CHAPTER V

The Puberty Ritual Among The Veddas

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THE PUBERTY RITUAL AMONG THE VEDDAS

5.1 Ritual

a. Introduction

Ritual is derived from Latin term ‘ritus’ which means custom. There are two distinct trends of common usage for the words rite - ritual, ceremony - ceremonial and custom - customary (Leach 1968 : 520). According to Kelly and Kaplan (1990 : 120) the study of ritual has to turn to history and raise fundamental questions for anthropology. Definition of ‘ritual’ has long been debated. Proposed delimiting features range from biological bases; to functional values; to linguistic, symbolic, or semiotic forms; to rejection of the category altogether; to rejection of all general categories, and insistence that the proper starting point is indigenous experience and category. But the definitions of ritual that have been offered have tended to share a presupposition about their object. In part because many rituals are indigenously represented as “ancient” and unchanging, rituals unlike riots, for example carry an albatross of connections to “tradition,” the scared, to structures that have generally been imagined in stasis. While riots are obviously events in history, scholars have had a great deal of difficulty conceiving of rituals as anything more concrete than types of events. Until recently the unique ritual event has been an anomaly, understood only when the function or transformation is discovered that identifies its place in structure. It is the possibility that rituals are historical events that now intrigues many anthropologists.

In fact there are different views and approaches to a study of ritual. Some scholars study rituals as expressions of relations between historically specific selves and others in theories of identity and alterity. Others study ritual within dynamic cultural systems and articulations in the colonial encounter. Still others focus on rituals of rule and resistance in studies of domination, which some following William’s and Gramsci, call “hegemony”(Kelly and Kaplan 1990 : 32). Accordingly there are number of theories on ritual such as sociological, anthropological and psycho-analytic. This study examines the puberty ritual and its relation to the socialization process.
An anthropological analysis of puberty ritual is located in a general theory of ritual of Emile Durkhiem. Therefore my inquiry starts from Durkhiem's theory of ritual. Durkhiem (1954 : 37) classified rituals into two forms 'sacred' and 'profane.' Sacred things come under the realm of religion and profane activities are secular activities. Sacred is further divided into 'beliefs' and 'rites'. Religion is a system of beliefs and rites which are sacred. Beliefs are states of opinion, rites are determined modes of action and beliefs are translated into action through rites.

Durkhiem (1954 : 37) distinguishes three different types of rites: (1) negative rites, (2) positive rites and (3) piacular rites. Negative rites are essentially interdicts, taboos and prohibitions whose purpose is to preserve the discontinuity between the sacred and profane. They serve the preparatory function and the disciplinary function. The positive rites on the other hand seek to establish a perpetual communion with the sacred. These rites can be seen operating to promote fecundity and reproduction. Sacrifices are an excellent examples of positive rites. The function of positive rites are the cohesive, revitalising and euphoric functions. Piacular rites are the rites of expiation, they seek to appease, to make amends or to pay the penalty for transgression of the 'morality' of the society. The function of piacular rites is to redress the morality of the society which has been transgressed.

There are two basic attributes of rites: firstly 'sacredness' and secondly 'moral necessity'. Sacredness marks a ritual action from non-ritual action. The celebration of rites and rituals are marked by the concentration of the entire society at a certain point for a certain period of time. The feeling of effervescence and exaltation are experienced by the participants in the ritual. Ritual activity is a collective activity where the individual is totally subsumed in the collective. This gives rise to a collective force which is extraordinary, immanent and transcendent. The ritual actions produce a sense of sacredness totally incompatible with profane actions (Durkhiem 1954 : 41-47).

The moral necessity aspect of ritual is based on Durkhiem's conception of relation between religion, and individual and his society. The society awakens in every individual a sense of the divine or sacred through rites and rituals. According to Durkhiem religious interests are merely the symbolic form of social and moral interest. Society is thus perceived as a moral community, the 'morality' of a society lies in the system of meanings within which human existence is located. The function of the ritual is that it gives to interpersonal
relations which are continuously renewed and reinforced, leading to development of a new 'collective consciousness' among individuals. Rituals result in the domination of collective consciousness over individual consciousness. The individual is integrated into the society and common bonds are reaffirmed among individuals leading to social solidarity (Darkhiem 1954: 41-47).

But Leach (1968: 527) argues, that the overprecision of Durkhiem’s classification leads to some difficulties. He asserts dogmatically that the division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought.

The central theme of Radcliffe-Brown’s theory of ritual, which he derived from Durkhiem can be summarized thus. In The Andaman Islanders and elsewhere Radcliffe-Brown argued that ritual’s main social function is to express certain important social sentiments (or as we should nowadays call them values), such as the need for mutual support and solidarity between the members of a community. Unless enough people held and acted on these values the society could not survive, and through the performance of ritual they are kept constantly in the minds of the performers, and so the maintenance of the social system is secured. Radcliffe-Brown’s argument that ritual is a kind of language, that what it says is often socially very important, and that the statements it makes have significant implications for action (Beattie 1972: 210; See also Radcliffe Brown 1922).

Levi-Strauss (1987: 204-205) is inclined to see the relations between mythology and ritual. He has done it, in terms of Pawnee mythology. But the theoretical views frequently put forward as to the close relations between mythology and ritual were in no ways confirmed. There is no myth underlying the ritual as a whole, and when foundation myths exist, they generally bear on details of the ritual which appear secondary or supernumerary. However, if myth and ritual do not mirror each other, they often reciprocally complete each other, and it is only by comparing them that one can formulate hypotheses on the nature of certain intellectual strategies typical of the culture under consideration. Among the Pawnee, this complementarity between myth and ritual is manifest in a striking fashion. An example is the case of initiation customs, where the myths and rites concerned with initiation into the brotherhoods of sorcerer-healers exhibit structures that are rigorously identical, but inverse. One is thus led to postulate the existence of an underlying psycho-sociological system, of which mythology and ritual constitute facets.
Mary Douglas (1970: 21) argues that ritual is a viable means of communication, and it will help us to understand religious behavior if we can treat ritual forms, like speech forms as transmitters of culture. For her, ritual 'is preeminently a form of communication' a kind of language which communicates social information, and as such helps replenish society's collective sentiments. As such, ritual should be treated like speech, which also transmits culture and is generated in social reactions.

Like Douglas many anthropologists have considered ritual as a means of communication. For instance Wagner (1984: 144-145) says that ritual has 'its own formal principle,' it is not primarily a form of Durkheimian social glue, nor is it necessarily any sort of social or mechanical regulatory mechanism. Its address to moral issues, its definite outcome, transformative capability is realized in an altogether different direction. Crocker (1983) also adheres to the same view.

But some other anthropologists and philosophers have tried to define ritual from different perspectives. Among them I here by mention the views of Maurice Bloch (1989) and Foucault's (1980). Bloch says that ritual is a kind of tunnel into which one plunges, and where, since there is no possibility of turning either to right or left, the only thing to do is to follow. Rituals are the "special strategy" of "a special form of authority", "traditional authority". They "hide reality". Bloch argues that "the particular form of different rituals varies but the basic point is the same: the cultivation of the hatred of life for the sake of authority. In Bloch's view, rituals are not a necessary part of social life. Some societies have more, some fewer: "the amount of social structure, of the past in the present, of ritual communication, is correlated with the amount of institutionalized hierarchy and that is what it is about" (Bloch, quoted in Kelly and Kaplan 1990: 125).

We know that Foucault's philosophy mainly constructs on the power relation. His focus on ritual is also based upon power. He says that the ritual in all politics and the politics in ritual. Following Foucault, Kelly and Kaplan argue that ritual plays a crucial role in practice, as a vehicle for all forms of authority. From the Foucaultian point of view, this makes all rituals sinister and the best defense in ironic distance. Azad (1983) also following Foucault, wants to study the instrumentality of rituals what they do rather than what they mean. He criticizes Geertz (1973) for neglecting power in his focus on symbols (See
Finally, it has been stressed that even among those who have specialized in this field there is the widest possible disagreement as to how the word ‘ritual’ should be defined and used.

b. Function and Performance of Ritual

I would next like to draw my attention towards the functions and performances of ritual. Schechner (1994: 613) says, that rituals are performative: they are acts done; and performances are ritualized: they are codified, repeatable actions. The functions of theater, identified by Aristotle and Horace - entertainment, celebration, enhancement of social solidarity, education (including political education), and healing - are also functions of ritual. The difference lies in context and emphasis. Rituals emphasize efficacy: healing the sick, initiating neophytes, burying the dead, teaching the ignorant, forming and cementing social relations, maintaining (or over throwing) the status quo, remembering the past, propitiating the Gods, exorcising the demonic, maintaining cosmic order. Rituals are performed on schedule, at special locations, regardless of weather or attendance. They mark days and places of importance (Latent to Easter in Christendom, the half-month leading up to dasera among Hindus, New Year’s day in Japan, Ramadan and the hadj in Islam, and so on); or are hung on life’s hinges where individual experience connects the society; rites of passage send people through birth, puberty, marriage, induction, resignation, and death.

Among above mentioned functions and performances, as the study relates to rites of passage, I give prominence to the functions and performances which associate with the puberty rituals.

The classic studies in anthropology of young male and female initiation by Audrey Richard’s Chisungu (1956) and Victor Turner’s Mukunda (1967), focus considerable attention on the competence for society as such of the ritual passage of young people to their new status. According to Cohen (1994: 57-58) these rites of initiation transform individuals by investing them with sociability. In doing so, they also enable the society to reproduce itself culturally. The picture which is presented shows the neophyte individual being reclaimed for society, by being drawn towards, and then inducted into, it. Individuality is replaced by sociatibility in the person; selfhood is replaced by society in the form of
personhood. But another interpretation may also be available: that initiation provides social experience which augments, rather than diminishes and displaces, the neophyte's self.

Cohen (1994: 58) further says that ritual which initiate children into adulthood emphasises the gendering of the social world and of those aspects of nature which are culturally appropriated. In so far as they involve more or less radical surgery, the gendering theme also entails the imposition of culture on nature, the transformation of the natural body according to specific and distinctive social conventions. Drastic and irrevocable though it may be, the surgery is not usually an end in itself, but is one of the fugue-like variations on the textual theme of the ritual, a text which grows increasingly complex in the course of its enactment, calling for ever more specialised ritual knowledge among the participants and exegetes. But it is the aspect of the ritual which can be regarded as impressing society most intimately and insistently on the individual's mind and body. Here he raises two question. Does puberty ritual transform the individual into a replicate of the larger social whole? Or does it provide initiates with a text which they assimilate, and thereby transform, to their own experience?

The answers to this questions would be clear once we analyse the views and experiences of other anthropologists on puberty rituals.

John Beattie (1972: 211) states that transition ritual expresses the great social importance which a society attaches to changes of status among its members: the smooth working of any social system depends on everyone knowing and accepting his proper role in it, and this is so specially where (as among the Nilo-Hamites) the maintenance of a fighting force in a state of constant preparedness is essential. Often transition ritual involves the infliction of pain, and so of some fear and anxiety, on the subject of it. This not only serves to impress upon the candidates and all others concerned the social importance of the occasion, but it may also, through the bond of shared suffering, strengthen the tie between those who are initiated together.

According to Mircea Eliade initiation is a recapitulation of the sacred history of the world and of the tribe. On this occasion, the entire society immerses itself once more in the mythical times of origin and emerges from them regenerated. Rituals which perform during initiation are all expressive of the human mind (Eliade, quoted in Auge 1982: 62).
Audrey Richards's ingenious analysis of the 'Chisungu' ceremony of Bemba in Zambia, expressed purposes of the puberty ritual of Bemba Community. Among many other functions of the ceremony one is, that the Bemba tribals want to make their female children according to their own social etiquette. Richards reports, that she has seen, Bemba women explain and teaching the candidates during the 'chisungu' ceremony. They say with great emphasis and characteristic repetition "we teach and teach and teach the girls" and they sometimes add "we make them clever" using the causative form of the verb 'to be intelligent and socially component and to have a knowledge of etiquette', (Ukubacenjela) (Richards 1982 : 125). This is a clear example, how does a community present their own experiences to the next generation and thereby transform them.

Victor Turner (1966 : 93) also considered the rituals (rites) indicate and constitute transitions between states. According to Turner the word state means "a relatively fixed or stable condition." (The rites of transition will be discussed under the next sub topic of Rites of Passage)

The above mentioned perspective and anthropologists' experiences provide evidence for us, through the puberty rituals how a community present their own experiences to their descendants and how they collectively initiate neophytes and assimilate to their larger social World.

c. Relation Between Rituals and Symbols

I would like to conclude this essay by briefly mentioning the relation between rituals and symbols. The logic behind the performance of a ritual or the rationale behind ritual practices can be understood through 'symbolism'. The key to understanding and interpretation of rituals is the 'symbolic elements' of the ritual. Ritual is a symbolic action the distinctive feature of symbolic action is that they are not governed by the laws of logic which govern an ordinary action. A symbol is a representation of reality at a certain level of reference by a corresponding reality at another level of reference. There is thus a possibility of different interpretations of the symbolic elements of a ritual, each interpretation presupposing a different theory of symbolism.

Berger (1966 : 40) defines symbol as 'any significant theme that spans spheres of reality' and symbolic language as 'the linguistic mode by which such transcendence is achieved. Among the most important symbol systems historically have been religion, art and
philosophy. More recently the symbol systems of politics and psychology have gained increasing attention. Symbols or symbolic representations are highly abstract and loom far above everyday life yet they tangibly impose themselves upon everyday life in their capacity to inspire or to give meaning to individual or collective activity, to delegitimate other activity, and to bring to bear the force of social control. In a word, symbols and symbol systems provide an important ordering impulse to social affair and to the collective views of the world. Thus they are an essential part of the reality of everyday life (Wuthnow and et. al 1984 : 37).

Carl Jung (1968 : 4) explains the meaning of symbols is as follows:

Thus a word or image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. It has a wider "unconscious" aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained. Nor can one hope to define or explain it. As the mind explores the symbol, it leads to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason.

In her theory Douglas (1966 : 114-139 ; 1973 : 173-188) draws her attention on symbolic boundaries. Like Levi-strauss though she does not set forth the grand design, with Levi-strauss she also grants that the structuring of experience often comes about through a system of symbolic opposites: Male/Female, black/white, good/evil, purity/dirt. Generally Douglas has refrained from looking at highly integrated patterns of this type in her own work, pointing at most to similarities between the surface content of symbols and implicit beliefs accompanying these symbols. She seeks to discover why symbols occur in some settings and not in others, and why patterns among symbols are sometimes more complex than at other times. To answer these questions she has herself focused heavily on patterns or structures or relations among symbols, rather than on the specific meanings hidden in these symbols (Wuthnow and et. al 1984 : 82 - 84). For instance Douglas (1966 : 136) argues that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. Here she seems to be arguing, though, that power, potency, and danger are generated both by the presence of a well-bounded social order and by the presence of social breakdowns, marginal situations, and ill-defined areas, such that both form and nonform generate the same social experience. It might be that positive rites, such as celebrations and ceremonies are intended to reaffirm corporate social reality and negative rites, such as pollution beliefs, pertain to boundaries and ill-defined areas. But this hypothesis oversimplifies: there are moral interdictions against touching, seeing, and polluting sacred religious objects which are collective representations of corporate society, not the margins of social life (Wuthnow and et.al 1984 : 98-99).
How then can order and disorder generate the same beliefs? Possibly a strong corporate order is accompanied by ritual and pollution beliefs to reaffirm its collective reality, with the margins of system having an extraordinary sense of potency and danger because the contrast between form and nonform is so great. Further, given a boundary crisis, a strongly bounded system will generate more of a ritual response (manufacturing deviance and dirt) than a society with weaker boundaries and less reality conversely, a weaker corporate order will have less ritual and fewer pollution beliefs, as there is less collective reality to renew, and if all its social relations are somewhat ill-defined, the presence of ambiguity at the boundaries will be less threatening and hence not emit such a sense of power and danger. Finally, given a boundary crisis, there will be less of a response, as there is less corporate reality to be threatened and ritually reaffirmed (Wuthrow and et. al 1984 : 99).

According to Victor Turner (1966 : 19 ; and see also 1975 : 145 - 159) the symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behavior, it is the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context. In terms of the Ndembu ritual, he has analysed the structure and properties of symbols. Turner (1966 : 20) says, he found that he could not analyze ritual symbols without studying them in a time series in relation to other "events", for symbols are essentially involved in social process. He came to see performances of ritual as distinct phases in the social processes whereby groups became adjusted to internal changes and adapted to their external environment. From this standpoint the ritual symbol becomes a factor in social action, a positive force in field of activity. The symbol becomes associated with human interests, purposes, ends, and means, whether these are explicitly formulated or have to be inferred from the observed behavior. The structure and properties of a symbol become those of a dynamic entity, at least within its appropriate context of action.

The above concerned perspectives on rituals reveals us the importance of understanding rituals and its performances. In fact the rituals are at the core of the social identity of all communities. Yet each society varies in its view of what is ritual and what is not. Understanding rituals explores how ritual can be understood within the framework of contemporary social anthropology, and shows that ritual is now one of the most fertile fields of anthropological research.
5.2 Rites of Passage

The rituals that mark or accompany the transition from one life status to another are known to anthropologists as "rites of passage". These are reserved for such events as birth, naming a child, the passage from childhood to adult life, marriage, death, and burial. They are somewhat more marked among 'simple' folk than among 'modern' peoples, and among the latter are more often private than public affairs. All such rites receive less attention in the 'simplest primitive' societies than in those with more ritual complexity; but at least the rites of passage were many and complex any individual instance, varying from celebration and public (hence legal) recognition of the new status to seeking religious sanction. The kinds of rite differed from culture to culture, each culture area having its fixed patterns. The extent to which the rites were practiced also varied from individual to individual; for some they were mere forms, for others an outlet for emotion engendered by a new social situation (Spier 1983 : 358).

In fact the term 'rites of passage' was first used by the Dutch anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1908. The analysis of ceremonies accompanying an individual's "life crises" which van Gennep called rites de passage is usually considered to be his unique contribution. He pointed out that, when the activities associated with such ceremonies were examined in terms of their order and content, it was possible to distinguish three major phases: separation (separation), transition (margin), and incorporation (aggregation). Considered as a whole, he labeled these the schema of rites de passage. Passage might more appropriately have been translated as "transition", but in deference to van Gennep and general usage of the term "rites of passage", this form of the translation has been preserved. His term schema has usually been translated as "pattern", although the flavour of his usage inclines one toward "dynamics" if such a term might be construed to include "process" and "structure" (van Gennep 1960 ed : vii).

That the rites carried out on the threshold itself are transition rites. "Purifications" (washing, cleansing etc.) constitute rites of separation from previous surroundings; there follow rites of incorporation (presentation of salt, a shared meal, etc.). The rites of the threshold are therefore not "union" ceremonies, properly speaking, but rites of preparation for union, themselves preceded by rites of preparation for the transitional stage. Consequently, he proposes to call the rites of separation from a previous world, preliminal rites, those executed during the transitional stage liminal (or threshold) rites, and the
ceremonies of incorporation into the new world postliminal rites (van Gennep 1969: 20-21). Thus in a more sophisticated formulation van Gennep defined the notion of liminality as the extreme marginal state, the typical ritual state, and distinguished between preliminal, liminal and postliminal phases.

According to van Gennep man cannot pass from one state to another without going through an intermediate stage. Therefore he explains the necessity of the rites of passage for humans thus:

The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another. Wherever there are fine distinctions among age or occupational groups, progression from one group to the next is accompanied by special acts, like those which make up apprenticeship in our trades. Among semi-civilized people such acts are enveloped in ceremonies, since to the semi-civilized mind no act is entirely free of the sacred. In such societies every change in a person's life involves actions and reactions between sacred and profane--actions and reactions to be regulated and guarded so that society as a whole will suffer no discomfort or injury. Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization and death. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined. Since the goal is the same, it follows of necessity that the ways of attaining should be at least analogous, if not identical in detail (since in any case the individual involved has been modified by passing through several stages and transversing several boundaries) (van Gennep 1969: 2-3).

'Rites of passage' is a very broad category which has been applied in various disciplines. In the case of the present study it refers to rituals symbolizing transition from childhood to adulthood, I have drawn special attention to 'initiation rites' in dealing with adolescent rituals.

Van Gennep (1960: 65-115) has classified puberty as physiological and social. He says that 'physiological puberty' and 'social puberty' are essentially different and only rarely converge. The physiological puberty is recognized by the physical maturity of the adolescents, such as swelling of the breasts, an enlargement of the pelvis, the appearance of pubic hair and so on. The social puberty is recognized by the rites, ceremonies and practices which among different peoples mark the transition from childhood to adolescence.
Describing certain ceremonies of the Todas, circumcision practice among the Rahuna, Djabala, Orthodox Muslims and so forth, van Gennep states that the distinction between physical puberty and social puberty is most clearly apparent.

Van Gennep (1960 : ix, 66-67) was also insistent that puberty ceremonies were misnamed, since this type of rite occurred at ages which had no specific relation to the physical appearance of sexual maturity. He considered these rites to be primarily rites of separation from an asexual world.

Summing up his theory van Gennep (1960 : 186) says, that since rites of passage are observed at birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, enthronement, ordination, funerals and the travels of sacred personages (such as a king or priest), a general explanation must be found for it, and the simplest is, he thinks that it should be viewed as a transition rite.

Many anthropologists have placed emphasis on different parts of this transition process. For instance Lloyd Warner, Henri Junod, John Whiting, Victor Turner and others have drawn their attention on the concept of rites of passage.

According to Lloyd Warner (1959 : 303) the movement of a man through his lifetime, from a fixed placental placement within his mother’s womb to his death and ultimate fixed point of his tombstone and final containment in his grave as a dead organism - punctuated by a number of critical moments of transition which all societies ritualize and publicly mark with suitable observances to impress the significance of the individual and the group on living members of the community. These are the important times of birth, puberty, marriage, and death.

But as van Gennep, Junod and others have shown rites of passage are not confined to culturally defined life-crisis, it accompanies with socially defined various events of life (Turner 1966 : 95).

Considering initiation and certain other rites Mircea Eliade (1965) remarks that most of the rites are expressive of the human mind. For Eliade, initiation is defined as a ‘body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a radical modification in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated’, and it is equivalent to ‘an ontological mutation in existential condition’ characteristic of puberty rites, of admission rites into sects or brotherhoods, and of those rites through which the vocation of specialists like Shamans is
realised. All these rites have a number of themes in common, and these guarantee their efficacy, in as much as they evoke and re-enact the inaugural cosmogonic myth. Of these themes she will single out those pertaining to the neophyte’s separation from his mother, to death and symbolic resurrection, and those (complementing the previous ones) that pertain to gestation, ingestion and symbolic cannibalism. These are all basically variations of a central theme; Australian puberty rites or the Mysteries of Eleusis are above all a repetition of the cosmogony: ‘Initiation is a recapitulation of the sacred history of the world and of the tribe. On this occasion, the entire society immerses itself once more in the mythical times of origin and emerges from them regenerated.’ If, therefore, a history of religions is possible this is due to the recurrence of certain number of themes, a recurrence which may be explained without having recourse to diffusionist hypotheses, but by invoking universal properties of the human mind, i.e., that one participates in the ‘plenitude of sacred, primordial time’ (Eliade, quoted in Auge 1982: 61-62)

Without setting aside the problem of the rite’s efficacy, Eliade does in fact link it to the satisfaction that an evocation of origins would produce, whilst at the same time making a second distinction, which also features in functionalism, between a society’s official and marginal sectors. In Eliade’s work this is phrased in terms of an opposite between masculine initiation, as recognition of the fact of menstruation, which is therefore directed at nature and beyond that, at magic and acts of reversal that to some extent work to counterbalance the established power of men (Eliade, quoted in Auge 1982: 62).

But Auge (1982: 62) states, a distinction of this is totally artificial, as a whole range of examples would serve to demonstrate. Women often play a significant role in rituals that are perfectly integrated with a society’s official functioning, nor can rituals of reversal (which play on the relations between the sexes or on power relations) be understood if one treats them as marginal and accessory phenomena.

Turner’s view points on rites of passage are mostly similar to van Gennep. In fact, Turner was inspired by Van Gennep’s analysis of rites of passage, where he distinguished between different phases (separation, marginality and aggregation) of passage from one culturally defined state to another. The notion of van Gennep’s liminality allows Turner to define and discriminate between notions of ‘structure’ and ‘communitas’; for him liminality would correspond to the periods of transition between the ‘normal’ or ‘structured’ states of social life. All social life would in fact be ordered according to two main models, alternative or superimposed, one defining the structured, differentiated and hierarchised system of
political, juridical and economic 'structures', the other corresponding to a relatively undifferentiated state proper to periods of liminality, and defining a community or even a communion of equals, all equally subordinated to the authority of the masters of ritual (Turner, quoted in Auge 1982: 62-63; and also see Turner 1966).

Examining Turner's above mentioned viewpoints on 'structure' and 'communitas' Auge (1982: 63) says, 'Turner, who is faithful here to an Anglo-Saxon research tradition, seeks to discover the element that is common to the apparently diverse types of situation: that of neophytes in the liminal phase of initiation rituals, that of the indigenous people in a country dominated by invaders, that of beggars in a society, that of millenarian movements, that of monastic orders, that of patrilineality in a matrilineal society, and that of matrilineality in a patrilineal society, etc. In this respect, Turner’s project is as classical as it is ambitious, but it is as fragile as it is classical.

Coming back to Turner, there are actually only two types of liminality and two types of ritual, which are, moreover, closely connected: rites of status elevation and rites of status reversal. The first ensure the progress of neophytes through a hierarchy of institutional positions (this is the case, for instance, with puberty rites), and the second are essentially cyclical or seasonal rites in which persons occupying inferior positions in the social hierarchy can be brought to exercise a ritual authority over their superiors, this 'reversal' sometimes being accompanied by very spectacular demonstrations and provocations (Turner, quoted in Auge 1982: 63-64; see also Turner 1966: 93-110).

There are at least two respects in which Turner supersedes the sort of thematic analysis so dear to the historian of religions. First he tries to understand the mechanism of ritual efficacy. He thus suggests that the symbolism of rites and myths is apparently so complex and tortuous because ritual at any rate derives its identity from two sources, one of which is physiological, the other social and moral. The drives and emotions that stem from human physiology and are aroused by ritual forms would therefore guarantee the passage from the obligatory to the desirable that, in Durkheim’s terms, was the essence of the religious functions. In constituting the unity of the affective and somatic with the structural and the psychological a rite provides its participants with a psychological aid, and in this sense religion is 'rational' (Auge 1982: 64).

Second, Turner tries to give an account of what ritual in general is, and does not consider initiation rites to be a subject to be analysed on its own. In thus transcending a
simple empirical apprehension of an institution, he shows how the two types of liminality and the two types of ritual orientations (rise in, and reversal of, status) that he has distinguished, together apply as much to the definition of initiation rites as to that of rites of installation and coronation; liminality or 'communitas' are not specific to female initiation but are an aspect of ritual activity in general. Lastly, if cyclical and collective rites tied to production, the rhythm of the seasons, or natural calamities, are more often the occasion for status reversals than are other rituals, they do not enjoy a monopoly over them; thus the naming ritual for a Ndembu chief combines both rites of 'elevation' and rites of status reversal (Auge 1982: 64).

According to the above mentioned definitions, classifications and perspectives on rites of passage, can be seen, how anthropologists draw their attention in this field of study and its importance to the human life. Thus it can be concluded, the ritual performances during the rites of passage are meaningful occasions for statement and demonstration of the social relationships which have long-term, abstract implications-maintenance of social order and solidarity.

5.3 The Puberty Ritual of Veddas

A Vedda girl approaching her puberty period is socialised in this aspect in advance by her mother. She is advised to go under a milking-tree close to her hut; stand in opposite direction to the West, facing the East and to tap on the tree with a splinter of wood, loud enough for others to hear. She is requested to carry out this procedure no sooner than she (the girl) observes a mark of blood on the dress she was wearing at that time. In general, a Vedda girl attains puberty around the age of about 11 - 14 years. There is a belief among the Vedda community that, in cases where a Yedda girl is influenced by evil effects she is supposed to attain puberty at a later period than is usual.

A girl who attains her first menses, thus goes under a milking-tree as has been instructed. The mother who then understands her behavior, approaches her immediately and covers the daughter with a veil. A sickle is then handed over to the girl, and makes the latter tap on the tree in order that the girl is able to see the oozing of milky stuff from the tree. Subsequently the mother makes the girl say the following verse so that all ill effects on her are dispelled:
Ammita appita vas nethiyo  
Meeyan daluwata vas palayo  
Mamee muththata vas nethiyo  
Meeyan daluwata vas palyo  
Aiyya akkata vas nethiyo  
Meeyan daluwata vas palayo  
Nena massinata vas nethiyo  
Meeyan daluwata vas palayo.

The translation to the verse is as follows:

Let the evil on the mother and father be dispelled  
Let that evil be resided on the tree giving forth honey  
Let the evil on the uncle and great grandfather be dispelled  
Let that evil be resided on the tree giving forth honey  
Let the evil on the brother and sister be dispelled  
Let that evil be resided the tree giving forth honey  
Let the evil on the cross-cousin sister and the cross-cousin brother be dispelled  
Let that evil be resided on the tree giving forth honey.

According to the belief of the Veddas, if the girl happened to be evil-influenced, then either the milking-tree would wither and die or the cross-cousin sister the aunt who dispelled the evil would succumb to a calamity. If not, some close relative would have to face such negative circumstances. On such an occasion the shaman who understands the situation would perform a *Baliya* (a ritual of exorcism using an image, made out of clay) and thus dispel the evil from the person concerned. After dispelling such evil, the mother of the girl would call forth the cross-cousin of the latter. This person would then come and perform the custom of the ‘*Vas Kalaya*’ or the ‘*Vas Labba*’ as it is called. The cross-cousin sister throws the ‘*Vas Labba*’ in a manner that it strikes the milking-tree. In this case, the gourd shell shatters into pieces and falls at the feet of the girl. According to the nature in which the gourd shell is shattered, they render their versions of the good and the evil. If the gourd shell was shattered in only two, then it is believed that the girl and members of her family would have to undergo various forms of misfortune. In such an instance, the gourd shell lies on the ground and it is made to be trampled by the girl herself so that it is reduced to small fragments. However, the really unshattered gourd shell

---

1 It is the shell of a gourd that is dried used as the 'Vas Kalaya' or pot. Some use an earthen pot for this purpose.
portends the misfortune that awaits the girl. The Veddas firmly believe that, if this custom
was to be performed either by the cross-cousin sister or the girl’s aunt; then the evil effects
lie in store for the person who so performs it. On the day the custom of the ‘Vas Labba’ is
performed, milk-rice is prepared and the girl partakes of it.

Subsequently the mother of the girl calls the cross-cousin brother. On his arrival, he
constructs the Kili pela close to the hut of the girl with branches of Indi\(^2\) or any other
suitable type of branches. Just as much as the cross-cousin sister performs the custom of the
Vas Kalaya, it is the role of the cross-cousin brother to put up the Kili pela. The Veddas
believe that the father or a brother erecting this hut would bring ill-effects upon them. While
the roof of the Kili pela is thatched with Iluk branches, some others plant a Rambuk\(^3\) tree in
front of the Kili pela. The girl is kept in isolation in the Kili pela for a period of nine days.
The reason for keeping the girl in seclusion in this manner is to safeguard her from the
evil eye of the demons. The Veddas say that the odour of a girl who has attained puberty
goes to demons even across the oceans. Since the Yak Pettiya (literally, Devil-box) is found
in the majority of Vedda homes, it has to be protected from the killa(defilement) or
pollution. If the Yak Pettiya was polluted, the demons would go into a rage and cause
serious adversities to occur in the life of the person who succumbed to the killa. Therefore,
they follow special protection methods to protect the girl who is isolated in the Kili pela on
her attainment, from such calamities. These protective measures are as follows. For this
purpose, a Vedda shaman collects some ash from the hearth together with a few pebbles in a
coconut shell and begins to chant manthrams (incantations). The ash is strewn right round
the Kili pela and also round the mat on which the girl sleeps. A little bit of ash is tied in a
knot from the part of the cloth the girl is wearing. This they call the Alu Weli Arakshawa.
Other than this, precautions are taken so as not to leave the girl in total solitude. For her
safety, it is said that in the past, for the purpose of protection, the cross-cousin brother who
erected the Kili pela used to sleep outside it all throughout the nine days.

\(^2\)Surychros neix-Vomica L.-Loganiaceae Phoenix Zelanica.
\(^3\)Musa acuminata-Musa balbisiana.
5.1 - The attained Vedda girl in the confinement of Kili Pela.

No taboos in relation to eatables are issued to a Vedda girl who attains puberty. During the aforementioned period of time, any form of food that is cooked within the house is given for her to eat. Among food items that are most popular are hunted flesh, bees-honey, kurakkan and porridge made out of maize. However, from modern times, they are treated with rice and vegetables. Whatever variety the meals happened to be, the meals are supplied right upto her doorstep at the Kili pela. Though no food taboos were in operation, steps are taken to keep a Vedda girl who had attained puberty away from all other social transactions. Accordingly, the little volume of water brought to the Kili pela is given to her to perform her ablutions. After a lapse of three days, however, some others would bring water in which leaves found in the jungle, such as Pavatta, Adhatoda, Kohomba, and Endaru have been boiled, with which she is cleansed. This washing of the girl’s body is done by the girl’s cross-cousin sister or aunt. It is still the forest that is used as the toilet. During the period of the girl’s isolation, speaking in a loud voice and laughing is prohibited. While she is totally kept away from male-folk, she is to strictly adhere to the taboos in maintaining them.

4 Vaastica Nees Acanthaceae.
5 Indica L. Rutaceae.
6 Azadirachta indica A. Juss Meliaceae.
7 Ricinus Communis.
The girl who is kept inside the *Kili pela* for nine days is finally given a bath as soon as the nineth day comes to a close. This activity too is performed by her cross-cousin sister. The water required for this purpose is supplied right into the *Kili pela*. After the bath, the girl is dressed with fresh clothing. All the clothing which has been worn during the nine days period is then bundled up and is deposited in the *Kili pela*, subsequent to which the cross-cousin brother or the cross-cousin sister sets fire to the hut. If there happened to be any fancy ornaments that she was wearing, these items then becomes the possession of the cross-cousin sister. It is believed that once the *Kili pela* is set fire to in this fashion, any evil influences that had been remaining also would be dispelled. Subsequently, according to the financial means, a small treat is given to the visitors present.

The girl who is bathed and escorted back home is given advice by the elders. From here onwards, until at least another three months passes, the girl is socialised and advised not to travel about alone and not to go looking for firewood or in search of water. If the need really arises, she is at least to be accompanied by a younger girl. The Vedda community believes that a girl who has attained puberty; if she were to go about alone, would be subjected to supernatural influences. For purposes of evading such incidents occurring, these folk adopt such measures. The information regarding the percentages of those who perform the various steps involved in the puberty rites and those who do not perform them and also the reasons for not performing those steps are given below in the table 5.1.

If the above-mentioned custom is not followed in the case of a girl who had achieved puberty, the Veddas believe that the girl would not enter into marriage at the appropriate period in her life. Further, that even if a girl who attained age were to marry, and this custom had not been followed, then her family-life would be inharmonious, and one full of sorrow. Therefore, the Vedda community do not forget to follow this ritual of puberty in the case of every girl. The diagram 5.1 and the table 5.2 give details of the practice of puberty ritual among the Veddas at Dambana and Henanigala.
THE PUBERTY RITUAL OF THE DAMBANA VEDDA COMMUNITY - 1995

The number of Daughters on whom the puberty ritual was performed

The number of Daughters on whom the puberty ritual was not performed

DIAGRAM 5.1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE OF MOTHER</th>
<th>NUMBER OF DAUGHTERS</th>
<th>THE NUMBER OF DAUGHTER ON WHOM THE PUBERTY RITUAL WAS PERFORMED</th>
<th>THE NUMBER OF DAUGHTER ON WHOM THE PUBERTY RITUAL WAS NOT PERFORMED</th>
<th>REASONS FOR NOT CONDUCTING RITUAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>Not yet attained puberty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>Employed as servants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>Employed as servants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>Not yet attained puberty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>Employed as servants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>Not yet attained puberty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>Not yet attained puberty &amp; Employed as servants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>Not yet attained puberty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>Not yet attained puberty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 5.1

THE PUBERTY RITUAL OF THE VEDDA COMMUNITY - 1996
HENANIGALA AND DAMBANA COMBINED
**TABLE 5.2**
THE MANNER IN WHICH THE VEDDA COMMUNITY CONDUCTS THE PUBERTY RITUAL AND ITS DEVIATION
HENANIGALA AND DAMBANA COMBINED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE NUMBER OF STEPS OR PROCEDURE FOLLOWED IN PERFORMING THE PUBERTY RITUAL</th>
<th>THE PERCENTAGE OF GIRLS FOR WHOM THE PARTICULAR STEP WAS PERFORMED</th>
<th>THE PERCENTAGE OF GIRLS FOR WHOM THE PARTICULAR STEP WAS NOT PERFORMED</th>
<th>THE REASON FOR DEVIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whether the girl was pre-informed about her first menstruation.</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>Employed as servants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The girl approaching a milk-tree and tapping with a splinter.</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>-Do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The girl being covered from head to toe by a cloth.</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>-Do-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cross-cousin sister being summoned for the above purpose.</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>Instead of mother and aunt have performed this step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The custom of performing the <em>Vas Kalaya</em>.</td>
<td>97.6%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>Employed as servants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The erection of the <em>Kili pela</em>.</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>A partition in the house itself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cross-cousin brother being summoned for the above purpose.</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Sister-in-law or brother-in-law of girl’s performing the above role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The procedure of not leaving the girl in solitude.</td>
<td>97.6%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>Employed as servants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No taboos in relation to meals.</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>Due to influence of Sinhalese neighbours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolating the girl inside the <em>Kili pela</em> for nine days.</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>Employed as servants or isolated at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bathing the girl for the second time.</td>
<td>97.6%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>Employed as servants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cross-cousin sister perform the above step.</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>Mother or aunt or elder sister of girl who attained puberty perform this step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting fire to the <em>Kili pela</em></td>
<td>87.8%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>Employed as servants or isolated at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cross-cousins act of setting fire to the <em>Kili pela</em>.</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>Mother and aunt of the girl who attained puberty performing this step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving advice and guidance to the girl.</td>
<td>97.6%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>Employed as servants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The occasion of celebration in the house.</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>Employed as servants or due to poverty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4 The 'Kili' Concept Associated With the Puberty Ritual

The Vedda community maintains a strong faith on the 'Killa' or 'Kiluta' meaning defilement. A community that has made demon worship a significant part of religious belief cannot ignore the concept of the killa. Demons relish blood and flesh. Since blood occupies a prominent position in the case of the main rites of passage (birth, attaining age, marriage, death), the connection between the influence of the demons and the rites of passage happens to be direct. As a result, efforts taken to avoid or subdue the anger of the demons during the killa period are many.

It is the foremost objective of the Veddas to leave the girl who had attained puberty in a lonely hut and to erect the hut meant for this purpose away from the house. In olden days, the kili pela was constructed at quite a distance away from the usual lodging place. On certain occasions it was erected almost ½ k.m. away from the house, in the interiors of the jungle. Even about ten or twenty years ago, the hut was erected approximately 20 - 100 yards away from the usual lodging place. However, the construction of the kili pela in close proximity to the house came into existence when shamans began to deposit their Devil-box in a Yak Pela, meaning the 'hut of the devil' located at a distance from the house. It is the customary procedure of Vedda women to spend their time inside a kili pela in menstrual periods subsequent to their first menses. For this purpose, kili pelas are erected in close proximity to the hut. These women spend a period of three days within the hut, and there is a plate, a cup and a mat allocated specially for this occasion only. During the kili period, she does not have any association with her family members and also refrains from doing any cooking. In times of the past, she would partake of whatever food that was brought by her mother to the hut during menstrual period while the husband would eat from his parental home and the children would eat from their father's or mother's home. After three days, she is expected to bathe and then cleanse herself from the water brought to the hut and subsequently return home. During the Kili period, if a small child were to go to the Kili Pela, the child is not permitted to enter the house unless he or she is given a bath. Even today one can see that separate huts are erected for shamans who deal with demons during periods when the women undergoing menses are stationed in Kili pelas. Three Kili Pela were observed in Henanigala during my field survey. This custom however went into almost total oblivion in Dambana about a decade ago.
5.1 - The girl confined in Kili Pela during menstruation.

The table given below shows the information regarding utilization of *kili pela* among the Veddas at Dambana and Henanigala.

### TABLE 5.3

**THE MONTHLY MENSTRUATION, USING THE "KILI PELA" AND ITS CHANGES - 1996**

**HENANIGALA AND DAMBANA COMBINED**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER OF FEMALE RESPONDENTS</th>
<th>HAS A &quot;KILI PELA&quot; BEING UTILISED IN THE PAST?</th>
<th>IS THE &quot;KILI PELA&quot; CURRENTLY IN OPERATION?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NO*</td>
<td>NO*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>30 (71.4 %)</td>
<td>3 (7.1 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 (28.6 %)</td>
<td>39 (92.9 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* When the ‘Kili Pela’ is not utilised the girl stays in the house during her menstrual periods.

** All three *Kili Pela* belong to Henanigala.
Even though circumstances are such, there is yet another special custom in operation both in Dambana and Henanigala which is being followed by the Veddas during the monthly menstrual cycle of the women. Subsequent to the bathing process of the women after the third day of their menses, they apply a fresh coating of cow-dung to the floor of their houses. While this procedure is carried out in the case of the menses of both the mother and the daughters in a family, they do not consider it any form of burden or additional role of duty by any means. The primary objective for this custom is to safeguard the Yak pela and Yak Pettiya from any possible calamity that could befall as a result of the puberty killa and the monthly menstrual killa.

Important information which could be found from various regions from around the world in this respect have been quoted by Touchman in a magazine by the name of Melusine. This description has been quoted by Goonathillaka (1888-1889: 201 - 203) in the following manner. Persian females, during their menstrual cycle are left in solitude in a separate hut. Their daily meals are delivered to them to this hut. In the case of the Siaposh tribe in Afghanistan, they build a structure in total solitude in the vicinity of every hamlet. Here they rest, and all their clothing and meals are brought there. After the relevant period comes to an end, these women engage in a cleansing bath and then return home. Similar patterns of customs are being followed by Polynesian tribes, the Havupas living by the side of the river Trinit, those of Central Africa and the Americans.

From among them those in Central Africa erect a special hut in some area devoid of human habitation and leave the woman undergoing her menses for a period of almost 1 year. This period of time is known as the ‘burying alive’ period. During this period, a number of taboos are issued to the woman (Hoebel 1958: 377-381).

Apart from the above, the Muslims of India, women in certain parts of Japan, the Shoshons of the North and the community living on the planes or the hilltops of Columbia, people of Andaman Islands and those of New Guinea too follow this custom of solitude. Accordingly, what becomes clear in this case is that leaving a woman in solitude during her menses period is a very popular custom performed by many tribes living around the world. The cleansing procedure or custom which is to be followed subsequent to living in isolation too is something that is being followed both by the Vedda community as well as other communities round the globe.
Battacharyya (1980: 7-11) comments that a description is given about the taboos issued in relation to Indian women and how the cleansing procedure should be carried out by them as reported by Bose in a research done by the latter, relating to India. Indian women who achieve their puberty are not permitted to set their eyes on the sun. The reason is because she is unclean and is untouchable during this period. In the same way, she is expected to refrain from partaking of boiled rice, milk, sugar, buffalo milk and Tamarind. Specially, she is expected to refrain from drinking cow milk. Among other taboos imposed on her are the following: prohibition from touching any flame, sleeping in an elevated position, moving about in public places, crossing footsteps left by any beast, moving aside trees having flowers in bloom and setting eyes on the galaxy. The Bhuiyars of South Mirzapur consider the uncleanness which results in a menstrual period as something of immense fright. While two doors are always found in their house, during such menstrual periods, one door is invariably confined to these women. During this menstrual period, the husband feeds the wife. However, when there is a necessity for her to go out of the house, she is expected to crawl through on her hands and feet without disturbing the roof of the house.

An entire chapter has been devoted about taboos issued during a menstrual period in Varha Purana. In certain passages recorded in Nittyā Karma and Padma purana published by Abbot Dubois (Bhattacharya 1980: 201 - 203), the following account is given. When a female begins menstruating, she should be left in isolation during the three days her menstrual cycle is in operation and she must not engage in any form of communication with others. Even if a few such females happen to meet in one spot, they are prohibited from communicating with each other. A female undergoing her menstrual period should not even approach her children. While she should go to the river on the fourth day, since any person on whom she sets her eyes would be subjected to pollution, she is expected to walk with her head down -- avoiding looking at anybody. The Hindu community regards a bath as a highly venerated act of cleanliness. As related in the fifth chapter, verse 66 of Manusmṛuti, the lapse of an equal number of nights similar to the number of nights that have elapsed since a woman’s day of conception, her uncleanness vanishes. Once the menstrual flow comes to a halt, she retrieves her cleanliness after a bath (Nissanka 1991: 66 - 158).

It is observed that the ceremonial customs of cleanliness go closely hand in hand with discipline and behavioural taboos. It is further believed that these taboos or rules if

*Tamarindus Indica.*
violated through a sense of voluntary willingness or otherwise would subject the woman to supernatural or some spiritual influences. Apart from that, such a woman could not only bring about calamity to herself, but to others as well, and would thus be a threat to the entire community. On the other hand, water is considered as something that could be utilised to show the difference of the previous position and the present position of a person in a symbolical significance to some measure. It is noticed that the Veddas follow cleanliness procedures in order to dispel the Ki/la.

In addition, the motive of setting fire to the kili pela associated with puberty and the clothing worn during that period by the Veddas signify the dispelling of the Ki/la. The Ki/la symbolises the uncleanliness. Cleanliness is restored by burning and destroying the object considered dirty. Among many forms of Killas, the Malwara Killa (killa of puberty) is considered a very forceful Ki/la. According to Vedda beliefs, the entire hamlet where one finds a girl who has attained puberty is veiled in defilement till three days elapse. Therefore, a girl who attains age is absolutely prohibited from participating in Hethma main rituals until the lapse of three months. It is believed that a person who has been subjected to a Ki/la participates in a ritual is unable to reap the anticipated positive results of such a ritual.

According to what Vedda of Gurukumbura in Dambana, Ooruwarige Tissahamy says, in accordance with the folk belief of the Veddas, there are nine Killas which affect a woman. They are as follows:

(1) 'Killas' associated with a woman’s menstruation:
   (a) Magul Killla.
   (b) Bena Killla.
   (c) Yaalu Killla.

(2) 'Killas' resulting in a demon casting his evil eye:
   (a) Udayassa Killla.
   (b) Thotayassa Killla.
   (c) Avarayassa Killla.
   (d) Kurumbarayassa Killla.
   (e) Dalayassa Killla.
(3) 'Killas' occurring as a result of pressure of windy (Vayu), colic (Pitta) and phlegmy (kapha or shlesma) state in the constitution:

(a) Tun dos Killa.

In the case of the Malwara Killa (defilement during puberty), other Killas too assume a serious state. When a Killa reaches an aggravated form, one could be subjected to supernatural influences quite easily, and which may bring about fatal illnesses. On such occasions, rituals have to be performed on the women.

A girl attaining age is the first occasion when she faces a Killa as a woman. It may be for this reason that this situation bears an importance both in a personal as well as sociological sense. The notion that the blood flow in the case of the first menstruation carried with it fatal germs may have given rise to the thought that it is a state of Killa. Apart from the two Killas, Magul Killa and the Masika Killa the Vedum Killa is another important Killa in relation to a woman. An individual who is subjected to a Killa is expected to behave in a specific manner for which special methods and various restrictions have been laid down in alignment with customs because of the immense fear the individual has in relation to them. When there is a Killa, there are restrictions. These two are therefore inseparable. According to what anthropologists say, restrictions are set of rules which should not be violated and are accepted in a sociological sense. Among these restrictions, it is known that the female is made to practice certain taboos, and the violation of taboos would mean calamity. Through the enforcement of these taboos, the female is kept free of germs and further prevents her from being a carrier of these germs. The Veddas keep themselves totally free of mutual sex activities during the period the woman has her menses in operation, and they consider it as something which should not be exercised during such a period. Three verses of the Manusmruti make mention of this in the following manner:

Even if aroused by lust, the wife undergoing her period of menses should not be approached. Should not sleep with her on the same bed.

The man who approaches the woman during the period of menses finds his wisdom, majesty, power, eyesight and span of life decreasing.

9 First menstruation.
10 Monthly menstruation.
11 The Killa that is associated with the delivery of a child.
In avoiding approaching the woman, the majesty, power, eyesight and span of life increases in the man. (Nissanka 1991: 40-42, 125).

Further, through beliefs in incest, Leper Islanders in Hebrides, New Caledonians, tribes in the Gazell Peninsula of New Britain, communities in New Mecklenburg and the Fiji Islanders make an effort to retain the gap between the males and the females in accordance with the taboos (Freud 1950: 10-11). Though the Veddas do not entertain such strong beliefs over incest, what they expect by following the custom of isolation during menstrual periods is the practice of separating the man from the woman.

As mentioned once earlier, what is made clear by each of these instances is that man has fixed the element of fear on himself through the concept of the Killa, or in other words 'defilement.' What the anthropologist Chadwick records in his book The Psychological Problems in Menstruation is that the ideas and feeling of immense fear, embarrassment and a sense of sin in relation to menstruation has been observed in almost every society (Deutsh 1946: 118 - 125). The anthropologist Daly in his German treatise by the name of Der Menstruation-Skomplex has expressed the same idea. In accordance with anthropological data, the common association is founded on dread and filthiness of women menstruation. According to the Cloca Theory too, the phenomenon of menstruation is considered as something unclean that passes out from the bottom part of the body as any other matter is (Dutsh 1946: 118 - 125).

But Adamson Hoebel (1958: 59) who entertains a slightly different opinion to the above, expresses that the individual acts on the basis of a dual belief on achieving puberty. According to Hoebel, the community regards this as something which is the cause for some terrible calamity or otherwise as a blessing. As such, certain tribal societies treat this condition as an abnormal form of blessing. If an example was to be quoted, the Apache tribal society considers this as some event which warrants the blessings of their clergy. Girls of this society on attaining puberty are never subject to isolation or any gruesome solitude. The reason for this that they consider this as an abnormal type of blessing which the girl has received.

As quoted by James Frazer in his book The Golden Bough, a girl is kept isolated on such an occasion for the purpose of her own protection and that of the others (Frazer, quoted in Galpin 1917: 100 - 104). Since a powerful force had begun to function within the
girl at such a moment, though no limitations have been applied on her, this was supposed to bring destruction upon her as well as on everyone else. The idea of enforcing restrictions for purpose of protection has sprung for the purpose of limiting this power within certain boundaries. As Frazer remarks, while this supernatural force should be reckoned as a common force, it is nevertheless good, nor it is bad. Whether it is good or bad depends on the manner in which it is utilised.

It has been noted that there is an anthropological foundation at the bottom of many an ancient custom. Through such customs and practices, an important role has been provided to the society. Uncleanliness and avoiding contact with germs during the menstrual period and prevention of the spread of germs have been the scientific connotation of the customs and practices founded on the *Killa*. Active procedures develop around concepts, and these display themselves externally as customs and practices through the society. Along with the track of time, they became a part of the life pattern and cultural foundation and began to operate as symbols which safeguard the identity of societies. The sociological effect of this happens to be the fact that the social order is protected through these bases of beliefs and that the social order is created through it. It is for this reason that the society pays a dignified reverence to such concepts as the *Killa* and taboos or restrictions which have evolved through social acceptances. The maintenance of such customs and practices provides a life free of dangers.

As a result of these customs and practices that man has created on behalf of his own social and mental needs, a number of unmaterialistic cultural features too have found their way into it.

5.5 A comparison of Puberty Rituals Between the Veddas and the Sinhalese

When it comes to light that a girl has attained puberty, the Veddas as well as the Sinhalese community adopt various customary procedures. Since the Veddas and the Sinhalese have been living in adjoining villages in a congenial atmosphere for centuries, there has been much diffusion that has come to pass. Therefore, it is no longer a secret that the Vedda culture was nurtured through Sinhalese customs and particularly through provincial customs. At this point our attention is drawn towards the comparisons and contrasts of the customs followed in respect of the aforementioned custom of these two communities.
The terms used by both the Sinhalese community and the Veddas for this custom show a similarity. Just as much as the Sinhalese people do, the Veddas also identify this phenomenon by the words ‘Mafwara Vuna.’ Apart from these, such terms as ‘Mase Maru Vuna’ and ‘Ahak Venawa’ which are in usage in the Sinhalese provincial dialect too are in vogue among the Veddas. As far as this phenomenon is concerned, there doesn’t seem to be any specific term in their usage which could be considered as inherent to them. Since by this time the vernacular usage of the majority of the Veddas too has become the Sinhala language, it may be that they adopted the very same terms the Sinhalese community used in this respect. However, though the Vedda parents keep their young daughters well-informed in advance when approaching the puberty period, the Sinhalese community display a reluctance to talk about this subject until the girl attains puberty. In other words, the elders discuss matters with the girl about the related customs and the period associated after the attainment of puberty only after the latter attains age. The Sinhalese believe that by discussing the subject in advance would instill matured ideas in the girl’s mind before her age.

When a girl has her first menstruation, what the Vedda folk immediately does is to accompany her to a spot under a milking-tree and then point out the milky oozings; thereby dispelling all evils. This is a custom which is in operation among the Sinhalese community as well as the Vedda community. This custom is practised among the Sinhalese people in the South too. But the statement expressed by the Sinhalese when dispelling evils is different from that which is uttered by the Veddas. It is noticed that the Veddas have adjusted the above idea to suit their purpose. The new adolescent who engages in dispelling these evil forces pleads that goodwill fall on her parents, cross-cousin sister and aunt, the brothers and sisters, and her future partner by the act of dispensing such negativities to a tree which gives out honey. It was in this manner that the Vedda folk reminisced the phenomenon of collecting bees-honey which is their main source of income on occasions which they consider as significant in their life.

Even though the custom of the Vas Kalaya, performed when a girl attains puberty is not different between the Sinhalese and the Veddas; yet the manner in which each party conducts it, differs. From the time a Sinhalese girl attains puberty, up to the moment she is escorted back home, the main person who attends to all the customs is the Redi Nend( the washerwomen ). Accordingly, the prominence in undertaking the responsibility of
performing the *Vas Kalaya*\textsuperscript{12} custom, removal of the *Kotahalu Muttiya*\textsuperscript{13} supplying of *Piruwata*\textsuperscript{14} given by the washerwomen to the girl for her to wear during her menstrual period and the *Kotahalu goda*\textsuperscript{15} in front of which customs are carried out is bestowed upon the washerwoman by the Sinhalese society. It must be noted here that the Sinhalese society is founded upon a certain caste hierarchy. On the occasion of the puberty ritual, the washerwomen assumes a special status; thereby carrying out the related customs on behalf of the girl concerned. For this role of duties she receives gifts and presents from others. Unlike the Sinhalese caste hierarchy, there is no clan hierarchy among the Veddas. But there have been references made by certain authors that there is a clan hierarchy among the Veddas.\textsuperscript{16} But at present, no clan hierarchy or role activity is in operation among them. Accordingly, unlike Sinhalese in the case of the puberty custom, no necessity of a washerwoman is expected by Veddas. The role and status that the washerwoman plays in the puberty ritual in the Sinhalese community is bestowed on the girl’s cross-cousin sister in the Vedda community. If no cross-cousin sister is available, this responsibility is undertaken by the aunt. In this way, it is seen that while the Sinhalese community of the South has the *Vas Kalaya* custom conducted on the even that day the girl attains puberty and the custom of having a purifying bath carried out by the *Redi Nenda*, the Veddas have the same customs performed by the girl’s cross-cousin sister. Further, the time at which this *Vas Kalaya* custom is performed, differs between these two communities. The moment that the Veddas come to know that a girl has attained puberty, it is this custom that the Veddas hasten to perform first. It is only after this custom is performed that the girl is sent into seclusion in the *Kili Pela*. However, where the Sinhalese of the South are concerned, a girl who attains puberty in the morning hours of the day is sent to the rear of the house (usually the kitchen), and the relevant custom referred to earlier is carried out in the evening after sunset on the same day, and is accompanied to some spot which is allocated for this purpose in the house. They identify this custom as ‘*Geta Ena Mangalya*.’ But the Sinhalese community of Uva performs this custom the moment they come to know the girl has attained puberty, no different from the Veddas.

After the *Vas Kalaya* custom is performed, the role of erecting the *Kili Pela* and it being subsequently set fire to is done by the cross-cousin brother. This cross-cousin brother

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\textsuperscript{12} Presently seen only in the Southern region.
\textsuperscript{13} The bowl in which the girl’s clothes stained with menstrual blood is dumped into.
\textsuperscript{14} Fresh white clothing.
\textsuperscript{15} The floor-mat on which is kept paddy. *Pun Kalas* and oil lamps.
\textsuperscript{16} See (Wijesekera 1964 : 91 - 92).
is one who assumes a prominent position in puberty rituals. The responsibility and role of
duties he is expected to perform is equal to that which is performed by the cross-cousin
sister; or at times even more than that of the sister-in-law. Among the foremost duties of the
cross-cousin brother is the creation of the *Killi Pela* and setting fire to it after keeping vigil
for nine days. Even though the erection and setting fire to the *Killi Pela* is seen to function
among the Sinhalese of the South and those of the Uva province, it is not the cross-cousin
brother who is involved in the act. Even in the Central Province, the custom of erecting the
*Killi Pela* was at one time carried out by the Sinhalese community. Irrespective of the good
and evil, the Veddas continue to practice the custom of constructing the *Killi Pela* on behalf
of every Vedda girl who attains puberty. On contrary, where the Sinhalese are concerned,
only if the soothsayer happens to say that the girl who attained age is subjected to evil or
negative influences; they then carry out the custom of erecting the *Killi Pela* on the advice of
the soothsayer to dispel such evil. When a girl attains puberty at the time of a *Gini Nekatha*,
it is the advice of the Sinhalese soothsayers about negative influences, which is unpotent.
Therefore, in order to dispel this influence, the girl has to be kept in *Killi Pela*, and the hut is
later set on fire. In such situations the erection and setting fire to the *Killi Pela* is carried out
by some elderly person in the house. In the case of matrimonial transactions among the
Vedda community, the connection between the cross-cousin sister and the cross-cousin
brother is very strong. The Vedda community which has sanctioned cross-cousin marriages,
often, in most instances lead the girl to marry such a person from the clan. As a result of
this, the Vedda community is invariably compelled to bestow an important role of duties on
him on the occasion of a girl’s puberty. In the ancient Vedda society where child-marriages
were noticed, the cross-cousin brother happened to be more powerful. In those days, a girl
in most instances attained age within the cross-cousin’s house itself. At such moments, all
the pertinent duties on behalf of her were carried out by her husband who was also her
cross-cousin brother, and by the cross-cousin sister and aunt. Though during the latter stages
these child-marriages began to dwindle, its rudiments being still perceivable, it may be that
the cross-cousin brother has retained a prominent position till recent times where this role of
duties is concerned. Although similar cross-cousin marriages did occur within the
Sinhalese community too, on the occasion of girl’s puberty, the cross-cousin brother or the
cross-cousin sister assumed no particular responsibility. As mentioned earlier, in the case of
the puberty custom in the Sinhalese community, the individual who held the biggest
responsibility has been decided upon by the social organisation. *Redi Nenda* is the person
who attends to the washing of clothes of members of the family.\(^{17}\)

\(^{17}\) *Redi mama* (*washer man*) does not participate for the rituals of girls puberty.
In the taboos and beliefs practiced during the *Killa* period, similarities and dissimilarities are to be observed. Just as much as the Vedda girls, the Sinhalese girls too were not confined to solitude during the aforementioned period. It is for this reason that a young or elderly person is frequently made to keep company near the adolescent girl. During this period, both parties are totally prohibited from maintaining any relationship with the male. During this period which is considered as the solitude period, laughter and loud conversation are taboo. They are expected to refrain from all activities both on a domestic level and in society at large, and this period could be termed as a period of hiding of some sort. However, the Veddas do not follow any taboos in relation to consumption of food. On the other hand, the Sinhalese enforce strict taboos during the *Killa* period. Any form of meat, special types of vegetables and leaves which are considered as kinds of food items which are polluted are not given to a girl who has attained puberty. Certain forms of food are forbidden for as longer a period of three months. While food items that are simple in nature and are easily digestible only are given to the girl, a special kind of beverage known as ‘Rasam’ prepared with garlic is given to her during the aforementioned period. None of these are important customs for members of the Vedda community. During the said period, any type of food is given for consumption to the girl. In this manner, while there are no taboos in operation among the Veddas in relation to food, there is no classification of food items considered ‘polluted’ or not. It is for this reason that hunted flesh and bees-honey were given to a girl who attained puberty as the main of food in the past.

Though the Veddas did not categorise food items as ‘polluted’ as the Sinhalese did, they did believe the *Killa* as the Sinhalese did. It was earlier discussed that the Veddas had to devote their attention to *Killa* because their religion is connected to beliefs in the demons, and also because that relative demons would bring upon both fortune and misfortune upon the Vedda folk. As far as the Veddas are concerned, the *Killa* operates in two distinct ways. Since demons are greedy for blood and flesh, these demons come in search of those who have been subjected to the *Killa*. It is for this reason that the odour of a girl who has menstruated draws the attention of the demons. On such occasions, for the simple reason of greediness for blood, the demons bring upon calamity to those who have been subjected to the *Killa*. On the other hand, when the *Yak Pettiya* (Devil-box) which contains tools used in conducting rituals in connection with the demons and the *Yak Pela* (Devil Hut) where those are deposited are subjected to the *Killa*, the positive effects of the offerings made are lost.
In such instances when the demons fly into a rage; then too they bring misfortune on those who were subjected to the *Killa*. It is thus noticed that it is the direct connection with *Killa* and the demon which results in calamities befalling in both instances. The Sinhalese community too pins much faith in *Killa*. According to Sinhalese folklore, death is brought upon by the demon sucking the blood (Ratnapala 1969: 26 - 34). In this manner, in rites of passage related to birth, attaining of puberty, marriage and death, it is observed how the concept of *Killa* has affected the Sinhalese across the element of blood. Palliyaguru(1986: 195) makes mention of a book written by the name of *Kili Malaya* during the Kandyan Period. *Kalu Kumaraya* (meaning Black Prince) is the demon among the Sinhalese group of demons that displays a greed towards young females. The notion among the Sinhalese that *Kalu Kumaraya* frequently infests houses where girls who have attained puberty live is expressed by a well-known verse among the Sinhalese in the following manner:

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Kotahalu gewale nithi               gewasenne
Kili mala le pili lobaya            karanne
Kalu kumaruni thopa netha          biliwanne
Buddha anath thopa naasa           inne
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The connotation of the above-mentioned verse is as follows:

"*Kalu Kumaraya*, thee who desires impurities, defilement, pollution, blood and stench, and who haunts houses where girls who attained puberty live, thee do not die. You are one who does not even lend ears to the preachings of even the Buddha".

Apart from the *Kalu Kumaraya*, the Sinhalese say that *Kadawara Yakku* too cast their eye on girls who attain puberty. The belief that at one time as a demon, and at other times as a God the *Kadawara* demon would make himself felt for both negative and positive influences, is particularly prevalent among the Sinhalese of the Central Province.

Though the concept of the *Killa* and connection between the demons is common to both the Veddas and the Sinhalese, it must be mentioned that there are differences in the manner in which it has crept into the foundation of belief. While the concept of the *Killa* has arisen through the worship of the cult of the dead which is the religious belief of the Veddas, religion is not attached to the Sinhalese in their belief over the *Killa*. The main religion of the Sinhalese is Buddhism. As far as the Buddhist doctrine is concerned,
pollution is not restricted to any particular human race or any particular period of time. Buddha looked upon the entire human body as something that is abhorred. ‘Koombhoopamang Kaayammang Vidithva’ (Dhammapada - Chittha Vegga : 8th verse) here defines Buddha’s idea about human body where he compares it to a pot of clay wherein is contained excreta. In the same way, the mind is compared to a piece of clean cloth in the Vatthupama Sutta (Rev. Dhammarama 1924 : 39 - 44). Accordingly, the Buddha has given prominence to the purity of intentions or in other words, cleanliness of the mind. If so, it is pertinent to enquire as to how beliefs dealing with demons involved in blood-thirst and the Killa has influenced a community that venerate such a philosophy. It is nevertheless difficult to extract information about a subject such as the Killa from ancient documents. The main reason for this is that the majority of those who authored books in the ancient days were monks, and because they viewed concepts such as these from the perspective of a Buddhistic attitude as mentioned before. However, it is a significant point to note that certain publications came to be written about the Killa and its effects during the Kandy and Matara Periods. Though nothing has been specifically mentioned about this, it is the opinion of scholars that the attention of the Sinhalese authors were tapped as a result of the Nayakkars and South Indian influence which took place during the Kandyan Period. The formerly mentioned publication by the name of Kili Malaya too is considered to be a book written during the Kandyan Period. Since the Buddhists have undergone the Hindu influence throughout history, the above-quoted opinion holds ground. On the other hand, the concept of demons attached itself to the Sinhalese community as a result of the pre-historic beliefs. Even with the advent of Buddhism too, it was because the Buddhism did not get in conflict with these beliefs that such pre-historic beliefs remained within the Sri Lankan society. Beliefs about demons is one such. It may be that Buddhism gave a new facelift to the belief about demons prevalent upto then. Among belief hierarchy of the Veddas, demons occupy a highly prominent position. In the case of the foundation of Buddhist beliefs, demons may have come to represent a lower status because of the influence of Buddhism. Therefore, unlike in the case of Veddas, the demons do not bestow any influence of fortune on the Buddhists. Demons bring only ill-will on the Buddhists.

As such, what is made clear by all this is the fact that though there is a similarity in the results created through the beliefs about the Killa and the demons, that there is a difference of views between the Veddas and the Sinhalese about these concepts.
Further, when a girl attains puberty, unlike the Sinhalese community, the Veddas do not consult an astrologer. On the occasion when a girl attains puberty, the Sinhalese go to a soothsayers to find out the luck or ill-luck that is in store for the girl, the forecast for the Nekatha (auspicious time) at the time of her puberty and the manner in which the puberty custom has to be carried out. Accordingly, when a girl attains age, the soothsayers holds a large role of responsibilities within the social organisation of the Sinhalese community. While the utterances and guidance of the soothsayers is of utmost significance, it is according to their instructions that all procedures are carried out. In this way, the date and auspicious time of when the girl should indulge in her cleansing bath, the procedures to be adopted during the bath, the period of time when she has to spend in solitude, the manner in which she has to return to her house, the colour of dress that she has to wear on that day are all instructions issued by him, and it is according to his instructions that all such activities take place. On certain occasions, instructions from the soothsayers is solicited to conduct special customs in order to dispel the Killa and evil influences of the girl who has attained puberty. However, since the Veddas do not go to an astrologer in this instance, there is no process in operation between the Vedda community and the soothsayers. The Veddas have built up a process of customs to follow from the moment a girl attains her puberty upto the time she enters home after her period of seclusion and it is followed in steps. Unlike among the Sinhalese, there are no additions of special customs as instructed by a soothsayer. In this way, where the seclusion period is concerned, there is a difference between the Veddas and the Sinhalese community. The Vedda-folk who do not seek the services of the soothsayers leaves the girl in seclusion for a period of nine days within the Kili Pela. However, since the period of confining the girl to a hut is decided upon by the soothsayers in the case of the Sinhalese, it may be only for three days or it may be extended further. Because the Sinhalese escort the girl home according to an auspicious hour, their period of solitude is fixed according to the auspicious time in process. Here it is clear that unlike the Sinhalese community, the Vedda folk does not believe in an auspicious time.

During the period the girl remains in solitude, in order to protect the girl from supernatural elements, the Veddas make use of special protective methods such as the Alu Weli Aarakshava In the case of those in the North Central province, a protective thread is tied to the girl by the Sinhalese soothsayer at the end of all the puberty rituals. Towards the end of the period in solitude, to dispel her loneliness, an item of iron is kept by her side and the above-mentioned custom is thus performed by the Sinhalese in other regions.
A similarity is noticed in the cleansing bath process of a girl who has attained puberty among the Sinhalese folk of both the Southern and Uva provinces. The Sinhalese of the other regions follow a different system in this respect. The Sinhalese of the South and the Uva region and the Veddas perform the Vas Kalaya custom on the very day she attains puberty in order to dispel all negative influences and after the specific number of days makes her engage in her cleansing bath, after which she is escorted back home. However, in other regions (except the regions which above mentioned) the Sinhalese community perform the Vas kalaya custom and the cleansing bath at one and the same time. They do not consider these two customs as two separate events. The moment they become aware that the girl has attained puberty, what they do first is to keep the girl in isolation for a particular number of days. During this period of isolation, according to the auspicious time given by the soothsayer, the Vas Kalaya custom and the cleansing bath act is simultaneously carried out under a milking-tree or under the branch of a milking tree. For the purpose of the Vas Kalaya, a clay pot filled with water is used. The Redi Nenda or washerwoman turns the Vas Kalaya filled with water, three times round the girl’s head, and then dashes it on the ground. By this act, all evil is dispelled and the washerwoman directs the girl to her cleansing bath. According to the auspicious time and in accordance with the instructions of the soothsayer, perfumed or medicinal stuff is mixed into the Vas Kalaya in order to dispel evil influences and to invite good fortune. But the Veddas make the cross-cousin sister conduct this custom in a simplified foam by the water brought to the doorstep of the hut.

Subsequent to the cleansing-bath, the clothing worn by the girl is deposited in the Kili Pela. However, in the case of the Sinhalese, they follow a number of colourful customs on behalf of the adolescent who is accompanied back home with a new identity after her cleansing bath. The Sinhalese adolescent who has been purified by the bath, then cracks a coconut and gaze on the Kotahalu Goda or shadangam Veediya18 erected within the house. Mal vila19 a hair-wig and osariya20 make up the Kotahalu Goda which differs from area to area. The girl removes the veil covering her head and initially sets her eyes on the Mal Vila. While the girl, together with the washerwoman goes round and round the Kotahalu Goda three or seven times; then claps and extinguishes the seven lamps. In front of the Kotahalu Goda too a process of dispelling evil is done three times. In the up-country region,

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18 Items consisting of a lamp that has been lit, Kevum and Kokis (types of oil cakes), a heap of paddy, flower of coconut.
19 Some flowers or a mirror deposited inside a bowl of water or milk.
20 A Sinhalese traditional saree of up-country origin.
subsequent to this custom the girl is adorned with the osariya and is made to wear the hair-wig.

Subsequent to this custom, the parents, relations and friends bestow their blessings and advice on the girl. Even among the Vedda folk, the process of giving advice to the girl is in operation. At the end of the preliminary procedures of customs, on behalf of the adolescent who then adorns herself with new clothing, a puberty ceremony is held for the relations and friends and they are treated according to each one’s means. The girl also receives gifts and presents from them. But there is no such ceremony to be seen in the case of the Vedda community when a girl attains her puberty. But all the same, if there is an attendance of visitors, they of course are treated according to the economic means available to them. Instead of fresh and new clothing, the Vedda girl receives only a previously worn dress of hers which is washed and given to her.

From this point onwards, the elders show an extra attention on the girl; irrespective of whether the girl is a Vedda or Sinhalese.

There is one important difference between the Veddas and the Sinhalese in relation to the puberty ritual. There are a number of legends woven round the puberty ritual of the Sinhalese community. The Kotahalu Upatha and Maha Sammatha Puranaya\(^{21}\) Neela Deva Puvatha\(^{22}\) Ridi Parapure Sambhavaya\(^{23}\) are some such examples (Perera 1993: 23 - 28)\(^{24}\). Through these legends, the manner in which the world’s first puberty\(^{25}\) and how its customs were carried out, how the participation of those of the washermen caste took place, and how the puberty custom of the Sinhalese community remained intact are all portrayed here. The Sinhalese community has been successful in adding a historical significance to this custom through the legends which revolve around the aforementioned puberty custom. But there is no legend or folk-story of such a nature woven round the puberty custom to be found among the Vedda community. If in some way the Veddas maintain a silence in relation to

\(^{21}\) Origin of Puberty and Legend of World’s First King.
\(^{22}\) Legend of Neela Deva.
\(^{23}\) Origin of the Washermen’s Caste.
\(^{24}\) This is an empirical study, conducted by the present author for her M.A degree done in Sri Lanka which she has concentrated on the sociological analysis of young girls with reference to puberty ceremonies which preside over various regions of Sri Lanka.
\(^{25}\) According to the Maha Sammatha Puranaya, (cosmology of Sinhalese community) Umayangana who was the daughter of Isuru, the first menstruated in the world and she was the one who first underwent the ceremonial ritual after she attained puberty.
cosmology, it is much the same way that they are silent with regard to the origin of puberty custom.

Further, when speaking about the puberty custom of the Sinhalese community, the ritual known as the Kotahalu Yagaya\(^{26}\) which holds a great importance. The main objective of the Sinhalese conducting the Kotahalu Yagaya is to save the girl who has attained puberty from evil effects that has resulted when her Nekatha is negatively influenced. When a girl is subjected to such evils at puberty, the soothsayer advises that a Kotahalu Yagaya be performed. In association with the verse and prose sung right throughout the night at this Yagaya, the Sinhalese subject the girl who has attained puberty into a process of socialization in reality. However, such historical rituals of this nature have not been added to the puberty custom to the Veddas.

There are some factors which one notices in relation to the comparison and contrasts of the puberty custom of the Sinhalese and the Vedda-folk. We do not lack evidence over the fact that the above mentioned custom has been practically adhered to and practised without a break among the Veddas from quite a considerable length of time. Though the puberty custom of Veddas has been always subjected to nurturing by the puberty custom of the Sinhalese community, neither has it been directly copied from the puberty custom of the latter. In the course of this study we come to feel that the Vedda community has succeeded in adjusting it to suit their socio-economy and to make it something of their own.

\(^{26}\) Special ritual attached to puberty rites which includes chanting and simple dancing.
5.6 An Overview Of The Puberty Ritual Of Veddas

In the process of this study we were able to derive an understanding as to how this cultural aspect which is in operation among them from time immemorial has come into being; how it has changed and the present position. Though many a study has been made about the Veddas during the past decade and a half, and though many things have been written in relation to them, only nominal mention had been made about the Vedda woman and the customs that have been built around her. Not only ancient writers, but even contemporary writers have neglected this point.

The first piece of information about puberty and menstruation of the Vedda female is brought to us through the ethnographic study done on this community in 1911 by Seligmann. The full study done by Seligmann on the Vedda girl’s puberty custom and menstruation is as follows:

There are no puberty ceremonies for either sex, except among certain Veddas who had been much influenced by Tamils or Sinhalese, among whom the girls are isolated for a short time at puberty. Thus although the following ceremony is observed at puberty by the Uniche Veddas, there is no doubt that it has been borrowed from the local Sinhalese who have a similar ceremony, though according to our information the latter people do not break the pot. When a girl becomes unwell for the first time, one of her naena places a pot of water on her head and goes with her to some place where there is a Nuga tree. Here the naena takes the pot from the girl’s head and dashes it on the ground so that the pot breaks. The girl is then secluded in a specially built shelter in which she stays until the end of the period, when she washes and returns to her parents’ house. During her seclusion, she is attended by a girl, always one of her naena who brings her food in a vessel set apart but which is not cooked at a special fire. Among the wilder Veddas no special measures are taken when a woman menstruates. She is allowed to eat the ordinary food, and to sleep in the cave as usual. But among all the village Veddas, and most of those who have mixed at all with the Sinhalese, the menstruous women are strictly isolated, a little shelter being built for them a few paces from the family hut. At Bendiyagalge, where the Henebedda and Kolomboedda people were staying at the time of our visit, menstruous women stayed apart at one corner of the cave, they were fed from the pot in which the food for the community was cooked, but we do not think they would touch it or assist in check any way in the cooking. At Omuni, a menstruous woman is isolated under a rough shelter where she is waited upon by a younger unmarried sister or cousin who, it was stated, should not herself have attained puberty. During her seclusion she may eat any food cooked at the ordinary
fire, but a special platter is kept for her use. The girls who look after her suffer no restrictions. This happens every time a girl or woman menstruates (1969 ed: 94 - 95).

Since the above-mentioned exposition by Seligmann, this subject has been touched upon once again only two decades later.

In 1933, one Byron Joseph has supplied an article titled Vedda Customs As Observed in the Neighborhood of Alut-Nuwara, Uva Province, Ceylon to the magazine by the name of ‘Folklore Record About the Customs and Patterns of Living of the Vedda Folk of Uva. Here is a description he gives in relation to the puberty custom of the Veddas:

As regards puberty, the same ideas as those concerning contamination of the hut prevails. At the first onset of menses, the girl is therefore similarly isolated for three days in a crude hut away from the living hut. No one save her mother is allowed to visit her during this period. On the third day at noon the girl is bathed and is then allowed to resume her normal life. No rejoicing attends this event, and the dire poverty of the Vedda forbids even the provision of new apparel for the girl. (1933: 393).

Subsequently, the following very brief description about menstruation in relation to Vedda girls appears in an article written by M. D. Raghavan in the year 1953 to The New Lanka, a quarterly review magazine under the title: The Vedda today.

A woman in menses is taboo and observes isolation for three or four days, when she stays in a separate adjacent shed, the kilige or the House of Pollution (1953: 57).

Other than this, Nandadeva Wijesekera, in the book titled: ‘Veddas in Transition’ published in 1964, expresses the following observations with regard to the puberty of the Vedda girl:

In the case of a girl, the attainment of puberty was noted and carefully observed with special ceremony and ritual. At the time of the first menstruation she was isolated in a hut specially built near the house or adjoining the house. An old woman usually kept her company until she bathed and was again considered clean to resume normal family activities. Thereafter she had to spend the period of her monthly course in the isolation hut. Nowadays the menstruating woman is cloistered in a part of the rear portion of the house itself or in an adjunct to it. One rarely sees an isolation hut away
from the house. The Vedda girls and boys reach adolescence comparatively earlier than those of other racial groups, particularly their neighbours. By that time they have acquired a grounding in the essential ways of life of the Veddas so as to understand the significance of adolescence (1964: 99-100).

Though much of literature, articles and books about the Vedda community have been written within three decades after the publication of the above-mentioned description of Nandadeva Wijesekera, a very brief quote about their puberty custom appears only in the article written in 1990 by Jon Dart. This too refers only to the Veddas of the coastal area. In the description, Dart writing about the practices of these Veddas of the coastal region, reveals a brief point regarding the custom of puberty thus:

They observe life-cycle events (i.e. marriages, girls’ puberty ceremonies and funerals) according to their means, but none of them are able to have ceremonies as elaborate as those performed by the more affluent Tamils (1990: 71).

Once more, if we were to take into consideration the description given by Seligmann, the above quotation appears to give a contradictory view. On this occasion, Seligmann who remarks that there is no doubt that this custom was something that the Veddas have borrowed from the Sinhalese, goes on to draw attention to the fact that the pot with which the Vedda girl is bathed, is finally dashed on the ground, thus explicitly mentions that this custom is not at all in operation among the Sinhalese community. Even then, we do find that the act of dashing the pot has been operating among the entire Sinhalese community as a main aspect of the custom of puberty continuously. Even today, the whole of the Sinhalese community follow this custom without any distinction is relation to their province, whatever it may be. Seligmann may have made such a statement as a result of an error he had committed during the process of collecting his data. If we were to accept that Seligmann’s observations were accurate; it is pertinent to enquire as to how a custom observed only by the Veddas happened to become a common custom among the Sinhalese.

In such a case, if we were to accept that Seligmann’s statement is correct -- it is important to know as to how a certain custom which spread among the Veddas came to operate among the Sinhalese. If Seligmann is of the view that the Veddas borrowed the custom of puberty from the Sinhalese, it should be accepted that the Sinhalese too had borrowed some customs from the Veddas. We having observed the manner in which the
colonies of the Veddas had scattered in the early days, there is plenty of evidence to prove that they had been scattered all over the country. As such, we are justified in concluding that both the Veddas and the Sinhalese have followed this custom in accordance with each other's cultural inheritances in days gone by; that the Vedda community who gradually became subjected to Sinhalization as a consequence of the influence thrust upon secondary society by mass society, had absorbed the customs of mass Society by logical order into their own customs, and that this mass society had emerged more powerfully during this acculturization. As such, it may be deemed correct that the Sinhalese community too has accepted certain customs coming down from the Veddas during this exchange of culture. However, as Seligmann exclaims, if the Veddas have taken over this custom from the Sinhalese, the statement that this custom of dashing the pot operated only among the Veddas, and not among the Sinhalese is open to debate.

Further, as Seligmann mentions, though the Veddas who maintained interrelationships with the Sinhalese and Tamil communities had followed this custom of puberty, where the more wilder Veddas are concerned, there are no special customs that seem to operate in relation to puberty. They had simply allowed the girl who had attained puberty to partake of the usual routine food and let her sleep in the cave. Even though Seligmann has expressed his opinions in the above manner, he goes on to say that he has observed that Vedda women undergoing the menstrual period and living in Henebedda and Kolombedda within the area of Bendiyagalge were resting in the corner of a cave and that they eat food cooked by the others, and that he believes that these women gave no support or help in cooking the food. Accordingly there are some contradictions regarding the behavior patterns during menstruation in Seligmann's study. We can rely more on his observations than his conclusions. That is we can accept his observations of some Vedda women being isolated in their caves during menstruation. This may be due to the fact that they did not use loin clothes and therefore they had to adopt some sort of practical measure (the easiest being isolation in the caves) during this period, irrespective of being wild or village Veddas. Also by this time the village Veddas had been cultivating chenas, 'migrating' from one chena to the other and had begun to live in huts of a very simple style. If this had been the case, what Seligmann had seen as those who were cooking their food and had made the caves their place of dwelling had been partly at least a group of the more wilder Veddas.
The main obstacle faced in getting at the origin of the custom of puberty of the Veddas during the present study was the lack of sufficient documentary evidence. But general feeling among the Vedda is that this was a custom which had been in operation from time immemorial. The Vedda chieftain Tissahamy who lives presently in Dambana, according to the opinion of the villagers, is more than a hundred years old. He is supposed to have come to know that this custom had been carried out on his great-grandmother too at the time she attained puberty. When considering this information, this custom had apparently been in progress among the Vedda community for close upon three centuries. If so, they have been successful in maintaining this custom for some three hundred years or even a longer period of time. Tissahamy's contemporaries have provided evidence to this opinion as well as for the information supplied by Seligmann. In short, what they say is that their ancestors have told them that even during the time when the former were living in rock caves, a girl who had achieved puberty was left secluded in an isolated cave.

Thus, one could clearly understand how a conflict has arisen here over the original statement made by Seligmann and facts revealed from the analysis conducted. If what Seligmann has unraveled and the information supplied by the elderly Veddas of Dambana are accepted to be correct; and that if this custom was carried out from the remote time the Veddas were living in caves and were passing through a more wilder age of their existence, when they did not have inter-relationships with the Sinhalese -- how justified is it to simply brush it aside as saying it is only something which had been 'borrowed' from the Sinhalese?

It was previously mentioned that Robert Knox, in the 17th century had categorised the Vedda people into two groups such as the 'tame' and the 'wild.' The evidence we possess is sufficient enough to make things clear that the tame Veddas who mixed about with the Sinhalese had practiced the above custom in a continuing process over the years. But it would not be justified to say that the wild Veddas have not practised any type of custom at that time and therefore to ignore them by classifying them as the 'wild Veddas' for this reason. Knox (1958 ed : 100) explains in the following manner how the wild Veddas followed their religion:

The wilder and tamer sort of them do both observe a religion. They have a God peculiar to themselves. The tamer do build temples, the wild only bring their sacrifice under trees, and while it is offering, dance round it, both men and women.
What we can assess from this is that, though these wild Veddas did not erect temples unlike the tame Veddas, they did not forget to worship their religion in accordance with their own living pattern. Can we debate that as much as the religion itself, that these wild Veddas did not possess their own customs? However, after a period of time, the wild Veddas gradually became extinct. If not, they had gradually become Village Veddas. In this manner, they began to mix with the Sinhalese community more and more, and were thereby influenced in their culture. From among the rites of passage, the Veddas would have considered the custom of puberty which is the event that is more closely connected to socialization on a personal level as a special phenomenon from time immemorial. It may be for this reason that a girl who attained puberty was left in solitude within the precincts of a cave even from the olden days. At the time when Seligmann met the Veddas during the first quarter of the 20th century, there were not many wild Veddas about whom Knox had spoken of. Though there were some partially wild Veddas who were unmixed and living in certain solitary areas, they were entering into the village social stream. At that time Seligmann identified the Dambana Yedda community as the Show Yedda (1969: 49 - 50). According to Seligmann, even by that time the Veddas of Dambana had already succumbed to much corruption. The Vedda folk whom Seligmann identified as unmixed Veddas, at a later time began to join into the main social stream in a rapid way. If not for this, these people who could not safeguard their state of being unmixed would have gone extinct within mass society. Dr. R.L. Spittle has made mention of this in his book Vanished Trails published in 1944 (see P15). But today we are left with only some members of those whom Seligmann identified as ‘Show Veddas’ and another few only. As such, it is not possible to detect ‘pure’ and ‘original customs’ from a community of people who have undergone considerable change in this manner. For the very reason that the Vedda folk considered a girl attaining puberty as a significant occasion from the distant past itself, during the process of intermingling with the Sinhalese, the customs etc., of the latter may have been speedily absorbed by the Vedda community. Even then, it is clearly observed that instead of assimilating those customs without inquisition, they have strived to adjust them to suit themselves. On enquiring further into the customs followed by the Veddas, we could confirm this opinion even better.

Unlike the Sinhalese community, it is noted that the Vedda parents give the necessary guidelines to their daughters well in advance of their puberty. Equally so, unlike the Sinhalese community, the Vedda were not used to a domestic form of living in the past. Vedda elders who go in search of food, sometimes are compelled to spend days on end
within the jungles. On some such occasions it is only their children who spend the time inside the house. In such instances, it is the girl who had still not attained puberty who undertakes the responsibility of looking after her younger brothers and sisters. On the other hand, a community who made slash and burn cultivation their mode of income from the distant past, were compelled to shift their huts from one chena to the other when changing their location. In this manner, they were used to a migratory form of life more than a sedentary one. Spittle records that on most occasions when he went in search of the Veddas, he had been unable to locate them at their normal abodes. As is thus seen, a community who lived in a migratory form of living are not possible to devote their entire attention on their off-spring. However, in respect of the customs that portray special events in a person’s life, their pattern of life needs not be a barrier. Therefore, unlike the Sinhalese, they guided the girl in relation to the aforementioned phenomenon and they further instructed her as to how she should inform the elders about that ‘special moment’ (i.e. to go under a milking-tree and to make a sound by tapping on it with a splinter of wood). Because of this, even if the girl’s mother was not present in the house at that time, either the aunt or some other elderly person in the house could attend to the customs relevant to the moment. It is in this manner that they adjusted their migratory system of living so that those would be no barrier to carry on with the above-quoted custom. In this way, it is seen that the act of guiding the girl in advance of her puberty did operate among the Sinhalese community in the province of Uva. There was not much of a great difference between the living patterns of the ancient Sinhalese of the Uva province and the Yedda folk. In fact, the forest did supply them with the most important part of their necessities where their daily living was concerned. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that both these parties who made chena cultivation their foremost mode of living and lived a jungle-life were called upon to dismiss customs of the common Sinhalese community and adjust it to suit them.

While the Sinhalese community warranted the services of the washerwoman with regard to the ‘Vas Kalaya’ custom, the Vedda community bestowed this duty on their aunt or cross-cousin sister so that it suits their social organisation. Though this custom was picked up through the influence of the Sinhalese, it is clearly seen how the difference in the two structures of the two social organisations have had its impact on the custom in a direct sense. We have already mentioned that though the Sinhalese society have been organised according to a caste hierarchy, there is no such hierarchy or role designation to be observed within the Vedda community. Yet, the Vedda folk who have not decided upon a role differentiation according to birth are expected to follow the aforementioned custom. What is
expected in such a case is to adjust it to suit their own social organisation. In this way, this role and responsibility has been allotted to the girl’s aunt or cross-cousin sister by the Vedda society. Through this procedure, no harm has been done to the original ‘connotation’ of the custom, a further value has been added to the custom through the cross-cousin marriages. Since the responsibility of the future partner of one’s brother or son is held in high esteem by the aunt and cross-cousin sister, it is in like manner that the Sinhalese modified their custom to harmonise with their own society.

By adding another feature to the cross-cousin relationship, the Vedda community bestowed the role of erecting the Kili hut, protecting it and finally burning it down by the future partner of the girl, her cross-cousin. It is mentioned that this custom was performed by whoever elder who was there in the house, within the Sinhalese community. What is noted here is how the Vedda customs were not subjected totally to the Sinhalese way and instead have taken on social characteristics prevalent within their society into their own customs. Though marriages took place in the Sinhalese community between a girl and her cross-cousin brother, it does not hold much significance as it functions in the Vedda community. In the past, about forty to fifty years ago, the Veddas showed a preference for endogamous marriages. While there was a better tendency for marriages consumed within the tribe at that time, it was very important that a partner from one’s own tribe was sought for a girl who had attained puberty. This custom operated within a limited population, and the most eligible among them for such a purpose were the cross-cousin brother and the girl’s cross-cousin sister. As such, in order to pursue the tribal marriage system in a more fruitful manner, the cross-cousin brother was responsible in handling a significant part of the responsibilities in relation to the custom of the Kili hut, but in a manner different from that of the Sinhalese. Therefore, the Vedda folk made an unconcealed request from the cross-cousin brother to take the hand of the girl who was his cross-cousin sister. The above message and responsibility is even further confirmed when one notices how the cross-cousin brother would keep vigil outside the Kili hut, protecting the solitary girl staying there for nine days.

The Vedda girl who has attained age and spends her solitude within the Kili hut is not subjected to food taboos contrary to that which is seen among the Sinhalese. One reads this in Seligmann’s description (1969 : 95) too. The Sinhalese have attempted to build up a strict discipline through such customary taboos of this kind and thereby teach the girl about the modesty expected of her. But the Veddas on the other hand attached no importance to
this custom because of the fact that they led a very difficult life accompanied with so much economic hardships. For this community which face immense adversities due to climatic conditions, finances and the means to live, the most important problem has been food. To a community who goes into the jungle to procure some food can never inquire into the state of the food they so secure. On the other hand, can these people who secure one meal per day and stay for days on end in hunger attempt to classify what they procure as food? There is no trustworthy connection between food taboos and the Vedda folk because of the difficult living conditions they are subjected to. It is for this reason that they are compelled to accept anything that they find and depend on it without enquiring into its good or bad; its benefits or otherwise. We cannot expect such customs as the ones mentioned formerly from an ethnic group of people. Further, not only in the past, but even in the present, the Veddas live in a ‘simple’ and not so ‘complex’ society when compared in a parallel level with the Sinhalese. They live a life which is further from external social attachments. Added reasons for this have been their poverty, illiteracy and the lack of experience. As a consequence of this, there has been no conflicts as is evidenced in the case of the Sinhalese people. Therefore, it is not necessary to inject strict control and regulations on a Vedda girl in order to instill a powerful morality or character as in the Sinhalese. As such, there is no fruitful result they could reap in imposing taboos in relation to food etc.

The soothsayer gives his forecast about the girl’s education, the good and the evil that would befall the parents, brothers and sisters, the matrimonial life and the rest of her future through the Malwara Nekatha. But none of these things have been of any importance to the Veddas because they have so far not faced the competitive world seen in the complex society today. Curiosity builds up in correspondence to the number of aspirations for the future. When aspirations and hopes are limited -- so does the curiosity diminish. Since the Vedda community and its members have still not encountered such an impact, the soothsayer is of no significance to them. As a result, though the soothsayer performs an important role of duties over the custom of puberty of the Sinhalese, the Vedda people have not absorbed it into their custom of puberty.

The Sinhalese community indulge in a number of colourful customs with the objective of implanting a fresh identity on the event of the puberty of the girl and the role of duties that is built on it plus the responsibility carried with it. For example, it is the Mal

27 Auspicious moment when puberty has taken place.
that the girl who steps into the house at the auspicious hour after the puberty sees initially. On seeing her countenance from the mirror embedded in the Mal Vila, the girl is made to remind the new identity bestowed on her. It is the same purpose that is achieved through the exercise performed in the North-Central province by jumping over the stilt (fence). The girl who jumps over the stilt made of ‘Pengiri’ (Cumbopogan nardus) outside the house, then sets her eyes on a milking tree, at which moment her mother comes and rests the pot of water on the former’s lap. The Sinhalese symbolise the transition that occurs from the period of childhood upto youth in a girl by this custom of jumping the stilt. On the other hand, subsequent to this important landmark, there is something of value with regard to the new status she is bestowed upon and the role allotted to it, which needs mention. The adolescent who now has assumed the qualification of a mother, housewife and a number of other serious host of duties on puberty, is expected by the society to act as an efficient woman henceforth in the future. The Sinhalese people follow these customs with a view of directing her into a suitable position with this purpose in mind by giving her the necessary pretaining in this manner. On the contrary, the Vedda folk do not show interest about these customs. The message about the new identity and the role of duties that accompany the puberty is not something that needs to be explained afresh to the Vedda girls unlike in the case of the Sinhalese. In actual fact, the Vedda girls receive an understanding about their mother’s role of duties at the tender age of 6 - 7 years. When the mother leaves to the jungle or for labour-work, it is the elder daughter of the age of 6 - 7 who has still not attained her puberty who is called upon to play the role of the guardian to the younger brothers and sisters, apart from the duties of the kitchen. On the other hand, these girls who work as servants in houses in the city at that young age are forced to behave more grown up and do many forms of household duties. In such a case, what use is there for the Veddas to adhere to Sinhalese customs that give a training about the new identity, status or the role of duties assigned with the onset of puberty. This community who have understood this have not blindly accepted what is not relevant to their context of living.

When one considers the utensils used to perform the custom of puberty, the winnowing--fan assumes a distinct position in the puberty custom of the Sinhalese. When preparing the Kotahalu Goda, (Ritual objects) Kevum (oily cake), Kokis and other items of food are deposited within the winnowing-fan. The ancients who considered paddy as a Buddha Bogha also displayed a great respect for it. Since the staple food of the Sinhalese

28 A vessel consist of white colour flowers, small mirror, and water.
29 Produce kept separate in veneration of the Buddha.
happens to be rice; the winnowing-fan has been given a special status. Utensils such as the winnowing-fan has been held in esteem within the Sinhalese community because they represent fertility and prosperity in customs such as this. However, the staple diet of the ancient Veddas had not been rice. For them, the main form of food at that time had been bee-honey, Kurakkan Millet and Maize Rice became their food item only in very recent times. Therefore, the winnowing-fan is not something which was a symbol of prosperity to them. Naturally, for this reason they did not utilise the winnowing-fan unlike the Sinhalese. What we observed from this is that we have to dismiss the simple attitude that the Veddas have not borrowed the custom of puberty from the Sinhalese.

Though there is an anthropological significance in conducting ceremonies on the occasion of a girl’s puberty with relatives and friends being invited, unlike the Sinhalese the Veddas do not indulge in such festivity on such occasions. Certain sections of the Sinhalese community are known to engage in beating the Rabana and in lighting fire crackers at the moment when the girl is accompanied back home. While all this operate as means of communication tools; through such procedures the society is made aware of a maiden of marriageable status. The responsibility of seeking a suitable partner of equal status or even higher status for the daughter who has achieved puberty and is a member of mass society is nevertheless a demanding challenge for her parents. The more aggravating the challenge becomes, the more clever become the strategies employed to face it. Therefore, essentially the Sinhalese urban community considers the puberty of a girl as a ceremonious occasion and strive to broadcast this message to other members of the society. But even then, the duty of seeking a suitable partner for marriage to their daughter in a ‘simple’ society where competition and social status has become something of no value is not a difficult task for the parents. It takes place on mutual consent alone. In this context, is there a message to hold a ceremony and so broadcast it? The Vedda girls inevitably always maintain social relationships devoid of any male-female distinction within their tribe. As a result, they are familiar with each other. They do not require new introductions based on the fresh identity that occurs on puberty. On the other hand, as Byron Josef has pointed out, the fact that this community is in dire straits of poverty has prevented them from indulging in such festivities.

In relation to the above-mentioned facts, what we can observe is, that though the Veddas have absorbed the custom of puberty from the Sinhalese community; nevertheless it
cannot be simply brushed aside as a custom which has been borrowed, as Seligmann interprets it. Leach (1963: 69) also says that customs are quite distinct between Sinhalese and the village Veddas who mixed with the Sinhalese. From the above remark of Leach we can conclude that either Veddas had their own customs or they adapted the Sinhalese customs to their own needs.

In reality, we do not possess sufficient evidence to distinguish whether the custom of puberty of the Veddas is something which they practise as a result of the influence of the Sinhalese or whether it originated within the community of the Veddas itself. Since features of the custom of puberty of the Sinhalese have been noticed within the procedure of the custom of puberty conducted by the Veddas, we have to infer that this was something which the Veddas assimilated from the Sinhalese during the process of their inter-communication with the latter. But, we should not forget the fact that they have acknowledged only the features which were applicable to them, and discarded whatever was deemed irrelevant for their own purpose.

5.7 Conclusion

The attaining of puberty can be considered as a marginal or a boundary situation in the life of that individual. Mary Douglas points out that the boundaries of the classification systems generate feelings of awe, danger, and potency. To make her point she expands on the van Gennep (1909) imagery of society as a house, with rooms being well defined status categories and corridors being transitional zones that are filled with fear and danger. But she argues along with margins power also resides in a well structured social system. As Douglas suggests, the margins of social life create a variety of experiences. Large breaks in continuity of social reality, like death, are filled with dread and horror. Small gaps like attaining of puberty create feelings of anomie or identity crisis. There is also a certain ecstasy that can be experienced during temporary breakdowns in social reality, a very minor loss of self that is not significant enough to create the negative feelings of severe anomie, but out of the ordinary enough to create a momentary sense of danger and excitement. Ecstasy, argues Beger (1967: 43), invokes a sensation of ‘standing or stepping outside reality as commonly defined.’ This is like anomie, but not quite as severe. It is as if one is at the edge of organized reality and can feel the anomic terror of uncertainty and confusion, but if taken in

30 A traditional flat circular drum played on most festive occasions in Sri Lanka.
mild propotions, this can be experienced as ecstasy rather than anomie. Too much of a break is terrifying. Just a little bit is exciting and ecstatic and sometimes dangerous and frightening. Within the framework developed by Mary Douglas down and dusk and similarly the attaining of puberty can be treated as in-between times. The experience of awe or ecstasy that is generated is a mild form of anomie, a loss of self that is not as traumatic as falling though larger cracks in social reality. At these in-between times people experience the break of crack between the socially constructed cosmologies. The point here is the one Douglas makes about the corridors between the rooms being filled with a sense of danger and dread. There is no way of going from one room to the other without passing through the corridor and experiencing the mild fright and anomie of this in-between time. Danger lies in transitional states; simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others.

Therefore it is necessary to separate the newly attained girl during puberty which is a transitional state. The puberty ritual plays the vital role of shaping the reality construction during this temporary breakdown of social reality. That is why Mary Douglas views ritual as a necessary component of reality construction.