CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

a. Relevance of the Study

One of the earliest aboriginal groups, the Veddas have long aroused world-wide interest. The reason for this lies perhaps in the fact that in spite of tumultuous social changes, they have survived as one of the last of Sri Lanaka’s earliest inhabitants. Though a handful of the Ahikuntaka, Kinnara and the Rodi people still live, none of them are able to display their identity as distinctly as the Veddas. Nittawo, an earlier Pigmy type of aboriginal group had long vanished.

Though much has been discussed about the Veddas, there is a dearth of information about the Vedda women and the changes occurring in their lives along with the social change. Most of the studies have been confined to a study of the past of the Vedda community. We know no longer have Veddas chasing deer with bows and arrows. In earlier times they retained their identity within a pattern of life peculiar to them. However, today they are in the brink of loosing their past identity. What would be left for us in another twenty to twenty five years is not the Veddas we speak of, but the land in which the Veddas once lived. The importance of anthropological work spring-up here. Seligmann (1911) observes:

Not only was the work urgently needed on account of its scientific importance, but it was known that the Veddas were a numerically small people verging on extinction, and so affected by contact with Tamil and Sinhalese, that if they were not studied promptly there was every possibility that it would soon be too late to study them at all (Seligmann 1969 ed : vi ).

No doubt some writers1 did their work among the Veddas which gives some knowledge about historical facts but there is dearth of any relevant work pertaining to changes with Vedda life along with social change due to urbanization or industrialization. In

1 Baily (1863), Virchow (1881), Sarasins (1881), Seligmann (1911).
This work I have paid special attention to Vedda women, their puberty rituals and how Vedda culture has been affected by social change. Since the Vedda community is fast disintegrating as a community, there is a pressing need to document the present situation of these people for the benefit of the future generations. My attempt is to perform that task from an anthropological point of view.

The existing studies of anthropologists are being subjected to severe criticisms from various quarters. Amongst them, the criticisms of Clifford, Azad, Marcus and Feyeraband are significant. According to Feyeraband (1991: 69) many anthropologists, being ignorant in the fields, where 'primitive' tribes lived projected their own ignorance upon them and inferred a 'primitive mentality', producing 'superstitious' instead of 'scientific results'. Hence, I have put in much effort to experience and understand the current situation of the Vedda Society especially, the real position of Vedda women.

On the other hand, I cannot think of an epoch in which the indigenous population can be talked about. My interest on Veddas grew because I had a long interaction with Veddas as a student of anthropology and then as a university lecturer, I visited the Vedda folk on a number of occasions. This exposure to the Vedda community motivated me to select them as my focus of research for Ph.D. thesis. To refer to James Clifford (1990 : 9-10) who observed that the insiders studying their own cultures offers new angles of visions and depth of understanding. Their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways. Though I do not belong to Vedda community itself but as a member of Sinhalese community with whom Veddas have interacted intimately to imbibe their culture, I can attempt to understand and analyze the actual life of Veddas, their culture and the ongoing changes in their lives.

And also while doing the empirical study on the Sinhalese puberty ritual for the M.Phil thesis, I had the opportunity to view and elaborate puberty ritual named Kotahalu Yagaya. When I studied the script provided by the leader of the group, who perform that ritual, I could realized the richness of the content and its creative presentation. This provides ample evidence to justify the creative potential of the people in ancient societies. This

2 For the sake of completeness mention has to be made here of a theories on race, ethnicity, differentiation of 'simple', 'complex' societies, 'pure', 'mixed', 'primitive', 'modern' people although I personally endorse their points of views.

3 This is an ancient ritual of the Sinhala society which perfoms to the girl who attained puberty. But it is very rarely performed at present.
prompted me to investigate how the puberty ritual is performed in their own indigenous (Vedda) society, which goes back to the pre-history when the Vedda society itself was facing extinction.

Till date, most of studies on puberty has focused on the ritual itself and how it is performed. It is surprising that not a single relevant and authentic research work exist on social change and its effect on the puberty rituals of Veddas. Since social change has affected every aspect of human existence, culture also undergoes tremendous changes. At time, it loses its rigidity to accommodate the changing line. Similarly the social changes has influenced Vedda puberty ritual and their close contact with Sinhalese due to their resettlement have manifested itself in the way they perform their ritual now.

The two major events of the rituals of Vedda community which have withstood social changes and also which are taking a new shape are the puberty ritual and the ritual associated with Vedda religion. There have been ample studies by many scholars concerning the rituals which are associated with Vedda religion. Thus, as the puberty ritual has not been ventured to be discussed by the researches, this study attempts to pay attention to this aspect.

b. Objectives of the Study

The focal point of this study is confined to the present nature of the Vedda puberty ritual and the influence of Sinhala society on that ritual. In this context status and the role of Vedda women is studied.

The process of socialization associated with this complex puberty ritual is analyzed primarily from the standpoint of Veddas' everyday life. I have attempted a comprehensive and comparative study between Vedda and Sinhalese puberty rites to point out differences and similarities of these two rituals and also to inquire about the origin of this ritual among Veddas and to what extent it has been influenced by the Sinhala culture.

Being sensitive to the hindrances that has impeded the progress in the study of culture such as the positivistic tendencies and reductionism, I was keen to explore the contemporary approaches which are more relevant to the present study and which have
succeeded in molding a required framework for the investigation of culture. The positivistic tradition is especially guilty for its tendency to construct third or fourth order constructs (e.g. through mathematical modeling) and to analyze social reality entirely with reference to these constructs. The constructs that have been reified in this manner are unable to penetrate what is specifically human reality - a serious fault in a science that takes this human reality as its avowed object.

In this context the theory propagated by Mary Douglas and Peter Berger have been heavily drawn upon. According to Douglas (1970: 21) rituals should be treated like speech, which also transmit culture and is generated in social relations. Rituals, particularly the rites of passage, do occupy a significant role in transmitting 'knowledge and experience' vital to the process of socialization. It is this aspect which I have emphasized, i.e. analyzing the role of rituals in the socialization of the Vedda women.

Here, while paying special attention to Vedda and Sinhalese puberty rites, the puberty rites of the other communities have also been analyzed. This is because it is important to study and identify the similarities and differences among the puberty rituals of various societies to find out how those societies transmit their customs and cultural heritage to their offspring.

The contributions made by women in the construction of social life are indeed immense. One does not see a difference in this respect even in the traditional societies. The duties performed by her as a mother, wife and housewife are extensive. In order to exercise such a responsibility, she should undoubtedly receive a training. Such a training is associated with customs and the socialization process. Socialization is determined by the culture of society. Thus it is important here to study the influence of puberty ritual on the socialization process of Vedda women.

On the other hand rituals and customs always relate to the women in the society. Without understanding the status and role of the women in society, studying the culture of society would remain rather incomplete. Hence, in this study the status and role of Vedda women have also been subjected to deep analysis. It is important to study how poverty, illiteracy and social change affects these women and how it influences to the Vedda ritual and their whole culture.
Moreover a chaotic situation exists today due to the rapid changing phase of the Vedda society. Thus I have made an attempt to explore the nature and form of this ritual under such circumstances. Since ancient times this folk have lived in a natural environment without any external socio-cultural intervention. But due to gradual urbanization and industrialization the Veddas culture were exposed to this change and due to the socio-cultural influence of Sinhalese society, it lost its indigenous exclusiveness. As a result they were deprived of a conducive atmosphere in which they could protect their traditional heritage and rituals. This study seeks to identify and comprehend the consequent social changes.

And also, judging by the rapid onset of cultural invasion, it is vital to identify the extent of its erosion of their heritage and consequently to realize the causes of this erosion as well as find solutions to this problem. Hence it is important to explore the situations that led to the fast declining of Vedda tradition and the threat to the Vedda identity so as to identify the cause of this. Therefore, as a requirement of this theoretical research, the concept of anthropologists and sociologists like Mary Douglas and Peter Berger have been used. The cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas is extensively used in this study complemented by the phenomenological approach of Peter Berger. While Mary Douglas stresses the importance of moral dimension to reality, Peter Berger adds subjectivity as an important dimension of reality. It is expected that this study will contribute to the effort made by this cultural anthropologist and sociologist to construct an emerging framework in order to address this problem.

My aim was to do a macro level study of the total situation of the Vedda society in which this ritual is being practiced, rather than attempt to study the different stages of puberty ritual and find out anthropological hidden meaning of it. Accordingly the aim of this research was to study the place this ritual occupies in the Vedda society rather than scrutinize the different stages of this ritual and their universal characteristics as was done by Victor Turner or Audry Richards.

The studies hitherto done about this ritual within anthropology belong to the category of symbolic studies. However, my study departs slightly from this aspect on the ground that the aim of this research is to do a macro study of the importance of this ritual
occupies in the context of social change and to discuss the transformation that this ritual undergoes.

Moreover, I constantly attempt to compare the Veddas with tribals in the world. Studies of Indian tribes have been specially used for comparison. Since Sri Lanka and India share a common socio-cultural and colonial heritage, it is more relevant to compare the Veddas with the Indian tribes.

c. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is confined to the puberty rituals of and the present socio-cultural position of the Vedda community.

As has been mentioned earlier most of the studies have been confined to a study of the past of the Vedda community. The early writers mostly studied the community as a ‘whole’ and examined their past way of life, social organization, their rituals and so on. Thus it became imperative to discuss about the present state of this community since they have been facing gigantic changes in their socio-cultural lives. In fact it is impossible to talk about any aspect of Vedda society excluding the concept of social change. Hence, the scope of the present study is confined to the puberty ritual and socialization of Veddas and its transformation due to the ongoing social changes.

On the other hand there is no other ethnic group which can be identified as ‘pure’. Vedda have also have been interacting with their Sinhalese and Tamil counterparts since a long time. It is difficult to avoid the penetration of neighboring cultures through this continuous intervention. The scope of my study enquires about the extent of socialization and the examine the consequences of this in their daily life.

Due to massive development projects the Veddas have been displaced and marginalized today. Resettlements, assimilation, tourism, religious conversion have adversely affected the whole traditional communities in the world. As an indigenous folk the Veddas also have facing these challenges. Either assimilating to the mainstream or resisting to the ongoing social change, these people have been trying hard to construct their social reality. Poverty, illiteracy is dominant in their lives. Accordingly the scope of my
study is being extended to a macro level analysis of the changing structure of rituals of Veddas and comparing their state with the ongoing situation of the other traditional communities.

d. Chapterization

This thesis consists of ten chapters. The first chapter consists of the objectives of the study. It also includes introduction of the country and Vedda as an ethnic group. In the objectives of the study I have described the relevance and the scope of the study too. A brief geographical, historical, economic and socio-cultural background of the country is given to understand the position of the Veddas in the socio-political and cultural context.

In the second chapter a description of Vedda as an ethnic group, their language, social structure, religious beliefs and rituals is given to provide a better insight to understand their unique culture.

The third chapter consists of research method. This further includes explanation about the area of research, research sample, access to the research field, building rapport with the Veddas and various problems that arose during the research work and their possible resolution.

In the fourth chapter emphasis has been given to the review of literature concerning the research area and theoretical framework. The review of literature is divided into two parts. In the first part the literature available on Veddas are discussed to understand their living pattern and other aspects of their life. In the second part of the review of literature, the focus is on adolescence and puberty rituals.

The theoretical framework of the research work is discussed towards the end of this chapter. In addressing the central issues which underpin the task of analyzing culture, I drew upon the cultural anthropology of Mary Douglas, and attempt to applying to the Vedda society. I also drew from the phenomenological approach of Peter Berger. In drawing upon them, I of course also seek to understand the limitations of this approach.
The fifth chapter contains the empirical study. It further includes theoretical aspects of ritual and rites of passage in the context of current concepts and literature. Subsequently the puberty ritual of Veddas are explained according to the order of the ritual. The Kili concept associated with the Vedda puberty ritual is analyzed. A comparison between puberty rituals of the Veddas and the Sinhalese are also elaborated. The similarities and differences between these two ritual are explained to find out the influence of both the cultures on each other. Finally the meaning of all the steps of the rituals are highlighted.

In the sixth chapter of the thesis, the process of socialization associated with these complex of puberty ritual are discussed. To begin with the theoretical aspects of adolescence, primary and secondary socialization are highlighted. The approaches of Berger and Luckmann’s are discussed. The puberty rituals and socialization among various societies are elaborated which includes the puberty rituals of the African tribals, the Indians, the South American Indians and finally conclusions are deduced. A comparative psychological perspective of the socialization process of young Vedda girls to Sinhalese community is discussed. The role of the social institutions such as family, school, peer groups, religious councils and media are explained.

In the seventh chapter of the thesis ‘The status and the role of women among the Veddas’, the contribution made by women in the construction of social life are explained. The duties performed by her as a role of a mother, wife and housewife are extensive. Though status of women in other countries are briefly discussed but main attention has been focused on Sri Lanka and India. A feminists perspective and the status of the women in tribal societies is also elaborated. The status and role of the Vedda women in the family, the contribution in the economic sphere and their sex life is discussed. Finally an outlook of women issues is given at the end of the chapter.

The eighth chapter consists of ten case studies relevant to the thesis. Case studies have been taken from the life history through the recollection and contemplation by the respondents. Some of the findings are given at the end of the chapter to derive conclusion to support the theme of this thesis.

In the nineth, the changing structure of rituals at a macro level approach has been discussed. In the beginning of the chapter, attention has been paid on the acculturation and social change. The theoretical and conceptual outlook of acculturation and social change
are discussed briefly. Subsequently the puberty rituals of Veddas in the changing society has been explained. Major factors affecting the social and cultural change have also explained. This includes tourism, displacement and resettlement, religious conversions and assimilation. Giving primacy to the Vedda ethnic group, the ongoing situation among some tribals also is discussed. Finally while presenting the points of views of several eminent anthropologists a framework is developed focusing on the rapid chugging life of the Veddas and the tribal societies in the world.

The tenth and final chapter of the thesis consists of final remarks, major findings and conclusions.

1.2 Sri Lanka

a. Location and Area

Sri Lanka (Ceylon) is a compact island 26,332 square miles (65,610 Sq. Km.) in extent, lying off the Southern tip of the Indian peninsula between latitudes 5 55 - 951 N. and longitudes of 79 41 - 81 53E. It is separated from the Indian Sub-continent by a strip of sea, the Gulf of Mannar, which at its narrowest, is about 25 miles wide. The Island is centrally located in the Indian Ocean (Peiris 1977 : 3).

Colombo is the capital of the country. Sri Lanka has two geographical regions. A flat or gently rolling plain, occupying four-fifths of the country, which makes up the entire Northern half of the island and continues around the coast of the Southern half. The South-Central part is hilly and mountainous, ranging from 900-2,100 metres (3,000-7,000 ft) above sea level, with two abruptly ascending platforms flanking the Uva Basin, Hatton Plateau, the Kandy Plateau, Knuckles Group and Piduru Ridges. (Kurian 1978 : 1315).

There are sixteen significant rivers of which the longest are the Mahaweli Ganga 325 Km (206 mi.) and the Aruvi Aru 167 Km (104 mi)(Kurian 1978 : 1315).

b. Weather

Sri Lanka has a generally uniform tropical climate with little variation in the daily or seasonal temperature. Humidity is high throughout the year, frequently ninety per cent.
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The average annual temperature for the whole country ranges from 26.7°C to 28.3°C (80°F to 83°F). The highest temperature recorded is 36.7°C (98°F) in the region around Trincomalee. The island has two monsoons, from the SouthWest in May and the NorthEast in November. The dry zone in the Northern, Central and SouthEastern plain receives from 127 to 190 cm (50 to 75 in) of annual rainfall, and the Western zone in the SouthWestern plain and SouthWestern uplands receives 254 to 508 cm (100 to 200 in.) in a year. Two small arid zones stretching from Puttalam to Jaffna, and from Tangalla to Potuvil receive some 63 to 126 cm (25 to 50) of precipitation a year (Kurian 1978: 1315 - 1316).

c. Geological Structure

The geological structure of the island consists of the following Archaean, Jurassic, Miocene, Pleistocene and recent residual and alluvial deposits (Wijesekara 1949: 43).

d. History

The island of Sri Lanka, was known in ancient times by a variety of names suggestive of wealth, riches and prosperity -- the “Land without Sorrow” to the Chinese, the “Isle of Gems” to the Tamils of South India, and the “Isle of Delight” to the merchants of Arabia. To the Sinhalese it was Lanka Dipa, “The Resplendent Isle”, and Lanka was mentioned in the great Indian epic the Ramayana (de Silva 1977: 31).

Sri Lanka which was nurtured for an entire 2500 years by the Indian culture, considered the prototype of the Eastern culture, has been successful in inheriting a sovereign cultural identity akin to her. Besides this, throughout the entire history, Sri Lanka as a subcontinent has maintained a close relationship with her neighbours in sharing almost all great cultural features in the form of literature, the arts, languages, technology and customs.

As recorded in the Mahavamsa, considered as Sri Lanka unique great chronicle (supposed by compiled in or after the sixth century AD), it was after the arrival of prince Vijaya on the island from a North Indian province around the fifth century BC, that Aryan colonies began spreading around all parts of the island (Guruge 1989: 537 - 539). Prior to that, this island had been under the administration of so-called ‘primitive indigenous’ groups of people known as the Yakshas, Nagas and Rakshas (Guruge 1989: 92 - 96).
Vijaya’s followers founded several settlements in the North and South of the island and built cities. Anuradhapura was built by king Pandukhabaya. Ruhunu, Maya and Pihti Ratas were the divisions of Lanka in olden times, and that is why the king of Lanka was called the ‘King of Tri Sinhala’ (Vijayatunga 1955: 90).

The most significant event recorded in the history of the country occurred in the first century B.C when during the reign of Devanampiyatissa, Buddhism was introduced to Ceylon by Mahinda thero, the son of emperor Ashoka of India. In fact, Sinhala nationalism is deeply rooted in Buddhism. The mainstream of Sri Lanka’s socio-political life is nourished in several ways by Buddhism (Sharma 1988: 36). The island became the home of primary form of Buddhism, and it has remained so upto the present time (Geiger 1960: 19).

Since the Aryan migration the country was ruled for an uninterrupted period (from the fifth century BC to the third century BC) by Sinhalese kings.

After the arrival of the Aryans and Buddhism, the Dravidian influence was the third major ingredient in the island’s development in proto-historic times. There is no firm evidence as to when the Dravidians first came to the island, but they did so early times, either as invaders or as peaceful immigrants. By the third century BC the Dravidian intrusion into the affairs of Sri Lanka became very marked (De Silva 1981: 12). The present-day Tamil community living in Sri Lanka consider themselves as the descendants of these early Dravidians.

The Indian Tamils are the descendants of those who have been brought into this country from 1825 to 1932 as plantation workers during the period of the British rule (Desai 1934: 15-17). Merchants and maritime traders who arrived here from Arabia settled down in Ceylon and had intermarriages with Sinhalese and Tamil people, thus establishing Muslim colonies in proximity to the coastal areas of the the island.

Sri Lanka’s modern history needs to be discussed in relation to two eras, the period under Western rule and the post-independence period. It is to be seen how the ancient documented history running back to a period of 2500 years, deviated into a new path with the invasion of the Portuguese in 1505. From there onwards, the Portuguese and the Dutch acquired the coastal regions, while finally the British subdued the entire land through
invasions starting in 1796. The local inhabitants were thus subjected to numerous pressures and influences for not less than 450 years under Western colonial administration.

After a continuous administration of one and a half centuries, the British granted independence to Ceylon on February 4th, 1948 while at the same time bestowing a Westminster-style parliamentary democracy.

e. Population


Seventy four per cent of the population is classified as rural population. The urban component of the population is estimated at 24 per cent. The annual rate of growth is 2 per cent. The annual birth rate is 27 per 1,000, Sri Lanka ranks 96th in the world in this respect. Birth control has been accepted as official policy since 1954 (Kurian 1978 :1316 and also see Sharma 1988 :3).

The population density was 267 per sq. km (104 per sq. mi.) in 1991. The density is greatest in the SouthWestern quarter of the island. About 22 per cent of the population lives in the Colombo district (Population Statistics of Sri Lanka, Population Information Centre 1992:1).

The national male/female ratio is 104 to 100. The population is young with 40 per cent of the population under fourteen years of age. Fifty four per cent is between 15 and 64 years and 6 per cent over 65 (Kurian 1978 :1316).

Since 1950 the net flow of migration has been outward. Following an agreement with the Government of India 525,000 Indian Tamils were repatriated. Legal immigration has been stopped but some illegal immigration still takes place (Kurian 1978:1316).

f. Ethnic Composition

Seventy four per cent of the population are Sinhalese, 18.2 per cent Tamil, 7 per cent Moors and the rest are mainly Burghers (descendants of the Dutch and the Portuguese).

Accordingly the Sinhalese form the ethnic majority. They form a fairly homogeneous group, though they are sometimes divided on the basis of geography and culture into the low country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese. The next most numerous group are the Ceylon Tamils and the Moors. Burghers and Malays form smaller ethnic groups.

Ninety per cent of the Sinhalese are Buddhists and speak Sinhala, while about the same percentage of Tamil are Hindus and speak Tamil. Moors and Malays also speak Tamil and practice Islam, and the Burghers are Christian and English speaking.

Some two thousand Veddas, the original inhabitants of Sri Lanka, still survive in the Uva and Eastern provinces.

The Kinnara, Rodi and Ahikuntaka live in Sri Lanka as three small groups confined to well known isolated villages or localities. They have adopted simple professions as their modes of living, such as cleaning up fields, manufacturing leather belts, drumming and dancing, mat weaving, fortunetelling and snakecharming. The Ahikuntaka are an entirely nomadic group who construct temporary small huts for made of palm or coconut leaves. The population of all these three communities is fast decreasing due to social change and the assimilation into the mainstream.

g. Languages

Sinhala and Tamil are the official languages. English was replaced by Sinhala and Tamil as the medium of administration and education, but it is still the lingua franca and the second language in all schools. About 10 per cent of the population can speak or understand English while 58.9 per cent can speak Sinhala and 21.6 per cent Tamil (Kurian 1978: 1316).
h. Religion

Buddhism in its 'Theravada' form is the religion of most of the Sinhalese. Tamils are mostly Hindu and Islams the Moors and Malays. Christianity cuts across ethnic lines with about 7 per cent followers, most of whom are descendants of converts to Roman Catholicism during the Portuguese era. The Constitution makes no reference to an official religion. However, Buddhism is generally identified with Sinhalese nationalism and the Sinhala language. In 1981 Buddhists formed 69.3 per cent of the population, Hindus 15.5 per cent, Christians 7.5 per cent, Islam 7.6 per cent and others 0.1 per cent of the population ((Population Statistics of Sri Lanka, Population Information Centre 1992 : 11).

i. Law

In addition to the Roman-Dutch Laws, the British introduced the English Law into the country. Accordingly, in Sri Lanka the present common law happens to be the Roman-Dutch Law, and the English Law. Apart from this, three customary codes Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim law are also in practice. The Sinhalese law is also known as 'Kandyan law' and the Tamil law as 'Thesawalamai'.

j. Literacy and Education


The missionary education system had been introduced by the British rulers. When it began to achieve popularity, the national education began to suffer. The establishment of the University of Ceylon in 1942 may be regarded as yet another key educational development of this era of reform (de Silva 1977 : 409).

The progress achieved in the field of education after gaining independence, is conspicuous. Results of the free education system instituted in 1945 could be reaped only after independence.
k. Health

Due to the health policy in independent Sri Lanka, the ratio of death began to decline rapidly. According to the population statistics of Sri Lanka in 1990, the crude death rate was 5.8 per 1,000. Infant mortality rate was 15 per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy at birth: 79.1 (males), 74.8 (females) (Population Information Centre 1992: 20-22). By promoting the welfare of the citizens after independence, malnutrition too began to fall decrease.

Compared to other Asians, Sri Lankans are relatively healthy and free from major endemic and infectious diseases. According to the WHO, the major causes of death are gastritis, pneumonia, malignant neoplasms, heart diseases and anemia (Kurian 1978: 1325).

l. Constitution and Government

While parliamentary democracy became Sri Lanka's political system, the constitutional amendments which were included in 1972 and 1978 are considered as the next important change occurring in the political arena. Subsequent to the constitutional amendments instituted in 1972, Sri Lanka which upto then had accepted the Queen's authority, dismissed the latter and became an independent, sovereign republic. A constitutional change introducing an executive presidential system took place in 1978. The presidential term of office is six years.

The head of the Government is the President, who is elected by universal suffrage. The Prime Minister is appointed by the President. The Prime Minister and the cabinet of ministers are collectively responsible to the National State Assembly and hold office only as long as they enjoy its confidence. The President holds the portfolios of defence and plan implementation in the cabinet.

Sri Lanka was the first country in Asia to adopt universal franchise for men and women over the age of 21 (later reduced to 18).

m. Economy

Agriculture had been the foremost source of livelihood of the locals. The cultivation of paddy occupied a prominent position from ancient times. After tea, rubber, coconut and
spices were introduced during the British period, these crops became the primary sources which contributed finances to the national income.

Though Sri Lanka has given pride of place to traditional agriculture, at present a complex multi-faceted economy with industry and other export-oriented economic activities function. Till 1977 a closed economy prevailed. After 1977, because of the liberal economic policy, or in other words, open economy, a number of socio-economic changes have taken place.

The pattern of industrialization has been marked by an increasing Government role in investment and production, and a rapid shift from consumer to strategic and basic industries. Agriculture is mechanized and modern technology is being introduced even into rural areas. The rural landscape is rapidly changing with a quick urbanization in which industrial technology and electronic media play an important role.

n. Socio-Cultural Background

It is pertinent to make mention of the caste and class structure at least in relation to Sri Lanka’s present social organization. Caste in Sri Lanka is not the same as in India. There is less rigidity, and caste mobility is a common feature. Among Tamil Hindus, the institution of caste still has the rigidity that one finds in the Indian subcontinent. Sharma (1988: 4) states that it is said to be very rigid in Jaffna; somewhat less rigid in the Kandyan region and even less rigid in the low country districts. Yet in proposal marriages, the traditional Sinhalese would consider caste ensuring that the partner comes from an identical caste as theirs. But in modern marriages where young people ‘fall in love’, caste does not occupy the same position as in traditional marriages. Education and modernization thus have played a key role in reducing the rigidity of caste roles. Social class is determined by economic, political and educational abilities.

Marriage among the Sinhalese takes two forms: i.e. the ‘Binna’, and the ‘Diga’. The former is where the bride is favored with better advantages and inherits immovable property too. The latter is where the bride in most cases inherits moveable property. But, in modern times it has been noticed that parents have tended to discard bygone customs of the past and have adopted a process where their property is to be equally shared between the partners, irrespective of sex. The men however enjoys more advantages in the inheritance of property; where Muslims are concerned, it is seen that they too now seem to have adopted
a more liberal attitude in this respect. In this context, the more conventional minded happen to be the Tamils. Their right to ownership of property is decided upon by the Tamil personal law known as the ‘Thesawalamai’. Though one would assume on the surface level that the Tamil woman enjoys a greater right in the ownership of property, an analysis of the law show that the right to ownership of property and freedom has been restricted by firm laws and customs. The Tamil female has been controlled to such an extent by the ‘Thesawalamai law’ that she is not permitted to arrive at any decision over her own property without the consent of her husband.

In this manner it is evident that as far as the inheritance of property in Sri Lanka, is concerned the ethnic identity of the individual is of prime importance.

This brief description of the socio-cultural background of Sri Lanka can be concluded as follows: the present situation of Sri Lanka is far from healthy. Due to youth unrest there were uprisings in the South in 1971 and in 1987 - 89. The insurgency in the North which started in the early 1980s is still continuing. The root cause of most of these problems are the post-colonial policies adopted in the name of ‘development’. Therefore the country is in need of a new socio-political order which takes into account its natural resources, location and culture. The present study is being conducted in the above mentioned socio-political scenario.