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The representation of Sri Lankan indigenous (Vedda) people on television news: A study in intercultural communication perspective

The Veddas (also known as Wanniyala Atto) are the only remaining indigenous people in Sri Lanka in the 21st century. Currently, Sri Lanka is in the post war period where the government is working towards rapid national development that helps to harmonize all ethnic groups under one Sri Lankan flag. In this regard this study examined how television channels (Sinhala) are representing Veddas (Wanniyala Atto) in an intercultural perspective.

This study observed media viewing habits of the Vedda ethnic group, with special reference to the Veddas (Wanniyala Atto) who are living at Dambana, Uve Province in Sri Lanka. In-depth, personal interviews were conducted with participants as their oral language lacks a literary tradition. Accordingly, the study focused on participants who watch television and have a good understanding of the Sinhala language.

After conducting these interviews, it was discovered that Sinhala television news programs do not sufficiently report information about issues the Veddas face. Instead, preference is given to political personalities who visit Dambana, Vedda people that visit Sinhala political and religious personalities. Further, television news programs depict them as being a developed ethnic group that should change and adapt to a contemporary world. Furthermore, these programs encourage the notion that the Veddas are a ‘second people’ within Sri Lankan society, and thus are not so important in comparison to the Sinhalese. As such it can be stated with significant conviction that the Sri Lankan media does not understand or appreciate the cultural, political, linguistic and other special interests and problems of the Veddas.

Keywords: Indigenous people, Representation, Understanding, Ethnic group