



# Witches, Tea Plantations, and Lives of Migrant Laborers in India: Tempest in a Teapot

*Soma Chaudhuri*

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## Witches, Tea Plantations, and Lives of Migrant Laborers in India: Tempest in a Teapot Soma Chaudhuri

*Witches, Migrant and Lives of Plantation Workers in India: Tempest in Teapot* is a unique and fascinating book that brings together a holistic theoretical approach on the subject of witchcraft accusations that is taking place inside a tea workers community within a tea plantation wage economy in India. Using a combination of in depth and extensive qualitative methods and drawing on sociological, anthropological and historical perspectives, the book explores how the *adivasi* (tribal) migrant worker community in Jalpaiguri, that is socially, economically and politically oppressed uses witchcraft accusations to deal with worker-management conflict. The central argument of the book is witchcraft accusations can be interpreted as a periodic reaction of the *adivasi* worker community against their oppression by the plantation management. The typical avenues of social protest are often unavailable for the marginalized workers due to lack of organizational and political representation and resources. As a result the *dain* (witch) becomes a scapegoat for the malice of the plantation economy and the incidents of witch hunts are a discourse. It is within this discourse that witch hunts are not viewed as exotic/primitive rituals of a backward community, but as a powerful protest by a community against its oppressors. The book attempts to understand the complex network of relationships, ties of friendship, family, politics, and gender that provide legitimacy before the witch hunt takes place. In most cases of witch hunts in this area, seemingly petty conflicts within the villagers often escalate to a hunt. At the height of the conflict, the exploitative basis of relationship between the plantation management and the *adivasi* migrant workers often gets hidden. It is within this backdrop of labor-planters relationship, based on rigidity of power, patronage and social distance, that witchcraft accusations should be interpreted.

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