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## Racism in vaccine policy of the UK

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*The concept of Race comes after the division of many historical facts and it is further divided into many groups and is the part of history, and is studied on a very broad basis, but racism is the narrow concept that has been created by the white and Europeans to show that they are superior to the “slave” they brought from Africa and later to the people of different ethnic origin that live in their country. Racism has been developed for centuries, and it still prevails but its dimensions have changed during COVID time especially when developed countries have made the vaccine and are using them as “Emergency Use” in their country and sending it to developing countries as a “COVAX” program of WHO, UK and India are the who made their vaccines with the collaboration of different pharmaceutical bodies. UK’s racist behavior is seen when they made guidelines related to Indian travelers, especially those who have been vaccinated by Covishield, a vaccine that Serum Institute of India and AstraZeneca (a British-Swedish multinational pharmaceutical and biotechnology company) has made. That behavior has invited many criticisms from Indian counterparts stating that this guideline made by UK High Commission is “racial” and needs to be scraped out.*

**Keywords:** race, blacks, and ethnic minorities, north east Indians.

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### INTRODUCTION

“There is no such thing as race. None. There is just human race- scientifically and anthropologically”.

- Toni Morrison

If Toni Morrison (Noble Prize winner for Literature) thinks that racism is made up term by the “white people or Europeans” and only the term “race” exists. Here she believes that only humans are superior. Now the question arises that what is the human race or race is and how it is different from racism? The term “race” focuses on the understanding of how humans shared physical or social qualities into categories generally viewed as distinct by society. In the definition of race, it is nowhere mentioned that it means differences between colour, ethnicity, or nationality. Then how come race is being associated with racism. Racism is often associated with abuse or harassment, making racial jokes, or taking their racial name-calling (e.g., Northeast people often called Chinese) or excluding them from group activities.

The definition of racism according to the Australian Human Rights Commission is, Racism includes prejudice, discrimination against someone because of their colour, ethnicity, or national origin. From the definition of racism, it is very much clear that race and racism are two distinct things but still people by large associate both the term as one, the former being the positive form, and the latter being the made-up concept of the society especially by whites or the Europeans. Racism prevents people from other races to enjoy and live with dignity because they are not part of the superior race.

### **RACISM DURING COVID - 19**

It is very much complex to understand the notion of the dominance of white people in respect of different ethnic people because their politicians and bureaucracies which are generally white and are the ones who make laws related to their citizens which also include blacks and people from other ethnic origins<sup>1</sup>. The situation is even more complex if we see the population percentage of the USA and UK where 14.1% of the population in the USA comprises of blacks and peoples of other ethnic groups whereas in the UK 13% of the population is of different ethnicity.

Today, the issue is back at the centre of the national debate, this time amid shifting attitudes and heightened expectations that are demanding more than sympathetic rhetoric and safe

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<sup>1</sup> Teun A Van Dijk, *Political Disclosure and Racism: Describing others in Western Parliament* (1997)

steps from the political leaders. The two unexpected episodes that added fuel to the fire in the movement against racism are i) Coronavirus and ii) the Killing of George Floyd<sup>2</sup>. These events especially the killing of George Floyd by a white American police officer have highlighted the inequality in the most powerful country and outrages many protests against discrimination happening against blacks and other racial minorities around the world. Episodes of racism or racial discrimination are not new to the UK, but COVID- 19 pandemic has increased the gap especially in health care services between whites and blacks. According to one of the BBC reports, Dr. Halima Begum, Chief Executive of the Runnymede Trust (race equality think tank), said she felt “deeply, massively let down” by the reports and the governments did not have confidence have of blacks and minority ethnic groups. These show that racism has been institutionally rooted despite repeated denial by the government. Dr. Halima Begum also mentions that the reports presented by the government fail to acknowledge the “suffering” caused to the blacks and ethnic minority community. Health care service is universal and everyone irrespective of nationality they have the right to access health care services but still, it is quite visible from the data and reports that many blacks and minority people have died due to lack of medical services. According to The Institution of Fiscal, a higher proportion of people from minority background lives in the area harder hit by COVID- 19. Reports also state that various blacks, Asians, and ethnic minority groups are experiencing higher death rates. Zabida Haque, the deputy director of Runnymede Trust, also describes that the reports are very much alarming. She says that “we cannot ignore the racial discrimination and inequality has grown like in providing housing facility to lower Socio- economic people in the UK. These factors are very much important but are not considered by the government in modeling COVID -19 risk factors. Even when it comes to unemployment during the COVID time; blacks, and the ethnic minority are the ones who suffered the most by losing their jobs in comparison to the white population. This statement can be better understood by an illustration if I am an Indian or any black working in the UK and during the COVID times my boss ask me and my other colleagues (from other ethnic minorities) to write an English test so that he can choose who is good for his company’s growth and when I protested that this test is totally

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<sup>2</sup> Dan Balz, ‘The Politics of race are shifting, and politicians are struggling to keep pace’ (*The Washington Post*, 2020) < <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/politics/race-reckoning/> > accessed 09 October 2021

unacceptable to the hard work I have given to the company in all these years, his simple answer was either write the test or you are free to leave but the test was not for the whites working in the office. This illustration shows how there was racial discrimination done to the people to the ethnic minority during hard times like COVID -19. All the data and reports show us how blacks and the ethnic minority have been facing discrimination in receiving health care services during the pandemic and the death rate is high among this group of people if we compare to the white population. Many reports have shown that the police and justice system has failed to proper measures to support blacks and ethnic minorities and have been known to delay or fail to effectively address complaints and reports of hate crime with the addition of the COVID pandemic.

### **RACISM IN UK AND INDIA**

“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends,” says Martin Luther King during the civil rights movement in the context of America’s silence.

UK and India are very much on the same footing when it comes to racial discrimination, India north-eastern citizens are being discriminated against in many places of the country, they are being called as ‘Chinses’ or ‘Nepali’, being from the same country they are being discriminated by their people. There are many cases in recent times where people from the northeast were being told to empty their rooms by their landlords, a similarly happened in May’20 in Ahmedabad where a landlord asked his tenet to evacuate their rooms without giving them any reasons(those girls were from north-eastern), these kind of attacks from various parts of the country are on these people were ‘harassed, attacked and traumatized’ and were called as “coronavirus”. The Centre for Criminology and Victimology at National Law University, Delhi conducted the study under the aegis of the ICSSR, Delhi, on the prevalence of the hate crimes against the people of the northeast in six metropolitan cities, people from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram says that they face racial discrimination in terms of rental accommodations, transportation. The study concluded that there is deep-rooted hatred for the northeastern people in these cosmopolitan cities. The study also quotes a report from Right and Risk Analysis Group (RAG) that there is an increase in racial discrimination among

these people between February and March 2020. The highest percentage of discrimination has been seen in Mumbai (44.7%), 78% of northeast people think that (according to the report) that their physical and especially their facial appearance is the main reason for the prejudice that happens to them because for Indians in these metropolitan cities northeast people does not fit into being Indian, they consider then to be 'Chinese'. This oppression needs to deal with legal policing, looking at the seriousness of the matter in 2014 government set up the M.P. Bezbarurh Committee, which recommended amendment on IPC and creates new offenses under section 153C and 509A which deals with the comments, gestures, and acts intended to insult a member of a particular racial group. The report also suggested the offenses should make 'gender-neutral', 'cognizable', and 'non-bailable' offenses with the imprisonment extendable up to three years or five years with the fine. In 2014 itself Supreme Court in its judgment of *Karma Dorji & Others vs Union of India & Others* made several recommendations to prevent racial discrimination and to monitor racial hatred and violence against the people of the northeast but that does not seem to be followed says the report. Looking at the scenario in India how the people of the northeast are being treated the same is the situation in the UK where blacks, ethnic minorities are being discriminated against. Many teenagers in the UK experience discrimination from their peers and teachers, in schools' Muslim girls, discourage not to wear headscarves and are sometimes headscarf is being pulled by their fellow pupils<sup>3</sup>. Many reports say that racial discrimination cases are not being adequately solved by the teachers and school authority, even the punishments are not being distributed when racial incidents happen. In a recent case of the University of Oxford, where an Indian student Rashmi Samant<sup>4</sup> step down from Oxford University Student's Union election though she won the elections making her first Indian Woman President, but she become an object of criticism and trolling over her old social media posts which branded her 'racist' due to which she has to resign from her post. This is one such case that came into the limelight about racial

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<sup>3</sup> Misha Ketchell, 'The racism faced by teenager in UK: new researcher' (*The Conversation*, 2020) <<https://theconversation.com/the-racism-faced-by-teenagers-in-the-uk-new-research-142596>> accessed 09 October 2021

<sup>4</sup> Vijaita Singh, 'India to raise racism with U.K., says Jaishankar' (*The Hindu*, 2021) <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-to-take-up-with-uk-racism-issues-when-required-jaishankar/article34072325.ece>> accessed 12 October 2021

discrimination in one of the world's most prestigious colleges, but many such cases are not being reported to authorities. The situation is even more grim in job opportunities, blacks and south Asian faces shocking discrimination in the labour market at levels which remained unchanged since the late 1960s, research has found. Studies conducted by the expert at the Centre for Social Investigation at Nuffield College, University of Oxford, shows that blacks and the ethnic minority must send 60% to 70% more job application to get a response as compared to their white counterpart of British origin. Dr. Zubaida Haque, the deputy director of the race equality think tank Runnymede, described the findings as shocking. She says these about reports that "it's not just covert racism or unconscious bias that we need to worry about; it's overt and conscious racism, where applicants are getting shortlisted based on their ethnicity and/or name". Racism is only happening in the offline world; it has penetrated deep into social media making the matter even worse. Social media has no such mechanism to stop the spread of hate comments towards the minority community, they simply have the option to block, report, or turn off the comment sections, is this enough for the person facing racial discrimination? Online forms of racial discrimination also include what are commonly known as "cloaked sites" that are created to spread misinformation about the history and culture of certain racial/ethnic groups. One example is "martinlutherking.org" which was created to disparage Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement all while appearing to be a legitimate site. There are many incidents in the UK where football players have to face racist comments over social media. The issue of racial discrimination in India and the UK is almost similar but the only difference is that racial discrimination in the UK has been happening for a very long time.

### **VACCINE POLICY OF UK FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVELLERS**

When India was hit by the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of COVID-19 in April and May, travel restriction was put, and many countries have put India on the different lists so that they can shortlist the travelers coming from India so that they can go for compulsory quarantine. The UK has also put India under the Red list and travelers coming from India need to go through 10 days of compulsory quarantine and must go through 2 COVID tests. When the restriction was eased and students and travelers wished to go back to the UK, the authority was not providing visa as the UK has

not yet approved Covishield which has been manufactured by Serum Institute of India and AstraZeneca ( British- Swedish pharmaceutical company) and Covaxin (Bharat Biotech is developed in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) - National Institute of Virology (NIV) as they put the reason that these vaccines are only approved in India for 'Emergency Use' and yet has to be approved by WHO for emergency use in other countries. According to the guideline released by the UK authorises stating that from October 4, the U.K. will recognize passengers vaccinated in the U.S., the U.K. and Europe, and 17 other jurisdictions (16 countries and Taiwan), which do not include India. UK High Commission said that they still have to decide over the "vaccine certification of Government of India" which indicates that UK authority has yet to decide whether to include India in the list of recognized vaccine administrators.

London has cleared 18 nations, including Canada, Denmark, Antigua, and Barbuda, for the 'Green List', which will allow doubly vaccinated travellers from these countries to fly to the U.K. without quarantine requirements. The current rules and the recognition of Covishield mean that a traveller from the 'Green List' countries can use the Covishield vaccine before flying to the U.K., but an Indian traveller from India will still have to undergo quarantine lasting 10 days despite using the same vaccine, this shows that UK High Commission still not confident in letting Indian travellers in UK borders just because Indian vaccine is not as efficient as compared to the vaccines develop by USA or UK itself. According to the latest announcement, the UK- approved vaccines will have to be administered in 14 days before traveling to the UK. On 8<sup>th</sup> August Britain has removed India from the 'red list' and listed to 'amber list' under which Indian travellers has been not required for hotel or institutional quarantine but must be under home quarantine for 10 days, till September there is no changes in India's position in 'amber list'. Aren't this practice of letting only Indian travellers going through home quarantine 'discriminatory'? it is, all the practice of not approving the Indian vaccines seems to be discriminatory because UK authorities don't believe in the efficiency of the Indian vaccine, the UK authorities considered the fully vaccinated adults to be 'unvaccinated', when it has been administered to 94,70,10,175 adults till 10<sup>th</sup> of October.

This shows a lack of trust in the efficiency and discriminatory practice of the UK by not allowing Indian travellers to go through without going under any compulsory quarantine but letting other travellers from countries that administered Indian vaccine. This is very much mean and discriminatory. Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla stated that India could impose “reciprocal measures” if the U.K. continued with its policy on Covishield. He termed it “discriminatory”. He also mentions that if India will also take reciprocal measures against the travellers coming from the UK if their issues are not being addressed by 4<sup>th</sup> October. Harsh Vardhan Shringal also stated that "The basic issue is that there is a vaccine, Covishield, which is a licensed product of the UK company, manufactured in India of which we have supplied five million doses to the UK at the request of the government of the UK. Still, the UK authority has not made any changes and continues its discriminatory practices. These all practices draw lots of from opposition also Former union ministers and Congress leaders Jairam Ramesh, Anand Sharma, and Shashi Tharoor have slammed the UK's travel policy, with Ramesh saying it "smacks of racism". These all show how the UK is not letting Indians into its border is one of the finest examples of racial discrimination in one of the toughest times.

## CONCLUSION

Racism is one of the major problems in the current world and has increased with the COVID pandemic all across the globe. Racism needs to be stopped but it is not a one-day thing or protesting on social media that blacks life matters, if it matters for anyone it should be from inside them that they need to bring some changes, everyone is human and everyone has equal opportunities. No race is superior, it's just the made-up concept, which needs to be stopped. People are talking about racism for centuries, but are not talking about how it should be stopped. We have to admit that racism is a problem and that it's a psycho-social problem. There are a few ways through which one can stop racism: one can discuss, the debate about racism, racial discrimination in public without any fear of anyone. Another way is that one needs to accept that everyone is equal and should believe in character, and not in the skin colour of a person. Racism is one of the most revolting things within the vicinity of humanity.