

Scrap N R C!

- Alope Mukherjee

Now after the National Registration of Citizenship (NRC) for Assam has primarily been published and more than 40 lakh of people are found to be not registered, voices are being raised by all opposing the sinister aim with which it has been used by the rulers at the centre as well as at Assam level. It is clear that 40 lakh of Indian people have been declared 'stateless', although those at the helm of the power are adding insult to injury of those people by giving them another 'chance' through further application or objection. Who are these 40 lakh people? Mostly Bengalis; then Jharkandis, Biharis, Nepalis and others. Of the 40 lakh more than 80 per cent are Muslims.

The whole thing has not happened suddenly which the opposition politicians and even a large number of politicians of revolutionary variety are trying to make the people of India outside Assam believe. The source of it could be found in 1983 Assam movement when a chauvinistic section of Assamese led by *Assam Ganatantra Parishad* (AGP) and *Pranta Parishad* (PP) started arming themselves against "foreigners" and/or "outsiders". At first it was a movement against the central government to force 'foreigners/outsiders' out of Assam. Then they started attacks on non-Assamese people. In September 1983, India witnessed the worst ever massacre of minorities, even the killing of Naokhali or the Punjab cannot be compared with it, where nearly 3000 people of linguistic and religious minority were killed on a single day in two adjacent villages of Nellie. The state authorities even though knew that such a satanic act was going to be performed remained silent and blind observers.

But that did not satisfy the chauvinists. Murder, arson, terrorization went on. Both the Congress and BJP fomented the chauvinistic acts for their own gains. To carry on these indiscriminate killings ULFA were formed. These killers would not leave even any democratic voice from within the Assamese. Saurabh Bora, a student leader, was killed at the campus of the Dibrugarh University since he opposed the chauvinistic movement. There were dozens of killings.

What actually could mobilize the youth in Assam? The problem was that Assam being a cauldron of various nationalities and tribes, having separate language and religions, was kept under-developed by the centre. The educated youth of Assamese origin had to face unemployment. Moreover, agriculture in the valley of Brahmaputra was not developed by the Assamese. During the British rule, the rulers brought large number of Muslim peasants from the then Bangal (Mymensingh of present Bangladesh) to till the land of Brahmaputra valley which was a forest laden swampy area. These peasants were experts in tilling water-logged areas. Within 50 years the area became the granary of Assam. So when unemployment grew up in a critical scale the children of Assamese origin found that they could not fall upon the agriculture either. So the educated youth wanted hegemony in all employments of the state. At the same time, due the crunch of capital, bourgeoisie of Assamese origin could not grow even. Most of the tea garden owners were either foreigners (British) or from outside Assam. So only a small petty bourgeoisie could develop, who could thrive upon government contracts and large scale plunder of state exchequer. Mainly these people utilized youth to foment the Assam agitation. They were instigated by both Congress and BJP. Accordingly their demands differed. Those instigated by the Congress demanded expulsion of "outsiders" mainly Bengali Hindus and Nepalese who at that time were tilting towards left parties of both varieties – parliamentary and revolutionary. Those instigated by BJP demanded expulsion of "foreigners" –mainly Bengali Muslims – to start a Hindu Muslim divide.

Once the Frankenstein was erupted, it became almost impossible to stop it. Months after months killing, arson and plunder went on. Within this period, the death of Indira Gandhi loosened the grip of Congress on the agitation. So government of Rajiv Gandhi signed "Assam Accord" with the leaders of Assam movement in 1985.

The essence of the Assam accord was detection of foreigners or illegal entrants in Assam. The first step was to re-examine the voter lists of Assam. In the process voters were asked to produce proofs of their domicile, any small mistake or lapse would mean the voter would be identified as 'doubtful'. A new term started to be used for them D-voters. In this exercise, the real sufferers were both Hindu and Muslim poor peasants of Bengali origin, the tea-tribes whose ancestry came generations ago when the gardens started. They did not have proper land rights or other proofs of domicile. Moreover, those refugees who

were poor and moved from camp to camp after crossing the border due to partition of India have been living in Assam for generations. But many of them lost papers they were given by authorities at that time. Rather businessmen of western parts of India had their papers all right. Even some really doubtful persons were clever enough to arrange for their papers by graft to officials.

However by listing a large number of the people as D-voters, the Congress thought that it had created a stable base in Assam. But such unjust deals with the chauvinists cannot buy a permanent solution. Especially when a party like the BJP with their communal card is present in the country.

The moment BJP could form a stable government with its allies like the TMC, it planned something new. In 2003 it amended the Citizenship Act. In that Amendment two very important things were brought up.

In its Para 2(i)(b) it defined the word "illegal migrant". It said, "illegal migrant means a foreigner who has entered into India, -

1. Without a valid passport or other travel document or authority as may be prescribed by or under any law in that behalf, or
2. With a valid passport or other travel documents and such other document as may be prescribed by or under any law in that behalf but remains therein beyond permitted period of time".

With this a problem arose because according to the Constitution of India "a person who has migrated to India from the territories now included in Pakistan (at present Pakistan and Bangladesh) shall be deemed to be the citizen of India at the commencement of this Constitution where such person has so migrated before the eighteenth day of July 1948 and he has been ordinarily resident in the territory of India since the date of migration".

Now the problem is that there had been a continuous influx of refugees from Pakistan (Bangla-desh) after the partition. At some years like 1965 or 1971 it was in large scale. And most of them had not crossed the border with valid passport or travel document. So time to time the cut off year was extended. But no official cared for it.

What happened after that is known to all those who are concerned. Youths, mostly Muslims, working in Mumbai were packed up and sent to West Bengal to finally throw them out of India. Finally it was found that the boys were from a village Domjur in Howrah district. This is only an example. For a few years after that amendment, every month two or three such incidents involving more number of youths went on. All of them were detected as so called 'illegal migrants'.

The second important development is the direction to maintain National Register of Citizens. So far, the Registrar for citizens was there to issue citizenship to those who wish to become citizens by registration. It had its office in Delhi. Nobody took it seriously except those who were afraid to be marked as illegal migrants. But for more than 90 per cent of them it was something unattainable to travel as far as Delhi from remote villages of Assam and apply for registration with all requisite papers.

It may be noted that 2003 amendment was passed in both houses of Parliament without any opposition. To be true, in Rajya Sabha the Home Minister L.K.Advani promised to keep in mind the problems to be faced by Hindu migrants who have to leave Pakistan or Bangladesh raised by Manmohan Singh, But while the Act was finalized nothing was changed. One must remember that Mamata Banerjee was a central cabinet minister at that time.

However there were protests. Thousands of people sat at dharna in New Delhi for more than a week. The Congress assured to a change in the Act. But it did not do anything. The BJP thought that it can again play communal card on this. So in 2016 another amendment was brought which assured that Hindus, Budhists, Jains, Parsis migrated from Pakistan, Banladesh or Afghanistan would not be treated as illegal migrants. Here again is a travesty to the religious neutrality or secularism whatever you may call it. All the parliamentary parties, not only NDA allies but also all other parties voted for it. Nobody even questioned that what would be the real status of those who would not be treated as illegal migrants but also were not citizens.

In this scenario, when the question of D-voters and citizenship in Assam came for hearing the Supreme Court had to fall upon the National Register of Citizens to finalise it.

And now it became crystal clear the intents of the amendment by the BJP. Names of 4 million (40 lakh) people are not there in NRC while the population of Assam is 33.3 million in 2017. This means that more than 12 per cent of people were put out of register. Going into more details we will find that out of the

40 lakh nearly 30 lakh are Bengalis – both Hindus and Muslims. The rest 10 million comprised of Jharkandis, Rajbanshis, Nepalis, Biharis and others.

The central government has been assuring that this is not the final list. There will be chances for further application and objections. Moreover, nobody would be pushed back (actually they cannot do so because the government of Bangladesh would not allow them to enter). They would only be kept in separate camps. The president of BJP is thundering that all these (meaning 40 lakh people) *Ghujspetias* (infiltrators) will be thrown out of the country.

Thus a situation of terrorizing the people, mainly Muslims, has been created. They are afraid of being taken into detention camps and losing all their rights as citizens of India.

Actually the so called NRC became a New Redivision Conspiracy on communal lines. In this situation, all democratic and patriotic Indians who feel that the motherland is not just a geopolitical entity, but the embodiment of people must rise up and demand:

Scrap NRC!

Scrap the amendments to Citizenship Act in 2003 and 2016!

Some may argue that we cannot allow people to enter unbridled into our country. The answer is the NRC is not an arrangement to stop illegal entrants. There are so many governmental arms and elected representatives to look after this problem even if the border security arrangements fail. Rather the NRC was engineered to force some people out of the country. Some people are arguing that this is being done at the order of the Supreme Court. Let us ask them, was there any order from the SC in 2009? No; but the process of enlisting started at that time. Peoples' protests were drowned under firing and killing of people in Barpeta district.

The fig-leaf with which all the parliamentary parties are trying to cover their earlier bigotry has now come into open, from the Congress to TMC, the CPI to CPM. We are not talking much about the parties that have no foot hold in Assam or West Bengal or who have never bothered about the refugees coming from eastern part of Pakistan (now Bangladesh) have betrayed the people. It is time for them to self introspect and make self criticism.

Once again the clarion call should be

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Scrap the amendments to Citizenship Act in 2003 and 2016!
