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Investigation of a Crime Scene Involving Apparently Planted and Deceptive Physical Evidences

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ABSTRACT: Crime scene investigation is the first and the most crucial step in deciphering the mode of committing the crime and tracing the identity of the criminal by collecting and preserving physical evidences found at the crime scene. However, in some cases, the culprit implants false evidences in and around the crime scene in order to delude the investigators and lead them to draw incorrect conclusions. The present paper describes the investigation of a crime scene in which it appeared that the deceased had deliberately planted physical evidences with the intention of accusing his wife for killing her husband. On April 16, 2019, a man was found dead on the floor of his house in Pipariya, district Kabirdham, Chhattisgarh state, India. A careful and detailed investigation of the crime scene strongly suggested that the deceased had committed suicide before which he had intentionally planted many physical evidences including a lock, broken bangles, necklace, slippers and slipper mark at the crime scene so as to put an illusionary impression on the investigators that his wife had killed him.

KEYWORDS: Supine position, Ligature mark, Dead body, Physical evidences, Transparent tape.

I. INTRODUCTION

Crime scene investigation is at the heart of understanding the nature of crime, the means and possible purpose of committing the crime and procuring evidences to correlate the crime with the criminal. The physical evidences found at the crime scene serve as most valuable clues to trace the criminal. Forensic investigation heavily relies on Locard's exchange principle which states that when a criminal commits crime, some material is exchanged between the criminal and the crime scene^[1,2]. Proper identification, preservation and examination of the exchanged material is critical in drawing correct conclusions about the crime, identification of the culprit and furnishing scientific assistance to the Criminal Justice System of the country. However, the investigators should be very careful and skeptical in interpreting the implications of the nature and distribution of physical evidences found at or near the crime scene. While investigating the crime scene, one should bear in mind the possibility that the physical evidences might have been purposely planted by the perpetrator in order to defend himself (or with some other intention) by deluding the investigators to draw incorrect inferences.

On April 16, 2019, the dead body of an adult male named Naveen Keshari, son of Poonam Keshari, aged 36 years was found lying on floor in supine position inside his house in Pipariya, district Kabirdham, Chhattisgarh as mentioned above. Investigation of the crime scene and the pattern of distribution of physical evidences found therein strongly implicated the possibility of planting false evidences at the crime scene. This paper elaborates on the physical evidences found at the crime scene and their implications leading to the notion that the evidences were purposefully planted by the deceased in order to misguide the crime scene investigator to believe that his own wife was the culprit, most likely due to discord between him and his wife.

II. SUICIDAL VERSUS HOMICIDAL HANGING/STRANGULATION

A vast number of death cases occur in the world each year resulting from asphyxia and occlusion of blood vessels in the neck as a result of hanging or strangulation. Hanging might be suicidal in which the deceased had used a ligature material to suspend his own body from a hook, fan or any other solid support so that asphyxiation and death occur



under his own body weight compressing the neck. However, not all cases of hanging are suicidal. In many incidences, the perpetrator first kills a person by some means (for instance, by administering toxin or poison) and then puts the dead body in a hanging position to simulate a suicidal case. A culprit might also inflict murder by forcibly hanging the victim on a ligature material like rope, usually by first debilitating the person through intoxication or if the culprit is physically far more robust than the victim so that the latter cannot offer much resistance. Alternatively, a homicidal death can be caused by strangulation using a long scarf, towel, rope or any other ligature material that chokes the victim to death. In all such cases, examination of the ligature material, pattern of ligature mark in the neck of the deceased, histological examination of the abraded tissue and anatomical findings regarding fracture of bones in the neck or compression of the respiratory tract furnish important information in concluding if the death is suicidal or homicidal^[3,4]. If a person is found hanged in the crime scene, the investigator must keep in mind both the possibilities: a homicidal case made to simulate a suicide or vice versa. In a previously published case in Japan, a 38-year-old woman was found dead near the bed in a hotel room. A cotton rope was tied on her neck and one end of the rope was tethered to a bedpost. At first sight, it appeared to be a suicide. But upon carefully studying the multiple ligature marks on her neck, the pattern of haemorrhages in the throat region and congestion of cervical lymph nodes, it was concluded that she was actually strangled to death (a homicidal case) and the crime scene was fabricated to resemble a suicidal case. Later, her former husband confessed that he had committed the crime^[5]. A very similar case was reported for a 43-year-old woman in Germany who was found dead in a room of her house. The lady was strangled to death by the perpetrator but circumstances were concocted to resemble a suicidal case^[6]. In yet another case, contrary to those described above, an adult male was found dead in his bedroom with a white cable tied around his neck and one end of the cable was fastened to the door knob of his closet. Thus, the body was partially suspended from the closet knob by means of the white cable. The hands of the deceased were tied on the back with stainless steel handcuffs and the legs were bound with a black cable. There were no evidences of any perpetrator making a forced entry into the house. The main door of the house was locked from inside and the key to the lock was found inside the house. Further investigation revealed that the handcuffs were purchased by the deceased himself about one year before the incidence and he was aware of the method of tying and untying the handcuffs. The cable tied on his legs was loose and could be easily removed. The deceased was depressed due a failed relationship with a girl and had expressed thoughts of suicide. A thorough investigation finally led to the conclusion that the man had actually committed suicide but staged it as a homicide^[7]. Besides other evidences, the ligature mark is very important in drawing valid conclusions if the death of an individual was suicidal or homicidal. Observations made from a large number of cases have led to the consensus that the ligature mark on the neck is oblique in case of suicidal hanging while it is circular (or transverse) in case of homicidal strangulation^[8,9], although there are exceptions where the pattern of ligature mark might not be conclusive in this respect, particularly in cases of partial hanging where the ligature mark is mostly found in the lower region of the neck, more or less in a horizontal fashion^[10].

III. CASE HISTORY AND FINDINGS AT THE CRIME SCENE

At morning 9.00 am on April 16, 2019, a phone call was received from the station incharge of police station Pipariya informing that a resident of Pipariya was found lying dead in his own house. The police registered the case with merge number 17/2019 under section 174 Cr.P.C. Upon reaching the spot, it was seen that the dead body of a man was lying in supine position on the floor of the central hall in his residence (Fig.1). The first task undertaken was to freeze the crime scene and extensive photography of the scene was done. This was followed by careful examination of the crime scene.



Fig.1: Dead body of an adult male lying in supine position on the floor. A yellow coloured nylon rope was tied around the neck. Transparent tape was tied on face, wrists and

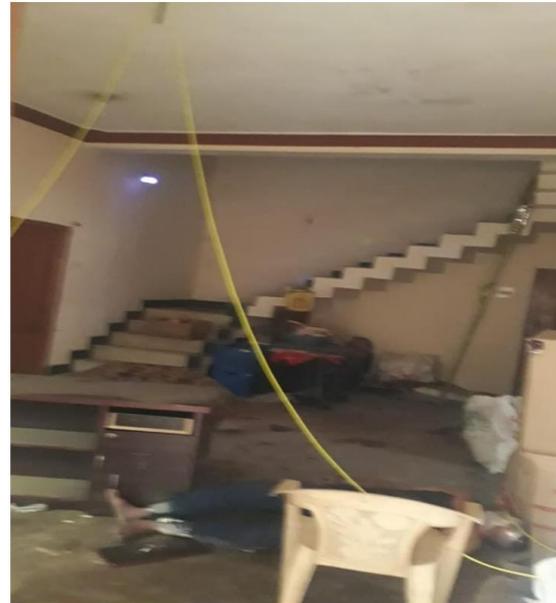


Fig.2: A glimpse of the hall in which the dead body was found. A wooden table was present close to the dead body.

The deceased was wearing a black baniyan and a blue coloured full length lower garment. The baniyan was partially torn on the left side. A wooden table was present near the dead body (Fig.2). A yellow coloured nylon rope was tied around the neck of the dead body and 4 inches wide transparent tape was tightly wrapped on the face of the deceased (Fig.3). Paper was found sticking to the end of the tape, implicating that the entire length of the tape was used to wrap around the face. The ligature mark, as seen on the deceased's neck beneath the nylon rope, was found to be oblique. The hub of the tape (tape-ring) was lying in the same hall where the dead body was found and a hand glove was present near the tape-ring (Fig.4). Same kind of tape was wrapped around both the wrists separately and in the legs above the ankle joints (Fig.5 and Fig.6).

A closer look suggested that the tape was cut at its end after wrapping it around the wrists and lower portion of the legs. It gave the impression that an attempt has been made to convince the people in believing that somebody had purposely tied tape on the face, wrists and hands of the deceased before killing him.



Fig.3: The face of the deceased was covered with transparent tape. The ligature mark on the neck was found to be oblique.



Fig.4: The hub of the tape (tape ring) and a hand glove were found in the hall where the dead body was lying.



Fig.5: Transparent tape wrapped around the wrists of the deceased.



Fig.6: Transparent tape wrapped around the lower portion of legs (above the ankle joints) of the deceased.

below the divan in the outer, distal room of the house where the man used to sleep at night (Fig.7). A broken bangle was also seen in the hall where the deceased's body was found (Fig.8). The deceased's brother told that both these items belonged to the deceased's wife.



Fig.7: Broken necklace found below the bed on which the deceased used to sleep.



Fig.8: Broken bangle found in the hall where the dead body was lying.

The deceased's brother further explained that he jumped over the huge iron gate present at the rear side of the house and upon entering the house, he found that the body of the deceased was hanging from the noose of a yellow coloured nylon rope. The lower part of the body was resting on the table present in the hall. Other people present at the spot also told the same thing. It is possible that the body of the deceased later on fell down on the ground due to some reason. The nylon rope was drawn through a hook in the ceiling and the other end of the rope was manoeuvred over a rod in the window of the room. It is possible that the rope was initially tied to the rod and later on some relative of the deceased untied it from the rod.

The iron gate was earlier locked on the outer side with an old lock. While investigating the crime scene, it was found that the lock was lying on the ground near the gate (Fig.9). The lock was not broken but had been unlocked with a key which was found inside the house. Aglove was also found lying near the plants on the inner side of the iron gate (Fig.10).



Fig.9: Old lock lying on the ground in the region inside the iron gate. The lock was intact (not broken).



Fig.10: Glove found on the ground near the plants on the inner side of the iron gate.

Inplace of the older lock, a new lock made of stainless steel was found on the outer side of the gate (Fig.11 and Fig.12). Three keys corresponding to the new lock were recovered from the pocket of the deceased (Fig.13). There were extensive cobwebs on the gate which implicated that the gate had not been opened since a long time.



Fig.11: Iron gate on the rear side of the house. A new lock made of stainless steel was found on the outer side of the gate.



Fig.12: A closer view of the new lock found on the gate.

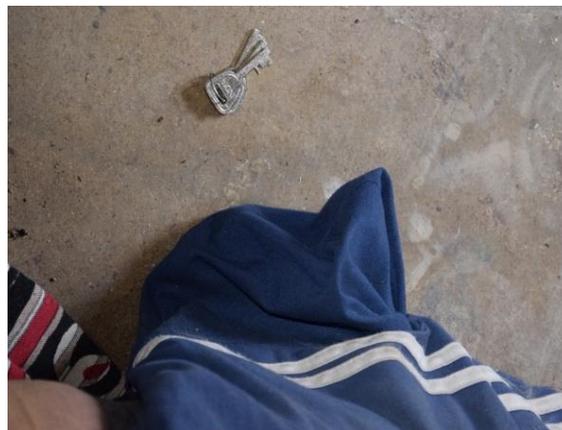


Fig.13: Three keys (corresponding to the new lock found on the gate) were recovered from pocket in the lower garment of the deceased.

A pair of ladies slipper with green straps was found scattered outside the gate (Fig.14 and Fig.15). The deceased's brother told that these slippers belonged to the deceased's wife and were previously kept inside the house. There was a lot of dust everywhere in the house. The mark of right slipper was found on the dust over the table present near the dead body (Fig.16 and Fig.17). Possibly, it was planted to convince that a lady wearing these slippers entered the house and putting her right foot on the table, she forcibly hanged the deceased. But it appears unlikely that a lady would be able to do so in order to kill a reasonably well built, hefty man in a manner found at the crime scene. In addition to the

slipper mark, a footprint was also observed on the table (Fig.16 and Fig.18). Careful examination of the footprint and measurements made using a scale confirmed that it was a print of the deceased's right foot.



Fig.14: Ladies slipper with green straps found outside the gate.



Fig.15: Backside of the ladies slipper showing the pattern therein.



Fig.16: A footprint and a mark of slipper found on the dust present over the table. Careful examination revealed that the footprint corresponded to the right foot of the deceased and the slipper mark corresponded to right slipper among the two slippers found outside the iron gate.



Fig.17: Mark of the right slipper found on the table near the dead body. The patterns within the mark and measurements of its dimensions confirmed that it corresponded to the right slipper found outside the gate.



Fig.18: Footprint of the right foot of the deceased found on the table present near the dead body. Careful examination of the footprint and measurements made using a scale confirmed that it was a print of the deceased's right foot.

In addition to the glove found near the plants on the inner side of the gate, another glove was found near the tape ring in the hall where the dead body was lying (as previously mentioned in Fig.4). The latter was bearing a golden ring (Fig. 19). It was learnt from the deceased's brother that the golden ring existed in the house even before the occurrence of the incidence. This too implicated the likelihood of planting fake evidences.



Fig.19: A golden ring was entangled in the glove found in the hall where the dead body was lying. According to the deceased's brother, the golden ring was present in the house even before the occurrence of the incidence, suggesting that it was fake evidence planted in the crime scene.

The door of the hall (in which the dead body was found) was expected to be locked from outside. However, the latch on the outer side of the door was found to be displaced from its normal position but the lock present on it was intact (Fig. 20). Considering this together with other evidences found at the crime scene, it seems to be another attempt made by the deceased to show that somebody from outside had tried to tamper with the latch in order to open the door and kill him. A sketch of the entire crime scene is given in Fig. 21.



Fig.20: The outside latch on the door of the hall (in which the dead body was lying) was found to be displaced from its normal position but the lock associated with it was intact.

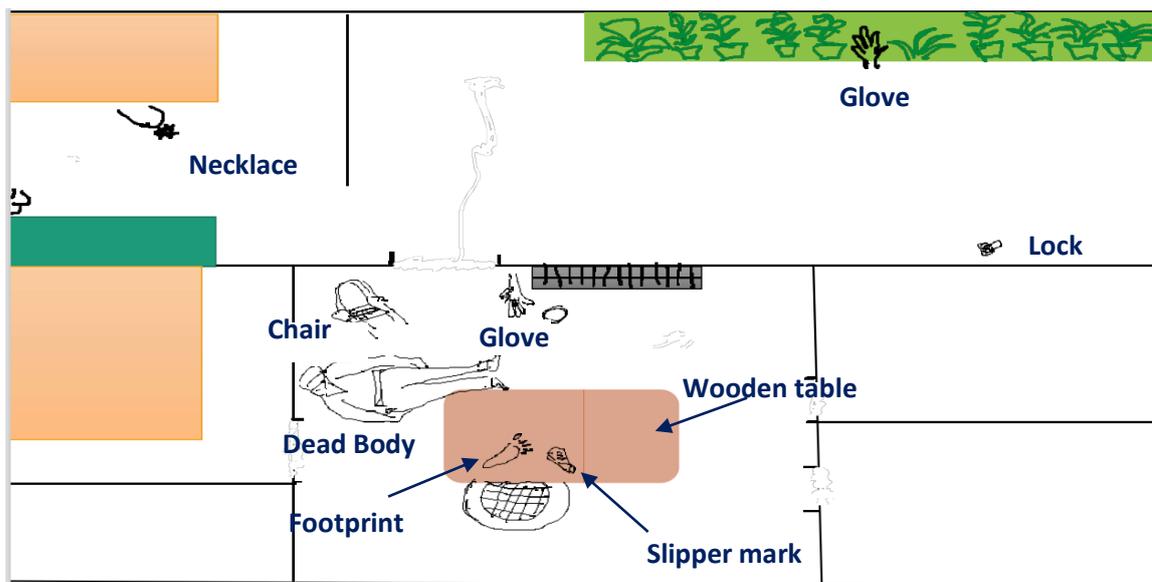


Fig.21: A sketch of the crime scene showing the location of the dead body and the physical evidences found therein.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings described above are strongly suggestive of a framed crime scene in which the deceased had deliberately planted evidences to show that his wife had killed him but actually he had made a suicidal attempt. As learnt from the station incharge of Pipariya police station regarding the history of the deceased, he had a dispute with his wife who had left the house and was staying separately. After his wife left, he had locked the major portion of the house and used to sleep only in the outer room. Major findings which implicate the possibility that the deceased himself had planted false evidences on the spot and subsequently made a suicidal attempt in order to persuade the law to punish his estranged wife are discussed as follows:

- 1) There were no evidences of any kind of struggle at the crime scene. Neither his neighbours on either sides of the house nor his brother who stayed in a house in front of the deceased's residence heard any kind of noise or yelling associated with struggle. The deceased was healthy with a good physical built and if somebody would have tried to kill him, there should have been some evidences of struggle at the spot and the people around were likely to have heard some kind of noise or disturbance.
- 2) Among the physical evidences found at the crime scene, only three evidences were new namely gloves, nylon cord and the new lock on the gate. Rest other evidences (the golden ring, slippers and key to the old lock) already existed in the deceased's house previously.
- 3) The keys to the new lock were found in the deceased's pocket.
- 4) The ligature mark on the neck was found to be oblique which is characteristic to suicidal hanging whereas in a homicidal death where the perpetrator had killed somebody and then hanged the dead body, ligature mark would be typically circular or transverse (as discussed previously).
- 5) The presence of the deceased's footprint on the table near his dead body suggests that the deceased had climbed on the table in order to hang himself using the yellow nylon rope perched on hook in the ceiling.
- 6) If any outsider would have made entry into the house, then evidences should have been found regarding the entry of the perpetrator. But no such evidences were found. The older lock was open but intact (not broken) suggesting that it was unlocked using its key which was kept inside the house. An outsider would not have got access to a key present inside the house.

V. CONCLUSION

The above account strongly favours the notion that the deceased wanted to avenge his wife whom he hated because of dispute with her, after which she had left the house. In order to get his wife punished, he planted fake evidences and succumbed to suicidal hanging.

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