



## Anti-Superstition Laws in India

**For Prelims:** National Crime Records Bureau, IPC, Drugs and Magic Remedies Act, 1954.

**For Mains:** Need for Anti-Superstition Laws in India.

### Why in News?

The brutal murders as part of "ritualistic human sacrifices" of two women in Kerala have left the country in shock.

- The murders have sparked a debate about the **prevalence of superstitious beliefs, black magic, and witchcraft in India.**

### What is Superstition?

- It is a belief related to **ignorance or fear and characterized by obsessive reverence** for reverence for the supernatural.
- The term 'Superstition' has been taken from the Latin word '**Superstitio**', which indicates **extreme fear of the god.**
- Superstitions are not country, religion, culture, community, region, caste, or class-specific, it is **widespread and found in every corner of the world.**

### What is Black Magic?

- Black magic, also known as witchcraft, is the usage of **supernatural power for evil and selfish purposes** and to perform **malicious practices to destroy someone physically or mentally** or financially.
- It can be done using the **victim's hair, clothes, photo or looking directly into eyes.**

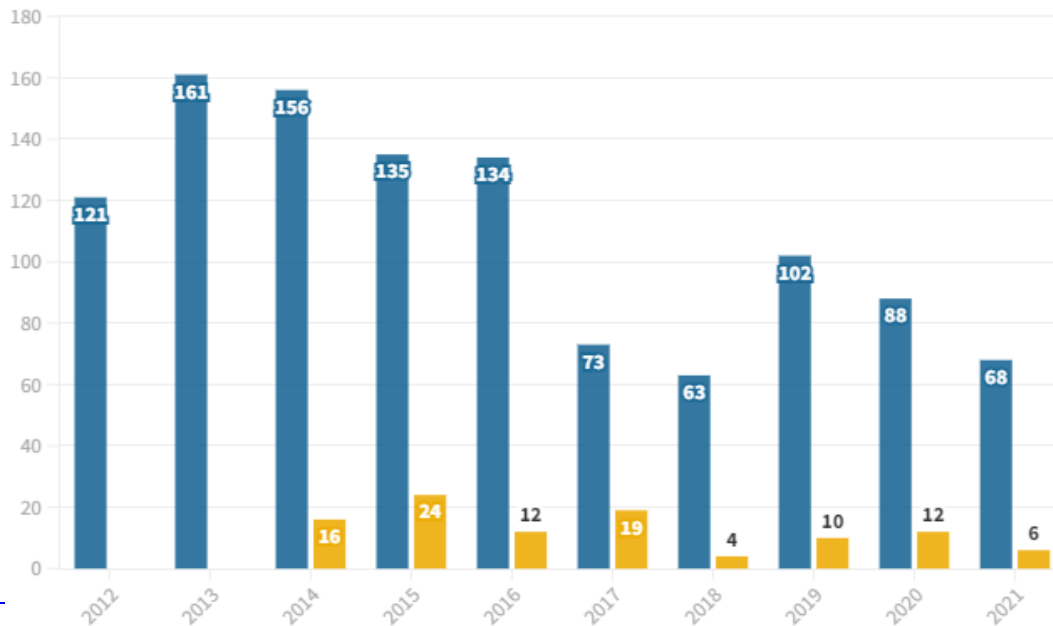
### How Pervasive are Superstitious Killings in India?

- As per the 2021 report of the [National Crime Records Bureau \(NCRB\)](#), six deaths were linked to human sacrifices, while witchcraft was the motive for 68 killings.
- The **maximum number** of witchcraft cases were **reported from Chhattisgarh (20), followed by Madhya Pradesh (18) and Telangana (11).**
- In 2020, India saw 88 deaths due to witchcraft and 11 died as part of 'human sacrifices', the NCRB report states.

## Witchcraft-related and child/human sacrifice-related deaths 2012-21

Data for child/human sacrifice-related deaths in 2012 and 2013 is not accounted for in the NCRB

■ Witchcraft-related Deaths ■ Human Sacrifice



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### What are the Related Laws in India?

- In India, there is no central law that exclusively deals with crimes related to witchcraft, superstition, or occult-inspired activities.
- In 2016, Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha, but it wasn't passed.
  - The draft provisions included **punishment for accusing or identifying a woman as a witch, use of criminal force** against a woman, or torture or humiliation on the pretext of performing witchcraft.
- Section 302 (punishment for murder) of [IPC \(Indian Penal Code\)](#) takes cognisance of human sacrifice, but **only after the murder is committed**, likewise, Section 295A works to discourage such practices.
- **Article 51A (h) of the Indian Constitution makes it a fundamental duty for Indian citizens to develop the scientific temper**, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform.
- Other provisions under the **Drugs and Magic Remedies Act, 1954** also aim to tackle the **debilitating impact of various superstitious activities** prevalent in India.

### What are the State-Specific Laws?

- **Bihar:**
  - Bihar was the **first State to enact a law** to prevent witchcraft, identification of a woman as a witch and eliminate torture, humiliation and killing of women.
  - The Prevention of Witch (Daain) Practices Act came into force in October 1999.
- **Maharashtra:**
  - In 2013 Maharashtra enacted the **Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and Other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act**, which banned the practice of human sacrifice in the state.
  - A section in the legislation specifically deals with claims made by 'godmen' who say they have supernatural powers.
- **Karnataka:**
  - Karnataka effected anti-superstition law in 2017 known as the **Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Act**.

- The Act comprehensively counters "inhumane" practices linked to religious rituals.
- **Kerala:**
  - Kerala does **not have a comprehensive Act** to deal with black magic and other superstitions.

## What is the Need for Country-Wide Anti-superstition Act?

- Allowing the unhindered continuance of such practices **violates an individual's fundamental right to equality and right to life** under **Articles 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution** respectively.
- Such acts also violate several provisions of various international legislations to which India is a signatory, such as the '**Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948**', '**The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966**', and 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979'.
- Only eight states in India have witch-hunting legislations so far.
  - These include Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Rajasthan, Assam, Maharashtra and Karnataka.
- In the absence of measures to tackle superstitions, unscientific and irrational practices such as **faith healing, quackery, and misinformation regarding medical procedures can also balloon up**, which can have severe detrimental effects on public order and health of citizens.

## Way Forward

- It is **pertinent to remember that bringing a legislation to deal with this social issue shall only mean half the battle won.**
- A meaningful reform will **need to increase awareness among the masses** through information campaigns, and by roping in community/religious leaders to debunk the myths surrounding such practices.

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