**School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds**

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Who gets to be a citizen?: Citizenship Discourse on Twitter during the 2019 CAA-NRC movement in India

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**Abstract**


This study sought to explore how people conceptualised and practised citizenship in India, on Twitter, in the context of the CAA-NRC movement. The movement was sparked by the introduction and passing of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in the country that year. The aim was to examine the online discourse on citizenship – in the context of citizenship history, literature and the realities of religious hegemony in India. Therefore, critical discourse analysis, along with some basic quantitative textual analysis was used to locate the discourse topics and discursive strategies. It was found that the Indian Twittersphere was made up of people holding a variety of complex stances on the issue; many of which indicated different, often competing, conceptualisations of citizenship. Citizenship was closely linked to notions of nationalism and regionalism, and the discourses seemed be operating on strong religious lines. There were also discourses that attempted to counter the hegemonic (religious) claims of citizenship by adopting more secular and/or humanitarian conceptions of citizenship.


Keywords: citizenship, discourses, Twitter, public sphere, India

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# 1. Introduction

India indeed is an "unnatural" nation as the eminent historian Ramachandra Guha (2007, pp.xi-xxvi) contends. India, in some sense, was never *India* before 1947. From 1857 until 1947, the region was under the rule of the British Crown. For around a century before that, it was under the British East India company. As the company could not maintain proper control, and several Indian powers rose to oppose the British in 1857 (leading to the "Sepoy mutiny" as the British called it, or "the First War of Indian Independence" as some Indians came to refer to it; Guha, 2007, p.xii), the Crown took over and established stronger control.

Before the British asserted their rule, the region comprised of several different kingdoms and states, which were overseen by various rulers (Thapar, 1990). Since medieval India was a cluster of regions under various monarchs, the notion of citizenship corresponded to this form of political organisation. So, to understand citizenship in the subcontinent at the time, one has to reconfigure the meaning of the term. While different from the concept that Western thought formalised later, as Washbrook (2019) explains, the communities in medieval India had their own versions of civil and citizenship practices.

In the 18th century, with the fall of the Mughal empire, the British, in the way of the East India Company, started gaining prominence. Still, many regional powers, like "Bengal, Avadh, Hyderabad, Mysore and the Maratha Kingdom" had some control and "challenged the British attempt at supremacy in India in the second half of the 18th century" (basically, culminating in the 1857 conflict mentioned before; Chandra, 1982, p.16). But even after official British administration began in 1857, many of the "princely states" remained in or in some cases were even returned to the control of local rulers and their heirs (of course, operating with

an allegiance to the British Crown; Chandra, 1982, p.150-58). So, suffice to say, the subcontinent was never one country before or even during British rule.

But during British rule, citizenship started taking the shape of codified rights and responsibilities. It evolved to be of a "subject-citizen" kind – with there being a shift from "imperial citizenship", that existed under the East India Company, to a form of "colonial citizenship" (Jayal, 2013, pp.11-36). Of course, this again came to change with the nationalist movement and subsequent independence of India in 1947. That period saw the evolution of citizenship from being defined on the basis of colonial subjecthood to birth of citizenship as a product of democratisation.

So, the current form of Indian citizenship, democratic citizenship designed around the concept of a nation-state, is less than 75 years old. Only in 1947, when India gained Independence from the British did it become a "single Indian nation" (Guha, 2007, p.xiii). And it is then that the concept of citizenship became increasingly sealed with that of nationhood (although the nationalist movements during the British rule did lay foundations for this).

Also, to be noted is the fact that, at the time, the nation birthed and split simultaneously – with the partition and formation of the nation of Pakistan the same year. India was born a "Hindu nation" and Pakistan a Muslim one (Chandra, 1982, p.303). So, as Jayal (2013, p.11) explains, even as India gained independence, the creation of the *Indian citizen* took a while since "millions were fleeing their homes and crossing newly demarcated borders, motivated by the quest for physical safety more than the search for citizenship".

So, the events that led to 1947, and incidents in India since (especially religious disputes and recently, the rise of Hindu nationalism with the rise of Narendra Modi in 2014; Hundal, 2014; McCarthy, 2014), all have shaped and reshaped notions of citizenship for *Indians*. And the

events with regard to the politics of NRC in the state of Assam, the passing of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 and the movement that ensued (which form the core of this study) are very much linked to this history of Indian colonialism, independence, partition, and nationalism (see Newbigin, 2009; Sundar, 2011; Kinnvall and Svensson, 2010). So, in any consideration of the concept of *the Indian citizenship*, it was important to trace how it took shape historically and what elements came to define it.

Post-independence, citizenship, based on principles of "justice" "liberty" and "equality" was legally enshrined with the passing of the Indian Constitution in 1950 (Department of Justice, no date). But the complicated colonial history, characterised by religious divides (along with caste, class and gender ones) has affected experiences of citizenship along these lines: religious ones being especially significant to this study. Explaining this very aspect, Jayal (2019, p.33) writes that since the rise of the Hindu-nationalist BJP government in 2014 there has been a "routinisation and normalisation of identitarian violence against Dalits and Muslims, rendering their citizenship even more precarious". This stands in contrast to experiences of people from more privileged social groups (like upper-caste Hindu citizens).

But despite the continued friction seen amongst various social groups over the decades, India has somehow stood the test of time and has remained more or less integrated. Explaining this, Shani (2010) contends that despite all the differences in and layers of social identification, people have still managed to have a somewhat intact notion of being an Indian citizen. This is because citizenship has been allowed to have variable manifestations as practices across social groups.

This is where the concept of discourse enters. While citizenship is about membership – it is not just about that; or the legal status awarded as a result of it. It is also the "practices" (as

described above) that shape discourse, and discourse that shapes practices and the meaning of citizenship itself (Fairclough et al., 2006). So, citizenship discourse can be seen as "political and linguistic strategies of membership fashioned out of alternative combinations of identities and claims" (Shafir and Peled, 1998, p.409). The aim of this study is to examine the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) movement in India from 2019, with consideration of the politics surrounding the National Registry of Citizens (NRC), to locate the various discourse strands on citizenship that were found in the Twittersphere. These, while not a reflection of the entirety of public opinion, still gives us an insight into the narratives that were propagated and shared on the subject.

Along with the historical account of citizenship in India, also of significance to this study are details surrounding the Citizenship (Amendment) Act itself, and the allied politics of the NRC. The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2019 was passed and became an Act (that is, a law) on 12th December 2019 (Vaid, 2020). It was after this that countrywide anti-CAA protests started, along with some pro-CAA mobilisations. These protests came against the backdrop of politics surrounding the National Register of Citizens (NRC). While the nationwide movement kicked off in December, the first set of protests against the citizenship bill took place in early November 2019 in the state of Assam. These protests came as a backlash against the new citizenship legislation that was granting citizenship to those being perceived as "foreigners" (essentially people from Bangladesh, the neighbouring country; Dutta, 2019).

These protests were not isolated incidents but were a new chapter in the history of NRC politics in the state of Assam. Over the course of several decades, the state of Assam had seen an influx of migrants from the state of Bengal and the neighbouring country of Bangladesh – during British rule, during Partition in 1947 and after the 1971 Bangladesh War (when the

region which was East Pakistan became the independent nation of Bangladesh; Baruah, 2009; Murshid, 2011). This movement of migrants into the state has been a matter of contention therefore since the 1970s – wherein many existent Assamese residents felt threatened by the incoming migrants, perceiving a stark change in state demographics. While the region had earlier seen several tribes from neighbouring regions come in, it was during British rule and the arrival of "educated Hindu Bengalis" and "Muslim Bengali peasants" that this sort of competition for resources and conflict seemed to arise in the minds of people who were already residing in the region (Srikanth, 2000). This resentment towards so-called outsiders led to the Assam Agitation in 1979, led by the All Assam Students Union (AASU; ET, 2018).

The agitation resulted in strikes and even violence, leading to the Nellie Massacre in 1983, that claimed the lives of thousands of people (Choudhary, 2019). This led the government and the movement heads to sign the Assam Accord, wherein the state agreed to protect the identity of the Assamese people; identify and expel illegals from the state who had entered the state post 1966 (Government of Assam, 2019). It was this that resulted in the push for updating of the National Registry of Citizens (a document that was supposed to identify legitimate citizens of the state; first carried out in 1951; Roychoudhury, 1981). Over the years, the exercise of updating the NRC list kept on dragging and it was only in August 2019 that the final list was published. The list excluded 19.06 lakh people in the state, which corresponds to 6% of the population in the state (Pisharoty, 2019). And it left the AASU (which wanted the NRC in the first place) unhappy because it believed the process was not carried out duly (PTI, 2019).

The NRC politics subsequently became intertwined with the Citizenship Act politics in 2019. This was because the CAA was to give fast-track citizenship to persecuted illegals from

some neighbouring countries (if they were "Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian"; Ministry of Law and Justice, 2019). This was met with opposition in Assam because it was seen as countering the effects of the NRC exercise and encouraging entry of illegals. On the other hand, many others opposed the Citizenship Bill/Act since it excluded Muslims, and the NRC exercise since it was seen as inhumane towards the migrants. Therefore, there were many different strands of opposition and the CAA-NRC movement that resulted brought to fore several different conceptualisations of citizenship.

## 2. Literature Review

The review of the literature is done using a thematic framework. The first section traces the meaning and evolution of the concept of citizenship; since it forms the core of this research. The next section examines the notion of discourse as a means of knowledge production and provides an introduction to the analytical structure that would be employed in the form of Discourse Analysis (DA) in the study of citizenship. This is followed by a section on the public (networked) sphere – to contextualise this study in the world of political communication research. The final section then situates the work in relation to research on the CAA and Twitter in the Indian context. So, the review starts with a consideration of the theoretical basis, followed by an inquiry of the methodological approaches and tools used, and finally places the research within the larger body of work on citizenship and the digital sphere in India and the world.

## 2.1 Citizenship: Definition and Dimensions

"Contrary to predictions that it would become increasingly unimportant in a globalizing world, citizenship is back with a vengeance", write Shachar et al. (2017, p.1). Taking scholarly mention as a metric, they show that while the usage of the term went down after the 1920s, it rose back up after the 1980s, peaking in the beginning of 2000s.

In the Indian context particularly, there seems to have been a surge in scholarly attention on citizenship after the passing of the latest Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019 (see Jayal, 2019; Sharma, 2019; Chandrachud, 2020). Though of course there exist numerous texts on citizenship written in previous decades too, especially with reference to the colonial and post-colonial experience (see Roy, 2010; Sundar, 2011; Jayal, 2013). However, much of this literature approaches citizenship within a largely legal framework. But citizenship is more than membership and the rights-obligations that are an appendage to it. Even in the context of the CAA movement (which was sparked by the passing of a law), citizenship came to represent ideas that were far more wide-ranging. This study, therefore, by focusing on the communicative (discursive) aspects of citizenship in India is a fairly novel addition to the exiting body of work.

Broadly put, "citizenship raises questions of what we owe to whom" (Shachar et al., 2017, p.3). The aspect of *whom* is essentially about defining of a community: who is included and who is not within the created boundary. The aspect of *what* is about the content of shared ties within this community: aspects that are expected to be given and received from members. In a similar vein, Faulks (2000, pp.7-11) explains citizenship by bringing to fore three dimensions: "extent", "content" and "depth". The first two are similar to the aspects of *whom* and *what* discussed above. The last one, depth, refers to the degree to which citizenship entails "rights and obligations". So, citizenship can have a "thin" conception, in which it entails certain

rights but does not place much expectations off citizens in return. On the other hand, there could be a "thick" conception in which citizens are expected to play an "active" part and "right and responsibilities are mutually supportive". So, while the former is rights-oriented, the later demands active civic participation in return for the rights ensured through membership - and these respectively relate to the "liberal" and the "civic republican" models of citizenship (Cohen and Ghosh, 2019, pp.28-31); two dominant paradigms of citizenship in Western thought.

The origin of these two models goes back to the Greek and Roman way of living (Cohen and Ghosh, 2019, pp.28-31). The "civic-republican" has affinities to the model followed in Athens. It was based on certain privileges being conferred upon an "elite minority" who qualified as citizens. They came "together for a common purpose" and bore the responsibility for the rest of the people. While the Athenian model is known for its deliberative structures, it excluded women and slaves. In contrast, the Roman model (which relates more to the "liberal" model), based upon the granting of a form of legal membership, was less deliberative and more administrative in nature; having a vaster base of citizenry (albeit more passive).

So, when we look at the tradition of civic-republicanism, citizenship goes beyond the membership-rights framework by focusing on active political participation of citizens; wherein it also comprises of "practices". Oldfield (1990, pp.177-78) writes that practices are contextualised within "a language of 'duties', whose discharge is necessary to establish individuals as citizens among other citizens". So, practices are those actions that constitute a sense of being a citizen – things individuals do to fulfil their own and others' citizenship needs,

leading to a "communally based conception of citizenship". It is examination of this element of citizenship as a practice which is the prime focus of this study.

While the models and dimensions described so far give a theoretical basis to the subject of citizenship, it of critical value to lay out the definition of the concept too. Drawing on the term given by Gallie, Cohen and Ghosh (2019, p.14-15) describe citizenship as an "essentially contested" concept: a term that is considered significant even though it does not have a pointed definitional basis and gives rise to numerous meanings. There are inconsistencies in what it means to be a citizen across the world, and incongruencies in what it means to be a non-citizen too; in that "noncitizens [are not] uniformly denied all the rights" (Cohen and Ghosh, 2019, p.7). Hence, a considered, study-specific approach towards adoption of a definition seems appropriate.

This research is quite exploratory in nature in that it seeks to locate the myriad ways in which people discuss and practice citizenship. Therefore, a fairly broad definition of citizenship is employed; looking at it as something that "confers membership, identity, values, and rights of participation and assumes a body of common political knowledge" (Abowitz and Harnish, 2006, p.653). The CAA movement led to different forms of expressions of citizenship. These expressions as well as the discussion surrounding them seemed to be closely tied particularly to the idea of nationhood, and by extension, nationalism.

In this context, one could explore how the literature deals with the concept of nationhood. Gans (2017, pp.1-2) differentiates citizenship from nationhood, in that the former is conceived to be "membership of a state" and the latter as "membership of a nation". This is indicative of how citizenship functions at various levels, not just at that of a nation-state. But as he outlines, there has come to be much overlap between the two terms post-Enlightenment.

When nations became the basis of organising communities, citizenship also acquired strong nationalistic hues. Kymlicka (2006, pp.129-130) terms this development as "liberal nationhood", wherein citizenship came to be characterised by "liberal-democratic values" and national boundaries. While this gave democratic freedoms to the citizenry, it has not always resulted in an equal claim to rights and responsibilities across all members of a political community. In the case of CAA (in combination with NRC), one line of criticism was that it discriminated against Muslim residents. Another consequence of a model of citizenship based on national ties is that it inevitably results in discrimination against people considered to lie beyond the boundary (like "immigrants"). In this particular case, while certain immigrants were to be eligible for citizenship, others were not granted the same rights.

Having contextualised this study in what is largely a normative literature of citizenship, it is also of significance to consider the empirical side of citizenship studies. This study itself, making use of a social movement to study citizenship, falls in the latter category. This is because it looks at the ways in which citizenship is conceived and practiced by citizens. Given this aim, I refer to the work of Fairclough et al. (2006, p.98) who define citizenship "as an ongoing communicative achievement". They proposed the use of discourse analysis to study citizenship practices since it allows for the study of language at a communicative level. And this is the method used in the study.

## 2.2 Discourse, Knowledge Production and Discourse Analysis

As employed in communication studies, the roots of Discourse Analysis lie in theories given by Michel Foucault. Foucault is in fact credited for laying the "conceptual and methodological" foundation of discourse analysis. While the meaning of discourse(s) in his writings is still closely

connected to language, it moves away from the linguistic usage of the word. He explains "discourse (or discourses) in terms of bodies of knowledge" (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 26) that exist in the context of social realities. So, discourse results from existing societal structures and is also something that further shapes "social practices". Therefore, discourse analysis, as a method of research, considers language in the form of discourse as something that not just describes reality but actively shapes it (Johnstone, 2002).

Following in Foucault's tradition, Fairclough (1995, p.14) defines discourse analysis as "a way of signifying a particular domain of social practice from a particular perspective". So, it is more about the processes shaping beliefs through the use of language (and vice-versa) than specific linguistic structures. Therefore, discourse can be seen as a manifestation and product of "ideology"; in that "discourse is ideological" and simultaneously helps create, re-create ideologies (Wodak, 2002, p.3). Explaining this link between the two, and their connection with the notion of "power", Johnstone (2002, p.3) writes that discourses:

> are conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional
> ways of thinking. These linked ways of talking and thinking constitute ideologies
> (sets of interrelated ideas) and serve to circulate power in society.

Discourse Analysis (DA) in itself is quite broad as a methodology. In this study, I specifically made use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), using a "discourse-historical approach" (Wodak, 2002b, p.64). CDA is a particular "mode" within DA that focuses on social dynamics; wherein the political ("ideological") context becomes a conscious part of the analysis (Van Dijk, 2003, pp.352-53). As described before, the notion of power is central to DA; and CDA as an approach examines the role of this in the formation and circulation of discourses. Here,

this would take the shape of considering the religious and nationalistic politics in India and how that results out of and results into certain citizenship discourses.

In this study, Wodak's historical approach (which is one method under CDA; Wodak, 2002b) was used for coding, analysis and interpretation of the texts. His approach, with its focus on macro-historical and micro-textual analysis was suitable since it was deemed important to factor in India's historical context to draw meaningful analyses. This method was used in an attempt to move "away from preconceptions about what citizenship is, and […] to look at how it's done" Fairclough et al. (2006, p.98).

The methods were further adapted to fit the study of online discussions. This is because the "online networked sphere" (Benkler, 2006, p.7) operates on principles that differ from other communication mediums. This is what the next sub-section unpacks; connecting this study to the world of political communication research.

## 2.3 Public Sphere, Networked Sphere and Twitter

Central to political communication research is the notion of a "public sphere", which Habermas (1974, p.49) describes as "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed". Public opinion is the collective evaluation and scrutiny by a faction of citizens with regards to the structures of power; namely, the state. And, public sphere comprises of spaces and mediums that facilitate the communication and deliberation of ideas that are relevant not only to the individual, but relevant to the functioning of a democratic political unit. The notion of a public sphere is associated with the framework of "deliberative democracy", which operates with the principle that "those affected by a collective decision have the right, opportunity, and capacity to participate in consequential deliberation about the

content of decisions" (Hendriks et al., 2020, p.9). So, this form of democratic arrangement is based on the principle of active deliberation by citizens in what constitutes the public sphere.

With the rise of the internet, the actions associated with the public sphere have permeated the digital space. But scholars seem to be divided in their views on the public sphere-ness of the internet. This follows the trend of views on the democratic capabilities of the internet generally – with some looking at the Internet as a great democratiser (e.g., Diamond, 2010; Dzisah, 2018) and some looking at it as a space of fragmentation, polarisation and power imbalance (e.g., Sunstein, 2001, Vaidhyanathan, 2018). Given the networked nature of the internet, the online public sphere has come to be called "networked public sphere" (Benkler, 2006, p.7), and it can be defined as, "practices, organizations, and technologies that have emerged from networked communication as an alternative arena for public discourse, political debate, and mobilization alongside, and in interaction with, traditional media" (Benkler et al., 2015, p.596).

Drawing a comparison between the public sphere-ness of the internet versus the "old media", Gerhards and Schäfer (2010, pp.143-156) write that while the old media have been criticised by scholars for lacking deliberative features due to their mass broadcasting nature that allow less in the form of actual participation by public. For some, the "new media" seemed to bring new possibilities in way of considerable potential for citizen engagement. But through their study, which looked at the discussion on "human genome research" in print media and on the internet, they found "internet communication" to be no different than "offline debate" in the press; that is, the online discussions were no more "participatory" (with regards to variables like inclusivity and plurality).

In another empirical consideration of Twitter as a possible "alternative form of public sphere", Yang et al. (2016, pp.1983-95) used network analysis to look at the deliberation surrounding the "#righttobeforgotten" movement (which was about a privacy ruling on public availability of digital information). The study pointed out that Twitter as platform did not allow for democratic "information diffusion". Rather, few "key players" like corporate parties and news media controlled the agenda – leading the researchers to conclude that "social media do not serve as a democratising tool for ordinary citizens". Even the study by Liu and Weber (2014) on Twitter's public sphere-ness using metrics like "equality, diversity, reciprocity and quality" concluded the same.

In contrast to these, an experimental study conducted by Min (2007, pp.1369-1387), which compared deliberation across mediums, that is "online" versus "face-to-face", saw that the effects of online deliberation were similar to that of a face-to-face setup. Though, it is to be noted that in this experiment, in both the conditions, students did not significantly change their opinions at all as a result of the deliberation.

This study though did not explore the extent of democratic deliberation on Twitter; which, as outlined, has received considerable empirical attention. Rather, the focus was to look at Twitter as a fragment of the larger public sphere and consider the discourses that were part of it – of course, having noted that it may not be ideal sphere (especially from a deliberative framework). It focused on Twitter since it still serves as a significant part of the political sphere, being used by crucial players like politicians, journalists and activists (Ausserhofer and Maireder, 2013). Additionally, the effects of the interactions on the platform are not contained to the actions performed within it. As Chadwick et al. (2015, pp.8-18) explain using the concept of "media hybridity", in the present media system, individuals can "steer information flows in

ways that suit their goals and […] across and between a range of older and newer media settings". While this does not always result in democratic engagement, it is important to be mindful of the transfer of information and power across mediums. Another point of significance with studying Twitter here is for its role in the CAA movement particularly; as a political tool for propaganda and mobilisation, as the next section delineates.

## 2.4 Twitter and the CAA in the Indian Context

Twitter served to be an important medium of activism, mobilisation and discussion during the CAA-NRC movement. Numerous articles and journalistic investigations have pointed out that the platform was being used as a propaganda tool by government and pro-government forces too (see Paul, 2020; Halder, 2020).

There have also been a few studies that have looked at the ways in which Twitter was being used as a tool of activism. Vashishata and Arya (2020, p.184-195) examined tweets from the CAA movement using textual and sentiment analysis. They found that Twitter was actively used by major political parties, including the two major national parties in the country (the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress). Very significantly, they also concluded that the "lexical diversity" of the tweets was low – that is they had a "repetitive message"; pointing to them being used to drive simplistic, pointed narratives than being used as means of debating complex ideas. In another study carried out by Vashisht and Sinha (2021, pp.1-13) to gauge the sentiments on the CAA on Twitter, it was found that overall, there were more "positive tweets" than "negative tweets" towards the Act. Though, the gap was not found to be very significant. They also used corpus-based sentiment analysis for the analysis.

This study, while also looking at the Twitter discussions on the CAA, is unique given its methodology and the focus of analysis. Unlike previous studies that were concerned with performing a quantitative analysis of a huge corpus of data, this study uses a largely qualitative approach to focus on the intricacies (discursive and linguistic aspects) of citizenship discourse. It also makes a conscious attempt to look closely at NRC politics, which is tied with the CAA – something that existent studies did not consider actively. While it does examine the CAA-NRC movement, it is used as a means to scrutinise the underlying discourses on citizenship. So, the main concern is not the movement itself, but the ways in which citizenship was practiced and talked about online during it.

## 3. Research Design and Methods

### 3.1 Research Question, Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study, as traced and delineated through the introductory chapters, was to understand the nature of Twitter discussions on the subject of citizenship in India. The research question (RQ) was this:

**What was the nature of citizenship discourse in the Twitter discussions during the 2019 CAA-NRC movement in India?**

It sought to explore the nuances of the content of Twitter discussions that formed citizenship discourse. The objective was to examine the nature of symbols and actions attributed to the notion of citizenship, and thus uncover how citizenship was constituted and reconstituted through discourse; with particular attention to the religious politics and hegemony present in

the country. It was also to reflect on the notion of "democratic citizenship" (Coleman and Blumler, 2009, p.3) – understand how citizens defined citizenship online through exercising citizenship itself (by deliberating, criticising and mobilising).

## 3.2 Research Strategy and Design

Given the RQ and purposes of this study, a largely "qualitative" approach was employed, complemented with some "quantitative" textual analysis (Bryman, 2016, p.37). Hence, a "mixed methods" approach defined the study. This was because while a quantitative approach to textual analysis allowed for examining the broader trends in citizenship discourse, the qualitative allowed for exploring the nuanced attributes within and surrounding the text (in terms of discourse topics, discursive strategies and the linguistic markers).

When it comes to ontology, a combination of objective and constructivist approaches defined the study. For the first stage of analysis, quantitative textual analysis was carried out; which has objective/positivist roots. For the second stage of analysis, *discourse analysis* was used; which is a qualitative method and has constructivist/interpretivist roots. In their extreme forms, objectivism believes in the presence of an objective reality in relation to "social phenomena […] that is independent of social actors", while constructionism takes on the position that all reality is socially constructed and that "social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision" (Bryman, 2016, pp.32-34). This study operates with an understanding that while text frequencies can be useful in revealing patterns in discourse topics, citizenship discourse is empirically best studied using a qualitative, inductive method like critical discourse analysis (see Fairclough et al., 2006). This is because the discourse on citizenship is socially constructed;

shapes and is shaped by social, political and cultural variables. Therefore, a combination of positivist-constructivist viewpoints and quantitative-qualitative methods were adopted.

## 3.3 Tools

The main research tool that was used was the web-version of Mecodify: 'Mecodify v2.006'. The tool has been built specifically for online social science research, especially ones based on Twitter (see Al-Saqaf and Christensen, 2019; Sorensen, 2020). The tool enables historical scrapping of tweets (something that many other data scrapping tools are not equipped for). This meant that Twitter data dating back years could be found and scrapped easily. It facilitates time-defined searches through the use of hashtags and keywords, and allows for other category filtering of this data (on the basis of 'tweet type', 'languages', etc). It also has the feature of hashtag cloud visualisations that provide a frequency-based list of associated hashtags.

Other tools that were used as part of this research were the Twitter Advanced Search function (to facilitate informal browsing of tweets and for initial locating of relevant hashtags), NVivo Plus (to code and analyse the collected data/tweets), the Google News custom search function (to locate relevant, time-specific news reports), and MS Excel (for producing randomised sample of tweets).

## 3.4 Case selection & Sampling

In this study, the data comprised of tweets scrapped from Twitter that related to the CAA movement that began in late 2019 in India. The cases were identified using relevant hashtags (like #CAB, #CAA and #NRC) that came to be associated with the movement.

Unlike some social movements like MeToo and Black Lives Matter which ran on the basis of one prominent hashtag (that is, #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter; see Modrek and Chakalov, 2019; Carney, 2016), the CAA-NRC movement saw the use of numerous hashtags; no one hashtag came to define the movement or was uniformly used throughout the movement. But searches performed using Twitter's Advanced Search function seemed to indicate the presence of some hashtags that were more frequently and consistently used than others. These hashtags were found by making use of hashtag clouds on Mecodify. But before locating the hashtags, it was of significance to locate the time frame to be studied.

To choose a relevant time frame, firstly, Mecodify was used to locate the initial tweets on the subject. In order to do that, the news coverage on the movement was tracked and that was compared with tweets found on the subject through case searches on Mecodify. It was seen that while the CAA was sealed as a law on 12th December 2019, the Bill was a subject of discussion even before parliamentary proceedings started, with some protests against it taking place even the month before. Therefore, the search net was extended back to spot the beginnings of the movement.

The Google News custom search function was used for this purpose. Setting the search phrase as "citizenship amendment bill protest", date of the first set of offline protests for that period was found. According to an article in the regional newspaper *Northeast Now* (dated 5 November 2019), the first set of protests in opposition to the potential re-introduction of CAB took place on 4th November 2019. Another article spotted in *Swarajya Magazine* (dated 6 November 2019) also indicated the same. Therefore, 4th November 2020 was taken as the start date for case selection.

Having this information, case search was performed on Mecodify for the month of November 2019 (using #CAB as the query) and tweets concerning the subject were found. This confirmed the presence of online discussions with regard to the topic that operated parallelly to the offline protests, further validating the use of 4th November as a start date. Though, it is to be noted that given the same Bill was introduced in the Parliament several years before and also once at the start of that very year in January (when it passed through the Lower house but did not go to the Upper house of the parliament due to an earlier set of protests in North-east India), it was quite likely that conversations on the subject on Twitter would be found stretching back several years. But, keeping in mind the scope of this study, and its focus on the discussions in the purview of the nation-wide CAA movement, only tweets related to the late 2019 CAA movement were considered.

The end of the CAA movement in terms of the offline protests was in the month of March when the coronavirus pandemic hit and gatherings were banned (BBC, 2020). This did not stop the conversation on Twitter that continues to this day in some capacity. But, given such a quantity of data spanning more than a year would be simply unmanageable, end date was chosen in accordance with consideration of offline incidents during the movement.

The nationwide anti-CAA-NRC protests really took off after mid-December, continuing in full force for the rest of December. The pro-CAA-NRC protests also took place around the time. So, to safely account for the discussions surrounding these events, the entire month of December was considered. And since tweets were sampled week-wise, the last week of data considered ended on 5th January. Hence, the case selection in this study included tweets spanning a total of nine weeks: posted between 4 November 2019 00:00:00 IST and 6th January 2020 00:00:00 IST.

Having this time frame, an initial sample of tweets was obtained for this period using #CAB as the query. This was because while numerous hashtags were used during the movement, keyword searches using Mecodify (using 'citizenship amendment bill' as the query) pointed out that people originally were using #CAB to talk about the issue and then later on majorly shifted to #CAA, when the Bill became an Act post 12th December. Even though #CAB was not the only hashtag that ran at first, it was the one that was used consistently in all of the initial posts in November and December. #CAB was also chosen given it was comparatively more neutral than hashtags like #IndiaSupportsCAA and #IndiaRejectsCAA. Such an approach was adopted not with an ignorance to the varying stances rather to capture the various sides of the issue. So, using #CAB, a hashtag cloud was obtained to locate other significant hashtags that were used along with it. These were ordered according to their frequency and from that, the other two top hashtags, #NRC and #CAA were picked.

Using this, second level sampling was done. All the 'original tweets' containing the hashtags, #CAB, #CAA, #NRC, were scrapped using the Mecodify tool for the time period. Only original tweets were used since retweets would have led to presence of copies of the same text, misconstruing the actual frequency of the terms. Along with that, given the aim was to analyse the content of the text for discourses (as opposed to studying the network of communication), it was necessary to consider only unique tweets. So, by this process, a total of 320,989 tweets were obtained at this stage.

This sample of data was then cleaned. That is, tweets irrelevant to the subject of discussion were removed. For instance, #CAB was used in other unrelated contexts (e.g., in some cab service adverts). After this process, 121,165 tweets remained. Given a detailed qualitative analysis could not be done of hundreds of thousands of tweets, a random sample of

315 tweets were taken for analysis (35 from each week, from the span of nine weeks). This method was adopted as opposed to choosing a shorter time period (that would have produced far less tweets) because the purpose of the study was to perform some time-related analyses and chart trends in the discourses across the period of the movement.

Other than hashtags, time frame and tweet type, language was another sampling parameter. Since India is a multi-lingual country, people engage in a variety of languages. But given the limited resources and challenges with translation of tweets, only English-language tweets were considered in this study (note: this level of filtering for language was done in the beginning of the tweet scrapping process). The complete sampling criteria is listed in Table 1.

For both the quantitative textual analysis and discourse analysis, the same sample was used since the aim of this research was to be able to connect the findings from both analyses cohesively – and a common set of tweets ensured there were no differences based on the samples of tweets used.

| Criteria | Sample |
| --- | --- |
| Date (time period) | 4th Nov 2019 – 5th January 2020 |
| Hashtags | #CAB, #CAA, #NRC |
| Tweet type | Original tweets |
| Content | Textual; relevant to citizenship and the CAA movement |
| Language | English-language only |
| Sampling method | Periodical (week-wise), random sampling |

Table 1. Sampling Criteria

## 3.5 Text Analysis

As outlined in the section on research design, this study made use of two methods in combination. In order to identify key trends in the discussions, some basic quantitative text analysis was used - which is the "application of […] methods for drawing statistical inferences from text populations" (Roberts, 2000, p.259). In this study, this took the form of measuring word frequencies and tracing their occurrences over the time period of the movement.

Many previous studies about online discourse and social movements have made use of such textual analysis. Modrek and Chakalov (2019) used quantitative text analysis to study the "public discourse" on twitter in relation to the #MeToo movement, where they located and categorised the kinds of revelations women made with regards to experiences of sexual assault. In a slightly different kind of study, Viguria et al. (2020, p.1) compared the various different hashtag campaigns associated with the "Eating Disorder Awareness Week" in 2018; assessing the content and performance of various hashtags.

Yet another study of relevance is by Altoaimy (2018, p.1) who looked at the Twitter discourse in Saudi Arabia surrounding the "debate on women's right to drive". He used a combination of textual analysis and discourse analysis to analyse the online discourse. The method of analysis in that study inspired some of the methodology decisions in this research.

## 3.6 Discourse Analysis

In order to study the online discourse in detail, critical discourse analysis was employed; since it is quite suited to studying and identifying themes of citizenship discourse (see Fairclough et al., 2006, p.98). The literature review, quite comprehensively, looked at the theoretical basis of the

concept of discourse and that of discourse analysis. Therefore, here I focus on elaborating the steps followed while carrying out analysis using the Discourse-Historical Approach (note: the coding manual is given here itself alongside the layout of the larger analytical process).

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) as given by Reisigl and Woodak (2008) comprises of eight steps. These are listed in Figure 1. In accordance to this framework (combining steps 1 and 2), firstly, historical and contextual information was gathered. This included collecting the following information: (1) theoretical literature on citizenship and related concepts, like nationhood, subjecthood and nationalism; (2) history of citizenship in India – specifically, post-colonial history, formation of India as a nation-state, partition and formation of Pakistan as a separate state, and the rise of Hindu nationalism in India; (3) the 2019 CAA movement, linked to the drawing up of the National Registry of Citizens (NRC). This step was carried out simultaneously with the scholarship search and writing of the introduction and literature review of this thesis.

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**The DHA in eight steps**

A thorough discourse-historical analysis ideally follows an eight-stage programme. Typically, the eight steps are implemented recursively:

1. **Activation and consultation of preceding theoretical knowledge** (i.e. recollection, reading and discussion of previous research).
2. **Systematic collection of data and context information** (depending on the research question, various discourses and discursive events, social fields as well as actors, semiotic media, genres and texts are focused on).
3. **Selection and preparation of data for specific analyses** (selection and downsizing of data according to relevant criteria, transcription of tape recordings, etc.).
4. **Specification of the research question and formulation of assumptions** (on the basis of a literature review and a first skimming of the data).
5. **Qualitative pilot analysis** (allows testing categories and first assumptions as well as the further specification of assumptions).
6. **Detailed case studies** (of a whole range of data, primarily qualitative, but in part also quantitative).
7. **Formulation of critique** (interpretation of results, taking into account the relevant context knowledge and referring to the three dimensions of critique).
8. **Application of the detailed analytical results** (if possible, the results might be applied or proposed for application).
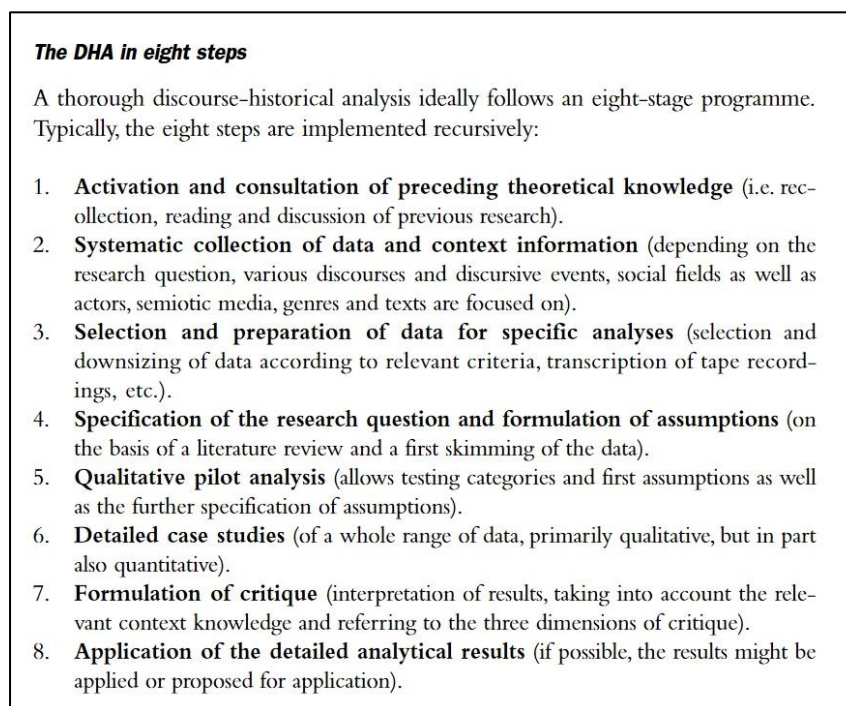
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Figure 1. The eight steps of Discourse-Historical Approach to data analysis; Reisigl and Woodak (2008, p.96)

After this, data was collected and then tailored for use (corresponds to Step 3). The data/tweets from Mecodify were obtained in a .csv file. From this, relevant columns (tweet time, user name, tweet text, etc) were transferred to a word document. This word document was then imported on NVivo and coding was carried out. Before starting the coding process, the research done as part of Steps 1 and 2 (that is, gathering of historical and contextual information) was used to frame certain sub-questions, which informed the initial coding categories.

The actual coding was done in a three-step process. First-level coding was concerned with identifying the larger discourse topics. This was accompanied with consideration of political actions and genres identified using contextual information. After this, a week's worth of tweets were coded first in a process of pilot analysis to see if the codes and categories were relevant to the tweet text, which led to the refining of the initial set of codes (Step 5). This was followed by second-level coding that located the use of various discursive strategies (see Figure 2; Step 6-7). This included considering "interdiscursivity" Wodak (2002b, p.67), wherein links between discourses were explored. Then, third-level coding was done to locate more nuanced linguistic strategies employed in the discourses. The process of coding and analysis finally led to consideration of application of the results in theoretical and non-theoretical contexts (Step 8).

## 3.7 Operationalisation

In the case of textual analysis, the trend in discourses was traced using text frequencies. So, the occurrences of various terms were considered in general and in relation to the progression of the CAA-NRC movement over time. The frequencies were a simple count of the number of times a term was used as part of the tweet text (this included the hashtags, but excluded

hyperlink text). The list of terms was arranged according to their frequencies, and the top five terms were plotted in a time-frequency graph to examine their use over time.

In the case of discourse analysis, the discourses were operationalised in the form of various codes and sub-codes that resulted out of the topics identified from the various stages of coding. Discourse topics were all the themes that were identified from the tweet text in relation to the historical-contextual information during the first stage of coding. Not only that, discourses were examined using discursive strategies and linguistic markers as well. Discursive strategies were defined and categorised using the frame given by Reisigl and Woodak (2008; see Figure 2). The discursive strategies analysed in the study include:

- Nomination: has to do with the naming and devising of categories that resulted in the "construction of in-groups and out-groups"
- Predication: concerns with associating the above categories/groups (of people) with positive or negative characteristics
- Argumentation: revolves around reasoning of the "positive and negative attributions" given

Linguistic markers that were analysed included looking at "word groups" (Schneider, 2013). This entailed analysing particular set of terms that tended to be used together repeatedly in the tweets. This linking of words exposed the ways in which language was used to set certain narratives, in line and countering hegemonic views.

| Strategy | Objectives | Devices |
|---|---|---|
| nomination | discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/ events and processes/ actions | • membership categorization devices, deictics, anthroponyms, etc.<br>• tropes such as metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches (*pars pro toto, totum pro parte*)<br>• verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions, etc. |
| predication | discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events/ processes and actions (more or less positively or negatively) | • stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (e.g. in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctional clauses, infinitive clauses and participial clauses or groups)<br>• explicit predicates or predicative nouns/adjectives/pronouns<br>• collocations<br>• explicit comparisons, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures (including metonymies, hyperboles, litotes, euphemisms)<br>• allusions, evocations, and presuppositions/implicatures, etc. |
| argumentation | justification and quest-ioning of claims of truth and normative rightness | • topoi (formal or more content-related)<br>• fallacies |
| perspectivization, framing or discourse representation | positioning speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance | • deictics<br>• direct, indirect or free indirect speech<br>• quotation marks, discourse markers/ particles<br>• metaphors<br>• animating prosody, etc. |
| intensification, mitigation | modifying (intensifying or mitigating) the illocut-ionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances | • diminutives or augmentatives<br>• (modal) particles, tag questions, subjunctive, hesitations, vague expressions, etc.<br>• hyperboles, litotes<br>• indirect speech acts (e.g. question instead of assertion)<br>• verbs of saying, feeling, thinking, etc. |

Figure 2. List of Discursive Strategies; Reisigl and Woodak (2008, p.96)

## 3.8 Reliability & Validity

Reliability and validity was ensured through the process of "triangulation" (Wodak, 2002b, p.65). As a "principle", triangulation helps "analysts to minimise the risk of being biased". As Deocampo (2015, p.38) writes, by moving away from doing solely a close reading of the text and using "the historical and political, sociological and/or psychological" context in addition to it, the researcher avoids imposing personal frames in the process of "analysis and interpretation". This form of consideration of a variety of sources of information, from different angles, along with an application of multiple research methods forms the basis of triangulation. So, in this study, before undertaking any form of analysis, the historical context of the movement and the history of citizenship in India was laid out in detail. This was done

through reviewing academic texts (journals, books) and news reports on the topics. I have also attempted to be completely transparent about the process of analysis – detailing it in a step-by-step manner. In addition, the process of analysis also included some quantitative textual analysis that helped in concertising the qualitative observations with regards to the larger trends in the discourse.

In the coding process itself, while a constructivist approach was used, the first level of coding was made up of mostly descriptive categories – to avoid having a biased lens of analysis. This was doubly ensured by doing a pilot analysis of the tweets to ensure all tweets (pro and anti NRC and CAB/CAA) were able to be put in various categories without difficulty. Not only was reliability ensured in the process of data analysis, it was also seriously considered during data collection. A random, week-wise sample of tweets was drawn – to authoritatively make conclusions about the movement as a whole, which spanned several months. As opposed to this, drawing of tweets in a non-random manner, and/or from a narrow time period could have seriously skewed the findings with regards to the significance of the various discourse topics.

## 3.9 Limitations

The study is not without its limitations. While Twitter was a platform of significance to this movement and plays a key role in the networked public sphere, there are still shortcomings with studying it. Firstly, the Twitter space keeps changing: tweets and accounts get removed. Especially when doing a study like this that considers historical tweets (as opposed to collecting tweets in real time), some data might become unavailable over time (Fang et al., 2020). Secondly, while Twitter is an increasingly important tool in the political sphere, it is still used by a limited section of the world population (only 0.2 billion of the more than 7 billion people on

the planet; Twitter IR, 2021). In India specifically, only 0.02 billion of the 1.3 billion people are on the platform (Statista Research Department, 2021). So, as studies on political views from the UK and the US have shown (Mellon and Prosser, 2017; Wojcik and Hughes, 2019), the views expressed on the platform may not be representative of the larger public in terms of demographics and in terms public opinion.

There were also limits that concerned this particular study. One of the main ones being language. The study looked at only English-language tweets. India as a country is home to hundreds of languages and its Twittersphere comprises of tweets in several of these languages. These multi-lingual exchanges and the discourses that were part of it did not feature in the analyses. Along with this, given the focus on studying discourses (with a linguistic slant), the study only considered textual information. This meant the forgoing of analysis of other multimedia that feature on the platform (like pictures and videos).

In terms of the method of analysis, both quantitative textual analysis and discourse analysis are not free of shortcomings. While quantitative textual analysis is more objective in terms of its focus on quantifiable elements (word counts, etc), it is not always effective in examining the nuances of discourses. When it comes to discourse analysis, like all qualitative methods, it could be criticised by positivists for the subjectivity and lack of generalisability of the findings. Scholars have also questioned the basis of CDA in particular, pointing to the lack of concreteness to the principle of criticality that CDA scholars propagate (Breeze, 2011). This study therefore, by adopting a mixed methods approach, and combining various forms of analyses, tries to forgo some of these limitations.

## 4. Findings, Analysis and Discussion

### 4.1 Charting broad trends

The sample of 315 tweets (tweet text only) was run on the online text analysis tool called 'Voyant Tools'. The tweets were arranged chronologically for this exercise to also obtain the trend of word usage over the course of the movement. The most frequently used terms in the tweet sample were "nrc", "india", "cab", "caa" and "citizenship" (in that order). The term "nrc" appeared 227 times; followed by "india", 119 times; "cab", 109 times; "caa", 83 times; and "citizenship", a total of 50 times.

Given the tweets were about the Citizenship Amendment Act movement (earlier referred to as Citizenship Amendment Bill, obtained using #caa, #cab and #nrc as search terms), it was unsurprising that these were the most used terms. As the use of words "india" and "citizenship" suggests, the Twitter discourse surrounding the CAA-NRC movement was a lot about discussing the basis of Indian citizenship. While at one level the discourse was about debating the CAA (the legislation) itself, showing support or rejecting it, mobilising against or for it, it was also about grappling with claims of citizenship.

The plotting of the occurrence of the frequently used words in the tweet sample (arranged chronologically) resulted in useful insights into the Twitter discourse. As seen in Figure 3, the term "nrc" (light blue) dominated the discourse in the beginning, eventually dipping and slightly picking up use later in the movement. The term "cab" (green) started on the lower end, picked up frequency, peaking sometime in the middle (which approximately would be early December) and then eventually falling in use (after the passing of the Bill and it becoming an Act; with people switching CAB for CAA). Meanwhile, "caa" (dark blue) with no

occurrence for the first half, picked up use in the latter half of the time period (which would be mid-December to January). This matches with the offline timeline of events in relation to the movement starting with anti-NRC protests in November, discussions and anti-CAB rhetoric in November and December, followed by the passing of the CAA, anti-CAA and pro-CAA protests (mobilizations) 12th December onwards. This shows that the Twitter discourse broadly matches the patterns of real time offline events. But of course, in order to analyse the exact time lapse (between offline occurrence and its presence in online discourse; whichever directionality), a more detailed time-oriented analysis would be needed which is outside the purview of this study.
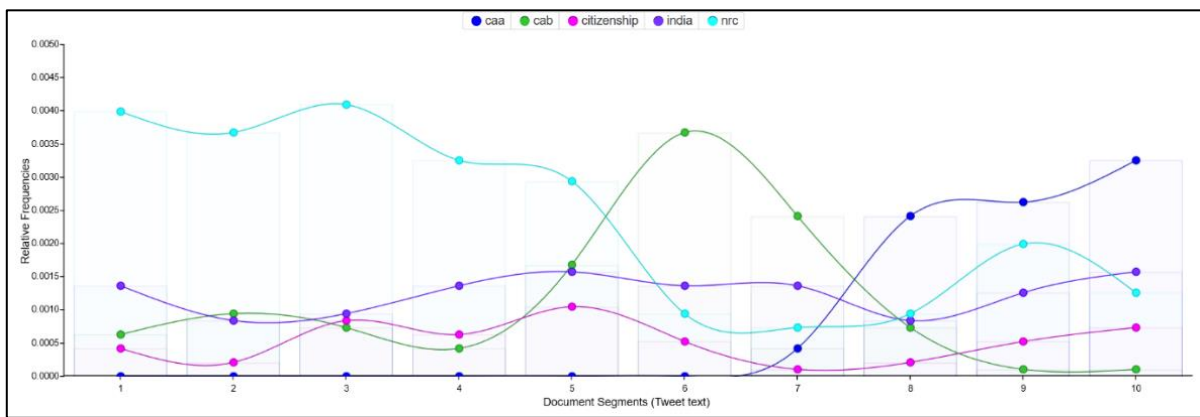


Figure 3. Most frequently used words in the tweet sample (chronological)

In comparison to other terms, the use of the terms "india" and "citizenship" remained more or less stable throughout the time period. Another key term used was "assam", which was in fact the sixth most used word. Assam is the Indian state that first saw protests against the Citizenship Amendment Bill in late 2019. Tracing the occurrence of the word (Figure 4) clearly shows how the discourse which was Assam-centric to start with, was less so as time went by.

So, discussions gradually shifted from being focused around the realities in Assam to that of citizenship claims nationwide.
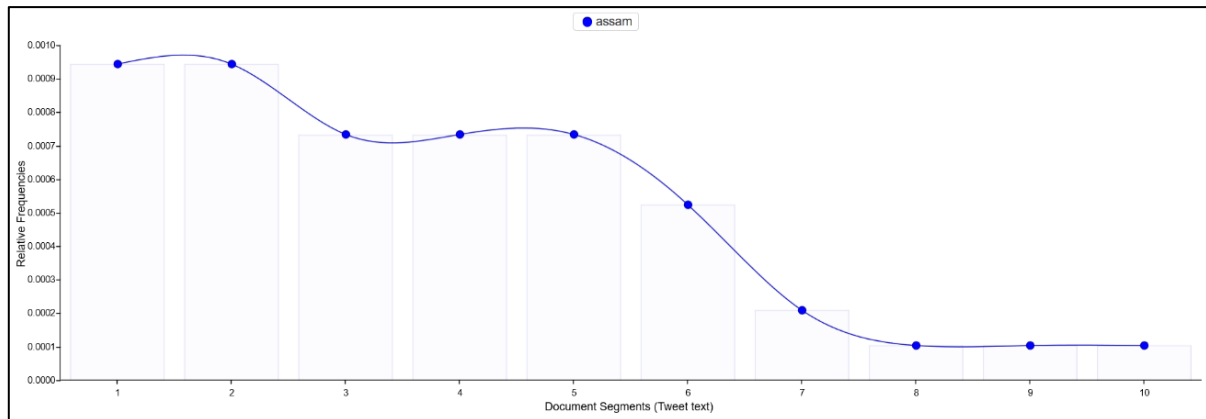


Figure 4. Trend of the usage of the word "assam" in the tweet sample (chronological)

## 4.2 Discourses & Discourse Topics

Figure 5 gives the matrix with the fields of action, the genres, the discourses and the discourse topics that were identified from the sample tweets. Field of action "indicates a segment of social reality, a field that constitutes the 'frame' of a discourse" (Wodak, 2015, p.10). In this study, it was defined on the basis of the political actors as well as actions that were part of the CAA-NRC movement. These include: (a) legal proceedings/framework, (b) political parties and politicians, (c) public action and mobilisation, and (d) news media. This was seen as a valuable distinction since it helped locate the variations in discourses with regard to the different political actors and their functions in the public sphere. For these different fields, genres (in the form of texts that constitute them) were also recognised. Genres "are socially ratified way of using language in connection with particular types of social activity" (Wodak, 2015, p.5). So, the fields of action and genres were then used for the identification of discourses and topics. The

initial set of codes obtained were further developed and revised with the actual coding of the tweet text.



**Field of Action**

| Legal proceedings and framework | Political parties and politicians | Public action and mobilisation | News Media |

**Genres**

- The Citizenship Act, 1955
- The Foreigners Act, 1946
- NRC and 'D Voters' List
- CAB/CAA 2019
- Constitution of India
- News reports
- Journal articles

- News articles
- Opinion pieces
- Comments made by politicians and party channels
- Public opinion/comments

- Posts
- Hashtags (online campaigns)
- Creative expression
- Offline protest announcements
- Posters, pictures and videos
- Opinion polls

- News reports
- Opinion polls
- Personal opinions (journos)
- Pictures, videos coverage

Discourse Topic: Citizenship Dimension

Discourse Topic 1: Citizenship as affect

Discourse Topic 2: Citizenship as legal rights

Discourse Topic 3: Citizenship as membership
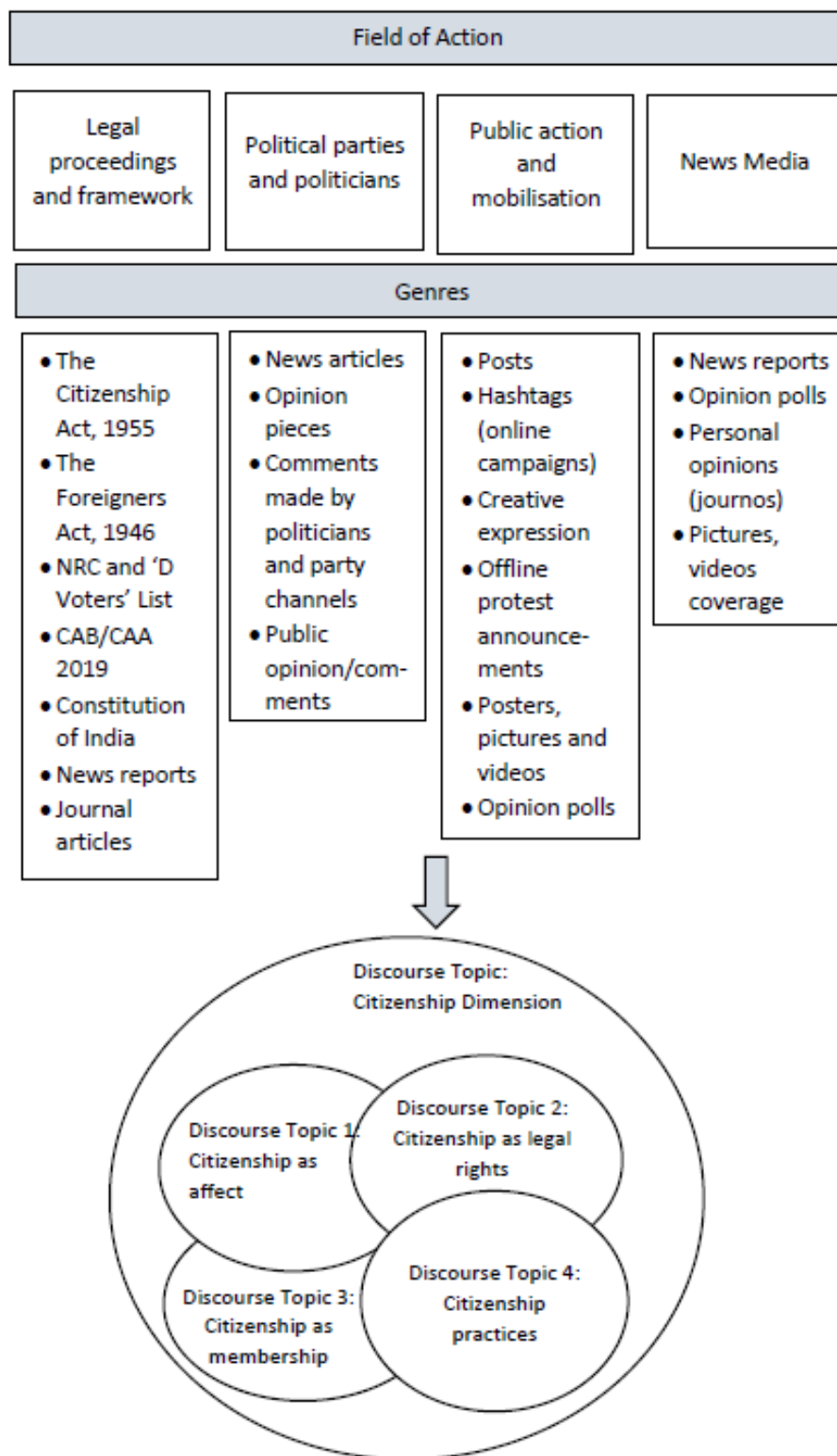
Discourse Topic 4: Citizenship practices

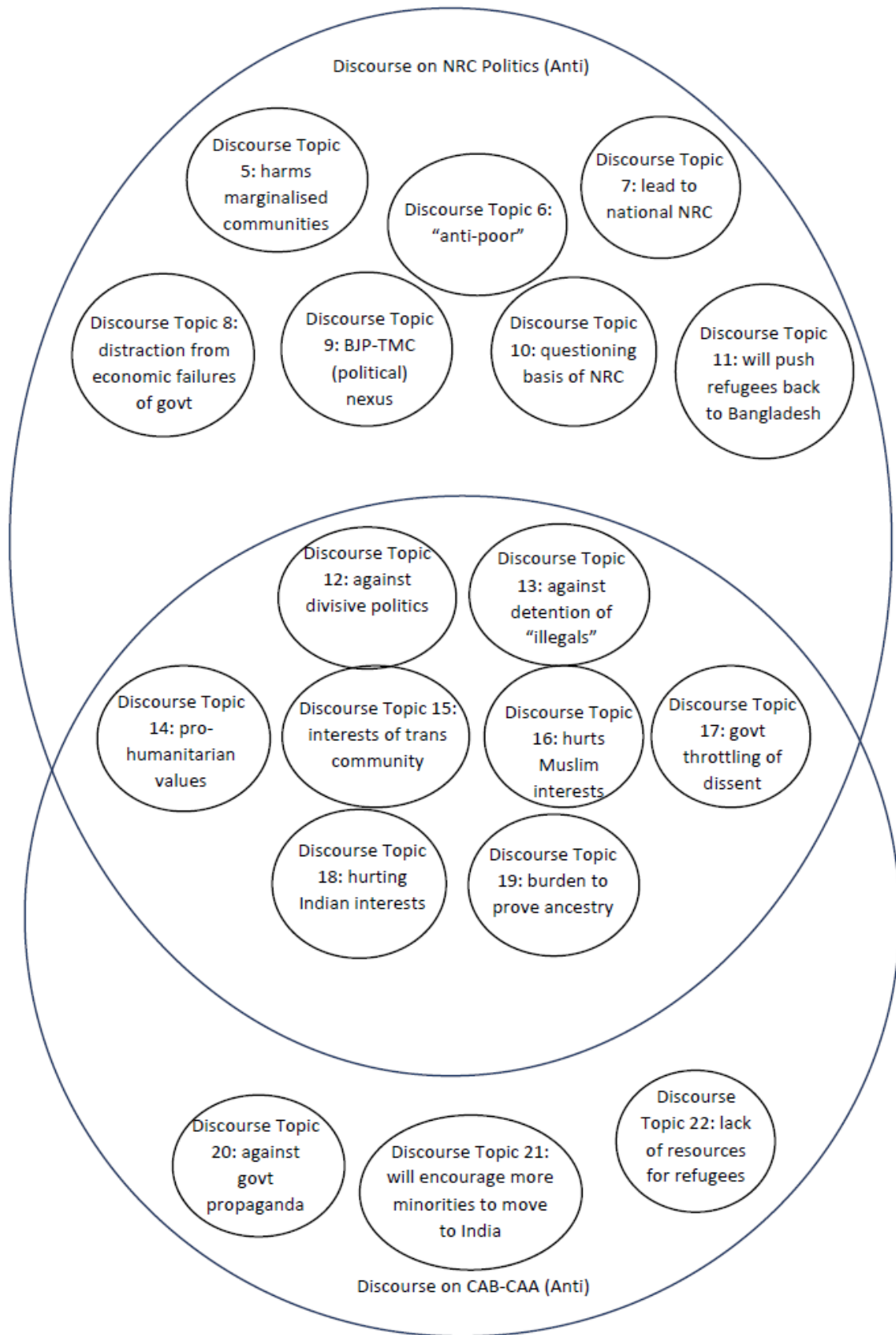Figure 5. The discourse about Indian citizenship during CAA-NRC movement

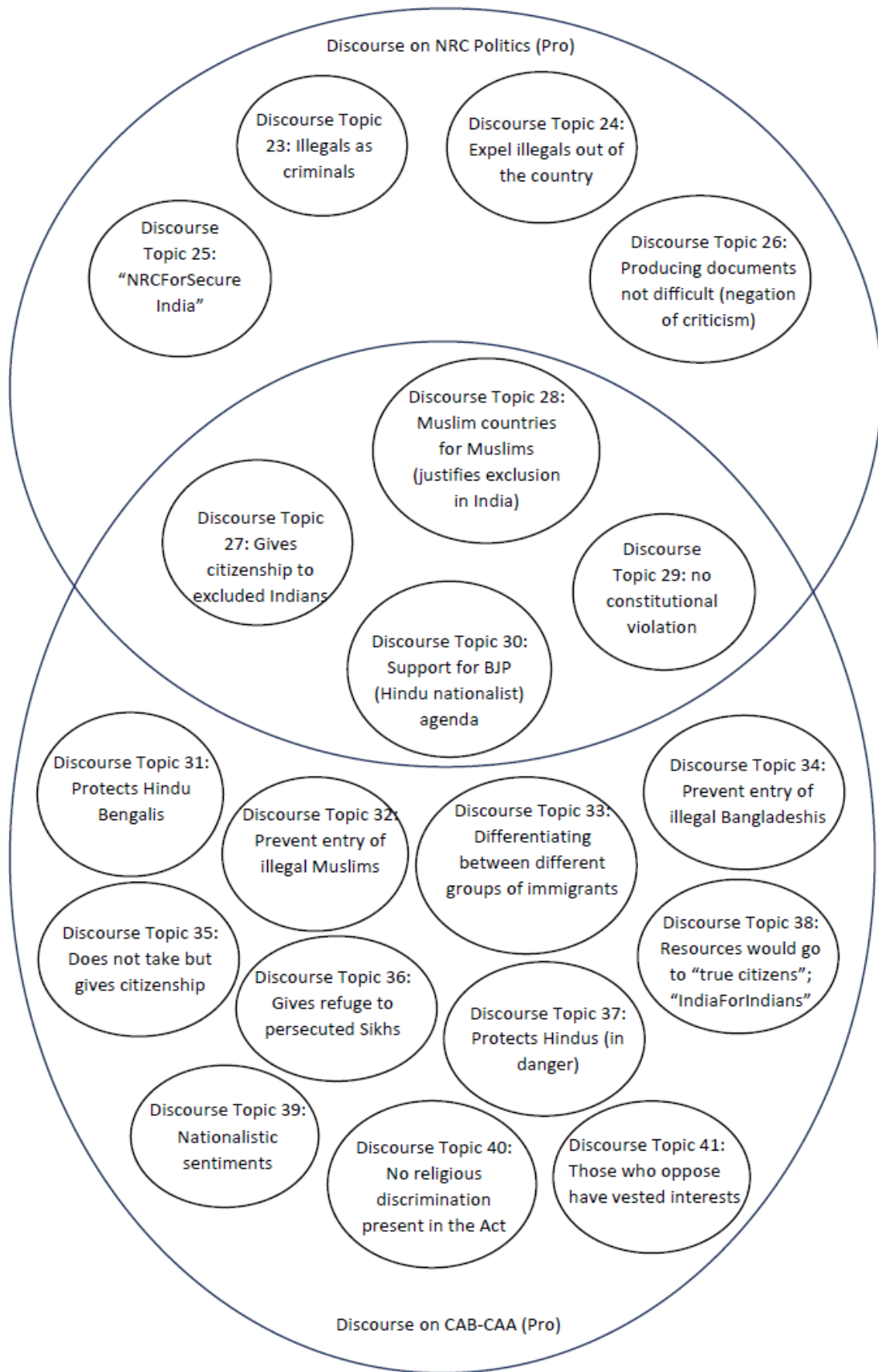Figure 6. Interdiscursivity between Anti-NRC and Anti-CAB/CAA discourses

Figure 7. Interdiscursivity between Anti-NRC and Anti-CAB/CAA discourses

## I. Citizenship Dimension

The first major discourse identified was that of *citizenship dimension*. Dimensions can be looked at as different forms of conceptualisations of citizenship. As discussed in the literature review, citizenship is more than membership. It is also about the practices that come to be associated with citizenship. There were four different dimensions of citizenship that were identified: (1) citizenship as membership, (2) citizenship as legal status, (3) citizenship as practices, (4) citizenship as affect.

It was seen that the Twitter populace was operating with all of these varied (yet not separate) conceptualisations of the concept. While the roots of the CAA-NRC movement lay in changes in legislation, people overwhelmingly referred to citizenship in the form of many different practices. Some linked citizenship to the act of voting – putting forth voting as a way of showing their approval or disapproval towards government's political moves. One user wrote that they voted for the government for their promise on implementing the NRC. These and many other similar statements sought to paint the act of voting as a significant citizenship function; with people debating on which issues should or should not matter to individuals as citizens.

Many used the Twitter platform as a space of deliberation – wherein by discussing the NRC, CAA and the ensuing movement, they were performing out their role as a citizen (although that did not mean that the platform or the communication was necessarily deliberative-democratic). One user wrote that the CAA and NRC in combination would put socio-economically "marginalised people" at a disadvantage and deny them "basic rights". This reiterates how these discussions became an instance of citizenship deliberation as form of citizenship practice. It also became a space to either show support for or criticise the

government in power; wherein one user, describing what they felt as the inhumanity of the CAA and NRC, wrote that people "must not stop asking questions to the Govt".

Users also came to talk about notions of free speech in an attempt to express their opinions on the issue. In response to the throttling of protests in Jamia Millia Islamia college located in the Indian capital of New Delhi, one user said that "Free speech is the foundation of an open and liberal democracy". Not only was Twitter used to debate the various sides of the issue and the claims of citizenship, but also came to be used as a platform used to gauge public opinion. Citizens and news organisations ran various online polls asking of people if they supported the CAA or not.

Apart from these, Twitter discourse on citizenship also included calls for mobilisation and protests offline. One user, calling for the rejection of the NRC and CAA wrote, "Join people's protests against NRC". Numerous calls like that were floated on Twitter in the months of November and December 2019 as the movement gained momentum. But the reasons for these mobilisations or motivations behind joining them were not uniform – some mobilised against the CAA-NRC and some in support (and not for the same reasons as the next sub-section would discuss). Some showed opposition to the CAA-NRC demonstrations due to the violent turn of events at the protests. So, the platform was used not just for the act of mobilising but also ended up becoming a space where the legitimacy and motivations behind mobilisation itself became a subject of discussion – with people drawing onto their legal rights as citizens.

While various forms of citizenship practices came to dominate the discourse, other elements did not escape discussion – chief among them, membership claims. One strand of discourse (employed by individuals who were in support of the NRC) was about creating an us-

them distinction between 'legals' and 'illegals' (a referential discursive strategy to reinforce an "in-group" and "out-group" narrative; Wodak, 2002b, p.73). These were directed to people seen to be from outside the country; that is, migrants who had come in from the neighbouring nation of Bangladesh, by terming them "illegal Bangladeshi infiltrates". This form of referential strategy was linked to a form predication strategy, where these perceived infiltrators were attributed negative characteristics. There were calls to expel them in an attempt to "clean the country". And a user even wrote, "throw up the garbage" – what could be seen as an attempt to dehumanise groups of people who were seen as not belonging to the country. The perceived illegals were even painted as criminals and rapists.

When it came to the CAA though (as opposed to the NRC) and the awarding of citizenship to (certain religiously-defined) persecuted refugees, this distinction was made less relevant. Instead, people in support of the CAA chose a discourse where they identified the beneficiaries of the CAA as "Hindus", "Sikhs", as opposed to painting them as infiltrators or outsiders (which was the case for Bangladeshi and/or Muslim migrants). So, while some exercised an exclusionary discourse when it came to their support for the NRC (to legitimise expelling of Bangladeshi immigrants), they bypassed that or even adopted an inclusionary discourse when it came to speaking of immigrants of Hindu and Sikh faiths from neighbouring countries in the context of the CAA.

For these people, the claims of citizenship seemed to be religiously motivated. So, it was less relevant if the person or persons concerned were from within the national boundary or not, what was of concern was their religious denomination. A reflection of such thought is made clear in this tweet where the user wrote, "When Pakistan is made for muslims of India, why Muslims (sic) of Pakistan need shelter in India?". As traced in the introduction, this discourse

finds its roots in Partition history wherein the split and formation of Pakistan and India as separate nations was on religious lines. And such a discourse on India as a Hindu nation is also something perpetuated and endorsed by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, led by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This has essentially led to the undermining of citizenship claims of religious minorities in the country – which was reflective in the CAA-NRC movement discourse too.

When it comes to affect, one considers instances of what is termed "affective citizenship"; which is essentially about "how some feelings attach themselves to citizenship and to how citizenship itself can evoke certain feelings" (Fortier, 2016, p.1038). In the Twitter discussions these feelings that came to be associated with citizenship were driven by notions of patriotism, secularism and humanitarianism. Individuals who were patriotic had a very nationalistic conception of citizenship and therefore evoked so-called symbols of national pride like the Indian flag and used slogans like "Jai Bharat!" (which translates roughly to Hail India or Long Live India). There were others who had a more open conception of citizenship and argued for a humanitarian approach – for instance, one user called attention to what he saw as the Gandhian principle of "internationalism and humanism above anything else". There were others who referred to the secular pride and conception of the Indian nation and used that to argue against a religious basis to citizenship in the country.

Affective tools were also employed for mobilisation purposes – some referring to the anti-CAA-NRC demonstrations as "people's protest" (pitting it as a fight against what was seen as governmental oppression). There were also pro-CAA-NRC mobilisation messages that sought to equate the 'I' with the 'We' (India as whole), painting their personal support as a national consensus of approval for the CAA and NRC.

II. CAA-NRC

Apart from citizenship dimension, another major discourse was about the CAA and the NRC and reasonings behind support for or opposition to it. Figure 6 & 7 identify and list the various discourse topics that fall under the larger umbrella discourses of pro-CAA, anti-CAA, pro-NRC and anti-NRC. These are used to analyse the argumentation (discursive) strategies used. There are four larger ellipses containing nodes, corresponding to various discourse topics. And two of these ellipses are presented as overlapping with two others. This is because there was overlap in the topics within these larger discourses. It indicates the presence of interdiscursivity between pro-CAA and pro-NRC discourses, and anti-CAA and anti-NRC discourses.

Figure 6 shows the various discourses employed against the implementation of the NRC and the CAA. These discourses roughly fall under two major strands – (1) protectionism-regionalism, and (2) humanitarianism-secularism. There was one set of discourses that were against the CAA because they saw it as legitimising illegal refugees in the state, and even as an endorsement for welcoming more refugees in the state. This group of people wished to protect their own ethnic identity and hence felt threatened by the entering migrants whom they viewed as encroaching on resources they saw as rightfully theirs (*protectionism-regionalism*). While this group were anti-CAA, their sentiments were pro-NRC though. This was because the NRC as an activity sought to identify and expel illegals from the state.

Another group of people, in stark contrast, were against the CAA and NRC because they felt immigrants of all religions should be welcomed (*humanitarianism-secularism*). They saw the CAA as discriminatory since it excluded provisions for Muslim. In general, the first discourse of protectionism was employed more in the context of the state of Assam (which has a history with dealing with an influx of these immigrants). And the second strand was seen

predominantly in the rest of the country during the country wide anti-CAA protests in December 2019 and January 2020.

Apart from these, there were also anti-government discourses that were seen as playing a part in the anti-CAA-NRC stances. These people saw the CAA-NRC politics as a charade being put up by the government to distract from the economic woes that they were responsible for. These discourses seemed to be driven in part by the fear of a national imposition of NRC exercise and expansion of anti-minority policies.

Figure 7 shows the discourses employed by those having pro-NRC and pro-CAA sentiments. The pro-NRC discourse was largely driven by a legal-illegal divide, that is based on regionalist politics (same as the protectionism-regionalism discourse used in anti-CAA discourses). This was based on a certain exclusionary basis of citizenship. The pro-CAA discourse on the other hand was based on a combination of inclusionary and exclusionary claims of citizenship. In that, the discourses legitimised citizenship for certain groups of illegal settlers (predominantly Hindus and Sikhs), but did not extend it to other group(s) of people (like Muslims). These were driven by a certain sense of being an 'Indian' driven by Hindu nationalistic beliefs. In fact, it was this sense of Hindu nationalism that formed the basis of discourses common to both pro-NRC and pro-CAA tweets. The interdiscursivity here was therefore tied to a pro-government sentiment too.


III. News Media

Another strand of discourse found was about the news media (see Figure 8). Not only were news organisations tweeting out news on the subject, but they were also themselves subjected to the scrutiny of the public (for their reporting within and outside the Twitter space). Speaking

of a lack of coverage of a statement by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) in support of the NRC, a user criticised The Hindu, a national newspaper in the country, They saw this move by the newspaper as biased. Another user wrote on what was a perceived lack of expertise of the news media on the subject. So, citizenship discourse extended to discussing the role of news media too, pointing to an instance of practicing of citizenship by performing the democratic function of holding the news media to account.
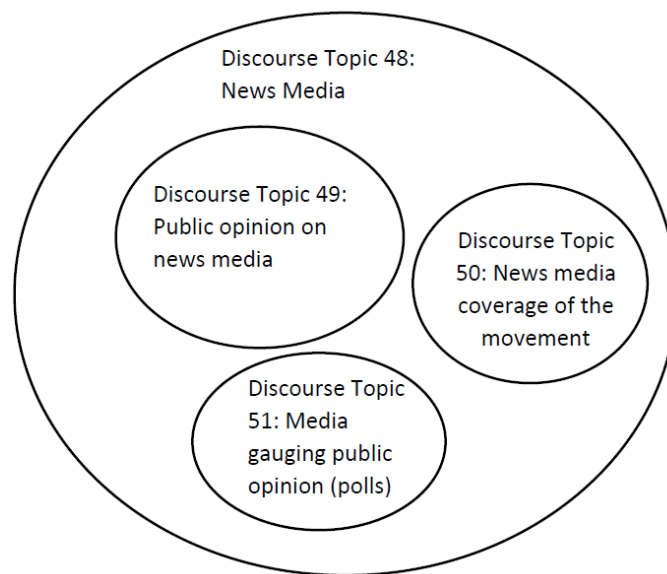


Figure 8. Discourses related to the news media

IV. Politicians & Political Parties

The discourses on the CAA-NRC and on citizenship were also linked to political loyalties. Individuals subscribing to a nationalistic conception of citizenship (driven by a belief in India as a Hindu nation) tended to be supporters of the Modi-led BJP government. The tweets that were pro-NRC and pro-CAA therefore tended to have references to the BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and the Home Minister Amit Shah. These references often valorised the BJP leaders. Mr. Modi was described as a doer; a man who gets things done. This form of predication strategy was employed in order to justify Mr. Modi's political move to implement

the NRC and CAA. The pro-government discourse was also linked to an anti-opposition party reference, wherein especially the main national opposition party, the Indian National Congress (INC) faced a lot of criticism for what was seen as its historic failures in bringing any significant improvement in the lives of Indian citizens.

References of the BJP leaders were also made by those individuals who were against the NRC and CAA and had a secular/open conception of citizenship. They instead described these leaders as being ineffective and discriminatory.

### 4.3 Linguistic Markers

I. Constructing the citizen and the outsider

Along with the use of various discursive strategies, the citizenship discourse on Twitter in this case also saw the use of certain word groups – used in effect to build a certain narrative about who was a citizen and who not. This insider-outsider distinction was reinforced by the use of particular words to describe 'outsiders'; like "refugees", "migrants", "immigrants", "foreigners" and "infiltrators". Those individuals subscribing particularly to a more inclusive sense of citizenship, or at least having a more humanitarian outlook in this case, subscribed to the use of words like "refugees" and "migrants". Those who subscribed to a more nationalistic and/or regionalist, as well as a bounded notion of citizenship, used the terms "foreigners" and "infiltrators". While all these terms differentiated the so-called outsiders from insiders (that is, 'Indian citizens'), the former set of words painted a more neutral/positive picture of *them,* as opposed to the latter, that had more negative connotations. It has to be noted that the notion

of the 'outsider' was quite varied; with different sets of people having a different percept of the 'outsider'. They could be illegal Bangladeshis in India, residents in Assam who had moved from Bengal and other states after the 1960s and 70s, the persecuted (non-Muslim) refugees from neighbouring countries (basically the targets of the CAA), or even Rohingya and other refugees seeking shelter.

In certain instances, a religious bias and motivation was also noted in the use of various outsider terminologies. It was seen that some actively used the term "refugees" or "immigrants" to refer to persecuted Hindus from neighbouring countries but instead used the term "infiltrators" to refer to Muslims entering from other countries (like Bangladesh, Myanmar, etc). This points to the presence of a religious hegemony favouring citizenship status and rights for people from one religious denomination over another.

II. I, We and India: Portraying a national consensus

Another trend in terms of word groupings was the linking of phrases "I Support CAA" and "#IndiaSupportsCAA". Here, a personal support for the CAA and a certain notion of citizenship was equated with having a form of national consensus on the CAA. This creation of a consensus seemed to be a tool employed to mobilise support for the CAA – by painting it as an act of nationalism, and even patriotism. As Halder (2020) found by conducting a network analysis to track the movement progression, the #IndiaSupportsCAA narrative was introduced on Twitter as a counter-measure to the anti-CAA mobilisation by the government itself. He located a video tweeted by a famous Indian religious leader by the name of Sadhguru. Sadhguru posted a video in support of the CAA which was then tweeted directly by the Indian Prime Minster as expert opinion. That retweet contained the 'IndiaSuppportsCAA' hashtag which

then was picked up by pro-government handles. So, this injection of a narrative of national support for the CAA was a deliberate attempt by the government in power to introduce a pro-CAA discourse on Twitter (although of course, it is not to say that individuals did not tweet in support prior to it).

## 5. Conclusion: What does it mean to be an Indian citizen?

As the previous sections laid out, the stances with regard to the movement under study and notions of citizenship were many. While some were driven by nationalistic and/or pro-government sentiments, others were backed by secular and/or open conceptions of what it meant to be an Indian citizen. While the government was found to be propagating a pro-CAA narrative on Twitter, citizens seemed to be lying on a spectrum it terms of their opinion on the issue. While some supported the views of the government and propelled pro-NRC-CAA narratives, there were others who countered it with anti-NRC-CAA rhetoric. There were yet others who supported the NRC but not the CAA – with their views reflecting a regionalist discourse of citizenship. All these conceptualisations of citizenship competed in the Twittersphere, but seemingly without much deliberation or substance to arguments. As the study by Vashishata and Arya (2020) pointed out, the nature of the online (Twitter) discourse was quite repetitive and driven by unidimensional messaging, not reflecting any nuanced debating. This was also noted in this study. People tended to state their views simply as facts and hardly gave any valid explanations (if at all).

Along with the law itself and the movement, people in the Twittersphere made references to and engaged in other citizenship practices too: including discussing voting,

hosting and participating in online polling, and scrutinising the news media and politicians for their actions. This reinforced the assumption the study began with – of Twitter being used as a space for citizenship discussions, while simultaneously also acting as a platform that saw the exercising of some of these citizenship practices being discussed.

The content of the discussions corroborated the existence of religious hegemony in the country – with citizenship claims having a strong religious basis to them. Discourses shaped the narrative in such a way that migrants belonging to one religious denomination were seen as less deserving of citizenship rights in comparison to those of other denominations. This matches with the claim of religion-based distinctions in citizenship practices that the literature review indicated. The study also showed how the laying down of a religious basis to citizenship in the Act itself and subsequent framing by government reinforces the religious power structures through the circulation of certain discourses (e.g., calling Muslim migrants "infiltrators", while referring to Hindu migrants as "refugees").

The study has given quite a comprehensive picture of the various strands of discussion that were seen on Twitter during the 2019 CAA-NRC movement. These now can be used further for refined probing of particular discourses; including the use of discourses on the basis of the political actors being considered. Further research can also build upon these findings by extending the time period and considering other events linked to the case under study (for instance, study the discourse during Delhi riots that took place in February 2020). Particularly with regards to political communication research, the structural and deliberative aspects of Twitter could be considered too: through an empirical examination of the public sphere-ness of the Indian Twittersphere.

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