



POISONING IN ANCIENT INDIA W.S.R. TO KAUTILYA
ARTHASHASTRA

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ABSTRACT

Many *āyurvedika* literatures are contemporary to other non - *āyurvedika* literatures like Koutilya Arthaśāstra and they seem to be influenced by each other. Koutilya Arthaśāstra also has references regarding *Viṣavijñāna*, which is one among the *aṣṭāṅgas* of Ayurveda. It is necessary to know the *Viṣavijñāna* practices in ancient time.

Keywords: Koutilya Arthaśāstra, *Viṣavijñāna* , poison

INTRODUCTION: The importance of *Agadtantra* in ancient times was in the context of power politics, in royal families. Administration of poison through food and drink to eliminate an unwanted person was a common practice. The prevalence of poisonous reptiles, rodents, wild animals and poisonous vegetables in country necessitated the knowledge of plant & animal poisons. This might have lead to the origin of expert person for handling these cases. And the deaths which occur due to poisoning or due to any other unnatural cause, may be suicidal, homicidal or accidental, comes under the medico legal part. The truth should be find out in medico-legal cases and for this the doctor plays an important role. There are very few and scattered references about this aspect of medicine in *āyurvedika* literature. So, it's necessary to find out references of these sciences in other ancient literature.

SUBJECT MATTER RELATED TO VISHAVIGYĀNA FROM KOUTILYA ARTHASHASTRA: Kautilya has mentioned *viṣadātā lakshana* i.e signs of identification of Poisoner (*Viṣadātā*) -

The person who has administered poison can be identified with the help following points:

i) His mouth get dry frequently ;

ii) hesitation in speaking;

iii) heavy perspiration;

iv) yawning;

v) too much bodily tremor;

vi) frequent tumbling;

vii) evasion of speech;

viii) carelessness in work

ix) unwillingness to keep the place assigned to him.¹

Means of Administration of Poison: throughout Kautilya Arthaśāstra various means of administration are found, like-

i) cow - dung mixed with poison applied on the floor (adhikaran 12-prakaran 5-adhyay 6)

ii) poison mixed with pure water (12-5-6)

iii) poison mixed in grains, oil, jaggery, salt (12-5-47)

iv) poisoned food (12-5-62)

v) poisoned vessels, liquor, milk, curd, ghee or oil (12-4-11)

vi) poison mixed with cooked meat, rice (12-4-10)

vii) poisoned grass (12-4-14)

viii) anklet painted with poison (1-20-26)

Methods of detection of poison: Kautilya has also mentioned different methods of detection of poison

Animal experimentation for detection of poison: Detection of poison was done by

observing the behavioural changes of birds in response to smell, touch, taste etc.

1. Parrots, *mainā (sārikā)* and Malbar birds (*bhringarāja*) shriek when they perceive the smell of snake poison.
2. The heron (*Krounca*) swoons in the vicinity of poison.
3. The pheasant (*jivanjivika*) feels distress.
4. The youthful cuckoo (*mattakokila*) dies.
5. The eyes of partridge (*Cakora*) becomes red.²

Detection of poison in the food:

1. with the help of flame: When the flame and the smoke turn blue and crackle and when birds (that eat the oblation) die, presence of poison (in the dish) shall be inferred.
2. Identification of poison in food by appearance:
 - i) When the vapor arising from cooked rice possesses the color of the neck of a peacock and appears chill as if suddenly cooled,
 - ii) when vegetables possess an unnatural color and are watery and hardened and appear to have suddenly turned dry, being possessed of broken layers of blackish foam and being devoid of their natural smell, touch and taste ;
 - iii) when utensils reflect light either more or less than usual, and are covered with a layer of foam at their edges;
 - iv) when any liquid preparation possesses streaks on its surface;
 - a) when milk bears a bluish streak in the centre of its surface;
 - b) when liquor and water possess reddish streaks.
 - c) when curd is marked with black and dark streaks;
 - d) honey with white streaks;
 - v) when watery things appear parched as if overcooked and look blue & swollen;

vi) when dry things have shrunk and changed in their color;

vii) when hard things appear soft, and soft things hard;

viii) when minute animal culae die in the vicinity of the dishes, presence of poison should be inferred.³

Detection of poison in the clothes: When carpets and curtains possess blackish circular spots, with their threads (of cotton clothes) and hair (of woolen clothes) fallen off; it should be regarded as poisoned.⁴

Detection of poison in the metallic things: When metallic things appear tarnished as though by roasting and have lost their polish, color, shine and softness of touch, presence of poison shall be inferred.⁵

Signs of death due to poisoning:

Kouṭilya has explained signs and symptoms of death due to poisoning.

1. Any dead person with bluish or dark colored hands, legs, teeth and nails;
2. with loose skin,
3. hairs fallen,
4. flesh reduced and
5. face bedaubed with foam, may be regarded as having been poisoned".⁶
6. Signs of death due to snake bite or poisonous insect bite:

Kouṭilya also states signs and symptoms of death due to snake bite / poisonous insect bite as :

1. Bluish / dark colored hands, legs, teeth and nails
2. With marks of a bleeding bite, may be considered as having been bitten by serpents and other poisonous creatures.⁷

Signs & symptoms of death due to Madanayoga: *Madanayoga* has used abundantly as a stupefying drug.²⁵ Also deaths may occur due to *madanayoga*. Its signs & symptoms has been told as:

1. Any dead person with body disorganized

2. dress scattered after excessive vomiting and purging may be considered as killed due to administration of *Madanayoga*.⁸

Kouṭilya also states how to protect from poison: Remedies against poisons and poisonous compounds applied by an enemy against one's own army or people.

1. When the things that are meant for the king's use, inclusive of the private parts of the women, as well as the things of the army are washed in the tepid water prepared from the decoction of *Śleṣmātak*, *kapittha*, *dantī*, *dantaśatha*, *gojī*, *shirīṣa*, *pātali*, *balā*, *syonāka*, *punarnavā*, *śvetā*, decoction of *varaṇa* mixed with *candana* and the blood of *sālāvrikī* (jackal) is known as *Tejanodaka*, it removes the bad effects of poison.⁹

2. The application of the mixture prepared from *priyangu*, *manjīsthā*, *tagara*, *lakṣārāsa*, *madhuka*, *haridrā* and *kṣoudra* (honey) to persons who have fallen senseless by being beaten by a rope, by falling into water, or by eating poison, or by being whipped, or by falling, resuscitates them.

The proportion of a dose is as much as an *akṣa* to men; twice as much to cows and horses; and four times as much to elephants and camels.¹⁰

3. A round ball (*maṇī*) prepared from the above mixture and containing gold (*rukma*) in its centre, removes the effects due to any kind of poison.¹¹

4. A round ball (*maṇī*) prepared from the *jivantī*, *śvetā*, *muṣkaka*, *puṣpavandāka*, *aśvattha*, which is spread over *akṣīva*, removes the effects due to any kind of poison.¹²

5. The sound of trumpets painted with the above mixture destroys poison; whoever looks at a flag or banner besmeared with the above mixture will get rid of poison.¹³

Madanadoṣahara yoga:

1. The mixture prepared from the biles of *priṣata* (red-spotted deer), *nakula* (mongoose), *nilakanṭha* (peacock), and *godhā* (alligator), with charcoal powder (*mashirājī*), combined with the sprouts (*agra*) of *sinduvāra* (*Vitex trifolia*), *tagara* (*Tabernaemontana coronaria*, *varuṇa*) (*Teriandium indicum*), *taṇḍulīyaka* (*Amaranthus polygamus*), and *śataparva* (*Convolvulus repens*) together with *piṇḍītaka* (*Vangueria spinosa*) removes the effects of the mixture of *madana*.¹⁴

2. Among the decoctions of the roots of *śrigālavinnā*, *madana*, *sinduvāra* (*Vitex trifolia*), *tagara* (*Taberna montana coronaria*), and *valli*, (a creeper), any one or all mixed with milk removes, when drunk, the effects of the mixture of *madana*.¹⁵

Protection from snakes

(Sarpapatikāra): That time snakes were numerous and accidental bites were very common. So, for protection from them measures of protection has been told by Kouṭilya.

1. Poisonous snakes will not dare to enter into such buildings as are provided with: *Jīvantī* (*Guḍuci*), *Śvetā* (*Śankhinī*), *Muṣkaka* (*Lodhrabheda*), *Puṣpavandāka*, branches of *aśvattha* which are spread over *Akṣīva* (*Śigru*)¹⁶

2. Cats, peacocks, mongooses and the spotted deer eat up snakes.¹⁷

3. Where there is the smoke caused by burning the essence of cotton seeds and the dead skin of a snake there snakes will not stay.¹⁸

4. a)When there is fear from snakes, experts in applying remedies against snake poison (*jānglīvid*) shall resort to incantations (*mantras*) and medicines; or they may destroy snakes; or those who are learned in

the Atharvaveda may perform auspicious rites.

d) On new and full moon days, snakes may be worshipped.¹⁹

Protection from rats (*Muṣikāpratīkāra*):

1. With a view to destroy rats, grains mixed with the milk of the milk- hedge plant or grains mixed with such ingredients as are treated of in the *Oupniṣadika adhikaraṇa* may be left on the ground.

2. Ascetics and prophets may perform auspicious ceremonies.

3. On new and full moon days rats may be worshipped.

Similar measures may also be taken against the danger from locusts, birds and insects.²⁰

Punishment for poisoner: There were strict punishments for the person who administer or sell poison. Kouṭilya states thirteen kinds of criminals who, secretly attempting to live by foul means, destroy the peace of the country. *Rasad* (poisoner), *Madanayogavyavahartā* (who sells / gives *Madanayoga*) are among them. They shall either be banished or made to pay an adequate compensation according as their guilt is light or serious.²¹

DISCUSSION: At the time of Kouṭilya, *Viṣavijñāna* was the main clinical branch which was in routine practice. Poisons were commonly used to remove unwanted person or to kill enemy. That time snakes, wild animals were abundant in number; man usually came in contact with them. Kouṭilya states various remedies like *sarpapratīkāra*, *viśapratīkāra* etc. as well as the treatment of poisoning and bite.

Throughout treatise it is found that Kouṭilya states various means of administration of poison like mixing with food, liquor, milk etc. Different means for administration of poison were used for easy administration, to hide identity.

• At the time of Kouṭilya, *madanayoga* were abundantly used for stupefying purpose. But, overdose of it might have been leading to death as signs of death due to *madanayoga* is told by Kouṭilya.²⁶

• Kouṭilya states signs of death due to poisoning.

• He states many offensive & defensive remedies of poisoning.

• To protect from wild animals Kouṭilya states *vyālapratīkāra yogas*, for the protection from snake & rat he states *sarpapratīkāra & muṣikāpratīkāra yogas* respectively and to prevent from poisoning he states *vishapratīkāra yogas*.

• For offensive purpose he states many poisonous remedies, *madakara yogas*. Offensive measures are stated to kill the enemy or to stupefy him.

CONCLUSION: Kouṭilya Arthaśāstra is a treatise which is actually non - *Āyurvedika* text. Though it is non-*āyurvedika*, it has been found that this treatise contains subjects related to *Āyurveda*. After reading the treatise, question arises in mind that, from where author got so much knowledge to write a book having so wide range of subjects. He might have referred many valuable literature of that time including *āyurvedika* classics. While writing Kouṭilya Arthaśāstra, Kouṭilya might have taken references from *āyurvedika* classics because when we see the subject matter related to *Viṣavijñāna* in Kouṭilya Arthaśāstra as well as in *Suśruta*, we find it too much similar.

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