

# Our Cultural Heritage

## Introduction

When we speak of ancient cities like Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, we are reminded of the ancient civilization of our country. When we visit those cities, we can see the remains of buildings, statues, tanks, bunds and ponds which had been constructed by our ancient forefathers. They are considered to be national property of our country and are hence protected. Such national property is also called the national heritage. In this chapter you will learn about what comes under national heritage of our country and about the importance of protecting such national heritage.

## What is Cultural Heritage?

We still marvel at the technology that was used in the past in constructing large tanks for storing rainwater and at the extent of those tanks and the size of their bunds. It is also amazing to see how our forefathers had created various objects by making granite smooth.

Not only such objects, the customs and formalities, beliefs and rituals, folk songs, folk dances, folktales, arts and crafts and knowledge on traditional medicine which are handed down through the generations also belong to our cultural heritage. The knowledge we gain on various areas that have been mentioned above can be applied even today in solving the problems that we



Fig 3.1 Ranmasu Uyana (Royal Goldfish Park)



Fig 3.2 Nishshankalatha Mandapaya

face in our day-to-day life. Knowledge on various kinds of popular medicines and secret treatment methods adopted in agriculture are examples for what we have inherited from our forefathers.

As citizens of a country which has a very long history, we are inheritors of a diverse cultural heritage. Places of religious importance, palaces of kings, fortresses, parks and many other historical sites, buildings, various works of art, types of food, traditions, and customs and formalities etc. are parts of our cultural heritage.

The figure 3.1 is a picture of the Ranmasu Uyana in Anuradhapura. The figure 3.2 is Nishshankalatha Mandapaya. These are examples for our cultural heritage. Such parts of our heritage can be felt with our hand: that means they can be touched with our hands. Therefore they are named as tangible heritage. Accordingly, places of religious importance, palaces of kings, fortresses, gardens and many other historical

sites, buildings, works of art, tanks, ponds, canals and dams and books etc. are tangible and hence they are called tangible heritage.

Activities like offering a sheaf of betel to elders and worshipping them, and engaging in religious activities during the new year are parts of our heritage that cannot be felt with the hand or that cannot be touched. They are customs and formalities that are inherited from generation to generation. Such aspects of heritage are called intangible heritage. Folklore, traditions, languages, folk dances, folk songs, knowledge on various arts and crafts, customs and traditions, rituals and beliefs and various secret treatment methods that a society had inherited belong to intangible heritage. Let us further study about these aspects of heritage.

### **Tangible Heritage**

As explained above, the parts of heritage that can be touched are called tangible heritage. Despite being a small country, Sri Lanka has

a very long history with a number of tangible heritage sites. Examples of these have been discovered from various sites that are located throughout the island. In addition to the vast variety of artifacts of great archaeological value, Sri Lanka also has a highly developed irrigation system.

The fact that we have got such a vast variety of cultural heritage attractions displays to the world that we are a proud nation.

The cultural heritage of our country is important in showing to the world our identity amidst world cultures. The tanks, ponds and bunds Sri Lanka had inherited and the technology that had been used in constructing them, the works of art made of granite, wood carvings of Embekke and the rock fortress in Sigiriya are unsurpassed among the creations of the other countries of the world. These are living proof of our cultural heritage and identity.

### Activity

Make a booklet containing pictures of ancient artifacts of our country.

## World Cultural Heritages

As well as Sri Lanka, many other countries of the world, too, have cultural heritage attractions that are inherent to those countries. Out of them, exceptionally rare and immensely valuable cultural heritage attractions have been declared as heritage

that belongs not only to the people of those countries, but also to the people of the entire world in general. Such acts are carried out by the UNESCO, which is the active body of the United Nations Organization on educational, scientific and cultural affairs. The duty of the UNESCO is to protect the world heritage sites and prevent them from being destroyed. Accordingly, by 2011 AD, the UNESCO has declared 704 cultural heritage sites as world heritages. Six of those sites are located in Sri Lanka.

Before discussing the world heritage sites in Sri Lanka, let's find out how world heritage sites are selected.

When selecting world heritage sites of different countries by the UNESCO, the following facts are considered.

- The creations should depict the great creative talents or intelligence of the man.
- The creations should be able to depict the development of architecture, town planning, art, technology of a particular culture.
- It should be a strong proof of the existence of an ancient civilization which has disappeared at present.
- It should be an example of buildings, architecture or technology that depict important events of the human history.
- A habitat of an ancient society or a monument that has been under the threat of being destroyed due to unavoidable reasons.





Fig 3.3

A historical place or a monument of a particular country being named as a world cultural heritage by the UNESCO is a fact that makes the citizens of that country proud. The UNESCO has named more than 15 cultural heritage sites in our neighbouring country, India as world cultural heritage sites. More than 20 cultural heritage sites in China have been added to the list of world cultural heritage sites.

### **Ancient Mohenjo-daro City**

This is a world cultural heritage which shows the ancient urban development. Mohenjo-daro city in Pakistan has been included in the world cultural heritage sites as a proof of a disappeared civilization and an art of ancient urban development.

### **Great Wall of China**

This is a world cultural heritage named as an ancient fortress.

This was constructed as a fortress in China and it is an important symbol in China.



Fig 3.4

### **World Heritage Sites in Sri Lanka**

The above mentioned Mohenjo-daro city and the Great Wall of China are examples of world cultural heritage sites in other countries. Now, let's find out about the world cultural heritage sites in Sri Lanka.

Six cultural heritage sites in Sri Lanka have been accepted as world heritage sites by the UNESCO. They are;

1. Ancient city of Anuradhapura
2. Ancient city of Polonnaruwa
3. Sigiriya
4. Rangiri Dambulu cave temple



5. Temple of Tooth, Kandy

6. Gall Fort

Due to the fact that six places have been included into the list of world heritage sites, the entire world knows about the proud history and the cultural importance of Sri Lanka, although it is a small country. Therefore, tourists often visit these places. We can boast the ancient pride of our country to the world. Therefore, it is our duty to find out about our historical heritage and protect them.

### **The Ancient City of Anuradhapura**

The glorious heritage of Anuradhapura city, the sacred Bo tree 'Sri Maha Bodhi', *Ruwanweliseya*, the Brazen Palace (*Lowamahapaya*), *Abhayagiri stupa*, Jethavana Stupa, the twin ponds, Isurumuniya carvings, Samadhi statue, architectural masterpieces which had been influenced by Buddhism, and Dagobas, palaces of kings, gardens and beautiful ponds that had been constructed with various arts and crafts were included in the list of world heritage sites in 1982 considering their historical and cultural value.



Fig 3.5

### **The Ancient City of Polonnaruwa**

By the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, Polonnaruwa had developed into a prosperous capital. Ruined Buddhist and Hindu religious places and great creations of various kings can be seen here. Because of the Buddhist and Hindu monuments, large tanks including Parakrama Samudraya, Watadageya, the seven-storey mansion (Sath Mahal Prasadaya), Thivanka image house, Rankoth Vehera, Kiri Vehera, Lankathilaka image house, palaces of kings, Nishshanka Latha Mandapa, Gal Viharaya, Shiva temple and many other great constructions that are situated in Polonnaruwa, this ancient city was included in the list of world heritage sites in 1982.



Fig 3.6

## Sigiriya

Sigiriya which was constructed by King Kashyapa is an important place as an ancient fortress, a palace and an art gallery.

It has been included in the list of the world heritage sites in 1982 considering its importance. More details will be discussed under the topic “The Amazing Sigiriya”.



Fig 3.7

## Dambulla Raja Maha Viharaya

Dambulla Raja Maha Viharaya is the largest of the old rock cave temples with ancient paintings in Sri Lanka. This temple has been constructed with a roof and walls made of a natural rock and therefore the inside of this temple is cool and comfortable. Because of the greatness of the paintings of this temple, it was included in the list of world heritage sites in 1991.



Fig 3.8

## Galle Fort

The Galle Fort that had originally been constructed by the Portuguese was developed into a very strong and well-planned fortress by the Dutch for security purposes.

Therefore, many buildings that had been constructed according to the Dutch architectural style, and other archaeological monuments can be seen inside this fortress even today. The Galle Fort that is situated in magnificent surroundings in the southern sea coast of Sri Lanka was included in the list of world heritage sites in 1988 because of the constructions of great historical value that are situated inside this fort.



Fig 3.9

## The Holy City of Kandy

Considering the history of the city of Kandy, its ancient buildings and religious and cultural activities that take place even today in the city, it was named as a world heritage site in 1988 by the UNESCO. The Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, the ancient palace hall and *Magul Maduwa* (Audience Hall) are examples for the ancient buildings in the city of Kandy. The Kandy Esala Perahera is a cultural pageant which displays the ancient customs, traditions and various artistic traditions of our country.



Fig 3.10

## The Amazing Sigiriya

We learnt earlier that Sigiriya is one of the cultural heritage sites of our country that has been included in the list of world heritage sites. Let us now study about this marvel.

There are various stories about Sigiriya that was built by King Kashyapa. Sources report that Kashyapa, who killed his father King Dathusena and became king, feared that his brother Mugalan would kill him and

therefore he fled to Sigiriya and built a fortress there for his protection. When studying the great architecture of Sigiriya, the Mirror Wall, Sigiri graffiti, the stairway of Sigiriya, the Lion's Paw, the ponds, the bathing pool and the moat around Sigiriya, it is understood that Sigiriya is not only a fortress, but also an excellent art gallery.



Fig 3.11

## The Architecture of Sigiriya

A palace that had been constructed on a rock that was situated in a wood that is 1214 feet high above the sea level and ruins of other buildings could still be seen even today. The area on the top of the rock with ruins is about 3 acres.

The path way constructed to reach the top of the rock is a marvellous creation that consists of steps, bridges and moats. The path to climb to the difficult area of the rock starts with a mouth of a lion. Due to this image of a lion, this place was called "Sigiri" or "Sihagiri".



Before arriving at the area with the lion's image, the inner side of the long rampart constructed for the protection of the path has been built with smoothness. It was known as the Mirror Wall. The songs written on this Mirror Wall are called Sigiri Graffiti.



Fig 3.12 Mirror Wall

women at the opening of the rock are more famous as Sigiri graffiti. These graffiti include paintings of women whose upper part of the body is visible and they have appeared from clouds. These paintings which are old about 1500 years are famous in the world as a great artistic creation.



Fig 3.14 Sigiri graffiti



Fig 3.13 Lion Paw & Climbing Stretch

### Sigiri Graffiti

After climbing the flight of stairs, one could see the Sigiri graffiti in the caves. Although there are parts of Sigiri graffiti in the caves at the base of the Sigiriya rock, the paintings of

### The Pleasure Garden in Sigiriya

When seen from the top of the rock, the pleasure garden is spread in a large area of the west. Mr. Paranavithana has named this as *Pramada Wanaya*. The Sigiriya pleasure garden consists of a water park.



Fig 3.15 The Gardens

### The Ponds in Sigiriya and their Water Technology

The fountains of Sigiriya are a wonderful creation of technology. The architect who designed Sigiriya thought of the scientific concept that water could be raised high by obstructing a fast flowing current of water. Accordingly, a current of water that is flowing fast from about 60 feet above had been obstructed with a slab of rock in which small holes had been made by drilling it as shown in the picture and a beautiful fountain has been made. This fountain becomes active during rainy seasons even at present.

You will now realize that Sigiriya is a real wonder. It is surprising to see how a big

palace had been built on the top of the rock carrying there all the materials needed during such a period where there were no transport facilities.

It is an unsurpassed construction. Indeed we are indebted to the great designer whose skill enabled Sri Lanka to show its greatness to the world.



Fig 3.16 Underground conduits



#### Activity

1. Make a picture book containing pictures of world heritage sites of Sri Lanka.
  2. Make a booklet on Sigiriya.
- Do this as a group activity.





Fig 3.17 Pools or ponds

### Intangible Heritage

You might have heard your grandparents advising children not to walk about streams of water alone at dusk. There is a belief in our society that going out alone at dusk should not be done. Do you remember your grandparents talking to you about such beliefs, faiths, and customs and formalities? They must have learnt those things from their parents and grandparents. Thus the cultural heritage that is handed down from generation to generation within different societies in this manner is considered to be intangible. Such aspects of heritage cannot be touched like buildings, images and paintings that are touchable. UNESCO has named five types of intangible heritage namely;

1. the language we speak,
2. performing arts, folk songs and folk music,
3. popular faiths and festive events,
4. knowledge and practices adopted from nature and experiences, and
5. traditional arts and crafts.

Based on the above criteria, we can identify the intangible cultural heritage that we have inherited. Now let's find out about them.

### The Language

The Sinhala language that is spoken at present has a history of about 2500 years and the Tamil language has a similar history.

Due to their usage for a long period of time they have developed their own language



styles. Furthermore, these languages are enriched by comparisons, metaphors, proverbs and idioms.

The Sinhala language is influenced by the Tamil language as well as other languages that existed in the past. The Tamil language has also been influenced by other contemporary languages. Therefore, the way a language is practised in Sri Lanka has its own style and a tradition. It's our intangible heritage.

### **The Art of Dancing**

There is an art of dancing which has evolved from the culture in our country. That is also a result of our ancient heritage.

It is recorded in the Mahavamsa that at the ceremony of laying the foundation stone to Ruwanwelisaya, King Dutugemunu arrived at the premises accompanied by dancers similar to divine ladies and a group of musical band.

Even at present you may have seen that when special guests are accompanied to a function, they are welcomed with dance and music. Thus, it can be seen from the example of King Dutugemunu that this tradition was practised even in the past.

During the rule of King Parakramabahu I, it was recorded that there were dancing and singing events at different occasions. The king has even constructed buildings where these performances could be held. It was recorded

in the Mahavamsa that Queen Rupavathi had special skills in singing and dancing.

Different types of singing and dancing events that were performed in ancient Sri Lanka have been mentioned in the Mahavamsa, Kavsilumina and Sadhdharmalankaraya. The Mahavamsa records that King Parakramabahu II had held a ceremony with "different types of dancing and melodious music". In ancient singing and dancing events, different types of musical instruments such as drums, violin, horns were used. Some remnants of the ancient music and dancing tradition can be seen in the traditional rituals. The Kandy Esala Perahera is another occasion where we can see these types of music and dancing.

Often, it is clear that the art of dancing is used to perform religious offerings. The artists have performed dancing dressed in colourful costumes to make the religious offerings. Even at present you could see music and dancing in different religious ceremonies as well as in other functions. It can be called our intangible heritage.

### **Folk Poems**

There are folk poems unique to each area in our country. The present generation has inherited those folk poems from listening to their ancestors. That is from oral tradition. Thus, folk poems and songs could be considered as an intangible heritage descended from generation to generation. Following is a folk poem that exists in

Anuradhapura about constructing Kala Wewa by King Dhatusena.

*Kala oye diya paharata yanna beri  
Hitiye kala welak oya harahata wethiri  
Ethana hondai wewakata diya kanda ithiri  
Kala wewa bende dasen rajuya pin piri*

The information on the poets or time of composition of these poems is often unknown. Ancient *goyam kawi* (poems sung during agricultural activities), *pel kawi* (poems sung during protecting chenas in the night), *karaththa kawi* (poems sung by bullock cart drivers when transporting goods), *pathal kawi* (poems sung by miners), *paru kawi* (poems sung by bargees) are composed and sung to drive away the solitude and tiredness. These folk poems are important to understand the experiences of people who were engaged in those tasks and the nature of different occupations.

Moreover, the folk poem is used to praise the qualities of parents and elders, to express love for children, to show the correct path to the younger generation, to express hunger and to express relationships between relatives. The expression of a sensitive feeling born in the mind creatively and to get satisfaction by singing it to a tune. Such creative folk poems are found in any community of a society.



### Activity

Make a booklet with folk poems.

### Social Habits and Beliefs

Different social habits and beliefs are an intangible heritage which is handed down from generation to generation. Removing shoes and hats when entering temples and other religious places, worshipping the parents, elders and teachers by going down on the knees, washing hands before taking meals, showing compassion to animals, helping the needy are examples of good values inherited from generation to generation. When we see this traditional heritage, humbleness, kindness, compassion, courtesy mould in our characters.

### Holding Ceremonies

There are various ceremonies in the present society. Even in the past there had been different ceremonies from the birth to the death of a person. Some ceremonies held a long period ago such as during the Anuradhapura era familiarized in our society due to the influence of Hindu traditions that were found in our neighbouring country, India. In ancient Hindu books mention a number of customs that should be fulfilled from a birth of a person until he/ she commences education. Some such customs are mentioned below.

Jatha Karma	– Customs that should be fulfilled at birth
Namakarana	– Giving a name
Karnawedana	– Pierce the ear for the first time
Anthaprashana	– Giving the first solid meal
Vidhyarambha	– Commencing education (reading the letters of the alphabet)

Even in Sri Lanka, there was a custom of holding a function at the occasions of naming the baby, giving the first solid meal, reading the letters of the alphabet and marriage.

Even at present, ceremonies are held for these occasions following the ancient traditions that were inherited from generation to generation. Most of these ceremonies are held at homes. Apart from that, there are public functions held by masses. Following are some of the ceremonies held during the Rajarata civilization.

- Wesak Festival
- Water Sports Festival
- Wapmagul Festival

In the present society, there are a number of festivals held during a particular period of the year. Wesak Festival, Esala Perahera and Upasampada ceremony are influenced by several ceremonies and customs practised in the past. They are intangible heritage handed down from generation to generation.

There are different religious groups in our country who are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims

and Christians. The customs and traditions of those religions and cultures are different. Sinhala New Year festival is celebrated giving a prominent place to Buddhist traditions. In the Thaipongal Festival of Hindus and Ramalan Festival of Muslims, their customs and traditions are followed. Customs and traditions related to these festivals too is an intangible heritage brought down from generation to generation.



### Activity

Select an occasion of festivity related to you and present the details of the customs and traditions followed to the class.





Fig 3.18 Kandy Esala Perahera

### **Knowledge and Habits obtained from the Nature and External Influence**

As a country with a long history, we are in the possession of a huge amount of traditional knowledge inherited from ancient human experiences. In the field of agriculture, constructing tanks, making sluices, constructing canals, sowing crops, taking care of the crops, gathering harvest existed as traditional knowledge in the past. The crop diseases, the treatments to them and secret methods too are examples for the traditional knowledge that was inherited from generation to generation. Many skills such as traditional medicine, carpentry, gem

industry contain this traditional knowledge. These too is a part of the intangible heritage owned by a nation.

### **Traditional Art and Craft**

When the traditional art and craft of this country is considered, it is visible that even at present the knowledge inherited from the past is applied in those art and craft. Wood carving, frescos, weaving mats, making and polishing brass objects, mask and puppetry and laquer industry are examples for this.

## Preserving Our Cultural Heritage

You may have understood in this lesson that our country possesses an ancient history and a number of cultural heritage sites although it's a small country. This cultural heritage categorized as tangible and intangible heritage is handed down to the present society by preserving it from generation to generation.



Fig 3.19 Weaving mats



Fig 3.20 Hand bags and purses made with reed



Fig 3.21 Brass carving

## Mask and Puppetry

Masks were made for different types of rituals and ceremonial dances. Here, images of devils and gods are used as masks. Masks are used to generate feelings like horror and pride. Villages in the south of the country such as Ambalangoda and Udupila are famous for the making of masks.



Fig 3.22



## Laquer Painting Industry

Upcountry is famous for this craft. The raw materials needed for this industry are provided by a fluid found in the lac insect who lives on kappetiya plants. Laquer industry was used to beautify the outer surface of the walking sticks, wooden trays, bowls, furniture, handle of the palmyra-fan, lascarins and ola leaves.



Fig 3.23

## The Value of Protecting our Cultural Heritage

Our ancestors had the creative talents to carve unique works of art out of rough rock that amaze and attract anybody who visit our country. Creativity and knowledge about it that the ancestors had possessed, good attitudes they had on their country, nation and religion and their experiences are connected to this heritage. Therefore, it is very important that we protect this precious heritage.

Different countries of the world have got cultures that are inherent to each of those

countries. It is important that the cultural heritage we have got is protected in order to display to the world the pride we have in our culture amidst the other cultures of the world. You have already learnt about six places of our cultural heritage that have been declared as world heritage. When such places are declared as world heritage, the whole world comes to know of the precious heritage that we have inherited. That contributes to the development of the tourism industry of our country, too.

By learning about the creativity, artistic skill, advanced engineering skills and the technology that our ancient forefathers had possessed, the present generation feels proud of them and develops love for their country.

We still grow paddy needed for our main meals using the tank and the irrigation system inherited to us by our ancestors.

It also makes it clear how the ancient heritage helps for the existence of the present society.

Cultural heritages are similar to that. Good customs and habits inherited from the past are necessary for the existence of the present society. All these heritages were inherited by us as our ancestors protected them to pass on to the next generation. Therefore, the precious heritage that we have got should be protected so that they can be inherited to the future generations in order to produce future generations that love our country.





### Activity

Write an essay on “Let’s Protect Our Cultural Heritage.”

### Summary

1. Sri Lanka is a country which owns a number of cultural heritage sites.
2. Cultural heritage is divided into two categories namely tangible and intangible heritage.
3. Sri Lanka has offered six world heritage sites.
4. We must protect our heritage in order to display the Sri Lankan identity to the world and to preserve our own identity.