

Documenting cultural values of a Sri Lankan Minority of Indian Origin: A Pilot Study of the Bharatha Community

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The Bharatha community, also known as the “parava”, is one of the 23 ethnic minority ethnic groups in the country, believed to have arrived in Sri Lanka from the 12th to the 16th centuries with skills in pearl fishery. This pilot study attempts to document their cultural characteristics and specific modes of communication within the community. The aim of the study is to record their cultural identity, with special focus on how the community was able to preserve their own cultural identity in the last 30 years as speakers of Tamil, and how other communities are able to identify the unique features of the Bharatha community. Several hurdles in the research area and the research methods were faced by this researcher in the process of conducting the pilot study, which will be presented for discussion. These hurdles include the unsuitability of questionnaires and open interviews to elicit complex data, the heterogeneity of the community that prevented the identification of general views on ethnicity among the community, as well as their assimilation into the Tamil Christian community. The presentation will demonstrate how these difficulties were overcome through participatory methods. As a minority group that has hitherto been ignored in research, this study presents for the first time an insight into the community through an innovative use of participatory research methods.