

## **Changing Patterns of Puberty Customs of Sri Lankan Indigenous People: as Evident among the Yakkure Indigenous People Living in Polonnaruwa District, Sri Lanka**

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Puberty is a key process of human development into adulthood, involving the most rapid physical growth the human undergoes except for prenatal and neonatal growth. Most of the cultures possess customs and practices to mark this life-transforming event. According to the literature, the culture of the Sri Lankan indigenous people: The Veddas, had possessed specific puberty customs. During past hundreds of years, their whole cultural system has undergone intensive changes so the puberty practices. One of the indigenous communities that now have become a trans-community is Yakkure, situated in the Polonnaruwa District. Traditional dwellers of Yakkure relocated into the present habitat since Parana Yakkure which was affected by the Mahaweli development project. The present study was aimed to study the changing patterns of puberty customs of Yakkure people. Data collection was done through interviews and life histories. Data saturation was reached after 15 interviews conducted with adult females selected through purposive sampling method. Three stages of indigenous people's lifestyle were identified: cave dwelling (hunting and gathering), nomad (Chena cultivation) and domestic (paddy cultivation). Puberty customs have formed and changed as an adaptation to these lifestyles. Merging with the main society and diffusion of cultural traits have directly caused the intensive changes of puberty practices. Separation of the girl in a hut called *Kili Pela* was a residual of their nomadic life style. Yakkure people have practiced this custom before they were relocated into their present habitat. This hut had been made with the roof covered by *Illuk* leaves and walls made of wattle and mud. At present girls allows staying inside the house and the majority are not aware of the use of *Kili Pela*. Corresponding to the Sinhalese, astrologer has become most influenced person throughout the custom. As a result of diffusion adorning charmed thread around girls' neck (similar to the *pariththa* thread), dressing her in beautiful frocks, performing *Kulla Damime* custom (custom performed using winnowing fan), lighting an oil lamp, looking at her face through a mirror or a water basin, serving sweets etc. are practiced. This community's culture is on the edge of disappearing. Further studies focusing on absorbing remaining cultural aspects are urgent than ever.

**Keywords:** *Assimilation, Cultural Change, Kili Pela, Vedda*

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