

Editorial

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ST demand is a blunder.

At this crucial juncture, some among the Meitei populations, who have been taking major role in the nation building process of Manipur nation since the time immemorial with their courage and determination; have become weak-hearted and started to demand to include Meiteis in the ST list of Indian Constitution. Meitei/Meetei demanding for ST status needs to think it through because it is not a simple demand. It is not only about the Meitei/Meetei, but also a demand that will have a connection to the history of tomorrow. While discussing the matter, we have seen people who disgraced being threatened to inflict fear, portrayed as illiterate, and projected as hateful towards Meitei/Meetei. On top of this, we have also heard a leader of an armed group and other organisations say that striving to restore our nation's independence is not revolution. The reasons for ST demand seem to change with time. In the beginning, it has mentioned that on the grounds of constitution, Meitei/Meetei lacks development, lives in isolation, and if granted ST status, people could receive employment benefits due to reservation, even to the point of claiming to be able to produce more IAS officers and overpower India. However, looking at the current scenario, Indian government's employment rate is seeing a decline every year in spite of the reservation facility. The most important element of India's neoliberal economy at present is Public Private Partnership (PPP), wherein the government's employment rate is falling. Therefore, the 7.5% ST reservation is not going to bring about a huge change in the employment of Meitei/Meetei. After considering this, the reasons for ST demand have been changed.

Status of religion before Hinduism
 Claims were made of Meitei/Meetei lifestyle having both tribal and primitive elements. There was also a time when they said that they were not demanding for ST status, they just wanted to lie about it. The Meitei/Meetei religion prior to the Hindu conversion, was falsely portrayed as just a religion with no temple and with maichou only at the level of maiba-maibi but not at the village level, stating multiple times that the religion belonged to tribal and primitive regions. The philosophy and related festivals of this religion had a respectable status, but the constant fabrication of lies just to avail ST status might create a false impression of the religion. At the same time, they are saying that availing ST status will not bring any change to our religion. Whether it changes or not is a different matter. No thought has not gone in to understand that labeling a phase of our religion as tribal religion is us bringing ourselves down in front of the world. If there is no element of backwardness or underdevelopment in being ST, then why are they provided with reservation as a part of Redistribution Junction? It is just an act of willful ignorance in spite of knowing the reasons behind providing other protective measures. If the attitude remains as 'let people think whatever they want', then a question arises if all the efforts to strive forward were in vain. Various rituals of celebrating and offering prayers to Sidaba mapu, Laininthou Lairembi, Apokpa etc. were unavoidable elements and did not exist as just mere word-of-mouth. A number of Puya on religious matter clearly stated that our religion was not a tribal religion. We need to study the stories and philosophy of seven Maichou's in order to understand the same. It was also not so that Meitei/Meetei religion suddenly became regional or tribal after Hindu conversion. Hill-Valley Relationship

The hill-valley division to run a state has been going on since the time of British colonialism. Various 20th century leaders have stood against this division, mentioning it time and again in the resolutions of Nkhil Hindu Manipur Mahasava. Government's attempt to separate the hills from the valley does not help in building a united Manipur. Instead of enabling people to think collectively, it has led to people think either for hills only or for valley only. The division has been going on since the time of merger into Indian Union, when various administrative and judicial bodies meant only for hills were formed. Thus, the hill-valley division continues till date. The current situation is not about Meitei/Meetei not being ST and chingmee becoming ST. Therefore, the claim that the ST demand will bring the Meitei/Meetei and chingmee closer, is a distortion of history. It is nothing but encouraging the colonizers by putting the blames on the self for the differences between the hills and valley.

Meitei/Meetei becoming ST could bring back and intensify the hill-valley division and be the reason behind the idea of Meitei for Meitei and Chingmee for Chingmee. Till now, we are not able to decolonize ourselves.

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Citizenship Amendment Act 2019: The Great Lotus 'Rope Trick' Unfold

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"The forest was shrinking but the trees kept voting for the axe as its handle was made of wood and they thought it was one of them."
 ~ Turkish Proverb

The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday 11th December, 2019 passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill with a majority of 125 MPs voting in favour and 105 voting against it. It was thought to be a close contest; however absence of number of political parties from participating in the voting played a significant role. There were around 16 members who did not vote in the House. They included two from BJP MPs, one from INC MP, three from Shiv Sena MPs and two from NCP, INDD, and BSP each. Apart from them, one MP each from the AITC, SP, JD(S) and TRS parties did not attend the CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT BILL 2019 proceedings. History will remember the names of those who have voted for this HISTORIC Bill and those who preferred to remain silent when the flag of secularism and voice of democracy floundered in captivity.

For the first time in the constitutional, parliamentary and political history of India, now, the law makes religion a criterion for the granting of citizenship to migrants and refugees by excluding Muslims – regardless of whether they face persecution in their own countries – from its purview. The 'exclusionary' politics which the ruling government has played in legal arena – by making 'politically suitable' amendments in Foreigners and Passport Act in 2015 became a part of grand conspiracy to give yet another 'Unconstitutional Shock' to India in the form of Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019 which has now become Law after an assent of the Hon'ble President of India. The present government and auxiliary communal forces have been playing with the sentiments as well as the constitutional fabric of this nation through parliamentary routes and other means & modes since 2014 sometimes in the name of Demoralisation, GST, Art.370, Love Jihad, Triple Talaq, Gharwasti Movement, Black Money (Kasauli Damnam) or sometimes in the name of NRC and CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT.

The major attraction of this Bill is that it grants super-fast track Indian citizenship rights to non-Muslim communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan – Hindus, Parsis, Christians, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs while suppressing the voices and concerns of the people from the north east region which is going to be affected the most by this Act. In the past, whenever people faced persecution, which happened with Tamil Hindus in Sri Lanka, when genocide happened in countries like Uganda, when Pondichery, Goa were liberated, all these people who were the victims of their history were granted Indian citizenship on pure humanitarian ground. However, religion was never made legal ground for giving citizenship as it not only violates the foundation of constitution but also threatens the values that India has cherished for thousands of years. Moreover, a historical fact must be acknowledged that the states which have been formed on the basis of religion that 'by nature' discriminate against minorities, and now time has come for the government to assure that this will not happen in India. Now the common belief has been building up that the very basic nature of CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT 2019 which has now become a law will reflect the communal character with all its might and turn this glorious, free nation into some sort of Religious Republic where majoritarianism would be the norm. At the outset it must be understood that the People from the northeast does not understand religious dynamics. They do not know its n bits about Hindu-Muslim 'thing'; a notion that mainlanders have developed. They are straight people. However, this Act strive to inject the ideas of 'Religious Binaries' in the free, uncontaminated, purcellure of people who doesn't believe in 'religious fetishism', 'exhibitionism', 'discrimination' and does not weigh nationalism and patriotism on the scale of 'Religion'.

Moreover, there is a reason to believe that the entire CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT affair has also gone parallel to fix the holes created by the failed NRC exercise. Question arises how it will differentiate between 'illegal immigrants' from those who claim to have been persecuted religiously. "In the case of those Hindus who have been excluded from the NRC, they have submitted legacy data saying they are residents of India. However, ironically it seems this Act wants to tell them, 'no you are from Bangladesh' and then make them legally entitled for the grant of citizenship? People of all religions and also those who are non-religious have the right to live as an Indian citizen. There is a conspiracy to tear down democratic fabric and constitutional values of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity upon which this nation has been

founded, and establish dictatorship and make India a religious state. It is said that one bad idea can often lead to many others, similarly one mistake and omission if goes unchecked paves the way for another. The National Register of Citizens (NRC) left us with 1.9 million people classified as 'illegal immigrants' — though they still have a right of appeal. Over 50 per cent of these 'illegal immigrants' are Hindus and, who, in the central government's plan of action, immediately need to be saved from the threat of statelessness. Hence, the CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT, 2019 has become an urgent political necessity for the government not only to save the Hindus but also to 'catch' a golden opportunity to become a saviour of millions of poor, rejected, dejected, hopeless, scared categories of people, then that must be justified by the state in the context of the rationale of the law, nexus of provisions in question with the object of the law, intelligible differentia and the spirit of the constitution of India. The classification of people can only be valid in the eyes of law if it is rational. Classification based on religion, language, geography, community or beliefs can never be reasonable classification. If classification is based on the individual needs to have different citizenship then it can be considered as a reasonable classification. However, a person belong to particular community and state has material evidence that the presence of the person might pose threat to the national security then such a condition state can deny citizenship to such a person, which is valid and acceptable in the eyes of law but state cannot reject citizenship merely on the basis of a particular region that the applicant for citizenship belong to. This act goes against the fundamental tenets of the constitution; it is not just a question of secularism but that of a Justice, equality, liberty and constructive liberalism as well. By adopting this regressive provision, I do not have an iota of doubt that the India is going in the direction of Law of Return of Israel that Israel is a natural home of all Jews.

This Act suppresses the voices of the people which is a blow to the core of democracy where the voices of the people, their aspirations given paramount importance. Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 is not just a betrayal of the people of Assam, but also an invalidation of their struggle that brought Assam Accord in 1985. The demand of Assamese has always been to protect their lands from millions of Bangladesh illegal immigrants which seriously pose a threat to the very survival of the people and their culture. Assam Movement was never against any religion; however, it is the government by enacting this communal Act dividing society into Hindu-Muslims. Assam Movement was a battle against people who have been coming illegally in Assam bypassing the immigration norms. It was a raging issue sooner after independence forcing the government to bring the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act in 1950. A National Register of Citizens (NRC) was to be prepared on the basis of Census 1951. The NRC finally came up earlier this year only to be turned out as a failed exercise and to supplement it CAB was introduced which has been widely opposed, that now has become a law.

However, question arises as to whether this matter is simply an internal matter of Assam, whether CAA will have any impact on neighbouring state including Nagaland, whether Art. 371(A), Inner Line Permit System is robust enough to face this new menace. We need to take out sometime to ponder upon it. The problem of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants is not new to this region. Assam has been directly affected primarily because it shares 263 kilometers (163 mi) of border with Bangladesh out of which 143.9 kilometers (89.4 mi) is land and 119.1 kilometers (74.0 mi) is riverine. To control the influx of certain measures were taken in the past. When Bangladesh was not in existence, it was a part of Pakistan (previously East Bengal) from which gradually after the partition of India saw millions of people migrating in India. These waves of Refugees who sneaked through Assam Border in India did not remain in India but gradually spread all over the northeast and also the eastern regions of the country including West Bengal. That was the beginning of a disaster, this was the point from where the illegal movements of East Pakistan Bengali immigrants started and continued, right up to the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, both an ongoing basis and with spikes during periods of particular communal unrest such as the 1964 East Pakistan riots and the 1965 India-Pakistan War, when it is estimated that 600,000 refugees left for India. Estimates of the number of refugees up to 1970 are over 5 million attributed to West Bengal alone. This includes around 4.1 million coming between 1946 and 1958 and 1.2 million coming between 1959 and 1971. Another major influx into India came in 1971 during the Bangladesh Liberation War. It is estimated that around 10 million East Bengal refugees entered India during the early months of the war. These refugees remain in India and became the citizens of India and never went back to their native land. The reasons to do economic, fear of insecurity for being a

minority there. Along with Bengali Hindus, minority Chakmas and Hajongs too fled the erstwhile East Pakistan to take shelter in the Northeast during that period. The existence of Chakmas and Hajongs in their native place was further impelled by the construction of the Kaptai dam on the river Kamaphuli in 1962. They entered India through what was then the Lushai Hills district of Assam (today's Mizoram). While some stayed back with the Chakmas who were already living in the Lushai Hills, the Indian government gave settlement to a majority of the 'recognized' refugees in the sparsely populated North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), present-day Arunachal Pradesh. The immigration issue is a worldwide nationality phenomenon. India is not exceptional that in turn is impacting Northeastern region of India and even the Nagas. The conflicts that occurred in Bodoland between indigenous Bodos and illegal Bangladeshi immigrants a proof that the protected areas are bound to be troubled by the illegal immigrants. Moreover, illegal immigrants are able to easily obtain forged citizenship documents, enabling them to vote and access government services. The creation of the BTC and BTAD has failed to protect the rights of the Bodos or curb the unabated illegal migration from Bangladesh, leaving them increasingly vulnerable. The case of Bodoland can be a test case to all protected areas to assess their situation in the context of Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 and its possible impact with reference to the legalization of millions of people who have already been migrated, married, living, settled among different ethnic tribal populations of entire northeast for the past 70 years. Moreover, in the commercial hub Dimapur, the population of these immigrants is quite big but officially this fact has not been confirmed. However, a stroll on the streets of Dimapur, local street markets will reveal a lot more shocking story that the papers of government may not. Majority of the labourers in Dimapur are reportedly from Bangladesh. Street vendors from Bangladesh. All the north-eastern states were facing the problem of illegal immigration from Bangladesh, which posed a threat to the social fabric of the region and the demography of the state. Northeast India will definitely not like to see multiple Tripuras in making.

Moreover, the question of cut-off date which is set as 31st December 2014 is irrelevant since maximum damage/deto illegal immigrants has already been done in the last seven decades, the only difference is, by virtue of Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 the damage has now been legalized. The beneficiaries of people now can conveniently follow the procedure of application for e.g. in Assam if not in Nagaland since Nagaland has been exempted from the operation of CAA and become official, bonafide, naturalized citizens and apply for I.P and enter Nagaland for different purposes including that of 'employment'. Now, question is, on what ground can they be stopped from entering in Nagaland once they become legal citizen of the Republic of India? Our existing I.P system and Art. 371(A) will not be able to have much influence over the population of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants which already exist already here. Moreover, it is statistics that we already have approx. 12% (suspected may vary) of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants of our total population in Nagaland. Isn't it a matter of grave concern?

Moreover, the instances of allegations of forged documentary evidences to support citizenship claims has also come in the light which directly impacted the local and state politics in northeast to the great extent. Also, it needs to be taken into account that the state of Nagaland shares its borders with Assam to the west and Arunachal Pradesh & Assam to the north. Moreover, it is blessed to have Dimapur as a Railway station that connects it not only to the rest of the northeast via Gauhati but also to the rest of India. Nagaland is not secluded or fortified, and it can never be. Physical barriers or legal barriers cannot stop Nagaland from getting exposed to the reality of the outside world. Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 brought a question not only of Constitutional survival of all the people of India, but also, the survival of the culture and traditions that has been gifted to our Naga and other indigenous people by their great ancestors.

As reiterated by various legal experts, jurists, constitutional experts from time to time that the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019 is unconstitutional. CAA will not stand to the test of the Constitution. All Assam Students Union, AIMIM chief, Assadiuddin Owaisi, Tripura royal scion, chairperson of joint movement against CAB, Pradyut Debbanma, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra, Congress leader and former minister Jaiaram Ramesh have filed their petitions before the Supreme Court to challenge the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019. It is heard that many more stakeholders including individuals, students unions, civil society organizations in different parts of the northeast will soon be moving to apex court to challenge the Law which has been democratically rejected by the majority of people of the northeast. The Final Constitutional mandate is yet to be delivered, but the people have already given their mandate. Let Democracy prevail!