

Proving 'Indianness' as a Woman in 2019

A (missing) Paper Trail

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While we were undergraduate students of Political Science, passing references to Charles Tilly could often be heard floating in Political Theory lectures. His more complex analyses were above reach, but two concepts appealed the most to me; firstly and quite presumably, that “war made the state and the state made war”, and secondly, his reference of the modern state as the “National State” (Tilly 1992). Such a theory of state formation (or transformation) intrigues me as a member of a ‘postcolonial’(?) and patriarchal state; one that is reasserting itself in 2019 with instruments like the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the promised Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019. As Nitasha Kaul (2018) puts it, “patriarchal visions of the nation state are an enduring feature of the (inter)national system, since ‘nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope’ (Enloe, 2000, pp. 64, 44)” (Kaul 2018). Gender is indispensable in state making.

For the purpose of this study, ‘postcolonial’ India can be understood as India as it has shaped up since 15th August 1947, while its patriarchal nature is indicated by “the gender of household heads, the kin composition of the households, sex ratio, age heaping, missing information about women, age at marriage, and household complexity” (Gruber and Szołtysek 2012, 2). Where I come from, people around me are scurrying to get their documents in order to re-establish their ‘Indianness’ with an urgency I had not witnessed until now. Why?

The two prongs of establishing the new state-citizen relationship in India have emerged as the NRC and the promised Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) floated in 2016. This paper will try to understand the implications of the NRC on women, in context of the larger social relations and the state-citizen equation in India.

What is the NRC?

The National Register of Citizens (NRC) was compiled in the state of Assam for the first time in the history of independent India in 1951, based on the first Census of population conducted in the same year.

“The registry is meant to be a list of bonafide Indian citizens of Assam. It was first published in 1951 and is being updated to exclude people who may have illegally entered Assam via Bangladesh after March 25, 1971...Since many applicants were born after the cut-off date, they had to show two sets of documents: **“legacy documents”** to prove their ancestors lived in India before 1971 and **“linkage documents”** to prove they were related to this ancestor” (Saikia 2019).

The political background had changed significantly from 1951 to 2009, when the conversation restarted regarding the NRC. An NGO called Assam Public Works “filed a petition in the Supreme Court asking for the deletion of undocumented migrants from voter rolls and the updating of the citizens’ list as part of the process” (Chakravarty 2018). The years in between 1951 and 2009 were politically charged, and witnessed popular movements and uprisings pivotal to the build-up to NRC. Most prominent of these is the Assam Movement of 1979-1985 that voiced national and sub-national assertions of indigeneity in the state.

The political turmoil began in the fall of 1979 when the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP), an ad hoc coalition of a few regional political and cultural organizations, sponsored a campaign drawing attention to the problem of illegal immigration into the state, mostly from Bangladesh. Relying on census data and electoral rolls that showed significantly higher rates of growth of population and of voters in Assam compared to that in the rest of the country, the movement leaders demanded that the central government take steps to identify, disenfranchise, and deport illegal aliens (Baruah 1986).

To understand what triggered the demand for an exercise like the NRC, we need to refer to the Indian subcontinent's Partition of 1947 that violently displaced millions of people across newly imposed cartographic lines dividing the provinces of Bengal and Punjab. It is marked with an unprecedented mass migration and a massive human rights disaster that exploded in form of the riots between Hindus and Muslims on either side of the new borders dividing India and Pakistan.

It may be estimated that about five and half million people travelled each way across the new India-Pakistan border in Punjab. In addition about 400,000 Hindus migrated from Sind and well over a million moved from East Pakistan to West Bengal. As a matter of fact the partition related displacement and migratory flow had started a year before the partition, i.e., on August 6, 1946 the 'Direct Action' day declared by Muslim League. But on partition, the migration had to be managed by the state, as it was no more migration but evacuation. The state estimated that about 25 lakh Muslims and 20 lakh Hindus had to be evacuated from the two countries (Nag 2001, 4755).

It might be useful to note from this introductory stage that while the Partition of 1947 of the Indian subcontinent was on the basis of religion, its implications were and continue to be extremely intersectional in nature. Among others, class and gender within class have played decisive roles in the nature of Partition-induced displacement and resettlement, as I have derived from a previous research. The same intersectionalities characterise the process of updating the NRC that began in Assam in 2013 and published the final list of citizens recently on August 31, 2019.

Theoretically, at Partition, every citizen had the right to choose where they wanted to belong; barring women. A huge number of women were reported missing by their families, who were abducted during Partition. The Central Recovery Mission launched by the government attempted to "restore" to their "homes" based on their religion. Abduction cases were determined based on the religious affiliation of men and women cohabiting, starting after a certain date.

...the governments of India and Pakistan came together to discuss the problem. They arrived at an understanding to set up search-parties made up of women social workers and the police, authorized to look at reports and go into clearly demarcated 'interior' areas, in search of abducted women. Women thus located had to be brought back to what was defined as their 'home': Hindu women were to be brought back to India and Muslim women to Pakistan, no matter that this might not correspond to their real homes. It was a curious paradox for the Indian state, for India perceived itself as a secular, rational and modern nation, and religion was not what defined its identity (Butalia 2006, 138-139).

The relevance of bringing Urvashi Butalia's account of gendered dislocation up in this discussion is to firmly contextualise the way gender relations have determined women's lives in India (and the subcontinent) and the role that has been historically played by the state. The

insensitivity of legal decisions to women's realities can further jeopardise a precarious existence, as was witnessed in the Central Recovery Operation. "many 'recovered' women found that by the time they came back, or were brought back to their natal families, they were no longer acceptable and the families refused to take them back" (Butalia 2006, 139). Since the NRC tackles questions of migration and citizenship, and relies on paperwork to determine credibility, ignorance of gender realities will have disastrous impact on the lives of women, as is already becoming evident in Assam.

Indigenous vs. Immigrant

While the Partition triggered mass migration across the western and eastern fronts of India, the eastern border reports far greater porosity till date. The grey area between the 'legal' and the 'real' characterises its regular life. This facilitates immigration (including the illegal and undocumented) into the eastern and Northeastern states of West-Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura, which then spills into the neighbouring regions. Since the construction of a nation relies on the construction of the "other" (Nag 2001), the resentment that the "indigenous" (or the 'national' self, in Tilly's argument) harbours against the immigrant has reflected across human history. Bengt G. Karlsson (2003) has highlighted the controversial notion of "indigenous peoples" in India, especially in the Northeast where, it is feared that the politics of separatism might receive further impetus from the assertion of indigenous rights. "This, however, does not prevent marginalized 'tribal peoples' from asserting themselves as indigenous and claiming rights on the basis of this identity" (Karlsson 2003). The politics of indigeneity as well as its academic expressions can perhaps be best explained as a complex conflation of interest articulation in a neo-liberal world. David Chandler and Julian Reid (2018) argue in their "Being in Being: Contesting the Ontopolitics of Indigeneity" that "the ontopolitical arguments for the superiority of indigenous ways of being should not be seen as radical or emancipatory resistances to modernist or colonial epistemological and ontological legacies but rather as a new form of neoliberal governmentality, cynically manipulating critical, postcolonial and ecological sensibilities for its own ends" (Chandler and Reid 2018). Simply put, when the world is finally inclined to recognise the rights of the indigenous, the need to guard it against sabotage has become more severe than ever. If misappropriated, it can become a medium of rearticulating the social relations of colonialism; the only change being in the set of incumbents and thus not changing anything, at all.

Construction of the "authentic subject" of the Indian nation-state

Any analysis the entire drill from 2009 to 2019, which has reportedly excluded 1.9 million people in Assam from being listed as Indian citizens, needs to take account of further changes in the Indian political rubric in these 10 years. "In contemporary times, we find the new post-2014 'Modified' Indian nation, a neoliberal state with a Hindutva basis and a super-enhanced idea of enforced nationalism and patriotism" (Kaul 2018). The focus of this paper will be on the gendered nature of this "enforcement", nuanced by other intersectionalities. Present nature of the state and how it perceives its minorities is part of the problematic changed context that renders such an exercise particularly dangerous.

The said danger is rooted in peculiarities of the Partition (based on Hindus and Muslims being '*two nations*') that required the nation-builders to distinguish between the partition-refugees and illegal immigrants. From 15th August 1947 to 19th July 1948, there were no restrictions on the movement of people from India to Pakistan or vice versa. The end date was eventually marked as the formal cut-off for determining the Right to citizenship of 'certain migrants' from Pakistan to India. On the eastern border, communal tensions

continued and got accentuated through legislative measures like the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act in 1950, that enabled the Centre to “expel certain immigrants” (Chakravarty 2018). The Act was later repealed in 1957. This is a pivotal point in establishing the differences implied as distinction between “Hindu refugees” and “Muslim illegal immigrants”, as noted by Sanjib Baruah in his book *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (1999). The same concern is repeating itself in the NRC and the CAB. While the NRC is meant to disenfranchise those who do not possess documented proof of their citizenship, the proposed CAB will enfranchise even illegal immigrants who constitute religious minorities in the neighbouring countries. The catch is in the religious identity of the neighbouring countries – Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and the fact that India will extend citizenship only to the non-Muslims from there (E. O. Staff 2019) under the CAB. Hence, citizenship is not a ‘neutral’ identity in this case, but is negotiated primarily by religion and the suspicion of being citizen of a neighbouring country.

Divisive citizenship: Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016

On September 18, Union Home Minister Amit Shah declared that the National Register of Citizens (NRC) would be implemented across the country as the 2019 mandate for the Bharatiya Janata Party-National Democratic Alliance (BJP-NDA) indicated that there was all-round approval for the same. This notwithstanding the various questions connected with the publication of the final NRC list with respect to Assam, which had excluded some 1,906, 857 persons, the majority of them from the majority community. Amit Shah stated emphatically that it was not the National Register of Assam but the National Register of Citizens, implying that there was a pan India connotation to the concept. Connected to this and, more interestingly, 10 days before this declaration, while addressing the fourth conclave of the North East Democratic Alliance, or NEDA (the north-eastern version of the NDA), in Guwahati on September 9, he made a conscious reference to the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), 2019. He said, “our intention is to expel illegal immigrants from the entire country and not just Assam” (Rajalakshmi 2019).

The dual prongs of India’s new state-citizen relationship, as mentioned before, are the NRC and the CAB; both heavy with religious, economic and gendered implications. “The CAB is an outrightly sectarian Bill, which will change the definition of illegal immigrants” (Rajalakshmi 2019). The catch lies in the fact that the government is trying to amend the Citizenship Act of 1951 to facilitate the grant of Indian citizenship to immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who are of Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Jain, Buddhist and Christian without valid travel documents to India. The reason cited for extending citizenship to such immigrants, however, is cited as “religious persecution or fear of religious persecution in their countries of origin” but displays bigotry in its dismissal of “Muslim sects such as Shia and Ahmediya, whose members face persecution in Pakistan” (Rajalakshmi 2019).

By the government's own admission to the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), which was set up in 2016 under the chairmanship of BJP Member of Parliament P. Rajendra Aggarwal to examine the Bill and receive feedback from stakeholders, the total number of such “persecuted persons” was around 31,313 among whom Hindus constituted the largest chunk, 25,447, followed by Sikhs at 5,807, Christians at 56, and Buddhists and Parsis numbering only two each. Their problems ranged from claims of being discriminated against in jobs, being called “kafir” (disbeliever), their places of worship getting destroyed, and men and women being compelled to wear clothes of a particular religious denomination. Notwithstanding the small numbers, the CAB has been opposed by the indigenous tribes of the north-eastern States for the potential floodgates it could open in the future. Those who

oppose the Bill argue that Assam will be a “victim” in view of its immediate proximity to Bangladesh. It was also opined that if Bangladesh could be removed from the list of countries identified under the CAB, the people of Assam would have no objection to it. The JPC submitted its report to Parliament in January 2019. The irony is that while the NRC fulfilled the ideological demographic agenda of the BJP and raised the jingoistic quotient within the north-eastern region, the amendments to the Citizenship Bill, which have a similar sectarian objective, have been met with resistance by the same sections that pushed for the NRC on the grounds that it would alter the demographic pattern in the region, particularly Assam, and pose a threat to the political, economic, cultural and social affairs of the indigenous people.

Gender and Documentation of Citizenship

I am quoting an official source from the Government of Assam regarding the technical impediments to consolidate the line between the refugee and the illegal immigrant:

The effectiveness of any drive against illegal immigrants in the early fifties was handicapped by the fact that passport and visa regulations between India and Pakistan came into operation only from October 1952 and the definition of a foreigner to cover a Pakistan national was only clearly spelt out with the amendment of the Foreigner's Act 1946 in 1957. In the then existing Foreigner's Act 1946 under section 2(a) (i), 'Foreigner' was defined among other things, as a person who is not a natural born British subject as defined in Subsection (1) and (2) of Section 1 of the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act of 1914 or (ii) has not been granted *certificate of naturalization* as a British subject under any law for the time being in force in India. In 1957, Section 2 (a) of the then existing Foreigners Act, 1946 was amended and a foreigner came to be defined as a *person who is not a citizen of India*. This amendment, which came into force on 19th January 1957 brought Pakistani nationals within the purview of the definition of foreigner...detailed instructions were only thereafter issued by the Government of India in March, 1957 to all State Governments including Assam to deport Pakistani nationals staying in India without proper authority or sanction (Home and Political Department n.d.).

Thus, from the beginning, the determination of citizenship of the Indian nation-state has depended on documentation of identity – recorded on paper and in the process of digitization only of late. In simpler terms, to prove oneself as a citizen of India, they need to produce certain government approved proofs of identification in hard copies. What often goes unnoticed in this seemingly obvious criterion is the *tremendous impact that gender realities have on it*. In the introduction to this proposal, I have borrowed some indicators of patriarchy from Gruber and Szołtysek (2012) to call India a patriarchal state, of which all are relevant to this section and most of all “gender of household heads” and “missing information about women”. Interestingly, a report released by GSMA (an organisation of mobile operators worldwide) called *Understanding the Gender Identity Gap* (2017) discloses some of the reasons why women do not have/have access to official identification documents across the world:

“Although there is currently a deficit of gender-disaggregated data relating to access to identification (ID), it is presumed that of the 1.1 billion people in the world who are unable to prove their identity, a disproportionate number are women and girls who, in many countries, remain particularly vulnerable as well as socially, politically and financially excluded... Although data from UNICEF indicates that birth registration rates in most countries are relatively gender-neutral, girls in at least sixty-two countries are less likely than boys to be registered before the age of five... Due to

a number of prevailing gender inequalities that make young women less likely (or perceived to be less likely) to enrol in secondary education, participate in politics, access formal employment, own a mobile phone or act as the head of the household, in many cases registration will seem to be a less critical investment for a daughter” (GSMA 2017).

For proving identity in India, the NRC requires an individual to furnish two kinds of documents to be enlisted in it: “**legacy documents**” to prove their ancestors lived in India before 1971 and “**linkage documents**” to prove they were related to this ancestor” (Saikia 2019).

| LISTS OF DOCUMENTS | |
|---|--|
| <p>LIST A</p> <p>A person's name on any one of these documents, if issued before the midnight of March 24, 1971, will make him/her eligible for inclusion in the updated NRC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) 1951 NRC (2) Any Assam voter list up to March 24, 1971 (3) Land and tenancy records (4) Citizenship certificate (5) Permanent residential certificate (6) Refugee registration certificate (7) Passport (8) LIC policy document (9) Any government-issued licence/certificate (10) Any govt service/ employment certificate (11) Bank or post office accounts (12) Birth certificate (13) Board/university educational certificate (14) Court records/processes | <p>LIST B</p> <p>If a person has no List A document that carries his/her name, he/she can furnish a List A document that carries the name of a direct ancestor (father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, and so on), along with a List B document to establish his/her relationship with the ancestor. The List B documents — which are not subject to the March 24, 1971, cut-off date — are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Birth certificate (2) Land document (3) Board/university certificate (4) Bank/LIC/post office records (5) A certificate from a circle officer or gram panchayat secretary in case of a married woman (6) Voter list (7) Ration card (8) Any other legally acceptable document. |

Looking at the list, the centrality of kinship/ family charts in the NRC can be easily deduced, carrying special disadvantages for women. The locality of women necessarily shifts after marriage, which have implications for their identity as citizens in this case. The patriarchal state is thus being unable to see the consequences of where women are located physically in the patriarchal family; a situation further complicated by social intersections.

In rural and lower middle-class urban settings, more than half of total childbirths happen at home and without a medical supervisor (Kapoor 2017), thus a birth certificate is seldom procured even today. With the high rates of school drop outs among girls, early marriages (and its following changes in identity required in a patrilocal society) and confinement to domestic labour, the likelihood of women possessing individual IDs to prove their citizenship becomes questionable.

Even more precarious is the situation of transgender people when formal identity proofs are demanded from them. Despite the legal recognition of the non-binary gender in India through a Supreme Court judgement of 2014, transgender children are frequently abandoned by families fearing social persecution and stigma. Dissociation from the family at a young age jeopardises their chances of obtaining formal identification from the state. Combine the criteria for obtaining legal identity proofs with the gender realities of the Indian society, and the chances of non-male genders possessing them will be slimmed down significantly.

¹ Sourced from <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/everything-you-want-to-know-about-the-nrc/cid/1352646> (accessed on 05.11.2019)

Unequal society ↔ Unequal state

The concept of citizenship was revolutionary at its emergence, redefining the relationship of the individual and the state; transitioning the ‘subject’ to a ‘citizen’ endowed with rights against arbitrary rule. However, the citizen was never a universal figure and neither were the rights of citizenship extended to everyone on the basis of cartographic divisions. Bringing gender into the conversation about citizenship disrupts the idea of equal rights, despite the apparent neutrality of constitutionally governed nation-states. Will Kymlicka (2001) talks about the notion of ‘civility’ associated with liberal citizenship rather hopefully.

“This sort of civility is the logical extension of non-discrimination, since it is needed to ensure that all citizens have the same opportunity to participate within civil society. But it now extends into the very hearts and minds of citizens. Liberal citizens must learn to interact in everyday settings on an equal basis with people for whom they might harbour prejudice. The extent to which this requirement of civility can (or should) be legally enforced is limited” (Kymlicka 2001).

Kymlicka’s expectation of civility from “all citizens” falls flat in the Indian context, especially when we acknowledge intersectionalities. He does acknowledge the need to be sensitive to cultural variations in the norms of civility, but fails to address the gender dynamic in such exchanges. The example of minimally pleasant waiters being preferable over overly cheerful ones who are surly to black customers that he cites in his book, does not account for gender relations and the risk factors of extending civility such as ‘smiling back’, for example, by women to random men in a heteronormative patriarchal set-up. The excavations of feminist scholarship have, on the contrary, revealed how, in both theory and practice, despite its claims to universalism, citizenship has been quintessentially male. “Citizenship as both a theory and a practice operates simultaneously as a force for inclusion and exclusion, both within and at the borders of nation-states. Women have been denied the full and effective title of citizen for much of history, ancient and modern” (Lister 2012, 372). Neither rights, nor Kymlicka’s notion of ‘civility’ has played out evenly in favour of all gender groups in any country so far – even securing the basic right to vote for *all* above a certain age has been an uphill battle. In this paper, I will make a case against the claim of ‘gender-neutral’ citizenship in the Indian state using the exercise of drafting the National Register of Citizens in Assam – which is now being promised to be done across the country by the current Minister of Defence (India Today 2019) and the Minister of Home Affairs, as quoted from a news report in a previous paragraph. Behind the supposed objectivity of determining one’s citizenship in India lays a tremendous invisibilisation of the gender disparities in its society. To locate it concretely, the reader might want to look at the clauses of determining Indian citizenship:

Acquisition and Determination of Indian Citizenship²

- There are **four ways** in which Indian citizenship can be acquired: **birth, descent, registration and naturalisation**. The provisions are listed under the **Citizenship Act, 1955**.

² Information quoted from <https://www.drishtiias.com/to-the-points/Paper2/citizenship-of-india> (accessed on 07.12.2019)

- **By Birth:**

- Every person born in India on or after 26.01.1950 but before 01.07.1987 is an Indian citizen irrespective of the nationality of his/her parents.
- Every person born in India between 01.07.1987 and 02.12.2004 is a citizen of India given either of his/her parents is a citizen of the country at the time of his/her birth.
- Every person born in India on or after 3.12.2004 is a citizen of the country given both his/her parents are Indians or at least one parent is a citizen and the other is not an illegal migrant at the time of birth.

- **By Registration:**

Citizenship can also be acquired by registration. Some of the mandatory rules are:

- A person of **Indian origin** who has **been a resident of India for 7 years** before applying for registration.
- A person of Indian origin who is a resident of any country outside undivided India.
- A person **who is married to an Indian citizen** and is ordinarily **resident for 7 years** before applying for registration.
- **Minor children** of persons who are **citizens of India**.

- **By Descent:**

- A person born outside India on or after January 26, 1950 is a citizen of India by descent if **his/her father was a citizen of India by birth**.
- A person born outside India on or after December 10, 1992, but before December 3, 2004 if either of his/her parent was a citizen of India by birth.
- If a person born outside India on or after December 3, 2004 has to acquire citizenship, his/her parents have to declare that the minor does not hold a passport of another country and his/her birth is registered at an Indian consulate within one year of birth.

- **By Naturalisation:**

- A person can acquire citizenship by naturalisation if **he/she is ordinarily resident of India for 12 years** (throughout 12 months preceding the date of application and 11 years in the aggregate) and fulfils all **qualifications in the third schedule** of the Citizenship Act.

While these were the clauses in the original citizenship law of India, nowhere in the text can one locate belonging to a religious group as a criterion, implicit or explicit. The amended Act not only implies exclusion of the Muslims, it can be correctly called unconstitutional for it violates the *basic structure* that prohibits discrimination on the basis of any ascribed aspects of identity.

Assam's experience

The point of the entire discussion preceding this section was to point at the apparent absence of gender in the exercise of acquiring citizenship. However, when the state enforces a mechanism of 'updating the list', its gross overlooking of the social context became painfully clear. Illa Bhoumik, who had moved to Guwahati from Jalpaiguri in West Bengal after being married, said she had submitted documents pertaining to her school to prove her legacy. But her name did not appear. Bina Rani Saha was born in Dinhata in West Bengal's Cooch Behar district in 1953. But it is Assam that is really home for the 65-year-old, for it is here that she has spent her entire adult life. She has been left out of the NRC despite submitting the required verification from her village authority. In Bajegaon village, Malati Bala Ghosh has the same problem to contend with. The village panchayat certificate she had submitted to establish her linkage with her father was found to be invalid despite it being counter-signed by a block-level officer.

The village panchayat certificates, used by tens of lakhs of unlettered women, have been contentious for some time. In 2017, the Gauhati High Court had declared them invalid. But the Supreme Court allowed them to be used after rigorous scrutiny. The authorities then appointed special officers for the sole purpose of verifying the authenticity of these certificates. While local officers had earlier hinted that these documents had been rejected en masse, the high-rate of rejection of women who were dependent of these documents confirms that now. (Saikia 2019)

Around 1.5 lakh documents were sent to West Bengal for verification, and only 15,000 were verified.



³ Sourced from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/many-married-women-left-out-in-nrc/articleshow/65266070.cms?from=mdr> (accessed on 06.12.2019)

To keep track of the loopholes in the exercise of updating the NRC, several watchdog projects were initiated. *Humans of Assam*, one such endeavour by a progressive news agency Scroll.in, is a collection of stories of people living in the state who fear losing their Indian citizenship. It is part of the month-long reporting project called [The Final Count](#).

Among those who was left off the list was nine-year old Kulsuna Khatun, also from Baksa district. Though she had made it to the NRC draft list published in 2018, her name was dropped in June. She was among the 1.02 lakh people the NRC authorities claimed to have wrongly included in the draft NRC. “Linkage with claimed legacy person not found acceptable,” her rejection note stated, implying that she was not the daughter of the person she was claiming as a parent. Her father has been included the NRC. On Saturday, her status remained unchanged: “Reject.” Kulsuna Khatun’s parents had submitted a birth certificate for her. Curiously, her younger sister, Munni Akhtara, who had also submitted a similar birth certificate, has been included. “We have submitted all documents,” said her mother Nabiron Nessa. “Will her name really not come?” (Saikia 2019)

Among those did not make it include several women and children, many of whose family members were counted as citizens. These women and children failed to convince the NRC authorities of their “linkages” with their family. Now, they have to face Assam’s dreaded foreigners’ tribunals to clear their names, failing which they risk being put into detention centres, said Saikia in his article.

Interestingly, patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal social realities have caused several educated women with required documentation to be discounted of the register. Rupa Dutta, a homemaker from Guwahati whose father was the Principal of Tinsukia College faced the consequences of producing her mother’s citizenship certificate instead of her father’s. Her mother who had relocated to Tinsukia, Assam from Shillong, Meghalaya had obtained her citizenship certificate in Shillong in 1956. Rupa’s linkage document to her mother’s proof of citizenship was denied, stating its redundancy since it was issued from Shillong, and not a place in Assam. Women in a patrilocal society are habitually relocated to their husband’s address after marriage, which has created a ruckus in the quest to prove not only their citizenship, but also their children’s.

Carried out only to be abandoned?

A gender-blind, state sponsored exercise that risks lakhs of legitimate citizens in India was carried out only to be fired down by the ruling government in Assam. “Given the migration of Hindus from Bangladesh, the final NRC list is thought to exclude a large number of Bengali Hindus. This goes against both the BJP’s Hindu nationalist ideology as well as its electoral calculations – Bengali Hindus are its oldest vote bank in Assam” (Daniyal 2019).

The continuum of NRC-CAA is aptly described in Daniyal’s reportage. “One way the BJP supporters hopes to circumvent this situation is to amend India’s citizenship rules be amended to put in an explicitly religious rider that allows Hindu, Buddhist Sikh, Christian and Parsi migrants from South Asia to settle in India but not Muslims”.

In a surprising turn of events, the NRC data vanished from public domain on December 15, 2019. The Central government called it a technical glitch, while the Chief Minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma was reported saying “as per my information, there is some payment issue. Because of that the service provider has taken off the data, but data is safe. I have talked to the NRC State Coordinator and he said that all data is safe, nothing to worry about. This is only related to payment issue and we are sorting it out,”.

How it will unfold with detention camps, foreigner’s tribunals and possible deportation looming over 1.9 million people, while the NDA government is taking steps to make it a pan-Indian exercise, should be cautiously watched by all stakeholders in the world.

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