

PLANTS AND ETHNOVETERINARY PRACTICES IN SRI LANKA

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Ethnoveterinary practices in Sri Lanka were in use from time immemorial. This system of treatments rely on the herbal species available and their medicinal value. These traditional practices descended from generation to generation had become a culture in the socio-economic life of the people and the ones who practice these traditional systems of treatment possessed a high status in the society. The evidence of practising this system of treatments is not confined only to Sri Lanka, but to the whole of Asia and Africa. In Asia it is believed that this is one of the major branches of Ayurveda. In India, ethnoveterinary practices using various plants were recorded during 1200 B.C. Even during King Asoka's period these herbal based treatments were used to treat animal. The Sri Lankan ethnoveterinary practices has its roots from India. According to the history, king Rawana has a team of physicians to treat animals headed by Sushena. With Mahinda, a group of Ayurvedic scholars had also arrived and settled at Anuradhapura. In the 3 century, king Dutugemunu has his physicians treated his Royal elephant. King Buddadasa (337 to 365 A.D.) himself was a physician and treated animals. In addition to Ayurveda, time to time Siddha system and Unani systems were introduced to Sri Lanka by the Hindu Tamils and Muslims, respectively.

Sri Lanka being an island and its strategic location, it is rich in florist biodiversity to accommodate many species of plants both endemic and indigenous. These plants have been widely used in the Ethnoveterinary practices. Almost all the plant parts are used in treatment and commonly called "pas panguva" including flower, fruit, leaf, whole plant, rhizome, root, bark, seed, stem and juice. The active ingredients are alkaloids, polyphenolic compounds, saponin, glucoside, essential oils, sterol, inorganic and organic salts etc. These medicinal plants are used in the Ethnoveterinary practices as decoctions, infusions, powder, juice, poultice or paste, bolus etc. These preparations are used in drenching, force feeding, topical application, nasal application, vaginal application, anal application, fumigation and hanging bouquet. Presently, many plant species of medicinal value and their populations are rapidly diminishing due to so called development and lack of awareness. On the other hand these traditional systems are either not passed down to next generation or the present generation is not interested. Therefore, they are subjected to a natural death with time. Another aspect for the rapid disappearance of this traditional treatment system is the invasion by the allopathic therapy.

Effective action is needed to both conserve these traditional Ethnoveterinary systems and propagate and conserve these medicinally important plants for the future.