

Yameena Hassan is a student at Jamia Millia University, India, who witnessed first-hand the brutal crackdown on 15 December 2019, when students protested against the government's citizenship legislation.

The Brutal Attack at Jamia Millia

Doleful screams, smoke and fear filled air, petrified faces. This isn't a movie neither a war scene but a reputed educational institute of India, Jamia Millia Islamia.

A central university located in the national capital New Delhi. On 15th December, the prestigious university was turned upside down by the police backed by the Home Minister, just because students dared to raise their voice against the discriminatory CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act). The fascist government was not able to tolerate the young voices of dissent and decided to curb them by unleashing brutal assault on university students.

We, who were present outside the campus, witnessed the innumerable cries of our friends who were trapped inside and were desperately calling us for help but at the same time asking us not to come inside the campus as police were on a rampage there. Feeling absolutely helpless, the only option that we were left with was to raise awareness about the horrible plight of the students trapped inside so that pressure can be built upon the Delhi Police. Thankfully, the internet wasn't unplugged, and we were able to spread the word, otherwise the situation could have been worse. It was a night of horror which still brings goosebumps to us. It was distressing that the students who were merely peacefully protesting the draconian law (CAA) faced such a brutal suppression.

What is the CAA and how it is discriminatory?

On 11th December 2019, the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAA) was passed in both the houses of Parliament and was given Presidential assent making it law.

According to the CAA Hindu, Christians, Buddhists, Jain, Sikh and Parsi migrants who have entered India illegally, that is without a visa on or before 31st December 2014, from Muslim majority countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and have stayed in the country for five years, are eligible to apply for Indian citizenship; this act consciously excludes Muslims from above countries to obtain citizenship.

CAA is often seen in conjunction with proposed National Register of Citizen (NRC). According to the government NRC is a record of legal Indian citizens.

On 20th November 2019, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said in Parliament that NRC will be extended throughout the country, which until then was prepared only for Assam.

In Assam of the 33 million applicants: 31.1 million applicants made it to the official NRC list and 1.9 million people were excluded from the final NRC. From the 1.9 million people excluded, more than 500,000 Hindu migrants from Bangladesh who could not find a place in the final NRC, will be able to claim Indian citizenship under the provision of CAA, but 700,000 Muslims excluded from NRC will not have the chance to claim citizenship through CAA.

This proves how discriminatory this act is where Hindus from Bangladesh will be granted citizenship and Muslims will be stripped of their citizenship if they fail to meet the criteria set by the government.

When the NRC is rolled out every person living in India will have to prove their citizenship, failing to do so will lead to them being deemed as illegal immigrants. Indian Muslims fear that they will be termed illegal immigrants if they are unable to produce the required proof of citizenship as only Muslims are not included in the CAA.

The CAA aims at providing citizenship on the basis of religion which is discriminatory and goes against the ethos of the Indian constitution.

What ignited nationwide protests?

As the CAA was passed, students from Jamia Millia Islamia erupted in protests against this naked discrimination. The protests were peaceful and saw huge participation of female students of the university.

On 13th December, students organised a protest march from university campus to Parliament, but the police barricaded the university area and also used tear gas and baton charged the students. Many students were detained and some students received serious injuries. Despite the brutal crackdown on students the protests continued the next day as well and was peaceful. On 15th December 2019, police entered the university campus on the pretext of students causing damage to public property and unleashed a brutal assault on students. They fired hundreds of tear gas shells inside the campus and started beating students ruthlessly with wooden batons.

The police then entered the university library, started vandalising it and fired tear gas inside the library. They didn't care that they were using tear gas inside confined spaces.

Madiha Aziz, a student of the university, told me that out of fear they locked the library gates from inside, police broke the doors, shattered the window panes, entered the reading hall and started beating everyone who was present there. Muslim students from Kashmir were specifically targeted.

Hussain, an engineering student, was brutally thrashed by policemen. He said he begged for mercy and told them that he wasn't even part of the protest, he was just studying in the library. Hussain suffered a knee fracture.

Minhajuddin, a law student, is in a state of trauma. He has lost his left eye. A policeman shoved a wooden baton into his eye as he was studying in the campus library.

Even female students were not spared. They too were beaten, and some were sexually assaulted as well.

About 200 students got injured that day, many students suffered multiple fractures and two students even received bullet injuries and were in critical condition, hundreds of students were detained and no medical help was provided to those who were injured and detained, they were later released that night.

As the news of brutal crackdown of students in Jamia emerged, students across the country burst out in protest, the first in the line were the students of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), but little did they know that they too would soon become the victims of state sponsored terrorism.

In complete solidarity with the students of Jamia, the AMU students gathered at the university gate and shouted slogans against the CAA and police brutality on Jamia students. Dozens of policemen then stormed into the AMU campus launching baton attack on students and firing tear gas and stun grenades! A grenade is something used in war sites by the army, but here it was used on the educated youths inside on a university campus!

Around 70 students were seriously wounded that night. Mohammad Tariq, a doctoral student of chemistry, was hit by tear gas shell and lost his right hand; the injury was so grave that his hand was amputated.

Tazeem Khan, a student of AMU, who suffered fractures in both his hands, said that police beat him mercilessly as if he were a criminal, and a cop even threatened to urinate in his mouth. Later that night police detained dozens of protesters and tortured them in custody, they were then released the next day.

Students from both Jamia and the AMU said that policemen threw communal slurs at them. They called them anti-nationals, terrorists, abused them and asked them to go to Pakistan.

Several students from both the universities claim that the police came with the intent to inflict maximum damage to them and not to disperse. The reason behind the way police dealt with the students of Jamia and the AMU is that they are Muslim minority institutions with majority of students belonging to Muslim community and thus a freehand was given to the police which comes under the BJP government, in both the states where these universities are located.

As the news of police brutality on the students of Jamia and AMU spread, the students of various universities came out in solidarity with the students of Jamia and AMU. Soon the protests gained momentum and the nation erupted in anti CAA protests. Barring the protests in BJP ruled states, the protests elsewhere were peaceful.

In states where the police come under the BJP government, the protests turned violent, with police resorting to baton attacks and teargas shelling, detaining and arresting the protesters, some cases of protesters pelting stones at police were also reported. The most severely affected in the ongoing protests against the CAA are the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh (UP). On 19th and 20th December, India saw nationwide protests against the religion based citizenship law, demonstrations erupted in many districts of Uttar Pradesh too. In some places, the protests turned violent, where police used tear gas and baton charged the protestors and at some places police even started firing indiscriminately.

Mohammad Sattar, an eyewitness from the Muzaffarnagar protest, said that protesters gathered at Menakshi Chawk after the Friday prayer around 2:00 pm. It was a peaceful protest and as the protesters started dispersing at 3:45 pm, stones started raining. He said nobody knows who started it and nobody knows who set the police vehicles on fire.

Following these incidents, the UP Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, a hardline Hindu nationalist, pledged that the government will take 'revenge' from those who damaged public property.

What Muslims and some activists of UP witnessed next was absolutely horrific!

Police started barging into Muslim homes at night, vandalising their properties, smashing everything that stood in their paths. They even confiscated valuables from homes during these night raids. Male members of the family were brutally thrashed, arrested and tortured in police custody. Even children, women and elderly were not spared of police brutality.

On 20th December 2019, police barged into a Madarsa run by Maulana Asad Raza Hussaini, who is a teacher and also the caretaker of Sadat Madarsa. The Maulana was beaten black and blue and was detained along with almost all of 100 Madarsa students, many of them were minors and orphans. The Maulana and his students were stripped and tortured in custody.

Maulana Hussaini has a fracture in his left arm and injuries all over his body. The boys from the orphanage were denied access to toilets, starved and were brutally assaulted that some of them suffered rectal bleeding. The police even asked some students to drink urine. The released students have confirmed the police abused them, forced them to chant "Jai Shri Ram" and slandered the Prophet (saw). More than ten students are still in custody on false charges of rioting.

Muslim locals of Muzaffarnagar say that they are terrified and are living under constant fear. In UP more than 1200 people have been arrested and over 5000 detained. The whereabouts of many are unknown. At least 25 people have died in anti CAA protests across the country with 19 deaths from Uttar Pradesh.

Since 15th December, there have been continuous protests happening across the country with hundreds and thousands of protesters participating in different parts of the nation on a daily basis.

The impact of CAA-NRC on Indian Muslims

The act has not been implemented yet but has created a lot of panic and fear among the Muslims of India. India, a country with extremely poor documentation culture, where millions live below the poverty line, where people are hit by natural calamities almost every year, where many are the victims of communal riots: it is quite hard for people to provide documents related to their ancestry which are required to prove their citizenship. There is panic and chaos among educated Muslims as well as many of them do not have the adequate documents required to prove their nativity. The plight of Muslims of Assam where the NRC has been implemented is in front of the Muslims of the rest of the country. Muslims are noting how arbitrary the CAA-NRC

determination seem. Take Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, the fifth President of India: his brother's family has not been listed in the final NRC. Kargil war veteran Sana Ullah has also been excluded from NRC, he was declared a foreigner and sent to detention centre in Goalpara district, Assam. This shows that the NRC prepared for just one state was so full of errors. What will happen if it is rolled out across the nation! Currently there are six detention centres in Assam where over 1000 people who have been declared as foreigners are residing, more such detention camps are under construction. In Assam, several people are reportedly committing suicide because of the anxiety they feel over the citizenship list. According to a report by the *New York Times*, Noor Begum after finding out that she and her mother had been excluded from the citizenship list, but her father and seven siblings had made it, hanged herself from a rafter. She was 14.

Most of the Muslims excluded from the NRC in Assam, belong to an economically weaker section of society, they do not have the resources to fight a legal battle and thus are certain to lose their citizenship.

Muslims in the rest of the country fear that they might end up with similar fate if CAA-NRC is implemented throughout the nation. They fear if they fail to prove their nativity, they might lose their fundamental rights or face detention or maybe rendered stateless.

India and the BJP

The hatred for Muslims was always there in India but since BJP came to power in 2014 the hatred has been provoked systematically in which the mainstream media has played a venomous role. Muslims are broadcasted as potential threats and burden on the soil of the nation. They are again and again asked to prove their loyalty to their country and branded as anti-nationals simply because they refuse to chant "Vande Matram" or "Bharat Mata Ki Jai". Mob lynchings have become a new norm here especially in the rural areas. Any visibly identifiable Muslim is picked up and is mercilessly beaten by a mob until he dies. The killers even capture the gruesome video and upload it online, they know there is no-one to hold them accountable for their heinous crimes; they are in fact provided with an environment of total impunity. The perpetrators are often welcomed and even given election tickets.

With mob lynchings happening on unprecedented levels, scrapping of Article 370 and shutting down the internet in Kashmir for more than five months now, leaving us with no clue as to what sort of atrocities they are going through, abolition of triple talaq, the Babri Masjid verdict and now with CAA-NRC, Indian Muslims have lost complete faith in the judiciary and have realised the fact that all this is done to consolidate Hindu votes as Hindus are a majority in democratic India, and majority is what matters in democratic elections. Muslims in India are living under constant fear, to an extent that majority of them prefer to live in Muslim dominant areas even if it means living in a ghetto!

Being a Muslim in India with our identity intact, this very existence is now like a resistance. Indian Muslims are living as second-class citizens here but with the implementation the CAA-NRC, we fear we might even lose that status as well. The CAA-NRC is a clear attempt by the Hindutva government to marginalise India's 200 million Muslim population.

The CAA along with the NRC is clearly a discriminatory act that is attempting to create a two tier system; one for Muslims and one for the rest of the country. As for the issue of citizenship of the Muslims in India, we don't raise our voices at the fact of not getting Indian citizenship, rather at the dual standards with which the Ummah is treated.

This is the reality of the world's largest democracy where one cannot even fight for their rights as they are a minority.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Yameena Hassan**