

A Sociological Understanding of Witch-hunt in Assam

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Abstract: Witchcraft encompasses broad based beliefs and practices manifesting into myriad forms in everyday life. The concept of witch is a part of these broad based beliefs. Witchcraft and witch-hunt is connected through crisis that occurs in society. Crisis can manifest in various forms in society. However, the witchcraft accusations do not always result in witch-hunting. Today, the focus of witchcraft practices is only on the destructive aspect leading to witch-hunt. In recent years, witch hunting is gaining attention around the world for violation of human rights. In Assam, the report on the increasing number of witch-hunting cases views it as tradition of the tribal communities. In Assam, the media reports cases of witch-hunt among Bodos, Rabhas, and Santhals. The reports suggest that the numbers of deaths resulting from witch-hunting are escalating every year. This raises few questions whether witch-hunt is a practise only of the tribal communities? Witch hunting is gaining attention around the world for violation of human rights. So, it is not just a tribal issue. The study seeks to understand the aetiology of witch-hunt as a phenomenon. The study focuses on how witch-hunting cases are perceived by the community and dealt by the state.

Keywords: Witchcraft; Witch-Hunting; Crisis; Law; Tribal; State.

UNDERSTANDING WITCHCRAFT AND WITCH- HUNT

In an attempt to understand witchcraft practices, one wonders can beliefs be researched upon? How can one study beliefs, superstitions, and even fear that are not considered to be rational by pure Sciences? Anthropologists observe not just the communities, but their values, morals and beliefs for a better understanding of the communities itself. The aim of studying beliefs is not about supporting or defending or passing judgements on values of the communities under study. Rather, it is essential to locate ‘moral anthropology’ (Fassin 2012) against the backdrop of the social, cultural, religious, political, economic and moral climate that shapes those moral experiences.

In India, witchcraft represents evil to people because ‘witchcraft has been associated with evil, darkness, illness, misfortune and death in almost all those societies’ (Daimari 2012:101) wherever witchcraft beliefs are present. Such occurrences are the crises that occur in a community. When witches strike with witchcraft or when spirits harm them, the communities seek help from their helpful spirits to counter the harmful spirits. So, to regulate human life, communities make bonds with divinity to alleviate human suffering (Prabhu 2012). As witchcraft encompasses broad based beliefs and practices in everyday life, it also believes in misfortunes brought by witch. A crisis can be brought by spirits or witches which can take the

form of destruction of crops, sudden illness leading to death, missing calf from the barn and so on. The spirits can be propitiated through rituals to calm them down and remove the crisis but it is not the same in case of witches. The communities believe witches are human beings who cannot be appeased so elimination is the only possible solution. So, such crises or misfortune are the connecting element between witchcraft and witch-hunting. The origin of witch-hunt lies in the identification of crisis or misfortune within the community. Hence, witch-hunting is not a singular event as it has several stages which lead to the manifestation of witch-hunt, although it is not necessary that every witch-hunt follows the exact steps. First, the crisis brings a suspicion of the existence of the witch in the community. The people start discussing who could be the potential witch. Rumours form the instrument to form an idea of who is the targeted witch as it alienates the accused person from the community (Stewart and Strathern 2004). ‘The main actors in the hunt are the accused, the accuser or accusers, the victim of the witch’s evil eye, and the Ojha (Chaudhuri 2013:107). The community may invite a diviner to use divination techniques to find out the witch. The diviner accuses the identified person as the witch. According to Chaudhuri (2013), witch-hunting takes place when two or more people are involved in a process of not only identifying a person as a witch (for doing witchcraft) but also punishing the witch in a manner that involves mobilizing an entire community (Chaudhuri 2013). The accused is violently punished for performing witchcraft. The

fear of the power of the witch is so real that people come together to fight one imaginary enemy: the witch. The witch-hunt collectively punish the witch and torture to draw confessions of performing witchcraft thereby showing that it has social acceptance of the society to use violence as the method of punishment. Besides violent persecution (as punishment) for practicing witchcraft, there are other lesser forms of punishments in witch-hunting such as social isolation and fines (Bailey 1997, Sinha 2006, Chaudhuri 2013).

Witch-hunt is accepted as legitimate in the communities, because, removing a person who is accused as witch makes sense. This is because, diseases and illness are part of daily occurrence, which can lead to death; the power of the witch is very much a real threat (Chaudhuri 2013). What justifies the participation in witch-hunt is the deep rooted fear, real threat as well as hatred of witch's power to harm. The witch threatens the values and the interests of the society. The belief in and fear of the powers of a witch is shared knowledge. This knowledge becomes vital in legitimising and executing the hunt (Chaudhuri 2013). A person is punished brutally as witch by the community, because, people believe that the only way to deal with the witch is to either force her to give up her power or by performing counter magic or by corporal punishment (Hutton 2004). The removal of evil through witch-hunting results in men feeling secure in their world again (Kridge 1970). It is for this reasons, Puja Roy (1998) says that witch-hunting is sanctioned violence to protect the community from the witch's harmful magic. Just like Sati, it falls within the boundaries of socially sanctioned violence. People see it as 'culturally acceptable' and necessary in upholding the patriarchal traditional values and beliefs (Roy 1998). Such kind of social sanction shows silence and consent and protects the perpetrators, thereby trapping the victim of violence (Roy 1998). Also, Comaroff & Comaroff (2004) argue that witch-hunting is cultural policing backed by violence perpetrated mostly by unemployed youths – it becomes an expression of 'cultural justice'.

Chaudhuri (2013) differentiates between two kinds of attacks, on the person accused as witch, and at times on the family members of the accused. In surprise attacks, no prior warning is given to the accused. The perpetrators do not give alleged witch the opportunity to defend oneself. In such attack,

they get motivated by the fear of witch's power and so they attack without planning and preparation. In contrast to this, the calculated attack has an 'ulterior move and the accused is a scapegoat in the real scheme of events' (Chaudhuri 2013:70). In calculated attack, a person may accuse another person as a witch in order to take personal revenge. It is also possible that in a conflict between two parties, the stronger party may accuse smaller party as the scapegoat in calculated attack. Therefore, witch-hunting is about removing unwanted, scapegoats from the community by accusing a person as witch, who is seen as evil personified.

PREVALENCE OF WITCH-HUNTING ACROSS SPACE AND TIME

E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1976), renowned as the father of witchcraft studies, whose study of Azande has defined the path to understand witchcraft beliefs and practices. It focuses on witchcraft in everyday life activities among relatively stable societies such as the Azande. Over the years, the witchcraft studies became static as the anthropological ideas of witchcraft fixated only on witchcraft accusations based on beliefs. This led to the stagnation of witchcraft studies. Meanwhile, this led to the study of witchcraft accusations in European countries. The study on witchcraft accusations leading to witch killings shifted small-scale societies to large societies. For instance, in Essex, England witch-hunting occurred due to economic changes, due to a breakdown in communal bonds (Macfalane 1999). However, Europe on the other hand, during the witch craze period from the fourteenth to seventeenth-century experiences large-scale changes. 'Witch-finding techniques operate along the lines of a self fulfilling prophecy: they are designed to confirm rather than refute the prevalent demonology (Schoeneman 1975: 538). As witch-hunts are reflective of change of culture in societies (Schoeneman 1975), and the creation of the social situation (Trevor- Roper 1967), in the case of Europe, it was a 'sign of crisis' (Muchembled 2002) and a period of anomie (Ben-Yehuda 1980).

In contemporary times, there is a re-emergence of African studies under a group of scholars. This new group perceives African witchcraft away from the colonial point of view by focusing on

modernity. It perceived its beliefs as rational which needs to be engaged with and its relation to violence too was recognised. As witch-hunts are not bound to any specific period (Federici 2008), modern witch-hunts reveal witchcraft has a 'conceptual continuity' as it has been subjected to constant re-interpretations and shifts of meaning to be used either as levelling or as accumulative force that can be applied to achieve different ends in various societies Geschiere (1998). At the community level, there is an increasing fear of witchcraft for which the solution is offered by the modern-day witch-finders (Richards 1935, Green & Mesaki 2005, Smith 2005). Colonialism brought economic inequalities in communities which have led to structural violence in Haiti (Farmer 2004). Moreover, the dynamism of modern-day witch hunt reflected in political circumstances affecting countries such as the Chinese Cultural Revolution 1966-69 (Bergesen 1978) and rising witch-hunts in Java during political instability (Siegel 2006) and ninja killings in Indonesia (Retsikas 2006). In times of distress and political instability, the rumours are the tool used in witchcraft accusations Bubandt (2008) Herriman (2015).

On the range of witchcraft studies done in the Indian context, it begins with the colonial records of witch-hunting in western India (Skaria 1997) and colonial witch-hunting records of Assam (Hazarika 2020). Bailey (1997) discusses the witch-hunt in Bisipara village, Orissa to highlight the social order of the caste system. Using Marxist perspectives, witch hunt cases in India highlight how capitalism and colonialism in India increased cases of witch-hunt (Sinha 2007). Shashank Sinha mentions that among the tribal societies, owing to economic growth, and subsequent resource depletion witch-hunt became a means charging fines (in cash or kind) or seek money for rituals to calm down the spirit. This led to monetization of witch trials towards end of 19th century and beginning of 20th century (Sinha 2006).

Since women across cultures are often accused as witches more than men, witchcraft accusations are gender discrimination. Women are not only seen as potential witches but men construct and categorise women into 'good' and 'bad' women. Men exclude women from controlling ritual and land rights by focusing on the idea that 'good' women do not take part in rituals. Those women who claim land rights are labelled as 'bad' women

or as witches. During any misfortune or period of crisis, communities extend the image of 'bad' to target unwanted persons and vulnerable persons due to old age, inability to contribute in production and reproduction as a witch. So, women as 'marginalised group' (Chaudhuri 2013) especially old widows, single women are targeted as witches. The violence meted out on women as witches have been studied by various scholars (Chaudhuri 2013, Skaria 1997).

The colonial rule imposed their European understanding of witchcraft into binary division of good and bad magic. The colonial records for the longest time did not allow the indigenous beliefs and practices flourish in its own right. In 1800s, the British imposed anti witchcraft and anti witch hunt laws, thereby criminalising indigenous witchcraft beliefs. It is only after British colonisation, the witchcraft accusation emerged for the first time. In case of India, the colonial rule imposed anti witch-hunt laws in the princely states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra which retaliated with violence on women by accusing them as witches.

The colonial rule in India in an attempt to gain a stronghold over the colonies to exploit its resources banned witch-hunting. However, the banning was met with different reactions across communities. Ajay Skaria (1997) studied the cases of witch-hunts during the colonial period in Western India. The colonial rule in India banned witch killings in Western India. Around 1847, it was banned in Dang region, Rajputana in 1853, Udaipur in 1862. Ban on witch hunting by the British rule decreased the number of witch-hunting cases, but the intensity of violence used against witch nevertheless increased Skaria (1997) argues that colonial ban on witch hunting triggered retaliation by the western communities. As a protest, it led to more witchcraft accusations on women in western India.

However, banning of witch hunting did not lead to increase in witch hunting cases in colonial Assam as in the rest of India. Witchcraft practices always existed in tribal areas and witch-hunting may have been prevalent in indigenous communities. During pre-colonial period in Assam, there existed different indigenous practices including witchcraft. The notion of witchcraft was not viewed in binary division; rather it was used to address various social problems. Witchcraft practices among the indigenous had a different

cultural notion. There was an existence of slavery, head-hunting and human-sacrifices prevalent among the indigenous communities. The witchcraft practices in tribal communities addressing social issues, treated illness and were regarded custodians of indigenous power (Hazarika 2020). British period eroded tribal institutions and outlawed witch hunting. In case of Assam, the first case recorded was in 1848 where the accused was not female as it is common in communities practising witchcraft. According to Hazarika (2020), the first case of witch-hunting ever recorded in Assam was in 1848, when the colonial administration charged a Singpho community chief of torturing and killing another Singpho man of witchcraft. This incident highlights that the community was in loggerheads with the British who punished the community with witchcraft accusations. The case itself highlight that it was a power struggle for domination between the indigenous and the British. Following this, in 1850, a circular was issued against the Singpho community, outlawing all forms of witchcraft and witch-hunting. It was issued by Major F. Jenkins, the chief commissioner of Assam.

After the independence, the Indian state viewed witch hunt as violation of human rights and punished the guilt using the Indian Penal Code. Despite the registering and investigating the cases using Indian Penal Code continued, it was felt that there is a need for a broader approach in handling witch-hunt cases. Hence, it signalled a need for a law which was tailored to handle only witch-hunting cases. Many states took active part to come up with different legislation. For instance, Bihar passed the Prevention of Witch Practices Act in 1999. Jharkhand followed by enacting Anti-Witchcraft Act in 2001. Chattisgarh passed the Chattisgarh Tonhi Pratama Bill in 2005. The Rajasthan Women (Prevention and Protection from Atrocities) was formed in 2016.

In Assam, Project Prahari of Assam Police, under DGP Kuladhar Saikia, in 2000s was among the first to tackle the issue of witch-hunting and also raising awareness against witch-hunt as superstition. In Assam, Birubala Rabha, a Human Rights activist was honoured with Padma Shri Award in January, 2021 for playing an instrumental role in her fight against witch-hunt. The continuous effort by activists such as Birubala Rabha, women

organisations, NGOs, Police has led to the formulation of the Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act, 2018 which addresses witch-hunting as the social malaise. The Assam witch-hunting bill is the most stringent laws made in comparison to laws enacted in other states of India. It specifies each and every stage of discrimination and the specific punishment and fines for it. It is a well intended law made to protect the innocent and punish the guilty in witch-hunting cases. However, according to Mehra and Agrawal (2016), anti witch-hunt laws in India as special laws are not effective as it does not address the entire problems faced by the victims. By accusing someone as criminal, it is not able to handle the cases properly as witch-hunt is like any other form of violence. The law is present but it responds to the idea that it belongs to the realm of superstitions and irrational beliefs. It does not look into the violence meted out to the victim such as tonsuring, feeding faeces and blackening the face. The judgements are given only when physical violence has been used or someone has died. Moreover, there is indifference of police when it comes to investigating the poor and marginalised. Most importantly, Mehra and Agrawal (2016), argues witch hunt violence is similar to caste based atrocities and humiliation as they are enacted as public spectacle.

An interesting observation by Helen Macdonald (2009), based on her fieldwork on witch-hunt in Chattisgarh, argues that there is difference in attitude of officials when it comes to dealing with witchcraft accusations. She discussed the case of Kulwanti Bai, there are differences in opinion amongst officials themselves. For lower rank officer's witchcraft accusations are an uncomfortable zone between personal belief, moral obligation and application of the law, whereas for higher officials, they view it as superstition and sign of backwardness which requires to be eradicated completely.

OBJECTIVES

Broadly, witchcraft encompasses broad based beliefs and practices manifesting into myriad forms in everyday life. The belief in witchcraft is about addressing social issues, treatment of epidemics, and illness by the custodians of indigenous power in tribal communities (Hazarika 2020). However,

today the focus of witchcraft practices is only on the destructive aspect leading to witch-hunting. In recent years, witch hunting is gaining attention around the world for violation of human rights. In Assam, the report on the increasing number of witch-hunting cases views it as tradition of the tribal communities. In Assam, the media reports cases of witch-hunt among Bodos, Rabhas, and Santhals. The reports suggest that the numbers of deaths resulting from witch-hunting are escalating every year. The National Crime Records Bureau in 2011 stated that 768 women were accused as witches from the year 2008 to 2012.¹ A newspaper report in 2013 says that the Assam government claimed that about 105 cases of 'witch-hunting' have been reported across Assam from the year 2006 to 2012. Newspaper reports highlight tribal areas has higher instances of witch-hunting. Instead of viewing witch-hunting as the result of superstition, the study argues that there is a need for a deeper understanding of the community to contextualise witch hunts as the occurrences signify latent issues of the society. It is not just a tribal issue. Today, witch-hunt has turned into a global issue as it is not just confined to tribal communities in India. In the name of beliefs, many innocent people are accused as witch and punished. There are many national and international organisations fighting against witch-hunting because culturally sanctioned violence in the name of witch-hunt is a serious violation of human rights. It is against this backdrop, the objectives of the study to know the aetiology of witch-hunt as a phenomenon. Secondly, to examine the perception of communities on handling witch-hunt cases. Lastly, to understand how witch-hunt cases are dealt by the state.

STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

According to the literature and media reports on witch-hunting cases, in Assam the witch-hunting cases occur among the tribal communities such as the Bodos, Santhals, Rabhas in the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Goalpara and so on. Based on the reports, the study is based on PhD fieldwork among the Bodos and Santhals in the districts of Kokrajhar and Chirang in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam. The qualitative study

based on witch-hunt cases as case studies focuses on how the cases are handled by the community as well as by the state. Keeping in mind the sensitivity of the topic, the techniques adopted for the study are in-depth interviews and focused group discussion.

ANALYSIS

In the context of witch-hunting, existing literature on witchcraft studies view superstition as the main reason for witch hunting in tribal communities. This view itself is problematic because superstition is not the only reason for witch-hunt. Superstition is just a symptom for underlying strains in the community. It is used as a tool for witchcraft accusations. Moreover, the study has found that witchcraft and witch-hunting are part of broad based beliefs. Witchcraft does not always lead to witch-hunting.

The aim of studying beliefs is not about supporting or defending or passing judgements on values of the communities under study. Rather, it is essential to locate 'moral anthropology' (Fassin 2012) of beliefs that shapes the moral experiences. In India, witchcraft represents evil to people because 'witchcraft has been associated with evil, darkness, illness, misfortune and death in almost all those societies' (Daimari 2012:101) wherever witchcraft beliefs are present. The study argues that witchcraft and witch-hunting are not separate categories rather there is a connection between the two. What connects both the entities is crisis. Crisis could manifest in a various form: crop failure, sudden death of a person, serious illness, losing a calf and so on. Therefore, crisis brings the suspicion of witchcraft in the communities which leads to witchcraft accusations.

The study attempts to understand the aetiology, that is, study of social causes or origins of witch-hunting as a phenomenon. The aetiology of witch-hunt can be traced to witchcraft accusations on alleged witch due to hierarchical relations, dispute on wealth, conflict resolution or even social change or even its inhibition (Macdonald 2004). The study on Bodos and Santhals argue that there can be multiple causes for the occurrences of witch hunt ranging from kinship issues, to strain in gender relations with property dispute, gender and sexuality and so on. Among Bodos the identities

are interwoven with age, gender, kinship, ethnicity, and so on so use of witchcraft accusations as levelling and accumulative force (Geschiere 1998), can change the hierarchical arrangements of power relations among the members of the community. The witch-hunt occurs due to levelling of a successful person by the community because they are jealous of the prosperity achieved by the person who is later accused as the witch. The tribal societies are not egalitarian anymore as there is insecurity arising from socio-economic inequality within the so called tribal societies (Basumatary 2020). Witch-hunting can occur also due to “exercise discrimination on the individual, especially on the vulnerable and marginalised sections” (Basumatary 2020: 158). Once a person is accused as the witch, witch-hunt is about humiliation and stripping the person of social status and dignity in the community. The witch-hunting cases highlight the gender discrimination of single women who are vulnerable and weak and marginalised are accused as the witches.

The study observes that witch-hunting is viewed as sanctioned violence (Roy 1998) because the fear of witch’s harm is seen as real (Chaudhuri 2013). For the society, harm brought by the witch on a person or an animal or on community is a crisis which needs to be resolved within the community. In witchcraft accusations, the alleged witch needs to be punished. However, the anti witch-hunt law punishes the person who accused the witch. In earlier times, there were two ways to punish the person accused as the ‘witch’. One is use of violence to punish the accused and the other is use of violence as well as socially boycott the accused and their family from the village. Social boycott was the most preferred form of punishment as it was the highest form of humiliation in a small knit community, where everyone knew each other very well. The villagers punish the accused themselves because they believe that no one has a right to interfere in their internal matters. The traditional customary laws sanction the society to punish the witch. The villagers think that no outsider will believe in the power of ‘witch’ so there is no point in talking to any outsider about their issues. In such situations, crisis becomes personal issue for the entire community to which no outsider has any kind of access to resolve it in any other way. It is due to this reason, highest numbers of cases are never reported and hence it is not recorded in the files. The witch-hunting by the society regards the

punishment as legal and collective society has the final say over the alleged witch.

The anti witch-hunt law in Assam has come into effect in the year 2018 with collective efforts of individuals, state officials and organisations. It is a well intended effort to punish the guilty and protect the alleged witch who faces physical, mental and emotional harassment during witch-hunt. In the districts of Kokrajhar and Chirang, in context of witch-hunting cases, the record of occurrences of witch hunting has been maintained year wise and district wise. Whenever there was a witch hunting case, the police immediately registered it followed by investigation. As per the law, if there has been death in witch-hunt cases then the guilty is arrested. In most cases, the perpetrator who gets arrested for witchcraft accusations show no remorse because they believe the witch exists in real life. However, despite the introduction of stringent law to tackle witch-hunting cases, there are issue and challenges in handling the cases. Hence, the study highlights that witch-hunting is still understood as sanctioned violence handled only by the community. However, the anti witch-hunt law does the opposite; it saves the alleged witch and punishes the perpetrator. It is due to this change in the role of who is guilty and who needs to be saved has brought the challenge in handling the witch-hunting cases as the communities still regard the crisis as personal issue of the community (Basumatary 2024). Hence, trying to change the traditional perception of the community on witch-hunt has been met with difficulties. The other hindrance in the effective implementation of law is the attitude of the officials. Similar to Helen MacDonald (2009) finding in Chattisgarh, the study observes that the higher officials are genuinely interested in eradicating the witch-hunt. For instance, it was observed that the higher officials opined that witch-hunting cases needs to be contextualised and examined beyond superstitions. However, there are many officers who are from the region share the same beliefs that witch exists in society and the witch needs to be removed from the society. The witch-hunt cases are assumed to occur only among the downtrodden. This creates a clash of opinions in professional versus personal opinion. Interestingly, the study also highlights that if no death has occurred in witch-hunt cases, then just as the concept of advice generally has great value in African contexts (Ashforth 2015) in effectively handling witch-hunt

cases, it has a high value in Indian context of handling witch-hunt as well. As there is awareness about the presence of anti witch hunt law in Assam, many organisations together join hands with the state officials and locals in advising the communities against the witch-hunt (Basumatary 2024). Such participation of local organisations with officials is an effort to view witchcraft as crisis as beyond personal issue of the community. It is signifying the latent issues of the community, be it, economic, kinship feud, gender discrimination and so on.

CONCLUSION

Witchcraft encompasses broad based beliefs and practices manifesting into myriad forms in everyday life. A part of these broad beliefs is the existence of witch-hunt. Witchcraft and witch-hunting are not separate categories rather there is a connection between the two. What connects both the entities is crisis. The origin of witch-hunt lies in the identification of crisis or misfortune within the community. What justifies the participation in witch-hunt is the deep rooted fear, real threat as well as hatred of witch's power to harm. It is a sanctioned violence to protect the community from the witch's harmful magic. For the society, the victim of witchcraft accusation is the witch who needs to be punished but the laws punish the person who accused the witch. Social boycott was the most preferred form of punishment as it was the highest form of humiliation in a small knit community, where everyone knew each other very well. The villagers punish the accused themselves because they believe that no one has a right to interfere in their internal matters. It is due to this reason, highest number of cases are never reported. The aetiology of witch-hunt are many factors such as socio-economic inequality, gender discrimination, domination of the marginalised sections, kinship feud and so on. Today, witch-hunt

is a global concern as it is not just confined to tribal communities in India. In context of laws, British period eroded tribal institutions and outlawed witch hunting. However, banning of witch hunting did not lead to increase in witch hunting cases in colonial Assam as in the rest of India. After the independence, the Indian state viewed witch hunt as violation of human rights and punished the guilt using the Indian Penal Code. Despite the registering and investigating the cases using Indian Penal Code continued, it was felt that there is a need for a broader approach in handling witch-hunt cases. The Assam witch-hunting bill of 2018 is the most stringent laws made in comparison to laws enacted in other states of India. The law has been passed with the intention to eradicate the practice of witch-hunting. It is a well intended law to protect the innocent ones and punish the perpetrators. The anti witch-hunt law does not punish the alleged witch, rather, it does the opposite. The law saves the alleged witch and punishes the perpetrator. It is due to this change in the role of who is guilty and who needs to be saved has brought the challenge in handling the witch-hunting cases (Basumatary 2024). The other hindrance is that the higher officials are genuinely interested in eradicating the witch-hunt but there are many local officials who share the same beliefs that witch exists in society and the witch needs to be removed from the society. Just as the concept of advice generally has great value in African contexts (Ashforth 2015) of handling witch-hunt cases, it has a high value in Indian context of handling witch-hunt as well. As there is awareness about the presence of anti witch hunt law in Assam, many organisations together join hands with the state officials and locals in advising the communities against the witch-hunt (Basumatary 2024). Such participation of local organisations with officials is an effort to view witchcraft as crisis as beyond personal issue of the community. It is signifying the latent issues of the community, be it, economic, kinship feud, gender discrimination and so on.

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Received on 05-06-2026

Accepted on 15-06-2026

Published on 29-06-2026

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