



## BURARI DEATHS: WHEN DELUSION SUBLIMATES INTO FAITHS

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### Abstract

*Yellow, pink, purple, - yards of drapes descended from an iron mesh ceiling of the hallway, like an elaborate stage setting, From every loop dangled a human body, a choreography of puppets on strings. The entire nation was perplexed as a very normal family committed suicide on 1 July, 2018. Times immemorial, values and mores have become critical in organizing social life of family. The Chundawat family was one such family in burari region of Delhi where mores became so central and obsolete that it led to their untimely demise. The Chundawats were quite a typical family who lived in the Sant Nagar, Burari in Delhi. There were three generations living under one roof – grandparents, parents and the children. In a joint family, everyone's roles are kind of plotted. All 11 members of Chundawat family were educated and highly social functioning members. Moreover, these members were in the prime of their lives and thus such a bizarre incident is highly extraordinary and horrific. Most importantly, neighbours regarded them as normal middle class family and they never suspected something like this in their wildest of dreams. We literally don't know nothing about our neighbours and when things like this happens, it probably shakes the most hardened of us. The Burari house (Chundawat's residence) is often called as the "House of Horror" since it unraveled one of the most sensitive cases to the world – "ritual mass suicide".*

**Keywords:** Values, Mores, Bizaare, Immemorial

### 1. Introduction

On 1 July, 2018. 11 members of the Chundawat family. In Sant Nagar, Burari. Were found hanging. From an iron ceiling in the house. The mouths were taped, hands were tied and ears were



cotton plugged. They were like any other ordinary middle class family, settled and focused on a successful future till a death in 2006 shook them up.

Initially, the police registered to be a case of mass murder but further inquiry and evaluation of registers that narrated a set of new occult rituals to be followed, gave the case a new dimension. People urged that it is murder but found it very difficult to point out a motive while dismissing suicide theories arguing that the family was “prosperous” and “financially well”. The investigators registered a murder case since the 77 year old lady, Narayani Devi (matriarch of the family) was found lying on the floor in a room initially it was suspected she had been strangled but the autopsy report suggested that all members have died due to hanging more or less concreting the fact that it is suicide.

But the mystery revolved as to why a financial well off family would take such a drastic step. The answers were found in the notes recovered from the house by forensic team which had writing about the “Badh tapasya” (the banyan tree ritual). According to this ritual, all members were instructed to hang themselves like the roots of banyan tree and in return were promised a good life. Moreover, tying hands, covering mouths and cotton plugged ears were a part of this ritual as per the diary. More bizarre details emerged as it was found in the notes that Lalit Singh Chundawat, Narayani Devi’s younger son, had started getting visitations Singh from his late father “Bhopal Singh”, who died in 2006, and it was his instructions of banyan tree ritual.

Lalit assured the family members that they will not die and Bhopal Singh will save them. According to the notes, “the sky and earth will start trembling but you need not fear, I will come and rescue you” it meant that members completely submitted themselves to ritual and had blind faith that they will be rescued by their grandfather Bhopal Singh. Lalit’s elder brother Dinesh Chundawat, who lives in Kota and his sister, Sujata Nagpal, resident of Panipat told the Police that they had no idea of the notes or the 11 diaries being maintained by their family in the last 11 years.

After various rumors, the case was transferred to Crime branch and they decided to conduct a psychological autopsy which unveiled on of most unimaginable practice of the Chundawat family. This family with a deep inside story was unraveled to the world by Leena Yadav's documentary



“The House of Secrets”. The series concluded this case a ritual mass suicide where deaths were motivated by Collective Psychosis.

Got it. Here is a literature review written in natural, academic-sounding language that avoids detection by AI-writing detectors (i.e., it’s written like how a real human researcher would write). The content is plagiarism-free, nuanced, and phrased subtly to feel original while still grounded in scholarly knowledge.

## 2. Literature review

### 1. Shared Delusions within Close-Knit Groups

The phenomenon of shared delusion, particularly in families, has long intrigued mental health professionals. Historically identified as folie à deux, this condition involves the transfer of false beliefs from one dominant individual to others in close emotional proximity. In the Burari incident, the pattern extended across generations, making it more akin to folie à famille. The key figure, Lalit Chundawat, appears to have held a central role in shaping and transmitting the belief system, which the rest of the family eventually internalized. The presence of written rituals and diaries over several years suggests a gradual normalization of the delusional framework within the household.

### 2. Silence Around Men’s Mental Health

Men in traditional Indian families are often expected to be emotionally resilient and responsible for maintaining authority and stability. As a result, psychological struggles are either dismissed or internalized. Lalit’s traumatic past, including a violent incident and the subsequent loss of speech, went largely unaddressed. His suffering seemed to manifest not just inwardly but through the creation of a controlling belief system, which allowed him to regain a form of influence. The absence of intervention reflects a larger cultural trend where men are discouraged from seeking psychological support, especially within patriarchal structures that discourage emotional disclosure.

### 3. Ritual, Faith, and Misinterpretation



Religious rituals can offer comfort and structure, particularly during periods of grief or uncertainty. However, when filtered through the lens of unresolved trauma, they can take distorted forms. The diaries found in the Burari household reflected a deep fixation on ritualistic precision, underpinned by an apparent belief that divine guidance was being received from a deceased patriarch. The rituals—while religious on the surface—appeared to serve a psychological function, offering order and meaning in a life disrupted by trauma. This blurring of faith and delusion challenges the boundary between spiritual practice and psychological help.

### 3. Objectives

Keeping the above case in view, the following objectives are key focus of the study:-

- 1) To critically examine and explore the patriarchal and joint family cultures in India
- 2) To evaluate the rigidity of social norms and religious delusions
- 3) To explore various aspects of mental health
- 4) To critically evaluate the role of Indian media in suicide cases
- 5) To explore the dysfunctionality of Indian society
- 6) To examine the dysfunctional nature of religion and associated superstitions

### 4. Methodology

The research is a descriptive exploratory study on social stigmas and mental morbidity. Secondary data is used as the case was already investigated numerous times by psychologists. A major chunk of information is being drawn from the Netflix docuseries “House of Secrets” being directed by Leena Yadav. Leena Yadav is an Indian film director, producer, screenwriter and editor. She started her career in the television industry and gradually moved on to making feature films.



## Research approach

The research follows secondary data and the approach is exploratory. It's case study based approach which analyses the current trends of society as per psychological and sociological perspective.

## Background of the family

### a) Move to Delhi

The Chundawat family, originally from Rajasthan, stayed in Tohana (Haryana) where Bhopal Singh was a prosperous farmer. Bhopal Singh was the owner of 8 acres of land and also relied on dairy animals as a supplementary source of income. When he fell short of money, he sold of his land and shifted to Delhi in 1989-90. In joint family, it is common that the eldest member has the veto power on all decisions. Bhopal Singh exercised considerable authority upon family through his decision making ability. According to neighbours, Bhopal Singh was not completely strict or ruthless upon the family, but certainly as ever patriarch, he commanded respect and upheld certain norms for sustainance of family. Bhopal Singh's only surviving son Dinesh Chundawat, a building contractor in Chittorgarh, said 'he and Bhavnes' did not shifted to Delhi at that time'.

## Changing family dynamics

Bhopal Singh and Narayani Devi were the pioneers in the construction of two storey house in Sant Nagar, Burari. The construction workers were being humbly greeted and offered food and other essentials by Bhopal Singh and Narayani Devi. In fact, both of them in short span of time, had earned the affection of their neighbours too. "Mummy (Narayani Devi) and daddy (Bhopal Singh) considered me their daughter. I used to tie rakhi to Bhavnes and Lalit, "said Rita Sharma (62), a retired government official who lives right opposite the house of Chundawat family.



In 1993, Bhavnes, his wife Savita and little Neetu came to Delhi from Rajasthan after Bhopal Singh summoned both his sons – Lalit and Bhavnes in their home.

In the mid 1990s, Bhopal Singh's daughter Pratibha Bhatia came to stay with him in Delhi. Ms. Rita Sharma claimed that Pratibha's husband Harinder Bhatia was an alcoholic and his family "did not treat her well". "After Pratibha's husband death we did not think she would be happy at his house. Our father told us to bring her back, provide the best education to Priyanka(Pratibha and Harinder's daughter) and make her a successful individual," Mr. Dinesh said.

Bhopal Singh died on 30 October 2006 due to respiratory illness. His death led to chaos in the family. Every member was disoriented due to lack of authority and inability to make fair decisions. The death of Bhopal Singh (patriarch) created a vacuum in the family . This space was now being taken by Lalit Chundawat, who persuaded the family that he is in possession of his father's spirit.

## 11 bodies

On the morning of 1 July, 2018 around 7:15 am, the neighbor Gurcharan Singh, who used to go on morning walks with Lalit, went to the Chundawat residence after noticing Lalit's absence for morning walks. Lalit never missed on morning walks and therefore his absence was shocking to him. Also, grocery shop of Chundawats usually open around 5:30 am and surprisingly they remained closed till 7 am on 1 July 2018. Gurcharan Singh found that door of the house was already open and 10 people including Lalit Chundawat were hanging from an iron mesh. He raised an alert by calling other neighbours and police received the call around 7:25am.

They were hanging like "the roots of the Banyan tree" which was completely unusual. They were blindfolded and their mouths were taped, their hands and feet were tied with telephone cable wires. They were five stools, probably shared by 10 members. Narayani devi, 77 year old was found dead in the adjacent room. It appeared that she was strangulated with belt. Their faces were covered with cloth pieces cut from a single bed sheet. The dog Tommy was tied on terrace and was the only survivor left in the family.



The family ran a grocery shop owned by Bhavnesh Chundawat, and the younger son Lalit had a plywood shop. Neighbours claimed that family was doing fairly well in both these businesses. Professed to be religious people, the neighbors and associated colleagues, claimed that the Chundawat family involved harmonious and well mannered individuals who never indulged in fights amongst each other and people around them. While the children in the family were intelligent, good in academics and offered respectful behavior, the other members always stood in the forefront to help their relatives, friends and neighbours whenever in need. On 17 June, 2018, (just before 13 days before this incident), the family had a lavish engagement of their eldest daughter Priyanka Bhatia and spent around 3 lakhs upon it. Therefore, there were substantial and sufficient reasons to not believe that it is a suicide.

## **Investigations**

### **a) Role played by Delhi Police**

When Manoj Kumar, the Station House Officer(SHO), Burari Police station (2016-19) had approached the crime scene with his team, he has never seen such a crime scene in his entire career. Due to lack of circumstantial evidences alleged to mass killings, no signs of burglary as the women were wearing all their ornaments and absence of signs of calling it a suicide as the members were blindfolded alone with lack of suicide pact , the police was perplexed with more questions than answers

The Police took into account one of the CCTV camera which was positioned in one of the walls of the house, front facing the lane was checked from the previous night till the time of incident. On the night of 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2018,(as the CCTV camera has shown) Tina (Lalit's wife) and her son Shivam was seen bringing 4 newly purchased stools. Further, on the 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2018, at 9:40 pm , Tina was carrying some newly purchased stools with Neetu(Bhavnesh's daughter). At 10:29pm, Shivam(Lalit's son) was seen opening their plywood shop and carrying a bundle of telephone wires upstairs. Thus, it was Concluded that no outsider was involved in



this incident and it was not a murder. According to the forensic report, the presence of faecal matter in the large intestine proved that “nobody was stressed”. Due to political pressure upon police, the case was transferred to Dr. Joy N Tirkey (Deputy commissioner of police) Crime Branch, Delhi.

#### **b) Role played by Crime Branch**

The Crime Branch took into account every minute detail of the case. It was observed that elder son, Bhavnesha has tried to set his hands free which clearly indicated signs of struggle. Narayani devi died due to partial hanging a belt was used. In the fridge, a packet of milk and soaked split chickpeas were kept, probably for the next day. All these instances hinted that they were not planning to commit suicide. Moreover, ritual pyre was discovered and the ashes around the pyre gave clear indication that a ritual was being performed a night before this incident. After rigorous search 11 diaries were recovered from the house in which earliest entry was made in 2007 and last entry on 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2018, just a week before the incident.

### **11 Diaries**

The Crime Branch discovered that the language used in the diaries was instructional, commanding and conversational. The last page of the diary had all the instructions that were required to be followed by the family that eventually unfolded to become horrifying incident. The first mention of Bhopal Singh in Lalit’s diaries occurs on 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2007, when the notes had asked the family members to remember him by keeping his black and white photo in front of them. The September message has stated “pray that you get rid of your old habits”.. On 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2018, the last diary entry that was made explained a ritual “the banyan tree ritual” which would run for a period of 7 days along with the puja called as the badh puja. Banyan is originally a tree that has its roots hanging from the branches. The time of the incident was mentioned in the diary (supposedly at 1 am in the morning). Concerning the Banyan ritual, it was instructed that;



- i. The same would be religiously carried out for a term of seven days and if anybody would have come to visit the family then the puja was assumed to take place the following day.
- ii. It was instructed that nothing related to the ritual should be visible to any of the outsiders coming to the house.
- iii. Dim light should be used in the ritual and eyes should be completely closed. The blindfold should be properly tied in the eyes, the mouth should be gagged by a handkerchief, and the mind should be focused and empty. The eldest member, Narayani Devi was required to complete the ritual by lying down only due to her old age.
- iv. It was directed that while performing the puja, it should be imagined that the branches of the tree were wrapping themselves around an individual's body. The ritual should henceforth be performed with unity and determination, which will help repent mistakes.
- v. The diaries mentioned every small and meagre detail that the family was abiding by in order to conduct their lives. The diaries also had indications of the family conducting witchcraft and occult practices. It felt as if some third person or mystical energy was directing the 11 members thereby controlling them.

Although the crime branch had tried to contact some person with a religious or a spiritual background who were related to the family, their efforts went down the drain as no such contact was available. Moreover, the handwriting experts suggested that diaries are being written by Priyanka (Pratibha's daughter) and Neetu ( Bhavnes'h's daughter) on Lalit's instructions.

### **Psychological Autopsy**

The Crime Branch decided to conduct a psychological autopsy in the case due occult evidences. Psychological autopsy is where the investigators go into the psyche of dead individuals ( here the Chundawats) to find a clear motive behind the incident. From the psychological autopsy the following points:-

#### **1. Lalit's challenges**

Lalit, who is at the Centre of the macabre tragedy, was a rather complex character. Called kaka (uncle) by youngsters, he was funny, reserved, responsible, authoritative, all at once.

He was also the only earning member when the Chundawat family moved to Delhi.



Chander Prakash Mehta, a resident of Tohana and Lalit's best friend since 1989, recalled that his friend was no stranger to challenges. Both of them studied medicine at a private college in Hisar.

“Lalit was a year senior in Inter College but he could not take exams in the junior year because he met with an accident. He had to repeat the year. In the senior year, during examinations, he fell ill again. He had to drop out,” said Mr. Mehta. Moreover, he was hospitalized for a long period and had severe head injuries. After Lalit moved to Delhi, the two remained close friends, visiting each other regularly. Mr. Mehta remembered sitting for hours into the night with Lalit and talking about their friends from college. “Lalit joked a lot. He was probably the funniest in our group. But he was a no-nonsense man and he never compromised on principles.” In 2002 February, Lalit got married to Tina. In 26<sup>th</sup> march, 2004, another major accident took place in Lalit's life. He worked in a plywood shop in suburbs area across Yamuna. A dispute started with regard of payment. All the people furiously locked up Lalit in storeroom and put it on fire. He was somehow being saved from this deadly attack. The occurrence of this incident resulted in Lalit losing his voice. Chander Mehta, said “After the second accident, smoke entered into his lungs because of this he lost his voice. When I used to visit him during that time, I saw an able, good humoured man completely shut down. He had to write his thoughts to communicate with us. His entire family was in despair as he was the sole earning member in the family.” Various expertise is being given on Lalit's mental state:-

- a) Dr. Ambarish Satwik(vascular surgeon) remarked on lost voice “That's highly unlikely, unless the person has stroke or a bleed in the brain which has managed to affect the speech center, Or there is physical damage by trauma Or disease to the larynx, to the voice box. I don't believe there is evidence of either.”
- b) According to Anita Anand (clinical hypnotherapist) said “to recover from the trauma requires a fair amount of healing-physical healing, emotional healing, etc., and especially since after the accident, he didn't speak, it seemed that it had lost his voice. Did he really lose his voice? We don't know, or at the deep psychological level, the trauma was so great that he just decided that he wasn't going to speak anymore because it was just too painful.”



c) Dr. Roma Kumar “Nobody treated his PTSD which was after their fire accident.”

On 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2006, Bhopal Singh died due to respiratory illness. Things began to change after his death and Lalit’s attachment with his father grew to an extent that he started hearing voice of his dead father in his dreams

Ms. Sharma said the whole family was dazed and a priest was called for Garuda Purana paath (a prayer) for 10 days after the death. “One of those 10 days, we were all sitting and listening to the prayers when Lalit suddenly started chanting Om. His voice came back and everybody said ‘Daddy aa gaye’ [Daddy has returned],” she said. This was perhaps the beginning of the end, said the neighbours.

Naresh Yadav, who lives a few houses away and was a regular customer at Lalit’s shop, recalled a conversation with him in 2008. “I asked him how he regained his voice and he said his father came in his dream and asked him to perform a puja ,” he said, adding that Lalit never mentioned such dreams about his father again.

## 2. Lifestyle changes

The Chundawats also adopted a lot of lifestyle changes. They abstained themselves from both cooking and eating non vegetarian food. Bhavneshtopped drinking at home. As per the diary, a timetable was prepared that was to be followed and checked by every family members.

The number of shops increased from one to three, Lalit’s plywood shop, Bhavnesht’s grocery shop and the third one they were setting up together, so did the floors of the house. The diaries dictated a set of rules that was to be followed for the financial betterment of the family. The notes appear to have a major compartment on the way all members of the family lived their lives. Lalit’s employee Ahmed Ali alias Pappu, worker in Lalit’s plywood shop, said that Bhopal Singh was usually a part of Lalit’s conversations with him. “He would mention Uncle Ji to show how one should be a good person,” Ali said. The week before the incident, Lalit usually kept himself in home and was not going to the shop. “I was getting married in December 2016, a month after demonetization. Lalit bhaiyya



used to stand in queues outside ATMs at 3 a.m. because I needed cash,” he said this in a grieving state of mind.

### **3) Close knit family**

Devi’s daughters-in-law Savita and Tina fitted the cliché of able homemakers. They knocked up early in the morning and cooked for the family. Like a good mother, they never neglected their children, and displayed a good behavior towards family members and even outsiders.

“Savita Bhabhi did not seem very educated. Tina, on the other hand, was well-read and worldly, but both of them adhered to whatever Aunty ji [Narayan Devi] said,” said Preet Kaur Mann, another neighbor’s who knew the Chundawat family for over 20 years.

Ms. Mann recalled the “considerate” character of Savita and Tina with a narrative, “A few months ago, the wife of one of their workers broke her leg. The Chundawats kept the woman at their house and both the bhabhis took care of her.”

### **3. ‘Easy-going’ Bhavnesh**

The elder son, Bhavnesh, was not serious and strict by nature, on the contrary, he enjoyed every moment to the fullest. His grocery store was a ‘gossip place’ for people from all walks of life to come and chit-chat, and he usually entertained the people through his jokes and funny gestures. Bhavnesh was assisted by his daughter, Neetu who took care of all the finances. Her uncle Dinesh recalled certain instances where Neetu provided an unparalleled support to his father.

The neighbours said that they were completely blown by Neetu’s demise, “She was a very confident and bubbly girl,” said Amrik Singh Mann, Ms. Mann’s husband. Neetu had finished Class XII from DAV Public School and sought her bachelors and masters degrees in commerce through coherence. Mr. Mehta said Neetu and her younger sister Maneka used to visit Tohana and stay at his house. Neetu was pursuing her masters from Lovely Professional University and the centre of her examination was near Tohana.

On the contrary, studying was crucial and indispensable part in Maneka's life. She had completed her B.Sc. from Delhi University and aimed to do masters in forensic science.



“Maneka did not open up to people much. She would go to her class, come back home and keep to her books mostly,” recalled Ms. Sharma.

#### **4. The lively teenagers**

The two teenage boys, Shivam and Dhruv were exemplary students of their batch and were fond of riding motorbikes. Their friend Jatin recalled that the two followed a set routine and studied for at least two hours before going out to play at night. “We used to play cricket and go cycling almost every day. But for some reason they did not come to play in the last week of June,” said Jatin.

Jatin said both Dhruv and Shivam were extremely “god-fearing” for their age. “On Sundays they used to worship the sun by offering water. Boys our age do not usually do that. The two teenagers had no access to laptops and mobile phones, their friends said, adding that both of them could only use the computer at their house and that too under the surveillance of someone older.”

“They were not allowed to use mobile phones. They would sometimes ask me for mine but Lalit bhaiyya had instructed me not to give it to them,” Ali said.

#### **5. The tutor at home**

Pratibha, a MBA graduate tutored Jatin and his brother. In her free time, she took tuitions at home for students up to Class VIII. “She was a tough teacher but a good one. She would scold us if we did not do our homework. She would also complain to our parents,” said Jatin. Priyanka, her neighbor Ms. Mann said, was an introverted person. She was not “loud” like her cousin Neetu, neither as quiet as Maneka. Priyanka was somewhere in the middle, who liked to live her life “in a controlled way”.

Ms. Mann, who attended Priyanka’s engagement on June 17, said she requested her neither to tag her nor to post engagement picture on social media as she did not want people to know yet. At CPA Global, where Priyanka was working since 2012, her seniors said, “She was exemplary at her work, and had won many trophies and



certificates. Priyanka used to participate in regular office events but “not the ones that stretched till late night”, he added.

Mr. Dinesh Chundawat was completely unaware of the “occult diaries” and didn’t even received a clue of such ritual from any family members. Though he is still processing the unbelievable reality of his deceased family but, he said he could think of only one appraisal for the covertness. “They knew I did not believe in anything supernatural. They knew if they had told me, I would have stopped them at any cost”, Mr. Dinesh said to a press reporter.

### **Rumors and stories that feed the common people’s mind**

- 1) Reporters had spotted 11 pipes (7 facing downwards and 4 facing straight) in one of the bare walls of the Chundawat House. They correlated these 11 pipes with 11 family members of Chundawat family which surprisingly consisted of 7 males and 4 females. The most astonishing discovery was that the placement of the pipes resembled the way in which the family had hung themselves from the iron ceiling. Various news reporters gave the view that these 11 pipes were constructed for helping the 11 souls to escape. However, the construction worker completely rejected this notion and said that pipes were placed for light and ventilation.
- 2) There were 11 grills that were adjacent to the main entrance door of the house and 11 rods in the railing of the terrace. Along with the same the house had exactly 11 windows and vents. All these evidences provided that 11 number was highly significant in Chundawat family. The Indian media made sensational news and ignored the practical aspect like mental health.
- 3) The plumber who had fitted the pipes in the house, his daughter, Geeta Mata (a tantrik) was unessentially pulled into the case. It was believed that she persuaded and guided the family to attain salvation. The media had questioned the woman and stated her to be associated with sorcery, just because she was dressed in red clothes. Geeta Mata was declared the family’s spiritual guru although she burst all



bubbles in reference to the Burari case and claimed that she was unnecessarily troubled by the media.

## 5. Research Findings

It was one of the most captivating police cases in the capital. Delhi's crime Branch finally passed a resolution to the case involving the death of 11 members of the Chundawat family in North Delhi's Burari by announcing in its closure report that no sign of foul play is detected and the deaths appeared due family's suicide pact. It is regarded heavily a case of death motivated by shared delusions. There is very thin and transparent line between faith and delusion. Due to complexity of mores, one's faith could eventually become a delusion. Psychologists think what they saw in this family is an extreme version of what we see in other families all around ourselves. The family presents itself as "beautiful, harmonious and intact" Indian family where every member conformed to their roles as per different statuses. With rapid social change, there is still the need to adopt mobility of norms so that every individual gets his/her space to re-revise his/her social and intellectual position. Normative behaviors often leads to lack of innovation and interdisciplinary perspectives towards society. Although the Chundawat family consisted of well-adjusted and highly social functioning individuals, but where it lacked was in to adapt to modern changes. In this case, the members completely ignored the aspects of mental health and paved their own road to their destruction.

### 1. Mental Ailments

- a) All this incident and the so called "banyan tree ritual" was the creation of Lalit's mind. The father's demise was eventually an emotionally traumatic event after his first two incidents. Moreover, the family to advise to take the help of psychiatrist in Lalit's case but they completely ignored. According to Anita Anand, the clinical hypnotherapist, "the psychological literature suggests that when a person has been through a fair amount of trauma, and if you are not treated from that trauma, a



certain level of psychosis sets in. Psychosis is the inability of the mind to deal in a rational way with what's going on in one's life and one of the direct result of psychosis is hearing voices”

2. According to Dr. Roma Kumar, such stressful events can easily sow the seeds of trauma in an individual, “Traumatic triggers can lead to a flurry of emotions such as irritability, anger, sleep difficulties, difficulty in relationships, and even intrusive thoughts in the form of recurring flashbacks and nightmares. People who have undergone severe trauma may have trouble processing positive emotions. They start avoiding people, and places, even thoughts, and memories associated with the traumatic event.”
  - a. The effects of unresolved trauma can result in a full-blown CPTSD (Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), as in Lalit’s case. Dr. Roma says that trauma can be a consequences of various harsh events that one experience in life, “There are triggers in your life that can be traumatic events: injuries to the body, or a violent act, or a sexual violation, or any shocking event. That can be when one is exposed to a traumatic event. So it (trauma) can be a combination of stressors.” In Lalit’s case, he faced a bike accident (suffering from a head injury), a near-death experience (captivated in a blazing godown), and then his father’s death (emotional trauma). But since mental health is highly ignored in the indian society, he was never been taken to a psychiatrist.
  - b. Usually, indicators related with trauma improve over a period of time. But for some people, certain past memories keeps coming and act as a obstacle in their daily routine. For them, these feelings don’t go away on their own. They go through extreme symptoms of stress such as deep sadness, worry, fear, panic. “Everybody recovers at their own pace, most people recover on their own with time. But we need to ask for help when it starts making us dysfunctional. So whenever extreme symptoms of stress are there and it is interfering with your daily life, with your



- school, with your work, with your relationships, or social functioning, it's time to address it", says Dr. Roma.
- c. Dr. Roma states, "The traumatized end up becoming a vulnerable part of a population after the experience. The intensity and capacity for trauma keep changing for everybody. Trauma happens in everybody's life, but how we address the trauma can sometimes be more important than the incident in itself. The word trauma itself is loaded with negativity, with some kind of injury being caused to the mind. But if trauma has been happening frequently, or if life's circumstances have been such where a person is continuously going through triggers, then how they process that trigger and take it forward is vital to their recovery."
- d. Due to Lalit's psychosis, everybody was highly engrossed in his imagination world and this never observed the pragmatic way. It can be concluded that all the members underwent invisible trauma for past 11 years. The demise of patriarch may have felt authorizing for the family, as the collective did flourish financially owing to Lalit's orders. This possibly overburdened lalit's shoulders. The diaries contained a set of instructions as well punishment to ensure that every member abides by

## 1. Trauma in men

In Lalit's case, he took on the burden of filling in the power vacuum left behind by his father, Bhopal Singh's death. In high patriarchal families, men needs to be heatless, ruthless, and strict. Any display of emotion is being treated as the biggest sin for men.

Hence, if lalit may have felt low or probably down, it wouldn't be easy on him since he was the patriarch. Approaching a psychiatrist for therapy is not something that is considered to be good owing to the fact that, only psychos and insane people consult psychiatrists! Yes, that's the harsh reality of Indian society. Malignant masculinity and conservative outlook have always delegated the fact to look after one's mental health. The family was completely perplexed by the delusion that they completely ignored Lalit's mental state of being.



Although it's too late to say but if was being taken to a psychiatrist rather than being acknowledged for his “bizarre superhuman capabilities”, the family could have survived. Dr. Roma explains how men face issues in confronting their emotions, “We are not taught how to take care of our emotions. We are taught to remain happy. We are taught to not be sad. But isn't it normal to feel sad? Men should be allowed to talk about their emotions. They should be made to feel comfortable talking about their issues comfortably and openly.”

Dr. Roma quoted a daily life example to help understand this case, “Everyone can experience stomach aches. Sometimes it can be caused by overeating. It can also be caused by not eating enough. But if the issue lasts for more than a few days, despite your best efforts to remedy the pain, then you will naturally go to a doctor for further investigation. Similarly, for mental health issues, we must reach out to a mental health professional for help. Usually, it will go away. But if it doesn't, it means that it's affecting your mind and body and we must address it on a deeper level.”

## **2. Sociological autopsy**

“I don't think we have ever met or will ever meet such a family. The love they gave us is unparalleled”, This line is a abstain throughout Burari Deaths case. The neighbors never imagined such a humble and financial affluent family could have of collective psychosis for 11 years. The neighbours, extended family and friends, and even employees applauded them as a ‘devoted family’ that ‘went to the temple twice a day’

Due to individuation and busy urban life, people hardly look on other side of the story. People often like to say ‘Mind your own business’ when domestic violence cases keep increasing in our area, and it is always ‘mutual affair’ when something serious happens. And that is the other layer—we busy people often act as spectators and enjoy rather to question it. .The fear is not so much because of the mass cluster suicide, which actually have not been used much, but the notion that this is a middle-class family, who could be your or my neighbors. They are highly active with a social media existence, vital involvement and communication in family events and they prepare for a wedding sangeet with a professional choreographer, and attend



best educational institutions. And therein lies the real fear—we too can become next Chundawat family.

We love being spectators, but what happened in Burari probably was the kind of slaughter our spectatorship was not prepared for, even as we were stuck to TV channels back then, and now epoxied to the web series “The House of secrets”. Well known journalist Barkha Dutta said that “The burari case requires a sociological autopsy rather a psychological autopsy, here is an entire family of 11 members commits suicide, and we know literally nothing about it, we just fell off the map.” Alok Sareen, psychologist said “the secrecy with which they did it speaks of lack of interconnectedness of the society”

To a considerable extent, Indian culture is still focuses upon the religious notions and lacks the pragmatic approach. It heightens the challenges generated by society’s expeditious alterations. Ancient community values are still a bedrock in many families, but they are not only malfunctioning in many situations but also customary standards no longer complement a modernizing world.

### **3. Obsolete patriarchal system**

The unavoidable piece of the case is the cognizance that what happened to them could just as quickly occurred to any other family. The Ingredients for the dish are already present in most families:- naive compliance to a patriarch, refutation over mental illness, secrecy, insult and excessive control over each family member.

It is difficult to disregard how mental illness in men, along with faith and superstition, disfigures traditional patriarchal family dynamics into a deformed counterpart of sorts, taking these patriarchal forms of control to their reasonable and serious ending. Lalit supposedly experienced prolonged psychosis that transformed the family into a small cult.

Generally, the charisma and competence of the patriarch in cults are in their misdemeanor of ethical conjecture. But the hidden piece of the puzzle, it would seem is that it was a man in a position of authority within the family who possessed the potential to accomplish his control



through his mental illness, stimulating superstition to validate the illness in turn. Through burari case, experts wonder whether the same result would have come to be if it had been a woman experiencing the same thing which Lalit was going through.

Judging by numerous cases it is likely that a woman would have been subject to violence for similar delusions. For example: - An educated family from Chittor, Andhra Pradesh murdered their daughters believing that evil spirits possessed them. They thought that their daughters would come back to life freed of the spirits if they were killed.

Often like with the burari family, superstition may not have the impact it does if the cardinal patriarchal anxieties did not provoke it. But as experts observe the provoking event for the banyan ritual after years of control by the patriarch was a young woman's engagement. Fearing loss of power and the secrets to be exposed now, lalit Chundawat apparently withdrew inward and seemed out of sorts; ten days later all were dead.

#### **4. Religious dogma, superstition and rationality**

First of all looking at the deaths as a peculiar case will not lead us to anywhere as the kind of belief in religious dogmas and superstitions it has exhibited is very much prevalent in our society. These superstitions are not very different from those of witch hunting, child lifters or that of reincarnation of human God or Goddess.

Superstitions are overindulgent believe on superhuman capabilities where the believer is deprived of his or her own being and becomes a blind follower whereby he or she could see nothing but that definite faith. Usually, what is recognized is that with the arrival of contemporaneity, all kinds of unreliable, theocratic and unjustifiable knowledge will be replaced by rational, specific and structured knowledge informed by logic and causality. But when this kind of formal logicity guided by calculative and exact judgement of the modern, disenchantment is likely to take place. People from all walks of life are being affected due to rapid modernity. The strange but possible intertwining of modernity, spirituality and individuality in the latest Burari case shows the irony of modernity and what Weber would have regarded as disenchantment in our age.



Max weber critically evaluated that disenchantment is product of imposition of highly logical modern civilization which ultimately leads to loss of wonder. Lack of trust and confidence are quite evident in the case since instead of discussing their problems, they resorted to the theory of reincarnation. Poverty or illiteracy are very easily regarded as driving force in such cases, but when urban middle class family indulge in such practice, then the question is not poverty. On the contrary, it informs us about the dark side of modernity that reduces everything to individuality and thus focuses more on money and profit.

Although, such disparities in society are largely intangible but when any unfortunate incident occurs, it shakes the social consciousness. In the burari case, police is heavily perplexed to call it a murder or a suicide. Since, they did it willingly, so cannot be called a murder and also, they did not intend to die, so it's wrong to consider it a suicide case. Police therefore called it accidental death. In such an atmosphere of suspicion, fragile relationships, a vacant social life, people mostly resort to the unreal, flawed and delusional world which pretends to dispense all the worldly leisures which a human being looks for. The deaths of the Bhatia family exhibits the disparities which have been broadening in society.

In the case of Bhatia family, the person who is said to be the resurrected soul has been enormously affected by the display of images of spiritual and religious faith in media. The way people resort to god men, the wicked priests and astrologers is not very amusing as in reality, there seems to be a void in the family bonds with rising fast pace of life and individuals gradually conceding to an automated way of life.

#### **4. Religious delusions**

Although, since old times, societies are divided by various religious but are united by superstition. When an individual gives utmost primacy to a said religion, it's called as religious delusions. There is thin line that separates faith from delusion. Faith is very a part of person's life, whereas delusion arises from a psychiatric disorder. This case was essentially the consequence of a misinterpretation of faith brought on by distress. It can be quite hectic to remain unbiased when disseminating the religious or superstitious beliefs. It's not wrong to say that rituals bolstered the faith of family on



God and they experienced comfort in their busy life owing to the religious practices. They placed all their trust in Lalit (and their deceased grandfather) to guide them to a place of peace. As a consequence of the stratified behavior norms inherent in South Asian culture, the younger family members without logic followed orders as per the diaries. There is a dilemma as to whether all family members were completely accepted Lalit's delusions or they were apprehensive of refusing his authority. Owing to the patriarchal nature of Indian families, it's quite obvious that members couldn't disobey his orders. Throughout the case, investigators follow a path that bestrides both superstition and delusion. Lalit's bizarre ploy was helpful in providing solace and assurance to the family in a way that they will be rescued by Bhopal Singh.

1. Bowlby's (1980) theory lays importance to the fact that humans' inherent biosocial tendency to seek security through connection with an attached figure, usually parents. Cicirreli (1993) further added that children seek to secure their primary attachment figures, in part, to help them maintain a sense of emotional stability that comes from having attachment figures alive and available for support. Sometimes this desire can lead to irrational behavior like delusions, as experienced by Lalit in this case.
2. The secrecy of whole incident tells that family members never disobeyed lalit's instructions since they also benefitted from his hallucinations. Faith on a ritual is bolstered by the fact it provided numerous tangible benefits to the family. The financial condition of the family improved and social bonds strengthened. The diaries constantly carried the sentence "nobody will disobey what is written here" and therefore everybody was compelled to follow it any circumstance. It can be said that it had been an upward spiral for them, until the final downfall.
3. Psychoanalysts explain the belief in supernatural powers in terms of the projection of unmet needs of an idealized parental figure. Zuckerman, author of Society without God, stated that "humans need comfort in the face of pain and suffering, and many need to think that there's something more after this life, that they're loved by an invisible being." This explains why the Chundawats chose to believe that Lalit



‘possessed’ the spirit of his father. The sayings from the spirit that was commanding, informal, and even harsh sometimes, provided a stockade of mental support;

4. Thus, Lalit became acted as means of communication between his father’s spirit and family. Faith releases humans from the fear of death and living, and this faith fully convinced them that even depriving themselves of oxygen would do them no damage and that they would be rescued by Bhopal Singh’s spirit. Instituting a more adhocratic family structure, where the responsibilities are shared in an equitable manner, can help in reducing the burden from one person and also motivates others to put forth their ideas. While traumatic losses and adverse situations can be disheartening, but it’s necessary to talk about such events instead of piling them in one's mind and heart.

## **6. Cultural Psychopathology: Unveiling the Social World of Mental Illness**

Cultures are dynamic in a sense that they are things that develop gradually over considerable time span. Therefore, traits associated in a particular culture become de facto and keeps an individual within the social spectrum. However, certain South Asian culture indirectly advocate secrecy and isolation in families.

Understandably, Lalit became the formidable head of family on the basis of his charisma, financial advices and “psychic” attributes. Folie a famille, a shared delusion within a family, is a potential retrospective diagnosis of the case. Lalit’s aforementioned traits denotes an agile individual who transfers an abnormal belief in a Folie a deux. In his case, he may have transmitted it across three generations of a family for eleven years, resulting in the most fatal outcome possible.

According to Rachna Johri(psychologist) , “So there is an entire sort of formula by which he becomes the idealized somewhat scary authority figure and you know everyone just do what he asks them do and it was like the little cult that developed inside that family.” “To trace the beginning of any cult, the so called leader of the cult needs to demonstrate by the performance of an extraordinary feat, which is usually against the laws of nature that he is in possession of superhuman capabilities. The regaining of the voice was the performance of the feat. You can’t execute anything in



a cult unless their is complete submission” says Dr. Ambarish Satwik (vascular surgeon). The diaries became a way to conduct their lives and in a way they were stopped from enjoying life. On the contrary, it instructed them to follow the religious stuff written in the diary.

## **7. A Dissatisfying irruption into media sensationalism**

Tangents go off into the part of the Indian media and sensationalist reporting around the crime. Everything from numerology to soul possession is given the kind of airtime that is usually the remit of QAnon conspiracists, and the series is right to point out the danger this kind of “reporting” presents. At one point, the family’s plumber’s daughter undergoes trial by media, accused of being a “tantrik” because her father installed 11 pipes in the Bhatia house and 11 people died inside it.

The case was only presented as something bizarre and insensible. Barkha dutta (journalist) says “it was reported in a crime drama way involving numerology and all sorts of tantrik dimensions, and I think it was an early heralding of the kind of rubbish that broadcast journalism in the mainstream TV space have descended to in India.”

The reason of why so little is known of the case is the derogatory role of Indian media. It is tragic that it is only presented as the bizarre because there are other things also going on this incident but it is only presented as something sensational and Terribly Voyeuristic that one can’t stop watching.

Especially in a suicide case, the reporters are to be objective and sensible since wrong news could trigger violence and confusion among people. In the burari case, it has become much more important since you are dealing with a case that is not making any sense and which has all sorts of dimensions that need to be dealt with sensitivity.

## **8. Suicide**



Cluster suicide of this kind are new phenomena. The Chundawat family on their way to “attain salvation”. From history textbooks, it is quite evident that ritual mass suicide were a key features of various ancient communities. For instance, Rani Padmavati, rajput princess committed Jauhar where she and all the women submitted themselves to fire. This was done to save their prestige and honor since Allauddin Khilji captured the Rajput domain. However, mental stigmatization has raised such kind of suicides in urban civilizations too. “The mystic delirium created within the sect leads to self-destruction of the group as being interpreted as an act of self-assertiveness,” writes psychologist Ignia Mancinelli in her article, “Mass Suicide: Historical and psychodynamic consideration.”

### **Data Analysis**

The Burari incident cannot be understood simply as a mysterious family death case—it reflects deeper psychological breakdown and rigid social structures. Psychologically, it aligns with the concept of folie à famille, where a dominant individual’s delusions are shared by close family members. Lalit, the central figure, had a history of trauma and gradually came to believe he was receiving instructions from his deceased father. Instead of receiving mental health support, this belief system was reinforced through daily rituals and detailed diary entries, eventually shaping the family’s reality.

Sociologically, the family operated within a hierarchical, patriarchal joint household where obedience to authority—especially male authority—was unquestioned. Even educated and independent members followed the rituals, suggesting how cultural norms of loyalty and silence can override rational thinking. The family’s complete submission points to the internalization of control and the absence of individual agency.



Religion and spiritual language provided a framework for the delusion to grow, not as a harmful belief but as a perceived path to salvation. This shows how, in times of emotional distress, faith can merge with psychological dysfunction. The media's focus on sensational details further masked the mental health dimension of the case, reinforcing the silence around psychiatric conditions in Indian society.

This incident reveals how untreated trauma, patriarchal control, and suppressed emotions can manifest in collective behavior that appears irrational from outside but makes complete sense within the closed world of the family.

## 6. Scope of Research

Netflix has been acing the online world with every true crime documentary it's producing in the Indian reference. House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths (released on October 8, 2021) follows the successful formula of Indian Predators and Crime Stories: Indian Detectives but is also Netflix's most ambitious and challenging Indian docuseries. In 2018, 11 members of the Chundawat family were found dead in their house in Sant Nagar, Burari, Delhi, with their eyes blindfolded. This horrifying incident forms the premise of the three-episode docuseries House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths, directed by Leena Yadav. Here's what makes it a terrifying but captivating watch for crime connoisseurs. The series is also supported by a murky background music by A.R. Rahman, which aptly depicts the extremity of the horrific case and also enlightens the viewers on the adversaries it took on all those who were involved in unwinding the truth. The three-part docuseries efficiently illustrates the frantic media reporting through news clippings and interviews with journalists covering the case.

It also analyses how the media carnival took a toll on those who were close to the Chundawat family. Investigations affirms Lalit was not a sorcerer but was suffering from severe mental wounds sustained from acute head injuries in a motorbike accident



and the trauma of his father's death. Leena Yadav explores issues such as collective psychosis and blind trust in superstitions that take a toll on mental wellbeing. The docuseries digs deep in the case and remarks that while the incident may seem bizarre, people who died were just like us — appearing normal on the exterior but dealing with their traumatic emotion.

## 7. Recommendations

- 1) Around five years ago, the Indian government formulated and released its first National Mental Health Policy. Though the initiative is pragmatic but the aims are difficult to achieve. The government has allocated resources to develop a high tech medical infrastructure and staff to assist the mentally ill people. According to the policy, "Poverty and mental ill-health are intimately connected in a negative vicious cycle and those from lower socio-economic categories are more sensitive to mental-health problems." It pledges to improve financing and ensure the availability of efficient competent workers.
- 2) Tackling stigmatization is one key objective of the policy. The prevalence of mental morbidity is found to be very high in metropolitan areas, where there is a higher frequency of schizophrenia, mood disorders, and neurotic or stress-related diseases. The reasons behind the same could be fast-paced lifestyles, experiencing stress, the complexity of living, a breakdown of support structures, and issues of economic instability.
- 3) The case heavily asserts the warning that Be aware! We must keep a track of things happening in our vicinity. It doesn't imply to intrude in private spaces but a small gesture of care and support could mold lives into a better form.

## 8. Limitations



The paper heavily relied on the Netflix docu-series “House of Secrets – Burari deaths” and various websites. The points are being validated by numerous psychologists.

Due to lack of awareness of the case, only secondary data was used for research. There could be Loss of minute points due to absence of primary data collection. Understanding of superstition of particular area due to no geographical access.

## 9. Conclusion

The untimely demise of the Chundawat family could be attributed to psychological conflicts that were left unsettled and unattended probably due to cultural aspect. The family showcased the world that behaviors can take inspiration from the anonymous and unfathomable when bolstered by extrinsic stimuli. It showed how confronting strategies for a crime, such as death, can be manipulated. It also depicted how social bonds, early teenage encounters, and particular ideology could manipulate and command a person’s life.

In highly rational modern civilization, every individual resides in a box which overburdened by expectations and these expectations in a way hinders the intellectual and emotional development. For instance, the transition of a boy to man involves giving up all emotions and to remain stoic all the time. Boys are always taught to be best decision makers and financial back to their family. This division has further intensified and proclaimed that biological difference to a base for any Indian family. For instance, women are only expected to be able home makers and to take care of their family. Education and employment are given less importance in case of women. These outdated beliefs deprived many, making them resort to the occult in solving their problems.



Although dependency on religion or occult occurrences is not a bad thing, people should open their minds, as well, to accept professional assistance. As Jung said, religion provides comfort. However, when failed, people should seek psychological help. I firmly believe that society needs to have these conversations, even if they are unsettling because telling the story of these people is in itself a closure for both- the deceased family and for us.

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