**The NRC: Why, How and What Next?**

Assam is in the process of updating its National Register of Citizenship (NRC) and counting its citizens, the first since 1951. It is a document that entails the names of all Indian citizens living within the geographic boundaries of Assam and was first introduced to distinguish Indian citizens from the influx of *illegal immigrants* from the then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh (Deka 2018). However even after more than half a century this issue of illegal migration in the region remains an unresolved and an explosive issue. For decades, the migration issue has fueled violence, militancy, anxiety and animosity based on ethnolinguistic identity in the region which has strained the state’s social and economic fabric. Hence aiming to gain a closure to this citizenship question, the Assam Public Works petitioned to the Supreme Court (Writ Petition (CIVIL) NO. 274 OF 2009) for the deletion of illegal voters (illegal immigrants) from the voters list of Assam and consequently, updating the NRC 1951 (NRC Assam 2018). Monitored under the authority of the Supreme Court of India, the NRC is being updated according to Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, inserted in 1986 which grants citizenship to those who entered Assam before March 25, 1971 while the reference date for the rest of India is July 19, 1948 (Mustafa 2018). However, in seeking to verify legacy papers over 48-year-old from applicants which involve a lot of poor, illiterate people, or those who have migrated from all corners of India, has resulted in its own grave challenges. The final NRC draft published on 30th July 2018 however found over 40 lakh names out of the 3.09 crore applications cutting across ethnicity, language, religion, age, rural and urban (Singh 2018).

This paper will start first discuss the historical legacy of this ‘immigration’ issue in Assam and then analyse the racial, security and gender concerns associated with the NRC process. Later it will elaborate on the NRC implementation process as a cause of fault line before a section on the possible policy alternatives the state might undertake to deal with those excluded in the NRC.

**From Internal Migrants to Illegal Immigrants: A Colonial Legacy**

The geographical region of Assam represents a uniquely diverse demography which has altered with migration from different ethnic groups since antiquity. While home to indigenous groups such as the Bodos, Dimasas, Mishings, Barmans, Lalungs, Rabhas, Kacharis, Hajongs and others, its current dominant ethnic group of Assamese have migrated from the Gangetic plains whereas the Ahoms group trace their history back to over 600 years as Shan tribe from North Burma (Dikshit and Dikshit 2014). Additionally, the Asamiya Mussulman assimilation in the society go back to the Muslim invasions in the early 13th Century (Mishra 1999). Post the British colonization, the region faced in-migrants in different sectors and from varying regions such as tea garden labourers from the West, Central and United Provinces, Bengali Muslim agricultural peasants from East Bengal along with traders, artisans, administrators, miners etc. from various parts of India (Goswami 1985). However, this section will focus on migration of the Bengali’s post the British colonization of India and it’s relation to the NRC update in Assam.

First, after the annexation of Assam into the Colonial Empire, the British administration brought in Bengali Hindus to various government posts. This resulted in being instated Bengali as the official language in the region (from 1837 to 1873) which forced the Assamese and other indigenous populations to use a non-local language in their native land for educational and official purpose (Goswami 1985). Secondly, the British rulers pushed for large peasant migration, of mostly Bengali Muslims, from the densely populated districts of Mymensingh, Rangpur, Pabna and Bogra in erstwhile East Bengal to settle on the uninhabited riverine tracts of Assam for revenue generation through cash crop cultivation (Guha 1977). Here the peasant settlement were largely along the river flood plains, the ‘Char’ areas, which were and remain geographically ‘alienated’ from the ‘mainland’ and psychologically ‘detached’ from the ‘mainstream’ population groups in Assam (Chakraborty 2014).

After the division of Bengal in 1905, Assam province was brought under East Bengal jurisdiction. Even after this division was revoked in 1911, the Assam province remained under the Bengali-majority Sylhet district for economic reasons (Goswami 1985). Hence the Assamese anxieties and source of Nationalism over language and culture against the Bengalis first started brewing in the Colonial era.

Over the 10th century, Assam faced a significant increase in the Bengali population through immigration. This was alarmingly described by the Superintendent of 1931 Census C.S. Mullan, ICS as an ‘invasion of a vast horde of land-hungry immigrants’, where ‘in another 30 years, it would not be improbable that ‘Sibsagar district will be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home’ (Sharma 2012). Mullan’s statement has since been sourced to the anti- immigration voices in Assam and has assumed a legendary status within the Assamese nationalist discourse (Sharma 2012).

Another blow of threat against the Assamese identity came during the infamous Grouping Scheme of the Cabinet Mission Plan where Assam was once again tagged with Bengal. There was widespread rebellion as the people feared against being under East Pakistan in the eventual Partition. While Assam eventually was removed from this grouping, the present-day districts of Karimganj and Cachar districts who voted pro-East Pakistan in the Sylhet referendum as they were then part of Sylhet district, had to remained as a thin slice of the Sylhet district, attached to Assam (Ghosh 2015).

Post-partition, an influx of both Hindu and Muslim Bengalis from across the newly created borders lead to the creation of the 1951 NRC. But the immigration continued where the state dealt with this immigration with enfranchising them through rudimentary documents (Baruah 2009). However post the liberation war of Bangladesh, the ethnolinguistic spears of identity animosity were to be sparked again. Ironically it was not by a radical local nationalist but instead the then India’s Chief Electoral Commissioner, S.L. Shakdher who in 1978 spoke publicly of the ‘large-scale inclusions of foreign nationals in the electoral rolls’. Seemingly unaware of the political firestorm he was about to set off, he warned that ‘a stage would be reached when the state may have to reckon with the foreign nationals who may in all probability constitute a sizeable percentage if not the majority of population’ (Asom Jagriti 1980). The words proved to be the lightning rod for the Assam Movement of 1979–1985 (Baruah 2009).

What started as civil society movement of the ethnic Assamese against the enfranchisement of, the supposed ‘illegal immigrants’, the anti-government campaign soon garnered support from Assam’s Tribal communities to protest against the economic, political and cultural threat believed to have been imposed by the ‘immigrant’ community. From massive civil non-cooperation and boycott of elections, soon the movement turned violent, commencing the Nellie Massacre, one of Independent India’s worst communal bloodshed where in a matter of 6 hours, over 2000 people, including children of Bengali ethnics had been killed in Nellie by the local Tribal and Assamese communities out of xenophobic fear (Sen & Dubanshi 1983). This spiraled into a series of violent mob attacks such as the Chaoulkhowa Chapori of Darrang and Silapathar of Lakhimpur district attacks on the Bengali ethnics (Hussain 2000: 4521). However the ethnic conflicts also erupted between the tribal communities and the Assamese ethnics such as the Bodo attack on the Assamese in Gohpur in Darrang district, with the former protesting against the latter ethnicity’s hegemonic perpetuation in the state (Ahmed 1989).

The Movement came to an official end with the signing of the Assam Accord on the 15th August 1985 where the tri-partisan signatories agreed to 25th March 1971 as the cut off date for the detecting of illegal immigrants in the state. However, hopes that with the implementation of the accord, also known as the genesis of the current NRC update demand, peace and harmony after years of communal and political disturbances would be restored was not to be. Communal tensions took on militant outfits. The perceived failure of this movement to resolve Assam’s immigration crisis further surged Assamese subnationalism in the region as the presence of the ‘Bengali ethnics’ is still increasing viewed as threat to the existence of the Assamese and the indigenous communities. This sustained campaign has strained ties between the ethnic groups frequent episodes of violence between “indigenous” and “immigrant” communities (Baruah 1999: 117).

Hence we observe how this ‘illegal immigration’ is a post-Colonial construct of the Colonial legacy where one goes from being resident from the neighbouring province to overnight turned into immigrant from another nation; foreigners to be ousted and not tolerated within the social sphere. And with the NRC attempting to determine the legal status of these migrants, the next section will discuss how in the judiciary-monitored administrative process, the shared ethnic identity of a community with that of a neighbouring nation continues to serve as the basis of perceived survival threat and social division.

**Assamese Nationalism and ‘the threat to identity and culture’**

Cross-Border Migration of formal and undocumented migrants is both an historical and global phenomenon and not just unique to the Assam-Bangladesh border movement. With Bangladesh sharing 95% of its land border with India (5 states namely, Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Tripura and Mizoram, the Bangladesh-India migration corridor is reported to be the fourth largest migration corridors in the world (World Bank 2011) and often compared to other large-scale migration such as those between the United States-Mexico and Indonesia-Malaysia borders (Sarma 2015). However, what is of particular social discord within the Assam-Bangladesh immigration is the ethnolinguistic based unrest and anxiety of this movement that also colours into the NRC construction and conduct process. While migration into Assam is also witnessed from other neighbouring nations of Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar, the Bangladeshi immigrants have received great resentment as perceived to have destailised the demographic, political, socio-economic and environmental condition of the state and hence the existence of the state and its people (Sarma 2015). To understand the ethnolinguistic basis of the immigration issue and the NRC process, this section will first examine the ethnolinguistic factor in the demand for the NRC, both in 1951 as well in 2009. Then it will explore if the NRC can fulfil this demand to achieve the end of solving the citizenship question, successfully create the identity marker of who belongs to Assam and ease ethnic tension, stemmed into the socio-political fabric of the state.

Soon after Independence, Gopinath Bordoloi the then Chief Minister of Assam started to work towards barring the Bengali inhabitants and the incoming immigrants into the social and economic productivity in the state such as from getting settlement of land, recruitment in government services and in getting licenses in business and trade. One such example is highlighted through a May 4, 1948 circular, issued on the question of land settlement which stated that: *“…….that settlement of land should in no circumstances be made with persons who are not indigenous to the province,….. persons who are non-Assamese settlers in Assam though they already have lands and houses of their own and have made Assam their home to all intents and purposes*”(Sarma 2015*).* Consequently, after the first Census of Independent India was conducted in 1951, the NRC 1951 register was prepared only in the state of Assam as a record of all inhabitants against the incoming population from across the borders. Also, underlying this register lay fears of the Assamese nationalist leaders that the incoming Bengali migrants from the newly constructed borders were strategized for a demographic invasion of Assam and to consequently incorporate the state into a Bengali or East Pakistani territory (Misra 1999).

Similarly, the petition filed by Assam Public Works NGO in 2009 sought to remove ‘illegal voters’ from Assam’s electoral rolls and hence the NRC update, have also stated threat to the Assamese culture and identity as the basis of need to identify the true citizens and preserve the Assamese nature of the state. Ironically, it is noted that the petitioners stated that the 2008 serial bombings by the banned National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), compromised of Bodo tribe members that gave impetus to their genesis of fighting against illegal immigration in Assam and not an immigrant attack (Hindustan Times 2018).

As mentioned in the previous section, the perceived threat to Assamese Language and Culture is embedded in the Colonial legacy. However, the ability of the NRC to resolve these fears is yet to be determined. Firstly, as Sharma (2012) observes, it must be noted that the immigration issue in the state is largely pivoted on the apprehensions of the Assamese community, which is the single largest ethnic group in the state who also often acts as the spokesperson of the diverse indigenous communities in Assam. As seen throughout the modern history of Assam, the issue of Assamese linguistic and cultural dominance has continuingly dominated over the state’s intellectual and political sphere, overshadowed all other imperative issues (Misra 1999). Hence within the NRC debate, the need for this register to remove the ‘Foreigners’ perceived to impose a territorial, cultural and security threat in the state rises from the accusations of the Bengali ethnics from across the border as inhabiting land belong to the Assamese as well as diluting and debasing the ethnic Assamese culture through the instrument of a foreign language (Bengali) and often, an alien religion (Islam) (Barooah 2013).

Secondly, the asserted ‘Security’ concerns rising from this migration are also sought to be resolved through the NRC’s identification of who is illegally residing in the state. This issue is fairly recent and is traced back to a report by, S K Sinha in 1998, the then Governor of Assam who stated that this Illegal immigration from Bangladesh to Assam, was [undermines Indian national security](https://m.rediff.com/news/1999/dec/16assam1.htm) (Baruah 2009b). Continuing to this, fear psychosis with this immigration was also fanned by widespread politicisation of the issue where the absence of credible and sustained data has lead to aggressive language, political assertions and unchecked facts against the immigration. It has created a sense of Security’s intimate dependence on the presence of an ‘other’ ethnolinguistic identity. Within the framework of the NRC, Abhijeet Sharma, the petitioner for NRC who filed for the electoral removal of the illegal voters stated that their presence threatened the security of Assam. In his direct words after the Supreme Court verdict on updating the NRC, he said “*I want my 13-year-old daughter to live in a safe Assam without the fear of foreigners”* (Hindustan Times 2018).

But within the discourse of who is a foreigner, lies the primary concern of the ‘foreigner’ assumption based on an ethnolinguistic identity. The racial, cultural and linguistic similarity of the Bengali inhabitants in the border areas of Assam and Bangladesh created the primary predicament in distinguishing between the legal settlers and illegal immigrants in the region (Weiner 1983). And consequently, the drive to remove the ‘illegal immigrants’ has also lead to the branding of Bengali ethnic inhabitants from pre-1971 in the region, especially from the border sitricts, as ‘Bangladeshis’(Bhaumik 2013). Also, the scale of immigration and its quantification lie at the heart of the NRC. Numerous studies have presented the case for this increasing ‘Bengali speaking’ or ‘Muslim’ population in the state as rising from high fertility rate and official mainstreaming of these communities (Barooah 2013). Statistics also states that between 1985 to October 2017, 92,304 people have been found to be illegal immigrants in the state by the Foreign Tribunal in Assam, around 0.29% of Assam’s population (Choudhary 2017). However, the socio-political sphere in the state and nationally, continue to present inflated immigration statistic which is popularly considered an accepted fact in the region. Hence given these ethnolinguistic biased perceptions of the elite in the Brahmaputra valley, the acceptance of the NRC as ending the citizenship question will be threatened if it fails to preserve the ethnolinguistic dominance of the Assamese ethnics.

Also, in Assam’s history, often this ‘immigrant’, ‘non-indigenous’ or outsider status is not just restricted to the Bengali immigrants but also a contested issue as used to imply other ethnolinguistic communities who have migrated to Assam from different parts of India (Sharma 2012). Over the past few decades, ethnic or linguistic based sporadic occurrence of violence within the state has manifested in local militant drive against the ‘Bengalis, Marwaris or the Biharis’ (India Today 2003). While this is not considered to be of direct consequence to the NRC, it must be noted that this quest of preserving the ‘Assamese identity’ against the Indian or other non-Assamese identity poses threat of communal tension in an undesirable publication of the NRC.

Additionally, in dealing with the identity marker, as duty charged with the NRC, lies a counter argument by the various tribal communities in Assam who assert their indigenous status predating to the arrival of the ‘Assamese and the Ahom’ ethnics (Hussain 1992). As Misra (1999) argues that the Assamese nationalist sentiments of a hegemonic Assamese linguistic identity for the state of Assam had propagated alienation, political struggle and autonomy demand from the diverse hill and plain tribes of Assam. This has also resulted in politicalisation of the development and social challenges as faced by these communities to be blames on the ‘foreigner Bengalis or Bangladeshis’. Hence these indigenous communities also uphold this process of immigrant detection as a safeguard against becoming a minority in the state and to reclaim land from the Bengali ethnics.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the Bengali ethnic community, two main discourses have risen. First given that the NRC update is embedded in the Assam Accord, many from the Bengali ethnic community state this to be a tool for their continued harassment and disenfranchisement (Pisharoty 2018). Meanwhile for others, inclusion in the NRC carries the hope of officially sealing their citizenship debate and being considered as full citizens of the state. Hence, the NRC for this community presents the final closure and means to get rid of the “Bangladeshi tag”, deeply entrenched in the socio-political sphere of the state.

**Gender Bias**

On the objective level, the NRC claims to be gender fair and non-discriminative. However, existing realities in the society with gender inequalities exploits the situation of women and the third gender in the current context and works in creating gender inequality and inequiity. The social context of Assam as marked with higher female illiteracy levels, female child marriage, social isolation and conservative practises has patriarchy firmly entrenched in the region (Mohan 2018). Further, the socio-economic fabric of the indigenous and migrant population groups in Assam are patrilineal where inheritance and succession rules follow the male line resulting in low land holdings in both private as well as clan property for women. These factors of high school dropout, child marriage, change of name after marriage, low levels of female land ownership holds direct consequences for NRC inclusion as they make women and her children as well as dependent on her male relatives to prove their legal legacy in India. For example, women have reported higher rates of holding no documentation proving link to her father as they did not finish school (school admit card), got married early (no voter list entry) and birth was not registered (birth certificate).

Over 47 lakh women have submitted the Panchayat or the village headman’s Certificate as the main legacy link in their NRC application. But the use of this document was strongly contested multi times by the NRC State Coordinator Prateek Hajela stating they were easily faked and the use of this document was consequently invalidated. However, on the 1st November 2018, the Supreme Court accepted the use of document upon due verification (The Indian Express 2018). Additionally, there have been various claims about more women than men being left out in the final NRC draft but the absence of official data on the social composition of the 4 million left out leaves this speculation to be verified.

The transgender gender group have also been impacted in their inability to get legacy documents from parental homes as the social realities have led to their outcast and disownment by the family. More than 20,000 transgender individuals have been excluded from the final NRC draft and are currently petitioning at the Supreme Court for their cause (Choudhary 2018).

**Implementation**

In the implementation and the administrative process of the NRC, several factors have been highlighted as advantageous or disadvantageous to certain social or ethnic groups while other factors as cutting across all social elements and hence propagating a discord.

First is discussed under the Original Inhabitant (OI) provision, according to the Clause 3(3) of Schedule of “The Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003. While the NRC website claims of no special status or preferential treatment given to those with the OI status, it simultaneously also mentions that the provision of the OI to be include in the NRC is to ensure that individuals from this group is not ‘*excluded from the from NRC due to unavailability of document or any such* reason’ (Government of Assam 2018a). Here the paper only seeks to highlight that in its promise to ensure the inclusion of every genuine citizen, the OIs provisions hold benefit to counter the anxiety and fears from NRC exclusion for certain groups unlike for the others who might for similar reasons lack legacy data to prove their citizenship. Furthermore, while the ‘tea tribes’, who were brought into Assam during the British Colonisation have been included under the OI provision, such status have not been presented to the Bengali ethnics who also first migrated into Assam as peasants under the British rule.

Secondly, among those whose names are excluded, approximately 5 lakhs of the applicants constitute to internal migrants who have settled in Assam from other states of India. Failure from other states to verify the legacy documents originating from their states have created further anxiety amongst the non-ethnic Assamese residents from other states. Amongst the big defaulters, state authorities of West Bengal Bihar, Chandigarh, Manipur and Meghalaya have returned just 2 to 7% of the documents after verification (Kalita 2018a).

Another process for detecting illegal immigrants currently in practice in Assam are the Foreigners Tribunals, quasi-judicial bodies which determine citizenship under the Foreigners’ Act of 1946 (more about this machinery will be discussed in the section). Here the border police tasked with investigating the D voters or suspected foreigners and conduct their affairs in non-transparent manner. However, the NRC process barrs those declared as ‘D’ or doubtful voters from the Election Commission as well as their families who hold document proving their Indian nationality, from being included in the NRC process until their names are cleared from the Foreigner’s Tribunal. These, according to state minister Chandra Mohan Patowary’s statement in the State Legislature, include 1,25,333 D-voters (Sarma 2018). Furthermore, of the 92,000 individuals declared as Foreigner by the tribunals, nearly 15,000 declared foreigners were stated to be pre-1971 immigrants, who according to the Assam Accord and the current NRC legislation hold legibility for Indian citizenship. Additionally, it was also found that over 26,000 of those declared as foreigners declared as foreigner through expatriate decree, implying that they didn’t appear before the court and the decision laced credential scrutiny of their citizenship (Azad 2018). It is important to note here that that the majority of those tagged as ‘D’ voters belong to linguistic minority or the Bengali ethnic community. Hence this superiority of the Foreigner Tribunals detection authority over the NRC body adversely affects those from the minority community tagged as ‘D’ voters.

And lastly, in its process for a robust family tree verification, a non-transparent ‘family tree verification’ process has resulted in legal inconsistencies and errors (The Hindu 2018). The omission of names of certain members of the family is an example of the latter implementation factor which cuts across applicants from diverse religion, ethnic, educational and social background has created fissures within the family.

**Alternatives**

At the end of the NRC discussion, the elephant in the room remains what is the end of this exercise and what is to happen for those who are unable to prove their citizenship? In the nine years since the Supreme Court pushed for the NRC update, it is yet to propose any official proposal for the same. Hence, in this section the paper presents three possible alternatives which might be prosed by the state, deduced from the past actions of the political front and media discourses.

Deportation and Statelessness

Deportation or expulsion of those left out of the final NRC from the Indian soil has been the widespread demand of various groups and influential leaders such as the Former Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Mahanta, in Assam (Financial Express 2018). However, an understanding of the current context reflects that most illegal immigrants either have been living in India for generations or hold no documents to prove their country of origin. Also, given the absence of any treaty with Bangladesh, the proposed deportation would lead to Statelessness, a formal absence of citizenship everywhere which is quoted as the world's 'hidden catastrophe (ISI 2017).

But contrasting these demands, the incumbent government of India has also shown signs of undertaking any steps towards deportation and have instead played it as a domestic concern of the Indian state. For example, the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka H V Shringla has been stated as assuring Bangladesh Foreign Minister A H Mahmood Ali and top Awami League leaders that the NRC was an ‘internal exercise’ of India not to affect Bangladesh in any way (Financial Express 2018). Additionally, the humanitarian as well as political consequences associated with deportation and statelessness could severely impact India’s global standing and relationship with Bangladesh, both of which the nation state is likely to avoid.

IMDT and Detention Centres: Current machinery for immigrant charge

In 1983, during the years of Assam Agitation, the Foreigners Act of 1946 was replaced, by the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act or the IMDT Act in Assam to deal with the immigrant identification and deportation issue. However, in 2005 this Act was struck down by the Supreme Court of India in 2005 as ‘wholly unconstitutional’. However as a legacy of this act, there are 100 Foreigners Tribunal functioning in Assam which currently handle cases of suspected non-nationals, now guided under the Foreigners Tribunal Act, 1941 and Foreigners Tribunal ORDER 1964 (Government of Assam 2018b). While this paper will not expand on the ex-parte decisions undertaken by these tribunals on the questioned citizenships of those from the lowest rung of the society, the inhuman conditions of the detention centres which inhabit those declared as ‘Foreigners’ by the tribunals or those marked as doubtful ‘D’ voters by the Election Commission is of grave concern, particularly if the state plans to continue this Detention centre immigrant care for those exclude in the NRC (Mitra 2018).

Currently there are 6 detention centres functioning in Assam with combined capacity of about 1,000 people where 3 of the centres are located inside the jail premises of Tezpur, Dibrugarh and Jorhat prisons. While little is known about these centres otherwise, in a Januray 2018 Report on National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Mission to Assam’s Detention Centres, the special monitor team found that these detention centres conditions violate human rights and are run without any guidelines or instructions from either the National or the state authorities on the rights of the detainees (Deccan Herald 2018). Hence these centres are de facto, if not de jure, administered under the Assam Jail Manual where the detainees are treated as prisoners charged with or convicted of crimes except the former are denied benefits of parole and waged work which the latter are entitled to (Deccan Herald 2018).  The report further comments on how this functioning of the detention centres violates both the Constitution of India and the international law. Article 21 of the Constitution states for a transparent procedure for immigrants with respect for right to life and liberty of detainees while the UNHRC Guidelines state for detention only in officially recognized places of detention, with ‘asylum-seekers or immigrants in premises separate from those persons imprisoned under criminal law’ (UN 2008). Additionally, both legal institutions oppose indefinite detention as also practiced in the current system.

Hence given the unlawful conditions and detention of the current system, the possible use of detention centre for those excluded in the NRC must be discouraged to prevent further human rights violation. It’s important to note that recently, the National government has approved for another standalone detention camp in Goalpara district, housing capacity of 3,000 people, signaling a continuation of their inhumane detention treatment (Kalitab 2018)

According to Assam Accord

Stating from the Assam Accord (1985), the settlement for the Foreigners issues proposed that (Clause 4) ‘*Names of foreigners (who came to Assam after 1-1-1966) so detected will be deleted from the electoral rolls*’ and consequently be ‘*required to register themselves before the Registration Officers of the respective districts in accordance with the provisions of the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939 and the Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1939*’. Clause (6) further expands that ‘*On the expiry of the period of ten year following the date of detection, the names of all such persons which have been deleted from the electoral rolls shall be restored*’ (Government of Assam 2018c).

Therefore, eventual re-enfranchisement of those excluded from the NRC list and granting them statehood on humanitarian grounds is another alternative the state could possibly consider. Such considerations are not unheard of such as when in 1986 President Ronald Reagan of the United States granted amnesty of millions who had entered the United States before 1 January 1982 and resided there continuously illegally. Within South Asia itself we have two examples of successfully granting statehood to prolonged statelessness situations. In 2008, the Bangladesh High Court gave citizenship to some 300,000 Urdu speakers, also called Biharis, who were rendered stateless with the separation of the West and East Pakistan in 1971. More recently, in August 2015, India and Bangladesh ended a 300-year territorial anomaly of enclaves, by swapping land and people where 14,000 residents were granted Indian citizenship and over 37,000 became Bangladeshi citizens (Purie 2018).

In conclusion, we observe how the Post-Colonial legacy of migration from Bengal into Assam lies at the genesis of the modern-day Assamese Nationalism whose ethnolinguistic anxieties predominates over the state’s current political and social functioning. Given this legacy and the ethnolinguistic bias in the demand for the NRC, the current discourse on NRC is also found as festering on increasing ethnic consciousness and has revived decades old fears. Additionally, with this process, the issues of land, identity and belonging have regained its centrality in both the state and the national dialogue. However, the current process has also gained significant international attention as the possibility of ethnic and communal based tensions as well as statelessness from exclusion from the NRC is detrimental to asserting India’s global standing. As Assam celebrates the publication of the draft NRC, a historical moment since the signing of the Assam Accord, it still has a long way to go to ensure that in its aftermath, a time similar to that preceding the Accord is not repeated. Only time will tell if the Assamese anxiety of threat to their territory, language and culture spanning over a century old will be resolved with the final NRC process and promote social harmony amongst the diverse communities in the state.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

* Ahmed, F. (1989) *Assam explodes in an orgy of violence between Bodos and non-Bodos, leaves 30 people dead*. [online] India Today. Available at: https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/special-report/story/19890915-assam-explodes-in-an-orgy-of-violence-between-bodos-and-non-bodos-leaves-30-people-dead-816490-1989-09-15 [Accessed 11 October 2018].
* Asom Jagriti (1980) *Indian citizens versus foreign nationals*. Memorandum submitted to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by Ajit Kumar Sharma and others. Guwahati: Asom Jagriti.
* Azad, A. (2018) *'Despite Valid Papers, My Wife is a Doubtful Citizen': How Sword of NRC is Destroying Families in Assam*. [online] News18. Available at: https://www.news18.com/news/india/despite-valid-documents-my-wife-is-a-doubtful-citizen-how-sword-of-nrc-is-destroying-families-in-assam-1827111.html [Accessed 11 October 2018].
* Barooah, V. (2013) The Killing Fields of Assam Myth and Reality of Its Muslim Immigration. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 48(4).
* Baruah, S. (1999) *India against itself*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
* Baruah S (2009) *The Partition's long shadow: the ambiguities of citizenship in Assam, India*, Citizenship Studies, 13:6, 593-606 .
* Bezbaruah, M. (2018) *Anatomy of an anxiety*. [online] The Indian Express. Available at: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/assam-citizenship-bill-sarbananda-sonowal-hindus-muslims-northeast-5185850/ [Accessed 24 October 2018].
* Bhaumik, S. (2013) The East Bengali Muslims in Assam and Rohingyas of Myanmar: Comparative Perspectives of Migration, Exclusion, Statelessness. *REFUGEE WATCH*, 41, pp.30-46.
* Chakroborty, G. (2014) The Demographic Question in the Char Areas of Assam. *Social Change and Development*, 11(2).
* Choudhury, R. (2018) *The Harsh Truth Of Assam's Drive To Find Bangladeshis*. [online] NDTV.com. Available at: https://www.ndtv.com/guwahati-news/the-harsh-truth-of-assams-drive-to-find-bangladeshis-1780747 [Accessed 18 October 2018].
* Choudhury, R. (2018) *Transgenders Find It Hard To Make It To Assam Citizens' List*. [online] NDTV.com. Available at: https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/assam-nrc-transgenders-find-it-hard-to-make-it-to-assam-citizens-list-1900280 [Accessed 20 October 2018].
* Deccan Herald (2018) *Harsh Mander's full report to NHRC*. [online] Available at: https://www.deccanherald.com/national/top-national-stories/harsh-manders-full-report-nhrc-678127.html [Accessed 21 October 2018].
* Deka, K. (2018) *The nowhere people: Assam and the citizenship register*. [online] India Today. Available at: https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20180806-the-nowhere-people-assam-and-the-looming-citizenship-register-1296562-2018-07-27 [Accessed 16 October 2018]
* Dutta, P. (2018) *Assam National Register of Citizens explained*. [online] India Today. Available at: https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/assam-nrc-final-draft-1299941-2018-07-30 [Accessed 6 October 2018].
* Dikshit, K. and Dikshit, J. (2014) North-East India: land, people and economy. *Choice Reviews Online*, 51(10).
* Financial Express. (2018) *Dhaka kept in the loop on NRC, no talks on “deportation”*. [online] Available at: https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/dhaka-kept-in-the-loop-on-nrc-no-talks-on-deportation/1269211/ [Accessed 10 October 2018].
* Financial Express. (2018) *NRC Assam: Congress questions exclusion of 40 lakh people; Prafulla Mahanta demands deportation of illegals*. [online] Available at: https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/nrc-assam-congress-questions-exclusion-of-40-lakh-people-prafulla-mahanta-demands-deportation-of-illegals/1263576/ [Accessed 9 October 2018].
* Ghosh, B. (2015) *On the road to Karimganj*. [online] The Hindu. Available at: https://www.thehindu.com/thread/politics-and-policy/article7883683.ece [Accessed 15 October 2018]
* Gibney, M. (2013) Should Citizenship Be Conditional? The Ethics of Denationalization. *The Journal of Politics*, 75(3), pp.646-658.
* Goswami, H. (1985) *Population trends in the Brahmaputra Valley (1881-1931)*. Delhi: Mittal.
* Government of Assam (2018a) *Office of the State Coordinator of National Registration (NRC), Assam*. [online] Available at: http://nrcassam.nic.in/faq13.html [Accessed 1 Nov. 2018].
* Government of Assam. (2018b) *Foreigners Tribunal | Home & Political | Government Of Assam, India*. [online] Available at: https://homeandpolitical.assam.gov.in/portlets/foreigners-tribunal [Accessed 3 Oct. 2018].
* Government of Assam. (2018c) *Assam Accord and its Clauses | Implementation of Assam Accord | Government Of Assam, India*. [online] Available at: https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in/portlets/assam-accord-and-its-clauses [Accessed 6 Oct. 2018].
* Guha A. (1977) *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826- 1947*, New Delhi: ICHR
* Hazarika, S. (2000) *Rites of passage*. New Delhi: Penguin Books
* Hindustan Times (2018) *How the 2008 Assam bombings and a meeting set the NRC ball rolling*. [online] https://www.hindustantimes.com/. Available at: https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-the-2008-assam-bombings-and-a-meeting-set-the-nrc-ball-rolling/story-2dos1EpN8muIO21X7f8WXL.html [Accessed 20 October 2018]
* Hussian, M. (2000). State, Identity Movements and Internal Displacement in the North-East. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35(51).
* ISI (2017) *Statelessness Monthly Bulletin* [online] Institution on Statelessness and Inclusion. Available at: http://www.institutesi.org/stateless\_bulletin\_2017-09.pdf [Accessed 12 October 2018].
* Kalita, P. (2018a) *Bengal among worst defaulters in NRC verification - Times of India*. [online] The Times of India. Available at: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/bengal-among-worst-defaulters-in-nrc-verification/articleshow/65220538.cms [Accessed 15 October 2018].
* Kalita, P. (2018b) *SC asks Centre, Assam for reports on detention camps - Times of India*. [online] The Times of India. Available at: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/sc-asks-centre-assam-for-reports-on-detention-camps/articleshow/65278369.cms [Accessed 13 Oct. 2018].
* World Bank (2011) Migration and Remittances Factbook, Second Edition, viewed on November 11, 2012 at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLAC/Resource/Factbook2011-Ebook.pdf
* Misra, U. (1999) Immigration and Identity Transformation in Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(21), pp.1264-1271.
* Mitra, N (2018) *102-year-old detained as 'foreigner' released from detention camp on bail - Times of India*. [online] The Times of India. Available at: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/102-year-old-detained-as-foreigner-released-from-detention-camp-on-bail/articleshow/64776015.cms [Accessed 13 September. 2018].
* Mohan, R. (2018) *Lakhs Of The Most Marginalised Women In Assam’s River Islands Risk Becoming Stateless*. [online] HuffPost India. Available at: <https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2018/08/07/lakhs-of-the-most-marginalised-w>
* Mustafa, F. (2018) *What a petition on citizenship law could mean to Assam NRC update*. [online] The Indian Express, available at: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/what-a-petition-on-citizenship-law-could-mean-to-assam-nrc-update-5325924/ [Accessed 22 October 2018].
* NRC Assam. (2018) *In The Supreme Court of India Civil Original Jurisdiction* [online] Available at: http://nrcassam.nic.in/images/pdf/01.pdf [Accessed 9 Oct. 2018].
* Pisharoty, S (2018) *The NRC and Citizenship Bill Have Fuelled Old, Divisive Anxieties in Assam*. [online] The Wire. Available at: https://thewire.in/politics/assam-nrc-citizenship-bill-bangladesh [Accessed 17 October 2018].
* Purie, A. (2018) *From the Editor-in-Chief*. [online] India Today. Available at: https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/editor-s-note/story/20180806-from-the-editor-in-chief-1296567-2018-07-27 [Accessed 7 October 2018].
* Sarma, M. (2015) *A Study of Migration from Bangladesh to Assam, India and Its Impact*. Phd. The University of Adelaide.
* Sarma, P. (2018) *Dispur gives D-voters data*. [online] Telegraphindia.com. Available at: https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/dispur-gives-d-voters-data/cid/1441810 [Accessed 20 October 2018].
* Sen, S. and Dubashi, J. (1983) *Nellie massacre: Assam burns as ethnic violence singes the state*. [online] India Today. Available at: https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/19830315-nellie-massacre-assam-burns-as-ethnic-violence-singes-the-state-770520-2013-07-23 [Accessed 13 Nov. 2018].
* Shamshad, R. (2017) *Bangladeshi migrants in India*. Oxford Publishers.
* Sharma, C. (2012) The immigration issue in Assam and conflicts around it. *Asian Ethnicity*, 13(3), pp.287-309.
* Singh, B. (2018) *Assam citizenship status: 2.89 crore names appear in the final NRC draft*. [online] The Economic Times. Available at: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/assam-citizenship-status-2-89-crore-names-appear-in-the-final-nrc-draft/articleshow/65193078.cms [Accessed 9 October 2018].
* The Indian Express (2018) *Supreme Court allows five more papers for NRC claim, last date extended*. [online] Available at: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/supreme-court-allows-five-more-papers-for-nrc-claim-last-date-extended-5430352/ [Accessed 13 October 2018].
* UN (2008) *Refworld | Report to the Seventh Session of the Human Rights Council - Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention*. [online] Refworld. Available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/502e0eb02.html [Accessed 10 October 2018].