

Universal Hinduphobia or Clanging Bells

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A couple of days ago, a 27-year-old Indian student, working at a gas station at night was shot dead by an unidentified gunman in Dallas, USA. Another shooter had 'Nuke India' etched on his bullets. In July 2024, the Diaspora Engagement Division of the MEA said that over the preceding 3 years, 1,622 Indians died in accidents, 686 due to occupational hazards, 1,736 from suicide, and 136 from violence and murder. The last two are worrisome as they include several racial hate crimes. The same report mentioned that in 6 months of 2024, 11 Indian and Indian-origin students died due to shooting, kidnappings, suicides and so on. This included the much publicised murder of a 25-year Indian student working at a convenience store in West Georgia whose skull was smashed by a hammer up to fifty times. Around the same time, two Indian students were found dead in mysterious circumstances in their Connecticut home.

Exactly a year later, an Indian media gave gory details of 10 Indian students who were killed under a host of circumstances-- from campus brawls to mental health issues, substance abuse or the sheer misfortune of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. This is not a mortuary report and not all such deaths are acts of racialism, but seasoned Americans (many of Indian origin) swear that there is an unprecedented undercurrent of racial hatred directed at Indians -- that was previously targeted at Blacks and Hispanics. Indians in the US were always considered a brainy mid-upper strata group who stayed out of trouble, so what went wrong?

Studies place the median income of Indian Americans at the very top, at \$100,500, while that of white Americans is way below at \$ 59,900, Hispanic/Latin Americans are at \$ 43,000 and African Americans at the bottom, with just \$35,000. By the way, Japanese Americans earn \$72,300 and Chinese Americans get \$69,100 -- both considerably below Indians. while Pakistanis earn much and Bangladeshis get exactly half of what Indians earn in America. Though not a single Indian, except Mamdani, could muster the guts to speak up against Trump's lunacy, clearly demonstrating that dollars matter more -- their relative prosperity sings many hearts, even non-white ones. This heartburning is institutionalised into Trump's MAGA (Make America Great Again) that stokes hate against all non-white immigrants. Jealousy led easily to hatred ("kick them out!") and Indians are almost overtaking the native Black and Hispanic Americans in the voodoo pins/needles 'kill list' of both uneducated rednecks and educated white supremacists.

In 2023, the year before Trump 2.0, Indian enrolment in US universities rocketed to 135% as compared to the previous year, but the Indian American community had also become more conscious of hate crimes. Many Indian deaths are clustered around East and Midwest universities, especially in Cleveland in Ohio, Illinois and Indiana. 2024 was the year when racial anger was stoked by Republicans, even as Trump cheered on, as this is the very hate on which Rightwing populists ride to power -- everywhere. The rise in killing of Indians in 2024 can now be understood

more clearly -- even though it is known that gun violence is a way of life in the US. Other than killings, Indians, especially students, face bias-motivated incidents, hate crimes, discrimination, and tons of racial slurs and vandalism, like never before. In fact, Indian-American Democrat Congressman Thanedar told Hindu leaders and organisations clearly that there is a growing "Hinduphobia" in the United States. This is partly true and we will see the why of this a little later, but then it does not explain the harassment of, injuries to and the murder of Indian Muslims and Sikhs in the US.

It is not only America where this anti-Indian torment is so visible. Data released by the Indian External Affairs Ministry (MEA) has clearly shown that Canada is way ahead in the list of Indians killed (many by other Indians, surely) and the UK, Russia and Australia are high on the list. In July 2024, MEA informed parliament that 633 Indian students died abroad in the preceding 5 years, out of which 108 were in the US, 58 in the UK, 57 in Australia and 37 were in Russia. MEA further stated (on the basis of incomplete data) that in 2024, 13,35,878 Indians were pursuing higher studies abroad as against 6,85,097 just 6 years ago. And, they were spread over 108 countries of the world. The US State Department records show over 330,000 Indian students enrolled in US higher education institutions in 2024, though this year, the number is bound to fall -- mercifully or otherwise. Canada also hosted 400,000 Indian students in 2024, despite all the problems that Modi had with Trudeau -- according to the Indian MEA.

We need to wake up to this Indian-bashing issue and take remedial measures before it is too late, as this violence is more widespread than ever before. In Australia, a 25 year old Indian Sikh student, was mercilessly assaulted recently by a group that kept hurling racist abuse and left him unconscious, to die -- at a parking lot in Adelaide. A week later, another young Indian-origin man was attacked by a group of teenagers in Melbourne, that hacked him with a machete, leaving him with several injuries, including a nearly severed hand. One remembers how a rash of violence against Indian students had broken out in Australia in the 2008-10 period, when the Australian High Commission had to issue a notification saying that Australia was perfectly safe for Indian students and issued a notice on 1st July 2009 that the death rate of (foreign students) was only 0.15 per 1,000 population, much less than Australian students' death rates. Next year, during an official visit to Australia, some explained quite candidly what issues troubled a section of unrestrained Australians into targeting Indian students. First was that India students appeared more prosperous with their laptops and gadgets, which bugged a muscular section of Australian students. Secondly, they hardly mixed with Australians and other international students and appeared mortally scared to eat together as they carried their taboo against beef or even non-vegetarian food to extremes -- which no one else seemed to appreciate. They hardly ever participated in 'Aussie' outdoor games or tried to bond and were extremely ghetto-bound. These are universal truths applicable elsewhere, but while co-students in many other countries could choose to ignore these Indian traits, often rather snootily, Australians were more direct and swarthy in getting their disgust clear to Indians -- through fisticuffs, or worse.

We get the picture, but these complaints are everywhere. By the way, the Russians are a step ahead of frank Australians and make it clear to Indians that your food taboos be damned, but your abstinence from divine vodka is a sin that needs to be punished with severe thrashing.

During my days at two well-known universities in the UK, I was often asked by professors and fellow students at the college bars and pubs why my countrymen (and women) -- many from the elite administrative service -- abjured their company. I guess NCERT has to put in a chapter on how to mix with one's hosts abroad and repeat a dozen times "When in Rome, do as the Romans do"

But, when we study violence against Indians in the UK, it is not the student community that gets their goat, for their university towns have seen them come and behave in myriad ways for some 160 years. The angst is against immigrants as such, even those who are second generation Brits, with perfectly unintelligible accents. For they are brown and black and much too many. The situation is getting hostile as, just a fortnight ago, police had a terrible time in London scuffling and hand-fighting some 110,000 anti-migrant protesters. The heat is quite scalding for sure, with immigration and work permit laws being tightened more and more. A social media post of an Indian graduate seen tearing up some paper on stage during his UK graduation ceremony, amid applause, went viral a week ago -- as it conveyed protest against a bleak future in Britain.

The fact that most Indians kept to themselves and the majority stayed away from community events and public participation in their host countries remains a universal grievance. Besides, the less cosmopolitan ones loved to ghetto together and are/were in constant terror about what they were offered lest their lips touch prohibited food. The better educated and more integrated lot of Indians have no such problems -- many gorge on Ribeye steaks. But this does not impress the mugger and hate-monger among the fair-skinned KKK who rule America and several western nations.

Three major factors are playing their role in the obvious display of universal anti-Indianism, if one may term it as such. Though a class of lesser educated but industrious Indians do manual labour in the Middle East, and still clean toilets, drive taxis or run petty neighbourhood stores in western countries, educated Indians have long been respected in the Western world, for their contribution to technology, education, health, business and as CEOs of mega corporations. But, unlike Jews and Muslims who have had running battles with western civilisation (though one coterie is literally running the US by holding indebted American Presidents by the scruff of their necks), Hindus and Buddhists have always been viewed as peaceful and non-disturbing. But reports of aggressive Hindu assertion and endless attacks on Christians (and Muslims) in India have disturbed people in the West, even those who last entered Church during their baptism and never thereafter. Then, the large and ostentatious temples that the mercantile classes, especially from Gujarat, have started building everywhere is an ethnic assertion on foreign soil that is often rather disturbing. Some viewed them with alarm, like hectic mosque building activity. Public celebrations of Hindu festivals have increased and become more flashy, supremely over-confident and much too noisy. This does not auger well in a foreign country and not every Western plaza is as tolerant as Times Square of New York. This explosive public assertiveness of Hindus, especially during

festivals, called the 'Risen Hinduism' is surely counter-productive in many foreign countries and is triggering negative emotions.

The mushrooming of Hindu organisations abroad that kept flexing their muscles -- as some had donated well during American elections -- could have been more discreet. California retaliated with its anti-caste bill, which hurt upper caste Hindus a lot. It let the gas out of those who felt that the world was expected to accept the new swagger of Hindus as they have actually fallen for the marketing slogan, "India is Vishwaguru" that has been drilled into Bhakts everywhere. Then, as one has been pointing out repeatedly, no visiting PM or President summons stadium loads of his/her countrymen (herded in, often with great difficulty and expense) to get his highs from their 'rapturous' cheers. This is not on -- as it splits loyalty and one has a queasy feeling that Modi's Houston Tamasha (Abki Baar Trump Sarkar farce in September 2019) and the massive Colosseum type drama called Namaste Trump in February 2020 at Narendra Modi Stadium (without blushing) did more harm than good. Trump's ego is not only more gargantuan but totally demented.

Just to understand the implication -- what would Indians feel if a Sheikh Hasina or a Mohammad Yunus held a huge rally in Delhi with all resident and legitimate Bangladeshis? It's just not done but Modi has done it scores of times -- spending billions to hear their music of his name. So, the growing "Hinduphobia" that Congressman Thanedar talks off appears to have been triggered with a lot of Indian effort. A pompous undiplomatic foreign minister earned kudos from Hindu fundamentalists by ticking off the west (even as the US is his second home) and justifying punching far above the country's weight-- only to face unprecedented diplomatic isolation after 'Operation Sindoor'. Skinheads and stormtroopers kept bashing minorities in India with aplomb, while MEA's not-too-endearing spokespersons routinely abuse, quite roughly, all foreign critics, well-wishers and critical reports.

The cards are now laid bare on the table -- with the hope that we take all bulls, in India and abroad, by their horns before they gore us too deep.