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Black girl in Bengaluru stripped by 'racist' India

BY [GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN](#) on FEBRUARY 11, 2016 in [ASIA TIMES NEWS & FEATURES, INDIA](#)

Long ago in June 1893, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a young advocate then, was on his way from Durban to Pretoria by train. He had a first class ticket and sat in a first class coach, but was thrown out of the compartment at Pietermaritzburg station after a European had objected to the presence of a non-white. That night as Gandhi stayed shivering in the station's waiting room, he decided he would fight racial inequality, which he did during his two-decade stay in South Africa.

After returning to India, Gandhi began his battle against all forms of racism in his country as well.

Sadly, it is Gandhi's India today which is brazenly racist in a variety of ways. There is racism against caste, against religion, against the poor and against color.

Bengaluru (formerly Bangalore), once idolized as a beautiful garden city and as a pensioner's paradise and, in the recent past, as the country's most cosmopolitan metropolis and Silicon Valley, has turned out to be frighteningly racist.

Recently, a Tanzanian girl student was humiliated on the streets of Bengaluru in broad daylight in the presence of policemen. These 'men in khaki' looked on as the hapless girl was stripped and paraded on the roads by a mob, enraged over an earlier incident in which a Sudanese student had accidentally run his car over a woman.

(As an aside, may I point out that Bollywood actor Salman Khan, who drank himself silly and drove his fancy vehicle over sleeping pavement

dwellers in Mumbai/Bombay about 14 years ago — killing one of them and wounding others — still walks free, having managed to stay out of jail because of his star status and through reportedly unlawful methods. No mob has gone after him. Why? Is it because he seduces millions through the magic of movies or because he has money and muscle power to ride through any storm? Or is it because he is not black?)

Much as all this may sound alarming, Bengaluru has got itself the unenviable tag of racist. In 2012, bloody riots in India's north-eastern state of Assam led to a chain of events in other parts of the country. Thousands of men and women from Assam and other north-eastern states — who



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can be easily distinguished by their physical features which are different from those of people from other parts of India — ran away from Bengaluru in scenes that resembled the mass exodus during India's independence and partition (the Indian subcontinent was divided into India and Pakistan) in 1947.

Hundreds of north-easterners work in Bengaluru as they do in other part of India. Even though they are very much citizens of this country, they face hostile discrimination. They are often ridiculed and rebuked by other Indians — including policemen and administrators. Addressed as "chinky" because of their mongoloid features and pale skin, the men and women from the northeast — who have left their home and hearth to earn a livelihood in places like Bengaluru — have not been at peace.

It is not different for blacks from Africa who come to India mostly for university education and medical treatment that they find unsatisfactory back home. The recent molestation of a Tanzanian girl is but one of a string of incidents against blacks — and these have been happening not just in Bengaluru.

The western Indian state of Goa saw the murder of a Nigerian man in 2013, and this provoked a huge outcry by other Nigerians. The government then began to deport Nigerians. Like the Bengaluru incident which led to a diplomatic crisis between India and Tanzania, the Goa episode caused a similar uproar after the deportation of Nigerians and "cancer" remarks against them by a couple of ministers.

Angry over this horrible comment, Jacob Nwadibia, an administrative *attache* of the Nigerian High Commission in New Delhi, retorted: "There are only 50,000 Nigerians living in India, but there are over a million Indians living in Nigeria. Thousands of Indians living there will be thrown out on the streets if the forcible eviction of Nigerians in Goa does not stop".

Back to Bengaluru in 2013. An Al-Jazeera report had this to say about a Chadian national who regarded Bengaluru as his second home. "Wandoh Timothy, 44, from Chad, came face to face with the hatred on the streets of Bangalore a few months ago. Living in India for the past 10 years and married to an Indian, he had got into an argument with two bike riders while on his way to pick up his three-year-old daughter, Sya, from school.

"A mob joined the two riders and assaulted Timothy in full public view. 'It was three in the afternoon, and though I am known in the area, no one came to my rescue,'" Timothy said.

"His compatriots said racism towards Africans in India was a daily routine. If not physical assaults, most of them have had to endure attitudes ranging from curiosity to irrational phobia to being treated unfairly.

"My first day in college, I felt like a tourist attraction. It actually took many students a few days to even come up and talk to me," Fred Kigozi, 25, from Uganda said then."

India, which is now competing with China for business ventures in Africa, must pull up its socks and stamp out racism towards blacks from the continent, and towards north-eastern men and women as well, who have the right, as fellow Indians do, to live and work wherever they want to. And Tanzanians and Nigerians and other blacks, who travel to India mostly for university education or medical treatment, must be made welcome here. It is imperative that they carry home pleasant memories after their short stay in India. Otherwise, trade and commerce will suffer.

A cartoonist quipped, "Why do Indians treat white visitors with respect while blacks are harassed and shamed — like the young Tanzanian girl was in Bengaluru? Why, because Indians can be downright racist. Has any white woman in India been treated like the girl from Tanzania?"

Gautaman Bhaskaran is an author, commentator and movie critic, who has worked with The Statesman in Kolkata and The Hindu in Chennai for 35 years. He now writes for the Hindustan Times, the Gulf Times and The Seoul Times.

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