

NOTE ON A FEW WORDS IN THE VEDDA LANGUAGE

By F. LEWIS

While exploring for timber in the country round Alutnewara (Bintenna) I happened to come into contact with a procession that was going to a Perahera at that place. This was in September, 1922.

Among the processional persons attending the Temple at Alutnewara I found a party of five Veddass, who came from Dambane, and with them was an Arachi who spoke both Sinhalese and Vedda, so finding a suitable opportunity, I managed to get the party to come to the Resthouse, where I was staying, in order to gather some information respecting those interesting people, and also to collect some of their words, as I had failed to do the latter when exploring the Vedda country in 1914, notwithstanding repeated attempts, and generous offers of money payment.

The five men I refer to were said to be of the *Nambudana Warugè*, or clan, and were in one party. No women were with them.

They were all of a medium height, thin bodied, with slender limbs. Their skin was dark, and very dirty, but free from cutaneous eruptions. The eyes, dark, almost black, deep set, and most restless. The hair black, matted, and hanging, but not particularly long, which except for the eyebrows, the hair growth on the face was not conspicuously abundant. Prominent cheek bones, and small chins, were characteristic.

Unfortunately, these people were brought to the Rest-house so late in the evening that I was unable to photograph them, and as I feared they might resent it as a liberty, I did not take any measurements of the people themselves.

Proceedings began by the Arachi ordering the men to sing some verses in my honour. This they did in a very loud and unmusical manner, but I was unable to detect a single word with which I was familiar.

At the conclusion of one or two verses, the Arachi interpreted to me the substance of what had been sang, which might be described as a complimentary welcome.

I then got the men to give me their names, which were Kaluwa, Demata, Dawuta, Millalana, and Kanda.

I asked if they could give me any women's names, and was informed that those usually given were Kiri, Kandi, Hudi and Kalu.

These people had no idea of the days of the week, and appeared to be unable to count; their arithmetical power being confined to distinguishing odds from evens. Thus, when I placed 7 matches on the ground, and I asked how many there were, it appeared that this proposition was far too difficult, and after much careful picking up and placing down of the matches, they were finally laid in pairs, thus obviously leaving a single one over.

This was triumphantly held up, as being "one over!" On an additional match being put down, the matches were once more grouped in pairs, but with no further exclamation or arrangement.

I failed to get any expression that I could understand as the equivalent of a figure, or number, and by spreading the matches out, one by one, no further result was obtained, except that once more they would be picked up in twos.

From this I concluded, that as there was neither a word to express a number, nor a capacity to find an analogy with such obvious things as the fingers of the hand with numbers, and that there was wanting the corresponding brain power to be able to count.

I next proceeded to collect a few words, and for the sake of comparison I arranged those with the corresponding words as recorded by Dr. Seligmann,* and Mr. H. Parker, giving for the sake of brevity the letters S (= Seligmann), and P (= Parker), after each word. Thus:

| <i>English Word</i> | <i>Vedda as given to me</i> =(L) |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Man</i> | = Minik-gajja (L) = Minigeja (S) = Mina (P) = Hobarayā (P) in <i>Kaelē-bāsa</i> |
| 2. <i>Wife or woman</i> | = Nēna (L) and (P) = ? (P) = Mini (P) = woman |
| 3. <i>Child</i> | = Kekullala (L) = Hineto, kekula (S) = Kaekula (P) |
| 4. <i>Hand</i> | = At-pojja (L) = Athandia, Atkira (S) = ? (P) |
| 5. <i>Arm</i> | = At-pojja (L) = Adane, aidanda, atula (S) = ? (P) |
| 6. <i>Foot</i> | = Piya-pojja (L) = Kura, Paiapatula (S) = ? (P) |
| 7. <i>Head</i> | = Eeya-kabala (L) and (S), also = Iakaba, Iakabala (S) = Ica, Isi, Iya (P) |
| 8. <i>Eye</i> | = Eiru-kuba (L) = Acaldeka, airukula, aiyarukula (S) = Eccel (P) |

*"The Veddas," by C. G. Seligmann, M.D., 1911.

†"Ancient Ceylon," by H. Parker, 1909.

| English Word | Vedda as given to me=(L) |
|---------------------|--|
| 9. Mouth | = Kata-pojja (L) = Katakabale, katarukula (S) = ? (P) |
| 10. Body | = Anga-pojja (L and S) = Enge, Kanda (S) = Bo-pata (P) |
| 11. Finger | = Angili-pojja (L and S) = ? (P) |
| 12. Water | = Dira-rachcha (L) = Dia, diaraca, diarukula (S) = Dira in Kaele-bāsa (P) = Diya (P) |
| 13. Fire | = Gini-rachcha (L) = Gine, gini-pojja, Ratumala (S) |
| 14. Sky | = Diya-kabbala (L) = Aci, Akawe (S) = Dewu-ula (P) |
| 15. Stone | = Gal-pojja (L) = Gale (S) = ? (P) |
| 16. Sun | = Ira-pojja (L and S) also Parker = Sakolawa, Suriya (S) = Suriya (in Kaele-bāsa, P) |
| 17. Moon | = Handa-pojja (L and S) = Delungrajal, Handageya (S) = Pāna-pojja (P) |
| 18. Tree | = Gai-dandu (L) = Ga, Gapoja, Gaipoja (S) = Ga (P) = in Kaele-bāsa, Honda, Honde, Hondeya (P) |
| 19. Leaf | = Kola-pojja (L and S) = ? (P) |
| 20. Axe-head or Axe | = Garrakke (L) = Asirikaluwa, Galrakiya, Poro- datula, Poroketiya, Porowa, Sambala, Tarainkeea, Tekkiya (S) = Gal-raekki, At-barawa (P) = in Kaele-bāsa = Kotanna, Waduwa (P) |

| English Word | Vedda as given to me=(L) |
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| 21. "Catty" | = Bimpojja-patagatana-yamake(L) = ? (S) = Adinata, Māla-koti (P) = in Kaele-bāsa = Kaeti-waduwa (P) |
| 22. Bow | = Mala-liya (L and S) = Donda, Dunne, Ikele, Mandaliya (S) = Iun-gā (P) = in Kaele-bāsa Dunne (?) |
| 23. Arrow | = Moriyān-Kechcha (L), (S) and (P) = Aude, Danda, Morian Ketiya (S) |
| 24. Elephant | = Botta-kanda (L and S), also (P) = Botakabala (S) = Botā, Gombara-Uhalla, Act-bota, Kadā, Kota-baebēlā, Mōla (P) = in Kaele-bāsa = Usallā, Gajjara (P) |
| 25. Leopard | = Polachcha (L and S) = Divia, Diya, Kerikotia, Mita, Poleca, Poletēa, Walkuparu- balla (S) = Kapuru-balla, Pollecca, Mita, Mita-botā (P) = in Kaele-bāsa = Iiviya, Siwu- pawa, Baedi-muta, Raenaya (P) |
| 26. Bear | = Karriar (L and S) also (P) = Hatera, Keriā, Keri-kanda, Wal- balla, Malapulakuna (S) = Balā, Haecca, Wala, Araci, Baraci, Kiri-bota (P) = in Kaele-bāsa = Uyangowwa, Tadiya, Kaluwa, Gamaya |
| 27. Day | = Iripojja-patabachchiga (L) = ? (S and P) |
| 28. Night | = Rai-machchama (L) = Ramecavena (S) ? (P) |
| 29. Come | = Humbata mangachchi (L) and (S) = Anokala ganyayi, Mitagacēnēwa (S) |

*English Word*30. *Go**Vedda as given to me*=(L)

- = Ombakattamangachcha (L)
- = Mangacenawa, Mitagacapam,
Naman (S)
- = Mangaccana (P)
- = in *Kaele-bāsa* = Baendenawa,
Karana karanawa (P)

It will be noticed that the word "*pojja*" is frequently used. I take this to be equivalent to the word "thing," as a child might express a knife as a cutting-*thing*, or for a scale, as a measuring-*thing*, and so on.

I leave it to the learned to establish the origin of any of these words, for while many may argue,—and probably with much reason,—that while Sinhalese words can be distinctly traced in many, the difficulty arises if the Vedda language originated in the Sinhalese, or *vice versa*; or did both languages find their origin in a language that was common to both, or the parent of both?

If the last view is to be taken, how is it that no written characters are used by the Veddas, and how is it that they have practically none of the arts of the Sinhalese? Alternatively, if we are to assume the Vedda as our local aboriginal man, has he lost his aboriginal language, and adapted a language that has words of Sinhalese type, to convey his meaning? If he has done so, it is difficult to understand how, in so many other matters, he differs from the Sinhalese: nor can it be understood why he should abandon his natural tongue for an adopted one, without other changes being made as well.

Dr. Seligmann is at great pains to give us the root of many words, to show the affinity between many Vedda and Sinhalese words, but much as this is of interest, I submit that it does not clear the difficulties in the way to fixing the position the Vedda language has to take, and it leaves very much to speculation whether the Vedda is the Aboriginal man of Ceylon, or if he came from elsewhere, and in the struggle for existence has he acquired another language with which to amplify his own?