

## ASSAM OPPOSE COMMUNALISATION OF CITIZENSHIP

**The** tag of “foreigners” attached to a section of people who migrated to Assam decades back continues to be a convenient tool for the parties of ruling classes to harass the concerned people.

Assam is a State where the National Register of Citizens was first prepared in 1951. A Citizenship Act was enacted in 1955. But the list of citizenship was not updated for a long time.

Assam attracted a good chunk of the masses of peasants and tea plantation workers from West Bengal at various times. Many of them made Assam as their permanent residence. In the context of the 1971 war, many people from the bordering villages of present Bangla Desh had migrated to Assam. The Indian Govt. had opened the doors of Assam for them.

In 1979 the AASU and AGSP led an agitation in Assam demanding the identification and deportation of foreigners from Assam. There reflected the tendencies of viewing even the people from West Bengal as foreigners. The agitation took a violent form and went on for six years. At last, the Rajiv Gandhi Govt. at the Centre and the AASU and AGSP – signed an Assam Peace Accord on Aug 15, 1985. This Accord said that anyone who came to Assam after the midnight of Mar 24, 1971 will be considered as a “foreigner.” The State Govt. must ‘detect and deport’ the illegal immigrants. However, the successive govt. in the state made little progress in their job. In 2005, the Central and state Govt. and AASU had signed another Agreement. It mandated the updating of NRC at the earliest. But this work was stopped in the half way. On the petition of a NGO, the Supreme Court had directed the state Govt. to complete the work.

While the job of updating the lists of NRC was still incomplete, the BJP Govt. at the Centre came to the fore to give a dangerous twist to the problem. It introduced a “Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in Parliament in 2016 to amend the 1955 Act. This Bill has triggered off serious objections from the Opposition. The BJP Govt. was forced to send this Bill to the Joint Select Committee of Parliament in Aug’ 2016.

At the midnight on Dec 31, 2017, a first Draft of the Updated NRC was published in Assam. It noted that 13.9 million names out of 32.9 million are under scrutiny. Those whose names are under the scrutiny or missing are worried about their status. The State Govt. assures that there is no reason to panic as there is scope for corrections even after the final draft is out.

The BJP Govt’s Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 proposes to grant citizenship to ‘religious minorities’, barring the Muslims. It considers Hindu, Sikh, Budhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian migrants from Bangla Desh, Afghanistan and Pakistan as eligible for citizenship. Here is a move to discriminate people based on religion and communalise the whole citizenship granting exercise. It is also a move by the Sangh Parivar to smuggle the idea of Hindu Nation from a back door.

Thus the granting of citizenship in Assam was complicated and made a never ending exercise. All these years, the ruling classes and Govts used the undetermined status of many to subject to various harassments, inequality and deny them the rights and evict them from the lands. They also used the insecure status of migrant people to reap votes out of it. Now the BJP’s move to exclude the Muslim migrants from the eligibility of citizenship pushes them into a most pathetic state. The democratic forces must oppose this policy tooth and nail and stand by the just right of the Muslim people for Citizenship.

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