

Traditional Treatment for Diseases of Captive Elephants in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

It is believed that Sri Lanka had knowledge in traditional treatment techniques for ailments of diverse species including mankind, from the period of King Rawana. With the introduction of the Ayurvedic system of medicine to Sri Lanka from North India during the reign of King Dharmasoka, Sri Lankan traditional medicine combined with that of Ayurveda, sustained the health services in Sri Lanka. During the European colonial invasion in Sri Lanka, however, most of these ancient traditions were destroyed, while a few generations of practitioners preserved a part of these medical and cultural systems that are yet practiced today. Traditional treatment practiced for cattle and elephants are yet in evidence, as these species have proved to be very useful in the lives of humans. Treatment for elephants (*Hasti wedakama*) remains without destruction as the elephant is no doubt the most useful animal depicted in Buddhist religious ceremonies particularly for the “*Dalada perahara*” (a religious pageant bearing the Temple of the Tooth relic). A detailed study carried out by the authors on the traditions of *Hasti wedakama* has uncovered nearly three generations of traditional medical practitioners treating captive elephants even today. A large number of medicinal plants are used in the treatments identified by their respective botanical names. Astrological methods and mantras also have been used for the treatment of elephants.

These details have been systematically documented to aid future research studies that will also be presented at the conference. These traditional practitioners should be recognised by the State authorities with the aim of securing their invaluable services for the treatment of elephants as a whole, as well as for the owners.