

# Women lead new mass movement against Indian fascism

Saturday 7 March 2020, by [GANDBHIR Gauri](#) (Date first published: 28 February 2020).

**On a one-kilometre strip of road in Delhi's Shaheen Bagh neighbourhood, hundreds of people, predominantly Muslim women are holding a *dharna* — a non-violent, sit-in protest — to stop the implementation of the *Indian Citizenship Amendment Act* (CAA), *National Register of Citizenship* (NRC) and *National Population Register* (NPR) — which records all Indian residents.**

[The discriminatory CAA seeks to grant a path to Indian citizenship](#) to asylum seekers who entered India on or before December 31, 2014 and who belong to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities, on the grounds of religious persecution in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. It excludes Muslims.

The CAA was introduced last year by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Act is the subject of a Supreme Court challenge brought by Kerala state on the grounds that the Act is unconstitutional.

All India Students Association (AISA) National President **Sucheta De**, who is a leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, told *Green Left* that the CAA “shows the communal agenda of the [BJP] ruling party”.

“Firstly, it introduces religion as a basis for citizenship, and excludes, specifically, Muslims from obtaining citizenship.

“Secondly, if religious persecution is what concerns the government: Why not [include] the Tamils of Sri Lanka? Why not [include] the Tibetans? Why not [include] the Ahmadiyya and Shia of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh? Why not [include] the Rohingya?

“The main motive of the government is to create a religious, communal division within Indian society.”

The NRC was first implemented in Assam state and, if enacted across India, requires each Indian to prove their citizenship.

“If the CAA and NRC are implemented, it will be disastrous for Muslims ... and for the people of India,” explained De.

“If 1.3 billion people are asked to prove their citizenship, it is going to be difficult for the poor, the homeless, for dalits (the lower caste in India) and the tribals [indigenous people] to say when and where their parents were born, to prove their citizenship.

“We have seen in Assam that 19 lakh (1.9 million) people have been excluded from the NRC list. Most of them are poor and most of them are women.

"It is going to be very difficult for women of any religion to prove their citizenship, because in Indian society, women move out of their parental house, they go to their in-laws, they change their name, their cities."

De explained that, before the passage of the CAA and the start of the protests, the BJP's Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah announced that the implementation of the CAA and NRC would begin in April.

Even though the government's own reports designate that the NPR "is the first step of the NRC", said De, the NPR would seek to determine who is a resident and who must provide proof of citizenship for the NRC.

De said that under pressure from mass movements across the country, including in Shaheen Bagh, the government announced that they "won't bring in an all-India NRC, but they are going to introduce NRC in the form of the NPR."

"NPR is a measure to see who is a 'usual resident' of India.

"But through the NPR [process], residents will be required to give personal details like [their] voter ID number, Aadhaar Card number [a unique biometric identification card] and when and where their parents were born.

"According to the *2003 Citizenship Act*, a person whose parents were both born in India is an Indian citizen. If one of your parents was not born in India, you are not a citizen, according to the Act.

"A person who is not able to satisfy the government will be marked as a doubtful citizen. Once you are a doubtful citizen, you will have to prove your citizenship in the NRC [process]."

### **New mass movement for democracy**

In light of these fascist, anti-secular and unconstitutional measures, a massive women-led movement, symbolised by the protests of Shaheen Bagh, has grown into a nationwide pro-democracy movement.

Shaheen Bagh started on December 14 and is ongoing. Operating 24/7 for more than 75 days, the peaceful sit-in protest does not have any leaders and is a self-disciplined practice based on [self-belief and solidarity](#).

Women are coming out of their roles as homemakers to become first-time activists. De explained that for the women, "this is an unprecedented, coming-out moment, sitting in day and night, and has support from a large part of society".

[The first night](#) at Shaheen Bagh, the demonstration consisted of four women and six men, but as the movement grew, some nights there were [10-20,000 protesters](#). On January 12, the protest grew to [150,000](#).

[As men leave for work](#), women head to the protest, after completing their household jobs. Undeterred by rain, cold, or threats from police, government officials and Hindu nationalists, women arrive in the morning and stay until the early hours of the next day, before returning home for a few hours.

For Muslim women, this is a fight for their constitutional rights, their families' rights and the rights of all Indians. The dharnas will go on indefinitely and [they will not submit](#) until the government

agrees to their demands to revoke the CAA, NRC and NPR.

Volunteers provide food, water and medicine, and have set up stages, security cameras and toilet facilities. The movement has attracted celebrity attention, with artists and actors coming out to perform and show solidarity with the protesters.

As the movement gained momentum, similar protests [erupted across Delhi and the country](#). De explained that “Shaheen Bagh is no longer just the name of a place. It is a movement, and there are many Shaheen Baghs across the country now”.

In Delhi, along with the Shaheen Bagh dharna, women are holding indefinite sit-ins at Seelampur, Khureji and Indralok, and hold daily dharnas at Jama Masjid.

### **Ongoing protests**

In Chennai, in the state of Tamil Nadu, [3000 protesters](#) occupy two streets in the suburb of Lala Gunda in Old Washermanpet.

Chennai police used violence against the female protesters in an attempt to clear the street on February 14. In a display of solidarity, women all over the city came out to the protest site.

Jannath, a 26-year-old woman who was among 16 women detained by the police reported to *The Newsmminute* that the (mostly male) police “broke through the barricades around the protest site.

“They shoved us, pulled at our sarees and burqas, yanked our hair and dragged us into the van.

“I was the first woman to be pushed into the vehicle and they abused me and threatened to jail our men indefinitely.”

“We do not have the means to procure any documents if the government asks. Although five generations of my family have been living here, today we are [protesting] because tomorrow this could happen to you.”

The women’s slogan for the protests is: “You divide, we multiply.”

In Kolkata, West Bengal, a dharna has been ongoing outside a local mosque since January 7. In Roshan Bagh, Uttar Pradesh, a dharna in a park, started by 100 women is still ongoing.

In Bihar, dharnas have been ongoing in Shanti Bagh (since December 29), in Beguserai (since January 11), in Samastipur (since January 10) and in Patna (since January 12).

De told *Green Left* that in all of these protests, “there is a call to boycott NPR”.

“When the government officials come to us, there is a call from all the protests not to cooperate, unless they get rid of the NPR.

“One of the main slogans of the movement is ‘*Hum kagaz nahi dikhai*’ which means, ‘We won’t show our papers’.

“We are also pursuing [the] non-BJP state governments not to cooperate with NPR.

As a result, De said, the “government is actually feeling the pressure”.

### **More protests planned**

De said that as the dharnas continue, students and youth have called for huge nationwide mobilisations on March 3, called the “3<sup>rd</sup> March Dilli chalo” [Let’s go to Delhi on March 3].

“Students and youth have formed their own platform, called Young India against the [CAA], NRC and NPR.

“It includes around 100 colleges and universities ... that have come out in protest.

“One of the demands is to scrap NPR by March 22. The government will be given a deadline of around 20 days. If the government doesn’t scrap it, then we will come to Delhi again on March 23.

“The present movement brings back the memory of the Indian freedom struggle. At all the protest sites, people are remembering India’s freedom fight against colonialism. The symbols, the slogans, everything is being remembered.

“The present sit-ins are actually Satyagraha, which were actually a Gandhian mode of protest.”

“Until now the BJP government has been using the Indian national flag, the tricolour, for its own purposes, for calling citizens anti-nationals.

“During the BJP’s tenure, there were rallies and marches to defend rapists who were politically affiliated with the BJP government. Those rallies were done with tricolour in hand.

“Right now, the people have reclaimed the tricolour, reclaimed the national anthem. People are saying that ‘it is we the people’ to whom the republic belongs, the constitution, the tricolour belongs. It is not Amit Shah, it is not the prime minister, it is us.”

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