

**A CONCLUSIVE STUDY ON DECODING WITCH-HUNTING AS A SOCIETAL THREAT
TO ASSAM**

Dr. Violina Gogoi, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankardeva Viswavidyalaya, Nagaon 782001, Assam, India Email : violinag31@gmail.com

Abstract

In rural India, the practice of witch hunting has long been a part of the culture. Similar to other regions of India, Assam is witnessing this heinous behaviour at a worrying level. Assam has had 250 incidences of witch-hunting between 1989 and 2022, which is a serious problem for the developing community. Because most of the victims labelled as "witches" are women, killings committed in the name of witch hunts also violate women's rights and basic human rights. The goal of this study is to draw attention to the practice, trials, and phenomena of witch hunting on a global, national, and mainly Assamese level. Additionally, it describes the general level of legal security provided by Assam. The study completes an evaluation of the effectiveness of the legal tools used for protection.

Keywords: Witch-hunting, Witch-trials, Human rights, Women, Society, Legal safety

1. Introduction

On May 7, 2022, a 45-year old married woman named Anjali Murmu, Adivasi woman of Mohanpur village in Kokrajhar district was allegedly killed by four men who suspected her of practicing witchcraft in Assam. According to reports, the woman was dragged out of her house by the four villagers and was brutally assaulted and later taken to an unknown location. The police arrested three people in connection and based on their confession the police found her body hanged from a tree. A social activist also stated that even after having such a stringent law against witch-hunting, it is still prevalent in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam.

The history of witch hunts may be traced back to prehistoric, mediaeval, modern, and current times. Witch hunting is spreading like an infectious illness to fresh places, thus quick remedies must be developed to stop these awful practice. All natural disasters, including hunger, floods, and pandemic illnesses that killed cattle, were blamed on women. And the only remedy they could think of was to execute those accountable.

It was observed that situations for which there was no explanation were attributed to women using their innate superpowers. Even males have occasionally been falsely accused of possessing supernatural abilities, leading to frequent beatings, torture, public humiliation, and murder. It is brought up to harm or threaten someone's reputation or resources without having any proof. It still constitutes a personal assault or threat. It is a system that violates all moral principles.

It is true that witch-hunting occurs not just in India but also in other nations. It is specifically aimed against women who have been accused of being witches due to their physical characteristics, such as a hunchback, unusual hairstyles, or skin colour, making the witch-hunt a crime against women. Witch-hunting is still considered a crime. It is one of the superstitions that have developed throughout human civilization as a result of deceptive prejudice. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Tanzania, Gambia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Uganda, Mexico, South Africa, Chile, and the West Indies also engage in this practise. Additionally, children are being victimised, primarily in African countries. The majority of the time, the victims' close relatives or neighbours are the ones who commit the crimes, and sometimes they behave as traditional witch doctors. When the majority of the neighbourhood or villagers participate in the attacks, it creates a stunning situation where the village chief either watches helplessly or joins the mob that is assaulting. The fact that most instances occur in public and just small percentages are committed covertly is also a cause for worry. Male community members have been seen to share incidences with a lot more initiative than female counterparts.

Witchcraft and witch-hunting have received a great lot of attention in several articles and monographs, which addressed the various facets of it (Banerjee, 2017; Chaudhuri, 2008; Chaudhuri, 2012; Chaudhuri, 2014; Das, 2015; Kapur, 1983; Rajaram, 1981; Gogoi, 2020).

The common conclusions drawn from these studies downplay witch-hunting as something connected to superstition and beliefs, law and order, religious influences, or related to property matters and its connections to illiteracy and poverty (Geis, 1978; Goodin, 1981; Miguel, 2005; Rabia, 2005), as well as its connections to climate and its connections to failed food crops and income declines. This is due to the fact that witchcraft practise increases during periods of excessive rains leading to droughts leading to bad harvests and near feminine conditions in distant and backward locations in order to protect the near existence consumption nutrition level of the region by evicting elderly residents (Behringer, 1999; Cohen, 1941; Cohn, 1990; Miguel, 2005; Pfister, 2007). Additionally, politics have also been involved. The establishment of a new political party and the ensuing witch hunt were considered as a way to quell the disruption of the established order. (Kapur, 1983; Bernhard, 2010). The current administration employed a witch hunt to pin the blame for the escalating political unrest on a certain individual. However, numerous research have focused on the negative aspects of kinship, marital traditions, and polygenic communities (Behringer, 2004; Feng, 2018).

Several states in the nation still engage in the practise of witch-hunting, but it is unknown when it first began there. It is a common ritual that is especially common among tribal people in remote, secluded locations. Killing is not a recent practise in Indian civilization; rather, it has a long history. Witch currently refers to women who develop superhuman abilities and engage in wicked rituals. They are thought to be connected to bad energy, and they murder innocent people for their own benefit and to increase their power. Thus, the practise of "witch hunting" involves eliminating these individuals to prevent society from suffering as a result of their actions. Rural India's past is rife with accusations of witchcraft that lead to racial or religious murder. Although, irregularly this practise has persisted up to the present. Typically, it occurs in areas with little to no economic growth and little to no access to fundamental education. People tend to acquire extremely strong beliefs in this sort of environment, and anything terrible that may happen to these villagers—poor crops, infections, the abrupt loss of a family member, the dying of a well or pond—is often blamed on a "witch." Consequently, a witch hunt to find the culprit gets started. In Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujrat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal, witch-hunting occurrences are common.

The three stages of a witch hunt are allegation, declaration, and persecution. "Accusing women of any harm occurred in the community or to the individual, such as the death of any person, child, or animal, any sickness in the village, natural catastrophe, or crop loss" is what the word accusation implies and encompasses. Declaring a lady as a witch is to label her as having some form of evil power and socially exclude her. Traditional witch-finders or witch-doctors, also known as the khonses, sokha, janguru, or ojha, identify the alleged witches through certain rites before accusing them of persecution (Malick, 2008). Social isolation, name-calling, psychological torture, lynching, and other forms of execution are all forms of persecution that encompass both mental and physical torment. The term "persecution" refers to deliberate actions supported by powerful and prominent social organisations against those that pose a danger to them (Jensen, 2007). It is well accepted that widows, elderly single women, socially and economically disadvantaged women, and widows without any assistance constitute the majority of those who fall prey to witchcraft (Barman, 2002; Kelkar and Nathan, 1991; Mehra and Agrawal, 2016). Two types of persons are often involved in such incidents. People who reside in the village, town, culture, or location where the witch-hunting episode occurred view the witch as being responsible for the purported victim's miseries, which is represented by the first group. The second group, on the other hand, consists of those who are unfamiliar with the alleged witch and do not live in their neighbourhood or location and view the locals as the culprits and the witch as the victim.

The term "Witch" refers to a woman who is thought to possess magical abilities with the intent to cause harm to others. The majority of the time, women are accused of using "black magic" to kill individuals where they belong. The term "witch" or its Assamese equivalent, "daaini," which derives from the Indo-Aryan "dakini," is used to describe a male or female who is thought to possess magical abilities that might cause evil in the neighbourhood. While males are not exempt from this stigmatisation, witch hunting mostly targets widowed women, childless women, mentally ill women, elderly couples, and women from lower social classes. The local politics of many places make them targets. The society makes use of "witch doctors," also known as "Bej" or "Ojha," who label anyone

(men or women) as a "witch" based on symptoms including fever, cough, cold, and hysteria, among others. The individual's destiny is then decided by the community as a whole, and the neighbourhood they reside in is subjected to scathing criticism.

In comparison to the international and national levels, there aren't as many reports and research on the witch-hunting phenomenon at the state level. The practise of witchcraft and the phenomenon of witch hunts in the state are very briefly discussed in a relatively small number of texts. Witch hunt incidents have become quite common in Assam in recent years. Both tribal and non-tribal groups may be found in Assam. The majority of the state's tribes have diverse traditions and cultures. A variety of diverse ethnic groups that are really unique in their own identities are present in all of the state's districts. Bodo, Karbi, Deori, Dimasa, Rabha, Miri, Mishng, and many other tribes are among the significant ones. Through their practises, traditions, and participation in cultural and religious activities, people from different groups constantly strive to preserve their sense of self. According to recent media reports on Assam's witch hunts, the situation is most severe in the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Goalpara, Tinsukia, Udalguri, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Karbi Anglong, Majuli, and Baksa.

This research focused on the worldwide as well as national perspective of witch trials, practise, and phenomenon, mainly in the setting of Assam. It conveys the anxieties and abuse different categories of individuals experience when labelled as witches. The report is the outcome of a qualitative investigation using an exploratory methodology, identifying the challenges facing women and offering sociolegal remedies to stop similar incidents. This essay also describes the broad legal protections provided by Assam. This essay achieves its goal by evaluating the effectiveness of the legislative safeguards put in place to prevent "witch-hunting."

2. Methodology and Data

Mostly secondary data have been used in this study to meet its goals. The secondary data were gathered from a variety of publications, including books on witchcraft, journals, newspapers, magazines, research articles, government reports, survey results, and online sources. A specific observation related to the topic has also been included in this paper.

3. Discussions

3.1. Witch-Hunting Practice in India:

Witchcraft allegations, practise, belief in the existence of witches, and witch hunts are all global phenomena that persist in contemporary India. Women who are accused of being witches have historically faced threats of inhumane torture. Witch-hunting, however, has evolved into a technique that certain powerful individuals exploit to further their own agendas in the current era. Numerous evildoers in our culture have been concealing their genuine motives behind the suffering and killings associated with witchcraft by erecting a curtain of superstition. The issue has also persisted for a variety of reasons, including inadequate police investigations, inaccessible laws, a lack of severe penalties, inefficient support or rehabilitation programmes, etc. Disparities in social and economic standing have been a major factor in the genesis of such instances.

one of the primary catalysts for the start of witch-hunt episodes in the context of India is sickness in the neighbourhood, which is complemented by individual jealousy, conflicts, and entrenched interests. Once the perpetrators succeed in their goal of stigmatising and expelling a victim, the way is open for the fulfilment of a wide range of goals. The criminals have also devised several strategies to label the "witches" in their targets in order to accomplish their aims. Once the "witch" is finally located, the captives endure a never-ending barrage of barbaric torture. The issue is made considerably worse by the fact that not only the targeted victims had to endure suffering, but in the majority of cases, the victim's whole family also had to do so. Their humiliation and socio-economic losses frequently last a lifetime, and in some severe situations, the victims' sufferings last until their deaths.

It is a popular belief that witches, who are mostly female, utilise their alleged malevolent supernatural abilities to bring about undesirable and unfavourable occurrences like the loss of crops, villager poor health, the death of neighbouring children, etc. Because she is blamed for everything

dreadful, she is then exposed to widespread suffering and barbarism, which frequently results in cruel acts like rape, harassment, burning alive, and even execution.

Even though there are several laws and stages of legislation in place to safeguard witch-hunting, the cruel practise still exists in various Indian states, including Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Assam, particularly in tribal regions. In its most recent report, the National Crime Records Bureau (a department of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India) listed 2900 incidents of witch-hunting between the years 1999-2018 (Fig. 1) or 145 cases on average each year. These are the numbers that have logged in; the actual number of users is probably far higher.

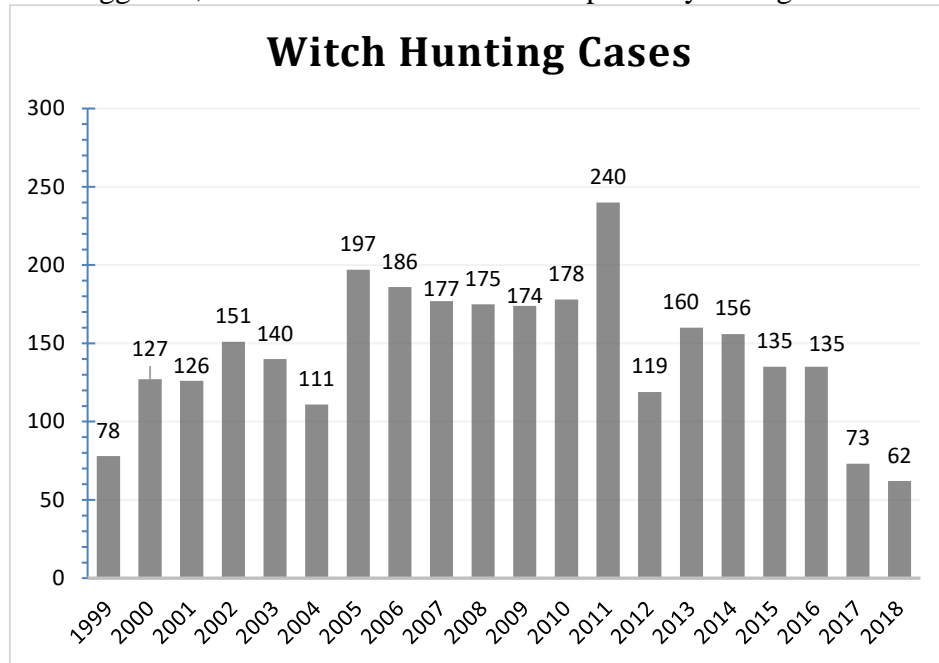


Figure 1: Number of witch hunting cases in India during 1999 to 2018

With the exception of India and a few African nations, the social evil has long since disappeared from the majority of the world. The Indian Constitution, the Indian Penal Code, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, and the Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill, 2016, are examples of such laws that protect witch hunting in India (in process), The Prevention of Witch (Daain) Practices Act, 1999, the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, and the Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Act, 2006 Witch (Daain) Practices Prevention 2001, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand The Odisha Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill, 2013, and the Tonahi Pratadna Nivaran Act from 2005. Act of 2018 prohibiting, preventing, and protecting against witchcraft in Assam.

The foundational presumption that led to the creation of specialised anti-witchcraft legislation is flawed. It is only a safety mechanism and should not be viewed as a satisfactory solution to the problems that arise in society as a result of unethical behaviour, illogic, or suspicion. Such laws cannot totally end superstitions, provide victims justice, or introduce scientific thinking and knowledge into the community. These laws also fail to consider the following factors: a) the context in which such practises flourish; b) the gaps in existing laws; c) the mechanism of reporting incidents; d) the investigation conducted after reporting; and e) the victims' developing requirements. As a result, a strategy that is more socially acceptable than strictly lawful must be accepted. 21 Most witch-hunting instances are also never reported to the police or the courts. Even when taken, more than half are released owing to inadequate investigation, lack of witnesses, ineffective punishment of the offenders, or an agreement between the victim and the offender. Due to the aforementioned factors, anti-witchcraft laws are unable to fulfil the purpose and fervour for which they were designed.

3.2 Witch-Hunting in the Context of Assam:

The state of Assam, which is in the India's north-eastern region (Fig. 2), has been a key hotspot for the presence of this crime, which has roots that are more deeply ingrained in tribal society (Bhattacharya, 1994). It has a 78,438 sq. km. area. Its population is 31,169,272 people (Census, 2011). The state's literacy rate is 73.18%, and there are 954 females for every 1000 males. Rural

regions are home to around 87% of the state's population. Due to a number of factors, including its underdeveloped economy, the area has fallen behind the rest of the nation (Borah and Das, 2019).

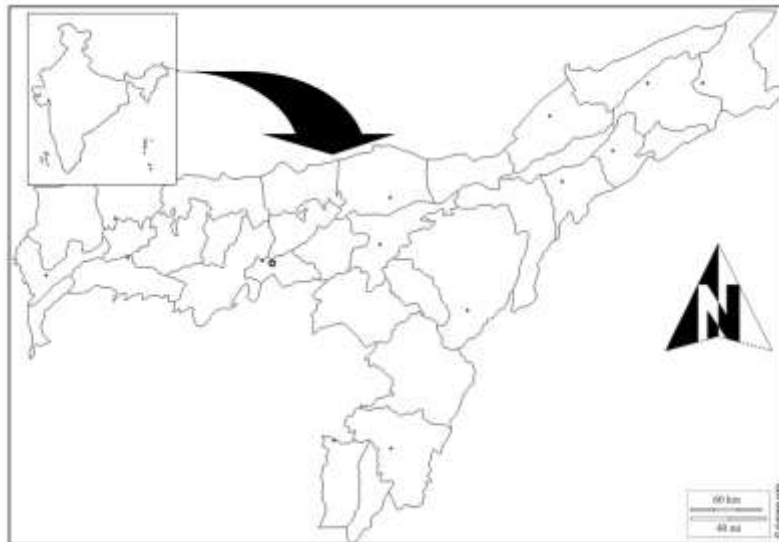


Figure 2: Map of the state of Assam with all its districts. In inset: Map of India

Witchcraft and black magic have also been practised for hundreds of years in Assam. Formerly regarded as the Indian Capital of Black Magic, Mayong in the Morigaon area is now a popular tourist destination. Witchcraft, however, was not just practised in Mayong; regrettably, it was and still is widespread among many clans and tribes in the Brahmaputra valley. The Assam government reported in 2019 to the State Legislative Assembly that 161 persons had died as a result of witchcraft in the previous 18 years (from 2001 to 2019). 250 instances have been reported between 1989 and 2022, which poses a serious problem for this developing civilization. However, this is merely on the small proportion of actual happening as most of it goes unreported and unknown. This observation is similar to various forms of crime against women which also remains unreported for various reasons (Bhattacharyya, 2015; Beniwal, 2017). Nonetheless, considering the seriousness of witch-hunting practices, since 1995, it has been incorporated in the realm of crime against women in the country. Out of 34 total districts present in the state of Assam, witch-hunting cases were found mostly in the districts like Kokrajhar, Chirang, Sonitpur, Goalpara, Udalguri, Baksa, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon, Jorhat, Majuli, Sivasagar, Tinsukia (**Fig 3**). Out of these, Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang, Baksa, and Goalpara are under the Lower Assam region, with the Bodo tribes being predominately affected by witch-hunting cases—with the exception of Goalpara, where the Rabhas were predominately affected. An incident involving a mixed group of Karbi, Tea tribes, and Bodo is recorded at Sonitpur, which is located in the Upper Brahmaputra Valley (Northern Bank). The Misings, Deuri, and Ahom tribes see the highest frequency of witch-hunting instances in Jorhat, which includes Majuli and Sivasagar and is located in the Lower Brahmaputra Valley (Southern Bank).

Witch-hunting incidents have mostly been reported in Assam's six districts of Baksa, Chirang, Udalguri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, and Sonitpur (**Fig 3**). The cases are getting increasingly complicated along with the rise in witch hunt cases in the state. At first, occurrences were restricted to tribes punishing anyone accused of doing black magic in public. Aside from simple superstition, witch-hunting cases nowadays sometimes involve personal rivalry, snatching away property or land, and other polarising problems. Recently, it has become more common for people to kill suspects covertly, particularly at night to take advantage of the darkness and prevent witnesses from catching the killers.

Table 1-Witch-hunting cases in Assam during the period 1989-2020

District	Witch Hunt Cases
Baksa	11
Barpeta	0
Biswanath	6
Bongaigaon	3
Chirang	31

Charaideo	1
Cachar	2
Darrang	0
Udalguri	15
Dhemaji	8
Dhubri	0
Dibrugarh	0
Dima Hasao	0
Goalpara	25
Golaghat	4
Hailakandi	0
Hojai	0
Jorhat	4
Majuli	5
Kamrup	4
Kamrup Metro	2
Karbi Anglong	10
West Karbi Anglong	2
Karimganj	0
Kokrajhar	57
Lakhimpur	4
Morigaon	3
Nagaon	2
Nalbari	3
South Soolmara Mankachar	0
Sibsagar	12
Sonitpur	15
Tinsukia	7
Total	236

(** 14 cases were registered during 2021 to 2022 October, Statistical Handbook of Assam 2021)

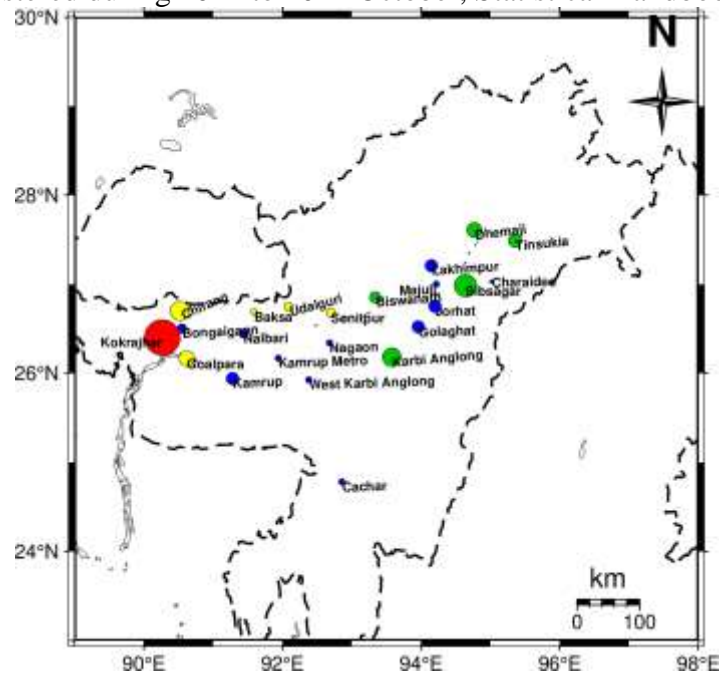


Figure 3: Map showing the spatial distribution of registered witch hunting cases. The colored circle represent the reported cases (Blue: less than 5 cases, green: between 5-15 cases, yellow: between 15-25, red: more than 25)

Table 2: Comparison of district wise witch hunting cases against Literacy Rate and different communities

District	Witch Hunt Cases	Literacy Rate	%SC	%ST
Baksa	11	69.25	7.69234	34.84009
Barpeta	0	63.81	5.628174	1.614528
Bongaigaon	3	69.74	11.20514	2.549391
Chirang	31	63.55	7.28697	37.05974
Cachar	2	79.34	15.25362	1.01168
Darrang	0	63.08	4.336026	0.906731
Udalguri	15	65.41	4.550373	32.14889
Dhemaji	8	72.7	6.445543	47.44853
Dhubri	0	58.34	3.611374	0.324842
Dibrugarh	0	76.05	4.438999	7.756034
Dima Hasa	0	77.54	2.02567	70.92087
Goalpara	25	67.37	4.472799	22.96904
Golaghat	4	77.43	5.839226	10.4758
Hailakandi	0	74.33	10.71734	0.104809
Jorhat	4	82.15	8.117602	12.81485
Kamrup	4	75.55	7.105372	11.99558
Kamrup Metro	2	88.71	8.117546	5.990807
Karbi Anglong	10	69.25	4.701494	56.3349
Karimganj	0	78.22	12.85031	0.157892
Kokrajhar	57	65.22	3.333176	31.41154
Lakhimpur	4	77.2	7.853094	23.93409
Morigaon	3	68.03	12.30814	14.28595
Nagaon	2	72.37	9.432432	4.077991
Nalbari	3	78.63	7.803649	3.027841
Sibsagar	12	80.41	3.678989	4.260371
Sonitpur	15	67.34	5.671713	12.06828
Tinsukia	7	69.66	2.838104	6.179999

3.3 Witch-Hunting Cases in Assam vs District Wise Literacy Rate:

As can be observed in Fig. 4, there have been more than 10 witch-hunting instances in Baksa, Chirang, Udalguri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, and Sonitpur. In comparison to the total literacy rate of Assam, the comparable literacy rates in Baksa, Udalguri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, and Sonitpur are lower (below the Indian literacy rate), where blind faith, evil practise, and superstitions lead people to believe in witchcraft and witch hunts. This indicates that the absence of healthcare services and illiteracy may be blamed for the commission of this crime; similarly, reports of similar events have also come from several districts, where the literacy rate is relatively higher. This study is consistent with the widespread belief that the illiterate segment of our society is more susceptible to witch hunts, which may have several base reasons and the ability to lead to a number of dangerous scenarios. Such dangerous circumstances, which were influenced by external factors mostly superstitions, give rise to several issues for the rural community where the practise of witch hunting is prevalent. Additionally, illiteracy prevents the community from developing inclusively. Therefore, practical education for the community's most vulnerable members, particularly women, is essential.



Figure 4: Comparison of Witch-hunting cases against District Wise Literacy Rate in Assam.

3.4 Witch-Hunting Cases in Assam vs District Wise Different Communities in Assam

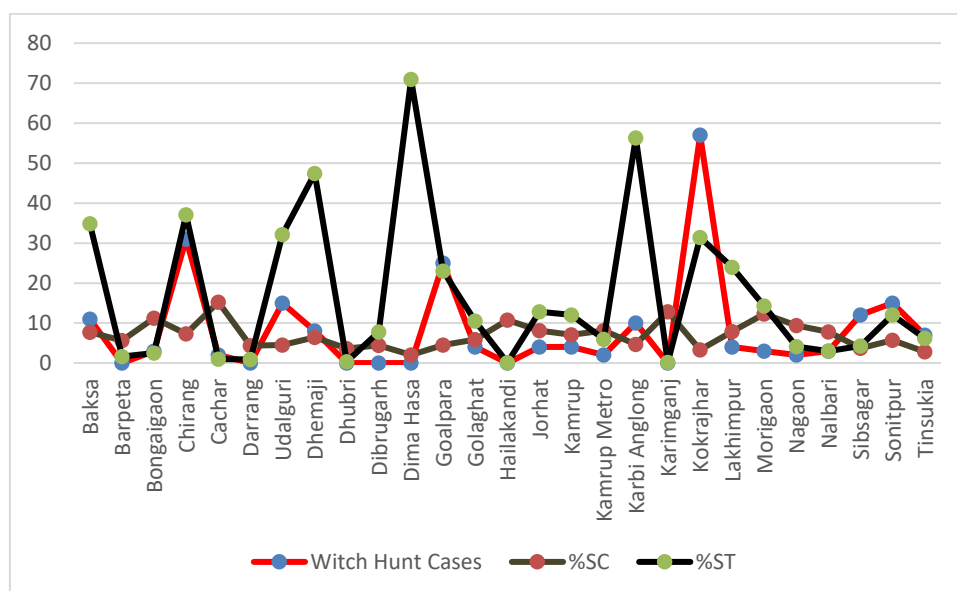


Figure 5: Comparison of Witch-hunting cases against District Wise different communities in Assam.

It is evident from Fig. 5 that there is a systematic imbalance in the number of witch-hunting incidents compared to the dominant communities. For instance, Scheduled Tribe communities outnumber Scheduled Caste people in Baksa, Chirang, Udalguri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, and Sonitpur districts. The Rabhas are the fourth-most numerous Plain Tribes of Assam, behind the Bodos, Miris, and Mikirs, out of the state's 23 tribal groups (Saikia et. al. 2016).

Lower Assam area includes the eight districts of Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang, Baksa, and Goalpara. Bodo tribes predominately experience witch-hunting, with the exception of Goalpara, where incidents are more common among Rabhas. An incident involving a mixed group of Karbi, Tea tribes, and Bodo is recorded at Sonitpur, which is located in the Upper Brahmaputra Valley (Northern Bank). These groups are superstitious by nature, much like many other Assamese tribal people.

But it's also fascinating to observe how local media report information, sometimes emphasising the name of the particular tribe or village involved in the witch-hunting tradition. These articles paint a harsh picture of the locality. The history, social structure, and belief system of the community are never taken into consideration by the publishing businesses, which is a serious flaw in these news pieces. As a result, this sort of news invariably gives readers a bad view about the target community.

3.5 Witch-Hunting Cases in Assam vs District-Wise Poverty Rate

According to the Assam Human Development Report 2014, one-third of the state's residents are "multidimensionally impoverished," or lacking in several areas of human development. The communities where the vast majority of the victims in our case studies come from are shown in the table along with the general economic and social standing. With Kamrup Metro excluded, the majority of Assam's districts do significantly lower than the national average. As stated in the 2014 Assam Human Development Report, the districts of Udalguri, Chirang, Baksa, Kokrajhar, and Goalpara are extremely impoverished. Goalpara district was one of those areas that the Indian government designated as the most underdeveloped in the nation in 2006. The availability of medical care is poor. In addition, they are unable to afford the latest medical treatment procedures like sonography, scanning, frequent blood and stool tests, regular medication use and purchases, vitamin-based nutrition, relaxation, etc. owing to their bad economic situation. Due to their filthy living conditions, they are more susceptible to a number of ailments. Science and technology have made it possible for this horrible crime to be curbed, yet the number of witch-hunting victims is actually rising. The Assam Witch-hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2015 passed by the state legislative assembly and with the President of India's assent in June 2018, it became a law and made the torturing of women in the name of finding witches an offence under the act. However, Assam is the most recent state in India to pass a strict law to combat witch-hunting. The legislation has certain strict provisions, such as a potential sentence of seven years to life in jail and a fine of between 5,000 and 50,000 rupees. The bill's most important provision is that Section 438 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)¹ would not apply in witch hunt cases, eliminating the possibility of anticipatory release in such circumstances. The bill also helps the victims receive rehabilitation.

3.6 Primary Factor behind Witch-Hunting:

Witch-hunting practises violate fundamental rights, including the right to life, liberty, and social and economic equality. The rise in witch-hunting cases discredits India's claim to be a democracy that upholds equality for all people regardless of gender, caste, or ethnicity as well as accomplishments in literacy, compassion, and gender sensitivity. It also highlights the state's shortcomings in promoting equality, women's dignity, scientific temper, and health facilities.

The criminal justice system and the law have failed to comprehend the underlying causes of this threat. The reality of this issue is inherent in society and cannot be brought to light alone through data. The majority of witch-hunting occurrences go undocumented and unrecorded, while only a small number of the worst instances are publicised. Since the underlying concerns of land, salaries, and the desire for power lie at the centre of most atrocities, poverty and powerlessness are seen to be the ideal conditions for such violence to flourish.

The following are some major factors that contribute to witch hunting-

- Poverty, illiteracy, lack of healthcare, education and infrastructure facilities in backward or remote areas/ villages.
- In several states around the nation, superstitious notions of witches have been a persistent issue that has resulted in terrible human rights violations. The majority of people in tribal and underdeveloped communities are superstitious by nature. There are always some with ulterior motives who propagate rumours to brand their adversaries as "witches."
- We have observed that the majority of Indian communities are split into higher and lower caste groups. Upper caste societies have a propensity to dominate society while downplaying the significance of lower caste.
- In some tribal cultures, animosity resulting from political competition is a typical reason why people kill their rivals under the pretext of "witchcraft." Humans are political creatures, and the political tide is influencing them, making them unable to distinguish between right and wrong. Personal intention to grasp property may be in terms of land, money, valuable assets etc. is also a prime cause for witch-hunting and mainly female witch-hunting.
- The adaptation of other religions has advanced in tribal and underdeveloped culture. This shift in faith alters people's attitudes and ways of interacting with their neighbours. In some

isolated places, the angry locals get together and accuse the converted individuals of practising black magic. In this way, the alleged "witch" is put to death.

- The state government's laws are not always followed by the police. This statute allows for prompt arrest of the accused, although that doesn't usually happen.

3.7 Realistic Approach to Control the Practice of Witch-Hunting:

The solutions to stop this awful habit from happening are not very simple to explain. To stop this horrible crime, several actions have been done. A law called "the Assam Witch-hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act, 2018" was particularly introduced by the government of Assam.

As a result of the conversation that has just taken place, we now realise that the practise of witch-hunting is still prevalent in rural or backward societies. Particularly in those regions where the local population sadly lacks understanding, modern infrastructure, health facilities, and in generally being able to meet their basic requirements. Retired DIG on August 1st, 2001, Kuladhar Saikia, DIG of the Assam Police initiated Project Prahari to eradicate the practise of witch-hunting from society. As part of his endeavour, he started rehabilitation programmes in the impacted communities. Well-known figure Birubala Rabha, witch-hunt crusader from Assam has been rendering her relentless effort to save lives from being hacked to death on suspicion of practicing witchcraft. In 2011, she set up Mission Birubala against the practice of branding women as 'dayans' or 'witches', torturing and even killing them. Mission Birubala, joint effort with Assam Mahila Samata Society rescued many witch victims which surely brings a ray of hope for removal of superstitions and evil practice of witch-hunt. The witch-hunting legislation of Assam has been in effect since 2018. Witch-hunting viewed as a cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable offence. However, it has been noted that neither the laws nor the social activists have been able to totally eradicate witch-hunting from society. Legislation by itself can never bring about a change in society without sufficient support from the people who want to positively transform the society. It is past time for a collective social platform to bring all relevant parties together, including NGOs, social activists, government agencies, women's organisations, student organisations, science societies, members of civil society, and local organisations, to raise awareness of such heinous crimes.

- Superstitions are more common in the uneducated. As a result, focus should be placed on teaching the illiterate in rural areas, particularly women.
- The eradication of poverty and the opportunity to get basic necessities can stop the superstitious peasants from carrying out this terrible behaviour.
- In the majority of cases, personal enmity or hatred was the main driver of the charges and searches. As a result, the villagers should keep friendly connections with one another.
- Due to the fact that the majority of occurrences took place distant from a police station or outpost. Security should be tightened by the police in certain places, and awareness campaigns might be set up to raise awareness of this heinous crime. NGOs can be quite important in this situation.
- Because Assam is a tribal state, its residents often consume traditional rice beer, which can occasionally persuade locals to commit crimes.
- At the local level, we must create a social eco-system with a scientific mindset.
- The propensity to blame women for any natural disasters or other calamities, including medical emergencies or epidemics, has to halt immediately.
- Exposing fraudsters who attempt to label someone as a "witch."
- It's important for women to become financially independent

We need to increase the capacity of our institutions for education, health, communication, and transportation in those delicate areas in order to address this issue. Only increased public knowledge will be able to solve this issue. People should abandon such irrational ideas and seek medical care when ill rather than visiting quacks or witch doctors. The media should be incredibly important in educating society.

Conclusion

Witch-hunting is still widely practised today, which is a misfortune. It destroys a society's established norms and traumatises the victim or their family. Why and how are such primitive superstitions still in use in this day and age, when people's beliefs and standards of life have advanced? It is absolutely regrettable that despite many people dying as a result of this barbaric practise, our government and civic society did little to halt such inhumane events. Police indifference, subpar investigations, and tight action are some of the main obstacles preventing the victims from receiving relief in this situation. To raise awareness among the populace, the anti-witchcraft legislation requires strict enforcement in addition to implementation, as well as police and welfare department sensitization. To entirely end the practise of witch hunts throughout the state, every concerned member of society must work together. Improvement in the practise of witch-hunting and witch-hunting-related crimes will remain an unattainable goal until and unless essential action is taken in response to these instances. The right kind of help and rehabilitation should be provided to these tragedies' victims. Witch-hunting becomes a roadblock to a country's inclusive growth. Therefore, to deal with this complex issue, a scientific method is needed.

References

- Banerji, B. (2017). *Witch Beliefs and Violence Against Women Among Tribal Communities in The State of West Bengal*. A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Community Organization and Development Practice, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.
- Barman, M. (2002). *Persecution of Women: Widows and Witches*. Kolkata: Indian Anthropological Society.
- Bernhard, V. (2010). Religion, Politics, and Witchcraft in Bermuda, 1651–55. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 67(4), 677-708. Retrieved on 13 July 2018 from, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5309/willmaryquar.67.4.0677>.
- Behringer, W. (1999). Climate Change and Witch-Hunting: The Impact of the Little Ice Age on Mentalities. *Climate Change*, 43, 335-351.
- Behringer, W. (2004). *Witches and Witchhunts, A Global History*. Polity Press, USA, 14-241.
- Beniwal, S. (2017). *Crime Against Women in Chandigarh: A Study of Role of Police*. An Unpublished PhD Thesis, Center for Police Administration. Panjab University, Chandigarh.
- Bhattacharya, P. K. (1994). *Witchcraft Among Santhals: A Case Study of Fifty Cases in Three Districts of West Bengal*. Bankura: Liberal Association for Movement of People, Bankura, West Bengal, 1-63.
- Bhattacharyya, R. (2015). Understanding the Spatialities of Sexual Assault Against Indian Women in India. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 22(9), 1340–1356. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2014.969684
- Borah, L., & Das, M. (2019). Witch-Hunting in Assam: Myth or Reality. *Space and Culture, India*, 7(3), 99–114. <https://doi.org/10.20896/saci.v7i3.566>
- Chaudhuri, S. (2008). *Tempest in a Tea Pot: Analysis of Contemporary Witch Hunts in the Tea Plantations of Bengal*. An Unpublished PhD Thesis in Sociology, Graduate School Of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.
- Chaudhuri, S. (2012). Women as Easy Scapegoats: Witchcraft Accusations and Women Targets in Tea Plantations of India. *Violence Against Women*, 18(10) 1213 –1234. DOI: 10.1177/1077801212465155
- Chaudhuri, S. (2014). Unusual Expressions of Social Protest Witchcraft Accusations in Jalpaiguri, India. CAS Working Paper Series Centre For The Study Of Social Systems Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, May 2014. CAS/WP/14-5.
- Cohen, J. (1941). Geography of Crime Against Women. *Annals of The Academy of Political And Social Science*, 217, 29-37.
- Cohn, E. G. (1990). Weather and Crime. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 30(1), 51-64
- Das, Itu. (2015). Witch-Hunting in the Present Scenario of the State of Assam – A Social Challenge. *Assam College Teachers' Association Journal*, XXXVII, 253-257.
- Feng, D. (2018). Witch-Hunting, Cultural Revolution and the Bright Side of Kinship. *International Journal of Development Issues*, 17(1), 87-101. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJDI-05-2017-0096>

- Geis, G. (2016). Lord Hale, Witches, and Rape. *British Journal of Law and Society*, 5(1), 26-44.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1409846>
- Gogoi, V (2020), Deciphering Witch-Hunting- A Social Menace In The Context Of Assam, Ner India, *Psychology And Education*, 57(8): 1192-1204.
- Goodin, R. (1981). Civil Religion and Political Witch Hunts: Three Explanations. *Comparative Politics*, 14 (1), 1-15.
- Jensen, G. F. (2007). *The Path of the Devil: Early Modern Witch Hunts*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Kapur, S. (1983). *Witchcraft in Western India*. Orient, Longman, Bombay.
- Kelkar, G., & Nathan, D. (1991). Women, Witches and Land rights. In G. Kelkar & D.Nathan (Eds.), *Gender and Tribe: Women, Land and Forest* (pp. 88–109). London: Zed books Ltd.
- Mallick, A. (2008). Witch-hunting in 1857. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(39), 118–119.
- Mehra, M., & Agrawal, A. (2016). Witch-hunting in India? Do We Need Special Law? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(13), 51–57.
- Miguel. E. (2005). Poverty and Witch Killing. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 72 (4), 1153-1172.
- Mukherjee, C., Rustagi, P., & Krishnaji, N. (2001). Crime Against Women in India Analysis of Official Statistics. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(43), 136-147.
- Pfister. C. (2007). Climatic Extremes, Recurrent Crises and Witch Hunts: Strategies of European Societies in Coping with Exogenous Shocks in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries. *The Medieval History Journal*, 10(1 & 2), 33–73. DOI: 10.1177/097194580701000202.
- Rabia, A. A. (2005). The Evil Eye and Cultural Beliefs Among the Bedouin Tribes of the Negev, Middle East. *Folklore*, 116(3), 241-254. DOI: 10.1080/00155870500282677.
- Rajaram, N. S. (1981). *Indian Witchcraft. A Study in Indian Occultism*. ON Abhinav Publications, New Delhi.
- Saikia, Sailajananda, Bishmita Medhi and Bidyum Kr Medhi. “Spatial Distribution of Tribal Population and Inter Tribal Differences in Population Growth: A Critical Review on Demography and Immigration in Assam.” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3.3 (2012): 23-30. Web. 12 Oct. 2016.