

MORNING MIX

‘Black witch priest’ in India dismembers 4-year-old in sacrifice to find teen’s missing cellphone

By [Travis M. Andrews](#) and Swati Gupta

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On Oct. 24, a 4-year-old girl went missing from her home in the Charaideo district of upper Assam, a mostly tribal state in northeast India.

Last Monday, the child’s body was found in a forest about 75 to 90 yards from the Ratanpur tea estate where she lived with her parents. She had been decapitated and her arms had been severed.

Both her arms and her head were found scattered near the body on the forest floor.

The horrific dismembering was allegedly the result of a 14-year-old girl, who lived in the same village, losing her mobile phone.

Wanting it back, her parents — Hanuman Bhumij and his wife, Many Bhumij — turned to black magic, police said.

As Prasanta Phukan, an inspector in charge of the Sonari Police Station in Assam, told The Washington Post, many in the remote tribal area are uneducated and steeped in superstition.

They conducted a prayer ritual that Phukan said was performed by Gul Mhammad Ali, also known as Gulam, a tantric, or black witch priest, in the village.

With Gulam were his nephew Hajrat Ali and another assistant, Ariful Haqmulla.

Part of the prayer ritual to retrieve the mobile phone included sacrificing the 4-year-old girl. On Oct. 24, they allegedly kidnapped her and proceeded to horribly disfigure her, eventually killing her.

Police have arrested Hanuman and Many, along with the two assistants in the ritual. Gulam, though, has fled.

The 14-year-old who originally lost her phone was not arrested, since she is a minor. The family of the victim and the family that took part in the prayer ritual knew each other from living together in the same small village.

Everyone involved, including the deceased child, are Adivasis, descendants of indigenous people in India who have been the objects of discrimination and exploitation in India for years.

These communities tend to be poor and uneducated, generally working as laborers. Many of them tend to be deeply superstitious, and their belief systems can involve goddesses and witches.

Crimes, particularly forms of ritual human sacrifice, stemming from these occult beliefs are not unheard of in more rural parts of India.

In 2006, the Guardian published a story titled “Indian cult kills children for goddess” that discussed a few different human sacrifices in the name of the occult. It cited an unofficially tally that 28 humans had been sacrificed in western Uttar Pradesh in four months. During that time, four tantrics were jailed for these crimes.

One woman who was having night terrors abducted a 3-year-old on the advice of a “holy man.” She and two other men allegedly cut the boy’s nose, ears and hands off after covering him in ghee and sandalwood. They left his bleeding body in front of an image of Kali.

Last June, to offer a more recent example, a 55-year-old man in a rural village in Jharkhand, a state in eastern India, was beheaded in what was allegedly a ritualistic sacrifice. The offering was meant to bring about a better harvest and more timely rains, police told the Hindustan Times.

Police believe that the crime was carried out by the Orkas or Mudkatwa, which the Times reported is “an occultist group that buries human heads in paddy fields for better rains and harvest.”

Sometimes, though, beliefs are used to potentially cover up other motives.

A week prior to the 55-year-old’s beheading, a 5-year-old was beheaded on the Rangapara Tea Estate in Assam. People living in the area blamed the crime on a tantric named Kali Puja. A mob lynched him, supposedly for this crime, though police later said that the child was killed over a monetary dispute and the lynched person was Nanu Mirdha, who was not a tantric, Firspost reported.

Meanwhile on the other side, those accused of being witches or black magic priests are often hunted and killed.

As The Post’s Terrance McCoy wrote in July 2014, “In places where superstition and vigilantism overlap and small rumors can turn deadly, nearly 2,100 people accused of witchcraft have been killed between 2000 and 2012.”

This, though, might not come close to showing the breadth of the problem.

“Like the proverbial tip of a very deep iceberg, available data hides much of the reality of a problem that is deeply ingrained in society,” stated New Delhi-based Partners for Law in Development. “It is only the most gruesome cases that are reported — most cases of witch-hunting go unreported and unrecorded.”

The executions take place in deeply disturbing ways.

As Singh wrote:

The helpless ‘witches’ are hounded and punished by being stripped naked, paraded around the villages, their hair is burnt off or their heads tonsured, their faces blackened, their noses cut off, their teeth pulled out (they are supposedly defanged) so that they can no longer curse, they are whipped, they are branded, sometimes, they are forced to eat human excreta and finally, they are put to death (the victim is hanged, impaled, hacked, lynched or buried alive). Surprisingly, such stomach-churning, toe-curling torture takes place not in dingy, shadowy places, but mostly in vast, open village lands where the cheering crowd can fill a modest stadium.

This fear of black magic runs deeply through the community. In 2006, for example, a family of five — a tea plantation worker and his four children — were beheaded when several members of the Adivasi community at the Sadharu tea plantation became ill and died.

“A trial was held to prove if Munda and his family were involved in casting evil spells in the tea garden that led to a bout of epidemics in the area,” police officer D Das told the BBC. “They said the killings would appease the gods.”

Swati Gupta reported from New Delhi. Travis M. Andrews reported from Washington.

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