

A HISTORY OF POSTHUMOUS BODY DONATION AND OF ITS USE:

Brojo Roy

All the species of this planet suffer from various ailments. Others, according to their intuitions, swallow some grass like substance and get relief after vomiting out. Mankind applies brain. 'Try to understand the cause. Consults the knowledgeable person, who in turn prescribes medicine or surgery.

The history of medicine mentions that the Ayurveda is one of the ancient book on medicine. It is of India.

India had a past of scientific culture. Even before Christ, India had UddaJaka, Aruni. 'Had Caraka, Sushruta, the medicos. The Asvins brothers were well known physicians of India.

The Ayurveda was in its prime at the time of Caraka and Sushruta. Brahminism of 8th to 12th century killed all the scientific activities. Paved the way for obscurantism. It is not the history of India alone. It was an all out phenomenon. Orthodoxy and fundamentalism ruled the world.

Renaissance of the West brought revolution. Along with other branch of sciences, medicine also started to bring a sea change. To know the Anatomy, Andreas Vesalius dissected human cadaver. The great work of Vasllius is De humani corporis fabrica Concerning the structure of the Human Body. Galen of 2nd century had produced 256 treaties and 15 of those concerned anatomy, his special interest. His most famous book On Anatomical Preparations remained the standard text for anatomical studies for more than 1,400 year, Galen, an astute and careful anatomist, was forbidden by Roman law to dissect human bodies. In India Sushruta dissected human body in about 500 BC.

The England and America had to wait for 1st part of 19th century. The Anatomy Act was passed in Massachusetts of America in the year 1831 and in England 1832. This Act provided the authority to use the body of have-nots. Prior to this, all the gymnasiums were working in clandestine. The body for dissection they got from grave thieves against cash. Subsequently committing murder made the supply. The famous Hare and Buck case is a glaring instance.

The history of Pathological Post-mortem dated back to 14th century. In die year 1341 first dissection of a human body took place at Padua, Italy. It was to know about the unknown disease, which plagued the country. Emperor Fredrick II had to confront the church. Pope Clement the 7th accepted human body dissection almost after two hundred years, Pathology developed rapidly in the period of 2nd world war. In many parts of India Pathological Post-mortem seldom take place. IMA, the biggest organisation of the practicing physicians and surgeons, had to lament on the subject.

The idea to transplant organs from one human being to another was raised already during ancient times. Unsuccessful attempts to transplant organs were made around the turn of 20th century. Nobel Laureate of 1912, Alexis Carrel concluded that there was a biological force that prevented successful transplantation. At the end of the 1940s, the Nobel Laureate in medicine, Sir Peter Medawar observed that this force forever will inhibit transplanation from one individual to another.

During the 1950s and 1960s the discoveries of specific substances on the cell surface, i.e., the so-called transplantation antigens, which in man were called HLA (Human Leukocyte Antigens). This changed the scenario. 1990s Nobel Laureates Joseph E Murray was first to successful Kidney Transplantation and E Donnall Thomas, Bone Marrow Transplantation. In 1960s Christian Barnard transplanted Heart at South Africa.

Donation of body to science was unheard of up till 1832. Utilitarian Philosopher Jeremy Bentham's body was donated in 1832. It was according to Bentham's will. India first experienced of donation of body in the year 1956, Panduranga Sridhar Apte,s body was donated at B J Medical College, Pune. Organised donation was made by Ganadarpan on 18 January, 1990 at RG Kar Medical College, Kolkata. The body was of Sukumar Home Chowdhury.

The concept of Donation of Bodies is getting momentum. Still it has to go a long way. People have the superstitions, taboos, obscurantist ideas of century unknown. Time has come to think otherwise. To give the science and the scientific temper a boost, for the future world, let us vouchsafe to make a noble gift by way of pledging our posthumous body to science.