

Importance of beliefs, values and rituals in the use of forest resources: A case study in Koralegama village in the periphery of the Kanneliya forest reserve

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Forests in Sri Lanka consist of high biodiversity. There are certain beliefs, faiths and rituals among the peripheral forest dwellers. These are being changed from place to place since the past to the present. The purpose of this study was to understand the importance of these beliefs and faiths in utilizing the forest resources. Kanneliya Forest Reserve situated in Southern Province, and peripheral community of Koralegama village were selected for the study. Primary data were gathered by a field survey. Secondary data were gathered from books, electronic media and other sources. Primary data were gathered through observations, target group discussions, and semi structural group discussions. According to the data gathered, there have been beliefs and faiths related to the forest in the past among the Koralegama villagers, however, at present, majority of Koralegama villagers do not have faith in traditional beliefs and rituals. The majority of those who believe in beliefs and rituals are elders above sixty years of age. Fearful respect towards the forest of the villagers unknowingly helped to protect the forest from human disturbances in the past. At present, Kanneliya forest is protected by very command and control mechanisms. Also, Koralegama villagers are semi-urbanized and separated from the forest. In addition, legal enforcements of the Government have greatly reduced the utilization of the forests. Therefore, it is suggested to consider these beliefs and faiths among the community in forest conservation and management efforts to lessen the enforcement of strict rules and regulations.

Key words: Beliefs, faiths, rituals, forests, conservation