



REGIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON

# **DIMINISHING CULTURES IN SOUTH ASIA**

**SAARC  
Cultural Centre**





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**SAARC REGIONAL  
CONFERENCE ON  
DIMINISHING CULTURES  
IN SOUTH ASIA**

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**19-21 JULY 2011  
KANDY, SRI LANKA**

**Organised by  
SAARC Cultural Centre  
Sri Lanka**

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# INTRODUCTION

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## BACKGROUND

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South Asia is a region where diverse ethnic, religious and social groups exist. The Tenth SAARC Summit (Colombo, 29-31 July 1998) recognized the need to acknowledge the profound cultural continuum of South Asia as a historical basis for sustaining harmonious relations among the people of the region. As a result of the recognition given on the importance of protecting and promoting cultures of South Asia, the SAARC Cultural Centre was established.

In order to fulfill its mandate, SAARC Cultural Centre has launched a research project on **Diminishing Cultures in South Asia** as part of its research activities for 2011-12. This project focuses on promoting cultural diversity in South Asia by recognizing and protecting diminishing cultures.

The project on diminishing cultures in South Asia will include a regional conference on diminishing cultures to identify issues and research themes and research projects conducted in the 8 countries of the SAARC region. The outcome of these projects will be shared with all concerned in the form of research publication. It is expected that the recommendations enshrined in these reports could be by the advocates and the policy-makers alike in protecting diminishing cultures in South Asia.

SAARC Regional Conference on Diminishing Cultures will be a brainstorming session to discuss related issues and to identify themes and subthemes on diminishing cultures that merit independent and in-depth research. Experts on the subject from the region are invited for the Conference to present papers on a relevant theme.

Based on the findings of the Conference on Diminishing Cultures in South Asia, SAARC Cultural Centre will call for Proposals and will award research projects amongst the Member States. The research will give an opportunity for the Member States to conduct an in-depth study on their diminishing cultures and identify and project the productive components for the benefit of their people.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE

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- To identify diminishing cultures in the Region;
- To discuss the country situation related to diminishing cultures in SAARC Member States;
- To identify research topics and questions related to diminishing cultures in the Region that need further investigation; and
- To recognize research approaches and methods for further research on diminishing cultures.

## **DATES AND VENUE**

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**The academic sessions of the SAARC Regional Conference on Diminishing Cultures was held at the historic Queen's Hotel, Kandy, Sri Lanka on 19-20 July 2011. The one day field visit to Dambana was on 21 July 2011, to meet, experience the lifestyle and discuss issues faced by the Vedda Community of Sri Lanka.**



**Queens Hotel, Kandy**

## **PARTICIPATION AT THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE**

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**Group photo: Delegates with the Chief Guest and the Officials of the SAARC Cultural Centre**

**The Conference was attended by eight delegates from the SAARC Member States representing, viz., Bangladesh (2), Bhutan (1), India (2), Maldives (1) and Sri Lanka (2). Five Resource Persons and 24 Participants from Sri Lanka also attended the Regional Conference.**

**A complete list of Delegates, Resource Persons and the Participants may be seen at Ann. 1.**

## PROGRAMME

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### DAY 1 - 19 July 2011

The Conference was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Tikiri Kobbekaduwa, Governor of the Central Province. In his address Hon. Kobbekaduwa emphasized on the singular responsibility that we jointly have in representing, devising and crafting the future of our South Asian regional culture in general and more importantly the specific cultures of our respective countries and communities that are facing immense stress in today's fast changing world.

Academic Session 1 was an Introduction session. This session was chaired by Mr G.L.W. Samarasinghe, Director of SAARC Cultural Centre. The session started with an Introduction of the Conference Theme and Research Project by Dr Sanjay Garg, Deputy Director, Research of SAARC Cultural Centre. The session proceeded with the Key Note Speech by Prof. K.T. Nimal P. de Silva on **Diminishing Cultures in South Asia: An Overview** and a presentation by Prof. Desmond Mallikarachchi on **Why (indigenous) Cultures diminish or face the danger of extinction?**

Academic Session 2 was chaired by Prof. K.N.O. Dharmadasa. During this session Mr Gengop Karchung, Delegate from Bhutan presented a paper on **Diminishing of Bhutanese Cultures, with Special Reference to the Costume of Merak Community** and Dr

B.N. Sarkar, Delegate from India, presented a paper on **Diminishing Culture of the Tribes of Andaman Islands: Bio-Cultural Perspectives.**

Academic Session 3 was chaired by Mr Shamsuzzaman Khan, Director General, Bangle Academy, Dhaka (Bangladesh). The session began with a video and presentation by Prof. Surjeet Singh from India on **Performing Arts and Traditions of the Nomadic (Gypsy) Tribe of Bazigars.** It was followed by Prof. Kalinga Tudor Silva's presentation on the **Social Marginality and Cultural Challenges of Rodiya Communities in Sri Lanka.**

## **DAY 2 - 20 July 2011**

Continuing with the Academic Sessions from 19 July, 3 more Academic Sessions and the Plenary Session were held on Day 2 of the Conference. The Fourth Session was chaired by Prof. Surjeet Singh, Project Director, The Oral Traditions and Cultural Heritage of Punjab. The first presentation for the day was by Prof. K.N.O. Dharmadasa, Chief Editor, Sinhala Encyclopaedia Office, Sri Lanka on **Creolization as Mechanism for Language Survival: The Case of the Vedda Language of Sri Lanka.** The next presentation on **Living Heritage in Sri Lanka: The New Tourism Product for the Vedda Society** was by Prof. Prishantha Gunawardhana, Professor of Archaeology, Department of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya.

Mr. Moosa Naseem, First Secretary of the High Commission of Maldives chaired the Fifth Academic Session. In this session Prof. Premakumara Silva presented his paper on **Diminishing or Struggle for Survival: Case of Vedda Culture in Sri Lanka**. The presentation was followed by a video on Vedda Community.

The Sixth Academic Session was chaired by Prof. Desmond Mallikarachchi. Mr Amaralal Sumith Nakandala, Director General, Economic Affairs Division, Ministry of External Affairs, presented a paper on **Intellectual Property Rights of the Diminishing Cultures: Need for Global and Regional Framework for protection and preservation**.

There was special screening of a Video film entitled *Vanaspati Uruma Laddho* (People who inherit the Nature) – a film produced by the Colombo Institute for Advanced Study of Society and Culture. The film was in Sinhala with English sub-titles. It highlighted the lifestyle of the Vedda community of Sri Lanka.

The Plenary Session focused on identifying and finalizing key issues and research themes on cultures that will merit independent and in-depth research and was chaired by Dr. SinhaRaja Tammita-Delgoda. After extensive discussion, the Plenary Committee of the Conference made its recommendations for the research themes/ topics.

The Valedictory Session concluded the Conference. The participants voiced their observations on its theme and were unanimous in commending the initiative taken by the SAARC Cultural Centre. Thereafter, the Director distributed Certificates of Participation to all Delegates from the Member States, Resource persons and other participants. Dr Sanjay Garg, Deputy Director (Research), SAARC Cultural Centre conveyed the Concluding remarks and the Vote of Thanks.

### **DAY 3 - 21 July 2011**

Delegates of Member States and participants participated in a field trip to Dambana, a village of the Vedda Community on 21 July 2011. During the visit, a visit to the Museum and an interaction with the Vedda Community was facilitated by Prof. Yasanjali Jayathilake. A Cultural performance by the Vedda Community and a traditional lunch was also organized.

The delegates and participants lauded the efforts and initiative taken by the SAARC Cultural Centre in addressing this critical issue of diminishing cultures in South Asia and assured their full cooperation in playing an active role in their protection and preservation.

## INAUGURAL SESSION

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The SAARC Regional Conference on Diminishing Cultures in South Asia was inaugurated by the Chief Guest, Hon'ble Tikiri Kobbekaduwa, Governor, Central Province of Sri Lanka, with the traditional lighting of the oil lamp accompanied by Delegates of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka who participated at the Conference. Mr R.K. Mishra, the Assistant High Commissioner of India in Kandy, attended the Inaugural Session of the Conference as a Special Invitee.

Mr G.L.W. Samarasinghe, Director, SAARC Cultural Affairs, welcomed the Chief Guest, the Assistant High Commissioner of India in Kandy, distinguished delegates of SAARC Member States, Resource Persons and the Participants and outlined the

objective of the Conference. He described it as preparatory to the research programme on Diminishing Cultures in the SAARC region which the SAARC Cultural Centre has taken up as part of its research activities for 2011-12.

In his address, the Chief Guest, Hon'ble Tikiri Kobbekaduwa congratulated the SAARC Cultural Centre for selecting Kandy - a heritage city identified by UNESCO, as the venue of the Conference and described it and the Central Province quite relevant for the Conference of this nature. He expressed hope that the deliberations at this Conference will serve as a wake-up call to all the stakeholders in the region to rejig their efforts for promoting and protecting the rich and diverse cultural identities of South Asian countries.

At the end of the inaugural session, Ms Soundarie David Rodrigo, Deputy Director (Programmes), thanked the Chief Guest, the Assistant High Commissioner of India in Kandy, and the delegates and participants for their valued participation at the Inaugural ceremony. She stated that the Centre believes in promoting culture that is unique to the region and yet so diverse. She emphasised that the Centre not only seeks to promote culture, but preserving it as well, and this is one of the reasons why the Centre embarked on this Research topic of Diminishing Cultures.

## **WELCOME ADDRESS**

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**MR. G. L.W. SAMARASINGHE,  
DIRECTOR, SAARC CULTURAL CENTRE, COLOMBO.**



**It is a great pleasure and a privilege for me to welcome you this morning for this very important occasion of the Regional Conference on Diminishing Cultures in the SAARC region. Today, we are very happy to see a very good gathering of scholars here to have a very effective and fruitful dialogue on this subject. All delegates from the Member States and the participants from Sri Lanka present here today were invited on their research background, because this Conference is the first part that is the preparatory part of the research programme on Diminishing Cultures in the SAARC region which will be continued after this Conference. So the outcome of this Conference is the basement for selection of specifications which should be emphasized when we conduct the research on diminishing cultures in each country in South Asia.**

Considering the fact that the South Asia is a region where diverse ethnic, religious and social groups exist, everybody needs to acknowledge the profound cultural continuum of South Asia as a historical basis for sustaining harmonious relations among the peoples of the region. As a result of the recognition given on the importance of protecting and promoting positive factors of cultures of the region which are diminishing, special programmes have to be introduced. Under these circumstances SAARC Cultural Centre has taken steps to introduce this research project on diminishing cultures of Member States in the SAARC region.

When we were designing this research project last year, we were in the thought of focusing this project on promoting peace and harmony, increasing level of happiness and containment among the people of South Asia and promoting economic development through recognizing diminishing cultures and protecting cultural diversity. These aspects have to be considered when you do your deliberations during the Conference. If we can identify and map out all forms of diminishing cultures in the SAARC region through this research, that might be a great achievement for the region. That will help SAARC Member States to understand and document the socio-economic, cultural and political situations of communities belonging to diminishing cultures in the region and analyse the government policies and practices. Then those Member States could identify measures taken to protect diminishing cultures

for the benefit of their own people. Major outcome of the project would be source material that could be used by all Member States to advocate in protecting diminishing cultures in South Asia.

I believe you would be able to achieve that objective to fulfil the expectations of the Member States as you all are competent intellectuals in this field. It has become a matter of urgency for us living in South Asia today to advance our knowledge of other cultures to identify positive factors diminishing but very useful for the human development in the world. In that way those factors could be used as a tool for development strategies of Member States. This will be the final outcome we are going to achieve by conducting this regional Conference and the research. We are very happy that the SAARC Cultural Centre has been able to initiate and give the leadership to conduct this research project by commencing it with this regional conference.

For this very important occasion, Hon. Tikiri Kobbekaduwa, Governor as well as the first citizen of the Central Province is with us. We are very happy to welcome you to the SAARC Cultural Centre today.

While welcoming all of you once again, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all distinguished delegates of the Member States for kindly taking off time from their busy schedule and travelling across the region to attend this Conference and also to other distinguished participants and invitees for

attending this inauguration and the Conference. I believe your contribution might give us sound encouragement to make this Conference a success to lead the Research Project.

## **ADDRESS BY THE CHIEF GUEST**

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**HON. TIKIRI KOBBEKADUWA,  
GOVERNOR, CENTRAL PROVINCE, SRI LANKA**



**First of all, let me thank the SAARC Cultural Centre for Inviting me as the Chief Guest at this Conference, which I am told is the first such conference in our region. You have selected a city and Province quite relevant for the Conference of this nature. Central Province and Kandy is a heritage city identified by UNESCO. I am proud you are having this Conference in this city.**

**I believe that all of you are fully aware about the pioneering responsibility that we jointly have in representing, devising and crafting the future of our South Asian regional culture in general, more importantly the specific cultures of our respective**

countries and communities that are facing immense stress in today's fast changing world.

It is generally accepted that cultures are prone to change and cultures that have adaptive or assimilative traits are more likely to withstand vagaries of change. In the present globalized and highly market-oriented world dominated by neo-liberal ideologies, every living or non-living entity, genetic material and even the water we drink is increasingly getting commercialised. In such circumstances, cultures, especially those of the smaller social groups, or those that are less attractive and have little or no 'market value', run the risk of being subsumed by more dominant, multinational and transnational corporations to serve their profit-enhancement goals. While there are these manifest tentacles of 'corporatocracy' that strike every aspect of human life and well-being, there are other invisible ones that are far more aggressive and affect individuals as well as vast population and its several generations.

We have numerous instances of original cultures that embraced modernisation ultimately became puppets of a system which, like a black hole, swallows anything that comes its way. In our own region, the Veddas, Bhils, Kolis, Kirats, and Monpas, are increasingly facing the ill-effects of globalisation which threatens their cultures on a daily basis.

The need to convene such a Conference points towards a harsh reality that we have somewhere failed in playing our role to ensure the continued existence and flourishing of these marginalised communities and their cultures. We need to ask ourselves: whether we have done enough for preventing these cultures from diminishing or vanishing? Were we genuinely addressing the grievances of the marginalised communities or were we merely undertaking projects and publications to enrich our academic profiles? We must strive to become the voices of scores of our voiceless cultures. Watching the cultures dye and doing nothing is perhaps the worst form of social apathy.

None of us would realise the actual need for pristine cultures and the traditional knowledge to survive for longer until we realize its real potential. Imagine if a loved one is diagnosed with an incurable disease by the Western medical system that seems to have become the most common these days. Wouldn't we consider traditional healing? Consider a situation when these forms of traditional therapies perished along with cultural extinction? Our future generations would probably never be able to benefit from such traditional healing therapies in the same way as today we are deprived of some of the potent traditional healing that our grandparents had access to. On the other hand, Mantra and traditional dances were considered native and primitive a generation, ago but with the modern name tag of "acoustic therapy" and

with persuasive marketing it is becoming 'fashionable'. Therefore, it depends on our own approach how we look at the rich repertoire of our traditional practices and cultural assets.

I think that there is a need to think about diminishing cultures more broadly so that it accommodates not only the marginalised communities but also populations at large. Although we currently consider only a few communities in each country under diminishing cultures, there could be many more communities and cultures that are on the brink of extinction and could be preserved with systemic intervention. Therefore, there should be a regional policy, supported both by state as well as the private sectors, to encourage an inclusive approach for protecting the diminishing cultures.

We owe our culture to our future generations and, therefore, each one of us has a responsible role in protecting the cultures that are diminishing in our region. Seeing all of you here, I am confident that with this collective approach we could help in evolving regional and national policies, services and other mechanisms that are not only more friendlier towards the diminishing and marginalised cultures, but which also allow those cultures to develop as per their own natural evolutionary process.

I am sure that the deliberations at this Conference will serve as a wake-up call to all the

stakeholders in the region to rejig their efforts for promoting and protecting the rich and diverse cultural identities of South Asian countries, which have so much in common. I am told that the SAARC Cultural Centre proposes to follow-up the recommendations of this Conference by sponsoring a series of research projects on different aspects of diminishing cultures of this region. I congratulate the Centre for its pioneering effort and wish all its members a sterling success in their noble mission.

## **VOTE OF THANKS**

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**MS SOUNDARIE DAVID RODRIGO  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR – PROGRAMMES**



**On behalf of the SAARC Cultural Centre it gives me great pleasure to propose this Vote of thanks on the occasion of the inauguration of the Conference on Diminishing Cultures.**

**The SAARC Cultural Centres believes in promoting culture that is unique to the region, yet so diverse. And it is not only about promoting culture, but preserving culture as well, which is also one of the reasons the Centre embarked on this Research topic of Diminishing Cultures. In keeping with the SAARC Agenda for Culture, emphasis is placed on acknowledging diversity in culture and reflecting the expressions of**

richness of culture found in the region of the SAARC. With this in mind, the Centre organizes events, and research projects every year, covering culture and the arts, bringing together scholars, academics, artists, performers, film makers from the SAARC Region. Last year, the Research seminar focused on Rituals, Ethics and Societal Stability, and the Centre published an Annual Journal on SAARC Culture, which has now been widely distributed and also available on line.

To support us in this initiative, by his presence, we thank our Chief Guest today, the Hon'ble Tikiri Kobbekaduwa, Governor of the Central Province. To have this conference in Kandy, was a deliberate decision, and your presence here, is a sign of encouragement and welcome to all our visiting delegates.

I also thank all other distinguished guests, thank you for taking time to be with us as we inaugurate this seminar.

I would like to thank all State Nominees participating at this Regional Conference, we welcome all learned scholars from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives and of course Sri Lanka. We are honoured to have you in our midst, and look forward to hearing you at the conference session. We are convinced that the conference would facilitate some interactive sessions, and sharing of knowledge thanks to your contribution.

The SAARC Cultural Centre would like to thank all its resource persons, who have taken time off to participate at this Regional Conference. Your valuable input into this Conference is much appreciated. We look forward to working with you at our future programmes as well.

We thank the SAARC Secretariat, for all their support in securing nominations from Member States, and we also would like to recognize the role of the Ministry of External Affairs, Sri Lanka for their help. I also would like to place on record the help given by the missions abroad and locally in securing nominations.

A very special thank you to the officials from the Ministry of Culture, for coordinating our field trip on the 21st July.

The Research Division of the Centre, led by Dr Sanjay Garg would also like to thank our Director, Mr Samarasinghe without whose leadership, this conference would not have been possible. We also thank the staff of the Centre, those with us today, and those at the office in Colombo for their efforts. In conclusion, I would like to thank all those who are present here, thank you for being with us, and please do continue to support us in our future programmes.

## **ACADEMIC SESSION – 1: INTRODUCTION**

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**CHAired BY MR G.L.W. SAMARASINGHE**





## **INTRODUCTION OF THE CONFERENCE THEME AND RESEARCH PROJECT**

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**DR SANJAY GARG  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, RESEARCH**



### **WHAT IS CULTURE?**

**Culture is defined as to include customs, arts, social Institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group.**

**In fact, all manifestations of human Intellectual achievement are collectively regarded as culture. It is a system of building Identities. Identities that developed by beliefs, faiths, practices, customs, traditions, arts, crafts, language, food habits, dress etc. of a society or social group.**

**For e.g. Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Jews or Buddhists etc. have different religious and social**

customs, which are also influenced by the geo-spatial and environmental factors. Thus Christian Churches and their religious ceremonies and social customs are different from say Islamic mosques and religious ceremonies and social customs. Similarly, when we come across an artefact we can identify which society, which region or which period it represents.

In essence Culture mirrors the community and cultural growth is the growth of the community it represents.

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### WHY CULTURES DIMINISH OR VANISH?

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There are a number of factors that initiate or accelerate the erosion of cultures and this is exactly what this Conference and the subsequent Research Programme sponsored by the SAARC Cultural Centre seeks to find out. Most often, when cultures of two different societies clash, it leads to a conflict in which the stronger one usually overpowers the other. The dominant (often foreign) power establishes its hegemony, local or indigenous cultures are made to appear inferior, ridiculous or otherwise not worth preserving. These are often forced to adopt the ways of the dominant society. An apparent example is the western culture which has, in the last two or three centuries, spread in most part of the world. Though, it may be argued that this process, in a way, broadens the cultures both of the victor as well as the vanquished or the dominating as well as the dominated.

Other factors include the race to globalization. Young generations, lured by the modern ethos that cities offer, are moving away from their villages. Compulsory schooling favours the national language. The growth of global media, the introduction of money, the distribution of certain material goods, religious conversion and immigration hasten the dissolution of oral cultures.

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### IMPACT OF DIMINISHING OR VANISHING CULTURES

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Change is a natural and undeniable phenomenon. Many cultural practices and traditions of the past are now confined to the pages of history and it's good that are. Whether it is cannibalism or widow burning, human sacrifice or polygamy, all these have no place in the modern world that we live in. Yet there are a number of cultural manifestations that take away with them a bit of our basic identity. These erosions are not always tangible or quantifiable.

For example, experts believe that with the rush to globalization, half of the world's **6,900** languages will disappear within the next fifty years, and with them will vanish the ideas, history, culture, stories, and songs that these languages embody. This loss is felt not only by the community that has practiced ancestral traditions throughout the millennia, but also by mankind, for cultural diversity provides a source of exchange, innovation and creativity that is vital to the survival of humankind.

South Asia is an area with the greatest linguistic diversity in the Old World, with the possible exception of Papua New Guinea. It is more imperative here, than anywhere else, that sustained efforts are put in place to save the languages that are on the verge of extinction. For example, out of the three surviving Andamanese languages, namely Önge, Sentinelese, and Jarawa, the 1981 census enumerated 31 speakers of Jarawa, 97 speakers of Önge, and a comparably small Sentinelese language community.

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### WHAT CAN BE DONE?

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- To Prevent Cultures from diminishing or vanishing
- To Arrest the process of erosion of Cultures
- To Salvage Cultures from extinction
- To Restore Cultures (to the extent possible) to their original order
- To Preserve Cultures for Posterity: Documentation and Research.

The early anthropological practice of documenting endangered cultures was called 'salvage ethnography' and is now also known as 'urgent anthropology'. It documents and studies:

#### **Cultural Artifacts**

(Utensils, weapons, clothing, ceremonial objects (Masks), musical instruments etc.)

<b>Human remains</b>	(skulls, bones)
<b>Languages</b>	(Vocabularies, myths, oral traditions)
<b>Customs and Practices</b>	(religious, social, medicine)

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### WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS?

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The academic study of culture is generally appropriated by the sociologists and anthropologists. For e.g. since 1930s anthropologists have made several studies on “asymmetrical (sharply uneven) cultural contacts” (Haviland et al: 45) studying a number of traditional cultures that are quickly diminishing.

Then there are State and non-state players. In India, for example, there is a Ministry of Tribal Affairs, which is mandated to protect the interests as well as the culture and identity of the scores of tribal societies that inhabit in India. Almost all the nation-states have a number of state-owned or supported cultural institutions, be it Crafts Councils, Literary societies, Music and Dance Academies or similar other institutes.

At the international level, a **Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity** was made by the UNESCO in 2001, which was, in 2008, converted into a broader program called **Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage** which this program identifies as an essential

component and a repository of cultural diversity and creative expression. For South Asia, the SAARC Cultural Centre is committed to play a leading role in promotion and preservation of culture of this region.

And finally there are ordinary people like you and me, who are most of the time oblivious of the fact as to what part of their culture is being eroded on a daily basis.

**The first step towards any solution is awareness, which is to be followed by knowledge and determination. I believe that this Conference will contribute towards all three.**

Reference:

Haviland, William A., Prins, Harald E.L., McBride, Bunny, and Walrath, Dana, (2010), *Cultural Anthropology: The Human Challenge*, 13<sup>th</sup> edn., Wadsworth Pub Co., Belmont.

## **DIMINISHING CULTURES IN SOUTH ASIA -AN OVERVIEW-**

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**PROF. K.T. NIMAL P. DE SILVA**  
**DIRECTOR GENERAL, CENTRAL CULTURAL FUND AND DEPUTY**  
**PRESIDENT, NATIONAL TRUST, SRI LANKA**



Culture is commonly known in the region as 'Sanskriti' and it is a product evolved with time in association with the climate, environment, beliefs, social practices, language etc. resulting in social values, behaviour patterns, art, and crafts etc. Continuing practices in social groups are called traditions. Tradition is the accumulated wisdom of the past, and it forms the heritage. This heritage has two major components, the intangible heritage and tangible heritage. With the passage of time all cultures have continuously changed. But historically the path of change was very slow and today the state of change is very high and moves beyond control. Do not think this is applicable only to small

ethnic groups but much more applicable to urban community.

Most of the influences that brought these changes are indirect, mainly through socio-political and economic changes, introduction of advance technology, direct interaction with influencing cultures, loss of land for traditional agriculture and due to urbanization. Changing culture and diminishing culture are two things, but the present change disregard and eliminate long standing traditions. Why people talk about preserving these culture, for what, for whose benefit. Already changed urban society is of the opinion that the cultures of small ethnic groups are interesting and important. It has become a fascinating subject for academic researchers to publish paper in refereed journals.

South Asia can be considered as the largest pool of various cultures enriched with Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam and partly Christianity. These cultures were enriched with Human values, practices arts and crafts that have served mankind for thousands of years. Now many parasites are living on these cultural bodies that will destroy the host with time. It will not take long but with a short period of time. To preserve these cultures one must understand their current social standing, the economic situation, problems that they are faced with, values and skills they have preserved with. It is said that curiosity begins only where the necessity ends. Majority of these ethnic groups are

struggling to survive in this fast moving money based social environment.

It was observed that people recognize and realize their cultural values only when outsiders started appreciating these cultures. As change is inevitable if is necessary to document various cultural activities with proper scientific understanding. They themselves are not capable of doing it. There should be outside patronage provided for research and documentation. The objective should not be focused there to being tourism but for the owners to understand the values of their culture, appreciate and to make all efforts it for posterity. For this they need outside patronage as support.

All tangible heritage found was a product made to support different activities of the intangible with the loss and elimination of intangible heritage, with the associate tangible components become only museum objects. Therefore, in the process of preserving the vanishing cultural heritage we should focus on preserving both intangible and tangible component of the valued heritage.

## **WHY (INDIGENOUS) CULTURES DIMINISH OR FACE THE DANGER OF EXTINCTION?**

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**PROF. DESMOND MALLIKARACHCHI  
FORMER HEAD, DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND  
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Indigenous cultures are on the verge of disappearance, not only in South Asia but also in other parts of the globe. This undoubtedly is a grave problem, and therefore, calls for an immediate solution and for which we need to understand clearly the exact causes and sources underlying the diminishing process. It is our responsibility, both cultural and ethical, to safeguard these dying communities at any cost and to do it without any further delay. In order to meet this objective it is imperative to work out, if possible, for a permanent solution to put an end to the disintegration and protect global cultural diversity.

Writing ethnographic accounts of indigenous communities is one thing and fighting for their rights is another. What most scholars prefer to do is to write ethnographies and historical accounts of their chosen communities. We must look for the devil where he is present and not where he is absent. Ethnography cannot redeem the indigenous communities from their oppression.

There are so many oppressive mechanisms in operation but due to time constraints I will discuss only two; the political manipulation and the globalization process.

Politics has played a crucial role in marginalising indigenous communities. The role of politics in marginalising the Vedda community in Sri Lanka and the aborigines in Australia can be cited as examples.

Similarly, the impact of globalization on indigenous cultures is most detrimental. If we are to rescue the indigenous communities from disintegration and if we are seriously thinking of a viable *modus-operandi* to protect their cultural diversity, then we have no alternative but to study in depth the globalisation process and its impact on indigenous cultures.

The concept globalisation is very complex and, in a way, it is indefinable as its underlying logic is in flux all

the time. There are four major manifestations of globalization, viz., economic, political, cultural and ideological. One of the major effects of globalisation is the creation of a new and identifiable class of persons who belong to an emergent global culture, which threatens the national and/ indigenous cultures, resulting in their eventual obsolescence or even extinction.

The important and the immediate task at hand, therefore, is to find a way out of the problem and try to protect and save these communities along with their cultures as they possessed and are still possessing good human values and qualities compared to culturally spoilt and commercially motivated the so called modern, or in fact, the post-modern individuals.

### **Discussion**

1. In the colonial mode, there is only one culture, one language and one religion. As a result, European Scholars were trying to discover India again and again, e.g., James Mill considered Indians as superstitious people because they worship monkeys!
2. Many communities belonging to indigenous cultures develop a complex that their language and culture are backward. Such complexes negatively impact the protection of culture. Instead of such complexes, it is necessary to build confidence.

3. How do you use language and culture in making of nations?
4. Globalization is a contradiction of diversity. It is very clearly said that if we go for globalization and patronize it our sub-cultures will become extinct.
5. Internationalization is very important. We are international from time immemorial. Our cultures are mixtures of cultures from many countries. It is very important to obtain international cooperation in safeguarding of our cultures.

### **Session Chairperson's Comments**

I would like to extend my thanks to the Guest Lecturers. We had arranged these two guest lectures to give an overall view of the diminishing process of the culture. The purpose of this Conference is to give an opportunity to lay the groundwork of the research process. We need to develop meaningful dialogue between the countries on open market economy and modern market development. Now-a-days people can access information very fast. As a result, while global culture is developing, the local culture is not. In this session we have been able to briefly review the current situation experienced in the region.

With the research we conduct policy makers will be able to map cultural diversity. This will give an opportunity to the Governments to decide with regard to the open market economy of the country.

I would like to thank the paper presenters. I would also like to thank all of you for your active participating in this session.

## **ACADEMIC SESSION - 2: BHUTAN/ INDIA**

**CHAired BY PROF. K.N.O. DHARMADAŚA**





## **DIMINISHING OF BHUTANESE CULTURES, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE COSTUME OF MERAK COMMUNITY**

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**MR. GENGOP KARCHUNG  
RESEARCH AND MEDIA DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF  
CULTURE, MINISTRY OF HOME AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS,  
BHUTAN**



Preservation and promotion of culture is one of the pillars of Bhutan's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness. Besides, the Constitution of Kingdom of Bhutan enshrines a separate article on culture preservation. Hence, the culture has an outstanding recognition in the kingdom of Bhutan, which has been through generations intact. However, with the contemporary developments, such as economic development, information and communication technology, modernisation, regionalisation and also the so called globalisation,

poses a great threat. The question arises that whether the tradition and culture of Bhutan or local communities can thrive in the years to come. Thus, this study, carried out based on secondary sources, interviews, and other oral history, brings out Bhutanese diminishing cultures in general and “Costume of Merag Community” in particular, with a dawn of an each new day. As such, to address diminishing local heritages, the local indigenous groups should be given special attention through incentives to protect, preserve and promote their culture and should also be made aware of the importance of their indigenous heritage through education. So that, with the changing time, the degradation and dilution of some forms and values of such cultures are inevitable, its pace can be slowed down. Whereby, it provides time for research and documentation for the future generation, in case of its disappearance. Consequently, despite being deprived of living-culture, the identity, essence of the culture is and will be retained.

## **DIMINISHING CULTURE OF THE TRIBES OF ANDAMAN ISLANDS: BIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES**

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**DR. B.N. SARKAR**

**ANTHROPOLOGIST (PHYSICAL), ANTHROPOLOGICAL SURVEY  
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**A population may be subjected to a condition of being in danger because of unknown, unexpected operation of human and other biotic and/ or abiotic factors, or by conscious human activities. The most extreme state of endangerment is a threat to 'survival' of biological, demographic or cultural dimensions, which may be real or perceived. The influence of culture on breeding behaviour, through different mating systems, population sizes or densities, different opportunities for gene exchange and so forth determine the process of**

microevolution. The Andaman Islanders (except the Great Andamanese) are still considered to be the remnant of true 'Negrito' population in South-East Asia. They have dwindled to a size where the chance of extinction is very real. The study on such population would provide a unique opportunity to understand the evolutionary history of mankind. The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the ramification of such endangerment as experienced by the tribes of Andaman Islands in recent past.

### **Discussion**

1. How does the name 'Andaman Island' came?

Port-men mentioned the Island as 'Handumans.' With time it developed as Andaman.

2. We, as academics should prepare socio-cultural profiles of communities with lot of information. Most of us do not go to the field and collect good ethnographic data. How the indigenous cultures survive? What are their survival strategies?
3. In India, unless there are 10,000 speakers it is not recognized as a language.
4. The tribal communities survived the tsunami. They understood the sign systems which evolved

through thousands of years. This is the paradigm we have to understand.

5. Schedule Castes Act in India is aimed at the protecting the interests of the marginalised communities in India. Do such legislations have any lasting influence on these people?
6. The two presentations – one on the Merak community of Bhutan and the other on tribes of Andamans - provide an overall view that adds to the tremendous depths of insight and enables us to grasp the language, environment, and practice.
7. The delegate from Bhutan gave a fascinating presentation. Bhutan is a unique case. It has a king as a living tradition and there has not been any uncontrolled tourism. There is awareness of the culture from within, not without that would serve as the most effective safeguard for its survival. In Bhutan, the elite king and the people lead the protection of the indigenous culture from within. In Sri Lanka we should develop these ideologies.
8. In India we have taken action to create awareness/ sensitization about the indigenous people. They have unique language. In North-

East India, one community tried to revive their traditional culture by developing a 'Community Knowledge Centre'. It is a unique feature to preserve the culture of that community.

## **ACADEMIC SESSION- 3: INDIA/ SRI LANKA**

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**CHAired BY MR SHAMSUZZAMAN KHAN**





## **PERFORMING ARTS AND TRADITIONS OF THE NOMADIC (GYPSY) TRIBE OF BAZIGARS**

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**PROF. SURJEET SINGH  
PROJECT DIRECTOR, 'ORAL TRADITIONS AND CULTURAL  
HERITAGE OF PUNJAB', NORTH ZONE CULTURAL CENTRE,  
PATIALA (PUNJAB).**



This paper and the documentary film is part of a project 'Socio-Cultural Profile of the Vanishing Communities of Punjab' which the author is planning under the auspices of North Zone Cultural Centre (Ministry of Culture, Government of India, Patiala). It is a well-known fact that the fertile land of Punjab has been the abode of many nomadic tribes and gypsies but there is hardly any information available about these fascinating communities. The documentary film on the performing

arts of the gypsy tribe of Bazigars has been prepared as a part of UNESCO's on-going project Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of humanity. *Bazi* is a Persian word for a particular type of acrobatics performed by the Bazigars, one of the major nomadic tribes settled down recently on the outskirts of the villages and the towns of Punjab. The Bazigar men are known for their acrobatics and the women for dance and singing. The dances of Bazigar women are entirely different from the dances of Punjabi women in terms of body movements, rhythmic and in terms of form and content and praxis of the total composition. It is a well-known fact that the gypsies have produced best singers and dancers. Therefore, it is not surprising that all the Bhangra drummers come from the Bazigar community.

The major components of the performance are:

- a. Acrobatics
- b. *Nakal* (a satirical form of folk theatre)
- c. Music of the *dhol* (drum)

The venue of the performance is an open space on the outskirts of the village. The performance begins with invocation to god Hanuman for they believe that they learnt the art of acrobatics from Hanuman. In traditional communities, arts and crafts are completely integrated with religion and belief system of people signifying a harmonious life of body and mind, matter

and spirit and of man and god. The performers are male members of the Bazigar community ranging from small kids to elderly people, though the star performers are agile young men with shining serpentine bodies.

The leader of the group conducts the performance in a highly professional manner with remarkable skill and control over diction. The *dholi* (drummer) and the music of the drum plays very important role in the performance for the whole event take place under the overwhelming music of the drum. The form and the range of the acrobatics goes up, step by step, from simple to complex, finally leading to dangerous dare-devil beats which demand perfect control over mind and body. Risks are very high and the Bazigars really live dangerously! Intercepted in between the series of events of acrobatics, a group of talented actors from the community presents interludes of Nakal for humour and comic relief. Nakal is a developed satirical form of folk theatre which exposes the foibles and follies of men and women, high and low. At the conclusion of the event, the performers are amply rewarded in kind and cash by the village community. With the forces of industrialisation, modernisation and globalisation, the Bazigars like other tribes of the region, are rapidly losing their lifestyles, their ways of living and their art forms are fast vanishing. This paper will finally focus on the process of their assimilation in the main

society and their strategies to maintain their distinct cultural identity.

### **Discussion**

1. Folk tales are important in keeping cultures alive
2. If you understand India, the *Panchathranta* and Jataka tales can make you understand India as another reality. These people create their own discourse. Narratives are more important. We construct narratives and in those narratives there is a story.
3. Tales were used to teach social, cultural and productive aspects of life. It is not fiction. It is another way of constructing reality. These tales are deeply rooted in our sub-conscious.
4. Narrating stories was a living tradition in Sri Lanka.
5. When you discuss culture there are many nonsensical things. In these nonsensical things there is a meaning. We have to reconstruct things what people construct.

## **SOCIAL MARGINALITY AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES OF RODIYA COMMUNITIES IN SRI LANKA**

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**PROF. KALINGA TUDOR DE SILVA  
SENIOR PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY,  
UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIA, PERADENIA**



**Rodiyas constitute the lowest caste in Sri Lanka. There has been considerable debate regarding their identity, various authors identifying them as a race, tribe, caste and an ethnic group (Neville 1887, Raghavan 1957, Weeratunga 1988). They constitute a small segment of Sinhala society and they are distributed in small isolated communities in various parts of Sri Lanka. Traditionally they have been engaged in various caste occupations of a degrading nature including begging, black magic, making of brooms and drums, making of pounding**

vessels and cleaning of streets after religious celebrations like annual perehera in deity shrines (*devale*). All these occupations have an aura of disgrace and ritual impurity about them. Some Rodiya communities have acquired wealth over the years through long distance trade in specific commodities like mattresses and carpets. But many remain in abject poverty and outright social exclusion from the mainstream Sinhala communities. The survival of Rodiya communities remain problematic due to decreasing population, widespread malnutrition, alcoholism, outmigration of the more educated resulting in their total separation from the original communities, continuing patterns of social marginalization and discrimination and the tendency in younger generations to abandon caste occupations, acquire family and personal names indicative of rodi status and their altogether denial of caste identity. Continuing their customary association with dirt, some Rodiyas have joined the local government agencies as sanitary workers. Rodiyas have had a distinctive subculture reflecting in their distinctive Sinhala dialect, dress code, knowledge about hereditary occupations, and folklore and folk music, including those associated with traditional black magic. Based on on-going field research conducted by the International Centre of Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo on marginalized communities in Sri Lanka, this paper will focus on the current situation with

regard to Rodiya communities in Sri Lanka and their future prospects within a globalizing context. The paper also examines some possible social policies in dealing with fast disappearing socially marginalized communities in Sri Lanka.

#### References:

Nevill, Hugh (1887), 'The Gadi or Rodi race in Ceylon', in *Taprobanian* 2.3: 81-96.

Raghavan, M.D. (1957), *Handsome Beggars: the Rodiya of Ceylon*. Colombo: National Museum.

Weeratunge, Nireka (1988), *Aspects of Ethnicity and Gender among the Rodi of Sri Lanka*. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.



## **ACADEMIC SESSION - 4: SRI LANKA**

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**CHAired BY PROF. SURJEET SINGH**





## **CREOLIZATION AS MECHANISM FOR LANGUAGE SURVIVAL: THE CASE OF THE VEDDA LANGUAGE OF SRI LANKA**

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**PROF. K.N.O. DHARMADASA**  
**CHIEF EDITOR, SINHALA ENCYCLOPAEDIA OFFICE, SRI LANKA**



When the Vedda tribe, the aboriginal people of Sri Lanka, was first 'discovered' in mid-19th century by European anthropologists one of the distinguishing cultural features of this group was their language. Thus in their classic work *The Veddās* (1911) the Cambridge anthropologists, C.G. Seligmann and B.Z. Seligmann were to include a whole chapter which portrayed the phrases, songs, incantations and other linguistic expressions of these 'primitive' people. The Seligmans have stated that one of the reasons why they considered the study of the Veddās was important was the fact that they were a 'numerically small people

verging on extinction'. Interestingly, they found still existing a few families who according to them were 'pure blooded Veddas' and who were still retaining the primitive livelihood of hunter-gatherers. As Sri Lanka has a fairly well-documented history dating from about the sixth century BCE, the scanty references to the Veddas in the sources of history, particularly those pertaining to the ancient and medieval times become highly significant. These references indicate a 'peaceful co-existence' between the Veddas and the numerically preponderant and the culturally more 'advanced' Sinhalese who in the course of history were able to develop a civilization with sophisticated technology, artistic accomplishments and a life moulded by Buddhist ethics. Obviously, during this long period of existing side-by-side with the more numerous and 'civilized' group has led gradually to the Veddas losing their identity genetically as well as culturally. Traces of the 'original' Vedda culture is most patently visible in their language, which, due to admixture with the Sinhala language, has led to the formation of a 'contact language', a creole, which is what goes as the Vedda language today. The paper intends to illustrate, with linguistic analysis that the creolization was a strategy of language survival. In my study I will indicate what features of the present-day Vedda language can be taken as belonging to the "original Vedda" language, and examine, in comparison with other well-known creoles, the processes whereby the Vedda creolization

would have taken place. Also, with the help of Sinhala literary sources, the papers tries to suggest the period when the creolization would have occurred.

**Reference:**

C.G. Seligmann and Brenda Z. Seligmann, (1911), *The Veddas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

**Discussion**

1. It is recommended to undertake collaborative studies on creolization particularly in the Indian Sub-Continent.
2. Apart from the linguistic evidence and tactics mentioned in the paper, there is another integrated approach in studying indigenous community, which would include artistic, linguistic, cultural, ideological, biological evidences. It would be a better if we could undertake cross-border studies for an integrated approach.
3. In this presentation you seem to propose creolization as a model to safeguard endangered cultures.
4. For everyday survival, creolization occurs. But the problem is creolization languages in the world have not been able to create literature.
5. What is the best option for indigenous communities? Should these indigenous group be there as permanent primordial community? Or do we suggest bilingual or multilingualism as a mode of

survival than creolization? Or do we suggest creolization?

6. In the case of colonial contact I agree with you the hierarchy is their but in most of the cases colonial contact has enriched languages.
7. I have a doubt on the notion of creolization as a survival strategy. The Vedda community in Sri Lanka could be divided to two groups, namely interior Vedda and coastal Vedda. These communities are assimilated into the dominant culture. Now only 11% of the Vedda community can speak Vedda language.

I was not aware there is creolization in other parts of South Asia. There are several problems. One is an ethical problem. Is it correct for us to keep them as they are without letting them enter into the civilization if they want to? Ethically they have a right to choose on what they want to do. Dambane Gunawardena, belonging to the Vedda Community in Sri Lanka entered University. Now he is a school principle. He wrote a novel in Sinhala while retaining his own identity. Opting to be bi-lingual is another mechanism. I am not recommending any language. I am presenting the current situation.

When Indonesia got independence, the government decided on developing the language to Bhasa Indonesia. Like the Indonesian experience, Creol can develop to a very respectable language.

## **LIVING HERITAGE IN SRI LANKA: THE NEW TOURISM PRODUCT FOR THE VEDDA SOCIETY**

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**PROF. PRISHANTHA GUNAWARDHANA  
PROFESSOR OF ARCHAEOLOGY, DEPARTMENT OF  
ARCHAEOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF KELANIYA, KELANIYA.**



The Vedda people are the descendants of a pre historic man who settled Sri Lanka several millennia ago. The artefacts found and their distribution pattern draws our attention to conjecture that probably entire Island had been settled by the ancestors of the Vedda people. However, these people considerably found today in Sabaragamuwa, Uva and Eastern provinces. Significantly leader of the Vedda society is Uruwarige Wanniyalaththo, lives in Dambana, the main hub of the society.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the importance for making tourism product in Sri Lanka with regard to the Vedda society in Dabana village. This

paper is suggested that the Vedda nature and cultural based tourism product will be able to introduce as a new tourism development. Globally primitive cultures are becoming more involved in the tourism industry, mostly with environmental based eco-tourism. In the tourism sector in Sri Lanka, the overall arrival for the year 2010 recorded 600,000 and after the establishment of the peace environment is expected that 2.5 million tourists will be visiting in 2015. In this regard, it is concerned with Vedda owned and operated nature ventures that benefit Vedda society and protect the cultural and environmental landscape. It is likely that a considerable number of domestic and international tourists visit Dambana to see the Vedda society.

The recent data show that more than sixty international tourists and two thousands domestic tourists tour Dambana per week. This may suggesting that the informal tourism product are organised among the Domestic and international tourists.

By the proposed programme, Vedda people are directly involved in control the tourism product. The cultural centre including the visitor facilities will be established in the Dambana village. This will be giving proper guidance to the tourists. The present museum will be improved, and the material culture of this society organized to make the souvenirs. By this programme a

ticket will be issued to the tourists. The generated income in various field such as tickets, philanthropists will be deposited to the Vedda heritage fund, money will be utilised to the socio-economic development of the society. Significantly, as other primitive cultures, the Vedda society is becoming more participated in the tourism industry. The leader of the Vedda society has given his consent to launch this tourist product and the negative tourism impacts will be managed by their community.

### **Discussion**

1. There is increased tourism in Sri Lanka but if it is not well defined it will damage the culture and ecological patterns as well. It should be protected and conserved for the future generation rather than marketing. What are your ideas in conserving?
2. We should think about the concept of tourism-promotion more carefully otherwise it could cause problems.
3. Is there any negative impact of tourism for Vedda society?
4. Government has allocated a lot of money to safeguard the Vedda society. But the allocated funds do not directly go to the Vedda society.

**Response to questions/ comments** - This type of model on Informal tourism products in Dambana has been made under the instructions of Vannialatto. Now the ancient cites are surviving as tourism products. Here I am suggesting a formal product of tourism. We have discussed with Vannia latto and he agreed and that's why we are suggesting to establish the heritage fund, but this is still not the final draft. We are inviting anthropologist, archaeologists, etc. to come forward and discuss.

## **Session Chairperson's Comments**

We have heard two very interesting papers by distinguished scholars – Prof. Dharmadasa, whom I have known for a long time, and by Prof. Gunawardena. Both the papers have given us new insights as well as some very valuable suggestions with respect of diminishing cultures.

The presentation by Prof. Gunawardena on a product for tourist industry is a new trend, kind of a colonial model. For us as human beings we have to see the indigenous communities as human beings with equal respect and wellbeing. It is sad to see their survival as tourist products. What we have to think is to develop them as full-fledged communities.

The phenomenon of migration is a wide phenomenon. People are moving from one place to another and to interact with the society they develop bi-lingualism. Bilingualism is important for their survival.

When people move from one place to another they lose their language that results in losing identity. As people committed to dignity and respect we should work on up lifting every community whatever their situation is.

Prof. Dharmadasa presented a phenomenon that is happening all over the world. Language is not static. It is always changing. Sometimes there are very

violent inventions from outside. In language and cultural studies we think it is natural phenomena.

We should think of long term plans in protecting diminishing cultures. Thank you very much for brilliant presentations and equally brilliant interventions.

## **ACADEMIC SESSION - 5: SRI LANKA (CONTD.).**

**CHAired BY MR. MOOSA NASEEM**





## **DIMINISHING OR STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL: CASE OF VEDDA CULTURE IN SRI LANKA**

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**PROF. PREMAKUMARA DE SILVA  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO,  
COLOMBO**



The Veddass of Sri Lanka, an aboriginal group have survived for several millennia through adapting and coping with external stresses imposed on them. They inhabited the Island long before the arrival of Aryans and had spread all over the island and later confined themselves only to Vadi rata or Maha Vadi rata consisting of areas from Hunnasgiriya hills and lowlands up to the sea in the east.

Currently they are as a community is facing stresses that threaten to modernize them which could easily result in cultural extinction and genetic leaching.

While certain aspects of the Vedda culture such as using the language, and the bow and arrow in hunting has come to near complete disuse, the assimilation of the Veddas with mainstream Sinhalese and Tamils has resulted in Veddas of Sri Lanka being confined to small scattered communities in the Eastern, Uva and North Central Province of the country. Veddas over the years under many stresses have approached into their present state where there is a need to preserve their way of life, cultural aspects and their traditional homelands. Like Vedda there are other cultural groups (e.g., Rodiyas, Gypsies, Burgher, Malay, Chatty, Bharatha and Kaffir), who have been struggling for survival of their 'traditional lifestyles' from the cultural encroachment of hegemonic Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim communities of the country as well as the process of globalization.

It is in this backdrop my presentation will be focused on the current status of Vedda community particularly their cultural life. Cultural aspects of the Veddas are analysed with qualitative and quantitative analysis on the nature of use and disuse of cultural activities such as hunting and food gathering, religion, customs, traditional medicine, language skill. The findings of the cultural aspects have a mixed bag that includes optimistic and pessimistic versions on the possible interventions. However, unless speedy holistic

action is not taken, there is always a chance for the Vedda culture to become only an episode of the history within a generation or two.

### **Discussion**

1. Why is the Vedda community using names as Gunawardhana, Anuradha, etc. which are Sinhalese names? How is it happening?

It's a good observation. I don't have a specific answer to your question. It is an interesting phenomena. In Vakarai they are given Tamil names although they prefer to retain their own forms of names (Vedda name)

2. This is an interesting phenomena happening in the tribal community. People from the lower caste acquire names of higher castes even in India. It is about the identity and acceptance from the community. In Sri Lankan Newspapers you can see many of these people changing their names.
3. In my observation in Dambana, I have experienced that the Vedda community is facing harassment/ discrimination in schools. That could be one of the reasons inducing them to change their names.
4. Why is the traditional practice of hunting is high in Vakarai than in Dambana?

5. If Community Knowledge Centres are established to preserve indigenous cultures, it might be possible to safeguard cultural identity, liberty and wisdom of the indigenous communities.
6. What is the goal of the conference? Why are we doing this? Is it only for research? We should do visible, tangible things to develop the indigenous communities rather than just talking about them.
7. Development of the indigenous communities should be such as to develop them from within. They should have the autonomy to decide.
8. How can we have a shared strategy of planned development for indigenous communities in South Asia?

The first step when someone is sick is to diagnose the illness. Then one can treat him by giving the necessary medication and treatments. Research Projects proposed to be implemented on the recommendations of this Conference will diagnose the situation of diminishing cultures of South Asia.

## **ACADEMIC SESSION - 6: SRI LANKA (CONTD.).**

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**CHAired BY PROF. DESMOND MALLIKARACHCHI**





## **INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS OF THE DIMINISHING CULTURES: NEED FOR GLOBAL AND REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION**

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**AMBASSADOR SUMITH AMARALALA NAKANDALA  
DIRECTOR GENERAL, ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, MINISTRY OF  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, SRI LANKA**



**There is no definitive definition for cultures but In the liberal democratic frame, the culture is increasingly Identified with political connotations. South Asia is blessed with rich diversity of cultures and that provides the strength of South Asia. Culture Is shared by many means and especially Sri Lanka and Indian subcontinent provides a classic example for the shared-ness of cultures.**

**In the recent past, aspects associated with cultures such as Traditional Knowledge [TK], Traditional**

Cultural Expressions [TCE] and Folklore [FL] have been subjected to intense debate in terms of Intellectual Property Rights [IPRs]. This debate has taken the centre stage of World Intellectual Property Organization's [WIPO] contemporary agenda.

For the last few years, WIPO has facilitated parallel dialogue processes on Genetic Resources, TK, TCE and FL to device text based Treaties through Diplomatic Conferences.

While such efforts need appreciation at the global level, the question remains whether the Treaty Framework would challenge the mere existence of the pluralism of the cultures.

### **Discussion**

It is very difficult to see who the owners of these wise documents of folklore are and folk-culture. It is not static. It is always changing. It is a knowledge created for centuries and centuries.

1. Anything related to folk culture that belongs to a country belongs to all its citizens.
2. According to the UNESCO project on Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, culture that you have created in Sri Lanka is a common heritage of people of India, people of Bangladesh, etc.
3. We have nation states which are political/administrative boundaries, but we as scholars do

not recognize these boundaries in cultural relations. Since we have a culture which is known as main stream culture and there is an interaction on parallel cultural traditions. We have to recognize all this when we are formulating a policy document.

4. You mentioned about Kotalahimbutu. There are similar Ayurvedic medicines that we have used for generations. There are Europeans who have got patents for such medicines. Is it possible legally to establish our right, after Europeans have got the patents?

In relation to the Patency document on 'Kothalahimbutu,' we do not know whether what has been done, was done mistakenly. In literature review they refer to Sri Lanka, where it says traditionally Sri Lanka has been using 'kothalahimbutu'.

We do have a few options: Option 1 is to have the holistic Buddhist attitude: we have created it but you can have it. Option 2 is to say, you can have it but there should be profit sharing. Third option is adopt an aggressive research methodology by our indigenous research institutions- why not go for 3<sup>rd</sup> option?

5. Ultimate aim of the SAARC is to create a South Asian Union (SAU) in line with the European

Union. It will be difficult to compare with the mode of superendi with the EU. When we talk about SAU we will keep the national boundaries and will work together.

6. How do we respond to the challenges in creating a SAU? Member Countries are sensitive. India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are very active in negotiations.
7. In India, an Indian Law firm got the patent on Neem Oil. Haladi (turmeric) has been used as an antiseptic. Neem is used everywhere in India and is treated as a sacred plant. It is document in Ayurvedic literature. They can cheat us saying it is just folklore.
8. We have two options for safeguarding traditional knowledge. One is protection and the other is development. When you protect and document it can be counterproductive. It might change power structures of society. Protection in terms of money? In terms of money being lost? While protection are we losing knowledge?
9. Non-binding treaty cannot be implemented effectively and therefore all developing countries like to have binding treaty.
10. Traditional proactive are well documented by Ayurvedic practitioners and Ayurveda Research Institutes. Some vaidyas (Ayurvedic doctors)

have sold 'pothis' (original works) for very low prices for Europeans.

11. To understand how we are placed in globalization in relation to intellectual property, traditional knowledge and exploitation of indigenous communities, we have to go beyond culture.
12. No Culture is static, no culture stands alone. Culture is pollinated. With imposed globalization change pollination of culture is increasing.
13. We have to recognize the micro aspects and variations of culture. Unless and until we recognize we will not respect diversity. Culture and heritage is essentially shared. We have very rich culture which is essentially shared. For over 30,000 years we have seen cultures crisscrossing. We cannot talk about mono-cultures. Multiculturalism is strength of our country.
14. Intellectual piracy: Who controls information specially in this digital age? Who sets the standards? How do they do the bench marking? How do they set the agenda? How much intrusion from outside?
15. The findings and knowledge created by the works of foreign archeologists in Sri Lankan sites doesn't even come back to the country.

16. We should see how heritage could be used for conflict resolution. Just as diversity, we should be talking about commonalities too.
17. How colonial are we as academics? Do we have hegemony over knowledge?

### **Chairperson's Comments**

When we talk about Patent and intellectual property law, can forests be brought under intellectual property law? If so how? Does the forest belong to the Government or the Veddas?

Patenting and intellectual property law cannot be applied for forests where Veddas are living.

The WIPO is scheduled to meet in 2013 for a adopting a convention with regard to the TCE, FL and IPRs. We must, therefore, start now to formulate our position, lest we miss the bus.

## **PLENARY SESSION**

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**CHAired BY DR SINHARAJA TAMMITA-DELGODA**



The Plenary Session was chaired by Dr SinhaRaja Tammita Delgoda. The members of the Plenary Committee included the Chairpersons of the academic sessions, namely: Mr G.L.W. Samarasinghe, Prof. K.N.O. Dharmadasa, Mr Shamsuzzaman Khan, Prof. Surjeet Singh, Mr Moosa Naseem and Prof. Desmond Mallikarachchi. Dr Sanjay Garg attended the Meeting as Special Invitee.

The agenda of the Plenary Committee was:

- to consider all suggestions submitted by the participants in Feedback forms,
- prepare preliminary draft of Research themes,
- discuss preliminary draft with the participants,
- finalize the Research themes/ topics, and
- approve the Research Proposal Form.

The Plenary Committee set forth the following objectives before itself:

**I. To Identify and Establish the Priorities**

To consider, discover and identify main concerns, themes, priorities and areas of priority. **To Know What We Have To Do.**

**II. To Understand and Define the Objective**

To try and define what we are trying to achieve and what can be delivered. The consensus was that the best way to do this was through **Research, Documentation and Publication.**

*"If nothing else can be done, we can document it and record it. Then at least the knowledge will survive."*

*"What we know of the great cultures of the past is because someone has taken the trouble to document it and record it."*

**III. To Create a Blue Print for Action**

Once we have identified the objectives and defined what can be done through the medium of documentation - we will have charted the course. It will then be up to the governments to follow the course which we have charted and implement the recommendations which we have come up with.

## **Proceedings**

The Chairman of the Plenary Session and all Members of the Plenary Committee were invited to the dais and the Session commenced with opening remarks by Dr SinhaRaja Tammita-Delgoda. He invited the participants to handover any remaining feedback forms (Form No. 1) so that suggestions made by them could be taken on board by the Plenary Committee. The participants who had already submitted their feedback forms were also invited to give a short presentation to elaborate the theme(s) suggested by them. Thereafter, the Members of the Plenary Committee met in a separate chamber and considered all suggestions for the themes of research on diminishing cultures in South Asia that the participants had submitted in their feedback forms. After filtering the duplicates and the overlaps, 14 broad themes were identified. The Plenary Committee once again met at the Conference Hall and the list of themes identified by it was presented before the participants. All the themes were discussed seriatim and comments and suggestions were invited from the participants. Thereafter, the list of research themes was regrouped in 12 topics for the purpose of inviting the research proposals.

## RESEARCH THEMES

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1. Diminishing/ Dying Languages and Scripts
2. Diminishing Food/ Culinary Cultures and Traditions
3. Traditional Cultural Expressions (Phonetic or verbal expressions/ musical or sound expressions/ expressions by actions such as dance, plays, folk theatre, ceremonies, rituals, etc.)
4. Folk Religions
5. Indigenous communities (Comparative Study/ Survival Strategies)
6. Indigenous Farming (Agricultural and Agro-based practices and traditional knowledge)
7. Traditional Technology
8. Traditional Games and sports
9. Traditional Medicines, therapies and healing practices,
10. Kaffirs of Sri Lanka
11. Gypsy Communities
12. Bio-cultural heritage of inter-state communities of SAARC countries.

## **VALEDICTORY SESSION**

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The Valedictory Session concluded the Conference. The participants voiced their observations on its theme and were unanimous in commending the initiative taken by the SAARC Cultural Centre. Thereafter, the Director distributed the Certificates of Participation to all Delegates from the Member States, Resource persons and other participants.



Dr. Sanjay Garg, Deputy Director (Research), SAARC Cultural Centre conveyed the Concluding remarks and the Vote of Thanks. On behalf of the Director and Staff of the SAARC Cultural Centre, he thanked the participating delegates for their valuable inputs in bringing the deliberations of the SAARC Regional Conference on Diminishing Cultures In South Asia to a successful conclusion.

## **CULTURAL SHOW AND DINNER**

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On the evening of 19 July 2011, a cultural show of diminishing Sri Lankan dances was organised at the Queen's Hotel, Kandy. The Cultural Show was followed with a poolside South Asian dinner organized with a live Calypso band.





## FIELD TRIP

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Delegates of the Member States and participants of the Conference were taken on a field trip to Dambana, one of the villages inhabited by the Vedda Community. Their visit to the Community's Museum was facilitated by Prof. Yasanjall Jayatilake. After a formal Introduction with the Chief and other members of the Veddah Community, a formal interaction session was Inaugurated by the traditional holsting of the National flag of Sri Lanka and the Community flag of the Vedda community. The interaction with the community was facilitated by Prof. Yasanjall Jayatilake and Dr. Sanjay Garg. Later, the participants were treated with a traditional Vedda lunch, a Cultural Programme performed by the young members of the Vedda Community and a live demonstration of a community ritual.







## ANNEXEURES

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## ANN. 1: PROGRAMME

<b>Day 1 : Tuesday, 19 July 2011</b>	
<b>9.00 – 10.30</b>	<b>Inaugural Session</b>
09:00 – 09:30	Registration of the Delegates
09:30	Arrival of the Chief Guest
09:35	Lighting of the Oil Lamp
09:45 – 10:00	Welcome Address by the Mr G.L.W. Samarasinghe, Director, SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo.
10:00 – 10:15	Address by the Chief Guest: Hon. Tikiri Kobbekaduwa, Governor, Central Province, Sri Lanka
10:15 – 10:25	Vote of Thanks by Ms Soundarie David Rodrigo, Deputy Director, Programmes
10:25 – 10:30	Group Photograph
10:30 – 11:00	Tea
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>Academic Session – 1: Introduction. Chaired by Mr G.L.W. Samarasinghe</b>
11:00 – 11:20	Introduction of the Delegates/ Participants
11:20 – 11:30	Introduction of the Conference Theme and Research Project by Dr Sanjay Garg, Deputy Director, Research
11:30 – 12:00	Guest Lecture by Prof. K.T. Nimal P. de Silva Diminishing Cultures in South Asia: An Overview
12:00 – 12:30	Prof. Desmond Mallikarachchi Why (indigenous) Cultures diminish or face the danger of extinction?
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
<b>13:30 – 15:00</b>	<b>Academic Session - 2: Bhutan/ India. Chaired by Prof. K.N.O. Dharmadasa</b>
13:30 – 14:00	Mr Gengop Karchung Diminishing of Bhutanese Cultures, with Special Reference to the Costume of Merak Community

14:00 – 14:15	Discussion
14:15 – 14:45	Dr B.N. Sarkar Diminishing Culture of the Tribes of Andaman Islands: Bio-Cultural Perspectives
14:45 – 15:00	Discussion
15:00 – 15:30	Tea
<b>15:30-17:00</b>	<b>Academic Session - 3: India/ Sri Lanka. Chaired by Mr Shamsuzzaman Khan</b>
15:30 – 16:00	Prof. Surjeet Singh Performing Arts and Traditions of the Nomadic (Gypsy) Tribe of Bazigars
16:00 – 16:15	Discussion
16:15 – 16:45	Prof. Kalinga Tudor Silva Social Marginality and Cultural Challenges of Rodiya Communities in Sri Lanka
16:45 – 17:00	Discussion
	End of Academic Sessions for Day 1
<b>19:00</b>	<b>Dinner Hosted by the Director, SAARC Cultural Centre</b>
<b>Day 2: Wednesday, 20 July 2011</b>	
<b>9:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>Academic Session - 4: Sri Lanka. Chaired by Prof. Surjeet Singh</b>
09:00 – 09:30	Prof. K.N.O. Dharmadasa Creolization as Mechanism for Language Survival: The Case of the Vedda Language of Sri Lanka
09:30 – 09:45	Discussion
09:45 – 10:15	Prof. Prishantha Gunawardhana Living Heritage in Sri Lanka: The New Tourism Product for the Vedda Society
10:15 – 10:30	Discussion
10:30 – 11:00	Tea

<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>Academic Session - 5: Sri Lanka (Contd.). Chaired by Mr. Moosa Naseem</b>
11:00 – 11:30	Prof. Premakumara Silva Diminishing or Struggle for Survival: Case of Vedda Culture in Sri Lanka
11:30 – 11:45	Discussion
11:45 – 12:15	Video: on Vedda Community
12:15 – 12:30	Discussion
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
<b>13:30 – 15:00</b>	<b>Academic Session - 6: Sri Lanka (Contd.). Chaired by Prof. Desmond Mallikarachchi</b>
13:30 – 14:00	Mr. Amaralal Sumith Nakandala Intellectual Property Rights of the Diminishing Cultures: Need for Global and Regional Framework for protection and preservation
14:00 – 14:15	Discussion
14:15 – 14:45	Video: <i>Vanaspati Uruma Laddho</i> (People who inherit the Nature) – a film produced by the Colombo Institute for Advanced Study of Society and Culture.
14:45 – 15:00	Discussion
15:00 – 15:30	Tea
<b>15:30 – 16:30</b>	<b>Plenary Session. Chaired by Dr. SinhaRaja Tammitta-Delgoda</b>
	Finalization of the Research themes/ topics
<b>16:30 – 17:00</b>	<b>Valedictory Session</b>
	Concluding Remarks by the Participants
<b>Day 3 : Thursday, 21 July 2011</b>	
<b>07:30-17:00</b>	<b>Field Trip</b>
07:30	Leaving Hotel for Dambana
10:30	Arrival at Dambana: Welcome Drink

10:45 – 11:30	Visit to the Museum - Facilitated by Prof. Yasanjali Jayatilake
11:30 – 12:30	Interaction with the Vedda Community- Facilitated by Prof. Yasanjali Jayatilake and Dr Sanjay Garg
12:30 – 13:00	Cultural Performance
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00	Leaving for Kandy
17:00	Arrival at Kandy

## ANN. 2: LIST OF DELEGATES FROM THE MEMBER STATES

Member State	Name	Designation	Contact Details
Bangladesh	Mr. Shamsuz-zaman Khan	Director General, Bangla Academy, Dhaka	
	Ms. Munira Sultana	Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Dhaka	
Bhutan	Mr. Gengop Karchung	Research and Media Division, Department of Culture, MoHCA, PO Box 185, Thimphu	Mobile: + 975 17668088, Tele: + 975 2 324314/3291 40
India	Dr. B.N. Sarkar	Anthropologist (Physical), Anthropological Survey of India, 27 Jawaharlal Nehru Road, Kolkata 700016	Tele- 033- 22861781; Fax- 91-33- 22861799; e-mail: drbnsarkar@y ahoo.com
	Prof. Surjeet Singh	Project Director, The Oral Traditions and Cultural Heritage of Punjab, North Zone Cultural Centre, Punjab	Tel- 94635- 55065 (m) 0175- 2228183 e-mail: surjeetlee@y ahoo.com

Maldives	Mr. Moosa Naseem	First Secretary, High Commission of Maldives in Sri Lanka	Tel- 011- 5516302/3, Fax- 011- 2581200/ Mobile- 0777- 861927
Sri Lanka	Prof. K.N.O. Dharmadasa	Chief Editor, Sinhala Encyclopedia Office, Sri Lanka (405B 1, Gunaratana Mawatha, Pahala Eriyagama, Peradeniya	081-2387182, e-mail: knod@pdn.ac .lk
	Prof. Prisantha Gunawardana	Professor of Archaeology, Department of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya	e-mail: <a href="mailto:prishantagunawardhana@yahoo.com">prishantagunawardhana@yahoo.com</a>

### **ANN. 3: LIST OF RESOURCE PERSONS**

#	Name	Designation/ Institution	Contact Details
1	Dr. Premakumara De Silva	Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, Colombo 3.	e-mail: prema112@hotmail.com
2	Prof. Kalinga Tudor Silva	Department of Sociology, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.	
3	Prof. Nimal De Silva	Director General Central Cultural Fund Bauddaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7.	e-mail: nimaldes@pgiar.lk Tele- +94112508960
4	Prof. Desmond Mallikarachchi	Former Head, Department of Philosophy and Psychology, University of Peradeniya.	email: wasanthimanik@yahoo.com
5	Dr. Singaraja Tammita Delgoda	8/1, Liyanage Mawatha, Nawala Road, Rajagiriya.	email: srted@gmail.com

## ANN. 4: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

#	Name	Designation/ Institution	Contact Details
1	Dr. Jayantha Jayasiri	University of Sri Jayawardenapura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda.	
2	Prof. Yasanjali Jayatilake	University of Sri Jayawardenapura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda.	
3	Dr. Charmalie Nahallage	Sr. Lecturer in Physical Anthropology, University of Sri Jayawardenapura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda.	Tele- 011-2802207
4	Dr. Subashini Tennakoon	University of Sri Jayawardenapura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda.	
5	Mrs. Anusha Edirisinghe	University of Sri Jayawardenapura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda.	
6	Mr. Sepala Samarasekara	University of Sri Jayawardenapura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda.	
7	Mr. Asitha G. Punchihewa	University of Colombo, Colombo.	714900238
8	Ms. Apsara Karunaratne	University of Colombo, Colombo.	
10	Mr. Namal Weerasena	Research Coordinator/ Socio-Anthropological Research Project on Vedda, Community, Dept. of Sociology University of Colombo.	Tel: 0718358526 email: namalww@yahoo.com

11	Mr. Chintaka Ranasinghe	Lecturer/ Dept. of Sinhala University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya.	Tel: 0718015838 email: chintakaranasinha@gmail.com
12	Prof. H.M.D.R. Herath	Department of Sociology, University of Peradeniya Peradeniya.	776148906
13	Dr. Abhya Ratnayaka	Department of Sociology, University of Peradeniya Peradeniya.	771525535
14	Mr. S. Pathmanesan	Lecturer, Open University of Sri Lanka, Nawala.	Mobile- 0718263043
15	Dr. Prashantha Perera	General Manager, Aitken Spence Travels (Pvt.) Ltd, 305, Vauxhall Street, Colombo 2.	
16	Ms. Manju Gunasekera	Head, Department of Philosophy and Psychology, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.	
17	Mr. Sumith Nakandala	Director General of International Development, Ministry of External Affairs, Colombo.	<a href="mailto:dgea@mea.gov.lk">dgea@mea.gov.lk</a>
18	Dr. Danesh Karunanayake	University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya.	Mobile- 0773602437
19	Mr. Roshan Lakneel	51/Nishahankamallapura, Polonnaruwa.	077-5029372
20	Mr. Prasad Dharmasena	180, Samanpura, Watawala.	

21	G.R.N. Wijayarathna	Lecturer, Image Arts Unit, Department of Fine Arts, University of Kelaniya.	071-2775331
22	Dr. U. G. Gunasekara	Lecturer, Image Arts Unit, Department of Fine Arts, University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya.	071-8106680



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