

Relevancy of Motive, Preparation, and Conduct in Evidence Law: A Doctrinal and Analytical Study

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Abstract: *The law of evidence plays a pivotal role in the administration of justice by determining what facts may be considered by courts in adjudicating disputes. Among the various categories of relevant facts, motive, preparation, and conduct occupy a unique and significant position. Though not constituting direct evidence of guilt or liability, these elements often provide circumstantial support that strengthens or weakens a case. This paper explores the doctrinal foundations, legal relevance, judicial interpretations, and practical implications of motive, preparation, and conduct within the framework of evidence law. By analysing statutory provisions, case laws, and theoretical underpinnings, this study highlights their evidentiary value and limitations in both civil and criminal proceedings.*

Keywords: Evidence Law, Motive, Preparation, Conduct, Relevancy, Circumstantial Evidence, Criminal Justice

I. INTRODUCTION

Evidence law governs the admissibility and relevance of facts presented before a court. The central aim is to ensure that only logically probative and legally permissible facts influence judicial decisions. Among the recognized categories of relevant facts are motive, preparation, and conduct, which are particularly important in cases relying on circumstantial evidence.

While direct evidence establishes facts explicitly, circumstantial evidence relies on inference. Motive, preparation, and conduct help form a chain of circumstances that can lead to conclusions about intent, guilt, or liability. Their relevance lies not in proving the act itself but in providing context that makes the occurrence of the act more or less probable.

CONCEPT OF RELEVANCY IN EVIDENCE LAW

Relevancy refers to the logical connection between a fact and the matter in issue. A fact is relevant if it makes the existence or non-existence of another fact more probable.

Legal systems codify relevancy rules to:

- Avoid confusion and prejudice
- Ensure fairness in trials
- Streamline judicial proceedings
- Motive, preparation, and conduct are categorized as relevant facts because they influence the probability of a fact in issue.

MOTIVE: MEANING AND LEGAL SIGNIFICANCE

Definition of Motive

Motive refers to the underlying reason that prompts a person to act in a particular way. It is the psychological force that drives human behavior.



Relevance of Motive

Motive is relevant because:

- It explains *why* a person committed an act
- It strengthens circumstantial evidence
- It helps establish intention in criminal cases

However, motive alone does not prove guilt. Its absence is not fatal if other evidence is strong.

Motive in Criminal Cases

In criminal law, motive is particularly important in cases lacking direct evidence. For example:

- Financial gain in fraud cases
- Revenge in murder cases
- Courts often consider motive as corroborative evidence.

Judicial Interpretation

Under the *Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023*, the relevancy of motive, preparation, and conduct is governed by Section 6. This provision is crucial in both civil and criminal trials because it helps courts infer intention, planning, and behavior surrounding a fact in issue.

Section 6 – Core Principle

Facts showing motive or preparation are relevant, and Conduct (previous or subsequent) of parties related to the case is also relevant, provided it influences or is influenced by the fact in issue.

RELEVANCY OF PREPARATION

Meaning:

Preparation involves steps taken before committing an act

Legal Position:

Facts showing planning or readiness for a crime are relevant. It indicates that the act was not accidental. Ex: Buying poison before poisoning someone, Purchasing weapons before an attack. Its importance Shows premeditation and helps distinguish between intention and mere suspicion.

RELEVANCY OF CONDUCT

Section 6(2) deals with conduct of parties or persons concerned.

Previous Conduct : Behaviour before the event Eg; Threatening the victim earlier

Subsequent Conduct: Behaviour after the event Eg; Absconding, destroying evidence

Legal Rule: Conduct is relevant if it: Influences, or Is influenced by the fact in issue

Clarification on Conduct:

“Conduct” does not include statements, unless they explain actions. Statements affecting conduct (e.g., warning leading to escape) may be relevant. Eg; Running away after hearing police are coming → indicates guilt Concealing evidence → relevant subsequent conduct

Section 6 of BSA emphasizes that the conduct of any party to any proceeding is relevant if it influences or is influenced by any fact-in-issue.

Motive is not the same as intention; the former is the cause of the latter. (Wigmore, §)

State of U.P. v. Rohan Singh (1996): Established that motive is critical in cases resting solely on circumstantial evidence.

Preparation becomes an attempt when the 'locus poenitentiae' (room for repentance) is passed.

Malkani v. State of Maharashtra (1973): On the relevance of conduct as a "res gestae" fact



PREPARATION: CONCEPT AND EVIDENTIARY VALUE

Definition of Preparation

Preparation refers to acts undertaken prior to the commission of an offense that facilitate its execution.

Distinction Between Preparation and Attempt

Preparation: Arranging means or measures

Attempt: Direct movement towards commission

Preparation is generally not punishable but becomes relevant in evidence law.

Relevancy of Preparation

Preparation is relevant because it indicates planning and deliberation Demonstrates intent and Connects the accused to the crime. Eg: Purchasing a weapon before a murder, Forging documents before committing fraud

Judicial Approach

Courts treat preparation as a strong indicator when it is closely connected in time and purpose, It aligns with subsequent conduct

CONDUCT :SCOPE AND INTREPRETATION

Relevancy of Conduct

Conduct is relevant when it influences or is influenced by a fact in issue, It Reflects intention, knowledge, or consciousness of guilt. Eg: Absconding after a crime, Providing false explanations, Attempting to destroy evidence

Conduct and Admissions

Certain conduct may amount to implied admissions, especially when actions indicate acknowledgment of guilt.

INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVE, CONDUCT, PREPARATION

These three elements are interconnected:

Element	Function
Motive -	<i>Explains why</i>
Preparation	- <i>Show how it was planned</i>
Conduct -	<i>Reflects behaviour before/after</i>

Together, they create a comprehensive narrative that supports or contradicts the main fact in issue.

ROLE IN CIRCUMSTANCIAL EVIDENCE

Subsequently cases based entirely on circumstantial evidence such as motive establishes intent, Preparation shows readiness, Conduct indicates guilt or innocence. Courts require that the chain of evidence be complete and all circumstances point to a single conclusion

EVIDENTIARY VALUE AND LIMITATION

Strengths : Provide contextual understanding, Support indirect proof Assist in reconstructing events

Limitations:

Motive may be speculative

Preparation may be ambiguous

Conduct may be misinterpreted

Risk of Prejudice

Improper reliance may bias judicial reasoning and it leads to wrongful convictions

1. R v. Richardson (1858): A foundational UK case on the relevance of preparation and prior conduct.



COMPARATIVE JURISPRUDENCE

Common Law Systems

In jurisdictions like the UK and USA:

Motive is relevant but not essential

Conduct is widely admissible

Preparation is evaluated contextually

Civil Law Systems

Civil law countries emphasize:

Documentary evidence

Limited reliance on psychological factors

LANDMARK ANALYSIS (Generalized)

Judicial precedents illustrate:

Convictions based on strong circumstantial chains

Acquittals where motive was absent and evidence weak

Courts emphasize caution in relying solely on these factors.

APPLICATION IN CIVIL CASES

Though primarily relevant in criminal law, these elements also apply in civil cases:

Motive in breach of contract

Conduct in negligence claims

Preparation in fraud disputes

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

While motive, preparation, and conduct are valuable:

They should not replace direct evidence

Courts must apply strict scrutiny

Contextual interpretation is essential

The balance between probative value and prejudicial effect must be maintained.

II. CONCLUSION

Motive, preparation, and conduct are indispensable components of evidence law, particularly in cases reliant on circumstantial evidence. While they do not independently establish guilt, their combined effect can significantly influence judicial outcomes. Courts must exercise caution to ensure that these elements are used as supportive tools rather than decisive factors. A nuanced understanding and careful application will enhance fairness and accuracy in the justice system.

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