

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JHARKHAND AT RANCHI
W.P (PIL) No. 3684 of 2015

Court On Its Own Motion

Petitioner

Versus

State of Jharkhand & Ors.

Respondents

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Coram: Hon'ble Mr. Justice Virender Singh, Chief Justice
Hon'ble Mr. Justice Shree Chandrashekhar

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For the Petitioners/Appellant : Ms.Suchitra Pandey, A.C
For the Respondents : Mr.R.R.Mishra, GP II
Ms.Soumya S.Pandey, JC to AAG

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Order No.16/Dated : 29th June, 2016
Per Virender Singh, C.J. :

Record reveals that after 6th January, 2016 no effective order has been passed in the instant PIL, which was taken by the Court on its own motion, in which Ms.Suchitra Pandey was appointed as Amicus Curiae to assist the Court. Vide last order dated 11th May, 2016, the instant matter was adjourned for 31st August, 2016. Ms.Suchitra Pandey made mentioning slip yesterday only for preponing the date apprising the Court that in last 3-4 month's time many witch hunting cases have taken place in different parts of the State. It is how after preponing the date, the matter is before the Court today for its consideration.

2. Order dated 10th August, 2015 reflects the registration of cases with regard to witch hunting since 2010 till February, 2015 as indicated in the newspaper "*Dainik Bhaskar*" of August, 9th, 2015. Although the State has not been able to provide the latest detailed report but what is reflected in Annexure - 1 annexed with the supplementary counter-affidavit filed on behalf of the State is that right from 2007 till September, 2015 as many as 3854 case of witch hunting (*Daain Hatya*) have been registered in the State of Jharkhand in different police stations, reference thereto has also been made in Annexure - 1.

3. Mr. Mishra appearing for the State is directed to provide the latest information to the Court about the cases registered with regard to witch hunting till May, 2016 on or before the next date of hearing by filing the affidavit of the concerned official of the State.

4. This is one aspect of the matter and really disturbs the Court. What appears to the Court is that the State has not taken any effective corrective measures by making the people aware of the evils of witch craft. The *Hindustan Times* in its news of today itself (29th June, 2016) indicates that the Vans which were flagged off by Hon'ble Chief Minister of the State in August, 2015 many women have been branded as witches and lynched by the villagers in Ranchi district only. The heading in the news is "*Witch-hunt awareness vans go off road due to fund crunch*". The news further indicates that one Shri M.S. Bhatia, Social Welfare Secretary, was contacted in this regard and he made a statement that he had asked the officials concerned to prepare a blueprint for a much more intensive programme against witch hunting and superstition and that in this regard, fresh campaign will start through mobile vans. JHALSA has also its mobile vans for the purposes of reaching out to the people under different awareness programmes formulated by JHALSA. It has no doubt taken certain effective steps with regard to holding awareness programme vis-a-vis witch hunting, but in our view, it would be most appropriate, if JHALSA co-ordinates with the Social Welfare Department of the State and kicks off effective awareness programme with regard to witch hunting covering the most affected districts, first of all but forthwith.

5. Let the Principal Secretary, Social Welfare Department, contact the Member Secretary, JHALSA, in this regard without any waste of time for starting the joint venture.

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6. Consideration of the instant petition is deferred for three weeks. List again on 27.07.2016. Meanwhile detailed report/response by the State with a copy in advance to be provided to Ms.Suchitra Pandey.

7. Copy of the order to be provided to Mr.R.R.Mishra appearing for the State for its compliance. Member Secretary, JHALSA, be also made aware of the orders.

Sd/-

(Virender Singh, C.J.)

Sd/-

(Shree Chandrashekhar,J.)

True Copy,

~~St.P.A./P.A.~~ 29.08/2016 Secretary

Ratan Shera
29/6/16
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