



The Destroyed Evidence

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Abstract

A series of investigation and examination of evidences is required to solve any criminal mystery. A crime scene investigator must be trained enough to observe crime scene and extract all crucial and reliable evidence with concurrently information of body identification, cause of death and sequence of events occurred. The investigation becomes more meticulous in the cases of burn, where identification of dead body is very challenging. Burns are the most devastating type of injury that one can bear and is equally devastating for relevant information that investigator can use to reconstitute the events of crime. A case was reported in Sukhi Sewania Police Station Bhopal MP, that a burned body was found in secluded place of forest near Amoni Village. The body was unidentifiable due to the severely burns and the only evidences collected from the crime scene were a piece of mattress, two empty cans with smell like petrol and mark of tyres from nearby soil in forest. This study highlights how investigators skillfully establish the link between two apparently different cases and solve the mystery by very limited silent clues. Finally, DNA test conclusively confirmed the identity of the victim.

Keywords: Burnt Body; Postmortem Burns; Physical Evidence; Destroyed Evidences

Introduction

Investigation of a crime is based on the physical evidences and information collected [1]. The revealing truth from physical evidences is much more reliable and authentic from other sources comparatively; like eye witnesses they can be manipulated [2]. A skilled forensic investigator while investigating a crime scene collects any particular object that seems to be reliable to the crime and uses it as a forensic evidence like a weapon used for crime, pattern of bloodstain, position of body or bullet collected from the deceased and also uses them to reconstruct the crime scene events, which in turn establish a link between crime and the criminal [3]. Meticulous investigation of crime scene and analysis of forensic evidences often lead to success in solving the criminal mystery and due to the lack of these substantial physical evidences many cases remain unsolved [4,5]. However, the most particular investigation of crime for the recognition of evidences did not always lead to a clear interpretation of the cause of death [6]. In case of burns the important information like body identification, time & cause of death is challenging for the forensic investigator to find, due to

condition of the body [7,8]. The forensic assessment of the burned bodies is difficult to establish the manner of death and the role of forensic pathologist is very crucial in revealing the cause of death whether it is accident, suicide or homicide [9]. A burned body has always been a hard task for forensic investigators in identification, time, cause, and manner of death [10,11]. The authors present a case of an unidentified burned body that was found in the forest of Amoni Village of Madhya Pradesh and the interpretation of that case was very difficult as not much substantial evidence was found on and near the spot.

Case History

An unrecognized burnt body was found near forest area of village Amoni. P. S. Sukhi Sewania on the outskirts of Bhopal MP. The recognition of the body was difficult as the burns were of 5th to 6th degree. No many evidences are also found on the crime scene and ante-mortem signs of burns were not present on the body of the deceased. The post-mortem sign of burns was enough evidence

to describe that it was a case of homicide, which was confirmed by a thorough observation of signs and symptoms by forensic investigation team. The only evidences are collected from the scene of crime was a piece of burned mattress in which the body was probably wrapped, cloth piece from the body, two empty petrol canes and tyre marks of a vehicle on nearby soil surface. The details were noted i.e., distance between tyres, width and pattern of the tyre. Still the body remain unidentified and case remain unsolved due to lack of any lead in the case. The available details could not identify the deceased or provide any other lead and the case remained unsolved for about a year.

The spot was examined as per forensic requirements and observations are as below:

Forensic Expert Observations and Reconstruction of Scene of Crime

- The burnt body was of a male aged about 30 years and the height was 5'7" (Figure 1).
- It was lying on a partially burnt cotton mattress (Figure 2).
- Two plastic containers smelling of petrol were recovered from the spot.
- There were tyre marks of a vehicle near the body (Figure 3).
- The mouth was open and eyes popped out and burns were postmortem in nature (Figure 4).
- The piece of mattress was found below the body containing grey coloured waste cotton and hard traces of shining thread which was usually used in tent houses and hieres (Figure 5).



Figure 1: Burnt body.



Figure 2: Partially burned mattress cotton.



Figure 3: Tyre marks of a vehicle.

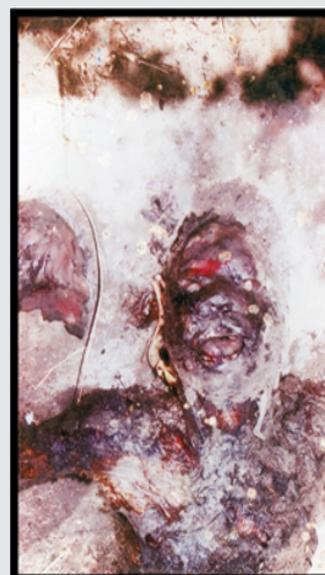


Figure 4: Facial features.



Figure 5: Burnt piece of mattress.

- Relevant photographs were taken.
- The burns were about 5th to 6th degree and postmortem in nature.
- The person had stained teeth and was habituated to use of catechu (pan/gutka).
- The cause of death was not ascertained.

There was no lead in the case for about a year, the only progress is that the tyre marks was possibly of TATA-407 make vehicle or its derivatives, revealed on the basis of wheel dimension observation. But this could not lead to body identification.

Investigation of the case and Turning point

Police officers during the investigation applied the several efforts to crack the case and finally they got a breakthrough and clue to this case, when an apparently different case of missing person from railway colony resolved by Government Railway Police, Bhopal. Suddenly, a turning point came. In this case a man named Rajesh Gupta was missing from railway colony. The father of missing person received ransom calls of Rs 1,00,000/- from his son's mobile number, after which a complaint was filed. The mobile number details were investigated and on suspicious account a friend of missing person was found suspected and interrogated for the same. He disclosed that the missing person was dead and body was disposed off by burning in the forest near Amoni Village. The suspect revealed in the statement that he killed the missing person Mr. Rajesh Gupta while having a drink party, where an argument went between the two regarding money and he strangulate Rajesh to death during this. After this accused and his two friends booked a TATA-407 pick-up van vehicle, some mattresses and utensils were taken from a tent house purportedly for a picnic, they wrapped the

Rajesh's body in mattress and transport it to the forest near Amoni village and tried to burn the body by using petrol as a fuel for the destruction of evidences. This spot was same as of the case where burn body was recovered from Sukhi Sewania police. The deceased (Rajesh) friend mimic Rajesh's voice and continue in touch with deceased father on calls with Rajesh's number, so that he believed that his son is alive. But one day Sanjay asked for Rs 1,00,000/- from his father on call, which made him to register a complaint in police station regarding these ransom calls. The mattress piece of burn case evidence then matched with some mattresses (Figure 6,7) of the tent house stated by accused. The study of tyre marks was also confirmed by the accused statement. And further DNA testing confirms the body identification too. The location hooked the link between both the cases and DNA testing was performed which confirms that recovered burned body was of the missing person i.e. Mr. Rajesh Gupta. The investigating and police officers were able to establish the link between the two apparently different cases by matching the silent clues (cloth and cotton of the mattress). All the efforts to destroy the evidence thus failed and conclusively two apparently different cases were solved.



Figure 6: Grey coloured waste cotton and hard traces of shining thread matched.



Figure 7: Fabric pattern of the mattress matched.

Conclusion

Physical evidences play a crucial role in investigation of any crimes. They work as silent witnesses. The case was solved on the basis of those physical evidences and even after so many efforts for the destruction of evidences, this case was finally solved by putting together the details of two different registered cases. The following points were notable

- The culprit thought that he could escape by burning the body off in a secluded place and there by prevent the identification of the victim and hence the cases would not be solved.
- The piece of mattress found on the spot with body was established to be from the tent house where the accused had disclosed to have hired it by matching the type of grey coloured waste cotton and the cloth fiber patterns with other mattresses found in the tent house.
- The tyre marks found in the soil near the piece from where the body was recovered was found matching with the vehicle said to be used in the crime to transport the body-i.e. TATA-407 pick-up van.
- Finally, DNA test conclusively confirmed the identity of the victim as that of missing Rajesh Gupta.

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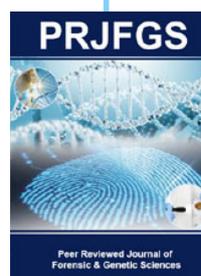
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