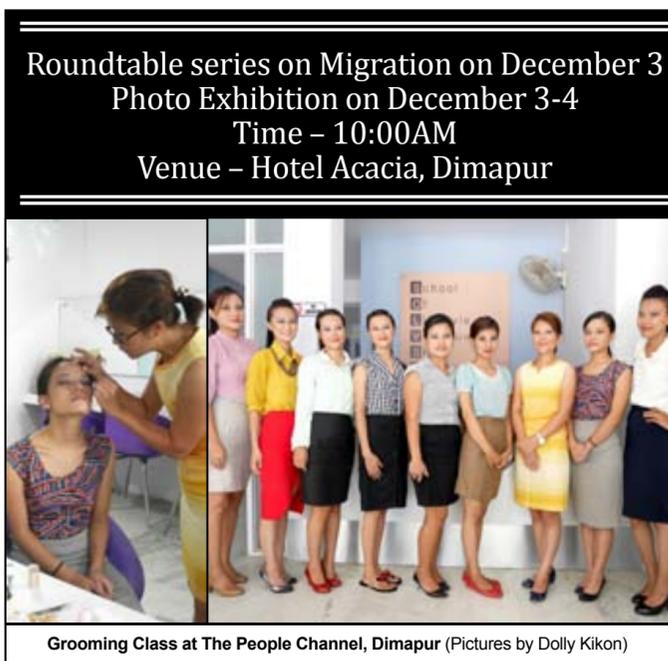


Indigenous People as Service Providers Hospitality and Race in Global India

Dolly Kikon (University of Melbourne)
Bengt Karlsson (Stockholm University)

The People Channel is a placement center that offers grooming classes. According to the director, Rozelle Mero 80% of the students and alumni come from rural Nagaland, and have successfully secured jobs in the high end hospitality sector in India and abroad. Located in Dimapur, this center has consistently managed to provide placements for its trainees in the hospitality industry, especially in the Five Star hotels across cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Pune. The term Five Star is an international hotel rating based on luxurious service and facilities offered. What is significant is that the Five Star brands in the hospitality industry is premised on a wholesome experience where guests can unwind because they are looked after by a fleet of service providers, of course, for a substantial amount of money. Therefore, all Five star luxury hotels explicitly spell out the goods it offers such as spa, world cuisine restaurants, banquet halls, swimming pools, and the categories of guest rooms and the views it offers.

When we started our ethnographic fieldwork tracing tribal migrants from Northeast to the metropolitan hubs across India, we did not expect that that it would lead us to the heart of luxurious Five Star hotels and restaurants in Mumbai, Trivandrum, Bangalore, and Delhi. These conversations about high quality service, personal development, and communication skills were terms that were carefully underlined at The People Channel in Dimapur city. Our first impression of The People Channel was the impressive signboards where monthly bulletins were put up announcing the extraordinary placement records. We quickly realized that we were not the only ones impressed with its success rate. Many other people in Nagaland noticed this exceptional trait of the center and had arrived there to get the training. A trainer at TPC said, “Most of the students who come here are



Grooming Class at The People Channel, Dimapur (Pictures by Dolly Kikon)

raw and fresh. Some of them come here with no idea about make up at all. So it becomes a little difficult for me to teach them. Suddenly from no make up to full make up – they are also shocked and feel awkward. So what I do initially is that I study their background. As in like what kind of family do they come from; do they come from the village. I look at all these things. They have to apply make up for their interviews.”

It was clear that The People Channel was not solely a training and recruitment center. The driving force about this center was the intensive grooming class offered to the students. The knowledge about serving and working in the high-end hospitality sector imparted here was instilled as work ethics about self-respect and dignity. Students were

made to reflect about their future and the opportunities about working in a prestigious and privileged working environment. One of the features about tribal migration from Northeast India that came up in our research work was about physical appearance.

Even as increasing number of cases about discrimination and racist attacks on migrants from Northeast India took place, we found that hotels and restaurants serving pan-Asian food employed a high number of migrants from the tribal states like Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh. It appeared that while the citizenship test in India had consistently failed to recognize indigenous migrants from Northeast India, the hospitality industry and corporation in global India embraced

this diversity. However, this jubilation of this diversity was not based on constitutional guarantees about equality and respect for human rights, but one that asserted the privatization of labour, elimination of unions, and the imposition of a corporate value and culture.

Indigenous students, during the placement and grooming classes at The People Channel underwent various trainings – from picking up facial expressions, communication skills, adjusting body languages – all the way to learning makeup color that captured sobriety and grace. These skills were defined as soft skills knowledge. These practices captured how the hospitality industry in contemporary India presented notions of racial diversity through their employees, especially the indigenous face from the Northeast, as a representative of a global Asian and cosmopolitan expression in India. Such processes, as we observed in our research, called for a particular kind of care, value, and labour practice that needed to be communicated with expressions. How could features that had been at the center racist abuse in India, ever become the face of the company?

The larger Indian public attributes racism as a practice that exists only in the west, and the non-west world, including Indians as mere victims. Such an understanding of racism only reinforces and legitimizes institutionalized racist practices and discrimination. During our fieldwork at The People Channel in Dimapur, we were intrigued with the conversations about appearance and the face. The significance of the indigenous migrant's face is an important aspect to reflect upon. What are the high-end hospitality sectors in contemporary India selling their customers? Can we say that it is a neoliberal gaze in global India where the inequalities and hierarchies, combined with disciplining of the most vulnerable and poor citizens into servers taking place? These are, indeed, some of the more difficult questions that we need to engage with.

xenophobia

is Dictionary.com's Word of the Year

[zen-uh-foh-bee-uh, zee-nuh-]

Examples Word Origin See more synonyms on Thesaurus.com

noun

- fear or hatred of foreigners, people from different cultures, or strangers: Xenophobia and nationalism can be seen as a reaction to the rise of globalization.
- fear or dislike of the customs, dress, etc., of people who are culturally different from oneself: Learning a foreign language can help to overcome xenophobia.

Jenna Amatulli
The Huffington Post

There were a lot of surprises to come out of 2016, but “xenophobia” being named Dictionary.com's Word of the Year is not one of them. When you consider the rhetoric that galvanized people in this year's Brexit vote and the U.S. presidential race, the proof that “xenophobia” is the word that most represents the zeitgeist of 2016 is, well, in the pudding. According to Dictionary.com, the word's origins stem from two Greek terms meaning “stranger” (“xénos”) and “fear” or “panic” (“phóbos”). Searches for “xenophobia” on the site surged right after the Brexit vote in June. There was an even larger spike days later, when President Obama delivered a speech stating that language used by Donald Trump, current President-elect, was not an example of populism, but rather “nativism or xenophobia.” (Hear Obama's comments below.) “Xenophobia and other words tied to global news and political rhetoric reflected the worldwide interest in the unfortunate rise of fear of otherness in 2016, making it the clear choice for Word of the Year,” said Liz McMillan, CEO of Dictionary.com, in a statement. “While we can never know the exact reasons why xenophobia trWended in our lookups this year, this reflects a desire in our users to understand the significant discourse surrounding global events.” Dictionary.com's selection of “xenophobia” is far from the only indicator of our tumultuous year. Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year was “post-truth,” a term that means “objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” In 2013, Oxford gave “selfie” the same honor. If only we could go back to those simpler times.

Harvard research suggests that an entire global generation has lost faith in democracy

Gwynn Guilford
Quartz

People everywhere are down on democracy. Especially young people. In fact, so rampant is democratic indifference and disengagement among millennials that a shocking share of them are open to trying something new—like, say, government by military coup.

That's according to research by Yascha Mounk, a Harvard University researcher, and Roberto Stefan Foa, a political scientist at the University of Melbourne. The remit of their study, which the Journal of Democracy will publish in January, analyzes historical data on attitudes toward government that spans various generations in North America, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. They find that, across the board, citizens of stable liberal democracies have grown jaded about their government, say Mounk and Foa—and worse.

“[T]hey have also become more cynical about the value of democracy as a political system, less hopeful that anything they do might influence public policy,” they write in a previous article on their research (pdf) published in Jul. 2106, “and more willing to express support for authoritarian alternatives.”

And it's among millennials that this “crisis of democratic legitimacy” is starkest. Young people today are more into political radicalism and exhibit less support for freedom of speech than previous generations, according to the July study. Consider some of the other data Mounk and Foa report:

- Okay with autocracy: Many fewer millennials in both Europe and the US object outright to military coups than their elders.
- Rights, schmights: Only around a third of US millennials see civil rights as “absolutely essential” in a democracy, compared with 41% among older Americans. In the European Union, it's 39% and 45%, respectively.
- Election optional: More than a quarter of US millennials dismiss the importance of free elections to democracy. (Though rates are overall lower in Europe, millennials also agree at higher rates than older generations.)
- They're just not that into it: Back in 1990, majorities of both young and older people reported being interested in politics. For millennials, that's no longer true.

Couldn't you chalk this up to time-honored tendencies of youth disaffection?

Not really. For instance, in 1995, only 16% of American youngsters—those in their late teens and early 20s—thought democracy was a “bad” political system for their nation. In 2011, nearly a quarter of millennials did. Though the increase among European youth was less marked, it was still significant, say the researchers.

It might be that since this particular generation of young people have grown up in highly stable democracies, they take democracy for granted. It would then stand to reason that, as Mounk and Foa found, millennials in the US and Europe are less likely to participate in conventional civic engagement.

But millennials aren't doing much unconventional political action either. While one in 11 American baby-boomers had demonstrated in a political protest in the previous year, only one in 15 millennials had.

It's not clear how this squares with real life. Sharp deteriorations in measures of democratic health presaged autocratic shifts in Poland and Venezuela, as the New York Times points out. But those were both much younger democracies than those in the US and Western Europe.

Still, recent events there aren't exactly heartening. For instance, millennial Americans voted in far greater numbers for Hillary Clinton than her anti-democratic rival, Donald Trump. Then again, Clinton would have won in a landslide if Democratic-leaning millennials had voted. But too many of them simply didn't.

OPEN LETTER TO THE CHIEF MINISTER

Dear Mr Chief Minister,

With repeated attempts by Persons with Disability representatives for an appointment running into the proverbial brick wall time and again, I am compelled to write this letter.

Mr Chief Minister, our understanding of our government is that it is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. I believe this essentially means that the government has come to power via the votes of the people, that the people who voted them to power have a say in what the government does or doesn't do and that the government exists to better the lives of its citizens – all its citizens and not only the privileged class or a chosen few. As you are the head of our government right now, our desire to meet you was simply to apprise you of the appalling conditions in our State that continue to marginalise and discriminate people living with disability and deprive them of their rights, in the hope that you will hear our voice and take steps to right the wrong that has been perpetuated by consecutive state governments.

However, since you apparently cannot make the time to meet us, on this day – the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disability – I write this open letter to you on behalf of all people living with disability in Nagaland.

The theme for this year's International Day is “Achieving 17 Goals for the Future We Want”. This theme notes the recent adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the role of these goals in building a more inclusive and equitable world for persons with disabilities.

So, let's take a look at Nagaland. I'm assuming that you're aware that the number of people with various disabilities in Nagaland as per Census 2011 was 29,631, around 1.5% of the total population. This figure was an underestimation, in my opinion, and the actual number would have been much higher. In any case, this was the official number – 29,631 people with disabilities in Nagaland, 26% of whom were younger than 18 years. And it may be pointed out here that this is the one and only data on disability available in Nagaland. By now, the number would have increased considerably.

I'm also assuming that you're aware that the country's first ever legislation that laid the foundation for equal rights of people with disability came into being over 20 years ago with the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995 which came into force on February 7, 1996. Furthermore, in October 2007, India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) 2006. You may or may not know, but the process of getting a stronger disability rights legislation based on the UN Convention has been underway and a new bill is currently awaiting passage by Parliament which we are hoping will happen in this winter session.

So, 20 years have passed since the passing of the PwD Act 1995. How has it benefited people with disability in Nagaland?

JUST CONSIDER THESE:

- * 20 years and Nagaland still does not have a State Disability Policy in place
- * Two crucial committees for ensuring implementation of the PwD Act (Chapter III Section 13 and 19) – State Co-ordination Committee (SCC) and State Executive Committee (SEC) – have not been constituted and government officials are not even aware of the mandatory provision
- * Nagaland is the only state in the country that does not have even a single proper medical or social rehabilitation service facility for persons with disability

* There is not even a single facility for those with severe disabilities or those needing special care

* Only about 5.17% of persons with disability in Nagaland have a disability certificate, the lowest in the whole of North East region. Many of these also contain wrong or incomplete information.

* Social Security pension for the neediest is also in a pathetic state. Only 1833 PwDs out of the 29,631 (Census 2011), as per Social Welfare Dept information, are availing disability pension. The amount being given, Rs 200/-, is again among the lowest in the entire country.

* Public buildings and public spaces are yet to be made accessible to PwDs – these include office buildings, educational institutions, hospitals and clinics, marketplaces, churches, etc.

The annual International Day theme provides a frame for considering how people with disability are marginalised and excluded from society by assessing the existing conditions and promoting the removal of all types of barriers. This glimpse of the bleak reality in Nagaland completes the ‘assessing’ part. It would actually be funny if it was not so terribly sad! The above are just some main aspects of the PwD Act 1995 which our government is barely aware of much less implement. In Nagaland, the observation of the day has done nothing to improve the quality of life of people with disability. It is just a wonderful annual event where politicians, bureaucrats and other public leaders get the opportunity to show off their pseudo concern and compassion with stirring speeches peppered with patronising platitudes.

And then, Mr Chief Minister, there is the matter of the **STATE BUDGET**. The now dissolved Planning Commission had earlier specified three percent budget allocation for disability and identified 20 ministries to mandatorily have a disability component in their budget. However, this has never been reflected in the Nagaland State Government budgets. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find any mention of disability, not to speak of any specific funds being allocated to ensure that disabled people are not deprived and left behind in the development process, as expressly laid down in the PwD Act 1995. And, of course, no department has any disaggregated data on disability or any kind of disability component in their annual budgets.

By the way, the Supreme Court had recently pulled up some states and Union Territories for not filing the status report with regard to implementation of its verdict and the legal scheme to grant of reservation to disabled people and asked them to furnish the same within two weeks. We do not know whether Nagaland has filed its status report, but we would certainly like to know the status of steps taken to implement the SC verdict. The verdict, as you must know, is with regard to implementation of the specific provision of three percent quota in jobs to persons with disability.

Mr Chief Minister, I could go on and on, but it would be presumptuous on my part to expect the papers to grant me that much space. But before I end, there are a couple of SPECIFIC ISSUES that I must strongly urge upon you. As mentioned above, one aspect that particularly puts our State to shame is the complete lack of Disability Rehabilitation services. Nagaland has the dubious honour of being the only state in the country without a single proper rehabilitation service centre – medical, social or vocational. I am certain that I don't have to remind you that rehabilitation is instrumental in enabling people with disabilities, whose functions are limited, to live independently, and participate in education, the labour market and civic life.

In this connection, we have learned of two very crucial projects being taken up by the Social Welfare De-

partment, Nagaland:

1. Composite Regional Centre (CRC) at Dimapur – project put up for inclusion in the State NEC Priority List 2016-17

2. Blind School and Vocational Training Centre for the Disabled – project is under the 13th Finance Commission for which funds were released till the 3rd Phase and completed. 4th Phase is to be taken up under NEC project during 2016-17.

As regards the Composite Regional Centre, it is our understanding that the NEC Priority List has already been sent by the State Government and it does not include the project. Instead, we learn that an NGO ‘Disability Park’ project has been put in its place. This is just another shocking example of the government's utter apathy towards people with disability and complete lack of understanding of the priority needs of disabled people. The ‘Disability Park’ being listed as a priority project over the Regional Centre is a mind-boggling move by the government in the face of the prevailing situation of extreme lack of disability services and programmes in the state. Right now, we don't need a stroll in the park – we need accessible education, training, rehabilitation and health services and so on, so that we can live, earn and participate in society with dignity as equal citizens.

Mr Chief Minister, through this open letter, I strongly urge the State Government not to let us down again by going through with this travesty. There is only so much that we can take!

On the Blind School and Vocational Training Centre, we appreciate the pro-activeness of the Secretary and officials of the Social Welfare Dept in taking forward the project. It may be mentioned that, once operational, this will be the first and only state-run institute for people with disability in Nagaland. The project is completed up to the third phase, but funding for the fourth and last phase has ceased with the closing of the 13th FC. It goes without saying that it is now incumbent upon the state government to ensure its completion.

Mr Chief Minister, I wish to let you know that the disabled community of Nagaland is waiting for this desperately needed institute to start functioning and be not mistaken that we are taking this as a crucial test of your government's sincerity to deliver on the promises that have been made to us time and again – especially on Disability Day every year.

The above is just a brief overview of the situation of extreme exclusion, neglect and indignity that exists in this beloved state that we call home. A national report on disability has stated that even among the North East states where rehabilitation and disability services and programmes are generally quite inadequate, the situation in Nagaland is ‘especially critical’. Mr Chief Minister, I write this letter to you today because I have faith that, as head of the Government of the day and an honourable leader of the Naga people, you will personally not permit this unacceptable situation to continue.

‘The Future we want’ is an inclusive Nagaland that does not leave us behind; a Nagaland that enables us to realise our full potential as equal and valued members of society; a Nagaland where we can participate in and benefit equitably from everyday life, everywhere; a sustainable Nagaland that embraces humanity in all its diversity. It is not impossible to get there, Mr Chief Minister – all that is needed is political will and a strong commitment to do the right thing.

Diethono Nakhro
Executive Director, CAN-Nagaland and
Member, National Committee on the Rights of PwD