

Revival and Re-evaluation of Some Traditional Methods of Conservation of Palm Leaf Manuscripts in Sri Lanka

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Sri Lanka is a land of a rich heritage. From very ancient times this island and her neighboring countries are rich in resources of manuscripts. Compared to other countries of the world Sri Lanka is one of the richest countries in terms of palm-leaf manuscripts. The palm-leaf manuscripts are the written records of man which served as the path of intellectual ideas reflecting the wisdom and knowledge of the ancestors of the medieval period. Therefore ancient rare palm-leaf manuscripts are a precious treasure for any country which possesses the literary evidence of the society to trace the cultural legacy of that particular nation.

Care of these manuscripts was a major concern in the past and efforts were made to protect them from the different agents of deterioration. There are many biological agents which deteriorate these organic materials. This may have happened due to the lack of proper maintenance, unsuitable storage techniques and unsatisfactory environmental conditions. Today many synthetic chemicals and pesticides manufactured are used for the preservation of this cultural property in Sri Lanka. Most of the modern materials and readymade materials used to counter deterioration are relatively toxic and harmful too. It is therefore important to find out the traditional materials and methods which are in use and to conserve them for the sake of these treasures of knowledge.

This study will make an investigative approach into the traditional Sri Lankan manuscript conservation techniques practiced in Sri Lanka and their applicability in the present day. Therefore the following stages of the palm-leaf manuscripts were discussed in detail with the traditional conservation techniques used for seasoning the leaves, preparation for writing, writing on leaves, oiling methods, storage and housekeeping methods of palm-leaves and insect control methods. Some of the aforesaid information may enable us to unravel some of the secrets of preservative methods and techniques used in the past time which are cheaper and convenient.

This study will make an investigative approach into the traditional Sri Lankan manuscript conservation techniques practiced in Sri Lanka and their applicability in the present day. A literary survey will also be applied to identify the traditional methods in the conservation of palm-leaves.

Therefore, by a reviewing of these traditional treatments of existing palm-leaf manuscripts and the materials used for conservation and protection may help in the field of conservation to improve the longevity and endurance of the cultural heritage in the country. According to the budgetary conditions of the repositories, the identified traditional materials and methods can be applied to preserve the palm leaves.

Key words: *Preservation, Conservation, Palm leaf, Traditional method, Sri Lanka*