

**A STUDY ON
WITCH HUNTING: IS IT A SOCIAL
PREJUDICE**

Sponsored by-

**Ministry of Tribal Affairs,
Government of India, New Delhi**

Conducted by:

**Directorate of Assam Institute of Research for
Tribals and Scheduled Castes,
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara,
Guwahati-22
2017**

PREFACE

Witch hunting is an age old tradition considered to be driven by superstitious beliefs of people in rural India. The woman who is perceived to be practicing witchcraft is punished severely by the whole community and branded as 'dayan', 'daini,' 'chudail', etc. It is one such dangerous superstition that often kills the victim. The belief in the practice of witchcraft is part of almost all living societies and it can be felt at various degrees among all communities, especially Tribals, Dalits and Adivasis. One common thing in most cultures and societies is that witchcraft is seen as something evil and harmful. In most cases, the alleged witches are severely punished, displaced or killed which are seen as the major consequences of witchcraft accusations. It is called witch-hunting which is often used as a symbol of the "barbaric" and "superstitious" practices of medieval and early modern period, now forgotten in the enlightened era. This is prominent mostly among the tribes living in rural areas. According to the National Crime Record Bureau of Government of India, in 2001 there were 126 total number of witch-hunting cases, 151 cases in 2002, 138 in 2003, 111 in 2004, 197 in 2005, 186 in 2006, 177 in 2007 and 175 in 2008. A report published by the North East India Studies states that there were more than 65 cases of witch hunting in Assam alone in the years 2007 to 2012. An NDTV report of September 2013 claimed that the Assam government reported 105 cases of witch hunting in the period between 2006 and 2012.

Accordingly, Assam has been listed as having 11 cases of witch-hunting reported or registered from 2001 to 2008. (Singh, 2011). As many as ten districts of Assam, including Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang, Darrang, Majuli, Dhemaji, Sonitpur, Kamrup, Nalbari, Goalpara, Sivasagar and Udalguri, besides others have shown an upward trend in 'witch-hunting' cases since 2011. Branding someone as witch is social stigma and it destroys the social image of an individual. By branding witch a large number of victims are humiliated through community punishments, ostracization and dislocation from their homes and villages, resulting in impoverishment and a life of fear and isolation. *Meanwhile in the last five years, Assam witnessed more than 400 cases of witch hunting. The witch is called as 'daini' in local dialect in Assam and is believed to cause ailment to people, destroy crops and other livestock etc. She is usually identified by an 'ojha', 'bej' or 'deodhani' (all names for witch doctors) and either banished from the community or killed. Various studies are undertaken to understand the practice of witch hunting worldwide and they attribute it to different reasons beyond mere superstition. Present study was an attempt to study the intensity, motives and its various*

dimension of witch hunting case occurred in the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang and Baksa of BTAD of Assam.

We are grateful to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, New Delhi and WPT & BC Department, Government of Assam for entrusting this Directorate for carrying out the Research Study on the topic “Witch Hunting: Is it a social prejudice! Thanks are due to various individuals of the local leaders, village organisations, police stations, local teachers, for extending necessary help, without whose co-operation the project would not have been completed in specific time frame. I acknowledge the valuable guidance and help extended in course of the project by Mr. G.C. Kakati. Joint Director, AITSC. I offer my thanks to Mr. Birendra Kumar Barman, Research Officer, who was entrusted with the task of conducting this research study. I also offer my thanks to the ARO and other temporarily engaged investigators without whose co-operation this study would not have been possible. On the whole, I offer my thanks to all other officers and staff of this Directorate for their help and co-operation in conducting the study.

At last, but not least I render my thanks to the people of the area under study, who extended their unconditional and whole hearted co-operation to make the study to its successful end.

Shri Udayan Hazarika, IAS
Director,
Assam Institute of Research for
Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Jawaharnagar,
Khanapara, Guwahati-22

List of Tables

Table No-1	District wise surveyed villages, total household and sex wise total Population
Table No-2	Categorization of victims
Table No-3	Age and sex distribution of the victims
Table No-4	Marital status of the victims
Table No-5	Economic status of the victims
Table No-6	Land holding pattern of the victims
Table No-7	Availability of live stock/cattle of the victims
Table No-8	Availability of modern gadget in the victim's family
Table No-9	Types of houses owned by the victims
Table No-10	Educational status of the victims
Table No-11	Number of primary and secondary victims
Table No-12	Types of instigators involved in the witch hunt
Table No-13	Sex of the instigators
Table No-14	Attitudes/views of the of the villagers on the existence of witch

CONTENTS

CHAPTERS	TITLE	PAGE NO
CHAPTER ONE	INTRODUCTION	1-17
	1.1 Introduction	
	1.2 Beliefs, assumption and sprits in different communities	
	1.3 Objectives	
	1.4 Geographical coverage and socio-economic features	
	1.5 A little glance of the three districts	
	1.5.1 Kokrajhar district	
	1.5.2 Chirang district	
	1.5.3 Baksa district	
	1.6 Methodology	
	1.6.1 Selection of respondents	
	1.6.2 Data collection tools	
	1.6.3 Data collection	
CHAPTER TWO	ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES OF WITCH HUNT	18-33
	2. Analysis of case Studies of witch hunt	
	2.1 Categorization of victims	
	2.2 Attributes of the primary and collateral victims	
	2.3 Age and sex of the victims	
	2.4 Marital status of the victims	
	2.5 Caste groups of the victims	
	2.6 Economic status of the victims	
	2.7 Land ownership	
	2.8 Living condition and ownership of live stocks	
	2.9 Occupation of the victims	
	2.10 Availability of modern gadgets in the victim's family	
	2.11 House type of the victims	
	2.12 Educational status of the victims	
	2.13 Individuals victimized collaterally	
CHAPTER THREE	INSTIGATING FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR WITCH HUNT	34-42
	3. Instigating factors responsible for witch hunt	
	3.1 Types of instigators	
	3.2 Relationship between instigators and victims	
	3.3 Role played by Ojha, Kabiraj and traditional healers	
	3.4 Sex of the instigators	
	3.5 Economic condition of the instigators in relation to victims	

CHAPTER FOUR	FACTORS RELATED TO TARGETING THE VICTIMS	43-50
	4. Factors related to targeting the victims	
	4.1 Structural factors that enable witch hunting	
	4.2 Kokrajhar district	
	4.3 Chirang district	
	4.4 Baksa district	
	4.5 Individual factor	
	4.6 Illness, death and misfortune	
	4.7 Jealousy, animosity and conflict	
	4.8 Material and economic reason	
	4.9 Non conformity, difference and transgression	
	4.10 Social factors	
CHAPTER FIVE	RESPONSES OF VARIOUS AGENCIES/ AUTHORITIES	51-60
	5. Responses of various agencies/Authorities	
	5.1 Response of the nuclear family	
	5.2 Action of the extended family	
	5.3 Action of the local authority and role by played the state actors	
CHAPTER SIX	WITCH HUNTING AND SOCIAL PREJUDICES	61-64
	6. Witch hunting and social prejudices	
	6.1 Attitudes/Views of the villagers on the existence of witch	
CHAPTER SEVEN	LAW AND ITS USES	65-67
	7. Law ant its course	
	7.1 Interfaces of law	
CHAPTER EIGHT	CONCLUSION	68-74
	REFERENCE	75
	ANNEXURE	76-97
	Case studies from Case No-1 to Case No-12	

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

The word “witch” is a translation of the Hebrew word “Kashaph”, which comes from the root meaning “to whisper” which probably meant “one who whispers a spell.” (Linder, 2005). According to some Anthropologists, the word “witchcraft” has been derived from the word “Wicca” which means the wise one. Witchcraft has been a magical phenomenon, a pagan worship or religion, sorcery and others at different periods in witchcraft history (Bonewits: 1971). Evans Pritchard (1920s and 1930s) when studying the Azande of Sudan, defined witchcraft, as an ability to perpetuate evil that derives from an intrinsic quality of the evil doer that is not deliberately acquired. It is purely a psychic art. Pritchard observed that witch for Azande a psychic power inherited from a parent of the same sex. Witchcraft may be used to harm others either consciously or unconsciously by sending out or activating witchcraft substance. Kluckhohn (1944) studied Navaho witchcraft in the United States in terms of anxieties and tensions generated within small group of communities. His studies reflect the relationship between the insecurity and aggression of the victim and the like hood that he or she will accuse others of witchcraft has been widely recognised in both emic and etic ethnographic account.

The practice of persecuting witches is as old as witchcraft. One common thing in most cultures and societies is that witchcraft is seen as something evil and harmful. In most cases, the alleged witches are sought after, severely punished, displaced or killed which are seen as the major consequences of witchcraft accusations. It is called witch-hunting which is often used as a symbol of the "barbaric" and "superstitious" practices of medieval and early modern period, now forgotten in the enlightened era. This is an interpretation that actually emerged in the later stages of the witch-hunts in European countries. In fact, it was legally sanctioned in countries like France, Ireland, Norway, Russia, Netherlands and Switzerland in the fourteenth Century and legal witch-hunting continued in Europe till the eighteenth century (Burns, 1959: xxi). The European Witch Craze started roughly during end of the 15th century and peaked during the first half of the seventeenth century. The belief that women were sinful and had the power of the devil within them developed out of the middle Ages. The Reformation further promoted the idea of a satanic kingdom of evil on earth with which to justify

persecutions. From the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, many Europeans developed a heightened concern with the phenomenon of witchcraft, seeing a new sect hostile to humanity. Thus, governments and society organized “hunts” for those alleged witches: accusing, torturing, and executing thousands of people. The intensity and viciousness of these hunts varied from place to place, as did their focus on particular targets, such as women. Finally, a changed world-view, informed by the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, brought an end to these hunts for threats that did not empirically exist. While the concept of ‘witchcraft’ has evolved and changed into different forms over the years and in different cultural contexts, the problem of witch-hunting has become a burning issue in recent years in different cultures and societies in India. Although after the enlightenment period, witch-hunting has been regarded as an illegal accusation and violation of human rights, it is still practiced in this 21st Century in the developing country like India. Though not legally permitted today, in India, finding out witches is an established process for most of the villages or tribes who still has this practice. In contemporary period, the practice of witch-hunting is more prominent mostly among the people living in rural areas. Evidences has been made clear by the National Crime Record Bureau that, in India, each year there is about 200 women killed as witches in rural India. During the year 2000-2001, there were 253 cases of witch-hunting, and in between 2008-2012, more than 768 women have been murdered for allegedly practicing witchcraft. The report consist of the registered witch-hunting cases in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharastra, Orissa, Rajasthan and West Bengal. Here, middle aged and elderly single women in tribal as well as non-tribal women are orchestrated as witches and they suffer. Dr. Juri Gogoi Konwar Permanent Faculty, Department of Cultural Studies, Tezpur Central University, Assam, India Dina Swargiari Research Scholar, Department of Cultural Studies, Tezpur Central University, Assam, stated in the abstract of their study, in most cultures and societies witchcraft is seen as something evil and harmful, that’s why the suspected witches are being accused and hunted. Witch-hunting is the witchcraft accusation that is often used as a symbol of the "barbaric" and "superstitious" practices of medieval and early modern people. After the enlightenment period witch-hunting is regarded as an illegal accusation and violation of human rights in different countries but it is still practiced in the current 21st century in the developing country like, India. In most cases, the alleged witches are severely punished, displaced or killed. Throughout the milieu of studying the process of accusation in witch-hunting cases, one interesting idea came up as having a conflicting nature. The idea of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’ has a confusing and conflicting nature as it

differs between outsiders' and the insiders' viewpoint. (*The International Journal Of Humanities & Social Studies (ISSN 2321 - 9203) www.theijhss.com 133 Vol 3 Issue 5 May, 2015*). This is prominent mostly among the tribes living in rural areas. According to the National Crime Record Bureau of Government of India, in 2001 there were 126 total number of witch-hunting cases, 151 cases in 2002, 138 in 2003, 111 in 2004, 197 in 2005, 186 in 2006, 177 in 2007 and 175 in 2008. Accordingly, Assam has been listed as having 11 cases of witch-hunting reported or registered from 2001 to 2008. (Singh,2011). As many as ten districts of Assam, including Kamrup, Nalbari, Goalpara, Sivasagar and Udalguri, besides others have shown an upward trend in 'witch-hunting' cases since 2011. However, of the 80-odd cases, police did file charge sheet in 53 cases of attack/murder on allegations of practising witchcraft and also arrested over 500 suspects in connection with the total cases registered (Ray, 2014). Not less than 85 cases of witch-hunting have been registered with various police stations in the state between 2008 and 2014. Between 2005 and 2013, total number of 66 women has been branded as witch and killed (Choudhury, 2014). The tribal communities of North-East India have traditional belief in witchcraft, which is a magico-religious practice, at one point of time or other that was prevalent among most of the ethnic communities of the world. It is related to the traditional belief that the person, who is suspected to be practicing witchcraft, causes harm to his or her community through abuse of magical power. It is important to note that in the cultural milieu of Assam, the traditional belief in witchcraft is prevalent in many communities. According to Brahma, in most tribal communities of Assam, religion and magic are often treated together and regarded as complementary to each other (Brahma, 1992:145). In recent times, this social-evil of witch-hunting has raised its ugly head in Assam following recent incidents of killing of innocent people in the name of witch hunting particularly among the Adivasis, Bodos, Mishings, Rabhas and some other communities. While the validity of the allegations remain unclear and un-established, false in most cases, it is alarming to note that so many women continue to be discriminated and exploited on the basis of this charge. In Assam every year women have been branded as witches, tortured, hounded out of villages, often killed by mobs but very few confront the murderers. It is to be noted that, only the cases of murdered witches or reported cases are registered and counted. So, the number of witch-hunting cases is more than the given number, if both the registered and unregistered cases are summed up. There are an uncountable number of unregistered witch-hunting cases where the alleged witches are accused and neglected/socially excluded by their society or villagers.

Witch hunting is one of the most dangerous superstitions prevailing all over India. Meanwhile in the last five years, Assam witnessed more than 400 cases of witch hunting. The witch is called as '*Daini*' (*Daina* in case of male practitioners) in local dialect and is believed to cause ailment to people, destroy crops and other livestock etc. He/she is usually identified by an 'ojha', 'bej' or '*deodhani*' (all names for witch doctors) or sometimes suspected by the villagers, relatives and either banished from the community or killed. Various studies are undertaken to understand the practice of witch hunting worldwide and they attribute it to different reasons beyond mere superstition

Actually what is witch or how it is defined? In the areas of the study, the term such as '*Daini*' is used to label a woman as a witch. The term '*Daina*' is used for males who are labeled as a witch. The preponderance of terms used for women is one indication that this is a gendered practice. Whatever the different practices and understandings of the term 'witch' may be, it involves one common feature—the attribution of certain 'supernatural' powers to a person by others. An attribution of a person as a witch is nearly always negative, fearful and destructive. Although such attribution draws upon what may be treated as superstition, it does not necessarily arise from superstition. In many cases, interpersonal animosity, rivalry and conflict over various material sources may lie behind the labeling of a person as a witch. Once a person is labeled, whether or not such labeling is malicious in nature, a complex set of reactions and fear are invoked, making it very difficult for the women (sometimes men) targeted as witch to defend themselves. Witch hunts might in some (not all) cases be accompanied by extreme brutality and violence including forcible stripping, being paraded naked in public, cutting or tonsuring of the hair, blackening of the face, cutting off of the nose, pulling of the teeth to 'defang', gouging out the eye, whipping, gang rape, forcible consumption of human excreta, cow dung or other noxious substances, sexual assault, and killing by hanging, hacking, lynching or burying alive. Subsequent to the branding and the accompanying physical violence there may be several other negative fall-outs, social stigma, psychological torture, social and economic boycott, loss of livelihood and violence for the survivors of witch hunting. This kind of societal alienation and violence can be for short period of time or go on for years and sometimes can last a lifetime.

In Assam and north east, practicing witchcraft or black magic dates back hundreds of years too. Mayong in Morigaon district, now a major tourist hub, used to be known as the *Indian capital of Black magic* and even people from far off countries were claimed to have come to

learn the dark art and spells in this place. Tales of human sacrifice and horror have been penned in contemporary literature as well as folk tales.

However witchcraft was not limited to Mayong in Assam; it was and unfortunately is, prevalent amidst several communities and tribes across the Brahmaputra valley. People who practice these dark acts are referred to as *Bej* or *Ojha*, and some of them even believed to keep *domestic ghost-servants* called *Beera* or *Beera Bhoot*. In fact a few years ago, suspicious activity carried out by *Beera* ghosts at the heart of city Guwahati made headlines in newspapers as well as TV channels!

The fact that *witch-hunting* or *witch-burning* has been making headlines of all local newspapers of Assam for quite some time, every now and then, is not only disturbing but also alarming. More than 500 people have been killed and 116 official cases of *witch killing* have been registered since 2001 in Assam and this numbers has increased as time rolls on. In this way every year such incidents of witch hunting are reported from different parts of the state. And this is not confined only among the tribal people. In 2014 20 such incidents were recorded officially, though the actual figure would be more.

One would question as to why and how such things could happen when science and technology are its peak, people are advanced in their thoughts and life style. The truth however is, back in Assam, people still cling to age old myths, superstitions and worst, some know well to take advantage of these blind beliefs.

A large number of *Bej* or *Ojha*, *Kabiraj* are often involved themselves in curing the village people who makes a living by providing medication to the villagers from several diseases. Rural Assam is a hotbed of several epidemics such as malaria, cholera, jaundice and some other water born diseases and due to the nature of developments that have taken place, anyone seriously ill has to be taken by handcart or bicycle through paddy fields, dirt roads and forests to the nearest hospital, if available, often several miles away. As such, very often the villagers approach to the nearby *Bej* or *Ojha* or *Kabiraj* abundantly available in rural Assam. As understood, many of the patients could not be cured in spite of the tall claims and predictions of these *Bej* or *Ojha*. As a result, emotions run high and the villagers often accuse the *Bej* or *Ojha* or *Kabiraj* to be responsible for the death of the patient, which in turn leads to sever punishments including death. Needless to say, even the practitioners of witchcraft in Assam have to remain in constant fear.

On the other hand, there are some cases reported where it is claimed by a section of people that the witch killings are acts by the Land Mafia. In such cases, some miscreants use social superstitions to destroy and uproot families completely from the land they have their eye on, so that this piece of property can later be acquired at dirt cheap prices. For the common man, who would want to own a property where *witches* lived and practiced black magic once? Even the Police have often claimed that some alleged witch killings were nothing more than murders carried out by people with their eyes on land owned by the victims.

There is no disagreement on the fact that the illiteracy and lack of proper health care facilities are behind the powers as well as plight of the *Bej, Ojha* or *Kabiraj* in rural Assam, especially the tribal-dominated areas. In addition to this, alcoholism also forms an important reason. Most of the locally or home brewed alcohol (rice beer) consumed in such areas contains a high alcohol content, running to even 40-70%. Due to regular consumption (often daily at evenings) of such highly intoxicating and unfiltered alcohol, the thought process of the individuals essentially goes awry, overwhelmed with emotion and it does not take anyone much effort to convince such people that the *Bej, Ojha* or *Kabiraj* in their neighbourhood is evil and that he/she needs to be killed.

Most importantly, the thought process of the educated ones has to change in the state. We find people all over the state who claim to have found powers of medicine and cure through dreams. Such people become overnight Godmen and most of the thousands of believers who throng their doors are often the most educated ones including high officials, businessmen, etc. Of course the efforts of some genuine good people who have helped and healed innumerable poor and needy through their herbal medicine or spiritualism cannot be disregarded, nor can the issue of witchcraft be clubbed or mixed with religious beliefs. But there has to be a clear division between the two, something many at times people fail in.

Now witch hunting has become one of the social stigmas of Assam. The land of black magic is now a land of bloodshed in the name of black magic, that too in the 21st century. It is high time that NGOs, Government bodies as well as local organizations come forward to make people aware of such inhuman acts and jump in action right away instead of holding symbolic protests and demands. One Birubala Rabha is not sufficient; we need hundreds more from amongst us to put this shame away and move forward.

We live in a world of duality where light and darkness are two sides of the same coin. Black magic is the negative use of energies and power by evil minded humans. People who practice black magic or take the help of professional black magicians are extremely dedicated people who have one goal in their minds to harm or deprive others from living peaceful lives, make them sick, bed ridden and finally kill them. Sun is the source of light provider for our planet but at any given point half of the earth remains in darkness while the other half gets the light. The world of light is hosted by angels and higher beings while the world of darkness is ruled by the spirit world and is hosted by demons, devils and evil spirits. Collectively it's called the world of devils. On the other hand we humans have been given the choice to dwell in darkness or towards the light.

Black magic is used to harm or hurt another human by performing certain rituals making human or animal sacrifices to appease or control the spirits. Once the black magician has acquired the necessary control over the spirit world, they acquire the power to inflict and harm on their victims sitting thousands of miles away as time and space do not exist in the spirit world. With the increase of jealousy, frustration, greed, selfishness, negativity and inability to accept other's happiness and growth the use of Black magic has become the more common way to take out one's vindictiveness and get an evil kind of satisfaction from the turmoil of others. This problem has intensified a lot in the last few years and many are suffering all over the world, totally unaware of the attacks made by no other than their siblings, closest friends, acquaintances and relatives using the help of the black magicians or the spirit world. Everyday many prosperous and happy families are being ruined by Black magic.

In Assam this practice has got a crucial momentum from last couple of years with a number of such incidents taking place. In the state of Assam and North Eastern region of India, such beliefs continue to prevail even to this day, in the 21st century , where gory murders of helpless women often taken up newspapers headlines. In a world where technology is rapidly transforming aspects of everyday life, there is still the looming menace of superstition and barbaric crimes committed by humans on fellow humans. The basic rights and freedom to which all humans are entitled never reach the remote corners of this world that is still surrounded in the darkest veil of evil acts of inhuman atrocities. In the state's remote countryside, the prevalence of witch-hunting is closely linked to absence of healthcare, lack of access to hospitals and doctors nearby leads people to treat diseases through medicines prepared by *tantriks* or quacks who make a living from selling cures and conducting

purification ceremonies. When the patients are unable to recover, these medicine hawkers are quick to lay the blame on someone else often the most vulnerable in the village, unmarried women, widows or elderly people. Branded as witches, these victims are ostracised, even more dangerously, they are beaten, buried alive, or forced to undergo horrific rituals, such as being covered from head to toe with a net and the onlookers prodding the body with sharp sticks.

The practice of witch hunting in India is more prominent among the tribal communities. They are also the people who usually inhabit the rough or mountainous fringe areas within the country characterized by limited access to livelihood opportunities and lack of awareness. The North-Eastern region of India, which is termed as anthropological paradise, the home to diverse ethnic groups, and this practice, is more prominent. Assam is the best example of the belief and practices of this social prejudice or evils. It may not be simply coincidental that Assam also has the lowest gender development index among the North-Eastern states. The practice is more prominent among Rabha, Hajong, Mishing, Bodo, Karbi and the Adivasi community in Assam. The witch is called 'Daini' in the local language and believed to cause ailment to people, destroy crops and other livestock etc. She is usually identified by an *Ojha*, *Bej* or *Deodhani* (all these local names are for the witch doctors) and are either banished from the community or killed. Sometimes the victimized families are kept under home arrest by the villagers. In some cases, the designated family of the witch is levied a hefty fine by the community leaders, by which the victim may be pardoned of her ill deeds or intentions against the fellow villagers. The process of identification of the witch is specified by the witch doctor by looking into the symptoms of the patient or by divination. The alleged recipient of witchcraft is usually seen suffering from symptoms of the patient or by divination. The alleged recipient of witchcraft is usually seen suffering from symptoms like fever, severe body ache, cough-cold, delirium or hysteria and mental disorder etc.

As soon as it is believed that a disease has been caused due to the witch craft people try to get rid of the spell through prayers and offerings. Depending on the cultural norms of the society boiled rice together with a cock reduced to ashes is taken in a banana leaf and kept in the middle of a road as an offering to the *Daini*. Sometimes cock or pig is sacrificed and blood is offered to evil spirit so that evil spirit can help in mitigating the problem suffered by patients. People believe that without these prayers and offerings the patient would not survive. It is only after this that the option of medical treatment is explored. It is also believed that there are some diseases which cannot be treated by the medical doctor and needs to be addressed

specifically by an '*Ojha*'. Sometimes patients die due to delay in receiving proper treatment. If the patient dies the belief of existence of a witch gets further vindicated and the identification of the witch starts. In the absence of any medical facilities in the remote villages, the patient is taken to the '*Ojha*'. The patient is suspected by the '*Ojha*' to be under the spell of a witch. In other cases the '*Ojha*', performs some religious rites to arrive at the description of the person practicing the witch craft. Identified by this process, the alleged is then either lynched to death or forced to run away abandoning her family and property. Lack of education, poor economy, cultural rigidity, lack of proper world view, communication gap, isolated social behaviour and poor medical facilities may play the role of driving force behind the belief in witchcraft among the tribal communities in Assam.

In Assam, Goalpara, Majuli, Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri etc. are the worst affected districts in the state in terms of prevalence of witch hunting practices. Unfortunately in the year 2014 July such incident of witch hunting took place in the village Sapkhaiti of Udalguri district located 2km away from Udalguri town. Similarly, there are 51 cases of witch hunting in the Goalpara district from 1998 that are reported as when the Goalpara district implementation unit of AMSS started operations. As such witch hunting has emerged as the focus area of AMSS in Goalpara. The unit has been working towards prevention of witch hunting based on an agenda for awareness generation and capacity building of stakeholders for participation in creating a protective environment. The organization works through the creation of village level Sangha or woman's group who are sensitized about women's right, health issues and superstitions that are prevalent in the society disguised as traditions. The AMSS has been successful in saving the lives of many women branded as witches and facilitating their rehabilitation. Amongst the 51 cases 32 have been successfully settled and the victims rehabilitated.

Belief and superstition are the main characteristics of a tribal society. Superstition is an unwritten social law and it keeps the society intact. It is believed by the general people with awe and veneration. It embodies usage, custom or etiquette of society. Some superstitious believes contains much practical wisdom. It helps in regulating the conduct of life and also sometimes it makes man religiously disposed. There are hundreds of beliefs which the elderly man and the tribal society still strongly follows these beliefs. The major beliefs of a tribal man may fall into any of the following categories such as evil spirit, magic, taboo, totem and superstition.

1.2 BELIEFS, ASSUMPTION AND SPIRITS IN DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES

Superstitions exist more or less in all societies. But it is deep rooted in the tribal societies with the advancement of education and development of science and technology it has been to a great extent extinguished from the non-tribal societies. Though superstition has been extinguished to a great extent from the educationally advanced tribals but it is still among the illiterate and backward tribals living in the rural and interior areas.

One of the glaring example of superstition is the existence of the blind faith regarding '*Daini*' among the tribal communities. The blind faith relating to '*Daini*' has brought darkness in many tribal families. The superstitions on '*Daini*' is so deep rooted in the tribal societies that sometimes persons are mercilessly killed by the people on suspicion of being '*Daini*'. It is a major social disease existing in the tribal societies even in the present age of science.

During field work focus was laid on the people's assumption on the belief and its folk meaning i.e. how people define witch. In the response, the respondents described it as an individual who has certain evil potential to cause harm to others- be it an individual, family as well as society at large. This powers it is believed, can be acquired from practicing certain kinds of rituals and chanting specific mantras. Ritual practice like worshiping trees, stones or performing certain types of dances under big trees are believed to be the medium of acquiring evil or supernatural powers. One of the respondents during the field work refers to the performance of a secret puja on new moon light. It is also described that in certain occasion the individuals having this powers are seen to spent the night in the cemetery or graveyard to acquire special supernatural power. Some witch as detailed by the respondents perform puja at midnight very secretly where animal sacrifice is made and the blood is consumed to acquire special power. According to the villagers, the '*Daini*' or the black magicians have their own secret societies and the members of the secret societies have their own relation and they are known by their secret names. They have special characters not akin to common people.

In rural parts of Assam, they belief that witches can cause drought, disease, death of children or ailed person, livestock with a curse is common. It is also believed that once the powers of a witch are acquired, the person can change forms, i.e. from human to animal and vice versa. In the broadest sense, superstitions are not specific to Assam or indeed to rural parts of Assam.

Like the tribals this superstitious disease is found among the Rabha society also. It is noteworthy to mention here is that '*Daini*' is not a supernatural being, rather human beings mostly women who according to the ordinary people become '*Daini*' by learning exorcism. According to the Rabha people the '*Daini*' causes harm and diseases to the people. If any person detected on suspicion of being '*Daini*' he or she is not spared rather mercilessly killed. The existence of '*Daini*' is a clear indication of superstition in the Rabha society. The root cause of this disease is large scale illiteracy among the Rabhas.

Assam is a habitation of various tribal communities. Amongst those the Rabhas, Boro, Hajongs, Mech Kachari, and Mishings who are recognized as plain tribes are more susceptible to have strong belief on this social prejudice . Though these tribes are more or less found in several districts of Assam but their major concentrated in lower Assam districts except Mishing. The Mishings are found in the Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Jorhat and Golaghat who are very conservative in their tradition and culture.

The Rabhas have a distinct social life of their own. The social life of the Rabhas is enriched with traditional customs, fairs and festivals, religious beliefs, dresses etc. They perform their various socio-religious rites and festivals according to their customary laws. But a trend of change has been noticed in the social life of the Rabhas in recent times. A section of the Rabhas has converted to the different sects of Hinduism. They have deviated from their customary laws and perform their socio-religious activities according to the methods followed by the Hindu people. This is the result of their close association and living with the neighbouring Hindu people. On the other hand a number of organizations came into existence in the Rabha society during the second half of the twentieth century. These organizations have tremendous impact on the Rabhas. Although a section of the Rabhas have got changed from tradition to modernity, yet a remarkable group of them living in interior areas of Goalpara district and adjacent part of Meghalaya are still bound strongly by the belief on superstition. In these areas the '*Daini*' is known as the '*than-thin*' *Daini*'. According to the common Rabha people these '*Daini*' causes harm to the people in different ways. The person may be attacked by '*Daini*' can't be cured and so ultimately dies. So this attack is very serious and also sometimes this attacked can be cured by worshipping and offering pujas to the '*Daini*'. The concept of '*Daini*' is not been extinguished from the Rabha society. Being a tribal community the Rabha people are not free from the social disease. Different kinds of superstitions are noticed among the Rabha society. Virtually this is one of the major social problems which have become a barrier in the way of the development of the Rabhas.

The tribal people of Assam especially those residing in the rural areas are not conscious about their health and the vital causes of this is illiteracy, poverty, lack of worldview and as such are not aware of the treatment of the particular disease. It is believed that superstition is so much deep rooted amongst them that they do not like to afford the modern medical treatments and as such do not like to be treated by the medical practitioners as doctors. In this modern era of science still these tribal people believes that such types of diseases are caused by the ghost or through black magic. And in order to get rid of diseases they worship various evil spirits, gods and goddess such as 'Ghor Gosai', 'Nachini Sila', 'Aai Daini', 'Baghdeu', 'Batordev', 'Sildeu', 'Naodeu', 'Chordeu', 'Hamdeu', 'Banariya Gasain', etc. Similar case is with the Boro people who are living in the interior areas of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri district of BTAD, Assam. It is most commonly seen in the Indo-Bhutan areas of BTAD districts. They also propitiate different Gods like Bura- Bathou, Mainoand Than God in order to get rid of from various health anomalies. They take immediate help from their local medicine men like Ojaa, Bez or Kabiraj who are professional by nature. It is also interesting to note here that many of the old women have the knowledge of traditional medicines.

In spite of the availability of hospitals the tribal people residing in the rural places do not prefer doctors or hospital as their first choice and instead they prefer to go to the traditional healer who practices prayers and do traditional healing techniques. Due to the lack of knowledge on modern scientific techniques which are being used to cure diseases the tribal people take their first resort to traditional healer.. As these peoples have more faith in the traditional healing applications.

Like the Rabhas, the Hajongs have also got changes in their social life. The Hajongs consider themselves to be Hindu and perform their various socio-religious rites and festivals according to the Hindus. This is the result of their close association and living with the neighbouring Hindu people for centuries together.

Various problems are noticed among the Hajong society. These problems are responsible for the backwardness of the community. It may be mentioned here is that the Hajongs are more backward than the Rabhas. Like the other tribal communities superstition also exists in the Hajong society. It is also a barrier in the development of the community. In this era of modern science and technology they have faith in evil spirits and '*Demi*'-Gods. According to these '*Demi*'--gods and evil spirits cause various diseases and harm the common people. The

evil-spirits are 'MoilaDeo', 'Daini', 'Pretri', 'Kalpisatch', 'Bon Deo', 'Hudum and Haka', 'PhulDeo', 'NikaniDeo', and 'Pubnideo'.

The ordinary Hajongs believe that '*Molia Deo*', cause weakness to the children and babies. This deo is worshipped outside the village generally in an open space or near a jungle. For the purpose goat, duck, fowl, etc are sacrificed. On the other hand '*Daini*' causes delirium to children. This '*Daini*' is worshipped with tortoise, pig, etc. '*Pretri*' causes continuous crying of babies and as such one fowl is left in a jungle as worship. '*Kalpisatch*' causes sudden illness and it is worshipped by sacrificing a he-goat. '*Bondeo*' causes stomach trouble and it is worshipped by sacrificing a he-goat. On the other hand '*Hudum and Haka*', cause general weakness and pain in the various parts of the body. The deity is worshipped by sacrificing tortoise, duck, he-goat. *Hudum* is worshipped by the women during drought for bringing rice. Sometimes *Haka* is worshipped to bring down rain. '*Phuldeo*' causes excessive vomiting to the babies. To propitiate this deity a garland of flowers is immersed in a stream.

It is found that superstition and blind belief exist in the Hajong society. Due to the prevalence of this type of superstition the ordinary Hajongs do not go to doctors for the treatment of the people like the babies and adults. They believe that worshipping various spirits, deities and *demi*-Gods the disease may be cured. This is very serious and may cause disastrous for the society at the present age of science, internet, computers. This is beyond imagination. These superstitions still exists due to the large scale illiteracy among the community. Of course as a result of the advancement of education and the influence of the neighbouring advanced communities the superstitions have decreased to a great extent.

Like the other society the Bodos also believes that the spirits cast no shadow on the ground as other things do and the spirits are believed to have no foot. The Bodos believe that the *Fagons*(ghost) mostly lives in a bamboo clump. And as such blows down and shakes the bamboo as a strong blast to frighten a passerby. The *Fagons* sometimes assumes the form of a man or woman and gives company to a traveller specially in the form of a familiar friend. They follow a traveller and try to frighten him.

The Bodos also believe that the spirit who takes a woman away does not always keep her but sends her home. It is believed by the Bodos that sometimes a male *pari* visits a woman and vice versa. They make elicit proposals and if the man or woman as the case may be accepts the proposed ultimately he or she becomes mad and later on dies. The Bodos believe that the

spirits have wives and children like man. The Bodos believe that except *Pari* other spirits like *Fagon* and *Biras* do not kill man.

They believe that a person should not open the door at night to receive a visitor and if the one calls for thrice to the owner of the house then he is human being and because it is believed that if a evil visits a house at night if he does not call three times then it is a evil spirit. The Bodos believe that the spirits are afraid of mustard seeds chillies and lemon. Among these things the one which is most dreaded by the evil spirit is mustard seeds. And it is also believed that the spirit are afraid of weapons made of iron and fire. Besides all these things *Fagon* is afraid of the urination of human beings.

There are many beliefs relating to women amongst the Bodos. A woman with short and ragged hair on the head is believed as unlucky. So that most of the parents of boys do not select these types of girls as bride for their sons. A woman should not laugh aloud because it is believed to be a sign of bad omen. A Bodo woman do not kill any living creature specially ducks, fowls, or pegions because it is believed that her own child might die in her womb if she takes the life of any bird, animals during her period of pregnancy. After puberty a girls from the Bodo society do not climb trees because they are believed to be unclean after puberty and the trees are very sacred to them. Even the girls and women do not take fruits which are joined as together as it may lead her to give birth to twin babies in future.

Bodos also believe in the efficiency of witch craft and are afraid of the tribal and non-tribal groups who practice witchcraft. Nearly all societies have some concept of witchcraft in that certain individuals are thought to have supernatural powers, which may be used to do harm. If we look for the world of witchcraft in a dictionary we will see that it is the art of bringing magical power to bear or at least of trying to do so. Belief in witchcraft from part of a magical world view in which power and forces inherent in the universe may be directed for good or evil. This is a world where everything is seen in terms of spirits and where certain persons specialized in their control. The magic workers have been called by many different names most commonly witches, and magicians. The word *daini* and *bhutuni* bears the meaning of witches in the Assamese societies. In Bodo society it is known as *daini* or *daina*.

Generally however witches are usually female associated with the reversal of normal life. But among the Bodos it is seen that besides old women young women and men are also involved in practicing witch craft. Witches are also commonly believed to have special spirit animals or familiars such as black cats, snakes that perform services for them. They have also

knowledge of plants and herbs and they are thought to be able to change their shape, fly and sometimes trick and disappear. A witch is often believed to be capable of being in two places at once. She can act at night while her physical body lies sleeping at home. They believe that the witches use magic to harm specific people. It is also believed that the witches insert small things into victim's body that would make him or her fall ill and ultimately die before counter magic is applied on time. The witches collect clothes, hairs, nails, and other things used by people whom she wants to do harm. Sometimes with the help of other persons she buries these types of things which is being collected by her in front of the person whom the witch wants to harm. And as such the victim falls ill and slowly destroyed by the witch as they believe and a witch always tries to obtain an object connected with the person that the witch can send caterpillars or grasshoppers to destroy crops and they may not send insects into the body of a victim to destroy it.

In tribal societies of Assam fear of witches acted as a section enforcing neighbourly conduct. Alternatively cutting all contact and avoiding the borrowing or lending of object through which witches might work and magic was another option, it was considered dangerous to receive a gift from a witch as this might cause misfortune.

Religion may be regarded as the beliefs and patterns of behaviour by which people try to control the area of the universe that is otherwise beyond control. Religion is the origin of rites and rituals are one of the most important institutions of human culture which relates people to each other on special occasions. It is the expression of the manner and type of their concept of the supernatural.

1.3 OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the socio-cultural factors, economic status of the people bounded by this superstition.
2. To find out the educational status of the people practicing this beliefs.
3. To find out the availability of modern civil amenities, like health and communication, government awareness campaign etc.
4. To find out the number of incidents/cases occurred among the tribal community in order to carry out case study.
5. To find out solution to mitigate this social prejudice.

1.4

1.5 GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE, SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

The study was carried out in three districts like Kokrajhar, Chirang and Baksa of BTAD. The prime concern of the study was to unearth the number of witch hunting incidents that have already taken place among the tribal people of these three districts of Assam. These three districts are thought as important from geographical point of view. Because, this three districts share the international border with Bhutan and communication in certain areas of those districts are very poor. Moreover socio-economic conditions of some villages are very miserable compared to other parts of the state. And dominant population of those areas are mainly Boro. Though time was a great constraint in our study yet we tried to cover cases which were available in our short fathom. We thereby surveyed thirty six nos. of revenue villages in three districts. The surveyed villages of Kokrajhar district are- 1) *Komabari*, 2) *East Brahmapur*, 3) *Samarpur*, 4) *Mainaopur*, 5) *Gwiwnpuri*, 6) *Samthaibari*. Similarly the villages of Chirang district are- 1) *Undergaon*, 2) *Dahalapara*, 3) *Daoraibari*, 4) *Belguri*, 5) *Kagrabari*, 6) *Thongsidongi*, 7) *Santipur*, 8) *Dimakumari*, 9) *No.1 Samudisa*, 10) *No.3 Samudisa*, 11) *Ranipur*, 12) *Bandhuguri*, 13) *Kapaguri* and villages of Baksa district are- 1) *Majarbari*, 2) *No.1 Koklabari*, 3) *Bhalmanuhar Vita (Borpam)*, 4) *Dirira*, 5) *Koklabari*, 6) *Agrangguri (Rabang)*, 7) *Rabang (Randhanipara)* 8) *Akhra*, 9) *Longthibari*, 10) *New Betbari*, 11) *Rangidhara (Betbari)*, 12) *Chalchali*, 10) *Sitalpur*, 11) *No.2 Kotaligaon*, 12) *No.2 Balabari*, 13) *Adalbari*, 14) *Goldingpara*, 15) *Ulubari*, 16) *Khatarbari*, 17) *Ghogmar*.

1.6 A LITTLE GLANCE OF THE THREE DISTRICTS

1.5.1 KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT

Kokrajhar district is an administrative district in the state of Assam in north-eastern India. The district headquarters are located at Kokrajhar town. The district occupies an area of 3,169.22 square kilometres. As of 2001, the district had a population of 905,764. Kokrajhar was originally a part the undivided Goalpara district. In 1957, under the administration of Bimala Prasad Chaliha as the Chief Minister of Assam, three sub-divisions were created one of which was Kokrajhar. This sub-division was made into a district on 1st July 1983

Kokrajhar district serves as the gateway to the North Eastern region of India. Roads and rails to Seven Sister States pass through this district on their way to other North Eastern states. Kokrajhar district is located on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra river. It forms the gateway to the Seven Sister States. Kokrajhar shares its boundary with Bongaigaon (now

known as Chirang), Dhubri, West Bengal, Barpeta and Bhutan. In 2006 the Indian government named Kokrajhar one of the country's 250 most backward districts out of a total of 640. There are four Assam Legislative Assembly constituencies in this district: Gossaigaon, Kokrajhar West, Kokrajhar East, and Sidli. According to the 2011 census Kokrajhar district has a population of 886,999. The district has a population density of 280 inhabitants per square kilometre. Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 5.19%. Kokrajhar has a sex ratio of 958 females for every 1000 males and a literacy rate of 66.63%. The district is multi-ethnic, with no majority ethnic group. Most of the Bodo and Assamese are Hindu, with a small Christian minority. Almost all of the Bengalis are Muslim, while more than 90% of the Santhals are Christian.

1.5.2 CHIRANG

The word "Chirang" has derived from Garo word "chi" means water and "rang" means wealth. Chirang district is one of the four districts of Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) under the govt. of Assam. The district was created vide notification no. Gag (b). 137/ 2002/ pt/ 117 Dated, 30/10/2003 under clause 6 of Article 332 by the 90th Amendment Act, 2003 of the constitution of India under the provision of the sixth schedule. The district started functioning with effect from 4th June, 2014 with its head quarter at Kajalgaon. This district is having one civil sub-division with its head quarter at Bijni and one sadar sub-division with its head quarter at Kajalgaon. The Chirang district possesses a plain topography. It also has undulating areas and the northern parts of the district lie on the foothills of Bhutan that has slightly higher elevation, which is decreasing towards the southern parts of the district. The four types of soil found here are entisols, inceptisols, alfisols and ultisols. The district comes under lower Brahmaputra valley agro-climatic zone. The climate is sub-tropical in nature with warm and humid summer followed by dry and cool winter. The pre and post-monsoon months are unpredictable and experience erratic rainfall. Champawati, Aie and Manas rivers flow through the district and join the Brahmaputra river. Many other tributaries, small rivulets and streams flow through this district.

Chirang district has two sub-division and three development blocks. It has 479 revenue villages. According to 2011 census the total population of Chirang district is 481,818 and total household is 97,395. Out of this, 244,860 are male population and 2,37,302 are female population and sex ratio is 969. Literacy rate 70.24% for males and 56.65% for females respectively.

1.5.3 BAKSA

It was created from parts of Barpeta, Nalbari, and Kamrup districts. Mushalpur town is its headquarter of the district. It has three Sub-division Salbari sub-division, Salbari, Tamulpur Sub-division, Tamulpur and Mushalpur sub-division, Mushalpur. This district is bounded by Bhutan in the north, Udalguri district in the east, Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup districts in the south and Chirang district in the west. Area of the district is 2400 square kilometre. These sub-divisions are further divided into 13 revenue circles such as: Baska, Barama, Tamulpur, Goreswar, Baganpara, Ghograpar, Barnagar, Bajali, Jalah, Patharighat, Rangia, Sarupeta and Tihu. Three Vidhan Sabha constituencies of this district are Tamulpur, Barama and Chapaguri. All of these are part of Kokrajhar Lok Sabha constituency.

According to the 2011 census Baksa district has a population of 953,773. This gives it a ranking of 458th in India (out of a total of 640). The district has a population density of 475 inhabitants per square kilometre (1,230/sq mi). Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 11.17%. Baksa has a sex ratio of 967 females for every 1000 males and literacy rate of 70.53%.

Baksa district is located in North-Western part of Assam with the district headquarter at Mushalpur which is 105 Km away from State Capital Guwahati and 20 Km away from National Highway No. 31 towards North. The district headquarter is linked to the National Highway 31 mainly at two junction point namely Barama and Kadamtola which is about 14 and 18 Km away from Nalbari district HQ towards West via NH 31. The main mode of connectivity to the district is through Road. The district shares the privilege of being the International Boundary with Bhutan in the North with a mixed topography of plains and foot hills. The gentle and gradual slopes can be seen stretching from the foot hill of Bhutan and reaching out to the southern tips of Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup district. The East and Western boundaries of the district respectively shares with the neighbouring district of Chirang, while the eastern boundaries are connected Darrang and Udalguri district. The vegetation of the district is characterized mainly by lush green forest and varieties of flora and fauna. Manas National Park stands out as the glaring example of this bio-diversified feature of the district. The climate of the district is sub-tropical in nature with warm and humid summer and also followed by cool and dry winter. The average rainfall of the district

is found to be 76 mm in the recent years. The Baksa district is inhabited by mainly Bodo-Kachari, Assamese, Sarania-Kachari, Koch-Rajbonshi, Adibashi (Tea Tribe), Nepali, Bengali and religious minorities.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

The present study was purely based on the data collected through field work and it was a sensitive issue. And some problems had to face by the investigators during the time of interview with the respondents, be it victim's survivors or villagers. Therefore maximum flexibility was maintained in data collection process.

1.6.1 SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS

The study sought to document cases in which the victim/survivor had faced violence in the last couple of years. Therefore certain information on witch hunting incidents of three districts dominated by tribal population were collected from different published and unpublished sources before going to the field and later identified for the present study as core area of investigation. Attention was laid on to collect the information as stated below. -

- Diversity in age, land ownership, livelihood, memberships in associations/ organization of the survivors/victims.
- Diversity of practice amongst the tribals.
- Type of injury/violence, recurrence of violence: from extreme forms of brutality to instances which were confined to labeling.
- Cases in which there had been no intervention by the state and non-state agencies as well.

The idea was thus to select a diverse range of cases of witch hunting in the three districts viz- Kokrajhar, Chirang and Baksa as far as possible. Accordingly eight numbers of temporary field investigators were engaged for data collection whom were given three months and started on 1st May, 2017 and ended on 31st July, 2017. However, given the sensitiveness of the subject and the paucity of reliable sources of information in many cases, it was not possible to follow very rigorous sampling techniques in this process of selection. The patterns and variations which have been revealed through an analysis of the data may thus be a consequence of the selection process, something inevitable in a qualitative study at a small scale. Given the relatively small size of the sample, the patterns set out in the following chapters should be treated as indicative of the trends rather than as statistically precise in a more strict sense.

It also needs to be reiterated here that this study is based on cases from three districts which covered a small area of the concerned district due to time constrained. Moreover, each of

which have their own peculiar socio-economic and demographic features given the specific socio-demographic profiles of the areas of the study, the patterns identified in this study may not be exhaustive. Other areas with starkly different socio-demographic conditions may reflect other patterns which this study may not have been able to fathom. Hence the data need not be generalized for the entire state, let alone for the rest of India. The forty one cases collected for this study thus reflect as broad a spectrum of cases of witch hunting as the investigators could come across and form the basis of extrapolating about the patterns of witch hunting discernible in the areas of the study. Nevertheless, the trends and patterns we have discerned should be valuable points of departure for later studies and also comparisons with new data as and when they are available.

1.6.2 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Keeping in mind the sensitivity of the issue, simple and user-friendly Anthropological tools were adopted to enable the field investigators to into the possible depth of the investigation. And simple and easy individuals were selected as respondents for collection of common but vital data. Relatively straight forward easy questions were asked to the survivors, which provided data which is usable in a comparative framework as well as sensitive to the particular nuances of each case. The case studies were thus collected through in-depth/open-ended individual interviews with victim-survivor based on a common template. The story narrative included history of the woman targeted much before her identification as a witch to understand her relations with the community and family before the violence manifested itself. The quantitative details were collected with an interview questionnaire, consisting of key socio-demographic details of the villagers where incidents of witch hunting took place. The qualitative aspects were covered through a semistructured interview schedule

1.6.3 DATA COLLECTION

The interviews were conducted in local vernacular language. The process of data collection was largely similar across the field areas in the three districts. A team of temporarily engage field investigators (eight nos.) went to the field sites for varying number of days, ranging from three to five. Informant especially the victim's survivors, was spoken to at his/ her own house or where he/she had been staying, or a location of his/her preference. Although data collection was based on the questions set out in a format that was the main data gathering tool, the interview itself was in the form of an informal conversation so as to not make the interviewees self-conscious or anxious, given the deep distrust and apprehension regarding inquiries related to the subject. The field investigators avoided noting down information in

front of the interviewees, apart from factual details such as age, sex and dates of relevant incidents. The field investigators would commit the information gathered to memory and then write it down as per the questionnaire at night the same day either in Assamese or in English in which the conversation had taken place. Finally, the lead field investigator went over the completed questionnaire along with the entire team of field investigators. On an average, the entire process of documenting a case took about five to seven days; two days to establish contacts with local actors and making logistical arrangements, three days for meeting the victim or victim's survivors, the accused and others, and finally two days to write the information in the format provided in the questionnaire.

CHAPTER TWO

2. ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDIES OF WITCH HUNT

To unearth the socio-economic, socio-cultural factors linked with incident of witch hunting the present study was carried out in three district of BTAD. Accordingly thirty nine revenue villages have been selected for gathering our data. It would be better to mention here that all villages were not equally the sufferer of this social evil though we have visited all those villages. It is merely for collection of certain socio-economic data that we have selected thirty nine revenue villages. Here we have given below a list of revenue villages, their total number of households and total population along with the number of male and female.

Table No-1
District wise surveyed villages, total households and sex wise total population

Sl. No.	Name of District	Name of Village	No. of Household	Total Population	Total Male	Total Female
1.	Kokrajhar	Komabari,	143	678	386	292
2.		East Brahmapur	123	615	324	291
3.		Samarpur	176	894	480	414
4.		Mainaopur	122	488	280	208
5.		Gwiwnpuri	154	693	400	293
6.		Samthaibari	163	723	402	321
7.	Chirang	Undergaon	143	690	368	322
8.		Dahalapara	123	567	301	266
9.		Daoraibari	156	656	376	280
10.		Belguri	167	752	411	341
11.		Kagrabari	134	643	345	298
12.		Thongsidongi	153	688	398	290
13.		Santipur	167	805	488	317
14.		Dimakumari	159	749	417	332
15.		No.1 Samudisa	165	775	402	373
16.		No.3 Samudisa	122	549	301	248
17.		Ranipur	134	668	392	276
18.		Bandhuguri	152	729	396	333
19.		Kapaguri	142	653	334	319
20.		Majarbari	171	738	399	339
21.		No.1 Koklabari	163	749	391	358
22.		Bhalmanuhar Vita	152	638	374	264
23.		Dirira	144	665	391	274
24.		Koklabari	159	670	392	298
25.		Agrangguri	122	515	275	240
26.		Rabang	165	775	461	314

27.	Baksa	Akhra	145	696	378	318
28.		Longthibari	178	747	389	358
29.		New Betbari	138	664	389	275
30.		Rangidhara	149	670	390	280
31.		Chalchali	143	645	395	250
32.		Sitalpur	123	590	307	283
33.		No.2 Kotaligaon	177	852	462	390
34.		No.2 Balabari	167	820	485	335
35.		Adalbari	133	532	287	245
36.		Goldingpara	131	524	311	213
37.		Ulubari,	122	549	310	239
38.		Khatarbari,	143	660	378	282
39.		Ghogmar	138	734	410	324

Witch-hunting attracts more attention than the craft itself. The traditional belief on witchcraft is most common among poor rural communities with little access to education and health services, and so, having more and longstanding practice of witch-hunting. Among the Bodo community (other communities like Rajbongsi, Rabha, Mishing, the Adivasi and many more Community), when an individual gets sick or harm befalls the community, the blame falls not upon a virus or crop disease, but upon an alleged witch. The *Ojha*, who works as a local/village medicine man plays a crucial role in this context. The 41 cases which are studied so far during our field work in three districts like Kokrajhar, Chirang and Baksa, reveal that the marginalization of the alleged witches start with the discourse of the *Ojha*'s pointing out the work of witch. The alleged witches are blamed and the accusation process takes its road. The discourse of the alleged witch is powerless compared to the group of people in the community who stands against him/her, when taken for granted the insiders' standpoint and the discourse of the witch-hunters is powerless compared to the group of people outside the hunter's community, when taken for granted the outsiders' standpoint as rightly said by M. Foucault that individual is powerless compared to institutions, groups or the state (Balan, 2010). Because gossips and rumours play an important part in the processes leading to accusations of any "wrongdoing", it is similar in witchcraft accusations. Even when the art of witchcraft and sorcery are not overtly at work, rumour and gossip always work as a covert form of witchcraft against persons.

So far the study is concerned, we have identified the victims in two categories depending on the motives of the accused i.e. instigators or perpetrators. In our survey it was found that some of the victims were targeted for giving logical or physical support to the victims. It was observed that out of 56 victims under 41 case studies 13 nos. of victims i.e. almost 23 percent

were the collateral victims whom were not suspected primarily as witch. They were killed because of their strategic involvement or protective role to their primary victims. Accordingly, 41 primary victims of 41 case studies constitute one set of victims those accused as witch. In addition, other people particularly family members and supporters, who were collaterally victimized, make the total number of victims relatively higher than 41. The collateral victims in the study were the spouse, sons and daughters, brothers of the primary victims, members of extended family or other relatives. This chapter attempts to discuss the primary targets of witch hunting as well as those who bear the brunt of the attack collaterally on account of their proximity to support of the main victim. These two categories such as the primary who were targeted as witch and other 13 collateral victims are discussed separately. The profile of primary victim are discussed in detail while the section of the collateral victims examine their relationship with main victim, in order to understand the category of relatives (or kin) and associates that are likely to also be victimized.

2.1 ATTRIBUTES OF THE PRIMARY AND COLLATERAL VICTIMS

The criteria used in the present study for profiling of the 56 numbers of victims in the case studies include sex, age, marital status caste, economic status, educational status, each of which is set out in a separate subsection. Here primary victims are those who were directly targeted and killed and collateral victims are those who were either killed or punished on account of their support to the primary victims. They are the close relatives or sons and daughters, spouses and near and dear ones. In our study we have found the status of such victims as shown in table given below. Data shows that out total 56 nos. of victims, collateral victims 13, where 6 nos. male and 7 nos. female. We have found no one who was alive after getting punishment from the miscreants or villagers. In most of the cases collateral victims were mercilessly murdered and body of dead either buried or burnt.

2.2 AGE AND SEX OF THE VICTIMS

Table No-2
Age and sex distribution of the victims

Sl. No,	Age Group	No. Males	Percentage	No. of Females	Percentage
1.	10-20	0	0	0	0

2.	20-30	1	2.86	1	4.76
3.	30-40	1	2.86	0	0
4.	40-50	5	14.29	2	9.52
5.	50-60	17	48.57	9	42.86
6.	60-70	8	22.85	9	42.86
7.	70-80	3	8.57	0	0
	Total	35	100	21	100

Age and sex plays a vital role for determination of any socio-cultural or socio-political incidents in human society. Depending on age and sex each human society frames some social hierarchy, under which roles and functions are bestowed on. Social status, division of labour, social jurisdiction etc. are relied on age and sex of the members of a given society. It is an obvious and innate characters of human society that all negative works or social evils are basically well defined with respect to the older section of the society though certain exception are not uncommon. In common parlances aged and weaker sections are very often blamed for any unwanted incidents that occurred in a society. And it is clear from the table stated above, that in witch hunting incidents maximum numbers of targeted individuals belong to the age 50-60 and 60-70 for both male and female. It appears 48.57 and 22.85 percent in case of males and 42.86 and 42.86 percent for females respectively. These age groups are normally more prone to be victimized in our society due to their weak socio-economic support. Hence we have seen large number of incidents of brutality within those sections attained the age 50 to 70 years. The vulnerability of such incident takes place in all human society. In certain cases vulnerability of incident also takes place in the age group 20-30 and 40-50. In the present study the data reflects that 2.86 percent males and 4.76 percent females victimized in the age group 20 to 30. The fact of these cases need to be examined more closely to understand the unique factors that contributed to their being labeled as witch or something else. Similarly, 2.86 percent males became victim in the age group 30 to 40. It is to be mentioned here that no incident has taken place in case of female in the age group 70 to 80, contrary to this 3 nos. of cases have been found in case of male counterpart. The vulnerability of victimization seems to be increased in the age group 40 to 60 and data shows that it is 30 nos. for male and 20 nos. for female respectively, making predominant age group amongst victims. Both males and females targeted equally, though some studies advocated the female's victimization as more rather than males.

The two incidents that occurred in the age group 20-30 was very pathetic. Both of them were male and female. The 21 years old male victim was a student of third semester degree student

of U.N. Brahma College, was killed by some members of the village on account of property, because he was a lone child of a widow mother. He played a special role in the area being a Secretary of the Dotoma Block ABSU. He was fighting against the existing social prejudices and tried to motivate the people towards modern thought. He had developed an alarming popularity among different sections of people. He developed the economic status of his family though he was too young compared to other village youth. Some youth of his age or more became upset in his continuous growth and thus he became the cause of jealousy. In the mean time his mother was suspected as witch by the villagers and one day some villagers came to his house in search of his mother. They did not find his mother; but killed him. Similarly, a 25 year old girl was killed by miscreant in Baska district when she tried to protect her mother from the miscreant. Her mother was suspected by the miscreant as witch.

2.3 MARITAL STATUS OF THE VICTIMS

Table No-3
Marital status of the victims

Sl. No.	Marital Status	No. of Males	%	No. of Females	%
1.	Married	33	94.28	18	85.72
2.	Unmarried	1	2.86	1	4.76
3.	Widow	0	0	1	4.76
4.	Widower	1	2.86	0	0
5.	Separated	0	0	1	4.76
	Total	35	100	21	100

The marital status of the victims in our study directly correlates to the age of the victims. The data stated above shows that almost all victims are married except two nos. of individuals who were 21 years and 25 years old and out of two young victims one was male, while other one was female. The table shows the distribution of the victim's marital status as married, never married, widow, widower and separated. It is also clear from above that 94.28 percent victims are married males and 85 percent are married female victims. This indicates that beliefs on superstition are equally enforced irrespective of gender. Interestingly data shows one female who is separated. Due to her separation she was always targeted by her husband and other husband relatives. She lived independently and maintained cordial relationship with other. She practiced traditional medicine for curing the ailment of animals only. But villagers suspected her as witch. Accordingly one night she was killed by some villagers. Data also

shows one widow and one widower. It must be noted that the social stigma of widowhood in large parts of India does not in the context of Assam, particularly among the tribals.

The most striking aspect of the findings on the marital status is the fact that out of 35 male victims 33 nos. are married and 18 nos. are married female victims out of 21 total female victims. Only two nos. of unmarried victims were under the age 21 and 25 years, was about to get married before the victimization took place and in fact targeted on account of jealousy and animosity. Indeed, in all the cases of married women victims witch hunting took place while women were residing in their affinal or marital villages, which indicates the unwanted role of the villagers in her new local residence after marriage. Data indicates that married women are also more vulnerable to targeting. It proves that it is not merely the widow who is thought to be more vulnerable to witch hunting, equally the married women are also victimized or targeted.

2.4 CASTE GROUP OF THE VICTIMS

As mentioned above that North East India may be termed as homeland of numbers tribal groups with their variegated culture and life. Assam is one of such state of North East where we may see various tribal groups with their culture and life styles unique to each other. Assam has demographic composition that is distinct from other state. According to the census of India 2011, Assam has tribal population of 12.4% which includes all indigenous population. The Boros are one of the major tribal groups of Assam. They are more advance in terms of their socio-economic, educational and political aspects. They are the autochthones of this state. Though they are the indigenous group or son of soil of the state yet the socio-economic condition, educational or health scenario of a handsome section of them living in the marginal areas in the district of Kokrajhar, Chirang and Baksa are quite deplorable. Most of the villages in these three districts are still in isolated condition since there is no proper road communication within or outside the villages. No proper educational institution, health service is available. People are purely dependent of nature and their fate. The present study attempted to cover some of such villages located in these three districts of BTAD and dominant caste group were Boro and they were the follower of Hindu religion.

2.5 ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE VICTIMS

Table no-4

Occupational status of the victims

Sl. No,	Category of Occupation	No. of	%	No. of	%
---------	------------------------	--------	---	--------	---

		Males		Females	
1.	Daily Wage Labour	4	11.43	0	0
2.	Agriculture	21	60	4	19.05
3.	Business	3	8.57	4	19.05
4.	Service (Private/Govt.)	0	0	2	9.52
5.	House Wife	0	0	5	23.81
6.	Student	1	2.86	1	4.76
7.	Others (<i>Ojha</i> <i>/Bej/Baidhya/Kabiraj</i>)	6	17.14	4	19.05
8.	Dependent	0	0	1	4.76
	Total	35	100	21	100

The economic conditions of the victims, like their age groups throws light on the position of the men and women concerned. The economic status outlined here is more in terms of the household's economic status rather than the individual victim's as it is difficult to distinguish between the individual's assets and those of the family in a rural context, especially where they live as a common household. An income whatever is classified as total as household income is the total outcome of the family. Hence, the household economy is the only available indicator for assessing the economic condition of the victims. However, the few instances where victims were employed or owned property have been mentioned as well. The economic status of the victim and his or her family in some cases appears to have been the cause for targeting and victimization, inevitably resulting in loss of the property. In some cases it was observed that the victim's property occupied a remarkably better position compared to the instigators and it perhaps developed an agony among some village miscreants that led the incident of killing of an individual labeling him or her as witch. It is striking to note here that out of 56 victims 8.57% male victims maintained their livelihood through business and in case of females it is 19.05 percent respectively. The business run by these victims were tea stall in daily market/weekly market and meat seller. They had good earnings as compared to their neighbours. It caused jealousy and attempted to label them as witch by the neighbours, what was supported by rest of the villagers too. Finally they were victimized. Data also shows that 60% male victims were cultivator and it is 9.05% in case females. So, it is learnt from this output that a large section of the victim's source of income was sound as they had land to substantiate their daily needs. Their source of income may have led the cause of animosity among some members of the village. They were indulged in blaming them as witch. It was not confined among the good income holders, but the victim who earned their bread by doing labour in door to door they were also targeted and victimized. In 41 nos. of cases, data shows 4 nos. of victims who were labour. It is easy to

blame or making target to weaker section of a society because they can't protest or logically prove their innocence. This group of people falls under the BPL category. Even then they were easily targeted by the miscreants. Another striking feature is that two women who were village health guard were also stigmatized by the people. These two women had relationship with other people who do not belong to the same group. They tried to inculcate the people as to how belief on certain socio-cultural thought may harm their society. People suspected them as witch instead of accepting their views and killed them brutally in a stormy day when most of people were confined in their house due heavy rain and storm. Moreover, data also shows some victims who practiced traditional medicine and were known as Ojha, Bej or Kabiraj. By their profession they were easily came under suspect as witch and became victim. In our study we have found 6 (17.14%) nos. of males and 4 (19.05%) nos. of females who practiced traditional medicine and became victimized.

2.6 LAND OWNERSHIP

The district chosen for the study were predominantly rural, where land ownership is a major indicator of prosperity. In our study we had covered 36 nos. of witch hunting cases (whom to whom we may also call as household in our following discussion) of different villages located in three district, and found total 56 nos. of victims. Out of 56 victims 20 numbers of individuals are victimized from 8 nos. of households. If we would see the ownership of property we may see that 42 victims had access to family and household land and assets. They had comparatively satisfactory economy except a few who had small plot of land and livelihood was purely based on either labour or practicing traditional medicine. Some of the victims especially the women victims owned property through inheritance or owned property after death of her father. The table below provides details regarding landownership of the victims.

Table No-5

Land holding pattern of the victims

Land Holding Pattern in Bighas	No. of Households (Victim's)
Only Homestead Land Less than one Bigha	5
1 Bigha to 5 Bighas	7
6 Bighas to 10 Bighas	10
11 Bighas to 15 Bighas	8
16 Bighas to 20 Bighas	4
21 Bighas+	7

The table shows that 5 victims' households possess less than 1 bigha of land, 7 nos. of household possesses 1-5 bighas of land and highest nos. of household possess 6-10 bighas of land which is quite moderate. Similarly 8 nos. of victim's family possesses 11-15 bighas, 4 nos. of family possesses 16-20 bighas and 7 nos. of family possess more than 21 bighas of land. Compared to other non-tribal groups land holding pattern of the victim's families can be cited as good.

2.7 LIVING CONDITIONS AND OWNERSHIP OF LIVE STOCK

Table No-6

Availability of livestock/cattle of the victims

Name of the Live stocks/Cattle	No. of Household
Cow	32
Buffalo	0
Hen	41
Duck	17
Goat	5
Pig	39
Other	0

This section will discuss the living conditions, and the livestock and vehicles owned by the victim as indicators of their economic status. The data indicates that most of the victims owned small quantities of livestock, comprising cattle, goats and poultry. For most of the families, the livestock was not a primary source of income but supplemented the nutritional needs of the household, besides enabling them to generate a small income through the sale of dairy produce. It is a well known fact that the Boros are one of the major and dominant tribal groups of Assam. From socio-economic, political and cultural view they are much more advance tribal community compared to other tribal communities of Assam. They are the one of the most powerful indigenous tribal group of Assam. They should have huge areas of land and other natural properties. But data stated above shows that most of the victim's family has seen to possessed moderate type of land. They possess little numbers of pet animals which provides additional income to a family. In our study it is seen that most of the victim's family possesses less number of such pet animals. Data shows that out of 41 nos. of families 32 nos. of families had cows that is also 3 to 4 in numbers. Of course all victims' family possesses poultry. Only 5 nos. of families had duck. As an important tradition and powerful economic

asset pigs were seen to rear by almost all victims' family and it appears 39 nos. among surveyed households.

2.8 OCCUPATION OF THE VICTIMS

Agriculture is the primary occupation of the village communities in Assam, and this is reflected in our table no-4 above that 21 males and 4 females out of the 41 victims' families being involved mainly in agriculture. In addition, most of the families of the victims were also engaged in non-agricultural economic pursuits. Our data shows that a number of victims were engaged in small business like tea stall or works as meat seller in their local place. Two female victims were service holder in private sector, who were care taker of nursery and 4 nos. of victims were engaged as casual labour, Moreover, there were a few cases where the victims' husbands had practiced traditional medicine for beneficial purpose of the community. There is also an instance of the victim being a widow whose primary sources of income were raising livestock, undertaking contractual farming with owners (*adhikheti* and receiving a widow's pension from the government. Other secondary occupations with which the victims and their families supplemented their household income were selling farm products, like betel nuts, mustard seeds, seasonal fruits etc.

2.9 AVAILABILITY OF MODERN GADGET IN THE VICTIM'S FAMILY

Table No-7

Availability of modern gadget in the victim's family

Name of the Items/Gadgets	No. of Household
TV/Radio	22
Fridge	0
TV with DTH connection	4
Bicycle	38
Motor Cycle/Scooter	0
Car	0
Mobile	41
Mobile with Net connection	32
Tractor	0
Agriculture Water Pump	0
Swing Machine	0

Availability of modern gadget also plays an important role in a society as it reflects the economic status of the victim's family. Availability of these gadgets states the mental environment and their outlook towards the modern world. Because application of modern gadgets helps people in justifying the traditional human thought and it is reflected in their normal or day-today activities. Data shows that out 41 households 22 families possess TV/Radio as their modern asset. Some of them i.e. 4 nos. of families even had the DTH connection with their TV set. As for vehicles, the victims and their families possessed only the most basic forms of transport. Most of the victims' family i.e. 38 nos. of families had bicycles, 41 nos. families had mobiles, 32 nos. of them had mobiles with internet connection. It is an interesting feature, because use of internet may provide all modern information to an individual which may be termed as an essence of modern human life. It helps people to wipe the preoccupied attitudes of social prejudices. Moreover, it also helps people to be integrated and make the society more active and aware of the recent happenings taken place in around the globe. Such modern equipments are not merely available in the victim's families, but these are equally available among the instigators families also.

2.10 HOUSE TYPE OF THE VICTIMS

Table No-8

Type of houses owned by the Victims

Type of Houses of the Victims	No. of Households (Victim's)
Kutchra Thatched House	7
Kutchra GI Sheet House	19
Semi Pucca Assam Type House	10
Pucca Assam Type House	5
R.C.C. House	0

House type of a victim indicates his/her economic condition. It reflects the role or position of an individual in his/her society. A good income holder may construct a good house or purchase modern things. It also reflects his/her social outlook or social contact. In our study, it is observed that out of 41 families 19 nos. of families have kutchra GI sheet house which are well structured, 10 nos. families have semi pucca Assam type house and 5 nos. of families have pucca Assam type house. This indicates the moderate economic status of victims'

family. Being a purely remote rural habitant such economic status may be cited as satisfactory, if we would compare the national economic status of rural India. Considering this status jealousy on property has no role to play. It may also be mentioned here that though Government has implemented the scheme of Indira AwasYojana for rural poor, the scheme has able to touch these villages. Therefore we have not come across any such house in our surveyed areas.

2.11 EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE VICTIMS

Table No-9
Educational status of the victims

Sl. No.	Type of Education	No of Males	%	No. of Females	%e
1.	Illiterate	14	40	17	80.95
2.	Class-I - Class-IV	12	34.29	2	9.53
3.	Class-V - Class-VII	5	14.29	1	4.76
4.	Class-VIII - Class-X	0	0	1	4.76
5.	HSLC	3	8.57	0	0
6.	HS and Above	1	2.85	0	0
	Total	35	100	21	100

The data on the educational status of the victims is dismal with 31 out of the 56 victims (both male and female) in the case studies having received no formal education. There is a lack of formal education among the victims of witch hunting. Even if our sample size is too small to make conclusive claims that lack of education creates an enabling environment for vegetables, or forest products, like firewood and straw. Working as casual labour also appears to be a common source of primary income for some victims. There are a few cases where the supplementary household income comes from contractual shared farming or *adhikheti*, weaving or working as a *dhai*, midwife, or an *ojha*, or as traditional healer. There are some evidence in our case studies, where highly educated individuals being present in the village communities and even then the targeting and victimization has taken place. While it is clear that all victims are defined by lack of formal education, establishing a plausible connection between denial of education and victimization, it is equally apparent that formal education alone is not enough to tackle practices like witch hunting.

2.12 INDIVIDUALS VICTIMIZED COLLATERALLY

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, a number of persons other than those directly labelled witches are also victimized in many of the cases, making the total number of victims

higher than the actual number of cases documented. This section looks at the secondary victims of witch hunting, to map relationships that render a person vulnerable to secondary victimization. The number of secondary victims is 1/3 of primary victims. Based on a modest calculation, the table below shows an approximate figure of 15 secondary victims for 41 primary victims, where 8 nos. are male and 7 nos. are female. Due to the victimization of the parents or sometimes relatives, the victimized family has to face lots of problems in their subsequent days. The stigma that the family encountered as witch developed a social gap between the members of the society. In some stigmatised families daughters are not receiving marriage proposals. They are socially isolated. No villagers are ready to cooperate with the remaining members of the victimized family. Thus in our study we have seen some victimized families who have left their villages and started a new life in other place. In our study we have come to know that no collateral victims were remained alive. The collateral victims were not being punished rather killed in order to wipe out the clues or evidences of the incidents. Therefore, most of the data presented here were collected either from the relatives or from some well wishers of the victim.

Table no- 10
No. of primary and collateral victims

No. of Primary Victims		No. of Collateral Victims	
No. of Males	No. of Females	No. of Males	No. of Females
27	14	8	7

Moreover we observed a kind fear psychosis among the respondents who very often refused to spell any words relating to the incidents. It became possible only after the mediation of the local school teacher or village head who took tactical role in our data collection. As stated, victimized families are still in severe mental stress. Because they witnessed the state authority's insignificant role to protect their lives or properties even though the concerned authorities were informed relating to their problems. Rather culprit or main instigators were seen more active after the incident.

CHAPTER THREE

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO WITCH HUNTING: EXPERIENCE FROM FIELD SURVEY

3. INSTIGATING FACTORS RESPONSIBLE IN WITCH HUNTING

For the purposes of this study, we define the instigator as the one who accuses or labels the victim as a ‘witch, regardless of the reasons for targeting. The instigator may be the *Ojha*, *Kabiraj*, *Baidhya*, *other traditional village healers* but it would be incorrect to assume the involvement of an *Ojhain* all the cases, or to view the *Ojha* as the only instigator. Nevertheless, it is true that in most of the cases main victim is either the *Ojha* himself or an individual to whom an *Ojha* pointed out as black magician or witch. In our data all instigators are also perpetrators, and the two terms are therefore used interchangeably. This chapter contextualizes the social and economic backgrounds of the instigators, and their relationship with the victims, to help understand the motivations for targeting, which we examine in the next chapter.

3.1 TYPES OF INSTIGATORS

The data reflects that in most of the cases documented, the instigators and perpetrators were known to the victims. They were either physically proximate to the victims or with familial ties to the victims. Our study shows a high rate of involvement of neighbours as instigators, followed by relatives and co-workers. In thirty one out of 41 cases, the main instigator was a villager of the victims. Neighbours who instigated the victimization closely follow this number. In three out of 41 cases the victims of witch hunting were related to their perpetrators as neighbours. In three cases the perpetrators were co-workers and friends and in four cases the perpetrator was both related by marriage and was a co-worker of the victim. This proximity in relationship and location between the victim and the perpetrators also suggests a close social and economic relationship, which could become competitive in some cases, giving rise to conflict between

Table No-11
Types of instigators involved with the witch hunt

Instigators Involved	Instigators Involved	Instigators Involved	Instigators Involved
Villagers	Neighbour	Friends and Villagers	Relatives
Case Nos. 1,5,6,8,9,10,11,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23, 24,26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33,34, 35,36,37 38,39,40 (31)	Case Nos. 3,4,12, (3)	Case Nos. 2,14,13 (3)	Case Nos. 7,15,25, 41 (4)

3.2 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTIGATORS AND VICTIMS

Relationship of the victim with neighbours, villagers and instigators or perpetrators have an important correlation with the witch hunting. It indicates the social status of the victims. Moreover role plays by these actors can be gauged easily by studying the relationship. An attempt is made below to show the relationship of victims with neighbours, villagers and instigators or perpetrators.

Case no. Relationship of the victim with the village, neighbours

Case No-1 Instigators were the members of the village, who had good relation with the victim as stated by the step son of the victim, who was in Kokrajhar at the time of incident.

Case No-2 Instigators were the friends who worked together for a long time and three members from the same village while other six members from the nearby village as stated by the victim's brother.

Case No-3 Instigators were the neighbours of the same village who were the rival of the victim because she remained herself engaged with selling of rice beer what was objected by the neighbours. This is expressed by her son, who is an unskilled labour.

Case No-4 Both husband and wife were murdered by the neighbours and other village members. Wife who practiced traditional medicine was suspected and the an Ojha and neighbours instigated the villagers who finally murdered the

couple. This information was provided by the son and relatives.

- Case No-5 This couple was labour by their occupation and had good relation with the villagers. Even then they were suspected by the villagers as witch. Because they used to come back to their house at night. They were murdered by the villagers as stated by the victim's son.
- Case No-6 He was a traditional medicine practitioner and used to treat the animals of his villages and also the nearby villagers. But once a pair of bullocks of a villager died abruptly. This was the reason villagers suspected him as witch and murdered without giving him any space to justify the matter. A FIR was lodged in Runikhata Police station by the relative of the victim, as stated by the relatives of the victim.
- Case No-7 Instigators were the relatives of the victim who were influenced by an Ojha.
- Case No-8 Instigators were the members of his neighbouring village with home the victim had causal relation.
- Case No-9 The instigators were the members of the village and the victims had normal relation with the villagers. Three members of the same family were killed by the villagers.
- Case No-10 A young boy who was a 3rd year degree student and secretary of Block ABSU, murdered by the villagers for his active participation in social works, stated by one of the victim's class mate who is resident of the nearby village.
- Case No-11 This victim was murdered by the villagers thought to be involved in black magic what was confirmed by an Ojha. The victims had good relation with all.
- Case No-12 He had a good relation with the villagers but he had animosity with his neighbours in connection with his property boundary. The neighbour was quite rich compared to him. This was the reason he was blamed as witch and murdered.

- Case No-13 Being farmer he had cordial relationship with the villagers. He knew some mantras which applied to cure the snake bite. Villagers suspected him for any untoward incidents occurred within the village and he was killed by the villagers as stated by the victim's daughter.
- Case No-14 He was a active member of the village and practiced traditional medicine. Local people hatched doubt on him that he may do harm of the people. He was killed by his friends and villagers said by the victim's relatives.
- Case No-15 She had a good relation with the villagers. Her two relatives who were suffering from some health problems used to get dream her as witch and when villagers came to know this murdered her as said by a member of the same village. In this case relative instigated the villagers
- Case No-16 Three victims who were the member of the village and practiced medicine. They were suspected due to their abnormal mode of movements and killed by the villagers as stated by one of the village member who was a spectator of the incident.
- Case No-17 As instigated by the Baidhya, the villagers killed him though he had cordial relation with the villagers.
- Case No-18 She had cordial relation with instigators. Instigators were her sister's marital relatives. She was a daughter of an Ojha. This was the reason that she was suspected and killed.
- Case No-19 He was a member of the village. As pointed out by an ailed woman that she was being infected due to an Ojha available in their village and villagers finally killed him.
- Case No-20 He did not have relation with the villagers, because he was hailed from another village. He forcefully occupied the house of a widow. Villagers suspected him as Witch, since he practiced medicine and killed by the villagers.
- Case No-21 He had good relation with the villagers. He was killed by the villagers.
- Case No-22 He did not have good relation with villagers and tried to maintain distance

with the villagers. Instigators i.e. villagers did not like his behaviour.

- Case No-23 He had good relation with the villagers. He was pointed out as black magician by one of his competitor who lived in his nearby village. The instigators i.e. the villagers also trusted it and killed him.
- Case No-24 She did not have good relation with the instigators. She was always looked by the villagers as witch. Because she used to walk lonely at midnight. That is why she was killed.
- Case No-25 Instigators were her husband's family members. It was merely for her inherent paternal property that she was murdered by blaming her as 'daini'.
- Case No-26 Instigators were the villagers. Relation with them was good. Reasons of murder was not known.
- Case No-27 She was killed by the villagers. Because she maintained relationship with the outsiders who did not belong to the community.
- Case No-28 Instigators were the village members.
- Case No-29 Instigators were unknown as stated by the villagers.
- Case No-30 The instigators were the extremist as stated by the villagers. Both mothers and daughters were killed due to villagers suspect on the woman as '*daini*' whom was believed as having relation with the absurd death of three individuals of the village.
- Case No-31 The instigators were unknown to the victim's family. The victim had casual relation with the villagers. Of course villagers had doubt on her movements.
- Case No-32 The instigators were unknown to the victim's family and she was killed on her way back from the evening market. She was already a suspected woman for the villagers. She was blamed as having abusive relation with other.
- Case No-33 The instigators were a few village members who had animosity in

connection with the distribution of the share of certain group income. He was blamed as a black magician.

- Case No-34 The villagers were involved in this case. They suspected the victim as black magician, because of her movement and looking style to the people. As stated by the villagers. she used to sleep at their public cemetery in certain days, when there was ritual festivals.
- Case No-35 Being an Ojaa, he kept distance from the villagers and did not take part in any socio-cultural occasions of the village.
- Case No-36 He had good relation with the villagers. The villagers were instigated by an Ojaa to take action against him and he was tortured but somehow got rid of from severe penalty.
- Case No-37 She had good relation with the villagers. But some members of the villages attempted to kill her but due presence of police she got rid of from death.
- Case No-38 Her relationship with the villagers as not satisfactory and always kept distance from the villagers. She was killed by the villagers.
- Case No-39 He was traditional healer who had good relation with the villagers. In a sudden death of an individual of the village he was suspected as witch and he was identified as witch by an Ojaa and he was killed by the villagers.
- Case No-40 She had an amicable relationship with the villagers. It is not known why she was killed. The miscreants were suspected to be her co-workers.
- Case No-41 She was killed by her relatives as stated by some members of the village. Because she had a competitive mind and did not adjust with the relatives.

3.3ROLE PLAYED BY OJHAS, KABIRAJ AND TRADITIONAL HEALERS

In addition to the main instigators, discussed above, there may also be an involvement of *Ojhas*, who are known to sometimes lead and, at other times, reinforce the accusation of

witchery, which often signals the commencement of physical violence and active victimization. In at least 29 out of the 41 cases collected by us, an *Ojha* was involved in the process of labelling a victim as a witch. Notably, in our case studies, the *Ojhas* did not intervene on their own initiative although their intervention and role magnified the impact of labeling. The table below demonstrates the involvement of *Ojhas* in the cases documented. The findings of this data suggest that while the involvement of the *Ojhas* is high in cases of witch hunting, it is not imperative, as in four cases there was no involvement of *ojhas* who were also directly involved in the targeting of the victim.

3.4 SEX OF THE INSTIGATORS

The data indicates that although there are fewer cases in which the instigators were primarily female, there are a number of cases in which men and women were both involved. Here we have observed that males are more active as it is in case of women. In most of the cases instigation was initiated by the female depending on the foretelling of the *Ojhas*. The women pass the message to their male counterpart pertaining to an event occurs in their locality. They make the men to be more excited over the situation. Therefore in 50% of the cases women participated along with the men as primary instigators. The data shows that the instigators and the perpetrators of witch hunting were not exclusively men. Thus in a number of cases women are found to be primary instigators.

Table No-12

Sex of the instigators

Case No.	Sex of the Instigators	
Case No- 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17	Male	Female
Case No- 11, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25	Male	Female <i>Ojha</i> 9 nos.
Case No- 2, 7, 20, 22, 26, 27, 28, 30, 33, 41	Male <i>Ojha</i> 10 nos.	Female
Case No- 29,31, 32, 34, 35,36, 37,38, 39, 40	-	All were Females

3.5 ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE INSTIGATORS IN RELATION TO VICTIM

Details of the economic condition of the conspirators/perpetrators were available only minimally through the fieldwork, as the polarization between the perpetrators and the victims' families made it difficult to approach the conspirators/perpetrators directly. Information was therefore pieced together through other informants and sources. In the cases where the data on land, livestock, housing and vehicle possession is available, a sizeable number of cases show that the economic status of the victim and that of the conspirators/perpetrators were more or less at par or that the differences were not significant enough to be the cause of the targeting, although material interests have played a role in some cases. The available data on the economic status of the instigator, although not substantial or complete, suggests that conspirators/perpetrators involved in our 41 cases, the economy of the 25 nos. of conspirators/perpetrators (out of 41 cases), are better off than the victims and in 6 cases out of 41 cases economic condition of conspirators/perpetrators are almost equal with those of their victims. On the other hand there are evidences of the victim possessing more assets than the main instigator. It is 4 in numbers out of 41 cases. In two cases the victim and the perpetrator were on economic parity, and the information in the remaining four cases is not sufficient for assessing the conspirators'/perpetrators' economic status. In those cases conspirators/perpetrators were hailed from different places. Assessment or assumption of their economy or property was not possible. There were fewer situations in which the instigators are seen trying to capture the property of the victims. By and large the basic objectives of the conspirators/perpetrators were creating social havoc whereby they can either capture the victim's property or fulfil their jealousy. In some cases instigators' intentions were to make weak the victim's family or they aimed to annihilate the competitor in respect of the popularity or business. In our study, it was observed that some instigators or conspirators/perpetrators were too close with the victims, even then victimizations were done. In this regard it was difficult to ascertain the intentions of the conspirators/perpetrators.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. FACTORS RELATED TO TARGETING AND VICTIMIZATION

This chapter attempts to throw light on motivations underpinning the targeting of persons as witches. It can be stated that superstition and belief systems of the community create a context that sanctions accusations of witchcraft. Most of our case studies reveal other factors that play a role, including pre-existing tensions, conflict between the instigator and the victim. These factors make for a complex reading of witch hunting, where individual motives and tensions, as well as systemic deprivations and structural failures, come together to target and victimize particular individuals and those who are close to them. This section will examine the complex reasons both individual and contextual that appear to play a significant role in the targeting of a particular person as a witch. We will also consider the structural factors that make it possible for victimization to happen with the tacit support and non interference by the wider community. Superstition or the belief in witchcraft is not discussed as an independent factor, as it appears to be part of a wider belief system that is not limited to the regions where witch hunting is reported, but extends beyond those. We therefore believe that the belief system cannot be considered to be an independent or exclusive factor, but one that assumes greater force when it combines with individual motivations and structural and systemic failures that enable witch hunting. Structural factors are most important attributes of a system may be it society or something else. It gives a special shape to a given system. In our study it is concerned with the society where the attitudes, behaviour, rules and regulations and other cultural practices may be termed as its fundamental essence or component. If a society grows up in an industrial set up the fundamental elements of that society takes its shape accordingly. The rural societies are always bond by its traditions and accordingly their motives, attitudes, social behaviour, belief system etc are grown as per the dictation of the social tradition. Therefore, if the structure of the society gets all impetus required for its normal or modern development as we expect so, the possibilities of prejudices or untoward incidents may have little occurrence.

4.1 STRUCTURAL FACTORS THAT ENABLE WITCH HUNTING

By structural factors we would like to define the social, economic and political contexts that shape the lives, status and relations of the communities from which victims are drawn. We will look at the development status of the region from where the victims in Assam are drawn, as well as the status of the communities to which they belong. This section sets out the status of the three districts like Kokrajhar, Chirang and Baksa. Discussing the overall social and

economic status, and within that, the communities to which the majority of the victims in our case studies belong.

4.2 KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT

The district is getting a developing momentum from last couple of years, but the entire developments are city centric. Most of the development schemes are confined within the reach of city. Due to the lack of government initiatives in certain areas or the community living in marginal areas the social cohesion has lost. It is seen that most of the villages under our survey are still in isolation. Contact with rest of the part of the district is very difficult, because there is no direct transport system. There is no road communication in some villages located in Gossaigaon block. Moreover, these areas are purely dependent on the grace of nature. There is no good educational institution, health care system and pure drinking water facilities. Most of the villagers consume water from either river or traditional well. People's awareness on health and hygiene, sanitation, education are not at all seen.

4.3 CHIRANG DISTRICT

Chirang is a newly created district, where development process has just started. It is a small district, where most of the areas are connected with international boundary. The conditions of the villages located near the boundary are very complex. There no proper road communication, educational facilities, health facilities, electric facilities or even no market facilities. Though they are agriculturists by their occupation, they are fully dependent on nature. Moreover, most of the villages adjacent to boundary of Bhutan are having tremendous water crisis during winter season. Soils are sandy and upper surface is enveloped by small to medium types of stones and this is the reason that they can't dig well or tube well. Agriculture is purely based on the grace of nature. For drinking water they have to travel a long way in winter season. Most of the villages under our survey were located near small rivers where there were no bridges. Therefore, during rainy season some of the villages remain cut off from the rest of the part of the district. Due to lack of common minimum facilities or structure sudden break out of diseases becomes more fatal for the villagers and to get relief from all these health problems the villagers take the resort of traditional healers or medicine men.

4.4 BAKSA DISTRICT

If we would look at the general infrastructural condition of this district, then we would see that this district is one of the poorest as compared to other three district of BTAD. It is pathetic to note here that 85% areas of this district are still under turbulent condition. Even its head quarter i.e. Musalpur is devoid of required facilities. If a visitor likes to halt there in Musalpur then he will have to spend the night on the road. As there in no hotels or guest house or other accommodation facilities in the head quarter itself. There is no good hospital, except important Government offices. Road communication within the district head quarter is beyond imagination. Regarding higher educational institute, there is a college located at Barama, which is 25 km away from the head quarter. The interior areas are purely inconvenient for the outsiders. Most of the areas are not having their minimum requirement what is supposed to provide by the Government. People are not aware of their basic needs. They are cohabitated with the nature and nature is their grace of life. People are not free from their own justice and prejudices.

4.5 INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Within the socio-economic context described above, we now take stock of the individual motivations and factors which lead the instigators to accuse the victims as witches. The motives have been clustered into broad themes for emphasis, although these are not exclusive but often interconnected with each other and, indeed, with the structural factors discussed above. Often, multiple conflicting motives appear to be at play in a given case- some alluding to personal reasons, and others based on narratives of witchcraft. The infrastructure for education, health, public distribution, sanitation or hygiene is severely inadequate, with the supply of electricity and drinking water being below minimum health standards. The lack of education, lack of availability of modern access poor healthcare, and administrative negligence in terms of basic needs and services create conditions where disease is common and routine illness can be fatal; it sets the context that enables rather than prevents witch hunting, and lends impunity to perpetrators confident of the inaction of the law enforcement machinery. The structural factors become important in understanding how witch hunting helps rationalize tragedies and resolve conflicts, and why superstition, which is not unique to any population group or region in India, can assume the form of witch hunting in select regions and communities.

4.6 ILLNESS, DEATHS AND MISFORTUNE

Our case studies show that an accusation of witchcraft is triggered by a situation that spurs the instigator in some way. There are also individual tragedies or collective ones that lead to despair, and search for a resolution in some way. And in this connection solution was sought by adopting certain blind belief. We look at the various motives and triggers setting off the accusations and victimization in the case studies. In a number of cases, the trigger was the illness or death of a human or an animal. In all the cases collected from Assam the victims were held responsible for an *actual* or *alleged* illness (ranging from wounds and infection, mental illness, stomach aches, diarrhoea, fever, malaria, tuberculosis, jaundice, etc.), inability to conceive a child or birth of still-born babies, deaths due to illness. The accusations become all the more plausible in contexts where the victim shares physical and familial proximity with the instigator, which we know is a common feature of all cases. Anxieties and grief in these situations play into existing tensions between the parties, or are manipulated by *ojhas*, *Baidhyas*, *Kabirajor* such local traditional healers, who confirm the accusations. The *ojhas* do not introduce the idea of a 'witch; they confirm the idea and perform or reinforce the identification. The Ojha plays the role identifying an individual as evil medicine practitioner or witch or Daini. The lack of medical facilities or necessary infrastructure in the concerned areas makes the *ojhas* more important than they would be in a context where quality of health care is available and accessible. It may be added here that once a woman or a man is identified as responsible for any particular undesirable event, a series of other accusations may be made which reinforce and further establish claims about the suspicious conduct of the victim. Often extreme difference in religious practices, social behaviour, movement any novel ritual practice, etc. are themselves read as signs of witchcraft and may be treated as evidence to support the labelling.

4.7 JEALOUSY, ANIMOSITY AND CONFLICT

Often, inconsequential or random events such as repeated bad dreams, death on account of an undiagnosed illness a few days after a feast offered by the victim or a visit by the victim or, indeed, an altercation with the victim seem to trigger accusations, especially where pre-existing conflict, tension, animosity or jealousy is evident. The accusations of witchcraft enable the instigator to resolve such conflicts through different ways with no opposition or debate. This accusation may be intentionally orchestrated in some cases; in others, certain

peculiar mishaps feed into existing tensions, leading to blaming the victim, who was accidentally found in proximity to the person or place where such mishaps took place. That is to say, the case studies indicate that witch accusations are sometimes used to settle scores, and at other times it appears that belief in superstition fuels suspicion against someone with whom animosity in the broadest sense already exists. In one case, the perpetrator's ailing sister would often see the victim in her dreams, leading her to suspect the victim of being a witch. There is also an instance where the victim had verbally abused and cursed the instigator's daughter; later, when the young girl happened to get wounded and contracted an infection, the victim was blamed although the victim herself explained the targeting as an excuse to deny her wages. Although jealousy appears to be at play the victim, despite being a woman, had inherited land from her father, and her husband had grown vegetables on the instigator's land without permission. Similarly, the 25-year-old victim appeared to have been targeted because she argued with the perpetrators and tried to restrict the entry of the miscreant and she was finally molested and killed. In another case a 21 years old boy who was a secretary of Block ABSU and a 3rd year degree student was targeted because he tried to make aware the people in connection with the social prejudices prevalent in his localities. He has also developed his economic condition and encouraged the local youths to work for their society. In another case the victim's sons and daughters were a little bit advance in their studies and were praised by all teachers and neighbouring village and victim also did not have close proximity with the villagers was the factor of being jealous with the neighbours and finally he was blamed and killed.

4.8 MATERIAL AND ECONOMIC REASONS

In two-thirds of the case studies, it is possible to identify factors that may have formed a material basis for a conflict between the perpetrator and the victim, more often between the families of the two. It is striking that in these cases, disputes over land, intentions to grab land or houses, attempts to offset legitimate claims to property, jealousy over the prosperity or personality, popularity, of the victim's family due to their economic entrepreneurship or holding more property due to circumstances such as inheritance, failure to establish control over the victim or her family (socially as well as economically), jealousy over the victim's strong marital bonds or possibility of acquiring inheritance through a second marriage caused discord and animosity, leading to the targeting of the victims and their families. In 12 out of 41 cases, there was property dispute or conflict over material wealth within the context of a

familial relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. There is yet another set of cases where jealousy over other forms of prosperity in familial bonds and relationships led to victimization. Attempts to avoid payments or sharing of income and neighbours lay behind victimization in some cases. To avoid rightful payments to the victim, the instigators orchestrated the accusation of witchcraft to get rid of the victim.

4.9 NON-CONFORMITY, DIFFERENCE AND TRANSGRESSION

The personality of the victim, particularly his/her assertiveness and characteristics that set him/her apart as different, also become a reason for labelling. In a few cases, the victim's outspoken and assertive behaviour evoked suspicion within the community which fuelled the targeting. In one case, the victim was labelled a witch because she was vocal, articulate and assertive in the village community, and continued to demand justice for her sister's murder. An outspoken woman who challenges, questions or demands, rather than accepts male dominance, or the way things are, tends to get silenced through witch hunting. There are cases where the primary reason behind victimization was either differences in ritual practices or failure to participate in ritual observation. In six cases, the victims' main problem was that they had no regular touch with the villagers or the victims' avoided the normal attachment with either neighbours or the villagers. As stated by the victim's sons or daughters, that they did not prefer the attitudes, values and justification of the villagers and that was the reason they avoided the close proximities with them. Moreover, the uncommon behaviour like looking the people in queerly look, abnormal movement at deep night, visiting the burial ground at night are considered by the villagers as main characters of a witch. Some victims adopted rituals of different sects even though they belonged to the same religion as the rest of the community. In one case, the victim started following tantric cult which was quite absurd for villagers which developed tensions and doubt within the community members. The community members later developed suspect on the victim. Moreover, certain words used as curse during the course of verbal tussle were used by the instigators to ascertain someone as witch. There are four nos. of such victims who were murdered by the conspirators on the spot. These words though did not have genuine value, yet it gave them a scope to take an advantage against the victims. Even the free behaviour or intermingling with the out caste member on the part of a woman was considered as transgression.

4.10 SOCIAL FACTORS

Social factors are those factors which compels the villagers to look into the matters in their own way. It is observed that the villagers under our survey did not have much more contact with other communities. Most the members did not have any geographical ideas regarding their district. Due to lack of education the people of the surveyed villages were too traditional in nature. Societies were conservative and the people strictly followed their traditions. Role of the traditional village administrative body was very strong and any dispute of the society was controlled by the society itself. Therefore, chances of such incidents like witch hunting and other such incidents of social prejudices took place very frequently. Another important social factor was that any type diseases occurred within the village was defined as either the wrath of evil spirits or the act of medicine man like *Ojhas*, *Baidhyas* or black magician whom they termed as 'Daina or Daini'. Death of a person or severity of any disease is always justified as the harmful act of witch. Due to lack of worldview, people justified all social activities in their own way. So called superstition, orthodox social value, social grouping etc. plays a dominant role in rural society.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. RESPONSES OF VARIOUS AGENCIEES/AUTHORITIES,TO VICTIMS OF WITCH HUNTING

This chapter takes stock of the responses towards the victim from the nuclear family, the joint family, the community/ neighbours, the local authorities and the police. These categories are the ones that commonly recur in the case studies. The nuclear family refers to the members of the same household unit, whereas the joint family includes relatives beyond the household unit, such as the married and unmarried brothers and sisters from the parents' extended family and the relatives by marriage. The category of the community is inclusive of neighbours and village residents who reside in the same village unit as the victim. The local authorities for purposes of this study include state and non-state bodies that exercise leadership, wield a measure of authority and command respect within the community. They include local governance bodies like the Panchayat/VCDC, Village Defence Party (VDP) and woman's welfare organizations like the Assam Mahila Samata Society (AMSS) as well as the All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) that is active in these three districts. The last category is that of the police and the legal system. The cases studies reflect that the immediate family of victims more often than not supports them.

5.1 RESPONSES OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

Nuclear family is the basic platform of an individual which gives all possible helps to a person while he or she falls in peril. It gives identity to an individual. In our study it is found that in all cases, the nuclear family provided all possible helps to protect the victim during and after the victimization. Protection here refers to the family giving company at any moments as and when the victim requires the help in resisting and shielding him or her from the violence, and often getting attacked themselves. In some cases the immediate family member was unable to help the victim, despite their support for him or her, on account of not being available at the time of incident or in some cases the instigators took opportunity in a lonely state. There is a case where the victim was murdered on the way back from evening market and nobody came to know the incident. In another incident victim was murdered when he was went to his paddy field. There are also cases where even though the entire family

supported the victim, some were not present at the time of attack. In one case the victim was alone and he got no help from anyone. In four to five cases, the victims were called by the villagers in their community ground beaten mercilessly by one to all, though family members tried to protect the victims, practically it was not possible rather they were also tortured and compelled to leave the site. In some cases the family members were threatened by the instigators. In one case, the victim's husband was dead and her adopted son was not around when the attack occurred. In another case, the victim's husband was caught unawares by the sudden murderous attack and killed along with her.

5.2 ACTION OF THE EXTENDED FAMILY

Role of extended family is an important indicator in the study of witch hunting. But data collected so far on the response or role of extended family is not adequate in all case studies. Therefore the available information does not indicate the actual response of an extended family. In almost all these cases, the perpetrators were related to the victim in different ways. There are a few cases where the extended family came forward to help the victims, offering them shelter and protection after the victimization or murder of the victim. In most of the case the extended family refrained from helping the victim due to threats or other social obligations from the instigators. Therefore, we may see common opposing of the extended family in this connection.

5.3 ACTION OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND ROLE PLAYED BY THE STATE ACTORS

It was attempted to find out the role of the authorities during or after the incidents of witch hunt. It is observed that in most cases of witch hunting the main instigators were either the family relatives or the villagers where they were the active members. Therefore in a good number of cases incidents were not being informed to the Govt. authorities for taking appropriate and legal steps that led the easy escape of the culprits. In some cases a mutual compromise was undertaken between the victim's family and the instigators or perpetrators or threatening was given to the victim's family. That is why such cases were not being registered in the police stations. In our observation it was found that village administrative body what is traditional in nature took dominant steps in subsiding and normalizing of such an important social evils. The table given bellow gives an idea of the role played by the authorities. Here authorities are classified in two categories like non-state actors and state

actors. Non-state actors are the villagers, social organizations such as club, students' organizations, Mahila Samittee, All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) that is active in these three districts. Village Administrative body and state actors are police, district administration and Legal Authorities etc. Details of the role played by non-state actors and state actors are shown in the table given below-

No. Case	Response of non-state actors	Role played by state actors
Case No-1	This incident was informed by the family members though they were threatened by the villagers. Villagers played opposite role.	Police registered a case under IPC 447, 325, 427, 507, and 302. Arrested the accused and sent to jail.
Case No-2	Villagers did not play any role rather tried to threaten the victim's family. It was ABSU and ABWWAF and family members who filed case against the instigators.	Police registered a case under IPC 325, 427, 507, and 302. and arrested the culprits.
Case No-3	Villagers helped the family in filing case. Neighbours were involved in the case.	Police registered a case under IPC 174, 325,324 and arrested almost 30 culprits and sent them to jail..
Case No-4	Villagers did not help the victim's family. Victims relative, brother-in-law and ABWWF helped the family. They filed a case against the instigators.	Police registered a case under IPC U/S 120(B), 448, 302, 427, 307, 324 and took stern action to nab the culprit. Arrested twenty eight culprits.
Case No-5	Some people of the village came forward to help the victim's family though nobody was alive out of two members. ABSU took necessary initiative including filing case.	Police registered a case under IPC U/S 120(B), 302,201 and 506 and arrested twelve culprits.
Case No-6	Villagers did not response well. Relatives, NGO, ABSU, and other organisation extended all kinds of support like financial, medical and legal.	A case was registered in local police-out post under IPC U/S 324, 307, 302, and 447.
Case No-7	Instigators were victim's neighbours.	Police registered a case under

	Villagers did nothing in this connection. Family members were quite supportive with the victim. ABSU, ABWWF helped a lot.	IPCU/S 120(B), 392,201, 506,302, 34 and nabbed the culprits.
Case No-8	FIR was lodged by the son of the victim. No role played by the villagers or any other organisations.	Police registered a case under IPC U/S 302, 201 and 506 against the instigators and arrested twelve villagers including relatives of the victim and sent to jail.
Case No-9	No role played by the villagers. A social organisation took initiative and informed the police.	A case was registered under, IPC U/S 302, 325, 506, 447 and arrested twenty villagers and sent to jail.
Case No-10	No role played by the community members. When the victim was not seen in the house for days together, then victim's relative informed the incidents to students' organisation (ABSU) and they finally proceeded to police.	A case was registered under IPC U/S 302, 201 and 506 and arrested eighteen accuse and sent to jail.
Case No-11	No role played by the villagers or any other organisation. Victim's son somehow escaped from the incident and informed the police.	Police recorded the case but nobody was arrested or caught for interrogation.
Case No-12	Victim's wife somehow escaped from the incident and later with the help of her well wisher from nearby locality, victim's wife informed the police. The villagers did not cooperate with her.	Police registered the case and took initiative to nab the wrong doers. Six persons were arrested U/S of IPC 302, 325 506, in this connection.
Case No-13	No role played by the villagers or any other organisation rather the victim's family members were threatened by the instigators.	No role played by the state authorities. Police did not come and investigate the matter.
Case No-14	No complain was made from the villagers or other organisations to the state authority.	Police did not play any role in this connection as nobody took

	Villagers forced the victim's family that they would have to vacate the place if they would like to go for further action.	initiative to lodge complain against the brutality of the incident.
District: Baksa Case No-15	No role played by any organisation, since the relatives of the victim's was involved in the incident. Villagers were not concern on that matter.	Police played no role in this connection.
Case No-16	No role played by the villagers rather they tried to keep the incident secret.	Police somehow came to know the incident and arrested twenty four accused and sent to jail.
Case No-17	Victim was supposed to kill by the villagers. They were in search of opportunity, but failed due police intervention.	Police came to know the development and visited the village and tried to compromise the situation, but failed. Finally when situation got worsen police arrested the village chief i.e. president and secretary along with other members.

Case No-18	No role played by the non state actors rather they discouraged the people who attempted to do something.	No role played by the police. Because no complain or information was given to the police or any other state functionaries.
Case No-19	No role played by the villagers rather tried to keep secret from others.	No role played by the Govt authority as no information was provided by any one.
Case No-20	No role played by the villagers or any other social organisation. And they seemed to involved in the entire incident.	Police or district authority took no responsibility in this connection.

Case No-21	No role played by the villagers. Because the incident was given the deadly shape by the villagers. Relative and family members lodged complain to police.	Police took initiative to nab the culprit and registered a case under IPC 302, 325 506 and arrested twelve culprits and them to jail.
Case No-22	Villagers took no responsibility of the incident and they took active role in killing the victim mercilessly. Only the family members took active role including protection though they were physically tortured. A case was filed in the police out-post.	Police registered the case and conducted search operation to nab the culprit and arrested seven accused in connection with the case.
Case No-23	Villagers did not play any role rather remain silent. Even if though the family members wanted to lodge complain to police, they were threatened. As stated the incident was given brutal step by the extremist.	Police played no role. Matter was kept secret by the local people. Moreover the area was too complicated to reach.
Case No-24	Villagers took no responsibility and remained normal after the incident as stated by the family members of the victim. Complain was lodged by the family members.	Police registered the case under IPC 302, 325, 506, 447 and arrested fifteen individuals whom were finally sent to jail.
Case No-25	No role played by the villagers regarding the incident. As stated the whole villagers were involved in the incident.	Police did not play any role to nab the instigators or culprits. They were not informed.
Case No-26	No role played by the villagers. The villagers were involved with the incident. Other family members were threatened and tortured physically	Police played no role in this matter.
Case No-27	No role played by the villagers. They were the main instigators of the incident. They threatened the victim's family members forced not to complain to police.	Police played no role as they were not informed by the victim's family or villagers.

Case No-28	No organisation or village members reported the incident to police. Family members of the victim were threatened. But later they complained the police	Police played no role, though were informed. Police visited the village but arrest was made even for interrogation.
Case No-29	As stated some unknown miscreant killed the victim at night. Villagers played no role.	Police registered a case under IPC 302, 506 and arrested ten individuals in this connection.
Case No-30	No role played by the villagers and they were seemed to involved in the incident.	No case was registered and police took no initiative.
Case No-31	No role played by the villagers. Family members were threatened by some members of the village.	Police did not play any role in this regard.
Case No-32	No role played by the villagers rather they tried to change the environment. The family members lodged complain with the help of other social organisation.	Police got the information after one month. They tried to nab the miscreant and arrested six nos. of villagers for interrogation but could not find out the clue due to non availability of sources.
Case No-33	No role played by the villagers.	Police did not take any action due to non-receive of complain from the family of the victim.
Case No-34	No role played by the villagers.	Police did not take any action due to non-receive of complain from the family of the victim.
Case No-35	No role played by the villagers. Family members were threatened by some members of the village. Even then they lodged complain to police.	Police conducted search operation. They arrested thirteen instigators and registered a case under IPC 302, 325 506.

Case No-36	No role played by the villagers. Family members later lodge complain against the miscreant who were hailed from the same village	Police registered a case under IPC 303, 325 506 and arrested ten members from the same village and sent to jail.
Case No-36	Villagers did not know the incident as it was done by the unknown miscreants from outside of the village. Two days later some of the villagers came to know the incident. Even the family members were not aware of the incident.	Police received complain from two members of the village and registered the case under IPC 302, 325 506 and later police arrested twenty members from the village and sent them to jail.
Case No-37	Villagers played no role. After the incident they remained silent. Family members of the victim fled away.	After one week a case was registered under IPC 302, 506, 447 in Runikhata police station and police arrested ten individuals involved with the incidents.
Case No-38	Villagers lodge complain and gave protection to the family members of the victims.	Police registered a case IPC 302, 506, 447 and arrested six individuals and sent to jail.
Case No-39	Villagers did not cooperate with the police and no information was provided.	Police was helpless because the local people did not provide any vital clues in this connection.
Case No-40	No role played by the villagers since the entire village members were involved with case as stated by the sons of the victim. Victims family lodged written complain to nearby police station.	Police took immediate initiative and conducted search operation and arrested sixteen instigators and registered a case under IPC 302, 506, 427 and 507.
Case No-41	No role played by the villagers since the	Police was helpless because

	entire village members were involved with case as stated by the sons of the victim. They made forceful compromise with the victim's family.	the local people did not provide any vital clues in this connection.
--	---	--

CHAPTER-SIX

6. WITCH HUNTING AND SOCIAL PREJUDICES

In this chapter we define the so called social concept what we term as prejudice. Prejudice is a dangerous social evil that compels an individual in shaping certain beliefs, values or morals in his own way and subsequently it influences other members of a society to which he belongs to. It becomes detrimental for the society after putting its roots in the given society. Allport (1979) defines prejudice as an antipathy one has or a tendency to avoid the other, based on the other person's group. For Allport, prejudice is a cognitive or psychological phenomenon: Prejudice is thus ultimately a problem of personality formation and development; no two cases of prejudice are precisely the same. No individual would mirror his (or her) group's attitude unless he (or she) had a personal need, or personal habit, that leads him (or her) to do so.

One of the difficulties of discussing prejudice is the conceptual overlap between terms (e.g., xenophobia conflates with racial or ethnic prejudice; ethnocentrism might refer to any people group, such as ethnic groups, and not just nations). At the root of our understanding of prejudice is the very goal of "tolerance." In fact, the notion of tolerance for diversity may be limited: It is often treated merely as "the application of the same moral principles and rules, caring and empathy, and feelings of connections to human beings of other perceived groups" (Baldwin & Hecht, 1995, p. 65). That is, it is similar to Bennett's (1993) notion of acceptance, of respect for difference, though that respect sometimes (a) occurs at a difference and (b) sometimes exists in behavioural form only, but is not internalized. Communication of tolerance is a worthwhile pursuit in our behaviour and research; however, we argue that we can go beyond tolerance to appreciation-even to the behavioural and attitudinal integration of elements of the other culture (Hecht & Baldwin, 1998). Thus prejudice is an unjustified or incorrect attitude (usually negative) towards an individual based solely on the individual's membership of a social group. Prejudice can also refer to unfounded beliefs and it may include "any unreasonable attitude that is unusually resistant to rational influence". The word is often used to refer to preconceived, usually unfavourable feelings towards people or a person, or a certain ideas, beliefs, values, social class, disability, age, religion etc.

The belief in the practice of witch craft has a deeper connection with Assam's spiritual history. As since 3000 BC all diseases and mental disorders were treated as being caused by

uncanny super naturals, some of which are supposed to dwell every nearby human habitat in the countryside. Even certain areas of Darrang, erstwhile Kamrup, Mayong, known to be the land of witchery and natural paradise and is situated in Assam. People of erstwhile Kamrup, Dararrang and Mayong believed to worship the planet of MAYA or BYADHI and some stones. It is also believed that planet bestowed its devotees the art of black magic and sorcery. Tales and stories describe its connection with astrology and practice of witchcraft. Similarly after centuries past in rural Assam the *Ojha, Bej, Deodhani, Fortune Teller, Traditional Healer*, are revered for their skills at countering black magic. According to folktales, the medicine man learns his skills which include identifying and curing diseases, but witches are said to be born with their powers. In patriarchal communities this is a convenient distinction. It is rare to find a single society in Assam where society is devoid of such practices. Interestingly Assam has a number of cases of both male and female witch hunt. It is more commonly seen among the tribals and lower castes people where lack of education, health and hygiene and economic backwardness are prominently prevalent. In rural areas are these scenery are the important essence of the society. Societies are bound by their customs and traditional values and they have their own explanation. Anything that happens in a society is justified as per their prevailing rules and everybody has to abide by that rules or it is mandatory for each and every individuals of a society. If someone attempts to counter that rule he or she is either punished or excommunicated. In certain cases he or she is compelled to vacate the place of residence, otherwise he or she has to face severe punishment inclusive of dead penalty. With hunting is an execution of such severe penalty prevalent in Assam. Most of illiterate or even literate rural people do not like to admit witch hunting as social evils or prejudice, rather some literate people seems to act as catalyst. They make no comments but play an unseen role. These are the great difficulties that help illiterate people in taking active part in such cases.

Table No-13

Attitudes/Views of the Villagers on the Existence of Witch

Views on our Questions	Yes	No Comment
Belief on Witch is a social evil/prejudice	34	0
It (Witch) is prevalent in our society that harms our people.	190	0
Earlier it was prevalent and now it is not available	42	0
No comment.	0	39

Here we have attempted to give an empirical notion or perception on prejudice prevails among the tribal people of Assam, who are living purely in rural set up with meager infrastructure facilities. Accordingly we have surveyed thirty seven revenue villages in three districts to have an idea on their attitude in respect of witch or prevalence of witch in their societies. We conducted the study among 305 respondents to know their views/attitudes on their belief in Witch. Accordingly we had prepared four simple questions to be asked to our selected literate and illiterate respondents of different villages under our survey. Our data shows that out of 305 respondents 34 respondents gave their views against the belief i.e. they do not believe the existence of witch. According to them it is nothing but a kind of social evil or prejudice. Some people having their vested interest take an opportunity by labeling someone as black magician or Daini. Out of 305 respondents 190 respondents views it as a fact. According to Rupen Basumatary a village member, “witch hunting is still prevalent in their societies and they (witch/daini) play a negative role in their societies. The members of daini have their own society which is led by a chief, who organize the society. A daini feels proud of their power. They like to experiment their capacity among the innocent member of their village. They perform various typical rituals to gain supernatural power whereby they can do harm of the people.” A daini usually goes to cemetery at midnight and perform certain rites in order to gain extra ordinary power. As stated by a villager, that a *daini* performs her tantric puja at mid night and she wears no single dress. People therefore believe it as absurd character which may cause harm to the common rural people of Assam. Data also reflects that there a section of people (42) who believed the prevalence of witch in earlier days; but now according to them there is no such black magicians or witch, daini to do harm of the common people living in rural areas. On the other hand 39 nos. of respondents have given no comments. They are quite confused over this issue. They have heard the role or impact of daini in some villages but practically they have not seen such incident in around their localities. But they can’t rigidly state any positive or negative comments over this social evil. Now from the above analysis it can be concluded that though it is social prejudice yet majority of the people residing in rural set up do not like to admit that the concept of witch or daini is wrong or a social evil. Most of them even today believe the prevalence of witch, black magician or daini in their society

CHAPTER SEVEN

7. LAW AND ITS USES

We first report on the finding of the study which address the social, economic and political context within which witch hunting occurred. Important finding is that both men and women were targeted as witch, though normally in other studies women are reflected as the prime target. In our 41 case studies, the primary victims were both men and women. Of the 56 victims found so far in our case studies 35 were male and 21 were female. We also found evidence of women being instigators of witch-hunting although men outnumber them in this respect. Contrary to the received wisdom, widows and single women were not the only ones vulnerable to witch-hunting. Majority of the victims in the case studies belonged to the age group of 40 to 60 years, showing middle-aged, married men and women to be the most vulnerable to witch-hunting, although there are a few instances of younger women being labelled as witches as well. In fact witch-hunting appeared to be a prevalent form of violence used to target women fully ensconced in their marital homes. The instigator(s) of the violence are generally related to the victim through kinship, community or neighbourhood ties. A most significant finding of our study is that a very large segment of the perpetrators are related to the victims through ties of marriage. Although allegations about use of “supernatural” powers are invariably present in cases of witch-hunting, land, property, jealousy, and other common sources of tension between social intimates were found in a large number of cases. Counter narratives in every case make for a more complex understanding of witch hunting than what the framework of “superstition” suggests. As the instigators are persons who are proximate to the victim, the plausibility of conflicts, tensions and jealousies between them is reinforced. While the Ojha, Bej or traditional Kabiraj appears in majority (not all) of the cases, the tensions and conflicts in many cases exist prior to the entry of the Ojha, suggesting that they tend to confirm rather than initiate the accusation. We found that marriage and the unstinting support of the immediate family, especially the husband, offers little immunity against targeting. Rather, as stated above, targeting often results in victimisation of the immediate family members of an individual. While the sample size is not sufficient to say that married men or women are always more vulnerable, the need to think about witch-hunting as one among many forms of violence which surface in contexts of family disputes and stresses is clearly indicated in our study. In light of the above it was not surprising to find that cases of targeting persons, mostly women, as witches occur across all sections of society and the

patterns in this regard reflected the socio-economic and infrastructural composition of the sites of the study. No significant inter-caste/inter-community dynamics could be discerned in our case studies. Since the study was carried among the Boro community who were homogenous in their residential setup. Thus the position in social hierarchy in itself does not appear to directly shape vulnerability although this may be so in regions where such dynamics play a significant part in everyday relations of people. The economic condition of the victims also does not appear to have a significant bearing on the vulnerability to being targeted, as the economic status of the victims' households was found to vary along the scale of adequate to marginal, some with land and some without land, and varied degrees of access to other resources such as animals, availability of modern gadgets and built houses. While interpersonal jealousies, conflicts and tensions arise in a context of close proximity, it seems that witch-hunting is also linked with a set of broader political and economic context which shapes people's lives. The high rates of lack of formal education among the victims and the perpetrators and the large number of health issues which surfaced as pretexts for labelling women as witches indicate the links that witch hunting has with issues central to governance and development. The areas from where the case studies were collected suffer from acute neglect and dismal administration that has manifested in poor healthcare, sanitation and education, with large sections of the population being below the poverty line. Illness, deaths and tragedies that cannot be explained, particularly in the context where education, health facilities, and sanitation are lacking, tend to get rationalised through witch-blaming. The structural context within which victimization took place reflect governance failure as well as absence of rule of law, which create the necessary impunity for targeting and victimization.

7.1 INTERFACES WITH THE LAW

It is significant to observe that a great number of cases are never taken to the police. Out of the 41 cases 46.34% cases never approached the police. Of the remaining cases (22) in which the police was approached, more than half had been dismissed due to factors such as lack of proper investigation, absence of witnesses, minor punishments to the perpetrators, compromise between the victim and the perpetrator, etc. Due to lack of proper witness most of culprit or instigators got bail after three months of jail. Our data reveals that 41nos. of cases were associated with violence and brutal murder. FIRs were involved physical violence, hurt and murder in addition to other offences, such as theft, destruction of property, trespass and humiliation. It is of course essential for us for understanding what kinds of cases, and indeed, offences, eventually get prosecuted. The study of trial court judgments pertaining to

witch-hunting is strongly recommended as an area of further research to gain insights into which complaints reported to the police enter the judicial system, and which never do. Our case studies also reveal that a majority of the cases of witch-hunting either do not reach the police or are dismissed due to a variety of reasons including shoddy investigations. The study also looked at the laws and the provisions that are most frequently used and whether they provide redress that is commensurate with the nature and type of victimisation. In fact, the data establishes that special laws are rarely, if ever, used alone, and almost never at the preliminary stages to prevent escalation of violence. Our data from police records show that most of the cases were registered under provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), with one or more provisions of the special law. The majority of the provisions of the IPC invoked in the records are related to beating, hurt, trespass, theft, murder, conspiracy etc. with both bailable and non-bailable offences being invoked.

CHAPTER-EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Through this study, we have sought to understand the various dimensions of witch hunting practices in Assam along with prejudices jumbled with this evil practice of the society. There is deep rooted traditional belief system in rural areas of Assam that works to designate someone as witch which in the long run are connected to witch-hunting cases. It is our polite attempt to draw attention to the need for policy solutions to be rooted in evidence.

The findings show that both men and women are equally targeted in our present study, though females are found more as targets in other studies carried out by some organisations. Females, as a whole, are considered as easier targets for instigators due to being viewed as weaker than men physically, spiritually, and morally. Both men and women above 30 years, and more specifically, in the 40-60 age groups are the most vulnerable to being targeted as witches. Since the large majority of the victims of this study were married, we know that marriage and the unstinting support of nuclear family, especially the husband, offers little immunity against targeting.

The economic condition of the victims also does not appear to have a significant bearing on the vulnerability to being targeted, as the economic status of their households vary along the scale of adequate to marginal, some with land and some without land; what appears to have a more decisive bearing on vulnerability. It is the development status, infrastructural deficiencies of the regions where witch hunting is reported. The areas where the fieldwork was carried out suffer from acute neglect and dismal administration that has manifested in poor health care, sanitation and education, and lack of proper road communication. The lack of formal education of the victims or high casualty on account of routine illnesses and deaths appear to be a consequence of the poverty and governance failure. The instigators in our data are persons who are proximate to the victim, reinforcing tenacity of conflicts, tensions and jealousies between them, as is evident through the data gathered in the field. While the *Ojha* appears in 12 out of 41 case studies, the tensions and conflicts in many cases exist prior to the entry of the *Ojha*, suggesting that they tend to confirm rather than initiate the accusation. Many of the motivations that result in ‘witch’ accusations may appear trivial but assume alarming proportions in contexts of structural neglect, deprivations and impunity that enable

accusations to result in victimization, without fear of consequences illness, deaths and tragedies that cannot be explained, particularly in the context where education, health facilities, and sanitation are lacking, tend to get rationalized through explanations of witchery. Inter-personal jealousies, conflicts and tensions also tend to get resolved through accusations, which in one stroke dehumanize the victim in the eyes of others and open the way of extreme humiliation and violence to be perpetrated without any social inhibition. Besides this, differences in social behaviour, (what was explained by some villagers), performances of uncommon rituals in a context of close association, also gives birth suspicion of witchcraft. Data shows the evidence of women *Ojha*, who cured the ailed animals and sometimes the ailed individual of the society. She was accepted by the villagers as a wise, friendly and beneficial for them. She was treated nicely and called by villagers at any circumstances. She was popular among all. But her popularity was not peacefully digested by her friends and some co-practitioners. So they were in search of doing harm to her. And unfortunately once a village woman who was suffering from severe jaundice took traditional treatment from her; but did not get cured rather died after a few days. This was defined by her co-practitioners (who were females) as the evil work of the village *Ojha*. The villagers did not give her scope to prove her innocence and suspected her as witch as dictated by her co-practitioners and she was called in a village meeting forced her to acknowledge the guilt committed by her. She had refused since she did not do any mistake. But people were rigid to their suspect and punished her by beating mercilessly and died after a few moments. Thus there is a wide spectrum of victimization evident beginning with verbal taunts and slurs, through local terms denoting 'witch' as well as other abuses aimed at demonizing and isolating the victim. It is thus observed that due to lack of awareness and narrow social touch people are more prone to have blind social belief or prejudice. Therefore if a person is labeled as *daini* then he or she has to pass a pathetic life with accusation, physical and mental torture, social isolation or forceful displacement. Regardless of where the victims may be, in their village or displaced, they become impoverished and live in fear. The consequences upon the family are equally grim, with entire nuclear families being harassed by the dislocation, isolation and loss of property and livelihood. With regard to the responses of institutions and actors closest to the site of victimization, it came to our observation that the nuclear family is most protective, and consequently member of such families are victimized or murdered collaterally. The responses of the extended family vary, because some of them were the doubtful instigators in some cases. But it is not for all cases, because data shows that in many cases when the victim was killed by labeling as witch, members of the extended family

sheltered them. The neighbours appear to be hostile, either as instigators themselves, or as supportive of instigators, and as passive onlookers in a few cases. The local leaders, some social organization, women body etc. played significant and effective role in some cases. The women's bodies particularly stand out as the main lifeline for the victims' protection, redress and restoration of dignity. They deploy dialogue, negotiation and legal action, drawing in multiple actors to address the ostracism, expulsion and victimization, to safeguard the victims' interests. The police, despite being the sole agency fully mandated by law to take pre-emptive action and provide redress, demonstrate neither initiative nor diligence in protecting the victims; some cases indicate that the police intervened only after they were pulled in by local authorities. The data from 13 cases registered with the police in Chirang, when read with the data from the 41 case studies, reveals a lot about the law. The data from the case studies show that entire (41) cases involved murder, with murder of twelve collateral victims of the main victim's family. Out of this 19 case were not reported to police due to threatening or non-availability of actual complainant. The police also did not try to enquire the incident even though they came to know the matter quite a month later. The inference that the police are not likely to take pre-emptive action or offer redress for what are perceived as lesser forms of victimization is a compelling one. Police intervention is apparent only in cases involving high thresholds of violence and murder. The comparative reading of the data from case studies and police records also reveals protection gaps in the legal framework.

In view of the complex factors that trigger accusations, and additionally, the underlying structural conditions that enable victimization with impunity, it is necessary to frame witch hunting in terms that are not limited to superstition, *Ojhas* and witchcraft. Preventive responses too cannot be limited to demystifying superstitions but must go beyond that to correct underlying deprivation and pin accountability for structural failures and lapses. The capacity to transcend one's belief systems is possible not just through awareness and information, but calls for parallel material changes that bring about accessible and quality education, health care, sanitation, drinking water and a responsible administration. It is necessary that legislative frameworks are not exclusive to witchcraft practices, to ensure that the legal recourse is inclusive of and available to all who are victimized. Similarly legal remedies need to address all kinds of victimization witnessed in witch hunting (and other kinds of community targeting) regardless of the motives that is to say, such remedies should not hinge upon evidence of accusations of witch craft to ensure that whatever be the motive, the law is able to protect against the continuing spiral of victimization; that impunity is not

indirectly sanctioned when similar victimization occurs without the element of witch' accusations. Criminal redress for prevention and protection can only be one part of a broader policy. The data from police records from Chirang and Baksa shows that the police intervention under the Indian Penal Code (1860) occurs only for serious crimes, most likely for murder and attempt to murder. They are not seen to take sincere measure if they are given regular pressure. Very often they try to defy the case lodged by a poor complainant. They are very slow in their action and seen to be managed.

Moreover, in addition to the police, other agencies at the community level need to be involved. The value of social processes, particularly those led by women's groups are significant. The various non-political bodies like NGO's, Mahila Samitties, Mahila Samata body, Mahila Mandals, ABWWF, ABSU and SHG must be mandated and mobilized to play a role. The local VCDC, VDP can be mobilized as well, through a combination of rewards and penalties that hold them accountable for witch hunting in their jurisdiction. Schemes and programmes having responsibility upon the local administration and governing bodies for restoring the victim's socio-economic status in his/her village, including through compensation, are vital parts of redress. Where necessary, victims must be assisted with relocation and support to rebuild their life and livelihood elsewhere.

The practice of witch hunting is a social evil. Such practices need to be controlled and eliminated from the society. The biggest problem in the way of achieving it is the concept of superstition which has been prevailing in the society for ages and passed on to successive generations. As it can be seen, such practices are more in existence in rural areas which do not have the basic infrastructure and are struggling to survive. They are bound with ignorance, fear and vested interests. The people of these areas are suspicious in nature. Narrow feeling, rude logic is their prime asset, which create social chaos. Such practices need to be annihilated at the source and the best possible way for such change in outlook and perspective is education. Education and awareness is the best tool to elimination of such evils. The validity of traditional beliefs and cultural systems in these modern times need to be argued. The law needs to be put into operation at the earliest and the provisions and proposals must be implemented in the most sincere manner with the best efforts. Mere existence of a good law without its effective execution is a futile law. Thus, the need of the hour is to mobilize the society and deal with the social evil to protect the vulnerable sections of the society. Although it is an established fact that witch hunting is a social evil and it can be

curbed by promulgating laws, yet practically it is seen to connive by our law enforcing authority. That is the reason of increasing such incidents day by day. In remote rural areas there are numbers such victimizations which are not possible to unearth due to lack of timely information and cooperation of the people. Most of the societies do not like to share the problems and if some wants to do so he is threatened. In some cases the instigators compel the victims to make compromise. Police or other state actors do not like to take stern action against the perpetrators. After analyzing all the factors we have deduced a few most important factors that play a role in those areas and these factors are discussed below.-

LACK OF EDUCATION

Illiteracy is one of the most effective parameter, and generates many unsafe conditions. Such unsafe conditions combined with some external threats mainly superstitions, which causes different problems to the rural community especially tribal community and other backward people in which the practice of witch hunt is prevalent. Illiteracy also prohibits the overall progress of the community. So, practical education to all members of the vulnerable community including women is necessary for overall development of the community. Mere providing the facilities can't solve the purpose if proper monitoring and awareness campaign is not done time and again.

HEALTH CARE DEFICITS

In rural areas every year, many people die of malaria, diarrhoea, and jaundice etc. Due to the extreme ignorance of the administration, these people lack proper education, and is still today far from the reach of the modern idea. As the people of these areas are unaware of the modern ways of health and hygiene, various diseases including tuberculosis, cancer, cerebral malaria, typhoid, encephalopathy, encephalitis, meningitis, metabolic encephalopathy, jaundice etc. breaks out easily among them without their knowledge. And which is later linked in illogical way of treatment and finally leading to witchcraft and hunt. Lack of pure drinking water and so called unhealthy life styles of the people create lots of health problems which are normally defined as the act of black magician or with craft.

POVERTY

Poverty and violence travels hand in hand. It has been witnessed several time that extreme rainfall, epidemic leads to the death of a large numbers of people in the rural areas and every years number of such instances increases. And deaths of the people of these areas are always seen justifying as the evil deeds of witch or wrath of malevolent Gods or supernatural. Therefore, they organise community Puja every year to propitiate their traditional God. In their community Puja one who does not take part due to his or her poor economic condition or so he or she is later treated as *daini* or '*KalikaLagaManuh*'. This sections are always become the easy target of the villagers. The findings provide novel evidence on the role of income shocks in causing violent crime, and religious violence in particular.

CONSPIRACY

Finally conspiracy is an important factor which claims lots of incidents in these societies. No human society is free from the act of conspiracy. Studies carried out so far in different areas of the state, it shows that in majority of cases in Assam involvement of third party is witnessed branding witches, which initiates the hunts in order to confiscate property, mainly of the victim. Jealousy and family rivalry are also seen in these cases. If any motives of the neighbours can not fulfilled by their independent effort a third party is invited to handle the case and thereby they get success. This is almost common in Assam. Therefore the law enforcing authority should take stern step to identify the third party so that right punishment could be given to them.

ANNEXURE

CASE NO.-1

This incident took place in Sitalpur village of Baksa district which is a Boro community dominated village with total population 2356. The main occupation of the villagers is cultivation. Almost 86% percent of the households are having their cultivable land.

VICTIM

There were three victims and all of them were married males in the 50-60 age group. All of them had their sons and daughters. They belonged to Boro tribe and were from same village. And three of them became the target of the instigator in the same day. Three of them completed middle primary schooling and were member of the sports club. They practised agriculture as their main occupation and were also did fishing in their off times and earned supplementary income by selling fishes. They owned 7-10 bighas of cultivable land and 2.5 bigha of homestead land. Each of them had four mud plastered GI Sheet roofing houses and a compound with various fruit bearing trees, as well as cows, two bullocks (each). The spouses of the victims had their family looms.

INSTIGATOR

The instigators were the members of their village who had amicable relation with the victims.

VICTIMIZATION

The victims' and the perpetrator's families had a very amicable relationship. The incident occurred based on an illness of an individual who was sick for a week. He (the ailed person) was taking both traditional and modern treatment; but his health condition was becoming bed day by day and one day the ailed person saw a dream where he was witnessing the three persons of his village who were putting something in his campus. He then told his wife that I may die because some of his friends of his village had put something in their campus to kill him and mentioned the name of the victims. The very next day the village chief called the villagers along with the three who were already accused by the ailed man. They asked them whether they had done any wrong with the ailed man. As the victims were innocent, they could not say anything. But some relatives of the ailed person suspected them and planned to do something and meeting was over peacefully. After two days the ailed man took his last breath. This situation made the relatives of the diseased too angry and waited for opportunity. The villagers buried the dead body in their public burial ground. And at night of the same day the relatives of the diseased went to the house of these three persons whom were already suspected and called them saying that they had a discussion with them. As per their call they

came out from their house and met the instigators at one end of the village near a river. The instigators were ready with their sharp knives and dragged them one by one to a nearby jungle and stabbed them by their sharp knives and buried them there itself. The victims' family did not have any idea till the next day. On next day the family members of the victims began to search their father/ husband. They reported it to police and filed a case. Police came to the spot began their search operation. They employed sniffer dog to locate exactly what was the wrong. Police recovered the body of the slain victims on bank of the river and did the post-mortem. Police arrested more than thirty villagers and interrogated them to nab the actual culprit. They were came out on bail. After a week the actual culprit were caught by the ABSU and handed over to police. Police registered a case under IPC U/S 447, 507 and 302 and sent to Nalbari Jail.

ROLE OF FAMILY AND NEIGHBOURS

While the victims were suspected by the perpetrators, the matter was politely discussed with the victims' neighbours. Even after the meeting the same was discussed specially with the village chief and it was made lighten by all of them and gave them assurance that nothing would be happen. The spouses of the victims were afraid of and were cautious about the situation. But they did not get the opportunity to protect their husband. The widow of one of the victim lamented and said us about the tragedy. Neighbours did not show their interest over the problems faced by the victims' families.

ROLE OF THE AUTHORITIES

As stated above the police intervened on receiving a complaint from the victims' families. They held a meeting with the community and urged the people involved with the murder to surrender. Initially the community members did not cooperate and therefore they were arrested. The main instigators were caught by ABSU and handed over to police. Police registered a case under IPC U/S 447, 325, 427, 507 and 302 and sent to Nalbari Jail.

CASE NO-2

VICTIM

The victim was a married woman from the Boro community of Baksa district. She was 45 years old, with two sons and two daughters. She had received no formal education; at the time of her victimization she was a good weaver and knew typical design of Boro traditional garments. Her cloths had special demand in the market. Even she got numbers of orders.

INSTIGATORS

The instigators were her close relative and one distant relative from the victim's elder sister's marital family; some of them were also neighbours.

VICTIMIZATION

The incident occurred when the people were busy with Durga Puja. She was too busy during those days because of her huge orders. Her neighbours did not like her busy status. Though some of her neighbours called her for enjoying puja she refused. People therefore began to avoid her. She liked her works rather wasting time meaninglessly. One day her elder sister who is inhabitant of her nearby village invited her on account of puja.. In the mean time the elder Brother-in-Law of the victim was suffering from severe disease According to her elder sister's invitation she gave a visit and back to her house on the same day. Unfortunately the victim's elder Brother-in-Law died at night of the day of her visit. The news of the death reached the village and the women of her neighbours got a scope to blame her as 'Daini'. They began to abuse her physically and mentally. It became serious when they came to know that she was a daughter of an Ojha. One day she called by the villagers and forced her to confess the matter. But did say nothing and remained stand like a statue. There were some instigators from the nearby village and they began shouting she prostitute, she is Dine. The women folk began to beat her mercilessly and later the males also accompanied them. She died on the spot and some instigators cut her into small pieces and buried her inside the forest. Her husband and children were beaten badly when they tried to protect her. They even threatened victim's elder sister not create any problem against the community people. The next day the family members fled away from the village and they informed the matter to the member ABSU and ABWWF who lodged complain against brutality of killing of an innocent woman by branding as witch. Police arrested more than fifty accused male and female from different location of the district who were trying to keep away from the eye of police and registered a case under IPC U/S 302, 447, 325, 427, 506, 34 and sent them to jail.

ROLE OF FAMILY AND NEIGHBOURS

Her husband and children were very supportive of the victim. Her son approached the All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) and ABSU for help. The victim's married daughters provided the shelter after the incident. The neighbours on the other hand participated in the violations targeting the victim. Moreover they also instigated the neighbouring village for taking part. The hostile majority in the village threatened some people who attempted to help her, saying that they too would be banished from the village if they helped the victim. Later, with the help of ABWWF and ABSU the victim's family able to go to police and registered complain.

ROLE OF THE AUTHORITIES

The police was informed about the victimization but took rapid initiative when the victim's family with the help of ABWWF and ABSU registered a complaint. The police arrested numbers of instigators irrespective of male and females and lodged tough section of IPC and all of them sent to jail.

CASE NO-3

VICTIM

The victim was 55 years old married man with two sons and one daughter. He belonged to Boro tribe. He had completed his education up to fourth standard and was a well known Ojha of the locality. The name of his village was Koklabari that belongs to Jalah block of Baksa district. He was invited by many people of different villages for treatment of their child. In one word he was a child specialist of traditional medicine. He was being praised by many people for his accuracy of treatment. Though he practiced traditional medicine, basically his main occupation is agriculture. Practicing traditional medicine or helping people as *ojhawas* his hobby. He owned 13 bighas of cultivable land and 5.5 bighas of homestead land and one semi Pucca and three well finished bamboo houses. He also had a well, and a few nos. of hen, two bullocks, three pigs and three cows. Moreover he had one bi-cycle which was main transport.

INSTIGATORS

The main instigator was not known but the perpetrators were all community members.

VICTIMIZATION

As it is stated above that he had a popular personality what was not confined within his village, rather he got more respect in outside. He was frequently called by the neighbouring people for any kind of health related issue of their children. He had been rendering his service since last fifteen years in those areas and everybody knew him very well. His popularity was not easily born by some of his friends and neighbours. They were in search of the opportunity. They always tried to spread message against when they saw favourable situation; most of villagers or other people of neighbouring villages did not pay any importance rather they discouraged or scolded them. The negative force never stopped their mission and always putting their dangerous tentacles to harm the victim or Ojha. It was full monsoon season and most of the people were infected by common fever, malaria and jaundice etc. People took treatment both modern and traditional and some of them got

recovered. Unfortunately, a lady of 45 years old who had love once with the victim but married to someone of the same village fell sick. She was not cured for weeks together because she not given proper treatment. She was not shown to any doctor and her severity of disease became more fatal. She used to dream that the Ojha's (victim's) spirit was coming to kill her. She was spelling the Ojha's name all the time. When the Ojha came to her house to see her health condition as a well wisher, she loudly used to utter his name pointing to sky, see *Ojhas's* spirit was coming to kill me. Help me please, help me please. People present there started suspecting the Ojha and in the evening time he was summoned by some villagers (not all) who were basically his (victim's) enemy and was always trying to blame him now and then. He along with his two real friends came to meet them on the spot specified by the instigators. Of course he never thought that they would do harm to him, because he knew everyone and had causal relation also. When he reached their place they raised question relating to his spirit what was mentioned by the lady. He directly answered that it was false. He did not have such spirit. It was nothing but a conspiracy against him. He said that the lady was suffering from severe disease and should take her to doctor immediately. The instigators were angry with him and started beating by rods and sticks. His friends present there tried to protect him but they were also beaten mercilessly. They fled away from the spot and informed the other villagers. The villagers rushed to the spot and unfortunately they found Ojha's dead body. And thus he was killed.

ROLE OF THE FAMILY AND NEIGHBOUR

Being a well known personality, the victim was loved by almost all people except his neighbours and their relatives. His family members were quite supportive to him and they encouraged his hobby. They felt happy when people praised their father/husband/brother. Villagers supported the victim's family in aspect after the incident. They lodged case on behalf of the victim's family. They gave them mental courage and organised the funeral activities communally.

ROLE OF AUTHORITIES

As soon as police got the complain rushed to the village though it was located at twenty kilometres away from the town. Since the villagers were cooperative, police did not wait for a moment. They started their operation with the help of local people and arrested seventeen people from the same village and thirteen people from different nearby villages. A case was registered under IPC U/S 147, 325, 324, 302 and all the culprits were sent to jail.

CASE NO-4

VICTIM

The victim was a widowed woman in the 58 years old, with one son and three daughters. She belonged to the Boro tribe of Rangidara village of Jalah block of Baksa district. She had received no formal education. Her main occupation was cultivation and her only son did some small business side by side of his cultivation and daughters help their mother in agriculture and they remained busy in weaving. She had three family looms. They owned 9 bigha of cultivable land, three *kutchah* houses and three bi-cycles. They also had one fishery, two, two bullocks, two cows, four nos. pigs and more than twenty poultry.

INSTIGATORS

The main instigator was related to the victim by marriage. The other perpetrators were distant marital relatives or neighbours or community members.

VICTIMIZATION

The victim's husband's nephew had a seven-year-old daughter who often used to suffer from stomach aches. He suspected that the victim was responsible for his daughter's illness. He therefore called a meeting to punish her for the suffering of his daughter. The victim was completely unaware of these plans. On the day of the meeting, the victim went for fishing with her husband's brother's wife. Her husband's nephew had tried to prevent them from going, telling them that some guests were expected to arrive, when, in fact, he had called a meeting in the house to accuse the victim of practising witchcraft. The victim's youngest daughter came to know the impending meeting and informed her mother and other family members.

Consequently, the victim along with her children came to the main instigator's house, where the meeting was to be held. Here, the community members accused the victim of witchcraft, imposed a fine of Rs. 5,000 and also threatened her with dire consequences if she did not pay the fine. Fearing further trouble, the victim and her son agreed to pay the fine. After reaching home, her son decided against paying the fine as his mother was wrongly blamed.

When the village community learnt that the victim would not pay the fine, another meeting was called where the main instigator intentionally served alcohol to avoid productive discussion. The next day, yet another meeting was called in which the main instigator furiously blamed the victim for the deteriorating health of his daughter. After failing to convince the community of her innocence, and under unrelenting pressure from them, the victim was forced to 'confess'. The villagers consulted with three '*deodhanis*' and all declared the victim as witch. The villagers were furious and determined to kill the victim; the main instigator hit the victim with an iron rod and other villagers also joined in the assault. The victim lost consciousness and died after some time and her brother and cousin carried her

back to her house. The villagers believed that the daughters of a woman practising witchcraft would also acquire the craft with time, so the victim's younger daughter was also accused of being a witch, following which it was decided that both mother and daughter should be banished. The villagers also tortured the younger daughter, but she escaped and informed the police, asking for protection. The police admitted her in the hospital, but after she recovered, the villagers did not let the victim and her daughter return to the village. The victim's family stayed outside the village for ten months with a distant relative.

The victim's married elder daughter pleaded for a peaceful negotiation with the main instigator but he threatened to get her declared a witch as well. This terrified her into committing suicide. The victim's marital relatives took the advantage of her absence from the village and mortgaged her land and sold her livestock. The villagers raided all the fish from her fishery. During exile, the victim requested ABWWF functionaries to intervene in the matter. After much effort, ABWWF members brought the victim's daughters and son back to the village, although complete social ostracism continued. Having faced cruelty, rejection and stigma, the victim's family decided to live an isolated life.

WHY WAS SHE TARGETED

According to the victim's, family, their father, had planted five big trees along the boundary line of his nephew's (cousin) homestead land, which the nephew objected to. Their father promised to relocate the saplings to another place when they grew, and the issue essentially remained unresolved. Subsequently, the nephew forcefully uprooted the trees, resulting in the victim having a verbal fight with him, in which victim cursed him, When his daughter fell ill, he accused the victim of causing the misfortune. Moreover, before the labelling, the victim's son had earned an amount of Rs. 40,000, from a land selling deal with a group of people and from that amount 50% was demanded by the village committee, but he gave only Rs. 10,000. Already disgruntled with the victim's family, the villagers joined the nephew when the opportunity arose to take revenge.

VIOLATIONS

As stated by the victim's family, their mother was abused and called names like *daini*. A group of twenty people assaulted her with iron rods. She was beaten brutally, lost consciousness and later died on the spot. The villagers also attempted to kill our family members and therefore, they fled away from their village, until and unless an amicable solution was made by the state authority. They are still scared to venture out. One of their sister committed suicide.

ROLE OF FAMILY AND NEIGHBOURS

Family members supported the victim and sought to protect her. Victim's two brothers-in-law pleaded the villagers and victim's husband nephew not to commit any untoward incident; but they did not care for it and took the final step and killed her in their absence.

ROLE OF THE STATE AUTHORITY

As soon as the incident occurred and victim's brothers-in-law and other relatives who were the resident of distant village rushed to the victim's family and lodged a FIR in the local police station. In this regard sufficient help was extended by the ABWWF and exerted pressure on the district administration to take quick action. After receiving the complain police started search operation and nabbed the culprit. Police arrested twenty eight instigators who gave the final touch of the incident including victim's husband nephew other family relatives who extended moral support and encouraged the instigators. A case under IPC U/S 120 (B), 448, 302, 427, 307, 324 etc. was registered and sent the culprit to jail for rigorous punishment.

CASE NO-5

VICTIM:

He was a 21 years old young student of Gwjwnpuri village under Dotoma block of Kokrajhar district. He was a student of degree 3rd Semester of U.N.Brahma College, Kokrajhar. He had no connection with any anti social activities, rather was an active member i.e. Secretary of block ABSU. He was a young dynamic student leader and worked for the interest of the community. He was the only son of his widowed mother. His mother's occupation is labour. She maintained her small family with her little income. Of course her son though was a student worked a lot for his family and earned a good amount from different sources. He also encouraged the village youths to remain busy in different small works available in Kokrajhar

town. He tried to make aware of the village people regarding the importance of education. He taught the people to be cautious about their beliefs, cultural practices relating to existing social prejudices. Some of the villagers did not like his teachings, rather they criticised him. A section of the villagers were not at all happy. His mother on the other hand was suspected by the villagers. As an asset they had 2 bighas of cultivable land and 2 bighas homestead land, two cows, 5 nos. of hen and 2 nos. of pigs.

INSTIGATORS

The instigators were the members of the village and perpetrated by three neighbours with whom the victim's mother did not have good relation. The neighbours always tried to capture the victim's cultivable land and his mother strongly nullified the instigators' planning all the time.

VICTIMIZATION

The victim's mother had verbal fight with her neighbour's wife in connection with her cultivable land and in the course of which victim's mother cursed the neighbour, saying her husband would die. Coincidentally, after a few days the husband of the neighbour died in an accident and people began to suspect the victim of being a witch. After a year, a young boy died of malaria and jaundice in the village. He was the son of the victim's mother's marital relatives, who were also neighbours of the victim. Being relative the victim, had tried to send the young boy to doctors of Kokrajhar town and helped the family in getting the boy medically treated. Though the victim tried to give him the best treatment, his all attempts proved as futile because the young boy did not recover and passed away. The victim was too sad and went to Kokrajhar town and stayed for a week with his friends. After a week he came back to his house and reached his house in the evening while it was 6 o'clock. His mother was not in his house while he entered inside his room. He then tried to take rest for a while and in the same time four young men of the village came to the victim's house and asked him about his mother. They began to scold his mother with bad words and accused his mother as Daini, 'Kechaikaiti' and many more. The victim became angry with them and began to argue with them. They accused his mother of harming the boy while his treatment was going on in Kokrajhar. As the argument went on, three drunken young men of the neighbourhood entered inside the house and killed the victim with sharp knives. The entire incident was narrated by the relative of the victim. The relative was then bed ridden condition due to fracture of his hip bone was sleeping in the house of nearby plot, and although he had heard everything, he was unable to come out without the support of other to intervene and he was just shouting from his house. After stabbing the young boy the culprit ran away from the spot. After an hour the

victim's mother came back and saw the unbearable incident. She became helpless and lost her sense and died after a few hours without treatment. The relative though was unable to come out, he was crying and shouting. Then some villagers came out to see the situation. When they saw the brutal killing, they immediately informed the ABSU workers. The ABSU workers rushed to the spot and later lodged complain.

ROLE OF THE STATE AUTHORITY

After getting complain from ABSU, police rushed to the spot and took away the dead bodies of both mother and son did post-mortem. A case was registered under IPC U/S 120(B), 302, 201, 506. Police arrested twelve culprit associated with the brutal killing. All of them were sent to district jail.

CASE NO-6

VICTIM

The victim was a married man and was 52 years old belonged to Boro community of Kokrajhar district. He had two sons and one daughter. He had completed LP school. He was an agriculturist. Moreover, he also worked as MGNREGA labour in his leisure time. He had 8 bighas of cultivable land and 2 bighas homestead land, two bullocks, three cows, more than 15 hens and three pigs and a small pond.

VICTIMIZATION

The victim practised traditional medicine though his family does not like it. He used to treat the people who suffered from snake bite. Some of his villagers did not like him because he did not care the local people. He did not keep amicable relation with his villagers. His sons and daughters were very active in their study and they also maintained a little bit distance from rest of the villagers rather they had good relation with other community members of the nearby villages. One day a villager was bit by a poisonous snake and the family members called an Ojha from a nearby village. He applied his medicine and mantras for a hours but the patient could not get relive from severe pain. The Ojha was at a loss. He was trying to cure the patient but failed and then the Ojha began to tell him some evil man was there in the village who was trying to do harm of the patient. The Ojha suggested the villagers to call him to the spot so that something could be done. The villagers got angry with the victim and immediately rushed the victim's house to bring him to the patient's house. But the victim was not present at that moment because of his MGNREGA work. He was busy with his work came back at 9 o' clock. At his home when he came to know the incident he immediately

rushed to the patient's house. The condition of the patients was then out of treatment and after a few minutes of his entry the patient took his last breath. He became nervous as there was no way to treat him. And in the mean time the Ojha whom was called for treatment had left the house of the deceased family. The villagers became angry with the victim and began to blame him. They accused him as '*daina*' and threatened him that he would have to face terrible punishment from them. At night the dead body of the deceased buried in the burial ground of the community. After a few days a few unidentified people knocked the door of the victim at mid night, when everybody of the family was in deep sleep. They shouted the victim's name forced to open the door. The victim refused to open the door. But his two sons came out and they saw some people who were trying to break the door of the victim's room. Both the sons requested them not to break the door. But three of the instigators came to them stated beating with wooden stick and they became senseless. The culprit broke the door of the victim and dragged him to the bank of the river stabbed him there and he died. The body of the victim threw on the river. The culprit then came back. After few hours victim's sons got back their sense and began to search their father. They asked help from the neighbour, but nobody came forward. They ran to their nearby village for help when it was almost 4 o' clock. The members of the nearby village came to search the victim. But they did not find the victim. Next day morning they went to police station and filed a case.

ROLE OF FAMILY AND NEIGHBOURS

The victim's family always supported him and his family was quite peaceful. Due to villagers' orthodox role they did not like to mixed up with them except some unavoidable circumstances. The sons and daughter were brilliant in their studies and the school teachers praised them and used to visit their house. Victim's wife was very sincere in her family works. The neighbours did not like their growth and development. The villagers liked to avoid them. The victim's family had good relation with the learned men. They had good relation their other family relatives and they were well honoured by all relatives. The victim's sons were given medical treatment by their relatives and gave the security in subsequent days. After the incidents they were helped by all except the villagers. They helped them in complaining the incident to police. The local organisation like ABSU, NGO, Teachers Association extended financial support to the victim's sons and daughter so as to enable them to continue their study without any disruption.

ROLE OF THE AUTHORITIES

Police registered a case under IPC U/S 324, 307, 447,302 and arrested twenty eight villagers along with female instigators who took initiative to harm the family since last couple of years. All culprit were sent to jail.

CASE NO-7

VICTIM: The victim was a married man from the Boro community of Kokrajhar district and 56 years old. He had two sons. He completed upper primary level of schooling. He was a cultivator and had 5 bighas cultivable land 1.5 bighas homestead land, two bullocks, 5 hens and two pigs. Moreover he had a bi-cycle. He knew the use medicine and practised it now and then. It was not his regular practice and was not known by all except his close relative.

INSTIGATORS

The instigators consisted of one of his relatives and six villagers who were neighbours and a distant relative from the victim's marital family.

VICTIMIZATION

The incident occurred during winter season. A marriage ceremony was being held in the neighbourhood; the groom was related to the victim. As the ceremony progressed, the bride lost consciousness and the guests attributed this to the evil powers of some witch. The main instigator, a distant relative who was also known to be a fortune teller, took advantage of the situation and asserted it as the act of local people who supposed to an Ojha. Then he sprinkled some water onto the body of the bride and coincidentally she revived. In this way the instigator gained the confidence of the people present at the wedding ceremony, and they had no difficulty believing that the instigator's claim was correct. The victim and her family were not present at the wedding and so they had no clue about this branding. After a few days the newly-wed bride again lost consciousness and that very morning the victim visited their house to give them fishes that he caught in his pond. As soon as he entered the house, the second instigator, (the bride's elder brother, who was victim's cousin) rebuked him. He called him a witch and threw a chair at him and began to scold him. He immediately returned home without showing any reaction and informed his two sons and wife. When his wife went to his cousin's house to ask why such an attack was made on her husband, the cousin and his son denied the charge and claimed that the story was just made up by the victim. The following evening a female *ojhawas* called and a public meeting was held. The *ojha* claimed, after performing some rituals and uttering some mantras, that she could see the face of the witch on her thumbnail. The soothsayer declared the victim to be the witch responsible for the misfortunes of the newly-wed bride. The villagers then clamoured for the victim to confess

that he was involved in witchcraft. By this time, fearing for his life, he had already called some of his friends. The family of the bride and some other village members got angry with the victim and they confirmed that the accusation they had in their minds was true. Some of the villagers wanted to burn down him along with his house, which was prevented by the victim's friends though a physical tussle took place between them. But somehow it was controlled. In this way he was branded as witch by the rest of the villagers. But the victim did not care the blame and remained busy in his regular work along with his two sons who were also very hard worker and was becoming prosperous and popular among others. The main instigator was jealous of this success and was looking for an opportunity to destroy this image. People in the village already had very strong beliefs in witchcraft and so it was very easy to manipulate the villagers against the victim.

VIOLATIONS

The victim was mentally abused. He was called names like *dina*, *rakshas* and they were trying to block his way from all aspects. He was excommunicated and even the outsiders who used to visit victim's house was prohibited. The victim's family was forced to leave their paternal place. But they were tolerating all and did their duty regularly.

EFFECTS OF THE BRANDING ON HIM AND HIS FAMILY

Day by day the victim's relationship with the neighbours and the community broke down. One day evening the victim was coming from the local market accompanied by one of his friend of his neighbouring village. It was raining heavily and the instigators of his village were waiting behind the jungles of the road and when the victim reached that place caught him and dragged him inside the jungles and was beaten him with iron rods. He lost his consciousness and the instigators left the victim there itself. His friend ran away out of threat of the culprits and informed the family. As it was heavily raining, the victim's body was submerged on the rain water and he lost his life there. Family members along with some well wisher rushed to the spot and recovered the victim's dead body. Thus victim's family became helpless.

ROLE OF FAMILY AND NEIGHBOURS

Victim's family were very happy and lived a peaceful life. They had good understanding to each other due to which the family got prosperous as compared to others. Everybody was very supportive. The victim's sons and other well wishers approached the All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) and ABSU for help. The neighbours on the other hand

participated in the violations targeting the victim. The hostile majority in the village threatened some people who attempted to help the victim's family saying that they too would be banished from the village if they helped the victim. Later, when ABWWF, ABSU came to the situation got a shape.

ROLE OF THE AUTHORITIES

The police was informed about the victimization and filed a case. Both ABWWF and ABSU urged police to take immediate and stern action against the culprit. Police arrested more than thirty villagers including male and female and eight other members from different villages depending on the confession of the culprit. Police registered a case under IPC 120(B), 392,201,506 and 34. The culprits were sent to Kokrajhar district jail.

CASE NO-8

VICTIM

A widowed woman named Ajab Basumatary who was 50 years old living with her two step sons of Undergaon village of Chirang district. She had 2 bighas of homestead land three pigs and 10 nos. of hen. She did not have any other property of her own. She worked as vegetable vendor and in between this she also sold local rice brewed in her house. She had no formal education. Her two sons remained busy with outside works and earned a satisfactory amount. As she was the second wife of her deceased husband, had maintained distance from the neighbours and villagers, therefore she was not accepted by the villagers. She was always looked at by the villagers in dubious way.

VICTIMIZATION

One day taking the opportunity of her absence some her kitchen garden was destroyed by someone. When she came back from market one of his son who had also just arrived before her told her about her kitchen garden. Next day morning she observed the garden and became upset and got angry. And stated rebuking the destroyer without shouting any name and cursed them that if she was true in her faith of Lord the wrong doer will die by committing suicide. After a few days an individual of 40 years old of the village committed suicide due to some family matters. The wife of the deceased man began to cry shouting the victim's curse that her husband had died due to curse given by the victim, actually with whom she did not have contact. It was supported by the victim's neighbours.

VIOLATION

The family of the deceased man called a meeting in the village Bathow Mandir and they also called the victim, but she did not attend the meeting and was busy in the marked on the day of meeting. The villagers got angry with her and rushed to the market and forcefully dragged her to village playground. They asked her many dirty questions and accused her as ‘dhandabaji’ and killer. She refused all the blames and accusation and protested strongly. She said the villagers that she would file case against the atrocities made unlawfully by the villagers. Villagers got angry with her and started beating with wooden and bamboo sticks. She died on the spot and the body was burnt on the bank of the nearby river.

ROLE OF THE FAMILY, RELATIVE AND VILLAGERS

She was a step mother, but her two step sons supported her. They were not available at the time of the incident. On the other hand victim’s deceased husband’s relative did not help the victim. Villagers were the main culprit and solely responsible for death.

ROLE OF THE AUTHORITIES

The incident was not informed to any state authority by the family member since they were threatened by the villagers. No case was registered.

CASE NO-9

VICTIM

The victim was 55 years old widow of Ranipur village under Runikhata of Chirang district. The victim completed LP level school education. She had three daughters of 18 years, 21 years, and 25 years old. The victim’s husband was a sincere cultivator, who had 25 bighas of cultivable land 8 bighas homestead land with valuable trees, tubers, beetle nut and leave and two nos. fisheries. Moreover he had four bi-cycles, two bullocks, four cows, more than twenty hens and five pigs. The victim’s husband had good economy. Unfortunately, victim’s husband had died due to sudden stomach disorder, though the victim tried her best to get recovery.

VICTIMIZATION

After the death of her husband, the husband’s family members began to torture her in different ways. They began to blame her as witch. One day evening the relatives fished out all fishes and after fishing sprayed poison on the fishery so that no fishes could remain alive. Next day morning when the victim questioned the husband’s brother regarding the fishery he got angry with her and began to shout that their sister-in-law was really a *Daini*. He called all their relatives and started scolding and abusing her. The victim’s father-in-law ordered her to leave the village. Actually the husband’s brothers had the intension of snatching her property.

The victim did not care and tolerated all tortures because she had to bring up her three daughters. As the family members did not get success therefore they instigated the villagers and compelled the villagers to accuse her as *Daini*. The villagers warned her to leave the village otherwise she would be killed or burnt.

VIOLATION

The victim was not ready to leave her property what was earned by her husband doing hard labour. She was accused by all as *Daini* and termed her as the killer of her husband. One day evening, when she was coming from her agricultural field, she was caught by the culprit and stabbed her to death. Her daughters did not get any clue of the incidents.

ROLE OF THE FAMILY, RELATIVE AND VILLAGERS

The victim's relatives and other members of the village were the main culprit and they did not take any remarkable step. They kept everything secret.

ROLE OF THE AUTHORITY

Since the authority was unknown to the incident therefore they did not any initiative or not even visit the village.

CASE NO-10

VICTIM

She was 65 years old married woman and a house wife, hailed from Lonthibari village of Baksa district. Her husband is a dependent. She had three sons and one daughter. Her sons and daughter were married. The victim and husband lived with her youngest son. Remaining two sons lived in distant village. The family had 10 bighas cultivable land and 2 bighas homestead land along with a small pond. Moreover the family had two bullocks, three cows, 15 numbers of hens, 4 numbers of pigs which was specially taken care of by the victim. Of course entire property belonged to her husband and was looking after by her youngest son being a sole care taker of the parents.

VICTIMIZATION

People suspected her as *Daini* from couple of years. The villagers had observed that when she visited any family, the small kid of that family had fallen abruptly sick. They marked it seriously. And in this way they noticed a good number of such strange incidents occurred due to the victim's visit in the families. In one such incident a small kid died without any marked symptoms diseases. The got angry with her and accused her as *daini*.

VIOLATION

One in a full moon day, the villagers organized a meeting and the victim was called in the meeting. Unfortunately the victim was absent in the meeting due to her ailed health. Her husband represented on behalf of her. The villagers passed lots bad comments against the victim in front of the victim's husband. Victim's husband requested them not to suspect her as she was innocent. The villagers passed a resolution that they have to pay fine of Rs, 10,000/-, otherwise they have to vacate the village within ten days. The victim's family failed to pay the fine in their prescribed time. After ten days the villagers called the same meeting for second time and ordered the victim to be present. The victim along with her sons and other family members attended the meeting. The villagers got angry to see all the family members in the meeting. They began to ask question to victim regarding the incidents. They tried to get confession from the victim that the entire incidents were the result of her witchery activities. But she refused and stood by her decision. She replied that she had no link with the incidents occurred so far. Even the family members were also requesting the villagers on her innocence. But villagers got more and more excited and started beating the victim. The family got surprised and tried to rescue her from the attack of the people. But some youths had forbidden them and told not to proceed any more. When they proceeded to the victim the youths started beating them too. In the mean time the victim and her husband became senseless. The villagers thereafter left them there. After a few minutes the victim took her last breath.

ROLE OF THE VILLAGERS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Villagers played very negative role and intentionally accused the victim and murdered her on the spot. Family members were very supportive and took extreme pain to protect her but unfortunately they too victimized and somehow got rid of from severe attack.

ROLE OF AUTHORITIES

The family members were threatened by the villagers and warned them not to complain anywhere, otherwise they would be perished.

CASE NO-11

VICTIM

A housewife, Thokli Basumatary (67) lives with her husband in a village called New Betbari of Baksa district nine kilometers away from Jalah block. She had some knowledge of herbal medication and mid witchery. She has been accused as a witch for two times, once in 2004 and another in 2014. The Ojha (village medicine man) had pointed that the disease was caused by the hands of a witch. The Ojha assessed that the witch resides at the northern direction of the patient's house. The villagers thought it was because of the evil spell of

Thokli who lives in the nearby house. So, the family members of the patient came to Thokli's house with an aim to request her to let the disease be cured. At that time Thokli got surprised and was also afraid because the group carried sword and knife with them and the group was consisted of about ten to twelve members. So, as she had some knowledge of applying medicinal plants for some simple diseases, at that time, she brought some turmeric and other plants, grinded them and asked the patient to drink two teaspoon full. After two or three days the patient got relieved and cured. This incident happened 10 years ago. But very recently, in April, 2014, another patient got seriously ill. The patient was not taken to the doctor for treatment, rather, taken to ojha. According to the victim's son (who was absent at the time of incident), " This time, it was a different Ojha, who pointed his mother to be involved in the case of the second patient and also pointed that the witch is located on the eastern direction of the patient's house (the earlier ojha died at that time). Accordingly the second patient's relatives came to the victim's house and requested to cure the disease by applying her mantras or medicine. The victim was at a loss, because she did not have any way to cure the patient as she was severely ailed and she did not have any such ways to put for her. Any way she gave medicines to be consumed. But after a few days the patient died and not being cured by the ojha, a group of the patient's family members and their relatives came taking sword, forcefully trying entered her house in the evening time and stabbed the victim and thereafter the culprit fled away from the spot.

ROLE OF THE FAMILY MEMBERS AND VILLAGERS

There was a huge hue and cry at the time of the incident but nobody came forward to the victim's family. The old helpless husband could not protect the victim from the brutal attack of the miscreants. The only son who is a small business man was out of station. He was busy with business in the evening market located ten kilometers away from his house.

ROLE OF THE AUTHORITIES

Victim's son with the help of his friends had lodged complain in the police station. Police rushed to the spot at night and took the stock of the situation. Next day they started their search operation to nab the culprits. Accordingly, the arrested seven culprits from the nearby village and registered a case under IPC.

CASE NO-12

VICTIM

Langai Ram Boro and Phurbala Boro both were husband and wife and resided at No-1 Samudisha village under Sidli block of Chirang district. Langai was 60 years old and his wife Phurbala was 48 years old. Langai was a cultivator while Phurbala helped her husband in

agricultural activities. They had two sons one of them died due to ailment caused by unknown disease. The victims had 10 bighas cultivable land and 2 bighas homestead land. Moreover they had two bullocks, two cows, 10 nos. of hens and 2 nos. of pigs.

VICTIMIZATION

Longai's wife had served as village *dhai* and helped the village pregnant women in delivery. She had her traditional knowledge and used to make herbal pills out of wild medicinal herbs. Thus she was admired by many people. One day she was called by a woman who was suffering from severe disease from a couple of weeks. The patient took a dozen herbal pills from her and used to consume. But her health condition began to deteriorate. The patient's family became nervous and went to a Kabiraj for taking new treatment of the patient. When Kabiraj came to know her disease he refused to provide treatment saying that the patient had already taken poisonous pill. And it is not possible to cure the patient. Because the village *dhai* is a *daini* and she can't treat patient rather she can kill people. Coincidentally the patient died in the next day. The family of the patient became angry with Phurbala and after three days of the death of the woman the family members along with some relatives came to Phurbala's house and dragged her to jungles. Her husband tried to protect her and he was also dragged. They killed them inside the jungles and buried their body inside the jungles.

ROLE OF FAMILY, NEIGHBOUR AND VILLAGERS

The victims' son who was resided in Bijni and worked there as an unskilled labour came to know the incident after two days had rushed to his village and to search the dead bodies of his parents but could not find. The neighbours and the other village members did not extent any cooperation. He then with the help of other people from neighbouring village went to police station and filed a written complain.

ROLE OF AUTHORITY

Police registered the case and started search operation of the dead body and after a week they recovered the two dead bodies from the nearby jungle which were already started decaying.

Police later arrested seven culprits involved the murder and sent them to

REFERENCES

1. Brahma, Kameswar. 1992. A Study of Socio Religious Beliefs Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos. Calcutta: PunthiPustak
2. Burns, William E. 1959 Witch Hunts in Europe and America: An Encyclopedia. London: Greenwood Press.

3. Bailey, F. G., 1994, *Witch-Hunt in an Indian Village: Or, the Triumph of Morality*, Delhi: Oxford University Press.
4. Chakraborty, Joya. And Borah, Anjuman. 2013 “Witch hunting in Assam: Strategising Alternative Media for Women Empowerment and Overcoming Superstition.” *Journal of North- East India Studies*. 3.215-24. Retrieved September 6, 2014.
5. Pandey A. 2013. In Assam, a rising trend of murders on allegations of witchcraft’, <http://www-ndtv.com/article/India/in-assam-a-rising-trend-of-murders-on-allegations-of-witchcraft-414016>