CHAPTER X

Final Remarks

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The adoption of a multi disciplinary approach in the anthropological study on the puberty ritual and socialization of Veddas has resulted in many findings.

I was attracted specially to the approaches of Mary Douglas and Peter Berger which succeed in casting an interesting light upon the present study such that new insights are gleaned. Both Douglas and Berger associate culture with the dynamics of social interaction, dramatized in ritual, in speech, and in social arrangements. They both devote primary attention to the identification of patterns - objective demarcations and regularities - at the symbolic - expressive level itself. Mary Douglas stresses the moral aspect of culture while Peter Berger stress the important dimension of subjectivity into cultural analysis.

The inspiration gained from of the cultural analysis of Mary Douglas has helped immensely in this study and further it has been the most appropriate anthropological theory to study the puberty ritual. According to van Gennep, Mary Douglas, Victor Turner and other anthropologists, when faced with transitional or intermediary events in life which bring fear, excitement and anxiety to people they react by celebrating such occasions with colourful festivals. They have used these occasions to bring out some important messages in life. The Vedda puberty ritual and other traditions associated with it too have served the same purpose. This ritual has clearly manifested the three concepts, namely the separation or per-liminal concept of van Gennep and Turner which is associated with the confinement of attained Vedda girl for nine days, the transition or liminal concept which is associated with the traditions and rituals that are practiced during this confinement period which makes the girl realize her new status in life, and finally the incorporation or post liminal concept which deals with the purification bath that concludes the totality of the traditions and rituals. Besides this, we have been able to view the place that the rituals and rites of passage occupy in society through the references made to the pioneers in anthropology such as Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown, Levi-strauss, Leach and Clifford, Geertz, Foucalt, Wagner,
Crocker, Azad, Kelly and Kaplan who hold the most modern opinions on this aspect. Also the studies hitherto done on the psychological concept called adolescence and the findings by those psychologists concerning this aspect have given a new insight to the study concerned. Once of the most important aspects of the current study was to view the socialization of Vedda girls through the puberty ritual. The study discusses in detail the unfavourable outcomes of numerous mental and identity crises that Vedda youths face as a community in transition. Further, the ill-effects created by the disappearance of such cultural events from society too have been subject to the study.

Throughout the study the rapid transition of Vedda society was ventured to discuss. In fact it is impossible to talk about any aspect of Vedda society by neglecting the ongoing social change. To that extent the social change has had an impact on every aspect of Vedda society. Rituals of a society often reflect the social structure of that society. However, in the face of changes in that social structure it is inevitable that the rituals which are an integral part of such system has to change accordingly. Hence, the existence of this ritual in a rapidly changing society has been treated as the subject matter of this study. The use of the theoretical exploration of Mary Douglas and Peter Berger has enabled us to view the plight of the culture in a transitional society. Berger who does a sociological review about the courses of change of a society and culture has amply explained how the members of a transitional society attempt to construct reality when faced with such a situation. This study of the origin of puberty ritual of Vedda community, its transmission and different new formations it has assumed today has revealed the attempt of such people to construct reality. The same aspect is reflected in the very few social and religious rituals in current Vedda society, Vedda language which still exists amidst numerous changes and their contemporary behaviour.

The recurrent complaint levelled against Veddas by the mainstream society is that the Veddas who lead a similar life like them attempt to mislead the ordinary person on the pretext that they are the indigenous people. This has been the opinion of the scholars such as Seligmann who used the term 'show Veddas' for the Veddas of Dambana. The theory of Douglas and Berger and the consequent data analysis have revealed. The underlying causes for such an attempt by Veddas. The current study shows the inevitability of the artificial nature that the reaction of the members of the society assumes in the event of external forces operating beyond the control of the society itself. The study attempts to
answer the problems such as why evils have replaced the norms and values of Vedda traditions and rituals, why the sophistication has replaced simplicity and the commercial aspect has overshadowed the reciprocacy and finally why the Vedda language is dying out due to constant interaction with other languages.

On the other hand the constant struggle of these people to protect their heritage and identity as an ethnic group in the face of numerous difficulties should be admired. It is part of their struggle for survival. It should also be appreciated that these people have defeated the efforts of conversion by the others and have always stood by their traditions and beliefs associated with their religion. Vedda puberty ritual too expresses this same fact. The custom of *Kili Pela* which has vanished from the Sinhala rural society still exists only in Vedda society. Its significance is more poignant in the fact that even among Veddas this custom still exists only in Vedda model village in Henanigala which has undergone numerous changes. When I visited Henanigala for the first time for field work there were two *Kili pela* of which one had disappeared when I visited the same area for the second time after one year. When I inquired about this disappearance it was revealed that although even one month had elapsed after the deterioration of the old *kili pela*, they were financially not in a position to construct a new one. According to the informant, it was illegal to extract raw material from the jungle, they had to wait till they earned some money in order to buy Illuk and other splinters. To my question whether they would construct it when they received money the answer was that it was an urgent task.

Thus, no more examples are required to prove the constant struggle by these people to protect their identity and heritage. In a society in transition, to what extent the loss of its ways of life affect its members and also the constant struggle of man to protect their culture even in the face of disaster are amply revealed by these examples. This explains why Paul Rabinow has stated that a culture cannot be easily wiped out from a society. Hence the conclusion, that the man has a strong desire to protect his identity and people inevitably engage in constructing social reality. Identity leads to self-dignity which results in the growth of social dignity and this is the truth behind the survival of any culture. On the other hand a homeless mind leads to a void one. It hinders the existence of a society and this is exactly what has happened to Vedda folk.

1 See (Seligmann 1969 ed : 49).
The logic of the commonest and the most convenient answer that the village Veddas who lead a rustic life have borrowed all their traditions and customs from the neighbouring Sinhalese. The current research has highlighted the importance of a serious analysis of this aspect for any future researcher about Vedda folk. The association with Sinhala folk has to be addressed seriously. It accounts for many contributions Vedda life. The history of the Sinhalese puberty ritual has a clear root and it is also associated with the ancient rituals such as the Kotahalu Yagaya. The absence of any evidence about the origin of Vedda puberty ritual or the lack of legends prove the fact that this ritual has come to them through the puberty ritual of the Sinhalese. The importance the Vedda folk have attached to this event is revealed in the fact that this is their rite of passage. On the other hand Sinhalese community practice a number of traditions and rituals to celebrate their rites of passage. But the Vedda folk have not attempted to imitate all of them. If this was an adhoc imitation of Sinhalese traditions the question arises why the Veddas did not imitate all other traditions and rites of passage of Sinhalese community. As explained above, Vedda folk who had to construct their reality in keeping pace with the transformation of their society happened to borrow from the Sinhalese traditions and rituals which were relevant to them. This study highlights how creatively it took place rather than being a complete imitation.

On the other hand the study has answered many a question that arose in the literature written about Vedda community during the past century. Whether the Veddas have had cast hierarchy has been a controversial subject in the works of Seligmann, Leach and Brow. The fact that the Vedda folk have not resorted to washer woman (dhobi) duty or not giving the responsibility of that ritual to a particular class within their tribe negates the notion that a cast hierarchy existed in Veddas as it did in Sinhalese society. Further this study has highlighted the cosmology of Veddas. As the concept of good and evil which exist in Vedda’s universal vision is different from the Sinhalese. They have not requested the services of the soothsayer. The same reason explains why unlike Sinhala or Hindu community, widowhood is not treated as evil. Veddas who lived in harmony with nature accepted life as it was. Hence, they did not attempt to destroy the natural inspiration of life by complicating the concept of good and evil.

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3 See (Chapter V Sub Topic: The Comparison of Puberty Rituals between the Veddas and the Sinhalese)
4 Due to ongoing social change and influences of the Sinhalese community some of the Veddas now request the service of the soothsayer specially during puberty.
Further, the nature of marriage namely endogamy or exogamy has been subjected to the constant attention of scholars. In fact the responsibility given to cross cousins in cousins in celebrating the puberty ritual reveals that the Veddas have preferred endogamy marriages. However, it is doubtful whether this was an established principle or whether this ritual was activated due to the fact that the cross-cousin being the most accessible as partner for the marriage of an adult girl. It is also clear that endogamy marriages have contributed to the perpetuation of their society as well as to the protection of their tribe. On the other hand cross-cousin marriages occupied an important place in a period in which their society was free from interactions with the external world. Thus, it is also evident to what extent they have practiced cross-cousin marriages which are based on this ritual. However, in the transitionary period that followed they failed to protect this tradition due to the fact that it was difficult to find cross cousin brothers for cross cousin sisters and vice-versa. The dwindling Vedda population, their displacement and integration with Sinhala people have resulted in the negligence of their age-old traditions and rituals. However, it is necessary that Vedda youths should find Partners for marriage. Hence, it is inevitable that they happen to marry any person irrespective of their tribe or relation. Accordingly they construct reality by marrying any person irrespective of Vedda tribe, Sinhala, cross or parallel cousin or racial relationships.

The current study has focused on the responsibilities and duties of the Vedda women soon after she became an adult in order to assess her social responsibility. An attempt has been made in relation to the life histories subjected to this study to reveal the plight of Vedda women today while highlighting the lack of attention by explorers on the Vedda woman hitherto. The current researcher has presented only a marginal picture about the Vedda woman, the numerous challenges she faces and her ongoing struggle to survive. There are more uncovered areas concerning this aspect. In fact if any researcher needs to understand the reality in Vedda society he must do an extensive study about the social, economic and cultural life of Vedda woman. We should not forget that the Vedda woman constitutes the reflection of reality in Vedda Society. On the other hand if a genuine scheme is to be launched in order to uplift the Vedda Society, the Vedda woman should be given the priority in such an effort. It is difficult to imagine any development effort concerning Vedda society ignoring the participation of Vedda woman whose courage is outstanding and the challenges tough. Hence, rather than adopting adhoc financial schemes for them, a long term project should be launched for the enhancement of knowledge and understanding of her. A financial scheme should be launched after this and by giving a leading role to Vedda
woman and through the maximum participation of her, Vedda society can be developed. At the same time enhancement of the knowledge of Vedda male and his participation too are stressed. This is the most appropriate way to uplift a backward community in any society.

Any effort to protect the identity and culture of a minority community like Veddas will be productive if it is done with the participation of the mass society. For example when compared with the tribal societies in India it is evident that Vedda society has been subjected to acculturation and fallen into a homeless mind. The reason for this is that while the Indian tribal population constitutes 7.76 per cent of the total population, Vedda population in Sri Lanka constitutes only a meagre 0.02 per cent of the total population. It is inevitable that a majority population becomes stronger while a minority population constitutes a weaker force. Hence, Indian tribals have succeeded in resisting the cultural invasions better. On the other hand due to the vastness of India as a country the integration of tribal societies with urban societies has been geographically confined. Therefore, tribals and rural societies of India are cut off from the urban society. But in a small country like Sri Lanka, a close physical relationship exist between the village and city, thus forcing the peasant to interact with the urban people very often. This interaction has endangered the protection of their cultural identity and heritage. Therefore, if we need to protect the culture of Sri Lankan Veddas we should also consider it as part of our duty rather than making the Veddas solely responsible for it. We should not forget that these people have lost their identity and culture today as a result of undesirable influences on their free and unsophisticated life style over the centuries. Unless we don’t realize this truth at least today we also do not have the right to make such allegations like ‘that the Vedda community does not need to protect their heritage’ or ‘they are not different from us’.

Further, the extreme poverty and illiteracy that have gripped the Vedda community which is a marginalized people within the mass society are highlighted in this study. This carries an important message to the potential researchers. That is, the apparent inadequacy of the confinement of studies only to the heritage of the Vedda society. Further, it highlights the growing need for an extensive sociological research on the extreme poverty of these people which has an overwhelming impact upon the socio-cultural aspect of them. Thus if the attention of the potential researchers is paid to the poverty that has gripped these people, it will inevitably benefit their existence immensely.
On the other hand the integration and identity preservation of a society do not take place simultaneously. The protection of the identity and culture of Veddas and absorbing them into the mainstream of the mass society are two contradictory processes. The macro study conducted in the final chapter of this research has stressed on the different causes for the change of culture in a society as well as the inevitability of a destruction of such culture when the culture of mass society is forcefully imposed upon it. This highlights the disastrous consequences of an adhoc implementation of a development scheme for them. It has to be considered whether the Vedda community was mentally prepared before any integration should take place. Hence, it is evident throughout the history that only the policy makers have attempted to bring about a change in these people living style to integrate them to the mainstream rather than be self-prepared to accept it. The Vedda should be given sufficient time and space to get adjusted to the new influences (e.g. modernity). Only then they will use their creativity in incorporating the new trends to their traditional life style. As a result an identity crisis arose because they were not given sufficient time and space to get adjusted in the resistance that followed. One does not have a right to prevent the integration of a tribal society into the mainstream society should they wish it. Neither do we have a right to destroy their roots and to force them to the rat-race of the present society. Hence, the urgent requirement for a project for the development and welfare of these people balancing the intervention and identity preservation an urgent requirement. On the other hand we should identify the true needs of the tribal people before any development effort takes place. There is an outcry from different quarters of the world that the indigenous peoples should be given political and economic autonomy. This has become a controversial debate between tribal and non-tribal sectors of the population. However, unlike their counterparts like Baluchis, Pakhtuns in the Pakistan, Iranian and Afghanistan boarders and Naga, Bodo-kacharis, Mizo, Santal and other tribes in India, Veddas in Sri Lanka have never asked for a political autonomy. What they truly require is a free environment in which they can protect their culture. In the face of the changes of social winds that blew across Veddas what was mostly threatened were their identity and much loved culture. What is required today is the creation of an environment where they can protect their identity and culture.

Finally it should also be mentioned about the limitations of the study that this author faced. One of the most acute limitations is the dearth of literature about the Vedda community. Hence, it was a tedious task to find information about the origin of Vedda puberty ritual. This was
due to the fact that most researchers have come to the conclusion that the Vedda puberty ritual is no longer operative on the evidence of a surface study. This was propagated initially by the researchers of the early 20th century and their later counterparts too repeated the same without going into the details of this aspect. As there hasn’t been an independent research about this ritual hitherto the researcher had to resort to the information provided by the people today in the study about origin and transmission of the Vedda puberty ritual. Hence, everything written about the Vedda puberty ritual in this study constitutes of my field work. On the other hand there a great deal of controversy in anthropology is about the theoretical understanding about culture. Most of the theories that are used to study a culture are incomplete in dealing with the complexity of a culture. The theoretical framework of this study itself has highlighted the limitations of Douglas and Berger in their conceptual framework.

We have hitherto discussed different paradigms in studying tribal and rural societies and exploring ways of developing them. We are in a constant process of reinforcing the drawbacks of the current paradigms. We have realized the futility of our efforts over the centuries. It is high-time we concentrated on new paradigms and attempt to analyze social reality through them. As Paul Feyerband says we should encourage different paradigms to mature, thereby doing justice to the potential of the human creativity rather than protecting one particular dominant paradigm at the cost of destroying the emerging new paradigms.