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Paper: Equity

Present status of coastal Veddahs in Wakare, Sri Lanka

The Coast Veddahs or Vedar or Veda Vellalar are Tamilized indigenous Veddah people, who have adopted a dialect of the Tamil language and some of the Tamil social customs, while some original language and customs are still followed. In March 2010 Kunjalkukulam, Thunaadi and Madurankulam areas were visited and their livelihood was observed.

After the Tsunami struck in 2004, coastal Veddahs who lived in Batticaloa, Kalkuda, Maankerny, Panichchankerni, Kadiraweli, Werugal were resettled in inland areas such as Kirimichchiya, Kunjalkukulam, Thunaadi, Kattamuvikulam, Aandankulam and Madurankulam. These Tamil speaking, resettled Veddahs belong to three caste systems such as Singhawanniyan Kudi, Ilasingha Wanniya and Warda Wellalam. They worship about 10 different gods and spirits.

Presently, they live in concrete houses in small land plots and utilize the resources of the reservoirs and the surrounding dry forests. Fishing is done by men in the reservoir from August till February by gill nets and the rest of the year, women are involved in angling in the reservoir. From January to May fishing is done in Upaar Lagoon in Panichchankerny mainly for crabs and prawns and their marketplace is in Walachchane. Fishing was also done with plant ichthyotoxics. Karonkodiwel, Kukuru, Kalliya, Kokatiya and Kayan plants were used for fish stupefying. They have their own names for freshwater fishes which were analogous of Tamil language. Spatial transformation has caused them to start new survival techniques. Traditional knowledge and practices related to the coastal environment could be soon obsolete and disappear. Hence, further detailed investigations would be essential and timely in order to document their traditional knowledge and practices.

Keywords: Coastal Veddah, Fishing, Ichthyotoxics, Reservoirs