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Fight against Racism

KINJAL ASMI¹

ABSTRACT

This article talks about structural inequalities like racism which continues to haunt us even today. It's ironic because, in today's world, we speak of equality and dignity and respect, but at the same time, we have institutionalised such inequalities. Further, it talks about International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination which was celebrated recently to underline the importance of the fight against racism and how we can come together to make this world a better place. Some countries like South Africa and the United States of America have seen significant protests and the impact of racism. It serves as a reminder that we have a moral obligation to tackle racism in all its forms, and we should work together if we want to bring a change.

Keywords: *Racism, fight against racial inequality*

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was observed on March 21. The theme was “*Voices for action against racism.*” Which calls on everyone to listen closely, speak out loudly, and act decisively. It is a reminder that we should eliminate racism and establish an egalitarian society where everybody can live peacefully and with dignity and respect. Secretary-General António Guterres, in an address to the General Assembly, described the day as “both a day of recognition and an urgent call to action”. “Racism continues to poison institutions, social structures & everyday life in every society. Realizing the vision of a world free of racism & racial discrimination demands action every day, at every level, in every society,² he said.

Definition

Racism is defined as “a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human racial groups determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to dominate others or that a particular racial group is inferior to the others”.³

¹ Author is a student at Gujarat National Law University, India.

² UN News. 2022. *For equality, respect and dignity we must 'speak as one' against racism: Guterres.* [online] Available at: <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114252>> [Accessed 29 March 2022].

³ 2022. [online] Available at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism>> [Accessed 29 March 2022]

II. WHY IS IT CELEBRATED?

A massive gathering of South Africans assembled in the Sharpeville township on March 21, 1960, to oppose the cruel apartheid government. The protestors were specifically protesting the Pass regulations, which forced all indigenous Africans above the age of 16 to carry a passbook with them everywhere they went. This long-standing practice restricted and controlled movement by prescribing when, where, and how long black South Africans might stay in white areas. The demonstration began with a festive atmosphere, as thousands of unarmed South Africans gathered in peaceful protest. As the crowd grew ever-larger, however, long-simmering tensions rose to a boil. An initial police presence of fewer than 20 officers soon rose to nearly 150 as reinforcements were rushed in, joined by four armored personnel carriers and armed with various rifles and submachine guns. Scuffles broke out as the crowd, armed only with rocks, surged toward the police station. The police opened fire on the crowd, killing 69 people and injuring 180 more. Thus, to commemorate this day is celebrated.⁴

III. APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA

Apartheid is a term that signifies "separation." It was used to define the racial segregationist political and economic system imposed on non-whites by the white minority. Segregation based on race was not a new concept in South Africa, as racial legislation dates back to 1806. The Population Registration Act of 1950, however, considerably expanded it, dividing South Africans into four categories: Bantu (black South Africans), Coloured (mixed race), White, and Asian (Indian and Pakistani South Africans). The Act was enacted to keep white supremacy alive in the country. Apartheid had an impact on every facet of daily life. Marriage and sexual connections between white and non-white South Africans were prohibited by 1950, and a series of Land Acts made it more difficult to own land. Men and women of colour were forced to live in ten so-called "black homelands," where they were allowed to own enterprises. They needed permission to live and operate in specified 'white areas.' Hospitals, ambulances, transportation, and other public services were all segregated, and non-whites were barred from participating in government. The consequences for South Africa's non-white population were disastrous. The laws frequently split families. 3.5 million individuals were forcibly evicted from their homes between 1961 and 1994. Their land was sold for a fraction of its price, plunging non-whites into severe poverty and despair.

Those people caught disobeying apartheid could be imprisoned, fined, or whipped, while those

⁴ Gov.za. 2022. International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2022 | South African Government. [online] Available at: <<https://www.gov.za/EliminationofRacialDiscrimination2022>> [Accessed 29 March 2022].

suspected of being in a racially mixed relationship were punished under the Immorality Acts of 1927 and 1950. The majority of the 'guilty' couples were sentenced to prison. A black man or woman found without their 'dompas,' a passport comprising fingerprints, a photograph, personal information, and permission from the government to remain in a specific section of the country, might be imprisoned. The Pass Laws resulted in the arrest of over 250,000 black South Africans per year. One of the significant non-political campaigns was held in 1952 called the Defiance Campaign against the laws. For four months, over 8,000 volunteers disobeyed apartheid rules by refusing to carry passes, breaking curfews, and using public locations and services reserved for whites only. It was promoted by African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Indian Congress.

Nelson Mandela being President of the ANC Youth League and Volunteer-in-Chief of the 1952 Defiance Campaign, played a leading role in generating large-scale resistance to apartheid. He was sentenced to a 27-year prison sentence where he was subjected to appalling and inhumane conditions. But his efforts can never be forgotten.⁵

IV. SITUATION IN U.S

In the US, racism is a very prevalent event today. African Americans made up less than 14% of the population but accounted for more than 23% of just over 1,000 fatal shootings by the police in 2019. African Americans are arrested for drug abuse at a much higher rate than white Americans, even though surveys show drug use at similar levels for both groups. In 2018, African Americans represented almost a third of the country's prison population. Racial divisions in US society are also prevalent in areas such as housing, healthcare, and employment. In 2016, the typical net worth of a white family was found to be nearly ten times greater than that of a black family. Compared with white Americans, African Americans are almost twice as likely not to have medical insurance. Black residents were about nine times more likely than whites to be arrested for low-level offenses.

V. BLACK LIVES MATTER

The hashtag black lives matter was cofounded in 2013 as an online movement by three Black community organizers: Patrisse Khan Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi, to fight against racism. It happened after the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012. Zimmerman, a neighborhood-watch volunteer, had seen Martin walking in his neighborhood and called the police because

⁵ Historyextra.com. 2021. *Apartheid in South Africa | History, Start & End, Meaning, Facts*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/apartheid-facts-history-south-africa-dates-when-start-end-laws-nelson-mandela-affect-impact/>> [Accessed 29 March 2022].

he thought Martin looked “suspicious.” Although Zimmerman was told not to do anything, he followed Martin, got into an argument, and shot and killed him. When law enforcement arrived, Zimmerman claimed that he had been assaulted by Martin and fired in self-defense. Later in May 2020, the death of George Floyd created a lot of controversies. He was arrested in Minneapolis for allegedly using counterfeit money to buy a pack of cigarettes. He died after a white police officer kneeled on his neck for nearly nine minutes while pleading that he could not breathe. The death of George Floyd triggered a lot of protests and ignited a sense of unity condemning unjust killings of Black people by police. ⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

This day remarks the importance of acknowledging racism and believing that it continues to exist today. Although it makes no sense to judge people on their color, caste, or creed, we must accept that society continues to believe us and associate these characteristics with our capabilities. It is preposterous to discriminate against people on their colour, caste, etc. In his commencement address at Howard University, Lyndon B. Johnson said, “To this end, equal opportunity is essential, but not enough, not enough. Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with and the neighbourhood you live in--by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man.” These lines cannot be overemphasized. Article 14 of the Indian constitution prohibits discrimination based on caste, colour, or creed. These systematic inequalities will continue to exist if we don’t counter with our logical thinking and rationality. It’s high time people realise that colour is not the reflection of our virtue. In the end, the only thing that matters is goodness. Thus, we should collectively eliminate racial discrimination.

Quoting Marian Anderson,

“None of us is responsible for the complexion of his skin. This fact of nature offers no clue to the character or quality of the person underneath.”

⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica. n.d. Black Lives Matter | Definition, Founders, Goals, History, & Influence. [online] Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Lives-Matter>> [Accessed 29 March 2022].