

# North Eastern States and Citizenship Amendment Act 2019: A Case Study on Dibrugarh, District of Assam.

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## Abstract

The North East Region comprises of 8 states namely: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Both Manipur and Tripura were princely states whereas the remaining states were the different parts of Assam which latter on got a separate statehood status. The inhabitants of the entire North Eastern Region are of diverse in culture, ethnicity, traditions and languages. The land consists of numerous tribes which have their separate belongingness. Both the hilly and non-hilly tribes are always up to preservation of their identity which they prefer a lot of importance and for which they themselves quarrel & fight if required due to maintain their identity. Autonomous movement in Assam is the consequence of this region. This resembles that the population are very conscious about their land and individuals. There are many rebellions witnessed in the history till date regarding the preservation and protection of the North East culture, land, identity, employment, traditions, languages, practices etc. Since pre independence period, the region is suffering a lot due to legal as well as illegal migrants. And they have been protesting against this issue for which Assam Accord 1985 came into existence. But yet they don't have the faith towards the Central Government in context to their problems faced for those immigrants especially as because they believe that the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 shall decrease their cultural values, norms and ethics if those 6 religious minorities come and take shelter in the North East Region. They totally oppose the Act since the passing of the Bill till date. They had gone through a huge pathetic revolutionary protest against the Government for not enacting the Act. A huge mass destruction took place in the region especially in Assam for more than 1 month in view of asking from the Government for their protection and preservation. It led to a great economic and infrastructural loss in the region along with that it hampered the educational sector and also the political parties as well.

**Keywords:** Assam, Citizenship Amendment Act 2019, Identity, Indigenous, Illegal Immigrants.

## Introduction

The geographical area of the region is 2.55 lakh square km. It has its own importance to the nation state due to its geographical location and the natural resources as because the region is quite rich in many natural resources it has a good contribution to Indian economic growth. "The region is a gateway to South East Asia as it is bordered by Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal and China (Rocky, 2013)."

Though the area is rich in resources and also occupies large number of geographical area but it cannot be absolutely said that there is enough development in the region. Since Independence, till date no major development is seen in the area and the people believe that Central Government is willingly not putting much emphasis on the developmental projects of the North East Region due to its Step Mother nature. The population also well claims that the Government must take some progressive initiative in order to grow the region towards development by considering the fact that the region is helping in the growth of Nation's economy.

Initially, there was nothing like North East India, because prior to British colonialism this entire region was already divided into small kingdoms by ancient kings. Those kings established their rule since time immemorial in North East, namely: *the Ahom, the Naga, the Kachari, the Jaintia, the Khasi, the Maran and Muttock, the Koch Rajbongshis* etc. Among these all above mentioned kingdoms the Ahom were the only one who maintained a dominant position over all but latter on Burmese succeeded over the Ahom kingdom and occupied Assam. At that time British already started colonizing India and came towards North East and when they got to know that Burmese invaded Assam by defeating Ahom, the Britishers planned accordingly to help the Ahom in succeeding over Burmese which resulted to the Treaty of Yandaboo 24<sup>th</sup> February 1826 (agreement between British and Burmese). At that time only Tripura and Manipur were different princely states, rest all the current north east states except Sikkim were under Assam. The state Sikkim came under North East Region in the year 2002 and is being recognized as the younger brother of the seven sisters, where seven sisters resemble the remaining current North Eastern States.

The society of North Eastern Region is heterogeneous in nature where more than 200 tribes are present. Actually there exist 635 tribal communities in India. It can be easily analyzed that those 200 approx tribes have their definite language, culture, traditional norms, practices, believes, identity, ethnicity etc. Some of the communities are namely: Ahoms, Anals, Bodos, Dimasas, Kalitas, Karbis, Mishings, Rabhas, Garos, Sonowal Kacharis, Sutiya, Tiwas etc. Along with all these diverse characters all the people are living in one region, therefore it is obvious that all wants to preserve, protect and promote to upcoming generations their own specific cultures. On the basis of that Assam is divided into upper Assam and lower Assam. Each division recognized on the basis of districts it comprises of. The indigenous inhabitants' of respected tribal communities are always found in group wise on a particular specific land area. It can be said that maximum of Ahom people are found in Upper Assam and in Arunachal Pradesh. The term heterogeneous does not refer here only the tribal communities; it also denotes that in this region except the tribes other community people also exist namely: Bengalis, Marwaris, Nepalis, Biharis, Muslims, Buddhist, Christians and Sikhs respectively. The whole land is full of uniqueness and beautiful diversity. But when the issue of preserving and protecting owns cultures comes then the problem is only between the tribes which are further divided into hills and plains. Since time immemorial there exist a conflictual relation between the hill tribes and plain tribes along with the non-tribal communities as well. "It has been alleged that hill-plains or tribal-non-tribal equation in Assam has never been stable (Chaube, 1999:256)."

History is the witness of the fact that the tribes were the prior ones who migrated to this land and that is the reason why the tribes consider Assam as their identity origin by claiming the state as their own land. But latter on due to many factors there occurred a problematic relation between the different land communities and at last that led to Autonomous movement in Assam and demand for 6 Schedule statuses, where some large group of tribes were demanding separate statehood identities and willing to get apart from Assam. The populations within the state are against each other on the basis of communities and they are so much conscious about their identity protection that they developed a fear

factor of losing their uniqueness. Moreover the region also supported regionalism & sub-regionalism and support the separation in the context of tribes. Therefore the Autonomous movement resulted to 4 new states departed from Assam on the geographical context namely: Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram (1987).

The concept of Migration is also very familiar like the concept autonomous movement in North East Region. This phenomenon is a dynamic process which threw a great impact in the region since pre-independence period. North Eastern State: Assam is the hub of migrants and immigrants from ages. The tea garden laborers, Muslim peasant immigrants, Land hungry peasants, Stock farmer Nepalese, Traders from North India, barbers, washer men, shoe-makers, cobblers etc are those people who migrated to North East, Assam before India Independence i.e. before British invasion. Therefore, it can be said that Assam had been providing shelter to large number of migrants till date. During British rule, they were brought by the British due to some official work, field work, labor work etc within the nation so they were termed as Indian Migrants but on the other hand there were many immigrants who illegally migrated from Bangladesh (East Pakistan) in India and entered in to Assam. This phenomenon of Muslim Peasants illegally immigrating in Assam is still continued in contemporary period. In the majority of the slum areas of Assam their shelters are being found and moreover in majority of the criminal offence cases their names are being found. Their numbers are increasing accordingly and because of them the indigenous inhabitants are in threat of losing their identity, culture, language, land, ethnicity, originality, employment opportunities etc. They are affecting the socio-economic, political and cultural aspect of the Nation widely. This issue is very serious in context to Assamese people and therefore creating problem for the citizens of Assam. It is already known that the tribes of Assam are very much concern to their identity. Only because of preserving their identity they took the step of getting separated from the Origin State itself. In spite of being in peace after reorganization of the states, the region is still in same threat.

That too after the partition of the nation, huge influx of Hindu refugees took shelter in Assam. And it cannot be denied that the then Ruling Congress Party allowed those immigrants to settle down in Assam because of which the demography of the state is affected. Therefore, the problems related to language and culture got provoked in the region. Assam is economically backward but not culturally, the people could not accept the truth that their culture & language was going on diminishing. Indeed, this resulted to huge language movement, identity movement, foreign national movement and Assam Movement. Assam Accord which is a continuous six years agitation took place due to these illegal immigrants by the people of Assam leaded by All Assam Student Union (AASU). They agitated against the import of illegally occupation of land by the immigrants from Bangladesh and other foreign neighboring countries started in 1979. Due to illegal immigrants the people of the region are in fear of losing their population, political rights, language and land rights. Therefore after a long revolutionary protest the Memorandum of Settlement came in to existence between the Government of India and the leaders of Assam Movement in the year 1985 with the objective to identify and deport the illegal foreigners and detent them as well. The clause 6 of the Accord describes about the preservation and protection of the language, culture, ethnicity, identity, rights of the Assamese people.

Indian Citizenship is not easy to get for an outsider alien. For this a particular law is there in the Indian Constitution namely the Citizenship Act of 1955. This Act has gone through 6 amendment procedures in the year 1986, 1992, 2003, 2005, 2015 and 2019. After the five amendments, in the year 2019 another bill for amending the Act was introduced in the parliament and that bill got passed in 11 December, 2019 and enacted by the Rajya Sabha became Citizenship Amendment Act 2019. The objective of the Act is to grant citizenship status to the six non-Muslim religiously persecuted

minorities residing in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh of Sikh, Hindu, Parsi, Jain, Christian and Buddhist. Those people are lacking identity and citizenship beneficiaries. This Act has mentioned that it would not harm the clause 6 of Assam Accord and indigenous people of Assam will not be affected for them. Still the people of North East are against the Act and they carried on a huge protest from the time introducing the Bill till enactment. For more than one month the people of Assam protested drastically and pathetically. It cannot be said that their movement is over because they are still against the Act and don't trust the current Government. Majority of the population are against it and in some areas a handful of people supports the Act and are in favor of it.

Statement of the problem- The huge protest regarding Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizen has a historical reason behind it. North East is that region where migration has been continuing since the time about 5<sup>th</sup> century before Christ & from pre-British era. Literary the immigration started during Pre-British period, British rule, during Partition, Post Partition and during Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. The consequences of this immigration process were very worst in nature. It led to crisis to identity of the indigenous inhabitants, environmental degradation, occupation of large areas to land by the illegal immigrants and the most difficult problem is to identify the illegal immigrants as because it becomes very tough to differentiate between the people from Bangladesh and the indigenous Bengali speaking Muslim of Assam due to their similarity in languages. The Citizenship Act has gone through six amendments till date from which a severe change was done in CAA 2019. And because of this particular amendment the people of Assam stood violently against the act as since, time immemorial the Assamese people were very much up to conserving their cultures, languages, traditions, majority etc. They don't want to become minority in their own region where they assumed this Act shall make them minor and for which latter on they shall lose their identity.

Research Questions- Looking at the statement of the problem, this research will try to find answers to the following questions:

- Why people of Dibrugarh, District of Assam want North East CAA free?
- Why CAA is seen as a problem in Dibrugarh, District of Assam?
- Why Assamese wants to send illegal immigrants back to Bangladesh?
- What is the major reason behind their agitation & unrest in Assam?
- Why it is different from rest of the country?
- What are the difficulties faced by the people of Assam due to immigrants?
- What measures need to be taken to resolve the conflict & disagreement regarding the Act in Dibrugarh, Assam?

Nature and scope- This research includes the views & concern of the Assamese people regarding the Act and also the study provides an perception about the people of North East through which it can be identified the reason behind their huge and continuous protest against CAA 2019. The study of the paper also comprises of the suggestions of the North Eastern grass root level population related to the law concerning Citizenship Amendment Act 2019. However, the scope of this research is limited to North Eastern state Assam (Dibrugarh district's Naliapool area only).

Limitation- The lacks of financial support for the research is the first limitation, the requisition of sufficient time is necessary for the study which is limited in nature. In majority of the places of the study area there is an existence of insecurity, unwillingness among the people to share their respective



view points on the controversial Act (2019) for which the study may be limited. So, the responses cannot be taken as an adequate and honest which can affect the findings of the research.

### Literature Review

Though there are many literatures available on the issue of North Eastern states related to illegal immigration, National Registration Certificate (NRC), Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019. There is no specific research conducted on the topic of the in depth study on the revolutionary actions taken for the Controversial act 2019 by the Dibrugarh district of Assam. Hence it is a new research in Dibrugarh District. Here are some of the works accessible on Citizenship Amendment Act.

**Dr Chandrachud, A. (2020)** in his research paper titled “Secularism and the Citizenship Amendment Act” discussed that the Act is associated with vote bank politics which harms the constitutional provisions of secularism and prevails discrimination between Indian Muslims, persecuted non Indian Muslims and non Muslims. The nation doesn’t have any law related to religions and provide equal opportunities & status to every religious. But this Act is against the concept of “Secularism” in India.

**Sharma, C. (2019)** in her paper titled “Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016: continuity and contestation with special reference to politics in Assam, India” found out the reason of tagging the bill as controversial on a threefold arguments in her article. Firstly, the provision of granting citizenship status on the basis of religious identity. Secondly, still if on the basis of religious but the norms are not equal for all, it differs from Muslim to non Muslim. Thirdly, the North East Region is perpetually facing a lot of challenges for the immigrant and their identity is in threat due to the Act 2019.

**Dr Nagarwal, N. (2019)** in his article named “The Poisonous Law: The Citizenship Amendment Act 2019” used the term poisonous for the Act, it is because on or the other way the whole Act is spreading communal and religious riots across the nation and targeting the largest minority group i.e. Muslims. Through NRC the government tried to identify the immigrants who came to India after 1971 from Bangladesh and latter on through CAA the provision of granting new citizenship status is raised to the populations who came before 2014 but only to the non-Muslims.

**Manuvie, R. (2019)** in his conference paper titled “Explaining the impact of CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT: FAQs for the uninitiated” discussed adequately about the frequently asked question regarding Indian Citizen, CAA 2019, violation of the act of Constitution, implications of the Act, about NRC, problems of NRC and India’s policy on refugee & asylum seekers. This paper concludes that CAA is not a refugee policy, it is a citizenship determination and provision policy.

**Ashesh, A. and Thiruvengadam, A. (2017)** in their research paper “Report on Citizenship Law : India” analytically discussed on the debates going on across the nation regarding the question of identity since from the colonial periods till date. The thorough examination of the constitutional provisions related to the history of citizenship law is been found in the report. The recent political debates & discussions and suggestion on these matters are also analyzed by the Authors.

**F Chandra, A.S. (2019)** in his research article named “Citizenship Amendment Act: Uncalled for Protest” gave a clear and vivid discussion about the bill’s journey to an Act i.e. from being under public dominance (since 2016) to debate, analysis and with due democratic process enactment in 2019. He termed CAA as ‘narrow tailored law’ and described the reason that because of facilitating the persecuted ones from the neighboring 3 countries.

**Sharma, B.SK and Dr Baruah, M. (2019)** in their research article titled “National Register of Citizen: Genesis and Way forward” elaborately discussed and analyzed about the contradictory relation between NRC and CAB. Moreover, they attempted to highlight the different viewpoints of people in support and against of CAB (the revolutionary actions of North Eastern Staes) by claiming that one or the other way CAB is defeating the purpose of NRC and meanwhile it is providing shelter to the persecuted ones but again with a condition i.e where Muslims (Shias, Ahmadiyas and Balooch) doesn't include.

**Paranjape, M. (2019)** in his research paper named “A Home for the Persecuted.” considered the Act in a positive perspective as a shelter for the religious persecuted non-Muslims. Through the tremendous presentation of Home Minister, Amit Shah in the parliament followed by the Assent of the President. This paper said that the only reason behind the anti-CAA agitation is the misinformation and interpretation of the Act, it is needed to be understood that the Act is a ‘pro-Non-Muslims Religious Refugees: which is very different from being anti-Muslim’.

**Sharma, C.K. (2012)** in his research article titled “The immigration issue in Assam and conflicts around it.” Discussed about the North East Region's experiences in tolerating and suffering for outsiders for more than half century. He mentioned how the states are yet carrying the anti-outsiders sentiment which makes the State, Assam unique in the sense it faced both external and internal immigration's populations.

**Sarma, M. (2015)** in her article named ‘A Study of Migration from Bangladesh to Assam, India and its Impact’ discussed specifically about the term migration with regards from Bangladesh to Assam. This paper gave an elaborated description about how Bangladeshis came to India, how India is facing illegal immigrants issue due to its neighboring country; Bangladesh, how this issue has drastically affect the demography, economy, social, political and cultural sector of the North East, Assam.

**Das, J. and Talukdar, D.** in their Research Article named “Socio-Economic and Political Consequences of Illegal Migration into Assam from Bangladesh” ” opined and discussed in this paper about the issue of illegal immigrants and their huge problems creation effecting the socio-economic and political structure of the State for which those sector resulted into disastrous consequences. The country's Socio-Economic and Political status is very essential and very crucial; this should not get affected in a bad manner.

**Chowdhury, B. (2013)** in her research paper named “Migration and Population Growth: A Case Study of Assam” discussed the findings on the case study conducted in Assam, district of North East. This paper lays special emphasis on the problem of population explosion in Assam for this huge influx of migration. It creates a heavy pressure on the socio-economic infrastructure of the state. Population explosion directly leads to increase in unemployment, environmental degradation, deforestation, illegal land occupation, corruption and most importantly it results to developing threat in the mind set of the local inhabitants as because this population explosion is due to illegal immigrants.

**Nath, B.K. and Nath, D. C. and Bhattacharya, B. (2012)** in their paper named “Undocumented Migration in the State of Assam in Northeast India Estimates Since 1971 to 2001” vividly discussed about the population who are migrated and living undocumented since from 1971 to 2001 in Northeast. Without having any accurate & adequate data and any identity huge influx of peoples are residing in the region illegally. Through using different strategy the authors presented in this paper the exact data of the census of population exceeded due to undocumented migration in the state of Assam.

**Misra, U. (1999)** in his journal article titled “Immigration and Identity Transformation in Assam.” Specifically discussed about the Assamese culture and its origin related to the context of pre & post independence, language movement, Assamese ethnicity, linguistics & religious divisions in Assamese society. The article said about the political scenario related to Assam from the immigration perspective and described the reason behind the huge influx of immigration in Assam, due to which identity transformation, language issue also took place.

**Anand, A. and Anand, S.** in their research paper named “Constitutionality of The Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 and Why it was Essential” very broadly discussed about the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 from historical background to cotemporary period. In the historical part the authors put the view point of Justice M.N Rao clearly with regards to CAA 2019, identified the reason how can the religious minorities from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan can come India and claim Indian citizenship status. This paper contributed very actively in identifying the core reason behind the Act.

**Nagarwal, N. (2020)** in his article titled “Global Implications of India’s Citizenship Amendment Act 2019.” Gave a clear and vivid description about the implementation of the Act globally on international Community. The paper discussed properly the manner, in which this Indian law is significant on Global world, global position of CAA 2019. Nationwide protest has been witnessed against the Act and moreover many other countries had alleged against India as because it’s developing nation so it should put emphasis upon being developed not in protecting Minorities.

**Research Gap:** In all the research articles which are reviewed in this paper have not find the exact & the real reason behind the hilarious protest of the Assamese people against the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019. I want to find the appropriate reasons through my research by keeping the view points of the people who are opposing the Act and also the people who are supporting the Act. That is why my work is unique in nature.

### Research Methodology and Objectives

The paper explains with qualitative nature. It is based on the secondary and primary data derived from books, journals, articles, websites, questionnaire, unstructured personnel interview and random sampling survey. Observational method is also used for analyzing the data. The main objectives of this research are: 1. to find out the actual meaning of Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 and the reason of why it is going through such a controversy.

2. To find out the reason that why this Act is seen as a problem in North Eastern Region, with special importance on Dibrugarh district.
3. To explore the hidden issues which were encountered by the inhabitants of North East regarding CAA that are still not highlighted.

### Research Hypothesis

- It is believed that the indigenous people of Assam, has been acting against the CAA since from the time of the proposal of the act as a bill in 2016.
- Majority of the area is totally against the Act because of which many pathetic and disastrous activities took place by the inhabitants in the districts of Assam which defines that there are some negative impacts of the Act.
- Not the whole population is against the Act, there are also people residing in Assam, who are supporting the Act which entails that there are some positive impacts of Citizenship Amendment Act 2019.

**Tools and Techniques-** The research was conducted in a locality named Naliapool, Assamese Para in Dibrugarh district of Assam. The locality holds a population of approx 2000, from which for the purpose of primary data collection 4 senior citizens are randomly selected from 4 families. They are retired Government officials. On the basis of information collected through questionnaire 50 people participated in the data collection process of this research paper. 10 out of 50 are from Government official sector, where 4 of them are retired senior citizens and 6 of them are still working. 25 out of 50 participants are students pursuing their respective degrees, where 7 out of 25 are pursuing UG, 10 out of 25 are pursuing PG, 4 out of 25 are pursuing Doctorate and 4 out of 25 are pursuing Post Doctorate. 5 out of 50 participants are engaged in teaching profession in renowned Private Schools & Colleges. 7 out of 50 respondents are educated homemakers. 3 out of 50 respondents are businessman. Total 22 number of female and 28 number of Male participated respectively in the data collection process.

### Discussion of Findings and Results

Through the survey conducted to collect the primary data in this research I opted for the questionnaire method, personnel interview method, sampling survey method and one extra interview method which I conducted only with the senior citizens with equal respect to their gender of my research area. As the total participants were 50 in numbers holding 22 females and 28 males respectively. Both the genders adequately participated in providing me the raw data related to their opinion with regards to the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019, its impact in Dibrugarh district and the reason behind the huge revolutionary protest against the Act in the area and locality.

The inhabitants understood the concept very differently and took it very controversially. While surveying if the Act is effecting positively in any manner to the locality, different answers are found from different age group respondents. From the youths point of view if I analyze then yes they have the perception that the Act is going to benefit the Dibrugarh district of Assam by suggesting that versatile people with diverse mindset will come to India and that may lead to new ideologies, innovation and progressing activities which may directly or indirectly effect the district. But in contrast to this opinion the people from age group 39 to 60 and the senior citizens possessed different viewpoint. They denied to the concept of benefit through the Act. Majority of the senior citizens along with minimum number of young generation youth have the perception that this Act shall increase the rate of unemployment and harm the life of workers. While surveying the motto and objective behind the protest, one thing came out clearly that the protestors were provoked by the local inhabitants of the Dibrugarh District of Assam with the view point that if Centre grants the Indian Citizenship status to those religiously persecuted non Muslims than they will take shelter in North East region. The senior citizens believe that while implementation of this Act the clause 6 of Assam Accord's provisions will not exist. The people claimed that if Centre was about to bring changes through this Act then what was the necessity to implement the NRC. It is known to all that NRC was only implemented and meant in Assam all over India with the objective to identify the illegal immigrants those who came from Bangladesh and were residing in the state illegally. They were about to be punished and deport out from the country and also the provision of keeping those immigrants in the detention centre was also prevailed by the Government.

### Conclusion

The findings of the research entails that the people of the naliapool locality in Dibrugarh district of Assam have actively participated and helped in the data collection process of this research work with their honest and valuable responses. But still it can be said that there are many people who don't want to comment on this controversial Act and it is been observed that most of them are from Bengali community. So, their responses may not be considered as the honest and true one. The Assamese



peoples are totally against the Act and they don't hesitate upon commenting and discussing on it. The population properly doesn't possess any raw and clear framed idea about the Law; they are being wrongly manipulated by some group of people who are against the current Government's policy. Even though while surveying it is continuously found that people don't even know that the Act is providing citizenship to only non-Muslims and hence, they are carrying the perception that they will not allow the Muslims to enter in their region and so they are protesting against the Act. Majority of the population that took part in the revolutionary protest from Nalbari area are old age senior citizens. They discussed their reason of acting against by stating that they have seen Assam suffering a lot from long back due to Bangladeshis, who illegally occupied some of the areas in the region and also occupied the employment opportunities in the region by engaging themselves in numerous labor activities which could have been the earning source of the indigenous ones. And moreover they too occupied the land and are being staying illegally in the state where their numbers are increasing day by day. It cannot be denied that Government took initiative to identify those immigrants but till now we also cannot say that those initiatives are proved effective in practical. The youth in the area are holding the view that Government is taking good initiative to provide citizenship status to those religious persecuted ones because they are suffering without any proper identity. There are also some youths in the area who are not considering this Act as good because their observation is from historical point of view and they too don't believe and have no faith in the Central Government, they even state very confidentially that the clause 6 of the Assam Accord will not be kept in mind while implementing this Act. Therefore, they oppose the current Government.

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