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Doyens of Forensic Medicine - 1

Lallukhum Fimate (1950-)

Dr. Lallukhum Fimate was born on 1st March 1950, in Parbung Village of Manipur, India. Despite having his education in the most deplorable of circumstances, he rose to the position of the Head of Department of Forensic Medicine in a leading Medical College of India, and is now rated as one of the finest forensic scientists of the world. This only shows this scientist's grit, determination and courage, and I hope his life will be a guiding light to the aspiring youngsters wanting to become leading forensic scientists.

Professor Lallukhum Fimate



Dr. Fimate had his primary education in a mission school deep into the remote rural area where only one teacher taught the entire students of about 300 consisting of Nursery to class VI. His high school education was completed in Sielmat Christian High School. This was the nearest good school from his village, and it was not at a distance of 10, 20 or even 50 Km. It was about 220 Km from his village, and as there was no motorable road, it took him 4 days to reach there by foot! One can imagine how difficult it must have been for him to come back home and meet his parents even on a monthly basis.

From his primary school days itself, Dr. Fimate wanted to become a surgeon. "My dream was to become a surgeon and run a Mission type of Govt. rural hospital in my village, but it could not be achieved," recalls Dr. Fimate ruefully, with a nostalgic gleam in his eyes. But what is Surgery's loss is Forensic Medicine's gain. If he had gone to surgery, no doubt the world would have seen a fine surgeon, but it would have never seen such a fine crime scientist.

Dr. Fimate joined the MBBS course in Andhra University and completed it in 1972. After serving for a few years as Medical Officer in the Government, he did his post graduation in Forensic Medicine from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, and completed this course in 1981. Since

then he has been teaching Forensic Medicine in Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal and became Professor and Head of the Department in 1992.

Discussing a technical point with his German Colleagues



There are a number of interesting cases which Dr. Fimate has solved. To tell the details of all, or even to enumerate all of them would be an impossible task, but we will take up some of his most important cases. This will give an insight into the depth of learning of this great crime scientist. Once a 30 year old man was found dead in his rented house. He was declared dead as a result of heart failure which was confirmed by post-mortem report. The post-mortem was done by some other doctor. He was subsequently buried according to Christian religious rites.

The relatives refused to believe the heart failure story as they never heard him of having any such problems. They submitted a complaint to the magistrate requesting him to investigate into the cause of death.

About 3 months later exhumation was ordered and the medico legal investigation was conducted by Dr. Fimate. The body was well preserved in the deep grave, and it told its tale to Dr. Fimate very clearly. Of course only experts like Dr. Fimate can listen to the dead- not every one. Dead have their own language, and one has to learn their language thoroughly. This language is in the form of physical signs which are found on the body.

Dr. Fimate found that the heart was healthy. The internal body organs did not show signs of any disease. However the skull showed a signature fracture. This is a special kind of fracture, caused by a blunt heavy instrument in such a way, that its pattern is reflected in the fracture. Dr. Fimate determined that this fracture had been caused before death, and this clearly reversed the whole story. After Dr. Fimate submitted his findings, a new investigation was instituted and the culprits who were colleagues of the deceased were arrested and confessed to the crime.

In yet another case, a couple went to another village to collect fishes for their fishing farm. In that village, while they were taking tea in a small hotel, the wife suddenly had severe headache and a doctor was immediately called but was unable to help. She died within one hour. The doctor issued a death certificate giving the cause of death as heart failure and was buried as such.

Relatives of the deceased were later on suspicious of the cause of death from the behavior of her husband. They lodged a complaint to the magistrate and appealed to find the cause and nature of the death.

With W. Eisenmenger of Germany during an International Conference



Two and half months later, under orders of the magistrate, medico legal investigation of the death was ordered and Dr. Fimate conducted the investigation. The body was exhumed after two and a half months of burial in a watery soil. The body was putrefied but could still be identified as adipocere was formed. Adipocere is a wax like substance which forms from the body fats when the body is buried in watery soil. Its importance is that when it forms, the body does not putrefy further, and its features are more or less preserved. Dr. Fimate got the viscera (internal body organs) analyzed and found fatal dose of a metabolite of heroine. This confirmed the cause of death. Heroine is a dangerous drug of addiction and has rarely been used for murder. It was not clear, how the heroin reached her body organs. When the police reached her husband's place, he fled and his whereabouts are currently not known. But this clarified one thing: that the husband indeed must have been guilty, otherwise he had no need to flee away. Thus Dr. Fimate's shrewd analysis confirmed yet another cause of death.

Another of his case is also interesting and worth mentioning. In the above two cases, Dr. Fimate's analysis proved a man guilty, but sometimes the reverse may also happen, i.e. the person is wrongly accused, but the forensic scientist's report proves him not guilty. This third case falls in that category. One officer in the government was invited by his friends for a dinner one day. He did not return in the night. However the next morning his dead body was found near the gate of his house. The officer who invited him for the dinner was arrested and his Maruti car in which he picked up the deceased was seized as it showed some blood like stain.

The body was brought to Dr. Fimate for postmortem as a case of murder committed by a group of friends on financial dispute. They body was accompanied by a doctor, a relative of the victim, who strongly believed it was a murder case. The presence of a scalp laceration (a deep tear) strengthened his belief in the murder theory. Lacerations are caused when somebody hits the body with a blunt weapon.

When Dr. Fimate examined the dead body, he found that the laceration was about 5 cm in length on the side of the scalp. However when he examined the laceration closely, he discovered that it has serrated margins, and there was no blood in the edges of the tear. Had this laceration formed during life, there would have been blood in its margins. Thus it was clear that the wound was made after death. But how? The answer was supplied by the serrated margins.

These margins are formed when rats eat away the body. Thus it was established that it was not a true laceration, but a postmortem tear caused by rodent bite. This finding went a long way in proving the accused innocent.

With his colleagues (from left: 1. Dr. Anil Aggrawal, Dr. S.K. Khanna, Dr. Fimate, Dr. Fimate's daughter, Dr. Fimate's wife, Dr. Balbir Kaur)



Furthermore there were no bloodstains on the shirts or on the body. The lungs and the windpipe were filled with food particles mixed with mucus. The air tubes leading to lungs were congested, i.e. engorged with blood. The blood revealed alcohol on examination. The stomach contents were strongly smelling of alcohol. It is well known that if a person is drunk, he can inhale food particles during eating. This clearly indicated that the person had died due to food particles getting impacted in his air tubes rather than someone hitting him with a blunt weapon. These findings helped the accused and the police had to release them from custody. The blood like stain on the car was later found to be a *paan* (betel leaf stuffed with lime and catechu: very commonly consumed in India after food as a digestive) stain. People who chew *paan* often spit here and there and the spit may look like blood stain. It was a *paan* stain giving the appearance of a blood stain.

One can go on and on telling Dr. Fimate's interesting cases. The list is endless. But these three cases can give the depth of learning and deduction powers that Dr. Fimate is blessed with.

Dr. Fimate is having a God fearing religious family. He was married in 1977 to Mrs. Thangneikim. His eldest daughter Miss Olivia Fimlalkim is 19 years old and is studying medicine. His son Lalroubul Fimate, 15 year old and his twin sister Phirthangmoi are reading in class X and want to become a crime scientist just like their father. Youngsters and other persons who want more information on Dr. Fimate and his life may want to write to him at Forensic Medicine Department, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal-795 004, Manipur, India.

Dr. Fimate has one of the best departments of forensic medicine in India. One of the star attractions of his department is the "Wound Man". This is the statue of a man, who is wounded by several weapons. Basically this statue tells even a non-pathologist of the innumerable ways in which a man may be wounded. Everyone who comes to this department would like to get himself photographed with this statue. When this author visited Dr. Fimate's department recently to interview him, even he wanted to have this photograph taken.

From 25 to 27 March 1998, Dr. Fimate organized a very successful International Conference of Forensic Medicine at Manipur in which several forensic luminaries from all over the world took part. In the recently concluded conference of the Indian Academy of Forensic Medicine (XXI Annual Conference held from 5th to 8th February 2000), Dr. Fimate was elected President of the Academy by a huge margin.

Dr. Fimate loves traveling and has been sent by the World Health Organization to some of the best forensic medicine centers in the World, namely in Canada, UK and Germany. His German counterparts have been so impressed with him, that recently they came to visit him in a conference organized by him. When I asked Dr. Fimate, if he loves seeing TV, he told me coyly that he enjoys watching Discovery channel. The answer was quite expected. A person like him couldn't by engaged by any lesser channel!

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