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WITCH HUNTING AS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN INDIA

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Abstract:

Witch-hunting in India constitutes a persistent form of gendered and structural violence that disproportionately affects marginalised women, particularly those from Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and poor rural communities. This paper argues that violence carried out in the name of witchcraft amounts to a grave human rights violation, engaging the rights to life, dignity, equality, and freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. It examines the phenomenon through constitutional, criminal, and international human rights frameworks, with particular attention to the State's duties of prevention, protection, prosecution, and rehabilitation. The paper also analyses the fragmented nature of India's legal response, including state-specific anti-witch-hunting statutes and the limitations of general penal provisions. It contends that while these laws reflect legislative concern, their uneven design and weak implementation have left affected communities insufficiently protected. The paper concludes that witch-hunting must be treated not as superstition-driven misconduct alone, but as a rights-based issue requiring stronger legal uniformity, victim-centred remedies, institutional accountability, and sustained social reform.

Introduction

In August 2025, a 75-year-old Santhal woman, Singo Kisku, living alone in a village in East Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, was bludgeoned to death by her neighbour, who slit her throat with a sickle after accusing her of practising witchcraft and causing deaths in his family.¹ The police registered the incident as a murder case, but for the Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Dalit populations living in central and eastern India, such incidents symbolize targeted violence, social stigma or exclusion and lack of adequate protection from the criminal justice system. The frequency of these incidents illustrates the continuing fatality of these practices. In another case, a woman was accused of witch craft and burned to death with her one year old child. An arrest was made but this episode revealed a chronic scarcity of healthcare and deep rooted superstition in a remote tribal area, underscoring how structural neglect enables such attacks.²

Despite formal constitutional guarantees of equality, dignity and the right to life, as well as state level statutes targeting witch hunting, such violence remains a recurring feature of social life of in parts of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and other states. This case is not an isolated incident but part of a wider pattern. The gravity of the situation is such that the NHRC (National Human Rights Commission) has taken cognizance numerous times about incidents of witch hunting and issued directions to the state governments, asking for detailed reports.³

This paper argues that these incidents are not isolated crimes, on the contrary, killing in the name of witchcraft should be considered a grave human rights violation. By situating the practice of witch hunting within international human rights norm, the paper examines how constitutional guarantees, criminal law and specialized anti-witch hunting laws have responded and often failed to prevent such deaths.

India: Scale & Pattern Of Witchcraft Related Killings

Witchcraft-related killings in India represent one of the most persistent and under-addressed forms of gender-based violence in the country. The data paints a deeply troubling picture. According to a UN report, between 1987 and 2003, almost 25,000 cases related to witch-hunting were recorded across India.⁴ Between 2015 and 2021 alone, the NCRB recorded 663 murders motivated by witch-hunting or fear of witchcraft, averaging approximately 95 such killings per year.⁵ These are just the reported incidents, there are a lot more incidents which go unreported due to either fear, deep social shame, lack of awareness about anti witch hunting laws and systemic police apathy.

Witch hunting is more prevalent in 12 states of India, which are: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, UP, West Bengal.⁶ It is apparent that witch-hunting and killings in the name of witchcraft remain a serious problem in several Indian states, particularly in rural and tribal areas. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has tracked murders attributed to witchcraft, with research indicating hundreds of such killings in recent decades.

Studies show that those accused of witchcraft in India are usually elderly or single women, often from lower castes or tribal communities and from poorer, rural regions.⁷ Most of them are marginalised due to their social background and therefore, more vulnerable to being scapegoated. Similarly, a pattern is observed in the accusations as they are frequently linked to misfortunes such as illness or sudden death of a family member, crop failure or financial hardship. Very often, witchcraft accusations are also used to grab land and property, settle

personal vendettas, or punish women who resist patriarchal control or societal norms.⁸

The persistence of witchcraft killings is inseparable from broader failures of public infrastructure. In Jharkhand, poor literacy rates at 70.3%, against a national average of 75.4%, combined with a critical shortage of accessible healthcare, create a vacuum that traditional ojhas (faith healers) step in to fill. When someone falls ill and the nearest medical facility is 15 kilometres away with no public transport, communities turn to superstition. In this context, when a person dies unexpectedly, an ojha is consulted to reveal the "real" reason for the death and then the blame is placed on an identified "witch."

Women accused of witchcraft face a range of physical and psychological abuses including rape, beating, flogging, severing of limbs, ostracism, banishment, and public humiliation. The violence rarely ends at physical assault, the survivors of witch hunting also face lifelong stigma, displacement, and psychological trauma, often with no institutional support.

Bihar passed the Prevention of Witch (Daain) Practices Act in 1999, and a handful of other states have followed. Yet legislative responses remain fragmented and poorly implemented. Without a central law that covers the whole country, comprehensive law enforcement training, and sustained healthcare expansion in tribal and rural areas, the scale of witchcraft-related killings in India is likely to remain a persistent humanitarian crisis well into the 21st century.

Witch hunting and witchcraft accusations in India do not occur randomly, they reflect a deeply structured and intersecting systems of patriarchy, caste and tribal marginalisation, and lack of access to health care and education, rather than being a purely religious phenomenon. These structural factors are relevant under human rights law because they highlight State responsibilities to address root causes of violence and discrimination.⁹

International Legal Framework

Killings and other violence justified in the name of witchcraft accusations constitute serious human rights violations under international law and also under Indian constitutional and statutory frameworks. In India, such acts violate the rights to life, dignity, equality, non-discrimination, and freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and they trigger State duties to prevent, investigate, punish, and remedy these harms. Under international and Indian human rights law, States have both negative obligations (to refrain from arbitrary killing or torture) and positive obligations (to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish such abuses by private actors and to provide redress to victims).

Witch hunting or witchcraft related killings typically involve several overlapping elements of human rights violations, that include but are not limited to:

-Arbitrary deprivation of life: Victims are killed without any lawful process, often by mobs or community actors, thus violating the right to life.

-Torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment: Victims may be beaten, burned, sexually assaulted, mutilated, or otherwise tortured before death.

-Discrimination and inequality: Accusations disproportionately target marginalised women (often older, widowed, from Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes or other vulnerable groups), reflecting structural gender, caste and tribal discrimination.

-Violation of dignity and social exclusion: Branding someone a witch entails severe stigma, public humiliation, banishment and loss of livelihood and property, undermining the right to dignity and social security.

Witch hunting triggers the violation of the following provisions in an international context:

International Human Rights Framework (Right to Life & Prohibition of Torture)

International human rights law treats witch hunting, understood as violence and killings following accusations of witchcraft, as a direct attack to the right to life and also violation of the absolute prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. International instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) protect the right to life and prohibit torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment as non derogable core rights. Killings and severe assaults justified by witchcraft beliefs directly breach these core protections because they involve deliberate deprivation of life and extreme physical and psychological abuse.

- UDHR and ICCPR

The UDHR, in article 3 affirms that “everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”¹⁰ and that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”¹¹ in article 5. The ICCPR translates these principles as binding via Article 6 (right to life)¹² and Article 7 (prohibition of torture and ill-treatment),¹³ both of which apply regardless of whether the perpetrator is a state agent or a private actor whose violence the state failed to prevent. The Convention against Torture further codifies the absolute ban on torture, while the Human Rights Committee’s General Comment No. 36 on the right to life stresses that states must exercise due diligence to prevent and punish deprivations of life by non-state actors.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has explicitly recognized that beliefs and practices related to witchcraft lead to serious violations including beatings, mutilation, torture and murder, often targeting women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.¹⁴

- UN Human Rights Council Resolution 47/8 (Witch-hunting as a violation of the right to life)

Witch hunting often results in mob killings, lynchings or ritual murders of people. The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has repeatedly highlighted killings of persons accused of witchcraft as a form of unlawful, arbitrary deprivation of life that must be treated as murder and investigated, prosecuted and punished accordingly. In 2021, the UN Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 47/8 on the elimination of harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks to “ensure that no one within their jurisdiction is deprived of the right to life, liberty or security of person because of religion or belief” and to bring all perpetrators to justice by urging states to condemn these practices and to take all measures necessary for their elimination. The Resolution expresses deep concern that such accusations have led to killings, mutilation, burning, trafficking, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and social stigma. This resolution confirms that witchcraft-related killings are not merely private crimes but are understood as a global human rights problem that requires State action through law reform, effective enforcement, victim protection, and public education. The resolution calls for states to adopt comprehensive legislative, policy and social measures to prevent witch hunting.

Once a person is beaten to death, burned alive or otherwise killed because they are labelled a witch, states are under an obligation not only to refrain from such killings themselves but also to prevent, investigate and punish such acts by others. Persistent patterns of witch-hunting killings, especially where authorities fail to intervene or prosecutions are rare, therefore amount to a structural violation of the right to life.

Witch-hunting as torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

Witch-hunting rarely consists of a single lethal attack, it frequently involves prolonged beatings, mutilations, public humiliation, sexual violence, and banishment before or instead of killing. The OHCHR’s thematic work on witchcraft and human rights notes that witchcraft-related beliefs and practices have led to “beatings, banishment, cutting of body parts, and amputation of limbs, torture and murder” of alleged witches. UN experts have characterized

this range of abuses to include killings, ritual attacks, mutilations and human sacrifice, as forms of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment within the meaning of international law.

Under the Convention against Torture and the article 7 of ICCPR, such treatment is absolutely prohibited. Where state agents participate in or condone witch-hunting, the prohibition on torture is directly engaged. Even where the perpetrators are private actors, consistent failure by police and courts to protect victims, investigate attacks or prosecute offenders can give rise to state responsibility for torture or ill-treatment, because the state has not exercised due diligence to safeguard individuals from severe suffering inflicted for purposes such as punishment, coercion or discrimination.

- Other Relevant Conventions – CEDAW and CRC

Witchcraft and related violence violate the obligations other conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), given the strong gendered pattern of accusations and attacks, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), where children are targeted. These instruments require States to act with due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide remedies for gender-based and child-directed violence, whether perpetrated by state or non-state actors. India is a signatory to both the UN conventions and has signed and ratified both. Article 5(a) of the CEDAW lays down that states shall modify social and cultural pattern of conduct to eliminate prejudices and customary practices against women, in this case, witch hunting.

In the case of *Mrs. Sashiprava Bindhani vs State Of Orissa*,¹⁵ the petitioner invoked writ petitions under article 226 and 227 of the Constitution of India, to direct the Orissa state government to make laws against witch hunting in the state. They pleaded that India is a signatory to the UDHR and CEDAW and hence the state is obliged to make laws to protect women. The court directed the state government to create public awareness against witch-hunting at the Gram Panchayat level and to formulate proper guidelines, leading to the enactment of the Odisha Prevention of Witch Hunting Act 2013.

In summary, within the international human rights framework, witch-hunting is not treated as a culturally specific practice but as a concrete context in which the right to life and the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment are systematically violated. This imposes clear, legally grounded duties on states to act against witchcraft-related violence wherever it occurs.

Domestic Legal Framework

India's legal response to witch-hunting has been characterized not by uniformity and comprehensive national laws, but by a patchwork of state-level legislations that vary dramatically in their scope, punitive severity, and effectiveness. The absence of a central law, one that applies across the entire country and captures the full social complexity of this gendered crime, remains the most significant structural gap in India's fight against witchcraft-related violence. In the case of *Jitu Murmu v. State of Odisha*,¹⁶ the Odisha High Court observed that the practice of witchcraft is still prevalent and that the existing IPC provisions have not proved effective enough to deter these offences. The court highlighted the absence of a law has resulted in a lack of uniformity in the application of law across the country.

Understanding the legal framework requires examining four interlocking layers: the general provisions of pre-existing penal law, specific state-level legislation, the failed attempt at central legislation, and the constitutional and judicial dimensions that underpin the entire edifice.

- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)

Before any state specific anti witch hunting statute existed, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) 1860 was the primary legal instrument available to prosecute the perpetrators. Its replacement, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), continues to be so in states that have no dedicated legislation. In the absence of specific national legislation connecting witch-hunting to violence and torture, the BNS usually covers its punishment, with applicable provisions falling under murder (section 103),¹⁷ attempt to murder (section 109),¹⁸ hurt (section 115),¹⁹ grievous hurt (section 116),²⁰ rape (section 64),²¹ rape resulting in death or vegetative state (section 66),²² voluntarily causing injury by a dangerous weapon (section 118)²³ and outraging a woman's modesty (section 74).²⁴ Although detailed, these legal provisions treat each act of violence as isolated, failing to address the systemic and premeditated nature of a witch hunt, which typically unfolds over multiple stages involving identification, public humiliation, torture, and eventual killing.

Constitution of India and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act At the constitutional level, the legal argument against witch hunting is considerably stronger. Witch hunting cases constitute a violation of several constitutional provisions: Article 14 (right to equality),²⁵ Articles 15(3) and 15(4) (prohibition of discrimination),²⁶ Article 21 (protection of the right to life and personal liberty),²⁷ Article 51 (promotion of international peace and security),²⁸ and Article 51A(h),²⁹ which makes it a fundamental duty of citizens to

develop scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform. Additionally, the practice violates the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, given that the overwhelming majority of victims belong to tribal and Dalit communities.

Currently, the states have specific laws targeting witch-hunting are Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Odisha, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Assam. Maharashtra and Karnataka have broader legislation that encompasses witch-hunting within a wider anti-superstition framework. The evolution of witch hunting related state laws falls broadly into two phases: a pre-2013 era characterised by minimal punishments and a limited understanding of the crime, and a post-2013 era marked by harsher sentencing and more comprehensive legislative framework.

- Bihar (1999) and Jharkhand (2001)

Bihar was the first state to introduce dedicated witch-hunting legislation, the Bihar Prevention of Witch (Dayan) Practices Act, 1999, followed by Jharkhand, which introduced the Jharkhand Prevention of Witch (Daain) Practices Act in 2001. Both statutes were aimed at preventing witchcraft-related violence, providing limited rehabilitation for victims, and imposing penalties for accusing someone of witchcraft or performing exorcism rituals. Under Bihar's law, identifying a woman as a witch (Daain) carries a sentence of up to three months in prison, a fine of Rs. 1,000, or both.³⁰ Any person who tortures (physically or mentally) any woman by identifying her as a witch, is to be punished with imprisonment for 6 months or fine or both.³¹ The law also penalises acts of Jhadphook or Totka performed in an effort to 'cure' or 'heal' someone branded as a witch, when accompanied by torture or mental harm.³²

However, both the statutes offer no provisions for compensation, rehabilitation, income support, legal aid, or health services for survivors of witch-hunting, and does not mandate training of police, healthcare providers, or judicial personnel in recognizing the structural roots of such violence. The imprisonment terms of three months to one year, and fines as low as Rs. 1,000–2,000, signal a dangerously low punitive response to what is, in practice, a crime that frequently ends in murder.

- Chhattisgarh (2005) and Odisha (2013)

Chhattisgarh adopted its own law in 2005, the Chhattisgarh Tonahi Pratadna Nivaran Act and Odisha followed in 2013 with the Prevention of Witch-Hunting Act. These laws showed marginal improvements while broadly retaining the light-sentencing model. The word “tonahi”

means witch or dayan and any person who identifies another person as tonahi was liable for punishment in the form of imprisonment upto 3 years and also with fine.³³ Anyone who causes physical or mental harassment to another as tonahi or was liable for imprisonment upto 5 years and also with fine.³⁴ Any “ojha” who claims to cure tonahi by any act of jhaar phook or totka or tantra mantra is punishable for imprisonment upto 5 years and fine.³⁵

The Odisha Act is considerably more detailed in its definitional scope. The Odisha law defines a witch³⁶ as well as witch craft³⁷ and witch hunting³⁸. It also punishes witchcraft or similar practices with intent to cause harm with up to three years imprisonment and a minimum Rs. 5,000 fine, and penalises “gunias” or “tantriks”, described as “witch doctors” who claim to have supernatural powers to cure or control a witch. The act punishes witch-hunting with between one and five years imprisonment or fine upto One Thousand Rupees or both.³⁹ Despite these provisions, the state's home department noted in 2017 that even though the 2013 Act provided for stringent punishments, instances of witch-hunting had still come to the government's notice.

- Rajasthan (2015) and Assam (2015) – The Post 2013 Shift

The Rajasthan and Assam Acts of 2015 represent a significant departure from earlier legislation, with much harsher sentencing allocating seven and ten years maximum sentencing respectively for a range of witch-hunt-related crimes. The Rajasthan Prevention of Witch-Hunting Act 2015 lays down that every person involved in the unnatural death of a woman subjected to witch hunting will be punishable for imprisonment extending from seven years to life or fine of one lakh rupees or both.⁴⁰ The act also gives the state government power to impose collective fine over an area if the government thinks that area is involved in aiding or abetting offences under this act or harbouring offenders or hiding evidence.⁴¹

The Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act, 2015 is widely regarded as the most comprehensive and stringent anti-witch-hunting law in India. The Act's stated purpose is to provide more effective measures to prohibit witch-hunting, eliminate torture, oppression, humiliation, and killing of persons, and provide for the relief and rehabilitation of victims. It defines an “abettor or identifier” as any person who identifies, calls, stigmatises, defames, or accuses any other person as a witch through words, signs, conduct, or actions, and punishes such acts with imprisonment of not less than three years and up to seven years, and a fine of not less than Rs. 50,000 and up to Rs. 5,00,000.⁴²

Whoever intimidates a person by identifying, calling, stigmatising, or defaming them as a witch, thereby compelling that person to commit suicide, shall be punished with imprisonment

of not less than seven years and up to life imprisonment and fine of not less than Rs. 1,00,000 and up to Rs. 5,00,000.⁴³ In addition to the punitive measures, the Assam Act also includes special provisions like sensitization and training of all stakeholders, providing counselling services for victims and victim rehabilitation, shelter homes and compensation, improve education and health in affected areas and community-level awareness initiatives⁴⁴ – elements entirely absent from the earlier state laws. The Act also provides for free legal services⁴⁵ and free medical assistance to the victims.⁴⁶

- Maharashtra (2013) and Karnataka (2017)

Maharashtra enacted the Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act in 2013, as a direct consequence of the assassination of anti-superstition activist Narendra Dabholkar. The Act expanded the criminal ambit of superstition to encompass witch-hunting as a subset. A vigilance officer is to be appointed by the state government in police stations, to detect and prevent the violation of provisions of this Act,⁴⁷ that includes a ban on witch hunting. The vigilance officer also has powers of entry and search, to seize and examine any document or object.⁴⁸

Karnataka passed an anti-superstition statute in 2020, modelled on the Maharashtra Act. The Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Act, 2017, bans several practices related to superstitions and black magic. Like the Maharashtra Act, this one also provides for a vigilance officer to be appointed. The government may also conduct awareness programs to teach about the ill effects of black magic and to provide medical relief to victims.⁴⁹

These broader anti-superstition frameworks represent a distinct legislative philosophy, one that situates witch-hunting within a wider societal problem of exploitative supernatural practices rather than treating it purely as a gender-violence issue.

- Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill, 2016 (A Failed Attempt at Central Legislation)

India has no central law that exclusively deals with crimes related to witchcraft, superstition, or occult-inspired activities. The closest Parliament has come to addressing the gap is the Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill, 2016. Introduced in the Lok Sabha by Shri Raghav Lakhanpal, the Bill's stated purpose was to prevent and protect women from witch-hunt practices and to eliminate the torment, oppression, humiliation, and loss of lives endured by women subjected to such violence.

The Bill made perpetrators accountable for branding, intimidating, using criminal force,

assaulting, or subjecting victims to torture and humiliation, in harmony with the penalisation structures of the Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure.

The 2016 Bill provides for punishments ranging from three months to life imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 50,000. Section 14 categorises witch-hunting as a cognizable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable offence. State governments are also encouraged to provide free medical assistance to victims under Section 22, and the victims' right to free legal aid is affirmed by Section

24. Despite its progressive design, the Bill has been pending in Parliament for years, with the actual culprits continuing to go without accountability.

India's domestic legal framework on witch-hunting is marked by genuine legislative effort at the state level, particularly in Assam, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka, but remains fundamentally incomplete without a binding central law. The key reasons for the non-implementation of laws drafted with good intent are found in community realities, including the structural patriarchy and casteism that underline crimes of superstition, and police complicity in secretive negotiations that render victims helpless. Until Parliament enacts comprehensive central legislation, one that treats witch-hunting not as a cultural aberration but as a structural crime rooted in gender discrimination, caste hierarchy, and economic vulnerability, the legal framework will continue to fall short of the protection India's most marginalised women urgently need.

Despite these state laws, implementation remains weak due to lack of awareness, poor victim protection mechanisms, and minimal judicial intervention. Most cases are prosecuted under general BNS provisions that do not adequately capture the specific socio-cultural context of witch-hunting. As a result, police officers and trial courts often fail to recognise the deeper issues of superstition, gender-based violence, and caste oppression involved in such cases.

Conclusion

Witch-hunting in India is not a relic of the past, nor is it confined to remote tribal communities. It is a living, recurring, and systematic violation of the most fundamental human rights that a democratic state is obligated to protect. When a woman is branded a witch, stripped naked, paraded through her village, beaten, sexually assaulted, and killed with the sanction of community leaders and the silence of law enforcement, the state has not merely failed to prevent a crime but it has failed its constitutional promise. These witchcraft accusations are embedded in structures of patriarchy, caste and tribal marginalisation, often used as a shield to settle personal disputes.

At its core, every instance of witch-hunting constitutes a direct assault on the right to life and personal liberty guaranteed under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. The fact that majority of victims belong to backward castes and tribal communities is not coincidental, it is the defining feature of the crime. India's obligations do not end at its own Constitution. As a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), India is bound under international law to investigate, prosecute, and remedy such violence. With a low conviction rate and the majority of reported cases being dismissed or settled through coerced compromise, India is in persistent breach of these obligations.

What makes witch-hunting a particularly heinous human rights violation is that its harms are layered and compounding. The women who survive witch branding do not simply return to their life, they face social ostracism, displacement, psychological trauma, and continued economic dispossession. Surviving the violence is often only the beginning of a longer suffering. The need of the hour is a central or national law that bans witch hunting, its robust implementation, and genuine victim-centred rehabilitation not as optional reforms, but as human rights imperatives.

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² "Woman, Infant Burnt Alive over "Witchcraft" Charge in Jharkhand" (News Arena India, 2026) <<https://newsarenaindia.com/states/woman-infant-burnt-alive-after-witchcraft-charge-in-jharkhand/70311>> accessed 3 April 2026.

³ National Human Rights Commission, "NHRC Notice to the Jharkhand Government over the Reported Witch Hunting in the Latehar District" (Press Release, 23 August 2023) <<https://nhrc.nic.in/media/press-release/nhrc-notice-to-the-jharkhand-government-over-the-reported-witch-hunting-in-the-latehar-district>> accessed 5 April 2026

⁴ AR Alagarsami, P Kannekanti and AK Rajan, "Psychosocial Consequences Among Witch-hunting Survivors: A Qualitative Study from Jharkhand, India" (2024) *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* 1 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/02537176241260846>> accessed 4 April 2026

⁵ "100 Per Cent Increase In Witch-Hunting & Honour Killings In Jharkhand" (Outlook India, 2025) <<https://www.outlookindia.com/national/100-per-cent-increase-in-witch-hunting-honour-killings-in-jharkhand>> accessed 7 April 2026.

⁶ Kamlesh Kumar Sahu, 'Witch hunting in Jharkhand: does mental health has any business on it?' (Open Journal of Psychiatry & Allied Sciences, 19 March 2018) <<https://globalpsychiatry.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ojpas-2018-03-19.pdf>> accessed 7 April 2026.

⁷ A R Alagarasami and others, "Witch-Hunting Experiences in Jharkhand: Scope for Mental Health Interventions" (2024) 46 *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* 87 <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10958086/>> accessed 13 April 2026.

⁸ Dipshikha Roy Chowdhury, "Witch-Hunting in India: A Socio-Legal Study" (International Journal of Legal

Research and Academics, 2020) <<https://www.ijlra.com/details/witch-hunting-in-india-a-socio-legal-study-by-dipshikha-roy-chowdhury>> accessed 13 April 2026.

⁹ Nupur Raj and Vinaya Bhosale, “Witch-Hunting: An Analysis from Socio-Legal Perspective” (2021) 26(5) IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences 30 <<https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.26-Issue5/Series-10/E2605103035.pdf>> accessed 13 April 2026.

¹⁰ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNGA Res 217 A(III) (10 December 1948) art 3

¹¹ UDHR (n 10) art 5

¹² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171 (ICCPR) art 6(1)

¹³ ICCPR (n 12) art 7

¹⁴ Independent Expert on Albinism, “Witchcraft and Human Rights” (OHCHR) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-albinism/witchcraft-and-human-rights>> accessed 13 April 2026.

¹⁵ *Mrs Sashiprava Bindhani v State of Orissa* WP (C) No 17638 of 2011 (Orissa HC)

¹⁶ *Jitu Murmu @ Sukul Murmu v State of Odisha* 2020 SCC OnLine Ori 667

¹⁷ Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, s 103

¹⁸ *Ibid.* s 109

¹⁹ Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, s 115

²⁰ *Ibid.* s 116

²¹ Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, s 64

²² *Ibid.* s 66

²³ Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, s 118

²⁴ *Ibid.* s 74

²⁵ The Constitution of India 1950, art 14

²⁶ *Ibid.* art 15

²⁷ The Constitution of India 1950, art 21

²⁸ *Ibid.* art 51

²⁹ The Constitution of India 1950, art 51A (h)

³⁰ Prevention of Witch Practices Act 1999, s 3

³¹ *Ibid.* s 4

³² Prevention of Witch Practices Act 1999, s 6

³³ Chhattisgarh Tonahi Pratadna Nivaran Act 2005, s 4

³⁴ *Ibid.* s 5

³⁵ Chhattisgarh Tonahi Pratadna Nivaran Act 2005, s 6

³⁶ Prevention of Witch-Hunting Act 2013, s 2(a)

³⁷ *Ibid.* s 2(b)

³⁸ Prevention of Witch-Hunting Act 2013, s 2(c)

³⁹ *Ibid.* s 4

⁴⁰ Prevention of Witch-Hunting Act 2015, s 7

⁴¹ *Ibid.* s 8

⁴² Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act 2015, s 4

⁴³ *Ibid.* s 6

⁴⁴ Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act 2015, s 22

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* s 29

⁴⁶ Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act 2015, s 27

⁴⁷ Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act 2013, s 5

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* s 6

⁴⁹ Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Act 2017, s 12