

Racialism

The phenomenon of white racism is directly correlated to colonialism and imperialism. During the period of colonialism when forces of European capitalism occupied various parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America in their search for profits, they also developed a theory of racist superiority in order to justify the process of economic exploitation. The attitudes of the white man to the Latin American Indians, to Asians and Africans was one of treating the latter peoples as undeveloped and uncivilised. A similar form of racism was the phenomenon of Zionism which too was a product of 19th century European colonialism. As one of the founders of this Zionist Movement put it, the introduction of European Jews to the Middle East "act as injections of a European culture and technology into the decaying Asian trunk".

White racism takes two forms, petty racism and institutional racism. The best example of the former aspect of racism are rules of petty apartheid in South Africa or till recently in the United States and in Britain where black men were not permitted to enter clubs, parks etc. In Sri Lanka too, there were many exclusively white clubs during the colonial period and the best cited example in Asia is the prohibition in pre-liberation China in a Shanghai park which stated 'No dogs, no Chinese.' Governor Barnes articulated the racial aspect of British colonialism in Sri Lanka at the turn of the 19th century when he said "I have no hesitation in saying that black faces and white can never be so amalgamated together in a society, as to be on an equal footing". It is a paradox that when the colonial powers who claimed that the non-white racists were uncivilised and poor nevertheless came and stayed in these countries for centuries despite the proclaimed alleged lack of civilisation and poverty.

Racism emanated in its most crude form in the institutions of slavery whereby Africans were bought and sold by European slave traders to the plantations in the West Indies and the United States.

In the Triangular Trade, European ships carried various trinkets from Europe to the African coasts, exchanged them for slaves, transported the slaves to the American plantations, sold them to the plantation owners, collected the colonial produce and returned to Europe. In this way the African people were forcibly dispersed throughout the world into Brazil, Guyana, the West Indies, Cuba, U.S.A., Mauritius etc. The rate of depletion of the African population was so great that it has been estimated that the population of the African continent was static at 100 million between 1650 and 1850 primarily because the slave traders robbed Africa of its youth. Millions of Africans died in the 'Middle Passage' of the Atlantic and millions of others were killed in the 'Scramble for Africa'.

It has been estimated that 10 million Africans died in the Congo alone as a result of the Belgian onslaught. In addition to this brutality the remaining Africans even lost their land as is well illustrated by a West African saying "when the Europeans first came to Africa we had the land and they had the Bible, now we have the Bible and they have the land".

In preaching a theory of the savage, we in Asia suffered no less than other parts of the Third World. It is only now that we are reassessing the impact of the destruction and in a sense beginning to understand the implications of the highly advanced cultures that existed in Africa, Latin America and Asia long before the white man ever reached our shores.

The story of fortunes, cities and countries being developed with the profits of the slave trade and the sweat of colonised people has been thoroughly documented.

With the development of industrial capitalism, the slave trade ended, but the phenomenon of racism continued and continues even today as one sees in the attitudes taken by South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe to the peoples of the region. But the struggle against this racism continues and there is no doubt that it will succeed. Even in countries which have

obtained their political independence, there are major problems associated with the attitudes taken to the concept of education and the education system. As much as the peoples of the Middle East and the peoples of Africa are struggling against direct colonialism, we in Asia continue our struggle against neo-colonialism in all forms.

The forcible removal of the Palestinian people from their native land and the restriction of South Africa's 14 million black people to 13% of the land spring from the same source and are insults to the dignity of mankind itself.

It is also clear to us that the struggle against racism is at the same time a struggle against imperialism. The fact that foreign investments of over £3000 million are to be found in South Africa is evidence of the support that imperialism gives to the South African racist regime. Similar interests continue to dominate the presence of Zionism and racism in the Middle East. The wealth of Africa and the Middle East is the real reason for the existence of these doctrines of racism and Zionism. The struggle of the peoples of the Middle East and Africa against these evil forces is a struggle for self-determination, freedom and independence and it will continue to receive the support of the peoples of the world particularly those who have suffered in the same way previously. In the words of Nelson Mandela we must understand that "the struggle is truly a national one. It is a struggle for the right to live. During my life time I dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination. I have fought against black domination. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But, if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die".

The struggle to put an end to racism particularly in its institutional form is a part of the aspirations of the peoples of the Third World. We cannot understand the race question without reference to imperialism and we will be understating the meaning of imperialism if we do not refer to the race question.