

Understanding the complexities of Racism in contemporary India: Challenges and the way ahead

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Introduction:

The issue of racism is a not new social phenomena in India. The extreme obsession with fairness of skin and the aversion with the darker complexion are known social facts. The practices of racial discrimination against people with certain racial-cultural affinities (primarily Mongoliad and Blacks) are widespread, as well as a common knowledge among the public. Yet the dominant mood among the public and government is that of denial of these social practices. It's only few brazen incidents of extreme violence which have managed to bring the issue of racism in forefront of public discourse in India. But public deliberations about racism alone cannot always give a correct perspective of what constitutes and sustains racism especially in the peculiar context of the Indian sub continent. One cannot simply emulate the theories of racism which have developed in the context of Europe or US and simply implement them in the Indian social context. This paper is an attempt to contextualise racism within the particularities and peculiarities of the Indian context in order to develop a holistic and historical perspective of Indian racism at large and how it is bolstered by the existing social processes and practices.

Theorising racism in Indian Context:

Existing literature on the issue of racism in Indian context is in its nascent stage. The existing literature has viewed the problem of racism as different from that of caste. While finding certain similarities, these authors has failed to connect the organic link between the issue of caste and that of racism in Indian context (Swar Thounaojam,2012; Thangkhanlal Ngaihte,2014; Teltumbra .A ,2014).The major drawback of existing literature is the lack of consistent theory to explain the deeper social dynamics which are behind racism. Even the categorisation of racism into “footnote racism”, “headline racism” and “institutional racism” is analytically very simplistic. All they describe is the different modalities of racism but what they fail to explain is the source/cause of these social phenomena.

Indian society is deeply embedded in the web of hierarchical caste inequalities sanctioned by Hindu Brahmanical religious texts, where Dalits (oppressed caste and scheduled tribes people) has to face insurmountable amount of socio economic discrimination at the hand of dominant caste group.

According to Ambedkar, Hindu society was essentially structured by ‘Brahminism’. Brahminism was the dominant ideology proposing a set of ideals and justifications, which shaped the daily mode of interaction between different castes (Valerian Rodrigues,2005). According to Ambedkar, the philosophy of Brahminism are following,

“ (1) graded inequality between the different classes; (2) complete disarmament of the Shudras And the Untouchables; (8) complete ban on the education of the Shudras and the Untouchables; (4) total exclusion of the Shudras and the Untouchables from places of power and authority; (5) complete

prohibition against the Shudras and the Untouchables acquiring property, and (6) complete subjugation and suppression of women”

According to him this “inequality was the official doctrine of Brahminism” and suppression of the oppressed classes aspiring to equality has been looked down upon by them and carries out by them without remorse as their bouden duty” (Rodrigues ,2002). It is this ideology that is able to reproduce such ‘graded inequality’ in society and has successfully normalised the grotesque form of social practices that manifests in rampant discrimination and inequality. Ideology of Brahminism like all form of dominant ideology generates a false consciousness that caste system is in the interest of all whereas it primarily benefits the dominant castes. By granting exclusive authority to Brahmins who read and interpret hindu religious texts, the other castes has to occupy subservient position to them. The material condition of dominant caste allows them to effectively impose the various forms of sanction on those who don’t adhere to their world view.

“Brahmins alone do not reproduce Brahminism. To the extent anybody lives by the ideas of Brahminism, he contributes to its reproduction even though he might be untouchable himself. Brahminism brings together a set of interest s in congruence with certain ideals and justifications upheld by it. Brahmins tend to benefit from Brahminism economically as do the different ranks in caste hierarchy all the way down till the last rung. Therefore oppositions to Brahminism affects the Brahmins materially as it does the upper castes, although to different degress. ” (Rodrigues ,2005:8)

In such an already unequal and hierarchical society, racism takes a different form. Here, the invasion of an alien ‘other’ in their social space, where everyone’s role and duties are already rigidly ordained, is looked with suspicion. This wandering and fluid ‘other’ which is not caged in rigid caste hierarchies will be perceived as threat to entire hierarchical social order. Hence there is need for taming, appropriation and subordination of this ‘other’. This need for taming and appropriation is reflected through different modalities of obverse social interaction. So the inclusion of this alien ‘other’ to their local social space can only be done through a set of exclusionary practices and imaginaries. This entire gamut of obverse social interaction mediated through a set of exclusionary practices and imaginaries is what I define as ‘Indian Racism’.

Incidents of racism against people with ‘Mongoloid’ features in general and North East in particular:

The people from North East have to face continuous harassment on account of their racial features in their day to day interaction with the people from the ‘mainland India’. The nature of this harassment varies from passing derogatory comments based on structure of face, food habits, fashion sense, sexuality to open violent attacks without any provocations. Based on their looks they are called “Chinki” , “Momos” and “Chinese” so on. The Gender dimension of this racial discrimination is that most of women from North East have to face the worst from of gender insensitive remarks and actions of harassment. The women from Northeast are dominantly perceived as sexually promiscuous. While men are summarily ridiculed and thoroughly patronised in day to day interaction, women are sexually harassed and molested. Most of these incidents go unreported or no case is filed against them.

In 19 January 2014 Nido Tania, a young boy from Arunachal Pradesh was beaten to death in Lajpat Nagar, Delhi. After the death of Nido Tania, the people from Northeast participated in protests in large numbers and strongly lodged their note of dissent to the larger Indian society and against the

discrimination, harassment and violence that they are subject to in their daily lives. This incident broke the silence on the issue of the Racism and created the public outcry on issue of Indian racism.

Even if we take into cognizance the incidents that were reported in the media, it reveals shocking facts.

On the night of 30 March 2014 in Gurgaon's Sikanderpur village a mob of 15-20 locals beat up six persons from the Northeast with hockey sticks and iron rods. The mob shouted racial slogan, targeted and selectively assaulted people from North East in the area after a Manipuri student, Seigoulal Kipgenhad had an altercation with his landlord. Two of the people who were assaulted lost their sense of hearing as a result of the brutal beating that they had to face and one of them Rinmaso Huishuwo, is now forced to use a hearing aid. Another student Bruce K Thangkhal, who stopped his car to help the already injured North East students on the streets, was also charged with lathis and iron rods by the local mob and was severely injured. All their mobile phones and wallets were snatched by the mob, to stop them from calling for help. Although the police have filed an FIR against 'unknown persons' after several North East Students' Union put pressure on them, no one was arrested. The police was deployed in the area, but instead resulted further harass the people from North East, put them under surveillance and restrict and question their mobility, instead of stopping the dominant local communities who perpetrate such violence.

On the night of 11th April, 2014 two Manipuri students, Neo and Lein were walking in Maurice Nagar with a female friend, when two Indian men, who were inebriated, started passing lewd and racist abuses at them. When the two of them protested, immediately those men started calling their friends and within no time a mob gathered armed with hockey sticks, ready to beat Neo and Lein to pulp. Other students from North East called the police, and after a spirited demonstration in front of Maurice Nagar PS, the police was forced to detain the lumpens, Akash and Amit and later arrested them.

On the night of 13th April, 2014 a young woman from Nagaland, who works as a sales girl in a shopping mall Delhi was molested inside a taxi, on her way back to Gurgaon. She was waiting for a vehicle near Mahipalpur, when some drunken men gathered around her. Feeling intimidated, she took a taxi and the taxi driver molested her inside the vehicle. The driver had locked the car trying to prevent her from getting out. She finally somehow managed to unlock the car and was forced to jump out of the running vehicle. She sustained injuries in her neck and head. The accused Manoj Yadav, had taken her purse and mobile phone and escaped.

In yet another racist attack on North-eastern residents, two young Manipuri students were brutally beaten up, one of them even attacked with scissors, by a group of people in South Delhi's Munirka last Saturday. The incident took place around 9-30 p.m. when two Manipuri men Lunminlal Haokip and Latmainlen were sitting at Babulal Chowk. They both were discussing a college project when a group of 4 boys standing close by passed racist remarks. After ignoring for some time they asked these boys to leave the place, which resulted in heated argument and scuffle. Then one of the minors then called

his elder brother, identified as Rajesh, and this gang attacked Lunminlal and Latmainlen. Lunminlal was attacked with scissors and sustained wounds on stomach, back and neck. Both the students were also hit with bricks lying at a construction site close by. When the locals started gathering, the attackers fled from the spot.

A women lawyer from North east beaten in front of judge in Court room for fight for case of sexual harassment of women from north east by one of lawyer :

On Thursday night, 22nd May, 2014 while a woman from Nagalim was returning home, one Narayan passed lewd remarks at her. When the woman protested, Narayan slapped and molested her. As she confronted him and raised alarm, the passers-by near the Metro station nabbed him and handed him over to the local police. Such instances of racist assault, sexual harassment, rape, molestation and even killing of women from the North East; moral policing on the way they dress; vulgar character assassination and stereotypes have become rampant over the years. This particular instance at Delhi University, however, did not end there. Next afternoon, as the woman complainant along with her advocates and friends went to Tees Hazari court to file a complaint against Narayan, who happens to be an advocate at Tees Hazari himself, around 70 lawyers barged into the court room, beat up the complainant's friends and tore the police files. J Mavio Woba, a student activist, was slapped, racially abused and threatened by the group inside the court room in front of the judge. Around 4:30pm, three of the activists including Noshi, a woman lawyer practicing at the Saket court, were followed by the same crowd. After chasing her down, they slapped and threatened to molest her if she pursued the case further. Such belligerence and arrogance on the part of the Indian advocates and hoodlums is certainly the result of their faith and confidence upon the fact that the police, the "law of the land" and its court rooms would ensure that they are shielded.

What happened in Delhi University Metro station and followed in Tees Hazari – none are aberrations. While the murder of Nido Tania enraged the people of North East and the progressive-democratic sections who registered their protest braving heavy crackdown, countless such cases are forgotten or go unreported.

After the death of Nido Tania, it was the series of vibrant protests which compelled the various state apparatus to take cognisance of this issue of racist violence and take action against it. The militant protests were however, gradually NGO-ised by one section eventually blunting its effectiveness and vibrancy. From the protests which rocked the silence and complacency of the country on the issue of Indian racism, it has slowly turned into a well managed routine affair of symbolism. The victory of the state can be gauged by the kind of normalisation which this issue has reached. Even the brutal death of Akha Salouni failed to raise outrage which we have seen before in the case of Nido Tania. The move to recruit more people from North-east in Delhi police or creating separate help-line for Northeast is also being projected as 'fight against racism'. But even if more people from North East are recruited in Delhi police, the racist attitude of Indian State will remain the same, just that the brutal orders will be executed by different people. The farce of the much touted help line is clearly brought in light by the current incident where the staff from the police station concerned reached the spot after the victims had been taken to the hospital.

None of these incidents were either isolated or aberrations. They rather reflect the entrenched racist mentality among the Indian masses that ignite such assault, abuses, harassment and discrimination.

The brutal murder of the young Nido Tania also saw huge protests against the continued racist violence against people of North East. Some of these protests faced brutal lathi charge, arrests and mass detention from the state, but at the end of the protests, the ruling class also was forced to accept that racist violence is on a rise. With the General Elections round the corner, the pacification of the mass anger was necessary and the militancy that the people from North East showed in the protests had to be managed for the time being. Hence the Bezbaruah Committee was formed, to give a comprehensive report on racist violence and discrimination, so that the government could work towards passing an anti-racial law. Enacting an anti-racial law that specifically takes into cognizance racist violence and discrimination could have been a significant step in the fight against racism. This law would have been the first step in officially recognizing that racism in its most ugly form exists in the hallowed and self-proclaimed liberal democracy of India. So far that minimum recognition of reality has not come from the Indian state even after these continued spur of racist violence and discrimination.

That these ‘promises’ were nothing but pre-election posturing has become clear in the way even the Bezbaruah Committee was put in cold storage for long time. The Bezbaruah committee that comprised retired bureaucrats from all eight states in the North East, has not only failed in submitting its report within the scheduled deadline of 31 March, but has also stopped doing any internal and external meetings as it was supposed to do. Despite enthusiasm from many activists who had hoped that this Committee will be active and give a comprehensive report to the government which will form a basis for the anti-Racial law, the committee has simply gone into hibernation. The committee refused to include academicians and activists as was the demand that time from the people, and most of the members are seen as least motivated to even understand the daily racist harassment faced by people from North East. Despite efforts from many genuine people, these bureaucrats, much like their Indian ruling class masters, have deliberately stopped holding any more dialogues and discussions with people across the country to even register the nature and pattern of racist violence and discrimination.

The Indian state thus has been in constant denial of the existence of racism in India, and has refused to officially acknowledge either racist violence or discrimination. But it is through sheer violence and discrimination both extremely racist in nature, that Indian state has forcefully subjugated the people and the various oppressed nationalities in North East. Extreme underdevelopment, poverty, forceful extraction of resources, lack of educational and employment opportunities, displacement all together have forced the people from these regions to migrate en masse for education and jobs to different Indian cities. Their vulnerability once again make them subject to further racial discrimination, abuse and violence. Their different physical features enable the racist Indians to identify them and thereby abuse, assault or harass them at any opportunity. Racism, infact, is so fundamental to “Indian culture” and its social structure and is deeply entwined into its right-wing edifice, and again lays bare the hollowness of all its proclaimed ‘trans-racial empathy’.

In the name of promoting the ‘harmony’ between various Northeast and local communities, various “cultural exchange events” were organised, where people from different communities were asked to have deeper ‘cultural understanding of each other’. But can such so called ‘exchange’ have any effects when the Indian society itself is ridden with power hierarchies and inequality? Racism is entrenched in the Brahmanical Indian society and the power structures and cannot be fought by mere facades of ‘dialogue exchanges’. The difficulty that people from the North-east face while finding rented accommodation, the constant racist slurs and discrimination they face every day, the profiling of people from the North-east, specially women (as was done even by the Delhi police in a booklet

'instructing' the North-eastern people about how to conduct oneself) are examples of the same ingrained Indian racism. In such a power ridden society, the facade of 'cultural exchange' at the end will turn out to be nothing but an act of appeasement of the majoritarian community. Further, to go into the roots of how this racist violence has been institutionalized one needs to look at what the Indian state has done in the entire region of the North-East for the past 6 decades.

The post –colonial Indian state has forcefully suppressed the various nationalities in North East and have unleashed brutal state repression to deny them their basic right of dignity, livelihood and right to self-determination. Right since 1947, the Indian state has undertaken brutal military campaign repeatedly against the people of North East. Various state governments in the North East under different parties have only ushered extreme state repression on the people of North East from carpet bombing, strategic hamletting, killing people in fake encounters, raping women, torture and other forms of grotesque violence (Sundar,2011). The entire region has been put under the draconian Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), since 1958, in order to ensure unbridled state repression. AFSPA is fundamentally against the spirit of Indian constitutions and violates multiple international human rights treaties and conventions which India itself has signed. Rape, murder, kidnap, torture and all sorts of crimes are routinely carried out by the armed forces in North-East which has been highlighted by numerous Human right groups and by Supreme Court (Fernandes, W. 2013, Mangattuthazhe, T.). Even the left parties like CPM, which time and again posture to be the torch bearer in the fight against racism, implement the same draconian AFSPA in the state where they rule. They have recently made the statement that laws like AFSPA should not be repealed but be retained with a 'human face.' ("CPM not in favour of repeal AFSPA from North east", Business Standard, March 2014). They are the same forces who even without the protection of AFSPA had killed nearly 3000 people of Gorkhaland by deploying 50 companies of CRPF in the period of just two years of 1986-88, when they were fighting for their long standing demand of a separate state (Gorkha Students, JNU ,2014).

Simultaneously their entire economy has been devastated with unabashed extraction of resources like oils, minerals, hydel power, natural gas and forest produces. The state of basic development of essential necessities like health, education or employment has been systematically denied so that the people are forced to migrate to India to avail the same. Nearly 1.5 lakh youth have migrated from Manipur and Nagaland to Delhi till 2011. And this vulnerability of the people from the North East bolsters further racism and racial discrimination in India. According to government own report, the two lakh people from the North East have migrated to Delhi between 2005 and 2013 and that about 86 percent of them have faced discrimination (Bezbaruah, M. 2014). In New Delhi alone, this year the incident of racial violence has gone up to 236%. On one hand it has deliberately refused to address the problems like unemployment, poverty and under-education of the entire North eastern society, and on the other hand these various subjugated nationalities have been kept occupied with sheer military might by the Indian state. This has forced the people from these regions to migrate en masse for education and jobs to different Indian cities wherein they are again vulnerable to further racial discrimination, abuse and violence.

Racism against Blacks:

The African American/black community also has to face the crude form of racist prejudices and humiliations on a daily basis. The extent of humiliation and harassment they face on account of their racial features are also similar to one faced by the people from northeast.

They are called by derogatory names like “blacky”, “Negro”, “African”, “hapse”. They are usually accused to be source of ‘nuisance’ and constantly being criminalised. Getting house in rent is very difficult for them. Most of the males are being viewed as ‘drug peddlers’ and women are looked as ‘sex workers’ (Vasudeva, R., 2014). Whenever any black person goes to a public space, it is turned into some form of ‘public spectacle’ by the “mainstream Indian crowd”. An African American student Dr. Diepiriye Kuku-Siemons, who did his PhD in Dehli School of Economic shares his feeling in following words;

“Once I stood gazing at the giraffes at the Lucknow Zoo only to turn and see 50-odd families gawking at me rather than the exhibit. Parents abruptly withdrew infants that inquisitively wandered towards me. I felt like an exotic African creature-cum-spectacle, stirring fear and awe. Even my attempts to beguile the public through simple greetings or smiles are often not reciprocated. Instead, the look of wonder swells as if this were all part of the act and we were all playing our parts.”(Kuku.D, 2009)

State School Text book advocating blatant form of the Racism:

A highly racist narration of African American can be found in one of compulsory text book of government school of Gujarat, written by Dinanath Batra. His numerous other writing for schools are also been made available under series titled “Prernadeep”. This series are forwarded by Prime Minster Narandra Modi and state education minister themselves.

The basic outline of his story is how a brave Indian man stopped an African American criminal from escaping from the aircraft.

“An Indian youth came forward and gave a strong blow to the negro ... The pilot too came and the two thrashed the negro and tied him with a rope. The criminal struggled like a tied buffalo.”

Not only prohibited words like ‘Negro’ is been used in this story but also the level of dehumanisation reaches its low when he describes the African American “criminal” as a ‘tied buffalo’.

Similarly in one story on Lord Krishna’s complexion, the colour of skin has been associated with certain virtues and capabilities. When the saint asks a student for the reason behind the Krishna’s ‘blue’ complexion, the student replies, “*Krishna’s glory is infinite like the blue sky and the blue sea.*” (The Hindu,30/07/2014)

Union minister joke steeped in racist connotation:

Giriraj Singh, the Minister of State for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises of current BJP government made very racist remarks,

"If Rajiv Gandhi had married a Nigerian lady, someone not white-skinned, would the Congress have accepted her as its leader?" (NDTV,3/4/ 2015)

Though the actual intention was to malign the foreign origin of Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi foreign origin, but the matter of amusement for his party cadre was the idea that erstwhile Prime minister marrying a Nigerian women. After widespread protest by Congress against such racist remarks, Giriraj finally accepted that that statement was made “off the record” and part of private conversation and was even willing to apologise to Sonia Gandhi. Still he did not apologise for the racist connotation of his remarks against people of African origin.

A renowned political commentator of Indian politics sharply deciphers this event in flowing words,

“They are laughing at the mental image that Giriraj fleetingly conjures of a Nigerian woman ordering Congressmen around. The laughter is not at the notion of men following the orders of a woman in general, but those of an African woman, a black woman, a dark-skinned woman. You wouldn't even marry such a woman, the sub-text is, let alone place political power in her hands. Hilarious, isn't it?Most shocking of all, to my mind, is his failure to apologise to Nigeria, despite that country's envoy to India already expressing his anger at the racist suggestion that Nigerian women are in some way inferior to whites or Indians.”(Siddharth Varadarajan,NDTV,3/4/ 2015)

Race in Popular Culture:

The representation of people from North east in popular culture also perpetuates and strengthens the same kind of prejudices which manifest in every day to day interaction.

Bollywood:

From the effable savage wondering in misty mountains to Olympics women boxing champions, the entertainment industry in general and movie production in particular has exhibited and reproduced the same old racial stereotypes. Whereas people of Mongoliad features are usually shown as dumb, subservient, or violent blood thirsty savages, the African Americans are usually shown as criminals, drug peddlers, assassins and so on. Inherent notion of primitiveness/ lack of civilised attributes is directly or indirectly associated while representing these communities in movies.

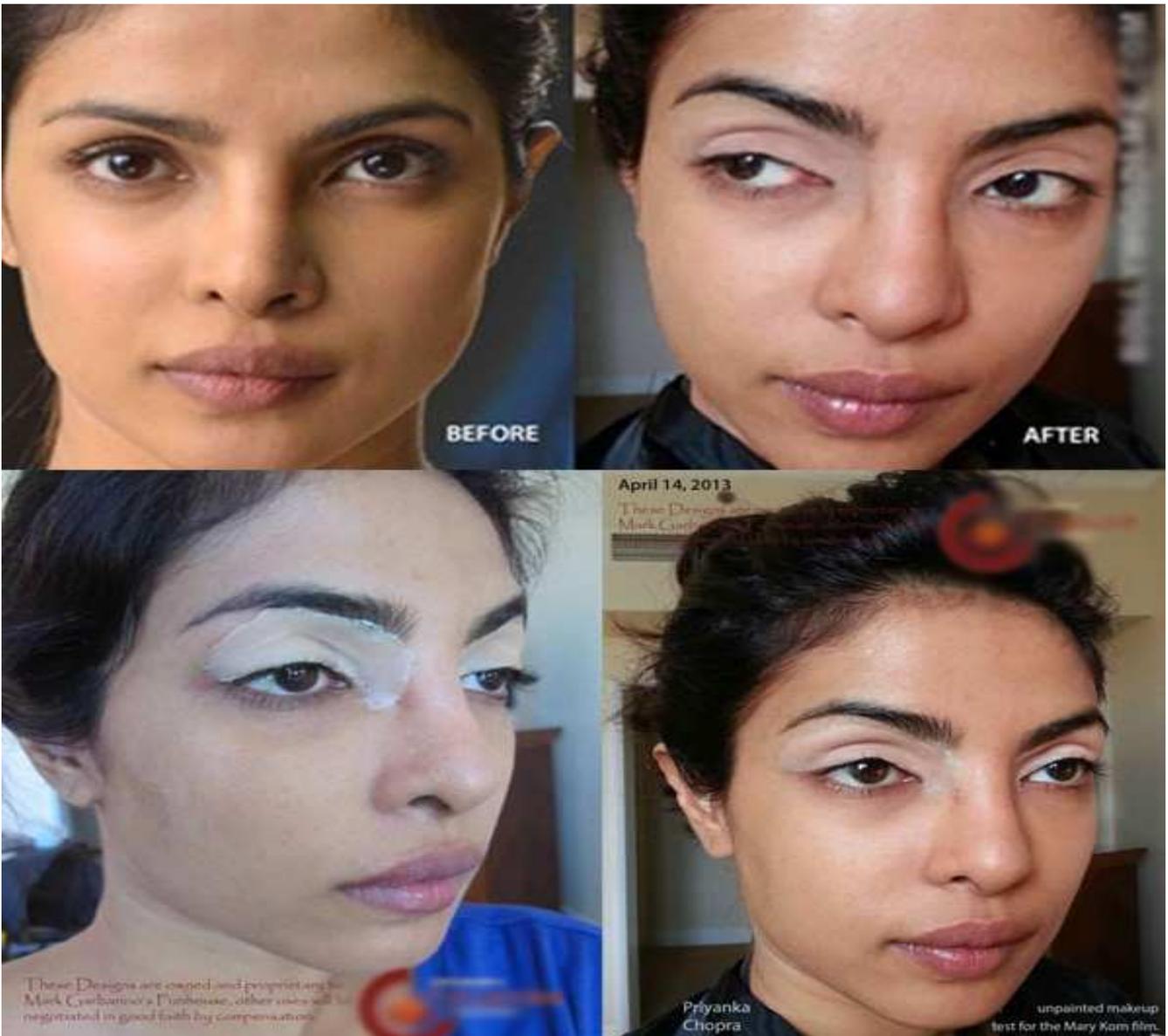
From the portrayal of Gorkha community, either as dumb headed ‘Chowkidars/ Watchmen’ (like for example as portrayed in the film ‘Apna Sapna Money Money,2006’ or fierce blood thirsty soldiers (like in films like “Line of Control, 2003”), the dehumanisation of entire community is done without any hint of sensitivity or remorse. Entire community which is hailed for its ‘bravery’ and ‘sacrifice’ in Indian military is somehow snubbed as ‘illegal Nepalese Migrants’ by larger public when their try to exercise their democratic right to have separate state of “Gorkhaland”.

They are being ridiculed and their authenticity of being ‘true Indian citizens’ are questioned. While making the biopic of Boxing champion Mary Kom (who is from North east),the director chose the lead actress as Priyanka Chopra. Instead of hiring some one with North east with Mongoliad features to play the role of Mary Kom, the choice of Priyanka Chopra was primarily based on the apprehension of rejection of North eastern face in lead role by the audience.



Source: <http://www.scoopwhoop.com/inothernews/bollywood-mary-kom-priyanka>

To ensure that movie served the authenticity of role being played by the lead actress Priyanka Chopra prosthetics was applied to her eyes and accented hindi was used accented to made her look like someone from North east.



Source: <http://www.scoopwhoop.com/inothernews/bollywood-mary-kom-priyanka/>

After objection from people from North east community the filmmakers went ahead without any prosthetic enhanced looks. What is more worrisome is that the open message these kinds of movies are giving it larger audience. Rather than breaking the racial stereotypes prevalent in society they actually end up consolidating the same stereotypes.

As Bimol Akoijam aptly puts, “The fact is race matters in India. A country that promotes fairness cannot be colourblind. Along with skin colour, one’s facial features also matter. Bollywood is not an island; it is bound to reflect India. As a site of popular culture, it has been presenting its template of its idea of a nation. What is ironical is that the ordeal Ms Kom has gone through in life includes her struggle against those very stereotypes and prejudices propagated in Bollywood.Thus, Bollywood’s inability to cast an actor from a similar ethnic (for the want of a better expression) or cultural group for the role of the main protagonist in this film speaks of a larger issue that goes beyond cinema: Race.” (A. Bimol Akoijam, The Hindu, 9th Sept, 2014)

The story of rise of women boxer from small town to world arena against all odds seems very attractive story to sell but at the same time burning issue of this region like forceful imposition of military emergency for past 60 years, chronic underdevelopment, numerous secessionist movements are conveniently avoided. The atrocities of military which has been critiqued for its excess by highest court in this republic and the decade of hunger strike by Irom Sharmila therefore do not find any space in this field.

“Bollywood reproduces the same racism. From the civilising nationalist mission (“Yeh Gulistan Hamara,” 1972) and neutralising the recalcitrant antinational “other” (“Tango Charlie,” 2005) to the latest act of exclusion in “Mary Kom,” Bollywood has its share of contribution in propagating this attitude. Tellingly, Irom Sharmila’s saga or the human tragedies of the protracted conflicts in India’s Northeast that implicate the military are no inspiration for Bollywood. Hollywood has similar race issues, but it has been constrained by public consciousness on the issue. However, India is still beset in denial mode on the question of race, despite the fact that Article 15 of the Constitution talks against race based discrimination and India is signatory to the international covenant against racial discrimination.” (A. Bimol Akoijam, The Hindu, 9th Sept,2014). He further enumerates

“Various themes which are closer to lived experiences, aspirations and dilemmas have been depicted in Bollywood productions over the last decade or so. Indeed, the changed political economy of the country, the expansion of electronic media and the shift from single theatre to multiplexes have transformed not only the tastes of the audience but also the nature of the movie business. Consequently, these changes have enabled filmmakers to take chances with their craft and depart from earlier kinds of movies. Thereby, some semblance of realism has come to be a part of these new films. Yet, despite such changes, the makers of a biopic on a living sport legend and national icon, chose not to cast an actor from a similar ethnic or cultural background. This speaks volumes of the entrenched and insidious nature of racial stereotypes including the condescending outlook towards the people of India’s Northeast.” (A. Bimol Akoijam, The Hindu, 9th Sept,2014)

After all this, government appointed committee (**Bezbaruah Committee**) has suggested that Bollywood can take positive role in dismantling the negative perception of people from northeast.

Similarly in most movies the blacks are shown as either drug peddler or arm trader or hired bouncers. Even in movie which tries to overcome racial profiling of different communities, they end up using the same racist tropes which defeats the original purpose. In movie like 'My name is Khan' 2010, which is supposed to overcome issue of "Islamophobia" and tries to build cross continent solidarity among South Asian and African American communities end up using the same racist tropes. The protagonist interaction with people from African American community end up using the same old racist undertones-

"the film relies on a lexicon of dialect, dress, behavioral codes, and stock figures like the pick-a-ninny and the mammy drawn from the racist representation of African Americans in nineteenth and twentieth-century U.S. culture to craft the characters of Joel and Jenny (referred to as "funny-haired Joel" and "Mama Jenny" in Rizwan's voiceovers). The viewer is so appalled by the seemingly unconscious utilization of these racist tropes (twangy "Southern" banjo music, Jenny's unshapely cotton shift, Joel's wide-eyed innocence) that she is hurled out of the film, and all future efforts to build an affective community in the film carries the bitter taste of ignorance and racism."(**Priya J. Shah,28 oct,2013**)

In another Bollywood film "Kartoos" has in a scene where the Hero (Sunjay Dutt) is imagining a scene where he is about to get married with the attractive, and "fair skinned" actress (Manisha Koirala). The bride is covered in veil and therein he imagines the epitome of perfection and beauty. But immediately in next phase of day dreaming a nightmare appears in front of him. That nightmare is visualised in terms of bride not being beautiful, "fair skinned-Indian" but instead a dark skinned Black women.



Source:<https://tahsinthoughts.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/racist-and-negrophobic-moment-in-bollywood/>

The director deliberately focus the entire scene on the face this unknown Black women as the portrayal of that "nightmarish" moment for the hero.



Source:<https://tahsinthoughts.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/racist-and-negrophobic-moment-in-bollywood/>

To dramatise the effect of this nightmare and to convey the extent of shock the friends of the hero is shown as covering their faces and some falling from their seat in astonishment or disgust.



Source:<https://tahsinthoughts.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/racist-and-negrophobic-moment-in-bollywood/>

Then in the next twist in this scene the heroine appears from the back of this black woman and finally the moment of happiness and celebration return.



Source:<https://tahsinthoughts.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/racist-and-negrophobic-moment-in-bollywood/>

The heroine is shown as leaving with her friends while the black woman stays back. So the only purpose of that black woman in that scene was to produce the nightmarish effect.

“Let’s look at the connotations it provides. I know the directors did not intend to do so, but this moment in the music video not only perpetuates but exposes the undesirability of women with darker skin; less than fair-skinned, close to “black.” It was only six seconds, but it showed us a lot about not just Indian, but South Asian norms at large when it comes to beauty. Fair skin > all. And it mostly applies to women. I know there’s much more to be said about that last paragraph. I’ll write another post in the future, discussing colorism in South Asia. But until then, let’s keep having nightmares about marrying black people.” (Tashin Thoughts, 7 Jan ,2014)

This kind of portrayal limits the imagination and perpetuates the same racial bias within the larger society.

Nationalism without Nation:

The political project of building Hindu Majoritarian State was conceptualised from the very birth of Hindu nationalist groups like RSS and Hindu Mahasabha in late 1930’s. This project has been further extended by the rise of BJP and numerous frontal organisations of RSS. Their imagination of nation is based on glorification of past ‘Hindu regimes’ and the same time demonization of certain religious communities like Islam and Christians.

According to one of its founder of this organisation, M.S.Golwalkar the ‘Hindu nation’ was

‘a people characterised by Varnas and Ashramas , learning their duties at the feet of the “eldest born” Brahmans of this land” (quoted in Sumit Sarkar,2010)

Similarly in the words of another founder, V.D.Savarkar,

“in Hindustan exists and must exist the ancient Hindu nation and nought else but the Hindu nation. All those not belonging to the national ,i.e. but the Hindu Race, Religion, Culture and belonging to the national fall out of the pale of real “national life” (quoted in Sumit Sarkar,2010)

Clearly their imagination of nation is privileging the numerically weak upper caste while excluding the rest.

According to Savarkar, the non Hindu peoples must conduct themselves vis a vis Hindu as following

“ the non hindus peoples in Hindusthan must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion , must entertain no idea but those of glorification of Hindu Race and Culture – must cease to be foreigner or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation , claiming nothing, deserving no privileges ,far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen’s right” (quoted in Sumit Sarkar,2010)

Once the enemy has been identified, the tasks of current generation are to return to roots and achieve that glory once again. So any concept of nation which is in variance from their narration is discredited and even rejected. Thangkhanlal Ngaihte,2014 succinctly summarises this idea in following line:

“like Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, sought to trace Indianness from the Vedic past, Aryan in race, Sanskritic in culture and language and Hindu in religion. In this conception, the north-east was excluded, territorially, culturally, racially (Savarkar 2005). This idea of Indianness was rejected by independent India, but it still dominates our cultural imaginings of this nation.”

While dealing the issue of handling “foreign races” who choose to live in Hindustan, M.S.Golwalkar proposed two solutions: first was what Nazi Germany did to “Semitic races-the Jews” and the second path was that of US where the

“emigrants have to get themselves naturally assimilated in the principal mass of population, the national Race, by adopting its culture and language and sharing in its aspirations...forgetting their foreign origin.....that is the only logical and correct solution” (quoted in Sumit Sarkar,2010)

This shows the racial underpinning of the concept of nation by these forces. Even the other nationalist used the racial categories like “Indo Aryan” and “Dravidian” to evoke the idea of nation during the pre independence period. This has historically started the process of “othering” which has also dissipated in larger public consciousness.

“For instance, unlike Indologist Max Müller who used these classification as linguistic categories, nationalists such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay used them as racial categories. Incidentally, nation, etymologically speaking, has its root in the Latin word “natio” which means “to be born.” The idea of race, too, invokes some notion of common ancestry. Nationalists often invoked this biological metaphor. Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, a 19th century nationalist intellectual, described Hindus as those “born from the womb” of Bharat Mata, and Muslims as her “adopted children.” This distinction between “biological” and “adopted” in some sense continues to mark the Muslims as the “other” in this country” (A. Bimol Akoijam, The Hindu, 9th Sept, 2014)

Such exclusive Brahmanical imagination of nation has resulted in alienating and subordinating ‘numerous others’. Hence, this ‘numerous others’ cannot be part of legitimate member of this larger “imagined community” called nation. It is in this spirit that sociologist Aloysius, G. (1998) has called this India has ‘nationalism with nation’. In case of people from North east this process of “othering” acquires the concrete form of racial discrimination. It is this process of othering where the “Indianness” of people from north east is continuously challenged and onus is bestowed on them to prove their loyalty toward this nation.

“And when this “racial other” is positioned as “backward” or “tribal” (anthropological subjects), it produces a judgment that converts the “difference” to being “inferior.” This informs the racist attitude towards the people from India’s Northeast. especially in the context of the Look East Policy. It speaks of an entity which is politico geographically South Asia but racially and culturally.” (A. Bimol Akoijam, The Hindu, 9th Sept, 2014)

Contrary to these views, BR Ambedkar had recognised the complexities of idea of nation in such diverse socio-cultural population steeped in caste hierarchies.

“I am of this opinion that in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion”(Ambedkar 1994:1216)

He identified the caste as one of factors that inhibited the emergence of nation,

“ how can people divide into several thousands of castes be a nation? ...the castes are anti national . in the first place because they generate jealousy and antipathy between caste and caste.Therefore we must overcome all these difficulties if we wish to become a nation in reality. For fraternity can be a fact only when there is a nation. Without fraternity, equality and liberty will not be deeper than coats of paints.”

Arguing that Hindus cannot be nation, he said that

“In every Hindu the consciousness that exist is the consciousness of his caste. That is the reason why hindu cannot be said to form a society or a nation” (Ambedkar, 1979,50-51)

He also recognised that building nation required shared experience and memories of past and the actual consent to live together in present. He had this opinion that India was always nation in making. He was against any form of imposition of homogenisation of difference in communities in name of building a nation.

“first of all there is no nation of Indians in real sense of the word. The nation does not exist, it is to be created, and i think it will be admitted that the suppression of distinct and separate community is not the method of creating a nation.” (Ambedkar 1991:412)

The idea of nation is evolving concept and always a site of perpetual contestation by diverse socio-economic groups.

Conclusion:

The practice of racism in India is therefore systemic and institutionalised. The ‘iron cage of social hierarchies’ created by social norms (legitimised by Brahmanical Hindu religion) has stunted the growth of capabilities of liberal and egalitarian ethos . In Brahmanical hindu social order and its vision of nation, the space for ‘oppressed other’ is subordinated and at best marginal. It is their narration of nation which precludes Dalits, religious and sexual Minorities and others. The very conception of Hindu nation is steeped in racial connotations and context. Though the notion of race as socio-political category has been discredited but the evocation of racial identities has suited the project of building Hindu nationalism. It is exclusivity of this imagination of nation where the majority of ‘others’ are viewed with suspicion and discontent. The presence of ‘alien other’ in this hierarchal social space is accommodated by this social body in from of perverse social interactions to maintain the structure of

this social space intact. This is act of self preservation of this social space. Until the systems of graded inequalities based on social identities are challenged and democratisation of social space and relation are initiated, the problem of racism will continue to manifest in multiple mutated forms and contents.

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