

## **In Search of Diverse Prospects of Existence in a New Conurbation**

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Migration is not a new phenomenon. It has been happening since time immemorial. Northeast India is a region extremely rich in natural resources, but still remains relatively less developed as compared to other parts of the country in all fields including education, health, infrastructure, etc. This article discusses the various push and pull factors which lead to the migration of young people from Northeast India to Delhi and map the issues of coexistence confronted by them in Delhi. It also looks into the myriad experiences of migrants from the northeast region in Delhi and the perceptions of the host population about the migrants. Often people's decision of migrating from Northeast India to Delhi in search of better higher education, infrastructure and job opportunities, which are reasonably lacking in the Northeast region, is a conscious one. It is not an unknown fact that discrimination exists in Delhi. There are various challenges that people from Northeast India face in Delhi, discrimination being one of the most common one. There is a major difference in culture which makes it harder for people from Northeast India to adjust in Delhi.

**Keywords:** Migration, Coexistence, Challenges, Discrimination

### **Introduction**

Aims and aspirations brought Khreimeno, a girl from Nagaland to Delhi. She wanted to experience life in a big city like Delhi. She joined the bachelors programme at the University of Delhi and started living in Gautam Nagar which is a popular place for paying guests for the people from Northeast India. She wanted to experience the richness of the big city "Delhi". She was awed by the excellent facilities, shopping malls, etc. Her stay in Delhi gave her good exposure to city life and above all she experienced a combination of joy and melancholy. She experienced strange people staring at her as if she was an alien; some people were quite rude (rough and uncivilized as she would like to put it). Her day often started with a fuming argument with the auto drivers because the only time autos would go by meter was if the driver thought she wouldn't know the proper route or if there was a cop watching her negotiate. Many times auto divers asked her for double fare because she looked different. Soon she got used to all these and tried

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to concentrate on her studies. She accepted that she made some close friends and as a whole her stay in Delhi was extremely useful as she explored the city and studied the subject in the college of her choice and became an independent person. Her experience probably reflects the experience of many women from Northeast India in Delhi but not all. There is a positive side as well as a negative side to it.

The above narrative is a reflection of the everyday struggles migrants from Northeast India confront outside the region, particularly in metropolitan cities like Delhi. Like the girl from Nagaland whose experiences were told in the above narrative, many young people from Northeast India have migrated out of the region having high aspirations and hopes for a better life. So far, the experiences of migrants from the northeast region have been complex. This article will look at the young people who migrate from Northeast India to Delhi for various reasons and the various challenges they face.

### **Relocating from Northeast India to the National Capital**

Since 2000, there has been a rapid increase in migration especially of young people from Northeast India to other parts of the country including Delhi. The Northeast region embracing the eight states including Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Sikkim are relatively less developed and urbanised in terms of technological advancement and infrastructure as compared to other parts of India in spite of being endowed with abundance of natural resources (Das, 2013).

There are various reasons why people from Northeast India choose to migrate to Delhi. The existing studies show that the northeast region lacks quality education, employment opportunities, proper infrastructure, etc. The issues in Northeast India are deep rooted as the northeast region suffers from major ethnic problems and the army deployed heavily to control crisis situations and it has become a tormenting factor. To make the situation worse, the northeast region is not politically stable and the armed forces have ruined the peace and cultural essence to an extent. Ever since excessive army deployment took place molestation, rapes and murders became rampant and on top of that the people have the fear of being deprived of their basic human rights: the right to freedom and the right to life.

The major reason for regional isolation is lack of government initiative towards improving technology, industries and development as a whole and this has majorly reduced the trust of the people in their respective state governments and pushing them to go to other places like Delhi for a safe and better quality of life. Although the northeast region has high literacy rates with minimal gender disparity, yet, the employment market in the region has been limited to the government sector alone. The private sector is yet to penetrate into the region. But the people from Northeast India have elegantly blended up steadily to corporate and government positions in all parts of the country. Migration to metropolitan city like Delhi has offered them new opportunities as well as challenges. They have been successful in entering into the service sector and also in other important centres of higher learning. Yet, the other side of the reality remains that many of them continue to be victims of racial discrimination and sexual harassment. Despite such continual discrimination and harassment, migration to Delhi continues unabatedly and this trend seems to continue till date.

The existing literature on migration of people from Northeast India to Delhi reveals the fact that even after years of migration and settling in Delhi, there seems to be a gap between the locals and them or to put it bluntly migrants from North East. This research was an attempt to explore and understand why such gaps continue to exist and at the same time, highlighting how both made an effort to bridge such gaps. There is an urge amongst the youth in the northeast region for higher studies more and also in diverse fields, but there is lack of quality educational facilities and infrastructure in the northeast region. A girl from Nagaland says that Northeast India is a conservative, community-oriented society. Students especially women do not get the freedom to lead their lives in the way they want. Delhi is a place with corporate amalgamation and is cosmopolitan; there are people from all parts of the country and from foreign countries working in Delhi. These provide people an arena to interact with diverse people from different culture, which is lacking in Northeast India. The youth that comes from Northeast India has to cope with the new environment; they face many issues but at the same time it gives them a sense of freedom as they are far away from their homes and do not have the various cultural norms to be followed.

### **Northeast India: A Diverse Land**

Northeast India is embraced with eight states viz. Meghalaya, Manipur, Sikkim, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. The region covers 7.9 percent of the total geographical area of the country. It shares a vast international border with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan and therefore holds immense significance. The region is home to a diverse range of flora and fauna. It is a high biodiversity spot and leading conservation agencies want to invest in the northeast region. New species of animals have been discovered recently in the region. The northeast region embraces 51 forest types, out of 9 important types of vegetation; the northeast region has 6 types (Chatterjee, 2006).

Geographical detachment from other parts of the country has been the major obstacle in the economic and social development of the northeast region. About 40 to 45 percent of the region is covered by forests mainly hilly for which constructing roads and railways are extremely difficult. It also faces unexpected and recurrent interruptions because of heavy rainfall. Even today there are some villages in the region that can be reached only by foot or by crossing rivers without bridge which are often flooded. The population of Northeast India is predominantly rural and majority of them stays in villages. The major reason for lack of industries in the region is bad transportation system and also insufficient power generation in spite of immense potential. The feeling of neglect is the root cause for problems like insurgency. According to the census of India most states in the northeast have high literacy rate as compared to the national average. Limited job opportunities for educated youths and aspiration to lead western lifestyle have created frustration among the youths and this has led to an increase in the consumption of alcohol and drugs. Adding to the existing problems, the northeast region shares vast international borders with other countries which have led to large unskilled migration of people from neighbouring countries into the region. The situation can be improved if the northeast region is well connected with the rest of the country by good

quality roads and railways (Phadke, 2008).

A number of clans, kinship groups and extended families together form a tribe. There is a sense of belonging to a community. The tribal society has undergone a modernisation process and identity crises is bound to happen as the tribes have evolved from engaging themselves in head-hunting as a sport to cricket in a short duration (Singh, 1987).

### **Quantity over Quality Education**

Technical education got a boost with the establishment of quality technological institutions like various Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) in India. Northeast India has been relatively underdeveloped and late in technological advancements because of the confinement of the elite technological institutions in certain developed regions of the country. Development of the northeast region taken as a whole is being affected as a result of insufficient development of human resource base which is again due to lack of appropriate technological institutions in the region. Constant neglect and inadequate educational infrastructure has been creating constant problems in the northeast region. Educational institutions need to be relevant and imbibe the ability to be dynamic and proactive, and this will facilitate their adaptability which will guarantee their continued existence and expansion in the near future. Otherwise these institutions will become unavoidably extinct unless they are equipped to respond to the changing requirements. The only way Northeast India can make a place for itself in the educational scenario is by ensuring good quality education. Elite institutions providing good quality education will make the students of the northeast region skilled and help them in making place for themselves in the world of competition with many strong players (Pant, 2011).

The need of the hour is to develop societies in Northeast India whose growth has been stagnant for long. Every society desires development and denizens in the northeast are revolting against the lack of development and slow socio-economic advancement in the region. Rapid economic development can take place with the help of educational advancement. Education at school-level helps to equip a progressive work force and competent leaders develop from university education and both together help in the overall development of the nation by producing doctors, scientists and other professions required for the development of any nation. The growth in the education sector has been remarkable in the region with ten central universities and various premier institutions like IIT, Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Institute of Hotel Management, Catering and Nutrition (IHM), National Institute of Technology (NITs) and some medical colleges in the northeast region but still they are still falling short of adequate facilities. The number of schools and teachers are less as compared to the levels of enrolment. A disproportion can also be seen in the overall educational system with the higher education growing more than other levels of education. The main focus remains on mainstream education and not much attention is being given to vocational education. There is more quantitative growth in the educational sector rather than qualitative growth in the northeast region. Unemployment is rampant and educational and other facilities have not reached out to the people in the rural areas. Education helps in development and in improving living conditions in any society but it has failed to do so in Northeast India. Policies have been

implemented in the region without keeping in mind that the northeast region is different from other parts of India in many ways. Education and development are interlinked. Socio-economic development cannot be enhanced unless the educational institutes start producing man power that is most appropriate for the development of the region. Education can lead to development only if it produces human resource which would help in social, economic and scientific development of the country. In the case of Northeast India an educational policy exclusively meant for the region keeping in mind the various socio-cultural, geographical and other factors in mind could only accelerate the development process (Asadullah, 2010).

### **Is it Lack of Skill or Lack of State Attention?**

After many years since the new economic policy has been implemented, it pertinent to look into the impact of the reform in different parts of the country. Unemployment remains the main concern of policy makers in the country keeping in mind the emphasis on generating income to reduce poverty. The employment scenario since 1990s has not been very good. The studies on employment scenario at the state level have limited themselves to the seventeen major states including Assam, while the rest of the northeastern states are excluded in these studies. This is the main reason why the northeast region does not get appropriate attention in planning and also in implementation. The people of the northeast region are predominantly engaged in subsistence agriculture and the region has poor industrial background. The rate of poverty and migration is very high in the northeast region. Female workers are often pushed towards agriculture and they do not contribute much in the non-agricultural activities. Under such a situation it a great challenge to put forward an all-inclusive development strategy for the region. It is important to plan and implement inclusive policies especially designed for the northeast region and there should be effective monitoring (Sahu, 2012).

Inclusion and underdevelopment are the main challenges faced by Northeast India at present. Availability of basic facilities and equal opportunities for everyone is what characterizes development. The state has failed in providing development in the northeast region. There are separatist activities in the northeast region especially in Manipur, Assam, Nagaland and Tripura. In view of this the region is looked upon through the lens of national security and strategic concern. There are minimal efforts to reduce the natural and manmade limitation like topographical constrains, poor infrastructure, and reducing conflicts. The main cause of political instability is the unsettled issues of identity, poverty and unemployment. The state has chosen not to pay attention to the current situation in the northeast. This has caused political instability and not only caused fear amongst the people but has also affected the development process (Singh, 2006).

There is inequality in the levels of development within the northeast region as well. Assam and Manipur are relatively developed followed by Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. There is also difference in the levels of infrastructure development as well. Assam is the highest in terms of infrastructure development. As agricultural development is directly related to infrastructural development and the economy of the northeast region is predominantly agrarian, infrastructural development is important (Sharma, 2012).

### **An Obscure Region**

Adding to secessionist episodes and insurgency, the settlement of diverse ethnic groups together makes the problems in the northeast region more complex. In order to protect their own identity and culture different ethnic groups in the northeast region are fighting for the same space. Illegal immigration especially from Bangladesh has made the situation worse which increasingly reduce the number of indigenous people. There are demands for separate homelands by different ethnic groups as they are threatened of their existence. Large-scale internal displacement has taken place in the northeast region because of conflicts between states and ethnic groups. Northeast India is what it is mainly because it has been excluded and because of its tough geographical terrain. The governments have not bothered to look into the problems of the indigenous people which have caused mistrust and hatred. The only way to re-establish peace is by land restoration, eradication of poverty and enhanced development with dedicated leadership in the northeast region (Phukan, 2013).

The idea of being in an underdeveloped area where conflicting ethnic groups reside was cultivated from the exclusion of the northeast region. The history of exclusion from the other parts of India created a sense of incompatibility, mistrust and hard feelings about being made a part of India. An anti-India sentiment arose amongst the people of the northeast region.

In spite of the continued inter- and intra-ethnic violence in Northeast India, internal security in the northeast region is not a matter of much worry for the government. The region has witnessed years of insurgency: the hills on the south and east of the Assam plains witnessed series of turmoil by the Naga, Manipuri, and Mizo insurgency in the 1950s and 1960s. The wars with Pakistan followed by Bangladesh's independence in 1971 had drastic repercussions for the region's security as the war sent enormous refugees into Indian territory. There was a tribal movement against migrants since 1967 and in Assam an anti-immigrant movement was observed in 1979 which led to large-scale inter-communal violence. The current politically instable and complex scenario of the northeast region has more to do with the weakness and corruption of formal political institutions in the region (Lacina, 2009).

### **Migration: A Journey from the Northeast to Delhi**

There are various factors that lead to migration such as cost of living, connection with relatives and friends, better employment opportunities, higher education, marriage, etc. People choose certain places over the over because of these factors (Roy & Nijim, 1991). Migration has both positive and negative aspects for both men and women. In case of women, it helps them to move away from a patriarchal society and create an individualistic and independent lifestyle for themselves and become self-reliant. This helps in improving the socio-economic status of the women (Sharma, 2011).

McDuie-Ra (2012) talks about the three intertwined dynamics that can be observed in the process of migration from excluded areas to mainland metro cities. These are, the people who migrate from border areas to mainland metro cities often face discrimination. Along with the negative aspects of migration there is also a positive side, that is, they make a place for themselves in the new city and by migrating the people from

Northeast India feel more like citizens of India as compared to when they were staying in their excluded native areas. Migration of people from Northeast India to Delhi exhibits the inclusive approach towards drawing people from borderland areas to Delhi. This had reduced the feeling of being left out among the people from borderlands that have been excluded for long. The northeast region shares vast international border and is barely connected with other parts of India. It is inhabited by three main groups of people: indigenous communities classified as “Scheduled Tribes”, other ethnic communities that are not classified as tribes and migrant communities from within and around India. The tribals are largely followers of Christianity with small sections of tribal communities following Buddhism and animism and the non-tribals mostly follow Hinduism and Islam. The northeast region can no longer be called only as a borderland as it shares ethnic and cultural bond across the border. The process of state-making had created a separatist struggle in the northeast region. Earlier mostly people who travelled from Northeast India to Delhi were those who came to get trained in Indian bureaucracy or for tertiary education. This group of people continues to get attracted towards Delhi because it is home to many premier institutions and many preparatory classes. Many people from other backgrounds also have started migrating to Delhi in search of employment in hospitality sector, BPOs, etc. Out of all the people migrating from Northeast India to other cities, 48 percent migrate to Delhi. According to Duncan there are various reasons why people choose to migrate from Northeast India to Delhi: to live in a safer environment because the northeast region is conflict-prone, some areas are militarised and there is widespread insurgency. Along with a dream to live in a safer environment, the people of Northeast India also have ambitions. The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution also provides the tribal people reservation in the Indian bureaucracy and in educational institutions. For many parents, it is a factor of pride that their children are studying or working in Delhi. For the youth in Northeast India, Delhi seems like a way to fulfil their ambitions and achieve the goals they desire. Duncan also pointed out that the challenges and issues people from Northeast might face after migrating to Delhi are not much different from those faced by any other person migrating from any other city to Delhi. But the people of Northeast India often feel discriminated on account of being racially different and having different looks as compared to people from other parts of India. Discrimination is visible in the housing market because the housing is more expensive for migrants from Northeast India.

### **Discrimination**

It is a known fact that discrimination exists and often faced by marginalised people, particularly racially different northeasterners by other Indians. The death of a 19 year old boy Nido Tania from Arunachal Pradesh has once again brought out the issue of racial discrimination against people from Northeast India in Delhi (Singh, 2014).

According to the police, the shopkeepers made fun of Nido Tania’s appearance which led to a heated argument. Nido Tania’s father states that it was nothing but racism and his son was killed only because his looks are more like Chinese. Nido’s death has outraged people from Northeast and various communities have come out on the streets to protest. A Nigerian musician said that people call us with weird names like bamboos

and chimpanzees and spit on them. It is not just people from Northeast India who suffer from racial discrimination in Delhi. Pradyot Debbarma, Politician from northeast India, said that there is a sense among Indians that we cannot be racist; we have been victims of racism. The British were racist towards us during colonialism. But how long will we blame others? We are racist, let's accept it. Sanjoy Mazumdar wrote about his interaction with Nigerian students staying in the Khirki extension of Delhi. The Nigerian students shared their experience of how they were victims of racial discrimination. The Nigerian musician is leaving Delhi without completing his course. He said that he was extremely happy to come to Delhi but now he no longer wants to stay here. Indians think it is difference in culture and nothing else but it is high time we realise that racism does exist and something should be done urgently to deal with it.<sup>1</sup>

The outraged community from Northeast India in Delhi is out on protests. Fast track courts are being asked for by the legislators from the northeast region. The concerns of people from Northeast India were taken into account in a meeting where the home ministry constituted an administrative committee under the chairmanship of M.P. Bezbaruah, with H.W.T. Syeim, Alemtemshi Jamir, Tape Bagra, P. Bharat Singh, S. Saha, deputy secretary in the home ministry, and joint commissioner in Delhi Police Robin Hibu as members of the committee. M.P.s from Northeast India were asked to put forward their suggestions to the panel. The M.P.s asked to integrate the history and culture of Northeast India in the school textbooks and amalgamate the communities from Northeast India in the mainstream. There is a demand of a special anti-racism law to protect the people from Northeast India in Delhi (Jain, 2014).

Racially-motivated attacks further create a sense of being excluded and different from the rest of India. Since they are discriminated only because their looks and culture are not the same as others; people from the Northeast are made to feel like foreigners. Comments like “*chinky*”<sup>1</sup> due to the unwillingness of the police to file FIRs. Unless the case goes to the media, the police or political leaders take no action.

It is incorrectly perceived by most Indians that racism exists only in the western world, but they need to introspect their own attitudes and of people within the country towards the people from Northeast India. The mysterious death of Loitam Richard and many other young people from Northeast India will keep reminding them of how vulnerable the life of northeast people in the metropolitan cities of India. They are often treated as outsiders. In 2007, efforts were made by Delhi police to solve the problems of people from the northeast in Delhi especially women by coming up with a booklet named “Security Tips for North East Students” in which women from the northeast are asked not to wear “revealing dresses” and gave advice on preparing bamboo shoot, *akhuni*<sup>2</sup> and other dishes that give pungent smell without creating any problems in the neighbourhood. Racism continues to exist even though it is difficult to prove especially in case of sexual abuse or racial remarks and comments passed at people from Northeast India. It can only be felt. Only when there are extreme events which are racially-motivated the outrage within people comes out. We can be critical of racism if we make it visible and be aware of its presence not just try to deal with it legally (Jilangamba, 2012).

A person from Northeast India residing in Delhi said that there is no doubt that Delhi as a centre for education and studies is excellent and fair to all, and there are many



colleges and coaching institutions available to everyone alike. But in spite of all this, there are clear indications of discrimination in the daily life of a “North-eastern Delhiite” as he cited from his own experiences. In his view one very common problem the people from the northeast region face in Delhi is lack of or sometimes even complete loss of respect and acknowledgement for their culture and traditions. People from the northeast region are often racially harassed or abused or looked at differently mainly because of difference in their physical appearance. He said that in his experience, be it at local shops, metro stations or in any other queue, it is always the manner-deprived “Delhiites” who rush in and take their places. He continued sharing one of his appalling experiences that one day when he was at a sweet stall buying *jalebi*<sup>1</sup> and he was the first customer standing there. Even after reminding the shopkeeper about his order, the shopkeeper ignore him completely, but when other customers came along who spoke his language he took their orders and served them first. He explained how he just gnashed his teeth that moment and felt so frustrated. Soon after that day, he went to that shop again to buy the same usual stuff but this time there was a different shopkeeper. Having reached there first, he ordered the sweets and as he waited for the shopkeeper to weigh and pack the sweets, two other guys also came and asked for the same thing. It was only when the shopkeeper was handing over his order to the other two, he realised how disrespectful and uncivilized some people can be. Those guys audaciously ordered that shopkeeper to first give the order to them instead of him. They almost were going to make a fuss of the issue when the shopkeeper told them that the guy from Northeast India came first and so he deserves to get his order first. He was surprised that unlike the previous shopkeeper, this one had the decency to tell those guys that he came first. This happened in Gandhi Vihar where literally almost everyone except the shopkeepers are Civil Service aspirants and all one expects to find in such places is polite men and women. He inconsolably said that it is between such shopkeepers and people that people from Northeast India get their daily dose of discrimination. Even if you tell them how wrong they are, you would get to hear their quick and hurtful replies as they sarcastically laugh at them without feeling ashamed. He said that some people look at him and other people from Northeast India in such a way that makes them feel inferior and outlandish in Delhi.

### **Major Findings:**

#### *Migration - A Conscious Decision*

Interaction with people from the northeast in Delhi reflects the following observations on this issue. It was felt by the migrant population that lack of good facilities for higher education along with the requisite infrastructure and facilities coupled with lesser all-round development of the northeast region constituted one of the most important reasons for them to come to Delhi. This is all the more so in the field of technical, vocational and management education. According to most of them, their home towns and the northeast region as a whole lacked quality education, the facilities available for higher education were not sufficient. Lack of good roads and transportation system make things difficult for the students aspiring to take up quality education. It was also felt by the migrant population that constant disturbance on account of frequent bandhs, strikes and insurg-

ency in most parts of the northeast region is yet another reason that distracts the students from focusing their attention on education. It is all these factors coupled with the availability of excellent education and medical centres with latest state of the art equipment in Delhi along with modern well advanced living conditions that attract them to Delhi. Their admission to the prestigious courses and colleges of their choice is facilitated by the reservations provided by the constitution. Residing in Delhi gives the migrant population more job opportunities. Preference for Delhi is on account of relations and friends already staying in Delhi, good connectivity with the Northeast and other parts of India and also the low cost of living as compared to other metropolitan cities.

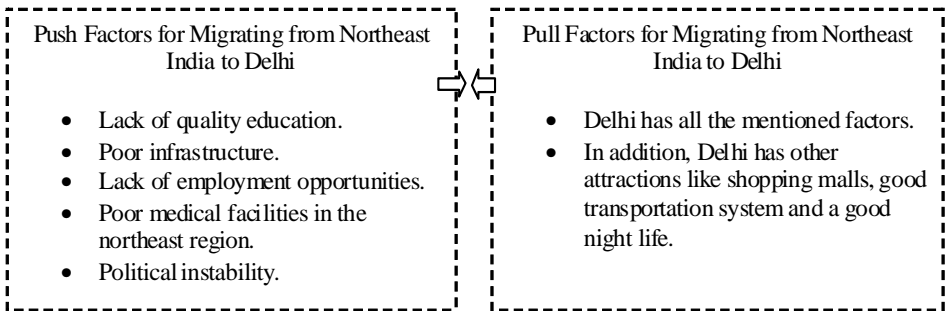


Figure-1: Reasons for Migration from Northeast India to Delhi

### *Confronting Challenges in Delhi*

In staying so far away from their homes the people from the northeast face certain difficulties. Grievances gathered during discussions with them are explained hereinafter. The first difficulty experienced by them is a complete change in the environment. Coming from small towns/villages they suddenly find themselves in the midst of teeming millions in a metropolitan city which appears quite different. There is also a considerable difference in the food habits. Not getting food of their choice results in further dissatisfaction. Further, on joining the college/workplace they find that their teachers/classmates/colleagues lapse into communication in Hindi which makes it difficult for them to understand. In commuting to and from the college/workplace they feel cheated by the auto rickshaw drivers overcharging them. Similarly they also feel that some shopkeepers also overcharge them. The perception of the migrant population in regard to this issue at hand is that the above acts of discrimination are due to their different appearance. It is in a bid to overcome the above challenges and feel more at home that the migrant population tends to gravitate towards other similarly placed people from the northeast region. Notwithstanding the above challenges, some of them explained that they had developed some very good friendships in Delhi which is a healthy and encouraging sign.

A female migrant from the northeast said while sharing her experiences that living in Delhi for her was a very good experience altogether. There were, of course, a lot of discussions about people from the northeast being mistreated in the nation's capital. But she said she was lucky enough to not have too many bad experiences. Major challenges faced by her being mistaken for or deliberately being called a foreigner a few times. Going to market places like Sarojini Nagar would render her and her friends from the

northeast region being called “Chinky”, “Nepali”, or some would even call them by weird names like “Ching-Chong-Chang”. She said that some people imitated the way she or other people from the northeast talk as if they understood every single word of what they said. For people like her who don’t use Hindi as their first language, it is definitely very hard to master the language, and she said that the pronunciation is quite tricky. She felt this was one reason that they would often be looked at differently; get cheap comments and some people would even imitate the way they spoke in Hindi. It sounds hard to believe but even in her coaching class where she was preparing for civil services exam, she would hear people referring to her as ching-chong, though the number of people was not as much as compared to market places. In her view this does not happen just because of their bold fashion sense. She said that it’s true that she does not wear Salwar kameez, but she dint wear shorts or sleeveless as well in public, as she was a conservative Jeans-T-shirt person. She felt that going for sightseeing to places of importance in and around Delhi is burdensome, as they were often mistaken as foreigners, and would be issued foreign national’s tickets. Sometimes even after explaining that they were Indians and they belonged to a particular state (Manipur in her case) they would still be asked to show their ID cards as a proof. It is understandable when rickshaw/auto drivers don’t know where Manipur is, but sometimes, people who are dressed up smartly and look intelligent enough would say “Oh Manipur” It’s in Assam right? Some even say is Manipur in India?

Looking at the positive side, she said that there were also many people who wanted to interact with her only because she looked different and spoke more English. Most often those people were not from Delhi but some other Indian states like Chhattisgarh or Uttar Pradesh. Lucky for her, she says! She said she also made several local friends who would really look forward to meeting her. But many people from the northeast region don’t have the same privilege. In her view, it is important that the northeast region of India should also be given as much priority as any other parts of India, and not only during election season when politicians are fishing for votes and saying things that they would not even remember one month later. She said that it is important for other people to understand that they don’t choose to be who they are, it is not like the “Delhites” are superior and people from Northeast India are inferior, because they are often made to feel that way.

The above narrative reveals how migrants from the northeast are placed in the capital city of India. It sure is an eye-opener for those who might not even know how racially-biased they are and that certain comments/statements made by them unintentionally might be very offensive to the others. Not everyone is bad in Delhi, but the host population in Delhi and all other people in different parts of the country certainly need to become more aware about Northeast India as a whole and they should start acknowledging and respecting them for who they are. When a highly regarded people from the political party in power can make the mistake of referring to the people of Northeast India as “Immigrants”, they do not have much future, do they? It is high time for more people to wake up and embrace “our unity in diversity” to the truest sense of the term.

### *Difference in Culture*

Reflections from people of Delhi were to an extent similar to that of the people from

Northeast India. It was felt by the host population, that the migrant population in the city might face discrimination slightly and for no other reason but because people assume they are not “Indian” and because they do not look like their idea of being “Indian”. They are often treated as foreigners. Some responses from the host population reflected that the people and women in specific from Northeast India are discriminated. Calling them “chinky” is very offensive as these are racially discriminating comments. The host population did recognise the fact that people don’t realise its impact before using such terms. A person from Delhi had personally come across men who think that women from Northeast India are always available. In spite of the preconceived notions, the host population felt that people from Northeast India are forward thinking people with an ambition and they are like anyone else.

The host population acknowledged that the people from Northeast India have a better fashion sense than most. It was mutually felt by the host population that people from Northeast India most often have friends and acquaintances from the northeast region itself as they find comfort and a sense of belonging in being with them. Initiating friendship becomes the main problem because there is a slight sense of discomfort on both the sides. There are certain preconceived notions that the host population and the migrant population have about each other that often act as an obstacle in initiating friendship. Adding to that it was felt that language becomes a barrier sometimes while communicating with the people from Northeast India, even though most of them can communicate fluently in English. Interacting with one another doesn’t seem like a problem if given a chance. When asked about their views on why people from different parts of the country and Northeast India in specific migrate to Delhi, the host population felt that they did not have much idea about the northeast region but the main reasons could be for good higher education, employment opportunities, good infrastructure, medical facilities and the lust for a life in a metropolitan city.

## **Conclusion**

Migration is a natural phenomenon that has taken place in all times. It has occurred for different reasons at different points of time. Trade and education have been the major factors responsible for migration. In the Indian context and more particularly with reference to the issue at hand viz. migration of people from all over the country including Northeast India to Delhi, it is seen that there are several factors responsible for it. Delhi being the capital of India, it is an important centre for practically all important activities including education, job opportunities and many others. Further by reason of its being the Capital it is perhaps the most advanced and developed State in the country with relatively developed infrastructure and facilities. Low cost of living, highly developed and modern medical facilities and good connectivity to the other parts of the country and to the world are other important factors. Being closer to the corridors of power and resultantly greater opportunities is yet another factor.

The youth from Northeast India has often expressed its frustration and fury in various ways because of lack of employment and quality higher education opportunities in the northeastern region. These have added to the already existing problems in the region eventually creating a sense of distrust and hatred. Unemployment is a major problem but

the existing problems like insurgency make the surviving of industries not a viable option. Unemployment leads to migration as people move to other places in search of better education and jobs.

The response of the host population and the migrants from Northeast India in Delhi was more or less similar. The migrant population shared their grievances and concerns regarding lack of quality education, employment, poor infrastructure and medical facilities in the northeast region. In addition to these, it was felt by the host population as well as the migrant population that the northeast region faces political instability and identity politics which leads to migration of people from Northeast India to other parts of the country including Delhi. Adapting to the new environment, facing challenges and making a place for themselves in Delhi continues to be an on-going process for people migrating from the northeast region to Delhi.

The migrant population shared positive as well as negative experiences of migration. The migrant population felt that the positive aspects could, more or less include, adapting to a new lifestyle, becoming more independent and competent, working towards achieving their ambitions, breaking cultural barriers and pre-conceived notions, making new friends and learning about different cultures and various traditional delicacies. Coming to metropolitan cities from small towns/villages gives most migrants from the northeast region a “Cultural Shock” at first. While adjusting with the fast life of Delhi the migrant population most often has to deal with the negative aspects of migration like racism, language barrier (sometimes), sexual harassment, and often overcharged and their traditional food often underestimated for using certain unique ingredients which have an unusual aroma. Some migrants also face the threat of “assimilation of their culture into different culture”.

It is high time the northeast region receives the due attention. Considering the abundance and richness of natural reservoirs that the northeast region embraces, the northeast region has a sky-scraping potential to develop. The northeast region requires specific investment for infrastructure and economic development. There sure is a lack of political will to improve the situation not only in the northeast region but also for people from the region facing various challenges based on ethnic and racial grounds outside the region. Sincere efforts need to be made not only at the policy-level but also at the implementation-level to end racial discrimination, sexual violence and human trafficking from Northeast India to other parts of the country including the national capital. Preventive steps need to be taken by enhancing security measures such as the existence of a proactive law enforcing agencies, setting up CCTV cameras, helplines, etc. for the people of the northeastern region. There is also general lack of sensitisation about different cultures in our society. At present the need of the hour is to integrate the people from Northeast India into the mainstream. Cultural integration is very important as it will facilitate to bridge the gap, discomfort and a sense of dislike between the people from Northeast India and the so called “mainland”.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://tevel1.com:81/news/world-asia-26222493>

<sup>2</sup> The term “chinky” is often used for people with mongoloid features.

<sup>3</sup> “Akhuni” is a chutney prepared mostly by people from Northeast India using fermented bamboo shoot and has a peculiar smell.

<sup>4</sup> “Jalebi” is an Indian dessert.

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