SEIZURE DISORDERS - VIEWS OF THE INDIAN MEDICAL SYSTEMS

O. SOMASUNDARAM

ABSTRACT

The descriptions, etio-pathology and some aspects of treatment of the seizure disorders in the three Indian Systems of Medicine, namely The Siddha, The Ayurveda and The Unani are briefly mentioned.

"If more or less, three humors cause disease,
The learned count the wind is the first of these."

-Medicine, Thirukkural

Key words : Seizure disorder, ayurveda, siddha, unani

Views of the Indian Medical Systems

The Indian Medical systems have considered the various mental disorders in their respective ancient texts and some of the aspects have been elaborated by Deb Shikdar (1961), Varma (1965) and Somasundaram (1984) and (1998). In this paper it is proposed to deal with another important disorder viz., namely seizure disorder. Historical aspects of this disorder in the western culture has been elaborately detailed by Temkin (1971) and the subsequent period's have been covered by GeBerrios (1995) and Porter (1995).

Siddha System

The Siddha system of medicine was indigenous to the old culture of the Tamils, which is of great antiquity. It is still practiced in Tamil Nadu and other neighbouring countries where people of Tamil origin live. The term 'Siddhi' means achievement and siddhars were men who achieved certain results in medicine as well as in yoga or tapas. According to tradition it was Lord Shiva who unfolded the knowledge of the Siddha system of Medicine to his consort Parvalthi who handed it down to Nandideva and from him to the siddhars. The origin of Tamil language was attributed to the sage Agasthya and the Siddha system of Medicine was attributed to him. He was one of the 18 Siddhars who bequeathed their experiences in Medicine and yoga to posterity. A number of medical books are imputed to the sage, who probably lived in the 6th or 7th century B.C., evidence of which is provided in the Rig Veda, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc.

A treatise on mental diseases were called 'Agasthiyar Kirigai Nool' is ascribed to him. Herein were described 18 psychiatric disorders with their appropriate treatments, which has been described in an earlier paper (Somasundaram et al.,1985).

The relationship between mental illness (i.e. Kirigai) and epilepsy is well recognized in this treatise were in one of the disorders is called Epileptic Insanity (Vallipu Kirigai).

The features of Vallipu Kirigai is described as follows :"The subject waits out a loud cry followed by convulsions spread throughout the body, all the time moaning and writhing in pain associated with drooling of saliva, violent uncontrollable head shaking. The eyes are ruddy and turgid."

It should be noted that the intimate relation between seizures and epileptic deterioration is
SEIZURE DISORDERS: INDIAN MEDICAL SYSTEMS

recognized here. The Siddha Classification of Epilepsy describes 5 major types:
1. Kumarakandam - an affliction named after hornless animals.
2. Amarakandam - disorder with ghastly features like hell.
3. Bhramakandam - characterised by prolonged stupor.
4. Kakkai vali - named after the crow.
5. Muyal vali - named after the demon, on which Lord Shiva performs his dance.

A brief description of the symptoms associated with each of the following:
The sickness of the three pains/Kumarakandam: This affliction comprises of unending stomach ache followed by diminution of vision with protrusion of tongue and distortion of lower jaw. There is stiffening of the neck due to severe pain around the shoulders. The features are attributed to three humors, namely the Vata, Pitham, Kavam.

Amarakandam: In this disorder there is restlessness due to a nagging pain and itching associated with increased perspiration and respiration. Sometimes the illness is so severe in form that the patient almost lays like a corpse, numb in pain. This experience is compared with a hellish experience.

Bhramakandam (Kurangu vali): The limbs are flaccid and gelid. The patient strains in pain and clenches his/her teeth associated with photophobia. The eyes are set staring lifelessly. The doctor invariably pronounces poor prognosis after examining the pulse in this condition. This condition is attributed to the foul interplay of the three humors.

Kakkai vali: This disease seizes the victim faster than the wind and extinguishes his life like Yama, the God of death. The features, which help to identify the victim of this illness, are: the eyes will be widely open with a constant upward gaze. The patient will have double incontinence with excessive chillness spread throughout the body. There is stiffness of limbs, collection of phlegm in the throat along with slurring of speech almost fitting the condition to a state of delirium.

It should be remembered that the crow is the conveyance (vahana) of the Saturn (Sani Bahavan).

Muyal vali: This form of epilepsy is precipitated by the proximity to or the sight of fire or water. It seizes the body and throws into convulsions with twitching of the facial muscles too. The saliva froths and dribbles. The entire body is heavy and writhes in pain. Muyalagan is the demon on which Lord Shiva performs his dance.

Most of the features of Grandmal seizure are to be found in the above 5 types of description with considerable mixing up of details. We can deduce from the above description the epigastric coma, uterine sensations, flaccidity much rarer to the rigidity and reflux epilepsy produced by fire and water. Further 16 types are enumerated. Most of them are symptomatic and associated with pathological features or various types of pains and emotions.

1. Thimir Vali (? Stubbornness)
2. Konnu Vali (? Dyskinetic fits)
3. Chandala Vali (? Lethal fits)
4. Marana Vali (? Terminal fits)
5. Mano Vali (fits as. With tension, prob. Hysteria)
6. Nanju Vali (fits caused by external toxins)
7. Mukkutra Vali (ass. With lust)
8. Iyya Vali (ass. With suspicion)
9. Vil Vali (the body contorts like a bow)
10. Soora Vali (? Febrile fits)
11. Vikkal Vali (ass. With hiccoughs)
12. Thalai Vali (ass. With headache)
13. Kozhai Vali (ass. With phlegm)
14. Odu Vali (fits produced by fever and exhaustion)
15. Marbu Vali (ass. With chest pain)
16. Thamaraga Vali (ass. With secretions of resp. tract.)

Many of these confirm to symptomatic fits either physical or mental along with the associated features.

Ayurveda System

Apasmara which roughly corresponds to epilepsy was defined in Ayurveda as a disorder.
due to the derangements of the intellect and the mind characterized by loss of memory, loss of consciousness and convulsive movements of the body. In those persons in whom the doshas had become excessive, deranged by addiction to unwholesome and unclean food and the Sathuva quality of mind had become obscured by passion and ignorance, the brain had become occluded with morbid humors and the mind oppressed with worry, passion, fright, anger, grief and anxiety etc. There are four kinds which are described in the ancient medical literature on the basis of doshas the following are the kinds of apasmara.

1. Vataja Apasmara
2. Pittaja Apasmara
3. Kaphaja Apasmara
4. Sannipataja Apasmara

**SYMPTOMS OF ENDODENOUS OR HUMORAL APASMARAS**

| Vataja | Pitta | Kapha |
|--------|-------|-------|
| Nails, face, skin and eyes are red & dusky | They are ginger like in green or Coppery in colour | They are found in white or Pale in colour |
| Dribbling of frothy saliva from mouth | Stertorous breathing | Dripping of saliva from angle of mouth |
| Head drawn to one side, clenching of fingers & feet | Tossing on the ground | Falling on the ground. No strong convulsive movements are seen |
| Frequent attacks of transient unconsciousness & immediate regaining of consciousness | Slowly becoming unconscious and regaining consciousness | |
| Visual aura of jerky, tickle, harsh & dry objects | Visual aura of blood red, fierce terrifying blazing & angry looking forms & non-homologation to pitta causing factors | Visual aura of white hairy and glossy shapes & antagonistic of kapha humor |

The Sanni Pataja apasmara is called incurable due to combination of three humors. The symptoms are usually atypical and this apasmara has usually bad prognosis. The vata type of epilepsy is treated by means of basic (the enemata), pittava epilepsy is treated mainly by virecana (the purgation) and kapha type of epilepsy mainly by vamana (the emesis). As preventive measures mortality and mental tranquility are advised. Existing psychic causes like worry, anxiety, greed, grief, passion should be avoided.

Various drugs and massage therapy with the aid of oils like mustard oil, katabhyadi oil, triphatadya oil were recommended. Drugs like ghratas (classified butter) Maha Panchganyaghrta, Brahma Ghrta were recommended.

Apatantrak - is a disease caused by psychic causes with physical manifestations. When it occurs in women it is called yosapannana and resembles hysterical disorder. One of the manifestations closely resembles pseudoseizures.

The apatantrak shows the following symptoms -
1. Fainting
2. The body bends like a bow and causes convulsions of limbs
3. Eyes are fixed in wide stare or remain closed.
4. Unconsciousness.
5. Cooing like a pigeon.
6. Making a mourning noise.
7. After relaxation of vata from heart the consciousness is regained.
8. Dreadful condition.
9. Difficulty in breathing.

Hence Madhavani danakara included apatantrak in apasmara but Susruta Samhita described it as apatanatraka (Gupta, 1977).

**Unani System**

This system became popular during the Muslim rule of the country and continues to be practiced even today in India. Najabuddin Unhammad (1222 AD) made a special study of mental diseases and described 7 varieties of illness. The treatment usually was purging and bleeding supplemented with nutritious diet. According to the Unani system of medicine, epilepsy is mainly due to the vicious humor accumulating in the blood. Based on this theory there are 4 humors:

(i) Dum (sanguine blood)
(ii) Baigham (phlegm)
SEIZURE DISORDERS: INDIAN MEDICAL SYSTEMS

(iii) Safra (yellow bile)
(iv) Sauda (black bile)

Humoral theory plays a vital role in the maintenance of health. Epilepsy is due to a block (sudda) in the roots of the nerves in the brain due to the accumulation of these humors. In treatment, after the patient recovers from the acute stage, the cause is identified and treatment is directed towards the causative humor. In case of the excessive sanguine humor, particular vein section and cupping is suggested.

Usually the first line of management are purgative medicines and cleansing agents like Jadwar-Ood-E-Salaib Khamir-E-Abresham-Harim-Arshadwala are used. Sometimes even sneezing is induced.

As anticonvulsant therapy, hot oil massages with the following oils are prescribed: Roghan-E-Surkh Roghan-E-Baboona etc.

As an antiepileptic Dana-Us-Shifa is given with 120 ml of cows milk. Finally brain & neural health tonics like Itherifal-Usta-Khudoos, Dawa Ul-Misk and Muatidil Jawahar Wali are given to nourish the neural tissue.

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O. SOMASUNDARAM MBBS, DPM, FRCPsych(London), Superintendent (Retd.), Institute of Mental Health, Chennai (*30, 23rd Cross street, Traniger Illam, Besant Nagar, Chennai-600 090).

*Correspondence