

Under the Kandyan dispensation, along with the rest of the classes the Rodiyas also held lands under service tenure in return for which they rendered their services to the society and the State, the latter taking the form of the supply, mainly of whips for State occasions ropes of hides for ensnaring elephants. The total strength of the Rodiyas has more or less remained the same during the past few decades, numbering not more than 1500. They have no doubt managed to maintain their integrity as a small social entity, despite the strenuous conditions of life. It is no doubt a case of the survival of the fittest. Though there are obvious differences in physical form and appearance, in different parts of Ceylon nevertheless the Rodiyas of the whole Island form one distinct social group well knit by social and even kinship bonds. Whether in the Patanas of Uva or the salubrious air of the Kandyan upland or in the hot plains of the Wannu, the Rodiya lives an organized and integral life and as a community. This has helped them to stand four square against all the winds that blew. The social set up of the Rodiya is such that it is at the same time, both collectively cooperative and individually unitary. This feature of a more or less effective village organisation imparts to the Rodiya village a value of its own, as a surviving example of a pattern of rural life and the past which has been disintegrating and passing into the realm of forgotten thing under the impact of modern civilisation. As Nevill records, the Rodiyas of the Wannu were divided into twelve exogamous clans known by the following names:-

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| 1. Mahappola | 7. Wapolla |
| 2. Tiringa | 8. Nuwaragama |
| 3. Mitangala | 9. Mangama |
| 4. Talinna | 10. Galawela |
| 5. Napola | 11. Tamankada |
| 6. Uwe | 12. Alpaga |

Whereas exogamous clans functioned in the Wannu and still survive to tell us something of the active operation of an exogamous clan organization which prevailed when Nevill studied them sixty years ago, there has been very little of clan life among the Kandyan Rodiyas, dominated as they were by the feudal practices of the Kandyan social life. In the more remote Wannu, the Rodiyas lived for ages a life free from the urbanising influences of large towns. The clan organization which would appear to have been strong among the Wannu Rodiyas a few decades ago has all but disappeared today. Nevertheless, the Wannu Rodiya of today tells you that they still exist, though they do not function to the extent that they operated in the earlier days. They, however, assert that they do not intermarry with the Rodiyas of Uva who are considered to belong to a lower social plane. This is easily credible for the Uva Rodiyas are socially and economically worse.

The Talavitiya Rodiyas of the Province of Sabaragamuwa, who are of better type physically and socially, have had a clan organization of their own, different from that of the Wannu Rodiyas. Four clans are known to prevail among them, namely, Kalugala, Gavaragala, Angurubedda, and Lunukottuwa. There are indications of a fuller clan life functioning in the past which does not obtain

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today. Janaratna Villiya's father was of Kalugala clan and his mother of Gavaragala clan, which shows that were exogamous. The two clans are considered superior.

Apart however from the traditional differences of clans, which are today more of a survival value than of functional value, what strikes you are the differences of physical forms and semantic characters which you find among the residents in almost every Rodiya settlement. Practically everyone who has written about the Rodiya observes that the men are "strong and robust and they look very healthy" and that



the woman "well made and of a fair complexion, with beautiful, dark and expressive eyes. In fact, they are considered handsome." I have often been asked how the distinctive light brown skin colour of certain of the Rodiyas combined with a refined and well proportioned cast of features, presenting in men types of robust manhood, and of grace and comeliness in women, could be accounted for among people who are reckoned as beyond the pace of Sinhalese society. The generalization regarding their physical form cannot be too literally interpreted, for as among all classes, men and women are of all sorts, though in referring to the Rodiyas the attractiveness of women has come to be rather emphasized as a strange phenomenon in a class of people socially despised. Almost in every Rodiya village could be seen men and women of varying shades of colour, with variations in facial features, the dark coloured strain even preponderating. This contrast in physical form is particularly noticeable round about the Kandyan district which has been explained as due to the blending of types consequent on the Kandyan mode of punishing social and political offenders by banishing them from the social fold and turning them over to the Rodiya. The offspring of such mixed blood would thus seem to account for differences in physical types. Though from the point of view of appearance the Rodiya may have benefited by the operation of the Kandyan penal customs, socially it has degraded the condition of the Rodiya in the estimation of society.

As a form of address, an elderly Rodiya would like to be addressed as Huluvaliya - whether he is the recognized headman of the village or not. For official purposes, the Huluvaliya today is the Rodiya headman of the village appointed as such under orders of Government. Obviously a traditional institution, the Huluvaliya being the traditional tribal chief, when the Rodiya was a tribe of hunters that they were in the very distant past, the word is presumably derived from "hula", a torch; huluvaliya thus meaning the "torch bearer" - the man who leads by light of his torch. The office of Huluvaliya as a rule runs in the same family. This may best be illustrated from what has been obtaining at the

Kuragandeniya Kuppayama in Hurikaduwa Madige, in the district of Kandy. Ausada the present Huluvaliya tells you that this settlement existed from the time of King Raja Sinha (1747-82). Madutilaka Huluvaliya was his great grandfather. Kadisaraya, the brother of Madutilakaya, was the next to hold the post. His son, Ridi villiya, succeeded him. After him, Ride Villiya's wife's brother, Dantaraya Villiya became the Huluvaliya, who was succeeded by his son the present Huluvaliya. The present population of the settlement consists of the Huluvaliya and his wife who have no children, and his brothers, sisters, and their issues. The Huluvaliya of this village gets a princely salary of Rs. 64.40 cents a month including dearness allowance. Huluvaliyas are not all paid at the same rate, some getting an allowance of Rs. 15 a year, as Huluvaliya Vijaya of Kalamadugastanne Kuppayama in Uva gets, the post being esteemed more for the authority attached to it than for the salary. The wife of a Huluvaliya assumes the honorary title of Huluvalini. The Huluvaliya is responsible for the peace of the settlement. He enquires into and 'settles minor disputes or quarrels among the residents, matters of a more serious nature, whether civil or criminal being taken cognisance of by the Village Headman, to whom the Huluvaliya reports such matters for disposal according to the administrative procedure or the law of the land. At a Rodiya village, the residents show marked regard for the Huluvaliya-which was clearly seen on one of my visits to the village of Talapitiya in Mawanella, when as the Huluvaliya was returning from his morning rounds, all the men and women get up and kept standing until he sat.

Rodiya villages go by the name of kuppayamas. The word Kuppayama has conjured up squalor and squalid surroundings which is scarcely true of Rodiya villages. It does not appear to have been true of the Rodiya villages in the past either. Simon Casie Chetty who was among the earliest to write on the Rodiyas, has remarked on their huts "exhibiting a neat appearance, having often small plots of ground planted with betel vines and plantain trees attached to them". This description is as good today as when Casie Chetty wrote about 100 years ago. Kuppayama - a term derived from the Tamil word Kuppa for dirt - is repugnant to Rodiya sentiment. They call their village a wadiya, a general term denoting a group of houses. In their own dialect the word for house is dumana-possibly traceable to the term dum, which I find is the word in Monkhmer and Munda group of languages for a house.

They do not have the ordinary ge-names, as is customary with the Sinhalese in general. Instead however of the ge-name, at certain of the villages, as at Kurugandeniya, families are named after the land on which their houses stand - such as, Aralugaha gedera and Damatagaha gedera. The same tendency was also observed at the Udugalpitiya village where houses are known by imposing names such as Guru Katta gedera, Pankahamulla vatte gedera and Varapattange gedera etc., members of the family taking this house name.

In the Kandyan days the dress of the women consisted only of a cloth wound round the waist and reaching down

their feet, the upper part of the body being innocent of any covering. Photographs of Rodiya women thus attired can still be seen displayed for sale at the shop windows in Colombo. But this is no longer true. Even when Nevill wrote (1988) the dress was undergoing modification, remarking as he did, that "at the present day they have made an addition to the covering of their bodies, by tying two ends of a handsome kerchief round the neck and tucking the other two ends into the waist". This mode of covering the breasts can rarely be seen today for the dress of the women has vastly changed, the women invariably wearing the flowered 'citha' (chintz cloth) or a bright-coloured 'Kambaya', as the garment of bright striped pattern is called, worn round the waist, and extending to the ankles. The dress of the upper part of the body is a jacket (hette) worn over the underwear of bodies (bodiya).

Rodiya jewellery varies with the economic condition. In the Kandyan Rodiya village of Kuragadeniya in Hurikaduwa Madige, the women wear broad silver bangles of Kandyan pattern, ridged or flat. Thinner kinds of bangles are more common elsewhere. Girls wear the 'Gypsy' pattern silver rings in the ears and women wear the 'arungula' as the small straight rod of gold with a small rounded knob at each end is called, or small fancy ornaments set with imitation stones.

There is nothing peculiar in the matter of the dress of men, except that in the Kandyan days the men had no covering for their heads. Both men and women grow their hair to its full length, and do not cut it short, as is the practice with kinnaraya men. On the right arm, or hanging from the neck, are work amulets of 'yantraya', or protective magical charms, on copper foil, rolled, and encased in a gilded tube, called the 'sure'. Rodiya children wear the 'panchayudhaya', the protective amulet of silver, circular in shape, of the size of a cent piece, suspended from the neck by a chain or string. The amulet is of the type commonly worn by Sinhalese children in the rural areas of the Island, bearing symbolic emblems in belief, of the five weapons, 'chakra' or the discus, 'trisule' or the trident, 'kaduwa' or the sword, 'hak-gadiya' or the conch, and 'dunna' or the bow and arrow.

An investigation into the system of kinship among the Rodiyas reveals that the prevailing system is classificatory as generally among the Sinhalese. Though the Rodiyas in their daily life use all the terms of kinship in vogue among the Sinhalese, they have special terms in their own dialect for certain relationships.

Under the category of "straight relationship", father is 'piya' or 'tatta' ; and in the Kandyan districts, appocci. "Father in their own dialect is "hidulu gava". Father's elder brothers are addressed as mahappa, loku appa, loku tatta or loku appocci; and the younger brothers as bappa and bappocci or hintatta. The grandfather is styled mutta, siya or atta, and by the appellation "ilayak hidulu gava" in the Rodiya dialect.

Mother is "Mava" or amma; and "hidulu gavi" in their dialect. The mother's elder sisters are loku amma or great mother, and younger sisters, balamma, or punciamma, small mother. The father's elder brother's wife is also loku amma and his younger brother's wife punciamma or hin-



amma. The grandmother is 'acci' or 'atta' or kiri amma and "ilayak hidulu gavi" in their dialect.

The elder brother is called ayiya, and the younger brother malli. The Rodiya equivalent for brother, both elder and younger, is "eka ango gadiya". The elder sister is akka and the younger sister is nangi, and its parallel Rodiya form is "eka ange gadi". Puta is son and its Rodiya equivalent is "gadi bilinda". In like manner daughter is duva, or "gadi bilinda".

In the category of cross relationships or 'avassa nayo', the Rodiyas have mama for uncle, and nanda for aunt. Bana is sister's son, women's brother's son, or daughter's husband. The term leli indicates a man's sister's daughter, woman's brother's daughter or son's wife. The basis underlying the system of cross relationships is that a man marries his cross-cousin; i.e. the mother's brother's daughter or father's sister's daughter. Such a system makes the maternal uncle the father-in-law, and the paternal aunt, the mother-in-law. This form of marriage is highly popular and much encouraged by the Rodiyas.

Under kinship by marriage they have purusaya, miniha, or gadiya in their own dialect to denote husband; and gani or gadi kevenni for wife.

The respect and regard paid to the elder by the younger folk, as traditionally enjoined by the Sinhalese society, is a healthy factor towards the maintenance of the social order and harmony in the family life of the Rodiyas.

On ceremonial occasions kinship operates in the same manner as with the other Sinhalese though in a limited field. The maternal uncle plays a prominent part at the wedding ceremony; he performs the poruva ceremony. At a funeral the closely knit kinsmen or blood relations play the most important part in the funeral rites.

Courtesy : Cultural Anthropology of Rodiyas