

The vacuum of identity politics

Paul Atreides might have felt equally surprised if he came to Assam instead of the planet Arrakis, seeing the newly stateless citizens driven through the gates of a detention camp and dropped off in their clumsy cells. The paddy fields of Assam bring in romanticism but what has been conspiring in these volatile lands serves to be an eerie reminder of the [Reich citizenship laws](#), which was a starting point for Adolf Hitler to pursue his anti-Semitic policies, resulting in a bloody chapter.

It is ironic that while many of us might be championing the rise of global order, but the internal crisis of identities has created a caveat leading to an alarming rise in [religious nationalism](#). While the exercise of NRC (National Register of Citizens) is not something new, it became a pivotal point of election rhetoric during the 2016 elections and the recently concluded 2021 elections. Essentially, NRC is an exercise that seeks to drive out "illegal immigrants" who have entered the state of Assam post the cut-off date of March 24, 1971, wherein families have to provide documentation proving that they are naturalised citizens of India. Sounds quite familiar, when during Hitler's regime there was an extensive focus to demarcate Jews and those of Aryan blood, with people running helter-skelter to produce documents. The final NRC list has left out [1.9 million people](#), declaring them as "foreigners" and "stateless citizens" became a buzzword in the lexicon of Indian media. Where do they go now?

Here come the multiple [detention camps](#), for housing these people left suspended in a vacuum of identities, turned into scapegoats of the long-standing tensions between Bengali Muslims and the Assamese gentry. Historically, Muslims from erstwhile East Pakistan would often cross

over into Assam and cultivate in the fertile riverine areas, this was encouraged by the British who saw it as an opportunity to increase their revenues. Soon, with the increasing migration of people, from across the border both Hindus and Muslims, the Bengalis would constitute a significant part of the population. This inflow sparked the rise of Assamese nationalism and slogans like "Joi Aai Axom" (Long live Assam) became a rallying cry. The tensions if seen in historical terms, bring in an all-new perspective to the dialogue rather than mere election rhetoric. The rise of the ruling BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), has exacerbated the clash of identities. The existing Government brass sticking to its populist formulae, functions in a post-truth era, denies the existence of detention camps and has made access to justice for those excluded from the NRC roll a strenuous exercise.

What will follow then? If one goes by the Nazi way, the Government would soon start erasing all forms of evidence and constantly deny this blot on their regime which has been accused to be a fascist one. Assam has slowly been transformed into a carceral state wherein we are witnessing a humanitarian crisis and our silence has given legitimacy to the ongoing exercise.

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