

Racial Discrimination in Timeri Murari's *Enduring Affairs*

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Abstract

Today, racism is an international issue that it is existing in humankind. In the world, people are still discriminated by language, age, religion, caste, gender, nationality, region, race and etc., Hundreds of men and women have been affected with it and some people take action against racism. Everyone should be equal in the nation, but immigrants and minority community members are insulted by colour. Few people still trust that they are superior by the colour, it is very unfortunate. Some literary writers such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Richard Wright, Mulkraj Anand, Chetan Bhagat, and Chitra Banerjee have dealt with the racism in their writings. In this array, Timeri N. Murari portrays racial discrimination in his novel *Enduring Affairs* (1990). He is an Indian novelist, playwright, essayist and journalist. *Enduring Affairs* is the story of the two youths; Chellapthimalai Venugopalan Charlie, Home Minister of Tamil Nadu, and Dexter Franklin Prescott III Empire in America. Charlie goes to America for his education. There he is discriminated by his colour and nationality. Similarly, some black people also face the same problems in America by white people. This paper is going to deal with how black people are discriminated by white people in America with particular reference to Timeri N. Murari's *Enduring Affairs*.

Key words: Racism, discrimination, colour, immigrant, sex, black

Introduction

From pre-independence to today, society has gone through development in various fields. In spite of massive population growth, living standards, education, transport, industrialization, and communication have grown positively. But we can't say that there is complete equality in the society. Discrimination is a universal phenomenon that has been studied from various perspectives at national and international levels. In the world, the people are still discriminated by language, religion, caste, gender, age, nationality, region, race and etc. Sometimes, they are discriminated by their social status rich or poor based on class. Traces of discrimination can be found even at home, the workplace, school and college and social gatherings. Richard T. Schaefer, Professor of Sociology, DePaul University says in his book *Encyclopaedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society* (2008) that, "Discrimination is the denial of opportunities and equal rights to individuals and groups because of prejudice or for other arbitrary reason" (p. 391).

The word 'race' emerged in the sixteenth century in English from the Italian *razza* and France *rasse*; it refers to a group of individuals, animals, or plants connected by common origin or descent. Bill Ashcroft mentions in his book *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (2000) that "'Race' is first used in the English language in 1508 in a poem by William Dunbar", and through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it remained essentially a literary word denoting a class of persons or things" (p. 199). Race is a social grouping of people with similar social or physical characteristics that are normally viewed as forming a distinct group. Bill Ashcroft says "race is a term for the classification of human beings into physically, biologically and genetically distinct groups" (*Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, p. 198)

The word racism typically denotes violence, hate, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression based on race. Richard Schaefer remarks that

Racism generally means believing that a person's behaviour is determined by stable inherited characteristics deriving from separate racial stocks; each of these distinctive attributes is then evaluated in relation to ideas of superiority and inferiority. This implies that there is a social construction in which certain group of people are superior to others. This social construction is the result of social, economic, and political factors that have ascribed power to some groups, while leaving others powerless (*Encyclopaedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*, p. 1113)

Racism means beliefs or political or social structures that are classified as fundamentally superior or inferior to each other by different races based on the colour of the skin, language, traditions and place of birth or some

other fundamental nature. R. S. Malik remarks, “racism was the result of colonial oppression because when the colonizer represented the native as backward, the latter began to supplant white man for the term” (*A New Approach to Literary Theory and Criticism*, p. 145)

The predominant symbol of racial differentiation has always been skin colour, hair, and the shape of facial bones. It is sometimes taken as proof of some kind of natural distinction between white and black Africans. Colorism targets not only the black-skinned people, but also affects white-skinned people in eastern countries. However, compare to black people it is less. Mostly, black-skinned people face problems, where they are noticed as inferior, less smart, less competent, and less lovely than white people. One could understand that there are no biological components improving one community superior than another. Many people think that race is a natural category and reflecting a biological different group of people. John McLeod aptly point out that “racial differences are based upon human invention and not biological fact” (*Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 110). The race is a social class, not a natural one.

In India racism is one of the forms of discrimination that causes the thought that some people are superior to others. In those Maharaja’s time, racism was much deeper than what it is today. Racial discrimination has always been an issue in the North-Eastern states and south India. Some people in India are still consciously and unconsciously racist and they make race-related remarks based on nationality, and skin colour. Some literary writers portray racism in their novels such as Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935), Richard Write’s *Black Boy* (1945), Richard Write’s *Black Boy* (1945), Toni Morison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987), Kamala Markandaya’s *The Nowhere Man* (1972), Alice Waker’s *Color Purple* (1982), Chitara Banerjee’s *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, and Chatan Bhagat’s *2 States* (2009). This sequence Timeri N. Murari portrays racial discrimination in his novel *Enduring Affairs* (1990).

Timeri N. Murari an Indian journalist, novelist, essayist, and playwright was born in 1942 in Madras, India. He started his career as a reporter for a Canadian newspaper before moving to London. He wrote for various newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The Hindu*, *The Washinton Post*, *The Observer*, *Sunday Times*, and *New York Times*. He also wrote columns and articles for *The Hindu*, *Frontline*, and *The Indian Express*. He has so far written seven plays, sixteen novels, five non-fiction books, two young adult trilogies, and screenplays. By Time Magazine, his film *Daayra* (1997) was voted one of the ten best movies in 1997. Afterward, he directed *The Square Circle*, at the Leicester Haymarket Theatre in November 1999 acted by Parminder Nagra. His novel *Taj* (1985) has been translated into twenty-five languages and *The Taliban Cricket Club* (2012) into eight.

Timeri N. Murari’s *Enduring Affairs*

It is noted that the racial discrimination is one of the major themes in Timeri N. Murari’s *Enduring Affairs* (1990). Nile Pramod Machhindra says

“Murari’s novels are skilfully plotted. His works imply a criticism of the modern Indian society. His writing had been strongly influenced by his travelling around the world. He saw racial issues in a wider context beyond east-west confrontation and even between extraterrestrial human species. His characters often develop close friendship of sexual ties with people from different gender, race, sexual orientation and social class” (*Major Thematic Concerns In The Selected Novels of Timeri N. Murari: A Critical Study*, p. 221)

Enduring Affairs is the narrative of the two youths Chellapthimalai Venugopalan Charlie, Home Minister of Tamil Nadu, and Dexter Franklin Prescott III Empire in America. The author divides *Enduring Affairs* into three categories present, past and present. The novel starts in the present where Dexter Prescott meets Charlie in India after twenty-five years. The second part past shows Dexter Prescott and Charlie’s college days in America and the third part presents the political life of Dexter Prescott and Charlie. Charlie and Dexter born on the same day, are handsome, come from an aristocratic background, and best friends when they share a room as graduate students in a college town in America. They lived in America happily. Later, without giving any clarification, Charlie V suddenly comes back to India. When the novel opens, Charlie V as the Home Minister and the number two man in the cabinet. Murari tells the story very well in fact and has the reader following him excitedly.

One day, Dexter brings Sandra, the daughter of Morovitch into their room to have sex with her. Suddenly, his roommate Charlie V enters the room. Sandra asks about Charlie V, then she says “I’m not gonna let him touch me.’ She half rose but he pulled her back down. ‘He’s a darkie’. ‘For Chrissake get your ethnic slurs right. I can’t stand mixed metaphors either’” (*Enduring Affairs*, p. 77). She does not like to touch Charlie V, because she thought white people superior to black people. Charlie V felt the piercing hurt of her words and no one had humiliated him with just one word before.

When Charlie V joins with Dexter, he didn’t notice Charlie’s colour. Swiftly, Dexter notice Charlie’s colour for the first time. Even though Dexter shares everything with Charlie V but he didn’t oppose Sandra’s

statement. He says "Darkies are Negroes," Dexter said. "Charlie V.'s not Negro" (p. 77). Dexter thought black only refer to Negroes people. Through this incident, Dexter acts as a stranger when Charlie humiliated by her and he didn't speak against her statement. By colour, people discriminate it shows immaturity.

In this novel, Timer Murari mentions the arrogance of white people. In many places, black people are killed by white people for many reasons particularly by colour. When Charlie V and Dexter visit South Africa, they observe the arrogance of White people and helplessness of black people "the blacks down south getting lynched by white racist, like those poor eating out of gutters and movies-stars, our goddesses, dying of overdoses" (p. 115). Charlie V wishes to know if it will ever change. Dexter says "sure it will". We will change everything. We got energy, we have got the money, we have got the will. And we got Kennedy. We are unbeatable" (p. 115).

Charlie V and Dexter travel to Dexter's house. During the travel time, Charlie V notices a lot of incidents, and their journey ended in a glade and a church that seemed part of the woods. At a trestle table, black and white students sat with registration forms and files and lists. At another table, black women and girls served sandwiches and coffee. Here Charlie V noticed that the southern black people remained distant and white students not mingled with black students. They are shy from college kids. Charlie V guessed that "they were as alien as the white people those poor black people knew. white was white was white. How can you tell the difference between a northern one and a southern one?" (p. 118). Through the incident, racism not only rooted in adult peoples' minds but also rooted in the students' minds. Awareness and education are gradually changing their pathetic situation.

The right to vote is a fundamental human right that allows people to choose their representative in the government. Black suffrage refers to the right to vote for black people. The black people's right to vote denies by colour race or previous of servitude. Timeri N. Murari clearly indicates white people's racism towards black people through the line "they couldn't vote because the white folks stopped them guns and dogs" (p.119). Here, a basic right of a citizen is denied.

Dexter and Charlie V go to a club; there Charlie V talks about the circumstance of Indian nation clubs. The British people opened the nation clubs in India for their enjoyment, and they didn't permit Indians into their clubs. When the British left India, Indians run own clubs, and behave like Britishers "We have "country clubs" in India,' Charlie V. Said. 'The British invented clubs for themselves, they were enclaves of England and Indians were not allowed in. Dogs and Indians, specifically" (p. 126). Dexter reasonably specifies the circumstance of nation clubs in the U.S.A. Dexter indicates "They don't admit Jews, Negroes, Lithuanians, Poles, Serbocroats, Mexicans, Catholics, Baptists, Californians or Eskimos and anyone else who's strange to them. You're way out of left field for them and now they'll bring in a new by-law barring Indian Hindus" (p, 126). Accordingly, the author appropriately comments that whether in America or India people are subjugated based on race, and religion.

Charlie V Compares the American black people with the African Indians and the Indian Dalits' plight. He knows the arrogance and helplessness of the British people in India before independence. Indians, even though he had a legitimate ticket for it, were not permitted to travel via the first -class railway compartment. In the cabin, the British passenger felt riding with an Indian was humiliating. Because the Britisher assumes that his presence would pollute the compartment and the Indian has been forcibly displaced from a train like a bag.

The day after Christmas Dexter got the prostitute's address from the bartender. Charlie V was still a virgin and he also felt life was conspiring to keep him a virgin until death. They go to the hooker apartment and the hooker denies sex with Charlie V, because of his race and colour. She says "It's thirty bucks but I won't do it with him". And her eyes slid off Charlie V as if she'd made him vanish. "You're kidding?" Dex Said. "I'm not," she said. "I don't" do it with coloreds... I have a right to choose and I don't want to be screwed by your buddy" (p.127). This incident shows the American sex worker superior to Indian fellows. Charlie V was insulted due to his non- Western status. Timeri N. Murari expresses here western racism.

Conclusion

Basically, Timeri N. Murari writes for an American audience than for an Indian one. Racism is one of the world's most major issues today and is one of the most disgusting things within the vicinity of humanity. Many people live obliviously to what is happening around them and do not view racism as an issue in our country. Others understand the issue but do not really understand the fact. Generally, it happens in school, college, social gathering, and workplace, or in their own homes. In conclusion, can be prevented the racial discrimination step by step only through awareness and education.

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