

# INDIGENOUS PEOPLE - INTERNATIONAL YEAR 1993

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The United Nations with a view to identifying, and preserving Indigenous Cultures in the World had declared 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People.

In recognition of this, His Excellency the President of the Democratic, Socialist, Republic of Sri Lanka has appointed a National Committee under the aegis of the Ministry of Environment and Parliamentary Affairs.

The National Committee chaired by the Secretary to the Ministry has drawn in officials from many other concerned ministries, Dons from various Universities and Non-Governmental organizations.

The Committee has had many meetings and programmes have been drawn up to increase public awareness of the island's indigenous culture. An Exhibition along with Symposium, Films Shows, and relevant Publications etc., will be held at the National Museum Premises in December 1993 with a view to enhancing the knowledge of the public in order that the indigenous communities may survive in the Natural environment. In fact the decision to dedicate this issue of 'Soba' the quarterly environmental magazine to the indigenous people was taken by this National Committee.

At this stage let us look at the definition of 'indigenous people' as stated by the World Bank Operational Manual September 1991 OD. 4.20.

## DEFINITION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The terms "indigenous peoples," "indigenous ethnic minorities," "tribal groups," and "scheduled tribes" describe social groups with a social and cultural identity distinct from the dominant society that makes them vulnerable to being disadvantaged in the development process. For the purposes of this directive, "indigenous peoples" is the term that will be used to refer to these groups.

Within their national constitutions, statutes, and relevant legislation, many of the Bank's borrower countries include specific definitional clauses and legal frameworks that provide a preliminary basis for identifying 'indigenous peoples'.

Because of the varied and changing contexts in which indigenous peoples are found, no single definition can capture their diversity. Indigenous people are commonly among the poorest segments of a population. They engage in economic activities that range from shifting agriculture in or near forests to wage labor or even small-scale market-oriented activities.

Indigenous peoples can be identified in particular geographical areas by the presence in varying degrees of the following characteristics.

- a) a close attachment to ancestral territories and to the natural resources in these areas:
- b) self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group:
- c) an indigenous language, often different from the national language:
- d) presence of customary social and political institutions: and
- e) Primarily subsistence-oriented production.

The Vedda are the present day aborigines of Sri Lanka, who lived as relict hunter-gatherers. The Veddah ancestors were once ubiquitous on the island and hence there were a large number of Veddah families.

In the Prehistory of Sri Lanka, Part II S.U. Deraniyagala (1992) states "Human remains dated to Ca. 28,000 B P constitute the earliest evidence of anatomically modern man in South Asia. Finally, three

assomblages of human skeletal material, dated radiometrically to ca. 16,000, 12,5000 and 6,500 B P, display a degree of morphological similarity that suggests a strong genetic continuum over these ten millennia, with survivals in living Vedda ethnic groups in Sri Lanka".

The above data strenthen our belief that the Veddahs of Sri Lanka are a unique tribe and not originated from the Australoid, Negroid or the Mediterranean types.

They speak a corrupt Sinhala/Veddah dialect and worship Saman Deiyyo which according to Dr. Paranavithama is said to be Pre-Buddhistic. They eat the flesh of the animals they hunt in the jungles using the bow and arrow. The length of the bow approximating to the height of a man. They gather honey from various bees. The common bee (*Apis indica*) the Rock bee. (*Apis dorsata*) and (*Apis florea*) The honey is consumed as a part of their diet and is also used to preserve the flesh of animals.

The Veddahs used the bark of the 'riti' tree to cover their nakedness, the use of skins of the beasts they killed were forbidden for this purpose.

The bark of the tree was softened by beating it.

As the subject of Veddahs will be dealt with in detail in another article of this magazine, I will now proceed to write on the other indigenous tribes in Sri Lanka. viz. the Rodiyas and the Ahukuntakayas.

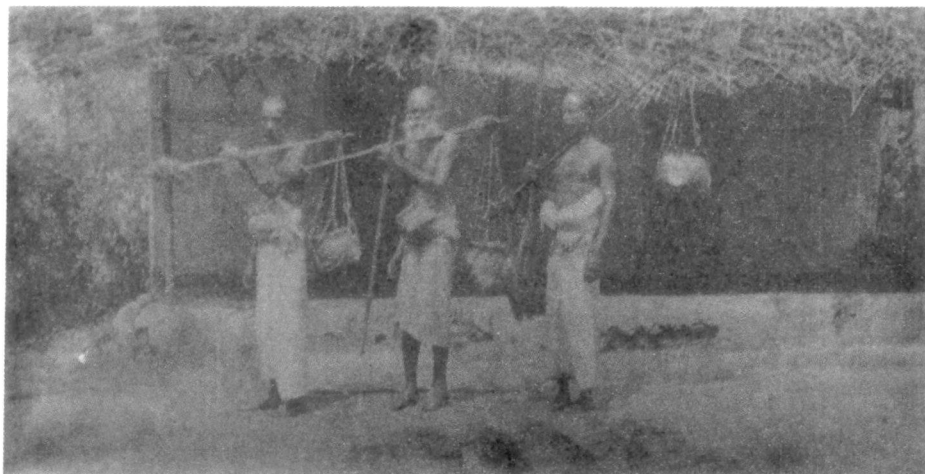
### THE RODIYAS

The Rodiyas are a tribe that was ostracized by the King over 600 years ago. As tradition has it has orginated from time of King Parakrama Bahu v (ca. A.D. 1344-1359) where his beautiful daughter Navaratne Valle

developed a taste for human flesh and thus ordered the Veddah hunter who supplies venison to the King's palace kitchen to bring human flesh. This Veddah hunter known as Dodda Veddah, when one day he could not find any venison brought the flesh of a boy he had met in the jungle, Navaratne Valli relished this meal, which resulted in her making such an order. The Veddah continued to kill children & supply the palace kitchen with human flesh. One day a barber who had lost, his only son came to the palace to complain to the King. He was given a meal at the palace, when he was about to eat it, he found a deformed knuckle, which he recognized as that of his child. He immediately left the palace spread the news that it was the king who was killing and eating the children. The King when he heard this held an enquiry & as the facts came to light, stripping his daughter Navaratne Valli, of all her ornaments drove her out with this Dodda Veddah declaring then as outcastes. The King established a decree - that all who belonged to this tribe, should not be given shelter or land & not be permitted to use water from wells, that they should beg from generation to generation and to be looked down upon by all people as outcastes. Robert Knox refers to another anecdote on Rodiyas which 13 as follows:-

Nahulu Mudiyanse, a person from an aristocratic Kandyan family who held high office at the Dalada Maligawa took a golden Buddha image and melted it down for personal use. On finding him guilty his punishment was death by drowning, or becoming members of the Rodiya community. He choose the latter & they occupied the Udugalpitiya Kuppayama near Kadugannawa.

The Rodiyas as a tribe are skilled in handicrafts such as the making of diverse kinds of musical drums, and combs of buffalo horn. They were the main suppliers of



Under the Kandyan Law men of the Rodee community were permitted to carry wares only on one side of their Bingo. (Times of Ceylon, Christmas number, 1939)

whips for the state and ropes made of hide for ensnaring elephants.

For the last few decades their numbers have not exceeded 1,500. Despite the strenuous condition of life they have maintained their integrity & lived as a small social group.

#### AHUKUNTAKAYO - GYPSIES

The Gypsies called by the Sinhalese as *Ahukuntakayo* and by the Tamils *Kuruver* are both words derived from India. In Southern India - Madure & Pandyan Cultures there is a tribe of nomadic people. They are known in India *Kuruver* or, *Kurovan* from *Kuram* - meaning palmistry and the sanskrit words *ahig* - snake charmer and *Punthika* or *tundika* meaning snarer. Their worship of goddess *Pathini* identified as *Valli* the consort of God *Skanda* supports their south Indian origins. In their language there are many words Telugu of Tamil origin. The Buddhist influence too is apparent in the customs the marriage custom of tying fingers together, and the pan on hurting on poya days are some of these.

These Gypsies of Shri Lanka are a distinct nomadic tribe which is fast disappearing due to the rapid social changes in the country, a number of families live together like one big family with the division into sects according to the occupations - viz., Snake charmers, fortune-tellers, basket makers etc., A chief is elected by common consent & he may hold office only as long as his conduct merits it. The only qualification being that they are well versed in gypsy tradition. The post is not hereditary and if he shows any signs of partiality in his judgement, he is instantly replaced.

They move from place to place in their wandering march with a straggling caravan of donkeys, snakes (cobras) dogs, hens and talipot palm leaves with which they make their make shift huts. On reaching a forest plain, they temporarily camp there put up the few "shelters" made usually of the talipot leaves, each shelter a few yards from the other. Inside this 'hut' one will find all their belongings such as gram - as food, brass vessels, kitchen utensils, bags of clothes, cobras in tattam baskets, flutes for snake charming weapons & the Javelin.

Snake charming is their chief means of livelihood and they are skilful in the art of capturing snakes. Their services are often made use of in the village to get rid of the cobras which, they (Buddhists & Hindus) do not like



A Rodee woman. (Picture by Joe Perera, Ceylon Observer, 1949)

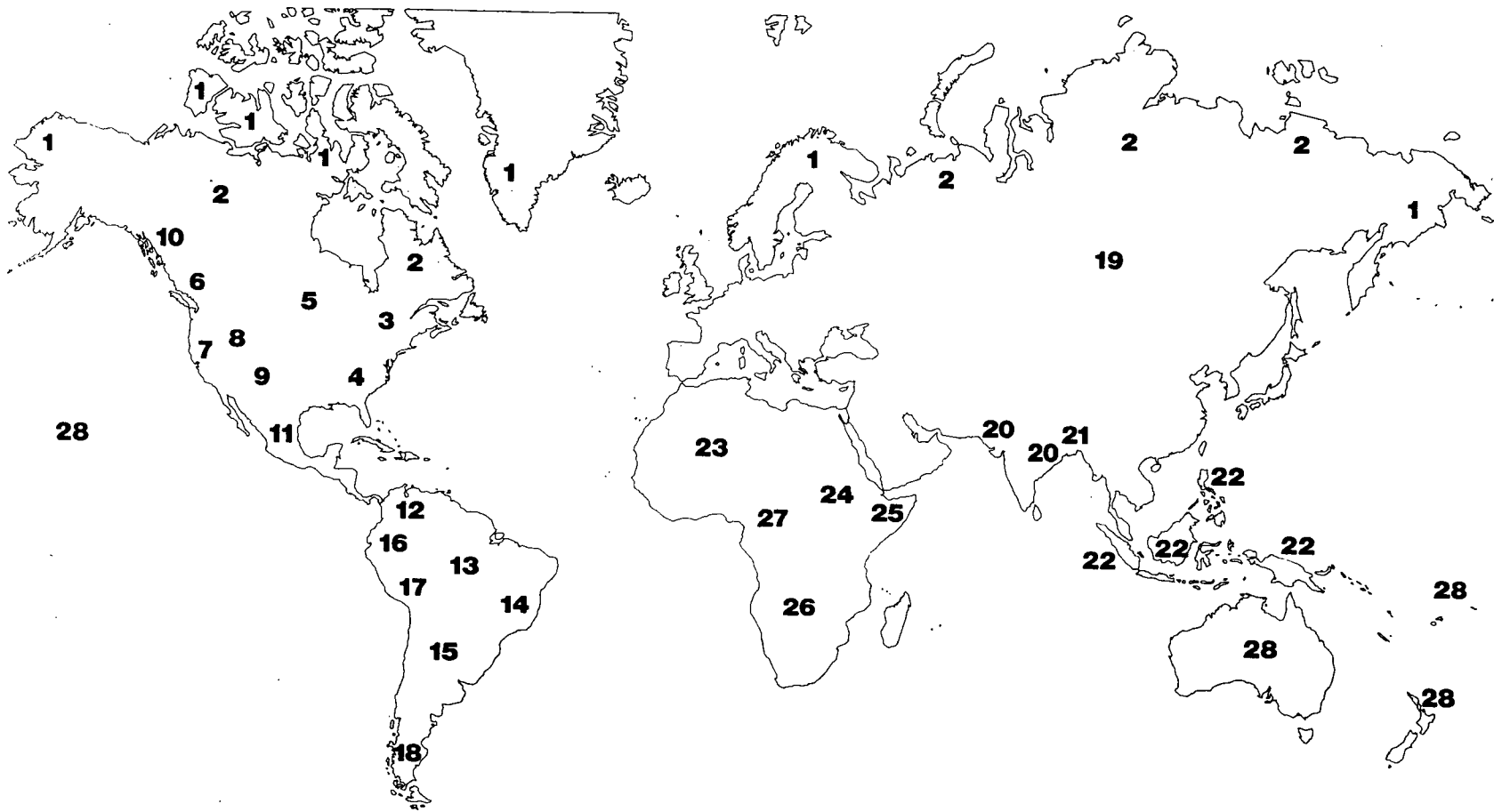
to kill. With the help of the dogs & the javelin & knife they hunt the deer, wildboar and the iguana for their food. In addition to the flesh of these animals they eat porridge, gram, such as rice mango & kurakkan. They live by the day and their philosophy is to eat drink & make merry.

The woman fold are dressed in cotton sarees and adorn the selves with jewels. The neck is bedecked with varying coloured bead chains of different sizes and lengths, with nickel bangles in their hands & ankles. Rings are worn on their noses, fingers and toes, and ear-studs on their bored ears.

The women go out in the village as "Fortune tellers" and earn money to purchase their requirements from the village boutique.

This tribe of gypsies has no charm for a settled form of living. But how long they will continue to enjoy their care free existence cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty. Due to the increase in population the growing pressure on land for permanent settlement seems to be reducing temporary camp sites which might ultimately compel their clan of indigenous people to give up their nomadic life and integrate the rest of society.

# WHERE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES LIVE



- 1. Arctic
- 2. Sub-Arctic
- 3. Eastern Woodlands
- 4. Southeast
- 5. Great Plains
- 6. North-west Plateau
- 7. California

- 8. Great Basin
- 9. Southwest
- 10. Pacific Northwest Coast
- 11. Central America
- 12. Circum-Caribbean
- 13. Amazonia
- 14. Mato Grosso

- 15. Gran Chaco
- 16. W. Andean Lowlands
- 17. Andean Highlands
- 18. Patagonia-Pampas
- 19. North and Central Asia
- 20. South Asia
- 21. Chittagong Hill Tract Peoples

- 22. South East Asia
- 23. Sahara and Sahel
- 24. Southern Sudan
- 25. The Horn and East Africa
- 26. Kalahari Desert
- 27. Ituri Forest
- 28. Australia and the Pacific

The following listing of indigenous peoples is not comprehensive, nor exclusive, but instead representative of peoples living worldwide.

### MAP KEY

1. **Arctic**  
Aleut  
Chipewyan  
Inuit  
Saami
2. **Sub-Arctic**  
Cree  
Dene  
Naskapi  
Ojibwa

### North America

3. **Eastern Woodlands**  
Algonquin  
Haudenosaunee  
(Six Nations)  
Huron  
Micmac  
Potawatomi  
Shawnee
4. **Southeast**  
Cherokee  
Chickasaw  
Creek  
Seminole
5. **Great Plains**  
Arapaho  
Cheyenne  
Pawnee  
Sioux
6. **North-west Plateau**  
Nez Perce  
Wasco  
Yakima
7. **California**  
Cahuillia  
Pomo  
Serrano
8. **Great Basin**  
Shoshone  
Ute
9. **Southwest**  
Apache  
Dine (Hopi)  
Navajo  
Zuni
10. **Pacific NW Coast**  
Bella Coola  
Chinook  
Haida  
Kwakiutl  
Salish  
Tlingit

11. **Central America**  
Bribri  
Cakchiquel  
Chol  
Chuj  
Cora  
Guaymi  
Huichol  
Ixil  
Kekchi  
Kuna  
Lacandon  
Lenca  
Maya (descendants)  
Miskito  
Nahua  
Pipile  
Quiche  
Rama  
Seri  
Sumu  
Tarahumara  
Yaqui  
Yucatec  
Zapotec

12. **Circum-Caribbean**  
Akawalo  
Bari (Motilonos)  
Choque  
Guajiro  
Karina  
Kogi  
Otomac  
Paez  
Yarawato  
Yukpa

### South America

13. **Amazonia**  
Aguaruna  
Amarakaeri  
Amuesha  
Arara  
Ashaninca  
Asurini  
Gaviao  
Kayapo  
Kreen-Akarore  
Matsigenka  
Mundurucu  
nambikwara  
Parakana  
Quichua (Oriental)  
Sanema  
Secoya  
Shipibo  
Shuar (Jivaro)  
Tukano  
Ufaina  
Waimiri-Atroari  
Waorani (Auca)  
Wayana  
Xavante

Yagua  
Yanomami

14. **Mato Grosso**  
Borboro  
Botocudo  
Ge (Central)  
Guato  
Kaduveo  
Kaingang  
Karaja  
Kayapo (Southern)  
Tupi

15. **Gran Chaco**  
Ache  
Ayoreo  
Chamacoco  
Chiriguano  
Guana  
Mataco  
Mbaya  
Toba-Maskoy

16. **W. Andean Lowlands**  
Cayapas  
Colorados

17. **Andean Highlands**  
Aymara  
Huancas  
Kolla  
Mojo  
Otavalo  
Quechua  
Salasaca  
Uros

18. **Patagonia-Pampas**  
Aracuanian  
Mapuche  
Ranquel  
Tehuelche

### Asia

19. **North and Central Asia**  
Ainu  
Hui  
Manchu  
Miao  
Mongolian  
Taiwan Aborigines  
Tibetan  
Uighur  
Yi  
Zhuang
20. **South Asia**  
Bhils  
Chenchus  
Dafflas  
Dandami  
Gadabas  
Garos  
Gond  
Hos  
Irula Kurumbas

- Juangs
  - Kadras
  - Kameng
  - Khassis
  - Khonds
  - Kolis
  - Lohit
  - Mundas
  - Naga
  - Oraons
  - Pathan
  - Santal
  - Savaras
  - Sholegas
  - Toda Kotas
  - Vedda
- 21. Chittagong Hill Tract Peoples**
- Chakma
  - Marma
  - Tripura
- 22. South East Asia**
- Chin
  - Hmong
  - Kachin
  - Karen
  - Kedang
  - Lisu
  - Semai
  - Shan
- frica**
- 23. Sahara, Sahel**
- Fulani
  - Tuareg
- 24. S. Sudan**
- Dinka
  - Hamar
  - Kawahla
  - Lotuko
  - Mondari
  - Nuba
  - Nuer
  - Rashaida
  - Shilluk
  - Zande
- 25. The Horn and East Africa**
- Barabaig
  - Eriteran
  - Massai
  - Oromo
  - Somali
  - Tigrayan
- 26. Kalahari Desert**
- San
- 27. Ituri Forest**
- Efe
  - Lese
  - Mbuti
- 28. Australia and the Pacific**
- Aboriginals
  - Arapesh
  - Asmat
  - Bangsa
  - Bontoc
  - Chamorro
  - Dani
  - Dayak
  - Hanunoo
  - Hawaiian
  - Iban
  - Ifugao
  - Kalinga
  - Kanank
  - Kayan
  - Kedang
  - Mae-Enga
  - Maori
  - Mundugumur
  - Penan
  - Rapa Nui
  - Tahitian
  - Torres Strait Islanders
  - Tsembaga

## AGENDA 21

### RECOGNISING AND STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND THEIR COMMUNITIES

#### 26.1 Basis for action

*"Indigenous people and their communities have an historical relationship with their lands and are generally descendants of the original inhabitants of such lands... Indigenous people and their communities represent a significant percentage of the global population. They have developed over many generations a holistic traditional scientific knowledge of their lands, natural resources and environment. Indigenous people and their communities shall enjoy the full measure of human rights and fundamental freedoms without hindrance or discrimination. Their ability to participate fully in sustainable development practices on their lands has tended to be limited as a result of factors of an economic, social and historical nature. In view of the interrelationship between the natural environment and its sustainable development and the cultural, social, economic and physical well-being of indigenous people, national and international efforts to implement environmentally sound and sustainable development should recognize, accommodate, promote and strengthen the role of indigenous people and their communities."*

*[Extracts from Agenda 21 as adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, the 'Earth Summit' held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992.]*

**Census of Wanniya-laeto Villages  
1983, 1984 and 1988**

Village	Year	No. of Families	No. of Persons	Average Persons/ Families
Kandeganville	1983	83	460	5.54
Karagoda	1983	15	ca. 70	ca. 4.66
Kotabakinnie	1983	9	43	4.77
Indiatta	1983	6	18	3.0
Gurukumbere	1983	46	266	5.7
Henanegalla*	1984	128	537	4.19
Kandeganville	1984	0	0	0
Kaaragoda	1984	0	0	0
Indiatta§	1984	0	0	0
Gurukumbere§	1988	37	167	4.5
Kotabakinnie	1988	6	35	5.83
Dambana¶	1988	97	489	5.04

\* Henanegalla is a relocation village within Mahaweli's System C. Kandeganville, Karagoda and other villages plus two families from Katabakinnie moved to Henanegalla.

§ Indiatta and part of Gurukumbere were moved to System B.

¶ Dambana is a village outside the national part.