



FROM CITIZENSHIP TO ECONOMIC INCLUSION: THE IMPACT OF CAA ON RAJBANGSHI AND MATUA COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was passed in 2019. Notified in 2024. It helps -Muslim immigrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who came to India before a certain deadline to get citizenship. The Act affects communities in West Bengal, especially the Matua and Rajbangshi communities. This paper looks at how the CAA changes citizenship, political loyalty and economic inclusion for these groups. The CAA was meant to be a citizenship law. It also affects economic goals, political identity and long-term inclusion. However these outcomes vary between the two communities due to their histories, documents, regional politics and development goals.

Keywords: Citizenship Amendment Act, Matua Community, Rajbangshi Community, Economic Inclusion

1. Introduction

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is a change in India's citizenship policy. It was made to help minorities from neighboring countries. The Act changes the Citizenship Act of 1955 to give citizenship to six non-Muslim minority communities who entered India from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan before December 31 2014.

In West Bengal many people moved from Bangladesh so the CAA is very important. The Matua community, who are mainly in North 24 Parganas and Nadia districts and the Rajbangshi community who're a large Scheduled Caste group in North Bengal are the most affected. Many Matuas see the CAA as an opportunity but some Rajbangshis are hesitant or opposed.

This paper looks at how the CAA affects these communities by looking at their history citizenship outcomes, economic inclusion and political impact.

Research Objectives

1. This study aims to understand how the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) shapes the way Rajbangshi and Matua communities think about citizenship.
2. It also looks at the socio-economic consequences of the CAA, especially in relation to access to welfare schemes, jobs, and mobility.
3. Another focus is how citizenship status plays out in everyday life, particularly in terms of inclusion and exclusion from economic opportunities.
4. The research further examines the social and political responses of both communities toward the CAA.
5. It seeks to understand how identity, migration history, and long-term marginalization influence their experiences of citizenship.
6. Finally, it evaluates whether the CAA improves long-term economic security or ends up reinforcing existing inequalities.

Research Questions

1. How does the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) influence the socio-economic inclusion of Rajbangshi and Matua communities in India?
2. How do Rajbangshi and Matua communities understand citizenship in the context of the CAA?
3. What changes has the CAA brought to their access to jobs, opportunities, and welfare benefits?
4. In what ways does legal citizenship status shape livelihood security and social mobility?
5. How do migration histories and experiences of marginalization affect their present-day citizenship situation?
6. What kinds of social and political responses have emerged from these communities regarding the CAA?
7. Does the CAA reduce exclusion, or does it reinforce existing structural inequalities?

Review of Literature

Citizenship in India has developed through a long historical process shaped by colonial rule, the Partition, and post-independence nation-building. Scholars like B.S. Chimni (2000) point out that citizenship in South Asia is closely tied to state security concerns and often involves exclusion, especially in border regions.

The Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) has been widely discussed in academic circles. Critics argue that it introduces religion-based criteria into citizenship law, raising concerns about its compatibility with India's secular constitutional framework (Jayal, 2019). Supporters, however, see it as a humanitarian effort to support persecuted minorities from neighboring countries.

Research on borderland and marginalized communities, such as the Rajbangshi population in North Bengal and Assam, highlights persistent challenges like identity uncertainty, land insecurity, and limited socio-economic access. In many cases, inconsistent classification in official records has contributed to unclear citizenship status and reduced access to state support.

The Matua community in West Bengal has been strongly shaped by Partition-era displacement from what is now Bangladesh. Their identity is closely linked to refugee history, where recognition of citizenship becomes central to accessing welfare schemes, education, and employment opportunities.

According to scholars like Samaddar (1999), citizenship in such border regions is not just a legal category but something experienced in everyday life, shaped by migration histories, administrative practices, and political narratives. It can therefore act as both a source of inclusion and exclusion.

More recent studies on policies like the NRC and CAA suggest that documentation-heavy processes can disproportionately affect rural and migrant communities, limiting their access to welfare systems and formal employment. However, there is still limited comparative research specifically focusing on how the CAA impacts the socio-economic conditions of Rajbangshi and Matua communities. This gap highlights the need for further detailed sociological investigation into their lived experiences.

2. Background: Citizenship Act and the CAA

2.1 Citizenship Act 1955: A Brief Overview

The Citizenship Act of India 1955 explains how to get, give up and lose citizenship. Before the CAA citizenship could be acquired by birth, descent, registration or naturalization.

Many refugees and migrants from Bangladesh those who fled during the partition had trouble getting citizenship due to lack of documents.

2.2 Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019

The CAA provides a fast-track path to citizenship for migrants from three neighboring countries belonging to six specified religious minority categories. Applicants must prove their identity and presence in their place of origin which's a barrier for many refugees.

The CAA has sparked debates over secularism, constitutional equality and demographic consequences.

3. The Matua community and the CAA

3.1 Who are the Matuas?

The Matua community consists of Bengali Hindus who migrated to India from East Bengal, Bangladesh. They are a Scheduled Caste group in West Bengal and an important vote bank.

Many Matuas arrived without documentation so citizenship was a demand. Before the CAA many had voter ID cards Aadhaar cards and other Indian identity cards but not valid citizenship certificates.

3.2 Initial reception and optimism

After the CAA was notified many Matuas registered and lined up to obtain citizenship. Community leaders and politicians said the CAA would ensure citizenship and protect Matuas from future scrutiny.

Union Minister Shantanu Thakur and Union Home Minister Amit Shah promised that the Matua community would receive citizenship under the law.

3.3 Challenges in Implementation

Matuas faced bureaucratic hurdles especially in providing proof of residency from Bangladesh. The All India Matua Mahasangh advised community members to delay applications until procedural clarity is obtained.

3.4 Eligibility expanded through policy

In 2025 the central government increased CAA relief to include minority migrants arriving before December 31 2024. This change has potentially broadened access and reshaped incentives.

4. The Rajbangshi. The CAA

4.1 Who are the Rajbangshi?

The Rajbangshi community is a Scheduled Caste group primarily in North Bengal. They have roots in the region, which distinguishes their experiences from refugee-descended groups like the Matuas.

4.2 Counter-reaction to the CAA

The Rajbangshi community has displayed reactions with some expressing discontent and opposition. They argued that the law focuses on migrants from Bangladesh providing few benefits for the indigenous population.

Some Rajbangshi leaders spoke out in favor of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) against the CAA arguing that the NRC would solidify the citizenship of the population and exclude undocumented immigrants.

4.3 Political Dimensions of Rajbangshi Opposition

Discontent among the Rajbangshis was exacerbated by calculations in North Bengal, where identity and land claims intersected with economic competition.

5. Citizenship, Identity and Economic Inclusion

5.1 Legal Citizenship as Economic Security

For both communities legal citizenship under the CAA was conceived not as status but as economic security. Citizenship facilitates access to welfare schemes, subsidized services and legal protections.

However each community's experience was different due to documentation challenges and different interpretations of the laws benefits.

5.2 Economic aspirations within community cohesion

For the Matua community the acquisition of citizenship is closely linked to hopes for socio- development. Many hope that formal citizenship will directly improve access to education, employment opportunities and social benefits.

For the Rajbangshis economic aspirations remain linked to demands for tribal recognition, affirmative action and indigenous rights.

6. Political and Social Impacts

6.1 Electoral Dynamics

The perceived benefits of the CAA for the Matua community have influenced calculations in West Bengal elections.

The different responses of Rajbangshi voters have complicated electoral strategies.

6.2 Community Divisions and Solidarity

The contrasting experiences of the Rajbangshi and Matua communities show how a reform can simultaneously mobilize support within one group and create resistance in another.

7. Criticism and Controversy

7.1 Legal and Constitutional Criticism

Critics argue that the religion-based criteria of the CAA challenge India's commitment to equality and risk deepening communal divisions.

7.2 Grassroots Administrative Concerns

Bureaucratic complexities pose obstacles for many applicants, especially those, without formal records.

7.3 Wider Social Tensions

In areas where people're not sure who they are, like North Bengal changes to the Citizenship Act have sometimes made communities more divided affecting how well they get along.

8. Conclusion

The Citizenship Amendment Act has had an impact on the economy, social identity and politics for the Rajbangshi and Matua communities. For the Matuas the Act has helped them get protection and might improve their lives but there are still problems to solve. For the Rajbangshi the law has hurt their economy. Shown that there are unfair systems and competitions for identity.

The experience with the Citizenship Act shows that laws about who's a citizen are connected to history, economy and society. Just getting citizenship is not enough; people also need help with documents, services and jobs.

Policymakers must make sure citizenship laws work with plans to help all communities whether they moved there or were born there have jobs and services.

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