

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF ANIMAL BITE: FROM THE AYURVEDIC CLASSICS

Abstract

Animal bite is not uncommon in day to day life. Bite may occur by domestic animals like dog, cat and sometimes by wild animals like monkey, tiger, wolf, fox etc. Dog bite is the commonest animal bite that is always considered as dangerous as it can cause a fatal condition “RABIS”. Generally the wild animals attack the human beings with the aim to use it as food and hence the attack causes immediate death or death after some time. But a dog bite generally does not cause immediate death. It can lead to a serious condition “rabies” that can end with fatal outcome. A long term continuous search gifted the human society with “Anti Rabies Vaccine” which is easy to use and also effective.

In ancient times also there was incidence of animal bite, specially dog bite stood as a matter of serious concern. Susruta, in Susruta Samhita, Kalpasthana, chapter 7 discussed about the characters of insane dog, signs and symptoms of insane dog bite and treatment of the condition in detail that can be considered as important even in this present century.

Keywords: animal bite, rabies, Susruta Samhita, character of insane dog

Author

Dr. Dilip Kr. Goswami

B.A. M.S, MD (Ayurveda), Ph. D

Associate Professor

Agada Tantra and Vidhi Ayurveda

(Toxicology and Forensic Medicine)

Government Ayurvedic College

Guwahati, Assam, India

drdilipgoswami37@gmail.com

Human are being surrounded by many animals of different class. A group of the animals are kept in the families. They provide food to the family. Some, remaining with the human, gives protection. Dogs are the animals that are kept in most of the families for their obedience and honesty to the householder. Protection from the unwanted strangers is honestly made by the dogs. As they remain as a member of the family they comes to the close contact with the members in most of the times and during the contact , sometimes , by chance they get pain from the human and in return they can bite even to their beloved master . Generally these bites are not harmful. But these bites may be the cause of a viral condition “RABIES” as the dogs are more prone to be sufferer/carrier of it . Hence, now-a-days bite by dog / any animal is dealt with seriously and the person is given the preventive course of Anti Rabies Vaccine.

Previously also the incidence of animal bite was considered seriously and some measures were taken to prevent the unwanted effects of these incidences. In Charaka and Susruta Samhita elaborate discussion on animal bite is available. There is close similarity of the two concepts. But, considering the explanation of Susruta to be more detail his concepts are tried to discuss in this context.

I. IDENTIFICATION OF AN INSANE (RABID)DOG (UNMATTASWA)

As per the concept of Charaka and Susruta specific treatment should not be given unless the biting dog is unmatta. An interesting guideline is given by Susruta for identification of such type of dog. The characters are as follows [1] –

- Drooping of the tail (prasastlangula)
- Drooping (looseness) of the lower jaw (prasastahanu)
- Drooping of the head (prasastaskandha)
- Excessive salivation (atilalaban)
- Very less barking , as if it is dumb (atyarthabadhira)
- Behaves like a blind animal (andha)
- Unstable movement (anyonya abhidhabana)

As per latest concept by just looking to the animal it is not easy to say whether it has rabies or not. Only laboratory testing (fluorescent antibody test – FAT) can give a confirm diagnosis. But rabies may be suspected if the animal act strangely and it becomes aggressive and try to bite [2]

II. CHARACTER OF BITE BY RABID AFFECTED DOG

The description of the character of the bite of unmattaswa are as follows [3] –

- Numbness at the site of bite (suptata)
- Black coloured bleeding through the injury (krishna raktasrava).

If a person, bitten by an animal develops the following characters then the prognosis should be understood to be bad [4] –

- Starts to behave like the animal that has bitten him
- Makes the sound like the animal that has bitten him
- If the person loses his normal activities

- If starts seeing the image of the animal in water , glass
- If develops phobia towards water (hydrophobia – jalatrasa).

The concept of the modern medicine regarding the signs and symptoms of rabid animal bite are [5]–

- Pain
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Fever
- Muscle spasm
- Irritability
- Excessive movement
- Agitation , aggressiveness
- Confusion
- Seizures
- Bizarre or abnormal thoughts
- Hallucinations
- Weakness , paralysis
- Increased production of saliva or tear
- Extreme sensitivity to bright light , sound or touch
- Difficulty in speaking

At the advance stage the following symptoms can be experienced –

- Double vision
- Problem in moving facial muscles
- Abnormal movement of diaphragm and muscles of breathing
- Difficulty in swallowing and increased production of saliva, leading to “foaming at the mouth”

III. TREATMENT

Susruta describes 2 types of treatment for the patients of rabid dog bite (unmatta swa dasta) [6] –

1. Application of medicines (Yuktivyapashraya)

- Expelling out of blood through the bite (Dangsa bisrabana)
- Cauterization with warm ghee (sarpisa paridahana)
- External application of antidotes (agada lepa)
- Oral application of old ghee (purana ghrita pana)
- Induce purgation with milk of calotropis (arkakshirayukta birechana)
- Oral application of Dhatura, Butterfly pea and Hogweed (Dhatura, Sweta Aparajita and Punarnava)
- Oral use of sesame seed paste (Tilakalka), sesame oil (Tilatoila) and milk of calotropis (Arkadugdha)
- Oral use of root of Wild indigo (Sarapungkha moola) one part, Dhatura half part mixed rice powder paste made in rice water (these ingredients should be mixed

together and paste is to prepare. This paste should be wrapped with Dhatura leaf and cake should be prepared and should give orally).

Here it is said that, if the insanity develops in its own course then it becomes incurable. Hence treatment by inducing rabid like symptoms should be followed.

2. Treatment with prayer to divine spirits etc. (Daibavyapashraya)

- Bathing in the river bank or at the union of 4 roads with medicated water (Snana)
- Offering of some prescribed preparations / substances to the Gods
- Prayer to the God of Alarka bisha “Yaksha” (Yaksha is an imaginary spirit that is respected as the God of Alarka bisha)

The word “RABIES” is not available in the Ayurvedic classics. But study and analysis of “ALARKA BISHA” discussed it gives sufficient ground to consider both the conditions as same. The diagnostic procedures and treatment of this condition as per modern protocol is gradually becoming easy and cost effective. Different health organizations, like WHO, are giving effort to prevent this disease as it is proved to be incurable if develops following the natural rule of its development (after the incubation period). Though it seems difficult to follow the Ayurvedic principles of treatment then also the concepts on the process of manifestation of the disease and its treatment mentioned in Susruta Samhita reveals the depth of knowledge, analysis and observation of the ancient Ayurvedic scholars which needs further study, research and application.

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