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Research Based Homoeopathic Practise

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Colubrid Snake Remedies and their Indications in Homeopathy Practice: "A Seminal Work by an Illustrious Researcher"

About the Reviewer



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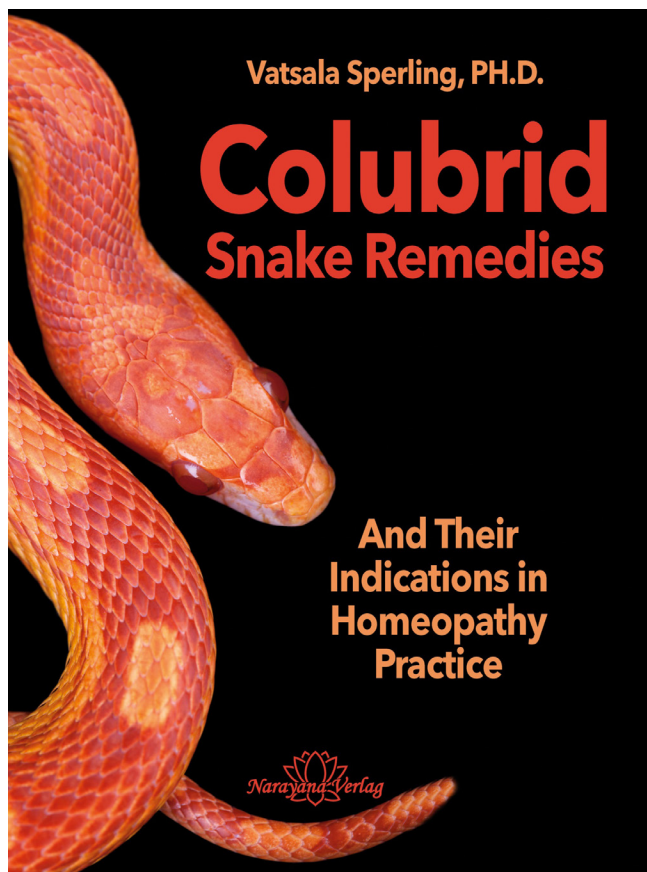
SNAKES evoke a mixed response. On the one hand, they have been revered in every culture since ancient times and on the other hand, they are also considered the most abominable creatures. But aside from their importance in rituals and worship, they have also been associated with the healing arts. Homeopaths since early times introduced many well-known snake remedies, such as *Lachesis*, *Crotalus*, and others. The choice of these remedies was based primarily on poisoning records and *provings*. As we all know, provings can never elicit all the possible symptoms in all possible combinations of constitutions, age groups, and other variations in humans. Therefore, in the last two decades, many new approaches have evolved to understanding remedies. One such approach is

based on **understanding a remedy based on its source**. Animal kingdom remedies are associated with issues of survival and instinctual expressions. These include competition, domination, persecution, sexuality, and group behavior as well as affection, care, and mischief.

The latest book by Vatsala Sperling is a groundbreaking study and analysis of the not-so-common snake remedies. The author spends a lot of time in the rainforests of super-rural Costa Rica, home to some of the most feared and dreaded snakes. She learned from the natives that several snake species look scary but are not venomous. On the contrary, they keep the rodent population down without posing a threat to humans. Such snakes, unlike the dangerous venomous ones, thrive near human habitations. Surely one could venture to consider these snakes as sources of remedies too. This set her on the quest to understand and benefit from these non-venomous snakes.

Dr Vatsala is a scientist by training and received a gold medal from the President of India for academic excellence. Before moving to the US, she was the Chief of Clinical Microbiological Services at India's largest children's hospital. She was initiated into the healing arts by her mother who taught her the elements of Ayurveda. Later she took up the study of Homeopathy and qualified as a professional practitioner of homeopathy from the United Kingdom. Presently, she runs a successful holistic practice in the United States. In addition to this, she is fluent in several Indian languages including Sanskrit. Her rich and diverse background spanning across science and spirituality gives her an exceptionally unique perspective.

Dr Vatsala takes inspiration from the pioneering work of Drs Bhawisha and Shachindra Joshi in adapting narrative medicine for the study of



remedy sources. Narrative medicine is about honoring the stories of illnesses of patients. By placing events in the lives of patients on a timeline, and by noting the metaphorical expressions and gestures of patients it is possible to connect the dots and point to a remedy using the principle of similitum. This approach has far-reaching consequences. Instead of just limiting oneself to the physical, mental, and emotional expression of symptoms, one can map the behavior and energy of the patient with a specific animal.

This book first summarizes the general characteristics, predatory and anti-predatory behavior, and venom effects of snakes. Further, for readers who are unfamiliar with the periodic table/maps of animals, this book provides a sufficiently comprehensive summary to get a clear understanding.

This book is about snake remedies derived from the *Colubridae* family. This family includes king snakes, water snakes, milk snakes, garter snakes, racers, rat snakes, and many others. The *Colubridae* family has nearly 1,866 members, and this

book explores five of them. The peculiarity of this family is that they mimic venomous snakes. Mimicry can occur in form, color, appearance, or even acoustics (hissing). This gives these snakes an evolutionary advantage, because by mimicking the dangerous snakes they deter predators by deceit and do not have to invest in the venom apparatus. Such mimicry is not limited to snakes and is found in butterflies, ants, and spiders too. As we all know, sometimes, even bank robbers steal money with toy guns!

Dr Vatsala outlines in detail the mimicry as well as the anti-predator behavior of the subfamilies of *Colubridae*. This helps the reader develop a thorough understanding and build a solid foundation in the application of newer approaches such as Kingdoms, Sensations, and the Periodic Table and Maps. The author explains how *Colubridae* family finds its place in Row 4 of the periodic table or Map of the animal kingdom which deals with self-protection. Interestingly, we humans are dominated by the characteristics of Row 3 (development of ego) and Row 4 (self-protection). It is important to note that only two contemporary authors, Sankaran and Vermeulen have written about the *Colubridae* family. These authors have only presented the biology, habitat, and reproductive behavior, but illustrative and homeopathic cases of *Colubridae* snakes are conspicuously absent. This book fills this important gap.

The examples in the book have been selected with care – they illustrate remedy selection based on the periodic table of animal maps. In each case study, the author walks you through actual human actions, gestures, words, and behavior and pairs them with corresponding snake characteristics. Each case study is more than just analyzing the sum of the symptoms - it guides the reader on how to be a keen listener and stay an unbiased observer. This leads to discovering how patients, through their expression, lead you to the appropriate remedy.

Each case is summarized in a tabular form listing the prominent animal themes, the snake themes, and the corresponding *Colubridae* themes. The principal expression themes and symptoms are gathered and matched with suitable rubrics

from the Complete Repertory. Thereafter, analysis results are filtered for the animal kingdom. *Colubridae* remedies are not represented in our materia medica and repertories and thus, these remedies do not show up at all. What does one do in such a situation? I will not put a spoiler in my review by revealing the secret and I would encourage you to read the book to work around this roadblock!

There are six case studies that cover five *Colubridae* remedies. The selection of these remedies is based purely on matching human expressions to the behavior of these snakes. There is no reference to any Homeopathic Pathogenetic Trials (HPT) or drug provings. In other words, drug choice is based purely on a speculative premise of mapping. The results obtained by using these drugs are shown as very effective, but it is felt that the reader would have liked to know how they compared with findings confirmed by HPTs. For example, in February 2011 Peter Fisher collated provings of *Natrix Natrix* where he compared and confirmed her findings with published provings.

In Case 1 the author concludes by stating that the patient “has received other remedies too, depending on his symptoms and the chief area of discomfort/disturbance, and usually these do not run him down as they did before *Natrix*”. It would have helped if the author had shared the details of case management and the remedies utilized over the 9-month-long timeline. This would

have helped understand remedy relationships such as collateral, complementary, inimical, or antidotal actions.

The book is truly the seminal work of a dedicated researcher. It will serve as an excellent resource not only to students and practitioners of homeopathy but also to those practicing narrative medicine and doing research in the fields of Batesian mimicry, evolutionary studies, and ophiology. It is very well written, and the production quality is excellent. Dr Vatsala shows how she has symbiotically integrated the newer trends of sensation, narrative medicine, periodic table, and the effective use of gestures and words. While the quality of the editing is excellent, the reviewer has one suggestion – use shorter sentences. There are many sentences with a word count ranging from 45 to 75 words. Such long sentences reduce readability. It has been found that when the average sentence length is 14 words, readers understand more than 90% of what they are reading. At 43 words, comprehension drops to less than 10%. Long sentences force users to slow down and work harder to understand what they are reading. The book has excellent high-resolution photographs of the snakes referred to in the book, but it would have helped the reader if pictures of the *Colubridae* were shown alongside the species they mimic.

In conclusion, I would say that this book deserves to be on the bookshelf of every serious homeopath.