

face: the lack of state-granted identification documents and land titles. “The constant movement of Adivasis, sometimes under extreme duress and without adequate time to take their belongings, means many misplace state-approved identity documents, or

and the reasons behind their reluctance to trust the Indian government. “Adivasis are nature worshippers; they have no idols or holy book or temple and believe that their ancestors are their guiding spirit...these are very different from what Hindus follow.”

[W]e must not ignore the implications of the CAA on the religious identities of several members of India’s disparate Adivasi communities, who fear that now more than ever they will be pigeonholed into one of the acceptable religions so as to be accepted as citizens.

many simply don’t have one,” explained Sreetama Gupta Bhaya of the non-profit Oxfam. “Many of these documents are also riddled with errors. Adivasis don’t even attempt to correct them because of a lack of education and an understanding that these need to be corrected; going to a government office means losing a day’s wage. Unhelpful and arrogant government officials who treat them as second-class citizens make them reluctant to visit government offices” (personal communication with author).

Even among the Adivasi community, the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups are in a worse predicament: they reside mostly in isolated and remote areas, with little education and awareness of the outside world.

Yamuna Murmu, a tribal rights activist in Bihar, cogently summarized the anti-CAA mood among the Adivasis: “Our ancestors—Tilka Majhi, Birsra Munda, Sidhu-Kanhu—fought vehemently against the British for our rights and independence but, sadly, today the government is seeking proof of relation and belongingness to our motherland,” he told *NewsClick*.³ “People protesting across the country are sloganeering ‘Hum Kaagaz Nahi Dikhayenge’ [We will not show documents], but it’s an undeniable truth for the tribal community because it has nothing to show.”

Back to the Fold

In recent years, the BJP and its affiliates have achieved some success in incorporating Adivasis into the Hindu fold. Its success can be measured by the electoral support that the BJP has had among Adivasi communities in recent elections (Jha 2017; Sitapati 2020; Thatchil 2014). Its success has been aided by the built-in discrimination in the government’s enumeration system. For example, the Census form has only six options under the religion column⁴: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh. However, Adivasis across India often hold religious faiths and practice religious traditions anchored in animism and nature worship, which are quite distinct from the six listed religions.

“If we do not consider ourselves followers of any of these religions, which option should we choose? Before 2011, a seventh option, ‘Others,’ was provided, and most of us used to opt for it. But now, even that has been removed,” Mahendra Dhruva, a tribal activist from Bihar, told Santoshi Markam, a writer for *The Wire*.⁵ “We want a separate religious code option for all the tribals [Adivasis] of the country.” The Adivasis also perceive the demands of right-wing groups to ban beef, which is included in their dietary habits, as a part of the broader India-for-Hindus agenda.

“People fail to understand that the Adivasi religion is fundamentally different from Hinduism,” explained Xalxo (personal communication with author), who has taken to social media to make Indians aware of her community, their way of life and living,

Understandably, much has been written about the potentially adverse impact of the CAA on India’s Muslims. However, we must not ignore its implications on the religious identities of several members of India’s disparate Adivasi communities, who fear that now more than ever they will be pigeonholed into one of the acceptable religions so as to be accepted as citizens. ■

NOTES

1. Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2020, 38).
2. See www.cprindia.org/news/understanding-land-rights-tribal-populations-scheduled-areas.
3. See www.newsclick.in/Bihar-Tribals-Face-Disenfranchisement-Threat-Wake-CAA.
4. See https://censusindia.gov.in/Census_and_You/religion.aspx.
5. See <https://thewire.in/rights/advasi-religion-recognition-census>.

REFERENCES

- Chemmencheri, Sudheesh R. 2015. “State, Social Policy and Subaltern Citizens in Adivasi India.” *Citizenship Studies* 19 (3–4): 436–49.
- Jha, Prashant. 2017. *How the BJP Wins: Inside India’s Greatest Electoral Machine*. Delhi: Juggernaut Books.
- Nilsen, Alf Gunvald. 2019. *Adivasis and the State: Subalternity and Citizenship in India’s Bhil Heartland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shah, Alpa, Jens Lerche, Richard Axelby, Dalel Benbabaali, Brendan Donegan, Jayaseelan Raj, and Vikramaditya Thakur. 2018. *Ground Down by Growth: Tribe, Caste, Class and Inequality in Twenty-First-Century India*. London: Pluto Press.
- Sitapati, Vinay. 2020. *Jugalbandi: The BJP Before Modi*. Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Thatchil, Tariq. 2014. “Elite Parties, Poor Voters: Theory and Evidence from India.” *American Political Science Review* 108 (2): 454–77.
- Yengde, Suraj. 2020. “The Anti-Dalit and Anti-Adivasi Features of the 2020 Indian Citizenship Act.” *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, September 7. <https://polarjournal.org/2020/09/07/the-anti-dalit-anti-advasi-features-of-the-2020-indian-citizenship-amendment-act>.

PRECARIOUS CITIZENSHIP: INTERNAL MIGRANTS AND INDIA’S AMENDED CITIZENSHIP LAWS

Priyanka Jain, *Labor Rights Researcher and Activist*

Nivedita Jayaram, *Labor Rights Researcher and Activist*

DOI:10.1017/S1049096521000718

In January 2020, residents of a slum in the suburbs of Bengaluru city (Karnataka State) found their homes razed to the ground by the city’s municipality. At the receiving end were internal labor migrants,¹ who routinely face such harassment in the cities to which they move for work. Although such evictions are a mainstay of contemporary urban life in India, this particular demolition caused an unusual stir because it reeked of the ominous politics of India’s new citizenship laws. The event was triggered by a viral video shared by a local resident that portrayed the slum as an

unhygienic and “illegal Bangladeshi settlement.” Stoking this hysteria, the parliamentarian representing the area (a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party) retweeted the video, declaring that relevant authorities have been “instructed to take action” against the outsiders (Pinto 2020; *The Wire* 2020). Instigated by such forces, municipal workers broke into the homes of migrants without even checking their identity documents (*The Wire* 2020). A few days later, approximately 5,000 migrants working in Karnataka’s coffee estates were forced into a National Register of Citizens (NRC) verification drive, triggered by a vigilante-styled

illegitimate outsiders (Singh 2015). Citizenship in India has a peculiar dual life. Formally, it may be a unitary feature granting all Indians the constitutional right to freely move around the country. In practice, however, poor laborers moving for work experience a near-total stripping of substantive citizenship. Regarding labor migrants, state borders in India have developed characteristics similar to international borders, steeped in extra-legal narratives of “insider–outsider.” Local social fabrics remain invested in a normalized, everyday politics of maintaining the “otherness” of migrants, whose stigmatized social backgrounds,

Internal migrants live like aliens inside their own country—a fugitive-like life condition that came into stark focus especially during the COVID-19 lockdown in India in early 2020.

intervention by Bajrang Dal.² Based on speculation that the coffee estates were harboring terrorists, the police swung into action, rounding up workers for an identity check and unlawfully detaining 500 of them (Mondal 2020). Alarmed by this police action, many housing complexes in Bangalore ostracized all Bengali-speaking domestic laborers from working in their residential complexes (Kadam 2019). These incidents cast light on the insidious politics unleashed by the NRC and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), ostensibly aimed at sacross-border migrants from Bangladesh. The de facto targets of this ambush, however, typically are Indian citizens who migrate within the country for manual work.

India’s 100 million internal labor migrants (Deshingkar and Akter 2009) belong to some of its most stigmatized communities: Adivasis, Dalits, racial minorities from the northeastern parts of the country, and Indian Muslims. Having faced historical discrimination by the Indian government and society, their life conditions have long been incongruous with any substantive notion of citizenship. Internal migrants live like aliens inside their own country—a fugitive-like life condition that came into stark focus especially during the COVID-19 lockdown in India in early 2020. They often must resort to living in open public spaces (e.g., under a bridge and on the pavement) or in unrecognized spaces near private properties (Thomas et al. 2020). The effect of the citizenship amendments is to expose these communities to greater violence and disruption through evictions carried out under the guise of NRC exercises, as the previous cases illustrate (Chandran 2020). In Karnataka’s case, the police and intelligence agencies arbitrarily identified certain areas as settlements of illegal immigrants. The 30,000 people identified by them (without any transparency in the process used) were largely Muslim labor migrants working as waste segregators, security guards, and domestic workers (Kaggere 2019), similar to the migrants in the cases described previously (who later were confirmed to be Indian citizens) (*The Wire* 2020).

Karnataka’s approach to the NRC and the CAA portends a graver danger. The nature of police action in these cases is not isolated and is part of a broader history of state-inflicted violence against migrants, underpinned by vicious forms of ethno-religious, linguistic mobilization. These forces function to manufacture fear of migrants as threatening “outsiders.” For instance, Mumbai’s sons-of-the-soil movement (which targeted laboring communities in states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) showcases how the government and its powerful non-state allies function to create lasting collective memories of migrant citizens as

aesthetics shaped by minority cultures, and desperate deployment of tools of resistance and coping against exploitative work together to provoke parochial logics and sensibilities. Although their use and effect may vary according to context, the NRC and the CAA threaten to lend discursive power to these local politics.

A critical aspect of the NRC-related incidents in Karnataka was that “complaints” and “suspicion” from local residents were adequate to instigate violent government action against migrants. This feature points to a vast underground malaise of how dominant classes and the state’s governance machinery have acted in collusion to suspend the citizenship rights of migrants, thereby serving the entrenched interests of capitalist and elite accumulation. Making migrants a subject of popular hate and suspicion makes it easier to evict them from public spaces and to claim them for neoliberal development. Moreover, essentializing migrants as “outsiders” also helps dominant groups in India to deflect the attention of the middle classes from the negative effects of elite accumulation that worsens the quality of life for the majority (Singh 2015). This makes the middle classes an ally of elite groups in the class war against poor, laboring migrants. “Complaints” made by “genteel” society against migrants to municipalities and the police for adding dirt, criminality, and crowding to the city are a central device of this class war. The local governance apparatus, in turn, panders to these dominant groups as “tax-paying citizens” while viewing migrants as the archetypal excess of the city: the antithesis of right-holding citizens (Thomas et al. 2020).

The NRC exercises in Karnataka were part of a familiar script of exercises—justified in the name of “good governance,” “public safety,” “hygiene,” and “development”—that upend the bare fragments of security and stability that migrants have painstakingly built over time. Thus, the NRC and the CAA are new tools in a very old war of keeping the citizenship of migrants precarious. ■

NOTES

1. Migrants who were affected by the NRC exercise in Karnataka originated from the states of Assam and West Bengal, which share borders with Bangladesh.
2. Bajrang Dal is a militant Hindu right-wing youth organization, which is part of the larger family of organizations associated with the BJP that espouse the vision of India as a Hindu country.

REFERENCES

- Chandran, Rina. 2020. “More Evictions Feared in India as Citizenship Law Is Enforced.” Thomson Reuters Foundation. www.reuters.com/article/us-india-landrights-migrants-idUSKBN1ZNoZ4.

- Deshingkar, Priya, and Shaheen Akter. 2009. Migration and Human Development in India. United Nations Development Program, 1–90. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdrp_2009_13.pdf.
- Kadam, Sanchita. 2019. "Bengali-Speaking Workers Face Likely Ban in Bengaluru Apartments; What's Next?" Citizens for Justice and Peace. <https://cjp.org.in/bengali-speaking-workers-face-likely-ban-in-bengaluru-apartments-whats-next>.
- Kaggere, Niranjana. 2019. "CAA–NRC: Karnataka Begins Mapping 'Illegal' Immigrants." Deccan Herald. www.deccanherald.com/state/top-karnataka-stories/caa-nrc-karnataka-begins-mapping-illegal-immigrants-787675.html.
- Mondal, Sudipto. 2020. "Police Line Up Migrant Workers for NRC-Like Check in Kodagu." The Federal. <https://thefederal.com/statuses/south/karnataka/police-line-up-migrant-workers-for-nrc-like-check-in-kodagu>.
- Pinto, Nolan. 2020. "Bengaluru Police Demolishes Makeshift Houses of Migrants as CAA–NRC Debate Rages On." India Today. www.indiatoday.in/india/story/bengaluru-police-demolishes-makeshift-houses-of-migrants-as-cao-nrc-debate-rages-on-1638322-2020-01-19.
- Singh, Simpreet. 2015. "The Emergence of the Migrant as a Problem Figure in Contemporary Mumbai: Chronicles of Violence and Issues of Justice." *Policies and Practice, Cities, Rural Migrants & the Urban Poor* 2 (73): 49–61.
- The Wire. 2020. "Bangladeshi Migrants' Evicted in Bengaluru Demolition Were from the Northeast, Karnataka." The Wire. <https://thewire.in/rights/bengaluru-demolition-bangladeshi-immigrants>.
- Thomas, Cenny, Divya Varma, Nivedita Jayaram, Raghav Mehrotra, Reetika Revathy Subramanian, and Sangeeth Sugathan. 2020. Unlocking the Urban: Reimagining Migrant Lives in Cities Post-COVID 19. Aajeevika Bureau, 14–18, 28–40. www.aajeevika.org/assets/pdfs/Unlocking%20the%20Urban.pdf.

DOUBTFUL CITIZENSHIP: DATA AND DIVISION IN INDIA'S NEW CITIZENSHIP LAWS

Buddhadeb Halder, *University of York*

DOI:10.1017/S1049096521000780

Within days of passing the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the Indian government allocated 39.4bn rupees (£427m) for updating the National Population Register (NPR) database (BBC 2019). Updating the NPR database is regarded as the first step toward a nationwide National Register of Citizens (NRC), which will enumerate all Indian citizens. The government's determination to conduct a countrywide NPR exercise as part of the 2021 Census provoked doubts about its real intention because, with the passage of the CAA, religion has become a criterion for expediting the acquisition of Indian citizenship. Indeed, India's Home Minister, Amit Shah, outlined the chronology (Dowerah 2019) linking the NPR, NRC, and CAA with characteristic (BJP 2019) clarity: "Please understand the chronology. First, we will bring the CAA. Then we will bring the NRC," Shah stated on at least five different occasions (Venkataramakrishnan 2019). Because the NRC could be based on the data collected for the NPR, the connection between the two exercises cannot be ignored (Dutta 2019). Although the government has strongly denied any links between the NPR and NRC, it in fact has asserted that the NPR is the base on which the NRC would be constructed.

Under the proposed NPR exercise, individuals and/or their family members could be marked as "doubtful citizens" if they cannot provide satisfactory "legacy-linkage" data (Mohanty, 2019). Legacy linkage can be proven only through a legally acceptable document that establishes a relationship in clear terms between an individual and a parent or ancestor whose name appears in Legacy Data.¹ The legacy-linkage data were used to construct the NRC in Assam in 2018, which resulted in the exclusion of 1.9 million people from citizenship. Almost 1.2 million (PTI 2019) of those excluded were Hindus, threatening the Hindu nationalist agenda of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which considers India the natural homeland for

persecuted Hindus (Jha 2014). It arguably was to offer a safety net to such individuals that the CAA was introduced and legislated in Parliament in December 2019. Thus, the NPR and CAA are parallel processes pressed into the service of an all-India NRC acceptable to the Hindu-majoritarian sentiments of the BJP.

NPR Data-Collection Process

In 2015–2016, within two years of Narendra Modi storming to power as India's Prime Minister, the Indian government updated the NPR database to create a comprehensive database of citizens. The NPR instruction manual states, "The Government has decided to update the NPR database along with house listing and Housing Census phase of Census of India 2021 during April–September 2020." Therefore, to "update" the NPR database, enumerators and supervisors—all government officials—visited every household, collecting names and other details of everyone living in India, including "foreigners." The instructions are contradictory as far as processing the information provided by residents. On the one hand, the manual affirms that "nationality recorded is as declared by the respondent"; on the other hand, it also instructs enumerators and supervisors to check the accuracy of the information provided by informants about their nationality and their place of birth. These instructions requiring government officials to verify already declared information question citizenship status and birthplace instead of accepting respondents' answers. Thus, the manual dictates that enumerators do not to accept a respondent's claim of being an Indian citizen without additional verification.

The manual also instructs enumerators to collect respondents' "Aadhaar number": a 12-digit unique number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India. The Aadhaar number includes an individual's biometric information (e.g., an iris scan and fingerprints) and demographic information (e.g., date and place of birth and address). The decision to collect Aadhaar-number data also has been fraught with contradictions. When announcing the approval of funding for Census 2021 and NPR 2020, the government stated that sharing the Aadhaar number during the NPR would be "optional" (Jain 2020). However, a leaked government file states that approximately 600 million Aadhaar numbers already have been linked to the existing NPR database without the knowledge or consent of respondents (Home Ministry 2019). As a consequence, people are concerned that, without their knowledge, the state is collecting data about them through government programs, services, and public institutions such as post offices, banks, and election-commission databases.

NPR Data Collection Using Other Sources

The anxiety that these data will be used for the NPR process without people's knowledge is widespread and palpable. In January 2020, the Reserve Bank of India made it a mandatory requirement for "a letter from NPR containing details of name and address" for citizens to open and maintain a bank account. Failure to submit these documents would result in the freezing of a customer's account (The Wire 2020). Opposition parties claimed that banks and post offices were being used to collect CAA–NRC data, and they accused the central government of conducting surveys and collecting NPR data without the prior permission of the state government (PTI 2020). In September 2018, India's Supreme Court ordered that the Aadhaar number