

Witch practice (Dakin Pratha) In Adivasi communities: An Economic and social reality

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Abstract

It is seen that many harmful practices such as voodoo, black magic, which are increasing even in these times in India which is fast becoming an economic superpower. On July 6, 2012, an incident took place which threw the 21st century people back into the Middle Ages. The Village Panchayat of Latehar village in Jharkhand State made an old couple consume excreta, on the charges of practicing voodoo. Similarly, thousands of women are stoned to death on the pretext that they are witches, they are driven out of their villages, a taboo is declared over their families. Superstition is decaying the society, and at least so far, nobody has been able to find a pesticide to completely destroy it. The practice of the Witch (Dakin) was born out of such superstition among Adivasi communities. Hundreds of Adivasi women in the Satpudas are living lives of social outcasts because they have been judged to be witches. In the entire Adivasi district of Nandurbar, incidents of social outcasting such 'witches' occur time and again. It is necessary to discontinue and ban these harmful practices permanently and justice is needed to be done to the stigmatized Adivasi women.

Keywords: Superstition, witch, witch doctor, Karagir, Anis, Babbilotacha Patla

Introduction

Whenever something saddening happens in an Adivasi community, a witch (Dakin) is supposed to be behind it. She is known by various names among the Adivasi community, such as Chetaki, Chetakin, Bhutali, Bhutalin, Jakhin, Jaakhin, Dayan, Hadal, Dakan and Dakin. In each region, the practices and traditions are as varied as names. The issue of Dakin is found to be rampant in Adivasi districts of Amravati, Dhule, Nashik, Nandurbar, Thane, Chandrapur, Gondia and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra. The Dakin practice is a very sensitive subject in Adivasi villages and settlements in Nandurbar district. It has assumed serious proportions in the Akkalkuwa, Taloda and DShadgaon talukas of the district. Records of Dakin-related crimes are found on a large scale in the Solgi police station situated in the inaccessible areas of the Akkalkuwa Taluka. The Dakin, Dakan traditions is found to be existing since ancient times in inaccessible areas of the Satpuda range in Nandurbar district. A village in Nandurbar Taluka is even named as "Dakin Pada". The number of recorded Dakin-related crimes is about 300 in the past 10 years, however, it is learnt that the number of such crimes not recorded is also very high.

Review of Research Literature

Many students have studied the proposed research subject and have analyzed this practice. According to the study by Sandhya Nare-Pawar (2012) ^[1], neither urban educated people nor the educated people among Adivasis do not feel that practices such as the Dakin practice are issues related to them. The Dakin resides in Adivasi minds. Whenever anything untoward happens in a Pada (settlement), humans turn into beasts. Prof. Aditi Mule (2013) says that when you understand the Adivasi concepts of life, voodoo is there at the base of any untoward incident. According to journalist Samir Marathe (2012) ^[9], the fact is underlined, that practices such as Dakin, traditions such as Bhagat, Badwa, Karagir still exist. Ramakant Patil, editor of

daily "Lokmat" (2012) ^[9] asks, how many more victims are going to be there because of the Dakin practice? This inhumane practice must stop. According to Prof. Jayashri Patil (2012), the Dakin practice is a superstition. It is harmful to the society. Women are found to be the enemies of women. This enmity must be abolished, and for this, the value of a human life must be understood. Women must be made more aware. Narendra Dabholkar, Anis (2012) says that laws must be passed against such practices. Though law cannot solve the problem entirely, it helps change peoples' mentality, and the severity of the issue is also understood quickly. Dr. N. D. Chaudhari (2010) ^[4] says that the Adivasi women have a secondary status in the district. The Dakin practice violates the human rights of Adivasi women. This violent practice must be abolished. For this, strict law needs to be passed.

Methodology

For the proposed study, research methods in social science have been used while selecting the problem. Also, primary and secondary material has been used for the study.

Primary material: The researcher has used sample selection method and survey method for the study. The researcher has collected information with the help of questionnaires from 150 respondents from all the six talukas; Nandurbar - 25, Shahada - 25, Navapur - 25, Taloda - 25, Akkalkuwa- 25 and Dhadgaon (Akrani) - 25, and also has analyzed information collected from interviews with a few women who have been cured of Dakin.

Secondary material: Secondary material includes books related to the Dakin issue, Andhashradhha Nirmulan Patrika, Hakara, private reports, information from newspapers such as the daily Sakal, Lokmat, Deshdoot and Nandadarshan and information from various websites.

Objectives of the study

- To study the reasons behind the Dakin practice.

- To study the economic and social characteristics of the Dakin practice.
- To study the problems of and effects on the victim women
- To suggest measures for abolishing the Dakin practice.

Assumptions

- Not only women but men also are suspected to be Dakins.
- Those cured of Dakins have to face terrible consequences
- Not just uneducated but even educated believe this superstition.
- There are economic and social vested interests behind the one being stamped as a Dakin.

Analysis of the Dakin practice

On May 12, 2011, at 8.30 a.m., in Sakliumar, tal. Akkalkuwa, Dist. Nandurbar, Jehrabai Kalusingh Patel (age 22 years) and her son Rakesh (age 1 year) were poisoned to death by her

family and the villagers because they believed that she performed black magic and was a Dakin. The boy dies after being poisoned, but the woman was still alive. So, her sister-in-law throttled her to death in a highly inhumanly manner. 11 years ago in Mandvi, tal. Dhadgaon, on May 6, 2003, a 60-year old woman named Kelibai Patle was determined to be a Dakin and was stoned to death. Such heart-rending incidents take place in the district. Many of such cases are settled before the Caste Panchayat, and are never allowed to reach the police.

Police stations in the district and yearly records of Dakin-related crimes

In Nandurbar district, Dakin-related crimes are recorded with a high incidence in the police stations at Molgi (Akkalkuwa), Dhadgaon and Taloda. This crime is analyzed in Table No. 1

Table 1: Years and Police station-wise Dakin-related crimes

Sr. No.	Police Stn/Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
1	Molgi Akkalkuwa	-	-	20 (28.57) (86.95)	33 (47.14) (94.28)	17 (24.28) (100)	70 (100) (85.36)
2	Dhadgaon	04 (40.0) (80.0)	02 (200) (100)	02 (200) (8.69)	02 (20.0) (5.72)	-	10 (100) (12.19)
3	Taloda	01 (50.0) (20.0)	-	01 (50.0) (4.35)	-	-	02 (100) (2.44)
	Total	05 (6.09) (100)	02 (2.44) (100)	23 (28.04) (100)	35 (42.68) (100)	17 (20.73) (100)	82 (100) (100)

Source: Daily Sakal, Nandurbar, dated May 18, 2011

It is clear from the analysis in Table no. 1 that the number of Dakin-related crimes recorded in the five years from 2007 to 2011 is 82. Most of these incidents occurred in Molgi, Akkalkuwa. The percentage is 85.36%, which is the highest. In all the talukas taken together, maximum crimes were recorded in 2010. Which is high at 42.68%.

Though the above table shows data from 2007, it officially informed that 216 crimes were recorded before that, from 2000 to 2005. But the actual number of these incidents must be more. The yearly average number of these incidents in the district is 76. The above analysis shows the severity of the issue of Dakin.

What is the Dakin practice?

A woman can give birth to a new life. As she has divine powers, she can also kill a person. A woman who becomes a Dakin learns certain Mantras, bathes naked at night, alone in a river. On finishing her bathing, she goes to a temple in the same condition and asks permission from the God to become a Dakin. After receiving the permit, she performs the first experiment of the Mantra on a person from her family. Then she attains all the powers. She can transform herself into any form, bring harm of any kind to anybody.

If anything bad happens in the villages and Padas (settlements) in the Satpuda area, immediately, the presence of a Dakin is suspected behind it. Even if an accident occurs, is someone dies, cattle get some illness, if there is an epidemic in the village, or a cow or buffalo stops producing milk, the presence of a Dakin is suspected behind it. This leads to some woman

from the village being suspected to be a Dakin. Even the process of determining someone to be a Dakin is queer.

Method of curing from (removing the “Dakin” from)/ determining someone to be a Dakin

If there has been a death, a handful of food grain is taken and moved over the dead body. This foodgrain is then packed into a piece of paper and all the villagers go to a Durgah, particularly in Pawagarh, Bawangunj, Horapani in Gujarat or even in Chalisgaon. The foodgrain is then shown to the witch doctor (Mantrik) present at any of the above places. The Mantrik ‘guesses’ why the particular incident occurred, whose “Drusht” resulted in the incident, who is the Dakin in the village etc., and thus the woman is determined to be a Dakin.

How to find out who is the Dakin? The suspected woman is made to drink water from a pan which is present with a cobbler. If a woman refuses to drink the water or throws it up after drinking, she is then said to be a Dakin. A cobbler soaks the skin of cattle in the water contained in his pan, which makes it very dirty and contaminated. Women do not drink it, or throw it up after drinking it, which is only natural. Then the woman is supposed to be a Dakin, and becomes a victim of such gross injustice.

There is a place where a woman is determined to be a Dakin. It is called “Babhilotcha Patla”. “Karagirs” or “Bhagats” hold a place of great importance in the life of Adivasis. “Babhilot” is their ancestor who has assumed an “Avtar” on the earth, and he is the Guru of the Adivasis. Invoking this Babhilot, the Bhagats treat the Adivasis and find out the Dakin for them. The

Karagir puts the foodgrain brought with him onto the Babbilot, and then makes a prediction. He takes a look at his equipment and then, without announcing clearly who is the Dakin, makes such vague statements, as that the Dakin's house is in such and such direction, that her household has such and such number of cattle, that there is such and such a tree in the foreground of her house. The house of the Dakin is then determined based on the maximum statements of the Karagir being applied to a particular house, and the woman in that household is determined to be the Dakin.

Reasons behind the Dakin practice

- An Adivasi woman has an inferior social status.
- The practice grows also because of illiteracy.
- Compared to men, women are more superstitious.
- Excessive backwardness due to lack of economic development is also a major reason behind the Dakin practice.
- As there is still a lack of means of communication, scientific thinking does not reach them.
- Lack of or insufficient healthcare facilities results in the Adivasis blindly believing that they are facing the wrath of some Goddess or that some mistake made by them resulted into the particular mishap.
- Dependence on the Bhagats or Karagirs.
- There are no means of employment. As they have no means of earning a living, most of the Adivasis remain idle

and unemployed for long intervals, which results into a situation called “an empty mind is a Devil’s workshop”.

- Poverty is another major reason.
- Addiction is also largely responsible for the growth of superstitions in this region. Wine from “Mahua” is readily available in every household, and thus, as the Adivasis remain for long times under the influence of it, they lose their ability to think clearly.

Effects of the Dakin practice

- The problems of the Dakin practice and superstition obstruct the Adivasi communities from joining the mainstream.
- The daughters of a woman determined to be a Dakin are unable to marry. They are also treated with suspicion.
- The woman determined to be a Dakin as well as her family face economic and social exploitation.
- Even the Adivasi community is economically exploited to a large extent by the Bhagats and Karagirs. Chicken, food grains, cash is demanded for any work from them, thus making the already poor Adivasis even poorer.
- Some people lose their lives, some face social stigma, while in some cases, entire families are driven away from the villages, because of the Dakin practice.

Analysis of respondents who believe in the Bhagat system–

The proportion of believers and non-believers in Bhagats or Karagirs is shown in Table No. 2.

Table 2: Respondents who believe in Bhagats

Sr. No.	Taluka	No. of Respondents	Bhagats		System
			Believers	Nonbelievers	Don't Know
1	Akkalkuwa	25	23 (92)	2 (8)	0
2	Taloda	25	21 (84)	2 (16)	2 (16)
3	Dhadgaon (Akrani)	25	25 (100)	0	0
4	Shahada	25	17 (68)	4 (16)	4 (16)
5	Nawapur	25	19 (76)	3 (12)	3 (12)
6	Nandurbar	25	11 (44)	8 (32)	7 (28)
	Total	150 (100)	116 (77.3)	19 (12.7)	15 (10)

Source: Face-to-face interviews

Note: Figures on the right denote percentages

Table no. 2 shows the Taluka-wise proportion of respondents believing and not believing in the Bhagat system. Out of the 150 respondents studied, 116 respondents believe in the Bhagat system. This is 77.3% of the entire district. 19 respondents do not believe in the Bhagat system, and their proportion is 12.7%. The number of respondents who ‘Don’t Know’ is 15, and their percentage is 10%. The maximum respondents believing in the Bhagat are in Akkalkuwa Taluka, with 92% proportion. The

last number is in the Nandurbar Taluka, with 44% proportion. Yet, those who do not believe in the Bhagat are in Nandurbar Taluka only, and their percentage is 32%.

The proportion of respondents answering whether the Dakin practice exists/does not exist

Table no. 3 analyzes Taluka-wise respondents answering whether the Dakin practice exists or does not exist.

Table 3: Respondents who answer whether the Dakin practice exists or does not exist

Sr. No.	Taluka	No. of Respondents	Bhagat/		System
			Believers	Nonbelievers	Don't Know
1	Akkalkuwa	25	21 (84)	4 (16)	0
2	Taloda	25	19 (76)	3 (12)	3 (12)
3	Dhadgaon (Akrani)	25	25 (100)	0	0
4	Shahada	25	17 (68)	5 (20)	3 (12)
5	Nawapur	25	12 (48)	8 (32)	5 (20)
6	Nandurbar	25	10 (40)	10 (40)	5 (10)
	Total	150 (100)	104 (69.3)	30 (20)	16 (10.7)

Source: Face-to-face interviews

Note: Figures on the right denote percentages

According to the above data in Table No. 3, out of the 150 respondents studied, 104 answer that they believe in the Dakin practice, which is 69.3%, while 20% are non-believers, whereas 10.7% respondents answer that they Don't Know. Analyzed Taluka-wise, the maximum number of believers in the Dakin practice are in Dhadgaon Taluka, which is 100%. The least number of believers is in Nandurbar Taluka again, the percentage being 40%. After Dhadgaon Taluka, the number of believers in the Dakin system in a decreasing order comes in Akkalkuwa (84%), Taloda (76%), Shahada (68%) and Nawapur (48%).

The proportion of respondents answering that the Dakin practice exists, based on education and tribes

Table no. 4 analyzes respondents answering that the Dakin practice exists, based on education and tribe.

Table 4: The proportion of respondents answering whether the Dakin practice exists/does not exist based on education and tribes

Sr. No.	Tribe	No. of respondents	Uneducated	Educated
1	Bhil	39	28 (71.8)	11 (28.2)
2	Pavra	28	13 (46.4)	15 (53.6)
3	Dhanka	11	7 (63.7)	4 (36.3)
4	Gavit	13	8 (61.5)	5 (38.5)
5	Mavchi	8	7 (87.5)	1 (12.5)
6	Kokani	5	3 (60)	2 (40)
	Total	104 (100)	66 (63.4)	38 (36.6)

Source: Face-to-face interviews

Note: Figures on the right denote percentages

It is clear from Table no. 4 that out of the 150 respondents studied, 63.4% Adivasis believing in the Dakin practice are uneducated, while 36.6% are educated. Out of the surveyed respondents in the district, 76.5%, i.e., maximum number of the Mavchi respondents are uneducated, whereas the proportion of respondents believing in the Dakin practice from the Bhil tribe is 71.8%, and the proportion of educated respondents from the same tribe is 28.2%. Proportion of the educated Pavra tribe is 53.6%, while that of the uneducated respondents is 46.4%. In the Dhanka tribe, proportion of the uneducated respondents is 63.7%, while that of the educated ones is 36.3%. In the Gavit tribe, the proportion of the educated respondents is 38.5%, while that of the uneducated ones is 61.5%. Thus, it is clear that those answering that the Dakin practice exists is sizeable among the uneducated as well as educated communities.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the survey of 150 respondents from all the six talukas of Nandurbar district, which was conducted to study the Dakin-related practice.

- The percentage of the number of families below poverty line is 90% in the area covered for research. Employment is available for only 4 to 6 months at village place, hence 96% of the families remain jobless.
- 71.40% men and 81.47% women in the area covered for research are illiterate, and so, then there is widespread superstition.
- 64.50% men and 44.18% women in the area covered for research smoke and consume alcohol, leading to widespread addiction.

- 87% Adivasis resort to the Bhagat for treating any health problems.
- 69.3% respondents answer that the Dakin practice exists. Of these, 63.4% are uneducated and 36.6% are educated.
- The proportion of those reporting that they were determined to be Dakins so that their land could be grabbed is significant.
- More than 75% respondents say that the Dakin practice is traditional and it is correct.
- A Dakin-related crime is performed by the entire community including family members. Though in reality, it is a crime, it is just punishment from the viewpoint of the Adivasis. In extreme cases, the whole crowd attacks a police station.
- The sufferings of a woman determined to be a Dakin are really heart-rending. "I am also a mother, I have children, I have a home, where can I go, leaving all this behind...?" cries Siplibai Bhimsingh Vasawe (30 years) from the Tembhalipada settlement at Sari, under the Sakliumar Gram Panchayat, tal. Akkalkuwa.
- 72% of the women determined to be Dakins are 60 to 70 years old. 4% are above 70 years, while 24% women are 30 to 60 years old.

Recommendations

- In order that the jobless hands should get some employment, earn a living, their poverty is eradicated, works such as irrigation of the land, leveling of the farming on hill slopes, need to be started.
- The majority of the incidents does not come to light because of geographic inaccessibility. So, means of communication must be increased. The government needs to construct to read up to each and every settlement, but roads must at least be constructed up to major villages.
- The Bhagat or Karagir system must be eradicated. Awareness must be created among the Adivasis. Today, there are electricity, TVs, dish cables in every village and settlement. This harmful practice must be removed through street plays, films, television.
- Dakin-related crimes are not allowed to reach police stations. For this, the village police officer, Sarpanch, Panchayat members must be held responsible.
- Firm action must be taken against Dakin-related crimes. For Dakin-related crimes that barely reported, articles such as 337, 341, 324, 574, 506, 34 are applied, which are applicable for crimes such as tutoring, threatening to kill, beating etc. But there is no separate article for charging a person with a Dakin-related crime. The government needs to make amendments for this.
- Womens' organizations and other organizations in the district must rise against this practice. Women become enemies of women, and this must stop.
- A Dakin is supposed to be very evil, frightening people, eating people alive, killing or making the fall victims of various illnesses with the power of her Mantras. But in reality, the poor, helpless woman who is determined to be the Dakin keeps running away, saving her life from the community, family members. Adivasis, particularly women need to be convinced, made to understand this self-contradiction.

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