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A comprehensive case study of strangulation by maoists from Chhattisgarh State, India

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Abstract

In the Maoists affected area of Chhattisgarh, killing of civilians on the suspicion of being a police informer is common. While Maoists may resort to any method of killing but strangulation was observed to be the uncommon one. Strangulation and hanging can have very similar sets of traumatic pathology¹ and can be mistaken for one another. Such cases require rigorous forensic examination involving crime scene inspection, autopsy findings and police investigation. On 11.08.2022, at midnight, police were informed about an incident in which an 18-year-old male was found in a partially hanged position inside his rented house in Tehsil para, Bijapur. Forensic Expert from Regional Forensic Science Laboratory, Jagdalpur, Bastar was called for crime scene inspection. Post investigation, the body was sent to District Hospital, Bijapur for autopsy. Here, we are presenting a comprehensive study constituting of both crime scene investigation and autopsy findings to provide a 360^o-viewpoint of forensic investigation.

Keywords: Strangulation, hanging, crime scene, maoists, autopsy

Introduction

Asphyxia is derived from a Greek word which literally means pulselessness. However, in Forensic practice, the term asphyxia is used to describe a condition in which the supply of oxygen to the blood and body tissues is reduced appreciably below the normal working level by interference with respiration^[2]. Among various categories of asphyxia Mechanical asphyxia involves obstruction of flow of air into the body by mechanical means i.e., external forces, and includes subtypes such as hanging and strangulation^[3]. Hanging involves the body's suspension with a ligature around the neck, where the weight of the body causes constriction, while strangulation is a violent form of asphyxia, where the neck is constricted by external force without suspension^[2, 3].

Bijapur is Maoists affected region of Chhattisgarh where Maoists attacks are still persistent. While the conflict lies between Maoists and armed forces, many of the civilians lose their lives too. As per the reports, in 2024 alone, more than 65 civilians have been murdered by Maoists after being branded as police informants^[4]. The current article is a case which initially seemed as suicide but with progressing crime scene inspection and autopsy findings turned out to be a homicide. Few days later, Maoists group PLGA, South Bastar Division took the responsibility of the murder by throwing pamphlets with their confession.

Case history

On 11.08.2022, A male body aged 18 years was found in partial hanging situation having yellow coloured ligature material in his neck, Bijapur, Chhattisgarh. Case was registered in Bijapur Police Station having marg no. 32/22 u/s 174Cr.PC. Initially it was assumed that it is a case of suicide but later it was suspected that the co-tenant with a few of his accomplices hanged the deceased to hide the evidences. The primary case was registered u/s 302, 201, 34 IPC and taken under investigation by Bijapur Police Station with through crime scene examination followed by postmortem.

Scene of crime inspection

Scientific Officer, RFSL, Jagdalpur along with the Investigating Officer and with his team visited the crime scene on 11.08.2022. The scene of the incident was a rented room located

on the first floor of the house in Tehsil Para, Bijapur. The room door was not closed from the inside during the incident, as told by the investigating officer. The body of the deceased was found in partial hanging position from the neck with a yellow nylon rope tied to the grill of an aluminium window located in the north direction of the room (refer Photo-1).



Photo 1: A distant view of the crime scene and deceased, for reference

The distance between the knot tied to the grill of this aluminium window and deceased's neck knot was found to be 90 cm and the distance from the knot of the nylon rope tied to the window grill to the floor was 185 cm was observed. A knot tied with a nylon rope was found below the right ear of deceased and a mark of ligature was found on the neck. The deceased's chest was facing south, the back was resting on the wall in the north direction, and the face was bent towards the left (Photo-2).



Photo 2: The full view of deceased



Photo 3: Close-up view of deceased

A maroon-coloured round-neck half T-shirt, black coloured full lower, white vest and black coloured underwear were found on the deceased's body. Both the eyes of the deceased were found closed and the tongue was found protruding out of the mouth and dribbling of saliva mixed with blood from left side of mouth (Photo-3b).

Saliva mixed with blood found on the T-shirt of the deceased. The deceased's right hand was straight, the fist was open and the left hand was slightly bent at the elbow, with the open fist resting on the left thigh. Both of the deceased's hands were found in a Rigor mortis state. The deceased's left leg was bent at the knee with the toes on the floor, and the right leg was bent at the knee with the knee to toes resting on the floor. Red ants were found on the inside of the deceased's right elbow and on the feet. A bruise mark was found on the deceased's right eye, and multiple abrasion were found on the face (Photo-3a). The deceased's height was 155 cm, and the genitals and anus of the deceased were found to be clean.

Autopsy findings

Dated 11.08.2022, A male dead body of young age average built lying supine on mortuary table of District hospital, Bijapur was wearing maroon coloured t shirt, black coloured trouser, white coloured vest and black coloured underwear. Eyes closed, mouth open with tongue protruding out and dribbling of saliva mixed with blood from left side of mouth. Ligature material yellow coloured rope loosely held over chest with knot loosened. T shirt was stained with blood on left side. Rigor mortis developed in all limbs. Ligature mark positive over the thyroid was complete, horizontal to oblique in nature, associated with surrounding ecchymosis and bruises mark is horizontal with is less prominent having imprint abrasion of rope and an oblique which is more prominent and deep in between the marks there is an abrasion all over neck with is due to the blunt rope material. Both are brown coloured. Thickness Infront is 1.5 cm approx. and at the back it is 5 cm including the abrasive area knot present at the back of neck just below the hairline.

Multiple tiny bruises and abrasion found on face with largest bruise on right eye with associated sub conjunctival haemorrhage seen bluish black coloured and nearby tiny abrasion seen 4-5 in number. Bruise in root of nose more on left side and blackish coloured. Bruises on right side of leg of size 3x1 cm size blueish black colour. Bruise on lower side of lower lip just above chin and multiple petechial haemorrhage seen over face. Multiple bruise and nail marks found on both of the forearm. The deceased's thyroid cartilage has been broken and all the injuries found on the deceased body were antemortem in nature.

Discussion

During the primary inspection of the dead body, it seemed as a simple case of suicide on the basis of the body position, protruding tongue and dribbling of saliva which are clear indicators of death due to hanging. Upon the inspection of the surroundings we found that door was not closed from inside and as well as the room of deceased was also found disturbed, which indicated the outside entry of a person other than deceased. This increased our suspicion and we revisited the crime scene and body inspection in a step-by-step manner as there is always a possibility of strangulation to be mistaken for hanging or vice versa.⁵ We observed

multiple tiny bruises and abrasion found on the face of deceased with largest bruise on right eye has been seen, which clearly indicates that there must have been struggle between deceased and some other person. The tongue was found protruding out of the mouth and dribbling of saliva mixed with blood from left side of mouth and as well as saliva mixed with blood found on the T-shirt of the deceased. Bruise on lower side of lower lip just above chin and multiple petechial haemorrhage seen over face due to increased venous stasis causing congestion resulting into high pressure causing rupture of the vessels. Multiple bruise and nail marks found on both of the forearm were clear indicators of struggle with the accused. Ligature mark positive over the thyroid was complete, horizontal to oblique in nature, associated with surrounding ecchymosis and bruises mark is horizontal which is less prominent having imprint abrasion of rope. The genitals and anus of the deceased were found to be clean. The deceased's thyroid cartilage has been broken, organs are congested and all the injuries found on the deceased body were antemortem in nature.

The crime scene inspection, autopsy internal and external findings clearly indicated that manner of death of deceased is homicide and cause of death is asphyxia due to ligature strangulation. Few days after the incident on 16.08.2022 Maoists group PLGA, South Bastar Division took the responsibility of the murder by throwing the pamphlets with their confession.

Conclusion

From above case study, we are trying to show that a case which clearly seemed as a suicidal hanging upon a keen crime scene inspection and thorough autopsy internal and external examination, turns out to be a brutal murder. The findings clearly indicated that manner of death of deceased is homicide and cause of death is asphyxia due to ligature strangulation. The case study here is a showcase of how crime scene investigation, autopsy and police investigation work as a tripod of a complete forensic study of any crime. The three together can give a full and a clear picture of any crime no matter how complex.

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Authors contribution

SD inspected the crime scene and supervised the drafting of this case study. SN done the autopsy of the deceased. SP has done the drafting of this case study and overall supervision was done by RM and PT.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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