The Tongue Tie: Untied

SCENE 1: ALWAR, RAJASTHAN

A man, in his late fifties, dressed in traditional *dhoti*, *kurta* and *paggar* entered the outpatient department (OPD) carrying his 4-year-old grandson. The child had autism with no eye contact, no meaningful words, hyperactivity and stereotypic movements.

“Sirji (even though I am Madamji!!!), he does not speak...rest everything is fine...eats very well, sleep is very good, understands everything...everything is fine.”

“And what about eye contact and social interaction? Does he plays by himself, what about his response to his name?”... I enquired.

“Oh!, He is just a bit shy and naughty...rest everything is fine...just check whether he has ‘*taantua*’... I think because of his ‘*taantua*’ he is unable to speak...” He dictated in his authoritative voice.

SCENE 2: GURGAON, HARYANA

An ultra-elite mother, in her latest Vero Moda collection and Louis Vuitton accessories came with her 2-year-old son for a neurology consultation. The child had hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy at birth. He was unable to sit, had fixation and following, response to sound was present, and could only babble.

I explained the cause of the developmental delay in detail and the need for physiotherapy and speech therapy. After answering all her google-searched questions, she came up with her experience- and knowledge-based suggestion. “Doc, I think he has ‘*taantua*’... just check upon it...”

Practising as a Pediatric neurologist in Gurgaon, I have the privilege of connecting with patients from four neighbouring states of Northern India. There is marked diversity in their culture, beliefs, language, custom, attire, cuisine, ideology, standard of living and educational background. But inspite of so much diversity, there is an interesting thing that unites them with their differences...they share an unanimous impeccable knowledge about tongue tie or ‘*taantua*.’

Any child, who has not achieved age-appropriate language and speech milestones or even motor milestones, irrespective of the diagnosis (autism, intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, hearing impairment *etc.*) is considered a case of ‘*taantua*’ or short frenulum that is supposed to need a surgical intervention following which the child is expected to speak fluently and run flawlessly.

In my initial practising years, during one OPD day, when I got three consecutive patients enquiring about the short frenulum and speech delay, I had serious doubts about my knowledge. I recalled that during my fourth year of MBBS, I had jaundice and took a leave for 15 days. Is it possible that this topic was taught in those days, and I missed the class... May be during my postgraduate training also, similar coincidences must have happened and I was ingenuous to such an indispensable and critical entity.

I seriously wonder how this association of frenulum to speech and language development has reached to the remotest of the village and the literates of the city alike – crossing all borders without any visible spread through newspapers or news channels or any other media involvement.

I think premier management institutes of the country should include this topic in their case study and research that inspite of spending scores of countless resources, we are still battling to educate the masses about the exact place to evacuate one’s bowel or bladder, and on the contrary, how each and every person in Northern India has exactly the same knowledge about frenulum despite any official spread of this ‘knowledge’.

Waiting for the day when science would fly above the snarls of common myths and beliefs...

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Editor’s note: Google is supposed to know everything on earth. But surprisingly, it too has no knowledge of ‘taantua’. Accessed www.google.com on September 09, 2018; received no results relevant to frenulum with this keyword. It is mentioned as a Finnish language word with some entirely different meaning.