

# Witch Hunting in Assam

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## Abstract:

Generally, the term witch is used to refer to a woman. It's a prevalent superstition that these women use magic or witchcraft to harm others or with bad intentions. When a woman after being investigated is accused of these, she is mentally and physically tortured until she dies as a punishment. And this murder is known as witch hunt. Although this witch hunting phenomenon is not a new one, we can see it's significance by turning the pages of history. All in all, witch hunt is a superstition. Earlier, the uneducated people were not so advanced and the number of villages were also high. Medical science was also not that widespread. The underdeveloped societal environment led diseases like black fever, dysentery, etc to be contagious.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Due to limited knowledge among people they doubted these diseases to be a result of some evil energy or black magic. And that doubt led to the start of the custom of searching of that evil energy. Ultimately innocent women had to be the victim of such superstition. People believed that satan entered a woman's body to spread evil in the society. Even in the 15th century, in the churches of Spain event like Inquisition took place where innocent women accused of practicing witchcraft or magic were murdered. Women like Joan O A\* were punished because of their progressiveness and bravery.

### 1.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ◆ These kinds of discussions will help to remove superstitions in society.
- ◆ It will help to know more about the negative and cruel mentality towards women.

- ◆ These are actually the real ages of dominance over women. These discussions will strengthen women mentally and make awareness too.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on data collected from field study. Also from different sources like research papers, research articles etc published in journals, periodicals, books and internet.

## III. DESCRIPTION

Countless women had to sacrifice their lives in the name of witch hunt even in foreign countries. If upon investigation they were proved to be witches, they would either be hanged or burned alive. In the disgusting witch hunt that took place in America thousands of people were killed where most of them were women. Punishment for practicing magic or witchcraft were prevalent in ancient Babylon and Egypt. And cases like these made witch hunt acceptable to the society. It was mentioned in the The code of Hammurabi like this-

People started to believe it in that time too i.e., in the 17th century. In fact, the director of the church spread the information that it was justified to annihilate witches. There are still some cases of witch hunt that takes place in some regions of the western countries. Near the Sahara desert of Africa, some backward regions of North East India and the islands of Papua New Guinea are some such areas. Currently a lot of countries have strict law against the practice of magic. In Saudi Arabia there is this government rule to execute anyone accused of being a witch.

It can be clearly seen in India or North East that people have some ulterior motives behind the name of witch hunt. Some of them are-

1. After the death of her husband, a woman is defamed of being a witch with the intention to seize her land and property.
2. If they fail to use a lonely widow as their sex object, she's accused of being a witch.
3. In extremely backward villages where there's no sign of education, women are accused of being a witch when they are menstruating.
4. Also if there's some personal grudges against a woman she is accused of being a witch.

After a woman is classified as witch due to such various reasons, the villagers then abuses and exploits the woman in numerous and finally kills her. Or else after experiencing so much pain and losing her everything, the woman commits suicide. With no proper means of transportation or health care, the women of these villages never reach police stations or women support centres. For which numerous have to lose their lives mercilessly in this process of witch hunt. According to a research done by a committee of Jharkhand i.e., the Free legal Aid Committee only 2% of the criminal are punished for witch hunting. According to a survey conducted in 2010 every year 1501 to 200 women are accused of being a witch and then killed. And this number has increased to more than 3000 from 1995 to 2010.

Generally in Assam, the evil that is witch hunt is seen among people of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, tea garden community and many other such groups. Innocent women are killed due to the inhuman act of witch hunt. It should be noted that, the act of witch hunt is still prevalent in today's modern world. And the villages or tea garden where these take place are not very far from the city. At a time where there's schools, colleges, hospitals opening in these villages, it is really shocking to see the other side of the coin which is the occurrence of the ancient barbaric act of witch hunt even today. If we look closely, we cannot help but notice that there are socio-economical and political reasons behind these.

Earlier women were accused of being a witch and killed for practicing spells and magic but nowadays there are some other reason behind these witch hunts.

1. Generally the women who are accused of being a witch or killed are financially weak, lonely, widowed. Or
2. A progressive woman is perceived as a threat in this patriarchy and hence accused of being a witch. Once a woman is titled as a witch, her situation becomes really heart wrenching. She's punished with a death penalty. She's blamed for all the diseases, epidemics and bad happenings. After the accused woman is physically abused, she's then killed by the people who stabs her multiple times as it is popularly believed that the village will be free from her evil spirit only when blood flows from her body.

These incidents remain inside the village and no one even informs the police about it. So, there's no way for the police to stop these incidents. Among the tribal people women are placed in a high pedestal. The men are not willing to accept the un dignified nature of women for which such women become the victim of these men's superstitious believes and are ultimately killed in this patriarchal society.

Below a chart consisting number victims of witch hunt for the last few years is presented. However, it is not possible to have accurate data relating the same. This chart has been prepared from the data collected from the internet-Birubala Rabha stood against the heinous crime i.e., the witch hunting. She was even tried to killed after she helped by providing protection to a woman accused of being a witch. She fought very hard to spread awareness in the society about this. In 2010 she was awarded with the Real Heroes Award by IBN Network.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Witch hunt is a problem of the society. And this problem can only be solved with the awareness and consciousness of the people of the state. In this patriarchal society men should also stand up for women empowerment. With women's education and men viewing women as fellow human will help this society to get rid of superstitions like witch hunt. The recent law made by the Indian government against witch hunting has provided a glimmer of hope.

This study provides from various perspectives how women empowerment can be possible, in this patriarchal society where the women have been tormented, molested and punished for centuries.

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