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## 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*



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## INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is categorized into eight parts (*Aṣṭāngas*) as follows,

“तद्यथा- शल्यं, शालाक्यं, कायचिकित्सा, भूतविद्या, कौमारभृत्यं, अगदतन्त्रं, रसायनतन्त्रं वाजीकरणमिति ॥” (सु.सू. १/६)

*Agadtantra (Viṣavīgyan)* is one among the *aṣṭāngas*<sup>1</sup>. For academic study purpose, this branch deals with *Vishvīgyan* (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 seem 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 ‘*KouṭilyaArthashastra*’
- 2) To find out the references of medicolegal aspect of death in *KouṭilyaArthashastra*
- 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<sup>2</sup>.

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*<sup>3</sup>.

*Nirudhochvashatam* can be correlated with strangulation.

#### Similarities in ancient and modern concept:

1. Mark of ligature
  2. Eyes open (Kautilya)
- Eyes may be partly open (Apurba Nandy)

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)*<sup>4</sup>. *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*<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>.

*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. (*kashthairashmibhirvahatam*)<sup>7</sup>.

6) ***Avakshiptam***(fall of building etc.) - In case of falling of house etc. over body, fractures and broken limbs these signs are found<sup>8</sup>.

#### 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. (*Vishahatam*)<sup>9</sup>. 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. (*Sarpkithatam*)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup>.

*Madanayogacā* can be correlated with narcotic drugs or *madya* (alcohol) or it can be considered as *madana* plant i.e., *dhatūra* or *madanaphala*

According to Modern science: Above same signs found in *dhatūra* & alcohol poisoning

## CONCLUSION

- 1) Related to *Vidhivaidyaka*, '*Aśumritakaparikṣā*' is the unique chapter of Kautilya Arthaśāstra, 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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