

Exploring Marginalisation: An Overview of Racism

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Abstract – Race is primarily a factor which is natural unlike gender or class. The factors that classify one as belonging to a particular race are required at the time of birth. Race is defined on the basis of colour of skin and physical features like hair, lips or the size of skull and so on. One cannot acquire a race. One is born to a race. Thus race is something permanent. So racial identity is something fixed and that cannot be overcome. The present paper focuses on the different approaches to race, tracing the evolution of racism. The study also explores how this racial politics operates at micro levels in the society.

Keywords: Race, Class Ethnicity, Identity

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INTRODUCTION

Race is defined as a category of humankind that shares distinctive physical traits. Race is a cultural construct that causes a kind of Identity which results in racial politics. Thus racial politics is an identity politics which is based on the cultural construct of race. Race is something fixed or unchanged. So racial identity is something that can't be separated.

We can trace two races- one is the white race and the other is the coloured race. Race became a matter of politics on the basis of certain assumptions that whites are dominant and the supreme race. Certain beliefs were reinforced in the global psyche by some historical circumstances that whites are dominant race. Primarily whites were the residents of Europe and the Europeans colonized other continents. Europeans then settled in America and subsequently, America also became a white dominant country. Thereafter they colonized other continents like Asia, Africa, Latin America and South America.

Britain used Australia as a penal colony. It was very similar to an open jail. British practice a system of open jail in the continent during colonization. Andaman and Nicobar Islands were also used as an open jail. Convicts from Britain were exiled to Australia and Australia became the most heterogeneous country in the matter of race. There were hundreds of aboriginals in Australia. The whites who settled in Australia were all convicts. That's why Australian psyche is quite different from that of others. The ancestors of Australians were convicts.

Europeans colonized every continent and every race in the world and their colonisation established a dichotomy or a bipolar structure in the world- the

oppressor and oppressed. This is something global. The bipolar structure of the society is all pervasive. In every bipolar structure the first element is given prominence at the expense of others. This is the drawback of bipolar structure. Here whites are given prominence and the coloured people are neglected. The coloured oppressed people are subordinated. This situation of dominance and subordination leads to discrimination, exploitation, segregation and marginalization of coloured communities.

In the social process of race, the white colonies became dominant and the coloured oppressed people became subordinated. This is the context of race studies. Race studies is based on the assumption that discrimination and marginalization on the basis of race is unnatural. This is the principle of race studies. Purely theoretical study of races is Anthropology. It is a systematic study of evolution of races but there are certain limitations of Anthropology. It only describes the evolution of race.

Race study is a form of politics. We can approach race from different perspectives-a) Historical approach to race b) Economic approach to race c) Cultural approach to race d) Ethical approach to race.

In the historical perspective, race studies are linked to history of slavery and bonded labour in America. There were several slaves in Roman Empire. Prisoners of war were brought to Rome. In the Roman Empire servants worked inside the palaces but the prisoners of war were forced to work in the estates. Their position was inferior to that of the slaves. They were defeated soldiers. In America there were African people who were captured and brought to Jamaica. It was a Slave Trade Centre after 1600. Every week there was a slave auction. Thus,

historically racism began with slavery. They were forced to work in master's house. They were used as chattels.

Racism is also related to the history of indentured labours. During the modernization of America, there were laying of railway tracks and concrete roads. Asian communities were brought to America as bonded labourers. They are the indentured labourers. In the northern parts of United States there were coal mines and salt mines and in the southern parts there were agrarian states. Blacks were forced to work in mines and fields. They will be free only after completing the entire work and they were known as indentured labours. Asian communities were the first who came to America as indentured labourers. Finally, the abolishment movement was organized to end the practice of slavery in the United States.

In America all became constitutionally equal. But it does not mean that there is no slavery. Freedom for blacks does not mean that they got total freedom. They have to depend on the whites for their survival. Whites are the owners of land. They manage the government. They are part of the decision making process. Blacks were excluded from power, land and government. They were excluded from politics and decision making also. There was a time when both the blacks and whites could not travel in the same bus or in the same compartment of a train.

American Civil Rights movement was a mass protest movement against social segregation and discrimination in the Southern United States. As a result of this movement American slaves were emancipated and were granted basic civil rights. This is a gradual and historical development of the rights of blacks. In spite of all these equalities the blacks were still discriminated from participation of government and assimilation in the main stream society. This is what we called Racism.

In the economic perspective, it is observed that after the abolishment of slavery the condition of the blacks were miserable. Previously, they were owned by white masters. After the abolition of slavery they were literally free. But they were not, because they have no means of survival. They have to depend on white people for jobs, placements and for their survival also.

During this time there was an emergence of Marxist thinkers in America. They tried to view slavery and racism as economic issues. As the slaves have no education, they have to depend on whites. The Marxists were right in their view. But in the course of several decades some blacks acquired money. But they were not socially accepted because race is fixed. Race restricted their social mobility. They realized that it is not simply an economic issue. Even well to do blacks found that they have no social acceptance. At the same time they found that poor whites are socially accepted. This proved that racism is not simply an economic issue as explained by Marxist.

In the course of time the blacks were dissented with Marxist ideology. Marxist could not appropriately explain their predicament. They cannot answer why a rich black was not socially accepted.

In the cultural perspective it is observed that the blacks try to preserve their cultural identity. The blacks develop a perspective to take up their struggle for freedom. The blacks have an organization called a society for the advancement of coloured people. They thought that it is not wise to get social acceptance. Because they feared that social assimilation would destroy their culture. When they get amalgamated with main stream white culture they are likely to lose their cultural identity. Assimilation is a way by which they will lose their cultural identity. The black intellectuals thought that their people have to derive strength from their black ancestry. They look upon the black identity as a source of power and inspiration rather than weakness. This can be a model to any racial group. The blacks' historical perspective of racism can be used as a model in any racial situation. Every racial group has to preserve their cultural identity as a source of power and inspiration.

In the ethical perspective, it is observed ironically that the dominant religion supports racism. During the days of slavery prominent Catholic Church in America supported racism indirectly. In America, during the abolishment struggle many priests joined the abolishment movement against the direction of church.

In India also, the situation was not better. Casteism is a similar situation like slavery. Historically, Indian society supports casteism by connecting it to religion. The hegemonic Brahmin culture in India tries to justify casteism by attributing it to Krishna. Even Gandhiji never went against Chaturvarnas. He stood for the amelioration of the lower caste within the hierarchy of hindu society. But he never spoke against Chaturvarna. He thought that untouchability is evil. He called Dalits, Harijans. Harijans means people who are adored to Vishnu. This is because Gandhi believes in the infallibility of Bhagavat Gita. That is why he never spoke against Chaturvarna. Organised religions all over the world are seemed to support racism. Only progressive radical or reformative elements within religion can work against racism.

There were many radical, progressive movements in America. People broke away from Catholic Church. They supported the antislavery movement in America. In India also, there are so many radical reformative movements led by great leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Maulana Abdul Kalam azad etc. In America they have Black church and Black Christ. They believed that Christ was black like them. A black man or women can identify themselves with Christ only when the Christ is having their own

colour.. Such was the intensity of Casteism practised in America.

In South Africa, there was apartheid from 1948 until the early 1990's. The whites were minority communities. Only white could enter into Electoral Politics and rule South Africa. That was a constitutional rule. The democracy in South Africa was totally restricted. The whites could conduct and won elections. Apartheid is a racial rule that justified the minority wise rule over the majority blacks. There is a tripolar structure in South Africa. There are three communities – the white colonizers who rule the country, the white settlers, who are the white people who settled in South Africa and got assimilated in South African culture and the native African communities who were still colonised.

CONCLUSION

Today, large differences among racial and ethnic groups continue to exist in employment, income, wealth, education, justice and other areas. While many factors may, contribute to such differences, their size and extent suggests that various forms of discrimination prevails in our society which undercuts the achievements of equal opportunity.

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