

Significant characteristics of traditional medicine in Sri Lanka: a review based on sources of available evidence

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Abstract

Traditional medicine in Sri Lanka dates back over a period of 3000 years and expanded with the influence of *Ayurveda* and traditional culture of the country. The objective of this study was to review the significant characteristics of traditional medicine in Sri Lanka on the basis of archeological evidence, inscriptions, *ola leaves* transcripts and traditional authentic texts such as *Yogarnavaya*, *Varayogasaraya*, *Bhesajjamanjusa* etc. The basic concept of dedicated hospitals for human beings was established in Sri Lanka, a fact justified by the archeological evidence of the Mihintale hospital which is believed to be the first hospital in the world. There is evidence from a number of inscriptions that traditional medicine received royal patronage and *Maha Wedanā* (medical superintendent) and *Sulu Wedanā* (medical officer) were appointed by the king to develop the traditional medicine and the significant treatment method *Pūdawedakama* (treating the patients by using leech) was practiced. Sri Lankan traditional medicine is composed of a number of disciplines of which *Ūrdhvajatrugata Roga* receives considerable significance. Endemic plants have been extensively used to treat diseases in the *Ūrdhvajatrugata Roga*; *Goda Manel* (*Crinum latifolium*), *Kapparawalliya* (*Anisochilus carnosus*) and *Kabarossa* (*Smilax zeylanica*) have been widely used. Apart from the native plants, minerals (*Walankatu*, *Yabora*) and animal parts (*Kabbellapotu*) have been used for preparation of drugs to treat abscesses in the *Ūrdhvajatrugata Roga*. Another significant feature is that most of the typical practices have been recorded in *Ola leaves* scripts which have been preserved in the University of Kelaniya and in some personal collections. According to those formulae, *Pathmana* is a special kind of *cūrṇa* in traditional medicine that consists of *China Ala* (*Smilax glabra* Roxb.) as the main ingredient recommended to treat *Ūrdhvajatrugata Roga*. These findings describe the significant characteristic features of traditional medicine in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Traditional medicine in Sri Lanka, *Ūrdhvajatrugata Roga*, endemic plants

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