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Scar by 'Branding': Alphabet "R".

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Case Report

Picture 1: English letter R branded along with a usual tattoo



Please click all pics to enlarge

See photograph 1. It shows the tattoo marks of initials “P.D.”. These are the initials of the name of the deceased. But along with this tattooing, photograph also shows an interesting finding – a scar in the form of English alphabet ‘R’. This scar is produced by ‘Branding’ (burns by solid object). It is obvious that this scar was not the result of any accidental burns.

It is known that psychiatric patient would injure themselves either by weapons or by hot objects. Such injuries would, in due course produce scars. Such injuries and scars are well documented in the literature.[1]

We are also aware of branding (application of heated objects on abdomen) as treatment of pain in abdomen prevailing in rural regions of India. Such applications would certainly produce scars corresponding to the size and shape of the heated object comes in contact with the body. In colloquial language it is known as ‘Dam’. Commonly ‘Dams’ are inflicted on abdomen. In our experience of thirty five years of witnessing and conducting about fifteen thousand postmortem examinations it is the first time that we observed this type of scarring.

We have tried to search literature but we could not find any such case.

It was unusual and required investigation.

The deceased was adult male of 23 years of age. He committed suicide by hanging.

The ‘R’ was on the front of left forearm and person was right handed.

Presumably it was produced by either himself or with his consent. At the time of death he was 23 years of age. And he died by committing suicide. It amply suggests that deceased had ‘unstable mind’. In India people do not commonly go to psychiatrist very easily and very early. Therefore, we are not in a position to comment upon which psychiatric disease the deceased was suffering from? On interrogation family members did not come forward to throw any light on the scar R. Presumably they did not know anything about it. Considering his tender age and unmarried status we presume that the R could be related to either his friend or more probably girl friend.

Photographs 2 and 3 show ligature mark of hanging on the neck.

References

(1) Gupta B.D. and Vaghela, P.C. Multiple scars of varying age- Self inflicted healed injuries in a psychiatric person. Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, 2009; Vol. 10, No. 2 (July - December 2009): http://anilaggrawal.com/ij/vol_010_no_002/poster/poster001.html. (Back to [citation] in text)

(N.B. Click all pictures to enlarge!)

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