

Dear Delhi,
there's something wrong with you.

Acknowledgements

This document is dedicated to the memory of Nido Taniam who stands as a testament to the cruelty of the inhabitants of this city.

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To Gil Scott Heron, whose legacy continues to inspire activism even today.

To ISTD, for developing a wonderful student brief and allowing us to the opportunity to harness the power of typography and address important issues.

To my family, friends & peers, I thank all of you wholeheartedly for your support, motivation & inspiration during different stages of this project.

To the creative community, I hope that this piece of work urges you to look around and use your respective mediums to give voices to stories that need to be heard.

To the readers of this document I quote Gil Scott-Heron, “No matter how far wrong you’ve gone, you can always turn around.”

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A Strange New Land

Delhi. The capital city of India has seen a remarkable increase in the number of inter-state migrants over the last 10 years. According to the 2011 census data on migration (*Kawoosa, V.M. 2014*), 40% of Delhi's population (approx. 63, 00, 000) were inter-state migrants.

With the middle classes embracing a rise in consumerism, Delhi presents its inhabitants with an increasing number of employment opportunities and better facilities & infrastructure. The promise to a better life in the city is what brings hundreds of migrants from the North Eastern states of India every year to Delhi.

It is here that the cosmopolitan identity of a North Eastern migrant is regarded as something that does not quite fit into the mainstream mould.

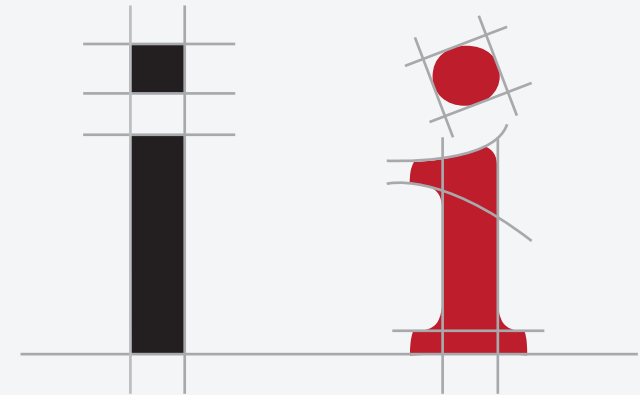


Visibly Different

What soon becomes a point of differentiation is that Northeast migrants differ in physical features from the Indian mainstream population. Prof. Duncan McDurie-Ra writes, *“Physical features denoting Tai, Tibeto-Burman, and Mon-Khmer lineages mark Northeasterners as separate from the Indian mainstream, even when accounting for the diversity of that mainstream. In fact, these features routinely lead to questioning of nationality and citizenship.”*

This becomes a constant reason for viewing North Eastern migrants as separatist entities and can take more serious forms when viewed as “anti-national” or other such absurd theories.

This leads to feelings of seclusion and rejection which further isolates the North Eastern migrants.



Place Making In The Society

When it becomes evident that one is viewed from a different lens based on things that they cannot change, it becomes difficult to escape this outsider identity even if one wishes to.

Hence, they are forced to find people with the same ethnic descent / communities / societies in the city where they are accepted.

This is why one can find a high concentration of North-East migrants in specific places across the city such as: Munirka, Shanti Niketan, Safdarjung, Green Park, South Extension, GTB Nagar & the DU North Campus (Ra, D.M. 2012).

Most of these settlements are additional floors on the landlord's houses, in cramped localities with poor sanitation & hygiene and aptly termed as "tribal towers" (Ra, D.M. 2012). Yet, these places charge exorbitant prices when compared to the amenities they offer.



Intimidation

Once this seclusion from the mainstream becomes evident, it manifests itself into many forms of harassment at the workplace or during regular activities.

The physical difference are now coupled with their tendencies to form separatist sub-groups within the mainstream population & this is often used to enforce their identity as social minorities in the city. This forms the basis for harassment in many different forms.

One such form is intimidation. A majority of north-east migrants in Delhi often work in shopping malls or call centres and face discrimination from their superiors simply because they are seen as “easy targets”.

ht**i**bk

Spying

The prevailing stereotypes against Northeastern men & women of being promiscuous, loose & immoral along with their heightened cosmopolitanism leads to the formulation of questions around their morals in the neighbourhood.

For the “greater good”, individuals in the society often try to test out their ridiculous assumptions against the reality by spying on Northeastern residents in order to find “suspicious” behaviour.

There have been countless cases of the police being called on North Eastern migrants in the city on grounds of “suspicious behaviour”.

This only adds to the insecurity for North Eastern migrants in the city of always being watched and observed which in turns weakens their confidence.



Answers
web a

Groping & Assault

A common stereotype, primarily against North-Eastern females in the city, is that their financial independence is earned by immoral means. This is strengthened with the hyper-sexual portrayal of Asian women in literature & film and results in a long string of multifarious harassment.

Groping or verbal assaults have found freedom to occur even in public spaces and this makes it profoundly hard to be addressed as a dangerous form of harassment because of its widespread acceptance. Even in more intense cases such as the Deer Park rape case in Hauz Khas in 2017 (*Sunny, S. 2017*), women are often blamed by the authorities and measures to curb their freedom are put into place.

North Eastern women, on a daily basis, have to tolerate catcalling, groping, slurs & judgement in the society.



Suppression of Voice

The harassment does not end with the possible manifestations but also in the fight against these.

In a document released by the Delhi Police in 2005 titled, "Security tips for North East students/visitors in Delhi", it is stated that "Revealing dress to be avoided. Avoid lonely road/bylane when dressed scantily. Dress according to sensitivity of the local populace". Another vivid example to illustrate this point is the statement made by a college principal following a gang-rape case in 2005 at the Delhi University. The statement, in a press release (Ra, D.M. 2012), stated, "All the NE (Northeast) girls are sent by the militants of the region in order to seduce the mainland people so they are molested (and) raped. In this way, they are trying to culminate anti-Indian sentiment."

Duncan Mc Duie-Ra, in his response, states, "The logic itself is astonishing, but perhaps even more instructive is that this view is not being expressed by a villager from rural Bihar coming to terms with Northeasterners for the first time after migrating to Delhi, but by the principal of a college at one of India's most prestigious universities."

It is not enough that a migrant, possibly quite young, far away from his/her home & alone in the city has to go through such deeply embedded forms of accepted racism, classism, sexism & harassment but also that this city unites to stand against them in order to maintain their social status as a minority group in the city.



Conclusion

This document explores the experience of one such group which is viewed differently by people who have formed the notion an undefined “Indian Mould”. There exist many more groups. It is bizarre how academicians, scholars & the media has/have chosen to focus their attention, quite cleverly, to forms of racism faced by Indian nationals outside the country. This has led to the rejection of accepting how deeply embedded structures of racism, classism & sexism are inside the geographical boundaries of India.

The acceptance of this by the Indian society can only arise if light is thrown on these issues through multiple mediums, channels and motivations. We, as a society, must first accept that racism is & always has existed in our society and move forward in unison.



Bibliography

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