

3.1 DEFINITION OF SUPERSTITION AND WITCHCRAFT

3.1.1 WEBSTER DICTIONARY

Superstition: A belief founded on irrational feelings, especially of fear, and marked by credulity; also, any rite or practice inspired by such belief. Specifically, a belief in a religious system regarded as without reasonable support; also, any of its rites. Credulity regarding or reverence for the occult or supernatural, as belief in omens, charms, and signs; loosely, any unreasoning or unreasonable belief or impression.

Witching: Having power to enchant, weird, fascinating.

Witch Doctor: Among certain primitive people of Africa, especially the Kaffirs, a medicine man skilled in detecting witches and counteracting evil spells, hence any medicine man or magician one who profess to heal or cure by sorcery, a hex.

Witch monger: One who deals with witches or believes in witchcraft.

Black Magic: Any of the branches of magic which invoke the aid of demons or spirit as witchcraft or diabolism.

Spell: A formula used as a charm, incantation, charm, hence, fascination.

Witch Finder: Formerly, one employed to seek and obtain information against witches.¹

3.1. 2 OXFORD DICTIONARY

Superstition: A widely held but irrational belief in supernatural influences, especially as bringing good or bad luck.

¹ Marckward, H. Alberth, Cassidy, G. Frederick and Mc. Millan, B. James (1977), *Webster Comprehensive Dictionary*, International Edition, vol. II, J.G. Ferguson Publishing Company, Chicago, pp. 765, 1206, 1260, 1446.

Witch: A woman thought to have evil magic powers, a follower or practitioner of modern witchcraft, an ugly or unpleasant old woman, a fascinatingly attractive girl or woman, cast an evil spell on.

Witchcraft: The practice of magic, especially the use of spells and the invocation of evil spirits.

Witch doctor: A tribal magician credited with powers of healing, divination and protection against the magic of others.

Witchery: The practice of magic, bewitching quality or power.

Witch hunt: A campaign directed against a person or group holding views considered unorthodox or a threat to society.

Witching hour: Midnight regarded as the time when witches are supposedly active.

Superstition: Excessively credulous belief in and reverence for the supernatural. A widely held but irrational belief in supernatural influence, especially as bringing good or bad luck.²

3.2 AZANDE AND WITCHCRAFT

Azande: A member of a central African people, linguistically Niger-Congo group. The concept of witchcraft nevertheless provides them with a natural philosophy by which the relations between men and unfortunate events are explained and a ready and stereotyped means of reacting to such events. Witchcraft beliefs also embrace a system of values which regulate human conduct.

Witchcraft is ubiquitous. It plays its part in every activity of *Zande* life; in agricultural, fishing, and hunting pursuits; in domestic life of homesteads as well as in communal life

² Judy, Pearsall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Tenth Edition, Oxford University Press, USA, 1999, pp.1439,1642.

of district and court; it is an important theme of mental life in which it forms the background of a vast panorama of oracles and magic; its influence is plainly stamped on law and morals, etiquette and religion; it is prominent in technology and language; there is no niche or corner of *Zande* culture into which it does not twist itself.

If blight seizes the ground nut crop it is witchcraft; if the bush is vainly scoured for game it is witchcraft; if women laboriously bale water out of a pool and are rewarded by but a few small fish it is witchcraft; if termites do not rise when their swarming is due and a cold useless night is spent in waiting for their flight it is witchcraft; if a wife is sulky and unresponsive to her husband it is witchcraft; if a prince is cold and distant with his subject it is witchcraft; if a magical rite fails to achieve its purpose it is witchcraft; if, in fact, any failure or misfortune falls upon any one at any time and in relation to any of the manifold activities of his life it may be due to witchcraft.³

3.3 RELIGION AND MAGIC AND ITS PLACE IN BODO SOCIETY

Dr. Kameswar Brahma in his book “A Study of Socio Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos (1992)” says the following connotations.

The word magic means profound. Magic is the attempt to control the mysterious forces of nature by means of inadequate to that end. Magic may be divided into many different types. It can be contagious or sympathetic, if it is the belief that once related objects retain some connection even though they are separated (for instance, the relation between a wounded man and the agent of his wound): it can also be imitative (homoeopathic) or symbolic, if it is the belief that owing to a certain likeness between things, influence can be exerted from the one to the other without physical contact (images or effigies of enemies are injured or destroyed, etc.). Magic can also be active or passive; active magic is concerned with the accomplishment of something, the attainment of an aim, while passive magic is the magic of omens, of signs which foretell what must be done or avoided; it is divination of any sort.

³. Pritchard, E. E. Evans (1937), *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp.63-64, retrieved from <http://faculty.washington.edu/Stevehar/Witchcraft.pdf> on May 5, 2017.

The Bodos believe in the existence of spirits, ghosts, witchcraft etc. and they also believe that these super natural elements cause diseases and sufferings to the human beings. With the help of magical power of the Bodo, *Ojhas* know the activities of those super natural elements.

I. *Bira Mwdai (Bira god)*: The *Bira Mwdai (Bira god)* is generally known as a popular malevolent god. The *Ojhas* (Medicine man) utilize them to fulfill their ill motives with the help of *Bira mwdai*. He emerges the *Bira mwdai* to do harm to any person who is regarded as his enemy. The *Bira mwdai* can disturb a person in such a way that he cannot live peacefully. Sometimes the *Bira mwdai* throws stones at the house in broad day light. Stones thrown at the houses are visible but the thrower is invisible. The harmful *Bira mwdai* can be removed only by another *Ojha* who is more powerful than the applier of the *Bira mwdai*.

II. *Gwthwi Mankhangnai (catching by dead spirit)*: There is a belief among the Bodos that sometimes the dead person enters into the body of a living person and speaks by the mouth of the latter. It is believed that if a person dies with his desires unfulfilled, his soul cannot be freed from the bondage of the earth. His soul roams here and there on the earth without reaching the heaven; the abode of the god.⁴

III. *Mayadhob (falling down)*: The *Ojhas* get pleasure by applying the *Mayadhob* as black magic on occasion of the marriage ceremony. Although not so harmful, the victims of the black magic known as *Mayadhob*, fall down on the ground and become unconscious for the time being. Sometimes as a precautionary measure some *Ojhas* are engaged during the ceremony to protect the members of the ceremony from the affect of any black magic like the *Mayadhob*.⁵

IV. *Bann Hogarnai (charmed arrow)*: By this black magic the *Ojhas* perform powerful magic against their enemies. This sort of black magic is of two kinds: *Sadab*

⁴. Brahma, Kameswar (1992), *A Study of Socio Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos*, Punthi Pustak, Calcuta, pp.144-152.

⁵. Kushia, Daina Dainia Swr, in *Sikrishikla*, vol.3 No.12, May 2011, ed: Jyoti Basumatary, Raja Debojit Basumatary, Chirang, Assam, p.11.

Bann and *Badab Bann*. With the help of these *Banns*, the *Ojhas* can apply his magic following the sound from a distant place without seeing with his eyes.

3.3.1 WHITE MAGIC: So far as the white magic is concerned the number of the *Ojhas*, who are expert in white magic, is not negligible. It is believed that like human beings the gods and goddesses are roaming invisibly. They create troubles to the human beings. To protect the people from their troubles the necessity of the *Ojha* (medicine man) is very great in the Bodo society even today. The *Ojhas* understand well when and what diseases attack the people because of the ill motives of the gods and goddesses.

I. *Khasini Ganhwnai* (to let to wear thread): The *Ojhas* use to apply white magic on a suffering person. A small piece of thread full of incantation is bound around the wrist or the neck of a sufferer. The formula applied thread is called *Khasini* (thread). It can be applied on Tuesday or Saturday only. One must use the thread (*Khasini*) for a period of one week. If the patient recovers before the completion of one week even then thread must be retained on the body for a week.

II. *Jharinai* (administration of *mantra*): There is a belief among the Bodos that some diseases can be removed by applying formula (*mantra*) only. The *Ojhas* apply the formula (*mantra* or *mwntwr*) on the body or any affected parts of the body of the patient with the leaves of *Saldaokhumoi* (a species of fern) seven times or five times.⁶

***Mann Jahwnai* (offering feast to *Ojha*):** This is a unique system of feeding feast as a mark of giving utmost respect to local physician. This feast is offered only after the fevering person gets well and cured by the treatment of such *Ojha*. The *Ojha* is the first and foremost in this feast. The traditional items for such feast must be very special as liked by the *Ojha*. As for example:

- I. Country wine made of *Maibra* (a kind of sticky) rice.
- II. *Khaji* (fry) of castrated cock or goat.
- III. Curry made of *Kumbra* (gourd) with dry pork meat.
- IV. *Onla* (a kind of curry) made of dust or flour of rice with castrated cock.

⁶. Brahma, Kameswar (1992), op. cit., pp.144-152.

V. *Nappam Batwn* (Fermentation of dried fish with arum and sour in the bamboo pipe by way of airtie)

VI. Curry of *Sobai* (black pulse), *Tharun*, *Tha Gunda* (A kind of Cultivated Creeping Plant and its larger Edible Tuber)

The feast has some peculiar characteristics. If somebody does not offer such feast to concerned *Ojha* even after the cured of illness, than the power and effective quality of such *Ojha* decreases. Gradually his or her *mantra* and art will functionless. But when the people offer such type of feast to *Ojha*, than the power of his *Mwntwr* and art will increases. In the treatment based on the symptom of patients he may uses *Jhahura* (local medicine). So, the villagers almost know that and offer such type of feast, when their health problem gets cured.⁷

3.4 SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEF AMONG BODOS

1. **To obey the power of *Dwi* (water) and *Or* (fire):** The Bodo people have great faith on the power of water and fire. They always try to keep sanctity of water and fire, because they have faith that water has deity (*Kaina Santi*) and fire has deity (*Brahma*). These deity may cause danger to disobedient persons.⁸

2. ***But Pret* (ghost):** Bodos have belief that the unholy person or soul becomes ghost (*Bhut Pret*) after death. The god of heaven doesn't accept the unholy soul, so his soul should stay in the earth as becoming ghost. The ghost may bring danger to some timid (weak zodiac sign) person.

3. ***Angri Mwnda*:** This is also unnatural object like god appeared at night in playfield, paddy field, Shore of Great River etc. But they appeared at reasonable distance from the sight of human being when they appear. They usually appear in groups and jokes at human being from distance.

⁷. Chanakya Brahma (70), informant, Culturalist, interviewed on July, 2011.

⁸. Narzary, Surat (2014), *Sandw Baodia*, N. L. Publication, Kokrajhar, Assam, P.9.

4. ***Kuber Mwdai***: This is one kind of deity who bites if he gets angry. The bitten person feels severe pain in stomach and heart.⁹

5. ***Asi Gwla***: This is one kind of ghost having long finger with long nail. They also frighten and attack the targeted person at their will.

6. ***Gorai Dabrainai***: The deity runs on horse at night to cause the people about their presence and worship.

7. ***Sikri Sikla***: They are female youths having beautiful looks. They persuade and lure the male youths in dream to marry. The male youth if he agrees to proposal of *Sikri Sikla* then he has to sacrifice his life in earth.

8. ***Mwdai Lama***: There is *Mwdai Lama* (deity's Path) in their particular places. These paths are seen in alter or big trees, forest cover, graveyard etc. The people cannot cross these kinds of paths. If anybody wrongly crosses the paths then he falls in danger.¹⁰

9. ***Bwrma Mwnamgnai***: *Bwrma Mwnamgnai* (Smelling of goat) happens in such places where there is presence of deities. These are happens in a dark moment in dark place.

10. ***Bar Gajri***: *Bar Gajri* (Evil Wind) is an evil wind released by deity which is very dangerous. If somebody collides with the *Bar Gajri* he or she has to fall in danger. To recover from this danger he or she has to sacrifice cock, goat etc.

11. ***Graha***: According to social belief that every human being is surrounded by various *grahas* (star). The presence of bad *graha* of a particular person could be foretold by exorcist. The bad *graha* are needed to be avoided by performing *pujas* or sacrifice etc.

12. ***Sigigra***: Frightener ghost threatens the human being by various means. They usually block the path with pulling live bamboo or shaking trees ahead of passerby.

⁹. Kushia (2011), op. cit., p.11.

¹⁰. Chanakya Brahma (70), informant, Culturalist, interviewed on July, 2011.

13. ***Mwsa Jarou***: The people can transform into tiger with the help of *mantra* which is known as *Mwsa Jarou*. The people who have will to become *Mwsa Jarou* should select garbage disposal place as secret place and collect varieties of materials for rituals to transform into *Mwsa Jarou*. The *Mwsa Jarou* can re-transform into human being after performing rituals by waiting family members.¹¹

14. ***Maosi Gwswm***: *Maosi Gwswm* (black cat) is regarded as bad sign in various social works. If the black cat crosses the path ahead of passerby then his or her destiny is at danger, as result he or she abruptly halt until somebody else crosses it. Then he or she has to cancel his work or go back to home.¹²

3.5 SOCIAL BLIND FAITH IN BODO SOCIETY

The social blind faith has been a part of Bodo society since immemorable period. For example, if people sees dead body of animals, the falling of plants, crossing of black cat, brooming the courtyard, cutting of earth with spade, quarreling, falling down by slipping, if could not bring the bride by the party etc. Among those blind faiths, the faith on witch (*Daina*) is the worst blind faith in Bodo society.

3.6 MYTHOLOGICAL STORY OF WITCH IN OLD BODO SOCIETY

There were two *Ojhas* namely, *Anasu* and *Banasu* in a certain place. Both of them were equally well versed in dealing the health problem. *Anasu* was three years bigger in age than *Banasu*. But *Banasu* used to get much respect from the villagers. So, *Anasu* had displeased with the *Banasu*. Because *Anasu* wanted more respect than *Banasu* from the villagers. Once a time, *Anasu* had enjoyed the feast as mark respect in a family of certain village. The family had sent a bottle of country wine with him in return. He arrived at home during the Sun set. He used to looks all the surroundings and everything is O.K. He washed his feet and opened the door to enter the inner room. After entering the room, he drank the country wine to drive out the weary mind. He drank half of the

¹¹. Chanakya Brahma (70), informant, Culturalist, interviewed on July, 2011.

¹². Somani, Saurav, The Luck Factor, in *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, dated, December 5, 2014, p.3.

bottle, left for the *Banasu Ojha*. But he mixed the poison with the wine to cause death to his contemporary *Banasu*.

In the meantime he thought that how the wine happened after mixing of poison. He unfortunately tested a drop, after that he got fell on the bed and died. The cockroach, cat died after touching the body of *Anasu*.

Next early in the morning, an old woman came to *Anasu* for calling him for treatment for her grandchild. But the old woman saw his straight death body and surprised. She shouted and nearby people arrived.

The further study revealed that *Banasu* was not present during death of *Anasu*, rather he was at the other far place for treatment of illness. He would be arriving tonight. How could he be the murderer of *Anasu* ?

After deep enquiry it was learnt that *Anasu* conspired to kill the *Banasu*, who was more respected by the locality. *Anasu* had jealousy over the reputation of *Banasu*, so he mixed the poison with the country wine to offer the *Banasu*. But mistakenly *Anasu* tested the poison mixed wine and fell on the bed for forever. In addition to that, after the post mortem it was learnt that *Anasu* died of poison.¹³

The above incident was very common to the Bodo society because of jealousy, envy etc. The learnt exorcists (*Ojha*) would treat the ill health as well as kill their opponents. Those kinds of incidents were not properly enquired in the remote village. Thus the illiterate villagers used to say such secret of incident as “Casting spell of Witch”.

3.7 SECRET OF BIRA IN THE BODO SOCIETY

Bira is regarded as a small Goddess. The *Ojhas* took help from the *Bira* to fulfill their purposes. The *Bira* could be reared at the home by *Ojhas*. The *Bira* were very truthful, they obey the command of their masters. The *Ojhas* used to keep the *Bira* inside the bamboo pipe, and release them in the night. The *Bira* was used to finish the enemy. The

¹³. Narzary, Dr. Phanindra Nath (2016), *Kwmsi Pwtainai Arw Daina*, Pranchis Narzaree, Kokrajhar, Assam, pp.1-28.

Bira used to pelt stone, earth, block the road by bamboo etc. to their enemy. The *Bira* used to frighten the villagers so that they call the *Ojhas* for treatment. So, the *Ojhas* used to play such tactics to gain respect and earn money.¹⁴

3.8 THEORY OF MYTHOLOGY AND RELIGION

Religion in its widest sense includes on the one hand the conception which men entertain of the divine or supernatural powers and on the other, that sense of the dependence of human welfare on those powers which finds its expression in various forms of worship. Mythology is connected with the former side of religion as furnishing the whole body of myths or stories which are told about gods and heroes and which describe their character and origin, their actions and surroundings. Such myths have their source in the attempt of the human mind, in a primitive and unscientific age, to explain the various forces and phenomena of nature with which man is confronted. They represent in fact the conjectural science of a primitive mental condition. For statements which to the highly civilised mind would be merely metaphorical, amount in that early stage to explanations of the phenomena observed. The intellectual difficulties which are raised by the course of the heavenly bodies, by the incidents of the thunderstorm, by reflections on the origin and constitution of the outer world, here receive their answers in the form of stories. The basis of these myths is the primitive attitude of mind which regards all nature as an aggregate of animated entities. A myth actually arises when the imagination interprets a natural event as the action of a personified resembling the human agent.

Thus the observation that the Moon follows the Sun without overtaking it would have been transformed into a myth by describing the former as a maiden following a man by whom she is rejected. Such an original myth enters on the further stage of poetical embellishment, as soon as it becomes the property of people endowed with creative imagination. Various traits are now added according to the individual fancy of the narrator, as the story passes from mouth to mouth. The natural phenomenon begins to fade out of the picture as its place is taken by a detailed representation of human passions. When the natural basis of the tale is forgotten new touches totally unconnected

¹⁴. Ibid., pp.1-28.

with its original significance may be added or even transferred from other myths. When met with at a late stage of its development, a myth may be so far overgrown with secondary accretions unconnected with its original form, that its analysis may be extremely difficult or even impossible.¹⁵

Vedic (Vedic is the language of the Vedas, an early form of Sanskrit of ancient Indian subcontinent of period 1500-500 B.C) mythology occupies a very important position in the study of the history of religions. Its oldest source presents to us an earlier stage in the evolution of beliefs based on the personification and worship of natural phenomena, than any other literary monument of the world. To this oldest phase can be traced by uninterrupted development the germs of the religious beliefs of the great majority of the modern Indians, the only branch of the Indo-European race in which its original nature worship has not been entirely supplanted many centuries ago by a foreign monotheistic faith. The earliest stage of *Vedic* mythology is not so primitive as was at one time supposed, but it is sufficiently primitive to enable us to see clearly enough the process of personification by which natural phenomena developed into gods, a process not apparent in other literatures. The mythology no less than the language is still transparent enough in many cases to show the connexion both of the god and his name with a physical basis; nay in several instances the anthropomorphism is only incipient.

The foundation, on which *Vedic* mythology rests, is still the belief, surviving from a remote antiquity, that all the objects and phenomena of nature with which man is surrounded are animate and divine. Everything that impressed the soul with awe or was regarded as capable of exercising a good or evil influence on man might in the *Vedic* age still become a direct object not only of adoration but of prayer. Heaven, earth, mountains, rivers, plants might be supplicated as divine powers; the horse, the cow, the bird of omen, and other animals might be invoked; even objects fashioned by the hand of man, weapons, the war-car, the drum, the plough, as well as ritual implements, such as the pressing stones and the sacrificial post, might be adored.

This lower form of worship, however, occupies but a small space in *Vedic* religion. The true gods of the *Veda* are glorified human beings, inspired with human motives and

¹⁵. Macdonell, A.A. (1974), *Vedic Mythology*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, p. 1.

passions, born like men but immortal. They are almost without exception the defied representatives of the phenomena or agencies of nature. The degree of anthropomorphism to which they have attained, however, varies considerably. When the name of the god is the same as that of his natural basis, the personification has not advanced beyond the rudimentary stage. Such is the case with *Dyaus* (sky), *Heaven* (heaven), *Prithvi* (Earth), *Surya* (Sun), *Usas* (Dawn), whose names represent the double character of natural phenomena and of the persons presiding over them. Similarly in the case of the two great ritual deities, *Agni* (fire) and *Soma* (ritual drink), the personifying imagination is held in check by the visible and tangible character of the element of fire and the sacrificial draught called by the same names of which they are the divine embodiments.¹⁶

3.9 THEORY OF DEMONS AND FIENDS

I. Asuras (superhuman or demon): This is opposed to the beneficent gods is a body of malevolent beings called by various designations. *Asura* is throughout the *Vedic* literature the name of the celestial demons who are regarded as the regular adversaries of the gods in their mythical conflicts and who only rarely appear as present foes of men. The term however occurs only a few times in the *Rig Veda* (one of the religious book of Sanskrit of ancient India) with the later sense of demon. It is there found only four times in the plural with this meaning. *Indra* (king of heaven referred in *Rig Veda*) is invoked to scatter the godless *Asuras*. The sense of demon is also found in the epithet *asurahan* (destroyer of Asura), ‘*Asura-slayer*’ (killer) which occurs three times and is applied to *Indra* and to the Sun.

In the *Atharva Veda* (fourth religious book of Sanskrit of ancient India) and later *asura* means ‘demon’ only; but in the *Rig Veda* the word is predominantly a designation of gods and in the *Avesta Ahura* (*asura-demon*) is the name of the highest god. Thus the sense of ‘god’ is clearly the older. An attempt has been made to explain the transition from this meaning to that of devil, from national conflicts in consequence of which the *Asuras* or gods of extra-*Vedic* tribes became ‘demons’ to the *Vedic* Indian.

¹⁶. Ibid., p.2.

II. Panis: A group of demons of the upper air, primarily the enemies of *Indra*, secondarily also of his allies *Soma* (moon, air, water) *Agni* (fire), *Brhaspati* (Jupiter or *Guru* of the Gods) and the *Angirases* (teacher of divine knowledge and mediator between man and god), are the *Panis*. In nearly all the passages in which these demons are named their cows are either expressly mentioned or alluded to as the treasure or wealth of the *panis*. There is a similar reference when *Agni* is said to have opened the doors of the *Panis*. In one passage the gods are described as having found in the cow the *Ghee* (butter) hidden by the *Panis*. The *Panis* are comparatively powerful for they are said to be surpassed in might by *Indra*.

III. Dasa: The word *dasa* or its equivalent *dasyu* is also used to designate atmospheric demons. Its history is the converse of that of *Vrtra* (personification of drought and adversary of *Indra*). Primarily signifying the dark aborigines of India contrasted with their fair *Aryan* conquerors it frequently raises to mythological rank in the *Rig Veda* as the line between what is historical and mythical is not clearly drawn. A demon must be meant by the *Dasa* who is the husband of the waters which by his victory *Indra* makes the wives of a noble husband.¹⁷

As the words *dasa* and *dasya* primarily mean 'malignant foe' and then 'demon' it seems convenient to render them by 'fiend'.

These demons have the form of dogs, vultures, owls and other birds. Becoming birds they fly about at night. Assuming the form of a brother, husband or lover, they approach women and desire to destroy their offspring. They also lie in wait for women in the shape of a dog or an ape. Thus they are dangerous during pregnancy and childbirth. They prowl around the bride at weddings, and little staves are therefore shot into the air to pierce the eye of the *Raksases* (giant man). The *Atharva Veda* gives the most detailed account of the appearance of the *Raksases*. They have mostly human form, their head, eyes, heart, and other parts being mentioned; but they have frequently some kind of monstrous deformity, being three headed, two-mouthed, bear-necked, four-eyed, five-footed, fingerless, with feet turned backwards, or with horns on their hands. Blue and

¹⁷. Ibid., pp. 156-157.

yellow or green demons are also spoken. They are further described as male and female, having families and even kings and they are mortal.

The time of the *Raksaes* is the evening or night. In the east they have no power, because they are dispersed by the rising sun. A falling meteor is regarded as an embodiment of a *Raksas*. It is especially the dark time of new moon that belongs to evil spirits, as to the souls of the dead. *Agni*, being the dispeller of darkness as well as the officiator at the sacrifice, is naturally the god who is oftenest opposed to them and who is frequently invoked to burn, ward off or destroy them. These evil spirits injure not only spontaneously but also at the institution of men. Thus the *Rig Veda* speaks of the ‘yoker of *Raksases*’ *raksoyuj* and refers to the *Raksas* and the *Yatu* (sorcerer) of sorcerers. One suffering from hostile sorcery drives away the *Raksases* by sacrificing to *Agni Yavistha* (supernatural means) and in a hymn of the *Atharva Veda* demons are called upon to devour him who sent them.¹⁸

3.10 CONCEPT OF ACTUAL WITCHCRAFT IN TRIBAL SOCIETY

According to Chanakya Brahma (2012), a great scholar has defined about the witchcraft in following way:

The exorcists those who have intention in mind to kill the targeted person are said witch. The *mantra* (*Rainai* in Bodo) must be very effective enough to affect the targeted person to become witch. According to some aged informants the exorcist those who have killed any targeted person are said witch. The witch implies that he has already killed somebody with the help of *mantras*. The exorcist transforms into witch after taking lives of prey. All exorcists are not *Daina* (witch) but all *Daina* are exorcist.

According to Bhaben Narzi, a great scholar on witchcraft in Bodo society has defined the witchcraft in his book “*Boro Kocharini Samaj Arw Harimu*” 2010, in following way:

¹⁸. Ibid., pp. 163.

With the power of deities the woman who can destroy the enemy is known as *Than Thin Dainy*. This *Than Thin Dainy* is found in Boro and other tribal of undivided Goalpara district.

The *Than Thin Dainy* is not ghost. They are human beings. Those who want to become *Than Thin Dainy* they have to pledge before fire, water, and land so many times. And he/she never can disclose the secrets of that *mantra*; otherwise he or she will fall in danger.

3.10.1 THAN THIN DAINY (FEMALE WITCH)

The woman learns the *mantra* of *Than Thin Dainy*. The learner of this *mantra* has to learn during midnight with covering whole body with thatch and reciting the *mantras*. After little moment while reciting the *mantra* the head only get separated and roam here and there. The whole body except the head remains on the bed. In roaming during the night if somebody collides with that head he falls in danger.¹⁹

If people become *Dainy* he becomes very greedy. She feels greedy when she sees fine goat, pig, hen, goose, vegetables, etc. accordingly she ask for that desires from the owner. If the owner of those things refuses to offer the asked things he/she has to face danger. She causes illness to those home members. The *Dainy* feels very angry to such person when she is refused of desired goods by the later. And she cast spell on such person.

Witchcraft can be defined as the power of a person to do harm or influence nature through sorcery. The sorcery is based on supernatural or magical powers. The meaning of witchcraft refers casting (*Rainai* in Bodo term) of black magic or sorcery to influence the targeted enemy. The practitioner of black magic release his/her *mantra* nourished by evil spirit. The *mantra* prepared with evil spirit attacks the targeted person. It is believed

¹⁹. Narzi, Bhaben (2010), *Boro Kacharini Samaj Arw Harimu*, Chirang Publication Board, Chirang, pp.188, 211,212.

that persons having weak zodiac sign (*Rashi*) are easily subject to victims. The witch applies some methods as a weapon to fulfill his/her plan.²⁰

In another connotation the practice of witchcraft is casting a spell (sorcery) on enemy whom he/she hates with the help of *mantra* inviting the evil spirit. The evil or demonic spirit attacks the targeted person. The witch plays a black magic to influence upon the targeted person time and again. But the witch does not attack the targeted person physically nor does rebuke severely. He/she does not challenge with muscle power or arguments. But he/she is silent victor. He/she takes the challenge against enemy whom he/she dislikes secretly. The witch then prepares some process (best known to him/her) with *mantra* and releases his prepared *mantra* to influence the targeted person.

3.11 BRIEF UNDERSTANDING OF WITCHCRAFT AND WITCH HUNTING

Witchcraft is the supposed power of a person to harm the other by occult or supernatural means. Witch is the supposed to be holder of such supernatural powers.

3.11.1 WITCH HUNTING: It is the process of persecution or execution of a witch.²¹ In most of the cases it is discovered that those women who are killed as witches, are actually meant to disown of their land, avenged for refusal to solicitation from upper class men. Witch hunters are basically land grabbers from or outside the family of the target, who with the collusion of *Ojhas* commit the crime. The *Ojhas* in most of cases play as instigator for witch finding and hunts.

²⁰. Ibid., pp.188, 211,212.

²¹. Mathur, Prof. Kanchan, Labelled for Life? A Study on Witches and Witchcraft in Rajasthan, India, Institute of Development Studies, India, 2009, retrieved from <http://www.svri.org/forums/forum/2009/presentations/Mathur.pdf>, on April 26, 2017.



Rajendra Nath Boro (78), President Boro

Samaj Afat (Social Organization of Bodo Society)

He was of the view that the Bodo society totally does not believe upon the witchcraft. It is the some section of people who take oppurtunity and mislead the gullible public. Boro *Samaj* now comprises some religious beliefs mainly as *Brahma*, *Bathou* and Christian. There is no belief on witchcraft in Christian *Samaj*. The Bodo society had a separate customary law to keep peace and order in the society. That customary law was enough to deal with the anti social element in the society. But the customary law was paralyzed during the long period of Bodo movement. The inactive of customary law resulted indiscipline and disorder in the society.

To him the *Ojha* (local physician) was good in the Bodo society. The *Ojha* used to treat the minor health problem with the purpose of giving utmost mental satisfaction. The mental satisfaction is one of the remedies for curing diseases.

He has been working against the witch hunting. He along with the other workers of All Bodo Students Union could have rescued about 34 victims of witch suspect. Again they have brought 84 witch detectors and warned them in future if they used to detect witch wrongly. He also expressed that there is some powerful people who instigate to kill in the name of witch to fulfill his personal scourge. The law must be implemented strictly to deal with anyone involving the crime.

*(Interviewed on 27.7.2016 at his residence (1 No. Habrubari),
Kokrajhar.*

Superstition also plays a culminating role in witch hunting. Illiterate and backwardness endorse superstitious belief. In their context of knowledge, witch hunting is the only way to get rid from the future danger of sorcery in the village. The fear out of superstitious mind of illiterate folks may go for finding out of witch with the help of *Ojhas* if there is outbreak of diseases, serial deaths or misfortune in the village.

Witchcrafts were rampantly used in ancient and medieval civilizations of Europe and Americas. The oriental lands were not either unaccustomed by the vicious practice. Although men have been victims of witch hunting or witch killing, women have been the most ubiquitously targeted witches in every era and society. Historically, it is believed that in Europe until 18th century many thousands of women were tortured and killed as witches, often by burning at the altar. Despite human civilizations have progressed in scientific temper, still there are societies which are steeped in ignorance and superstition. Witch hunting is one of the extreme violences against women whereby the entire community sanctions the punishment meted out to the person being accused of witchcraft.

Witchcraft is basically a practice of black magic or sorcery in which evil souls are invoked by performing rituals sanctioned as forces of devil or impure souls by religious scriptures.

3.11.2 WOMEN AND WITCH: A person, especially of female gender, may be considered a witch who acquires supernatural power, is capable of performing black magic or sorcery, and of causing purported harm to human health. Terms for witchcraft of Indian states such as *daayan* (Bihar), *tohni* (Chhatisgarh), *chudail* (Hindi term of female witch) etc. are used to brand a woman as a witch. The term *tohna* is used for men witches in the forest state of Chhatisgarh of India. The term ‘witch’ is popularly used for women.

It suggests that it is a gender attribution and practices of witchcraft are seen from gender perspective as in majority of witch killings, victims are women. Whatever the different practices and understandings of the term ‘witch’ may be, it shares a universal

commonality, and that is of the attribution of specific supernatural powers to a person by others. An attribution of a person as a witch is nearly always negative, fearful and destructive.²²

It is learnt that the attacked person firstly sees horrible nightmares about the evil or demonic activities in the night. The horrible nightmare creates traumatic diseases to many persons. That he fears seriously about the activities of demon falls easily into the onslaught of witch's attack. The purpose of the weapon of witchcraft is to firstly frighten the targeted person through horrible dreams, nightmare. The frightened person is easily subject to fall into various kinds of psychological problems or sufferings. During this stage the evil spirit vigorously attacks the victim grasping the mind. The horrified victims see the witch who attacks him/her in night dreams. It is found that some of the victims see the image of witch during the day also. The image of the witch appears in front of the victims and continues to remain until it achieves its destination. It is clear that witchcraft was in some ways conceived of as a form of power which ran between the body of the witch and her victim, and thus notions about witchcraft in this period were connected with ideas about the body.²³

3.12 WITCHCRAFT AND BLACK MAGIC IN HOLY BIBLE

The evils of witchcraft and practice of sorcery are found mentioned in the Bible. In the context of Christianity the Bible is considered as holy book written out of God's spirit during early creation of earth. In some chapters of Bible explain about the existence of witchcraft, practice of black magic, sorcery, consulting the evil spirits of death etc. The doctrines of Bible have a strong condemnation towards the witchcraft, magician and sorcery. As for example: In Exodus 22:18 says, "put to death any woman who practises magic". Leviticus 19:26 says, "Do not practise any kind of magic". Deuteronomy 18:10 says, "do not let your people practise divination or look omens or use spells or charms and donot let them consult the spirits of the dead". Job 3:8 says, "tell the sorcerers to curse that day". 1 Samuel 15:23 says, "rebellion against him is as bad as witchcraft".

²². Iqbal, Mohammad Tarique (2015), Witch hunting: A case of gender violence in the garb of vigilantism in India, in *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Science*, Centre for Women's Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India, p. 111, retrieved from http://www.garph.co.uk/IJARMSS/Nov_2015/13.pdf.v on April 26, 2017.

²³. Narzi, Bhaben (2010), *op.cit.*, pp.188,211,212.

Galatians 5:20 says, “in worship of idols and witchcraft, people become enemies”. Acts 13:6 says, “where they met a certain magician named Bar-Jesus, a Jew who claimed to be a prophet”. Revelation says, “those who practise magic, those who worship idols and all liars-the place for them is the lake burning with fire and sulphur which is the second death”.²⁴

3.13 THEORY OF EVIL SPIRITS IN *BOROK* SOCIETY OF TRIPURA

Borok: *Boroks* are the major tribes of Tripura, one of the states of India.

The concept of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is reflected in the daily lives of the *Borok* tribe of Tripura. It is also seen that they categorized the spirit that they believe and worship as ‘good spirit’ and ‘bad spirit’ indicating that the former is benevolent and the later malevolent. The belief in the supernatural powers is also one of the most dominant features of their religion. They also have idea about the abode of the spirits- both ‘good’ and ‘evil’.

No one knows when the beliefs in ‘good spirit’ and ‘evil spirit’ originated. It has been in the memory of the community since time immemorial. ‘Good spirits’ according to the *Boroks* are those who protect the home and hearth from illness. In this sense, they are the deities whom they worship. Examples of some ‘good spirits’ are given below:

I. *Nokchumwtai:* This is a female spirit and acts as the guardian of the homestead. She is worshipped mostly to recover from illness. To worship this deity, a fowl or a pig is required. After the worship, the cooked meat is offered to the deity and thereafter is eaten by the *ochai* and his assistants ‘*Barua*’ along with the members of the household.

II. *Saklakmwtai:* This is another deity of health. It is worshipped in the courtyard with different types of home made cakes. In the evening, a he goat is sacrificed inside the house to appease the deity.

²⁴. Holy Bible, Exodus 22:18, Leviticus 19:26, Deuteronomy 18:11, 1 Samuel 15:23, Job 3:8, Galatians 5:20.

III. *Swkalmwtai*: This is the deity of witches. To be cured from an illness caused by witches, this witch is worshipped. In order to appease this spirit, cooked meat or the tortoise and pork are offered outside the village mostly in jungles during the night time.

IV. *Burasa*: This is the male deity for different diseases. When a household member, especially children, cry incessantly from shiver, pain or fever, it is believed that the child is possessed by *Barusa*. In order to appease and cure the patient, the spirit of *Barasa* is to be offered with two black fowls along with two eggs.

V. *Haichukma*: This is a female spirit and wife of *Burasa*. It is believed that she does two things she has the ability to make people invisible right under one's nose, and she slaps people and makes their neck crooked. To appease this spirit, two black fowls or a pig is sacrificed in the jungles.

V. Evil eye: This happens during eating. Some people are believed to have evil eye. If such people cast any look on anyone while eating, which some of them would like to cast the particular person suffers from *huanango* that gave rise to a set of different ailments. It is believed that only the *ochai* can undo this bad effect and cure a victim from such sufferings.²⁵

VI. Witches/*Swkaljwk/Bedua*: These are the spirits that pervade the *Borok* worldview and govern the people even today. Most of the spirits that are believed are invisible. There is only one spirit which is visible to the human eye and that is the *Swkal*. Because this spirit is said to enter the human form and is the perpetrator of evil among the people. In common parlance *Swkal* is what in other cultures is described as a witch. The male witch in *Borok* is called *Bedua* and female is referred to as *Swkaljwk*. A *Swkaljwk* always gets what she asks from the villagers because no one denies anything to her. This is because they believe denying anything to a *Swkaljwk* is inviting her wrath. Once any woman is suspected to be witch or *Swkal*, everyone in the village/society is careful

²⁵. Debbarma, Sukhendu (2012), Evil and Evil Spirit in Borok Society of Tripura, in *Construction of Evil in North East India*, ed: Prasenjit Biswas and C. Joshua Thomas, Sage publications India, New Delhi, pp.142-144.

in dealing with her. It is believed that a witch or *Swkaljwk* usually pass on her knowledge of witchcraft to her daughter.²⁶

3.14 UNDERSTANDING OF EVIL IN THE *TIWA* CULTURE

Tiwa: *Tiwas* are one of the major ethnic tribes of Assam state of India.

For the *Tiwa*, evil is anything that violates the normal nature of human beings. It is an unnatural deed. Any act, deed or behavior that goes against the norms and is forbidden by the forefathers is considered as evil. Those acts, deeds and behaviours which are considered evil are passed on from generation to generation. Failure to perform in conformity with the traditional and cultural practices and rituals will be considered evil. Taking revenge on the neighbor, either in physical form or through black magic, is evil. According to the *Tiwa* traditional religion, the principles of Good and Evil coexisted from the very beginning. *Shari pahai* is the father of evil. He is the supreme of all the devils. *Shari pahai* has 12 legions of disciples known as *paro khondew*. *Mahadew* is the *Tew Tohorom Raja* meaning “True God and King’. He too has 12 legions of disciples under his command. The belief in the existence of evil is often expressed through magic. In fact, knowledge and skill in black and (or) white magic is often considered as attaining certain social status in the society. The head of the family is expected to preside over when the family sacrificial rituals are offered to family deities. When the family does not have any elder with knowledge of black or white magic and feel that they are being exploited by others, they are forced to hire knowledgeable people at exorbitant fees. Some of the examples of black magic are:

I. *Mai maya:* It is used for rich harvest even at the cost of others.

II. *Orsya:* It is giving a certain type of poison in the food and drink with the belief that such an act will obtain blessings from the evil spirit or the family deity. This is not common among the male members, but is practiced among the female members of some clans. The victims suffer from cough, severe eye infection or loss of teeth. Some

²⁶. Ibid., pp.142-144.

become permanently blind while others can lose all the teeth. In extreme cases, the victims suffer excessive bleeding in the throat and die.

III. *Muhini*: It is the use of the power of the evil one to induce physical attraction to either a male or a female person of one's choice. It is often done against the will of the person concerned.

IV. *Rat muhini*: It is misusing of the power of evil ones to influence the public at important meetings when decisions are to be taken against them.

V. *Evil powers*: Evil powers are also used to win games, fights and wars.

In religious doctrines of *Tiwa*, it imposes a number of restrictions. The *Tiwa* traditional religion believes that only the person who has knowledge of *mantras* should chant and invoke the supernatural spirits. The presence of the common people during these rituals is not mandatory.²⁷

3.15 EVIL AND WITCHCRAFT IN *KARBI* TRIBE OF ASSAM

***Karbi*:** *Karbis* are the tribal community in the district of Karbi Anglong, an autonomous district of Assam state of India.

Karbi represent one of the major tribes of North East India and possess rich traditions and culture, unique from other tribe of the region. *Thekere* or witchcraft is common among *Karbhis* and other tribal communities as well. *Thekere* is believed to possess divinity and can perform unbelievable acts. Some persons in the society hire the service of such divine person to settle personal scores and use black magic to cause illness. Illness caused by black magic does not respond to treatment by modern medicines and finally the patient dies, it is reported. However, timely detection and intervention by

²⁷. Kachappilly, Joy (2012), The *Tiwa* Understanding of Evil, in *Construction of Evil in North East India*, ed: Prasenjit Biswas and C.Joshua Thomas, Sage publications India, New Delhi, pp.200-209.

another *thekere* can negate the influence of evil and save the patient (not by medicines).²⁸

3.16 IDEA OF EVIL IN ADI TRIBE

Adi: The *Adis* are the major tribe who are known as the hill people of Arunachal Pradesh, one of the states of India.

Evils experienced by the *Adi* tribals have become legends and as such there are some guiding principles to deal with them properly. The *miri* (priest of *Adis*) and the experienced elderly men know many small histories about the role of evils in afflicting the tribes. The powerful priests have a very important role in the *Adi* society. They propitiate the evil spirits and bless the householders for peace and prosperity. The householders need to perform the rituals in frequent intervals by inviting the *miris*. If there is any negligence in the rituals, the spirits become angry and harm the children and the householders.

I. *Biribik*, the water serpent: On a night of heavy rain, a fisherman, who was all alone with his nets by the river, heard a rushing sound as the water parted and when he looked up at the tree he was sheltering under, he saw a serpent with a head with horns coiled up in the branches looking down at him. He then ran for his life. He never recovered from the effects of that terrible vision and died within a year of wasting illness. The name of this mysterious serpent was *Biribik*.

II. *Mitimili*: *Mitimili* is a race of supernatural beings. These small quiet people first prepared the mysterious *si-ye*, that is the yeast used to ferment rice into beer. Before this race disappeared, deranged by strange visions, they gave this sacred powder to mankind, warning that this sacred powder had special powers and was to be handled with respect by women only. This white powder mixed with ground rice, roots and berries is shaped into small flat biscuits called *si-ye* cakes which when eaten make

²⁸.Teron, Robindra (2012), Concept of Good and Evil among Karbi Tribe of North East India, in *Construction of Evil in North East India*, ed: Prasenjit Biswas and C.Joshua Thomas, Sage publications India, New Delhi, pp.174-179.

people hallucinate like *mitimili* race and as such are forbidden before a hunt or a journey.

III. *Dimitayang*: It is the lonely spirit who stirs up the lake waters and clutches trespassing men in an embrace of ice. Every winter *Adis* set out on a journey to the Snow Mountains to harvest a precious root (the deadly aconitum) for preparation of poison arrows.

IV. *Danki*: *Danki*, the fabulous vessel owned by the *Lotang* family of the *Migu* clan, was made of the strongest metal alloy. It was believed to be an auspicious gift from the gods. It had been passed down from father to son for generations in the family. One day the eldest son of the family noticed that the vessel was lying overturned in its usual place. He was surprised to see the moisture and patches of moss on its surface. Since then he was cleaning it everybody and next day finding it filled with bamboo leaves of the variety which is available only in far north hills. After such strange behavior, the *danki* was afterwards split into two halves and it disappeared.

The spirits of wind, place, big trees, rivers and streams which harm humans are mysterious and magical. *Nemen*, it was said, was carried away by wind and she was found dead at the water point beyond the orange trees. The ghostly aubergine plant that poisons the minds of men who go under it is mysterious like the behavior of the evil spirits.

Adis, the followers of animism have strange ideas about the evil spirits. Exorcism, rituals for the propitiation of the evil spirits, listening to the *miri* about the mysteries of the creation and the old stories, legends and small histories of the land keep them occupied in exploring the essentialism of life. The idea of Evil is the guiding principle of a cautious life that helps a tribal escape the danger at different stages of life.²⁹

²⁹. Das, Nigamananda (2012), The Idea of Evil among the *Adis* of Arunachal Pradesh, in *Construction of Evil in North East India*, ed: Prasenjit Biswas and C.Joshua Thomas, Sage publications India, New Delhi, pp.68-77.

3.17 THE IDEA OF SUPERNATURAL AND EVIL IN NAGA SOCIETY

Naga: *Naga* is a name of an ethnic social group which conglomerates several sub tribes of Nagaland, one of the states of India. The *Naga* people are also found in some parts of North Eastern states of India.

Evil in a traditional village setting is still a myth. It cannot be proved or disapproved. The idea of Evil is always linked to fear. It is always spoken of or thought alongside with a supernatural existence.

I. *Tero*: The idea of evil is felt more when one is in the village. If not evil spirits, there are also people particularly some women who are linked with evil deeds and are thereby considered evil. These women are said to be using '*Tero*' a poison which supposedly kills people or makes them sick. It is said that *Tero* users believe that when they kill seven people, then they can enjoy prosperity, good health and an increase in power and number of generations. When they don't make use of their *Tero*, they are believed to become weak.

II. *Tem-mi*: The medium for communication in the traditional days between the spirits and human beings was carried out through some men and women known as *Tem-mi*. they cannot be considered as modern day fortune tellers because they operate in a very traditional method. They were consulted when too many deaths occurred in the village. On one occasion, when many deaths were occurring consecutively for many days, the villagers consulted a *Tem-mi*. They were told by the *Tem-mi* that the evil spirits are yet to take three more cocks (three more able men) because their passage over a bridge were blocked by railings which were constructed to prevent people from falling. Hearing that the villagers went and cut the iron railings on the bridge both sides in the middle after which it was believed to have prevented the death of the three men predicted.³⁰

³⁰. Hibo, Visakhonu (2012), Good and Evil: Naga Society, in *Construction of Evil in North East India*, ed: Prasenjit Biswas and C.Joshua Thomas, Sage publications India, New Delhi, pp.114-117.

III. *Ratumi*: *Ratumis* are another type of evil spirit who was greatly feared and dreaded because they eat human innards. In fact, the word '*Ra*' means 'intestine' and '*tumi*' means 'eater'. These evil spirits were believed to roam in certain ranges of land. They were the traditional shawls lengthwise, instead of the usual breadth wise wearing of shawls by human beings. They were said to be having very bad body odour.

When these evil spirits are moving upwards, it was said, that the tips of bamboos will be found dying. When it is moving downwards, the tips of bamboo will die again.

IV. Head hunting: Head hunting was another practice of the past that was linked with brutal acts, but which was carried out with 'good intention' in the minds of the perpetrators. The head hunters head hunted in order to ward off evil spirits, sicknesses, poverty and immature deaths. It was intended to usher in prosperity, health, fertility, increase in population and other 'good' things in the village.³¹

³¹. Ibid., pp.114-117.