Hindu

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Inside Delhi's *malkhanas* where crime evidence are stored

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It's 9.30 a.m. and assistant sub-inspector Jag Parvesh, 53, in his Delhi Police uniform, is all set to leave for Tis Hazari court in the northern part of the city. He has pistols packed in a plastic box with a barcode ID. Mr. Parvesh is incharge of the Civil Lines police station *malkhana* (*mal*) meaning property, (*khana* meaning space), a storehouse of items seized by the police in a case during investigation, which forms crucial evidence in a court of law.

He calls it a "stressful job with too many responsibilities and too few hands".

Under him, are 2,451 exhibits of all kinds: blood samples, hair, body parts (stored in a freezer), pieces of cloth, cash and jewellery, knives, arms and ammunition, illicit liquor and more. When cash and jewellery or other valuables are caught, they are deposited in a bank.

Collect exhibits

It's his job to collect exhibits from the investigating officer, who visits the crime scene.

Mr. Parvesh, from Bhagpat in Uttar Pradesh, joined the Delhi Police force in 1990 after Class XII, and has been handling the *malakhana* since July 2020.

At the court, he spends hours waiting for his turn to present the exhibit. Then he drives to Karkardooma Court or Rouse Avenue Court to present evidence for another case. He's done by 5.30 p.m., heading back to the police station to prep for the next day.



Crucial storehouse: A *malkhana* room at the Model Town police station in Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

In his absence, there's a clerk who manages the heavily secured *malkhana*. Every year in January, a new register is opened for fresh cases, each containing the FIR details and evidence.

Once the exhibit leaves the station limits for Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) inspection, a road certificate is required. When a court orders a certain exhibit to be produced, an order is needed, Mr. Parvesh says.

In south Delhi's Chittaranjan Park, six or seven vehicles involved in accidents are parked outside the police station, all technically under the *malkhana*.

Inside the station's *malkhana* sits head constable Rajender Prasad Kapooria, 35, who is from Jaipur, and joined the force in 2008.

It's 37 degrees Celsius: "It's hot, but I can't leave the room," he says, adding that no one, not even the station house officer or the investigating officer, can access the room. It remains locked when he's not there.

Manoj Kumar, 50, at the Model Town police station, in charge of 1,710 items, says trials continue for years, and earlier case properties could get misplaced. "Thanks to barcodes today, it's easy to identify a certain case property," says Mr. Kumar.

The shift to digitisation that took place in 2018, needed some getting used to. Rajesh Kumar, 33, Mr. Manoj Kumar's clerk, says he didn't know how to use a computer: "I had to learn, but I'm equipped now," he says.

It's a stressful job, because as the custodian of evidence, if a piece gets lost, a case under IPC 409 (criminal breach of trust) is registered against the *malkhana* manager.