



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Racism in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An analysis of the South Asian community**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to discuss the hate crimes and instances of racism against the Sikh and Muslim communities from South Asia in America after the post-9/11 period and the strategies that the South Asian community has adopted to fight back the Racism in America against them. The history of racism in America was established with the advent of enslaved Black people from Africa in the 18th century. In the 1960s, Black Africans launched the civil rights movement to reclaim their civil rights and they won. But racism was not eliminated from America against them. The immigration act of 1960 paved the way for the immigration of different communities in America. The South Asian community also grew because of this act. The earliest immigrants came from India in 1960s, immigrants from Pakistan in 1980 and, in 2000 the immigrants from Bangladesh. This study includes Desk Research and the secondary sources. It is argued in this research that the incident of 9/11 has increased racial discrimination among the South Asia diaspora in America, due to which they are being subjected to hate crimes. It is the need of time to counter such incidents in USA if it is further promoted the negative image of USA will increase in Asian specially the Muslim countries.

**Keywords:** America, Black people, Racism, South Asian

**Introduction**

Racism has remained a part of American history since its inception. Racism started in America when Africans were brought in as enslaved people in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The white settlers from Britain established the plantations in America and brought the enslaved Africans to work on them. However, by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, slavery was abolished in America and blacks were recognized as citizens, but it did not mean that these black people were given equal rights. In the 1960s, Blacks launched the civil rights movement because they were given equal status in citizenship. Although institutional-level discrimination has been abolished at the societal level, it is still persistent (Shah and Adolphe 2019). The murder of George Floyd in 2021 is evidence of racism against the Black community in America (Barrie 2020)

However, the present research study does not discuss racism against the Black community. Instead, the present research aims to discuss the racism against the South Asian diaspora in America in the post-9/11 period. The incident of 9/11, when the terrorist attack took place in America and Al-Qaeda took responsibility, became a changing point in the history of racism in America (Chandrasekhar 2003). Previously, racism was targeted against the Black community in America, but after 9/11, the Muslims became the target of racism.

The number of South Asian started to increase in America after the passage of the immigration act. The immigration act of 1960 paved the way for the immigration of different

communities in America. The South Asian community has also grown because of this act. The earliest immigrants came from India in the 1960s, followed by immigrants from Pakistan in 1980. Finally, in 2000 the immigrants from Bangladesh also immigrated to America (M.P.I. 2014a). The incident of 9/11 has brought a significant rise in hate crimes against the South Asian community.

Although racism against Muslims has increased in the post-9/11 period. However, the Hindus and Sikh communities also started becoming targets for hate crimes. In America, those people who look like Arabs Muslims or those who wear a turban or have beards have started to face discrimination. The Sikh community also wore a turban and had beards, so the white population started to think they were also Muslims (Bajaj, Ghaffar-Kucher, and Desai 2016a). Due to the increase in hate crimes against South Asians, they started to reclaim their due rights by organizing themselves (Thompson, 2017).

This study has been divided into three parts a) a brief overview of the history of Racism in America has been discussed, b) the development of South Asian diaspora and socio-economic and cultural dimensions of racism have been discussed, c) the racial angst against the South Asian diaspora has been discussed. It is argued in this research study that the incident of 9/11 has increased racial discrimination among the South Asia diaspora in America due to which they are being subjected to hate crimes. The research is significant in the way that it would extend the debate of racism against the South Asian diaspora in America. The existing literature that has been written on racism mainly discusses the history of Racism in America by taking the case study of slavery in America and the Black civil rights movement (Powell 2017). Moreover, the literature mostly discusses the political dimension of the racism in America (Ahler, 2018).

The literature on the representation of people of colour by global north print media has also pointed towards racism (Dijk, 2009). The literature on the education and employment of people of colour in America has also pointed towards racism (Huber, Johnson, and Kohli 2006). Other than political literature on the South Asian diaspora in America, the cultural dimensions of the South Asian diaspora have also been discussed in the existing literature concerning the marriage pattern (Snipp 2008). The expansion of the Islamophobia and xenophobia in America against the Muslims has also been discussed in the existing literature (Bajaj, Ghaffar-Kucher, and Desai 2016b). The present research discusses the impact of the incident of 9/11 has been discussed concerning the South Asian diaspora in America. In this manner, the present research has contributed to the existing literature on Racism in America.

## **Literature Review**

Several works cover Racism, and South Asian Diaspora. The following literature has been reviewed to get a deep insight into the topic and further expand it that can positively contribute to the existing literature.

## **Racism in America**

The author says that racism started in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and continues today. He analysed different schools of thought on the racist explanation from the Enlightenment to the contemporary period. He also argues that racist attitudes have changed education and socialisation patterns in America over the last four decades. He concludes that racism is connected to political, religious, and societal values (Powell 1993). The present study primarily concerns the South Asian diaspora in America. Hence, in this study, a difference in the prevalence of racism will also be analysed between the different diasporas in America. The treatment of the diaspora also shifted with the 11 September 2001, when the terrorist committed attacks against the World Trade centre in America.

Further author Christopher discusses the case of the two cities, Chester and Pennsylvania, concerning the racial attitudes regulating economic development. The author argues that the establishment of the industries, housing patterns, and school segregation results from the racial attitudes in the American cities of Pennsylvania and Chester. The investment in these cities is determined racially due to inequality in the cities. In this manner, the region's overall economic growth has been affected (Mele 2017). The author has linked the debate of racial segregation with the economic development of the two cities and argued that the unequal economic growth is reflected in housing, schooling, and industrial development. However, the author has not focused on any community. This study concerns the South Asian diaspora, and the racial discrimination carried out against them in America. In this manner, this study would contribute to the community-specific discourse on racial discrimination in America

Author Douglas J Ahler in his article, "The Group Theory of Parties: Identity Politics, Party Stereotypes, and Polarization in the 21st Century", discusses the racial attitudes in voting behaviour in America. The Democratic Party has gained legitimacy among African Americans since the 1960s. This is mainly due to the civil rights acts passed by the Democratic Party in the 1960s as a response to the civil rights movement initiated by black people. This movement was primarily based in the southern parts of the USA. (Ahler 2018) The voting behaviour of the whites also underwent a shift in the southern parts of the USA. The white voter started to favour the Republican Party comparatively to the Democratic Party because the latter favoured the black community by passing the civil rights act. However, the focus of the present research is not on the politics of race in America. Instead, the focus of the present research is on the racial discrimination that is present among the South Asian diaspora. The article is helpful for the present research because it provides the background of the evolution of Racism in America, but it does not discuss the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of racism in America against a specific community.

According to Keith Boykin he discusses structural racism and politics in the context of America. The author argues that racism should not be seen just from the perspective of a political party's functioning in America. The author adopts a historical point of view to propose a new perspective for studying racism in America. The author argues that peace between the states was prioritised during the civil war over the notion of justice for black people. In this manner, the effort was put forward to establish peace between white Northerners and Southern. By the 1960s, the republican party started to appeal for the racial superiority of the white. The author then put forward the discussion of the racial policies as proposed by Bill Clinton, Barak Obama, and Donald Trump. For him, Barack Obama has not focused on black people while making the policies the republican party has anticipated (Boykin 2021). It is due to this reason that the political party's racial ideologies could not be taken to analyse the racial discrimination in America. However, the Period of Donald trump brought a change as he appealed more to racial policies, which is a continuity in the policy of the republican party in the promotion of white people supremacy in America.

Different scholars have investigated that how ethnic minorities are represented in the print media by the Global North countries. Teun has primarily conducted the content analysis of the British and Dutch newspapers, but the author has also included other countries from the global north. By global north, it means those countries where white people have more political say, like Europe, North America, and other westernised countries (Dijk 2009). This book provides deep insight into the cultural production of racism in the print media in the global north. Although the author has discussed the broader context of the global north, right-wing extremism emerged globally following the 9/11 incident. The present research focuses on racism against the South Asian diaspora. Hence, the representation of the cultural production of the South Asian diaspora in the American print media has been taken to discuss the racism against the South Asian diaspora in America.

The racial hierarchy's conscious and unconscious acceptance in US schools. The authors have used the critical race theory to elaborate on internalised racism in US schools. Three fundamental components are responsible for the prevalence of Racism in US schools. Firstly, the teachers are the primary agents that perpetuate racism in their teaching. The school curriculum also reproduces the racial hierarchies in the schools. Thirdly the school resources also privilege the white people in the schools while the student of colour is marginalised (Huber et al. 2006). In the present research, the focus has been placed on the South Asian diaspora in America. The internalised racism the author employs to analyse the schools of America has been used to analyse the racism prevalent among South Asian students from the diaspora community in America.

### **Racism after 9/11 in America**

The book "God and Race in American Politics: A short history", discusses the interweaving of race and religion in American politics. has adopted a historical perspective to advance his study of race and religion in America. He argues that racial segregation during the age of slavery was centred on the justifications derived by the white settlers from the Bible in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, the black rights movement in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century also mixed religion with politics in America. The black people used the morality of the Bible to justify their movements. The author argues that in this manner, religion was intertwined with the politics in America from the time of the civil war to the civil rights movement. He argues that the present-day examples of the interweaving of religion and politics could be seen in the arguments raised against the abortion laws and stem cell research (Noll 2010). The author's argument also has relevance in the present-day rise in right-wing extremism in America. The racial discrimination against Muslims in America is based on the interweaving of race and religion. The present research also focuses on interviewing religion and politics in America.

The scholar Erik Love discusses the nature and the causes of the prevalence of racism in contemporary America. He argues that the terrorist attacks, the refugee crisis, and the policies adopted by the Trump administration have intensified the racism against Middle Eastern Americans. The author has interviewed civil rights activists confronting the menace of racial discrimination in America. The author argues that instead of adopting a community-specific civil rights strategy to demand rights, the activists have adopted the path to demand the imposition of civil rights in general. The author found out that the civil rights regime in America is weak and cannot give justice to the people who are the target of the racial discrimination (Love 2017). The author has focused primarily on the Middle Eastern diaspora, while the present research focuses on the South Asian diasporas. However, the Islamophobic attacks are targeted explicitly against Muslims in South Asia, due to which the Hindus and the Sikhs are not part of the racial discrimination based on hatred of Islam. In this manner, this study has discussed the Islamophobic attacks against South Asian Muslims in America.

Sunil contests the idea that there is a universal model of acculturation by taking the case of the Indian diaspora in the American context. The author first discussed the model of acculturation presented in cross-cultural psychology. The author has taken the autobiographical approach and presented the perspective of three first-generation immigrants from India. The author discussed the impact of the incident of 9/11 on the lives of first-generation Indian immigrants (Bhatia 2008). The author has provided an in-depth analysis of the problems faced by the Indians in America after 9/11. However, the author has not discussed the problems faced by Muslim immigrants from India. The author has only discussed the Sikh and Hindu community while discussing the Indian problems after the incident of 9/11. It is argued in this paper that instead of creating a further binary in discussing the Hindus versus Muslims, it is necessary to discuss the commonalities that the Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs have in the context of America.

As per Monisha Bajaj and Ameena discuss the instances of bullying in US schools after the 9/11 attacks against South Asian students. The author argues that the macro-level information surrounding the popular consciousness concerning one community also influences the instances of bullying and hate crimes at the school level. The author examines the causes of Islamophobia against South Asians in US schools. The author also found out that those who are not Muslims from South Asia, such as the Sikh population, also face Islamophobia in the same manner as Muslims (Bajaj et al. 2016a). This article is helpful for the present research because it elaborates on the information about Islamophobia in schools in the US. However, the scope of the article is limited because it only discusses bullying in schools in America and do not consider other cultural and economic domains. This research study has taken other places where the possible islamophobia attacks are also committed after 9/11.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical race theory has been used as a theoretical framework in the present research study. Critical race theory emerged in the context of America to comprehend the dynamics of white supremacy in the political, legal, cultural, and social domains. Critical race theory, on the one hand, deals with racist discourses; on the other hand, it deals with the real-world effects of race and racism. Under the real-world effects of race and racism, the effect of racism on the bodies, identities, and experiences of the people is studied. Antonio De La Garza has defined this in the following words,

*“Thus it explains how racism, as social conditions, goes well beyond individual, intentional racist acts and must be understood at institutional, social, economic, political, and historical levels.”* (Antonio De La Garza and Kent A. Ono 2016).

As per the core principle of the critical race theory, race is conceptualized as the core component of American life. The scholars working in the critical race theory argues that it is necessary to discuss the strategies that white supremacist adopt to organise the context and contents of communication between people of colour and the mainstream ideological apparatus such as media, religious, and educational systems. Critical race theory’s second principle is on the narratives of people of colour. The aim of bringing the narratives of the people of colour is to counter the mainstream ideologies and narratives that reproduce racism and white supremacy. The mainstream ideologies promoted through media, education, and other mediums usually deprive people of colour of representing their experiences.

The third principle of critical race theory is rejecting the notion of liberalism. As per Critical race theory, liberalism is not a progressive idea. Conceptualise liberalism as not progressive. Instead, it argues that the reforms will not change the conditions of the people of the color. The gradual reform introduced through the legislation would not eliminate the racism against the people of colour. In this manner, the revolutionary change is supported by critical race theorists. This change in the thought of the critical race theorists is because they have faced many failures of the civil rights movements, and racism and cultural ethnocentrism has not been eliminated (Antonio De La Garza and Kent A. Ono 2016).

In the present research, the critical race theory has been taken to analyse the racism that has been meted out against the South Asian diaspora in America. Firstly, the strategies that white supremacists adopt to perpetuate racism against the South Asian diaspora have been analysed. Secondly, the narratives of the South Asian diaspora have been brought to the forefront to counter the mainstream ideologies dominating the media, education, and other domains. In this manner, the education, employment, religious celebrations, marriages, and the representation of the films produced by the South Asian diaspora has been taken under consideration.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Desk Research**

The desk research is carried out while sitting on a desk instead of going out to conduct fieldwork. Two types of desk research are internal and external. When the research is conducted within an organisation on the information available about the organisation, it is known as internal desk research. On the other hand, when the research is about some external phenomenon, it is called external desk research. The present research aimed to find out the strategies through which racism is meted out to the South Asian diaspora in America, due to which the external desk research method was adopted. However, external desk research is also divided into three categories: online, governmental published data, and customer service (Payne and Payne 2021). In the present research, online desk research has been adopted.

### **Data Collection**

The data has been collected from published books, journals, magazines, and periodicals. The data has also been collected from online forums and websites such as SAALT, SAPRI, and NACCP. These online forums have collected primary data on the incidents of racism against the South Asian diaspora.

### **Secondary Analysis**

In the secondary analysis, already collected qualitative or quantitative data is taken for the analysis to find answers to new research questions (Payne and Payne 2021). In the present research, the secondary analysis has been selected because the researcher could not find respondents from America due to the lack of social capital in America. However, the different online forums and published materials that have collected the primary data about the racism among the South Asian diaspora in America have been used for analysis.

### **South Asian Immigration in the United States**

According to Migration Institute policy, more than 2.6 million Indian immigrants are living in the United States. 69% of people are foreign-born from it. Indian diaspora is the third world largest diaspora in the United States after Mexicans and Chinese. Indian immigrants work in different sectors in many parts of the United States. But most people are temporarily employed.

The second largest number of students are from India and the United States on student visas in different colleges and universities. Many Indian people live in California, Texas and New Jersey. They are also settled in other states, such as New York, San Jose, Chicago, and San Francisco. According to the RAD analyses, the Indian population in the United States is highly educated among 15 countries. Approximately 69% of people are labourers but earn more than the general American labour force. Indian community in the United States is highly attached to their homeland country

Bangladeshi Diaspora in the USA. They are hardworking, they came to the USA with few resources, but now they are well settled. (M.P.I. 2014b). As per the estimations of 2014, there are almost 227000 Bangladeshi immigrants in America. However, the Bangladeshi people have recently settled in America. Almost half of the Bangladeshi population migrated to America after 2000.

However, despite their late immigration, most Bangladeshi population has become American citizens. The Bangladeshi population are more educated compared to the American citizens. They also have higher household incomes. They are overrepresented in

the top 10 % of the higher-income group in America. Most Bangladeshi immigrants have settled in New York, California, Texas, New Jersey, Michigan, and Florida. If the urban region is considered, the Bangladeshi immigrants are mostly settled in New York and its suburbs. Moreover, the Bangladeshi population is also settled in Washington DC, Detroit, and Los Angeles (M.P.I. 2014b).

There are almost 453000 Pakistani immigrants in America. Immigration from Pakistan started in the 1980s towards America. In the 1980s, almost 30000 immigrants from Pakistan and America were American citizens. The majority of Pakistan-born immigrants came to America before 2000. However, almost 63 % of Pakistani immigrants are now American citizens. The educational level among Pakistani immigrants is higher than that of Americans. The household income of Pakistani immigrants is also higher than that of Americans. Almost 18 % of Pakistani household is enumerated in America's top 10% income group. Pakistani immigrants have been spread to many different regions of America. Pakistani immigrants are found in the states of New York, Texas, and California. In the case of the urban metropolitan region, Pakistani immigrants are settled in the regions of New York, Washington DC, and Chicago (Bhatia 2008).

### **9/11 and Racism in America**

The terrorist attacks of 9 September 2001 on the world trade centre and Pentagon in America have brought significant changes in America. The incident occurred when 19 Arab Muslim men hijacked a commercial aeroplane, hit the world trade centre, and launched Pentagon. Since then, racial discrimination against people who are of South Asian, Arab, and middle eastern descent.

Racial profiling has also increased against the South Asian immigrant community in America because they look like Arabs in some manner (Chandrasekhart 2003). As per the report of the institute for social policy 2019, it was seen that discrimination against Muslims is on the rise in America. Several legislations have also targeted Muslims, such as the Patriot Act that banned Muslims in 2017. Islamophobia has been used to define the hate crime committed against Muslims globally. Islamophobia could be defined in the following words,

*"Islamophobia has been defined as the dehumanisation and demonisation of Muslims"*

A significant increase was recorded in the surveillance of the people by the American government. Congress passed the Patriot Act, which provided significant powers to law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement agencies were empowered to closely scrutinise those people's online accounts and phone calls who are suspected of involved in the terrorist activities. In addition, the government of America also started to adopt strict measures in the wake of the 9/11 attacks against Muslims in America (Abdalla 2021).

They prepared a list of the Arab and Muslim countries and demanded that male members from these countries register themselves with biometrics. However, this obligation was removed during the Obama administration in the year 2011. This program was removed because there was no single event of terrorism from the people who were registered during the last nine years. The onset of the Donald Trump administration added fuel to the fire in the racist environment of America.

As soon as Donald Trump assumed power, he adopted strict rules for the Muslim population and an anti-immigration policy. In January 2017, Trump signed orders to ban citizens from seven Muslim countries from entering America. Moreover, he also banned the entry of Syrian refugees into America. At the same time, hate crimes against Muslims in America started to increase. It is estimated that in 2016, there were 127 hate crimes

committed against Muslims, which were 93 in 2001. In this manner, hate crimes increased against Muslims in America (Neta C. Crawford 2021)

However, when South Asian immigrants in America are considered, the hate crimes are not committed against the Muslim community, but the Sikhs and Hindus are also targeted due to their suspected outlook by the white Americans. A Sikh student in the school was discriminated against for wearing a turban in class. He was said to be hiding a bomb in his turban.

On 12 September 2001, a Hindu woman named Meena Kumar was also expelled from a Train in Boston. These events indicate that the incident of 9/11 has not only affected the Muslim population but also increased racial discrimination against the overall South Asian immigrants in America (Bajaj et al. 2016b).

### **Racism against the Sikh Community**

The racist attacks and hate crimes increased against not just the Muslim community of South Asia in America; instead, the Sikh community was also attacked. When the 9/11 attacks took place on the world trade centre, two people from the Sikh community were running from the building to save their lives from the terrorist attack. Nevertheless, as soon as they left the building safely, they were attacked by the people on the streets. It was because they were considered a terrorist due to their beard and turban (Prashad 2005). Soon after the 9/11 incident, a Sikh man was murdered in Arizona. The reason was that the people perceived him as Arab due to his turban.

Another incident took place against the Sikh community in New England. The police caught a Sikh traveller for interrogation because of his beard and turban; he was suspected as a terrorist (Bhatia 2008). In 2012, some gunmen also attacked the Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek in America. That incident killed almost six members of the Sikh community.

However, despite the passage of time, the racism against the Sikh community continued unabated. On 15 April 2021, a gunman entered the FedEx facility in Indianapolis in, America and killed eight people from the Sikh community. He was an ex-employee of the same organisation. The gunman committed suicide after killing the eight members (Neta C. Crawford 2021).

In 2013, a Sikh man, Piyara Singh, who has reached the age of 82, was attacked by white men outside a gurdwara in Fresno, California. The attacker attacked the older man with a steel pipe, because of which the older man received injuries on his head and broke the ribs. The attack was so severe that the older man reached a coma. He spent two days in a coma due to severe injuries. Similar events were recorded in 2017 in California when a Sikh man named Amrik Bal Singh, 68, was attacked while walking outside on the street. Two young white men came, attacked him, and started beating him. Afterwards, they also ran a car over him, due to which he died on the spot. The young men attacked him because they thought that the older man was a member of the Muslim extremist group Islamic State (Thompson 2017)

Inderjit Singh Mukker came to America for a better job opportunity. He has done master's in agriculture from India. He came to America in 1988 in Chicago. However, Mukker could not find a suitable job due to a lack of English language command. He tried his fate in opening small businesses, but later, he closed those businesses due to the incident of 9/11. He started to fear that his turban and beard would lead to increased discrimination against him. In September 2015, he purchased food items for his household consumption at the Indiana grocery store located near his home in Illinois. Mukker purchased the items, mounted his car and started driving. While waiting for a traffic signal, one white teenager started to shout from his car and call Mukker Bin Ladin. Then that white teenager started to



pass the comments that “go back to your country what you are doing here”. When the traffic started to move then, the teenager brought his car in front of Mukker to stop his way.

Afterwards, he started to beat Mukker severely. The beating made Mukker unconscious and injured him badly. The injuries took almost two months to recover, but the eyesight was still not recovered Muker must visit the eye doctor for that purpose. He was barred from driving due to low vision. However, after six months, he recovered and was able to drive. However, the white teenager was sentenced to 200 hours of community service and a financial penalty for paying Mukker hospital bills. However, this incident severely traumatised Mukker. The people seldom call him a terrorist on the streets and pass derogatory remarks such as towel head and diaper head. Mukker is an American citizen, but the racial discrimination in the streets made him feel like he did not belong in America(Bhatia 2008).

Similarly, Harpreet Singh Saini also suffered from the racial attacks soon after the incident of 9/11. He came to America with his family in 2004 and settled in Oak Creek. He grew up in the same locality. His mother, Paramjit Kaur, was employed in a factory that produced syringes, and his father worked in a convenience store. Oak Creek comprises 86.6% of white population and is in the south of the Michigan region. Saini was studying at Milwaukee area technical college when the teacher asked the students to share their summer vacation adventures. Saini had a tragic story to share. His mother went to the Sikh gurdwara in Oak creek to offer prayers, but she lost her life due to the racist violence that took place in 2012. However, he did not remain silent about the violence that took her mother’s life. He shared his feeling by writing a letter to the New York times and also appeared in a documentary with his brother, Kamaljit. He also started to work with the Sikh community to make the issue of violence against the Sikhs a national issue. It is because the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) took notice of the hate crimes against Jews, Muslims, and Hindus but did not consider the hate crimes against the Sikh community. The endeavours of Saini borne fruit, and the FBI included the hate crimes committed against the Sikh community in 2015. (Thompson 2017)

### **Racism against the Muslim community of South Asia in America**

According to the Pew research data from 2019, approximately 82 percent of Americans said Muslims face discrimination. At the same time, approximately 56 percent of Americans think Muslims are discriminated against the most(Abdalla 2021). Pakistani American writer and Actress Fatima Aziza mentioned that the social environment regarding Muslims was very different before 9/11 took place in America. She argued that before 9/11, people were unaware of what it meant to be a Muslim, and no one perceived Muslims as a threat. However, the event of 9/11 changed the conditions. She said during an interview with Qantara.de that,

*Being a Muslim in pre-9/11 and post-9/11 America are two very different things. Before 9/11, no one knew what a Muslim was or what it meant. After 9/11, images of men with long beards threatening the US became equated with Muslims. This is far from the reality of what a Muslim looks like and, more specifically, what a Muslim American looks like(Roma Rajpal Weiss 2022).*

However, the experience of Fatima Aziza was different compared to the other Muslim women of South Asian origin in America. It was because she did not use the veil (Hijab), due to which she could be identified as a Muslim woman. She did not wear a Hijab during her school days, and she never faced racism the way other students who wear hijab faced in America. She elaborated on this in the following words,

*"I do think, however, that I grew up in something of a bubble: after all, since I don't cover my hair, I'm not visibly Muslim. My experience was very different to those who faced persecution and bullying at school".*

However, the conditions for those Pakistanis from the South Asian community were different who were recognised by their outlook that they belonged to the Muslim community or those who were seen as praying in the Muslim centres in America. In this manner, racism was levelled against those South Asian communities who were recognised from their outlook or practices that they were Muslims and posed a threat to the Americans (Roma Rajpal Weiss 2022).

Hasan Javed, who belonged to Pakistan, wrote a letter to the US Congress to narrate his experiences of being in America. He said that when he was a child living in America, his parents always taught him to give importance to his American identity. He carried multiple layers of identity, including Muslim, Pakistani, and American. Recalling his days at the schools, he remembered that he never tried to use any other identity except the American one because he feared that he would be treated with biases and discrimination.

He also mentioned that when their parents opened a shop in their locality in Columbia, where they were living, the conditions changed when the incident of 9/11 took place in America. His parent's shop was attacked by a mob of white people who threw stones and broke down the shop windows. He also mentioned that when he was walking down the train station, white men were carrying a knife; they started to treat him and said to him to leave their country and go back to his country.

However, for Javed, the problem was not just societal; it was operated from the governmental level because the American government has introduced numerous pieces of legislation that outrightly targeted the Muslim population in America. As per his knowledge, there were approximately 194 different bills introduced in Congress that targeted Muslims in America.

Javed expressed dismay over the treatment of Muslims by the government. He said that Muslims are targeted just based on their religion, put under extreme monitoring and in some cases, they are deported. Javed was a member of the Muslim organisation in Columbia. His organisation was also closely monitored. Even when they were praying or fasting, their activities were monitored by law enforcement agencies. He registered his complaints in the following words,

*You stereotyped me. Your media mis portrayed me. You taught against me in your schools. You jailed me over unjustified suspicion. You treated me as a lesser. So, the teenage me replied with faux patriotism. If what it took for you to stop treating me like an outsider was to be patriotic, or rather, accept your American ignorance and hatred without a word, teenage me did it. But I am no longer my teenage self. I am no longer afraid of your hatred. I am no longer faux patriotic (Javed 2022)*

Javed did not feel discouraged by the racial discrimination that he had suffered at the hands of American law enforcement agencies instead, he pledged that he would fight the injustice perpetrated against his community in America. He said he could take the identity of Muslim Americans or Pakistani Americans. It should not become the cause of racial discrimination against him. Similarly, Atif Akhtar from Pakistan also wrote a letter to the US congress regarding the treatment of Muslims in America. Iftikhar is a student at Cornell University New York and a leading activist from the platform of SAALT. He criticises the state for increased monitoring of the activities of Muslims around America. He said that Muslims across America must prove their loyalty to the state despite the passage of 20 years from 9/11. He also pointed to the discrimination that Muslim women face in America. He said that

the women who wear a veil (Hijab) continuously face racial discrimination. Moreover, their private space family is also being violated by law enforcement agencies in America.

He also pointed to the US congress that the increasing racial discrimination against Muslims has increased the solidarity of Muslims with those people who are also facing racial discrimination in America. As discussed earlier, the Sikh community are also being targeted because they wear turban and have beards, which also look like the Muslims (Akhtar 2016). It is due to this reason that Akhtar was referring to the growing solidarity across ethnicity and religion. To quote him,

*As a South Asian and Muslim student at Cornell University, it also became quickly clear that if there was any positive outcome from these years of censure, it has been that our sense of community had expanded to others who are not Muslim nor not South Asian but have shared experiences because of how Islamophobia often affects people because of how they are perceived. In many ways, there is new solidarity amongst Sikh, Hindu, and Jain youth as well as with Black and Arab Muslims*

In this manner, it could be seen that racial discrimination, on the one hand, has created division in American society. On the other hand, the same racial discrimination has increased solidarity among those who are experiencing racial discrimination in America. For instance, the Hindus and the Sikhs are also affected due to their outlook and their colour. They look like Muslims and experience racial discrimination at the hand of white Americans due to which they are now joining hands with the Muslims of the South Asia to fight back the racism.

### **Civic Engagement of South Asians in America**

Different NGOs are working in the United States for the Civic Engagement of South Asians. Indo-American Centre is one of the United States' leading civic engagement NGOs. Indo American educates the voters in the United States through different channels, such as calling the immigrants and door-to-door. It works with the South Asian American Policy Research Institute (SAAPRI) and the City of Chicago Board of Election. They inform immigrants about their rights as a US citizen and voting rights. It arranges many civic engagement programs to discuss issues affecting their communities. Indo-American Ngo also educates immigrant adults to develop their confidence and educate them with English. (Nida Hasan 2018)

South Asian Youth in Houston United (SAYHU) is the major organisation working in Texas. It deals with the significant issue of South Asian immigrants, such as sexual orientation, class, race, religion, gender, and ethnicity. However, its primary aim is the political engagement of immigrants. South Asian community was neglected community by political participation in the United States. The incident of 9/11 and Covid-19 greatly impacted South Asian immigrants. They are facing violence that is shaping the diaspora in the United States. It can be tackled by mobilising people and through political engagement. SAYHU is an active organisation in Texas that engages youth to resolve their social issues. White supremacy, racism and violence all around the United States harm different communities. SAYHU is a platform which makes different solutions regarding all social issues. (Usman Mehmood 2021)

The Sikh community also started to organise to fight racism against them after the incident of 9/11. The Sikhs community from across America joined hands to form the Sikh coalition. Among the conveners of the Sikh Coalition, a prominent name is Harsimran Kaur. She was educated in law at George Washington University Law School. Presently she is associated with a non-profit advocacy group. Kaur is 42 years old and works as a legal advisor for the Sikh coalition from her office at her home in Chicago. In the first conference of the formation of the Sikh Coalition, the aim was to collect the data regarding the hate

crimes committed against the Sikh community in America and arrange aid for those affected by it. However, the incidents of hate crime grew unabated despite of the decades after the incident of 9/11 in America. Kaur mentioned that the racism has penetrated the elections campaign as well she said,

*"We definitely saw an increase from August of 2016 to the elections in November... Then it was quiet....and then then since inauguration, we have seen an uptick in hate crimes against Sikhs"*(Thompson 2017)

Presently, the Sikh coalition has a budget of almost \$1.6 million as per the data of 2017. The Sikh coalition usually collects the incident of hate crimes against the Sikh community from all over America. When the Sikh coalition knows there has been a hate crime against the Sikh community, Kaur and her team, comprising people from different professional backgrounds, reached the place where the incident occurred. They try to investigate the potential factors that contributed to the incident. Firstly, they see whether there are injuries; Secondly, they assess whether the incident occurred due to the Sikh identity of the victim.

After the preliminary investigation, Kaur decides whether she can take the case. If she decides to take the case, they meet the local law enforcement agencies like the police and the sheriff's department and provide them with the investigation report that the coalition has prepared. They also inform law enforcement agencies about the difference between Sikhism, Hinduism, and Muslims. They also try to make law enforcement agencies realise that turban-wearing is a religious devotion for the Sikhs. It is not fashion. After mentioning these details, Kaur asks the law enforcement agencies whether they will deal with the case under the banner of hate crime. However, it is not simple for the coalition to deal with law enforcement agencies because it is unclear whether calling someone a terrorist is a hate crime or not. Kaur said,

*"Dealing with Law enforcement and prosecutors could be difficult. A lot of times we will see police officers who just don't know how to investigate. Or don't recognise that if somebody has been assaulted and they have been called 'Bin Laden' or 'terrorist', that is evidence of hate crime"*

However, after the effort of the Sikh coalition now, many police officers are aware of the sort of hate crimes committed against the Sikh community. However, many police officers are still unaware, and the Sikh coalition is looking forward to dealing with it effectively. However, the Sikh coalition is not the only group that is safeguarding the rights of the Sikh community in America against the hate crimes committed against them. Rather other groups also emerged to fight hate crimes. The United Sikhs and the Sikhs American legal defence and education fund (SALDEF) also perform a similar function that the Sikh coalition is performing in America. Jaideep Singh is the research director of the organisation SALDEF. He also mentioned that law enforcement agencies are not fully equipped with how to deal with the hate crimes against the Sikh community in America, He said that,

*"Many Sikhs feel frustrated at the difficulty in convincing the police to categorise even obvious hate incidents as such. Another elder was just found murdered in Fresno this week floating in a drainage canal"*(Thompson 2017)

Jaideep Singh also mentioned that he had investigated almost 525 hate crimes against the Sikh community in the Seattle area. Interestingly, no hate crimes were reported by that locality's law enforcement agency. The SALDEF and the Sikh coalition also joined hands to work in tandem to fight the hate crimes against the Sikh community in America. In 2015, A Sikh man driving a bus in Los Angeles suffered violence from a white man. The white man punched the Sikh bus driver several times and called him a terrorist and suicide

bomber. However, to the dismay of the Sikh community, the local sheriff's department categorised the incident as a misbehaviour attack.

Then Kaur and a member of the SALDEF took charge and started investigating the event. They reported the incident to the media and ran a news strip. This step compelled the sheriff's department to revisit the case. In 2016, Los Angeles County Attorney declared the incident as a part of a hate crime against the Sikh community. The perpetrator of the event was also charged with a long-term prison sentence. However, the case did not go to trial at that time. Kaur mentioned that it is difficult for prosecutors to get a hate crime conviction, due to which they usually do not dwell on hate crime cases. To quote her,

*"Acknowledge that there is evidence of hate crime but are reluctant to file charges because its very hard to get a hate crime conviction. Hate crime requires prosecutors to not only prove that an assault has occurred, but also prove that the assault was motivated by bias and that's very difficult. In many cases, if you do prove that a hate crime occurred, it may not add additional penalties"*

In 2005, five men were sent to trial for committing violence against the Sikh community outside a New York restaurant. The Sikh Coalition and SALDEF asked Queens County to invoke article 485 of the state penal code, which provides punishment against the hate crimes committed. However, when the trial ended, only two of the five men were found guilty and convicted. Nevertheless, Kaur said that the problem is not just with giving punishment to those who were found guilty or giving a longer-term punishment to those convicted. Instead, community service is also an option to make the relationship between those who committed aggression and those who were victims could make friends. She said,

*"You know it's absolutely imperative that as a society we take a stand against hate violence. Hate crimes undermine the fabric of our country. They're an assault, not only on an individual, but on an entire community and they degrade our democracy. They undermine the American dream, and they make us all feel less safe."*

In addition to the efforts by the Sikh community, the South Asian community is also fighting the menace of racial hatred. The South Asian community has formed the group with the name of South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT). The group usually organise rallies and demonstration against the growing hostility against the South Asian community in America that include members from all communities of South Asia, whether they are Hindus, Sikhs, or Muslims. In addition to it, they also speak for the middle eastern and Arab communities living in America. The executive director of SAALT, Suman Raghunathan, has criticised the politicians and the public officeholders for not paying attention to the growing intolerance and xenophobia in America. Instead, he argues that instead of making anti-xenophobic policies, the politicians are themselves involved in promoting them. He said,

*"We know our communities have consistently been the target of a hostile climate in the U.S even as our nation becomes more racially diverse. Yet I was certainly surprised that our nation's elected officials particularly those who sought to represent us at that national level, would resort to xenophobic political rhetoric"(SAALT 2014)*

In the report of 2014 compiled by SAALT, it was recorded that almost 78 political statements were issued from 2011 to 2014. In these statements, the members of the South Asian community were represented as disloyal or less American. Despite 13 years after the incident of 9/11, there has been no decrease in xenophobia in America. Instead, there was a 40 % increase in the uttering of those statements compared to the previous data. Moreover, the hate crimes also increased in the same duration to 76. If the data is brought daily, then it could be seen that a hate crime has been committed every after 3.5 days in America against the South Asian community. Ramanathan mentioned why there is a hate crime in America against the South Asian community in the following words,

*“Whenever anyone is targeted due to their perceived physical appearance, faith or nationality, we all become potential targets”*

In addition to the legal and political activism of the South Asian community in America, the members of the South Asian community also engaged in cultural production to represent the lives of the South Asian diaspora in America. American Pakistani writer and actress Fatima Aziza represented the experiences of Pakistani Muslim women in social media. She wrote a play name “Dirty Paki Lingerie”. She collected the data for the play by conducting interviews with the Pakistani community in the New York area. She found out that the mainstream media do not include the everyday experiences of women in their content, whether it is theatre, TV, or film. Instead, the media has constructed one monolith image of Western Muslim women in their representation. However, she also faced setbacks from the title of the play, which were racial and sexual. While reflecting on her performance in the play, she said,

*“In terms of programming the work, especially “Dirty Paki Lingerie”, I’ve had pushback from Christians, Muslims and Hindus equally on the word ‘Paki’ or the word ‘lingerie’. The former being a racial slur in Europe and the latter I assume because people aren’t comfortable with women’s sexuality. What I love about performing this play for audiences around the world is the opportunity to have a dialogue about the various themes the play touches on – sexuality, identity, racial profiling, bullying and issues of religion vs. culture. Whenever possible we put together talkbacks and panel discussions following a performance”* (Roma Rajpal Weiss 2022)

Despite the criticism raised against the word Paki and lingerie, Aziza continued to work in the plays. She also worked in the play with the title of Art of Hijab. The play was written by Sarah Sakaan and directed by Jerrica Barter. The story represents the experiences of two Muslim American sisters in American society. One sister was acquainted with feminist ideas, and the other woman was unaware of those feminist ideas. The play was shot in Southern Mississippi, where racism is more prevalent. The play that with the identity of Muslim women in the context of America.

## **Conclusion**

The terrorist attacks of 9 September 2001 on the world trade centre and Pentagon in America have brought significant changes in America. The incident occurred when 19 Arab Muslim men hijacked a commercial aeroplane, hit the world trade centre, and Pentagon. Since then, racial discrimination against people who are of South Asian, Arab, and middle eastern descent.

Racial profiling has also increased against the South Asian immigrant community in America because they look like Arabs in some manner (Chandrasekhar 2003). Several legislations have also targeted Muslims, such as the Patriot Act that banned Muslims in 2017. As soon as Donald Trump assumed power, he adopted strict rules for the Muslim population and an anti-immigration policy. In January 2017, Trump signed orders to ban citizens from seven Muslim countries from entering America. Moreover, he also banned the entry of Syrian refugees into America. At the same time, hate crimes against Muslims in America started to increase. It is estimated that in 2016 there were 127 hate crimes committed against the Muslims, which were 93 in 2001. In this manner, hate crimes increased against Muslims in America (Neta C. Crawford 2021)

However, when South Asian immigrants in America are considered, the hate crimes are not committed against the Muslim community, but the Sikhs and Hindus were also targeted due to their suspected outlook by the white Americans. On 12 September 2001, a Hindu woman named Meena Kumar was also expelled from a Train in Boston. These events indicate that the incident of 9/11 has not only affected the Muslim population but also increased racial discrimination against the overall South Asian immigrants in America (Bajaj

et al. 2016b). The hate crime continued to grow in America unabated. The Sikh community gurdwara was attacked, many Sikhs also faced attacks on the streets, and some were even killed.

Hence, hate crimes were committed due to the person's physical appearance. For instance, those women who used to wear hijabs are attacked on the streets. However, those Muslim women who are not wearing hijabs are not attacked on the streets? In this manner, Hate crimes are committed against the woman. The Muslim men also faced hate crimes, and they must prove that they were loyal American and not loyal to the cause of terrorism. To fight hate crimes, different organisations also came into being. Different NGOs are working in the United States for the Civic Engagement of South Asians. Indo-American Centre is one of the United States' leading civic engagement NGOs. Indo American educates the voters in the United States through different channels, such as calling immigrants and door-to-door. It works with the South Asian American Policy Research Institute (SAAPRI) and the City of Chicago Board of Election.

They inform immigrants about their rights as US citizens and voting rights. It arranges many civic engagement programs to discuss issues affecting their communities. Indo-American Ngo also educates immigrant adults to develop their confidence and educate them in English.(Nida Hasan 2018) South Asian Youth in Houston United (SAYHU) is the major organisation working in Texas. It deals with the central issue of South Asian immigrants, such as sexual orientation, class, race, religion, gender, and ethnicity. However, its primary aim is the political engagement of immigrants. South Asian community was neglected community by political participation in the United States. The Sikh coalition came into being to fight the hate crimes against the Sikh community in America. They used first to find the hate crime incident; then they investigated and filed a complaint with the law enforcement agencies. Other groups, such as SALDEF, also joined the Sikh Coalition. They joined hands to fight the hate crimes against the South Asian community.

The hate crimes, on the one hand, made the cleavages in American society sharper; on the other hand, they also brought solidarity among those who were the victims of those crimes. The hate crimes against Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus brought solidarity between them. SAALT is an example of the development such solidarity. They started to target the xenophobia in the political institutions of America and advocated for the rights of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus. Apart from the political and the legal activism of the South Asian community, the cultural production also started by the Pakistani American writer and actress Fatima Aziza who tried to counter the monolith representation of the Muslim women in America.

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