

"A man is
great by
deeds, not by
birth"
-Chanakya

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Family as the Political: Citizenship, Belonging and Law in Contemporary India

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Abstract:

In most cultures, family offers a meaningful adult life, and raising children has been seen as an essential part of family and human fulfilment. But of course, it is possible to live life in a non-traditional way and outside such the membership offered by family. Can family become a domain for understanding and evaluating citizenship? The case of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) process carried out in the state of Assam in Northeast India shows a close affinity between family and citizenship. NRC is a local site of citizenship with national consequences and affects South Asia at large. It has reterritorialized citizenship and the domain of family. This paper will show how family has been made fundamental to the citizenship determination process in Assam. NRC changes and organizes social relationships and re-inscribes the stage of difference in civil society, but also within the family (particularly during identification and NRC data gathering processes). The inclusion of family in this process allows such new relationships, differences, and distinctions to emerge, affecting state and society. The paper argues that family, rather than the individual, is the unit of citizenship in NRC, thereby offering a new direction for thinking about citizenship.



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