



## MIGRATION AND THE CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT IN INDIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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**DOI:**  
<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.250301021>

### Abstract

Migration has played a vital role in shaping India's socio-cultural and demographic landscape, with internal and cross-border movements deeply influencing its history. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019 has added a contentious dimension to the migration discourse by offering expedited citizenship to religious minorities—Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians—from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, while excluding Muslims. This selective inclusion has sparked debates about its impact on secularism, social cohesion, and the constitutional principle of equality. The CAA intersects significantly with migration and citizenship frameworks, particularly when viewed alongside the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC). Together, these policies risk creating statelessness for marginalized populations, including women and daily-wage labourers, who often lack the documentation required to prove citizenship. In regions like Assam, where migration has long been contentious, the CAA has amplified ethnic and cultural tensions, with indigenous communities expressing concerns over demographic shifts. This paper examines the sociological implications of the CAA, focusing on its redefinition of citizenship, potential for communal polarization, and its broader impact on India's pluralistic identity. It calls for inclusive policies that respect constitutional values, protect vulnerable groups, and foster dialogue to address the complexities of migration in a diverse society like India.

**Keywords:** Migration, Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Register of Citizens (NRC), Secularism, Marginalization

### Introduction

Migration has been a cornerstone of human civilization, shaping societies and cultures across history. In India, migration manifests in varied forms, influenced by an interplay of economic, political, social, and environmental factors. From internal migrations driven by rural-to-urban shifts to cross-border movements stemming from historical upheavals, migration has been a dynamic and transformative force. The country's migration patterns are deeply intertwined with its historical legacy, including colonial rule, partition, and socio-economic transitions. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), enacted in 2019, has introduced a significant dimension to the discourse on migration. This Act seeks to provide expedited citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, provided they entered India before December 31, 2014. While framed as a humanitarian gesture to protect religiously persecuted minorities in these neighboring countries, the exclusion of Muslim migrants from its provisions has sparked widespread debate. This exclusion has raised pressing sociological questions regarding identity, belonging, and exclusion in India's diverse socio-political landscape. The implications of the CAA extend beyond legal considerations, touching upon the broader themes of secularism, communal harmony, and the nature of Indian citizenship. The Act's interplay with the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC) has amplified concerns about marginalization and disenfranchisement among vulnerable populations. These developments have brought migration, citizenship, and identity into sharper focus, necessitating a critical examination of their sociological impact. This paper aims to unravel the complexities surrounding migration in India, examining the historical and contemporary patterns, analyzing the provisions and controversies of the CAA, and exploring its broader societal implications. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to an informed discourse on equitable and inclusive policies in a pluralistic society.

### Significance of the Paper

This paper is significant in understanding the sociological implications of migration policies like the CAA. By focusing on identity, belonging, and social cohesion, it sheds light on how such policies impact marginalized groups and the broader

pluralistic fabric of Indian society. It aims to contribute to academic and policy-level discussions on equitable citizenship frameworks and inclusive national narratives.

### Scope of the Paper

The scope of this paper includes an exploration of historical migration patterns, an in-depth analysis of the Citizenship Amendment Act, and its intersections with communal dynamics, gendered impacts, and socio-political tensions in India. While focusing on India, the paper also provides a framework for understanding migration issues in similar multicultural and developing contexts.

### Objectives of the Paper

- To analyse the historical and contemporary patterns of migration in India.
- To examine the provisions and implications of the Citizenship Amendment Act.
- To assess the sociological and communal impacts of the CAA on Indian society.
- To provide policy recommendations that promote inclusivity and social harmony.

### Migration in India: Patterns and Context

#### Historical Overview

India's migration history is deeply rooted in its colonial past and subsequent independence. The partition of 1947 remains one of the most significant events, leading to one of the largest displacements in human history. Millions of people were forced to migrate across the newly drawn borders of India, Pakistan, and later Bangladesh, reshaping the demographic, cultural, and political landscapes of the subcontinent. The post-partition period saw continued cross-border migration, often driven by religious persecution, economic disparities, and political instability in neighbouring countries.

Beyond the partition, colonial-era developments such as the construction of railways and industrialization also influenced migration patterns. The indentured labour system under British rule led to the migration of many Indians to foreign territories such as Fiji, Mauritius, and the Caribbean, forming significant diaspora communities. Post-independence, migration flows were shaped by regional conflicts and economic opportunities, creating diverse migration narratives.

#### Internal Migration

Within India, internal migration has been a defining feature of its socio-economic evolution. Rural-to-urban migration dominates internal flows as individuals and families move in search of better livelihood opportunities, education, and healthcare. Metropolitan cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru have emerged as major hubs attracting migrants from across the country.

Environmental factors also contribute significantly to internal migration. Floods, droughts, and other climate-induced disasters have displaced millions, particularly in vulnerable regions like Assam, Bengal, and Odisha. Seasonal migration, where individuals move temporarily to cities or agricultural zones for work, forms another important aspect of internal migration. These movements, while offering economic relief, often result in socio-economic vulnerabilities for the migrants, such as lack of access to basic services and social security.

#### Cross-Border Migration

India has a long history of cross-border migration due to its geographical proximity to politically and economically unstable neighbors. Migrants from Bangladesh form the largest segment of cross-border migrants to India. Many are driven by socio-political instability, economic hardships, and environmental crises such as river erosion in Bangladesh's deltaic regions. Refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan, often fleeing religious persecution, add complexity to the migration narrative. The Tibetan diaspora in India, established after the 1959 Chinese annexation of Tibet, highlights India's role as a refuge for persecuted communities. Additionally, Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka during the civil war and Rohingya refugees from Myanmar exemplify the multi-dimensional challenges of cross-border migration. These patterns are not only reflective of regional geopolitics but also influence India's internal policy frameworks and its approach to migration management. The socio-cultural impact of these migrations is profound, with migrant communities contributing to India's rich diversity while also posing challenges of integration and resource allocation. The issue of illegal migration to India from countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan is multifaceted, driven by a combination of economic, social, political, and humanitarian factors. Below are some of the key reasons:

##### 1. Economic Opportunities

- **Poverty and Unemployment:** Many individuals migrate in search of better economic prospects due to limited job opportunities in their home countries.
- **Wage Differences:** The perception of higher wages and improved living standards in India acts as a pull factor for economic migrants.

##### 2. Religious Persecution

- **Minority Rights Violations:** Religious minorities (such as Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, and Ahmadis) in Pakistan and Bangladesh often face persecution, driving them to seek refuge in India.

- **Ethnic and Sectarian Violence:** Afghanistan's Shia Hazara and other minorities have also faced violence, prompting migration to safer regions.

### 3. Political Instability

- **War and Conflict:** Afghanistan's decades-long conflict has forced many to flee their country. Political instability in Pakistan and Bangladesh also pushes people to look for stability.
- **Authoritarian Regimes:** Suppression of dissent and political opposition can lead to migration for freedom and safety.

### 4. Proximity and Porous Borders

- **Geographical Proximity:** Shared borders make India a practical destination for migration.
- **Porous Borders:** The Indo-Bangladesh and Indo-Pakistan borders are difficult to monitor entirely, enabling unauthorized crossings.

### 5. Family and Community Networks

- **Existing Diaspora:** Many migrants are drawn by the presence of established communities of their ethnicity or religion in India.
- **Cultural Affinities:** Shared languages, traditions, and cultural ties in border regions encourage migration.

### 6. Perceived Tolerance and Opportunities in India

- **Secular Democracy:** India's image as a diverse and democratic country attracts people escaping oppression.
- **Educational and Healthcare Access:** India offers relatively better access to education and healthcare compared to some neighbouring countries.

### Challenges Posed by Illegal Migration

1. **Strain on Resources:** The influx of migrants can create pressure on India's infrastructure, economy, and social services.
2. **Security Concerns:** Unregulated migration can pose security challenges, including concerns about smuggling or extremism.
3. **Social Tensions:** Migration can lead to ethnic and communal tensions in host communities.

### India's Approach

1. India has introduced laws like the **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019**, which aims to grant citizenship to persecuted minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. However, it excludes Muslim migrants, sparking debates about its inclusivity.
2. Border management has been strengthened, but addressing migration requires cooperation with neighbouring countries and international organizations to ensure humane treatment and sustainable solutions.

### The Citizenship Amendment Act: Provisions and Controversies

#### Key Provisions of the CAA

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) offers a pathway for expedited citizenship to six non-Muslim communities—Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians—from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. To qualify, these individuals must have entered India before December 31, 2014, and be able to substantiate claims of religious persecution. This provision is framed as a humanitarian gesture to offer refuge to those facing systemic oppression in their home countries.

#### Statistical Overview

- According to official government data, over 30,000 migrants, predominantly from Afghanistan and Pakistan, have applied for Indian citizenship under the CAA since its implementation.
- Data from the Ministry of Home Affairs indicates that Hindus and Sikhs form the largest share of applicants, with significant representation from regions like Punjab and Rajasthan.
- An estimated 4.4 million people in Assam alone faced uncertainty during the National Register of Citizens (NRC) process, further complicating the migration-citizenship nexus.

#### Exclusion of Muslims

The exclusion of Muslim migrants, including communities like the Rohingyas of Myanmar and Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims from Pakistan, has generated widespread criticism. This exclusion raises constitutional concerns as it contravenes India's secular ethos, which guarantees equality irrespective of religion. The Rohingya refugee population in India, numbering around 40,000, continues to face legal and societal challenges without access to the protections offered by the CAA.

#### Link to NRC

The potential combination of the CAA with the NRC has deepened anxieties among marginalized communities. While the CAA offers a safety net for certain groups excluded from the NRC, its religious criteria exclude Muslims, leaving them vulnerable to statelessness. For instance:

- Preliminary estimates suggest that around 1.9 million individuals in Assam were excluded from the NRC, many of whom belong to marginalized groups.

- A significant portion of these excluded individuals lacked adequate documentation, exacerbating fears of disenfranchisement and detention.

### **Public Protests and Controversies**

The enactment of the CAA sparked nationwide protests, with diverse groups highlighting its discriminatory nature. The Shaheen Bagh protest in Delhi became emblematic of the resistance, drawing attention to the fears and frustrations of affected communities. Protesters argued that the Act institutionalizes religious discrimination, undermining the secular foundation of Indian democracy.

### **Broader Implications**

The Act's selective inclusivity has introduced a hierarchy among migrants, legitimizing some while alienating others. These policies have amplified existing communal tensions, particularly in regions like Assam, where historical anxieties over migration and identity remain deeply entrenched. Furthermore, the exclusionary framework poses long-term challenges to social cohesion and the integration of marginalized groups.

### **Sociological Implications of the CAA**

#### **1. Identity and Belonging**

The CAA challenges traditional notions of Indian citizenship, which have historically been inclusive of diverse identities. By privileging certain religious groups, the Act redefines citizenship in exclusionary terms, fostering an "us versus them" narrative.

#### **2. Communal Polarization**

The exclusion of Muslims has deepened communal divisions, with the CAA perceived as institutionalizing religious discrimination. Protests against the Act, such as those at Shaheen Bagh, highlighted the anxieties of marginalized groups and underscored the growing communal fault lines.

#### **3. Impact on Migrants**

The Act creates a hierarchy of migrants, granting legitimacy to some while alienating others. Stateless individuals and undocumented migrants, particularly those excluded under the NRC framework, face heightened vulnerabilities.

#### **4. Challenges to Social Cohesion**

The Act disrupts the delicate balance of India's pluralistic society by prioritizing certain religious groups over others. In states like Assam, where migration is a sensitive issue, the CAA has reignited ethnic and cultural tensions, with indigenous groups fearing demographic changes.

#### **5. Gendered Dimensions**

Women, particularly from marginalized communities, are disproportionately affected by documentation requirements and exclusionary policies, further exacerbating their vulnerability.

### **Policy Recommendations**

#### **1. Revisiting the CAA**

- Amend the Act to include all persecuted groups, irrespective of religion, to uphold India's secular ethos.
- Ensure that citizenship policies are grounded in principles of equity and justice.

#### **2. Strengthening Refugee Protections**

- Develop a comprehensive refugee policy that aligns with international conventions and prioritizes humanitarian principles.
- Enhance support systems for refugees and stateless persons, including access to education, healthcare, and employment.

#### **3. Promoting Social Harmony**

- Foster dialogue between communities to address misconceptions and fears surrounding migration and citizenship.
- Implement awareness campaigns to promote inclusive narratives about India's pluralistic identity.

#### **4. Protecting Marginalized Groups**

- Ensure that documentation processes are transparent, accessible, and sensitive to the realities of marginalized populations.
- Address the specific vulnerabilities of women and other disadvantaged groups within the framework of citizenship policies.

### **Recommendations for Inclusivity and Social Harmony**

- **Educational Initiatives:** Introduce inclusive curricula in schools and colleges that highlight India's pluralistic heritage and the contributions of various communities to nation-building. Promote civic education to encourage tolerance and mutual respect among students from diverse backgrounds.
- **Community Engagement Programs:** Establish forums and platforms that enable regular inter-community dialogues, cultural exchanges, and collaborative initiatives. Local governments and NGOs can play a vital role in facilitating these interactions, reducing misconceptions, and fostering trust between communities.

- **Equitable Resource Allocation:** Ensure that migrant-hosting regions receive adequate funding and infrastructure support to prevent resource-based conflicts. This includes investments in housing, healthcare, education, and public services that cater to both migrants and local populations.
- **Strengthening Anti-Discrimination Policies:** Create legal mechanisms to identify and penalize acts of discrimination or hate speech against migrants and marginalized groups. Develop robust grievance redressal systems to ensure timely resolution of conflicts arising from prejudice or misunderstanding.
- **Media Responsibility and Positive Narratives:** Encourage responsible journalism that avoids sensationalizing migration issues. Media outlets should focus on sharing success stories of migrants contributing to society and addressing stereotypes, thereby fostering empathy and understanding.
- **Youth and Volunteer Programs:** Mobilize youth through volunteer programs aimed at social integration. Activities such as language classes, skill development workshops, and community service projects can bridge gaps between migrants and host communities.
- **Policy Advocacy for Inclusive Governance:** Encourage inclusive representation of diverse communities in local governance structures. This ensures that the voices and concerns of all groups are considered in policymaking, fostering a sense of belonging and participation.

### Measures to Curb Cross-Border Migration

- **Enhancing Border Security:** Strengthen border control mechanisms using advanced surveillance technologies, infrastructure, and personnel to prevent unauthorized migration.
- **Strengthening Bilateral Agreements:** Collaborate with neighbouring countries to address the root causes of migration, such as economic disparities and political instability, through diplomatic efforts and trade agreements.
- **Socio-Economic Development in Border Areas:** Invest in border regions to create employment opportunities, improve infrastructure, and reduce incentives for cross-border migration.
- **Crackdown on Human Trafficking Networks:** Implement stricter laws and international cooperation to dismantle smuggling and trafficking networks facilitating illegal migration.
- **Monitoring and Data Analysis:** Establish robust systems for monitoring migration patterns and sharing data with neighbouring countries to pre-empt large-scale movements.
- **International Collaboration:** Work with global organizations to address refugee crises and provide humanitarian aid to stabilize regions that are significant sources of migration.

### Conclusion

The Citizenship Amendment Act has brought the complex interplay of migration, identity, and citizenship to the forefront of India's socio-political discourse. In analysing its provisions, controversies, and sociological implications, this paper has highlighted the challenges posed by the Act's exclusionary framework. The objectives of the paper—to explore the historical context of migration, evaluate the Act's impact, and propose equitable solutions—underscore the need for policies that uphold India's constitutional values and pluralistic identity. Migration has historically enriched India's cultural and social fabric, offering a dynamic interplay of traditions, ideas, and identities. However, contemporary policies like the CAA risk fracturing this legacy by institutionalizing exclusions. To navigate these challenges, it is imperative to revisit and amend policies to reflect principles of justice, equity, and inclusion. Addressing vulnerabilities, fostering social cohesion, and promoting mutual respect among communities are vital to ensuring that India remains a land of refuge and opportunity for all. In conclusion, by reaffirming its commitment to secularism and pluralism, India can chart a path forward that honours its history of diversity and inclusivity while addressing contemporary concerns of migration and citizenship in a humane and equitable manner.

**Acknowledgment:** No

**Author's Contribution:** Dr. Dipankar Biswas: Data Collection, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

**Funding:** No

**Declaration/Consent for Publication:** Not Applicable

**Competing Interest:** No

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*The Social Science Review A Multidisciplinary Journal* remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published data, map and institutional affiliations.

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