

Social and cultural changes in a traditional Sinhala village of Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The changing patterns of rural society is an important issue in current sociology and social anthropology. This study enters the debate by probing a village which studied in 1954 by noted anthropologist, E. R. Leach (*Pul Eliya - A Village in Ceylon*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1961) in Anuradhapura District. Leach identified the village *Pul Eliya* as a traditional village of Ceylon. However, it is well known the rural society of Sri Lanka has changed during last 48 years due to several structural changes (predominantly social welfare programmes, agricultural innovations) have been introduced by the State. Therefore, to identify the changing patterns of a village it is intended to explore the current characteristics of *Pul Eliya* based on Leach's study.

As mentioned above, the changes took place in the rural society of Sri Lanka after the Independence were mostly associated with the urban centres of the country (Morrison *et al*: 1979, Perera: 1985). *Pul Eliya* was a remote village not much affected from urban centres of Sri Lanka in 1950s. However, there may be have some links with regional urban centres. In this context, following argument can be developed.

"The villages in remote areas in the country which do not have close nexuses with urban centres are also initiated several changes due to state intervention during post independence Sri Lanka."

This study uses life historical method and comparative method to analyse data. Observations and in-depth-interviews are the techniques which used to collect relevant primary data from the villagers.

The major findings are summarised as follows:

1. There are several infrastructural developments in the village, that is, roads access, bus service, new houses built in modern

architecture, solar power use, communication facilities, new buildings for the school including a library, etc.

2. High interest in education among the students of economically wealthy families (they settled their children in urban centres to send them to popular schools).
3. Low interest in *Chena* cultivation (slash and burned cultivation).
4. Low expansion in arable acreage of paddy (135 acres in 1954 and 170 acres in 2002).
5. Significant increase in population growth due to low rate of death.

Year	No. of Households	Men	Female	Total
1954	39	78	68	146
2002	202	362	410	772

6. High expansion in commercial cultivation such as banana, vegetables, big onion, etc. and money oriented economic activities.
7. Interest to link with main markets, e.g. *Dambulla Economic Centre*.
8. High usage of modern agricultural technology such as tractors, paddy harvesting machines, high yield paddy seeds, fertilizer, water pumps, weedicides and insecticides, etc.
9. Disintegrated social bond between *Variga* (lineage) members, villagers and monk.

The social system of *Pul Eliya* village has been influenced by both state intervention and urban centres during last 50 years. The state has introduced several structural reforms directly related to the village affairs. The urban centres are linked with villages like *Pul Eliya* as a consequence of commercialisation process of the country, especially after the open economic policy. This situation has caused to change not only social and economic structure but also cultural structure of the village. Furthermore, *Pul Eliya* is not a traditional village today.