



## **Discursive Socio-cultural Identity: A Study of Cultural Discourse Trajectories in Shaping the Socio-Cultural Identity of Veddas in Sri Lanka**

Rohan Thimbiripola, Matara Regional Centre, The Open University of Sri Lanka,

[rohan\\_galle@yahoo.com](mailto:rohan_galle@yahoo.com)

Suranjith Gunasekara, Department of Sociology, University of Ruhuna,

[suranjith@soci.ruh.ac.lk](mailto:suranjith@soci.ruh.ac.lk)

### **Abstract**

It is a globally accepted phenomenon that different ethnic, racial and religious groups form abstract social strata in all the societies in the world. The differences in social strata are seen through different lenses such as ethnocentrism, xenocentrism, cultural relativism, etc. Though human civilization has kept less weight on ethnicity, especially with the expansion of liberal ideology in the 20th century, the class distinction is getting thicker day by day due to the unequal distribution of global capital. As class is an achieved status, the racial notion of cultural identity creates a parallel stratum based on the ethnic identity with a hierarchy in the vertical social strata. This compels the high-level racial notion in the parallel strata to look at out-groups through an ethnocentric lens. The Vedda people in Sri Lanka were considered as a distinct ethnic group until 1971- But thereafter they have not been identified as so. Once the distinct cultural identity is diluted, the identity becomes discursive. As society transforms within the modernization process, cultural discourses help shape the cultural identities owing to cultural lag or cultural lead. The shaping of the cultural identity of Vedda people in Sri Lanka is not owing to the gradual transformation of their culture but a creation to cater the western interests. Consequently, the Vedda peoples' cultural identity has been hyper-realized with 'savage' & 'barbaric' notions. Nevertheless, some cultural discourses claim a 'noble barbaric' notion. However, the 'savage' and 'barbaric' notions have

overshadowed the “noble barbaric’ notion, thus creating an inferior cultural identity for the Vedda people. The purpose of this documentary research was to explore whether the perceptions created by the cultural discourses have made the socio-cultural identity of Vedda people discursive. The objective of this study is to understand how the discourses created can shape the small groups’ socio-cultural identities. This paper is based on secondary sources of data and the data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis method. The themes infer that Vedda people in Sri Lanka are entrenched in a hyperrealistisc hybrid cultural identity as a result of discursive links descried in cultural discourses.

**Keywords:** *Barbaric, Cultural Identity, Discourse, Discursive, Hyper Realty, Vedda People, Savage*

## **Introduction**

Fairclough and Wodak (as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009) outline that discourse constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of people and groups of people while the relationships created by this frame help sustain and reproduce social status-quo, and transform it. The ideologies generated by the discourses are instrumental in producing and reproducing unequal power relations between social classes, ethnic and cultural domination and subordination (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009). For Foucault (1997) it is through discourse that we are created and that discourse joins with power and knowledge, and its power flows from our causal acceptance of the reality with which we are presented. “Discourse as a social construct, is created and perpetuated by those who have the power and means of communication” (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2012, p.24). An ethnographic study of public discourse in Hong Kong, which shows that within any discourse there are specific discourse identities, which are expected to be taken up by the participants in the discourse. Scollon & Scollon (as cited in Scollon, 1996) argue that those discourse identities are not the same as the social identities of the persons who are in the discourse within any cultural group or discourse system. Ron Scollon (1996) defines discourse identity as:

Discourse identity is the persona along with the degree or range of power a particular person can claim in a specific discourse. It consists of the range of production/reception format

roles intersecting with the social-interactive roles over which one has the power, right, or obligation to enact in particular discourse. (Scollon, 1996, p.7)

This identity created in a discourse is always in conflict with the cultural identity because the discourse identity of a group or nation is created by the people who have power and disseminated via books, media, etc. The identity of a cultural group created in a discourse can place the group's cultural identity at a higher level or a power level. In other words, discourse identities are not relative but hierarchical. Friedman (1994) argues that, the strengthening of cultural identity makes the ethnicity distinct and is closely related to how the individual identities of that particular cultural group are constituted. Cultural identities are the distinct identities of people or groups in a culture or subcultural categories and social groups. The categories that make up cultural identities include sexuality, gender, religion, social class, or geographical region. A scholarly definition for cultural identity is; "Cultural identity is the generic concept referring to the attribution of a set of qualities of a given population." (Friedman, 1994, p.29). According to this definition, it is assumed that cultural identity is the experiences pursued by the individuals and known as 'ethnicity', which is an ascribed notion.

According to Friedman (1994), 'Hellenism' the cultural expansionism of the western imperialism has influenced the culture and identity of many nations and social groups in the world. Consequently, through a strong network of Greek colonies influenced other local cultural identities by implanting the language, religion and legal codes of Greek culture. However, the African churches have not been assimilated into the Greek culture instead; the African culture has assimilated Christianity. The imperialist expansionism used several cultural strategies in diffusing their culture from the centre to periphery of the global system. Reducing the 'ethnicity' to 'caste' through which the cultural specificity is transformed into relative purity and assimilation of small cultural groups into the market by the imperialist commercial systems can be identified as two main strategies. In addition, the creation of a situation in which the ethnic categories cannot function as categories in the social structure in which the social position has to be ascribed not through ethnicity but economically and politically (Friedman, 1994). The cultural identity of indigenous people in Sri Lanka bears a blurred notion based on the discourses created by the western writers and scholars that has been carried forward by curriculum of the formal primary education and by the general public as well. The notion is that the indigenous peoples have a relational

cultural identity, which is placed at a lower level. The origin of the word 'Vedda' is believed to be stemmed of Sanskrit word vyadha, which means someone who pierces or wounds an animal or a creature. In other words the 'hunter' (Brow, 2011). However, Robert Knox's identification of Vedda was mainly based on his knowledge on European notion of 'Wild Man' and he further categorizes 'Vedda' people as 'wild' and 'tame' (Knox, 2006). It is questionable whether Robert Knox had ever seen any Vedda during his captivity. However, Tylor (1896) in his book, 'Anthropology' says:

In the forests of Ceylon are found the only people in the world leading a savage life who speak an Aryan language akin to ours. These are the Veddas or 'hunters,' shy wild men who build bough huts, and live on game and wild honey.(Tylor, 1896,p.164).

In this backdrop, this documentary research explores whether the perceptions created by the cultural discourses have made the socio-cultural identity of indigenous people discursive. The research problem was; the Vedda people are struggling to create a distinct socio-cultural identity against the entrenched discursive socio-cultural identity created by the cultural discourses. The research questions were; How have the writers of colonial time described indigenous peoples' cultural aspects?, How have the post-colonial era writers interpreted the descriptions of indigenous people written in colonial time?, and what are the elements helped create the cultural identity of the indigenous peoples in Sri Lanka by the cultural discourses? The research objective is to understand how the discourses created can shape the small groups' socio-cultural identities.

### **Problem Statement**

According to Tylor (1896), the general categorization of human life is put under three stages namely; savage, barbaric and civilized. The definitions of these three terms are "The lowest or savage state is that in which man subsists on wild plants and animals, neither tilling the soil nor domesticating creatures for his food" (Tylor, 1896, p.24). "Men may be considered to have risen into the next or barbaric state when they take to agriculture" (Tylor, 1896, p.24). "Civilized life may be taken as beginning with the art of writing, which by recording history, law, knowledge, and religion for the service of ages to come, binds together the past and the future in an unbroken chain of intellectual and moral progress" (Tylor, 1896, p.24). Tylor (1896) claims that the 'only savage people' living in the world are in Sri Lanka, then Ceylon

and they are called as 'Veddass' or 'hunters'. With this the status of 'Veddass' has been placed at 'savage' level which is the lowest level of human living. Consequently, the term 'Vedda' to identify present Vedda people in Sri Lanka is not being used. At present, they are addressed as 'indigenous' people of Sri Lanka and their current leader as 'Wannilaththo' which itself rejects the ascribed socio-cultural identity of the indigenous people in Sri Lanka as 'Veddha.'

The socio-psychological infrastructure regarding the socio-cultural identity imbedded in the term 'Veddha' is savage, wild, and barbaric. Regarding Sri Lankan indigenous people, John Bailey (1863) states that "Indeed, so difficult is it to elicit anything from people in such a state of barbarism." (Bailey 1863, p.279). More than two hundred years ago Robert Knox in his book 'An Historical Relation of Ceylon' (1681) without any hesitation states that "Of these Natives there be two sorts, wild and Tame." , "The tamer sort of these men are in a kind of Subjection to the king"(Knox, 2006, p.195). The wild men live on hunting and gathering making the thick woods as their habitat. On the contrary, he says, "they speak the Chingulayes Language." (Knox, 2006, p.195). The term 'Veddha' simply means the 'hunter.' and it doesn't denote any race or ethnic group. As the term is related to an occupation, one can argue that it is a 'cast' which prevailed in Sri Lanka as a key social strata. Since caste is an ascribed status by birth, one cannot erase that from the personal identity. As people get more and more educated and socialized the caste factor is overshadowed in this modern society but some are still maintaining it to pursue a distinct cultural identity in establishing in-group social interactions. Many Veddhas have now changed their names to hide their cultural identity and have adopted Sinhala socio-cultural identity to find employment and higher social status. Rathnayake (2022), states, that many Sinhalese people considered them backward and uncultured, and have changed their names to hide their Vedda heritage and their Language too has been evolved. The inferred message from these statements is that the socio-cultural identity of the Veddha community has been made relative and inferior. Thus, they want to hide their socio-cultural identity and go beyond to adopt Sinhalese material culture, achieving a hybrid socio-cultural identity in order for their survival in this modern society. The primary education in Sri Lanka provides a space to make the students aware of other cultures. The Teacher Guides (TG) supplied by the National Institute of Education (NIE) for grades three, four and five give instructions under the theme 'Api Lak Wasio' as to how the students should learn to respect and protect other cultures in Sri Lanka. However only in grade five, the 'Vedda people' in Sri Lanka has been introduced (Teacher Guide Grade 5, 2018). The primary teachers use unauthentic resources to teach about the Vedda

culture and their cultural identity. All these are mainly based on the cultural discourses created by the early writers. It was observed that perception given to the students regarding the Vedda people in Sri Lanka is a relative and inferior cultural identity. The above literature and the observations infer a phenomenon that still the cultural discourses created by the early writers have an impact on the perception of the socio-cultural identity of the Vedda people in Sri Lanka. In this backdrop, this research study explores whether the perceptions created by the cultural discourses have made the socio-cultural identity of Vedda people discursive, which derived from the research problem, the indigenous people, are struggling to create a distinct socio-cultural identity against the entrenched discursive socio-cultural identity created by the cultural discourses. The rationale of the study is that how a discourse, a flow of knowledge with power over time can create perceptions among general public would help make cultural identities either hierarchical or relative.

### **Materials and Methods**

This study is of constructivist epistemological philosophy based on secondary data derived from five renowned books and two journal articles written on the Vedda people in Sri Lanka. The relevant books are: 'An Historical Relation of Ceylon,' Robert Knox (2006); 'Ancient Ceylon,' Henry Parker (2012); 'The Veddahs,' Seligmann & Seligmann (1969); 'Vedda Villages of Anuradhapura, The Historical Anthropology of a Community in Sri Lanka,' James Brow (2011); 'The Creation of the Hunter', Gananath Obeyesekere (2022). The two journal articles used for the study are 'An Account of the Wild Tribes of the Veddahs of Ceylon: their Habits, Customs, and Superstitious,' Johan Bailey (1681) and 'The leaf –Clad Vedda, An European contribution to Sri Lankan folk-lore,' Paul Streumer (1997). The rationale for selecting the books and the journals is that the researchers had an understanding of the books that could be reviewed to obtain the best and quality data for this study. The qualitative data extracted from the literature were analyzed using the inductive approach of the thematic analysis. According to Clarke & Braun (2016), the thematic analysis is a method for analyzing and finding patterns underline in a set of qualitative data and interpreting them and developing 'themes' that captures the research problem under study. Thematic analysis is very flexible in terms of theory, research question, the sample size and constitution. Data collection method and approaches to theme generation can be used for both inductive and deductive analysis as well (Clarke & Braun, 2016). The theoretical underpinning was ethnocentrism, and the philosophical stance was constructivism. The qualitative secondary data were

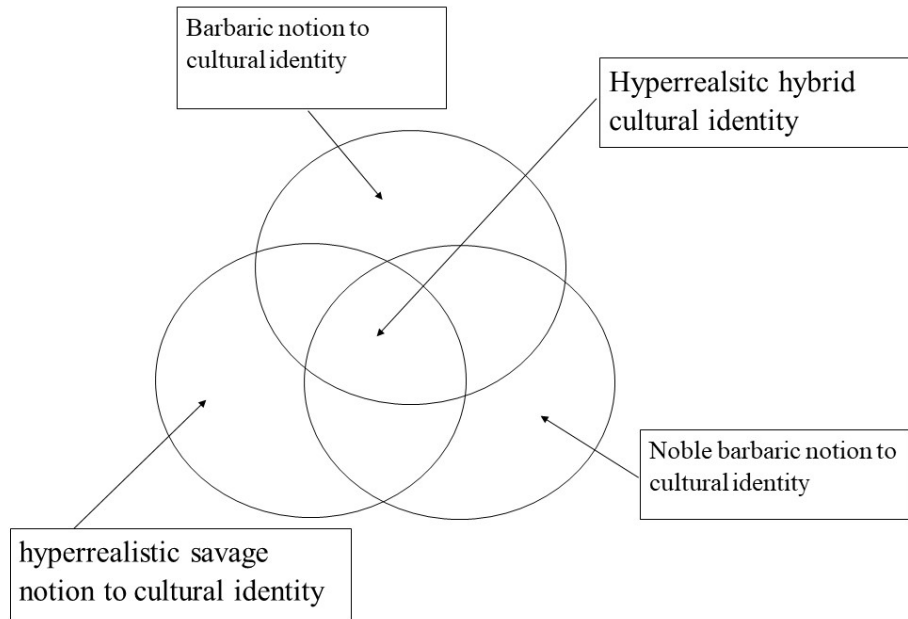
analyzed and themes generated within the cultural discourses were derived. The intensities of the themes generated were not analyzed, as it was not applicable in dissemination of knowledge through discourses. Then the themes were triangulated to infer the dominant cultural identity of the indigenous peoples in Sri Lanka within the cultural discourses. The typical way in using secondary data for research is to formulate the research problem first and look for the data that could give meaning to the research questions. However, an alternative method is also there to collect the data first and formulate the research questions that data may give answer to (Boslaugh, 2007). In this research study, the researchers adopted the former.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Analysis**

There were sixty-three duplicating sheets of qualitative data from seven related secondary sources. The coding of the data was done by applying 'lumper' method with In-Vivo, Descriptive and Holistic coding techniques (Saldana, 2013). "Coding in most qualitative studies is a solitary act-the 'lone ethnographer' intimately at work with her data" (Galman, 2007, cited in Saldana, 2013, p.34). A code is a gist of important facts of a part of writing or a visual data (Saldana, 2013). The total codes generated from the secondary qualitative data were three hundred and fifty-three and those were tabulated under three categories namely; Identity in nature, identity in nature and culture and, hyperrealistic socio-psychological context. When the codes under these categories were analyzed, the 'barbaric notion to cultural identity' 'noble barbaric notion to cultural identity' and 'hyperrealistic savage notion to cultural identity' were emerged as themes. Then the themes were triangulated and it was inferred that as shown in Figure 1, the 'hyperrealistic hybrid cultural identity' underpins the socio-cultural outlook of the Vedda people in Sri Lanka.

Figure 1



(Source: Authors' creation, 2022)

## Thematic Analysis

### Barbaric Notion to Cultural Identity

As Neilson (1999) mentions that a category of enlightenment 'universal history' places barbarism in between primitivism and civilization along temporal-historical sequencing. This idea has been discussed in a context where the barbarous societies have been transforming from hunting and gathering economy of primitivism into institutions in a society (Neilson, 1999). Kante (n.d.), states that barbarism is accompanied with hell of evils and violence that would cause devastative conditions even to a most civilized society and turn it into a "state of lawless freedom" (Kante, n.d., p.48). The general meaning of 'barbarous' as mentioned in the Little Oxford Dictionary is 'uncivilized, cruel' (Little Oxford Dictionary, 6th ed., 1986). When a group of people live on wild plants and animal, without tilling the soil for agriculture and not engaging in pastoral farming, they are identified as being in the



'savage' status which is the lowest stage of a human way of living. The next is the 'barbaric' stage, which is a better status of living based on agriculture and pastoral farming (Tylor, 1896). The cultural identity of a person or a group constitutes factors that are ascribed at birth and later achieved as a person living in a group. The ascribed elements are the race, gender, religion, language, locality etc. while education, skills, beliefs being the achieved elements. According to Wilson (n.d.), the combination of all these ascribed and achieved elements creates one's cultural identity. Question arises why cultural identity is so important for person or a group. Our cultural identity always influences our social interactions and people interpret those interactions based on one's cultural identity. It gives a sense of belonging to a group or a nation (Wilson, n.d.). In addition to this, the cultural identity helps place individuals or groups in the social strata either hierarchically or relatively. The cultural discourses created by the early writers on Vedda people in Sri Lanka have embedded a barbaric notion to the cultural identity of those people. The first categorization of indigenous peoples in Sri Lanka was "of the natives there be two sorts, wild and Tame" (Knox, 2006, p.195). Knox had never met the so called 'wild' sort, but has mentioned "many of these habitations we saw when we fled through the woods, but God be praised the Veddas were gone"(Knox, 2006,p.195). The notion of 'wild' means; in the natural state, not domesticated, uncivilized, out of control, violently excited or agitated (Little Oxford Dictionary, 6th ed., 1986). The social class of Sri Lankan Veddas in the global indigenous community has been described like this; "At best the possibility of placing Vaddas on a level with the Andamanese and the Australians, whilst, according to present facts, they must be placed decidedly lower" (Parker 2012, p. 103). This clearly shows that among global indigenous people the Sri Lankan Vedda people have been considered as a very low status group. This could have influenced the inference of the cultural identity of Veddas in Sri Lanka. the cultural identity of Vedda people has been described, as "indeed, so difficult is to elicit anything from people in such a state of barbarism" (Bailey, 1681, p.279). The word 'barbarism' comes to Vedda peoples' cultural identity for the first time. From this onwards, the notion of 'barbaric' intensifies the notion of 'wild' already attached to the cultural identity of the Vedda people. Furthermore, emphasis is given on the lower status by stating, "It would be difficult to conceive more barbarous types of the human race than they present" (Bailey, 1681, p.281). This raises a notion as if the Vedda people in Sri Lanka are the worst tribe compared to other indigenous tribes in the globe. When considering these knowledge discourses, it is apparent how the barbaric notion to the cultural identity of indigenous

peoples has been embedded during the colonial time. To establish this barbaric notion Streumer (1997) states as “But even the plaited leaves suggested in the early nineteenth century are far from the present day images of Veddas-of-old wearing generous bunches of branches. This imagery is an import from India via Germany and locally manufactured by the Swiss brothers Sarasin in 1885” (pp. 61-62). This statement of Streumer (1997) suggests that Sarasin brothers have instrumental in implanting the leaf clothing to the cultural identity of the Vedda people in Sri Lanka, which helps visualize Vedda people as barbaric.

### **Noble Barbaric Notion to Cultural Identity**

“By natural, I mean not that which a man hath from his birth: for that is nothing else but sense; wherein men differ so little one from another and from brute beasts” (Hobbes, 1651, p.53). This infers that man naturally intends to attack and fight which is a barbaric act. As Hobbes (1651) says, it is common to everyman in natural environment to be barbaric. Thus, the barbaric acts of indigenous peoples in Sri Lanka is no strange phenomenon as they inhabit the forests where wild beasts are the only living creatures interact with them. This interaction has been described as “savage man living dispersed among other animals, and finding himself betimes in a situation to measure his strength with theirs, soon comes to compare himself with them more in adroitness than they surpass him in strength.” (Rousseau, 1754, p. 11). Furthermore Rousseau (1754) argues that the distinction between ‘wilderness’ and ‘civilization’ as ‘Noble Savage’ and through this lens the Europeans define the new global society. The asserted meaning to ‘Noble Savage’ is that the nobility and purity is the basis of happiness and virtue of the ‘original man’ while describing the modern society man as avaricious, disingenuous, and ‘degenerate.’ (Clifford, 2001). However, the ‘Noble Barbaric’ theme doesn’t denote the ‘Noble Savage’ notion. ‘Noble Barbaric’ theme infers the noble blood link attached to the Vedda people in Sri Lanka. James Brow (2011) argues that the Anuradhapura district Veddas have a connection to the Knig Vijaya and the Kuwani. Obeyesekere (2022) too, has argued that there is royal link to Veddas, thus mentioning “her two children fled to the hills near the fastnesses of the God Saman and it is from them, it is said, that the Veddas were descended”(p.69). A prince called Bandara and the group who were considered as migrants from India have turned Veddas during the great famine and became hunters. Thus, it is believed that present day Vedda people have a Royal link considering as the descendants of the Bandara prince ( Obeyesekere , 2022). The Vedda people had engaged in supplying and taking care of tuskers for the king. This had been a

main cause for Vedda people to achieve noble status. One such instance is that Vendakaduva Vanakesara Gajanada, a prominent Vedda, was offered the title 'Tri Sinahala Kirti Raja Vanniya' for holding two tuskers at a ceremony ( Obeyesekere , 2022). This infers that the Veddas were serving the kings and they were given noble status as well. As Obeyesekere (2022) mentions that, a sub-king Buwanekabahu had ceremonially welcomed Vedda chiefs in the octagon in Sitavaka.. Referring to Lawrie, Obeyesekere (2022) brings forth another argument that a Vedda king of Opalgala married the daughter of a Sinhala king the Vira Parakrama Bahu. This statement shows that there were local Vedda kings as well. The material culture like homes in the forests, objects that are derived from nature and the customs of all the barbarous races have a close resemblance. Thus, inducing this notion to the Vedda people in Sri Lanka too have made their cultural identity barbaric (Bailey, 1681). Moreover, the Veddas' link to the royal line has been mentioned as "Veddas are not the 'mere remnants of the untrained aborigines,' but the descendants of the ill-fated Kuweni and the faithless Vijaya ; that they are indeed, as they profess themselves, 'the descendants' of kings'(Bailey, 1681, p.312). Kivulegedara who belongs to a royal line was a Vedda but considered as a Sinhala hero who resisted the British rule ( Obeyesekere , 2022).

### **Hyperealistic Savage Notion to Cultural Identity**

People are always confused with the reality filled with illusion and blended reality. As claimed by Jean Baudrillard (1983), hyperreality is when the consciousness fails to distinguish reality from a simulation. In other words, the exaggeration and falsification of the reality by media, texts, images and films. These simulations are called 'hyperreality' (Tramboo & Anthony, 2020). Hyperreality is there in all the fields of human culture. It is visible in art, literature, politics economics, beliefs and customs, films etc. Thus, it can be said that hyperreality is visible in all the elements of any culture. Consequently, these simulations are believed by the people and they never consider those as fake. Those attract people and they consider these simulations as real and original (Tramboo & Anthony, 2020). The secondary data revealed that some cultural discourses have described the Vedda peoples' way of living in a savage or wild status. It is apparent that the writers have been searching the 'savage' Vedda through 'wild' Vedda. Robert Knox (2006) mentions that "many of these inhabitants we saw when we fled through the woods, but God be praised the Veddas were gone" (p.195). This suggests that although the writer had painted a picture of the Veddas, he had never met 'Wild, Veddas. Then Seligmann and Seligmann (1969) state that

“there are no real Veddas left” (p.13). This infers that the Seligmanns’ description of Veddas is not of real Veddas. The categorization of Veddas by Robert Knox (2006) ‘Wild’ and ‘Tame’ and Seligmann and Seligmann (1969) ‘Veddas’, ‘Village Veddas’, ‘Coast Veddas’ had no proper sociological underpinning. Thus, it is apparent that this categorization is a simulation. Henry Parker (2012) states that “the food of the Forest Veddas consists of fruits, roots of wild yams, and especially honey and the flesh of any animals they can kill” (p.50). Seligmann and Seligmann (1969) too, add facts to describe Veddas as ‘savage’ by stating “They never till any ground for corn, their Food being only flesh”(p.6). James Brow (2011) too argues that many writers had never encountered Veddas. He claims “Many of the authors who have written about them never actually encountered them, and more or less fabulous representations of them have often been used to buttress an ideology, a world view, or a theory of social evolution”(p.5). The work of Seligmanns’ has been amplified, given a wide popularity, and disseminated in the writings of Spittel (1951; 1957) and by others as well. For this purpose, newspapers, magazines and films have been used (Brow, 2011). It can be argued that the ‘Wild’ Vedda, described by Seligmanns is an imagined concept, and has been described as; “Nowadays many middle-class Sri Lankans have accepted a version of this image created by grotesque caricatures of the Vedda represented in the local media” (Obeyesekere, 2022, p.17). This statement strongly shows that the socio-cultural aspect vested on ‘Wild’ notion of Vedda is a simulation. In 1817 a Britisher named R. Fellows under a pseudonym, Philalethes had tried to assert the Robert Knox by saying, “They were said to be of two types: ‘one wearing leaves about the body, and the other the bark of a tree made of soft for the purpose”(Streumer, 1997,p.61). Unfortunately Philalethes did not indicate whether this was a personal observation or just hearsay” (Streumer, 1997, p.61). The socio-cultural notion of the plaited leaves of Vedda attire is considered as an imported imagery from India via Germany by the Sarasin brothers in 1885 (Streumer, 1997). This suggests that in the early nineteenth century the writers had created a hyper realistic socio-cultural context in order to create the image of wild and barbaric Sri Lankan Vedda. However, a photograph was published in 1880, showing Veddas dressed in long strips of cloth covering front and behind, to emphasize that still the primitive and exotic cultural identity of Veddas can be induced without plaited leaves (Streumer, 1997). Soon after this publication, Le Mesurier published an ‘official’ report in 1886 to say that, “‘Wild’ Veddas wore only a small apron of plaited leaves.” (Streumer, 1997, p.68). This infers how the vested authority had been used to simulate the socio-cultural notion of Vedda dress. According Streumer (1997) in 1902, Paul and Fritz Sarasin had visited

then Ceylon with L. Rutimeyer and had re-established the plaited leaf Vedda attire by getting one Vedda from Henebedda to dress in plaited leaves attire to make it real through simulation (Streumer, 1997). The socio-cultural context Sleigmann (1969) based to construct the Vedda peoples' culture and society was mainly on four indigenous families (Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969).

## Discussion

The foregone thematic analysis has revealed how current discursive notions of the cultural identity of the indigenous peoples in Sri Lanka have been influenced by the cultural discourses created in the most prominent books written about indigenous peoples in Sri Lanka by eminent scholars from the colonial time to date. The three themes immersed from the documentary qualitative data infer three notions such as 'barbaric' notion to cultural identity: 'noble barbaric' notion to cultural identity and 'hyperrealistic savage' notion to cultural identity thus creating the current hyperrealistic hybrid cultural identity. That means the present cultural identity of the Vedda people is a product of hyperreality in which truth and simulation both are embedded. This could be the cause behind middle –class Sri Lankans capturing the cultural identity of the Vedda people as inferior, barbaric and savage. Obeysekera (2022) has mentioned, "Thus the 'Wild-man' was being created for the Europeans by the not-so-wild Veddas. Soon this image was being perpetuated for those Sinhala middle-class people who, in their own mimesis of colonialism, have imbedded much of the Vedda prejudices created by the Europeans" (pp.114-115).

The theme 'Barbaric notion to cultural identity' was given to create the wildest Vedda race to satisfy the European community in the world and at the same time to indicate that they are on agriculture too. It is evident that a 'Wild' cultural identity has been simulated, though the cultural discourses do not provide concrete evidence that the writers have ever met a 'Wild' Vedda in their natural habitat, the forest or had done any ethnographic study. This notion is being still taught in schools by the teachers in grade five under the topic 'Api Lak Vasio' (Teacher Guide Grade 5, 2018). The teachers too, create the image of the Vedda people in discursive manner, creating a hyperrealistic hybrid cultural identity about the Vedda people in Sri Lanka among the school children. This can be supported by the statement "Nor until recently, when some Sinhala middle –classes have mimicked colonial practice wherein the Veddas are seen as an inferior group" ( Obeyesekere , 2022, p.161).

The theme 'noble barbaric' notion to cultural identity infers that the Vedda people in Sri Lanka are of royal bloodline. However, this nobility is associated with barbarism. Obeyesekere (2022) too, has argued that there has been a royal link to Veddas, making a statement "her two children fled to the hills near the fastnesses of the God Saman and it is from them, it is said, that the Veddas were descended" ( Obeyesekere , 2022, p. 69). As Kuveni is of 'Yakka' clan, the barbaric notion to the Veddas' cultural identity induces from that kinship, whereas the royal notion comes from the Vijaya's kinship. However, the collective ideology of the cultural identity among Sri Lankans does not represent the noble notion. On the other hand, the 'noble' notion is mainly associated with the elephant catching and ceremonial participation with elephants. Vendakaduva Vanakesara Gajanada, a prominent Vedda, was offered the title 'Tri Sinahala Kirti Raja Vanniya' for holding two tuskers at a ceremony ( Obeyesekere , 2022).

The theme 'hyperrealistic savage notion to cultural identity' was immersed with data that supported to simulate a savage notion to cultural identity to create a discursive cultural identity for the indigenous people in Sri Lanka. As the secondary data revealed, the hyperrealistic savage notion to cultural identity was a powerful trajectory, that the cultural discourses created by the related literature. In 1902, Paul and Fritz Sarasin visited then Ceylon with L. Rutimeyer and took steps to re-establish the plaited leaf Vedda attire by getting one Vedda from Henebedda to dress in plaited leaves attire to make it real through simulation. This helped strengthen the sociopsychological infrastructure the general public had, regarding the inferior cultural identity of the Vedda people in Sri Lanka, then Ceylon (Streumer, 1997). To consider a group of people as 'savage' their food must be of the wild. Seligmann and Seligmann (1969) have clearly given this status to Veddas by stating, "They never till any ground for corn, their Food being only flesh" (p.6). Seligmanns had met only four families of indigenous peoples, "We met with only four families who still led the life described by Bailey in 1863." (Seligmann, 1969, p.35). Accordingly, Seligmann reaffirms Bailey's description of Veddas' life as natural hunting and honey gathering, in other words a 'savage' status. Bailey (1681) states that "They depend solely on hunting for their support, and hold little communication even with each other" (p.281) and "When brought in from their forests to be 'looked at' they huddle themselves together like a herd of wild and timid animals driven into a corner from which there is no escape"(p.284). These two statements of Bailey (1681) strongly assert the 'savage' status of the Veddas. It is understood, that the

hyperrealistic savage notion attached by these cultural discourses would have diluted the 'Barbaric' status that the Veddas have been socio-culturally achieving.

## Conclusion

The indigenous people didn't have or given a chance to transform their own cultural identity with the social transformation. When considering the themes generated it is apparent that the Vedda people in Sri Lanka have a discursive cultural identity due the discursive links described by the authors of the texts used for this secondary data study. Since 1681, descriptions and typologies of the Vedda people in Sri Lanka have been wrapped with simulations to cover their links to the royalty if ever had and to surface the primitive and barbaric notions with western ethnocentric perception. It seems that the discursive cultural identity which has been shaped and reshaped with the social evolution has made indigenous people in Sri Lanka entrenched in a hyperrealistic hybrid cultural identity. The 'savage' and the 'barbaric' status attached to the cultural identity of the Vedda people in Sri Lanka have been stigmatized as 'pure' and expected to preserve it in order for them to be 'admired' which eventually has created a struggle for the indigenous people in modernization process to transform socio-culturally to achieve 'civilized' status on their own. Finally, it is a question why the barbaric notion of cultural identity was created for Vedda people in Sri Lanka, who were socio-culturally transforming on their own from 'savage' status to 'barbaric' status, which is the threshold to 'civilized' status.

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