

F-09 Uses of floral resources in the pre-modern metal industry in Sri Lanka

H G Dayasisira

(Institute of Fundamental Studies, Kandy)

The utilization of floral resources in mineral related industries has a long history. The production of metals during ancient times involved mining, crushing, washing, roasting, smelting, melting, forging, annealing and casting. Many of these activities basically required heat; wood was used as a fuel and also in the production of handles of tools. Selected flora were used by ancient Indian chemists as chemicals in hardening, purifying, fixing, calcinating, increasing the malleability, restraining, and transmuting metals. They seasoned skins and planks for bellows using selected types of flora. Studies conducted by Ananda K Coomaraswamy and others, indicate that some of these systems were practiced by traditional craftsmen in Sri Lanka too. Information from previous records and field explorations were used in this study. Various types of flora utilized for charcoal making and leather and plank seasoning in selected areas of the island were studied. More than 25 types of wood utilized for charcoal making and more than 15 types of wood utilized for making handles of tools in pre-modern Sri Lanka were identified. The knowledge relating to the manipulation of the chemical properties of metal technology is rapidly disappearing. This calls for an urgent study of traditional crafts systems prior to their total obliteration.