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Symbiosis of Arts and Cultures: Nurturing Expression, Connection, and Wellbeing

## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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## **ICH for Social Well-being: A Study on the Significance of Puberty Rituals in the Rodi Community, Sri Lanka**

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Cultural ceremonies marking a girl's first menstruation or coming of age are prevalent in various ethnic groups across Sri Lanka. The Rodi community, a primitive ethnic group originating from Sinhala society but segregated according to Sri Lanka's caste hierarchy system since ancient times, has preserved its distinct intangible culture due to its isolation and environmental adaptation. The Rodi community practices numerous puberty rituals for girls, firmly believing in their pivotal role in preparing a girl to navigate her future as a biologically mature woman. This study aims to unveil the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) related to puberty and explore their social, and cultural significance as a framework for sustainable womanhood within this community. For this survey, 32 respondents were randomly selected as the sample from three traditional Rodi villages located in the Kurunegala district. The sample comprises females between the ages of 50-70. Primary data were collected through interviews and analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Results revealed that 86% of respondents have experience following traditional rituals at their own puberty and 71% of respondents expressed their positive attitude towards the continuation of traditional puberty rituals, because these rituals significantly direct girls in preparing for their roles as housewives and future mothers. The respondents emphasized the importance of providing a girl with appropriate education concerning the roles and responsibilities of a biologically mature female during the period of isolation. The results indicate that reintroducing a girl to society with a new status, value, and role after a short period of segregation, along with specific practices such as food restrictions, behavioral restrictions, ritual bathing, and rites associated with "*Kotahalu Padura*" (the mat and materials used in the day of the bathing ceremony encompassing all puberty-related rituals) were seen as crucial contributions to the overall well-being of women in their respective society. However, due to the adverse effects of ongoing global cultural changes including Westernization, this valued cultural heritage is no longer accepted by the younger generation. Therefore, studies of this nature are vital in preserving and reevaluating the significance of these cultural practices and raising awareness among the younger generation regarding the socio-cultural values inherent in these diminishing cultures.

**Keywords:** Female Roles, ICH, Puberty Rituals, Rodi Community, Social Well-being