

SAGA OF TRADITIONAL SNAKE BITE HEALER

¹Dr.Chaitra.H, ² Dr.Gururaj Anil Bhat, ³Dr.Pradeep

^{1, 2, 3} Associate professor, SDM College of Ayurveda & Hospital, Hassan, Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

Standard snake bite treatment guidelines of WHO and Ministry of Health and Family welfare Government of India say that “traditional remedies have no proven benefit in treating snake bite cases and they do more harm than good “Even today it is observed that lot of snakebite cases occurring in the rural areas are surviving. I took up a survey of traditional snake bite practitioners in Hassan District of Karnataka under Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences. Mr Eranna of Honnenahalli of Hassan district, Karnataka is a successful traditional snake bite practitioner. He is having an experience of more than 30 years and has treated more than 500 snake bite cases but lacks in documentation due to non-awareness. He treats all varieties of snake bites and follows very easy methods to diagnose and treat snakebite cases which he has learnt from his father. The herbs used by him are effective, easily available, less iatrogenic and cheap. Instead of just discarding all the so called traditional methods as useless without validating them is the most aversive way. There are many selfless, dedicated people in the society serving others without expecting publicity or fame and it’s our responsibility to identify them and document it and preserve for the future generation.

KEYWORDS: Traditional snake bite practitioner

INTRODUCTION

Snake bite is one among the neglected tropical disease according to WHO. The tragedy of injury, disability and death caused by snake bite remains unrecognized and unheard by global community¹ Due to inadequate health care facilities especially in rural areas of India people largely depend on alternative treatment by traditional healers. Standard snake bite treatment guidelines of WHO² and Ministry of Health and Family welfare Government of India³ say that “traditional remedies have no proven benefit in treating snake bite cases and they do more harm than good”

Snakebite cases existed even before WHO and people used to survive even after a bite. Today also it is observed that lot of snakebite cases occurring in the rural areas are surviving. Even though all cases are not venomous but chances of venomous bite cannot be ignored. History reveals that during the period of Alexander the great warrior the role of traditional poisonous bite healer came into limelight. The soldiers of Alexander force experienced poisonous snake bites and they were effectively treated by the traditional snake bite practitioners of India.

Agadatantra (Toxicology) is included in Ayurveda curriculum and recognised as a clinical branch but unfortunately Ministry of Health and Family welfare, Government of India says to discard herbal therapy in snake bite cases⁴. With all these confusions in the mind I took up a survey of traditional snake bite practitioners in Hassan District of Karnataka with the financial support by Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, Karnataka.

I received information about traditional snake bite practitioner Mr Eranna of Honnenahalli village of Hassan district of Karnataka. It was little bit difficult to search a remote village as the place was new for me. On the way while enquiring about Mr Eranna's residence each and every person to whom we enquired showed lot of respect towards him which made me much more curious to interview him. Finally with difficulty I reached his house and witnessed a real Karma yogi. Even though I had taken appointment with him unfortunately he was reluctant to reveal anything about snakebite management and went away from the house without giving any information. I followed him. Finally I got him in his field around 12 o'clock mid noon. Later Mr Eranna became bit laxer considering a lady has come in search of him in mid-day to gather information. The snake bite is one among the common medical emergencies and it takes lot of confidence and courage to treat snake bite cases. Mr Eranna learnt method of treating snakebite cases from his father Kalappa. As a boy he was very much interested in observing his father treating snakebite cases and other diseases of Cattles. At the age of 16 his father started to

show him different herbs, method of administration in different cases of snakebite. He is having an experience of more than 30 years and has treated more than 500 snake bite cases but lacks in documentation due to non-awareness. His confidence in treating a bite case was amazing. He is having more passion to treat animals than human beings as animals cannot express their problems verbally.

He is kind of a person who does not like publicity, very stubborn and hard worker. Before sunrise he goes to the field and returns back only after sunset. Takes only one meal a day or sometimes skips that also. He treats all varieties of snakebites including cobra bite. Many of the traditional practitioners fear to treat cobra bite cases as they get less time to reverse the condition. He says that it is very easy to treat cobra bite because symptoms aggravates and reduces very fast. Once symptoms are reduced chances of complications are very less. In case of Viper bite it takes more time to treat and complications are also more. He follows a very simple and strange method to diagnose the case i.e.; he offers green chillies for the snake bite persons to eat and checks whether they are able to identify the spice of chillies are not. According Mr Eranna Cobra bite can be cured completely if the patient approaches within one hour of the bite, symptoms can be reduced within 3 hours. He differentiates Cobra bite and Viper bite by the same green chilly. Viper bite patients cannot eat green chillies at all. Same green chilly administration method is used to check whether poison still persists or not, after the completion of the course of treatment. He does not allow the snakebite

patient to sleep for the first day as it will be difficult to assess the gravity of the effect of poison. He will not allow person to drink plain water. He uses tobacco more in treating and adds to the drinking water also. He uses the tobacco in different proportion to induce vomiting. He does not use water to clean the bite site instead lemon juice is used. Bite patients should follow strict diet regimen for a week without taking oily substances, milk, curd, coconut etc. But in a specific snakebite he makes the patient to sleep. He advises to take fox tail millet, little millet for diet along with Tuvar daal (*Cajanus cajan*) and roasted Horse gram (*Macrotyloma uniflorum*). He does not preserve nor prepare any medicines, uses only fresh roots and leaves as medicine. All the medicines whatever he gives should be chewed by the patient. He claims that not even a single patient went for complication who has taken treatment from him. By assessing the condition of the patient he rejects the case initially only if it is not possible to treat by him.

He explained different bite cases available in that area and their signs and symptoms along with his experiences with different patients are quite interesting. I was really impressed by the method of diagnosing using "Green chillies" to differentiate different varieties of Snakebite and severity of poisoning later the method to confirm neutralization of poison. It is easy, affordable and instant method than any of the other methods we use in this highly technical world. Research says that Lemon which is having citric acid neutralizes snake venom⁵. The freshly prepared medicines having more active principles has to be

chewed by the patient where the digestion and absorption should start from the mouth itself so that the action also will be very fast. He has vast treasure of knowledge which needs to be analysed and understood from him. The herbs used by him are effective, easily available, less iatrogenic and cost effective. Instead of just discarding all the so called traditional methods as useless without validating them is the most aversive way.

Mr Eranna made a special impact on me among all the traditional practitioners of Hassan. He studied up to fifth standard and he is farmer by occupation. He has remained as bachelor at the age of 55 years by dedicating his complete life for the service of the society. He is neither behind name or fame and does not take a single penny from the patients. He is least bothered about others comments. He has lot of faith in God and considers himself as an instrument to cure the patient. He never takes the credit to propagate him, works to satisfy his conscious and he is a highly ethical person. The respect shown by his own family members towards him and the impression he has made around his village was amazing. He is also a famous Veterinarian and he knows almost each and every cows and buffaloes around his village and 8-10 kilometres of his village. Other villagers are also showing respect and fame towards him, as he is available to the society at any time (day or night) without expecting any rewards from anybody. It was blissful interview with him. Brightness in his eyes, stubbornness not at all compromising with the quality of medicines and with the ethics is really impressive. The words fall short to

explain his honesty, truthfulness straight forwardness and selflessness.

There are many selfless, dedicated people in the society serving others without expecting publicity or fame. It's our responsibility to identify them and document it and preserve for the future generation. These are being successfully practised since generations and many centuries .If we don't identify their contribution and not explore it we need to accept what WHO says "Do not do harm for the Snakebite patient by giving traditional medicine".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Authors would like to thank Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, Karnataka for funding the project.

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Mr Eranna

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Dr. Chaitra. H.
Associate professor
SDM College of Ayurveda & Hospital,
Hassan, Karnataka, India
Email: drchaitrah@sdmcahassan.org

Source of support: Nil,
Conflict of interest: None Declared

Cite this article as

Chaitra. H.: Saga of Traditional Snake Bite Healer; ayurpub; V(1): 1435-1438



Interaction with Mr Eranna