

## Case report

### “The old morgue, dumping ground of human remains”

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## Abstract

The examination of skeletal remains is primarily an area of forensic anthropology. In India, since there is no such fully developed specialized branch, the cases are mainly dealt by forensic medicine experts. Skeletal remains are all that is left of a corpse after nature has taken its course and has disposed of skin, tissue, and any other organ that may cover the skeletal frame. For the most part skeletal remains are found long after a victim has died and this may be because the body has been disposed of in order to cover up the perpetration of a crime. The paper discusses various medico-legal issues after examination of skeletal remains found in a locked room of Reserve Police Lines in Unnao.

**Key words:** Skeletal remains, Medico-legal autopsy, Post mortem room, Careless handling.

## Introduction

Skeletal remains examination is primarily an area of forensic anthropology. In India, since there is no such fully developed specialized branch, the cases are mainly dealt by forensic medicine experts<sup>[1]</sup>. Skeletal remains are all that is left of a corpse after nature has taken its course and has disposed of skin, tissue, and any other organ that may cover the skeletal frame.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the present case, numerous human skeletons were found dumped in a locked room of the Reserve Police Lines in Unnao. This room was earlier used as a post mortem room and it triggered panic as it comes barely a month later of finding of 80 decaying bodies surfacing the river Ganga near Pariyar Ghat of the district<sup>[3,4,5]</sup>. The skeletons were kept in 22-25 sacks scattered all around in the room,

located opposite the police quarters and Mahila (female) police station. Reports said a few painters were working inside the Reserve Police Lines premises, when they curiously peeped into the room through an open window and saw human remains piled up in huge number<sup>[3]</sup>. They immediately alerted the police who rushed there and a case was registered by the police and skeletal remains were kept for medico legal examination. When the police recovered skeletal remains they registered the case and the skeletal remains were sent for medicolegal autopsy<sup>[1,6]</sup>. Most of these skeletal remains were unidentified. So after the autopsy bone samples were taken for DNA examination for identification and future reference and remaining skeletal remains were disposed of by the police. This corroborated with one fact that, before the year of 2008 the

DNA examination facility was not available in that area and so the whole skeletal remains were kept until cases were not decided by the court<sup>[3,4]</sup>. The police manual also states that skeletal remains have to be kept in the police custody and must be disposed only after permission from the magistrate. The autopsy surgeon after conducting the post mortem examination of these skeletal remains handed over to the police. The investigating police officer kept these skeletal remains in that room for forthcoming mention if any need in the future.

In the year 2008 this post mortem house was shifted to some other place and the old autopsy room was locked and left overlook until the day when some labourer working there found the human remains stacked in enormous number. This may initiate unnecessary investigation by law enforcing agencies. There is a need to frame guidelines for the disposal of skeletal remains after medico legal work is over.

To resolve the issue; a five-member committee was appointed for investigation comprising of the Head of department of forensic medicine, GSVM Medical college, Kanpur; Sub-divisional magistrate, Unnao; Deputy SP, Unnao; Deputy director, FSL, Lucknow, medical officer district hospital, Unnao and the Chief pharmacist, District hospital, Unnao. After detailed examination of the skeletal remains and scrutinization of the available documents, the post mortem house team furnished their opinion as follows, The skeletal remains were kept in the room after the post mortem examination. Out of these skeletal remains the oldest one was autopsied in 28-04-1980 and the newest

one was autopsied in 12-03-2008. In the room there were 47 gunny bags containing the skeletal remains and the year of post mortem examination matched with the available document and the autopsy record. Apart from the mentioned skeletal remains, some bones were found scattered all over the room.



**Fig 1: Human skeletons found in a room at Reserve Police Lines in Unnao district.**

All these scatters were finally collected in a gunny bag and kept separately. The committee recommended that all the 47 gunny bags which were synchronized with accessible papers and autopsy register be forwarded to all concerned police station to verify any pending proceedings so that action will be taken according to court order. If no case or crime is registered and no proceeding were pending before the court than the skeletal remains must be disposed off as per rule.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Significance of appropriate disposal of skeletal remains and bones after autopsy and medico legal examination should be emphasized. This will avoid unnecessary

attention from the public and media as well as added burden on police personal, doctor, laboratory & other associated workers, who are already overburdened with the cases. Police personal should take care in this regards and human remains especially unidentified ones must be properly disposed-off as per prevalent practice in the area, region and country. Every civilized person must show respect to the dead. Meticulous autopsy should be conducted in such cases with careful interpretation of circumstantial evidence including clothing, bones and other exhibits found at the crime scene. Examination should preferably be done with assistance from FSL personal<sup>[1]</sup>. There is a need for proper guidelines for the disposal of such human remains otherwise it will make the public suspicious and law enforcing agencies will come into the picture unnecessarily<sup>[6,7]</sup>.

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