



Opinion: Why India's COVID crisis could lead to more racism in Canada

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Worker refilling medical oxygen cylinder for Covid-19 infections patients at a gas supplier filling station (Shutterstock)

Written for Daily Hive, by [Raminder K. Hayre](#), lawyer and advocate.

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Warning: This article contains graphic content



I wanted to write in the first-person about why I have created the movement “brown equity.” It is my attempt at funnelling brown diasporic concerns into one hashtag — #brownequity.

This all started with the [Indian farmers' protests](#), but it has spread into much more for me. Through this protest, I have seen the lack of awareness around first- or second-generation cultural concerns in not only the legal profession, but other systems and the public at large too. Cultural competency should be at the forefront of addressing any concern of the dozens of oppressed minority groups Canada-wide, and worldwide.

What has been going on?



A Sikh farmer showing during Farmer protest at Singhu border/ (PradeepGaur/Shutterstock)

Since the end of November 2020, [millions of farmers have been protesting in India](#) for laws that they rightfully claim will be “the end of them.”

Approximately 400 lives have been lost through suicide or otherwise, and the prime minister of India has not spoken up about any of them. Given that two-thirds of these farmers are penny pinching to make ends meet, the Western world has taken to social media and the press (where possible) to advocate for Indian farmers' rights.

A majority of the protesters are Dalit and/or Sikh (Dalit is a caste, Sikh is a religion)



protestors are minorities.

How this relates to Canada is that over one-third of the visible minority population is South Asian. Many of these individuals are first- or second-generation Canadians (originally coming from India), and thousands have ties to farming in India. Some examples are through inheritance, family lineage, and having visited relatives' farms. Farming is something that these families often bring to Canada to make a living and prosper at.

COVID-19



COVID 19 death in Indian, Relatives carry a body of coronavirus (Covid-19) victim on a funeral pyre for his cremation at a Nigambodh Ghat crematorium / Shutterstock

The last couple of weeks, India has been in turmoil as the rise in COVID-related death has skyrocketed. [Currently, approximately 2,000 people are dying per day](#); additionally, one person every five minutes.

These deaths will naturally affect more minorities as their interests are not aligned with the current majority government in India (a nationalistic party, the “BJP”). The BJP has been promoting their upcoming political interests on oxygen tanks, so the natural question would be, “Who would they provide this oxygen to?”



News has come out that hospitals are releasing dozens of bodies at a time, and holding mass-cremations without alerting the families. This leaves a lot of uncertainty, stress, and room for discrimination.

Naturally, these concerns will affect us here as we see our people on the street, dying in mass numbers, and still being ignored by many mainstream media outlets. Some companies posted coverage near the beginning, but the international “noise and hype” is dying down – even though the situation is more dire than ever.

The combination of COVID-19 and the Indian farmers’ protests would potentially wipe out millions of those fighting for human rights.

The variant

With the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, there is a natural fear that South Asians will be targeted similar to the Chinese-Asian communities (for example). COVID-positive flights were landing from India into Canada, [and though they have been stalled for now](#), some members of the community have assumed that this will be another way for racist community members to target South Asians.

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The people here have nothing to do with the variant, or the flight system, but yet may face brutality and discriminatory language in both the media and online because of other people’s and organizations actions.

When ignorant folks prefer to point fingers, they look at those outside of their circles to promote blame for control of a situation.

Censorship

Many accounts have faced “shadow ban” and “censorship” due to posting up tips, information, and resources for those protesting in India (now extending to COVID). This is not a shadow ban where Instagram, for example, limits your reach or posting



capabilities because you are spamming or posting too much content – it is for a deeper reason.

Instagram (and the Facebook platform generally) is invested in by some of the biggest and richest entrepreneurs in India. These investors are not only the BJP prime minister's friends, but have already started finding ways to infiltrate the Indian agricultural sector. Corporate interest has been swapped out for the lives of farmers. The PM openly called protestors "agitated pests" in congress.

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This type of censorship or "blackout" of the South Asian community is not uncommon. As mentioned, a majority of the protestors are Sikh and/or Punjabi, and Instagram has censored the hashtag #sikh on multiple occasions. Additionally, it has left up hate speech against Sikh prophets, but taken down pictures of peaceful protestors. This has left a lot of stress on the brown diaspora, as getting the message out has been difficult online, and in the mainstream media.

Some major news outlets have posted either bias and/or racist headlines – some of which included calling these protestors "terrorists." They likely followed the Indian news outlets, which are bribed and blackmailed by the current Indian government to post propaganda. It is a toxic cycle that we have had to dismantle from a "grassroots" perspective.

Indianapolis

Just a few weeks ago, the USA was met with another white male (Brandon Hole) who committed a mass shooting. [He took his own life after he shot eight individuals](#), and injured several more. Half of these victims were of the Sikh-Punjabi community in Indianapolis, and the others were white, and one woman of colour (race unconfirmed).

Not only would have the shooter been labelled a "terrorist" if he was a person of colour, the FBI would have "held onto him" when they found out he was a danger to society. Hole's own family turned him into the police last year when they found criminal



showed that he visited white supremacist websites – he was also a former employee of the same FedEx facility, and was well aware of the dominant ratio of brown employees.

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To sum it up

As you can see, “brown equity” is important on many levels. This is just the “tip of the iceberg” when we look at deep-rooted issues that derive from colonization. Even though the racism and barriers may not be apparent, they are dangerous because they are invisible. If our systems and outlets do not turn around to see the harm that is being caused, there is the chance of thousands of people dying not only due to the protest, but because of hate crimes.



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