

CHAPTER 3

Witch-hunting: The History

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CHAPTER 3

WITCH-HUNTING: THE HISTORY

“The past is continually needed to explain the present, and the whole to explain the part.”

-Edward Burnett Tylor

Whenever there is any academic discussion on witch-hunting, references to historical incidents of witch-hunts are given utmost importance. Witch-hunting cannot be understood without referring to the practice that took place in the past. Scholars from different disciplines viz. Ritual studies, Religious studies, Theological studies and Demonology have studied Witchcraft with serious concern since the 15th century. While research on witch-hunting has been carried out lately and seriously by Historians, Sociologists, Folklorists, Anthropologists and Feminists from the 19th century, even though witch-hunting as a practice was extensively prevalent since much earlier.

The research is an attempt to explore the history and the discourses of the issue of witch-hunting that are made available in existing literature. How and why witch-hunting has become a global and serious issue are some of the important points to be discussed about in this chapter by studying it from international, national and local scenario. Due to paucity of time and space, only selected documents and literatures have been discussed here accordingly as they are relevant to the present study.

Looking upon the literature on historical witch-hunts, it is possible to understand the present context and local context of witch-hunting that is prevalent in Assam today. The discourses and interpretations of historical witch-hunts are partially used in understanding and analyzing the data collected from the field, the Bodo community of Assam. The chapter comprises of four major themes that are- Witch-hunting of the world; Witch-hunting of India, Witch-hunting of Assam and Witch-hunting of Bodo Society.

3.1 Witch-hunting of the World

The practice of witch-hunting can be traced from the period of commercial revolution (14th to 18th century) when it was a period of European economic expansion and colonialism. When it was the “age of discovery”, the powerful factor of overseas exploration in European culture emerged and it was the beginning of globalization in the world history. But the issue of witch-hunting was rarely studied during that time although witch-hunting was a popular practice in European countries. It has been observed that scholars and writers have taken keen interests in studying about the issue of witch-hunting, throughout the nineteenth and the twentieth century, and even more in the 21st century.

Historians declare that witch-hunting was widely accepted as legal trials from the age of renaissance (the fourteenth century) till the mid of the age of enlightenment (late eighteenth century) in the European and American Countries. During the period when industrial revolution emerged, this kind of practices got diminished as new era of secular government, science and rationality was established. The industrial revolution marks a turning point in history of Europe and almost every aspect of daily life was influenced in some way or the other. As a result the legal kind of witch-hunting is seen totally absent in the history from the eighteenth century till the current twenty-first century. Nevertheless, as perceived from the twentieth century to the twenty first century, there is a lively but illegal practice of witch-hunting in different parts of the world particularly in some developing countries of Asia and Africa. It characterizes a diverse and dynamic way of hunting the witch. At present, it is apparent as a global issue once again and happened to be another history of witch-hunting practices that has been recorded and prevalent in contemporary world. Robert Rapley’s argument is that characteristics of historical witch-hunting persist into modern times; in fact he often establishes the characteristics of witch hunts based on modern criteria rather than a clear understanding of historical patterns (Rapley, 2007).

History of religion needs to be seen first for a clear understanding of how the belief in witchcraft got its root and why witch-hunting began. Edward Burnett Tylor in his book

Primitive Culture (1871) introduced the idea that all society passed through the three stages of development of human society and religion i.e. from savagery through barbarism to civilization. He reintroduced the term 'animism' and observed that it is the first episode of development of religion which has a functional basis of development. As argued by Tylor,

Animism is described as the belief in spirits inhabiting and animating beings, or souls existing in things. The fact that modern religious practitioners continued to believe in spirits showed that these people were no more advanced than primitive societies. This implied that modern religious practitioners do not understand the ways of the universe and how life truly works because they have excluded science from their understanding of the world (Strenski 2006, 94).

A French sociologist Emile Durkheim, in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915) argued that religion was originated in totemism. So, worshipping the natural objects of the world holds its space of the strong belief in God that exists in the form of natural things. As a result of which the belief in supernatural abilities and spirit world emerged since times immemorial. Similar kind of thought can be seen in the writings of James George Frazer *The Golden Bough* (1890). He stated that the art of magic had arisen as a pseudo-science. This had achieved universality before the emergence of religion, and was a more firmly rooted belief system than religion (Frazer, 1890).

During the Pre-Christian era, the accepted idea of animistic endeavor got structured in such a way that the ancestors managed, valued and continued a deep rooted belief on supernatural powers. In primitive religion, magic and religion was same, priests were magicians and so vice versa. But, gradually there began a paradigm shift in the form of religious views that led to institutionalization of religions. Monotheistic and polytheistic faith came into existence which later labeled animism, shamanism and totemism as subordinate. The people who claim to heal outside Christianity were thought to have obtained it from the devil which was against Christianity. Due to some ideological clash Protestantism was born out of Christianity and reformation period began. But this kind of

various efforts at religious reformation brought about the practice of killing the practitioners of magic, particularly the black magic practitioners who are labeled as witches. This is how the practice of witch-hunting began in the world. A large number incidence of witch-hunting cases and witch-trials were recorded and at present they can be found in the existing literature, documentaries, museums and archives.

The first and most significant written cumulative of witchcraft available to a large audience was the *Malleus Maleficarum* written by Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Kraemer which was first published in 1486 and reprinted fourteen times before 1520. It was Pope Innocent who announced that Satanists in Germany were meeting with demons; casting spells that destroyed crops, and aborting infants. The pope asked two friars, Kramer and Sprenger, to publish a full report on the suspected witchcraft. Two years later, those friars published *Malleus maleficarum* (“Hammer of Witches”) which put to rest the old orthodoxy that witches were powerless in the face of God to a new orthodoxy that held Christians had an obligation to hunt down and kill witches. The book told frightening tales of women who would have sex with any convenient demon, kill babies, and even steal penises. Much of the book offered hints to judges and prosecutors some suggestions to strip each suspect completely and inspect the body to see whether a mole was present that might be a telltale sign of consort with demons, and to have the defendants brought into court backwards to minimize their opportunities to cast dangerous spells on officials (Mackay, 2009).

Malleus maleficarum ignited a widespread hunt for the so-called witches described in it. The hunts are often seen as a massive effort to keep women in their place. Most people accused of witchcraft during the fifteenth century were rural, poor, and single women. Women were seen as evil and unclean people whose weakness could summon the devil for sexual intercourse. During the hunt, witches were accused of impractical and traceless crimes such as intercourse with the devil, unregistered babies from hidden pregnancies who were supposedly eaten or sacrificed, and even natural disasters. But, there is no record of any solid evidence for any of these accused people’s crime of witchcraft.

Gender based question of witch hunts of Europe also arise. Christina Larner analyzed that gender is a factor in witch hunts but it is not the central element in her analysis. She argued that the development of rival and mutually exclusive forms of Christianity meant that in the period of witch-hunting (14th to 18th century), Christianity became a political ideology in a new way. Religious deviance became the equivalent of the reason and the prosecution of witches, whose pact with the Devil therefore represented the ultimate betrayal. Larner interpreted it as “a peculiarly economical way of attacking deviance.” Another important interpretation given by her was in reaction to the question, “Was Witch-hunting Women Hunting?” that it was not women-hunting because the identification of any women as witch is set against her not only by males but also conforming females and their children (Larner, 1984).

William Burns says that, by the time when witch-hunts started, Europe possessed a rich magical tradition drawing on Greek, Mesopotamian, Jewish, Egyptian, Arabic and indigenous European elements. Magic existed in highly elitist forms relying on the knowledge of learned languages such as Greek or Hebrew and in the common charms of the village witch or cunning man. Although witches were always accused of practicing magic, not all magicians were considered witches, and the learned magicians were always equalized to men and opposite to that is equalized to female. During the Medieval period, the principal focus of opposition to magic had been the learned magician against uneducated and illiterate witch (Burns 1959, 182).

Almost all pre-modern European societies believed in magic. Many of the stereotypes about witches got started from pre-Christian times. From the Mediterranean to Ireland, witches were said to fly about at night, drinking blood, killing babies, and devouring human corpses. That they practice a harmful magic with a group of associates and follow some powerful rituals. But, the belief that women were sinful and had the power of the devil within them developed out of the Medieval Ages. The Reformation movement further promoted the idea of a satanic kingdom of evil on earth with which justifying persecutions of people came out to be the forefront in the history of witch-hunting. Theologians also sought to prove that accused witches represented the devil. High magicians insisted that the spirits they worked with were good spirits, but neither the

church nor the common people always accepted high magicians as different from witches and demonic magicians (ibid, 184).

The first recorded prosecution in relation to practicing witchcraft in Europe was occurred in Kilkenny, Ireland in 1324. The executed was an aristocratic lady, Alice Kyteler who was accused of practicing harmful magic and participating in diabolic rites with a small group of associates. But as the idea that witches get pact with the devil and worships devil appeared in the late fourteenth century, it was not valid for Alice's witch-hunting case. In the late fourteenth century, the idea of witches as devil worshippers developed slowly and as a result of which in 1437, Pope Eugenius IV resurfaced the idea in a letter to all inquisitors of heretical depravity (Oldridge 2002, 4).

In the year 1484, Pope Innocent VIII declared witchcraft a heresy, the punishment was death. Since then practicing witchcraft was regarded a legal crime. Witch-hunting became a legally sanctioned practice in European countries from the fourteenth century till the eighteenth century. Witch-hunts firstly appeared in Ireland, France and Switzerland during the 14th and 15th centuries. They were seen across early modern Europe, but the most significant area of witch-hunting in modern Europe is often considered to be central and southern Germany. But Germany was a late starter in terms of the numbers of trials, compared to other regions of Europe. The peak years of witch-hunts in Germany were from 1561 to 1670. The first major persecution in Europe, when witches were caught, tried, convicted, and burned in the imperial lordship of Wiesensteig in southwestern Germany, is recorded in 1563 in a pamphlet called "True and Horrifying Deeds of 63 Witches". First, the trials were intensely sporadic. The rate of witch hunting varied dramatically throughout Europe, ranging from a high of 26,000 deaths in Germany to a low of 4 in Ireland.

While witch-hunts were practiced vigorously in Europe from more than three hundred years then, in 1692, it was a new phenomenon in North America. It started in a region called New England, located in northeastern part the United States of America; particularly in Massachusetts, which is one of the British Colony that formed the United States of America. Salem is a city in northeastern Massachusetts and it is a popular site of witchcraft trials in the history of witch-hunting, which is considered as their cultural

heritage in contemporary period. It was after 300 years, i.e. in 1992 that Salem got recognized by UNESCO in the list of World heritage Site and given a status of historical and cultural importance of witch-hunting. At present Salem is opened as tourist destination that comprises of the witch trial house, jail, hills and spots where accused witches were hung to death and so on.

Mass hysteria and rampant paranoia swept the New England countryside in 1692. Citizens of New England who live in a small village of Salem were accused of casting spells of consorting with the devil of being witches. The citizens believed witches should be killed as it is said in a Biblical scripture, Exodus 22: 18 “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”. So, the attitude towards witchcraft took a decidedly violent turn and they conducted a large number of executions with a short period of time in North America. Witch-hunting in America began in Salem and in the later years it spread to different neighboring states of North America.

It was in 1563, that the Scottish witchcraft act said, “People, who consulted the witches for their various maladies, were as guilty of practicing witchcraft. As a result the number of hunted alleged witches increased”. But from the eighteenth century, many Europeans developed a heightened concern with the phenomenon of witchcraft, seeing a new sect hostile to humanity. Finally, a changed world-view, informed by the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, brought an end to these hunts for threats that did not empirically exist.

The last execution for witchcraft in Europe took place in Switzerland. Some crusaders of that period claimed that, Anna Goeldi's name should be the last in the history of European witch-hunting.

3.2 Witch-hunting of India

In the twentieth and the 21st century, Asian countries like Saudi Arabia, India and Indonesia have the practice of witch-hunting among various ethnic groups. There are many literatures that come across the world, where there is mention of several African countries having established witchcraft accusations in courts after their independence. Countries like Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Gambia, Zambia and Cameroon in

Africa have occurrence of witch-hunting cases at present. News about witch-hunting in Papua New Guinea, Australia, can also be seen these days.

In regard to India, it is observed that, there are some states where witch-hunting is prevalent among some ethnic groups since from the twentieth century. Though not legally permitted, finding out witches is an established process for most of the villages that still has this practice. Practice of witch-hunting is prominent mostly among the people living in rural areas, particularly among the peasants.

Record dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reveals that witch hunting was found practiced in Chotanagpur. Varma pointed out that the practice of witch hunting was seen in the Santhal community, which he claims to predate British control of India that lasted long after they left and perhaps still continues (Verma, 2007). The first witch-hunting in India was seen among the Santhals in the year, 1792. It remained a heinous practice in the states like Gujarat, Rajasthan and Chottanagpur until the British banned it in the 1930s and 1940s. The years of 1930s and 1970s saw significant decline in witch-hunting. However, the belief in witchcraft continued to remain strong after that period in Chotanagpur, says Sinha (2015). The Shantals believed that the ban allowed the witches to flourish. Sinha further writes that there are studies from different regions in India that hint at or point out to woman playing the role of witch. The Birtishers played its part during the colonial days in stopping the practice of persecution of witches- a practice seen as barbaric (ibid).

Accusation of witchcraft and killing the accused witches had been a part of the history of rural India. It is still continuing to be a social issue in the 21st century India. For example, in 2012, within a single month, four people were murdered on allegations of practicing witchcraft. Recently in Chhattisgarh also two elderly women were killed by three boys in the name of witch-hunting. It was informed to the police that father of two boys were dead, and father of other boy was suffering of illness because of those women. They questioned those women about their involvement in witchcraft (Drolia, 2013).

In similar vein, Roy (1998) also writes about the practice of identifying and torturing women as *dains* (witches), in the year 1994 that claimed the lives of 15 women in the district of West Singhbhum in South Bihar, and of 24 women and children there the following year. Other than the above mentioned states, there are many other India states who witnessed the cases of witchcraft and witch-hunting.

Evidences has been made clear by the National Crime Record Bureau that, in India, each year there is about 200 women killed as witches in rural India. During the year 2000-2001, there were 253 cases of witch-hunting, and in between 2008-2012, more than 768 women have been murdered for allegedly practicing witchcraft. The report consist of the registered witch-hunting cases in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharastra, Orissa, Rajasthan and West Bengal. Here, middle aged and elderly single women in tribal as well as non-tribal women are orchestrated as witches and they suffer from social stigma, displacement, economic boycott, torture and murder. This is prominent mostly among the tribes living in rural areas (Chakraborty, 2013:17). Konwar and Swargiari (2015) also refer to this data of the National Crime Record Bureau of Government of India. As their record, in 2001, there were 126 total number of witch-hunting cases, 151 cases in 2002, 138 in 2003, 111 in 2004, 197 in 2005, 186 in 2006, 177 in 2007 and 175 in 2008. Assam has been listed as having 11 cases of witch-hunting reported or registered from 2001 to 2008 (Singh, 2011).

But as mentioned by Shyamal Prasad Saikia (2016) in his thesis, there are some others states in India where witch-hunting is prevalent, in states other than the above mentioned. He gave a list of 22 states, counting from North to South and from West to East viz. – Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Maharastra, Chattishgarh, Odisha, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Sikkim, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

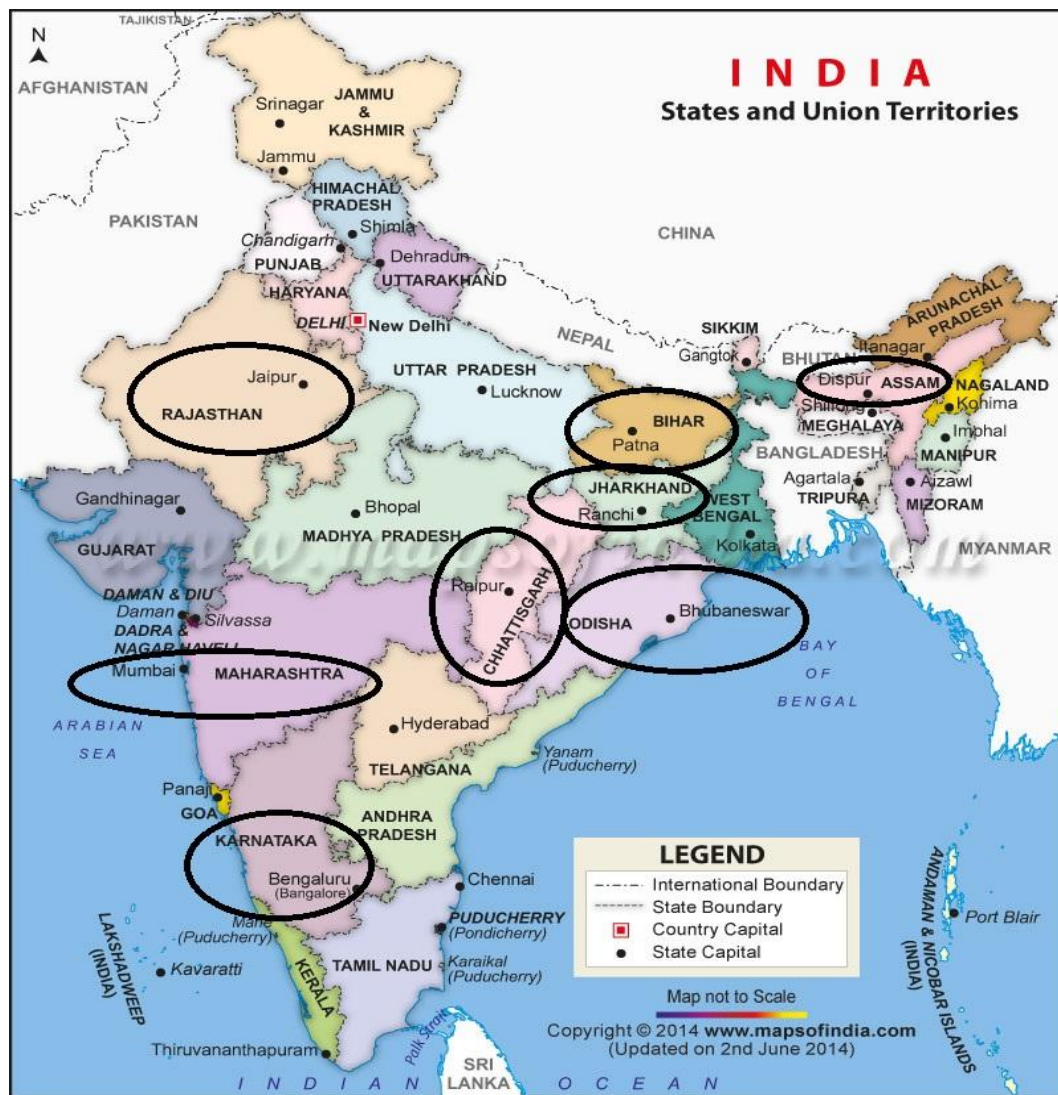
Map 3: Map of India, showing 22 states where witch-hunting is prevalent (as per newspaper and police reports)



Among them, 8 states- Rajasthan, Maharastra, Chattishgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Karnataka and Assam has taken initiative of curbing the issue of witch-hunting. Some of those states have already implemented law against witch-hunting, and some others are still trying. Shaffer (2014) has noted that the Jharkhand government passed the Dayan Pratha (Prevention of Witch Practices) Act in 2001 to protect women from inhumane treatment and give victims legal recourse to abuse. The Rajasthan Women Prevention

and Protection from Atrocities Bill that makes it illegal to call a women a “*dayan*” or accuse a women of performing witchcraft that leads to harm, has also been passed recently. The Government of Assam in 2015 has passed a bill “Prevention of and protection from witch-hunting” and is still trying to implement a law. In the same line the other states of India are giving effort to curb the practice of witch-hunting.

Map 4: Map of India, showing 8 states where the bill/law for prevention of witch-hunting and its related practices have been passed/ implemented (As per the newspaper reports)



3.3 Witch-hunting of Assam

In the article “Witch-hunts in India: We don’t talk about this form of violence against women”, the author Ila Ananya (2016) states,

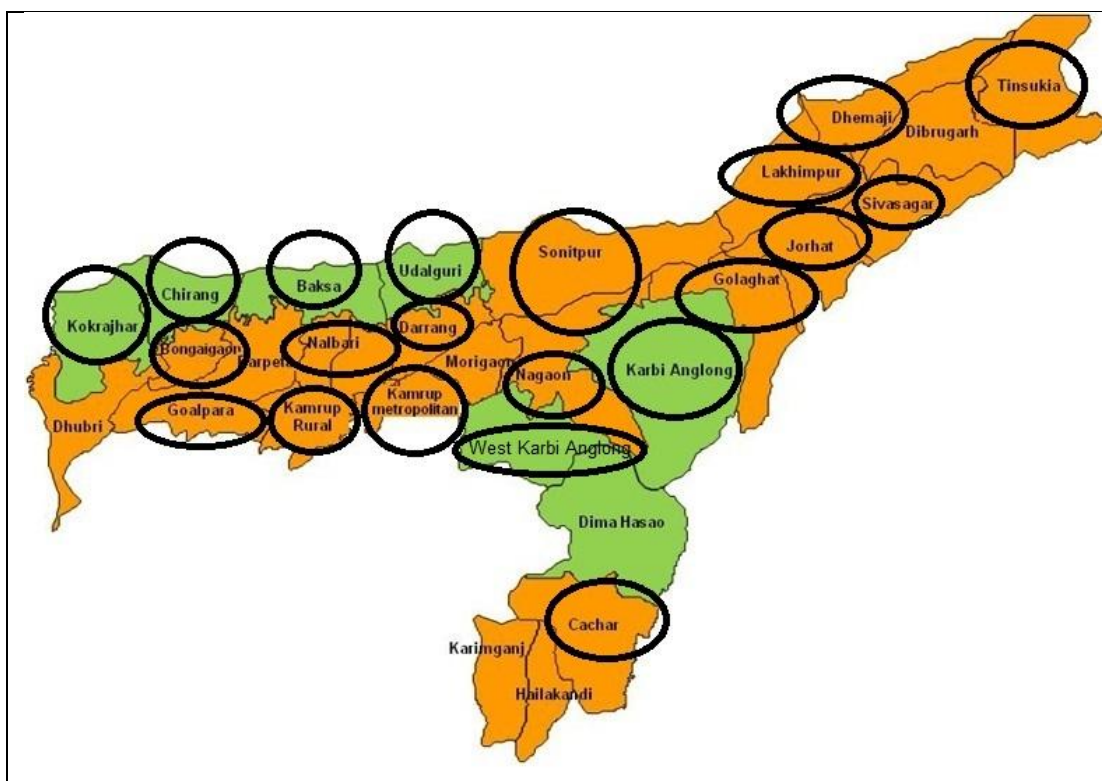
The Assam murders on Monday remains just a news report that people chanced upon Tuesday morning. It isn’t any different in other parts of the country that report a high rate of violence against women branded and persecuted as witches.

In Assam, one of the North-Eastern states of India, there is a wide prevalence of witch-hunting practices particularly among the different tribal community. The practice of witch-hunting is common among the Adivasis, Mishings, Bodos and Rabhas and some other tribal communities in various parts of Assam. The anti-superstition campaigners put the blame on state government’s health, education and social welfare ministries for not being proactive in eradicating inhuman and superstitious activities that are prevalent among certain tribal communities of Assam, despite having sufficient resources at their disposal (Bhattacharjee, 2014).

Singh (2011) said that witch-hunting is like an infectious disease and is slowly spreading to newer areas and solutions will have to be found to eradicate this evil practice.

Tortures and atrocities associated with witch-hunting have been occurring regularly and threatening the peace and harmony of the state ‘Assam’ since the last three decades. Police records as examined by Shyamal Prasad Saikia (2016) reveal that, a total number of 21 districts have the practice of witch-hunting in Assam. They were counted based on the registered police cases in the district police stations. District-wise details of registered cases of witch-hunting in Assam that took place from 1989 till 2016 are shown in his thesis. The districts are- Kokrajhar, Chirang, Bongaigaon, Baksa, Udalguri, Sonitpur, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Karbi Anglong, Nogaon, West Karbi Anglong, Darrang, Kamrup, Nalbari, Goalpara, Kamrup Metropolitan and Cachar.

Map 5: Map of Assam, showing 21 districts where witch-hunting is prevalent



As observed, it is under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code for murder case, that most of the cases of witch-hunting are registered. The people accused of murdering the accused witches are called accused witch-hunters and they are arrested as per rule. Cases of witch-hunting also falls under Section 323 of the Indian Penal Code, which says, Punishment for voluntarily causing hurt- whoever, except in the case provided for by section 334, voluntarily causes hurt, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees, or with both charges. This rule is applicable for all the states of India, and so Assam follows the same.

In contemporary period, this practice is seen very frequently via the mass media. The then Forest Minister of Assam informed the state assembly that a total of 80 people have been killed in Assam in the last five years, from January 2006 to February 2011, due to witch-hunting. Giving statistics about the witch hunting, the minister also said that a total

of 17 people have been tortured in the name of witch hunting during these period. Incidents of ‘witch hunting’ increased in Assam in 2011 with Kokrajhar district in lower Assam recording the highest number of witch hunting-related deaths (Geetika, 2012).

It has been in the history of witch-hunting in Assam that on 10 June 2008, four of the family members were burnt alive by fellow villagers at a place under Biswanath Chariali police station because they were allegedly practicing witchcraft. Superstition, of course, is the major cause for such unfounded allegations. Incidentally, this phenomenon seems to be more rampant among the Adivasi and Bodo community. Earlier, in March 2006, five members of a family were beheaded by fellow villagers at Sadharu tea estate in the heart of Biswanath Chariali.

In the year 2013, in a village called Chikari of Majuli, a total of 35 men and women have been rescued from being designated as witch by this mission. Mr. Bhaskar Pegu, leader of Mishing student’s union of Majuli offered his help and support in success of this mission. Team members of Mission Birubala are relentlessly travelling in numbers of areas with a vision to eradicate this menace of witch-hunt. (Das, 2015)

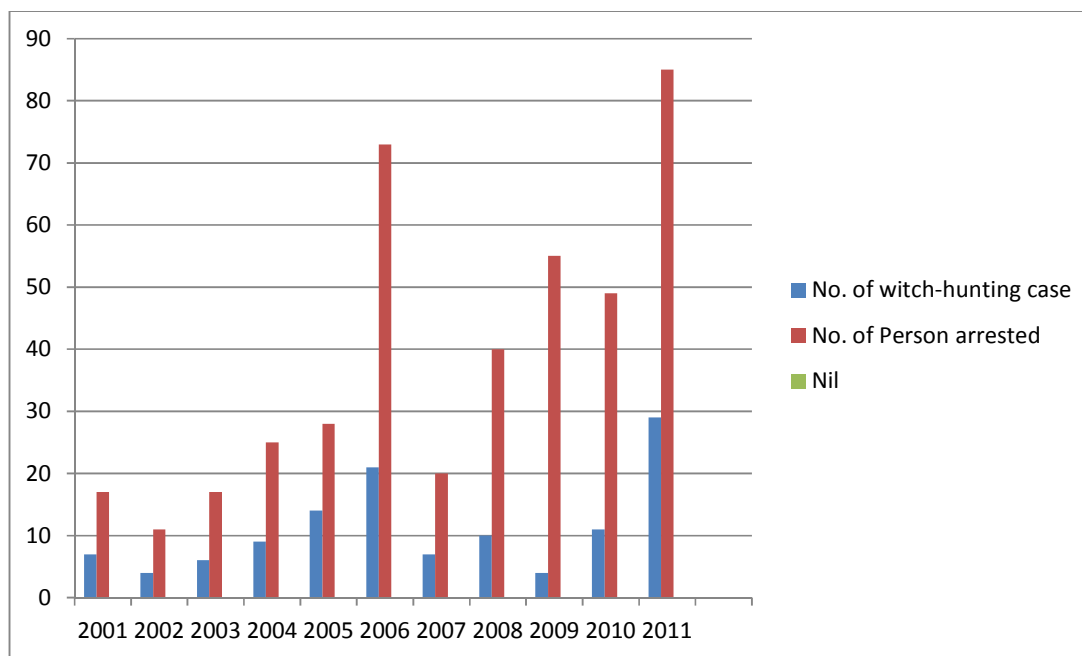
And also in 2014, Debojani Bora who was once a national level female athlete of Assam, from Dokmoka Serakani village in Karbi Anglong district was branded as a witch of her own village. She was wrapped with fishing net, grabbed and overpowered by the head priest of a *Naamghar*. Those are the examples of what kind of witch-hunting takes place in Assam and thus reflected in mass media.

According to a report as noted by Talukdar, in Assam, a total number of 21 cases of witch-hunting were registered in 2006, seven cases in 2007, 10 cases in 2008, four cases in 2009 and 11 cases in 2010 across the state. A maximum number of 29 cases were reported in 2011. In 2012, there were 14 such cases. Government records show that 66 women have been killed between 2005 and mid 2013 in Assam. Assam fact file from Gauhati High court report shows that there are 85 witch-hunting cases between 2008 and 2014 and 132 deaths between 2002 and 2012. The number of people arrested on charges of the registered cases is given below. (Talukdar, 2011)

Table 3: Statistics of the witch-hunting cases as registered from the year 2001 to 2011 in the state of Assam

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
No. of witch-hunting Case	7	4	6	9	14	21	7	10	4	11	29
No. of person Arrested	17	11	17	25	28	73	20	40	55	49	85

Fig. 14: Graph based on the statistics of witch-hunting cases as registered from the year 2001 to 2011 in the state of Assam



Source: (Talukdar, 2011)

In the graph given above, X-axis indicates the year from 2001 to 2011 and the Y-axis indicates the number of registered cases of witch-hunting in Assam. The blue block in the graph represents the number of witch-hunting cases registered in each respective years and the red block represents the number of arrested person on the charge of hunting accused witches.

Analysis based on the statistics and graphs:

- a) The statistic shows only the record of number of witch-hunting cases which are registered in the police stations of different districts of Assam. By this it can be understood that there are also unregistered cases of witch-hunting, which remains unreported and so left uncouncted by the Assam Legal Service Authority and CID or state government and central government. Hence, there are more cases of witch-hunting that had taken place from the year 2001 to 2011, in Assam which are not registered in the police stations.

- b) A total of 21 people have been killed in the name of witch hunting in 2006. The number of incidents and causality of the evil practice decreased after 2006 and till 2010. The number of incidents and casualties went up again in 2011 with killing of 29 people. It has been seen that the witch-hunting practices of Assam goes up in one year and then lower down in the other and again rise up gradually in the following years. This shows the increase-decrease-increase nature of the practice. It has been clearly shown in the graph given above.

- c) As per the given statistics and graph, it can be said that in comparison to 2001, the practice was lowered down by 4 cases in 2002. Then it slowly rises up in 2003 and 2004. Ultimately in the year 2005 it increased gradually and then in 2006 it rise up with a very high in number. After 2006, we can see that the practice of witch-hunting decreased up to 7, 10 and then 4 cases in 2009. Again in 2010, it increased up to 11 cases which also led to a high increase with more than 29 cases in the year 2011. It is because Assam took some remedial measures after the occurrence of a large number of incidents in 2006. But unfortunately

those measures remained a little untouched due to the decrease of the witch-hunting practice in Assam, which in-turn led to the next increase.

- d) Regarding the number of persons arrested on charges of practicing witch-hunting, the given statistics shows that highest number of witch-hunter were arrested in the year 2011 and then 2006. It has been seen that when the number of case rises the number of person arrested by the police also rises.
- e) Another point is that, as there are witch-hunting cases which are left unregistered, there are also persons who hunted the accused witch but are not arrested by the police. Some witch-hunters are unknown, unidentified and whole village people (too many people to arrest) and some are left un-arrested due to their absconding nature.

3.4 Witch-hunting of Bodo Society

The history of witch-hunting as a practice in Bodo society can be traced from the late twentieth century. But, the practice of/ belief in witchcraft is very old, which started with the fear of misfortune and death.

“Witches” in Bodo society, were earlier scared of because it is believed that witches can bring misfortune and death to people and destroy other’s properties. So, hunting witches was in a way impossible for them if they were even scared of going near by the witches or pass by their house. Almost all the elderly Bodo people (around the age of 60-100 years) said that *“We never had the courage to go to a village where witches lived, because if we meet them, we better go to hell”*. They believed witches to be very powerful and so they are afraid of killing the witch. It can be understood that the trend of hunting witches among the Bodos didn’t start before the late twentieth century. There is no written record of witch-hunting before the late twentieth century. Even in the earliest works on the Bodos, Rev. Sidney Endle didn’t mention anything about witch-hunting.

It was only in the year 1985 that a novel *Haynamuli* has been published by a Bodo litterateur, Manoranjan Lahary, where the issue of witch-hunting in Bodo society has been reflected. Again in 2005, he published another novel *Dayni* which depicted how a young and educated Bodo man tried to bring solution to the issue of witch-hunting. The author, being a member of the Bodo community has faced the issue and so tries to spread his message that believing witchcraft is a superstitious belief and so the practice of ‘witch-hunting’ should be eliminated from the society. Through this novel he gave his voice via a character played therein.

3.4.1 Idea of Magic: Bodo Oral Literature

The Bodo oral literature has no mention of ‘witches’ but in some folktales it is found mentioned about ‘magical transformation’ of human beings into animals, birds or reptiles.

Oral literature is one amongst the four classification of folklore as classified by Richard M. Dorson (1982) in his book, *Folklore and Folklife*. Through folklore, societal ideas and knowledge about certain things gets shared amongst the members of a group of people (folk). So, oral literature is one of the important tools that can shape the mentality of the people, whichever way they want.

The point that relates with the belief in witchcraft and practice of witch-hunting is magical powers that are revealed through some of their oral literature.

In almost all the folk-tales of the Bodos, the nature or characteristics of magical transformation is seen and heard. There are many such folk-tales but just as an example, some of them are discussed below:

- 1) In the folktale *Tezimola*, the magical transformation character is played by Tezimola. When her father went for business in far off place, she was left alone at home with her step-mother. Eventually, after a lot of torture from her mother, she died and was buried somewhere in the backyard. After some days, there developed a pumpkin climber exactly at the place where she was buried. This is a magical transformation. The climber was cut and threw away, but that also turned into a lemon tree after some days, again it was cut and was thrown in a far off

place, near the river. Ultimately, when her father returned home from business, he saw a beautiful rose flower in the river bank. When the father tried to pluck that flower, the flower talked in the voice of Tezimola, not to pluck it because it was his daughter Tezimola who was killed by her step-mother. So, such kind of magical transformation help people belief in magic and that leads to the belief in witchcraft too.

- 2) *Dukhashri* is a folktale that tells us about the sufferings of two siblings (an elder sister and a younger brother) of a king who were taken care by their step-mother. There, the magical transformation of the younger brother is seen and heard to be in the form of tortoise and bird. He was transformed as a result of witchcraft practice of their step-mother being learned the craft from someone. Such kind of folk-tales shapes the belief system of the society where witch-hunting practices are prevalent.
- 3) And also, the folktale of Sampabati also goes in the same line, but a slight difference is heard in regard to its supernatural powers. There were two daughters from different mothers of a polygamy father got married to snake. The two got different experience after marriage. One died after torture from the snake-husband and the other experienced a peaceful life ever after with the snake-husband. The two snakes also represents of 'God' and 'Satan' that relates to binary opposition 'good snake' vs. 'bad snake'. So, it also can in a way make people believe that some unseen supernatural power works in their day to day life.

Magical powers with an appeal to control the lovers and enemies are also a popular story amongst the Bodos of Assam. Related to the feeding of *haynamuli* (love-medicine) to bewitch someone in order to attract and profess love can be seen as a practice that started in the 1980s, which also got mention in the two novels *Dayna* and *Haynamuli* written by Manuranjan Lahary. These love-medicines are generally prepared by *Ojha* (local traditional medicine man/woman). The belief that goes in circulation among the people is that, if the *ojha* can prepare love-medicines, he/she can also prepare hate-medicines. So the belief-structure of the society took a shape of binary opposition viz. - love/hate, good/bad, harm/protect, evil/holy and so on and so forth.

It is regarded by the people of the field area that the preparation of medicines by *ojha* is not only as a belief but a reality that happens in their everyday lives. In addition, some people among them says that medicines given/mixed in food stuffs while eating and drinking them in order to bewitch somebody works for sure but excavating clothes, nails hair and amulets for bewitching somebody does not work every time.

Gossips are an oral-literature. The dreams, the incidence and the idea about witches and their practice of witchcraft get circulated among the members of the society via gossips and rumors. When the rumors spread wider, the sense of unity among the people's ideas grow stronger. It is important to note that women are very much engaged in such kind of activities. The person who gossips and the person who is gossiped are both women most often. It is like, women are involved in witch-hunting through oral, in the form of gossips and rumors; and men are involved in witch-hunting through action, in the form of beating, killing, hitting, burning alive and so on as already discussed in the above paragraphs. Basically, most often the whole village is involved in witch-hunting cases.

3.4.2 Exorcism: Bodo Christian Belief system

Among the Bodos of Assam, particularly among their Christian community, the culture of exorcism is very much prevalent. When an individual of any Bodo Christian family suffers from any disease, they call the pastors to pray for the ill person which is in fact a regular practice among them. And whenever there are diseases which can't be identified by the modern medical doctors, it is assumed that the evil spirit possessed the body of the ill person. Some illustrative cases related to exorcism has been selected and discussed for analyzing the narratives that were narrated by an exorcist during the field work.

Mr. R. Daimary is a retired Area Pastor popularly known in his local area as an Exorcist and a person having healing power. He lives with his wife, a son and a daughter-in-law and his grand-daughter, in a village called Gulundi Habi in Udalguri district. His history of healing ill person and sometimes driving out evil spirit by praying for the possessed widens his social relationship with the Bodo Christian community in Udalguri. The highest point of prayer by Mr. Daimary is attained when he prays for any evil spirit possessed person, because he can cast out the evil spirit and all the people around the

possessed can see the rapid change. Whenever he prays for any kind of sickness or physically unwell person, the change through prayer can be seen in slow motion, which takes about 4-5 days to recover the patient. But in the case of patient having possession of evil spirit, it takes only one night or so to recover him/her, which can be said as a task of impossibility for other pastors in the area, and so, he is called everywhere for such prayers. He narrated his own experiences of his service as an Exorcist and a healer. These experiences at present day occupy a space in the hearts of the people as oral ghost stories.

The following narratives portray the strong belief in exorcism. Mr. R. Daimary had narrated his own experiences in the form of stories. First the narration was about Mr. N. Daimary (42 years) who was born and brought up at a remote village about 25-30 kms from Udalguri town. He was a person, physically strong and fit. One day in 2011 suddenly his eyes got flawed and couldn't see anything around. As it continued, from then, he had to take a break from his daily activities; his wife had to hold him all the time to the bathroom and when he had to move from the bed every day. He was taken for treatment to many hospitals nearby and even taken to mental hospitals as his behaviours were terribly changing day by day. But every doctor reported that he has no eye defect. Then he was taken to Sankardeva Netralaya Eye Hospital, Guwahati, for treatment. Unfortunately, even there, all the nine doctors couldn't find any defect in his eyes, he was brought back home. It continued for two months and lastly, they called the two popular area pastor, Mr. R. Daimary and Mr. P. Daimary for a two-day fasting prayer at Bhitwr Sonai Village. The prayer session was attended by many people, particularly, village youth committee members; church women members and Bodo Baptist Convention staffs with an aim of curing him. He/the possessed was continuously kept seated around them during fasting prayer session for two days. Finally in the evening prayer session of the second day, Mr. N. Daimary spoke aloud, "*Please give me 10 minutes, and I'll go away.*" People stopped praying, but Reuben stood and said, "We are not giving you any minutes, just go away right now." Then he asked for at least five minutes but again been opposed. So he fell down on the ground and shiver a lot. Then, the area pastor Reuben asked him questions like- Who are you and where from have you come? He answered that he's not going to tell anything. The pastor read out some verses

from the Holy Bible and again asked aloud, “*Where from you came and who send you here?*” He replied, “*From the grave*” and “*The women whom the land was sold have send me here.*” After sometime, the pastor evicted the evil spirit by using filthy words upon the possessed. According to the pastor, the devil feels shy and leaves human body when insulted aloud in front of public. Fortunately, the devil left and the possessed stood up at once with a lot of anger and fell down hard. At last, he could steadily sit on the chair and see all around. He said, “*I can see everything now, you bathed me with Holy Spirit.*” At that time, the people came to know that, some days back he snatched the land which his father sold to a women and the women got angry and so, she send that devil. From the next day he could continue his daily works and activities easily. Now, it is a strong belief that the work of the witch can be countered only by prayer.

Mr. R. Daimary narrated another experience of exorcism. It was about a matric candidate boy, who is from a village called Bhalukmari in Udalguri district. One Christmas Eve, 24th December, at around 6:30 pm, the boy went to his friend’s house nearby, while his mother was working in their kitchen. When he returned home after 15 minutes, he saw seven footprints starting from their doorstep to the bedroom. He enquired his mother whether anybody came to their place. The mother said plainly that nobody came in. The boy rubbed the footprints with his slipper. All of a sudden, the boy trembled round inside the room and shouted “*mother, mother*”. Then he suffered from sickness, and on the next day, he was taken to a hospital in Udalguri. The doctors couldn’t identify the disease and they regard the disease as a mental disorder. The ailment continued and the boy became very weak day by day. Then he was taken to mental hospital and the doctors assumed that it was the function of supernatural power. Then mother brought some medicines and *tabis* (amulet) from Ojajs but didn’t get cured. After some days, the area pastor, Mr. R. Daimary was called to his home for prayer. On that day, the prayer time started in the evening time and ended at around 3am next day. It was attended by the church youth department’s members of the village, some elderly persons and the family members. The pastor prayed by applying some mustard oil and garlic in the boy’s body. While praying, the possessed strongly trembled and shouted with harsh voices. Reciting some verses from the Holy Bible, the pastor asked him, “Who are you and why have you come here?” the possessed replied, “*I am Jebgang King with six followers. We are very angry because*

you footed on our face.” So *“How does your face look like generally?”* The pastor asked and the evil replied that, they are very ugly to be looked at and they have black skin color and two horns overhead. Again he was asked, *“Where do you generally stay?”* The reply was surprising one- *“We generally stay together beneath in the fig tree near the Block office of Udalguri town.”* The possessed sat down immediately and caught the pastors’ hand in order to suck his blood, but said that, *“You have God’s blood in you, so I can’t suck it, just go away from me.”* The pastor prayed aloud in thundering voice and asks the evil spirit to leave the body. As it was not working at all, the pastor requested the boy’s mother to open and throw away the amulet that was in his body. She agreed and the pastor untied. All of a sudden, the spirit said that they are leaving to the black dog nearby that house. After sometime as the boy was about to get recovered, the evil spirit asked, *“Why is that women crying?”* The pastor could understand that the woman whom the spirit is pointing was the boy’s mother, and she was crying because the amulet which she thought was the only way to recover his son was untied by the pastor. So the pastor said, *“Until and unless the mother believes only one of them, i.e- the amulet or the prayer, I’m not going to pray or evict anymore as it will be a waste of time and effort.”* Now the sisters of the boy who were present in the prayer time cried aloud blaming their mother on matter of the possessed not being recovered. Finally the evil spirit got chance to widen his scope of penetrating into human body. The Jebgang king, head of the evil spirit ordered his disciples to split, and so, they got into the body of the family members of the possessed and other physically and mentality weak person out there. The pastor claimed that the mother still did not believe on prayer but only amulet as a result of which he has to surrender. He declare that, unless they have a full believe on prayer of the pastor, it is impossible for him to be cured. So, the pastor went for sleep leaving everything incomplete there.

Belief in exorcism is found strong among the young Bodo students and teachers too. Mr. R. Daimary was once called to a Missionary school called Diamond English School at Udalguri, for casting out evil spirit possessed by a Bhutanese student studying there. The student was then, a student of class VI. He was most often possessed by an evil spirit from the evening time and struggle the whole night. He disturbs his friends in his hostel at the school campus. As per the school’s daily routine, every hostel boarders should

attend the evening prayer held every day in the school church, once while the chorus songs were going on, the student couldn't tolerate and so, from his seat he scraped his fingers and all the guitar strings got shredded. Another day, the golden chain worn by a girl in her neck was also grabbed by him from distant. He was taken to the nearby hospital but no disease was found. Then he was taken to *Ojah* who gave him a *tabish* (amulet chain) to wear in his body. He did as instructed but there was no any change of behavior. The next attempt of his treatment was that they called the area pastor, Mr. R. Daimary to the school one night for prayer. Before starting his prayer, the pastor inquired about what kind of treatment he was given earlier for his ailment and whether he could eat food or not. Getting all these answers, the pastor began praying and he could identify that he has been possessed by an evil spirit. Then he ordered in a harsh voice to eat food. The student (boys) from class VI to X, and the teachers and the caretakers who were present in that prayer until late night got surprised to see the student eating food very fast, which was denied every time when they offered/requested/ordered, and for three days he was in an empty stomach. After having the food at around 9 pm that night, the pastor read aloud some Bible verses and prayed continuously. The possessed was trying to run here and there, but as the place was surrounded by the teachers, caretakers and students, he could not run away. After sometime, he pushed the people around and tried to come out of the gathering. He was tightly caught by people but at one point of time he could push all of them. He could even lift/pick up the dining table in one hand, which everybody present there got amazed and frightened. Till morning he didn't stop doing all these surprising acts/behavior. The pastor caught him finally and he fell down. Now the pastor stopped praying and asked him some questions in a harsh voice. "*Who are you?*" He ignored to respond him. Later on when the pastor repeatedly asked him the same question, he replied in the voice of a women that, "*I am Catherine Dorjee.*" Soon after the reply, the pastor immediately asked another question, "*From where have you come?*" The possessed replied that she came from her buried place near the school, in Nalbari Udalguri. After many questions were asked and replied, the pastor explained that, during the India-China war, many people from Bhutan came to Udalguri and in those days among many Bhutanese killed, one of them was Catherine Dorjee who died in 1962. As their own traditional custom, her dead body was buried beneath the tree near the place

where her dead body lied. As the student had an aim of becoming a preacher or Christian Missionary in Bhutan when grown up, Catherine attacked him and tried to prevent his success. The pastor ordered the spirit of Catherine to leave the body of the possessed by breaking, destroying and burning the amulet. After sometime, the spirit completely left the body and Wangcho got back into his normal state.

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