

WOMEN AND CONCEPT OF “*KILI*” (POLLUTION) IN SINHALESE SOCIETY

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Introduction

Birth, attainment (puberty) and death are considered as the main transitional events in human life. Everywhere in the world people make various offerings to gods and worship them during these transitional periods. As these events or occasions are universal, such behavior is not characteristic of any particular social sector. Most of these rituals are related to women. These special events and occasions are connected with blood and therefore they are believed to be causing pollution. Thus out of fear and abhorrence of blood the concept known as ‘*kill*’ or ‘pollution’ has emerged. In Sri Lankan society there are few famous taints such as birth, attainment, menstruation and death. In addition to these there are some other ‘*kili*’ or taints such as food, liquor and ‘*naga*’ or ‘cobra’ among folk beliefs. Taint of death and food are accepted as common to both males and females. This study aims to examine the concept and practice of the ‘*kill*’ or taint, as it is one of the major aspects in the folk culture of Sri Lanka. For this purpose, this comparative research project concentrates on the beginning of the [*kill*] taint, its chronological

evolution, folk-tales and its practice in traditional and modern society (in the fields of agriculture, rituals and customs for gods and exorcism etc.). From the information gathered, it was clear that there is still strong evidence to prove that the concept of ‘*kili*’ is strictly believed in the traditional society. Women, in a taint or polluted state, are strictly banned from attending religious and agricultural events or, healing rituals and other occult practices. Therefore women are not allowed to participate in such events. However, it was clear from the secondary sources an environment more sympathetic and tolerant towards women has evolved through the belief system on super-human forces.

Research Methodology

This research was conducted in the Thumpane and Kundasale Divisional Secretariat Divisions to find out how the rituals connected with the concept of ‘taint’ are practiced at present. Data was collected on traditional and modern knowledge through interviews, individual studies, and group discussions.

Results

The ancient customs and beliefs woven around the concept of birth taint etc. have been rejected by the attitudes of the modern society, which in effect has led to conflicts in the social order. Similarly, belief in taints in agriculture too is being abandoned. There is, nevertheless, a feeling among the villagers that this kind of disregard for customs and traditions has been the cause of diseases and failure in crops. In the modern society for attaining multiple objectives and solving personal problems when people invoke gods, they pay excessive attention to purity. Therefore, to have or to be with taints is considered as a disqualification for participation. People refrain from associating with everything connected with taints when they engage in occult practices and rituals. Even though people have reached an advanced stage in a number of fields, especially in education, they are still unable to free themselves fully from conventional beliefs and concepts. Folk tales such as *Giri Devi* and *Dala Kumara*, have provided the Sinhala society with the knowledge and experience for developing that kind of attitudes. Further, as a result of this, in the traditional society an individual self-control as well as an informal societal control has been developed. Due to development in education and advancement in technology the concept of [*kili*] taint is gradually disappearing in modern society.

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