

# Perceived Discrimination and the Challenges Faced by Women of North East India in Bengaluru

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## Abstract

The present study with the title 'Perceived discrimination and the challenges faced by women of North East India in Bengaluru' is a qualitative research which has concentrated on the kinds of discrimination and challenges faced by the North East Indian women in their everyday lives, living in the city of Bengaluru. The study was regarded as apt and essential due to research gaps, upward moving curve of the discrimination against North East women in Indian metropolitan cities and also because of higher discrimination against women in comparison to the men from the North East of India. 15 female participants were selected for the study, hailing from North East states of India living in Bengaluru. Participants were interviewed using face to face semi-structured personal interviews using a self-developed set of 16 questions that was prepared for the study. The results of the the study was analysed using thematic analysis, producing two sub-domains under which six themes are produced and those themes have finally produced 20 sub themes under two domains, according to the research questions/objectives of the study. The results are then briefly related to the new intergroup threat theory created by Stephen and Renfro in 2002, attempting to describe the perceived discrimination and challenges of North East Indian women concerning race-based discrimination in the metropolitan Indian city of Bengaluru.

*Keywords: North East women, multiculturalism, perceived discrimination.*

## 1. Introduction

The states located at the borderlands of India which are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and the hilly state of Sikkim, is the Northeast (NE) of India ("North-East India States," 2011; National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2017).

Due to the geographical location, these states are not as ahead in terms of development with other parts of India. Therefore, due to lack of occupational and educational opportunities, there has been a vast and rapid growth of migration of people from regions of the Northeast to the major cities of India. A study reported that around three lakh people from North East states reside in Bengaluru (AICC Centre for North East Relations, 2015).

One important issue for these migrants in the metropolitan cities of India is discrimination. Both men and women from the North East face discrimination in Indian cities, which is sadly a curve that is moving upwards today, showing the rise of attitudes of prejudice and stereotype against individuals from the North East in the Indian cities (Chhetri & Goswami, 2018).

Previous Studies (North East Support Centre & Helpline, 2011; McDuie-Ra, 2013; Reachout Foundation, 2014; Mal et al., 2015; Chhetri & Goswami, 2018) have established that discrimination against the Northeast is higher for the females than males. Therefore there are questions as to what are the types of discrimination perceived and the challenges of the women from the North East India in Bengaluru?

## 2. Review of Literature

In present times, although there is vast growth in terms of discrimination faced by them, studies have been conducted majorly in the cities Delhi and Bengaluru (North East Support Centre & Helpline, 2011; McDuie-Ra, 2013; Reachout Foundation, 2014; Mal, et al, 2015; McDuie-Ra, 2015; Jaiswal, 2016; Reimeingam, 2016; Chhetri & Goswami, 2018) as many acts and incidents of discrimination gaining national importance emerged from these two cities, and these two cities are top choices for migration NE people. NE people share Mongoloid features, assumed as Chinese or Koreans or people from Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan etc., who share the similar physical features (“Basis for racism in India”, 2013; McDuie-Ra, 2012; McDuie-Ra, 2015; Chhetri & Goswami, 2018) tagged named ‘Chinese, Chinki, Shaabji, Chinky monkeys’ (McDuie-Ra, 2013; Jaiswal, 2016; Chhetri & Goswami, 2018). NE people who do not share different features are not target of discrimination, therefore we can say that the appearance is one of the root causes of discrimination against NE people (McDuie-Ra, 2015; Chhetri & Goswami, 2018).

Migration of NE people, growing racial discrimination/sexual violence/harassment, experiences of NE people, inactive police/executive system are the major problems identified (North East Support Centre & Helpline, 2011; McDuie-Ra, 2013; Reachout Foundation, 2014). Challenges that exists are sexual crimes against women, racial acts, socially profiling, physical assault, obscene remarks, harassment by landlords, non-payment of salaries, suspension without proper notification and reasoning (North East Support Centre & Helpline, 2011, McDuie-Ra, 2013; Reachout Foundation, 2014; Chhetri & Goswami, 2018), treated with mistrust and suspected to be frauds or bad influence (Reachout Foundation, 2014; Chhetri & Goswami, 2018).

Women in greater risk as they are openly molested and such advances towards NE women is higher as they are regarded as loose in their morals due to the physical features, dressing sense, lifestyle & culture. Females are more worried about consequences (North East Support Centre & Helpline, 2011, McDuie-Ra, 2013; Reachout Foundation, 2014, Chhetri & Goswami, 2018). There is a need to be sensitive, change the perception, and the fault of both communities is lack of understanding, showing no feeling of oneness between these two groups (North East Support Centre & Helpline, 2011; McDuie-Ra, 2013; Mal, et al, 2015)

## 3. Method

### Research Aim

To investigate how the women of the North East India living in urban Bengaluru, perceive facing discrimination by other Indians residing in the city of Bengaluru and to explore the challenges faced by the North East Indian women in Bengaluru.

**Research Questions/ Objectives of the Study**

1. What are the kinds of discrimination women from the North East India face in Bengaluru?
2. What are the challenges faced by the Northeast women due to perceived discrimination in Bengaluru?

**Conceptual Definitions**

**Perceived Discrimination:** means discrimination in which people themselves perceive and describe as discrimination, regardless of the consequences. Events that are not regarded as discrimination according to the law or social scientific definitions can still be perceived as such by the people concerned (Andriessen, Fernee, & Wittebrood, 2014).

**North East Women:** are the women from the Eastern-most region of the country, which are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and the Himalayan state of Sikkim (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2017).

**Research design**

The research study is Qualitative in its approach which uses Phenomenological orientation for the present study.

**Sample and sampling method**

Semi structured face to face interview was conducted on 15 female participants, who are from the different states of the Northeast region residing in Bengaluru and who are either students in colleges or working in Bengaluru for more than a year. The convenience sampling method was used to include participants in the study. The sample size is small.

**Procedure**

A pilot study was carried on two participants to assess the validity of the interview questions before the study is carried out, after which the interviews were carried on with the study participants. Participants signed the consent form and filled the demographic details. Participants were interviewed individually, in which they have described their experiences and perceptions about living in Bengaluru and particular aspects stated in each question. The interview required about a maximum of 40 minutes.

**Tools of assessment**

Socio-demographic detail sheet of the participants was used for the study.

Self-developed set of 16 questions was used. A carefully designed set of 16 open ended questions with the help of the research supervisor and literature review was administered to the participants for the interview, which was tested for validity by two experts from the field of psychology.

**Analysis of the data**

Thematic analysis for analyzing data was used for the interviews.

**Inclusion criteria**

1. Participants are of 20-30 years of age.
2. Women from North Eastern region of India.
3. Women from Northeast region living in the city of Bengaluru for more than a year.

**Exclusion criteria**

1. Women who are not from the North East states of India.
2. North East women who have not been residing in Bengaluru for less than a year.

**Ethical consideration**

1. The researcher assured no psychological harm to the participants.
2. Participants anonymity is maintained by the researcher.
3. Confidentiality in terms of the participants Identity is upheld by the researcher.
4. Consent form was provided to the participants and the explanation of the ethical guidelines of the particular research was carried out with no influences in the responses of the participants.

**4. Results**

The researcher has identified two sub-domains, under which six themes are produced and those themes have finally produced 20 sub themes under two domains, according to the research questions/objectives of the study listed in the tables below and described as follows.

**Table 1.**

**Domain: Kinds of discrimination faced by women from the North East India in Bengaluru**

Sub Domain	Theme	Sub Theme
Women from the North East region treated differently than other Indian women	Prejudices faced by the women of North East region	In terms of values and morals
		In terms of lifestyle
		In terms of culture and ethnicity
		In terms of facial appearance
		In terms of personality
		In terms of dressing mannerisms
		In terms of communication
	Treatments faced by the women of North East regions	Eve teasing and comments passed
		Treated as non citizens
		Disregarded
		Cheated financially
	Police force unfair treatment to the North East women (47%)	Uncooperative behaviours faced
		Victim blaming of North East women
		Delayed responses
	Police force fair treatment to the North East women (40%)	Cooperative behaviour
		Quick actions taken

**Interpretation**

Table 1 exhibits the domain of the kinds of discrimination faced by women of north-east India in Bengaluru. This domain produce one sub-domain of women from the North East region treated differently than other Indian women, consistent with a finding that women from the North East are judged when compared to women from other states and regions (McDuiе-Ra, 2012). This sub- domain has further produced four themes out of which two themes are opposing each other. These themes are prejudices faced by the women of North East region, treatments faced by the women of North East region, and two opposing themes of police force unfair treatment to the North East women and police force fair treatment to the North East women.

The theme of prejudices faced by the women of North East region is experienced by the participants in terms different sub-themes like values and morals, in terms of lifestyle, in terms of culture and ethnicity, in terms of appearance, in terms of personality, in terms of dressing mannerisms and in terms of communication style.

In the theme of treatments faced by the women of North East region, women have experienced sub-themes like eve teasing and comments passed, treated as non- citizens, disregard and they have been cheated financially.

The two opposing themes of police force unfair treatment to the North East women and police force fair treatment to the North East women, 47% of the participants have perceived and experienced unfair treatment by the police due to sub-themes like uncooperative behaviours faced, victim blaming of North East women and delayed responses. 40% of the participants report fair treatment by the police force at all times in Bengaluru due to sub-themes like cooperative behaviour and quick actions taken. One participant (6.9%) had neutral response where it was stated that police force treatment towards North East women depends on the individual personality of the police and one participant (6.9%) had no response due to no experience with the police force in Bengaluru.

**Table 2.**

**Domain: Challenges faced by the women of North East India in Bengaluru.**

Sub domain	Themes	Sub themes
Differential and unfair treatment against women from the North East regions.	Misjudgments perceived	Prejudices against North East women.
		Perception of differential treatment than other Indian women.
	Actions against North East women.	Abuses and harassments
		Lack of support and assistance from other Indians

### Interpretation

Table 2 exhibits the domain of the challenges faced by the women of North East India in Bengaluru. This domain produced a subdomain of differential and unfair treatment against women from the North East region, further producing two themes of misjudgements perceived and actions against North East women.

In the theme of misjudgements perceived, participants have sensed facing challenges due to sub-themes of the prejudices against North East women and perception of differential treatment than other Indian woman. In the theme of actions against North East women, participants have faced challenges due to sub-themes like abuses and harassment and also due to lack of support and assistance from other Indians.

## 5. Discussion

Table 1 focuses on the domain which is the kinds of discrimination faced by women from the North East India in Bengaluru has produced one sub-domain, four themes and 16 sub-themes. The domain has produced a sub-domain i.e different treatment of women from the north-east region in comparison to other Indian women. Under this sub-domain, the theme, which is women from the north-east region face various kinds of prejudices in terms of sub-domains like morals, lifestyle, culture, appearance, attire and communication style. In terms of values and morals many participants have faced assumptions about their character as carefree and promiscuous as a women from the North East, due to which they have experienced women objectification and approaches by men in different social environments. This is consistent with a finding that states that because of women from the North East living independently in the Indian metropolitan cities, there are assumptions about North East women being beyond the moral boundaries of the society and who are available, morally loose, sexually promiscuous and do not backlash when unnecessary advances are being made and this is where the race and gender of North East people intersect (McDuie-Ra, 2015). A study has also reported that North East women are more unsafe due to social profiling of these women (North East Support and Helpline, 2011). In terms of lifestyle, many participants have experienced negative preconceptions about their ways of living as unreasonably fun-loving people who attend excessive parties and night clubs and assumed as having a filthy lifestyle. In terms of culture and ethnicity, participants have experienced presumption of inferiority among other Indians in terms of their culture and ethnicity and as an inferior women from the North East region of India. A study finding reports that due to the race and social background of North East women, they are considered different than North Indian women (North East Support and Helpline, 2011) and other study reports that such acts are committed by those people who have a mindset that people from particular culture and ethnicity are backward than them (Barkataki, 2017). The preconception about the food culture of the Northeast regions was also a factor within this aspect which was experienced by the participants. In terms of the appearance, due to different facial features of the women from the North East regions, they are more targeted by men as they are assumed as either a promiscuous women or as a women indulged in prostitution, and this is also consistent with the finding that the North East women with a different facial features like the 'Mongolian features' is subjected to prejudices (Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research and National Commission

for Women, 2014). The participants have also been asked questions regarding their identities and they have experienced strange behaviour when they have an encounter with other Indians in Bengaluru. In terms of personality women from the North East are seen as women who are not hardworking regarding their day to day activities and this was accredited to their nature and personality. Some participants who were seen as an outgoing personality have faced judgements as their personality is seen as different from other Indian women in general. In terms of dressing mannerisms, women feel that although they wear similar attire like other Indian women, only the North East women's mannerisms in dressing was seen as revealing for which they have faced comments being passed and staring behaviours mostly from the men. This is consistent with the findings stating that North East women are usually assumed to be wearing scanty clothes and are mannerless (Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research and National Commission for Women, 2014). In terms of communication, mostly people in Bengaluru assume North East women to be unfamiliar to the Hindi language which is taken by other Indians in surprise. Some North East women have faced communication barrier issues with various people in different environments in Bengaluru due to their unfamiliarity with the local language Kannada. This is consistent with a study in Bengaluru where 69.23% respondents from North East states that they face issues due to unfamiliarity with the basic local language (Rimei, 2016).

In the next theme of treatments faced by women of North East regions, women have come across sub-domains like eve teasing and comments being passed like sexist racist nicknames (Chinese maal- Chinese goods, chinkies), have been asked for rates, and comments have been passed regarding the participants appearances which is consistent with a study finding which reports that women are more prone to discrimination via eve-teasing (Mal et al., 2015). Participants have also experienced mocking by men in the streets or other social environments at times, which is a consistent with a finding that states that female participants have reported tales of verbal abuses and threats in various ways (McDuié-Ra, 2012). Another study finding reported that although the term 'Chinki' and the like are banned since the year of 2012 but there the term is still being used against North East women (Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research and National Commission for Women, 2014). Participants have experienced being treated as non-citizens as they have been encountered with strange questions regarding their identity as an Indian or strange questions regarding North East state and it being a part of India. This is consistent with the finding that reports that women from the North East of India with a different background are treated as strangers or an outsider and non-existent in the society (North East Support and Helpline, 2011). The disregards faced by participants is mostly preference based issues that they have faced as being given low preference or either ignored as non-existent in comparison to other Indian women, and the participants have experienced avoidance by other Indian women in forming close friendships and socialisation. The participants in the study have experienced being cheated financially mainly in the form of high fares for travelling and higher rates while buying commodities.

The last two opposing themes, i.e differential treatment by the police force or having experienced fair treatment by the police force in Bengaluru. In the theme of the police force unfair treatment to the North East women, participants have experienced sub-themes like uncooperative behaviours from the police force as they have not been keen enough to address the complaints of women from the North East and they have received no help from the cops

during crisis situations. Participants have also faced victim blaming of North East women in Bengaluru when they seek police assistance, who mostly assume the issues arose due to their own actions. Participants have experienced delayed responses from the police force during emergency situations and mostly enquire or arrive at the scene only after the incident has already occurred. This is consistent with a finding that states women from the North East frequently targeted but due to police not acting on their complaints, the culprits are feel more encouraged to victimise women from the North East regions and the study also states that North East women's cases are given lesser importance because gender causes complications in the issues of racial discrimination (McDuie-Ra, 2015). In another study finding, it is reported that women from the Northeast feel that it is useless approaching corrupt and insensitive police, and the police were reported as not reliable (Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research and National Commission for Women, 2014).

The opposing theme, which is police force fair treatment to the North East women, participants have experienced sub-themes like cooperative behaviour from the police force in Bengaluru , as they have been helpful during crisis situation to some participants assuring justice and equality. These participants have also experienced quick actions taken by the police force against the offenders ensuring safety.

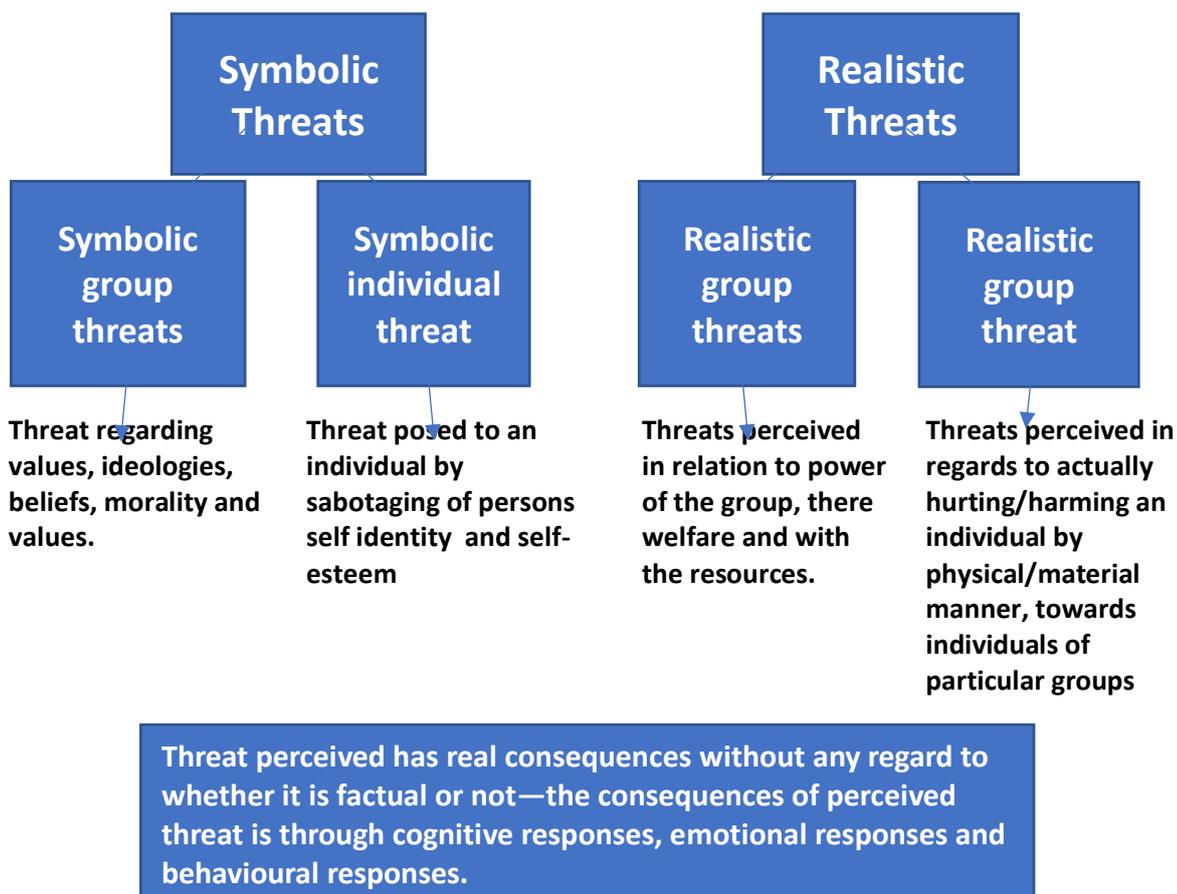
Table 2 focuses on the domain which is the challenges faced by the women of North East India in Bengaluru has produced one sub-domain, two themes and four sub- themes. The sub-domain produced is the differential and unfair treatments against women from the North East region, which are seen as challenges faced in daily life. Under this sub-domain in the theme of misjudgments perceived, participants have reported perceiving misjudgments due to sub-themes like prejudices against North East women about their character and personality as promiscuous women and perception of differential treatments of North East women in comparison to other Indian women is another challenge experienced by the participants as it is perceived that such prejudices and assumptions about the character and personality do not exist for other Indian women in Bengaluru. A study finding has reported in similar aspects that attack and victimisation by offenders is more towards North East women than other Indian women as they have an understanding that the North East women are defenceless and are outsiders (North East Support and Helpline, 2011).

In the next theme of actions against North East women, participants have experienced challenges in form of sub-domains like abuse and harassment in the form of sexist and racist nicknames, objectification, eve-teasing and other kinds of verbal abuses for which they are defenceless, and this is consistent with a finding stating that the bigger challenge of violence against North East women is them being easily targeted (North East Support and Helpline, 2011). Sexist racist remarks (Chinese maal- Chinese goods) having a sexual connotation to it have also been challenging to the participants in the study. And finally participants have experienced challenges due to the sub-theme of the lack of support and assistance from other Indians, especially during incidences against women from the North East where instead of getting some assistance, victim blaming has been experienced by the participants, which is perceived as a challenge by the participants in Bengaluru city. This is also consistent with a another finding that states that the culprits possess an altogether different kind of mindset when they are making advance and attack North East women as they have no support and

help rather than other women who have family support or get assistance (AICC Centre for North East Relations, 2015).

However there are some distinctive findings as well. One participant has expressed perceiving discrimination in only few areas and reported not having experienced any significant differential treatments in everyday life. Two participants have expressed that discrimination faced by North East women in Bengaluru depends on the locality of residence. One participant has highlighted the point that discrimination goes both ways as North East people are discriminated at the cities and people from different cities of India are discriminated in the North East region which has not been stated by other participants in the study.

The results of the study can be related to intergroup threat theory shown in figure 1, a theory about perceived group threat in social psychology created by Stephen and Renfro in the year 2002 (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009).



**1. Intergroup threat theory by Stephen and Renfro, 2002**

The theory states that there are two basic types of threat that is perceived, which is symbolic threats and realistic threats, further divided two types. Symbolic group threats are threat regarding the values, ideologies, beliefs and morality whereas symbolic individual threat is a threat posed to the individual by sabotaging a person’s identity of self and their self-esteem (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009). Participants in the study have expressed perceiving different types of prejudices (Threat) in terms of their values, belief systems, morality and

participants have reported perceiving issues with self-esteem and their self-identity due to discrimination that they perceive and experience in Bengaluru, hence the participants have experienced both symbolic group and individual threat.

Coming to realistic threats, realistic group threats are threats perceived in relation to the power of the group, their welfare and with their resources, whereas realistic individual threat is a threat perceived in regards to actually hurting or harming an individual in form of physical or material manner, intended towards the individuals of a particular groups (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009). Participants in the study have expressed threats perceived regarding power of the group, as these women participants have reported feeling defenceless and powerless, as not being able to retaliate to harassments, eve-teasing and abuses and participants in the study have perceived threat relating to their own security in Bengaluru, hence the participants have experienced both realistic group and individual threat

The threat which is perceived also has real consequences without any regard to whether the threat which is perceived is factual or not and the consequences of perceived threat is through cognitive responses, emotional responses and behavioural responses (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009), therefore women from the North East living in Bengaluru might also be experiencing these responses as a consequence of discrimination. Hence through the intergroup threat theory, we can say that North East women have experienced perceived symbolic threats, realistic threats due to perceived threats (Discrimination) in their day to day life in Bengaluru.

## 6. Conclusion

In the present study, the findings have supported that women from the North East of India living in Bengaluru do perceive discrimination based on race which has certain challenges. The study findings can be utilised by social organisations to develop models for workshop which focuses on raising awareness on multicultural diversity. There is a need to conduct group/ individual therapies and effective coping strategies for victims of discrimination is necessary. A need also exists to build awareness and conduct workshops in schools, colleges and workplaces about multicultural diversity as such activities would be possible facilitators to familiarise and sensitise people with cultures across India.

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