



## Here's why NPR-NRC will most affect India's poorest

Protests have raged against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the proposed National Population Register (NPR) that will be converted into the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Large numbers of Indians have understood the dangers behind the moves that are both anti-Constitutional, discriminatory and anti-poor. Indians have spoken clearly in one voice against the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) divisive policies. In Assam, where the NRC had already been implemented, 19 lakh people have been rendered borderline 'stateless', with the burden of proof on them to prove themselves citizens of India facing the draconian Foreigners Tribunals.

Now, with an all-India NPR-NRC on the cards, Indian society is likely to be thrown into turmoil, it will be Assam all over again. Trade unionists and activists know that the worst hit will be the unorganised sector workers, Adivasis-Forest dwellers, SCs/STs, OBCs and Muslims.

### Who is likely to suffer most ?

India's vast population, especially over 40 per cent of those marginalised by poverty, 8 crore Adivasis and Forest dwellers, 27-28 % of the population who is Dalit, small, marginalised farmer, migrant labour, worker especially the unorganised sector, and of course, Muslims. SCs, ST and OBCs have historically been kept away from education and property ownership and they will all be affected when the enlisting begins!

A staggering 400 million of the people in India work in the unorganised sector which is 90 per cent of the workforce now. As many as 39 million of these are Muslim with 36.5 million Muslim men and the rest, 2.5 million, women. Some households have only one working member, mostly a male and if that person has to run from pillar to post to gather documents, his household is bound to suffer extreme financial losses and be reduced to penury. Is this what the government wants ?

#### 1. Under Terms of Occupation

Small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural labourers, share croppers, fishermen, those engaged in animal husbandry, beedi rolling, labelling and packing, building and construction workers, leather workers, weavers, artisans, salt workers, workers in brick kilns and stone quarries, workers in saw mills, oil mills, etc. come under this category.

#### 2. Under Terms of Nature of Employment

Attached agricultural labourers, bonded labourers, migrant workers, contract and casual labourers come under this category.

#### 3. Under Terms of Specially Distressed Category

Toddy tappers, scavengers, carriers of head loads, drivers of animal driven vehicles, loaders and unloaders come under this category.

#### 4. Under Terms of Service Category

Midwives, domestic workers, fishermen and women, barbers, vegetable and fruit vendors, newspaper vendors, etc., belong to this category.

These workers from the unorganised sector mostly belong to scheduled castes / scheduled tribes, other backward classes and religious minorities mostly do not possess a permanent residential address, birth or school certificates and find it difficult to apply for voter IDs and Aadhaar identification numbers. In 2018, Parliament was told by the KJ Alphons, Minister of State for Electronics and IT, that more than 89% of the total population had been granted the AADHAR card. In 2019, India had around 900 million eligible voters, with 95.64% having a photo identity card. While the government planned to offer benefits like insurance and pension to over 40 crore unorganised workers using the Aadhaar, the govt is not clear whether the biometric identifier or the voter IDs will be regarded as proof of citizenship.

## WHY?

### Examples:

One, in Bengaluru's garment industry, informal women workers are still finding it difficult to enrol for Aadhaar because more than one document is required for address proof. Migrants often find it difficult to produce them, as their homes are in other states.

Second, in the APMC market in Bengaluru itself, over 3,000 head loaders don't have any documents, not even voter IDs! What happens to them when the NPR-NRC process starts?

Third, 2700 contract safai workers working in MCGM (Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai) got permanency after 12 years of struggle. Supreme Court ruled in our favour on 7/4/2017 by confirming a High Court order. But MCGM rejected 2370 claims on grounds of spelling differences/read name discrepancies (something that has plagued the poor & marginalised in Assam!); like Deepak or Dipak, Vasant or Vasanth, Harijan or Arjun, Kamble or Kambale. It has taken the Kachara Vahatuk Shramik Sangh over 2.5 years to rectify this, name by name says Milind Ranade

In Assam, among the 14 (plus two "weak" documents) applicants also had the option to present documents such as refugee registration certificate, birth certificate, LIC policy, land and tenancy records, citizenship certificate, passport, government issued license or certificate, bank/post office accounts, permanent residential certificate, government employment certificate, educational certificate and court records. The 19 lakh citizens were left out of the Assam NRC and scores were wrongly dubbed 'foreigners' or 'illegal immigrants' even after producing the required proofs.

## Women

In the NRC process in Assam a shocking 69 per cent were women who were left out of the list. Women from poorer backgrounds were excluded due to lack of documents. It was not compulsory in Assam to register birth or deaths until 1985. The NRC process does not factor this in. Several women were married off before they turned 18, so their name will not be on the voter list along with their parents. With no awareness of the NRC process and emotional and financial dependency on the patriarch, coupled with practices like early marriage and the dwindling girl-child education robs them of their valid identity proofs. Most of the women in rural areas or conservative households do not register for voter identity cards. Without educational degrees and land documents, women don't possess independent identity documents which makes them particularly vulnerable to the NRC process.

## Marginalised, Muslims, SCs, STS, Forest Dwellers

The rampant illiteracy and lack of awareness of maintaining documents is going to affect the Dalits and the tribal communities of India. In the Assam NRC over 100,000 Scheduled Tribes who were original inhabitants of Assam were left out of the list due to the inability to prove their legacy from 1971. Adivasis, Forest Dwellers, Landless Small Farmers, Slum Dwellers, Riot Victims Rehabilitated on 'Govt'

Land: There are millions of Indians who live on land that is not theirs by legal right or documentation while it is there, for decades, by occupation and possession! The government is even at this moment trying to establish ultimate and full control over this land that is public land as 'govt-land' change its user so that millions of persons get de-legitimised. Countywide displacement has over the past 70 years caused mass upheavals, denial of basic human rights and even impoverishment.

Forest lands are owned and tended by forest dwellers and Adivasis: They struggle today to legally establish individual and community claims over their historic legacies under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. How will NPR-NRC impact these sections?

### **Poor will be Hit Worst**

Not only will Indian society be in turmoil with divisiveness being the motive of the government, overall, the NRC is set to hit the poor the most especially with them running from pillar to post, gathering documents and facing undue harassment from authorities.

The NRC process to the exchequer itself may cost over Rs. 55,000 crore in administration expenses, Rs. 2 – 3 lakh crore to construct detention camps and Rs. 36,000 to take care of the citizens who will face a future in detention camps (National Herald). According to The Times of India, the cost of reclaiming citizenship will go up to Rs. 50,000 per person. In Assam, people left out of the NRC spend Rs. 7,836 crore for hearings. Will the economically crippled labour of India be able to bear the cost of the NRC if and when it does hit the country especially when over 22 per cent of the country's population is below the poverty line?

Now with the threat of NPR-NRC – ill thought out and not debated, India is looking at the mass disenfranchisement of its Citizens. A CIVIL DEATH OF MILLIONS. While the immediate target is undoubtedly religious minorities (especially Muslims) given the avowed project of a Hindu Rashtra, in the ultimate analysis, all Indians from the vulnerable and marginalized sections are all under target and attack.

### **DID YOU KNOW ?**

- **Voter Registration:** India does not have No 100 % voter registration. There have been also serious issues and concerns, especially of late, of certain marginalised sections of the population being disenfranchised politically, that is being denied of their basic right to vote. When we as a country have not even managed to register all Indians as Voters, can we be expected to have a fair registration process (NPR or NRC?)
- **Birth registration statistics:** The Registration of Births and Deaths Act was enacted in 1969. This act made it compulsory to register all births. However, according to UNICEF, "The current registration level of births and deaths in the country is about 58% for births and 54% for deaths. Each year about 42% of births go unregistered, which is about 10 million births." Now if this is the case today, imagine what it was like before 1971! Or whatever the new cut-off date will be! When even Birth Registrations are not cent per cent, how can we expect a thorough NPR/NRC?
- **Housing Statistics:** According to Census 2001, 187 million houses have been reported to be used as residences or residence-cum-other use by about 192 million households. According to the 2011 census, there are 24.67 crore households in India. Read more on this in Livemint's article: Five charts on the state of India's housing sector.

- Passport: Today, out of India's total population of 1.3 billion people, there are only about 65 million passport holders.
- LIC document: Even today India is grossly under-insured and frankly, insurance is a privilege as many people are excluded from it due to various disqualifying factors including but not limited to health and wealth. According to data (Handbook on Indian Insurance Statistics, 2016-2017) of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI). Assuming each policy corresponds to a unique citizen, these accounts for 25 per cent of the population having life insurance cover, leaving 75 per cent—or 988 million Indians—without cover.”
- Bank Accounts: Even today, more that 190 million Indians do not have a bank account.

What will the standards of proof/documentation required from those who do not own land or homes for the NPR/NRC?

- Migrant Labour: Then there is the question of lakhs of Indians who are migrant labour who are not found in their places of residence.
- How will NPR/NRC register or record India's Migrant Labour, who own no homes and no land and are not even given the Right to Vote? The process (inclusion/exclusion) for them, a section that needs access to the state's welfare schemes could be monstrous and tragic.
- Indian Literacy Rate (2018) as per UNESCO stands at 70.47%. If the process, criteria, Modalities that inform the NPR (which is a 'house to house' survey) is not like the Census which is collecting information (inclusive) it is likely to end in another Assam-like disaster of even worse proportions.

**Based on our pioneering work in dealing with Assam’s citizenship crisis, CJP has been conducting in-person and online trainings for volunteers, activists, legal professionals, trade unions and students. You can join a training near you or organise one for your area.**

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