

The Rodiya People and their Social Change with reference to Uva Province in Sri Lanka

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Various social groups live in Sri Lanka. Those are the Rodiya, Vedda, Kinnaraya and the Gypsies. According to some sources, there are several castes in Sri Lanka and the Rodiya caste is regarded as the lowest caste in Sri Lanka. Due to urbanization, westernization, industrialization, commercialization and modernization, the society in South Asia has been changing rapidly. Thus, Rodiya society also has been undergoing certain transformation as other societies in the world. Lowest social position was assigned for Rodiya society in the past, but nowadays it can be seen that these people occupy a higher social position. So it is very important to study about Rodiya people as a vanishing social group in Sri Lanka. The objective of this paper is to provide knowledge about the origin of the Rodiya people and their social, economic and cultural background and preserve information about this group for the benefit for the future generation in Sri Lanka and the world. The problem of this paper is to find out whether the Rodiya people have been changed keeping pace with other social changes in Sri Lanka. This study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected from two villages in the Uva province in Sri Lanka. For this study, participant observation method and in-depth interviews have been adopted, while comparative method and life historical method were used to analyze the data. Secondary data were collected from sources such as relevant books, magazines, Acts, journals, portraits and diaries.

Many Rodiya people were Buddhists in ancient times, but most of Rodiya people have been now converted to Christianity and they enjoy more benefits from the Church. Some Buddhist temples do not treat Rodiya peoples well, and that is the reason for them to embrace Christianity. In the past, they begged for their living. Making broom, combs (the material for the combs is the horn obtained from the buffalos), drums, ropes and nooses are among the other occupations pursued by them. The Rodi women are good dancers and they collect money by dancing and singing poems before the public. With the social changes that have been taken place in the mainstream society. Under the free education system in Sri Lanka most Rodiya people have been educated and are now employed in private and public sectors. There are more graduates in the Rodiya society. Under the open economic policies, introduced by the government of Sri Lanka in 1978, there are many employment opportunities for Rodiya people. Many Rodiya people are now employed in garment factories, urban councils, government departments and many private firms as security guards, secretaries, cleaners, clerks, Additional Government Agents, Juky machine operators and so on. Some Rodiya people follow self-employment ventures like business, retail shops, manufacturing of organic fertilizer, dairy farming, etc. Their social position also has been changed and many Rodiya people actively participate in social work and they can live alongside with high caste people without discrimination.

Key words: Social setup; Rodia people; Social changes; Uva province; Livelihoods; Social status

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