Traditional beliefs, values and rituals in the conservation of forests: A case study in the periphery of the Sinharaja forest

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Sri Lanka is a country rich with a cultural heritage consisting of beliefs, faiths and credence towards many natural resources including forests. In the past and even now in certain parts of Sri Lanka the connection between the man and the forest is inseparable. It is the fact that beliefs, faiths and credence have contributed directly to save the forest resource in the past. Purpose of this study was to investigate the appropriateness of using beliefs, values and rituals for the conservation of forests. Lankagama village which is situated in the peripheral of Sinharaja forest was selected for this study, which was basically a qualitative survey. Targeted applicable group discussions, semi-structural interviews and field observations were carried out to collect necessary information and data. A total of 33 families were used as the sample. Beliefs, faiths and credence among the community were studied under six categories i.e., beliefs related to flora, rituals of wild life, traditions of water sources, beliefs related to slip of the tongue, traditions of chena cultivation and beliefs related to supreme gods of the area. Findings of the study revealed that these beliefs, faiths and credence have affected directly as well as indirectly to conserve flora, wild life and water sources in the Sinharaja forest reserve.

Although these beliefs, faiths and credence continue, from generation to generation these have been declined. Hence the services accomplished by those in conservation of forests at present is considerably reduced.

Key words: Forest conservation, beliefs, rituals, Sinharaja