

Rites of passage performed by Panama inhabitants in the significant transition periods of an individual's life

Tharaka Ananda

Temporary Demonstrator, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Sri Jayewardenepura

tharakaananda@hotmail.com

All human societies use ceremonial rites to mark significant transitions in the social status of individuals. These rites highlight and validate changes in a person's status, particularly on the occasion of such life-transforming events as birth, puberty, marriage, parenthood, and death. The island of Sri Lanka is inhabited by multi-ethnic, multi-religious groups and is rich in diverse cultures. Panama village situated in Ampara district, Eastern province, possesses specific and colourful culture that cannot be seen anywhere else. Tamil and Sinhalese as well as according to the folklore Vedda people are living together in this village. Consequently it has given rise to an admixed culture. After the Wellassa fight (Wellassa Satana) in 1818, the defeated Sinhalese men had fallen back to panama region. Latter they assimilated with Tamil and Vedda people who had inhabited the Panama region. One of the specific traits that can be seen in their unique culture is “rites of passages / Initiation ceremonies” which have been shaped by the influence of these three ethnic groups. Thus the main objective of this research was to discover this valued cultural trait and to study about the accumulation manner of three traditions in the formation of one unique culture. Many beliefs have associated with the child birth. First they make a vow in the Okada Devalaya (temple dedicated to deity) and place a small stone on the rocky remains of historical temple called as Wehera Kema Wiharaya requesting protection for the fetus. They believe in pregnancy cravings and attempt to fulfil this desire. For child's delivery they use a separate room called “Madage” (Middle house). After the child is born, he is placed on a barn of rice layer, then other rituals are performed by the elders. Achieving puberty of both girls and boys is highly celebrated. The very first day of shaving is regarded as boys' first puberty. “Kudilla” custom is specific in girl's puberty rituals. Kudilla is a small house made of coconut leaves and white cloths. She spends her segregation period in this Kudilla while experiencing many customs and rituals. On an auspicious day she is bathed and the Alaththi custom is performed by Redi Nanda (A woman belonging to a cleaning caste) to spell bad things from her. Other transitional stages such as wedding and funeral are also associated with distinctive customs and traditions to prepare individuals to endure the new status of the life. At present, these valued rites of passages are being eliminating from their culture. According to the youngsters these ceremonies are expired and some are ashamed of them, such as puberty rituals. According to them puberty should not be advertised. Yet, anthropological mean of these rituals must be carried in to the youngsters to protect this precious traditional knowledge for the tomorrow's world.

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