

## **Recognition through Relocation: Dilemma of Sri Lankan Gypsies in State Sponsored Settlements**

**Anuththaradevi Widyalkara, PhD**

Department of History  
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka  
yawidyalkara@yahoo.com

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**Abstract:** *For a nomadic group such as gypsies 'the house' is necessarily a temporary shelter that represents their ephemeral pattern of living. The 'abode' of the Ceylon gypsies is a simple architectural device of dry sticks and palm leaves. State sponsored settlement schemes were a necessary corollary of the urbanization process that commenced in 1980s and made the cultural behavior of Sri Lankan gypsies dysfunctional. The state in its benevolence thought it necessary to make this nomadic tribe a pastoral people settled on arable land. To the gypsies the measure represented a 'cultural dilemma' where their identity and mode of sustenance was in jeopardy. This study investigates the challenges faced by the Sri Lankan gypsies who were offered permanent shelter which they perceived as a hindrance to their traditional way of life. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods facilitated to come to a conclusion that enhancing the quality of life is not solely confined to physical improvement at the cost of cultural dislocation.*

**Keywords:** *Sri Lankan gypsy, cultural practices, assimilation, acculturalisation, settlement schemes.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The gypsies are a close-knit nomadic people with some notable and shared characteristics scattered in Europe and the Indian subcontinent. The term 'Gypsies' in its empirical sense denotes and describes a people leading a nomadic life. Their origins have been the subject of controversy throughout the centuries, but in modern times, we have discovered, from research into their language, that the gypsies originated in Northern India, from whence they spread throughout Europe and the Middle East. But no one knows when the first gypsies left India or, indeed why. However, genetically it is now applied to the Roma who now form largest minority group within Europe.

A noted scholar of Roma history Ian Hancock in his book *We are the Romani People* concludes that linguistic and historical evidence indicates India as the ancestral home of the Romani people (Hancock, 2002). The Roma gypsies are universally recognized as a distinct people with a shared heritage that sets them apart as an ethnic group (Kalaydjieva et.al, 2005). The purpose of this paper is far removed from any inquiry into the anthropology of gypsies. Nevertheless it would help to remember the general scholarly approach to the Roma in particular and gypsies in general. That the 'Gypsies' are a people trapped between the past and the present with no history are an appropriate description of the term gypsy for the purpose of this paper.

The gypsies of Sri Lanka are known as Ahikuntikas a word of which, the etymology is uncertain. One view is that 'Ahi' means serpents. It is speculated that the prefix 'Ahi' is a reference the gypsy practice of making a living as itinerant entertainers exhibiting snakes (mostly Cobras) and monkeys. They also practice fortune telling by palm reading a vocation bordering the mystical and super natural given credence by the presence of a Cobra - an important motif in Oriental mythology.

While there is no clear evidence that explains the presence of the Ahikuntika people in Sri Lanka is available, the Gypsies of Sri Lanka trace their origins to a primitive tribal group that migrated to the island from present day Andhra Pradesh in South India. In a broader perspective there is a common understanding and a belief that of having an Indian connection to the origin of gypsies. It is assumed that gypsies found both in Europe and in Asia are descendants of migrants from India around 1000 A.D. (Okely, 1983).

“Studies of the language or dialects of gypsies in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries revealed a connection with a form of Sanskrit said to have evolved around or before 1000

A.D. The different forms of 'Romany' found throughout Europe have also many words from Persian, modern and Byzantine Greek, Slavic and Rumanian. These other ingredients have been perceived by scholars as 'corruptions' of a once 'pure' Indian Gypsy language" (Okely, 1983). The etymological work of John Sampson (1926) ascribes an Indian origin to gypsies of Wales according to vocabulary content (1923). On the basis of regional affiliations, ethno-cultural assimilations and the time-space harmonization there could be an amalgam of pronunciations and dialects in each group of gypsies living in different parts of the world. Thus, the words and accents are rarely linked with one country and it varies even in different areas of the same country. This is true in the context of Sri Lanka, too.

## 2. GYPSIES IN SRI LANKA

Some scholars have surmised that the Sri Lankan gypsies probably descend from wandering tribesmen called "Koravar" who continue their vagrancy to this day in provinces of Kerala, Madura and Pandya (Thananjayarajasingham, 1973). Thananjayarajasingham points out that the 'Kuravar' community found in the Eastern part of the country is undoubtedly, of Indian origin due to their dialect and the linguistic identification (Thananjayarajasingham, 1973). However, there are no authentic records of a gypsy migration from India to Sri Lanka.

Apart from their vernacular "Telingu", they are well conversant in both Sinhala and Tamil as a result of integration and assimilation. While they are known as 'ahikuntika' in Sinhala, Sri Lankan Tamils refer to them as 'Kuravar'. These people known as Kuravars are found in the eastern parts of the island. While some of them are subsistence farmer or farm hands most are still root less and roaming. They are mostly confined to the generally arid parts of the north central and eastern parts of the island. This is mainly due to the popular perception of gypsies as nomadic outcasts who tend to steal and plunder to augment their earnings as soothsayers and snake charmers. Instinctively they tend to avoid densely populated areas and seek sanctuary in areas sparse with people.

Obviously the Ahikuntikayas of Sri Lanka are a gypsy-like people who in all probability migrated from India several centuries ago. No chronological estimate of their arrival in Sri Lanka is available. Gypsies have been perennially regarded as nomads with no fixed abode. Currently they settled in the plains around Anuradhapura, especially in tank-fed areas in a greater quantity. They roamed the land never settling for more than a few days in any location.

Although Ahikuntikas have been inhabited in Sri Lanka for centuries, contemplations about their routine and lifestyle and identifications as a significant community illustrated through records belonging to the colonial period. The Europeans in Ceylon were amused with this group and to them they were differed from other sub-groups of the country. Probably they identified the gypsies in Ceylon as a significant cultural group. One of the earliest references made by a European on snake-charming was by Phillip Baldaeus, who in his *A Description of the Great and Most Famous Isle of Ceylon*, writes "among the inhabitants of the coast of Coromandel, and the Cingalese and Malabars are certain fellows who possess the art of making serpents stand upright and dance before them, which they perform by enchanting songs" (Baldaeus, 1992)

John Davy's recounts an experience of a snake charmer in his record of his residence in Sri Lanka. It substantiates the existence of the Gypsies in Sri Lanka for several centuries. Davy writes "during my residence in Ceylon, by the death of one of these performers, when his audience had provoked to attempt some unaccustomed familiarity with the cobra, it bit him on the wrist, and he expired the same evening" (Davy, 2005).

J. W. Bennett in his *Ceylon and its Capabilities* provides an excellent description of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century performance by an itinerant snake charming due from India, and a cautionary tale on buying cobras for those few, daring souls (such as himself) who wished to keep them as pets (Bennett, 2009). There are many documented instances that provide fascinating descriptions of Gypsy snake charmers and their skills in taming the fearful cobra.

Indeed, as any Ahikuntikaya would readily concede, cobras could sense fear. The success of a snake charmer depends on not displaying fear or nervousness. Emerson Tennett in his *Natural History of Ceylon* describes the use of a "snake stone" used by Gypsy snake charmers (Tennett, 1999).

It is interesting to note that during the British colonial rule of Ceylon, headmen of the Gypsy settlements called Kuppayamas were efficiently used by the Government Agent of the relevant province by appointing them as headman annually. H. Wase the Government Agent of the Central

province has reported this appointment in his daily records (SLNA No. 323/15717, 1905). All these records indicate the existence of the Ahikuntika people for centuries predating European occupation.

### 2.1. The Life of Sri Lankan Gypsies

The traditional life of the Ahikuntika people is simple in routine and dynamic in practice. Sri Lankan Gypsy life still remains firmly anchored to the primacy of the family with the elderly being revered and respected. Morality is very strict with chaperoning and the arrangement of marriages still the norm among gypsies in Sri Lanka. Exchange of goods with the father of the bride to compensate him for the loss of a daughter is still practiced by them.

A common legend in Sri Lanka associated with gypsies' claims that their cooking pots develop worms, should their sojourn in a place exceeded seven nights so they leave the place within that period. They have earned a deserved notoriety to entrap and tame snakes and rely on the fear and the mystique of snakes to arouse curiosity and fear among people. Usually they defang cobras who are then trained to sway from side to side from a woven basket to a tune played on a flute made of a dried gourd. What happens in reality is that the snakes respond to movements of the charmer's arms, knee and the flute. Yet the gypsy snake charmers genuinely believe that the snake responds to the flute music. It is mostly their womenfolk who practice palm reading and sooth saying.

As in most parts of the world, gypsies are held in low esteem in Sri Lanka too and they are deprived economically. Engaged in unimportant activities they work on their own behalf. The traditional occupations are fortune-telling and healing, small scale craftwork such as wood carving, and music and entertainment. The wanderings of gypsies are generally characterized by some unmistakable features. Donkeys, trained monkeys, hounds, men carrying reed boxes with poisonous snakes in them, and women wearing colorful garments carrying their children in cloth bags are some of these peculiar features. Interestingly enough, these nomadic people who call no particular place as home are saved nothing for the future and build no permanent dwellings. The idea of living in a permanent structure is integral to the concept of a house. In that sense the dwelling of the gypsy cannot be called a house, a hut or a tent.

The Gypsies were never accustomed to have permanent shelters. They built their huts usually on elevated ground but necessarily near a river bank or a tank bund. The roof was always constructed either in the shape of a triangle or in a curvature with Talipot palm leaves or Illuk grass. Since each family needed a hut, the number of huts in a 'colony' was always determined by the number of families moving in a given caravan. A gypsy shelter in general is about 7' -10' in length 9' in width and 5'-6' in height. It never exceeds that measurement. If the group is smaller automatically their huts become smaller in size. In such a situation the normal size of a hut is 9 x 7 x 5 in length, breadth, and in height respectively. Construction materials of their sheds were necessarily simple, portable and perhaps perishable and easily replaceable. Such a collection of gypsy shelters was called a 'Kuppayama' which in its traditional Sinhala meaning is a colony of 'social outcasts.'

These shelters always betrayed their semi-permanent character and had limited utensils. These included a knife (*maskan*), grinder (*Rolu*), basin (*thaale*), coconut scraper (*iramam*), pots (*kadawa*), saucepans (*kunda*) which were essential items in every gypsy shelter. Dogs and donkeys also accompanied them in every journey. Today this is rare due to the constraints of moving such animals through modern settlements even in rural settings.

The headman of the 'kuppayama' possessed a large collection of brassware which also implied the symbolic authority of the head of the clan and his household. There was a rigid order of organization in every kuppayama. This became apparent in the interviews and the field survey conducted for this paper.

The Sri Lanka gypsies observe a custom of holding an annual conclave which is called a Varigasabha or meeting of clans. Since the time of British rule when records of local events were archived this annual gypsy clan gathering had been held at a place called Kachchaduwa near Kekirawa town in Anuradhapura district. The clan gathering had a definite agenda. Future plans of the community, Nuptial bonds between clans, common problems encountered in maintaining their customs and livelihoods were the main items of concern.

The Ahikuntikas observe some unique customs and traditions and particularly so in their observance of rules relating to marriage, caste and shelter. Usually their marriages are arranged by elders at the

Varigasabha and strictly confined to their own community. Varigasabha means the communal gathering of the gypsies. Literally 'variga' means the ethnic group and 'sabha' means the council thus, varigasabha denotes the communal council of the gypsies in Sri Lanka. The Varigasabha traditionally brings together the gypsy community from all over Sri Lanka to discuss their issues and find solutions to the problems the community faces. There is a one leader who select among all the other gypsies scattered all over the island the wedding ceremonies are conducted through five days beginning on a Friday. It is the day earmarked to buy the required food provisions including alcohol. No meat or fish could be consumed during this period. And, when these happy itinerant folks wed, there is always a grand function in their remote forest settlements. The nuptial festivities where the two parties of the bride and groom camped in Talipot shelters within a few yards of each other are a sight to behold.

Although the Sri Lankan gypsies are identified as a marginalized micro community they practice a caste system that is considered important. The different castes or "kula" are "Babaloru" or barbers, "Kumbaloru" or potters, "Papaloru" or snake charmers and "Wadiga" or entertainers using monkeys. There are other sub- variations which are other clans such as Rodee, Kutani and Madggili clans.

The Sri Lankan gypsies nomadic in habit have a penchant for laughing away at adversity and problems in life. They thrive in a care-free, al-fresco existence that makes the civilized man ashamed of societal rigidity. It is this peripatetic nature that keeps the gypsies from establishing their roots and integrating with society. It precludes them from participating in economic activities and observing social practices as others.

### **3. SEDENTARISATION OF GYPSIES - STATE INITIATIVES**

Before their initiation into colonization projects and rehabilitation the Ceylon gypsies were primarily dependent on the resources of the forest. They encamped near a river or canal bank where they could access water. They met livelihood needs by hunting, food-gathering and trapping of birds and animals. The identity of the Sri Lankan gypsies was based on their nomadic life style which also defined the composition and the limits of their material culture. They preserved their traditional customs which were passed on from generation to generation by oral tradition. A factor that helped them was the tendency to keep to themselves. The passage of time and evolving circumstances such as rapid urbanization impacted them but their acquisition of new habits and mixed traditions was a slow process. They were adaptive and were familiar with the language of the region they settled in. This is displayed in their fluency in either Tamil or Sinhala. Social changes that altered the lifestyle of the larger society inevitably altered the gypsy way of isolation and resistance, but not in a greater extent. This brought about changes that eroded their traditional social order. Yet they remain firmly rooted in poverty and exclusion.

There is little doubt that gypsy people are experiencing a transformation due to evolving economic and social factors. Yet the changes that occur are not so sharp to compel them for a speedier transition towards socio economic integration. There is also the potential for some in the community or clan to entertain a desire for faster integration and assimilation in order to enjoy the living standards of the average citizen. They no longer regard the traditional semi-permanent shelters that were part of their cultural existence for centuries as conducive for living in contemporary times.

They have quietly assimilated the living habits of the larger society. They prefer to live in permanent structures that protect them from rain and wind. They are more inclined towards other vocations that promote better returns. They are now seen working as hired hands, tailors, stone carvers and small time traders. Yet, the general perception towards this Sri Lankan gypsies is rather negative and still it is believed that the Ahikuntika people are generally perceived as unclean, uneducated and coarse-a semi civilized and quasi cultured group of people. The process of sedentarization of gypsies started roughly since mid-twentieth century. The principal objective of the state was to improve the living conditions of gypsies who were identified as a "mostly poor community" in Sri Lanka with minimum living and nutritional conditions. The sedentarisation involved transition from nomadic lifestyle to a life of being attached to a fixed abode. Sedentarisation is an emphasis of the necessity of living in groups permanently in one place.

The state has taken an initiative to improve the living conditions of these people who are classified in development parlance as marginalized and deprived. The uplift of these people is obviously considered a development paradigm. Several community based development projects have been sponsored by the state in this direction. The most prominent among them is the setting up of

settlements which are referred to as 'colonies' with permanent houses constructed by the state. The purpose of these housing projects is ostensibly the upgrading of living standards of the Ahikuntika people. In a way, another objective of these state sponsored settlements for Ahikuntika community in Sri Lanka was to socialize the Ahikuntika people by cultural assimilation or aculturalization them as to suit the modern society; its needs and practices. Here the term acculturation is represented in two ways. First is to denote the idea of the process whereby 'new culture traits' develop through residing in settlements and are adopted and incorporated into an existing gypsy culture. Second, represents the process of mutual modification of two significant cultures-the existing gypsy culture and the culture of the macro society- which are in contact with each other without much sign of their fusing into a single homogenous culture.

Reference to these settlements as 'Colonies', even in the vernacular, has certain sociological implications. The word colony used instead of a term such as housing scheme or by a proper noun serves to underscore that the people living in them are wards of the larger society. They need supervision, guidance and oversight. The inhabitants of the 'colony' require assistance and watching. It is only natural that they in turn regard themselves as a different people yet to be assimilated. This sense of distrust and insecurity was palpable during the survey.

The state has settled these peoples in different locations within the same district more or less as close to their original choice of residence. This has minimized their alienation and also the herding of a people in to a large unmanageable settlement. Despite this effort the Ahikuntika people regard the houses as an imposition that they are compelled to live with. This study has examined the social formations of the gypsy community in several state sponsored settlements situated in North Central province, Eastern Province and the North Western province.

A group of Ahikuntikas were given houses in a village called Kuda Wewa in the North Central Province. Kudagama has the largest community with about 380 families. Another group of 25 gypsy families with a population of nearly 100 people speaking the Thelingu language were settled on the banks of the Mahakanadarawa tank in Mihintale while Kalawewa has 54 families. A great numbers of Ahikuntika people are found along Kalawewa, Mihintale and Kudagama in general.

Apart from these large Ahikuntika communities settled in state built houses in the North Central province there are some pockets of settlements in the Sabaragamuwa Province such as the Andarabedda village in Galgamuwa that has nearly 42 families who speak their vernacular of Telingu but are equally conversant in Sinhala. Thanajayarajasingham has claimed that the Ahikuntika people found in the Eastern Province could be descendants of the Kuravar people of Andhra Pradesh in South India and it was the reason for their fluency in Telingu language.

There are two prominent pockets of rehabilitated Ahikuntika people in the Eastern Province at Kanchirankudah and Aligampe. These are about 12 miles south of Akkaraipattu town and 8 miles north of Kanchirankudah. Aligambe has 280 families where some Ahikuntika customs and traditions including snake charming are still practiced. In Kanchikuda there are about 62 families who are Hindus and devotees of Lord Ganesh. They engage in palm reading.

The state has recognized these people as citizens restoring their electoral rights when settling them in Vakarai area. The settlement of Ahikuntikas in Vakarai has 50 houses built on a land with sufficient space for cultivation. There is provision for vocational training and primary education.

Apart from restoring their rights as citizens and the provision of permanent shelters to this once nomadic people, the state has adopted measures to assimilate them into the macro society. The gypsy people in Vakarai were provided with national identity cards, birth certificates and marriage certificates. Their children are enrolled in schools. They have access to medical care.

The village of Helogama in the Kurunegala district in North Western Province is one of the oldest settlements of the rehabilitated Ahikuntake people established in 1948 the year of Sri Lankan independence. In those early days the gypsy people were given land where they installed temporary palm-leaf shelters for nearly 50 families. According to statistics provided by the office of the Assistant Government Agent most members of these families practiced their traditional modes of living as illustrated in the following chart during the period between 1948 and 1950.

**Categorization of the Gypsy community according to their occupations (from 1940 to 1950)**

Palm Reading	08
Snake Charming and gaming of monkeys	06
Lithic works	04

This chart displays the occupations of gypsies at the time they settled in Helogama between 1940s and 1950s. In 1948 there was a gypsy community with about 20-24 members. At present there are 215 persons in 35 family units.

Influx of Ahikuntakas from its environs and due to natural growth of population this village has become a reservation for the Ahikuntaka people with a dual existence of nomadic and semi nomadic lives. During the festive seasons of New Year in April, Vesak in May and the Perehera Pageant in August these people leave their settlement seeking opportunity for practicing their traditional vocations. However the present trends indicate that the conditions have drastically changed.

**Table1.** Present Gypsy population as categorized on the basis of their occupation 1948-2013

Occupation	1948-50	1950-60	1960-70	1970-85	1985-95	1995-2005	2005-2013
Agriculture	-	04	24	70	74	76	80
Odd jobs	-	-	07	28	33	37	41
Trade	-	-	-	03	05	08	10
Palm reading	08	06	05	02	02	01	-
Snake charming and gaming monkeys	06	04	03	-	-	-	-
Lithic work	04	04	04	03	04	04	-

Similarly gypsies in Kudawewa, another state sponsored settlement in Ikiriwewa Grama Niladhari Division of Thambuttegama Divisional Secretariat in the Anuradhapura district of the North Central province lead a quasi-nomadic life.

Earlier they were compelled to cultivate the land they were provided with. But today they prefer to engage in activities that provide an instant return instead of the reluctant bounty yielded by tilling the soil. It is strange but true that modern consumerist society allows them greater opportunities as street entertainers practicing their age old crafts.

**Table2.** Categorization of the Gypsy community according to their occupations (from 1980 to 2013)

Occupation	1980-1990	1990-2000	2001-2010	2010-2013
Palm reading	10	07	05	03
Snake charming	07	04	02	-
Lithic Works	05	07	07	04

This chart demonstrates that the gypsy community in state sponsored settlements is moving from traditional occupations while responding to contemporary economic trends. They continue to face social pressures from the macro society that still has a negative perception towards them which leaves more than a trace of social ostracism of the Ahikuntika people.

Their personal hygiene, inadequacy of language and their stubborn adherence to a primitive mindset makes a substantial contribution to their own marginalization in a society that is not too anxious to embrace them. When engaged in vocations practiced by others, they experience some prejudice due to their inherited identity.

The collective behaviour of Sri Lankan Ahikuntaka people remain stratified with changes creeping in extremely low pace. Traditions observed from time immemorial are what define societal fault lines. As pointed out by Murdock, communal behavior is a significant characteristic of every sub-culture (Murdock, 1940). It is equally applicable to the Ahikuntaka people who had a sub culture of their own through the ages. The communal behavior and the concept of collective behavior possess a similar meaning but a different connotation. The 'We' is collective while the 'You' is communal. 'Ours' is a collective consensus. 'Theirs' is a communal point of view. The Ahikuntaka people consider 'We' as discriminated against and 'Them' as oppressors.

#### **4. RECOGNITION THROUGH RELOCATION: IDENTITY CRISIS AND CULTURAL FRUSTRATION**

It is apparent that the gypsy life in Sri Lanka has been gradually changing since early twentieth century. This transformation has accelerated by contemporary economic and social priorities. The unavoidable consequence of this change is the state of limbo that this exotic people find themselves in. The results connected to the purpose of this study is to show how this change can be seen through their present 'dwellings' and lifestyles.

Due to rapid development of areas which were under forest cover the Gypsies find their space increasingly restricted. The shrinking living environment is the most serious threat to their traditional existence. The choice of places for their temporary sojourns is almost nonexistent forcing them to remain in one permanent settlement. The rigid enforcement of laws governing wild life protection, forest conservation, and large scale irrigation schemes and river diversions have made the once nomadic people frozen in time.

Every human individual has two varieties of needs: biological needs and social needs. The term 'need' is used in Murray's sense, as a construct or a hypothetical concept, which 'stands for a force (the physiochemical nature of which is unknown) in the brain region, a force which organizes perception, apperception, intellection, conation and action in such a way as to transform in a certain direction existing, unsatisfying situations" (Murray, 1938). The biological needs refer to those for food, sex, air, bodily protection and gravitation. These needs are evidently of great importance to man. But for them he can hardly exist. Every society and culture most deals with them. For this reason some social scientists, notably Malinowski postulated them as a basis of human cultures (Malinowski, 1966).

The usual life pattern of the Sri Lankan gypsies which is encapsulated with their nomadic routine and the affiliated ad-hoc culture has been threatened by the rapidly changing economic trends. Their primitive existence they required no secondary needs. Their requirements of attire were scanty and remain so even to this day. As long as they had access to the forest they had the freedom of movement and hence required little from the market place. Trapped in modernity and civilization today they find themselves dependent on a cash based economy with little or no means of livelihood. Though they possess no particular secondary or tertiary needs as a social group they too require at least a minimum adaptation to those novel experiences of the society. This denotes the idea of the social change which is powered by current social 'innovations' such as globalization, socialization, hybridization etc.

Social change dictated by contemporary trends cannot be either arrested or avoided. It is an inevitable process that may well be intolerable to a people such as the gypsy who managed by accident and design to remain immune from progress due to their peculiar historical predicament. It can be assumed that group change instead of individual change is the end of the principal mediators of social change and perhaps organizational change. Indeed when a particular group is the target of planned change, a number of diverse strategies may be occupied. With reference to Sri Lankan gypsies, one of the major programmes among many was the establishment of gypsies in state sponsored settlements.

When initiating those settlement schemes it was expected both qualitative and quantitative forms of change through the assimilations of Ahikuntikas into an 'established' life style instead of their dynamic seasonal routine. Social change can be occurred due to various internally generated factors or externally motivated trends. According to Robert Nisbet's definition social change is "a succession of differences in time within a persistent identity" (Nisbet, 1972). Social change is an inevitable process. The changes that confronted the Ahikuntaka people of Sri Lanka that required them to adjust their lives in permanent abodes were the outcome of a larger political process. It impacted them in terms of culture, social structure and most importantly their economic activities or their livelihoods. According to Okely the change from nomadism to permanent housing does not necessarily end gypsy identity (Okely, 1983). Scholars who had researched on life patterns of gypsies in Europe also believed that permanent house dwelling for gypsies may not inevitably bring sedentarisation (Guy, 1975; Rehfisch 1958; Lineton 1976; Okely 1983). In some instances though the gypsies lived in houses, used to move frequently from house to house and travelled during a large part of the year (Sutherland 1975). It seems that gypsies in general in one or the other way, purposely or accidentally try to endure their identity either by their habit of traveling or by sustaining their group alliance. In this context would it be possible to assimilate gypsies culturally or integrate them into the macro society channeling through 'a solutions of permanency'?

## 5. CONCLUSION

The famous anthropologist Radcliffe Brown asserts that a society can experience change due to several reasons; the growth of the internal social complexity, invention and introduction of new technology and their gradual adaption by society at large and macro level forces such as industrialization, migration, capitalist expansion, and mercantilism. To express it in a less subtle form, social change is the product of significant alterations in behavior patterns, cultural values and norms. These 'significant alterations' in the lexicon of sociologists are changes that yield 'profound' social consequences. They hold that those social movements inspire the discontented members of a society to bring about social change. The state sponsored programs as well as some community based individual projects engaged in similar macro social movements facilitate the progress of society.

These concerns call for a concerted national and global strategy in the settlement and rehabilitation of the gypsy community. It needs to address two issues. Firstly, their integration into society should be offer them full civic rights while their cultural heritage should be preserved. What it implies is that the gypsies, like any other community should be entitled to preserve their legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of their own society, no matter how they are settled.

In fact the group behavior of the gypsies should not be devalued. It is as a part of their identity provides them with a 'higher level' of group autonomy within the broader society. The sociability of the local gypsy community is wrapped with their nomadic life style which they cannot find it in any circumstances through settle down in one place permanently. Sociability signifies the individual's enjoyment of being with his fellowmen. It means the desire on the part of the individual to maintain friendliness, affability and companionship with his fellow human beings or the group members. It includes the individuals desire to seek contact with fellow group members to promote group relationship (Hsu and Van Nostrand, 1963). At some level, the experience of economic and social changes intimately involved with the experience of state promoted 'modernization and acculturation processes'. To achieve that kind of a transformation is not a simple task and in relation to nomads it is even far more difficult goal to be achieved. Therefore, bring about the transformation or socialization of the gypsies in Sri Lanka would not be possible only providing with them a permanent shelter but need to have a thorough understanding of their nomadic life style and the culture that strengthened and nourished with the utmost mobility from place to place experiencing the 'change'. Thus the state sponsored settlement programmes of Sri Lanka initiatives to locate them in a permanent locale led to anarchy among the gypsies and the loss of the nomad's old logic of management and exploitation of resources, the cohesiveness and efficacy of which took into account the knowledge of the nature including climate, landscape, soil and cycle of vegetation and 'cultural investment of space. The dominant message of environmental psychology is that the private domain of the home or habitat is a benign, controllable, personal space standing in contrast to the exterior, public domain which is uncontrollable, uncertain and riven with conflict. Though it is a hut or a temporary shed, to any person including nomads too, house is a heaven and the dwelling place is a 'locus of sentiment' to everyone. Dislocating from one's own habitual practice and re-locating them in a 'foreign space' would definitely frustrate the 'newcomers' as because they are new to the space, locality, environment and in particularly the 'new structure'. This 'transformation' pressures the 'new comers' to get away from the place at the first instance.

Perhaps one aspect common to gypsies all over the world is that they have had to survive hostility and periods of persecution from the dominant society. They have also been the objects of fantasy and romance. The forms of persecution or exoticism change in their historical context. In contrast, Sri Lankan gypsies though are fortunate to have had peaceful co-existence with other ethnic communities although they are excluded from political, social and economic decisions. Sri Lankan gypsies increasingly recognize that, besides recognition of their right to a distinctive group identity, they are also entitled to participate in the political, cultural, social and economic life of the country.

Thus they should have the right to citizenship, and political representation. They should be allowed to pass on their belief systems and materiel culture to the next generation while leaving the discretion of deciding on the pace of assimilation with the external society in their own hands. All these should consider along with the steps taking to provide them with permanent shelters.

As discerned and experienced in this paper the Ahikuntika people would insist 'leave us alone to seek our own salvation and we assure you we shall not perish'. The simple reality that they have survived adversity and retained their distinct identity through the millennia on the surface of the planet is an



argument in their favour. The essential core of the Gypsy identity is their nomadic existence attached to a movable shelter. A permanent house undermines that identity. That remains the paradox of recognition and identity of the Ahikuntika people of Sri Lanka.

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### AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY



**Dr. Anuththaradevi Widyalkara** is a Senior Lecturer attached to the Department of History, University of Colombo-Sri Lanka. She obtained her BA degree in History from the University of Colombo, MA from University of Uppsala-Sweden and PhD from the University of Kelaniya-Sri Lanka. Her area of expertise is Architectural History. She has published many scholarly articles in numerous journals and in book chapters apart from books.