

# **Impact of 'Modern Development' on Socio-cultural Life of Vedda Community: A Socio-anthropological Analysis**

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Veddas of Sri Lanka, an aboriginal group, have survived for several millennia through adapting and coping with external stresses imposed on them. They were inhabiting the island long before the arrival of Aryans and had spread all over the island but later confined themselves only to Vedi rata or Maha Vedi rata consisting of areas from Hunnasgiriya hills and lowlands up to the sea in the East.

Currently they are as a community facing stresses that threaten to modernize them which could easily result in their vanishing as a cultural group. While certain aspects of the Vedda culture, such as using the language, and the bow and arrow in hunting have 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 Provinces of the country. Veddas over the years under many stresses have reached their present state where there is a need to preserve their way of life, cultural aspects and their traditional homelands. Like Veddas, there are other cultural groups (e.g., Rodiyas, Gypsies, Burgher, Malay, Chatty, Bharatha and Kaffir), who have been struggling to preserve their 'traditional lifestyles' amidst the 'modern development' discourses and cultural encroachment of hegemonic Sinahala, Tamil and Muslim communities of the country as well as the process of globalization.

It is against this backdrop that my presentation will focus on the current status of the Vedda community, particularly their socio-cultural life. The study was based on qualitative interactive interviews, collecting life histories and field observation, supplemented by a questionnaire based survey covering 1327 Vedda households. Cultural aspects of the Veddas are analyzed with qualitative and quantitative analysis on the nature of use and disuse of cultural activities such as hunting and food gathering, religion, customs, traditional medicine, language skill and social organization. The findings on the socio-cultural aspects are a mixed bag that includes optimistic and pessimistic views on possible interventions. However, unless speedy holistic action is taken, there is always a chance for the Vedda as a community to become only an episode in history within a generation or two.

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