

CAA and the Movement of youth Organisations in the North-East; with Special Reference to ‘Assam Accord 1985’

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ABSTRACT:

The ‘Citizenship Amendment Act 2019’ is adopted by the Parliament of India on 11th December, 2019 and got the President assent on the 12th December, 2019. From the very beginning of the process of Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), leading youth organizations of NE (North East) region such as NESO (North East Students Organisation), AASU (All Assam Students Union), AJYCP (All Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad) and others started to oppose it with dharna, strike, fasting etc. To them, if the bill executed, it will affect language, culture and demographic structure in the region. Even after the enactment of the bill, most of the organizations are continued their agitation and declared that they will continued their movement until the CAA withdrawn from the region. On the other hand, the respective State Government says that this is a law of Union Government, so they have nothing to do in this regard and assure that it will not affected the identity of any section in the society. Finally, near about 10 numbers of youth organization from this region submitted petition against the law in the Supreme Court.

The proposed manuscript attempts at highlighting the protests taken by various youth organizations against implementation of CAA in the Northeast region in India and the stand of state governments as well as the reflection seen among general mass people.

KEY WORDS: CAB, CAA, NESO, AASU, AJYCP, Dharna, Fasting, Language, State government, Demographic structure, Enactment, Implementation, Northeast etc.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The North Eastern region of India inhabited by million people and strategically located between international boundaries of Bhutan, Nepal, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and with a bare 2% geographical linkage with mainland India constituting 7% of the countries geographical area, is today is one of the most underdeveloped regions of India. In spite of rich natural endowment, high cultural heritage and being the greatest biodiversity region of the world, the region continued to lag behind in comparison to other States of India. The nature gifted wealth is yet to be properly utilized for the socio-economic upliftment of the people of this region. Over 50% of the NE region covered by dense forest 70% of the terrain being mountains, the area in general, is sparsely populated. Apart from Assam and Tripura, NE States are mostly inhabited by tribes having unique social and cultural practices, distinct from socio-cultural patterns observed elsewhere in India. Overall the tribal population accounts for over 30% of the total population in the North East. However, in six States out of eight, tribal population comprises more than 60% of the total population. This is what gives these States a predominantly tribal character.

The NE region, despite having vast resources of minerals high potential for industries, based on agriculture, horticulture and forest resources, does not have any major industries. The sole exception is Assam Valley which has oil and tea industries. Since, most of the NE people have so long lived in closed, subsistence level economies; they are not familiar with any kind of surplus generation or value addition activities. While agriculture continued to be the main occupation of the people, no thrust or efforts were made to educate the rural people about the science of value addition to their products. They are simple natured people and lived happily with whatever produces they are getting from the fields.

Objective of the Study:

- To understand the nature of the movement and the role of the youth organizations in the North-east; with special emphasis to Assam.
- To comprehend their ideology, methods adopted for fulfill their demands and preferences with the issue.
- To assess the response of general mass people regarding the demand for withdrawn of CAA in their respective regions.

Area of Study:

The present study is carried out during 2019 to present day with the activities of different youth organizations and the supporting role played by a section of artist, intellectual and the general mass people in the North-east region; with special reference to Assam Accord 1985.

II. METHODOLOGY:

The study design is descriptive and secondary source has been used to collect data. The secondary data comprised of various books, official data, news papers etc. Analytical tools like table has been applied to examine the objectives set for the study.

III. FINDINGS & INTERPRETATION:

The Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) became an Act which is known as Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) on the 12th December, 2019 with the assent of the President of India. It amended the Citizenship Act of 1955 by providing a path to Indian citizenship for illegal migrants of Hindu, Shikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian religious minorities, who had fled persecution from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan before December 2014. But the Act would not apply to the areas under the sixth schedule of the Constitution and that have the inner-line permit. Even after the bill became an Act, the flow of agitations against it proceeds in the Northeastern states excluding Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and the six schedule areas of other states, and firmly declared that it will continue until withdrawn the Act from this region. Protest against the Act first began in Assam then in entire northeast and finally spread all over the India. Furthermore, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura are the state where the CAA has been imposed partially. The hill areas and Bodoland Territory Autonomous Districts of the states have been excluded under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Leading organizations like AASU (All Assam Students Union), AJYCP (All Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad), NESO (North East Students Organisation) ect are appeal to other section of society such as artists, intellectual, sportsman etc for support and carry on the agitation with them, accordingly a section of artists and intellectual come forwarded to support the agitation.

To them, the foreigners from the neighboring countries, particularly, Bangladesh and Nepal are illegally occupying land and enjoying political rights in Assam as well as in the North east. They are present in large numbers. This is a government admitted fact. On the basis of calculation made by the Registrar General of Census the total influx in to Assam from these countries during the 1951-1971 periods is 17.17 lakhs. This figure adequately and undoubtedly establishes that the sovereignty of our country is being dangerously threatened.

Tripura and Assam, two of the eight States (including Sikkim) that comprise the North-East region which shares international boundaries with Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and China shouldered with protests. During 8th to 12th, December' 2019, large scale violence has broken out in several places of Assam including Guwahati. Public properties have been damaged by the agitators. Even activities of journalists, ambulances and water supply have been obstructed. Japanese Prime Minister Shizo Abe's scheduled visit to India has been postponed following widespread violent. In Nagaland (another State of North-east), agitation is continued by the Nagaland Students Federation (NSF). NSF Vice President Dievi Yano and General Secretary Liremo R. Kikon said that the Citizenship Bill was passed in the Parliament much against the interests and sentiments of the indigenous people of the North Eastern States. They expressed displeasure at Lok Sabha member from the State Tokheho Yepthomi (Nagaland Democratic Party), Rajya Sabha member KG Kenye (National People's Front) and Lorhe S Phoze (Naga People's Front) for voting in favour of the Bill in the Parliament 'without considering the threat and consequences' it posed to the indigenous inhabitants of the North-east.

Continuous Trends of Illegal Immigration:

Assam has experienced continued immigration of people from Nepal and Bangladesh. It is significant to note that all migrants up to this point of beginning of the Constitution are taken as Indian citizen under Article 5 of the Constitution. Unfortunately, in the absence of any statutory documentation of these people, who are real Indian citizens, many of these migrants to pre independence and harassed under such mistaken believes during various linguistic and communal disturbances in Assam in past. After independence, there occurred again occasional spurts of migration to Assam for various reasons. A very large numbers of people came to Assam during the last Bangladesh war. Many of these migrants, who entered India, did not go back after Bangladesh was created. Even after war, till now, political persecution and economic hardship has caused unabated migration from Bangladesh and Nepal to Assam. All these illegal infiltrations after independence have been possible only because of the above mention defects of our Constitution, i.e. not providing statutory recording of the names of the Indian citizens from its commencement in conjunction with the statutory registrations of connected Birth and Deaths.

In the words of NESO Chairman Samuel Tyrwa, ‘the government trying to play divide and rule politics but the indigenous people of the region will always remain united’. Supporting the agitation led by them he expressed that through such types of agitations a very clear message has been sent to the Government of India and we hope that the centre would understand that the people of the North-east would always stand together. Another notable youth organization namely AJYCP expressed another matter during their agitation. Palash Changmai, general secretary, AJYCP said that the Parishad raised the demand for Inner Line Permit (ILP) in Assam way back in March 1978 and has been demanding the same continuously for protecting the indigenous people of Assam. The provision for ILP was chalked out for Manipur after the anti-CAB movement, where as Assam still has been left alone to bear the burden of illegal migrants. From now we carry on the movement with a new slogan ‘NO CAA, Yes ILP.’ The leader of the organization also expressed that an offshoot of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations 1873, the Provision of ILP will ensure procuring obligatory travel documents for people traveling to ILP –protected areas for a limited period. Through this, we can also document and keep track of people entering to the State, apart from their duration of stay.

The protest programme titled ‘NO CAA-Concert for peace and harmony-voice of All Artists of Assam’, organized by the State’s artiste fraternity under the leadership of singer and filmmaker Zubeen Garg said, ‘youth of Assam have the power to change the country and it is the right time to use this.’ Reply to this, existing Chief Minister of Assam, Sarbananda Sonowal and Ex President of AASU (1992-99), says that once the rules are framed, everything will be crystal clear. The figures that are doing the rounds have no basis. We would not allow any fresh influx.

A section of students’ from the North-eastern States protest the CAA at Jantar Mantar terming it ‘anti-Constitution’ and a threat to identities of indigenous people in the region. The protesters demanded scrapping of the Act, claiming it was against the spirit of Assam Accord of 1985. Rituparna Kaushik, a Delhi IIT student from Assam express that the north-eastern States have been facing the issue of illegal immigration for decades which is going to be revived by the CAA. In the words of Donald V Thabah, general secretary of Khasi Students Union (KSU), the fight is ‘not a lone but a united revolution’ they opposed government move to ‘divide the North-East on the lines of religion. These days, a team of the Students Forum of the University of Science & Technology, Meghalaya left for New Delhi to file a case against the Act. They said that the CAA was illegal and discriminatory, and that it violated the Assam Accord and the basic structure of the Constitution and its core values. At present, the CAA is before the Supreme Court where 144 petitions of various individuals and organizations including AASU have been filed and the SC will only decide on the validity of the Act.

The gravity of current problem of foreign nationals in the North East can be assessed if we compare the census figures of population of any one State from the region for 1951, 1961, 1971, 1991, 2001 and 2011 with all India growth rates for the relevant census decades as shown in the comparative statements (here the State of Assam has taken as sample). A comparison of the trends in population in Assam with that in India as a whole reveals in the table-1 that during the period 1951-2011 the population of Assam increased from 80 lakhs in 1951 to 310 lakhs in 2011 implying an increase of 230 lakhs. Further, this implies that population of Assam has tremendously increased during the decades of 1951-1961 (35%) and 1961-1971 (35%). At the same time population growth rate of India as a whole at 22% and 24.8%. Here, it can be mention that during the liberation war of Bangladesh (1971) Millions of East Pakistani refugees migrated to Assam; and this is a major factor behind such a phenomenal growth of population in Assam.

Table -1, Population Growth Rate of Assam & India in Crore

Particulars	1951	Average growth rate for 51-61	1961	Average growth rate for 61-71	1971	Average growth rate for 71-81	1981 #	Average growth rate for 81-91	1991	Average growth rate for 91-01	2001	Average growth rate for 01-11	2011
Population of Assam	.80	35%	1.08	35%	1.46	23%	1.9	24%	2.2	19%	2.7	17%	3.1
Population of India	36.1	22%	43.8	24.8%	54.8	25%	86.5	24%	84.4	21.6%	102.9	17.5%	121.0

Interpolated based on the figures for 1971 and 1991 as the census of 1981 was not held in Assam.

Source: Statistical Handbook of Assam-2015 & self calculation by the author.

Table-2, Trend in Population in Assam 1951-2011 (in %)

Year	Hindu	Muslim	Assamese	Bengali
1951	72.1	24.9	69.3	21.2
1961	66.4	23.3	70.1	18.5
1971	72.5	24.6	70.1	19.7
1991	67.1	28.4	69.4	21.7
2001	64.9	30.9	60.8	27.5

2011	61.5	34.2	28.9
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1981 Census in Assam was not held & Data of Assamese in 2011 was not available in the Source.
Source: Statistical Handbook of Assam

The high growth of population since 1951 in Assam as well as other State of Northeast has attracted the attention of youth organizations, State government and the general mass people in the region. Each side is expressing concerns over rapid growth of population in the region. Particularly the Assamese speaking people is worried about their identity in coming days in the State as many commentators in the Brahmaputra valley held Bengali immigration from the Bangladesh responsible for change in the demography in the region.

The Assam Accord 1985:

The Assam Accord was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) between the Centre and the protesters. The people of Assam have sentimental relations with the issue of illegal immigration. The famous 'Assam Movement' was related with this one. The Assam Movement was started in 1979; which demanded for the deportation of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The movement also demanded for greater economic autonomy for the State. The long six years peaceful non-violent movement was successfully concluded by signing 'Assam Accord' on 15th August 1985 between AASU, AAGSP (All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad) and representatives of the Central Government in the presence of the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on the Foreign National Issue, which reads-Government have all along been most anxious to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of foreigner of Assam.

As a result of 'Assam Accord', detention and deletion of foreigners January 1, 1966 shall be the base date and year. All persons who came to Assam prior to January 1, 1966 (inclusive) and up to 24th March 1971 shall be deleted in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act 1946 and the Foreigners Order 1964. Names of foreigners so deleted will be deleted from the electoral rolls in force. Such persons will 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. For this purpose the Government of India will undertake suitable strengthening of the Governmental machinery. On the expiry of period of ten years following the date of deletion, the names of all such persons which have been deleted from the electoral rolls shall be restored. All persons who were expelled earlier, but have since entered illegally into Assam shall be expelled. Foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law. Immediate and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigners.

But the government which swears loyalty to the North-Eastern States, so the Constitution and to the people has failed to evolve fruitful device to eliminate the threat.

IV. CONCLUSION

There is a vast difference in the protest movement against the CAA in Assam along with other Northeastern states and the rest of India. The protests in the rest of India which are about religion-based exclusion, in northeast the protests are about religion-based inclusion. Northeast has a history of illegal immigration from Bangladesh and Nepal which has created an existential crisis for the people of the region.

The prime issue of the agitation (movement against CAA) run by various youth organization is not the beginning of now; it is related with the famous 'Assam Movement 1979'. On the other hand, it has to keep in mind that Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and right to protest to every Indian. However, it also makes clear that with freedom of rights comes 'responsibility' which implies that rights should be exercised with discretion and bounds should not be crossed. But during the agitation against CAA, numbers of youth from the region has taken extremely violent activities. Which can n't be support anytime, anywhere.

A section of indigenous people from Assam as well as Northeast have found themselves staring at a rather uncomfortable prospect as of today. A giant wave of discontentment against the ruling establishment has just swept across the length and breadth of North-east. People are disenchanted and disillusioned with the ruling government's near-pathological infatuation with the CAA.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The agitators should know in details each and every policy, terms and conditions, the aims and objectives of the CAA. After getting proper information about the Act, it should be analysed on the basis of real and legal information. Thereafter, if the impact of this going to harm the interest of the community, state and the country, then the agitators should stands against the Act; and oppose it with the help of political means; like pursue the opposition, call for face to face debate in front of Media, make strong public opinion with the peaceful means, make it as the movement of crowd etc.

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