



Class: 10ABC

**Political Science
Assignment**

Date:

Are even more racist than the Aussies!

The attacks on Indians in Australia have once again raised the ugly head of racism. Once again India is caught up in the midst of a racist storm. A while ago, the Big Brother controversy launched Shilpa Shetty as an international anti-racism icon from India. This is entirely appropriate as Indians are arguably the biggest targets of racism in the world. And they are targeted not just by unlettered British jobs or Australian thugs, but first and foremost, by their own compatriots. It's because we are so racist ourselves that we are so quick to react to a racist slur: it takes a racist to catch a racist. And our racism is colour-coded in black-and-white terms: white is intrinsically superior and desirable; black is inferior and undesirable.

In the Indian colour scheme of things, black is far from beautiful. The colloquial word for a black person of African origin is 'habshi', an epithet as offensive as the American 'nigger', both terms derived from the days of the slave trade.

For all India's official championing of the anti-apartheid crusade in South Africa's erstwhile white regime, north India at least is steeped in colour prejudice - ask any African student who's had a taste of Delhi's campus life. For the north Indian, fair is lovely, as those abominably tasteless TV commercials keep proclaiming: Don't get sunburnt, use skin whitening creams, or you'll end up dark and no one will marry you. (When did you last see a matrimonial ad seeking an 'attractive, dark-complexioned life partner'?)

Why is dark literally beyond the pale for so many of us? Is it an atavistic throwback to the supposed superiority of 'white' Aryans vis-à-vis the 'non-white' original inhabitants of the subcontinent? Is it the result of 250 years of white rule under the British? Is a pale skin, as against a deep tan, a testimonial to social rank, segregating those who don't have to toil under the sun from those who do? Is it an amalgam of all these?

Whatever the reason, 'chitti chamri' (fair skin) is a passport to fawning social acceptance — which might partly explain why an increasing number of Caucasians look for assignments in India, be it as MNC executives or bartenders in 5-star hotels.

Our racism is largely, but not exclusively, based on colour. Caste is India's unique contribution to the lexicon of racial bigotry. Whether 'caste' - a result of cultural and social segmentation - can legitimately be conflated with 'race' - with its genetic and physiological underpinnings - is a matter of academic debate. However, as only too many horror stories testify, the average rural Dalit fares worse on the human-rights scale than her 'kafir' counterpart in the worst days of South African apartheid.

Caste apart, real or imagined ethnic traits compound our racism. People from the northeast are said to have 'Chinky' (Chinese) eyes and are routinely asked if they eat dogs. Even in so-called 'mainstream' India we sub-divide ourselves with pejoratives: 'Panjus', whose only culture is agriculture; stingy 'Marrus'; mercenary 'Gujjus' who eat 'heavy snakes' for tea; lazy, shiftless 'Bongs'; 'Madrasis', who all live south of the Vindhya and speak a funny 'Illay-po' language. In our ingrained provincialism is our much-vaunted and illusory unity.

No wonder we can't stand racism. It reminds us disquietingly of the face we see in our own mirror.

Read the above article as well as the lesson on Gender Caste and Communalism in your textbooks and answer the following questions in your homework books.

1. Do you agree with the above article that in many aspects of our day today life we practice discrimination? Discuss with relevant examples. 5
2. With your understanding of politics in Sri Lanka, what repercussions in your opinion, can these divides have on the shaping of politics in India in the coming future? 5