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A questionnaire based survey study for the evaluation of knowledge on Gara visha (Artificial Toxins) among Ayurvedic practitioners of Kerala State, India

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Abstract

Background: Gara visha is a type of kritrima visha (artificial toxins) explained in Agadatantra (Ayurveda toxicology). The concept of Gara visha is the unique contribution of Ayurveda which has a wide application even today, but not explored yet to its full extent.

Aim: To evaluate the knowledge on Gara visha (artificial toxins).

Materials and Methods: The survey was carried out on the basis of Ayurveda literature regarding the various aspects and practice of Gara visha and analysed. This analysis was used to summarize the concept of Gara visha in the present scenario. The vaidyas (practitioners) selected for the collection of opinion were traditional practitioners from various parts of Kerala state, India. Also, those who were experts in Ayurvedic practice were also selected for the opinion regarding. In this study, opinion of some patients were also taken who were complaining of Gara visha, taking treatment at famous temples. A few astrologers were also approached to know about other aspects of Gara if any.

Discussion and Conclusion: The concept of Gara Visha is still a debatable topic among all sects of people, irrespective of their field. Nobody is having a concrete opinion regarding deeper aspects of this concept. But one thing we can reap from this study is that it was a very prevalent custom in ancient India, practiced for various benefits by people. Today also this concept is prevalent in India and has a wider application in various forms and many people are facing lot of problems from it.

Keywords: Gara visha, Kritrima visha, artificial toxins, Agadatantra, Toxicology.

Introduction

Gara visha is a type of Kritrima visha (artificial toxins) explained in Agadatantra (Ayurveda toxicology) [1-2]. The concept of Gara visha is the unique contribution of Ayurveda which has a wide application even today, but not explored yet to its full extent [3]. The practice of homicidal poisoning was very common in the ancient times, chiefly among rich people, though even ordinary men weren't exempt from this bad practice. Most of the time the poison was artificially prepared by mixing poisonous animal products, plant products, and body parts of insects etc. which were considered as a combination of poisonous and non-poisonous substances. In most of the cases instantaneous death was not reported but they produced chronic diseases along with psychological complaints. Kerala's contribution in the field of Ayurveda and its development, especially Agadatantra and other branches of Ayurveda is not small [4]. In Kerala state, traditional practitioners who are concentrating mainly on snake bite management, now a days are getting cases of latent poison also. In Kerala many people complaining of Gara visha are approaching different treatment centers [5]. These are worth to mention as some enrooted beliefs about poisons are still prevailing in our society. We have tuned ourselves to many beliefs and concepts without knowing the facts. If these beliefs are related very much with human life, they can influence a lot in human activities dramatically. Any slight emotional disturbance in man may alter his physiology. Many people believe that Gara is superstitious. After reading the textual descriptions about artificial poisons, one may be prompted to be skeptic and reject the information as superstitious. As the practice of Agadatantra does not mean the treatment of snake poison alone, there is still ample scope for this branch of Ayurveda and its practice. The concept of Gara visha explained in Agadatantra has wide application even today. Present life style changes, long term intake of adulterated food or incompatible food, possibility of entry of foreign protein in non-vegetarian diet and people who are following bad habits are victims of Gara visha [6]. Unavoidable incompatible medicines in compound preparations, cumulative toxicity of metallic preparations etc also may cause Gara visha. Many Ayurveda scholars and practitioners have different opinion regarding

its concepts. Above thoughts prompted the researcher to take this survey work for better understanding of the concept of Gara visha

Materials and Methods

Aim: To evaluate the knowledge on Gara visha (artificial toxins).

Research Design: The survey was carried out on the basis of Ayurvedic literature regarding the various aspects and practice of Gara visha. Then the opinion collected was observed and analyzed. This analysis was used to summarize the concept to the present scenario on Gara visha. The Vaidyas selected for the collection of opinion were all traditional practitioners from various parts of Kerala state, India. Also, those who were experts in Ayurvedic practice were selected for the opinion regarding. In this study patient's opinion were also taken who are complaining of Gara Visha. A few astrologers were also approached to know about the other aspects of Gara.

Research Technique and tools: A detailed questionnaire on Gara Visha (table 1).

Table 1: questionnaire

Sl. No.	Questions
1.	Do you know Gara visha?
2.	Is Gara visha relevant in day today life?
3.	How do we identify Gara visha?
4.	Are Gara visha symptoms psychological?
5.	Is it true that people following bad habits are more prone to Gara visha?
6.	In present day what do you consider as Gara visha?
7.	Which type of people in society are prone to Gara visha?
8.	Is Gara visha superstitious?

Assessment

Assessment was made as per the opinion. The survey facts were summarized in the discussion section. The answers given by the experts were also summarized.

Survey facts

For the first question regarding Gara visha, maximum number of traditional vaidyas and experts in Ayurveda gave the opinion similar to classics and traditional books. Some experts of Ayurveda opined it as same as Dooshivisha^[7]. Mixed opinion also came for discussion for this question. Another group of experts in Ayurveda opined that they don't know what is Gara visha. Some other experts opined that Gara visha is a magical preparation given for Vashikarana (attracting a person of opposite sex) and is not a serious problem today as it was there in the olden days.

For the second question about relevance of Gara visha, most of the traditional vaidyas and experts of Ayurveda replied that Gara visha is prevalent today also. Some people in Kerala are practicing this for various purposes to affect the enemies. Some traditional vaidyas says it is mainly given for the people to be made Buddhi mandya (psychological depression) and Nityarogi (sick) by the opponent people. For this question Ayurvedic experts gave many opinions regarding its prevalence in present society by adulteration of food,

cumulative toxicity of various poisons, pesticide poisoning, toxic chemicals in cosmetics, iatrogenic diseases and incompatible food. All these problems can be included under Gara visha. Other experts opine that various psychiatric problems in present society which are not diagnosed may be considered under Gara visha. One expert told that Gara visha can also be considered as cumulative toxicity of toxic plants/minerals in herbo-mineral preparation.

For the third question about identification of Gara visha, more number of traditional vaidyas and experts in Ayurveda told that many patients complaining of Gara Visha in Kerala, will be diagnosed by astrological experts and then they will visit different centers. Traditional vaidyas explained different procedures to identify Gara visha which were the same as that explained in many traditional books. Some Ayurvedic experts opined that it is difficult to identify Gara visha but by keen observation of symptoms it is possible. Some experts described that identification of Gara visha is only possible by proper history taking. Few astrologers gave the opinion that it is easy to identify poison considering planetary position in one's horoscope and can foretell the Gara visha or any poison. Astrologers told that food responsible for poison can also be identified, if ascendant (Aaroodha or Prasnalagna) is positioned in various planetary positions.

For the fourth question about the psychological aspect of symptoms of Gara visha, answers came positively from both vaidyas and experts of Ayurveda as they both opined that many patients exhibits psychological complaints. Some of the experts of Ayurveda explained Gara visha symptoms as both psychological and physical. Other traditional vaidyas said some Gara visha patients mainly presents with psychological symptoms just like a mad person. Other Ayurvedic experts told that patients who exhibit only physical symptoms are difficult to identify because these symptoms resembles many other diseases. Some experts said that Gara visha symptoms are only psychological and there is no need of any treatment, hence psychological counseling is enough. In Kerala state, many people complaining of Gara visha who are visiting various temples have psychological complaints.

For the question about people following bad habits prone for Gara visha, a number of answers came positively. Both Vaidyas and experts in Ayurveda agreed to this. Some vaidyas and experts told that it is not compulsory that any person can be affected with Gara visha. Some Ayurvedic experts described intake of alcohol, chewing gutka and drug addictions itself can act as Gara visha. Some Ayurvedic experts gave the opinion that drinking alcohol daily in excess quantity itself can act as Gara visha which is slow poison.

For this question about what do you consider as Gara visha, mixed responses came. Traditional vaidyas and experts in Ayurveda explained that Gara visha includes various poisons substances as explained in text, but it's practically difficult to identify these substances. Some vaidyas told that sometimes Gara visha does not include any substance and only the effects of Mantra by some people who are practicing this type vidya is enough to produce symptoms of Gara visha. Other vaidyas and experts said Gara visha includes poisonous substance along with chanting of mantras. Some experts told it is same like Dooshivisha. Some group of experts in Ayurveda told that Garavisha of present day includes various poisonous

substances present in adulterated foods and drinks specially carbonated colour bottle drinks and our day today using personal products including cosmetics etc. Some experts of Ayurveda also gave opinion that Garavisha does not include any substance.

For the question about which type of people are prone to Garavisha, many vaidyas and experts in Ayurveda gave opinion that it is common in lower socio economic section of people. Some other vaidyas and group of experts in Ayurveda said that Gara visha belief is common in all sections of society. Some Ayurvedic experts told that all sections of society are today exposed to Gara visha both externally and internally in many forms and will become victims of slow poison. At Thituvila temple (Near Alleppey) where maximum number of Gara cases are visiting, majority are from low socio-economical class.

For the last question whether Garavisha is superstitious, traditional vaidyas and more number of experts in Ayurveda gave opinion that it is not superstitious. While practitioners explained that many common people in Kerala believes that Gara visha is just superstitious, some vaidyas explained that many people in Kerala believe that it is a mantraprayoga done by some people for various purposes. Most experts of Ayurveda clearly rejected that Gara visha is superstitious as this poison is common in present society causing toxic symptoms by its various forms of exposure. Both traditional vaidyas and experts of Ayurveda gave opinion that it is true that most of the patients visiting temple, gets treatment as told in classics. Unfortunately some experts today still believe that Gara visha is superstitious.

Discussion

This survey conducted as a part of literary study is for better understanding of the concept of Gara visha. The survey work was conducted by preparing a questionnaire. It was later distributed to the Vaidyas, expert practitioners of Ayurveda and some patient's opinion were also taken who were visiting temple in Thiruvizha Kshetra (near Alleppey district, Kerala state). For the purpose of formulating a questionnaire, the experts had their own view regarding the concept. Many opinions were obtained and were diverse. Regarding the opinion on Gara visha, they gave answers which were very much similar as told in the text. When they were asked about its relevance all the opinions came to be positive i.e. it is still in practice in various parts of the state. Only difference was in the mode of administration and the objects used knowingly or unknowingly. But many Ayurvedic practitioners correlates Gara as adulterated food, cumulative toxicity, toxic cosmetics, occupational poisoning etc. It can be well fixed to our classics explaining various modes of poisoning like visha jushta anna, paana, lepa, paduka, dhooma and even visha mixed ornaments etc. For the above correlation of experts in classics, direct reference of Indu commentary Gara can be considered as special type poison along with food every substance 'Sakalamapi Vastujaatam'. For the query on identification, the answer was a mixed opinion in the way that it was difficult to be identified. But most of the traditional practitioners opined the same method of identification as told in traditional books of Visha Chikitsa, i.e. usage of Neelini (*Indigofera tinctoria* L.). The leaves of Neelini should be triturated well in milk and

this paste is smeared over the abdomen. The area where the paste does not dry up even after a long time should be known as the site of Gara visha.

Both traditional practitioners and experts of Ayurveda gave opinion that most of the cases they saw will be already diagnosed by various astrological experts. For the question of whether the Gara effect is psychological, many vaidyas and experts of Ayurveda said that many people presents with dominant psychological problems. For this answer, in classics there is reference of various psychological symptoms induced by Gara visha. They explained that it may be due to some enrooted belief in many people that Gara visha will produce psychological complaints only. Some Ayurvedic experts opined that as per text it is both physiological and psychological. Some traditional practitioners told that their effects are more of psychological problems. When observed the symptoms in patients who visit the temple for treatment, we got assured that most of them are psychological induced presentations. Some patients who themselves doubt that they are suffering from Gara visha, are visiting different centers. For the question that if people following bad habits are prone for Gara visha, answers came positive. Traditional practitioners told they have seen many cases coming to them. Experts of Ayurveda gave opinion that bad habits like alcohol, tobacco chewing, gutkha etc acts as Gara visha because they contain combination of poisonous and nonpoisonous substances. The text also has explained the same. For the question of what are all the substances included under Gara visha, answers came in diverse. Some traditional vaidyas and Ayurvedic experts told as per text i.e., Gara visha includes various poisonous substances. Some experts said even non-poisonous substances can act as Gara visha by combination. Some told Gara visha does not include any substance, but only magical preparation without containing any substance, given by chanting mantras which is enough to cause Gara visha effect. By this question we came to know that many practitioners have some confusion in this aspect. Both in classics and traditional books, we can see that Gara yogas contain various substances including animate and inanimate substances. But nowhere in classics it's mentioned that Gara visha does not contain any substance. For the question of which people are more prone for Gara visha, answers came in different view. Traditional practitioners and experts both opine that in Kerala state Gara visha practice are more common in lower socio economical class of people. Some experts told that today all people are victims of Gara visha. In classics it is explained that Gara visha was usually administered to the king. It does not mean that other people are exempt from this. We should understand that today all section of people is prone for garavisha. Answers given by experts are not contrary to classics. For the last question whether Gara visha is superstitious, answer came in this way. Traditional practitioners and experts gave the opinion that Gara visha is not superstitious and most of the people in Kerala believe that Gara visha is superstitious. But the fact is that after reading the concept of Gara visha explained in Ayurveda, one can reject the information that Gara is superstitious.

While discussing on Gara visha, experts of Ayurveda told that many people complaining of side effects due to consumption of herbomineral preparations containing unpurified heavy

metals can also be considered under Gara visha. In these cases the treatment principles of Garavisha is useful. Some experts of Ayurveda gave the opinion that today many people are exposed to various types of poisons both externally and internally. This is well explained in Ayurveda. For example, cosmetics can act as Garayogas which are unknowingly used by many people as they contain innumerable chemicals. These can get absorbed transdermally causing local as well as systemic diseases.

In short we can consider that the concept of Gara visha is still a debatable topic among all sections of people, irrespective of their field. Nobody is having a concrete opinion regarding deeper aspects of the concept. But one thing we can reap from this study is that it was a very prevalent custom in ancient India practiced for various benefits. Today also this concept is prevalent and has got wide application in various forms and people are facing lot of problems from it.

Conclusions

From the survey it is found that many Ayurvedic practitioners knowingly or unknowingly follows treatment principle of Gara visha for many chronic disorders. For example, Swarna kalpas (Agroushadi for Gara) is administered in various disorders. It is also found that today people are exposed to Gara visha (artificial poison) in various forms both externally and internally. As a result, health status is decreasing now a days. It is also found that Gara visha exposure is more common in lower socio economical class of the society. It is found that many Ayurveda practitioners have different opinion regarding this concept. It is even observed that the concept of Gara visha explained in traditional books of Agadatantra is similar to that in classics. But it is interesting to know these treatment principles and practice has got a wider application, which is easier to follow and patient friendly.

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