

‘Mautana’ and ‘Daam’: Socio-Cultural Violence in the Guise of Tradition in Tribal Society of Southern Rajasthan

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Abstract:

Many traditions were prevalent since ancient times in the tribal society and some of these changed with time. Some of these customs proved to be a hindrance in the development of society. Such customs include ‘Mautana’ and ‘Daam’. The persistence of practices like Mautana—a form of monetary compensation in the event of unnatural death—and Daam—branding children with hot iron rods to cure illness—continues to plague tribal communities in southern Rajasthan. Rooted in centuries-old customs, these practices now pose serious human rights, health, and justice challenges. This paper examines the origin, evolution, and modern-day consequences of these customs, drawing on field cases, media reports, and expert opinion. It calls for a multidisciplinary approach to intervention including legal reform, health education, and community sensitization.

Key words: Mautana, Daam, Centuries-old customs, Bhopa, Chadhotara, Legal reform, Health education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tribal societies of southern Rajasthan, particularly in the districts of Dungarpur, Banswara, Sirohi, Pali and Udaipur, are witnessing the tragic persistence of archaic customs such as Mautana and Daam. The practice of 'Mautana' started centuries ago in the tribal dominated areas. At that time, if the death was unnatural or abnormal, a fine was collected from the responsible people through the Panchayat. At present, the amount of mautana is ranging between Rs. 50,000 to 5,00,000. With time, this has now become a bad practice. The people of Dungarpur district probably know how innocent people are intimidated under the guise of this practice. Thousands of people have become its victims, many times the dead bodies have been deprived of last rites and there have been cases of looting and arson in many houses, but till now law regulate to eradicate this practice. The district police of Banswara, Dungarpur, Pratapgarh and Udaipur faces nearly 20-50 incidence of ‘Mautana’ and ‘Chadhotara’ every year.

Studies related to most of the tribals reveal that there is a socio-cultural background related to medicine and health. Every disease is considered to be related to some deity, and accordingly, they traditionally get treatment from the local Bhopa or by pleasing that deity. In most of the tribal communities, there is a special priest whose services are taken for treatment. At some places, priests and doctors are different, but at some places, the priests themselves do the work of treatment. In the tribal areas of Vagad in Rajasthan, such priests are called 'Bhopa' who treat various diseases through Daam, exorcism, witchcraft, etc., in which the tribals have full faith. Originally intended as community justice or healing, these practices have now evolved into instruments of extortion, coercion, and child abuse. This paper explores how these traditions function, who enforces them, and why they continue despite being socially regressive and legally questionable.

2. OBJECTIVES

- Situation arising from the prevalent Mautana and Daam in tribal society.
- Mental and physical harm caused by prevalent practices.

- In the present time, the scientific evaluation of Mautana and Daam practices in tribal area.
- Recommendation to stop the practice of 'Mautana' and 'Daam'.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher Obtained information about Mautana and Daam system from various newspapers, discussion with medical personnel and professors of college education.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

"MAUTANA" stands for MAUT+ANA. Here "MAUT" means death and "ANA" means money (Gupta,2018). According to Meena (2020), "Bargaining from both sides is common in this process. Many times, the body is not even cremated until the amount of 'Mautana' is fixed, whether it takes many hours or many days. According to Jayesh Kumar and Dr. Swikar Lama (2021), Mostly this tradition is seen in the rural "AADIWASI" caste. Usually, it is a caste and infra-caste matter. Generally, the controversy occurs between the castes of two villages. This is a tradition in which not only a family has to suffer losses, but when the 'Chadhotara' (Mass attack on a victim man's family for not paying amount) is fixed, other people of that family or community also have to give their share in it.

Bhilwara's pediatrician Dr. Kuldeep Singh Solanki says that the evil practice of dam has worsened the condition of innocent children in the society. According to Danik Bhaskar report (2021), In Rajasthan, the game of superstition continues in the name of curing diseases. Here, in the name of treatment, Bhopa's are giving pain to innocent people. There are many innocent people in villages of Bhilwara district who are becoming victims of the superstition of these Bhopa's (traditionally God representatives and functions as a portable temple). According to paliwalwan.com Doctors said that children are given a dam due to pneumonia or internal stomach diseases. After applying this dam, the family waits for 4 to 5 days for the child to get cured. But in the meantime, the innocent children get more injured due to this disease. Due to its unbearable pain, children get fever and difficulty in breathing. Their blood pressure decreases completely. Due to this, these children suffer lot and health condition leads to death.

5. MAUTANA: CUSTOMARY COMPENSATION OR EXTORTION?

Mautana literally translates to "money on death." Historically, it emerged as a non-judicial settlement system in the absence of formal law enforcement. For example, if a pregnant woman dies due to any reason, her husband's relatives can collect a fine from her because he is responsible for the pregnancy. The Panchayat would fix compensation if a death was deemed unnatural, with shares divided between the victim's family, community elders, and extended kin. However, modern cases show that it is increasingly weaponized: families delay funerals, arbitrary accusations are made, and refusal to pay can result in violent retribution. Many times, on the lines of "Kaare Koi Bhare Koi", the relatives of the accused also have to pay the fine. In some cases, people have been forced to leave the village and even the accused person's relatives have to pay compensation.



Photo 1. - The Print 2021

According to The Print 2021, The Mukesh Meena case involved a ₹4 lakh compensation before cremation. This story of dead body trade is from Chundawada village of Dungarpur, a tribal district of Rajasthan, adjacent to Gujarat. On the evening of 3 August, about 5 people attacked Mukesh with sharp weapons and killed him. Firstly, the family did not give Mukesh's body to the police for postmortem. When they gave it, they did not take it back until 20 hours after the postmortem. When they took it, it was kept in the vehicle for 30 hours. This entire incident happened during the implementation of the centuries-old tradition of the tribals of southern Rajasthan called 'Mautana', which has now become a problem for them.

In 2016, Bhairulal Damor died of illness in Dhedmaria village of Udaipur district, but the cousin accused the neighbor of murder and demanded compensation. For this, the body was kept at home for 35 days, and the last rites were performed only after receiving the money.

In such other cases Guldur area of Udaipur district, when a motorcycle met with an accident, the person who was riding it had to pay compensation. In Kaucha village, a woman was bitten by a snake, so the parents took compensation saying that the snake belonged to her in-laws. In Mahadev Netrawala village, the owner had to pay compensation when a pet dog bit her. Hamira of Kotda had to pay compensation because someone threw a dead body outside her house.

On 2023, November 11 in the Kotra area of Udaipur, relatives of a man who died by suicide set fire to two houses belonging to his in-laws, demanding compensation of ₹ 6 lakh. The incident occurred in Umriya village when an armed group attacked and burned down the houses, seeking Mautana, as per police officials. The episode followed the suicide of Sarwan Dama at his in-laws' house a few days earlier. Alleging it to be murder, Sarwan's relatives protested, refusing to allow a postmortem on the body. Villagers intervened, negotiating a compensation amount of ₹1.6 lakh. After receiving the agreed sum, the protestors allowed the police to conduct the postmortem, and the body was cremated with police presence.

6. DAAM: BRANDING IN THE NAME OF HEALING

Another deeply troubling practice is Daam, where children are branded with hot iron rods to "cure" illnesses like pneumonia or diarrhea. Carried out by traditional healers known as bhopa, this superstition is prevalent in Bhilwara, Mandsaur, and parts of Chhattisgarh. There have been many recent deaths and injuries due to this harmful practice. The biggest reason behind this is illiteracy, superstition and poverty. Modern medicine does not believe in superstition so proper treatment by medical personnel should be necessary.

According to Dr. Praful Bala Honta, Senior medical officer and Gynecologist, Dungarpur District Hospital, the traditional of superstitious medical practice 'Daam' is still prevalent in tribal areas like Dungarpur. She said that while working as a gynecologist, I had seen many cases where women – especially pregnant women – have been subjected to inhuman treatment due to this practice. 'Daam' involves placing a hot glass, burning wick or metal container on the area where the body is in pain. Local belief is that this removes "bad air" or "inauspicious influence" from the body.

She also described few cases and concerns expressed. A burning wick was placed on the hand of a seven-month pregnant woman, believing that a "witch" had entered her. Similarly, a young girl was found to have old burn marks on her stomach. When asked, she said that in childhood, a hot glass was stuck on her navel due to stomach pain.

These incidents show that due to superstition and illiteracy, many women are still falling prey to unsafe and humiliating traditions. Evil practices like 'Daam' are against women's health and dignity. To end such practices, it is necessary that we spread public awareness at the community level, increase access to health services and work towards change by understanding the local culture.



Photo 2. - Danik Bhaskar, 2021

According to Danik Bhaskar 2021, 15 days in Bhilwara, two innocent girls have suffered the pain of this dam. 5-month-old Leela was first brought to Bhilwara's MB hospital. Leela's mother had applied a hot iron rod on her stomach to cure her illness as per the advice of a Bhopa. After this, the doctors could not save Leela. 2-year-old Geeta is still suffering from this pain.



Photo 3. - Rajasthan Patrika, 2024

According to Rajasthan Patrika 15 dec. 2024, the grandmother created a ruckus when her four-month-old child fell ill. When the condition worsened, the family members took the child to the hospital here on Saturday.

7. LEGAL AND ETHICAL ANALYSIS

In July of this year, the Rajasthan Assembly approved the Rajasthan Honour of Dead Body Bill, 2023, which specifically addresses and aims to deter protests involving dead bodies. The legislation carries penalties for such acts, including imprisonment for a period ranging from six months to five years. Anyone found participating in a protest with a dead body, whether on roads, outside police stations, or any other public place, may be subject to both incarceration and a fine. The lack of political and social will raises ethical concerns about justice, consent, and cultural sensitivity.

8. DISCUSSION

According to Dr. Ganesh Lal Ninama, some traditions are prevalent in the tribal society since ancient times, in which Mautana and Dam are prominent. Both traditions were fine in ancient times but in today's context, they have emerged as social evils which are very dangerous for the society. It is very important for the

government and administration to prevent this. The meaning of Mautana Pratha is "Aana in exchange for death" (ancient currency). In ancient times, when someone killed a person in the tribal society, there was a tradition of death in for death. Gradually, the society improved and the people of the society started Mautana in the form of giving financial compensation in place of death in for death. In that period, giving financial compensation in place of death in for death, was in the interest of the society. But in today's perspective, this practice has taken the form of a social evil which is harmful for the society.

One such practice is prevalent in the tribal society since ancient times in the form of 'Dam'. In those times, as a treatment for diseases, experienced people of the society used to brand the diseased part of the body with a hot iron or copper tongs. The wound on the branded or burnt part was treated with herbal medicines. This practice is also prevalent in today's context as a social evil which is a symbol of ignorance and conservatism. Nowadays, despite the availability of medical facilities, if someone adopts this practice, then he commits a big crime which is punishable.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Explaining the harm being caused to the society by the Mautana and Daam system through conscious people, public representatives, educationists and doctors and making efforts to stop it. To dismantle these harmful traditions, a multi-pronged strategy is essential: Enact specific laws, engage communities, improve healthcare access, conduct education campaigns, and involve NGOs for mediation and support. Efforts have been made by civil society organizations to educate people in rural area and eliminate such practices and promote the rule of law in the region.

10. CONCLUSION

If any person is harmed physically or mentally due to prevalent customs, then such custom is fatal at social level. Mautana and Daam exemplify the darker side of customary traditions. Originally rooted in tribal governance and healing, they have morphed into exploitation and systemic abuse. They must be challenged with empathy, law, and sustained reform. Moreover, the customs like Mautana and Daam cannot be accepted in civilized society of modern century.

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