
The 'Veddas' in Sri Lanka: Cultural Heritage and Challenges

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Abstract: *The Vedda are aboriginal people and real inhabitant in Sri Lanka, before the advent of the Aryans. The culture and traditional way of life of the Veddhas has unique characters and distinct identity historically. The first inhabitants of this island are the Vedda who established their settlement in different parts of the countries covering Uva, North Central, Eastern and Sabaragamuwa Provinces of Sri Lanka. This article mainly studied about the Vedda living in Dambana, Mahiyangana of the Uva Province, Anuradhapura Vedda and the Coastal Vedda of the Eastern Province. Basically, this is qualitative study which used secondary materials as key data sources to interpret the findings. The major aspects of the Vedda's culture like; arts, social organization, medicine, music, language, clothing, family, inheritance, division of labor, housing, religion, and spiritual customs including death and cult as well as significant changes of their culture were described in this study. Further, the land fragmentation, relocation, drinking water scarcity, lack of educational facilities, livelihood issues, poor health and malnutrition, interaction with wildlife and law, and issues of modernization have also been discussed and presented as the key challenges faced by the Veddhas in Sri Lanka. Even though the Veddhas is an indigenous community and heritage of the country, they stressed with numerous challenges to ensure their survival and existence for years, even the decades.*

Keywords: Veddhas, Indigenous Culture, Heritage, Modernity, Settlement, Sri Lanka, Distribution

Introduction

Tribal communities live every part of the world. Almost, 476.6 million of tribes live in 90 countries globally, belonging to 5000 various groups, however 70% of indigenous people live in Asia and the Pacific, followed by in Africa 16.3%, in Latin America and Caribbean 11.5%, and in Central Asia and Europe 0.1% respectively (International Labor Organization; cited in Cultural Survival, 2018). Sri Lanka is a plural society which comprises Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities with their own traditions and historical backgrounds. Conversely, the indigenous communities live with difficult situation to assimilate with larger communities due to various factors (Uthayakumar, 2015).

The one indigenous community in Sri Lanka called 'Veddas' or 'Wanniya-laeththo' (forest-inhabitants), have inhabited in the monsoon dry forestry for more than 16,000 years longer history. The *Veddas* are the original community group in Sri Lanka, but they were not influenced the country, subsequently the Indian migrants were established their settlement in Sri Lanka 2500 years later than *Veddas*. The *Veddas* have their own unique inheritance and call themselves as 'Wanniyaaleththo', it denotes 'those of the forest'. The word 'Vedda' comes from 'Vyadda' of Sanskrit language (meaning: the hunter with bow and arrow) (Figure 1). In fact, the term 'Vedda' bestowed by the Sinhalese neighbors to the aboriginal community (Deraniyagala, 1992).



Figure 1: A Veddha Hunter with Bow and Arrow



Figure 2: A Group of East Coast Veddhas (Muhudu Vedda)

The Veddha people in Sri Lanka usually considered as native community of the island. The *Veddhas* has close association with south Asian and Western Eurasian people. According to the study on 'Crania' conducted in 2012, illustrates that Veddha people who have very close link with South Asian people namely; other Sri Lankan, South Indian and Punjabis (it is categorized based on Caucasoid kinships), but different from Andaman islanders. Raghavan *et.al.* (2013) evidenced the close association of *Veddhas* with other communities (Sinhala and Tamil) in Sri Lanka and some tribes in India, and also they have very close relations with South Asian people and contemporary modern communities of North Africa, Middle East and Europe. Raghavan *et.al* also noted the relations among South Asian (including *Veddhas*) and Andamanese crania which classified as Austro-Melanesians (Raghavan *et.al.* 2013).

Veddhas of Sri Lanka were formerly hunters and gathers. They are normally using bows and arrows for hunting, harpoons and lethal plants for fishing, and use this techniques for gathering wild plant, honey, yams, fruit and nuts (Cultural Survival, 2018 and Cultural Survival of Sri Lanka, 1994). Most of the *Veddhas* are farmers who always use the slash and burn or swidden cultivation (natural vegetation), it calls 'Hena' in Sri

Lanka. The Veddas of Eastern Coastal region in Sri Lanka are fishermen who frequently involve with sea fishing. Veddas kill animals merely for preparing food, and they do not kill young animal and or the pregnant animal. The hunting effort also shared within their family and other clans (Vedda, 2020). The Veddas are settled in many places in Sri Lanka. It is important to note that Veddda groups are living in various villages in different provinces (Silva and Punchihewa, 2011). Even though Veddas are minority group, they live belongs to other self-identified instinctive groups namely; 'Coast Vedda', 'Bintenne Veddas' and 'Anuradhapura Veddas' are recognized as aboriginal communities. These Veddas generally named themselves as 'Wanniya-laeththo' (forest dwellers). The other Vedda in the Eastern Province call 'Muhudu Vedda' (Seacoast Vedda), who mostly belong to fishing in the east coast regions of the country (Figure 2). Today most of the Vedda live in Dambana, and the other places exist in some other region of the island (Silva and Punchihewa, 2011).

Table 1: Geographical distribution of Vedda people in Sri Lanka

Province	Place of inhabitant	Indigenous Community
Uva	Mahiyanganaya (Dambana)	Veddas: (Wanniya-laeththo), they are native and heritage of the country. The most of the indigenous Vedda occupied the jungle villages in Dambana region where the leader of Wannya-laeththo lives and other major cultural traditions practiced and preserved here.
Eastern	Batticaloa and Trincomalee	Veddah: (Muhudu Vedda) meaning; Vedda of Seacoast, highly involved in fishing as their main source of income. However, they belong to indigenous status and exercise the traditional hunting and gathering and live in natural places.
Sabaragamuwa	Ratnapura	Veddas: (Wanniya-laeththo) reserved the name Sabaragamuwa, it indicate the place (village) of the Sabaras or 'primitive forest inhabitants'. Such places-named as VEDI-kanda (Vedda Mountain), Vedda-ela (Vedda Canal) and Vedda-gala (Vedda Rock).
North-Central	Anurdhapura	Anurdhapura Vedda are descendant of indigenous community who adopted with religion, language and traditions of Sinhalese in the province. Ethnically they are connected to Coastal Vedda who speak Tamil minority of Norther region. They extend their settlement in neighboring Polonnaruwa and Trincomalee districts.

(Source: Deraniyagala 1992, The Veddahs 2007, Anuradhapura Veddas 2020, Uthayakumar 2015)

This indigenous community live side by side with different geographical locations in Sri Lanka (Table 1). According to sociological and anthropological perspective, it can be defined that Vedda community basically a cultural heritage of the nation and it considers as unique identity of the multicultural society, not only Sri Lankan viewpoint, but also the global outlook. The traditional community mostly willing to live in their original natural places without any disruption or conflict with government other outside factors. The Vedda people of Sri Lanka practicing their cultural traditions (social, spiritual, medical, music, folkdance etc.) as their own way of life, and they willing to ensure their existence or better survival in the suitable settlement. However, as a tribal community, the Vedda of Sri Lanka also face lot of difficulties, challenges and they influenced by the modernization process as well. This paper attempts to examine the culture of Veddas and identify the major challenges that threatened their survival and existence.

Objectives and Methods

The key objective of this paper is to discuss the tradition, culture of Veddas inhabited in Uva (Dammana), Eastern, North-Central and Sabaragamuwa Provinces of Sri Lanka, and to address major issue faced by the Veddas, and cultural changes occurred among Veddas in the country. As it is a basically a qualitative work, the only secondary data were employed to discuss and narrate the cultural practices, changes and challenges faced by the Veddas in Sri Lanka. The Veddas (Wanniya-laeththo) from Dambana settlement in Mahiyanganaya region of Badulla district, and the Vedda (Muhudu Vedda) from Batticaloa and Trincomalee district of the Eastern Province, as well as Anuradhapura Vedda are taken into account, and mainly focused on Dambana and East Coastal Vedda in this study. The previously conducted research reports, published journal articles, project reports, report published by the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), and other organizations, and web sources were gathered to collect many information for this study. This study primarily used the data from socio-anthropological studies for understanding the social, demographic, cultural aspects and lifestyle of Vedda community and to address their different types of challenges. The key result and discussion have been interpreted in a narrative method.

Veddas of Sri Lanka: Previous Studies

Many studies related to Sri Lankan Vedda community have been undertaken by many researchers in various parts of world. James Brow (1990) argues how aboriginal marginalized descent group in Sri Lanka's 'the Veddas' affected due to the internal civil war taken place in the country. The study focused on the ritual structure of Veddas in Anuradhapura (NCP), Sri Lanka, and described particularly the differences between Veddas and Sinhalese, as well as the changing paradigm of political geography of ethnic relations in Anuradhapura district (Brow, 1990).

Sasni Amarasekara (2017) explains the challenges faced by the Veddas after relocation or resettlement from their own native places due to development projects. The study clearly emphasis the Veddas' present situation, cultural heritage and their thought

regarding forcible colonization due to Mahaweli Development Project. Most of the cultural, ritual and ceremonial activities no longer visible in the present settlement areas after many years (Amarasekara, 2017). As a result of government's development projects, the forced colonization and immigration, the Veddas have vanished their unique cultures when relocate from their native areas to new places allocated by the government (Uthayakumar, 2015 and Amarasekara, 2017). Therefore, Veddas simply associate with other cultures (including food, language, dress and lifestyle) belongs to the mainstream communities or any other groups. At present there are only few Wanniya-laeththo still maintain and protect their traditions, cultural identity, and lifestyle, even though many pressure, threat and dominant executed by the other communities (Uthayakumar, 2015).

Roberts, Gillingwater, Lahr, Lee-Thorp, MacCallum, Petraglia, Wedage, Heenbanda and Wainnya-laeththo (2018) have concludes that the idea of tropical forest was not assist longer period of hunting in the absence of agriculture (Roberts et.al. 2018 and Headland and Bailey, 1991), which has been raised from ecological and anthropological perspectives. This hypothetical assumption questioned in 1980s and the early 1990s. However, this study was undertaken on the basis of an Isotopic Perspective to understand about Wanniyalaeto (or Vedda) community in Sri Lanka (Roberts *et.al.* 2018).

Attanapola and Lund (2013) argued that indigenous people have their own identity in relation to nature and wildlife resource, but this cultural identity has been retained under stressed due to development plans, neoliberal politics, and market economy. This situation is forcing tribes to redefine their tradition and identity in the new social, economic and geographical framework. Further argument also made on the challenges faced by the Veddas in Sri Lanka, based on ethnographic field work.

David Blundell (2013) addressed the traditional lifestyle of Veddas in Sri Lanka, and argued that "Veddas are not an aboriginal primitive 'tribe', they are crucial heritage people in the country setting a basis for a plural society in the country" (Blundell, 2008 and 2013). Veddas are people enfolded in the ground of Sinhala and Tamil people from ancient epochs, however from 19th century the Veddas referred as marginal people or isolated group, without acknowledge their significant contribution to national programs (Blundell, 2013).

De Silva and PUNCHIHewa (2011) carried out a '*Socio-Anthropological study on Sri Lankan Vedda People*' which explored varies aspects of Veddas including their settlement, demography, dress, food pattern, dance and arts, family and marriage systems, ceremonies, livelihood, geographical distribution and inhabitant and the challenges faced by the Vedda community due to development initiatives, forced resettlement and the political factors. This study provides very details of Vedda community of Sri Lanka, with the different field experience and surveys done by the researchers. The researchers studied the Veddas who are residing in Dambana, Rathgala, Vakara,

Dimbulagala, Henanigala and Pollbedda regions (in different Provinces: Uva, Eastern and Sabaragamuwa) in Sri Lanka (Silva and Punchihewa, 2011).

There all literatures highly described the historical background, features or characteristic and lifestyle of Veddas, and looked at various issues including resettlement, social, economic and livelihood challenges confronting the Veddas in Sri Lanka. This study has been undertaken to illustrate the Veddas who live in various locations within an island of Sri Lanka. And further, this paper aimed to highlight different types of challenges faced by the indigenous community in Sri Lanka.

Discussion

This part begin with the interpretation of two major groups of Veddas who settled in two different parts of the country. They intentionally identified themselves as indigenous, but they belong to a two different geographical regions where they follow different way of traditions.

Veddas in Dambana

Dambana is a forest area situated in Badulla district (Mahiyanganaya), and it is jungle of Vedda people who popular for eco-tourism prospects. The village located around 300km away from Colombo, the Capital City of Sri Lanka. The estimated Vedda families only about 350 are living at present. The Veddas are highly influenced by the dominant culture, thus they are sing their own culture, tradition and deviating the livelihood what they have been for many centuries. Dambana is the last place for Vedda who show their culture significantly to address their indigenous identity; for instant, their way of lifespan with an axe hanging on their shoulder and a bow slung behind them give more impression and proof that they are warriors of the forest (Arunagirinathan, 2017 and Watching Lanka, 2019).

Veddas in East Coast

Veddas of Eastern Province, habitually termed as 'Muhudu Vedda' or 'Veddas of the sea', those predominantly living in many villages (Vakarai and Mutur) of Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts respectively. They often considered as 'original inhabitants of the soil', this dwellers are having some similarity to the aboriginal Veddas. The term 'Vedda' is usually linked with a bare chested man, carrying weapon on his shoulder with his hair tied his head (The Veddahs, 2007). This common definition does not refer the contemporary Eastern Veddas. They rarely bare similar to the indigenous Lankan. The Eastern Coast Vedda can be attributed to the social, economic and political reinvigoration which has removed around the island. At the same time, many of these Veddas have married into native Tamil families and they have changed their own way of community life.

Therefore, the Eastern Veddas, would identify themselves within this UN definition. The first arrival date of the Eastern seacoast Vedda and their consequent mixed-marriage with Tamils are unclear. According to Seligman, Eastern (coastal) Veddas

have believed that they migrated from the inland. Hugh Neville mentioned that they came to coastal region during 17th century, from Sabaragamuwa (Sufferegam), their native place. Against to this, an academic argument claim that there is not proper evident (date and place) of their first arrival to the east, therefore it can be opinioned that the forefathers of Veddas came to eastern part of the island from a place named 'Gala' (stone). Considering the above opinion, it can be assumed that the Eastern Veddas migrated from Nilgala or Dimbulagala, habitants located close to Polonnaruwa and Batticaloa district (The Veddahs, 2007).

Cultural Heritage of Veddas in Sri Lanka

Prominently, Veddas are hunter gatherers and forestry inhabitants deprived of considerable transformation in their way of life from Stone Age to modern era. Even today onwards they take immense pride in an age-old lifespan of collecting fruits, hunting and worshipping spirits.

Arts: Every Vedda groups produce the artistic expression in the prominent occasions and ritual performances (Figure 3), especially dancing, instrumental music marketing, chanting and the creation of impermanent sanctuaries afford some forms of Arts. Otherwise, the plastic arts are highlighted elsewhere in the separate decorations and creating utensils and artifacts from animal coatings and also involved in cave and rock sketches and make their hunting equipment like arrows, axes, bows and spears (Lakpura, 2020). The Anuradhapura Veddas attain their agrarian utensils in the bazaar and the Coast Veddas are conversely proficient in boat creating.

Social Organization: Generally social affairs are regulated by guidelines of kinship aside from gender and age. Caste also has a part in regulating the communication among Veddas and their Sinhala and Tamil neighbors (Lakpura, 2020).

Ceremonies: The Wanniya-laeththo, Coast, and Bintenne Veddas involve in numerous traditional dances in (Figures 4 and 5) which a particular expert converts to influence by a demon or God (Seligmann and Brenda, 1911). Additional ceremonies, like exorcisms, are planned by separate families. The Eastern Veddas perceive the Hindu festival calendar, however their significant sacraments are locally prearranged, and which are accompanied together by all Vedda villagers.

Medicine: Indigenous community aware with minimum characteristics with Ayurveda medicine, the South Asia's cultural heritage (Brow, 1978). Since the medical knowledge of the Vedda is limited, they practice herbal combinations to regulate the stability of comedies in the physique and nearly all disease was preserved by sacramental ceremonials. The rituals such as *Guru Kam*, *Thovil*, *Shanthi Karma* and *Yadini* are deliberated as features of customary medicine which connected with producing auditory surfs to operate the prediction, cosmic energy and supernatural forces for the advantages of the humans (Silva and Punchihewa, 2011). Further, pythonesa oil (*pimbura thel*) a native medication which practice for healing injuries and demonstrated

effective in the cure of cuts and profound fractures. Nowadays, Veddas aware about free medicines (provided by the government), attracted on technology and other inventions, which highly influenced them. For example, *Paracetamol* and prescribed drug are used by the Veddas.



Figure 3: Ritual Performance Place of Veddas



Figure 4: Veddas Performing Traditional Spiritual Dance



Figure 5: Veddas Performing Traditional Dance in Dambana Village



Figure 6: Settlement, Life, Faith and Economic Activities of Veddas

Music: Ancient Vedda song and dance are still passed and practiced by the younger generations. They have a close connection with nature and their ritualistic songs. The most common ballets and dances of the Veddas are accomplished through *Hathme Shanthi Karma and Kiri Koraha*. On the other hand, there are not several individuals who could sing old-style folk melodies, nonetheless the widespread claim shaped by the external biosphere, those are still vocal by older or senior Vedda (Lakpura, 2020).

Language: Vedda language is the original language of Veddas and they used this language during hunting and religious chants. Sinhala communicating Veddas are established predominantly in the Southern portion of the Sri Lanka and Coast Veddas have adopted Tamil language (Brow, 1978). Anyhow, increased interaction and modernization resulted for disuse of indigenous local language of Veddas.

Clothing: Historians and anthropologists have portrayed the Veddas as indigenous people who have long beard, hair and kept their upper body naked. But now their dressing pattern and the appearance have changed immensely with the past few decades. Men wear contained merely a garment adjourned with a rope at the belly, while women wear consisted a piece of material which prolonged from the navel to the knees. Nowadays, the adaptation of the Sinhala way of dressing, clothing of Vedda is covering. Men dress short sarong prolonging from the waist to the knees, though the womenfolk dressed themselves in a costume alike to the Sinhala *diya-redda* which covers from the breast line to the knees. But, during the hunting and fishing in the forests they wear sarong which naked from the waist-up and axe slung over the shoulder. Deeper in the jungle some of the Vedda communities wear traditional simple fiber coverings.

Family: Veddas living as nuclear families and infrequently as extended families. As a family unit, togetherness and cooperation was highly valued and they are mostly male headed because of the dominance, responsibility and masculinity. Men and women were treated as equals. In the past period, child birth took place in the domestic that one and the older mothers would support the pregnant mother by labor. Countless ceremonies would be perceived and the child and mother placed on ordinary medications and severe diets in unity with the knowledge they had collected over the eras. A kid would be entitled within a month of delivery, however they entitled the baby by pet names such as *Goraki/Goraka, Thuti/Thuta* till they were toddlers (Kennedy *et.al.*, 1987). Names such as *Sulliyaa, Suwandi, Poramola* and *Pinchi* are part of Vedda culture. Anyway, now Tamil and Sinhala names have create their effect in the names.

Marriage: The Vedda marriage ritual is a very humble concern. If a girl reaches to her parenthood, they considered suitable to wed and monogamy is the general rule and not practice a caste system in the marriage (Lakpura, 2020). They practice classificatory cross-cousin marriage and they called as *Avassa nana* and *Avassa massina*. Amongst the Anuradhapura Veddas almost 15 percent of weddings are among first cross counterparts (Brow, 1978). The ceremonial contains of the bride binding a bark rope

(*diya lanuva*) of her specific twisting, nearby the waist of the bridegroom. This is the spirit of the Vedda wedding and is representative of the bride's approval of the man as her life companion. Recently married pair, live in either in or close to the home of one of their parentages. Divorce is usual in the initial periods of wedding. Widow would habitually wed her husband's brother for the cause of consolation and support (Silva and Punchihewa, 2011).

Inheritance: According to Seligmann and Brenda (1911) children have equivalent privileges of legacy, but amongst the Bintenne Veddas the daughter's legacy, which is typically given to her partner at the period of wedding. Though it is not specially denoted as dowry and dowry is not prominent between the Veddas.

Division of Labor: Agricultural works, particularly in paddy cultivations are carried out by the men. Women collect firewood and wild foods, maintenance of children, cook, and incline the garden in domestic, harvesting paddy and contribution in shifting agriculture. In Coast Veddas, men engage with fishing (Dart, 1985). Anyhow, both male and female Veddas involve in wage employment. Nowadays, youths are migrated to Colombo and other urban areas of the countries and work in production sites and women are in the clothing industry.

Housing Condition: In the past, there were no long-lasting constructions contained by the settlements of the Vedda (Figure 6), however now along with the modernization they construct permanent houses. Apart from those immovable assets, they have movable belongings too such as electronic devises, furniture, torch, chairs, tables, mobile phones and livestock and those usages are becoming popular day by day.

Food: Veddas were initially hunter-gathers and used arrows, hunt and bows to wild plants, honey, nuts, yams and fruits. Men gathered honey which known as *Kadarnige Diyathana*. The initial parts of the year is deliberated to be the period of yams and on the middle of the year fruit and honey are available. The most important natural resource they depend is coconut palm which provide them fruit throughout the year (Kennedy et al. 1987). Nowadays, they are doing *Hena* cultivation. *Kurakkan* also cultivated very frequently and yams, melons, maize and gourds are cultivated by them. At the same time, women collect root vegetables named as *Kobbi*. These were prepared over a fire or heated. Meats were smoked or dried. East Coast Veddas also engage with sea fishing (Dart, 1985).

Religion: The Veddas believe in non-human entities (Animism, it is their original faith) such as animals, inanimate objects, plants and etc (Figure 6). Apart from that, most common characteristic of their faith is they worship the dead descendants who are particularly called as '*nae yaku*' amongst the Sinhala speaking Veddas. Apart from this, there are strange goddesses which distinctive to Veddas and they called as '*Kande Yakka*'. Apart from this, Anuradhapura Veddas define themselves as Buddhists while their contribution in Buddhist ceremonies are occasional (Brow, 1978). The Coast Veddas are mostly subjective by their Hindu Tamil neighbors and they involve in

numerous types of temple devotion connected with Hindu goddesses (Dart, 1985). Anyhow, the prominent god for the Anuradhapura Veddas is *Pulleyar and Kataragama*. For the Coast Veddas they are *Murugan, Pillaiyar, Shiva and Valli*. Although Veddas worship the high god of *Kataragama* and they believe that, Hindu god *Skanda* or *Murugan* in Tamil seen and wedded an indigenous Vedda girl named *Valli* and they know she is from Vedda community. So, it is considered as sacred for the Veddas.

Death: If a death happened, the body is merely enclosed with dry greeneries and left in the hollow and additional inhabitants would travel to a novel habitation. In Vedda interment ceremonies of the dead body was smeared and perfumed with some kind of extract which gained by the lime tree or greeneries of forest plants. The head or foot of the grave was not ever lit with wax or fire and water was not retained in a container by the grave side. Among the East Coast Veddah and Anuradhapura Vedda, the faith and concerning death are formed by Hindu and Buddhist notions of *reincarnation, transmigration of souls and karma* (Kennedy et al. 1987).

Cult: Most of the Vedda have the common faith and trust on cult that will trouble them passing out calamity and disease. They worshiped and create chants to their *Nae Yakka* (relative spirit) and doing additional regular ceremonial which named as *Kiri Koraha* (Somasundara, 2006).

Problems and Challenges of Veddas in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan Veddas, purely an aboriginal inhabitant live for numerous centuries through adjusting and coping with many stress both internally and externally executed on them. As a tribal community, the Veddas are threatened by modernity which is playing crucial role to vanish them as traditional or cultural group. In the recent past, the certain features of cultural practices have nearly been disappeared, the integration of Veddas with other majority ethnic groups like Tamils and Sinhalese has caused of being restricted to minor distributed groups in the Uva, Eastern and NCP in Sri Lanka. The Vedda face lot of stresses over the decades, it needs to be addressed in order to preserve their tradition, culture, and the way of tribal life (Silva and Punchihewa, 2011).

It has been observed by many researchers who said that indigenous people (Vedda) are diminishing, and they have mourned the decline of their own tradition and culture (Spittel, 1950). The government of Sri Lanka imposed restriction for forest reservation, land acquisition for huge agricultural extension and irrigation projects, and the internal conflict and civil war also were interrupted the traditional way of Veddas' lifecycle. The Mahaweli Development Project, period between 1977 and 1983, and the colonization schemes were turned 51,468 hectares land for hydroelectric dam irrigation project (Cultural Survival of Sri Lanka, 1994). The Vedda people represents to compass their cultural manifestation which entails global concern in preserving traditional diversity which is now quickly vanishing. These Veddas (Wanniya-leaththo) use to live continuously in their own ancient heritage world, but they are stressing for having a

community center and a museum for many years in order to dedicate to their existence (Blundell, 2013).

Veddas in Sri Lanka live over the millennia in the forest environment with natural food, shelter, rituals, communication etc. in a simple manner. Even though they are living in isolated areas, they were influenced by external factors from time to time, and Veddas were struggled to enrich their cultural diversity. The government law of prohibiting acquisition of natural resource including forest also has reduced availability of forest resource for food, therefore Veddas were compelled to transform their economic activities from hunting and gathering to nomadic and agricultural practices (Silva and Punchihewa, 2011).

Language is one of the unique cultures of Veddas. The urbanization process also has increased integration and assimilation of Veddas with other majority communities, which caused in disuse their own Vedda traditional language and nomenclature. On the other side, the fragmentation of settlement also was influenced for disuse of their classical Vedda language. The Veddas from Sinhala speaking regions of the country practice a shared dialect of Vedda language which generally seems to have huge influenced by Sinhala language and the Veddas from Eastern practice different dialect which mixed with Tamil language (Silva and Punchihewa, 2011).

After introducing the formal education (schooling) to Vedda in 1940s, they accepted to change their attire and appearance. Many Vedda men neither grow long hair nor have long beard or even moustaches. Most of older women wear the clothes, but the young generation use to wear frocks or skirt and blouse, and trousers in a rare occasion. This modern clothing style is mostly seen among young girls who work in the apparel factories and other sectors in nearest towns. According to the study conducted by De Silva and Punchihewa (2011), they highlighted some key challenges experiencing by the Veddas in Sri Lanka.

Scarcity of Water: The major challenge of Veddas is water scarcity for their survival. It is a common problem among all tribes in Sri Lanka. People may face water crisis during the months from July to September every year where they have to fight for drinking water in their own areas. The water quality is a big challenge among them. Meantime, Veddas are involved in paddy cultivation and chena cultivation due to water scarcity which affect their livelihood.

Adjusting with Jungle Life: The wild elephant's disturbance is a serious issue within every tribal community. Wild-elephants damaged the houses, destroy agricultural produce, and even threaten the life of people. The traditions, food, rituals and lifestyle of Veddas intensely connected with forest, so they compelled to adjust their life with wildlife's.

Interaction with Law: The rituals are performed by the Veddas as cultural heritage, which against the law of land issues that is limiting them to exercise their cultural

practices. This policy adoptions also have not been able to consider the indigenous people. However, on the other hand, many project or development plans implemented in the Veddas regions without integrating tribes, their knowledge, expectation and challenges.

Malnutrition: The malnutrition is one of the major issues especially among children, and lack of basic health condition are also created health problem to the next generation too. The health problem is coupled with educational problem among young generation, who will face many difficulties in future. And the teenage mothers and childhood pregnancy have also been observed in all Vedda places. This issue will led for negative impacts on both present and the future generations.

Education: The Veddas have faced many difficulties to get access in mainstream education, special education, or cultural education. Even though many schools were established for Veddas in their own places or regions, the lack of skilled teachers, the facilities, supervision are insufficient, and they are basically marginalized or backward from competitive education system.

Land Fragmentation: Many development projects like Mahaweli Development Project, Deduru Oya River projects and government implemented livelihood development and agricultural, irrigation extension projects, the Veddas compelled to relocate from their native place to other allocated regions where indigenous community faced lots of problems including social, economic, cultural, traditional as well as livelihood challenges. The main reason for their forcible dislocation is land issue related or natural resource conservation related laws and regulation (Silva and Punchihewa, 2011).

Due to rapid urbanization or in terms of modernization the lifestyle of Vedda has been transformed from traditional to new or moderated culture. The modern Vedda who are roaming across cities and searching an employment opportunity, rather than that of having uncertain life in marginalized forest areas. Exposure of other languages like Sinhala; the dressing pattern; politics of outside jungle, and culture of other outside communities have influenced among Vedda to moderate their life and livelihoods. Presently, the Vedda fighting as precarious (new social group) amongst extinction and survival (Arunagirinathan, 2017). The elders of the Vedda community are still living with their basic identity, but some observers have said the culture of Vedda is disuse and disappearing, and the structure of traditional lifestyle is also declining presently.

Conclusion

As original inhabitant, the Vedda people who live in a syncretistic traditional believes and exercising many things together associated with modern society (Obeysekera, 1982). In Sri Lanka, the Vedda have specific ideology or belief according to nature, and this indigenous knowledge is an asset that sharing cultural heritage to other groups like Sinhala and Tamil communities. The Wanniya-laeththo live as small group within limited natural environment. Historically, they maintain peaceful life without any

conflict or violation against to some other groups (Gunawardena, 1993). The local and international tourism paved the way to the local Vedda to come out from jungle life to village in Dambana. However, the Vedda in Dambana live in the ancient heritage place, and they struggle to obtain necessary facilities. On the other hand, the Vedda of East Coast are recognized as an indigenous community, but is purely theoretical matter (The Veddahs, 2007). The culture and traditions of native Vedda in Sri Lanka has been influenced by various factors and their own lifestyle and traditional practices also have been rapidly changed. Because they moderated their most of the livelihood and other cultural practices day by day as a result of the influence of other dominant culture, development policies and resettlement issues and so on. As indigenous community, Sri Lankan Vedda also face some challenges and difficulties from outsiders. Thus, the respective authorities should take necessary action to safeguard the indigenous people from any conflict or threats. The development projects also should consider the culture and traditional lifestyle of indigenous community for ensuring preservation of their survival and existence. The preservation of Veddahs heritage is recognized as national and global context. Therefore, the government and other non-governmental organization prepare a policy frame for safeguard indigenous people and preserve the cultural heritage of the country.

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