

## **2.1 TRACE BACK TO WITCH PRACTICE IN UNIVERSAL CONTEXT**

Witchcraft originated with the human civilization itself. No society of this universe can claim itself to be totally free of superstitious belief. Whatever it may high or lower society or strata, the superstitious belief or faith is found more or less. Educated or enlightened people are also not free the superstitious belief. The practices of witchcraft followed by hunting incidents have been occurring in Assam particularly in Kokrajhar district since immemorial period. The Bodo society is also not free from the superstitious belief and faith. Witchcraft, an earth based religion, was practiced in almost all the societies and cultures across the world according to local beliefs and traditions. The fear of the unknown and its imagined role in making our day to day life easy or difficult, created witches and their black art. Even though witchcraft as such was practiced mainly by experienced and old women, men also practiced it. Witches were the mediators between the human beings and the mysterious super powers such as spirits and angels. When a witch succeeded in resolving the apparently mysterious problem of someone, the performance was termed as magic, a process that could not be easily explained away through any logical analysis. The witches prayed with sacrifices of animals or blood to the higher powers or the spirits for help and guidance in resolving the problem by performing certain rituals and the whole process is called witch practice.<sup>1</sup>

**2.1.1 HISTORY OF SATAN DURING 12<sup>TH</sup> TO 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY:** Every human society poses the problem of evil, and attempts to resolve it. The philosopher may formulate the question in terms of the concept of human nature, when the reply will vary according to the optimism or pessimism of the questioner: dog eats dog, or the opposite, as the case may be. But historians, whose method is not fundamentally oriented towards moral assessments of this type, tend to steer clear of this sort of approach. They see a civilization not as an aggregation of individuals but as a system of relations oriented towards one or more collective goals and acquiring the means to attain them, in the face of all the natural or human dangers it encounters. The great cultures, the most brilliant and the most enduring, produce strong and numerous social

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<sup>1</sup>. Muchembled, Robert (2003), *A History of the Devil*, Polity Press, U.K, p. 9

ties. In other words, they weave around their members relational webs made up both of powerful, interconnected symbols and of concrete practices which strengthen the collective cement binding the individual to the whole, from the cradle to the grave.

No clue, therefore, however tenuous, is without its value in the attempt to understand how a civilization holds together, evolves and survives. And nothing is more prejudicial to the historical process than to analyse separately the different levels of human existence. The notion of culture, whether it refers to art, literature, the objects of material life or the devil, can be defined as a hidden link which gives overall meaning to the human universe to which it is applied. To isolate religion from politics or the economy from mental representations is to risk an unacceptable distortion of meaning. A society has to be perceived as a whole, without concealing its weaknesses and without refusing to explore its darker side.<sup>2</sup>

The belief on witchcraft is very old in universe. It was developed along with the development of human society. This belief has occupied in many societies as a blind faith or a traditional faith. The human being since beginning depends upon the nature. The nature always tries to control the human being at her interest. The ancient people had to depend upon the agriculture for livelihood. There was no development of industry. The agricultural life was depending on nature. So, the people have deep relation with the nature. The relation with the nature of people has two dimension, viz., negative and positive. The negative dimension implies the destructive. On the other hand the human being always wants to control the dimension of nature towards them. So, the human being has taken the help from religion and various rituals. The human being used to follow the art of magic to control the secret of nature.

The nature implies such condition that about the presence of river, hills, forest, seas, rain, storm, sky, livings beings etc. The hidden secret of nature can not be seen with eyes. The power of nature is felt by senses. Human beings have experienced about the secret power of nature since beginning.

The above definition shows the deep relation between human being and nature. In the nature good, evil, truth and untruth etc. are found. So, the magic has two dimensions,

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<sup>2</sup>. Ibid., p. 9

viz., negative and positive. When the people apply the magic for rain, that is positive and when the people apply magic to harm others, which is negative.

Along with the magic the human being in view of protecting them, the culture of Totemism is followed. In our local language the Totemism can be said as “*Gotro*” or clan. The people belonging to same clan are permitted to have marriage, social relation, help to each other in danger. There are some tribal clans who use ‘tattoo’ mark in their body, so that there can be unity in their society. Along with the “*Gotro*” or clan some social restriction developed which termed as social taboo.

To some tribes or clans the big river, mountain, seas, big tree etc. are the symbol of power of nature. So, such symbols are to be worshipped. According the human being since beginning has been worshipping such symbols.

Some people worship some goddesses to obtain special power in fulfilling their objective. The power of goddess remains with such worshipper. In early days when there was no idea of secularism, the people were forced to observe the common religious rituals. They were the leaders of society. However, in early society some people were believed to have some evil power to harm others.<sup>3</sup>

## **2.2 HISTORY OF TRIALS AND PERSECUTION OF WITCHES**

The persecution of witches is a consequence of witchcraft beliefs. However, beliefs as a necessary pre condition do not automatically generate persecutions. We can see from literate societies with codified law that certain forms of sorcery or witchcraft were severely punished from the earliest law code of King Hammurabi (sixth king of the first Babylonian dynasty during 1792-1750 B.C) in Ancient Mesopotamia. The code of Hammurabi imposes a river ordeal (swimming test), if the charge could not be proved by means of witnesses. This offered an effective remedy against too frequent accusations: according to the principle of talion the accuser had to face the accused’s punishment if the ordeal failed to prove the suspect’s guilt. In cases of witchcraft this was the death penalty. We know similar laws from the Middle Assyrian Empire, and it

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<sup>3</sup>. Pathak, Phanidhar (2013), *Dainy*, Chandra Prakash, Panbazar, Guwahati, Assam, pp.1-4.

is generally assumed that the death penalty was imposed on witches, male and female, throughout the Ancient Middle East.

The divine law of the Ancient Jews possibly collected by Moses around 1250 B.C contains the rules that witches must be killed (Exodus 22:18), that equally those employing a spirit should be stoned to death (Leviticus 20:27) and that generally diviners and prophets were to be killed (Deuteronomy 13:5). However, we do not know whether or how these laws were enacted. Herodotus (490-425 BC) for instance reports the killing of sorcerers from the Scythians, a nomadic people from central Asia, whose capital was then located north of the Black Sea, within the boundaries of present day Ukraine. As in other societies diviners or Shamans were particularly suspect and the penalty, if they turned evil, was burning. The procedure of proving guilt involved other diviners who had to agree and an accuser potentially faced prosecution himself in case of disagreement among these religious specialists. The execution of witches was not unknown in the Ancient Greek city states including Athens as the prominence of witches in Greek literature may indicate and surviving sources of some legal trials demonstrate.

Harmful magic was a punishable crime in Ancient Rome and a case exemplifying the statute against magical theft of crops in the earliest Roman law code (450 B.C) proves that the notion of limited good was prevalent among the Italian peasantry. The persecution of sorcerers assumed unprecedented dimensions in the late Roman Republic. In the context of an epidemic illness with high mortality 170 women were executed as witches in 331 B.C.<sup>4</sup>

In the first case about 2,000 persons were executed for witchcraft, thanks to denunciation and routine employment of torture. There is no way to prove or disprove these figures but what is important here is the link between popular anxieties, torture and massive persecutions of magicians which was to generate similar panics in the future.

After 1560 the large witch trial became the new style of witch hunting. The first major persecution in Europe is recorded in a printed pamphlet of 1563, the True and

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<sup>4</sup>. Behringer, Wolfgang (2008), *Witches and Witch-Hunts*, Polity Press, U.K, pp.47-48.

Horrifying Deeds of 63 Witches, who were caught, tried, convicted and burned in the tiny imperial lordship of Wiesensteig in south western Germany, a territory of barely 5,000 inhabitants, some villages and two market towns, subject to the Lutheran count Ulrich XVII von Helfenstein (1524-70, 1548-70). From the early 1560s witchcraft almost immediately gained new actuality from Lutheran Norway to Catholic Sicily. A witch hunt started in the kingdom of France in the northern Pyrenees and the parliament of Toulouse had to judge at least three dozen cases. Well connected contemporaries like the Dutch born Jesuit provincial for upper Germany and Austria, Petrus Canisius (1521-97), the main organizer of the counter reformation in Germany, stated that witches were now burned almost everywhere and never before had so many of them existed. Canisius fuelled the craze through sermons on witchcraft as cathedral preacher in Augsburg and through sensational exorcisms in noble families to the dismay of his superior in Rome, Diego Lainez (Spanish jesuist priest during 1512-65), the second general of the Jesuit order.

The story of witch persecution and murder are also very old which have been witnessed by the universe. In ancient period the suspected witch was brought to village court and punished. There was the provision of trial of such people. Such trial was known as witch trial. In Europe and America, there was such trial provision. In the middle ages, the witch persecution and murder took much horrible shape. In between 1480 and 1750 A.D. there was the system of witch trial in Europe and North America. During that period, about 60 thousand people were murdered in Europe and North America. In England, there was the “Witchcraft Act 1735” to inflict severe punishment to witch.<sup>5</sup>

In Rome (Italy), 331 B.C. about 170 women were suspected to be involved in the spreading of plague and they were awarded death sentence. In 16<sup>th</sup> century, the king of Jordan banished many women from the state which led to death of many women. So, thousands of people were persecuted and killed since long years back in the world. In India, during 1995 to 2009 according to “Free Legal Aid Committee” about 2500 women have been killed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>. Ibid., p.83.

<sup>6</sup>. Pathak, Phanidhar (2013), op. cit., pp.6-8.

### 2.3 MANTRA, WITCH PRACTICE AND HUNTING IN INDIA

The *mantra* has been occupying a great place in many cultures and traditions of communities of India. Moheswar Neog in his book “*Asomiya Sahityar Ruprekha*” (1986), mentioned about the *mantra* used in Assamese society. In Assamese society also we find *mantra* as essential in performing various rituals. There is no doubt that before Sankardev (Architect of Assamese Society) the *mantra* found a predominant place in the Assamese society. There are many kinds of *mantra* used in the Assamese society. The chanting of *mantras* is very essential and instrumental in performing of religious rituals in Indian civilization. The *mantra* can be classified into two broad categories, viz. *mantras* for good purposes and *mantras* for evil purposes. The *mantras* for evil purposes are aiming to harm or destroy opponents or enemies. The administrator of these evil *mantras* to destroy others can be regarded as witch. The magical activities or performances were seen in Ramayan (epic narrates the struggle of the divine prince Ram to rescue his wife Sita from the demon king Ravana) and Mahabharat (epic narrates the Kuruksetra war between Kauravas and Pandavas) epics of India.<sup>7</sup>

The belief on witches which is the grave social evil is prevalent mainly in some states, as Jharkhand, Haryana, Chhatisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Assam, and Bihar. Assam occupies the third position after which Bihar and Jharkhand, where the maximum numbers of cases have been reported.<sup>8</sup> However incidents of witchcraft and practising unapproved forms of magic are common instances in Indian villages, especially the north Indian villages. Burning innocent people to death on the charge that they have been indulging in black magic is a common feature of rural Indian society.

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<sup>7</sup>. Neog, Maheswar (1986), *Asomiya Sahityar Ruprekha*, Neog Publications, Dibrugarh, Assam, pp.31-34.

<sup>8</sup>. Mochahari, Monjib, Midnight's Killers, in “*Bibungthi-the opinion*” Vol.01 No.02, November, 2011, ed: Pratibha Brahma, Burlungbuthur Publication Board, Kokrajhar, Assam, pp.37-38.

Debojani Bora, 35 year old national javelin thrower of Karbi Anglong district of Assam (India), who won gold medal in 2011.

Unfortunately, she was suspected as witch (October, 2014) after some villagers died due to addiction of alcoholism. A *puja* was performed by the priest and they with the help of witch doctor detected the presence of witch in the village for the sudden death of villagers. Debojani Bora was identified as a black magic practitioner. She was forcibly took to the yard of the *Naamghar* (prayer house) and attacked. She managed to flee with injuries on her chest and back.

*Source: Sengupta, Nandita (2014), Kill that witch: A national athlete's plight reveals the medieval side of Assam, retrieved from [www.firstpost.com/.../kill\\_that\\_witch\\_a](http://www.firstpost.com/.../kill_that_witch_a).*

The Chhatisgarh, one of the states of India also has been witnessing the inhuman killing of suspected witch particularly in Santhals community since long years. The belief on power of black magic is very strong among those backward people. They have some procedures for inflicting punishment to suspected sorcerer. They in most cases forced witches to eat human excreta and drink blood before throwing them into the flames. The witch hunting among those communities still continues in large scale.<sup>9</sup>

The sensational witch related case of Umbargaon of Bombay (1958), the trial of six old women charged with witchcraft murder reflects the widespread belief in sorcery that still persists in rural India. Two teenage aborigine girls of a village named Umbargaon near Bombay were the principal witnesses in the trial. They related a gruesome story of killing their father and eating his flesh in the company of the accused women who were initiating them into witchcraft. The prosecution told the court that the accused taught the

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<sup>9</sup>. Varma, Daya, Witch Hunt among Santhals, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.42, No.42, dated June, 2007, p.2130, retrieved from [http:// www.jstor.org/stable/4419670](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4419670) on July 1, 2015.

girls five mystic chants and then suggested that their father should be sacrificed in the final phase of their training.<sup>10</sup>

The following account of a case (March, 1903), the basis of which is witchcraft, was elucidated by Mr. K.N. Knox, Assistant Magistrate of Banda, a very primitive district south of the River Jumna, and adjoining the hill country of Central India, where beliefs of this kind are very prevalent. “*Muth*” is the technical phrase for some magical substance, which after being the subject of sundry incantations by a wizard, is rolled inside or thrown over the wall of an enemy with the intention of injuring him. The wizards in this case seem to have been of the Bearer, caste, who has a reputation for the possession of magical powers.<sup>11</sup>

Witch-hunting is rampant in twelve states of India particularly in tribal concentrated areas. The twelve (12) states as Jharkhand, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Assam, and Bihar of India that are recognized as breeding grounds for witch hunts.<sup>12</sup>

In India, the number of witch hunting has been taking in alarming rate. Between 1987 and 2003, about 2556 women were charged for practicing witchcraft. In between 2006 and 2010, about 78 women were charged for witch practice and 23 of them were killed in Assam. In Bihar, during 1991 to 2000, about 522 women were killed. In Jharkhand, during 1991-2008, about 184, women were killed on charge of witch practice.<sup>13</sup>

## **2.4 PRACTICE OF MAGICAL MANTRA IN BODO SOCIETY**

The human being since early civilization regards the supernatural acts as influence of God and Goddess. Still backward tribal society regards the usual birth, raising and death as influences of God and Goddess. To them when the society can satisfy the God and Goddess, the people can live peacefully. That belief and practice lead to worship the

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<sup>10</sup>. Padmanabhan, P.K. and Sorrels, Laverene, Witchcraft in India, in *Western Folklore*, Vol.17, No.3 dated July, 1958, pp.213-214, retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1496054>, on July 1, 2015.

<sup>11</sup>. Crooke, W and Knox, K.N, Witchcraft in Northern India, in *Folklore*, Vol.14, No.4 dated December 25, 1903, pp.407-408, retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1254582>, on July 1, 2015.

<sup>12</sup>. Singh, Dr. Rakesh K, Witch-Hunting: Alive and Kicking, in *WOMEN'S LINK*, VOL. 17, NO. 1 dated January – March 2011, p.17, retrieved from [www.isidelhi.org.in/wl/.../rakesh](http://www.isidelhi.org.in/wl/.../rakesh) 1701, on November 3, 2015.

<sup>13</sup>. Pathak, Phanidhar, (2013), op. cit., P.60.



powerful God, deities which have become a traditional custom in society. Gradually the custom develops into religion.

When the people have been successfully pleasing the powerful God and Deities, then they began to seek unnatural power from God and Deities to dominate inferior objects and other beings. So they began to kneel and pray to God and Deities to obtain magical power. That chanting of prayer for amazing gave birth to *mantra*. The magical power has no scientific definition, no logical argument and unestablished with verification. The word is most important in magical acts. The correct chanting of *mantra* can fulfill the aspiration and desire of praying people. The exorcist (*Ojha*) used to claim that correct chanting of word can bring fulfill of aims.

**2.4.1 CLASSIFICATION OF MAGICAL MANTRAS:** The traditional *mantra* of Bodo tribe could be divided into six kinds. As for example:

**1. RELIGIOUS MANTRA:** This *mantra* is used in worshiping of God and various religious rituals.

**2. HEALING MANTRA:** This *mantra* is used for curing of ailment, disease, ill health etc. at home.

**3. CHARMING MANTRA:** When the people try to dominate over other creatures or people then they apply various *mantras* which are called charming *mantra*.

**4. MANTRA FOR WELFARE:** This *mantra* is used for welfare of business and trade.

**5. MANTRA FOR DESTRUCTION:** This *mantra* is used for dominating and destroying the enemy.

**6. MANTRA FOR UNCONSCIOUS:** This *mantra* is used for losing sense of other enemy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>. Narzi, Bhaben (2010), *Boro Kocharini Samaj Arw Harimu*, Chirang Publication Board, Kajolgaon, p. 188.

## 2.5 SOME OTHER MAGICAL MANTRAS

**RECONCILIATION MANTRA:** In early Bodo tradition the application of this *mantra* was very common. When both the wife and husband have misunderstanding and develop tense relation then the exorcist used to apply the medicine and *mantra* to drive out the misunderstanding between wife and husband.

**LOVE MANTRA:** There is also the *mantra* for love to get his/her choice even there is no love to each other. If the exorcist takes initiative to bring close the boy and girl to each other the two lovers can not leave each other.

**MANTRA IN ORDER TO LIVE:** *Tantrik* worshipers always seek the blessing from deities for healthy living. For those purposes the people observe and offer various *pujas*. Some common magical *mantras* in daily life are given below.

**MANTRA IN ORDER TO MAKE GOOD CROPS:** The farmers cultivate in the field. But the birds used to damage the crops. So the farmers make a man with straw and install in the middle of field to frighten the birds. When the paddy crop becomes very suitable and enlarging and if the insects is seen to harm the crops then to save the paddy the farmer has to step his unbeaten ankle by insect on some portion of water and that water should be spread over the paddy field.

**MANTRA USED IN REARING DOMESTIC ANIMAL:** Rearing of various domestic animals is part of tribal life. As for example the goat, pig, hen, duck, pigeon, rabbit etc. are animals reared.

**MANTRA USED IN HUNTING OF ANIMALS:** In early Bodo society the hunting of animals in the dense forest was one of the prime occupations in their life. In other tribal society there is also *mantra* for hunting the animals. The hunters apply the *mantra* so that the target does not miss. In Bodo society there is belief that if the weapon is thrown after giving *mantra* then the hunting will be very successful.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>. Ibid., p. 205.

But interestingly there is faith in Bodo society that if somebody learns the *mantra* for hunting of animals then he does not have any children. So many people do not learn this *mantra*.

## 2.6 MANTRA FOR HARMING PEOPLE

In Bodo society, the *mantra* that harms the people is said magic. The people who is well versed in magic is said learned witch and if harm the people with that *mantra* is called *Daina* or *Dainy* (male or female witch). In early Bodo society the people used to destroy the enemy with the help of magic. The *Rainai* (cursing) and *Bann* (*mantra*) casting were the old tradition in Bodo society.

Hindus traditionally worship the powerful God and Goddess to beat the enemy and to have successful life. In the worship there are many places for varieties of Deities. In the worship the *Prasad* (fruits offering of Hinduism) is offered to God to please them. In some worship the animals like buffalo, goat, cock, pigeon, chicken etc. offered to God.

After chanting of *mantra* the priest has to complete the worship service and little pure water is sprayed over the offering by *Tulsi* branch and *Dubri* grass (bent grass). After this the basket of offering object is advanced to nearer to God and Goddess. Otherwise the God and Goddess do not accept the offerings. After these the worshipers take *Sindur* (vermill) mark on forehead and pray for blessing for their welfare. Then they used to spray the pure water around the home campus and push gently the offerings by right hand. The worshipers have the custom to click the offering flower in their hair. There is also tradition of burning *Humm* (burning selected firewood) in worshiping place and later the worshipers take mark of ashes (charcoal) on forehead to fulfill the aims and aspiration in life. After the worship service the worshipers feel that they have become more powerful than other ordinary people. That belief and practice were the influence of magical power.

In Bodo society there has been the tradition of offering the animal blood to God and Goddess to seek healing from ailments and disease at home. Apart from this there is tradition of chanting of *mantra* and administration of herbal collection to ailing persons. The Bodos regard the creator of animals of earth as Goddess and the caretaker of these

animals is as father. So they regard the male and female God as human *Mahadev* and prime nature as Mother *Kamakya*. They have faith that the all animals and beings enjoying life under their grace.

The creation of plants and animals whatever in the earth are because of will of *Mahadev* and *Kamakya*. There is another faith that the smaller God and Goddess come among people and cause troubles in order to enjoy to be worshipped. So the Bodo people have the tradition to worship varieties of God before treating the patients with herbal medicine. They have strong belief that the medicine work effectively only after pleasing the God and Goddess successfully. <sup>16</sup>

According to belief in Bodo society if the exorcist can harm the people simultaneously he must has ability to heal such that person. Otherwise he will fall in great sin. Sometimes and somewhere if somebody falls due to casting of *mantra* then the patient hold the feet of exorcist and the exorcist has to make well to him.

If there is *mantra* for harming others, there is also *mantra* for curing others. The exorcising method with glass of water, with fern leave, bent grass etc. is popular for making well and drive out the evil spirit.

## 2.7 TYPICAL BELIEFS OF BODOS

Many Bodos believe that the God and the owner of ailments, ghost, witch, deities etc. can not seen by eye. The various deities usually seek the *puja* from people by hiding in river, lake, big tree and every corner of village. They sent to earth by God for enjoying of *puja* from human beings in earth. So the various deities bite the people in order to get *puja*. After enjoying the *puja* from patient they have to cure the disease otherwise they are held responsible before God. So the people have faith that after offering *puja* their disease is to be cured by God. The priest in some cases let the pair of pigeon to fly in the sky after moving round three times.

**2.7.1 KUBER MWDAI (BITING GOD):** In Bodo society the *Kuber Mwdai* is very bad. He used to bite anybody anywhere. Those who have been bitten by *Kuber*

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<sup>16</sup>. Ibid., pp.189-190.

God they have severe pain in stomach and chest and become restless out of unbearable pain. When such symptoms appear to somebody then it is considered as attacked by *Kuber* God.

**PUJA (RITUAL):** If the bitten person is female then the patient appear towards south direction and offer two pair of *Goi Patwi* (betel nuts) and leaves over the *Tailir Bilai* (banana leave). If the patient is male then he should appear towards north direction and offer single betel nut and leave over banana leave.<sup>17</sup>

**MANTRA:** “*Jol Kuber, Kala Kuber, Nol Kuber, Gupur Kuber!* Your son, make well, your grand children, make well. You should pacify him. Oh in the name of God, you should make well to those patients. Later when the patients become round he will offer *puja*. After saying this red cock is moved three times round the patient and the cock is left. Then the patient holds the red cock and must rear the red cock till the coming of ritual. After this the exorcist feed the herbal medicine to patient and thus become well.

**PUJA AFTER CURE OF PATIENTS:** There is tradition of observing ritual to please the *Kuber* God after the cure of patients. But the place for observing the ritual must be distance enough from the house of patient and beyond the reach of children. The altar of *puja* must be cleaned properly and a pair of betel nuts and leaves over the pure banana leave must be installed.

**MANTRA:** “*Awi, Aifwr, Jol Kuber, Dhaka Kuber, Nol Kuber, Kala Kuber,* we have promised to offer *puja* to you if our patients become cure. So today we have offered this *puja* for you, God, greeted”.

When the *puja* is finished the priest kneel down towards east direction and slaughter the cock. The blood of cock is advanced in front of God. The offered cock can not be brought to home. It must be eaten in the *puja* place. After the completion of *puja* a puppet is made with straw and put in fire followed by throwing backside of them. If it is done the *Kuber* God does not follow and attack the patient once again.

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<sup>17</sup>. Ibid., pp. 192-202.

In Bodo's belief the two famous *Kuber* God are red *Kuber* and white *Kuber*. The red *Kuber* is stronger than white *Kuber*. If red *Kuber* bites then one can not escape from observing the ritual. The white *Kuber* is somewhat soft and slow in anger. If white *Kuber* bites the patient must hold one egg and it must be kept over the stomach to cure. The *Kuber* God is very powerful God. In Bodo's belief if *Kuber* God bites then the medicine alone can not cure the patient without the observing *puja*.<sup>18</sup>

**2.7.2 KETRA HOMNAI (CATCHING BY EVIL DEITY):** In Bodo society if evil sight of evil God falls then the *Ketra* accompanies the target people. The *Ketra* accompanied people deteriorate his/ her health day by day. The patient sees elephant, horse, bear etc in dream. Otherwise the patient feel floating in heaven or roam here and there in the dense forest. And the health becomes thin day by day. The physical become yellow as bloodless. Usually the *Ketra* takes little children and helpless woman as a target.

Some mentionworthy *Ketra* and the process of ritual in Bodo society are discussed below.

**DHABHA KETRA (INSANITY):** This *Ketra* may attacks any children who have attained the three year of age. If the care taker of children does not offer *puja* properly then the patient may die immediately. And if the patient is not treated properly in future he/she become mad.

**PROCESS OF PUJA:** One knife, incense, a pair earthen lamp, a bundle of straw, moss grass, vermil, charcoal, a pair of betel nuts and leaves, branches of *Eri* (castor) plant, branch of fig tree, banana leave, branch of bamboo, red, white, black spun tread, a coin and a frog.

**ALTAR:** It should be far from home and place should be cleaned properly. The banana leave should be spread properly. In the right sight the picture of patient should be drawnd by charcoal. In both side of picture nine times marks of vermil should be

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<sup>18</sup>. Ibid.,pp. 191-192.

painted. Little bit of rice is offered. The betel leaves and nuts should be placed over the rice. And other all ingredients for *puja* should be placed in left side of banana leave.<sup>19</sup>

**MANTRA:** The priest performs the whole process of *puja* to please the God. After the chanting of several rhymes of *mantra* the process of *puja* is concluded. The offering materials and fruits in *puja* should be packed with banana leave and be thrown at far place. The one banana leaves of nine where the priest seat should be distributed among the worshipers. And when there is no people the banana leave must be tied in the jungle and come back to home.

According to priest they themselves become gurantor to God and Goddess for enjoying *puja*. So after the recovery of patient there must be offering of *puja* to their deities. If *puja* is not offered then the priest losts of trust before God. The priest also displeased with the family of patient if they fail to promise for *puja*. And as a result they will not visit in future to treat and offer *puja* in that family.

## 2.8 MANTRA AND PREPARATION OF AMULET

The Bodo society since early age has belief on both the power of deities and *mantra*. The disciple of saint (*mantra* teacher) can not chant the *mantra* properly without saluting the teacher. The *mantra* should be chanted in proper and selected place for good result. In some diseases the patients are treated by amulets given by priest. Inside the amulet along with the medicine the *mantra* is casted.

The famous exorcist, dacoits used to wear amulets to be free from the evil sight of enemy. Many Bodos used to wear the *eri* (cocoon) prepared with *mantra* to be away from problem. The people wearing amulets can not touch dead body or impure objects. Otherwise the essence of *mantra* will loses. The people since early age have been using bone of animals, teeth, skin etc. in wearing amulets for welfare of them. The Bodo and other tribal also used this practice. The tooth of cocrodile is worn in the neck of child if

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<sup>19</sup>. Ibid., pp. 192-202.

child does not grow teeth. If somebody gets constant fevering like bear then it is said as bear fever. Then the patient has to wear the skin of bear to cure the fevering.<sup>20</sup>

## **2.9 PRACTICE OF FEEDING POISON**

The Bodo society has belief that the quality of material is more powerful than *mantra*. So the people used to fear much of the feeding poison than casting of *mantra*. It is believed that traditional healer or exorcist has the knowledge about the effects of herbal or medicinal property of forest. The traditional healer or exorcist used to deals in selling of poisonous herbal medicine secretly to those who requires. Such type of traditional healer was considered as witch in Bodo society, because this local medicine is meant for harming others.<sup>21</sup>

## **2.10 PRACTICE OF BURRYING OF JOB**

Since early age the Bodo society has belief that the *Job* (in Bodo term, a small packs of collection of death human and animal bones collected from graveyard, roots of plants, human hair, cut parts of wearing dress) etc. are buried secretly by the witch in the courtyard or around the house of targeted person. The *Job* tightly bounded and prepared by witch's *mantra* is acute fearable to some people in remote villages. The purpose of burying *Job* is to frighten and harm to death of targeted prey.

## **2.11 PRACTICE OF NAIKANGNAI (DETECTION)**

If the patient does not come round for long days then to detect the causes of ailment the witch doctor conducts detection ritual to identify about the causes of diseases. Exorcist also uses oil and the person having zodiac sign libra in such rituals. The person in the form of deity slowly will tell all the secret reasons of patient. Then the exorcist use treatment accordingly. And if the patient does not come round then they have to offer *Kherai Puja* and in *Puja* the female vergin mediator (*Dhouthini*) tells all the secrets of ailment.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>. Ibid., pp. 192-202.

<sup>21</sup>. Bathuram Basumatary (50), Informant, interviewed on July, 2016.

<sup>22</sup>. Narzaree, Dr. Phanindra (2016), *Kwmsi Pwtainai Arw Daina*, Pranchis Narzaree, Kokrajhar, pp.18-23.



## 2.12 PRACTICE OF MANTRA LEARNING

According to *Tantrik* there are two ways for learning the *mantra*. The first one is direct learning from magic teacher and other is learning through dedication by staying with teacher (*Guru*). The magician coming out of dedication and meditation is very powerful; however he can hold and rear the deities under him. He can work any action through the help of those deities. So the general people tremble with fear of those magicians.

## 2.13 PRACTICE OF DAINY (FEMALE WITCH)

The *Dainy* becomes very greedy when she sees somebody's well material or domestic animals. Then she enjoys the desired objects anyway. The *Dainy* consumes the desired material uncooked. If she consumes then the animals die squirmly. From this symptom we can come into conclusion that *Dainy* has taken the prey. If we open the heart of animal that *Dainy* has taken, that heart becomes black as charcoal. Sometimes *Dainy* takes the food of social festival in the village, and then the remaining food becomes black. The *Dainy* kills the target by pressing in sleeping in night. But she can not enter and touch the person sleeping inside the net. The person who is being caught by *Dainy* feels cold in whole body. He gets trembling and falters in speaking. If such incident happens then the public should spread the net and cover the person properly to catch the *Dainy*. And the patient should come out from the net to be free from the attack of *Dainy*. However the patient become well from attack of *Dainy* but the *Dainy* can not be identified.

**2.13.1 CATCHING DAINY AND PUNISHMENT:** To catch the *Dainy* and giving punishment the net must be pressed tightly and the person is charged for question. The *Dainy* does not disclose her identity of being afraid. Then she used to tell anybody's name. So to get exact identity of *Dainy* the mouth of *Dainy* is burned during interrogation.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from this the ear and nose of *Dainy* caught person are cut slightly to inflict punishment to *Dainy*. However the *Dainy* caught person happens nothing, instead the

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<sup>23</sup>. Narzi, Bhaben (2010), op.,cit., pp. 208-211.

ear and nose of *Dainy* are getting cut indirectly by this practice. The punishment of cutting ear and nose are done to recognize the *Dainy* by public for her wrong acts.

## **2.14 LEGEND HISTORY OF SANDW BAODIA AND WITCHCRAFT**

The myth of *Monsingsing Brai* (father God) is undeniably one of the lively stories prevalent among the Bodos. Perhaps, indeed, it is capable of embracing of all the elements of their beliefs and traditions. Basically, *Monsingsing Brai* is a myth based on deep philosophy which invites the basic questions of life, society and religion as a whole. In the deeper and greater religious aspect of life is shown. It maintains a careful recording of the developments or changes of culture. As a myth, it confirms the idea of Geoffrey Parrinder who says-myth “is a world affirming philosophy.”

The myth of *Monsingsing Brai* provides us the basis of the scripture among the Bodos. It helps us to reveal the thought about life and religion of the Bodos. This myth upholds that the Bodos believe in the Supreme Being, the Absolute or *Ekam Ekan witiyam* who is the creator of the universe. It also confirms their belief in incarnation or *Avatarbad* as the myth of *Monsingsing Brai* is the story about the second coming. This story adjudicates in every possible way that “the myths make ‘a sacred history’ of the people.

It seems permissible to infer that Manu, Moses and *Monsingsing* were the law givers to the human society at different times and places. *Monsingsing* is more significant than the former two. The laws given by them are condified and followed in their times and places. The laws given by *Monsingsing* are not condified but sanctified and solemnized in the religious institutions of the Bodos. Not to be surprised, He is still invoked and worshipped. It is a fact that Manu (progenitor of humanity in Hindu mythology) is recognized as a *Bhagawan* or God, while *Monsingsing* is believed to be an incarnated God who descended on Earth with the help of golden ladder at the time of existential crisis. And this instance of His coming down on the mundane plane tends to draw ample literary possibilities of the story.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>. Narzary, Surat (2014), *Sandw Baodia*, N.L. Publication, Kokrajhar, Assam, pp.i-ii.

*Sandw Baodia* repulsive man in the worldly affairs was too concentric to the instrumental music, to which he always delves into the deep bottom. He was a son of a parent unnoted for. He passed his boyhood days in his village. Later on, he used to live in a particular spot of the *Baokhungri* hill which was filled with rarified atmosphere. He lived there for about eleven years without the touch of the society from the moment he met his goddess *Shantikhaina* whom all of the villagers thought to be mere make belief or an evil spirit. *Sandw Baodia-Maya-Ze-Ban* (Gordian Knout) of *Shantikhaina*. He was the only man to give in and give out that power magic. *Sandw Baodia* undermined the authority and the traditions of the society. Eventually, he was declared a *Daina* or witch, in the accepted sense of the society. Despite he was a significant agent of the social change, he had to stumble and climb down from his secular progress for want of security and authority. His security as well as authority was unseen conscience personified as *Khaina Shanti*.

Ultimately he had to bow down before the visible authority for puration of his wrong doings.

Though *Sandw Baodia* was not confined to the traditions and convention of his society, he seemed to have been following an austere life for achieving higher realms of sound. He might have promised not to see and touch any apposite sex and not to be in close touch with the humdrum life of the society. Thus *Sandw Baodia* is thought to have been a plot wherein the questions of aesthetics and ethics are involved.<sup>25</sup>

The counter of *Sandw Baodia* with *Asagi* (name of Bodo female youth) and *Baisagi* (female name) who are two virgin sisters and visited the forbidden land of *Sandw Baodia* with an impelling motive of winning his heart. They were the unbound agents of social ordinance. As a result, *Sandw Baodia* had to apply his secret magical power which brought him Hamlet's dilemma : To do or nor do-as a consequence.

*Sandw Baodia* had to take resort to the final verdict of his goddess, *Shantikhaina*. But that time her holiness justifiably become negative. The Goddess advised him to

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<sup>25</sup>. Ibid.,pp. iv-v.

surrender to the social authority and at the same time, she gave an oracle of the second coming, *Monsingsing Brai*.

*Sandw Baodia* had to appear before the jury as a proved nuptical criminal. But the Jury failed to interpret and located the crime and punishments. Moreover, an uproar of the new issues befooled the whole set of Jury. Meanwhile, *Sandw Baodia* revealed all about the oracles made by the goddess *Shanti Khaina* before the house.

Then followed the religious institution to welcome *Monsingsing Brai* who blessed the world with His new message and ascended to His abode again.

In a nutshell, this mythology upholds three ideas in the main: first, the Bodos believe in the absolute God, and they are not animists as some scholars intend to interpret. They believe in incarnation and they have a clear idea of Divine and the discrete. *Aham* is God in Sound Existent ever in Existence and He is the Divine eternal in that form. The existential secrecy was made known to *Alaidambra*-the first man, like Adam, ever conceived by the Bodos. And the God who descended on the earthly plane in the human embodiment like *Monsingsing Brai*, is the discrete. Secondly, they obey the code- the Authority. They regulated their life as was told by *Aham* (the voice of God) before *Alaidambra* once in the beginning of human society. Thirdly, they observe the traditions and conventions of the society.<sup>26</sup>

**2.14.1 SUSPECT OF WITCHCRAFT:** *Sandw Baodia* was suspected to be practitioner of witch by the villagers. He stayed alone at *Baokhungri* hill far away from the village and remained busy in playing of *Serja* instrument whole day. He did not talk much but thought much. He was very indifferent with the villagers. He did not care about the ending year festival, *Kherai* festival of the society. But the *Santikhaina* (river goddess) was pleasing with the music plaiying of *Sandw Baodia*. So the goddess gave *Sandw Baodia* the art of entrap *bann* (mantra) for safety of *Sandw Baodia*.

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<sup>26</sup>. Ibid., p.iii.

*Sandw Baodia* after deep meditation realized that with the playing of instrumental music we can have rain, melting of big stone to water, generate warm or fire etc. It is the music that can make fall of the tree, sprout of the new leaves of tree etc. So the power of nature has in the music. The secret of earth is fulfilled with the music. The voice of creator (God) might have present in the chirping of birds, the movement of leaves of tress etc. So when the music is played with deep meditation, certain amazing results are occurred. So, it is the secret of creator, the almighty.

#### **2.14.2 SANCTITY AND SHANTIKHAINA IN BODO SOCIETY:**

Maitaining sanctity in the life was very fundamental in worshipping the Goddess. The story about the wrath of *Santikhaina* (river goddess) due to impure activities of *Sandw Baodia* tells that, *Sandw Baodia* was went to forest with the group of people (campers) to cut the woods in the hills area. *Sandw Baodia*, one of the campers got assignment of cooking for the groups at the camp. *Sandw Baodia*, unknowingly by accident, washed the cooking utensils at nearby stream of water. But the goddess of river got angry because of washing utensils at river and making impure. So, at once the stream got dried up. *Sandw Baodia* got much worry about the drying of water. He thought that without water how can he cook? The group of wood cutter will be coming with much tire and hungry but if they will not find any food....what will happen. He became very sad.

*Sandw Baodia* was well versed in playing of *Serja* (local violin) instrument. So, he started to play the *Serja* like *go..go..ling..go...*(tune of music) with much meditation. After hearing the rhytemic music the goddess of river pleased with the melodious music after few moments the dry stream began to flow the water.

#### **2.14.3 TRIAL OF SANDW BAODIA IN VILLAGE COURT:**

*Sandw Baodia* was brought to village court to face charges against him. The villagers used to impose allegation upon the innocent *Sandw Baodia*. One exorcist tried to allege him of not following the rituals of village, the ending year festivals etc. But instead of those, he worship the goddess of forest, which is like the ghost and witch, because he also learned the entrap *mantra*. So, in the village court, different innocent people were imposed with the charge of witch.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>. Ibid., pp.3,9,15.

Parneswar Brahma (55), Principal, Basic Training Centre, Kokrajhar.

He was of the view that the belief on witchcraft in Bodo society was very old and rooted in the society. The witch is known as eater of people. The witchcraft is negative in nature. In early days where there was no medical development, the local physician offered herbal treatment to the patients. Some kinds of diseases were cured by the treatment of local physician. Sometimes the *Ojhas* were involved in the art of witchcraft. Since the *Ojha* has some knowledge about the herbal medicine and chemical reaction of various plants, fruit, herb etc. they used to feed secretly the poisonous chemical to patient or enemy for the purpose of harming. But the general people do not know about the secret feeding of poison. Alongwith that there are *mantras*, *tantras*, wearing amulet etc. both in positive and negative purposes, but these beliefs are just traditional belief. It lacks scientific proof. So the witch is believed to have used the technique of feeding of poison to kill the target. The spread of scientific education, medical reach out to backward, all round development etc. would be the ways for discouraging the traditional faith.

*Source: interviewed on 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2016*

## **2.15 TRACE BACK TO WITCH PRACTICE AND HUNTING IN THE CONTEXT OF BODO SOCIETY**

Bodo society as tribal based is not also free from the practice of witchcraft tradition. It was associated with the civilization of Bodo culture and tradition. Tribal societies and communities have traditional faith in witchcraft, which is a magico-religious practice that was prevalent among most of the tribal societies in the world. Most of tribes and communities in Assam are purely agrarian in nature and follow some kind of semi-primitive religious practices and witchcraft is deep rooted to their tradition and socio-religious life, even today.<sup>28</sup> There is oral tradition that the old women with grey or white

<sup>28</sup>. Talukdar, Ratna, Bharali, Witch- hunting-Needs Serious Concern, "*Bibungthi-the opinion*", November, 2011, ed: Pratibha Brahma, Burlungbuthur Publication Board, Kokrajhar, Assam, p.27.

hair are supposed to be the witchcraft. That old woman visits place to place or home to home. When he sees the gourd or any vegetables in the court of another's courtyard, then her mind becomes greedy to take that and accordingly she asks for that. If the owners refused to give her than she say like that "I will see you". After that she will prepare to cast a spell to eat or destroy the enemy person. Then she will curse (*Rainai*) that refuser person to death.

We find oral tradition since inception about the practice of *Daina* in Bodo society. But the *Daina* means *Raigra* (Curse giver). Earlier age the very old men and women are supposed to have learned the course of *Rainai or Daina*. But in modern days the middle or tender old person are also suspected to be witch.

Historically speaking, witchery or black magic dates back to hundreds of years in Assam and other states in North East India. Mayong in Morigaon district of Assam, once being the prime destination of witchcraft and people from different countries used to come and learn the art of witchcraft.<sup>29</sup>

The practice and hunting of witch are age old practice in Bodo society. It has been accompanying the civilization of Bodo society. Since the chanting of *mantras* to observe religious rituals are used, the practice of witchcraft has been occurring in Bodo society. Many tribal people are seen having faith upon the black magic or sorcery. *Ojhas* or religious priest performs the religious performance. It is believed that the *Ojhas*, religious priest if he learns the evil *mantra* than he becomes witch. The hunting of witch also has been following the witch practice. The village court conducts detection (*Naikangnai*) with the help of astrologers or quacks and if finds sufficient evidence against suspected person then he is fed cow dung, vulture's stool etc. to make functionless (*Badua*) of his/her evil *mantras* during old days. But in modern days this kind of punishment is being replaced by direct killing secretly in the night.

**2.15.1 SOME COMMON NAME OF POWERFUL OJHA:** There is no written record of black magic practitioner in Bodo society. The black magic practitioner

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<sup>29</sup>. Dwaipayana, Need of Strict Law Against Witch Hunting, in *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, dated September 13, 2014, p.6.

also never says about his/her knowing of witching art. Because, the practice of black magic is not allowed in the society. But the villagers have the habit of suspecting somebody as witch practitioner in case of somebody's critical illness in the village.

Although there are some common names given to powerful *Ojhas* and they are suspected of having learned of black magic. The following names of powerful *Ojhas* symbolize different types of exorcist.

- I. *Benga Ojha*: somewhat deaf exorcist.
- II. *Singhi Ojha*: furious exorcist like *Singhi* (local) fish.
- III. *Lengra Ojha*: somewhat lame exorcist.
- IV. *Amao Ojha*: moderate type of exorcist.
- V. *Bir Ojha*: hero like exorcist.
- VI. *Gwran Ojha*: unhealthy exorcist
- VII. *Kaosha Ojha*: half working exorcist.
- VIII. *Hongla Ojha*: openly working exorcist.
- IX. *Kakreb Ojha*: unsmooth face exorcist.

However, those nick names are not taken by *Ojhas* themselves but called by other people of locality based on their nature.

The above mentioned *Ojhas* are priest of religious rituals as well as local physician of different diseases in the village. They are very important for the villagers at the time of religious rituals and purifying of houses. Without the priest the religious ritual can not be completed. So, the renowned exorcists are waited since long days for religious rituals. On the other hand the villagers used to suspect that the *Ojhas* know the art of black magic also.



Daorao Dekreb Basumatary, Social worker (50)

The belief on witchcraft is very old blind belief in Bodo society. In broader sense the evil man who tries to harm others is known as witch. The witch is always based on negative nature. In early society the witch was tried in village court. There was no capital punishment directly to suspected witch. Rather the suspected witch was fed cow dung, human stool, vulture stool, dog stool etc. to make dysfunction of his witch *mantra*. In extreme step the suspected witch was expelled from the village for good.

He expressed that some *Ojhas* may know the chemical effect of some herbal plants. The meditation may bring some natural energy to cause effect for desired result. The symptoms of some dangers have relation with the nature. As for example the crying of Crow, Owl, Cat etc. indicates the forthcoming dangers in human beings. The *Mwntwr (mantra)* of Bodo society is composed of names of various rivers, hills and other natural objects.

The Bodo society has a mythology of *Sandw Baodia* (Bodo name) who could convince the god of river through playing his *Serja* (Violin). He gave utmost meditation on playing of *Serja* and he forgets everything. But in modern days the vested *Ojhas* exploit the situation and mislead the gullible public. Today, the clever people cover the social, economic, political crimes with the name of witch hunting. Because, the illiterate people do not like the witch. The conspiracies of murdering for self benefit are made by intelligent people in the village.

*Interviewed on 21.7.2016 at Kokrajhar*

## **2.16 PRACTICE OF PROCEDURE FOR TRIAL ON ACCUSED WITCH: TWO PHASES**

**2.16.1 WITCH HUNT IN EARLY AGE:** The hunting of suspected witch has been happening in Bodo society since time immemorial. In earlier days if there was a

suspect of witch to somebody, the suspected person is not given punishment immediately and without trial. The suspected person is summoned in the village court and procedure of trial begins. If the evidence against the suspected person is strong, firstly the accused were fed cow dung, human excreta, vulture etc. in village court to make disfunction his or her *mantra* and purify to him or her in the village. However, if he or she does not listen and goes continue with witch practice then the village court gives verdict with death punishment.<sup>30</sup>

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

**2.16.3 BODO MOVEMENT:** Socio-political awakening of Bodo tribe of Assam was born in 1920s when Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma led a delegation with memorandum to meet Simon Commission in Shillong in 1929.<sup>31</sup> The demand of *Udhaychal* (autonomous council) was made in 1967 by Plains Tribal Council of Assam. All Bodo Students Union born in 1967 rigorously streamlined the Bodo movement for separate political representative and arrangement for Bodo people.

The Bodo movement halted for few years for agreement brought Bodoland Autonomous Council in 1993. But after that Bodo movement restarted rigorously and as a result

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<sup>30</sup>. Woman Forced to Eat Human Excreta on Witchcraft Charges, in *The Sentinel*, Guwahati, Assam, dated, July 2, 2012, p.4.

<sup>31</sup>. Narjinari, Hira Charan (2014), *The Saga of the Bodos*, Hira Charan Narjinari, Kolkata, P.57.

Bodoland Territorial Council was accorded in 2003. Moreover, this accord also could not meet the aspiration of people of some sections as expectation. After that again conglomeration of several Bodoland demand organizations have been launching movement for separate state of Bodoland curving out of Assam.

**2.16.4 BODO MOVEMENT VIS A VIS WITCH PERSECUTION:** The Bodo movement gained strong direction since the birth of Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) in 1960s. At that period the Bodo group got divided and fratricidal killings took place. Since that period the witch hunting was to some extent politicized. The innocent enemy was killed in the name of witch hunting. The villagers began to disunite among themselves and bias in many cases. The police got confused whether the case is witch hunting or of fratricidal killing. So the police loss interest to differentiate the nature of cases. The public hand over their powers to them to lead movement and deal anti social elements during that period.

However, the hunting of black magic practitioner was done by enraged youths in the village suddenly in the night. The village court does not get sufficient time to try the case properly. The suspected witch also does not get time for fair trial in the village court. Because some section of furious youths proceed to kill the witch on suspect immediately for the cause of society. The Bodo movement complicated the dimension of witch related cases. Many vested people took the opportunity of fratricidal killing in the name of witch hunting. It may be mentioned that many killings might not have been reported to police station. During the tense situation of autonomy movement it is difficult to work jointly by public and police department.

After two Bodo accords in 1993 and 2003 the Bodo society start working about development in social, political and economic sectors. Number of literate people increases during that period. The NGOs and civil society began to work for public development and awareness against blind faiths. Many intellectuals and learned people began to discard the unscientific practices. Religious conversion was also getting larger in search of good and peace living. People began to approach the police and court for criminal cases for security of life. The criminal cases are registered and tried legally.



*Samarendra Narzary, 65, Crusader against witch hunting.*

He had to preside over a village court as a village headman of Serfanguri area of Kokrajhar district after the rumors about the practice of black magic in the village. That year (2000), unfortunately sudden and serial deaths took place in the village. So, the villagers began to suspect of having some black magic practitioner in the village. As per of the Kangaroo court, five accused were given death sentence in the same night. Narzary was not satisfied with the witch hunting in the society. He does not believe upon the power of witch. Next year of incident, he got opportunity to become active member of Project *Prahari* (Assam Police Project for curbing witch hunting in Assam) in 2001.

To him witches do not exist on earth. He wants to tell everybody that if somebody dies untimely, it is because of disease or health problem but not of witch. So, if somebody faces health problem, then let him to approach the doctor. To him, the all round backwardness of Bodo society in remote villages has become single biggest challenge in uprooting of witch belief. The illiterate poor villagers have to depend upon the local physician and astrologers for their welfare who mislead gullible public.

So, the astrologers play a great role in leading entire episode of witch hunting.

*Interviewed on July 6, 2016, Serfanguri (Kokrajhar).*

In modern days the suspected witches do not get trial and justice, rather they are killed on mere suspicion. In modern days the isolated and helpless couples have become easy prey to suspect of being witch. Moreover, in modern days the people kill their enemy as branding them as witch to hide their crime motives. It may be mentioned that in modern days killing weapons and arms got developed and easily accessible. The social unrest, agitation, autonomy movement, birth of many extremist groups, factions, poverty, unemployment etc. are factors for the witch related incidents.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>. Choudhury, Dr. Jagadindra Ray, Fight Against Superstition, in *Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, dated, September 22, 2013, p.6.