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THE CHAIN OF CUSTODY IN CRIME SCENE MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Forensic science is a multidisciplinary field that applies scientific principles from disciplines such as biology, chemistry, and physics to analyze evidence and support the judicial process. It plays a critical role in criminal investigations by establishing facts in legal cases through key components, including crime scene investigation, evidence analysis, and expert testimony. Effective crime scene management is essential to maintain the integrity of evidence. This involves securing the crime scene, documenting evidence, and adhering to strict protocols to ensure evidence remains uncontaminated and legally admissible in court. A critical aspect of this process is maintaining the chain of custody, which ensures the reliability and traceability of evidence.

This paper examines the significance of crime scene management, evaluates existing procedures and protocols, and underscores the importance of the chain of custody in criminal law.

KEY WORDS: Forensic Science, Crime Scene, Chain of Custody

INTRODUCTION

The chain of custody forms the backbone of effective crime scene management and forensic investigation. It refers to the systematic process of documenting the collection, preservation, transfer, and storage of physical evidence from the moment it is discovered at the crime scene until it is presented before the court of law. The primary objective of maintaining a proper chain of custody is to ensure that evidence remains authentic, uncontaminated, and unaltered throughout the entire investigative and judicial process. Any lapse in this process raises the possibility of tampering, fabrication, or mishandling, which in turn can cast doubt on the credibility of the evidence. Forensic science lies at the core of modern criminal investigations, bridging the gap between law and science by applying scientific techniques to uncover factual truths. It involves not only the meticulous examination of the crime scene but also the scientific analysis of biological, chemical, and physical traces, followed by expert testimony to guide judicial decision-making. Evidence such as fingerprints, DNA, ballistic materials, or digital records gains significance only when its origin, handling, and integrity can be firmly established through an unbroken chain of custody. The guiding forensic principle, *"every contact leaves a trace"* (Locard's Exchange Principle), underscores the fact that even minute traces, if properly preserved, can lead to the identification of perpetrators. Conversely, even minor lapses in handling may render the evidence unreliable and inadmissible.

Maintaining the chain of custody requires strict adherence to protocols, including detailed documentation at every stage of evidence handling. This involves recording who collected the

evidence, the exact date, time, and location of collection, the manner in which it was packaged, the persons who subsequently handled it, and the conditions under which it was stored or transported. Such transparency in record-keeping not only ensures accountability but also upholds the evidentiary value in judicial proceedings.

While many jurisdictions across the world have codified explicit statutory provisions governing chain of custody, Indian law does not directly define or regulate it in a comprehensive manner. Instead, Indian courts rely heavily on procedural safeguards under the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, and the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, along with supporting witness testimonies and documentary records, to assess whether the evidence has been handled in accordance with the principles of fairness and reliability. Judicial precedents in India have consistently highlighted that the admissibility of scientific evidence depends not only on its scientific validity but also on the credibility of the chain of custody. Cases where this link has been broken or inadequately demonstrated have often led to the exclusion of crucial evidence, sometimes resulting in the acquittal of accused persons. Thus, the challenges in maintaining a flawless chain of custody—such as lack of training among police personnel, poor infrastructure, inadequate storage facilities, and procedural lapses—have significant implications for the administration of justice. These challenges underscore the need for greater standardization, training, and codification of best practices in evidence handling.

UNDERSTANDING THE FORENSIC SCIENCE

Forensic Science And Crime

Forensic science is a multidisciplinary domain that integrates the principles and methodologies of various scientific disciplines to aid in the investigation of crime and the administration of justice. It draws upon fields such as biology, chemistry, physics, medicine, and increasingly digital and computer sciences, to analyze physical and digital evidence associated with criminal activity. As a bridge between law and science, forensic science provides an objective and methodical framework for uncovering factual information that may otherwise remain obscured.

The scope of forensic science extends beyond mere crime scene analysis to include specialized sub-disciplines such as forensic pathology, toxicology, ballistics, serology, forensic anthropology, and digital forensics, each of which contributes unique insights into different categories of evidence. By employing validated scientific techniques, forensic experts are able to identify suspects, establish links between individuals and crime scenes, reconstruct events, and either corroborate or challenge witness testimony. The primary objective of forensic science is to establish scientifically verifiable facts that are admissible in courts of law, thereby assisting law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, defense counsel, and the judiciary in the fair and efficient administration of justice. Its ultimate function lies in ensuring that investigations are grounded in objectivity and empirical reliability, minimizing the influence of bias or conjecture. In this sense, forensic science operates not merely as an investigative tool but as a crucial safeguard of due process, ensuring that truth, rather than speculation, guides the resolution of criminal cases.

The roots of forensic science can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where rudimentary methods were employed to solve crimes. However, the modern forensic science movement began in the late 19th century with the establishment of systematic techniques for evidence collection and analysis.[1] Forensic science can be broadly defined as the application of scientific methods and techniques to solve crimes and facilitate the administration of justice. It involves various processes, including:

[1] *Hans Gross, Groundwork for integrating scientific methods into criminal investigations 1893.*

Crime Scene Investigation: This involves the systematic collection and preservation of physical evidence from a crime scene. Crime scene investigators (CSIs) utilize various techniques, including photography, sketching, and evidence tagging, to ensure that all pertinent materials are documented and secured.

Evidence Analysis: Forensic scientists analyze the collected evidence in a laboratory setting. This may include the analysis of biological samples (e.g., blood, hair), chemical substances (e.g., drugs, explosives), and physical evidence (e.g., fingerprints, firearms). Each sub-discipline has its own set of methodologies and protocols to ensure accurate and reliable results.

Expert Testimony: Forensic experts often testify in court regarding their findings and the methods used in their analyses. Their testimony is critical in establishing the credibility of the evidence and helping juries understand complex scientific concepts.

Collaboration with Law Enforcement: Forensic scientists work closely with law enforcement agencies to provide support throughout the investigation process, from evidence collection to case closure.

A crime scene is defined as the physical location where a crime has been committed or where evidence of a crime can be found. It encompasses not only the immediate area of the crime but also any location that may be relevant to the investigation, including locations of subsequent actions by the perpetrator or witnesses.

PRINCIPLES OF Forensic Science

The principles of forensic science refer to the disciplines and methods of science in evidence analysis to answer some questions. These principles of forensic science have an impact on criminal proceedings which start from the investigation of a crime scene to the conviction of an accused in the courts of Law. The principles of forensic science which are very important in criminal investigation are as follows

Law Of Individuality

"Every object, natural or man - made, has an individuality which is not duplicated in any other object". This law has been established in several fields and fingerprints are the most common among them. Millions and Billions of fingerprints have been studied and yet not one fingerprint has matched with others whether it's of twins or two fingers of the individual.

Principle Of Exchange

"Every contact leaves a trace". It also known as Locard's Exchange Principle, is a foundational concept in forensic science. It asserts that whenever a person comes into contact with another person, object, or environment, there is an inevitable exchange of materials. In the context of criminal activity, this principle means that the perpetrator will both introduce something into the crime scene such as fingerprints, fibers, hair, or other trace evidence and simultaneously take something away from it, such as soil particles, dust, or biological matter. This reciprocal transfer creates a silent witness to the crime, leaving behind physical traces that, when scientifically analyzed, can connect the offender, the victim, and the crime scene.

Law Of Progressive Change

"Everything changes with the passage of time". The rate of change varies tremendously with different objects. Its impact on forensic science is immense. For example, the body of the victim starts decomposing with the passage of time, sample of blood also degrades in a period of time.

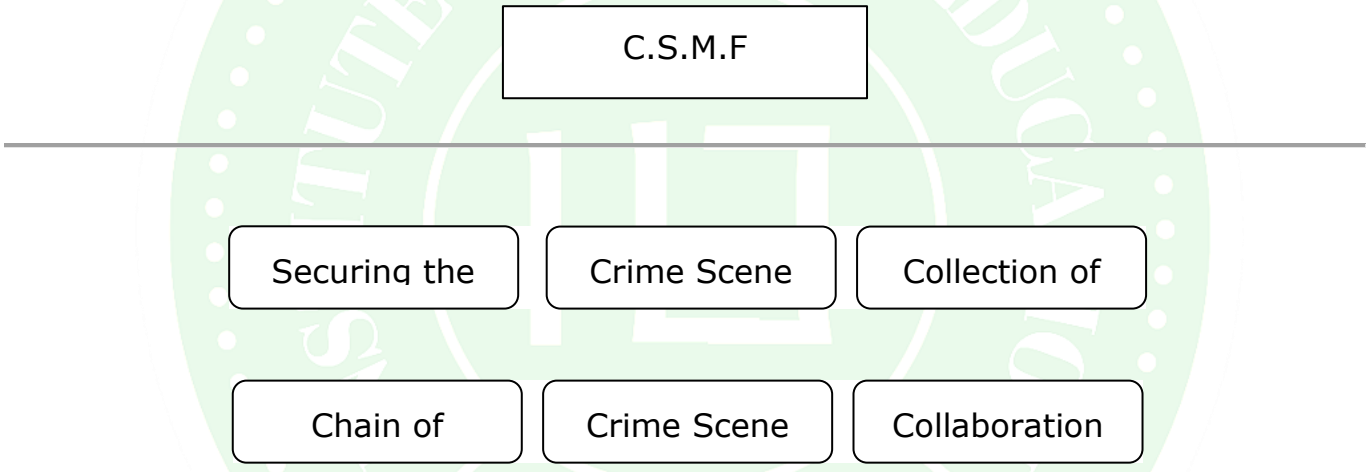
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Principle Of Comparison

"Only the like can be compared". It underscores the fundamental requirement in forensic examination that questioned items must be evaluated against comparable standards. This means that valid and reliable conclusions can only be drawn when samples or specimens of a similar nature, origin, and condition are provided for comparison. For instance, a questioned handwriting sample must be compared with authentic handwriting specimens of the same individual, or a DNA profile must be matched with a properly collected biological sample from a relevant source. Providing dissimilar or unrelated materials for comparison risks producing inconclusive or misleading results, thereby undermining the accuracy and credibility of the forensic analysis.

Crime Scene Management Framework

A Crime Scene Management Framework refers to the systematic process, guidelines and standardised protocols to ensure that all procedures followed at the crime scene uphold the integrity of the investigation, support the judicial process, and safeguard evidence for admissibility in court[2].



The first step involves securing the crime scene to prevent unauthorised access and to protect potential evidence from contamination or loss. Law enforcement officers establish a perimeter, ensuring that only authorised personnel are allowed entry.[3]

Accurate documentation is critical. The crime scene is recorded through photographs, sketches, and detailed notes that capture the condition of the scene and the location of evidence.[4]

Investigators systematically search the crime scene for physical evidence such as fingerprints, bloodstains, weapons, or electronic data. Proper techniques are employed to ensure the collection of evidence without contamination or destruction. Evidence is preserved in appropriate containers[5].

The chain of custody is a critical element of the crime scene management framework. It ensures that evidence remains unaltered from the time it is collected at the crime scene until its presentation in court.

After evidence is collected, investigators and forensic experts analyze the data to reconstruct the events leading up to, during, and after the crime. This analysis often involves developing hypotheses regarding the sequence of events, suspect behavior, and the interaction between the victim and perpetrator.

[2] Fisher, B. A. J. (2004). *Techniques of Crime Scene Investigation*. CRC Press.
[3] Inman, K., & Rudin, N. (2001). *Principles of Crime Scene Investigation*. CRC Press.
[4] Fisher, B. A. J. (2004). *Techniques of Crime Scene Investigation*. CRC Press.
[5] Saferstein, R. *Criminalistics: An Introduction to Forensic Science*. Pearson. (2018).

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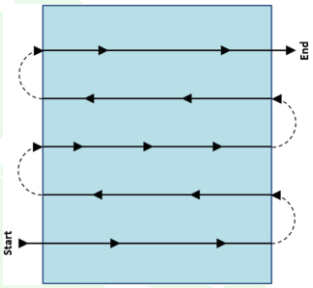
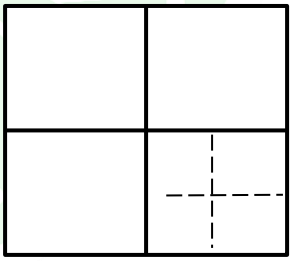
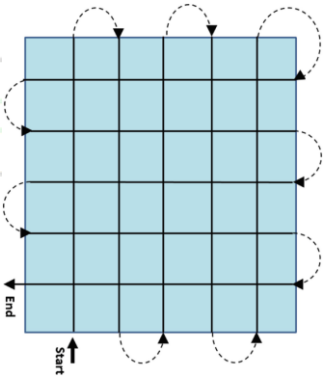
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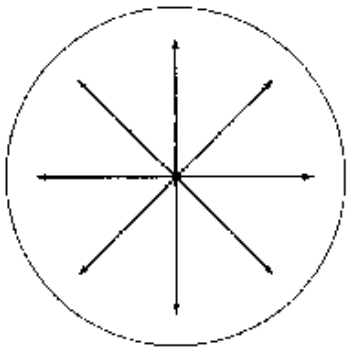
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Crime scene management involves close collaboration between law enforcement personnel and forensic scientists who specialize in various fields. Their testimony helps establish the credibility of the evidence presented and aids the court in understanding the scientific aspects of the case.

Search Method

Identification and recovery of physical evidence is the main part of crime scene investigation. In this point of view, appropriate searching method (s) should necessary to apply to those types of crime scenes. There are a number of search patterns that may be followed in the interest of investigation of the crime scene. Some of them as are follows:

1	STRIP METHOD Whole area to be searched and divided into a convenient number of strips. Each strip is examined carefully one after another. The process continues until the searchers cover the entire area.	
2	SPIRAL METHOD The searchers start from one end (a point of outside the area) of the crime scene move along with path of the spiral till they reached the centre of the crime scene.	
3	ZONE OR QUAD METHOD The crime scene is divided into several zones and each zone is examined in turn. The big square is then conveniently subdivided into small square and search each small square carefully.	
4	GRID METHOD In the grid method, the searcher begins like a strip search. After completing the search by horizontal lanes, he searches back at right angles to the original strip. This search method from two different angles helps in the recovery of evidence which may be missed in simple strip method.	

5	PIE OR WHEEL METHOD In this search method, the area is marked as circle or divided into pie slices or sections of a wheel, usually six in number. Crime scene searchers start from the centre point and proceed to travel outwards along straight lines or rays. Repeat the process several times depending on the size of the area.	

METHOD AND MODE OF SECURING EVIDENCE

EVIDENCE

Evidence is the means through which facts are established in a judicial proceeding. It includes all materials, whether in the form of testimony, documents, objects, or other means, presented before a court to prove or disprove the existence of facts at issue in a case.

Evidence means and includes –

1. All statements which the Court permits or requires to be made before it by witnesses, in relation to matters of fact under inquiry (oral evidence);
2. All documents including electronic records produced for the inspection of the Court (documentary evidence)[6].

KIT

A Crime Scene Management Kit is a collection of specialized tools, equipment, and materials used by law enforcement officers and forensic professionals to efficiently and systematically manage, investigate, and document a crime scene.

Evidence Protection Procedure[7]

Sample	Collection Method	Packing and preservation	Precaution
Wet Blood			
Liquid Blood	In EDTA vial/ tube or transfer on cotton gauze cloth or collect on FTA Card.	Air dry and keep in a paper envelope.	Use of disposable syringe for collection of blood in the EDTA vial/tube or FTA card. Do not handle samples with bare hands.
Wet clotted blood	Collect in sterile tubes and add equal volume of normal saline solution or transfer into	Air dry and keep in a paper envelope.	Do not handle samples with bare hands.

[6] *The Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (1 of 1872), s. 3 and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (47 of 2023), s. 2(e)*
[7] *"Guidelines for collection, storage and transportation of Crime Scene DNA samples For Investigating Officers" - DIRECTORATE OF FORENSIC SCIENCES SERVICES, MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, GOVT.OF INDIA*

	cotton gauze cloth.		
Wet Clothing of victim and suspect (s)	Thoroughly air dried at room temperature and collect whole samples or cuttings with control.	Pack separately in a paper envelope or paper bag.	Never try to pack the clothes dry or wet in an airtight container or polythene bag.
Blood stained Objects (such as knife)	Thoroughly air dried at room temperature and collected.	Packed the item in a paper envelope/bag or cotton cloth depending on the size of the object.	Do not handle evidence with a bare hand.
Blood Crust/ Stain/Spatter Crime scene unmovable surface floor, all etc.	Scrap the crust onto paper with scalpel or transfer onto a moistened clean cotton gauze cloth by rubbing against the stain.	Air dry and pack in a paper envelope. Collect proper negative control from the adjacent area.	Never use a polythene bag for packing.
Blood Stain on Weapon and other small movable object.	Allow the stain to dry and collect the whole item.	Pack in a paper envelope and keep it at room temperature.	Never use a polythene bag for packing. Never forwarded Loaded firearms.
Dried blood stains and other body fluid			
Blood stained on Vehicle, carpet, wall paper, wooden object etc	Cut the stain area. Collect the negative control cutting as control from the adjacent area.	Allow to dry in room temperature or shade. Pack each cutting separately.	Always document the stains pattern properly before removing. Do not mix stains from different locations. Collect scraps of different spots in separate packets.
Dried blood stained on Object or crime scene.	Collect the samples with sterile cotton cloth swab.	Air dry the swab and pack in a paper envelope.	Do not handle evidence with a bare hand.
Semen stain	Collect the samples with sterile cotton cloth swab.	Air dry the swab and pack in paper envelope	Do not handle evidence with a bare hand.
Saliva	Collect the samples with sterile cotton cloth swab.	Air dry the swab and pack in paper envelope	Do not handle evidence with a bare hand.
	The liquid urine sample is collected using a	Air dry the swab and pack in paper	Do not handle evidence with

Urine	syringe and the dried urine sample is collected using a sterile Cotton cloth swab.	envelope	a bare hand.
Fragmented Tissue/organ.	Tissue/ Organ should be placed in a clean container having normal saline.	Use a thermocol box stuffed with an ice/coolant pack.	Never add any fixatives like formalin.
Others evidences			
Bone/Teeth	Preserve at least two intact bones, reference Femur, Tibia, humerus, Teeth (Molar 2 - 3)	Allow to dry completely in air and pack in a paper packet / envelope.	Completely burnt bones are not useful for forensic tests.
Hair & Fiber	Use tweezers/forceps during collection. Collect reference samples from the victim and suspect 50 - 100 standard hair should be collected.	Pack in paper envelope.	Never wash the recovery hair.
Firearms	Pick up the gun with down position the barrel of the Firearm	Pack in paper box	Never wash the recovery firearms. Do not handle evidence with a bare hand. Never forwarded Loaded firearms.
Bullet and cartridge case.	The fired bullet or empty cartridge collected by forceps	Pack in paper box	Never wash the recovery firearms. Do not handle evidence with a bare hand.
GSR	The GSR particles on the hand and firearms can be collected by tape lifting and swabbing method.	Airs dry the GSR particles and pack the item in separate paper bag.	Do not handle evidence with a bare hand.
Glass, Paint and other trace evidence.	Use tweezers/forceps during collection. If required, Scrap the crust of paint onto paper with scalpel.	Pack in a paper envelope or suitable plastic container.	Do not handle evidence with a bare hand.

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Latent prints (This type of prints are not visible our naked eyes, it required to develop before collection)	After develop the print using Powder methods like magnetic brush, white powder, black powder, fluorescent powder method and Chemical methods like Ninhydrin method, silver chloride method, iodine fuming method etc. and then Collect the prints using Photography and Tape lifting method.	Pack in a paper box or envelope.	Do not handle evidence with a bare hand.
Patent prints It is visible through our naked eyes.	These types of prints are collected usually by photography method, lifting method and tracing method.	Pack in a paper box or envelope.	Do not handle evidence with a bare hand.
Plastic prints This type of prints are found in 3D condition	They are usually collected by using plaster of paris or dental stone for casting and Photographic methods.	Pack in a paper box or envelope.	Do not handle evidence with a bare hand.

SEIZURE TO TRIAL

Chain Of Custody

The integrity of physical evidence is an essential prerequisite for its admissibility in a court of law. Physical or real evidence is considered to be the most objective and reliable evidence in a criminal investigation or trial. However, before a court can consider a piece of physical evidence for evaluation during a trial, the integrity of the evidence must be proven. Chain of custody reflects the continuity of possession of an object or a property seized during an investigation, including its movement from the point of recovery to its transport to the forensic science laboratory (F.S.L.) for examination and eventual production in the court for admission and evaluation as evidence. It primarily aims to protect the evidence by preventing contamination or tampering with the evidence.

Elements Of Chain Of Custody

Chain of custody begins as soon as the investigating officer (I.O.) takes control of the seized object in his possession during the investigation. Following are the key ingredients of the chain of custody of a seized object which should be properly documented during investigation and forensic examination[8].

[8] *Robert Longley, "What is Chain of Custody", Available on: https://www.thoughtco.com/chain-of-custody-4589132 (Last Accessed 12.10.2024)*

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(i) Description of the evidence

(ii) Identification details/ unique case identifier (e.g., case number/property number)

(iii) Place of seizure/collection

(iv) Place of storage

(v) Identity of persons having possession of the evidence and purpose thereof

(vi) Details of handling of the evidence e.g., analysis, sampling, re-packaging.

(vii) Time and date-related information

(viii) Particulars of sealing including documentation regarding any removal of seal/re-sealing

it can be understood that there are two fundamental elements in the chain of custody. ***Chronological***[9]***,*** i.e., documentation regarding the sequence of movement of seized object in the period between seizure and production before the Court during the trial. It is mandatory to note the date and time along with the signatures of persons involved during each movement/transfer of the seized object. ***Logical***[10]***,*** i.e., justification and reasonableness of handling of the seized object by various persons, including custody, control, transport or analysis. Each movement/ transfer of seized object shall be done only in the interest of investigation, prosecution and production before the court.

The chain of custody documentation shall satisfy both the above requirements for admissibility of evidence. During the trial, the prosecution has to establish that during the entire period of transit from the point of seizure to the production before the court, duly identified and authorised persons only had custody of the seized object and all steps of transfer of evidence from one person to another were forwarded for justified purposes.

Legal Framework Of Chain Of Custody

The salient provisions concerned with the question of chain of custody in criminal laws in India

PROVISIONS IN CODE OF CRIMINAL PROCEDURE, 1973 (CRPC)

CrPC does not explicitly stipulate the requirements for chain of custody during investigation or trial. During the investigation, police are authorised to seize any material object (e.g., biological evidence, offending weapon, fingerprints)[11]. The section prescribes that every seizure should be forthwith reported to the concerned Magistrate along with the seized property.

the procedure of search only mandates signatures of at least two independent witnesses on the seizure list[12]. Prescribes for providing a copy of the seizure list to the occupant of the closed place from where the seizure is made[13] while sub-section 100 (7) contains the same provisions in case of seizure made from the person concealing any article about his person.

A receipt must be given to the arrested person showing the articles taken in possession by the police officer at the time of arrest[14]. Section 451[15] of the CrPC, which comes into operation after the production of property during enquiry or trial, does refer to "proper custody" of the property.

[9] *Pranav Kumar, "Chain of Custody for the Integrity of Evidence: A Critical Examination" ResearchGate (June - December 2024).*
[10] *Ibid.,*
[11] *Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1973), s. 102*
[12] *Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1973), s. 100*
[13] *Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1973), s. 100(6)*
[14] *Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1973), s. 51*
[15] *ORDER FOR CUSTODY AND DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY PENDING TRIAL IN CERTAIN CASES.—When any property is produced before any Criminal Court during any inquiry or trial, the Court may make such order as it thinks fit for the proper custody of such property pending the conclusion of the inquiry or trial, and, if the property is subject to speedy and natural decay, or if it is otherwise expedient so to do, the Court may, after recording such evidence as it thinks necessary, order it to be sold or otherwise disposed of.*

the admissibility of reports officers of mint or security/note printing press, officers of Forensic Science Laboratories and examiners of questioned documents even if such officer is not called as a witness[16].

PROVISIONS IN INDIAN EVIDENCE ACT, 1872 (EVIDENCE ACT)

The provisions regarding the admissibility of evidence apply to questions of chain of custody whenever raised during the inquiry or trial. The judge decides on the admissibility of evidence, and if one fact is contingent upon a second fact, the judge may ask for proof of the second fact first[17]. Thus, if the chain of custody of evidence is challenged, the judge may ask for evidence to show maintenance of the chain of custody before the evidence is considered.

As per the explanation to section 90 of the Evidence Act "proper custody" means documents being in their natural place and custody.

In practice, courts in India usually do not insist on any formal chain of custody form, as is the case in several Western jurisdictions. Instead, chain of custody is examined both on the basis of documents and statements of witnesses. During the trial station diary/general diary, Malkhana (store room)/Property register, Receipt/dispatch register, road certificate/challan and acknowledgement receipt of the laboratory are produced by the prosecution in the Court to prove chain of custody. Some FSLs now insist on the preparation of chain of custody form by I.O. in case of biological evidence.

Chain Of Custody On Electronic Evidence

The acquisition and processing of electronic evidence are also obligated to adhere to the rigorous chain of custody requirements. The electronic evidence is completely an admissible evidence[18].

In **Arjun Panditrao Khotkar vs. Kailash Kushanrao Gorantyal**[19], where the validity and scope of the section were in question, a three-judge bench of Supreme Court, inter-alia, suggested for "*framing suitable rules for the retention of data involved in trial of offences, their segregation, rules of chain of custody, stamping and record maintenance, for the entire duration of trials and appeals, and also in regard to preservation of the metadata to avoid corruption*".

Judicial View

Since the chain of custody is vital for the admissibility of evidence, defence always endeavours to challenge the chain of custody during criminal trials and thereby create doubt over the integrity of evidence.

In ***Malaichamy and anr. vs. State of Tamil Nadu***[20], the Supreme Court declined to consider the seizure of offending articles which were not kept under seal by the I.O.

In ***Okafor Chukwuka Ugochukwu and anr. Vs. Narcotics Control Bureau (2020)***[21]Delhi High Court while hearing an appeal in an NDPS case pertaining to the seizure of 1.78 kilograms of cocaine, acquitted two foreign nationals due to doubts on the chain of custody. The Court observed that: *"...It is well settled that the prosecution is required to establish the complete chain as to the movement of the sample in order to establish that the same had remained intact..."*

[16] *Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1973), s. 292*
[17] *Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (2 of 1973), s. 136*
[18] *The Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (1 of 1872), s. 65B*
[19] *AIRONLINE 2020 SC 641*
[20] *AIRONLINE 2019 SC 2153*
[21] *W.P.(CRL.) 938/2020*

In ***Ashit Biswas vs. State of West Bengal***[22], Calcutta High Court, while setting aside the conviction of an accused under the NDPS Act, held that the discrepancies in the statement of witnesses regarding the chain of seized articles "*clearly snap the link before the articles seized at the spot and those produced in Court during trial, rendering the prosecution case wholly unreliable.*"

In ***Prakash Nishad vs. State of Maharashtra***[23], Supreme Court, while acquitting an accused of rape probably for the first time has elaborately dealt with the concept of chain of custody.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the paramount importance of chain of custody for evidence integrity, the following suggestions can be considered by police and forensic examiners for improving the maintenance of chain of custody.

POLICE

- Seizure proceedings shall be video recorded and recordings shall be preserved till the conclusion of the trial. If video recording cannot be done, cogent reasons thereof shall be recorded in the case diary.
- Use of computer-assisted systems such as bar code/QR code or RFID for tracking the movement of exhibits in police stations Malkhanas/store rooms and FSLs is highly recommended.
- Entries in chain of custody forms should correspond to entries in the Malkhana register, station diary, correspondence registers and other relevant documents.
- An exhibit should be opened a minimum number of times and once sealed, the seal should be removed only with the permission of the Court under proper documentation.

Forensic Science Laboratory

- FSLs should develop ISO-compliant protocols for handling and examining exhibits. The protocol should include guidelines for evidence collection, packaging, labelling, storage, transportation and transfer of custody of items
- Chain of custody forms of FSLs must be mandatorily produced along with any exhibit produced in Court.

The above said measure can lead a strong evidential validity and improvement of chain of custody which highly strengthens the criminal trials from breach of evidence.

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[22] *C.R.A. 31 of 2016*
[23] *SCC Online SC 666*