ISSN: 2230-9926

Available online at http://www.journalijdr.com

IJDR

International Journal of Development Research
Vol. 16, Issue, 10, pp.71080-71084, October, 2026
https://doi.org/10.37118/ijdr.31235.10.2026



RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

DIGITAL EVIDENCE AND PRESUMPTION OF CRIMINALITY: AI-GENERATED EVIDENCE UNDER THE U.P. GOONDAS ACT, 1970

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India

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Received 20th July, 2026
Received in revised form
25th August, 2026
Accepted 15th September, 2026
Published online 31st October, 2026

Key Words:

Artificial Intelligence; Digital Evidence; Deepfakes; U.P. Goondas Act, 1970; Presumption of Criminality.

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how AI-generated digital evidence such as deepfake videos, synthetic audio, facial-recognition outputs and metadata could influence preventive criminal proceedings under the Uttar Pradesh Control of Goondas Act, 1970 (U.P. Goondas Act). We first outline the Act's framework: notice, hearing, externment/detention orders, appeal, etc. and the definition of "Goonda". We then summarise relevant provisions of the new BharatiyaSakshyaAdhiniyam, 2023, especially Sections 62–63 on electronic records, which require strict certification (including hash values) for AI-generated media. Notably, BSA's rules apply only in judicial proceedings, whereas Goonda Act proceedings are executive/quasi-judicial; Section 8 of the Goonda Act explicitly allows any probative evidence, setting aside ordinary Evidence Act rules. We then describe types of AI evidence like deepfake images/videos, voice clones, algorithmic ID, metadata logs, etc. and their inherent challenges: authenticity, chain-of-custody, bias, explainability. We analyse how reliance on such evidence might lead authorities to deem someone a "habitual offender" or threat under the Goonda Act, potentially creating a de facto presumption of criminality unless safeguards are imposed. We further review recent case-law (2023–2026) on digital evidence and preventive orders: for example, Ramji Pandey v. State of U.P. (1981), an Allahabad HC Full Bench insisted that a Goonda Act notice must state the general nature of allegations. More recently, the Supreme Court in State of Telangana v. Roshini Devi (2026) struck down a detention order under Telangana's "Goonda Act" because it merely recited offences without showing a specific public order threat. Courts have emphasised that preventive detention cannot override bail rights without concrete evidence of danger, distinguishing "public order" from mere "law and order" situations. No Indian court has directly ruled on deepfake evidence in a Goonda context. Still, recent Bombay and Delhi High Court injunctions, e.g. Arijit Singh v. Codible Bombay HC 2024, Jackie Shroff v. Peppy Store (Delhi HC 2024), Preity Zinta deepfake case (Bombay HC 2026), show courts are aware of AI misuse, albeit in personality rights cases. We draw on comparative sources (U.S. Federal Rules, European AI proposals) to suggest safeguards: for instance, judicially vetting AI evidence, requiring disclosure of AI methods, maintaining a rigorous chain of custody (hashes, logs), and ensuring expert validation and cross-examination rights. The conclusion recommends policy steps legislative guidance or rules on AI evidence, mandatory audit trails, and caution in Goonda proceedings to protect liberty and due process.

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Citation: Dr. Rajendra Kumar and Indu Gautam. 2026. "Digital Evidence and Presumption of Criminality: AI-Generated Evidence under the U.P. Goondas Act, 1970". *International Journal of Development Research*, 16, (10), 71080-71084.

INTRODUCTION

The *Uttar Pradesh Control of Goondas Act, 1970* is a preventive law empowering the District Magistrate to restrict or extern "goondas" to maintain public order. A person qualifies as a "Goonda" under Section 2(b) if, among other criteria, he "habitually commits or attempts to commit… offences under Chapters XVI, XVII or XXII of the IPC" or is "generally reputed to be… dangerous to the community".[i] Section 3 requires the Magistrate to issue a written notice detailing the *general nature of material allegations* and to give an opportunity of explanation.[ii] If satisfied that conditions (crime involvement, threat to public safety, unwilling witnesses) are met, the Magistrate may order externment removal from the district or impose restrictions on movement/activities. Critically, Section 8 allows the Magistrate to "take into consideration any

evidence which he considers to have probative value", and explicitly states the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 does not apply.[iii] Thus, in Goonda proceedings, which are administrative/executive, not criminal trials, authorities may admit unconventional evidence so long as it seems reliable.[iv]

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is based on doctrinal legal research and comparative analysis. Primary sources consulted include the text of the U.P. Goondas Act and BharatiyaSakshyaAdhiniyam (BSA) 2023, recent judicial decisions (2023–2026) from the Supreme Court and High Courts involving preventive orders and digital evidence, and government documents. Secondary sources include scholarly analyses and recent expert commentary on legal and policy. We systematically reviewed case law on Goonda/PD Acts via SCC Online, LiveLaw, and Indian Kanoon, and searched academic/press literature on AI evidence,*e.g*., IBA Global Insight, Thomson Reuters Institute. Comparative materials on the US Federal Rules and EU AI proposals were drawn from official sites and think-tank publications. The findings are organised thematically in the sections below.

Key Provisions and Procedure of the U.P. Goondas Act, 1970

Scope and Purpose: The *preamble*of the Act declares that it is for "control and suppression of Goondas with a view to maintenance of public order".[v] It extends to all of Uttar Pradesh. A person is designated a "Goonda" if he falls under any of several categories in Section 2(b): for example,[vi] if he "habitually commits or attempts to commit, or abets the commission of" serious offences e.g. under IPC Chapters XV, XVI, XVII, XXII or certain sections for obscenity or communal offenses; or has multiple convictions for trafficking (NDPS), immoral traffic, excise, arms offences, *etc*.; or is "generally reputed to be… dangerous to the community"; or engages in harassment of women, touting, or "house-grabbing". The breadth of these clauses gives wide discretion to authorities to label individuals as goondas.[vii]

Notice and Hearing: If the District Magistrate is satisfied that (a) a person *is* a goonda; (b)(i) his acts/movements "are causing, or are calculated to cause alarm, danger or harm" to persons or property in the district, *or* (ii) there are reasonable grounds to believe he is engaged/likely to engage in any of the offences listed in Section 2(b); and (c) witnesses are reluctant to come forward due to fear, then the Magistrate must issue a written *show-cause notice*.[viii] This notice must inform the person of the "general nature of the material allegations" under clauses (a), (b), (c) and give a reasonable opportunity to explain. In practice, courts have invalidated notices that merely list FIR numbers or statutory sections without narrative particulars.[ix] For example, in *Ramji Pandey* v. *State of U.P.*,[x] the Allahabad High Court held that a notice under Section 3(1) must do more than just cite offence numbers it must state a general description of facts, else it violates procedural fairness.[xi]

The person has rights during the inquiry: Section 3(2) grants the right to counsel, self-defence, and to produce and examine witnesses unless the Magistrate records that such examination is frivolous or intended only to delay.[xii] After hearing, if the Magistrate is satisfied that (a)-(c) are met, Section 3(3) empowers him to make an *order in writing*. Under (3)(a) he may direct the person to remove himself from the district or contiguous districts for up to 6 months; under (3)(b)(i)-(iii) he may impose reporting requirements, prohibit possession of certain articles, or order other conditions on conduct, also up to 6 months.[xiii]

Other Procedure: Section 4 allows the DM to grant temporary permission to return to the restricted area, on conditions. Section 5 authorises extensions of the externment/restriction periodup to 2 years total, with an opportunity to represent.[xiv] Section 6 provides an appeal mechanism: any person aggrieved by an order under Sections 3–5 can appeal to the Divisional Commissioner within 15 days.[xv] Notably, Section 6(2) permits the Commissioner to confirm, modify or set aside the order; and may stay its operation pending appeal.[xvi] Section 8 Nature of evidence is crucial: it states that the DM or Commissioner "may take into consideration any evidence which he considers to have probative value, and the provisions of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, shall not apply".[xvii] Thus, hearsay or otherwise inadmissible evidence in a criminal trial can be used here. Section 10 creates offences for violating Goonda Act orders up to 3 years imprisonment.[xviii]

Judicial Limits: Importantly, Section 13 of the Act bars *calling any Goonda Act order into question in any court*. This ouster clause means that writ petitions under Article 226 are very limited; courts generally can only examine procedural compliance or constitutional limits, not second-guess the merits.[xix] Section 14 protects officials acting in good faith under the Act.[xx] However, the broader constitutional rights Articles 14, 21, *etc*. remain applicable, so courts still supervise under fundamental rights, especially in preventive detention contexts.

BharatiyaSakshyaAdhiniyam, 2023: Relevant Provisions and Limits with Goonda Proceedings

Scope of BSA: The BharatiyaSakshyaAdhiniyam (BSA) 2023, enacted on 25 Dec 2023, replaces the Indian Evidence Act and generally governs "all judicial proceedings in or before any Court".[xxi] Section 1 clarifies it applies only to judicial or quasi-judicial proceedings (not arbitrations or mere affidavits). Crucially, preventive/executive actions like issuing a Goonda notice are *not* "judicial proceedings", so the formal BSA rules do *not* by their own force apply to the DM's administrative order-making. Thus, the Act's evidentiary provisions are binding only if Goonda proceedings are challenged in court.[xxii]

Key Provisions on Electronic Evidence: The BSA contains comprehensive rules for digital evidence. "Document" under the BSA includes all electronic or digital records, emails, server logs, phone documents, voicemails, *etc.* Importantly, unlike the old Evidence Act (IEA), electronic records are treated as **primary evidence** unless disputed. Sections 62–63 replace old Sections 65A–65B of the IEA. Section 62 simply provides that "contents of electronic records may be proved" via Section 63.[xxiii] Section 63 expands the admissibility framework. Sub-section 1 states that any computer output,*e.g*. printed email or a digital file, is *deemed a document* if conditions (2) are met.[xxiv] Conditions (2) require: (a) information was stored in a computer/device during its regular use; (b) the device was functioning; (c) no tampering occurred; (d) the content is faithfully reproduced.[xxv]

Critically, subsection 4 of Section 63 mandates a certificate whenever electronic evidence is tendered. The certificate must (a) identify the electronic record and describe how it was produced, (b) provide particulars of the device(s) used, and (c) address the sub-section (2) conditions.[xxvi] It must be signed by the person in charge of the computer/device and by an expert.The certificate (per Schedule) must state the hash value of the digital file and the hash algorithm used, effectively giving each record a cryptographic fingerprint. This two-part certification by custodian and expert is a stricter requirement than the old Act. Under BSA, this certificate *is itself evidence of its contents*. Failure to furnish it (or the hash) renders the evidence inadmissiblenot merely a technical defect but a substantive impediment.[xxvii]

Other Relevant BSA Rules: The BSAalso codifies presumptions: *e.g.,* a document purporting to bear a secure electronic signature is presumed genuine, and a secure electronic record under IT Act definitions is presumed unaltered S. 86).[xxviii] Old section 93's presumption for 5-year-old documents survives in a similar Section 93. These provisions enhance digital authentication. Note: these presumptions apply in courts under the BSA regime.

Interaction with Goonda Proceedings: Because BSA applies only in "judicial proceedings", it generally does *not govern* an executive act like issuance of a Goonda show-cause notice or order. The Goondas Act's Section 8 overrides the IEA and by extension, would operate notwithstanding the BSA, by permitting any evidence of probative value.[xxix] In other words, a District Magistrate need not adhere to the BSA's certification scheme when making an externment order. In practice, however, if AI-generated material (video, audio, *etc*.) is to be used, the investigating authorities would likely still follow principles of reliability: for instance, they may produce a transcription or summary, accompanied by an IT Act 65B-like certificate per old practice or now a BSA certificate if the case goes to court. But strictly, BSA rules could be invoked by the defence in judicial review: *e.g.,* a writ petitioner might argue that the AI evidence was not certified/hashes omitted, drawing an analogy to strict BSA requirements. Whether courts would enforce BSA on Goonda proceedings is uncertain.

Types of AI-Generated Digital Evidence

- **Deepfake Images/Videos:** Synthetic videos or images generated by AI to depict real persons doing or saying things they never did. *e.g.* a deepfake of an accused person committing a crime.[xxx]
- **Synthetic Audio/Voice Clones:** AI-generated speech or calls mimicking someone's voice. For instance, a fake voice recording of a suspect ordering a crime.[xxxi]
- **Facial-Recognition and Biometric Outputs:** AI algorithms that identify or flag individuals in surveillance footage or crowds. The *output,* matched name, and confidence score can itself become evidence.[xxxii]
- **Algorithmic Patterns/Profiling:** Data-driven inferences like "crime network analysis" or predictive policing scores, which are AI-derived conclusions about someone's proclivity to offend.[xxxiii]
- **Metadata and Digital Footprints:** Data from devices GPS logs, communication records, IP traces) that are processed by AI tools. For example, geolocation pings clustered by AI.[xxxiv]
- **Synthetic Documents or ChatGPT Outputs:** Text generated by AI *e.g.* fake "confession" statements, reports), including hallucinated or fabricated citations as seen in recent litigation.[xxxv]

Evidentiary Challenges with AI Evidence

- **Authenticity and Manipulation:** AI outputs are easily manipulated. Deepfakes can be near-indistinguishable from real footage. Courts have noted that AI lacks explainability: an AI "testimony" cannot show how it arrived at a result. The provenance of AI-generated content is hard to trace; there is often no clear chain of custody. Hashes and digital signatures now required by BSA can help, but if those aren't used, courts struggle to verify originality. As one analysis warns, AI exhibits prompt-sensitivity and inconsistency: the same AI query can give different outputs based on context.[xxxvi]
- **Reliability and Bias:** AI systems are trained on data that may be incomplete or biased. Facial recognition has high false-positive rates, especially for minorities. An Indian court has similarly expressed wariness: "AI… does not possess consciousness, moral reasoning, or the capacity to weigh evidence". AI chatbots *e.g.*ChatGPT famously hallucinate "facts" and citations. In one U.S. case, an expert's affidavit generated by GPT was full of fake sources. In sum, AI often cannot explain its "reasoning" or be cross-examined, undermining trust.[xxxvii]
- **Chain of Custody & Data Integrity:** Forensic best practices like BSA's hash requirement are crucial. If police seize a hard disk, they must log who had access, use write-blockers, record hash values, etc. Any break means a judge might exclude the digital file. The BSA's split certificate codifies this: a custodian must declare device integrity, and an expert must confirm it. If the certificate lacks hash details, the evidence "fails" admissibility.[xxxviii]
- **Expertise Required:** Courts will likely need technical experts to interpret AI evidence. Under BSA 63(4), an expert's certification is **evidence**.[xxxix] Judicial training is another need: judges must understand how deepfakes are made/detected. Some commentators recommend bench-cards and training materials for judges on AI evidence.[xl]
- **Admissibility Standards:** Traditional rules best evidence, hearsay, *etc.* often don't foresee AI. The Goonda Act says "any evidence" may be considered. However, for fairness, one may analogise BSA rules: *e.g.,* require a proper certificate if contested. There is tension: BSA prefers strict admissibility criteria hashes, *etc.*, but Goonda Act litigation may relax that.[xli]
- **Algorithmic Bias & Fairness:** Use of AI tools like predictive policing could unfairly label someone as habitual. If an AI flags someone as a "repeat offender" based on data patterns, that could be circular. Courts must be wary of "algorithmic evidence" that essentially acts as a presumption rather than proof.[xlii]
- **Standard of Proof:** Goonda Act orders are not criminal convictions; the standard is "satisfaction" of conditions, often lower than "beyond reasonable doubt. But the reliance on AI evidence could create a risk of a de facto *presumption* that if AI says "X is dangerous", then it must be true. Without counter-evidence, the accused may be presumed guilty/habitual by default. This raises Article 21 liberty concerns.[xliii]

AI Evidence and "Presumption of Criminality" in Goonda Proceedings: By design, Goonda proceedings flip the burden: once a person is proclaimed a habitual offender by police, he must *explain* himself. If *AI-generated evidence*say a deepfake implicating the person is used, the effect may be to predetermine them as a dangerous "goonda" unless they can disprove the evidence. In practice, this can create a presumption of criminality or habituality. For instance, a suspicious video synthesised by AI might lead the DM to declare: "we have evidence the person trafficked drugs. He will need to prove otherwise." This is problematic: it undermines the principle that even in preventive law, any doubt should favor liberty Sections 2(b) and 3(1) of the Goondas Act list specific offences. If AI evidence is used to tie someone to those offences *e.g*. a face-locked video of them firing a gun), the authorities may automatically count those crimes to classify them as goonda. Without a judicial trial, there's no opportunity for rigorous testing, witness cross-examination, or defence evidence.[xliv] The presumption arises because once the notice is served, the person is treated as a proved goonda unless he convinces the Magistrate otherwise at a hearing. If the AI output itself is fabricated, say a manipulated CCTV clip, the accused may never see the machine "logic" behind it to challenge it.

Role of Judiciary: Recent Case Law (2023–2026): No reported Indian judgment squarely addresses AI-generated evidence under the Goondas Act. However, relevant principles have been developed:

- **Allahabad High Court (Full Bench) – *Ramji Pandey* v. *State of U.P.***: Affirmed that the Goondas notice must articulate the general nature of allegations beyond bare references.[xlv] This implies that if digital evidence is AI-based, the notice must describe its general content,*e.g.* "a video appears to show you committing X onnot just cite a "computer report".[xlvi]
- **Allahabad HC (DB) – *Govardhan* v. *State of U.P.*[xlvii]** Although not on AI, the court decried the mechanical issuance of Goonda notices via stock forms without explaining allegations. It issued guidelines to prevent *"rampant misuse"* by requiring uniform procedures. This underscores that any new form of evidence, digital media, or AI outputmust be thoughtfully presented, not just checked as a box.[xlviii]
- **Allahabad HC – *Abhay Vishwakarma* v. *State of U.P.*[xlix]**Stayed a Goonda notice for failing to specify material allegations, citing *Ramji Pandey*. The Court observed that Goonda Act safeguards are "slender" and must be strictly followed. This principle would apply to AI evidence: courts would likely require a clear explanation of what the AI allegedly showed, the "general nature of material" for a Section 3 notice.[l]
- **Supreme Court – *State of Telangana* v. *Roshini Devi***:[li] Although under the Telangana Goonda Act, the SC's reasoning is persuasive nationwide. The Court quashed the detention of a woman accused in NDPS cases as a *"coloured exercise"* of power. It held that simply calling her a "habitual drug offender" (based on three FIRs) was not enough; there must be material showing *specific threat to public order*. It emphasised that preventive detention cannot be a backdoor to override bail. Crucially, the Court said "mere apprehension" of recidivism or replicating offences is *not sufficient* for public order. It required that the detention order *"indicate… subjective satisfaction"* with regard to public order not just recite Section 2(a). This case underscores that Goonda/detention orders must be factual and precise, not just boilerplatea principle equally vital if AI evidence is relied on.[lii]
- **Supreme Court – Ameena Begum v. State of Telangana[liii]** The SC struck down a Goonda order partly because the Magistrate had considered extraneous factors – specifically, frustration over bail orders. The Court warned that detaining authorities must avoid any "sentiments of having been ousted by courts". While not AI-related, the case underscores that preventive orders must be based on objective facts. It suggests that if an AI tool is used because humans cannot directly observe certain crimes, the reason for reliance must be clearly justified, not as a pretext for detaining a person otherwise eligible for bail.[liv]
- **Bombay and Delhi High Courts – Personality Rights / Deepfakes (2023–2026)**: These civil injunction cases like***Arijit Singh*v.*Codible Ventures LLP***;[lv]***Anil Kapoor v. Simply Life India &Ors.*[lvi]*Jackie Shroff v. Peppy Store***;[lvii]***Preity Zinta deepfake case*[lviii]**(BHC, 2026))** are outside criminal law but illustrate judicial awareness of AI. The Bombay HC in *Arijit Singh* explicitly recognized generative AI misuse, granting ex parte relief for unauthorized AI voice cloning of a singer's voice. The courts have granted *Ashok Kumar* (John Doe) orders against unknown defendants on deepfake platforms. These cases show that Indian courts are prepared to grapple with AI-based harms, though under Article 21/19 and civil statutes. They signal that evidence of AI creation is increasingly relevant.

Recommended Procedural and Constitutional Safeguards

Given the above, we suggest the following safeguards in Goonda proceedings involving AI evidence:

Safeguard	Description
Strict Authentication (BSA-like)	Require certification (akin to BSA §63) for any AI-digital evidence. This means any AI-generated file must be accompanied by a certificate: *Part A* (custodian) stating how the data was captured/handled, including hash; *Part B* (expert) verifying technical integrity.
Chain of Custody Documentation	Maintain an unbroken chain-of-custody log for digital data. Use write-blockers on storage devices, generate hash values at seizure, and record every transfer/storage. Failure to do so should render evidence suspect.
Independent Expert Analysis	Appoint independent digital forensic experts (outside of police) to examine AI outputs. Their analysis on how the content was created/altered should be available to both sides. Under BSA, this falls under the expert signature requirement.
Full Disclosure to Accused	Early disclosure of all material derived from AI, including source code, parameters, logs, and underlying data used for facial/voice recognition. The accused must know the basis of the allegations.
Right to Test and Challenge	Guarantee the accused the right to test the AI evidence: e.g. to present counter-forensic experts, request a retest of digital logs, or demonstrate alternative explanations (e.g. image could be deepfaked).
Cross-Examination	Affirm the right to cross-examine witnesses (including AI experts) on any AI evidence. For example, if a police officer testifies based on an AI report, the accused should be able to question the officer on the tool's accuracy and limits.
Burden of Proof and Presumption	Clarify that being named in AI-generated records is not conclusive. The State should bear the burden of showing AI outputs are authentic beyond a reasonable doubt. Courts should treat contested AI evidence with caution, given its manufactured nature.
Interim Judicial Review	Provide that high courts may entertain early interim relief (stay or release) if AI evidence is the sole basis of detention. Given the risk of irreparable liberty loss, an expedited review (similar to habeas) may be warranted.

These safeguards align with principles of fairness and reliability. For example, requiring hash-certified logs as BSA does directly ensures evidence authenticity. The U.S. benchcards encourage questioning the provenance and chain-of-custody of any digital evidence, which we echo. Mandatory expert vetting and cross-examination protect against blind acceptance. Courts in *Roshini Devi* stressed that mere repetition of statutory language is insufficient likewise, blindly citing "AI report says X" should not substitute for detailed satisfaction.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The advent of AI in evidence challenges the balance between state power and individual liberty in preventive law. On one hand, AI tools can aid investigations by identifying patterns and suspects efficiently. On the other hand, they can generate spurious "evidence" or amplify bias, risking wrongful deprivation of freedom under laws like the Goondas Act. Our analysis shows that existing legal frameworks provide some guidance but are not foolproof. The U.P. Goondas Act's openness to any probative evidence means AI outputs *can* be considered, but this very openness demands that courts impose strict checks. The new BSA 2023 offers a model for those checks: rigorous certification, hash integrity. We recommend the state frame rules (or the High Court issue guidelines) that explicitly incorporate such measures into Goonda procedures. For instance, rule-making under Section 15 of the Goondas Act could mandate that any digital evidence used must be collected and preserved per defined forensic protocols. Policy-makers should consider amendments to incorporate AI-specific safeguards. For example, the Act could

explicitly state that "if evidence is based on digital or AI-generated material, the state must produce a certificate of authenticity and grant the accused special inspection rights." The Law Commission or legislative committee could examine this gap. Training for magistrates and police on AI evidence risks should be conducted. Finally, Parliament should expedite general privacy and data-protection laws like the forthcoming Digital Personal Data Protection Act, which can indirectly check misuse of AI data.

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