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**Erasing Historical Roots and Vanishing Their Cultural
Identity: The Present Condition of Resettled Indigenous
Community under the Mahaweli Development Project in Sri
Lanka (*With Special Reference to Henanigala South*)**

Rohan Thimbiripola, Matara Regional Centre, the Open University of Sri Lanka,
rohan_galle@yahoo.com

Suranjith Gunasekara, Department of Sociology, University of Ruhuna,
suranjith@soci.ruh.ac.lk

Pulsie Epa, Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, Colombo, handunmali@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper explores if the relocation of the indigenous people has made a significant impact on their cultural practices and the way of life compared to their past history. The societies are dynamic. This dynamism is influenced by many things such as modernization, dominant cultures, environmental determinism, environmental possibilism etc. However, these factors could be controlled or manipulated to protect or strengthen their customs, beliefs to suit the changing dynamics if people have the desire and a collective effort to do so. The past history of the indigenous people was based on the secondary data collected from the documentary research and the present socio-cultural condition of indigenous people in Henanigala – South was

through in-depth interview data. Purposive sampling technique was employed to gather the primary data from the respondents and for the secondary data sources as well. Qualitative design was employed with the within method data triangulation technique to interpret the results. The within-method methodological data triangulation is an employment of more than one strategy of data collection under one design. The discussion on this data triangulation showed how the changes in all aspects of socio-cultural and economic life had taken place with the change of living environment of present indigenous people in Henanigala-South. The results revealed that the change of environment had influenced the socio-cultural and economic aspects of the resettled indigenous group of people in Henanigala South.

Keywords: Environmental Determinism, Environmental Possibilism, Indigenous Community, Modernization

Introduction

The history of Veddas' in Sri Lanka dates back to king Vijaya and even before that. However, a direct written record of Veddas in Sri Lanka appears in Robert Knox's book 'A historical relation of Ceylon' written in 1681. It says that there had been two sorts of Veddas, 'wilder and 'tame'. The wilder sort had lived in the thick forests away from other inhabitants. They had been living on game and honey and had never done cultivation. The 'tame' category had been living along with Chingulayes, maintaining some kinds of social relationships. They had been working for the kings as well. The interesting comment on the 'wilder' sort was that they had used Chingulayes Language and it records as "In this land are many of these wild men; they call them Vaddahs, dwelling near no other inhabitants, They spoke the Chingulayes Language" (Knox, 2006: 195). Then in Henry Parker's book 'Ancient Ceylon', written in 1908, too mentions about Veddas' contribution to some spheres at higher level. It mentions as; "It is extremely probable that contingents of Vaeddahs formed part of the Sinhalese army not only then but in every war. We find them still serving with the other troops under Raja Sinha in the early part of the seventeenth century."(Parker, 2012: 29). With

these two historical records, it is clear that the Veddas had been maintaining social interactions with the main Sinhala society since 1600s. Since then the community of Veddas had been subjected to many social transformation and one significant point could be identified as the termination of recognizing Veddas as a distinct ethnic group in 1971. The other turning point was the relocation of a group of Veddas who had been living in Kandeganvila, Dambana for generations to Henanigala-South a village established under the Mahaweli project in Nawamedagama, Dehiattakandiya in 1983. Since then one Vedda community, which took forward the traditions and the culture, was geographically divided. This created a challenging situation to transplant their traditions and the culture in an alien environment that is not conducive for their forest bounded living style. Hence, the existence of one culture in two opposite social contexts began. The Henanigala-South social context was semi-urban and it was surrounded by settlers from the other parts of the country, mainly by Sinhalese people. Thus, the settled indigenous people were more prone to the influence of the Sinhala culture than their counter part in Kandeganvila did. According the voter registry (2019) the indigenous population in four villages, Dambana Gama, Bimmalamulla, Gurukumbura and Kandeganvila in 7/A – Dambana Grama Niladari (GN) division is 1225. Whereas in 142/C Paranagama - Henanigala GN division it is 1479 (Voter Registry, 2018).

This article tries to explore if the relocation of the indigenous people had made a significant impact on their cultural practices and the way of life compared to their past history with the objective to understand how the environment determines the life style and the cultural practices of the relocated indigenous people in Henanigala-South. The overall design was qualitative in nature with two research methods namely; the secondary data based on library research and primary data based on the in-depth interviews.

Literature Review

A study done by R.M.M. Chandraratne (2016), on the topic 'Some Ethno-Archaeological observations on the Subsistence Strategies of the Veddas in Sri Lanka,' has explored the subsistence pattern of the Veddas in Sri Lanka in relation to their old equipment and practices. In this study the researcher has used Ethno-archeological approach. To fill the gap between ethnographic data and archeological data, the ethnographic analogy has been used. In addition, middle range theory too has been used to do the archeological interpretation. The discussion has been based on the recently excavated evidence from prehistoric, and early historic cultures in Sri Lanka. The findings suggest that during the historical period Veddas had been living many parts of Sri Lanka such as Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura, Bintanna, Nilgala, Rathnapura etc. Moreover, the Veddas had not adopted Sinhala style of living until 19th century and gradual acculturation had been taken place in Dambana then. The researcher concludes similar evidence of subsistence pattern had been found in the last century and the Mesolithic, Proto and the Early Historic periods in Sri Lanka. However, a certain decline in the distinction had been observed between the Vedda culture and the dominant culture in present days.

Another research on the topic The Linguistic study of the Contemporary Context of Vedda Language with Special Reference to Dambana, Sri Lanka done by R.A.D. Priyanka Weerasekara (2021), has examined the contemporary context of Vedda Language from the linguistic point of view, based on their overall socio –cultural background. The research has been based on Qualitative Empirical Research Methodology. The method has been Participant Observation Method based on Case study. The findings of the study reveal that colloquial Sinhalese has influenced the Vedda dialect. The researcher concludes that Vedda language is at a threat due to internal forces and the negligence of usage of mother tongue had been observed during her field visit.

A research had been done centered on Damabana and Henanigala areas focusing as study on the Veddas economics hardships that impede the development of the country on the topic 'An anthropological study of the economic hardships that impede development with special reference to the indebtedness of Veddas at Henanigala and Dambana areas in Sri Lanka'.by Charith Mudalige, Dinindu Dewapura, and Yasanjali Devika Jayatilleke (2021). There have been a few methods such as participant observation method, interview method, including focus group and key informant discussions employed to collect data. The findings of the research say that due to resettlement of Veddas in an unfamiliar geographical area, Veddas in Henanigala village face numerous socioeconomic issues compared to Veddas in Dambana. The researcher argue that forceful implementation of paddy cultivation had mainly kept the Veddas in Hananigala out of any income. That means they have not been permitted to practice their hunter-gatherer life style lawfully. Consequently, they had faced many hardships to find a living for food, housing, etc.. Thus, they had to find alternatives to support their families, the researchers argue. However, the Veddas in Henanigala have not been able to get adjusted to new lifestyle in the settled area in Mahaweli. This situation has led them to be in debt.

Robert Knox (1681) in Part III, Chapter I of his book 'an historical relation of Ceylon' mentions about Veddas in Sri Lanka. He speaks of two sorts 'wild' and 'tame.' The wild had been living in the thick jungles in Bintan. Their subsistence was flesh and honey. They had no houses. The tamer sort were living along with Chingulayas (Sinhalese). Some of them were supplying elephant tusks, honey, and venison to king. All these Veddas had had been having Bows, arrows and a small axe. The information Knox supply depicts that even in 16th century the Veddas have had interacted with the main culture, the Sinhalese.

In the book ancient Ceylon, Henry Parker (1909), mentions about Veddas in Sri Lanka. He speaks of two kinds the ancient and modern Veddas. He further argues that Veddas had been found only in the Eastern part of Sri Lanka. According to Parker there are three kinds of Veddas. They are, The wild forest Veddas, The village Veddas,

and The Tamil-speaking Veddas. According to categorization even at that time there had been some intermixture of Sinhalese blood and Tamil blood with Veddas blood.

Paul Streumer (1999), in the journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka has published an article on the topic 'The Leaf-Clad Vedda' An European contribution to Sri Lankan folk-lore. In this article he argues of how the discourse of the cultural identity of Vedda people had been created by the European writers. According to him, the created identity of Vedda people has some hyper-realistic characteristics that European community wanted at that time. He argues that leaf-clad Veddas were a creation of the European writers to give a 'savage' image to Veddas in Sri Lanka.

The classical anthropological study done on Veddas in Sri Lanka by C.G.Seligmann and B.Z. Seligmann and published in 1911, as a book titled 'The Veddas' gives a comprehensive understanding of all the socio-cultural aspects of the Veddas that had been living in Sri Lanka then. Participatory observation and interview techniques had been adopted to collect qualitative data. According to the researchers, the Veddas of Vedirata then too had been subjected to acculturation and assimilation even in their own environments. Many had taken slash and burn agriculture while leading a hunter-gatherer life style. According to the researchers, the Veddas then too have acquired Sinhala language from the villagers they interacted. Even that time too it had been difficult to find a 'pure Vedda.' Their beliefs and customs had been influenced by some Sinhala beliefs and customs as well.

Objectives of the Research

- To understand how the environment determines the lifestyle and the cultural practices of the relocated indigenous people in Henanigala-South.
- To find out the past lifestyle and the cultural practices of the indigenous people in Henanigala-South.
- To explore the present life style and the cultural practices of the indigenous people in Henanigala-South.

Research Methodology

This study is of constructivist epistemological philosophy and is based on secondary and primary data. The secondary data to identify the lifestyle and the cultural practices of the indigenous people of Sri Lanka in the past was derived from three renowned books and two journal articles written on the Vedda people in Sri Lanka. They are; 'A historical relation of Ceylon,' Robert Knox (2006); 'Ancient Ceylon,' Henry Parker (2012); 'The Veddas,' Seligmann & Seligmann (1969); and two journal articles : 'An Account of the Wild Tribes of the Vaddahs 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, which could be reviewed to obtain the best and quality data of the past history of the indigenous people in Sri Lanka. The primary data to understand the present lifestyle and the cultural practices of the indigenous people in Henanigala-South were extracted from the in-depth interviews had with twenty key informants in the Henanigala-South village. The target population for the research study in the Henanigala research site was all the indigenous residents of 142/C Paranagama –Henanigala (South), Grama Niladari Division in Dehiattakandiya which is 1479 (Voters' Registry, 2018). The sampling was done with the rationale that the best informants should be selected to get rich facts regarding the present socio-cultural and economic situation of the village. Therefore, the purposive sampling technique was employed to gather the primary data from the respondents. Broadly, there are three ways that the findings could be presented. They are; a situation, episode or an event can be put in a narrative form; writing about the themes that emerged from the coded transcription or the field notes by quoting extensively in verbatim format; or quantify the main themes to show how significant they are (Kumar, 2014). The thematic analysis is very flexible in terms of theory, research question, the sample size and constitution, data collection method and approaches to theme generation and could be used for both inductive and deductive

analysis as well (Clarke & Braun, 2016). The researchers adopted the deductive thematic analysis and analyzed the findings under those themes. The Table 01 shows the tabulation of the categories and the code intensities generated from verbatim data collected from in-depth interviews of twenty respondents. The categories have been tabulated under the pre-decided themes. Accordingly, the secondary data derived from the literature review and the primary data gathered from in-depth interviews were analyzed under pre decided themes namely, General description of the indigenous people, the socio-cultural context, and the traditional beliefs and Practices. The methodological triangulation was adopted to interpret the data. According to Denzin (1978), this is the strongest of all types of triangulation and has two forms, “within-method” triangulation and “between-method” triangulation. The “between-method” triangulation is also called as “across-method” triangulation. The “within method” triangulation involves in combining different data collecting techniques in one design. In this study, the researchers employed the “within-method” triangulation. In other words, a researcher uses multiple methods within the qualitative or quantitative paradigm towards increasing internal credibility of the research findings.

Table 1: Categories / Themes and their intensities

Category	Code Frequency	Themes Generated	Theme intensity as per code frequency
Appreciating old habitat	24	Traditional beliefs and Practices	156
Old cultural Practices	35		
Old beliefs	27		
Hunter-gatherer life style	11		
Old food habits	18		
Chena cultivation	05		
Appreciation of traditional life style	36		
Preserving old culture	28	Socio-cultural context	258

Influence of other cultures	39		
Seeking new jobs outside	40		
New food habits	15		
Education	09		
New house structure	24		
New life style	47		
New beliefs	17		
Intercultural marriages	25		
Paddy cultivation	14		
New appearance	33		
New way of dressing	54		

Source: Field Data, 2023

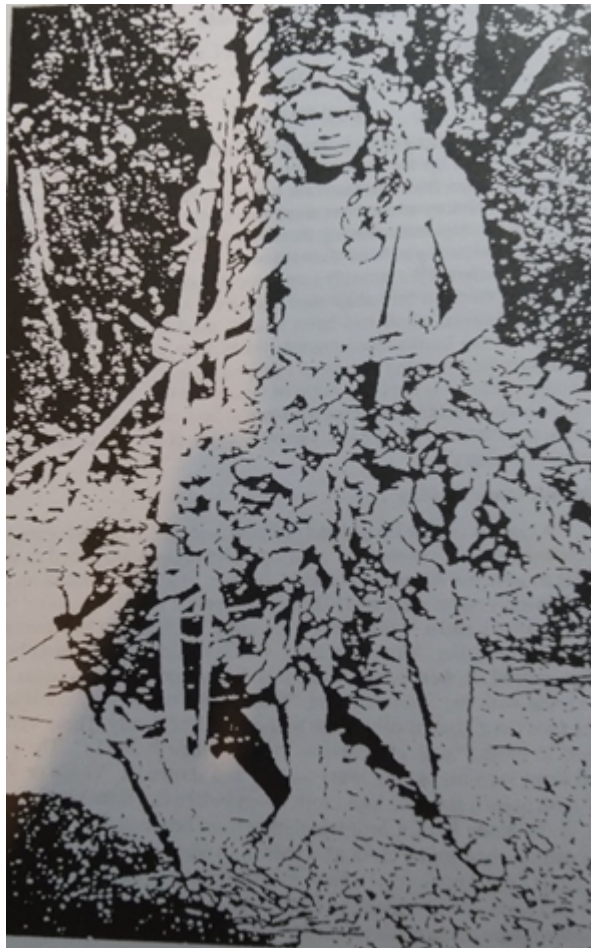
Results and Discussion

General Description of the Indigenous People

The early indigenous people had been addressed as 'Yakkas'. It is said that one Yakkinni called Kuweni married to king Wijaya. With the help of Kuweni, slaughtering all the Yakkkas, Wijaya became the king (Mahawansa Chap. VII). Decedents of these Yakkas were to be considered as Veddas. It says like, 'Thus it is clear that a large proportion of the population of Anuradhapura or its outskirts at that time consisted of the Vedda supporters of the king.'(Parker, 2012: 25-26). Knox (2006) had given a very shallow description of Veddas saying that they never cut their hair and tie it up on the head. Clothes they wore were scarcely enough to cover their buttocks. The socio-cultural notion of the plaited leaves of Vedda's attire as shown in Figure 1 is considered as an imported imagery from India via Germany by the Sarasin brothers in 1885 (Streumer, 1997). Rutimeyer had re-established the plaited leaves attire by getting one Vedda from Henebedda to dress in plaited leaves attire to make it real through simulation mentioning as "One member of small group of Veddas

from Henebedda, close to Nilgala, obliged the party by meeting Rutimeyer's request of changing his loin cloth to "a lot of twigs", forming a knee long apron made of leaves" (Streumer, 1997: 70). This is showing that leaf attire of Veddas had been an invention of the Europeans.

Figure 1: A Vedda Man, With Leaf Girdle



Source: Paul and Fritz Sarasin, n.d.

According to the Parker (2012), Veddas were having a dull looking dark reddish-brown color complexion. The average height of men was about five feet, or one inch more. They bore a slight figure, a narrow hip and a weak looking calves and thighs. The Veddas equally men and women had worn ear rings. The average height of pure Veddas was about 1.553 meters and the Vedda women were ranging from 1.355 meters to 1.500 meters (Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969: 16-17). According to

Seligmann and Seligmann (1969) Veddas were not unduly fat but were healthy and strong, the male Veddas hair was wavy, grown, and there was no hair on the body or chest. Moreover, they were with a thin moustache and a sparse goatee beard and, the colors of the skin were vary from deep brown–black, through various shades of bronze. The most common complexion was medium brown-black. The eye color was dark brown. The description of the Vedda “a wild man of the woods, clad only in a scanty loin cloth, carrying his bow and arrows on which he depended for his subsistence, simple and untrained, indeed, little removed from the very animal he hunted” (Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969: 39) provides an insight of the physical appearance of Veddas in the past. The Figure 2 shows an appearance of a typical Vedda as Seligmann and Seligmann described. Figure 3 shows the appearance of Vedda women during Seligmann’s time.

Figure 2: Poromala, a Henebedda Youth



Source: Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969

Figure 3: Vedda men and Women (Henebedda)



Source: Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969

The physical appearance of Henanigala-South indigenous people is quite contrasting to their ancestors. Men wear sarongs, trousers, T-shirts, shorts. The women wear skirts and blouses or Cheeththe and blouse. As Figure 4 depicts, the men who still try to maintain the indigenous identity do not cover the upper part of the body and are concerned of their hair and the beard.

Figure 4: An indigenous Person (Henanigala-South)



Source: Authors, 2023

One female respondent uttered, “*dress...so wear Cheeththe and blouse...I don’t wear it often...there are people who still wear it...we don’t wear it often...the society looked at in different angle...*”(Respondent 12). Another respondent expressed his thoughts as,

“now modified...those days not modified...didn't wear these clothes... Cheeththe and short sleeved blouse only...”(Respondent 07). Another female respondent reaffirm the wearing of modern clothing by the female folk in the Henanigala-South by saying like this, “wear those also...now as this wear the skirt and blouse...” (Respondent 05).

Socio-cultural context

The socio-cultural context in which the early Veddas lived was conducive to maintain their traditional life style and to practice their customs and beliefs. Veddas were referred to as a group of people who lived by hunting and gathering. They had never tilled the land for cultivation as their counterpart Sinhalese had been doing. It is apparent that the two occupations paddy cultivation and the primitive hunting were the main criterion in categorizing the hunter-gatherer group as wild, backward and dangerous other than race and language though not very much distinct. Based on these the Sinhalese community often calls this hunter-gatherer community as Veddas (Brow, 1978: 27). According to Seligmann and Seligmann (1969), there are seven waruges or clans in Vedda community. Of these, six clans had been clearly named while the last had been categorized as “waruge’ who had forgotten their line of decent. Thus, the Vedda clans are; (i). Moran *waruge*. (ii). Unapana *waruge*. (iii). Namadewa or Nabudan *waruge*. (iv). Aembela *waruge*.(v). Uru *waruge*.(vi). Tala *waruge*.(vii). *waruge*.(Seligmann and Seligmann, 1969: 30)

The early Veddas had worn a piece of cloth suspended in front supported by a bark string that was tied around the waist. In the book ‘The Veddas’ it is described Veddas as “a wild man of the woods, clad only in a scanty loin cloth, carrying his bow and arrows on which he depended for his subsistence, simple and untrained, indeed, little removed from the very animal he hunted”(Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969: 39). When going on hunting they wore a small piece of cloth like a flat band about four or three inches wide passed around the abdomen. Some early Veddas had worn skirt like thing made of fiber of bark of the ‘riti’ tree. This type of clothing was in use among the

very poor Veddas and if they could afford to buy cloth, the attire was of cloth (Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969).

The Tamil-speaking Veddas or Coast Veddas had dressed like the Tamils villagers, as shown in Figure 5, a cloth tied around the waist reaching the knees. It seems like a sarong what Sinhalese and Moors wear at present. The women folk wore a long 'calico' robe which wrapped around the under the arm pit and long enough to cover the body up to knees (Parker, 2012). The wild forest Veddas and the village Veddas had silver rings in their ears. The female Veddas, those who could afford had necklaces of colored glass beads, bangles and the others had similar ornaments made of shell, ivory or brass bangles (Parker, 2012).

Figure 5: Vedda men of Yakure



Source: Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969

There had been two types of cave living: private and communal. Communal living means in one cave there were many families lived by keeping their geographical boundaries uncrossed. As it can be seen in Figure 6, every family very well knew their

space in the cave. The walls of the houses of forest and village Veddas were of broad strips of tree barks, roofs were of grass called 'Iluk' as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 6: A rock Shelter at BendiyaGalge



Figure 7: Typical Vedda Houses



Source: Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969

The forest Veddas were living on wild yam, bee honey, and flesh of any permitted animal to eat, mainly 'Iguana', Pigs, and Deer. Whereas, village Veddas and the Tamil-speaking Veddas had the same food, in addition the small millet such as 'Kurakkan' etc. The village Veddas had done Chena cultivation once in seven years. The coast Veddas had fish as well (Parker, 2012).

The forest and village Veddas had been using several kinds of very simple utensils to support their cooking and other purposes. They had no understanding of weaving mats etc. they had used deer skin or alike as mats to sleep on. They had been in very primary stage of pottery making, Figure 8a shows some of the type of pottery that Veddas had used and as shown in Figure 8b the deer skin vessel to collect bee honey the (Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969). Other than these utensils the bows and arrows, the axes, were their tools. The bows, arrows and the axes were used as weapons as well (Parker, 2012). Figures 9a and 9b show a set of utensils and tools they had used in the early years.

Figure 8a: Vedda Clay Pots



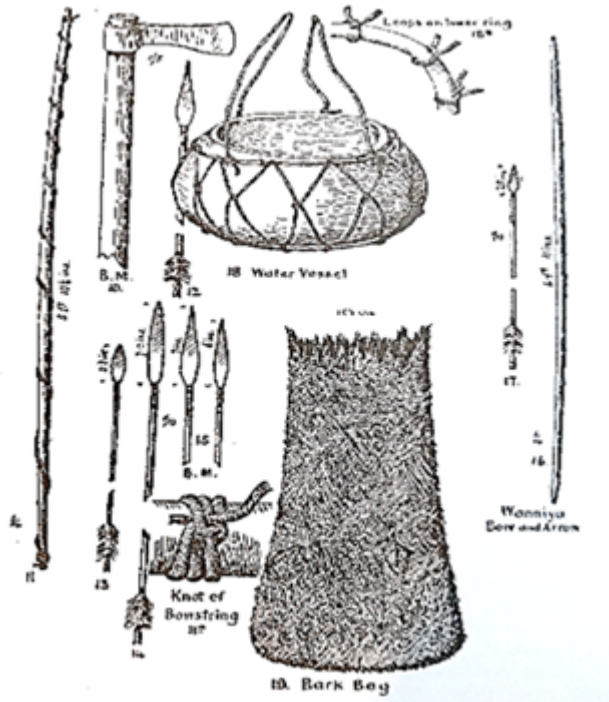
Source: Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969

Figure 8b: Deer Skin Vessel to Collect Bee Honey



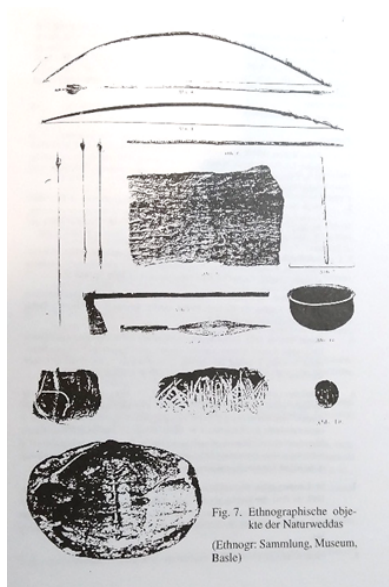
Source: Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969

Figure 9a: Vedda Tools and Utensils Used in Early Days



Source: Parker, 2012

Figure 9b: Vedda Tools and Utensils Used in Early Days



Source: Sammlung Museum, Basle (Paul Streumer, 1999)

The marriage custom had been monogamist and never practiced polyandry. They never had a habit of taking alcoholic liquor. They had not done any labor work in exchange of money or goods. They had solely lived on hunting and had been self-sufficient. Once they have enough food to eat for days they do nothing and stay idling at home. This had been considered by the other out-group people as laziness. Their temper changes suddenly and become very hot tempered if any injustice was done to them. Sometimes it had gone to extremes such as a murder. Moreover, they are extremely jealous, especially of their wives, and still very truthful, obedience to the family or tribe taboos and discipline (Parker, 2012).

According to Seligmann and Seligmann (1969) the Veddas in Dambana in Mahiyangana were village Veddas. There were about twenty families in Dambana then. They had their houses built, like huts and had been engaged in Chena cultivation. The surplus of the harvest from the Chena cultivation was traded with Moor and Sinhala traders. The Dambana Veddas were stout and darker. The Dambana Veddas had been called as 'show' Veddas because they were ready at any time to come before white visitors when they wanted to see a Vedda. The Arachi of Aluthnuwara now Mahiyangana had told that they were of Uru warige. The Nae Yaku veneration had done with great importance in Dambana. They believed in 'Indigolle' yaka too. They had charms for protection against wild animals, to obtain food, and for love purposes etc. These Veddas are the ancestors of the Henanigala-South indigenous people.

Socio-cultural context of Henanigala-South indigenous people are quite different to their ancestors'. It has modern features with many Sinhala cultural elements and practices. At present, there are 545 families and the total population is 1653 of indigenous people. There are 870 males and 783 females (Planning Branch Divisional Secretariat office Dehiattakandiya, 2023). The current chieftain of the Henanigala-South indigenous community is Thala Warige Gunabandalatto. These indigenous people inhabit in 142 C, Paranagama-Henanigala-South Grama Niladari (GN) division have not made paddy cultivation as their main livelihood. Instead, they

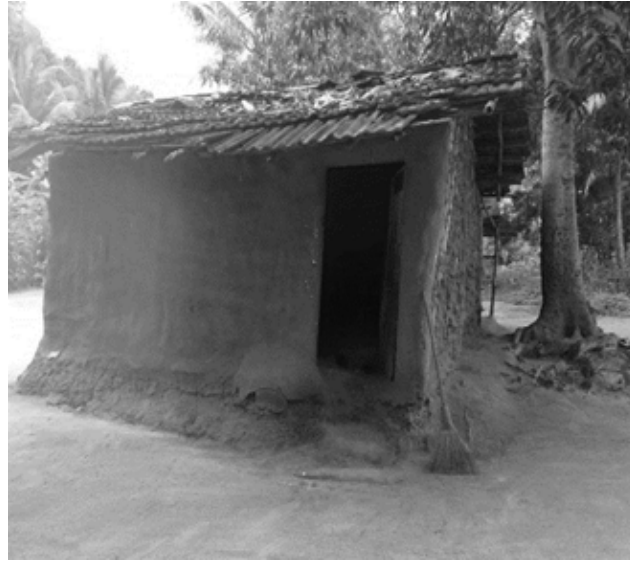
have taken up daily wage jobs and the government and private sector related jobs. One respondent said; *“Here in this village ... if can do a job like thing as an indigenous person...will not go to the town...then the tradition can be taken forward in this village as well...”* (Respondent 13). Another respondent explained the effects of going to big cities to do jobs like this, *“Ah...as we go out...that our new generation...they stay in working places in Colombo...If I wish to marry a girl from that area...then go to Colombo...then her children do not know any of these things...they would not like this here...then they go...”* (Respondent 09).

Few respondents expressed their views regarding socio-cultural atmosphere as; *“Now we have been brought to Mahaweliya...with Mahaweliya and new technology Aaa...our male and female youth are getting well-adjusted to the town...when they get accustomed to town ...like our ancestors it is difficult to take the culture forward...”* (Respondent 17). There are limited opportunities in the village for them get in engaged to earn a living. A respondent said like this, *“I...worked in an enterprise...I sent women aboard...not here in Kadawatha ...I worked for a lawyer...Did many jobs...”*(Respondent 07) . Regarding the dress, a young married respondent expressed her views as *“now that culture is changed no...therefore go like that way...only an old person only wear Cheeththe’ and ‘short jacket’...Not like that...(laughs)...do not wear like that...(laughs)...we like the modern way...(laughs)”*(Respondent 18). Another respondent too had the same view on the same *“children don’t like now...children are now in this society isn’t it...they have been never shaped by that society...with that only a little problem is there...”* (Respondent 15). However, the youth are struggling to preserve their traditions amidst this environmental determination. There are a few young males who still follow the indigenous way of dressing, but not as the ancient times. A respondent shared his thoughts like this: *“the young girls and boys who have got used to the city...came to the trousers...got used to wear a shirt...hair styles...have got used to cut numerous hair style ...”* (Respondent 17).

A gradual modernization of the architecture of their houses can be seen in across the village. Many houses have been built according to the modern architecture compared

to the Vedda houses in the past with 'Iluk' roof. Figures 10a , 10b and 10c show the diversity of house architecture in Henanigala (South) village. One respondent said; *"we can live in modern houses...now we have come to the project...clay house is better...in modern houses can't say...but we have our old practices..."* Respondent 11).

Figure 10a: An Indigenous House (Henanigala-South)



Source: Authors, 2023

Figure 10b: An Indigenous House (Henanigala-South)



Source: Authors, 2023

Figure 10c: An Indigenous House (Henanigala-South)



Source: Authors, 2023

In Henanigala-South village, many indigenous girls and boys are now getting married to boys and girls from out groups. After the marriage, a lot go for warige name changes and give up the indigenous culture for Sinhala culture. One respondent said that “*now we are in Henanigala...on the other side Medagama... once get married from there...they for sure go to that side...do not come to this side...*”(Respondent 09). The leader of the community expressed his views regarding the youth migration to other cities in search jobs as; “*now when this stomach is craving for food...for people to live...can't live like this...*”(Respondent 14). Regarding the mother tongue of the indigenous people have a thought like this; “*Yes sometimes we speak...but not always...but do not allow to vanish...*”(Respondent 12).

Traditional Beliefs and Practices

Cousin marriages were there among the Veddas. As a custom, the young man had to bring honey, dried venison, and flesh of the monitor lizard to the girl's father. Then gather hands over his daughter in marriage to the young Vedda. Immediately the girl ties a string called ‘dia lanuwa’ around the waist of her husband. There had been a

practice among the Veddas that they carry a piece of dried human liver in the betel pouch. Every Vedda including old and young were liked to have such a thing in his betel pouch as it shows bravery. If any intruder or enemy killed, the liver is taken out nothing else, for this purpose. Once a death occurs in a cave, then they abandon the cave leaving the dead body covered with leaves. They return to the cave after ten or twelve years, remove the remains of the deceased person, and settle in there once again. (Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969).

There had been no puberty ceremonies. The marriages had taken place between children of brother and sister. The marriages between children of two sisters were not permitted. The arrows played a bigger role in their religious ceremonies. (Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969). All the Veddas chewed Betel. They were very fond of it. They had a substitution for areca nuts such as the barks of demata tree, dawata tree, instead of lime, they had used shells of special snails. Their betel pouch was of cloth but Veddas in Henebedda used to make the pouch out of monkey skin as shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Monkey Skin Betel Pouch (Henebedda)



Source: Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969

The soothsaying in a sickness to find out, which 'Nae Yaka' caused the illness the bows' soothsaying had been done as shown in Figure 12. The invocation that is to seek the power of supernatural being to reveal things had been done in Sitala Wanniya. This invocation had done to ask the help of dead spirits or Nae Yaku to reveal which yaka had caused the illness. This had been associated with several soothsaying methods. They were stones' soothsaying, and auspicious soothsaying as well.

Figure 12: Bows' Soothsaying



Source: Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969

'Kirikoraha' is a dancing festival in which the spirits of the dead relatives are venerated. They are called 'Nae Yaku'. The ceremony is held as a thanks giving for game killed and for the future success in hunting. The 'Kande Yaka' and the 'Bilindi Yaka' are the most powerful dead spirits they believe and venerate. The Kirikoraha dance is done in almost all the Vedi communities in the island with some deviations. A scene of 'Kirikoraha' ceremony that had held in Henabadda is shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Kirikoraha Ceremony (Henebedda)



Source: Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969

The Kolamaduwa ritual had been danced by Henebedda Veddas in Bendiyagalge. There had been doubts whether it had danced by other VEDI communities in the island. A basket with various offerings like flowers, beads, bangles etc. to ‘Yakinni’ covered with a cloth was kept on a tripod. The shaman calls for Yakinni and invokes the offering to her. If the Yakinni was not satisfied with the offerings, she asks for bangles, etc. (Seligmann & Seligmann 1969). Figure 14 shows an event of Kolamaduwa ceremony at Henebedda.

Figure 14: Kolamaduwa Ceremony (Henebedda)



Source : Seligmann & Seligmann, 1969

In Henanigala-South too there are some cultural practices. The exotic cultural practices in sickness and other things are still prevailing in the Henanigala-South indigenous community but at a very shallow level. A respondent said “Aa...*cultural stuff maa...thovil like things...those ‘kirikoraha’ dances...ah...then to cure sick people...does thovil...then believe in Nae devils etc. ...Ah... there is a thovil for that also...I too believe them...*”(Respondent 12). Another respondent shared his ideas as, “*‘yaga homa’...‘bali-thovil do at home’...like that there are places for ‘thovil’...what that ‘hakme’ is there...we do ‘hakme’ in the centre of the village...*”(Respondent 08). A young male respondent who was born in Henanigala-South now a shaman in exorcism made his remarks on ‘Hakme’ which is the grand indigenous ritual annually held in Henanigala-South in order to bring peace, prosperity, as an urge for good health, to be free from epidemic diseases etc. for the whole village. This is how he described that :“*Mainly in the village ...diseases and troubles...connected those things...to dawn prosperity to us...then the cultivation we do...to take a good harvest of those...so for those things we mainly do the ‘Hakme’ ritual...to protect the village from all the external diseases, problems...for those things we do ‘Hakme’ ritual...does only once for a year...*”(Respondent 16).

A responsible old indigenous person who is still preserving and living his level best to the old traditions and customs expressed his thoughts as, “*I have boys...about thirty...there were five now there are now thirty...now they learn...in this year I have to do a ‘kiri koraha’ dance...I went there and talked with them...*” (Respondent 14). This indigenous person has his group of young boys trained to do ‘Hakme’, ‘Kiri Koraha’ dance, and other indigenous rituals. This way he is imparting the old traditions and the customs to the younger generation in Henanigala-South.

Soothtelling is still continued with some changes. Figure 15 shows how it is done in Henanigala-South now. This is done by a very few Shamans in the community. Majority had received some kinds of consolation from this ritual. Even those living in very modern houses, economically sound indigenous people, too seek the help of soothsayers. No person from out group is involved in it. A young Shaman explained it

as; “No outsider’s help is taken...even the drummer...even the shaman who do the ‘Thovil ritual’...even the person who sings those poems...all the things do by this Warige people...no outsiders can come and watch...the people of generation only does that job...it is a must that the warige people who offer the ritual should abstain from meat etc. ...” (Respondent 3).

Figure 15: Stone Soothsaying



Source: Authors, 2023

The chewing of betel is still practiced as a traditional habit among young and old in Henanigala-South. They all have their own betel pouches stuck in the waist or hang on the shoulder. The researchers witnessed an old indigenous person who is still trying to take forward old traditions and customs enjoying barks of demata tree, dawata tree, and shells of special snails in his chew of betel. Figure 16 depicts the said indigenous person’s betel pouch

Figure 16: A Cloth Betel Pouch



Source: Authors, 2023

The Indigolle Yakkinni and Elle Yakku veneration is done for a sickness. The researchers witnessed the special place devoted at a shaman's house compound, which is shown in Figure 17. All the utensils such as the special pots and other things that are needed for Indigolle Yakkinni and Elle Yakku veneration are placed in a small poorly built temporary hut. The son of the shaman described of it like this *"it is about 100 years it had come to my grandfather...now it has been handed over to us...those are there...that devils things...those are there laid in pots...the box, the pot everything is there...we do those things without failure when a sickness comes...yes in this house..."* (Respondent 09).

Figure 17: A Place for the Indigolle Yakkinni



Source: Authors, 2023

The leader of the community had taken steps to preserve the 'Kirikoraha' dance by training some youth to perform it. He shared his thoughts regarding that like this; *"our ancestral way of worshipping are still there as it was...I have a belief in those also...my young boys...I train them...now like that when doing this 'Hakme' ceremony ...I have trained and have a group to do 'Hakme' ritual...even if I die there is a group to take it forward..."* (Respondent 14). In addition to this, the indigenous people in Henanigala (South) is worried over for not opening the built museum, which is shown in Figure 18. One respondent expressed his ideas on this as; *"can develop...our museum is there isn't it?...if that comes right...then can develop that and...if the museum opens for public , then at least a few will immerge...I think..."* (Respondent 12).

Figure 18: The Museum



Source: Authors, 2023

Since the arrival of indigenous people to Henanigala-South in 1983, the use of Adi Vasi language too had gradually declined. Almost all of them can speak Sinhala language but a few can speak the Adi Vasi dialect. A young female respondent shared her thoughts as; “*If necessity arises only...if not don't use...when our leader speaks to us we speak...(with your son)...hum...in Sinhala...oh...(laughs)...*”(Respondent 20).

The foregone deductive thematic data analysis has revealed the historical background and the present condition of some aspects of relocated indigenous people in Henanigala-South. The objective was to understand how the environment determines the life style and the cultural practices of the relocated indigenous people in Henanigala-South. When the general appearance was concerned, there is a drastic change in the appearance of the indigenous people in Henanigala-South. There are a few old people especially the males still maintain the traditional appearance though with some changes. However, the leaf clad Veddass are considered to be a fabrication according to Streumer (1997). The Henanigala-South indigenous people resemble Sinhala appearance when compared to the appearance of Veddass Seligmann and

Seligmann (1969) had shown in their descriptions and the images. The Henanigala-South indigenous people could be easily mistaken for Sinhalese. Then the socio-cultural condition of the past is not visible in Henanigala-South. In the past when these people were in Kandeganvila, Dambana, the forest had been a part of their life. That environment was conducive for their hunter-gatherer life style. They could freely hunt animals and could do a little cultivation. After coming to Henanigala_South these people were deprived of their traditional livelihood and have turned into daily wage earners, and government and private sector employees. These support the research questions what were the main modes of living of the indigenous people in Henanigala-South in the past and, what are the main modes of living of the indigenous people in Henanigala-South at present. It is evident with the expression of ideas by the respondents. One said; *“Now we have been brought to Mahaweliya...with Mahaweliya and new technology Aaa...our male and female youth are getting well-adjusted to the town...when they get accustomed to town ...like our ancestors it is difficult to take the culture forward...”* (Respondent 17). This shows that they had to give up hunter-gatherer lifestyle completely for the whole life. The clothing had undergone a drastic change. This is evident with the saying: *“the young girls and boys who have got used to the city...came to the trousers...got used to wear a shirt...hair styles...have got used to cut numerous hair style ...”* (Respondent 17). Though the past Veddas wore a loin cloth just cover the nude, the Henanigala-South people are unable to do that because they have to interact with other cultures. Almost all the young males and females wear western type dresses. In addition, the schooling, and other social interaction with the government establishments have to be done when living in a colonized area. The youth have to move out of the village in search of jobs and for higher education. In the past, it wasn't the case as the group was an enclosed community and their needs were limited. The marriages were within the community. In contrast, the youth in Henanigala-South began schooling along with the youth of other cultures. Inter cultural marriages caused the indigenous girls and the boys to adopt new ways of dressing and a modern lifestyle. This argument is strengthened with view presented by a respondent. *“now we are in Henanigala...on*

the other side Medagama... once get married from there...they for sure go to that side...do not come to this side...” (Respondent 09).

The housing also has a big difference now. In the past, the Veddas had a simple structure and now with the development, their houses have become modern in structure. This is visible with comparison of images 11a,11b, and 11c of Henanigala –South with the Figure 7 of a house in Henebedda in the past. However, the respondents justify the new architecture like this; One says *“we can live in modern houses...now we have come to the project...clay house is better...in modern houses can’t say...but we have our old practices...”* (Respondent 11). This shows that they like the new house structure rather than the old traditional structure but still taking steps to preserve old traditions and the culture in the new house structures.

The customs and beliefs still survive with some transformations. The monkey skin betel pouch is not be seen among the people in Henanigala-South. However almost all of them have cloth betel pouches. The habit of eating betel still prevails equally among young and old. The soothsaying had been taken forward through a different technique. That is bow soothsaying has been transformed into stone soothsaying. However, the custom prevails as in the past. Meantime many indigenous elders are trying to preserve the old traditions and practice by training the youth. This can be justified by the saying of respondent (14); *“our ancestral way of worshipping are still there as it was...I have a belief in those also...my young boys...I train them...now like that when doing this ‘Hakme’ ceremony ...I have trained and have a group to do ‘Hakme’ ritual...even if I die there is a group to take it forward...”* . The ‘Kolamaduwa’ ceremony is not practiced in Henanigala-South. It is a question as if the ‘Hakme’ ceremony is an extended version of ‘Kolamaduwa’ ceremony or another main ceremony practiced in Dambana and Henanigala-South. The indigolle yakkinni ritual is done in Henanigala-South but the literature read regarding the past Veddas’ customs do not directly state of such event. The above discussion had answered the research questions, what were the main modes of living of the indigenous people in Henanigala-South in the past? what were their beliefs and traditional practices when

they were in forest life? what are the main modes of living of the indigenous people in Henanigala-South at present? and what are their beliefs and practices at present in Henanigala-South?

With this methodological data triangulated discussion it is apparent that the general description, socio-cultural condition, customs and beliefs among the past and the present indigenous people in Sri Lanka have differences. Though the changes in socio-cultural and economic aspects of the Veddas in Henanaigala-South show a significant difference, the results of this study reveal that there had been adaptations of dominant Sinhala culture even while they were in their natural habitat in the past. Customs like beliefs had been transformed to fit into the new environment but some socio-cultural aspects like the dress, the language, and house structure had been completely over showed by the modernization and the creole environment. Thus, it is evident that the environment had determined the changes of the life style and the cultural practices of the settled indigenous people in the Henanigala-South, which addresses the objective to understand how the environment determines the lifestyle and the cultural practices of the relocated indigenous people in Henanigala-South.

Conclusion

It is obvious with the results and the discussion, that the environment had had a significant impact on the traditional life style and cultural practices of the relocated indigenous people in Henanigala-South. There was no transformation but was a complete change. However, in some beliefs and rituals an environmental determined transformation could be seen. Moreover, it is apparent that how a group of people who lived with the nature depending on the forest for everything had completely transformed into a new socio-cultural and economic life style to suit the environment. This new environment is not enclosed as the former in which they were living prior to the resettlement. Finally, it can be concluded that the relocation of the indigenous people had had made a significant impact on their cultural practices and

the way of life where there is a significant difference between all the aspects of the past Veddas and the present settled Veddas of Henanigala-South.

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