

India's ugly face of racism & stereotyping

Bengaluru: In the latest act of racial discrimination, an African woman was attacked by a vicious mob, beaten up on the road, disrobed and paraded while her car was torched. She happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, as earlier in the day an African male unknown to her had run over and killed a local of that area. The Bengaluru city Police Commissioner got the media raging in fumes when he termed the incident as 'road rage.'

The agonizing question is why did the mob disrobe the woman which tantamount to sexual assault and humiliation? I just cannot wrap my head around this on going phenomenon of disgrace in modern India, that most of the time when a woman is involved in an incident; the humanity of her sexuality is targeted!

All of this at a time when Bengaluru is hosting the Global Investors Meet (GIM) to lure foreign investment, only to welcome these prospects with racial discrimination prevailing in the land with violation of women's' rights toping the chart of atrocities against humanity.

Enquiring into the matter and other prevailing issues in respect of the African community in Bengaluru, a number people have stated that there's a large integer of African students in Bengaluru who indulge in drunkenness, drug peddling, public nuisance & violence and alleged prostitution. While the allegation may be true to some extent, my rebuttal to that was, even Indians are doing the same thing in that locality, so why target a particular peoples' group? The cops are of very little help because even the cops have stereotyped Africans as some of them are in India illegally. With such a notion, all Africans have been painted with the same brush and thus stereotyped which is unfair and unwelcoming.

Most Africans in Bengaluru are students and I empathise with them because as an Indian student in the West in the mid nineties, I faced racism, discrimination and antagonism.

This calls for cultural sensitization between the African community and Indians with programs for harmonious living.

But overall, it is not the African community alone that has been targeted as we have seen other foreign nationals attacked and beaten up. On the flip side, Indians have also been subject to racial discrimination in other countries, to the point of being victims of homicide. And, not the mention, that I have witnessed expats discriminating the ethnicity of Indians in our own mother land for the way we eat, walk, talk and conduct ourselves.

In regards to a small percentage of Indians, there's a conscious sociological and psychological, malignant form of discrimination towards Africans, based on negative past experience or misinformation. This is exactly what is happening to

Muslims in Europe that due to extremists, evangelical radicals and fanatics, people are confused as to what exactly is true Islam and because of this confusion, the community has been stereotyped.

The UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stated that “Defeating racism, tribalism, intolerance and all forms of discrimination will liberate us all, victim and perpetrator alike.”

According to the United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, “the term "racial discrimination" shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.”

A citizen of a respective country needs to understand that when an expatriate resides in their country, they bring along with them their inextricable culture and heritage with the hope that their new abode would welcome such integration. As expats progress in their new habitat, they tend to integrate themselves and feel at home – that is what social adaptation is all about, because humans are social animals. Citizens have an obligation to respect foreigners and enjoy their inculturation.

According to the United Nations convention, there is no distinction between the terms ethnic discrimination and racial discrimination as in many cultures, it is one and the same. Superiority based on racial dispensation is morally condemnable, socially unjust and treacherous as it leads to ethnic profiling. Discrimination can never be justified in any shape or form.

Anti-national or demographic phobias and prejudices are communicated with ethnic stereotypes and sometimes through ethnic jokes. In India, we crack Sardarji or Malayali jokes and ironically, these segments of people do very well for themselves – the joke is now on the joker!

But is stereotyping and racial discrimination something new or have we always targeted certain people based on their nationality or demography? Well, let's look at India: In India, we discriminate between North East Indians and the rest of India, we discriminate between North Indians and South Indians, we discriminate between one southern state and another, we discriminate between East Bangaluru and South Bangaluru and politicians feast on caste based politics, while we citizens feed them on a racial platter.

Nobel Peace Prize winner, Malala Yousafzai said it well “There should be no discrimination against languages people speak, skin colour, or religion.”

In conclusion, may the wise words of Babasaheb - Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of India's greatest social reformers be echoed “What are we having this liberty for? We are having this liberty in order to reform our social system, which is full of

inequality, discrimination and other things, which conflict with our fundamental rights.”