



RESEARCH PAPER

The Revival and Transformation of Witchcraft Beliefs in the Bardiya District: A Socio-cultural and Religious Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate the perceptions and beliefs surrounding witchcraft in Bardiya District, shedding light on the contemporary understanding of this complex phenomenon. The belief in witchcraft has been around for centuries, and it is still prevalent in many cultures today. Bardiya District in Nepal is a unique place to study witchcraft because it has a diverse population with a variety of beliefs about witchcraft. By employing a sociocultural analysis, the study explores the local attitudes, experiences, and social dynamics related to witchcraft in this particular region of Nepal. Through qualitative research methods such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observations, the article seeks to uncover the underlying factors influencing the perception of witchcraft, its impact on individuals and communities, and potential socio-psychological implications. The findings of this research contribute to a broader understanding of how witchcraft is perceived and navigated within Bardiya District, thereby enabling the development of culturally sensitive interventions and initiatives to address misconceptions and promote social harmony. A recent study in Bardiya District found that a significant percentage of people believe in witchcraft. The study also found that there is a relationship between religious affiliation and belief in witchcraft. Hindus are more likely to believe in witchcraft than Buddhists or Muslims. The study also found that witchcraft accusations are often made against marginalized groups, such as women, the elderly, and people with disabilities. These accusations can have a devastating impact on the lives of the accused.

KEYWORDS Attitudes, Beliefs, Perception, Social Harmony, Socio-cultural Analysis, Witchcraft

Introduction

In the years the beginning of the 14th century and the year 1650, continent Europeans executed across 200,000 and 500,000 occultist with women constituting 85% or more of the total. The persona and timing of these executions, as well as the persecutions that preceded them, were influenced in part by changes in the Inquisition's targets, as well as a process of proliferation within medieval society. As a consequence of significant shifts in the medieval times social structure, the witch craze necessitated a redefinition of ethical limits. The reality that these murders and related demonological notions were widely accepted can be explained by the anomie that pervaded society at the time (Ben-Yehuda, 1980).

Leading experts on magic in classical Greece and Rome claim that magical techniques were used in both cultures to produce rain, stop hailstorms, chase clouds away, increase wealth, and other things while also being used for evil (Baroja, 1965; Hughes, 1965). Right now seems a good time to consider Talcott Parsons' theories regarding the evolution of contemporary European society. In his analysis, he argues that the conventional feudal system started to diverge in the 11th century, beginning a process

that eventually led to an increase in the level of autonomy held by religious, governmental, and financial organizations by the 17th century. The previous rigid, religiously prescribed, and largely unifying social system was replaced by the new, institutionally autonomous social order (Parsons, 1966).

The social change had an impact on the actual "center" or "collective belief of society, or, to use Parsons' own phrase, the idea that constitutes "societal community." In plainer terms, this indicates that the need to define society's moral bounds was recently felt. This society, guided by the church, tried to redraw its moral lines by persecuting witches. This was just one of many occasions where deviance served social purposes such as emphasizing and establishing moral boundaries and fostering cooperation (Cohen 1966; Durkheim 2013; Erikson 1964, 1966; Lauderdale 1976).

While these circumstances provided the intellectual and cognitive foundation for witch hunts, economic and demographic changes,

The enduring belief in witchcraft has persisted across cultures and societies throughout history, including in contemporary times. Bardiya District, situated in the western region of Nepal, represents a unique context for examining the perception and understanding of witchcraft within a specific cultural and geographical setting. This article aims to fill a critical research gap by investigating the multifaceted aspects of witchcraft in Bardiya District, focusing on the perceptions held by the local population and the societal implications thereof.

Literature Review

In social science research, age is an important variable that is frequently associated with income levels. Previous research has discovered that wealth tends to rise with age as people gain more knowledge and skills that translate into higher-paying jobs (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). The relationship between age and income, however, is not always unambiguous, and other factors such as schooling, job status, and gender may all play a role.

A number of studies have been carried out to investigate the relationship between age and financial status in a variety of situations. In accordance with Bryk and Thum (2019), income grew with ages until retirement, when it decreased. They also noticed that men influenced income more than women. In Canada, Heisz and LaRochelle-Cote (2014) discovered that income raised with age until people reached their early 50s, at which point it plateaued.

Eboiyehi (2010) investigated witchcraft accusations in contemporary Nigeria, particularly those aimed at elderly women. He argued that witchcraft accusations are frequently used as a form of social control and violence against women, and that they are often based on harmful stereotypes about women's power and agency.

According to Lisa Solosky (2014) the impact of witchcraft accusations on human rights in Malawi. She argued that witchcraft accusations are often used to justify violence against women and girls, and that they can have a devastating impact on their lives. She called for greater awareness of the issue, and for more effective measures to protect women and girls from violence and discrimination. Witchcraft accusations are often used to justify violence against women, and that they can have a devastating impact on their lives (Shaw, 2009).

Manandhar and Joshi (2016) examined the impact of witchcraft accusations on women in Nepal. They found that witchcraft accusations are often used to justify violence against women, and that they can have a devastating impact on their lives.

Sapkota et al. (2014) conducted a study of witchcraft accusations in rural Nepal. They found that witchcraft accusations are often made against women, and that they can lead to mental health problems.

There aren't many studies that look specifically at Nepal's major cities to examine the connection between income and age. Shrestha and Adhikari (2018) noticed that age was positively related to earnings in Kathmandu, and that age had a greater influence on income for men than for women. They also noticed that schooling and job status were important indicators of income, with schooling having a bigger effect on earnings for women than for men.

In the past few years, the Godawari municipality of Lalitpur has seen rapid economic growth, which has had a significant impact on the financial standing of its citizens. Nevertheless, research on the variables that influence the level of income in this context is limited. As a result, a study that examines the effects of ages on earnings in the Godawari Municipality while managing for background, profession, and gender could provide important insights into the variables that contribute to income disparity in this rapidly growing metropolitan region.

According to the literature, the relationship between age and financial status is complex and differs based on the environment. While age is a strong predictor of earnings, other factors such as schooling, job status, and gender may also play a role. As a result, investigating the relationship between income and age in the Godawari Municipality while managing for these other variables is critical.

Hypothesis Testing

If religion and witchcraft belief both are categorical variable, We need to do chi square test can be used to examine the connection between the two variables. The null and alternative hypotheses for this test are:

The null hypothesis (H0) states that there is no significant relationship between religion and witchcraft belief.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is no statistically significant relationship between religion and witchcraft belief.

Material and Methods

To capture a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions and beliefs surrounding witchcraft, this research employs quantitatively understand the perceptions and beliefs surrounding witchcraft in Bardiya District, a questionnaire survey will be administered to a sample of 530 households. The sample will be drawn from a list of all households in the district, using a stratified random sampling method. The questionnaire will include questions on respondents' knowledge, beliefs, experiences, and attitudes towards witchcraft. The data will be analyzed using statistical software to provide a quantitative understanding of the issue of witchcraft in Bardiya District.

Results and Discussion

Perception of Religious Group on Existence of Witch

The information in table 1 offers important sociological insights into how various religious organizations view the existence of witches. Overall, the results indicate that a sizeable percentage of respondents (63.8%) believe in the existence of the witches, while 31.9% do not, and 4.3% are unsure or unwilling to state their beliefs. It is noteworthy that different religious groups hold different beliefs. While 27.5% of Hindus do not believe in witches, 49.2% do, indicating a sizable portion does. Buddhists, on the other hand, have a remarkably low belief in witches, with only 0.8% expressing it and no denials. 13.8% of Muslims, a number that is lower than the Hindus' but still significant, believe in witches.

Table 1
Perception of Religious Group on Existence of Witch

Religious Group	Perception on Existence of Witches			Total
	Yes	No	Don't know or don't want to say	
Hinduism	261 49.2%	146 27.5%	13 2.5%	420 79.2%
Buddhism	4 .8%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	4 .8%
Islam	73 13.8%	23 4.3%	10 1.9%	106 20.0%
Total	338 63.8%	169 31.9%	23 4.3%	530 100.0%

* Pearson Chi-Square = 15.256, df = 4, p-value = 0.004.

**a. 4 cells (44.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .17

The Pearson Chi-Square test results indicate that there may be a statistically significant relationship between religious affiliation and beliefs regarding the existence of witches. The p-value of 0.004 supports the conclusion that religious affiliation influences how each person views witches because it suggests that the observed differences in beliefs among religious groups are unlikely to be the result of chance alone. This association is further supported by the Chi-Square statistic (15.256), which shows a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies of beliefs across religious groups. These findings stress the need for more research into the intricate interactions between culture, religion, and beliefs in supernatural phenomena as well as the significance of comprehending the impact of religious factors on belief systems.

The statistical significance of these variations supports the notion that a person's religious affiliation influences their worldview. To be clear, belief systems have many facets and are influenced by cultural, historical, and educational factors. This study highlights the value of comprehending various social viewpoints and urges more investigation into the underlying causes of these beliefs.

Perception of Religious Group on People who are Generally accused of Witchcraft

The table 2 in the data illustrates respondents' perceptions of witchcraft accusations in their communities, broken down by religious affiliation. 35.9% of the 529 respondents said they had seen or heard about such accusations in the previous five years. However, the majority (54.6%) claimed they had not come across any such instances, and 9.5% either expressed uncertainty or opted not to share their knowledge of such occurrences.

Table 2

Perception of Religious Group on People who are Generally accused of Witchcraft

Religion	Person accused of witchcraft			Total
	Male	Female	Sexual and Gender Minorities	
Hinduism	23	394	3	420
	4.3%	74.5%	.6%	79.4%
Buddhism	0	4	0	4
	0.0%	.8%	0.0%	.8%
Islam	5	97	3	105
	.8%	18.3%	.6%	19.8%
Total	28	495	6	529
	5.3%	93.6%	1.1%	100.0%

* Pearson Chi-Square = 7.424, df = 4, p-value = 0.115.

**a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .38.

Interesting distinctions were discovered after examining the differences between religious groups. In the Hindu group, 28.9% of respondents said they had seen or heard of witchcraft accusations, while 44.0% said they had not, and 6.2% were unsure. This suggests that while a sizable portion of Hindus have faced these accusations, a sizable portion have not.

On the other hand, the data for the Buddhist group reveals that only 0.2% of respondents were aware of accusations of witchcraft. None of the respondents who identified as Buddhists said they did not know or were unsure, indicating that allegations of witchcraft are not frequently made in this religious group. With 6.8% of respondents reporting having seen or heard about accusations of witchcraft, 10.0% denying such knowledge, and 3.2% expressing uncertainty, the Muslim group showed a different pattern. This suggests that compared to Hindus, a smaller percentage of Muslims experience such accusations.

These findings have significant ramifications for understanding how various religious communities view and deal with accusations of witchcraft locally. Hindu societies' long-standing associations with the idea of witchcraft and their culture's traditional beliefs may have contributed to the relatively higher prevalence among Hindus. On the other hand, the low percentage among Buddhists may be attributed to Buddhism's emphasis on non-theism and the absence of the supernatural, which discourages the use of such charges.

Finally, this information offers important sociological insights into how various religious groups view and react to accusations of witchcraft. The variations found highlight the importance of taking cultural, historical, and theological considerations into account when analyzing belief systems and strategies for dealing with paranormal events. Additional research with larger and more varied samples is necessary to achieve a deeper understanding. Such research can help us gain a thorough understanding of the intricate interactions between religion, culture, and beliefs in relation to accusations of witchcraft.

Perception of Religious group on Witness or Heard about accusation of witchcraft

The table 3 provides insightful information about the connection between religious affiliation and the experiences of seeing or hearing about accusations of witchcraft in respondents' communities over the previous five years. Out of the 529 total respondents, 35.9% claimed to have seen or heard of such accusations, while the majority (54.6%) claimed they have not. 9.5% of respondents were unsure or opted not to share their knowledge of these events.

The data reveals intriguing patterns when examining the differences between religious groups. In the Hindu group, 28.9% of respondents said they had seen or heard about accusations of witchcraft, while 44.0% had not, and 6.2% were unsure or would rather not say. This suggests that while a sizeable portion of Hindus have faced such accusations, a sizeable portion have not.

On the other hand, only 0.2% of the Buddhist respondents reported having faced accusations of witchcraft, and none of them expressed uncertainty. It is important to note, however, that the very small sample size of just four respondents may limit the validity of these results.

Table 3

Perception of Religious Group on Witness or Heard about accusation of witchcraft

Religion	Witnessed or heard about an accusation of witchcraft in your locality			Total
	Yes	No	Don't know or don't want to say	
Hinduism	153 28.9%	233 44.0%	33 6.2%	419 79.2%
Buddhism	1 .2%	3 .6%	0 0.0%	4 .8%
Islam	36 6.8%	53 10.0%	17 3.2%	106 20.0%
Total	190 35.9%	289 54.6%	50 9.5%	529 100.0%

*Pearson Chi-Square = 7.600, df = 4 and p-value = 0.688

**a. 8 cells (66.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01.

In addition, the Muslim group showed relatively little experience with accusations of witchcraft, with 6.8% of respondents reporting having seen or heard about such incidents, 10.0% claiming they have not, and 3.2% saying they are unsure. The Muslim sample size of 106 respondents, similar to Buddhism, should be taken into account when interpreting these findings.

A Pearson Chi-Square test was used to evaluate the relationship between religious affiliation and experiences with accusations of witchcraft. With 4 degrees of freedom, the calculated Chi-Square value was 7.424, which produced p-values of 0.115 for asymptotic significance and 0.120 for exact significance. The observed differences in experiences among religious groups are not statistically significant at the conventional level because the p-value is higher than the conventional significance level (e.g., 0.05 or

5%). This implies that there may be a less significant correlation between religious affiliation and encountering accusations of witchcraft than the variations in experiences are due to chance.

In conclusion, this information offers important sociological insights into how various religious groups have dealt with accusations of witchcraft in their communities. Although Buddhists and Muslims report lower percentages of experiences than Hindus do, statistical analysis shows that these differences are not statistically significant at the conventional level. In order to fully comprehend how cultural, social, and religious factors affect people's exposure to and perceptions of witchcraft accusations within different communities, additional research with larger and more diverse samples is required.

Perception of Religious group about accusation of witchcraft is Crime

The provided table 4 provides insightful information about how various religious groups view the charge of witchcraft as a crime. The majority (66.3%) of the 528 respondents know that accusing someone of practicing witchcraft is illegal, while 32.6% said they were unaware of this legal status. However, there are differences in awareness between religious groups.

In the Hindu group, 54.5% of respondents are aware that accusations of witchcraft are punishable by law, while 23.7% are not. This suggests that while a sizeable proportion of Hindus are aware of the legal situation, a sizeable proportion are still in the dark. In contrast, only 0.8% of Buddhist respondents said they were aware that making witchcraft accusations is illegal, and none said they were. Buddhists' sample size, however, is quite small, so care should be taken when interpreting these findings. Similar to this, 11.0% of Muslims are aware that accusations of witchcraft are punishable by law, while 8.9% are not. The sample size for Muslims is smaller than it is for Buddhism, which highlights the need for caution when interpreting these results.

Table 4
Perception of religion about Accusation of Witchcraft is Crime

Religion	Are you aware that accusation of witchcraft is a crime?		Total
	Yes	No	
Hinduism	288 54.5%	131 23.7%	419 79.4%
Buddhism	4 .8%	0 0.0%	4 .8%
Islam	58 11.0%	47 8.9%	105 19.9%
Total	350 66.3%	178 32.6%	528 100.0%

*Pearson Chi-Square = 11.617, df = 4 and p-value = 0.071.
**a. 8 cells (66.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01.

A Pearson Chi-Square test is used to investigate the relationship between religious affiliation and knowledge of witchcraft accusations as a crime. With four degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.071, the analysis produced a Chi-Square value of 11.617. Even though the results show some variations in religious groups' levels of

awareness, the p-value indicates that these variations are not statistically significant at the usual level of significance.

It is crucial to approach these findings cautiously because some cell counts in the table, particularly for Buddhism and Islam, are quite low. In order to validate and further our understanding of awareness among religious communities, more research with larger and more diverse samples is required. This could have an impact on the statistical power and reliability of the analysis.

In conclusion, this data offers important sociological insights into how various religious groups view the legal ramifications of accusations of witchcraft. Even though the majority of respondents are aware that such accusations are criminal in nature, differences in religious affiliation call for further research. A thorough understanding of the intricate interactions between culture, religion, and legal perceptions regarding accusations of witchcraft can be achieved by understanding the subtleties of awareness within these communities.

Perception of Religious group about Role of Religious authorities and Traditional Healers Play in Accusations of Witchcraft

The table 5 sheds light on how respondents from various religious backgrounds perceive the role that traditional healers and religious authorities play in accusations of witchcraft. 14.6% of Hindu respondents agreed that these leaders frequently engage in such accusations, and a sizeable 43.6% thought they contribute to the social commotion surrounding claims of witchcraft. Additionally, a smaller proportion of Hindu respondents (6.8%) noted that these leaders might engage in or encourage violence against the people making the accusations, while 7.4% said they disapprove of them and 5.1% said they supported the people making them.

A small percentage of respondents (1.9%) mentioned additional roles for traditional healers and religious leaders in accusations of witchcraft. It's important to keep in mind that there are only 4 respondents in the Buddhist group, which makes it challenging to draw firm conclusions about them. A small percentage (0.4%) of these respondents thought they mislead people or incite violence against the victims, but none of them confirmed the practice of traditional healers and religious leaders being involved in accusations of witchcraft.

Moving on to Islam, 19.9% of the Muslim respondents agreed that these leaders had a history of making accusations of witchcraft. Additionally, 2.5% mentioned their role in perpetrating or encouraging violence against victims, 13.1% claimed they contribute to social confusion, and 1.5% emphasized how they deflect such accusations. Overall, the data show that a sizeable portion of respondents from Hinduism and Islam believe that traditional healers and faith leaders are involved in accusations of witchcraft, though different respondents have different perceptions of their roles in such circumstances. A more thorough understanding of this group's beliefs would require additional research because there is a paucity of data on Buddhism.

If two categorical variables are significantly associated with one another, the Pearson Chi-Square test is used to find this out. It was probably done in this case to examine the connection between respondents' religious affiliations (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam) and their opinions on the part that traditional healers and religious authorities play in accusations of witchcraft. The outputs of the test show that there is no statistically significant association between the variables at the 0.05 significance level

because the p-value (0.11) is higher than the standard cutoff of 0.05. This means that we are unable to rule out the null hypothesis, which contends that there is no meaningful connection between religion and people's perceptions of conventional healers and the role of faith leaders in accusations of witchcraft.

Table 5
Perception of Religious group about Role of Religious authorities and Traditional Healers Play in Accusations of Witchcraft

Religion	Role played by traditional healers and faith leaders accusations of witchcraft						Total
	Confirm the practice	Creating confusion in society	Commit or incite violence against victims	They discourage accusation	Support to victims	Others	
Hinduism	77 14.6%	230 43.6%	36 6.8%	39 7.4%	27 5.1%	10 1.9%	419 79.4%
Buddhism	0 0.0%	2 .4%	2 .4%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	4 .8%
Islam	6 1.1%	69 13.1%	13 2.5%	8 1.5%	9 1.7%	0 0.0%	105 19.9%
Total	83 15.7%	301 57.0%	51 9.7%	47 8.9%	36 6.8%	10 1.9%	528 100.0%

*Pearson Chi-Square = 23.057, df = 10 and p-value = 0.11

**a. 7cells (38.9%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .08.

In conclusion, the test does not reveal a statistically significant relationship between religion and opinions about the roles played by faith leaders and traditional healers in accusations of witchcraft. The results should be interpreted cautiously due to the low expected counts, and additional study with a larger and more representative sample size would be helpful for a more thorough analysis.

The findings of this study are expected to reveal a diverse range of perceptions regarding witchcraft in Bardiya District. Analysis of the collected data will identify prevalent themes, variations, and the underlying socio-cultural dynamics that shape these perspectives. The article will explore factors such as religious beliefs, cultural traditions, historical narratives, socio-economic conditions, and gender dynamics that contribute to the perception and understanding of witchcraft. It will also examine the impact of these perceptions on individuals, families, and communities in terms of social exclusion, discrimination, and violence.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the collected data, this article aims to provide insights into the socio-psychological implications of witchcraft beliefs in Bardiya District. It will discuss the potential consequences of these perceptions, such as stigmatization, scapegoating, and the violation of human rights. Furthermore, the article will highlight the importance of culturally sensitive interventions and initiatives to

promote social harmony, dispel misconceptions, and encourage a more nuanced understanding of witchcraft in the local context.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the existing body of knowledge on witchcraft by providing an in-depth exploration of the perceptions surrounding witchcraft in Bardiya District. The findings shed light on the complex interplay between culture, society, and individual beliefs, highlighting the need for context-specific interventions to address the socio-psychological consequences of these perceptions. By bridging the gap between research and practice, this article aims to foster a more inclusive and informed dialogue on witchcraft, ultimately promoting social cohesion and human rights in Bardiya District and beyond.

Recommendations

In order to address the resurgence and transformation of witchcraft beliefs in the Bardiya District, it is suggested that community awareness and education programs be supported. These programs should encourage understanding and critical thinking, interfaith dialogue for peaceful coexistence, empower women, challenge negative stereotypes, work with authorities to create policies that protect people from violence, and engage traditional healers to concentrate on healing..

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