

## Deliberation on a Case of Partial Hanging Found at an Unusual Place: in the Rear of a Covered Tempo

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### Abstract

Deaths due to hanging are routinely encountered by the Forensic Pathologists all over the world and are the leading method of suicide in India. In equivocal circumstances, the ligature deaths are distinguished into hanging and strangulation by a thin line and possibility of a certain foul play arises whenever any unusual circumstances or findings are encountered. We report a case where a person was found partially hanged in a rear of a covered tempo. The external and internal findings during postmortem examination were of a typical hanging case. The chemical analysis reported Ethyl Alcohol in concentration of 62.30 mg/dl of blood of the deceased. The findings were corroborated with the circumstantial evidences and the cause of death was concluded as antemortem hanging. The authors aim to add the findings of this case to the Medical literature for future reference, and recommend that the autopsy surgeon should interact with the relatives in such cases so as to address their doubts about the cause and manner of death.

**Keywords:** Suicide; Hanging; Partial Hanging; Ligature Mark.

### Introduction

Preferred methods of committing suicides are different in different countries [1] and Hanging is the most common method in India [2]. Hanging is generally considered as suicidal until proven otherwise [3-6]. The commonest place of hanging is inside the house [7-9]. So, doubts arise about the manner of death when a person is found hanged at an unusual location. More suspicion arises when the suspension of the body is not complete and the feet are touching the ground. We report a

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case where a person was found partially hanged in a rear of a covered tempo. The authors aim to add the findings of this case to the Medical literature for future reference.

### Case History

A Tempo (Medium range Goods Carrier) (Image-1) was brought to Delhi from the state of Himachal Pradesh and after unloading of the goods the driver parked the vehicle in a ground meant for such vehicular parking. He came back to Tempo after three days for starting another trip and removed the cover on the rear of the tempo. He found an unknown person hanging in the rear of the vehicle (Image 2). The police was informed, identity of the deceased could not be established and after nine days the postmortem examination was conducted in the Department of Forensic Medicine, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi.

### Autopsy Findings

The body was of a young adult male with length 163 cm. The deceased was wearing a sweater, shirt

and pant. Clothes were dirty and intact. The rigor mortis was passed off, and postmortem lividity was present at the back. Bluish discoloration was present at the lips and the nails. Dribbling of saliva was present at the right angle of the mouth. Yellowish discoloration of sclera was present in the eyes. Signs of decomposition were present over the body.

A black and white nylon rope was encircling the neck having a single running knot present just below the left angle of the mandible. The neck circumference of the noose was 29cm; the ligature material was 3cm in diameter.

The Ligature mark was grooved reddish in colour, parchmented and present in the middle one third of the neck. The width of ligature mark was 1cm. The ligature mark was present 7cm below the mentum and 11 cm above the supra-sternal notch in the centre of neck. The mark was 6cm below the right mastoid and 3cm below the left mastoid on the lateral aspect of neck respectively. The ligature mark was directed upwards, backwards and obliquely merging with the hairline at the back of the neck. On dissection the soft tissues underneath the ligature mark was dry, pale, glistening and devoid of any haemorrhage. The underlying musculature and blood vessels were intact and devoid of any extravasation or hemorrhage. The thyro-hyoid complex was intact and the trachea was congested.

There was no other external or internal injury present on the body. The visceral organs were congested and softened. The stomach was empty and mucosal walls were congested. The chemical



Fig. 1: Tempo in which the body was recovered



Fig. 2: Position of the Body in Tempo

analysis reported Ethyl Alcohol in concentration of 62.30 mg/dl of blood of the deceased.

## Discussion

Hanging is caused by ligature compression of neck with the body weight acting as the constricting force due to suspension of the body [3-6]. In the present case we will first have a look at the autopsy findings. There was presence of dribbling of saliva, cyanosis over nail and lips and in-situ ligature material. The ligature mark was typical as seen in hanging cases [3-6, 10]. There was generalized congestion of viscera. No other external or internal antemortem injuries were present. All these clearly indicate the death was due to antemortem suicidal hanging.

The place where the body was recovered was unusual as it was a vehicle and an unknown place for the deceased. The suicide by hanging is done at a place known to the person, usually at home. But cases have been reported at very unusual places [8,11]. The suspension may complete with the feet above the surface/ground and when the feet are touching the surface it is termed as *Partial Hanging* [10]. The body of the deceased is in partial hanging position (incomplete suspension) found with his feet

touching the surface with flexion on the knee joint. Nandy [10] mentions the partial hanging to be diagnostic of suicidal hanging. Bennewith et al found incomplete suspension to be present in up to 47.6% of suicidal hanging cases [7].

The detection of alcohol in the blood of the deceased proves that he was under the influence of alcohol while committing suicide. The relationship of alcohol as a confounding factor for committing Suicide is well established [12-15]. All the findings were discussed with the investigating officer to corroborate with the circumstantial evidences. The investigating report also could not found any foul play. So, the cause of death in the case was concluded as antemortem hanging which was suicidal in nature committed under the influence of alcohol.

The authors have seen in their experience while interacting with the relatives of the suicide cases and the investigators, that there is a misconception that the hanging is suicidal when the suspension is complete and suicide note is present. When the hanging is found in an unusual location, without suicide note and with the part of the body touching the ground/surface, the possibility of a certain foul play arises. In this case though there were no complainants as the body was unidentified, still the investigation has to be led to a logical course for legal conclusion. The authors also recommend that the autopsy surgeon should interact with the relatives in such cases so as to address their doubts about the cause and manner of death.

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#### Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interests of any of the author

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