



Indigenous knowledge in veterinary practice— an easy path to globalisation

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Indigenous knowledge or traditional beliefs are unique to a culture and society. Hence the former is compatible with the latter and adoption is maximum. Local environmental factors and cultural conditions govern the evolution of indigenous knowledge. Hence, beliefs vary between regions and even from farm to farm. Regarding veterinary practice, there is a vast fund of traditional beliefs nurtured over generations. These beliefs serve as the package of practices from which the livestock owner selects appropriate ones for adoption. In fact, scientists and veterinary practitioners have rather ignored the worth of many such beliefs that could have a scientific base or that are rational. Realizing these fact documenta-

Haverkort (1991) observed that a weakness of farm experimentation by farmers may be based on limited scientific understanding of the process involved and may lead to wrong attribution of performance. The rationality, nonetheless, should be established and only those scientific and viable beliefs be accepted by the scientific world and propagated. At the same time superstitious beliefs shall be discouraged as practicing them would entail great risks and heavy economic loss. Similarly superstitious practices would block diffusion of scientific technologies thereby retarding social change of any society.

The influence of belief system in a tribal society is more pertinent and draws increased attention, as tribal societies are by and large traditional and backward. The authors have attempted to study a sample of tribal cattle keepers of Attappady block about their indigenous beliefs in animal husbandry. Expert opinion was sought on the rationality of the collected beliefs. Among the beliefs many were found to be superstitious.

The enlisted beliefs were strongly held irrational beliefs that could act as obstacles in the path of progress. The percentage of adopters (total of those really adopted and those said would adopt if and when an opportunity comes) ranged from 12 to 70 for these beliefs. Since adopters in this study included besides those already tried the beliefs, those would try in the future, it is clear that many are not going to seek scientific advises or remedies in the future. This is a matter of concern as this would either delay or completely block diffusion of appropriate technologies of scientific diagnosis and treatment.

Even practicing many of the rational beliefs could delay or block technological diffusion for these tradi-

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Realizing these fact documenta-
tion and validation of indig-
enous knowledge has been major themes for discussion
and research quite recently.

Nevertheless, the indigenous knowledge or tra-
ditional beliefs of any society cannot be in toto regarded
as scientific. The tendency of romanticizing traditional
beliefs should be critically viewed as it fails to accept
the relevant scientific and technological advances.



Sl. No.	Condition	Practice	Adopters (%)
1	Digestive disorder in cattle	Wild pig fat is orally given	62
2	Anorexia in cattle	A knot is made on the tongue with a plant material	12
3	Foot lesions including that of FMD	Made to stand on mud for some time	44
4	Do	Small fishes are ground well and the paste is applied in the lesions	50
5	Do	Fish washed water is poured on the lesion	35
6	Do	Snake skin ground well in wild pig fat is applied on the lesion	25
7	FMD	Cattle is kept in running water for some time	40
8	BQ	Affected part is cauterized with red hot iron	42
9	Plant poisoning	Tip of the ear is cut and bled	45
10	Snake bite	Do	42
11	Do	'Kilimookku' tuber, onion and 'keezharnelli' are ground well and is orally given	43
12	Do	Bark of 'Ungu' is ground well and a roll as big as an egg is given orally	25
13	Edema	A dehisced coconut is rolled over the affected part.	41
14	Corneal opacity	'Vellaramkallu' is powdered well and mixed in ghee and applied to the eye	45
15	Retention of placenta	'Appakovai' plant is fed and also is tied around the horns	52
16	Castration	Testes are crushed with stones or logs of wood	61
17	To get more milk yield	Placenta is wrapped and hung in trees having white sap	68



tional beliefs mostly are part therapy practiced in disease conditions which are highly infectious and contagious in nature. In such situation holistic treatment is warranted and not part therapy. Surprisingly, many of the rational practices identified in our study were only part therapy. For instance, one of the practices to cure mastitis was applying to the udder a paste made out of the stem and leaves of 'Appakovai' plant and turmeric. This is a part therapy being only an external application and practicing this does not mean that internal medication, use of antibiotics etc. are not required. But, when farmers view such part therapy as ultimate there is going to be no thinking about practicing scientific and holistic methods. In other words, practicing of rational beliefs even can block adoption of modern technologies of diagnosis and treatment.

A challenge to globalisation efforts

Practicing superstitious beliefs are a challenge to our globalization efforts of livestock production sector as these and productivity enhancement cannot go together. Obviously the former negates or neutralizes the latter. At the same time we realize that rational traditional knowledge can augment productivity and thereby ensure sustainability as it is locally adapted and minimizes cost of production. Such beliefs are to be identified, documented and integrated into our scientific package of practice. Perhaps, a parallel and supplementary, package of indigenous knowledge is equally important and is to be brought out. In this process, due recognition to individuals, communities etc. may have to be given for their inventions, ideas and information. In other words, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) must be got accorded to the farmer innovator. If eligible for patent, the legal monopoly, the innovator shall be enabled to get it. Moreover the community can share the benefit of indigenous knowledge of bio-resources. Therefore, it is high time that an exhaustive state-level survey is conducted to document the right indigenous veterinary practices. Veterinary Association at district level can take up this task. Location specific extension edu-

cation efforts to discourage superstitious veterinary practices involving wrong materials, equipments and methods need also to be taken up urgently.



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3. Rural Poultry

This ranges from backyard to small holding farmers engaged in composite farming. Ironically, this sector though contributing nearly 30% to the national egg production, is the most neglected one. Even more startling is the fact that their poultry eggs and meat fetch a much higher price. However, 70% of the poultry products and eggs are consumed in urban and semi urban areas and the rural consumption is very low. The major limiting factor in the way of increasing consumption of egg and poultry meat in rural area is not reduced purchasing power but rather poor availability.

The growth of poultry population during the past 35 years in Kerala was approximately 200% with an overall mean annual growth of 5.6%. As per 1996 livestock census, of the total poultry population in the state 95.18% are fowls, 4.41 % ducks and 0.41 % other species of poultry. During 1961 the improved varieties of fowls were 3.89% which went upto 47.39% in 1996. This single factor has contributed to a large extent towards productivity enhancement in the rural sector. However, in the changed liberalisation era special emphasis has to be bestowed on transfer of technology and rural farming system.

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