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## **ANTHROPOLOGY SNIPPET-420**



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## Nomadic Tribes and the NPR Process



It is unreasonable to expect this historically marginalised and exploited community to produce documents and prove their citizenship.

A report by the government of India's National Commission of Denotified, Nomadic and SemiNomadic Tribes of India

affirms this: “Although, many of the denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes are spread among SC/ST/OBC, many are still not classified anywhere and have no access to socioeconomic benefits whether education, health, housing or otherwise.” Data collection for the National Population Register (NPR), which is a preliminary step for the NRC, shall start from April 1 (but could be delayed because of the lockdown imposed to contain the spread of the coronavirus).

Those who will be unable to prove their citizenship will then have to ask for help from courts. Those who fail to prove their citizenship in courts shall then be sent to detention centres. This is a very brief but the basic picture of how the NRC process will unfold.

Here, some fundamental questions.

1. Nomadic tribes have been landless since 1871. So, how can we provide documentary proof of property rights?

2. The literacy levels of nomadic tribes are poor. Only 37% of NTs and DNTs in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra are literate. Even among those literate, it is the first generation which is completing primary education. So which documents are we expected to produce for our forefathers and mothers?

3. These communities, which are nomadic, find it hard to get even a simple domicile certificate made. According to a study conducted by the Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) in collaboration with the Gadia Lohar Sangharsh Samiti in Delhi, this community cannot avail benefits of various government schemes, since almost 99% do not have caste certificates. To obtain Aadhaar

and ration cards made, we are forced to pay thousands of rupees to agents. How are these communities expected to face the NRC exercise?

4. These tribes have been oppressed, exploited and ostracised for ages by the police, the government and the dominant feudal powers. How are we expected to confidently accept this law and face the consequent administrative processes?

5. Without political reservations, we have no political leaders who will strongly present our case. Political and intellectual revolution has still not taken place in these communities. It can, in fact, be said that social hierarchies have purposely kept this revolution away from us. While social violence, atrocities and casteist mentalities constantly target us, there is no law that protects us. We are not protected under the Prevention of Atrocities Act either. In short, in the emergency that will

be created in the wake of the NPR, we shall be rendered outsiders.

6. They do not have a single place of residence. Where we live, 'villagers' still consider us 'outsiders'. What assurance do we have that the decision-makers in these villages will not use pressure mechanisms against us, will not cheat and exploit us to declare us as 'foreigners'?

7. A majority of nomadic and denotified tribes are engaged in daily labour. Many have been taken over by addiction. Youth are unemployed and have been waiting for generations to see their basic needs met. In this pathetic situation, how does the government feel confident that the NT/DNT communities will manage to produce documents, give necessary correct information under the NPR?

In this scenario, what is the logic of imposing the CAA-NPR process ? We are descendants of proud communities that rebelled against the British. We have given everything for this country. Forcing us to prove our citizenship is disrespectful of the fight for this country's independence.

In my opinion, the combination of CAA and NPR will harm our country in ways even worse than the partition of India. Because then, we at least had the freedom to choose where to live. With this law, even that choice will be taken away.

This is call to all nomadic and denotified tribes: Whichever political party you support or whatever is your ideology, at least this time, think about our own community first. Hold close this statement, "I am first and last an Indian".