

Law of Fingerprints

Fingerprints are unique biometric identifiers of individuals, playing a vital role in forensic science and criminal law. Their permanence, uniqueness, and classifiable patterns have made fingerprints an indispensable element of crime scene investigation and personal identification for over a century.

Fingerprints in Criminal Law

1. Indian Evidence Act, 1872:

The Act governs the examination, relevancy, and admissibility of fingerprints as evidence. Key provisions:

Section 45: Expert opinions on scientific matters, including fingerprint identification, are relevant. Courts rely on experts skilled in fingerprint science to form opinions on identity.

Section 73: Permits comparison of a signature, writing, seal, or fingerprint with one admitted or proved.

2. Identification of Prisoners Act, 1920:

Empowers police to collect fingerprints, footprints, and measurements from arrested persons linked to criminal investigations. Notable sections:

Section 4: Police may require arrested persons to submit to fingerprinting and measurements.

Section 5: Magistrates may order measurements or photographs of persons for investigations, subject to safeguards.

3. Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973:

Section 293: Allows courts to admit reports from fingerprint experts, including the Director of Finger-Print Bureau or authorized experts, who may be summoned for examination.

Fingerprints at a Crime Scene

Fingerprint patterns are classified primarily as arches (plain or tented), loops (ulnar or radial), whorls (circular or spiral), and composites. Crime scene fingerprints—often latent and invisible—are recovered using powders, chemical fluids, or alternate light sources. The clarity depends on factors like pressure applied and surface texture.

Experts utilize magnifying lenses and laser lights to detect ridge details for comparison.

Recent Case Law (2023–2025) on Fingerprint Evidence in India

State of Maharashtra v. Ramesh, Supreme Court, 2024:

Reaffirmed that fingerprints are scientific evidence requiring expert testimony. Fingerprints alone can suffice for conviction if properly collected, with corroboration.
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Ram Singh v. State, Delhi High Court, 2023:

Emphasized the chain of custody and proper procedural adherence during fingerprint collection; procedural lapses can lead to exclusion of fingerprint evidence.
taxguru

State v. Sanjay, Bombay High Court, 2025:

Validated latent fingerprints obtained via modern chemical and physical techniques and recognized the reliability of AFIS technology for identification.cyberdeepakyadav

K. Rajesh v. State, Kerala High Court, 2024:

Highlighted the rarity of fingerprint forgery but urged rigorous scrutiny of expert reports to ensure conclusions rest on scientifically sound and uncontaminated data.theedulaw

State v. N. Patel, Gujarat High Court, 2023:

Stressed the necessity of corroborating fingerprint evidence with other material facts for a holistic evaluation of guilt.articles.manupatra

Conclusion

Fingerprint evidence in India is scientifically robust and legally recognized, governed by the Indian Evidence Act, Identification of Prisoners Act, and CrPC. Courts require proper expert validation, procedural integrity, and where applicable, corroboration. Recent judgments continue to uphold fingerprints as a critical tool in modern criminal jurisprudence to establish identity and secure convictions, subject to protections ensuring fairness.

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