

Non- Metric Dental Traits in an Aboriginal *Vedda* Population of Anuradhapura, North Central Province, Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Anthropologically, Sri Lanka is one of the most interesting islands in the world. Its population consists of several population groups. In the 2001 census, 73.95% were Sinhalese, 12.71% were Sri Lankan Tamils, 5.51% were Indian Tamils, 7.05% were Moors and 0.77% were small communities including Burgers, Malays and Aboriginal *Veddas*. *Veddas* are an indigenous people of Sri Lanka. They are believed to be original inhabitants of Sri Lanka (Seligman & Seligman, 1911) and probably have their origins in the "Naga" and the "Yakka" (Deraniyagala 1963) who occupied the island before the establishment of non- natives. According to the ancient chronicle of Sinhalese royalty, the "Mahawansa" the *Veddas* (Pulindas) descend from prince Vijaya (6th- 5th century B.C.) the founding father of the Sinhalese nation, through Kuveni, a woman of the "Yakka" clan whom he had espoused. To take racial variation first, while myth sustains the notion that all the *Veddas* have descended from Vijaya and Kuveni, it is evident that *Vedda* populations may in fact, have quite varied genetic histories. Physical anthropologists have established a biological affinity between certain groups of recent *Veddas* and aboriginal population known as the Balangodese (Kennedy 2000). According to sub divisions of the *Vedda* population, Sinhala speaking *Veddas* are found primarily in the southeastern part of the country, especially in the vicinity of Bintenne in Uva district. There are also Sinhala-speaking *Veddas* who live in Anuradhapura District in the North Central province (Brow 1978). Another, largely distinct group often termed east coast *Veddas*, is found in coastal areas of the eastern province mostly between Batticaloa and Trincomalee. They speak Tamil as their primary language.

The Anuradhapura *Vedda* who is the study population of the present research project fit comfortably in to the local caste structure. They speak Sinhalese, profess Buddhism, employ members of the service castes at rites of passage and subsist by cultivation. Physical characteristics of Anuradhapura *Veddas* have similarities to Sinhalese population but some of them have short broad faces (Mesocephalic to Brachycephalic), broad noses (related to platyrrhine) and their colors is similar as other *Veddas*. It is not well known how long the *Veddas* in this area (Anuradhapura) have been settled. It is believed that the grand parents of present day Anuradhapura *Vedda* lived mainly from hunting (Brow 1978). The Anuradhapura *Veddas* until recently have derived their living mainly from shifting cultivation, supplemented where possible by wet- rice agriculture, crop grown under shifting cultivation, include millet, maize, beans, squashes, manioc, chilies, eggplants, tomatoes etc.

The characteristics and variations of teeth have been used for many years as fundamental tools to reconstruct the diet, disease, and nutritional status of human groups as well as the biological relationship among the population (Scott & Turner 1997). Non-metric dental traits are useful for assessing population

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