



# Witch Hunting in India: A Socio Legal Perspective of Gendered Violence

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**Abstract:** Witchcraft and the practice of witch-hunting have been documented throughout history, whether it be in the prehistoric, mediaeval, contemporary, or industrial eras. Witch-hunting is often regarded as a social menace that is gradually spreading to other locations. In the Indian context, the practice has continued to thrive and is widespread across several states. This is partly due to the deep-rooted patriarchal norms and embedded superstitious beliefs that have been internalized within social structure, making it exceptionally challenging for women to get significance or status comparable to men. Killing in the name of witchcraft is where people-particularly women, are declared as witches said to possess supernatural powers to control others or cause diseases and death, and are then lynched, thrashed, or sexually assaulted across countries. Witch-Hunting is arguably among the most cruellest forms of gender-based violence in India, often resulting in severe torture and murder of those presumed to be witches. Thus this study looks at the historical perspectives of witch-hunting globally as well its specific evolution in Indian context. It also highlights the urgent need for stringent legal frameworks to monitor and prevent witch hunting across the country.

**Keywords:** Witch hunting; Gender hegemony; Women Rights; Superstitions; Gender based Violence

## 1. Introduction

Witchcraft became the dominating occult activity among the numerous black magic techniques, and it was usually blamed for adverse situations such as disease, physical deformities, starvation, failing crops, deaths, and other negative results.

It is spiritual, divinatory, and mystic in nature, and it has existed in almost every human community on the world since the beginning of human history, with a social framework that incorporates regard for supernatural realms. Although it is commonly used synonymously with black magic witchcraft, it also encompasses divination, spell casting, sorcery, enchantment, necromancy, shamanism, demonology, and mysticism. It is essentially described as the technique of summoning supernatural forces for evil intentions using certain rites and procedures.

Considered to be related with destructive actions and antithetical to the commonly accepted humanitarian purposes of religion, it is viewed as one of the techniques used by evil to carry out its mission of causing harm. Witchcraft is usually seen as a “wicked” discipline, with a bleak perspective due to its alleged malignant objectives. People associated with witchcraft practice are believed to cause undesirable repercussions or bring about harmful outcomes and are often less socially acceptable. Witchcraft has been historically portrayed, documented, and is widely assumed to be practiced mostly by women.

Trials and hunts have historically been utilized as socially sanctioned means of eradicating antisocial, maliciously motivated witches from society. Witchcraft has been traditionally established as a commonly practiced societal evil due to ignorance and out-dated belief systems. Witchcraft is believed to involve black magic or sorcery, when bad spirits are summoned via rituals as agents of the devil or unclean souls according to religious scriptures. Witchcraft was often practiced in ancient and medieval European and American societies, as extensively recorded.

Historically, witchcraft has been predominantly associated with gender, and all most all crimes connected to witchcraft have targeted women. The term “witch” typically has a negative and stigmatising connotation which symbolizes something catastrophic, ruinous, or gruesome. (Iqbal, M.2015). Understanding the implications of being called a witch is crucial. Due to its strong association with femininity, its more commonly accepted as ‘witchcraft’ rather than its masculine equivalent, wizardcraft or wizardry. Women who practice this skill are usually portrayed as menacing and frightening individuals, often shown carrying broomsticks and performing evil deeds. These women are accused of causing harm and are subjected to trial, labelled as witches, persecuted, exiled, whipped, sexually assaulted, burned at the stake and, in most instances, brutally killed. While males have also been victims of witch hunts, women have remained the primary targets of such accusations. Thousands of women were believed to have been killed and subjected to torture as witches in

Europe until the seventeenth century, often by burning in public or by other violent punishments.

Witchcraft and witch hunts are common in India, with the techniques and reasons varying throughout time and place. Individuals engage in witchcraft to protect themselves from harmful influences and attain eternal life, riches, health, and other fantastical objectives. Witch hunting incidents mostly take place in rural and in secluded areas of states across central and north-eastern India, which are known for their thick forests and abundant mineral deposits, although they face challenges such as a poorly developed economy, limited access basic amenities of life. These regions are mostly occupied by indigenous forest communities engaged in conflicts with law enforcement agencies, special task forces, and corporate entities over access to forest resources and the protection of fundamental human rights. In these areas, witchcraft is known by several names such as banamati, 'evil eye', dayan, chudail, bhootni, and others.

It is dominant in economically disadvantaged groups with strong superstitious beliefs, where misfortunes such as relocation, crop loss, and epidemic, sudden inexplicable deaths of children or relatives are sometimes blamed to an evil 'witch'. The victims primarily consist of middle-aged widows, elderly ladies, single women, or isolated women who have been bereaved by their spouse's passing. In undeveloped communities with little access to healthcare and education, witch hunts are primarily led by a local ojha, a tantrik, or sorcerer, together with a priest, taking advantage of the lack of scientific knowledge.

The practice includes suspicion of women's autonomy and sexuality, and limited access to education and health services. These factors have all played a role in continuing the out-dated practice of labelling women as witches. At times, women may experience severe forms of violence such as having their hair cut off, teeth taken out, body parts removed, social isolation, confiscation of land and property, and in extreme circumstances, execution and amputation of limbs. Genuine equality is achieved, and such equality cannot exist as long as violence and the fear of violence continues to shape women's life.

### **1.1. Global Trends and Indian realities: Historical perspectives on witch hunting**

The practice of witch-hunting dates back to ancient times. Witch-hunts in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America typically took place between 1450 and

1750, with an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 killings. Witch-hunting was prevalent in Germany and other parts of Europe, as well as in America during the early pilgrim period (1450-1750). The Salem witch trial, held in Massachusetts in 1690, marked the beginning of witch-hunting in America. During Queen Elizabeth's reign in England, three major proclamations were organised to combat witchcraft.. "Agnes Waterhouse" was the primary lady to be hanged for witchcraft in England in the well-known trial of "The Chelmsford Witches"(PLD,2014).Between 1581 and 1593, 368 persons, including inhabitants, judges and officials were hanged during the "Trier witch trials" in Europe, making it a watershed moment in history of witch hunting .(Diva Rai,2020)

Historically, clergy and municipal officials were responsible for documenting and investigating witch hunts. In Indian context, early colonial exhibitions and records aimed to engage and empower poor individuals in India's pioneering area. Several historical writings also highlight the prevalence of witch hunting along with archival evidence, administrative notes by British officers, local newspapers, and letters to kings, official announcements, tales, books, and historical documents. The British aim to distinguish national customs and traditions to strengthen their control In contrast, local communities or "Gentiles" viewed black magic as an imagined or exaggerated threat in their region. In tribal cultures, hunting witches to ward off evil practices is a common activity.

During the post-seventeenth century, East India Company's decline led to a breakdown in local administrative and customary laws. After this period, the proponents of the witch-hunting movement attempted to foster individual opposition and the rising popularity of materialism, which contributed to the frequent occurrence of witch hunts. However, English courts are hesitant to use genuine and trustworthy evidence, such as black magic and supernatural abilities. (Shamsher Alam & Aditya Raj,2017). The Chhotanagpur area was home to the Santhals, a courageous and an adventurous tribe. Within their society, witches had a significant role where they were both feared as well as expected to be despised. As a result, the accusations were often limited to persons with magical backgrounds and suspected witches. The tribes took action against those who accused of witchcraft or against local healers believed to operate under British influence. For the Adivasi people, believed that eradicating witches was the solution to their problems thereby restoring harmony.

Some people in India, particularly in cities, believe witchcraft and black sorcery are being practiced today. On the one side, people may seek advice from witches

about health, finances, or relationships. However, women are often suspected for witchcraft, leading to assaults and even deaths.<sup>13</sup> Widows and divorcees often face property disputes. “Apparently, venerated town witch-specialists are paid to mark explicit people as witches, allowing them to be killed without consequence.” Current laws are deemed ineffective in reducing homicide rates. “In June 2013, National Commission for Women (NCW) detailed that as per National Crime Records Bureau insights, 768 ladies had been killed for purportedly rehearsing witchcraft beginning around 2008 and reported designs for newer laws.”

Currently, witch-hunts mostly target the financially vulnerable and marginalised members of society. Additionally, it was seen that family members participated in these behaviours for social purification. Witchcraft has been associated with ethics, neo-agnosticism, shamanism, and traditional healing practices. According to the NCRB data, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Odisha have recorded the highest number of deaths related to witch hunting in the past years, with each state accounting over 400 fatalities. Besides India, global patterns show somewhat similar trends; Children in Sub-Saharan Africa have suffered violence related to witchcraft accusations for over three centuries, reflecting deep historical roots in such practices. Research indicates that witchcraft-related incidents are more common in locations with larger ancestral populations, compared to other populations.

In those countries where there is limited access to education and healthcare and are economically underdeveloped this practice is widely prevalent. In the Indian context, National Crimes Record Bureau indicate that 2,391 witch-hunting-related homicides or blameable manslaughters were reported between 1999 and 2013.

## 2. Literature Review

Witchcraft belief is a social phenomenon embedded in cultural and structural system rather than isolated irrational notions. There are many studies across the world providing theoretical foundation for understanding witch hunting not merely as a superstition but as an adaptive mechanism to insecurity, social stress and structural tensions. Various anthropological studies throw light to deeply tied social relations to community functioning, conflict management and the maintenance of social norms.

Evans-Pritchard’s (1935) study of Azanda shows that witchcraft becomes a pervasive explanatory framework for misfortune, shaping social behaviour and enabling mechanism of conflict resolutions. In African societies, the belief

in witchcraft thus reflects how belief system acts as a clear cultural logistics that structure everyday interactions. Among Navajo people mainly in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, Kluckhohn's (1944) work reveals that witchcraft beliefs are culturally embedded and adaptive, which help the people to manage anxiety, aggression and intragroup tensions. It functions as provider of psychological relief offering a means of social control and norm reinforcement.

After review of anthropological studies which shows witchcraft as a culturally grounded and socially meaningful system, it will be interesting to examine the global patterns which manifest broader social and structural phenomenon across various societies.

Throughout history across different societies, witch-hunting persisted as it is a practice deeply tied to cultural system rather than personal superstition. As similar socio cultural factors contribute to witch hunting it becomes necessary to examine the specific determinants that shape witch hunting practices in India.

Research on witchcraft in India focus mainly in deep rooted superstition, patriarchal norms and existing socio economic discriminations. Reports of witch-hunting incidents surface frequently, highlighting the brutal violence inflicted upon alleged witches and continue to be one to the significant issues in rural India. Women, particularly those from marginalized communities, are often targeted as witches due to jealousy, land disputes, or as scapegoats for natural calamities and diseases. Moreover, the lack of education and awareness in rural areas exacerbates these superstitions, leading to widespread fear and paranoia. It's more predominant among tribal communities in regions such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha where indigenous beliefs and practices blend with contemporary vulnerabilities. Witch hunting incident often related to alleged witches, mostly women victims subjected to physical assaults, torture, public executions and even death. This issue of witch hunting in India is often overlooked, with political apathy, police casualness, media underreporting, and limited sensitization at school and institutional levels, creating an environment where human rights violations remains neglected. (Meena, Kumari., Shamsher, Alam. 2021)

Contemporary research in witchcraft practices highlights the intersectionality of identities within Dalit and Adivasi traditions (Jolanda, Brunnekreef.2023). The practice of witchcraft and belief in witches has been prevalent in India since ancient times, with references found in folk literature and cultural traditions (Tanvi, Yadav2020). The caste system and Brahmanical patriarchy play a significant role in perpetuating

witch hunting, as they seek to control resources and maintain caste hierarchy by inflicting violence on Dalit women. Witch doctors, shamans and traditional healers contribute in reinforcing fear and legitimising accusations, especially in communities with limited access to education and health care. Overcoming witch hunting requires not only social change but also the abolition of the caste system, gender hierarchy, and economic inequality. Though these socio cultural determinants explain the background of witch hunting, patterns of accusation need to be studied by considering gender, caste and economic power intersect. This underlines the need focuses on intersectionality which is addressed in the following section.

The lived experiences of Dalits and Adivasis provide a complex intersectional power structures that contribute to the occurrence of witchcraft. Marvin Harris argues that witchcraft practices stem from concrete social and economic conditions, a notion supported by the review of contemporary research on witchcraft in India. Researchers recognize the importance of intersectionality in understanding witchcraft, with some introducing terms like ‘witch crafting’ to emphasize the organic and intersectional cultural practices underlying witchcraft, which are often seen as subversive and reflective of the struggles of most vulnerable groups.

Witchcraft accusations in India’s tea plantation areas, such as the Dooars region in West Bengal, target women due to the belief in the existence of witches and the association of witch images with females. Tribal women in these areas hold lower positions than men, making them vulnerable during witch hunts. The tea plantation labourers, predominantly from neighbouring tribal areas, face harsh living conditions, lack of modern health facilities, and dependence on traditional medicine. Belief in witches and spirits is deeply.

Witch-hunting in Assam is a socially sanctioned violence that results in deaths, injuries, and miseries. Official records suggest 196 cases of violence between 1989-2014, but newspaper reports and other agencies indicate a higher number of incidents. Factors contributing to witch-hunting include limited accessibility, strong superstitious beliefs and the role of Ojhas who are known as traditional medicine men, and plays a key role. Labelling as a witch can be based on transgression, non-conformity, difference, assertiveness, and characteristics that set the victim apart as different or transgressive. Attribution of illness or death to the victim, especially if they share physical and familial proximity with instigators’ family, further fuels the targeting. Victims are accused of causing diseases and death among the villagers, leading to their banishment or killing. (Lekha, Borah., Madhushree, Das. 2019).

Witch-hunting in Nepal and India is primarily driven by superstition, belief in witchcraft, and the influence of shamans and witch-doctors on illiterate communities. (Rachana, Shrestha. 2009). Patriarchal control over resources, discrimination, and exploitation contribute to women's subordination. Despite being members of the United Nations and ratifying global human rights instruments, both countries face alarming levels of human rights violations, including witch-hunting. The absence of specific laws addressing this issue highlights the need to address violence against women at multiple levels. Witch-hunting is a form of violence against women that transcends nationality, race, religion, and economic status. It is crucial to understand the immediate and structural factors behind branding women as witches to develop effective strategies for prevention and intervention. Witchcraft has been a long-standing belief and practice, predominantly associated with women, leading to their persecution and violence.

Women from marginalized, poor, ethnic, tribal, and widowed communities are often targeted. Violence against women in both countries is rooted in structural, cultural, and individual levels. Patriarchal control over resources, discrimination, and exploitation contribute to women's subordination. Witch-hunting among indigenous peoples in peninsular India is a phenomenon that occurs in various contexts, including struggles over domination in rituals and contestation over land, property, and new forms of accumulation. Witch-hunting has significant impacts on investment and accumulation within households, leading to restrictions or hiding of wealth. The literature on witch-hunting tends to focus on anthropological perspectives, but it is important to consider how those involved perceive these institutions. Witch-hunting is linked to the transition from subsistence to an accumulating economy, with potential impacts on economic well-being and gender relations. Accusations of witchcraft target both those who do well economically and those who fare poorly, creating a cycle of accusations and counter-accusations. (Dev, Nathan. Govind, Kelkar, Shivani, Satija. 2013). Witch-hunting remains a pervasive and deeply troubling phenomenon in India, fueled by centuries-old superstitions and socio-cultural dynamics. Efforts to combat witch-hunting require a multi-faceted approach, addressing both the immediate manifestations of violence and the underlying socio-economic factors. Continued research, advocacy, and community engagement are essential in challenging the entrenched beliefs and practices that perpetuate witch-hunting in India.

## ***2.1. Statement of Problem***

With hunting still prevails in many parts of the world, irrespective of social and legal reforms, and India is not an exception to this. It exists as a brutal form of superstition and reflects an oppressive system of culture and religion, deeply ingrained in society and shaped by patriarchy and is more commonly seen in rural regions. This is a form of gender-based violence that targets mostly women, particularly elderly, single or economically vulnerable women, usually labelled as witches for extraordinary or superstitious reasons that range from crop failures, unnatural deaths in that particular region, community rifts, or even or illness. Though it is often justified as a natural response to misfortune, gendered power relations and the influence of witch doctors, whose actions reinforce these accusations, play a significant role. Intolerance and rising crime rates often emerge as consequences of such belief systems. One such evil continues due to inflexible cultural norm is witch hunting. It is therefore important to analyse the phenomenon of witch hunting through existing case studies, starting from historical roots and extending to global trends. The lack of specialised legislation to curb this social evil is one of the reasons for its continuous occurrence.

In addition, cultural and other factors like lack of awareness about legal frameworks, including criminal and state specific laws, make these legislations ineffective in preventing such evils, further placing justice out of reach for victims. Besides these, limited access to education along with regional disparities contributes to the incidence, repetition and spread of witch hunting. Lack of awareness create an environment where harmful beliefs and superstitions thrive, making this gender biased violence appear quite normalised. Witch hunting in this context reflects issues of broader inequality and human rights violations, primarily gender biased violence, which is a socio legal problem. Understanding and addressing the causes of witch hunting is crucial for protecting human rights and promoting a more just and equitable society. There is a significant need to study witch hunting from a historical perspective by exploring socio cultural as well as economic factor contributing to its existence. An attempt is also made to analyse the existing laws and its effectiveness in implementing preventing measures in India

## ***2.2. Objectives***

- (a) To examine the practice of witch hunting from a historical perspective and to study its current status and regional patterns in India.

- (b) To analyze the socio-cultural, economic factors contributing to witch-hunting and to study the effectiveness of legal provisions in addressing the issue.

### 3. Witch-Hunting in India : An Overview

A witch hunt is a quest to find witches marked by moral panic and hysteria. Witchcraft is banned and considered a felony in Great Britain. An estimated 40,000 to 10,000 executions took place. Throughout history, various manifestations of witchcraft belief, such as calamities, sickness, mortality, and crop failure, have been observed. Such beliefs persist in many parts of the world today. Witchcraft in Western culture is based on restrictions from the Old Testament that prohibit it. The Bible verse Exod 22:18 says, “You shall not allow a witch to live.” The concept of witchcraft spread across Europe and is commonly perceived negatively, with Satan being revered over God. Witch-hunting proliferated in the 15th and 16th centuries once the church gained legal jurisdiction over behaviour. Witches were traditionally shown as wicked Halloween characters, often portrayed with wart-noses, pointed hats, and flying on broomsticks with a smile.

Historically, witches engaged in witchcraft by using magic and calling demons to assist them or do damage and activities involving supernatural power, utilized to address concerns and uncertainties by manipulating natural forces to avert disasters and misfortunes. The *Malleus Maleficarum* details the presence and prosecution of witches. Approximately 100,000 individuals were killed in Germany. During that era, prevalent customs included ‘sin-eaters’ and ‘whipping boys’. Witches were held responsible for disasters and unfavourable events in the hamlet or society. Various tragedies, such as decreased agricultural yields, spoiled beer, unsuitable marriages, and children crying constantly, were interpreted as signs of witches engaging in demonic activity.

The term “witchcraft” originates from the Old English word “wicca,” meaning witch, and “craft,” which refers to ability or aptitude, as per the *Beliefs and Practices of Witchcraft*. Discussing witchcraft in broad terms is challenging because of the many meanings and implications that arise from differences in places, customs, and behaviours. Witches are typically described as those who use magical powers or non-physical methods to impact or harm others. Moreover, power dynamics between witches and those who label them suggest that women who are unmarried, widowed, impoverished, or physically disabled are often stigmatized as witches. It gained prominence throughout the early modern period when the church-imposed

punishments for such acts. Witches are individuals with exceptional or inexplicable capabilities for carrying out malevolent deeds.

The first individual mentioned possesses the ability to cast spells, harm others by manipulating nature, and bring them misfortune. Jealousy, wealth, and physical appeal are occasionally associated with witches, prompting people to cause damage or injury to others. Secondly, witches are thought to acquire their supernatural abilities by having sexual relations with corrupted individuals or supernatural entities, such as 'the devil'. Lastly, another group of witches obtain their magical knowledge through religious rituals, which they then transmit to their offspring. Witches have the ability to transform into animals like bats, black panthers, and several other species. They might potentially damage neonates by having sexual intercourse with a mother who is menstruating. persons who practice mystical harm often employ magic or supernatural forces to harm or destroy others. This includes werewolves, malevolent witches, persons who transmit disease via gazing, and those who secretly use voodoo dolls. Magic encompasses the use of spells and religious ceremonies to achieve desired outcomes such as curing individuals and reducing illness. Witch hunting has a long history, with women being accused of witchcraft more frequently than men, often being associated with terms like Dayan and Chudail, which relate to feminine paranormal entities.

### ***3.1. Witch Trials***

The adverse social and economic conditions of the 14th century, referred to as the Middle Ages, led to several unforeseen events associated with the initiation of the witch hunt and trials. The book "Malleus Maleficarum" portrays men as intellectually and ethically inferior to women, while attributing many calamities including diseases, harsh weather, and crop failures on women who engage in witchcraft. Initially, the witch hunt targeted older women with physical limitations as victims. During the witch trials, the notion of witchcraft evolved significantly, with wise or experienced women being initially labelled as 'wizards' and then as 'witches', believed to be associates of Satan or the Devil. Witches are often used as scapegoats, typically women. They are often subjected to torture, especially old women with red eyes, killed, beaten, and sometimes burned alive in a big fire. It is believed that witches bear a mark or symbol of the Devil on their bodies. During the witch trials, these signs were carefully scrutinized to see if they had a foot injury or a bump (horn) on their forehead. This indication will serve as proof of their

collaboration with the devil, as horns are considered to be one of the Devil's primary traits or symbols. Branded witches have their hair cut off and their skins pierced with needles or pins during this procedure. If these techniques are unsuccessful, the officer will resort to torturing the individuals by extracting their nails or toes and applying a hot red iron to their chest

In ancient Greece, a scapegoat was a human, not an animal, who was usually killed or brutally tortured to prevent starvation or sickness from impacting society. Chosen persons typically come from marginalized populations or have a criminal background. Additionally, they are frequently killed by physical violence due to crop failure and their incapacity to reproduce independently. Sacrifice is mostly intended to enhance the strength of the existing vegetation. Women are often charged with witchcraft based on unfounded mystical beliefs. The suspected women are mostly caused by death, sickness, material loss, and aggressive activity among community members. The witch doctor (Ojhas) identifies the witches, who are then subjected to horrific torture including being forced to consume human excreta, physical violence, burning, and coerced rape, ultimately leading to the death of the accused individual. The greedy witch doctor, known as 'Ojhas', aims to sow discord among villages and falsely accuse someone of being a witch to extort large sums from the community for personal gain.

According to present-day research, it has been observed that throughout the last two decades, a total of over 3000 Indian women have lost their lives due to allegations of witchcraft. Vernon asserts that witch-hunts mostly occur among impoverished rural communities characterised by limited educational and healthcare resources, as well as entrenched beliefs in witchcraft. Furthermore, he highlights that among these groups, the responsibility for an individual's illness or sickness is not attributed to a virus or crop illnesses, but rather to a claimed witch. The persistence of witchcraft within the rural culture of India is readily apparent. Ostracism and severe violence against women suspected of witchcraft are prevalent in the villages of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, some areas of West Bengal, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Assam, and other North Eastern states. The pursuit of witches or proof of witchcraft often included a combination of moral panic, widespread hysteria, and lynching, as seen in several European locations, with legal deliberations conducted during trials. The prevailing belief posited that the potency of witchcraft is attributed to a hereditary or inherent material situated inside the abdominal region.

## 4. Socio-Cultural Factors influencing Witch-Hunts

### 4.1. Superstition and Custom

Customs, on the other hand, are traditional practices or behaviours that are widely accepted within a society, whereas Superstitions are beliefs or practices that are considered irrational or supernatural. In many cases, superstitions evolve into customs over time as they become deeply ingrained in a culture. For example, a superstition about avoiding certain actions on a specific day might eventually become a custom that is followed without question. Customs can also give rise to superstitions. When a custom is practiced for generations without a clear explanation, superstitions may develop to provide a rationale for the custom's continuation.

Over time, these superstitions can become so deeply embedded in the culture that they are accepted as truths. Why are witches considered evil and Ojhas good when both use magical powers? Why are witches mostly female? The answers to all of these queries are superstitions and conventions. Superstition is a significant component in witch-hunting. This superstition had been employed to prevent women from crossing the line, they were labelled as witches and punished accordingly. Superstition empowers Ojha. Superstition has the capacity to raise people even though, in the majority of cases, they lack the educational credentials to heal medical ailments. Even though witches and Ojha have comparable powers, norms dictate that Ojha will always use his power to benefit communities, while witches will use it to harm others. Power groups use this superstition to their advantage. The individuals who conduct witch hunts really believe that witches exist. They don't understand why the rainfall pattern has changed or why someone died while being taken to Ojha. When they don't grasp what's going on, they resort to magic, a belief they've had since childhood.

Beliefs are deeply ingrained in their emotions, leading them to seek for Ojha, Jhakri, or Lama initially. Some illnesses are believed to be beyond the treatment capabilities of modern professionals and need individuals to seek the assistance of traditional healers known as Ojhas. Ojha attributes underlying causes and tragedies to malicious spirits and supernatural forces due to a lack of appropriate medical knowledge, without any evidence. Some people consider them as a deity and gives him so much respect and money as well. Women who acted against or fought them were thought to be possessed or witches due to their out-of-character behaviour. Changing people's beliefs will take time, but education and addressing poverty and underdevelopment can help.

## *4.2. Witch-Hunt and Patriarchy*

Many individuals, especially women, faced accusations of witchcraft throughout the early modern period in European history. Several witch trials occurred in different Christian courts around Europe, resulting in half of the accused individuals being killed or hanged. European institutions were considered significant judicial authorities responsible for overseeing and adjusting an individual's behaviour in terms of what is proper and wrong. Certain witch trials were so extensive and frightening that the whole village became frightened. The significant changes in productive forces led to a major cause of witch trials or witch-hunts in early modern Europe. There was definitely intense witch-hunting at a period of extreme poverty. The rapid population growth of Europeans was the main cause of the unfortunate surge in witch accusations. The poorest and most vulnerable individuals were affected first, followed by wealthier people who became the major targets of witchcraft. Miguel's (2005) research on Poverty and Witch Killing aims to connect certain environmental calamities with witchcraft by examining the Sukuma ethnic group in rural parts of Tanzania. This community has a robust religious belief in witchcraft, leading to the practice of hunting witches. The study aims to examine the correlation between variations in rainfall patterns leading to drought or flood and instances of witch murder and death. Miguel demonstrated a correlation between excessive rainfall leading to agricultural failures and the savage killings of witches by their own family and neighbours, with a higher number of victims being elderly women.<sup>25</sup> The study primarily examined the economic reasons for crimes committed against victims to demonstrate how financial crises may lead to violent crime, including religious violence. Bever (2002) studied the connection between women and witchcraft in early modern society by analysing historical records and papers from the Duchy of Wallenberg. The study also included an investigation of the consistent portrayal of evil supernatural abilities linked to witchcraft. He stressed that the women accused of witchcraft were not marginalized, impoverished, or single, but rather married individuals belonging to a certain group or society

Witch-hunting accusations arose due to a dispute between poor elderly widows and affluent women from other regions. Wealthy women have been accused by less fortunate neighbours or community members, as well as by a majority of others in comparable circumstances. Disputes usually involved business matters, but might also stem from a significant mutual disagreement. A fractured human connection or relationship might serve as the foundation for an accusation of witchcraft.

Many of the women accused of witchcraft in New England either had inherited property or were in line to receive it. Consequently, property played a crucial role in the accusations made during witch-hunts.<sup>27</sup> Both women and children are equally vulnerable to being accused of witchcraft due to their social and economic disadvantages. When resources are limited, their families and communities may not be able to support them. This issue is particularly crucial when a woman is estranged from her biological link and the child is vulnerable due to the loss of one or both parents. Wealthy individuals in impoverished environments tend to prioritize their own well-being over assisting those in need, despite cultural and religious expectations of reciprocal support, resulting in limited opportunities to benefit the less fortunate. Allegations of witchcraft in this context might result in more challenging or strained relationships.

Many young individuals in many African nations are being charged with practicing witchcraft. Children are subjected to physical violence, murder, and forced eviction from their communities and residences. It describes McVeigh's challenges in reporting from Nigeria. Mary's mother administered poison on the young girl's neck. Her mother cautioned her that if she survived the poisoning, she would face the threat of barbed wire. Her mother poured scorching boiling water and caustic soda on her head and body, while her father threw his daughter into a field. Men were granted legal authority to control women's deeply rooted rebellious behaviour through patriarchal power. In 2002, Fischer recorded an event in North Carolina in 1697 where colonist women were attacked for violating their husband's property rights. He found that women who defied traditional gender standards faced certain types of public attacks and shame.

Challenging patriarchal advantages in public is seen as a threat to the social order or structure. Violence against women by men is a widespread issue that impacts all religious and cultural groups in society. Religious holy texts sometimes associate ideas, aspirations, practices, and meanings with violence against women. There are certainly more unreported cases of personal and public violence against women. It affects women of all sorts, irrespective of their social, economic, or cultural background. Patriarchy is characterized by male supremacy and the subjugation of women in political, economic, and social structures. Witch-hunting is linked to patriarchal beliefs and opposition to women's property rights. Recent trends suggest that independent, assertive women who challenge the status quo are being singled out, suspected, and exposed to violence. Witch hunting is a methodical violation

of rights and a cruel act of violence against women, when the entire community or village enforces punishment on the accused.

Violence against women is rooted in structural patterns that are inherent to the evolution of capitalism and governmental power at all times. Capitalists established a patriarchal society and subjected women to abuse by labelling them as witches. Due to numerous cruel punishments and persecutions, women realized the need of being submissive, quiet, and conforming to cultural norms without resistance. According to British law, males were allowed to use physical force to regulate women's provocative and belligerent behaviour. The dominant power of males was seen essential for maintaining the social and political stability of the society. Witchcraft is a superstitious belief that manipulates women to limit their rights and privileges. Factors like illiteracy, inadequate health facilities, disease, property rights, lack of education, etc., may be major contributors to the belief in witchcraft. Witch hunting is said to focus on women who are widowed or isolated, and women who lack a male protector are more vulnerable, especially if they own land or property. Furthermore, ladies who had lost their husbands were often charged with practicing witchcraft. If the economic situation suddenly worsens and the danger comes from neighbours or family members, a label may be more probable. Witch hunting is a kind of abuse against women that violates their rights and diminishes their dignity. Men are indeed impacted by witchcraft and witch hunting rituals, albeit to a lesser extent than women. The Ministry of Home Affairs study states that Tanzania saw 1,551 fatalities connected to crimes against women from 1996 to September 1998, with 500 cases including the death of elderly women linked to witchcraft practices.<sup>29</sup> Women in male-dominated cultures have experienced many types of violence and oppression. Men try to exert aggression and cruelty over their spouses to uphold their power and control. No significant findings have been made in study on the topic of violence against women, which has mostly been ignored and not acknowledged. The cruelty and submissiveness of women are mostly a result of patriarchal institutions that required women to adhere to their husbands' wishes.

### ***4.3. Consequences of Witch-Hunting***

Victims of witch hunts face a variety of types of exploitation and humiliation, including beatings, killings, torture, rape, exclusion from society, and, finally, the execution of the accused. These kinds of ideas have detrimental repercussions. Some of the biggest societal repercussions include the following:

Human rights breaches stem from a witch hunt. Allegations of witchcraft infringe upon fundamental human rights. Crimes such as rape, murder, domestic violence, witch hunting, and other forms of violence infringe against women's rights in society. Witch hunts are a kind of gender-based violence that may happen in private and public settings. Witch hunts have a greater impact on women from lower castes and economically disadvantaged women, particularly those from tribal communities. Despite scientific advancements and development, the belief and practice of witch hunts persist in the Dooars areas of West Bengal. Although witch hunting is governed by law, some innocent individuals have been killed secretly without any notifications to the authorities. Consequently, witch hunting is a prevalent kind of human rights abuses. These habits must be eradicated from society since they endanger human lives. Every individual worldwide should be entitled to liberty, personal protection, and freedom from humiliation and torture without bias.

In every civilization, including India, women's standing is deteriorated in terms of respect and position. Gender and power are major factors in charges of witchcraft and violence. Women have always been under the authority of males in patriarchal countries, and those who fail to comply with patriarchal norms face different types of abuse and punishment. Women are more likely than men to be targeted in witch hunts because they are perceived to be weak socially, politically, and physically, making it simple to accuse women of witchcraft. According to the history of the Salim witch trials in 1692, the most of the allegations were made by women, with relatively few by men. Such ideas and labelling women as witches will always impede gender equality. As a result, women will constantly be in a low-status position in society, which will have an impact on future generations. Simply giving women the right to vote is insufficient; other issues of society must be addressed as well. It is a fact that

The fear of being accused of witch hunting leads to conflict and animosity among them. People keep social distance and desire independence due to mutual suspicion. Another consequence is isolation, Social exclusion and psychological affect. Accusations of witchcraft and torment result in sorrow, disappointment, and seclusion for the person. Victims are often excluded and isolated from society, and threats are used to prevent them from entering the communities. Witch hunts are considered forms of emotional and mental abuse that may profoundly affect the accused individual's psyche. Labelling women as witches has psychological, physical, and societal consequences.

Property conflicts are considered a main cause of witch hunts, leading to the accused women losing their means of living. Family has a vital political function in recognising witches and acquiring property rights. Witches usually focus on unmarried ladies and widows to get husbands' property rights or half shares of their brother's property. Due to patriarchal norms and the poor social position of women, they are prohibited from inheriting half of their husbands' or brothers' property. Consequently, women experience emotional and mental distress from their siblings and their husband's family, who intimidate them to leave the household, leaving them vulnerable.

Due to claims and torture, the victims suffer psychological and emotional stress, which eventually leads to their death. Taking advantage of the age of the elderly ladies, some of them were also slain in quiet, and the occurrence was kept hidden by everyone in the hamlet during the police inquiry. Misfortunes, Sickness and Death: Diseases, disease, and death are inherent aspects of human existence. Individuals encounter several physical issues on a daily basis, including headaches, leg pain, dizziness, vomiting, and more, which can also impact their psychological well-being. When diseases and illnesses become severe or recurrent, individuals begin contemplating misfortunes and attempt to address or rectify the underlying reasons. Witch hunting is mostly linked to misfortunes, sickness, and death, with the victim being blamed for all suffering and grief. Residents who live in close proximity within a village or community are more likely to be targeted as witches. The local Ojha, a respected figure in the village, is responsible for investigating and determining if someone is a witch. When someone is accused of being a witch and blamed for all the calamities in the community, further claims might be made to better substantiate the first accusation of witchcraft. With the closure of the Tea Garden and its hospitals, which used to offer health facilities to the poor, individuals are unable to afford better hospitals and instead opt to visit traditional healers rather than doctors.. People who are heavily reliant on agriculture for income, particularly those in poverty, attribute misfortunes and tragedies to witchcraft and evil spirits instead of investigating the root causes.

## 5. Legal Framework

The perception of witchcraft reflects the societal belief system. According to the NCW research, which examined 413 families, 75% stated that practicing witchcraft causes significant health issues among innocent villagers. The The greatest percentages were observed in Jharkhand (78%), followed by Bihar (77%) and Odisha (69%).

Over 65% of families in Jharkhand and Bihar acknowledged suffering nightmares as a result of the practice. Based on the poll, a witch is believed to have the ability to not only cause harm to individuals but also to transmit her witchcraft abilities to others. People in Odisha believe that premature mortality, the death of a healthy individual, miscarriages, infertility, and persistent illnesses are attributed to witchcraft. Some diseases are considered incurable and believed to be caused by a suspected witch. This belief leads to the idea that unless the witch is removed, the suffering and deaths will persist. To address this, local healers known as Ojhas are called upon to identify and eliminate the witch promptly. The NCW Study found that witch assaults often occur on the auspicious day of Durga Puja, as reported by 32% of the questioned individuals.

**Caste of the Witches:** Approximately 32% of participants in the NCW research indicated that witches are associated with the Dalit group. Though Women from other castes are also stigmatized as witches, their percentage compared to Dalit women is negligible. Dalit women are mostly the ones that endure the most from witch accusations and punishment. The NCW survey reveals how individuals in rural regions see witchcraft, how they believe it manifests, and how they address the issue. There is undoubtedly a profound and inherent need to rely on ancient cultural beliefs for phenomena that defy explanation. Reasons include insufficient education, inadequate medical facilities, and a robust cultural belief system that strongly influences people to believe in the supernatural (Aditya 2022).

### ***5.1. Prevalent Legislations against Witch-Hunting***

There is no specific national legislation that punishes witch-hunts; thus victims might consider using the provisions of the Indian Penal Code 1860. The cases include several legal laws such as Section 302 for murder, Section 307 for attempted murder, Section 323 for causing wounds, Section 376 for rape, and Section 354 for exploitation of a woman. Bihar was the pioneer state in India to enact legislation against witch hunts in 1999, known as the “Prevention of the Witch (Dayan) Practices Act.”<sup>32</sup> Jharkhand enacted the “Anti Witchcraft Act” in 2001 to protect women from cruel treatment and offer them legal options in cases of assault. Sections 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the Act pertain to the consequences for identifying someone as a witch, trying to cure the witch, and the potential harm that may be inflicted on her. Section 7 outlines the trial protocol.

In 2005, the Chhattisgarh government enacted the “Chhattisgarh Tonhi Pratama Bill” to prevent the mistreatment of women under the pretext of Tonhi. The

Rajasthan government enacted the Rajasthan Women's (Prevention and Protection from Atrocities) Act of 2006, which prohibits calling a woman a *dayan* or accusing her of practicing witchcraft. Violating this legislation can result in up to three years of imprisonment and a fine of Rs 5000.<sup>34</sup>

In 2015, Rajasthan and Assam enacted legislation to ban the practice of witch-hunting. The Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention, and Protection) Bill enforces a jail term of three to seven years for accusing any anybody, regardless of gender, of being a witch.<sup>35</sup> If someone is coerced into suicide due to being accused of witchcraft, the punishment can be elevated to life imprisonment. Currently, there are no specific laws in place in Maharashtra to address witch-hunting due to opposition from certain religious groups who believe that such legislation may threaten their traditional practices. The state administration has resolved to adopt a measure to eradicate societal problems and human sacrifice following the witch-hunting instances. Witch-hunting is common in certain areas of West Bengal, including Purulia, Bankura, and Birbhum. However, the state government has declined to establish autonomous legislation to address the issue. A global law is needed to prohibit certain actions and apply to all States. Both of these acts prohibit not only directly impeding a woman but also penalize anybody who encourages another person to harm her, remove her from the house and property. Simultaneously, it is considered a criminal offense if a woman commits herself due to being tortured. In addition to national and state regulations, the Indian government is required to safeguard women from gender-based discrimination and provide their fundamental rights and security as outlined in several international treaties, covenants, and laws.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 is an international legal document that safeguards against discrimination and advocates for equality under the law. It also confirms that everyone is entitled to life and freedom. India joined the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1979. The ICCPR is an international organization that promotes gender equality by guaranteeing equal rights for both men and women in civil and political matters and prevents the infringement of anyone's fundamental rights. Article 7 of the covenant mandates the Indian government to enforce norms against cruelty, inhuman, or humiliating treatment. India ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, committing to eradicate discrimination and social cruelty against women, in addition to the UDHR and ICCPR.

The convention's Section 5 (a) clearly states that governments must take appropriate actions to change the social and cultural behaviours of men and women. It is essential to safeguard women and implement steps to promote the good enjoyment of rights

The Constitution of India, Indian Penal Code, The Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act 1954, Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, and The Protection of Human Rights Act 1993 can be linked to witch-hunting atrocities at the national level in India. Some states have enacted municipal Acts to outlaw witch-hunting,

While others are in the process of making it a criminal offense, Maharashtra state enacted India's inaugural anti-superstition law known as the Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil, and Aghori Practices and the Black Magic Act 2013. Dr. Narandra Dabholkar, a founding member of the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti, which is committed to eliminating superstitions, called for the first anti-superstition law. The Act's schedule lists twelve activities deemed dangerous superstitions, such as belief in demonic power and black magic, which may be associated with witch-hunting. Unfortunately, extremists labelled this anti-superstition law as anti-Hindu or anti-Brahminism. Tragically, Dr. Dabholkar was fatally assassinated by two men in August 2013. It is thought that extremist right-wing Hindu groups were responsible for his death. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has detained right-wing Hindutva leaders, but justice has not been given yet (Banerjee, 2020). In response to Maharashtra's anti-superstition laws, Karnataka enacted the Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017. Similarly, Kerala too took action. The Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices, Sorcery and Black Magic Bill, 2019, is currently stalled in parliament due to opposition from right-wing politics. The purpose of these anti-superstition legislation is to encourage a scientific mindset. The Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations, including 65 rationalist groups from various regions of the nation, has called for legislation to enforce the division of religion from politics, government, and education. State-sponsored religious activity should be prohibited by law. The state's advancement is hindered by the presence of superstitions, allowing charlatans to deceive the population poses a significant risk to the country. The Supreme Court of India established that religion is a personal issue of faith. If there is limited or incorrect understanding of religion, interpreted narrowly, it can lead to superstition, extremism, and fundamentalism,

which pose a threat to mankind. Superstitions disguised as religious beliefs may be detrimental to society. The court ruled that superstition could not be used as a valid reason for any homicide, especially one that was premeditated and intentional.<sup>38</sup> The court in *Hulikal Nataraju v. the State of Karnataka*<sup>39</sup> addresses the negative effects of superstition. The text argued that destructive beliefs, such as human sacrifice and witchhunting, create significant damage by diverting attention from the main problem and fostering a defeatist mindset of helpless acceptance. These superstitions perpetuate exploitation, untouchability, complexity, caste, creed, gender, and varna-based inequities. They were used by some to exploit, swindle, and fool the uninformed masses. The Rajasthan High Court has stated that considering the lack of progress in addressing the issue, the act of labelling a woman as a witch and killing her is a serious criminal that should not be accepted. In that scenario, Rajasthan would be perceived as sluggish in implementing measures and lacking in effectiveness in enacting suitable legislation and addressing crimes against women.<sup>40</sup> The Gauhati High Court in the case of *Bhim Turi v. the State of Assam*<sup>41</sup> described witchhunting as a societal scourge, attributing it to erroneous quasi-religious beliefs, old sociocultural traditions, and severe superstitious behaviours. The Court determined that ‘witch hunting is the most severe violation of human rights.’ In the 1991 case of *Gaurav Jain v. the State of Bihar*, the Supreme Court Bench, led by Justice Joymalya Bagchi, described witchhunting as a severe violation of human rights. The instructions directed state governments to eliminate the societal issue of witch-hunting. Despite being created over 20 years ago, the Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill, 2016, has not been deemed necessary by the legislative body.

## ***5.2. Gaps in the Existing Laws***

Witch hunting beliefs and behaviours are strongly ingrained in certain regions of West Bengal. While the Government of India has implemented many laws to address violence and criminality associated with witch hunts, these laws are still inadequate in certain rural areas of India where such beliefs and behaviours go unchallenged. Although public violence related to witch hunts is less common nowadays, certain lingering beliefs suggest that labelling and stigmatizing still persist, even if many individuals prefer not to openly discuss it. The government should enact stringent legislation to eliminate ingrained beliefs and behaviours that promote various forms of violence and prejudice. There should be gender equality in terms of rights and opportunities. Uneducated populations in regions with few health facilities and

transportation often engage in witch-hunting traditions. In these situations, the government should focus on providing free education and healthcare services in rural distant regions where a significant number of people depend on traditional healers for medical care. The government should develop initiatives to tackle the underlying cause of witch hunts and increase reserves for marginalized communities to help them break free from such belief systems.

### ***5.3. Reason for the Continued Persistence of Witch-Hunting***

Various causes, whether direct or indirect, contribute to the continued practice of witch-hunting in the region. The main issues include: lack of education, strong belief in superstitions, absence of critical thinking, hostility within villages, inadequate healthcare, ineffective awareness programs, lack of political commitment, absence of rehabilitation policies, lack of accountability among village representatives and traditional healers, and ignorance of existing laws. Other important factors contributing to the persistence of witch-hunting include ambiguous definitions of witchcraft, lenient punishments, shortcomings in the Jharkhand Anti Witch Hunting Act, absence of national laws, acquittal of perpetrators due to insufficient evidence, underreporting of cases, police indifference, ineffective law enforcement, inactive fast track courts, provocative television shows, and limited funding for civil society groups. Witchcraft is manifested in tribal rituals and customs, with a strong belief that it has been there since the dawn of time and will endure indefinitely. Delay in reporting the incident- Geographical and cultural constraints have limited the number of documented incidents over an extended period, casting doubt on witness evidence, which was a factor in the acquittal of the accused in the case of *Madhu Munda v. State of Bihar*.<sup>44</sup> • Poor implementation of prevalent laws – Some states do not have specific laws to handle the issue of witch-hunting, despite it being prevalent in those regions. The state laws are useless because they lack legal basis from national legislation. The increasing instances of witch-hunting after the enactment of state laws highlight the inefficacy of such legislation.<sup>45</sup> The sentence given to the accused is insufficient in relation to the severity of the crime committed. It only includes a maximum of 1 year imprisonment and a fine of Rs.1000, which fails to establish deterrence in society. This leads to insufficient implementation of existing legislation. • Absence of National Legislation – India does not have specific national laws or regulations to prohibit witch hunts. The administration is guided by certain parts of the Indian Penal Code, and penalties are imposed accordingly.

Adequate control is necessary to eliminate this abhorrent conduct from society. The absence of a law explicitly banning witch-hunting infringes upon fundamental rights protected by international agreements, such as the right to non-discrimination, security, life, access to national courts, and the right to a humane existence devoid of cruel treatment.

The verdicts usually include the explicit arguments that explain why victims are targeted as witches. The case background often suggests other factors, such as previous hostility or familial conflict, which may have motivated the targeting of the victim. Most often, the labelling occurred because to an unexpected death, disease in person or cattle, or an inexplicable outbreak. In other instances, victims were accused of being witches due to deaths or illnesses in the accuser's family, and in four cases, the loss of animals resulted in the victims being labelled as witches. Occasionally, sickness and epidemics in the community resulted in branding.

## 6. Conclusions

Many people believe that enacting a specific legislation targeting witch hunts is the most efficient solution. Legislative change is essential to address the deficiencies identified, but its effectiveness is significantly reduced by indifferent and apathetic execution. Failure to promptly record instances when warning signals first appear, and to take preventative measures, as well as inadequate investigation and prosecution, all weaken the enforcement of the law. Implementation gaps should not only be addressed in cases of witch hunts but also in situations where the poor are often overlooked. It is crucial to overcome these gaps by mandating the sensitization of agencies within the criminal justice system and by tackling the inherent inadequacies of these institutions. Judges frequently show disappointment and hopelessness when presented with proof of the lacklustre performance of these organizations, since it hinders their capacity to reach a verdict on the defendant's guilt with certainty. This emotion is frequently articulated in the judgments. Judges should provide explicit instructions to relevant organizations and persons along with their rulings to promote accountability. Expressions of despair help identify system problems but do not lead to reform and responsibility until specific individuals are held responsible for their mistakes.

Criminal law addresses many issues well but does not include specific offences related to witch hunts that go beyond this particular behaviour. Some acts of violence and cruelty that are not specified in the criminal code may be categorized as minor

offenses. This gap requires attention. Actions like as parading, shaving the head, blackening the face, and making someone ingest excreta have no appropriate legal remedy to match the harm caused. The penal law should acknowledge, identify, and offer appropriate compensation for acts of violence aimed at degrading and humiliating individuals, which are known to have lasting social, psychological, and economic impacts. legal vacuum is more related to the acknowledgment of certain offenses that are relevant to, but not limited to, witch hunts, rather than requiring unique legislation.

There is a significant level of impoverishment in areas where witch hunts takes place. Communities are wrongly accused of being responsible for their lack of literacy, belief in superstition, and out-dated habits. In reality, these communities do not choose to be deprived but rather face the repercussions of it. The root reasons of witch hunts include inadequate access to inexpensive high-quality health treatments, public healthcare systems, cleanliness, safe drinking water, and excellent education. The justification of elevated rates of sickness and death due to belief systems based on black magic is a result of systemic inequalities and lack of resources. The situations indicate shortcomings in administration and governance, as well as apathy and carelessness towards discrepancies in living conditions. Prevention hinges on ensuring that these circumstances are altered. Awareness raising alone will not suffice to debunk superstitions in such conditions. it is obvious that belief in witchcraft and harmful behaviours stem mostly from superstitious institutional practices, economic hardship, and healthcare issues. These elements combine in a multi-dimensional way to increase witchcraft-related delinquencies. Culpable agents can be reduced by improving economic conditions, enhancing healthcare facilities, promoting scientific thinking, and implementing rational institutional practices. Implementing education as the central strategy can achieve these therapeutic measures.

Upon thorough consideration, it becomes clear that most of these unexpected occurrences are connected in some way to unfortunate financial circumstances. Lack of financial resources prevents the implementation of necessary corrective actions to address the root cause of the problem.. Consequently, witches are held responsible for all negative occurrences. By expanding education and economic prospects, such as guaranteeing sustainable livelihood alternatives, enhancing career chances, increasing productivity, and fostering entrepreneurial and technology developments, we may secure progress. Moreover, it can lead to societal transformation by changing

the current socioeconomic power structures, where the accused witches are less powerful than those accusing them. By promoting education, the adverse economic conditions that contribute to superstition and witch-hunting may be effectively addressed, resulting in the decline of such activities.

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