

Rodiya people and their Social Position in past and present Time (with reference to Parameegama and Nilmalpothagama in Badulla District)

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ABSTRACT

There are various ethnic groups living in Sri Lanka since ancient time. The primitive types of ethnic groups are the Vaddhas, Rodiyas, Gypsies and Kinnarayas. Most of these groups have been vanishing due to development of the society. The Rodiya people also have been vanishing or mixed with other people in Sri Lanka and we cannot find them in the country where they lived. But they were spread throughout the country in Kandyan period according to historical sources. The Rodiya people are a caste who lived in Sri Lanka and they are considered as a lowest caste in caste system in Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese think that they are unclean people. So they are ill treated by other people in Sri Lanka. They live in small villages or hamlets away from the roads. This study examines the social position of Rodiya people in the past and present, who are the Rodiyas and are they a distinct ethnic group, how they became be outcastes and what changes have occurred of Rodiya people due to the changes of society. Two villages from Badulla district called Parameegama in Bandarawela and Nilmalpothagama in Haliela were selected as a case study.

There are several legends about the origin of the Rodi: according to Ragavan the Rodi people originated from persons who suffered from leprosy and they were lived in forest by eating roots and leaves of trees and strings. They were ill-treated by high caste people in Kandyan period, the Rodi men have no covering for their heads and the women for the upper parts of their body, have a gaudy handkerchief gracefully tied round them.

According to this study it can be concluded that the Rodiya people is a caste and this primitive group has been living since ancient time in Sri Lanka. And they have confined to several villages at present time. But they were spread throughout the country during the Kandyan period. Now days they have changed due to the modern changes in the society. They did begging for their living in ancient times but they are now educated under the free education system in Sri Lanka and they do government and private sector jobs and do self-employment like business, dairy farming as well. Their social position also has changed. They can join any religious group and they have married with high caste people. Many Rodiya people have joined the community society and work actively. So in the future we may not be able to find Rodiya people as a separate caste or group in Sri Lanka with changes occurring in the society and within the Rodiya peoples community.