Postmortem Examination (Ashumritakpariksha) in Ancient Era w.s.r to Kautilya Arthashastra

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ABSTRACT
KautilyaArthashastra is a monumental work written by Kautilya in 400 B.C. Wide range of subjects is covered in this treatise. We get many references about Ayurveda. It has description of many Ayurvedic herbs, metals, herbomineral preparations and poisonous substances (toxicology) & also deals with medicolegal autopsy which is the part of Vidhivaidyak (Medical jurisprudence).
In this treatise, in ‘Ashumritakpariksha’ medicolegal aspect of death is described in detail. The main aim of this article is to highlight the medicolegal aspect of death.

KEYWORDS
Kautilya, Arthashastra, Medicolegal, Autopsy, Vidhivaidyaka, Jurisprudence, Ashumritakpariksha
INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is categorized into eight parts (Aṣṭāṅgas) as follows,
“तद्वयः— राज्यः, शालावर्गः, कार्यविकित्सा, धृतविधिः, कौमारभूषणः, अग्रदत्तः, रसायनतन्त्रविज्ञानमिति” (वृ.सू. १५)

Agadatrantra (Viṣāvigion) is one among the aṣṭāṅgas. For academic study purpose, this branch deals with Vishvigion (Toxicology) & Vidhivaidyaka (Medical jurisprudence) subject.

That branch of science which teaches the application of every branch of medical knowledge to the purpose of the law is known as ‘Medical Jurisprudence’ (Vidhivaidyaka), or ‘forensic or legal medicine’. As crime will increase this branch will become more valuable. There are very few and scattered references about this aspect of medicine in āyurvedika literature. So, our next step should be to find out references of this sciences i.e., Vidhivaidyaka in other ancient literature. Many āyurvedika literatures are contemporary to other non-āyurvedika literature and they seems to be influenced by each other.

KouṭilyaArthaśāstra also has references regarding Vidhivaidyaka. It is necessary to know the Vidhivaidyaka practices in ancient time. For this purpose, ancient non-āyurvedika literature like KouṭilyaArthaśāstra can help us to fulfill the lacuna of the āyurvedika literature.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1) To study ancient literature ‘KautilyaArthashastra’
2) To find out the references of medicolegal aspect of death in KautilyaArthashastra
3) Critical study of this concept according to ancient and modern science

METHODOLOGY

The work has been carried out in following phases-
1) **Phase I** - Collection of the material & Conceptual study- For this study, the basic and conceptual materials have been collected from the KouṭilyaArthaśāstra with its available commentary.

2) **Phase II** - Accurate translation of the references of Vidhivaidyaka in English language with the help of Sanskrit and English language expert has been done.

3) **Phase III** - Comparative study with modern science.

4) **Phase IV** - Conclusion.

Examination of dead body (Postmortem appearances) –
Like today, in ancient time also postmortem was carrying out as per their method. Now-a-days dead bodies are preserved and examined by different techniques. Postmortem is done in unnatural death to find out the cause of death. In ancient times, in case of unnatural death, dead bodies were kept in oil so that the body should be well preserved. This reference is found in Ramayana also. With reference to this, Kautilya had said that, the dead body in case of sudden death should be examined by smearing oil over it.

Postmortem examination & postmortem appearances are described in detail in Kautilya Arthashastra as follows:

1) **Nirudhochvashatam (strangulation)** - First he stated examination in case of nirudhochvashatam (strangulation): Any dead person with urine and stool passed out, organs inflated with air, with swollen hands and legs, eyes open and neck marked with ligature may be regarded as nirudhochvashatam. Nirudhochvashatam can be correlated with strangulation.

**Similarities in ancient and modern concept:**
1. Mark of ligature
2. Eyes open (Kautilya)
3. Sphincters get relaxed so, incontinence of urine and faeces is seen.

**Dissimilarities:**
Swelling on hands and legs told by Kautilya and not found in modern science.

2) **Udbandhhatam (hanging)** - Along with the above signs as told in nirudhochvashatam, contracted arms and thighs indicate death by udbandhhatam (hanging). Udbandhhatam can be correlated with Hanging.

* Modern science has explained hanging in detail.

* **Similarities with modern science:**
1. Swelling on hands and legs this is due to postmortem lividity on dependent parts of body.
2. Contracted arms and thighs (Kautilya) Hands are clenched (C.K. Parikh)
3. Neck marked with ligature.

These signs are similar.

3) **Shoolaropitam** - Any dead person with swollen hands, legs and belly, with sunken eyes and inflated navel may be regarded as shoolaropitam.

These signs cannot be correlated with any one of the specific mode of death as per modern science.

4) **Udakahatam (drowning)** - In case of udakahatam (drowning), prolapsed rectum, eyeballs steady and outside the
cavity, tongue bitten between the teeth, swollen belly, person with these features are found.

_Udakahatam_ can be correlated with Drowning.

* swollen belly - due to collection of water in stomach.

* Modern science has also told, water in the stomach as the main sign of drowning.

* Other signs are dissimilar.

5) _Kashthairashmibhirvahatam_ - Dead body wetted with blood, fractured limbs these features may be regarded as the person having been killed with sticks or ropes. 

6) _Avakshiptam_(fall of building etc.) - In case of falling of house etc. over body, fractures and broken limbs these signs are found.

Modern science:

In modern science also injuries due to sticks, ropes and fall of house are described and the postmortem appearances are same as that of Kautilya.

7) _Vishahatam_ (Poisoning) - Any dead person with dark coloured hands, legs, teeth and nails; loose skin, hairs fallen, flesh reduced, face bedaubed with foam and saliva may be regarded as having been poisoned. 

According to Modern science: Modern science has explained in detail about different signs in postmortem appearances according to different types of poisons. All features told by Kautilya found in cases of many poisons.

8) _Sarpkithatam_ (snake bite or poisonous insect bite)- Signs of _Vishahatam_ as well as bleeding with marks of bite indicate death due to snake bite or poisonous insect bite. 

9) _Madanyoghatam_ - Death may occur due to consumption of narcotic drugs (madanyoghatam) signs seen are: With body disorganized and cloths scattered, excessive vomiting and purging may be seen.

_Madanayogacan_ be correlated with narcotic drugs or madya (alcohol) or it can be considered as madana plant i.e, _dhatura_ or _madanaphala_ 

According to Modern science: Above same signs found in dhatura & alcohol poisoning.

**CONCLUSION**

1) Related to _Vidhivaidyaka_, ‘_Aśumritakaparikṣā_ ’ is the unique chapter of KautilyaArthaśāstra , which deals with postmortem findings in case of unnatural deaths, which is the main aspect of Medical Jurisprudence (Vidhivaidyaka)

2) There are many similarities in postmortem findings of Kautilya & modern science.
3) KouṭilyaArthaśāstra is an ancient Sanskrit literature of India which was written many years ago. So, these references of KouṭilyaArthaśāstrastates that Kautilyahad knowledge about this science. It also proves that medical jurisprudence is a ancient science of India, which is a leading branch of medical science now-a-days.
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