

Philosophical Perspectives on Social Issues

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PREFACE

Men are social beings. As a social being men live in society. Men have to face different problems which are inherent in our society. Technological change engenders social and moral change which brings both positive and negative influences on individual as well as in society. In this book it is trying to focuses on different burning problems of the society relating to youth, women, religion and environment.

The problem of value has been increasing day by day. In present society, values particularly moral values are degraded to some extent. The youth are unrest. They have taken the arms in hands. The problem of terrorism is found in all over the world.

Women are the mirror of a society, but women are deprived of and neglected in our society. Gender discrimination and bias exist globally which placed women as the most oppressed, exploited and disadvantaged people. Violence against women is seen all over the world. There are various instances of witch hunting where women are the victims. Such superstitions exist in every society from the human civilization. These play the negative role in life of individual as well as in society.

Religion is found in all society. As we all know that religion must serve some social purpose. Whether that purpose is to preserve and to legitimate existing societies, or to promote social improvement and a change in society, has been the focus of a long-running debate. In the present day situation also, it is often noticed that people of belonging to different religious groups, clash each other leading to communal riots.

Environment is essential for human being. Human

have certain responsibilities to the natural world, and Environmental ethics seeks to help people become aware of them and to act responsibly when they do things that impact the natural world.

These are the burning problems or issues prevalent in the present society. So, it is an attempt to analyze these problems from philosophical point of view.

In this regard, I convey my thanks to my friends and colleagues who advised me to do this work. I want to express my thanks to my daughters for their co-operation.

I am also grateful to the employees of Computer Arts, for helping me in the matter of printing. Finally, it is pleasure to acknowledge my obligations to my husband for help and encouragement in preparing this book.

Dipika Barman

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Chapter-1

Degradation of Moral Values in Indian Society: A Social Perspective

**“Every time a value is born, existence takes on a new meaning: every time one dies, some part of that meaning passes away”——
—— Joseph Wood Krutch**

Men are social as well as spiritual being. As a social being men live in a society. In a society there are some conventions or rules. The conventions and rules are value oriented. Value is central to human actions. We cannot think of all round development of a human being without living in a society.

The value problem in society has been increasing day by day. It's become a threat to human race and it creates havoc problems not only in social level but also in political and economic level. The social problems pertaining to the degradation of values in society cannot be overlooked.

The concept of value is used differently in different subjects. Generally, when an object satisfies a human want or desire then it is said to have value. In philosophy, the concept of value is mainly related to morality or ethics. Moral values are the standers of good and evil, which govern an individual's behaviors

and choices. Individuals and Morals may derive from society and the government, religion, or self.

As a moral concept value has a special significance in human life. From this standpoint, values are ideals that guide or qualify our personal conduct and interaction with others. They help us to distinguish what is right and what is wrong and inform us on how we can conduct our life in a meaningful way.

Values may mean in broadest sense as codes of conduct or unique behaviors towards harmony, happiness and progress in a psycho-physical organism. Values stand for social as well as spiritual aspect of individual life. So, value relates to the aim of human life. Values are broadly classified into two types- intrinsic value and instrumental value. An intrinsic value is of worth of its own account and an instrumental value because of its consequences. W.M.Urban rightly says "That alone is ultimately and intrinsically valuable that leads to the development of selves or to self realization."

Values as ideals realized God, the eternal embodiment of truth, good, beauty, righteousness, justice, love and inspiring mankind to strive and struggle to achieve a better order seem to satisfy our intellectual, moral, religious and aesthetic aspirations. Man's relationships with the society or in the world don't end simply with the satisfaction of his material needs. Man's unending love for life implies his eagerness to keep contact within the world. The desire for material satisfaction makes man self-centered. Man also desire for the well being of the society.

Values are the guiding principles, decisive in day to day behaviors as also critical life situation. Values are a set of principles or standers of behaviors. Values are regarded as desirable, important and held in high esteem by a particular society in which a person lives.

Degradation of moral values:

The degradation of moral values or crisis of moral values has emerged due to not understanding its proper role in our society. The problem of value in society has been increasing day by day. A society which is endowed with lofty values makes progress. On the other hand, a society which values deteriorated degenerates. Non-violence, truth, non-stealing, etc, are eternal values. It is not that they are needed sometimes and at other times they are become redundant. These values are always. They are needed to be a factor in individual and society development.

Society is a network of co-ordination or integration among the different types of people through the value system. People can be conscious or aware about the social problems which are inherent in our society. Values like truthfulness, love, justice, honesty, humanity, etc, are such values which we must preserve in society in order to regulate our life in a well ordered manner. In the absence of these moral values we cannot think of a human society. Changes in value bring both positive and negative changes in an individual society.

Now-a-day moral tremendous achievement in science and technology, man is not happy. Moral values degradation leads to unhealthy environment in the society. So, technological changes engender social and moral change. At present, we find the ills of the social ethos which are caused by the over emphasis on wealth and power. The concept of easy money encourages our youth to go against the moral values. Modern society and its social ethos suffer from a number of ills which are responsible for restoration of values. In spite of the development of science and technology, everywhere there is a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness. Negative influences of mass communication, lack of moral education in the educational institutions are also factors for crisis of values.

The conflict between traditional and changes values of the present day may be considered as the major factor of value crisis of

Indian society. Our traditional socio-cultural value such as of mutual tolerance, of accommodation and assimilation sometimes rendered our society vulnerable to more aggressive and resourceful foreign elements and thus creating internal conflict in the process.

Values are usually influenced by the changing philosophical ideological, cultural and religious perspective, social, political and geography condition. In modern emerging society, there has been a revolutionary change in the field of values due to many factors in addition to the influences of modern cultural, industrialization, urbanization, globalization and multinationals. Globalization has brought a changes which has affected all aspects of our life and society. It has affected humanistic values most. In fact, though globalization and liberalization has certain positive affect like broadening one's outlook, providing better opportunities, etc, yet it causes degradation of moral values in Indian society. An average man today aspires for maximum material acquisition with minimum effort and by any means. Thus, the common of today is devoid of morality. Life has become mechanical and robotic and people have little opportunity to look after the welfare of others. Modernity has created a society where sensual pleasure have become dominant.

For upgrading moral values in the society, family, educational institutions, mass media, religion, culture and environment can play vital role in inculcating moral value of an individual and in society.

Family is the basic of foundation of all values. A family's mode of living, behaviour, attitudes, love, sympathy towards others centers round the value system of the entire members.

Along with family, the institutions of the society should have a proper foundation of manners, traditions, rituals and cultures. Education is another factor through every society sustains itself. Education helps in bringing social changes and stability.

Value education means inculcating in the individual a sense of humanism, a deep concern for the well being of others and the nation. Value education refers to a programme of planned educational action aim at the development of value and character. Lack of value education has seen as an important factor in creating social imbalance in our society. The aim of education should not be the learning and teaching of social, physical or biological sciences. The education should be fruitful and effective only when there is a personal touch between the teachers and the taught. So, one of the main factor of inculcation of moral value is the "student- teacher-relationship'. Here is also very much necessary to design a course on human values and make it a part of curriculum. The most basic of all moral values is the truth. Moral values must be taught through the educational and others institutions devoted to the pursuit and dissemination of truth rather than the teaching of ideology or custom. A society or an individual dedicated to truth faces the reality rather than obscures it.

The Mass media can play positive role in inculcating moral value in society. Through the realistic news, dramas, dialogues, it could strengthen the forces of national integration, communal harmony and political stability. The evil effects to mass media should be controlled by the Govt. also. So there should be co-relation between the society, community and educational institutions in developing moral values and the sense of spirituality in minds of the new generations.

Chapter-2

Terrorism of North East India: A Social perspective.

Terrorism is a global phenomenon. It is not a new phenomenon for human civilization. It is a problem we have been facing for more than two decades. Though methodology and forms have been changing, it has been practiced throughout history and throughout the world. Today, terrorism is perceived as a problem capable of destabilizing not only national, but also international politics. Terrorism in recent times has affected both the developed and the developing countries.

The north east India has been affected badly by terrorism involving number of insurgent groups. The north east is situated in a remote corner of India. The north east states included the states-Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and recently Sikkim. This region of India is surrounded by International borders. The north east is a mosaic of diverse ethnic groups, customs, cultures, dialects, languages and religious beliefs and practices. Terrorism creates so many socio-economic and political problems to this north east region.

No universally agreed, legally binding definition of terrorism currently exists. Common definition of terrorism refers only to those violent acts which are intended to create fear (terror), are perpetrated for a religious, political or ideological goal, deliberately target or disregard the safety of non-combatants, and are committed by non-government agencies. The Dictionary meaning of the term terrorism is that it is a practice of using violent and intimidating methods. Terrorism is broadly defined as "a method whereby an organized group or party seeks to achieve its avowed aims chiefly through the systematic use of violence". (Encyclopedia of social science). So we find from the above definitions that terrorism proper is the systematic use of violence to generate fear, and thereby to achieve political goals, when direct military victory is not possible. The goal of terrorism is generally to destroy the public's sense of security and to spread extreme fear in the society and try to compel the authority to compromise with them through their terrorist activities.

Terrorism of North East India a creation of politics. We have faced this problem in Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, and Tripura.

In Assam, a number of insurgent outfits are active out of which the most important is the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), which had its birth in 1979. The other active organizations are National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), the Dima Halong Daoga (DHD), Bodo Security Force (BSF), etc. Arunachal Pradesh is relatively quite peaceful, but it is a safe heaven for the presence of NSCN (K) and NSCN (IM) militants and ULFA of Assam.

Tripura is very badly affected by terrorist groups for past several decades. The two main militants' outfits are National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), and All Tripura Tribal Front (ATTF).

Among the present states of North East, Nagaland is the oldest theatre of insurgent and violence. In Nagaland, the

terrorists groups are Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) and (NSCN-K).

Mizoram is another state which witness unprecedented violence in the mid sixties. Following the secessionist example of the Naga rebels, the Mizo Secessionists formed the Mizo National Front (MNF) under the leadership of Laldenga.

Manipur has been facing insurgency by several militant outfits. The main groups are Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA), United National Liberation Front (UNLF), and Kanglei Yawol Kama Lup (KYKL), etc.

Meghalaya is a relatively peaceful state with only two militants outfits- Achik National Volunteers Concil (ANVC), HNLC.

Though the characteristics of different insurgent or terrorist groups operating in North East region appear to be different insurgent, considering its historical base and circumstances, yet it is obvious that negligence and ignorance by the state machinery has led to unrest and rebellion. The indigenous people living in the plains and hill of the N.E have genuinely felt that they have been deprived by the Centre far too long.

Although it is difficult to generalize the cause responsible for the growth of terrorism in North East region, it can be said that the centralize structure of Nation- building process failed to understand the needs of peripheries like N.E India. The problem of terrorism in the North East is a collective expression of the exploitation, deprivation and neglect in the terms of development and infrastructure of the land and its people. Terrorism in this region is outcome of certain intricate factors such as crisis of Identify, economic exploitation, inadequate development of communication, abject poverty, unemployment of youth, bureaucratic corruption, psychological alienation from the main stream and the influence of foreign power. Each of these

factors stimulated the followers of insurgency to involve themselves in terrorism for furthering their views. Every terrorist group operating in this region is revolting against the legally constituted authority for fulfillment of their demands. It is crystal clear that discontentment of youth with the existing social system is the root cause of terrorism in the macro level. The youths have developed a sense of hatredness against the menace of bribery in matters of appointment and red-tapism at the bureaucratic level and rampant corruption in all departments.

Terrorism has tremendous impact on socio-economic development. There is an intricate relationship between society and economic development especially in India context. Terrorism may be considered as hindrance for all-round development for the individual of the terrorist affect North East states. It carries potential threat to civilized life. As a result overall development seems to be disrupted.

As a social phenomenon, terrorism adversely affects the healthy social environment because of the fear that puts in the mind of the people. The innocent common people are used as the soft target by the terrorists. Another tactic generating fear is the abduction and assassination of heads of the states and members of government in order to make afraid of talking positions of leadership and so to spread a sense of insecurity. Again there may be crisis of civil rights of the individual in terrorism affected area.

Terrorism is a threat to social integration. Due to terrorism sense of human values are decreased. Terrorist activities increased the sense of insecurity of life and property. From the impact of terrorism, many youngsters were ruined their lives by drug addiction. Continuous societal violence or terrorism may be result of various facts having its root in socio-political system.

Any continuous armed struggle involves combat fatigue due to prolonged traumatic and strenuous environment.

Terrorism of North East is a threat to social stability and a stand as a barrier to economic development. Terrorism creates so many socio- economic and political problems to the society of the North East region. It results in social instability, creates panic among the people, reduce the enthusiasm of the people in the line of entrepreneurship, creative works etc.

Due to terrorist problem in North East, academic atmosphere has also been deteriorated. It results in drainage of brilliant students to outside regions.

Some remedial measures to stop terrorism:

- 1) Government needs to give much more attention to this problem. The Govt. should give high priority to meet the basic economic, social, humanitarian needs and rebuild the society.
- 2) The Govt. should examine the genuinity of demand of terrorist and the terrorist should take a compromising attitude towards Govt. decision regarding their demands.
- 3) The Govt. should take effective steps for generating employment avenues. The present education system is defective in the sense that graduates, master- degree holders cannot find jobs by simple producing their certificates. So, by spreading technical education it may be possible to solve the problem of unemployment.

In conclusion, we say that no one in earth is born as a terrorist. It is the situation which temps one to become a terrorist. As terrorist is a socio- political problem, responsibilities to eliminate it goes to each and every individual of the society in general and to authority of a country, or a state, or a region in particular. The causes of terrorism must be studied scientifically and the grievances must be discussed sincerely. The sentimental

issues and the feeling of insecurity of different ethnic groups of North East region must get proper attention from the Government from the political parties and from the common people.

Again the NGOs, political workers, social activists etc. may try to develop a sense of hatred to the terrorists' activities among the people of grass root level. So, the basic task on the part of the authority is to infuse confidence in the hearts and minds of the people that their ethnic and cultural identity would be protected.

By accepting the path of violence no problem can be solved. The terrorist and the Govt. should come forward for finding a better solution for this problem. Considering the greater interest of peace for human civilization, all the countries should have extend their sincere cooperation in this regard.

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Chapter-3

Gender Discrimination and Violence Against Women in India.

In any society marked by tradition and modernity, the women occupy an important place. In fact, men and women are supplementary to each other and the combination of men and women biologically, socially and culturally give rise to humanity. But women as a group are one of the oppressed, exploited and disadvantaged people. In our society, the birth of a girl has not been treated as joyous event. The son is precious to parents. They never receive equal position with that of males in our society. Ideologically, women are placed under the constant protection of men only. Though Indian women are rising in all walks of life, still she is being treated as second to men.

A Retrospective view on women's status:

If we go through ancient times, we find that the birth of a girl was not received well in the patriarchal society. But in the Vedic period, the status of women was very high. Upanishads

endowed equal status to men and women in social and religious functions. But in post-Vedic social life, women had to live in suppression in a male dominated society. During the Puranic period, women were forced to subjugation. We have various instances how females were exploited, oppressed and tortured by males. So, the Indian women, as historical and social evidences tell us, have always been in a subordinate position to men. Women are deprived in terms of choice of marriage partners, decision making power and are restricted in their mobility. The practice of male female differentiation result in deprivation and discrimination in the sphere of education, health, employment, property rights, etc. and atrocities in the sphere of dowry harassment, eve teasing, wife battering, rape, etc.

Discrimination in the sphere of education: Illiteracy is the major problem faced by Indian women. According to 2001 census report, the general literacy rate is 65.38% in which the literacy rate of men is 75.85% and of women is 54.16%. So, high rate of literacy amongst women limits their access to employment, health facilities and exercise of legal and constitutional rights. Illiterate women are more victims of exploitation and harassment.

Discrimination in the sphere of Health: The well-known definition given by World Health Organization is that 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity.' Health is one of the most important indicators of overall development and well being of society. If we look at the health status of women in India, we feel that the health status is not satisfactory. Preference for sons, dowry killings, early marriage of girls, sex selective abortion or female infanticide and violence against women continue to women's reproductive health. As girls under 5 years of age, women in India

face neglect in terms of medical care and education, sexual abuse and physical violence. As adolescent and adult women in the reproductive age group, they face early marriage, early pregnancy, sexual violence, domestic violence, dowry harassment, torture in case of infertility.

Discrimination in Employment: In the field of employment also men are better equipped than women since by and large; men have given better skills, training and competence. Employment puts a woman to a double disadvantage. One would often find women working in the fields- in transplantation harvesting work with small infants tied their backs.

Discrimination in property rights: Daughters are not considered as the part of the family. They are considered as 'parayadhan', who eventually go to their husband's houses. Thus, there is considerable hostility to passing property to the daughters as then the property would not move out of patrilineal descent. In cases where daughters and sisters do not voluntarily give up their claims to property, instances are found of force or violence being used to get their acceptance.

Violence against women:

Violence against women in India is becoming more frequent. Women, in Indian society have been victims of humiliation, torture and exploitation. Violence against women occurs in every sphere of life. Violence against women consist of (according to the U.N. Declaration) 'any act of gender-biased violence that result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Violence against women shall be understood to

encompass but not be limited to physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the community including battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry related violence, marital rape and other traditional practices harmful to women, violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment at workplace, in educational institutions, trafficking in women and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state.'

Violence against women are occurring in every sphere of life. Certain kinds of violence occur within the home setting while others are more prone to occur in the wider society. So, violence against women can be categorized as familial context and non familial context.

The familial contexts of violence against women are:

- (i) dowry harassment and dowry death
- (ii) Wife beating and wife battering
- (iii) Sexual abuse
- (iv) Female infanticide and female foeticide

The non- familial contexts are:

- (i) Eve teasing, molestation and rape
- (ii) Caste based sexual exploitation
- (iii) Trafficking in women and girl prostitution
- (iv) Sexual harassment at work place

Some facts of violence against women:

- In India, 31 women are raped every day. 5% of these are girls below 10 years of age.
- 16 women become dowry death victims daily.
- Every 15 minutes a molestation case is reported.
- 230 cases of crime are reported about violence against women daily.

The above facts are reported. But there are many cases which are not reported due to some causes. It still may be voiced. The causes why such incidents of violence against women are not reported are-

- (a) Social ostracism: if a female is sexually abused she and even her family may not voice the injustice that has been done to her due to the stigma attached to it.
- (b) Subjugation patriarchal structure: the status of females in our society is inferior to that of males. Subjugation and oppressive situation for are normal in society and are accepted by all, even the women themselves. In wife beating or blasting incidents, the women may be told that she provoked the husband. Even in cases of rape, the women are blamed for inviting the situation of hers.
- (c) Lack of legal literacy: Another reason for not expressing felt in justice is that people are not even aware that the state has made certain laws for redressing these injustices.
- (d) Financial compulsion: Most women are unable to support themselves financially and along with social ostracism and exploitation of women in society, they also accept injustices within the family.

For combating violence against women, the following can be done:

1. Awareness to constitutional rights: These rights are already granted to every citizen of India. In women's context, these become important since women are largely unaware of these rights. These rights are protected by the law. Information on these rights becomes important for women, since within their groups they are the most downtrodden and exploited. Some of the rights are- right to equality, right against exploitation, right to freedom,

freedom of religion, one third representation of women in local bodies.

2. To mobilize women and sensitize society: To mobilize and sensitize society to check atrocities on women and make violence against women visible. This is community's awareness to gender deprivation (of access to health, education, property etc.), discrimination against women (in employment, nutrition), violence that women face (dowry harassment, rape, wife beating).

So literacy is the first step to empower women. It is a fact that women once educated will bring change not only in their own development but also in the development of the whole family and society. The Govt. of India has taken a National policy to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women through a process of change in the societal attitudes towards women, all forms of discrimination against women and active participation of women in all sphere of life. Women's empowerment through provision of laws of equal remuneration, property rights, one- third reservation of seats for women in political bodies and free education to girls are some of the efforts undertaken by Govt. to improve women's status. The Govt. of India has enacted a number of laws to protect women. Some of these are

- (i) Immoral traffic Act. 1956
- (ii) Dowry prohibition Act. 1956
- (iii) Child marriage restraint Act. 1961.
- (iv) Indecent Representation of women Act. 1986.
- (v) Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques 1994.
- (vi) Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

If the laws given above are implemented in right direction, they will certainly contribute to have empowered women. But it have been seen that a lot of attempts to make women empowered have adopted, but the goals are yet to be fulfilled. In the occupational and general economic field, the women's position is still measurable. In spite of the various changes taken place in the social sphere of status, the Indian women can not be regarded as being emancipated and free from the constraints of age-old customs and traditions. Until and unless women do not change their mindset, the attitudes will remain same. That is why women must assert their rights by themselves. It is time women arose in revolt against the injustices meted out to them. Women be aware of their strength, potentialities and capacities, so as to enable them to emerge as strong and equal to men. Hence, our slogans are: 'Eliminate inequality, not women', 'Destroy Dowry, not Daughters'. Say 'No to sex discrimination', say 'yes to Gender justice'.

Chapter- 4

Witch- Hunting

Introduction:

Witch hunting is a systematic act of violence against women whereby the entire community sanctions the punishment meted out to the person being accused of witchcraft. As a social evil it is more difficult to tackle because the stimulus of such action is often rooted in the traditional spiritual and cultural belief system of the communities which is misinterpreted by a select few to manipulate the situation. Thus witch hunting perpetuates through a conspiracy of ignorance, fear and vested interest.

Witch hunting refers to stigmatization of people belonging to specific groups, mostly women by labeling them as 'witches' or evil spirits who bring bad omen to the society. Prevalent largely in rural and tribal areas, where blind faith guides the way of life, people after proclaiming the victims as 'witches'

Witch hunting is one of the superstition which is practiced in some form or the other in different parts India in general and

Assam in particular. Superstitions are the legacy of civilization and are inherited by the following generations. There is no denying the fact that women are the worst victims of superstition in our country. At the same time, they are the main agents who propagate superstitions most. The life of woman from the cradle to the grave has always, from the earliest period, been surrounded with all manner of curious beliefs.

The belief in the practice of witch craft is part of almost all living societies and some traces of it can be felt at various degrees among all cultures. The practice is more prominent among the Rabha, Hajong, Mishing, Bodo and the Adivasi community in Assam.

The concepts Superstition and Witch-hunting:

A superstition is generally understood to be an irrational fear or reverence for something which cannot be examined or testified by science. The very term 'superstition' denotes a conclusion not based on rational thinking and evidence. Superstition is the belief in supernatural causality that one event causes another without any natural process linking the two events such as astrology, religion, omens, witchcraft, prophecies, etc., that contradicts natural science. All civilizations have their respective superstitions. Superstitions are deep rooted and irrational beliefs which have no profanity. It was once believed that superstition could be rooted out with the spread of education. But these have continued to linger with the generations. Superstitions originated perhaps, when man was at the mercy of the natural elements. He respected and worshiped the forces of nature like the sun, the moon, water etc. He worshiped fire because of its destructive ability. When man started falling prey to diseases

he started appeasing the gods with offerings, penances and sacrifices to ward off evil spirits. The struggle between science and superstition has been a long standing one with each trying to overstep the other since centuries.

Witch hunting is one such dangerous superstition that kills. Witch hunting refers to stigmatization of people belonging to specific groups, mostly women, by labeling them as 'witches' or evil spirits who bring bad omen to the society. Prevalent largely in rural and tribal areas, where blind faith guides the way of life, people after proclaiming the victims as 'witches' or 'daini', The belief in the practice of witch craft is part of almost all living societies and some traces of it can be felt at various degrees among all cultures. Although both men and women are the victims of this practice, there is no denying the fact that women are the worst victims of superstition in our country. At the same time they are the main agents who propagate superstitions most. In the popular imagination, witchcraft is often associated with the infliction of harm on people or property through the purported exercise of supernatural powers. In sociological and anthropological terms, it can be described as a phenomenon that is invoked to explain misfortune by attributing it to the evil influence of someone, either from within or outside the community. Thus, witchcraft has historically been employed to bring about the death of some unpleasant persons or to bring calamity or impotence upon enemies, rivals and fancied oppressors.

The term 'witch' literally represents a woman who is believed to have magical powers especially to do evil to others. A witch, in most cases, is a woman who is allege to be a practitioner of black magic and causes death to villagers where she lives. It is

also known by the term 'daini', a local dialect of Assam. Witches, it is alleged, perform inauspicious things to any person or the community by practicing black magic. In fact, various studies undertaken to understand the practice of witch hunting worldwide attribute it to different reasons beyond mere superstition. The vulnerable sections of the society are usually identified as witches with an aim to denounce them from the community and take control over their land, property etc. This is the reason why mostly single women and widows become 'easy scapegoats' and are branded as witches to divest them of their land and property, or punished for transgressing social norms. Witch hunting is also understood as a manifestation of the low social status of women whereby male attitude of dominance and violence against women is legitimized by calling her a witch. These so called witches are made responsible for failure of crops, epidemics, diseases, low birth rate etc. So they feel that if the suspected Witch is killed, all their problems will also go away.

The superstitions harboured by women are much too deep-rooted. They have to face many more difficulties and obstructions, defeats, despair and calamities than the men. Consequently the helplessness that arises out of these is much more pronounced in women than in men. No wonder they become more superstitious. The reason is our male dominated or patriarchal society. Almost all the religions in the world relegate woman to a secondary status, denying all knowledge and learning to her for thousands of years. These religious teachings are so deep rooted that women have now come to believe that all this is but natural and they tend to find support and help in this very disparity and discrimination engendered by religion between the genders.

Witch- hunting and Assam:

Witch-hunt in Assam is not new events. But Witch hunting is now a major social evil in Assam. In fact, incidents of witch hunt in Assam are immensely widespread in recent times. Assam is the land of both tribal and non-tribal communities. Majority of the tribes in the state have heterogeneous tradition and culture. Actually, all the districts of the state exhibit a mix of divergent ethnic groups who are truly distinct in their own identities. Some of the important tribes include Bodo, Karbi, Deori, Hmar, Dimasa, Rabha, Hajong Miri, Mishimi, Khamti, and many others. People belonging to these various communities always try to protect their self identities through their customs, traditions and cultural and religious affairs. Recent revelations about the incidents of witch hunt in Assam shows that districts like, Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Baksa, Chirang, Tinshukia, Goalpara, Sivasagar, Sonitpur, Morigaon, Kamrup (rural) and Cachar are affected seriously by the problem.

Though it is given a superstitious stance, witch hunting is primarily the result of uneven development and distribution of services. Actually, uneven development of Assam is a common feature that helps many social malaises to take place. People living in rural areas of the state are lagging behind in socio-economic respect than those living in urban developed areas enjoying the fruits of science and technology. In the absence of adequate medical facilities people, in rural Assam, often avail the so called witch doctors (Ojha or Bez). Further, it has also been seen that women who are single, widow and the owner of property like land often become the target of such violence by the society. It is thus viewed that the causes of witch hunt cannot be simply located in

the irrational beliefs, but some other surrounding facts that are of public interest or political importance. The most common reason is that of ignorance and underdevelopment of scientific temper in these regions which easily fuel superstitions, wherein rural folk throw the burden of their miseries- be it bad crop, ill health, natural disasters, unnatural deaths and the like, upon the 'evil spirits'. Moreover, witch-hunting has become a customary practice, glorified by the upper castes 'witch doctors'. Other reasons include backwardness and herd mentality. However, the root of this practice goes way deeper than this.

The rise in witchhunting killings has become a social menace rather than only a law and order problem. There have been at least 65 cases of witch hunting reported during 2007-2012 from Assam alone. There are conflicting reports about the number of witchhunting incidents took place during 2000-2013. Some reports suggest that over 100 cases of witchhunting had been registered during 2002-2012, but charge sheets were submitted in only about 60 cases. According to a report, 132 persons were killed in witchhunting cases between 2002 and 2012. A CID report says that about 105 cases occurred during 2006-2012, with 21 cases were registered in 2006, seven cases in 2007, ten cases in 2008, four cases in 2009, eleven cases in 2010, a highest number of 29 cases in 2012, throughout the state. It is very difficult to extract accurate figures relating killing of people in the name of witch-hunt due to the nature of the problem itself, for instance, the victims or the family of the deceased one hesitate to speak out or they have to face social boycott and like this. However, with all these ruthless incidents continuing during 2006-2012, a total number of 105 cases of witch hunting have been reported in the state as stated by

the Govt. of Assam itself ("Assam State Commission for Women seeks law," 2013). Moreover, killing of 116 people including 66 women have also been accounted in the state during the last ten years (2001-June 2011) as confirmed by the State Government of Assam.

Effects of Witch-hunt:

Witch-hunt is a curse in modern society. The consequences of witchcraft accusations violate a wide range of human rights. Attacks against the accused violate fundamental rights including the right to life, liberty and security, the right to hold property, and in some cases, the prohibition against torture.

Witch-hunt is not only effect the victim family, but also destroys the traditional set up of the society. It is nothing but barbarism relating the belief and way of life of people in this civilized society. Its consequence on the lives of people is truly heartrending. The critical point is that women, who are accused of witchcraft in India, will often not seek any legal or police assistance. Shame, isolation and poverty feed the wheel of no protection, no rights and no dignity for women who are usually on the bottom layer of Indian society and already without any proper legal recourse. There are no provisions for providing rehabilitation, relief, or any form of compensation to women after they have been identified as witches.

Measures to stop Witch-hunt:

The most effective solution to the problem would be to educate the people and also to frame and implement effective laws for the protection of women
Legal system has to take positive steps. Rather than waiting for the

victim to crave justice, it should ensure that the problem is addressed with the seriousness it deserves, than just being relegated as any other offence in the IPC. There is an urgent need for a special legislation with expansive definition of the term 'witch', with stricter punishments, and which lays the burden of proof upon the accused. It must also provide for a minimum mandatory punishment. One thing is clear that witch-hunting is an out and out violation of human rights enshrined in several international conventions and the Indian Constitution, like Right to Equality, Right to Life, Right to Protection against All Forms of Gender Discrimination, Right to Security, Right to Subsistence, Right to Adequate Housing, Right to Access Law and National Tribunals and the like. Law has grossly failed in sensitizing people against this practice. Neither the mechanisms for adequate identification of the problem, nor for the rehabilitation of the victims is in place. To add to this, are the evidentiary and procedural glitches in the criminal justice system as well as lack of adequate legal awareness of one's rights in the areas where such practice has laid its clutches on.

Although various steps have been taken both by government agencies and non-government organizations to stop the evil practice, yet very little success has been achieved. The Assam police have also launched 'Project Prahari' for participatory development and people friendly policing to fight social maladies and deprivation. Under the project, Assam police launched awareness drive against 'witch hunting' in state's remote areas where tribal and Adivasi community are in majority. Assam Mahila Samata Society (AMSS), an autonomous body implementing the National Mahila Samakhya Programme

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(NMSP) in the state since 1995, remains prominent for its role in spearheading the movement. The AMSS has been successful in saving the lives of many women branded as witches and facilitating their rehabilitation. Most prominent amongst the AMSS workers is Birubala Rabha, a 59 year old widow from Thakurbilla, a village of Goalpara district. Today, Birubala Rabha is a name synonymous with anti witch-hunting activism in Assam.

As a matter of fact, the best strategies that the Government can adopt are:

- (a) Strict enforcement of the Anti-witchcraft law for effective prevention of witch-hunting practices and to eliminate the women's torture, humiliation and killing by the society for any other concerned matter.
- (b) Launching of campaigns against superstition of witch-hunting practices and public awareness meetings against through combined efforts of government, administration, voluntary organizations, schools, etc, especially in regions where the menace is most rampant, would certainly have a positive effect in containing the witch-hunt.

In the scientifically progressive 21st century, when people are advanced in their thoughts and life style, then why and how such beliefs are still living. Witch-hunting is a remediable threat, which needs an effectual solution from the legal system, complemented by a strong social backing. But the truth however is, back in Assam, people still cling to age old myths, superstitions and worst, some know well to take advantage of these blind beliefs. Witch-hunt thus emerges as a multifaceted issue which gets entwined with both the concerns for superstition and social disempowerment of women. Hence the promotion of scientific temper becomes an important factor to remove this evil belief from

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the society. It is high time that NGOs, Government bodies as well as local organizations come forwarded to make people aware of such inhuman acts.

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