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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FIGHTING PRECONCEPTION AND IDENTITY CHALLENGES: A VOICE FROM THE NORTHEAST INDIA

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ABSTRACT

There are stunning hills and plains in the eight states that make up North East India. It is a land abundant in natural resources, including tea, oil, gas, lumber, and heritage. The inhabitants of this area live in harmony despite having distinctive appearances, cultures, and primitive qualities. However, because the rest of India has ignored their stories, they have become victims of bigotry. According to research, 78% of those surveyed said they have experienced racism because of their physical appearance, which is another factor for racism. Through descriptive study, we shall gain an understanding of the numerous issues that Indians in the northeast confront in this paper. The people of the Northeast have had enough, and they are now speaking out to defend their rights as Indian citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

Hugely occupying much of South Asia, India is a unique country. Furthermore, it is a culturally diversified nation. 8.55% (8.6%) of India's tribal population lives in the North East, making it the country with the highest concentration of tribal people in the world (8.2%). Approximately 8.6% of the nation's population, or 104 million people, are members of the Scheduled Tribes, according to the 2011 Census. These societies' key traits are Primitive traits, Geographic isolation, Unique culture, Shyness of contact with the larger group, and Economic backwardness. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura are the eight states that comprise the North Eastern Region (NER). This region is home to roughly 200 distinct ethnic groups, each of which adds to the cultural and ethnic variety of the area with its own languages, dialects, and socio cultural identities. With 7.97% of the country's land area, the region is home to 3.78% of its inhabitants. The countries that make up its 5,484 kilometers of international borders include Bangladesh (1,880 km), Myanmar (1,643 km), China (1,346 km), Bhutan (516 km), and Nepal (99 km). Precarious security has been left in the North Eastern States by topography, the degree of socioeconomic development, and historical factors including language and ethnicity, tribal competition, migration, resource control, and long, porous international frontiers. Due to this, different Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs), which keep safe havens or camps in neighboring nations, have resorted to violence, extortion, and a variety of demands. From 2014 onwards, the security environment in

Besides its unique demography and culture in North East Region, the looks or the appearance of the North East people are unique and its different from their fellow Indians. Several racial stocks make up the population of North-East India, with the Dravidians being a relatively small group represented by some immigrant population, the Indo-Aryans, the Mongoloids, and Australoids or Austrics being the main racial stocks. The Indo-Aryans and other ethnicities arrived after the Mongoloids, who were the first settlers. Unquestionably, the population of North-East India is predominantly Mongoloid. This kind of person is characterized by scanty facial and body hair growth. The oblique setting of the eyes makes the epicanthic fold prominent. The face is flat, the cheekbones are prominent, and the hair is straight. It is possible to distinguish between two subgroups of this group, the Tibeto-Mongoloid and the Palaeo-Mongoloid. Further subgroups of the former are those with long and broad heads. Particularly within the Palaeo-Mongoloid group, the longheaded type has a long head, a medium nose, and a medium stature. Because they resembled East Asian nations in looks or appearance, as previously described, they were frequently misinterpreted or misunderstood by their fellow Indians. They are now victims of racism within their own nation. They are frequently referred to as the "chinkis," a derogatory term for Chinese people. What is racism? Racism, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, is the prejudice, discrimination, or hostility directed by an individual, group, or institution toward a person or individuals because they belong to a specific racial or ethnic group—typically one that is marginalized or a minority.

This essay will discuss the issues that Northeast Indians confront based on their identity and the underlying causes of such issues.

Challenges face by the North East: Numerous research on racial discrimination against Northeasterners have been conducted. Discrimination has become more prevalent, particularly during COVID-19, and it has been negatively impacting people in the Northeast. As a result, people in the region are beginning to write and speak up about their rights, but the majority of the literature currently in publication focuses on the racism that the region experienced during COVID-19. However, we often overlook the fact that racism against people from the Northeast has existed since antiquity. "Understanding North East India: Cultural Diversities, insurgency, and identities" by MADHU RAJPUT mentions that he experienced prejudice even prior to COVID-19. He was frequently referred to as "chinkis," "Chinese," "Nepali," "Japanese," "Momos," etc. He also mentioned that racism against North East is nothing new. So, what are the theses terms such as 'Chinkis'? Chambers 20th Dictionary, New Edition (Kirkpatrick ed., 1984, p. 220) defines "chinky" as a colloquial and disparaging epithet for Chinese people. According to Procter (1995, p. 227), the term "a Chinese person" is a disparaging term used in British slang. This is according to the Cambridge International Dictionary of English. Furthermore, the expression "a restaurant serving Chinese food" is formulated using colloquial British English (Procter, 1995, p. 227). Chink is described as "a contemptuous or patronizing term" in Webster's New World College Dictionary, New Millennium (Agnes, 2000, p. 256). Chink is described as "a very offensive word for a Chinese person" (Hornby, 2005, p. 257) in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. According to Samson (2017), although "chinky" is a permanent term, Northeast Indians are frequently referred to as "chinky," "chini," "Nepali," "Chinese," etc. Instead of being questioned "Where do you come from," people are frequently asked "Are you from Nepal/China" in mainland India. In the Indian Territory, the northeast Indian was officially rejected in this declaration.

Racism against North East, India: The Northeast Indian population living on the Indian subcontinent and other regions typically faces violence and prejudice because of their distinct physical characteristics, which are perceived as not being sufficiently "Indian." Nido Taniam was harassed in Lajpat Nagar, Delhi, till his death on January 29, 2014, since he didn't seem like the typical Indian. In 2016 two bachelors from Mizoram endured horrendous abuse in Bangalore because they refused to speak in the local language. Two Naga students who felt they didn't belong in Gurgaon had been subjected to hours of torture by local males. If the folks from the northeast came here, they would kill them, they threatened (Sharma, 2020). Mizoram resident Ram.L.C. claimed that he experienced racism and discrimination on numerous occasions. He claimed that one of his office clerk from college used to make fun of him, calling him "chinki" and laughing at him, but he had to just brush it off. He also mentioned that he asked ten to fifteen people for directions when he got lost in Delhi and Kolkata, but no one offered to help and they all continued to walk by him as if he weren't there. Despite some acceptance, the most of them didn't, according to a 27-year-old Meghalayan woman who worked in BPO in Delhi for five years. When they see our faces, they become upset and treat us as though we are Chinese foreigners. Some remark that it is immoral and less patriotic saying their appearance, language, or culture are not Indian. People express their rage at us whenever they can. A similar incident happened to a 24-year-old Manipur man who works in a restaurant claimed that when he went shopping, he was called names, heckled by onlookers, and even had a cab driver decline to take him home. A gang of young males yelled, "You people have brought the virus," he said. Manipur activist Binalakshmi Nepam claimed to have handled five dead bodies of young people from the Northeast. Two ladies from Manipur were harassed in broad daylight in south Delhi one week before to Nido Tanian's death. The landlord and his brother-in-law in Chirag, Delhi, sexually assaulted and killed a 27-year-old Manipur lady in her apartment.

A small child passed away at Safdarjung Hospital as a result of the hospital refusing to give him a bed. Manipur native Miss Kim, a call center employee, claimed that Delhi males saw them as loose women. She related how, as she was waiting for a bus to her office, a car pulled up and said, "Do you want ride?" from his look and the toned of voice it is clear what he wanted. Despite the fact that there was another girl from North India sitting next to her, they didn't ask her. She further mentioned that the males in her workplace never invite other Indian women for drinks or to go out; instead, they always ask the women from the Northeast. This is because they think North East women are easy going. A twenty-five-year-old Tripuran girl studying in Chennai experienced a similar situation. In exchange for her degree, one of her teachers ask her to become his girl and give him her body. She was invited by her professor to come along with him to a hotel though she refused to go with him. Although there are other girls from other parts of India, he chooses to ask a girl from the northeast to do this cheap works for him. His negative attitude toward the girls from the Northeast is the reason for this. Delhi-based journalist Bruce K. Thangkhal remarked that when people refer to him as Bahadur, China, etc., he respectfully asks them why, as he is also Indian, and they respond by grabbing his neck, pulling his shirt, and twisting his arms. In a quiet voice that is audible to him, he also mentioned that when he went to the market with his sister, people called him King-Kong, Chow-Chow, and Momo and when he went up against them, they began to rough him up. A mob gathered, and the men tried to pull his sister's hair and touch her back. He claimed that he has frequently experienced racism and discrimination.

The underlying reason of the difficulties that Northeast Indians encounter: Border disputes are the primary problem the Northeast faces. The Northeast has very permeable international borders. As a result, arms trafficking and militant infiltration across borders are commonplace in the area. Arunachal Pradesh is the target of Chinese claims. The people of the Northeast have embraced the mixed appearance of other Asian countries as a result of their near proximity to the border. The Northeast has a different culture from the rest of India. The region is distinguished by ethnic heterogeneity because many of its inhabitants were not admitted into nations until the British colonial era. Mizoram native Ram.L.C. has posted on social media explaining why other Indians were unaware of the North East. He said that there was no initiative coming from the Indian government to discuss North East India. Though there wasn't much written about the North East, he was taught about other sections of India in school and is well-versed in the country. That being said, it is a truth that the other areas of India were not taught about the North East from an early age in school, and there was not even a single dedicated chapter about the region, whereas numerous books and chapters discussing the region's history and current state were produced about the other parts of India.

A significant contributing factor to the difficulties Northeast India faces is the lack of media attention. The North East region's culture, language, appearance, people, stunning hills, and lush surroundings were not highlighted in the media. The Indian government frequently appeared to ignore issues that the North East region faced, even when they did arise. How would the people of India learn about the Northeast if the Indian government doesn't make much of an effort to promote it? Even while North East India is receiving a lot of attention these days and has had relatively little media coverage, it is still insufficient to fully represent the region. The majority of mainstream media is more focused on Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. Indeed, the media often ignores this region of the nation. Economic Backwardness is another prominent factor. Economically it is rich in natural resources. Even with abundant natural resources like coal, oil, gas, tea, etc., the Northeast's economy is still lagging behind. The states in the northeastern region must grow in harmony with their neighbors due to their geographic location. Significant pressure is also placed on the economies of Assam and other North-Eastern states due to the region's frequent floods and landslides in the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys of Assam. The poor condition of fundamental infrastructure facilities is one of the factors contributing to the Northeastern states' economic backwardness.

The main signs of inadequate infrastructure in this area are the progressively clogged roads, power outages, scarcity of potable water, etc.

Suggestions

The Indian government has implemented several measures aimed at curbing violence, including prohibiting the violation of fundamental rights outlined in Articles 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution. When people from the Northeast were labeled outsiders and faced prejudice within their own nation, these rules did not benefit them in the slightest. It is like their rights were taken away by the mainland's. We can stop this cruel act by improving in many levels. The Indian government can impose severe penalties for racism faced by citizens from the Northeast. Racial discrimination ought to be regarded as the worst crime. The government ought to be more proactive in discussing and providing crucial funding for the development of the Northeast. The Northeastern states, despite possessing the majority of the natural resources and environment, are known to have a regressive economy. Therefore, it is a high time that government take major step for it. More information on the North East should be set down in textbook form so that others can learn more about it. The Northeast is a region about which there is still plenty to discover and understand. Examining efforts to improve media portrayals of Northeast India and supporting truthful depictions and storylines that support a more optimistic and inclusive regional identity would help to reform media representation of the region. It is crucial to talk about policies that deal with the Northeast's development inequalities. Campaigns against stereotypes and movements addressing the discrimination experienced by Northeast Indians are necessary. Examine initiatives aimed at regional integration and political cooperation in order to overcome political division and strengthen Northeast India's sense of common identity.

CONCLUSION

The majority of Northeast Indians are victims of racism within their own nation. The moment has come for the administration to act decisively in this regard. Teaching the people about our country's history, culture, and politics should fall under the purview of the government. A research on hate crimes and racial prejudice against people of North Eastern descent, commissioned by the Indian Council of Social Science (icssr), revealed that "northeast India seamlessly fits indian's imagination of chinese person." It was shown that 78% of those surveyed said that the main factor contributing to discrimination against them was a person's physical appearance. This is a result of Northeastern culture never being discussed and their tales not being shared with the rest of India. However, we are now saying enough is enough and that we will defend our rights as citizens of this country.

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