

A STUDY OF THE SOCIO- ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE CAFFIR COMMUNITY IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract- The Caffir community in Sri Lanka could be identified as the descendants from African countries namely, Mozambique and Madagascar. They were brought into this country as slaves by the Portuguese regime during the colonial period, from the various communities in Sri Lanka. The Caffir community can easily be identified by several prominent physical features, such as their dark skin tone and curly hair. They first arrived in Sri Lanka in the first half of the 17th century and their tribal language was similar to that of the Portuguese language. These people of African descent presently live in the Sirambiadiya village, located in the Puttlam district. The main aim of this research is to study the socio-economic changes of the Caffir community living in Sri Lanka. Observing the present results of mixing the Caffir community with the people in Sri Lanka. The recognition of the Caffir community are given in terms of Social, Economic, Cultural differences and could be observed and quantified. Therefore the research problem which was faced was to identify the nature of changes within this community in the present day.

Depending on the nature of the data it can be divided into two groups of studied. Further, one is qualitative data and quantitative data (Sarantakos, 1998, P26) Qualitative data and quantitative data are used in this study based on Survey method and Case Study method. This study hopes to explore the hypothesis "the cultural practices of Caffir community have faced many changes" as well as delve into the changes which have taken place from ancient times to the present day.

Keywords- Caffir community, Portuguese Regime, Colonial period, Slaves, Cultural practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project is to study the socio – economic changes of the Caffir community living in Sri Lanka. The Caffir community in Sri Lanka can be identified and defined as people from African countries namely Mozambique and Madagascar, brought into this country as slaves by the Portuguese regime during the Colonial Period. These people of African descent are presently living in Sirambiadiya village in the Puttlam District. From the various communities in Sri Lanka, the Caffirs can easily be distinguished by their prominent physical features which they possess. These individuals arrived here in Sri Lanka during the first half of the 17th century and their tribal language was similar to that of the Portuguese language.

The Caffirs were brought into Sri Lanka by the Portuguese for security purposes and they were utilized by the British during the period they captured Sri Lanka. (Peiris; 1986, pp218) Used by the British, Caffirs by now they have mixed and merged with other Sri Lankan communities, such as the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslims. "As a result of their merging with the local communities, changes have occurred in their social economic political and cultural spheres." Accordingly this has been the hypothesis based in this research. Observing the present results of the mixing the Caffirs with the people in Sirambiadiya village in Puttlam, it is seen that they faced their marriage customs human relationships religion language clothing cultural activities is the end result of the present examination.

In this study of the Sri Lankan Caffir community several methods of data collection and assimilation of

information was utilized. A questionnaire was used for identifying of pertinent information in the level of education. Age groups in marriage. Economic standards identifying employment groups were done using a questionnaire. Qualitative data was identified by observation and study techniques. Group discussions a questionnaire were utilized.

There are various words that has the meaning Caffir. The word Caffir is denoted in Portuguese as Cafe or Caffir in Dutch. Moreover, in the Arabic context, the name for these individuals is referred to as Caffir. In general, all communities refer to them as Caffir. Furthermore, they were all Negroes and did not follow the religion of Islam, despite being believed to be descendants of the Arabs (Ariyaratna 1985 pp; 22). The word Caffir was derived from an Arabic word. The tribal name Caffir is the same as Caffrian Cafray. It is used not only to indicate a tribe but to denote a cluster of tribes. It is used in South Africa to name the tribe (Ngni) (Sinhalese Encyclopedia, 4th Vol; 1978, p 645). The Ngni population consists of 5 sub tribes having communal relationships.

1. South or Cape Ngni
2. The population captured in war by the minor King Shaka
3. North Ngni
4. Swasi
5. Other attached tribes

Sri Lanka was under the Colonial rule for a period of nearly 4 centuries. After becoming a Portuguese colony in 1505 the coastal regions were in the hands of the Portuguese. It is on record that by about 1630 they brought here from Goa the first load of Caffirs to

work as soldiers and laborers. After about one and a half a century the Dutch captured the coastal areas from the Portuguese. They used the Caffirs as slaves to build the Colombo fort. As the Caffir slaves multiplied very fast controlling them was a problem. As a result of a Dutch official and his wife being murdered as result revolt erupted. Consequently they were banned to live in the Colombo city but were allowed to work there in the daytime and to live in shanties in the area now termed "Slave Island." (Brohier; 1948: pp39-40). It is recorded that in 1807 during the British regime there was Caffir regiment of 700 Caffir soldiers in The Colombo city alone. More than a half of the 3rd British regiment was made up of African soldiers had more than a half of Caffirs. Later when the 3rd Regiment was scrapped up the Caffirs settled in Sirambiadiya on the Puttalam – Anuradhapura route. (Sinhalese Encyclopedia; 1978, pp 645-646).

II. EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

After the abolition of slavery the larger part of the Caffir population left for their mother lands while the remaining part settled about an around the security Fort. Although it was a very large community they were absorbed by the local population and a considerable sector settled in Sirambiadiya in the Puttalam District.

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Population	1208	1933	1860	2015	2011
Sinhalese	1108	105	12	95	2099
Tamil	36	39	42	25	27
Caffir	56	58	62	70	72
Muslim	06	08	08	-	-

Source: Survey data 2015

Table 01 The Population of Sirambiadiya

The population of Sirambiadiya in the Puttalam District also known as The Caffir colony is the only such settlement in Sri Lanka. Presently there are 47 families of them 25 families consisting of wife and husband were used as sample or control groups were used in this study – these families can be classified as Shown in the table -02.

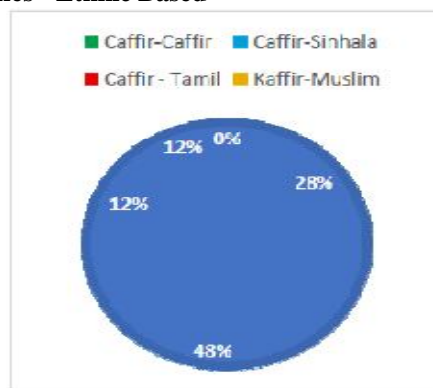
Nationality	Figure	Percentage (%)
Caffir – Caffir	07	28
Caffir – Sinhala	12	48
Caffir – Tamil	03	12
Caffir – Muslim	03	12
Total	25	100

Source: Survey data: 2015

Table No 02 Marriage patterns among Caffir community

At present only 07 inter marriages of Caffir – Caffir families and 12 Sinhala - Caffir marriages were found within the sample group. Apparently there was more affinity of Caffir –Sinhala marriages.

Graph: No 01
Families - Ethnic Based



Source: Survey data: 2015

Within the control group 48 % were Caffir – Sinhala Families. Inter-racial marriages were 28 % here too there was a sharp tendency for marriages between Caffir and Sinhala marriages.

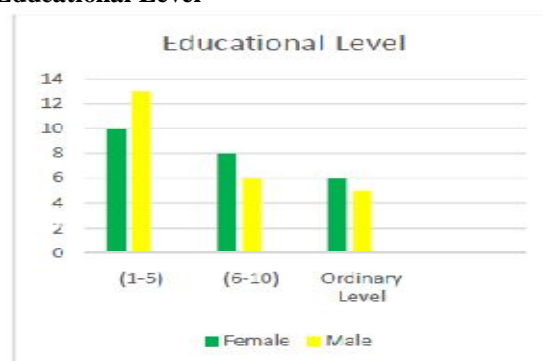
Literate Level	Mother	Father
Grade 01 – 05	10	14
Grade 06 – 10	08	06
Ordinary pass	07	05
Advanced Level	-	-
Degree Level	-	-
Total	25	25

Source: Survey data: 2015

Table No 03 The Literate level of Father and Mother

In 25 families the mother's level of education were higher than the father's literacy level. 07 females with level education was found within the Control, group. The Caffir Adults have no tendency for education of advanced or of degree levels' as result the Overall level of education of the Caffir community is very low.

Graph: No 02
Educational Level



Source: Survey data: 2015

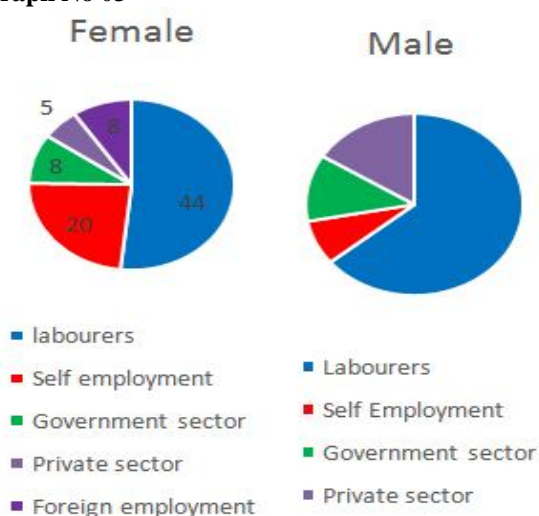
Employment	Number of Families			
	Female	Percentage (%)	Male	Percentage (%)
Laborers	11	44	16	64
Self Employment	05	20	02	08
Government Sector	02	08	03	12
Private Sector	05	20	04	16
Foreign Employment	02	08	-	-
Total	25	100	25	100

Source: Survey data: 2015

Table No 04 Employment Population

On inspection of the above table Control group both Male and female participants were employed as Laborers. Women were employed in the kilns (in pottery) and fiber products factories found in the area and as domestic servants in the vicinity. Males were employed in the quire factories as laborers or self-employed as coconut pluckers. Both males and females find self-employment in breeding cattle and fowl. Selling of lottery tickets. Some males worked government institutions as laborers and in the govt. hospital. 2 Females in the control group were employed in the Middle East as housemaids. We found no males employed overseas.

Graph No 03



Employment / Population

Source: Survey data: 2015

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On considering employment and population a large percentage is represented by the labor force - 44% women and 64% men. Within the control group the percentage employed in the private sector and the self-employed percentage is greater. At present in this group of the population – as result of assimilating into the greater local cultural group the hereditary marks in both physical and cultural aspects seems to fade out and the resultant changes can be observed in the relevant graph.

Physical features	Female	Male
Full of Caffir features	04	02
Not Caffir features	21	23
Total	25	25

Source: Survey data: 2015

Table No 05 Physical Features / Population Growth

On examining the 5th table color of the skin evidently the skin of all the Caffir populace in the settlement had been black but after generations of living in a close inter mingling social family and nuptial relationships the resultant color changes of individuals of the sample group have changed their skin color in various stages.

Skin Colour	Female	Male
Dark	16	19
White	02	-
Fair	07	06
Total	25	25

Source: Survey data: 2015

Table No 06 Husband | Wife - Skin Color

According to the above table the skin color majority of the Caffir people is black. Only two females were found white skinned it wasn't the usual white of a European. Caffir people occupied round huts similar to their tribal houses. Also there normal Sri Lankan homes as well. Several square cornered houses having a common compound were built close together. Mud huts thatched roofs with straw that had been built earlier were to be seen. Each house had a single door. There were no kitchens in these houses. All the cooking was done on the front compound. Even at present houses are built in clusters close together with a single common gate to enter the premises. Instead of mud walled houses there brick-walled houses. Most houses consisted of a single room and the verandah. The valuables of the inhabitants were kept in pots. Clothes were the valuables of women. From the past they reared cattle, fowl, goats, ducks etc. The complex of houses had a single lavatory. They their food and eating habits were primitive and simple. Various types of yams cowpea soya meat and plenty of meat and fish were taken as their common foods. At present their staple food is Rice. Fruits seeds and soups were

specialties. It was obvious that these women quite capable in turning out all kinds of sweetmeat of the local food culture. It is known that Caffir clan people is addicted to strong spirits. This addiction is still valid and strong in both males and females. Considering their costumes and apparel in the past women's dress has been the Kimono but now it is worn exclusively at festivities only.

The popular cultural female dress – the skirt and the blouse is popular with them. But the Kimono takes the floor during festivities where Kaffringha and Baila are sung and danced to. At marriage ceremonies The Maxi Dress for the Bride and for the Groom it is the traditional and popular long sleeved coat and dark Trousers is the popular tradition. Their jewelry is consistently made of Silver.

CONCLUSIONS

Historically the Caffir people we brought to the Colonial Ceylon for security purposes, but at present they are compelled to menial work for their subsistence. It is well known that the African people and their descendants were extremely popular with Maghgha or the Khafringgha musical score. The remaining compositions is being by them. Its notable feature is that these songs or recitals cannot be performed in solo. The musical instruments used at these occasions are, The "Dolakkiya" which is a 2 faced end to end – drum. Two Table spoons. Rabaana

– a single faced drum. Two Coconut shells. Tins and similar homemade implements.

When considering their formal education of the Sirambiadiya village people we find that the general standard is the primary stage. Out of the few that complete the first stage none has gone on to higher studies yet. Although brought here for security purposes presently the majority of they are manual laborers. The Caffir community as an autonomous tribe has an African heritage. Their legacy of a unique physical appearance was quite apparent in their offspring in the past. But there had been inter marriages with the Sinhalese Tamil and Muslims and other races. As a result the typical genetic physicalmarks of their race is not apparent in their present generation. They have the appearance of the present Sinhalese generation. It can be truthfully said that the Caffir race that remained in Ceylon had left their original heritage to enter and continue in the traditional and historical life as Sri Lankans.

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