

December 18, 2019

Open Letter to the Government of India: Solidarity Against CAA and NRC

As students, faculty, alumni, and affiliates of Columbia University, we firmly oppose India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC). We stand in solidarity with the students of Jamia Millia University, Aligarh Muslim University, and the many more students and individuals protesting across India and the world. We commend the bravery and commitment of these protestors and aim to use our platforms to uplift their voices.

By excluding Muslims from its definition, CAA disguises religious discrimination in the language of inclusion. The law provides a pathway to citizenship for Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Christian, Buddhist, and Jain refugees fleeing religious persecution in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The failure to extend these benefits to Muslims has been justified by the fact that Muslims do not comprise a religious minority in these countries, yet the context of the attitude of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Modi's government towards Muslims suggests more sinister reasoning.

Meanwhile, the implementation of the NRC in Assam has rendered almost 2 million people stateless. Many Indians--particularly those marginalized by religion, class, gender, sexuality, and caste-- have lived in India without formal documentation for generations. So while the CAA does not explicitly target Indian Muslims, the BJP's plans to expand the NRC nationally have created a reasonable fear that the combination of these two policies will further threaten Muslim rights. India claims to be a secular democracy, yet the CAA clearly violates Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, which safeguards equality before the law for all persons.

The recent crackdown on dissent by state officials is but the latest outcome of an increasingly fascist government. We acknowledge that Hindutva violence against Muslim, dalit, and adivasi communities did not begin with the passing of the CAA. We mourn the lives that have already been lost to this violence, such as Rohith Vemula, Tabrez Ansari, and Gauri Lankesh. Additionally, if the government has sanctioned such brutality against Indian students within the country's own capital, we are forced to imagine the atrocities being committed under the shroud of the communications blackout in Kashmir. The abrogation of Article 370, the incendiary Transgender Persons' (Protection of Rights) Act, the NRC, and the CAA are all connected in their attempts to violently undermine minority rights while simultaneously claiming to protect them.

The Indian government must revoke the CAA and NRC, but the journey to restore justice will require far more action. Until then, we encourage students, activists, and community members to continue protesting fascism, and we join them in this fight. Inquilab Zindabad, the revolution lives on.

Signatory Organizations:

Columbia University South Asian Feminism(s) Alliance
The Organization of Pakistani Students of Columbia University

Columbia Muslim Students Association
Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine
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