

## Attempted Concealing of Homicides by Railway Injuries

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### ABSTRACT

Two cases alleged to have died of railway accidents were brought for postmortem examination and revealed injuries suggestive of homicides. The postmortem findings along with photographs are presented herewith for the purpose of creating awareness of how misleading can the inquest report be to the investigating officers.

*Key words: Accident, Homicide, Railway Track*

### INTRODUCTION

The vast net work of railways in India is of immense help to us in our day to day activities, simultaneously has its hazards too. Deaths due to railway accidents and suicides are well known to Forensic experts. But in these two types of deaths, the injuries produced have a peculiar pattern depending upon the posture of the deceased at the time of such happenings. In accidents, the injuries sustained are untidy where as in suicides, it is generally decapitation [1] or amputation of limbs [2]. This can be easily differentiated by a visit to the scene of crime and a brief assessment of occurrence, nature, type and age of the injuries [3], distribution of

hypostasis and rigor mortis [4]. Since the facilities for visit to the scene of crime are limited in India it is important not to ignore other factors before making a conclusion. Little is reported in the literature about the seasoned criminals taking advantage of the railway tracks, to conceal their misdeeds [4,5] so that it mimicks the picture of accident or suicide. But the very motive of such criminals gets defeated if the forensic experts and investigating agencies are vigilant in this respect. It is well known fact that how so ever careful the criminal may be, he leaves certain clues which help in detecting him and his crime. Two cases of attempt to conceal homicides taking advantage of railway tracks are presented here, where the findings are evident enough to suggest it to be homicides than railway accidents or suicides.

### OBSERVATIONS

#### CASE NO.1

An unknown male, aged 22 years, moderately built and nourished wearing apparels (with cuts corresponding to the injuries) and crushed left lower limb (Fig. 1) was brought to the

Department of Forensic Medicine, Government Medical College, Amritsar on 8.2.1988 for postmortem examination with the inquest report indicating it as railway accident. Rigor mortis was present throughout the body. Postmortem staining was confined to the back sparing pressure points. On examination of the body thirty stab injuries were recorded (some of which are shown in Fig.2, 3) out of which four injuries were postmortem (One out of which is shown in Fig. 3) in nature and so was the amputation of the limb (because of absence of clotted blood at the site of injuries). Stab injuries on the chest and abdomen were sufficient to cause death. Cause of death was given as haemorrhage and shock as each chest cavity contained about 500 ml. of blood and the abdominal cavity contained about 1000 ml. of blood due to injuries to the lungs and liver. The time since death was given within 24 hours and between injuries and death was given as immediate.

#### CASE NO.2

An unknown female, aged 24-25 years, moderately built and nourished wearing apparels with crushing of the right leg (Fig. 4) at the knee joint level was brought for postmortem examination with the inquest report indicating it as alleged to have committed suicide. Rigor mortis was present throughout the body and postmortem staining was confined to the back sparing pressure points.

On examination of the body following injuries were recorded:

1. A lacerated wound on the right side of the face, fracturing maxilla. Blackening and tattooing around the wound was present (Fig. 5). On dissection a plastic wad and three pellets were recovered from the wound clotted blood was present.
2. Multiple lacerated wounds of varying sizes with contusions/abrasions in between were present on the back and left side of thorax in the scapular and suprascapular region (Fig. 6). On dissecting, three lead balls were recovered from the upper lobe of left lung. Clotted blood was present. Left thoracic cavity contained about 1000 ml. of fluid blood (Tears corresponding to injuries were present in the kameez).

3. The crushing of lower limb was postmortem because of absence of clotted blood.

The cause of death was given as haemorrhage and shock as a result of injury No.1 and 2 and the time since death was given as within 24 hours and between injuries and death was immediate. Genital swab examination was negative for semen and spermatozoa.

#### DISCUSSION

Railway accidental deaths and suicides using the railway tracks are not uncommon in India as well as in other under-developed countries, but homicides by other means and subsequent disposal of the body on the railway track so that it mimicks accident or suicide is less documented. Though the literature points out that such incidences are meagre yet one must be aware of it while dealing with such cases. The role of forensic experts and the investigating officers is clearly reflected in this paper. The interpretations by the investigating officer should not always be accepted for its face value by the forensic experts. These two cases themselves are self explanatory in the sense that in the first case, four postmortem stab injuries on the body of the deceased indicated clearly that the intention of the individual was to kill the person and not merely to injure him. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that even after the death of the deceased, he continued stabbing till he became doubly sure of his death and killing was done with cool and quiet mind and was well planned because subsequently he disposed off the body on the railway track.

Similarly in the second case, it was quite evident that the injuries on the face as well as on the back of thorax were the result of firearms but the pellets and lead balls recovered from the either sites suggested that two different types of firearms were used to kill the individual. The exact motive behind this killing could not be ascertained even after thorough examination, but definitely, it could be concluded that the case was that of homicide and the injury No.1. was a shot gun injury and the distance was within three feet from which a firearm was fired. Similarly in injury No.2, the abrasion/contusions in between the lead ball injuries is suggestive of the injury caused by the wad probably such the distance of the firearm was 3-10 feet.



Figure 1. Postmortem Crushing of Left Lower Limb:  
(No Clotted Blood Present)



Figure 2. Back of Trunk Showing Multiple  
Antemortem Stab Injuries



Figure 3. Arrow Showing Postmortem Stab injury (No  
Clotted Blood Present) - Rest of the Stab  
Injuries are antemortem on the Front of  
Abdomen and Chest.



Figure 4. Postmortem Crushing of Right Leg (No Clotted Blood)



Figure 5. Antemortem Lacerated Wound on Right Side of Face with Blackening and Tattooing



Figure 6. Antemortem Multiple Lacerated Wounds with an Abrasion and a Contusion (in between the Lacerations) on the Back of the Chest as shown by an Arrow

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