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Case Report

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Strangulate, burnt & disposed off- a case report

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ABSTRACT

A dead body of 40 years female was referred from GH Karnal to the Department of Forensic Medicine, Pt. B. D. Sharma PGIMS, Rohtak for postmortem examination. As per police inquest report, the body was recovered from a canal.

The body was naked except a underwear which showed burnt effects. Feet were tied with orange coloured nylon rope in six turn and secured with a fixed knot. Scalp hairs were singed off. The body was emitting foul smell. Maggots of size 0.5 to 1 cm were crawling all over the body. Scalp hairs were singed off. Epidermis was peeled off at places with degloving of hands and feet. Uterus and rectum were protruding out. Superficial to deep burns, chiefly epidermal and dermo-epidermal, were present over the body at places. Irregular heat ruptures were present over the burn area at places. There was no evidence of line of demarcation, infiltration of blood and cherry red discolouration of tissues.

A grooved reddish ligature mark was present over the neck. On examination, ligature mark was found antemortem in nature; however burns were postmortem in nature. So, we opined cause the cause of death by ligature strangulation. Burns were inflicted on the body only to destroy the identity of deceased, so that crime can be concealed.

Keywords: Burn, Ligature mark, Strangulation.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, crime is at its peak and criminal commits a crime and finds different ways to hide it. Various methods are used to conceal the crime like burning of the body to destroy the identity, by throwing the body in the water canal, crushing the face by a heavyweight, throwing the body on the railway track, etc. In such cases, a thorough autopsy can reveal the exact cause and manner of

death. Forensic pathologist plays a paramount role in cases, where bodies which are found dead on the spot, with no witnesses and no proper history. In such cases, the autopsy report gives vital clues to the investigating agencies to solve the crime. In Haryana, committing homicide and disposing off the body in the canal is a usual practice. A similar case is discussed here, in which the body was recovered from a metal trunk inside a canal. The

body was about completely burnt along with a mark of strangulation.

CASE REPORT

A female dead body of about 40 years was referred from civil hospital Karnal to the department of Forensic Medicine, Pt. B. D. Sharma PGIMS, Rohtak for postmortem examination. The body was wearing a lower and underwear which showed burnt effects all over. Feet were tied with orange-colored nylon rope in six turns and secured with a fixed knot. The body was emitting a foul smell. Maggots of size 0.5 to 1 cm were crawling all over the body at places. Scalp hairs were singed. The epidermis was peeled off at places with degloving of hands and feet. Uterus and rectum were protruding out. Along with these postmortem changes, the body was also suffered from burn injuries. Superficial to deep burns chiefly epidermal and dermo-epidermal were present over the frontal region of head, occipital region, face upper part of chest up to the breast on the front and along the left side of chest wall and adjoining

abdominal wall up to lumbar region, both upper extremities, right side of the abdomen, right thigh on its medial and anterolateral aspects, inner aspect of left thigh, back of abdomen on left side along with both gluteal region, which covers almost all parts of the body. Irregular heat ruptures were present over the burn area at places. There was no evidence of the red line of demarcation, infiltration of blood and cherry red discoloration of tissues. After careful inspection, a ligature mark was also evident. It was described as a grooved reddish ligature mark that was present over the front of the neck situated 6 cm below the center of the chin in the midline. It extends all around the neck in the transverse plane so as to lie 4.5 cm below the right angle of mandible, 5 cm below the left angle of the mandible and 5.5 cm below the external occipital protuberance. The width of the ligature mark varies from 1.5-2.5 cm. On dissection, underlying subcutaneous tissues, muscles, deep fascia, and laryngo-tracheal structures were markedly ecchymosed. The cause of death was opined as ligature strangulation which is homicidal in a manner along with postmortem burns.



Figure 1: Figure 1A shows general condition of the body at the time of postmortem examination showing postmortem burns, heat rupture. In figure 1B both feet are tied with nylon rope.



Figure 2: ligature mark in figure 2A. Echymosis of underlying soft tissue in figure 2B

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In cases where a person died with no proper history without any eyewitnesses, the role of Forensic experts is increased significantly. In these cases, findings of post-mortem give important clues to the investigating agency. However, in case of lack of experience, ignorance or misinterpretation of findings by the doctor during post-mortem examination, can lead injustice to the dead body. There are numerous cases in which crime is committed and to hide this act, criminals destroy the identity of the body. As we know that identification is very important to solve any crime. [1] The most common practice prevalent in Haryana after killing is to burn the body or to throw the body in the canal for destroying the identity. In our case both things are present. Since the body was recovered from the canal in a metallic trunk. Body was decomposed and estimated time since death was between 4 to 5 days. The body also has postmortem burns which are characterized by the absence of vital reaction, absence of line of redness, no soot particles in the trachea and bronchus, no cherry red color of blood, and absence of reparative process. [2] Other than this, the vesicles in the postmortem burns contain mostly air and the little fluid comprises of very little albumen with no chlorides and have a dull, yellow, dry hard base. [3] This biochemical test was not performed in our case. Another important differentiating factor between post-mortem burns from ante-mortem burns is the carboxyhemoglobin level. The level greater than 10 % indicates that the victim

inhaled smoke and was alive at the time of the fire. [3] Tumer studied thirteen cases of homicides involving post-mortem burn and observed that the level of carboxyhemoglobin was less than 10 % in all cases. Soot particles were not present in 12 cases and only one case contained soot particles that too in the oropharyngeal area only. There was no red line of demarcation in any of the cases. [4] Similarly, in our case also, there was no soot particle. Burning body after killing is a common tactics used by assailants to hide the findings of the ante-mortem homicidal attack, thus misleading the autopsy surgeon and police. In the famous ‘Naina Sahni Tandoor’ case, the initial autopsy mentioned the cause of death was due to burns, but in second autopsy it was revealed that the victim was shot prior to her death and the same findings helped in linking the accused to the crime and their prosecution. [5, 6] Paliwal [7] and Meshram [8] also reported similar cases where post-mortem burning of the body has been done to conceal the murder. Similarly in our case after careful inspection, a strangulation mark is found present around the neck. The assailant tries to hide this strangulation mark by burning the body. It is also pertinent to mention that the most common error which can happen in such cases by the autopsy surgeon is to believe in the inquest of the police and this can lead to falsity in the post-mortem report. So an autopsy surgeon must be vigilant and he should believe in scientific evidences and not in police inquest report.

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