

Witchcraft and Witch Hunting in Assam in Historical Perspective with Reference to the Bodos

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Introduction

The practice of witchcraft and witch hunting has been often reported from among some of the tribal communities of Assam like many other such communities of the country. Here the practice has been largely reported from among the Bodos of lower Assam. The practice of witchcraft and witch-hunting has been variously interpreted by different scholars. To some it has been a gender question- a male struggle for establishing domination over women who exercise ritual knowledge for all practical purposes, or a woman resistance against growing hegemony of men,¹ while to some others it was a religious clash- a clash between the marginalised beliefs of the tribal communities against the organized religions,² while still some others treat it as a kind of struggle between the rich and the poor or between the forest and urban communities.³ It is even believed that in the witchcraft there is the element of ancient system of medicine and treatment, and the process of witch hunting is an attempt on part of men to professionalise it taking it from the hands of women.⁴ Whatever be the actual reason for its origin, the practice is universal, and in Assam also, it has a reasonably remote beginning. In the present paper an attempt has been made to investigate into the origin of the practice among the Bodos of Assam, the nature and impact of the craft on the society. It is therefore, an attempt to study the nature and extent of the practice in the state with particular reference to the Bodos. While doing so we must confess that the study has been based entirely on the paper reports, and no empirical study has been made.

Witchcraft- Origin and Development in Assam

The word *Daini* is the local form for the word witch. It is stated that this word (*daini*) has come from the Indo-Aryan word *dakini*⁵ According to Philip Rowson, the original meaning of the word *dakini* can be traced in the Tantra. In Tantrik Buddhism *dakini* means the female

personification of a stage of wisdom.⁶ A popular image of Hindu goddess Kali is found to be associated with many other images such as Siva, her so called husband, and *dakini* and *yogini* her two associates. Thus the word *daini* has its root in the Indo-Aryan language, and therefore it should be noted that the word was originally foreign to the Bodos, and as pointed by a scholar, 'neither the Santhal nor the Bodos have words for witch in their own languages. This fact may lead one to believe that they borrowed the idea and the institution of witchcraft from their neighbours, most probably from the Hindu castes.⁷ To support this view we can quote Dalton who stated that in Chotnagpur area along with the tribes witchcraft was practiced by damsels of true Aryan blood; even Brahmans were sometimes accused for witchcraft. He quotes major Roughsedge, who wrote in the year 1818, a Brahman lady was denounced as a witch and tried, and having escaped in the ordeal by water she was found to be a witch and, deprived of her nose.⁸ In this connection a writer in the Assamese language has stated that the Bodos might have developed the idea of *daini* from their contact with the Santhals who used to migrate to Assam since the sixty's of the 19th century, and suspected also that their contact with the culture of the Mayang region in Nagaon in the British period and other Assamese people may have created the concept of *daini*.⁹ He further argued that the idea of witchcraft and witch hunt was therefore never known to them till about the close of the 19th century.¹⁰ He is more sharp in giving the opinion that in no record about the Bodos since the days of Hodgson's Essay on the Koch, the Bodo and the Dhimal Tribes (1847) till 1947 there is any information about witchcraft and witch hunt among the tribe.¹¹ His statement is however, not based on genuine facts. For we know for certain that E.T. Dalton while collecting data in Assam for his Tribal History (first published in 1872) in the early part of the 19th century, has clearly recorded the practice of witchcraft and witch hunt among the Bodos of Assam.¹² If this is believed, then the pertinent question in this regard shall be- at what point of time this practice entered the Bodo society and under what circumstances.

In order to understand the emergence of the witch-hunt as a social process a look back investigation would be necessary. Incantation, magic and sorcery, and witchcraft have been very old practices in the human society all over the world. Evidence of such practices in India also are found since at least the days of the Atharva Veda, or even earlier.¹³ It was undoubtedly an accompaniment of the process of magic which the

primitive men largely depended upon.¹⁴ According to Thomson, 'witchcraft is the misapplication by individuals of magic, which was designed for the service of the community.'¹⁵ In Assam the emergence of the Mother Goddess in the form of Kamakhya and her manifestations in different forms and their personifications, and men's belief in various magico-religious agricultural practices are some of the significant developments in the social formation process of the state in early times. If the magical power of the lady goddesses is to be believed, then the practice here was of much remote origin. In the middle ages too magic, sorcery and witchcraft have been extensively recorded in literature of the land and outside. For example, while referring to the witchcraft practiced by a class of women in Goalpara and Khuntaghat area in the 16th-17th century, Mughal historian Mirza Nathan has recorded very interesting incidents. He says :

The place of (Khuntaghat) is notorious for magic and sorcery. Thus if a man takes by force a fowl from a ryot and the ryot comes to the judge for redress, and if that person is refused justice then the complainant by means of his magic and sorcery could make the accused produce the voice of a fowl from inside his stomach and thus prove the falsity of the protestations of the accused. If a bailiff of the judge stay at a village in connection with the work of the *Dihidar* and the *Pattadar* (the tenure holder or the revenue farmer) and if in a state of drunkenness he demanded fish with violence in the evening or at midnight when no fresh fish was available, and persisted in his demand by torturing the ryots, then they would bring some leaves of mango tree or (another tree whose name reads like *lashura*). and breathe on these leaves some words of magic and sorcery. When these fishes were cooked by him in a state of drunkenness. they turn into blood. As soon as they were eaten by the bailiff, he died.¹⁶

It is interesting to note that as a place of magic and sorcery the land of Kamarupa was well known all over the country in middle ages.¹⁷ The belief in the mother goddess Kamakhya and in her many other manifestations, such as Kali, and her two associates such as *Dakini* and *Yogini* are interesting in this regard. It is believed that the man engaged to sacrifice a human being before the goddess *Dikkaravasini* aliàs *Kechaikhathi* alias *Tamreswari*, was always caught by a witch before he propitiated the goddess by his act.¹⁸ All Vaishnavite literature refer to the occult practices done by men in the rural villages where one used

to create ills and the other cured it.¹⁹ It is to be noted that everywhere the preachers of neo-Vaishnavism came into clash with the practitioners of the occult and magical practices.²⁰ This fact explains how the early beliefs in magic and witchcraft slowly came into clashes with the organized religious beliefs of the land. But the practice did not end here; it has been popular among some sections of the society in the later periods too. Reference to what was called *Indrajal Vidya* (magic and witchcraft) in Assam has been found in the literature left by the Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur who visited Assam during Ram Singha's invasion of the state in 1667-1671.^{20(a)} In the 19th century Gunaviram Barua has recorded that women in Assam were well known for witchcraft (*ku-kriya*) and incantation and for doing evil to the society.^{20(b)} There are sufficient reference in the Assamese folklore and literature to women practicing medicine. The words *ahudi* (witchcraft, potioning, mesmarise), *bejini* (medicine women) are found in Assamese *Bihu Nam* which were used to attract young boys towards young girls. In certain ballads prevalent in Assam women practitioners are mentioned who were sometimes engaged even by kings and princes to treat some secrete diseases, such as pregnancy and abortion.^{20(c)} This shows that witchcraft and sorcery and through them practice of medicine by women was once a widely practiced culture in Assam. But now the practice has largely been reduced, particularly among the caste and urban societies, although in the poor and backward societies it is still found in one form or other. In the understanding of social changes the association between magic and medicine is well established. Witch hunting is not just related to stamping out witchcraft and its practices, as for example, healing by women. The suppression of women healers and dealers in magical potions is part of this struggle surrounding witch hunting. The one area of medicine that is still the preserve particularly of old women who are most likely to be denounced as witches is that of contraception and abortion. Women's loss of control over their child-bearing capacities is something that would contribute to strengthening men's control over the patrilineal line.^{20(d)}

The practice is not only found in India, they are universal all over the globe among the tribal, backward or peasant societies.²¹ The practice was widely prevalent in Europe in the middle ages.²² According to Trevor-Roper there were always witch beliefs associated with the 'casting of spells, the making of storms, converse with spirits, sympathetic magic.'²³ According to Mary Douglas, "The term witchcraft was used loosely in

Tudor and Stuart England, and was at one time or another applied to virtually every kind of magical activity or ritual operation that worked by occult method. Village diviners who foretold the future or who tracked down lost property were often called 'witches'; so were the wise women who healed the sick by charms or prayers. Contemporary scientists whose operations baffled the ignorant were sometimes suspected as witchcraft. Here the term witchcraft meant the employment (or presumed employment) of some supernatural means of doing harm to other people in a way that was generally disapproved of by the mass of society. A witch was thus a person of either sex (but in belief and practice more often female) who could mysteriously injure or kill other people. She could also molest farm animals."²⁴ But what is more important in this case is that it involves witch hunting, a process by which some members of a community practicing witchcraft attack some others of the same community for practicing it considering that all evils in the society has been created by the witches.²⁵

Witch Hunting : It is to be noted that in a society where witchcraft is a religio-cultural practice, every calamity, man-made or natural, are attributed to the witchcraft, and hence a witch, normally a woman, who is suspected to be a witch, is held responsible for all such calamities occurring in the society. As a result, Dev Nathan and others who have extensively worked on the Santhal community, have stated that every "woman live under the threat of being declared a witch. At times of crisis, like epidemics, all the women of a village could be attacked as witches."²⁶ They further stated that in the village of Mahagama in Orissa, "All the villagers (sic) became desperate and seeing no other remedy they beat all the women in the village and made them drink human excreta."²⁷ While writing about the witch hunting practice of the Bodos of Assam, Dalton also in a similar tune has written that "it often happens that sickness or other misfortune is ascribed to the spells of witchcraft rather than to the wrath of the deity, and then three *Ojhas* are summoned, with whose aid, and that of a cane freely applied, the elders endeavour wrath to extort from the witch a confession of the fact and her motives, and if condemned, she is expelled from the district."²⁸ In regard to the Ho tribe of Jharkhand, Dalton gives a more clear picture about the act of with hunt: "All disease in men or animals is attributed to one of two causes, the wrath of some evil spirit who has to be pleased, or to the spell of some witch or sorcerer, who should be destroyed or driven out of the land. In the latter case a 'Sokha' or witch-finder, is employed to divine who has cast the spell, and various modes of divination are resorted to."²⁹

Finding out a witch is an established process in every village of the tribe who have this practice. In a genuinely empirical study, Dev Nathan, Govind Kelkar and Yu Xiaogang have stated as follows about the process of witch hunt among the Santhal community which stands almost an example in case of all tribal communities practicing the craft :

While women's participation in rituals became evil, men alone could be the witch finders. The *ojas*, *deoras* and the *jan-gurus* perform this function with a combination of divining and knowledge in the contradictions existing in the village. Our discussions with the witch finders in the Maranghada region of Ranchi and with the Santhal women in the Giridih and other districts showed that the witch finders through their questions and other means (investigation by assistants) gathered information from the complainants. The identification of the witch is then based on the information gathered. Initially the names of the witches are not mentioned. The complainants are left to make their own inferences. All this makes it very easy to identify the person whom the village (men) want to get rid of as the witch. Usually the whole village knows beforehand who is the woman who is going to be named a witch. The various tensions in the village and the identity of those women who without support are both well known.³⁰

In the first stage, a woman named as a witch may be fined, asked to "behave" herself and otherwise threatened. Repetition of deaths due to diseases that cannot be identified, or other tragedies in the village which are certain to occur in a not too long a period of time, are then the occasion when the *ojha* may name the woman who is the witch. By this time there is already a consensus in the village that a particular woman is a witch. Recurrence of usual tragedies is taken as proof that the witch is unrelenting. The woman may then be either driven out of the village or killed."³¹

Dev Nathan and others have further mentioned that "police figures for one district of India (Malda) found that at least 46 persons had been killed as witches as late as in the period 1950-1980. These were only those cases that came to the notice of the police and that too in a period when the phenomenon was on a lower scale than in the 19th century."³² Recording the belief of the Warlis tribe of Maharashtra on witchcraft, Indra Munshi³³ has stated as follows:

Bhutali are believed to possess special powers by which they can instantly put a person to death or cause illness...As one political activist observed, when there is an illness, or death among human beings or cattle, widespread crop diseases or failure, the *bhutali* is held responsible. In such a situation the villagers go to the *bhagat (ojha)* to identify the cause of the calamity. If the situation does not improve, the *bhagat* goes ahead with the task of identifying the *bhutali*. Through a variety of rituals like *dan herne* (reading the message in grains of rice), *diva herne* (identifying the witch in the light of a lamp), the *vati chalavne* (using a cup which moves and identifies the witch), the *bhagat* tries to find the witch. The *bhagat* who identifies the witch is usually not from the same village. Through a careful questioning, he can locate women who are socially weak and vulnerable, quarrelsome, destitute, with poor family support, midwives, and so on. He gives a vague description of the women who caused harm.

The next step is to find the woman. The men of the village call for an identification parade. Women are sometimes made to stand on a hot pan as the Warli believe a witch's feet do not burn. At other times, the witch is simply pointed out by some one. Another way is that all the women who fit the description are beaten till some one confess to the crime. Once the witch or witches are identified, the whole village goes through the ritual of exorcising her. The woman is beaten, sometimes to death. No one, not even close relatives, protect her from the attacks, for fear of being accused as an accomplice. A survivor in most cases leaves the village. If the woman dies, she is buried rather than burnt, and the villagers give no information regarding the death to the police.

While this is an idea of witch hunting among some of the known tribes of India, there is no lack of examples of witch hunt among the Bodos of Assam although no proper and systematic study has yet been done on the practice as continued by the tribe since at least a century ago when in the late 19th century Dalton recorded this practice among the community. It is interesting that the method of detecting and penalizing the witch in the Bodo society does not materially differ much from what has been the practice among the Santhal or the Warli societies in other parts India, and for that matter any society of the country. Thus

it is not the witchcraft, but the process of witch-hunting that now attracts more attention than the craft itself.

Now, as against the European evidence as stated earlier, it is not known for certain as to the time when the practice of witch-hunting first emerged in Assam. Known as *daini hatya* the practice of witch hunting in Assam has been comparatively recent; and has been noticed among a number of tribes, mainly the Bodos, since at least the mid 19th century. If Dalton is to be believed, however, it was by then (middle of the 19th century, 1866) a well established practice among the Bodos of Assam. In his Preface to the *Tirbal History of Eastern India* (earlier *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*) he has stated that he collected his materials from 'all available sources of information', and that he "probably had more opportunities of observing various races and tribes, especially those usually called Aborigines, than have been conceded to any other officer now in the service."³⁴ Likewise, following Dalton, a few others also, such as W.G.Archer, missionaries like Bodding and Hoffman, have made mention of the practice in the land in the 19th and early 20th century.

The practice of witch hunting has still been reported from among the Bodos, Santhals and a few other minor communities. Thus it is a living practice and can be treated as a continuum of an old religio-cultural practice of the tribe. The publication of a number of news items in the national dailies during the second half of the last century amply prove this fact. It is to be noted that although in a number of occasions, particularly in early and middle ages, a witch may be both men and women although the number of women was always larger, in recent reports a witch is invariably a woman, such as in the Santhal and the Bodo society. It is believed that the women earn the education of witchcraft through a secret procedure³⁵ and apply her learning for creating diseases and death in a village. In this connection Bhaben Narzary, one of the eminent scholars of the Bodo tribe of Assam, has stated as follows:

The Bodos believe in a wonderful *daini* called *Than Thin Diani* who through her utmost devotion attain a supernatural power to do harm to the living creatures. She is popular among the Rabhas and the Bodo-Kacharis of Goalpara. Women in the main learn the *mantras* of the *daini*. They do harm to anybody who would not satisfy her by offering all that is desired by the witch. As a matter of fact, people of the villages penalise the victim of the *daini* thinking him/her to be the *daini* herself in various ways including putting his/her mouth to fire, or by cutting the nose, or by banishing him/her from the village.

It is interesting to note that the understanding of the witchcraft among these people has undergone a significant change during the last four decades since Bhaben Narjery's work first published in 1966. In present condition a woman is normally suspected by the neighbours to be the personification of the witch and the force behind all evils in the community. And then found her out through some specified devices and penalysed.

Reconstructing the History : Recent incidents of Witch Hunt among the Bodos : From the Bodo society in lower Assam, particularly those in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Darrang, Sunitpur and Nalbari frequent news of *daini* massacre are published in the news papers and periodicals. Here we shall enumerate a few incidents of witch hunt among the Bodos and other tribes of Assam during the last five years as published in the national and state dailies and periodicals. In the year 2001 a Bodo woman named Dakharsri Baglari in the Odalguri area within the Darrang district was killed by the villagers along with her old father-in-law suspecting that she was a witch.³⁷ One Jonali Rabha in the Barjara village under Lakkhipur Police Station of the Goalpara district was similarly given a verdict by the village council to be penalized suspecting her to be a witch and making her responsible for the death of a man of 55 years age.³⁸ In the same year in Kokrajhar in lower Assam another Bodo woman called Angao Musahary along with a man was killed by the villagers on the same ground.³⁹ Similarly, Pramilarani Basumatary, a Bodo woman, living in a village on the Assam -Arunachal border near Biswanath, was killed by the villagers on the ground that a girl of the village died due to the woman's witchcraft.⁴⁰ In another occasion a couple of the same community in Kokrajhar was killed by the villagers on the ground that they declined to confess that they were witches as accused by the villagers.⁴¹ In the same year it was reported that a Bodo woman called Sabitry Hajowari, was burnt alive on the ground that she was declared to be a witch who caused the death of a girl in the same village.⁴²

In 2002 there were four cases reported in *The Telegraph* and *The Assam* Tribune*⁴³ In the first case a couple was killed, while in the second case a woman was killed on the ground of witchcraft. A man called Kandle Hembrom in Kokrajhar was killed suspecting that he was maintaining a *daini*.⁴⁴ During the same year one woman called Mainamati Ghatowar of the Kakodonga Tea Estate in Upper Assam was put to hot iron for the death of a child suspecting that the death was caused by her.⁴⁵

In 2003 things did not much improve. In that year in an Upper Assam village called Jgroban Gaon a woman called Jaimati Robidas of

the age of 70 was physically tortured and forced to eat human excreta and banished from her village. She was held responsible for the death of a number of children in the village of the Santhals.⁴⁶ In the same year another such incident took place in the Madhuting Tea garden in Upper Assam where a woman was tortured physically and forced to eat human excreta⁴⁷ In the year 2004 a woman called Moni Hemrom was killed on the ground of her being suspected as a witch.⁴⁸ Two other men along with a woman were killed on Assam-Bhutan border at Bagcha on the same ground. (*Amar Asam*, 9 November, 2004).⁴⁹ It was reported that this incident was actually planned in connection with the possession of waste lands.⁵⁰ In the year 2005 in the village called Gobha a Tiwa couple was killed by the villagers suspecting their involvement in witchcraft.⁵¹ In the same year in the Biswanath subdivision in a village called Samukjuli a couple was killed by the villagers because the couple treated the people with medicine and did not allow the villagers to go for the doctors.⁵² In Kokrajhar two women in the village called Jharbari within the Sirang district were killed suspecting them to have practiced witchcraft.⁵³ In the month of June a couple was killed in the Kathalguri village under Bismuri Police Station in Kokrajhar District on suspicion of practicing witchcraft.⁵⁴ A Bodo man was killed on the suspicion of being a witch in the Pub Kamardaicha village under Patacharkuchi Police station on the Indo-Bhutan border.⁵⁵

Conclusion : Thus “attacks by villagers on so-called witches have been taking place in parts of Assam, destroying the lives of innocent men and women. Branded as practitioners of witchcraft, they have become the targets of violence without recourse to the benefit of the scientific review or judicial process.”⁵⁶ All the cases mentioned above, however, are not from the Bodos alone although majority belongs to them; but they all carry a common character : all victims belong to the backward and ethnic or tribal communities, most of them are women, in no case the crime is committed by women, and all victims are labeled as witch i.e. they are supposed to have some supernatural power of causing diseases or curing illness. It is, however, not possible to understand the actual socio-economic background of the events cited above to explain these incidents of witch hunting unless extensive and serious field investigations are made. It, however, appears that in most cases the ulterior reason is economic, ownership of property, especially land; and professional jealousy of men against women who handle all power to treat diseases in a society that is far superstitious and devoid of all knowledge

of modern science and technology. In that sense witch hunting can be considered as an attempt of one section of the society to change the existing social order whether in the field of economy or in the case of culture. Witchcraft has sometimes been explained as a protest method of the tribal society against the growing impact of organized religion on it in the process of social transformation from tribe to caste or from tribe to an organized and developed society. This contention finds support in the evidence of the religious history of medieval Assam when most believers in primitive religions used to trouble the preachers of Neo-Vaishnavism who, on their part, condemned them in no uncertain terms to marginalise them to the periphery.⁵⁷ On the other hand, killing of women by men of the same community cannot be explained in terms of a protest against an organized religion unless we believe that the organized religion created or encouraged patriarchy in the tribal societies. But this supposition cannot be accepted only in case of a few tribes. Killing or hunting of women by men also do not explain a male attempt to establish their superiority over women as witches are not always women, nor this is the practice in all tribal and backward societies to establish patriarchy. In case of Assam this contention is more inappropriate when we still worship the goddess Kamakhya in all crude method and her associates, and manifestations. The only probable reason lies in the economy and ownership of property which plays a significant role in a backward and poor society. It is not unreasonable to believe that in the process of detribalisation and early Brahmanisation members of tribal communities of Assam, particularly the Bodos, who played historic role in the state formation process in the early Brahmaputra valley,⁵⁸ acquired the culture of patriarchy and thereby slowly became accustomed to the property ownership right for men.⁵⁹ But due to a number of reasons women retained in their hands much economic power through their old medicinal practice or through their relationship to the production systems. As pointed out by a group of scholars, with this system- economic power with women, but socio-political authority with men, consequently failed to cope with the changing economic systems in the past centuries, particularly in modern times since the early 19th century, when capitalist economy controls the entire society. This fact possibly has caused in men's mind a desire to acquire wealth at their hands for which interested members of a family/community declare someone to be witch so that her killing would entitle them to the property of the victim. This is particularly true in case of single women or widow. The killing of a couple that happens sometimes, can be explained from this point of view. It is pointed out

that “when widows do have a substantial right to land (a life interest as opposed to a maintenance right or even more so opposed to living on charity) that they may become the targets of a witch hunt. It is here where women generally have considerable authority in society that it would be necessary to attack them as source of all evil in order to establish the full authority of men. Where women’s authority has been destroyed or reduced, such a continued attack would then not be necessary.”⁶⁰ In our present list of witch hunt as given elsewhere, there is at least one very clear case where the reason was economic and property ownership.⁶¹ All other hypothesis, such as marginalisation of tribal religion, process of male attempt to establish dominance over women, gender question- women’s protest against men’s domination, or vice versa, or protest of forest communities against deforestation⁶² can be explained in this light.

Notes and References

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2. Mary Douglas. *Purity and Danger*, London, 1966, p.102; I.M.Lewis. *Religion in Context: Cults and Cherisma*, Cambridge. 1996, p.65
3. Marvin Harris states that the “principal result of the witch hunt system (apart from the charred bodies) was that the poor came to believe that they were being victimized by witches and devils instead of princes and popes....It was the magic bullet of society’s privileged and powerful classes” See *Cannibals and Kings : The Origins of Culture*. New York, 1977. pp.237ff; also Aparna Mahanta, *Joc.cit.* p.14
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6. *Art of Tantra*, 1978, p. 210.
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10. *Ibid*, p. 29.
11. *Ibid*, p. 27.
12. *Op. cit*, p. 200.
13. D.P.Chattopadhyaya, *Lokayata*, 4th edition. Calcutta. 1978. pp.620f
14. *Ibid*.
15. vol. I, p.132
16. *Baharistan-I-Ghaybi* by Mirza Nathan, (ed. & tr.) M.I.Borah, vol.i, p. 132
17. S.K.Bhuyan, *Studies in the History of Assam*, Gauhati, 1965. pp.74ff
18. As reported to the present author by the people of the Sadiya region in Upper Assam and belief of the people of the Chutiya community of Assam who once ruled a part of Upper Assam with the head quarters at Sadiya.
19. *Katha Guru Charit*, (ed): R.M.Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture*, 2nd print. Guwahati. 1978. pp. 47f
20. *ibid*. 20(a) B.Kakati, *Purani Kamrupar Dharmar Dhara*, in *Banikanta Rachanawali*, Guwahati, 1991, pp.204ff. 20(b). *Asam Buranji*, Reprint, Guwahati, 1972. p.203. 20(c). In a ballad called *Manikonwarar Geet* (collected & edited by B.P.Chaliha, Guwahati, 2005. pp.210ft) the queen is said to have requested a woman medicine practitioner- *bejini* to secretly abort her having unable to bear pain of pregnancy at the old age. The *bejini*, however, is said to have refused to abide on fear of being killed by the king. Maheswar Neog has stated that the ballad speaks of the age of the Ahom rule in Assam. See *Maheswar Neog Rachanawali*. vol.i, Dibrugarh, 1986. p.388. 20(d). Indra Munshi, 'Women and Forest- A Study of the Warlis of Western India" in *Gender, Technology and Development*, 5(2). New Delhi. 2001. p. 187.

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39. *ibid*, 29 June, 2001
40. *ibid*, 18 August. 2001
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42. *ibid*. 8 Feb. 2001
43. *The Telegraph*, 2 October. 2002
44. *ibid*. 24 October, 2002
45. *AmarAsam*, 29 December. 2002
46. *ibid*. 28 June, 2002
47. *ibid*., 26 July. 2003

48. *ibid*, 29 April, 2004
49. *ibid*, 9 November, 2004
50. *ibid*
51. *The Sentinel*, 12 June, 2005
52. *Amar Asam*, 15 March, 2005
53. *The Sentinel*, 27 April, 2005
54. *ibid*. 12 June. 2005
55. *The Statesman*, 4 may. 2002
57. *Gurucharit Katha*, (ed.) M.Neog. Guwahati. 1982. pp.38. 308
58. The Bodos once spread over the entire Brahmaputra valley. As a mark of their once hold over the entire valley the names of the rivers and many other geographical items have been found coined in their language. Scholars believe that almost all rivers of Assam and North Bengal beginning with the prefix *di/ti* are of the Bodo origin. The early ruling dynasties of Assam such as the Varmanas, Salasthambhas, Palas, Khyens, Koches, Chutiyas etc. are believed to have belonged to the Bodos of the valley.
59. The Bodos have a system of keeping a young boy for a girl at the house of the girl called *gharjonwai rakha*. The *gharjonwai*, however, is not entitled to the ownership of the property which the girl inherits from her parents. They also have a system called *dhoka* or *dangkha* whereby a widow marries a man and keeps him with her at her home. This man, however, does not become the rightful owner of the property which the woman possesses from the side of her former husband. (See Narzary, *op.cit.* pp.87ff"). It appears that this proprietary right of women has been a cause of witch-hunt among the Bodo society.
60. Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan, *op.cit.* p. 100
61. See fn.No. 50
62. See fn. No.1; Aparna Mahanta. 'Daini Hatya: Eta Samajttatik Bisleshan'. in (ed) Paramanad Majumdar, *op. cit.* pp.11 ff