Causes and Consequences of Resettlement towards the Traditional
Religious Belief System of Henanigala Indigenous Group, Sri Lanka

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Henanigala is one of the current villages occupied by the descendants of
indigenous people (IP) of the country: the Veddas. In 1982, IP lived in Dambana,
Kotabakiniya and Kandeganwila were resettled in the Henanigala C Zone
affected by the Mahaweli development project. Traditional religious belief
systems (RBS) of these people have been developed over centuries as an
adaptation to the natural environment they lived. Chena cultivation, fishing,
hunting and gathering, honey collecting etc. had been their traditional subsisting
patterns (TSP). Instead of those through the resettlement paddy cultivation was
introduced to them. Being forest people since the pre-historical time, their RBS
was extensively connected with TSP. Present study was aimed to find out causes
and consequences of resettlement towards these unique people’s RBS. Basic
characteristics of their RBS were gathered through in-depth interviews
conducted with purposively selected 10 individuals, representing both genders,
age ranged from 18 to 75 years. Participant observation was conducted to
discover more empirical data. Paddy cultivation has replaced Buddhist practices
instead of Na Yak offerings as they were no longer depending on their TSP.
Responsible government officers of their village have done considerable impact
on their RBS through introducing Buddhist practices as a method of obtaining
consolation in their life crises. As consequences of resettlement; assimilation,
diffusion and acculturation have accelerated and caused to a rapid change of
their RBS. Observing sil, observance of alms giving and sermon after a funeral is
frequent among IP instead of their traditional “Na Yak “offerings (diseased
relatives). Adopting Buddhist practices have done as their traditional Na Yakku
no longer can provide protection to their present life style. Destruction of the
link between them and the forest effected directly towards the RBS and though
it indirectly to the strength of the integrated cultural domains and finally to the
loss of their whole cultural system. Resettlements have lead IP into a market
economy, also it caused to the fragment of their cultural identity and to become
a trans-community.

Keywords: assimilation; cultural change; Na Yakku; subsisting patterns; Vedda