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Review of *Sarpa* according to Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

In the world, there are about 2500 species of snakes. In India, there are about 250 species, out of which about 50 species are poisonous. The ancient authors have done several classifications. Depending on the mythological habitat, they are divided into “*Divya*” and “*Bhauma*”. *Ananta*, *Takshaka*, *Vaasuki*, *Gulika*, *Karkotaka*, *Shamkhapaala*, *Padama* and *Mahaapadama* are the eight *divya* *Sarpas*. *Bhauma* *sarpas* are again sub classified into five as *Darveekara*, *Mandali*, *Rajimanta*, *Nirvisha* and *Vaikaranja*. Snake bites are well known medical emergencies in many part of the world especially in rural areas. It is common occupational hazards mainly in farmers, plantation workers, herders and labors leading significant morbidity and mortality that remains largely unreported. This article we will study about *sarpa* its classification of different features, reproduction, *sanka visha*, management and or other more topics.

KEYWORDS

Sarpa, *Snake bite*, *Mortality*, *Poison*



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INTRODUCTION

There are more than 2500 species of snakes in the world, and about 250 species in india out of which 52 are poisonous. It is estimated that annually about 2 lakh people are bitten and about 16000 of them die, annually. In India, snake bites take a heavy toll of human lives; India is reported to have the highest of snake bites (81000) and death (11000) per year. Snake bite remains an underestimated cause of accidental death in india. Estimates of snake bite mortality in india vary from approximately 1300 to 50000 anually.¹

CLASSIFICATION

“दिव्यभौमविभागेन द्विविधाः पत्रगाः स्मृताःश् च ,अ. स.उ. 41९2द्ध

In the basic classification snakes are two types –

1. *Divya* (Mythical)- They are *Vasuki*, *Taksaka*, *Sagara*, *Nanda* and *Upananda*. They are all poisonous and the venom is situated in their eyes and breath. These *Sarpas* were worshipped at several occasions like Nagapanchami to escape from their poison.
2. *Bhauma* (Living on earth) - . Totally eighty numbers of snakes are described in

this group. They are again classified into *nirvisha* and *savisha*.

Savisha sarpa include – *Darvikara* – 26, *Mandali* – 22, *Rajimanta* – 10, *Vaikaranja* – 3 *Nirvisha sarpa* - 12

CLASSIFICATION OF SNAKES

(Table - 2)

1. *Darveekara* – The snake having hood marked with spots resembling a wheel, plough umbrella, swastika symbol or a good on their heads are extremely swift are known as darveekara².

Darveekara snake can be interpreted with the morden view with the common cobra (*Naja- Naja*) and king cobra (*Naja-bungarus*).

2. *Mandali* - The snake coining under mandali family are large and slow, marked with ring like or spot on their skin and have the glow of the sun or fire.

It can be interpreted with vipers².

3. *Rajimanta* – Those which are glossy and which bodies are painted with lateral, horizontal and perpendicular strips are known as rajimanta.

It can be interpreted with common krait².

These three varieties of snakes vitiate vata, pitta, kapha respectively.

4. *Vaikaranja* – They are formed by the union of above three varieties vitiating dual doshas².



JANMA

(REPRODUCTION)

Generally the female snake is fertile during *Jyestha* (may), during *Asadha* (july) it mates with the male snake & during *Kartika* (november) it lays 200 eggs which resemble *Karketana mani* comes out male snakes, from the eggs which have long red lines, when hatched comes out female snakes, from those eggs resembling flowers of *shireesha* in color.

On the seventh day after birth, four fangs (poison teeth) develop & from the 14th day onward poison appear in these Apart from these four fangs, there are 44 no. of teeth in snakes, which are not poisonous⁵.

LIFE SPAN

Approximately all snakes have an average life of 120 years⁵.

SEX DIFFERENCES OF SNAKES

Snakes are again classified as male, female and bi-sexual. The eyes, tongue, mouth & the head of the male serpents are large. While those of a female snakes are comparatively small. Those which have both these features are mild venomous and not easily irritable should be considered as bi-sexual⁵.

FEATURES OF CASTES–

KARMA

Classification by *sushruta* and *vrudha* *vagbhata* according to their castes as *Brahamana*, *Kashatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra*² is discussed in Table -1.

1. **Brahamana** - Its snake having the color of gold silver and pearl and emits smell like the flowers of *bilva*, *hima*, *ushira*, *padma*, *guggul* etc. These snakes bite from the front and it aggravates the *tridosha*.
2. **Kashatriya** – These are proud, brave with red eyes, get angry soon, color like those of ripe fruit of *jambu*, *khajura*, *draksha*. Marked on the hood resembling half moon, conch wheel or plough, emit smell like *jati*, *champaka*, *punnaga*, *patra*. These snake bites from the right side of the person and it aggravates the *vatadosha*.
3. **Vaisya** – Vaisya snakes possess colour like a *vajra* and *gomdaka*, body covered either with dots or patches of the color of smoke, *patala*, flower or red, emit smell like that of *goat*, *kustha*, *sheeps* milk and ghee and it bites from the left side and it aggravates the *pitta dosa*.
4. **Sudra** – Sudra snakes are similar in color to *wheat*, *buffalo*, *elephant* or slush have dots or lines on the body dry and emit smell of *sura* or blood and it bites the person from the back and it aggravates the *kapha dosha*.

CAUSE OF SNAKE BITE



Bite happen when snakes mistake part of body as food, when frightened, when stumped over, when venom in their sac is accumulated, when angered due to their vile nature as revenge and when incited by gods, sagas or god of death. Gravity of bite increases in ascending order.

CLASSIFICATION OF SNAKE BITE

Table 1 Classification of Snake Bites

<i>Charaka</i>	<i>Sushruta</i>	<i>Vagbhatta</i>
Gudhasampadita	Sarpita	Tundahata
Vrutta	Radita	Vyaleedha
Peedita	Nirvisha	Vyalupta
Lambita		Damstraka
Arpita		Damstranispidita

1. **Tundahata** – Saliva of snake present, no bite marks.
2. **Vyaleedha** – Marks of one or two fangs but there is no bleeding.
3. **Vyalupta** – Mark of two teeth seen along with bleeding.
4. **Damstraka** – Three fang marks with bleeding, with tearing of muscle only but not the blood vessels.
5. **Damstranispidita** – Four fang marks seen with tearing of muscle and blood vessel.

The first two are non-poisonous and the last three are venomous.

Sarpangabhihata – In persons who are afraid of snakes when touched by some part of the body of the snake, accidentally leads to activation of vata which gets aggravated

by fear, produces swelling(at the site of touch). This is known as *sarpangabhihata*.³

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE POISONOUS AND NON POISONOUS SNAKE BITE

Bites of snake having poison are accompanied with painfull swelling, pricking, knotty, itching and severe burning sensation. Those without poison have opposite features.

Table 2 General Claasification of Snakes

	Caste	Age	Status of female
Darveekara	Brahaman	Bala	Garbhini
Mandali	Kashatriya	Vruddha	Soota
Rajimanta	Vaisya		
Vaikaranja	Shudra		
Nirvisha			

SHANKA VISHA

Persons walking in deep darkness, tread on a thorn but suspect to have been bitten by a snake & develop symptomps of poisoning such as fever, vomiting, fainting & even feeling of burning sensatrion or exhaustion, delusion & diarrhea. This condition is spoken as *shanka visha*².

FEATURES OF MALE SNAKE BITE

Bitten by a male snake the person gazes upwards, keeps his right leg briskey over the upper part of the body like a brave man and symptoms are weak during night.

FEATURES OF FEMALE SNAKE BITE

The symptoms are opposite to the features



of the male snake bite and person will have feeble voice, diarrhea, shivering fear and fever.

FEATURES OF EUNUCH SNAKE BITE

Bitten by an eunuch snake the person has a sideward gaze, greatly fearful and desire for copulation.

FEATURES OF OTHER SNAKE BITE

Bite by an aged snake (*Vrddhasarpa*) makes the person talks too much with mild grade of for longer period. Bite by a young snake (*Balasarpa*) cause appearance of symptom with severe grade of pain in a short term period.

Male offspring(*Kumarasarpa*- not having mating with female) produce redness in the right eye of the person , while bite by female offspring(*Kumarasarpa*- snake not having mating with a male) causes redness in the left eye.

Bitten by a pregnant snake(*Garbhinyasarpa*) leads to black colouration and with the squint eyes, more yawning, anger, suffers from adenoids(*Upjihva*) Oedema of the lips, whitish discolouration of the face , heaviness of the abdomen and headache, bitten by a snake which has just delivered(*Sutasarpa*) voids urine mixed with blood causes agonizing pain in an abdomen and uterus along with severe pricking type of pain³.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

A poisonous bite is identified by the presence of following³-

- *Local oedema
- *Pricking pain at bitten part
- *Hardening of bitten part
- *Itching
- *Burning sensation

DREADFUL SNAKES

Snakes which dwell in a place such as burial ground, sacred tree, anthill sacrificial site, temple, meeting place of four roads, reserviour of water, old gardens, hallows in tree etc. are more poisonous & difficult to cure patient³.

INCURABLE BITES

If patient bitten by snakes at burial ground, on heaps of dirt, sacred tree etc. on the 5th , 8th, 9th, new moon & full moon days, in the evening, middle of night & day & on *marmas* etc. should be rejected for treatment³.

TREATMENT

In snake poisoning cases emergency treatment is required as the poison remains for a period of 100 *matra* only at the site of the bite and then spreads through out the body vitiating the blood and other tissues. Within this period itself, incising the site of bite and other treatments should be done



quickly so that the poison does not grow in the body⁵.

Acharya vagbhatta still explain that the person who is bitten by the same snake or a lump of stone or mud tearing it was his teeth violently.

GENERAL TREATMENT –

i. ***Aristabandhana*** – *Arista* means unfavourable or which gives the indication of death. Obviously when the intensity of the poison increase it signifies the *arista*. As poison starts combining with the blood and gets sepreate all over the body successively it invanding the other organs in the body. Thus to prevent or stop the disasters, created by the poison the physician has to option the *bhandhana*. To stop the arista can be called *arista bandhana*.

ii. ***Dansanigraha (Removing the fangs)*** –

The teeth which are not on vital spots should be pulled out by squeezing the area of bite, symptoms of toxicity of poison will not develop(if the fangs are removed) when the seed is destroyed. Removing the teeth which are on vital spots leads to death and on the joints to distortims of the body.

iii. ***Agnikarma***

iv. ***Achusana(sucking)***

v. ***Siravyadhana(vein section)***

vi. ***Hridayavarana(protecting of the heart)***

vii. ***Vamana***

SPECIFIC TREATMENT -

Special treatment should be adopted after carefully considering the nature of the snake, the *dosa*, *sthana* and the site of the bite on the body, *vega*.

TREATMENT OF THE SANKAVISA AND SARPANGABHIHATA –

In this context *Acharya charaka* explained about *shanka visa* and *sushruta* explained about *sarpangabhihata*, while *vagbhatta* has explained both types.

Sita, *Vaigandhika*, *Draksha*, *Payasya*, *Madhuka* and *madhu* should be consumed as a drink, water sanctified by the person, he should be sprinkled on the person, he should be consoled with courageous words and pleasant things, this is the treatment for *sarpangabhihata* as well as *shankavisa*^{2,3}.

CONCLUSION

Snakes possess utmost importance since ages and are worshiped as god. There are many classifications found in the classics based on the different characteristics but their practically applicability in observing the symptoms and treating accordingly is difficult in the present era. So more and more seminars, CME should be conducted regarding identification of poisonous snakes as well as its line of treatment.



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