

Indian Xenophobia

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Abstract: Loyalty and devotion to one's nation are widespread in every part of the world. India is one of the several third world countries in the world that houses people of varied races. India, therefore, is called a country of all caste, color, and creed. However, housing people of distinctions seeds the germination of civil war, racial discrimination, and social chaos. In the current era, reports of mob-lynching of Bengalis in Assam, Nigerians in Delhi and Karnataka, and Portuguese in Goa get the first-page coverage of esteemed newspapers and tabloids. Explicitly speaking, Indians' attitude to the people of African origin, now, is kind of similar to what colonists had to Africans in the 19th century. Even though the preaching of liberal ideology in various university campuses in the West has played a pivotal role in brushing xenophobia aside to an appreciable degree, not a single organization in colleges, schools, and universities in India preach or promote radical, unbiased and egalitarian discussion because Indian mentality perceives such "organizations" as the powerhouse of brainwashing youths toward anarchy.

Keywords:- xenophobia, liberal ideology, egalitarianism, Nigerians, Africans, colonists, mob-lynching, anarchy

Xenophobia is described as the hatred for and prejudice against people of foreign origin. The term is very much accessible and is one of the most-searched words in recent times. It is due to the ongoing civil war in Syria, Trump's travel ban on seven countries such as, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, and Libya which were known as 'countries of concern' by the Obama administration, and non-acceptance of Middle Eastern refugees in European countries. Xenophobia is formally defined in the context of 'dark skin prejudice' in Europe as a tendency to react negatively towards 'people of color' against aspects of European culture and its normative habits. In India, xenophobia plays out very differently. The British force colonized India for more than 200

years and labeled the Indian citizens as ‘barbarians.’ The belief that India is uncivilized and therefore needs mass-civilization mission—it reiterated a sense of Indian inferiority time and again. The regressive Indian practices are questioned on a global scale, and therefore the attempt to westernize the Indian mass infuriates the Indians while making them question their own sole identity time and again. After Indian independence, a robust patriotic essence in the Indian mindset was forged by agent provocateurs and demagogues, which led to over-exaltation of Indian culture and practices, and these were considered to be superior to Western tradition. “A superiority complex is a cover-up for an inferiority complex. They are different sides of the same coin”(Alder, Alfred). The chauvinistic attitude of Indian nationalism clouds the retina of its citizen’s fallacies. This is evident in Indian endorsement of reverence for white skin and irreverence for the dark skin. In my experience, we have found a strange Indian affinity to refer people of white origin as ‘sir’ or ‘madam,’ no matter

what the white person does or who he or she is, but when a black foreigner comes up, Indian can’t stand the sight of them. Strangely, in India, its citizens deplore people of darker skin tone! Therefore, it is expected that the fairness cream category is anticipated to achieve market revenues of more than Rs. 5,000 crore by the year 2023(Research and Markets).It is not surprising, because Indians spent up to \$300 million on fairness products in 2016 – just from household cosmetics(Livemint). Indian’s obsession with fair skin has become cancer; it is irredeemable. In Hyderabad, pregnant women consume limestones so that they can have baby of fair skin. These stones are called ‘Khadi’ that are believed to make babies in women’s womb white(Henry, Nikhila.). The cultural craze for fairness has taken hold of the Indian imagination and reality. The perception that fairness leads to success has been cultivated by numerous advertising campaigns. However, it is also one that has roots in how mythology is depicted. ‘Rakshasas,’ usually portrayed as dark-skinned demons in children’s comics, are visually identifiable antagonists of society. In television dramas and films, ironically, only the fairest actors have been picked to depict Krishna, who is known to be dark-skinned. On matrimonial websites, fairer candidates are more likely to have a match that ends in a wedding. “A subservience can still be traced to British and Western structures. The common notion of beauty is attached to fair and light skin, which is evident in the search for brides/grooms who are fair-skinned. The endorsement of a plethora of fairness products substantiates this. The persecution of Africans and black-skinned people from Uganda and Nigeria in the past can be attributed to the deep-seated contempt towards dark skin”(Bhaseen, Asis.). According to a survey conducted by The Washington Post in 2013, India was ranked as one of the most racist countries in the world(Max, Fisher.).

The recent Indian tabloids, newspapers, and TV stations have been booming with reports of mob-lynching of Bengalis in Assam, killing of Nigerians and people of other African origins in Delhi, Goa, Bangalore, and Hyderabad. On April 3, 2017, India reacted sharply when a group of 44 African envoys described the attacks on innocent Nigerians as "xenophobic and racial" and accused the government of taking no known, sufficient, and visible deterrent action. Allegedly, 4 Nigerians were assaulted by a large group of people at Greater Noida, and before that, roughly, one week ago, one Nigerian student was beaten mercilessly inside a mall by a mob because he was suspected to be involved in the murder of a high school Indian student(Phukan.).

Hitting Indian headlines right now are stories that fill all decent Indians with sadness and shame. Over the years, India has had ugly racist attacks on people who are 'not like them.' One African, or one Chinese-Burmese-Thai-Northeastern person, is precisely like another for the Indians, but ironically this mentality falls out of the sense of unconditional, almost voluntary reverence for the whites. In Bangalore, there is also frenzied xenophobic spurts of violence against Africans and our own Northeastern citizens(Indians are one of the most ill-trained people on Earth who perceives people with epicanthic fold as despicable people because now and then Chinese relationship with India has been ambivalent and this creates a sense of resentment in the Indians for the entire species of humans with epicanthic fold). In another news, An African woman was pulled out of a cab and stripped by a mob (Punit Sharma, Itika.). There are plethora crimes against Africans in India, but the media cover less than half of it because it hurts Indian pride for which such reports remain in oblivion. In 2016, the racist face of India made headlines when an African student was stripped and beaten following a road accident in Bangalore in February(The woman student was allegedly beaten up and stripped by a mob in a case of "mistaken identity" after a local was mowed down by a car). The 21-year-old African student was assaulted and partially ripped by a mob in Bangalore. The crowd removed her top, and also harassed her friends who were with her during the incident(Varandini, Suman.).

Another such despicable example of Indian xenophobia could be exemplified by an incident that took place in Delhi in 2014 when a mob attacked three African students in New Delhi's Rajiv Chowk Metro Station. A video was posted on YouTube (https://youtu.be/sIPw7_wNfy0), which showed the three students were beaten with belts, shoes, rods, and glass, while the police force was making a half-hearted attempt to impede. Although it is not clear what happened, it was alleged that they were making lewd comments on a woman on a train. According to the police, however, no such complaint was filed against the students. After police officers eventually rescued them, the students were taken to a hospital, and one of them had a

gash in his neck. Due to the untiring efforts of the African Union or AU in India, news of attacks on Africans by Indians is now getting its place in skyrocketing world stations.(HT Correspondent)

In the current era, racism plays out through caste, class, complexion, and nationality in India and some of these have roots in long-held stigmas. In Goa, which is regarded as a hippie destination for tourists and natives, the situation in the state is troublingly similar to one of Apartheid – where signs were set up by Panchayats and shop owners with “say no to Nigerian, say no to drugs” on them. Black foreign nationals find it hard to rent a scooter or enter a club without discrimination – often choosing to stay at home in their circles(Nelson.Dean).

For the sake of gaining vote affinity from people in various political bodies, politicians do not speak on the racial discrimination prevailing in India towards the Africans because that would make the politicians look like they are anti-nationalist. Thus, the xenophobic attitude of India towards the Africans remain unexplored, unforgiven, and unresolved. The former Goa Chief Minister DayanandMandrekar once called Nigerians nationals ‘cancer’(Panjali.PTI.). When the AamAadmi Party rose to power in Delhi, SomnathBharati, one of its MLAs, tried to order the Delhi Police to raid an apartment block of Ugandan nationals on the pretext that they were running drugs and prostitution racket. When the police refused to do so, citing a lack of evidence, he got a vigilante mob to conduct the raid at midnight(Livemint.)

In Delhi, even the African ambassadors have faced racism. It is no wonder that after the killing of a Congolese student in 2016, a diplomatic row ensued. Ambassadors from various African nations threatened to boycott Africa Day celebrations organized by the government – and to advise their nationals against studying in India. The government tried to appease them by sending the Minister of External Affairs V.K. Singh on an assurance-gaining mission.

Nevertheless, it does not help that this is the same minister who had dismissed the attacks as a ‘minor scuffle’ – blaming the issue’s blowup on the media(Bhattacharjee, Kallol.). The Madras Courier team conducted a series of interviews with students and patients who have come to India to study and to access health care facilities in private hospitals in Hyderabad. The experiences they shared with them are harrowing. The quotes are given below smack of ignorance and racism:-

“I’m a biotechnology student... Indians are very inquisitive. They can ask you any question: they would ask me do you wear clothes in your country? Or things like – do you eat human beings and chimpanzees in your country?

When you are going on a bus, random strangers touch my hair and pull it – I do not know why they do that – without even asking me.

When I was at a bus stop, I walked towards a person to ask for directions. Just as I was walking closer to him, he got scared and ran away without talking to me. Even though the bus is full, sometimes, people refuse to sit next to me.

When I smiled at a baby and said hello to her mother, an older woman next to her said Eiyy Chee Chee– Go, Go. I came here for my kidney treatment. However, I have never experienced anything like this in my life. It is terrible racism.

Men on motorcycles come and randomly grab my breasts and zoom away. They laugh and shriek as if they have done something great. There is no better way to put this – Indians are very racist”(Madras Courier).

The roots of the Xenophobic attitude in India is deeply embedded in its history. As a developing nation of the Global-South, India has much in common with the African countries – a shared history of colonialism, and the need for a voice in negotiations with the powerful ‘first world.’ It is not clear what drives racism against African nationals in India. Once upon a time, people of all races and nationalities were welcomed with open arms. Slaves were allowed to become regents. Malik Ambar who was appointed as the Prime Minister and regent, helped the Deccan sultans fight their foes and administer their kingdoms. It is an irony that those who complain of racism in other parts of the world show varying forms of racism in their own country. In any case, one thing is clear: if Indians expect to be treated with respect in other parts of the world, they should learn to show the same sense of respect for those who are from Africa.

A valuable contribution to our understanding of historic xenophobia in India is GijsKruijtzter’s 2009 book, ‘Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India,’ by Leiden University Press. In six chapters, Gijs explores the many facets of South Indian xenophobia in the pre-colonial era. India

Has been home to foreigners since its incitation. When European colonizers laid the foundation on Indian soil, they had to fear more from each other than from the locals. Between the Dutch, Portuguese, French, Spanish, and British, certain events in Europe caused both a sense of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in each other's mentality. The Dutch-Portuguese rivalry was prevalent in the 15th and 16th centuries, and while the Europeans went on a head-to-head collision with each other, the Mughal Empire was at its pinnacle of success and progress. Muslims have flowed into India from the Persian Gulf, Turkey, and from other Middle East states. To the Deccan Muslims, they were Afaqis(foreigners) or Gharbis(Westerners). The elite rulers gravitated within the Persian or Turkish worlds, making these languages familiar in court. Ethiopian slave tribes such

as the Habshis or Siddis, when began to find prominence in the Deccan (partly because of their dark skin), were employed by various local kingdoms as elite warriors. One such prominent figure was Malik Ambar, who joined the local Indian kings against the rulers in Delhi. Jahangir grew so dissatisfied with Malik Ambar that he had a painting commissioned of himself firing an arrow at the Ethiopian's severed head (The Sunday Tribune). The contribution of Colonizers to the increment of communal and caste-based differences between the natives and the conquerors was very minimal in comparison to what was presumed earlier. The dominance of current Indian xenophobia has proved that in history, India was intolerant of people of color, no matter what their social or professional standards were. Indians do tend to prefer light-skinned people, even Indians inter-se. We are xenophobic when it comes to dark-skinned foreigners, especially Africans although their skin tone is closer to ours. The priority for white skin is prevalent because white skinned people ruled us for about 200 years—so white skin signified superiority. It is in addition to the difference between the Aryan (lighter-skinned) and Dravidian (darker-skinned) races. Indians' attitude to African Americans now is kind of similar to what colonists had to African Americans in the 19th century. What is different between India and a lot of the West is that the West has learned to combat its xenophobia better, and India is still coming to terms with it. Organizations such as Black Lives Matter, SHOUT, Hope Not Hate, Right to Remain, City of Sanctuary (regional branches), Movement For Justice, United For Intercultural Actions, etc in the West helps to cut through some of that xenophobia. In India there are no mainstream institutions, movements, and organizations to combat racism and xenophobia. The Afrophobia in India is in sharp contrast to the bidirectional movement of Africans and Indians across the western Indian Ocean in the pre-globalization era, and the cosmopolitanism it had engendered. At the India-Africa Forum Summit in 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken several initiatives to enhance their partnership to a strategic level further, but the materialization of such initiatives has not been solidified. It is time to remember that a person is a person, regardless of its color, origin, and immigration status. Celebrating other cultures emphasizes the fact that we are all people and sends the message that racism and xenophobia — the fear and distrust of that which is perceived to be foreign or strange — will not be tolerated in a civil society. It is our job, as people, as parents, as citizens of the world, to combat racism and xenophobia wherever we can. We should support for diverse ethnic groups in our community by attending, promoting or helping fund events run by local organizations. Our denizens and citizens need to stand in solidarity with immigrants and marginalized groups. We should realize that we are all human, and we all share one planet by keeping in mind that “all of us—you and I especially, are descended from immigrants and revolutionists.” (Franklin D. Roosevelt)

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