailed style of referencing is as follows:

a. *Published Works*

i. Books:
Das, *Veena, Routledge Handbook of South Asian Culture and Society,* (London, 2010).
(Note: Publishers‟ names are not to be cited. If a book is published simultaneously at different places, one or at most two of them may be cited.)

ii. Edited Volumes:
Bhattacharjee, J.B., (ed.), Studies in the History of North East India (Shillong, 1986). OrBlusse, L and F. Gaastra, (eds.), Companies and Trade: Essays on Overseas Trading Companies during the Ancient Regime, (Leiden, 1981).

iii. Articles in Journals:
Gopal, Surendra. „A Note on Archival Material in Russia on Russo-Indian Relations‟, The Indian Archives, vol. 35 (2), 1986, pp. 29-36.

iv. Articles in Edited Volumes:
Bayly, C.A., „Pre-Colonial Indian Merchant and Rationality‟, in India‟s Colonial Encounter: Essays in Memory of Eric Stokes, Mushirul Hasan and Narayani Gupta eds., 2nd revised and enlarged edn., (New Delhi,2004), pp. 39-60.

v. Material from Websites:
Complete reference of the material used along with full URL of the website together with the date it was last accessed must be given, viz.,,

The Clemency of Canning", Punch, No. 33 (24 October 1857), p. 171 from http://www.victorianweb.org/periodicals/punch/57.html (last accessed 8 March 2011).

b. *Unpublished Works*

i. Theses and dissertations:
Ghosh, Utpal, „The Communist Party of India and India"s freedom struggle, 1937-1947", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Burdwan, West Bengal, 1991. Vijoo Krishnan, „Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism in Pakistani Punjab, 1947-1977", unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1997.

ii. Manuscripts and Archival Material:
Please mention the name of the library or the archival repository, its location, including the town and, if necessary, the country. Please retain the original names of library/ archives but also translate them into English, for example, Rigsarkivet (National Archives). This may be followed by the major series used. Names of repository and major series should be accompanied by the abbreviations used to refer to them in subsequent citations, viz.

National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI), Foreign Department, Political Branch, Original Consultation (hereafter OC), 11 February 1831, Nos. 72-73.

Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK (hereafter BL), Tabakat-i Nasiri by Minhaj ud-Din Siraj, (Persian Ms), Acc. No. 16, folio(s) 17a (18a and 18b).

In case of materials in a private collection, the name and location of the collection should be mentioned. Where recorded oral materials stored in audio archives are used, the location of the recordings should be specified.

10. All Notes and References should be consecutively numbered and presented at the end of the article. Please do NOT use „insert footnote/ endnote" option available in MS Word or similar softwares. Complete references with the precise page reference if applicable should be given.

11. An acknowledgement or statement about the background of the article, if any, may be given immediately after the main text of the article under a separate heading, viz. „Acknowledgement(s)."

12. All Figures and Tables should be presented on separate sheets at the end of the article and should NOT be inserted in the text.Only a mention of each figure or table in the text is to be given, viz. „as shown in Figure 2". Please distinguish between Figures (diagrams) and Tables (statistical material) and number them in separate sequences, i.e., „Figure 8", and „Table 8". Please use short

and crisp titles and headings for each Figure or Table, citing source where applicable. The units used and the sources should be stated at the foot of the table. Notes relating to the table should be placed after the source.

13. Illustrations should be of sufficient quality to be reproduced in the journal. If they are larger than the print area of the journal, please ensure that all details and text in the artworks are sufficiently large so that they remain legible when reduced to the actual size of the journal. Photographs should be black and white prints on matt paper. Digital pictures should be in .tiff format of not less than 300 dpi resolution. Please use short and crisp titles and headings for each Iluustration, citing source where applicable. Please obtain permission to reproduce any figures or photographs that are not your own copyright. Similarly, permission may be required for quotations beyond the limits of „fair dealing".

14. Book reviews must contain name of author and book reviewed, place of publication and publisher, year of publication, number of pages and price (if available).

15. All contributors shall receive an hononaria of US $ 150 per article and US $ 75 per book review and two complementary copies of the SAARC Culture after the publication.

For any other detail or clarification please write to:

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SAARC Cultural Centre

The SAARC Cultural Centre is a regional centre established on the 25 March 2009 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to recognize and promote the profound cultural continuum of South Asia in order to sustain harmonious relations among the people and to contribute towards holistic development in the region.

The Centre, successfully completed programmes that saw the birth of cultural exchange of ideas, knowledge sharing and showcasing the cultural experiences of the SAARC Member States through various interesting programmes and publications.

SAARC Cultural Centre Programmes for 2012

The theme for SAARC Cultural Centre Programme 2012 is "***Unity within Diversity – Exploring the Arts and Culture.***" Programmes implemented in 2012 will focus on:

- **Establishing linkages between culture and other sectors -** As part of promoting Cultural Cooperation, the SAARC Cultural Centre will celebrate SAARC Charter Day, SAARC Non-Violence Day, International Women's Day, World Poetry Day, World Heritage Day, World Music Day, SAARC Cultural Centre Foundation Day etc.The Centre will also be organizing SAARC Lecture Series.
- **Promoting SAARC Culture online -** SAARC Cultural Centre will use this website and web portal to reflect the essence of cultural heritage of the Member States of the SAARC Region, to promote socio economic development through tourism and other world economic forces.
- **Promoting Cultural Festivals in the Region -** The theme of the Cultural Festival for 2012 is Traditional Drumming.

The Festival of Traditional Drumming would invite drummers from all the SAARC Countries, and would include an opening parade of drummers, culminating with an orchestration of drumming specially choreographed and scored for the event. The Cultural Festival will also include a Symposium on "Socio Economic Significance of Drummers in the SAARC Region", and "Drumming as a Modern Performing Art".

- **Developing Archaeology, Architecture and Archives -** In the year of 2012, the SAARC Cultural Centre will organize a Conference on "Archaeology of Buddhism: Recent Discoveries in South Asia".

- **Developing Cultural Industries -** the Centre will organize SAARC Expo Shop (Exhibition and Workshop) on Traditional Handloom of South Asia – "The Wheel of Life"; Directory/ Source Book of Cultural Industries (Handlooms) in the SAARC Region; SAARC Map of Cultural Industries in the SAARC Region 2012-2016.

- **Developing Literature in the Region -** SAARC Cultural Centre will launch a programme for translation of classical literature of South Asia into English as well as other national languages of the Member States; Collection of Contemporary Short Stories in the SAARC Region; and Collection of Contemporary Poetry in the SAARC Region.

- **Promoting Visual and Performing Arts in the SAARC Region -** Programmes for 2012 would include The SAARC Film Festival, SAARC Film Day, Photographic Exhibition, Paintings and Sculpture – Artists Camp.

- **Preserving Folklore in the SAARC Countries -** The SAARC Cultural Centre will undertake the publication of

anthologies of folk literature to preserve this heritage, with a view to preserve these oral traditions of posterity. The SAARC Cultural Centre will start a publication of a collection of folk stories of the SAARC Region in the year 2012.

- **Research Programme -** Major Research projects implemented in 2012 will be Research Project on Diminishing Cultures in South Asia and Research Project on Diasporic Cultures of South Asia.
- **SAARC Publication Programme -** At the conclusion of all workshops, seminars, symposiums, conferences etc, conducted by the SAARC Cultural Centre a **monograph** will be published using deliberations for reference for scholars and others, in addition to publishing this online. In the year 2012, the SAARC Cultural Centre will endeavor to publish a minimum of eight monographs/ reports.
- **SAARC Cultural Journal -** "SAARC Culture" the Annual SAARC Cultural Journal of the SAARC Cultural Centre will be published in 2012, calling for contributions from scholars of the Member States - this will be distributed as well as posted online.

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