

Indian Supreme Court Upholds Acquittal: DNA Match Could Not Fill Gaps in Murder Evidence

India's Supreme Court upheld Anchla's acquittal: an accepted DNA match did not prove when she was at the scene, while unreliable witnesses and investigation gaps left the chain incomplete.

State of Himachal Pradesh v Anchla | Supreme Court of India | 1 October 2026

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What the Supreme Court decided

India's Supreme Court upheld Anchla alias Chanchla's acquittal in a prosecution for the murders of her stepmother and minor stepbrother. The State relied on last-seen testimony, a bleeding thumb injury, recovered keys and a mobile phone, and a DNA match between her blood and blood lifted from a cabinet in the victims' house. Those circumstances did not prove a complete chain pointing only to her guilt.

The important distinction is that the Court accepted the forensic report as it stood. It did not hold that DNA profiling is generally unreliable. The match established a possible connection with the house, which Anchla regularly visited, but did not establish when the blood was deposited or that she committed the murders. Weaknesses in the other evidence left that gap unfilled.

In *The State of Himachal Pradesh v Anchla @ Chanchla*, 2026 INSC 1074, Criminal Appeal No. 166 of 2019, Justices Manoj Misra and Vijay Bishnoi dismissed the State's appeal on 1 October 2026. Justice Misra authored the sixty-page judgment.

The prosecution case and the earlier acquittal

On 7 September 2011, Bhagi Ram reported that his daughter Mithilesh Kumari and her son Bhupinder Singh had not been seen for six or seven days and that a foul smell was coming from their house. Police found their bodies inside. Medical evidence established death by strangulation.

The prosecution alleged that Anchla had visited the house on 31 August 2011, returned to Chamba in a taxi after midnight with a bleeding thumb, and stayed in a hotel. It claimed that her father had left property to the boy and that she committed the murders to obtain that property. It also relied on recoveries allegedly made following her disclosure.

The Sessions Court at Chamba convicted her under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code on 7 November 2012 in Sessions Trial No. 48 of 2011. The Himachal Pradesh High Court set aside that conviction on 28 July 2014 in Criminal Appeal No. 28 of 2013. The Supreme Court was deciding the State's challenge to that acquittal, rather than a bail application.

Why the DNA match did not establish murder

The forensic report matched Anchla's blood profile with dried blood scraped from the trunk or cabinet and blood lifted from it using cotton thread. Other samples were too degraded to generate a profile. The Court questioned the different degradation and the absence of a control sample, but accepted the report because the expert was not called for cross-examination and the defence had not substantially demonstrated seal tampering (paragraphs 72-78).

The decisive issue was the inference to draw from the accepted match. Anchla had regularly visited her stepmother's house. A past injury causing blood to fall on the cabinet could not be ruled out. Her blood was not found on the victims' clothing or material that might have been used to strangle them (paragraph 79).

A DNA match identifies a biological connection; its significance depends on where the material was found and how it connects to the alleged offence. Here, the prosecution did not establish the date of deposition or provide reliable surrounding evidence fixing her presence at the time of the murders. The judgment does not impose a rule that DNA evidence can never support a conviction.

Last-seen evidence and uncertainty about the time of death

The autopsies were conducted on 8 September 2011. The medical opinion placed death five to seven days earlier, leaving open a later date than the night alleged by the prosecution. This uncertainty mattered because the case depended on Anchla being with the victims on 31 August.

Bhagi Ram's assertion that he saw her talking to the boy was an improvement over his earlier police statement. His delay in reporting the disappearance, despite living nearby and having a room provided in his daughter's house, also required a convincing explanation. The Court assessed those matters together with the medical evidence and investigation gaps; it did not disqualify him merely because he was related to the victims.

The taxi driver and hotel worker did not provide reliable corroboration. The hotel register was not produced. The Court also found serious problems in the investigating officer's account of how those witnesses entered the investigation.

Police must explain how a crucial witness was found

Paragraphs 40–46 examine why the investigating officer recorded the taxi driver's and hotel worker's statements. He did not adequately explain the investigative lead or disclose the dates despite questioning. Neither the accused's recorded disclosure nor the father's account explained how police identified the taxi driver.

The Court reasoned that recording a statement following a genuine clue from another witness, a call record or an accused's disclosure can be entirely proper. But unexplained sourcing of a witness, where that person has no apparent reason to volunteer the information, may raise doubt that evidence has been created rather than collected.

This was an assessment of the credibility of these witnesses in these circumstances. It does not make every police-discovered witness inadmissible or require every witness to approach police voluntarily. The missing explanation became significant alongside the other weaknesses in the case.

Missing call records and doubtful recoveries

Police obtained call records but did not collect the corresponding tower locations. The deceased's call record was not exhibited. Such information could have tested whether her phone remained active after 31 August, whether the accused's and deceased's phones were near each other, and whether the deceased's phone moved to the accused's residence. The Court treated these omissions as serious investigation lapses on these facts (paragraphs 51–57).

The key recovery also lacked a necessary foundation: the prosecution did not prove beyond reasonable doubt that the lock examined by the laboratory and produced in court was the very lock broken to enter the house. A finding that keys operated a particular lock could not connect the accused to the locked crime scene without establishing that identity (paragraphs 58–66).

The phone recovery was doubtful in the wider evidential context. The judgment does not require tower-location evidence in every criminal case; it explains why its absence mattered in this particular prosecution.

Injury and motive did not repair the broken chain

Anchla's thumb injury and treatment on 1 September were proved. She explained that her thumb had been crushed in a car door while travelling to Mani Mahesh and voluntarily supplied her treatment slip. Since the taxi and hotel witnesses were unreliable, the injury did not establish the prosecution's proposed connection with the scene of murder (paragraph 80).

The alleged bequest to the boy was not proved. The Court explained that absence of motive is not invariably fatal, but becomes important where other circumstances are inconclusive. There were also other daughters who could have benefited from removal of the boy; the prosecution had not established the strong motive it asserted (paragraphs 81-82).

The standard for reversing an acquittal

An appellate court may review the evidence and reverse an acquittal where substantial reasons justify intervention, including perversity or unjustified rejection of convincing evidence. But if acquittal is a reasonably possible view of the record, another possible view does not by itself justify reversal (paragraphs 21-25).

The Court reaffirmed the circumstantial-evidence requirements associated with *Hanumant v State of Madhya Pradesh* and *Sharad Birdhichand Sarda v State of Maharashtra*. The circumstances must be established, consistent only with guilt and form a complete chain excluding reasonable hypotheses of innocence. It found that neither the individual circumstances nor their combined effect met that standard.

Practical relevance for lawyers in Pakistan

This is an Indian decision applying Indian criminal procedure and evidence principles. It is not binding precedent in Pakistan. Its reasoning may assist comparative research on forensic inference, witness improvements, recovery identification and investigation gaps, subject to Pakistani law and binding local authorities.

For counsel, the useful question is not merely whether a DNA match exists, but what fact it actually proves. The same discipline applies to a recovered key, a phone record or a medical injury: identify the established fact, the missing link and the alternative explanation. If working on bail, the applicable further-inquiry test must be addressed separately; the final-proof and acquittal-appeal standards should not be mechanically substituted for it.

For related Pakistani analysis, read our comparison of five judgments on appeals against acquittal. The linked judgment page provides the complete Indian decision and a direct PDF download.