



WHEN GENEROUS GODS OFFER “BACKHOE-ARM LOAD OF GEMS”: FOLK IDEAS FOUND AMONG GEM MINERS OF THE SABARAGAMUWA REGION

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Though Folktales are considered carriers of cultural axioms, there is a tendency to overlook such details owing to the notion that folktales are created/heard/told by ‘common folk’ with the term ‘folk’ usually conveying ideas of ‘unsophisticated’— and even ‘uneducated.’ However, folkloristics, or scholarly study of folklore (folktales being an item of folklore), has opened up a world of cultural possibilities embedded in folklore which not only include cultural conjecture but also cultural prejudices. The present study focuses on deep-seated cultural postulates of gem miners of the Sabaragamuwa region through a focused reading of their folktales. Through a close reading of a collection of tales titled *Sabaragamuwe Menik Kathandara saha Sinharaje Withthi* (Gem-related Tales from Sabaragamuwa and the Events of Sinharaja), which feature 110 folktales and myths told by those involved in the gem industry, this study intends to understand the deep-rooted ‘folk ideas’ of the gem miners. Using folkloric definitions of ‘folk ideas’ this study attempts to locate and analyze the folk beliefs of a community of people bonded by a common desire—to find valuable gems.

Keywords: Folklore, Folktales, Folk Ideas, Myths, Cultural Postulate

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