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INTERACTION WITH MRS. ANU SEBASTIAN

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We had the opportunity to interact with Mrs. Anu Sebastian, Scientific Officer, Forensic Psychology Division, Karnataka Forensic Science Laboratory. We asked a few questions about her experience being a forensic psychologist.

1. How well is Forensic Psychology understood in India?

For that, you'll have to divide the country into two parts - the northern part and the southern. In the northern part, Forensic Psychology is quite established, and we have a lot of case inflow as well. Even the results that the Forensic Science Laboratories (FSLs) give are reliable. Coming to the southern part of the country, we don't have that many FSLs equipped with Forensic Psychology. Bangalore, Kerala, and Chennai have also only recently started, so not much case inflow is there. Even the police don't have much idea about Forensic Psychology. Psychological evidence is only corroborative, and the court accepts this only as secondary evidence.

2. Are mental illness examinations of criminals conducted in FSLs?

We don't deal with that part where we see whether the person is mentally sane or not. Whatever cases we have gotten so far, it has only

been normal individuals who have been committing crimes. We haven't gotten cases where the person has an extreme disorder like an antisocial personality disorder or other personality disorders. That is usually dealt with by NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences) . If the court wants to see if a person is competent enough to stand trial then it is sent to NIMHANS and they do the competency test. What we do is only related to polygraph, brain mapping, and narco analysis. The other section is usually done by clinical psychologists.

3. What type of crimes are referenced to you the most?

We get different varieties of cases such as murder, theft, smuggling, and rape. Murder cases constitute 80-90% of the cases we get. We did have a theft case that involved a long list of suspects, which was quite time-consuming. Mostly it is 302 IPC (Indian Penal Code) and POCSO (Protection of Children against Sexual Offences) cases.

4. What is done when a person going on trial is suspected to be mentally ill?

If the court sees that the person is not mentally sane, then they go for a psychiatric evaluation, and as per the result, they give the ruling. Maybe they admit them into a psychiatric ward where they will be monitored often.

5. Is criminal profiling often used in India? Under what circumstances is it used?

Criminal profiling is rarely used. As far as I know, it was used in the Burari deaths case. The Delhi FSL and CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) did the criminal profiling, and they were able to identify the cause. Similarly, a 20 - 25-year-old case in Kerala also used criminal profiling where they were able to assess how the death happened. Criminal profiling is like the autopsy of the psychological state of the person, which has led to death. Western countries do give a lot of importance to Forensic Psychology as they emphasize on men

tal wellbeing, so criminal profiling is frequently practiced. However, criminal profiling needs are yet to be discovered in India. The FSLs are not into profiling since it requires experts who have 10-15 years of experience.

6. What was the first case that you worked on?

It was a murder case, and it was quite confusing. All the teams worked on the case and talked with the suspect. And we did arrive at some interesting conclusions. It was a 302 case of murder and burning.

7. What are the psychological assessments most commonly practiced in India?

We do an extensive MSE (Mental Status Examination) on the suspect and a pre-test and post-test interview. In other FSLs, even personality tests like the Draw-a-man test, 16PF (The Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire), and TAT (Thematic Apperception Test) are done. Every FSL has its own way of investigation and mode of procedure. Mostly it is personality tests; MSE and clinical interview methods, which are done before any other procedures like brain mapping, narco analysis, etc.

Myth - Test firing for a control bullet is done outdoors.

Fact - Test firing is usually done in a controlled environment such as a water tank or cotton box.