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## **Institutionalization of Witch Hunting In Bodo Society of Kokrajhar District, Assam**

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### **Abstract**

*Each and every civilization in this earth has stemmed from rudimentary and ignorance lives in their primitive stage. As human knowledge was developing and passing from ignorance, the socio-economic backwardness was part of any human society in their initial stage of civilization. The socio-economic backwardness has very disadvantageous because it breeds many social evils and superstitions in the society concerned.*

*The much appeared gory incident owing to witch related issue particularly among the Bodo society has been endorsed by socio-economic backwardness of that tribe. The belief on witch's power is a part of superstition which is rooted in Bodo society. As per the articles of Indian constitution, the tribal communities have been recognized as most backward in their all spheres of lives.*

*The unabated hunting of witches has been occurring in the backward tribal communities since long years. However, in days of scientific development, the magical power or blind faith is not granted for believe by the people. Although in many places around the world, belief upon black magic and hunting of suspected witches has been becoming order of day. The witch hunting has become a catchphrase for opportunist peoples for their nasty gain.*

*However, the witch hunting has been institutionalized behind the curtain of laws of the land in the society. The suspected quacks those who are innocent are being killed by the conspirators in midnight. Undoubtly, the hunting of witches has been leading gross violation of human rights.*

***Keywords: Primitive, superstition, conspiracy, witch hunt, human rights.***

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**I. Introduction:** Witch practice and hunting are permeated all aspects of ancient and renaissance culture. The witch practice was born out of jealousy, hatred, conflict, competition etc. in the society. Witchcraft as a primitive human endeavor by necromancer to deal with adversity is perhaps as ancient as humanity. However, much appeared gory incident owing to witch related issue particularly among the tribal society has been endorsed by socio-economic backwardness of those tribes.

The Bodos are influential tribal social group in Assam, where the witch hunting has become much tenacious last few decades. The research paper will find out the actual factors for the contagious witch hunting which has been prevailing as an institutionalization in Bodo society.

## **II. Objective:**

- I. To make broader study on the people's concept about the witchcraft of human societies.
- II. To focus the actual motives and causes for witch hunting and its impacts in the society.
- III. To provide help to the concerned authorities to formulate possible policy and laws to mitigate this menace.

**III. Significance:** The incident of macabre owing to witchcraft had been taking place frequently as an institutionalization in Bodo society of Assam. This shocking incident has become order of the day which has been violating basic human rights. Many innocent persons have been killed in the name of witch hunting and tormented. In scientific context, the beliefs on witchcraft are considered as superstitious. Although the scientific development is going on in every society more or less but the belief on superstitious is not going down. The pitiless action over the suspected witch should be articulated in civilized age. The belief on witchcraft has deeply embedded in the hearts of larger illiterates. The entire episode of belief on witchcraft and hunting of witch on the verdict of nocturnal court encompass the universal human rights issues.

## **IV. Hypothesis:**

- a. The faith on witch practice and hunting in Bodo society is result of both superstitious belief and socio-economic and political conspiracy.
- b. Witch hunting in Bodo society is injustice and certainly leads to gross violation of human rights.

**V. Methodology:** This research is analytical type of research. The data regarding the incidents of witch are collected through the primary and secondary sources. This research has a target to cover total responses 500 from 500 households of Kokrajhar district.

**VI. Field survey and measurement:** The field survey was administered to 500 respondents in various blocks of Kokrajhar district based on the purposive and convenience sampling method. The 500 respondents have been classified into various clusters on the basis of education, residential place and income. The varying responses are analyzed in following way:

### **Analysis on causes of witch hunting**

#### **Illiterate villagers on causes of witch hunting Bodo society.**

**Total respondents= 156**

**Table no-1:**

Responses from illiterate	No. of People	P/C
(I) Superstitious Only	60	38.46 %
(II) Social and Economic Only	26	16.66 %
(III) Political Only	Nil	Nil
Both I & II only	Nil	Nil
All above	31	19.87 %
No Comment	39	25 %

**Source: Field Survey**

The above table of analysis on witch hunting by illiterate backward villagers on causes shows that, 38.46 % peoples say superstition, 16.66 % peoples say social and economic, 19.87 % peoples believe all causes and 25 % peoples do not give comment.

**Literate villagers on witch hunting in Bodo society**

**Total respondents= 294**

**Table no-2:**

Responses from literate backward	No. of People	P/C
(I) Superstitious Only	110	37.41 %
(II) Social and Economic Only	51	17.34 %
(III) Political Only	Nil	Nil
Both I & II Only	Nil	Nil
All above	70	23.80 %
No Comment	63	21.42 %

**Source: Field Survey**

The above table of analysis on witch hunting by literate backward villagers on causes shows that, 37.41 % peoples say superstition, 17.34 % peoples say social and economic, 23.80 % peoples believe all causes and 21.42 % peoples do not give comment.

**Literate urban respondents on witch hunting in Bodo society**

**Total respondents =28**

**Table no- 3:**

Responses from literate urban	No. of People	P/C
(I) Superstitious Only	09	32.14 %
(II) Social and Economic Only	05	17.85 %
(III) Political Only	Nil	Nil
Both I & II Only	Nil	Nil
All above	13	46.42 %
No Comment	01	3.57 %

**Source: Field Survey**

The above table of analysis on witch hunting by literate backward villagers on causes shows that, 32.14 % peoples say superstition, 17.85 % peoples say social and economic, 46.42 % peoples believe all causes and 3.57 % peoples do not give comment.

**Family members of victim and survived victim on causes of witch hunting in Bodo society.**

**Total respondents =10**

**Table no-4:**

Responses from victims	No. of People	P/C
(I) Superstitious Only	02	20%
(II) Social and Economic Only	03	30%
(III) Political Only	01	10%
Both I & II	03	30%
All above	01	10%

**Source: Field Survey**

The above table of analysis on witch hunting by family members, relatives, near of victim and survived victim on causes shows that, 20 % peoples say superstition, 30 % peoples say social and economic, 10 % peoples say political, 30 % peoples believe first and second causes and 10 % peoples believe all causes.

**Intellectuals on causes of witch hunting Bodo society.**

**Total respondents = 40**

**Table no-5:**

Responses from intellectuals	No. of People	P/C
(I) Superstitious only	5	12.5 %
(II) Social and Economic only	Nil	Nil
(III) Political only	Nil	Nil
Both I & II Only	5	12.5 %
All above	29	72.5 %
No Comment	01	2.5 %

**Source: Field Survey**

The above table of analysis on witch hunting by intellectuals on causes shows that, 12.5 % peoples say superstition, 12.5 % peoples believe first and second causes, 72.5 % peoples believe all causes and 2.5 % peoples do not give comment.

**VII. Theoretical framework:** The Marxian theory of class described as in economic terms does not regard women as a class worth considering in any system of production. The witch allegation and hunting involves the innocent wife along with the husband for hunts. The hunters of witch do not leave the woman whether she is innocent or guilty. In addition to this the single woman or widow is very soft victim of witch hunts. So the women have to face very adverse impact due to witch allegation and hunting which leads to violation of human rights.

**VIII. Brief introduction of Bodo:** The Bodos belong to Mongoloids group of people and linguistically Sino Tibetan speech family and sub group of Tibeto Burmese. The race of the Mongolian people's who are described as the inhabitants of a country lying to the north of the Himalayas and in the western belt of China. According to the collection regarding Bodo race by Dr. Kameswar Brahma (educationist and Historian of Bodo Culture), the Bodo's kingdom was known as Bod. The word Bod is supposed to mean a homeland.

The inhabitants of Bod country are known as the Bodo Phicha or Bodocha or Borosa (Bod means land or country and Phicha or Cha means son or children, hence, the children of the Bod or country. In course of time they come to be known as simply Boddo-Bodo-Boro. Linguistically the Boros include a large group of people who are the speakers of the Tibeto-Burman speeches of the North and East Bengal, Assam and Burma.

According to Dr. Charu Chandra Sanyal "the Austric, the Aryans, the Mongols and the aborigines all appeared to have taken part in the formation of the great Bodo tribe of today. The Bodo live in various regions of Assam, north Bengal, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nepal and even neighbouring Bangladesh. (Brahma, 1998: 1-2)

**IX. Witch in Bodo terminology:** The exorcist those who have intention in mind to kill the targeted person are said *Daina or Dainy* (witch) in Bodo tradition. The sundry mantras have been occupying a predominant place in some rituals of Bodo society. The incantation of mantras is very essential and is carried forward by exorcist or priest. The mantras could be divided into black and white, where the former resembles with witching art. The belief on witch power by the folks has been becoming a base for the prevailing of witchcraft. The black magic practitioner are believed to have the power with the help of mantra to harm the targeted enemy. (Narzi, 2010: 206-211)

**X. Superstitious beliefs:** The outbreak of unusual diseases, infant death, serial death are the provocations for detection of any handiwork of necromancer in the same village. The interior villagers are accustomed, particularly the kith and kins of patient approach *Ojhas* or exorcists when their prolonged illness does not come round soon. The witch finder or quack by their detection activity leads to blame somebody and hunting of witch.

The belief on power of witchcraft was originated along with the origin of Bodo society. So belief on such practice is not new in Bodo society as oral tradition says. The purpose of witchcraft is to harm others, it never aims for welfare of others. The witchcraft invites pre hatred, pre curse from the peoples.

In primitive period, the villagers had to depend upon the *Ojhas* for their welfare of life. Naturally, they believed that if *Ojha* could do good, he also could do bad. So, the bad works of *Ojhas* developed the concept of witchcraft. The strong folk belief on witch power is the base of its existence.

The Kherai is the religious festival of Bathou worshipers of Bodos which witness some supernatural performances. The Ojha (exorcist), Dhoudhini (female virgin having selected zodiac), Dhouri (male promoter) are the key performers in Kherai festival. The female virgin mediator of gods gets transformed to powerful functionary after the influence of mantra by priest. However, she gets the ability to foretell the future luck of villagers. (Brahma, 1998: 105-106)

**XI. Attributes of witch hunting:** The witch doctor or soothsayer often plays a negative role with gullible public in blaming somebody for misfortune events in the village. The traditional healer or quack used to enjoy public loyalty in inadequacy of medical access. Their living condition is so unhygienic where they are easy prone to various diseases. Moreover, they are not able to cooperate with the modern technique of medical treatment such (ultra sound, scanning, frequent blood, stool, etc. taking the regular medicine doses, purchasing medicine, vitamin rich nutrition, rest etc.) due to poor financial condition.

**XII. Structural causes of witch hunting:** There are common social causes for the hunting of witch in the village. As for example, the personal enmity, jealousy over other, social forces etc. are social conspiracies for the murdering of enemy in the name of hunting of witch. The clever exploiter administers force belief on black magic to illiterate folks for personal scourge.

The enemy arisen out of political rivalry has become one of common factor in some parts of tribal areas to kill the opponent in the name of witchcraft practice. Due to the trend of political party defection the political rivalry, political jealousy and enemy arise very easily. The vote bank politics complicate and aggravate the political relationship among them.

The intention to grab property is also one of the prime reasons for witch hunting. The relatives or in laws are always in attempt to grab the property belongs to widow or helpless kith and kins. Practical experience shows that the widow (if any) is no longer loved by her in laws at home. Even the in laws are always in attempt to seize her property.

The conversion from one religion to other religion has been getting progress in tribal and backward society. Even, the relatives also feel angry and restless on converted person, because he seems betrays the family tradition. In fact, the enraged villagers get together and began to plan murder of him. So, the converted people are to be branded as practitioner of black magic and responsible of misery of some villagers.

**XIII. Witch hunts as unjust and it leads violation of human rights:** The witch hunting on suspect is based on injustice which leads to violation of human rights in society. The right to live in peace and order is disturbed by the unhealthy belief and practice.

I. Violates right to life, II. Entitled to live in peace and order atmosphere, III. Socio-economic security, IV. Right to freedom violated.

#### **XIV. Institutionalization of Witch hunting**

**Kangaroo Court in early period:** The hunting of suspected witch has been happening in Bodo society since times immemorial. In earlier days if there was a suspect of witch to somebody, the suspected person is not given punishment immediately and without trial. The suspected person is summoned in the village court and procedure of trial begins. If the evidence against the suspected person is strong, firstly the accused were fed cow dung, human excreta, vulture etc. in village court to make disfunction his or her mantra and purify to him or her in the village. However, if he or she does not listen and goes continue with witch practice then the village court gives verdict with death punishment.

**Legal procedure in court:** The belief on black magic and hunting of which are age old phenomenon in Bodo society. But the practice of black magic is not allowed in the villages. Rather it is considered as an anti-social practice which deserves severe punishment. The Bodo villages have separate code of rules headed by village headman. The village court judges any kinds of anti-social elements, crime and awards the degree of punishment to culprits. It may be mentioned that the remote villages are stay very far from the police station and district court. In early days the communication to approach the police and court was not developed as of today. The villagers on the other hand get hesitation due to illiterate and lack of exposure. So the criminal cases in the village are not reported and registered in the police station. However, the village court awards any kinds of punishment to culprits which is regarded as legal in the village.

**Witch hunts in modern age:** The following types of attack on witches could be seen in modern days. The suspected person is killed in cold blood by the enraged groups which produce various natures of attack. In modern days the suspected witches do not get trial and justice, rather they are killed on mere suspicion. In modern days the isolated living and helpless couples have become easy prey to suspect of being witch. Moreover, in modern days the peoples kill their enemy as branding them as witch to hide their crime motives. It may be mentioned that in modern days killing weapons and arms got developed and easily accessible. The social unrest, agitation, autonomy movement, birth of many extremist groups, factions, poverty, unemployment etc. are factors for the witch related incidents.

**XV. Suggestion for mitigation:** First of all the general education should reach to all the interior villagers to articulate on evil ideas. The evil practice and belief on witchcraft could be introduced in academic course to some extent.

The mission based awareness programme about witch practice as an evil and superstitious should be launched by academicians, religious gurus, government representatives and NGOs etc.

The separate state investigation department can be set up. The practice of witch detector as fortune tellers, quacks, Ojhas etc. particularly for witch finding must be banned by government.

Mobile medical unit must visit every village once in a month to help the poor people and eliminate the chance of superstition.

The village defense committee appointed by district commissioner can be set up to guard the villagers against the sinister practice in the village.

The government should encourage and extend their help to villagers so that they would form self-help group. The self-help group aims at socio-economic development of the villagers. Such group ensures economic security and healthy livelihood.

The government should formulate separate law to deal with witch hunting case in the state. The formulated law should be implemented in letter and spirit. The strict punishment is one of the ways to mitigate the witch hunting cases.

**XVI. Conclusion:** The traditional belief on witchcraft and hunting are key issues of Pandora's box universally. Human beings have the nature of love, hatred, domination, jealous, enmity, revenge etc. These factors guide the internal human minds to seek evil power, thus it gives birth of witchcraft. The socio-economic and educationally backwardness are the prime inducers of blind belief, practice and witch hunts.

The beliefs on witch power are ethnically strong in Bodo society of Assam. The practice of black art to causes harm to others also has been prevailing since long period in Bodo society. The black art practitioners are also in superstition regarding the power of witchcraft who offers attempts to bewitch unsuccessfully.

The belief, practice and spurt of witch hunting lead to violation of human rights in the society. In fact, the witch hunting has been prevailing as an institutionalized in village court behind the curtain. The right to live in peace and order is disturbed by the unhealthy belief and practice. The belief and practice have the relation with the witch hunts which lead psychological trauma and social stigma. The unabated witch hunting despite of having opposition in the society has been witnessing a shame for humanity in present society.

The Biru Bala Mission (2011), joint effort with Assam Mahila Samata Society is surely a ray of hope for elimination of blind faith and witch hunts. Almost two decades, she has been rendering vigorous role with strong determination. She could have rescued many witch victims and in the cudgel to build a shelter for such victims and psychiatric help.

In this conjuncture, all the concerned peoples whether layman or intellectual must come forward to articulate the macabre of witchcraft.

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