



“Resilience of Northeast Migrants in Chennai: Adversity to Stability”

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**Citation:** N. Chibenthung Lotha, (2024), “Resilience of Northeast Migrants in Chennai: Adversity to Stability”, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(3), 2712 – 2725

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i3.7935

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**ARTICLE INFO****ABSTRACT**

The migration of individuals from Northeast India to metropolitan cities like Chennai has increased significantly over the past two decades. This study aims to explore different factors that promotes resilience among Northeast migrants in Chennai, focusing on their socio-cultural adaptation, economic integration, and coping mechanisms in the face of structural and social challenges. Through a mixed-methods approach combining surveys and in-depth semi structure interviews and secondary data of existing literature review on migrant resilience, focusing on social support, discrimination, and coping mechanisms.

The study investigates key factors that contribute to the resilience of migrants in navigating a highly diverse and challenging new sociocultural and religious environment of Chennai. Findings indicate that while migrants face significant discrimination, economic hardship, and cultural isolation, they develop strong support networks, local populace supports, and a collective sense of identity to cope with these challenges. The study concludes that resilience among Northeast migrants in Chennai is a dynamic, multi-faceted process driven by individuals, Non-governmental Organizations, local people support and community cohesion.

**Keywords:** Resilience, Northeast, migration, Chennai, community networks, religion.

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**1. Introduction**

Migration from the northeastern states of India to Chennai has risen dramatically due to economic opportunities, educational aspirations, medical treatment and political instability in the region (Rajaratnam & Kiruthiga, 2017). While searching for better living condition in the new sociocultural and religious environments in the metro cities of India, Northeast migrants face numerous challenges. Loss of family, friends, language, culture, and traditions are among the many losses and grieving experiences that migrants go through (Falicov, 2005). Northeast Indian migrants “experience high levels of racism, harassment, and violence” (McDuie-Ra, Northeast Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge and Retail, 2012). Due to systematic structural constraints that limit their access to resources and their capacity to reconstruct their life after migration, many migrants also face economic marginalisation, social isolation, physical abuse, gender stereotyping and cultural alienation.

Northeast migrants often face unique challenges in Chennai due to their cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences, leading to discrimination and socio-economic marginalization (Prabhakar, 2020). Despite these challenges, Northeast migrants demonstrate remarkable resilience, developing coping mechanisms that allow them to survive and thrive in the metro cities of Chennai. It is essential to have a knowledge of how diverse risk and protective variables, as well as social institutions, contribute to migrant resilience. The ability of people, groups, and systems to withstand stress and shocks, and even shift when circumstances call for it, is referred to as resilience (Akbar & Preston, 2019). Much of the literatures available on Northeast Migrants are related to challenges they faced in the host cities in India. However, this paper explores how the northeast migrants overcome the challenges and thrive in a new locality of Chennai's local.

**2. Objectives or aims**

The primary objectives of this paper are to investigate the resilience of Northeast migrants in Chennai in the context of socio-cultural and religious challenges and economic hardships. The researcher in this study examines the following points;

1. Different challenges encounter by the Northeast migrants
2. Factors promoting resilience among Northeast migrants in Chennai

3. To explore how Northeastern migrants in Chennai navigate through challenges they encounter, and cope up with the city's new sociocultural and religious environment.

### 3. Method

The study employs a mixed method, it combines qualitative data from semi structured in-depth interviews and secondary data from the review of existing literature on northeast migrants, migrant resilience, focusing on social support, discrimination, and coping mechanisms. Since the target population for the study is undocumented and hard to reach, non-probability method like snowball sampling is more appropriate to study migrants (Johnson, 2014). A popular non-probability sampling method is snowball sampling, which is particularly helpful for conducting “in-depth interviews” with “difficult-to-reach populations” (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018), “where there is no easily available data like their demographic information, and not willing to be identified” (Bhat, 2022), “hard to find undocumented migrants” (Lindstrom, 2014). Internal migrants’ data in India “lack of robust data on the scale of internal migration” (Patel, 2020), Northeast migrants in Chennai are undocumented, mostly working in the unorganized sector; they are hard to locate and contact with, and they are reluctant to easily reveal their nature of work in Chennai. So, the researcher employs snowball sampling method for the research which is best suit for such studies.

**Sample Size for qualitative data:** 70 in-depth interviews respondents, representative of the migrant population from various states of Northeast in Chennai.

#### Data Collection and Analysis:

Ethnographic data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Seventy participants were interviewed using semi-structure in-depth interview questionnaires to investigate about their encounter on sociocultural and religious setting in Chennai and the factors that promote resilient in migrants. After transcribing the interview audio recordings, the researcher examined the literature on the study's pertinent topic and conducted a theme analysis. Participants for the study were selected based on snowball sampling, allowing access to students, working professionals, and entrepreneurs of Northeast migrants in Chennai.

### 4. Resilience

Over time, the concept of resilience has been broadened. The importance of stability and systems' capacity to recover from disturbances were frequently stressed in the early research on resilience. It is thought that the Latin verb ‘resilare’ which meaning ‘to jump back’ or ‘jump backward,’ is the word etymological source (Plastina 2020). The notion has only recently been used in reference to migrant settlement and integration. International migration has a big impact on the contemporary world's economic, cultural, and social situations (Akbar and Preston 2019). Resilience essentially refers to positive adaptability, or the capacity to preserve or reclaim mental health in the face of difficulty (Wald, Steven, Gordon , & Jang, 2006). Resilience is seen as a dynamic process of growth that involves achieving positive adaptation in the face of considerable adversity. For Cicchetti the model of resilience (Cicchetti, 2010) makes two essential requirements:

- i. Exposure to grave danger, extreme hardship, or trauma; and
- ii. Success in adapting positively despite serious setbacks to the process of growth

The Latin word "resilare," which meaning to "leap backwards," is where the word "resilience" first emerged (Plastina, 2020). Definitions have changed as scientific understanding has grown. Researchers from a wide range of disciplines, including psychology, psychiatry, sociology, religious studies or theology and more recently biological fields including genetics, epigenetics, endocrinology, and neuroscience, are studying resilience. There is not, however, agreement on an operational definition. Early study on resilience centred on the specific traits or abilities, such cognitive ability, that assisted people in overcoming hardship. Early studies centred on childhood hardships. The definition of adversity has evolved over time to cover any adverse life experiences that are statistically linked to later adjustment problems or mental diseases. These occurrences included poor parenting, homelessness, poverty, traumatic experiences, natural catastrophes, violence, and physical sickness. Later studies concentrated on the role that systems (families, services, groups, and communities) play in helping individuals cope with hardship. The term "resilience" and "resilience treatments" were consequently enlarged to include "protective and vulnerability factors at several levels of influence—culture, community, family, and the person (Cicchetti, 2010).

### 5. Migration and Resilience

Migration is a common occurrence that has been around since humans first appeared on the planet. Individuals move from one area to another for a variety of reasons, but the primary motivation is usually to improve their living circumstances or “to get away from debt and poverty” (Virupaksha, Kumar, & Nirmala, 2014). Studies on migration and resilience generally evaluate how migrants use their motivational objectives and resources to

deal with discrimination and other adaptation problems connected to gaining access to job, education, and affordable housing in order to study migrant resilience (Thomas, 2013).

Migration is a process since there are stages to go through. After going through several stages "from adversity to stability," migrants experience changing conditions as a result of "what they learn they learn and adapt during the transition" (Qamar, 2023). The migrants would frequently face discomfort due to a lack of preparation, challenges "adjusting to the new environment, the complexity of the local system, language" barriers, cultural differences, and negative experiences. Also, it consequently has a detrimental effect on the population's mental health (Virupaksha, Kumar, & Nirmala, 2014). It is acknowledged that a variety of individual characteristics—such as self-esteem, drive, optimism, intelligence, coping mechanisms, and competence—as well as a variety of communal assets—such as ethnic pride, racial and cultural networks, spiritual and religious networks—can strengthen migrants' capacity to overcome obstacles. Importantly, such studies on migration and resilience emphasises the considerable support systems migrant families and communities have in place to assist migrants in overcoming adjustment difficulties in their new place (Akbar & Preston, 2019).

## 6. Northeast Migrants and their Challenges

Migration has been an integral component of human communities, with individuals and groups migrating around for a number of reasons. Factors like improved people's ability to travel, the improvement in technology and communication, civil unrest, economic crisis, war (United Nations, 2017), the search for opportunities for more equality and freedom, and the brain drain, global migration have significantly changed and continued to increase over the course of the 21st century. A United Nation report on migration states that "armed conflict and economic crisis" major factors influencing migration (United Nations, 2017).

Northeast India is a diverse region comprising eight states: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. These people who come from these states often called to as Northeast migrants have certain things in common, but they also differ significantly depending on the state where they were born (Haloi, 2021). Individuals who originated from the geographical and the administrative territory of the eight states of northeast India, and migrated to Chennai for job, education, or other reasons are referred to as Northeast migrants in the study.

Northeast migrants faced many challenges in their new communities, including prejudice, linguistic obstacles, and cultural differences (Kikon, 2022). Nonetheless, a number of Non-Governmental Organizations and religious organizations help these migrants throughout India (Gilon, 2020). These groups offer a range of services, including counselling, healthcare, legal help, and spiritual wellbeing (Prabhakar, 2020). In order to foster understanding and integration between Northeast migrants and the local community in the host destination, they also arrange cultural events and activities.

Migrants from ethnically or racially minority groups face additional obstacles to settlement in their new place (Maiter & Stalker, 2011). Duncan McDuie-Ra (2012) noticed prejudice and discrimination experienced by the Northeast Indian migrants when they migrate to other parts of India, because of the 'race' they belong to. They are "seen as racially different from the Indian mainstream" (McDuie-Ra, *Northeast Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge and Retail*, 2012).

Migrant resilience is seen as a positive response to the major threats to development and adaptability. Most studies look at how migrants use resources and motivation to overcome barriers to work, education, and affordable housing as well as prejudice in order to examine effective integration (Thomas, 2013). Research by Duncan McDuie-Ra (2012) the terrible living conditions among northeast migrants in Delhi are exacerbated by violence, harassment, and discrimination because of their race, as well as their challenging economic conditions, and how they struggle to create place in such condition and "allows patterns and rhythms of life to develop" (McDuie-Ra, *Northeast Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge and Retail*, 2012).

A growing body of research looks at the likelihood of stress and depression in vulnerable immigrant populations, including refugees and homosexuals and lesbians, who have previously experienced violence, conflict, and trauma. (Arnetz et al. 2013; Simich et al. 2012; Gray et al. 2015). Numerous individual characteristics such as "self-esteem, motivation, optimism, intellect, coping skills, and competence" and social resources such as pride in one's ethnic group, "cultural practises, ethnic networks," and spiritual and religious networks are generally acknowledged as protective factors that increase migrants' capacity to overcome obstacles (Maiter & Stalker, 2011).

## 7. Findings: Factors that promote Resilience to Nagaland Migrants

### 7.1. Economic and Employment Opportunities

In recent years, Chennai, which was formerly recognised for its rich cultural legacy (The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2022) and as the entry point to South India (The Editors of UNESCO, 2022), has developed into an industrial hub with a vibrant metropolitan economy. The city has drawn both local and foreign investors due to its advantageous position on India's southeast coast, its well-connected transportation networks, and its highly skilled workforce (Muthu, 2023). Chennai has developed into a centre for several industries in recent

years, including as IT, automotive, healthcare, and education, offering both professional and unskilled people an extensive range of job opportunities.

The economic opportunities Chennai offers motivate migrants to work harder and earn money, so that they will have better economic mobility in their life. After ten years of working at a mall, Alex, a migrant from the Northeast, states, "It is difficult to save money, as the expenses are high. However, in the thick of everything, I'm cutting back on a number of expenses so that, after two years, I will return to my hometown and start a business" (Alex, 2022). Deborah, another migrant from Northeast stated that

"In my home state in other district, my husband and I had purchased a piece of property. However, at this time, we are unable to start a business. After working in Chennai for a few years and earning money, we want to return to my home state and do so" (Deborah, 2021).

One of the most important reasons people from northeast come to Chennai is to economic reason, to earn money for living. The economic and employment opportunities the city provides make them resilience, because the city gives stable income to support themselves and their families, and enables them to have better economic mobility.

## **7.2. Cultural Festivals in Chennai**

Cultural festivals are an important part of Northeast communities in Chennai. Each state of northeast India has their own distinct culture. Through the celebration of cultural festival, they preserved their cultural identity and cultural heritage. In the midst of living in a different sociocultural and religious settings of Chennai, different communities of Northeast migrants in Chennai come together and celebrate their own festivals. Festivals that are celebrated regularly by communities of Northeast migrants in Chennai are as follows:

### **7.2.1. Rongali (Bohag) Bihu:**

Rongali Bihu is one of the most important and widely celebrated festivals in the state of Assam in northeast India (Sharma, 2023). The festival is celebrated even in Chennai, the Assam Association Chennai initiates every year to celebrate the marking the Assamese New Year and the start of the sowing season (The Editor Assam Association Chennai, 2020). The festival involves traditional dances, music, and cuisine, showcasing the Assamese people's rich heritage of culture.

### **7.2.2. Chapchar Kut:**

Chapchar Kut is one of the most significant festivals of the Mizos in the state of Mizoram. It is a season of joy, regeneration, and bonding within the community, and marks the coming of spring. The festival is celebrated with colourful cultural expressions, traditional dances, music, and rituals (Ministry of Communication & Information Technology, Government of Mizoram, 2023). The Mizos in Chennai also celebrate expressing and preserving their rich traditional cultural heritage.

### **7.2.3. Chavang Kut:**

Chavang Kut is the autumn harvest festival celebrated by the Kuki, Chin and Mizo tribes in Manipur (Manipur MyGov, 2021). The festival is also observed among the Kuki, Chin and Mizo migrant communities from Manipur in Chennai.

### **7.2.4. Sajibu Nongma Pānba**

Sajibu Nongma Pānba, also known as Sajibu Cheiraoba, is the New Year celebration of the Meitei people, the predominant ethnic group in the Indian state of Manipur (IFP Bureau, 2023). The festival is also celebrated among the Meitei migrant's community in Chennai.

### **7.2.5. Luira Phanit:**

Luira Phanit, is a traditional festival celebrated by the Tangkhul tribe in the northeastern state of Manipur, India. It is also celebrated by the Tangkhul migrants from Manipur in Chennai (Menezes, 2019). It is an important festival among the Tangkhul in Manipur, associated with the sowing of seeds, and marking the start of the agricultural season. It is a colourful and vibrant festival that symbolises the strong bond between the people, their land, and the natural cycles, as it has its roots in the agrarian lifestyle of the Tangkhul.

### **7.2.6. Tokhu Emong**

The Lotha tribe, who largely live in the Wokha district of Nagaland, India, celebrate Tokhu Emong. It is a colourful and most important post-harvest celebration for the Lotha people, signifying the ending of the harvest season and the start of a season of gratitude, reconciliation, and celebration (Kithan, 2022). Every year on November 7th, the Lotha community in Chennai gathers to celebrate the festival that represents and upholds the cultural values and traditions that have been passed down to them.

### **7.2.7. Moatsu:**

The Ao tribe in Nagaland celebrate Moatsu. It is a harvest festival that honours the people's labour and sense of community while marking the end of the sowing season. The festival is held every first week of May, to give



gratitude for a fruitful planting season and to pray for an abundant harvest (Culture and Heritage, 2023). In Chennai, Ao community often come together and celebrate the festival as a time for community building, mending broken connections, and reaffirming their traditional identity while living a migrant life.

### 7.2.8. Metümnyo:

The Yimkhiung tribe of Nagaland celebrate Metümnyo. It is an important harvest festival, especially celebrated right after millet harvesting, which falls in the second week of August (Shamator District Administration, 2023). The Yimkhiung community in Chennai also get together and celebrate the festival to preserve their rich cultural heritage and cultural identity.

Cultural festivals conduct by the northeast migrants in Chennai indicates that there are preservation of identity and cultural amid change. It fosters community spirit and brotherhood among within the migrant community. Mrs Florence stated that

"I had been waiting eagerly for the event for a long time. In Chennai, my community festival takes place during the rainy season, unlike in my hometown. I was even praying to God to grant my community and I good health and weather. So that all my community members in Chennai will get together and celebrate the occasion. Since this is the only time when everyone in my community can come together in Chennai. I work at a restaurant and we have a lot of customers these days as it is festive season in Chennai so my manager did not give me permission to go to my festival. But I went and report to the work place and took half day leave. I informed him that today is the most important day for my community and I have to go and attend it" (Florence, 2023).

For James who works in a shopping mall in Chennai stated that

"My Festival falls on the week days, and I took leave. The festival is very important for us. It is not only about eating my traditional food and have fun, but we meet lots of new people from my community during the festival in Chennai. Our community members are small in number in Chennai as compare to other community members. So, one of the most important things about celebrating the festival in Chennai is that it helps us to connect to one another and help each other during difficult times. Last year I even invited one of my Tamil friends. He did not understand my language but was very happy to for inviting to my festival. He told me that he enjoyed a lot meeting different people, seeing different cultural shows, participating in activities and eating different cultural foods" (James, 2023).

Jesper a student from Northeast studying in Chennai remarks that

"I have attended my community festival every year. As a student we are mandatory to attend, because most of my community members are working in different private sectors and it is difficult for every one of them to come together. Those people who are working in shopping malls and hospitality industry do not get holiday easily especially during weekends and government holidays. One of the best things about celebrating festival in Chennai is feeling of home away from home. There I meet my community friends who are staying far away from my locality in Chennai. During the festival, different prominent people are also invited each year for the program and speak on different topics like how to become successful in life or achieve somethings of our dreams, how to overcome complications in Chennai, how important is to connect each other and live a community life in Chennai and so on" (Jesper, 2023).

All these shows how festivals are important to them among the Northeast Migrants in Chennai. The festivals in Chennai do not act as sense of preserving their own cultural and traditions, but also a point where they meet new people from their own community and established networking for their survival in Chennai. It creates a sense of belonging and community in a life of migrant that foster resilience.

### 7.3. Sports meets and Community Events

Studies have shown that who take part in sports can positively impact their resilience. According to research by Narelle Eather, Levi Wade, Aurélie Pankowiak, and Rochelle Eime, "sport is a subset of physical activity that can be particularly beneficial for short-and-long-term physical and mental health, and social outcomes in adults" (Eather, Wade, Pankowiak, & Eime, 2023). For Donna Paula "sports are crucial for students' lives as they instill discipline, time management, and resilience" (Paula, 2023). Many India's most talented athletes are from Northeastern states. Sports are very popular in Northeast and have a great deal of respect for athletes (Babu, 2022). Community outings and sports events among the Northeast migrants in Chennai are often held together, and it play an important role in promoting resilience in the Northeast Migrants. Community events and sports event are organised every year by the Churches, Students unions and organizations belonging to the northeast community in Chennai. William, a student from northeast remarks that,

"I participate in the sports meet every time my community church and students' union organised. I along with other northeast friend from my college form a football team and participate in the tournament. Those are some of the best moments I remember in Chennai with my friends. It helps us to relive from academic pressure and also get an opportunity to meet new friends from my community" (William, 2023).

Alex adds,

"My friends and I always ask my pastor and the student leader when the sports meet and community outing are scheduled each year. Since we work for private companies, we are unable to regularly go to church, but we are still eager to attend community events and sports events. For a number of years, my team has held the running football trophy, and this time again we are prepared for the competition. In Chennai, I don't see lots of people from my community, but on these occasions, I do. I feel relieved and happy, like though I'm back in my hometown" (Alex, 2022).

#### 7.4. Preference of Migrant's labour over the local population

Tamil Nadu is the “second largest economy in the India” (In three years, TN will be India's largest GDP contributor: I-T chief Ravichandran, 2023). The private companies especially the manufacturers in Tamil Nadu heavily rely on migrant workers from other states, and they become very worry “over the possibility of migrant workers leaving the state after videos showing Hindi-speaking men being assaulted” in Tamil Nadu (Magazine, 2023). The viral video created panic among migrants in Tamil Nadu, and Jaya Vijayan, secretary of the Chennai District Small Scale Industries Association remarks after a video went viral of abusing inter-state migrants that “The entire industrial and manufacturing sector in Tamil Nadu will come to a halt if these rumours of attacks on north Indian workers continue to escalate. Without the workforce from north India, we cannot not operate in Tamil Nadu. We are waiting to see how many of these workers return after Holi,” (Janardhanan, 2023).

Migrants plays an important role in the development of the host economy. The United Nations Global Compact remarks that “migrant workers make a positive contribution to business performance and productivity, and they contribute to growth and development in their ‘host’ countries or regions” (The Editor United Nations Global Compact, 2023). The researcher has found cases where migrants from Northeast are given more preference over the local people, especially in unorganised sectors and hospitality industries. Mr Peter, a northeast migrants could not complete his high school, but now become a manager in one of the reputed companies expresses that

“I have working experiences in retail and sales from several national and international companies for fifteen years. In every company I have worked for, I achieved my targets and done really well. If you have solid work experience, it is easy to get job in Chennai. Private enterprises favour migrant who has robust working experience, because migrants labour really work without giving much trouble to their boss, if they do, they are easily fired. Usually, we don't voice out much” (Peter, 2023).

Ms Tracy a Northeast migrant who has been working in retail for seven years in Chennai says that “Local people make many excuses from work. They are very clever and lethargic to do works. For us we want to finished the work quickly that is assigned to us and go early. So, owners prefer us to hire” (Tracy, 2022).

Working in a mall, Ms. Nilli, a Northeastern migrant, continues,

“My manager often tells me that my colleagues' local girls from Chennai are too irritating to him and the owner, unlike northeast staff. They usually grumble when small incidents happen or their salary is little delayed. I think, they know their rights, sometimes they are too particular even to minor issues and complain to the owner. Therefore, private companies prefer that migrant like me to work for them without complaining much” (Nilli, 2022).

Mr. Vincent who could not finished schooling, but now placed beyond his education qualifications, express that “he starts from very low; he came to Chennai while he was 17 years of age for work. He searched job a lot but could not get, one reason was because of my age. Eventually, I was hired as a dishwashing in a restaurant by the workers out of kindness. One Tamil madam who came to restaurant noticed me working very sincerely, and she called me to work in her franchises company. She helped me a lot and I worked there for seven years, until the franchises got change. Like me there are many northeast migrants who have come from poor economic background and are willing to work with low wages, able to take risk and do any kind of work to earn money for living. Such people work very sincerely and harder in their work as they do not have much options unlike the local people in Chennai, so the private sectors prefer to hire such migrants from northeast” (Vincent, 2023). Mr Kiran who works in a hospitality industry adds “the company also prefers people who can speak English and Hindi well, where the local does not have that privilege. Normally, local people who can speak English and Hindi fluently does not want to work in low salary. So Northeast people are preferred” (Kiran, 2023).

#### 7.5. Success Stories of Migrants

Motivation is an important aspect that “affects human behaviour and performance” (Özen, 2017). Success Stories of migrants who have succeeded in overcoming challenges in Chennai and become a successful business person or crack competitive exam inspired a great deal of motivation, determination and resilience in their fellow migrants. Examples of resilience leading to personal and communal success. Marina shares a story about one of her senior friends who have successfully crack both state and central competitive exams that

“Job is my senior. We attended the same Chennai college. Because of his health, he had several issues while he was in Chennai. He had a really hard time adjusting to the food and climate in Chennai during those days. After returning home, he cracked the state and central competitive examinations. However, he chose to open a competitive exam coaching centre in my native state rather than accepting the job. I'm also getting ready for the civil service test. I pray and hope that I also do well on the exam as well” (Marina, 2023).

After living in Chennai for 15 years, Nathan started his own business and says,

“I worked in different brands in Chennai shopping malls. As a result of COVID, all of my friends from Northeast in Chennai suffered severely; many of us lost our jobs, and all Northeast restaurants and shops get closed. Before Covid, there were a lot of grocery stores selling vegetables and products from Northeast, and they were all doing really well financially. I noticed them significantly improving their standard of living dramatically. However, the majority of them do not return early and reopen their businesses when the COVID-19 pandemic began to subside. After COVID19, I was hired by another private firm; nevertheless, I quit and started my own business in Chennai, and it's going well” (Nathan, 2023).

The victorious stories of migrants serve as evidence of their perseverance and resilience. Beyond conquering challenges, these people make an important impact and inspire resilience in other migrants. Their accomplishments serve as a testament to the transformational potential of resilience in transforming challenges into opportunities for individuals as well as communities' success and progress.

### 7.6. Support from Local populace

Yes, there are reports of racial discrimination of Northeast migrants in Chennai (Prabhakar, 2020), (Haokip, 2020). However, Chennai is "rated the safest city in India" by Mercer, a global consultancy firm. According to a survey on Quality of Living rankings the city "has been rated the safest city in the country, going by the low crime rate and better law enforcement" (Lakshmi, 2016). The researcher has also found stories of support from local populace in Chennai, following are few stories,

Mr Simon, a migrant from the Northeast remarks,

"I came to Chennai looking for job. Because my family members cannot finance my studies, I left my home state after completing my higher secondary education without informing my parents upon seeing a job advertisement in the local newspaper. I worked at a factory for six months. I was tiny and quite young, and the job at the factory was really hard, so I moved to another state and worked in the hotel industry; after a few months, I came to Chennai looking for job. I came to Chennai by train 20 years ago, with no connections, family, or friends in the city. I was quite young and slim at that time, and I used to sleep at the train stations while looking for work. Then I met one Tamil man, who offered me a little space to live and invited me to work in his grocery store. When I found the manager and a few employees stealing money without the owner's knowledge and dividing it among themselves, they also tried to offer me money, but I refused to take it and told them it wasn't good. However, because all the staff are all locals, I chose not to inform the owner. After a few years, I was promoted to cashier by the owner, who has a lot of faith in me. I worked there for five years before enrolling in a public college. After completing my college, I went to his house and meet him and he was very happy to see me again. The owner has a great deal of trust in me and has helped me in ways I cannot even comprehend" (Simon, 2022)

Mr Alex, who has been working at a retail mall in Chennai, says,

"There are some rowdy people, but the majority of Tamil people I know are very good and helpful. For example, I often went to a Tamil church in my neighbourhood. The Tamil pastor is a respected individual in the community, and he knows me. So, if there is a misunderstanding or a problem in my locality in Chennai, he always comes to help us" (Alex, 2022).

These stories and the research conducted by the Mercer shows that Chennai local populace has been kind enough and supportive towards the Northeast migrants, even though there are few pockets of report on racial discrimination.

### 7.7. NGOs and Community fellowships

The Non-Governmental Organizations and community fellowships in Chennai plays a crucial role in promoting resilience among Northeast migrants in Chennai by addressing various sociocultural, economic, and religious challenges. The researcher has found seventeen northeast based secular NGOs and twenty religious organizations (also called fellowship/church among their own community) in Chennai, that are playing a very important role in promoting resilience among the Northeast migrants. Following are different established Northeast based secular and religious NGOs.

#### Secular Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) of Northeast migrants in Chennai

1. Anal Students Union Chennai (ASUC)
2. Assam Association Chennai (AAC)
3. Chennai Bodo Society (CBS)
4. Chennai Manipur Forum (CMF)
5. Chennai Mizo Welfare Association (CMWA)
6. Inpui Students' Union Chennai (ISUC)
7. Liangmai Students' Union Chennai
8. Maram Students Union Chennai
9. Meghalaya Garo Chennai (MGC)
10. Naga Students' Union Chennai (NSUC)
11. Northeast India Welfare Association Chennai (NEIWAC)
12. Poumai Students Union Chennai
13. Rongmai Students Union Chennai
14. Tangkhul Welfare Association
15. Tripura Association Tamil Nadu (TAT)
16. Student Association for the Development of India's Northeast Region (SADINER), Autonomous Student Body Under IIT Madras
17. Zeliangrong Students Union Chennai

### Religious organizations and fellowships of Northeast migrants in Chennai

1. Anal Christian Fellowship Chennai
2. Boro Christian Fellowship Chennai
3. Chennai Mizo Christian Fellowship
4. Hmar Christian Fellowship, Chennai
5. Inpui Christian Fellowship Chennai
6. Khasi-Jaintia Christian Fellowship (KJCF)
7. Kuki Christina Fellowship Chennai
8. Life Foundation Gate, Tambaram
9. Mara Christian Fellowship
10. Maram Christian Fellowship Chennai
11. Naga Christian Fellowship Chennai (NCFC)
12. Northeast Catholic Community Chennai
13. Northeast Christian Fellowship Chennai, Velachery (NECF)
14. Northeast Christian Fellowship, (NECF) Madras Christian College (MCC)
15. Poumai Naga Baptist Fellowship Chennai
16. Rongmai Christian Fellowship Chennai
17. Tangkhul Baptist Church Chennai
18. Tripura Christian Fellowship Chennai
19. Zeliangrong Christian Fellowship Chennai
20. Zomi Christian Fellowship

The above listed NGOs are-established organisations and church/fellowship in Chennai that support migrants from northeast and assist them in overcoming obstacles they encounter there. A significant part in building resilience among the migrant community in Chennai is also played by the numerous small, unofficial community groups and fellowship among the Northeast migrants that are not mentioned here, because they are in small number and decided to remain underground, while helping their own community. Northeastern migrants frequently experience discrimination, cultural isolation, and other challenges in their new location, particularly in India's major metropolitan areas, so one the leaders of northeast migrants in Chennai shared a precaution message to all his members that;

1. Keep in touch with others through phone calls and visiting.
2. Be a social person don't isolate yourself get involve in all social activities of folk.
3. Stay close to one another (we're stranger here) we need each other in good or bad time.
4. Know your leaders and keep their contact Number with your.
5. You might have known as Alias so and so but make sure to introduce your official Name as well. (Please use your proper name in Work place, college and hospitals etc).
6. Whenever you go out carry valid ID since you don't know what will happen out there.
7. Always wear decent dress outside your room (especially ladies), don't invites trouble by exposing your body.
8. Avoid shortcut route, quiet and dark places are not safe chances of being attack is very much.
9. If you felt insecure by goons or aggressive people better rush to crowded place and seek help.
10. Think for your safety first and then punctuality, its OK to be late for the sake of safeguard.
11. Before crossing the road check four angles, also follow traffic. don't hit vehicle you'll get hurt Don't try to over take vehicles no man ever run faster than engine.
12. If you're not sure of something don't hesitate to ask for help, don't act as if you know blind smart never end well.
13. Ensure your doors and windows are locked properly before you off to bed & office.
14. To sleep in Terrace and corridor is not advisable since you're exposing yourself to danger.
15. Don't sleep naked, keep your room neat and clean because you may or may not wake up the next day.
16. When you search for new room do thorough queries explain your needs before shifted for hassle free stay.
17. Ask for room rental Agreement paper (which is for your safety purpose)
18. Maintain your room and surrounding even be good to your landlord then only may get bonus of little freedom.
19. Your room is for you not for all your friends nor for community people, we should avoid dormitory (morung) lifestyle in city.
20. Let your family's and room mates know where you work and where you go.
21. Know you residential address properly.
22. Secure all documents and contact Numbers in diary or in email, not only in phone.
23. Don't sucked all your bank balance, maintain some few thousands for emergency purpose.
24. Let's Respect local culture and practice's, especially in these three areas alcoholic rampage, inappropriate dressing, going crazy romance in street.
25. Better not roam around at late night if you're not looking for troubles.



26. Prefer healthy food and drink forget about the kicks, eat on time sleep sufficiently that's enough for healthy life.
27. Try to posses any of local ID proof this will give you convenient to access more opportunities (Dominic, 2023).

The northeast based Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Chennai play an important multidimensional role in promoting resilience among Northeast migrants in Chennai by addressing their needs with regards to legal, economic, sociocultural and religious needs. One such example is during the times of COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Gilon, 2020) all the northeast migrants come together under the banner of Northeast India Welfare Association Chennai (NEIWAC) and helped the migrants (Prabhakar, 2020). The NGOs take different initiatives and measures to help their own migrant community grow stronger, making supportive networks to connect one another and respond immediately in times of crisis and empower them to overcome the challenges they face in a new sociocultural and religious settings of Chennai.

### 7.8. Underground Community Support Networks

Networks throughout the community support have become essential for resilience. The Community networks are essential to the lives of migrants from the Northeast because they give them the support, connection, and sense of belonging they have to overcome the difficulties of moving and settling in new places. Social support networks have been formed by humans since prehistoric times. To safeguard the group's existence, the early networks were centred on the family, clan, or tribe (Barnett, 2011).

In Chennai, there are seventeen secular NGOs and twenty religious established organizations that look after the social, cultural, economic and spiritual wellbeing of the Northeast migrants. These established organizations are important in fostering a feeling of community and belonging, which lessens the negative impacts of social isolation and ethnic discrimination in Chennai. However, Northeast comprises of different communities, where the sense of community is very strong. The region has "over 200 distinct communities. Each group has its own language, customs, and traditions." (Haloi, 2021). For example, even in a small state of Nagaland, the Naga people are made up of several tribes, "each tribe has its own distinct customs, languages, and social structures" (The Enigmatic Living Cultures of Nagaland: A Glimpse into Tribal Traditions, 2023), and each of which is further subdivided into several clans and sub-tribes (Zhimomi, 2004). The government of Nagaland has recognized 17 indigenous tribes of the state namely Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Kachari, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Kuki, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Tikhir, Yimkhiong and Zeliang (Department of Information Technology & Communication, 2023). So, primarily migrants from northeast usually flock with their own racial or tribal community members, and forms an 'underground community support networks' within themselves that are informal and not established like the other NGOs as mentioned above. The underground community networks comprising of members within their own tribe or community act as the first stop of community support networks with regards to locate homes, jobs, and emotional support. Such is a similar case even to the other states of northeast which are much bigger and diverse than Nagaland state.

Ms Phoebe a migrant from Northeast living in Chennai said how her community members in Chennai helped her that

"I am really grateful for my community people in my neighbourhood because without them, my husband and I could not have gone to the hospital to deliver the baby. Despite coming from different communities, my spouse and I met in Chennai at work and got married. For almost two months, my spouse and I did not go for work, and we did not have enough money. However, my Chennai community friends were a big assistance to us. Upon observing our suffering and discovering that we lack adequate financial assistance even from our native land, our friends from the community took us to one of their houses, where we are currently residing and to the hospital for delivery" (Phoebe, 2022)

In another incident, Oliver a migrant from Nagaland who was working in a restaurant was met with an accident said that

"Since I recently moved to Chennai, I don't have any family here. That is, until my Chennai community people learnt that I had an accident and was hospitalised. They came looking for me at the hospital after raising money. In the hospital, they provide care day and night. I have never met almost all of those that helped me in getting better. I am now completely recovered from the accident, and I am grateful to everyone in my community who offered their help" (Oliver, 2023).

### 7.9. Northeast Restaurants

India is a sub-continent and land of diversity. Each and every state of India has their own unique cuisine and cultural tradition. India's numerous varieties of food habits are the result of an intricate intersection of historical, geographical, religious, and cultural factors. Due to factors such as local climates, geographical condition, agricultural resources, religious beliefs, and historical influences like trade routes and invasions, each area of the country has created its own unique eating habits (Baral & Lamsal, 2021). Northeast region of India has a diverse cuisine, each state has its "own distinct culinary practices, emphasis on utilizing the fresh ingredients" it produces in their locality (Cucina, 2023). People from the northeast therefore have trouble adjusting to the eating habits of other regions when they first travel outside of their own. Northeasterners are forced to leave their home states due to factors such as ethnic strife, unstable political environments, insurgency

issues, and a lack of employment possibilities; yet, once they arrive at their new location, "food habits and life styles remain prominent" (Raleng, 2023). During the study, the researcher has found eight northeast restaurants in Chennai who are providing food services especially to the northeast migrant community in Chennai, and therefore promote resilience to the migrants. Following are the Northeast restaurants in Chennai during the time of the research from 2018 to 2024;

1. Bamboo Shoot Restaurant, Velachery
2. Ethnic Naga Restaurant, Aminjikarai
3. K2 Restaurant, Perungudi
4. Naga Cuisine, Velachery
5. Naga Reju, Choolaimedu
6. North East Kitchen, Egmore Chennai
7. Northeast Food Cratering, Velachery, Chennai
8. Northeast Tangkhul Kitchen, Velachery

Pamela a migrant from Northeast says that "I got a job in one of the renowned five star hotels in Chennai. There, I get free food, but I have a hard time adjusting. So, I go to Northeast Restaurant and dine there wherever I get a week off. Eating there seems like dining at home. It does not only boost my energy levels, but it also gives me the feeling of being at my home" (Pemela, 2023).

Penelope, a northeastern student staying in a hostel in Chennai, says that

"I find it very difficult to adjust with the hostel food, so once I felt like I am done with hostel food. I've been admitted three times in a hospital after eating hostel food. I have to leave for class early in the morning and return in the evening, which makes cooking at my hostel challenging. I often go to the Northeast restaurants and dine there, and feel like eating home-food and as if it were truly opened for me. Every time I visit a northeast restaurant, I also purchase some northeast food, like as pickles and other delicacies, to have in my hostel. Along with those delicacies, it helps me eating some of the hostel food" (Penelope, 2023).

#### **7.10. Northeast Groceries Shops**

India is famous for its diverse range of foods, with unique eating cultures found in each area. These variations are not coincidental; rather, they are the outcome of centuries of adjustment to regional climates, customs, and historical advancements. There are 20 northeast groceries shop in Chennai during the time of the study. In Velachery and Adambakkam locality alone has 10 northeast shops in Chennai. Chennai's Northeast Indian groceries shops have grown to be important resilient factor that helps the migrant population in to cope up with the challenges and stay there for longer years. Portia who has been working in Chennai for sixteen years says that

"My house owner is asking me to vacate the room since he is planning to renovate the building. I've asked all of my neighbourhood and community friends to look for a room for me near my locality I am staying. There are plenty of northeast grocery stores here in my locality, so I don't want to move and stay in other areas. I get all the needs from Northeast groceries shop in Chennai like whatever is available in my hometown's local bazaar. If it's not there, I order it from the shopkeeper at Northeast Grocery, and it will be delivered in a few days. It will be really hard for me to survive and stay in Chennai for this very long if there are no northeast grocery shops" (Portia, 2023).

### **8. Results: Resilience in Northeast Migrants**

In the past ten years, the concept of "resilience" has gained more attention in efforts to comprehend and study how well people, groups, and systems can endure stress and shocks while adapting and growing, and even changing when necessary (Hall & Lamont, 2013). The notion has only recently been used in reference to migrant settlement and integration. International migration has a big impact on the contemporary world's economic, cultural, and social situations. Yet migration is usually accompanied by challenges and difficulties (Akbar & Preston, 2019). Research indicates that the following outcomes were the results of resilience among migrants from the Northeast:

- i. Cultural festivals promote community cohesion and make migrants feel home away from home in Chennai
- ii. Established NGOs provide essential services that improve resilience in migrants.
- iii. In order to be successful in life, many migrants are developing adaptive coping strategies through success stories from their migrant community.
- iv. Informal organisations and community-based NGOs provide a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation.
- v. Northeast churches, student unions, and community organisations offer socialisation, skill-sharing, spiritual wellbeing, and emotional resilience as well as a platform for fostering emotional resilience.
- vi. Northeast restaurants and groceries shops help northeast migrants to cope with the adversity and unfamiliar, and allow them to even stay for longer years in Chennai.
- vii. Preference of labour over the local population promotes economic opportunities and contribute to their overall resilience.

- viii. Sports meets and community events build social networks, foster community support, and helps recover from the challenges and adversity
- ix. Support from local populace promotes sense of security and well-being despite challenges, and adapt to the new sociocultural and religious environments.

## 9. Conclusion

Resilience is the ability to heal, adapt, or bounce back from adversity. The challenges and adversaries that Northeastern migrants encounter, together with their determination and resilience, define their experience in Chennai. The study indicates that they thrive in spite of numerous barriers, and contribute to the sociocultural, and economic development of the state they migrate to. The support from the local Tamil community, the NGOs, churches and the underground community support networks, community events, northeast groceries stores and restaurants all significantly contribute to the resilience among the migrants in Chennai. The relentless resilience of Northeast migrants in Chennai serve as an important illustration of the human spirit's perseverance and determination in the face of hardship.

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