

## **From forest to polity: *Veddas* as chieftains in medieval Sri Lanka**

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The *Veddas* have been known as a relic population of hunter-gathers in Sri Lanka. They have always been referred to as a less-cultured primitive community and often considered as much lower in social status to other communities in Sri Lanka. The *Veddas* themselves attempt to distinguish them from others and maintain their identity as jungle clad hunters, hence still prefer live in jungles or isolated settlements.

*Anthropological studies and Indeginous culture* But, it is a known fact that a large section of *Vedda* population has been assimilated into cultural mainstream throughout history. This has hither to been understood as a natural process and considered as less important from a historical point of view.

The present study shows that this assimilation was not simple or unimportant, but very crucial and complex in the medieval period. The *Veddas* have been understood as one of the power groups in the society after the decline of the Polonnarava kingdom and some of them were identified as chieftains in the peripheral regions. This phenomena and its impact during the period of the formation of later feudal society in Sri Lankan is the focus of the present study.

**Key words:** *Veddas*, Medieval politics, Peripheral regions, Feudal society, Cultural assimilation

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