

Development, Change and Vedda Community in Sri Lanka*

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Abstract

Veddas are a small community and a fast disappearing indigenous group in Sri Lanka. They refer to themselves as "Vanniyalatto" (forest dwellers) preserve their cultural identity for centuries and live on hunting and gathering in the Dry Zone forests of Sri Lanka. The government effort to develop irrigation and settlement schemes since early decades of 20th century made a considerable impact on their habitat and livelihood. Those who lived in the last remaining vedda settlements in Dambana were the most recent case of victimisation of indigenous people by development projects. The establishment of a Mudiuru Oya wild life reserve, in the Mahaweli Development Project area and evacuation of some of veddas from their traditional habitats have made a tremendous impact on Veddas who existed as a close knitted community. Resettlement of evacuees from Dambana in Hennanigala South Mahaweli System "C" in 1980s was a novel experiment to incorporate indigenous people into the main stream of development. However, majority of them were failed to adjust to the situation and adopt new agricultural practices at the beginning so that there was a desire to move back to their