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Settlements in Sri Lanka

Introduction

The first residing of people who arrive in a country is called settlement. One hundred and twenty five thousand years ago people came to our country, which is an island, for the first time. They came from a distant country. They were our ancestors. In this lesson you will learn how they developed this country while living here for a long time.

Part I

4.1 Early Settlements in Sri Lanka

Those who came to this country for the first time lived on hunting. In addition to hunting, they strolled from place to place and collected edible things for their food. They preferred living in caves during the rainy season. In the dry season they lived outside where animals roamed. They did so as it was easy for them to hunt animals.

They used tools made of stones for their day- to-day activities. Those tools were called stone tools. Besides, they used tools made of bones of animals and wood.

They ate wild jack, wild plantain and yams. They hunted animals such as deer, giant squirrels, tortoises, hares, porcupines, iguanas and snails for their food. They lived in different parts of our country.



Fig. 4.1 They roamed and picked up fruits for their food in the hunting era. It was their main activity.

They too had worn jewellery on various occasions as we prefer to wear today. A bead, which had been worn to adorn one's neck, made out of a tooth of a shark has been found in a cave. However, there is no trace to find out how they had prepared their dresses.



Fig. 4.2. People in the hunting era used to eat various kinds of yams which grew naturally.

They buried the dead bodies of their relatives in caves when they died. The bones of those who were buried thus have been discovered. The dead bodies had been curled and buried. They applied red colour on some bones. The colour had been made of some natural stones called 'red-ochre'. These facts reveal that they had performed some funeral rites for the dead.



Fig. 4.3. A pendent (thella / pathaggam), made out of a shell of an oyster worn by hunters. This was discovered in Pahiyangala cave. (Photograph: from the Archaeological Department)



Fig. 4.4. Kithulgala Beli Lena (cave), believed to be used as a dwelling by people in the hunting era.

The early age is called the Stone Age since the settlers mainly used tools made out of stones. The people lived in the Stone Age did not have any difference. They never thought as Sinhalese, Muslim or Tamil. Such differences started recently.



Group Work

1. Find some splinters of quartz (Thiruwana gal/padihak katkal) from your surroundings. Discuss how they can be used to cut something.
2. Visit a cave with your history teacher and prepare a series of challenges that you would face if you had to live in it.

Important Points

1. Settlements started in our country around one hundred and twenty five thousand years ago.
2. Early settlers in this country came from a distant country. They lived in different parts of our country.
3. They lived on hunting and collecting other eatables.
4. They had known to wear jewellery and respect the dead.
5. The tools that they used for their day-to-day activities were made of stones, bones of animals and wood. That age was called Stone Age.
6. People in the Stone Age never had religious or racial differences.



Activity 10

1. Imagine a man in the Stone Age and draw a picture of one of his day-to-day activities.
2. Find a stone with a certain colour, make a colour that can be applied and write how people in the Stone Age could have made colours.

Part II

4.2 The Arrival of King Vijaya and the Expansion of Settlements

Introduction

Stone Age existed for more than one hundred thousand years. But during a time between 5,000 – 4,500 years ago, people led a more advanced life style. Starting pottery and using tools made of iron instead of stone are the main features which depict this advancement. When prince Vijaya and his retinue landed in this country in 544 B.C. the people of our country were making a similar progress. You will learn it in detail in this lesson.

The oldest people who got used to farming lived in the hillside areas. It happened about 4,400 years ago (in 2,400 B.C.).

They lived in plains in mountainous areas. Such a plain is called a plateau. Stones used for grinding grains have been discovered from the places where they had lived. It is a piece of evidence that reveals that they had consumed grains for their food. They might have consumed the seeds of grass which grew naturally. However, the variety of those grains has not yet been discovered.



Fig. 4.5 This picture shows some grinding stones used by early farmers who lived in the mountain region in Sri Lanka.

They made clay pots and urns. They learned the art of producing iron during this time. It was a great achievement of them. They have produced iron out of ore by melting them. They used tools made of stone mainly for their day-to-day activities. However, the tools made of iron too were used for the same purpose though not abundantly. As the iron tools were strong enough, they could do their work more efficiently.

They lived in houses made out of clay and wattle. The roofs of those houses were thatched with leaves. They might have used dried Mana (tall grass) and Iluk for thatching the roofs of their houses. Even now the farmers in those areas use dried Iluk or Mana leaves for Pela (huts in the farm or Chena) for thatching.

They have erected tombs for their dead relatives. They had buried the dead bodies in a particular place, exhumed the bones after some time and cremated. The remaining ash was put into a clay pot and deposited in a tomb made of clay. These people had lived in the mountain regions during the very early stage. Later they migrated to plains. Gradually they were stepping towards advancement. The clay pots and iron tools they made and the houses they built clearly show that they had practised a systematic technology.

The Arrival of Prince Vijaya

History says that a prince called Vijaya and his retinue consisting of seven hundred people arrived from India and settled in this country in about 544 BC. This is clearly described in Mahawamsa. It is a very important historical source (chronicle) which helps us learn the history of our country. The place where Vijaya and his retinue landed is called Thambapanni. It is in the western coast of Sri Lanka.



It is believed that when prince Vijaya landed in this country, there lived three groups of people who belonged to Yakka, Naga and Deva tribes. A woman called Kuweni, who belonged Naga, Yakka, tribe caught Prince Vijaya's people and hid them. Prince Vijaya who was searching his people met Kuweni. It is said that she was spinning cotton at the time.

Prince Vijaya who realized that Kuweni was a Yakka woman, raised his sword, frightened her and retrieved his people hidden by Kuweni. Later prince Vijaya married Kuweni. Kuweni bore a male child and a female child from prince Vijaya. They were named Jeewahattha and Disala respectively.

There were two cities which belonged to this Yakka tribe. They were called Sirisawatthu and Lankapura. On a day when there was a celebration in Sirisawatthu, Kuweni helped prince Vijaya to kill all Yakka people and become the King of Sri Lanka.

After destroying the Yakkas, prince Vijaya left Kuweni and married a princess brought from the state of Pandya in India.

The people who arrived with prince Vijaya settled in various places in the country. The Mahawamsa says that they started their villages in the area close to Malwathu Oya. Upatissa Gama was established by minister Upatissa. In the same way, Anuradhagama, was established by minister Anuradha.

According to Mahawamsa, prince Vijaya and his retinue consisting of seven hundred people belonged to the Aryan community. After the arrival of prince Vijaya and his retinue, the customs and formalities prevailing in the then Indian society spread in this country too.

Important Points

1. The people who lived in the Stone Age in this country started agriculture later.
2. They discovered iron 4,000 years ago. In addition to that, they knew the art of making pots and urns out of clay.
3. They erected tombs for their dead relations and performed funeral rites.
4. There is a story in Mahawamsa about settlements in Sri Lanka. According to the story, the settlement was started in this country by a prince called Vijaya and his retinue consisting of seven hundred people. They arrived in this country 2,500 years ago.



Activity 11

1. Write a description about three types of grains used in Chena cultivation.
2. Find and paste a picture of a hut made of clay and wattle and thatched with Iluk or Mana. Make a list of the materials used to build such a house.