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## A Marxist Reading of the Story, “Hansel and Gretel”

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes the story “Hansel and Gretel” from the Marxist point of view. This children’s story is the story of haves-and-have-nots. The conflict between these two classes: the upper class and the working class is a non-stop process. There is a conflict between the witch and the children: the upper class and working class, feudalism and Marxism. Theoretically, feudal society is out of practice but it is still going on. This conflict is because of discrimination. The working-class people are suffering from the upper-class people’s domination and discrimination. The findings of the study show that the discrimination between upper-class and working-class people is never ending process. Society still has a feudal mentality. In every sector, discrimination is as usual. The upper class or high-ranking people dominate the working class or low-ranking people. This paper focuses on how to minimize the feudal discriminating mentality. The grounded feudal system is more dangerous than the surface-level feudal system. The study adopts the Marxist approach to analyze the story. Millions of people struggled and sacrificed for providing economic freedom to the working class people for ages so that the gap between them would fill up, but their sacrifice has not been meaningful. The change, which is nominal, is not satisfactory. Monetary power beats almost all kinds of power in the world. Exceptionally, intellectual powers seldom beat some orthodox power but money, which is all in all in the world of the American dream, is the major cause of discrimination.

**Keywords:**- classes, discrimination, feudalism, haves-and-have-nots, Marxism,

## Introduction

The study explores dictatorship and discrimination in society. The Marxist dream is attempting to make the world classless or equal, but more classes have been generated now and several kinds of discrimination have come into practice. Marxian theory attempts to establish a utopian society where everyone is respected by everyone though this is a challenging task. The problem is that those who are Marxists do not follow the Marxian theory properly. Those who are upgraded from the working class enjoy dominating the working class people. As Orwell (2021) defines that some animals are more equal. Or some of the people, whose economic condition has been upgraded, become more equal, the oppressors. And those, whose economic condition has not been upgraded, have been badly suppressed and discriminated against by the new feudalists. This is how some people, who cannot have enhanced their economic status and remain working class, have been suffering. And those who have been dominating the working class people from their ancestor's time are still dominating. They are used to dominating. The new feudalists are much more dangerous than the by-birth feudalists. However, the increment of rich people is good for sake of the nation because they pay the tax to the government and it is beneficial. But the new feudalists are the hindrances to the poor people. They suffer more now than their forefathers did. The new feudalists torture the working-class people more than those who used to dominate them. The upper-class people always want to rule the working-class people. This is human nature or a kind of poor mentality. The working class people have very little chance of coming to the centre or the decision-making board. Hardly, some working-class people reach the decision-making place through a quota system. But when they come to this ruling level, they start ruling the remaining working-class people. Therefore, discrimination never ends.

## Literature Survey

Including this children's story, "Hansel and Gretel", there are other stories like "Poverty" by Parker, "Grief" by Chekhov and so on. All these stories show that there is discrimination between different classes. There are several authors who have written stories about working class people. A number of films about working class people have been made. Several governments in several countries have conducted poverty elevation programs for the enhancement of working class people. Although some reformation has taken place, although the working class people's lifestyle has been upgraded and a number of Hansel and Gretel might have gone down, discrimination between them has not gone down. This paper concerns when discrimination will go down. Nepal government has also conducted different programs for poverty elevation but working class people's condition is deteriorating day by day. They have to leave the family for food as Hansel and Gretel did. This paper attempted to find the solutions to the over discrimination problem. No one likes discrimination but everyone likes discrimination. Because of this trend, the life of working class people has not been changed yet. And they have always been the victims of discrimination. This is the major concern of the study. "Hansel and Gretel" is a children story about the extreme starvation problem of Hansel (13 yr) and Gretel (11 yr). Their mother died because of frequent childbearing in the lack of nutritious food and good care. Marxist reveals that one of the major reasons for becoming poor is society. Society is fully responsible for creating the classes. This story depicts the 18th century famine in Germany because of wars.

Poverty has several definitions. According to the world standard, when a person earns less than five dollars a day, he is called a poor person. There are a huge number of people in developing worlds like Africa, Latin America and Asian countries. They earn less and have

miserable lives (Sharma, 2022, p. 145). Poverty was rampant and many people suffered from food shortage problems. "Hansel and Gretel" story is the story of the poverty of the woodcutter family. The woodcutter's income was not enough to support his family's expenses. Most working-class people have the problem of basic needs like that of the woodcutter. They go through the extreme starvation time and again. So, his stepwife advised him to abandon the children in the forest to die. But the children came back home the next morning. They lived for some time but famine took place again. This time, the woodcutter abandoned the children with the best trick in the middle of the dense forest so that they could not get back home as before. It was their obligation, not their interest. Reluctantly, the woodcutter had abandoned his children in the forest and a witch had nearly devoured them but they tricked the witch and killed her. After a long time, they came home back with money and jewels that they had taken from the witch. Taking or robbing the properties of the rich by the poor is common in Marxian practice. It is a kind of right in Marxism although it is not humanitarian activity. The hungry stomach does not account the humanitarian ground. A hungry stomach leads a man to do even unethical work but there must be food. The children killed the witch because she attempted to eat them turn by turn by making the roast.

So, the witch represents the feudal society and the children the proletariat. In the conflict, the working class people win the war and high class people lose it. Only discrimination might not be a matter of concern but working class people are tortured in the name of discrimination physically and mentally. Therefore, discriminating means dominating and dominating means humiliating or torturing. This is what the children faced. To be free from this, they killed the witch. This is what Marxism defines and justifies it. According to Marxism, killing is not fooling. The witch has a house of food, whereas the children are dying of starvation. This contrast is always there in society. The starvation problem has not freed the working class people like Hansel and Gretel yet. Although it is comparatively low, the discrimination problem has more. The number of poor people seems to be decreasing, and some of them are still the victims of discrimination.

Once a man is victimized by bad luck or poverty, he may become ready to do even unethical activities. He does not care whether it is wrong or right, moral or immoral, ethical or unethical. Character, morals, and ethics all become secondary things before the hungry stomach. The woodcutter has abandoned his children in the forest. The children know that their abandonment is not because of their parents, it is because of society. Therefore, they do not revolt against their parents. This is a glimpse of the story:

The story of "Hansel and Gretel" is a story of hope and victory. The perspective is plebeian. A woodcutter does not have enough food to feed his family. His wife, the stepmother of his children, convinces him that they must abandon his children in the woods in order that they survive. (Zipes, 2009, p.166)

Zipes (2009) claims that this children story is a story of hope and victory. And it depicts that survival is the most concerning matter for every man. He gets ready to do anything to fill the empty stomach. There is none to help him and his children with food. The principle of live and let live applies in the story. This is what the main concern of Marxism is. This children story is not only about the empty stomach problem, it is also about the problem of never-ending discrimination problem between haves and have-nots, high class and working-class people. The high-class or high-post people always demean and belittle the working class people or low post persons. Almost in all the offices, there is discrimination between high ranking staff and low ranking ones. This is common. If there are ten levels, for instance, level one is dominated by level two, level two is

dominated by level three and so on. This is well reflected in societies, too. This mentality has never been obsolete though millions of protests have taken place. This study is also a protest against the poor mentality of belittling and demeaning the working class people. Although elimination of discrimination is not possible, minimizing is possible. This is what this paper focuses on.

## Problem Definition

The children story “Hansel and Gretel” depicts the discrimination problem that the world is facing. Economic status plays a vital role in every sector. All people never have an equal income level. This difference creates a gap between man and man. The woodcutter’s income level is limited. Therefore, he cannot support his family’s daily expenses. This reflects the worldly realities. Both in formal and informal sector, the income inequality appears constant over period (Adhikari, 2020, p. 15). Because of the income inequality that has been constant for a long period in some working class people, discrimination gets flourished. The income inequality process is never ending process but the demeaning nature of upper class people must be changed. Different people increase their income level from different formal or informal work. Adhikari (2020) further opines that the income and assets have been significantly increased for those who are involved in informal work. Informal does not mean illegal. The high-income level people always discriminate against and dominate low-income level people. This trend must be discouraged.

The humanitarian principle may claim that every human should respect every human, but the situation is not so. The major problem of the present-day world is the discrimination that has flourished in such a way that it cannot be controlled or has gone beyond human control. The number of classes has increased now. The classes are generated because of economic growth or income level increment of the people. An increase in employment due to economic growth brings new areas and better opportunities of earning income (Dahal and Rai, 2019, p. 34). The very earning income generates several classes. Due to economic growth, the gap between low income level people and high income level people gets widened.

Oppressing from one group to another group is because of economic variation. This is called the mistreatment of one man by another man. The mistreatment is generated because of ego. The one who oppresses the lower income level ones is oppressed by the other upper class. The class is generated between rich and poor as the rich people oppress the poor people. Mainly an oppressor group gains as the oppressed group loses (New, 2001, p. 730). There are a number of upper-class people though this study delimits three major types: first is by-birth upper class, the second upper class is by education and qualification, and the third upper class is by earning from different sources. The type one upper class is by birth feudal. Type two upper class is those who have become educated and qualified and deserved the posts and grabbed the opportunities and have become an upper class. They not only earn their living on a monthly salary but they also do the corruption if they get a chance. The government mechanism seems to be weak and pathetic as the inner network of corruption has been much stronger day by day. Even the strong rule becomes helpless. For whatever reason people earn money, and they start discriminating against working class people. In the story, the food which the witch has hoarded is not gained from her income. She has cheated many working-class people like a woodcutter. The witch gains things through her black magic power, too, according to myths. The high-class people exercise their power over those people who have low income. Many people have U-turned their economic status either by doing hard work or by applying tact. As soon as they earn money, they start looking at the low-

income level people from different perspectives. This is because now they have also become the upper class or feudalists. And type three upper class is, those, who have earned money either from business or foreign employment. These newly upper-class people seem to be showier than the by birth high class people. These type two and type three people, the new feudalists, have suffered and tortured the working class people more than the type one high class people.

The better economic condition of the citizens has become the sharp weapon for them to dominate the working class people or lower class than they are. These modern feudalists are the major problems of the present world society. Because of these new modern upper class people, discrimination has been well flourished. The present behavioral activities of modern people show that discrimination is still going on in every society or every community, in one way or other. This is called othering. The problem of dominating and discriminating has not been overcome yet. For whatever reason, a person can grab the opportunity and his status is upgraded from normal level to upper level, he starts immediately discriminating against the lower level ones. For example, if he was in the eighth level, he has been promoted to the ninth level. Immediately, he begins to discriminate against the eighth level. This goes down to other levels respectively. There are several layers of such dominant groups. The working class is dominated by the middle class; the middle class is dominated by the upper middle class; the upper middle class is dominated by the upper class; the upper class is dominated by the upper higher class; the upper higher class is dominated by the topper higher class and so on. So, the channel does not get ended. The discrimination problem never goes away. "Hansel and Gretel" story projects these realities. There are several kinds of discrimination like colour, class, gender, race, sexuality, geography, nationality etcetera. This paper focuses on class discrimination though these discriminations matter the class discrimination. Due to past and ongoing racial discrimination, poverty rates are higher among many minority racial groups. Poverty is caused by racial discrimination, and discrimination based on SES reinforces the racial discrimination that caused poverty (Peterman, 2018, p. 1288). There are a number of reasons for becoming poor.

## Methodology

The study employs the Marxian theory for the analysis of the text, "Hansel and Gretel". This theory advocates that there should be equality but not discrimination between the upper class and the working class. The data have been collected from different books and research articles from libraries and websites. The researcher has reviewed and analyzed them by applying qualitative methods. Different views of Marxian theorists have been included in the analysis. Marxism always emphasizes establishing a classless society for the betterment and enhancement of common people. Fostering the feudal society is highly discouraged in Marxism. Although there are several Marxists like neo-Marxist or so, this paper employs general Marxism which discourages conservative thought. This is the concern of this theory. The killing of the witch by the children has not been considered a crime, this is a struggle for survival. Killing is a necessary action of the proletariat or they have to die themselves. The central thrust of our interpretation of Marxian theory is to see accumulation as the expanded reproduction of a fabric of capitalist control that is always tenuous and repeatedly threatened by working-class struggle (Bell, & Cleaver, 2002, p. 1). The ruling class is supposed to be strong but they are weak in reality so they often lose the battle when they are threatened by the working class. It is because the rich people fight against the poor people with the help of money or hiring people or putting their money at the stake, whereas the poor people fight against rich people by putting their life at the stake. The children put their

lives at the stake while fighting against the witch. She attempted to kill the children with her magic power but Gretel seized it and she charged at her and killed her. It is because she was alone and the children were two. It shows that the number of proletariats is always higher than feudalists. This is how discrimination has been discouraged in the story.

Most of the time, the so-called upper class people always dominate and discriminate against the lower-class people. But the working class people are not as weak as the upper class people think. The productive forces are the creative energies of the working class (Bell, & Cleaver, 2002, p. 5). Because of the creative energies of the working class, victory does not go in the hand of ruling class. The ruling class often discriminates the ruled class. Marx’s theory is a working class perspective on the capitalist accumulation process. Capital has its own views embodied in bourgeois economics, sociology and so on (Bell, & Cleaver, 2002, p. 18). And economics is the *base* on which the *superstructure* of social/political/ ideological realities is built. Economic power therefore always includes social and political power as well (Tyson, 2006, p. 54). Discrimination and inequality have been well projected in *Animal Farm* by George Orwell (2021). The metaphors in the novel are lively and interesting, and it is didactic.

## Results and Discussion

“Hansel and Gretel” is a children story about the conflict between the haves-and-have-nots, the upper class and lower class or working class, the bourgeois and proletariat. The bourgeois makes their living through ownership of means of production (proletariat vs. bourgeoisie), whereas the proletariat makes their living through manual work and labour. And proletariat means the working class people whose income level is nominal or limited. They are always busy in earning a wage for solving their hand-to-mouth problem but the bourgeois has easy access of such materialistic goods etcetera. The bourgeois people do not get troubled with basic needs like food and shelter. The woodcutter abandons his children in the forest to die for his survival reluctantly. Here the power exercise plays a vital role. It is because parents are more powerful than children. The woodcutter has dominated his children as his stepwife suggested to him that he should do this. This domination is discrimination. In most cases, there is no conflict as children did not protest against their parents. But sometimes, conflict turns into a dangerous way in which the high class people lose the battle. This is all because of poverty. Parker (2020) states about poverty as, dirty, smelly, and with no proper underwear on and with stench of my rotting teeth near you (p. 275). Here, the author has projected a clear picture of poverty with sight and smell that sensitize the readers. The children, Hansel and Gretel have dirty and smelly clothes that have not been washed for a long time because they do not have money to buy the soap. Their teeth are rotting which looks so unattractive. This is the identity of working-class people. As a result, they are discriminated against by the people who have clean teeth and clean clothes.

Moreover, the speaker, in the story “Poverty”, tells her live experience. When the dried diaper came off, bits of my baby’s flesh came with it (p. 275). How a painful situation! The situation of working class people is more or less the same. The speaker leaves her baby in charge of granny when she goes out for work but there has not been proper care for her breastfeeding baby. When she got back home in the evening from her work, she found her baby in the same diaper she had on in the morning. It was smelly and urine drenched. Then she changed the diaper, and her baby’s flesh came with it. What a pathetic condition! Most working class people’s daily life passes this way. Further, Parker (2020) defines what poverty is like. Poverty is cooking without

food and cleaning without soap (p. 276). He defines it as, no needles and thread, no hot water, no aspirin, no worm medicine, no hand cream no shampoo (p. 277). This depicts the reality of working class people. Their lives have lots of such scarcities. The woodcutter family is deprived of all these things. Scarcity, your name is working class people; humiliation, your name is working class people; discrimination, your name is working class people. Most of these people plunge into a whirlpool of scarcities and difficulties. This is what their everyday lifestyle working class people is. Because of their low life, they are always humiliated and discriminated.

One very popular story written by Chekhov is "Grief" in which Iona tells the little horse the whole story (Chekhov, 2022, p. 43) when no one gets ready to listen to his son's death story. He had told his son's death to the officer, three boys and his friend but they turned deaf ears to him. This shows that none is ready to listen to someone's tragic story. None gets sensitized to others pains. Only he listens to the insults hurled at him, sees the people, and little by little the feeling of loneliness leaves him (Chekhov, 2022, p. 41). The world is so dry that none helps the helpless and needy people. Those helpless and needy people are always neglected and discriminated against. This is the reality. This is why the woodcutter abandoned Hansel and Gretel.

The speaker of "Grief", Iona has grief and he wants to share it with other people so that it releases him because he has a trauma but the world is not so kind to hear others pains. The father is very sad. My son has died, and I am alive.../A wonderful thing, death mistook the door... instead of coming to me, it went to my son (Chekhov 2022, p. 41). The victim of ill fate, Iona, wanted to die himself instead of his little son but happened otherwise. This is the irony of fate. As Iona was neglected and discriminated against by other people, Hansel and Gretel were discriminated against by their parents. They have become helpless at that small age and they have to survive by themselves. They were dying of hunger, whereas the witch had hoarded the food. It so happens when the crisis takes place, as the rich people start hoarding food. The witch is the representative of rich people, the feudalist. The children worked more than the witch but they did not have sufficient food to eat. This is how the working class people always do more work than the high class people but their wage is low and their life is harsh. This is all because of discrimination.

George Orwell's (2021) *Animal Farm* symbolically present how the lower animals on Animal Farm did more work and received less food than any animals in the county (Orwell, 2021, p. 50). This is the reality in many countries where the system has not worked well. As lower animals and bigger animals are discriminated against, this trend is always there even in developed countries. The satirical claim, ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS (p. 49), by Orwell (2021) is contextual in the modern age. Those Marxian people who have upgraded their status are more equal than the other working class people. This discrimination is more dangerous than the discrimination that is impose by the by-birth upper class. When they were working class, they were equal and they struggled for their rights but once their status has been upgraded, they forgot their ground level. Now, their suppression over the working class people is much more torturous than the suppression from the by birth feudal class people. The new feudal class people dominate, belittle, demean, exploit and discriminate against the working class people unlimitedly. This is the major focus of the study.

Most working class people suffer from the hand-to-mouth problem rather than other problems. They are always busy in earning for food and clothes. The reason of their poverty is not only their weak performance but the domination of upper class people. Poverty has a far-reaching impact on their lives by lacking adequate food, education, health, and other basic needs. (Pant,

2021, p. 99). Tasty food, higher education, and good health as such are the dreams of the working class people. This is not because of their ill fate, their ill fate is caused or created and discriminated against by the new feudal class people. Therefore, discrimination must be eliminated.

## Conclusion

"Hansel and Gretel" is the story of discrimination and domination of the working class people. The children, Hansel and Gretel, are discriminated by their parents first at home, and they were discriminated and dominated by the witch in the forest. The discrimination was not only between the upper class and working class, the discrimination was between senior and junior; officer and non-officer; youths and children; male and female; rich and poor and so on. Although there were and are several discriminations in practice in the societies, this paper concerned the discrimination between haves-and-have-nots, like the witch and the children. The children story, "Hansel and Gretel" depicted how discrimination is still going in society. In the story, there are just two parties of a witch and two children. This is rampant everywhere. This paper discussed three types of upper class people: by birth, by mistake or by luck and by hard work or tact. As the millionaire dominates the non-millionaire or the billionaire dominates the non-billionaire or trillion-owner dominates the billionaire or so. And the purpose of the study is discusses over-discrimination between these people. could be minimised For this, social awareness programs and the very strict rule should be implemented by the state. The law must support those people who are really crushed by the unjust. This paper suggest that there should be equal income opportunities for all though it is not a hundred per cent possible or at least all people should be capable of supporting their basic needs. The findings of the study show that it can be minimized by enhancing the economic condition of the working class people, either by providing them with the subsidies from government or raising the social fund. The needy people should be helped and strong monitoring is to be conducted. It cannot be settled at once but it is not impossible. There should be a strong provision of punishment for those who dominate and discriminate against the working class or lower than their class. The system works. The government whether it is local or central must be aware and watchful. If discrimination is officially discouraged by the government, it will be minimized.

There are many Hansels and Gretels in many societies who have been abandoned by their parents. We find a number of house servants in our societies like small children and working women as well as cleaning ladies. Because of a lack of opportunities, they are bound to work even for the same salary for a decade or more. Domination and discrimination over them are common. To enhance their economic condition, job opportunity is to be generated by running a lot of factories and industries. Both the private sectors and government sectors should involve in generating job opportunities. It should be guaranteed by the government. On the other hand, working class people are a bit careless about spending money. They should not be showy. They must minimize or limit their expenses and economize as much as possible. This will also help them. For the minimization of poverty, by which discrimination is generated, a number of job creators should be enhanced rather than a number of job holders. Or there should be a lot of entrepreneurs in the country whether they are running small-scale industries or large-scale industries. If the number of workers is low, the wage will be high. Therefore, job creators' numbers must be increased. There should be a scarcity of workers. But the tragedy is that the number of lazy bone is increasing and risk-bearing people are few. Female entrepreneurship should be well



encouraged. For this, the government should formulate the rule for every educated and qualified woman in a family to the job or run some kind of small scale industry. Many master's degree holder women are working in the kitchen in Nepal. They have been badly discriminated by their husbands but they do not want to do the job either by the family pressure or their nature. If these opportunities are generated by the government sector to encourage the backward societies of working class people, there will be few Hansel and Gretel, there will be less discrimination and domination over the working class people like woodcutter's children.

## Future scope

Discrimination between haves-and-have-nots has been a never-ending process. Everyone wants to have a utopian world that is without discrimination and domination. According to Marxian theory, establishing a classless society is the concept of an ideal society. This concept will surely be emphasized by people from different countries. Although total eradication is not possible, minimizing the maximum level of discrimination between upper class and working class is possible. And Marxism are effective practical solution to controlling the discrimination problem from which the world is suffering. Although it will not work for those who are newly upgraded feudal upper class, it will be beneficial to those who have been crushed under the multiple newly upper class feudal people. This article is expected to give insights to the government to launch a number of new projects in the country so that employment opportunities will be generated and discrimination will be discouraged. This research paper will teach the societies, SAY NO DISCRIMINATION, SAY NO DOMINATION BUT SAY YES ASSIMILATION AND SAY YES EQUALITY.

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