

Historical background of Polonnaruwa

Contributed by Lanka Nest
 Sunday, 09 March 2008
 Last Updated Wednesday, 30 April 2008

History of Polonnaruwa goes back to 2c BCE. Historians are of the view the first inhabitants of Sri Lanka is considered to be the area in which such pre historic tribes had settled down. Habarana forest is considered to be the area in which of ‘Sabara’ tribe had lived in. ‘Sabara’ is the ancient name given to present day ‘Vedda’ community . The name ‘Habarana ‘ is considered to have derived out of the word ‘Sabara” , people who were inhabiting around Habarana during pre historic times. Out of pre historic settlements as well as cemeteries found in Sri Lanka, the largest number is found in the North Central Province. Similarly ‘Veddas’ who are considered to be the descendents of pre historic tribes live in this region even today. These appear to confirm the view of historians that the earliest human settlements in Sri Lanka were in the North central province in which Polonnaruwa is situated in. consisted of pre historic tribes. Habrana which is situated close to Polonnaruwa

Chulawamsa as well as inscriptions of the Polonnaruwa period refer to Polonnaruwa as ‘Pulasthipura’ or ‘Pulathisipura’. This name was given to Polonnaruwa in honor of the ancient ‘Rishi’ called ‘Pulasthi’.

Agriculture is the main occupation of those residing at Polonnaruwa from very ancient times. Most of the residents of Polonnaruwa at present , are colonists settled by the Government under several irrigation schemes. Polonnaruwa being a historic city with many ruins of archaeological interest, thousands of local as well as foreign tourists visit Polonnaruwa annually . Polonnaruwa became a capital city only in the 11th century; therefore the works of Polonnaruwa are preserved quite well. Since the places of interest at Polonnaruwa are situated within a small area, one could see them within a few hours.

Several important events of world history took place during the Polonnaruwa period. These include the birth of prophet Mohammed, the beginning of the dark ages in Europe and the reign of the kings of Wan dynasty of China.

King Parakramabahu, the Great is considered as the greatest king of the Polonnaruwa period. His services extended to almost every aspect of human life of that time . His reign brought about vast changes to the economy, administration, culture, religion etc. However his greatest work is considered to be ‘ Parakrama Samudraya ” (the sea of Parakrama), the tank he built by joining tanks called Giritale Wewa , Thopa Wewa and Kaudulu Wewa. It is generally accepted that the country was very prosperous during his reign. What is startling is that there is no record of building a tank by a Sri Lankan king for the next seven hundred years. Polonnaruwa period therefore is considered as a very prosperous period of Sri Lankan history.