

Bulls, Bullocks and Bullock-Carts: Masculinity, Transport and Trade in Protohistoric and Historic South Asia

Kurush F. Dalal¹, Raamesh Gowri Raghavan²

Abstract

Ever since the domestication of *Bos indicus*, the prime means of transportation and traction, and therefore the bulwark of carriage, haulage and transshipment of goods during the Protohistoric and Historic Periods in South Asia has been the humble bullock-cart. This paper deals with its representations as seen from the Art and associated archaeological data of these periods. In addition, we look at the representations of the animals themselves, either as stud bulls (bulls) or the humbler bullocks (bullocks). We will also look at the portrayal of bulls as symbols of masculinity, as seen in cultural expressions such as *Jallikattu*, of bullocks as symbols of fallen status and bondage and of bullocks unhitched from their carts as the soul freed from its mortal corpse. Expressions of human masculinity, through bullock-cart racing in the Deccan will also be looked into. This paper attempts to trace the journey of this mode of transportation though the various different depictions of bulls, bullocks and bullock-carts from Protohistory and History making a case for its origins, evolution, adaptation and use, including approximations of freightage. At the same time, it looks at the various cultural connotations of bulls, bullocks and bullock-carts in literature ancient and modern. What is most surprising is that though this was the prime mode of transportation in these periods and that its use was spread over almost the entire landmass of South Asia, it is not very often seen represented in contemporary art and its very ‘common’ nature has almost made it invisible to students of South Asian Art History.

Key Words: Art History, South Asia, Animals, Transportation

¹ Centre for Archaeology, Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, University of Mumbai.

kurushdalal@gmail.com

² iambecomedeath@gmail.com