



A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS USED IN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN THE PAST AND IN WESTERN MEDICINE TODAY FOR EPIDEMIC CONTROL

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Abstract

According to the Oxford Dictionary, “A large number of cases of a particular disease happening at the same time in a particular community, is called an epidemic”. Thus, it is essential to impose restrictions in any society to control the spread of epidemics from one person to another. A detailed analytical methodology has been used for this research and the overall research is based on secondary sources. The purpose of the research is to make a comparative study of the social restrictions imposed during an epidemic, and the research question is whether there are similarities between past and present social restrictions. Among the various social restrictions found in the indigenous medical system of Sri Lanka, the restrictions imposed during an epidemic are unique. These are called ‘*Wasangatha Thahanchi*’ (epidemic taboos). Here are some of them. That is *Anabōla-thahanchi* (if the use of something is forbidden, a leafy branch is tied and symbolized), *Ranchu-thahanchi* (prohibition of gathering), *Yām-ēm-thahanchi* (prohibition of travel), *Waw-thahanchi* (prohibition of using the tank), and *Aththam-thahanchi* (prohibition of participating in agricultural actions). Through each of these taboos, the spread of an epidemic has been brought under control. All the world accepted social restrictions in western medicine for controlling the Covid-19 epidemic today are embedded in our social taboos of the past. That is, maintaining social isolation (lockdowns), stopping crowds, quarantine, imposing restrictions on travel (curfews), and adhering to health advice are all imposed taboos. It can be seen that it is difficult to control the behaviour of individuals to control the current Covid-19 epidemic. But in the indigenous system of medicine, all these taboos were used as a ritual. Cultural man prefers to follow such things. It can be concluded that even in the present day Sri Lankan society which is full of cultural people, the past social taboos in the form of a custom are more practical than the present restrictions in the form of a law to control the Covid-19 epidemic.

Keywords: *Traditional, medicine, Taboos, Epidemic, Restrictions*