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## **Marxian View on Class, Gender and Witch Hunt: Special Reference to Violation of Women's Rights in Bodo Society**

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### **Abstract**

*Social scientist Karl Marx scientifically studied the relation of human beings with the state and society. To him state was created by the rich people to suit their vested interest. With the help of state power, the bourgeois class exploit over the disadvantageous classes of people. The economically weak people and women constitute lower classes and thus oppressed in well designed state.*

*The social discrimination and segregation prevail in the wombs of created state system. The widow, women, poor, helpless, illiterates are the component parts of oppressed class. The oppressed classes may be imposed charges or allegations of being witch or evil doer. Since the state's power is with the side of rich class, it does not care the life of victimized.*

*The witch hunt is not unfamiliar in all civilizations of universe. It permeated all the cultures and states in universe. The witchcraft has been misused as a diverting way of criminal acts and to fulfill the personal scourge of clever. The jealousy, enmity, hatred, ransack of property, political rivalry are diluted in witch hunt to mislead the gullible public.*

*The witch hunts have been regarded as one of the greatest violators of human rights in present age. It could draw the attention of intellectual societies as human rights concerns and emancipation of women in all corners of the universe.*

**Keywords:** *Bourgeois, Oppressed, Marxism, Witch hunts, Gender, Emancipation, Human rights.*

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### **I. Introduction:**

**Brief introduction of Bodo:** The Bodo tribe of Assam is known as Kachari originally from the Mongolian race of China. They were the earliest, who migrated into present Assam. Now, they are presently concentrated in the north bank of Brahmaputra of Assam. (Endle, 2007: 1-10).

The age old practice and hunting of witch both female and male is undoubtedly a serious problem in Bodo society. The practice of black magic has been creating acute fear psychosis in the minds of many illiterate villagers. The witches always try to create panic in

society to get illiterate villagers feared and remained under them. The illiterate villagers unnecessary remain in fear of exorcists. The free living atmosphere is obstructed by the practice of witch and it is followed by massive witch hunts. However, the society is seen with presence of classes, and it involves in the suppression and murder of antagonistic of their interest.

**II. Significance:** Despite the spread of scientific knowledge, the evil practice which is based on superstition is not disappeared in backward tribal societies. The ethos of brotherhood among the same villagers is disrupted by this macabre of witchcraft. Also the unprecedented hunting of witch has been affecting the society adversely causing lost of many lives. Many innocent exorcists and their wife and children are killed on suspicion. The massive hunting like without proper trial has been leading to gross violation of human rights. In contemporary society the witch hunting is additional secret tactics to hide political murder. This gory incident is common to all backward people which must be addressed properly and eliminated from the society.

**III. Objective:** To root out underneath involvement of class conspiracies of witch hunting in the society which leads to gross violation of human rights. To bring awareness to the illiterate villagers about the witchcraft as a superstitious and designed by advantageous class. To find out the ways to give steward to women's rights.

**IV. Methodology:** This research is analytical type of research. The data regarding the class consideration, incidents of witch hunting and violation of human rights are collected through the primary and secondary sources.

**V. Witchcraft in popular belief and allegation:** Witchcraft is a controversial subject and offers multiple opportunities for misunderstandings. During the first presidency of Mathieu Kerekou (1933-1996), the government of Benin launched a campaign against witchcraft. The president was asking for support for his policy of Africanization in the former French colony of Dahomey and for the intended transformation into a Soviet type 'People's Republic of Benin' based upon the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism. The campaign against witchcraft was meant to signify class war, since in traditional African societies wealth is considered to be suspicious, if everybody is working, how some people can get richer than others, except by mystical theft from relatives or neighbors. In Africa, the association of wealth and witchcraft is still widespread, and, although unexpected to European Marxists, the association with class war is not completely off the point. The populace began to chase old women, who were held responsible for a dramatically increased infant mortality. Child and infant mortality is generally high in Africa compared to the developed world. (Behringer, 2008: 11-12).

The various allegations on suspected witches may come when there is outbreak of diseases, untimely death, destruction of crops, frequent death of child etc. in the village. (Daimari, 2012: 101)

**VI. Marxian class theory and its classification:** The Marxists (Karl Marx a German Philosopher 1818) hold the view that power is a class concept; that it arose with the development of antagonistic classes in the society; that it is a phenomenon of a class society; that it has been the monopoly of an economically dominated class in the class society; that the workers, in the capitalist society, would organize themselves and capture power so to abolish it altogether by establishing the classless society; that power would, ultimately, cease to function in the classless society.

To Marx, the state is creation by the rich class of society. In any society the people can be classified into two main divisions, viz., rich and poor. Thus the state is used as instrument for domination and exploitation of poor classes by the rich class. The power of state is symbolized by the military power of a state. The rich class needs state power for their protection of physical as well as property. (Arora and Awasthy, 2004: 77-82)

Marx believed that the only basis of social class is economic. In the past property was the dividing basis. He expounded the theory of proletariat and bourgeois relationship and came to the conclusion that both of them formed a class in themselves. (Mukhi, 1997: 132).

**I. Class of very Poor:** To Marx in any society, there are only two classes of people. They are rich and poor class. The capitalist or industrialist class always at attempt to exploit the poor class. The poor class due to weak and helpless are not in position to challenge the rich class. So, they are exploited, dominated and victimized by the rich class.

**II. Class of Backwardness of Village:** To Marx, in the present state system, the poor becomes poorer and rich become richer. The backward class can never uplift them into the higher position. Because, the rich class always try to pose obstacle in their way of development. So, the people of backward villages are dominated, exploited, neglected and overlooked by the rich layer.

**III. Class of Illiterate:** The poor class of people are discriminated and underestimated by the rich class. They are deprived of rights and facilities. So, the poor class of people becomes illiterates.

**IV. Class of Helpless:** Since, the state is controlled by the rich class, it does not care the poor class. The state power is means for protecting the rich class and not poor class. So, the poor class becomes helpless in the times of danger.

**V. Class of Widow:** The labour, woman, widow etc. are not worthy in the present state system. The economic is the only concern and worthy for determination in the society. So, such category of people does not enjoy the rights and power of state. Rather, they are always at danger of their life and property at their own home.

**VII. Class theory and gender:** The strong rural social system compels the women to surrender themselves to the patriarchal values because of which, they have been ignored and denied opportunities for participating and sharing the benefits of education and development. The mindset of the women is equally a contributor to their poor status. The existence of an antithetical relationship between culture and modernity, with women being

seen as the representative of the bearers of the Indian culture, has taken a heavy toll on women, who have been reduced to cultural artifacts. Therefore, women attempting to wriggle out of this socially constructed role of culture bearers are still looked down upon in certain conservative pockets. 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. (Lahkar, 2015: 6)

The Marxian theory of class described as in economic terms does not regard women as a class worth considering in any system of production. To say as the Marxists do that women would be emancipated once there develops a classless society is to say not much. They do not see or understand any non economic sources of oppression and that is why they regard women like most men as exploited by the possessing classes. The helpless and widow women are easily prey to witch allegation by her in laws and other neighbors for ransack of property. There are some natures of exploitation over women as domination, oppression, physically exploitation, subordinate in the society etc.

**VIII. Witchcraft, women and persecution:** The concept of women empowerment has undergone a sea change in the past six decades, but when a woman is still humiliated by labeling her as witch and tortured, it reminds us the dark side of the story that a woman's right to live with dignity is still not recognized by the society at large.

There are no traces of evidence as to how many witches are there in the state, but the records prove that a large number of women have been victimized in the name of witch hunt. The witch hunt is a centuries old tool of prejudice against society, in particular women. Many a time this method is used as a tool to exploit women sexually and to deprive her of her property rights.

Traditionally, a witch is believed to be a woman having evil magic powers. In early Europe, women who defied the order of the church were considered as witches and to save the society from the shadow of the evil spirit, such women were burnt alive. Subsequently, they were held responsible for famine and epidemics and were eliminated.

According to the state government (Assam), between 2005 and May, 2013, 66 women have killed in the name of witch hunting in 105 cases. (Choudhury, 2015: 6)

Intellectuals are of the opinion that in most of the cases women and mostly the widow are targeted. They opine that when some powerful person in the village fails to exploit the women sexually, the women is accused of witch craft to eliminate future threat of being accused by women for sexual violence. (Brahma, 2011: 20)

Witch hunting since 2000 upto 2015, registered in police station of Kokrajhar district, Assam.

**Table: 1**

Sl. No.	Year	Number of killed	Male	Female
1	2000	7	6	1
2	2001	4	2	2
3	2002	2	1	1
4	2003	2	0	2
5	2004	1	0	1
6	2005	4	3	1
7	2006	5	3	2
8	2007	0	0	0
9	2008	1	1	0
10	2009	0	0	0
11	2010	0	0	0
12	2011	9	2	7
13	2012	0	0	0
14	2013	3	1	2
15	2014	3	1	2
16	2015	0	0	0

Source: Crime Branch, SP, Kokrajhar, Assam, 2016

**IX. Witch hunts and violation of human rights:** Accusing an innocent woman of causing ailments or other misfortunes, especially the widows and single women and branding her as a witch, following it up with public ridicule and death is one of the grossest form of human rights violations. The vulnerable women, men and children, the elderly and the mentally ill have been branded witches and condemned to death. Particular targets have been the single women who inherit property or gain political influence. (Lahkar, 2015: 6)

However, the belief on witchcraft and hunting of suspected witch together lead to violation of human rights. It causes adverse affect on right to life, freedom, peace and order, socio-economic security etc.

**I. Violates right to life:** The villagers begin to suspect of having black magic practitioner, when people dies, infant dies, facing serious disease, ill luck etc. in the village. It results to suspect somebody to have practiced black magic in the village. As a result the suspected witch is killed and lives of family members are at danger.

**II. Entitled to live in peace and order atmosphere:** Every people is entitled to live in peace and order atmosphere in the society. But witch hunting leads to violation of these basic rights. The vulnerable people have to pass the nights without sleep because of fear on suspect.

**III. Socio-economic security:** The attack on suspected witch leads to violation of right to socio-economic security. The suspected witch is ostracized or their property is seized by the

vested people. They are socially boycotted and ill treated by co-villagers leading insecure and loss of social life.

**IV. Right to freedom violated:** Every people are entitled to enjoy right to various freedoms by the constitution. He or she can pursue any profession or work best to them, conscience, expression, free of imposition in life etc.

**X. Uprooting witch hunts and emancipation of women:** As the tribal societies are still far from satisfactory education and enlightenment, so effective equal education to them is the most need of the time to mitigate this menace. The women should be encouraged to participate in political bodies and economically be empowered for emancipation of class consideration. The village development or steering committee for each village could be formed under the supervision of District Magistrate. The easy access of medical facilities and health awareness of the villagers are also fundamental needs for attention. The NGOs also should launch sensitize programs to curb this social menace.

**XI. Conclusion:** The laws are alone cannot totally root out the aged old social evils. The brutalities perpetrated against women in the name of witchcraft are contrary to the fundamental ethos of the country. It violates the basic human rights and contravenes the spirit of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

However, the witch hunting on suspect and allegation on helpless fellow, following the much ill luck, disease and death in the village is the constructive metaphor of discrimination by advantageous classes of people. The right to life, social security, right to property, freedom of conscience etc. are violated by this heinous crime. This menace has been regarded as cancer in the society. It has been posing social division, hatred, tense and misery to vulnerable women.

The Mission Biru Bala, a brave woman of Assam has been rendering untiring effort for elimination of this menace which is very encouraging to the concerned societies. But this mission needs to be collaborated by each and everybody to root out this social evil.

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