

Are we different from you: changing facets of Kaffir community in Sri Lanka

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Kaffir community is a unique socio-cultural group in Sri Lankan society. Though the term “kaffir” is a derogatory term for African people, Sri Lankan Kaffirs use it to introduce themselves. They have accustomed to Sri Lankan culture while preserving their racial identity. A majority of Kaffirs can be seen in Puttalam currently. The objective of this study was to identify their cultural changes and contemporary problems in their daily life. A qualitative descriptive study has been conducted at the Siranbiadiya village in Puttalam area from August to December 2014. 42 villagers from the total of 22 family units including men and women considering their age were selected randomly with their consent. A pretested interviewer-administered questionnaire and focus group discussions were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using SPSS and thematic analysis.

The majority of the sample was females (54.76%) and most of the villagers were daily paid labourers. Only 08% of the community was engaged in government and private sector and 76.2% earn below Rs.10, 000.00 per month. The mean age was 35 years and the majority had not completed secondary education. In the study sample, 73.8% were Sri Lankan kaffirs and others were Sinhalese due to the cultural assimilation through marriages. This community has high integration with catholic religion and rituals. Among them, attitudes in younger generations are different from elders towards the perseverance of their culture because of the social stigma. Elders are worrying about dying culture and their unique identity while younger generation pays resistance to the cultural preservation. Name changes, following popular cultures and migrating to cities are high among youth. This community faces different psycho-social problems due to economic hardships, social stigma and discriminatory social interactions. Increasing demands of their culture in the academic field also has created problems for them as they become a hotspot for researchers. This study reveals Kaffirs seeking sovereignty of their community. Provisions for reducing social stigma, cultural acceptance and financial assistance for livelihood development are vital to achieving the psycho-social well-being of this community.

Key words: Cultural assimilation, Kaffir, language, social integration

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