

Aristha lakshana (Near death sign)- A Historical Review

1Dr.Devendra Singh, 2Dr. Darshana H. Pandya, 3Dr.Renu
1Ph.D. Scholar, 2Associate Professor, 3Research Officer
1Roga Nidana evam Vikriti Vigyana,
1Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda, Jamnagar, India

Abstract: Life begins with the association of consciousness, or the Atma (soul), with the five fundamental elements (panchamahabhuta) and ends in the dissolution of this association. Indian classical texts emphasize on identifying certain signs and symptoms that could forebear, with some level of certainty, imminent death. This comprehensive review delves into the historical evolution and significance of Arista Lakshanas, which are fatal signs and symptoms indicating imminent death. The study covers various Ayurvedic classical texts start from the Veda to till recent era. In this review also analyze near death sign from contemporary science and also workshops and research initiatives by Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeetha. In the Vedic period, scatter references are available and from Samhita text structured section of near-death sign available. Those gradually become more practice oriented. Overall, the historical journey presented here underscores the significance of Arista Lakshanas as a crucial aspect of prognosis and end-of-life care in traditional Indian medicine systems. Over centuries, this knowledge has been passed down through generation of practitioners, contributing to the development of comprehensive end of life care practices with in Ayurveda.

Index Terms – Arista Lakshanas, near death signs and symptoms, Imminent death, Ayurveda

I. INTRODUCTION

Aristha lakshanas are the fatal signs and symptoms which denote imminent death. Death definitely follows after the manifestation of Arista lakshanas. Person is either diseased; in the last days of life, distinctive, bedside physical signs or surrounding indicates signal that death is imminent. There are several bedside clinical signs. Word Arista is traced from Vedic literatures. Arista can be identified and also be classified according to involvement of Dosha, Dushya, Sthana, Sharir as per Ayurvediya. The study of Indian medical as well as spiritual literature reveals that records of Arista lakshana can be traced back to Vedas.1 From the historical point of view, it has divided in 5 parts as below:
1. **Vedic period (6000-4000 B.C.)**

   Vedic period is considered to be the oldest period of the Vedas in India. The Vedas are the oldest record of religion and literature of the world. Ayurveda is considered to be the Upaveda of Atharvaveda. The history of Indian medicine starts with Veda.

   Rigveda, Sukla Yajurveda, Atharvaveda use many words like Arishta, Arishtaa, Arishtaat, Arishtam, Arishtae, Arishtabhi, Arishtim, Arishtayai etc. appears in different places to be used for the meaning of non-violence, blessing, Arjun, integrity.

   From the above references it can be said that word Arishta has been used in Vedic Kala but meaning of word Arishta has not studied in the contains of disease & near-death sign.

2. **Upanishad / Purana period (4000-1000 B.C.)**

   Purana contain a lot of details relating to health care procedures, treatments, drugs and surgical procedures.

   The importance given to the system of Ayurveda can be clearly read out from the Purana. The description of Panchamahabhoota, Tridosha, diseases and their manifestation, medicines and details about death are seen in different Purana.

   Apart from the mentioning of health, diseases and treatment, there is discussion about the aspects of death in most of them.

   In the Siva Purana the queries of Goddess Parvati regarding death and its signs are answered by Lord Siva. During the discussion, Siva mentions about 18 signs which indicate the forthcoming death of a person.

   There are 18 Chief Puranas and 18 Sub-Puranas, with over 400,000 verses. Among the Mahapurana, Garuda Purana is considered to be the treatise which details more about the death. The signs of forthcoming death are not described in detail, but explanations about the liberation of Atma from the body, its relation with Prana etc are seen in the Preta Khandha. Death is explained as the detachment of soul from the body by the effect of Kala.

   In the Agni purana, the auspicious and inauspicious features of Purushaand Stri are mentioned in the 145th chapter (Purusha Lakshana) and 146th chapter (Stri Lakshana). These signs were used to determine if a person has good fortune and lifespan. The aspects of death are dealt in topics under the concept of Pralaya or Laya.

3. **Samhita period (1000 B.C. – 7th century A.D.)**

   JYOTISHA SHASTRA: -(3000B.C.)

   The understanding of Jyotisha Shastra is an integral part in understanding many concepts in Rishta. Brihat Parashara Horashastra, an authentic Jyotisha text, contains references about life span (Ayu), Sign of definite death (Arishta) and death indicating sign (Marana Karaka). Near death sign with regard to the planetary positions is mentioned in the 10th chapter, Arishta Vivechana Adhyaya. Maharshi Parasara quotes that till the 24th year of a person he will have Janma Arishta and the Ayu should not be thought till that time. The various positioning of the planetary influences (Graha) in the horoscope of an individual can give...
indication relating to his death. Even the death of the parents can be predicted based on the position and association of planetary influences especially Sun (Surya) and Moon (Chandra).\textsuperscript{x\textdegree}

Another famous book on Jyotisha Shastra is PrasnaMarga. Detailed description about the topics on disease indicate by planets, Cause of death according to PrasnaMarga, features of short and long Ayu, Arishta related to dream (Swapna), auspicious sign (Sakuna) and messenger (Doota) obtained from this text.\textsuperscript{xii}

3. **SAMHITA KALA: (1000 BC - 600 AD)**

Understanding of Arishta Lakshanas reaches its height during Samhita kala.

1. **Caraka Samhita: (2\textsuperscript{nd} - 3\textsuperscript{rd} B.C.)**

   A separate section named Indriya Sthana is given that contains the knowledge of Arishta Lakshanas in twelve chapters. Indriya Sthana consist of the description of various death indicating signs and symptoms (Arishtak lakshanas). In Charaka Samhita, Arishta lakshanas classified into two groups Purushaashritabhava (seen in person own) and Purushaanashritabhav (seen in surrounding)\textsuperscript{xiii}. Some of the signs and symptoms are not apparent in a patient but can be observed in the surrounding of the patient. These are evaluated by logic based on scriptural instructions and inference. The factors not observed in patients are often circumstantial like an informer who comes with news of patient and the good/bad omens seen by the physician.

   The Prakriti explained in Indriya Sthana is of six types\textsuperscript{xiv}. It is very important to know the Prakriti of a person to understand the Arishta, as only after knowing the normal condition one will come to know the Vikriti and then only, he can understand that what Arishta is.

   In Charaka Samhita, Arishta (Signs and symptoms of imminent death) are perceived by special changes in colour (Varna), sound (Swara), odour (Gandha), taste (Rasa), touch (Sparsha), complexion (Chhaya), and radiance (Prabha). Charaka Samhita also denotes Arishta that could be perceived by Purvarupa of disease, physical (Bahyakarana) and mental levels, with references to good / bad consequential happening (Shakun), messenger (Doota), dreams (Swapna) and other miscellaneous signs.

2. **Susruta Samhita: (3\textsuperscript{rd} B.C.)**

   Total 7 Adhyayas of Sutra Sthana i.e. 23\textsuperscript{rd} & 28\textsuperscript{th} to 33\textsuperscript{rd} are depicted about Aristha. It shows that Arishta can be perceived by special changes in colour (Varna), dream (Swapana), sensory (Indriya), complexion (Chhaya), behavior and Avarana (updarava of disease)\textsuperscript{xv}.

   Susruta samhita an authentic text on Salya Tantra, one can view the importance given to the knowledge of Rishta Lakshana, especially in surgical aspects like symptoms related to odour (Gandha), colour (Varna), voice (Sabda), touch (Sparsha) and structural changes (Akriti) in context of wound are mentioned. The features of curable (Sadya), (Yapya) and incurable (Asadya) wound are listed. Incurable symptoms include copious discharge, sprouts of soft muscles, exogenous wound (Agantu Vrana) with exudation of muscle fat, marrow or brain matter etc\textsuperscript{xvi}. Even the Yapya type of wounds, if not treated properly it will result in the loss of one’s life\textsuperscript{xvii}. 
3. Ashtanga Samgraha (6th Cent. A. D.)

Vridha Vagbhat denotes 4 consecutive chapters for Arishta. The contents are explained in the 9th to 12th chapters of this Section. Ashtanga samgraha describes Rishta and the types of Rishta like- Incurable signs related to Varna (colour), Chaya (complexion), Prabha (radiance), fatal signs related with specific diseases, Doota (messenger) Shakun (omens) and Swapna (dreams). The ways to pacify the ill effects of dreams is also mentioned. He describes two types of Arishta i.e. stable (Sthira) and unstable (Asthira). Here unstable type is not actually confirmed death sign but if person misunderstand / misinterpret as sign of near death. It is also known as Rishtaabhasa (impression of near-death sign). Unstable near-death sign occurs due to excessive aggravation of Dosa. While describing dreams, Vagbhat has mentioned that dreams seen by an ill person as well his relatives have significance in determining the Arishta Lakshana.

Though a separate section is not assigned, the clear and detailed information about death signs is incorporated in Sharira Sthana of this Samhita.

4. Astanga Hridya: (7th Cent. A. D.)

Likewise, Ashtanga Samgraha Acharya here also Arishta Lakshanas are described in Sharira Sthana. Acharya Vagbhata classified Arishta into two groups on the basis of stability i.e. Stable Arishta and Unstable Arishta. Astanga Hridya denotes Arishta like changes in various sensory perceptions like- appearance (Rupa), odour (Gandha), colour (Varna), Sensory (Indriya), complexion (Chhaya), nature (Prakriti). Acharya Vagbhata also denotes Arishta that could be perceived by disease specific severity and miscellaneous signs. The verses are almost the same as that in Ashtanga Samgraha.

5. Kasyapa Samhita (7th Cent. A. D.)

The 5th section of the Samhita is Indriya Sthana, of which a single chapter regarding death sign is available. The chapter is named Oushada Bhesajeeynam Indriyam and starts with the classification of treatment into Oushada and Bhesajam.

Acharya has mentioned about the importance of understanding of Rishta Lakshana especially in children.

Bad prognostic features and dreams are mentioned, which are much similar to the opinions of Charaka and Susruta. Being text of Kaumarbharatiya subject showing near death sign related to Bala Graha shown additionally. Descriptions about specific Indriya Arishta, Features of messengers and omens are not mentioned but Vyadh Arishta related Bala Graha are mentioned. Since only a very small portion relating to Indriya Sthana of Kasyapa Samhita is available, a complete picture of Arishta Lakshana could not be understood.

6. Bhela Samhita: (7th Cent. A. D.)

Acharya Bhela has followed Caraka Samhita regarding classification and details of Arishta. The Indriya Sthana of Bhela Samhita also contains the knowledge of Arishta lakshanas in twelve chapters. The Indriya Sthana of Bhela Samhita describes Arishta lakshana for various age groups, including children. It outlines diagnostic signs, predictions of longevity, characteristics, and attributes of individuals living up to a hundred years. Additionally, it delineates short-lived (Alpayu) and long-lived (Deerghayu) Lakshanas are described.
Acharya Bhela has given details description of time related Arishta in his chapter 3rd, 4th and 5th. In Bhela Samhita Arishta are explained in form of premonitory symptoms of disease, messenger, complexion, special changes in sensory organ and miscellaneous signs.

The layout of chapters and their names in Bhela Samhita bears certain similarities to Charaka Samhita, but the contents are not identical between the two texts. The arrangement of Arishta Lakshanas in this Samhita does not follow a specific order, likely due to the loss of certain parts of the original treatise, making it challenging to extract the exact meaning from some verses. Additionally, the text lacks explanations about omens, and there is limited information on premonitory symptoms or disease-related Arishta Lakshanas.


1. **Harita Samhita: (10-12th Cent. A.D.)**

Description of Arishta is available in 2nd section of this text. It explains that disease appear in person due to his karma and its treatment remains in the form of charitable deeds.

The detailed description of Arishta in Harita Samhita includes aspects related to dreams, Complications, appearance, disease severity, senses, asterism (Nakshatra), messenger, and omen. Additionally, the text elaborates on the method of offering prayers to God in a holy fire (Havan) in its second section.

In this text, a more categorised layout is made regarding the sign and symptoms of impending death. Though a separate section has not been allotted to describe the symptoms related to death, a detailed picture of impending death can be obtained from this treatise. The facts related to Arishta Lakshana and Jyotisha are explained in a very simple and clear manner. Harita Samhita helps to understand aspects of Arishta including physical and mental faculties of a dying person, description of external factors such as messenger and analysis of astrological effects prior to therapy has also been emphasized in the text.

1. **Madhava Nidana: (7th Cent. A.D.)**

*Madhava Nidana* is a comprehensive, standard, indisputable and very popular work compiled by Madhava on etiology, pathogenesis, diagnosis, symptoms, Complications and Arishta lakshana of the diseases mentioned in Charak Samhita, Susruta Samhita, Astanga Sangraha of Ayurveda.

Acharaya Madhava has given incurable stage or bad prognosis of disease, separate chapters not mentioned in his text related to Arishta lakshana. He compiles Arishta lakshana in incurable sign of disease in his text.

2. **Sharangadhara Samhita (13th cent.)**

The brief description about factors relating to Rishta Lakshana in context of Nadi movement is found in the 3rd chapter of Prathama Khanda, Nadi Pareekshadi Vidhi. This chapter contains topics related to examination of Nadi of a person, messenger, omens and dreams. The features of messenger and dreams which indicate health as well as disease or death is enumerated, which is similar to Charaka Samhita.

3. **Bhavaprakasha (16th cent.)**

Description of Arishta also found in this text. There are similar to that of Arishta laksana told by Acharya Susruta. The Rishta Lakshana related to one's activities, physical change, treatment etc. are also mentioned. In this text, the author discusses about the importance in determining the lifespan of a patient before treatment, the bad prognosis signs and implication by the messenger.
4. Yoga Ratnakara: (17th Cent. A.D.)

The *Arishta Lakshanas* are mentioned in the beginning of this *Samhita*. Certain particular contents mentioned under *Rishta*, which are not mentioned in i.e. *Arishta Lakshana* regarding *Nadi* (pulse), *Mala* (stool), *Mutra* (urine) and *Drik Pareeksha* (eye examination)xxxii.

5. MODERN PERIOD (18th cent. A.D.- till now.)

Modern Medicine System-

In modern era, the inclusion of *Arishta laksanas* has been done in the form of near-death sign in contemporary medical system. It describes death as the cessation of all vital functions of the body including the heartbeat, brain activity and breathing. It is the terminations of all biological processes that sustain a living organism. They define it in terms of asphyxia, syncope and coma. In the present era, the wide spread of contemporary medicine, near death sign are mentioned in form of 11 major signs. When a person is terminally ill, they may be in hospital or receiving palliative carexxxiii. These signs are explored below.

1. Gradual cessation of appetite
2. Sleeping more
3. Becoming less social
4. Changing vital signs
5. Changing toilet habits
6. Weakening muscles
7. Dropping body temperature
8. Experiencing confusion
9. Changing breathing pattern
10. Increasing pain
11. Hallucinations

If a dying person is attached to a heart rate monitor, stoppage of the heart can be monitored.

Other signs of death include:

1. Not having a pulse
2. Not breathing
3. No muscle tensions
4. Eyes remaining fixed
5. Bowel or bladder releasing
6. Eyelids partially shutxxxiv
In Ayurveda-

In the modern era, Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeeth arrange workshop programmed with initiate “Prognosis through Arishta Lakshanas and their scientific Basis” in March 2011. This workshop threw some light on the forgotten aspects of this branch (Arishta) of knowledge and encourage starting experiencing the prognostic features also while managing the patients.xxxv

In modern era a book with initiate “Arista Vijana (Prognostic methodology of Indian System of medicine- Ayurveda)” also a review work on Arishta Lakshanas from various Samhita and compare some Arishta Lakshana with modern medical science disease near death sign.xxxvi

Conclusion-

Over centuries, knowledge of impending death has been passed down through generation of practitioners, contributing to the development of comprehensive end of life care practices with in Ayurveda.

Start from Vedic era gradually development in various aspect of near-death sign found in various classical text. With the passage of time these sign and symptoms explanation become more and more patient oriented and practice based. Identifying this symptom enables prompt measures to relieve discomfort and offer palliative care. It aids in directing treatment plans and getting patients and their families ready for the unavoidable.

Furthermore, by acknowledging Arishta lakshanas, practitioners can address any unresolved emotional or spiritual issues, promoting an all-encompassing approach to ayurvedic end-of-life care.

Understanding these ancient signs not only enhances clinical practice but also opens avenues for future research into near-death signs and their implications.

Aristha lakshana in Various Textbook-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Indriya</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sharirika bhava</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Manasika bhava</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Vikara/ Vyadhi</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ahara- vihara</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Bhesha</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Nadi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Mala</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Mutra</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Duta</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Sakuna</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Swapna</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Jyotisha</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>