

Indigenous Medicine for Snake Bites in Palm Leaf Manuscripts in Sri Lanka

Conference title and Venue:

“Business, Economics and Social Science & Humanities” BESSH 19th – 20th August 2017,
Sydney, Australia

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Abstract

Palm leaf manuscript culture in Sri Lanka has a long history. According to Sri Lankan chronicles which were composed around 5th century A.C.E. writing on palm leaves started in the 1st century B.C.E, as mentioned in those chronicles, during the reign of King Vaṭṭagāmaṇi Abhaya (89-77 B.C.E). Buddhist monks used palm leaves to inscribe the doctrine of the Buddha. In the later periods, in addition to religious texts, secular subjects were also written on palm leaves, like indigenous medical practices, astrology, palmistry, literature and various kinds of black magic. Indigenous medical practices included medical treatments for human beings as well as animals. Ailments such as diarrhea, vomiting, snakebites, fever, and mental disorders were commonly treated using indigenous medicines. A large number of PLMSRL covers the treatments for snake bites. As an agricultural society even today there are a considerable number of deaths by snake bites. So the situation in the past was very serious. There are various methods for cure of snake bites using indigenous medicine of various kinds.

The Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Kelaniya Sri Lanka has established a Palm Leaf Manuscript Study and Research Library (PLMSRL) to preserve those manuscripts, especially to preserve manuscripts that are damaged due to various causes. Currently, there are more than 3000 (800,000 images) manuscripts preserved by this library. This research present study was carried out by using these manuscripts. The methodology used for this research is to examine those manuscripts thoroughly and the main objective is to recognize the major areas of the indigenous knowledge which prevailed for more than twenty centuries throughout the history of Sri Lanka.

Key words: Palm Leaf Manuscripts, Indigenous Knowledge, Chronicles, snakebites, Astrology

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