

BUILDING A 'HOME' AWAY FROM HOME:
THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG NAGA MIGRANTS IN DELHI

ILIYANA ANGELOVA

Introduction

Every year, thousands of people from Northeast India migrate to cosmopolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Pune in search of better education and employment opportunities. While internal migration from the periphery to centres of economic, political and educational activity have been observed across India for decades, a number of factors make the recent large-scale migrations from the Northeast to 'mainland India'¹ distinctive and in need of urgent scholarly attention. Although no reliable statistical information is available regarding the exact demographic composition of northeast migrations to the mainland, it has been suggested that Delhi attracts the largest number of migrants, the majority of whom are young and single (cf. McDuie-Ra 2013). Migrants from the state of Nagaland form a significant percentage of northeast migrants to Delhi, and while many arrive in the capital city in pursuit of higher education and leave having completed it, a significant proportion of Naga migrants are labour migrants who remain in Delhi for prolonged periods of time and build precarious homes there.

This precariousness is underscored by the ambiguous position of Naga migrants in the social landscape of the capital city. As Duncan McDuie-Ra (2012b, 2013) rightly observes about Northeast migrants to Delhi in general, including the Naga, they are caught between the extremes of economic inclusion and social marginality. This article utilises the concept of 'precarity' in order to explain the nature and causes of this ambiguity, as well as the ways in which Naga migrants negotiate their lives within it. While 'precarity' is often used in activist and academic discourses to describe and analyse new forms of labour organisation and the de-regularisation and transformation of labour relations in neoliberal economic settings (for an overview,

¹ 'Mainland India' is a popular expression used across Northeast India when talking about the rest of the country. Geographically, the Northeast is connected to the 'mainland' by the Siliguri Corridor (popularly called the 'Chicken Neck'), which at its narrowest is only about twenty kilometres wide and is confined by India's international borders with Nepal and Bangladesh. The fact that a separate term is used when talking about 'India' reflects the ontological gap between the inhabitants of the Northeast and the rest of India. The expression 'mainland India' will be used without further qualification hereafter.

see Muehlebach 2013, Neilson and Rossiter 2005), often its uses also extend to the existential and ontological feelings of being alone, insecure and socially disconnected in the modern world of fractured socio-economic relations (cf. Allison 2012, Butler 2004, etc.). This article is theoretically informed by these discussions, as Naga labour in Delhi is precarious in a number of ways, often being temporary and not contract-based, and often requiring working unregulated hours, frequently at night. Naga experiences of precarity, however, extend beyond these economic aspects and into the socio-cultural domain, as the Naga occupy a structurally vulnerable position within the Indian caste system and the stereotypes it perpetuates.

In this article I will focus on these sociological and structural dimensions of the precarity experienced by my Naga informants in Delhi. By virtue of being a scheduled tribe,² the Naga occupy the lowest position in the hierarchy of the caste system. However, they are even more marginalised by virtue of the fact that they fall outside the shared imaginary of what counts as having a 'typically' 'Indian face', as Wouters and Subba (2013) explore in detail. When travelling or residing in the mainland, therefore, Naga migrants are often confused for foreigners of Nepali, Tibetan or East Asian origin and are often pejoratively referred to as 'chinkies'.³ As a result of this complex unfolding of identity politics, Naga migrants in Delhi are negatively conceptualised by the majority Hindu and Muslim population of the capital city as the quintessential 'Other' and are placed in a marginal and vulnerable position which exposes them to various forms of discrimination and abuse. The article will argue that it is through the operation of their existing social networks of kinship, tribal affiliation and church membership that Naga migrants negotiate their daily existence in Delhi and overcome the multiple forms of precarity they experience. I will seek to elucidate how these support networks provide young Naga migrants with meaningful forms of belonging in the hostile urban environment, inform their employment and residential

² Although the terms 'tribe' and 'tribal' have been largely discarded in anthropology in favour of 'ethnic group' in an attempt to overcome the connotations of 'backwardness' and 'primitiveness' implicit in them, their use in India is legitimised by the existence of the constitutional category of 'Scheduled Tribes' (ST), which entitles the members of suitably recognized social groups to certain privileges (quotas for government jobs, university places, political representation) within the system of positive discrimination offered by the reservations policy. Therefore, 'although the term "tribe" has the same popular connotations of backwardness and even primitiveness in India as in other parts of the world, in India uniquely there is a certain incentive in being seen as a tribe' (Parkin 2001: 218). Inasmuch as the Naga themselves subscribe to the term 'tribe', it will be retained throughout the present paper without further qualification, the ethnographically contingent status of its use being recognised.

³ From the British English slang term 'Chink'.

choices, and underpin even more intensified geographic mobility from their home places to the capital city.

The Naga and India

'Naga' is a generic ethnonym used to denote a number of closely related tribal groups spread across the hilly borderlands between India and Burma, in the northeast Indian states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and in the Sagaing Administrative Division and Kachin State in Burma. In the older literature the Naga are described as 'Indo-Mongoloid' peoples speaking a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages. Culturally and historically, the lands which the Naga identify as their homeland form part of a broader region in highland South and Southeast Asia, which Willem van Schendel (2002) identifies as 'Zomia'.⁴ According to van Schendel, Zomia is a geographically marginal space, a borderland region, a periphery, which does not fit well into conventional academic scholarship in Area Studies. Borrowing van Schendel's concept and adding a stronger political and historical dimension to it, as well as building on Edmund Leach's seminal contributions on the Kachin of Burma (1954, 1960),⁵ in his own influential work James Scott (2009) argues that, throughout history, the peoples of Zomia have always resisted the political control of lowland kingdoms by choosing to occupy the remote highlands and differentiate themselves from lowland populations in a number of ways (e.g. they occupied different ecological niches, practised different modes of subsistence agriculture, spoke different languages and, crucially, chose forms of religious affiliation which differed from the lowland 'mainstream').⁶ In relation to lowland kingdoms, therefore, the Zomia highlands were 'nonstate spaces', a 'barbarian frontier' inhabited by 'uncivilised' tribals (Scott 2009: 99). Unsurprisingly, in the post-colonial era of nation-building, this long history of resisting and evading state control has been translated into a number of nationalist and separatist movements across Zomia.

⁴ *Zomia* – from *zomi*, a highlander, a hill-dweller, in the Zou (Kuki-Chin-Mizo) languages spoken in Northeast India and Northwestern Burma.

⁵ While being the first to draw scholarly attention to the ontological difference between the highland and lowland populations of Southeast Asia, Leach also acknowledged that the hill–valley divide was not absolute, as there was much continuity, ethnic mixing and trade between the two types of communities. The divide was made much starker by colonial powers and their isolationist policies, which cut off the hill from the valley populations in pursuit of the economic interests of the former (see Franke 2009).

⁶ See Sadan (2010), Fiskesjo (2010) and Formoso (2010) for a critique of Scott's arguments regarding Southeast Asia; see Wouters (2011) for a critique regarding Northeast India and the Naga.

The Naga nationalist struggle for independence from India is the longest ongoing struggle of its sort on the sub-continent, which was initiated in the early twentieth century and picked up momentum in the mid-1950s. From its inception, the movement has been motivated by Naga perceptions of their socio-cultural and religious distinctiveness from the rest of (Hindu and Muslim) India. Baptist Christianity has played a central role in shaping and sustaining these perceptions and has served as a main ideological motivator of the Naga movement. This has had a number of important consequences for the ways in which group identities have been constructed and Indo-Naga antagonisms have been perpetuated over time. One important consequence of the protracted Indo-Naga political conflict is that, in the name of maintaining law and order in Nagaland, the Government of India has introduced a series of draconian laws, such as the infamous AFSPA,⁷ which not only leads to violations of human rights, but also justify the heavy military presence of Indian military and paramilitary personnel in Nagaland. The atrocities committed by these armed forces over the years (cf. Maxwell 1980, Iralu 2009 etc.) have generated bitterness and alienation among the Naga and have perpetuated feelings of mistrust for mainland Indians. At the same time, Nagaland has been isolated from the mainland for more than sixty years, as access for foreigners was restricted and strictly monitored until recently.⁸ As a result, Nagaland is generally unknown and misperceived by mainland Indians as a distant and exotic land inhabited by wild and uncivilised tribes. Thus, the ontological gap between the valley and the hills, masterfully theorised by Leach, is still ideologically motivating the ongoing tensions and identity politics in Nagaland. At the same time, the sustained Naga migrations outside the Northeast since the 2000s reflect an equally important process that has been overlooked in the literature, namely that although Indo-Naga antagonisms might

⁷ Since 1958, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has been in operation in all areas of Northeast India, which have been designated as 'disturbed'. This includes the whole state of Nagaland, whose status is reviewed each year. Although human rights activists have been fighting for the repeal of AFSPA for years, there is no indication that this will be done any time soon. On the contrary, in early April 2015 AFSPA was extended to cover 'disturbed' districts in Arunachal Pradesh which border Assam and are inhabited by tribal peoples, including Naga.

⁸ Access to Nagaland and other tribal areas in Northeast India has been restricted since colonial times. In 1873 the British passed the first piece of legislation, the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (otherwise known as the Inner Line Regulation), which required any non-Naga wishing to enter the lands of the Naga to procure a special permit (an Inner Line Permit, or ILP) in order to do so. This policy was continued by the independent Indian state, especially in view of the fragile political situation in Nagaland, and even today every Indian national who wishes to visit Nagaland has to be issued with an ILP. The access regime for foreign nationals was even more restrictive, with foreign visitors having to procure a Restricted Area Permit (RAP), travel in groups of four (or as a married couple) and stay in Nagaland no longer than seven days. The RAP was revoked in 2011.

remain potent, they are also 'assuaged by a mixture of necessity and opportunity' (McDuie-Ra 2012a: 40).

While the first Naga migrations to Delhi are recorded as having taken place in the 1950s (some were Naga bureaucrats and politicians who were posted to serve in Delhi, while a few others enrolled in Delhi universities), those were isolated instances (cf. Jamir 2000). It was only after the ceasefire of 1997,⁹ and especially after the 2000s, when Nagaland became somewhat opened up to the rest of India, that larger numbers of people, mostly young, started migrating out of Nagaland in search of better education and job opportunities. This process has been facilitated by the implementation of the reservations policy (explained above), as well as by a number of push factors in Nagaland, such as militarisation, economic underdevelopment and a lack of diversified college education. While the complex operation of the Naga economy falls outside the purview of the present article, it will suffice here to say that Nagaland is a predominantly agrarian state which has no industry of any scale that can generate any revenue. The core of the state's budget consists of grants and subsidies provided by the central government in Delhi that often fail to be utilised efficiently by the Nagaland government. The majority population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, but the process lacks mechanisation, productivity is low and marketable surplus scarce. The state economy is therefore very import-dependent. Unemployment rates among young people are high, especially the ever-growing group of the so-called 'educated but unemployed youth'. Collectively, all these factors motivate the continued migration of young Naga outside their home state and into the bigger cities of mainland India.

The role of networks in Naga migration and settlement in Delhi

Sending a child away for higher studies or in search of employment is an endeavour which often involves a number of consanguineal and affinal kinsmen, who pool financial resources in order to be able to do so. At the same time, those who contribute in this way expect a certain reciprocation of their contribution when the need arises. A very well-organised network for the exchange of information exists between families and fellow villagers regarding their members who live outside Nagaland, who are expected to render help to newcomers. This includes providing

⁹ The 1997 ceasefire is very important because it put an end to the armed hostilities and paved the way for political negotiations that have been going on ever since.

them with accommodation and meals, especially until they find accommodation of their own, showing them around the city, helping them to obtain admission to university, helping them find jobs, introducing them to their tribal community in Delhi etc. Therefore, it is through kinship and village networks that the Naga create and sustain chain migration, as these networks share the financial burden, provide emotional support and help ease the process of transition for the new migrants.

This mode of migration creates large concentrations of people from the same village, or even the same Naga tribe, in the same locality in Delhi where siblings¹⁰ (occasionally close friends and couples) split the costs of sharing a flat. Among the localities with the largest concentrations of Naga in North Delhi are Mukherjee Nagar, Indra Vihar and Nehru Vihar (all close to the main campus of Delhi University), and in South Delhi, Munirka (just off the Jawaharlal Nehru University campus), Safdarjung Enclave, Mohammadpur, Moti Bagh and Satyaniketan (opposite the South Campus of Delhi University). Moti Bagh and Satyaniketan, where I lived intermittently for several months in 2011, are over-populated, very student- and young people-dominated areas with cramped three- or four-storey buildings along narrow alleys (or *galī* in Hindi), whose owners usually occupy the ground floor with their families and rent out the top floors to migrants, many of whom are from the Northeast. My informants' flats in Moti Bagh were often shabby and in poor repair, sparsely furnished and with no windows, with small kitchenettes and basic bathrooms. Most landlords rarely invest in flat maintenance, and the water problem is a common nuisance, especially in the hot months preceding the monsoon, when it is available for an hour in the early mornings (4–5 am) and an hour in the evenings (4–5 pm).

Puloto,¹¹ a young Sumi Naga man in his early thirties, left his home village and came to Delhi ten years ago. Since he is the oldest of six siblings, he had no immediate family when he arrived in Delhi but shared a flat with some other boys from his village who had come to Delhi before him. They introduced him to the call centre in which they were working, and he started his first job there. Four years later his younger brother came too and stayed with Puloto sharing his room. Now it was Puloto's turn to refer his younger brother to the call centre where he was working. Yet another two years later, when their younger sister came to Delhi searching for a job,

¹⁰ My use of the word 'sibling' here extends to cover all cousins who, according to Naga kinship rules, are considered one's brothers and sisters.

¹¹ All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

all three siblings moved out together into a flat near the one the boys had been occupying in Moti Bagh. A couple of years ago, with all three elder siblings working, the parents decided to send the next brother and sister to pursue their higher studies in Delhi and be financially supported by their elder siblings. In 2011, when I met the family, they were still living in the same flat they had started renting four years ago: two small rooms (one for the boys and one for the girls), an adjacent bathroom and a tiny kitchen which could accommodate only one person at a time, all for 8,000 rupees a month, which the elder siblings contributed from their salaries.

Living together is part of the community way of life that young Naga are accustomed to, and since they have shared rooms and belongings with younger siblings back home, most of them do not seem to mind doing the same in Delhi. 'It's [the flat] not too good, OK, but it's not too bad [either]', conceded Atoni, Puloto's youngest sister, and she went on to explain that she would prefer to live in a bigger room with a nice big window in it, but the locality was not bad, as there were many friends around whom she could visit and who came to visit her. She ended by saying, 'What to do, na?'¹² This is how we live, there is no other way, we have to bear. But it's also not good to live alone, it's not safe but it's also too boring'. Atoni's words highlight the complex precarity of my informants' lives in Delhi. While they are forced to share tiny, low-quality flats with siblings because of the heavy financial burden involved in living independently, they do not seem to mind doing this because it replicates a communal way of life that they are used to. Crucially, sharing with siblings is considered to provide both a certain level of security and support in times of need and entertainment in times of boredom (to borrow Atoni's words, it would be 'too boring' to live alone). All these aspects stress the importance of networks not just for the way Naga chain migrations take place, but also because they inform residential and employment choices.

As Duncan McDuie-Ra rightly observes (2013), the job market in Delhi is highly specialised when it comes to Northeast migrants, as there are several employment routes which the majority of them seem to follow. According to McDuie-Ra, these include working as shop assistants in Delhi's shopping malls (what he calls 'new consumer spaces') and in the booming call centre business (2013: 1629). In addition to these, an increasing number of Naga take up employment in the beauty and spa

¹² 'Na' is a characteristic particle which intersperses Naga speech and is loosely translated as 'right'.

industry, in hospitality as well as in the music and entertainment business (especially as live performers in the bars and restaurants of Delhi's five-star hotels). In all these jobs, the fact that Naga people are fluent speakers of English¹³ (unlike many of their counterparts from the mainland) serves as a strong incentive in the recruitment process as these jobs rely heavily on the use of English for communication with (foreign) customers. The usual way of finding a job, as already demonstrated above, is through the operation of kinship networks. One is usually referred to these jobs by one's siblings and/or friends, who receive a commission for each successful referral they have made. In this way, a number of incentives operate together and ensure the continued employment of Naga in the same distinct economic niches.

'Exceptional citizens'

However, as McDuie-Ra aptly points out, '[o]utside these spaces of economic inclusion, many north-east migrants continue to live as exceptional citizens' (2013: 1637). This exceptionality highlights the ambivalent position of Naga migrants in Delhi: on the one hand, they are able to earn a living by occupying certain job niches, but on the other hand, they have been unable to fit into the social fabric of 'proper' Indian society as imagined in the mainland. Naga migrants are therefore regularly subjected to various forms of racial profiling and discrimination. As Wouters and Subba rightly observe (2013: 128), even though the category of 'race' has fallen out of academic use, 'popular conceptions of race have long outlived its critics'. The pervasiveness of these popular conceptions in India is perhaps best demonstrated in the common use the word 'chinky' when addressing people from Northeast India. The term is particularly abusive and signifies the perceived superiority of the person using it in respect of a racially contemptible 'Other'.

I have observed that such discriminatory attitudes are culturally acquired and inculcated. For example, while I was staying at the house of some Naga friends in Moti Bagh, it was commonplace for the landlord's small children (aged around ten) to call out to my Naga friends: 'Hey, *chinku bhaiya*' ('Hey, elder brother chinky'). They must have heard the word either at home or in the street, and were using it, perhaps unaware of its negative connotations. My friends tended to dismiss this as an innocent

¹³ Nagaland is the only state in India whose official language is English, this being the language in which the state administration and the education system are run. Therefore, the majority Naga, and certainly the younger generations, become fluent speakers of English from a relatively early age.

childhood blunder, rather than correcting the children and helping them understand that it was a bad word to use. 'These people, they are so backward, na, their mentality is just too backward. What's the point to talk to them even?!', remarked my friend Akho during one of our conversations. Akho's remark signifies a reversal of perceptions of backwardness and civility: while the local population in Delhi perceives the Naga as 'backward' and 'primitive' because of their ethnic origin, for the Naga it is the inability to overcome such stereotypes in one's thinking and behaviour that represents backwardness. In opposition to such stereotyping, McDuie-Ra (2012a) observes that the Naga imagine themselves and their lifestyles as distinctly non-Indian, modern and cosmopolitan.

My informants often find themselves in confrontational situations laden with racism and sexism. Savino, a young Angami Naga woman in her early thirties who has lived in Delhi for more than ten years and works at a call centre, narrates:

They call me, 'Hey chinky, how much?' when I come back from work at night. I sometimes reply something but usually just go [away] as they might become violent.

But I just want to give them one tight slap! What is this??

Savino's narrative highlights the strongly gendered dimension of racial discrimination in Delhi: questions such as 'How much?' reflect the misconception commonly shared by many mainland Indian men that Naga women are promiscuous. Savino feels unsafe returning home after a shift at work, and her vulnerability is exacerbated by the fact that she is worried that if she reacts to the offence, her abusers might turn violent and attack her. One hears of similar eve-teasing incidents¹⁴ on a daily basis. Such incidents highlight the magnitude of the exceptionality of my Naga informants and friends as citizens of India: they are not only a minority population marginalised from the mainstream (an experience undoubtedly shared by other migrant minority communities in Delhi), they are also racially abused and discriminated against because of their ethnic origin.

The role of Naga networks in navigating life in Delhi

Amidst the precarity of urban life in Delhi, the existing tribal and church networks of the Naga provide them with support, guidance and meaningful forms of belonging

¹⁴ According to Oxford Dictionaries Online, the term 'eve-teasing' has been coined for the Indian context in order to describe various instances of sexual harassment and abuse of women by men in public (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/eve-teasing>). Personally, I find the word 'teasing' inappropriately mild to describe this type of offensive behaviour.

and help them overcome their marginality and discrimination. These social structures replicate existing structures in Nagaland, where the members of each Naga tribe form an informal community headed by an apex body of elders and community leaders (called a *hoho*), and where Naga churches are hierarchically organised into tribal associations. Upon their arrival in Delhi, young Naga migrants become initiated and socialised into their respective tribal networks through a series of welcome programmes organised at different levels with the purpose of helping newcomers adjust to life in Delhi more quickly.

In Nagaland, where the majority Naga population is Baptist Christian, belonging to a church has become an essential part of one's individual and group identity. The church is the focal point of community life, and all life-cycle events, public functions and tribal festivals are celebrated with Christian ritualism. The centrality of the church to people's self-ascriptions has been retained by the Naga in Delhi, as elsewhere in the mainland. Those Naga tribes that are numerically well-represented in Delhi have formed tribal churches and fellowships (e.g. Delhi Ao Baptist Church, Sumi Christian Fellowship Delhi, Delhi Lotha Christian Fellowship etc.). People belonging to Naga tribes which are not numerically strong in Delhi, and have therefore not established their own tribe-specific churches, are welcome to attend the services organised by the Naga Christian Fellowship (NCF)¹⁵ in North Delhi.

I attended the services and events organised by both the Sumi Christian Fellowship Delhi (SCFD)¹⁶ and the NCF. Both churches are frequented predominantly by young people (students and young professionals), although the NCF also attracts families and foreigners. The services in the SCFD are held in the vernacular most of the time and in English on the last Sunday of the month, whereas services in the NCF are held in English. In September each year both churches hold special programmes for newcomers. In addition, whenever a person attends church for the first time, the pastor asks them to stand up at the beginning of the service and introduce themselves to the congregation. In this way, newcomers are welcomed informally into the community of fellow churchgoers.

¹⁵ The Naga Christian Fellowship (NCF) Delhi was established in 1975 as a discipleship ministry catering to the spiritual needs of Naga students residing in Delhi.

¹⁶ The Sumi Christian Fellowship Delhi was established in 1991 in order to cater to the spiritual needs of Sumi students. It operated without a full-time pastor until 2007, when the current pastor was commissioned from Nagaland by the Western Sumi Baptist Akukuhou Kuqhakulu (WSBAK, or the Baptist Association of the Western Sumi).

Naga Baptist churches in Delhi hold services on Sundays and organise Bible study groups during the week, annual retreat camps and various other activities throughout the year. These activities serve a twofold purpose: to cater to the spiritual needs of the congregation, and to create a sense of community and belonging while replicating accepted forms of sociality that exist in Nagaland. Church-going is a weekly routine in Nagaland, and many of my young informants had been actively involved in the activities of the Youth Departments of their churches back home. They were used to such forms of fellowship and very often sought to reproduce them in Delhi by joining their respective tribal church or the NCF. Young people were encouraged to become actively involved in and take responsibility for their church while in Delhi: they were encouraged to join the praise and worship team that opened each service, do the scripture reading during service, present their musical talent in special numbers which interspersed each service, act as ushers and volunteers in serving refreshments after the service, and share important events in their lives by giving special prayer points for the congregation to pray on. My young informants and friends visited church as often as they could both as a matter of habit and in fulfilment of their Christian duty ('We have to, na, it's our duty', was an explanation given to me often). This duty was perceived to operate at multiple levels: it was a duty one owed God by virtue of being a 'good' Christian, a duty one owed oneself for the salvation of one's soul, and finally, a duty one owed one's parents, who would feel reassured knowing that their children attended church regularly. At the same time, attending church and its various functions and outreach initiatives helped create and maintain a sense of community and belonging that my friends sought to recreate in their new lives in Delhi. Many of them explained that their closest friends were members of the same tribal church with whom they socialised regularly outside church-organised events.

In addition to tribal churches, Naga newcomers to Delhi also join their respective tribal communities: either the tribal student unions (for incoming Naga students) or the informal tribal networks (for young professionals and families). All students become official members of their respective tribal student unions at fresher's programmes (that is, programmes for incoming students) held in September and pay a nominal annual membership fee. The student unions organise a number of recurrent activities each year which provide their members with the opportunity to get to know each other better and have fun fellowship. For example, they organise annual sports events both internally and in competition with other student unions; the major tribal

Angelova, 'Home' away from home

festivals are celebrated annually with guests from other Naga tribes, which helps strengthen the perception of a common Naga identity in Delhi; and in typical Naga fashion, cultural nights, talent shows and music competitions are organised regularly as a platform where young Naga can exhibit their talents.

In this way, both church and tribal networks co-ordinate their efforts in order to create supportive and friendly social spaces where their members can find temporary refuge from the challenges of daily life in Delhi. Indeed, one of the main purposes of Naga networks is to sensitise their members to these challenges and the dangers they might encounter in Delhi. This formed the central theme of the fresher's programmes organised by both churches and student unions. In October 2011 one pastor issued the following message during the fresher's programme in church:

Every year I tell our young people who come to Delhi this: You've lived in a secure family environment – a mono-religious and mono-cultural environment, with no exposure to religious variety, a lot of different things, but here you find so many difficulties and differences! Delhi can be dangerous in this way – it can drive you away from your fundamental values. Therefore, be careful, guard your hearts, keep your feeling of gratitude for what God has provided you.

At a similar function organised by a student union earlier in September, the invited senior speaker also talked about the challenges of life in Delhi:

Life is very difficult for people from Nagaland because we face many challenges here, we are a minority and have to be responsible for what we do, to be careful with the people because people's mentality here is different, they don't know about our culture, the way we dress and interact. You should do the things that you are meant to do – respect your parents and elders, look up to your seniors and to your pastor.

In such messages, Naga newcomers to Delhi are warned of the multiple dangers and challenges they are going to face in the capital city as a result of the different social environment, their structural vulnerability within the caste system and the resultant prejudices that the majority population shares of them. Both the pastor and the invited speaker conveyed the message that the best ways to tackle this marginality and mitigate the precarity of life in Delhi is to adhere to one's own social networks – kinship, tribal and church – and to participate actively in their activities and forms of socialising. By doing this, one will also preserve one's 'fundamental values', as the pastor put it, that are accorded high significance in Naga society, such as respect for elders and church leaders, regular church attendance and involvement in church activities.

In addition to sensitising their members to potential dangers, Naga social networks also act as a first point of reference in emergency situations. As soon as something bad happens to any Naga, the community responds by notifying its members of the incident either by text messages or by phone, and the news spreads immediately. When a Sumi Naga student suddenly passed away in his hostel in May 2011, the church executives were among the first to reach the spot and alert the police; later the same day news of the unfortunate incident circulated among all community members and in the social media. The same thing happened when a young Tangkhul Naga boy went missing in Delhi in August 2011. In this way, the social networks of the Naga in Delhi fulfil their multiple purposes as providers of guidance, support and assistance, as the need arises, while also working towards strengthening a sense of group cohesion and belonging. They also liaise closely with the Delhi police in order to raise awareness of the problems faced by Naga people in Delhi and take joint action towards trying to solve them.

Conclusion

Even though a thorough survey of the Naga population in Delhi is not available and perhaps is impossible to make, as many people arrive in the capital and leave unregistered, it is still plausible to suggest that many thousands come to stay. Due to the unfavourable economic environment, the unstable political situation and the lack of diversified college education in Nagaland, many young Naga migrate to Delhi in search of employment and educational opportunities. Many of my Naga informants told me that they did not like Delhi very much: yes, it is better to live away from parental supervision and have ample opportunities to party with friends, or go shopping in the big markets and shopping malls of Delhi, or go out for a pizza, or go see the latest movie in 3D – there is so much more to do and enjoy in Delhi. But at the same time my informants and friends were also acutely aware that the lives they had built for themselves in Delhi were precarious in a number of ways. The Naga inhabit the social space of Delhi and benefit from the economic and entertainment opportunities it offers, but they remain socially excluded from the mainstream. They do not fit into the shared imaginary of what represents Indian-ness in terms of culture, religion or even facial features, and they are often stereotypically perceived as foreigners of morally questionable character. Daily newspapers are interspersed with news about molestation, abuse by landlords and employers and various forms of

sexual assault committed against Naga. Caught between the extremes of economic inclusion and social exclusion, my Naga informants navigate their way through the precarity of life in Delhi by drawing on the support of their social networks – family, tribal affiliation and church membership. The present article has sought to show how these networks provide my young friends with guidance, support and a sense of security and belonging in the capital city, informing their employment and residential choices, and helping sustain their continued migrations from Nagaland to Delhi.

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