NORTH-EASTERNERS IN NEW DELHI: A STUDY OF ACCULTURATION ATTITUDES AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Pragyendu[1]
Asst. Professor ,
Applied Psychology Department ,
Sri Aurobindo College (Eve.) , University of Delhi

Shailendra Kumar Sharma[2]
Asst. Professor,
Applied Psychology Department ,
Sri Aurobindo College (Eve.) , University of Delhi

Parvender S. Negi[3]
Student,
Applied Psychology,
Sri Aurobindo College, University of Delhi

Aastha Kapoor[4]
Student,
Applied Psychology,
Sri Aurobindo College, University of Delhi

ABSTRACT

It is quite common in Delhi to witness the arrivals of thousands of migrants every year. A small portion of these migrants constitutes the adolescents coming from north-eastern states for better education. Being a cosmopolitan city, the cultural landscape of Delhi is quite rich and flexible enough for people from different cultural background to integrate. Yet it is strange that the acculturation process for the north-east students have always been problematic.

This paper uses a qualitative method to explore the acculturation attitudes of the north-easterners and looks into their cultural identity through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the interviews of some north-east migrants. The paper also highlights the racial discrimination faced by the north-easterners and the factors inhibiting the integration of the cultures among them. The findings indicate the role of racial discrimination in acculturation attitudes and it is therefore necessary to make amendments in the system to improve acculturation conditions and orientations for a better society.

*Key Words***: Acculturation, acculturation attitudes, and racial discrimination.**

INTRODUCTION

North-easterners refer to the people belonging to the states located on India's far eastern periphery. Almost completely isolated from the rest of India, there are eight federal states in the region namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura that constitutes the Northeast. The Northeast is home to a diverse population of people that are ethnically distinct from the rest of India yet accounting for India's vast cultural and ethnic diversity. The region has a decades-long history of armed insurgency and counter-insurgency in reaction to the separatist demands.

Because of limited job and educational opportunities, thousands of north-easterners migrate to the "mainland" cities every year. According to a survey conducted by the North East

Support Centre and Helpline(NESCH) in 2011, the number of northeast migrants in Indian cities has reached a 12-fold increase since 2005, of which 48 percent migrate to Delhi.

Bearing the aspirational tag of a global city, Delhi has India's best universities and colleges, all of which have reserved places for North-easterners. Apart from being the capital of the country, its the place where migrants from different regions and different cultures comes in contact, and so the process of acculturation begins.

ACCULTURATION LITERATURE

Acculturation refers to process of cultural and psychological changes that occur as a result of sustained first hand contact between individuals of different cultural origins. Often it results in the change in values, belief and behavior of the migrants (Berry, Trimble & Olmeda, 1986) . Any such process can have multiple level effects on both interacting cultures. At the group level, acculturation can result in changes in food, clothing or language whereas in the individual level, the way in which individuals acculturate have been shown to be associated not just with changes in daily behavior, but with numerous measures of psychological and physical well-being. In addition to these changes, acculturation leads to the issues related to social and ethnic identity for the migrant. Cultural identity can be regarded as the global term for referring to these identity issues.

Cultural identity reflects the sense of solidarity towards the shared attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that are considered ideal for a given cultural group (Jensen, 2003; Roberts, Phinney, Mosse, Chen, Roberts & Romeo, 1999). It can includes attitudes, religious beliefs, behaviours and cultural preferences for friends, diet, clothes, language and education & marital partners.

Prominent in this area of research is Berry's fourfold model of acculturation strategies. According to Berry(2003), there are four acculturation strategies namely: assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization. Assimilation means giving up one's original culture and adopts the cultural norms of the host culture whereas separation refers to the rejection the dominant or host culture in favor of preserving one's original culture. Similarly, integration refers to the adoption of the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture while maintaining one's culture of origin. And marginalization means rejection of both the culture of origin and the dominant host culture.

The type of acculturation strategy chosen by a migrant is partly influenced by the acculturation attitudes of that migrant and partly by the attitude of the host culture towards the migrant. In fact, the attitude of the dominant host culture towards the migrants can greatly shape their acculturation attitudes which in turn influence the type of acculturation strategy adopted by them. Acceptance by the host culture can result in the integration of the migrants whereas rejection of the migrants can lead to separation or marginalization. The acculturation process is also influenced by the expectations of the larger society about how the migrants should acculturate. For example, societies in which harmonious and homogeneous culture is promoted, assimilation is the endorsed acculturation strategy. In segregationist society, in which humans are separated into racial groups in daily life, a separation acculturation strategy is endorsed. In a multiculturalist society, in which multiple cultures are accepted and appreciated, individuals are encouraged to adopt an integrationist approach to acculturation. In societies where cultural exclusion is promoted, individuals often adopt marginalization strategies of acculturation.

Important factors that have an impact on acculturation include migrants' attitude towards acculturation, social support, age, length of residence in the host culture, level of education, fluency in the host culture language and gender (Berry, 2003; Bhugra, 2003; Oh et al., 2002; Yeh, 2003).

NORTH-EAST MIGRANTS IN DELHI

Being a cosmopolitan city, Delhi doesn't belong to any particular cultural or ethnic background. That's why population of Delhi is quite diverse with people belonging to various regions and cultures. These people, although coming from different cultural or ethnic background,

still manage to somehow integrate as one. However, this is not always the case, not for the north-easterners at least. For most of the north-easterners, their experience in Delhi is characterized by violence, racism, discrimination, and sexism . Such experiences increases the already existing distance between the north-easterners and the rest of the India.

Delhi is over two thousand kilometers from the north-east but its not the just the physical distance that matters, there is a considerable gap between the values, beliefs, attitudes, and culture of these two regions. Besides that, there is a strong belief among the north-easterners and the "mainlands" people that the north-easterners will never be able to become a part of this country in the same way as the rest of the "mainlands" people. These beliefs have different origins for both the north-easterners and the "mainland" people. In the "mainland", it is believed that the north-easterners have a different history, and are culturally, linguistically, and racially separate from the Indian mainstream. This might be reason for the hostility shown by the people of Delhi towards the north-easterners.

For the north-easterners, these beliefs probably stem out in the aftermath of six decades of insurgency and counter-insurgency. People of the northeast primarily saw Indians in military uniform, enforcing unpleasant laws on them that build in them, a kind of distrust and fear towards the Indians. No doubt the acculturation attitudes of north-east migrants in Delhi are somehow shaped by these existing believes.

Rationale of the Study : This study was conducted to explore the acculturation attitudes of the north-east migrants in Delhi and identify the reasons behind these acculturation attitudes.

METHOD

For this paper, narratives from a small sample of interviews were analyzed to draw conclusions regarding the phenomenon of increasing incidents of racial discrimination faced by the north-east migrants in Delhi. After getting the consent from the participants, interviews were conducted which were semi-structured in nature. The audio recording of the interviews was also done. The transcribed data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) - a method aimed to understand the participants' world through their experiences, cognitions and meaning making (Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 1997, 1999).

NOTE: Names of the participants are changed in order to maintain confidentiality.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

ACCULTURATION ATTITUDES AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

The concept of acculturation attitudes refers to the various ways that acculturating individuals prefer to live with the two cultures that they are in contact with. Before understanding the attitudes of north-east migrants towards acculturation, it is important to have a look at their cultural identity.

Coming from a culture where Christianity is the dominant religion, its not easy for the north-easterners to acculturate into a society where majority of people are Hindu or Muslim. Apart from religion, clothing plays one of the important role in the expression of identity pertaining to one's culture. There is a considerable difference in the way north-easterners and the mainland peoples prefer to dress.

A different culture poses a threat to the cultural identity of the north-east migrants so it becomes difficult for them to adapt according to the cultural norms of Delhi. This is reflected in the following excerpt from the interview of Tya Chi, a 28 year old female from Nagaland, teaching in Delhi:

Respondent[R]: our cultural background? Actually our culture is like very different from our Indian also like we...we believe also and like north-eastern are mostly like 95 percent are Christians...yeah..

Interviewer[I]: so then you are a christen..

R: I am also a Christian. Its like 95 percent...like 5 percent is like....somebody can't married with other religion unless convert to that religion. Its that only..but north-east...its like everybody is Christian.

.
.

I: how do you feel among Delhi people here?

R: Its like they are also fine but like...see that our knowledge are looking different, even our looks, everything is very different...like if we just go out, like people just staring us. See if we are wearing something short...like they used to stare even.....whereas Indian also wearing the same...like....see like Indian were wearing sarees and all. So sarees' blouse and all...are very sexy and all but see like....the way wearing India in north-east make it very different. When the north-east wear saree or something else like very short, they really look down on us.....whereas its the same thing only, when we look up at the people...

.
.

I: do you think you have adapted to this culture or you can adapt someday?

R: its like....its with like...adapt to this culture is very difficult because there minds are like...very conservative, very like....what do I say.......there minds are very narrow and I don't know like what.....i don't know what they thinks about girls....what do they think about north-east. There minds are very different and I don't like it...its the cultures thing like....I don't like so much.

Clearly, Aya finds it difficult to adapt to the Delhi culture as it appears to her as conservative and narrow-minded. She doesn't like it here in Delhi because she feels that her cultural identity is not respected in this culture. The short dresses invite unwanted stares from the people in Delhi whereas the same outfit was acceptable in her culture.

According to the multicultural hypothesis, confidence in one's cultural identity instill a sense of security in an individual, which is a psychological precondition for the acceptance of those who are culturally different (Berry, Kalin & Taylor, 1977). There is a tendency for people to reject others if they feel their cultural identity is threatened.

Thus, failure to accept the north-east culture by the "mainland" people shapes a negative acculturation attitude in north-east migrants, resulting in adoption of separation as the possible acculturation strategy as it seems to them that an alien culture is being imposed on them and they are compromised of their own cultural identity.

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND ACCULTURATION ATTITUDES

As a matter of fact, the north-easterners are seen as racially distinct from rest of the Indian society. Race here captures the differences in physical appearances of north-east people and mainland people. It is partly because of these differences in facial features that the "mainland" society refuse to perceive the north-easterners as Indians. These differences are expressed in the epithets like "chinky", "momos" etc. that reflects deeply embedded stereotypes and prejudices about north-east women and men . As 21 year old Mozorika, says:

R: I am...its okay. I mean life is hard here obviously and....um its a capital so it has to be like this but then people very very rude and it.. ... very very hard..

I: Do you have your experiences regarding this.."Delhi is Rude" ?

R: uh..yeah people.....people doesn't wanna help each other and they are also selfish in nature on their own..... and um... I do get comments like "chinki", and all the "chowmein, momos", sometimes like that but not a very bad experience.

Mozorika's perception of Delhi people as "rude" points to the racial discrimination faced by the north-easterners in Delhi. A report on a project by the North East Support Centre & Helpline (NESCH) says up to 78 percent of the 200,000 North- East population living in Delhi is subject to various kinds of humiliations, including sexual harassment, molestation, human trafficking, beating, rape and murder, largely because of their appearance, with the women bearing the brunt of the abuse for the past six years.

In the original model of acculturation presented by Padilla (1980, 1987) , one of the feature reported was that the greater the perceived discrimination reported by a migrant, the more likely he or she was to identify with his or her heritage group. It is important to note here that the discrimination reported by the migrant need not to be directed at him/her exclusively. In fact, it is sufficient for the migrant to feel discriminated if he/she feels that discriminatory act has been directed towards other members of the group he/she belong (as evident in the case of Mozorika).

As it was mentioned earlier that societies in which humans are separated into racial groups in daily life, a separation acculturation strategy is prominent among the minorities. It clearly shows how the racial discrimination is responsible for the isolated living of north-east migrants in Delhi.

TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED FUTURE

Despite the existing problems between the north-east people and the "mainland" people, it is still possible to create a future where the terms like "mainland" and "north-east" would integrate into a single term i.e "Indian". And the first step towards this wonderful future will be to accept the other culture the way it is. As Mozorika suggested:

R: ....we just need to educate them and then...what the world is like...its not just India...there is lot of culture...different culture outside India....we have to accept that...accept people just the way they are.

A similar suggestion was given by Dazzo, 24 year old migrant from manipur.

Apart from that, it is important to educate people about the north-east culture so that they can understand the north-east culture properly. Tya Chi is in support of this idea as she explains:

R: see...its like...see if we have in books like...if they are published...like something like about north-east and like focus on north-east, it will be good...like if we are giving in books and all...so like...from the generation only would know that like what north-east...from the childhood only....like if we don't give anything like about north-east and how do people also know.

CONCLUSIONS

In the present paper, the narratives from the interviews of some north-east migrants in Delhi were analyzed to understand why the acculturation process is problematic for the north-east migrants in Delhi by exploring the reasons behind their acculturation attitudes. It was found that the racial discrimination faced by the north-easterners might be responsible for their acculturation attitudes. Also, they appeared to be shaped by the sense of insecurity regarding their cultural identity.

Education about the north-east culture and the acceptance of their culture by the "mainland" people are seen as the possible ways in which the acculturation conditions and orientations can be improved for a better society.

REFERENCES

Berry, J.W. & Sabatier, C (2011). Variations in the assessment of acculturation attitudes: Their relationships with psychological wellbeing, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations 35, 658–669.*

Berry J.W. (1997). Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation, *APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY: AN INTERNATIONAL REVIEW, 46 (1). 5-68.*

Bhatia, S (2008). 9/11 and the Indian Diaspora: Narratives of Race, Place and Immigrant Identity, *Journal of Intercultural Studies Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 21Á39.*

Bhui K., Stansfeld S., Head J., Haines M., Viner R., and Booy R. (2005). Cultural Identity, Acculturation and Mental Health among Adolescents in East London's Multiethnic Community. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (1979-), Volm 59, No. 4, 296-302

Choi, J.B. & Thomas, M (2009). Predictive factors of acculturation attitudes and social support amongAsian immigrants in the USA, *International Journal Of Social Welfare 18: 76– 84.*

McDuie-Ra, D (2012) *Northeast Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge and Retail,* Amsterdam University Press.

Padilla A.M., and Perez W. (2003). Acculturation, Social identity, and Social cognition: A new perspective. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioural Sciences, Vol. 25, No. 1, 35-55.*

Ryder, A., Alden, L., & Paulhus, D. (2000). Is acculturation unidimensional or bidimensional? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79, 49–65.*

Schwartz S.J., Montgomery M.J., and Briones E. (2006). The role of identity in Acculturation among Immigrant People: Theoretical propositions, Empirical questions, and Applied Recommendations. Human Development, Vol 49, 1-30.

Smith, J.A. and Eatough, V. (2006) 'Interpretative phenomenological analysis', in G. Breakwell, C. Fife-Schaw, S. Hammond and J.A. Smith (eds) Research Methods in Psychology, (3rd edn). London: Sage.