

# Creolization, Legend and History: an Aspect of the History of the Veddas of Sri Lanka\*

The Veddas of Sri Lanka are a near extinct aboriginal community confined at the moment to a narrow strip of forest in the area east of the central hill country.<sup>1</sup> The census of 1881 recorded their number as 2,200. By 1958 it had dropped to 800 and by 1963 it had dwindled to such an extent that the Veddas were no longer assigned a separate entry in the census and were included in the column for "other races".<sup>2</sup>

Historians and anthropologists are generally agreed on the point that Veddas are the descendants of the Stone Age Man of Sri Lanka whose traces have been found in places such as Bandarawela and Balangoda.<sup>3</sup> The Seligmans who did intensive field-work among the Veddas at the beginning of the present century have shown that there is considerable evidence to suggest that once the Vedda country embraced "the whole of Uva and much of the Central and North Central provinces, while there is no reason to suppose that their territory did not extend beyond these limits."<sup>4</sup> However, with the advent of the Aryan settlers in the sixth century B.C. who established a hydraulic civilization in the north central and south eastern plains, the Veddas seem to have retreated towards the upper basin of the Mahaweli. With the final collapse of the hydraulic civilization and the drift of the Sinhalese population to the south west which began towards the thirteenth century<sup>5</sup> the Veddas again seem to have extended their activities north and eastwards. The main Sinhalese settlements henceforth were concentrated in the central and south western regions. This state of affairs continued until about the middle of the nineteenth century when under British administration attempts began to be made to retrieve the northern plains by repairing the system of irrigation and opening it up for agriculture once more. Subsequently there was established a system of colonization schemes and with their expansion and the spread of modern communications the Vedda itinerary and their population has gradually been shrinking in the face of the agents of modernization.

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\* Adapted from a paper entitled "Vedda: Some Aspects of Creolization" presented to *The Ceylon Studies Seminar*, University of Sri Lanka, Peradeniya Campus, as paper No. 1, of the 1973 series.

1. For details of this "Vedda Itinerary Strip" see M. W. Sugathapala De Silva, *The Vedda Language of Ceylon: Texts and Lexicon*, Munchen, 1972, p. 7.
2. "The population of Ceylon by Race in Census Years", *Statistical Abstract of Ceylon*, 1966, Ceylon Government Press, Colombo 1969, Table 16 p. 30.
3. Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *The Birth of Indian Civilization*, London, 1968, pp. 95-96; S. Deraniyagala, "Pre-historic Ceylon: A summary of 1968", *Ancient Ceylon*, Colombo 1971, pp. 3-46.
4. G. C. Seligmann and B. Z. Seligmann, *The Veddas*, Cambridge 1911, pp. 1 ff.
5. For details see K. Indrapala (ed.), *The Collapse of the Rajarata Civilization*, Peradeniya, 1971.

For a period of about twenty-five centuries the Veddas continued to live side by side with the Sinhalese without a complete effacement of their individual physical and cultural traits. Investigators have pointed out that the Veddas are physically and culturally distinct from the other inhabitants of Sri Lanka—Sinhalese, Tamil, Arab and European.<sup>6</sup>

The retention of the distinctive identity of the Veddas is most prominently illustrated in their language. There has been no language shift. Instead what has happened is not the retention of the original Vedda language. For, the long period of contact with the dominant language of the country, Sinhalese, has had its impact. The next best has been achieved, as it were, by a process of creolization—the result of the interaction between Sinhalese, the source language and the original Vedda language, the substrate.<sup>7</sup>

The language of the Veddas, as an examination of its recorded form from about the 1880's shows, is evidently a creole. The term "creole" refers to a linguistic medium which had been crystallized in a situation of language contact. The crystallization of the new medium begins as a "pidgin" and might end up as a creole. The process can be summarized as follows: In a situation of language contact where conditions do not obtain for the mastery of any particular language by the speakers of other language(s), communication is effected by a compromise formula which is normally based on one of the languages in contact. The structure of this source language will be drastically transformed due to interference from the substrate language(s).<sup>8</sup> Thus, structurally, a pidgin is a simplified and hybridized formula of communication *vis a vis* the languages involved in the contact situation. Functionally, it will be a common medium of communication and, being, nobody's mother tongue, will remain a second language. In the course of time, however, the pidgin might achieve greater stability of form and elaboration of function and new generations might eventually adopt it as their mother tongue. If and when the pidgin reaches this second structural and functional stage, it is identified as a creole.<sup>9</sup>

To substantiate the thesis that the present day Vedda is a creole<sup>10</sup> I give below some features of Vedda language which indicate a metamorphosis of features found in Sinhalese. These instances, as will be shown, find parallels in

6. Bridget Allchin, "The Late Stone Age of Ceylon", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 88, pt. ii, July-Dec. 1958, pp. 179-201.
7. For "source" and "substrate" see A. S. C. Rose, "On the Historical Study of Pidgin", in *Symposium on Multilingualism*, London 1964, pp. 243-249. There are traces of another Vedda creole i.e., one for which Tamil was the source. See M. W. Sugathapala De Silva, *op. cit.*, Introduction.
8. R. A. Hall, Jr. *Introductory Linguistics*, N. Y. 1964, p. 374.
9. R. A. Hall Jr., "The Life Cycle of Pidgin Languages," *Lingua*, II, 1962, pp. 151-6.
10. The idea that the modern Vedda speech is a hybridized new medium is inherent in the writings of Henry Parker (*Ancient Ceylon*, London, 1909, p. 111), the Seligmanns (G. C. Seligmann and B. Z. Seligmann, *The Veddas*, Cambridge, 1911, p. 383, f. n. 1) and Wilhelm Geiger ("The Language of The Veddas," *Indian Historical Quarterly* Vol. XI, Calcutta, 1935, pp. 504-16) But it was M. W. Sugathapala De Silva who first explicitly stated this idea in his *Dambane Vädi Basa* (Gampaha, 1964, p. 9) and later in *A Structural Analysis of Vedda*, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1965, Introduction) and in *The Vedda Language of Ceylon: Texts and Lexicon* (Munich, 1972, Introduction) Among these earlier studies the only instance where any specific examination of the creole features of Vedda has been undertaken is De Silva's *The Vedda Languages of Ceylon: Texts and Lexicon* pp. 15-23. Thereafter in my "Vedda: Some Aspects of Creolization" (*Ceylon Studies Seminar*, 1973 series, No. 1) and in "The Creolization of an Aboriginal Language: The case of Vedda in Sri Lanka" (*Anthropological Linguistics*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1974, pp. 79-106) I made the first detailed study of the creole features of Vedda in comparison with other pidgins and creoles from other parts of the world.

better known pidgins and creoles from other parts of the world. My contention is that in the crystallization of Vedda pidgin (the precursor of the modern creole), Sinhalese, the source language, was transformed due to interference from the substrate language, the original tongue of the Veddas, which I would term "Original Vedda." The features I have chosen are, inanimate noun suffixes, feminine formation in animate nouns, numerals, and some peculiarities of semantic devices.

### (i) Inanimate Noun Suffixes

In order to understand the transformation undergone by the Sinhalese forms the Sinhalese and Vedda forms may be kept side by side in the following manner.<sup>11</sup>

Sinhalese Noun	Sinhalese Adjective	Vedda Noun
naase "nose"	naas "of the nose"	naaspojja "nose"
kaviya "poem"	kavi "poetic"	kavitana "poem"
ähä "eye"	äs "of the eye"	äjjejja "eye"
kana "ear"	kan "of the ear"	kanrukula "ear"
ugura "throat"	uguru "of the throat"	ugurudaṇḍa "throat"
ginna "fire"	gini "of the fire"	ginraacca "fire"

The transformation undergone by the Sinhalese forms may be summarized as:

Noun → Adjective + *pojja*|-*tana* |-*gejja* |-*rukula* |-*daṇḍa* |-*raacca*

The above set of Vedda nominal suffixes could be compared with certain suffixes in Neo-Melanesian<sup>12</sup> and Chinese Pidgin English. In Neo-Melanesian there is a suffix *-fela* which while not adding any contentive meaning to the form it is appended to, performs the function of "simply marking it as a member of that class,"<sup>13</sup> in this instance adjectival, e.g. *bigfela* "large" as in *bigfela haws* "large house" and *nadarfela* as in *nadarfela man* "another man". Similarly in Chinese Pidgin English there are two "empty" suffixes *-pisi* and *-fela* which denote whether the numerals to which they are added are inanimate or animate respectively, for example: *wanpisi haws* "one house" and *wanfela man* "one man"<sup>14</sup>. In the same manner the Vedda suffixes cited above simply perform the function of marking the nouns with which they occur as members of the inanimate class.

It has been revealed that *-pisi* and *-fela* of Chinese Pidgin English are loanshifts based on the substrate language, i.e. that these suffixes developed out of the English nouns "piece" and "fellow" respectively to perform a function similar to a model in Chinese.<sup>15</sup> In the light of this it could be conjectured that the nominal suffixes in Vedda under discussion reveal a similar process of loanshift formation and that they are based on the semantics of a structural feature in Original Vedda.

11. For my material on Vedda I am depending on M. W. Sugathapala De Silva, *The Vedda Language of Ceylon: Texts and Lexicon*, Munchen, 1972.
12. Better known as "Melanesian Pidgin English". It is becoming a creole in certain parts of Melanesia. See R. A. Hall Jr., *Melanesian Pidgin English: Grammar, Texts and Vocabulary*, Baltimore, 1944.
13. R. A. Hall Jr., *Introductory Linguistics*, p. 146.
14. R. A. Hall Jr., "Chinese Pidgin English", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 64, 1944, pp. 95-113.
15. R. A. Hall Jr., *Introductory Linguistics*, p. 380.

The Vedda suffixes *-pojja*, *-tana*, *-gejja*, *-rukula*, *-danda* and *-rācca* are evidently derived from the Sinhalese nouns *poḍḍa* "a little"; *geḍiya* "nut"; *rukula* "stay"/"support"; *danda* "stick"; and *raasiya* "heap"<sup>16</sup> and some of them are already used in Sinhalese as second members of certain compounds, e.g. *mutṭipodda* "small pot" *baḍa geḍiya* "pot belly". It appears therefore that an idiomatic tendency in Sinhalese had been utilized in Vedda in order to create a marker of word-class membership. Such re-structuring of elements in the source language giving them entirely different functions is a well known feature in pidgins and creoles.<sup>17</sup>

### (ii) Feminine formation in Animate Nouns

Given below are some feminine formations in Sinhalese and their Vedda parallels.

Sinhalese		Vedda	
Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine
gonaa "bull"	eladena "cow"	gonaa	gonii
miima "he-buffalo"	miidena "she-buffalo"	miimañña	miimaññi
kukka "dog"	kikki "bitch"	kukka	kukki

It would have been noted that in Sinhalese, feminine forms are derived from masculine forms by:

- full substitution : gonaa → eladena
- partial substitution : miima → miidena and
- change in stem + change in suffix : kukka → kikki

In Vedda on the other hand, there is only one device for feminine formation: change in suffix alone. The masculine suffix is *-a/-aa* while the feminine suffix *-i/-ii*, the phonetic length depending on the phonological structure of the word.<sup>18</sup> Vedda thus dispenses with structural redundancies, such as changes in the stem in type (c) above, and effects a structural levelling, by having a common feminine formation. Similar transformations of the source language have been observed in other Pidgins and creoles. To cite an example from Neo-Melanesian.

Singular	Plural
mi "I" "me"	mifela "we" "us"
yu "you" (singular)	yufela "you" (plural)

Infectional reductions where redundant features have been dispensed of have been observed in Jamaican creole as well.<sup>19</sup>

### (iii) Numerals

Another reduction in Vedda morphology is the loss of the distinction maintained in Sinhalese numerals between nominals and adverbials on the one hand and between animate numeral nominals and inanimate numeral nominals on the other. This can be illustrated with some parallel sentences:

16. I have not been able to suggest a source of derivation for *-tana*. A possibility is *-tan*, 'place' or 'status' in Classical Sinhalese.

17. R. A. Hall Jr., 'Pidgin English and Linguistic change', *Lingua*, 3, 2, 1952. pp. 138-146.

18. For details see M. W. Sugathapala De Silva, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

19. See R. B. Le Page, *Jamaican Creole*, London, 1960, p. 117.

- (1) V= eeätto mandokaragena iüdina kaalapojje din  
 kākulo dekamak mandounaa kiyaalaa  
 kataadamaala tienawa  
 S= eyaa kasaadabāñdagena inna koṭa lamay  
 dennek upannai kiyala tienava  
 "It is said that when he lived having married, her two children  
 were born."
- (2) V= yamake dekamak tunamak mando karalaa eeättanta ānookalāva  
 S= baajana dekak tunak puravalaa eyaāta dunna  
 "Having filled two or three vessels gave them to him."
- (3) V= deevaala pojje tunamak mangaccanava  
 S= deevaale vaṭee tunpaarak yanava  
 "Go thrice round the temple"

Thus Vedda manages with one numeral where Sinhalese would have three:

	Sinhalese	Vedda
"two persons" (nominal, animate)	dennek	dekamak
"two things" (nominal, inanimate)	dekap	
"twice" (adverbial)	depaarak	

#### (iv) Semantic devices

Coming to the lexical stock and the semantic range of Vedda the peculiarities in this sphere too find parallels in the better known pidgins and creoles.

It was mentioned earlier that the life cycle of contact languages consists of two stages: (i) The crystallization of a pidgin which remains a marginal medium for native speakers of different languages and (ii) The adoption of the new medium as their mother-tongue by a later generation, whereby it becomes nativized and creolized.

At the first stage the new medium would be used only in certain domains such as trade; and its vocabulary (and grammar) would be of a rudimentary nature. At the second stage, however, it will have to cope with all the linguistic needs of the community and therefore be more stable in structure and evolve a full-fledged semantic range depending on the cultural needs of the community.<sup>20</sup> In the expansion of their semantic range contact languages have shown a partiality towards ingenious combinations and extensions of meaning of the already existing lexical items rather than borrowing or coining of new words.<sup>21</sup> Thus in Neo-Melanesian *gras* "grass" has been used in such formations as *gras bilon hed* "hair"; *gras bilon fes* "beard"; and *gras bilon maws* "moustache". In this way the meaning of *gras* from the word "grass" in the source language, has been extended to "anything which projects blade-like from a surface."<sup>22</sup> Vedda too is replete with such periphrastic expressions.<sup>23</sup> For example V=*baḍapojjen mandovenava* "emerging from the

20. R. B. Le Page, *National Language Question*, Oxford, 1964, p. 40.

21. R. A. Hall Jr., *Introductory Linguistics*, p. 378.

22. *Ibid.*

23. The Seligmans (op. cit. p. 382-3) and Geiger (op. cit. p. 511) have made references to this feature of Vedda. Their conception of periphrasis is a very broad one. For example, they would consider *āngilipojja*, "finger" and *mangaccanava* "go" as periphrastic expressions. In the present study however, the material treated under this head is confined to those periphrastic phrases in Vedda which correspond to one word in Sinhalese.

belly", (S=*upadinava* "be born") V=*maadiyaganülle dandukücca* "vehicle in the ocean" (S=*näva* "ship") V=*udatanin mandovena diyaraacca* "water falling from above" (S=*vässa* "rain") V=*yätarena yamake* "sleeping gadget" S = *püduralända* "mat"/"bed") V = *puccakadana yamake* "shooting gadget" (S=*tuvakkuva* "gun").

A striking similarity of Vedda to the classic creoles is evinced in the expression *nikitipojje bucca* "tuft on the chin" (Sinhalese=*räula* "beard") and *äspojje bucca* "tuft on the eye" (Sinhalese=*ähibäma* "eyebrow"). Also *bucca* in Vedda can mean "bush" (Sinhalese=*pandura*) or "straw" (Sinhalese=*piduru*). Thus it seems that the semantic range of the word *bucca* in Vedda is extended to include, like *gras* in Melanesian Pidgin English "anything that projects blade-like from a surface."

It was stated above that a creole is a new medium which had got crystallized in a situation of contact between two linguistic communities. As the peculiarities of the socio-cultural contact do not permit the mastery of one language by the speakers of the other, resort is made to a compromise formula which is based largely on one of the languages in contact. This compromise formula which is the *lingua franca* in those specific instances of inter-community communication is called a pidgin. In course of time the pidgin might achieve greater stability of form and elaboration of vocabulary and also become the mother tongue of a later generation thus technically becoming a creole. Thus the process of creolization of the Vedda language can be traced in a survey of the history of the Veddas as can be gathered from the sources of Sri Lanka history.

Acculturation, language shift in particular, may not be accomplished when there is resistance from the group which is expected to undergo that process. The retention of their individual physical and cultural traits by the Veddas, albeit transformed due to a long period of contact, is remarkable and as has been pointed out "is not one that could be expected in the case of a degenerate group living in the outskirts of a more advanced community."<sup>24</sup> On the contrary all evidence seems to suggest that the Veddas are a very independent group, proud of their individuality. And the self-recognition of their super-ordinate status is acquiesced in by the Sinhalese of the neighbouring areas.<sup>25</sup> The crystallization of the creole may be attributed to

24. Bridget Allchin, *op. cit.*

25. In John Davy's account on caste in Ceylon (1821) the Vedda are considered as belonging to the highest "govi" caste (Ralph Pieris, *Sinhalese Social Organization*, Colombo 1956, p. 191). Also compare, "While the Sinhalese held and hold the Vedda race to be honourable and had no reluctance to give their daughters to Veddas and were ready and even eager to marry Vedda girls, yet the Vedda as a rule look down upon the descendants of those mixed marriages," Hugh Nevill, *The Taprobanian*, Vol. I, 1885, p. 193; "The unsophisticated Veddas... by no means stand at the lowest stage of humanity. They are proud people and the Sinhalese look on them with respect and acknowledge them as the original owners of the country by ascribing them the rank of the highest caste." Wilhelm Geiger, "The Language of the Veddas", *Indian Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XI, Calcutta, 1935, pp. 504-516; The people of Wellassa "... refer to themselves as Vedda... this is partly.... a way of claiming high status, since the Vedda are thought to be people of high birth and good caste." Nur Yalman. *Under the Bo-Tree*, Los Angeles, 1967, p. 230.

the peculiarities of this socio-cultural context: a situation in which there was paucity of contact, although it could not be completely prevented, largely due to the desire on the part of the Veddas to keep the Sinhalese at arms length.<sup>26</sup>

At the initial stages of contact between the autochthones and the Aryan settlers however, there appears to have been, in certain circumstances a different relationship. There is evidence to suggest that a section of the autochthones welcomed the new and prospering civilization and were readily absorbed into it. Thus Paranavitana, commenting on the word *milaka* occurring before personal names in two inscriptions of the second century B.C., says, "*milaka* can be equated with Pali *Milakkha* which corresponds to Sanskrit *Mleeccha* 'a barbarian'. It is possible that the autochthones of the island were meant by that term. If so, these names are evidence of the fact that the aborigines of the island adopted the languages and customs of the invading Aryans, came to occupy high positions in society, and that, in course of time, the two coalesced to form one people. At any rate, the name *milaka* does not appear to have had any stigma (of inferiority) attached to it when it was given in an inscription as the epithet prefixed to the name of a donor."<sup>27</sup> Thus while it is possible that a section of the autochthones underwent complete acculturation and were absorbed into the "higher" culture, those who did not wish to do so were left alone to their traditional ways to be the precursors of the present-day Veddas.

The manner in which legendary and historical sources depict the story of the Veddas is different from the above conjecture however. The main indigenous source of the history of the period, the *Mahāvamsa* (5th century A.D.) has the following story to tell about the origin of the Veddas. When the band of seven hundred strong immigrants landed in Lanka, Vijaya, the leader of the band and son of the King of Vanga in North India, took Kuveni, a princess from among the locally resident *yakkhas*,<sup>28</sup> to wife and with her assistance killed many *yakkhas*, destroyed their power, and established the first Sinhalese kingdom in the island. Later, after Kuveni had borne him a son and a daughter, Vijaya, being urged by his ministers to marry a queen of royal blood and undergo consecration, sent an embassy to the city of Madura (in South India) to woo the daughter of the Paṇḍu king. The alliance was agreed upon. "When he now heard that the princess had arrived he said to the *yakkhini*: 'Go thou now, dear one, leaving the two children behind; men are ever in fear of super-human beings.' But when she heard this she was seized with fear of the *yakkhas*; then he said (again) to the *yakkhini*: 'Delay not! I will bestow on thee an offering by (spending) a thousand (pieces of money).' When she had again and again besought him (in vain) she took her two children and departed for Lankapura, though fearing that evil should come of it. She set the children down outside and went, herself, into that city. When the *yakkhas* in the city recognized the *yakkhini*, in their terror they took her for a spy and there was a great stir among them; but one who was violent killed the *yakkhini* with a single blow of his fist. But her uncle, on the mother's side, a *yakkha* went forth from the city, and when he

26. For details see my "The Creolization of An Aboriginal Language: The case of Vedda in Sri Lanka (Ceylon)", *Anthropological Linguistics* Vol. 16, No. 2, 1974, pp. 79-106.

27. S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Vol. I, Colombo, 1970, pp. xci-xcii.

28. According to the *Mahāvamsa*, the island at the arrival of Vijaya and his followers was populated by a variety of super-human beings called *yakkhas*.

saw the children he asked them: 'Whose children are you?' and hearing that they were Kuveni's he said: 'Here has your mother been slain, and they will slay you also if they see you, (therefore) flee swiftly?' Fleeing with speed they went from thence to Sumanakūṭa (i.e. Adam's Peak). The brother, the elder of the two, when he grew up took his sister, the younger, for his wife, and multiplying with sons and daughters, they dwelt with the king's leave, there in Malaya (the central mountain region in the interior of Ceylon). From these sprang the Punlinda (a designation of barbarous tribes, is here evidently a name of the Veddas.)"<sup>29</sup>

Herein the ancient chronicler of the 5th century, no doubt depending on the then prevalent traditions, attempts to explain the existence of an aboriginal populace in the island. In the *Mahāvamsa*, Lanka is depicted as the island of the Sinhalese people who were destined to be the protectors of the Buddhist religion.<sup>30</sup> And the aborigines, for whose presence an explanation was necessary, came to be portrayed as the descendants of the progeny of Vijaya, the founder of the Sinhalese dynasty and Kuveni, a super-human autochthonous princess. It appears that in this explanation a convenient connection has been established between the Aryan immigrants and the indigenous inhabitants.<sup>31</sup>

While the Great Tradition depicted in the *Māhāvamsa* accounts for the existence of the Vedda in this land, the Little Tradition<sup>32</sup> depicted in the folk ritual called *Kohomba Kankariya* seems to explain the peaceful co-existence of the two communities. The origin of the ritual as narrated in the text of the *Kohomba Kankariya*<sup>33</sup> is as follows:

When Vijaya broke his promises and ousted Kuveni, she out of revenge (being a *yakkhini*) created for herself a tongue of diamond and when the king was asleep in the night, extended it through locks and doors into the bedroom

29. *The Mahāvamsa*, tr. Wilhelm Geiger, Colombo, 1912, p. 60. The notes within brackets are Geiger's.
30. Thus the author of the *Mahāvamsa* seems to have conceived the island of Sri Lanka as the *Dhammadvīpa* (Pali, *dhamma* "doctrine of the Buddha" *dvīpa* "island"). See L. S. Perera, "The Pali Chronicles of Ceylon," *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, ed. C. H. Philips, London, 1961, pp. 29-43.
31. It is interesting to note in this connection that the Seligmanns who wrote their book *The Veddas* in 1911 after lengthy and thorough field-work among the Veddas, report of the fact that the Vijaya-Kuveni legend is "absolutely unknown to the Veddas", although "firmly established among the Sinhalese" (*op cit.*, p. 28). However, M. W. Sugathapala De Silva doing field work in 1959 in Dambana—one of the Vedda settlements covered in the survey of the Seligmanns—has reported a Vedda rendering of the Vijaya-Kuveni legend. (See *Dambāne Vādi Basa*, Gampaha, 1964, pp. 45-46 and *Vedda Language of Ceylon: Texts and Lexicon*, München, 1972, pp. 50-52).
32. Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*, Chicago, 1963, pp. 41-42, has defined the two traditions in the following manner: "In a civilization there is a great tradition of the reflective few; and a little tradition of the largely unreflective many. The great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples; the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities".
33. The composition of the text of this ritual is attributed to about the 16th century (P. B. Sannasgala, *Sinhala Sūhitya Wamsaya*, Colombo 1964, p. 691). This extension of the story of Kuveni, which is absent in the *Mahāvamsa* is found in several other works composed around this date. Two of them are, *Kuveni Asna* ("The Message of Kuveni"), an invocatory prose composition blessing a king of the 15th century (ed. Ven. Doḍanduve Sri Dharmaratna, Doḍanduva, 1927); and *Rājāvaliya* ("The line of royalty"), a narration of the story of the Sinhalese dynasty written about a century and a half later (ed. B. Gunasekara, Colombo, 1926).

with the intention of killing him. However, as the Buddha had entrusted the care of the island to the gods, and they being watchful over the king caused the said diamond tongue to be broken and protected the king until he had reigned for thirty years. The broken diamond tongue took the form of a leopard and escaped. When Vijaya's successor, Panduvasdev, was reigning, the curse of Kuveni fell on him in the form of apparitions of leopards in his sleep. All the magical rites known in the country being of no avail in curing the king, the guardian gods of the kingdom intervened to bring prince Malaya, a person born of super-natural circumstances and possessing supernatural powers, from India for the purpose. Prince Malaya and his two brothers being brought to Sri Lanka by the contrivance of the highest gods in the Buddhist pantheon, performed the ceremony called *Kohomba Kankāriya* and the king was cured.<sup>34</sup>

The *Kohomba Kankāriya* is an elaborate ritual lasting about eighteen hours, performed up to date with the purpose of warding off evil and bringing general prosperity upon a person, family or village. The ritual begins with an invitation to the various gods in the Buddhist pantheon and the three princes from India, to be present. This is followed by an invitation to the Veddās. Veddās from eighty four localities in the island, each mentioned by name, are invited to be present at the ritual. After this a number of local deities are invoked by name. During the ritual among a number of stories recited in verse, is the story of Vijaya and Kuveni—including their lives in the previous birth. At the end of several minor rites the gods and the Veddās are again invoked and two dramatic enactments connected with the coming of the Malaya princes, "the shooting of the boar" and "the shooting of the deer" are performed. Finally, the blessings of the three brothers (also known as "*kohomba*") are invoked on the patient and his home.<sup>35</sup>

If we are to examine the significance of this legend, it seems that therein the guilt of the immigrants in doing the autochthones an injustice is accepted. Kuveni's justifiable curse, as the culprit monarch was protected by the supernatural, strikes the next in succession. Thus, it is as if the curse is directed to the group as a continuity: for the malady of the monarch would affect the affairs of all. The need for the intervention of the highest in the pantheon for the ritual of healing underlines the gravity of the curse, and the wrong. The most significant aspect of the legend in the present context seems to be the extremely important place given to the Veddās. Apart from the gods and the three shaman characters from India, the Veddās are the most prominent individual group in the legend. Of the residents of the island only the local gods and the Veddās are invited to be present. Moreover, the fact that Veddās were invoked twice along with the three shaman characters points to a recognition of their power. In the course of the ceremony the Veddās are placated by offerings in the ritual enactment named *vādi daane* "offering to the Veddās", and their allegiance is ensured in the ritual enactment called *vāddan givissiima* "swearing in of the Veddās".<sup>36</sup> Thus the legend seems to dramatise a period of conflict and the ultimate compromise that was accomplished between the autochthones and the immigrants.

34. See *Kohomba Kankāriya* (ed.) C. E. Godakumbura, Colombo, 1963.

35. C. E. Godakumbura, "The Cult of the Kohomba or The Three Sons of Sita". *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1946, pp. 184-191.

36. Also, it is stated in some traditions that the Malaya princes, before they returned to India having cured King Panduvasdev, committed the people of the island to the care of twelve deities, among whom is *Vādi Yckā* ("Vedda demon"). See E. R. Sarathchandra, *Folk Drama of Ceylon*. Colombo, 1966, p. 54.

Thereafter, as attested in the more matter of fact literary sources of history, the relation between the jungle dwellers and the Sinhalese seems to have been harmonious and even characterised by mutual assistance when the need arose. Thus the *Mahāvamsa* mentions that during the building of the Mahāthūpa in Anuradhapura, in the first century B.C., King Duṭṭhagāminī was informed of the availability of certain building materials in the jungle by a Vedda.<sup>37</sup> The Pāli commentaries *Sumangalavilāsini* and *Manōrathapūraṇi* (circa 5th century A.D.) mention hunters who ultimately entered the Buddhist order.<sup>38</sup> Also, there is reference in these works to hunters' settlements and their trading in meat in neighbouring Sinhalese villages.<sup>39</sup> Again, the *Cūlavamsa* (13th century) mentions how King Parākramabāhu I harnessed the talents of the Veddas, perhaps as scouts and bowmen, in his long campaign to gain supremacy over the whole island.<sup>40</sup> *Dambadeni Asna*, a work of the 14th century, while specifying the composition of the retinue of the Sinhalese king mentions several Veddas among them, perhaps to supply meat and also to act as scouts and bowmen.<sup>41</sup> The *Oruvala Sannasa*, a record of a grant made during the 16th century, prohibits the violation of this grant by kings, sub-kings, ministers etc. and finally by *balu vuddan* "hunters with dogs" and *dandu vuddan* "hunters with clubs".<sup>42</sup> This shows that they were frequent visitors to the area. Parker has reported of a 16th century manuscript called *Wanni Kadayim Pota* where the appointment of a Vedda as "Bandara Mudiyanse" (a title applied only to high caste chiefs) on the orders of the King Bhuvanekabahu VII is mentioned. This Vedda chief is said to have supplied the king with elephants captured in the area.<sup>43</sup> Parker has also mentioned another manuscript of the early 17th century giving an account of a civil war against King Rājasimha II. Among the insurgent leaders were, in liason with the Sinhalese chiefs, several Vedda chieftains including one woman.<sup>44</sup>

Legends prevalent among the Veddas, too, narrate incidents of mutual harmony. For example, according to one story current among the Veddas of Bintenne, the tank bed of Minneriya was formerly a hunting ground of the Veddas; and they were compensated for the loss by King Mahasen (circa A.D. 275-301) when he constructed the tank.<sup>45</sup> Another story relates how a king named Rājasimha (most probably Rajasimha II who appears in a large number of folk tales) while travelling through the jungle was supplied with drinking water by a Vedda lady, upon whom he conferred a title.<sup>46</sup>

37. Geiger's translation, p. 187. Even if this incident is not to be taken literally it shows that these jungle dwellers had constant intercourse with civilization.

38. See, Walpola Rahula, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, Colombo, 1966, p. 243.

39. *ibid.*, There is inscriptional evidence of the selling of meat in a market town in the Mahiyangana (Bintenne) area. See, S. Paranavitana, "Badulla Pillar Inscription," *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, iii, p. 76.

40. *Cūlavamsa*, translated by W. Geiger, Colombo, 1953, p. 268; W. Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon in Medieval Times*, ed. H. Bechert, Wiesbaden, 1960, p. 154.

41. ed. D. D. Ranasinghe, 1917, p. 5.

42. The translation is by H. W. Codrington in "Oruvala Sannasa," *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, iii, pp. 51-71.

43. Seligmann, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

44. Quoted by Seligmann, *op. cit.* That the Vedda was a powerful element in this area at the time is attested by a document called *Mātalē Vitti Pota*. See, Pandita Naulle Dhammananda, *Madhyama Lankā Purāvritta*, Colombo, 1969, p. 293.

45. R. L. Brohier, *Ancient Irrigation Works of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1934, p. 31.

46. M. W. Sugathapala De Silva, *Dambānē Vādi Basa*, p. 20.

Robert Knox, who lived in the Kandyan provinces as a prisoner for nineteen years during the 17th century, in a detailed account of the Veddas, which seems to be based on the ideas prevalent among the Sinhalese, says that there were two types among these jungle dwellers: a "tamer sort" who were used to having dealings with the Sinhalese and a "wilder sort" who were shy and confined themselves to the jungles.<sup>47</sup> The "tamer sort," says Knox, "come and buy and sell among the people". Moreover, reporting an incident reminiscent of the days of Parākramabāhu I, Knox narrates how Rājasimha II in a campaign against the Dutch mobilized the support of the Vedda who "with their bows and arrows did as good a service as any of the rest."<sup>48</sup>

Knox's categorization of the Veddas into two sorts may be taken as epitomizing a state of affairs that has been there since very early times. The several references, cited above, to the Veddas having constant dealings with Sinhalese most probably refer to the "tamer sort." It may be conjectured that the situation of language contact arose between the Sinhalese and this more adventurous section of the Vedda community. The sense of independence among the Veddas and their reluctance to change their traditional ways would have prevented complete acculturation including a language shift. For the purposes of inter-community communication the rudiments of a pidgin would have been evolved which by the process of stabilization and elaboration during a period of contact extending to about twenty five centuries has resulted in the creole which is extant today, the original Vedda language becoming extinct in the process.

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47. Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*, 1681, Reprint, Colombo, 1958, pp. 98-101. Knox narrates how the "wilder sort" are said to get their arrows made by Sinhalese. They "will carry their load of flesh in the night and hang it up in a smith's shop, also a leaf cut in the form they will have their arrows made, and hang by it, which if the smith do make according to their pattern they will requite, and bring him more flesh. . . .". The same device is reported by Joao Ribeiro. *The Historic Tragedy of the Island of Ceylon*, 1685, English translation by P. E. Pieris, Colombo, 1948, p. 78.

48. Knox, op cit., p. 78.