

Couple burnt to death for practicing black magic

An elderly couple was burnt to death Thursday by fellow villagers in Andhra Pradesh's Medak district who alleged they were killing their cattle with black magic. Six people have been arrested.

Police said Sailu, 70, and his wife Pochamma, 65, both labourers, were burnt to death in Ulitimaipalli village in Medak, about 100 km from Hyderabad, on suspicion they were practicing 'bhanamati', a local term for black magic.

One Rajaiah, a distant relative of the couple, alleged that they killed his cattle with black magic. Rajaiah and some others picked up the couple from their house, beat them and tied up their hands and legs. They then poured kerosene on them and burnt them as other villagers watched.

Such incidents have taken place earlier in the backward Telangana region. People suspected to be practicing 'bhanamati' on others are beaten or stoned to death or burnt. However, this is perhaps the first incident that a couple was burnt to death for such a reason.

In the region, steeped in poverty and illiteracy, villagers resort to 'bhanamati' for revenge. Self-styled witch doctors are in demand to solve land disputes, family feuds and other enmities with the help of black magic.

In the last decade, about 300 people were killed in the region on the suspicion they were practising black magic. The practice is prevalent in Medak, Nalgonda, Ranga Reddy, Warangal, Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Adilabad districts. The actual number of deaths could be higher as many of the 'bhanamati' deaths are treated as deaths caused by illness.

The superstition among villagers continues despite the administration and police running anti-superstition campaigns to create awareness.

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