

BEYOND THE CRIME SCENE: HOW FORENSICS TURNS CLUE INTO CONVICTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Forensic science has become an indispensable component of the modern criminal justice system, fundamentally transforming the manner in which crimes are investigated, evidence is interpreted, and guilt or innocence is determined. The integration of scientific techniques such as DNA profiling, fingerprint analysis, digital forensics, and forensic psychology has significantly reduced reliance on subjective testimony and confession-based investigations. This research paper examines the role of forensic science in converting physical and psychological clues into legally sustainable convictions. It explores the importance of forensic evidence, the contribution of behavioral and psychological analysis, the evolution of legal frameworks in India, the role of forensic databases, and landmark judicial decisions that shape admissibility standards. The paper further addresses the inherent disadvantages of forensic science, including evidentiary contamination, misinterpretation, infrastructural inadequacies, and ethical concerns, while proposing mitigation strategies to enhance reliability and fairness. The study concludes that forensic science, when applied with scientific integrity and legal safeguards, serves as a powerful instrument for ensuring justice and upholding constitutional values.

KEYWORDS: Forensic Science, Criminal Justice, Scientific Evidence, Forensic Psychology, Legal Frameworks, Criminal Convictions, India.

INTRODUCTION

The administration of criminal justice has historically depended on eyewitness testimony, confessions, and circumstantial evidence as the primary means of establishing guilt or innocence. While these forms of evidence have played a foundational role in legal systems

across the world, they remain inherently vulnerable to human error, coercion, prejudice, memory distortion, and deliberate manipulation. Eyewitness accounts may be influenced by stress or suggestion, confessions may be extracted under pressure, and circumstantial evidence often requires subjective interpretation.

With the advancement of science and technology, forensic science has emerged as a critical mechanism for reducing these uncertainties by introducing objectivity, precision, and empirical reliability into criminal investigations. Forensic science involves the application of established scientific principles and systematic methodologies to legal matters, particularly in the detection, examination, interpretation, and prosecution of criminal activity. Its function extends beyond assisting investigative agencies, as it also equips courts with scientifically validated evidence that supports accurate fact-finding and promotes fairness in judicial decision-making.

In contemporary legal systems, forensic science functions as a vital link between the crime scene and the courtroom by transforming raw physical and digital traces into admissible legal evidence. Materials such as bloodstains, fingerprints, firearms, tool marks, electronic data, and biological samples are subjected to rigorous scientific analysis in order to reconstruct criminal events and establish connections between victims, suspects, and locations.

The growing sophistication of criminal activity in India—including cybercrime, financial fraud, organized violence, and transnational offenses—has made traditional investigative methods increasingly insufficient, thereby necessitating a greater reliance on scientific and technological tools. As a result, forensic science has assumed a central role in strengthening investigations and enhancing the credibility of prosecutions. However, despite its immense potential, the expanding use of forensic science also raises significant concerns related to misuse, over-dependence on scientific evidence, procedural lapses, and the protection of constitutional rights. Consequently, this paper critically examines the role of forensic science in converting investigative clues into criminal convictions while emphasizing the need to balance scientific advancement with legal safeguards, ethical responsibility, and judicial oversight.

Importance of Forensic Science in Criminal Investigations

Forensic science plays a vital role in strengthening the credibility of criminal investigations by introducing objective and verifiable evidence. Unlike oral testimony, which may be

influenced by fear, bias, or faulty memory, forensic evidence derives its value from scientific analysis and standardized procedures. The importance of forensic science lies in its ability to establish facts beyond reasonable doubt, thereby reinforcing the foundational principles of criminal jurisprudence.

One of the most significant contributions of forensic science is its role in identifying individuals involved in criminal acts. DNA profiling, for instance, allows investigators to match biological material recovered from crime scenes with suspects or victims with a high degree of accuracy. Similarly, fingerprint analysis continues to be a cornerstone of criminal identification due to the uniqueness and permanence of fingerprint patterns. These techniques not only assist in identifying perpetrators but also help exclude innocent individuals from suspicion.

Forensic science also aids in reconstructing crime scenes and understanding the sequence of events surrounding an offense. Techniques such as bloodstain pattern analysis, forensic pathology, and ballistics examination help investigators determine the manner of death, the type of weapon used, and the positions of individuals during the commission of a crime. In addition, digital forensics has become increasingly important in an era dominated by electronic communication, enabling investigators to recover emails, call records, location data, and deleted files that may prove decisive in criminal trials.

Equally important is the role of forensic science in preventing wrongful convictions. Post-conviction forensic testing has led to the exoneration of numerous individuals who were convicted based on unreliable or coerced evidence. By providing an impartial scientific basis for decision-making, forensic science enhances public confidence in the justice system and promotes the rule of law.

Understanding Psychological Behaviour through Forensic Science

Forensic science is not confined solely to the examination of physical, biological, or digital evidence; it also encompasses the systematic study of human behavior and mental processes associated with criminal conduct. Within this broader framework, forensic psychology has emerged as a specialized and increasingly significant branch that applies established psychological theories and methods to legal and investigative contexts. Its primary objective is to understand criminal behavior, evaluate mental competence, and assist courts in making informed judicial decisions. By examining cognitive functioning, emotional states,

personality traits, and behavioral patterns, forensic psychology provides crucial insights into the motives, intentions, and psychological conditions of offenders, thereby complementing traditional forensic techniques.

Forensic psychologists play an important role in criminal investigations by constructing behavioral profiles derived from crime scene analysis, victim characteristics, and recurring patterns of offending. Such profiling is especially valuable in cases involving serial offenses, sexual crimes, terrorism, and violent conduct, where material evidence alone may be insufficient to identify the perpetrator. Understanding the offender's mindset, decision-making processes, and behavioral signatures enables law enforcement agencies to narrow suspect pools, anticipate future actions, and refine investigative strategies. In addition to profiling, forensic psychologists conduct psychological evaluations to determine whether an accused individual possesses the mental capacity to stand trial, comprehend the nature of legal proceedings, and meaningfully participate in their defense. These assessments are essential for ensuring that trials are conducted in accordance with principles of fairness and due process.

Within the Indian legal framework, the application of forensic psychological techniques such as narco-analysis, polygraph examinations, and brain mapping has been subjected to rigorous constitutional scrutiny due to their potential impact on individual liberties. The Supreme Court of India, in the landmark decision of *Selvi v. State of Karnataka (2010)*¹, unequivocally held that the involuntary administration of these techniques violates the right against self-incrimination guaranteed under Article 20(3) and the right to personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution.

At the same time, the Court acknowledged the limited investigative value of such methods by permitting their voluntary use under strict procedural safeguards, including informed consent and judicial oversight. The Court further emphasized that the results obtained from these techniques cannot constitute substantive evidence or serve as the sole basis for conviction, and must always be corroborated by independent and legally admissible evidence. This judicial stance highlights the delicate balance that must be maintained between the pursuit of effective criminal investigation and the protection of fundamental rights, reinforcing the principle that scientific advancement cannot come at the cost of constitutional guarantees.

Case Laws Highlighting the Role of Forensic Science

Judicial decisions have played a decisive role in shaping the admissibility and scope of forensic evidence in criminal trials. Courts have consistently emphasized the importance of scientific evidence while cautioning against its uncritical acceptance. In *Tomaso Bruno v. State of Uttar Pradesh*², the Supreme Court observed that failure to collect and present scientific evidence, particularly electronic evidence, may weaken the prosecution's case. The Court highlighted the growing relevance of forensic tools in ensuring fair investigations.

The role of forensic science was prominently demonstrated in the *Nirbhaya case (2012)*³, where DNA evidence and forensic medical examinations were instrumental in identifying the perpetrators and establishing the brutality of the offense. The case illustrated how scientific evidence can strengthen prosecution arguments and support the imposition of proportionate punishment.

More recently, in *Amlesh Kumar v. State of Bihar (2025)*, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the constitutional prohibition on forced narco-analysis and emphasized the concept of "mental privacy" as an integral component of personal liberty. The judgment reflects the judiciary's evolving understanding of forensic psychology and its constitutional limitations in the digital age.

Legal Framework Governing Forensic Science in India

Judicial interpretation has played a crucial role in defining the admissibility, reliability, and limitations of forensic evidence in criminal trials. Indian courts have repeatedly acknowledged the growing importance of scientific and technological evidence in modern investigations, while simultaneously cautioning against its mechanical or unquestioned acceptance. The judiciary has emphasized that forensic evidence must be collected, analyzed, and presented in accordance with established legal and scientific standards to ensure fairness and accuracy in criminal proceedings. This balanced approach reflects the courts' recognition that while forensic science can significantly enhance the truth-seeking function of trials, it must not override principles of due process or be treated as infallible.

In *Tomaso Bruno v. State of Uttar Pradesh*, the Supreme Court underscored the necessity of incorporating scientific and electronic evidence into criminal investigations, particularly in an era where technological tools are widely available. The Court observed that the failure of investigative agencies to collect and produce scientific evidence, including electronic records

such as call data and surveillance footage, may adversely affect the prosecution's case and raise doubts about the credibility of the investigation.

This judgment highlighted the evolving duty of law enforcement agencies to employ forensic tools effectively and transparently, thereby strengthening the evidentiary foundation of criminal trials and ensuring procedural fairness.

The significance of forensic science was further demonstrated in the landmark *Nirbhaya case* (2012), where DNA profiling, forensic medical examinations, and crime scene analysis played a decisive role in identifying the accused and establishing the nature and severity of the offense. The extensive use of scientific evidence in this case not only reinforced the prosecution's narrative but also reduced reliance on testimonial inconsistencies, thereby ensuring a higher degree of evidentiary certainty. The case illustrated how forensic science can support proportionate sentencing by providing courts with objective insights into the circumstances and impact of the crime, particularly in cases involving extreme violence.

In a more recent development, the Supreme Court in *Amlesh Kumar v. State of Bihar*⁴ (2025) reaffirmed the constitutional prohibition on the involuntary use of forensic psychological techniques such as narco-analysis. The Court emphasized the concept of "mental privacy" as an essential component of personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution, reflecting a progressive judicial understanding of cognitive autonomy in the digital and scientific age. This judgment illustrates the judiciary's evolving engagement with forensic psychology and underscores the need to impose constitutional limitations on investigative methods that intrude into the mental domain of individuals. Together, these judicial pronouncements demonstrate that courts play a pivotal role in regulating the use of forensic science, ensuring that its application advances justice without compromising fundamental rights.

Role of Forensic Databases

Effective coordination among investigative agencies is significantly enhanced through the use of forensic databases, which have become an integral component of contemporary criminal justice systems. DNA databanks, fingerprint repositories, and digital evidence management systems enable law enforcement authorities to identify repeat offenders, establish patterns of criminal behavior, solve long-pending cold cases, and link offenses committed across different jurisdictions. These databases allow for rapid comparison and verification of forensic data, thereby improving investigative efficiency and reducing dependency on

traditional, time-consuming methods. In the Indian context, the gradual expansion of forensic infrastructure, including the strengthening of Central and State Forensic Science Laboratories, reflects a growing institutional commitment to incorporating scientific techniques into criminal investigations and enhancing the overall credibility of law enforcement processes.

In India, the expansion of forensic infrastructure, including the strengthening of Central and State Forensic Science Laboratories, reflects a growing institutional commitment to scientific investigation. This commitment has been further reinforced by legislative developments such as the *Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, 2022*, which authorizes the collection and preservation of biometric and biological data of certain categories of individuals for the purpose of criminal investigation and identification.

However, the creation and maintenance of expansive forensic databases under the framework of the *Criminal Procedure (Identification) Act, 2022*, have also generated serious ethical and legal concerns. The Act permits the collection of sensitive personal data, including fingerprints, iris scans, and biological samples, thereby raising questions related to data security, informed consent, scope of use, and duration of retention. In the absence of comprehensive data protection legislation and independent oversight mechanisms, there exists a substantial risk of unauthorized access, misuse, or surveillance overreach. Such concerns are particularly significant in light of the constitutional right to privacy recognized by the Supreme Court, which requires that any intrusion into personal data must satisfy standards of legality, necessity, and proportionality. Without adequate procedural safeguards and accountability structures, forensic databases may undermine individual privacy and personal liberty.

Consequently, while the 2022 Act aims to strengthen investigative capabilities, its implementation must be carefully regulated to ensure that the pursuit of efficient law enforcement remains consistent with constitutional guarantees and ethical standards.s.

Disadvantages of Forensic Science and Their Mitigation

Despite its significant contributions to the criminal justice system, forensic science is not free from inherent limitations and practical challenges. One of the most persistent concerns is the risk of evidence contamination, which may occur at various stages of the investigative process, including collection at the crime scene, transportation, storage, and laboratory

examination. Improper handling techniques, inadequate preservation methods, or non-compliance with established protocols can severely compromise the integrity and reliability of forensic results, thereby undermining their evidentiary value in court. Even minor lapses in procedure can lead to erroneous conclusions, raising doubts about the credibility of scientific findings and potentially affecting the outcome of criminal trials.

Another major limitation lies in the misinterpretation of forensic evidence, which often arises from cognitive bias, lack of uniform standards, or insufficient expertise on the part of forensic analysts. In the absence of standardized methodologies and quality control mechanisms, forensic conclusions may be influenced by preconceived assumptions, investigative pressures, or confirmation bias. Furthermore, systemic issues such as inadequate funding, shortage of trained forensic professionals, and insufficient laboratory infrastructure continue to hamper the effective functioning of forensic institutions, particularly in developing jurisdictions. These deficiencies frequently result in delays, case backlogs, and prolonged trials, thereby impeding the timely delivery of justice and diminishing public confidence in the criminal justice system.

In addition to these structural challenges, an over-reliance on forensic evidence poses its own set of risks. Popular media portrayals of forensic science often create unrealistic expectations regarding the infallibility and speed of scientific investigations, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the “CSI effect.” This perception may influence judges, lawyers, and jurors to accord disproportionate weight to forensic evidence, sometimes at the expense of evaluating its limitations and the broader context of the case. To address these concerns, it is essential to adopt uniform and transparent forensic protocols, invest in continuous training and capacity-building of forensic professionals, and establish independent regulatory and accreditation bodies to ensure accountability and quality assurance. Equally important is the need to enhance judicial awareness and legal literacy regarding the strengths and limitations of forensic science, so that scientific evidence is assessed critically and responsibly. Through such measures, the reliability and credibility of forensic science can be strengthened while minimizing the risk of error and injustice..

CONCLUSION

Forensic science has undeniably reshaped the landscape of the criminal justice system by transforming seemingly insignificant physical, biological, and digital traces into persuasive and legally admissible evidence capable of securing criminal convictions. Its reliance on

scientific rigor, methodological precision, and technological advancement has significantly enhanced the accuracy and reliability of criminal investigations, thereby reducing dependence on subjective testimony and minimizing the scope for arbitrary decision-making. By providing courts with objective tools for evaluating facts, forensic science strengthens the credibility of judicial outcomes and reinforces public confidence in the administration of justice.

Nevertheless, the expanding influence of forensic science must be exercised with caution, responsibility, and unwavering respect for constitutional and ethical principles. Scientific evidence, despite its apparent objectivity, is susceptible to error, misuse, and misinterpretation if not governed by robust legal safeguards and professional standards. Addressing these challenges requires continuous legal reform, ethical oversight, investment in forensic infrastructure, and the development of standardized practices that ensure transparency and accountability. When integrated thoughtfully within the legal framework and subjected to judicial scrutiny, forensic science can continue to function not merely as a tool for conviction, but as a balanced and reliable guardian of justice.

Ultimately, its true value lies in its ability to uphold fairness, protect individual rights, and contribute to a criminal justice system that is both effective and just.

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