CHAPTER IX

The Changing Structure of Rituals: A Marolevel View

9.1 Acculturation and Social Change
9.2 Vedda Puberty Ritual in Changing Society
9.3 Vedda Women in Changing Society
9.4 Major Factors Affecting the Social and Cultural Change
   a. Tourism
   b. Displacement and Re-Settlements
   c. Religious Conversion
   d. Assimilation
9.5 Conclusion
THE CHANGING STRUCTURE OF RITUALS: A MACRO LEVEL VIEW

9.1 Acculturation and Social Change.

The concept of acculturation and culture “contact” as a process of social and cultural change occupied the major attention of the American and the British anthropologists for quite sometime between 1930 to 1950. The first systematic definition on acculturation was made by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits in 1936. They state:

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups (Redfield and et. al 1936: 149 - 50).

Although this can be considered as one of the most broad definitions, objections were soon raised. One very pertinent objection was raised by Linton (1940: 464 - 465) himself against the phrase “continuous firsthand contact.” It was pointed out that “changes in the original cultural pattern” were possible, and have in fact been happening in the recent historical past in the absence of what may be termed as “continuous firsthand contact.” Another set of critiques pointed out that the definition makes no attempt to specify the nature of the phenomena which are to be treated as part of acculturation.” It is in this sphere that we come to the confusion existing between the two terms diffusion and acculturation. Thus according to Herskovits (1955: 472) “diffusion is the study of achieved cultural transmission while acculturation is the study of cultural transmission in process. And also he admits “to differentiate diffusion from acculturation pragmatically as has been done here. does not, however, fully delimit the meaning of the term acculturation” (Herskovits 1955: 473).
In fact, in the chapter on acculturation Beals and Hoijer (1973) under the sub-title “The problem of acculturation,” start with diffusion and go on to clarify the “importance of culture contact in relation to culture change situation that involve not the mere adapting of new elements to the existing structure of culture, but the significant and rapid restructuring of one or both the cultures in contact (Ghosh 1989 : 5). The main points were the relation of acculturation to the concepts of culture change and diffusion, the relation between acculturation and assimilation, whether acculturation is a process or a condition and so on. Apart from these theoretical stances there are also several methodologies involved in a study of acculturation and social change. For example, the quality and quantity of change, techniques to ascertain that change, base line data for determining a change, types of contact between two cultures, kinds of socio-cultural situation involved, role of individual or group in the process of acceptance, rejection and accomodation of particular element or trait, and so on (Chakrabarti 1989 : 56). In fact, Beals and Hoijer have pointed out that acculturation is clearly a type of culture change and for this reason the need for the term has been questioned”. After a detailed discussion, Beal writes this brief review clearly suggests that both definitions and usage of the term acculturation (or culture contact) are varied and unsatisfactory (Chakrabarti 1989 : 56).

There is another interesting dimension in the study of culture change which was mentioned by Malinowski (1945). He says that the culture change may be factors and forces spontaneously arising within the community, or it may take place through the contact of different cultures (Chakrabarti 1989 : 56).

The materialist standpoint on social / cultural change is worth recording at this stage. Maurice Conforth summarises some of those points as follows:

(i) When a system exists in an environment which contain process the confrontation of which contradict the requirements for the continued existence of the system in that environment, then there may be said to be a ‘contradiction’ in relation of the system with its surroundings ......... The presence of a contradiction then, implies some kind of tensions or stress, some kind of conflict or struggle, the issue of which is whether the system affected will continue to exist or will undergo some fundamental change or be destroyed.
In social practice people are continually establishing fresh points of contact with the world they inhabit, discovering new things and new uses of things. And as the scope of practical social activity expands, so does the scope of human knowledge. The scope of human knowledge is determined by the multiplicity of the real connections people have established in their practical activities as knowledge advances, so does the scope and power of human practice (Conrorth, quoted in Chakrabarti 1989: 57).

Scholars who have written on social change, again, have brought out many parameters for studying such changes. Like the studies in culture change, questions have been raised whether change is a process or an end product of a process; what is the relation between social change and the rest of the changes in economic, political and cultural aspects of life, the actual relation between diachronic and synchronic levels of changes and micro and macro factors of changes; whether social change can be viewed as a continuum, and so on (Chakrabarti 1989: 57).

Social and political philosophers have tried to put primacy on different aspects for social change. For example, the French thinker August Comte thought of social change as the outcome of a change in the intellectual level. Whereas to the German thinker Karl Marx, the social relations of people in a given means and mode of production have been the determinants of a social change. Social change in the history of mankind has also been viewed in terms of a cyclical development. For example, while the ancient Indian philosophers have conceptualized the four Yugas (eras) as a repetitive order, the German thinker Oswald Spengler and the British historian Arnold Toynbee have formulated some historical stages for each culture or civilization to pass through, starting from its birth, growth and decay (Chakrabarti 1989: 57-58).

A set of other social scientists have preferred to see change in the social organisation in terms of a dichotomy of human relations, and systems. To note a few, Henry Maine’s ‘status and contract’, Ferdinand Tonnies’ ‘gemeinschaft and gesellschaft’, Emile Durkheim’s ‘organic and mechanical solidarity’, Robert Redfield’s ‘folk and urban’ and so on and so forth (Chakrabarti 1989: 58).

In distinguishing between gemeinschaft and gesellschaft, Tonnies was trying to focus attention on the obvious fact that interdependence between individuals is more marked in certain types of social context. People are more subjected to the attention and scrutiny of
those around them in a small provincial town them in a capital. This idea was taken up by Durkheim and later by Redfield and others. Tonnies’s obvious fact, however, has given rise to tiresome corollaries, amongst which is the view that in a *gemeinschaft* individuality dissolves, the individual as such does not exist and is simply a focus of the collective will. The proof of this is the unanimity and consensus reigning in village communities. The individual is thus seen not as an immediate datum, but as a concept linked to a particular form of society, the *gesellschaft*, which contrasts at every point with the *gemeinschaft*. This means that individualism is an ideology, the characteristic ideology of the *gesellschaft* (Boudon 1986: 53).

Factors affecting the social and cultural changes could be many, depending upon the particular historical, economic and political situation. To be brief, these factors are largely demographic, technological, cultural, economic and political in nature. In a specific situation, the factors of change are sometimes identified with urbanisation, industrialization, displacement (migration) religious conversion, tourism, assimilation, educational and other ideological motivation, improved communication, political mobilization, administrative reforms and so on.

In Sri Lanka, especially after independence there are two major factors underlying culture and social change of the Vedda folk. They are (i) changes in social environment (ii) change in the physical environment. The changes due to these major factors are discussed in the present chapter.
9.2 Vedda Puberty Ritual in Changing Society

No society can avoid change. In this regard the tribal societies are no exception. Vedda society in Sri Lanka is undergoing tremendous change. By closely studying the culture of a society we can understand and explain the changes of that society. Puberty ritual is an important event of the Vedda culture. A thorough survey on the changes undergone by the Vedda puberty ritual over the last half century reveals how far the interaction of the Vedda society with the mainstream contributed to its change.

For example, I have observed how the *kili-pela* came into operation in order to seclude the girl who attained puberty and how the *kili pela* gradually went into oblivion with social change. This reveals the impact of the changing Vedda society on their socio-cultural formations.

**The usage of the ‘kili pela’ in the corresponding life styles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Transition of Vedda life style</th>
<th>The usage of the ‘kili pela’ in the corresponding life styles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Sedentary life in caves</td>
<td>Not used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Nomadic life with no permanent habitats</td>
<td>Used.</td>
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<tr>
<td>iii. Sedentary life in permanent houses</td>
<td>Not used.</td>
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**TABLE 9.1**

As shown in the above table, Vedda lived in caves about a century ago. During that period when the main subsistence was hunting and gathering, the Vedda men roamed in the forest in search of hunt and returned to their caves. They lived in those caves for a major part of their lives or even for the entire life-spans thereby leading a sedentary life. Gradually slash and burn or chena cultivation became their main subsistence. That prompted them to move in search of suitable lands for chena cultivation, transforming them into nomadic life style. During this period hunting became a secondary livelihood. In a particular season Veddas prepare a field by slashing and burning that portion of the forest. Then he cultivates it with various seeds. In order to look after the cultivated field and to stay in with his family he puts up a hut adjoining the field. After one or two seasons he leaves that field and goes in search of another fertile land which was in abundance. The next hut would be erected as in
It is interesting to see how their customs changed with the transition from sedentary life to nomadic life.

It is evident from Seligman's (1911) description that Vedda women too lived in the caves during their puberty and menstruation periods when Veddas were living in caves. Seligman says (1969 ed : 94 - 95) that he himself saw such women living in separated portions of the caves. The custom of strict isolation was not necessary since they led a sedentary life. But the beginning of a new life based on agriculture left them with no permanent dwellings. Thus the important of a Kili Pela was greatly felt. Kili Pela served many purposes. Their temporarily dwellings were very small in size. Therefore during this period of impurity (Kili Kalaya) it was practically a hazard for all in the family to live together. On the other hand in the jungles they had the blessings of the devils for protection. Worshipers of devils protect themselves from this kind of impurity (Killa) in order to escape from the devil’s wrath. Therefore it was more sensible to keep her away from the rest of the family during this period. They achieved this by keeping her in a separate hut away from their houses. Many early writers have recorded that when Veddas dwelt in caves they led their lives in groups and had an extended family system. (Seligman 1969 : 94 - 95). Females were quite safe in these groups. But with the emergence of the life style based more on agriculture this group system gave way to a family centered life (nuclear family). In Nuclear family system safety of women was inadequate. The importance of familiarizing women to the ferocity of jungles was greatly felt. Loneliness, darkness and animals are common attributes in jungle and to live in it these is no alternative other than being familiar with them. Therefore the Vedda community isolated their females who attained adolescence (puberty) in a hut built 20 - 100 yards away from the their homes for nine days. She did not have any company for loneliness. The importance of this exercise was that it trains them to live safely in isolation during their puberty and monthly menstruation process. Thus she was isolated during the period of impurity and by that she spontaneously received the above training. There is another factor that is responsible for the coming up of Kili Pela during their agricultural life. Veddas began their agricultural life style half a century ago as a result of the influence they had in the company of neighbouring Sinhalese. In fact the Sinhalese life style was somewhat similar to this. Sinhalese who lived by chena cultivation went to the interiors of the jungles and as a result Veddas mingled with Sinhalese very easily. The needs of these of two communities who lived by the same livelihood were probably similar. Veddas imbibed the Sinhalese practices very easily and they surely have felt the practical
importance of them. Therefore some customs that were in practice among the Sinhalese villagers spread easily among Vedda’s.

Two decades later Veddas returned to a sedentary life style. Jungles were cleaned for roads. Villages gradually became crowded. Travelling in and out of villages happened frequently. Forest coverage became less and less owing to new development projects. Veddas who found it impossible to move into the jungle interiors for chena cultivation settled permanently in jungle strips by the sides of the roads. Government policies that later came into implementation also restricted their jungle territory. Thus their life styles and customs and practices based on them gradually became extinct. As a result Kili Pela bore no practical importance and at the same time it was difficult to adhere to that custom. Hence during the past two decades that custom gradually died away. Thus not only the Veddas but also the Sinhalese abandoned that custom. Thus it is clear that in the face of social change how the ‘Kili Pela’ became a necessity at a certain stage and was neglected in a subsequent stage. In other words ‘Kili Pela’ was not in use in the distant past when Veddas led a sedentary life in caves engaging in hunting and gathering and it came into usage when they adopted a nomadic life style due to their change over to chena (slash and burn) cultivation. But the ‘Kili Pela’ went into oblivion when the Veddas subsequently returned to sedentary life by settling in houses. Therefore we can infer that ‘Kili Pal’ came into usage as a necessity of the nomadic life style.

Colonization that began two to three decades ago heightened intermixing the Sinhalese and Veddas. As a result Sinhalese customs and practices entered into Yedda way of life. In effect today Sinhalese life and Vedda life are hardly distinguishable from one another. At present Vedda puberty rituals encompass many of Sinhala customs. Instead of the shell of a gourd (Labu Katta) used by Veddas in bathing the newly attained girl for the first time after her period of seclusion, they now use a clay pot for this purpose just as the Sinhalese. The Veddas who in the past completely isolated their girls who attained puberty today take care not to isolate them completely in keeping with the Sinhalese custom. Excepting few, most of the Veddas separate their newly attained girls in their houses like the Sinhalese. Those days the Veddas did not perform the various tasks pertaining to the puberty ritual according to auspicious times. But at present some of them also go to the astrologer as the Sinhalese for instructions regarding the important events of the puberty ritual. They no longer go in search of lakes and water falls for bathing the newly attained girls. The girl is bathed at the auspicious time with the water brought to the house.
Following Sinhalese they too get the child, who emerge from her seclusion period having been bathed at the auspicious time, to crack coconuts and to perform some rituals in front of ritual objects (*Kotahalu goda*). Those days Veddas did not enforce any food restrictions on the girl who attained of age. But today with the Sinhalese influence they restrict their newly attained girls from certain food and prescribe certain special dishes. The Sinhalese influence is such that, Veddas even go to the extent of throwing small parties in celebration of attainment of age of their daughters according to their financial status. Like the present Sinhalese, among Veddas too celebrations have overtaken the customs and rituals.

Our study was revealed the importance and responsibility of the cross cousin in the Vedda puberty ritual. Child marriages had been common among Veddas since fifty years ago. Then the responsibilities entrusted upon the cross cousins were even more. That was mainly because of the fact that mostly Vedda girls attained puberty in their husband’s huts. Then Vedda marriages took place between the cross cousins. Therefore all puberty rites were performed by the mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and her husband (cross-cousin brother). Now child marriages are extinct in the Vedda society. But cross cousin marriages took place until recent times. Even then the blood relations fulfilled their responsibilities in the performance of her puberty rites. Gradually the concept of cross-cousin marriages have died away from Vedda community. As a result the importance and responsibility borne by the cross cousins too dwindled. Today even the few ‘*Kili Palas*’ constructed are not built by cross-cousin brothers. That too has to be done either by her parents or her sister’s husband. Those duties that were then performed by the cross-cousin sister or the mother-in-law are now performed by her own mother or brother’s wife. It is thus clear that marriage system of Veddas have changed they have accordingly adjusted the customs of puberty.

But even in these modern changes their past can be discerned. The burning of *Illuk* leaves taken from the roof where the newly attained girl was isolated, symbolizes the burning down of *Kili Pala* in the past. Some Veddas still continue to burn the dress in which she attained age. Even though certain rites and rituals parted from them as a result of social change, still they retain some aspects of those rites in various forms. It is thus clear that though people undergo speedy change in their dress, food and other material means, it takes a much longer time to change their mental habits.
On the other hand the puberty rituals were interwoven with their lifestyle but with the destruction of that lifestyle these customs have become redundant for modern society. For today it is not pragmatic to isolate a woman in a Kili Pela which is about twenty to hundred yards away from their homes since the safety of women cannot be assumed in modern day society as was in the past. As discussed earlier puberty rites of Vedda girls, those who serve as servants, are done according to the wishes of their mistresses often they are asked to bathe after a short period of isolation without performing any special rites. What could such girls offer their own children as customs to follow in such situations?

Even at present economically the Veddas are far worse off than the Sinhalese are. With cultural imitations certain changes and omissions are inevitable. As a result there is no order or unity in such rituals among Veddas. They follow them according to their own tastes and abilities. Certain Veddas follow no rites of puberty because of their extreme poverty. The modern Vedda society oscillates precariously between their traditional and the neighbouring village life styles. They belong to neither of these two streams. The injustice of this condition is that it is something that is forced upon them by various social forces and social changes. Vedda puberty rituals no longer belong to the Vedda past nor to the Sinhalese present but are a set of rites alien to both.

9.3 Vedda Women in Changing Society

Vedda women mirror the fast social change that has taken place in the Vedda society during the past half century. The status and responsibilities of Vedda women are being greatly affected in the face of this rapid social change.

Many historical documents and reports prove that Vedda woman was leading a solitary life aloof from social relationships (See Nerill 1987 ; Seligmann 1911). Then the Vedda woman hid herself or hearing a human voice in the jungle and confined herself away from all external social relationships. As a result she was confined only to the institution of family and in it she played the roles of a daughter, wife or a mother. The break down of their conventional life pattern based on hunting and gathering, chena cultivation resulted in

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1 In South India the marriages between girls and their maternal uncles (mother's younger brother) are no longer practised. Though they still symbolize that custom with the shouldering (carring) away of the girl child (who was supposed to be bride) by her maternal uncle to some distance.
changing the whole lifestyle of Vedda woman. These changes left an enormous gap between her old and the new life styles.

Vedda girls began schooling four to five decades ago. They received just enough education to sign their names and inadequate to meet their socio-economical demand. Even today the formal education received by Vedda girls is not satisfactory in the sense that it does not provide them with the skills and other fruits of basic education to face the demands of the society. On the other hand the overwhelming poverty has forced many of them to drop out from school in their early childhood.

In fact the Vedda women received a marked transformation of their status with the advent of socio-economic change. Construction of roads, launching of the development projects, establishment of new colonies and interaction with Sinhalese have resulted their traditional life disappear. Poverty drove Vedda women to become active supporters in earning money. They changed their family centered life and went in search of various employments like labour work, domestic services, services related to tourism, selling vegetables, fruits and other things. Through these avenues they began to have a diverse set of social relationships. These social relationships adversely affected the values of the Vedda women. A sequential investigation of this process would reveal the changing scenario of the Vedda women.

Here we have to concentrate on two main factors. One is the departure from the jungle life. The other is the exposure of Vedda society to various external social relationships.

When modernization reached the villages from the cities in the name of development, it deprived the Veddas of their jungle life and traditional life style. This situation was thrust upon Veddas though they were not willing to part from their conventional life style. During the chena cultivation period Vedda wife was his main helper playing a significant role. It was she who properly preserved the hunted meat and supported him in collecting bee honey. She also gathered yam and fruits for daily consumption by roaming in the jungle, brought firewood and clay for making clay pots. But the shrinking of jungles resulted in the loss of all these things for Vedda women and for the whole Vedda community.
The destruction and deprivation of the jungles affected the values of the Vedda community. This is not peculiar to Vedda community alone. It has happened and still happening in tribal societies all over the world. Sundaralal Bahuguna (1984: 132) has explained the erosion of the life style among Indian tribal women thus.

On the night of 31 may 1979, Bhadi Devi of Sabi village, who belong to the Chipko Padayatra team, told me about the ill effects of the devastation of forest. When we were young, we used to go to the forest early in the morning, without eating anything. There we would eat plenty of berries and wild fruits. We used to drink cold, sweet liquid of the Banj roots (which is now sold as mineral water at Rs. 10/- a bottle in Delhi five-star hotels). In a short while we would gather all the fodder and fire wood we needed, rest under the shade of some huge tree and then go home. Now, with the going of the trees, everything else has gone too.

The above story is true about the Vedda women too. The elderly Vedda women disgusted with the loss of jungles utter sentences like "we needed nothing when we had the jungle" and "jungles gave us life". It has been already stated that the Veddas lost their native jungles due to the acquirement of their forest lands for Madura Oya National Park. As such they lost their jungle based life-style and the women too lost their roles with regard to jungles. The jungles provided them with many materials. That was an immense support given by the jungles for them to survive. But now it is not only a threat but also they are devoid of such jungle based life style. The Vedda woman whose working area was restricted to Vedda village or outskirts of it was focused to seek employment outside her village. Vedda women move from Dambana to Henanigala during the period in which people work as agricultural labour for paddy farming. They work as labourers in building sites or development projects. But the scarcity of such activities has posed a great difficulty for Vedda women to make a living out of them. This is how the Vedda woman is caught in a terrible struggle in the face of changing society.

The process of development, itself created problems for them. The Vedda woman is more adversely affected than the Vedda man. This happens mainly because Vedda women are responsible finally for their children. Children's suffering is greatly felt by the Vedda women. Knowing that their husbands income is limited they too seek means of making money. As a result Vedda women beg for local and foreign tourists for some money.

Tourist industry has changed the course of life for Vedda women in various aspects. In past two decades there has been a considerable growth in the number of tourists visiting
Veddas. Vedda attire, bow and arrows and hand axe are important symbols of ‘Veddahood’. Vedda men earn money through singing and dancing. But Vedda women whose dresses are very close to that of the Sinhalese women can not show their distinctive identity through those means. As a result Vedda women are hardly invited by the tourists for sing songs. Therefore these women who lead an independent life full of happiness are now a set of beggars and parasites.

The more the Vedda society gets in touch with external society the more it received various features of that life. Especially the values of young Vedda women are affected by them. This is more conspicuous in Vedda women who go to cities as servants. For example these women have a great liking of modern dresses, radios wall clocks and etc. Failing to gain them makes them frustrated and they work hard to make money to buy them. This way the certain means they choose to make money are very short and easy. However, it is only a few of them who know the art of saving money for future purposes. Their attitude towards financial economy is another factor that proves their inability to cope up with social change. Some women with better economical understanding lead more prominent lives than others.

Cultural crises cannot be avoided in a society that tries to decimate from its inherited culture. At present the Vedda community and especially the Vedda women have faced this cultural erosion. Woman carries the culture of the society. And as such the Vedda woman is likely to get affected more than a Vedda male in such crisis.

9.4 Major Factors Affecting the Social and Cultural Change

(a) Tourism

Tourism has occupied a prominent place among the factors that contribute to the change of social order in Vedda community.

The interest of both foreigners and locals in Veddas who are considered the ‘primitive people’ of Sri Lanka during the past five decades has increased the number of tourists who are visiting them. Another factor that made the Vedda community a tourist resort was the activities of journalists and politicians. Vedda community received a great deal of attention from the politicians after the country gained independence and the journalists, too, informed the public about Vedda life through the media.² The nomination of

² See (Chapter II Sub Topic : The Political organization ).
the year 1993 as 'the year of the indigenous people' by the United Nations Organization (UNO) also drew attention to them. Today the popularity of tourist industry in Vedda villages is such that it has become one of the avenues for earning money.

It is important to consider the kind of tourism that has become a source of income for the Veddas who live in the interior of Dambana as well as the Sinhalese living in neighbouring villages. Sinhalese who live in major cities like Colombo, Kandy and Galle visit the Veddas along with tourists as their guides. Another set of touts and guides constantly flock near Dambana junction to guide mostly the local tourists to Vedda villages and the chieftain of Veddas. These guides are benefitted both by the tourists and Veddas for the services they provide.

These guides sometimes earn money through various unscrupulous ways. It has sometimes been reported from Vedda villages that these so called tourist guides have deceived the Vedda youth and put them into difficulties. In order to retain the monopoly of the trade they fleece and deceive Veddas and tourists.

Veddas too depend on the income received from the tourists. They receive money from entertaining the tourists with their songs and dances, selling handicrafts and begging. The impact of tourism upon Veddas is such that some Veddas who wore trousers and sarongs and trimmed their hair like Sinhalese returned to their traditional dress and manners to overcome their financial problems. They know that the exhibition of themselves as Veddas spontaneously bring them some income.

The role played by journalists in attracting tourists to Vedda villages is immense. Journalists, cinematographers tele-drama produces and certain learned people do create exaggerated newspaper articles, films, tele-dramas and books based on the information received from Veddas during their very short visits to these villages. These creations produce an exaggerated picture of Vedda community rather than stark reality. Tourists fascinated by these exaggerations visit Vedda villages to observe a community that lives in caves consume hunted meat and honey, wear Vedda costume, communicate only in Vedda language and performs their traditional dances and rituals. Foreign tourists, too, are attracted by these exaggerations.
It is a fact that the ‘unmixed’ Veddas extincted more than a half a century ago. The present Veddas who desperately attempt to sing, dance, behave and relate stories in imitation of what they have in the past. Sinhalese traders too send their fraudulent goods to the Vedda market through Veddas. These traders get their goods sold by Veddas and the Veddas receive a commission in return.

Dambana, the village of Veddas is situated 17 kilometers away from the historical sacred land of Mahiyangana. Pilgrims from all corners of the country flock to worship the sacred temple of Mahiyangana. After religious observances their pilgrimage become a happy journey and many buses carrying these people reach Dambana. Vedda village transforms itself into a very busy place during week-ends, Government holidays, full moon days and especially during the religious festivities and the annual procession of Mahiyangana temple which fall in the month of September. During the field study in the year 1994, I and my research assistant noticed, a daily arrival of fifty to seventy five buses for a period of five to seven days filling the whole village with pleasure seekers, young girls and boys dressed in fancy clothes entering the Vedda village and playing various musical instruments. They park their buses near Dambana school and the rest of the distance they go on foot cracking jokes and shouting. On their way they play their instruments breaking the silence of the jungle. These noisy crowds sit around the feeble Vedda chieftan and bother him with various questions. The feeble chieftan had no other alternative but to maintain silence. Then these tourists talk to the other Veddas. Both young and old Veddas sing, dance and shoot arrows. The tourists entertained by these things give them money in return. Little Vedda children fight one another to grasp coins thrown at them. These pleasure seekers with their usual music and dance then return to their villages. This is how the Dambana Vedda village has become.

The well-off town dwellers who represent the upper class of the society and are quite fluent in English do come with their children in search of Veddas. They introduce the Veddas to their children. This an attitude that reflects these people that are mere showpiece that should be visited by the children and themselves. They pay a little money to Veddas and take photographs of their kids with Veddas while their children cry in fear. But they are satisfied that they have showed these jungle-dwellers to their children.
Those elderly tourists who have become inquisitive about Vedda life, too, are disappointed with their modern behaviour and probably blame the Veddas as a 'false set' forgetting the fact that they have been deceived by the information provided by the media.

The reality is duly covered by the authorities and hence more and more tourists visit Veddas. Veddas cater to tastes of the tourists in order to make a better living. The indecent and improper behaviour of tourists often make the Vedda dwelling a play-spot. Veddas, too, are compelled to tolerate this kind of behaviour on the part of tourists since is a means to overcome their poverty. Veddas are rebuked severely when the tourists are denied the satisfaction of seeing 'unmixed Veddas'. And Veddas think of more realistic ways of performing their arts, and as a result of this vicious-circle both the Veddas and tourists more far from what is the reality.

Veddas welcome the foreign tourists more than they do the local tourists for they offer more financial aid. In 1911 Seligmann describes the Dambana Vedda thus.

The Dambani people are unfortunately "show" Veddas, that is to say, people who have been sent for so often by white visitors that they have learnt certain tricks, which they show off directly they see a European, and so constantly demand presents that serious work with them is an impossibility. (Seligman 1969ed : 49). [Sic]

In modern days Veddas are exploited by foreign tourists and especially unscrupulous business-men. They visit Veddas from all corners of the world, and televise photographs and tape their dance, songs and Vedda rituals. Sometimes the cultural activities are performed in a leading hotel which is situated at Colombo, Kandy or Katharayama. Veddas also provide them with what they want with their knowledge recieded from what they have heard about their own past. This kind of audio visual information received a very high price in the international market and Veddas are paid a paltry sum for their performances. The payments received by Veddas are very little in comparison with the money that these professionals make. Though some of the Vedda youth are aware of this exploitation yet the elderly Veddas are still ignorant of this fact. Even those who are aware of this kind of exploitation pay a deaf ear to these matters for they receive a comparatively higher income from foreigners and a protest might result in a total loss of such income. Local men work to bridge the Veddas and these business men in this trade which happen at international level and these local middle men earn profits after their foreign masters.
But Henanigala is not a tourist resort as Dambana is owing to many reasons. Reaching Henanigala which is far from the highway and a bit isolated is no easy task. On the other hand the publicity received through media is minimum when compared to that of Dambana. Above all the most influential reason is that it is governed by Mahaweli Economic Agency as all the other Mahaweli Colonies and as a result the outsiders are controlled and restricted in their activities. Therefore, media men and non-Government organizations find it difficult to proceed with their enterprises. Hence, the Henanigala Vedda community is much safer than that of Dambana Veddas since they are less exposed to the exploitation caused by tourists and businessmen. On the other hand the lack of tourism in Henanigala has resulted in providing them with a less income.

Money has become such an important factor in the Vedda community that it has changed almost all virtues and values of Veddas. Veddas tend to become very competitive as a result of their being mere ignorant players of the abovementioned trade. Rivalry and breaking of human relationships cannot be averted when money becomes the soul of a society. The contention of Veddas today is solely due to the background created by the above circumstances. Those Veddas that are more attracted by tourists make money and become prosperous while others envy their well being and hence those in the destruction of unity and solidarity in Vedda community.

It is quite pathetic to observe the amount to which the Vedda society has been corrupted by the main stream. The future of Vedda village which has begun a fast journey is very indefinite. Instead of the conventional Vedda life what is in prominence in Vedda village is the dirty money making business. Their day-to-day expenses are met by the money earned through little donations and tips. Veddas themselves have no idea as to how long they can earn by these means. When tourists are fed up with them and when there is no marked differences between them and Sinhalese villages this business will die its own death. The deprivation of jungle has driven them away from their conventional life style and hence they can not step back to their usual way of living. Then what could be the fate of the Vedda community?
9.1 - Local tourists treating Veddas as a “Showpiece”.

9.2 - Local tourists making fun of Veddas.

402
9.3 - A Vedda dance to entertain foreign tourists

9.4 - Veddas entertaining a group of foreign tourists
b. Displacement and Re-Settlements.

The gigantic development projects implemented all over the world during the last fifty years has played havoc among the lives of tribals and peasant societies. They have been removed from their natural habitats giving way to reserviors, dams, canals and roads. These uprooted people were resettled in far-flung, alien environments without proper rehabilitation programmes. Therefore these resettlements have adversly affected their culture and basis of livelihood making their very survival traumatic.

It is important to consider the impact on the tribals and peasants by the post independence development projects of Sri Lanka. I have earlier mentioned (See Chapter II) about the Sinhalese and Tamil settlements in Mahiyanganaya and Polonnaruwa due to Minneriya and Minipe irrigation projects carried out in 1930s and 1940s and also about the consequences of the Gal Oya development project (1950s) on the survival of Veddas. Under the Gal Oya irrigation scheme the Veddas and peasants who lived in the Eastern province were evacuated in order to construct the ‘Senanayake Samudraya’ (massive reservoir) at Iginiyagala. At present considerable amount of forest land has been cleared.

The forest resources in Sri Lanka have dwindled drastically during the last two decades. In 1956 there was a forest cover of 7.2 million acres which constituted 44% of the land area. But after 20 years, in 1976, this figure has come down to 22%. At the present rate of deforestation it has been estimated that the last tree will be felled by the end of the next century (Mmahaweli Newsletter August 1981:2).

With the implemention of the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project in 1977 the Veddas and the peasants of Central and Uva provinces were evacuated from their traditional habitats and resettled in the Mahaweli colonies.

The Mahaweli Ganga is the largest and longest river in Sri Lanka (335 km long). It would be developed, channelled and diverted into tunnels and turbines for hydroelectric power, then guided to reservoirs and canals for irrigation. 640,000 acres of undeveloped land would provide new agricultural lands and homesteads for more than one million families. Given below are the extracts from the important related documents issued by the Mahaweli Development Authority.
The programme would include the construction, storage and irrigation facilities sufficient to supply water for the cultivation 128,000 hectares of new lands and for the ungrading of 32,000 of existing agricultural lands in the irrigation systems designated as C and D (TAMS Report, Vol I oct. 1980:3). The major projects selected by the Jayawardena Government for the Accelerated Mahaweli Programme decided in 1977 were Kotmale, Victoria, Madura Oy with its ancillary Ulhitiya - Ratkinda projects, Randenigala with its ancillary Rantembe reservoir, and Moragahakaanda (Mahaweli Newsletter August 1981:3).

However the confidence engendered by the return to power by an unprecedented 5/6 majority of a politically stable Government, attracted financial support from many sources -- Britain, Canada the Federal Republic of Germany, the U.S.A., Japan, Sweden, the Netherlands, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and other U.N. Agencies. Britain led the way with a magnificently generous outright grant of £100 million for the Victoria project which was inaugurated in March 1980. This project will be unique many ways. At 400 feet, it will be the highest dam in this part of the world. It will also be the first ever double curvature arch concrete dam to be built here, and it will be a multipurpose project serving the irrigation needs of a major part of the Dry Zone, generating eventually 420 Megawatts of hydro-power and also serving the interests of the tourist industry while functioning additionally as an inland fisheries station (Mahaweli Newsletter August 1981:3).

The proposed settlement plan for the Accelerated programme the clustering of house lots into a hamlet which will be located near one to two kilometers from irrigated allotments. Each hamlet will be of about 100 settler family units, each allotted 0.4 hectares as a house plot and vegetable garden and one hectare for paddy cultivation (TAMS Report, Vol I Oct. 1980:6).

In addition to present inhabitants, the Accelerated Mahaweli Programme will accommodate a population of about one million people. This is estimated on the following basis:
Farm family units settled on new lands 80,800
Non-farm support family units +80,800
Farm or support family units for improved lands 14,350
Average family unit size x 5
Average family unit size 879,750
Migrant seasonal labour + 40,400
Total Say 920,150
Total Say 1,000,000


Accordingly these colonies mainly consist of the present inhabitants as well as the peasants and Veddas who were evacuated from their traditional lands.

Cerneaa (1990) has identified seven dimension of impoverishment risks induced by displacement. They are: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, morbility, social disarticulation (Parasuraman 1996:1). I have considered this situation with respective displacements and resettlements carried out so far in Sri Lanka.3

There we can see how Sri Lankan peasants have managed to some extent to adopt gradually to their new environment under severe constraint while the resettled Veddas have been struggling desperately. Even though the Veddas were resettled as owners of their lands today they have become landless labours in their settlements. Other than hunting and slash and burn cultivation they do not posses any other skill. They show immense liking to live as a group with their kith and kin. But they were randomly dispersed under the resettlements schemes. They are plagued by food insecurity. Although the Vedda elders struggle to preserve their beliefs and rituals practical problems make it impossible to put them into practice. On the other hand there is no systematic rehabilitation programmed to help them in adapting to the new enviroment. Due to these factors the resettled Veddas have become strangers belonging neither to their life style nor to the peasant life style.

The other neglected dimension of displacement is its adverse impact on women. Their trauma is compounded by the loss of access to fuel, fodder (Illuk) and food whose collection inevitably requires greater time and effort.

3 See (Chapter II Sub Topic : The Present Position of Veddas).
This human tragedy has become a common scenario wherever these big dam projects have been implemented in the name of development.

With over 1600 major dams and ten thousands of medium and smaller irrigation projects having been built since independence with the attendant canal systems and the invariable consequence of waterlogging and soil salinization, between 100-120 lakh (10-12 million) people have been forcibly displaced by large dams in India. Another estimate places the number as closer to 210 lakhs (21 million) by these dams from 1951 till 1985. The estimates of the total numbers displaced since 1951 range from 110 lakh (11 million) to a conservative overall figure of 185 lakh by development schemes, till 1990. These figures do not include the sizeable number of people who are not acknowledged as being "project affected" and those victimized by the processes of secondary displacement (Kothari 1994:5).

A significant number of those displaced are tribals and other economically marginal rural populations who have historically depended on the natural resource base, particularly the commons for their subsistance. The 29th Report of the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Tribes mentions that even though tribal people are roughly 7.5% of the population, over 40 per cent of those displaced till 1990 came from these communities underscoring the fact that tribals are disproportionately affected by developmental displacement (Kothari 1994:6).

Walter Fernandes (1991) estimates that in the recent past the proportion of tribals among those displaced has been increasing. For example, of the 11.6 lakh persons to be displaced by 20 representative dams above 50 meters either under construction or being planned in the 1990's, 59% are tribals. This figure obviously increase for dams planned in predominantly tribal areas (Suvarnarekha, Pollavaram, Koel-Karo, etc.,). The Central Water Commission's 1990 Register of Large Dams in India suggests that of the 32 dams of more than 50 metre height completed between 1951 and 1970, only nine (22-13 per cent) were in tribal areas. Between 1971 and 1990, 85 additional dams of similar sizes were either completed or were under construction. However, sixty per cent of these dams are belonging to the tribal regions (Fernandes, quoted in Kothari 1994:6).

Today the Narmada Velly Project is marching ahead in spite of the massive protest by the effected and concerned people. The project will transform the giant river into a series of large pools and reservoirs, and destroy it as we know it, for all time. Destroying too the
livelihood of more than a million people, who must be evacuated to make way for the dams; submerging extensive areas of irreplaceable forest; slaughtering wildlife on an unimaginable large scale; and destabilizing permanently the river basin's ecology, decisively for the worse. This vast damage to the living ecosystem is basically to provide water to thirteen districts in Gujrat— only three of them backward -- and two districts of Madhya Pradesh. Naturally, the decision to clear the project was greeted with dismay by environmentalists all over India and the world. But with delight by the World Bank, which, in 1986 had expressed annoyance that the Indian Government was holding up clearance of projects like the Narmada on environmental grounds (Alvares and Billore 1988: 5-6).

As far as the other countries are concerned the construction of a sewerage system in Shanghai, China is estimated to result in the displacement of 15,000 inhabitants; and in Indonesia the Cirata hydropower project will necessitate relocation for a population of 55,000 (Mathur 1995: 153-154). Ghana's Volta dam saw the evacuation of 78,000 people from 700 towns and villages; Lake Kingi in Nigeria displaced 42,000; the Aswan dam 120,000, the Karabia dam 20,000, Turkey's Keban dam 30,000. The Panon dam in Vietnam will uproot 500,000 people, and the three Gorges dam in China, an estimated 2,000,000 people. In the Philippines, forty new dams will displace 1-5 million people. Closer in India, the dams in the Bastar area will inundate 1,70,000 hectares of land (Visvanathan 1996: 281).

In the process, peaceful development has created more refugees than have bloody wars. The list is awesome. The irony of the tribal-peasant turning into a refugee becomes even more poignant in today's world (Visvanathan 1996: 281).

The technology of most large dams is basically vivisectional. With the limited simulation, they are imposed on the people. Goldsmith and Hildyard note that 'many dams fail as a result of what Widstrand calls "pilot plant syndrome"'. Williams regards the technology of large dams as being, in many ways, comparable to that of nuclear power plants. 'Both require massive capital expenditures: both are new technologies with limited operating experience; and, for both, the consequences of catastrophic failure are large-scale devastation (Visvanathan 1996: 282). Therefore while post modern critics are especially suspicious of the disciplinary power of the state and the discipline through normalization implied in many development projects, the consequences of the disintegration of the state and of projects of development have also been disastrous.
Indeed, the plight of peasants and especially indigenous, aboriginal or tribal peoples (as they are various referred to) has become a major issue in contemporary development policy. The attitude of the political leaders and bureaucrats who implement these ‘development projects’ clearly shows their arrogance and short sightness.

On May 28th 1830, President Andrew Jackson in U.S.A. signed the Indian Removal Act, which gave the President authority to remove all Indians West of the Mississippi river. On December 6th 1830, he declared in his second Annual Message thus:

> Humanity has often wept over the fate of the aborigines of this country . . . . . one by one, have many powerful tribes disappeared from the earth. To follow to the tomb the last of his race and to tread on the graves of extinct nations excite melancholy reflections . . . [but] what good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive republic (Jackson, quoted in Stevenson 1991 - 1992 : 326-327).

In India though, the leaders notion on displacement was not that ruthless but they also strictly believed that people “must make sacrifices for the development of the nation”. Nehru was one of the first who legitimized this attitude. In a speech a few months after independence, at the foundation laying ceremony of India’s first major river valley project, the Hirakud dam in Orissa, he said to those facing displacement, “If you have to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country” (Kothari 1994 : 13).

On August 30th 1984, writing a letter to Baba Amte, Indira Gandhi said thus:

> I am most unhappy that development projects displace tribal people from their habitat, especially a project authorities do not always take care to properly rehabilitate the affected population. But sometimes there is no alternative and we have to go ahead in the large interest (Gandhi, quoted in Kothari 1994 : 2).

Recently the Chairman of the Narmada Valley Development Agency (NFDA), S.C. Varma, justifies the mammoth suffering the project is bound to cause. He writes:

> No trauma could be more painful for a family than to get uprooted from a place where it has lived for generations and to move to a place where it may be a total stranger. And nothing could be more irksome than being asked to switch over to an avocation which the family has not practised before. Yet the uprooting has to be done. Because the land occupied by the family is required for a development project which holds promise of progress and prosperity.
for the country and the people in general. The family getting displaced thus makes a sacrifice for the sake of the community. It undergoes hardship and distress and faces an uncertain future so that others may live in happiness and be economically better off (Verma, quoted in Alvares and Billorey 1988: 18).

The attitudes of Sri Lankan political leaders and bureaucrats are more or less the same. In August 1985 Redolfo Stavenhagen had the honour of being received by President J.R. Jayawardene, together with the members of the Board of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies. Among other topics of conversation, he asked the President about the situation of the Veddas. His reply seemed to indicate that the Government felt that the future well-being of the Veddas lay in their rapid assimilation into the mainstream society; that the inevitable economic development which the country was rapidly undergoing, would necessarily undermine the basis of traditional Vedda culture (Stavenhagen 1990: 22).

Justification for such large-scale sacrifices demanded of vulnerable tribals and disadvantaged rural masses is always in the 'national interest'. Is it presumed that tribals and others of their class are not really part of the nation? Even this argument is misleading. Very often the benefits of these projects are reaped by a minority belonging to the upper social strata, because in the developing countries like Sri Lanka and India majority of people live in villages. According to a study conducted by D.G. Senadhipathy (1989: 34-57) shows, of the Open University of Sri Lanka, it is an established that most of the hydro-electric power generated through the power stations belonging to the Accelerated Mahaweli Project is consumed by the elite urban minority of the country.

However, many such situations have, in recent years, been brought to the attention of the public and the international community has become increasingly concerned with these issues. This new public awareness about indigenous and tribal people come none too soon, because time is running out for them. It has, more over, not been an easy task to create this awareness. For years, indigenous and tribal people have attempted to organize themselves at the national and international levels in order to make their grievances and demands known to policy-makers and the general public (Stavenhagen 1990: 20). For example, when Guyana's Akawaio Indians were asked 'to contribute to development' by vacating their land, their headmen wrote the following letter to Prime Minister Forbes Burnham.

This land is where we belong -- it is God's gift to us and has made us as we are. This land is where we are at home; we know its way; and the things that happen here are known and
remembered, so that the stories the old people told are still alive here . . . . This land is the place where we know where to find all that it provides for us -- food for hunting and fishing, and farms, building and tools, materials, medicines. Also the spirits around us know us and are friendly and helpful . . . . If we had to move, we would be lost to those who remain in other villages. This would be a sadness to us all, like the sadness of death. (Visvanathan 1996: 283).

This reminds me of an answer which once R.L. Spittle got from a Vedda in 1936. Spittle reports, whenever they have complained to him of their hardships, as they always do, he asks them: “Would you like to be taken away from here and live in happier conditions in a village”? The invariable answer to that has been more or less the one Spittle notes:

These are our lands, and the lands of our fathers. Why should they be taken away from us? If Government won’t give us enough chenas for our needs, we prefer to starve and die here than go away. The earth of our lands is honey to our mouths. (Spittle 1936: 179-180)

It seems that these people are fighting a losing battle. The main reason for this pathetic situation is that the political leaders, the bureaucrats who plan and implement these ‘development programmes’ and the urbanized people blindly worship the attitude and the world view of the Western civilization. The attitudes and the world view of Indian civilization has provided with rich alternatives. It is heartening to see new generation of creative thinkers, activists and organizations inspired by attitudes and world views which will lead to eco-friendly, sustainable development emerging in the horizon.

c. Religious Conversions

Religious conversion also is one of the major factors which vastly change and affect the tribal cultures and their societies. Specially most of the tribal societies are often being victimized by this process.

As far as Vedda society is concerned the first known project of this nature was launched in the 19th century at Bintenna by the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries with financial and other support from the British colonial authorities. By 1843 the missionaries reported that there was enough progress to gratify both philanthropist and Christian. Houses were being built and children were taught at a school in which agriculture and
animal husbandry were part of the curriculum. The hope was that there would be conversions to Christianity. Before the end of the decade, however, the Vedda mission was on the decline. The initial enthusiasm could not be sustained and there was no infrastructure to check the Vedda propensity to fall back on traditional ways (Dharmadasa 1990: 160-161). The decline of the missionary efforts were reported by the early writers as follows:

A number of them were formally baptized on a profession of faith in Christ and willingness to abandon their superstitious; but almost all of them have gone back again to their former habits and follies. What they formerly heard they have forgotten. They declare it impossible for them to live without devil-worship (Gillings 1853: 88).

We must add that the English Government has frequently attempted to introduce the benefits of civilization among the Veddas. Even schools were built, but they would have nothing to do with them; some were converted to Christianity, but they very soon gave it up (Verma 1894: 149-150).

Tambimuttu (1942: 303-307) has written the same:

The Hindu New Year was celebrated by all the Veddas in April, although many of them were Christian.

Furthermore, the withdrawal of the Government’s financial support and diminished missionary funds had a debilitating effect on the mission. Added to this was a sectarian antagonism between the Wesleyans and Anglicans. The Vedda mission was abandoned in 1851 (Dharmadasa 1990: 161).

A hundred years later there was another missionary endeavour, this time by the Buddhists, and it brought more positive results. A Buddhist monk named Bhikku Kitalagama Silallankara arrived in Dimbulagala, to the North of the Bintenna area mentioned above, in the 1950’s and settled down in one of the caves. Dimbulagala had been a thriving Buddhist monastery in about the 12th century. The site selected by Kitalagama Silalankara was a ruined temple. He faced great difficulties at the beginning, since this was thick jungle inhabited by wild animals. However, over the years he has been successful in building up a large monastery in which most of the young bhikkus were Vedda children.

4 Mahathma Gandhi in his book Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule and Fritz Schumachar by his book Small is
Today Dimbulagala had become a popular centre of Buddhist pilgrimage (Dhamasena 1990: 161).

Likewise, although the Christian missionary efforts brought negative results, effort of Kithalagama Silalankara was succeed in promoting Buddhism among the Veddas. But the Veddas at Dambana and Henanigala even amidst new formations of the Vedda religion, still are capable to retain their own religion of demon worship till now.

Religious conversions are seriously disruptive of the close-knit community life of the tribal people. Even one person converted to alien religion creates a stir and disturbs the peace of the whole community. It is difficult for the non-tribals to realize the harmful impact of such an event on the community life of a tribal village. Writing on Central India, Christoph-Von-Furer-Haimendorf had said:

Christians deliberately disrupted the harmony of community life. They allegedly refused to share the house of adherents of old faith, and this meant that old parents were abandoned by their converted children who claimed that they could not stay in dwellings where devils were worshipped and meat of sacrificed animals was consumed (Mishra 1991: 10).

The missionary work has been going on for over a hundred years in the North East India. This might lead now to serious consequences as far as the security and unity of the country is concerned. In fact, conversions have the deleterious effect of introducing religion in politics and of threatening the social order and national unity. An episode is revealing in this respect. A Nishing leader wanted to contest election to Arunachal Pradesh Assembly in 1977. He was shocked to find that majority of his electorate had taken to Christianity. A month before the elections, when all other measures of persuasion had failed he got himself converted to Christianity for winning the elections. The pastor had asked his Christian folks to vote for a Christian candidate only. Conversion secured this Nishing leader his seat in the assembly (Mishra 1991: 9-11). This incident also reveals us to what extent tribals change through the missionary work.

Not only Nishing tribals but tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Khasis, Garoas, Angami and Tangkhul Nagas and many other tribals all over India also have been converted to Christianity. In fact, Christianity has been one of the most important factors that caused

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Beautifull with a stress on Buddhist world view have given us insights in this regard.

413
the transformation in tribal societies touching all the vital aspects of their socio-economic and cultural life.

Explaining the effect of religious conversions writers were describing how cultural erosion took place among Khasis and Garoas due to the influx of Christianity. The Christian missionaries preached strongly against 'animistic' beliefs which they disbelieved and condemned. This led to a considerable decline in belief in clan totems, especially among Christian Khasis. This decline in turn, affected *sang* (taboo) regarding the eating of the clan totem by certain clans especially among educated members and those from urban areas. For instance, the members of the *Tham* clan, who had been strictly forbidden to eat crabs, no longer observed this taboo. Beliefs that certain objects as, for example, fruits, flowers or animals, also died down among these clan (Nataranjan 1977: 108).

The Roman Catholic mission and the Seventh Day Adventists entered Garo hills during the nineteen thirties and fifties respectively. Cumulative efforts of all these missions are expanding the Christian section of the Garo society. Consequently, Garo villagers are frequently found divided into Christian and non-Christian blocks. All aspects of their culture that are related to the traditional religion, feasts, festivals, music, dancing, and all sacrifices for supplication of spirits or natural forces are abandoned by the Christian Garos. Traditional music is replaced by Christian hymns, folk community dances by Western dances, sacrifice for curing diseases by modern medicines. Long hair kept by non-Christian males, turbans and pugrees used by them, traditional brass earrings, jewelery, bronze or brass hops, all had to bade goodbye to the Garos immediately after conversion (Kar 1982: 75-76).

With new values and beliefs the Western model mission has thus emerged among the Khasis and Garos modifying their age old socio-cultural practices.

Hinduism also has wide and broad influence on Indian tribals. For instance the Hinduization process is going on among the Jamatia of Tripura since the beginning of last century. Maharaja Bir Chardra Manikya of Agartala, took initiative to bring their people under the fold of Hinduism and conferred the *Kashayapa Gotra* to all the Jamatia, so that the latter do not face any difficulty in getting services of Brahman in their rituals and rites of passage in absence of such gotra. A few aged Jamatia have accepted *Vaishanavism* too (Mandal 1984: 12). The Rabha, Goalpara district of Assam, in the past had their own tribal
religion. But after the purificatory ceremony in 1940 they have accepted Hinduism (Raychaudhuri 1984 : 56). Traditionally, the Nagesia of Madhya Pradesh are animists. However, the movements of Raj Mohini Devi and Gahira Guru have drawn a small number of Nagesia partially towards Hinduism. This has led to the emergence of social stratification within a single ethnic endogamous group giving rise to the concept of ritual purity and pollution and bringing about social and religious changes of ramifying implications (Ekka 1984 : 132).

Tribals of Philippines, aborigines of Australia, Maoris of New Zealand, Indians of North and South America and many other tribals in the world have been facing a similar situation. Vasudha Dhagamar (1996 :5-7) who visited Philipines aborigines recently, describes how far they have got changed due to the impact of Christianity. Since she heard that the indigenous children come home only for holidays and they prefer to live in their cities called Sagada, Baguio, and Manila, She wanted to know why. The reason given by a villager is thus :

"The grandchildren did not like village life no T.V., no cars or motor cycles, no discos, no electricity -- in short no city life. They did not speak the tribal language either. (Dhagamar 1996 : 7).

Michelle Rosaldo (1979) who has done a detailed study on Ilongot (head hunters) in Philippine also reported how this community had been converted to fundamentalist Christianity and thereby how their way of life got changed drastically (See Rosaldo 1979 : ix - 186).

As far as Indians of North and South America are concerned, during the Spanish invasions of Indian territories in Mexico and Peru, writer Harold E. Driver (1972 : 456-478) describes how these tribals were converted to Christianity by Spanish rulers and thereby how their traditional religion was destroyed: "The rapidity of the mass conversion of a large majority of Indians to the Roman Catholic faith has probably set a world record for missionary zeal and efficiency. The Christian doctrine of equality of all men in the eyes of God had tremendous appeal to those whose worldly possessions and status had been reduced to the very minimum. In addition, there were many demonstrations of the impotence of the Indian Gods. When men in the Spanish army dashed the Indian idols to pieces, as was the practice everywhere, the idols failed to respond by harming the Spanish in any way. The myth that the pyramid of Cholula contained water which, if released, would
drown anyone in its path was shown to be false when the Indian priests removed the keystones and nothing happened to the advancing Spanish army. In hundreds of such demonstrations, the old Gods proved to be powerless (Driver 1972 : 474).

The above mentioned descriptions provide us with ample evidence to show the forceful conversions which took place among the innocent tribals and it further explains to what extent their culture, way of life, art and beliefs and eventually their entire society were changed by this process.

Explaining the harmful effects of the missionary work among tribals Verrier Elwin (1943 : 25) states that “the term ‘missionary solution’ may be applied to any attempt to deal with aboriginals not by their own problems from inside and on the basis of their own life and culture, but by changing them or assimilating them entirely into a new community. This does not solve the problem but substitute another problem for it. Instead of the poor aboriginals we now have the poor converts. If the aboriginal becomes a Christian, he generally finds himself deprived of the moral and social sanctions under which he was grown up, of the free and natural recreations to which he is accustomed, and in many cases he sinks into moral and economic degradation.

In spite of all the above mentioned negative effects due to Christianity, it would be mentioned that there are some positive affects too in this regard. For example the tribals in the North Eastern tribal belt of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh etc., have got the opportunity to occupy higher places in society due to their missionary education that came through conversion. However, it should be mentioned that resulted in these tribals loosing their identity with their heritage. The existence of the tribal societies was being threatened by the development model that came after independence. Further they were not provided with the facilities that they required to accustom to the new development trend, thus isolating these people. Finally it should be mentioned that the missionary education which came through conversion has given them the required impetus in life in order to face new challenges.

d. Assimilation

The policy of assimilation takes the other extreme stand in relation to tribal culture and social change. A laissez - fair policy befitted an era when there was enough jungle land
for them to live their traditional lives and when proselytism, whether religious or cultural, was uncommon. With the expansion of Government activities, however, particularly for the purposes of economic development, and the emergence of economic and socio-cultural ventures by non-Governmental organizations and individuals in recent times, there has been steady encroachment by agents of 'civilization' into the habitat and lifestyle of the Veddas. Furthermore, political thinking in modern times compels the state to take an active interest in all people coming under its jurisdiction (Dharmadasa 1990: 156).

In the early 1950s the Government of Sri Lanka first formulated a specific policy towards the Veddas. The plight of the Veddas, beset by poverty, malnutrition and disease was brought to public attention by several observers, prominent among whom were Dr. R.L. Spittle and Dr. Verier Elwin, a visiting anthropologist with several years of experience among tribal people in India (Dharmasena 1990: 156).

He wrote a series of articles to the Daily News in which he stated:

"I am astounded that in all the many years of their rule, the British did so little to preserve or develop the Veddas. I am even more astounded that the rulers and the public of free Ceylon - so enlightened, so prosperous, so generous - should be following the bad example of the past (Elwin 1950: 1)." 

Elwin's remarks aroused the concern of the authorities about the plight of the Veddas and steps were taken immediately to ameliorate their condition. Spittle wrote to Elwin after the latter had left the island:

"Believe me, your comments in the press stirred the hearts of our ministers. They felt the sting pretty badly, as more than one of them confessed to me. I have now drawn up, at their request, a Vedda Welfare Scheme with Vedda Welfare Officer and a Vedda Welfare Committee and suggested as an immediate necessity that the Pollebedda folk at least should have food rations and guns. Mirabile dictuhs has already been put into effect. You can well picture the result on some of those sad starved faces you saw (Spittle, quoted in Dharmadasa 1990: 157)."

It is against this background of humanitarianism that then the Government decided on special measures to improve the conditions of the Veddas. A Backward Communities Development Board was established for this purpose in 1951. Thus the first ever formal
effort of Vedda assimilation had been inaugurated by the Government of Ceylon (Dharmadasa 1990: 157).

The Backward Communities Development Board concentrate on the Veddas of the Eastern and Uva Provinces, perhaps because those Veddas were most in need of amelioration. The Veddas of Tamankaduwa had, by this time, become more like Sinhalese and Tamil peasantry in the dry zone (Dharmadasa 1990: 158).

The Board apparently felt that it had no option but to lead the Veddas to a more settled way of life, like that of the Sinhalese or Tamil peasant. Assimilation did not, at the time, have the sinister connotations it has today. Thus, there were critics of the Government's policies on the Veddas who felt that assimilation had not gone far enough, stalled by Government policies. An opposition member of parliament raised a query in Parliament as to whether the Government was trying to keep the Veddas in as "anthropoligical curiosities". Then the Minister of Finance, J.R. Jayawardene (Late Executive President of Sri Lanka during 1977-1989) replied that the Government's aim was to,

lead them away from the hunter stage to the agricultural stage. We want to bring about a stage when the backwardness, the primitiveness of the Vedda...will disappear... and make them full citizens of Lanka (Jayawardene, quoted in Dharmadasa 1990: 159).

The current thinking, implied in this statement, is that the traditional Vedda mode of life had to be deserted and the Government would take all the steps to expedite the process.

From then onwards there were many other welfare schemes launched out among the Veddas in order to uplift their agricultural activities. Loans were released by Bank of Ceylon, Peoples' Bank and various community development organizations during 1965-1975 in order to facilitate this effort. But due to the non repayment of loans by the Veddas, who were actually not in a financially well off position to repay, these funding schemes collapsed.

Again in 1965, Kandeganwilla model village was built by the commission of the rehabilitation of up-country community in order to create and competition in agriculture
between Sinhalese and Veddas. As a pre-requisite Sinhalese were settled among the Veddas by the commission.

A centre of Sarvodaya had started its work in 1977 at Dambana. They implemented welfare development programmes, community participation programmes, food and nutrition programmes for children in the villages and thereby tried to uplift their social status. Though the funds were in circulation and initially the community had given its support to the movement the scheme was abandoned by the Veddas in its development stage. Therefore the Sarvodaya movement also failed at Dambana.

In 1980, a German couple Hans Heeber and Ivon Febric started a welfare programme for the Vedda community. Under this long term programme they planned to develop the economy, education, generate self-employment and improve health facilities of Veddas. They formed an anthropologist organization which was called ‘Future In Our Hands’ with financial aid from one of the Norway based welfare organizations. Montessory, sewing and English classes, training centres for elders as well as for carpenters were introduced. Spending a 80 lakh rupees the founders of this programme had planned to construct a new water reservoir and thereby to develop irrigation facilities and agriculture of the Veddas. Those days Dambana village consisted of 80 vedda families only. These members of the families went to the Heeber couple and demanded one lakh rupee for each family rather than cultivate their lands. This demand led to a heated argument between the villagers and Heeber couple. Eventually Hans Heeber and Ivon Febric left the Vedda village as well as the organization and went off to their country.

After they left K.A.J. Kahadava (Former land commissioner) and G.A. Prabath Kumar (Film Director and Journalist) have formed an organization called ‘Future In Our Hands - Development Foundation’ utilizing the money and funds left by the Heeber couple. It has spread over the entire district of Badulla. Even today it is still functioning, as a participatory community development programme, to uplift the social status of poor villagers at Dambana. But the new organization has failed to render its services to this community like earlier organization did.

The next organization ‘Foundation of Wanniyalaththo’ began in 1993 on the occasion of the declaration of the year of indigenous people. This consisted of Government
officials, non Governmental personalities and Veddas themselves. But this also faded into oblivion without rendering any significant service to this community.

Apart from the above mentioned organizations today there are some associations such as ‘Kamkaru Sevana’ (Shelter for Labourers), ‘Help Age’, ‘Community Aid Approach’ which provide some aid to this folk according to their necessities. Finally old ‘Wanniyalaththo Foundation’ has been reformed again in 1996 with new office bearers to regain the forest lands which were lost to the Veddas.

Over the past five, six decades many Government and non-Governmental organization has concentrated on improving the status of Vedda community and assimilating them into the mass society. However, unfortunately all these organizations have failed in achieving their objectives. They have made these efforts to uplift Veddas and to assimilate them into the mainstream without having clear understanding of the socio-cultural background of these people. It is doubtful that any attempt in this regard will be successful without doing a proper study of the attitudes and concepts of a traditional people. This is also truth regarding the Vedda community. The consequences of a forceful imposition of the concepts of the mass society upon the Vedda society were that all efforts to uplift these folk have failed and resulted in wastaged of funds. On the other hand the Government and non Government organizations who came forward to fulfill this task often had vested interests. The Vedda community was deprived of benifits due to corruption and exploitation by the officials. Different political parties often disrupted the development efforts launched by their rivals on the assumption that such schemes would threaten their leadership. In any development schemes for a traditional people, the transparency of those who launched it as well the social institutions in the village is an important factor. Further development projects were introduced to Vedda community in a period in which they did not anticipate a social change and they were not mentally prepared to accept them. They were not ready to abandon their traditional way of life in order to accustom to modern way of life.

This was why the introduction of the most development projects was unsuccessful as all such efforts ignored the attitudes and concepts of the Vedda society. Most rulers, official, and activists even today are of the opinion that tribal communities should be readily assimilated into the mainstream of the society. This has been the policy of most Governmental and none Governmental organizations around the world towards indigenous people. Many examples can be cited in this regard.
At a conference in Canberra on 26th and 27th January 1961 describing the policy of assimilation of the Australian tribals the Government of Australia proclaimed that their policy was to give them the same manner of living as other Australians (See Hasluck 1965 : 449). We should not forget the inherent danger facing the culture and identity of tribal communities in the policy of different Government towards these people. Not only Australia even in New Zealand, Canada, America and many other countries also had similar policies for assimilating them, by literally erasing their past.

Assimilation of tribals is a common debate even in India. According to some scholars to some extent the seething discontent currently noticeable amongst certain tribes is attributable to the desire of the regional segment of the national majority for culturally assimilating the tribal people at a rapid pace. But Srinivas and Sanwal express themselves against this approach. “Assimilation involves a total loss of cultural identity for the group that is being assimilated and its absorption into the dominant group on the latter’s terms. the minority’s fear of losing its cultural identity to the majority makes it suspicious of the majority’s actions. This leads to increasing alienation of each from the other. Attempts to produce cultural uniformity and integration through induced assimilation can be dangerous” (Srinivas and Sanwal, quoted in Mathur 1995 : 134-135).

In fact, the policy of integration makes sensitive argument among the scholars and activists. Some of them says the policy of integration seeks to reconcile the need for change with the necessity of maintaining some continuity with the past, to secure the products of modern civilization to the tribal people with the least harm to their traditional lifestyle. According to V. Elwin it is essentially a policy of the middle way in this regard. As Elwin put it:

We do not want to preserve the tribal culture in its colour and beauty to interest the scientists or attract the tourists. To try to preserve and develop the best elements in tribal art, religion and culture is something very different from wishing to keep the people in a zoo. We do not want to preserve the tribesmen as museum specimens, but equally we do not want to turn them into clowns in a circus. We do not want to stop the clock of progress, but we do want to see that it keeps the right time. We do not accept the myth of the Noble Savage, but we do not want to create a class of Ignoble Serfs (Elwin, quoted in Mathur 1995 : 135).
What this reveals is that the two contrary processes such as assimilation and the preservation of identity and culture should take a balanced approach and follow meticulous manning rather than making it an overnight affair.

9.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how the puberty ritual is being performed by the Vedda community in spite of the enormous difficulties they face in the midst of the drastic social change. As I have mentioned in an earlier chapter, the only rituals that are still being performed by the Veddas are the rituals pertaining to puberty and religion. At present the Vedda community is vaguely bounded and have weak ties among its members. As such there is little external social reality to reaffirm. Therefore this weak group-weak grid category has the least ritualistic cosmology. As explained earliar in chapter IV, theoretical framework, it is clear that the Veddas belong to weak group-weak grid category, the scheme which Mary Douglas devises to analyze this situation. From Douglas’s point of view social relations are like clay, We mold them this way or that way or that way as we make, or shape, our society, social order, class structure, livelihood, etc. But whatever the shape, however redisturbuted the rights, power, there is still some kind of social order - still some clay and the clay is reaffirmed and reprodused by ritual. That is why in the midst of drastic social change the Veddas have managed to keep rituals of puberty and religion with appropriate modifications.

The dynamic approch of Peter Berger also provide important clues in understanding social change and its consequences. According to Berger people constuct what was not provided for them in their biological constitution. Human being is the world-or cultural maker, including both the material and non- material dimensions of culture. Society, then is a world-making activity. Humans are constantly in the process of creating and recreating their worlds. As such, it presents an image of culture as fluid, an image of society as perpetually in motion - even changing.

Technology, bureaucracy and pluralism are the dominant institutional features of modernity. Modernization in its structure and its essence is a process that has radically changed the face of civilization and continues to do so in those parts of the world presently confronted by it.
As far as Vedda society is concerned, it seems that their society and culture are being eroded by the social change. It is explained how Vedda community maintain their identity in the past and how it has been in crisis with the arrival of modernity. In the distant past, the Vedda society was almost isolated from the mainstream. Therefore, they could maintain their identity somewhat smoothly. Sometime later, an interaction between the Vedda society and the neighbouring peasant society increased considerably. But as the Vedda were able to carry on their way of life without much interruption from external forces, and as the two societies had mutual respect for each other, the identity of Vedda remained intact. Then the situation has changed drastically. Due to the colonial occupation, the social structure of the mainstream, based on agriculture backed by an efficient irrigation network, was destroyed. By the time, the country gained independence, the island was heavily dependent on plantation sectors of tea, rubber and coconut. The post-independence rulers continued to carry on the colonial policies. These rulers, groomed by the colonials to continue their policies in their absence, belonged to an elite group who had thoroughly internalized the value system and attitudes of the Western civilization. They embarked on various development project which had a damaging impact on both the mainstream and the Vedda way of life.

In implementing the so-called development projects, both mainstream and Vedda community were displaced and resettled. People inhabiting those lands which are acquired for irrigation schemes were resettled in new colonies without giving proper consideration to the environmental and social factors. For example, adequate facilities were not provided for the people to get adjusted to their new environment which was somewhat hostile to them. In most of these colonies, the resettled people belonged to various parts of the country, thereby their traditional social relationships were almost destroyed. Therefore, these people became alienated in their new settlements. The peasant community at least managed to adjust to the new environment due to their familiarity with agriculture and related skills and also their stronger social institutions such as schools, temples, Government officers etc. But the Veddas who were not equipped with the above-mentioned skills of the peasants were in dire straits. Therefore, the impact of these changes were devastating in the Vedda social life.

Accordingly Vedda primary social relationships such as courtship and marriage, family, ritual child rearing and socialization are facing crisis due to the on-going social change. The ritual performances in Vedda society rarely takes place in its true spirit and glamour. The ‘Hethma’ ritual performed annually by this community has become a burden
to themselves. Ritual items mostly found in the forest such as flowers of different colours Illuk (*Cymbopogeon Nardus*), various sorts of wood and leaves etc., have become scarce because the Vedda are prohibited from entering the jungle. Therefore, they have to depend on cash for everything. On the other hand, this is an elaborate ritual, performed by experienced Vedda shamans. Most of these experience shamans now live scattered in resettlement areas, sometimes more than 25 km away from each other. Due to various reasons, the relationships among Veddas of different resettlements as well as of a particular settlement have been deteriorated, giving rise to factionalism among them. This situation was witnessed on two occasions of *Hathma* performances in 1994 and 1995 at Dambana by me. Even though the *Hathma* ritual was symbol of their collectiveness, solidarity and harmony, it was missing at the above-mentioned performances. This shows how in the on-going process of social change their primary social relationships are weakened.

This on-going situation in Vedda society can be analysed by the Paul Rabinow’s point of view.

**Tradition is a moving image of the past.** When a culture stops moving, when its structures of beliefs no longer offer a means to integrate, create, and make meaningful new experiences, then a process of alienation begins. Tradition is opposed not to modernity but to alienation. (Rabinow 1978: 1).

Thus Paul Rabinow deviates from most other anthropologists who have so far focused on the conflict between tradition and modernity. He concentrates on the factors that leads to alienation of traditional people in the face to modernity. Instead of looking at modernity and tradition as eternal rivals, Rabinow emphasizes that traditional people should be given sufficient time and space to incorporate modernity creatively and meaningfully into their tradition. I think (that) this should be a two way process, as a result of which both the tradition as well as what is introduced as modernity will undergo changes of varying degrees according to the circumstances. But very often modernity has been introduced into tradition as one way express traffic remove ruthlessly bulldozing over tradition if leaving those people in dire-straits.

I have already discussed how it has become a near impossibility for the Veddas to hunt meat and honey. They lost their forest land due to our gigantic ‘development’ projects. Therefore this relentless onslaught of modernity was in conflict with Vedda tradition. They were not given sufficient time and space to adopt to the new environment created by
modernity. Had these been provided the Veddas would have creatively participated in this process and thereby minimized their culture shock. The creative participation of the people may result in giving birth to new value systems which helps them to develop the capacity to stomach the ongoing changes. Instead of leaving people out of goes in the face of modernity this creative interaction between modernity and tradition will enable them to achieve a dynamic equilibrium. Rabinow discusses the importance of striking a balance between modernity and tradition.

The main reason for the cultural change taking place in the present day Vedda society in the onslaught of unplanned ‘development’ projects. Various distortions that are visible in the Vedda puberty ritual and the rapid disappearance of some important elements of this ritual are clear indicators of the above mentioned cultural change gripping this society. On the other hand as in any other society the present Vedda culture while struggling for survival, still reveal their traditional features like puberty rites, Hethma ritual and their religious believes and practices though in a changing form. Rabinow explains how certain elements in Moroccan culture continue to survive even after the establishment of the French protectorate in 1912. He writes:

The basic symbols conceptions of saintliness, mediation, strength, generosity, bounty - have demonstrated an impressive continuity, whereas the material conditions varied in accordance with the tumultuous changes in Moroccan history. Basic new orderings in these realms seem to have emerged in almost every generation during the twentieth century. Social conditions and the cultural categories which inform them do not change at the same rate, and this is a source of both the continuity and profound malaise and disharmony in Moroccan society (Rabinow 1978: 99).

Irrespective of time and space every society undergoes change, which invariably affects its institutions. But to forcibly change a society in the name of ‘civilizing’ the people by imposing rules and regulations and other means will certainly create chaos in that society and finally destroy it as it has happened in the past and is still happening all over the world. The remedy has become worse than the ailment. This is exactly what has happened to the Vedda society through forcible displacements—and poorly planned resettlements. If a Government has no other option but to implement a certain development project in the wider interest of the nation they should provide a reasonable alternative to the affected people. This should be done in consultation with those very people who are affected—anthropologists, sociologists and enviromentalists etc. It is also of paramount importance to
educate and train the officials who are to deal with the people to be rehabilitated. Verrier Elwin has vividly elucidated this as far back in 1943 thus:

If you want to help to aboriginal do not try to reform him: reform the lawyer, the doctor, the schoolmaster, the official, the merchant, with whom he has to deal. Until that is done it is far better to leave the aboriginals alone (Elwin 1943 : 31).

The people who rule a country should be equipped with a far sighted vision regarding their country. They should strive to keep intact with the genius of their own civilization. The politician and the bureaucrats should give due consideration to the cultural, geographical and environmental factors when planning development schemes and implementing them. The political leaders of the countries which gained independence from the colonial rulers, continued to adopt almost the same policies implemented by their colonial predecessor. Most of these political leaders were not deeply rooted in their own cultures. The nature of this dominating paradigm of politics is that it is based on the centrality of power -- the power by select politicians and bureaucrats for their concrete material gains. That is why far from causing collective empowerment, this power further divides and hierarchise society. The language of this power politics is inherently immoral. It can use any strategy for the acquisition and consolidation of power. As a result criminality, violence, opportunism, dishonesty are its primary characteristics.

In order to get out of this chaotic situation that we are facing today we have to go back to the basics. We need a paradigm shift in political sphere. Regarding India's future after independence Mahathma Gandhi had a far sighted vision. He firmly stated thus:

India is to be found not in its few cities but in its 7,000,000 villages. We have hardly ever paused to inquire if those poor folk get sufficient to eat and clothe themselves with, whether they have roof to shelter themselves from sun and rain (Mahatma Gandhi, quoted in Gupta and et. al 1997 : 8).

It is important to emphasize here that a paradigm shift does not mean that we are going back to the past or getting into a closed system. By a paradigm shift we mean replacing the basic premises of the present dominating paradigm, changing the grammar of present politics, having a different world view, different set of values and attitudes firmly rooted in our own culture but sufficiently flexible to adopt creatively to new situations. This will result in cultivating or restoring the lost faculties like altruism, responsibility to the
larger community and devotion to human dignity. Further in this radical social transformation we will see an alternative world view that emphasizes ecological balance, absence of developmental violence, decentralization, ethics of love and responsibility, absence of separation and distance.