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To cite this article: Thongkholal Haokip (2020): From 'Chinky' to 'Coronavirus': racism against Northeast Indians during the Covid-19 pandemic, Asian Ethnicity, DOI: [10.1080/14631369.2020.1763161](https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2020.1763161)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2020.1763161>



Published online: 18 May 2020.



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ARTICLE



From 'Chinky' to 'Coronavirus': racism against Northeast Indians during the Covid-19 pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of Covid-19 has been highly racialised and stigmatised around the world based on the origin of the virus and its highly infectious nature. Profiling of Asians or mongoloid looking individuals as a suspect carrier of the virus and the resultant taunts and discriminations occur worldwide. In India, the pandemic has reinforced racism against Northeast Indians, which the country has been grappling with this social problem in the last one decade or so. Such discriminations were overt acts of racial prejudice that primarily stems from the non-recognition or misrecognition of Northeast Indians, who are mainly mongoloid race, as Indians. During the pandemic, the fight by Northeast Indians was with the mindset of the rest of Indians as much as the virus itself. It was a fight not only against the presumption of being 'non-Indian' with negative affiliation, or worse 'unwanted Indians', but also to get due recognition and acceptance as equal Indians. The absence of stringent anti-racism laws may have resulted in the pervasiveness of overt acts of racism during the pandemic. However, such actions are best understood on the structural elements that underpin Indian societies. The legal measures to address this social problem will reduce overt acts of racism but addressing covert racial acts, which are structural in nature, is a long way to go.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 April 2020
Accepted 28 April 2020

KEYWORDS

Racism; India; coronavirus;
Covid-19; Chinky; Northeast
Indian

Introduction

The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the world's biggest lockdown on 24 March 2020 for 21 days in his late evening televised address to the nation to contain the spread of Covid-19 commonly known as the novel coronavirus. This announcement came 2 weeks after the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak as 'pandemic' considering 'the alarming levels of spread and severity' on 11 March.¹ Earlier, on 31 December 2019 the WHO first reported that, 'A pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, China was first reported to the WHO Country Office in China,' and a month later the coronavirus 'outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern' on 30 January 2020. The announcement of lockdown in India was to avert a major pandemic catastrophe within the country. International flights were shut down and borders were sealed with the neighbouring countries to prevent the possibility of further import of the virus from other countries. Domestic flights, trains and other services

were also put to halt eventually and borders between states were also closed to control the spread of the dreaded virus within the country.

As the coronavirus epidemic in China worsen and spread to different parts of the world in February 2020, particularly in Europe, Iran and the United States of America, there was a rise in racism and prejudice against Asian looking people in some of these countries. The President of the United States of America Donald Trump and his Vice President Mike Pence termed the novel coronavirus as 'Chinese Virus', which many critics believe that it reinforces xenophobia and intolerance against Asian people. During the first week of April, it is reported that the attacks on Asian Americans in the United States skyrocket to 100 per day.² Labeling the coronavirus and stigmatising China as 'narrow mindset', Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Weidong posted on twitter that the Minister of External Affairs of India Dr Jaishankar 'agreed not to label the virus and the international community should send (a) strong signal of solidarity.' Though officially India is committed to not labeling the virus, controversial personalities and a legislator in India publicly labeled the novel coronavirus as 'Chinese Virus'. Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked Indian citizens to light *diya* or candle on 5 April at 9pm for 9 minutes to show solidarity in the fight against the virus. In one of the viral clips of this event shared widely in the social media, the lone Bharatiya Janata Party Member of Legislative Assembly in the state of Telangana Raja Singh along with his supporters came out in the streets in the group, defying the lockdown and social distancing rules, each with a burning torch and shouted several times 'Go back, go back, China virus go back.'³ Chairman of Vivekanand Foundation Mr Amlan Biswas put up a campaign poster wherein it reads: 'If India stop using tiktok China loses approx. 1 USD million daily and 250+ Chinese loses their job. Let's take revenge.' As the infection of the virus slowly rose in number in India since early March incidents of discrimination and ostracisation of flight attendants, doctors and nurses were reported in several parts of the country mainly due to the fear that they might be carrying and spreading the virus. Alongside, racial discriminations against the Northeast Indians were also increasingly reported, and such incidents culminated in the first week of the lockdown. The lockdown announcement by the Indian Prime Minister is significant in that it spurt incidents of racism in the week that followed.

A report in the *Washington Post* in 2013 on the 'map of the world's most and least racially tolerant countries' based on the study conducted by two Swedish economists using World Values Survey, 'which has been measuring global attitudes and opinions for decades' irked many Indians.⁴ The two economists considered that 'The more frequently that people in a given country say they don't want neighbors from other races, the less racially tolerant you could call that society.' In the survey conducted in 81 different countries India was found to be one of the two least tolerant countries with 43.5% of Indians 'would not want a neighbor of a different race.' In light of the knee-jerk rejection of this report by Indians around the world, Samrat explained 'why Washington Post isn't so off-the-mark for naming India as the most racist country in the world.'⁵ Acknowledging that many Indian apologists may agree that they might be the most 'caste-ist' society in the world but not racist, he contend that 'Caste-ism and racism are not very different,' as 'the word caste comes from the Spanish and Portuguese "casta" which means race.' He, thus, argued: 'Caste is a form of discrimination based, without doubt, on descent. It would therefore be recognised as a form of racial discrimination in

the UN definition.’ According to Article 1 of the United Nations’ International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination adopted in 1965, ‘racial discrimination’ means, ‘any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.’ The official Indian government position is that ‘caste is not race and hence the issue is not relevant’ to any discussion on racism and racial discrimination in any international forums. However, dalits argue that ‘Caste discrimination is a part of the discrimination based on descent and occupation’ thus forms the basis of racial discrimination. Despite the practice of casteism in India is between the same racial stock it has all its manifestation of racism and cannot be simply brush aside.⁶

Racism, in simple terms, is defined as ‘discriminatory behaviour based on inherited physical appearance.’⁷ This paper looks into racial discrimination of Northeast Indians during the outbreak of novel coronavirus in India. It argues that the delay in bringing out a strong legal framework against racial discrimination has been responsible for the overt acts of personally mediated racism in the country during the pandemic. Though generalising the northeastern region into certain categories is generally avoided, here Northeast Indians would refer to the Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic linguistic families of the region, who have a mongoloid appearance and mainly categorised as Scheduled Tribes in Article 342 and 366(25) of the Indian Constitution, but not limited to this category. In this paper, while this section has introduced the issue during the coronavirus pandemic, the second section briefly looks into the migration of Northeast Indian into mainland cities, focusing on the push and pull factors. The third section looks into the worldwide phenomenon of stigmatisation of a particular population and the attempts by international agencies to address this problem. The next section outlines incidents of racism against Northeast Indians during the coronavirus outbreak. While the fifth section describes the forms of protests and resistance against such discriminations, the sixth section discusses the response of the state. The seventh and eighth sections look into the structural issue of racism and questions whether competition for jobs can be a contributory factor and worsen this social problem. The conclusion encapsulates the main findings of the paper.

Northeast Indians in mainland cities

Since the early decades of Indian independence, there were the presence of people from the Northeast in various mainland cities. They were mainly employees in various government services and other public sector undertakings as administrators and clerks, bankers, and students mainly in the higher education. Most of them were the first generation in such employments, and likewise, students were also the first generation to receive higher education in their family. Their number was less and concentrated in few cities, mainly Delhi and Kolkata. Over the years, their number steadily increased due to the policy of positive discriminations of the national government in the form of affirmative action in public employment and in educational institutions for such groups.

The early 1990s was a watershed in Indian’s economic history. The political instability and acute financial crisis coupled with the changing post-Cold War international system

forced India to reform its economy through liberalisation and massive privatisation resulting in rapid globalisation of its markets.⁸ The opening of India's economy attracted multi-national corporations not only to invest but they also find a huge market for its products. Such transformations open many avenues for employment in the private sector. Since the beginning of the new millennium, there is a rapid increase in migration from the northeastern region to the mainland metropolitan cities. Yet, the reason for migration remains the same as in the last century – for education and employment.⁹ In his ethnographic study of Northeast migrants in Delhi McDuire-Ra observed that Delhi's transformation into a global city 'has created new opportunities for migrants from north-east India,' and thus 'employment opportunities in the neo-liberal spaces of the global city are fuelling a rapid increase in migration from the north-east.'¹⁰ The rate of migration does not subside even after two decades. A study by Reimeingam using census data has shown that migration from the Northeastern region of India to the rest of India especially in big cities 'has been noticeably increasing in recent times.'¹¹ The push factors are beyond the scope of this study but clearly insurgency and the endemic law and order situation, lack of quality in higher education and of employment opportunities in the region are the contributing factors. The migrant populations are employed in the organised as well as the unorganised or informal sectors, wherein the overwhelming majority are in the latter sector such as call centres, retails, hospitality industries and shopping malls.

In mainland India racism against the Northeast Indians, who look mongoloid in feature as against the other Indians who are racially categorised as brown, were not prevalent before the new millennium or perhaps not adequately reported and studied before. For a Northeast Indian hearing a question 'Are you from China?' from a mainland Indian is a common phenomenon in public places. However, what matters to them is the intention of such a question, especially when they are invectively referred to as 'chinky' and other remarks that are considered to be derogatory.¹² Many times such comments were made not out of ignorance but to otherise and question their belongingness. This intention of 'rejection' through questioning is what hurts them the most. In addition to otherising them, objectifying and despising is common. The women from the region are doubly profiled. They are seen as 'easy women'.¹³ On the other hand the different food culture, particularly the fermented foods, has led them to be often despised for such eating habits. A study conducted by North-East Support Centre & Helpline in 2011 on North-East Migration and Challenges in National Cities reported that 86% of North-East people in 2009–2010 said they faced racial discrimination in metro cities of India, based on such cultural profiling. Banton explains why racism has become widespread in the last two centuries: 'The reason why racism became the great pandemic of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was simply the sudden acceleration of large-scale, long-distance migration across wide genetic clines.'¹⁴

Constructing an 'Indian face' which is highly diversified and an inclusive concept, Wouters and Subba argue 'that Mongoloid phenotypes ... have not found a place in common imaginaries of the "Indian Face". Instead, Northeasterners are nonrecognized and misrecognized, mirrored back by the wider Indian society as foreigners, hailing from such places as China, Nepal, Thailand, or Japan and on a visit to India, or as "lesser Indians" rather than as equal citizens; and this withholding of equal recognition of "Indianness" works to discriminate against and marginalize them.'¹⁵ The reception of

Northeast Indians in different cities may differ depending on the size of the population and the length of their stay. In places such as Delhi or Bangalore, with huge migration flow from the Northeast in the last two decades, incidents of racism were not due to nonrecognition but rather a consideration of ‘lesser Indian’ or worst ‘unwanted Indian’. In places of their lesser concentration most cases may be related to misrecognition as a ‘non-Indian’ or foreigner. A recent study has shown that due to such discrimination the ‘migrants have formed ethnic clusters, which have turned out to be a survival strategy in a new social milieu’ for some Northeast Indians in Delhi.¹⁶

WHO, coronavirus and public stigmatisation

With the increasing incidence of racism against Asian or mongoloid looking individuals in different parts of the world with the coronavirus outbreak the World Health Organisation (WHO) took the lead in sensitising and clarifying how the virus spread do not discriminate between human beings. The UN health agency in its *Situation Report – 35* on 24 February stated: ‘Given that COVID-19 is a new disease, it is understandable that its emergence and spread cause confusion, anxiety and fear among the general public.’ Recognising the ‘instances of public stigmatization among specific populations, and the rise of harmful stereotypes’ since the emergence of coronavirus epidemic, the WHO warns that, ‘stigmatization could potentially contribute to more severe health problems, ongoing transmission, and difficulties controlling infectious diseases during an epidemic.’¹⁷ Giving the underlying condition, WHO said: ‘Stigma occurs when people negatively associate an infectious disease, such as Covid-19, with a specific population.’ In the case of coronavirus, the report specifically mentioned that, ‘there are an increasing number of reports of public stigmatization against people from areas affected by the epidemic.’

Deeply concerned about the stigma and myth associated with coronavirus the UNESCO on 6 April also tweeted: ‘The fight against the coronavirus needs science, not stigma. It calls for facts, not fear.’ The same day the UN agency, while trying to dispel the misconception that ‘Eating Asian food will infect you with coronavirus,’ also posted in Facebook: ‘You may like it or not, but one thing is sure: avoiding Asian food won’t protect you from Covid-19. The virus isn’t linked to any gastronomy or ethnicity. Always fact-check first before sharing anything! Don’t spread rumors. The fight against coronavirus is also a fight against disinformation.’ The stigmatisation runs deep from race to foods associated with Asians.

The first case of coronavirus in India was reported on 30 January in Kerala. The number rose to three cases in the next week, wherein all the cases were with students who had returned from Wuhan in China, the epicenter of the viral outbreak. But all these did not evoke any kind of profiling despite being directly associated with the place of origin of the virus. Rather the Northeast Indians, who are not physically associated with the place of origin of the virus, but on the mere ground of racial affinity with those associated with the origin of the virus were negatively affiliated with the disease.

Racism in India during spring 2020

Ever since the first case of coronavirus was reported at the end of January in India, instances of race-based discriminations on the Northeast Indians began to surface in different cities of mainland India from the month of February. Spatially, these incidents

had occurred in the four corners of the country. The following incidents were 'self-reported' cases of racism during the coronavirus pandemic in India.

On 10 February a woman from Nagaland was visiting a friend at Chembur in Mumbai, who is a student at Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Wearing a black mask and travelling straight from the airport, she was confronted by a resident of the building while taking a video of the confrontation. Suspected to be a Chinese and carrying coronavirus, she was considered as a threat to the surrounding.¹⁸ When she was not allowed to enter the building, an acquaintance in another locality of the city had to accommodate her.

On 6 March an undergraduate student of Delhi University from the Northeast 'went to a shop in Kamla Nagar to repair her spectacles. Two men threw water balloons at her and called her "coronavirus".' She was reported to be in tears after the racial attack. In another similar incident at Vijay Nagar in Delhi, an MPhil student of Delhi University hailing from Manipur, went out to shop grocery items after the Janata Curfew that was announced by the Indian Prime Minister on 22 March 2020 was over at 9pm. A man called her 'corona' and spat on her body with the betel nut that the accused chew and escaped with a scooter.¹⁹ The 40 years old man was later identified with CCTV footage by the police and arrested.

In Ahmedabad Northeast girls from Nagaland were accused of spreading coronavirus and were asked to vacate their rented apartment despite the rent being paid in advance for the month of March.²⁰ In another similar case in Kolkata, a student from North Bengal was told by her landlord to vacate her rented accommodation because he suspected her to be a carrier of coronavirus. On 28 March two Northeast students from Nagaland were not allowed to enter a grocery store in Mysore. Even after showing their aadhaar card the security denied them to be Indians.²¹ A journalist tweeted on 29 March about the action taken by Karnataka Police: 'This happen in Mysore. FIR lodged in Krishnaraja PS. The manager and staff of the outlet have been taken to custody. We urged people & shop owners/staff to desist from doing such acts & behave responsibly in this time of crisis.'

On 6 April afternoon a Manipuri girl was deliberately spat on her shirt by a biker in Mumbai with the betel nut he was chewing and sped away.²² Sharing the social media picture of the incident the National Commission for Women posted in its official Facebook page: 'Yet another case of racial discrimination amid #Covid19Outbreak, a miscreant spat on a Northeastern girl today in Kalina Market area in Mumbai. NCW will look into this matter for appropriate action.' The girl was on her way to collect groceries distributed for Northeast people. Mumbai Police tweeted on 18 April that the accused was identified and arrested after 'video analytics, analysis of mobile data and other such information' were done. On 7 April a nurse in Siliguri was not allowed to enter her rented accommodation by the landlord and neighbours in the locality because of her profession and racial appearance, assuming that she might carry coronavirus. Addressing her as 'coronadi', people gathered to stop her from entering her rented accommodation at Matigara community development block of Siliguri in North Bengal.

On 8 April two youths from Manipur's Senapati and Chandel districts were not allowed to enter Star Market in Hyderabad despite both of them attempting to show their aadhaar card. The two youths pleaded to the security that they reside near the store and they are not infected with the coronavirus. In the 3-min video clip that was shared in social media taken by one of them, the videographer said: "These people didn't allow us to

enter the mall to buy some grocery because our face look different.’ The Facebook post by Hau-Initiatives North-East captioned with what one of the victims said: ‘These two security denied that we are Indian. This is totally prejudice. Instead of fighting Covid-19, we are still fighting racism. Why do we people of Northeast India need to prove that we are Indian even though we are also a part of India.’ The engineering student from Chandel said: ‘It is very humiliating when someone call us foreigners when we are born Indian citizens. We explained to them that we are Indians, showed our aadhar card and identity card but they refused to recognise it. But stopping people from buying food just because of our looks is a crime against humanity.’²³ The official twitter account of Rachakonda Police tweeted on 9 April that an FIR has been registered ‘against store manager & 2 guards of StarMarket at Vansthalipuram PS. Accused are in custody, Regretted Incident. Police will not tolerate such an act. In case of any problem dial 100.’

On 14 April two Manipuri youths were called ‘Chinese’, ‘Chinki’, ‘Corona’ in front of police personnel at Mahipalpur in South Delhi whom the two youths called the police after they face discrimination during their grocery shopping. Later on, they called Northeast Helpline number and the three SPUNER police held the accused who had poured water over them.²⁴ In another incident at Bangalore, three youths from Manipur went to grocery shopping on 20 April. Two policemen try to disperse the crowd asking them not to gather and maintain social distancing. The victim who reported the incident in his facebook post claimed that the policemen never hit local people who gathered there but once they saw our face they hit us. He questioned: ‘There are so many people gathering and walking in this street why only us? Why hit people only after seeing their face, isn’t that racist?’ The National Commission for Women also took cognizance of another social media post on 24 April, ‘wherein few northeast girls were brutally attacked, abused by a lady & her daughters living at Porvorim, Goa.’ It was alleged that ‘local police did not file any complaints,’ but ‘instead threatened them to refrain from registering any complaint.’ The Commission directed Goa Police ‘for immediate inquiry’ and to take action ‘against the accused of the crime, and to take necessary steps for providing security to the girls.’ One of the comments on this post alleged that a male was warning other northeast girls not to come near them.

These were the few cases of self-reported overt acts of racial discriminations during the pandemic that surfaced in the social media as well as in the print and visual media such as newspapers and television channels. There will be many more victims during this pandemic, and many incidents of racism may not be reported as the victims did not want to protest or lodge a formal complaint with the law enforcing agencies.

Forms of protests and resistance

In the past one and half decade digital revolution has made citizens around the world ‘become increasingly aware of and interested in the expanding use of digital technologies – mobile phones and internet-enabled devices, in campaigns for social and political change.’²⁵ It reinvented social activism with the new tools of social media, in that social media have become a new platform for social activism.²⁶ It is easy and cost effective to start a movement on such platforms despite the uncertainty in influencing policy decision. Digital activism has ‘been reported by journalists, dissected by bloggers, and eagerly studied by scholars, students, activists, and enthusiasts who wish to understand

and replicate the most effective tactics.’²⁷ Thus, social media have become a site of resistance and protest, as well as an engagement and intervention in the digital age. It has become weapons of the weak.

During the coronavirus outbreak in India most of the victims and activists of racism self-report and engaged themselves in digital activism. Apart from reporting such incidents in the social media, they demanded political action through these mediums, given the nature of lockdown that prohibited mobility and social gathering. The emergence of smartphone and social media has not only changed the ways humans live, it has also revolutionised their relationship. It helps in generating digital content anytime, anywhere and, as van Haperen and others pointed out, ‘Social media can be used to create and share content, helping to spread information far and wide, fast.’²⁸ The patterns of engagement of the digital activists against racism during the pandemic show that the activists were not connected, neither were the campaigns persistent and sustained. Despite being disconnected, sporadic and spasmodic, it nevertheless generated a sense of solidarity across all sections of the northeasterners,²⁹ and such solidarity not going beyond the issue of racism and internal differences and conflicts back at home lingering.³⁰

Using text along with photo post of the racial abuse in social media is one of the common forms of protests against racial discrimination. The text indicates the language of protest, description of the turn of events, appeal for justice and solidarity, along with mentioning or tagging of those in the position of power to gain their attention. Along with such dissemination, protest posters were posted in social media to sensitise and generate mass awareness. Once such poster seeking to ‘Stand up for those who can’t’ reads: ‘Stop Calling People from Northeast “Coronavirus”. It is not okay. Say no to Racism.’ This poster has nearly five thousand shares within a month it was posted.

Video post of incidents of racial discrimination and vlog post have become effective in gaining attention with far-reaching impacts during the pandemic. Meiyang Chang, a third-generation Indian-Chinese and popular Indian Idol contestant in the year 2007, narrated his experience of racism in Mumbai during the initial outbreak in his 3-min video post in Instagram. Singing the popular Bollywood song – ‘chehara kya dekhate ho, dil mein utarakar dekho na,’ translated as ‘What do you see at the face, look from the heart,’ Dr Chang passionately stated: ‘My name is Chang, and I am not Coronavirus.’ Explaining why he sang the popular Bollywood song of the 1990 s, Chang narrated his experience during the lockdown. One night when he was returning home, two people on a bike who pass by saw him and they screamed ‘coronavirus’ and rode away. He said verbal abuse that happened to him can be ignored to an extent as an act of ignorant, but when it comes to physical abuses such as what had happened to Northeast women, it is different. He appealed to desist from such kinds of racism.

In early March a viral video taken at a shop in Pune where a woman from Mizoram is seen confronting another mainland Indian woman covering her mouth with a dupatta or Indian scarf. The Mizo lady confronted the mainland lady for covering her face when she pass-by her. In another social media post by two Northeast women in Hyderabad on 27 March, an incident occurred where one of them went to a nearby pharmacy to buy medicine. On the way, she was called ‘coronavirus’ by a group of people for more than 20 times. The vlogger, who is a nurse in a hospital in Hyderabad, demanded not to be discriminated. The mongoloid looks of the Northeast Indians are presumed to be infected with the virus. Sharing the video of this incident a page name *Let’s promote*

North-East protested: ‘This is too much just because someone has Mongolian feature it doesn’t make them Chinese/corona virus infected,’ to eventually lament by asking: ‘When our fellow Indian brothers and sisters will accept us as an Indian.’³¹ In another 3 min vlog post two northeast women narrated their experience, while the other holding a placard ‘Stop Racism! We are also Indians. Stop calling us corona virus.’ The widespread use and penetration of smartphone and social media during the last one decade has help the Northeast Indians in their struggle against racism. Incidents of racial discriminations are instantly recorded and shared in social media such as Facebook and YouTube.

In recent years using rap songs to express dissent and protest against the social hierarchies and political regime in India is gaining popularity. A rapper from Sikkim Ugen Namgyal Bhutia released his fourth extended play and first Hindi Project titled ‘Made in India’, and targeted a wider audience. Through this hip-hop album the rapper intended to spread awareness about the Northeast Indians, as the title of the album would also suggest. Talking about the album the rapper said ‘being an Indian Nepali and a Northeasterner staying in New Delhi, it is tough when I have to explain my nationality every time I say I’m Nepali or every time they see my face or every time they listen to my songs. So, this EP is basically the voice of every north-easterner and Indian Nepalese’s who have to prove their nationality every time, just because they look different and they speak a certain language.’³²

An online campaign using different means of visual and metadata tag were started in social networks by a small group of users to create awareness and build protest. Such campaigns were a message urging those in the position of political power for political action. Hashtag such as #IamIndian, #IamNotCoronavirus and #NoToDiscriminationAgainstNortheastIndians were started in Facebook and twitter along with a Facebook profile frame with such words inscribed in it. A petition was started in Change.org to Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, urging the Prime Minister to condemn racial attacks on Northeast Indians. The petitioner also describes her experience: ‘I faced severe harassment online. I was flooded with racial abuse on Twitter, and finally, I filed an FIR with Delhi Police against those persons who have been calling me “chinki”, a racial slur which is punishable by law.’ The petition also sought ‘the Prime Minister to issue strict orders against any such discrimination across the country,’ and it has more than 36 thousand signatures in mid April.

Racial taunts and abuse during the coronavirus pandemic are not confined to the common people on the street. It also percolated to renowned sportspersons of the country. Writing an opinion in *The Indian Express* on 7 April with the headline ‘Growing up in India with a Chinese mother hasn’t been easy, Covid makes it worse,’ Indian ace badminton player Jwala Gutta expressed her experience as a child with mixed heritage, particularly when she disagrees with the majority view and often being called ‘China ka maal’ or made in China, ‘half Chinese’ and ‘Chinki’. She wrote how she was given a new label ‘half corona’, and highlighted ‘the importance of respecting others and of humanity’ as India battle the virus. Another woman national footballer from Manipur, a national awards winner, Oinam Bembem Devi also faced similar discrimination. The official twitter handle of the Indian Women’s Football Team tweeted on 11 April: ‘We’re taking a break from #WindingTheCLockdown to address an important issue. In the last

few weeks, we've seen several attacks on North-Eastern Indians. There is never an excuse from racism. Let's stand united and #DistanceTheHate. #HerGameTo.' Asserting that Bembem is 'not a Chinki', the poster of the tweet also highlighted how 'Indians from the northeastern region have been fighting a battle on two fronts – the COVID-19 outbreak and a spate of racially charged attacks across the country.'

Many Facebook pages took an active part in the fight against racism during the pandemic by uploading videos of such incidents. Narrating the incidents in text, along with the video uploads, the pages also took part in critical assessment of the ways 'Janata Curfew' and the diya and candle light at '9pm, 9 minutes' were observed along with related hashtags. Most of these videos were shared many thousand times. The common hashtags were #StopRacism, #StopAbuse, #NorthEastIndia, and #SocialStigma. The lockdown has made digital activism the only mechanism of protest as well as reaching out to those in power. Indeed internet, particularly social media, was the only and most effective medium to put pressure on the government during the lockdown.

Response of state

On 24 March 2020 the young Member of Parliament (MP) from Ladakh Mr Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, while sharing the viral video of the two boys from Nagaland pleading to the security of a store in Mysore, tweeted: 'We are not Corona! We were, are and will be Indian always.' The only Northeastern face in the Union Cabinet of Indian government, Kiren Rijiju, who is a Member of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh and India's Minister of State for Minority Affairs, also tweeted the same day: 'I'm sad to see such racial discrimination in many parts of India. Anyone whoever discriminates people of other community, region, religion or race is the real enemy virus. All-State Govt. must take strict action as per the direction of the Govt. of India.' Earlier, the Ministry of Home Affairs (North East Division) on 21 March issued a notice to all states and union territories on the 'Harassment of people from North East.' The office memorandum reads: 'It has come to notice of the Ministry that people from North East have been facing harassment after the occurrence of COVID-19 in the country. There have been cases where people of the North East including the athletes and sports persons have been harassed by linking them to COVID-19. This is racially discriminatory, inconvenient and painful to them.' The Ministry requested that all law enforcing agencies should 'be sensitised to take appropriate action in cases of harassment when these are reported.'

Many of the Chief Ministers of the Northeastern states took cognizance of this incident of 'harassment' that took place in Mysore and requested their counterpart and the concerned state police to take necessary action. The Chief Minister of Meghalaya Conrad Sangma tweeted on 29 March: 'It is very unfortunate that during this time of crisis our people from NE are being harassed,' and informed that Mysore MP Pratap Sinha 'assured to look into the matter.' Sharing Sangma's video the Chief Minister of Manipur N. Biren Singh also tweeted: 'This is really condemnable, when these people will come out of the colonial mindset which (is) rooted in their blood.' The Chief Minister of Mizoram Zoramthanga also tweeted: 'I am pained, shocked and in my worst awe seeing this video! When has humanity stooped so low?' He requested the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah 'to look into the matter.' During a video-conferencing of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chief Ministers of Indian

states on 11 April 2020, the Chief Minister of Manipur, N. Biren Singh, raised the issue of Northeast people facing racial slur and unnecessary harassment amidst the coronavirus pandemic in the country. Biren also pleaded to the Chief Ministers to look after the needs of the Northeast people stranded in their respective states, and ‘requested the Prime Minister to direct the States to do the needful to stop harassment of NE people.’³³ To reassure the people of India, the Prime Minister on 19 April tweeted that ‘Covid-19 does not see race, religion, colour, caste, creed, language or borders before striking. Our response and conduct thereafter should attach primacy to unity and brotherhood. We are in this together.’

This is the first time that massive condemnation of an incident of racism is taken note by political heads from the Northeast and Ladakh, and unanimously requested the central government to take action. However, the Chief Minister of the home state of the two Naga boys, as well as the two MPs from Nagaland state were unheard of making any effort to contact their counterparts or condemn the incident.

Call for strong anti-racism law

In April 2012 two students from the Northeast, Richard Loitam and Dana Sylvia Sangma, died after facing racial discrimination in mainland metropolitan cities and raised a hue and cry over such discriminations by students from the Northeast. A 12 member committee under the chairmanship of MP Bezbaruah was appointed on 5 February 2014 in the wake of the death of Nido Tania, a student from Arunachal Pradesh, on 29 January 2014 after racist attack in Delhi and widespread protests that followed in major cities of India by Northeast students.³⁴ Two among the four ‘Terms of Reference of the Committee’ included – ‘to suggest measure to be taken by the Government to address these concerns,’ and ‘to suggest remedies to address these concerns including legal aspect of the issues.’ One of the major concerns of the Northeast people highlighted by the Committee was on the ‘discrimination and apathy of the law enforcing agencies.’ It stated: ‘Most vocal complaints from the North East people have been about the behavior and attitude of the police. Most of them did not trust the police and were bitter about the attitude of discrimination and harassment faced when they go for registering cases.’ The Committee also had taken note of ‘institutional racism’ that ‘comes into play when victim of racist attacks seek to take remedy through the law,’ wherein ‘racist prejudice is experienced in the form of attempts by the police to suppress or to make light of the crime, the tendency to cast apprehensions on the character of the victim or complaints and refusal to register FIRs, or of putting unnecessary pressures on the victim to withdraw the case, etc.’ It also further highlighted that ‘all recent protests by the people from the North East are as much about police apathy as they are about racial prejudice experienced in everyday life,’ and express its apprehension that ‘when the institutions of law-governed societies themselves become places where racism occurs,’ which also include ‘places of study, hospitals and other public delivery institutions.’

Taking note of the derogatory remarks of racial prejudice that hurt the sentiments of Northeast people the report stated that ‘The most common demand is to make words like “Momos”, “Chinkis”, “Chinese”, “Chichi Chu Chu”, or any derogatory remarks relating to race, culture, identity or physical appearance to be made punishable.’ To prevent such expressions the Committee recommended new sections to be inserted to the Indian Penal Code ‘to include racial discrimination, taunt and words that reflect racial prejudices that

hurt the sentiment of a particular group.’ The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2019, was introduced in the Rajya Sabha or the Upper House of the Indian Parliament on 7 February 2020, 6 years after the death of Nido Tania. The bill seeks to introduce section 153 C and 505A in the Indian Penal Code (IPC). It reads:

After section 153B, the following new section shall be inserted, namely: – 153C. Whoever on grounds of religion, race, caste or community, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, place of birth, residence, language disability or tribe – (a) uses gravely threatening words either spoken or written, signs, visible representations within the hearing or sight of a person with the intention to cause or knowledge that it is likely to cause, fear or alarm; or (b) advocates hatred by words either spoken or written, signs, visible representations, that causes or is likely to cause incitement to violence; shall be punishable with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

In the Penal Code, after section 505 the following new section shall be inserted, namely: – 505A. Whoever on grounds of religion, race, caste or community, sex, gender, sexual orientation, place of birth, residence, language, disability or tribe, intentionally or knowingly uses, in public, words, statements containing rumour or alarming news or displays any writing, sign, or other visible representation which is or is likely to be gravely threatening, or derogatory; (i) within the hearing or sight of a person, causing fear or alarm; or (ii) with the intent to provoke or knowledge that it is likely to provoke the use of violence, against that person or another, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with fine, or with both.

After the death of Richard Loitam and Dana Sylvia Sangma in April 2012, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an office memorandum on 10 May 2012 and calls for ‘Zero Tolerance Policy’ on crime against Northeast Indians and assured that serious view would be taken against police officers for dereliction of duties in such cases. The Home Ministry calls for sensitisation of law-enforcing agencies, minimising delays in the investigation of cases involving atrocities of STs, recruitment of sufficient numbers belonging to Northeast Indians as police personnel. Taking note of the study by Delhi Policy Groups that only about 13% of cases the complainant got justice, the Committee calls for setting up North East Special Police Unit for ‘speedy justice in criminal cases’ involving Northeast Indians.

The Committee also ‘felt that justice to be effective needs to be dispensed promptly,’ and ‘cases settled quickly with deterrent punishment would go a long way in preventing recurrence of such incidents.’ For this, it suggested for the ‘creation of Fast Track Courts for handling the cases relating to North East people, particularly those which are racially motivated and heinous crimes against North East women and children,’ besides setting up a special police unit of Delhi police to look after the needs of Northeast Indians in Delhi. The Special Police Unit for North Eastern Region (SPUNER) was formed in light of the Bezbaruah Committee recommendations and police personnel from the region were recruited to this unit. During the pandemic, SPUNER along with concerned Northeast Indians formed the North East Task Force ‘to facilitate and reach out to NE people in dire situation during lockdown.’

Why did it happen again?

When the gang rape of a young woman at Munirka in Delhi occurred on 16 December 2012, which came to be popularly known as the Nirbhaya Gang Rape case,

wherein the physiotherapy intern later succumbed to injuries leading to widespread protest and condemnation all over India, the anti-rape bill was quickly passed in the parliament and came into force as Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, from 3 April 2013. The Act amended various laws related to sexual offences making them more stringent.³⁵ It took less than 4 months to amend the criminal law related to sexual offences after this incident. There were an outpour of dissatisfaction in reprimanding the accused, which took more than 7 years. In the case of the anti-racism law, soon after the Bezbaruah Committee submitted its report to the Indian Home Ministry, the news reports were hugely shared in the social media. A report by the Times of India with the heading ‘Calling NE people “chinki” will land you in jail,’ states that ‘Calling people of northeastern origin by “derogatory” names such as “chinki” may land one in jail for up to 5 years, besides being non-bailable, if the Union home ministry accepts a recommendation of the MP Bezbaruah panel to amend the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for strengthening the legal framework against racial discrimination.’³⁶ However, in the case of racial discrimination and the death of three students from the Northeast in a stretch of two years it took more than 6 years to introduce the bill in the parliament, which is still pending. The Indian state response to the issue of racism seems to be slow and tardy, and responsible for the massive racial profiling and abuses during the coronavirus pandemic.

Racism in India as a structural issue

Racism around the world operates at multiple levels, ranging from personal to structural.³⁷ To show this Gilbert Gee and others use the metaphor of an iceberg to describe the levels at which racism operates. The tip of the iceberg represents ‘hate crimes and other overt acts of racial bias’ which can be ‘easily seen and individually mediated.’ On the other hand, the base of the iceberg represents the covert or the ‘subtle, symbolic, and mundane’ types of discrimination, which are difficult to observe. Explaining the ‘discrimination iceberg’, Gee and others warn that, ‘The base of the iceberg, however, is often more hazardous than the tip. What lies below the surface determines the direction and velocity of the iceberg and, when unrecognized, can cause catastrophes.’³⁸ Gee and Ford further caution that ‘The portion of the iceberg that lies below the water represents structural racism; it is more dangerous and harder to eliminate.’³⁹

In their study of racial discrimination and health among Asian Americans Gee and others claim that overt actions ‘are far less prevalent than’ covert ‘discrimination, such as being treated with less respect. Although less dramatic, these mundane actions may be as damaging as more overt ones.’⁴⁰ What at present the policies and interventions in India attempt to deal with are the overt actions and such, as Gee and Ford explained in a similar case, ‘Policies and interventions that change the iceberg’s tip may do little to change its base, resulting in structural inequalities that remain intact, though less detectable.’⁴¹ In another study, they explain: ‘The basic idea is that racism is not merely the actions and prejudices of individuals against individuals. More importantly, racism may be perpetuated by social organizations. Hence, institutional racism represents the processes built into social entities – such as governments, bureaucracies, and culture – that reinforce the racial hierarchy.’⁴² Drawing from research in the field of systems theory, which focuses on relationships and processes, and building upon Calmore’s insights on the existence of racism not simply in individuals, but ‘in our societal organization and cultural

understandings,' Powell emphasises how 'structures matter' and 'the structure of a system gives rise to its behavior.' Thus, 'structural model of racism hopes to overcome this deficiency by emphasizing the structural relationships that produce racialized outcomes.'⁴³

Racism during the pandemic need not necessarily 'be either intentional or individualist,' as 'cultural patterns' and 'social institutions produce critical racialized outcomes' and 'can perpetuate racial inequity without relying on racist actors.'⁴⁴ Considering that racism in India is not only 'othering' with negative discriminatory practices, it is structural and racism in India has to be understood in structural terms and not only on individual relationships, Akoijam argued: 'But racism has more deeper ideological and structural elements such as superiority-inferiority, subordination, superordination, etc. Deploying and treating a group of people as inferior beings based on some essentialized "social category" and denying them rights or access to employment and basic amenities of a dignified life etc. are markers of racism.'⁴⁵

Racism in India is also seen as a result of power relation and racial minorities cannot be racist. This formulation is similar to what Schein called 'internal others', a non-Indian face 'positioned at the geographic/cognitive periphery'.⁴⁶ The claim is that the stereotypes which the rest of Indians have on the 'Northeast' – the racial minority or nonrecognised Indians, as a region inhabited by tribals, and that there is no acknowledgement of the structural nature of racism and the issue of cultural differences are brush aside. However, looking into the federal nature of the Indian state and more importantly the ethno-territoriality of sub-national state formations in the Northeast region may point otherwise. Such ethno-territorial formations have given another level of political power to certain groups and unconsciously shaped stereotypes against the 'rest of Indians' and also 'the other minorities' within each state in the region. For instance, in Manipur the term 'mayang' is used to refer to the rest of Indians and 'hao' to denote the tribal minorities. Research establish that this social problem exist in 'every society, country and region of the world,' and 'one common thread that seems to be woven throughout almost every culture, country and region is that people deny that racism exists.'⁴⁷

The non-acknowledgement of the structural nature of racism, it is claimed, shows the complicity of the Indian state. To date, racial discriminations in India are focused on, what Gee and Ford call, 'the relatively narrow band that emphasizes self-reported racism' that are primarily overt in nature.⁴⁸ The study of racism in India needs to be expanded to include the under-studied forms of racism and such expansion will unearth and unpack the structural forms of racism that are prevalent widely. The ongoing effort to strengthen the legal framework against racism in India is a mere beginning of an institutional attempt to deal with overt acts. To address the many experiences of covert or the structural forms of racisms, including the institutionalised ones, that permeate in the everyday life of Northeast Indians is a long way to go.

Will competition for jobs worsen racism?

The Northeastern region was the earliest epicenter of separatist movements in India and few continuing their struggle till today. The oft-quoted stance of the Naga National Council in 1946 was that 'the Nagas never were a part of India and they must be given the choice to decide on the nature of their relationship with the latter.' The United Mizo Freedom Organisation in July 1947 also included in its main objectives, to 'start

a movement for joining Burma during the transfer of power. Their argument was that the Mizos were ethnically and linguistically close to the Burmese.⁴⁹ This perception of not being an Indian and the sense of alienation arising out of the imposition of the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) since 1958 by declaring almost the whole part of the region as ‘disturbed areas’ and the impunity associated the military during operations lingered in the minds of the people of the region. The suspicion of loyalty on Northeast Indians was also prevalent among some political circles in Delhi. The then Indian Minister of States, Sardar Patel, in his letter to Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: ‘Our north-eastern approaches consist of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling and the tribal areas in Assam ... The people inhabiting these portions have no established loyalty or devotion to India. Even Darjeeling and Kalimpong areas are not free from pro-Mongoloid prejudices. During the last three years, we have not been able to make any appreciable approaches to the Nagas and other hill tribes in Assam.’⁵⁰ The signing of a ceasefire agreement by the Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland with the Government of India in 1997, and the Suspension of Operations signed by the Kuki National Organisation and United Peoples’ Front with the Government of India and Manipur in 2008, and later followed by other armed groups in Assam and Nagaland have dramatically brought peace and stability in the region. It was after five decades of Indian independence that the youths of this region keep aside the pangs of alienation and started identifying themselves with the larger Indian nationhood.

In recent protests against racial discriminations of Northeast Indians in mainland cities as a result of the coronavirus pandemic the protesters often claim their Indianness. Rupesh Reang, while sharing the video of Meiyang Chang’s 3-min speech in social media, commented: ‘We are hurt when we are not treated as Indians in our own home.’ In the study that was conducted in the mid-2000 s I argued that the global forces that were in operation since the early 1990 s that bring opportunities of employment in the private sectors and small business ventures has brought about integration as well as reduce the alienation of the youths more than the conscious efforts of the government of India since independence.⁵¹

In the neo-liberal market spaces, there is an increasing preference of employment for Northeast Indians. The soft speaking and fair complex Northeast Indians are preferred as attendants in shopping malls and restaurants, hospitality sector and Business Process Outsourcing units. In his study of Northeast migrants in Delhi McDuie-Ra observed: ‘Further, employers in these sectors desire migrant labour from the north-east in particular, targeting their distinct appearance and their English language skills. These changes link the north-east frontier to India’s heartland cities in ways that were unimaginable a generation ago.’⁵² In his earlier work, McDuie-Ra also noted that ‘Tribals are well equipped to play this neutral role, since most tribals from the hill states and hilly areas attend English medium schooling. Literacy rates in tribal areas are generally high and English is often the lingua franca between different ethnic groups.’⁵³ As such ‘Tribals were ubiquitous in clothing and sports stores, spas and beauty stores, restaurants, cafes and homeware stores. They were especially well represented in businesses that project a denationalised global brand image. In restaurants tribal men and women worked as waiters, or as maître d’hotel in more expensive restaurants, especially those serving “Asian” cuisine.’⁵⁴ The Bezbaruah Committee also noted that: ‘There are many establishments which prefer to employ people

from the North East with their oriental looks and knowledge of English. The people from the North East have a reputation for sincerity and reliability.’

In many of the big Chinese, Japanese and particularly Korean industrial plants these companies employed Northeast Indians not only for their racial affinity but for their acquaintance with East Asian cultures due to huge media consumption. Another study conducted by Reimeingam on the ‘consumption of Korean media among the young people in Manipur’ found that such consumption ‘acted as a catalyst of acculturation to Korean culture, a blend of Western and Korean cultures’ in recent years. He added: ‘Adoption of Korean culture is widely prevalent irrespective of their household economic background, educational level, religion, occupation and ethnic group. These people really craze about the Korean culture ranging from food, hair style, make up, movies, clothing to language.’⁵⁵ In Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi Korean studies in the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies is the favourite undergraduate course among Northeast students, and they constitute a large chunk of the students in the department. Such understanding of not only the culture but also language of East Asians help them in getting jobs in the multi-national companies of East Asia in India.

In the beauty, hospitality and healthcare sectors many Northeast Indians, particularly women, are preferred in this job. With the gaining popularity of ‘spa culture’ in India and the increasing demand for spa, particularly Thai Spa, ‘beauty salons are now turning into “spalons” to dish out not just the regular hair cuts and facials but also aroma therapy, soothing massages, easy yoga and maybe even some fat reduction thrown in’ with affordable rates.⁵⁶ Nursing is one professional education which women from the Northeast are hugely trained in the last three decades. Many of them who are not absorbed in the government hospitals are moving out of the region into metropolitan cities for jobs in private healthcare sector.

Unemployment in India, according to World Population Review estimate, was 8.8 per cent of its labour force in 2020.⁵⁷ With the lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy in its weekly tracker survey released on 5 April estimated that unemployment has risen to 23.4% from 8.4% in mid-March.⁵⁸ Unlike the public sector where a certain percentage of employment is reserved for disadvantaged groups such as the Northeast Indians, and competition for such jobs are within such classificatory groups and the rest are largely left for the unreserved groups, the government is yet to bring about a legislation for such reservation in the organised private sector. As the competition for jobs in the private sector too, particularly in the organised, has also got worsen in recent years there is a probability that it might lead to increasing racial hatred and crimes related to this. Will the competition for jobs in retail, hospitality, shopping mall and other avenues exacerbate the racial hate towards the Northeast Indians? The Bezbaruah Committee also noted ‘It appears that in some cases local citizens, especially the educated unemployed youth feel threatened. This feeling is accentuated particularly as they look different with their mongoloid features.’ Further research on job market and racism would establish the correlation, which is beyond this paper.

Conclusion

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Northeast Indians in different parts of mainland Indian cities were racially profiled and negatively stereotyped as the ‘face of coronavirus’. Such

profiling led to a spate of racial abuse and discrimination. Narratives of such incidents show that the victims desperately assert their Indianness in the face of such racial abuse and discrimination. The coronavirus racism reveals the persistence of the racial fault line and the nonrecognition of Northeasterners as equal Indians. If racial profiling is not timely and adequately addressed it can, 'reinforces the "us-versus-them" mentality,' as shown in others studies, and may once again bring back the sense of alienation that the Northeast Indians were once subjected to and further exacerbate it.⁵⁹ This will impede the Nehruvian dream of 'unity in diversity' in the long run, when the Northeast Indians willingly identify themselves as Indians after decades of alienation.

The persistence of racism sent a strong message that the current legal framework is inadequate to ward-off overt acts of racial discrimination and necessitates a strong anti-racism law for a stronger national integration. Apart from the introduction of strong anti-racism law, the future will depend much on the responsiveness of the law-enforcing agencies and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system related to racism. As indicated in many studies, overt acts of racisms are just the tip of an iceberg which, as in India too, the other levels of racisms are hidden or are much more complex to deal with. Given the nature of prevalence of casteism, which marginal groups equate it to racism, and the hierarchisation of societies in India, addressing this social problem is just the beginning of a long struggle for an equal and just society. As for now, how ordinary Northeast Indians cope with these extraordinary circumstances along with racial discrimination will remain in the minds of the victims for long even after the viral pandemic is gone. The scars of racial discrimination will linger in their memories.

Notes

- 1 'Rolling updates on coronavirus disease (COVID-19).'
- 2 Kelley, "Attacks on Asian Americans skyrocket.'
- 3 For a report on this viral video see "China Virus Go Back": and BJP MLA Starts New Chant, Without a Mask, in a Crowd.'
- 4 Fisher, "A fascinating map of the world's most and least racially tolerant countries'.
- 5 Samrat, "Indians, racist? Kabhi nahin.'
- 6 Pinto, "UN Conference against Racism Is Caste Race?" 2817.
- 7 Banton, *Racial Theories*, 114.
- 8 Haokip, "Recent trends in regional integration and the Indian experience."
- 9 See Banati, "In Search of Diverse Prospects of Existence in a New Conurbation,"; and Reimeingam, "Migration from North Eastern Region to Bangalore."
- 10 McDuire-Ra, "Beyond the "Exclusionary City"," 1625.
- 11 Reimeingam, "Migration from North Eastern Region to Bangalore," 40.
- 12 Chinky is considered to 'an offensive word for a restaurant serving Chinese food," or simply a Chinese.
- 13 Chandira, "Men See Northeastern Girls as Easy Women.'
- 14 Banton, *Racial Theories*, 115.
- 15 Wouters and Subba, "The "Indian Face," India's Northeast, and "The Idea of India"," 127.
- 16 Kipgen and Panda, "Migrants and Their Social Networks," 242.
- 17 "Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report – 35."
- 18 "Coronavirus scare in Mumbai after Nagaland woman mistaken for Chinese."
- 19 Hindustan Times Correspondent, "In racist attack, man spits at woman from Manipur, heckles her."
- 20 Pant, "Gujarat cop comes to rescue of NE girls amid COVID-19 rumours.'

- 21 Aadhar Card is a twelve-digit unique identity number that is obtained voluntarily by Indian citizens based on biometric and demographic data. It is commonly used as proof of residence.
- 22 “Girl from Northeast Spat on in Mumbai, Says NCW as Cases of Racist Abuse Go up Amid Coronavirus Outbreak.”
- 23 “Now, Manipur students barred from entering Hyderabad Store.”
- 24 Imphal Free Press Bureau, “Two more Manipuris face racial attack in Delhi.”
- 25 Joyce, *Digital Activism Decoded*, vii.
- 26 For more discussion on digital activism see Sivitanides and Shah, 2011.
- 27 Joyce. *Digital Activism Decoded*, vii.
- 28 van Haperen et.al., “Building protest online,” 408.
- 29 Macduie-Ra, “The “North-East” Map of Delhi.”
- 30 Haokip, “Is There a Pan-North-East Identity and Solidarity?”
- 31 See the video post of the Pune shop “Let’s promote North-East.”
- 32 “Sikkim rapper speaks out against racial attacks on Northeasterners through his music.”
- 33 “Biren Raises Question of Racial Discrimination of NE People.”
- 34 Bezbaruah Committee, “Report of the Committee under the Chairmanship of M.P. Bezbaruah to look into the concerns of the people of the North East living in other parts of the country.”
- 35 Haokip, “Long-term approach to the menace of rape in India,” i.
- 36 “Calling NE people “chinki” will land you in jail.”
- 37 Jones, “Levels of Racism.”
- 38 Gee et.al., “Racial discrimination and health among Asian Americans,” 131.
- 39 Gee and Ford, “Structural racism and health inequities,” 116.
- 40 Gee et al., “Racial discrimination and health among Asian Americans,” 131.
- 41 See note 39 above.
- 42 Gee et.al., “Racial discrimination and health among Asian Americans,” 130.
- 43 Powell, “Structural racism,” 793–797.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 795.
- 45 Akoijam, “Racism as “structural” issue.”
- 46 Schein, “Gender and Internal Orientalism in China”, 73.
- 47 Dulitzky, “A region in denial,” 39.
- 48 Gee and Ford, “Structural racism and health inequities,” 128.
- 49 Haokip, “Political Integration of Northeast India,” 309–312. For further reading on the Naga movement see Wouters, “Difficult Decolonization.”
- 50 Cited in Wouters and Subba, *Op. Cit.*, 129.
- 51 Haokip, *India’s Look East Policy and the Northeast*.
- 52 McDuie-Ra, “Beyond the ‘Exclusionary City’,” 1626.
- 53 McDuie-Ra, “Cosmopolitan Tribals,” 46–47.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 55 Reimeingam, “Korean Media,” 1.
- 56 Hindustan Times Correspondent, “Spa culture gains popularity in India.”
- 57 “Unemployment by Country 2020.”
- 58 Sreevatsant, “Covid-19 lockdown impact: Unemployment rate rises to 23.4%.”
- 59 Cited in Vito, *Racial Profiling*, 58.

Acknowledgments

I am thankful to Dr Jelle J.P. Wouters and Dr Hoineilhing Sampar for their quick comments on the earlier draft of this paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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