

Elephants in Literature and Folklore

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ABSTRACT

Folk songs have some unique features of expressing emotional feelings which couldn't be told in words. These unique songs played an important role in the cultural development of the society and were called "Jana Kavi" which were originated by Sinhalese ancestors. The Folk Songs were sung as a form of cultural expressions and were unique to personnel of different tasks like farmers, cart riders, miners, etc.

The "Chena Farmers" sung folk songs to protect their cultivations from wild animals like elephants, wild bores, deer, birds etc. According to them, most untamed and wildest animal is the elephant. So they used to sing folk songs to make them awaken throughout the night to secure their cultivated lands. Folk songs which were sung to chase away the elephants are called "Eth Seepada". Apart from the Chena Farmers the community sings folk songs related to elephants like lullabies, Kurakkan kavi, Upadesha kavi, Terawili kavi, Paru kavi, and traditional Game Songs.

In ancient days, workings with elephants were part of the Sri Lankan day today life. Elephants were captured and tamed as work animals and used in the war front as King's official vehicle, leisure carts, construction industry, transportation of heavy material, etc. So there were lots of capturing techniques, taming techniques, medical treatments, elephant mantras, etc., for elephants which were written in "Palm Leaf Manuscripts".

Example: Gaja Angama (Mantra)/ Hasti Yoga Sathakaya/Eth Veda Pota/Ali Torana Pota

There is an ingenious language between mahout and the elephant. This language mainly consists of very few words. There is a specific way of pronouncing words which is an inherent quality of the mahout.

Elephant characteristics are in classical literature too. There are "Jathaka Stories" which describe elephant's characteristics like intelligence, strength, majesty, bravery, etc. In literature poems like "Subashithaya", "Guttala Kawya" describe elephants' characters.

In modern music the characteristics of the elephant have become the subject of the songs. There is a true story about the leader tusker kraaled at Panamure who was trying to save its herd by breaking the kraal. Then the majestic tusker leader was shot dead. The whole tragedy is described in a heart rending song called "PanamureAth Raja" (The King of

Panamure) sung by Sugathapala Malalasekara. Panamure kraal wrote a legend in Sri Lankan history. There are some writings found in our literature.

Examples: Sri Chandrarathna Manawasinghe – Eth Gale Daru Pema

P.B Alwis Perera– Panamure Ali weeraya

In performing art there are 18 Dancing Techniques which display the dancing of birds and animals. Classical example out of 18 techniques is GajagaWannama – The dance of the elephant.

The folklore and literature were carried from generation to generation like in other cultures. Generally they are based on some combinations of ethnic, racial, religious, tribal, political or geographic boundaries.

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