

1 Sources of Studying History

Introduction

Sources are needed to study history. The sources that help us to study history are diverse. In this unit you will learn the areas such as, introduction to sources, the way how history is built on the information provided by the sources and the benefits of studying history.

1.1 Classification of Sources

History is a subject which studies the past human activities. When we study the history of hundreds and thousands of years back, we find writings and various creations made by people who lived in those ages. They are called 'sources' because information about past human activities can be extracted from them. The sources, which belonged to each different age, provide us a good understanding about those eras and their social backgrounds. Thus, when the information taken from those sources are studied logically, the history about people's lives in each period is formed.

As there are a number of sources which are available to study history, they are mainly divided into two;

1. Literary sources
2. Archaeological sources

Books and documents written at different time periods by the people who lived in the past are considered 'literary sources'. Relics, monuments, coins, inscriptions and various ruins which are unearthed from archaeological excavations and experiments are called 'archaeological sources'. Next, let's discuss the above mentioned two types further using the sources which are helpful to study the history of Sri Lanka.

1. Literary Sources

The literary sources, which can be used to study the history of Sri Lanka, can be categorized into two, as, 'local literary sources' and 'foreign literary sources'. The texts, written by Sri Lankans in the form of prose and poetry from time to time about two thousand years ago are considered 'local literary sources'. Apart from the texts written by Sri Lankans, some books were written by foreigners who were interested in Sri Lanka. Or else, some foreign writers have included information about Sri Lanka in the books they wrote. Thus, the books written by foreign writers mentioning information about Sri Lanka are called 'foreign literary sources'.

■ Local Literary Sources

Among the local literary sources in Sri Lanka 'Deepawamsa' is considered the oldest text. Deepawamsa was written in about 4th century A.D. Deepawamsa consists of historical information of this country up to the end of King Mahasen's ruling period and descriptions of the history of the Buddhist order (Sasana) in this country.



Fig 1.1. Ancient literary and religious information as well as the Wamsakatha have been written on ola leaves. Sri Lanka inherits a tradition of talipots, which belonged to a long period of time.

But, some historical events have been recorded briefly in Deepawamsa. Repetitions too can be seen in this source. Therefore, Mahawamsa was composed as a historical chronicle with lesser mistakes than Deepawamsa.

Mahawamsa is a text with several parts. The first part of it was written by a Bhikku named 'Mahanama' who lived in the 'Diksanda Seneviya' Piriwena (monastery). As in Deepawamsa, the first part of Mahawamsa consists of the historical information of this country from the arrival of the Lord Buddha to Sri Lanka up to the end of the ruling time of king Mahasen. This part had been written in about 5th or 6th century A.D. One can see a certain similarity between the information of Deepawamsa and the first part of Mahawamsa. The reason for this may have been the influence of the early texts such as, Seehala Attakatha Mahawamsa, Uttara Vihara Attakatha and Vinaya Attakatha which were written before these two sources.

After the first part of Mahawamsa was written by Mahanama Thero, some other writers extended Mahawamsa as a continuous text with several parts by including some information about their contemporary time periods from time to time. Therefore, the history of Sri Lanka has been written continuously in Mahawamsa. As there are a limited number of countries of which

the history has been written in one continuous text, Sri Lankans can be proud because the history of this country has been written in one text. Mahawamsa is considered a more credible historical source because some historical events recorded in it have been substantiated by the inscriptions and some other sources.

About four centuries after the writing of Mahawamsa, in Pali, an annotation was compiled in order to interpret it by explaining some areas. That text, which is called the 'Mahawamsa Teekawa' (annotation of the Mahawamsa), is named as Wansattappakasini. It consists of a lot of information which are not available in some other sources.

Type of Source	Examples
Sandesha Kawya	Mayura, Thisara, Selalihini Sandesha
Prashasthi Kawya	Perakumba Siritha
Hatan Kawya	Seethawaka Hatana, Constantinu Hatana, Ingirisi Hatana

Table No:1.1 A few ancient literary sources consisting different content from each other

A number of books, which can be considered to be local literary works, had been written from Anuradhapura era to Kandyan era of the history of this country. The books, considered as Buddhist religious texts such as Bodhiwamasa, Thupawamsa, Dhatuwamsa, Poojawaliya and Saddharmalankaraya, are important to study the history of Rajarata civilization. The Nikaya Sangraha which has been written on the history of the Buddhist order (Sasana) and Rajawaliya which includes political information of the country are important sources of studying history from Gampola to Kotte period. Sandesha Kawya, Prashasthi Kawya and Hatan Kawya are important to study the history between the periods of Kotte and Kandy. Some examples are given in the table No 1.1.

The local books were written during different periods and the reasons which influenced to write

them too are different. The books which had been written from Anuradhapura era to the beginning of Kotte era have had religious objectives. Some books were written a few centuries after the historical incidents, which have been mentioned in the same books. Therefore, when we form our history using the literary sources, we have to pay our attention to the facts given below.

1. The time in which the sources were written
2. The author of the source
3. The author's objectives
4. The way in which facts were obtained for the source

Therefore, you may understand that you have to be clever when you refer to the sources.

■ Foreign Sources

As Sri Lanka maintained trade relations with foreign countries from early period of Anuradhapura era, many foreigners who were engaged in trade activities in the Indian Ocean were aware of this country. Therefore, the foreigners, who had written from the period of B.C, have included some information about Sri Lanka in their books. From ancient time there was a good relation between Sri Lanka and India. Therefore, some Indian books have mentioned information about Sri Lanka. Some Tamil books, such as Seelappadikaram, Manimekalayi and Padirruppattu written in India too have information about Sri Lanka. Some foreigners tended even to write books with separate information about Sri Lanka after the arrival of the Portuguese in this country in the 16th century. When we examine the foreign sources consisting information about Sri Lanka, we can clearly see that there had been writers who came to Sri Lanka and studied and wrote about it as well as writers who didn't visit Sri Lanka but inquired information about Sri Lanka from others and wrote.

Uses of Literary Sources

1. To prepare the historical chronology.
2. To obtain information about political, economic, and social affairs in each era.
3. To substantiate the information provided by one source with another source.
4. To study the international relations of a country (in this regard foreign sources are very important).

Chinese Sources	Fa-Hsien Thero's travelling accounts (Account on Buddhist Kingdom)
Arabian Sources	Iban Batuta's travelling accounts
Portuguese Sources	Ribeiro's book on Sri Lanka (Ribeiro's Lanka History)
Holland Sources	The book of Phillippus Baldaeus (The Sri Lankan Chronicle of Baldaeus)
English Sources	Robert Knox's book (An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon- Sinhala translation: Eda Heladiva)

Table No. 1.2 The records and authors who came to Sri Lanka and wrote about it.

2. Archaeological Sources

Archaeological sources can be divided into a few categories such as epigraphy, coins, ruins, drawings, sculptures and antiquities.

Epigraphy

Epigraphy is a word used commonly to introduce writings on stones (Shila), clay slabs, walls, copper plates, golden plates, wood, and on various urns. Writings on stone slabs or rocks are called 'Sellipi / Shilalipi' inscriptions.

Inscriptions (Sellipi)

According to the shapes of the stones on which writings have been inscribed, the inscriptions can be categorized as cave inscriptions, rock inscriptions (Giri Lipi), pile inscriptions (Tam Lipi), slab inscriptions (Puwaru Lipi)



Fig. 1.2. Claudius Ptolemy, a Greek-Roman lived in Alexandria between 90-168 A.D., was a geographer. He drew a map of Sri Lanka.

and seat inscriptions (Asana Lipi). The oldest inscriptions in this country are named 'Brahmi inscriptions' and they were written to record the events such as offering of caves to Bhikku.

These inscriptions are important to understand the history of the ancient society and the expansion of settlements. Writing of inscriptions had continued from the 2nd century B.C. to the period of Kandyan kingdom.

After the 2nd century A.D. inscriptions were established to write records on various events such as offering premises to temples, administrating temples, informing government laws to people, charge taxes, trading, forgiving convicts, and appreciating the service of some people. Therefore, much information, which is not provided by the literary sources can be discovered from the inscriptions.

Coins

Coins were used in Sri Lanka from Anuradhapura era. The oldest coins found in this country are called 'Kahapana'. The names 'Purana' and 'Dharana' too are used for them. The tusker and Swastika coins, Lakshmi coins and a type of golden coins named 'Aka' were used in this country. The copper coins (Thamba Massa) were used during the Polonnaruwa kingdom. The coins needed for the country were produced in the country itself and even the moulds which were used to produce coins have been discovered in excavations. Apart from the local coins, Roman coins, Chinese coins, and Indian coins are found in Sri Lanka. In studying the economic condition, trade, and use of metals, coins are an immensely important source. The study of ancient coins is called 'numismatics'.

Type of Source	Examples
Greek Sources	Demundo by Aristotle, Indica by Megasthenis, the records of Onesicritus.
Roman Sources	Naturalis Historia by Plini, Approach to Geography by Ptolemy, Sri Lankan Map by Ptolemy
Chinese Sources	The book on records of tours of Hsuan-Tsang Thero
Portuguese Sources	The book about Sri Lanka by Father Fernão de Queiroz

Table No. 1.3. The authors who have written records about Sri Lanka based on the information obtained from others without seeing the country with their own eyes, and their books.

Ancient Ruins

Many ruins such as ancient buildings, stupas, stone pillars, tanks and ponds can be seen in Sri Lanka. Since some places, where ancient people of this country lived are still in wilderness, such ruins exist even in and close to the forestry areas.

These ruins, which are called archaeological monuments, are a very good source to study the history of this country. These ruins help us to gain a clear knowledge on various aspects such as creative ability, technology, building designing or architecture, craftsmanship, ability to conserve the environment and water management of the ancient people.



Fig. No. 1.3. The 'Galpotha inscription', made by King Keerthi Sri Nisshankamalla. This is located in Polonnaruwa.



Fig. 1.4. Panakaduwa copper plate, written on the order of king Vijayabahu I. This was granted to an officer named Sithnarubima Budalna with gratitude for his loyalty to the king. This is what was written from its first line to the third; "Swasthi Sirisiriwath Apiriyath Lo Ikuth Gunamulin Uthurath Mulu Dambadiwhi Ankethkula Pamili Kala Okawas Rad Parapuren Bat Keth Usabnat Agamehesun Wu Lakdiw Polo Yohena Parapuren Himi Sirisangabo Vijayabahu Rajapa Wahanse". This document is important to study the history of 12th century A.D.

Media of Epigraphy	Examples
Inscriptions (Stone)	King Nisshankamalla's Galpotha inscription
Walls	The graffiti in Sigiriya
Copper Plates	Panakaduwa Copper Plate of King Vijayabahu I
Golden Plates	Vallipuram golden plate
Wood	Writings on the wooden posts of the Ambekke Devalaya
Clay Slabs	Scripts written on tiles and bricks
Urns	Scripts written on clay pots and begging bowls

Table No.1.4. Different Media of Epigraphy.

Cave Inscriptions	Inscriptions written near the drip ledges of caves
Rock inscriptions	Inscriptions written on rock surfaces or top of the rocks
Pillar Inscriptions	Inscriptions written on arranged stone pillars
Slab Inscriptions	Inscriptions written on arranged stone slabs
Seat Inscriptions	Inscriptions written on stone slabs like altar or pulpit

Table 1.5. The names used to introduce the epigraphy according to the nature of the place where they were written.

Drawings, Sculpture and Antiquities

Ancient drawings, sculpture and engravings are live evidence that display our culture. Drawings, sculpture, and engravings are helpful to gain information about various aspects of the ancient people such as their clothes, art skills, use of jewellery, using colours, and religious beliefs; for example, the frescos in Sigiriya provide us some information about clothes, jewellery, hair styles and beauty culture of women who lived during ancient times.

The objects which are remaining now, after being created or used by the ancient people can be introduced as antiquities. Antiquities are in the museums, religious places, and various institutions and in care of some people of this country. Many antiquities are discovered in excavations. Antiquities help us to understand many different aspects of the ancient people, such as their abilities, skills, ancient culture, technology, foreign relations and their life style.

You may see that there are diverse sources which can be used to construct the history of Sri Lanka. In constructing the history with the help of the information extracted from a particular source, one has to be shrewd in using that source. Historical sources in Sri Lanka are past reports rather than past events. And also there is a possibility of including the personal likes and dislikes of the authors of these books into the sources. Archaeological sources are mostly considered as contemporary ones to the historical events. Accordingly, if the information mentioned in the literary sources is substantiated by the archaeological sources, that information

can be considered credible. In constructing history regarding a certain historical incident, all sources relevant to that incident should be used. Next, after analyzing the various information received from the sources critically, history should be constructed by using the most credible information. Accordingly, archaeological sources are useful to fill up what lacks in the literary sources, to obtain new information and to substantiate the information mentioned in the literary sources.



Fig. 1.5. This coin, used in Sri Lanka, has been made of gold. It is called 'medieval golden coins (Madyakalina Ran Kahawanu)'. These coins are a source which helps to study not only the ancient economy but also the technology.

1.2 Importance of Learning History

History is a subject which is linked with the study of sources. It could be studied with curiosity too. Therefore, one who studies history naturally tends to read books. Since the reader comes across with diverse facts, ideas, and opinions



Fig. 1.6. The sculpture of Man and the Head of Horse in Isurumuni temple in Anuradhapura. This sculpture is believed to have been created in 7th or 8th century A.D. This sculpture represents the gods 'Agni' (Head of Horse) and 'Parjanya'. (Image of man)

1.3 Protecting Archaeological Sources

When we consider the long history of Sri Lanka, expansion of ancient population, and the number of people who had lived in this country, what remains here for us as archaeological sources today is only the creations made of long lasting raw materials such as stone, metal and clay; or large scale creations such as tanks and canals.

There is a possibility of

in reading books, his or her critical sense gets developed. Therefore, he or she tends to think of anything with a logical mind and this will help him or her to understand the problems properly. When the problems are understood properly, he or she will tend to find solutions to those problems creatively. Therefore, when one learns history, it helps him or her to develop his or her personality. Apart from these, one will gain the benefits given below by studying history.

1. Proper understanding of society and the world in which one lives
2. Constructing future by understanding the present through the past experiences
3. Recognizing the national identity
4. Building up national reconciliation by loving humanity
5. Respecting others' cultures
6. Tolerating different views

these valuable sources getting destroyed due to speedy urbanization, expansion of settlements, constructing roads, constructing buildings, and agricultural activities happening in the country. Today we see historical places, monuments and antiquities because our ancestors had protected them. Therefore, it is a responsibility of the citizens of the country to protect them as the present generation.

There are different types of ancient marks inscribed on the rocky surfaces in various areas in Sri Lanka. Among them various figures such as, Sun and Moon, Palmyra- fan, bow, arrow, conch, ox-hoof, tusker- step, figures of various animals are marks that show the ancient borders of areas; or they are an ancient form of communication as the present road signs. Some people dig out and destroy the places where there are these marks and moonstones, guard stones, stone pillars and other antiquities by misunderstanding that the treasures have been deposited in such places. These activities and other activities like scribbling and drawing pictures in historical places and on the antiquities will pave the way to destroy the antiquities. It is a punishable offence according to the law of the country. Therefore, you should be determined to protect the antiquities as the students who have understood the value of them.

Important Facts

- ✓ The things that help learn history are called sources.
- ✓ Sources are divided into two as literary sources and archaeological sources.
- ✓ Books and documents belong to the literary source category and ruins and various antiques are archaeological sources.
- ✓ We can realize how our ancestors faced various experiences by learning history. Through that one can get the knowledge necessary to face the same problems at present.
- ✓ History of a country reflects the identity of the citizens who live in that country.

Activity

1. Arrange the various sources you learnt in this lesson as given below.

Source	Type of Source- Literary / Archaeological	Uses for forming history
Deepawamsa		
Mahawamsa		
An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon (Eda Heladiva)		
Perakumba Siritha		
Sigiriya		
Seethawaka Hatana		
Panakaduwa Copper Plate		
Lanka Map of Ptolemy		
Vallipuram Golden Plate		
VOC coins		

2. Write an article to a newspaper titled “The examples I can take to my life by learning history”.

Diksanda Seneviya Pirivena (Monastery)– There were several monasteries affiliated to Anuradhapura Maha Vihara. Sunhatha Pirivena, Marugana Pirivena, Phalagga Pirivena were some of them. Diksanda Seneviya Pirivena was another one that belonged to them. Mahanama Thero, who composed Mahawamsa, lived in that temple.

Fa-Hsien Thero – Fa-Hsien Thero was a Chinese monk. He came to India on foot in search of Buddhist texts. Fa-Hsien Thero arrived in Sri Lanka in the 5th century A.D. and stayed in Anuradhapura Maha Vihara for two years. He was born at Wuyang village in Shun- Si province in China. He has mentioned some things existed in Sri Lanka in his travelling accounts.

Hsuan Tsang – Hsuan Tsang (602 -664 A.D) was a Chinese monk. He came to India on a pilgrimage. He left China in 629 A.D. and was engaged in his pilgrimage for sixteen years. Meanwhile, he recorded what he saw in Asia. Though he did not come to Sri Lanka, he recorded what he learnt about Sri Lanka when he was in India. Even those information is important to study the history of this country in the 7th century A.D.

Joao Ribeiro – He was a Portuguese national. In the month of March, 1640 he came to Sri Lanka to serve in the Portuguese army. He reached the rank of captain in his army by staying 18 years in Sri Lanka and serving in the army. In his old age he wrote several books about Sri Lanka by living in Lisbon city in Portugal. Those books are highly important to study the history of Sri Lanka in the 17th century.

Philippus Baldaeus (1632 – 1672 A.D) – Philippus Balaedius was a Dutch priest. He came to Sri Lanka with the Dutch army.

His duty was to serve the East Indian Trade Company of the Dutch. In addition to his duty, he made records on the social life, language and culture in Sri Lanka. Those records have been published in Dutch and German languages. Baldaeus' records are important to study the Sri Lankan history in the 17th century A.D.

Robert Knox – Robert Knox (1641 -1720 A.D) was an English naval captain. He came to India by ship with his father when he was 14 years old. In 1658 while he was sailing to Persia, he came adrift to Sri Lanka on 19th November 1659 as the mast of their ship was broken due to a tempest. On that occasion Robert Knox along with another sixteen people who were in the ship were arrested by King Rajasinghe II. He spent nineteen years in Sri Lanka as a prisoner and afterwards escaped. He went to Arippe in Mannar and then escaped to Bathavia. In 1680 he went back to England. While he was on his way back, he wrote a book on his experiences in Sri Lanka. That book was published in 1681 by the name of An Historical Relations of the Island of Ceylon. The book consists of descriptions and drawings which reflect the Sri Lankan society in the 17th century, the time in which he stayed in this country.

Fernão de Queiroz – He was a priest of the catholic Jesuit sect. Queiroz was a Portuguese national. In 1688 he wrote a book on Sri Lanka. Its name was Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon. Queiroz did not come to Sri Lanka. He wrote this book while he was staying in India.