

Use of Twitter as a Tool for Digital Activism

A Study on the Citizen Amendment Act, 2020 in reference to Assam

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ABSTRACT

The Anti-CAA protest in Assam has gained immense support whereas social media has been playing a significant role in organising public mass protest against the Bill. In the course event, central government even called for the internet ban to curb the protest. The study investigates the role of twitter in digital activism with reference to Citizen Amendment Act and how political figures use the medium twitter to further facilitate a digital discourse in support and against the act. Citizen Amendment Act that is passed in January,2020 proposes to give citizenship to people based on religious identity. The research analyses the tweets that were trending on twitter during the CAA protest. The media, students and intelligentsia of Assam have been playing a vital role in support of social movements in different periods of history in Assam. The advent of digital media has provided a new dimension to protest movement and people's participation to issue based politics. The study attempts to find out how twitter is used as a tool for alternative communication by the CAA activist and political figures. The study analyses the political agenda followed from the contrasting narratives of a region and intent of the Government.

Keyword: *Citizen Amendment Act 2020, Social Media and Activism, Digital Activism, Hashtag Activism, Twitter Activism, Political Communication*

Introduction

The struggle for regional autonomy is parallel to nationality or national identity in India which has been exacerbated during post-colonial era. Most of the south Asian countries are plagued by inter-state and intra-state tensions. The region, Assam has been the sources of multiple ascriptive identity that includes culture and ethnicity, dialectal practices like language, faith based practices, and many other fanciful inspirations. There are sources that can stimulate the notional inspirations, thus, provide the array of possible mobilizations of group of activist and protesters who no longer hesitate to assert their aspirations for socio-economic security, e.g. job, decent living, good education, good medical facilities and their land rights etc. Moreover, each group with ascriptive identity came out with their specific experience, avow different aspirations for equality, autonomy and self-respect which is built from the experiences of existence on a land accompanied by deprivation, inferior position, marginality and disgrace from real or perceived majoritarian extravagances. The political agenda against the illegal immigration has been a major issue in the Northeast. For decades the region has witnessed many agitations against illegal immigrants now.

The Political Agenda behind CAA Movement

The Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 was introduced on 19th July, 2016 in the Indian Parliament which proposes to amend the Citizenship Act of 1955. The Citizenship Amendment ACT while allows illegal immigrants belonging to religious communities especially Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian from neighboring countries (in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh and enter India on or before December 31, 2014) are allowed to stay in India without being imprisoned or deported, it neither extends to illegal Muslim migrants nor embraces other minority communities such as Jews, Bahais etc. In the midst of skirmishes between anti and pro citizens and elite of the country, the Bill was passed by the Parliament of India on 11th December, 2019.

The citizenship bill has tried to redefine the illegal immigrant while undermined the effects of the Assam Accord that was signed by the then Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi in 1985. However, the Assam Accord didn't discriminate on the basis of religion and it ended the 6-years long agitation against illegal immigration in the state of Assam.

The Clause 6 of the Assam Accord stresses on the importance of constitutional safeguard to indigenous citizens of Assam. However, the Clause 6 of the Accord was never executed by any of the party government reign the country (Ghoshal, 2011). Hence, the issue of illegal immigrants has been a political agenda of contesting parties during every election. The implementation of the “constitutional protection to indigenous people of Assam” is not parallel to “no voting rights” to illegal immigrants who continued to influx in Assam even after 1971 thus, won’t restrict the inflow of illegal immigrants to Assam. Since the signing of the Assam Accord, no political parties whether the Congress, BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and even the regional party, AGP (Assam Gana Parisad) that formed governments in Assam were keen about implementing a single clause of Assam Accord. Every political party reaped their power hunger from vote banks of illegal immigrants.

However, the Assam Accord placed the cut off year at 1971 in order to stop the inflow of immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh, thus, contributed to tapering the anger against the immigrants to some extent. Then, CAA led to resurrect the twin emotion for a vicious “anti-foreigner” campaign and safeguard the land and people of Assam. The act suggests the eligibility of people belonging to religious community namely Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Parsi and Christians from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh to apply for Indian nationality by means of naturalization in 7 years against the earlier rule that binds 12 years (Borah, 2019). They are the people belonging to minority communities who either passed into India without legal travel documents or with an expired visa.

Digital Activism and Social Media

The permeating nature of digital mobile devices and easy access to online social media platforms support activist to share content and express their experience and concerns. The communication in digital media facilitates the large crowds to work together with no need for leaders and an organization for collective action. With growth of internet and mobile in India, digital activism spread in developing nations like India. India is the second-biggest country which has crossed over 500 million smartphone users in January, 2020 (Kantar IMRB Report, 2019). The internet users have enlisted a yearly development of 18% in 2018 in India and counted to cross 630 million before the finish of 2020 (Kantar IMRB Report, 2019). Digital activism not only provides a

platform to activists to voice their opinions but also empower the political groups to propagate the political campaigns to masses efficiently than ever before.

Twitter allows quick exchange of information, simultaneously, made individuals share common views and political stand. Through the use Twitter hashtags, many social movements like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter become trending issues in society. Online activism through twitter has been creating awareness and helps to connect people all over the world to support the issue.

In India, the tools of digital activism were used during movement of Anna Hazare, when the civil society pursues to challenge the secrecy of the government. Digital activism turned into a social tool for mass dissent during Nirbhaya case, where a young girl was raped and killed. Digital activism turned into a political tool in the possession of Arvind Kejriwal, presently Delhi Chief Minister, who used the affordance of social media tools to control public dissent. Further, digital tools with various social media affordances are being used by Narendra Modi during his political rallies and campaigns to win Lok Sabha elections in 2014 and 2019. Prime Minister Modi has joined Twitter in 2019 and become the most followed politician after previous US President Barack Obama and current US President Donald Trump.

On the other hand, hashtag activism refers to the use of hashtags in Twitter for digital activism. Hashtag has been powerful social media tool that can be used at ease without restriction. It represents and establishes equal participation of all in online world. Hashtag refers to the act of showing support for a cause on the social media platform. The hashtag or symbol “#” becomes an integral part of social media that signifies broad themes. Hashtag is first initiated in twitter by user to tag post of specific cluster of people, theme. It is an user generated practice that categories debate and discussion and trending topic in Twitter (Sandra et al, 2020). It is also used on Twitter or any other social media platform to plan protests, boycotts, share stories, discussions, political topics and ultimately drive the social change.

Terming it the progressive right wing agenda, BJP has forced the illegal bill on the nation which led to stir turmoil in Assam and the whole of India. By launching a widespread protest across the state, the student activists resurrect Assam Movement in a new form. Prevalence of digital media has made the protests spread to the online world. Unlike the Assam movement when the print media played a role in mobilizing protests, the spontaneous digital protests on social medium of

the Anti CAA agitation has mobilized and fragmented the support for and against the ACT and build a discourse around the CAA. Social media acts to connect the protesters and activist emotionally and help to form political communities on issues relating to the ACT.

The state of Assam has been erupting in protest. The university students has been resisting the bill since 2016. Assam has been trying to convince the mainland India that a dangerous piece of legislation is coming, before the bill becomes the act. The activism of public at the state level has been interspersed to witness a rising consciousness at national level against CAA.

The wake of CAA Protest is followed by lifting of the internet ban by the Assam Government for 10 days (PTI, 2019) . Five persons lost their lives in the violence that broke out in the state due to the Citizen Amendment protest. Indefinite Curfews were imposed on several towns and cities including Guwahati, the epicenter of the protest, besides Dibrugarh, Tezpur and Dhekiajuli. Night curfews was also imposed in districts like Jorhat, Golaghat, Tinsukia and Charaideo.

The Study Pursuits and Research Methods

The study is mainly descriptive explanatory. Both primary as well as secondary sources have been used to analyze the event. Primary data of tweets relating to the CAA protest in Assam is studied. A semantic and thematic analysis of the tweets in terms of word frequency (how regularly the word appears in tweets), keywords and hashtags around the agenda and word range (series of words and variety of related words) was carried out to understand the recurring words that indicate apprehensions of the protesters and political leaders towards the CAA protest. At the same time, the analysis of the tweets would also show the character and split in text and its disposition towards the issue along with the overall impact.

Semantic Analysis of Twitter offers a fast and effective way to monitor the political stands of the public and their opinions on issues.

On the other hand, thematic analysis method is used for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing and reporting themes found within a data set while closely examining the shared themes such as subject area, notion and how the meaning in the data set is repeatedly outlined (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is used to analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of concepts, terms and make inferences about the messages of awareness.

Twitter data has been used for the research purpose with the use of Twitter API. A total of 28346 tweets having the keywords “caa” and “cab” are collected out of which a considerable number are the retweets.

A freeware text analysis toolkit is used to find the frequency of words appearing in the data sample. The results are found with the use of word frequencies, keyword search functions in the software that help to separate the tweets and study it more precisely.

First week of the digital protests in twitter in hashtags that started from 09 December, 2019 (when the CAB bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha) till 16 December, 2019 was chosen as the reference period for the sample of data. This was the best period to record the most genuine and initial reactions of the people. In between, the Bill was introduced and passed in the Parliament, and the Act came out. The public were highly active during that time. The political participation of the political leaders, tweets of political leaders: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Rahul Gandhi, Health and Finance Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Minister of Assam Sarbananda Sonowal and twitter handles of BJP and opposition parties like Congress form the basis for analysis from December 1, 2019 to April 30, 2020.

Objectives of the study

- To assess the use of twitter as a tool for mobilizing political support for CAA by the political leaders
- To assess the usefulness of twitter as an alternative tool for communication during anti CAA protest movement

Twitter as a Tool for Digital Activism

The findings show how social users, i.e. activists, students, journalist participate in hashtag activism on twitter through discussing their views on the issue of Citizen Amendment Act.

Both political parties and their opposition, BJP and Congress use Twitter, but BJP is more successful in using it more effectively to propagate their point of view behind the Act. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah are seen to be proactive on Twitter in

comparison to the opposition parties i.e. President of the Congress Party Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in persuading people about the intentions of the government behind the Act.

Most of the tweets of political figures are clarifications or assurance by the BJP leaders that there is no threat to the citizenship of the Indian Muslims.

The analysis was dissipated with the words like protests, agitation, religion, NRC, communal, secular, constitution, Muslim and so on. The findings showed that quite a good number of tweets are from political leaders (Narendra Modi, Amit Shah and Rahul Gandhi, Himanta Biswa Sarma, Sarbananda Sonowal), political organizations like the ruling party (BJP) and the opposition party (Congress) along with normal twitter activists. This manifests the power of digital platforms like twitter that can run, manage and counter political campaigns and help to form and counter public opinion.

Among all, Amit Shah is the most active leader on Twitter followed by Narendra Modi. Amit Shah tweets 17 times during the period. Each tweet has a video link that shows Amit Shah communicating with people about the pointless uproar against the Act. Himanta Biswa Sarma tweets 12 times and Sarbananda Sonowal tweets 5 times. On the other hand, Rahul Gandhi tweets only once about CAA and there are no tweets from Sonia Gandhi or Priyanka Gandhi. However, both the parties' twitter handles are active during the period. Some examples of the tweets are -

“I want to tell the 130 crore people of India with full responsibility that CAA will not affect any citizen of India in any way: PM Modi #PMInLokSabhaities”

"Why did a secular and visionary leader like Nehru use the term 'religious minorities' and not all minorities" @BJP4India

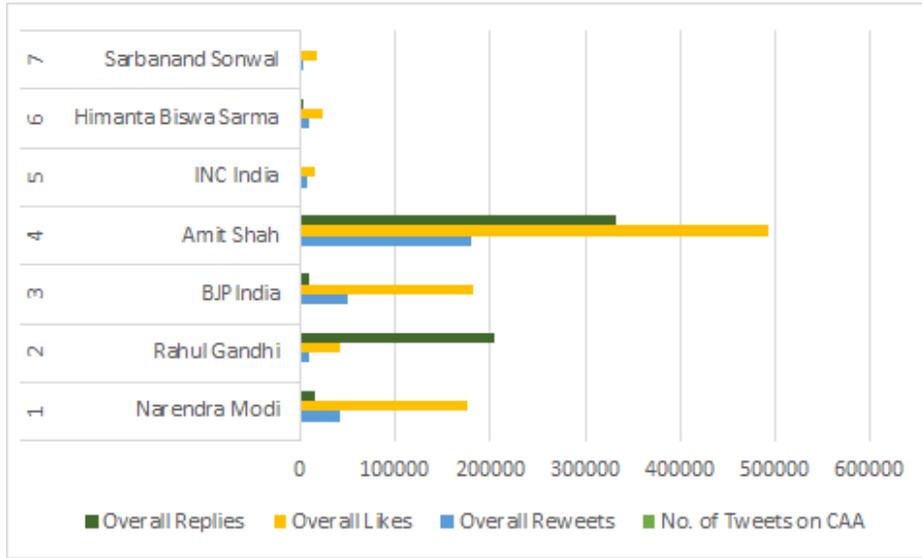
“I have already publicly requested Advisor of AASU Sri Samujjal Bhattacharya to join us for a debate in Srimanta Sankardebava Kalakhetra on CAA, NRC and on the factual details of assurances given by Hon'ble Home Minister Amit Shah during his discussion with AASU leadership.” @himantabiswa

“Across India, many young men & women have been wounded & even killed while protesting against the CAA. I urge our Congress party workers to meet the victim’s families & provide them with all possible assistance. On Saturday I met the families of 2 young martyrs in Assam.”
@RahulGandhi.

Table 1. Tweets by political leaders on CAA (From December 1, 2019 to April 30, 2020)

S.No	Username	No. of Tweets on CAA	Overall Retweets	Overall Likes	Overall Replies
1	Narendra Modi	4	41.8 k	175.4 k	14.7 k
2	Rahul Gandhi	1	9.7 k	41.5 k	203.9 k
3	BJPIndia	95	49.9 k	182.9 k	10.2 k
4	Amit Shah	17	180.9 k	492.0 k	331.7 k
5	INC India	2	6.77 k	15.46 k	1.551k
6	Himanta Biswa Sarma	12	9.2 k	23.5 k	2.66 k
7	Sarbanand Sonowal	5	4.3 k	17.4 k	.789 k

Table 1.1 : Graphical representation of Tweets by political leaders



The motive of the tweets of the BJP are to convince the people that CAA and NRC will not affect the present citizenship status of a person belonging to any religion and undoing of the injustice that has been done on Hindu minorities in three neighboring countries. They want to justify their stand by saying that CAA is not a new event instead CAA has been the key agenda in party manifesto. BJP has brought Nehru, the first prime minister of India into the scene saying Nehru the architect of India did not make any arrangement of giving protection to religious minorities prosecuted during post partition, post-independence years in India. BJP proclaims it to be their moral duty and the responsibility to undo the injustice met by religious minorities in neighboring countries of India. The party could not justify their selective stand for extending shelter to prosecuted religious minorities that excludes Muslims. The BJP leaders of Assam, Chief minister Sarbanada Sonowal and Education and Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma strained a lot to convince the people of Assam that no new outsiders/foreigners influx to Assam will be encouraged by the Act.

On the other hand, the Congress and other leaders against CAA carry dissent against the stand of government saying that CAA is unconstitutional and unjust to the Muslim minorities in India. The twitter is used by the people of Assam for protest against CAA. Most of tweets say that the CAA will destroy the indigenous culture of Assam. The Assamese language will be at stake. It is also a violation of the Assam Accord.

The collection of around 28346 tweets in a week itself is an evident proof of people's interest on the issue of CAA. People were highly mobilized and divided on their stand on CAA.

Words that appeared frequently for at least 100 times in tweets are also studied. Words with topmost share are – Amendment (25121), Citizenship Amendment Bill (15330), Citizenship (19572), Assam (11540), (6072) BJP, Muslims (5861), NRC (5750), Narendra Modi (4657), Amit Shah (4024), Hindu (3580), Constitution (2000), Religion(1779), Immigrants(1230), Violence(1228), INCIndia(1156), Religious(1144), Assam Want Answers (1122), Unconstitutional(1106).

Though the higher frequency of the first three words i.e., ‘amendment’, ‘citizenship amendment bill’ and ‘citizenship’ are quite obvious owing to the protest being about the Citizenship Amendment Bill, but the unusually high occurrence of words like ‘Assam’, ‘BJP’, ‘CabProtest’, ‘Muslim’, clearly show the priority of words towards the protests that has political and religious tone. High frequency of words to Assam indicates that maximum protests on twitter came from the region of Assam during that period. Domination of words like ‘BJP’, ‘Muslim’ and ‘NRC’ indicates a discourse based on religion and the ruling party’s role in it. The names of political leaders like Narendra Modi, Amit Shah, Rahul Gandhi and regional political leaders of Assam like Himanta Biswa Sarma and Sarbananda Sonowal demonstrate the inevitability of the political discourse formed in and around Assam taking to CAA.

Table 2. Words with highest frequency

Rank	Frequency of Word	Word
1	25121	amendment
2	19572	citizenship
3	15330	citizenshipammendmentbill
4	11540	assam

5	9935	cabprotest
6	6094	cabbill
7	6072	bjp
8	5861	muslims
9	5750	nrc
10	5340	protest
11	4657	narendramodi
12	4024	amitshah
13	3960	protest
14	3580	hindu
15	3179	pakistan
16	2706	cabpassed
17	2507	government
18	2448	cabprotests
19	2339	congress
20	2283	minorities
21	2267	guwahati
22	2260	protesting

Phrases or groups of words relating to 'CAA' appear frequently among the tweets are studied. The meaning of the word is understood by employing it in relationship with another word which helps to understand the situation and attitude of the people tweets. The study of such groups of words in

relation to the word ‘Caa’ build the agenda and gave the direction of the tweets. Two subsequent words in the left and right of the word “Caa” demonstrate interesting associations. Words like protests (27), nrc (28), discriminatory (18), assam (18) are followed by ‘Caa’. It is also interesting to see the group of words in the tweets of other keywords that have maximum frequency in the word list. The high-intensity words that go together with “cab” are religion basis (254), religion based (246), India (58), persecuted (48), islam (46), discrimination (43), culture (24) and Nationalism (18). It shows how the discourse around ‘Caa’ is based on religion-based discrimination. The words in relation to the constitution are India (493), redundant (56), religion (50), government (48) democracy (46), protect (36), human (26), violating (20) and spirit (16). It reveals the usages of words pointing towards the threat of the constitution of India. ‘Muslim’ shows words like nation (108), democratic (62), direct (46), parties (46), assault (44), liberal (29), Punjab (28), state (26). For ‘secular’ the high intensity words used with it are india (523), character(72), democratic(62), fabric (48), reject (46), onslaught (44), secular (34), democracy (20), ideology(16), hypocrite(14), pseudo(12)

The repeated occurrence of “protests” is found in all the tweet collections. It coexists with words like “assam”, “muslim”, “bjp” “amendment” and “religion”, Other groups of words too have an association with words like assam, ‘nrc’, ‘protests’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘culture’ etc. This represents the systematic association of words like religion, secular in the twitter discourse on the citizenship amendment bill.

Table 3. Tweet samples in support of CAA

We Indians stand shoulder to shoulder with @narendramodi ji @AmitShah ji and @BJP4India for #CAB2019 CONGRATULATIONS to the immigrants who came To India to leave a fearless and peaceful life. Jai Ho.

Above statement of tweet says how some students from reputed institutions like IIT support Citizenship Amendment Bill even if there is large scale protest in the campus against the bill.

@AmitShah, “As the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019 passes in the Parliament, the dreams of crores of deprived & victimized people has come true.”

@chetan_bhagat “Sir don't tell these people..they only know one thing..that is nothing.. People should read the #CAB sensibly but they don't..and then they protest without any logic.. The govt must make some strong decisions for the country and they are.”

@narendramodi “CAA manifests India’s ethos of harmony and compassion. Sadly, the vested interest groups opposing the Act are now protesting against India’s Parliament.”

Dear #AMU #Jamia students & faculty .salute to your spirit fight against #CAB

@narendramodi “I want to assure my brothers and sisters of Assam that they have nothing to worry after the passing of #CAB.”

@narendramodi “Lies and more lies- this is what the Congress and its allies are spreading on CAB. The CAB affects no citizen of India. In line with our ethos of assimilation and compassion, it ensures a better life for persecuted minorities from other nations.”

Table 3.2. Tweet samples against CAA

“Citizenship Amendment Act Protests Updates: UNHRC says CAA is 'fundamentally discriminatory', global body to analyze possible consequences of law” – First post

Those who created a state based on religion, ignoring the forewarnings of people like Savarkar, left Hindu refugees...RT @OpIndia_com: Those who created a state based on religion, ignoring the forewarnings of people like Savarkar.

Assam News Citizenship (Amendment) Bill: Thousands Defy Curfew In Guwahati As Assam Rages Over Citizenship Bill @nsui @INCAssam@ndtvindia It's like saying: we will put you in prison but we will not take away your rights. You will continue enjoying the luxury of rights but can't come out of jail. We will decide whether your demands can be met.

RT @Krishn_: Asking the judiciary to defend the Constitution & protect India's soul, @hangs your head in shame, those parliamentarians who support this atrocious laws. #CABProtest #NoMoreBJP #NoCAB @himantabiswa @narendramodi @AmitShah WAKE UP ALREADY! Being delusional to such an extent is plain stupid.

Communal Citizenship Amendment Bill! Wanting to study and save. Says 'unconstitutional' #CAB won't be implemented in Kerala.

The sample of tweets in the above support the cause of CAA and government's claims of giving justice to the persecuted people of non-Muslim religious background on the grounds of atrocities done due to partition. Tweets of some known celebrities like Chetan Bhagat apart from Premier Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah show solidarity to pro CAA stand. However, on the list of Tweets against CAA, words such as 'protests', 'unconstitutional', 'caa is discriminatory', 'religion amounts to the rejection of the Constitution', 'Muslim, I'm feeling alienated', 'NRC against the Secular character', 'NRC' 'Fascism is ruling at the Centre'. The contrasting use of words has helped to distinguish between the CAA supporters and CAA opposers.

On the other hand, hashtags help in combining the tweets on a particular topic and translate it to a constructive dialogue. Many popular hashtags campaigns are started either to counter or garner support for CAA. All eight post in the above repeatedly used hashtags, as a reference point to citizenship amendment bill (CAB) .

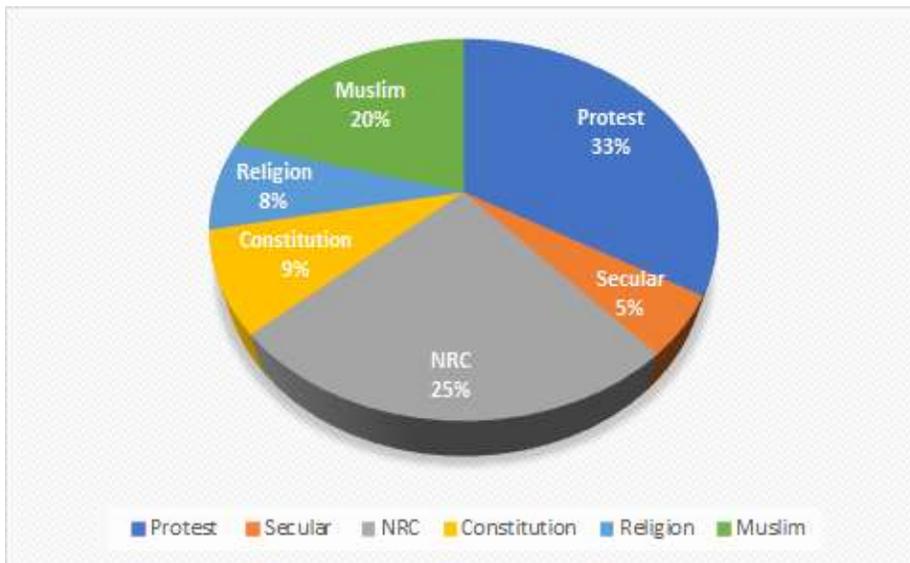
Most hashtags are used an anti CAA approach to show the commitment of activist towards the cause. This shows the public anger against the ruling party BJP who hurriedly brought the bill in the parliament. The BJP, in opposition to public move, brings the hashtag campaign on Twitter in the name of the #indiasupportscaa. Hence, most incongruously, an anti-CAA campaign with the hashtag #indiadoesnotsupportscaa is launched at the same time which got tremendous strength online. Narendra Modi government's #indiasupportscaa campaign collects 4.14 lakhs tweets and its opposing campaign #indiadoesnotsupportcaa gather 4.44 lakhs tweets. Hence, the tool hashtags are used to run campaigns in support and against CAA. During CAA agitation, most trending nine top hashtags are labeled below in Table 4.

Table 4: Top Trending hashtags

Trending Hashtags during the period of study.	
1.	#cabprotest
2.	#citizenshipamendmentbill
3.	#cabpassed

4. #indiarejectscab
5. #assamwantsanswers
6. #indiasupportscaa
7. #indiadoesnotsupportscaaa
8. #indiarejectstsnrc
9. #indiaagainstcab

Table 5: Top frequency of keywords.



Out of total 28346 sampled retweets, 5669 (20%) tweets belong to protests, 4212 (14.86 %) to nrc, 1456 (5.17 %) to constitution, 1303 (4.60%) to religion, 3500 (12.35%) to muslim, 858 (3.03%) to secular.

Out of 100 statements, twenty-five had the mention of “protests” as a keyword e.g. “CABProtests spill over to #Meghalaya”, “Indefinite curfew imposed in Meghalaya”, “CABProtests #CAB2019 “Cheap gimmick to divert from the economic slump.”

“Northeast troubles are sponsored by @INCIndia. #CAB2019 #”

“CABProtests since morning. Is media hiding the news related to #”,

“CABProtests #RahulGandhi #Amit_Shah_is_New_Jinnah #CABProtest,” Says 'unconstitutional' #CAB won't be implemented in Kerala, “#caaprotestsCitizenshipAmendmentBill has been slammed by rights groups and opposition.

Eleven statements are spurred by nationalistic feeling which are in support of the caa with the keywords like ‘democracy’ and ‘commitment’.

“@tavleen_singh It's a fashion nowadays for seditious elements to regularize themselves under the facade of dissidence and foe. Long live Democracy”,

“Govt is fully committed and accomplishes each and every election manifestos with full dedication. It was never before.. Kudos to @narendramodi & @AmitShah for the bill”,

“Sorry #RohitSharma, I can't see your batting because last night my favorite batsman is #AmitShah #PoliticsLive #CricketLive #CAB2019 “.

Some of the tweets collected are the statements of the political leaders that represent the issue of citizenship amendment bill which shows its presence in 14 tweets.

Some parties are spreading rumors and inciting violence for their interest”

@RahulGandhi, “@narendramodi should resign as he is supporting #CAB” ;@AmitShah, “Bro as we have the majority, I will be the PM then” ; @RahulGandhi, “Modiji is much better”. Important references like ‘NRC’, ‘citizenship’ and ‘religion’ are also written in the text of the sample tweets.

“NRC actually weaponizes the State and law enforcement agencies again”. @RahulGandhi.

“The government's obstinacy in going ahead with citizenship bill is a sad day for Indian democracy because of the legislation that challenges its founding principles of equality and secularism is allowed to be passed. All faith in the Supreme Court now #CABProtest”.

In the tweet sample below, the BJP Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma tweets an image where a crowd at an anti-CAA rally is compared with a photo taken at a pro-CAA rally in Dhemaji district of Assam. The picture displays the massive protest against CAA which led to the BJP Minister countering with a pro-CAA rally. Political leaders have extensively used Twitter to undermine the mass protest going on against CAA in Assam. ‘আমাক ব্রজনিবাদ নহয়, বিকাশৰহে নিবাদ লাগে। নাগৰিকত্ব সংশোধনী বিধেয়ক জাতিৰ শত্ৰু নহয়। ই আমাক সুৰক্ষিতহে কৰিব’ – the statement has tweeted by Himanta Biswa Sharma, one of the strong political leaders of

Bharatiya Janata Party from Assam. Himanta Biswa Sharma has assured the people of Assam that the implementation of CAA would solve the burning issue of immigrant in Assam perpetually.



On the other hand, Lurinjyoti Googi , the general secretary of AASU tweets the picture of the mass rally organized by All Assam Students Union to protest against the Citizen Amendment Bill. People of Assam have been strongly opposing Citizenship Amendment Act saying that there is a hidden agenda of ruling government to implement the act in Assam.



Akhil Gogoi, an activist from Assam has remarked, ‘কা আমি নামিনো। নাগৰিকত্ব সংশোধনী বিধেয়ক জাতিৰ শত্ৰু। ই আমাক সুৰক্ষিত নকৰে, ই বিজেপিৰ এক কূটনীতি।’

There are slogans used by the activists during the CAA protest to gather public awareness on CAA and instill negative inferences on the people of Assam. Some slogans are stood out and hashtag activism facilitates an anti CAA discourse by tweeting the slogan.

The slogan like ‘CAA Aami Namanu’ means ‘We don’t accept CAA’ has been reflective of the mood of the Assamese people; ‘**Tumi Jodi Axomiya, Ulaai Aaha, Ulaai Aaha**’ (If you are an Assamese, come out), these slogan are tweeted and retweeted, further written in the traditional Assamese gamusa when people take the movement against CAA to the streets.

‘Joi Aai Axom’, (Hail Mother Assam), a slogan symbolic to Assam Movement represents the insignia of AASU has been further popularized by twitter to become an everyday discourse of supporters of anti CAA movement. Aai is a term used across Assam to address their mothers, irrespective of personal beliefs, religious affiliations or ethnic identity.

Although there are different opinions in Assamese society regarding the markers of identity, then anti CAA protest witnesses a revival of past where Assamese language came to be seen as the fortifying force of the different cultures and ethnicity. In the shouts and slogan, in dress and expressions, in writings, in blood and voice, there is the consciousness for the greater Assamese community which further bears the mark of tradition and culture of Assam.

Discussion

Migration in Assam has its own history. The influx of illegal migration to Assam was the core issue behind the Assam student movement during 1979- 85. Assam Accord, 1985 came out as an outcome of the student movement that proposed to solve the issues related to ethnic and language identity of Assamese people.

The Assam movement from 1979 to 1985 laid the foundation for the updated National Register of Citizens (NRC). As per the provisions of the accord, illegal immigrants should be detected and deported from India. Thus, National Register of Citizens (1951, 1971), regional elections and most

importantly Assam Movement and Assam Agreement (1979-85) are assumed to be the footsteps to fight against illegal migration. However, the issue has failed to retain its track and it has become a headache for the indigenous people of Assam.

The data from Twitter is consistently reflecting the “protests” connected to the citizenship amendment bill with numerous committed supporters. The hashtag revolution that is unleashed on social media shows the proposition of the discourse of participation and discourse of protest. The activist on Twitter has reacted tremendously on the hurried implementation of the bill and consider the bill as a part of the Hindutva political agenda. While ruling government used twitter to blame the Congress and other opposition parties for the chaos.

It is apparent from the exchange of discourse in twitter and determination of BJP Government regarding the implementation of citizenship amendment bill, 2016 in Assam that ruling party has come to power with an organized agenda or pre-planned idea to fulfil their greater political equations.

“I am a product of the Assamese society and my regional consciousness is still very much there. Just because somebody has joined a national party it does not mean that he or she has done away with my regional consciousness,” Sarbananda Sonowal, Chief Minister of Assam, says making an apparent reference to the anti-CAA protest in the State.

He reiterates that the government has the action plan in place to safeguard the interests of the Assamese society. Government of India promises to ensure constitutional safeguards to the indigenous people. Further, in regard to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, CM of Assam expresses that the people of the state need not fear as the state government has already sent the rules to be framed by the newly-amended legislation. “Once the rules are framed, everything will be crystal clear. The figures that are doing the rounds have no basis. We would not allow any fresh influx,” he claims in his tweet.

CM Sonowal asserts in another tweet that the BJP-led government of the State with support from the Centre are laying special emphasis on Clause 7 of the Assam Accord which aims to trigger economic prosperity in the State.

Apart from regional leaders, prime Minister Modi explains how India has been providing nationality to refugees of different countries irrespective of religions. However, the main attack

against the CAA was registered for the time-bound provision to provide relief to persecuted immigrants of selective religions in Islamic countries. The Government of India justifies its dichotomous stand by saying that the implementation of NRC and CAA will result in driving out the illegal Rohingyas and Bangladeshi immigrants from India, which has been a major setback for the ability of Congress and allies.

The public sphere makes a vital part to facilitate the communication between the state and society. An ideal public sphere allows the democratic control of the actions of the state and government. Twitter represents the vibrant platform that acts to facilitate online discourse, simultaneously, carry forward the discussion in offline platform. Twitter helps to form public opinion on the event that affects the ethnic majority of the state. At the same time, it represents a public sphere that keeps a record of state-related activities and making it relevant for all and accessible to all.

Habermas contemplates how state power can become the 'public power' which is further legitimized by the public during elections through voting. Further, the influential practices of the state would make a share in policy making concerning the public complement the public sphere and helps to form an opinion. It is seen how political leaders have ensembled on Twitter to express their opinions on the issue of CAA.

However, The opposition parties reiterated antagonism to show how the proposition in the citizen amendment act violates Articles 14, 15, 19, 21, 25, and 29 of the Constitution of India.

In the letter to the President of India, the petitioners have pointed out that the recently-enacted Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in India is an unconstitutional Act which threatens the secular fabric of the nation. It is anti-indigenous and has grave economic and socio-cultural implications for Northeast India, specifically Assam. Congress party leader in Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Choudhury confronted the government over the NRC and CAA, saying "it was a sinister design foiled by the people." "Our people are coming out to save the Constitution from you," he says while participating in the debate in Lok Sabha. Amit Shah has keenly mentioned during Lok Sabha session that the Bill is key to BJP electoral campaign that takes a prominent weightage in BJP manifesto.

Azad, who has appeared as prominent Dalit icon, remarks forcefully against the ruling BJP on the CAA and NRC mentioning it as “ the political agenda”. He tweets, “This could be a political agenda. BJP has less numbers in the Rajya Sabha, and these issues (CAA and NRC) could be raised to increase that number. But for us, it’s not politics; it’s about the constitution and the rights it provides”.

Groups like All Assam Students' Union (AASU), Akhil Gogoi-led Krishak Mukti Sangram Parishad (KMSS), Asom Jatiyatabadi Juba Chatra Parishad have spearheaded the protests against CAA and stimulate the mobilization of the students in colleges and universities. There are good numbers of participants who are neither students nor affiliated to any of these organizations.

The protesters express doubt on the political intention of the ruling party in relation to generating larger vote bank with the policy of accommodation of immigrants. They question the selective inclusion and exclusion of other states of India in reference to the implementation of CAA.

In the regional politics, AASU and other organizations strongly opposed the CAA, terming CAA as the red- carpet of illegal immigrants which not only violates Assam Accord,1985 but also creates qualms among Assamese, a fear and insecurity that they would lose their "political rights, culture and land rights"

Conclusion

The findings implicates that the maximum amount of digital protest is registered from the state of Assam. Most trending hashtags that come out of the region are against the bill.

The CAA has witnessed a mixed fate in twitter discourse. The agitation could not the goal as the government had already passed the bill and the sudden outbreak of the COVID 19 took the wind out of the campaign.

The present government of India has assured the people that they will not do any wrong to the Assamese society and the people as well. The debate around CAA has been bifurcated with active involvement of various media houses with splits in ideologies. The division around the discourse

is formed in twitter and simultaneously followed by television journalist and other online platforms in support and against the bill.

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that the grant of citizenship status to illegal migrants solely based on religion; which makes the proposition in CAA discriminatory, unconstitutional and unconventional that violates the Assam Accord of 1985. Rather, citizenship should be granted to those people who have proper legal documents and all persons who do not possess required legal documents no matter from which religion they belong must be deported. If this bill is truly a humanitarian move, then, the benefits to be derived from the bill should be conferred to all religious communities.

There is a distinguishing mark in the north eastern protest and larger Indian protest which are not against each other, rather go with each other.

When the rest of India fought against the communal nature of the law, the Assamese fight was for preserving their ethno-linguistic identity. The complaints of Assamese people's with CAA varies from the pan-Indian attention. A decision on the immigration issue is very crucial to the inhabitants of the state of Assam as the state shares boundaries with Bangladesh, which makes enumerable influx of Bangladeshis to Assam.

On the other hand, demographically Assam is home to many indigenous communities who rely on traditional livelihoods. They are not provided with adequate protective cover i.e., constitutional safeguard and economic protection to face the aggression of refugees who are to settle on their land.

The political parties in India are known for scheming vote arithmetic for decades. Meanwhile, the outcome of NRC depends on effective implementation. If implemented properly, NRC has the potential to emerge out to be a powerful tool to prevent further infiltration into the country.

In view of the debate regarding the weight and relevance of CAA, CAA does not stand up for scrutiny and there are reasons why it is so. First, persecution can occur along several lines but CAA signals out religious persecution while putting aside other equally stern discriminations. Secondly, several law experts argue that owing to its arbitrariness and lack of sound logic and clarity in objectives, CAA fails to justify its constitutionality.

The contemporary refugee crisis hits many parts of the world hard including India and South Asian neighbor regions. There are countries facing the worst humanitarian crisis of the world as declared by UN. India has not acceded to 1951 UN convention in relation to the status of refugees nor does India have a national law for refugee protection.

India needs a solid refugee legislation and CAA cannot be the solution to refugee problem. There is no harm in the reception of refugees fleeing from many parts of the world. The ruling elite of the country has to show political will to address the problem of refugees based on a duly enacted legal framework. Primarily, the ruling elite should comprehend the regional sentiment of the citizens of the nation and prioritize the needs, preferences and interest of the general public.

Twitter provided the stimuli for the growth of community consciousness among users. Agenda-building shows how tweets and retweets influence the issue and create a discourse when media houses and journalists take a follow up of the issue. There are repeat exposures of the same issue through information subsidies. Twitter has a role in agenda building as it could further shape media stories and public perception, often by disseminating information subsidies, which include speeches, videos, and press releases.

In relation to CAA, agenda is shaped in the already existing policy. The issue of CAA has been long standing which would definitely put a pressure on Government to deal with. Agenda building sets in as a result of the expansion of an issue from a specific interest group to an attentive public and finally to a general public. Although there are contentions among media houses taking to CAA, but, the role of media is crucial in arousing concern about CAA, provoking action against CAA, persuading the opposition for CAA and showing the commitment to the issues of public concern while affirming support to the public. Twitter has a role in carrying out the debate given the agenda and opinion on twitter that could further draw the attention of media and policy community.

The interplay of public opinion and public power can give rise to policy agenda, however, the public on twitter has been fragmented with new right and right based politics. Yet, the public opinion portrays the mood of the nation that can be assumed as the control of public on government.

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