

## **History of Smallpox Epidemics that Ravaged Ceylon from 1500 to 1800**

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Smallpox, caused by the *variola* virus, was a deadly scourge that plagued mankind for centuries, causing severe disfigurement, blindness, and death in most cases. In Ceylon, smallpox was known as Vasuriya, Vaduru rogaya, Deviyange ledé (divine affliction), Maha leda (great disease), Divi dosa (leopard misfortune), Ankaria and Masurika and the natives worshipped deities like, Mari Amman and Pattini to ward off smallpox, which was believed to be an indication of divine displeasure. It is surmised that it wreaked havoc in the time of Panduvasdeva and led to the collapse of the Rajarata Civilization. At the time of Arahat Mahinda's visit, smallpox ravaged Anuradhapura & during Srisangabo's reign in the 3rd century, it wiped out half of Ceylon's populace. This study aimed to trace the history of smallpox and to explore the herbal remedies used for treating pox boils and its complications. Also examined are the waves of smallpox epidemics that repeatedly assailed Ceylon from 1500 to 1800, and its influence on Colonial expansion, Lankan culture and tradition. I argue that smallpox was the 'unspecified pestilence' that desolated Mannar at the time of St Xavier's advent in 1543 and that the European Colonists introduced new epidemics into Ceylon. I also argue that Prince Sakka Senatipati, King Karaliyadde Bandara, Princes Dom Luis & Dora Joao of Kotte, Modliar Simon de Melho and the wife of Governor Adriaan van der Meyden fell victim to smallpox. An archival review was conducted for this study and I perused the writings of Loten, North, Gollonese, De Orta, Daelmans, Grimm and Hermann. To date, there has been no research wholly dedicated to the history of smallpox epidemics before the British rule in Ceylon, ergo, my research will not only fill the knowledge gaps but it will also add to the existing body of knowledge available on the history of medicine of Sri Lanka. Moreover, the lessons learned from smallpox eradication are essential in tackling the ongoing global pandemic of COVID-19.

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