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Poverty And Illiteracy Are The Major Causes Of Witch Hunting Among The Tribal Community Of Assam-A Case Study On Missing Tribe Of Dhemaji.

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Abstract:

Witch hunting or witch branding are the social menace, which are very much prevalent in the State of Assam. Witch doctors are the people, who usually brand a women (in few cases man also) as witch, in cases where there are issues of draught, flood, illness, death of the people of particular locality. The reasons of witch hunting or witch crafting are many, however, it has been in practice as a part of traditional belief, which is the reason people are reluctant to give up the practice. Existing laws in India have failed to address the issue. NGOs, Civil Societies, and Judiciary had expressed several times for need of the special laws for curbing this social evil. In Assam, the areas which are tribal and rural and low rate of literacy & income; particularly the Missing Tribe, people are guided by blind faith and superstition in these areas and this blind faith invokes them to believe in witchcraft.

Introduction:

The Mising are an indigenous community inhabiting parts of the Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. They are also known as Miris in history and the Constitution of India. The Misings belong to the greater group of Tani people, who speak languages of the Sino-Tibetan family, which comprise many tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in India and Tibet. All Tani tribes share linguistic, cultural and ritual similarities. According to Census of India conducted in 2011, the population of Mising in Assam is 6,80,424; of which 3,45,786 are male and 3,34,638 female, with sex ratio of 967 per thousand.

Objectives of the Study:

The present study has the following objectives

1. What are the causes of Witch hunting among the Missings
2. Survey is done on rate of literacy and income, employment, social status, their job-culture, motive, faith and tradition etc within the proposed area.

Hypotheses:

Following hypotheses have been developed in order to materialise the above-mentioned objectives

Superstition Vs Poverty and Illiteracy—supplementary to each other, among the Missing Tribe.

Methodology:

In order to attain the objectives and to prove the hypotheses a survey is done on ten randomly selected village of Dhemaji District inhabited by the Missing Tribe, their rate of income, literacy, political orientation, social status, their job-culture, motive, faith and belief etc., This research is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary sources include the collection of data on different aspects of witch-hunting from the field using a structured questionnaire. Secondary sources include the collection of data from different government agencies, newspapers, journals, books and others. Interviews and cases studies were used to collect data from the victims, instigators, ojhas and other persons involved in cases of witch hunts.

Analysis:

Witch hunting is a disaster, which employs violence, which is mostly directed towards women, though, there are many instances of entire families being wiped away, including male members and children too. A comprehensive definition of witch hunting is quite impossible, as this crime has various dimensions. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'witch' as a women thought to have evil magic powers, especially to do evil things and 'witchcraft' as use of magic powers, especially evil ones, and the word 'witch hunt' defines an attempt to find and punish people who hold opinions that are thought to be unacceptable or dangerous. Thus, witch hunt is a search to find and destroy people thought to be witches. The term 'witch' has been derived from the old English words 'wicca' (masculine) and 'wicce' (feminine). It is basically a deep rooted psychological anomaly that certain people possess. Accusations of being a 'witch' refers to the alleged possession of an evil spirit by a women (or much less often a man), giving her supernatural powers to alter the course of nature. Witch hunting is a superstitious believes in searching a witch in order to harm people. After being accused, they are tortured and treated inhumanly by their communities and often relatives. Witch hunting is a phenomenon, which had originated in Western Europe in the early fifteenth century, but the most significant era of witch hunting is the earliest series of trials took place in Italy and in French and German speaking regions around the western Alps.

In India around 1500 B C, the practice of witchcraft find mention in the Veda. This ugly tradition is flows today among the poor section of Indian society. According to India's National Crime Records Bureau, more than 2500 people in India have been tortured and killed in these hunts between 2000 to 2016, most of them being women. However, people say that "number is much higher, because most states don't list witchcraft as a motive of murder". So there is no concrete number of people that have lost their lives to being accused of a witch. On average, an Indian woman is "killed every other day after being accused of witchcraft, according to government statistics".

Witch hunting in Assam is not a recent origin which can be traced back from the ancient time. Witch hunting in Assam is one of the traditional practices. Witch hunting involves branding of a victim especially women as witches when by the community or by relatives or in most of the cases by 'Oja' or 'Bej' also known as witch doctor. The victim who is branded as witch (witches are called 'dainis' in the local dialect in Assam) is subjected to number of torture including beating, burns, paraded naked through the village, forced to eat human excrement and sometimes even raped and in many cases lynched by villagers. This evil traditional practice is prevailing at different district of Assam. The practice of witch-

hunting is unfortunately prevalent amidst several communities and tribes across the Brahmaputra Valley. This practice is a part of traditional belief system in Assam, including Missing people.

Mishings belong to the Tibeto-Burman family of the Mongoloid group and are primarily concentrated in the riverine areas of the eight districts of Assam, namely, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Sonitpur, Golaghat, Sivasagar, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh. According to the 2011 Census, the total Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of Assam was recorded at 3,884,371. The Mishings form 17.51 per cent of Assam's ST population.

The Mishings dwell basically on the banks of rivers in a natural environment, which is the main reason they are continuously threatened by problems of flood and displacement. Their houses, made of thatches and bamboos, are constructed on raised platforms about five feet above the ground in order to avert the fury of floods. The main occupation of the tribe is agriculture. Though they are traditionally fond of community hunting and fishing, the former occupation is somewhat extinct now while the latter is still done with a lot of community feeling. They grow varieties of rice paddy, mustard seeds, black pulses and few vegetables basically for their own consumptions. As for livestock, every household commonly rears pig and fowl. Due to globalisation and other factors, certain changes are visible in the socio-economic life of this tribe. However, despite these changes, this ethnic tribe has been able to maintain its traditional socio-cultural-religious traits unimpaired.

The community has various Clans as, including: Doley, Pegu, Bori, Gam, Charoh, Dao, Darig, Dang, Jimey, Kuli, Kutum, Kumbang, Kaman, Kardong, Kari, Lagachu, Loying, Modi, Moyong, Morang, Mili, Medok, Misong, Narah, Ngate, Pangging, Pasar, Perme, Pertin, Pait, Pagag, Patir, Patiri, Padi, Payeng, Payun, Pao, Padun, Regon, Ratan, chungkrang, Chintey, Charoh, Taw, Tayee, Tawid, Tayeng, Tayung and Yewin.

Witch Hunting and Causes among Missing Tribe:

There are diverse reasons of witch hunting in Assam. Apart from a traditional blind belief, the reasons sometimes could be of ulterior motive of some sections of the people. Following are the few major reasons of witch-hunting Missing Tribe:

1. Old Superstitious Traditions:

This superstitious tradition finds a breeding ground in tribal society, not because of illiteracy among the people, but largely because of their historical fascination with black magic. When more than one unfortunate event take in a village, the village people in the grip of superstition tend to believe that such instances are outcome of witchcraft by witches and seek help from 'oja', 'bej', or witch doctors, who identify a person in the village as the witch and culprit behind the incidents. It is believed that, this practice has existed in Assam since Vedic period. All types of witch doctors were unconditionally treated as supernatural being.

In the researched area of Dhemaji district the researcher has found that among the Missing people the Witch are locally known as Moru. The Moru use Kusere (medicine) as Yokmo (poison) to kill a person or make him sick.

The Mibu (astrologer) can identify the witch. After identification of a witch the open and general meeting of the village decide future course of action on the witch. Generally they are tortured.

2. Lack of Education:

Illiteracy is one of the reasons of the witch hunting among Missings. People believe in old traditional Bej, oja or witch doctors due to lack of awareness and education. This has immensely affected the mindset of the backward tribal villages of Dhemaji. Illiterate section of the society blindly believes in witch hunting.

3. Diseases and poor health care system:

People in remote tribal village of Dhemaji are highly affected by diseases like malaria, diarrhea, typhoid and jaundice etc. Every year large number of people dies due to several diseases. The village folks have a tradition of visiting witch doctor when they fall ill rather than seeking advice from qualified health practitioners, who in turn tell them that disease is an outcome of witchcraft, after that the hunt for the witch begins.

4. Poverty:

Poverty is one of the most important reasons for witch hunting. It has often been witnessed that, during extreme rainfall or other during epidemics, there is an increase in the torture of witches. As such, poverty makes people to grow trust on the easily available and affordable witch doctors than proper medicines and trained doctors.

5. Victimization of women over claim on property and denial of sex:

In Assam, there is a steep growth in number of cases of witch hunting which had resulted due to clash over claim for property. In present days, branding someone as witch is becoming a tool to assert domination over other's property, personal rivalry and to create new power center in village. There are also instances of witch hunting being used against families who emerged as powerful, challenging the existing power structure of the village. Further, there are instances, where women are accused of witch after they deny sex with man. Many young widows go through this problem, when the man they have rejected accuse them of being witch and spread rumors among the villagers to hunting the witches.

After a witch is identified, they are tortured. Every case is different depending on what the witch supposedly did and what village they are in. The impact as a result of it on victim's life is far from the imagination. The actual mental and emotional upheavals that the victim and family have to go through have far-reaching and deep scratches on their lives. Verbal abuse seems to be the mere portion of what actual victimisation process results in. Others grievous consequences includes separation from children and family, forced stigma, isolation, threat, denial of access to public resources, forced displacement, loss of property and livelihood, payment of fines, oath-taking, performance of rituals, separation from community, humiliation etc.

Serious economic consequences due to loss of livelihood were faced by the victim and family after accusation. Further, it was seen that this helplessness situation was taken advantage of by many to get hold of the property and other materials of the victim

Conclusion:

The witch hunt is a superstitious practice that has been inflicting the lives of many since ages. Recurring instances of the crime is seen to occur among many tribal and aboriginal communities of Assam today. The genies of the practices have its roots in the tantra- matra rituals that have survived overages and have small reminisce of it in the traditional and customary beliefs of many tribal communities of the state. Accessibility, along with superstitions fuels the cases which lead to extreme brutalisation of the accused along with many collateral victims. It is thus utmost necessary to raise awareness, try to prevent and protect from becoming the victim of such a superstitious belief which leads into such a heinous crime.

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