Transformation of the Kohombayo Folk Belief: A Study on Daduru Oya Valley in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The belief in *Kohombayo* is an ancient folklore tradition associated with paddy cultivation. The *Kohombayo* were believed to be invisible beings who steal a portion of harvest, a series of ritualistic practices were performed at threshing floor to prevent loss. This research aims to identify history of Kohombayo belief, rituals associated with them, and how modern farming methods have influenced this. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's theory of mechanical and digital reproduction, this study explores, how agriculture modernization and digitalization have transformed to influence of this belief. The research was conducted through qualitative research methodology with Bandarigalgoda village in Daduru oya valley serving as study area. Data were collected from 55 residents through non participant observation. Library study incorporated with books and research articles, field study incorporated with interviews and questionnaires. Thematic analysis was adopted to interpret. Findings reveal that, while the Kohombayo belief and rituals like spilling milk, hiding salt in threshing floor, drawing symbol called *Alu yantharaya* on threshing floor to prevent harvest from Kohombayo , is largely declined due to introduction of machine harvesting, it has not completely vanished. Only four adult participants were familiar with term Kohombayo and limited knowledge was preserved, mainly among the oldest generation. They still maintain Kohombayo faith in belief, communicate through dreams, practicing divine remembrance while offering alms and planting *Kohombo* trees, as symbolic acts of protection for their harvest. The study concludes that the last bearers of Kohombayo knowledge are fading with rise of the digital era, as younger generation increasingly rely on technological and digital knowledge rather than traditional beliefs. Preserving vanishing folk heritage must be prioritized before it is lost to modern agriculture and digital influences.

Keywords: *Daduru Oya, Folklore, Kohombayo, Modernization, Paddy, Transformation.*