

Indigenous medicinal knowledge in palm-leaves manuscripts collection at Library of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura

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Abstract

There is much evidence that ancient ancestors of Sri Lanka have developed most glorious technology thousands of years ago to come up with modern technology. Their technology, traditional knowledge, creativity and things they did in everyday life perfectly embodied using their intellectual knowledge. These include life experiences and oral tradition which is called as “indigenous knowledge”. Indigenous knowledge brings what they have seen; the things that were heard; and the teachings of elders learned generation after generation. From generation to generation, indigenous knowledge was inherited from the native community of their ancestors. Accordingly, the native community as well as indigenous knowledge is an interconnected phenomenon.

Indigenous knowledge mainly consists of two components: recognized knowledge and unacceptable knowledge. After the emergence of civilizations, the knowledge recognized by scholars and society has been transferred into books, and it has become a recognized knowledge.

The characteristics of indigenous knowledge in the book of *Best Practices on Indigenous Knowledge*, a publication of UNESCO (2002:12-13) are as follows:

- Indigenous knowledge is location and culture specific
- Indigenous knowledge the basis for decision making and survival strategies
- Indigenous knowledge is not systematically documented
- Indigenous knowledge concerns critical issues of human and animal life; primary production of human and animal life, natural resource management

- Indigenous knowledge is dynamic and based in innovation, adaptation, and experimentation
- Indigenous knowledge oral and rural in nature

It is clear that indigenous knowledge is diverse. Our old ancestors did not forget writing it on palm- leaf referring to autochthonous knowledge. Among the aggregation of indigenous knowledge written in this manner, the Sri Jayewardenepura University library's collection of palm-leaves manuscripts which is being conserved is important.

On the other hand, indigenous knowledge is grounded in man's practical life-styles and that is a great way to establish their life based on this knowledge. Moreover this indigenous knowledge includes everything from Agriculture, Arts and crafts, Food and nutrition, Housing, Irrigation, Medicine, Folk beliefs, Forest lore (Ranasinghe,2008:4) which could be used simply for the day-to-day lives of the people without having huge efforts.

Therefore, it is important to bring out the indigenous knowledge included in palm-leaves manuscripts to be able to use them whenever necessary. This study is an attempt made to analyze the content of the palm leaves collection in the library of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

The specific objectives of the study are to categorize the palm leaves collection according to the subjects and conduct a content analysis on medicinal palm-leaves manuscripts.

The study is qualitative in nature and it adapts the content analytical technique using the secondary data included in medicinal palm-leaves manuscripts collection in the Library of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

The palm-leaf manuscripts collection of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura is 20, and it was taken as the collection for the research. They were numbered from 1 to 20 for analytical purpose. There were 18 palm-leaf manuscripts on indigenous medicine and they were considered for the content analysis. These are comprised of Sinhala and Sanskrit languages and both are composed as manner of prose and verse.

They include same treatment methods for variety of physical and psychiatric illnesses consistent different medicine. Treatments methods are Churana, Guli, Kalka, Nasna and Vireka etc. There are some recipes for making treatment methods, such as, Churana (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 paste), Nasna (medicine inhaled through the nose), Vireka (purgative) for various diseases mainly as fever, small children's worms pain (ringworm), toothache, boils, stomachache, cough, strangulation, diarrhea, rickets, hypochondria, catarrh and headache.

In addition, some remedies and medicines for people skin diseases, all snake bites and elephant diseases and treatments have been identified.

According to the content analysis, various prescriptions for some major diseases of human and treatment methods and medicines, as well as all snake toxins and treatment methods and medicines, and also elephants' diseases and treatment methods and medicines could be identified. There for it is revealed that the Library of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura has a valuable palm-leaf manuscript collection on indigenous medicine.

Key words: Diseases, Indigenous knowledge, Medical treatment, Palm-leaves, University of Sri Jayewardenepura.