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## **A sociological study of the living fashions of peasantry communities in contemporary Sri Lankan rural societies**

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### **Abstract**

Over the years 'rural life' has been defined, redefined and eventually fallen out of fashion as a sociological concept - in contrast to urban studies, which has flourished. This much-needed reappraisal calls for its reinterpretation in light of the profound changes affecting the countryside. In this context, this study, endeavored a sociological analysis of the living styles of countryside populaces in the modern social milieu. The facts revealed that the peasantry communities who had harnessed traditional livelihoods as their economy while ensuing humble life style has converted into rural village communities due to the complexity that caused on the rural living pattern. In this perspective, the study problem of this research is the cause of factors affected to change the living pattern of the rural peasantry communities in the modern-day society. Accordingly, the main objective of this study is to delve into the living fashions of rural communities of contemporary society. This study was focused on *Diggapura Grama Niladhari division in Madirigiriya Divisional Secretarial division in the Polonnaruwa district* in line with a random sampling method having selected 153 informants for the sample. Information collected through a questionnaire with added investigations via focused group discussions (FGDs), and observations, attended in qualitatively and quantitatively through field visits as well. While farming becomes the key livelihood as yet, there are additional living means as well such as; coolly work, masonry and carpentry work, garment related jobs, businesses, driving, overseas jobs, mechanical, teaching, pensioners, security services, health services, means of self-employment and several other Govt. jobs. When the family sizes are concerned 92% of family units were with less than six members in each unit. Also it is visible in current context that the extensive family system that was one of a predominating factors in the past has now changed into nuclear family system in the modern villages. In consideration of the communication methods that being practiced in current era, 33% of them acclimatized with Televisions while 28% adapt Radios and 4% manage through computers while there are 28% depend on mobile telephones. In the meantime there are 3% of them using laptop. This transformation elaborates that the living fashions of modern-day rural communities have subjected for a gradual change in comparison situation in the past.

**Keywords:** Rural communities, life style, modern-day rural peasantry, society

### **1. Introduction**

Any society can be delineated as a human aggregation inclined to a common culture. It is noticeable that all internal acts of them are based on their culture. Also perceptible that society emerges first and culture appears next. Those living in the society are accustomed to a life style in conformity to the existing culture. In this scenario, the existing culture can be indicated as an elementary characteristic of the society while, identifying society as a mirror reflecting the culture. The society is to be denoted as a human congregation with commonly shared-out culture, hence, it is identifiable that society is a unit built through communal collectivity and conformity. Largely, the main and active substance within the society is the human or the person. Thereby, society can be identified as a congregation which has acquired a culture. Accordingly, the life style of the society which is merged by common culture with other identities of the people are shaped up with those features. It is apparent that with the change happened on society the cultural background too, of rural communities within the countryside society was exposed to a change through which their living pattern also was subjected to a change.

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When deliberate on all segments of societies involved in hunting, crop cultivation, agricultural, technical and mechanical work there are varied differences of magnitudes, economies, inequality and the male and female composition. The pattern of dressing, and all behavioral models of people can be branded as living fashions. Also the traditional living modes of the agricultural society could be seen totally in difference to the concurrent rural society. Accordingly, the living fashions of rural communities are built in consistent with the changes of socio-cultural and modern social settings. Émile Durkheim in his study analyzed social changes across the concept of social cohesion. Those mechanical cohesive features prevailed within the rural as well as traditional societies such as; decrease of population, simplified labour division, spontaneous social relationships and also the existence of inter-relationships between personal level and a modest living fashion built in accordingly could be seen with the lives of the rural societies in villages. According to the analysis of Émile Durkheim it is clear that, rural living pattern has been changed or had transformed in to an status of organismic cohesion due to the increase of population, complicated labour division, sweated labour and the endeavored social contacts. In view of Émile Durkheim's analysis the older society had mechanical cohesion and it has been in practice too, hence the personnel inter-relationship had transpired in an effective manner. He has also emphasized that within those transformed societies energetic or live communication was in existence instead of weariness communication.

The above reveals that modes of artificial communication prevails within organismic cohesion societies that had been changed from traditionalism. It is also visible that in comparatively to the social changes happened in the said organismic societies there are changes happening in the community's living fashions as well.

## 2. Research Problem

As briefed above, it is perceptible that the living fashions of communities, are changing in varied nature depending on the circumstantial effects. This is verifiable through the processes of transformation happening within those traditional rural communities while moving ahead in line with varied nature of challenges. The research problem is to identify the causes and effects affecting for changes of living pattern of the present rural communities,

## 3. Objectives

### 3.1 Main Objective

To study the living fashions/ life style of villagers in the modern rural communities.

### 3.2 Specific Objectives

- To ascertain characteristics of the life styles of villagers living in modern rural societies
- To identify those facts affecting the changes of the life styles of rural communities.

## 4. Literature Review

As per the illustration of the Oxford dictionary, the psychologist Alfred *Aller* was the original user of the term 'Lifestyle'. He used this term as the basic character of early childhood which controls reaction and the behavior (Veal, 1993, 234) <sup>[4]</sup>. The nature and the caliber of internal relationships between social groups living in specific society

and also the differences of their status and role too, can be introduced as Lifestyle. It is also a common incident that life style of communities change with the move of time.

In 1993 <sup>[4]</sup>, a literary and analytical research done by A.J. Veal studied the relationship between the concept of lifestyle and the lifestyle Vs. hobbies also focusing on how the leisure time is related to the Lifestyle.

"This review of literature and an analysis of the concept of lifestyle and its relationship to leisure elaborates in its first part of the paper having divided into nine sections covering Weberian, sub-cultural, psychological, market research and psychographics, leisure/tourism styles, spatial, socialist lifestyles, consumer culture, gender, and miscellaneous approaches. In the second part of the paper a number of themes are identified and their roles in defining lifestyle; these are: activities / behavior; values and attitudes; individuals versus groups; group interaction, coherence, recognition and choice. In conclusion, a definition of lifestyle is offered and a brief indication of a research agenda is presented" (Veal, 1993, 234) <sup>[4]</sup>. In addition. In 2007 Mischel Pieris too, performed a research study on lifestyle and an analytical overview was publicized on several thematic areas Viz; Domestic composition, domestic features and private transport services.

"A postal questionnaire on lifestyles was randomly distributed to approximately 1000 residents of the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames. This generated 122 completed and returned responses. The sample represents a broad geographical spread across the Borough, a wide range of age groups and incomes and a distribution of household composition (in terms of the number of people living in a household) that reflects well the distribution of this factor existing across the Borough as a whole. 70 survey respondents expressed an interest in future stages of the research (~ 57% of the sample). Approximately half of the sample place little emphasis on the acquisition and possession of material goods and a sizeable majority hold positive environmental attitudes, recognizing for example the importance of climate change as a key world issue and agreeing that every household should 'do their bit' to help reduce the impacts of climate change. Many respondents have undertaken – and continue to carry out – routine actions consistent with improved energy efficiency that include regular purchase of energy efficient light bulbs, turning appliances off fully rather than leaving them on standby and insulating their homes. Nevertheless, there remains a proportion of the sample who apparently have yet to be convinced of the veracity of climate change and the contribution that they can make in helping to reduce carbon emissions. Although there was a split of opinion as to the extent to which individuals alone can influence decisions that affect the local area, the bulk of the sample agreed that by working together people in their geographical community can influence these decisions. It is suggested that this potentially bodes well for community based projects designed to engage Richmond's residents in collective action to reduce carbon emissions. That said, when asked to describe their lifestyles the sample generated a diverse array of defining statements suggesting that any emerging community strategy for carbon reduction will require the capacity and flexibility to resonate effectively with individuals who have vastly differing needs, priorities and lifestyle aspirations" (Peters, 2007, 4) <sup>[3]</sup>.

Also noticeable that the research completed on the living pattern in the context of domestic economic conduct too, is vital in the study of lifestyle.

“A theory-based approach to lifestyle research is developed in this study. An household production model is introduced which provides the basis for identifying three basic lifestyle traits: (1) income expansion, (2) household production, and (3) adaptive consumption. Measures of these traits are presented which show generally acceptable levels of reliability and validity” (Fisher, 2015, 69)<sup>[1]</sup>.

To transform the traditional rural agricultural society to be a rural or urban industrial society the urbanization too, was an elementary cause and there is a rural society which has impressed by the features of urbanization. Social change is a transformation of cultural, social institutions and the social structures in line with the time. The other elements associated with the society such as; culture and the social behavior which is determined via the culture, and the political system, economic and the Educational system. These elements were transformed during the past duration affecting the rural lifestyle to turn into change. Due to the transmutation of above factors within the past time, the rural lifestyle too took a new pathway. In this context, social system and the social internal operation exists inclusively similar to the lifestyle.

## 5. Methodology

### • Study area

The Grama Niladhiri division named Diggalpura in Medirigiriya Divisional Secretariat division in the district of Polonnaruwa of the North Central province is selected to be the study area.

### • Sample

A team consisted by a random sample of 85 women and 68 men in total 153 informants in *Diggalpura* GN Division was selected as to be the sample.

### • Primary Source of information

In this study, collecting information was attended through Observation, Focused group discussions and Questionnaire for gathering information as primary sources.

### • Secondary Source of information

Access for internet, varied publications were applied to collect data and information as secondary source of information.

### • Data Collection

Process of data gathering was accomplished through Questionnaires, Chain of interviews, and through focused group discussions (FGDs), having visited locations In addition, constant observations attended while also recording case stories.

## 5.1 Data Analysis

Data Analysis was managed through SPSS computer data analysis system. Data in pertinent to Event Recording and Case study assessments were brought under a detailed analytical judgment.

## 6. Results / Findings and Discussions

The study sample was represented by 85 women (56%) and 68 men (44%). When the age levels of the study sample are

concerned, the highest percentage was belong to the age limits of 35 – 44 which has represented 29%.

**Table 1:** Analysis of the structure of age ranges of rural community.

Age Distribution	Percentage
Between 20 - 24	5.23%
Between 25 - 34	21.57%
Between 35 - 44	28.76%
Between 45 - 54	11.76%
Between 55 - 64	19.61%
More than 65	13.07%
Total	100.00%

Source: Field Research 2018)

Investigations revealed that education becomes an influential factor on the life style of rural society. When the levels of education is considered it was disclosed that higher percentage of rural personnel (53%) had attended education from 6<sup>th</sup>. Grade to O'level. It could be ascertained that unlike in the past the contemporary society follows modern style of Food habits, clothes and ornamental fashions due to their access and influence on the modern educational levels they achieved. Additionally, the information received on the range of non-attendees on educational processes stated that only 1% had not attended schooling, which asserts further that it is one other eminent factor for the said modernization. The changed ideologies inculcated as a result of education, normally creates influence on the living styles.

In concern with the outcomes of investigation attended on the employment pattern of the community in this area, 35% were found as un-employees yet, higher percentage of those are employed found to be employed under agro-based actions. Consequently, it could be noted that their living pattern is built in parallel to their livelihoods. It was also apparent that this community follows own style of living in line with the key livelihoods actions. Those supplementary living means apart from the agriculture were; coolly work, masonry work, garment work, trade and businesses, driving, foreign employments, jobs within industrial sector, security services, and benefits of retirement, health services and varied self-employment avenues. Also, there are categories of employments such as carpentry and those positions holding under Government.

Subsequently, the investigations were extended to ascertain whether the status of residences had effects on changes happened on the lifestyles of the community under the current study. Accordingly, it was disclosed that 55% of families were traditional dwellers in this locality while 45% had been migrated from external areas. Thereby it was noticeable that the different socio-cultural pattern of living ushered by the migrated families too, had affected for the changes of traditional lifestyles of native families. Also, it was perceptible that imitation of thoughts and hopes of migrant families including their styles of dressings and ornaments too, had caused change of life styles of conventional families. One other observable element was the mixture of typical lifestyle prevailed in the village and the different lifestyles escorted by the migrated families within the mixed community.

When the family based memberships are analyzed, it was conspicuous that higher percentage of families having 3 - 4 memberships and the families reported less than 6 members within the sample represented 92%. This scrutiny had

asserted that lesser number of family members too, has affected for changes of lifestyles of the contemporary rural societies than the changes happened on the lifestyles of traditional societies. This is tolerable since, nuclear family system had come into existence instead of dimensional family system prevailed in the history.

Also considered the reasons for families to migrate to this locality and the outcomes of such assessment revealed that 33% of them were native families while 30% had migrated after marriages affirming that the status of residence too is a factor affecting the lifestyle of the communities. The harmony and unity visible between native families and those migrated ones even though the reasons for migration were not known, showing the conviviality of the lifestyles of both traditional and modern families.

One other essential factor affecting the lifestyles of modern families is the usage of mass communication equipment. Could also be noticed that a greater influence of mass communication media affects varied nature of modernization of dressings, food habits and many other elements of the life style. Studies revealed that the types of mass media being used by the contemporary society, that volume of 33% are adopted to televisions, and 28% are espoused to broadcasting services while 4% on computers and 28% to use hand phones. Whereas, the percentage of those are accustomed to use hand phones and laptop represents equal volume which is 3%. Normally, spending leisure times within the lifestyles occupies a vital status. Accordingly, it could be identified that usage of communication media happens in particular during leisure times. Could also be identified a comprehensive change of the lifestyles due to the affection for TVs and hand phones while also enabling the modern society to widen their horizons on the status of society and the world. The said change has curtailed the leisure times enjoyed by the society and there is a velocity of retreat from the folk arts and sports.

The research shows that there is a relationship between changed food style and consumption pattern of modern society and the media of which the expressions of 18% of the sample has confirmed the said change, whereas, 49% of informers commented that there is no such changes happening. Yet, 13% of respondents stated that they can watch programmes of latest food preparation methods through media. This occurrences assert that changed food habits and newly found recipes play a role in changed lifestyles too. Overall, a vital stance is there on consumption of food within the changed life style. In consideration of factors affecting the processes of food consumption or selecting menus the conclusion would be that there is no forceful influence of media on food consumption pattern within the modern society.

Another significant matter identifiable within the lifestyle is the usage of apparel and costumes. The said apparel can be noted as a factor depicting the external shape of the lives of community. Normally, selected apparel are being used by people depending on each one's wishes and expectations. This research disclosed that 27% of the rural communities are using varied fashions of apparel owing to the usage of media. Nevertheless, 66% of informers articulated that there is no any causes or facts affected the purchases of apparel which means that the influence of media on apparel and lifestyle is not in a powerful manner. Their leisure pursuits are horticulture, home gardening, watching films, practicing

musical actions, get to know sports, to practice dancing and to familiarize with cottage industries.

Another way of identifying those features of rural life styles is to identify their leisure pursuits. These families usually enjoy their leisure time by involving on gardening, watching films, getting into the use of music and sports, attending dancing practices, practicing new methods of cooking, getting use to travel and to involve in handicrafts. When their involvement on hobbies are concerned, those hobbies are in varied nature rather than being homogeneous, through which, those characteristics of existing lifestyles of those in the rural societies can be well determined.

Other strong obligatory factor linked with the lifestyles is the thoughts and wills because, there is a direct link with pattern of thinking, views and attitudes, for changing lifestyles. When the thoughts and views of the modern rural society are analyzed, that, giving credence to several beliefs such as Astrology, varied imagines and emulations or spiritual believes becomes ruling factors affecting the nature of lifestyles.

Also, by examining the physical environment of houses too, it can reveal the lifestyle of rural families. Generally, in the current context it can be seen that physical environment of houses are compared with furniture. Could also be seen that a segment of 58% of families manage their affairs through traditional processes without using modern furniture. Further investigations revealed that among the informers, 2% are using washing machines, segment of 3% using home theaters while, 13% using new LED televisions whereas, 6% had purchased refrigerators and Sofa and about 1% of them had done color washing to keep the house in a pleasant manner. These factors affirm that a segment of communities do not pay higher attention on modern equipment because, a simple mind-set is in prevalence as yet. On inquiry of health habits of modern peasants & it was expounded that ; slimming, be alert on communicable diseases, be attentive on tooth Vs. gum related diseases, cleaning hands, practicing physical exercises, retreat from agro-chemical, usage of clean water, trend of using *Ayurvedic* medicine were some of the practices shown under secured health habits within their lifestyles.

In concern with the inter-relationship within families the unity is persisted since, 44% said that family members used to watch TVs together, also giving prominence to watch religious programmes. In reference to the academic backgrounds and their prominence a substantial percentage of modern society had managed to find employments such as; to join military services, finding avenues to start self-employments etc., by means of advertisements published through media, while also, applying technology for employment and to learn legal aspects related to their jobs could be noticed. Despite the fact that 44% had commented saying that watching TV had not created any positive impact on education, while 3% said watching TV is a blockade for the progress of education, yet, 36% ensued that usage of media enables positive improvement of education, while 2% uttered that it is helpful for new explorations, whereas 7% expressed views that watching TV facilitates, raised awareness on new opportunities of education. This illustrates the influence of TV or other media sources for changes of lifestyles of the rural communities.

When religious believes are concerned, it helps to determine the nature of lifestyles. Majority of respondents (29%) uttered that beliefs of different religions is a specific feature

of their religious living. Another 22% stated that higher tendency is there to watch religious programmes particularly on Poya Days. Other 16% of informers expressed their eagerness to listen Pirith while 6% shared views commenting that they need to create a religious background. Eventually, 12% were uttered to say that they do not have specific concerns on their religion.

Also, 11% of the sample mentioned that media has some influences on their lifestyles and it is also, important to watch news which facilitates knowledge gathering on the risks of lifestyles. However, 22% says that watching news has no any influence on their lives. In contrary 48% says watching news helps them to raise awareness on incidences happening in different ways. 9% pointed out that watching news help them to secure their protection while 7% expressed on the possibilities to know how things happening in the political sector. Also 5% mentioned the importance to know the price changes of commodities. Whereas, 2% shared views uttering that news enable them to access information on legal aspects, while 3% commented on certain other reasons too to persuade them to watch news.

Popularity of modern society to watch news as a regular habit which also illustrates the pattern of the lifestyles. Most of the rural communities the breadwinners are committed to spend time during day time on product related work and spend time in the night to watch tele-drama, of which 13%, said it strengthens family bondage since all used to watch TVs jointly. Yet, 3% expressed views on watching TV together limits the time to communicate among each other, while 08% were in the opinion that watching Tele-drama helps them to evolve different qualities of living and 1% feels it is a waste of time. Also 2% of them shared views that watching Tele-drama secure the protection of families, while 38% were in the opinion that watching TV had not created any difference in their living processes. The above expressions had well illustrated the attitude of rural communities on watching tele-drama and also the differences of ideologies emerged within their lifestyles.

Similar to other nations the usage of hand phones in Sri Lanka too, is widely spreading and the percentage of users also represents an higher percentage. Study outcomes revealed that 41% of the sample informants using exclusive types of hand phones while, 59% are using ordinary types. Further investigations uncovered that the usage of hand phones in the current context shows in an higher scale whereas, the hand phones are kept as a tool attached to their lives and also to underscore the social class. It is an additional resource that all the users of exclusive hand phones can access to inter-net services and that facility is unavailable for ordinary hand phone users. Conversely, when the usage of hand phones by the rural citizens are assessed it enables to understand the social category of the sample and their life styles, too. Since Facebook being a vibrant social media it was decide to assert up to which level or degree the face book is under. Finally, it was revealed that only 20% of them are accessing face book and the balance 80% do not access the same. In contrary, face book media is accessed by a large number of well to do citizens and the inquiries made through the sample uncovered the status of the social networks prevailing within the rural community and their status.

## 7. Conclusion

The pattern of living or else the normal behavioral system of people could be identified as to be the fashion of the living. Thus, it is an acceptable fact that the traditional life styles prevailed within the traditional agricultural society is diametrically opposite to the concurrent life styles of the community. Nevertheless, the lifestyles of modern rural community too, has been subjected for varied changes. In accordance with the facts discovered during this study, the lifestyles of rural community could be analyzed through those elementary factors such as; education, employment, family structure, as well as the types of residential modes of modern societies. Similarly, it could be noted that in comparatively to the lifestyles of traditional rural communities, visible changes of the lifestyles of modern society too had happened. The extent of changes happened within the modern rural society too could be assessed by studying the food consumption habits, hobbies, dresses and ornaments, usage of media, ways of spending leisure times, nature of physical assets at domestic level.

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