CHAPTER VIII

The Vedda Woman: Case Studies

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Chapter VIII

THE VEDDA WOMEN : CASE STUDIES

8.1 Case studies

I order to maintain the secrecy and privacy of the informants I used English letters to the respective respondents instead of proper names.

Case no 1 : A (35)

A who lives in Dambana has both her parents, Ooru Warige SM (mother) and Ooru Warige SB (father). A happens to be the second in a family of seven brothers and sisters. A is married to Ooru Warige M. A is the mother of 11 children, of whom 2 are already married. The youngest is a child aged 1½ years.

A can well recollect how her father was tilling the chenas when she was just 7 years old. At that time they were living in a hut made of kanda pothu (barks of trees) and thatched with Iluk (Cymbopogon Nardus). During this time, the danger of wild elephants approaching the hut and creating extensive damage to the chenas were at its maximum. In order to combat this situation, a form of high platform house had been constructed on top of a huge tree. On occasions when elephants approached the hut, A remembers how her father used to put the small ones into the small piece of sarong and climb the ladder.

At that time they had a chena of about ½ acre where crops like kurakkanmillet, maize, pumpkin and peas were cultivated. Unlike today, according to what A says, in those days one who cultivated a small chena could reap a rich harvest.

Another thing that A recalls is how her father used to go on his hunting sprees. Her mother would prepare Kanji (a form of soup made of rice) for the small ones and then join the husband on his hunting sessions. If the small ones happen to get hungry at some time, they would go to the forest, dig for katualal and eat them after boiling. Till the parents who went hunting returned home, the children would occupy themselves making play-houses.
The parents would come back home bringing along with them such items as the flesh of iguana, mouse deer, armadillo, various items of berries, kong and bee honey. A mentions that even in the past, as far as she remembers, no villager in the Vedda village of Dambana had given and helped to another villager.

Apart from chena cultivation and hunting, they existed on the earnings received when A’s father performed a Vedda dancing. People used to approach her father and would take him for exhibiting Vedda dancing at Kandy, Colombo and Panadura. On returning home, he would bring along a small amount of cash and some clothing which the gentlemen who escorted him had given.

The villagers in the area would purchase their articles like salt, and other items needed from Kanegale Muthubanda’s kiosk known as ‘Kele Kade’. During this time there was a school in existence at Dambana. But it was not in the developed state as it now is. The school building then had a roof thatched with Iluk (Cymbopogon nardus) and the walls were constructed of wattle-and-daub. The school had only 2 teachers and the media used by them was the Vedda language. A did her schooling here only up to the second class, and she is unable to sign her name even.

When she was 10 years old and had just been promoted to the 2nd class, she was sent by her father to work as a servant in a house in the Serangkada area. Her monthly wage was nothing more than Rs. 15/= and her father who used to come to the kiosk at Padiyathlawa, owned by the person in whose house she worked, would take her salary even before the month was over. However, A was unaware that the father used to take her salary in this manner. As a result of this she returned home after a service of 3 years, empty-handed. The householders too had ill-treated her, she said. It was A who had to do the cooking, go and fetch firewood and water, and also do the baby-sitting.

Once during the 1970s when a curfew was enforced all over the island, and during the curfew hours itself A’s father brought her home from where she was working. In this instance they had traveled to Dambana by foot along the Serakada-Padiyatalawa route.

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20 Dioscorea alata.
21 Schleichera oleosa.
From the aforesaid date, one year later, A attained age. One day, around ten in the morning, she found blood dripping down one of her legs. She was so embarrassed and gripped with fear that she hid this fact from her mother, and the latter too had not informed about any such matter earlier. She concealed what happened to her for three whole days, and engaged in washing her clothes and bathing frequently. But when her condition persisted, she informed of this to her peers. They in turn blamed her for not telling her mother about this, and the news was promptly conveyed to her mother by them.

As soon as the mother was notified, she covered A from head to toe and took her to a tree which gave forth milk (milking-tree). Subsequently the sister-in-law was summoned and the custom of throwing the vas kalaya was performed. But what A says is that, conducting such ceremonies is of no use. She believes that the cause for not having had this custom carried out at the proper time is constantly pursuing her all her life in a detrimental way. Her mother habitually blames that A is responsible for all the misfortunes she has had to face.

Once the throwing the Vas Kalaya custom was performed, the brother-in-law was summoned and a Kili Pela was erected in the forest. Timber of albesia and its branches were used to construct this hut. It was he who took her in marriage later on. Her husband kept vigil over her in the nights outside the hut, and the mother too was beside him. If there was a necessity for food, the mother brought it to the hut. In order to ward away the mosquitoes, a fire, using raw leaves was kept burning inside the hut, and A thus spent nine days within the Kili Pela. Every call of nature was performed within the forest itself, and a sickle was given into her hands for purposes of protection. On the nineth day, she bathed herself towards the rear of the hut with the water brought to her by the sister-in-law and draped herself in a clean dress.

Since A possessed only two skirts and two blouses, the polluted clothes were not burnt. Instead, these clothing itself were used by her. Finally the Kili Pela was destroyed and set fire to by herself.

The brother-in-law who arrived for the purpose of erecting the hut for puberty occasion stayed at A’s house for 1 month. It was after this that she married her own cross
cousin by the name of M. For the marriage, he brought a cloth and jacket for A. On the day of the wedding, M's parents too were present, and rice together with a manioc-yam curry was served to them. Subsequently, A adorned herself with the clothing presented by M, and in his company retreated to a hut erected behind her house. For purposes of cooking, her mother presented her with a pot, a ladle and a pot to cook curries.

The following day it self M went out to engage in labour work. During those days, one was compensated with maize or Indian corn for such labour. One could further earn a sum of Rs. 7/= if a bottle of honey from the forest was supplied. When there was no labour work, one would go to the forest and fetch honey and some hunted meat. At this period of time, they had a hunting dog too. It would go in accompaniment and bring back some animal like an iguana, mouse deer or armadillo. Though one would cultivate a chena, at some stage or the other, elephants would come and destroy the cultivated crops. Such was the manner in which they lived at that time.

A has given birth to 10 children apart from the last offspring, within her own hut itself. At the time the first child, a daughter, was born there happened to be a severe food shortage. It was at a time when M had gone to the forest for a week that she gave birth to this child. She had felt her labour pains around three o’clock in the morning, and A’s mother had been present with her at that moment. The mother had tied a rope for her on the roof, and with much courage A finally delivered the child with the support of the rope. With the aid of a shaving blade, she herself had severed her umbilical cord. Since her mother had offer her a brew of boiled tender leavés of Pana23, Ili Pathu24 and leaves of the cotton tree, her placenta detached itself within a period of four hours without causing her any inconvenience, and she herself dug a small pit in the rear side of her house and deposited it there. A then bathed her new-born baby with the warm water prepared for her by her mother, drank the same water and washed her ownself too. Subsequently, she bound her stomach area with a rope made of the bark of Pathirinda.25 A says that when the stomach area is so fastened, she would not feel the desire for eating.

22 Alhizia Falcata.
23 Cassipourea Ceylanica.
24 Syzygium Cylindricum.
25 Citrus megaloxylocarpa var.
When a child is delivered, one would feel a great hunger and the whole body would succumb to a sense of great fatigue. As soon as the child was delivered, 'A's mother promptly prepared a brew of boiled pepper and garlic. Yet, she suffered great pangs of hunger she says. There had been nothing suitable in the house either, in the form of food. Her mother had offered her a dish of chopped Manioc leaves and rice plus a loaf of roast bread in the form of food. However, none of these could appease A's burning hunger. Therefore she had gone into the forest, managed to prepare some flour made out of Opulla\textsuperscript{26} fruits, mixed salt and water into it, prepared a rotti and consumed it. She however admitted to me that though Opulla fruits so filled with sticky substances was not something that one takes for food, she had eaten this because she was unable to withstand her hunger anymore.

There were instances when A's was not there when she gave birth to some of her children. She then had delivered the children in total solitude. She described to me how when one of her children by the name U was delivered, she had severed her umbilical cord all by herself in the following manner:

The child was born. I could not even keep a blade with me beforehand. There was no one at all for my support. I grasped the sickle that was beside me; kept the umbilical cord on top of a piece of firewood and cut it off with one blow of the sickle all by myself. It didn't sever at the first blow. The piece of flesh began to stretch, and I began to experience profuse bleeding. In order to put a stop to the bleeding, I burnt a piece of cloth and mixed a little bit of coconut oil to the ashes produced from it and applied it on the wound.

She then told that it was from the child's shoulder area that she once delivered the child. She further said that it was a miracle she did not fall unconscious, and both of them did not die. She had been unable to raise herself up for ten days after giving birth to the child because of the torturing wounds. She then explained to me how she made a preparation with chilly powder, lemon and orange leaves; burnt them and cured the wounds by holding them over the emanating smoke.

Most of A's children were thus delivered by her without any from of assistance and completely on her own. When her labour pains began to heighten, and she would begin to scream in agony, her other small children, he told, would flee in fear. She further said how

\textsuperscript{26} Cynometra bijugaspan.
on certain occasions she was compelled to deliver some of her offsprings in the presence of other children.

A then told me how she went to the Badulla hospital to deliver her youngest son at the persuasion of the midwife and that she had the L.R.T. operation performed on her there. The researcher was further told that her husband had vehemently objected to her having this operation done and that on the occasion of the midwife reproaching him sternly, he had finally consented to give his signature in agreement. What M says is that she had showed her willingness to have the L.R.T. operation performed on her because of her tremendous desire to still remain young.

Next, she began to describe how she and her family are gripped with so much economic problems. At the time A entered into marriage with M the latter did not flaunt a beard or have his hair tied behind in real Vedda fashion as he did now. It was due to reasons of financial problems and because of the difficulty to exist under such conditions that he had began to dress in this manner and grow and tie his hair in Vedda style. To verify this situation I thought of checking his National Identity Card issued by the People's Registration Department. A said that he had dressed himself as a Sinhala man in that National Identity Card.

A has to beg from locals and foreign tourists who come there to see the Veddas for overcoming the financial crisis they are faced with. Even though the couple is unable to look after the children M shows a negative attitude towards his wife begging like this, and since the villagers too accuse her of begging, M reacts by physically molesting her and by abusing her. She went on to explain that she goes begging like this not for her own self, but for her children.

Not that I eat and drink with joy. It is sorrow forever that I face. My thoughts are always on my children. If he earns something, he brings home some item like rice. Whenever I go behind tourist buses and bring back some money, he shouts at me saying 'You're going after men, without being satisfied with what I earn. So I keep mum. If I go to answer back, he beats me. I avoid him and take my kids and run away.

It is only recently that so many tourist vehicles have begun to arrive in the village of Dambana. The children are being sent to school only from the money earned from these
tourist vehicles. Even some clothing is received from the tourists who come there in vehicles. She explains to me manner how she has always faced the problem of securing her clothing:

Dear madam listen ............ when I delivered W (now 10 years old) the clothing I had at that time on my body was smeared with foul blood. I had no way of removing the cloth even to wash it. There was an old umbrella in the house. I removed the fastenings on that umbrella, and it was by wearing that umbrella cloth around me that I was able to wash the cloth worn around my waist.

At one time, A was employed as a servant in two houses at Dehiaththakandiya and Padiyatalawa. On another occasion she did labour work for pilgrim groups visiting the Mawaragala temple. As wages for this work, she was compensated with whatever food that was left-over, any raw material and some clothing. When she was thus engaged in this occupation for about five years, M began to find fault with her by accusing her and scolding her of having a secret liason with the monk of the temple. As a result, she stopped visiting the temple for a period of two years; thus abandoning her labour work.

According to what A says, most husbands in the village of Dambana beat their wives. Her own father had beat her mother like a cow. She recalled her painful past by saying: “When father used to beat our mother, we as kids used to cover mother and cry”.

Case no 2 : B (50)

Unapana Warige C and D, the parents of Unapana Warige B living in Dambana are no longer alive.

B, the mother of two children lost her husband at the time when she was about to deliver her youngest child. Recalling her past she recorded how they lived in thatched houses of Iluk and Kanda pothu (bark of trees) during her childhood. Even after her marriage, her abode had been a house of Kanda pothu. It is only very recently that she had the house structured in wattle-and-daub style. Recollecting her childhood she said that when her parents were to leave the house into the jungles to bring something home, she as the eldest among the children would undertake the duty of looking after her younger brothers and sisters. Since she was conversant with household chores even from her tender
age, her parents would return home bringing such animals as the mouse deer, hare and also honey. In addition they would also bring Katuwala and Gonala. B remembers well how her father used to hunt animals with the bow and arrow. He would use the same bow and arrow to shoot at elephants that would come and destroy their chena cultivation. She further recalls that when wild boars were hunted, the flesh was set to dry and later torn into five segments, tied into bundles and taken to the boutique and bartered for salt. This process was resorted to only in cases where such bartering was necessary to procure some essential domestic items. If not, any hunted stuff was held back for personal consumption.

In days gone by, as far as she could remember, the villagers were in the habit of always producing their own necessities whenever possible because of scarcity of the financial resources to purchase amenities which were anyway available in plenty. Pots and pans which are necessary for purposes of cooking were produced by breaking up clay portions. B remembers how her mother used to sell such clay pots and pans to other villagers. At that time, items in the form of kurakkkan millet, maize, hunted flesh, bees honey and Goda Wee were used as articles for consumption.

B's mother had explained matters about puberty to her before she attained age. Early one morning B as usual had filled up the pot with water and kept it inside the hut and was engaged in sweeping the yard. While engaged in this activity she sensed signs of her first menstruation. According to the prior instructions received, she darted towards a milky tree. Subsequently she picked up a splinter by the side of the tree and started tapping it to produce some sound. Her mother who understood her motions promptly covered her up with a cloth and summoned the mother-in-law. The latter arrived on the scene and threw the Vas Kalaya and made B tread on the pot of gourd. Later, a sickle was placed in her hand and her mother prepared milk-rice and gave it to her on the day the Vas Kalaya ritual was performed by the cross cousin. Then she was sent to the Kili Pella where her cross cousin sister kept company for her.

The Kili Pella was a hut thatched with lluk and constructed with Kanda Pothu. After a period of nine days, she was escorted out of the hut by her cross cousin sister and

27 Dioscorea alata
28 Dioscorea Spicata Roth
29 Orysa sp. (This is seed of paddy which is sowing on the un ploughing soil)
was given a bath. The hut referred to above was set on fire together with the clothes B was wearing, thrown inside it by the cross cousin sister.

About eight months later, B entered into matrimony. However, at that time marriages were not consumed soon after attainment. In the meantime, the cross cousin who erected B's Kili Pella was having hopes of entering into marriage with another. Preparing a Kili Pella alone it does not mean that the girl belongs to that man. He should also have the desire to take her hand in marriage. Likewise, in B's case she married M who was one of her parallel cousin.

M's parents came and discussed the issue with B's parents. His parents care and presented B with a cloth and jacket which she adorned herself and she was accompanied by them to his house. Since they were not have much understanding about wedded life B stayed about a month at M's house. However, after the lapse of about a month, they constructed a hut in a chena and thus the couple went to live there.

At that time, chena cultivation, hunted meat and bees honey were the major mode of income. When money was difficult to come by, M would go to some Government workplace in order to secure some labour job. Unfortunately a few months after the youngest child was born, M passed away. As a result of his death, B and her children were left totally alone. However, she picked up courage and engaged herself in chena cultivation work, and also took up some form of labour work, thus supporting her children as far as it was possible. Even now she continues with her chena cultivation all by herself. Apart from this, she receives a dole of Rs. 180/- from the Government, plus food stamps as aid.

B has given birth to her children within her own house with the assistance of her mother and other elders. A shaving blade or sharp knife was disinfected by boiling water and was used as the instrument to detach the umbilical cord on such occasions. Once she was pregnant B's husband voluntarily gave his signature for the L.R.T. operation to be performed.

One of B's children was completely crippled at birth. By this time, except for this crippled child, a young daughter and son of hers, the rest were married. She mentions that
her married children support her and help her as far as it is possible for them. They provide her with meals and clothing. B talks about the death of her husband and her courage as follows:

My man was stricken with a fever. The fever did not go down. He began to vomit blood. Finally he bled from the nose and the mouth and died. When the body was taken to the Mahiyangana Hospital, the doctors said that he died because the fever had become chronic. From that point onwards I never anticipated any support from the Government. I would dig the ground to cultivate something and live like that.

After her husband's death, a person from the Yedda village had made overtures to her, and B who lost her temper over this had scolded him. Now, as B says, he had put a curse on her. As a result of this curse, the right-hand side of her hips had begun to get numb, accompanied by a fever. She had been unable to eat or drink anything. She had then been taken to the Mahiyangana Hospital. But she had not been cured. The doctor in charge (D.M.O.) of the hospital had ultimately remarked: "This ailment would not come right. It's better that you go home and get a Thovilaya done."

B who returned home had summoned the Vedda shaman. According to what was seen in the penabaleema, a Thovilaya was to be performed. She then sold one of the bulls belonging to her for a sum of Rs. 3,300/- which she spent for the Thovilaya. While she was cured by the powers of the Thovilaya, the magnetism exerted by the betel that was given to her after an incantation by the shaman which made attract her towards him. B explained this episode to me in the following manner:

After my man's death, I resolved not to go with any man. It was solely because of this charm that I was trapped by this man.

The shaman supports both his first wife and B. He equally distributes the money that he earns by performing Vedda dances-- between the two families. His former wife constantly nags at him. On such occasions, as B says, he would react saying:

What is wrong in my giving you to eat and drink?
If you nag at me, I will go to that woman's house and lodge there.

30 A common form of ceremonial occult ritual.
Case no 3: C (55)

C living in Dambana has no idea about her mother’s name. She says that her father’s name is Ooru Warige H. The mother had passed away at the time of child delivery. Subsequently, C’s father had got married to another woman. Therefore, C and her brother had been brought up by their grandfather and grandmother.

As time passed by, her brother too had passed away. She records this event as follows:

Around the age of 18 my elder brother had made for himself a hand-cart to draw firewood. One day he had gone to the canal to bathe. At the bathing-spot he had to tread on a Kema (a sort of exorcised element used in Thovilayas). 15 days later his leg got swollen and he thus passed away.

C’s grandparents too were engaged in chena cultivation and hunting. At that time there had been so much problems and havoc caused by wild animals. When the wild elephants used to come and destroy their cultivations, they would climb up to the Attala and thus save their lives.

Their main form of food had been the flesh of hunted animals and bees honey, supplemented by maize porridge and kurakkam millet. Apart from this, they would fetch oil, coconuts, salt, onions and saffron and other spices from shops at Padiyatalawa. Further, they would sell Indian corn and bees honey and thus earn some money in order to purchase certain items necessary for domestic use. They would also sell peas and grains of mung to purchase cloth, and would go to Padiyatalawa where they would give these to be sown. C recall that unlike the present day, there had been no shortage of food then. There had always been a stock of mung, Peas, Indian corn and kurakkam.

When C was small, the family had lived in houses made of Kanda Pothu. When they had to shift from house to house, since the shelters too changed, it was customary to erect houses from the Kanda Pothu temporarily. C mentions that since her grandfather had 3 children, he had been a great asset and support for cultivation activities.

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31 Light-reading
32 A shed erected on top of a tree for this purpose.
She had been informed in advance of what to do when she attained age, by her grandmother. Early morning one day, when the cock began to crow and everyone else was asleep, she had been sweeping the garden. She then realised that her first menstruation had begun and she promptly covered herself with a cloth and ran under a milky tree. Subsequently, as a result of the tapping made on the tree by her, the others came to know the message. Consequently a sister-in-law in the house had approached her and performed the Vas Kalaya custom on her. C was then brought home covered up by the cloth and was given milk-rice as is usual on such an occasion. Her Kili Pela was constructed by her own cross-cousin (male). Accordingly she stayed for nine days in the hut away from her house. During this period she was given wat was prepared in the house. At the end of the 9th day, the sister-in-law was summoned once more and C was taken to the backyard where she was customarily bathed by the former. The clothing she wore in the hut was set on fire by the sister-in-law.

It was at the age of 14 that C attained age. Two years later, at the age of 16, she married the cross-cousin, who had constructed the Kili Pela for her. At that time her mother was not among the living. C’s sister-in-law took the mother’s place by adorning the former with a new piece of cloth and jacket and thus accompanied her to her new home. The new couple then made themselves a hut in Gurukubura and lived there separately.

They too supported themselves by earnings from chena cultivation and hunting of animals. Since K was a clever shaman, the villagers used to approach him at his doorstep and escort him to certain places for such activities, and on such occasions he would earn some money. C speaks of her own earnings at that time in this manner:

He (K) never used to go for labour work. Since the income was not sufficient, I used to go to do labour work. I would go to Government work-sites and also work on day-wages at other people’s chenas giving assistance. I also did labour jobs on a relief basis. What I mean is, when working like that, what is paid is not money, but being compensated with things like flour and tins of salmon. I used to do clearing with the a spade and clear the garden. Of course later, when I went to work in a chena, a sum of Rs. 30/=, Rs.40/= was paid for a day. At such times money was a big problem.......
C had begotten thirteen children. Five of them had died. Three children had died before delivery and two after being delivered. The rest who are living are five females and three males. Among them, three are married.

At times when C and K were stricken with financial problems, they would send their daughters out to work as servants, and the latter would employ themselves in such areas like Galle, Colombo, Mahiyangana, Kegalla, Girandurukotte and Badulla. One of their daughters was stationed at a house at Kadawatha. However, even without informing the parents, she had found work in some other house. In this way, she was missing for a period of four years. After the end of four years, the householder in the family for which she was working for those long years finally brought her back to her parents’ doorstep in a vehicle. C says that such incidents where Vedda girls who go to work in houses shift from one house to another without informing their parents is a common occurrence.

Other than that what they earn from some plot of land cultivated as a chena, they now maintain themselves from the earnings K gets by practising witchcraft as a shaman and from the money they get from foreign tourists and friends. C reveals that they are recipients of the dole and relief aid, but her family had rejected the Janasaviya\footnote{A poverty alleviation programme.} because they do not wish to be indebted to the Government. She goes on to explain this issue further saying that the foremost motive in giving the Janasaviya was to develop a sense of unity among everyone. However, according to her, there is no unity among the Janasaviya recipients and that these people live a life of conflict among them, proving that there is no meaning in giving this Janasaviya.

Going on to another matter, she says that extra-marital affairs among married men in the village is a major problem. She admits that even her own husband K openly has a liason with another female. She says that she retain her patience for if she were to raise his issue with him, he may ultimately abandon her and live permanently with the other woman. Even C’s and K’s marriage is not a registered one. On one night K had left the house seeking the company of the other woman. C who flew into a rage had gone in search of him to the woman’s house, and there was a heated argument at the place. In the end, the
neighbouring villagers had arrived on the scene, intervened and settled the issue between both parties.

Like the others, C had delivered her children within the hut itself. K’s aunt who looked after him after his mother’s death was a midwife who would care to help everybody in the village and she gave a helping hand to C, during childbirth by serving the umbilical cord with a shaving blade, later tying it with a thread and subsequently applying *deli thel* on the affected area. Though she faced no problems as such at the moment of delivery, with her youngest child, delivery she faced a great degree of trouble. She records her story thus:

The child died that night within my womb itself. My mother’s sister did everything possible to make me bring forth the child. But yet the foetus did not fall. There was an uncle who knew manthrams (charms) of protection. He was brought, and he began to chant. Though this worked on earlier occasions, on this last occasion it did not work, and my condition began to aggravate. Then I was taken to the Mahiyangana Hospital where the physicians immediately dispatched me to the Badulla Hospital. Both myself and the child in the womb were in a swollen state. I was then operated and the foetus was removed. The doctors said that it was miracle that I escaped death. Then and there the doctors performed the L.R.T. operation on me so that I would not get anymore children. K gave his signature in this respect.

According to C, till recent times, *Kili Pela* have been found constructed in the village of Dambana. She goes on to say that after her initial *Kili Pela* was burnt down, another *Kili Pela* had been erected, and that up to recent times, during her menstrual periods she had stayed in this hut. At the close of the menstrual period she had not entered her house until she had bathed from the water which was brought right into her *Kili Pela*. She says that the *Kili Pela* became an obsolete phenomenon only as recently as ten years ago. However, during the time when C’s daughters were approaching the period of puberty, it was gradually losing its presence as a custom. Only the two eldest daughters of her had got the opportunity of staying in the *Kili Pela*. As for the others, even when they had their first menses, the *Kili Pela* was not erected, and instead they were made to stay at a specified spot within the precincts of the house.

Loku Menika then began to explain about social changes she had to undergo during her lifetime. While there were no properly constructed roads in the village at that time...
unlike today, the entire village was shrouded with trees and shrubs. The village had been cleared up only after the birth of four of her children. Even the villagers were not stricken by various ailments and deseases at that time. When the village was covered with jungle, one would catch a fever only very rarely according to C, but in the present day, as she says, they have to frequently visit the dispensary to fetch medicine.

The dispensary and the school had been there for quite some time in the village. The co-operative society however came into being in the village only after the dispensary and the school was put up. Though C had attended school upto the 2nd standard, she has no understanding about the script of letters.

Case no 4 : D (42)

Unapana Warige D resident at the Dambana region is the daughter of Unapana Warige HM and KB. Her husband is Unapana Warige S.

Reminiscing about her past D says that as a child she had lived in the jungle area about 4 miles away from the region where she now lives and that the villagers have come to make huts by the roadside only in recent times, only 7-8 years ago.

She has had nine members in her parental family, and of them, three happened to be brothers while five were sisters. She recalls her mother telling her that two of her brothers and sisters had passed away when she was small.

While the father was engaged in clearing the chena and setting fire, the children used to co-operate to chop the residual pieces of wood and sticks, erect the fence and in cultivation activities. They would take string-beans,6 Vigna Cylindrica, ladies fingers,7 Hibiscus Esculentus, cucumber,8 Cucumis Satius, kekiri,9 Cucumis Melo, elabatu,10 maize and chillies for personal consumption and sell the surplus to the Saturday fair. When the surplus was good, they would sell these stuffs at the fair and earn a sum of around Rs.150/- - Rs. 200/-. On days when there was heavy rain and no such items

35 An oily preparation made of soot.
36 Vigna Cylindrica.
37 Hibiscus Esculentus.
38 Cucumis Satius.
39 Cucumis Melo.
were available, they could not earn anything more than Rs. 30/- - Rs. 40/- . At that time, D told me, she would maintain a chena producing approximately three kilos of maize all by herself.

D had attended the Dambana School and had studied up to the 3rd standard there. However, she can neither read nor write. She is able only to place her thumb impression when an occasion arises. Even when she was her parents, she saw to it that she did not become a burden on them. She would take the crops that she alone had cultivated to the fair and thus sell them there. Though she is unable to pursue this activity now, she still has a tremendous desire for it.

In the past, D too lived in a hut constructed with Kanda Pothu, and even after her marriage to S, they lived in a similar hut. At that time they used to wear a type of cloth called Kamba. They could secure the Kamba only when they were able to get some money by selling some articles at the fair. D records that there were no road facilities at that time unlike today. She described how the roads gradually came into being through the forest environment which is very much familiar to her. A vehicle in those days was seldom seen entering the village. The dense forest would extend up to a range of seven to eight miles from where the chenas were. It was through the jungle that one could enter the road. There was such a scarcity of vehicles in those days that according to D, there were many instances when they would just throw away the articles they were carrying on their shoulders to the market by the wayside and return home empty-handed. During the past, the Vedda community it is said, to have seldom consumed rice. Their staple food happened to be kurakkan, porridge and maize. However, at present rice has taken the prominent place, and though the consumption of maize is still to be observed, consumption of Kurakkan has totally become a thing of the past.

D attained age when she was 12 years old, and her mother had already instructed her of how to be alert about it. D who always awake early in the morning to sweep the garden had been told by the mother to be vigilant about the clothing she wears. On one such morning, she together with her sister's daughter had gone to the well to fetch water. She then noticed something peculiar in relation to the clothing she was wearing. She immediately understood the phenomenon and then instructed the niece that she would not

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40 Spordios Pimuaba.
be accompanying her home, and for she would be retreating towards the banyan\textsuperscript{41} tree, and that she should inform about this to her grandmother. Even before her mother approached her, she covered herself from the head downwards to her feet with the clothing she had on. Her sister-in-law quickly came on to scene and bathed her with the *Vas Kalaya*. Her brother-in-law who was married to her elder sister then erected the *Kili Pela* at a spot far away from their house. He was the cross-cousin of D. Her sister-in-law who happened to be a sister of his, came to keep company to her in the *Kili Pela*. All meals were brought to the hut. Initially, while milk-rice was served, subsequently all other forms of eatables were provided to her.

In accordance with the Vedda custom, D rested in the *Kili Pela* for nine consecutive days. For purposes of personal ablutions, she was accompanied by another to the jungle, taking enough water with her. At the end of the ninth day, her sister-in-law brought the *Vas Kalaya* right into the *Kili Pela* and bathed her with a few pots of water. The necklaces and bangles of variety plus her clothing were all handed over to her sister-in-law. The latter then set fire to the hut. From that date onwards, D stayed in a *Kili Pela* every month during her menstrual periods. She would thus stay for three days in the hut, and after a bath would return home once more. During her monthly menstrual periods, someone would take her food to her *Kili Pela*. But subsequent to her marriage which took place five years after her menses, she was not required to stay in the *Kili Pela* on her menstrual periods due to the reason that by that time this custom was slowly waning away from the village of Dambana.

Her marriage was the result of a proposal brought forward by her husband’s side. S’s parents had inquired from D’s parents first and then approached her about her consent. Though she gave no positive response at first, later on she had given her consent. S visited her at her parental home, and her father on arranging a hut in a chena, the two of them went to live there as husband and wife. It is in this manner that the two of them entered into a marriage which was devoid of any legal registration.

She begot five children within the hut, but when contemplating entering the hospital for the confinement of her youngest child, she begot the child in the hut itself. Consequently she entered the Mahiyangana Hospital where she had the L.R.T. operation done on her. She explained this event in the following manner:

\textsuperscript{41} *Ficus.*
There's nothing to eat and drink properly. Only if something could be found do we eat and live. So how could we conceive a large number of children and live like that? If we have only two or three children, we could do some labour job at least and live. When people decline to get the operation done, the midwife lady scolds them saying: 'Don't beget children for poverty!' If I had a proper understanding about it those days, I would have got this done soon after my 3rd child. In this area, leave alone something to eat...there isn't any water even. So why should we conceive children for them to suffer? I got the operation done. It was only after that I got a pain in the spine.

When delivering her children, her mother-in-law came for her support. If her mother was aware, she too would have come. D says that her mother-in-law would sever her umbilical cord after delivery, and then bathe her new-born child, waiting for the placenta to fall off, and then after helping her to wash herself, she would make a preparation with rice, pepper, garlic, goraka\textsuperscript{42} to which pieces of the outer covering of the murunga\textsuperscript{43} was added and give it to her to drink, and would not leave her till all that was done. She says that she never faced any problems at delivery.

D shares both happiness and sorrow in their wedded life with her husband. Even when going to the forest, they are in each other's company. In the jungle they manage to find some honey and iguana flesh. She mentions that smaller animals are shot at with the bow and arrow while bigger animals like the hare, mouse deer and iguana are hunted with the aid of hunting dogs. Whenever S would climb up to extract honey from a honey-comb, she would hold the torch (locally prepared in the jungle) and render support to him. On such occasions she most often lends a hand in such activities even now. She also relates an incident which took place recently in which when the two of them went into the forest in search of honey when a wild elephant had begun to give chase to them, and they had to jump into a nearby field and save their lives.

Because of the scarcity of labour jobs at present, they now find it difficult to earn something from such a type of activity. Menial labour work which she resumed a month after her marriage, she says she would do even now if available. She had up to now done labour jobs at Government work-sites, at Vedda chieftain Tissahamy's house at Kotabakiny, at Girandurukotte and Wewaththa. At one time she had worked as a labourer

\textsuperscript{42} Gardinia Cambogia.
\textsuperscript{43} Moringa Oleifera.
in a Government nursery (of plants). In this manner, both she and S had worked for about 3 years there. At that time a person could earn a wage of Rs. 35/-. But now such work are no more available. Even today D is engaged in chena cultivation for a daily wage of Rs. 60/-. But since labour jobs are available only during the rainy season, when there happens to be no rain, she would accompany S to the jungles.

As related by D, S causes her no harassment. The only thing that torments her is poverty. When bringing honey from the jungles, they would sell the honey to someone or a group that has come to see the Vedda chieftain and thus earn something. What she reiterates is that unlike some Vedda women in the village, she would not beg from the people. She says that she believes it is not proper to become a problem to others in that way. She goes on to say that though they are recipients of food stamps, they have refused the Janasaviya. According to her, getting the Janasaviya too is a form of begging from the state, and for that reason they had refused to accept it.

Case no 5: E (30)

The mother and father of E living in Dambana is Unapana Warige SM and B, respectively. E has entered into matrimony with R and is the mother of five children. At the time I met her, she was pregnant with her 6th child and her date of delivery was close at hand.

E began her story of the past, saying that she had seven brothers and sisters, and that she was the fourth in the family. While three of them were females, the other four were males.

When she was small, the family were engaged in cultivating a chena which rested in the midst of the jungle, and from time to time they were shifting from chena to chena by clearing the jungle area and moving further and further towards the interior of the forest. She vividly recalls how her mother and father who are still living, went hunting. She says that she too would join them on such trips on and off. They would bring home some small animals like the iguana and also honey. On certain occasions they would encounter large

44 This also a poverty alleviation programme.
animals like the wild elephant, and in such instances they would not be gripped with fear, but would climb up a tree to avoid them.

Around the age of 9, she went to work as a servant of a family at Kadawatha. This family had come in a group to see the Vedda chieftain Tissahamy, but much to the displeasure of E’s mother she left to work for them. However, the family had treated her well. Every month the lady of the house would send a sum of Rs. 100/- by mail to her parents. E’s duty was to play and keep company to the small child in the family. The lady would tell her that if she would be faithful to them, they would support her in giving her hand in marriage too. However, E who did not give ear to these promises, and around 12 years of age began to ask permission to return home to her parents. Since she always began to cry over this issue, the family finally brought her home to Dambana and handed her over to her parents.

E’s parents lived in a hut made of Kanda Pothu. She says that wattle-and-daub huts which are seen today came into being only in recent times. At that time there was no shortage of animal flesh, and types of potatoes like Katuwela and Gonala. When iguanas would enter ant-hills, they would break the ant-hill and kill the iguana by chopping it up with a hand-axe. E remembers how her father used the bow and arrow on his hunting sprees.

At that time there had been an acute shortage of clothing. Since there were not many tourists’ vehicles coming to the village at that time, they had no other alternative than to wear a piece of dirty clothing when going to the Mahiyangana fair. They would go to the fair and sell their harvest from the chenas. From the money they earned like this, at times, her mother would buy her a piece of frock material.

In those times when one fell sick, they would not go to a hospital; they would instead drink some brew made of some potent plant found in the jungles itself and thus get cured. E’s personal opinion is that among such plants, ela batu is a very significant one, and that for the common cold and fever, it is a fine remedy. But in the present day, panadol and disprin has taken its place.
E has studied up to the second standard in school. In those days the school did not have buildings like now, and the school was thickly surrounded by trees and shrubs. No vehicles were seen entering the village, and there was only a footpath to enter the village. As a result, if one could not go to the jungle and find Katuala or Gonala he or she had to remain starved. Apart from this, the cultivators too were at stake because of wild elephants and natural calamities.

When E was approaching puberty, her mother had given her the necessary instructions. Thus on the day she attained puberty, instead of becoming agitated, she went under a milky-tree. Her brother K who saw her behaving like this, went to the mother and remarked: "Sister is under a milky-tree covering herself with a cloth." The mother who understood the daughter's behaviour, promptly called the sister-in-law and made her attend to the Vas kalaya custom. Subsequently the mother summoned the brother-in-law and had him erect the Killi Pela where E was asked to stay. At the end of the ninth day, the sister-in-law approached her, and after bathing her, she set fire to the clothes she was wearing and the hut where she was staying during those nine days, and then escorted her back home. At the time she was staying in the Kili Pela, there was no taboo where her meals were concerned. Maize, kurakkan porridge and manioc which was the staple diet was served to her hut itself. E says that preparation of milk-rice or any ceremony being held for the occasion was carried out in her case. From that day onwards, she had never stayed in a kili pela on her subsequent menstrual dates. E goes on to say that she had heard from her mother that the latter however had stayed in separate kili pela during her young days at each menstrual period, and that she (E) had seen women pursuing this custom in days gone by.

E then began to bring forth memories of her past. She had been 12 years old when she reached adolescence. Not even one year had passed when she fell in love affair. At that time there was a bus plying across Dambana to Kadupaharawala on behalf of the passengers. As a result of the romance that developed between her and the Sinhala driver of this bus, she became pregnant. The driver who was already a married man, left her soon after he became aware that she had conceived. Thus she begot a son. However, the parents made her give a promise to them that she was not to repeat the same mistake, and only on that promise did the parents take her back into the house with the child.

45 These are Antipyretics and analgesics.
Seven years later she secretly eloped into the forest with a man, who by relationship to her was a cross cousin. She begot a daughter by him. Not long after she came to know that her second paramour too was a married man. The relationship was that one of his brothers had been married to a sister of E. When the romance developed, she was not aware that this man who was a Sinhalese had been already married. Not long after, his legal wife came in search of E and she was a woman from Hunnasgiriya. E remarks that this woman picked up quarrel with her and said that she had six children from this man. E goes on to say that she met this man at her sister’s house, and further that this legal wife of his had promised to help her too. But E had panicked at this funny promise and finally decided to enter into marriage with the present husband R.

E who by this time had faced numerous problems and difficulties, began to reminisce about her bitter past. She recalls that because of her second husband she had had to encounter many hardships. He was a man who never earned anything, and therefore he was unable to maintain her. Further, he was even having a romance with a Sinhalese woman in Padiyatalawa. Though he had not physically hurt her, she had undergone much suffering at his hands in other ways for not having been supported by him as a husband should. She had thus resolved to scrap her marriage to this man and leave him, taking the child with her.

By the time E was 30 years old and, her present husband was 65 years old. She had begotten three children from him, and was expecting her fourth child. She is incidentally the third wife of R who was also known as RM and from his three marriages he has had twelve children, altogether. The first and second wives are dead. It was at this stage that he had approached E’s parents to propose to her. Since he was very much older than her, she had no liking for him. However, because of the calamities that had befallen on her upto that time, and on the request of her mother, she finally decided to wed him.

E then began to unravel her economic problems which she had been facing right along: “My financial difficulties are immense. My problem is that I hardly have anything to eat or drink”.
Continuing her pathetic story she exclaimed that R would beat her only when he would fly into a fury. She had approached the vehicles coming into the village to beg and so earn something at a tender age herself she admitted. At that time there had been not many vehicles that came there like now. However, since now there are so many tourist vehicles coming there, she sees this as a very satisfactory opportunity to earn something. R too does not object to her earning some money this way. The money that he himself earns by operating as a shaman and from the labour work he does, he hands over to her for domestic requirements. But these earnings are not at all sufficient and therefore she remarks that she is compelled to beg from the tourist vehicles. Though she is engaged in labour work prior to begetting children and earned something that way, now she is unable to continue doing so because of her small children. Though she is a beneficiary of the food stamps, she is not a recipient of the Janasaviya.

Almost all of her children have been born within her abode itself, and for her support, her mother had been present. It was she who helped her in performing the duties of detaching the umbilical cord and other related activities. She says that prior to delivery, she would have all the necessary articles such as the shaving blade, the rope, garlic and pepper etc., close at hand. She explained further in the following manner:

I delivered in the very same hut where my small kids are. They don't understand. So they are not scared either. The eldest is a boy of 12 years of age. For the reason that they have witnessed me delivering the babies itself they have lost all fear. This boy would wait by my side until I deliver those younger to him. He has never cried with fear. My lady ......... we have only one piece of house. So everything must be varied out here. So these things are not anything unfamiliar to them you see. They don't even ask about those things. In fact they know everything. They even see both me and my man engaging in sex. They never ask me about such things, because they have been seeing those things from the time they were kids.

On this occasion the family health nurse had requested her to enter the hospital to deliver the child and to have the L.R.T. operation performed. E told me that her husband did not object to it, but that since she is not equipped with the necessary clothing etc., and because of the fear to be warded, she is afraid. She enquires from me if her mother could deliver all her seven children right inside the house, as to why she is unable to do so. Since she did not attend the regular monthly clinic days, she says that she is hoping to deliver this child too in her own hut.
Two months later I visited Dambana and I happened to meet R and through him came to know that E was seriously ill and that she had been admitted to the Mahiyannahana hospital. Since her condition was critical, E had been transferred to the Kandy hospital. He told me that at the Kandy Hospital she had been subjected to an emergency operation for delivery of the child and that a tumor had been removed from her womb.

That day, bidding good-bye to Dambana I travelled back to Colombo and returned once more to India to resume my research work. Through my research assistant Prasanna and respondents I continuously received communications about the prevalent situation in Dambana. In one such communication that I received, came to know that as a result of a womb cancer, E died at the Kandy hospital. Six months later I visited Dambana on my return trip to Sri Lanka, and by that time I found that E’s husband R had entered into marriage for the fourth time leaving E’s children with E’s old parents.

Case no 6: F (20)

Ooru Warige H who is the mother of Ooru Warige F and in living in Dambana. Uru Warige M the father is not among the living. F’s husband is Uru Warige T.

F recalls her past saying that she can remember how when she was small she used to wear a small piece of cloth and stand at the roadside, also wearing two seeds of maize pods. Her parents would engage in cultivation activities and work their way into the interior to the jungle. They too lived in a hut constructed with Kanda Pothu. However, when the Maduru Oya sanctuary came into being, their receding towards the interior of the forest stopped.

She remembers how her parents frequently used to go to the forest to hunt. She says that though she did not accompany them on such hunting sprees, she would go to the lake to catch fish. She further mentions that her parents were experts in laying traps and catching animals. In those days, their meals consisted of animal flesh, kurakkan and maize porridge. The porridge was eaten with a preparation made together with the tender leaves of ela buta, a type of curry.

F who had only a pre-school education was 7 years old when a family from Padiyatalawa who had arrived at the Mawaragala Aranya (temple) for bestowal of also had invited her to come with them. If she was given money to eat bread, she had said, she would
come with them. They had given her Rs. 10/- and had told her that they would be coming back to see her soon. As promised, in a few days' time they had come in search of F. She had most willingly joined them and there had been no objection from her mother. The lady of the family had handed over F to her son living at Kuliyapitiya, and she had served that family for seven years.

It was while serving in that house that she had attained age. They had summoned the Redi Nanda and made her bathe F, and later she was kept in seclusion in a certain part of the house. After a few days, she was bathed again and given fresh clothing to wear.

She reveals that the time spent at the Kuliyapitiya house was one of much agony. She has had to work the whole day through, doing a number of jobs. Some of the duties had been to water the plants, collect coconuts, baby-sit, draw water and wash clothes. There had been another maid-servant for this family, and the two of them had been given instructions to share their duties. One day, for not washing the clothes, F had been beaten by the lady of the house. But she admits that she was however not beaten always like this. Her main role of duty was to pick the coconuts that fell in the large garden, amidst which stood the house. She also mentioned that at times when she felt highly exhausted, she would throw some of the coconuts to neighbouring gardens, and the neighbours gladly accepted them. She says that even though she used to pick coconuts all day through, it was not at all an easy task to finish the job.

Because she was burdened with so much work, she despised working in the house anymore. She had explained about her predicament to a neighbouring family, and the suffering she was undergoing, and thus made them write to her home at Dambana about all that. F's mother H had taken her daughter's letter to the police, and the officer-in-charge of the station had sent a telegram to the Kuliyapitiya family instructing them to hand over F to her parents. The telegram also stated that if these orders were not carried out, legal action would be taken against them. Fear-struck house-holders came and handed over F to her parents. The family who had never paid a wage for the seven years of F's services, finally handed over a sum of Rs. 500/- on the day they brought her home to her parents.
The family, as F records, had come in search of her once more after a period of time. By that time she was married. It had so happened that a peasant in the village who had confronted the Kuliyapitiya people who were on their way to F's house on the way had persuaded them to turn back and go.

F who returned from the Kuliyapitiya house had entered into matrimony with T, and she says that the marriage took place with the sanction of her parents. T had presented his proposal through her parallel cousin to her mother, and the latter handed over F to T's house.

Three years after her marriage, she was the mother of two daughters, and on the instructions of the midwife, she began to use birth control pills. Like most other Vedda women, she too had delivered her children within her own house. The birth of the second child had taken place with the assistance of the Government midwife. Since there is much loss of blood at the moment of delivery, she admits that she had become unconscious. However, since she had been using the birth control pills given to her, this condition had lessened to some degree, she says. Therefore, unlike the first occasion, she had not faced much difficulty at the moment of delivery on the second occasion. It was F's mother who had assisted her to detach the umbilical cord and other related matters at the birth of her first child while the midwife had assisted her on the second occasion.

F then began to speak of her financial difficulties. Though she is the recipient of food stamps, she does not benefit from the Janasaviya. She says that both she and her husband earn something by stretching their hands to tourist vehicles that approach the village.

This way we earn Rs. 10/- or Rs. 15/- for a day. On some days like the Poya when vehicles come to see the chieftain Tissahamy, we manage to earn about Rs. 50/- from them. Recently T had gone to Mahiyagana and earned Rs. 125/-. We cultivate chenas. But it's impossible to do it alone. We have no money to give the workers to remove the kirinda in them. Unlike in previous times, this time foreigners did not come to the village. Last year a foreign woman called Sylvi gave Rs. 1,500/- and went. They don't give if you demand. Even that we got with great difficulty. The hut also is leaking. We are without money to repair the house....
Case no 7 : G (29)

The father and mother of G who live in the Dambana area are Unapana Warige A and Thala Warige S respectively. G who has a number of brothers and sisters is the youngest among them. Though still legally unmarried, she is the mother of 2 children, and she began to reveal her pathetic story.

According to G, her parents had arrived in the area where they now live when she was about 11 years old. When G was very small, there had been no wattle-and-daub huts as is found now, and unlike today when pillars are erected and the roof is thatched with Iluk the huts had been covered with animal skin. Occasionally one would construct a house with *kanda pothu*. When in her childhood, G recalls having gone to the jungle to escape for seven or eight days with her brothers. From the time she could remember, her father had been a deaf and blind person, and it was the eldest brother who carried the entire burden of running the family. He would go further into the jungle and cultivate chenas. When they were small, their meals comprised of maize and *kur*~*an* plus porridge and bhooma. In addition they would have animal flesh, bee honey and rice. G remembers her father saying that, way back in the past, the Yedda folk had taken *gas rambha* and bee honey as their food. Her father himself had consumed this food according to what he had told her.

To earn money in those days had not been an easy task, and for quite some time in her childhood, G had remained naked because her parents were unable to provide her with any clothes. She described this situation thus:

When I was small, due to sheer poverty, I did not have a dress to wear. I was so desirous of wearing a piece of clothing which I could call my own. When I was about 4 years old, a group of people came to visit our chieftain. They presented me with a towel. I wore that towel for about 3 years from then onwards ......

When G was about 7 years old, a group of people who came to the Mawaragala temple entered G's house in the company of her father. These people who saw sheila G in a towel were overcome with great sympathy for her and they gave her a promise that they would give her clothes and invited her to come with them. She was so overjoyed on hearing

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46 Flour type substance present in the trunk of some trees.

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this, and even though her mother was not in favour of her leaving, owing to G's tremendous desire for clothes, she went with them. She mentions that they treated her very kindly, and that they bestowed her with many items of clothing. She had lived there for about six months when quite suddenly the lady of the house had received a letter written by someone known to G's mother at the latter's request. The lady had brought G home, and she comments on this event thus:

I left crying from that house. That is my fate.
If I stayed there, I would have been fine.....

Next, she began to speak about how she attained puberty. It was at P's (sister-in-law married to her eldest brother) house that she had attained age. One day P had invited G to come to her place. There both of them had got together. Early morning the following day, she had had her first menstruation in that house. Though she had been kept informed about attaining age by her mother, when her sister-in-law told her that she had attained age, G had been shocked for a while, and P had then escorted her home. P had given her instructions not to come across the house, but to go through the forest. Subsequently, she had covered herself up with a piece of clothing and gone under a mango tree. She looked at no one, and instead had kept her eyes fixed on the ground. Her mother and the sister-in-law had prepared the kili pela. The custom of throwing the Vas kalaya was carried out by the sister-in-law herself, and later G was taken to the kili pela which was erected after the latter trown on the Vas kalaya. She stayed in this hut for nine days, and at the end of the ninth day she was bathed by the sister-in-law who escorted her to the house. It was once again the sister-in-law who removed the clothing G was wearing and threw them into the kili pela to be burnt together with the hut itself. G says that there were no taboos issued on her so far as her food was concerned during the time she was in the hut. Next she began to record how like she herself, other Vedda women in Dambana too stayed in the kili pela during their monthly periods:

There was a separate kili pela reserved for those in the house to stay every month. Even I,.......for about 3 years used to occupy this hut every month whenever I used to get my menses. But now I don't stay like that. None of the articles in that hut was taken inside our house. It was after a bath after three or four days that everyone entered the house. But nobody in the village follows this custom now.
Subsequently she began to unravel her story of how she became a mother just after reached puberty. H, a youth from the village itself got involved with G, and it was through him that she became pregnant. But when she informed of this to H, he refused to accept that he had fathered the child. However, the villagers were aware that she had conceived as a result of H. And when G bore the child, a daughter, H deserted her and got married to another woman. According to what G says, H even harassed his new wife. After this episode, a group of foreign tourists and their tour-guide had arrived in the village. The tour-guide started conversing with G and revealed personal information about himself. He introduced himself as V and told her that though his parents were living they did not care for him. And that on one occasion his father had broken his leg too. He went on to say that because of these reasons he was living with his grandmother, and at one time had even begged in the town of Kandy. After encountering all these difficulties, he finally managed to become a tour-guide. G who listened to this story was overcome with sympathy. As time passed by, he began to visit G’s home. As a result of all this, G became pregnant for the second time. He had then suggested: “Let us cultivate something”. So saying, he gave some money to her to set up a hut, and she had proceeded to construct one as requested. One day, after coming to G’s house and when going back, G too had gone behind him towards the road for the purpose of going to a house at the Damana junction. At that moment G had noticed a women dressed in an Osariya carrying a baby and a handbag in the other hand approaching them. Just then G saw her paramour increase his speed and walk up towards the woman. Soon after, G had noticed the two of them getting into a heated argument, and G too had hastened to the spot. V then covered the mouth of the woman with his hands and asked G to move away from them. But G was in no mood to go away, and she quickly understood everything. The woman had then turned to G and said:

Sister ...... I found your address and I came in search of like this. This man had destroyed the town of Kandy and has come to Mahiyangana now. Including me, this man has five other women there.

G who told V not to come back to Dambana anymore, then returned home. By this time she had been eight months pregnant by him. But from that date he was never seen in the village of Dambana. If he was to return, G’s brothers had conspired to kill him.
Thus G bore two fatherless children in her own home. She mentioned that when her eldest child was born, an elderly ‘sister’ in the village had given her some support to deliver the child. To detach the umbilical cord, a small blade immersed in boiling water had been made use of. The placenta had been removed without any difficulty. The birth of the second child too took place similarly without any problem. When she experienced her labour pains, there had been no one at that time in the house, and she had to wait patiently till some elderly person arrived on the scene.

The birth of the second child also occurred without any problem in her own house. When she had her labour pains on this occasion too, there had been no one in the house, and she had waited for some elderly person to come there. Fortunately the sister-in-law arrived in the house almost then, and she gave her the necessary assistance. As such, the detaching of the umbilical cord and the placenta took place without any difficulty. After delivery, she did not stick to any taboos in relation to her food. Just for one day only she partook of a ‘Rasam’ made of black pepper. At the moment of child-birth, even without the usual custom of burning incense, the wounds that occurred had quietly dried away. The soot oil which was prepared by mixing kahata leaves with burnt coconut oil which was rubbed on the umbilicus of the new born baby.

Now G maintains the family from whatever she earns from labour work. Though her brothers help her when she is in need, they too live in great financial difficulties. The money that a foreigner who had come to the village sends occasionally also helps her in her existence. But such benefits cannot be anticipated she says. Though she is familiar with chena cultivation, her problem is safeguarding the crops from wild animals. Her two daughters are 12 and 6 years of age respectively, and are schooling. So G’s foremost problem is poverty.

Case no 8 : H (30)

Unapana Warige B and Unapana Warige A are the parents of H who lives at Henanigala. She recalls living in Kandegamwila when small, and began to describe how her father was involved in cultivating a chena in the interiors of the jungle. She says that he used to cultivate maize and to retain them for a longer period of time, the crop was deposited in the store while the surplus was taken to Dambana and Padiyatalawa where it was sold. At
that time, on certain days people from outside would come to take the harvest of the villagers in lorries.

H who had never attended school says that she too contributed to the battle her parents engaged in just to exist. She also had involved herself in chena cultivation. When her brother was just 7 years old, her mother had fallen seriously ill. She had then been taken to the Mahiyangana Hospital from where she had next been transferred to the Badulla Hospital by the hospital authorities. Her father would travel daily covering so many miles to see his ailing wife at the Badulla Hospital. It had been a time when the whole family had been undergoing a period of great difficulty, and she describes that era thus:

I went to do labour-work at Nambudanwela Bande's house for a daily wage of Rs. 35/- . I would clean up ginger and prepare pathways in the chena. All throughout the time mother was in hospital, it was I who maintained everybody in the house. The day that mother was brought home from the hospital, there was not a morsel of food left in the house to give her. I went all alone into the forest and dug up some gonalas and prepared and gave them to her to eat. When I did this, I was only about 11 years old......

Two years after the time when her mother had fallen sick, at a time when H was working in the chena, she remembers having her first menstruation. According to what her mother had instructed, she had gone under a banyan tree. The mother who summoned the sister-in-law, had her perform the Vas Kalaya custom as is customary. Subsequently, H had spent nine days in the Kili Pela constructed by her parallel-cousin, and then was escorted home after she was bathed by the sister-in-law. Her parallel-cousin burnt down the Kili Pela. She says that she stayed in the company of her parents after her puberty. Later on, her parallel-cousin had approached her parents and proposed marriage to her. As a consequence he had brought clothing for her, and on a particular date a reception was held where the guests were treated with oil cakes etc. Subsequent to this, they had erected a hut at Indiaththa and thus separated her from her parents. By this marriage she had borne one child. But before long, the marriage had broken because the husband had got entangled with another female. H left the house and came back to her parents.

While living like this with her parents, hundred and three families including H’s living in Kandegamwila were forced to leave the Madura Oya forest region and enter the

47 Ficus.
Mahaweli Project area. However, since she lived with her parents, the consensus officers did not categorise her as a separate family. H who arrived in Henanigala, then entered into another marriage. She conceived three children from this second marriage. Even for the husband, it was a second marriage. His earlier wife had left him and gone with another man by leaving the children in his custody. However, before he got married to H he had left the children with his own parents.

H says that she begot her children in her own hut. Further, she mentions that her mother is quite competent in these matters and that not only in her case, but also in the case of other women in the village, her mother had helped in the delivery of their children. H described how the umbilical cord was severed with a used blade, and was subsequently tied with a thread. She said that if a new blade was to be used, it would be disinfected by holding it to the flame of a lamp, and then thoroughly washed. Once the placenta drops, the umbilical cord is detached. Since her aged mother is no longer able to involve herself in these activities anymore, H says that she herself attends to herself on such occasions. As for H, delivering of babies is something casual in nature. She then began to describe how she delivered one baby:

It was a Poya day. My mother asked me to pound Kurakkan. Kurakkan was pounded, and porridge was made. With Dhal and Polos, I enjoyed the meal. On that day a group of pilgrims had come to the village. They gave me Rs. 100/=.

When I was at home, my mother went to have a bath. I then felt that I was beginning to have labour pains. Then I sent a message to my mother saying that I was about to deliver a baby. But by the time my mother arrived, I had already delivered the child. At that moment I was washing the blood scattered all over the floor......

H told me that she had already fixed a date for the L.R.T. operation to be performed on her. She questioned me as to how she could have any more children and maintain them. H's family which comes under the classification of sub-families who are not farmers, exists under the support of doing labour-work for a family in the plot of land where they live. She says that they are unable to extract anything by cultivating Indian corn during the rainy season in a plot of land of half-acre for which licence has not been issued. She and her husband says they are able to engage in labour-work only during the seasons of Yala and Maha. They are individually able to earn a sum of Rs. 100/- during a period of few months.
for an year. According to her, they are able to have a meal on other days only by hunting animals in the Madura Oya National Reserve. But unlike in days gone by, H says that at present there are not many animals to be hunted. She adds that they do not have sufficient money to send their children to school. H who records that existing is an immense problem, emphasises that her problems are indeed incessant.

Case no 9 : I (45)

Ooru Warige I is a Vedda woman living in Vathuyaya B and A are her parents. I is married to J.

When she was small, her parental family lived in Kandegamwila, and I had studied upto Grade two in the Dambana school and thus has an idea of identifying written letters and to sign her name.

Her parents were cultivating chenas and moving from one place to the other. When she was small, she could remember her father going hunting in the forest. Her mother had got married for the second time when her father A had passed away. I is the eldest of the five children born mother from A. I remarks that her father died as a result of a curse on him. Her father had been stricken with a fever, and soon after, his knees had swollen. Three days later he had died. I was only seven years old at that time. The mother had entered into her second marriage almost within 1 year after the father’s demise. However, according to I, her step-father had never ill-treated her or her brothers and sisters. From this second marriage her mother had borne six children.

At that time the staple food of the Vedda community had been yam, plus kurakkan and porridge made from maize. Apart from these, the Veddas used to cultivate such crops as ela batu and manioc in their chenas and seldom have the Veddas had rice for a meal according to I. They had to travel to Padiyatalawa to purchase salt. I also recollects how villagers used to buy cloth material from traders who used to keep their wares on the head and come to the village to sell them. These were bought from the money the villagers earned from selling the crops in their chenas. At that time, unlike today, the roads to the village were not cleared up. The traders would come to the village in troop and would also barter their goods for crops, animal flesh and honey.

48 Artocarpus heterophyllus.
I then began to explain the customs involved when she attained puberty. Well beforehand, her mother had given her the necessary instructions in relation to same. One morning I sensed that her menstruation had began, and as instructed by the mother, she went under a milky-tree. The mother who understood that the daughter had attained age, then called the dhoby (according to the Sinhalese style) and had the Vas Kalaya ritual performed. Subsequently she sent I to a Kili Pela already in existence close to her house. A new Kili Pela had not been constructed however for her on this occasion. She stayed in the hut for nine consecutive days, and she was given everything to eat without any taboos attached. On the nineth day she was bathed and the clothes she was wearing were set fire to. A small ceremony was held where oil cakes and milk-rice were served. Though Kili Pela had to be set fire to, it was not done, and what I says is that setting fire to that hut is not the right thing to do. Later, on each occasion she had her monthly ‘periods’, she would spend three days in the same hut.

From that date onwards, she spent a reasonable period of time in her house. During this period her husband would visit them. She understood that his visits were intentional, he had some interest on her; but she entertained a fear that he would cheat her and desert her, and therefore showed no positive response. The reason for this negative attitude was because such incidents in her village were rather a common feature. However, her grandmother requested her to give consent to this proposal, and she consequently obliged. I’s husband was a Sinhalese from the province of Colombo. He had been sent to Dambana by the Irrigation Department to operate bulldozers to clear earth and sand in the area of Keragoda Mahawalakandiya. Sometime later after these drivers lost their jobs, J voluntarily stayed back in the village and sought lodging in I’s aunt’s house. J who had lost his parents, had only one brother. A few years before (yet, after begetting all her children), a set of Government officials arrived in the village and registered the marriages of Vedda couples at the village school, and it was on this date that the two of them too had their marriage registered. Though J did labour work and chena cultivation after marriage, he never engaged himself in hunting.

I bore nine children from this marriage, and seven of them were born within her home itself. She warded herself at the Padiyatalawa Hospital in the case of the other two children because she was confronted with several problems, and because there was no one to give her a helping hand on such an occasion. Prior to delivering the seven children within her house, she had gained all the relevant information about such procedures from her
grandmother as to how she should handle the situation by herself. Therefore, she managed to attend to such matters like removing the umbilical cord, the falling of the placenta, bathing herself and the baby etc. I records that she had not encountered much problems in delivering, and that her experiences had helped her own daughters when they were faced with such a situation.

According to what I says, after her husband died as a result of a stroke brought about by witchcraft, the children had neglected. In the meantime, her 3rd child had died when a bolt of lightning had struck him. Some of her children are married while the others are not.

Next I began to unravel her endless problems to me. She has nine heads of cattle, all of which are milking cows, and she is able to collect three or four bottles of milk every day from them. She would sell a bottle of milk for Rs. 8/- . Though there were daily customers, to find customers from within the village itself was not easy. At such times she is compelled to use the milk for domestic consumption. What I says is that there is no stable income for her and her children to exist, and therefore she is struggling for existence. She says that she has no strength now to work in a chena, and that even to employ workers she does not have sufficient cash (It must be mentioned that the period the I spent in the field was a season when chenas were being cultivated). I says that because the cattle she owns happen to graze in neighbouring chenas and destroy the crops, she has to put up a cattle-shed of her own. Because of this problem she finds it so tiring to run behind them when they go in search of food to other areas, and on the other hand she does not possess the money either to erect a shed for them. Though her married children are ever willing to support her, they too are faced with many financial problems, and are unable to do anything positive for her. One of her daughters is employed in a garment factory at Padiyatalawa and draws a meagre salary; but even that is not sufficient for her travelling expenses, I complains. As a result of all this, she and her children have to live a life of great difficulty.

Case no 10 : J (46)

The mother and father of Morana Warige J lived in Dambana and were Morana warige H and S respectively. J is the eldest in the family of eight members, comprising of brothers and sisters. She remembers well how her father would go deeper and deeper into
the forest, cultivating chenas. She described how thala\textsuperscript{49} chillies\textsuperscript{50}, batu, mung\textsuperscript{51} maize, kurakan and kesel\textsuperscript{52} were cultivated at that time in chenas as large as four or five acres. In chenas where the harvest was picked, el wee were cultivated. Since J’s father was not efficient in shooting with a rifle, he had used hunting-dogs and traps for hunting purposes. The reason for this is that, while still a small youngster, his father and mother had died, and he had been brought up outside villages.

The peasants who reaped their crops from the chenas would bring their harvest to Padiyatalawa with the aid of caravans. During the time J’s father had been cultivating chenas in areas such as Idiaththa and Thibirana, he had travelled upto Padiyatalawa in these caravans even at one or two in the night and arrived home bringing such items like salt, kerosene oil and coconut oil which he had bought as provisions for the house. She recalls that at that time, when one would exert oneself and cultivate a chena, the harvest reaped would stand sufficient all through the year.

J has never been to school, and therefore she is illiterate. She says that she was made familiar with chena cultivation by her parents while still a young girl. On the day J attained age, adhering to the advice given by her mother, she had gone under a milk-tree. The mother had then summoned the sister-in-law and made her perform the Vas Kalaya ritual, and she was sent to the Kili Pela which her own mother had used at her first menstruation. After nine days of staying there, her sister-in-law had bathed her and escorted her to J’s house. Subsequently, a coconut had been placed in front of the house with Punkalas\textsuperscript{53} kept on the two sides on top of which lamps were kept and the coconut was cracked, thus performing the puberty ritual according to the Sinhalese custom. She says that it was so performed because her mother was of the Sinhalese community. A simple reception was held for the individuals present on that day.

A year after attaining age, when J was 12 years of age, a youth who by relationship was a cross-cousin of hers had come to take her hand. Her mother gave her consent to his proposal saying: “You can take her if only you can keep her company till death, without deserting her, and living well with her .....

\textsuperscript{49} Corypha umbraculifera. 
\textsuperscript{50} Capsicum annum. 
\textsuperscript{51} Phascolus aureus. 
\textsuperscript{52} Musa acuminata/Musa balbisiana. 
\textsuperscript{53} Clay pot with flower of coconut.
That night the youth stayed at her house. For another two years the two of them lived with J's parents before they left to live in a erected hut in a chena.

J became the mother of seven children. She bore all these seven children within her own hut with the assistance rendered by her eldest aunt who belonged to her own tribe and was also a midwife. This woman who is the wife of Kaluappu, the oldest person living at present in the Vedda village of Henanigala, J says, is an expert as a midwife. She says that this woman could place her hands on the stomach of the pregnant mother and say whether the child had died within the womb or not, and that she was even able to remove the dead child from the mother's womb. J also says that she never faced any problem at all when delivering any of her seven children.

J and her husband (T) had lived by cultivating chenas and by hunting wild animals. Apart from this, T was adept at gathering honey. She says that she too went with him when he used to go to the forest. He had also worked at Government workshop sites for a wage of Rs. 35/- per day. She further mentions that at that time, she had not faced any economic problems.

However, three months after she gave birth to her youngest child, T began to suffer from a growth at the centre of his shoulder. He was then taken to the Mahiyangana hospital from where he was transferred to Kandy hospital. After an operation was performed on him there, his condition worsened and he was brought back to the Mahiyangana hospital by the authorities of the Kandy hospital. J subsequently received a telegram from the authorities at the Mahiyangana hospital. She then rushed to the hospital with a relative brother of hers. She still vividly recalls how she saw her husband who could not even sit up straight and was in such a grave condition, smeared all over with his own urine and excreta. J says that she got down two buckets of warm water and herself bathed him. She had then made him sit on a wheel-chair of the hospital, and later transported him in this fashion with the aid of her relative brother to a bus. She further described how they got off from the bus at Dambana and brought T to Kandegamwila. She had asked for a gunny bag from a nearby house and made it into a sort of cradle. She had then made T sit inside it and she her relative brother carried T to her mother-in-law's house at Kandegamwila -- travelling in this manner a distance of about five miles.
The following day T had asked J to fry an ear of corn for him to eat. She had not hesitated to oblige him. Subsequently he had requested her to go to sleep, and she had acceded to this request too. But J has swiftly woken up to give her attention to her husband, and on noticing that T was lying on his back with the fatal wound pressed down underneath, questioned him; only to find T breathing his last. Though she had tried to place some water on to his lips, she had found that her husband was already dead by that time. She then began to explain her woes of how she and her children were left abandoned in this world from then onwards as a result of T’s bereavement.

J had begun to engage herself in chena cultivation all by herself to bring up her children. She says that like her parents who had constructed the huts and did chena cultivation when she was a small child, she too had followed their footsteps by adopting the same procedures.

While living like this, the Vedda community had to shift from Kandegamwila to Henanigala. J found it difficult to understand the new programme of activities of the Mahaweli Project. At that time, as a form of aid, 12 kgs. of rice were given. This amount was sufficient as four meals for a family of eight members. Almost at this time, the World Food Organisation commenced the programme of donating rice in proportion to the number of members present in a family. In this way, her family found the opportunity of receiving 70 kgs. of rice per month under the Family Ration scheme. However, J says that the officers distributing had given them only 35 kgs. of rice. Thus the sheer difficulty day by day. As such, she had decided to engage in labour-work of removing soil at the Mahaweli accelerated project. The day’s wages were dependent upon the volume of the soil so removed. Since she was able to remove a quantity of 1½ cubes of soil by five in the evening, she could earn a sum of Rs. 75/- per day. With this money she would buy food provisions sufficient for two days. And thus, in this manner she was able to save one day’s earnings. With the money so saved, she would buy clothing for herself and her seven children. With tears in her eyes J explained that she would only eat a bun and drink a cup of plain tea and work the whole day through to remove those 1½ cubes of soil; which even a male would not be able to do, simply because of the courage she possessed.

In the meantime, one day a Unit Manager had approached J saying that since due to a mistake, two huts had been erected in one plot of land, she had to remove the hut in which she was residing. J who used to work the whole day through and come back home in the
night, little by little began to break down the hut while fixing some logs as support to the balance part of the house was remaining to be broken down. One day when she had gone to work at the site having so fixed supports to the rest of the hut; torrential rain had begun to pour down. Thinking that the rest of the house under the shelter of which her children were living may have come down, she hastened home. On arriving home she had found that all her children had left to a neighbouring house by that time, and she says that a pit of clay had to be dug right throughout the night to put up a new hut. J who had to go to work in the mornings had to engage herself in mixing clay during the night too to put up the new structure. She extended her story of woe to me in the following manner:

Madam ....... I am a woman who did hard labour-work. What I did was not something meant to be done by a woman. I was only 30 when my man died. Oh! The sufferings I went through from then onwards to bring up my children. I didn’t sell a single child of mine .........

At a time when the wooden planks were deteriorating, the house that J built with such great difficulty once again began to give way. She then got in to a dilapidated tank (reservoir) and cut some logs to serve as supporting pillars; applied coatings of clay and constructed another house. She herself climbed up and thatched the roof with Iluk leaves. By this time her children had grown up. Her second son took up the family burden and carried the entire responsibility of maintaining the family. He undertook to handle the paddy cultivation work in the plot of land he had got from the Government. Apart from this, he engaged himself in hunting and labour-work. In addition, J too employed herself in labour-work on lands belonging to others to earn some money. Disregarding her son’s pleas to refrain from such work, she managed to save some money which she earned this way. The money she saved in this manner, was spent on buying insecticides required for her son’s paddy field. The son who at the end of the paddy harvesting would sell the crops and repay the money her mother invested on the insecticides to her. J describes how her son maintained her:

Though I suffered for some time, I enjoyed life for sometime. My son got married. My daughter-in-law was to beget a child too. Yet, my child treated me well. If he brings a quarter litre of coconut oil, he would give half of it saying: This is my mother’s share .........

When the daughter-in-law was six months pregnant, J’s son suddenly became ill. He was stricken with fever and was taken to the Polonnaruwa hospital. After two weeks, he was brought back home from the hospital. The following day J got ready to go to the
jungles to fetch Iluk to earn something by selling it. At that moment her son who maintained her so far asked her as to why she wanted to suffer further and handed her some money to buy rice and dal as food for those working in the paddy field. Subsequently he had picked up his fishing net etc, and had gone towards the tank (reservoir) for the purpose of catching some fish. He was able to catch about 6 kgs. of fish and this he handed over to his brother to sell and fetch some provisions of food necessary for the house. He complained of a severe headache too and returned home, and after laying one of his mother's cloths on the floor, reclined to sleep. J who was then in the paddy field was informed by a villager that her son is in a serious condition. According to J:

I came running home from the paddy field. Even by that time I noticed my son lying there like a withered flower. It was three years before this, on May 11th in 1993 that my son died from malaria of the brain......

After his death, J had thought that there was no meaning in living any further. She would gaze into the open sky as if insane, and had waited for days on end without eating anything. six months later, on hearing that her son's wife had delivered a child, J had visited her. On arriving there and noticing that she had begotten a baby son, J was overcome with so much joy which she described in the following manner:

Madam ...... I regained my desire to live. I felt a desire to see the baby boy ......... my grandchild. I told my daughter-in-law too to look after the boy somehow on the other, and that I would bring there the rice the following day. But she didn't listen to me. When I returned, my daughter-in-law had said that I did not bring that stuff when I came there, and had left the house leaving behind the child. And now I am looking after the child ..........

J who once more has her battle with life, with the support of her children and her own courage is again involved in paddy cultivation. It was in this manner that she closed the chapter of her life-story.

8.2 Conclusion

From these case studies the enormous difficulties faced by Vedda women are starkly evident. By courageously facing up to extreme physical and mental agony, these Vedda women show a high level of endurance capacity. They desperately try to maintain their pollution beliefs like killa (dirt) and to act accordingly. They use 'Killy pela' to
separate the girls who attend puberty and take care to keep the 'Yak pela' (devil box) out of bounds of menstruation women. They link these acts to their strong beliefs inRelative devils and take special care not to displease these devils fearing to come under their wrath. Therefore that aspect is still an important constituent of the traditional Vedda cosmology. As Mary Douglas points out "Where there is dirt, there is a system". If dirt is a by-product of ordering and classifying, and society is the source of rules and categories, then dirt is very much a normal part of social life. At the same time these case studies also illustrate the capacity of Vedda women to adopt the changing situations. They understand that this is necessary for their survival. It is true that the present Vedda community is vaguely bounded and have weak ties among its members which has resulted in decreases in their group solidarity. This situation has also made it somewhat easier for the Vedda women to try out new things which are alien to their tradition. The popularity of the family planning technique of contraceptive injection among the Vedda women is a clear example of this. In contrast the Vedda men show no interest in planning techniques and sometimes even object wives in taking contraceptive injections. In this respect the Vedda women show a more pragmatic and responsible attitude.

Peter Berger, while acknowledging that the society is the stronger partner in the dialectical relationship between the individual and the society, he also contends that the individual is not passively shaped by his/her world. He/she is a participant in the process, co-producing shaped by his/her world. He/she is a participant in the process, co-producing with others not only the social world but himself/herself as well. More important is Berger's repeated insistence that individuals can say 'No' to the institutional imperatives. The Vedda women have done that courageously.

These case studies also indicate that if anyone or an organization is really keen in helping the Vedda community in their desperate struggle for survival, it is important to acknowledge the potential of Vedda women and incorporate them in any project that is intended to improve the quality of their lives. Outsiders should not try to impose their 'development' models on them. Instead they (the Veddas), should be allowed to take decisions either to restore their traditional practices or to modify the traditional practices to suit the changing environment or the pragmatically embrace practices which are alien to their tradition. Given the necessary assistance (financially, materially or otherwise) these Vedda women would no doubt come up with creative and bold solutions.

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