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## **An Anthropological Study of Vedda's Sub-culture and its Change (with special reference to Eastern Province, Ampara District, Henanigala village)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

When studying a human society, it is very important to examine the culture. The reason is culture is the way of life of the people living. Subcultures can be defined as lifestyles that have been created as a part of the larger society, but as a separate unit from the larger society. Subcultures are found in any society where the main culture is represented. In the past, Sri Lankan Veddas people had a great culture. It has become a subculture over time due to various reasons. The purpose of this research was to study the facts that Vedda people have occurred at present. This study was conducted at the main settlement area of the Veddas' community, which located at Henanigala, in the Ampara district in the Eastern province of Sri Lanka. 20 elderly women over 50 years of age were selected for this purpose that had maximum experience in cultural change. Women have a better understanding of cultural change and are more exposed to that social change; therefore women were used to collect the data. At present, the people of Hennanigala have come under the cultural grip of Sinhala great society in every way. They no longer have the need to pretend to be Veddas. Having lost their native land, they have to face a life struggle. To get rid of it, they have turned to farming and fishing, and migration to cities in search of work is also increasing. Children of this culture are aware of the world around them. Due to the education they receive from school, they are accustomed to a systematic behavior. This situation continues to change due to factors such as constant mixing with the Sinhalese people, measures taken by the government to civilize the Veddas, the spread of Christian missionary religions, road construction, and development activities. On the whole, it can be concluded that Vedda's society is also becoming multicultural by submitting to the general principle of change. In the past, Veddas culture has been widespread in Sri Lanka as a great culture. But due to the above-discussed facts, artistically, that great culture has transformed into a sub-culture. At present, it can be concluded that the existing sub-cultural characteristics are gradually fading away

**KEYWORDS:** *Culture, Henanigala, Primitive society, Sub culture, Vedda,*

## **Introduction**

### *Traditional Vedda's Culture*

#### *Culture*

When studying a human society, it is very important to examine the culture. The reason is culture is the way of life of the people living. Culture is the primary factor in shaping human behavior and thoughts. Culture can also be called the intellectual aspect of civilization. In other words, building culture has become a basic psychological element in the civilization of people. Man differs from other animals in that he possesses a superior culture. Accordingly, it is not wrong to call culture as a psychological concept that reflects human thoughts. There is an inseparable relationship between man and culture. The presence of culture has become a common feature of any society in the world. In social anthropology, man is called a cultural animal. Man shapes his behavior according to the general behavior pattern of the society in which he lives. It is called socialization. According to this, man becomes stable in taking over the culture as well as integrating into the society he belongs to. According to the anthropological approach, the study of culture is the study of various human behaviors. It can be defined as the everything of what people have learned as they transmit their unique culture to the next generation.

What has been termed the classic definition of culture was provided by the 19th-century English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in the first paragraph of his *Primitive Culture*. "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 1871).

American anthropologist Clark Whistler defined culture from a different perspective. "All social activities like language, marriage, rights, art etc. are culture". Here he has defined culture in social terms (Rayan, 2005).

Ralph Linton defined culture as the set of learned behaviors and the results of those behaviors passed down from generation to generation as members of a society enjoy sharing. Linton's analysis of culture provides a good understanding of its nature and characteristics. Shared enjoyment by members of society means that culture is something that is constructed and maintained by a collective. That is, culture is a collective thing (Linton, 1945).

#### *Sub culture*

It is difficult to find a society where the entire membership lives a similar lifestyle according to one culture. Such a situation can only be seen in a small-scale, simple and isolated society that is not far from industrialization. But the human groups found in many societies generally follow certain cultural features of that society. Among them, it is seen that there are special cultural complexes peculiar to each group. Cultural units that can be distinguished in this way can be identified as subcultures. Subcultures exist within the boundaries of the mass culture but have their own values and values as well as lifestyles (අමුණුගම, 2005).

Many subcultures exist within the larger culture. A small group that is part of a larger society represents the larger culture of that society and reflects the characteristics of their own unique culture. When they are together as a group they can be identified separately. Such groups are defined as subcultures. When people belonging to a subculture behave in the general society, the larger Culture is represented without hindrance or discomfort. The reason for this is that subculture is in many important respects a way of thinking within small groups to maintain their own way of thinking, a specialty of activities, livelihoods or other identities (සමරසේකර, 2005).

Subcultures can be defined as lifestyles that have been created as a part of the larger society, but as a separate unit from the larger society. Subcultures are found in any society where the main culture is represented. These are implemented in a manner that does not harm the main culture. A subculture is similar to a subset contained in the set called the mass culture. In any society there is a mass culture that is generally represented as a corporation, and although they follow the common elements of the mass culture, they belong to social subcultures that exist with distinctive characteristics separated from the mass culture. They follow the characteristics of the mass culture and their subcultures. Living patterns specific to culture have added material elements. Examples are slum subculture, underworld subculture, university subculture, prison subculture, tricycle driver subculture, etc. In many of these subcultures, the language used in the larger society has been modified and adapted to them. In some subcultures, the words of the language used in the larger culture are different. Used for meanings. In this way, subcultures that belong to the larger society but are separate from it are seen in a subculture (රත්නපාල, 2000).

### *Vedda's culture*

Among the primary groups living in Sri Lanka, the main primitive culture group that can be traditionally considered as primitive social class is the Veddha people, and the Veddha people are a group that has attracted the attention of scholars, not only when Sri Lanka was a colony, but also before. The Veddhas of Sri Lanka have a unique place among the remaining primitive cultures in the world. In the first half of this century, the Veddhas have been constantly studied by local and foreign scholars. The Veddhas were located in several areas of the Eastern and Uva Province, among which the main Veddhas were located in the middle of the country (සමරසේකර, 2001).

In the past, the Veddhas were known as a community that lived a unique social and cultural life without external social relations, but this situation has changed. Literary sources provide evidence that the Veddhas have been involved in the governance of the state at various times. The Veddhas have lived a dignified life, preserving their identity as archers in the royal army during the royal period and as village patrons during the colonial period (Seligman, 1911).

The Vedda people have a rich and distinctive cultural heritage that spans thousands of years. Rooted in ancient traditions, the Vedda culture is deeply connected to nature and the surrounding environment. Traditional Vedda communities are often characterized by their nomadic lifestyle, relying on hunting and gathering for sustenance. The Vedda language, known as Vedda or Vedda, is distinct and has its own unique linguistic features. Their spiritual beliefs center around a close relationship with the natural world, with various deities and spirits

playing integral roles in their cosmology. Rituals, ceremonies, and dances are essential components of Vedda culture, providing a means for community bonding and the transmission of cultural knowledge through generations. The Vedda people's traditional knowledge of medicinal plants, hunting techniques, and sustainable living practices reflects a deep understanding of their ecological surroundings. Despite the challenges posed by modernization, efforts are being made to preserve and revitalize Vedda culture, ensuring that this ancient way of life endures for future generations.

A statement by Nandadeva Wijesekera, who studied the Veddas, can be quoted to explain how much they are involved in the process of cultural contact. That is, "The missionaries convert them. The traveler is amused by them, studied by the researcher, condemned by the neighbor." (විජේසේකර, 1960. පි. 43).

RL Spittle, who has studied about the Vedda people with great interest, has presented several factors that influenced the alienation of the Vedda people (සමරසේකර, 2001. පි. 221).

- Constant mixing with the Sinhalese and Tamil people
- Measures taken by the Government from time to time to civilize the Veddas
- Devotion to agriculture willingly or unwillingly
- Missionary activities
- Acquisition of land by Government
- Construction of vehicular roads to Veddas villages
- Influence of Muslim traders

### *Vedda people in Henanigala*

Henanigala, which is located in the Eastern Province, Ampara District is one of the current villages occupied by the descendants of veddas people of the country. 1982, they lived in Dambana, Kotabakiniya and Kandeganwila were resettled in the Henanigala C Zone affected by the Mahaweli development project. Food rations were provided by the World Food Organization for three years to the displaced people here and crop credit facilities were provided by the banks (දංකොටුව, 2003).

But the Vedda people, who lived in their own unique culture in an isolated forest environment, could not adapt to this new socio-economic pattern. Their traditional laws clashed with the new laws. The pilot study revealed that there have been changes in the Veda's subculture today as compared to the past. It is necessary to investigate the factors that affected the socio-cultural change. It can be stated here as the research problem.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted as a descriptive study by selecting respondents purposively. For collecting primary data, 20 women were used as data contributors to conduct this study based on the convenience of the study. Judgment sampling has been used for this. The two methods of

consensus discussion and observation methods were used to collect data. Secondary data were collected from relevant sources and information available in the internet.

### *Selection of location*

This study was conducted at the main settlement area of the veddas community, which located at Henanigala, in the Ampara district in the Eastern province of Sri Lanka.

### *Selection of respondents*

20 elderly women over 50 years of age were selected for this purpose that had maximum experience in cultural change. Most of them can speak Sinhala language as their native Vedda language. The reason why only women were used for this was because women take a primary position in the discussion about culture. Women have a good understanding about customs, occasions, kinship etc. Women have a better understanding of cultural change and are more exposed to that social change. Therefore, women were used to collect the data.

## **Results and discussion**

### *Social and cultural changes*

When investigating the social and cultural environment of the Vedda people of this village, it was found that they are keenly interested in modernization. They are trying to blend in with the Sinhala society. The previous social relations have also disappeared. Looking at the way they live their daily life, they are economically unstable and live in the midst of many difficulties. The Veddas are currently being exposed to the outside society. Their age-old code of conduct has been transformed in every way. In the early days, they used to do farming, hunting, and collecting honey in the forest, but now they have turned to paddy farming. Even though they are engaged in the fishing industry, they have no knowledge about the fishing industry, so they face a lot of difficulties. They are of the opinion that even if animal husbandry is done on a small scale, it is a very troublesome work. While living in the wild, they used to put *dadamas* in tree trunks and eat them with honey, but nowadays they consume rice as their staple food. Most of the women have become vegetarians by joining Sinhala Buddhist society.

Not only that, the previous religious beliefs has also gradually drifted away from them. While living in the forest, they did not strictly worship devils or the idols of their dead relatives anymore. Small shrines are maintained in some houses, where rituals such as bringing dead relatives, performing black rituals etc. are carried out. The beliefs of the traditional Vedda people such as *kiri koraha netima*, *Hatham Yagya*, *kiri mawwarun pidhiima* etc. are performed only for tourist attraction. In addition to this, *Bodhi Puja* are performed, worshiping the Gods etc. All these are the result of their blending with the Sinhala society.

Something that should be mentioned here is that the members of the families tend to Catholicism due to economic benefits. Non-governmental organizations provide them with food, clothing, money and change their traditional surnames.

They use this as a great trick to get rid of those tribal identity. This makes it clear that nowadays these people have a tendency to leave their religion and follow other religions to get rid of poverty and gain benefits.

Nature-based world view that existed in the past among them has faded with the Sinhalese people mixing with the society and being modernized. The young generation no longer adheres to age-old practices or traditions and lives with a broader vision by connecting with modern technology.

### *Customs and Festivals*

Customs and festivals can be identified as a very important part of Sri Lankan culture. But when studying about the Vedda people today, it can be said that their traditional customs and ceremonies are gradually dying out. In the past, when a Vedda woman became pregnant, she was taken to a hut built at a short distance from the house called *Vedum Geya*. Childbirth takes place in that chamber with the services of a midwife. *Unapana kiri amma*, and the *ne yakku* prevents the side effects that occur during childbirth. But such *Vedum Geya* did not exist in any of the family units that were studied in the field, and the members of the new generation at least do not know what a *Vedum Geya* is. 80% of the data contributors said they never went to a hospital to give birth and gave birth at home. They were of the opinion that giving birth in a hospital is much easier and safer. Even so, they take care to perform the religious rituals that are performed before childbirth. It must be said that the customs performed when a girl reaches puberty have also undergone changes. *Kili pela*, which were used in the past to keep the girl of puberty, are still used in some houses today, but in most houses, it is not used. But food bans are implemented in the same way. It was revealed that the girl who has reached puberty is not allowed to eat oily food and only milk and white rice. They still believe in the concept of *Killa* and also prevents the girl from making eye contact with men during that period. They said that in this village they did not have their own puberty ritual system and as is done in the normal Sinhalese society, the girl was bathed and invited to the house, and only a feast was made by cooking *kaum kiribat* etc. Death can be described as a juncture in life that shocks Veddas. Almost all the local and foreign Veddas who have written about Veddas have confirmed this fact. In general, it is believed that after the death of all types of Vedda people, the spirit of the person roams around for a few days. It is their belief that after death, a demon goes to the nearby mountain and hangs around the body for a few days. Among them, they believe that the spirit can enter the body of a family member or someone else. If so, the person will be at risk of disease. Therefore, this place should be vacated as soon as possible. It was discovered that in the past, a Vedda was buried wrapped in the bark of a plant called *patta* after his death. Even today, after the death of a Vedda leader, they are buried in the bark of the *Patta* plant. They have never cremated dead bodies. They do not know the reason. At present, it has become their custom to bring coffins from the shops and perform burial rituals after the monks carry them out. The practices of earlier times have died out today.

### *Social relations and kinship*

The social organization and kinship pattern of the Vadda people in this village has undergone a major change. Inheritance of property occurs mostly from father to all children or from mother to all children. In the past, they did not own enough land and other property to be divided like this. But nowadays property is distributed equally from parents to children. While paying attention to the wedding customs, the common Sinhalese people consider the wedding as a very important occasion, but they do not consider it as a very important festival. In the past, this is known as taking support and it has meant a young man taking a young woman for his support. Another synonym related to this is to bloom in the Veda's society. A brother-in-law inheriting his sister-in-law is a traditional custom that has been going on for a long time. In the past, the marriages of the Vedda people took place only between the same caste. No facts about divorce can be identified from the literature source. It is a clear fact that all the customs of the past have disappeared nowadays. It appears that caste is not considered during marriage and there are more marriages based on other relationships besides sister-in-law marriages. Marriage is done on the basis of love relationships and they pay more attention to the legal side. But they don't do big weddings. Only those who have a lot of money organize weddings at home and those who don't celebrate it by organizing a small party in a normal way. The gap between weddings in the past and present should be due to lack of money if nothing else. When asked about kinship, they say that now they do not have the space to have kinship relations as much as in the past. They are of the opinion that in the past there were about twelve to fifteen members in a family and nowadays nuclear families are mostly seen. In the past there were close family bonds, but now those bonds are distant. Parents are left alone as children leave the village. It is special that mostly nuclear families were found here. However, they still give high value to kinship relationships.

### *Language*

The Vedda people had a unique language in the past. At present Vedda's language is not spoken even by Vedda people. It is totally rejected by the youth. Language is one of the main characteristics that reflect the identity of a society. The current Vedda people's rejection of their language has negated their identity. Without a language, there is no culture. Those characteristics were very clearly seen in this community. The difference between the language they used in the past and the language they use today can be stated as follows.

Table 01: Language difference between past and present

The word	Used in the past (vedda's language)	Using now a days
Father	<i>appileththo</i>	<i>Thaththa</i>
Mother	<i>Ammileththo</i>	<i>Amma</i>
Person	<i>Minigajju</i>	<i>Minihaa</i>
Aunty	<i>Nendileththo</i>	<i>Nendha</i>
Uncle	<i>Mamileththo</i>	<i>Mama</i>
Boy	<i>Hūra</i>	<i>Kolla</i>

Girl	<i>Hūri</i>	<i>Kella</i>
Lord Buddha	<i>Muddala aththo</i>	<i>Budhun</i>
Him/her self (me)	<i>Me aththo</i>	<i>Mama</i>

## Conclusion

The vedda people living in a country should be studied and protected because they are the main living factor in the search for information about the country's past. In this research conducted on the basis of human factors, very important information could be provided about this society and culture. With the changes in the global economy, no population group in the world has been able to protect its identity in isolation. Like many primitive societies of the world, the Sri Lankan Vedda people have also had to face that reality. The main factor that has affected it is the loss of their native land or their displacement from their native land to another land. At present, the people of Hennanigala have come under the cultural grip of Sinhala great society in every way. They no longer have the need to pretend to be Veddas. Having lost their native land, they have to face a life struggle. To get rid of it, they have turned to farming and fishing, and migration to cities in search of work is also increasing.

However, it is evident from the fact that there is no one working abroad in the field of study that they do not want to leave their motherland and go abroad. The older generation is interested in doing government jobs and directing the younger generation to further education. The Vedda people today have undergone a great change in terms of clothing, customs, language and religion. Unlike in the past, nowadays people wear skirts, hats, gowns and pants. Mobile phones as well as televisions, radios, motorcycles, etc. have come into their use nowadays. Lost in the use of the ax and cleaver. The culture of marrying outside one's caste has been turned upside down. Some of the Vedda people who learned to dance and sing have preserved these cultural elements till today with great effort.

Children of this culture are aware of the world around them. Due to the education they receive from school, they are accustomed to a good behavior. Even though in the past they used to do medical work for diseases etc., nowadays they get the services of government hospitals. Due to getting rid of the traditional food pattern and following the distorted food pattern in modern times, the number of people suffering from diseases like diabetes is huge. This situation continues to change due to factors such as constant mixing with the Sinhalese people, measures taken by the government to civilize the Veddas, the spread of Christian missionary religions, road construction, and development activities. On the whole, it can be concluded that Vedda's society is also becoming multicultural by submitting to the general principle of change.

In the past, Veddas culture has been widespread in Sri Lanka as a great culture. But due to the above-discussed facts, artistically, that great culture has transformed into a sub-culture. At present, it can be concluded that the existing sub-cultural characteristics are gradually fading away.

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