

## **Medical Facilities in Ancient Sri Lanka**

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### **Introduction:**

The literary and archaeological evidence available today demonstrates clearly that the rulers of ancient Sri Lanka made every possible effort for the spiritual and economic development of the subjects. Similarly a fair amount of references occur in literary sources and inscriptions and archaeological remains have come to light to prove that ancient kings have directed their efforts to provide medical facilities for the people. The main objective of this paper is to explore the important concepts of the ancient medical fields of Sri Lanka.

Mahavamsa, the Great Chronicle of Sri Lanka contains a fair amount of references to the building of hospitals and the provisions of other medical facilities in the past. The earliest reference in this regard appears in the account of the reign of Pandukabhaya, a pre-Buddhist king who ruled in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The chronicle in describing a fairly detailed account of buildings in the city of Anuradhapura, mentions how the king had taken steps to organize the health facilities of the people. This account includes the construction of a *Sivikasala* and a *Soththisala* of which the former has been interpreted as a lying-in-home and the latter as a hospital or a hall for the sick (*gilanasala*) (Mahavamsa X: 102). Mahavamsa Tika explains the word 'sivikasala' as a 'house of delivery' or 'Vijayanagara'.

### **Physicians:**

Next in importance is the reign of King Dutugemunu in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. during whose reign the Mahavamsa records that he provided eighteen places for the sick where they were given sick food and remedies as ordered by the physicians (Mahavamsa X: 38-39). The Brahmi inscriptions belonging to the early Christian centuries make references to the title 'vedja' indicating physicians. The Brahmi inscriptions from Piccandiyava mention the title 'vedja' (skt. Vaidya), a physician who was the donor of a cave to Buddhist monk (Paranavitana 1970: 83- no. 1059).

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