MY TURN
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Abandon Elitism, Embrace Pluralism

Mohan, Brji Integration of the people of Indian origin in an Anglo-Saxon society is neither possible nor advisable. The melting pot ideology has become obsolete. Assimilation seeks total identification and conformity with the norms, values and expectations of the host society. East Indians, by and large, comprise a group of self-conscious, proud and motivated people who consciously chose to settle down in a foreign land. The latent acquisitive-competitive endowment prompted by a sense of familial and "national" pride yields results in a capitalist system that values performance. But nothing is for free; there is a price for material gains. Our alienation therefore is a self-created necessity of self-deprivation. The violent backlash again. Indians in USA, Canada, England and elsewhere is a manifestation of reactionary forces. The problems will grow as we multiply in numbers.

A few observations and suggestions are offered with humility and insight. First, we the people of Indian origin should reorient ourselves to the new realities without losing our identity. This involves understanding and acceptance of certain modern-existential considerations at the expense of obscurantist beliefs and attitudes. We cannot practice casteism and communalism while fighting against racism and sexism in the American society. Our socialization and organizations should reflect the dynamism of our culture, not its archaic character. The mushrooming growth of temples, mosques, gurudwaras and other associations is fraught with the dangers of duplicating an archaic order. In a feverish effort to overcome a sense of alienation are we also transplanting a decadent culture? (I predict dowry, if not sati, will become a common practice within a decade or so.) New consciousness must expunge the dysfunctional aspects of our pedigree.

Second, we should pride ourselves on accomplishments without projecting as elitist exhibitionists. A toot-your-own-horn theory does not apply to aliens. Our assertions must be subtle and much more profound. Who cares who has what in this callously impersonal society? Our elitism is pretentious, false and uncalled for; it flies in the face of the "American Creed;" it demeans our own people who are struggling hard to survive. The Establishment has stereotyped us as "elitists." This

may help some leaders, but it's not going to help the people. It looks unsound and hypocritical to join the perpetrators if you are a victim. We cannot discriminate if we do not wish to be discriminated against. Pervasive class, color and caste consciousness calls for serious self-analysis.

And lastly, networking of resources and energies is imperative to consolidate collective power. We must realize the complexity of the society we live in. Our relationship with the host society is reciprocal and formal. Our outsideness is a powerful unifying force if we explore it with a secular mind. If we remain stratified in an Indian-style divisive pattern based on caste, religion and region, we are bound to become victims of our own success!

In conclusion, assimilation is a nebulous and outdated concept. Pluralism allows the flowering of ethnicity. We must believe in and practice the ideals enshrined in the Indian culture and the American Creed. Despite incongruence, Indian and American identities have a great deal in common.

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