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Racism: Still dreaming of Freedom?

Shivangi Rajiva

Racism has been there in this world from time immemorial. This has been the most sensitive topic from centuries and by far it has been the cause of many civil wars, nation formations and slavery. In India people have been the victim of racism from the pre-colonial era. Facial features, body structures, skin colour difference, caste, creed, language barriers, ethnic minority, asylum seekers are some of the basic criteria of discrimination we see in our day to day life. Racism comes from the word race and by that we mean, a certain group of people with some similarities combining to form a race. And when people from different race come together to look down upon a particular race of people, we call it racism.

If we go back in time, racism basically started with the slavery and then with the invention of Anthropometry¹ system. Earlier in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Church of Protestant-Calvinist very less recognised the Africans and the Indians as humans. They wanted to separate themselves from the Catholic and when the question of whether the Africans and the Indians have soul raised, the different opinion of both the sects differentiated the two of them and gave rise to the two system of slavery. Then in the late 19th century, Bertillon² invented the system of Anthropometry to identify and record the measurements of human body. Later in the early 20th century, it became the main cause of racial discrimination. The demonstration of the “fully evolved” and “the less evolved” came into existence which perceived supremacy to the white. For people like Chinese immigrants and the black people, the method of anthropometry was not used as it was considered a sophisticated method of identifying the superior people. Hence, fingerprints were used for those undistinguishable racial people. This is most commonly known as Scientific Racism.

Now if we see in India, the racial differentiation is one of the main reasons of the inequality that prevails in this country, caste system being the most prominent one. Here, in India we basically follow the Varna System³. This system distinguishes people into upper class and lower class making a barrier between the two groups, giving rise to the discrimination of the Dalit's and the untouchables. Indians have been the victim of slavery for at least a century and people of India have been protesting against Racism since the time of Gandhi. One of the most prominent

¹ Anthropometry is a scientific method of classifying and comparing the anthropological measurements of the human body. “It includes body measurements, such as height, weight and hand size, and functional measurements, principally concerning how far people can reach in different directions.”

² "Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914), a French police officer who was recognized as the “Father of Scientific Detection”. In Arthur Doyle's novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a visitor to Sherlock Holmes calls Bertillon instead of Holmes, his host, “Europe's highest expert in criminalistics.” One could imagine Bertillon's great fame and authority in criminal sciences between the mid-19th century and the early 19th century.”

³ "Varna seems to have been the division of the society in the Rig Vedic times when there were four classes. These classes were Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. It is found from the Vedic literature that Varna meant the colour of the skin according to which society was divided into four classes. These classes were based on the distinction and differences between the white or the Aryans and the black or the Dravidians."

movements seen was the Civil Disobedience Movement⁴ in the 1930s lead by Gandhi himself. And then there have been a lot of protests all over the world by the brown community. Fight for Freedom, South Africa, 1950s, Action Committee against Racial Attacks, Hyde Park, 1978, Indian Youth against Racism, New Jersey, 1980s, Drive out the Nazi Murderers, 1970s, Black People against State Brutality, 1979, Dupatta-Burning Protest, Lahore, 1980s and many more like these have been the history of the brown people fighting for their rights. But after all of the struggle, protests and civil wars, India still faces racism. The present scenario is not as it was earlier but it is neither better than that.

For instances, during this pandemic era, since the country is under the lockdown, there have been 30 major incidents in relation to the caste-based violence. People of the upper class is using this critical time to assault the ones belonging to the lower sect and taking undue advantage of them. There are many incidents which happened during the spread of COVID-19⁵, one of them being the story from the town of Nilakkottai. Here the shopkeepers refused to supply the Dalit's with the basic groceries and the reason for doing so was because according to them the men and women from the lower section were unkempt and unclean. This gave rise to much a more crises. As regular wage people, they are already in a condemning position and now with that they even have to face the racial discrimination and the tension of how to buy the basic needs from the local shops. Likewise, the cases with the migrant workers have also increased as most of them are again from the daily wager class who are returning to their home from different cities. While a considerable lot of them, particularly ones that have come back from Covid-19 hotspot Ramganj and Kota have been isolated, their relatives are confronting the brunt of discrimination. In the villages of Tiruvannamalai region, people from upper class have supposedly even positioned thistles outside Dalit houses to guarantee they don't move out. This is really saddening and disturbing at the same point.

Then comes the facial discrimination, which the north eastern people from our country faces the most. Now again if we see it in the recent times, China is being considered responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, the people from the north-east due to their similar facial structure as the people from China has been facing a lot of racially motivated attacks from the people around the country. Everyone knows that Delhi has always racially discriminate to the people of north

⁴ "On March 12, 1930, Indian independence leader [Mohandas Gandhi](#) begins a defiant march to the sea in protest of the British monopoly on salt, his boldest act of civil disobedience yet against British rule in India."

⁵ "Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is defined as illness caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV), which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It was initially reported to the WHO on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic."

east but this time it has reached to a whole new spectrum. Many of them have been recently attacked and abused and also not allowed to enter the grocery shops. One of them even complained to the local police saying that a man spat on her calling her corona and Chinese.

Several tribes like the Nagas, Gorkhas, Mizos, Bodos, Kukis and Meiteis comes from the north-eastern states. The discrimination did to the Gorkhas have made them demand for the Gorkhaland⁶. Cases have come up saying that the tribal people from the north-eastern states are forcibly kept in quarantine even when there are no corona symptoms and that is just because of the fact that they are the lookalike of the Han Chinese.

Racism is pandemic. It's everywhere. The end to this is nowhere to be seen in near future. Angela Davis, an American political activist, said, "In a Racist society it is not enough to be a non-racist. We must be anti-racist." And therefore it is not just important for a person to be a non-racist but he/she should be an anti to the people who promotes Racism and by doing this we can somehow make the condition better. And for doing this the first step is to be informed. If one is not aware of their rights then how are they supposed to fight battle for it? A person should be well aware of their human right. They say the blood we bleed is of the same colour then why are the people here are not treated as the same? Racism should not be tolerated in any form or in any kind. Respect and tolerance are the two things sadly lacking in today's society and the whole of the human race should learn to do that better. People should be containing courtesy and kindness and that can do a lot to make people feel happy and more inclined to do the same to others. A priority should be given to the cases related to Racism and also to the measures which can stop the atrocities caused by the racist people. A committee was formed known as 'The World Conference against Racism'⁷ who looks into the matters related to the intolerance to the people facing the discrimination on a global basis especially in Africa. It was made to promote the struggle and the intolerance caused to people due to racism. Likewise many laws were made in India too but they don't seem to be of much help to the victims. In India racism starts at home and therefore for it to be removed from the roots we as individuals should take the first step and raise our voice against anyone who follows racism in any kind. As racism starts at home, the anti-racism should also start at home. The first

⁶ "Gorkhaland is the name of the proposed state in India that the Nepali-speaking Gorkha ethnic group in the district of Darjeeling and Kalimpong and the Dooars in northern region of West Bengal have expressed a desire to create. A demand for a separate administrative unit in Darjeeling has existed since 1909, when the Hillmen's Association of Darjeeling submitted a memorandum to Minto-Morley Reforms demanding a separate administrative setup."

⁷ "The World Conference against Racism (WCAR) is a series of international events organized by UNESCO to promote struggle against racism ideologies and behaviours. Four conferences have been held so far, in 1978, 1983, 2001, and 2009. Founded after World War II and the Holocaust as a dependent body of the United Nations, UNESCO started as soon as it was created to promote scientific studies concerning ethnic groups and their diffusion in public opinion to dispel pseudo-scientific rationalizations of racism."

step should be to make people around us aware of their rights and also to teach them why all of us are one.