

An anthropological study of adverse behaviour against development: with special reference to alcohol and narcotic-drug use among Veddas at Henanigala and Dambana in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lankan Indigenous people called Veddas are in transition for a long period. As a result, they face many issues that adversely affect their development as well. Consumption of alcohol and narcotic-drugs have become major issues in these communities. The main objective of this research is to study the addiction of alcohols and narcotic-drugs observed in Vedda community in historical and cultural perspectives. This research was conducted, adopting both qualitative and quantitative methods; participant observation, interview method, key informant interview method and focus group discussions were the key methods of collecting data. Out of 758 families in Henanigala and 350 families in Dambana, hundred and twenty (120) individuals were considered for the data collection. Dambana is the Vedda habitat where they have been living since the ancient past. In 1983, due to the Accelerated Mahaweli Project, displaced Vedda people who lived in Kandegamwila (close to Dambana area) were resettled in Henanigala. Respondents stated that before 1961, use of alcohol and narcotic-drugs was not a socio-cultural habit that existed among them. However, they had used to drink toddy as a traditional drink. Some ancient Vedda folk seldom had brewed water, collected inside tree hollows and cavities, which activates a feeling of intoxication. Even Veddas who live in this area today have had such experiences. However, most of the Vedda folks have got used to consume alcohol and narcotic-drugs very recently. They have access to illegal alcohol from the nearest villages of Kalegama, Anchchikade and within the forest of Madura Oya for a cheap price. Also, licensed alcohol is available in the liquor shops at Sandunpura, Giradurukotte and Dehiattakandiya. Further, intoxication-tablets also prevail in the vicinity. Children of Veddas, who are around fifteen years old, are considerably addicted to such type of tablets. Children are being adversely influenced by their drug-addicted elders. Farming activities of Vedda folks have been severely affected due to serious addictions to alcohol. Due to alcohol consumption Vedda people tend to be violent, and it leads to a different kind of harassments against the people of the community. Accordingly, numerous social problems like family violence, poverty, illiteracy, physical injuries and various legal issues it can be observed linked with their alcohol and narcotic-drug addiction. This new trend has devastated Vedda people's usual lifestyle and they have spread these adverse habits into their society. This situation puts their lives in chaos. Therefore, more effective strategies should be implemented to safeguard these people from unhealthy and harmful habits that ruins their tradition, image and identity.

Keywords: *alcohol, narcotic-drugs, intoxication, Vedda community, adverse behaviour*

1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional indigenous community Veddas has faced the impact of globalization and Neoliberalism. As a result of that, they have embraced everything without considering their bad effects. Poor education, lack of economic well-being and not receiving proper guidance for cultural changes had become effective factors for this and that governs this ignorance.

People all over the world become closer than ever before with the influence of globalization. International travel and communication have become very easy and common. As a result, the present era is known as the era of globalization. This phenomenon has a wide influence on society. It brings both opportunities and disadvantages to the countries and communities.

Globalization has become a fashionable concept these days, and it is on everybody's lips. Neo-liberalism is a powerful political and economic dogma under globalization. As an ideology, it promotes forceful defence of private property, competitive markets and 'individual freedom', in addition to an all-round attack against state intervention (Harvey, 2005).

The modern concept of globalization promotes modern capitalist culture. Nonetheless, it has forgotten to ensure opportunities of all, since it focuses on economic aspects. Furthermore, the world is facing many contradictions because of the globalization. However, the rise of neoliberal philosophy has made the state a receding player in the process of sustainable development.

Neo-liberalism is a set of economic policies that have become widespread during the last 25 years or so. Although the word is rarely heard in the United States, you can see the effects of neo-liberalism here as the rich grow richer and the poor grow poorer (Martinez & Garcia, 2019).

It is well known that the problems faced by the indigenous peoples are by and large universal. They suffer from the consequences of historic injustice, including colonization, dispossession of the lands, territories and resources, oppression and discrimination, as well as lack of control over their ways of life. Their right to development has been largely denied by colonial and modern states in the pursuit of economic growth. As a consequence, indigenous peoples often lose out to more powerful actors, becoming one of the most impoverished groups in the country (UN, 2010).

After 1977, due to the Accelerated Mahaweli Project, most of the displaced Vedda people were resettled in unfamiliar geographical areas in the country. Moreover, their subsistence patterns and cultural elements drastically changed with the influence of the so-called development. Accordingly, they have isolated in the culture with the influence of globalization and neoliberalism.

Veddas are known as an indigenous community in Sri Lanka. They are known by different names such as dwellers, forest people, tribal people, Adivasi, Wannilaaetto, Veddas, and the more common term Veddas. There is a small population of Veddas in Sri Lanka and still they attempt to maintain their traditional culture with many difficulties. There are three types of Veddas in Sri Lanka; Rock dwelling Veddas, Village Veddas and Coastal Veddas. However, in the present day, there are only two types of them live in the country; Village Veddas and Coastal Veddas. Furthermore, there are many places in the country named with the term 'Vedda'. For instance, according to the folklore 'Sabara' in the name Sabaragamuwa is a synonym for Veddas. Moreover, there are many places such as Vedi Kanda (Vedda Mountain), Vedda ela (Vedda Canal) are Vedda gala (Vedda Rock) in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, these provide evidence for their existence in the country.

According to Early Man and the Rise of Civilisation in Sri Lanka: the Archaeological Evidence by S. U. Deraniyagala, by about 125,000 BP it is certain that there were prehistoric settlements in Sri Lanka. From as early as 18,000 BC a genetic continuum is shown with present-day Veddas.

According to the genesis myth of the Sinhala "race"/people, recorded in the ancient chronicle of the Sinhalese royalty, the Mahavamsa, the Pulindas also called Veddas are descended from Prince Vijaya (6th-5th century BC), the founding father of the Sinhalese nation, through Kuveni, a woman of the Yakkha clan whom he had espoused. The Mahavamsa relates that following the repudiation of Kuveni by Vijaya, in favour of a "Kshatriya" princess from the "Pandyas" country, their two children, a boy and a girl, departed to the region of "Samanakuta" (Adam's Peak in the

Ratnapura District), where they multiplied, and gave rise to the Veddhas. Anthropologists such as the Seligmann's (The Veddhas 1911) believe the Veddhas to be identical with the "Yakkhas" of yore.

Veddhas are also mentioned in Robert Knox's history of his captivity by the King of Kandy in the 17th century. Knox described them as "wild men," but also said there was a "tamer sort," and that the latter sometimes served in the king's army (Lakpura, 2019).

Studies on the contemporary status of Veddhas in the country reveal that they have been vastly influenced by external factors. The Veddhas have been changing for a long period with the influence of new socio-cultural factors. As a result, they face many problems and those issues adversely affect to their development as well. Use of alcohol and narcotic-drugs has become one of the major issues among them. This research was carried out based on this serious issue.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research is to study the addiction of alcohol and narcotic-drugs in Vedda community in historical and cultural perspectives. Moreover, it focuses on Globalization, Neo-liberalism, and their impacts on the Veddhas in the country. In this study, the researchers have aimed to determine the purposes of Veddhas using alcohol and narcotic-drugs. Moreover, it was expected to study the habits and subjective and objective responses to alcohol in Vedda community. Another objective was to identify the possible reasons that affect their addictions to alcohol and narcotic drugs. Also, it was aimed to discover the reasons for the abundance of licensed alcohol and illegal alcohol and narcotic-drugs among Veddhas. Especially it was expected to study the use of alcohol and narcotic-drugs and its effect on the children in this community. Another main objective of this study was to examine the factors that have increased the use of alcohol and narcotic-drug and their effects on the individual, the family and the society. Finally, this research intends to support specific policy projects to reduce the use of alcohol and narcotic-drug use among Veddhas.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out by a research team during December 2018. It was conducted by adopting qualitative and quantitative methods. Participant observation, interview method and focus group discussions were the key methods of collecting data. Out of 758 families in Henanigala and 350 families in Dambana, hundred and twenty (120) individuals were interviewed and observed in the data collection. Out of the above-mentioned methods, focus group discussions were given a significant place, and they were conducted as part of a study of alcohol and drug use among Veddhas at Henanigala and Dabana in Sri Lanka. It was a very effective method to study narcotic-drugs and alcohol problems among Vedda people in Henanigala and Dambana. Quantitative data for this research was provided by Gramaniladari officer (headman of the village) of the village and Forest Officers and Civil Security Officers of the area. A community-based survey was conducted using a structured interview schedule. Public places like small boutiques, the village lake, canals, paddy fields, chenas or places where they carry out slash and burn cultivation were selected for these community-based surveys. During this survey, it was found that a considerable number of people are severely addicted to narcotic-drugs and alcohol. These persons were the target groups to apply the participant observation method for an in-depth study on the use of narcotic-drugs and alcoholism in Veddhas community. Researchers imitated and pretended to be alcoholics while being engaged in the participant observation method to have a grasp of more confidential and personal matters in regarding the present problem.

Often described as an immersion in a culture, participant observation is the principal research methods in cultural anthropology (Anthropology, 2019).

The study was conducted under the guidance and supervision of a renowned and experienced anthropologist and researcher called Prof. Yasanjali Devika Jayatileke who had studied on Vedda community in Sri Lanka for her PhD research. She served as the principal researcher of this research. Her previous experiences regarding the use of narcotic drugs and alcohol in the Vedda community contributed immensely to study their socio-cultural, economic and mental conditions that affect their adverse behaviour. It was an additional support for the understanding of the background of the research. Moreover, this knowledge was very useful in the research field for a deep understanding about this issue.

Interview method was used as the next data-gathering technique. Participants were carefully selected, including both the youngest and oldest participants who lived in Henanigala Village. Some interviews were conducted in traditional Vedda (Indigenous) language with the assistance of a villager named Heenbanda, one of the persons from Veddas Community (Indigenous person) in Henanigala, living there since 1983. Furthermore, the traditional Vedda language knowledge given by Prof. Yasanjali Devika Jayatilleka was very helpful to communicate in the research field. The topics of the interview schedule targeted the use of narcotic-drug and alcohol in their community before significant interaction with the mainstream of the society, how new trends have distorted their previous lifestyle and why did they have embraced these adverse and unhealthy behaviours. Moreover, the interview schedule discovered how they receive narcotic-narcotic-drugs, illegal and legalize alcohol. Suggestions to remedy this adverse behaviour were also focused during the interview. Data was mainly recorded manually. Also, camcorders and sound recorders were used for recording data. Recorded answers to all questions were summarized manually and computerized. Collected data were analyzed using narrative analysis and its focused experiences shared by people to answer the research problem.

4. RESULTS

Respondents stated that before 1961, use of alcohol and narcotic-drugs were not a socio-cultural habit among them. However, they had used to drink toddy since times as far as they can remember. Drinking toddy is a common practice in almost every rural village in Sri Lanka. According to respondents drinking toddy in the past was not a problem for their community. One folk belief among Vedda people describes the beginning of the use alcohol in this community. In the past some Vedda folk have had water collected in tree hollows and cavities. Ancient Veddas were intoxicated by this brewed water. Even today, some Veddas who live in this area have had the same experience. It has never been a big problem at that time since it was very infrequent. After 1977, due to the Accelerated Mahaweli Project, Vedda people those who lived in Kandegamwila – close to Dambana area – were displaced, and they were resettled in Henanigala. This resettlement had become one of the major reasons for the sudden changes in their community. New socio-cultural elements of cultural contact and diffusion have influenced them. Also, these changes have altered their previous lifestyle. In present, they have embraced reckless practices of the mainstream society. Most of the Veddas are used to consume alcohol and narcotic-drugs nowadays. Due to alcohol consumption Vedda people tend to be violent, which leads to different kinds of harassments against their people of the community.

The related diagrams of the topic ‘alcohol and drug use among Veddas at Henanigala and Dambana in Sri Lanka’ are as follows.

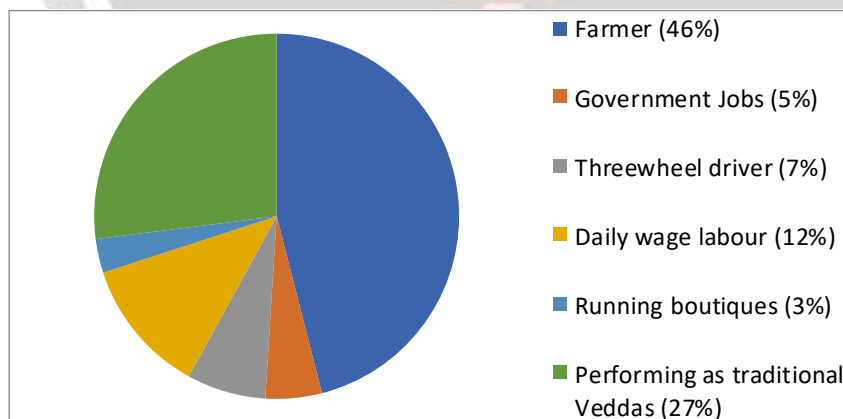


Figure -1: No of respondents in the study area.

Accordingly, a hundred respondents from Henanigala and twenty respondents from Dambana were interviewed.

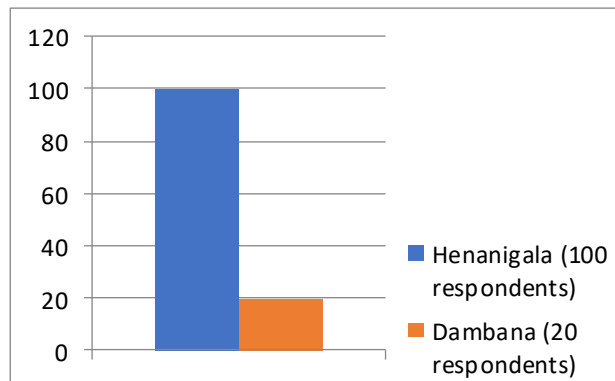


Figure-2: Occupations of the targeted population in Veddas community

Figure-2 points out the occupations which are exist in the Veddas community of Henanigala and Dambana. The diagram shows that the highest rate of 46% of the population were farmers and the lowest 3% was earning their daily income through small boutiques. The second-largest percentage rate, 27% per cent of the population in the study area were found to be running small boutiques as their daily income.

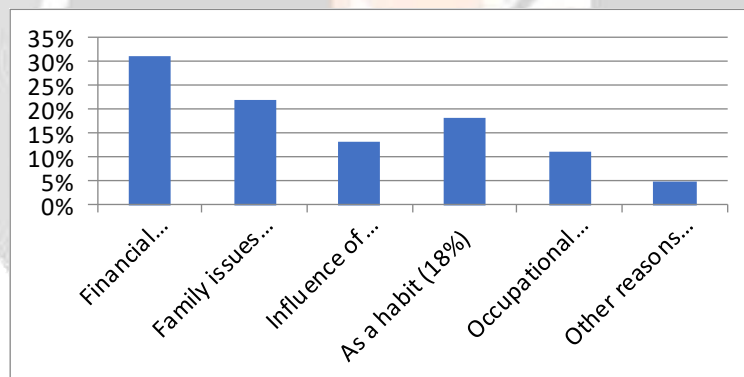


Figure-3: The reasons for using alcohol and drugs

The diagram shows that the majority of people, which is 31% as a percentage, use alcohol and narcotic-drugs due to financial problems. Family problems have also become a major reason for this adverse behaviour. The lowest rate of 5% of the population use alcohol and drug due to other reasons like enjoyment, and 13% per cent of respondents use alcohol and drug due to various problems in their occupations.

4.1. Parental influence on the use of narcotic-drugs and alcoholism

Parents of a family play a vital role in moulding the personality of children in every society. Often, parents’ influence decides the positive or negative behaviour of children. It has been tremendously effective in the Vedda community, due to the strong relationship between parents and children.

According to the respondents, the children of alcoholics and drug users tend to addict to alcohol and narcotic drugs. As they state, children always see how their fathers use narcotic-drugs and alcohol. Disapproval of alcohol and narcotic-drug use makes a child initiate addiction. According to the findings, most of the children who use alcohol and narcotic-drugs have been influenced by their fathers. During the research, a strong relationship between parental care, alcohol and narcotic-drugs use was found. Moreover, lower education levels of parents have also been

influenced. Parents who use alcohol and drug without concerns of their children's psychological stage unconsciously give them easy access to alcohol and other narcotic drugs. Respondents stated that parents of alcohol and drug-addicted children are less likely to oppose their children's habits or practices of using alcohol and narcotic-drugs. The influence of brothers and other siblings is also another factor that encourages this behaviour. Most of the times, the children have brothers and siblings addicted to use alcohol and narcotic-drugs. In Vedda community, children have freedom since their parents struggle for daily chores. There are only two or three sections in most of the houses of these people. Some respondents have stated that young children leave their houses every night due to their parents' sex life and lack of space. As a result, they sleep in the verandas of boutiques and on the lake dam. Exposure to the corrupted society has become another major reason for these socially disapproved behaviours. Accordingly, parental attitudes and behaviour have strongly influenced the use of alcohol and narcotic-drugs in Vedda community.

4.2. Peer group influence

Almost every person in the society has friends. The peer groups play a vital role in changing the person's behaviour. Peer group influence has become a major factor that affects the use of alcohol and narcotic-drugs in Vedda community too. As mentioned by some respondents, they have initiated using alcohol and narcotic-drugs due to influence of their peer groups. Generally, they use alcohol and narcotic-drugs with their friends. Respondents stated that sometimes they had used alcohol and narcotic-drugs to reserve their place among friends. Some respondents described how their friends pressurized them to drink alcohol and use narcotic-drugs. Some persons had started drinking alcohol during the school time as a leisure time activity. Even today, it is observed that the use of alcohol and narcotic-drugs is a group activity in this community. There have been some persons who have used only alcohol in the functions like birthday parties, puberty functions and weddings, due to the pressure from their friends.

School children have also got used to have alcohol and intoxicative tablets because of the weakness of school management. Further, due to drop out from schools and alternative lifestyles like engaging in jobs from their childhood also tend to addict alcoholism. In Veddas community fishing has become a very common livelihood. Usually, they perform fishing in Henanigala Lake. The children who are around 15 years old also engage in this activity. Associating with peer groups and outsiders engaged in this occupation is a reason for the exposure to alcohol and narcotic drugs. Furthermore, teenagers also go to Colombo and nearby places for working as daily-wage-labourers, which is also a direct reason for this adverse behaviour.

The findings of this study reflect the peer group influence on the use of alcohol and drug among Veddas. Especially, many persons have started that it is a result of the influence of their friends in their school time. Less attention on the attitude development of students is also a factor that leads to this adverse behaviour. In the rural school system of Vedda people, there are no successful programs to develop students' awareness about the harmful aspects of using alcohol and narcotic-drugs. Respondents stated that teachers' deep involvement in students' affairs can play a vital role in solving this issue. Not having access to secondary school education for most of the students is a major reason for this issue. Many students who have dropped out of schools state that teachers do not pay attention to these students in schools since they belong to the Vedda community. As a result, many students have given up hopes to have proper education. Therefore, attitudinal development of teachers is essential to enhance their commitment to duties. The education system that exists in these areas tends to give unnecessary free-times for the children, and as a result, they attempt to use drink alcohol in the school premises. As mentioned by respondents, students have become a target of many illegal alcohol and narcotic-drug dealers. Usually, the propaganda for popularizing these narcotic-drugs is carried out by a student or few of them who are seriously addicted to these narcotic-drugs.

Moreover, the playgrounds of the village are functioning as places for spreading alcohol and narcotic-drugs among students. Both peer groups and adults use for this adverse behaviour in these places. Most of the three-wheeler drivers of the village are selling illegal alcohol and narcotic-drugs in these areas for a cheap price. Most of the children and adults buy them thereby collecting money from colleagues. Accordingly, both children and adults had been endangered by this impact.

4.3. Socio-economic background of Veddas that leads to the use of alcohol and narcotic-drugs

Veddas, who live in Dambana and Henanigala have their economic hardships, which are barriers to the development of the area and the country. According to them, they have been resettled in an unfamiliar geographical area. As a result, the people from both areas are facing numerous socio-economic issues. Most of the respondents have stated

that they are frustrated by the new social and economic pattern, for their traditional pattern of living has been drastically changed. However, the condition of Dambana is different compared to Henanigala; the Veddas of Dambana have been able to maintain their traditional way of living based on tourism.

Nevertheless, there are many Veddas who still maintain their indigenous cultural traditions, like wearing sarongs and using the axe. Moreover, they grow long hair and beard like their ancestors. There is a folk museum of Veddas in Dambana. They perform their traditional rituals near these premises merely for the economic purposes. These cultural components lead them to have both local and foreign attraction towards their culture. However, nowadays they are unable to practice their traditional hunting as Veddas are prohibited to enter the Madura Oya National forest by the Wildlife Department of the country. Many Veddas had been arrested by officers of the Wildlife Department for trespassing on the forest. Accordingly, their forest-dwelling lifestyle had been interrupted due to the government's intervention. Veddas had practised slash and burn cultivation while they were living in the forest, but after they were resettled in Henanigala, they have been forcefully pushed into the paddy cultivation. As a result of the rapid changes, Henanigala Veddas had given up their usual lifestyle. Studies on Veddas reveal that although they have adopted some features of modern social and economic structures, still they prefer to live with the indigenous world view. They believe that the forest and natural resources are their ancestral heritages. However, as they always violate the existing law especially by violating the Wildlife Act, they have to either pay a fine, by mortgaging their goods and paddy lands, or get arrested. These people always suffer from economic hardships since they have no proper income. According to them these frustrations also lead them to use alcohol and narcotic-drugs as a short-term relaxation.

5. CONCLUSION

Use of alcohol and narcotic-drugs has become a critical issue in every society. Almost every person in the society has experienced the harmful effects of this alcohol and drug use. It is difficult to estimate the individual, social, economic and health effects of alcohol and drug use. These factors are completely valid when it comes to Vedda community as well. It has been collapsed - in different ways – with the influence of this adverse behaviour. Young people affected by this menace have become a serious problem to this community and the society. It has endangered the future of this community as a traditional tribal group. Indigenous people are considered as a national symbol of a nation. In Sri Lanka Veddas have this traditional and cultural identity. Many valuable elements of their intangible cultural heritage have been endangered due to the negative influence of globalization and neoliberalism such as Alcohol and narcotic-drugs. Before 1961, use of alcohol and narcotic-drugs has not been a socio-cultural habit among Veddas. Even if they had used to drink toddy, it was not that problem in their traditional life. Initiating Accelerated Mahaweli Project and the influence of globalization and neoliberalism have been prominent reasons behind the drastic changes of Vedda lives. Today, the use of alcohol and narcotic-drug has become a daily habit of many Veddas. The availability of numerous avenues to access legal alcohol and illegal intoxicants made their lives chaos. Poor education status of parents, unsuccessful farming activities and being isolated between modern and traditional cultures were identified as major circumstances behind this type of adverse behaviours. Because of using narcotic-drugs and alcohol, Vedda people tend to be more violent and harass the people of their community. Accordingly, it is observed that social problems like family violence, poverty, illiteracy, physical injuries and various legal issues ultimately result in alcohol and drug use. It has directly influenced the collapse of their usual lifestyle, and as a result, they embrace these scandalous practices from the mainstream society. This situation interrupts their traditional and peaceful lifestyle. Therefore, more effective strategies, policies and plans should be implemented to safeguard these people from these negative habits that ruin their tradition, image and identity.

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