CHAPTER 1

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CHAPTER- 1

INTRODUCTION

Witchcraft is usually seen as something evil and harmful in most cultures and societies. It is a common perception that exists among almost all social beings. Witches are believed to possess special spirit of supernatural existence that can harm people to death and devastate the community. In the late medieval or early modern European societies, accused witches were mostly women who are thought to enter into a diabolic pact with the devil and thereby accused of heresy and apostasy. In most cases they were hunted down, severely punished or killed, which is popularly known as witch-hunting. William Burns writes,

> Witch-hunting is often used as a symbol of the "barbaric" and "superstitious" practices of medieval and early modern people, now happily forgotten in our own enlightened era, an interpretation that actually emerged in the later stages of the witch-hunt. Despite the variety of activities described pejoratively as witch-hunting, the actual witch hunt remained limited in space and time. Although many societies have believed and still believe that some people could have magical powers and have punished people alleged to have used these powers in a destructive or illicit way (Burns 1959, xvii).

Starting from the 1320s till the late 1780s, witch hunts were legally sanctioned in countries like France, Germany, Italy, England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Spain, Norway, Russia, Estonia, Netherlands, Hungary and Switzerland. The legal kind of witch-hunting began and continued in European countries from the fourteenth century and followed by countries in North America till the eighteenth century (Ibid 1959, xxi-xxxiiii).

The concept of 'witch-hunting' has evolved and changed into different forms over the years and in different cultural contexts. In some culture and society, witch-hunting was practiced earlier and for some it is still prevalent and for others it is a recent trend. The practice of witch-hunting has emerged as a burning issue in recent years in some

developing countries of Asia and Africa. It is a contemporary practice in developing societies which had its start in the nineteenth century and is still prevalent in the 21st century. It is observed that there are a number of news reports related to the issue of witch-hunting in recent years particularly among the different cultural groups of India.

In the cultural milieu of India, the traditional belief in witchcraft is prevalent almost in all societies. While witch-hunting is not prevalent in all societies, it is seen prominently practiced in rural areas habited by tribal communities of Indian states including Assam. According to Brahma (1992), in most tribal communities of Assam, religion and magic are often treated together and regarded as complementary to each other. In the case of the Bodos, a tribal community of Assam, there is strong belief in the practices of witchcraft. It is believed that the 'witch' or '*dayna*' in their local language, have the possession of supernatural spirit to carry out the rituals of witchcraft. The practice as witchcraft is considered harmful to the society as it is looked upon with suspicion that it brings about illness and death to people. As a result, the 'witch' alleged to have been practicing 'witchcraft' is hunted down, driven away from villages, and in some cases even killed. This is the core idea of what witch-hunting mean in Bodo society.

In contemporary period, witch-hunting has become a serious social issue, evident with reports of several incidents of killing individuals in the name of witch- hunting. While the weight of the allegations remain unclear and un-established, false in most cases, it is significant to note that there are many women who continue to be discriminated and exploited on the basis of being charged of practicing witchcraft. The popular notion of witches has also something to do with gender prejudice. Because the word 'witch' is generally referred to 'wise-woman having evil power' and on the other hand, the word 'wizard' refers to 'wise-man having special power'. The terms 'witch' and 'wizard' are given negative and positive connotation respectively. If wise-man equalizes wise-women, why there power has contrast connotation.

Witch-hunting as a recent trend of practice in India still needs to be understood by the people that it is a serious social issue. As observed, the practice of witch-hunting takes place in rural areas of India which most often goes unreported. And besides, if the cases

are reported they often appear from illiterate citizens or agricultural based villagers. Here the question arises, if nobody educates them on the matter of witch-hunting, how can they be aware of the fact that it is one of the social issues? Moreover, most of the witch-hunting cases have been kept hidden and unspoken by the people who have this practice because the whole group believes in the practice of witchcraft and so they speaks about witchcraft, not about witch-hunting. On the other hand, government's law and order is not being able to accomplish them in this regard because their perspective differs. It is observed that their belief in witchcraft is so strong that they prefer witches should be eliminated from the society because practicing witchcraft is a serious problem for them. They understand in their level of thinking and regard witch-hunting as an essential practice in order to save their (insider) society from witches. This totally contradicts the idea between 'the insiders' and 'the outsiders'. One needs to question, when the insiders strongly believe that witchcraft is an issue, how would they understand that witch-hunting is also an issue?

Among the Bodos of Assam, the beliefs in witchcraft got its root since from times immemorial. It goes hand in hand with their indigenous religion and idea of magic. There are some oral literatures, particularly folktales that represent supernatural powers of human beings and also their magical transformation. As observed, there is a strong connection between traditional culture of the belief in witchcraft and the contemporary practice of witch-hunting. In order to understand their relationship and find out the causes of witch-hunting, the study has been taken under undertaken.

Ethnography is a proper branch of Anthropology to deal with, if the requirement of the research is to interpret how a cultural group acts/reacts and to analyse the beliefs, behaviors and language used by them. The research taking ethnography as a tool intends to find out the outline of the group's mental activities like ideas and beliefs which are reflected in their language and physical activities. It fulfills the requirement of ethnographic research by doing an extensive field study for collection of primary data. It takes into account 'the society' as a field. The interviews and observations have been conducted in the settings where the groups of people actually live, rather than conducting it in laboratories where the researcher controls the elements of the behaviors to be experimental. Traditionally, an ethnographer selects knowledgeable informant who is

familiar with the activities of the community. Then, that informant identifies and fixes other informants and as a result the use of snowball or chain sampling process is carried out. This process is effective in revealing the factual scenario of the cultural beliefs and practices of a community. Hence, the beliefs and practices related to witch-hunting are studied here by using an ethnographic approach of study.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

A hypothetical framework has been made for the study. It assumes- "The practice of witch-hunting as it has been carried out in Bodo Society, reveals that there is a deep politics related to it, rather than being just a religious or traditional belief that has been taken for granted." The study observes that lack of education and inadequate health facilities in remote villages lead the members of Bodo community residing in Assam to depend on the traditional methods of healing diseases. This indicates certain belief system of the community. In contrast, the loss of faith in traditional belief systems is prominent with the emergence of modernity. During the age of globalization, a sense of cultural revivalism can be observed. It reflects in the thought processing of the community in which the practice of witchcraft is believed, and 'witches' are considered as harmful for the community. Taking advantage of the traditional and religious belief in witchcraft, it is observed that some powerful people of the village brand anyone mostly their 'enemies' as 'witch' by spreading constructed evidence among the folks. Thereby, an instrumental use of belief system is observed to be contributing in propagating the practice of witch-hunting. The accused witches are observed to be the 'victim' of witch-hunting cases who happened to be of powerless and voiceless among the group.

Besides, the condition of the accused 'witch' reveals their marginalized status. There is an inherent power-structure and power-politics at work which leads to such social practice of witch-hunting (Daimary, 2012). Keeping these views in mind, the research attempts to look into the various factors and circumstances under which belief in witchcraft lead to sensitivity about witches and then lead to the practice of witch-hunting in contemporary Bodo society.

The problem for the study is stated based on the relevant research questions. The research intends to explore the politics behind the practice of witch-hunting within Bodo community from the perspectives of Cultural Studies. The context of this practice has been problematized and the major research questions are- What are the relations between witchcraft, witch-hunting and culture? Why are women the most targeted in witch-hunting cases? How can modernity be related to witch-hunting? Why the belief in witchcraft still exists in the 21st century? Is witch-hunting in Bodo society, a cultural violence? Why are the Non-governmental organizations and women organizations concerned about the issue of witch-hunting? What possibilities can be seen for eradicating witch-hunting in Assam?

1.2 Literature Review

In order to understand the different insights of the practice of witch-hunting and other relevant factors and circumstances, existing literatures have been reviewed. It looks upon how the existing studies on subject of witch-hunting were done and what were their analysis, discussions and conclusions. These literatures have been used or criticized or taken as support system for the study. The following are some of those literatures which have been reviewed:

The book *Malleus Maleficarum* authored by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Spranger is one of the earliest writings on witchcraft and witch-hunting published in 1486. The book talks about the idea of female witch and their connection with evil/devil. It states that the insatiable sexual appetite of women is the root cause of witchcraft. Women were seen as evil and unclean people whose weakness could summon the devil for sexual intercourse. So, any deviation in gender roles or sexual practices could be associated with the devil and witchcraft. The authors argue that demons are passive medium and the witches are in active battle for human souls. The book is to be considered a demonological text of the 15th century which contributes to a wide range of witch-hunting practices in European countries. In today's academic arena, scholars do not suggest such demonological text for influential interpretations but it can be said that this book has informed us with effective way of understanding the impact of socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts of early modern period in Europe (Mackay, 2009).

Brian P. Levack through his book *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* and *The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe* shows his understandings on European beliefs on witchcraft. He collected primary data which happened to be the text that were written between 1400 to 1750 in different European countries and Colonial America. He found out that most of the confessions by the accused witches were made under torture or the threat of torture. Therefore trials provide a better indication of what judges and inquisitors wanted the accused witches to say than what they actually did. The statement of witnesses may be considered superior sources in the trials and they gave a better sense of how the witches was viewed by their neighbors, but even that testimony could be manipulated by court officials who recorded the statements. Some witnesses, moreover, were themselves subjected to torture thereafter (Levack, 2004; 2006).

Diane Purkiss (1996) in her work, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations*, examines how early modern villagers, especially women, constructed stories regarding the nature of witches. Purkiss argues that "witch" is not simply the creation of patriarchy, but that, women have invested heavily in the identity of a fantasy which permitted them to articulate and manage unspeakable fears and desires, centering on the question of motherhood. Purkiss looks at the presentation of the witch on the early modern period. She examines the way in which these village stories were taken up and reshaped by early modern dramatists, who turned them into stage spectaculars and interpretative challenges leading to moral homilies; the effect was to give 'the witch' a public meaning and in defining the notion of good order in the political and social realms. She also examines the way how women were accused as witches and had used the opportunity of supernatural agency and confession to shape an identity for themselves. This book gives an immense picture of how witch-hunting practices have exploited women and their empowerment. Women are branded as witch very easily and the beliefs of witchcraft are very fast spread among the women folks themselves through gossips and groupings. So, the issue of witch-hunting seems to be a gendered, moreover a feminist issue.

In the book *Naming the Witch*, James Siegel wrote focusing on the social tensions and their resolution through witchcraft accusations. A social tension that occurred due to witch-hunting violence in some societies in Indonesia has been studied by him from an

anthropological perspective. It is about the violence that serves no social purpose, neither serve to construct new social forms or restore old ones. One of his is suggestions through this book is that- when witchcraft is set in the state, in the nation and in the international economy, one needs to account for complex exogenous factors but still one needs to first examine in its local settings because it is there that the ideas of witchcraft took shape (Seigel, 1937). This is something that should be followed by researchers studying on the matter of both witchcraft and witch-hunting.

In the article "Was Witch-hunting Women-hunting?", Christina Larner talks about the stereotype that witches are independent women that does not conform the patriarchal idea of feminine behavior which in a way threaten male hegemony. When the Europeans became concerned about the practice of witchcraft, they targeted the entire female population. It was like if you are looking for a witch, you are looking for a woman, and it can be any woman. The ratio of females and males put on witchcraft trials strengthen the theory that witch-hunting was a part of the sex-war. She writes that in Germany, France, Switzerland and Scotland, 80% of the accused were female and for areas on periphery, 95% to 100 % of the proportions of accused witches were female. There was also incidence in the court where the accused woman was also accepted as witness of other witches. And since women accused other women, witch-hunts were not directed primarily by men against women. So, witch-hunting was actually witch-hunting and not simply a women-hunting (Oldridge, 2002).

In Pauline Bartel's book, *Spellcasters: Witches and Witchcraft in History, Folklore, and Popular Culture*, Bartel discussed about witchcraft and its origin, how witches came to be believed, what kind witch hunts were prevalent in Europe, how were Salem witch trials, the manifestation of witchcraft in the 20th century, important figures in the history of witchcraft and the manipulation of witchcraft and witches on popular culture. The book is not too in-depth on any one of the given topics but could give some knowledge to a person who had no prior understanding about witches or witchcraft (Bartel, 2000).

Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum wrote a book on *Salem Possessed: The Social Origin of Witchcraft* which emphasize on the patterns of witchcraft accusation focusing

on status of the people and their geography. The book also focuses on their quest for community and identity and the role of religion and ministers of Salem Village. The author collects the most extensive primary sources to support the hypothesis stating that the social issues widespread in Salem Village of Massachusetts were mostly responsible because of the sufferings that went on there during the late 17th century (Boyer, 1974).

In the book *"Counterfeiting God": James VI (I) and the Politics of Demonologie*, Fischlin Daniel says that the history of witchcraft is the history of male anxieties about their own empowerment or sexual limitation. Nevertheless, it is also the history of women's oppression as gendered political subjects constructed by the patriarchy and as subjects who created in their demonized collectivity particular threats to male empowerment. There is a substantial, though often unrecognized connection, between sexual empowerment and political empowerment and, as Deborah Willis has noted, "To varying degrees and with varying emphases, elite discourse about the witch was concerned with promoting a new religious orthodoxy and maintaining political order and social hierarchy" (Fischlin, 1996). In most of the witch-hunting cases, accuses are made because it is believed that, 'the witch' gains revolutionary power not only through her ability to dismember with religious groups but also through her control over the choice of the male member. When 'a women' used her power of critique or comment regarding the parish priest being an obvious anti-clerical person by way of extensive corruption amongst the clergymen, the attack against her appear in the name of witch-hunting on a form of religious hierarchy. The similar kind of marginalization of the sub-ordinate section of the society is seen in the Bodo Society.

Archana Mishra (2003) in her book, *Casting The Evil Eye*, talks about the health issue in relation to witch-hunting. According to her, in India the people living in tribal areas have the worst health facilities, where a very few medical practitioners are found and as a result the people take help from the witch doctors and midwives during illness. Superstition, illiteracy, lack of proper health facilities all contributes towards reliance on witch doctors. There is less number of female witch doctors in comparison to the number of male witch doctors. These witch doctors serve as 'medicine men' and also as a mediator in the daily troubles of the people. They are also regarded as religious priests,

who play an active role in saving the people from epidemics with the help of special knowledge or skills they obtain. The witch doctors also play a crucial role in identifying a witch and instigating a witch hunt which is observed as similar tendency among all the tribal communities of India. It is not specific only in the context of the Bodo community.

In the article, "The Idea of 'Evil' among the Bodos: Text and Context", Anjali Daimari (2012) discussed about the Bodo-Adivasi practice of witch-hunting and the resultant murder of poor women among them. According to her, it is believed that remedy of a disease caused by an evil spirit or black magic can be cured only by the *ojha* (medicine man) or *Kaviraj* (shaman) who has the power to drive away the evil spirit. It is a belief that a disease caused by black magic can only be countered or cured by counter-magic. The *dayna* (witch) and the *ojha* are, therefore, constitutive of the everyday life, health, sickness, cure and the culture of indigenous medicinal knowledge of the Bodos. *Dayna* is seen as the propitiator of that evil. The majority of the Bodos believe that one requires an *ojha* to identify a *dayna*, but the irony is that, as her case studies reveal, the *kaviraj* is no different from *dayna* and often uses his privileged position as the medicine man to marginalize and subordinate the *dayna*, associating her with all that is evil. This establishes a hierarchy of actors that functions in accordance with the contexts of need and belief in Bodo society. And also, Daimari declares that, it would not be overstatement to say that evil arises from a hierarchical social order, and when the order fails to deliver, it attempts to sustain its legitimacy by those practices that have evil effect. Her exploration into the conflict between *dayna* and *ojha* and the marginalization of the former by the latter brings out this not-so-easily understandable mechanism of authority and legitimating within Bodo social hierarchy.

The two novels *Haynamuli* and *Dayni* written by a Bodo litterateur Manoranjan Lahary, published in 1985 and 2005 respectively have been helpful in studying about the practice of witch-hunting among the Bodo society. These novels reflect the lifestyle of the Bodos and their reliance on local traditional medicine men and the new trend of witch-hunting during the late 20th century and the early 21st century.

'*Haynamuli*' is a Bodo word which means the medicine that is prepared by *ojahs* and given to anyone who seeks his or her help to get his love. The novel *Haynamuli* is based on the practice of feeding *haynamuli* to bewitch someone in order to attract and profess love. The central trope in the novel is that feeding *haynamuli* affected the work and life of the people in characters, which led to a tragic end like- boycotting the one who was involved in feeding it being branded as *daina* which mean 'the witch'; the village members of the village where the witch's daughters got married have banished them from their village and as a result they came back to their mother's house; the witch died and daughters and son-in-laws suffered from illness; the rich man in the village was no longer rich, his wife died, he lost everything and finally by the end of the novel he was left alone with his grandson (Lahary, 1985).

'*Dayni*' is a local word used by the people of Assam which means a 'witch' or a person who practices witchcraft. In the novel *Dayni* the author interrogates the process whereby an innocent becomes a victim of age old beliefs and the prevalent issue of witch-hunting in a Bodo village. The novel reflects on how stories about *dayni* have been constructed; why are they accused and how punishment is given to them (Lahary, 2005).

In both the novels *Haynamuli* and *Dayni* the two women who were branded as *dayni* are presented as people from a poor economic background who works as *ojah* practicing local herbal medicines to sustain their families. Udli being characterized a 'witch' is an *ojah* who prepares *haynamuli*; Dhwrmao being branded as 'witch' within the novel *Dayni* has only done good to people through her practice of medicines. The conclusions of the two novels are different, pointing towards the growing animosity against *dayni* and the large scale killings that followed. Udli, in *Haynamuli*, once identified as a *dayni* is boycotted from the village and she dies a natural death. In *Dayni*, Dwmrao's punishment is much harsher and she is mutilated till her last breath. Besides, the punishment is extended to her family as well, which of course the novelist does not allow to happen. Orong, in *Dayni* seems to be the voice of the novelist, who as an educated youth sees the inhumanity of witch-killings on false charges.

1.3 Keywords

The following words or concepts have been perceived as keywords used in the thesis. They are important to be understood while studying the issue of witch-hunting.

<u>Witch and witchcraft</u>

The word 'witch' is a translation of the Hebrew word 'kashaph', which originated from the meaning 'to whisper' which meant 'one who whispers a spell' (Linder, 2005). The two terms 'witch' and 'witchcraft' are English terms that denote negative connotation of power as portrayed in literatures and visual representations. "In the most general sense a witch is a person who possesses a supernatural, occult, or mysterious power to cause misfortune or injury to others" (Levack, 2004:2). The two terms 'witch' and 'sorcerer' are sometimes interchangeably used to designate someone who possesses magical powers and gets hold of what is beyond nature but rather different from the definition of magician. Nevertheless, magical powers are exercised by both the magician who practices magic and the witches/sorcerer who practices witchcraft/sorcery.

It can be made more understandable by stating what Jonathan H. Thumra (2006) has noted in his article "The Primal Religious Tradition", that magic can be broadly classified into two types, viz. 1) White magic and 2) Black magic. Here 'white magic' means socially acceptable as it indicates the magic that is not harmful. And 'black magic' means socially unacceptable as it indicates the magic that is harmful. Black magic is being practiced in bringing torture to someone, sickness or death of an enemy. Among these two types of magic, witchcraft is categorized under 'black magic', so, the one who practices black magic is called 'witch' and the one who practices white magic is called 'magician'. Thus the term 'black magic' signifies the practice of 'witchcraft' or 'sorcery'. Witches or sorcerers are believed to have an association with harmful forces of supernatural powers and magicians are associated with special and amazing supernatural powers.

According to Levack, it was during the early modern period of European history that the term 'witch' had a precise definition. It says,

The witch is a person who exercised maleficent magical power by virtue of having made a pact with the Devil. This definition was embellished in various ways so that witches in many European countries came to be viewed, as least among those who were educated, as people who worshipped the Devil collectively in nocturnal assemblies, where they sacrificed and ate infants, engaged in promiscuous sex, and mocked the rituals of Christianity. Witches were believed to be members of a new and dangerous sect of heretics who used magic to destroy human and animal life and who threatened the entire moral order. (Levack 2004:2)

Hutton (2002) has identified five major characteristics of a witch that makes sense to the present study to be carried out with bold definition and foundation. First, a witch is somebody who uses apparently supernatural means to injure others or to cause misfortune. Second, a witch harms the members of the community such as neighbor or kin rather than strangers. Third, a witch is inherently evil and conducts actions in malice or envy. Fourth, a witch works in a tradition, meaning that the witch is not an isolated individual but is someone who is training for her skills. Lastly, witches can be defeated or removed through the use of counter magic by other individuals. Here, acts performed secretly by the witch are called 'witchcraft' which involves the employing of supernatural powers through prayers, petitions and rituals. It is generally believed that witchcraft is a magi co religious practice which has been present in human society since times immemorial and is still prevalent in many cultures and society today.

Witch-hunting

With the passage of time and changes in society, the concept of witch-hunting took diverse shape in different cultures and societies. So, in order to understand the concept of this word, a clear understanding of the context where they have been used and practiced is necessary, because if the context differs, the meaning also differs. Witch-hunting is not a phenomenon with precise boundaries. "Not all magic using criminals fit the definition of a witch. Some people in early modern Europe were merely charged with having used magic, without it being claimed that the magic was malevolent or of demonic origin. But distinguishing 'sorcery' trials from 'witch' trials can be difficult" (Burns 1959, XVIII). From the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, Europeans developed a heightened

concern with the phenomenon of witchcraft, seeing a new sect hostile to humanity. Thus, governments and society organized 'hunts' for these alleged witches in the form of accusing, hanging or torturing thousands of people. Witch-hunting was a legally accepted execution against the crime of witchcraft. The conceptual framework of witch-hunting may be drawn as per the local context of Assam, India. Witch-hunting is seen as a kind of social control by the village/community leaders that rescue and maintain its members. A witch-hunt is a search for witches or evidence of witchcraft. It involves moral panic, mass hysteria, banishment and killing or an attempt to kill alleged witches.

Belief and Practice

Schwitzgebel (2006) says that 'belief' is the state of mind in which a person thinks something to be the case, with or without there being empirical evidence to prove that something is the case with factual certainty. Another way of defining belief is that it is a mental representation of an attitude positively oriented towards the likelihood of something being true. The 'belief' that has been discussed is the belief in witchcraft or the belief that witches exists. The belief is that "witches practices witchcraft" or "there is the existence of practice of witchcraft". That belief makes a way to the hunting of witches because witches are regarded as harmful for the society. It is a belief that 'witches' are engaged in practicing destructive activities that harm human life and property and so they are hunted. Witch-hunting involves the accusation of witchcraft and killing, torturing or banishment of the witch. So, the practice that has been discussed about is the practice of witch-hunting.

Insider and outsider

The 'insider' here means the people who live in the village/community/society/place where the incident of witch hunting cases took place and the outsider means the people who are unknown to the accused witch and are not residing in their area or place. But there are some limitations in using the word 'outsider'. It is because there are some people residing in the village/community where witch-hunting occurred but does not agree with the fellow member regarding the accusation on the charges of witchcraft. They specifically do not support hunting the accused witches because they do not believe

in witchcraft practices. So, they can be defined as outsiders. But it is impossible to identify those people in terms of family, education and acts because they had to follow their village/community ideology and so they cannot go against their other leaders. (Konwar and Swargiari 2015, 133)

Victim and Perpetrator

The notion of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' has a vast difference in the outsiders' point of view and in the insiders' point of view. For the insiders, the one who harm the community members is the perpetrator who is called a witch and the victim according to them is the one/people who suffers by the spell/curse of the witch. The sufferer or the sick person in their society is regarded a victim according to the people in that community. As their member had to suffer for that witch, the people of that community try to rescue the victim (sufferer who suffers from sickness, illness, misfortune, accident and death etc) from the witch (perpetrator). (Ibid, 133)

For the outsiders, the idea of victim and the perpetrator is different from that of insiders' viewpoint. Here in the case of witch-hunting, the notion of 'victim' is similar to the other cases like in murder case, criminal case and other such accusations. The alleged witch is regarded as the victim and the people who hunt and torture the witch are the perpetrator. In the hunting or accusation, there is an involvement of the ill person, family members of the ill person and members of their village or community, who are called perpetrator because they kill and hound the alleged witch. (Ibid, 133)

So, the concept of the victim and the perpetrator framed for the study can be made clear by stating in a single line- The victim of witchcraft is the perpetrator of witch-hunting and the perpetrator of witchcraft is the victim of witch-hunting. (For its understanding, see the "standpoint model of witch-hunting" shown in page no. 83-87, chapter 4)

1.4 Research Objectives

The intention of this research is to study the politics of witch-hunting that are seen deep rooted in the beliefs and practices amongst the Bodos of Assam. Keeping this in mind the main objectives of the study are:

- To explore the present context of witch-hunting among the Bodos of Assam
- To study the history of witch-hunting in global and local scenario
- To analyze the causes of Bodos' belief in witchcraft and practice of witch-hunting
- To look upon the remedial measures taken against witch-hunting in Assam

1.5 Significance of the Study

Anthropologists, historians and sociologists have conducted a number of scholarly studies on witchcraft and witch hunts prevalent in other parts of the world, especially among the various societies in Africa, Europe and North America. However, there are only a few studies on witchcraft and witch hunts practiced in India.

Witch-hunting has been a burning issue for the last three decades in the north-eastern regions of India, very high particularly among the Bodo Community of Assam with evidence from media texts. Nevertheless, studies on witch-hunting has remained one of the most fascinating but hitherto less researched areas of study in the state of Assam. Even if there are some studies done on this issue, none of them focus on the incidents prevalent among the Bodos of Assam. Therefore, it is significant that a systematic and scientific research is required for filling the gap of existing literature. Other significance of the study is that, this work could contribute partly in formulating policies related to anti-witch hunts law and create awareness in every region of India.

1.6 Methods and Methodologies

For the research, an ethnographic approach has been used to understand and explore the group's mental activities; ideas and beliefs that are often reflected in their use of languages and physical activities.

Ethnographic research requires an extensive field study for collection of primary data and it engages methods like interviews and field observations. So, field work has been done in Bodo villages of Kokhrajar, Chirang and Udalguri districts of Assam for collecting primary data.

Map 1: Map of Assam, showing the districts for field study (encircled in black)
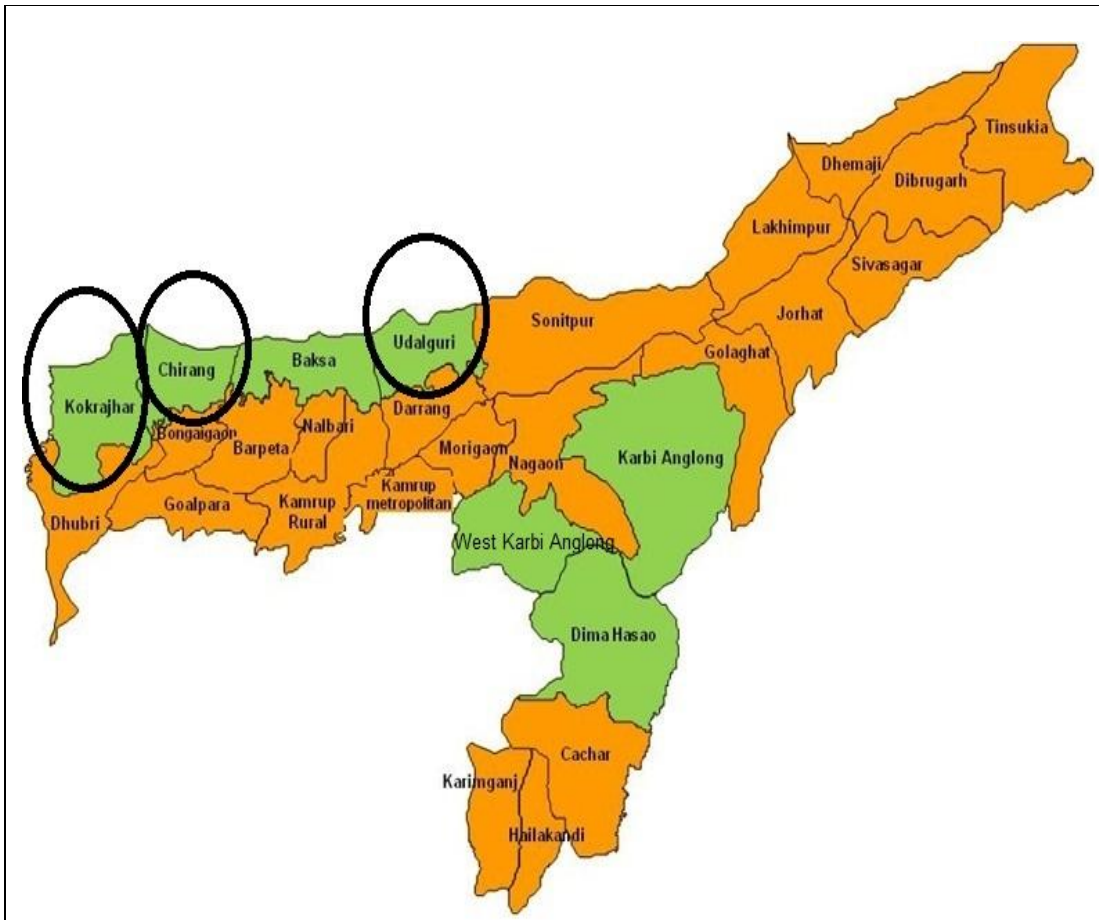
The primary data has been collected by using semi-structured interview method and participant observation method. It includes collection of narratives and testimonies. For qualitative research of finding the insider and outsider standpoints, an in-depth interview of the accused witches and their family members; the accuser and their followers; the villagers and their neighbors; legal authorities and officials; academicians and students; and, NGO officials and local/regional women association members have been conducted from time to time during the time of research investigation (from 2012 to 2017). And observation of the villagers, environment of the villages, health status, and the family members of both the victim and perpetrator are analyzed. Necessary photographs and recordings have also been gathered from the field for authenticity.

For secondary data collection, existing literature related to witch-hunting published in magazines, internet, journals, newspapers, articles and books have been studied. Those materials particularly deal with the history of witchcraft and witch-hunting practices; their causes based on different social and cultural contexts; and discourses/action taken against the practice of witch hunts in Assam. Archival data has also been collected from Police Thana, newspaper, NGOs and village headman for understanding how the mainstream discourses hold about witch-hunting and what kind of actions against witch-hunting are being conducted in Assam.

1.7 Limitation of the study

- The fieldwork of the study is limited to the members of Bodo community residing in three different districts Assam, particularly Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Chirang.

- While conducting the field work for the thesis, the researcher realized that better conclusion could have been achieved if the period of time had been extended to cover all the witch-hunting cases in the target area, since the incidents of witch hunting were random and only the period when the witch hunting took place comes out with productive data.

- The informants basically ignore to recall/retell the depressing incidents of their life, village, community and that is also when everything related to that incidence has already got over.

1.8 Chapterization

The thesis has been divided into 6 (six) chapters which are structured in a systematic order and they are mentioned in the following lines:

Chapter 1- Introduction

This chapter deals with the introductory part where the fundamental information of the thesis has been declared. At first the research topic has been introduced and then it is followed by introduction of statement of the problem, literature review, keywords,

research objectives, and significance of the study, methods and methodologies, limitation of the study, chapterization and introduction of bibliography of the thesis.

Chapter 2- The Bodos: The "Sons of the Soil"

This chapter gives an ethnographic profile of the Bodo Community of Assam. It discusses the background of the field area and about the people living there. These are discussed under the themes like origin and settlement, population and family Inheritance, folklore and culture, religion, economic and educational background, status of women, language and literature, and identity movement and political autonomy.

Chapter 3- Witch-hunting: The History

This chapter studies the history of witch-hunting. It tries to focus on the global and local setting of the practice of witch-hunting. It gives idea about witch hunts of the world that happened to be a popular practice in the European countries and in America from the fourteenth century to the eighteenth century. Moving to the local scenario, the chapter discusses the practice of witch-hunting taken place in different parts of India particularly focusing on its history among the Bodos of Assam. The main themes included in this chapter are: witch-hunting of the world, witch-hunting of India, witch-hunting in Assam, and witch-hunting in Bodo society that comprises of sub-themes like prevalence of witch-hunting, traditional healing practices of the Bodos, idea of magic in Bodo folklore and Exorcism in Bodo Christian Belief system.

Chapter 4- Witch-hunting: The Context

This chapter discusses the present context of witch-hunting in Bodo society. Witch-hunting is one of the kinds of practice that grows in constant association with cultural activities, belief systems and lifestyle of a society. It can be called a cultural practice of the society where it exists. On the contrary the perspective differs when it comes to the society where it does not exist. So, based on the different perspectives, the discussion is surrounded by the issue of witch-hunting with an aim to understand its present context. The main themes included in this chapter are: context of witchcraft; context of witch-hunting; witch-hunting as cultural violence; modernity and loss of faith in traditional medicines; and activism and protests against witch-hunting in Assam

Chapter 5- Witch-hunting: Beliefs and Practices among the Bodos of Assam

This chapter deals with analysis of the beliefs and practices that are associated with the issue of witch-hunting prevalent in the Bodo community of Assam. The belief in existence of witch persists almost in all human heart and mind due to some mysteries of life and death. Amongst the Bodos of Assam, the natural disasters like flood, cyclone, and earthquake and the human sufferings like illness, unidentified diseases and death are all believed as mysterious occurrences/happenings driven by the supernatural powers. So, the chapter tries to bring out in discussion about how and why such beliefs take place. And it talks about why and how does the practice of witch-hunting takes place among the Bodos of Assam. Illustration of cases from different Bodo villages has been elaborately discussed under the six major reasons that have been identified. They are: the stranglehold of beliefs, sanctioning violence in the name of witch-hunting, loss of faith in "western" medicines, growth of inequality, and instrumental use of beliefs.

Chapter 6- Conclusion

This chapter is the summing up of the research outcome and analysis. It also gives an overall insight of the research which might lead the readers to think from the perspective of a researcher without any biased comments from insiders' and outsiders' perspective. The new dimension of suggestions of how the issue of witch-hunting should be tackled and what the further research on witch-hunting should touch are also mentioned in the conclusion part.

1.9 Bibliography

In writing of the thesis, bibliography has been included at the end of the thesis after conclusion and references/works cited have been included at the end of each chapter as per the regulation of uniform pattern followed by Tezpur University. The bibliographic style for theses and dissertations for 'School of Humanities and Social Sciences' as suggested to follow is the 'Author year' mode, shown in the guidelines published in the Tezpur University website. Therefore, the suggested pattern of writing references and bibliography has been followed in the thesis.

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