

**VETERINARY MEDICINES MENTIONED IN THE PALM LEAF
MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS AT THE LIBRARY OF NATIONAL
MUSEUM OF COLOMBO**

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Introduction

Traditional Indigenous Medicine is unique and is a landmark heritage in Sri Lankan territory. The traditional Indigenous Medicine system is a collection of several streams. Tumours (Gedi Wedakama), traditional orthopedic treatment system (Kedum Bindum Vedakama), Sarvanga (physicians) and Eye medicine (Aksi wedakama), etc., are some of the treatments in traditional indigenous system. In addition, they have treated animal diseases too. As mentioned in the chronicles of Sri Lanka, indigenous medical treatments were done even to the animals. King Buddhadasa had a very good knowledge of the medicine and according to the legends, he successfully mastered treatments for both people and animal. The chronicles mentioned that doctors have been appointed to treat animals (Mahavamsa, 37, 124-145). The indigenous medical treatments have evolved from thousand years and transmitted from generation to generation (Attanayaka, 2005, p. 39).

The major collection of palm-leaf manuscripts in Sri Lanka could be obtained from the library, National Museum of Colombo (Bulathsinghala, 2012, p.85). There are over 4,000 manuscripts and the "Cullavagga" text of the Vinaya Pitaka of the 13th century deposited in this library was the oldest manuscript discovered so far (Amarakoon,1996). The manuscripts were consisted in various subjects as well as variety of languages. These are written in Sinhala, Pali, Sanskrit, Burmese, Telegu and Tamil characters and the subject coverages are Buddhist Canon, Sinhalese Literature, Prose and Verse, History and Tradition, Grammar and lexicography, Art, Indigenous Medicine and Veterinary Science, Astrology, Demonology, Science, Architecture, and Folklore (Alahakoon, 2006, p. 54-55). The palm leaf manuscripts on traditional indigenous medicine are one of the most important manuscripts found in Sri Lanka. Most of the researchers focus their research on indigenous medicine for human diseases and treatment. Many of them have not focused their research on indigenous veterinary medicine for animal diseases and treatments.

Objective

The main objective of the study is to identify the indigenous medicine methods for animals mentioned in the palm leaf manuscripts. It is expected to analyze the following categories.

- Recognize the diseases of the animal
- Identify the methods of treatments and medicines for diseases of the animals

Methodology

The visual observation and it adapts the content analytical technique using the primary data included in the veterinary science palm leaf manuscripts collection in the library, National Museum of Colombo.

Data Collection

The largest collection of palm-leaf manuscripts is available in the library, National Museum of Colombo. The study was based on veterinary science palm leaf manuscripts containing medical treatments for animals. It was selected 10 palm leaf manuscripts including five (05) Ali wedapotha (elephants) and five (05) Gava wedapotha (cattle) on veterinary science. These were written in Sinhala and Sanskrit languages and they were considered for the content analysis.

Results

In this study, after analyzing the palm leaf manuscripts collection at the library, National Museum of Colombo, it was observed that indigenous medicine was used for diseases of elephants or tuskers and cattle. It was noticed some diagnosis methods and treatments for disorder and injury of elephants and tuskers such as eye diseases, abdominal ailment, hyperacidity, wound and rash occur on the skin, dog biting, snakes biting and worm diseases etc. are available in this veterinary science palm leaf manuscripts.

In addition to medical treatment for elephants and tuskers, indigenous treatments for cattle were also observed. It includes treatments for the ear diseases of the cattle, hooves, horns, mucus and fever diseases, diseases occurring from cold and heat, especially diseases for the pregnant cows and diseases caused by snakes biting such as cobra and viper.

These veterinary science palm leaf manuscripts have explained various treatment methods for variety of diseases with different kind of medicine. These animals were treated with local medicines. It is clear that the animals were healed by using medication prescription and treatment such as herbal oils, paththu (herbs and plants to make a pastes), choorna (Choorna is a dry powder made by crushing and powdering the herbs), guli (tabloids), kalka (Kalka is made by crushing the herbs and plants to make a pastes), nasna (medicine inhaled through the nose), kasaya (juice of herbs) etc.

Recommendations

According to the content analysis, various prescriptions, treatment methods and medicines for diseases of elephants, tuskers and cattle were identified. Therefore, it is possible to state that palm leaf manuscript collection which belongs to library, National Museum of Colombo demonstrate valuable facts and details for veterinary medicine. This palm leaf manuscript collection is very important for studying indigenous medicine.

Though, this collection has been applied microfilming as a means of preservation of the palm leaf collections, some palm leaf manuscripts have no facilities to obtain the copies by using microfilmed reels. Therefore, it is advisable to go for best digital preservation techniques to safeguard this valuable collection. Digitization is a useful technique that could be applied for conservation as well as to enhance the usage of this palm leaf manuscript collection.

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