

| LAW AUDIENCE JOURNAL |
| VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 2 | JUNE 2020 | ISSN (O): 2581-6705 |
| INDEXED JOURNAL | IPI VALUE (2019): 2.32 |
| IMPACT FACTOR (2018): 2.527 |

| LAW AUDIENCE JOURNAL® |
| VOLUME 2 & ISSUE 2 | JUNE 2020 |
| ISSN (O): 2581-6705 |

EDITED BY:
LAW AUDIENCE JOURNAL'S
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(ISSN (O): 2581-6705)

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“ROLE OF ANTI- SUPERSTITION LAWS IN MODERN INDIA.”

AUTHORED BY: MS. RHEA BAZAZ, CO-AUTHORED BY: MS. DEEPSHIKHA

UGHADE, SYMBIOSIS LAW SCHOOL, PUNE,

EMAIL IDS: RHEABAZAZ@GMAIL.COM,

17010125156@SYMLAW.AC.IN,

PUBLISHED AT: WWW.LAWAUDIENCE.COM.

I. ABSTRACT:

“India is a country with the second-largest population in the world and is home to all four major religions in the world. With such a large population, there is bound to be a lot of diversity in the practices and customs of each group. These practices get further diversified on the basis of the locale- rural or urban.

Due to a lack of education and a strong attachment to their roots, many villagers still hold on to their old beliefs and are said to be superstitious. The Cambridge Dictionary defines ‘superstition’ as a ‘belief which is not based on human reasoning or scientific knowledge but related to old ideas about magic and spirits.’¹ While holding on to superstitious beliefs help one to rationalize and come to terms with the things that happen around oneself, it can also lead to clouding of judgment which can lead to dire consequences for the society as a whole.

This paper talks about the importance of customs in many parts of the country and how those in positions of power use this blind belief for revenge or to exploit certain people. The authors take into consideration two villages- one where an anti-superstition law has been enacted and one where ignorance is still used as a tool for revenge. The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of an anti-superstition law in order to act on such incidents and discourage blind faith.”

¹Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/superstition>.

II. INTRODUCTION:

People have a lot of belief in tantriks and babas amongst which most of them are fraud and earn plenty of money on the basis of promising people that miracles will occur and health problems will be cured which in reality is black marketing in the business of beliefs. In recent times, there has been advancement in science and technologies still many people have strong beliefs about superstitions. If a person falls ill, he will be taken to the baba first and not to a doctor believing that baba in the form of God will cure the person. People and animals are sacrificed as offerings to God and in order to please the deity. In many places till date witch hunts take place.

According to India's National Crime Records Bureau, more than 2,500 people have been chased, assaulted and killed.² Witch-hunting is an infectious disease and is prevalent in a number of states in India. A person who is accused of Dayan, Dakan, Chudail or a witch as called in different states can be subjected to immense torture, rape and are burned alive.³

Common starts to witch hunt are in places where there is a low level of economic development where battles start over land or property, death of a person, diseases and low level of income or agricultural failures wherein people tend to have superstitious beliefs that all these events are taking place due to the evil work of some "witch". India's caste system and culture of patriarchy are exploited as women are mostly targeted in witch hunts. Women are considered as a scapegoat by men who have deep-rooted superstitions which are built on the systems of patriarchy and brand and blame women as Dayan or witch. Witch hunts provide an outlet for men to remove frustration for their own lack of power.

It is disheartening that witch-hunting is still practiced in a few parts of India like Gujarat where more than one thousand witch hunts took place in the year 2014. Recently, in

²Crime in India 2012 Statistics. 2012. National Crime Records Bureau. Online at <http://ncrb.nic.in/CD-CII2012/Statistics2012.pdf>.

³Woman burnt alive for allegedly practising witchcraft. 2012. *Times of India* (February 10). Online at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-02-10/mad-mad-world/31045501_1witchcraft-woman-massive-hunt.

Chhattisgarh, an incident took place where two women who were in their fifties were killed by three boys believing those women to be involved in witch practices, as one boy's father was ill and the other two boy's father was dead.⁴ There is no easy solution for stopping witch hunts. Many states have passed a law against witch-hunting practices and Bihar was the first state to pass the Prevention of Witch (Dayan) Practices Act in 1999. Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam and Rajasthan also started following the Bihar model and passed laws prohibiting witch-hunting practices.

III. WITCH-HUNTING AS A MEANS TO GRAB LAND:

Unfortunately, this concept of witchcraft and black magic is used in villages as a tool to exercise power and to oppress the lower castes. This technique is most commonly used for 'land-grabbing'. According to the report released by NCRB in 2016, Jharkhand occupies the top position for deaths caused due to accusations of witchcraft. 27 deaths due to witch-hunting have been reported in the state for the year 2016.⁵

Talking about Dumra, a small village within the state, a social welfare group reported that over 30 women in the village have been branded as 'witches' and are attacked by a group of villagers, every time somebody in the village falls sick. They are abused, beaten up, tonsured and forced to eat human excreta. Whenever somebody falls sick in the village, he or she is taken to a witch doctor instead of a medical practitioner and when the witch doctor fails to cure the patient, he blames the most vulnerable woman in the village. In Konchbong village, Sunita and her family have been accused of witchcraft. This family owns several acres of land valued at almost 1 crore across Ring Road. They are blamed for every accident that happens along this road. This rumour had been started about this family so that they could be chased away from the village and their land could be grabbed. Due to continuous taunts and

⁴Witchcraft:3arrested.2013. *TimesofIndia* (February13).Onlineat http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-02-13/bhubaneswar/37078284_1_villagers-witchcraft-sundargarh.

⁵ Author Unknown, *Crime in India, 2016*, NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU, (last updated: 30 October 2017)<http://ncrb.gov.in/StatPublications/CII/CII2016/pdfs/NEWPDFs/Crime%20in%20India%20-%202016%20Complete%20PDF.pdf>.

harassment, Sunita's husband lost his sanity and had to seek medical treatment. Finally, the villagers had to threaten police action with the intervention of some social workers.⁶

IV. FACTORS LEADING TO SUPERSTITIOUS PRACTICES:

Bihar was the first state in India to pass a law against witch-hunting in 1999 and Jharkhand followed it and established the 'Anti Witchcraft Act' in 2001. Sections 3 to 6 impose a fine of Rs. 1000 to 2000 and imprisonment for up to a year for those who harass or hurt or kill a person by accusing them of practicing witchcraft and those who perform certain acts claiming to cure a witch. Section 7 lays down the procedure for trial and states that all offences under this Act shall be cognizable and non-bailable.⁷ However, this Act has failed to meet its objectives as the fine and term of imprisonment stipulated is very less and does not cause the deterrence effect.

There is no specific law at the national level to penalize witch-hunting. Provisions of the Indian Penal Code are used in order to invoke some form of punishment: section 302- murder, section 307- attempt to murder, section 323- hurt, section 356- outraging the modesty of a woman and section 376- rape. India has also signed the Convention on Elimination of All Kinds of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 which includes social cruelty and discrimination as well. In spite of these legal measures in place, witch-hunting still hasn't been curbed due to various factors:

- ***Lack of Evidence:*** In order to punish the accused, the court needs proof. In such a socially manifested crime, people choose to remain silent either out of fear of persecution or their belief in the practice, which becomes a hurdle in collecting evidences. Hence, justice is not achieved. Apart from that, usually, people who indulge in witch-hunting are influential people and due to fear or threat, no one speaks against them.

⁶Kelly Kislaya, *Witch Hunts on the Rise in Jharkhand*, FIRST POST, (last updated: 4 June 2018) <https://www.firstpost.com/india/witch-hunts-on-the-rise-in-jharkhand-govt-gears-up-awareness-campaign-land-grab-behind-most-cases-4495409.html>.

⁷The Prevention of Witch (DAAIN) Practices Act, 2001, Jharkhand.

- **Delay in Reporting:** Due to geographical barriers and societal pressure, only a few incidents are reported, that too after a long gap. Hence, it makes the witness testimony unreliable. Also, the quantum of punishment granted to accused is lesser than the gravity of crime they have committed, as the punishment extends merely up to one year with a fine of Rs. 1000, which fails to set deterrence in society.⁸

V. SUPERSTITIOUS TRADITIONS FOLLOWED IN DIFFERENT PLACES:

Black magic and witchcraft practices are things that take us far away from reality and realm of understanding and feed on people's insecurities and lead them to a comfortable space in their own mind called blind faith. The recent Burari case where 11 people committed mass suicide by hanging themselves as a result of religious ritual. Other such black magic practices consist of the use of voodoo dolls, lemons and chillies, planchette and sacrifices. People who are emotionally weak usually resort to such practices in order to gain power or revenge over the other person.⁹

People who are suffering from mental diseases are often believed to be possessed by ghosts and are taken to babas for the cure. Things become worse when sexual favours by claiming to be an embodiment of a holy spirit by saying the spirit is of the client's husband or wife from the past life. Problems surround us when the ability to reason ceases as the practitioners or babas take advantage of the situation.

The case of Nirmal baba which took place in Uttar Pradesh, who proclaimed himself as a spiritual leader and a messenger of God. He was charged with fraud and cheating across several states in India. Another incident took place in a remote village in the western state of

⁸AyushRastogi, *The Witches of Jharkhand*, INDIA FELLOW, (last updated: 17 July 2018)
<https://www.indiafellow.org/blog/2018/07/the-witches-of-jharkhand/>.

⁹Author Unknown *Burari Case, New Delhi*. INDIA TODAY (last updated: 22 October 2018)
<https://www.indiatoday.in/mail-today/story/forensic-experts-one-step-closer-to-closing-burari-mass-suicides-case-1372529-2018-10-22>.

Maharashtra where a childless couple killed five young boys as a sacrifice in order to help the women conceive self-proclaimed by a baba.¹⁰

V.I TAMIL NADU AND KARNATAKA:

Apart from being lynched on accusations of practicing witchcraft and black magic, there are some bizarre traditions which the lower-caste people have to go through due to age-old superstitions. The annual festival of Kukke Subrahmanya, a three-day event is held in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Here, a ritual called 'made snana' is held wherein the Brahmans consume their meal on plantain leaves after which devotees roll around in the leftover food, followed by a dip in the Kumaradhara River. The basis of this ancient ritual is to relieve stress and rid oneself of bad Karma. It is believed to solve various problems such as skin diseases, marriage issues and infertility. Due to criticism and protests from social and backward groups, the Karnataka government tried to ban the ritual. However, it was brought back in 2011 due to pressure from the devotees. However, the government acknowledged that this ritual was discriminatory and derogatory towards the lower-castes. Keeping this in mind, 'Ede Snan', a modified version of the same ritual was introduced. The difference here was that instead of rolling in leftover foods consumed by Brahmans, the devotees could roll or bathe in the food offered to the deities. This ritual removed the issue of hygiene and discrimination as the food was not consumed by anybody before rolling and human dignity was not affected this way. Also, this ritual was open to people of all castes and even Dalits could take part in it.¹¹

V.II MADHYA PRADESH:

In the district of Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, villagers who mostly work as cowherds, lie down on the ground and allow cows to run over them. This ritual takes place a day after Diwali and is called 'Gaay Gauhri'. It is believed to bring good luck and prosperity and the locals claim that it causes no serious injuries. In case anyone sustains minor injuries, they are treated with

¹⁰Saharsh Srivastava *Nirmal Baba*, TIMES OF INDIA <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/meerut/Man-who-filed-cheating-case-against-Nirmal-Baba-presented-in-court/articleshow/50345594.cms>.

¹¹Chirali Sharma, *South Indian Tradition of Rolling Over Leftover Foods Out*, ED TIMES, (last updated: 12 August 2017) <https://edtimes.in/south-indian-tradition-of-rolling-over-in-food-to-cure-ailments-and-bad-karma-in-temples-is-on-its-way-out/>.

cow dung and urine, which are believed to have medicinal and healing properties. This ritual is believed to have started with a man praying for a son and when his wish came true, the villagers started celebrating it as an annual event. The villagers claim that this ritual celebrates the relationship they share with their cows and is a way to seek blessings and positivity. A Gowardhan statue is also prepared-made of cow dung and the ritual is considered complete only once the cow steps on this statue.¹²

V.III KARNATAKA:

The Chamarajnar district of Southern Karnataka is known for black magic. In March 2015, a suspected case of human sacrifice came up. Two Dalit agricultural labourers had been beheaded by their employer in the Santhemarahalli village of the district and a Dalit rights group alleged that the men had been sacrificed. Villagers of that area say that the black magic aspect of this case was realized only because the men were beheaded and such cases are more prevalent than one realizes but rarely come to light. Such cases are generally registered as murders or unnatural deaths. Apart from being a hub for black magic and witchcraft, this district is also supposed to be cursed for Chief Ministers as it was believed and coincidentally proved by some events that an incumbent Chief Minister shall lose his post if he visits this place. Siddaramaiah became the first Chief Minister in 2 decades to visit this place to challenge this convention. However, he also is no longer in power now, whether it because of this supposed jinx or by coincidence.

The practitioners of black magic guarantee results and whether the outcome shall be good or bad depends on his intentions. Most of these practitioners or 'mantravadis' are penniless men from Kerala who have settled in these villages and have now become very rich. Any material belonging to the person who is supposed to be targeted- such as the hair or clothes- is handed over to the mantravadi who then prays to certain regional goddesses. A black rooster is normally sacrificed for such rituals for major tasks, the dead body of a child has been offered to appease the goddess. The death of a young girl in Davangere in 2014 was suspected to be a

¹²Vivek Trivedi, *Madhya Pradesh Farmers Allow Hundreds of Cows to Trample them in Bizarre Diwali Ritual*, NEWS 18, (last updated: 20 October 2017) <https://www.news18.com/news/india/madhya-pradesh-villagers-allow-hundreds-of-cows-to-trample-them-in-bizarre-ritual-1551823.html>.

case of such sacrifice. Practitioners charge their own fees depending on the type of tasks. Good results in exams cost between Rs. 8000 to 10,000 while a murder costs between Rs. 5 to 10 lakhs. Those who turn to black magic are assured of a 90% rate of success and black magic is not necessarily viewed in a bad light as it depends on the intentions of the practitioner. There is an example of a couple who did not get along with for three years used black magic and they had a child and are happy with each other. Due to lack of education and health facilities in the area, people have succumbed to irrational beliefs like black magic to solve their problems.¹³

The Karnataka Cabinet has cleared the much delayed and debated Bill known as Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017. It forbids practices like persuading the performance of inhuman activities for any reason like an assault on the pretext of eliminating spirits or ghosts from inside a person, making somebody parade naked, performing surgeries to change the sex of the foetus, indulging in sexual activity on the pretext of supernatural powers or killing animals among other heinous acts. The state will appoint a vigilance officer who shall supervise the prevention of such acts. Acts like Vastu, plucking of the hair and astrology have not been forbidden.¹⁴ The Bill was earlier named the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifices and other Inhuman Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Bill but since then the name has been changed.¹⁵

V.IV MAHARASHTRA:

There is a difference between faith and superstition which needs to be defined in law as these rituals and religious practices may be to some an expression of faith for God. This idea has been introduced in the Anti-Superstition Bill of India which was originally drafted by Narendra Dhabolkar. In Maharashtra, at Baba Umer Dargah near Sholapur, babies are

¹³Nayantara N., *Sorcery and Murder: Dark Spell of Black Magic in Karnataka's Chamaraajanagar*, THE NEWS MINUTE, (last updated: 21 June, 2015) <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/sorcery-and-murder-dark-spell-black-magic-karnatakas-chamarajnagar>.

¹⁴SharanPuvanna, *Karnataka Cabinet Clears Anti-Black Magic Bill*, LIVE MINT, (last updated: 27 September 2017) <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/ghDnH5fZSpFazXKEYi9uGL/Karnataka-cabinet-clears-antisuperstition-bill.html>.

¹⁵NageshPrabhu, *Karnataka Anti- Superstition Bill- What is Banned and What is Not?* THE HINDU, (last updated: 27 September 2017) <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/karnataka-anti-superstition-bill-what-is-banned-and-what-is-not/article19762981.ece>.

dropped from a height of 50 feet and are caught in a sheet held by waiting men. Over more than 700 years this ritual is being followed and is believed to bring prosperity to the family. These cases are being investigated by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights. This custom of tossing infants from the roof just for good luck is extremely dangerous and may cause grievous hurt to the infants. So many women have been sexually assaulted by so-called “Godman” in the name of superstitions.

A recent case took place in Panvel, wherein a family asked their own daughter to get naked before a Godman while he performed prayers to cure their family of financial problems. These babas usually target places where there is a low level of literacy and people believe in superstitions which make people more vulnerable.

In another recent case, a Pune based NGO helped a 12-year-old girl to get rid of here naturally formed dreadlocks. In Maharashtra, it is believed that naturally formed dreadlocks are god-given. The little girl kept falling sick as her dreadlock kept growing and a local godwoman made her family believe her sick condition is due to menstruating girls from school touching her during their period. The girl’s hair was filled with lice and ant dig hills. Due to superstitious belief, the family members believed the local godwoman and did not show to a doctor or even apply for medicine.¹⁶

The practice of Black magic is illegal in India and anti-superstition laws and black magic acts have been introduced by the name of Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013 wherein one practicing such arts is termed as illegal and is punishable for the same. The anti-superstition law prohibits the practice, propagation, promotion of human sacrifice and other evil, black magic and Aghori practices. The law prescribes an imprisonment term of six

¹⁶Author Unknown, *Pune based NGO cuts off superstition*HINDUSTAN TIMES
<https://www.hindustantimes.com/pune-news/12-yr-old-girl-forced-to-keep-god-given-dread-locks-for-3-years-pune-based-ngo-cuts-off-superstition/story-1BvB46XYxR9PGWYcjp0nzM.html>.

months which may extend to seven years and the amount of fine ranges from 5000 to 50,000. Such practices have no place in an enlightened society.¹⁷

V.V RAJASTHAN:

In the state of Rajasthan people from Peepliya village try to enter hospitals to perform rituals by carrying a basket covered with red cloth and ignited incense sticks and sing religious songs to liberate the soul of the dead person in order to save another person from troubles. Hariram Gujjar aged 23 died during the treatment in the hospital three years ago. The villagers believed that the soul of Hariram is causing troubles to the woman of the house. Rituals are performed within the hospital premises in order to take back the departed soul for salvation and help the woman from all the troubles. In another case, a rooster was sacrificed by the family members in order to revive the dead. Such reports are reported every month from government hospitals in Rajasthan. These rituals performed by the villagers are a part of “Jujhar” tradition in Rajasthan in which stones are brought from the place where their family members died as a symbol of the soul. A Hanuman Temple is situated in Rajasthan and it is believed that the deity in this temple has divine powers which can cure a person who is possessed by evil spirits. In order to remove the spirits from the body of the person, physical pain is afflicted on one’s body.¹⁸

In Udaipur city, Shanta Devi, a 65-year-old woman was branded a witch after her family was plagued by fever and respiratory problems. The relatives of the woman made her drink goat’s blood as a cure which was advised by a witch doctor. On refusing to drink the neighbours wielded sticks in her backyard for doing so.¹⁹ Women are branded as witches in mostly rural parts of India for any illnesses among villagers. The lack of medical facilities near villages is a factor for such superstitious beliefs to prevail. Many people cannot afford the jeep far till hospitals resultant they turn to a witch doctor who plays the dual role of doctor and priest.

¹⁷ Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013.

¹⁸ SCC Online, <https://www.scconline.com/blog/post/2018/12/03/the-rajasthan-prevention-of-witch-hunting-act-2015-and-the-problem-of-overcriminalisation/>.

¹⁹ M.P. Singh, *50 cases of witch-hunting in Rajasthan in over a year, not one conviction*, INDIAN EXPRESS (last updated: 31 October 2017), <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/50-cases-of-witch-hunting-in-rajasthan-in-over-a-year-not-one-conviction-4821381>.

The witch doctor called bhopa sometimes made people put their hands inside a snake's pit in order to test they are guilty or not and if bitten by the snake they are proved to be guilty. The main solution for eradicating such superstitious beliefs is by educating young people and creating awareness among the people.²⁰

In 2015, Rajasthan state legislative assembly had passed the Rajasthan Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill stating the practices of witch-hunting will be treated as a punishable offence. Section 3 of the Act prohibits the commission of witch-hunting and exercise an practice of witchcraft.²¹ Section 15 of the Act, empowers the government to make rules for the implementation of the provisions stated in the act.²² Section 8 of the Act states that the proposed law imposes collective fine on the inhabitants where the offence committed took place.²³ Any person involved in witchcraft or branding of any woman as a witch, as proposed in the bill the person will face a financial penalty and rigorous imprisonment. Any woman who dies as a subject to witch branding, every person involved in the commission of the act shall be liable with rigorous imprisonment not less than seven years which may extend to imprisonment for life or fine up to one lakh rupees or both. As per the statistics of the home department from the year 2010 to 2014, 43 cases of witchcraft practices were registered in the state.²⁴

V.VI ASSAM:

In Assam, there is a small village known as Mayong which is considered as a black magic capital of India. Mayong got its name from the Sanskrit word Maya meaning illusion. There are famous and scary stories about this place where people vanish into thin air, people turned into animals and many more. A similar story is of the emperor Muhammad Shah and his army of 100,000 horsemen disappeared near Mayong and not a single trace was left. People do not fear Mayong's army then for it because of its black magic practices. One of the

²⁰Sharma, Betwa. *Women fight back against witch-branding in Rajasthan*. NEW YORK TIMES (last updated: 26 October 2012) <http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/26/women-fight-back-against-witch-branding-in-rajasthan/>.

²¹ S. 3, Rajasthan Prevention of Witch-hunting Act, 2015.

²² S. 15, Rajasthan Prevention of Witch-hunting Act, 2015.

²³ S. 8(1), Rajasthan Prevention of Witch-hunting Act, 2015.

²⁴ The Rajasthan Prevention (PRS) of Witch Hunting Bill, 2015.

famous rituals of Mayong is Narbali meaning human sacrifice. Rituals are performed to worship Goddess Shaki in order to attain powers of black magic. People in Mayong can predict your future and tell your fortune by using seashells and broken pieces of glasses. The doctors in the village use copper plates to treat pain. They place the plate at the spot of the injury and chant few mantras and the pain vanishes. In Assam, any vulnerable women involved in land disputes or property disputes are labelled as a witch. The women become the victim in these cases and have to face terrible consequences which include stripping the woman in public, ripping off the teeth and nails and burning her alive or beaten to death.²⁵

In order to curb witch-hunting practices an Assam witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2015 was passed making any offence under the act as non-bailable, on compoundable and cognizable to eliminate superstition from the society. Under the Bill provisions for imprisonment was upto seven years along with a fine upto 5 lakhs for identifying and branding a person witch. If someone is killed after branding as a witch this will come under Section 302 of the IPC.²⁶ The reports say that 77 persons were killed and 60 injured due to witch-hunting practices.²⁷

V.VII ODISHA:

According to the NCRB Report of 2016, Odisha occupied the second place after Jharkhand in the highest number of killings due to witch-hunting with 24 such murders reported during that year. The State Commission for Women launched awareness campaigns in various districts to curb the rising incidents of witch-hunting against the women. The state government enacted the Odisha Prevention of Witch Hunting Act in 2013. Sensitisation programmes are being conducted regularly for police officers for strict implementation of the Act and in the sensitive areas, where this evil practice is rampant; police have been instructed

²⁵ Karmarkar, Rahul, *Rape behind witch-hunt murders in Assam, 6 held*. HINDUSTAN TIMES (last updated: 23 June 2011) <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/rape-behind-witch-hunt-murders-in-assam-6-held/article1-712799.aspx>.

²⁶ Assam Witch Hunting(Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2015.

²⁷ Alok Pandey, *In Assam, a rising trend of murders on allegations of witchcraft*. NDTV (last updated: 4 September 2013) <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/in-assam-a-rising-trend-of-murders-on-allegations-of-witchcraft-414016>.

to take strong action against the perpetrator.²⁸ The Act prescribes a fine of Rs. 1000 and a jail term of 3 to 5 years for those who brand a woman as a witch and torture her. Practising witchcraft is punishable with imprisonment from 1 to 3 years or a fine of Rs. 5000 or both. The legislation also provides that in case of conviction for a second offence, the punishment is imprisonment for 3 to 7 years or a fine of Rs. 10,000 or both. The Act also talks about providing compensation to the victim on the basis of the damages suffered by them and all offences under this Act are to be treated as cognizable and non-bailable. This Act also mandates the State government to create schemes to educate people about blind belief and bizarre practices.²⁹ However, the Act still hasn't been implemented strictly and the people still aren't aware of the evils of witch-hunting due to the lack of development and education in the tribal areas. The government is yet to act on its proposal to introduce chapters on the negative impacts of witchcraft in the school curricula.

V.VIII CHHATTISGARH:

In Chhattisgarh, Raipur topped the list of all districts in which witch-hunting was carried out according to a report made by the State Commission for Women. A senior police officer in Raipur believes that there are several reasons such as gender inequality and property disputes behind accusing a woman of being a witch. It is a common ploy to grab land or even take revenge for rejecting sexual advances made towards her. It is not easy for the victim to seek help and she is shunted out of the village, brutally killed or she ends up committing suicide. Lower-caste women, widows, infertile women, those who are old or poor and those with 'ugly' features are easy targets in such cases. Women who become powerful and threaten male leadership can also become targets. The Chhattisgarh government passed 'Chhattisgarh TonhiPratama Bill' in 2005. Experts believe that the BJP government was efficient in taking action to curb witch-hunting and in punishing the perpetrators. However, it has failed to curb the practice of witchcraft and black magic in the region.³⁰

²⁸DebabrataMohapatra, *Witch-hunting Continues Unabated in Tribal Pockets of Odisha*, TIMES OF INDIA, (last updated: 23 February 2018), <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhubaneswar/witch-hunting-continues-unabated-in-tribal-pockets-of-odisha/articleshow/63043374.cms>.

²⁹Author Unknown, *Salient Features of the Existing Odisha Prevention of Witch-Hunting Act, 2013*, ODISHA LIVE, <https://odishalive.tv/news/salient-features-of-the-existing-odisha-prevention-of-witch-hunting-act-2013/>.

³⁰Dinesh Akula, *How Witch-hunting Grips Chhattisgarh Tribal Villages*, GOVERNANCE NOW, <http://mobilegov.in/gov/news/regular-story/witch-hunting-grips-chhattisgarh-tribal-villages>.

VI. SUGGESTIONS:

Superstition and aftermath cruelty are not new in India which in today's time are having an iron grip on people's imaginations and actions which are growing stronger by each passing day. Superstitions have become an integral part of people's lives in the country. We often notice instances wherein people say if a person sneezes before making a start it is a bad sign or if a black cat crosses your way something wrong will happen. This problem of superstition is very deeply rooted in Indian society and it is not easy to get rid of thoughts which have been passed on since generations. In India, it is especially more difficult since personal laws and customs take precedence over statutory laws in many cases.

However, there has to be a beginning at some point and the following steps could be taken at the basic level:

- **National Anti-Superstition Law:** A national legislation is required to curb witch-hunting and black magic practices. This will bring about uniformity regarding the law in each place and will make it easier to implement since there will not be any ambiguity regarding any term or definition.
- **Bring About Development:** In order to change the mentality of people, it is important to provide them with proper healthcare and education so that they do not get frustrated or weak-minded and do not turn to black magic practitioners or false witch doctors. Better education facilities would also ensure that women are aware of their rights and are not exploited at any point of time. It would also empower the lower-caste people to be aware of their rights.
- **Modern Curriculum:** Awareness must be brought about since the beginning and certain chapters or subjects must be introduced in schools as young minds are impressionable and it is never too soon to convey a message. More emphasis should be laid on science and logical reasoning so that critical thinking skills are honed in the future generation.
- **Stricter Licensing:** In order to set up a medical practice, proper certification and procedure must be established and strictly enforced. There must be some authority

which oversees the licensing and certification so that fake doctors and godmen do not flourish.

- ***Formation of Committee:*** There must be a committee which could be composed of the *Gram Sevak*, social workers and legal officers. The purpose of this committee would be to look into the black magic practices and create a report to be sent into the Central government so that better laws can be implemented accordingly. This committee could also file police reports on behalf of the victims and provide free legal aid as well.

VII. CONCLUSION:

Development and legislative changes cannot be brought in overnight but taking small steps in the right direction can also go a long way to ensure that no more people suffer due to blind belief or ignorance. The way to curb fraudulent practices and exploitation is education and awareness in even the remotest of locations as an educated population cannot be exploited easily.