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Problems Faced by The Students from North-East India In Metropolitan Cities: A Sociological Study

Bitharai Narzary

Abstract: As a lot of North-Eastern students go to other states of India for their higher education or job purposes, undoubtedly, they face a lot of problems every day. So, this paper seeks to inquire and understand the nature and extension of the problems faced by the NorthEastern students.

Keywords: North-eastern, Students, Migration, Racism, Discrimination, Metropolitan cities, Problems.

Introduction

The people from North East in general migrate to metropolitan cities in India for better education and job opportunities, as most of the premier educational institutes and Multinational Corporations are in the metropolitan cities like New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore and the like. Metro cities have become a preferred destination for work on a part-time basis also. A large number of North eastern people are also engaged in the organized and unorganized sectors like hospitality, shopping malls, and Business Process Outsourcing jobs. Most of the migrants are young unmarried men and women who want to be financially independent with a good career. The people from the North-east migrate to metro cities because of political turmoil, issues of security, and lack of employment opportunities in their region. It is primarily the lop-sided economic development in this region that has induced people to migrate to cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Bangalore. Secondary data sources like Census of India (2001) reveal that Delhi is the most popular destination as it offers both economic and educational opportunities. According to the 2001 Census, north-eastern migrants constituted 64 thousand of total migrants in Delhi.

The existing studies on this issue has shown that migration has offered both educational as well as economic opportunities to north-eastern people. These studies have also portrayed that the migrants from the North-East are also facing different types of problems in metro cities. They find difficulty in finding a house for rent. Sometimes they are also subjected to racism, as Northeast people have different facial features from mainland people. They are being questioned on what they eat (dog or snake-eaters), they are also being mocked for their accent as they are not perfect in speaking Hindi. The people from North-east appear different in terms of physical features when compared to any other part of India because of the geographical impact and heredity. Also, at a time when the world is battling a global health crisis, things in India have taken an unpleasant turn. Now, with the rise of pandemic, the toll of racism has increased which resulted in labelling North-eastern as "corona" or "virus". Many incidents happened such as they could not even dare to step out of their homes for groceries. Some of them are being forced to go back home. People from Northeast have been targeted for racial discrimination and slurs, with such incident like a Manipuri girl was being 'spat on' and was called 'corona' by a middle-age man. On the other hand, a group of students in Kolkata were allegedly attacked and beaten by their neighbours who demanded for them to leave their houses. From being abused to being evicted from their hostels and rented rooms, Covid-19 has shown cruelty towards people from northeast India. This is not the first time that these people are facing problems in the different metropolitan cities in India. They are often questioned on their identity and have to fight hard to gain mainstream acceptance. The rise of such issues, with the onset of the pandemic at present times, have made it even more difficult for them to survive in other parts of India. Keeping this in mind, the present study, makes an attempt to document and analyse the major challenges faced by the people of North-east India in the various metropolitan cities of India.

Literature review

North-East people are increasingly migrating towards different destinations like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai in search of opportunities despite of prevalence of problems and racial discrimination. Many of them are youth and migration has substantially increased (Marchang 2008 and 2011). Racial prejudice and discrimination were common and obvious to them. Studies in Delhi concluded that in Delhi a racial discrimination against North-Eastern people has increased and social profiling is the root cause of racial discrimination from North-East India. (Chandra 2011)

NSSO (64th Round) 2007-08 not only provides inter-state in-migration and out-migration data, but also the reasons for migration. It has listed out five reasons for migration, that are: employment, study, marriage, forced migration, movement of parents or earning members and others. It is found that female migration from rural areas for education is very high in states like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland and Sikkim. In case of employment, rural female migration is very high from Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. NSSO also reveals that net-migration rate is calculated by subtracting in-migration and out-migration rates for all the states. It has found that net-migration is highest for Delhi and Maharashtra with highest number of in-migrants. These states are followed by Haryana, Punjab and Gujarat. Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam and Tripura which also record positive figures, indicating inmigration being higher than out-migration. Negative net-migration rate is observed in states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Kerala, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur, here out-migration rate is higher than in-migration.

Marchang (2008) pointed out that young unmarried Tangkhuls were increasingly migrating from Ukhrul district of Manipur to Delhi due to unemployment problems and increase in educational contest. Those migrants only migrated after the completion of their matriculation and above education and this kind of migration has been largely motivated by self. Migrants mostly considered Delhi to be the better option for the educational system to fulfill their aspirations of employment opportunities. Acquiring a government job was the main motive of the student migrants. So, most of the students stayed back in Delhi to seek their aspired government jobs through competitive exams. Further, Marchang (2008 and 2011), Usha and Shimray (2010), Chandra (2011) and Remesh (2012) established that many migrants were students or employed in formal and informal salaried employments including retail sector, hospitality, BPO, etc. A large number of north-east people are engaged in organized and unorganized sectors in Bangalore (Gooptu and Sengupta,2012). Moreover, Remesh (2012) pointed out that migrants from North-east to Delhi are from the rich segment, better economic condition and better educational background who have completed matriculation and above education.

Sumi Krishna (2013), described that the North-east is 'ethnically' and 'geographically' distinct from the mainland. There are many misconceptions regarding this region and its people. Most popular misconceptions lie in their cultural practices and eating habits (dog or beef or snake-eaters), taking advantage of Scheduled Tribe reservations in the matter of education and employment. Some even have the notion that this region is not part of India (Longkumer, 2014). They are often considered as Chinese due to their Mongoloid physical features. Nido Tania's murder (January 29, 2014) was one of the infamous examples of 'hate crime' in Delhi where a student from Arunachal Pradesh was abused so badly that he later succumbed to death.

According to Bezbaruah Committee Report (2014), north-east migrants' feeling of

"insecurity" and "vulnerability" in cities is different from their homeland. Their Mongoloid features and friendly outlooks are often mistaken. They prefer to live with people who are either their relatives or friends or anyone coming from this region. Harassment like verbal abuse through derogatory words like 'Chinki', 'Chow' and so on has taken a daily pattern. The Committee has been very proactive in suggesting various short term and long-term recommendations in the form of awareness campaigns and strict legal procedures. Taking due notice of the recommendations, the government has banned the word 'Chinki' in public places and anyone using the word can be booked under the Schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 and can face five years of imprisonment without anticipatory bail (Jan 2, 2015, Times of India).

Deccan Herald, August 2012, pointed out that the migrants of the North-east are also held responsible for any political turmoil occurring in their region. For example, in July 2012, when riots broke out in Assam between Bodo people and Muslims, north-east migrants faced abuse and threats in all cities. Many of them tried to escape from Mumbai, Bangalore and other urban centers.

Racial attacks and discrimination increased during COVID-19 pandemic: Indians from the northeast face intensified racism as coronavirus fear grows. The coronavirus pandemic has unleashed new kinds of racism. Several people from northeast became a target to racial attack, they were being called "corona" or "virus" by mainland

Indians. The main reason for northeast to become a target has been that people from Northeast, to racist minds, share the 'mongoloid' feature of East Asians. Many incidents came into light, such as in Ahmedabad, on 22 March, police arrived at the office of the dental insurance company to take nine employees from Nagaland away for Covid-19 testing. Complaints were made against them stating that the employees were from China. In another case on 28 March, a 24 year old woman from Sikkim with intense abdominal pain from pre-diagnosed urinary-tract infection was denied entry to the emergency ward at KPC Hospital in Jadavpur in Kolkata. She was directed to undergo screening for Covid-19 despite having no symptoms of viral infection. Later, when she headed to another hospital in Tollygunge she was directed to do the same, but the hospital didn't have the required equipment. She showed her medical certificate detailing her treatment for UTI which exempted her from Covid-19 screening, but she was taken to the isolation ward and was kept for a night with other patients suspected to have Covid-19. She was ignored and was questioned by the doctor if she was from China. Northeastern people across the country who have faced pervasive racism from fellow Indians since the country's foundation have been reporting a spike of racist attacks and discrimination (The Caravan, April 2020).

The Print (2020) also spoke to several people from across the Northeast who claimed similar experiences since the pandemic broke. According to the report, in Delhi's north campus area a man on a scooty spat on a woman from Manipur and called her 'corona'. It also mentioned that the list does not end here, a group of students in Kolkata were allegedly attacked and beaten by their neighbours who demanded for them to leave their houses. Two students from Darjeeling also faced racial slurs linked to coronavirus in Kolkata. 'Corona' is not just a virus but Indians are using it as a slur against people from Northeast.

Findings and Discussion

The paper title 'Problems faced by students of North-east India in metropolitan cities' which was conducted among various students from different parts of north-east India provides an overview regarding different types of problems like racism, discrimination etc. faced by North-eastern students in metro cities. It also highlights the present issue faced by the Northeastern in metro cities due to Covid-19 pandemic. The most important part of the study deals with the nature and extension of such issues.

Where did they migrate and why?

Majority of the respondents migrated to metro cities for education purposes as they felt that the opportunities back at home are limited and the employment rate is very low. Most of the respondents migrated to Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata and Pune. Majority of the respondents migrated to Delhi for education purposes. Findings also revealed that people migrated to Bangalore for job purposes.

Kinds of problem faced after migrating

Most of the respondents said that they have faced problems in adjusting to a new place with different food habits and new people as the place was completely different from their hometown. They had faced issues in communicating with people as they didn't know how to speak their native language. Some of the respondents faced problems in finding rent, facing stereotypical assumptions by house owners concerning the food and habit. Majority of the respondents have faced racial slurs in public, being teased for their eating habits as "rat eater", "dog eater". One of the respondents who migrated to Bangalore shared his experience as he was requested to eat stray dogs by a stranger who was frustrated with dogs. Another respondent who migrated to Delhi shared that she experienced racist remarks in the city (Delhi) was almost an utter unpleasant experience. She was called out names in the metro which she took as a daily route to her workplace and institution. She had also faced issues searching for a house as the real estate broker took advantage of their innocence and misinterpreted in sales. Few respondents have faced problems in adapting to the new weather. As we can see that northeastern still face harassment and racism while migrating to cities, one respondent was of the opinion that north-eastern facing racial slurs in public space and stereotypical social categories should not be caused to form a 'norm' or 'normalize'. So, she highly agrees to the fact that people from Northeast India still face prejudice in cities. Another respondent who migrated to Kolkata shared his experience that vegetable sellers and rickshaw pullers always tried to loot them as their faces were not familiar and they were also being passed comments by few locals. One respondent said that there are many problems faced by North-east people such as name calling, verbal abuse, being asked for a higher fare than the average even though the distance is the same while travelling by auto rickshaw. Most of them were of the view that they had faced racial discrimination to some extent.

Opinions regarding the problems faced by north-eastern

Most of the respondents are aware of different types of problems in metro cities as they have experienced or faced it themselves. Majority of the respondents have faced racial discrimination to some extent. One was of the opinion that it is because of the way we look and language can be a barrier and he also said that they don't know that we exist and are part of India, they have never heard of Assam. He also shared an incident which happened with him and his roommate when they were about to go back home for holiday, their caretaker of the house asked from which country they are even when they said Assam as their hometown. Some of the respondents were of the view that North-east region has always been isolated from the mainland India. One of the respondents said that negligence by mainlanders, national news agencies together sum up the reason of North-Eastern being harassed, either physically or socially. Another respondent gave her opinion that North-eastern are mostly discriminated from the mainstream India. She felt that it was also prevalent to some extent in the place she stayed. She also said that Northeast is often considered to be a hilly place with trees and forest around without much buildings around. Most of the respondents felt that cultural education is necessary as one respondent has said that the kind of problems faced by North-eastern is a matter of concern which directly reflects the lack of quality qualification across the Nation and lesser priorities given to the cultures and historical significance of North east. Few of the respondents felt that it has come down in recent years. In support to that, one respondent has said that there's certainly racism present but the good thing is people have also started accepting that it is a problem. Many of his friends have stood up for him on matters like this. Another respondent was of the opinion that cases of North-eastern being harassed and ill-treated have come into limelight recently and need more attention from the government. Seeing that racial discrimination against North-east Indians which is still very prevalent, one of the respondents said that there is racism in India not only against north-eastern people but also against south Indians, Adivasi(tribal). She gave an example as harassment from landlords, employees and assaults on the street are commonplace. She also mentioned that people should know that we belong to a vibrant and more diverse part of the country, because of their sheer ignorance and lack of acknowledgement towards our own people of Northeast has pushed them to the corner. Another respondent gave his opinion that this is not something new for the North-eastern students who left their homeland for studies or job to other states racist slur are very common and this shows lack of law and order that despite of many reforms in the Constitution for safeguarding its own people, North-eastern have to go through such incidents in their day-today life.

Reason behind the problems faced by North-eastern

The problem about Northeast people facing racism is truly concerning especially when it is still valid till recent times. Majority of the respondents said that the reasons behind these problems are mainly based on the way we look and the food we eat. One of the respondents was of the view that people have already built a perception on their mind regarding Northeast, starting from our mongoloid looks to food behaviour. She felt it's more about clearing out the pictures they have in their mind and making them educate about Northeast. People should be taught that North-eastern are presented with diverse cultures, languages and food habits with one commonality. She also mentioned that they should be made aware that our home is not a remote corner of a huge country but we all are one and should not forget that at the end of the day, we are all mere human beings. Another respondent felt that the reason behind these discriminations is the upbringing of these people who have never been acquainted to the Northeastern part of the country. Also, the facial characteristics of the North-eastern people was considered different from other people due to which we generally face discrimination. She also mentioned that, in her case she was considered to be Bengali as her facial characteristics were not similar to their idea of North-eastern girl. She also gave another reason that the mainlanders have an idea about our eating habits which they considered as something different and most of the time identify us and our personalities with our eating habits. The third respondent mentioned that the main reason behind the problems face by north-eastern in different scopes are mainly because they are minority in India, also differences in their race and features from the mainland Indians as the mainlanders see them as outsiders often giving names like Chinese, Nepali, Corona and other racial comments. The fourth respondent was of the view that the low exposure to north east is one of the major factors which leads to wrongly formed perception and generalization about people coming from Northeast. Whereas some of the few respondents felt that it is due to lack of awareness among the people and lack of knowledge regarding the Northeastern states and its culture. Most of them felt that non-inclusive mentality, ignorance and lack of knowledge about the people of this region are few of the main reasons. One respondent mentioned that the lack of awareness among people regarding north-eastern and apart from that he also mentioned about the language barrier between the northeast people and rest of India as people from northeast don't necessarily speak Hindi or understand it which further leads to alienation between the two groups. Another respondent gave education or literacy as a factor constituting to the masses. He said that many people in India still do not know where Assam is situated, whether Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh is part of India. One of the respondents also shared that along with lack of awareness and education, also being from a privileged background the mainland Indian often feel themselves superior that north-eastern. The stereotype needs to be stopped in order to evolve as a better human being and a better society to live in.

Opinion regarding the present situation faced by north-eastern due to Covid-19 Pandemic.

It is very difficult to see that people considered the north-eastern people as 'Chinese' who have carried 'Corona' into the country and blame them. The present situation faced by north-eastern people due to Covid-19 pandemic, that discrimination based on race still exist in the country. Many incidents happened such as a women were spitted in Delhi by two local boys, belonging to northeast were not allowed inside the malls in Bengaluru and many similar incidents took place in the entire country which shows that racial discrimination has further increased in times of pandemic. In regard to this, one respondent said that Covid-19 is generally a community disease. It has nothing to do with caste, religion etc. But right now because of mongoloid features assume that north-eastern belong from China and as general they have been blaming Chinese people for the virus and north-eastern looks sum up more with their beliefs. So, cases like racism are very common from cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore. North-eastern who live across cities in India, for work or for study, face such racism almost daily. Sometimes even ending in tragedies. Recently, however, the Covid-19 pandemic is bringing out far more deplorable sides to the mainland population of India. She also mentioned that cases ranges from being called names to being spat on a public road, all because of the way we look. She also added that as a person living outside from home, north-eastern still live in fear every day and tend to ask themselves whether they are safe here or not in different cities. The other respondent said that Covid-19 pandemic has made it even worse for north-eastern as mainland Indians are calling people 'corona' and 'virus'. He also said that proper action should be taken by higher authority and should ensure proper law and order and vigilant towards such incident. One of the respondent said that north-eastern are facing this racist remarks because of our resemblance with Chinese. Whereas, one respondent who got stuck in Bangalore said that some people from north-east are facing difficulties like shortage of money, shortage of food as they are not being allowed to go out and also facing difficulty in going back home. Some of the respondents said that as coronavirus originated from China and since Chinese are in the states people might be confused with north-eastern because they look similar so mainlanders are being aware of them. One respondent was of the view that people in metro cities are facing the worst time due to outbreak of pandemic. She also mentioned that some of her friends who are stuck in the cities are being asked to leave their room, being teased as virus, were not allowed to seat in auto rickshaw. Racial slurs and attacks, discrimination based on facial features, north-eastern are regarded as carrier of corona virus as they have Chinese look. The other respondent said it is saddening and shocking, times like this bring out the worst and the best in people. It has also pointed out the fact racism is present and need to be tackled immediately.

These problems will continue or end

Majority of the respondents said that these problems will continue. In regard to this, one respondent said that these problems will never end until and unless people don't initiate or take certain measures for example, Voice of North East should reach to every single person living in this country so that they can educate their generation about northeastern, that they are also human. But this case is not unique to India. Many Asians living in the US and Europe have also said they are becoming targets of racist attacks and verbal slurs. Another respondent was of the view that prejudice of race will continue throughout. She said whether it is against the north-eastern by mainland Indians or vice-versa, against Blacks, against any minorities. The belief in separatism and to remain segregated because of skin color, customs, place of birth, or any factor is deeply rooted in Indian History since the Vedic era. One of the respondents also shared his opinion saying that these problems will still continue in the near future. He said that as long as people are ignorant about the people belonging to the northeast, the problems will continue to occur. He also added if the situation is to be improved, he believed that education can play an important role in bridging the gap between Rest of India and northeast, school syllabus has to include chapters with information or people living in the northeast. The more people in Rest of India start to know about northeast, the less will be the discrimination faced by the North-eastern people. Racial discrimination has always been present in every society and will remain until people learn to accept each other. The other respondent shared his view saying this problem will continue until the whole of India gets a mass uprising and get rid of their own ignorant attitude and also the National Media is the first and foremost thing that of every group and generation in the country should accept north-eastern and their issues within the region must be highlighted at a national level because they have a major role in influencing the masses. One of the respondents also shared that everyone has a role to play in this matter, their stories of glories go unheard. He also said that it can nowhere be seen in textbooks, nor been shared and passed through to the whole nation by people. He also added to his point that they have been part of this before the independent day till today during this pandemic but always been taken lightly and more so over wholly neglected. Whereas the other

respondent was of the view that these problems may decrease but will never end even though they get education this won't stop now or in near future because of mainland Indians who don't think north-eastern as Indians because of their looks. Another respondent was of the opinion that these problems will continue but with more awareness, it will eventually come to an end. One of the respondents felt that a part of it will continue but as a part of being from the northeast community, they can always take steps to at-least change their perspective. The other respondent shared that until and unless people are not aware regarding their own fellow Indians from the East and stop treating them as second-class citizens, he felt that only strict law and order and rapid action against culprits can minimize the increasing number of racism slur towards North-eastern.

Conclusion

The findings of the present research study have revealed that people from Northeast India migrated to metro cities for education and job opportunities. As an educational level keeps growing the likelihood of migration keeps going as well. It has also revealed that most of the migrants are students rather than workers. Some of them had migrated alone and some of them along with their friends or relatives. The reason that was found behind their migration was due to limited educational facilities and lack of employment opportunities in their region. Along with the migration they also have to face different types of problems in metro cities. The present study explored various types of problems faced by north-eastern students and workers in metro cities. The study revealed that most of the people from northeast face difficulty in adjusting with the new environment, with food and new people. Besides that, they also have to face stereotypical assumptions, discrimination, racial slurs, ill-treatment etc. Results from this study indicated that racial discrimination against north-eastern is still very much valid till recent times. We can also see that with the rise of global health crisis, covid-19 pandemic which has created panic across India, people from Northeast have become targets for racial discrimination and slurs. Many incidents came to light, such as a Manipuri woman who had been 'spat on' and called 'corona' by a middle-aged man. People from northeast were not allowed to enter the malls, some are forced to leave the house, being called "corona" or "virus" to their face, have been denied entry into apartment complexes etc. These incidents faced by north-eastern people due to Covid-19 pandemic shows that discrimination based on race has further increased in the country and it is even getting worse. Research has indicated that these incidents faced by northeastern people are due to their 'mongoloid' feature which is similar to Chinese people as the virus originated from China. Violence against and stigmatizing people from the north-east in metro cities is not just a corona phenomenon. It has been deeply rooted in the country and every once in a while, and sometimes even ends in a very ugly form. Seeing all these incidents we still can say that racial discrimination against north-eastern are still prevalent in the country. North-eastern are a minority in India, also differences in their race and features from mainland India cause the mainlanders to see them as an outsider, often giving names like Chinese, Nepali, momo, Corona and other racial comments. The people from northeast India also appear differently when compared to any parts of India because of their Geographical impact. The study suggests that these problems will be less only when the people from rest of India start to know about the Northeast. It also suggests that until and unless the north-eastern and their problems are not given national importance such problems will continue. However, cultural education can also play an important role in bridging the gap between the north-eastern and rest of India. School syllabus should include chapters with information on people living in the Northeast. The Central Government should also take initiative in preventing the natives of one state harassing in any manner the migrants of any other Indian states. It also suggests that the condition of northeastern people in metro cities across India should be the subject matter of discussion.

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