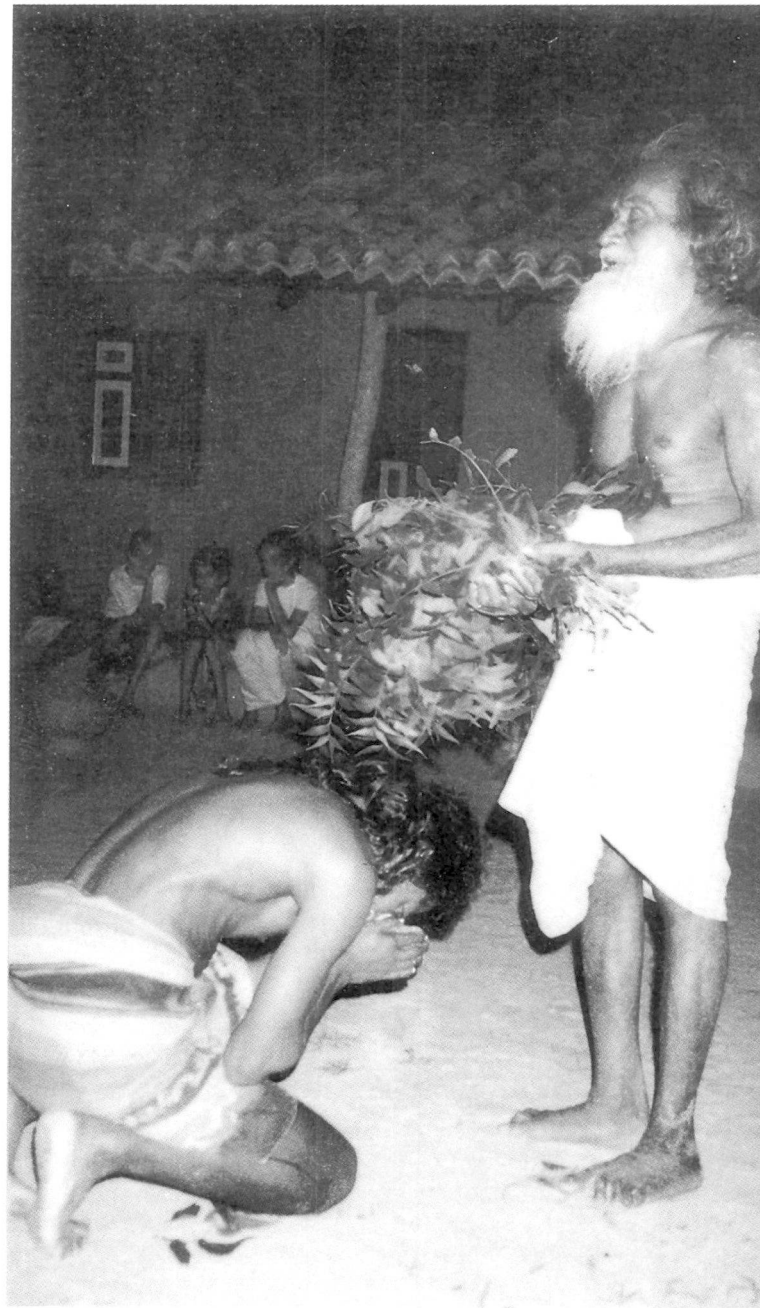


Indigenous people living in many countries of the world are the "Children of Nature". According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist, the evolving of homo - sapiens occurred as a conflict between the origin and the culture. This is a development from nature to culture. Culturalization is a gradual departure from the origin. Nature is the origin. "Original People" is the distinctive name used to identify the indigenous people as they protect the original form and live close to the original position.

Veddas living in Sri Lanka are known as indigenous people or the primitive people because they do not have any culture. Reflectively, they also have long-standing cultural features developed for their existence. But as they use to make their living out of what they get from the nature, they are treated as the primitive people. They adapt themselves to the nature but do not attempt to bring the nature under their control and to act against it. They hunt animals but not eradicate them. They pluck fruit from trees but do not destroy the forest. They consume things like yams, bee's honey etc., which they get from the forest without causing any harm as they do all that within the fine-cycle. They who live within the nature make no material change in the balance of nature.

Why should we pay our attention to the indigenous people who lead such a natural life and to their rituals etc. Primitive or indigenous people also have same physical features as we have, but their tribal world and the customs operative in it differ from and are simpler than that of ours. For instance, the Veddas were not the traditional followers of a religion of "high standard" such as Buddhism, Hinduism etc. Although, the Hindu Gods like God Kataragama, Vishnu, Pattini as well as Bandara Gods and certain Buddhist beliefs have been introduced to their cults, they are not aware of either Buddhist or Hindu way of emancipation. They have no belief in them, too. Veddas have now forgotten their language called "Vedi Basa" and speak Sinhala. Some of them dress as we do. Some newspaper critics who criticized recent Rupavahini programmes about Veddas, spoke sarcastically of Veddas wearing a loin-cloth, having an axe placed on the shoulder and holding a bow and arrows are the imperative signs of a Vedda. By such external characteristics we are unable to fully understand the difference between us and the Veddas. But, we can understand this difference well if we take into consideration their conceptual world and their cults. As such, let us, to some extent, go into their rituals and invocations.



The Rituals and Shanthi Karma (invocations) of Vedda Community

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Rituals and invocations are the most important aspects of the culture of an indigenous community. As the "modern" man does not believe so much in such matters, they are at the brink of gradual extinction. Rituals and invocations contribute to healing of diseases and prosperity as expected, and in addition, bring about social co-operation, entertainment and enjoyment of

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aesthetic pleasure and many other matters. However primitive they may be, such rituals have some religious aesthetic purpose. Rituals are based on religious beliefs. Religious ideas are the suppositions about universe and the man. Religious ideas are put into action by rituals and invocations. Religion is staged or "dramatized" through them. Pirith recital, religious functions, Bali, Devil Dances etc. are the media through which our series of beliefs are practically brought on to the stage. When the link series of beliefs are practically brought on to the stage, when the link between religion and rituals is taken into consideration the following five facts brought out by Talcot Parsons, an anthropologist, relating to the features of religion are the five fundamental features of a religion as pointed out by him are :

- (1) Use of sacred objects which are not used in the day-to-day life ;
- (2) Having a system of symbols which are conducive to high spiritual standard ;
- (3) Having a system of rituals ;
- (4) Mutual cordiality among the followers ; and
- (5) Super-natural status parallel to the values, expectations and conducts. As such, rituals and invocations are the imperative features of a religion.

Religious conduct is often treated as abandonment of life. As the life is an experience with suffering and strain, freedom from such situation is anticipated through concepts such as liberation, emancipation and Nirvana. But, the religion of primitive people like Veddas is not of this type. It is a super-natural status projecting the interaction between human life and environment. Accordingly, living persons after their death become devil relatives. They, being the relations, expect rituals from their relatives of this world for their subsistence. If suitable offerings and rituals are made, they would provide health, food and drinks required for the prosperity of those who remain in this world. Otherwise, they will create various diseases and sufferings to them. Likewise, there is a four-cornered connection between person, nature, rituals and the dead. It is the dead persons who enhance and reduce the contents of the origin and who bestow them to the person. They would be able to do so only if the rituals are made out of what is attained from the nature and thereby the dead are supported for their existence in their world. Accordingly, there appears to be a transaction between the survivors and the dead.

Likewise, the belief in the dead is the main cult among Veddas and the chief of the dead is known by

different names such as Kande Yak, Appochchi Kande Yak, Kande Devi , etc. Generally, Vanniya is a Vedda but he can also be a dead relative. In Vedda's dialect, a dead person may be called 'Malapenne Vanniya' (Vanniya of the deal soul) and a person who was recently died may be called "Aluth Malapenne Vanniya". Kande Yaka is the head of all of them and the second in command is "Bilindu Yakka". The purpose of Vedda's rituals is to get the worldly objectives like (1) food obtainable from the environment, (2) healing of disease (3) elimination of effects of spells and incantations, and (4) procuring prosperity through their intervention. They have no other super-mundane motives than these.

According to this cult, Veddas' belief can be treated as an animism, than, when he becomes a devil after death, ends his cycle of Sansara. This is a kind of perpetualism. According to Veddas, trees, plantations, animals and natural objects are either occupied by demons or apparitions of demons. They cannot therefore, automatically receive what they get from the nature. There is an intervention of devils/gods in them. Read the following poem :

අකුල කපා පාරට නමමන්	නේ
රුකුල පුරා මියේ පැනි ලන්	නේ
කපුරු මලේ සුවදයි විහිදෙන්	නේ
ලකුණු නමයි කන්දේ දෙවියන්	නේ

Kande God guides the (passenger) to the correct path by cutting the scrub; fills the beehive in the tree-hollow with honey and by the small of kapuru flowers, indicates that he is close by. This will show that Kande God or Kande devil is not a demon as we believe but is someone who bestows benefits to Vanniya laeto.

In addition to the belief in Kande Yaka and other spirit-relatives, there are persons who learn enchantments from Sinhala exorcists and practice incantations. Those spirits are mean one's with very harsh qualities. They are known as "Avara Madana Yakun". By performing rituals to them one may be able to get rid diseases and troubles they have created. But one will find hardly any chance to be benefited by them. Let us now consider the modes of rituals and invocations performed for these spirits and gods.

There are several transitional methods of offerings followed by Veddas most of which have now gone out of their usage. Let us, however, briefly examine those rituals which are gradually disappearing and which the Veddas have continued to practice until recent times

and for which the Veddas have continued to practice till recent times-and for whom and for what they were performed :

them. They pour coconut milk into a pot like a large pan and keep it on a scaffold and beat drums. On this occasion certain people possessed by demons show the

<i>Rituals</i>	<i>Spirits/gods invited</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
1. Kirikoraha Naaveema	Kande Yaka Bilindi Yaka (Devil relatives)	To get huntings, bee's honey, fruits
2. Naa Yakuma	Kande, Bilindi and relative devils	Prosperity/security and protection
3. Arrow Dance (not present now)	Kande Yaka	Protection
4. Anguru Mas Yakana Adukku	Kande Yaka, Bilindu Yaka, Ne Yaka (devil relatives)	Offerings for huntings provided
5. Bambara Yak Pooja	Bambara Yaka	Procuring yams, hunting pigs
6. Dole Yaka Dance (Dramatizing how honey is obtained)	Dolay Yaka	Procuring honey, healing diseases
7. Rahu Yaku Poojava	Rahu Yaku	Procurment of honey, protection
8. Vanagatha Yaka Neteema	Vanagatha Yaka	Procurment of game, protection in hunting
9. Patta Yaka Pooja	Patta Yaka	Protection for pregnant women healing diseases
10. Kolamaduwa (Alut Yakagama)	Alut Yaka Alut Devi	Prosperity, grains, protection
11. Kiri Amma Pooja	Kiri Ammas	Protection for children
12. Ruvala Pooja	Millane Yaka	Healing, protection from devils
13. Hethme Pooja	Eleyakka Galey Yakku	Procurment of children
14. Avana Pooja	Vedi Yakku (12) Indigolle Yakku	Offerings for hunt
15. Dammaduwa	Kadawara/Marala Yakku, Ambarapothi	Offering for prosperity after harvest
16. Pena Beleema	Kande Yaka	Catch the disease making demons
17. Talisments, enchantments etc. (Sinhala influence)	Riri, Kalu, Maha, Sonhon, Oddi	Elimination of disasters
18. Mentioning gods by name	Minneri Devi, Gal'Iri Bandara, Vishnu, Kataragama etc.	Seeking prosperity, protection
19. Veddi Perahera (Budu Puda)	John Mahiyangana Perahera	Elimination of troubles and disasters

Scholars such as Seligamann and Parker have described at length the rituals referred to above. Methods of poojas focusing on the Vedda's cult are given at the beginning. This will show that demon cult is very popular among them. Gods are mentioned very often but certain gods are born as demons. Goddesses Kiki Kiri Ammas also qualities of demons. Gods such as Vishnu and Kataragama are only mentioned by name. Although some Vedda communities are inclined to Buddhist influences they cannot completely depart from their traditional beliefs.

Veddas are a small community but evidently there had been so many rituals among them. It appears, according to their objectives, that the rituals were aimed at fulfilling their mundane affairs. Let us now consider a little about rituals.

Kirikoraha is still popular among Veddas. The main purpose is to get hunting. They believe that hunting is not successful because the dead devils are opposed to

direction whjere animals are found. This practice is now done aiming at prosperity as well.

Neyakuma—This is held for the whole night. Here too, as in the case of *Kirikoraha*, drums are beaten while people dance. For this purpose, a shed adorned with tree-leaves etc. is used. *Kolamaduwa* too, is an invocation of the same type. A prayer at *Neyakuma* held in Dambana is as follows :

Arrow Dance—Now out of use. Veddas now are not used to handle even the arrows. This is a method of protection performed with an arrow erected on the ground and dancing round the arrow. When small children are left alone in the jungle, it is believed that he will be free from dangers from snakes, if the child is kept near these arrows after the completion of arrow dance.

Angurumas Yahuna, as well as *Avana Poojava* is meant to make offerings with various parts of the hunted animals to the demons who provided game. *Anugurumas Yahuna* is an ancient ritual of Veddas. An



A Kirikoraha dance.

invocation used in respect of Angurumas Yahuna is as follows :

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This can be linked with "Aapana". It is customary on this occasion to place some parts of blood and flesh of animals just killed, on leaves and offer them to Kadavara Devils. In this performance, demons such as Avana Vedda, Gal Vedda (Vedda who smeared blood on leaves), Mas Vedda, (Vedda who kept flesh on leaves), Butha Vedda (Vedda who first sent the animals), Athu Holman Vedda (a demon who shakes branches and deceives Veddas), Bindi Holman Vedda (who breaks branches and chase out animals), Kilimas Vedda (Vedda who cuts the animal), Meligi Vedda (Demon who blinds the eyes of the hunter), Ahuru Gahana Vedda (demon who calls dogs) and Ihurum Gahana Vedda (Demon who calls dogs by whistling) receive the offerings. Thus, the purpose of this is to please the demons who help hunting as well as the demons who are against it. Avana Pooja is presently not performed in the same manner.

Bambura Yak Poojava is a system of offerings initiating
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the slaughter of pigs. The Bambura Vedda, who went to extract yams, met a pig. Dogs chassed after it. Bambura accompanied by his companions killed the pig with the spike, sword and the bow. In this instance, offerings are usually made to Korimini Ala Yaka as well. This pooja appears to have been conducted initiating the killing of a pig which is very difficult to be killed with bow and arrows. This method of offerings is not in practice at present.

Bambura Devil Dance prevailing in the South is treated to be a remnant of this Vedda invocation. *Bambura Yak Poojava* is connected with getting yams and as Parker says, it is also connected with getting honey.

A *Bambura Yak* prayer is as follows :

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Dole Yaka Piduma which is not in practice at present was aimed at getting honey which is a valuable forest resource. Here it resembles the cutting of bee's nest in stone door-ways. Although there is no legend relating to this, in the conceptional world of Veddas, bees were called "Raaja Vanni". Raaja Malwatti Atto mentioned in



Small Devalas (huts) with Hamba or Panduru boxes are still available in Veddas villages.

some prayers may be the bees carrying pollen and "dolo" may be the Bee-queen. A portion of prayer to Dole Yaka is given below :

Seligmann states that offerings to Rahu Yaku has connection with offerings to Gini Rahu Bandara done by Sinhalese. This was a customary ritual performed for getting honey. One of the three brothers got displeased with his wife and went away. When he came back he saw the wife with somebody else, but couldn't catch the man and having beaten the wife jumped into the fire and committed suicide. He was born as Gini Rahu Bandara Devil. Brothers too, after death, were born as demons who were known by the same name.

Vanagatha Yak Poojava which was conducted to make hunting a success is done on behalf of a group of people who died enclosed in a stone cave. This method of offering is not in practice now.

At *Pattayakuna*, three sticks are erected and barks of trees are split like hairs and bundled and placed on the sticks. This is an invocative practice done for pregnant women to deliver the child without trouble. It can be inferred that the three sticks stand for mother, father and child because this practice is called *Baalakanuwa*". Through possession of devil, it is believed that the sex of the child could also be known. This may, perhaps, be similar to the practice called *Kambakanuwa*". Such Yaga is said to be prevailing in Dumbara Area.

Kolamaduwa is a method of offering for many demons. *Galey Devils, Aluth Yaku, Maha Yakini* and *Kiri Ammas* receive these offerings.

Hamba Petti or *Hekme Poojava* which is performed for the harmful devils called *Elle Yakku* and *Gale Yakku* is also important. Sterility is believed to be caused by these devils. Small Devalas (huts) with Hamba or Panduru boxes are still available in Veddas' villages. It is believed that if sterile women drop a pandura (coin as present) into these boxes and an invocation made, they would get children.

Light reading is still popular among Veddas. It is said that there had been 18 methods of light-reading among them. Such as *Athalasa Pena, Kothsala Pena, Gal Oena, Wee Pena, Dunu Pena* etc. Light reading is done for catching the disease-making devils. When somebody falls sick, he is taken to a light-reader. Then the light-reader takes a pounder or one on the things referred to above and addresses different animals. For instance, when he takes a pounder, keeps it on the thigh and prays, the pounder is said to get stuck hard to his leg with the utterances of the name of the devil who caused the illness. When devil is caught in this manner, rituals relevant to him should be performed.

When the rituals described here are taken into consideration, Veddas who have a primitive community are still in a primitive world whether they wear sarongs or whether they are engaged in small scale cultivations. So, subjecting them to sudden modernization has to "be done very carefully. It is our duty to allow them to live as they wish because they are the children of nature". They should be admitted to our world not by force but at their option.

