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REVIEW ARTICLE

THE ANATOMY ACT - LEGAL AND ETHICAL PROGRESSION OF HUMAN CADAVER DISSECTION

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Abstract

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In India most of the state has its own state specific Anatomy act. In post-independence period, Bombay Anatomy act, currently known as the Maharashtra Anatomy Act was the first legislation to be enacted in India to provide for the supply of cadavers to hospitals and medical teaching institutions for the purpose of anatomical examination and dissection. It provided framework for different state wise Anatomy act. In Uttar Pradesh, The Uttar Pradesh Anatomy Act of 1956 provides a legal framework to ensure ethical handling and utilization of cadavers for scientific purposes. Studying cadavers helps to relate theoretical concepts to real-life human structures, making diagnosis and treatment more precise.

INTRODUCTION

History of Human Body Dissection

The **Sushruta Samhita**, written around **1500 BCE**, is an ancient and unique piece of Vedic literature. It mentions that **Sushruta**, a renowned surgeon, procured **willfully donated cadavers** for dissection. He believed that **dissections** were a profound source of

knowledge in medicine and surgery. He also emphasized that **a good clinician must be a good anatomist**, making anatomical science essential for medical education.

According to ancient mythology, **Rishi Dadhichi** donated his bones, which were used to create the divine weapon **Vajra** to kill the demon **Vritrasura**.

However, in ancient times, **religious laws discouraged human dissection.**

In the **3rd century BCE**, **Herophilus** conducted **systematic human dissections** despite religious opposition. He and his fellow physicians received royal patronage, which encouraged the **growth of medicine and science.** However, after his death, **human dissection declined**, especially in **Alexandria.** Due to his contributions, Herophilus is known as the **"Father of Anatomy."**

In **130 AD**, **Galen** conducted dissections on animals, believing their anatomy was similar to that of humans. This **false notion led to the stagnation of human dissections** and contributed to the **downfall of anatomical studies** during the dark middle ages in Europe (5-15th Century)

Revival of Human Dissection

The 12th century saw a revival of human dissection, supported by the Church but restricted to authorized medical institutions.

Between **1514–1564**, **Andreas Vesalius** played a crucial role in advancing human dissection as a student and later as a professor. In that period, importance of **dissection of human body** for the learning process **of anatomy** resulted in the **establishment of medical schools** dedicated to dissection. This led to

increased **demand for cadavers.** This demand was often met by **"body snatchers" or grave robbers**, who stole corpses from graves. Some **criminal gangs even murdered poor and destitute individuals** to sell their bodies to **medical schools.**

During this time, **dead bodies were treated as commodities** and had **no ethical value due to which body snatchers** could easily escape punishment for their crimes.

To address these unethical practices, the **Murder Act of 1752** was introduced. It allowed **use of Executed Criminals' Bodies for Dissection.** But by early 19th century, the rise of medical science resulted in increase in demand but due to shortage of supply majorly because of decrease in number of executions led to continuation of practice of **body snatching and grave robbery.** The act was **eventually repealed** in the 19th century with the passage of the **Anatomy Act of 1832**, which introduced a more regulated and ethical way of obtaining cadavers for medical study. but it had **limited provisions regarding the cause of death and death certification.** The Act allowed medical institutions to receive unclaimed bodies, but it did not require a detailed medical certificate confirming the cause of death.



Fig: Medical professionals dissecting cadaver

The **Anatomy Act, 1832** had significant drawbacks, mainly the **absence of clear accountability** for unclaimed bodies. One major issue was the **lack of a designated authority** to certify deaths, raising concerns about ethical and legal oversight. This gap was later filled by the **Coroner's Act of 1871**, which empowered coroners—holding a rank similar to judicial magistrates—to **investigate and officially certify deaths**, particularly in cases where unclaimed bodies were intended for dissection. (1-6)

Anatomy Act in India

The **Anatomy Act** was introduced in **India in 1949**, after independence. However, during **pre-independence India**, there was no central law governing the use of unclaimed bodies for medical education and research. Instead, different provinces had their own regulations or followed British-era practices.

The **first Anatomy Act in British India** was introduced in **West Bengal in**

1834, largely influenced by the British Anatomy Act of 1832 (UK), which legalized the use of unclaimed bodies for medical dissection.

The **Anatomy Act of 1832** regulated the procurement of bodies for medical research and dissection. This act remained in effect **until 1949**. Later, the **Anatomy Act of 1832** was modified into the **Bombay Anatomy Act of 1949**.

The **Bombay Anatomy Act** was first of the **earliest state-level laws** in India regulating the use of **unclaimed bodies** for medical education. It got governors assent on 1st April 1949. It allowed the use of **unclaimed bodies from hospitals, prisons, and public places** for dissection in medical colleges. Initially focused only on **unclaimed cadavers**, but later amendments **permitted voluntary body donation**. This act also served as an inspiration to other states to formulate their own anatomy acts

The **Uttar Pradesh Anatomy Act of 1956** is a legislative framework established to regulate the use of unclaimed bodies for medical education and research within the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. Enacted on January 14, 1957, the Act ensures that medical institutions have access to human bodies necessary for anatomical studies, while

maintaining ethical standards and legal protocols.

The **Uttar Pradesh Anatomy Act, 1956**, primarily addresses the utilization of **unclaimed dead bodies** for medical education and research. While the original Act did not explicitly cover **voluntary body donation**, the subsequent **Uttar Pradesh Anatomy Rules, 1959**, introduced provisions to facilitate such donations. The **UP Anatomy Act, 1956** lays the **legal foundation**, while the **UP Anatomy Rules, 1959** provide **detailed procedures** for enforcing the Act effectively.

Some key provisions of the UP Anatomy Act 1956 and UP Anatomy Rules 1959 includes:

- **Authority to Accept Bodies:** If a body remains unclaimed after 48 hours, it may be handed over to a recognized medical institution for: Anatomical dissection, Medical research, Educational purposes. Under the Uttar Pradesh Anatomy Rules, 1959, a deceased person's body is considered unclaimed if it is not claimed by any relatives, friends, or servants within **48 hours** of death.
- **Body Donation:** Individuals can voluntarily donate their bodies for educational and research purposes by providing written consent before death.

Relatives can also donate the body of a deceased person if there is no objection.

- **Procedures for Handling Bodies:** The Act specifies the procedure for handing over bodies to medical institutions, ensuring proper documentation and respect for the deceased.
- **Restrictions and Ethical Considerations:** The Act prohibits unauthorized handling, selling, or misuse of human bodies. Bodies must only be used for legitimate scientific and medical purposes.
- **Duty to Report Unclaimed Bodies:** Hospitals, prisons, police stations, and other public institutions must inform the authorized officer about any unclaimed dead bodies in their custody. After notification, the authorized officer decides whether to transfer the body to a medical institution.
- **Role of the Authorized Officer:** The State Government appoints an officer to oversee the handling of unclaimed bodies. This officer ensures proper documentation, transportation, and ethical use of cadavers.
- **Voluntary Body Donation:** The Act allows individuals to donate their bodies for medical research before

death through written consent. The State Government may set additional rules to facilitate body donation programs.

- **Protection for Persons Acting Under the Act:** Medical professionals, hospital staff, and authorized officers acting in good faith under this Act are protected from legal liability.
- **Power to Make Rules:** The State Government has the authority to frame additional rules and procedures for the implementation of this Act.
- **Penalty:** Individuals who dispose of an unclaimed dead body contrary to the Act's provisions, or who obstruct authorities from performing their duties under the Act, shall, on conviction, be punished with fine which may extend to five hundred rupees. (7-9)

Role of the Anatomy Act in Homeopathy Education:

The **Anatomy Act** plays a crucial role in **homeopathy education**, particularly in the study of **human anatomy**, which is a foundational subject in **Bachelor of Homeopathic Medicine and Surgery (BHMS)** and other homeopathy-related courses.

The **Anatomy Act** plays a crucial role in **Homeopathy education** by allowing the use of **cadavers for anatomy**

study, benefiting BHMS students through hands-on dissection. It **enhances practical knowledge for BHMS students** by providing real anatomical experience, bridging the gap between theory and practice. The Act **helps in homeopathy's medical integration** by ensuring students receive the same anatomical training as allopathic students. It also **supports research and development** by enabling studies on pathological changes and homeopathic treatments. **Bridging Classical & Modern Medicine** – Teaching these subjects **together** helps homeopathy students **connect traditional holistic principles with modern medical science**, improving diagnostic and therapeutic accuracy.

Lastly, it **strengthens medical ethics and legal compliance**, ensuring the ethical and lawful use of human bodies in education.

CONCLUSION

The history of human cadaver dissection reflects a profound journey of scientific discovery, ethical debates, and legal evolution. From ancient prohibitions and body-snatching practices to modern regulated donations, the field has undergone significant transformation. Laws such as the Anatomy Act of 1832 and India's post-independence Anatomy Acts have ensured ethical sourcing and usage of cadavers for medical education

and research. These advancements have played a crucial role in improving anatomical knowledge, benefiting both allopathic and homeopathic medical studies. By maintaining ethical standards and legal oversight, cadaver dissection continues to be an essential pillar of medical education, bridging traditional wisdom with modern scientific advancements. But there are few limitations as well due to lack of central legislation as Anatomy act of many of the states like Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Goa, Daman and Dia, and Tamil Nadu have no provisions of body donation as a source of cadaver.

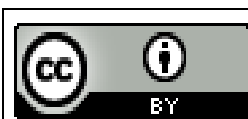
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