

The Role of the Ox As a Local Mode of Traditional Transport (An Investigation through folksongs)

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Abstract

One of the milestones and landmarks of human evolution is the domestication of animals. The significant feature of this process which began some 1500 years ago was that the ox which was tamed and domesticated has been of much use and utility to man and it has been subjected to respect, honor and grace by him as well. At the beginning, the ox has been used for dairy purposes or for milk, and as the beast of the burden or as a hard working laborer for agricultural activities and agrarian purposes. With the beginning of the transport, following the invention of the wheel, the importance, use and the utility of the ox as a closest friend of man increased. Therefore a set of attitudes on the ox was formed in different societies and accordingly the ox enjoyed an important social status in different communities. Accordingly, in the Sri Lankan cultural context too, the ox commanded a social recognition, respect and status. Sinhala literature, folklore and other forms serve as good sources in this respect to understand the close relationship between man and the ox. Although there is evidence to prove that there has been oxen in Sri Lanka since the pre-historic age, scholars point out that the tribal people who lived a semi-shepherd type of life in the Iron or Mesolithic age would have reared the ox for dairy purposes. The ox which was domesticated and came into close contact with man purely for dairy purposes, became an important component for all agrarian purposes with the arrival of Aryans. Since the 4th century, there has been historical evidence to prove that animal husbandry was in existence in Sri Lanka. By the 16th century, although the ox has been a close friend of man and reared for dairy products, but after the 16th century with the arrival of the Europeans, the connection and relationship between man and the ox was lost due to the habit of flesh-eating and setting up of abattoirs and the place which the ox had as a mode of transport was also lost with the advent of new machinery. Folksongs which help to understand and identify cultural traits and heritage and to experience the depth of humanity are a carrier of the traditional and conventional wisdom of one generation to another. It is also a reflection of the social life of a community that belongs to a particular social group. The Sinhala folklore reflects the type of food, clothes, houses traditions, habits, values, beliefs, social norms and mores and other cultural features. The research problem here is the investigation of how in folklore, the ox as a local traditional transport mode is used and appreciated. To achieve this goal, the research methodology used here is the study of written and unwritten or oral folklore and books written on folklore by scholars. According to the investigation, the most popular mode of transport of the Sri Lankan tradesmen in the past was a fleet of carts with bullocks tied to its

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