

**Research Study on Violence against Dalit Women in  
Different States of India by studying the Sources of  
Materials that are Available and Conducting  
Interview of the Perpetrators, Victims and Witnesses**

**A Report Submitted by  
Centre for Alternative Dalit Media (CADAM)  
New Delhi**



**Supported by  
National Commission for Women (NCW)  
New Delhi**

# CONTENTS

Acknowledgement .....	5--6
Chapter - I INTRODUCTION.....	7--13
1.1 Background	
1.2 Statement of the problem	
1.3 Rationale of the study	
1.4 Objectives of the Study	
1.5 Research Sample and Methodology	
1.6 Organization of the report	
1.7 Limitations of the Study	
Chapter - II REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	14--24
2.1 Brief History	
2.2 Witch hunting in India	
2.3 Summary	
Chapter - III SOCIO-ECONOMIC & DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE.....	25--33
3.1 Population and Distribution	
3.2 Religion	
3.3 Social category	
3.4 Educational Status	
3.5 Occupation	
3.6 Income Level	
3.7 Water and Sanitation Facilities	
3.8 Household Facilities	
3.9 Assets	
Chapter - IV WITCH-HUNTING: BELIEFS AND PRACTICES.....	34--43
4.1 Introduction	
4.2 Findings of the study	
4.2.1 Perception of Witchcraft	
4.2.2 Perception of Respondents Regarding the Manifestation of Witchcraft	
4.2.3 Perception on special occasion of witch attack	
4.2.4 Perception on the Caste of Witches	
4.2.5 Reason and Sources of treatment	
4.3 Summary	

Chapter - V	INCIDENCE AND VIOLENCE OF WITCH HUNTING AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIO ECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING.....	44--53
5.1	Introduction	
5.2	Findings of the study	
5.2.1	Range and Types of violence against women accused of witchcraft	
5.2.2	Incidences of witch violence	
5.2.3	Identification and Activities of witch incidences	
5.2.4	Socio-economic status of women accused of being a witch	
5.2.5	Types of Action Taken against perpetrators	
5.2.6	Impact on socio economic and psychological well-being of accused women	
5.3	Summary	
Chapter - VI	WITCH AND WITCH PRACTICES: AN ILLOGICAL MYTH.....	54--61
6.1	Introduction	
6.2	Findings of the study	
6.2.1	Reason for prevalence of witch hunting	
6.2.2	Intention of <i>Ojhas</i>	
6.2.3	Role of family/community/caste, panchayat, enforcement agencies in preventing /abetting these practices	
6.2.3	Remedies for Elimination of eliminate the violence against women accused of Witchcraft	
6.3	Summary	
Chapter - VII	INSTITUTIONAL, SOCIAL MECHANISMS AND POLICY INITIATIVES.....	62--67
7.1	Introduction	
7.1.1	Policy Level Initiatives	
7.2	Findings of the study	
7.2.1	Laws and Legal awareness	
7.2.2	Assessing the Action of Police on Witch Hunting Cases	
7.2.3	Severity of punishment	
7.2.4	Awareness Meetings	
7.2.5	Remedies	
7.3	Summary	
Chapter - VIII	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	68--75
REFERENCES	.....	76--78
ANNEXURE-I-	Data ob Violecne against Dalit women.....	79--82
ANNEXURE-II	Caste Studies and Interviews.....	83--139
ANNEXURE-II	Press news responded by the research team.....	142--140
ANNEXURE-III	Questionaie .....	141--155



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

With abundance of gratitude for the support of National Commission of Women for support to research study on 'Violence against Dalit Women in Different States of India by Studying the Sources of Materials that are Available and Conducting Interviews of the Perpetrators, Victims and Witnesses', we express our gratitude to activists of Rashtriya Dalit Mahila Andolan and Dalit and Adivasi women leader who have been active at the grassroots for many years working for empowerment of women, education of girl children, land rights of Dalit women and labourers ,livelihoods, skill development, health and nutrition, forest conservation, forest rights ,agriculture, horticulture and so on. We are deeply indebted to them for their time for collecting the cases, visiting the remote villages, meeting the victims, witnesses, and perpetrators, law enforcement agencies and discussing in detail on the incidence of witch hunting, violence against SC, ST and minorities through the accusation of being a witch.

We are especially indebted to Ms. Chunni Kumari, Ms. Neelam Besra, Mr. Sunil Mishra once again for data organisation, Sumedha Boudh for conducting some of the most interesting focus discussions generating insights in the problem after meeting the victims of the allegations. We could not have the report , if we did not interviews for case studies conducted in the villages by Mr. Shankar Dass, Mr. Puran Singh, Mr. Satya, Ms. Neelam Besra, Ms. Promila, Ms. Radha, Ms. Vandna, Ms. Khushbu, Ms. Kanti Kumari, Mr. Jyoti Raj, Ms. Savitri Devi, Mr. Sanjiv, Ms. Putul, Ms. Tarkeswari Negi and Ms. Chander Nigam. We are grateful for all fellows of CADAM for their dedicated work in conducting interviews and collecting case from the villages and cities. Once these cases were collected, the task was there for conducting a content analysing for preparing the tables under the supervision of Mr. Sukant Chandra Behera, Team Lead, Programme Development and Implementation, NACDOR.

Simple tables tell us a lot, but in order to have a cogent understanding of the data and findings in the table and description of the table is very important along with narrating the context of the table, assessing the policy initiatives, report on the legal provisions, awareness programme, bringing out the stories of pain and anguish, feeling them and then drafting the recommendations as per the guidelines. The first version of the report keeping in consideration all the parameters was done by the Ms. Madhusmita Mohanty, Consultant, Research and Documentation, CADAM and NACDOR. We are indebted to Mr. Ashok Bharti, Chairman of National Confederation of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR) who conceived the programme for eliminating violence against Dalit women through eliminating ignorance and then then through producing knowledge products that are helpful in building policy for eliminating violence against Dalit and Adivasi women through accusing them of being a Witch.

Common sense wisdom for debunking the idea that some could be witch was apt when an NGO leader said 'Ojha is Bojha' considering the fact that some of the psychological problems or illness that could not be treated by him or some of the deaths that were not explained by him were attributed to witch in order to give an answer. We are indebted to NGOs leaders and police personnel who cooperated in the investigation giving out a clear picture of their understanding on the issue sharing their reports and experience in

dealing with the incidence of violence through witch-hunting. Panchayat leaders are most important as those who have been negotiating and discussing the issue emerging out of allegations and resultant violence on women during the data collection for the report. CADAM research expresses gratitude for their time in the interviews that has contributed in the generation of recommendations for this research. We once again express our gratitude to Ashok Bharti, Chairman NACDOR for giving technical advice on the report. Acknowledgement is due to Mr. Sukanta Behera, Program Lead of NACDOR who reviewed the report for incorporating the suggestions of National Commission of Women and finalising the report with critical inputs from Dr. Mukhtar Alam, Advocacy Coordinator, NACDOR, Mr. Rajesh Upadhyay, Executive Director, CADAM.

**Ms. Rajni Tilak**  
**Project Direct Director, Sectrectary**  
**Centre for Alternative Dalit Media (CADAM)**

## CHAPTER - I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

The situation of Dalit women in India needs special attention. They are one of the largest socially segregated groups anywhere in the world, and make up 2 per cent of the world's total population. Dalit women constitute half of 200 million Dalit populations, and 16.3 of the total Indian female population. Dalit women are placed at the absolute bottom of the social hierarchy as they face systemic and structural discrimination threefold: as Dalits, as poor, and as women. The caste system, estimated to affect 260 million people globally, declares Dalit women to be intrinsically impure and 'untouchable', which sanctions social exclusion and exploitation. The vast majority of Dalit women are poor; they are landless wage labourers and lack access to basic amenities and entitlements. They are subjugated by patriarchal structures, both in the general community and within their own family. Although, the traditional taboos are similar for both Dalit men and women, but Dalit women bear the burden more often. Moreover, men are dominant in Dalit communities. Dalit women are subjected to inhumane living conditions and human rights violations; discrimination and violence systematically deny them opportunities, choices and freedoms in all spheres of life. This undermines not only their dignity and self-respect, but also their rights to equality and development. Dalit women also have less power within the Dalit movement itself. Women are active in large numbers in the movement but most leadership positions in the organizations, local bodies and associations have until now been held by men. Dalit women are discriminated in economic, socio-cultural, political and legal spheres. Such deprivation and discrimination against Dalit women presents clear evidence of widespread exploitation and violence against these women subordinated in terms of power relations to men in a patriarchal society, as also against their communities based on caste.

Violence against women is the most pervasive yet under recognized human rights violation in the world. This includes domestic violence, polygamy, sexual harassment, rape, molestation, kidnapping, abduction, homicide, physical and mental torture and trafficking etc. As the National Commission for Women has commented, "in the commission of offences against... scheduled caste [Dalit] women the offenders try to establish their authority and humiliate the community by subjecting their women to indecent and inhuman treatment, including sexual assault, parading naked, using filthy language, etc."<sup>1</sup> The National Crime Records Bureau data records reveal that more than four Dalit women are raped every day in India.<sup>2</sup> According to the UN Declaration on the elimination of violence against Women 1993, VAW encompasses, but is not limited to physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women. Hence, violence, which serves as a crucial social mechanism to maintain Dalit women's subordinate position in

---

<sup>1</sup> National Commission for Women, *Women of Weaker Sections: Socio-Economic Development of Scheduled Caste Women*, New Delhi, 1996, p.33

<sup>2</sup> National Crime Records Bureau, Govt. of India. <http://www.ncrb.gov.in/>

society, is the core outcome of gender-based inequalities shaped and intensified by the caste system.

Dalit /Scheduled caste (SC) women, in India's highly patriarchal and caste-based society, bear the triple burden of caste, class, and gender. Being positioned at the lowest social order of Indian society, Scheduled caste women suffer from multiple forms of discrimination, including lack of education, economic disadvantages, social disempowerment, domestic violence, political invisibility, and sexual oppression. In contravention of both national laws and international human rights standards that prohibit any physical, sexual or psychological violence against women, varying forms of violent acts specifically targeting SC women are occurring on a large scale across India today. Witch-hunting is one of the heinous forms of violence that Dalit women are subjected to in India. Though protective measures are there in place to punish those who commit violence against women in cases of witchcraft allegations, but they are still ineffective to protect most women accused of witchcraft. With this background, the present study makes an attempt to explore the extent and nature of violence against *Dalit* women in the name of witch-hunt in Bihar, Odisha and Jharkhand.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

"Witch craft is seen as a manifestation of evil believed to come from a human source" (Kgatla et. al. 2003:5). Hence, accusations of being a 'witch' refers to the alleged possession by an evil spirit in a women (or much less often, a man) giving her supernatural powers to alter the course of nature. Likewise, witch-hunting is a 'search' for suspected witches, who are believed to use witchcraft to harm people. After being accused, they are tortured and treated inhumanly by their communities and often by relatives. 'Witch-hunting' could be seen as one of the worst forms of cultural violence against women. Witchcraft in India is still part of the deep rooted traditional rural culture of India. Violence against women who are accused of being witches is generally present and pervasive. This violence is so severe and dangerous; it results in the death of women who are accused. Hundreds of women in India's conservative villages have been killed or tortured after being accused of witchcraft. Those who survive are shunned and live in poor conditions. The accused women, primarily from Adivasi (tribal) and Dalit populations are often victims of land disputes or gender discrimination. A combination of poor health facilities, illiteracy, and government corruption reinforces the customary influence of *Ojhas*, traditional healers who also serve as mediators in village disputes. As important religious, political and social figures, *ojha* legitimize witch hunts by confirming the supposed involvement of witchcraft in any ill fortune.

In a country which ranks at 129 out of 146 in gender inequality index with a score of 0.6, the highest in South Asia, each year an estimated 200 women are killed as witches in rural India. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, over 1791 women had died between 2001 and 2010 on account of black magic and witchcraft. According to the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), 175 cases of witchcraft-related murders were reported in 2008 from various states, including Jharkhand, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.<sup>3</sup> As per a study by an NGO, more than 2,500

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

women were killed in the past 15 years in India after being accused of practicing witchcraft.<sup>4</sup> There is also research evidence suggesting that there has been a disturbing rise in Witch hunting cases in 2011. The rate of conviction in cases of crime against women is the lowest in India (26.9 %) when compared to other crimes and adding to this crisis is the fact that there is no specific law in India to fight against witch hunting. Witch hunting cases are currently registered under sections 302 (murder), 320 (grievous hurt), 351(Assault), 354 (Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 364a (kidnapping for ransom) and 503 (criminal intimidation) (Ghosh, 2012; WGHR, 2012; HDR, 2011; NCRB, 2011; NAWO, 2006).

According to Rebecca Vernon, the editor of the Cornell Law Journal “Over the last fifteen years, an estimated 2,500 Indian women have been killed because they were ‘witches...Witch hunts are most common among poor rural communities with little access to education and health services, and longstanding beliefs in witchcraft. When an individual gets sick or harm befalls the community, the blame falls not upon a virus or crop disease, but upon an alleged witch’”. Further, *the Institute of Development Studies, reported that “Poor, low-caste women are easy targets for naming/branding (as a witch)...Women who are widowed, infertile, possess ‘ugly’ features or are old, unprotected, poor or socially ostracized are easy targets.”* said professor Kanchan Mathur, from the Institute of Development Studies - India, in a recent 2009 report. *Women accused of witchcraft have been physically abused, ostracized and driven from their homes.*

The practice of witch hunting in India is more prominent among the socially educationally excluded Dalits and Adivasis who usually inhabit the secluded areas within the country characterized by limited access to livelihood opportunities. The practice of witchcraft in the state of Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar is present and pervasive despite having protective measures and acts in place. “The state of Jharkhand is deviating from International law obligations requiring India to address and prevent the problem of witch-hunting, which has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of women.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore “International courts mandate that this Court (High Court of Judicature, Jharkhand State, India) must take action to provide effective judicial remedies for violations of these integral human rights,” the appeal continues. Four states in India have approved protective anti-witchcraft laws, but they are still ineffective to protect most women accused of witchcraft. Police protections, courtroom decisions and legal representations need much more improvement. Education on the issues surrounding violence of women, superstitions and belief, along with greater understanding of equal human rights for women are essential to marking improvements.

Moreover, the situation of *Dalit* is very critical. Due to patriarchal and caste based society and superstition they face multiple discrimination. Without comprehensive and carefully

---

<sup>4</sup> See more at: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/nhrc-seeks-actiontaken-report-on-assam-witchhunting-cases/792480/#sthash.LkdC4cKi.dpuf>

<sup>5</sup> Cornell Law School International Human Rights Clinic, petition to the High Court of Judicature, Ranchi, Jharkhand State, India – January 2010

documented research on violence against women in cases of witchcraft allegations, it is impossible to know whether *Dalit* women are experiencing more violence in their household or community, or whether they are reporting it more often. In the absence of proper research, it is difficult to compare and assess the scope of violence as well as the effectiveness of programmes to end it. Therefore, the study made an attempt to assess the violence against *Dalit* women (VADW) in cases of witchcraft allegation. The study is descriptive in nature. It explores the extent and nature of violence against *Dalit* women in the name of witch-hunt and their perception to the violence.

### **1.3 Rationale of the study**

The focus of the paper is to analyze the phenomenon of 'witch hunting' in Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar as a manifestation of violence against women. The justification is that women of all communities are facing violence but *Dalit* women are facing different forms of violence in domestic and social fronts besides their lower socio-economic and educational status.

India is a multi-religious, multiethnic and multi-cultural country. In terms of human development indicators, it ranks 127 out of 177 countries (UNDP 2004). However, patriarchal system norms are also deeply embedded and women still face discrimination at various levels. The constitution of India states that no citizen shall be discriminated or deprived of the right of equality and equal protection of law. But, the fact remains that this is an illusion for many socially excluded women who are victimized by society. Incidents of violence against women are a normal feature of life. Rape incidents have also increased and witch killing in indigenous communities are also another form of violence against women in India (Kelkar 1992). The Indian government has reported that from dowry harassment nearly 6,000 women a year die and many more are mutilated in India (Reddy 2002).

Some empirical studies have also highlighted the incidents of witch hunting as a violation of women's rights and gender disparity. These studies show that women are vulnerable; especially widows, single, poor and socially marginalised women. The absence of specific laws to address this social evil has made it impossible to punish the perpetrators and seek justice for the victims of such abuses. However, there is a need to have a more theoretically informed analysis of this phenomenon as well. This research paper will analyze the actual ground situation with special reference to the states of Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar. This study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomena of witch-hunting by studying cases and information. The study would allow investigation of the significance of culture vis-à-vis other factors, which may be the causes for the prevalence/spread of 'witch hunting' in India.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The major objective of the study is to understand and conceptualize 'witch-hunting' as a form of violence against women in the contemporary era. For this, the study attempts to investigate the current situation of violence against women in the name of witch-hunting especially focusing on *Dalit* women. The specific objectives are:

- To examine the nature and extent of violence against Dalit women in cases of witchcraft allegation.
- To explore and analyze the immediate causes/factors of such violence against Dalit women.
- To analyze the debilitating effect of these customs and practices on women's psychological and the socio-economic well being.
- To analyze the role of the family/community caste Panchayat and enforcement machinery in preventing/ abetting these practices.
- To examine the policy level initiatives

### 1.5 Research Sample and Methodology

The present study is a descriptive research. The collection and analysis of data from various sources suitable to the context of violence against Dalit women due to witch allegation was done through primary and secondary sources. The primary data have been collected through empirical surveys in the selected sample districts of selected sample states. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been adopted while collecting the primary data.

### 1.6 Limitations of the Study

The study through quantitative and qualitative assessment has endeavoured to capture the problems at it exists and there are prescriptive propositions with acceptance of the human rights framework where each person has rights and duties. The qualitative data analysis could have been more rigorous with generation of more data sets also sample size could have been much bigger. However, religious and cultural setting being same across the states with similar history, the findings to present a situation where interventions are needed and shows the direction for the intervention of the multiple stakeholders that would ensure zero incidence of violence against women generated as a result of the accusation for women and men of being a witch or someone casting evil spell. Case studies shows patterns of social transactions that result in violence and these abundantly shows how local governance institution and police are responding to the incidence of violence against women as a result of accusation of being a witch.

#### Sampling

The present study was conducted in three selected sample states of Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar. The states were selected on the basis of higher concentration of Dalit population to the total population. Moreover, the study was conducted in 12 backward districts of the states. The identification of districts was done on the basis of high percentage of Dalit population and having lower indicators of development. Furthermore, the study was conducted in 98 villages of 21 blocks of the districts. The selected states and district is given in the following Table 1.1:

**Table - 1.1 Sample Districts, Blocks and Villages**

State	District	Blocks	Number of villages
Bihar	Jahanabad	Makhdumpur	8
		Biharsarif	1
	Nalanda	Hilsa	16
		Nawada	5
		Rohtas	1

		Sasaram	1
		Sivsagar	1
Jharkhand	Deoghar	Deoghar	3
		Faron	3
		Madhupur	6
		Mohanpur	6
	Dumka Giridih	Kathikund	4
		Giridih	14
		Jamua	2
	Hazaribagh	Churchu	13
		Keridadi	1
		Tatijharia	1
Odisha	Bhadrak Gajapati	Bhadrak	3
		Mahano	3
	Koraput Sonepur	Chandrapur	3
		Binka	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>98</b>

During the selection of sample villages, adequate representation of different socio-economic and demographic aspects like gender, caste, religion, occupation, education status, near to town and far from town, etc. were taken into consideration. The villages for detailed study were identified in consultation with local government officials/community leaders/social workers and Civil Society Organisations working in the areas.

### Methods of Data Collection

In order to collect primary data, 50 structured questionnaires were administered in each district. The victims and their relatives, Panchayat leaders and local Ojhas were also interviewed. The study conducted in-depth interviews of 5 women (Dalit) who are the victim of witch-hunt in each district. It also included the people from the victim's neighbourhood. The questionnaires consist of both open ended and close-ended questions. A total of 12 focus group discussions were held separately with *Dalit* women, using semi structured checklists. Each group consisted of about 10-12 persons. It involved women group leaders, CBOs leaders, members of Gram Panchayat and caste Panchayat and media persons. During the period of interview, some depth information about violence and, any pertinent cases and, inhumane behaviour were also taken as a case study to complement the set objective of this research. For each case study 5 persons such as Panchayat leaders, Local *Ojhas*, Caste Panchayat leaders and in-charge of the local police station were interviewed and from each district at least two case studies were collected. Furthermore, the study involved discussions with individuals and community organizations which address problems of violence in the community. An analysis of the response to violence of the Criminal Justice agencies and voluntary and statutory agencies was also done. The total sample size consists of 1000 questionnaire, 50 in-depth interviews and 20 case studies.

The secondary sources of information involved critical review of statistical reports, annual reports, district and village development, women development office, profiles and plan

documents, Journal articles, and other published materials and official records of I/N/GOs. Finally, the data collected was analyzed using SPSS and Ms excels.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The study was conducted so as to find out the nature, extent and causes of violence against Dalit women in the name of witch-hunting and its mental and psychological impacts. For this study, sample was selected from 12 backward districts of India and so, the findings cannot be used to generalize to outside area. The research was done qualitatively than quantitatively. Thus, the findings of this study would be helpful for initiating a step to make people aware for stopping any forms of violence against women in a wider scale.

### **1.5 Organization of the Report**

Witch hunts in contemporary India occur primarily among the tribal populations of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Jharkhand. While there are a few studies on the witch hunts in these states (Barman, 2002; Chaudhuri, 1981; Mishra, 2003; Nathan et al., 1998), witch hunts, particularly among the Dalit communities, are neglected issues among both policy makers and academic scholars. The Dalits are the most socially, economically and educationally discriminated and exploited sections of the society. Accusation and persecution of witch hunts are common among them, and it is particularly interesting to study the factors responsible. On the other hand, witches are viewed as “deviant” in the caste social structure as they are considered to cause harm to the community. The most interesting thing is that it is practiced covertly in the society. And, the perpetrators or victims are chastised by their own community members without the knowledge of the authorities. Thus, in order to have a detailed and better understanding of the study, the report is structured as follows:

In Chapter II, a detailed conceptual framework of the problem is discussed. In other words, a review of the existing literatures or theories related to witch hunting has been initiated.

In Chapter III, the socio-historical and demographic setting of the study area and the people is elucidated.

In Chapter IV, the nature and extent of the perception of the Dalits relating to presence of witches and witch craft, the effects of such practices and the treatment involved has been discussed.

In Chapter V, the type and severity of violence against the Dalit women alleged of witches and witch practices is elucidated.

In Chapter VI, the institutional mechanisms to address the issue of witch hunting in the villages is illustrated.

Lastly, Chapter VII is the conclusion and discussion section of the report and it summarizes the main findings and the implications of the study. It ends with some recommendations for future policy initiatives.

## CHAPTER - II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Brief History

A “witch-hunt” is a comment that damages or threatens to damage a specific person or entity's reputation or resources even if he/she is guilty. These often take the form of personal threats or attacks and calls to action. Witch hunting is the act of unfairly searching for and punishing people who are accused of having opinions that are believed to be dangerous or evil. Although the ideas of witchcraft and malicious witches are quite ancient, the notion of the “heretic witch” who makes a pact with the Devil has dominated research on witch hunts. The literature on these witch hunts is heavily centred upon why the victims are mostly women. One type of explanation focuses on witch hunts as an expression of male hegemony with attacks directed at female cults, midwives and women healers.

Several centuries ago, many practicing Christians, and those of other religions, had a strong belief that the Devil could give certain people known as witches the power to harm others in return for their loyalty. A “**witchcraft craze**” rise through Europe from the 1300s to the end of the 1600s. Witch-hunts, especially in Central Europe, resulted in the trial, torture, and execution of victims and about three-quarters of victims were women. Arguably, neither before nor since have adult European women been selectively targeted for such large-scale atrocities. The witch-hunts of early modern Europe took place against a backdrop of rapid social, economic, and religious transformation.

However, the original witch-hunts took place in America in the 17th century, most famously in Salem, Massachusetts. These witch-hunts happened for various reasons and were greatly influenced by the fear of devil. Young girls were usually thought to be witches or under the control of evil spirits and the trials were held in such a way that it was almost impossible for them to prove that they were not guilty. The Salem witch trials occurred in colonial Massachusetts between 1692 and 1693. As per the data, more than 200 people were accused of practicing witchcraft and around 20 were executed. Eventually, the colony admitted the trials were a mistake and compensated the families of those convicted. Since then, the story of the trials has become synonymous with fear and injustice, and it continues to entice the popular imagination more than 300 years later.

#### **The pre-modern European and the colonial American witch hunts**

The literatures on the witch hunts in Europe & America have concentrated mostly on religious rebellion and inheritance conflicts. In all of these explanations, there is reference to the “**scapegoat**” (“female witch”) who was the victim of conflicts over property, religion, social status caused by epidemics or wars. Jenny Gibbons' (1998) analysis ties the witch-hunts to other “panics” in early modern Europe: “Traditional attitudes towards witchcraft began to change in the 14th century, at the very end of the Middle-Ages. ... Early 14th century central Europe was seized by a series of rumour-panics. Some malign conspiracy (Jews and lepers, Moslems, or Jews and witches) was attempting

to destroy the Christian kingdoms through magic and poison. After the terrible devastation caused by the Black Death [bubonic plague] (1347-1349), these rumours increased in intensity and focused primarily on the witches and 'plague-spreaders'. Witchcraft cases increased slowly but steadily from the 14th-15th century. The first mass trials appeared in the 15th century. At the beginning of the 16th century, as the first shock-waves from the Reformation hit, the number of witch trials actually dropped. Then, around 1550, the persecution skyrocketed. What we think of as 'the Burning Times' -- the crazes, panics, and mass hysteria -- largely occurred in one century, from 1550-1650. In the 17th century, the Great Hunt passed nearly as suddenly as it had arisen. Trials dropped sharply after 1650 and disappeared completely by the end of the 18th century". Gibbons' mention to the Reformation reminds the clash between Catholicism and Protestantism, which eventually led to panic and hyper-suspiciousness on the part of Catholic and Protestant authorities alike. Nachman Ben-Yehuda (1980) writes, "This helps us understand why only the most rapidly developing countries, where the Catholic Church was weakest, experienced a virulent witch craze (i.e., Germany, France, Switzerland). Where the Catholic Church was strong (Spain, Italy, Portugal) hardly any witch craze occurred ... the Reformation was definitely the first time that the church had to cope with a large-scale threat to its very existence and legitimacy." But Ben-Yehuda adds that "Protestants persecuted witches with almost the same zeal as the Catholics ... Protestants and Catholics alike felt threatened." It is notable that the witch-hunts lost most of their momentum with the end of the Thirty Years War (Peace of Westphalia, 1648), which gave official recognition and legitimacy to religious pluralism.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus on the topic of witch hunting was paid during the 1990s (Barstow, 1995; Behringer, 2004; Briggs, 1996; Godbeer, 1994; Hill, 1997; Harley, 1990; Karlsen, 1998; Reis, 1997). However, momentum has been building since the 1970s with the publication of important general studies by Alan MacFarlane (1970), Keith Thomas (1963) and John Demos (2008), to name just a few. New multidisciplinary approaches, including the New Social History, feminism, deconstruction, ethnographic and anthropological & sociological methods and literary criticism have contributed to uncovering the complexities of popular religion and understanding the experiences of the persecuted. Witch-hunt is one of the few topics of scholarly pursuit that can be correlated with popular activity and interest. Furthermore, an examination of the historiography of witch-hunt over the past years reveals a significant number of works that consider the intersection of witchcraft, witch-hunt and gender. This approach had its origins in such pioneering books as Christina Lamer's (1981) *"The Enemies of God"* and Carol Karlsen's (1998) *"The Devil in the Shape of a Woman"*, which combined witch-hunt studies with women's studies approach and emerging feminist theories. In some cases, applying these theories has proven especially instructive in exploring such questions as why women were the great majority of those accused of and executed for witchcraft during the past centuries. Moving chronologically and from European historiography to American, this essay will provide a summary and analysis of selected studies from the past decade that deal, either totally or in part, with witch-hunt and gender in the early modern period and that are representative of several current avenues of inquiry. On one hand, the European writers who used advanced applications of feminist theory were mostly traditional, anthropologically based scholars as well as those sympathetic to a feminist approach but intent on historical context and on the other hand, the American scholars, in the wake of

synthetic works such as those by Karlsen (1998) and Demos (2008) with the recent publication of new documents.

For instance, Karlsen (1998) argues that economic factor, especially New England's system of inheritance, provides clues about the special positions of most accused witches' vis-à-vis their society's rules for transferring wealth from one generation to another. Most accused women had no legitimate male heirs in their immediate families and therefore stood to inherit or did inherit the property left by their father or husband. These women were aberrations in a society with an inheritance system designed to keep property in the hands of men. Continuing the gender frame of analysis to witch hunts, Barstow (1994) attributes witch hunts to competition between men and women during changing economic and political conditions in pre modern Europe. The witch hunts took place at the same time as colonization's and the slave trade, and according to Barstow, all three were made possible by the same "ecclesiastical policies and legal changes." Barstow and Hester (1992) focused on specifically the sexual and dynamic, process whereby men have, and maintain, dominance over women. The practice of witch-hunting provided a platform for demonstrating this power relation, in which sexuality is the "central dynamic" by which men retain dominance. In some instances, Barstow explains, wealthy women were attacked. This was typical in the later years of the witch hunt, at a time when poor women victims were depleted or when the poor women sort revenge by naming well-to-do women. Between 1550 and 1700, Barstow states, women became "marginal workers" as a result of which there was rise of a male medical profession and new Christian ideologies. Women were hereby deprived of their traditional roles as healers and "wise women". In this context, Hester writes, the witch-hunts were "one means of controlling women socially within a male supremacist society, using violence or the threat of violence, and relying on a particular construct of female sexuality". This construct was of women as "passive" and "domesticated," in order to curb their more sexual, emotional, and therefore more irrational natures. These attributed traits made woman, as Fraser (1984) has put it, "the weaker vessel."

In addition to gender and economy, Karlsen (1998) brings in a third factor tied to the previous two in her analysis: religion. According to Karlsen, the New England settlers also carried with them a dual conception of witchcraft and the menace i.e. witches were not only threats to their neighbours' physical and economic well-being, but were heretics. Witchcraft was viewed as rebellion against God. The constant fear was about the Devil's success in recruiting people to help destroy Puritan churches. Women healers, who aided during illnesses and child birth procedures, were common targets during witch hunts. *Barstow* (1994) writes that a typical witch in Europe was a woman who possessed the power of healing a power that everyone believed was also the power to kill.

However, the late Sigrid Brauner's (1995) work does not merely present gendered explanations for why women were thought to be witches but actually traces the shifting definitions of both witch hunt and gender in order to explain how women came to be more susceptible to accusation. Her work explores "the issue of gender in the conception of the modern witch" by deconstructing learned and vernacular literatures in order to discover "social stereotypes of women". The definition of the witch and of gender identity both

changed in the beginning of sixteenth century. Previously, a man could be in league with the devil as easily as a woman, and devils themselves could be female as often as male. Moreover, in the wake of religious reformation and the emergence of urban capitalism, medieval assumptions about husbands and wives being interdependent in domestic concerns and in earning income started to give way to a complementary view. In this, the husband and wife had separate spheres of responsibility and the wife was obliged to subject herself to her husband in virtually all matters. Brauner draws on three sixteenth-century writers-Martin Luther, Paul Rebhun, and Hans Sachs to show how Protestants evolved a "new set of moral and religious values derived from the Lutheran concept of marriage". Central to this concept was that women were to marry and be devoted to house-work. Any woman who did not conform to this new standard was disobedient to God. In contrast to Catholic demonologists like Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, 1971 (*"The Malleus Maleficarum"*) who concluded that women were driven to witchcraft because of their rapacious sexual natures, Luther held that women became witches by free choice and that their driving motive to do so was fear for their families, their possessions, and their own well-being.

Yet another issue insufficiently considered in the intersection of witch-hunting and gender is that women were more likely than men to be accusers. In *"Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England"*(1995), Deborah Willis is critical of studies that represent witch-hunts as "all-male" and "univocally misogynist"; she takes issue with the "widely held feminist view that assigns the women accused of witchcraft to the role of rebellious proto-feminists and the female accusers to that of patriarchal conformists". The witch's "malevolent, persecutory power," associated with the "mother's body, voice, or nurturant role," was "a central feature of her ability to threaten order". Where Willis finds variations in the rewriting of witches across class lines in English society, Thompson's (1993) study adds local colour by concentrating on one area of rural England. Her most interesting finding is that women were twice as likely as men to be accusers. She places this within a larger trend of defamation suits, in which women resorted to words, including accusations of witch-craft, to attack neighbouring enemies. Robin Briggs (1996) points out that, actually the causes for witch-hunting were "dauntingly complex," differing from place to place over time, and defying easy generalization. Briggs writes, "It is quite simply a fiction, in the sense that there is no evidence that witches existed." For Briggs, the answer lies in the realities of early modern village life, characterized by all kinds of quarrels and tensions between neighbours who lived side by side for their entire lives in a minuscule "universe of local feeling and feuding".

In providing for an explanation of what structured the social action of individuals who motivate witch hunt, Isaac Reed (2007) analyses witch hunts to be functional in a society where social actions are structured by necessity. Witch hunts are perhaps, as Kai Erickson said in his 1962 piece in *Social Problems "Notes on the Sociology of Deviance"*, a "normal" response to "abnormal" social conditions. Thus, anthropologists & sociologists studying witch hunts in pre modern Europe and Colonial America focus mainly on gender and related variables of economic disruptions, social & moral upheavals, religious rebellion as the main motivations behind witch hunts. Witch hunts serve the purpose of maintaining social order in periods of conflicts, and witches are the perfect scapegoats to divert blame for upheavals leading to disruptions.

## African Witch Hunts

In the past few decades of the twentieth century, most of the research on witch hunts was carried out in the African nations by white western historians who were driven by a need to understand the newly independent modern states. Silvia Federici (2008)<sup>6</sup> commented that especially in Africa, witch hunt had become a serious problem over the past few decades. As per her statistics in Kenya (2008), eleven people, eight women and three men, were murdered, in the South-western province of Kisii, accused of witchcraft. She argues that these witch-hunts must be understood in the context of the deep crisis in the process of social reproduction that the liberalization and globalization of African economies have produced, as they have undermined local economies, devalued women's social position, and generated intense conflicts between young and old, women and men, over the use of crucial economic resources starting with land. In this sense, she visualises the present witch-hunts on a continuum with such phenomena as the dowry murders and the return of sati in India, and the killings of hundreds of women in the Mexican towns at the border with the U.S., victims of rapists or snuff/porno producers. Moreover, she points out that while mobilizing against these violations of women's rights, feminists should put on trial the agencies that have created the material and social conditions that have made them possible such as the African government, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and their international supporters and more importantly the United Nations.

Although the fear of witchcraft is often described as a deep-seated feature of Africa's belief systems, assaults on 'witches' have intensified across Africa in the 1990s in ways unprecedented in the pre-colonial period. Figures are difficult to come by, since attacks and killings have often gone unpunished and unrecorded. But what is available shows the magnitude of the problem. Many works of eminent scholars on witch-hunting in Africa such as Justus Ogembo's *"Contemporary Witch-hunting in Gusii, South-western Kenya"* (2006), Adam Ashford's (2005) *"Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa"*, Federici Silvia's (2004) *"Caliban and the witch: Women, the body and primitive accumulation"*, etc. showed that the reasons of witch hunting in Africa were the same as in colonial Europe and America such as wealth accusation, economic globalization, social and religious factors etc.

## 2.2 Witch Hunting in India

Unlike witch hunting studies in Europe, Africa and USA, the historians and sociologists have ignored the study of witch hunts in India. Anthropologists have conducted a number of scholarly studies of witch hunts in other parts of the world, especially among the various tribes in Africa and South America. However, there are only a few studies on witch hunts in India namely F.G. Bailey's (1992) *"The Witch Hunt or the Triumph of Morality"*; Mita Barman's (2002) *"Persecution of Women: Widows and Witches"*; Wolfgang Behringer's (2004) *"Witches and Witch Hunts. A Global History"*; Ipsita Roy Chakraverti's (2000) *"Beloved Witch An autobiography: India"*; A.B.Chaudhuri's (1981) *"Witch Killings Amongst Santals"*; Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan's (1991) *"Women, Witches and Land Rights in"*

---

<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol10/iss1/3>

*Women, Land and Forest*"; Archana Mishra's (2003) "*Casting the Evil Eye*"; Nathan, Dev Govind Kelkar, and Xu Xiaogang's (1998) "*Women as witches and keepers of demons: Cross-cultural analysis of struggles to change gender relations*". The literatures related to witch hunting in India identifies economic conditions, particularly the struggle for property between families, disease and illness, village level conflicts and gender conflicts as the leading causes of witch hunts (Barman, 2002; Chaudhuri, 1981; Kelkar and Nathan, 1991; Mishra, 2003; Nathan et al., 1998). For instance, research on witch hunts in the Jharkhand and Bihar states of India, focused on the agricultural land struggles between the tribal widows and their kin as the leading cause of witch hunts.

Barman (2002), one of the few anthropologists studying witch hunts in contemporary West Bengal, claims that witch hunts are a form of "persecution" towards women, especially widows, who face a '**condition of marginality culminating in total exclusion from society**'. By accusing them of practicing witchcraft, those men inherit the land immediately. This persecution is part of a wide assault on women's traditional rights and part of a successful attempt to establish a patriarchal order, an attempt to force women into a particular gender role that is considered appropriate. It is also a way to discredit the women who have an inside track with the household spirits. Kelkar et al. (1991) also stressed witch-hunts in tribal Bihar and West Bengal to the land rights of the widow. In addition to widows, women with separated/divorced husbands were vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft. The threat of such a label increases especially if she suddenly has an increase in economic status especially from neighbours or kin. Moreover, the women suffering from any serious ailments such as cholera, small/chicken pox, diarrhoea, etc. were also vulnerable to witch hunt. A major part of Mishra's (2003) study focuses on health and law in the tribal areas. According to her, due to lack of medical facilities in tribal areas, superstitions, illiteracy, etc. the people have a faith on the witch doctors who are basically men. They are also viewed as religious ministers or religious priests, the ones next to God, who play an active role in saving the people from epidemics with the help of special knowledge or skills that they possess. However, these male witch doctors also play a crucial role in identifying a witch and instigating a witch hunt. Thus, witch hunts in contemporary India occur primarily among the tribal populations of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Jharkhand.

A study conducted by Soma Chaturvedi, 2008, "*Tempest in a Tea Pot; Analysis of contemporary witch hunts in the tea plantation of Bengal*" reveals a link between witch accusations and neighbours and women being the main targets. She argues that in her study, there is no evidence on the relation between land ownership of the tribal widows and the witchcraft accusations. Instead, she says that "*witch hunts are cultural; that is, witch hunts cannot take place in a community where there is no real fear in witches*". Further, witch hunts arise from village level conflicts where women are the scapegoat. In addition, witch hunts are products of the prevalence of disease that provides the excuse or justification for the need for a witch hunt. Finally, the factors such as gender, poor health care, poor legal aid and belief in witches lead to witch hunts in the plantations.

In *The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal, 1970-2000: The Challenge Ahead*, Anuradha Chanda's (2005) essay on Tribal Women, revealed that the practice of witch hunting is also found among the Santhals of West Bengal. The women here are mostly

subjected to oppression in case of witch hunting. The men have access over ritual knowledge which empower them to control women's labour and used consistently to impose oppression on them. Moreover, as Mahasweta Devi (1990) writes, "The tribals today are pressed from all sides. They have lost their lands and are forced to work as migrant labours. Their culture is threatened by the vulgar onslaught of *jatra*, films and video parlours. Political forces have created an exploitative elite class within them who exercise undue power. The dowry system has made its way into the tribal society. Faced with such absolute erosion of traditional norms and culture, the tribals have held on to the witch cult with a vengeance in order to assert their identity".<sup>7</sup> Chanda further says the witch hunting is now used for settling all kinds of scores such as land and political disputes and interpersonal differences.

Similarly, Gladson Dungdung<sup>8</sup> in his work "*Hunting Witches or Hunting Women? (2004)*" illustrated how two innocent women of a small village in Jharkhand, became victim of witch hunting and how they were beaten to death. He agrees with Chanda(2005) and states that the root cause is the patriarchal system. Men use weapons like witch-hunting to get rid of women they fear. In the *Adivasi* communities, it is largely women who are considered to have an evil influence and thus, capable of being witches. Witch hunting is common among the Santhal, Munda, Oraon and Kharia Adivasis. And, according to him, "Jharkhand is the worst affected state with witch hunting cases, holding police records of 517 *Adivasi* women being killed in 10 districts in the past decade. Among them 124 women were killed in Ranchi alone, 109 in West Singhbhum, 104 in Lohardaga, 89 in Gumla, 38 in Palamu, 17 in Garhwa, 15 in Hazaribagh, 10 in East Singhbhum, 8 in Kodarma and 3 in Dhanbad. Andhra Pradesh ranks second in position with 147 cases of witch killing in 1999-2000. In Assam, 200 murder cases were filed for witch hunting. 5 cases of witch killing were filed in Bihar in 2001. There were several cases of witch-hunting, which were never brought to the attention of police because women are not aware about their rights and lack social security".<sup>9</sup>

The findings of the study "*Contemporary Practices of Witch Hunting: A Report on Social Trends and the Interface with Law*"<sup>10</sup> indicates that witch hunting primarily targets women. In 46 out of 48 case studies, the primary victims were women. An analysis of the police records and the reported judgments also indicated 86 per cent primary targets of witch hunting to be women. The victims cut across castes and communities, largely from weaker socio economic strata with the two seeming to belong to comparable social and economic strata. The study also found, evidences of women being instigators of witch-hunting although men outnumber them in this respect. Allegations about use of 'supernatural' powers are invariably present in cases of witch hunting. But land, property, jealousy, sexual advances and other common tensions between social intimates emerged as underlying factors in a very large number of cases. As per the statistics, as many as 71 of the 86 FIRs involved physical violence and hurt, in addition to other offences, such as theft, destruction of property, trespass and humiliation. The 15 cases, where physical

---

<sup>7</sup> Ghatak Maitreya (ed), "Dust on the Road: The Activist Writing of Mahasweta Devi, Seagull Books, Calcutta 1997.

<sup>8</sup> He is a Human Rights Activist and Writer. He comes from the Indigenous community of Jharkhand

<sup>9</sup> Source: <http://jharkhandmirror.org/2009/07/25/hunting-witches-or-hunting-women/>

<sup>10</sup> This study was conducted by Partners for Law in Development in three States - Jharkhand, Bihar and Chhattisgarh - with support from the Ministry of Women and Child Development to document and analyse trends in the contemporary practices of witch hunting as well as their interface with the law.

violence was not found, complained of name-calling, abuses in combination with threat to life.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Karthik Navayan<sup>12</sup> (2011) who has studied a few cases of witch-hunting in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh stated that in most of the cases, women are the victims; that too women belonging to Dalit Bahujan castes. One Dalit woman belonging to Kannepalli village of Luxettipet mandal, Adilabad district was killed by non-Dalits who suspected her to be a witch. In some cases, if women had properties in their names, their own family members projected those women as witches and killed them. And in other instances, many Dalit women were exploited and if some of them refused to yield, they were branded as witches, paraded nude, and later killed. In one instance, one Dalit family head was killed in the name of practicing witchcraft just because he refused to vote for a particular party. Even the superstitions are used as oppressive methods against Dalits and Dalit women. There are several interconnected social, political and economic causes for the continued existence of these superstitions. One of the examples is of Ilamma (60) who belonged to a Scheduled Caste (Mala). She stayed along with her husband, a daughter and a son. The whole village of Warangal district in Telangana region believed her to be a witch and held her responsible if the buffaloes stopped giving milk, or if children fell ill. In the year 2000, villagers boycotted her family. In due course, her daughter-in-law, also started projecting Ilamma as a witch, probably because she felt the old woman was a heavy burden to feed, and held her responsible for her father's death. Ilamma left the village and went to her sister's place in Bethikal village in Karimnagar district. After three years, one night in 2003, the village suspected that Ilamma had placed lemons before a few houses. The villagers, reportedly, searched Ilamma's house and found some lemons and turmeric powder in a bag. The furious villagers made her eat human excreta; they accused Ilamma of wandering around the village, at midnight, on *amavasya* and *pournami* days.<sup>13</sup>

A similar incidence occurred in August 2004, a middle-aged woman, Dituben Shinghod in Vadodara, Gujarat - branded as a witch - was hacked to death by villagers in Dahod. The police did not find any motive except that the victim was suspected to be a witch. Two brothers, Raman Malcwana and Savshingh Makwana of Zari Bujarg village in Garbada Taluka, accused her of casting a spell on their niece who had been sick. When the girl died, they ran into Dituben's house shouting that she had killed the girl. Dituben tried to run but was hit with a scythe and an axe, killing her on the spot. Savshingh was arrested but Raman absconded.<sup>14</sup> In the same year in September 2004, a man beheaded his sister-in-law in a village in Jharkhand, because he claimed she was a witch. Gansu Singh beheaded his sister-in-law with a sharp-edged weapon, and then got her head tonsured and went to police station. He had no regrets over the murder because he held her responsible for the death of his three children. The children had died due to a diseases and he suspected that the victim had used black magic to kill them.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/inclusion-of-witchhunting-under-laws-on-domestic-violence-and-sexual-harassment-favoured/article5408947.ece>

<sup>12</sup> Karthik Navayan is a human rights activists.

<sup>13</sup> Source: [http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4332:killings-in-the-name-of-witchcraft-&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132](http://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4332:killings-in-the-name-of-witchcraft-&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132)

<sup>14</sup> Source: The Times of India, 2004

<sup>15</sup> Source: The Hindustan Times, 2004

The practice of witch hunting is not only prominent among the tribal or indigenous communities of Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, but it is also found in the north-eastern region. In the north-eastern region of India, which is home to diverse indigenous communities, the practice is more prominent in Assam. It may not be simply coincidental that Assam also has the lowest gender development index among the north-eastern states. There have been at least 65 cases of witch hunting reported during 2007-2012 from Assam alone. The practice is more prominent among the *Rabha*, *Hajong*, *Mishing*, *Bodo* and other Adivasi communities in Assam.<sup>16</sup> Joya Chakraborty & Anjuman Borah (2013)<sup>17</sup> in their paper titled “*Witch hunting in Assam: Strategising Alternative Media for Women Empowerment and Overcoming Superstition*” analyses the prevalence of witch hunting in Assam and through case study of the initiatives undertaken by Assam Mahila Samata Society (AMSS) towards rescue and rehabilitation of the victims, attempts to understand the role of alternative communication strategies in mitigation of the problem. Chakraborty (2013) states that in Assam, the witch is called a ‘*daini*’ in local parlance and believed to cause ailment to people, destroy crops and other livestock, etc. She is usually identified by an ‘*ojha*’, ‘*bez*’ or ‘*deodhani*’ (all names for witch doctors) and either banished from the community or killed. Sometimes, the designated family of the witch is levied a hefty fine by the community leaders, by which she may be pardoned of her ill deeds/intentions against the fellow villagers. The process of identification of the witch is specified by the witch doctor by looking into the symptoms of the patient such as, fever, cough-cold, delirium or hysteria. As soon as it is believed that a disease has been caused due to the ‘witch craft’ people try to get rid of the spell through prayers and offerings. They offer boiled rice together with a cock reduced to ashes in a banana leaf and keep it in the middle of a road for the ‘*daini*’. People believe that without these prayers and offerings, the patient would not survive. It is also believed that there are some diseases which cannot be treated by the medical doctor and needs to be addressed specifically by an *ojha*. The patient, if suspected by the *ojha* to be under the spell of a witch, is covered by a hunting net and poked with a sharp object till he/she names the witch. In other cases the *ojha* performs some religious rites to arrive at the description of the person practicing the witch craft. Identified by this process, the alleged Witch is then either lynched to death or forced to run away abandoning her family and property.

Goalpara is one of the worst affected districts in the State of Assam in terms of prevalence of witch hunting practices. Around 51 cases of witch hunting have been reported in this district alone since the year 1998. In one instance, on 17 May, 2001, when a woman in the Borjhora Dhaporbila village fell ill, Jonal Rabha, a mother of two children was accused of casting evil spells on the woman. She was branded a witch and a mob of villagers attacked her. She somehow ran for her life and took shelter in a nearby village. However, although the people have accepted her after a settlement and a police complaint, she still faces discrimination. In another instance, a woman in the village had fallen sick and the *Oja* was called in to treat her. As per the customary practice, the *Oja* kept on pricking her with the pointed teeth of a swine till in a state of delirium she uttered the name of Jogai Bala. The villagers lost no time in launching a brutal attack on her. Her son managed to save her but

---

<sup>16</sup> Chakraborty, et. al. 2013

<sup>17</sup> Joya Chakraborty and Anjuman Borah are Assistant Professors at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, Tezpur University, Tezpur, Assam, India

65 years old *Jogai Bala* was compelled to leave the village. Her son then took her away to Tura in West Garo Hills, Meghalaya and kept her with him for nine years. Nine years later, the matter was taken up by the AMSS and she was brought back to the village.<sup>18</sup>

In another instance of Subhadra Bassumatarey, a 45-year-old woman, was declared a witch by the local witch doctor (*ojha*) in August 2000 and did not return to her village in the Goalpara district in Assam. Subhadra, a member of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), had challenged the obscurantist practices of *Ojhas* for which she had incurred their wrath. Further, she had demanded a share in her late father's property, challenging her step-brother's claim to the whole property. The stepbrother and the local *ojha* in the area developed a common interest in eliminating her, so she was declared a witch and accused of casting a spell on three children in the village who had fallen sick. One night, a group of men, accompanied by a female *ojha*, abducted Subhadra, took her to a lonely spot and asked her to sign a confession that she was a witch. She refused to sign; they then proceeded to break her right arm saying that this was the punishment for not signing. When she still refused, they assaulted her and broke her ribs and she was left for dead. Her husband later found her and rushed her to the district hospital. Later, women organizations provided shelter to the victim (Karat, 2001).

However, in Tripura, also there are evidences of witch hunting. One, Laxmi Dev Burman, a communist member and also an active worker of the AIDWA, had taken her colleague to the local hospital for treatment of fever, but she died. The following night, a group of men known to be involved with the NLFT, a terrorist group in Tripura, came to Laxmi's house and they dragged her out, hacked her to death and put up notices in the village that she had to be killed because she was a 'witch' (Rajalakshmi, 2000).

According to Nath (2005)<sup>19</sup>, it appears that the ultimate reason of witch hunting among the Bodo communities of Assam is economic, ownership of property, especially land and professional jealousy of men against women who handle all power to treat diseases in a society that is far superstitious and devoid of all knowledge of modern science and technology.

Thus, the cases highlight the scale and severity of witch-hunting incidents in India. The murders of individual women and entire families accused of witchcraft appears to be common in states such as Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Tripura, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. According to Shrestha (2004), in India, the main victims of witchcraft allegations have been mostly tribal women and women belonging to the various Dalit communities. However, the immediate causes behind witch hunting are various such as sickness and fatalities, beliefs, illiteracy and lack of awareness, loss of property, personal disputes, etc. She further states that women in India have unequal access to productive resources, food and health care, education and employment and also unequal access to the judicial system which makes them vulnerable. Although possessing maintenance rights, in the event their spouses die; the greed by their kith and kin to illegally acquire the land leads to accusations of women on witchcraft, resulting in torture and even death. In India, witch-hunting is related to attempts by male members within

---

<sup>18</sup> Chakraborty, et. al. 2013

<sup>19</sup> <http://dspace.nehu.ac.in/handle/1/9360>

tribal communities' to deprive the women of their rights to inheritance land. Cultural violence legitimizes the direct and structural violence.

### **2.3 Summary**

Witch-hunting incidents in various countries indicate a rising trend. The above instances have depicted how violence against women in the form of witch hunting - continues unabated in India and other countries. Given the situation, what has been the response and strategies from the concerned persons to stop or check this form of violence against women? Nevertheless, various strategies have been adopted by the government and civil society vis-à-vis domestic laws and international human rights instruments. But, the response from the governments has been slow and only recently is note being taken. For instance, it was only in 1999 that the Indian state of Bihar passed the bill making witch-hunting unlawful, with jurisdiction in that particular state only. Lately, the government of India is considering proposal to implement new laws to make witch-hunting a social crime. The passing of these laws will send a strong signal that the practice of witchcraft allegations will be considered a grave crime.

"Laws are a major tool in promoting and protecting human rights and they play a vital role in the well being of any society" (Goonesekere, 2004). Although laws alone cannot address the problem, legal norms and standard setting are essential dimensions to prevent or eliminate violence against women and protect and realize women's human rights to personal security, personal liberty and range of socio-economic rights (Goonesekere, 2004). Without effective legal measures, many perpetrators enjoy impunity and victims do not get justice. Enactment of strict laws would be necessary to prevent women being tortured and accused of witchcraft. The culture of violence against women from all levels viz. structure, culture and individual would be tackled and supplemented by efforts to usher socioeconomic change (including value systems) in these societies.

## CHAPTER - III

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC & DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The socio-economic, cultural and religious setting of an area and people largely determines their belief system. So, before elucidating about the nature and extent of witch hunting in the studied area, it is imperative to have a detailed understanding about the socio-economic and cultural background of the people.

#### 3.1 Population and Distribution

The study covered a total of 606 respondents (as shown in below table 3.1). Notably, the proportion of male respondents (74 per cent) is higher than the female respondents (26 per cent). In the state of Bihar, a total of 199 respondents were interviewed, out of which, 63 per cent were males and 37 per cent females. Similarly, 209 respondents were interviewed in the state of Jharkhand, out of which 70 per cent were males and 30 per cent females. In Odisha, 198 respondents were interviewed, out of which surprisingly, 90 per cent were males and a very minimal of 10 per cent were females.

**Table 3.1: Gender Distribution of the Respondents**

State/District	Male Respondents	Female respondents	Total
Jahanabad	11.5	88.5	52
Nalanda	80.9	19.1	47
Nawada	66.0	34.0	50
Rohtas	98.0	2.0	50
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>63.3</b>	<b>36.7</b>	<b>199</b>
Deoghar	52.0	48.0	50
Dumka	96.4	3.6	56
Giridih	74.5	25.5	55
Hazaribagh	52.1	47.9	48
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>69.9</b>	<b>30.1</b>	<b>209</b>
Bhadrak	76.0	24.0	50
Gajapati	94.0	6.0	50
Koraput	98.0	2.0	50
Sonepur	93.8	6.3	48
<b>Odisha</b>	<b>90.4</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>74.4</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>606</b>

Source: Field Study

As regards to the age-groups of the respondents, it was found that majority of the respondents (57 per cent) were in the age-group of 15-60 years (as shown in below table 3.2). Around, 28 per cent were in the age-group of 6-15 years. The age-wise distribution of respondents is similar across the states.

**Table 3.2: Population Distribution by Age Group**

District/State	% of the respondents by age group				Total
	0-5 age	6-15 age	15-60 age	>60 age	

Jahanabad	16.3	29.4	52.9	1.4	100.0
Nalanda	10.9	29.4	56.9	2.7	100.0
Nawada	9.4	28.7	53.1	8.7	100.0
Rohtas	4.1	31.0	60.4	4.4	100.0
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>29.6</b>	<b>55.7</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Deoghar	7.1	21.9	66.6	4.4	100.0
Dumka	10.2	29.9	56.0	3.9	100.0
Giridih	9.5	30.1	53.3	7.1	100.0
Hazaribagh	8.9	25.1	55.1	10.9	100.0
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Bhadrak	11.1	14.0	59.4	15.5	100.0
Gajapati	13.1	29.9	55.7	1.2	100.0
Koraput	9.3	35.0	53.3	2.3	100.0
Sonepur	5.1	30.3	56.1	8.6	100.0
<b>Odisha</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>56.3</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>56.5</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Study

### 3.2 Religion

The religion of the respondents in the studied area depicts that majority of them belonged to Hindu religion (80 per cent). However, a small proportion of respondents also belonged to the religion of Christianity (14 per cent). Across the sample states, the proportion of Hindus is highest in the state of Bihar, followed by Jharkhand and Odisha as shown in the table 3.3 below. Majority of Christian were found in the state of Odisha (32 per cent).

**Table 3.3: Percentage Distribution of Households by Religion**

State/District	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Buddhist	Total household Surveyed
Jahanabad	98.1	1.9	0.0	0.0	52
Nalanda	95.7	0.0	4.3	0.0	47
Nawada	98.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	50
Rohtas	98.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	50
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>97.5</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>199</b>
Deoghar	98.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	50
Dumka	41.1	46.4	12.5	0.0	56
Giridih	94.5	3.6	1.8	0.0	55
Hazaribagh	72.9	4.2	20.8	2.1	48
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>76.1</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>209</b>
Bhadrak	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	50
Gajapati	26.0	2.0	72.0	0.0	50
Koraput	46.0	0.0	54.0	0.0	50
Sonepur	97.9	0.0	2.1	0.0	48
<b>Odisha</b>	<b>67.2</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>32.3</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>80.2</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>606</b>

Source: Field Study

### 3.3 Social Category

Out of the total households surveyed, 51 per cent belonged to Scheduled castes, 28 per cent belonged to Scheduled tribes, 18 per cent belonged to OBC and the remaining were from general and other category (as shown in table 3.4). The state of Bihar has the highest concentration of Scheduled caste communities (61 per cent), followed by Odisha (52 per cent) and Jharkhand (40 per cent). However, among the intervened households, the proportion of Scheduled tribes was found to be high in Odisha (41 per cent) and low in Bihar (12 per cent).

**Table 3.4: Percentage Distribution of Household by Social Category**

State/District	SC	ST	OBC	general	Others	Total	Total household surveyed
Jahanabad	71.2	11.5	17.3	0.0	0.0	100.0	52
Nalanda	93.6	2.1	4.3	0.0	0.0	100.0	47
Nawada	66.0	32.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	50
Rohtas	14.0	0.0	86.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	50
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>60.8</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>27.6</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>199</b>
Deoghar	54.0	14.0	28.0	4.0	0.0	100.0	50
Dumka	1.8	53.6	42.9	1.8	0.0	100.0	56
Giridih	81.8	3.6	9.1	1.8	3.6	100.0	55
Hazaribagh	20.8	56.3	18.8	4.2	0.0	100.0	48
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>39.7</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>24.9</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>209</b>
Bhadrak	68.0	32.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	50
Gajapati	8.0	92.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	50
Koraput	36.0	38.0	0.0	26.0	0.0	100.0	50
Sonepur	97.9	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	48
<b>Odisha</b>	<b>52.0</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>50.7</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>606</b>

Source: Field Study

### 3.4 Educational Status

The educational status of the respondents revealed that the rate of female illiteracy (55 per cent) is more than male illiteracy (23 per cent) and it is highest in Bihar (70 per cent) and Odisha (60 per cent). This can be attributed to the existence of the supernatural belief and practices of witch hunting and subsequent cohesion in the states. Among the literates, majority of the male respondents studied till primary and middle level education whereas the female respondents attended below primary level education. This accounts for their low educational status, which in turn affects their overall socio-economic and political sphere.

**Table 3.5: Educational Status of the Respondents**

Sex	Status	Bihar	Jharkhand	Odisha	Total
Male	Illiterate	49.2	12.4	7.1	22.8
	Informal education	12.6	4.8	7.6	8.3
	below primary	4.5	10.5	14.6	9.9
	Primary	10.6	15.3	33.3	19.6

Female	Middle	7.5	12.9	25.3	15.2
	Secondary	8.0	16.3	3.5	9.4
	Higher Secondary	5.0	18.7	4.5	9.6
	Graduation/BA/Degree and above	2.5	8.6	3.5	5.0
	Technical	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.2
	Other	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	Illiterate	70.2	35.9	60.1	55.0
	Informal education	9.1	6.2	10.6	8.6
	below primary	4.5	10.5	17.6	10.8
	Primary	5.1	10.5	1.1	5.7
	Middle	3.5	9.6	3.2	5.5
	Secondary	3.0	13.4	2.7	6.6
	Higher Secondary	3.5	9.6	4.3	5.9
	Graduation/BA/Degree and above	1.0	3.8	0.5	1.8
	Other	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Study

### 3.5 Occupation

The present study revealed that the major occupation of the respondents is cultivation (21 per cent) and casual labourer in agricultural (32 per cent) and non-agricultural sectors (33 per cent). Table 3.6 reveals that in Bihar, majority of them are engaged as casual labourer in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Similarly, in Jharkhand, the people are engaged as cultivators and casual labourers in non-agricultural sector. However, in Odisha, the people primarily engage themselves in cultivation. A negligible proportion of respondents are also engaged in various other activities such as bonded labour, unpaid family labour, salaried in Government and private sector, personal services, skilled artisan, etc. Thus, from this, it can be inferred that the people have subsistence economy and lack of employment opportunities. It was also found that 71 per cent of the households belonged to below poverty line (BPL) category. It is highest in Bihar (80 per cent) and Odisha (75 per cent).

Table 3.6: Occupational Status of the Respondents

Work Status	Bihar	Jharkhand	Odisha	Total
Cultivator	6.0	14.4	41.4	20.5
Casual labour in agriculture	54.8	12.4	29.3	31.8
Casual labour in non-agriculture	30.7	41.1	26.3	32.8
Attached/bonded labour	3.5	4.8	0.5	3.0
Unpaid family labour	0.0	1.9	1.0	1.0
Regular salaried wage in government sector	0.0	5.7	0.5	2.1
Regular salaried wage in private sector	1.5	3.3	0.0	1.7
Own account worker (self-employed)	0.5	7.2	0.0	2.6
Personal Services (Jajmani)	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.5
Skilled Artisans	0.5	5.7	0.0	2.1
Trader	0.0	1.9	0.0	0.7

Domestic work	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.2
Retired/pensioner/ too old	0.0	1.0	1.0	0.7
Beggar	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.2
Other	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total household surveyed</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>606</b>

Source: Field Study

### 3.6 Income Level

The empirical data shows that majority of the households (27 per cent) belonged to the income group of Rs. 20001-30000 per annum. However, 18 per cent belonged to the income group of Rs. 10001-20000 and 17 per cent to the group of Rs. 30001-40000 per annum. Notably, 4 per cent households were from the income group of above Rs. 100000/annum. In Bihar, the condition is slightly better than the other two states, since here majority belonged to the group of Rs. 40001-50000 per annum. They have an average annual income of Rs. 40,492 per household.

**Table 3.7: Percentage Distribution of Household by Income group**

District/State	Income group								Total number of household
	0-10000	10001-20000	20001-30000	30001-40000	40001-50000	50001-100000	greater than 100000	Total	
Jahanabad	0.0	3.8	11.5	28.8	44.2	11.5	0.0	100.0	52
Nalanda	31.9	4.3	2.1	0.0	34.0	25.5	2.1	100.0	47
Nawada	4.0	14.0	22.0	16.0	16.0	24.0	4.0	100.0	50
Rohtas	4.0	36.0	38.0	12.0	2.0	6.0	2.0	100.0	50
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>199</b>
Deoghar	8.0	6.0	14.0	28.0	16.0	14.0	14.0	100.0	50
Dumka	39.3	12.5	14.3	12.5	5.4	3.6	12.5	100.0	56
Giridih	3.6	3.6	18.2	58.2	7.3	9.1	0.0	100.0	55
Hazaribagh	29.2	35.4	10.4	10.4	8.3	6.3	0.0	100.0	48
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>27.8</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>209</b>
Bhadrak	2.0	10.0	28.0	16.0	6.0	32.0	6.0	100.0	50
Gajapati	0.0	24.0	62.0	8.0	0.0	4.0	2.0	100.0	50
K8Koraput	8.0	44.0	48.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	50
Sonepur	14.6	18.8	56.3	8.3	2.1	0.0	0.0	100.0	48
Odisha	6.1	24.2	48.5	8.1	2.0	9.1	2.0	100.0	198
<b>Total</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>606</b>

Source: Field Study

### 3.7 Water and Sanitation Facilities

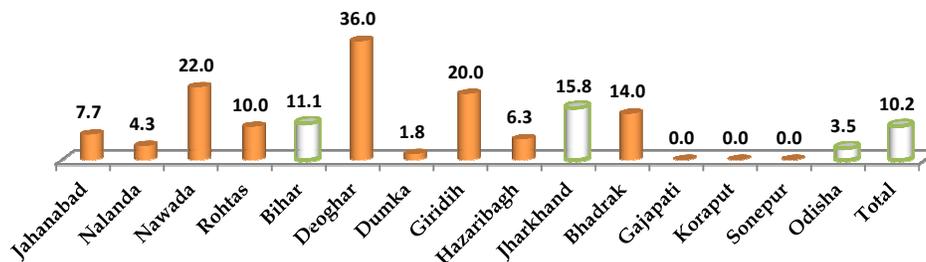
As regards to the facilities of water and sanitation in the villages, it was found that hand pump is the main source of water for the villagers (43 per cent). However, they also depend on public stand post (26 per cent) as well as open wells (14 per cent) for fetching drinking water. Table 3.8 depicts that in Bihar, the people mostly depend on public hand posts and local hand pumps for their source of drinking water. In Jharkhand, there are multiple sources of water such as, public stand post (31 per cent), open well (27 per cent), local hand pump (21 per cent) and household tap supply (18 per cent). Interestingly, majority of the people in Odisha, procure water from local hand pumps (50 per cent) and the most unsafe and unhygienic source of water i.e. rivers/streams/ *nalas* (23 per cent).

**Table 3.8: Distribution of Household by Source of Water**

District/State	Household Tap water supply	Pubic Stand Post	local Hand Pump	India Mark 2/3	River/ Stream/Nala	Rainwater harvested	Pond	Open well	other	Total
Jahanabad	3.8	17.3	73.1	1.9	1.9	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Nalanda	4.3	48.9	44.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.1	0.0	100.0
Nawada	6.0	22.0	72.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Rohtas	0.0	48.0	52.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>33.7</b>	<b>60.8</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Deoghar	10.0	22.0	36.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	32.0	0.0	100.0
Dumka	32.1	62.5	3.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	100.0
Giridih	23.6	29.1	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8	23.6	1.8	100.0
Hazaribagh	2.1	6.3	27.1	0.0	6.3	0.0	0.0	58.3	0.0	100.0
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Bhadrak	2.0	8.0	90.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Gajapati	0.0	10.0	36.0	0.0	30.0	0.0	0.0	24.0	0.0	100.0
Koraput	0.0	4.0	16.0	0.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	100.0
Sonepur	0.0	35.4	56.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.0	100.0
Odisha	0.5	14.1	49.5	0.0	22.7	0.0	0.0	13.1	0.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>43.4</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Study

The sanitation facility in the studied villages is a matter of concern. Out of a total of 606 households, only 10 per cent have toilet facility. In Bihar, total 11 per cent households have toilet facility. From among the studied districts, in Nawada maximum proportion of the households has toilet facility (22 per cent). In Jharkhand, 16 per cent households have toilet facility. The districts of Deoghar and Giridih are in a better of position with 36 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. However, the state of Odisha has very poor sanitation facility with only 3.5 per cent households having toilets (as shown in Figure 3.1).



**Figure 3.1: Percentage of Household Having Toilet Facility**

Source: Field Study

### 3.8 Household Facilities

More than half of the households were found residing in *kutcha* houses. Around 22 per cent were staying in semi-*pucca* houses. A significant proportion of households in Bihar (26 per cent) and Odisha (13 per cent) were found having thatched houses. However, 14 per cent households studied in Jharkhand were residing in *pucca* houses.

As regards to the provision of lighting facility, it was found that majority of the households were having electricity facility (71 per cent). It varied from 34 per cent in Bihar to 90 per cent in Odisha. Surprisingly, as contrast to sanitation facility, the state of Odisha has a satisfactory provision of electricity as shown in below Table 3.9.

**Table 3.9: Percentage Distribution of Household by Lighting facility**

District/State	Electricity	Kerosene lamp	Solar lamp	None	Total	Total household surveyed
Jahanabad	25.0	75.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	52
Nalanda	48.9	51.1	0.0	0.0	100.0	47
Nawada	4.0	92.0	4.0	0.0	100.0	50
Rohtas	60.0	38.0	0.0	2.0	100.0	50
Bihar	34.2	64.3	1.0	0.5	100.0	199
Deoghar	90.0	4.0	0.0	6.0	100.0	50
Dumka	78.6	21.4	0.0	0.0	100.0	56
Giridih	98.2	1.8	0.0	0.0	100.0	55
Hazaribagh	89.6	6.3	0.0	4.2	100.0	48
Jharkhand	89.0	8.6	0.0	2.4	100.0	209
Bhadrak	90.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	50
Gajapati	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	50
Koraput	82.0	10.0	8.0	0.0	100.0	50
Sonepur	87.5	12.5	0.0	0.0	100.0	48
Odisha	89.9	8.1	2.0	0.0	100.0	198
Total	71.3	26.7	1.0	1.0	100.0	606

Source: Field Study

### 3.9 Assets

Around 67 per cent households of the studied villages, possessed bicycle/cycle rickshaw. Notably, more than half of the households had mobile phone and more than 60 per cent had TV and electric fan. It is imperative to mention that around 34 per cent households in Jharkhand possessed land holdings and 10 per cent LPG (Table 3.10)

**Table 3.10: Percentage of Households having the following Asset**

District/State	Tractor	Agricultural machinery and tools	Non-agricultural Motor vehicle	Car/jeep	Scooter/ motorcycle	Bicycle/Cycle rickshaw	TV	Fridge	Mobile Phone	Electric fan	LPG	Land owned	
Jahanabad	0.0	3.8	1.9	0.0	0.0	42.3	25.0	3.8	59.6	7.7	1.9	5.8	
Nalanda	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.1	40.4	27.7	0.0	51.1	8.5	2.1	4.3	
Nawada	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	14.0	2.0	64.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Rohtas	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	46.0	24.0	2.0	56.0	6.0	2.0	0.0	
Bihar	0.0	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.5	42.2	22.6	2.0	57.8	5.5	1.5	2.5	
Deoghar	2.0	4.0	2.0	0.0	2.0	24.0	80.0	56.0	10.0	94.0	44.0	22.0	80.0
Dumka	0.0	1.8	3.6	0.0	1.8	25.0	85.7	25.0	1.8	85.7	30.4	8.9	33.9
Giridih	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8	3.6	20.0	76.4	70.9	14.5	74.5	65.5	7.3	0.0
Hazaribagh	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.1	12.5	70.8	25.0	4.2	45.8	20.8	2.1	27.1
Jharkhand	0.5	1.4	1.4	0.5	2.4	20.6	78.5	44.5	7.7	75.6	40.7	10.0	34.4
Bhadrak	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	74.0	46.0	4.0	48.0	60.0	2.0	24.0
Gajapati	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	2.0	90.0	24.0	6.0	46.0	40.0	0.0	0.0
Koraput	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	82.0	32.0	0.0	0.0	22.0	0.0	0.0
Sonepur	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	72.9	54.2	0.0	22.9	33.3	0.0	0.0
Odisha	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.0	3.0	79.8	38.9	2.5	29.3	38.9	0.5	6.1
Total	0.2	0.8	0.7	0.3	1.0	8.3	67.0	35.5	4.1	54.6	28.5	4.1	14.7

Source: Field Study



## CHAPTER - IV

### WITCH-HUNTING - BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

#### 4.1 Introduction

Witch hunting is an age old tradition considered to be driven by superstitious beliefs of people in rural India. The woman who is perceived to be practicing witchcraft is punished severely by the whole community and branded as '*dayan*', '*chudail*', etc. It is one such dangerous superstition that often kills the victim. The belief in the practice of witchcraft is part of almost all living societies and some traces of it can be felt at various degrees among all communities, especially Dalits and Adivasis. The practice is dominant among the socially excluded communities of states like Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, even today. It has been considered as a mere superstitious act for a long time; however, the studies and observations by sociologists and anthropologists reveal a completely different story. Dalit woman who are rebellious in nature or a threat to the patriarchal system or widows who possess some property are the ones who are tormented on the name of being a witch. It is a conspiracy to throw them out of the community; to acquire their property or suppress their voice. Witch hunting is also understood as a manifestation of the low social status of women whereby male attitude of dominance and violence against women is legitimized by calling her a witch (Chaudhuri, 2012).

Witch hunting is a prearranged act of violence against Dalit and Adivasi women whereby the entire community sanctions the punishment meted out to the person being accused of "witch". As a social evil, it is more difficult to tackle because the motivation of such action is often rooted in the traditional spiritual and cultural belief system of the communities which is misinterpreted by few persons for manipulating the situation. Thus, witch hunting perpetuates through a conspiracy of ignorance, fear and vested interest.

#### 4.2 Findings of the study

Belief in witches and witch practices occupies a central place in rural socially excluded Dalits' spiritual and ethical life. They firmly believe in controlling the evil spirit by seeking help of good spirits through magic and exorcism. They also draw boundaries between white magic (benevolent) and black magic (malevolent). The *ojha* (local doctor), the diviner or the medicine man, practices the white magic. He uses his powers to counteract the powers of the *dayan* or the witch. It is a common belief among the Dalits and Adivasis that a witch possesses supernatural powers which can harm animals, children, men, and women and even make them fatally ill. The witch can cause illness such as diarrhoea, malaria, tuberculosis, common fever, stomach ailments, etc. Sometimes she may cause infertility also. In this connection, it is imperative to explore and examine the claim of existence of witches and the perception of the people to get a better understanding of the issue, before continuing on to the nature and extent of violence meted against these alleged witches and the mechanisms to control it.

##### 4.2.1 Perception of Witchcraft

The first question that one has to deal with is whether people have heard of witches? Are there really such women? And, if yes, do they believe in witches? Interacting with the

people of the studied area, it was found that there certainly is a strong awareness among the people in the existence of such women who practice witchcraft, and thus as per belief gain certain supernatural powers to cause harm to mankind as well as livestock. Majority of the Dalits of Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar are aware and have heard about the practice of witchcraft (as shown in Figure 4.1).

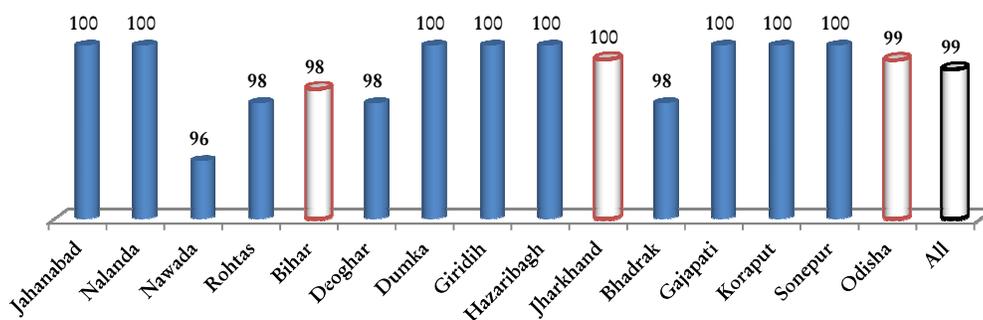


Figure 4.1: Households Heard about Witchcraft

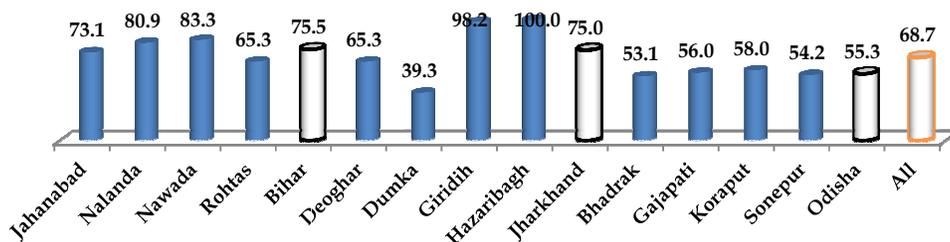
Source: Field Study

One such instance is of Manju Devi, aged 45 years of Govindpur village of Nalanda district, Bihar. Though a very strong and assertive person, Manju Devi has a strong belief in the superstition of witches and witch practices. She resides with her husband, Vijay Ravidas and four daughters and two sons in Dalit basti. Ravidas's first wife also resides in the same *basti* with her 24 year old son. She usually comes to meet Ravidas, which creates distress in Manju's family. Manju alleges her to be a "witch" and practicing witchcraft on her newly born grand-daughter. As a result, her grand-daughter died on the second day of her birth. Finally, the *ohja* of the village confirmed that the child died due to casting evil spells by Ravidas's first wife. Since then, all the villagers also regard her 'witch' and discriminate and exploit her. This shows the extent of belief in the minds of rural people regarding the superstition of witches and witch-hunting.

Source: Filed Survey by NACDOR Team, Govindpur village of Nalanda district, Bihar

The empirical findings further reveal that to some extent the belief in witchcraft still exists today among the socially and educationally backward and excluded communities of rural India. An overwhelming majority (70 per cent) of the households have strong faith in witchcraft. The conviction is higher among the people of Bihar (75.5 per cent), followed by Jharkhand (75.0 per cent) and then, Odisha (55.3 per cent). Moreover, it is evident from the Figure 4.2, that the people of Giridih (98.2 per cent) and Hazaribagh (100 per cent) are firm believers of existence of witch and witch practices. This can be evidenced from the instance of Basmati Devi. Once, there was rejoice and celebration at Ramchandra Modi's house in Gamhardiha village of Giridih district, Jharkhand. The purpose of celebration was the birth of his grand-daughter. Many people from the village were invited to bless the newly born baby. Ramchandra belongs to upper caste community. However, people from different caste groups also visited his house and offered gifts to the baby. Ramchandra's neighbour Basmati Devi, 45 years age, a lower caste (*Badhai*) widow, also offered her blessings and gift to the baby. Unfortunately, after the function, the baby fell ill and died the next morning. After that, Ramchandra along with all the villagers believed and accused Basmati Devi of inflicting disease and death on the baby using black magic. Conflict arose between the two families and she was severely

beaten by neighbours for allegedly practicing witchcraft on the baby. Thus, the instance of Basmati Devi is a clear evidence of firm believes on the superstition.



**Figure 4.2: Households Believe in Witchcraft**

Source: Field Study

#### 4.2.2 Perception of Respondents Regarding the Manifestation of Witchcraft

The perception of the people relating to the severity of the consequences of Witch Practices on the community, as a whole, by the branded Witch is also an important aspect which determines the belief system of the community. Majority of the Dalits are firm believers of witch practices. Their belief arises from both fatalistic and superstitious attitudes. They assume that a woman who is believed to be a witch not only kills fellow human beings but also can spread her powers of witchcraft.

According to the below Table 4.1, out of a total of 413 households, majority of the households (75 per cent) were of the opinion that the practice of witchcraft leads to severe health problems among the innocent villagers. The highest was reported from Jharkhand (78 per cent) followed by Bihar (77 per cent) and Odisha (68 per cent). More than 65 per cent of the households in Jharkhand and Bihar affirmed of experiencing bad dreams due to the practice. However, it is lower in Odisha (46 per cent). But, more than half of the households in Odisha reported of death at young age, death of a healthy person, miscarriages or infertility as well as stubborn illness due to the effect of witchcraft. Around 53 per cent of the Dalit households in Bihar reported of death at young age and 42 per cent reported of sudden death of a healthy person. Notably, only 21 per cent of the households in Jharkhand reported death at young age and 33 per cent reported of sudden death of a healthy person.

**Table 4.1: Perception of Respondents on Manifestation of Witchcraft**

District/State	Bihar	Jharkhand	Odisha	All
Health problem	77.0	78.2	68.8	75.3
Crop failure	22.3	6.4	36.7	20.1
Bad Dream	67.6	66.0	46.8	61.5
Death at young age	53.4	20.5	56.9	41.9
Death of domestic animal	38.5	7.7	20.2	22.0
Paddy crop destroy by fire	6.8	1.9	3.7	4.1
Stubborn illness	31.1	48.7	56.0	44.3
A stock of bad luck	10.1	5.8	17.4	10.4
Drying up of well	18.9	3.2	31.2	16.2
Inability to give birth of a son	34.5	7.7	33.9	24.2
Sudden storm in the lake	4.1	1.3	1.8	2.4
Sudden death of a healthy person	41.9	32.7	56.9	42.4
Miscarriages or infertility	37.2	17.9	57.8	35.4

Drought or flood	9.5	3.2	11.9	7.7
Death from snake bite	31.1	19.9	22.9	24.7
Dog bite	27.0	5.1	1.8	12.1
Psychological disorder	35.8	10.3	45.0	28.6
Households believe on witches	148	156	109	413

Source: Field Study

It can be attributed to the ignorance of the people, which leads to irrational beliefs and a perception that natural occurrences like sickness and death in the village are caused by supernatural powers. The belief that unless the witches are not eliminated, such suffering and sickness will continue is not uncommon. It, therefore, becomes necessary to identify the witch with the help of the *Ojhas* (local healers) followed by severe punishment to the accused. Moreover, around 50 per cent of the households surveyed, believed in the fact that the children of witch families are also taught the skills of casting evil spells and black magic by their parents or relatives (as shown in Figure 4.3). Interestingly, such a perception is highly prevalent in the state of Jharkhand (78 per cent), followed by Bihar (50 per cent) and, lowest in Odisha (20 per cent). The study also revealed that majority of the Dalits of Jahanabad in Bihar and Giridih & Hazaribagh in Jharkhand believe that witch hunting is a legacy of violence against women and it is passed on to the next generation through proper skill and training by their own family members or relatives.

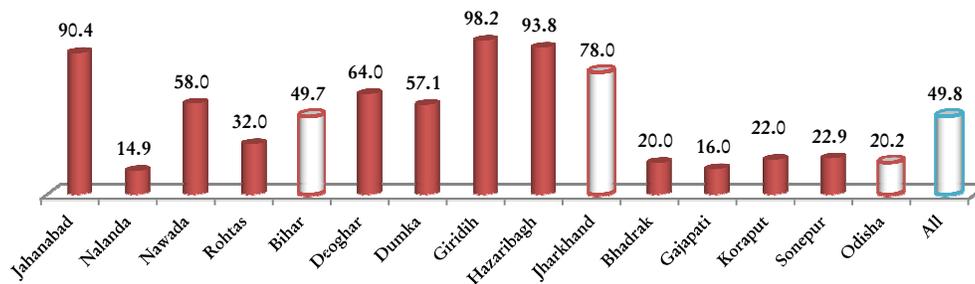


Figure 4.3: Respondents believe that the Children of Witch Families are trained by their Family Members Only

Source: Field Study

#### 4.2.3 Perception on Special Occasion of Witch Attack

The study also explored the perception of the Dalits as regards to any special occasion of witch attack. It was revealed from the below Table 4.2 that the witch attacks on the auspicious day of Durga Puja (32 per cent households reported). The conviction is highest in Odisha (46 per cent), followed by Bihar (36.5 per cent) and Jharkhand (19 per cent). However, a trivial portion of households hold the view that the witch attacks on the day of both Durga puja and Kali puja. It can be attributed to the entrenched religious and spiritual belief system of the Dalit communities. Some people believe that the appearance of witch and witch attack is not bound to any time frame; instead it appears any time. It was also reported that majority of the people believe in applying *kajal* in the eyes of the children to get rid of witch attack.

Table 4.2: Perception of Respondents Regarding Special Occasions of Witch Attack

Occasion/Events	Bihar	Jharkhand	Odisha	All
-----------------	-------	-----------	--------	-----

Durga Puja	36.5	18.7	45.9	32.3
Both durga Puja and Kali Puja	13.5	13.5	21.1	15.5
Any time	15.5	7.1	11	11.2
Sravan month	5.4	3.2	0	3.2
Chaitra month	1.4	0	2.8	1.2
During night	2	0	2.8	1.5
Aghan month	4.7	0.6	0.9	2.2
Every Saturday and Sunday	1.4	24.5	0.9	10
Noon and midnight	4.7	10.3	3.7	6.6
Only midnight	0	4.5	0	1.7
Amabashya night	0	7.7	0	2.9
Ashwin month	1.4	4.5	2.8	2.9
Purnima night	4.1	0.6	2.8	2.4
Only in noon	5.4	0	5.5	3.4
Evening	2.7	0	0	1
Early morning	0.7	0	0	0.2
When someone is alone	0.7	4.5	0	1.9

Source: Field Study

#### 4.2.4 The Caste of Witches

The witch-hunting menace has seen many innocent women being persecuted, tortured and even lynched. Various studies reveal that the practice of witchcraft and 'witch-hunting' in parts of India appears to be prevalent predominantly among certain castes and tribes though the present study shows that allegation on women for being a witch is found among muslim hamlets as well in Jharkhand . The following Figure 4.4 shows a detailed picture regarding the perception of people on the castes of accused witches. Around 32 per cent of the respondents revealed that the alleged witches belong to the lower Dalit caste community. These communities have lived a socially, economically, educationally excluded and deprived life for centuries. They have suffered the burden of heinous forms of discrimination and exploitation in the society, including witch practices. There are also women from other castes who are branded as witch. However, their proportion in relation to Dalit women is minimal. It is a Dalit woman who suffers the most of Witch accusation and persecution. Various focused group discussions and in-depth interviews with the authorities, doctors, media personnel, political and local representatives, Panchayat level representatives, etc. also proved the fact that the existence and persecution of witch hunting is highly prevalent among the Dalit communities.

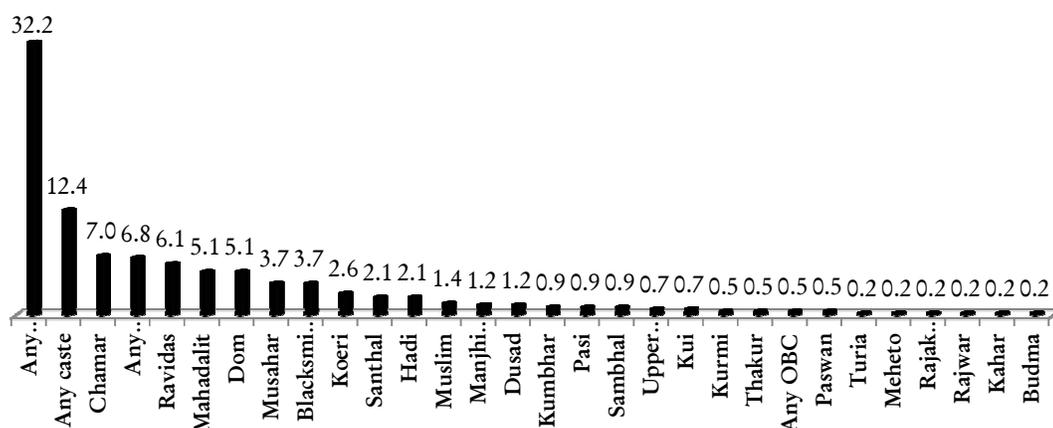


Figure 4.4: Respondents' Revelation on the Caste of Witches

Source: Field Study

#### 4.2.5 Reason and Sources of Treatment

Apart from the belief and perception of the people regarding witch and witch practices, it is also important to understand the dynamics of the source and reason of treatment of ailments believed to be caused by the witch. As stated earlier, majority of the people in the studied villages believed in the presence of witch who casts evil spells and practices black magic and believed to cause ailment to people and animals. Initially, she is usually identified by an *ojha* or *gunia*. The process of identification of the witch is specified by the *Ojhas* by looking at the symptoms of the patient. The alleged recipient of witchcraft is usually seen suffering from symptoms like, chronic disease, blood-vomiting, faint, medicine do not react, eye becoming red, voice chocked, etc,. However, majority (19 per cent) of the people reported that the medicine of the doctors did not react. It is highest among the Dalits of Jharkhand (22 per cent), followed by Bihar (20 per cent) and lowest in Odisha (13 per cent). Some 13 per cent of them reported of chronic ailment and 11 per cent reported of sudden death of family member (as shown in the Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Perception of Household by Different Symptom/Symbol found

Symbol/symptom	Bihar	Jharkhand	Odisha	Total
Once start saying witch other replicate	6.1	13.6	12.8	10.7
Sudden death of family member	10.2	7.8	17.4	11.2
Chronic disease or serious health problem	12.2	20.1	4.6	13.2
Not conceive of child/abortion continuously	4.1	2.6	3.7	3.4
When society declare someone as witch	0.7	1.3	0.9	1.0
Blood vomiting /lack of blood in body	4.8	1.3	3.7	3.2
Faint	5.4	5.8	2.8	4.9
Medicine do not react	20.4	22.1	12.8	19.0
When patient cure after <i>jhar-funk/ojha</i> start believing	14.3	9.1	7.3	10.5
Death of child after delivery	0.7	0.0	0.9	0.5
Drying of Brest milk of mother	0.7	1.3	1.8	1.2
Behave like mad/becoming mad	10.9	1.9	15.6	8.8
Eye becoming red	2.7	0.6	0.0	1.2
Part of body suddenly wet at night	2.0	0.6	0.0	1.0
Throwing stone to house in midnight	0.7	3.9	1.8	2.2

Voice choked	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.2
Tension in house/quarrel in small thing	2.0	1.3	1.8	1.7
Sudden fear in the house	2.7	4.5	3.7	3.7
Unrelated talking by self/quarrel	6.8	8.4	12.8	9.0
Seeing someone continuously	3.4	0.6	0.9	1.7
Small child being disturbed	4.8	3.9	2.8	3.9
Black/red spot in the body	4.1	5.2	3.7	4.4
Not able to speak	7.5	2.6	2.8	4.4
When rice with vermillion/turmeric laying in front of house	0.0	1.3	1.8	1.0
Sleeplessness/ not feeling hungry	0.0	1.9	1.8	1.2
Feeling heavy and drowsy	0.7	0.0	0.9	0.5
Boil in the face	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.5
Sudden accident	1.4	2.6	2.8	2.2
The victim would laugh or cry loudly without having any reason	8.8	6.5	6.4	7.3
Sudden eye power reduced	0.0	1.3	1.8	1.0
Production reduced drastically	0.7	0.6	1.8	1.0
Strange voice / change in vocal chord	2.7	1.3	0.9	1.7
Not getting job/continuously unemployed	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.5
Sudden falling of utensils	1.4	0.0	0.9	0.7
Disorder in menstruation cycle	4.1	0.0	4.6	2.7
Death of animal	2.7	0.6	0.0	1.2
Bad dream	4.1	3.9	2.8	3.7
Others	5.4	0.6	3.7	3.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Study

As soon as it is believed that the disease/harm has been caused due to ‘witchcraft’ people try to get rid of the spell through prayers and offerings. The people of the studied villages believe that without these prayers and offerings, the patient would not survive. It is only after failure from *Ojhas* that they seek medical treatment. It was also reported that sometimes, patients die due to delay in treatment. If the patient dies the belief of existence of a witch gets further vindicated and the identification and persecution of the witch starts. In the present study, out of a total of 581 households who are going for treatment, more than 60 per cent go to private doctors and Government hospitals for treatment and 45 per cent exclusively go to *Ojhas* for treatment (as shown in below Table 4.4). The proportion of people going to *Ojhas* for treatment is similar across the studied states. However, majority of Dalits from Jharkhand (66 per cent) and Odisha (62 per cent) go to Government hospital for treatment as compared to Bihar (40 per cent). The proportion of people consulting private doctor is highest in Bihar (74 per cent), followed by Jharkhand (62 per cent) and Odisha (48 per cent).

A deep analysis about the qualification private doctors to whom the affected people are visiting for medical help reveals that most of them are not qualified doctors. They are register medical practioners, pharmacists, nurses etc. When the victims go government hospital to access medical services, they are subjected to discrimination. During the interview with the victims and victims’ family reveals that the doctors do not touch them and prescribe treatment without examining their health. In addition to this, absence of

medical workers is very common in the hospital as they do not prefer to work in rural areas work in the private clinic during working hours. Doctors posted at remote facilities and at facilities with poor infrastructure and equipment are absent at significantly higher rates, as are those with longer commutes.

Due to lack of awareness and medical care, many of them suffer from reproductive health complications; including STDs and cervical cancer. They do not get basic medical facilities. Pregnant Dalit women receive discriminatory treatment in hospitals and there are instances where doctors have refused to conduct the delivery of Dalit women.

Sanghmitra S Acharya (2010)<sup>20</sup> provides evidence on discriminatory access to Scheduled Castes women and children to primary health services which in turn lead to lower utilisation of health services. The study reported that health personnel discriminate Scheduled Castes by not visiting their habitations and families. When they do visit, they express discomfort and disrespect for the clients. Further, most healthcare camps are held in the dominant caste habitations and hence the use by Dalit communities is restricted.<sup>21</sup>

The following table depicts the spheres and indicators of discrimination faced by Dalit women in public health services:

Spheres of Discrimination	Identifiers of Discrimination	Consequences of Discrimination
Treatment at the time of antenatal check-up	Face rude verbal responses from health workers. Nurses give medicines without check-up and send them away.	Lack of care leads to requirement of private medical attention
Treatment by auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM) for family planning operations	Indifferent verbal responses and coerced to take decisions, e.g. prospect of ration card being withdrawn if refused to have tubectomy. Do not receive appropriate post operative care	Lack of post operative care leads to requirement of private medical attention
Treatment at the time of delivery	Ignored and kept waiting for long. The staff then directs to go to a distant district headquarter hospital for the delivery.	The delay complicates delivery which leads to requirement of private medical attention. Take loan for delivery in private Hospital
Treatment after assault by men in authority (police and dominant caste landlord-employer)	Refusal of treatment by doctors in local government hospital in order to avoid being involved in a police case.	Lack of care leads to requirement of private medical attention

Source: Compiled by Nidhi Sadana Sabharwal drawing from various health studies undertaken by AIDMAM and IIDS

<sup>20</sup> Acharya, Sangamitra S. 2010. 'Caste and Patterns of Discrimination in Rural Public Health Care Services', in Sukhdeo Thorat and Katherine S. Newman (Eds), *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

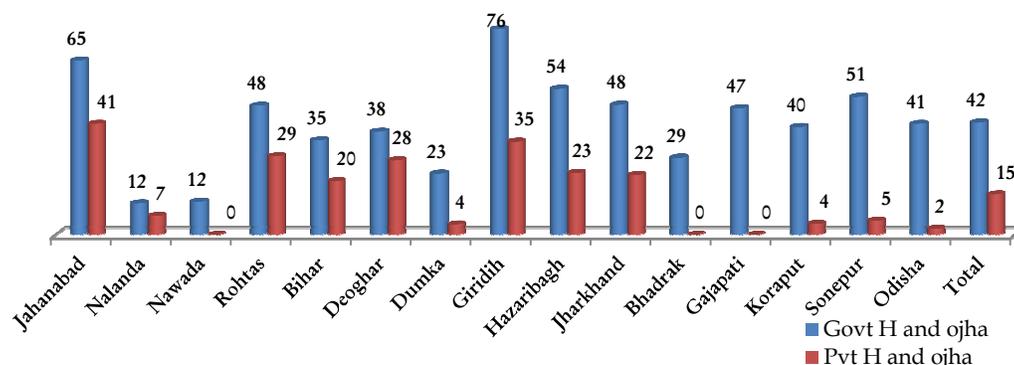
<sup>21</sup> Barroah, V.K; Sabarwal, N. S & Thorat, S. (2006). *Gender and Caste Based Inequality in Health Outcomes in India*. IIDS

**Table 4.4: Source of Treatment of the Households**

District/State	Government Hospital	Private Doctors	Medicine shop	Ojha	Tantrik	Other	Total	Total households going for treatment
Jahanabad	27.5	76.5	0.0	62.7	2.0	0.0	100.0	51
Nalanda	30.2	83.7	2.3	30.2	0.0	0.0	100.0	43
Nawada	65.3	71.4	12.2	12.2	0.0	2.0	100.0	49
Rohtas	35.4	66.7	37.5	58.3	2.1	0.0	100.0	48
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>39.8</b>	<b>74.3</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>191</b>
Deoghar	55.3	76.6	0.0	34.0	17.0	0.0	100.0	47
Dumka	88.7	79.2	0.0	17.0	9.4	0.0	100.0	53
Giridih	50.9	45.5	1.8	80.0	1.8	1.8	100.0	55
Hazaribagh	68.8	47.9	8.3	60.4	6.3	8.3	100.0	48
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>66.0</b>	<b>62.1</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>48.3</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>203</b>
Bhadrak	89.8	67.3	0.0	42.9	10.2	0.0	100.0	49
Gajapati	42.9	36.7	38.8	44.9	30.6	6.1	100.0	49
Koraput	60.0	50.0	26.0	36.0	16.0	10.0	100.0	50
Sonepur	51.3	33.3	25.6	53.8	17.9	7.7	100.0	39
<b>Odisha</b>	<b>61.5</b>	<b>47.6</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>43.9</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>55.9</b>	<b>61.4</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>581</b>

Source: Field Study

In order to have a precise and comprehensive understanding on the role of *Ojhas* or *tantriks* and the perception of the people towards them, the study attempted to examine the response of the people consulting the *Ojhas* for treatment along with Government or private hospitals. It was found from below Figure 4.5, that majority of the people (42 per cent) in all the districts and the states consult the *Ojhas* along with visiting the government hospital for treatment as compared to private hospitals (15 per cent). It is highest in Giridih of Jharkhand (76 per cent) and Jahanabad of Bihar (65 per cent).



**Figure 4.5: Household visit to Ojha/Tantrik besides Government or Private Hospital**

Source: Field Study

The study also interviewed some doctors and *Ojhas* to have an accurate understanding of the problem. Dr. A.K.Chaudhary, a resident of Patna, is working in the Primary Health Centre of Katghat block of Rohtas district for last 4 years. On probing, whether he has come across any case of violence of women due to allegations of witchcraft, he stated that he has never come across any such cases. It is because; the villagers believe and seek treatment from the *Ojhas*. He stressed that the *Ojhas*, *tantriks*, *gunias*, etc. play a

dominating & influencing role in the lives of the rural marginalized and excluded Dalit communities.

On enquiring about the reasons for consulting the *Ojhas* for treatment, 40 per cent of the households reported that they believe in using both the medicine of the doctors as well as the *Ojhas* to cure the patient (as shown in the below Table 4.5). Across the states, it varies from 22 per cent in Odisha to 54 per cent in Jharkhand. Moreover, it was also reported by 30 per cent of the respondents that the reason for consulting the *Ojhas* is due to failure of doctor's treatment. The belief of such a reason was found to be highest among the Dalits of Odisha. A very trivial proportion of people (25 per cent) opined that the medicine of the Government hospital is incapable of treating the ailment and the patient.

**Table 4.5: Reasons behind Attending *Ojha/Tantrik* for Treatment**

District/State	Medicine provided by Government is not sufficient as witch attack is common	Medical Practitioners unable to treat the patients	Use both medicine by doctor and <i>Ojha</i>	To get self satisfied treated by <i>Ojha/Tantrik</i>	Total
Jahanabad	13.9	41.7	41.7	2.8	100.0
Nalanda	36.7	30.0	30.0	3.3	100.0
Nawada	40.7	18.5	33.3	7.4	100.0
Rohtas	20.7	0.0	79.3	0.0	100.0
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>23.8</b>	<b>45.9</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Deoghar	46.2	30.8	11.5	11.5	100.0
Dumka	26.7	23.3	50.0	0.0	100.0
Giridih	11.8	3.9	84.3	0.0	100.0
Hazaribagh	23.8	21.4	47.6	7.1	100.0
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>17.4</b>	<b>54.4</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Bhadrak	40.0	36.0	8.0	16.0	100.0
Gajapati	8.2	71.4	12.2	8.2	100.0
Koraput	24.0	38.0	36.0	2.0	100.0
Sonepur	36.8	36.8	26.3	0.0	100.0
<b>Odisha</b>	<b>24.7</b>	<b>47.5</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>All</b>	<b>25.2</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>40.0</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Study

### 4.3 Summary

To sum up, the existence of witch and witch practices is deeply rooted in the belief system of the socially excluded communities of the studied area. They firmly believe that a witch casts evil spells and black magic through some acquired supernatural powers and do harm to the community and livestock. And, to get rid of the harmful effects of a witch, they consult the local *Ojhas* or *gunias*, who offers prayers and charms. The villager's conviction in the *Ojhas* is so strong that they are blindfolded of the malicious intentions of the *Ojhas*. Thus, this gives rise to conflicts and violence in the community. And, the alleged victim is severely ostracised and even lynched to death. The scale and severity of the violence against Dalit women in regard to witch hunting has been explicitly discussed in the subsequent chapter.

## CHAPTER - V

### INCIDENCE AND VIOLENCE OF WITCH HUNTING

#### 5.1 Introduction

The Dalit women face the burden of multiple disadvantages and vulnerabilities in everyday life. The human rights and dignity of Dalit women are generally violated by heinous forms of atrocities and mayhem, often leading to death of the person. Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Ms. Yakin Ertürk (2009) quoted - “Dalit women are confronted with discrimination, exclusion and violence to a larger extent than men. Land and property issues in particular, tend to cause or be at the root of conflicts over which Dalit women have faced eviction, harassment, physical abuse and assault. Dalit women are often denied access to or are evicted from their land by dominant castes, especially if it borders land belonging to such castes. They are thus forced to live in the outskirts of villages, often on barren land. Reportedly, on many occasions, cases of violence against Dalit women are not registered, and adequate procedures are not taken by the police.”<sup>22</sup> The European Parliament adopted a resolution on violence against women in India which includes several references to caste discrimination and the situation of Dalit women in January 2013. The resolution expresses “deep concern about the widespread violence committed against Dalit women and girls in India, including sexual violence committed by men of dominant castes.”<sup>23</sup> The Dalit women face various forms of violence like verbal abuse, physical assault, sexual harassment and assault, domestic violence, rape, murder, dowry related violence and not the least witch hunting.

Witch hunting is a superstitious practice which entails the worst forms of cultural violence against women in a society. The suspected women are brutally tortured and inhumanly treated. Although, there has been widespread scientific and technological development in the country, but still in many parts, the women, especially Dalits and Adivasis suffer mercilessly due to the gruesome practice. The National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) reported that in 2011, 242 cases of witchcraft-related murders were reported from different states of India. In Karnataka 77 witch-related murders were reported, followed by Odisha with 41 cases, Jharkhand with 36 cases, Andhra Pradesh with 29 cases of murder, Chhattisgarh, where 17 witch-related murders were reported, Madhya Pradesh with 15, Maharashtra with 13, Assam and Haryana with 5 each, Meghalaya with 3 deaths and Rajasthan with 1 death in 2011. Although, the witch-related murders have decreased in 2012 to 121 cases, but, still it is significantly evidenced in Odisha with 32 cases, followed by Jharkhand with 22 cases, Andhra Pradesh with 24 cases, Bihar with 13 cases, Madhya Pradesh with 11 cases of murder, etc.<sup>24</sup> According to a study conducted by Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK), Dehradun, more than 2,500 women have been killed in India in the past 15 years after being accused of practicing witchcraft. On an average, as many as 200 women get lynched under witch-craft related crimes.<sup>25</sup> In this regard, the present chapter discusses the scale and severity of the violence meted against the Dalit women of the studied area. The chapter also discussed the incidences, processes

---

<sup>22</sup> Addendum to Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Ms. Yakin Ertürk's report to 11th HRC session, June 2009 (A/HRC/11/6/Add.1)

<sup>23</sup> European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2012 on caste discrimination in India (2012/2909(RSP))

<sup>24</sup> Crimes in India: 2011, National Crime Records Bureau, Government of India

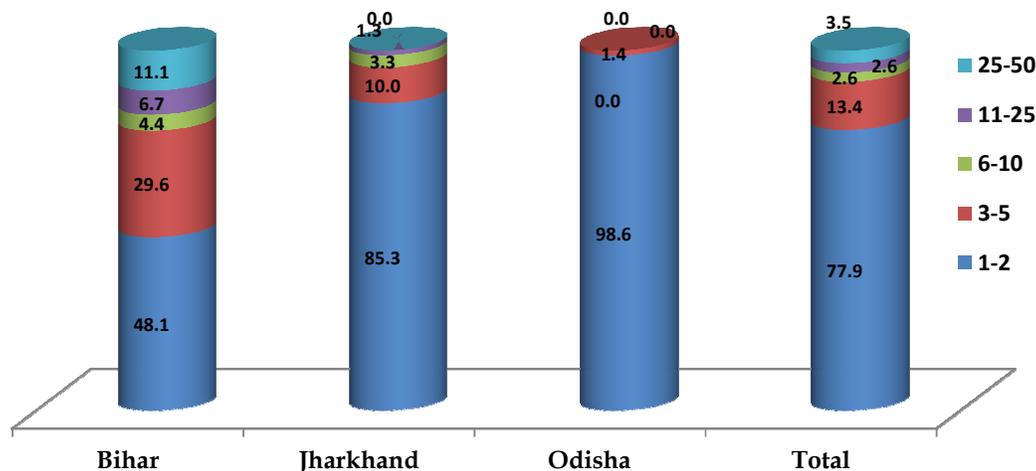
<sup>25</sup> The Hindu, July 26, 2010

and activities of witch attack. It takes into account the role of *Ojhas* in deterring the effect and action taken by the villagers against the alleged witch.

## 5.2 Findings of the study

### 5.2.1 Range and Type of Witch Violence

The nature and extent of violence against Dalit women on allegation of witch practices is an important concern. It portrays the structural and cultural dynamics of a society. On enquiring about the incidences of witch-related violence during the last 10 years in the studied villages, 78 per cent of the households revealed of 1-2 incidence of witch violence during the last 10 years. It is found to be highest in Odisha where 99 per cent households reported of 1-2 incidences of witch violence, followed by Jharkhand at 85 per cent and Bihar at 48 per cent. However, in Bihar, a substantial proportion of respondents (30 per cent) reported of 3-5 incidences of witch violence as well as 11 per cent reported of 25-50 incidences during the last 10 years in or nearby the village. Thus, the evidences further vindicated the prevalence and persecution of the practice in the studied states.



**Figure 5.1: Incidences of Witch Violence occurred in last 10 years within or nearby the village**

Source: Field Study

While analysing the severity of the violence, it was observed that majority of the victims are physically beaten up (45 per cent), forced to consume human excreta/urine (40 per cent) and physically abused, ostracized and driven from their homes (37 per cent). Some women also face the burden of social stigma, displacement and economic boycott. Around 15 per cent of the women are paraded naked and 14 per cent women are gang raped and lynched by the mob. The type of violence is almost similar across the studied states as revealed from the Table 5.1. Various case studies also confirm the severity of the violence.

The case of Sakina Biwi of Lakhanpur village of Dumka district, Jharkhand is one such instance. Sakina Biwi, 40 years, is residing in Muslim tola of Lakhanpur village with her husband, Badurrudin Ansari and four sons. They are daily wage labours. Their socio-economic and educational status is very poor and backward. However, their suffering multiplied 9-10 years back, when Sakina biwi was held responsible for the death of a boy from Muslim tola, since she was regarded as a witch. It so happened that the boy was

suffering from some ailment which gradually aggravated, his body turned yellowish and finally he died. This brought a change in the mindset of the villagers and they accused Sakina biwi for his death. The boy's family members and the villagers regard her as a witch who casts evil spells and black magic. She and her family were subjected to abusive language, harsh treatment and even beaten badly. Moreover, Sakina biwi was forced to consume human excreta and urine. Importantly, they faced the humiliation and discrimination by their own Muslim community. Thus, there exists a class-based discrimination with the caste group. Even the socially excluded Dalits and Adivasis residing in the village did not come to their rescue. Moreover, her husband's and sons' plea and complain to the police was in vain. Although, the matter was resolved internally by the villagers, but today also she is looked upon as a witch.

Source: Filed Survey by NACDOR Team, of Lakhanpur village of Dumka district, Jharkhand

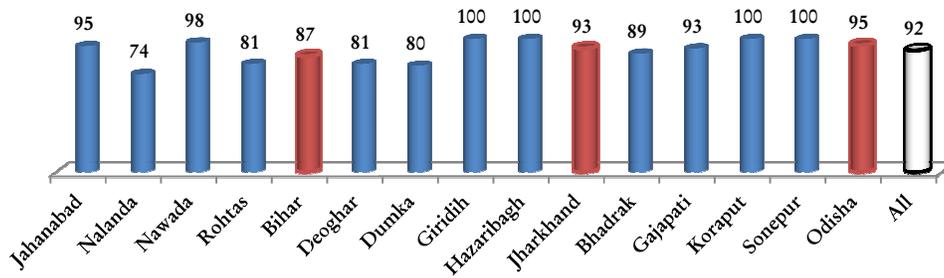
**Table 5.1: Type of Violence against Witches**

Type of violence	Bihar	Jharkhand	Odisha	Total
Beat up	56.3	54.7	24.1	45.1
Forced to consume human excreta/urine	20.7	40.7	56.0	39.4
Paraded naked	4.4	2.0	39.7	15.3
Physically abused, ostracized and driven from their homes	30.4	38.7	40.4	36.6
Mob lynching, gang rape	0.7	2.0	39.0	13.8
Blackening of face	2.2	5.3	10.6	6.1
Shaving of head	0.7	1.3	4.3	2.1
Locked her in a dark room	0.0	0.7	10.6	3.8
Pull my nails out	0.7	0.0	9.2	3.3
Strings of shoes hung around their necks	0.7	1.3	9.2	3.8
Social stigma, displacement, economic boycott	19.3	16.7	19.1	18.3
Physically injured (Noses cut or pull out teeth)	6.7	10.0	7.1	8.0
Others	3.7	16.0	4.3	8.2
<b>Number of household opined</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>426</b>

Source: Field Study

### 5.2.2 Incidences of Witch Violence

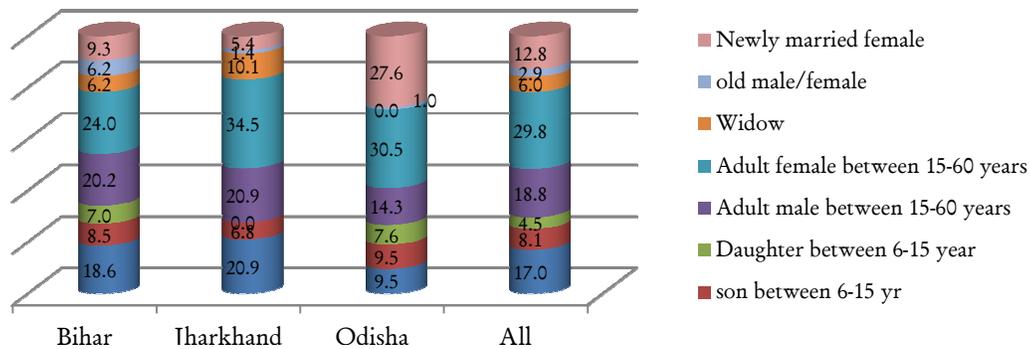
The study made an attempt to understand the ground realities of witch hunting. In other words, the incidences of witch attack such as activity of witch attack, action after witch doubt, activity performed by *Ojha* to get rid of witch, etc. is an integral part of the issue and needs to be addressed. To the question on occurrence of any witch practices cases in their own family or relatives, above 90 per cent affirmed of coming across incidences of witchcraft in their own family or neighbours. While 87 per cent households experienced witchcraft cases in their own family or neighbours in Bihar, around 93 per cent in Jharkhand and 95 per cent in Odisha experienced such incidences in their own family/neighbours (Figure 5.2). Thus, it can be indicated that there is widespread prevalence of the superstitious practice in the studied villages.



**Figure 5.2: Respondents Informed Their Own Family or Relatives Involved in Witchcraft**

Source: Field Study

The Figure 5.3 reveals that majority (30 per cent) of the adult female between the age-group of 15-60 years are highly affected by the practice of witchcraft. It varies from 24 per cent in Bihar to 35 per cent in Jharkhand. However, some adult males between the age group of 15-60 years are also affected by the practice. In Odisha, 28 per cent households stated that newly married females are also affected by the superstitious practice. In Bihar and Jharkhand, the son or daughter below 5 years are also affected by the witch practice.



**Figure 5.3: Type of Affected Person**

Source: Field Study

### 5.2.3 Identification and Activities of Witch Incidences

Moreover, the people of the studied area reported that they usually identify the witch attack by a person's uncontrolled conversation or laugh or unnatural activity (51per cent). However, some also referred to the cutting sign of used saree of newly married female and black spot in the body as the identification mark of witch attack. While, majority in Bihar & Jharkhand identify by unnatural activity, the people of Odisha identify by a cut in hair and used saree of newly married female. As soon as the process of identification is done, they consult the *ojha* for further confirmation and identification of the witch and seek medicines or *taveez* (amulet) or *daunria* for the affected person. They also reported of requesting the *ojha* for performing *pujas* and offerings to get rid of the evil spells cast by the witch. The *ojha*, then performs a wide range of activities to treat the patient such as pouring turmeric on the affected person, pouring oil in the ears, giving some herbal medicine to consume, etc. Such type of activity was reported mostly from the state of Odisha and Jharkhand as shown in the below Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2: Percentage Distribution of Households by Type of Activity Done by Ojha**

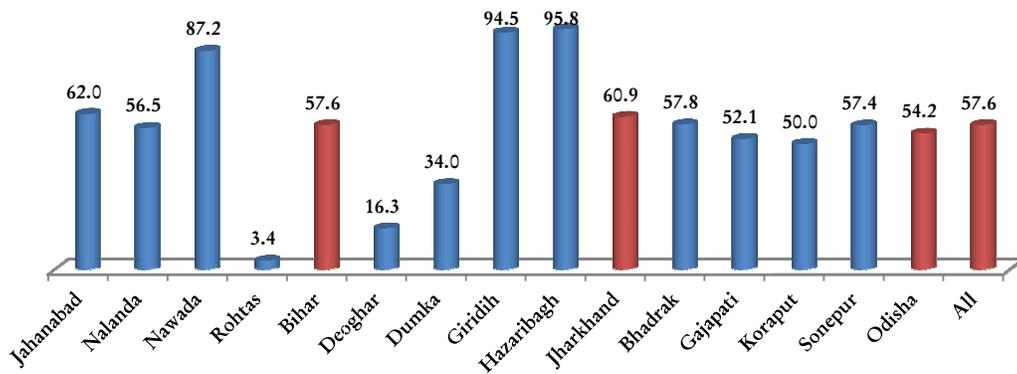
District/State	Pouring turmeric on the affected person	Pouring oil in ear	Giving some herbal to eat	Other	Wearing <i>taveej</i>	Chanting and giving rice to eat	Giving <i>Vivhuti</i>	Doing <i>Jhar-Funk</i>
Jahanabad	11.8	17.6	35.3	5.9	11.8	0.0	23.5	0.0
Nalanda	4.2	16.7	58.3	0.0	0.0	4.2	0.0	20.8
Nawada	30.0	46.7	23.3	3.3	6.7	13.3	3.3	3.3
Rohtas	75.0	25.0	56.3	12.5	0.0	12.5	0.0	0.0
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>27.6</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>6.9</b>
Deoghar	13.0	52.2	52.2	0.0	8.7	0.0	8.7	4.3
Dumka	10.5	78.9	68.4	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0
Giridih	5.0	70.0	15.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	5.0	0.0
Hazaribagh	23.9	52.2	54.3	2.2	10.9	4.3	2.2	4.3
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>15.7</b>	<b>60.2</b>	<b>49.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>2.8</b>
Bhadrak	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Gajapati	33.3	37.5	100.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	4.2	0.0
Koraput	58.3	56.3	75.0	0.0	4.2	0.0	2.1	0.0
Sonepur	57.1	60.7	67.9	0.0	3.6	3.6	3.6	0.0
Odisha	55.2	56.6	72.0	0.0	10.5	0.7	2.8	0.0
<b>All</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>50.6</b>	<b>56.8</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>2.7</b>

Source: Field Study

The villagers reported that after performing the activities to treat the patient, the *Ojha* involves in the processes of identifying the witch. Above 55 per cent of the respondents across the studied states opined that the major activity of an *ojha* is to identify and punish the culprit (believed to be a witch) responsible for all the misfortunes happening in the village. Majority of the respondents in Giridih (95 per cent) and Hazaribagh (96 per cent) of Jharkhand state as well as Nawada (87 per cent) of Bihar stated that they believe the *Ojhas* who identifies the witch.

A Dalit woman named Basanti Devi of Sismo village of Nawada district, Bihar stated that 10 years ago, a woman in her village was accused a witch by the *ojha*. As a result, the villagers abused, physically tortured, humiliated and finally set her on fire to death. However, peoples' believe in *Ojhas* has become a mere traditional & religious business for them. The *Ojhas* take advantage of the situation and influence the villagers. As stated by Mr. Sushil Kumar, lawyer, Giridih district, Jharkhand, "the *Ojhas* also mislead the villagers by identifying mostly poor and helpless widows. Along with creating disputes and differences between villagers, family and individuals, the *Ojhas* simultaneously demand a handsome amount for the treatment. But, if somebody in the *Ojhas*' family falls ill, then he takes the patient to the hospital instead of treating himself".

Source: Filed Survey by NACDOR Team, Sismo village of Nawada district, Bihar



**Figure 5.4: Household opined that Ojha or Traditional healers identify the witch**  
 Source: Field Study

#### 5.2.4 Socio-Economic Status of Witches

It was also reported by above 40 per cent of the respondents that the accusation and persecution of witch and witch practices is mainly prevalent among the low socially, economically and politically backward and poor households (Table 5.3). Mr. Sanjay Basu Mallick, a writer from Jharkhand stated that “people have firm belief in witch and witch practices. They think that both men and women are possessed with evil spirit and are designated as witch. They have supernatural power which can harm anybody. And, it is highly prevalent among the low and poor socio-economic background communities”. Moreover, Ramesh Chandra Das, a ward member in Deogarh district, Jharkhand stated that, “the poor, backward and minority women, especially widow are regarded as inferior and are subordinated due to the patriarchal system of society. The prevalence of witch hunting is usually found among the lower castes and illiterate communities. These vulnerable sections of the society are usually identified as witches with an aim to denounce them from the community and take control over their land, property, etc. He further stated that the practice is mostly prevalent in rural areas than urban areas”. The respondents across the states were of the analogous opinion. Various case histories of the victims reveals that lower class & caste based discrimination is still prevalent in many parts of the studied states. Moreover, the exploitation and violence against the poor, backward and marginalised women begins from their own family.

One such instance is of Alwa Devi, a widow of 45 years old. She belongs to a lower caste community, chamar and resides in Bhalgada village of Giridih district, Jharkhand. She was denounced a witch and mercilessly tortured since she belonged to lower caste 10 years ago, in Bhalgada village of Dandidiha Panchayat, Giridih district, Jharkhand, a young boy suddenly fell ill and could not be recovered even after the doctor’s treatment. Then, his family members consulted an *ojha*. After examining the boy, the *ojha* enquired if the boy had any confrontation with anybody in the village and the details about it. To this, the family stated that they had a quarrel some days back with Alwa devi, their neighbour and she threatened to kill him. On hearing this, the *ojha* immediately affirmed that Alwa devi has cast evil spells on their son and they need to do some praying and offerings to get rid of her. After performing the pujas, they went to Alwa Devi’s house and started abusing and beating mercilessly. They even forced her to eat human excreta and wastes. Alwa Devi went to the police station with her husband to file complaint against the culprits.

Although the case was registered, but no strong action was taken against them. This incident changed the entire course of her life and she is still being cursed as witch (*diyan*) by the villagers because she belonged to lower caste '*chamar*'.

Source: Filed Survey by NACDOR Team, Bhalgada village of Giridih district, Jharkhand

**Table 5.3: Distribution of Households by Socio-economic Status of Witch**

State/District	Very poor	Poor	Moderate	Rich	Very rich	Total
Jahanabad	22.2	47.2	25.0	5.6	0.0	100.0
Nalanda	63.6	21.2	9.1	6.1	0.0	100.0
Nawada	31.0	42.9	21.4	2.4	2.4	100.0
Rohtas	53.8	26.9	19.2	0.0	0.0	100.0
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>40.9</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Deoghar	69.7	24.2	6.1	0.0	0.0	100.0
Dumka	72.7	21.2	6.1	0.0	0.0	100.0
Giridih	32.7	58.2	9.1	0.0	0.0	100.0
Hazaribagh	36.2	29.8	34.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>48.8</b>	<b>36.3</b>	<b>14.9</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Bhadrak	46.2	53.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Gajapati	25.0	33.3	33.3	2.1	6.3	100.0
Koraput	32.7	14.3	30.6	20.4	2.0	100.0
Sonepur	35.6	33.3	20.0	4.4	6.7	100.0
<b>Odisha</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>31.0</b>	<b>23.8</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>All</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>34.2</b>	<b>19.2</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Study

### 5.2.5 Type of Action Taken against Perpetrators of violence on women accused of being a witch

The accusation and subsequent violence against socially excluded SC/ST women as witches and witch practices has been increasing in the studied states as indicated by NCRB. The women are accused of witches and persecuted in various severe forms. The empirical data revealed that after confirmation from the *Ojhas*, the accused Witch is immediately expelled from the family and neighbours (52 per cent) along with verbally abusing and torturing (47 per cent). According to below table 5.4, around 30 per cent reported of complaining the ward member or Samaj against the witch and 19 per cent stated they the witch family is socially discarded. Above 30 per cent stated that the alleged Witch is physically beaten and forced to go to the *ojha*. Importantly, the action of registering complain in the police station is very low across all states. It is inferred from the data that the persecution against the identified witches is vastly rampant in the state of Odisha. (Include a case study of Odisha on violence).

**Table 5.4: Type of Action Taken After Identifying the Witch**

District/State	Cut off relation with witch and her family	Verbally abuse the witch and her family	Complain to ward member against the witch	Physically beat the witch or witch family	Socially discarded witch family	Forced the witch to come to puja done by ojha	FIR in police station	Others	Total
Jahanabad	62.2	32.4	8.1	0.0	5.4	2.7	8.1	5.4	100.0
Nalanda	32.3	61.3	6.5	0.0	0.0	9.7	3.2	0.0	100.0
Nawada	41.9	48.8	7.0	4.7	16.3	14.0	9.3	4.7	100.0
Rohtas	53.8	26.9	11.5	0.0	7.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>47.4</b>	<b>43.1</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Deoghar	64.5	45.2	6.5	0.0	9.7	3.2	0.0	0.0	100.0
Dumka	80.0	16.0	12.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0	0.0	100.0
Giridih	41.8	23.6	12.7	1.8	5.5	10.9	7.3	3.6	100.0
Hazaribagh	39.1	52.2	17.4	15.2	8.7	23.9	6.5	2.2	100.0
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>51.6</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Bhadrak	92.6	3.7	0.0	0.0	96.3	92.6	0.0	0.0	100.0
Gajapati	50.0	77.1	87.5	50.0	20.8	10.4	2.1	0.0	100.0
Koraput	49.0	69.4	55.1	53.1	32.7	22.4	4.1	12.2	100.0
Sonepur	47.8	67.4	73.9	43.5	37.0	21.7	2.2	2.2	100.0
<b>Odisha</b>	<b>55.9</b>	<b>60.6</b>	<b>60.6</b>	<b>41.2</b>	<b>40.6</b>	<b>30.0</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>46.8</b>	<b>28.9</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Study

### 5.2.6: Impact on socio economic and psychological wellbeing of women accused of being a witch

Once the accusation is levelled, most immediate impacts are psychological. These have been demonstrated through resistance and avoidance behaviour following the response pattern on fight and flight. Several cases demonstrate the severe debilitating impact on the psychological health of women being accused of a witch. This was evident in the case of a 55 year old widow named Savitri Devi of Darnai village in Makdumpur block of Jehanabad district in Bihar. A woman of 55 years looked 20 years elder than her age. She looked very old, tired and frightened. Savitri Devi's misery started when her husband passed away 14 years back. She was left alone with her four sons and three daughters. However, she engaged herself in daily wage labour works and struggled a lot for the upbringing of children. Now, her three sons and two daughters are married. The sons are residing along with their family in different houses. And, she is staying with one of her son who is studying and a mentally weak daughter. Her life is filled with gloom, grief and struggle. However, her miseries double when her relatives and villagers accuse her of being a witch and held her responsible for the death of her husband. She is often abused and beaten badly by her relatives. And, the villagers humiliate, discriminate and deprive her of basic facilities. Moreover, her elder daughter who was married in Ranigunj of Gaya

district also faced similar persecution and humiliation. Her in-laws also accused her witch. They abused, tortured and physically assaulted her to death on complaining to the police. However, now her in-laws are in prison. Savitri Devi is taking care of her two granddaughters. With a grief stricken tone, Savitri Devi stated that till the time her husband was alive, no one was addressing her witch. The moment he died, her life changed; even her sons are not supporting her. All this could have not happened to her, had her sons been most supportive to her.

There are several other cases where dejection, pain, avoidance, separation from the loved ones is the outcome of the accusation. This is evident from the case of Ms. Jyoti Devi w/o Shri Phunchagi Turi in village Simuratiapanna of Giridih district in Jharkhand. Jyoti Devi is a scheduled caste woman of Simuratiapanna village of Giridih district, Jharkhand. She is a smart, hard working and knowledgeable woman. She makes efforts to keep her house clean and beautiful. Her in-laws who belong to simple family background were pleased with her. But, sometimes, she was abused by her sister-in-laws. Nevertheless, her misery started 13 years back when one of her sister-in-laws child fell ill and eventually died. Thereafter, everything changed. Her in-laws started abusing and cursing her witch and practicing witchcraft. Jyoti's efforts in convincing them that she tried her level best to cure the child but as destined he died went in vain.

She was brutally tortured and harassed. On getting the news of their daughter's exploitation, her parents took the matter to the panchayat which was resolved then and there. The situation was under control for some days. But, again, she was abused and tortured, not only by her family but also the other lower and upper caste people in the village. They even tried to lynch her. Her husband also started torturing her. Her parents were threatened to death if they extended any moral support to their daughter. The intervention of local NGO there did not bring succour to her as those accusing her of being a witch were not relenting and they were not realising that death could be from a disease and an outcome of someone wanting. The representatives of the Dalit Vikas Samiti also tried to convince them, but failed. The extent of exploitation was such that the scar marks of her wounds were still visible when CADAM team met her in course of conducting interviews with the victim for this report. She revealed that, on resisting, she was tied with a rope, locked in a room and mercilessly beaten. However, one day she escaped to the police station and filed a case against her in-laws. But, due to lack of witness, or one can say, police biasness, the culprits were not punished. Instead, she was brutally physically and mentally tortured. As a result, she had ran away to save her life and left behind her children. The incident totally ruined her life and now also it haunts her terribly. The pain of being separated from the children is intolerable. But it is the pain that Ms. Jyoti Devi was found suffering from just because all counselling available did not create conducive conditions for her to live with her children whom she carried for nine months in her womb.

Cases after cases across the states specially in the states surveyed, stories with deep psychological scars resulting in poor mental health of women accused, beaten, humiliated publicly through forcing urine drinking and human excreta feeding have been found. Some of the interviews and expert analyses found in the cases and reports show the clear motive of the usurping the property that belongs to accused women and their children. Accusations are made as a ploy to force a widow to move out, go elsewhere leaving behind the property of deceased which could have been claimed by the women and her children.

### 5.3 Summary

To sum up, the lower caste women, firstly, bear the curse of being a witch and then the hardship and agony of the atrocities and violence meted against them by the upper caste people to ensure their superior position in the society. They are mercilessly beaten up and forced to consume human excreta and wastes. They are expelled from the family, village and community. The *Ojhas* also misled the villagers by identifying a poor and helpless lower caste woman or widow. Thus, allegation of witch & witchcraft, the most effective weapon in rural India, is used to destroy a woman's life, dignity & social prestige having huge debilitating impact on the psychological wellbeing for which till date there is no policy for supporting and looking after women who become victims of violence. There have been direct economic losses in terms of loss of properties in cases where women accused of being a witch had to move to their maternal place or to the house of their daughter for security and peace of mind.

## CHAPTER - VI

### WITCH AND WITCH PRACTICES: AN ILLOGICAL MYTH

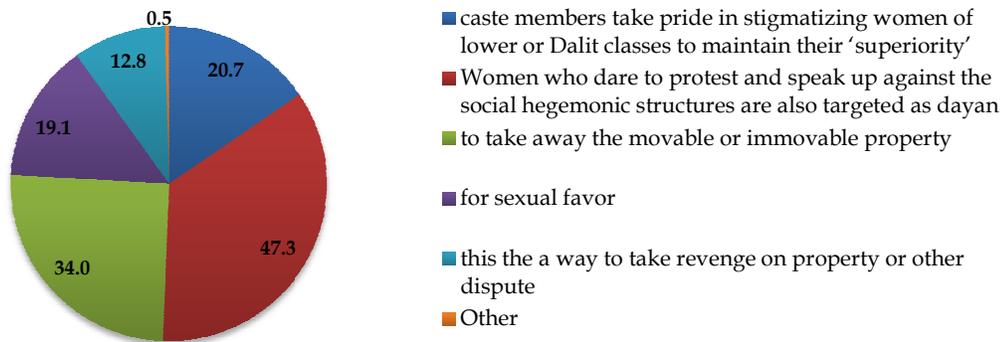
#### 6.1 Introduction

The phenomenon of witch and witch hunting has witnessed phases of change & transformation in the society. Although, a vast majority of the rural people in India are possessed with the faith and believe of witch and witchcraft, a significant section of the population are in opposition to such superstitious belief. We have looked at the dimension of the conviction of people regarding the practice of witchcraft and the related violence emerging from it. But, apart from these, the perception of the people who do not believe in witches and witchcraft is an important aspect of the study. Their views and opinion can give rise to revolutionary policies and strategies in evading the practice along with a change in the mindset and behaviour of the people. With this backdrop, the present chapter discusses the perception and opinions of some people who do not believe in the existence of witches.

#### 6.2 Findings of the study

##### 6.2.1 Reason behind the Prevalence of Witch Hunting

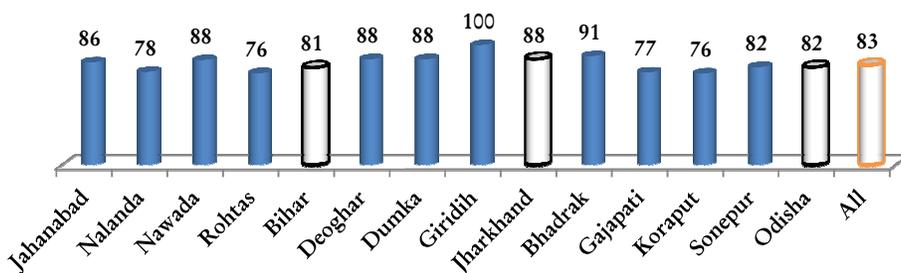
According to the Figure 6.1, majority of the respondents (47 per cent) stated that the women who dare to protest and speak up against the social hegemonic structure are always targeted as witch. Moreover, 34 per cent of the respondents reported that a woman is accused a witch with an aim to denounce her from the community and have control over her land and property. One such instance is of Rambalak Ravidas, a resident of Chamar Vigaha village of district of Nalanda, Bihar. He was working in the Police Department and retired in 2004. He has a daughter who is married. After retirement, he returned to his village with his wife. On reaching, he was shocked to see that the door of his house was locked and a wall was constructed in front of the door. This infuriated him and he had a confrontation with the neighbours and the villagers who disrespect and humiliate the couple for not having a male child. The villagers even accuse his wife a witch and discriminate and humiliate her. Since, Rambalak is without a male heir, some of the villagers and relatives make efforts to grab their property also. Thus, it is a general practice that any family that accumulated land or property was subjected to envy and those people with a claim over the land or property are often the ones who initiate witch accusations in order to immediately takeover the property. Many upper caste people also instigate such practices against the lower caste men and women in order to maintain their superior status in the society. Furthermore, there are also instances where the accusation of Witch was basically due to sexual pleasure (19 per cent).



**Figure 6.1: Reasons behind the Prevalence of Witch in Society**

Source: Field Study

Lack of proper scientific awareness and education are one of the reasons of large-scale prevalence of witch hunting in India. In the Figure 6.2, majority of the respondents, who do not believe in the superstition of Witch hunting (83 per cent), opined that the main reason for the incidences of witch hunting and practices is the ignorance and underdevelopment of scientific temper among the people. All the respondents from Giridih district in Jharkhand and 91 per cent from Bhadrak district in Odisha were of similar opinion (as shown in below Figure 6.2). In this regard, Shri Lalit Mohan Singh, a representative of Zila Samaj Kalyan Kendriya, Deogarh, Jharkhand, stated that “Witch hunting is a superstitious and unpleasant practice in society. It results in socio-economic disempowerment of marginalized women. Hence, the promotion of scientific temper becomes as important as ensuring the empowerment of fringe communities.” Moreover, a teacher, Likhani Tundu from Dumka, Jharkhand said that “there is no such thing as witch and witch practice. These are superstitions arising due to illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, inequality, etc”. Mr. Arvind kumar, a newspaper journalist from Giridih, Jharkhand said that “although, education played a vital role in the development of urban areas, but, it could not impact the backward areas. Now also, in some backward areas, there is prevalence of child marriage. So, there is need for scientific and technological advancement in the rural areas”.



**Figure 6.2: Respondents Believe that Lack of Awareness and Education among the people are the major reasons of Witch Hunting**

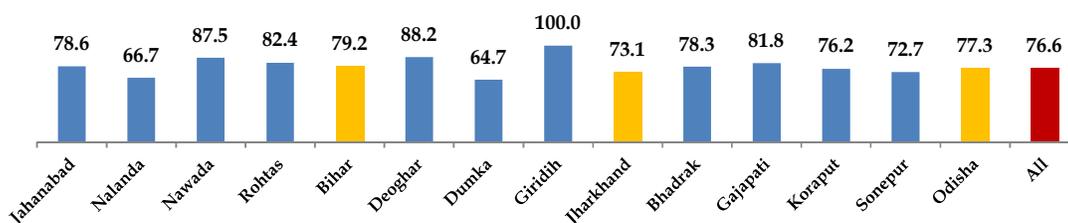
Source: Field Study

The empirical data also revealed the fact that out of the people who do not believe in witches and witch practices 78 per cent perceive that witch hunting is a customary practice glorified by upper caste witch doctors. They want to secure their position in the social hierarchy and the society. It is imperative to mention that such response was strongly reported by the respondents of Giridih and Nawada. Moreover, all the

respondents of Giridih district who believe in witchcraft also agrees to the statement that “the dominant and powerful in such areas eye on the property (if any) owned by the weakest and most vulnerable persons in their community. Upon categorizing them as ‘*daayan*’, and causing their ostracism from the village or compelling them to leave their residence, it becomes easier for them to forcibly acquire and hawk on the relinquished property”. Thus, it can be inferred from the above responses that the upper castes intentions in ensuring their position and dominance in the social hierarchy leads to the accusation and persecution of witch hunting.

### 6.2.2 Intention of *Ojhas*

It is highly evident from various studies that the practice of witch hunting has become a social and religious business for the local doctors/medicine men/*Ojhas*. The *Ojhas* take advantage of the situation and create differences between villagers to fulfil their materialistic requirements. In spite of the development of various health care facilities in the villages, people are still influenced by the fraud *Ojhas*. The *Ojhas* exploit the villagers socially, economically and physically to fulfil their egotistic and selfish desires. The interviewed doctors, ward members, sarpanch, journalists, social worker, etc. reported that the *Ojhas* also mislead the villagers by identifying mostly poor and helpless widows of lower castes. Along with creating disputes and differences between villagers, family and individuals, the *Ojhas* simultaneously demand a handsome amount for the treatment. The Figure 6.3 reveals that out of the total people who do not believe in witchcraft, 77 per cent reported that *ojha* takes bribe to accuse a woman as witch. However, all the interviewers of Giridih district reported of similar response.



**Figure 6.3: Respondents believe that the Ojha Demands Bribe for Accusing Women as Witch**

Source: Field Study

One such instance is of Ms. Rita Devi, a resident of Shahapur village, was married to Anuj Manjhi 20 years back. After giving birth to a daughter, she frequently suffered from ill health. They consulted the doctor but she could not be recovered. Finally, the family members took her to the *ojha* for treatment. The *ojha* informed that Rita Devi is being possessed by a witch who is her own relative. The witch will cast evil spells, as a result of which she might also die. The *ojha* advised them to perform two religious rites to get rid of the witch. On agreeing, they gave Rs. 1500 to the *ojha* for the rites. Apart from demanding a goat, a pig, two hen and new clothes, the *ojha* demanded Rs. 30,000 for performing the rites & offerings.

Filed Survey by NACDOR Team, Nlanda District, Bihar

### 6.2.3 Role of Family/Community/caste, panchayat, enforcement agencies in preventing/abetting these practices

**Role of Family/Community/Caste:**

Family members have been found to be behind the accusations for women being a witch for various reasons. Ignorance is one disease and death and its causative factors is one of them. Usurping property is one of the main reported in several of cases. According to the news entitled 'Witch-hunting is not about the superstition' published in Indian New from Kolkata on May 9, 2013, Women are lynched, sexually exploited and forcibly evicted from their homes after being branded witches. Witch-hunting is not about a stray report tucked away in a corner of the newspaper but an increasingly worrying pan-India trend that specifically targets women in a patriarchal society, say experts. With reports of witch-hunting coming in from villages and even towns across the country, sociologists, women activists and others believe that it is but another form of gender-based violence. And women who stand out from the crowd, either because they have property, are good looking or independent are specifically targeted.

There have been increased instances of single women/widows being branded witches and murdered when they refused sexual overtures of someone dominant in the village or in the family. In some cases, relatives branded them witches to grab their property. NGOs working in rural areas have found "beauty and wealth" to be the prime reasons behind witch-hunts.

"It is less of superstition and more of a conspiracy, either to grab the property of the woman or to take revenge for unfulfilled sexual intent in the case of younger women," social activist Shravani is reported to have told IANS. According to Shravani, Ms. Saloni Kujur of Mandar village, an educated single woman, was branded a witch and killed because her relative wanted to grab her property and they could not tolerate a woman being the heir of her father's property and people don't want to see women being self-dependent,".

### **Role of Panchayats:**

From the analysis of the case studies, there are several instances when FIR is not lodged persecution of women resulting from the accusation of being a witch is hushed up and sorted out locally by Panchayats. This was evident from the discussion with Sarpanches in Jharkhand. Panchayat leaders were found interested in sorting out the cases locally but they in doing so did not realise that through making compromises, they are not ensuring the elimination of the violence on women as a result of a very serious accusation and specially when there is violence on the women accused. Such compromises may be assessed for the impact in order to have a clear impact on the incidence of violence on SC and ST women. Sorting out the cases by Panchayats does not generate awareness on the punishment for Dalit women exploitation

Despite presence of women who suffer the accusation of being a 'Dayan' /witch, there is a tendency to deny its existence since the number of the incidence is not very significant. This became evident when Ms. Chunni Kumari, an activist of Rashtriya Dalit Mahila Andolan, associated with National Confederation of Dalit Organisation visited police station of Makhdoompur in district of Jehanabad in the state of Bihar, India. The visit was made on the occasion of the meeting with the Sarpanches in the area on the occasion of Holi. Chunni Kumari introduced the purpose of visiting the police station in order to learn

on the reports that may have reached the police. First of all Sarpanches said that they did not know about such instance. However, when Ms. Chunni Kumari insisted on the story of a widows like Sarita Devi in the villages within Makhdoompur police region. Initially, Sarpanches did not accept that there is any instance of witch hunting .The Assistant Sub Inspector said that he did not know of any report. While the discussion was going on with the detailed sharing by Ms.Chunni Kumari, one of the sarpanch came who said he knew on the instance of women suffering from the accusations of being a witch. He informed that there are cases of women accused of being a witch. He informed that a case has come to him but the same was sorted out at village panchayat level. The case involved the same caste. He further informed that the cases are generally reported from the so called low castes. According to him, the cases sorted out at panchayat level is better rather than getting the issues in the hand of police since people on both sides get harassed if a case is filed and that case goes on and one without speedy delivery of justice. The person who had persecuted the woman calling her witch *dayan* was socially punished and the accused women was compensated for the economic losses that were incurred. He said if the oppressor party would not have accepted than the matter would have been taken to police. Reflecting on the social and economic profile of women, Sarpanch said it is generally low wealth group women who are accused of being a Dayan and then generally accusations came from the same caste groups and not from others. He said, in his lifetime, he has not heard about the incidence of this happening in the higher caste women.

Ms.Chunni Kumari, RDMA activist said that with the local sorting out of the issues, there is a negative outcome that is possible. People are not made aware that accusations being a witch are a crime and there are punishments for the same. Also, she highlighted the need for making awareness on the legal provisions which Sarpanches accepted. They all accepted that awareness meetings need to be organised in order to ensure that women are not persecuted through levelling the accusation of being a witch/Dayan. She highlighted that through these accusations, women are exploited. In the discussion with the police inspector, he shared that case of women being persecuted through the accusation of being a witch has not reached him but he is aware of the presence of Ojhas who are reached by people for sorting out health related and other problems in anticipation of change in the situation that is found troubling. He informed that in Gaya district, there is a place where a fair of ghost is being organised where people go to meet Ojhas for sorting out problems. On the understanding of the reasons for the existence of Ojhas, the Police Inspector was aware that Ojhas are found across the castes and they are using the existence of the problems for ensuring their psychological influence. In the process of delivering their remedies, there are Ojhas who are seeking money along with the meat, intoxicating drinks and several other items that they call for performing incantations that are part of their remedies. Considering the mental health perspective, it is clear that psychological problems and problems of relationships and other injustices that are part of the social existence are being sought to be remedied with the help of Ojhas. He informed that whenever there is an instance of exploitation, he is visiting the places. On discussion the legal provision, it became clear that punishment is not severe for the oppressors. On the query for the possession of the act, deputy station officer informed that he did not have a copy of the Act. On the discussion on awareness programme, he agreed that joint work is needed in order to ensure minimisation of violence against Dalit

women through the accusation of being a Dayan. Sarpanches and deputy station in charge expressed their full support if RDMA and CADAM were to organise awareness programme for ensuring elimination of oppression of Dalit women through accusation of being a witch.

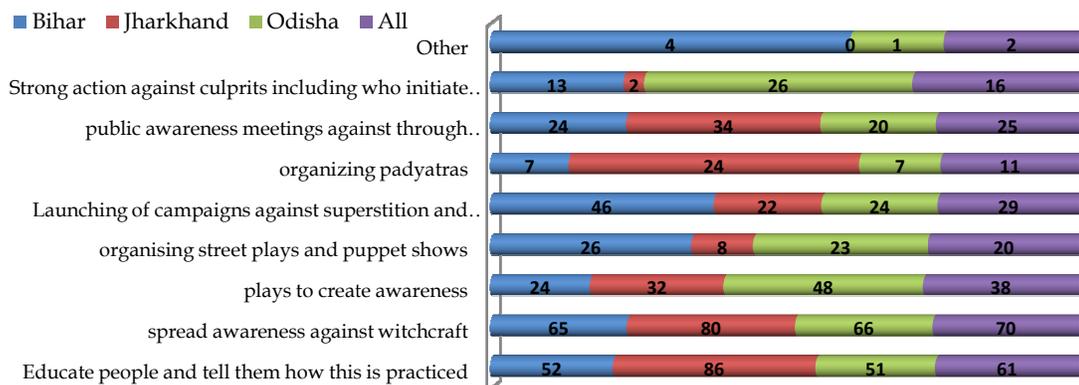
#### **Role of Enforcement agencies in preventing /abetting in the crime:**

Interview with police officials show that all the cases are not registered. There are occasion when police officials are letting off the perpetrators through taking money for the same. There are instances where police officials have prevented perpetration of violence. All this was evident in the interview with Interview with Hirankant Jha, Munshi, Police Station, Nawada City, District, Nawada, Bihar. He informed that a case of death of boy was attributed to woman who was accused of being being a witch. When it was investigated, it was found that death of a boy happening to his suffering Injuries due to fall from a tree which was attributed falsely to a woman accused on being a witch. In another instance a case of HIV AIDS victim dying from AIDS was attributed to witch. Police investigation exposed truth. These facts became clear in the interview with Mr.Hirakant Jha, a clerk at Nawada police station in Bihar. The purpose of the interview was to learn on the data related to reports on the persecution of women as a result of the accusation of Dayan. He informed that only one case has been reported since he joined the police station. He did not have the report from earlier period. For him, police station is place of compromise and when cases are coming then FIR is not registered. But according to him if there is someone reported to have beaten a woman, then he is called to the police station and beaten and then left. On the use of influence, there are some who wish to influence the police but then, due course of laws are followed considering the legal rights of women to protection from violence. On the social profile of people who are reporting the case of Dayan, he said that these cases are from the scheduled castes. There are times when reason of death is not known properly as this happened once when a boy passed away and then there were some who reported that a Dayan has been involved . When the matter was investigated, it was found that boy had fallen from a tree. There are incidences when upper caste people accuse SC and ST women for oppressing them. He felt that an honest police officer can deliver justice but for extorting money from those persecuted women, there are instance when police officials are seen to be covering up the fact after receiving bribe for the same.

Thus, it is important to ensure those police officials bound with the duties are particular in delivering justice. He confessed that instance of beating and mental torture through leveling the accusation of being a Dayan is generally not recorded. Person is called, rebuked and then let off. On the query for sufficiency of the legal provisions, he said laws are enough for preventing atrocities on women. Informing on the case from Silkandarpur village, he informed that a man living in Gujarat used to come after every two years and the contracted AIDS and passed away before Holi. An old woman was being accused of being a dayan. She reported this to police and then police became active. Finding the reality, police asked the wife of the dead man to testify that he had AIDS that he contracted due to unsafe sex with other women. Concluding the interview, it was observed that upper caste people are also engaged in using this work for oppressing Dalits. Also SC and ST being the poorest and illiterate are more prone to accuse women being a Dayan /Witch.

### 6.2.4 Remedies to Eliminate Ignorance Generated Social Evil of Accusing Women of Witchcraft

The practice of witch hunting is a social evil in the society which has been generated as a result of ignorance on reasons on death and disease and lack of access to quality health care in rural areas. It entails human suffering and agony for thousands of women who have been made victim of violence as a result of being accused of being a witch. Dealing with it requires adoption of effective strategies and approaches. On probing about how to address the issue, the respondents stated that there should be awareness campaigns & programmes in the village regarding witch hunting. People should be educated, motivated, encouraged and convinced to cease such a baseless practice or belief which is a mere illusion. On agreeing to support awareness programmes in the future, the respondent women affirmed that there should be group building exercise by the self-help groups or civil society organizations among women within the communities not only to create a network of support system at the grassroots level but also to extend opportunities of socio-economic development. Moreover, the women's *sanghas* (associations) also become the secure point for initiatives in health awareness and adult literacy. Some respondents also suggested organizing street plays and puppet shows to create awareness, launching of campaigns against superstition and witch hunting, organizing march conducting public awareness meetings, taking strong action against culprits, etc. (Figure 6.4).



**Figure 6.4: Respondents' View on Various Mode of Increasing Awareness among the People against Witchcraft**

Source: Field Study

### 6.3 Summary

To conclude, there are also some significant magnitudes of people in the society who do not believe in Witch hunting and accusing women of witchcraft. They perceive witch hunting as a baseless and illogical practice. It is observed that women from SC and ST especially illiterate and uneducated age old/widow women who dare to protest injustices and atrocities and speak up against the social hegemonic structure are always targeted as witch. They are basically accused by the upper caste communities to denounce them from the community and have control over their land and property. In other words, there is widespread prevalence of class and caste-based discrimination within the society in order to subjugate SC and ST and keep them in social and economic conditions in order to extract work from them. However, the ignorance and underdevelopment of scientific

temper in the region is also an influencing factor. If education and access to comprehensive health care were ensured, incidence of the violence of women due to ignorance would be substantially reduced. The malicious intention of the *Ojhas* also adds on to the destitution and anguish of the women who have been functioning in the villages over the year prescribing processes for death and disease for which he did not have any other way but to ascribe the reasons to external agencies and powers . Efforts should be made to aware and educate the common people on the evil effects of witch hunting in society. Considering the deficit in access to health care, it is important to ensure that mental health care and support reaches villages with the appointment of psychiatrists and psychologists at the block level while ensuring delivery of justice to accused women through all mean with accelerated programmatic and policy action. Comprehensive approach consisting of legal remedies, psychosocial support, economic empowerment, education, persecution of the perpetrator of violence is the urgent need to hour if India has to achieve better indicators in human development. Practice of caste based discrimination will have to be eradicated addressing the root cause with the involvement of all in government, civil society, academia, judiciary, police ,health service delivery, local government institutions

## CHAPTER - VII

### INSTITUTIONAL, SOCIAL MECHANISMS AND POLICY INITIATIVES

#### 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have illustrated how people have a firm and strong believe in Witch Hunting and how violence against women related to witch hunting continues unabated in Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha. The question which arises in this situation is what have been the measures and strategies to combat such form of violence against women? The present chapter deals with the knowledge and awareness of the people regarding the witch hunting laws and regulations and the steps to be adopted to overcome such a practice in the society. It also de the various measures adopted by the government to address the issue. It will also assess the role of community based organizations (CBOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), NGOs, local and state level authorities working in the studied area. Last but not the least, the chapter will also discuss about the measures to be taken to end such a practice.

##### 7.1.1. Policy Level Initiatives:

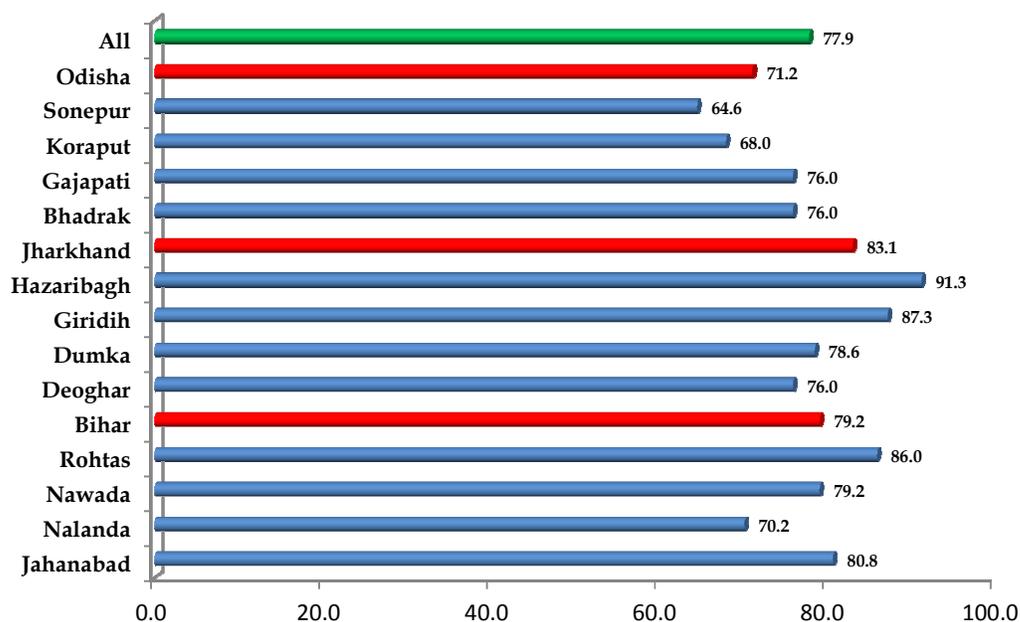
Recently, the Government of India introduced "**The Protection from Domestic Violence Bill 2002**". The Bill (Section 4) defines domestic violence as a conduct whereby the abuser habitually assaults the person, makes his/her life miserable by his conduct, forces him/her to lead an immoral life and otherwise injures or harms the person (GOI, 2002). However, this law is only about the domestic violence and does not mention community violence as well as witch-hunting. However, the increasing rate of crimes against women related to witch hunting and tireless efforts by NGOs and civil society organizations has compelled some states in India to formulate necessary legislation against this appalling practice. Bihar, was the first state in India to pass a law against witch hunting. The Bihar government passed a law in 1999 called the "**Prevention of Witch (Dayan) Practices Act, 1999**". Jharkhand followed it with the "**Anti Witchcraft Act in 2001**". The "**Chhattisgarh Tonhi Pratarna Bill 2005**" (Chhattisgarh Prevention of Atrocities on Women in the name of Tonhi) was formulated in 2005 followed by Rajasthan in 2006. The provision of the law takes very serious action if anyone tries to identify or instigate others to identify a woman as a witch. If a person alleges a woman to be a witch, he/she faces imprisonment for up to three months. If a person declares a woman as a witch or participates in torture, he/she is imposed fines ranging from Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 2,000 or imprisonment for up to a year without bail. But, in reality, the Acts has proved unable to provide for effective preventative, curative, or punitive measures for women who have been labelled as witches. Despite the presence of these Acts, people accused as witches, particularly in the studied states of Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha have been persecuted, tortured, and murdered and the practice continues today. Though people claim to have knowledge about the laws of witch hunting, but in reality they do not have any idea about the laws. Every year, hundreds of people, often older women, are accused as witches or '*Daayans*', often abused, cast out of their families and communities and are, in many cases, murdered.

#### 7.2 Findings of the Study

##### 7.2.1 Legal Awareness

The present study interrogated the people regarding the level of knowledge and awareness on the laws of witch hunting. It was revealed that 78 per cent of the

households are aware of the legal provisions of witch hunting (Figure 7.1). The level of awareness is highest in Jharkhand (83 per cent) and lowest in Odisha (71 per cent). But, in reality, not a single household is exactly aware of the laws of witch hunting. When probed deeply into the matter, majority of the respondents were found having half-hearted or partial knowledge of the Acts and rules of witch hunting. Neither, the local level authorities nor the police have made efforts to aware the common people about the Acts.



**Figure 7.1: Awareness of Respondents on the Legal Compliances of Witch Craft**  
*Source: Field Study*

### 7.2.2 Assessing the Action of Police on Witch Hunting Cases

Dealing witch hunting inevitably requires police action. While assessing the role of police in the studied states, it was found that in many cases, FIRs reporting incidents of witch hunting are not getting lodged at all, due to the social taboos relating to the practice of witch hunting, as well as the unwillingness of the police to get involved in cases of witch hunting. As revealed in Table 7.1, a vast majority of the respondents reported that lodging complaint is not possible as the police are not at all supportive. Moreover, at times the alleged woman does not want to register the case due to various reasons. Furthermore, it was reported that in many incidences, the police tries to negotiate and compromise due to influence of the dominant caste people. The fact that no protections are given to witnesses of the crimes further acts as hindrances to the lodging of FIRs. Notably, some significant proportion of households from Jharkhand and Odisha reveals that the police action is effective and prompt. Above 60 per cent of the households also think that the victims in such cases have little or no access to law or police, mainly because of their social, geographical and educational background, which makes it difficult for them to attain justice. The assertion is more in Jharkhand (81 per cent) and Bihar (71 per cent) than Odisha (44 per cent).

**Table 7.1: Rating police action when there is witch violence (% of household)**

State/District	Police refuse to register FIR	Victims seldom lodge FIR as the perpetrator dominates most of the time	Police try to negotiate and compromised between victims and perpetrators	Effective as there is prompt police action	Others	Total household opined
Jahanabad	51.1	46.8	2.1	0.0	0.0	47
Nalanda	56.4	35.9	7.7	0.0	0.0	39
Nawada	57.8	15.6	8.9	6.7	11.1	45
Rohtas	40.9	40.9	18.2	0.0	0.0	22
<b>Bihar</b>	<b>52.9</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>153</b>
Deoghar	35.1	8.1	5.4	48.6	2.7	37
Dumka	39.2	23.5	31.4	5.9	0.0	51
Giridih	17.0	83.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	47
Hazaribagh	17.1	43.9	7.3	31.7	0.0	41
<b>Jharkhand</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>40.9</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>176</b>
Bhadrak	78.3	17.4	4.3	0.0	0.0	46
Gajapati	0.0	31.3	27.1	14.6	27.1	48
Koraput	10.2	8.2	26.5	24.5	30.6	49
Sonepur	31.9	21.3	21.3	17.0	8.5	47
<b>Odisha</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>All</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>31.0</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>519</b>

Source: Field Study

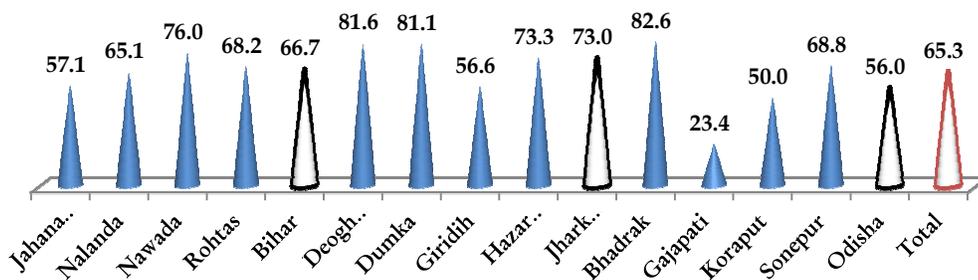
One such instance is of Jyoti Devi, a Scheduled Caste woman of Simuratiapanna village of Giridih district, Jharkhand. She is a smart, hard working and knowledgeable woman. Her misery started 13 years back when one of her sister-in-laws child fell ill and eventually died. Thereafter, everything changed. Her in-laws started abusing and cursing her witch and practicing witchcraft. Jyoti's efforts in convincing them that she tried her level best to cure the child but as destined he died went in vain. She was brutally tortured and harassed. Her parents took the matter to the panchayat which was resolved then and there. The situation was under control for some days. But, again, she was harassed, not only by her husband and family but also the other lower and upper caste people in the village. They even tried to lynch her. Her parents were threatened to death if they support their daughter. The representatives of the Dalit Vikas Samiti also tried to convince them, but failed. The extent of exploitation was such that the scar marks of her wounds were still visible. However, one day she escaped to the police station and filed a case against her in-laws. But, due to lack of witness, or one can say, police biasness, the culprits were not punished. Unable to bear the torture, she ran away from her house to save her life leaving behind her children. The incident totally ruined her life and now also it haunts her terribly. The pain of being separated from the children is intolerable.

Source: Filed Survey by NACDOR Team, Simuratiapanna village of Giridih district, Jharkhand

### 7.2.3 Severity of Punishment

The perpetrators of witch hunting are imprisoned only for a year or fined up to Rs. 1000 to Rs. 2000 according to the witch hunting Acts. This can be an important factor for the rise

in the crime in society. People are not frightened of such petty punishments or penalty. Moreover, the crimes that the perpetrators of witch hunters are booked under are often paltry offences when one observes the nature of the atrocities committed against women in these circumstances. As revealed from Figure 7.2, the respondents consider that the punishment and penalty imposed on the culprit is extremely low for such heinous crimes. As a result, it instigates and encourages the culprits to reiterate the offence.



**Figure 7.2: Respondents Perceive that the Punishment and Fine is too Low For the Perpetrators**

Source: Field Study

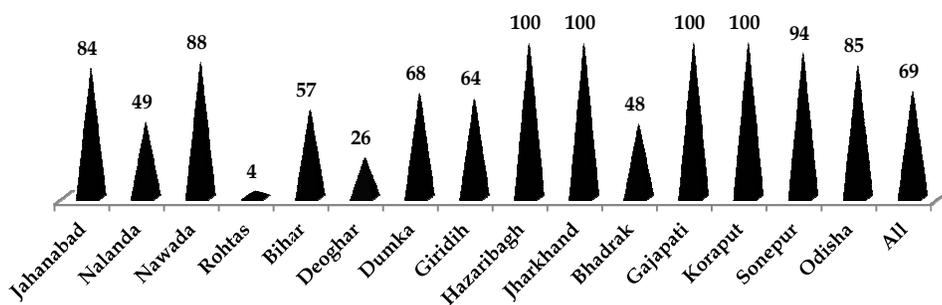
In this context, Mr. Sushil kumar, a lawyer from Giridih district, Jharkhand said that “although there has been progress in the country, but the people are still uneducated and superstitious”. As regards to witch hunting, he said that he trailed a case but due to lack of witness and evidence, the culprit could not be punished and the alleged victim could not get justice. Also added, “It is a general practice that the culprit is set free due to lack of evidence against him/her. Moreover, even if punished, he/she is imprisoned only for 6 months or levied minimal fine”. However, he suggested extending the imprisonment to 10 years. Moreover, it becomes very difficult for the victim to register a case in the police station. And, if registered, amid all difficulties, the case is taken to the court and both the parties had to attend the trial for nearly six months.

#### 7.2.4 Awareness Meetings

In order to overcome such a social evil practice, various local leaders, organizations and *sansthas* working in the districts reported of organising awareness campaigns and meetings related to witch hunting. Mr. Bhola Shankar, a resident of Sasaram has been working as a leader in the Gramiya Mazdur Sangathan since 1974 for the social, economic and political rights of the poor, marginalized, Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims and women. He has also worked against the superstitious mindset of the people by organising awareness campaigns, movements and meetings in different villages of Rohtas district. He said that “the meetings were mainly organized to aware people about the baseless belief of witch, *Ojhas* and witch practices. The *Ojhas* are forced to reveal their selfish motives to the people in the meetings. They are threatened by saying that if they don’t reveal, then they will be taken to the police for action. As a result, they disclose their motives. The movements and meetings had a great impact on the lives of the people. They, apart from seeking advice from the *Ojhas*, explored the option of going to doctor for treatment”. The Figure 7.3 depicts that the respondents from all the districts reported of recalling prevalence of

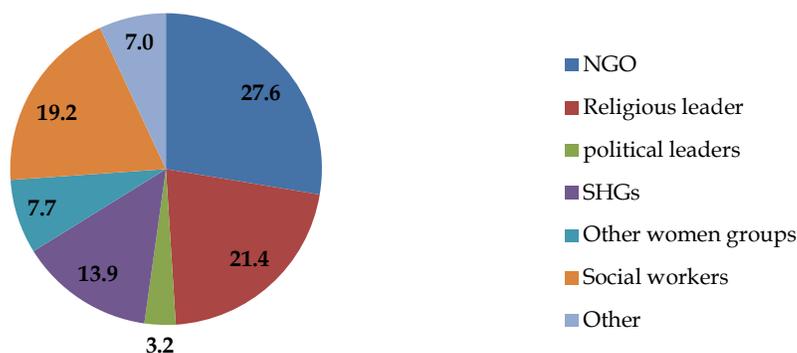
awareness meetings in the village except for Rohtas and Deogarh. However, the people of Jharkhand claimed to have witnessed various awareness meetings in or nearby the village.

**Figure 7.3: Respondents Participated in any Awareness Meeting against Witch Hunting**



Source: Field Study

On enquiring about the persons responsible for organising and conducting the awareness meetings, majority of the population asserted that the NGOs, religious leaders, social workers and self help groups are the ones who make attempts to aware people about the effects of illogical belief of witch hunting (Figure 7.4).

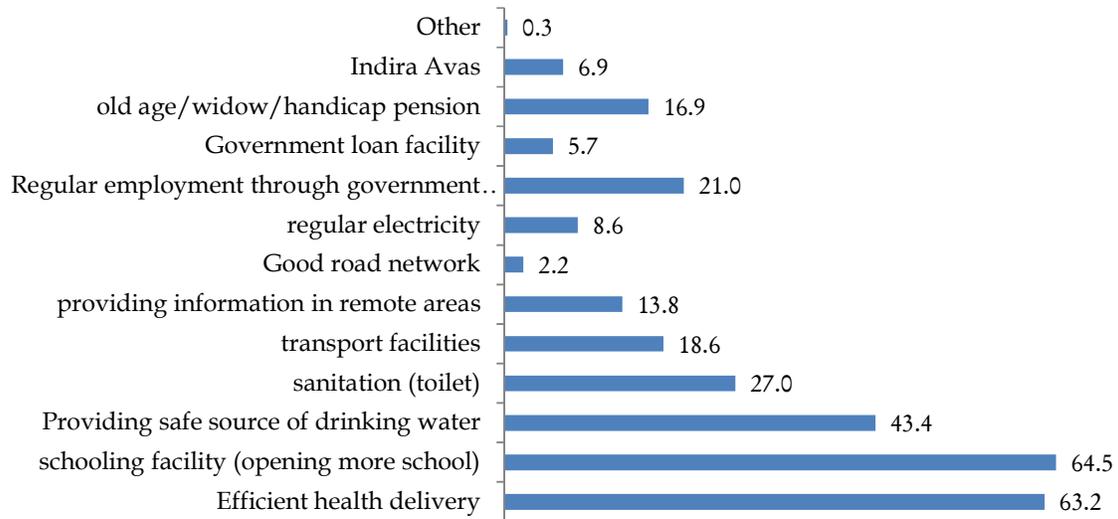


**Figure 7.4: Organisers of the Awareness Meeting**

Source: Field Study

### 7.2.5 Remedies

Immediate and effective measures and strategies are needed to address the superstitious practice of witch hunting. On probing how to deal or address the issue, above 60 per cent stated that there is a need for effective healthcare delivery mechanisms as well as educational facility such as opening of more schools, enrolment of more children in schools, etc. in the village (Figure 7.5). Moreover, around 70 per cent demanded of providing safe source of drinking water and sanitation facilities. The people of the studied area also suggested enhancing the generation of employment facilities, transport facilities, age old/widow/handicap pension facilities as well as disseminating information in remote areas to combat the issue.



**Figure 7.5: Respondent’s Perceptions on the Remedies against Witch Hunting**

Source: Field Study

### 7.3 Summary

Although, the socially excluded and backward communities of Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha are aware of the laws of witch hunting, their knowledge is partial and inadequate. Moreover, unfortunately, the existing laws have not been able to either tackle such vicious crimes or create fear in the minds of the perpetrators. The threat of punishment and conviction hasn’t been a deterrent since the perpetrators of the crime (always male, mostly upper caste Hindus) know that they could not be punished as any FIRs or written complaints are lodged. Thus, it is because of lack of laws or rather powerless laws and their weak implementation that specifically targets this practice. Furthermore, the intervention of police and authorities in such cases is negligible. The victims, often, disagree to lodge complaint due to social stigma. This instigates the perpetrators to repeat such incidences. Therefore, there is need to aware, motivate and sensitize people against such practice along with implementing better health, educational and employment facilities.

## CHAPTER - VIII

### CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Witch-hunting is one of the worst forms of cultural violence against women in India and other developing countries. Witch hunting is manifestation of violence against women that is practiced in the name of culture, religion and social norms and practices, which are usually overlooked by the society. It is a baseless and illogical superstition which entails death of women. Women in India, particularly, the Dalits and Adivasis have unequal access to productive resources, food and health care, education, employment opportunities, judicial system, etc. which makes them vulnerable to possible abuses, including allegations of being witches. Furthermore, widowhood is perceived to be inauspicious in upper caste Hindu society. However, because of the *Sanskritization* process, other lower castes also started to adhere to strict Hindu practices. Thus, this process has also made women belonging to other castes vulnerable. From the cases, it is seen that many widows and single women were victims of witchcraft allegations.

In patriarchal societies, women face different kinds of discrimination and exploitation. Although there are some maintenance rights, but, in the event of the death of their spouses, relatives and neighbours illegally acquire the land, accuse the women of witchcraft, leading to torture and death. Moreover, there are no provisions for providing rehabilitation, relief, or any form of compensation to women after they have been identified and persecuted as witches. Thus, in many cases, even if FIRs are lodged and an arrest is made, the culprit is either freed due to lack of witness or influence of upper caste people. However, in any circumstances, the woman is still left to bear the brunt of her injuries, or the social stigma faced by the villagers. Often women continue to live ostracized from their villages and their lands, with no means of sustenance. In cases where the woman is murdered, her next of kin do not even get any form of compensation or relief. Thus, it is evident from the case studies that the uneducated people have a firm belief in the practice and also the local doctor (*Ojhas*) who mislead the villagers due to fulfilment of his personal and materialistic needs. The involvement of the authorities and police is negligible.

However, apart from witch allegation on lower caste women, the study also unveiled the fact that the lower caste men are also victim of witch accusation. One such instance is of Abba Mia, aged 70 years of Bagadabera village of Deogarh district. In 2011, Abba Mia passed away due to violence and atrocity meted against him for practicing witchcraft. Abba Mia has four daughters and a son. His son, Niam Ansari stated that their neighbour Kadir Mia, Nehru Biwi and some villagers accused Abba Mia of casting evil spells and black magic on their son who eventually died. They brutally tortured and beat him mercilessly to death. After his death, his family registered the case against them and finally they were found guilty and put behind the bars. However, Abba Mia's family did not receive any compensation from the government. There are also instances of lower caste man being alleged as *ojha* and doing harm to the villagers. Mahendra Majhi, aged 60 years, is a resident of Jehanabad district, Bihar. He belongs to a lower caste, *Majhi*. He stated that his grandmother and father was devotee of goddess Durga. The villagers' belief that his

grandmother was also often possessed with the goddess. They used to seek advice and treatment for themselves and their family's ill health. After her death, Mahendra's father continued the profession of ojha and people believed him. However, after his death, the work discontinued since no one in the family had knowledge about it. Mahendra engaged himself in daily wage labour works. He had the burden of nurturing his two daughters after the sudden death of his wife. Since, his grandmother and father were Ojhas, so he was also forcibly alleged an ojha. The villagers blame him for any mishappening in the village. They think that he is practicing witchcraft on the victims and brutally assault him. He even did not get any help from the Panchayat or Sarpanch.

Thus, after analyzing the cause and effect of witch-hunting in the states, it is inferred that there exist class and caste based discrimination along with gender-based discrimination in the society in the name of Witch Hunting. The major reason for the prevalence of such practices can be attributed to accumulation of economic belongings, dominance in social hierarchy, sexual dissatisfaction and personal vendetta. The roles and responsibilities of the police and the local authorities have been negligible in overcoming the practice. However, various NGOs, CBOs, social workers and self-help groups are making sincere efforts to curtail the practice through awareness campaigns, but their efforts needs to be supplemented by proper implementation of Government Acts and schemes and support from the authorities.

The study shows that violence against women in the name of witch is a burning issue. Though the Government of India has enacted various legislations like incorporation of section 498A in the IPC, Dowry Prohibition Act, Child Marriage Prevention Act, Prevention of Immoral Traffic Act, and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 to deal with various offences against women, still there are various situations encountered by women wherein they are subjected to torture and atrocities. There are specific laws dealing in those areas e.g. in certain areas women are accused of performing witchcraft and unnecessarily being harassed in the name of witch hunting. At least 12 states – Jharkhand, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Assam and Bihar – are recognized as areas where witch hunts are rampant even today.

'Witch hunting' involves the branding of women as witches, mostly after an 'ojha' or witch doctor confirms that a woman is a witch. A woman who is branded a witch is then subjected to numerous forms of torture: beatings, burns, being paraded naked through the village, being forced to eat human excrement, raped, having wooden or sharp objects inserted in her private parts. In some cases her hair is cut off, her teeth are pulled out (she is supposedly 'defanged'), in some instances her nose or other body-parts are cut off, she and her children are socially ostracized, her land and property is seized, and sometimes women are even put to death and their limbs hacked off. Witch hunting is widely seen to be used as 'a pretext for suppressing women and gaining personal interest.' In the tribal villages of Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha the village 'ojhas' (known as 'sorcerers') boast of their powers to detect a witch - but they will only do so "for a price." For the overly greedy ojha to declare a woman a witch, villagers simply need to cough up a goat, a bottle of liquor, or any other poultry animal to pay the ojha. When women reject the sexual advances of their male neighbors, it is another cause on the list

leading to allegations of witchcraft. Widows who refuse to relinquish claim over their husband's property can similarly be threatened and charged with being a witch; an act that often succeeds to compel them to let go of their claim on their husband's land. So we can connect the practice of witch-hunting to the prevalence of patriarchal attitudes, stating that an opposition to women's rights over property, a general suspicion of female sexuality, as well as a lack of education and health services have contributed to the continuation of the antiquated practice of branding women witches. Therefore, real reasons why women are branded witches are economic gain or sexual vengeance.

The critical point is that women, who are accused of witchcraft in India, will often not seek any legal or police assistance. Shame, isolation and poverty feed the wheel of no protection, no rights and no dignity for women who are usually on the bottom layer of Indian society and already without any proper legal recourse. There are no provisions for providing rehabilitation, relief, or any form of compensation to women after they have been identified as witches. Thus in many cases, even if FIRs are lodged and an arrest is made, the woman is still left to bear the brunt of her injuries, or the social stigma she is still faced with from others in the village. Often women continue to live ostracized from their villages and their lands, with no means of sustenance. In cases where the woman is murdered, her next of kin do not even get any form of compensation or relief.

The descriptions of the killings are hair-raising and horrifying to the point of insanity. In most cases women are beaten until they fall unconscious and forced to eat their own excreta or drink urine before being burnt alive. In some places they are also stripped and paraded naked. Of late, it has also been observed that most killings have a common pattern: the victims are always poor, mostly from marginalized communities and own some property. The killings occur when women try to resist attempts to grab their property, or refuse sexual favors demanded by men who have dominant position in the community. The brutality that follows, therefore, is an act of 'punishment' to the women for being rebellious.

If we look at national laws, most witch hunt cases are dealt with by Section 323 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which prescribes one year's imprisonment and a Rs 1,000 fine to anyone who causes harm voluntarily. In other words, the punishment for brutalising a woman by calling her a witch could be the same as that for slapping a person. Other sections like 302 (murder) of the IPC are invoked in witch hunt cases that lead to a woman's death. **Therefore, there is an immediate need for enacting a National Law on witch hunting.** In the light of the discussion, it is necessary to provide some recommendations classified by implementing agencies which are as follows:

#### **Central Government:**

- The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development should organise a national consultation to develop an act to provide for more effective measures to prevent and protect the women from witch hunt practices and to eliminate their torture, oppression, humiliation and killing by the society by trial of offences related to witch hunt practices and providing for punishment and, for the relief and rehabilitation of women victim of such offences and for any other matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

- Considering the continuation of incidence of violence against women , there is need allocate budgets for Dalit, minority and Adivasi led NGOs so that awareness programmes and campaigns are conducted to aware people about the debilitating psychological and economic impacts on women who are made victim of accusations of being a witch.
- Special budget for adult education curriculum in the regions in order to engage women in understanding the reason of death and disease that are attributed to women accusing them of being a witch. Adult education should be incentivised for ensuring participation of all illiterate women in order to ensure that that they are not vulnerable to suggestions of those who are prone to make unscientific prescriptions. ASHA should be trained in preventing false accusations reporting on it rapidly to health personnel.
- Support awareness programmes for eliminating witch hunting to alter the deep-rooted value system of patriarchy that discriminate and subordinate women. There is also need for organising *padyatras* . NGOs and media have an important role to play in disseminating awareness and advocacy to change such defective value systems from society. Central Government needs to create a mission mode programme for ensuring zero report on the incidence for witch hunting through social audits conducted by reputed Dalit, Adivasi and women organisations.
- Ministry of Panchayat Raj should be creating special budget for training of the panchayat leaders in handling the reports on witch hunting and taking all preventive measures in order to ensure zero incidence of witch accusation related violence on women. Panchayat level training module should be made for step by step communication and action patterns for the accusation of witchcraft for women.
- Central Government should declare **Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Social Justice Award** for Sarpanches who ensure zero incidence of the witch hunting and caste based atrocities and discrimination. Indicators for award should include specific activities and its frequency targeted for eliminating violence of SC, ST, minority's men and women who are accused of witchcraft or casting evil spell.
- The study has shown that witch hunting violence is not formally recorded in many cases. There is a need to address the issues rapidly through seeking report through social audits on the instance of cases where police did not report the cases. Accountability needs to affixed and due action needs to against negligence of duty. Violence against women through witch hunting cannot be condoned.
- Ministry of Human Resource Development should be ensuring opening Department of Psychology in all the colleges in order to ensure availability of Clinical Psychologists at block level hospitals. University Grant Commission should be mandated for a targeted introduction of Department of Psychology across the universities in order to generate human resource for addressing the issues of psychological damage that are generated from widespread practice of caste based discrimination, untouchability and violence against SC and ST women.
- In the interim, NRHM should have component for time bound training of all the health workers specially ASHAs at the village level in order to ensure that mental illness issues are reported objectively and due psychological and psychiatric assistance is provided to cases reported by the ASHAs.

## State Government

- The study reveals that in Nalanda district of Bihar only 44.7 % households have their own hand pump followed by Rohtas 52 % Nawada 72 %, Jahanabad 23.1 %. Therefore, the state government should taken immediate step to install handpump and supply pipe water in Dalit habitations of these districts to resolve drinking water problem.
- In Odisha state of Koraput district only 16 % Dalits have access to local handpump followed by Gajpati 36 %, Sonepur 56 %. It was also found that the Dalit women are subjected to violence and atrocities while fetching water from a distance source owned by dominant caste. Therefore it is recommended that the government of Odisha should supply drinking water immediately in those districts. This will contribute in reducing the violence against women.
- In Dumka district of Jharkhand only 36 % Dalits and Adivasi household have access to local handpump followed by Giridih 20 %, Hazaribagh 27.1 % and Deoghar 36 %. Therefore, the government of Jharkhand should supply drinking water to these districts immediately.
- The study revealed that the incidence of witch is highest in Odisha followed by Jharkhand and Bihar in the last 10 years. Therefore, there is need of organising awareness in Odisha on these issues for spreading awareness.
- Special budget should be sanctioned for training the police station heads who would be implementing the laws in order to elimination of violence on women as a result of accusations of being a witch.
- Report on the implementation of laws through social audits should be made mandatory with social audits conducted through engaging Dalit, Adivasi and minority led NGOs in order to ensure more organic engagement with the Dalit, Adivasi and minorities where most of the incidence of witch hunting has been reported.
- Budget for special training of police and Welfare Department Personal, and NGOs working for prevention of witch related atrocities should be allocated.
- Panchayat level health education trainings should be conducted reaching SC, ST and minorities in order to let them be aware on the scientific understanding of the physical and psychological health and encourage prevention of evil practices though apply their energy for more constructive purposes.
- Organizing women's groups, community or *sanghas* at village level to enhance the self-confidence and economic independence of vulnerable women.
- Government should make strong Anti-witchcraft laws and penalties to combat the situation while implementing the existing laws. The Features of the new laws should have punitive actions for police officials who are not lodging FIR on witch violence.
- Women accused of being a witch should be encouraged to file defamation cases against those who are accusing women of being a witch.
- Without compromising through sorting out cases, punishment should be given for those engaging in violence against women through giving force feeding them excreta and urine should be for three years for those engaged in violence. All the

applicable legal provision should be applied to the perpetrators of violence against women accusing them of being witch.

- Copies of laws against witchcraft should be made available to all panchayats and this should be available with all the police stations.
- Special budget should be given to police stations for travel related to violence against SC, ST women that are reported.
- Police officials and panchayat leaders not delivering justice should be punished.
- Social and economic losses and psychological damage should be compensated by the state.
- Government should aim to enforce free universal (at primary, secondary and tertiary levels) female education. There is need to introduce the subject of witchcraft in school textbooks to raise awareness among school children about the ancient practice of witch hunting based on superstitious beliefs, so that it can eventually be discredited and eradicated.
- School based programme for science and health education with innovative use of communication engaging children so that children become defender of women rights against all kinds of violence.
- Government should formulate employment policies and opportunities to enable women to participate in the labour market for gainful occupation in all sectors, formal and informal. There should be special focus on SC, ST and minorities.
- Government should provide health facilities to all whereas women's access to health services needs to be expanded and improved. They should also aid traditional healers/*Ojhas* learn about the benefits of modern healthcare and sensitize them in favour of modern means of diagnosis. National Rural Health Mission should have special component budget for health education among SC, ST and minorities.
- Mental health assistance for all should be made available at the block level with creation of permanent post of Psychiatrists assisted by Clinical Psychologists and counsellors considering the fact the system of neurotic and psychotic disorders are attributed to invisible entities while ignoring the psychoneurotic side of the symptoms.
- Stringent laws that prevent discrimination against women belonging to SC, ST and minorities should be enforced.
- Government has to introduce affirmative action programmes in the fields of education, health and employment.
- Strategies need to be formulated to address the root causes of witch-hunting, which would help other non-political organizations working in this sector.
- The judicial system should be sensitive to the plight of women. Free legal aid should be provided to the poor and needy women. NGOs should also provide such legal aid to those women who have fallen victims to abuses on charges of alleged witchcraft practices.
- Government should raise the quota system for women in all tiers of government for their socioeconomic uplift.

#### **Local Self Government:**

- Panchayat leaders should be ensuring delivery of justice through due punishment as per the law for those engaged in the violence against women accused of being a witch.
- All social groups should be encouraged to ensure that accusations are not made for women.
- Panchayat leaders being responsible for the development of panchayat should be alert to the signs and information on the potential perpetrators in order to prevent the incidence of violence.
- Panchayats leaders should be encouraged to travel through the panchayat once a week in order to ensure information and news on the potential perpetrators is not ignored. Strategy should be contradicting the accusation at the right time so that violence on women as a result of accusation does not take place and those making the accusation are shamed and educated on the correct reason for death and illness through post mortem and scientific investigation.
- Mandatory post mortems should be ensured for the deaths that are attributed to witchcraft in order to debunk the idea that death could be related to witchcraft or some magical influence.
- Panchayat leader should be trained for identifying the special health related problems so that they are aware of the psychiatric and psychological condition of women and men whose conditions are wrongly attributed to magic, witchcraft and so on.
- Panchayat leaders should be made aware that psychological and psychiatric conditions are developed due to various factors and due to ignorance on the etiology of diseases, there are instance of unscientific diagnosis. Medical and Mental Health professionals including Psychiatrists and Psychologists need to be engaged in health training of the panchayat leader, ASHA, ANM, ICDS workers, primary school teachers and other community based who have public responsibilities.

#### **Measures to be taken by Police for Prevention & Protection of Women:**

- When a police officer receives any information or a report that witch hunt is likely to be committed or there are reasonable grounds to suspect that witch hunt is committed against a woman, shall forthwith proceed to the place and shall take all suitable measures to prevent the witch hunt and to provide protection to the woman including getting her admitted in the recognized protective or shelter home, in case the woman has no place for such shelter.
- The police officer shall immediately remove or cause to remove the person and the objects expected to harm the woman. The police officer shall verbally or in writing warn the person or persons accused of having intention or attempting at committing witch hunt against the woman to leave the place immediately and abstain from inflicting any harm upon the woman.
- In case the situation warrants the police officer may cause arrest of the person or persons and take action in accordance with section 151 of the Code. The person so arrested shall be produced before the executive Magistrate of the area who shall proceed under section 107 and section 116 of the Code.

- Whenever offence against the woman under the Act is reported to the police officer, in whose jurisdiction the offence is committed, the officer concerned shall record the FIR and shall take suitable action as per the law.  
(ii) Whenever such incident is reported to the police officer not belonging to his jurisdiction, the officer shall immediately inform the police officer concerned and also send the copy of the written complaint, if available, for further necessary action.

#### **Any other Agencies**

- NGOs and civil society should provide special skills training to women accused of being a witch who have no access to productive resources and education. Income generating activities need to be expanded to such women in order to let them recover rapidly from the psychological damage experience through violence.

## REFERENCES

- Ashford, A. 2005. "Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa". Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bagchi, J (ed). "The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal, 1970-2000: The Challenge Ahead". Sage Publication.
- Bailey, F.G. 1992. "The Witch Hunt or The Triumph of Morality". Cornell University Press.
- Barman, M. 2002. "Persecution of Women: Widows and Witches". Calcutta, India. Indian Anthropological Society.
- Barstow. Anne. L, 1994, "Witch raze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts", Harper Collins.
- Behringer, W. 2004. "Witches and Witch Hunts. A Global History". Polity Press.
- Ben-Yehuda. N, 1980, "The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective," American Journal of Sociology, 86: 1, pp. 15, 23.
- Brauner. S, 1995, "Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany", Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Briggs. R, 1996, "Witches and Neighbors. The social and cultural context of European Witchcraft", Viking Penguin.
- Chakravarti, Ipsita Roy. 2000. "Beloved Witch. An autobiography". India. Harper Collins.
- Chakraborty, J & Anjuman Borah. 2013. "Witch hunting in Assam: Strategising Alternative Media for Women Empowerment and Overcoming Superstition". Journal of North East India Studies, Vol. 3(2), Jul.-Dec. 2013, pp. 15-24.
- Chakravarty, Anuradha and Soma Chaudhuri. 2012. "Strategic Framing Work(s): How Micro-credit Loans facilitate Anti-Witch Hunt Movements Mobilization". Vol. 17.
- Chaturvedi, S. 2008. "Tempest in a Tea Pot; Analysis of contemporary witch hunts in the tea plantation of Bengal". Research Thesis (Unpublished).
- Chaudhuri, A B. 1981. "Witch Killings amongst Santals". New Delhi. Ashish Publishing House.
- Demos, J. 2008. "The Enemy Within: A Short History of Witch-hunting". Penguin Group US.
- Devi, Mahasweta. 1990. "The witch hunt. In 'Of women, outcastes, peasants and rebels. A selection of Bengali short stories". Edited, translated with an introduction by Kalpana Bardhan. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Dungdung, G. 2004. "Hunting Witches or Hunting Women? Combat Law Publications Pvt. Ltd.
- Erickson, Kai T. 1962. "Notes on the Sociology of Deviance". Social Problems.
- Federici, S. 2004. "Caliban and the witch: Women, the body and primitive accumulation". Brooklyn: Autonomedia.
- Federici, S. 2008. "Witch-Hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today". Journal of International Women's Studies.
- Fraser. A., 1984, "The Weaker Vessel: Woman's Lot in Seventeenth-Century England", published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London.
- Ghosh, R.A. 2012. "Witch-hunting - another sin against women".

- Gibbons, J., 1998, "Recent Developments in the Study of the Great European Witch Hunt", Research Article in Pomegranate, Issue - 5.
- Godbeer. R, 1994, "The Devil's Dominion. Magic and Religion in Early New England", Cambridge University Press (Reprint).
- Goonesekere, S. 2004. "Violence, Law and Women's Rights in South Asia", UNIFEM, South Asian Regional Office, New Delhi: Sage Publication and London: Thousands Oaks.
- Harley. D, 1990, "Historians as Demonologists: The myth of the mid wife witch. Social History of Medicine", Cambridge University Press.
- Hester. M, 1992, "Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination", Routledge, London.
- Hill. F, 1997, "A delusion of Satan. The full story of Salem Witch Trials", First Da Capo Press Edition.
- Human Development Report, 2011.
- Karat. B, 2001, "Some issues in the struggle against witch-hunting", Peoples' Democracy. Weekly organ of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Vol. 25, No.2, January 14, 2001.
- Karlsen, Carol F. 1998. "The Devil in the Shape of a Woman. Witchcraft in Colonial New England". New York. W W Norton.
- Kelkar, G and Dev N. 1991. "Women, Witches and Land Rights in Women, Land and Forest". Zed books.
- Kelkar, G. 1992. "Stopping the violence against women: Fifteen years of activism in India" in M. Schuler, Freedom from Violence: Women's Strategies From Around The World, UNIFEM
- Kgatla, ST, Ter Haar, G, Van Beek, WEA & De Wolf, JJ (eds). 2003. "Crossing witchcraft barriers in South Africa". Utrecht: University of Utrecht.
- Kramer, H and James S. 1971. "The Malleus Maleficarum". New York. Dover Publications, INC.
- Lamer. C, 1981, "Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland. Baltimore", John Hopkins University Press,. Pp. xii, 244. \$17.50.
- Macfarlane, A. 1970. "Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England". London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mathur, K. 2009. "Witchcraft, witches and social exclusion in Family violence in India: human rights, issues, actions and international comparisons". ed. by Swati Shirwadkar. - Jaipur: Rawat.
- Mishra, A. 2003. "Casting the Evil Eye". New Delhi. India. Roli books.
- Nathan, D, Govind Kelkar, and Xu Xiaogang. 1998. "Women as witches and keepers of demons. Cross-cultural analysis of struggles to change gender relations". Economic and Political Weekly, October 31.
- Nath, Jahnabi Gogoi. 2005. "Witchcraft and witch hunting in Assam in historical perspective with reference to the Bodos". Seminar/Conference, Proceedings of North East India History Association (26<sup>th</sup> Session), Edited by: Manorama Sharma. North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.
- National Crime Records Bureau (2011). <http://ncrb.nic.in/>
- National Alliance of women (2006). The Second NGO Shadow Report on CEDAW.

- Ogembo, J. 2006. "Contemporary Witch-hunting in Gusii, Southwestern Kenya". Edwin Mellen Press.
- Rajalakshmi, T.K. (2000), "In the name of the witch". Frontline, Vol. 17, Issue 23, November 11-24, 2000. Chennai, India
- Reddy, S. 2002. "Ancient practice of dowry perpetuates violence against women in India", accessed from [www.asiaobserve.com/India-story2.htm](http://www.asiaobserve.com/India-story2.htm)
- Reed, I. 2007. "Why Salem Made Sense: Culture, Gender, and the Puritan Persecution of Witchcraft". Cultural Sociology.
- Reis, E. 1997. "Damned Women: Sinners And Witches In Puritan New England". Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Shrestha, R. (2004), "Witch-hunting: A study of cultural violence against women with reference to Nepal and India", Research Paper, Institute of Social Sciences, The Netherlands.
- Thomas, K. 1963. "History and Anthropology. Past and Present".
- Thompson, Janet. A. 1993. "Wives, Widows, Witches and Bitches: Women in Seventeenth-Century Devon". New York: Lang.
- Vernon, R. 2011. "Witch-Hunts" On The Rise In Rural India. Assessed from <http://jezebel.com/5729684/witch-hunts-on-the-rise-in-rural-india>
- Willis, D. 1995. "Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England". Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN (2012). Human Rights in India Status Report

## ANNEXURE-I

### Data on Violence against Dalit Women

It has been rightly said that a caste society is inherently violent in nature and this violence is most brutal and horrific towards Dalit women.

Violence against women takes a horrific form when gender and caste intersect. Vulnerably positioned at the bottom of India's caste, class and gender hierarchies, Dalit women experience endemic gender-and-caste discrimination and violence as the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations. Their socio-economic vulnerability and lack of political voice, when combined with the dominant risk factors of being Dalit and female, increase their exposure to potentially violent situations while simultaneously reducing their ability to escape. Violence against Dalit women presents clear evidence of widespread exploitation and discrimination against these women subordinated in terms of power relations to men in a patriarchal society, as also against their communities based on caste.

In 2007, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) delivered its concluding observations regarding India's compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The Committee's report found that 'de facto segregation of Dalits persists' and highlighted systematic abuse against Dalits including torture and extrajudicial killings, and an 'alarming' extent of sexual violence against Dalit women. The concluding observation of the committee confirms that India has failed to properly protect Dalits and tribal communities<sup>26</sup>.

India is a signatory to many international declarations which obligates it to protect any form of human rights violation. ***The Universal Declaration of Human Rights***<sup>27</sup> states that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." (Article 2) ***Similarly The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women***<sup>28</sup> defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." (Article 1) It further asserts that states have an obligation to "exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons." (Article 4-c) ***The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)***<sup>29</sup>, defines discrimination against women as any "distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality between men and women, of human rights or fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field." (Article 1). However, deeply ingrained normative values of appropriate gender and caste

---

<sup>26</sup> Human Right Watch, 2007

<sup>27</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1948, as a result of the devastations and atrocities caused by the Second World War. It was vowed by the international community that such experience should not happen again

<sup>28</sup> The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women was adopted by the UN General assembly on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1993 as a recognition of the 'the urgent need for the universal application to women of the rights and principles with regard to equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity of all human beings.'

<sup>29</sup> The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. Described as an international bill of rights for women, it came into force on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1981.

roles and behaviour patterns influence government officials, police and even judges who have the power to interpret and actualize rights. These socio-culturally-religiously rooted biases enforce the discriminatory status quo to the detriment of Dalit women's right to justice where violence takes place.

The violation of the human rights of the Dalit women often takes extremely demeaning and deplorable forms. Stripping naked, naked parading, accused of witch craft and black-magic, caste abuses, pulling out nails and hair, made to eat vile substances, sexual slavery & bondage are some of the few forms that are often employed in the violence against Dalit women. Further Dalit women are subjected to various kinds of sexual violence such as rape, molestation, kidnapping, abduction, homicide, physical and mental torture, immoral traffic and sexual abuse. The National Crime Records Bureau<sup>30</sup> data records reveal that more than 4 Dalit women are raped every day in India.

Most often Dalit women are seen as the representative of their caste and violence against them is used as a means of punishment and demonstration of power by the dominant castes towards both the woman herself and her community. Women are seen as a symbol of a community's prestige and this is equally true of the Dalit community. Therefore, an outsider violating the honour of their women signals the powerlessness of the Dalits to protect their womenfolk. And there are people who will not tolerate any assertion by Dalit women and are ready to suppress them and/or their voice at all costs<sup>31</sup>.

Incidentally, this phenomenon also poses a major challenge for the empowerment of Dalit women, who are not able to speak out against the atrocities committed against them. A recent three-year study of 500 Dalit women's experiences of violence across four Indian states revealed that the majority of Dalit women faced one or more incidents of verbal abuse (62.4%), physical assault (54.8%), sexual harassment and assault (46.8%), domestic violence (43.0%) and rape (23.2%)<sup>32</sup>

Apart from being forced into the most demeaning jobs, Dalit women are extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation and are often victims of **trafficking and forced sexual labour**. In India, some Dalit women are especially targeted for the harmful practices of the *devadasi* and *jogini* systems of forced prostitution<sup>33</sup>.

A recent study conducted has cited twelve major forms of violence against Dalit women, nine being violence in the general community - physical assault, verbal abuse, sexual harassment and assault, rape, sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, kidnapping and abduction, forced incarceration and medical negligence - and three being violence in the family - female foeticide and infanticide, child sexual abuse and domestic violence from natal and marital family members.

When considering discrimination and violence against Dalit women, sanctioned impunity on behalf of the offenders is a key problem. **Police personnel often neglect or deny the Dalit women of their right to seek legal and judicial aid.** Women tell of police officers refusing to intervene or to even take their statements. In many cases, the judiciary fails to

---

<sup>30</sup> The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) formed on 11<sup>th</sup> March 1986, is an Indian Government agency responsible for collecting and analysing crime data as defined by the Indian Penal Code

<sup>31</sup>2013. Dalit Women. International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) briefing paper;

<sup>32</sup> Irudayam A. s.j.; Mangubhai, J.P & Lee,J.G; (March 2006) Dalit Women Speak Out: Violence against Dalit Women in India - Overview Report of Study in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu/Pondicherry and Uttar Pradesh. New Delhi. NCDHR

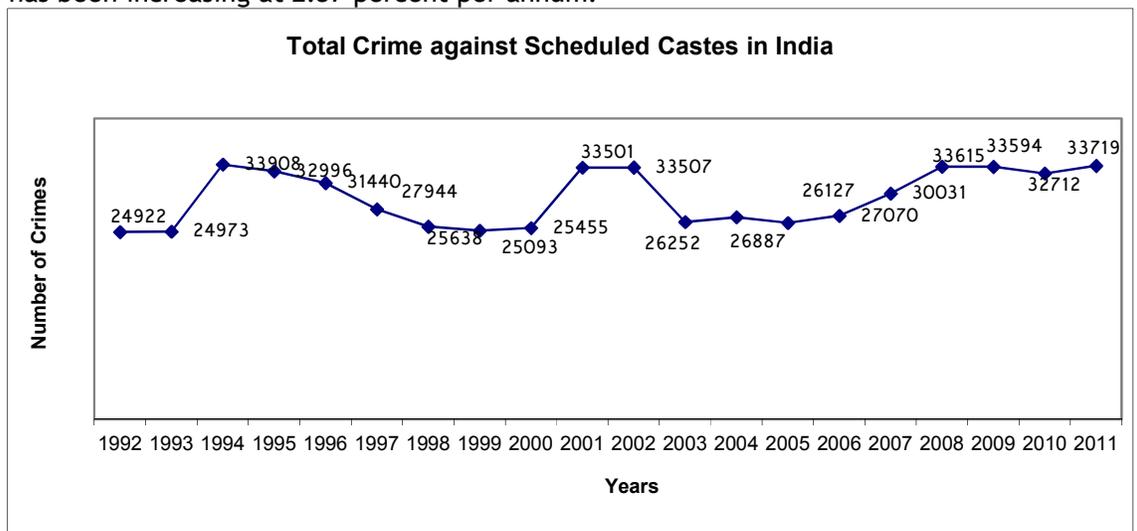
<sup>33</sup> 2013. Dalit Women. International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) briefing paper

enforce the laws that protect Dalit women from discrimination. In 2006 in India, the official conviction rate for Dalit atrocity cases was just 5.3%.<sup>34</sup> (IDSN Briefing paper) **Access to justice:** P. Ashalatha in her study states that the impunity enjoyed by both dominant caste community and the state officials continues largely due to the insensitiveness and the continuous failure of the criminal justice administrative system. This is clearly illustrated in a recent national study of violence against Dalit women based on 500 cases<sup>35</sup>:

- In 40.4 per cent of the cases, the women did not even attempt to obtain justice
- In 26.6 per cent of the cases, the victims were prevented to file cases
- In 1.6 per cent of the cases, the women were able to obtain informal justice
- In 17.5 per cent of incidents, the violence reached the notice of the police, but cases were left unaddressed
- Only in 13.9 per cent of cases was appropriate police or judicial action taken.
- A mere 3.6 per cent of cases have ever reached the courts while only 3 of the cases (less than one per cent) have ended in conviction. (Cited - Manorama, 2006)

The injustices and atrocities are made worse by the impunity enjoyed by the dominant caste and state officials. But perhaps what is most disturbing is that Dalits themselves are not aware that they are being abused or exploited, as such behaviour is considered to be the norm and accepted as necessary even to live in society. For example, Dalits might not protest at being called by their caste names, as this is the accepted mode of address by all sections of the community. A child made to sit at the back of the classroom or being asked to sweep the classroom is not considered discriminated against or exploited by either upper or lower castes.

According to the Crime Statistics brought out by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, the rate of crime committed against the SCs at all-India level is in the order of about twenty five to thirty thousand per year. It shows an increasing trend over the years. During 1992 total crime against SCs was 24922 which increased to 33719 during 2011. It has been increasing at 2.37 percent per annum.



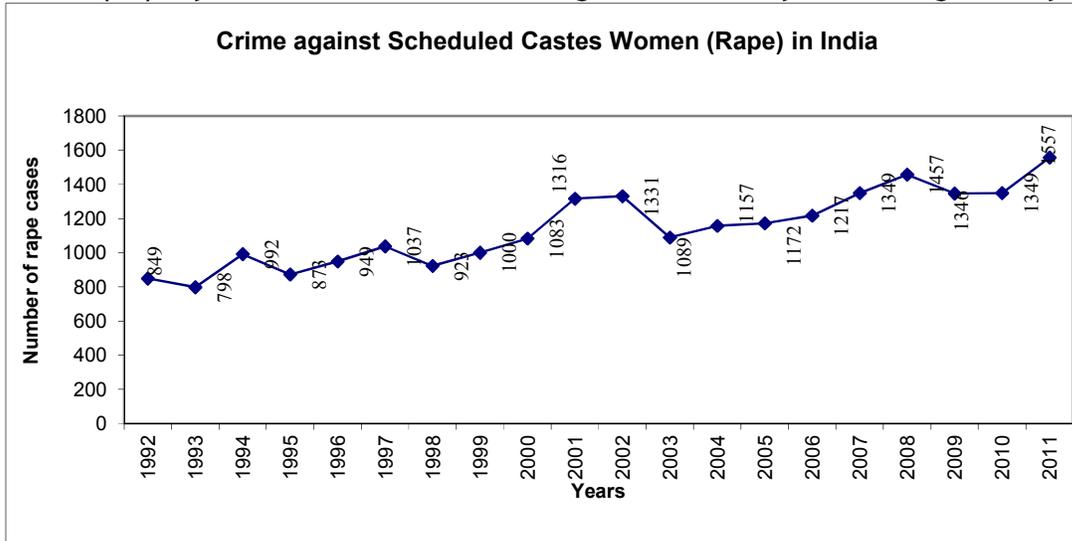
Source: National Crime Record Bureau

<sup>34</sup> 2013. Dalit Women. International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) briefing paper

<sup>35</sup> Ashalatha P, (February 2013) Status of Dalit Women in India- Caste and Gender Based Exclusion. Indian Journal of research. Volume : 2 | Issue : 2

The discussion in the present section shall focus on the violence and atrocities committed against the women belonging to SC community, especially in the context of their access to WASH services.

**Atrocity and Violence against SC Women:** Atrocity against women cannot be directly measured from the crime record statistic. Only one column ‘Rape’, clearly pointed out atrocity against women, even though women are easy victim of other types of atrocities mentioned here. If we observe the trend of ‘rape’ over few years, it is showing an increasing trend. During the year 1992, 849 were became the soft target of ‘rape’ which has increased to 1557 during 2011 which is estimated to be growing at the rate of 3.82 percent per annum. Besides, there are thousands of cases unreported and hence not factored in the official statistics of the government. Therefore the reality is always different. Besides, the violence and atrocities committed against the SC women are neither properly classified nor recorded through a scientifically data management system.



Source: National Crime Record Bureau

## ANNEXURE - I (CASE STUDIES)

### CASE STUDIES

#### Jharkhand

##### Case 1 :

**Name - Babuni Kisku, Husband's name - Umak Kisku, Village - Kolha, Gram Panchayat - Bandana Pahadi, District - Dumka, Jharkhand.**

The prevalence and practice of witch-hunting or witchcraft in rural Jharkhand can be traced to the pre-independence period. However, after independence, despite various protective measures in action to punish the perpetrators, today also majority of rural Dalit and Adivasi women are subjected to such heinous form of violence, as is the case of Babuni Kisku, a *Majhi*. Babuni Kisku resides in the village Kolha of Dumka district, Jharkhand with his husband, Umak Kisku. Kolha village comes under Bandana Pahadi gram panchayat. It was reported that 10 years before when Babuni Kisku was pregnant, she underwent severe health problems. Her husband, Umak Kisku, consulted the doctor who advised her some medications. However, the medicines could not recover her illness. So, after failing from various sources of treatment, Umak Kisku decided to consult the traditional healer, locally known as *tantric baba*, of the nearby village karanpura,. The *tantrik baba* visited her house, performed some rituals and chanted *mantras*. After which, he gave a list of things to be bought for the next day's ritual puja and assured Umak Kisku to disclose the name of the witch responsible for his wife's illness. However, on his way back home, he was threatened by some Dalit women not to revisit the village as they knew that he would impose the belief of witches in the mind of the villagers. But, due to male hegemony and fulfilment of personal wishes, he again visited Babuni Kisku's place the next day and performed the puja till evening, after which he insisted to stay overnight. He had dinner and consumed excess alcoholic drink bought by Umak Kisku for the puja which resulted in his death. Thus, although, being from the same caste, he believed in the presence of witches and also forced the villagers to belief that such a practice is prevalent in the village, for which the women are subjected to harassment, discrimination and violence.

##### Case 2 :

**Name - Sakina Biwi, Husband's name - Badurrudin Ansari, Village - Lakhanpur, Gram Panchayat - Kadma Pahadi, District - Dumka, Jharkhand.**

The conviction of witches and witchcraft is widely found among all communities of rural India such as Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, etc. The case of Sakina Biwi of Lakhanpur village of Dumka district, Jharkhand is one such instance. Sakina Biwi, 40 years, is residing in Muslim tola of Lakhanpur village with her husband, Badurrudin Ansari and four sons. They are mainly engaged as daily wage labours. Their socio-economic and educational status is very poor and backward. However, their suffering multiplied 9-10 years back, when Sakina biwi was held responsible for the death of a boy from Muslim tola, since she was regarded as a witch. It so happened that the boy was suffering from some ailment which gradually aggravated, his body turned yellowish and finally he died. This bought a change in the

mindset of the villagers and they accused Sakina biwi for his death. The boy's family members and the villagers regard her as a witch who casts spells and evil deeds. She and her family were subjected to abusive language, harsh treatment and even beaten badly. Moreover, Sakina biwi was forced to consume human excreta and urine. Importantly, they faced the humiliation and discrimination by their own muslim community. Thus, there exists a class-based discrimination with the caste group. Even the socially excluded Dalits and Adivasis residing in the village did not come to their rescue. Moreover, her husband's and sons' plea and complain to the police was in vain. Although, the matter was resolved internally by the villagers, but today also she is looked upon as a witch.

#### **Case 3 :**

**Name - Kulsun Biwi, Husband's name - Niyamat Ansari, Village - Lakhanpur, Gram Panchayat - Kadma Pahadi, District - Dumka, Jharkhand.**

Another instance of a Muslim woman, named Kulsun biwi is also an evidence of existence of class-based discrimination and deprivation with the caste group as regards to witches and witch-hunting. Kulsun biwi, 48 years old, is residing in Muslim tola of Lakhanpur village with her husband Niyamat Ansari and 3 sons. They are also mainly engaged as daily wage labours and are extremely backward. While narrating the incidence, Kulsun biwi stated that 10 years before, there was a girl named Sakila biwi in Muslim tola, who fell in love with her neighbour's relative named, Salam Ansari. After some days, the boy went back and Sakila biwi suffered from mental disability and illness. Her family members, then started blaming Kulsun biwi for their daughters' deteriorating health condition. Similarly, the villagers regard her as a witch. She and her family were subjected to abusive language, harsh treatment and even beaten badly. Moreover, she was also forced to consume human excreta and urine. They faced the humiliation and accusation by their own muslim community. Even the socially excluded Dalits and Adivasis residing in the village did not come to their rescue. Moreover, her husband's and sons' plea and complain to the police was in vain. Although, the matter was resolved internally by the villagers, but today also she is looked upon as a witch.

#### **Case- 4 :**

##### **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

**In FGD 1: Village - Lakhanpur, Panchayat - Kadma, Block - Kathikund, District - Dumka, Jharkhand**

On 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2014, a focus group discussion was conducted by anganwadi sevika Ms. Nachan Murmu in lakhanpur village of Kadma panchayat of Kathikund block, Dumka. Around 30 Dalit women participated in the meeting. The women stated that they strongly believe witches, witch practices and *Ojhas*. They added, a patient or a alleged victim becomes mentally strong by the treatment of the *ojha* which helps in recovering faster. However, a social worker, Abram Murmu was also present in the discussion. He stated that there is no such thing as witch, *dian*, *chudial*, black magic, sorcery, etc. The peoples' faith and believe in all these things are superstitious, illogical and baseless. In fact, all the women in the village are accused witch and practicing witchcraft. They are addressed as *dian*, *chudial*, etc. while engaging in any conflict.

The ward member, Mr. Narain Marandi, agrees to the presence of the practice of witchcraft & sorcery. He cited examples such as, if a person is bitten by a snake, then he/she is recovered through sorcery, magic charms, offerings, etc. performed by the *ojha*. Moreover, if somebody is suffering from any ailment in the village, then the *ojha* treats him/her through his pujas and offerings or ties the amulet and he/she gets recovered. If a person is mentally disturbed and could not control his/her mind, then the *ojha*'s treatment cures him/her. From all these examples, it indicates that there is some supernatural power in the practice of sorcery and black magic. As regards to accusation of witch to a woman, he opined that a living woman cannot be considered a witch. Witch or *dian* or *chudial* are basically spirits who are invisible and evaded through charms and pujas.

A teacher, Likhani Tundu was also present in the discussion. He also said that there is no such thing as witch and witch practice. These are superstitions arising due to illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, inequality, etc. Lack of knowledge and education amongst the *Ojhas* are the key factors which results in their wrong diagnosis and treatment. Hence, the patient's ailment aggravates or he/she dies resulting in suspicion in the minds of the family members. They get influenced by the *ojha*, who performs pujas and offerings and identifies the culprit to be a witch. The villagers who are educated enough to understand the importance of medical doctor, are in a better off position. However, some of the people consult both the medical doctor as well as local doctor (*ojha*). And, even if the patient gets recovered by the doctor's treatment, they give credit to the *ojha*. Likewise, another teacher, Luisa Soran present in the discussion was also of the opinion that the superstition of witch and witch practices are illogical. In some villages, the health care facilities and services are inadequate. Hence, the uneducated and unaware villagers could not know the exact cause and extent of the disease which mislead them to believe in the practice of witchcraft. As a result, they suffer more day by day due to physical and mental pressure and do not get recovered. But, if consulted a doctor and gets recovered, then, the mental pressure and blockness lessens.

Moreover, a dealer, named Mohammad Shamshad Ansari present in the meeting, asserts that sometimes one should believe in the practice of witchcraft which has supernatural power to heal patients. For example, if a child cries constantly without stopping, then the villagers believe that he/she is possessed by an evil spirit. As soon as the *ojha* performs charms and pujas, the child stops crying.

Thus, based on the instances of witch practices by different people in the meeting, it can be inferred that some regard it as superstition while others think that it exists and has some supernatural powers to heal patients. But, as regards to accusation of witch, the women were silent. It seems, they were afraid of disclosing the fact as they might also have to suffer the same discrimination and exploitation as the victim.

#### Case 5 :

**Name - Mary Chauda (Murbhu), Village - Puradi, Block - Churchu, District - Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.**

In Jharkhand, the accusation and subsequent violence against socially excluded SC/ST women as witches and witch practices has been increasing. The women are accused of witches and persecuted in various severe forms. This has raised many questions such as, who are these women? what is their socio-economic background? what factors are responsible for their accusing as witches? etc. Thus, in order to get the answers to these questions, the present study explored the existence and extent of witch hunting in Puradi

village of Churchu block of Hazaribagh district, Jharkhand. The village is about 11 kms from block churchu. The village has a private school and a dispensary. It was evident that the SC/ST households were scattered around the village. In order to know the extent of the practice of witch hunting in the village, various cases of SC/ST women were gathered. One such instance is of Mary Chauda (Murbhu), aged 50-55 years. Mary got married at the age of 18 years. She has a son who is residing separately with his family. She and her husband are engaged in daily wage labour works to sustain their livelihood. Mary's misery started at a very young age, after the death of her parents and four siblings. Her father's paternal property was sold by her uncle who ill-treated her and forced her to depend on the villagers and relatives for her upbringing. Moreover, some years back, Mary was accused as a witch by her neighbour Namita Surain after her husband's death. However, it was found that Mary's husband was having relation with Namita Surain. On complaining, Mary was brutally harassed and beaten by her husband. In due course, her husband went to town for work and she was left alone in her house amid severe health and financial problems. With great difficulty, she works two days a week through MNREGA and if needed takes loan from SHGs to sustain her livelihood. Thus, frustrated on being accused as a witch in the village and leading a very miserable life, Mary seeks justice and help from various sources, but in vain.

#### Case 6 :

**Name - Badki Mosamat (widow), Age - 60 years, Tribe - Santhal, Husband's name - Late Baburam Tundu, Village - Purnadi, Block - Churchu, District - Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.**

This is an instance of a illiterate widow, Badki Mosamat, aged 60 years. She belongs to santhal tribe and resides with her four sons in hazaribagh district, Jharkhand. All her sons are married and have children. Her husband, Baburam Tundu passed away 18 years back. Unfortunately, her own elder son was responsible for her suffering and agony. It so happened that once suddenly her elder son's daughter suffered from some ailments and could not be recovered. Having ultimate faith on the *Ojhas*, her elder son consulted an *ojha* who identified Badki as witch and practicing witch craft on his daughter. On getting a baseless confirmation from the *ojha*, he abused and humiliated her mother. He accused her witch, blamed her for his daughter's illness and finally, drove her from his house. Badki, then stay with his younger son. However, after some days, the elder son's cattle died. He again went to the *ojha* who reassured that his mother is a witch and all these misfortunes are happening because of her casting evil spells and black magic. He immediately went to his younger brother's house to fight with his mother, but her younger daughter-in-law came to her rescue. Moreover, one day, a young girl of the village died on the day of her wedding. An angry mob of villagers attached Badki and her younger son and brutally tortured them. However, the case was discussed in the panchayat and then some people went to seek advice from the *bhagat (knowledgeable person)* who told them that the main culprit is her elder daughter-in-law's mother. But, instead of believing the *bhagat*, the villagers believed the *ojha* and once again humiliated and tortured her. They believe that the cause of all deaths and illness in the village is because of evil spells and black magic practiced by Badki. They regard her witch and threaten to banish from the village or lynch her. To this, her younger son advised her to shift to some other place, so that she can be saved from the malicious intentions of the villagers and her elder son. Badki shifted to her native village purnadi in church block of hazaribagh district and residing with her widow sister-in-law. But, a helpless and fearless widow Badki, without having any means of financial & personal support tried to end her life. Fortunately, she was saved, motivated and convinced by the women of a self-help group of the village. Today, the self-help group is encouraging and helping badki mosamat to overcome the sufferings and lead a very contented life.

#### Case 7 :

**Name - Sangeeta Devi (widow), Age - 30 years, Caste - Paswan (SC), Husband's name - Late Gopi Singh, Native Village - Mohalabi Nagina bazar, Dhanbad, Jharkhand, Husband's place - Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.**

A young widow of 30 years, sangeeta Devi was born in mohalabi nagina bazaar of Dhanbad district, Jharkhand. She was married at the age of 24 years to rajrani's son gopi singh of hazaribagh district, Jharkhand. After one year of marriage, she was blessed with a son. Gopi singh was a cancer patient. He and his parents mislead sangeeta's family for marriage. Sangeeta was not aware of his illness till marriage. Gopi had a tea stall in the village. He used to handover all his earnings to his mother and she used to provide him the harmful drugs and drinks he was addicted to. Despite being advised by the doctor to stop the consuming of drugs and drinks, he continued it. This aggravated his condition. Moreover, his family discontinued the treatment of the doctor and consulted the *ojha*. But, as destined, he passed away after some years. After 10 days of his death, the family members started considering Sangeeta a witch and she was held responsible for the death of his husband. She was cursed, abused, tormented and discriminated severely. Likewise, she was given the leftover foods to eat and sometimes no food at all. Inadequate food, brutal & intolerable torture, humiliation, burden of work, curse of witch, etc. degraded her health. One day, while going to fetch water from the well, she covertly called up her father from her neighbour's phone and told him all about her sufferings. She asked him to come and take her away. On arriving in his daughter's house, he saw that she is been pulled by her hairs and beaten badly by in-laws. However, he resisted and saved her. Sangeeta was one and half months pregnant at that time. There were some arguments between the two parties but finally sangeeta returned to her native place, dhanbad. While returning her in-laws grabbed their grandchild from her and kept with them. She registered the case in the police station in dhanbad. But, the police in dhanbad demanded Rs. 5000 for the logistics and other arrangements to hazaribagh. On receiving Rs 5000 from sangeeta, two lady police officers visited her in-laws and returned back without much effort. They neither get her son back nor did they take any action against them. The police could not do anything to bring back her son. This totally changed her life and she remained depressed, silent and ailed. But, then, a ray of hope shined on her and she gave birth to a daughter. She is now 7 months old but, its been one and half years sangeeta is away from her son. Due to her acute financial condition, she even could not fight in the court for her son. Thus, now, her only inspiration in life is her daughter about which her in-laws are not aware. They would have otherwise, definitely tried to kill her and also take her away from her life.

#### Case 8 :

**Name - Mamta Devi W/o Sh. Satish Ram R/o Village - Churchu, Post - Churchu, District - Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.**

Present case is related to Mamta Devi who belongs to a poor family. Her husband is a daily wager. Due to her ill health she frequently visited to *ojha*/tantric. More than 80% of earnings were going in tantric's hand. Her son got ill in January'2014 and Mamta took him to one Tantric. Who charged a lot and also demanded goat, hen and alcohol. Even after offering huge money, goat, hen and alcohol her son was not coming out of his sickness.

Mamta also shared that one day quarrel took place between her and her neighbour who abused Mamta and also blamed her for illness of her (neighbour) son because that lady

believed that Mamta is witch-hunter. Mamta took this case to Panchayat. Panchayat hold that that Mamta's neighbour is guilty of abusing her and calling witch. At that time Neelam Basera, worker of Jharkhand Mahila Utthan Sanstha came in contact with Mamta and she did counselling of Mamta. Now Mamta had come out of all *tantra-mantra and jhad-phoonk*.

**Case 9 :**

**Name - Salo Murmu, 65 years W/o Late Sh. Bonifus Besra R/o Village - Lara, Post - Churchu, District - Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.**

Salo Murmu, 65 years, belongs to a poor family. Salo Murmu's husband was suffering from Mirgi. During Mirgi feasts Bonifus Besra behaved like a mad person. The victim and other neighbours took him to some Ojha/tantric. But victim's husband could not recover from disease and in frustration, one day he jumped into a well and died. After his demise relatives and neighbours started calling her a witch. They believed that she had eaten her husband.

After few days victim's elder daughter-in-law had abdominal pain and she died in the lack of proper treatment. Again, people got chance to blame Salo Murmu for the sudden demise of her daughter-in-law. Relatives and other people also abused her a lot and took her to Ojhas and tantrics who said there was evil spirit in the house and these killings would continue if they would not donate chicken, mutton and alcohol to tantrics. Salo Murmu and her relatives donated chicken, mutton and alcohol for a long period without fail. After one year tantric told the victim's in-laws that Salo Murmu's parents sent a ghost with her at the time of her marriage and that ghost killed two people in house. After listening this news she tried to kill herself but fortunately her son saved her life.

At present her son is working as cook in a Christian hostel. She is living with her family happily. She had come out of all superstitions.

**Case 10 :**

**Name - Taitri Devi W/o Sh. Chhoti Ram R/o Village - Churchu, Post - Churchu, District - Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.**

Taitri Devi, aged 35, belongs to a poor family. In the month of June' 2013 her sister-in-law's (*jethani*) daughter-in-law conceived but unfortunately daughter-in-law could not carry the child due to weakness and miscarriage took place. Taitri Devi's *jethani* blamed her for miscarriage and abused her a lot by saying that Taitri Devi is a witch. Whenever there is any fight at home Taitri Devi is blamed for it. This is another case of the false attribution and ignorance breeding undue damage to the health of women by significant relatives.

**CASE NO. 11 :**

**Name - Merry Murmu W/o Sanju Nandi R/o Village - Dumar, Post - Churchu, District - Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.**

Merry Murmu, aged 35, belongs to a lower middle class family. Her marriage was a love marriage. Her children do study in a Christian school. Due to her frequent illness, her parents took her to one tantric. Tantric asked for goat, hen and alcohol. Merry Murmu and her parents donated all items which were asked by tantric. Even after donating these items she did not come out of her illness. At last tantric claimed that he believes, a bad spirit had entered in Taitri Devi's body that's why she did not recover and she has turned into a witch.

At that time Neelam Basera, worker of Jharkhand Mahila Utthan Sanstha came in contact with Merry Murmu and she did counselling of Merry Murmu. Now Merry had come out of all *tantra-mantra and jhad-phoonk*.

**CASE NO. 12 :**

**Name - Manjula Soren W/o Julian Tudu R/o Village - Dumar, Post - Churchu, District - Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.**

Manjula, aged 40, a single parent of five sons. She independently upbringing her children. Her husband dumped her at her parental home and never came back to tack her.

Manjula's parents left a small piece of land for her. After their demise villagers tried to grab her land. But she did not left that house and is living at her parental home. Manjula got serious illness between 2010 to 20013. She went to a Tantric for her treatment. Tantrik asked for goat, hen and alcohol. Manjula donated all items which were asked by tantric. Even after donating these items she did not come out of her illness.

At that point of time she came in contact with Jharkhand Mahila Utthan Sanstha. She started attending Sanstha's meetings. During these meetings her counselling was done and she was advised to contact doctor for her treatment. She went to a doctor and T.V. was detected. Now her treatment is completed and she has become a hale and hearty woman. Now Manjula had come out of all *tantra-mantra and jhad-phoonk*.

**CASE NO. 13 :**

**Name - Sunita Tudu W/o Ashish Tudu R/o Village - Dumar, Post - Churchu, District - Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.**

Sunita Tudu, aged 35, comes from Muslim community while her husband is a tribal. She belongs to a lower class family. She has a 3 years old son. After getting married to Ashish everything was going well for one year, but after that situation changed. Sunita started becoming running away from home and not returning home. She started speaking to self, laugh without reason and then not recalling when returning on her running from home. This used to happen in the night.

Due to her frequent illness, her parents took her to a Maulvi who gave her a taweez. Later she was taken to one tantric. Tantric asked for goat, hen and alcohol. Ms. Sunita Tudu and her parents donated all items which were asked by tantric. Even after donating these items she did not come out of her illness. At last tantric claimed that he believes a bad spirit had entered in Sunita dudus body that's why she did not recover and she has turned into a witch. She went to church, where she asked for prayer. The priest prayed for her.

While he was praying, she started rolling on the floor like a snake. On query, she referred the name of Muslim boy called Shaikh who appeared to have possessed her. After this process, she became well.

**Case 14:**

**Name- Leela Devi w/o Praveel Ram, 45 years, Village and Post- Churchu, District - Hazaribagh, Jharkhand.**

Ms. Leela Devi is from a Dalit family earning livelihood through wage. She is the mother of two sons and one daughter .Some one is ill for various reasons in the family. She has visited Ojhas and some have done prayers for her house. She has not been able to get any relief spending lot of money. Her husband has lost one eye and now he is being able to use only eye. This case shows that doctors were not consulted for the illness . Leela Devi did not report the illness to doctor and neither she received an advice in this regard.

**Case 15 :**

**Name- Khadri Devi w/o Janaki Mahto, 40 years, Village- Lasod, Post- Churchu, District -Hazaribagh , Jharkhand**

40 year Khadri Devi has one son and one daughter .She is living separately. She informed that whenever there is something bad happening in the village, there are some who point fingers at her accusing her of practicing witchcraft. In such situation, most of the villager get on one side and she get weak. Whenever, she goes out, mother hide their children and whenever there are good events like marriage happening in the village , people do not call her.

**Case Number 16 :**

**Name- Chandmuni Murmu W/O Chepna Besra, Village, Lara, Post -Churchu ,District Hazaribaagh, Jharkhand.**

Chandni Murmu was 95 when he started getting accused of being a Dayan. Having ten children and the children of children . The accusation came after the death of her husband and then her son. When the wife of her son called Ojha then Ojha said that Chandani Murmu is afflicted with Bhoot. It was only toward the last of her lifetime that she got this accusation. People started calling her a dayan after the death of her husband and son. This happened after her daughter in law brought in Ojha who received chicken, goat, pig, alchohal, clothes. Since ,Ojha has nothing else to say for the illness related death and since he had to establish his importance ,he had to find a person who could be identified as a witch. She found Chandani Murmu an easy. Sons of Chandani Murmu supported her. But , she was harassed with the accusation and suffered. She was beaten for being a Dayan when the wife of one of his son passed away. Here, again ,we have a pattern of false attribution for illnesses that become responsible for death. Some get scared for some reasons and then there is no psychological counselling. People have been away from the hospitals. Illnesses have not be diagnosed. India needs to get mental health and health support delivered across the villages. Clinical Psychologists need to be appointed in each block in order to ensure that people are counselled for understanding the reasons of death and illness which appear to be letting people go to consult Ojhas who

comes up with the name of someone as the person whose evil magic needs to be taken care off. Nothing happens as a result of Ojha's incantation but with more deaths , the person identified as Dayan is persecuted again and again.

#### Case 17 :

##### In INDEPTH INTERVIEWS 1 :

**Name- Mr. Horil Sharma, Churchu, Hazaribagh, Social Worker**

He informed that he has been working against corruption that is most prevalent in his working area. Informing about his work for raising awareness on women's right ,he said that he did not work against prevention of violence against generated through the accusation of being a witch. He believed that Ojhas are responsible for generating ideas on witchcraft. Rohinia and Gondwar village were the locations where he reported women had been beaten.

#### Case 18 :

**In INT 2 : Name - Mr. Sanjay Basu Mallick, Renowned Writer, Ranchi, Jharkhand.**

The study conducted the interview of most renowned writer, Mr. Sanjay Basu Mallick in regard to witch and witchcraft. Mr. Basu was born in West Bengal. He is the only pampered son of his parents. His father was a businessman and mother, housewife. From a very young age of 17 years, he became the joint secretary of his college. Subsequently, he left his home and stayed with the Dalits and Adivasis for rendering his myriad service to them. He worked dedicatedly for the wellbeing and development of these socially excluded communities. Through various protests and *andolans*, he fought for their rights and justice. He even had to go to jail in the struggle for justice alongwith 300 Dalits and Adivasis. In this process, he and his associates adapted the language and culture of the Adivasis and Dalits. They were in the jail for nearly 5 years, due to which his studies discontinued and subsequently, he moved to Ranchi. In Ranchi, he started protest against witch hunting and for preservation of forests and married to a girl who was also involved in the countless service of the poor and excluded. He did his M.A. in Adivasis language, Mungri and then, after 16 years in 1997, he got admission in Jawaharlal Nehru University for pursuing his Ph.D. studies.

Mr. Basu asserted that he came to know many things about the cultures and traditions of the Adivasis and Dalits while working with them. He added, people have a firm belief in witch and witch practices. They think that both men and women are possessed with evil spirit and are designated as witch. They have supernatural power which can harm anybody. **One of his friend, Sanjay said that although he has not seen a witch but has heard about it.** On a full moon night, the witch comes near the village or the bank of the river and start dancing nakedly. On enquiring why nakedly, Sanjay replied that people reveal that while dancing nakedly a witch gets the supernatural power to harm the people or children. Furthermore, a witch is discriminated and exploited severely, by forcing them to consume human wastes or drink urine or physically assault them (beat) or at the least abuse and drag them by their hairs.

Thus, in order to have in-depth knowledge about the extent and reason of witch accusation and persecution, he did his Ph.D. in this topic. In this regard, while doing his Ph.D., he consulted Dr. Devnathan and his wife Govinda in order to get some information about it. From the discussion, he inferred that witch hunting is basically a religious and traditional superstition, due to which women are severely exploited, persecuted and

discriminated. Who am I?, From where have I come and where will I go?, etc. are the questions that have generated ideas and faiths and there are some who are ready to accept the occult ideas without learning on the answers without having any superstition that results in exploitation of women and usurpation of their rights to live with dignity. Black magic and sorcery are the factors which nurture superstition. Then, he explored the cause of black magic and sorcery. He found that people believe that every living being is born out of *yonis* (vulva/womb or source of life) and after death he merges in the five elements of earth. Hence, a *yonis* is powerful and needs to be worshipped. There are many places where *yonis* are worshipped such as in Jagannath temple, Puri, Kamakhya temple, Nepal, etc. but they are covered with clothes and *sindoor*.

Moreover, traditionally, women have discovered many things which gives them inner strength and power, such as doing agriculture by burning fields and forests, preparing traditional medicines by plants & herbs in natural way, etc. They were also very strong and considerate in checking the quality of burnt foods to be given to their children by consuming the burnt seeds and fruits first. In this process, they also discovered the traditional medicines from the herbs and plants by witnessing recovery in minor ailments. Moreover, they discovered fire by striking two stones with each other. All these things made them the owner which developed envy in the minds of men. Hence, in order to have control over their strength and power, the men started exploiting and discriminating women.

He further stated that in other communities the discrimination and exploitation against women is limited to abusive language. But, in Dalit community, women have failed & surrendered towards men's harassment and violence on them. They are like non-living materials for their husbands, who think they can torture and exploit their women in any ways. Mr. Basu is of the opinion that a society where a woman is subordinated and exploited cannot develop. Citing examples, he cited the instance of Holika, Tadaka and Sita. This is the reason why Dalit and Adivasi communities are still backward and underdeveloped where women are not being honoured. A woman is a symbol of love and affection. According to him, violence and atrocities is happening due to the existence patriarchal system of society where men consider women as their slaves. Some decades ago, thousands of women were burnt alive because they were having the knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs. Earlier, there were no male doctors in the society, the females were treating the patients. But, now, everything has changed. The women are deprived of their right to treat patients, build houses, etc. since, the owner of the house is a male. This resulted in various struggles and protests but in vain. The practice of witch and witch hunting is prevalent mostly in the patriarchal system of society where the men dominate women and where modern health delivery system has not reached creating space for the quacks and Ojhas who are being reached.

Now, the question is what is a witch? It might be a conspiracy by men to subordinate or weaken women who are more powerful and have control over many things. They accuse them of being a witch and humiliate them in front of the villagers. They motivate and convince the villagers against the alleged woman. Now, he turned the discussion towards the issue of sexual assault, which is also one of the most important factors of witch accusation. What is the main reason for all the rape and sexual assault cases? Men are attracted towards women only because of sexual pleasure which weakens them. According to Basu, a man cannot remain satisfied by a single woman even though there is no concern where women are feeling satisfied or not. He needs many women to satisfy his sexual motive. So, in order to put an end to the growing cases of rape, a woman needs to satisfy man. It is because of this that poly-marriages prevail in our society. If a woman denies

satisfying the sexual drive of a man, then she is accused a witch and harassed severely. The extent of exploitation is such that, the police also does not help the victim who is being accused a witch and then raped, assuming it a social and religious matter. Thus, the exploitation and discrimination against women, particularly Dalit women are immense. The media has also pointed out many such cases. On one hand, they are illiterate and on the other, they do not get exposure in the media.

The various case studies illustrated reveals that the practice of witchcraft prevails in different districts of Jharkhand. Many innocent women are being persecuted, tortured and even lynched in Jharkhand. Thus, in order to have detailed understanding of the dimensions, existence and extent of the witch phenomenon in the districts of Jharkhand, indepth interviews of doctors, ward member, sarpanch, police authorities, political and social leaders and NGO leaders were conducted which is discussed in the subsequent section.

#### **Case 19 :**

**Name - Mala Devi, Husband's name - Balram Verma, Village - Simra, District - Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

The life of Dalit and Adivasi women of Deogarh district, Jharkhand is also centred on the accusation and discrimination of witches and witch practices. There have been evidences of many such instances. However, the case of Mala Devi & Chunni Devi is one such instance. Mala Devi lives in Simra village with her husband and two young daughters. It was reported that she is accused and addressed as a witch in the village. The villagers held her responsible for anybody's ill health or even death as they perceive that she practices witchcraft. She is often harshly abused or beaten badly. The villagers harass her and her family by excluding and discriminating them in accessing the basic services in the village. They live a life of fear and anguish. It is because of this that her two young daughters could not marry till now. Thus, she stated that although there have been laws and provisions to punish the perpetrators, but, today also, the rural women are facing the hardship of being witches. The Governments campaigns and programs are somehow failing to address the issue. She further stated that there is need to abolish this superstition from the roots. For this, the women themselves have to come to the front and struggle for their rights, so that they can lead a life of honour and dignity.

#### **Case 20 :**

**Name - Quresha Biwi, Village - Simra, District - Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

On 25<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2014, another instance of the practice of witch hunting was found in Simra village, Jharkhand. This is the case of Quresha biwi, an old aged woman. She is residing alone in Simra village. It was found that she is being accused as a witch and held responsible for the death of a child by some of the villagers namely, Safik, Aadish Mia, Hamidan biwi, Fahima Khatun and Asgul Mia. She was subjected to harassment, discrimination and violence and finally forced to drink human urine by her own community people. However, she filed complaint against them in the police station. Thus, it is evident that there still exists discrimination within the caste or community group.

#### **Case 21 :**

**Name - Nunwati Devi, Village - Baghmari, District - Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

This is the case of Nunwati Devi of Baghmari village, Jharkhand. She is accused as a witch and practicing witchcraft by Gita Devi & her family of the same village. She was badly physically tortured and forced to consume human urine. However, the case was registered in C.J.M court.

**Case 22 :**

**Name - Late Abba Mia (male), Age - 70 years, Village - Bagadabera, Police station - Sarath, Post - Wamandiha, District - Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

In many parts of Jharkhand, the victims of witchcraft allegations have not only been women from the marginalized, poor and ethnic communities but, there are also various instances of accusation of witch on men. One such instance is of Abba Mia, aged 70 years of bagadabera village of deogarh district. In 2011, Abba Mia passed away due to violence and atrocity meted against him for practicing witchcraft. The village bagadabera comes under Sarath police station and Wamandiha post office. It is dominated by Muslims excepting 3 houses of Yadavs. It has a primary school named, Primary and Middle School, bagadabera. There are 3 wells and 2 handpumps in the village. A total of 77 households have BPL card but they are not benefitted by Indira Awas Yojana. The village does not have a community hall. The sarpanch, Ms. Pramila Devi, wife of Naresh Mandal resides in Khera village of Bagadabera panchayat. The head of the village is Suleiman Ansari, aged 55 years. The anganwadi sevika's name is Ms. Rehana Khatun and her assistant Ms. Tabassum Khatun. Abba Mia has four daughters and a son. The sons' name is Naim Ansari, aged 30 years and his wife's name is kadbanu Biwi. Niam Ansari stated that their neighbour Kadir Mia, Nehru Biwi and some villagers accused Abba Mia of casting evil spells and black magic on their son who eventually died. They brutally tortured and beat him mercilessly to die. After his death, his family registered the case against them and finally they were found guilty and put behind the bars. However, Abba Mia's family did not receive any compensation from the government.

**Case 23 :**

**Name - Late Sabini Biwi, Age - 62 years, Village - Patharghatiya, Police station - Palojori, District - Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

This is the case of a 62 year old Muslim woman Late Sabini Biwi. She was residing in patharghatiya village of Deogarh district, Jharkhand. The village consists of 150 households. The village has one functional handpump. Majority of them belong to Muslim community. The aaganwadi sevak, Shri Nageshwar Prasad Das resides in Madhupur village. Sabini biwi's son, Islam Mia reported that his mother was considered a witch and practicing witchcraft on the villagers. The villagers had a belief that Sabini biwi was responsible for anybody's death or illness in the village. So, she and her family were discriminated ruthlessly. Sabini biwi could not tolerate the curse of the baseless & superstitious practice of witchcraft and ultimately died in 2011. Islam Mia further stated that, now also their family are humiliated and deprived of the basic facilities in the village. They are living a life of fear and apprehension. Majority of the villagers also regard Gulenur Biwi, her daughter-in-law, a witch (*dian*). They are discriminated in accessing the basic services or facilities provided by the Government. They even have not received the voter id card. He stated that the villagers also create problem in the market place while selling mutton which is their primary occupation. However, the sarpanch was of the opinion that such a practice is mere superstition and efforts are being made to evade it. Moreover, in regard to the Government facilities, he said that the villagers, who have not been benefitted, were assured to receive soon. Thus, it can be concluded that

witch hunting is a superstitious practice that leads to the persecution and death of hundreds of widow women of poor, backward and ethnic communities.

**Case 24 :**

**Name - Nuneswari Devi, Age - 62 years, W/O Late Jogeshwar Das, Village - Garmuadiha, Police station - Kunda, Panchayat - Jharkhandi, Block - Mohanpur, District - Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

Another case of prevalence of witch hunting in Deogarh district in 2010 is of a 62 year old widow, Nuneswari Devi residing in Garmuadiha village of Mohanpur block. The village garmuadiha is at a distance of about 16 kms from deogarh district. The means of communication to the village is very poor. There are two handpumps, one of which is non-functional. There is a higher secondary school in the village consisting of total 174 students. But, the attendance is very poor i.e. around 40 students per day. The village lacks employment opportunities and health facilities. Therefore, the villagers had to commute 16 kms to deogarh for work opportunity and health facility. The village consists of a total of 300 households of which 70 percent belongs to Scheduled caste and 30 percent belongs to other backward classes. The ward member name is Smt. Pinky Devi, wife of Mr. Arun Das. The sarpanch of the village is Shri Ramnarayan Mahato. Shri Maheswar Das, son of late Viru Das, reported that Nuneswari Devi practices witchcraft and black magic on their family as well as the whole village. She is believed to have an alleged possession by an evil spirit giving her supernatural powers to alter the course of nature. She does all kinds of pujas, prayers, and offerings and casts evil spells. However, Nuneswari Devi states that Maheswar Das's allegation is baseless and illogical. Maheswar Das and some of his relatives address her witch and harass her terribly. They physically and mentally assault her brutally. However, the matter resolved after intervention of police and court.

**Case 25 :**

**Name - Nanuwati Devi, Age - 45 years, W/O Kailash Das, Village - Koriassa, District - Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

The present illustration is a clear evidence of interpersonal dispute or family dispute. The dispute is due to the possession of land, property and other valuable belongings. Nunuwati Devi, 45 years old woman is the second wife of Kailash Das. They reside in koriassa village of deogarh district, Jharkhand. The village consists of 200 households of various castes. Kailash Das was working as a labourer in the railway department, now retired. Kailash Das has two sons named Subhash Kumar and Nirmal kumar from his first wife. Subhash kumar works as a photographer and Nirmal kumar works in the veterinary department. Due to family disputes, particularly, land and property, both the brothers are staying away from their father in Kanmankathi village. However, on the evening of 20<sup>th</sup> March 2011, the sons visited her house and physically assaulted (beat) her. They snatched all her jewellery and forced her to consume human wastes. They alleged her being a witch and practicing witchcraft on their mother who died. Thus, nanuwati lodged complaint against them but, action was not taken. Now, also they harass and threaten her due to which she is leading a life of fear. On the other hand, Subhash, his wife and Nirmal opined that they are innocent. They have never alleged her of practicing witchcraft. Instead, she has taken hold of all the property of their father and denied to share. Thus, the dispute is still going on between them. The villagers tried to resolve the matter but in vain.

### Case 26 and 27 :

**Name - Rasimi (Age - 14 years, Father's name - Sanjay Singh) and Rosni (Age - 12 years, Father - Ramanuj Singh), Mohalla - Police line, Village - Dabar, Police station - Gisidiha, District - Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

In deogarh district, there has been rise in the cases of witch accusation and persecution of the young girls. One such instance is of Rasim and Rosni of police line of dabar village of deogarh district. On the evening of 27<sup>th</sup> May 2013, these two minor girls were kidnapped and found murdered. Their dead body was recovered from a manhole. Such type of instances is on a rise in deogarh district even though there are strict laws and regulations against it. The women and girls are subordinated and exploited by the patriarchal system of the society. They live a life of fear and apprehension. The Government should take extreme steps to protect the women and girls and make them independent. The perpetrators should be severely punished. Efforts should be made to create a matriarchal system of society rather than patriarchal society. As a result, women's strength, voices and importance can be understood. They can live a happy and fereless life. However, the increase in the inhuman exploitation and violence meted out against the women and minor girls, indicate the failure of the government's efforts in rendering them justice and equality in the society.

### Case 28 :

**Block - Manikapur, District - Deoghar, Jharkhand.**

On 24<sup>th</sup> July 2014, in manikapur block of Deogarh district, a S.T.F. Jawan, Pintu Sharma attempted to molest a minor girl of the nearby viilage. The villagers were outraged and started beating him brutally. On seeing this, the Deogarh authorities, deported Pintu Sharma to headquarter. However, this raised their anger and they protested against it. They asserted that if the culprit had been a common villager, then he would have been punished. But, since, Pintu sharma was a police jawan, he was not punished. This shows the biasness of the authorities. The person responsible for the protection and safety of the general public, is committing the crime which dissuades believe in them. The villagers feel unsafe and unprotected. So, extreme steps should be taken against him. In fact, he should be expelled from his service and imprisoned for attempting such a heinous crime.

*Figure 1 CADAM and RDMA leader Ms.Sumedha Bodh Interviewing Mala Devi*

### Case Number 29:

**Mala Devi W/O Sh. Balram Sharma, 45 years, Caste-Koiri, Religion- Hindu, Village- Masnodi, Post- Simra, Police Station- Jasidih, District- Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

On 27 September, 2014 Mala Devi was given human excreta to drink. Her daughter some years ago had committed suicide. After two month, daughter of sister in law (gotni) passed away. She was accused of being a witch after some said that Jagdamba baba



appeared on her sister in law and revealed about this. Mala Devi and her husband went to the police station after she was forced to drink human excreta, but police did not register her FIR. However police reached the village and threatened that if there is a repeat of the incidence

then all perpetrators would be in jail. Once this was in the news, RDMA activist Jyotiraj reached Masnodi village. She was asked not to visit the house of Mala Devi but when she reached with the police, they had no option. Police threatened again that none should be calling her a witch. When inquired on the background of all this violence, Mala Devi said that her daughter ten years ago committed suicide by jumping in a well. At that time, she was not being able to get a good match for her daughter and home environment was also full of dispute on land ownership and share. There was no proper match for her daughter. Once a match came with a man who had two kids ,but villager spoke against her and her daughter saying that she is witch and her daughter is also one. All this created deep pain and anguish in the mind of her daughter due to which she committed suicide. Now, she has two more daughters who need to be married. Since the visit of RDMA, police has made several rounds of the village. None is calling her *dayan*, but then there is no guarantee that villagers steeped in ignorance would not be speaking against her. This case shows how the false accusation is being with zero sensitivity on the needs of Mala Devi and her daughters. Ideally, villagers should have supported finding a good match, counselling the daughter of Mala Devi on marrying and establishing a family rather than speaking against her. Much work for compassion , support and care is needed in villages where attitude for care and concern for suffering is lacking

#### Case Number 30 :

**Name - Chunka Devi W/O Sh. Jagannath Rana, 59 years, Caste- Badhai (carpenter) , Category - OBC, Religion- Hindu, Village- Masnodi, Post- Simra, Police Station- Jasidih, District- Deogarh, Jharkhand .**



A lady called Panji Devi one day opened here hair and reached the house of Chunka Devi alleging the later that she way a witch. Villagers followed her and she was accused of being a witch. Villager asked her to go to Makhdoom Baba but she refused to go. Then villager took Panji Devi to Makdoom Baba who informed that there are two witches in her village. When villagers came back they assaulted Chunka Devi but could

Figure 2 Jyoti Raj and Sumedh both meeting Chunka Devi

not do anything to Mala Devi. On 16 October, 2014, RDMA team consisting of Ms. Jyoti Raj, Sumedha Bodh, Lawyer Phuleshwar Kumar Pandit and Annu Devi visited Chunki Devi to find out whether there was any issue between her and the villagers or between the relatives. She denied the existence of any such thing. She went to the police station but police did not take action. Then, she filed a complaint in the court, where people were called and an agreement was reached without any punishment to the perpetrators.

#### Case Number 31:

**Pancha Devi w/o Sh. Prakash Verma, 25 years, Caste- Koiri , Category - OBC, Religion- Hindu, Village- Masnodi, Post- Simra, Police Station- Jasidih, District- Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

The case of Pancha Devi is related to Mala Devi which RDMA investigated to find out the



*Figure 3 RDMA activist meeting Pancha Devi sitting on the ground*

reason of her going to the house of Mala Devi and telling her that she was a witch. Pancha Devi informed that she did not know about her going there but villager say that she went to the house of Mala Devi calling her a dayan in the influence of Makhdoom Baba. On probing it was found that she used to have headache and burning sensation in chest for which she sought treatment. Doctor finally giving up at the government hospital suggested that she should be visiting for prayer. This is the reason she went to the Makdoom Baba where she was gave the needful for asking

like Itr, chador and other one for Makhdoom baba and another for Jalali Baba whose graves were there. Their family reported that since last one year she is not reporting any problem. However, it can be inferred that there was some psychological problem for which she needed treatment. Faith healing appeared to have helped her. In a special mental state, she reached the house of Mala Devi about which she was not conscious. Such cases further show that psychiatric and psychological support is needed for people in the villages where deep counselling and proper medications helps. Mala Devi and Chunka Devi became the victim of mental illness of Pancha Devi who not being conscious spoke things about which she was not aware.

#### Case Number 32 :

**Sumitra Devi W/O Sh. Nehru Yadav, 30 years, Caste- Gwala (Backward Caste) , Religion- Hindu, Village- Khijuria, Post- Mamdih, Police Station- Sonarai Thadi, District- Deogarh, Jharkhand .**

Sumitra Devi was accused by the family members of Jayaram Yadav who had taken money from the husband of Sumitra Devi for buying bricks for her house under Indira Awas Yojna. She demanded money when she did not receive brick. Instead of returning money,



Figure 4 RDMA team meeting the husband of Sumitra Devi

Jayaram Yadav and her family plotted to accuse her being a witch. One day, Sumitra Devi went to take bath and there family members of Jayaram Yadav, she was harassed and women of her family gave her human excreta. Geeta Devi a lady from the village went to defend her, and then they tried to feed her excreta as well. In this case, it is clear the Jayaram Yadav for usurping the money of Sumitra Devi accused her of being a witch and when she protested, she was

tortured through calling her a witch by Jayaram Yadav and her family members on 12 October, 2014

### Case Number 33 :

**Nirashi Devi W/O Sh. Maru Mandal, 50 years, Caste- Teli (Oilsmith), Category - OBC, Religion- Hindu, Village- Mangjuria, Post- Magdih , Police Station- Sonarai Thadi, District- Deogarh, Jharkhand .**

Nirashi Devi lost her son due to electric shock when some villagers had taken electric wire and this has caused some livewire remaining causing death. One day, she decided to file a



Figure 5 Nirashi Devi

complaint then villagers did not permit her to go to file the complained. In the panchayat, Mukhiya of the village Shiv Shankar also did not want the case to be taken up with the police. 10 days later, villagers wanted to capture her land make her naked and assaulted her .Also, she was accused of being responsible for the death of her son. Upper caste men according to her wanted to get them killed through naked live wire but her son got killed. Here, we have a case of upper caste men wanting to usurp the land of Sumitra Devi and plotted to kill them. RDMA team visited village on 17

October, 2014. Case has not been registered. Sumitra Devi is living with fear.

### Case Number 34:

**Menwa Devi W/O Sh. Bhola Mahto, 40 years, Caste- Gwala , Category - OBC, Religion- Hindu, Village- Digaria, Post- Koridih, Police Station- Jasidih, District- Deogarh, Jharkhand.**



Menwa Devi has been accused of being a witch due to land dispute among the four brothers of her husband. Jalo Mahto did not get any child in the family of his grandson and for this he started accusing the wife of his brother and her two sisters Boria Devi and Suki Devi. One day, women of Jalo Mahto caught hold of Menwa Devi and forced her to drink human excreta. None among the villager came to defend Menwa Devi. Police did not register FIR. Gopal Sharma; an advocate has filed case in the court of SDM.



*Figure 7RDMA team meeting Menwa Devi*

#### **Case 35:**

**IN INDEPTH INTERVIEWS 1: Name - Shri Ramesh Chandra Das, Ward Member, Village - Koriassa, District - Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

Shri Ramesh Chandra Das resides in Koriassa village, Satsang Vihar, Deogarh district. He is a ward member of ward no 16. While interviewing, he stated that the poor, backward and minority women, especially widows are regarded as inferior and are subordinated due to the patriarchal system of society. The prevalence of witch hunting is usually found among the lower castes and illiterate communities. These vulnerable sections of the society are usually identified as witches with an aim to denounce them from the community and take control over their land, property etc. He further stated that this is the reason why mostly single women and widows become 'easy scapegoats' and are branded as witches to deprive them of their property. The practice is mostly prevalent in rural areas than urban areas. While stressing on putting an end to such a superstitious practice, he affirmed that many attempts have been made to end the practice through various protests and campaigns even against the authorities and had also been fruitful. However, the media and newspaper also exaggerate such cases. One such case was of two brothers who had disputes because of property, which later took the shape of witch allegation, but finally resolved.

#### **Case 36 :**

**In INT 2 : Name - Shri Lalit Mohan Singh, Zila Samaj Kalyan Kendriya, Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

Shri Lalit Mohan Singh is a representative of Zila Samaj Kalyan Kendriya. While discussing on the issues of witchcraft and witch hunting, he revealed that there has been no support, cooperation or efforts of the organization in evading the practice. He is of the

opinion that the self help groups, social & political organizations as well as Government play an important role in impeding the practice and seeking justice for the vulnerable communities. Witch hunting is a superstitious and unpleasant practice in society. It results in socio-economic disempowerment of marginalized women. Hence, the promotion of scientific temper becomes as important as ensuring the empowerment of fringe communities. Moreover, awareness campaigns are organized in large-scale through posters, pamphlets, banners, etc. The self help groups and other organizations also conduct rallies, protests, andolans, seminars, etc in the market place. Even, the Government have allocated a budget of Rs. 55,000 for the issue. At the panchayat level, the voices of the common people and their participation are also considered an important factor for culminating the practice. Thus, the Zila Samaj Kalyan Kendriya is making every possible effort and providing enormous support to other non-governmental organizations to impede the practice.

#### **Case 37 :**

**In INT 3 : Name - Shri Subodh Prasad, Police Officer, Deogarh, Jharkhand.**

The study also involved interviewing the police authority on the concerns of witch hunting. Shri Subodh Prasad is a police officer in deogarh district, Jharkhand. He revealed some of the cases of witch hunting which he encountered in his service period. The first case is of Sarai Kela where an old witch doctor (*Ojha*) was accused of practicing black magic and sorcery on a child who eventually fell ill. However, the main cause of child's illness was dog bite. But, the family blamed the *ojha* and wasted no time in attacking him. Another case is of Lohardaga where an old aged minority woman was alleged a witch by the pradhan of the village and levied a hefty fine of Rs. 10,000. However, the police intervened and resolved the case. There was also a case of witch hunting in Dumka, where five culprits were arrested due to witch allegation. Such type of practice is mostly prevalent among the Scheduled caste, Scheduled tribe, Minority and Other backward classes and particularly the widow women. He is also of the opinion that it commences due to family disputes in land or property. Moreover, in some instances, the victims are usually restrained from seeking help from the police, and on the other, mislead the police. There is hardly any prevalence among the upper class or middle class communities. He added that it is a very serious concern and needs to be addressed through awareness campaigns and support from media. Media can play an important role in awaking and convincing the people. Witch hunting is an age old social and traditional superstitious belief that leads to the persecution and death of innocent women. Hence, efforts should be made to protect the vulnerable women. On affirming his support for such incidents, he stated that he has and would make attempts to culminate the practice. There should be large-scale meetings and associations of women in different villages to awake them against the practice. People should be educated and empowered to understand the evil effects of the practice. Lastly, he stated that the role of police should be strong enough to impact and change the mindset of the villagers.

#### **Interview with the representatives of NGOs as per the checklist**

#### **Case 38 :**

**In Interview number 4 : Mr.Kuldip Ravidas, Dr.B.R.Ambedkar Library, Doeghar , Jharkhand, Mobile Number 9430182225**

Mr.Kuldip Ravidas narrated that since his childhood he has been fighting against social evils. He recounted his experience of communicating against undue respect to people

from Bhumihaar caste who used to ensure that a Dalit /SC person does not sit on the cot when there is a Bhumihaar reaching the village. He organised people to oppose this in order to ensure that all elders are respected not the person of particular caste. On query about violence against women , he informed that he did not hear about any though he found police moving around in the villages in order to ensure prevention of untoward action. On the query on the issue of Dayan and Witch, he said most of cases are reported due to property disputes and usurpation of properties by relatives.

**Case 39 :**

**In Interview Number 5 :**

**Mr. Ram Lakhan Ram, Retired Head Clerk, Department of Soil Conservation, President, SC/ST Workers Association, Deoghar , Jharkhand, Mobile :9470994120.**

He informed that he has been active since student days fighting against superstition and promoting education, prevention of violence against women. On taking up the cases, he informed that he had taken up cases of an SC employee who was being harassed. He informed about a case of a Dalit woman who had not been elected in the Panchayat election while the seat was for SC woman. On the reasons for violence on women, he said lack of education, presence of superstitious ideas and property dispute are the reasons for violence on women.

**Case 40:**

**In Interview Number 6: (Interview with the representative of a political party)**

**Interview with Mr. Sushil Das, Mobile Number: 9431150582, Deoghar, State Secretary, Janta Dal U, Jharkhand (a political representative as per the checklist).**

RDMA met Mr. Sushil Das and spoke on his understanding on the violence on Dalit and Adivasi women from within the community. He recognised the presence of ignorance on diseases and its scientific reasons and therefore, this false attribution for women was being made by people who were visiting Ojhas rather than doctors for treating the illnesses. He informed on the case of an Adivasi woman who had been tortured by being called a Dayan since a child had passed away. On the query for whether he would be associating with Rashtriya Dalit Mahila Andolan (RDMA) for eradication of violence on women through false allegations and false attribution of disease and deaths due to illnesses happening in the rural areas which did not have access to quality mental and physical health care. He informed that FIR was not lodged in most of the cases of the violence on women across the communities for incidence of persecution due to the false allegation of being a witch /Dayan. On the query as to whether his party would be part of the campaign against violence on women, he said, his party is committed to eliminate impacts of superstitions from the society. On the reasons for incidence of violence, he said all this is happening due to lack of awareness of diseases that are not diagnosed well due to health service system not functioning well.

**Case 41:**

**Name - Basmati Devi (name changed), Age - 45 years, Caste - Badhai (lower caste), Village - Gamhardiha, Panchayat - Kurhobindo, District - Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

Once, there was rejoice and celebration at Ramchandra Modi's house in gamhardiha village of giridiha district, Jharkhand. The purpose of celebration was the birth of his grand-daughter. Many people from the village were invited to bless the newly born baby. Ramchandra belongs to upper caste community. However, people from different caste groups also visited his house and got gifts for the baby. Ramchandra's neighbour Basmati Devi, 45 years age, a lower caste (badhai) widow, also blessed the baby and got dresses for her. Unfortunately, after the function, the baby fell ill and died the early morning. After that, Ramchandra alongwith all the villagers accused Basmati Devi of inflicting disease & death on the baby using black magic. However, both the families had arguments & quarrels and finally, she was severely beaten by neighbours for allegedly practicing witchcraft on the baby. Thus, the instance of Basmati Devi is a clear evidence of existence of caste-based discrimination, deprivation and violence.

**Case 42 :**

**Name - Manwa Devi (widow), Age - 60 years, Village - Khandiha, Panchayat - Pajodiha, District - Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

Another case of existence of class and caste-based atrocity and violence is of a widow, Manwa Devi, aged 60 years of khandiha village of Giridiha district, Jharkhand. Manwa Devi belongs to lower caste. The assertion of witch and witch practice on Manwa Devi started 15 years back, when Lakpati das's one year old grandson died. All the family members accused Manwa Devi of practicing black magic and casting evil spells on the boy. Subsequently, the villagers also regarded her witch. She was abused and beaten severely. However, she went to the police station and filed complaint against the culprits. The case was then taken to the court but she could not get justice as all the culprits were found innocent. Till now, she is leading a life of curse of witch and witch practices.

**Case 43:**

**Name - Kaushaliya Devi (widow), Age - 60 years, Caste - Koire (lower caste), Village - Beragi, Panchayat - Pandayadiha, District - Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

This is the case of a lower caste widow, Kaushaliya Devi, aged 60 years of beragi village, Giridiha, Jharkhand. Kaushaliya Devi is residing with her family in her own constructed house. Earlier, she was looking after the cattles and staying in the 3 acres land of the upper caste Lala family in the village. All the members of lala family are in government services. Unfortunately, Kaushaliya Devi was asked to vacant the house as Lala sold the land and the house to his neighbour. However, on requesting, he gave them some time and asked the neighbour to stay back for some days. After some days, Lala's neighbour, out of envy, accused kaushaliya Devi a witch and blamed her for the illness of her niece and all other misfortunes happening in his family. He even motivated and convinced the villager about it. Then, a mob of villagers alongwith his neighbour reached Kaushaliya Devi's house and started abusing and cursing her. Their intention was malicious. On seeing such a horrified scene outside the house and knowing their intentions, kaushaliya's son immediately locked the house from outside and escaped secretly to call and seek help

from the police. Fortunately, the police arrived on time and saved the family. The police intervened the case and threatened the villagers about the dire consequences. However, the villagers assured the police to mutually solve the case in the panchayat. The panchayat, after interrogating the whole case, affirmed that kaushaliya Devi is innocent and not a witch. Her son had also called the social service coordinators from the nearby villages. Although, the panchayat found kaushaliya Devi innocent, but, she was levied a fine of Rs. 100 for her deed. Kaushaliya Devi was not satisfied with the panchayat's decision. So, she & her family went to seek help and justice from S.P., Giridiha. The S.P called all the cuprits from the village and threatened them not to repeat such incidents further in the village. Thus, the case was resolved.

#### **Case 44:**

**Name - Shanti Devi (widow), Age - 65 years, Caste - Harijan (lower caste), Village - Harijan tola, Panchayat - Pajodiha, District - Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

Shanti Devi, 65 years old, is a lower caste widow woman of harijan tola of pajodiha panchayat, Giridiha district, Jharkhand. As is the general practice, a helpless, powerless and lower caste widow is usually a victim of witchcraft, she too was alleged a witch and practicing black magic on Jogi das's wife. Jogi das believed that it is due to her casting evil spells and black magic that his wife is suffering from ailments and not recovering even after consulting doctor and taking medicines. So, he and some of the villagers started humiliating, torturing and exploiting her brutally. Without any delay, the matter was taken to the panchayat. Shanti Devi had a ray of hope for justice from the panchayat. The panchayat members alongwith Shanti Devi went to the *ojha* (shaman) to seek advice. On examining, the *ojha* assured them that Shanti Devi is innocent. She is not a witch and has not practiced black magic on Jogi das's wife. Thus, the matter was resolved then and there. But, the villagers covertly discriminated and deprived her from the basic services and facilities in the village. Unfortunately, the incident left an ever ending mark on her heart and mind which lead to her death after some days. Thus, this is an account of a vulnerable lower caste widow who tolerated the anguish inflicted on her, struggled & resented against those, but, at the cost of her life.

#### **Case 45 :**

**Name - Dhanias Devi (widow), Age - 45 years, Caste - Chamar (Scheduled Caste), Village - Gandhinagar, Panchayat - Akdoni Khurd, District - Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

A 27 year old boy, named Sonu Hadi, was residing in gandhinagar village of akdoni panchayat of Giridiha district, Jharkhand. He was a conductor of a bus. Once, while sleeping at night, on the floor of his house, a snake bites him and he died. The villagers gathered near his house and called the *ojha* to treat him. They had a belief that the *ojha* can cure him through his pujas, offerings and prayers. The *ojha* tried his best to cure him and bring back his consciousness but in vain. After failure from the *ojha*, they took him to the hospital where the doctor declared him dead. However, the family members again took him to the *ojha* who tried to cure him, but could not. In the meantime, the owner of the bus in which Sonu was conductor, visited his house and tried to console the family. For their satisfaction, he took Sonu again to another hospital who also declared him dead. At last, they returned back to the village and cremated his body. After some days, the *ojha* confirmed that the cause of sonu's death was due to somebody's practice of sorcery and black magic on the snake to lynch sonu. He said that there are five women, consisting two widows and three married, in the gar group of 40-60 years in the village who practice witchcraft and they have given Rs. 18,000 to a shaman for the death of Sonu. He

demanded Rs 1 lakh from his family to identify the five women and punish the culprit. Thus, this created a situation of chaos and violence in the village.

**Case 46 :**

**Name - Mamta Devi (widow), Age - 70 years, Caste - Badi, Village - Panchmaba, District - Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

Mamata Devi, 70 years old resides in panchmaba village of Giridiha district, Jharkhand with her three sons. She belongs to badi caste and is a widow. She is illiterate. However, her sons are literate and elder son is a lawyer. Her tragedy begins from her own home. After the death of two of her grandson, her sons and daughter-in-laws believed that Mamta Devi is a witch and practiced witchcraft on their sons who died. They abused, cursed and tortured her brutally. They even physically and mentally assaulted her and drove her away from their house. Mamata Devi was totally in a state of shock and surprise. After spending some time alone in the road, she was bought to Gyandeeep Old Age Home with the help of some villagers. She stayed there for three days. Inbetween, some media person got the news and came to help her. They highlighted her case and talked to her sons to resolve the matter. Then, the sons realized their fault, apologized and bought her back home. Despite, bringing her back, with a fear of being humiliated & insulted, they still regard her witch and exploit her. They snapped all relations with her. Now also Mamata Devi, a weak, old and helpless woman is leading a life of curse and humiliation.

**Case 47 :**

**Name - Alwa Devi (widow), Age - 45 years, Caste - Ravidas, chamar (lower caste), Village - Bhalgada, Panchayat - Dandidiha, District - Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

10 years ago, in bhalgada village of dandidiha panchayat, Giridiha district, Jharkhand, a young boy suddenly fell ill. He could not be recovered even from the doctor's treatment. His condition deteriorated. Then, his family members consulted an *ojha*. After examining the boy, the *ojha* enquired if the boy had any confrontation with anybody in the village and the details about it. To this, the family stated that they had a quarrel some days back with Alwa Devi, their neighbour and she threatened to kill. Alwa Devi is a 45 year old widow. She belongs to a lower caste, chamar. On hearing this, the *ojha* immediately affirmed that Alwa Devi has cast evil spells on their son and they need to do some prayings and offerings to get rid of her. After performing the pujas, they went to Alwa Devi's house and started abusing and beating mercilessly. They even forced her to eat human excreta and wastes. Alwa Devi went to the police station with her husband to file complaint against the culprits. Although the case was registered, but no strong action was taken against them. This incident changed the entire course of her life and she is still being cursed as witch (*dian*) by the villagers.

**Case 48 :**

**Name - Bhagia Devi (name changed), Age - 65 years, Caste -Chamar (lower caste), Village - Sihodiha, District - Giridiha, Jharkhand**

Bhagia Devi, a widow of sihodiha village of Giridiha district, Jharkhand belongs to a lower caste, Chamar. She is around 65 years old. She had only one daughter who was married. Her daughter had five children. Bhagia Devi's daughter suddenly died due to some ailments. One of her child also died due to ill health. Thus, this instigated the villagers and they blamed and accused her witch and responsible for the death of her daughter and grand-daughter. She was also held responsible for any misfortune or mishappenings in the

village. They discriminated and deprived her exclusively. They believed that she spells black magic and does harm to the person who insults or fights with her. So, the villagers socially and physically excluded her. On the other hand, her son-in-law married again for proper nurturing & caring of his daughters and stayed with Bhagia Devi. But, some days later, his wife, after being influenced by the villagers, also accused her practicing witchcraft and shifted to her native place alongwith her family. This mounted her sufferings. She was left helpless and alone in her house without her husband, daughter, son-in-law or grandchildren. On one hand the allegation of a “witch” and on the other, the deprived social and financial condition shattered her life. Finally, she shifted to a village in Jamua panchayat of Giridiha district.

**Case 49 :**

**Name - Ramiya Devi (name changed), Age - 65 years, Caste -Chamar (lower caste), Village - Tiwaridiha, District - Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

This is an instance of discrimination & hardship faced by Ramiya Devi, a widow of 65 years old of tiwaridiha village of sikdardiha panchayat of Giridiha district, Jharkhand. Ramiya Devi, mother of Dinesh das was believed to be a witch and practicing witchcraft. She was held responsible for the death or illness of any person or animal in the family and even in the village. The villagers and relatives had a perception that Ramiya Devi is a devotee of goddesses Satkhandwa Devi and worships seven types of living elements such as goat, hen, egg, etc. and does harm to everybody. They consulted the *ojha* and told them that it is because of Ramiya Devi that there often arises arguments and misfortunes in their family. However, the *ojha* advised them to take Ramiya Devi to gaya and purify her by offering pujas & prayers to their great-grand fathers. Thus, on his advice, her husband, family and relatives took her secretly to gaya for the pujas. They had arranged everything beforehand in gaya. After reaching gaya, Ramiya Devi went to defecate and never returned. On failure of searching, her family and relatives lodged a lost complaint in the police station. The police also tried to search her but in vain. Surprisingly, till now, nothing has been found out about her whereabouts. Thus, the villagers and relatives assume that she might have committed suicide or somebody might have lynched her.

**Case 50 :**

**Name - Jyoti Devi, W/O Shri Phunchagi Turi, Village - Simuratiapanna, District - Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

The present incident reveals that class & caste based discrimination is still prevalent in many parts of Jharkhand. However, the exploitation and violence against the poor, backward and marginalised women begins from their own family. Jyoti Devi is a scheduled caste woman of Simuratiapanna village of Giridih district, Jharkhand. She is a smart, hard working and knowledgeable woman. She makes efforts to keep her house clean and beautiful. Her in-laws who belong to simple family background were pleased with her. But, sometimes, she was abused by her sister-in-laws. Nevertheless, her misery started 13 years back when one of her sister-in-laws child fell ill and eventually died. Thereafter, everything changed. Her in-laws started abusing and cursing her witch and practicing witchcraft. Jyoti’s efforts in convincing them that she tried her level best to cure the child but as destined he died, went in vain. She was brutally tortured and harassed. On getting the news of their daughter’s exploitation, her parents took the matter to the panchayat which was resolved then and there. The situation was under control for some days. But, again, she was abused and tortured, not only by her family but also the other lower and upper caste people in the village. They even tried to lynch her. Her husband

also started torturing her. Her parents were threatened to death if they support their daughter. The representatives of the Dalit Vikas Samiti also tried to convince them, but failed. The extent of exploitation was such that the scar marks of her wounds were still visible. She revealed that, on resisting, she was tied with a rope, locked in a room and mercilessly beaten. However, one day she escaped to the police station and filed a case against her in-laws. But, due to lack of witness, or one can say, police biasness, the culprits were not punished. Instead, she was brutally physically and mentally tortured. As a result, she had ran away to save her life and left behind her children. The incident totally ruined her life and now also it haunts her terribly. The pain of being separated from the children is intolerable.

**Case 51 :**

**Mamta Devi, Village-Pachamba ,Giridih Block, District- Giridih, Jharkhand.**

Mamta Devi belonging to the Carpenter caste is 70 year old living in the Pachamba village of the Giridih block in Giridih district of Jharkhand. There is no ojha involved in her case who said that she is a witch. She has three sons and all are educated. Eldest is a lawyer . But all this education did not come in rescue for Mamta Devi (changed name as per the request of the family members) when two sons of the second son passed away. Instead of the understanding the reason of death, the youngest son and other misbehaved with Mamta Devi. They beat her and threw out of the home. She started staying in Gyandeep Ashram where news channels went and found out about her suffering. Media people then went to sons and asked for the reason .After much persuasion, sons brought their mother back to home where she lives secluded in one room. RDMA activist would be follow up for securing more psychological support in order to let sons conduct properly without breaking the ties of womb and repaying the debt through best care and support for mother.

**Case Number 52 :**

**Masomat Sundari, Village Mathadih, Harijan Tola, Giridih, Jharkhand.**

Masomat Sundari was accused of being a dayan when 10 years ago , Prabhu Das passed away. Her close relatives from his parent side called Gotiya people in the local language started harassing her saying her that she should bring back the dead boy to life. How could she do this. They threatened that she would be burnt alive if she were not to make the boy alive . They tried to feed her excreta and urine but their efforts were not supported. It was decided that both parties should go to an Ojha who will decide and it was agreed that expenses would be borne by the accused . Ojha spent around two hours and concluded that there is nothing and thus, he saved the life of Masomaat in a way. This case shows that work with Ojhas is also important or rather most important so that he is made to give only ayurvedic medication rather than engaging the warding off evils through suggesting the existence of Dayans among Dalits and Adivasis.

**Case Number 53 :**

**Alwa Devi, 45 years, Village Bhalgarha , belongs to Ravidas caste.**

Alwa Devi, 45 years, Village Bhalgarha , belong to Ravidas caste .She suffered the accusation after a person in his neighbourhood started bleeding from his mouth. Instead of taking the person to doctor, an Ojha was consulted who told that Bhuchari Das is has blood

from his mouth due to Alwa Devi. Ojha called for Puja and when all was done, people of the household of Bhuchari Das caught hold of Alwa Devi blaming her to be a Dayan and then forcefeeding her excrete and urine. She went to the police station in the same state and filed complaint. Police registered the case and arrested all who had been involved in feeding excreta and urine to Alwa Devi. where case was registered. One person has received bail and others are still behind bars.

People are abusing her calling her Chudail saying that rice does not fill her stomach and this is the reason she is eating people. She feels that people need to stop having this thought for her. This way all who are innocents would not be harassed and tortured.

**Case Number: 54 :**

**Girija Devi W/O Jairam Das, Village, Baksidih, Harijan Tola, Giridih, Jharkhand .**

In the eastern part of the village that is known as Harijan tola , son of Mr.Deepak Das became ill and all the necessary medication was done but not appreciable change was seen. Someone suggested to Mr. Deepak Das that he should visit an Ojha. When they visited the Ojha, he speculated on the impact of a lady who according to him was not letting his son recover from illness. Once they returned to the village, they accused Mrs. Girija Devi of being the woman who was responsible for zero progress in the health of the son of Mr. Deepak Das. Girija Devi was abused and beaten. After this, a meeting was held and it was decided that 10 people would go to another Ojha. Once, they went to meet another Ojha , they were told that Girija Devi was innocent.

**Case Number-55 :**

**Badki, Village Kandbekha, Block-Gomia, District -Giridih.**

Badki has been thrown out of her home with the accusation of being a 'Dayan'/witch. Ignorance and lack of perfect medical knowledge on disease has been a reason for false attribution and suffering for men, women and children in among SC and ST. Badki Mo ,belonging to Santhal tribe is 65 year old believing in Sarna religion. She was thrown out of her village with the accusation of being a Dayan and as a result, she is living with her brother in village Purandih where she is living now with intent for never going back. She has been beaten several times whenever someone fell ill, someone passed away. When her younger son speaks for his mother, he has been also beaten. There have been panchayats in the village where people accepted their fault but again she was beaten and harassed. This happened even after relative of Badki Mo and SHG leaders went to Kandvekha to meet the village head and asked them not to harass her and beat her. Even then, she was beaten and accused of being a dayan/witch. Badki Mo is now living with her brother without having her name on BPL and neither having widow pension. There is a need to quickly work for such women who have been victims of violence with due protection guaranteed. This case along with all other cases strengthens the argument for mass education, awareness programme in a mission mode in order to eradicate the suffering of women who are being made victims for various reasons.

**Case 56 :**

**Name - Rupumuni W/O Late Suhrai, Village -Phiribanda, Giridih.**

65 years old Rupumuni has maternal place in village-chaunara, tola-parbaad. She is living with her daughter in Purnadih, the place where she is married. After her marriage of her daughter, husband passed away leaving wife and one and half year old daughter. Rupumuni was brought to her maternal village saying her husband passed away due to her in laws killing his husband. They told her that she might be killed through black magic along with her daughter. Rukumani came her maternal place and from there she married off her daughter. She called her in laws but they did not turn up. She is not going to her in laws but reaches Chanaro sometime. This case presents a case where usurpation of the property appears to be the intent. She was terrorised with the consequence of death for her and her daughter since according to her in laws, her husband was killed by the 'bhoot' from her maternal place.

**Case 57 :**

**In INT 1 : Name - Dr. R.P. Das, Sadar Prakhand Pravari, Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

The study conducted indepth interview of a doctor, Dr. R.P. Das, who have been working in the area for the last 30 years. He asserted that today, majority of the villagers are uneducated and superstitious. Hence, they have a firm belief on the witch doctor (*ojha*) rather than the medical doctor. The villagers believe that without the prayers and offerings of the *ojha*, the patient would not survive. It is only after this that the option of medical treatment is explored. It is also believed that there are some diseases which cannot be treated by the medical doctor and needs to be addressed specifically by an *ojha*. He added, sometimes patients die due to delay in appropriate treatment. If the patient dies, the belief of existence of a witch gets further vindicated and the 'identification' of the witch starts. He has encountered many such cases where initially the patient is taken to the *ojha* and on failure, he/she is bought for medical treatment. The *Ojhas* also take advantage of the situation and influence the villagers. It is only when the people are aware of the malicious intentions of the *Ojhas* and importance of medical treatment, the practice would culminate.

Furthermore, he is of the opinion that the practice of witch hunting is prominent among the marginalised scheduled caste communities including Muslims and OBCs and particularly, among women, both widow and married. Their strong belief in witch and witch practices do not allow them to oppose such a superstitious practice. They give importance to the *Ojhas* rather than the doctor. However, when the situation is beyond their control, they consult the doctor, which results in the death of a patient. Then, they blame or accuse doctor, witch, black magic, sorcery, etc for the death and motivate the rest of the villagers against them. Thus, there is a need to protest and aware people against it.

Lack of education is a driving force behind the belief and existence of witchcraft among communities. They also lack knowledge of laws and regulations pertaining to witch hunting due to which they suffer terribly. Dr. R.P. Das attempts to convince the villagers and pull them out from the well of superstitions. He also provides free of cost treatment and medicines to the poor villagers. According to him, there is need to change the mindset of the people. Since, there are poor medical facilities in the village, people depend on the *Ojhas* for treatment which increases their belief in them and the superstition of witchcraft. Although, the practice is still prevalent in many parts of the country, but, a significant change has been witnessed. Due to various awareness programmes, the

incidents are being publicized and the alleged person fights for justice, instead of covertly concealing the incident.

**Case 58 :**

**In INT 2 : Name - Mr. Sushil kumar, Lawyer, Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

Mr. Sushil kumar, a lawyer, has been in the profession for last 10 years. He said that although there has been progress in the country, but the people are still uneducated and superstitious. As regards to witch hunting, he said that he trailed a case but due to lack of witness and evidence, the culprit could not be punished and the alleged victim could not get justice. It is a general practice that the culprit is set free due to lack of evidence against him/her. Moreover, even if punished, he/she is imprisoned only for 6 months or levied minimal fine. However, he suggested extending the imprisonment to 10 years. Moreover, it becomes very difficult for the victim to register a case in the police station. And, if registered, amid all difficulties, the case is taken to the court and both the parties had to attend the trial for nearly six months. In order to maintain peace and tranquillity in the village the Code of 107 is usually administered.

The accusation of witch practice is a superstition. It is a general belief that if a woman is more inclined towards pujas and prayers, then she is accused a witch. Moreover, if a single woman or widow has a possession of land or property, she is immediately alleged a witch by her relatives with an intention to control her property. All the villagers support the perpetrators and the victim is left alone and deprived. The *Ojhas* also mislead the villagers by identifying mostly poor and helpless widows. Alongwith creating disputes and differences between villagers, family and individuals, the *Ojhas* simultaneously demand a handsome amount for the treatment. But, if somebody in the *Ojhas'* family falls ill, then he takes the patient to the hospital instead of treating himself. The efforts of Sushil kumar in protesting against the *Ojhas* and convincing the villagers went in vain. Whenever, such case arises, he tries to convince them and resolve the matter. He opined that the practice of witch hunting is prominent among the scheduled tribes and scheduled caste communities such as chamar, turi, dome, hadi, etc. Although, the practice is still prevalent, the situation has improved to some extent.

**Case 59 :**

**In INT 3 : Name - Ms. Sanju Devi, B.J.P. Mahila Morcha, Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

Ms. Sanju Devi, a politician, has experience of 7 years in the field of politics. She stated that in a society women suffers from and are exploited in various ways such as domestic violence, battering, rape, dowry-related violence, drugs-related violence, female infanticide, superstitions and, last but not the least, witch-hunting. These are all serious concerns and needs to be addressed. And, it is prominent among the poor, backward and marginalized communities of the society.

She narrated, once, in a nearby village, a woman died due to jaundice. Her husband had shifted to Surat for job opportunities. Due to delay on his arrival, the dead body was kept in the village for three days. This spread the rumour that the deceased woman was possessed by evil spirit and was a witch (*chudail*). Meanwhile, another woman in the village was suffering from jaundice and some were suffering from ill-health. The villagers called the *ojha* to treat them. But, then, Sanju Devi and some of her associates reached the place, protested against the *ojha* and arranged for treatment of the women. Within no time, the women recovered from illness. She informed that the villagers have a firm belief on the *ojha* and he controls the mind and behaviour of the villagers. He creates differences between them. 75 percent rural people are still surrounded by superstitious

beliefs and rituals of witchcraft. With the help of the party, Sanju Devi organised programmes in various districts and villages and tried to convince and aware people about the baseless belief and the consequences of such belief. Thus, she stated that it is due to people's consciousness & awareness that, now-a-days, such incidents are being revealed and efforts is being made to end it.

#### **Case 60 :**

##### **In INT 4 : Incharge of police station, Giridiha, Jharkhand.**

The incharge of the police station revealed that he has been working in the post for last two years. He said that there is prevalence of witch, witch practices, *dian*, etc. in the society due to lack of education. The other factors responsible for witchcraft are lack of social bonding between villagers, lack of knowledge about the laws and regulations and superstition. He added that such instances are prominent among the poor and scheduled caste community rather than higher community. On enquiring about experiencing any such case, he reported that till now there has not been complaint of any serious case of witch hunting in their police station. The cases are usually resolved at the panchayat level. Earlier, the phenomenon of witchcraft was not revealed, but, now, within no time, the incidence is exposed by the media. Hence, the cases are registered in the police station and then taken to the court for trial. However, due to lack of evidence and witness, the perpetrators are not punished. Rightly, the menace of media is playing an active role in decreasing the incidences but in order to eliminate the instances of violence on Dalit ,Adivasi women , awareness programmes need to be organised consistently engaging women, explaining the diseases and how these are attributed witches wrongly by Ojhas who do not have comprehensive knowledge on diseases and reasons of death.

#### **Case 61 :**

##### **In INT 5 : Name - Mr. Arvind kumar, Newspaper Journalist, Giridih, Jharkhand.**

The study also conducted in-depth interview of the journalist, Mr. Arvind kumar who has an experience of 22 years in the field of journalism. He is of the opinion that today, majority of rural women face the discrimination, exploitation and violence due to dowry-related practice. Although, education played a vital role in the development of urban areas, but, it could not impact the backward areas. Now also, in some backward areas, there is prevalence of child marriage. As regards to witch hunting, he stated that once he had also protested against the persecution of witch practice and the practice of *Ojhas*. He tried to convince the villagers but in vain. He tried to threaten the *ojha* on the dire consequences of misleading the common villagers but the *ojha* retaliated and said that if the villagers belief him and eagerly seek his advice then how can it be stopped. It is due to lack of education and people's traditional mindset, which nurtures such superstitions in the society. The *Ojhas* take advantage of the situation and create differences between villagers to fulfil their materialistic requirements. Although, there has been development in health care facilities in the villages, still people are influenced by the fraud *Ojhas*. As a result, the alleged woman is boycott from the society.

While narrating an incident of witch accusation and persecution, Arvind kumar said that once in Boingabad block, **a son accused her own mother for being a witch and lynched her**. As regards to the laws and regulations of witch hunting, it is usually seen that the case is not registered in the police station and the villagers try to resolve it at the panchayat level. Moreover, at the panchayat level, no substantial action is taken against the culprit, instead the alleged victim is either banished from the community or levied a hefty fine. Hence, the villagers are tried to persuade through the medium of media. He added, although there are introduction of various Laws and Acts regarding witch hunting, but, the common villagers are either not aware about it or fear it. He suggested

encouraging social behavioural-change intervention rather than awareness programmes to end such practice.

#### **Case 62:**

##### **In INT 6: Interview with Ramdev Vishwabandhu, Giridih, A Social Activist.**

Mr. Ramdev Vishwabandhu has been working against social evils like the attribution of Dayan, caste discrimination, poverty, dowry, drinking intoxicating drinks, usury. He informed about the panchayat meetings in which he has been involved in villages like Bijla Bathan, Mohanpur, Sihodih in which women belonging to Koiri, Chamar caste were involved as victim of being accused as a dayan. He said that women who had been accused were in the range of 28-50 years. He believe that existence of Ojha is a burden 'Ojha is Bojha' for society .There is a need to educate the Ojha, find him alternative livelihood rather than being an agent of victimising women through making her the source of disease and death without understanding the reason of death. He said caste system is another false idea that is imposed and then we have this false ideas like bhoot ,pishach that is made part of the live of lower castes in order to keep these castes remain in ignorance. He informed that there are at times, when there are properties involved and some wanting to usurp the rights of relatives or the accused come up with accusations for harassing her and making her mentally dysfunctional, psychologically traumatised. Ignorance generate suffering can be eliminated with knowledge. He informed about his work on forest rights, capacity building of the panchayat members and training of member of the Joint Forest Management. He said he would be including education on eliminating superstitions in order to have cleared hundred percent accesses to health care for people so that people have a clear understanding on disease. Mental Health awareness programme needs to be conducted in order to ensure that Dalits and Adivasis in the remote villages are aware of reasons for illnesses caused by nutrition deficiencies and lack of psychosocial support.

#### **Bihar**

Women in rural India suffer from and are exploited in various ways such as domestic violence, battering, rape, marital rape, incest, dowry-related violence, female infanticide, sexual harassment, human trafficking for prostitution and, last but not the least, witch-hunting. The practice of witch and 'witch-hunting' in parts of India appears to be prevalent among certain castes and tribes. However, in recent years, in Bihar, many incidents have been reported regarding the violence meted out to SC/ST women due to allegations of witchcraft. Thus, the existence and extent of witch practices and witch hunting in Govindpur village, Hilsa block of Nalanda district, Bihar is illustrated in detail in the following lines. Govindpur village is nearly 2 kms from Hilsa block. On the way to Maika tola of the village, at a distance of 20 meters, on both sides of the road, there are two storey houses of Thakurs and Redas. The Dalit basti, located at a distance of few meters has 22 kutcha houses of Redas and Paswan. Apart from them, the basti is also inhabited by Beldar, Kurmi, Yadav and Srivastava castes people. On conversing with some of the women from the village, it was observed that they firmly believe in the presence of witches and the practice of witch craft. It was reported that many women in the village are "witches" and practice witchcraft, due to which some innocent people have suffered a lot, even died.

**Case 63 :**

**Name - Sharmila Devi, W/O Binad Ravidas, Village - Govindpur, Tola - Maika, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

Sharmila Devi, aged 40 years, resides in Dalit basti of Maika tola of Govindpur village with her husband, Binad Ravidas and four daughters and two sons. Her husband works as a Government Driver. Since her marriage, she is constantly been suffering from ill health, weakness, unconsciousness and fatigue. The treatment of doctor also couldn't recover her. Finally, she was taken to the local *Ojha* for treatment. The *ojha's* treatment i.e. puja, offerings, chanting mantras, etc. went for almost 2 years, but did not give desired results. Now also, she is suffering from the same problem. Her brother-in law and sister-in law, who reside in the neighbourhood, allege her as a "witch" and assault her physically and mentally. Even the villagers, now-a-days, have also started accusing her as a "witch" and responsible for anybody's death. Likewise, many SC/ST women in the village are living a life of fear and anguish.

**Case 64:**

**Name - Manju Devi, W/O Vijay Ravidas, Village - Govindpur, Tola - Maika, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

Manju Devi, aged 45 years, though a very extrovert person believes in the superstition of witches and witch practices. She resides with her husband, Vijay Ravidas and four daughters and two sons in Dalit basti. Ravidas's first wife also resides in the same basti with her 24 year old son. She usually comes to meet Ravidas, which creates distress in Manju's family. However, Manju alleged her sister-in law to be a "witch" and practiced witchcraft on her newly born grand-daughter. As a result, her grand-daughter died on the second day of her birth. Finally, the *ohja* of the village confirmed that the child died due to evil spells and deeds by her sister-in law. Since then, all the villagers also regard her as a "witch" and discriminate and exploit her. This shows the extent of belief in the minds of rural people regarding the superstition of "witches and "witch-hunting".

**Case 65 :**

**Name - Sundari (widow), Village - Mathadiha, Tola - Harijan, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

There are various instances of witch accusation and persecution in India because of property disputes and personal vendetta. And, these are mainly inflicted upon the socially excluded castes and tribes women especially widow, divorced or separated. Thus, the present case is of Sundari, a widow of harijan tola of mathadiha village. 10 years ago, Prabhudas, a relative of Sundari suddenly died. He was a young boy. The parents and other relatives of the boy started blaming Sundari for his death. They accused her as a witch and tortured & abused her terribly. She was forced to drink urine and other wastes. She was even dragged and tried to set on fire. But, the villagers came to her rescue and took the matter to the panchayat. The panchayat decided to seek advice from the local *Ojha* before taking the decision of punishing the culprit. The family members of the boy and some of the panchayat members consulted the *Ojha* for nearly 2 hours, but in vain. Thus, finally, the case was settled then and there and no one was punished.

**Case 66 :**

**Name - Girja Devi, Village - Bakshidiha, Tola - Harijan, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

In harijan tola of bakshidiha village, Deepak Das's son, aged 5 years was ill due to some disease. He was not recovering by doctor's treatment and medicine also. Finally, deepak alongwith some villagers went to the *Ojha* for his recovery. The *Ojha* told him that the reason of the boy's illness is his neighbour girja Devi. She is a "witch" and practicing witch craft on him. He advised him to perform some pujas and offerings to cure his son. On hearing this, deepak went to girja's house and started scolding, abusing and beating her. Meanwhile, girja's husband came to her rescue and was also beaten badly. When the case was taken to the panchayat, the members decided that 10 people from the village will go and consult the *Ojha* and then punish the culprit. The villagers went to another *Ojha* in the village who confirmed that girja Devi was not a "witch" and should not be punished.

**Case 67 :**

**Name - Sia Saran Paswan, Village - Gajendra Vigaha, Block - Hilsa, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

Sia Saran Paswan is a resident of Gajendra Vigaha village of Hilsa block. He had two daughters. Unfortunately, his elder daughter passed away four years back due to some ailment. However, they had a belief that she was possessed by some evil spirit or witch. Sia Saran stated that, his younger daughter is also suffering from ill health due to the same evil spirit or witch. On seeking advice, the *ojha* informed that the reason of his daughters' illness is because of a witch who demands offering worship to her. But, Sia denied worshipping her, since they belief that unmarried girls become impure on being worshipped. Thus, this mounts their agony, suffering & humiliation.

**Case 68 :**

**Name - Rambalak Ravidas , Village - Chamar Vigaha, Block - Hilsa, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

Rambalak Ravidas is a resident of chamar vigaha village of Nalanda district. He was working in the police department and retired in 2004. He has an only daughter who is married. After retirement, he returned to his village with his wife. On reaching, he was shocked to see that the door of his house was locked and a wall was constructed in front of the door. This infuriated him and he had a confrontation with the neighbours and the villagers who disrespect and humiliate the couple for not having a male child. The villagers even accuse his wife as a witch and discriminate and humiliate her. Since, Rambalak is without a male heir, some of the villagers and relatives make efforts to grab their property. Thus, it is a general practice that any family that accumulated land or property was subjected to envy and those people with a claim over the land or property are often the ones who initiate witch accusations in order to immediately takeover the property.

**Case 69 :**

**Name - Rita Devi W/O Late Dhiraj Verma, Village - Durga, Block - Hilsa, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

Rita Devi, aged 26 years is a widow. She was married to Dhiraj Verma in 2001. She has two sons, one aged 4 years and the other 9 years. In 2007, her parents-in-laws passed away due to some disease which could not be cured. Unfortunately, in 2010, her husband also died due to some severe ailment. This incidence shattered her life. The villagers gradually blamed her of in-laws and husband's death by practicing black magic and branded her a

witch. She suffered discrimination and humiliation from the villagers. However, she is an epitome of strong will and mindset and example for all those women who suffer the accusation of witch in their life. Alongwith, upbringing and educating her sons by engaging herself in daily wage labourer works, she completed her matriculation study. Today, she is working as pulse polio coordinator and selling garlands of flowers. She also engages herself with many social activities. But, today also, the villagers regard her as a witch and blame her for the death of her husband and in-laws. Rita Devi's account is a clear case of community sponsored violence against a weak and helpless woman to grab her belongings after her husband's death. When some villagers realized that a widow with two children would have no one to turn for support, they conspired to take hold of her belongings and accuse her a witch.

**Case 70 :**

**Name - Rita Devi W/O Anuj Manjhi, Village - Shahapur, Block - Hilsa, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

This is an instance of a woman facing the hardships and discrimination of a witch allegation. Ms. Rita Devi, a resident of shahapur village, was married to Anuj Manjhi 20 years back. After giving birth to a daughter, she frequently suffered from ill health. They consulted the doctor also but she could not be recovered. Finally, the family members took her to the *ojha* for treatment. The *ojha* informed that Rita Devi is being possessed by a witch who is her own relative. The witch will cast evil spells, as a result of which she might also die. The *ojha* advised them to perform two religious rites to get rid of the witch. On agreeing, they gave Rs. 1500 to the *ojha* for the rites. Apart from demanding a goat, a pig, two hen and new clothes, the *ojha* demanded Rs. 30,000 for performing the rites & offerings. Unable to give him the money, they called their own caste *ojha* for performing the puja. Amid all sufferings, Rita Devi was alleged as a witch and practicing witch craft.

**Case 71 :**

**Name - Kamala Devi W/O Bhushan Paswan, Village - Indoat, Block - Hilsa, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

Kamala Devi's case gives us a clear evidence of the profound belief & faith of the rural people on the deceived *Ojhas* and *tantriks*. It also shows people's believe in the superstitious practice of witch & witchcraft. They envisage that without the prayers and offerings of the *Ojhas*, the patient (who is accused or possessed a witch) would not survive. Kamala Devi, resides in indoat village of Hilsa block with her husband, Bhushan Paswan and two children. She believed that it is due to stepping over somebody's practice of black magic & sorcery, that since then, she is suffering from ill health. Failing from the doctor's treatment, she went to the *ojha*. The *ohja* performed some rites and pujas to instigate the witch. After that, the *ojha* identified the witch, named Mia sheikh, who demanded being worshipped. They worshipped the evil spirit, but it did not affect kamala Devi's condition. Today also she is suffering from ailing health conditions. Moreover, she is branded a witch and looked upon by the villagers. They humiliate, torture and discriminate her. Even, the villagers accused Kamala Devi of inflicting diseases on children and animals of the neighbourhood using black magic. Thus, allegation of witch & witchcraft, the most effective weapon in rural India, is used to destroy a woman's life, dignity & social prestige.

**Case 72 :**

**Name - Radhiya Devi W/O Siddeshwar Manjhi, Village - Indoat, Block - Hilsa, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

Radhiya Devi, is residing in indoat village of Nalanda district with her husband. She belongs to a very lower caste. She had a daughter, named Ritu, whom, she had married off to Sukhadi Manjhi of Kharjama village. Both her daughter and son-in-law were engaged in daily wage labour works. On day, when her daughter had come to meet her in indoat, radhiya Devi's uncle-in-law, a *ojha*, commented that her daughter could never live a happy & contended life. Instead, in near future, she would suffer from ill health. After a couple of days, her daughter fell ill and was paralysed. She had to stay in indoat with her husband. After one year, she gave birth to a son and henceforth, her condition deteriorated and was totally paralysed. Radhiya Devi took her to many *Ojhas* for traditional treatment, but in vain. She could not be recovered even from modern medical treatment and eventually died. Thus, radhiya Devi accused her uncle-in-law of casting evil spells and black magic on her daughter. She said that he has some special power of influencing and changing the life of people. However, in a span of time, her uncle-in-law also died.

**Case 73 :**

**Name - Khushbu Kumari W/O Ranjit Ravidas , Village - Sakrole, Post Office- Mahanandpur, Police Station - Deepangarh, Block - Hilsa, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

This instance is a case of violence, torture, humiliation and discrimination against a lower caste woman and accusing her witch. Khushbu Devi, aged 25 years, married to Ranjit Ravidas in 2003 and resides in sakrole village. She has a 7 years old son. Her husband is engaged in daily wage work. However, in a span of time, her husband developed the bad habit of drinking alcohol, selling off things from his house and even physically torturing khushbu. Annoyed and worried of her husband's habits, she shifted to a rented house in hilsa, near her parents. She thought that a change in a place might change her husband's habits. But, this did not affect her husband. He, as usual, continued his bad habits and behaviour. However, alongwith facing all these hardships, Khushbu was also tortured by her landlord. Her landlord deprived and discriminated her from accessing the basic amenities such as water, toilet, etc. She was addressed as a "lower caste witch". The villagers believed her of learning and teaching witchcraft and practicing it on their children and animals. Thus, her life was ruined, as, on one hand her husband's deteriorating lifestyle stressed her and, on the other, landlord's & villager's allegation weakened her mentally.

**Case Number-74 :**

**Jamundri Devi W/O Anandi Manjhi , Vilage ,Idaut, Hilsa, District ,Nalanda, Bihar.**

*Ojha promotes the idea of some Dalit women being Dayan in order to halt the progress in the family*

Jamundri Devi informs that his family does not have Ojha ,but there is one of his relative who brings 'Deo' and 'Chudail' from outside. She informed that one of his grandson died through drowning in water because an Ojha had told his husband two days ago that his grandson studying in class X was very intelligent and therefore he will pass away. She further said that Ojha had also spoken before the death of her third son. She said that this Ojha is the one who is telling people about her being a Dayan. RDMA team felt here a

conspiracy for keeping the Manjhi steeped in superstition ensuring that they do not progress. The reasons for both deaths could be other than Jamundri Devi being witch. Educating Ojhas and such other people for having a scientific understanding of death and disease should be one of the important programme goals in National Rural Health Mission. If psycho-social and medical support is made available in the entire village and more being aware of the problems, then we would not have many incidence of violence.

**Case Number-75 :**

**Koshila Devi w/o Shobhi Majhi, Village -Redi, Hilsa, District, Nalanda, Bihar.**

When Koshila Devi married and started living with her husband, she started having headache sometime. When she went back her mother gave some medicine but this did not work. She was then taken to an Ojha who said that her sister in law (nanad ) was doing some magic against her. She got pain in her stomach then her in laws consulted again then Chudail said that she would not be able to give birth .All this story appears to be result of problems in sexuality or some problems in menstrual cycle that were attributed to Chudail. Some started calling her home to have Bhoot and Chudail though this is clear medical case that could have been dealt with by gynaecologist.

**Case 76 :**

**Name - Kanti Devi (widow), Age 50 years, District - Nalanda, Bihar.**

This is the case of Kanti Devi, aged 50 years, a Dalit widow woman of Koairi caste. She resides with her widow mother-in-law and two sons, of which one is married. She has a brother-in-law who migrated to adjoining state for work, but, takes care of the financial requirement of his mother. Kanti Devi engages in the work of caring the livestock. Six years back, after the death of her husband, she was blamed and branded as a witch in the village. She is discriminated and harassed. Her mother-in-law was also alleged as a witch and practicing black magic & sorcery after the death of her mentally retarded husband. She stated that if anybody in the village accuses any woman as a witch, then she is branded and addressed a witch. Therefore, it is necessary to aware and sensitize people about the laws of witch hunting. Thus, the curse of being a witch on kanti Devi and her mother-in-law has left them in deep resentment, fear and agony.

Cases MMA

**Case Number 77 :**

**The Story of Sharmila Devi accused of killing brother in law and his son in Maika Tola of Govindpur village ,Hilsa Block , District Nalanda, Bihar.**

***Just a victim of false attribution of death of husband and son***

40 year old Sharmila Devi is wife of Vinod Ravidas who is a driver. She said that for two years she was not well after marriage. When her mother in law approached Ojha and gave a goat, chunri and other items then she became well. She is now mother of four girls and two boys. She said that when she was living together in the family, all was well. Once,

they became separate , there were fights between the two brothers and the wife of the younger brother. She said that her brother in law passed away and her son also passed away. One day, her sister in law /wife of her brother in law (dewar) pulled her through catching her hair and said told everyone that she is a witch. She found this to be irrational. Also, she shared that she is not always feeling well. Only when, she goes to Ojha she gets well. If there had been mental health counselling , she would not have been required to go to Ojha for feeling well. This is another case where false attribution for disease was made naming a lady rather understanding the reason for death.

**Case Number 78 :**

**In INT 1 : With Dalit Women in Maiké Tola of Govindpur village ,Hilsa Block , District Nalanda, Bihar**

**Rumours must be countered for women who are accused to be a witch. Illiteracy and ignorance on disease and reasons of death breeds faith in witchcraft promoted by Ojhas**

Discussion with women in the village showed that there exists belief in the existence of witches. As the women were sharing the stories with the team, one of the Dalit women point out to one lady who according to them was a witch and she was accused of killing the brother of his husband and his son. She was reported to have fights of with the brother of her husband. After some time, when the accused woman was seen returning Dalit women being interviewed prevented to RDMA team from looking at her and speaking to her. They said with much of hatred that the woman was a witch.

Maika Tola has a Dalit habitation with 22 Ravidas household living in kutcha houses and 2 paswan houses .Other castes living in the village are Kurmi, Beldar, Yadav, Shrivastav. The RDMA late met Ms. Sharmila Devi whose information was found in the discussions with the Dalit women.

Years after introduction of special laws to combat the crime, witch hunts continue unabated. The practice of branding Dalit women as witches and torturing them, often to death continues unabated in remote rural areas of Bihar. Sources reveal that between the years 2010-12, Bihar witnessed 26 incidents of witch hunting. Witch-hunts aren't just about traditional superstitious belief. It is inextricably tied to conspiracies and village politics. Many of these cases are rooted in property disputes, personal vendetta, caste & gender based discrimination, etc. Thus, with this backdrop, the present study explores the phenomenon of witch hunting through various case studies as discussed below.

**Case 79 :**

**Name - Savitri Devi (widow), Age 38 years, Village - Darnai, Post - Verka, Gram Panchayat - Prakhand Makdumpur, District - Jehanabad, Bihar.**

The tradition of witch hunting is prevalent in different parts of the country in various degrees and mostly single women and widows become targets of this least talked about violence on women. They become 'easy scapegoats' and are branded as witches to deprive them of their land and property, or punished for transgressing social norms or refusing sexual advances. This is a case of Savitri Devi, aged 38 years, a widow of darnai village, Jehanabad, Bihar. She is blamed for the death of her husband and branded as a witch by

her relatives and villagers. She is even blamed for any mishappening in the village. While narrating an incidence of the death of her neighbour, Bina Devi's grandchild, savitri Devi stated that she was held responsible for the death of the child as she is regarded as a witch and practiced black magic or cast evil spells on the child. Bina Devi and all the villagers lost no time in initiation a vicious attack on her. She was even threatened to leave the village. Thus, with a fear of being harassed again, savitri Devi approached the sarpanch of the village for help, who talked to both the parties and resolved the case with mutual consent. However, this did not calm them and bina Devi's husband alongwith the villagers gathered outside her house at night and tried to hassle and bother her. On seeing this, savitri Devi locked the door and remained inside her house with her daughter. But, at night, even after denial, her daughter went to the fields for defecation. Suddenly, she was grabbed by the furious villagers who started hitting and beating her with sticks and iron rods. On seeing this, savitri Devi came to her daughter's rescue, but was too fallen prey to violent behaviour. They physically assaulted her and her daughter, injured their body, hands and head and left to lie unconscious and bleeding profoundly. No one even bothered to take them to hospital or police station. However, within hours, her son came and took them to hospital for treatment. After that, they went to the police station and lodged compliant against the culprits. But, it was found that, till now, no action has been taken against them. Her misery and suffering did not end here. Her daughter was also accused a witch by her in-laws, who had a belief that the occurrence of witch and witch practices is hereditary. She was severely tortured and physically assaulted. However, one day, she went to the police station and lodged complaint against her in-laws' accusation of a witch. On being threatened by the police, her in-laws got infuriated. Her brother-in-law, Deepak grabbed and dragged her by her hair, beaten her badly and finally lynched to death. Savitri Devi was in severe distress on the death of her daughter. However, she is trying to overcome the melancholy by taking care of her daughter's only child.

**Case 80 :**

**Name - Somwati (widow), Age 36 years, Caste - Yadav (lower catse), District - Jehanabad, Bihar.**

Another instance of a lower caste widow being charged as a witch is of Somwati, aged 36 years. Somwati was married at the age of 12 years. Unfortunately, her husband died due to some ailments after 5 years of marriage. However, despite societal restrictions and norms against widow marriage, her parents tied her knot with Ramprabes. She had two daughters from her second husband. One day, while returning from the *mundan* (hair cutting ceremony) of their daughters, her husband slipped off the bus while getting down and died. Without wasting any time, the villagers started blaming her for the death of both her husbands. They cursed and addressed her witch. On fear of being tortured and harassed, she alongwith her daughters shifted to her parents house, but in vain. There also she was abused, humiliated and alleged a witch. Despite all amids, she is trying to struggle against survival by working as agricultural labour and taking care of her daughters. Thus, she stated that a lower caste widow, having no male heir, helpless and powerless easily fall prey to the people's accusation of witch. They search opportunity to grab and take control of her land and property. Thus, a woman, once accused a witch, suffers the accusation for her lifetime.

**Case 81 :**

**Name - Rita Devi (widow), Age 37 years, Caste - Majhi (Dalit), District - Jehanabad, Bihar.**

Rita Devi, aged 37 years, a majhi widow woman of jehanabad district, is facing the discrimination and humiliation of practicing black magic and sorcery. She has six children.

Her misery started when she was accused a witch and blamed for her husband's death who actually died due to dog bite. He could not be cured either by the doctor or the *Ojhas*. The villagers also blame her for anybody's illness or death in the village. She is deprived to rejoice in any occasion or festivals in the village. They abuse, torture and assault her both mentally and physically. Thus, her torment intensifies when her children are also discriminated and deprived of the basic facilities and designated as "children of a witch".

**Case 82 :**

**Name - Hira Devi (widow), Age 40 years, Husband's name - Late Mahendra, Caste - Kahar (SC/Dalit), District - Jehanabad, Bihar.**

This is the case of Hira Devi, aged 40 years. She is a Dalit woman and belongs to kahar caste. She engages in the work of daily wage labourer. She has four daughters and a son. Some years back, her husband died due to jaundice. He was taken to the *ojha* for treatment but in vain. However, after his death, her relatives, friends and villagers consider her a witch and the cause of his death. She was even blamed for the death of her late husband's uncle in her neighbourhood. Her late husband's aunty and her children also held her responsible for his death. They abused, had confrontation with her and hit her badly. To this, hira Devi strongly resisted and asked them to prove her a witch. She argued that if no one can prove her a witch, then, she will lodge complaint against them. On hearing this, they got scared and apologized. Now, although, she is not addressed as a witch, but the villagers still belief her witch and discriminate covertly.

**Case 83 and 84 :**

**Name - Savitri Devi (widow), Age 55 years, Caste - Nai (lower caste), Village - Darnai, Gram Panchayat - Prakhand Makdumpur, District - Jehanabad, Bihar and her elder daughter.**

Another instance of witch accusation of a widow is the case of Savitri Devi of Darnai village. The first look at Savitri Devi, apprehended us while interacting with her. A woman of 55 years looked 20 years elder than her age. She looked very old, tired and frightened. Savitri Devi's misery started when her husband passed away 14 years back. She was left alone with her four sons and three daughters. However, she engaged herself in daily wage labour works and struggled a lot for the upbringing of children. Now, her three sons and two daughters are married. The sons are residing alongwith their family in different houses. And, she is staying with one of her son who is studying and a mentally weak daughter. Her life is filled with gloom, grief and struggle. However, her miseries double when her relatives and villagers accuse her witch and held her responsible for the death of her husband. She is often abused and beaten badly by her relatives. And, the villagers humiliate, discriminate and deprive her of basic facilities. Moreover, her elder daughter who was married in Ranigunj of gaya district also faced similar persecution and humiliation. Her in-laws also accused her witch. They abused, tortured and physically assaulted her to death on complaining to the police. However, now her in-laws are in prison. Savitri Devi is taking care of her two grand-daughters. With a grief stricken tone, Savitri Devi stated that till the time her husband was alive, no one was addressing her witch. The moment he died, her life changed; even her sons are not supporting her.

**Case 85 :**

**Name - Amrit Majhi (a man), Age - 40 years, Wife's name - Phulkumari, Caste - Majhi (lower caste), District - Jehanabad, Bihar.**

In witch hunting, women are generally accused and persecuted a witch. But, in the present case, a lower caste man was blamed of practicing magic charms, sorcery and chanting mantras on villagers and designated an *ojha*. Amrit majhi, aged 40 years is the husband of phulkumari. Amrit majhi's father, Rohit majhi who died at the age of 60 years, was having knowledge and performing pujas, chanting mantras, practising magic charms, etc. After his death, the work could not be continued since no one in his family knew about it. However, one fine day, amrit's neighbour vinay majhi's wife passed away due to some ailments. Then, he and the villagers blamed and accused amrit of practicing witchcraft with the help of a witch on his wife which caused her death. Amrit tried his level best to convince the villagers that he is not aware of any pujas & mantras, but in vain. The villagers abused, tortured and hit him severely with rods.

**Case 86 :**

**Name - Mahendra majhi, Age - 60 years, Caste - Majhi (lower caste), District - Jehanabad, Bihar.**

This is also an instance of a lower caste man being alleged as *ojha* and doing harm to the villagers. Mahendra majhi, aged 60 years, is a resident of jehanabad district, Bihar. He belongs to a lower caste, majhi. He stated that his grandmother and father were devotee of goddess Durga. The villagers' belief that his grandmother was also often possessed with the goddess. They used to seek advice and treatment for themselves and their family's illhealth. After her death, mahendra's father continued the profession of *ojha* and people believed him. However, after his death, the work discontinued since no one in the family had knowledge about it. Mahendra engaged himself in daliy wage labour works. He had the burden of nurturing his two daughters after the sudden death of his wife. Since, his grandmother and father were *Ojhas*, so he was also forcibly alleged an *ojha*. But, the villagers blame him for any mishappening in the village. They think that he is practicing witchcraft on the victims and brutally assault him. He even did not get any help from the panchayat or sarpanch. His age and health condition also does not permit him to work. So, he is dependent on both his married daughters for financial support. Thus, extreme steps should be taken to end such a superstitious practice which ruins peoples' life.

In Jharkhand, the accusation and subsequent violence against socially excluded SC/ST women as witches and witch practices has been increasing. The women are accused of witches and persecuted in various severe forms. This has raised many questions such as, who are these women? What is their socio-economic background? What factors are responsible for their accusing as witches? etc. Thus, in order to get the answers to these questions, the present study explored the existence and extent of witch hunting in Hazaribagh district, Jharkhand through various case studies which are illustrated below.

**Case Number 87 :**

**The Case of Kunti Devi who passed away due to neglect in the village of Chapna, Ghosi Prakhand, District, Jehanabad, Bihar.**

Ranjit Kumar loses his sister Kunti Devi . She was 27 year only .She was not happy in marriage and not getting all that he needed. According to Pinki Devi, sister in law of Kunti Devi , the later committed suicide because she wanted to marry elsewhere but this was not possible. According to the assessment of assessment of RDMA, it is case of domestic violence. Counselling on both sides would have addressed the issues better. It is so unfortunate that deaths are happening due to lack of proper counselling in the villages where there is a need to for same in order to ensure happy family life.

## Case 88 :

### IN FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 1 : Police Station - Makdampur, District - Jehanabad, State - Bihar .

Allegations against Dalit and Adivasi women for practicing witchcraft and witch-hunting cases are occurring with alarming frequency in Bihar but it is difficult to make accurate estimates since cases of witch hunting and killing are not registered under a separate category. The law enforcing authorities such as village sarpanch, police, court, etc. have a discriminatory attitude towards these alleged women. They operate along male centred norms whereas principles and values are insensitive to women's realities. Thus, in order to know the ground reality of the situation in Jehanabad district, some of our coordinators attempted to have a discussion with the sarpanch of different villages. The sarpanch of different villages had gathered at Makdampur police station to meet the police authority to discuss about the safety and security of the villagers on the occasion of Holi. On enquiring about the situation of witch practices in the district, almost all the sarpanch denied the prevalence of any such cases in their villages. However, one of the coordinator, named Chunni Devi, residing in the same village stated that she knows a case of a widow in the village who was blamed as a "witch" and tortured, abused and beaten badly. When the case could not be registered in the present police station, she took her to Jehanabad A.C.P where the case was registered. Except one sarpanch, rest of them denied of occurrence of such a case in the village. The sarpanch said that although the case was registered but decision was not taken since the authorities are also biased. To this, another sarpanch added that although there is prevalence and practice of witch-hunting in the villages, it is usually resolved at the panchayat level, by giving compensation to the naive. However, if the parties do not agree to resolve, then the case is taken to the court. But, then, such a practice does not aware people about the discriminatory treatment against rural women on such superstitions.

The perpetrators are not punished. So, there is need for awareness campaign and programmes related to witch hunting. They were of the view that the cases of witches and witch practices are usually prevalent among two groups of the same caste community especially lower caste or weaker section. Such types of cases are not prevalent among the higher caste community. However, on probing about the cases of witch hunting, the police officer stated that he has never in his service period come across any such cases. Instead, he has come across the cases of *Ojhas*. He stated that *Ojhas* are found in all communities and now also villagers seek advice from the *Ojhas* regarding their social, familial, individual as well as health problems. In Gaya, a spirit (*bhoot*) mela is organised, where people visit to get rid of the spirits. He added that the *Ojhas* exploit the villagers socially, economically and physically to fulfil their egotistic and selfish desires. Thus, in order to address the superstitious issues of *Ojhas*, witches, witch practices, etc. the laws and regulations should be severe and effectively implemented. Policy should be developed to prevent SC/ST women from being accused as witches and other kinds of violence against them by making strong laws.

Laws that prevent discrimination against SC/ST women should be enforced. There should be introduction of affirmative action programmes in education, health and employment to them. Strategies should be formulated to address the root causes of witch-hunting, which would help other non-political organizations working in this sector. The judicial system should be sensitive to the plight of SC/ST women. There should be strengthening of public-private partnership. Lastly, more and more people should be aware through people-centric awareness programmes and campaigns to alter the deep-rooted defective value system from society.

## Case 89 :

In FGD-2 : Focus Group Discussion with the Sarpanches in the Police Station of Makhdoompur, District Jehanabad, Bihar

**Sorting out the cases by Panchayats does not generate awareness on the punishment for Dalit women exploitation**

Despite presence of women who suffer the accusation of being a 'Dayan' /witch , there is a tendency to deny its existence since the number of the incidence is not very significant. This became evident when Ms. Chunni Kumari, an activist of Rashtriya Dalit Mahila Andolan , associated with National Confederation of Dalit Organisation visited police station of Makhdoompur in district of Jehanabad in the state of Bihar, India. The visit was made on the occasion of the meeting with the Sarpanches in the area on the occasion of Holi . Chunni Kumari introduced the purpose of visiting the police station in order to learn on the reports that may have reached the police. First of all Sarpanches said that they did not know about such instance. However ,when Ms. Chunni Kumari insisted on the story of a widows like Sarita Devi in the villages within Makhdoompur police region. Initially, Sarpanches did not accept that there is any instance of witch hunting .The Assistant Sub Inspector said that he did not know of any report. While the discussion was going on with the detailed sharing by Ms.Chunni Kumari, one of the sarpanch came who said he knew on the instance of women suffering from the accusations of being a witch. He informed that there are cases of women accused of being a witch. He informed that a case has come to him but the same was sorted out at village panchayat level. The case involved the same caste. He further informed that the cases are generally reported from the so called low castes. According to him, the cases sorted out at panchayat level is better rather than getting the issues in the hand of police since people on both sides get harassed if a case is filed and that case goes on and one without speedy delivery of justice. The person who had persecuted the woman calling her witch *dayan* was socially punished and the accused women was compensated for the economic losses that were incurred . He said if the oppressor party would not have accepted than the matter would have been taken to police. Reflecting on the social and economic profile of women , Sarpanch said it is generally low wealth group women who are accused of being a Dayan and then generally accusations came from the same caste groups and not from others. He said, in his lifetime, he has not heard about the incidence of this happening in the higher caste women.

Ms.Chunni Kumari, RDMA activist said that with the local sorting out of the issues, there is a negative outcome that is possible. People are not made aware that accusations being a witch are a crime and there are punishments for the same. Also, she highlighted the need for making awareness on the legal provisions which Sarpanches accepted. They all accepted that awareness meetings need to be organised in order to ensure that women are not persecuted through levelling the accusation of being a witch/Dayan. She highlighted that through these accusations, women are exploited. In the discussion with the police inspector, he shared that case of women being persecuted through the accusation of being a witch has not reached him but he is aware of the presence of Ojhas who are reached by people for sorting out health related and other problems in anticipation of change in the situation that is found troubling. He informed that in Gaya

district, there is a place where a fair of ghost is being organised where people go to meet Ojhas for sorting out problems. On the understanding of the reasons for the existence of Ojhas, the Police Inspector was aware that Ojhas are found across the castes and they are using the existence of the problems for ensuring their psychological influence. In the process of delivering their remedies, there are Ojhas who are seeking money along with the meat, intoxicating drinks and several other items that they call for performing incantations that are part of their remedies. Considering the mental health perspective, it is clear that psychological problems and problems of relationships and other injustices that are part of the social existence are being sought to be remedied with the help of Ojhas. He informed that whenever there is an instance of exploitation, he is visiting the places. On discussion the legal provision, it became clear that punishment is not severe for the oppressors. On the query for the possession of the act, deputy station officer informed that he did not have a copy of the Act. On the discussion on awareness programme, he agreed that joint work is needed in order to ensure minimisation of violence against Dalit women through the accusation of being a Dayan. Sarpanches and deputy station in charge expressed their full support if RDMA and CADAM were to organise awareness programme for ensuring elimination of oppression of Dalit women through accusation of being a witch.

**Case 90 :**

**Name - Meena Devi, Age - 55 years W/O Bishun Majhi, Village - Doman Bagh, Block - Kowakol, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

Meena Devi, a resident of Dakshinbari Mushari, belongs to a very poor and lower caste family. She is a very religious and spiritual person. She was married at the age of 12 years to Bishun Majhi of Domanbagh gaon. Meena Devi has one son and one daughter. They all lived happily till the time she was accused a witch and practicing witch craft. Meena Devi was alleged of casting evil spells on Minu Majhi, son of Vijay Maghi, their neighbour. Minu Maghi was not keeping well due to infection and damage of the liver. Unable to seek proper treatment, one day the boy died. Immediately without wasting any time, his family members misled Meena Devi to be the culprit and blamed her for the death of the boy. They tortured and threatened her and her family to kill. The villagers also believed her a witch and socially excluded and discriminated her and her family. Grieved with the accusation and exploitation, Meena Devi, finally went to her daughters place to stay. However, after some days, when the situation was under control, she returned to her village. She tried to file complaint against the accused in the police station, but in vain. Due to unhealthy situation in the village, Meena Devi and her family had to stay in a social worker's house for 20 days. Finally, with the help of some local leaders and organization, the case was resolved on both parties compromising.

**Case 91 :**

**Name - Ruby Devi, Age - 60 years W/O Ashin Majhi, Village - Khansari, Block - Kowakol, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

This is an instance of Ruby Devi, aged 60 years, who belongs to a very backward, poor and lower caste (Mushar) family. She and her husband are engaged as daily wage labourers to sustain their livelihood. They lead a very miserable and arduous life. Her misery doubled when the villagers allege her witch. With grieved eyes, she said that the villagers always blame her for any child's illness or death in the village. The moment they see her outside their houses, they immediately close the doors and advice the children to stay indoor. The

reason being they think her a witch and practicing witch craft on their children. Even, she is blamed of the death or sickness of any cattle in the village. One day, the cattle of her neighbour Kari Devi and Phagu Maghi died. She was blamed for the death of the cattles. She was abused and beaten badly. Unable to bear the torture and agony, once, Ruby Devi meets the local organization's member and urged to help her. Then, the organization's person with the help of her organization and other local influential persons summoned a notice to the culprit to be present for a discussion and meeting. Both the parties meet the officials and the case was resolved by negotiation. The villagers were also informed about the laws and consequences of the accusation of witch hunting. Since then, the villagers have stopped blaming and accusing Ruby Devi a witch.

**Case 92 :**

**Name - Rambatia Devi, Age - 60 years W/O Jhoju Yadav, Village - Rampur Balua, Block - Kowakol, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

Like many other women, Rambatia Devi has also been suffering from the allegation of witch craft since last 5 years. Some of her neighbours Monu Mia, Iqbal Mia, Razak Mia and Rafik Mia always abuse and accuse her witch and practicing witch craft. She said that if any misfortune happens in the village, then they blame her for the sufferings. In one instance, Rambatia Devi narrated that she is held responsible for the frequent illness of Monu Mia's son and always asked to cure him. Whenever she refuses, she was beaten mercilessly. Her husband and her daughter-in-laws always come to her rescue. She added that after the incident, her husband lodged complaint against the culprits in the police station, but no action was taken till now. Rambatia Devi came to know that it is because of the influence of the other party that the case is not preceding further and the perpetrators are not being punished. Finally, she seeks help from the local organizations and leaders, who supported her in resolving the case.

**Case 93 :**

**Name - Sushila Devi, Age - 45 years W/O Shri Yadav, Caste - Yadav, Village - Itapakawa, Block - Kowakol, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

Sushila Devi was married at a very early age to Shri Yadav and has a son. They were living a life of contentment till the unfortunate death of her husband. Since then, she is being charged a witch and held responsible for the death of her husband by her mother-in-law, Munma Devi and brother-in-law, Umesh Yadav. They physically torture and abuse her and threaten to throw away from their house & village. However, their main motive was to get hold of all her property and belongings. Unable to stand the day-to-day torment, she used to stay at her parents place and the responsibility of her son's education and upbringing was taken care of by her sister. Finally, she lodged complaint against her mother-in-law and brother-in-law in the police station. But, resolutely, the police presented the case as a property dispute rather than witch accusation. She, eventually did not get justice and went to the local organizations who helped her (financially also) in resolving the case.

**Case 94 :**

**Name - Radhawa Devi, Age - 65 years W/O Kameswar Yadav, Caste - Yadav, Village - Upraili Manjhila, Block - Kowakol, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

This is the instance of Radhawa Devi, a resident of Upraili Manjhila who belongs to a very poor and backward family. She has four sons and two daughters. She is being designated as a witch, not only in her husband's house but also in the village. One of her neighbour,

Suryug Yadav, blamed her for the sickness of his two baby goats. He said that, once Radhawa Devi had come to his house for some work and since then, his goats fell ill. He added, “she is a witch and practiced witch craft on the innocent goats”. He and some of other villagers went to Radhawa Devi’s house and beat her badly. She was even threatened of exterminating from the village and lynching her to death. She was discriminated and deprived of the basic amenities in the village. Radhawa Devi, then, went and narrated the incidents to her brother, who eventually appealed the panchayat to resolve the case. The panchayat gave 15 days time to Suryug Yadav to prove that Radhawa Devi is a witch or else he will be fined Rs. 50,000. However, the panchayat did not receive any evidence from Suryug Yadav after 15 days and advised Radhawa Devi to file a complaint in the police station. Radhawa Devi went to the police station to file complaint but, the police did not cooperate. Finally, she had to take help of some local women organizations, who helped her to lodge complaint. But, she stressed that neither the copy of the FIR has been received nor any action has been taken till now. This shows the biasness of the authorities towards the victims of witch accusation.

**Case 95:**

**Name - Nirmala Devi, Age - 55 years W/O Kuldeep Singh, Village - Adsania, Post - Jauri, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

The accusation of witch and witch craft is not only confined to the lower caste and backward women. There are also many instances of witch accusation among the upper caste as well as educated women. Such an instance is of Nirmala Devi, a resident of Adsania village, Nawada, Bihar. Nirmala Devi is educated women and also an active social worker in the village. Her husband, Kuldeep Singh works and stays outside the district. She has two sons and three daughters. Her daughters are married. Unfortunately, some years ago, she was designated a witch in her village. The villagers blamed her for any adversity in the village and abused and harassed her physically as well as mentally. Finally, she went to the authorities and complained. She, even seek help from the Chief Minister of the state. Now, all her problems are resolved and she is leading a peaceful life. She is regarded as a very influential and respected person in her village and currently working as an ASHA worker.

**Case 96 :**

**Name - Kamala Devi, Age - 50 years W/O Late Brajnandan Mahato, Caste - Koiri, Village - Dhanbigha, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

Kamala Devi has been residing in the village, Dhanbigha since last 40 years. She belongs to the respectable Mahato family. Her late husband was involved in the panchayat meetings. She has two sons and four daughters. She is an active social worker, associated with an organization in Nawada. But, unfortunately, after the death of her husband, she was accused a witch by her in-laws and tortured mercilessly. Their main intention was to acquire her share of land and property. Kamla Devi also seek help from the organization and the police. The authorities as well as the organization’s members tried to resolve the matter by mutual consent. Her in-laws were counselled and explained about the dire consequences of the accusation. Eventually, they agreed not to denote her witch and apologized.

**Case 97 :**

**Name - Munma Devi, Age - 55 years W/O Late Ramchandra, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

This is an instance of Munma Devi, a woman of a lower caste. Munma Devi's parents died very early. She was taken care off by her uncle and aunty. She was married at a very tender age of 11 years and had a son at the age of 13 years. Soon after the birth of her son, her husband died. Munma Devi was again married off to her brother-in-law, Parmeshwar Mann. After that she gave birth to three daughters and one son. Unfortunately, Parmeshwar Mann also died after some years. This changed her life completely. She had to engage in some menial work for herself and her children. Leading a very arduous life, left Munma with no options of getting her daughters married off at a very early age. The villagers also help her and her children at all stages. Meanwhile, her financial condition improved and was stabilized. Seeing this, her husband's family and relatives, out of envy, started accusing a witch. They blamed her for the death of both her husbands and abused and tortured her. They also blamed her for the death of one of her relative's son. Her misery multiplied when her own son also left her. She was left behind with two small daughters and the curse. The police also did not cooperate in lodging compliant against the perpetrators. Then, she went to the local influential leaders and seek help. They supported her, discussed the matter with police and resolved it.

**Case 98 :**

**Name - Sunita Devi, Age - 45 years W/O Anil Chaudhary, Caste - Maha Dalit, Village - Shehari, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

Sunita Devi, a Dalit woman, resides in Shehari village of Nawada district, Bihar. She has been remarried for last 10 years and has a son and a daughter. Her tragedy began after the death of her first husband. Immediately, after his death, she was thrown out of the house with the allegation of practicing witchcraft by her inlaws. Then, her parents again married her to Anil Chaudhary who was already married to Sanju Devi, her neighbour. Sanju Devi, out of envy, started accusing her a witch. Later on, some of the villagers also started believing and accusing her of practicing witchcraft. In another incident, she was blamed and tortured severely for the illness of the daughter of Prithvi Singh, a resident of Sheheri village. She stated that Prithvi Singh also threatened to kill her. Therefore, out of nervousness and apprehension, she sprinkled some water on her and went away hurriedly indicating that she tried to cure her. In some time, his daughter fully recovered. Therefore, the incidence imposed belief on Prithvi Singh and other villagers that Sunita Devi is a witch and practices witchcraft to cure as well as harm persons. But, the fact was that his daughter was cured by the medicines and treatment from the hospital. Thus, such situations in the life of Sunita Devi have remained unchanged till now.

**Case 99 :**

**Name - Bedmia Devi, Age - 45 years, Village - Lalpur, Block - Kobakol, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

Bedmia Devi resides at Lalpur village of Nawada district at her parent's place. She is separated from her husband. She is being designated a witch in the village. One day, while she was gazing the cattle in the forest, she saw a boy climbing a tree. She advised the boy to get down or else he will fall. But, as children are notorious, he did not listen to Bedmia Devi and fell from the tree and died. Within no time, his family members and some of the villagers went to Bedmia Devi's house and started abusing her a witch and blaming her for the death of the boy. They dragged her from her house and brutally assaulted and raped her. They left her alone bleeding profoundly. When the matter was reported in the police station, the police came, controlled the situation and admitted her to the hospital. However, they did not file any complaint against the culprits. It was only after the demand of the Bihar Vimesh Network, a local organization, the cuprits were arrested and

imprisoned for one year. But, as usual, they were given bail against custody of some money and are not imprisoned since then. Bedmia Devi has been fighting for justice for last 6 years, but in vain.

#### **Case 100 :**

**Name - Suma Devi, Age - 55 years, Caste - Badhai, Husband - Shri Kishori Mistri, Village - Itapakua, Block - Kobakol, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

The life of Suma Devi and her granddaughter, Nishu Kumari also centers around the accusation and allegation of witch hunting. She resides in Itapakua village of Nawada district, Bihar. Suma Devi stated that she is being alleged a witch and practicing witch craft by her brother-in law, Manohar Mistri and his wife, Sunaina Devi. They believe that Suma Devi is casting evil spells and magic charms on Sunaina Devi and the whole family. She was even blamed for Manohar's paralysis and the death of their grandson, who was suffering from some ailment. They abused and harassed her terribly. They even physically tortured and beat her mercilessly. Ultimately, Suma Devi went to seek help and support from the local organization, Bihar Vimesh Network. Thereafter, the organization's head issued notice to both the parties to be present on a specific date at the office to resolve the matter. On the mentioned date, both the parties were present and put forth their explanation. On hearing from both the parties, the organization's head informed them about the laws, regulations, verdicts and punishments of the accusation of witch and witchcraft. They explained Manohar Mistri the dire consequences of the accusation. For some days, he and his wife did not trouble Suma Devi and her family. But, after couple of days, they again started designating her witch and humiliating her. However, after stringent notices and warnings by the organization's members and workers, Manohar Mistri and his family were frightened of harassing with Suma Devi. Since then, Suma Devi and her family are leading a life of peace and tranquillity.

#### **Case 101 :**

**Name - Kanju Devi, Age - 28 years, Caste - Badhai, Husband - Manoj Mistri, Village - Itapakua, Block - Kobakol, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

This is an instance of a 28 year old & educated woman, Kanju Devi of Itapakua village of Nawada district, Bihar. She resides with her husband and children in the village. However, her husband, Manoj Mistri often stays outside the district in pursuit of work. Kanju Devi's trouble started when she was designated a witch in her village. Her neighbour, Mukesh Kumar's pregnant mother, Sia Devi died due to some ailment. But, then, Mukesh Kumar and his father Rambriksh Mistri blamed Kanju Devi for her death. They believed that Kanju Devi is a witch and might have practiced witchcraft on her and her would-be child. For this, they ill-treated and beat her profoundly. The helplessness of Kanju Devi (as her husband stays outside) further instigated Mukesh Kumar and his father to threaten to kill her. Eventually, she went to the police station to lodge FIR, but in vain. The police demanded evidences and witnesses and did not file FIR. Then, both the parties were counselled and informed about the laws, regulations and punishments of witch accusation by the local influential organizations, leaders and the panchayat. By admitting their fault, Mukesh Kumar and his father apologized and vowed never to repeat such superstitious practice. Now, Kanju Devi and her children are leading a very peaceful and respectful life in the village.

#### **Case 102 :**

**Name - Malti Devi, Age - 69 years, Village - Lalpur, Block - Kobakol, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

This is the case of Malti Devi, aged 69 years, who is totally shattered on being designated as witch by the villagers and, more importantly by her children. She said that, she has spent almost 25 years of her life in the village and earlier no one uttered a word against her. But, now, everything has changed. She is held responsible for anybody's illness or death in the village and alleged of practicing witchcraft. Sparing a day or two, she is being severely abused and physically exploited. The main reason behind it is to grab her land and property. Malti Devi is a self-independent strong woman, who even in the age of 69 years has the courage and strength of selling papdi 10-12 hours a day. This is a matter of resentment for other women and men in the village. Instead of helping a single lonely woman, the villagers are against her and try to get hold of her belongings such as land, house, jewellery, etc. The villagers even buy things from her and do not pay her the amount. Whenever she demands the money, she is cruelly beaten and ill-treated. The villagers took her to the *ohjas*, Salim Mia and Sadhu Mia, who also confirmed her witch with the intention of getting hold of her house. She was asked to leave the village and settle somewhere else. But, Malti Devi strongly denied and said that she will never leave the village whatsoever the situation might be. Thus, the curse of witch and the burden of torture have weakened her courage and survival to life.

**Case 103 :**

**Name - Bulu Devi, Age - 39 years, Husband - Indradev Chandravanshi, Caste - Kahar, Post - Islampur, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

Bulu Devi, as a ward person is highly devoted to the service of the poor and backward communities. Her husband, Indradev Chandravanshi is also associated with a political party and working for the emancipation of the poor. Bulu Devi has four daughters and two sons. One of her daughter is married. Bulu Devi's misery started when she was accused a witch, ill-treated and severely beaten to bleed by her own husband and family members. They blame her for the misfortune in the family. Not a single villager came to her rescue. But, Archana Kumari, working at Jai Prabha Vikas Samiti, came to her rescue and helped her in lodging complaint against the perpetrators under Violence on Women and Accusation of Witch Acts. A committee was formed to resolve the matter. However, the committee found that the police did not have any witness or evidence against the culprits. Instead, they asserted that such incidences usually occur in the villages because of personal vendetta, land disputes, etc. and gets resolved at the panchayat level. Likewise, Bulu Devi's case was also resolved at the panchayat with the help of police. The perpetrators were warned not to repeat such practices or else, as per witch hunting laws they will be severely punished.

**Case 104 :**

**Name - Prabha Devi, Age - 55 years W/O Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, Caste - Rajput, Post - Islampur, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

The accusation of witch hunting is not only limited to Dalits and Adivasis. Many upper caste women are also subjected to accusation of witch and witch hunting. Such an instance is of Prabha Devi, a literate (8<sup>th</sup> class) Rajput woman of Islampur, Nawada, Bihar. She is a highly religious and spiritual woman. Her husband is also a highly respected farmer in the village. She had two sons who died and a daughter who is married. Since last 3 years, Prabha Devi is being designated a witch by some of her neighbours and villagers. They believe her to be the cause for the death of her sons and think that she will also

harm their children. The *ojha* also misled the villagers and affirmed that Prabha Devi is a witch and will harm all in the village. On hearing this, the villagers made her dance like a witch in front of the whole village which was extremely humiliating. The death of her sons due to illness and the curse of witch totally shattered Prabha Devi. Then, her husband went to the police and the local organizations to seek help & support. The police and other influential leaders warned the perpetrators and informed them about the consequences of accusation. Thus, since then, the villagers have stopped harassing Prabha Devi and her family.

#### **Case 105 :**

**Name - Meena Devi W/O Sukhdev Chauhan Age - 35 years, Caste - Dalit, Village - Basedtar, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

On 22 Dec 2010, some of the notorious men of the village Basedtar, ruthlessly ill-treated and tortured Meena Devi. They accused her witch, heinously beat, raped her and even burnt her private parts. It is all because of an *ojha* who stated that Meena Devi is a witch. Meena Devi, a 35 year old Dalit woman has 6 children - 3 daughters and 3 sons. Two of her daughters and a son are married. Her youngest child is only 8 months old. Her husband, a plumber is illiterate and stays at Patna. He is the only bread earner of her family. Her married son and daughter-in-law also stays outside. Therefore, she along with her unmarried children stays in the village. A person, Haricharan Chauhan in her village along with some other villagers accuses her witch and physically exploits her. The reason being, she is held responsible for the death of his grandson as well as his own 18 year old son who was suffering from TB. The *ojha* confirmed her to be the reason for the death. Since then, Haricharan Chauhan accuses her witch and exploits her. And, on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of his son's death, he along with some of his relatives planned to take revenge. They severely physically and mentally tortured Meena Devi and left her to bleed. The other villagers also put off their hands. However, a case was registered against the five culprits, one of them was arrested, but was set free on bail. No progress on the case has been done till date. Meena Devi is still struggling and hopeful to get justice in the near future.

#### **Case No.106:**

**Kailash Majhi, Village, Bajvigha, Tola -Gandhi Nagar, tankugha, Police Station: Opi Tankugha,, Block, Tankugha, Gaya, Bihar.**

Kailash Majhi is held responsible for passing away of Chanchala and his people are named in FIR: Village, Bajvigha, Tola -Gandhi Nagar, tankugha, Police Station : Opi Tankugha,, Block, Tankugha, Gaya, Bihar.

Villages of specially Dalit castes suffering from illiteracy and neglect are the worst victims of superstitions. Manjhis are indigenous people in Bihar and they are asset less and poor. An *Ojha* from Rajauli village whose name is not mentioned informed that Kailash Manjhi is the one who has done some 'Jadu Tona' for the death of Chanchala Devi. Police has registered a case and six are behind bars according to Ola Devi in the village. Son of Girija Manjhi who passed away is also attributed to this jadu tona. However, Chunni Devi, RDMA activist assesses that death had its reasons. The idea of magical and evil intentions is being brought in by the *Ojha* as he is not being able to diagnose the reason. Accused family members are suffering from hunger and there is much dominance of superstition.

The witch-hunting menace has seen many innocent women being persecuted, tortured and even killed in Bihar. The practice of witchcraft prevails in several districts of Bihar, particularly Nawada, as cases have been reported. Thus, in order to have an account of the perception of people regarding the presence of witch hunting in Nawada district, indepth interviews were conducted which is discussed below.

#### **Case 107 :**

**In INT 1: Name - Manohar Majhi, Village - Amarpur, Post - Amirica Bigahad, Police Station - Mufasil, District - Nawada, Bihar.**

This is an instance of Manohar Majhi, aged 48 years and belongs to lower caste i.e. "majhi". He narrates his experiences and accounts of relationship with his neighbours and the villagers. He resides in amarpur village with his wife, elder mother, two daughters and a son. He is engaged in agricultural works. His neighbour, Suresh Majhi, also belongs to a lower caste and engages in daily wage labour works. The socio-economic and educational status of the "majhi" caste in the village is very poor. However, the villagers have cordial relation with their neighbours as well as other caste people in the village. They attend each other's festivals and functions and wherever needed help & support them. Manohar Majhi also maintains friendly relation with his neighbour and other villagers. He never creates any situation of confrontation with anybody. However, once, when fire broke out in his neighbourhood and engulfed the whole village, then some villagers blamed Manohar majhi for the incident. But, Manohar did not complain against the person because he apologised. In another incidence, when a woman was accused and persecuted a witch in the village, Manohar came to her rescue and she was saved. But, the villagers blamed and discriminated him & his family. Thus, it is evident that while the villagers have a friendly verbal relation with the lower caste people in the village, but, the ground reality is different. Firstly, the people have a firm belief in the presence of witch and witch practices and secondly, they blame and discriminate the lower caste people on account of witch practices. He further stated that he believes the *Ojhas* and *fakirs*, since his grandson was cured from some ailment after performing some rituals and rites by the *ojha*. It was evident from the information provided by Manohar that the villagers also practice untouchability in the case of epidemic like diarrhea, cholera, malaria, etc. which reveals their superstitious nature

#### **Case 108 and 109 :**

**In INT 2 and 3 with description of cases**

**Interview with Hirankant Jha, Munshi, Police Station, Nawada City, District, Nawada, Bihar:**

**Death of a Boy Suffering Injuries due to fall from a tree is attributed falsely to a witch and an HIV AIDS victim dying from AIDS is attributed to Witch. Police investigation exposes the truth**

The purpose of the interview was to learn on the data related to reports on the persecution of women as a result of the accusation of Dayan. He informed that only one case has been reported since he joined the police station. He did not have the report from earlier period. For him, police station is place of compromise and when cases are coming then FIR is not registered. But according to him if there is someone reported to have beaten a woman, then he is called to the police station and beaten and then left . On the use of influence , there are some who wish to influence the police but then , due course of laws are followed considering the legal rights of women to protection from violence .

On the social profile of people who are reporting the case of Dayan, he said that these cases are from the scheduled castes. There are times when reason of death is not known properly as this happened once when a boy passed away and then **there were some who reported that a Dayan has been involved** . When the matter was investigated, it was found that boy had fallen from a tree. There are incidences when upper caste people accuse SC and ST women for oppressing them. He felt that an honest police officer can deliver justice but for extorting money from those persecuted women, there are instance when police officials are seen to be covering up the fact after receiving bribe for the same.

Thus, it is important to ensure that police official bound with the duties is particular in delivering justice. He confessed that instance of beating and mental torture through leveling the accusation of being a Dayan is generally not recorded. Person is called, rebuked and then let off. On the query for sufficiency of the legal provisions, he said laws are enough for preventing atrocities on women. Informing on the case from Silkandarpur village, he informed that a man living in Gujarat used to come after every two years and the contracted AIDS and passed away before Holi. **An old woman was being accused of being a Dayan**. She reported this to police and then police became active. Finding the reality, police asked the wife of the dead man to testify that he had AIDS that he contracted due to unsafe sex with other women. Concluding the interview, it was observed that upper caste people are also engaged in using this work for oppressing Dalits. Also SC and ST being the poorest are more prone to accuse women being a Dayan /Witch.

#### **Case 110 :**

**In INT 4 : Arjun Ram c/o Radha Devi, Secretary, Nirman Sewa Samiti,Gopal Nagar , Nawada, Bihar**

He informed that he was working for ten years against caste based discrimination .He informed about preventing people if there were some calling some women , a Dayan. On the recent trends, he said people were believing in *Jadoo tona* but now with education , people are learning more on disease and death .He felt that Ojha was responsible for the prevalence of such faiths , since he was also making a gain in kind and cash through receiving goat, pig, chicken, clothes, alcohol. He said his organisation have been working for sorting out issues ,mitigating conflicts and making people understand each other .If there are some accusations to a woman then panchayat is called for solving the problem and ensuring the women are not oppressed and persecuted as a result of false accusation of being a Dayan. The issues are not permitted to be taken to police station in order to protect people from economic distress. On the programmes conducted, he said awareness meetings had been organised in the villages twice in this regard and now there is result for this. Even if people have this thought in the mind, they are not being to utter the word 'Dayan' for any lady. He said no Ojha is permitted to enter the village in order to misguide people and this is the reason, there is no more incidences of women being persecuted through the accusation of being a Dayan.

## Case-111:

### IN FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 1: Village - Sismo, Panchayat - Mahuli, District - Nawada, State - Bihar.

On 18<sup>th</sup> March 2014, a focus group discussion was conducted among the Dalit women of Sismo village of Mahuli panchayat, Nawada, Bihar. It was mainly organised & coordinated by the team of Mahamaya Vikas Sansthan, Nawada and Dalit Mahila Andolan. It was headed by Vandana Devi, Head, Mahamaya Vikas Sansthan. The main topic of discussion was the practice of witch hunting and the discrimination & violence against Dalit women on the superstitious accusation of witch. However, the discussion was attended by around 50 Dalit women who are now also blamed as witches by *Ojhas* or *tantriks*. The discussion started with the question to the women: whether they have come across any case of witch, witch practices or violence in their village? Some of the women stated that they do not believe in the presence of witches and no woman is blamed as a witch, but they have come across cases of casting evil spells and magic charms. The villagers believe that those who cast evil spells and magic charms are termed as witches. Furthermore, if someone in the village dies or suffers from any disease, then the family members seek advice from the *Ojhas* (*gunias*, *mati* or *tantrik*), who assures them that the culprit is a witch.

Moreover, on questioning, whether the villagers believe the *Ojhas*, a woman named Basanti Devi said, 10 years ago, a woman was blamed as a witch by the *ojha* of the village. Then, the villagers humiliated, tortured and killed by setting her on fire. Although, now also the villagers believe in witches and witch practices but such type of incidences have never occurred again. The prevalence and practice of witch hunting is mostly found among the Dalit and Adivasi communities. She further added that the village is inhabited by various dominant caste communities, which in turn affect the overall development of the village.

On probing about how to address the issue, the women stated that there should be awareness campaigns & programmes in the village regarding witch hunting. People should be motivated, encouraged and convinced to cease such a baseless practice or belief which is a mere illusion. Thus, on agreeing to support awareness programmes in the future, the women affirmed that there should be such group building exercise among women within the communities not only to create a network of support system at the grassroot level but also to extend opportunities of socio-economic development. Lastly, the women's collectives/*sanghas* also become the secure point for initiatives in health awareness and adult literacy that appeal to the fundamentals of this social evil.

In recent years, in Bihar, many incidents have been reported regarding the violence meted out to women due to allegations of witchcraft. The practice of witchcraft prevails in several districts of Bihar, particularly Rohtas, as cases have been reported. Thus, in order to have detailed understanding of the dimensions, existence and extent of the witch phenomenon in the districts of Bihar, indepth interviews of doctors, sarpanch, police authorities, political and social leaders, etc. were conducted which is discussed in the subsequent section.

## Case 112 :

In INT 1 : Name - Dr. A.K.Chaudhary, M.B.B.S, Primary Health Centre, Block- Katghat, District - Rohtas, Bihar.

Dr. Chaudhary, a resident of Patna, has been working in the Centre for last 4 years. On probing, whether he has come across any case of violence of women due to allegations of witchcraft, he stated that he has never come across any such cases. He added that during the last 4 years, not a single woman accused a witch has come for treatment suffering from physical violence. He denied of having any information of presence of witch or witch practices in the villages. Thus, it is apparent that the *Ojhas*, *tantriks*, *gunias*, etc. play a dominating & influencing role in the lives of the rural marginalized and excluded communities.

**Case 113 :**

**In INT 2 : Name - Mr. Ranjit Pratap Singh, A.S.I. Police Station - Katghat, Block-Kargahat, District - Rohtas, Bihar.**

Witch-hunting, even when it does not involve killing, is an extreme form of violence. It involves destruction of property, physical and sexual assault, etc. This is a threat against all rural indigenous women. So, dealing with witch hunting certainly necessitates police action. But, according to Mr. Rangit Pratap Singh (A.S.I) for the last 3 years of his service period in the block, not a single case of witch hunting has been reported. He stated that there is non-existence of witch or *dians* in their block. However, there are *Ojhas/gunias* and people belief them a lot. Furthermore, if there is any such case of witch accusation or witch practice in the village, it is not being reported in the police station, thereby, no further action could be taken.

**Case 114 :**

**In INT 3 : Name - Hadish Ansari, Sarpanch, Village - Konar, Block- Shivsagar District - Rohtas, Bihar.**

In order to have an understanding on the issue of witch hunting, Hadish Ansari, sarpanch of konar village of Shivsagar block was interviewed. He believed in the presence of witch who casts evil spells and practices black magic. The witch is called a '*dain*' in local parlance and believed to cause ailment to people and animals. Initially, she is usually identified by an *Ojhas* or *gunias*. The process of identification of the witch is specified by the *Ojhas* by looking into the symptoms of the patient. The alleged recipient of witchcraft is usually seen suffering from symptoms like, fever, cough-cold, fatigue, weakness, paralyses, hysteria, etc. As soon as it is believed that a disease has been caused due to the 'witch craft' people try to get rid of the spell through prayers and offerings. People believe that without these prayers and offerings the patient would not survive. It is only after failure from *Ojhas* that they seek medical treatment. However, it is believed that there are some diseases which cannot be treated by the medical doctor and needs to be addressed specifically by an *ojha*. Sometimes patients die due to delay in appropriate treatment. If the patient dies the belief of existence of a witch gets further vindicated and the identification and persecution of the witch starts. It so happens that she is either banished from the community or killed. He stated that around 75% of the people in rural areas believe in black magic & sorcery and they talk about the presence of witch. Today, there are 10 *Ojhas* in the village who are poor and belongs to lower caste community. Moreover, there is also evidence of existence of class and caste based discrimination in the village.

**Case 115 :**

**In INT 4 : Name - Hakim Warsi, Sarpanch, Village - Konar, Block- Shivsagar District - Rohtas, Bihar.**

Another sarpanch, named Hakim Warsi stated that although the villagers believe in witch, witch practices, black magic, sorcery, etc. but they do not reveal. The trend of witch hunting has engulfed everybody, from rich to poor, from higher caste to lower caste, from literate to illiterate, etc. Peoples' believe in *Ojhas* has become a mere traditional & religious business for them. There have been no attempts to address the issue. He was of the opinion that there should be awareness campaign to convince the people that their belief in such superstitious practice is baseless and illogical.

#### **Case 116 :**

**In INT 5 : Name - Bhola Shankar, Organization - Gramiya Mazdur Sangathan, Mohala - Bharti Gunj, Village - Sasaram, Block- Sasaram District - Rohtas, Bihar.**

Mr. Bhola Shankar is a resident of Sasaram. Since 1974, he has been working as a leader in the Gramiya Mazdur Sangathan for the social, economical and political rights of the poor, marginalized, Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims and women. He has also worked against the superstitious mindset of the people by organising awareness campaigns, andolans and meetings in different villages of Rohtas district. The meetings were mainly organized to aware people about the baseless belief of witch, *Ojhas* and witch practices. The *Ojhas* are forced to reveal their selfish motives to the people in the meetings. They are threatened by saying that if they don't reveal, then they will be taken to the police for action. As a result, they disclose their motives. The andolans and meetings had a great impact on the lives of the people. They, apart from seeking advice from the *Ojhas*, explored the option of going to doctor for treatment. However, sometimes, their belief in the practice dominates their mind, for which majority turn to *Ojhas*. In order to address the issue, are two major andolans were initiated in the district. One was the Triveni Sangh of the Koyari, Kumri and yadav caste people, and the other was the Ajay Sangh, which mainly dealt with the superstitions. These andolans were very active and had a great impact on the people. But, gradually, after the death of their leaders the andolans weakened, but still functioning. Thus, according to Mr. Bhola, the Government, civil society organizations, peoples' associations, etc. should take strong steps to put an end to the practice of witch hunting.

#### **Case 117 :**

**In INT 6 : Name - Siwadhar Rai, Organization - Jaipravah Vikas Mandal, Mohala - Punjabi Mohala, District - Rohtas, Bihar.**

Since 1966, Siwadhar Rai has been working against the superstitious perception of society against Dalits and other lower caste community. The lower caste Dalits has been facing the hardships of discrimination and violence since ages. He asserted that if a Dalit sits on the bed or chair in the presence of higher caste people, then he is severely exploited and beaten badly. Further, in one instance, when a Dalit boy was going to get married, sitting on a horse, he was physically tortured and beaten badly. However, at that time, Siwadhar Rai and some of his coordinators rescued the boy and organized protests and andolan against it. As a result, the discrimination against Dalits in the village decreased to some extent. Nevertheless, the belief of villagers against witch and witchcraft still existed. In 2005, a Dalit woman working in the organization was alleged as a witch and eventually, burnt alive. The case was registered and the proceedings went on for many years. The factors responsible for existence of witch and witch hunting in the society can be attributed to inequality, illiteracy, belief in religious, spiritual and supernatural powers, poverty, etc. Siwadhar stated that the organisation has protested and conducted various andolans in different villages against such a practice, which in turn, resulted in lower incidence of witch belief and practices.

## ORISSA

**Case 118 and 119 :**

**A female teacher accused a tribal girl and then later a boy for being a witch. Government relieves the teacher and makes the assistance in charge for Sewashram**

The shocking incidence of the seven year old girl being thrown out of the school by the teachers on the charges of being a witch has finally waken up the Keonjhar district administration in eastern Indian state Odisha. The Additional District Collector and the present collector in-charge Sangram Keshari Swain, accompanied by the Sub-collector Pratap Chandra Hota and District Education Officer Krushna Chandra Nayak have conducted an on spot enquiry.

The lady teacher have had abused the girl by calling her a witch. **The victim a class one tribal girl has returned to the sevashram.** This incident took place under Telkoi police station in Keonjhar district, 280 kilometers away from the state capital Bhubaneswar.

The girl from Juladera Kenduadari Munda Sahi village of Khuntapada panchayat under Telkoi police limits was admitted to class one of Talasahi Sevashram a tribal residential school last year. When her father dropped the girl in the Sevashram on January 03, after the x-mass holidays, the teachers there refused her entry into the school.

The head mistress alleged that the girl was a witch, she turns into a cat in the night and sucks blood from other inmates. Pronouncing the verdict that a witch cannot be accommodated in the Sevashram hostel, the teachers threw away her belongings out of the hostel.

Prayers and request by the father of the girl Birsinh Munda could not bring in any sense. Dejected, the father complained with the Tehsildar and the District Collector. The collector swung into action to suspend the Head Mistress and restore the girl into the school.

But, another student of the same Sevashram, Gurucharan Jamuda (9 years) was not that fortunate to invite immediate attention of the media as well as the district administration. The investigating officials headed by the officiating district collector Sangram Keshari Swain have found out that a similar incident had taken place in the school last year.

**Gurucharan Jamuda, a tribal boy was refused entry into the Sevashram on the grounds of being a witch by the same teacher.** Father of Gurucharan, Budhilal Jamuda has complained with the Block Development Officer and the district administration. While repeated appeals did not yield any result, the family was compelled to admit the boy into another school Durlavapur Primary School.

But for this the boy had to lose one year. He was admitted to class one, even though he

was reading in second class while this incident took place. Apart from losing a year Gurucharan also has to commute daily as this school does not have hostel facility. These Sevashrams are run by the Tribal and Harijan Welfare department to facilitate education of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe student. The boy is studying in class II at present.

The District Collector has assured that stern action will be taken against those found guilty. For the time being the headmistress has been relieved of her charge. Siksha Sahayak of the school has been entrusted with her charge.

It is noteworthy to mention here that barely a month back on 5th of December 2013, Odisha Legislative Assembly had enacted Odisha Prevention of Witch Hunting Bill, 2013. This legislation provided for effective measures to tackle the menace of witch hunting and prevent the practice of witchcraft with evil intention to harm others.

Penal provisions of minimum three years of imprisonment with a fine not less than Rs.1000 has been made for the crime of witch hunting, and abating or provoking for witchcraft. The imprisonment could be up to five years also. For the second time crime it could extend up to seven years.

However despite the risk of severe punishments, such incidents continue to happen in different parts of the state as the information and awareness about such enactments is yet to percolate down to the masses.

<http://www.merineews.com/article/despite-new-laws-cases-of-witch-hunting-continue-to-surface-in-odisha/15893752.shtml>

**Case 120,121,122 and 123 :**

**Three women stripped in Talsara in 2013 and one woman assaulted in 2005**

Three women were stripped naked in the village of Ambapada in Talsara police station areas of Sundergarh district in Odisha as per the news published in First post <http://www.firstpost.com/fwire/witchcraft-crowd-strip-three-women-in-odisha-622900.html> published on February 2,2013. Those accusing the women blackened the faces and then paraded these women naked in full public view. Some informed the police and when the police reached the village, the matter was being discussed in the village. Police rescued three women arresting three persons according to the investigating officer Mr. Padhi. The arrested persons were identified as Prafulla Barla, Ani Baa and Sanjam Soren. 9 years ago, a similar incident had happened when a woman accused of practicing witchcraft has been assaulted and forced to eat human excreta at Tanesar.

## Kolkata

### Case Number 124 :

According to the news entitled 'Witch-hunting is not about the superstition' published in Indian News from Kolkata on May 9, 2013, women are lynched, sexually exploited and forcibly evicted from their homes after being branded witches. Witch-hunting is not about a stray report tucked away in a corner of the newspaper but an increasingly worrying pan-India trend that specifically targets women in a patriarchal society, say experts. With reports of witch-hunting coming in from villages and even towns across the country, sociologists, women activists and others believe that it is but another form of gender-based violence. And women who stand out from the crowd, either because they have property, are good looking or independent are specifically targeted.

There have been increased instances of single women/widows being branded witches and murdered when they refused sexual overtures of someone dominant in the village or in the family. In some cases, relatives branded them witches to grab their property.

NGOs working in rural areas have found "beauty and wealth" to be the prime reasons behind witch-hunts.

"It is less of superstition and more of a conspiracy, either to grab the property of the woman or to take revenge for unfulfilled sexual intent in the case of younger women," social activist Shravani is reported to have told IANS.

Shravani has been working with rural women in what is now Jharkhand for the past 20 years. She said victims in most cases were young, good looking widows or single women/widows who had huge property in their names and were childless.

"Saloni Khujoor of Mandar village, an educated single woman, was branded a witch and killed because society could not tolerate a woman being the heir of her father's property and people don't want to see women being self-dependent," said Shravani.

Several NGOs in Jharkhand said that most cases go unnoticed and unreported as they are hushed up.

Renowned Wiccan priestess Ipsita Roy Chakraverti blamed "vested interests like property, personal interest in the woman" as the reasons for women being branded witches.

"More than 800 women have been killed after they were denounced as witches across the country since 2008. This is the official figure. The actual number may be higher," Chakraverti told IANS.

In a patriarchal society, an independent single woman is a threat, warranting immediate elimination.

Keeriti Roy, a social worker from West Bengal, said almost all the cases of witch killings in

the state had a close connection to property or other vested interests - and that rejection in love was also a reason.

City-based sociologist Bula Bhadra described witch killing as "genderised mass murder".

"The overall evidence makes plain that the panic of the witch craze is inseparable from the misogynist stigmatisation of women as evil. Women who seemed independent from patriarchal norms have been targeted as witches. Labelling women as witches effectively diverts attention from the daily multifaceted atrocities on women in India," Bhadra said.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 243 women have been killed after being denounced as witches across India in 2011, with Karnataka registering the maximum with 77 cases, followed by Odisha with 41 and Jharkhand with 36. Many other states are also in the list.

G. Vijayan of The Atheist Centre in Andhra Pradesh said settling old scores was a primary reasons for witch-hunting besides land grabbing. Often, there is official neglect.

"In some parts of the Telangana region, when a woman is killed after being branded a witch, a case is not even registered," he said.

According to All India Democratic Women Association Odisha secretary Pushpa Das, witchcraft is rampant in the state. "In 2012 alone, around 50 such cases came up and most of the victims were single women."

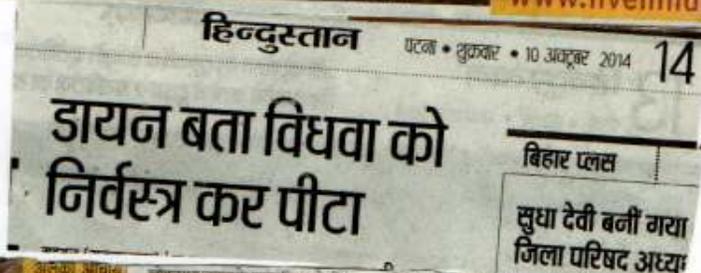
"The government needs to be proactive. Without the administration coming forward, such killings cannot be prevented," Shravani said



*Figure 8 A picture of woman accused of being a witch from India News report*

<http://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/witch-hunting-is-not-about-superstition-say-experts-22747.html>

Annexure -III Press news :



## ANNEXURE IV

Identity Number of Household

# Witchcraft among women in India: The Case of Odisha, Bihar and Jharkhand

### Section I: Basic Information of Household

1. District..... 2. Block .....

3. Village..... 4. Tola.....

5. Name of respondent .....

6. Sex of respondent

(1-Male, 2-Female)

7. Religion of the household

(1-Hindu, 2-Muslim, 3-Christian, 4-Buddhist, 5-Other)

8. Social Category

9. Caste Name

(SC-1, ST-2, OBC -3, General-4, Other- 5)

10. Household category (1-AAAY, 2-BPL, 3-APL, 4-No Card, Other-5)

11. Main occupation of household

(Cultivator-1, Casual labour in agriculture-2, Casual labour in non-agriculture-3, Attached/bonded labour-4 ,Unpaid family labour -5, Regular salaried wage in government sector-6, Regular salaried

wage in private sector-7, Own account worker (self-employed)-8 Personal Services (Jajmani)-9, Skilled Artisans-10, Scavenger-11, trader-12, Domestic work-13, Retired/pensioner/ too old-14, Rentier-15, Beggar-16, Other specify.....-17)

12. Highest education status within the household ?

(a) Male  b) Female

(1-Iliterate, 2- Informal education, 3-below primary, 4-Primary, 5-Middle, 6-Secondary, 7-Higher Secondary, 8-Graduation/BA/Degree and above, 9-Technical, 10-Other (specify.....))

13. Name of investigator.....14. Signature and date.....

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF DALIT ORGANIZATIONS**

M-3/22, Model Town-III,

Delhi 110009 INDIA

Telephone/Fax: 27442744

Email: [nacdor@gmail.com](mailto:nacdor@gmail.com) website: <http://www.nacdor.org>

## Section II: Demographic Information of Household

Variable	Number
1. Total male member (15-60 year)	
2. Total female members(15-60 year)	
3. Total male aged member (60 year and more)	
4. Total female aged members(60 and more year)	
5. Total child Male (5-15 years)	
6. Total child female (5-15 years)	
7. No of boys (5-15 years) going to school	
8. No of girls (5-15 years) going to school	
9. No of handicap members	
10. No of Boys age 0-5 age	
11. No of Girls age 0-5 age	

## Section III: Economic Status of Household

### 1: Assets holding of household?

		Number	Total current Value (In Rs.)
Productive assets	1.1 Tractor		
	1.2 Agricultural machinery and tools (pumpset, threshers, tiller, etc)		
	1.3 Non-agricultural machinery and tools (flour mill, oil press, Chuda Mill , etc.)		
Means of transport	2.1 Motor vehicle (truck, bus)		
	2.2.Car/jeep		
	2.3 Scooter/ motorcycle		
	2.4 Bicycle/Cycle rickshaw		
Durable assets	3.1 TV		
	3.2 Fridge		

	3.3 Mobile Phone		
	3.4 Electric fan		
	3.5 LPG		
Other assets	4.1 Value of other assets excluding jewellery, investment, and bank savings		
Land asset	5.1 Land owned (in acre) (if local measure please convert to acre)		

2. Total income earned by household during last one year (in Rupees) ?

3. Health expenditure during last one year (in Rupees) ?

4. Education expenditure during last one year (in Rupees) ?

5.1 Current indebtedness of household (a) Formal sources

5.2 Informal sources

**Section IV: Housing quality, water, drainage, electricity,**

1. House type (Pucca-1, Semi pucca-2, Kutcha-3, Thatched-4)

2. Toilet facility (yes-1, No-2)

3. Lighting facility (Electricity-1, Kerosene lamp-2, Solar lamp-3, None-4, Any other (specify)-5)

4. How many hours electricity is available in your village

5. Source of drinking water

( Household Tap water supply 1, Pubic Stand Post-2, local Hand Pump-3, India Mark 2/3-4, River/ Stream/Nala-5, Rainwater harvested-6, direct rain water-7, Pond-8, Open well-9, Any other, specify-----10)

**Section V: Idea on witchcraft**

1. Have you heard about witchcraft (yes-1, No-2) ?

2. If yes, do you believe on witches (yes-1, No-2) ?

2a. How do you believe? Explain ?

.....

.....

.....

.....

3. If you believe, what type of effects you visualize due to witchcraft ?

Sl. No.	(Yes-1, No-2)
1. Health problem	
2. Crop failure	
3. Bad dream	
4. Death at young age	
5. Death of a cow or a buffalo.	
6. Paddy crop that was destroyed in a fire	
7. Stubborn illnesses	
8. A stroke of bad luck	

9. Drying up of wells	
10. Inability to give birth to a son	
11. Sudden storms on the lake	
12. Sudden death of a healthy person	
13. Miscarriages and infertility	
14. Drought or flood	
15. Death from snake bite	
16. Dog bite	
17. Psychological (mental) disorder	

4. Do you believe in the fact that children of witch families were taught by their parents or relatives?

(Yes-1, No-2)

5. Do your household member fall ill during last five year ? (Yes-1, No-2)

6. If yes, where you have treated?

(government doctors-1, private doctors-2, Medicine shop-3, ogha-4, tantric-5, Other-6.....)

7. If you have treated through ojha or tantric, why?

(most of the time the government medicine is not working as witch attack is common-1, treated by the doctor a lot of time but is not cure-2, use both medicine by doctor and ogha-3, Other-4 (specify.....))

8. Normally what is the symbol to identify witch attack ?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

9. Is there any special occasions when the witch normally attacks ?

.....

10. Do you think during durga puja or kali puja or any special occasion the witch dance in the mid night (Yes-1, No-2) ?

10a. If in any special occasion the witch dance then what is the occasion ?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

11. Do you put kajal in the eye of children ? (Yes-1, No-2)

11a. If yes, why?

(Prevent witch attack-1, medically good-2, child looking nice-3, Other (specify)-4 .....  
.....)

12. Do you think the witch displace tree (pepal or other)? (In hindi it is called Pad (tree) hankna in bihar)? (Yes-1, No-2)

13. Do you also believer of reincarnation of witches (yes-1, No-2) ?

14: Is it also believe that the witch scarifies one of his/her favorite (like death husband, elder son etc ) (yes-1, No-2) ?

15. Do you think that the witches are from a specific caste/tribe (yes-1, No-2) ?

16. If yes, from which caste/tribe the witch belonged to ?  
.....

17. During last 10 years how many witch related violence in happened in your village ?

18. If yes what type of violence occurred against witches ?

(beat up-1, forced to consume human excreta/urine-2, paraded naked-3, physically abused, ostracized and driven from their homes-4, mob lynching, gang rape-5, blackening of face-6, shaving of head-7, locked her in a dark room-8, pull my nails out-9, strings of shoes hung around their necks-10, social stigma, displacement, economic boycott-11, Physically injured (Noses cut or pull out teeth)-12, Other (specify).....-13)

**Section VI: Incidence of witch Attack within the household**

1. Do you recall any incidence of witchcraft in your household/relatives/neighbour ?

(Yes-1, No-2, Don't believe in witchcraft-3)

2. Who is the affected person

(Son/daughter below 5 years-1, son between 6-15 yr-2, Daughter between 6-15 year-3, Adult male between 15-60 years-4, Adult female between 15-60 years-5, Widow-6,old male/female-7, Newly married female-8, Other (specify)-9.....)

3. If yes, what are the different activity or symbol from which you identify the witch attack?

(Cutting sign of used saree of newly married female-1, cut in hair-2, black spot in body-3, uncontrolled talking or laughing or unnatural activity of a person-4)

4. If your option is 4 please give details

.....  
.....

5. When you doubt about witch attack what you do?

(going to ogha for medicine/ tabij/daunria-1, request ogha to identify the witch-2, request the ogha to perform puja (giving llocal wine, hen, rupees)-3, Chanting mantra in front of the affected-4, Jhar and funk-5, Other-6 (Specify.....))

6. Do the ojha perform any physical activity in the affected person? (Yes-1, No-2)

7. If yes how ?

(pouring turmeric in the affected-1, pouring oil in ear-2, giving some he the harbal to eat-3,

Other (specify)-4.....)

8. How do the ojha perform the puja ?

.....  
.....  
.....

9. Has the ojha identify the witch ? (Yes-1, No-2)

10. If yes, who is the witch ?

(Adult male between 15-60 years-1, Adult female between 15-60 years-2, Widow-3, widower-4, old female-5, old male-6, separated female-7, Newly married female-8, with no family members-9, infertile women-10, single women-11, Ugly looking female-12, Other (specify)-13

..... ,

11. Caste of witch.....12. Age of witch.....

13. Economic status of witch

(Very poor-1, Poor-2, Moderate-3, rich-4, Very rich-5)

14. What type of action you have taken on identified witch

(Cut off relation with witch and its family-1, Verbally abuse the witch and its family-2, Complain to wardmember or samaj against the witch or witch family-3, Physically beat the witch or witch family-4, socially discarded witch family-5, forced the witch to come to puja done by ojha-6, Other (specify)-7.....)

15. If any physical violence was there what type of action you or your supporter taken

.....

16. Beside health problem or unnatural death in the household, can you recall any incidence, which you think due to witch (Yes-1, No-2) ?

17. If yes, what type of incidence you think ?

.....

.....

**Section VII: If you don't believe on witches**

1. Do you think that witch activity is a social evil ? (Yes-1, No-2)

2. If you do not believe on witch, than why there is witch activity ?

--	--

(1-upper caste members take pride in stigmatizing women of lower or Dalit classes to maintain their 'superiority', 2-Women who dare to protest and speak up against the social hegemonic structures are also targeted as dayan, to take away the movable or immovable property-3, for sexual favor-4, this the a way to take revenge on property or other dispute-5, Other (specify)-6 .....)

3. Please explain in detail the answer to question no 2.

.....  
.....  
.....

4. Do you think the ignorance and underdevelopment of scientific temper in the village or region is the main reason for such witch felling? (Yes-1, No-2)

5. Do you think witch-hunting has become a customary practice, glorified by the upper castes 'witch doctors'? (Yes-1, No-2)

6. Do you agree with the following statement (Agree-1, Disagree-2, Don't Know-3)

'The dominant and powerful in such areas eye on the property (if any) owned by the weakest and most vulnerable persons in their community. Upon categorizing them as 'daayan', and causing their ostracism from the village or compelling them to leave their residence, it becomes easier for them to forcibly acquire and hawk on the relinquished property'.

7. Do you think local ojha has accepted a bribe to name a woman as a witch ? (1-yes, 2-no)

8. If you think that witch craft is a social evil, how can it rectify?

(Educate people and tell them how this is practiced-1, spread awareness against witchcraft-2, plays to create awareness-3, organising street plays and puppet shows-4, Launching of campaigns against superstition and witch-hunting practices-5, organizing padyatras-6 public awareness meetings against through combined efforts of government, administration, voluntary organizations, schools-7, Strong action against culprits including who initiate violence, ojha etc-8, Other (specify)-9

.....

**Section VIII: Legal Awareness**

1. Do you aware about the law against anybody practicing witch craft (Yes-1, No-2) ?

2. If yes what is the law ?

.....

3. How you rate the police action when there is witch violence ?

(not at all effective as police don't easily register FIR-1, not effective as many a time the affected person not want to formally registered case as the culprits dominate-2, Many a time police try to negotiate and compromised due to influence of dominate people-3, effective as there is prompt police action-4, other (specify)-5.....

4. If you know the legal system, do you think that the punishment and fine is too low which again encourage the culprits to repeat the same offence ? (Yes-1, No-2)

5. Do you aware that the Government has a law, which prohibits anybody practicing witchcraft ? (Yes-1, No-2)

6. Do you think that the victims in such cases have little or no access to law or police, mainly because of their social, geographical and educational background, which makes it difficult for them to attain justice.(Yes-1, No-2)

7. Do you agree with the fact that this crime is socially manifested, out of either fear or acceptance of the practice, people prefer remaining silent, which makes collection of evidence for investigation difficult.

**Section IX: Remedies**

1. Can you recall any awareness meeting in your village organized by your local leaders/NGO personnels or any women group? .(Yes-1, No-2)

2. If yes, who organized? (NGO-1, Religious leader-2, political leaders-3, SHGs-4, Other women groups-5, Social workers-6, Other Specify-7..... )

3. What type of awareness generated by the leaders/organization ?

(About the legal right of women-1, community mobilization through education-2, support dialogue between members and ojha or tantric-3, Negotiation between witch family and affected family-4

4. Do you think follow-up of awareness generation regarding legal rights of monitoring of witch evidences/cases regarding witch related violence plays important role in reducing such incidence ? (Yes-1, No-2)

5. Do you think to child and family welfare services from government is important in reducing witch related violence ? (yes-1, No-2)

6. Do you think promote the role of health professionals in protecting women accused of witchcraft? (Yes-1, No-2)

7. Do you think social protection to strengthen vulnerable families (like schemes PDS, MGNREGA, old age pension, widow pension etc helpful in reducing witch related activity ? (Yes-1, No-2)

8. To solve, which are the important factors? (three most important)

--	--	--

(Efficient health delivery-1, schooling facility (opening more school)-2, Providing safe source of drinking water-3, sanitation (toilet)-4, transport facilities-5, providing information in remote areas-6, Good road network-7, regular electricity-8, Regular employment through government programme-9, Government loan facility-10, old age/widow/handicap pension-11, Indira Avas-12)

**Section X: Any Findings or Suggestion from Investigators**

Note1: For any identified witch this household schedule has to be field but the identity number of the identified witch household has to be repeated in case study of witch)

Note 2: It is also requested to all investigators to write their own experience that may very much helpful in writing report.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....