



Witchcraft and Witchcraft Cleansing among the Vasava Bhils

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Abstract. – This article concerns the social mechanism of witchcraft among the Vasava Bhils of South Gujarat, in the western part of India. Witches are frequently mentioned in Vasava oral literature. The practice of witchcraft continues even in modern times, but to a limited degree. In Vasava society, where no institutional controls by means of law and order for resolving conflicts exist, witchcraft acts as a means of social control. The article places witchcraft as well as anti-witchcraft practices in the corresponding social setting. A detailed description of specific magical practices has also been provided. [*India, Vasava Bhils, witchcraft, mythology, final rites, evil eye, social control*]

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The Vasavas are a subsection of the largest tribe of India called Bhil, which is spread across different states, especially Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. The traditional habitat of the Vasava Bhils is the region between the two rivers, Tapi and Narmada (Reva), which they call in their dialect *Oleba Van*. There are no bigger towns in this region but mostly scattered settlements in what remains of the former dense forest. The infrastructure is poor. The people who live there cherish their traditional belief system, and this holds true also for their ideas concerning illness, cure, and good health.

The Vasavas are by nature peace-loving people. When faced with centuries of outside invasion, they preferred to withdraw rather than to confront. As

a result, they were pushed to the remote forests in the hilly interior. In their struggle to preserve their noble identity, rich culture, and age old traditions, they had to give up fertile lands on the plains that they once possessed.

Originally, the dwellings of the Vasavas consisted of a cluster of huts (hamlets) scattered in the vast forest. They made a living by fishing, hunting, food gathering, and zoom cultivation. The tribal community owned the land and the forest, but in the course of time the forest became the property of the government, which led to a drastic change of their lifestyle and their pattern of living.

Though the Vasavas are distinctly different from the rest of the population in Gujarat, they have to get into the main-stream culture of Gujarat if they want to survive. The formation of the Republic of India brought the tribals into contact with the outside world through the government and forest departments, police and judiciary system, politics and election processes, education, etc. Media have also played an important role in that change.

Since the Vasavas live in remote areas, they lack even the basic amenities like primary health care centers, schools, public transportation, roads, market, and communication facilities. A vast majority of them depend upon agriculture for their livelihood, and partly on the forest by-products. Many of them possess small land holdings of the cultivable land, but they are too small to produce enough income for the family. Thus there is no food security throughout the year, and besides the deteriorating land productivity has compelled them to leave their homeland and migrate to the urban areas in search of other alternatives.

Vasavas on the Crossroads

With the growth of population the land gets divided and fragmented. As a result, the land available for each family for food production became insufficient. Due to the sloping terrain and the quantum of rainfall, the fertile top soil gets eroded, thus accelerating the degradation of the land. In the course of the last few years monsoon has become more and more erratic, and most of them who do rain-fed cultivation face starvation. Since they are illiterate and unskilled, they work as casual laborers, exploited by the contractors, and are forced to live in inadequate and unhygienic conditions.

Traders from outside who come to sell provisions and to buy agricultural produce from the tribals also plunder the timber, thus taking away the last resources from the tribal land. New development policies of the government also result in displacement and rampant migration (Narmada dam and wildlife sanctuary), and made them into a prey of development. The dominant culture imposed by the invaders does serious damage to the tribal ways. The employed sections of the community imitate the culture of outsiders as superior. The culture taught through the school textbooks is alien to them, but as a part of their curriculum they are forced to learn it. On the one hand, due to modern education they are totally cut off from their oral traditions (ethos of minority), on the other hand, however, they are forcefully taught the ethos of the majority, which resulted in "syncretization" and acculturation.

The impact of globalization also affects the Vasavas. The people of the area have suffered from grave consequences of unsustainable development involving an unregulated exploitation of environmental, economic and human resources. The educated tribal people know very little of their traditional religion and customary practices. In general, they are increasingly less interested in these matters. The scenario of their world is swiftly changing with the introduction of mass media. The audiovisual media have attacked their social fabric, thus creating conflictive situations around the area. Missionaries of various religions, sects, and neo-sects have built their bases in the village communities. In this worsening situation, the traditional leaders and religious intermediaries are becoming increasingly isolated and socially passive.

The Concept of *Dakan*

In Vasavi or in Bhili dialect, the word *dakan/dako* means a woman who is regarded as a witch. In their worldview, certain women are stimulated by negative emotions, mainly by envy, causing harm, sickness, misfortune, economic loss, and death by casting the evil power. *Dakan* implies activity which is antisocial and illegitimate.

Due to their belief in *dakan vidhya* or *maili vidi* (black magic), the family as well as the community have the suspicion that witches may be at work when obstacles and calamities in various forms start befalling them. The affected party suspects that the *dakan* is either in the family or outside, in the village community. This sometimes results in divisions, even within the family and in the community. The social image of the suspected family is tarnished and, at times, they are forced to leave the village for good. Since both accused and accusing parties can never get reconciled over the years, enmity persists for a long span of time. Consequently, the village suffers a lack of basic unity within the community resulting in distrust in each other. This enmity surfaces on many occasions, in particular when community works are in progress. If the village lacks a capable leader, or *vahavo*, to manage the problem, then the villagers distance themselves from such development until the members of the village community eventually reconcile with each other. "However, witchcraft accusation is also associated with some misfortune ... (On the other hand) personal misfortune and grudges are given expression through witchcraft accusation" (Chaudhari 1992: 160).

Mythology

When god created human beings, he also created some *dakans* (witches) among them, who were experts in performing *dakan vidi* (witchcraft). In their appearance, *dakans* were not like normal human beings. They had two horns (*hing*) on their heads, each shaped like a sickle. On account of these, they were openly recognized as witches. The witches went to deity and told him that people, apparently by seeing their horns, could recognize them as *dakans*. And pleaded for a normal human look, or otherwise they would become a laughing stock among the people. Further, they would not get married. God then took pity on them and removed the horns. From that time, the witches appear normal. Deity shifted these horns to the trees called *dudh kuvad* (*Wrightia finctoria*) and *garmalo*. That

is why the *dudh kuvad* tree bears horn or sickle-shaped horn-fruits (*hing*) today.

According to a Vasava Bhil mythological story, when the bird called Tidabi fell sick, Raja Pantha strewed a few grains around Tidabi and then took it to the shaman (*badavo*), which is another bird called Tudo (*badavo tudo jane koihi khakyo punjaro*). After looking at the grains, (*dana kholine*) Tudo *badavo* told Raja Pantha that the “pot of the house had been broken in the house itself” (*gharni matali gharmaj fute*). There Raja Pantha gave a single stroke on the head of Tudo and made it permanently flat, the reason being that he did not give proper information and advice. When Raja Pantha went home, the main queen, Yah Mogi (also known as *yah pandhar*), inquired about the incident, but Raja Pantha deliberately kept his mouth shut. The queen again insisted on getting an explanation of the *badavo*’s story. Raja Pantha finally surrendered to her request and told that the *dakan* (witch) “was within our own family.” In fact, it was a close relative of Raja Pantha called Umbaravanu who was involved in witchcraft (some even say that she was the mother of Raja Pantha). It is said that Umbaravanu brought a twelve-ton load (*bar mann dukhe*) of suffering and sorrows to this world and a thirteen-ton load of remedies and medicines (*ter mann jalamuli*) to cure them.

Vidhya or magical skill to kill persons was given to the *dakan* by the deity. It was so powerful that they could cast a spell upon their enemy and cause a big visible hole in his/her stomach. This being visible, the *dakan* could be caught red-handed while casting the spell on the victim. The *dakans* were initially happy to have this power, but upon their request the deity took away their full power and gave them a partial one (*adi got vidhya*), which targets the victim but leaves no outer appearances of a hole or a wound on the stomach.

Ordination to Sorcery

The *badavi* (a sort of female black magician) who practices witchcraft is commonly called a *dakan* who takes tyros above the age of five, mostly from her family and close relatives, primarily a grandson or a granddaughter. But the *dakan* imparts best of her witchcraft skills to her youngest daughter in order to continue and keep this practice alive. Sometimes it happens that while coming from the riverbank, she sprinkles water on an unaware village boy or girl, this being called *panino chhanto nakhe*. With this sprinkling of water, the boy or girl is called “half-learned” (*ador hikhyo*). In the case

of the *ador hikhyo*, there appears a strong inner inclination to learn evil art. The learning process has to be completed however. If s/he gives up in the middle, s/he will die or go mad (Naik 1956: 188; Mittal and Sharma 1998: 354).

In connection with the above mentioned case, the ordination to sorcery has to be completed by performing the initiation. The divination performed by a *badavo* will determine the rituals to be performed for the complete initiation in sorcery. The *karagir* (skilled person or expert) or *badavo* – that is, one who is an expert in this witchcraft – will call the “half-learned” at the dead of night to the bank of a river. On arrival, the *badavo* or *karagir* digs seven small wells (pit holes) in the riverbed and gives a ritual bath to her/him with the water of these wells. After performing some other related rituals, the *badavo* makes an offering of a goat or a cock. The people who have accompanied the “half-learned” and others few who have witnessed this occasion are told to keep the whole affair a complete secret. In case the ritual is not performed, the “half-learned” is not at peace. S/he becomes confused and cannot concentrate on anything since this works on her/his mind all the time.

Some other respondent narrated the whole nightly modus operandi of a witch when novices are trained. T. B. Naik writes on the same topic of magical witchcraft rituals about the same tribe in a similar manner. On a dark night, the *dakan* puts her family members in a deep slumber and prepares a horse out of bamboo strips which she makes come alive. After mounting this flying horse (*kunda pethe*), she travels towards the riverbank or cremation ground, where she is supposed to perform her *vidi* (1956: 188). There she removes all her pupil’s clothes, sprinkles water on the pupil’s head while murmuring certain spells. When the novice becomes self-possessed, she shakes and discards her clothes and runs naked (*nagi-poongi*) towards the water (1956: 188). The *dakan* or *badavi* digs seven or nine small pit holes (wells) in the sand of the riverbed and bathes the tyro, taking water from each small well. This means that she teaches from each well one lesson or *vidhya* while pouring the water from those wells over the novice. After this, the tyro regains consciousness. The aftermath of the training is that s/he has to sit on a single *kachya* raw threaded swing in a well and eat human excreta or perform other mean acts. This is to check whether the pupil has actually become a full-fledged *dakan*. If the tyro remains “half-learned,” s/he may lose senses or die (Presler 1971: 88; Naik 1956: 88).

Sometimes even as the *dakan* gives a round-shaped *gut* made out of flour or a coconut or some-

thing edible to the novice to consume, the *vidhya* enters the novice. After the young girl has surrendered to become a witch, she must be “hardened” by doing the worst possible deed, namely “eating” some members of her own family. As among the Vasavas, this practice is prevalent among most of the tribal peoples of the world.¹ She also has to sacrifice a near kin to the spirit of the witches. The tyro “eats” her close kinsman’s liver and shortly her close kinsman sickens and dies. Her close relatives will never come to know about the whole affair.² After this, the girl is in the circle of witches who know what she has done and there is no escape; she becomes heartless and may commit any foul deed in the future (Presler 1971: 89). After getting trained, the novice puts the skills acquired from the *badavi* into practice all by her own.

Performing Witchcraft

Although most witches are females, sometimes males, too, can perform witchcraft. Still, it is women who are almost always suspected of witchcraft.³ H. Presler notes that “it is believed that witches seduce young girls [including her youngest daughter], especially at puberty, to become witches, and thus the black art continues through generations” (1971: 88). The Vasavas believe that one who has been trained in witchcraft gets married and goes to her husband’s place in another village. However, she does not practice witchcraft there until and unless she has given birth to her first offspring. It is believed that in some rare cases she and her husband jointly sacrifice the first fruit of her womb (*bhog aape*) in order to make the practice of witchcraft strong and powerful. They prepare a statue out of their dead child’s mud, which is called *hiyaru*.

A woman who is engaged in witchcraft is extraordinarily good in public relations. She invites strangers (who are passing by) to her house and offers them water, food, and a smoke. This social dimension of her character positively boosts her social image and leaves a good impression on individuals of her community. The one who receives favours from her considers her a noble person and helps the witch to hide her evil mind and her destructive nature. For this reason, no one suspects her to be a *dakan*.

One of the respondents, Pachiabhai, from village Kaltar, narrated an incident when he, along with two others, was returning by jeep to his village at midnight. They saw a *dakan* who was standing stark naked on the riverbank near the crematory and water was dripping from her untied hair. She did not move an inch even when the jeep passed by. They got so frightened that they did not even dare to look back.

Witches are always associated with animals and birds which are black, disgusting, dangerous or active at night time (Mair 1969: 39; Haskins 1974: 30). Another respondent stated that a witch takes the form of various birds or animals (cat or dog) and goes to the victim’s house, one of her most favourite forms being that of an owl. In the darkness of night, she comes to the victim’s house and sits on *hovodu* (hedge). There she makes noise, after which she flies to the crossroads in the village and collects a *khapati* (the piece of a broken pot used for the final rite of dead). This *khapati* is carried to cremation ground (*mahan*) and from there to the riverbed, where she draws the house of her victims on the sand with all details (of the living room, kitchen, stable, etc.). She digs small pits in the drawn house, burying some flour in the kitchen place and some milk, bone, and hair of the tails of dead animals in the stable. She buries the same *khapati* (pieces of black pot) at the entrance to the main door. An effigy of Masanio Put (the male malevolent ghost of cremation ground) is also created by the power of magical ritual and buried in the drawn house. The ritual is completed by chanting/uttering some magical spell (*mantras/hokat*) with the sprinkling of water. The *dakan* performs all these rites without wearing any clothes. Sitting near the drawn house she begins to cry aloud on account of the loss of animal, crop, or human being, almost as if the loss was personal.

Whatever has been buried in the sand of the riverbed will invisibly travel to the exact location of the house of the victim and get buried therein at the exact location in the house. The *dakan* then takes a ritual bath in the river splashing water high into the air. While performing the magic ritual, Fatio Put (ghost) comes in the form of a snake to guard (*masul*) her clothes left on the riverbank. This snake coils around the clothes of the *dakan* not allowing anyone to touch them. She quietly walks back home before four in the morning after wearing her clothes and drying her hair. She keeps her clothes dry lest no household inmates could suspect regarding her evil activity. While returning from the river, she brings along a few pebbles to throw on to the tiled roof. This is to check if any member of

1 Mair (1969: 39); Naik (1956: 188); Glatter (1969: 145); Troisi (1979: 218); Haskins (1974: 29f.).

2 Mair (1969: 39); Troisi (1979: 218); Kumar (1977: 208).

3 Glatter (1969: 144); Troisi (1979: 108); Xalxo (1996: 16); Stevens (1996: 1229); Mbiti (1970: 224).

the household is awake before she sneaks into the house.

Effects of Witchcraft

On the completion of *dakan vidi* (witchcraft), the ghost of the cremation ground (Masanio Put / Mahanio Put) comes and sits on the main supporting wooden beam of the rooftop *Mob* of the victim's house. Masanio Put makes a creaking noise as if something is breaking, and one gets the feeling that the whole house is shaking (Naik 1956: 190). Children of the house suffer from one disease after another, milk animals stop giving milk or die suddenly, and certain crops in the field are destroyed due to disease caused by the *dakan* (Presler 1971: 88). When any fruit-giving tree in the field or compound suddenly withers, it is considered to be the effect of *dakan vidi*. Evans-Pritchard (1965) gives a long list of events that might be ascribed to witchcraft, which take place among the Azande African tribe (see Mair 1969: 19). Such events also occur in the Vasava Bhil tribe. Witches are believed to bring the whole village society to a standstill. They are the greatest enemies of society, engaged in performing antisocial deeds, which poison and hampers its welfare (Mbiti 1970: 224).

In some other type of performance on the individual level, the *dakan* harasses the victim (individually or the whole family) by physical or mental torture, and later kills the victim. At night, the *dakan* goes to the river and makes a victims statue of clay, places it in front of her and then performs the magic ritual (*vidi*). While doing the *vidi*, she pokes wooden sticks into the various body parts of the statue (Colaabavala 1977: 41). This action of hers simultaneously takes the corresponding effect on the represented person who is asleep in the house; s/he starts losing vitality of the limbs, unbearable pain occurs in the body, and after a short time the victim dies (Naik 1956: 188; Frazer 1944: 21). Sometimes the *dakan*, after returning from the river, performs another *vidi* behind the family hearth (*chulla*) of the house. It is believed that during this *vidi* she "removes" the liver of the victim into a vessel without extracting it (Presler 1971: 88; Glatter 1969: 145). At the same time, she replaces the extracted liver with that of a bird or animal. She "eats" the liver of the victim and the result is that the victim gradually sickens and dies.

Another type of ritual occurs on the village level. When several people die in the village community, or when children and livestock suffer from disease, or when the crop or the rain fail, the Vasava

Bhils suspect again that it is due to the practice of *dakan vidi*. The *vahavo* (headman of the village) gives a call to villagers to assemble at a particular place to discuss the preventive action. Some community members will go along with the headman to visit a *badavo*. Before leaving, they strew grains around the sick person or animal and then take the grains along with them. The *badavo* will open the packet (*Pudi Kholine*) and on seeing the grains or on opening the grains, performs the divination by looking at the grains and placing them on a piece of cloth spread before him. In the process he gives a detailed description of the patient or animal, its gender, caused sickness, location etc., and after that he indirectly articulates (sometimes in a poetic form) the name of the witch, her age, her outer appearances, the house locations, directions, the description regarding the house and its members, etc. (Nath 1954: 128).

The *badavolpanavi* from some other village (especially from Maharashtra State) gives out the name of the witch, but the *badavo* of the same village does not dare to do that. In case a person dies after a brief illness, the head of the family will go to the cremation ground the day after disposal in order to observe the position of the cremated body. If the head, neck, and chest have not been burnt well or any rib stands out in a straight line, then the family head doubts that something from outside (evil) may have caused the death of the family member. Hence, he throws a few grains, or picks up a coin from the ashes of the cremated body. He carries the grains to the *modvaya* or *fira jana* to another village to meet an expert (*karagir*). This *pudi* (packet of grain) will be shown to the *bavado* to get a detailed divination, which includes the name of the *dakan* who "ate" (*khai goei*) and killed the sick person. Among the Vasava Bhils a similar divination rite takes place to reveal the name of the witch, as it was also described by Evans-Pritchard among the Azande tribe (1965: 164). He writes that while performing the divination dance, the witch-doctor of the Azande tribe discloses the name of the witch who is injuring the sick person, in the midst of all the people who have gathered as spectators.

During my stay in Vandri, the villagers narrated an incident that took place about seven years ago. The *dakan* had bewitched a young girl of the village, who subsequently passed away after a brief illness. Her family members took a few grains to the *badavos'* place for divination. The *badavo* gave the name and the exact location of the house of the witch who had victimized their daughter. On their return, they found the suspected old lady gathering fuel wood on the outskirts of the village. In

fury, they gave her a merciless beating with wooden sticks, kicks, etc. and dragged her by the hair. She was left there unconscious and breathed her last at that spot. The family members of the suspected lady filed a criminal case in the Dediapada police station against those involved in the brutal killing. The accused were arrested and imprisoned for one and half year, until the court gave a verdict of acquittal.

Searching for a Cause

Makh hodhe chandu, ann dakan hodhe bahannu is a common proverb in the Vasava Bhil world. It means: “The *dakan* is always in search of a cause to bewitch someone, just like a fly is ever in search of a sore.” The supporting story to explain this proverb was narrated by the villagers during my stay in the village.

One day, a lady was going to the forest to collect fuelwood along with her young son. While moving through the forest, they saw a very big antelope (*sambar*) standing under a tree. The son said to the mother, “*Yah*, (mother) I have heard that people suspect you to be a *dakan*, and they often even accuse you of bewitching them. Why can't you ‘eat’ this antelope?” Mother patiently replied, “*Poira*, (son) I cannot ‘eat’ anybody without a proper cause. I need the slightest reason to do so.” On hearing the sound of human voices, the frightened antelope took a sudden leap. While trying to run, its foot touched a small pebble, which directly struck the body of her young son and hurt him. The antelope had hurt the boy and the *dakan* got a reason to “eat” the antelope, which she did.

It is said that a male sorcerer can affect only the standing crop in the field or the livestock of the household. He is unable to cause any great harm except in some cases, where he can exert great control over emotions. By contrast, female witches are capable of causing harm on a larger scale, which may extend to the individual household or even to the entire village. When I asked my informants for an explanation, they explained that women have a greater tendency towards envy or jealousy (see also Troisi 1979: 222; Colaabavala 1977: 48). Women become so emotional and cannot bear it to see something lacking in their home, which their neighbours have in plenty. Women cannot accept the welfare of other families and are hence more emotionally inclined towards witchcraft. They go to extremes – even taking the life of the bewitched person.

Obtaining Deity's Permission

The saying *Lekhuyu Vei Toj Khay* means “one gets eaten only if it is written in one's destiny.” The goddess Dhan Kukar writes the fate (*chhatti lekhatrī*) on the forehead of a child on the sixth or seventh day (*pechero/hathop Punjan*) after birth. Should it be written in one's destiny, one cannot escape it; it will take place exactly as written.

Whenever the *dakan* persistently thinks of “eating” a particular person in the village, it is called *dhakannu viro*. She first goes to the village deity Gamdevati, to obtain permission, since the life of the person can be taken only if the village deity grants permission. It is believed that the *dakan* goes for permission to the place where the village deity is worshiped, carrying her own urine, which she can sprinkle on the place of the deity, should her request be denied. The sprinkling of urine causes the village deity to become defiled as a result of which the offerings and sacrifices made to deity by the villagers cannot reach him. The displeased deity casts her/his wrath upon the village community in the form of sicknesses, sufferings, and natural calamities.

Sometimes the *dakan* insists on the approval of the village deity despite his persistent refusal. In this case, the village deity whips her with a long chain to drive her out of his presence. The *dakan* stubbornly refuses to leave, which may eventually result in her death. However, the entire village comes to know about it, when they notice the whip marks on the back of *dakan's* body, and they see that her body has turned black.

The Final Rites of the Dakan

T. B. Naik reports: “To find out whether a woman is a real witch or not, people take her out of the village and subject her to various ordeals” (1956: 234). For example, among the Santal people, “once witchcraft is suspected, the case does not remain restricted merely to the patient's household but becomes a public affair” (Troisi 1978: 217). Likewise among the Vasava Bhils, in the past the suspected “witches” were subjected to a lot of harsh treatments. The *panches* (five adjudicators) of the village community and the village head jointly decided as how to deal with the *dakan*.

A suspected woman is tied by her arms or feet to the overhanging branch of a large tree and made to swing. If the branch does not snap or she suffers no external or internal injuries, she is confirmed to be a witch. If a blindfolded woman gives the correct

name of the person who stands in front of her, she is considered to be a witch. If she comes safely and without much exertion to the opposite bank after being thrown into the strong current of fast running water, she is believed to be a witch. T. B. Naik (1956: 233–235; see also Nath 1960: 205) mentions all these aforementioned ordeals in his book on the Bhils. If the suspected woman fails to pass these ordeals, she is considered a normal human being, and not a witch.

Sometimes the village headman, along with some influential persons of his community, takes the suspected woman (or women) to Bava Gor (Baba Dev), a place near Jhagadia-Bharuch, where a temple and a *darga* (tomb of a holy man) stand side by side. On arrival, the real *dakan* starts shaking violently. Here, a *bava* (*aalim/fakir/seer*) puts heavy iron chains on her ankles and commands her to run. If the woman is proved to be a *dakan*, her chains will move upward and get so tight around the ankles that it results in the bleeding of the legs. Thereafter the *bavas* will take the *dakan* to a huge *neem* tree. A strand of her hair is woven with an iron nail and hammered into the trunk of the tree. The *dakan* jerks her head heavily uprooting some hair from her head. She then jumps into a shallow open water tank (*kundi*) and cries out aloud requesting that she be released from her *dakan vidhya* (black magical skill). On request she is given a ritual bath in the same water tank and the *dakan* is liberated. Her *vidhya* is washed away. From now on she will be unable to display her harmful skills. The iron chains will automatically come off the ankles of those women who are not proved to be *dakans*. There is yet another place near the Kim railway station called Kimkatawa, where *bavas* perform a similar ceremony to divest witches' evil powers. In some cases "the grinding-mill stone (*pad*) test" is conducted in the presence of an indicted woman. If the accused woman is a real *dakan*, then two separate stones of the rotating quern will remain stuck together so that on lifting the upper stone the lower one will also be raised. This above mentioned test is conducted on a village level.

The woman who is confirmed as *dakan*, "is driven away into the forest to die there of hunger or to fall a prey to some wild animal" (Naik 1956: 235). Sometimes she is beaten or whipped publicly in the village or taken out of the village by pulling, pushing, and sometimes dragging and then put to death by stoning. Sometimes her husband is forced to divorce his wife, when he – along with other villagers – suspects her to be an evil woman versed in black magic. In case the man is not willing to divorce his wife, then both, the man and his wife, are told to

leave the village for good (1956: 143). Y. V. S. Nath adds: "When a woman is accused of witchcraft, she may seek refuge in her natal village, where she is not feared: her father, brothers, or nephews may not refuse to accommodate her" (1960: 204f.; see also Delière 1985: 150; Chaudhuri 1992: 156). Chaudhuri further states: "Again it is seen that witchcraft accusations are invariably against some woman who is a wife and not a daughter in the homestead" (1992: 156). It is also believed that when a *dakan* becomes very old, she cannot practice witchcraft anymore, as all the *putada* (ghosts) leave her.

When a *dakan* is put to death by the individual household or village community, all burial rituals are performed like they are in the case of a common person; no substantial difference is made. The corpse of a *dakan* is handled with proper respect and the due honor, and the entire long and costly funeral is performed. All her relatives and close kinfolk come to pay the last homage to the dead.

Means Used by a Witch to Perform Evil Deeds

Witches operate secretly in the dark of night to conceal their identity. Generally speaking, witches are young, married, women with children, or barren, old and decrepit, deformed, or infirm wives or widows (Presler 1971: 88). At night, a *dakan* changes her form to that of an owl and comes to the victim's house. This owl sits on the hedge or on a tree near the house. It makes a noise at the one who tries to hit her with a stone. In fact, she will catch the stone and later even hatch the same stone. The heat of the body makes the stone become more solid making the person weaker and thinner by the day. The day the stone breaks into pieces on account of the high heat, the person dies.

The *dakan* places a wooden piece of *kher* (*Acacia chundra willd.*) tree in front of her when she performs the magical rite. This causes any victim to lose weight; the body turns black and the person subsequently dies. Moreover, the *dakan* can also take the sleeping victim from his or her house to the riverbed in order to give the person a ritual bath with the branches of *gando himado* (tree), resulting in the victim's becoming dull or mad.

Some of the village elders stated that if any man sees a naked *dakan* taking a bath in the river, the witch may seduce him to have sexual intercourse with her. In this regard Lucy Mair mentions that witches also have insatiable or perverted sexual lust. Others believe that female witches are nymphomaniac (1969: 38f.). Phillips Stevens, Jr. further explains: "Witches engage in whatever form

of sexual behavior that is forbidden or deemed aberrant by their society” (1996: 1228). The elders even explained further that the man who gets into a sexual relationship with her will never speak about it; otherwise she will publicly accuse him of *chhinalo* (adulterous sex). In some cases, when a man has tried to reveal the name of the *dakan*, he fails to give out the particular name, and instead he gives out the name of another person. After doing so, the man loses his senses or the *dakan* takes vengeance upon him in some other way (cf. Roy 1928: 258).

If a *dakan* invites a man to have sexual relations, the man is unable to refuse, else she nullifies the erection power of the penis, and consequently his attraction towards the opposite sex gradually dies out. It is called *indriya nabalu padi jay*. One of the incidents of this kind took place in the village of Gadi.

Daseriabhai Mugalia was constantly invited by a woman of the village to sleep with her. Wherever they met, either in the village or in the forest, she invited him to satisfy her considerable sexual appetite. However, Daseriabhai turned down her invitation each time. With the help of a magical rite, the woman rendered him impotent. As a result, he could not enter into a marital relationship despite his young age. However, he started having a normal erection of his vital organ soon after the death of the *dakan*.

The women usually go for *doyaro* (catching fish with a small basket shaped bamboo net) on the river. If the *dakan* catches less fish or gets a smaller share when the catch is distributed, it is believed that “she places fish” in a sore on the body as a means of taking revenge by performing *dakan vidi*. If this sore is not cured with medicine, either official or traditional, then the person begins to suspect that it is the work of a *dakan* and her evil art. The person moves a few grains over the sore and takes them in a packet to a *badavo* for divination. After looking at the grains, the *badavo* explains that the sore on his body is due to *dakane chandama machhala mekina* (the witch has kept fish in the sore). Similarly, if the *dakan* gets less than her share of cooked meat during the marriage festive meal, or if the shopkeeper gives her a little less than the proper measure of items (while charging full amount), the *dakan* puts fish in the sore and harms the victim.

In order to perform *dakan vidi* on the menstrual padding cloth of a woman (*matha maili*), a *dakan* must first get hold of that item. This results in the victim’s irregular menstruation, anemity, loss of body weight, and eventually – death. The *dakan* uses even person’s hair and a fallen tooth to do the same.

It is also believed that the *dakan* draws a ritual *mandalo* (drawing) in the air or on the ground. Anyone who steps on that design experiences numbness, loses vitality, and eventually dies. It is generally believed that the *dakan* draws a big circle, or *kundala*, with *juwar* (sorghum flour) in the front yard of the house, where children usually play. If any child, knowingly or unknowingly, crosses the line of the circle or enters in the circle, he or she becomes sickly and even crippled. Similarly, when women of the village see rice grains (*dana*) around the well, strewn on the ground, when they go to fetch water early in the morning, they believe that the *dakan* has performed black magic, and so they return home with empty pots.

In one of the villages it was also reported that a woman and her husband, who were both experts in *dakan vidi*, would not experience any shortage of grain for all twelve months. This couple sacrificed their first prematurely born baby (only seven months in the womb) in the house. After burying the child, they prepared a statue of clay from his grave. The couple jointly performed *dakan vidi* on this statue in order to prepare *hiyaru*. *Hirayu chalave* refers to the removal of grain from the stocks of others or of cooking food grain *mando* from the *chulla*, without the knowledge of others. It is commonly called *hiraru chalavin anaj kheche*. Some couples get a few grains of rice or *jowar* (*dana*) from the threshing floor and use it to pull the grain from the opponent’s house. After completing the ritual, they wash *hiyaru* in a *thhobu* (vessel used for kneading the flour). It is said that in old times these types of *hiyarus* were also sold during fairs.

Dakan’s Form

The *dakan* takes various forms to reach the victim’s abode. Besides the owl, cat (*binadi*) is her most favorite form. By taking the form of a tame housecat, she can conceal her identity from the home inhabitants. By licking the soles of a sleeping man’s feet or urinating on the sleeping person, or sleeping in the same bed along with the person, harms and sometimes even causes the person’s demise. Such a cat, because of the evil power that it contains, is not affected even if heavily beaten with a stick. The shadow of the cat is to be beaten to experience real beating on her body. On the following day the actual witch who had been beaten can be identified (cf. Naik 1956: 189).

The *dakan* can also enter a house in the form of a snake and bite people who live there. After doing so, it tries to turn itself into a piece of rag (*chitharu*)

lying on the floor. That is why, after killing a snake the Vasavas burn its carcass in order to make sure that the witch won't return to the house. However, it does not happen in normal situations, but in cases of extreme doubt only.

Antidotes

Whenever a *dakan* is hit in any part of her body, she at once transfers the hit to her legs, turning them ineffective. For unbearable hits, a *mahania bilake* (arrow), a *toddi* (bow) and a *kuhadee* (axe) must be used. Household tools offered during the final rite to the dead can also produce the same results.

A leather belt of a *dakan* is considered *hethu* (polluting, defiling), as it nullifies the effect of *dakan vidi*. If the *dakan* is whipped with a leather belt, she gets back to her original form. All leather articles are considered *hethu*. The cobblers' liquid tank (where animal skin is converted into leather by soaking in a liquid containing tannic acid) is also regarded as *hethu*. If the household members suspect any woman of the family of being a witch, they secretly put a few drops of liquid (that has been stolen from the cobbler's liquid tank) into the tea, liquor, or even in the drinking water. After drinking this *hethu* drink, the effects of *dakans vidhya* get washed away, and the desired harm is not achieved, even if the witch performs her magical rituals. However, this antidote was applied rarely because – as the liquid has been stolen from the cobbler's tank, the feeling of fear was attached to it, and there was a danger that one of the members of the cobbler's family would unexpectedly pass away.

By the same token, the fishing net – because of its numerous holes – is also considered *hethu*. That is why fishing on the river is considered safe from evil charms. It is because – as believed – the *dakan* has to count correctly all the holes in the net before “eating” the fisherman. Finishing the count is not possible, however, because she has to complete the *vidi* soon before four in the morning in order to return home. This makes the fishermen to work at night without fear of *dakan*.

A *khoyatallangot*, a loincloth, is worn by the *mondavi*, *badavo* and *panavi* (medicine man, shaman, and witch-doctor) in the villages. Because of such dress, they could easily urinate in the *langot* and quickly splash the urine over the *dakan* without wasting time. The Vasavas believe that the *dakan* returns to her original form (*assal roop*) as a human being, if urine is sprinkled on her when she is performing rites.

Evil Eye (*najar padehe*)

In the Vasava social setting, casting an “evil eye” is one of the main characteristics of a *dakan*. Regarding the Santal tribe, Joseph Troisi writes: “All witches are believed to invariably possess an evil eye.” It is called malevolent because it “can bring ruin on a person, destroy his household members, domestic animals, crops, and houses” (1979: 222). This is also valid for the Vasavas. Besides, it is believed that certain persons or families have the tendency to cast the evil eye, although they may not be even aware of it, and there is no proof available for it.⁴ It is also true that even an ordinary woman, who is not necessarily a *dakan*, is able to cast an evil eye.

When a *dakan* feels envious, she casts an evil eye on the milk animals, grain, crops, vegetable gardens, on the healthy children, etc. to cause a minor harm. For example, if a child is cute looking and healthy, and the *dakan* does not like it, she turns her *kharab najar* (evil eye) upon the child (Glatter 1969: 145). If a cow abruptly stops giving milk or begins giving less milk, it is suspected that a *dakan* has cast an evil eye. To counteract this ritually, one branch of *ashitralhigala* and five branches of *barkhuto* and *tilkhod* trees are shaken over the cow. These branches are laid on the village road and pressed beneath a medium-sized stone. Through this *vidi* (called *saraoo utariro*), the curse of evil eye is removed, and the cow begins to give milk as before.

The Vasavas also believe that certain physical characteristics are said to be specific for a witch. For instance, *dakans* are believed to have deep dark red eyes (*tejali aakho*) so that a normal person cannot look straight into her eyes. One can see different colours in her eyes. In general, staring is believed to be harmful (Mair 1969: 43). Bachchan Kumar explains that *dakan*'s eyes are “supposed to be red because of her predilection for eating human hearts and drinking blood” (1977: 204). In general, a *dakan* avoids a direct eye contact with another person.

Casting a Hex (*muth marvi*)

The usual harm that a *dakan* does is to cast an evil eye. However, when it is done along with the hex, it's considered as a major harm, dangerous also for the sender (Naik 1956: 189). The Vasavas call it

⁴ Sarkar (1994: 147); Stevens (1996: 1228); Glatter (1969: 145).

muth marvi or *aasad*. In the literary sense, *muth marvi* means that the *dakan* recites mantras into her fist left hand, and then she opens it to let loose the curses on the victim with a flinging movement (Glatter 1969: 145; Collabavala 1977: 43).

One elderly man from the village of Vandri narrated the following story of *muth marvi*:

Once upon a time (*sat vakhat*), when *dakans* would cast their hex and cause an immediate big visible hole in the body of the victim, the good king, Raja Pantha placed his hand on one such hole and made it invisible. Up to the present days, the casting of a hex creates a big hole beneath the skin of the victim's body, but it is not visible outside.

The casting of the hex disturbs the victim's blood circulation and consequently blood clotting takes place, causing a terrible pain in the area of the navel. The victim goes to a shaman for treatment, but if his or her condition does not improve, then something from outside (*baharnu*) is suspected. A few grains of *jaar* (*juwar*) or rice are shaken around the patient and then taken to the *badavo* or *panavi* (shaman or witch-doctor). Upon seeing the *dana*, and on examining and touching the patient's body, the divination is done to confirm if it is an act of a *dakan* – *muth marvi*. The *badavo* has to counteract the hex, the ritual that is called *muth valavi*. A skilled person called *karagir* can do this by using his magical powers. The patient is called before sunrise at the hour of dawn (*chadhata divase*), and the *badavo* brings branches of the trees called *aasadven* (*muth* is also called *aasad*), *neem*, and *ashitro*. After reciting a mantra, the *badavo* fans the patient with branches while sitting on the cow dung plastered floor. Ash stripes are drawn on the patient's chest, stomach, and back and the *badavo*, while still chanting the mantra, pinches several parts of the body, to collect the clotted blood in a central place. Then he makes a few minor cuts on the particular portion of the body with a shaving blade. The *badavo* sucks the oozing "spoiled" blood with his mouth and spits it on the ground. In some cases, the spoiled blood is sucked without making cuts on various parts of the body. The patient is at ease after the acute shooting pain subsides and gradually disappears. The *badavo* or *panavi* is paid a small amount in cash or in kind as the service charge.

Headache-causing Curse (*panu aape*)

If any healthy person suddenly complains of an acute headache which keeps on getting worse, then

people start suspecting that a curse has been cast by a witch. They say: "*Tenaj panhu aapihu, taha mundako dukhehe*," which literally means: "since she has cast a hex, therefore the headache." To counteract or avert the *panu aape* and cure the headache, a special rite is conducted. The victim is made to sit with legs spread on the cow dung-plastered floor. Fresh branches of *umro* (*Ficus glomerata*) and *pipalo* (*Ficus religiosa*) dipped in boiling water are moved behind and over the head of the affected person and brought in a linear movement to the soles of his or her feet; this is done seven times. The branches (*utareli dalakhhio*) are once again dipped into the boiling water which is then thrown outside the house. These branches are carried to a place in the middle of the village road and placed under a stone. The carrier should not turn back or else it is believed that the sickness returns to the victim's house again. The person's headache stops by the end of the ritual.

Removing Buried Articles (*datina kadehe*)

As it has been already said, the *dakan* – while performing her evil practices – buries milk, bones, tail hair, a piece of black pot, a wooden piece, etc. in the sand on the riverbed by drawing the figure of a victim's house with the intention of inflicting pain and injury on the represented household (Frazer 1944: 21). These objects get also instantaneously "buried" in the victim's house. After this ritual, the Mahanio Put (the malevolent ghost of cremation ground who is considered to be offspring of a witch) sits on the wooden beam (*mob*) of the house and makes crackling noise in the middle of night while walking on the roof tiles. In order to counteract the evil, a *badavo* comes to the victim's house and performs the rituals to unveil the *datina* (the buried things, or "treasure" of the witch). The *badavo* ties a white thread to the *mob* of the house in a centrally located point. He brings down Mahanio Put from the beam and places him in a *ghodavi* – basket made out of bamboo chips. Liquor *horo* is offered in a *bijaribat* (four corner leaf cup), and all grain seeds, except *adadia* (*Phaseolus radiata*) and *nani kali mor* (inferior grain), are offered. It is believed that Raj Pantha gets both the *adadia* and *nani mor* from the other world (underworld); while the rest of the grains are from this earth.

The *badavo* is able to see the *datina* through *khakhara* leaves (*Butea frondosa*) at the exact spot where it is buried. He then takes the winnowing fan, crowbar, for the *vidi* and he makes a circle with the dry stalk (*khajali bhindina lakdithi*) on the

plastered floor of the house where digging has to be done. This is to expose or unearth the hidden *datina*, and it is called *pan dabe kep pan chad-hhave*. While marking the circle, the *badavo* spits on it, so that the *datina* does not escape from sight or hide in a corner when digging is done. While digging is in progress, the *badavo* searches for pieces of bones, tail hair, rice, ash, and *khapati* (piece of black pot). He digs holes in different parts of the house, and whatever surfaces from the hole is collected in a green leaf, wrapped, and held tightly in the fist of the hand. The *badavo* then sprinkles water with *bili* leaves in every hole. He further prepares a fake cock out of same leaves to offer it to the Put. This sprinkling of water is called *khada saukal* (cleaning of holes).

The knotted white thread from the *mob* is next broken into small pieces and placed in the *ghodavi* basket. While breaking the thread, the *badavo* plays a bamboo instrument called *hona kangal* or *vasnu chhiptoo*. Various types of miniature objects, such as a bow and arrow, lance (*bhaloo*), *hona kangal*, grains, and fake eggs (*fukoon indu*) are placed there. Once this has been put down, the *badavo* takes the basket in his hand, starts shivering in trance (*vayu aave*, *pavan chane*, or *varo aave*) and runs towards a *behadoo* (*Terminalia bellirica*) or *pipalo* (*Ficus religiosa*) tree, or towards the river, according to the divination done before. Two persons who were assisting him run behind, one carrying an axe, to bang on the trees or on the ground, and the other *nani mor* (grain) to “tie the path” (*vat bandhava*), so that the Put is not able to get back home, and to throw it on the *badavo* to prevent him from coming out of the trance. After dispatching the *datina* to the river or particular trees, the ritual cleaning of the house, the so-called *ko saukal* (cleaning), is then undertaken. For this, some water from the river, milk, and a few coins, are put together in a metal plate and sprinkled with leaves of *dudh kuvadina* on the stable, and in the entire house. It is believed that only then the household is purified from all evils. In conclusion, a *kataroo kakkad* (black fowl) is sacrificed in honour of the deity of the house (*dhani-ba kovadia*) or of the clan, and the blood is sprinkled on the main entrance of the house. This sacrificed fowl is first roasted on a fire, cooked only in water, salt, and chilli, and then offered as a *prasadi* to those assembled to take part in the ritual. The *badavo* is paid a honorarium for the services rendered in the form of one *champo* of rice (eight *Ser*), with Rs. 20–25 paid in a hard cash, and one bottle pure liquor of *mahudo* (*Bassia latifolia*).

Gratitude of *Dakan*

After obtaining permission from the village deity, *dakan* kills the victim by bewitching. Before that, however, she has to vow to give the deity something in return, after finishing successfully the whole ritual. It is the so-called *vand ni kabulat kare*. *Dakan* goes to the victim’s house to take part in the wake (*khatalo jagave*). During the wake, one of the relatives pours a small dose of liquor in the dead man’s mouth and says: “Drink my share.” After that, the dead man’s cot is lifted up and turned around five times, and all household members and the assembled people have to do the same thing. While taking part in this ceremony, the *dakan* finishes secretly the ritual. After the cremation, the witch goes onto the cremation ground to exhume the corpse invisibly, “reinstalls” life, and completes all promised offerings over the “living corpse.” By doing this, she thanks the deity who granted her permission to perform the deadly ritual.

In one reported instance, in the village of Chokhimali, a young mother died and was cremated. Next day people who visited the cremation ground noticed stains of blood all around the funeral pyre. It was the confirmation that someone had performed rituals for the dead the night before. One of the interviewees gave additional information regarding the whole incident.

A village boy had fallen in love with a girl but she got married to another one, with whom she had an affair. This boy, to get her back, conducted magic rituals by employing a *badavo/dakano*. The boy was also supposed to do certain rituals to complete the process. But the girl died suddenly. The *badavo* wanted to complete all the unfinished magic rituals in order to free the young man from the magical bond that was established to perform the rite. To this purpose, the *badavo* offered a black cock on behalf of the boy at the cremation ground. The blood stains seen on the stones came from that particular offering.

Another informant stated that although the *dakan* learns *hat vidhya* (seven magical skills), she is able to put in practice just two and a half of them. Only an expert *badavo/panvi* who learned nine skills is able to counteract her magic. When a *badavo/panvi* conducts any ritual, the *dakan* comes to the spot in the form of her protective animal to obstruct it. When she is in or near the house, she is able to enter the sorcerer’s body with the strength of her protective spirit, which results in vehement trembling of his the body.

During the Holi festival, when *gosain/bavas* dance in a circle around the fire to fulfil their vows, the *dakan* also stands among the crowd of specta-

tors and scratches her body to obstruct the flow of grace. In order to divert her attention and to deflect the hex which she is casting, the *gosai* wear a mirror around their necks.

A person who wants to kill an enemy or take revenge on somebody employs a *badavolpanvi* who will perform the corresponding sorcery. As mentioned before, the *badavolpanvi* does not take anyone's life but in some rare cases it may happen. In the process, the *badavo* prepares a small piece of wood (*khiti*) of a teak or *kher* (catechu) wood, on which thin grooves are marked and to which a white or black colored thread is tied. In some cases a few drops of blood from the small finger of the *badavo* are spilled on the *khiti*. The piece of wood is then buried in the ground, either on the roadside, or under a tree. This ritual is called *hukano khutana*. After burying the *khiti*, he lets loose the *kachhado* (waist cloth passed between the legs and tucked behind) of his dhoti over the place. If the victim dies within the determined time, a post death *vidi* is performed by exhuming the *khiti*.

The Darkest Night (*kali chaudas*)

After the fourteenth day of the darker half of the month Asvin comes the darkest night of the year, which is also the most favorable for sorcery and witchcraft. The day itself is celebrated to gain power to nullify evil influences. Starting in the evening of that day, people do not even go outside until the dawn of the next day. They do not go the riverbank, cremation grounds, and some secluded places either. The Vasavas believe that all *badavas* and *badavis* as well as *dakano* and *dakan*) leave their dwellings under dark of night and go to those places to conduct their rituals. Moreover, harvesting and threshing of crops must be terminated before that period because of the fear that a witch may pull the grain from the field or threshing floor by applying her black magic.

Conclusion

We define witchcraft as supernatural, mystical powers that develop in adults and enable them to engage in evil practices directly or with the spiritual assistance of supernatural beings. The Vasava Bhils believe that it was the mother, as some say, of Raja Pantha, named Umarawanu (Putalavanu) – the patroness of all witches – who brought witchcraft and sorrow from the other world along with the remedies to counteract it.

Why does the belief in witchcraft persist among the Vasava Bhils? The answer to this question lies in their psychology and social organization (Presler 1971: 90–92). Sir James George Frazer explains that sorcerers practice magic following the magical law of contact or contagion, and the law of similarity (1944: 18). Although Frazer's principles might be understandable to social scientists, still, as Phillips Stevens says, "the content of beliefs in witches seems illogical and bizarre, and their emergence in the identical form in modern demonologies, such as Satanism, suggests other lines of research" (1996: 1231). Beatrice Whiting, who did her anthropological research among the Paiute, believes that the sorcery or witchcraft will be found in societies that lack procedures or judicial authorities to deal with crime and other offenses (see Ember and 1979: 494). In this context Henry Presler adds: "Witchcraft is seen as a mechanism of social control in a society without formal law or a police force. The fear of witch's revenge and the horror of being accused of witchcraft cause people to adhere to folkways and mores of the tribe" (1971: 91). Evans-Prichard's study among the Azande tribe showed how witchcraft beliefs are closely associated with strained personal relations, particularly where no institutional controls or means for resolving conflicts and antagonisms exist, and where the relationships are not governed by known and accepted procedures or regulations (Nayar and 2000: 279). "The belief that ill-tempered old people are witches enforces friendship and social cooperation, and the fear of going out at night reduces opportunities for extra-marital sex relations of widowed women" (Chaudhuri 1992: 156f.).

Witchcraft is not only an effect of political power struggle, but it can also occur on the household level, when two people want to claim authority. Two wives who want to get more attention or favors from their husband or when a mother-in-law mistreats the daughter-in-law, or vice versa, would also provide a fertile ground for witchcraft accusations. In all these cases there is a possibility that one of the parties will either resort to witchcraft or be accused of doing it. Witchcraft provides an outlet for feelings of hostility when other means are not available (Presler 1971: 91).

The Vasava Bhils believe in dangerous potentiality of females who are having menses to control evil spirits and wreck vengeance on their victims. That is why the participation of womenfolk in all village rites and rituals as well as in some household rites is limited. Women are prohibited from eating *prasadi* (offered coconut), *nodmaha* (flesh of sacrificed animal cooked on the place of sacrifice) or the liquor

offered to gods. With regard to the worship of god, women are allowed to take part in the *Punj Patri* in certain households, but they cannot eat *prasadi* or to drink the offered liquor (*horo*). Furthermore, women are usually not allowed to come to the cremation ground to take part in the funeral. It is because a *dakan* who may be present in a group of women may pick up some material from the cremation ground to do evil. However, women are allowed to come to the cremation ground in some villages.

The belief in witchcraft is also characteristic for small-scale societies with absence of proper medical knowledge. People in such communities intend to explain sickness and misfortune by witchcraft. This provides psychological relief to those who suffered a misfortune which the person sees as undeserved. Furthermore, the uncertainties of life associated with agricultural economy create a good environment for beliefs in witchcraft to flourish.

Wicked acts of transgression of established norms are being usually punished by society. Witches are naturally regarded as evildoers, and witchcraft goes against of what is socially defined as moral behavior and the correct attitude towards others. In many tribal religions (and this also applies to the Vasavas), witchcraft is seen as the conscience of the village community. To preserve the social unity and to ensure that every individual adheres to the informal moral code of the tribe, the belief in witchcraft acts as a mechanism of social control.

Due to increasing levels of formal education and the contact with the dominant society, the fear of being punished by the state legal system as well as because of the presence of NGOs in tribal areas, which are engaged in providing education and development opportunities to tribal women in on a various levels, women are gaining more political power in the local government. The belief in witchcraft among the younger generation of the Vasava Bhils is slowly disappearing. Only the elderly who live in remote villages are strong believers in the existence of witchcraft. Still, if someone files a First Information Report (F. I. R.) against his or her adversary at the local police station, it may happen that the witchcraft accusation and the associated loss of reputation are sometimes put as reasons for the conflict.

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