

Long - term continuity or an abrupt change? :a new conceptual frontier of cultural development in early first millennium BCE in Sri Lanka

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The objective of this paper is to organize a new set of archaeological data to address a specific problem of the cultural development (that was occurred) in Sri Lanka during the first millennium BCE. The problem relates with the cultural adaptive dynamism of prehistoric hunter-gatherers and the early farmers which had occurred in the late second millennium and the early first millennium BCE.

The hunter-gatherer's cultural traits in Sri Lanka are considered to have gradually declined in the late second millennium BCE. This was succeeded by the arrival of iron using agricultural communities to the north central and south eastern dry zones around 900 BCE. The transition between the two cultures seems an abrupt event as suggested by the limited number of chronostratigraphical sequences which has been so far unveiled by the archaeologists. It was said that the hunter-gatherer groups tended to retreat outwards as the result of the domination of the new farmers. The new iron using farmers were responsible for the proliferation of the first sedentary village culture in Sri Lanka. Archaeological evidence suggests that this process was continued during the first half of the first millennium BCE. This paper argues that the existing hypothesis upon the interaction between these two techno-cultures is not adequately explained and is theoretically polemical. Domination of the iron using farmers against the hunter-gatherers and finally the retreat of the later groups seems a simplification of a complex cultural process and it may echo the Victorian style of argumentation of the 'survival of the fittest' which mirrors the social Darwinism.

This paper addresses this question on the basis of new archaeological findings recovered through a series of integrated research projects together with an analysis of some of the existing data pertaining to the Pre and Protohistory in Sri Lanka.

Key words: Archeology, Cultural development, Sri Lanka, Pre-history

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