

Building Inclusive Cities: Tribal Women from North East India in Delhi

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Article Info

Volume 83

Page Number: 3193 - 3199

Publication Issue:

July - August 2020

Abstract: The contemporary challenges of globalization have caused rapid urbanization of metropolitan cities, while tribal areas face major land use changes. Dynamics in socio-economic and political conditions in tribal areas has led its women to migrate to urban areas for economic stability and ensure their identity. However, densely populated urban spaces have struggled to balance its economic prosperity and environmental sustainability. With residents of the city trying to pursue a livelihood, the question of legitimacy on migrants takes towards creating more resilient cities. A migrant in the city of Delhi, such as tribal women from North East India faces the inter-sectionality of gender, ethnicity and culture. The social differences and contrasting ethnic and cultural practices in gender relations of the community forms a both physical/spatial and political challenge for them. The paper attempts to observe these challenges that a women migrant from North East India faces in the urban spaces of Delhi comprising of social, economic and political constrains. It is a process of overcoming of barriers by the tribal woman to establish herself both in the social and economic system of the city, while maintaining her own cultural identity. It further observes the process of building a more inclusive city both by the state and the society.

Article History

Article Received: 06 June 2020

Revised: 29 June 2020

Accepted: 14 July 2020

Publication: 25 July 2020

Keywords: *Inclusive cities, tribal women, migrants, identity, legitimacy and resilience.*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has been responsible for structuring and restructuring identities resulting in the growth of a new culture in a space (Choudhary, 2014). This growth of a culture is a continuous process due to the constant changes in the social, political and economic characteristics of a particular space. According to Harvey globalization cause the accumulation of capital in a particular area (Harvey, 1982) i.e. Concentration of wealth, resource, technology, etc. and so concentration of human resource too. Migrations to such areas are a common factor of the globalized world. Lefebvre too talks of 'accumulation of space' (Lefebvre, 1991). Every day interactions for the accessing of these accumulated resources in a

space would build relation over time hence capitalism helps in forming an identity in an urban space. Choudhary rightly asserts that the pattern of this identity of an individual or a group results out of the structure of power prevailing in the society. Urban spaces are thus a continuous battle between the local residents and the migrants. It is a competition of who could survive this struggle. Even within the migrants there are differential level of acceptance by the society according to caste, class and race.

Neo-liberal transformation of cities has created vast opportunities for employment, education, health and recreation. Indian urban spaces have too been evolving into global cities which include metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad and Bangalore. As a result these cities

have been experiencing a huge influx of migration from other smaller towns and rural areas. Global cities in the neo-liberal world has to face rapid changes in the socio-economic situation; influencing the lives of both the migrants coming into the city and those that have been living here. In the case of Delhi; being the administrative capital of the country it provides a wide base for students in higher education and has also developed a huge market catering to vast employment opportunities especially in hospitality and outsourcing. But Delhi's transformation has created different opportunities for different groups of people (McDuie-Ra, 2013); i.e. the city reacts differently to different groups of people. And tribal women from North East India faces numerous challenges of inter-sectionality from a being a women from a socially backward and deprived caste or tribe and from a remote and neglected part of the country. Coming from a uniquely different ethnic and cultural background it challenges her legitimacy in the city and her emerging identity in the new market economy.

Tribal Women from North East India in Delhi

The neo-liberal transformation of Delhi, often critiqued for excluding the working poor and minority communities, has created opportunities for north-east migrants. It became a major center for North-east migrants especially women with education followed by the huge employment market that Delhi has created with the rise of "New Consumer Spaces" due to India's transformation from Nehruvian Socialism to Market Based Profit Economy (McDuie-Ra, 2013). The new Consumer Spaces comes in the form of new cosmopolitan behavior in metropolitan cities which basically caters to the needs of the rich and wealthy. These are basically in the form of outsourcing, recreation, restaurants, shopping complexes and beauty salons. These sectors of business have hired a large labour from the north east as they are flexible and qualified. Duncan terms them as the "Servants of the Wealthy and Sophisticated". The North-east labour migrant is well-spoken, well-educated, mostly unmarried and in their 20s. Their unique appearance and accent are in demand especially in call centers and hospitality trade. Hence, a large section of the labour market in these new consumer spaces of Delhi demands labour from

the north-east while the people here has had an increasing dependency on Delhi for remittances back home, explaining Core-Periphery dependency. It also shows the growing relationship between the frontier areas to the heartland caused by a market-based economy of neo-liberal India. It helps to incorporate in to the main stream and working towards development goals.

However, the requirements to enter in these jobs screen out the local residents of Delhi NCR and acquiring these jobs by the North East migrants is seen with abhorrence and an obstacle to their employment. With a large population of unemployment rates raising among the residents of the city the fight over resources becomes a major concern. The question of legitimacy becomes a both economic and political debate on the access to resources while countering the rights to a city and what citizenship to a city accounts for all residents in the city. The challenges faced by a migrant in the city become more complex in the case of Tribal women from North East India. A varying culture and strong ethnic values these women enjoy a more flexible societal tradition which gives her mobility over her choices and access to different development measures like education, health, political participation and decision making. The autonomy of tribal women enables her to gain both educational and employment, which make it possible for her to enter the neo-liberal market of Delhi, unlike many of the other women in the country who live in a strict patriarchal society. This leads to greater un-acceptance of women working in the city which falls in the North Indian patriarchal dominion. Intolerance towards tribal women in the city may take the form of racial discrimination that is observed in spheres of the urban space.

The City and its Resistance

Living in the city and getting a job has various constraints and limitations. The right working and living conditions for migrants is what makes a livable city. This can sustain the lives of all its residents and create an inclusive city. A small survey was conducted taking 150 tribal women from North East India living in different parts of Delhi to observe their access to employment, living conditions and access to public spaces. A

North East Indian tribal woman in Delhi faces resistance from the city in various ways, like restrictions in access, verbal abuse, physical and sexual assaults, etc. These discrimination racial or not are experienced over different urban spaces which are notably: Work Spaces, Public Spaces and Private Spaces.

(i) Work Spaces

In the neo-liberal market, Work Spaces favour North East Indian tribal women into their new consumer spaces of outsourcing and hospitality but these spaces are active grounds where tribal women face harassment in the form of verbal or physical abuse and lack in appropriate facilities of communication and income. With increasing concerns of rise in hate crimes against North East Indians and sexual assaults, few companies have taken initiatives like harassment cells to provide transportation facilities to their women employees. But in spite of the high demand of North East tribal women, neo-liberal consumer spaces have been argued to uplift the service sectors and no other sectors. Even among the service sector it is only the low waged blue collared jobs that are widely available. Quaternary jobs have not seen much availability and the production leases are yet in the clutches of the wealthy. As argued above job opportunities have been opened to north east only in selective sectors like BPOs, restaurants and wellness centers. Tribal women in the city have faced a major challenge in entry into better paid jobs.

The sample showed that a major 35% tribal woman was employed in the BPO sector and 18% in the beauty and fitness. However, administrative and highly paid professionals only consisted of 1% of the total sample. There is a major demand for tribal women in the sectors of BPOs, Beauty Salons, Restaurants and Fitness Centers. But, it is observed that white collared jobs have remained in the reach of only a few women, like Administrative services in Delhi. Jobs in Fashion and Design, Management and Journalism are good prospects of endeavor, and on the other hand women hardly opt for going into services in Engineering and Technology. Education is a powerful tool to grant women more autonomy and freedom. It leads to social, cultural, and economic development. Education further helps in the entry

in the workforce. Tribal women, in general, have higher labor force participation than women in non-tribal groups (Dunn, 1993). However, Chanana (2004) observes the choices women make in education and its process, where education is a panacea for social mobility and equality, education for women doesn't have a wide freedom of choice as there are several challenges and circumstances set by society and politics that paves the way in a woman's educational career.

Even though, tribal women from the region has found a large market to enter into economic activities, there are constrains and limitations set by the market forces and regional obstacles both from the market and the resident people. Language and appearance pose both as a benefit and a limit to their mobility and choices in job choice. While some jobs demand these feature, other are unaffected by them and such jobs are not easily accessible by these tribal women. They face the inter sectionality of gender, region and caste in these areas and accordingly a pattern appears on their employment segregations. A multiple reasons and causes are given by the employers during such rejections of jobs. 37% of the sampled women complain of communication in Hindi as the first reason that their employers give while rejecting their job proposal, while appearance (27%) is the second most prevalent reason followed by the amount of travelling time which the institution is reluctant to pay for. In some cases institutions are unwilling to pay for the accommodation for their employee in some institutions, especially in higher positions of MNCs and Companies and thus do not employ non-residents of the city.

The segregation of jobs and the concentration of tribal women employed in Blue collared service sector jobs suggests that the income pattern restrict a major section of tribal women in low paid jobs of less than Rs10000/- per month (18.6%) and Rs10000/- to Rs 15000/- per month (42.67%). This are patterned over jobs in BPOs, Beauty Salons and other recreational services for the wealthy (McDuie Ra, 2013). A moderate concentration of 23.33% was seen among the Rs15000/- to Rs20000/- per month category while only a 0.33% tribal women had more than Rs30000/- per month. There is a very restricted

entry of tribal women from NE India in to white collared jobs in administration. The survey included only one such woman who was working under the Delhi Municipality Board and only because she was married to a Delhi resident. Many respondents complain of discrimination on basis of gender and regional affluence. However, some also reason out the situation as a reflection of the degree of educational level they have which are mostly of graduation or even 12th pass. They have to enter into this market very early due to their distressed financial status.

(ii) Public Spaces

Public Spaces are a larger ground for discrimination and harassment as there are no proper grievances cells like in work spaces, but only the police. Thus, a number of cases may go unreported or sidelined in day today life. Comments on looks and language, calling them “chinky”, “sexy”, “momos”, etc with as far as going to touch inappropriately and throwing kisses and stares have been complained by many tribal women. Harassment in public spaces can be verbal, physical and sexual. Facing the intersectionality of being a woman and from North East India, racial discrimination and gender based harassment often merge into one. Verbal harassment (92%) which is the most common form of harassment target both their race and gender, as stigmatizations questions the morality of North East tribal women in the city. Racial attacks in worse forms take the shape of sexual harassment (82.67%) in case of tribal women and also physical harassment (16%).

The control of law and order over public spaces is rather difficult without proper channel to complain. Public spaces are the most significant spaces where the most exploitation occurs and access the rights to city is a struggle among migrants, especially tribal women. The question of legitimacy in social spaces is out of reach of formal institutions and there is a socio-cultural domain in these spaces. As a result, the access to parks, playgrounds or community halls are controlled by the local residents and migrants may be seen as an unwanted presence here. A tribal woman using these spaces is seen as a threat to cultural integrity of the area as there are numerous stigmatization attached to her morality as a

women and her region. Access to public spaces can faces barrier in the form of verbal assaults or verbal instructions by local residents obstructing their movement or entry into these spaces or as extreme as physical or sexual assaults. The study shows that most of the cases of having some kind of barriers are found in accessing parks (96.67%) and play grounds or sports grounds (59.33%). Other public spaces like religious or community grounds (37.33%) and shopping complex and malls (10%) were some spaces where these tribal women faced harassment.

(iii) Private Spaces

Harassment in Private spaces is experienced when it comes to seeking residential accommodation. Stigmatization of food habits and living habits: in case of dry fish, bamboo, pork, etc. have caused limitations for tribal women to choose their place of stay. The locals do not prefer having unmarried tribal women in their rented rooms, raising questions on her morality other than her food habits, choice of music and even her work timings. Discrimination of tribal women takes the form of personal attack on morality as her mobility may not be of cultural acceptance to the local residence. Tribal women face some of the most stigmatizations against them while choosing a decent place of stay in the city. The local resident who owns the rent apartments enquire various questions reflecting on their morality and ethnic practices. Some of the most asked questions which was asked at least once were on their marital status (which was agreed by all 150 respondents), on their work timings (80%), regional affiliation (78.6%) and male companionship (56.67) accordingly. They had also been enquired upon their type of job (52%) and others like food preferences (41.33%) and music preference (28%). Many of the residents of the city culture stigmatizations against North East Indians on their culture of relationships, food and music.

Tribal women from the North East India face multi variant resistance due to their gender and also for belonging to a socially backward group i.e. constitutionally speaking a scheduled tribe coming from an entirely different region. With different cultural background where women's mobility is not restricted by social constrains they

behave unlike women from the residential population or those that migrate from other parts of the country. A North east tribal woman have grown with less stringent patriarchal notions and enjoys a greater autonomy to choose the way she lives, dress or behave in life. These features may not be seen in women from other parts of the country where the rule of patriarchy is stringent. They enjoy a comparatively equal socio-economic and political access. Thus, their behavior in such an environment raises eyebrows of the local community. They are judged by pre-assumed notions that they are backward, exotic, loose and immoral. The owners question their morality on the choice of living practices like mixed-sex flats, drinking, unfamiliar odour and music. Often they are considered outsiders or anti-national. Due to various challenge these people have had a tendency to live in deeply segregated localities termed as northeast neighborhoods (McDuié-Ra, 2012). Such neighbourhoods provide the feeling of togetherness and markets catering to their needs, forming such residential segregations. They are usually pushed to these localities to form a sense of security and oneness among people of the same region. These are reflected by their first choice of stay, or preference of residence which includes cost of stay (41.33%), neighborhood (26.6%), utilities (1.33%), metro and communication lines (12%) and security (2.67%). The study observed a geographical preponderance of North East migrants living in selected areas like Munirka, Vijay Nagar, Satyaniketan, Patparganj and others. The sample suggested that their choice of stay in the city is influenced by various factors like income, ease of communication but most importantly racial discrimination which leads to the formation of such neighbourhoods.

Racial discrimination in the city has always been overshadowed by communal strains but with rise of North-east migrants complains of racial discrimination in the city has risen. Delhi being an historical city had always been accommodating various groups of people for trade, work or learning. As a result clashes between the old inhabitants and the new occur when resources are threatened as this is a natural phenomenon. These clashes may have been between religious groups or regional groups but were confined to the North Indian Hindi speaking lands. With liberalization

and the growing neo-liberal market migration of the north-eastern people has grown in Delhi. There was a different race of people in the society which didn't match to the dominant resident population here. They bared different physical appearances and spoke an entirely different language which is no near Hindi or Sanskrit. They thus became easy targets of un-acceptance into the city. This makes them difficult to conceal their identity and blend in. North east migrant especially women in Delhi often has to endure the pain of racial discrimination (McDuié-Ra, 2012).

Overcoming Barriers to Build an Inclusive City

Cultures can pose both as a resource a limitation. There can be discontentment among the local residents and the migrants due to their differences. But rising multiculturalism in the neo-liberal world behave in a unique fashion of its own since the urban areas now act as more of a mixed community of people raising a fierce competition among different groups of people to project their own identity. Migration pattern in the city behave in a rather interesting way of regionalism. Migrants in the city tend to accumulate around one another according to their region. This form of preponderance in the city is more intensive among north-east people due to the rejection they get from the city, thus they are united by similar living habits of food, festival, interests and other cultural practices. McDuié-Ra observes a residential segregation of these people living in specific areas spread across Delhi, while explaining the exclusionary city as enclosed urban spaces which exclude the poor, labour and migrants thus "sanitizing neighborhoods" (McDuié-Ra, 2013) The north-east migrants live outside these posh localities and choose cheap rent accommodations located especially near educational areas. These areas have also come up to the expectations of the people by providing them with the necessities of a north-east lifestyle. Even though there are class differences in choice of residence, both the poor and the posh locality seem to be nearby each other forming a larger residential segregation in the city. Such examples of residential segregation of poor-posh localities in Delhi are Satyaniketan to Moti Bagh in south campus, Vijay Nagar to Kingsway Camp in north campus, Patparganj to Mayur Vihar, Amar colony

to Lajpat Nagar, Masjid Moth Village to Green Park, Kotla Mubarakpur Village to South Extension-I, Humayunpur Village to Safdarjung Enclave and Munirka Village to Vasant Vihar.

Tribal women and North East migrants have taken out ways to tackle discrimination in the city by forming residential segregation firstly and then also forming formal associations to conduct events and festivals. This helps in practicing traditions and culture in unfamiliar places. One of these institutions of maintaining bonds and belongingness is the Churches conducted by the people themselves. There are numerous Baptist and Free Churches in the Delhi which are basically run by one community/ tribe. Some examples are the Garo-Khasi Christian Fellowship, the Naga Fellowship, the Delhi Lotha People's Church, the Ziliang Christian Community Church, etc. Such spaces encourages interactions are major forces in help maintaining identities and regional integrity. There is a new community of "cosmopolitan tribals" in the city as North East migrants have incorporated themselves into the city's social system (McDuié-Ra, 2012).

North East Migrants including women in Delhi have attempted to incorporate themselves into the existing society of urban Delhi through residential segregation and blending through interaction and sociability with the local residents. The cosmopolitan nature of the north-east migrants have thus helped them to survive and blend in to the fast changing neo liberal Delhi. They have also managed to keep their culture and identity alive through forming various groups and associations. These communities also help in tackling different kinds of discrimination faced by their women. However, to ensure an immediate environment for inclusiveness in the city the state must make sure of immediate assistance given to tribal women who is in despair. This includes the establishment of the Special Cell for Assistance to North East Indians under the Delhi Police. For easier communication and a people friendly initiative they have introduces using interactive social media with a WhatsApp No. 9810083486 and a Facebook page "Delhi Police for North East Folks". The Delhi Police is directly responsible for maintaining law and order in the city and providing aid to tribal women in the city is a priority for the welfare of the state to build an

Inclusive City. The Delhi Police has set up a Helpline number for North East People 1093 in the City including a Women's Helpline Number 1091 for 24x7 surveillance of crime and misdeeds against women and residents from North East India in the city. As a result, people have begun to feel more relaxed and strived to concentrate on aspirations. The special recruitment of North East People into the police force has given a boost for a more approachable police system for the people.

The Ministry for the Development of North East Region (DONER) has collaborated with the Delhi Government to take up steps to ensure a safe and resilient environment in the city. With the initiatives of various political leaders from the North Eastern States Delhi have now various hostels for both students and working women from the region. The North East Hostel in the University of Delhi is such an example for accommodating students from the region in the city. Moreover, there is a need for general awareness and gender sensitization in the society as well as in each sphere of urban spaces. In addition to the various workshops and promotional activities conducted for vigilance, gender sensitized committees have been formed in work spaces where any case of physical or sexual abuse can be reported in the particular space.

CONCLUSION

Sustaining lives in cities is an inclusive process of bringing people into the cultural dimension of the city and becoming a part of it. However, Inclusiveness requires a permanent effect on the people of the city and the understanding among people's right to the city is needed to be accepted. As Harvey explains, "The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire. It is, moreover, a collective rather than an individual right since changing the city inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power over the processes of urbanization and the freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities" (Harvey, 2008). Thus, building inclusive cities must assure equal access to all residents of the city including migrants and here the case of tribal women from North East India.

This form of indulgence in acknowledgment of equality to access the city's resources among all residents comes from not just awareness but through education. Educating one's mind is an eternal accomplishment of building inclusive cities and creating resilience to all migrants including tribal women. Education teaches equality which would result in eradicating discrimination in the name of caste, class, race, religion, region and most importantly gender. It creates a feeling of oneness and brotherhood in the view of a larger India as one nation. The syllabus in the context should include the North East India and its unique culture which let the mobility of its women to the choices they make. The need to distinguish the social evils which has restricted the mobility of women in patriarchal societies is a significant step to make people understand the characteristics of the tribal women who are a creation of a more flexible society. The idea of a woman having enough autonomy to make her own choices and create an identity of her own in a neo-liberal market is needed to be understood to build a more resilient city. The acceptance of the modern tribal women in the city is a step towards building an inclusive Delhi.

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