U.S. Racial Attacks Evoke Self-Scrutiny
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Tensions Mount in New Jersey; Sociologists Point To Urgent Need for Changes in Indian Attitudes

In October, Jud Colicchio, former mayor of Wanaque, New Jersey, created a public furor when he said he didn't want more housing in the district because it would attract "all these dot heads" to the area. In November 1987, in nearby Jersey City, Navroz Mody was murdered. Witnesses said the accused suspects shouted "Hindu, Hindu" while beating Mody to death. A hoodlum gang - "the Dotbusters" - claims credit for attacks on Indians who wear the traditional Hindu pottu - the red "Third Eye" mark on the forehead. This sporadic xenophobia - the fear or hatred of anything foreign or strange - toward Indians in America casts a pall on the otherwise rosy rise of Hinduism in this country and has sparked deep self-examination in the US Indian community.

Sociologist, Dr. Brij Mohan, one of only five Indians to ever hold the post of a dean in a US University, told Hinduism Today, "Many may not like to hear this, but US Indians have been stereotyped as elitist, and to a great extent we are responsible for that. Most Indians are doing very well, and in a way they have become victims of their own success. With strong professional backgrounds and a competitive spirit, we identify ourselves with the most accomplished sections of the society. Certain Indian organizations openly espouse elitism."

Dr. Mohan explained, "US racism is equivalent to Indian casteism and communalism. By carrying those cultural endowments here, we inadvertently contribute to racist tendencies."

Retired hospital president. Dr. Tandavan of Chicago says, "A good many of the Indian Hindus don't seem to want to integrate. Some ladies cannot speak English well. They may feel insecure. There is a big cultural gap. People consider them clannish. We see a build up of isolated Indian sectors."

Indian businessmen and landlords receive the brunt of frictional forces which psychiatry professor Dr. G. Solomon of UCLA says are similar to those which brought "hate crime" on earlier immigrants: Germans, Italians, Irish Catholics, Jews, etc. "The entrepreneurial class is seen as profiting at the expense of the ethnic minority which is being displaced" - a situation he feels is analogous to classical anti-Semitism. Focal sore points against Indians are dishonesty and failure to hire workers outside the Indian community.

An angry Hispanic in Jersey City told an India West reporter, "These Indian people, they come in. They take over. They've got a house and business because they're screwing us around. Everyone knows you can't trust them. They're cheap and will [manipulate] you around for a dollar." Another said, "Indians don't tend to hire these kids to work at their stores. They hire other Indians or do it themselves. That makes the kids angry because they feel they're somehow losing out."

Dr. Brij Mohan articulates a deeper level of the problem, "American perception of Indians is by and large positive. But neo-conservatism has released a reactionary backlash. Our aggressive attempt to maintain our own identity has run contrary to the Anglo-Saxon expectations of conformity. Add to this our own ambivalence about western materialism and Indian spirituality and you have an identity crisis which we are not able to resolve."

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