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## **ANTHROPOLOGY SNIPPET-295**

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## **Northeast citizens faced racial discrimination amid COVID-19 outbreak, says govt. study**

**They were “harassed, abused and traumatised” and disparagingly called ‘coronavirus,’ says study**

A study commissioned by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) on racial discrimination and hate crimes against people from the northeast States found that the “northeast India seamlessly fits [an] Indian’s imagination of a Chinese person”.

The study found that 78% of the people from the region who were interviewed believed that physical appearance was the most important reason for prejudice against them.

The study said amid the COVID-19 outbreak last year, people from the region “faced an increased number of acts of hate and prejudices against them”.

A series of attacks were reported in various parts of the country where people from the region were “harassed, abused, and traumatised” and were disparagingly called ‘coronavirus,’ the study said.

*The Hindu* accessed the findings of the unpublished report. The Centre for Criminology and Victimology at the National Law University (NLU), Delhi conducted the study under the aegis of the ICSSR, Delhi, on the prevalence of hate crimes

against the people of the region in six metropolitan cities – Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

Around 1200 persons, mostly women from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura were interviewed for the research. The study's associate is Dr. Garima Paul of the NLU.

G.S. Bajpai, Chairperson of the Centre, said the majority of those interviewed faced discrimination when it came to renting an accommodation, visit to a restaurant and even transportation.

“The study revealed that the hate crime and racial discrimination against people from the northeast is deep-rooted even in the cosmopolitan cities. Most of them faced problems while renting a house, even in restaurants they faced issues forcing them to eat mostly in eateries run by people from their communities. These issues cannot be solved by policing alone,” Prof. Bajpai said.

The study quotes a 2020 report from Right and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) that found a significant upsurge in acts of racial discrimination against people from the region. It mentions 22 reported cases of racial discrimination or hate crimes between February and March 25, 2020.

It examined various kinds of security concerns and experiences faced in their daily life.

“The risk of being victimised in racial hatred remains subtle yet deeply entrenched. The highest number of incidents were

reported from Mumbai (44.7%). Interestingly, 78% of the northeast people believed that physical appearance was the most important reason for prejudice against them. It appears as if the northeast India seamlessly fits Indian's imagination of a Chinese person," the report said.

Offensive and abusive language were reported to be most common across all the six cities. Mumbai recorded the highest offensive and abusive language related crime (74%), followed by Chennai (72%), Pune (67.3%), Delhi (64%), Hyderabad (48.7%) and Bengaluru (43.3%). More than 60% of the persons who were interviewed said their studies and work were seriously hampered by such experiences.

"The most pervasive reasons behind hate crime incidents against the northeastern people as per our data analysis were public attitude and insensitivity (44.5%). The incidence of non-reporting of the incidents was as high as 32.3%. As many as 34% of persons faced a common issue of refusal to file FIR by the police. The fear of hate crime was experienced to be particularly high in Chennai (74%)," the study said.

It said the M.P. Bezbaruah Committee in 2014 recommended amendments to the IPC by creating new offences under Section 153C and 509A to deal with comments, gestures and acts intended to insult a member of a particular racial group. "It also suggested to make such offences as 'gender-neutral', 'cognizable' and 'non-bailable' with imprisonment extendable up to three years or five years with fine, respectively. The Supreme Court in *Karma Dorji & Others vs Union of India & Others* (2014) made several

recommendations for the prevention and monitoring of racial hatred and violence. Though, not much seems to have been done in this regard,” said the study.

Earlier in December 2020, a report by the Nagaland government said the stranded State residents were subjected to “racism and harassment” in the wake of the March 24, 2020 nationwide lockdown.

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