

A Bibliographical Survey of the Palm Leaf Manuscripts found in Ruwangiri Rajamaha Viharaya, Anuradhapura District

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Abstract: This research was undertaken with the aim of studying the bibliographical features as well as the content of the palm leaf manuscript found in Ruwangiri Rajamaha Viharaya in Anuradhapura District. Regional differences in palm leaf manuscripts in different areas in the country persuaded the researcher to undertake the study. History of the Ruwangiri Rajamaha Viharaya goes back to early Anuradhapura period. It is believed that the temple was first built by the King Bhathikabhaya. It was renovated time to time by different kings who ruled the country. As such the temple had been a not only a place of worship but a dwelling place to many Buddhist priests and a little monastery. Therefore, since ancient times palm leaf manuscript were written and collected in the premises. The methodology of the study involved meticulous examination of manuscripts found in the temple to determine the bibliographical features, subject matters and specific regional differences if any in these documents. 101 manuscripts were found in the collection. All these are copies of original manuscript books. They belong to different time periods ranging from 17 century to early 19th century. The bibliographical features are more or less similar to manuscript books found in other parts of the country suggesting the copying was done by the same copyists. Although no original works were found the collection proved the existence of two different manuscript traditions, namely the great tradition (maha sampradaya) which consists of Tripitaka and other classical literary works and the lesser tradition (Chula sampradaya) which consist of mostly untitled works on medicine, astrology and rituals. Some of the medical practices unique to the North Central Province were found among the regional differences of these manuscripts. Medical preparation called “pethmana” is such a unique feature. Medical use of specific herbs of the area was also noted. Most important outcome of the research was the preparation of an extensive bibliography together with complete digitized copies of the manuscripts. These digital copies are now available at the Palm Leaf Study and Research Library of the University of Kelaniya. The character styles, leaf numbering patterns, basic bibliographical features such as author and title statements and writing techniques of the manuscripts were in conformity with the established manuscript tradition of the country. The outcome of the study would be useful to researchers in finding information relevant to manuscript studies in general and in Anuradhapura District particularly.