Authorizing Violence: Spatial Techniques of Citizenship Politics in Northeast India

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Authorizing Violence: Spatial Techniques of Citizenship Politics in Northeast India

Samarth Vachhrajani

A Thesis submitted to the faculty of the School of Architecture in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of: Master of Environmental Design

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Abstract

"Authorizing Violence: Spatial Techniques of Citizenship Politics in Northeast India" studies the spatial and legal instruments through which Hindu Nationalism and its political front, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), operates in Northeast India. I document the means through which authoritarian power has been introduced into a democratic structure of governance. Emphasizing the role of architecture and spatial knowledge, I attend to how the violence of disenfranchisement and dispossession is legitimized under the force of law.

For this, Chapter 1, entitled 'Legislating Containment,' turns to the legal instrument of citizenship and studies the Goalpara detention center and multi-purpose criminal jails in the northeastern state of Assam. The chapter illustrates how the conception of Indian nationhood and citizenship is fundamentally reformed by constructing a legislative loophole. As a result, a mechanism of detaining and disenfranchising has been set up for Bengali Muslims in the region. This chapter attends to how clearly defined laws have authorized the violence of indefinite detention. Chapter 2, 'Discontinuous Border,' traces the intermittent fences along the India-Bangladesh border. It explains how a discontinuous border fence allows the positioning of the military with shoot-at-sight orders and proliferates the infrastructures for the limestone extraction
industry. It emphasizes how the logic of infrastructural development is co-opted to make borders inseparable from circulations of global economic power and capital and finance ethnonationalist motives. Chapter 3, entitled 'Conservation Nationalism' looks at the Kaziranga National Park, where the global efforts of conserving the One-horned Rhinoceros and emergent environmentalism are repackaged with ideas of national heritage and religious patriotism to evict Bengali Muslim migrants that dwell in the forest margins. This chapter looks at how forest land rights are predicated on spatial knowledge of image resolutions of satellite images to expand national park boundaries and carry out eviction drives.

In all three cases, I show how spatial and legal instruments are used to introduce illiberal forms of rule within the existing liberal democratic structure of governance. I document how violence is legally authorized and spatially delivered in Northeast India.
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On my way from Guwahati, the largest city in Northeast India, towards Tezpur in upper Assam, the Assam State Transportation bus took a northern inroad instead of the new four-lane highway south of the river Brahmaputra. During this trip, between Assamese towns were nestled military campuses of the Indian Army, the Indian Air Force, the Assam Rifles, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), the National Security Guard (also known as Black Cats), the Border Security Force (BSF), the Sashastra Seema Dal (SSB for Indo-Nepal Border), Border Roads Organization (BRO) and the Indian Police Force. Almost all factions of Indian Military and Police Forces are lined along this inroad, and their respective training grounds and battalions
are enshrined with tanks and fighter jets exhibited on pedestals and easily visible from the outside. One can witness marching military troops in their everyday training between the lush tea estates most famous to Assam. Across Shillong - the capital city of Meghalaya- more billboards celebrate Military presence than commercial advertisements. One such billboard dedicated to the Assam Rifles - a designated military organization for counterinsurgency and border security in the Northeast read - “Forever in Operation.” If you travel to the Northeast of India, it is difficult to escape this extensive military presence in the region. Entire towns like Shillong or Tezpur have been converted into military cantonments.

The legacy of military presence in the Northeast has created some of the most violent and precarious conditions in the Indian subcontinent. I bring attention to their spatial and visual details because they sketch an instance of how architecture and design can be the most sophisticated tools of control and power yet remain politically disguised. It compels us to ask - how do architectural forms, beyond being outlined on maps, skyline images, or construction documents, produce fear, distress, and suffering? How are architectural forms, spatial conditions, and material choices defined to mark or articulate violence as a measurable, scalable, and quantifiable operation? How does a building, camp, prison, border, or even contained environments like national parks extend retribution by other means under democratic rule? How does architecture 'democratize death' as Achille Mbembe writes in Necropolitics, where its

\[\text{1 It is important to note here that in addition to the self-determination movements, the India-China border dispute has also further entrenched the military in the region.}\]
assumed righteousness gives ideology and discipline three-dimensional forms? This project asks such questions, looking for how to make sense of spatial and material evidence that is inescapable in media reports and political campaigns under Hindu Nationalist governance in India. Authorizing violence examines architecture as an apparatus for political ideologies and authoritarian power and as translated by judicial instruments, a form of governance.

The thesis turns to the Northeast of India, which has challenged the ideological and geographic framework of the Indian nation-state. In this region, instead of a state of exception where law ceases control, legal clarity, development promises, and collaborative governance, use spatial and material ways to mask violence. According to Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, under a state of exception, lawlessness can produce extremely bare life conditions in the form of camps and borders. However, architecture that mixes with lawfulness can generate equally severe conditions of violence, if not worse. As it will become evident, the Northeast region demonstrates how architectural violence establishes crisp laws and precise governance. As architectural historians, Anooradha Iyer Siddiqui and Andrew Herscher propose, "Spatial Violence may be understood not as something inflicted on architecture from the outside, but something that architecture inflicts even as it follows its own practices and protocols." In other words, architecture, often assumed to be an apolitical matter, makes the violence of dispossession, disenfranchisement, and containment a spatial reality through its practices.

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2 Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” Public Culture 15, no. 1 (2003) 19. Mbembe writes, “innovations in the technologies of murder aim not only at “civilizing” the ways of killing. They also aim at disposing of a large number of victims in a relatively short span of time. At the same time, a new cultural sensibility emerges in which killing the enemy of the state is an extension of play. More intimate, lurid and leisurely forms of cruelty appear.”


attend to the stories of how dispossession or disenfranchisement are organized spatially and legally in this project. It attempts to understand how violence has become expendable through clear definitions of law and jurisdiction. However, instead of being a consequence or an aftereffect, this project emphasizes that violence has become an accepted judgment in judicial and governance rulebooks. It documents how architecture and spatial knowledge are central to consortiums of power that authorize violence.

It is within matrices of power and governance that architecture is constructed. We witness them as architectural scholar Keller Easterling has defined - a 'spatial product' that "act not only as glyph or monument to an overt political text but as heavy information that becomes a nuanced, unexpressed subtext of action or practice." Actions and practices that allow architecture to possess the power of authoritarian governance are described at length to understand how information is collected or selected for ideological dispossession. At times, going farther away from architecture, the project nevertheless borrows from architectural and spatial thinking to study how ideologies inform spatial practices. The stories in this project understand architecture as a mixture of spatial knowledges unequivocally applied under a legal yet totalitarian regime that lubricates power to manage life in space. It takes seriously what French architect and cultural theorist Paul Virilio proclaimed - "Architecture is more than an

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6 See Keller Easterling, Medium Design: Knowing How to Work on the World (London and New York: Verso, 2021), xi. Easterling makes the point that “Space is an inclusive mixing chamber- an especially potent carrier of overlapping political, financial and environmental ecologies that graphically model some of the World’s most intractable dilemmas.” However, as she points out in her work, knowing this means that spatial medium can also offer a way or ‘forms’ of activism. See introduction (pg 9) and Afterword (139-140) in the book.

array of techniques designed to shelter us from the storm. It is an instrument of measure, a sum of knowledge that contending with the natural environment, becomes capable of organizing society's space and time.\textsuperscript{8} Organization of space, time, and politics is where architecture builds the most intimate relationships with forms of rule - democratic or authoritarian - that seek to manage territories and people.\textsuperscript{9} This requires knowledge of designing and planning by political leaders, judges/lawyers, multinational construction and manufacturing companies, forest rangers, NGOs, and science and technology institutions. They authorize or orchestrate violent events under the aegis of achieving peaceful order and maintaining democratic rule. If you read that statement again, it is an irony.

Architectural historian Felicity Scott reminds us to understand architecture within a global and socio-political matrix of power wherein the tactics of the field are co-opted.\textsuperscript{10}

Similarly, as anthropologist Brian Larkin suggests, "focusing on the form of infrastructure (or space) allows us to understand how the political can be constituted through different means."\textsuperscript{11} However, these produce some of the most antithetical circumstances. Political promises do not coincide with practices of law and governance. Such obverse conditions unmask how violence can be authorized; containment can be legalized (chapter 1), borders can be discontinuous


\textsuperscript{10} Scott brings together the work of Michelle Foucault on Biopolitics and governmentality as well as Paul Virilio’s work to explain the framing of her project Outlaw Territories. See Felicity Scott, Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity / Architectures of Counterinsurgency (New York: Zone Books, 2016) 20, 26, 30, 32.

(chapter 2), and environmental projects can be opportunities for nationalism (chapter 3). Even though contradictory, their inherent tensions create widespread acceptance of deceitful operations. This is how philosopher Jacques Ranciere defines the operation of modern democracy itself:

"Where the great models of political hope are in ruins, and at a time when one no longer dares to propose any rival to democracy as the good form of collective life, dogmatism has effectively outlived itself in the guise of skepticism. The indeterminate ritual of demystification continues to impose a way of thinking (and practicing) democracy on the basis of suspicion, as if it always had to be made to confess that it is not what it claims to be and that those who practice it are perpetually deluded about what they are doing."\(^{12}\)

The bracketed 'practices' of democracy in Ranciere's text above is where this project is focused on understanding how spatial techniques can make nationalism within a democratic structure and nation-state format. It speaks to the stories that international relations overemphasize. Yet, as large-scale projects of nation-state formation, sovereignty, and democratic system settle on the ground, it contradicts their intentions. This introduction, therefore, begins by understanding the rising Hindutva project and the culture of terror it propagates in the Northeast of India and returns to understanding these large-scale projects of nation, state, and sovereignty in the Indian context.

Hindu Nationalism is amongst the most robust populist movements of our times. Through a singular ideology, it stands to influence many people across India's culturally, ethnically, and religiously plural communities and its global diaspora. It is the subject of most political debates of the past few years in South Asia and employed some of the most sophisticated techniques of law, tools of governance, and social and cultural forms of representation to discharge its logic as an acceptable format for governing the largest democracy in the world. It has pervaded the large-scale governance mechanisms to define sovereignty, nationhood, and citizenships, and it has equally permeated the scale of everyday life in the country where the idea of a Hindu nation has come to define the limits of state membership and recognition. While Hindu Nationalism is not a new majoritarian movement seeking to change the Indian public and political culture, in the last decade, it has accelerated as an underlying, sometimes subtle, other times crude, technique of governance.

To illustrate this, let us refer to an example of how this ethno-national crusade has become an object of confrontation in everyday life. Suppose you fly to India, or within India. Inflight announcements from most Indian carriers like Air India or Indigo Airlines, after declaring immigration regulations or airport information, are now required to announce 'Jai Hind' (translated as Victory to Hindustan). Walking through airports, railway stations, or bus depots, travelers between 2020-2023 were welcomed with stickers on immigration or ticketing desks and billboards across the country of the G20 Summit, with a handsome picture of Prime Minister

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13 ‘Pilot Project 2.0: Air India Crew Told to say Jai Hind After Every Announcement.’ https://thewire.in/government/air-india-crew-say-jai-hind-flight-announcement
Narendra Modi accompanying the phrase, 'Bigger Responsibility, Bigger Ambitions,' and the word "Bharat" inscribed before "India." Bharat is being forwarded as the name the nation must have instead of India, which has Latin and English etymological roots. In any Indian city, tourist sites, national monuments, and big infrastructure projects, whether it is Mumbai, Delhi, Guwahati, or Srinagar, one can encounter life-size billboards of Modi and Home Minister of External Affairs, and long-term co-conspirator Amit Shah, as the faces of New India. It is hard to miss them anywhere, including inside your home, on your ID cards, on your COVID-19 vaccination certificates, or newspaper front pages.¹⁴

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government came to power with the popular victory of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India in 2014, and 2024 marks a decade in power. Moreover, at the time of writing this thesis, it has been five years since the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) were authorized. The CAA and NRC were introduced to add a religious vector to citizenship regulations, and it was for many, including myself, a defining moment when the BJP government sought to more deeply associate Hindutva with Indian nationhood. As anthropologist Thomas Blom Hansen explained in 1999, much before the CAA or NRC, the larger discourse on Hindu Nationalism or Hindutva was not an attempt to stage an "anti-western religious fundamentalism," instead, it is a desire to be recognized amidst global superpowers, through assertions of cultural difference as ideals of Indian sovereignty and democracy.¹⁵ The amendment of the Citizenship Act was a moment that

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ascertained such a cultural difference by defining citizenship regulations for religious groups. The political conditions that led to the CAA and NRC inspired this thesis project.

The CAA and NRC utilized judicial means to remove the constitutional veneer of secularism and justify Hindutva as a governing concept for Indian nationhood. The rising Hindu nationalist impulses characterize secularism as a Western ideal - a residue of partition politics, which Indian national culture cannot sustain. Removing the term "secular" from the preamble of the Indian Constitution has sparked one of the most virulent public political debates in recent times. However, as Hansen's work, among others, suggests, Hindu Nationalism and its inflections of Indian democracy or sovereignty did not have its pivotal moment in 2014. Nevertheless, since 2014, there has been an acceleration in the co-opting of popular political discourses of ethno-nationalism and austere organizing efforts of Hindutva organizations into legislative, judicial, and executive organs of governance. These organizations include the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS - 'National Voluntary Crops,' a paramilitary organization), the Bajrang Dal of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP - Youth wing of World Council of Hindus), Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP - right-wing student union) under the umbrella organization of Sangh Parivar (or the family of RSS which includes the BJP, VHP, RSS, Bajrang Dal and ABVP). The spatial and material implications of how Hindu nationalism is introduced into governance are most central to the stories this thesis gathers.

When the Citizenship Amendment Bill was introduced in the Indian parliament in 2016, a group of Assamese scholars and journalists expressed their discontent at mobilizing the discourse

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of Assamese linguistic chauvinism or instigating cultural nationalism as a rationale for the bill. Assamese politicians, like Chief Minister Himanta Biswas Sharma, were most concerned about the Bengali-speaking Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, erasing Assamese cultural identity. These scholars and journalists defended how the workings of Hindutva disregarded Assam's complex and heterogeneous history, which involved many cultural, tribal, and linguistic communities.\(^\text{17}\) Moreover, they emphasized that historical processes like colonialism, partition of the subcontinent, post-colonial nation-state building, and emergent ecological conditions like flooding brought Bengali Muslims to Assam. Their public letter remains an important reminder of how Hindutva politics, of which CAA and NRC are an outcome, endanger the cultural and social fabric of Northeast India. Therefore, this thesis not only focuses on the long-term presence of Hindu-Nationalism but also recognizes the long legacy of state-sponsored violence that has lingered in the Northeast of India.

Naga Anthropologist Arkotong Longkumer, in his book on Hindutva and the Northeast, presents another facet of the workings of this movement in the region. His ethnography opens the dynamics of right-wing Hindu nationalist organizations like the RSS and the VHP in the Northeast, which is mainly a Christian-dominated region. His ethnography highlights how these organizations, mainly run by Indians from other parts of the country (mainly Hindu men), shift their own Hindu principles and cultural practices, often operating silently, to be accepted in the region and preach the geocultural notion of Hindu Homeland.\(^\text{18}\) This geocultural notion


proclaimed that *Bharatvarsha* or the Indian homeland - is the land from the Indus to the seas. It was conceptualized by the founder of Hindutva Ideology and right-wing politician Vir Savarkar in his seminal 1923 book *"Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?"* (however, Savarkar famously called himself an atheist). Because the Northeast had mythological roots in epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and was bounded by the Hindu geocultural landscape defined between the Indus and the seas, its presence was essential to the modern Indian nation-state.19

Hindutva, by design, operates in both the imagined and real spaces. Geocultural notions mark the boundaries of an imagined nation-state. However, as sociologist Satish Deshpande explains, they require paramilitary and vigilante groups, which translate national culture into spatial strategies that construct concrete spaces like border fences or detention centers. Deshpande writes, "A spatial strategy not only unfolds in space, it is also about space—its appropriation, deployment, and control. Such strategies are among those designed to support and maintain relations of power or resistance."20 Spatial strategies can turn ideologies of social geography into patriotic notions grounded in material and spatial evidence. Whether a map of 'Mother India,' texts by Savarkar, speeches by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, or amendment of citizenship regulations, they are the undercurrents that manifest physical or spatial structures of violence. Deshpande writes that communalism is "peacefully at home" in these instances.21 They visually and spatially gratify the geocultural ideas of a Hindu Homeland and the sovereignty of a


21 Ibid, 270.
modern Indian nation-state simultaneously. This thesis observes and documents the sites where these undercurrents of Hindu nationalism solidify.

Terror Culture

The Northeast of India has remained a sensitive region in the country. Self-determination movements emerged in the region, protesting their membership in the dominion of India upon independence in 1947. The Naga National Council (NNC), a political group representing the Naga people, declared independence one day before India. However, even before 1947, then part of the colonial Assam province, NNC's demand for a separate Naga state was denied. Their political activities spurred a series of self-determination movements in a region comprising approximately 220 indigenous, tribal, and cultural communities. The Mizo National Front (MNF), The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the People's Liberation Army in Manipur, and many others demanded self-determination and legitimacy between the 1950s and 1960s.22 Some, like the National Democratic Front of Boroland, were active until 2020. These movements, documented as 'insurgencies' in government and military ledgers, resulted in the subsequent cleaving of states - the 'seven sisters' of Northeast India: Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura.23 Today, this region shares ninety-six percent of its borders with its neighbors - Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, and Myanmar,

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22 See the work of Artlong Longkumer, Sanjib Baruah, Dolly Kikon.

23 It is important to note that there were multiple ordinances through which the Northeast region was reorganized into seven states. The Assam Reorganization Act of 1969 created an autonomous state within Assam that was called Meghalaya. The Northeast Reorganization Act of 1971 separated the states of Tripura and Manipur, gave Meghalaya a statehood, and created Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh and Union Territories. Mizoram received statehood in 1987 after the Mizoram Peace Accord and Arunachal Pradesh in 1986 by the State of Arunachal Pradesh Act.
and it is connected to the Indian mainland by only a 12 km strip of land in Siliguri, in Northern Bengal. Therefore, throughout history, because it has challenged Indian nationhood through separatist movements, the violence of nationalism has been even more forcefully stressed and visible in this region.

In response to the self-determination movements of the Northeast, the Arms Forces Special Powers Act, a postcolonial version of a colonial-era ordinance, was established in the region to authorize "special powers" to the Indian Military. Under postcolonial governance, it became an instrument to envelop the self-determination movements under a blanket law to position the military in the region with complete impunity. It is still active in certain regions in the Northeast, especially in response to the ethnic violence experienced in the state of Manipur in the summer of 2023. This six-decade-long pseudo-military rule was first authorized in the region in 1958, in the initial days of the Naga Rebellion, and subsequently spread across the region until peace talks between the Indian government and various 'insurgent' groups of the region.\(^2\) For AFSPA to commence, a state or part of a state would be declared "disturbed," and the self-determination movements could be managed by preemptive arrests, searching premises without warrants, and shooting or killing civilians at sight. Among these legally authorized atrocities has been the rape and murder cases that brought AFSPA into the Supreme Court of India to be repealed in 1997 (Naga People's Movement for Human Rights v/s Union of India), ironically the same year as recognition of Sexual Harassment of Women by the Supreme Court.\(^3\)


Nevertheless, the Supreme Court delivered a judgment against the Naga People's Human Rights organization. Under AFSPA, any legal action against military personnel requires approval from the central government, which is impossible and gives the military complete impunity to carry out government-mandated violence.

Among the military organizations entrenched in the region, the Counterinsurgency and Jungle Warfare School (CIJW) in the State of Mizoram is a notable institution. The self-determination movement of the Mizo people faced one of the most violent crackdowns by the Indian state, which involved forced village re-groupings, burning entire villages, and aerial bombings on the city of Aizawl (now the capital).26 Started by a famine that the Indian government ignored, the fight for food turned into a fight for independence that was violently squashed. The CIJW's location in Mizoram is not a coincidence. It is a research and training establishment of the Indian Army that specializes in 'unconventional warfare' and guerrilla tactics, and it is one of the most premier institutions of its kind in the world. They train 7000 officers in a year and have invited military trainees from across the world.27 They have trained contingents from the American, Mongolian, and Uzbekistan armies, and the UK and Israeli military have also expressed interest in sending their contingents to the school, whose guiding motto is "Fight the Guerrilla like a Guerrilla." Boasting professionalism, the organization identifies its role as opening the "Gateway to Mizoram" and a sought-after place by foreign armies, placing the sophistication of the Indian Army and the Northeast simultaneously on the


world map. The school hosts some of the most advanced training facilities, thirteen firing ranges, places to become experienced with high-tech explosives, and numerous training fields within the thick jungles of Mizoram. Army personnel can get simulated training in insurgent tactics, deadly traps, and reflex firing at this school. The Hall of Fame on their website enlists their most proud troops who have served in the Northeast, Jammu, and Kashmir.

Anthropologist and Naga indigenous scholar Dolly Kikon, reflecting on fifty years of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act in 2009, explained how this act has created a culture of terror across the region. Foremost in creating this terror culture are the omnipresent military organizations that have saturated the region over seventy-six years of Indian independence. 28 Dr Kikon's reflections on the "predicament of justice" emphasize that AFSPA, in addition to solidifying a military regime in the region, has become "intricately linked with market, economy, and governance." This is because this terror culture has allowed the Northeast to remain a site of resource extraction. Against this backdrop, foregrounding the geocultural notions of Hindu-homeland to keep Northeast within India's imagined nation-state hides the remunerative undertones. The creation of the Northeast as a frontier-security zone under a culture of terror converts its landscape into a solvent currency in the calculations for the national and regional economies. These calculations also make authorized violence a tenable act. Therefore, this region is congenial in understanding the headstrong regime and its ringleaders determined to tip political scales. and turn sweeping ethno-nationalist motives into a delectable promise for the voting public.

Sovereignty and Authoritarian Rule

Against the backdrop of the terror culture that has lingered in the Northeast, a reflection on how illiberal or authoritarian forms of rule are sustained under a democracy is required. Preparing the ground for such authoritarianism requires knowledge and manipulation of existing laws, national and international frameworks, and constitutional or legislative loopholes in which the trickery of nationalism can hide. Moreover, as the accounts in the thesis document, political structures are bent out of shape to make this region into a 260,000-square-kilometer zone of authoritarian power.

The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 is widely understood as the moment when the modern international system of nation-states formed around individual authority, autonomy, and sovereignty delimited within geographic boundaries. However, as political scientist Stephen D. Krasner explains, "There has never been some golden age for sovereignty. The sovereign state model has always been a cognitive script; its basic rules are widely understood but frequently violated." Krasner points out that rather than an anomaly, violations of the sovereign state model, supposedly granting self-determination, are routinely normal. Instead of granting promises of exclusive authority or autonomy, Krasner explains that such international covenants order the minds of policymakers, and we can add government leaders. There are no authority structures to back the Peace of Westphalia or any other treaty that has followed since, and therefore, compromising sovereignty has always been an option. However, such contracts also

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operate on national and local scales (what Krasner calls domestic sovereignty). At this scale, acceptance of centralized control from governments is required. However, the level of this control is where the strength of national sovereignty is tested.\textsuperscript{32}

The Northeastern states have been a place of contestation where national sovereignty and local autonomy have been at odds. The rejection of the Union of India by the Naga people received some of the most aggressive military responses. At the same time, situated between the Subcontinent's political crossfires, the region has been central in attempting to solidify national sovereignty by marking national borders. However, due to the self-determination movements and border disputes, complete control over the region was impossible for the national government. In the case of the Indo-China dispute, for example, the borderline and territorial control itself has been under contestation even today in Arunachal Pradesh. On the other hand, the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh presented the predicament of people moving across borders arbitrarily marked upon colonial departure. This movement of people, mainly Bengali Muslims, provoked an ethnic and linguistic anti-immigrant uprising - the Assam Movement in the 1980s. More recently, the persecution of Rohingya Muslims since 2018 and the Myanmar Civil War since 2021 have also resulted in more migrants coming from Bangladesh and now Myanmar into Northeast India. Resource extraction is also involved in this entangled history, especially coal and oil in Assam and Nagaland and, more recently, limestones in Meghalaya, which have introduced differential regimes of ownership between national and corporate interests over indigenous lands - which are contested and unclear. Sovereignty on extraction produces its own politics and violence in the region.\textsuperscript{33} These issues have shaped contemporary politics in

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 20.

\textsuperscript{33} See the work of Dolly Kikon, \textit{Living with Oil and Coal: Resource politics and Militarization in Northeast India} (Seattle WA, University of Washington Press, 2019).
Northeast India, which have come to define citizenship parameters and regulate the presence of the military, the government, and multinational corporations.

It is evident in the Indian case, as many have demonstrated, that the European import of a 'monistic state' is an impossibility. The Northeast is the most compelling example of this. Covenants like the Peace of Westphalia may promise national autonomy to fragmented imagined communities. However, this is where nationalism finds its birthright. In other words, in India, the inability to congeal the entire nation under one flag or idea of nationhood has given Hindu Nationalism the traction required to keep its wheels turning. For example, in September 2023, the chief of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (considered a separatist group) emphasized in his statement that the seven-decade-long Naga conflict cannot be solved without a separate flag and a constitution. Such conditions have given Hindu Nationalism a reason to falsify its work as guardians of Indian sovereignty.

As postcolonial historian and political scientist Partha Chatterjee writes, this "modular form of national society" that promises sovereignty is a balancing act. Representative governments that imagine fragmented communities in one nation have to strike a balance among the "floating signifiers of the people." However, as he explains, representative democracies rarely equalize the representation of governed communities. This creates pockets of exception, which require not suspension but provisions of legal exceptions. These provisions can also be


militaristic as seen in the case of Arms Forces Special Powers Act in the Northeast or the autonomy granted to Kashmir (which has since been revoked by the Modi government), juridical - as in the case of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), or the form of affirmative action or special status, like the constitutional provisions granted to scheduled tribes and castes in India.

Collisions between national sovereignty and local autonomy are most apparent in frontier regions like the Northeast, where national policies, international relations, local cultural systems, and the history of the region face each other, either at parliament tables, courtrooms, or border fences. It is possible to influence constitutional or legal arrangements or impose disciplinary structures in regions where breaching conventions of sovereignty and local autonomy are justified as equalizing acts to maintain 'the consent of the governed.' In other words, the voting population, which in India is mainly the burgeoning middle class, is appealed through military regimes like AFSPA or legislations like the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens that promise security and peace and simultaneously administer an ethno-state in small doses. They are made to fear a separate flag and a separate constitution, giving workers of Hindu Nationalism more support for their work. Therefore, disenfranchisement or dispossession becomes readily accepted when law, governance, imagined ideas of the nation, and market-driven states are synthesized into a toxic mix. More importantly, as this thesis attests, such consortiums of power and ideology employ architecture or spatial practices toward their end goals.

37 Ibid, 85.
Chapter one of the thesis entitled 'Legislating Containment' presents the story of citizenship regulations and the Detention centers in Assam. The chapter explains the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens and their legal credentials to demonstrate how the terms of national citizenship and nationhood have been fundamentally transformed under Hindu nationalism. It describes a decade-long history of incarcerating people in Assam who were assumed to be migrants and assembles documentation of the Goalpara Detention Center located in western Assam. For those interested in understanding the combined effect of the legal provisions of citizenship and population management, the first section of the chapter - entitled "Hard Laws" will be of interest. For those interested in the spatial evidence, I draw your attention to the second section of the chapter on the Goalpara Detention Center. The thesis is followed by an appendix containing three white papers that pertain to this chapter - The Detention Center Manual (extracted from the Bombay High Court Case, where it was cited), A Parliamentary Record (unstarred question number 720, 2018), and the Citizenship Amendment Act.

Chapter two of the thesis, 'Discontinuous Border,' turns to the India-Bangladesh border in the state of Meghalaya, to understand how legal provisions, national sovereignty, citizenship anxieties, resource extraction, and movement of capital collude along the border. The chapter contrasts the unequal mobilities experienced along this border to showcase how an intermittent border fence has allowed nationalist interests to be repackaged as development promises and economic possibilities. Bringing together border agreements, archival maps, intelligence reports, media coverage, and field visit, the chapter emphasizes how the India-Bangladesh border is not
simply a line cutting through historically contiguous regions. It is instead a discontinuous border. For those interested in the violence of the border and how it expands as an instrument of capture, the first section on the ‘Border Fence’ is most pertinent. Those interested in an on-the-ground look at how borders have become seams for global exchanges - I direct you to the second part of the chapter on ‘Mining Infrastructures.’

Chapter three, entitled 'Conservation Nationalism,' brings into focus a subtle and unexpected site of disenfranchisement, the 'National' park. The chapter unfolds how the Kaziranga National Park - the only One-horned Rhinoceros sanctuary in India, has become a site of violent evictions of Bengali Muslims who have lived on the fringes of the park boundaries. The chapter breaks down the silent yet powerful tricks through which some of the most crude forms of violence are authorized. These tricks include pixel resolutions, satellite imagery, expanding National Park borders, procuring prime sites for eco-tourism and space-application and geo-informatic institutions. This chapter emphasizes how, by manipulating the cultural figure of the rhino under the shield of environmentalism and animal conservation, the ideas of the nation manifest in nature.

A conclusion that follows critically reflects on these accounts and argues how spatial practices are central for Hindu Nationalism to institute authoritarianism within India's democracy. It asserts how spatial knowledge organizes such a practice of governance. Rather than a summary, the conclusion is meant to reflect on the journey of this thesis project, and the political events that punctuated my timeline.

Each chapter of the thesis is followed by an "insert." The first insert - is an attempt to document the architecture of the Goalpara Detention Center. It is constructed through images
sourced from the National Human Rights Commission inspection team, available visual evidence in media accounts, interviews with a Pro Bono Lawyer from Guwahati, the Detention Center Manual, Parliamentary records, and Google Earth satellite images. The insert that follows Chapter Two - documents the on-ground conditions from my visit to the India-Bangladesh border. It has photographs and video stills of mountains shaved off for limestones, trucks lined up along the border, the Dawki-Tamabil Integrated border checkpost, and the discontinuous border fence. This insert also has some images of the breathtaking blue hills of Meghalaya, under the iconic northeastern summer sunset, that are most famous to the region. The last insert is an index of demolitions, evictions, and "bulldozer rallies" across India that the BJP government has sanctioned. It is an attempt to evidence the volume of evictions and demolition violence under Modi's regime that uses bulldozers and earthmovers as instruments for dispossession.

Ultimately, this thesis is an attempt to find the locations where nationalist ideologies harden. These locations are legislative and administrative, but they are also infrastructural and architectural.

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38 Some of the images used in the insert are from Dr. Abdul Kalam Azad, now a professor at Jindal School of Public Health and Human Development.

39 I had the opportunity to speak with Lawyer Aman Wadud, based out of Guwahati, Assam.
Chapter 1
Legislating Containment

A Central Jail is located in Tezpur, in Upper Assam, in the Northeast region of India, just adjacent to the banks of River Brahmaputra. It is a 30-acre jail campus that doubled as a 'Detention Center' after the detect and detain policy was adopted in Assam for Bangladeshi migrants in the 1980s. This jail complex is nestled between an enclave of government administrative buildings, controlled through weighted pulley-system blockades that allow entry by loosening the rope. A security officer checks for official permits and is stationed within this blockade. My researcher credentials allowed brief entry after being alerted that photography was strictly prohibited. Before me was an old building with
chipping white and red paint, mimicking an old colonial-style structure. A modest pitched roof canopy and an iron gate marked the entryway with corroding black and red metal bars and a built-in wicket gate. As far as I could see, behind this gate was a small entry passageway, with a side office for the jailor and another solid and even heavier black gate behind. It was completely shut, beyond which it appeared that even light or dust could not enter. On either side of this pitched-roof canopy were high walls flanking either end, marked with small windows in poor condition that concealed the prison complex.

As the jailor recounted during my visit, the Tezpur Central Jail functioned as a 'Detention Transit Center,' where those declared as illegal migrants or 'foreigners' were detained. Assam became central to the politics of citizenship due to the turbulent conditions that resulted from the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh. Further splitting the subcontinent, the Liberation War displaced a large number of people from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, into Assam and the Northeast of India. The requirement for detention centers was rooted in ethnolinguistic tensions and a resulting political movement that emerged in the aftermath of the War, as Bengali-speaking people moved into predominantly Assamese-speaking territories. Not only did migrations from Bangladesh exacerbate cultural and political conflicts, but it also organized what Anthropologist Sanjib Baruah called micro-nationalism, an Assamese version of nationalism, which, over time, produced continued political wrangling over defining the terms for Indian
nationality.¹ In other words, Assam became central to the politics of defining Indian citizenship. These fraught conditions, combined with the rise in Hindu nationalism by the 1990s, structurally transformed the conception of Indian nationality.

However difficult it is to get access inside the Tezpur Central Jail and grasp the violence of decade-long detention that took place within such prisons, even the architectural details of its facade are emblematic of how ideas of nationhood, defined ideologically, force people into material conditions of containment. Such spatial instruments have become reminders of challenges faced by nations-as-imagined communities in the face of global cultural flows.² As people are forced to move or desire to move, either by historical circumstances or economic consequences, they negotiate with not only the imagined ideas of nations - but also very real and tangible ways in which documents, laws, cultural identities, and, of course, architecture define a nation. Moreover, the story behind these detention centers represents the increasing divide between the nation and the state, which can allow authoritarian state power to determine the ideas of nationhood. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai notes, "State and nation are at each other's throats, and the hyphen that links them is now less an icon of conjuncture than an index of disjuncture."³ For Appadurai, this disjuncture challenges nationhood as more people move across the world (for example, the expanding diasporas around the world). However, internally within


countries, this disjuncture can also allow for ideology to maneuver different instruments of governance. These instruments are both legal and spatial.

This chapter studies the politics of reconceptualizing Indian citizenship. Upon Independence in 1947, India adopted a liberal notion of citizenship to incorporate the diverse social and cultural groups under a unified understanding of Indian nationhood. As a result, upon the partition of the subcontinent, multiple conceptions of citizenship were included, what modern historian Ornit Shani calls a 'mechanism of incorporation,' to accommodate competing demands from different social, cultural, and political communities.\(^4\) In the aftermath of the partition, with the large-scale migration of people across newly constituted borders of India and East and West Pakistan, the terms of citizenship were defined temporarily by the constituent assembly.\(^5\) Definite terms of citizenship for ordinary times were left to the Parliament, which materialized as the Citizenship Act in 1955. As Political Scientist and legal scholar Niraja Gopal Jayal explains, this Citizenship Act initially incorporated birth-based and decent-based citizenship.\(^6\) This is because, at the time, the state considered descent-based citizenship as a racialized form, not aligned with the republic's 'enlightened, civilized and modern' ideals. In this original conception, an 'illegal migrant' was defined as a foreigner who entered India without any valid travel documents or overstayed the prescribed limits in the travel document.\(^7\) However, this plural


\(^5\) It was defined under Article 5-11 of the Indian Constitution.


notion of citizenship changed over time by chipping away at its comprehensive nature through legal amendments. Since the 1980s, subsequent amendments to the Citizenship Act incrementally changed this conception, with the latest amendment being voted in December 2019. Therefore, as French Philosopher Etienne Balibar emphasizes, “We must ask what it is that has been transmitted under this name (of citizenship) through successive translations?” In India’s case, it is equally necessary to ask - how were political conflicts and nationalist thinking inserted into the law?

During the 2014 general election campaign and 2016 Assam State election campaign, amending the Citizenship Act was among the top issues on the election manifesto of the Narendra Modi-led BJP government. The manifesto guaranteed the amendment to the Citizenship Act and the National Register of Citizens - an index of proven legal citizens to solve the problem of illegal migration in Assam. However, as explained further, these legal and judicial measures fundamentally reformed the ideals of Indian nationhood. As a key institution for accommodating competing demands for state membership, citizenship was manipulated to advance the project of Hindu Nationalism. A religious conception of citizenship was introduced, inspired by the idea that Hindus possessed the historical right to citizenship or the predestined right to determine India's future. It is important to address how this conception of citizenship was legitimized? How was the law manipulated to suit the ethno-nationalist agenda?

The reactionary ideals of a Hindu Rashtra (Rashtra can be translated as nation) are defined within the system of liberal citizenship and the right to nationality as promised by the Indian Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.\(^8\) Another question that must

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be asked is, how did manipulating citizenship laws organize a mechanism for capturing people but keeping it legally and judicially patent? In other words, how did reconceptualizing the citizenship rule signify what Marxist political theorist Aijaz Ahmed writes as the "patiently engineered and legally legitimate takeover of institutions by their personnel from within while keeping the institutions intact." Therefore, this chapter documents the methods of capture - both legal and spatial - from the extreme right in India. It unfolds how illiberal agendas are incrementally introduced into liberal institutions but executed with legal clarity.

The peculiar nature of the growing authoritarian rule in India is that it is legislated under the tenets of liberal democracy. Directives like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), central to this chapter, clearly state their ideological and religious motivations as they orchestrate the dispossession of a large number of people. There is no authoritarian command or executive order but rather a parliamentary vote within the liberal scaffolding of Indian nationhood. The process is distinct from what the widely examined work of Italian Philosopher Giorgio Agamben suggests as the state of exception, where evacuation of law allows conditions of detention. Agamben argues that the state of exception has become a technique of governance. He describes it as a "process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life - which is originally situated at the margins of the political order - gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and the exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, bios and zoē, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible


indistinction."\textsuperscript{12} But the reconceptualization of citizenship in India is not an 'exception becoming the rule' or an 'indistinction' of the politics that Agamben implies. It is a distinct form of state power that determines the gradations of citizenship and spatial conditions of the camp.

However, this preponderance is not just legal. It is also spatial. In other words, the detention centers in Assam affirm that the sites where absolute state power solidifies can be a building. Therefore, this chapter assembles the evidence for structures like the Tezpur Central Jail and the new detention center built in Goalpara, Assam in 2019. These detention centers are not only spatial instruments to handle a political movement. They also exemplify how architecture’s ability to mediate violence is crucial for legislating an ideologically driven framework of citizenship. While prisons, detention centers, refugee camps, stockades, transit centers, security checkpoints, black sites, and even hulls of ships all detail the spatial techniques through which forms of containment get exceptional authority, increasingly, they have received new legitimacy under the force of law and liberal democracy. Therefore, we must also ask - how does architecture, whether in frail conditions with chipping paint or well-built reinforced buildings, become the most potent weapon for authorizing violence under democratic rule?

As the following sections explain, both legal and spatial instruments of governance allow disenfranchisement to be sanctioned and containment to be validated. Moreover, as anthropologists Kevin Lewis O’Neil and Jatin Dua, as well as Veena Das, point out, turning to material conditions of containment not only provides the ability to rethink the liberal and democratic conceptions of the 'human,' which engages the idea of national citizenships but also move between the domains of life, law, and architecture.13 These domains or sites where the nationalist power hardens, are at the heart of the entangled details that follow.

Hard Laws

At midnight on December 10th, 2019, the upper house of the Indian Parliament, or the Rajya Sabha, passed the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) with an overwhelming majority of 311 votes. Introduced initially and lapsed in the parliament in 2016, this reintroduced bill was

moved swiftly through the legislative ranks to amend the Citizenship Act of 1955. This brief amendment (less than a hundred words) marked a fundamental shift in India's idea of citizenship by introducing religion as a parameter. Preceding the Citizenship Amendment Act or CAA, as it came to be known, the Supreme Court of India sanctioned the National Register of Citizens (NRC) - a project to index or chart people who could legitimize themselves as Indian through documented proof. Primarily authorized for the northeastern state of Assam, the CAA - a legislative measure and NRC - a judicial ruling - marked a visible step in the BJP-led Indian government to foment the Hindu nationalist project within India's liberal democracy by designing a legislative loophole. The CAA and the NRC, coupled together, enabled a legally tenable process of disenfranchisement, clarifying the ideological undertones, otherwise not implicit in the individual laws themselves.14 Deepening the fault lines of communal divide, these legislative and judicial processes have created fertile conditions for explicit ideas of Hindu Nationalism to emerge through law and governance.

After the Citizenship Amendment Bill was voted in, widespread protests spread across the country against the amendment that could disenfranchise a large section of Muslims in Assam and, eventually, in India. The Minister of Home Affairs, Amit Shah, responding to the protests, presented his logic- emphasizing the importance of understanding the 'chronology' of the rules. In April 2019, he explained, "First, the CAB (Citizenship Amendment Bill) will come. All refugees will get citizenship. Then NRC will come. This is why refugees should not worry, but infiltrators should. Understand the chronology."15 Reducing the intricacy of the law to its

14 It is important to note here that Citizenship laws were put in the domain of executive government by the Constitutional committee instead of the judiciary in India.

chronology twisted the intentions of the CAA and NRC in the face of public scrutiny yet allowed people to be captured by the process of reconstituting the law. These public clarifications, articulated to oversimplify a complex law, were interlaced with ideological rhetoric, where appellations like 'refugee' and 'infiltrator' remained intentionally undefined. However, they become apparent when this chronology is flipped to understand how the legal process of disenfranchising transpired.

The Citizenship Amendment Act was introduced to change the concept of citizenship defined constitutionally and mark new contours for the premise of Indian nationhood. Political scientist Neerja Jayal Gopal explains that the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act "entrenches the move from soil to blood as the basis of citizenship and openly introduces a religious category into a religious-neutral law." As she explains, even before the amendment, over the years, India has turned the concept of citizenship from *jus soli* (citizenship acquired by birth) to *jus sanguinis* (descent-based citizenship). The CAA categorically redefined this conception of citizenship by establishing eligibility only for those persecuted because of their religious identity - defined as "Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist Jain, Parsi or Christian, in the Neighboring countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, who migrated into India before December 31st, 2014." Muslims were conveniently excluded from the amendment.

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18 Ibid. 16.


In 2019, the Citizenship Amendment Act was only notified, and the final rules were yet to be published and implemented. However, multiple discrepancies emerged in how the Act determined the context for citizenship. For example, countries like Sri Lanka and Myanmar, which share borders with India, were left out; meanwhile, Afghanistan, which does not share a definitive boundary with India, was included in the amendment. The Act was also challenged because persecution was defined one-dimensionally - only in terms of religion, not taking into

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20 The CAA rules were published in March 2024.

21 Important to note here is that India recognizes a border with Afghanistan, but this is internationally not accepted, since the border is shared by Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK) and Afghanistan, called the Durand Line.
account the persecution of Ahmadiyyas in Pakistan or the Rohingyas in Myanmar. Why was persecution and religion defined so marginally and restricted only to specific religious persecutions? Why must the rule mandate 2014 - the election year of the Modi-led BJP government- be the cut-off date? More importantly, as Dr. Niraja Jayal Gopal asks, why must religious identity determine the gradations of citizenship? She explains that the combination of CAA and NRC "signals a transformative shift from a civic-national conception to an ethno-national conception of India as a political community."\(^{22}\) Moreover, the peculiarity of this legislative design of exclusion by the Modi-led BJP government was how conspicuously and transparently religion was injected into the law. If the previous amendments of the Citizenship Act of 1955 obliquely mentioned religion, the CAA made it explicit, administering ideological impulses into a relatively innocuous law.\(^{23}\)

It is also critical to examine why the category of religious persecution was necessary to be introduced into citizenship regulations. The CAA and the experiments of citizenship in Assam were triggered by the Assam Movement, which marks the early years of the history of citizenship politics in Assam. This movement was primarily led by the political groups All Assam Student Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) in the 1980s, and it was initially based on language rather than religion. The migration of Bengali-speaking people, both Hindus and Muslims, into largely Assamese-speaking territory, provoked this movement, which demanded the dispelling of 'foreigners' to guard against demographic

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\(^{22}\) Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Citizenship Imperiled*, 31-32.

\(^{23}\) For example, Neerja Gopal Jayal explains that following the Nellie Massacre and the Assam Movement the Assam Accord amended the citizenship law that was initially based on naturalization. This earlier amendment eligibility of citizenship based on the year of entering the country. This amendment also introduced the term ‘Illegal Migrant’ for the first time, however this term primarily symbolized Muslim migrants in the region.
change. The height of this movement was marked by the Nellie Massacre, where a communal riot, led by mainly Hindu Assamese, massacred thousands (7000, if the unofficial numbers are to be believed) of Bengali Muslims in the town of Nellie in central Assam in 1983. Subsequently, the Rajiv Gandhi-led government negotiated the Assam Accord - a memorandum of settlement signed in 1983 to end the Assam Movement. Therefore, religion was introduced into the law, especially for Assam, given the unsettled history of citizenship, belonging, and sub-nationalism that emerged in the region after the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971.

Acknowledging that citizenship in India is deeply intertwined with electoral politics is also necessary. Earlier, 'illegal migrants' or assumed migrants were detected during the election process. Therefore, from the state's point of view, voting booths were viable locations to detect migrants by looking for forged documents, which were easy to secure through networks of kinships and money. As a result, the IMDT Act or the Illegal Migrants Detected by Tribunals Act (1983) was updated in 1997, and the category of "doubtful voter" or D-voter was introduced to identify, disenfranchise, and eventually incarcerate those with insufficient documentation.

While this Act was eventually scrapped in 2005, at that time, the Election Commission of India identified over 100,000 D-voters, listed possible illegal immigrants, and investigated them in villages around the border regions in Assam. Those marked as 'D-voters' were ordered to appear at Foreign Tribunals, transferring the burden of proof onto the assumed migrants. An


25 Religious persecution also entered the citizenship law due to the return of some Muslims and Hindus back into India from Pakistan who had moved during the 1947 partition.


important calendar date in the Assam Accord and subsequent amendments to the Citizenship Acts is March 25th, 1971 - the eve of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. According to the accord, those who entered after March 25th, 1971, their names were to be removed from electoral rolls and expelled.\(^{28}\)

However, previously, religious identity was not explicit in D-voter marking.\(^{29}\) The amendment of the Citizenship Act of 2019 and the NRC were orchestrated to recast this logic of citizenship management as explicitly a religious conception. Now, from the state's purview, citizenship is not only about granting the right to exist within India's borders; it has become a tool to carefully maintain the electoral roll by controlling voting eligibility along religious lines. Given the history of partition and the liberation war, this system takes advantage of the inability of individuals to furnish acceptable proof.\(^{30}\) Therefore, infrastructures like Foreign Tribunals and practices like D-voter markings from previous legal attempts have continued under the 2019 amendment. Moreover, terms like 'foreigners' were originally introduced as derogatory terms during the political mobilizations of the Assam Movement. However, under the CAA and NRC, they have turned into cultural, political, and, most importantly, legal identity markers for Bengali Muslims in the region.\(^{31}\)

Those who were detained indefinitely or subject to long-drawn legal


\(^{29}\) However, it is important to note that even then D-voter markings were discriminatory and mainly given to Bengali Muslims.


appeals might have forgotten their name but remember the 'D-voter' or 'foreigner' as a documented identity marker for themselves even today.32

Preceding the CAA, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) received renewed political attention in 2012 through a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed in the Supreme Court of India.33 This PIL mobilized the process of updating the NRC from 1951 when it was first authorized after the partition of the Indian subcontinent. It was a process of assembling a roster of all proven citizens of India who could produce documented evidence. This project was "one of the most ambitious judiciary-led bureaucratic exercises in the history of the country."34 As Dr. Niraja Gopal Jayal enlists, the Assam NRC is reported to have cost Rs. 1,600 crores (approx. $19.2 Billion), with 50,000 officials deployed to enroll almost 330 million applicants.35 At the heart of this project was 'legacy data' that required evidence of their ancestry through select government sources prior to March 25th, 1971 (date borrowed from the Assam Accord).36 In other words, anyone who entered India after March 25th, 1971, including those who were born in India to parents who migrated from Bangladesh, would be considered illegal (someone born in 1971 would have been 44 years of age in 2015).

32 This is a point that public health and human development scholar Dr. Abdul Kalam Azad, who worked as a researcher with the National Human Rights Commission of India/ Dr. Azad, explicitly made this point during my conversation with him, reflecting on his visit to the Detention Centers in Assam as a part of the NHRC mission. See also the monograph Breaking Worlds: Religion, Law, and Citizenship in India: A Story of Assam.

33 See Sanjib Baruah, In the Name of the Nation, 53. And Angana Chatterji et al. Breaking Worlds.


36 The Citizenship (Amendment) Act 1985, Foreigners Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. See also the work of Punathil, Precarious Citizenship, 55-72. See also Baruah, In the Name of the Nation, 71.
Updating the NRC in Assam started in 2015, immediately after the Narendra Modi-led BJP government came to power in 2014. It was by application only, and those who applied had to prove that their ancestors had entered India before 1971 and provide documented proof of their relationship with the ancestors.37 Following document submissions verified by issuing authorities, temporarily employed NRC officials had to aggregate the data for the applicants. Once the data was submitted and aggregated, government officials plotted an applicant's blood relations on a family tree (which at times opened unknown family secrets, too).38 This multi-step process required the submitted documents to be processed in digital software accompanied by field visits by government officials to verify documents that claimed Indian legacy.

In India, however, the legal, formal, and now digital formats for governance disproportionately impact those who are economically marginalized or not formally educated. In 2021, a team of scholars - Angana Chatterji, Mihir Desai, Harsh Mander, and Abdul Kalam Azad - originally part of The National Human Rights Commission, published a comprehensive monograph on the NRC and CAA, bringing together legal knowledge and ethnographic inquiry. Their work connected how Hindu nationalism and its presence in Assam profoundly affected this shift in the legal conception of citizenship. Moreover, they explained - "In India, where 68.8 percent of the population are poor, rendering customary practices and oral traditions inapplicable to evidentiary basis disadvantages the poor. Culturally relevant forms of identification and verification are critical for a large percentage of the population who are economically marginalized, non-formally educated, non-literate, and semi-literate so that they can effectively


and meaningfully exercise their rights.” Similar sociologist Sanjay Borbora illustrates his interaction with an NRC official hired in 2019 to manage the electronic database where documented claims were to be uploaded for verification. Listing the required documents - Borbora describes how property documents, passports, or education certificates had an "aura of middle-class respectability" to them. As a result, the NRC process not only unsettled the legal citizenship of Muslims in the state but introduced new vulnerabilities for other marginalized groups, especially those from class and caste-oppressed communities and women. Moreover, the process was filled with miscalculations and errors.

The first draft of the NRC was published on December 31st, 2017, in which, of the 32.9 million applicants, 19 million people were excluded. However, those excluded in the first draft were still awaiting their document verifications. The second draft, published on July 30th, 2018, excluded 4.1 million people marked as 'D' voters or doubtful voters. In June 2019, an additional 100,000 people previously included in the register erroneously were removed. Just before introducing the Citizenship Amendment Bill in the parliament, the final draft of the NRC was published in August 2019, excluding 2 million people. While the goal of NRC was to identify illegal Bengali Muslims who entered India after the Liberation War, the majority of people who


41 Ibid.


could not prove their legitimacy for Indian citizenship were Hindus.\textsuperscript{44} Moreover, the list excluded army veterans, government employees, families of former presidents, and Assam's only female Chief Minister. Numerous instances were seen where legislative and bureaucratic calculations did not account for common knowledge of family kinships - parents were included, but kids were not; grandparents remained excluded while their families were declared citizens. Despite NRC's inability to correctly authenticate a register of Indian Citizens, people excluded from the final list faced Foreign tribunals - a quasi-judicial body, where their cases were adjudicated and either given the title of "Declared Foreigners" or "Convicted Foreigners."\textsuperscript{45} Proven or not, those who had been living in India for generations but could not produce legitimate documentation for their national belonging were planned to be sent to new and old detention centers that were organized in Assam.

Those who were excluded from the final draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) but were Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, or Christian could make citizenship claims through the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA, 2019). However, those excluded from the list who were Muslims had no recourse under the Act. Just before reintroducing the CAA into parliament, the BJP government also announced plans to recondition the NRC as a national undertaking.\textsuperscript{46} Therefore, the CAA and NRC, coupled together, understood in a reverse chronology, clarify how they contingently created the legal pathway to disenfranchisement and, eventually, detention. As anthropologist Nayanika Mathur illustrated, the wicked twinning of the CAA and NRC was a

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} This clarification was provided by Lawyer Aman Wadud, in my conversation, where he explains how there were cases where even those convicted but yet proved to be ‘foreigners’ were also detained.

\textsuperscript{46} Breaking Worlds, 17.
way of "smuggling the Hindu Rashtra in by the backdoor under the garb of a law." Together, they marked what many have now contended as the "onset of absolute nationalism."

The CAA and NRC were an attempt at hardening the laws in the region, taking advantage of extant legal procedures to make legible those who lived in India for generations but could not authenticate or produce a predetermined list of documents required to establish citizenship. However muddled the judicial history of citizenship in India, the government has repeatedly attempted to clarify the concept of citizenship. Each amendment, order, or court ruling has concisely defined the parameters of citizenship; however, in flux, they might have been. This mutating nature of law has also allowed obfuscating and re-engineering of the legal language at different administrative levels. Moreover, these mutating citizenship laws, especially the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens, have made it convenient to legislate violence. They are sites where the evidence of absolute nationalism is visible, if one where to look carefully.

The CAA and NRC demonstrate how instruments of law and democracy are warped for ideological aims. A kind of statecraft that inoculates the law and simultaneously continues to observe the institutions of citizenship and democracy but bends them out of shape so they can fit the Hindutva ideological frameworks. By weaponizing citizenship, CAA and NRC assume genuine Indian citizens, mainly Bengali Muslims, who have lived in Assam for generations as 'illegal migrants,' 'foreigners,' or 'infiltrators' and subsequently establish a carceral assemblage to conceive the ideologically processed idea of India and Indians. In other words, it is enabled by a form of statecraft that shifts conceptions of citizenship and mobilizes sophisticated yet failed

47 Nayanika Mathur, NRC se Azadi, 7.

48 Breaking Worlds, 12. See Also Niraja Jayal Gopal and Sanjib Baruah.
methods of population management to disenfranchise people who have been in India for decades, if not since birth. A systematic mechanism for capturing people, not at India's borders, but from within its cities and villages. Those convicted or declared as foreigners, under the combined influence of the NRC and CAA, were ordered to be detained at six detention centers across Assam. By 2019, a new detention facility - the Goalpara Detention Center - was already under construction even before the CAA was reintroduced in the parliament on midnight December 10th, 2019.

*The Detention ‘Center’*

Enclosed amidst a largely agrarian landscape adjacent to the Brahmaputra River, between August and September 2019, a new campus was under construction along the peripheries of Goalpara in a village called Matia. Along Assam State Highway-46, lined with coconut trees, paddy fields, and tea plantations, a site approximately the size of seven football fields was cleared for constructing a set of buildings rumored to be the 'Detention Transit Center.' Initially, a brick and cement wall was raised, painted red, and topped with ringing barbed wires. Another concentric layer of red wall, taller than the previous one, was erected inside. Soon, a series of buildings with canopied roofs, steel I-beams, and
stocky reinforced concrete walls were under construction on this site.\cite{HarshMander2018}

Local, national, and global media reporters started to travel to rural Assam to interview site contractors and laborers constructing the largest Detention Center in Asia and the second largest in the world, costing 465.1 million Rupees (about $5.1 million). This detention center was being built by the Assam State Government, with assistance from the central government and in collaboration with the Assam Prison Housing Board, to contain and incarcerate politically produced 'migrants' in Assam.\cite{Krishnan2018}

Located approximately 120 Kilometers from Guwahati, the building, now entirely constructed and operational, has a total footprint of 300,000 square feet that accommodates 3,000 people.\cite{Das2020}

Once the Goalpara Detention Center was constructed in 2019, it operated as an exclusive facility that could allow detaining a large number of people who were expected once the NRC and CAA process was completed. This prison was deliberately called a 'transit center' to convey a pretense of temporary containment instead of permanent detention. The 'center' was meant to suggest that this newly constituted prison was, in fact, a processing facility for those in transit to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \cite{Das2020} The details on the detention center are published in an interview by Al Jazeera with Rabindra Das, an engineer with Assam Police housing board and in charge of the construction of the detention facility. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/1/2/how-is-it-human-indias-largest-detention-center-almost-ready
\end{itemize}
be eventually deported. However, even within the government documents and correspondences that deliberated these conditions for violence, the term 'camp' was most often in use, as opposed to 'transit center.'\(^{52}\) Moreover, there are no deportation agreements between India and Bangladesh, and as a result, many have been held indefinitely in Goalpara.\(^{53}\) More importantly, the architecture of this camp narrates a very different story of containment.

Far from being a transit facility, the architecture of the Goalpara Detention Center has made it materially and spatially evident what was inconclusive or hard to confirm through legal documents or political speeches - it was built as a permanent and enduring structure. The reinforced concrete walls, deep foundations, durable housing structures with welded I-beams, secure plumbing, ventilation, and electricity connections, as well as running water supply in toilets and kitchens, are designed to last. Moreover, this prison complex houses a recreation center, an auditorium, maternal care and nursing accommodations, a hospital, and a separate dining area, all conveying a sense of long-term organization of the facility and accommodating a large occupancy.\(^{54}\) A school is also built for children under the age of seven who have to live inside the detention center with their detained parents (even if the children might have been considered legally Indian). Seventeen four-storied buildings were master-planned and constructed, out of which fifteen are designated to house detainees, and just outside the concentric red walls are the other two apartment buildings and individual houses for security

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\(^{52}\) See for example the document - Assam Legislative Assembly, Unstarred Question No. 720. Sub: ‘Detention Camp.’ replied on 26/03/2018 - where the subject heading itself is ‘detention camp.’

\(^{53}\) Report on NHRC mission to Assam’s Detention Centers from 22-24 January 2018. 3.

personnel who live and work onsite.55 Hemming these red walls are a set of six watchtowers, CCTV cameras, and a 100-meter-high beam of light that surveil the entire prison complex.


Before the Goalpara Detention Center was constructed, those who were declared foreigners were imprisoned in a small, isolated area within existing district jails. In 2018, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) organized a team to conduct a field report that recorded the expedient conditions of these detention centers nestled within district jails. The NHRC report, acknowledging the experiences under what they termed as the "twilight zone of legality," observed "grave and extensive human suffering and distress" at these prisons.56 As the report acknowledged, before 2019, the state did not distinguish between detention centers and

55 Zeba Siddiqui, “As They Build India’s first Camp for Illegals, Some Workers Fear Detention There,” Reuters, 8 September 2019. https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN1VT01H/

56 Report on NHRC mission to Assam’s Detention Centers from 22-24 January 2018. 2.
jails and, consequently, between detainees and ordinary inmates.\textsuperscript{57} The NHRC report also listed the unique structure of Assam Police, which had a special unit entrusted with discretionary power to collect fingerprints and detect and deport migrants in Assam. Moreover, both the Border Police and the Foreign Tribunals have been pressured from the state to provide at least twenty cases a month.\textsuperscript{58} As a result, there have been multiple cases in which parole was denied, and legal defense was inaccessible. Moreover, according to the report, these jails followed strict gendered division, in which families were separated for years to accommodate the regulations of the existing district jail commanded by the Assam Jail Manual.

Collected testimonies from pro-bono lawyers who worked to secure bail orders for those detained unjustly due to documentary mistakes or incarcerated indefinitely admitted to the callous conditions inside these prisons. At the Kokrajhar Jail, one of the district jails that doubled as a detention center, two toilets, two bathrooms, and four taps were provided for over 100 women.\textsuperscript{59} Between the Criminal Jails and the exclusive Detention Center in Goalpara, by March 2020, there were about 3,300 detainees. At least thirty people have died in these camps or produced psychologically depressed and medically ill patients, with instances of hospitalized migrants and pregnant women chained to hospital beds.\textsuperscript{60} While only three such jails hosted detention facilities within them until 2014, after the Modi government came into power, six

\\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. 2.

\textsuperscript{58} See Amruta Singh, “Citizens Erased: In Assam’s NRC, a Near Impossible Trial Followed by Inhuman and Indefinite Detention” \textit{The Caravan}, 19 December 2018. \url{https://caravanmagazine.in/policy/assam-nrc-near-impossible-trial-inhuman-indefinite-detention}

\textsuperscript{59} This was emphasized in my conversations with Pro-bono Lawyer Aman Wadud, who described how the jails were in extremely deplorable conditions. The CJP - Center for Justice and Peace, is another team that offers pro-bono services, and their editorials also account for such conditions. See Editor, CJP Team. “Where Hope Fades and Time Stands Still: Assam’s Detention Camps.” Citizens for Justice and Peace. August 9, 2022. \url{https://cjp.org.in/where-hope-fades-and-time-stands-still-assams-detention-camps/}

\textsuperscript{60} See Chatterji Et al. “Breaking Worlds. 10.
detention centers were under operation until 2020, when the Goalpara Detention Center was inaugurated as an exclusive detention facility.\textsuperscript{61}

Image 7 & 8: \textit{Goalpara Detention Center Under Construction}. Courtesy of Dr. Abdul Kalam Azad, National Human Rights Commission

In January 2019, before the official opening of the Goalpara Detention Center, the BJP-led Indian government circulated a Model Detention Center Manual to all state governments and Union Territories. While the manual is unavailable publicly, the answers furnished in the Parliament for concerns raised about spatial conditions and indefinite incarceration in the Detention Centers revealed certain details. The questions were raised to inquire about steps taken by the BJP government to create hospitable conditions; however, the answers furnished by the Ministry of Home Affairs revealed the logic of planning and design laid out in this new government-produced rulebook:

\textsuperscript{61} See the document - Assam Legislative Assembly, Unstarred Question No. 720. Sub: ‘Detention Camp.’ replied on 26/03/2018.
"As per the information made available by the State Government of Assam, the Detention Centres are equipped with all the basic and medical care facilities. Basic facilities like food, clothing, daily newspapers, television facilities in every ward, sports facilities, the performance of cultural programs, library, yoga, meditation facilities (!!!!), etc., are provided to the detenues in the detention centers. Indoor hospital facilities are available in every detention center with medical staff. Health checkups of detenues are regularly done by the doctors."

This led to further questions, to which the MHA elaborated:

"The Model Detention Centre Manual, inter-alia, prescribes the amenities to be provided in the Detention Centres to maintain standards of living in consonance with human dignity, including electricity with generator, drinking water, hygiene, accommodation with beds, sufficient toilets/baths with provisions of running water, communication and medical facilities, provisions for kitchen and recreational facilities."

Far from Assam, these parliamentary exchanges in Delhi presented spatial provisions as evidence of judicious governance by the BJP. However incoherent with the on-ground reality, the detention facilities were proposed as well-planned, surveilled, and managed sites to contain those who did not fit the ideologically defined framework of citizenship. The answers furnished by the Ministry of Home Affairs detailed the state's provisioning strategies to make life possible.


63 Ibid.
under imprisonment. However, they were articulated in a way that could exhibit the state's goodwill and convince the country of violent state practices. To fully interpret this logic and the violence the detention center perpetuates, it is critical to see 'living standards' or 'human dignity' as spatial conditions that mask the authoritative logic in the Parliament. In other words, yoga classes or auditorium performances inside detention centers allow parliamentarians to reason containment as a benevolent project. Conditions in the camp and the parliamentary answers narrate different stories of captivity. But both use architecture's ability to masquerade violence and make it a legally and spatially legitimate option.

Detention centers, like the one built in Assam, have provided a blueprint for those built or planned across the country. A similar detention center was built in Karnataka, in the Sondekppa village, about forty kilometers from Bangalore. A twenty-year-old building was converted to function as a detention facility. Previously used as a dormitory for economically backward students, new surveillance technologies were installed, similar to the detention facility in Goalpara, to make it operational.\textsuperscript{64} The distributed Model Detention Center Manual also encouraged building detention centers in all states to establish a national detention framework. In Goa, Punjab, and Rajasthan, make-shift detention centers are already operational, and new centers have been promised in other states.\textsuperscript{65}

The architecture of the Detention Center becomes a potent weapon for authorizing violence because it is difficult to trace the ideological evidence behind them. As Architectural Scholar Eyal Weitzman shows, architecture possesses the ability to be “the least of all possible

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\textsuperscript{64} Swamy, Rohini. (2020) R. “A year after it was set up, Karnataka 'detention center' gets first detainee - A Sudanese.” The Print. Retrieved December 7, 2022. URL: https://theprint.in/india/a-year-after-it-was-set-up-karnataka-detention-centre-gets-first-detainee-a-sudanese/548776/

evils." In other words, it is a justifiable option in the calculations of ideology and governance. However, these spatial conditions are also the means through which the Hindutva ideology tightens its grip. As political geographer Richard Ek writes, at the camp, "Democracy closes itself upon totalitarianism." To trace this, one has to turn to the spatial conditions that are masquerading as politically inactive but are the locations where totalitarian power visibly accumulates.

**Conclusion**

The ideological goals of fundamentally changing the conception of Indian Citizenship and Nationhood were only achievable by the National Register of Citizens, which preceded the Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019. Widespread protests followed across the country after the CAA was voted in 2019. They further revealed the practice of bending existing laws to quell dissent against the state and simultaneously phase in the Hindutva project. Those who protested the CAA in Shaheen Bagh in Delhi and Sivasagar in Assam were met with repressive Indian forces and later incarcerated under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) - an act originally meant for stringent forms of incarceration for those involved in acts of terror.

The international media rightly questioned, "How is it human?" Perhaps the most inhuman detail in these experiments of citizenship is that much of the underpaid (Rs. 300 / $4.2 / 66 Eyal Weitzman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: A Short History of Humanitarian Violence* (London: Verso, 2017)


68 It is also important to note that Many Bengali Hindu's who awaited citizenship, haven’t received it yet. It remains to be seen how the 2024 CAA rules will be implemented.
€ 3.8 per day) labor for constructing the detention camp was provided by Muslim laborers who were unsure of their status in the National Register of Citizens. As a result, those employed as contracted laborers were themselves potential detainees in the prison they were building. The Government justified constructing this prison by contending that it is a solution to overpopulation and pressure on resources. Yet, 460 million Rupees ($6.47 million / € 5.85 Million) were spent on building the largest detention center in Assam and further plans to build and fund such projects.

Instead of reflecting on the inhumanity that is so clear in the spatial and legal details, one concluding approach might be to understand the masked ideological thinking that, under the guise of law, sanctions the prison. Unlike the state of exception, In the case of Assam and India, life and law are equated by clear and hard regulations by democratic institutions. In other words, the law is orchestrated to set up a state of legal clarity powered by religious prejudice to reconceptualize Indian citizenship - not as a status offered by the state but as a claim to be made and verified by the state.

The master plans of Hindutva are wrapped in clear laws that are precisely timed to institutionalize exclusion and cement long-term electoral support. The reintroduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act into the Parliament preceded the 2020 general elections in India,

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71 Agamben, Homo Sacer, 9.

72 This is a similar claim to what Veena Das explains the precariousness associated with citizenship as a form of relationship with the state. See Veena Das, “State Citizenship, and the Urban Poor,” Citizenship Studies 15, no. 3-4 (2011) 320.
and the guiding rules for the amendment were finally published and implemented in March 2024, just before the next round of general elections.\textsuperscript{73} Such precise timing gives authoritarian rule space inside the structure of representative democracy. Political Theorist Wendy Brown suggests that representative democracies - as a political structure - has lacked the ability to gather itself as a regime.\textsuperscript{74} As a result, she asserts, “Contemporary democracy invariably flirts with both narcissistic decadence and technocracy, which in different ways introduce markedly undemocratic cultural forces into democracy.”\textsuperscript{75} As we see, these different ways are legal but also spatial.

A palpable state power masks the Hindutva ideological conviction under a management logic by giving violence of the law a spatial form. In other words, it is more rewarding for ringleaders of democracy to use architecture as a vehicle for authorizing violence. This is because spatial techniques can vitalize state power but also mask the ideological motivations. In the Parliament, the Goalpara Detention Center was portrayed as an effective instrument for solving the migration problems of Assam.\textsuperscript{76} Likewise, the CAA has yet to be implemented, and NRC, even though now completed, has proved to be a failed project, however, the Detention Centers in Assam operate regardless. Moreover, expressed as buildings and reinforced concrete, the architecture allows violence to masquerade as a righteous act. The answers furnished in the Parliament halls or the Detention Center Manual that was circulated are the best pieces of


\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. 425-426.

\textsuperscript{76} The Ministry of Home Affairs has also set up a very comprehensive governance system. Two divisions of border security are in operation, and the Border Area Development Programme was started.
evidence for this. Architectural Scholar Keller Easterling writes that “Righteousness is a form of violence that most people cultivate.”\textsuperscript{77} This righteous violence might be difficult to ascertain in legal documents, whether explained chronologically or not. But it is glaringly visible in the architecture of the detention camp.

During an election campaign speech in 2014, in Silchar, Assam, Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised to close the criminal jails that also operated as detention centers.\textsuperscript{78} In 2019, at his rally in Delhi, he denied the existence of a newly created detention center in Goalpara.\textsuperscript{79} Obscuring spatial evidence is perhaps the most used tactic of the Hindutva ideology that wants to publicly portray the detention center as a legitimate solution in governance. However, the building’s construction, onsite experiences, and answers furnished in the Parliament narrate different stories. Hence, this preponderance of facts and the mechanisms of legislating containment requires assembling the spatial evidence. They disclose the ideological undercurrents that are prevalent in democratic rule in India. More importantly, they allow us to question - where do these undercurrents solidify? It could be a legal document, but it might be a building.

\textsuperscript{78} Narendra Modi. Address at Barak Vikas Samvesh Rally, Silchar Assam. 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm8R6Y5TOeU.
Most likely living quarters for Male detainees. There are four-storied structures, with iron I-beams, on a 3x4 grid, reinforced with cross-bracing. A central stairwell seems to be the main vertical circulation. Image from Prof. Abdul Kalam Azad (National Human Rights Council, NHRC)

New building still under construction

We know there is a school inside the Detention Center. One of these larger structures serves as a school for children who are detained either with their parents or themselves declared or convicted as foreigners.

As seen in this image - there are two large communal spaces in the detention center as well. They are designed for ‘multi-purpose’ use.
Looking at a map of the India-Bangladesh border, it will appear as a set of continuous lines, stretching across the monumental Brahmaputra River, the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, and the plains of Assam and Bengal. While a map might imprint the border as a complete line, on the ground, it emerges as a complex set of interrupted fences that attempt to negotiate with the region's uneven topography and political conditions. First marked in 1947 - during the partition of the Indian Subcontinent, over the years, simmering concerns of ethnic self-determination movements in the Northeast, the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, and insecure territorial control invented the urgency of marking the border spatially. Consequently,

sociopolitical insurgent movements, Bengali-Muslim migrants crossing the border, and pressures to secure national sovereignty from its neighbors transformed the Indian state into a ballooning military organization. While a map of the India-Bangladesh border might mislead its readers about the material realities of a fixed national periphery. However, as this chapter explains, an intermittent border is maintained to warrant expanding state-controlled infrastructures into the routines of daily life.\(^2\) Moreover, it demonstrates how the Hindutva ideology engages with the belief in a discontinuous border and infrastructure development to mask the ideological objectives.

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Image 1: *India-East Pakistan Boundary Map, Assam-Bengal (Goalpara-Rangpur), Sheet 23.* Assam State Archives. 1932.

10; and Dolly, Kikon, “The Predicament of Justice: Fifty Years of Armed Forces Special Powers Act in India,” Contemporary South Asia 17, no. 3 (2009), 280.

I traveled to the northeastern state of Meghalaya primarily to study the patchy India-Bangladesh barbed-wire border fence and the Border Security Force (BSF) policing ensemble that completes it. I wanted to understand the significance of this spatial structure constructed by the Indian government in the 1970s and, over time, renovated, remade, and replaced. However, as I witnessed it on the ground, this spatial structure and the corresponding infrastructures operated not only as an enduring security measure but as instruments mediating social, political, military, and economic discontinuities. The Barbed wire fencing has been an unfinished project along this approximately 4000-kilometer border, longer than the combined lengths of the US-Mexico and Israel-Palestine Borders. Today, it is fenced more than ever, but patches of the border remain spatially unmarked. For example, standing atop a bridge overlooking a dried-up waterfall along the border, I could see a green metal fence, freshly painted and topped with barbed wire, interrupted by a river. Over this river, between two fence posts, a taut jute rope was tied to mark the national border.
India-Bangladesh foreign relations are among the most productive in the subcontinent, yet a patchy border fence stands, at times, strengthening this alliance. While oil pipes, natural gas, and limestone trucks have easy mobility into northeastern India, people are still immobilized through spatial instruments like barbed wire fences, Border Security Force (BSF) checkposts, panoptic watchtowers, and limestone extraction projects. There has been an increasing desire

3 Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Chief has popularly remarked that the fence is crucial to both New Delhi and Dhaka.

4 In March 2023, the ‘India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline’ was announced jointly by PM Narendra Modi and PM Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh. “PM Narendra Modi, and Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Jointly Inaugurated India Bangladesh Pipeline.” Indian Public Information Bureau. 18th March 2023. 
across the world to create fortified and impenetrable border walls; therefore, we must ask - what does the discontinuity of the India-Bangladesh border achieve? What political decisions are legitimized by intermittent metal fences, concrete markers, or bamboo balusters that materially mark the borderline? There are geographic conditions that challenge the construction of a continuous border fence, but there are also political opportunities to keep it discontinuous. This is because the border does not merely immobilize people through a fortified wall; instead, its discontinuous nature draws people towards it to capture them. In other words, instead of being a deterrent, the border creates conditions where it must be confronted. This chapter turns to this eccentric nature of the India-Bangladesh border and the infrastructures that gather around it.

Infrastructures along the India-Bangladesh border are reasoned with a different logic - instead of the security of the sovereign territory, they are cloaked in developmental narratives. In addition to fences, the new weapons of the state in the region are limestone mining projects clawing into mountains, local and cross-border cement factories that cheaply circulate stones, Integrated Border Checkposts hemmed along the border to facilitate daily exports, and four-lane highway networks for easy mobility of military vehicles. Glossing over existing political issues, these fresh developments in the Northeast seek to exploit its "untapped potential" to mobilize the region toward Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Five Trillion Dollar Economy goals.⁵ Therefore, in addition to CCTV cameras installed on fence posts or regular police patrols that surveil the border, development is now introduced as another weapon that can mask violence and maintain a strong political foothold in the region.

This development logic has also reworked the narrative of the region from a disturbed frontier pressured by insurgent movements into a narrative of a strategic location that can drive India's economic connections with its neighboring partners. As a region historically steeped in ethnic conflict and violent state repression, it has remained underdeveloped, and critical infrastructures have been imperative. However, most projects planned through the central ministry in Delhi and implemented in the Northeast have been indifferent to the people and disconnected from the on-ground urgencies that could initiate meaningful change.\(^6\) Development scholar Dr. Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman explains that mindless and rushed development patterns in the Northeast are generating social and environmental concerns and can create new communal conflicts as people in the region confront them.\(^7\) Therefore, spatial infrastructures are ordering the frontier, not just as harbingers of development in a distant rural location; instead, as political scientist and anthropologist James Scott posits, the logic of development is introduced to restrict potential insurgence and introduce new ways of political control.\(^8\) Moreover, development is introduced to mask the ethnonationalist project. Anthropologist Sanjib Baruha explains them as attempts at 'nationalizing space' that are motivated by "high politics" of national security and unconcerned with the rights of indigenous people, local autonomy, and political stability.\(^9\)

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These new infrastructures along the India-Bangladesh border - like limestone trucks regularly crossing through the Integrated Border Checkposts or the trans-border limestone conveyor belt that hovers above the border fence to move stones seamlessly - also introduce unequal regimes of movement within the region. Instead of securing the territory through continuous fencing or a bilateral agreement, a discontinuous fence allows multiple political associations and various infrastructures to take advantage of the border. As a result, on the one hand, it captures and restricts the movement of people. However, it also allows resources like extracted limestones to move between India and Bangladesh uninterrupted. Therefore, it is important to ask—how does the spatial form of the border retain the capacity to capture people along the seams of global exchanges? What logic guides the institutions involved in designing these peculiar and unequal border conditions? The answers to these questions disclose contradictory ideas about the integrity of the nation and the economy and how they materialize unevenly on the ground along national borders.

Borders - surveyed on a map may compel us to consider them as binary conditions. However, on the ground, the line that stretches between India and Bangladesh demonstrates how an intermittent border can be an effective design for permitting violence. Architectural scholar Keller Easterling explains that an 'infrastructure space' becomes "the secret weapon of the most powerful people in the world precisely because it orchestrates activities that can remain unstated but are nevertheless consequential." Spatial conditions like concrete factories resurrected in old coal towns, cross-border conveyor belts, destructive mining sites, Integrated Border Checkposts

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(ICPs), and fences legitimize spatial and environmental violence that is only measured in the changing colors of rivers, accumulated cement dust, and life-size billboards of politicians hoisted at inauguration events. Instead of being straightforward, they mask the work of violence so that it can go unnoticed. This is what media scholar Ariella Azoulay and Philosopher Adi Ophir, in the context of the Israel-Palestine border, terms' suspended violence.' They write that sometimes, "there is nothing to be seen even if the whole world watches." Therefore, this chapter presents an on-the-ground picture that closely observes the discontinuity of the India-Bangladesh border as an instrument of capturing and simultaneously facilitating global connections and unequal movements. It documents how the BJP government's development promises and commitment to secure borders are just another disguise for Hindu nationalism, manifesting in infrastructural and spatial forms. To do this, I first highlight how the construction and design of the intermittent India-Bangladesh border fence facilitate violence. Then, I document the infrastructures that thicken the border to allow flexible but unequal conditions for the movement of capital and simultaneously introduce nationalist ambitions along the margins of the state.

**The Border Fence**

Dawki is a border village in India's northeastern state of Meghalaya. I first confronted the border on the Umngot River that flows through Dawki into Bangladesh, which gathered fame through social media travel vlogs.

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among Indian and Bangladeshi tourists for boating on its crystal-clear waters. India's Border Security Force (BSF) remains relatively less vigilant in Dawki due to a surge in tourism from across the country, wanting to row along the glassy river and experience the thrill of being at a national border. While on an hour-long boat ride from the 'Indian side,' the young sculler on my boat pointed to the opposite side of the river - making me aware of a makeshift rock island where Bangladeshi tourists experienced the glassy waters from their nation's end. Unlike many accounts that rendered the border a singular line and a violent place, it seemed unexpectedly peaceful here.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image2.jpg}
\caption{Boating on the Umngot River. Photograph by the author. June 5, 2023. Dawki, East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{13} Two scholars have recent published vivid ethnographies on the India-Bangladesh border documenting the militarization, violence and everyday life. See Malini, Sur, \textit{Jungle Passports: Fences, Mobility and Citizenship at the Northeast India-Bangladesh Border} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); and Sahana, Ghosh, \textit{A Thousand Tiny Cuts: Mobility and Security across the Bangladesh-India Borderlands}, (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2023).
The India-Bangladesh border was an afterthought, marked over historically and culturally homogenous territories. Originally a colonial resource frontier, the Bengal Province and the Assam Province (today known as the Northeast Region) were splintered, forcing people to move across newly constituted borders for daily convenience. During the late 1970s and 1980s, the idea of a fence stretching across the India-Bangladesh border was circulated by the Indian government in response to the anti-foreigner or anti-immigration Assam movement. To settle this violent movement, the Indian government, in addition to signing the Assam Accord that vowed to identify and detain migrants, also sanctioned the fence on its border with Bangladesh. Consequently, by the late 1980s, the fence construction project was underway, extending a spatial solution to the panic generated over Muslim migration during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. By 2011, about 3,145 Km. of the fences had been erected on the border, boxing in the country that India surrounds on its three sides.

The geography in the region restricts a continuous fence, where steep eastern Himalayan hills meet the Bengal plains and innumerable blue, green, and clear rivers course through it. The fencing has been an unfinished project, struggling to stretch across a volatile geography that shapes shifts during floods as the energetic Brahmaputra River crawls and dislocates. Moreover, since the fence cannot float, an approximately 44 km stretch of land in Assam remains unfenced where the river crosses the border. Hydrological conditions are even more challenging along the

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14 Baruha, Sanjib. In The Name of the Nation, 87-88

15 The 1980s saw a rise in anti-migration movements in Assam, from student unions and Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, which eventually led to the Assam Accord, which also began the legal citizenship experiments, since the 1980s, all the way to 2019. Niraja, Gopal Jayal, Citizenship Imperiled: India’s Fragile Democracy (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2021) 57-65

Bengal (western) side of the border, where the fencing appears like a stopgap, appearing to navigate the turbulent conditions in the Sunderbans Delta. On the river, where fences cannot be raised, a combination of distant watchtowers and patrol boats surveil the border.

Due to this volatility, constructing fences along the border required diplomatic flexibility. The 1974 Land Boundary Agreement restricted the Indian government from building defense structures within 150 meters of the "zero line." To accommodate the geographical and ecological limitations of the region, over the years, the Indian government had urged Bangladesh to edit this agreement and permit the building of fences within 150 meters of the "actual" borderline. Initially silent over the issue of fencing, Dhaka agreed to the requests under "humanitarian concerns and geographic realities." The fence construction and the agreements reworded to allow its existence not only facilitated further diplomatic collaborations between the countries but also recognized the surveillance benefits that collaboration along the border can offer.

Therefore, installing the intermittent fences was not only to fix a national boundary; it was a project to affirm state presence by rescripting political agreements and creating a profitable resource frontier. As a result, villages that obstructed the fences were often resolved by threading

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17 Zero line is the actual line of the border. It is an imaginary line that passes through the center of ‘no-man’s’ land.

18 “India-Bangladesh Border Fence,” Global Security.


20 Such agreements and their rewording also allowed the Indian government to collaborate with Bangladesh to accomplish illegal deportations. The Intelligence reports in the Assam State Archives show weekly statistics on operation “Pushback,” where those who were deemed illegal were pushed back into Bangladesh from a numbered border marker. This required cooperation from the Bangladesh Government, allowing flexible power dynamics in the region.
the international border through existing houses, where domestic space and national citizenships became disorienting. The difference of 150 meters of the 'no-man's land,' in some places 400 meters, in others 50 meters, left many local farmlands and even entire villages trapped in an intermediate zone between the borders. Those who resided or worked on farmlands caught in this in-between zone relied on the BSF to open the fence gates for access to healthcare, education, and work. As a result, this required other auxiliary infrastructures on which people have to depend for daily routines. For example, makeshift bamboo huts are placed along some parts of the border and used to collect fingerprints daily to regulate the movement of those crossing the border for work or sustenance.

The project of fence construction was delegated to the National Building Construction and Corporation (NBCC), a public sector undertaking of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs under the Government of India. However, NBCC is a semi-government enterprise and has subsidiary companies that have implemented infrastructure projects in Iraq, Libya, Nepal, Mauritius, Turkey, Botswana, Maldives, Yemen, Oman, UAE, Dubai, and other countries on the African continent. An international project that gets a special mention on its website is the National Prison Academy, which NBCC built in Maldives. Amongst its decorated list of government, private, and international patrons, the Ministry of Home Affairs regularly employs


NBCC to implement its projects. This includes the border infrastructure projects in North-East India. In the Northeast, the NBCC acts as a regional nodal agency. A private engineering contractor - Credible Engineering Construction Projects, a Hyderabad-based company, is directly involved with the on-ground construction of the India-Bangladesh Border Fences. Today, the architecture of the fence consists of eight-foot, double-walled partitions lodged with concrete wall pieces, stacked and rolled barbed wires in-between, supported by angular columns built on wet sand foundations dug from local rivers by borderland communities.24

The previous Home Minister, Rajnath Singh, called for sealing the border along its Assam frontier in 2016. Following this, the Ministry of Home Affairs identified 122 locations where the border had no physical barrier. Out of this, for 100 locations, physical barriers in the form of fences and concrete outposts were proposed, and for the rest of the 22 locations, non-physical barriers, including technological barriers, were planned to be installed.25 Moreover, the Modi government introduced a new Border Management System in 2019, which floated the idea of smart fencing work on the India-Bangladesh border. Smart technology-aided fences were rumored to consolidate surveillance and warning systems through devices such as cameras, sensors, lasers, and radar systems.26 Alarms were to be set up in this upgraded border that would go off on any infiltration attempt by cattle, elephants, or humans. This was planned to allow the Border Security Force (BSF) to maintain surveillance from the designated control rooms using a

24 Malini Sur, in her ethnography, accounts her experience of witnessing the border being constructed and Garo women using the traditional bamboo baskets to carry wet sand that would be used as foundations for the fence. See Malini Sur, Jungle Passports: Fences, Mobility and Citizenship at the Northeast India-Bangladesh Border (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 11.

25 India-Bangladesh Border Fence, Global Security.

26 See more on the border development schemes in Duncan, McDuie-Ra, “The India–Bangladesh Border Fence: Narratives and Political Possibilities,” Journal of Borderlands Studies, 29, no.1 (2014), 82.
computer, in addition to patrolling the ground. However, most of these plans have not yet been implemented.

While geography, property rights, and political jurisdictions play a role in keeping the border discontinuous, there has never been a comprehensive border-fencing project for the India-Bangladesh border. Border crossings transpire even today between Bangladesh and India. The fence does not necessarily achieve deterrence in this region, where movement across the border is motivated by economic precarity. It is possible to fortify the border if the Indian government desires. However, the border fencing project under NBCC has been a slow and cumulative process, periodically fencing and re-fencing a few-kilometer-long stretch. Using modern technology to fortify the border by other means repeatedly appears in speeches and evening news channel debates. However, they are only meant for symbolic and narrative purposes to gather votes in a polarized political climate. Anthropologist Malini Sur accounts in her ethnography along the border that even just the rumors of fence construction and the use of technology introduces anticipation of violence in the borderlands. Anticipation and obfuscation are introduced to promote a sense of unpredictability, what architectural scholar Eyal Weitzman calls a 'constructive blurring.' Instead of simply turning people away from a fortified fence, keeping the border discontinuous or 'blurry' but heavily policed with rumors of electrification or alarms creates a more inventive form of violence that is indisputable.

The border fence, rather than being a visual signpost of sovereignty, is positioned in a region where people have always moved (or forced to move), requiring people to confront it. As a result, the intermittent design of the border allows to legitimize the bodies that get entangled in

them. For example, in 2011, Felani Kahtun, a fifteen-year-old Bangladeshi girl, was shot while crossing the border by the Indian BSF and left to die atop the fence. Images of her body entangled with the barbed wires of the border fence were emblematic of what this discontinuity could achieve.28 The 2010 Human Rights Watch report documented that between 2001 and 2010, BSF personnel gunned down an estimated 900 Bangladeshis as they attempted to cross the border.29 Whether it is by editing Border Agreements that capture entire villages in-between no-man's land or bodies that get entangled as people move to meet families or seek healthcare, the border fence is not as much of a deterrent as it is a trap.

However, this state violence operates through the collective authorship of bureaucracies, courts of law, political leaders, and semi-government construction companies like NBCC.30 As the following section demonstrates, since the border does not guarantee immunized states, it not only legitimizes violence but also grants permission for capitalizing resources and inspiring investments. This also allows it to become a site for extractive and nationalist infrastructures rather than sites where the nation-state thins out.


30 Borders as being nefariously ‘photogenic’ is explained by Michel Agier in his work on Borderlands, where he contends with the visuality of border regimes - the kind of actions they spur and the lives they make unlivable. Wendy Brown also explains how border walls and fences have become abundant in contemporary times and provide visual gratification for governments. See Michael, Agier, “The World as Problem,” in Borderlands: Towards an anthropology of the cosmopolitan condition (Cambridge, Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016), 56; and Wendy, Brown, Walled States, Waning Sovereignty (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017), 145.
Mining Infrastructures

At the Umngot River, the border was largely unmarked. However, it was most visible as a solid fence at the "India-Bangladesh Friendship Gate" and the Dawki-Tamabil Integrated Check Post, approximately a three-kilometer drive along the border from Dawki.\footnote{Kindly note all names mentioned in the essay are changed to maintain privacy.} This short drive took us over four hours on the narrow, winding roads of the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. We were stuck amidst a long row of trucks of varying sizes, driven by Khasi, Garo, Assamese, and Bengali truckers employed by many enterprises, carrying limestone and boulder rocks extracted from the Indian hills and on their way to cement factories in Bangladesh. Damien, a Khasi Christian native of Dawki who drove me along the border, runs a tour and travel business in the capital city of Shillong. He expressed that over the years, the border infrastructure in the region has expanded in his home village, where the river used to gush down heavily to the Bengal plains.

Driving from the capital city of Shillong towards the border, we noticed shaved-off mountains and roads lined with excavators, earthmovers, and trucks. The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya are rich in limestone deposits that are easy to mine.\footnote{“Equity Valuation Report on Lafarge Holcim Bangladesh Limited,” Lafarge Holcim.} These hills are estimated to have fifteen thousand metric tons of limestone readily available on the surface, with
approximately a thousand metric tons mined daily.\textsuperscript{33} Large-scale and small-scale enterprises in the region transport stones by trucks and steamers to cement factories in India and Bangladesh.

Limestones and boulder rocks mined in Meghalaya, especially around the border regions, are trucked to the Integrated Checkposts to enter Bangladesh. Integrated Border Checkposts (ICPs) are the new spatial instruments of the Indian government that regulate customs, facilitate trade, move resources, and strengthen security by managing the movement of people across the border.\textsuperscript{34} At Dawki-Tamabil, a new checkpost-cum-campus primarily includes a passenger terminal that facilitates the movements of vehicles, a cargo terminal, and a warehouse. It also hosts a set of secondary programs like animal and plant quarantine facilities, buffer parking, rest areas for truck drivers, a canteen, and extra space for future expansion. This Fenced and gated campus is surrounded by soaring watchtowers, with BSF guards watching over these daily transactions on the national boundary and scanning for suspicious vehicles just three kilometers away from the tourists enjoying the glassy waters of Umngot River.

The trucks I witnessed were employed to exploit the region's economically opportune and resource-rich landscape. At the Dawki-Tamabil ICP, the trucks were primarily operated by the European cement giant Lafarge Holcim - the largest multinational cement manufacturing conglomerate in the world.\textsuperscript{35} This Swiss-French cement giant has 166 cement manufacturing

\textsuperscript{33} Arunabh, Saikia, “As limestone piles up on Bangladesh border, anger against Congress brews in Meghalaya,” \textit{Scroll.in}, February 17, 2018, \url{https://scroll.in/article/867669/as-limestone-piles-up-on-bangladesh-border-anger-against-congress-brews-in-meghalaya}

\textsuperscript{34} The integrated Border Checkposts replaced the old Land Custom Stations that used to operate at border crossings between India and Bangladesh.

\textsuperscript{35} Arunabh, Saikia, “As limestone piles up on Bangladesh border, anger against Congress brews in Meghalaya,” \textit{Scroll.in}, February 17, 2018, \url{https://scroll.in/article/867669/as-limestone-piles-up-on-bangladesh-border-anger-against-congress-brews-in-meghalaya}
factories worldwide, and one such factory is located along the India-Bangladesh Border in Chattak, Bangladesh.36 The Indian trucks lining up along the ICPs are only permitted to transport and unload stones across the border checkpoint and are required to return to India immediately. Another army of trucks awaits on the Bangladesh side to transport the stones to factories. This way, the truckers can make multiple profitable trips in a day between the mountains and the border but cannot drive beyond the ICP zone, controlled by the Border Security Force. This well-constructed border assembly is at odds with the rope hanging between fence posts a bit further south of the checkpoint. They allow the movement of limestones and boulder rocks while sifting and backpedaling people to maintain a border.

The discontinuity of the border is most explicit and paradoxical in the infrastructures that intersect it to develop alternative channels for keeping capital mobile and people immobile. A 17-kilometer-long trans-border conveyor belt is an instrument that cuts across the border fence at Chattak, Bangladesh, and Shella, India. This newly renovated conveyor belt, raised five meters above ground to keep it operational during the flooding season, is one of the longest in the world that transports mined stones from India directly to the cement factory run by Lafarge Holcim.37 As an astute infrastructural solution, the conveyor belt moves approximately five million tons of stones without requiring any human movement across the border.38

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36 Lafarge Holcim - is a Swiss Cement Giant, that has a production capacity of 385 million tones worldwide, which doubled after the Lafarge Holcim merger.

37 “Replacing the World's Longest Trans-Boundary Conveyor Belt,” Engineer Live, May 10, 2021. https://www.engineerlive.com/content/replacing-world-s-longest-trans-border-conveyor-belt#:~:text=The%20conveyor%20was%20originally%20constructed,replace%20the%2034km%20of%20belting.

Cement factories and mining sites are also spatial variables that interrupt the functions of the border and create environmental and political imbalances. Lafarge Holcim's cement plant in Bangladesh, valued at $225 million, relies entirely on mining operations directly across the border in India's East Khasi Hills. As rivers around Shella and Chattak change color because of excessive mining and cement dust, Lafarge Holcim has faced a handful of legal issues on environmental grounds. For example, in 2010, owing to a petition filed in the Meghalaya High Court, the cement factory experienced significant setbacks in its ability to mine limestone. A

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year-long legal battle ended when the company was granted permission to resume mining thanks to demands from the Bangladeshi Government, which had been pressured by the EU, the Spanish Ambassador, and the Swiss Charge D'affaires.\textsuperscript{40} The Indian Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) initially wanted Lafarge to set up its factory in India, not Bangladesh.\textsuperscript{41} They wished Indian cement factories could use the limestone mined in Meghalaya to benefit the Indian economy. However, the 2010 Supreme Court petition that resulted in the discussion on Lafarge's presence in the region eventually approved the company's limestone quarrying permit after they procured a no-objection certificate from MoEF through diplomatic pressures.\textsuperscript{42}

Therefore, instead of an obstruction, the premeditated discontinuity of borders licenses them as agents that inspire investments. Here, the world of logistics, business supply chains, organizational schemes, and economic interests collide with nationalist state practices and spatial infrastructures of sovereignty like the border fence. The border separates the location of mining and the factory where stones are turned into cement dust. However, the border made discontinuous by trucks that cross daily, or the conveyor belt transgressing it, also creates a lucrative condition for cement production between and beyond India and Bangladesh. The border's material construction and it’s becoming an 'infrastructure' is situated not just in the spatial apparatus of the fence but also in these unruly spatial installations that intersect with it.\textsuperscript{43}


\textsuperscript{41} Rining, Lyngdoh, “HC Ban Hits Limestone Export,” The Telegraph, August 8, 2015, https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/hc-ban-hits-limestone-export/cid/1392962


\textsuperscript{43} For more on the ontology of infrastructures, see Brian Larkin, Brian Larkin, “The Poetics and Politics of Infrastructure,” Annual Review of Anthropology 42 (2013) 327-343.
Meanwhile, small-scale indigenous mining rights in the Khasi and Garo Hills are still under inquiry in the high court. As a result, the border is shaped by diplomatic forces and extractive development infrastructures besides the discontinuous fences that intend to split the countries.

Spatial variables like - the Integrated Border Checkposts (IBCs), limestone extraction projects, cement manufacturing factories, and the world's longest trans-border conveyor belt for moving stones undermine the logic of a continuous borderline. They allow the border to be constructed as a space of differentiated mobilities, where people are restricted or killed for crossing; meanwhile, extracted resources like limestones from the border regions have the flexibility to be trucked between the countries.44

The presence of Lafarge Holcim's enterprise furnishes a different conception of the India-Bangladesh border. It demonstrates that global forces and capital flows, in addition to the state's authoritative impulses, shape margins in the contemporary global south and require its discontinuity. They interrupt and sometimes exacerbate regional political conditions as people confront them, disfiguring historical bonds. While large mining companies like Lafarge Holcim can procure documents, bend regulations, and receive permissions through international power play, those who dwell in the border region endure suspicion over autonomy and land ownership. Khasi and Garo indigenous groups and Bengali villages etched along the border have financially sustained on small-scale mining. However, their citizenship has increasingly been questioned, making it grueling to acquire documents.45 Driven by precarity, they move stones for the European cement giant. Others, like the sculler rowing my boat and Damien running the tours


45 See Arunabh Saikia’s report on limestones piling up on the border.
and travel business, have found employment promises in the booming tourism economy in Meghalaya. Tourism has become the Government of Meghalaya's new cash cow, and places like Dawki, once a remote border village, have had to support the surge of people and infrastructures resulting from both tourism and limestone extraction and export.

**Conclusion**

The leading pledge of the BJP government has been infrastructural development. Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office, an unprecedented amount of development funding has been channeled into Northeast India. Life-size billboards of the Prime Minister and his infrastructural promises are everywhere across towns in the Northeast. Under the new Act East Policy, the Indian government has named the Northeast region "Gateway to Southeast Asia," to invite foreign investment and take advantage of its strategic location with Bangladesh and Myanmar. However, new developments in the region have not provided essential resources. Instead, they have been used to suppress insurgent movements and establish lasting political power. For example, massive highway development projects are being developed and funded by the Asian Development Bank, Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, Islamic Development Bank Group, Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, and Allianz Capital Partners, among others. As a result, The Border Roads Organization received the largest budget allocation in its history in 2024 (30% increase) to build border roads and fences between the India-Bangladesh, India-Myanmar, and India-China borders in the Northeast.46 Moreover, the planning of national

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highways has mainly been to keep border areas connected to military cantonments spread across the region. These investments not only cement new highways, build conveyor belts or erect fences, they also fund populist governance.

Another development project is upgrading the Border Area Development Program (BADP). The BADP was initially introduced during the fourth Five-Year Plan under the Planning Commission of India. It was introduced as a project to meet the 'special developmental needs' and 'well-being of people' living in remote border areas of the country. However, in 2015, the Modi government updated the BADP program. Under this upgrade, in Meghalaya, 'Border Area' was defined as a "demarcated territory to the distance of 10km of crow fly distance inside the state from the international border with Bangladesh." Additionally, 1,692 border villages were identified to be developed. For administrative convenience and for proper implementation of schemes, these villages were divided into 14 border areas/blocks, with a Border Areas Development Officer assigned to each zone.

While we were in the traffic between the Umngot River and the Dawki-Tamabil Integrated checkpost, privately employed trucks moving stones, deep-green military vehicles, and siren-mounted police cars were also held up in the traffic with us. In between, men dressed in green cameo or khaki police uniforms got out of their vehicles, frustrated with the summer heat and unable to move in the traffic. Damien would talk to them in the Khasi language. Upon asking, he says they come here regularly to patrol

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47See Border Areas Development Department, Government of Meghalaya. https://megbad.gov.in/
the region. He said that there were very few military vehicles that day. However, sometimes, an entire convoy of military trucks can be lined on these roads.

During our long wait on the narrow one-way roads of Khasi and Garo Hills, which was facilitating two-way traffic, Damien remarks that he used to visit Bangladesh, eat lunch in the ‘Bombay Restaurant’, visible across the border, and come back to India without requiring a passport. Now, people from both sides of the border can edge close to the boundary line; however, those who seek to migrate, even occasionally for work, meet relatives, or seek healthcare, are met with aggression by the Indian Border Security Force.

I present these accounts to contrast the pervasive developments across the Northeast today. they demonstrate the increasing use of the neoliberal logic of development to secure a firmer grip not only on the border but also on the entire frontier region. Moreover, they finance populist power and make a profitable resource frontier. This is what anthropologist Anna Tsing calls "Franchise cronyism," where authoritarian power and capitalist interest collaborate along the seams of global exchanges.48 Here, a "good investment climate" is created for the Swiss-French cement giant Lafarge Holcim to extract and move stones, the Hyderabad-based construction company Credible Engineering Construction Projects to build fences, and the

tourists to enjoy the natural beauty of the region at once. Here, people who attempt to cross the border for sustenance get entangled in barbed wires or shot dead by the Border Security Force, ordinary people who live in the frontier regions are forced to destroy their own environments, mountains get shaved off, and rivers have started to change colors. These development projects may bring new but unequally distributed revenue to the region. However, the assembly of military vehicles, privately owned trucks, "all-India Tourist Passing" labeled luxury cars, stories of successful foreign investment deals, and newly built national highways squarely established the BJP's electoral support and prepare the ground for other authoritative projects to come.

Anthropologist Anna Tsing writes, "The frontier is not a philosophy but a series of historically nonlinear leaps and skirmishes that come together to create their own intensification and proliferation."\(^{49}\) The late twentieth century saw the creation of frontiers in every corner of the world with their own geopolitical twists and confusions. However, as Tsing cautions, "These twists are more than irony. They predict and perform their own reversals, forming productive confusions and becoming models for other frontiers."\(^{50}\) In other words, each resource frontier comes with its own combinations of military cantonments, resource extractions, infrastructural developments, and populist leaders. The Northeast was coerced into a resource frontier under the pseudo-military rule in the name of the Arms Forces Special Powers Act (still active in some regions of the Northeast). Intermittent border fences were constructed to make people confront state-sponsored instruments of violence, and extraction projects were allowed to undermine the border and create dependencies on state and corporate actors. In this region, not only do illiberal


\(^{50}\) Ibid, 33.
forms of the rule find traction under democracy through the legal instruments of citizenship, as seen in Chapter 1. The neoliberal logic of development is another ruse through which violence gets authorized.

In an increasingly mercurial world, borders are coming in the way of industrial-governance networks. A Swiss-French cement giant, backed by a Spanish subsidiary firm, entrenched itself along the India-Bangladesh border and seized the opportunity to exploit the cheap Bangladeshi labor and affordable Indian limestone. Similarly, NBCC from Delhi and Credible Engineering from Hyderabad collaborate in Meghalaya to construct the fence and take advantage of long-term government contracts (which are possible because of the impossibility of building a continuous fence). Instead of an obstruction, borders are increasingly becoming agents that inspire investments and where the world of logistics, business supply chains, organizational schemes, economic interests, nationalist state practices, and visual infrastructures of sovereignty collide. In the Theory of the Border, philosopher Thomas Nail conceptualizes borders not as fixed conditions that prevent movement but as technologies that control and process movement that resembles fluid dynamics. For Nail, the technology of the border fence or the border wall is not an outcome of political power. Instead, the kinetic condition of the border fence structures political power itself. As the India-Bangladesh border demonstrates, these conditions also

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51 This is similar to what architect and scholar Eyal Weitzman, in the context of Israel's fortified border with Palestine, has termed 'elastic geographies,' where multiple organizations and political associations collude to obscure the border materially. Eyal, Weizman, Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation. (London: Verso, 2007), 6-7.


53 Ibid.
allow taking advantage of the friction generated by the unevenness of neoliberalism on the ground. Moreover, these conditions legitimate shooting people on site along the border.

The extractive border assemblage between India and Bangladesh is coated with developmental rhetoric, which aims to achieve time-bound economic targets and establish long-term political authority. On the other hand, constructed as a discontinuous line, the border fence unevenly intersects a culturally and politically complex place, requiring people to confront it. Rather than ordering national margins to secure sovereign power, this intermittent border assemblage allows for mobilizing capital and immobilizing people. Sociologist Mimi Sheller emphasizes that "Borders themselves are mobile: they are biopolitical, geopolitical, geoeconomical and geoeological, being inscribed in and on our bodies, nations, infrastructures, and global ecologies." Therefore, the India-Bangladesh border is plural and discontinuous but registers itself through infrastructures like Integrated checkposts, transborder conveyor belts or border roads and military institutions like the BSF. They also make populist governance operable.

*A Discontinuous Border*, read as a paradox, can challenge the truism that borders are naturally uninterrupted conditions for national sovereignties established against the grain in an age of global exchanges. Instead, it emphasizes how architectural and spatial knowledge is co-opted not only to make borders inseparable from circulations of global economic power and capital but also ethnonationalist motives.

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54 See Michael, Agier, 56.

55 See Mimi sheller, 127.
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Photographs from the India-Bangladesh Border

*All photographs are by the author.*
Images 1-6: Limestone Mining in West Khasi Hills (20km from India-Bangladesh Border).
Images 7-9: Trucks Carrying Limestone and Boulder Rocks at Dawki-Tamabil Integrated Checkpost.
Image 14-16: India-Bangladesh Border Fence
Image 17-18: Summer Sunset in East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya.
Chapter 3

Conservation Nationalism

A well-sculpted model of the One-horned Rhinoceros - the state animal of Assam,¹ will welcome you at the arrivals hall of the Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati, along with an arcade of tourist kiosks for transit to the Kaziranga National Park. The Rhino has appeared on the Assam State Transportation buses, incorporated as an athletic mascot,² and recently, in 2021, appropriated as a company icon for the Indian Oil Corporation. Even at election public meetings in Assam, politicians, usually dressed in the red-embroidered Assamese Gomcha (cotton


towel), regularly accept, among other cultural gifts, a home-size statue of the animal. Near to extinction at the turn of the twentieth century, the World Wildlife Fund (W.W.F.) declared the One-horned Rhino as “Asia’s biggest success story” in the conservation of an endangered species.\(^3\) You might even be able to adopt a Rhino and receive a symbolic plush toy from the W.W.F. website to support animal conservation efforts in the Kaziranga National Park - the only Indian Rhinoceros sanctuary. Therefore, nothing equals the cultural and emotive iconography of the One-horned Rhino as a strong mark of Assamese belonging or Assam itself. However, it is untrue that the animal is unique to this northeastern Indian province.\(^4\)

Under the rising religious nationalism, the One-horned Rhino has been foregrounded to manipulate the cultural motif of the animal and provide it with political meaning, casting the call for saving the Rhinos with Assamese and Hindu Nationalist objectives. The issue of animal conservation is an indispensable environmental concern. However, the Bharatiya Janata Party’s (B.J.P.) political influence has re-engineered the cultural figure of the Rhino by intentionally knotting the issue of poaching with Bengali Muslim migrants in the region. For example, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, speaking in 2016 and 2021 during election public meetings in Assam, pronounced the migrants living on the fringes of the National Park as poachers. The Rhino has

\(^3\) World Wildlife Fund to acknowledge the conservation of Rhinos in Africa, India, and Vietnam as success stories of Asia. https://www.worldwildlife.org/species/rhino

\(^4\) The One-horned Rhinos are also found in Nepal at the foothills of Himalayas, and other varieties of Rhinos are found in the African continent and in Vietnam.
been charged with ‘anti-foreigner’ or ‘anti-Muslim’ sentiments in order to define the ideas of the nation and nationals through environmental icons. This is because, as anthropologist Annu Jalais explains (in her case, the Bengal Tiger), an animal can be laden with universal ideas of wildlife protection to obscure local and political complexities. In Assam, animal conservation and citizenship anxieties are voiced synonymously in political speech to mobilize the environmental importance of Rhino conservation and stimulate the process of removing assumed migrants from the region. The Rhino exemplifies how environmentalism is increasingly saturated with ideological expression to continue the project of religiously motivated disenfranchisement in Assam and Northeast India.

However, as this chapter unfolds, the law and logic of environmental protection employ spatial knowledge and technologies of spatial representation like GIS mapping and satellite

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imagery to make legislated denials of rights possible. The Kaziranga National Park has emerged as one of the most famous National Parks in Assam and Northeast India, where the growing Rhino population and conservation efforts have frequently swallowed lands around the park. The chapter follows the 2015 Guwahati High Court petition, which authorized violence of evictions, reads counter-petition submitted by residents of two villages that were eventually evicted, and the Forest Rights Act of 2006 to demonstrate how tectonics of pixel resolution of Google Earth satellite images, collection of geo-referenced data, plot or property sizes and informal construction of dwellings constituted evidence for plausible denial of rights. Through Conservation Nationalism, the chapter locates where ideas of the nation and national identity get domiciled and how designed dispossession receives its endorsement. A conclusion that follows acknowledges how eviction and bulldozing as a political practice for disenfranchisement have expanded across India.

The practice of shaping wilderness and nature as a nationalist currency and contouring nature for patriotic influence requires spatial formulas that map, demarcate, emborder, bulldoze, evict, and delete populations that do not meet the ideologically summoned idea of the nation. The ‘National’ Park is an example of a project where evictions and demolitions have become a regular political practice. Land rights or environmental laws get edited or rewritten, and the official nomenclature of forests can change to justify dispossession. Court proceedings and legal documents authorize surveys of property rights across forest villages. It also provides precise geographical markers through which the National Park is embordered to warrant evictions. Satellite images and pixel resolutions are defined in government documents to render new evidence, and N.G.O.s are employed for collecting geospatial data for forest cover, rhino census, and river movements to make ‘conservation’ successful, receiving international appreciation
from the W.W.F. Data points and spatialized census surveys expand forest boundaries and inflate the Rhino as a popular cultural and emotive symbol, making violence for preserving nature incontestable. Spatial knowledge makes conservation politically efficacious and provides a governance ideology with a mapped rationale for violent disenfranchisement. Therefore, Conservation Nationalism is a collection of spatial and environmental practices that converge to orchestrate dispossession. It places wildlife conservationists and nationalists in the same political latitude. However, this logic that conjoins conservation and nationalism is not only administrative. As this chapter emphasizes, both take spatiality as their means of operation.

In addition to the detention center and the border fence in Northeast India, disenfranchisement also takes place through rescripting of forest land rights and using conservation mandates for patriotic affect. Environmental concerns are repackaged as a nationalist problem. This is termed by environmental historian and anthropologist K. Sivaramakrishnan as 'thin nationalism,' where national governments reshape natural heritage as the basis for "communicative reconstruction of the nation in terms of naturalized identity between people and place." Tracing the importance given to natural heritage by the postcolonial Indian government, Sivaramakrishnan illustrates how, in India, wilderness and natural diversity get configured for cultural nationalism. The case of Rhino conservation in Assam discloses how environmental concerns get transacted with religious patriotism to justify violent political endgames.

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6 As an example, see the work of Aranyak - an NGO that works in Kaziranga.


8 Ibid, 104.
Borrowing from architectural and spatial studies scholars, the chapter explains wildlife conservation as a practice of measurement and representation that allows space to be authoritatively controlled, managed, and evidenced under a shield of environmentalism. Elimination or dispossession is a political and spatial action central to this story, which forges nature preservation as patriotic. Allegiance to wildlife conservation in political idioms endorses forced displacement without rehabilitation. Historian Patrick Wolfe, in the context of settler colonialism and the dispossession of Indigenous people, explains the ‘logic of elimination’ - a kind of death that leads to assimilation. His work connecting the ‘settler culture’ and genocide explains elimination as having a constructive valence. We might find in this logic the principle of structuring or building up rather than disrobing that utilizes spatial knowledge as a fundamental element for dispossession. In other words, it is a logic that constructs new boundaries, turns lands into forests, and whirls cultural figures like the Rhino inside-out to make dispossession politically convincing.

Spatially, eliminations are actualized by bulldozers and earthmovers - the basic hardware of dispossession. Conservation narratives, classification of forest lands, and adjusting environmental laws constitute spatial information on evicting citizenships that locate the sovereignty of the nation in nature. As addressed in the conclusion, evictions and political demolitions have become rampant across India, where zoning laws are altered to make way for bulldozers. The ruin and decay of fallen houses might visualize the success of Hindu Nationalist sentiments. However, these residues of bulldozer violence emphasize how political actions are predicated on spatial knowledge. Unlike the destructive preludes of authoritative modernist

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projects, whether in Haussmann’s Paris or Robert Moses’s New York, which relentlessly cleared space for urban renewal,\textsuperscript{10} the rising legislated displacements observed across India, sometimes under a developmental rationale, do not always construct in the vacated sites. As Keller Easterling, explaining her idea of ‘Subtraction,’ has demonstrated, ‘vacancy can have value.’\textsuperscript{11} Political evictions and demolitions in contemporary India plan vacancies for materializing ideologies, and the vacancy created through repeated attempts at altering or evicting the population, in addition to being politically efficacious, also makes fear perceivable.

\textit{Forest and Conservation}

Historically, forest lands across the Brahmaputra River Valley in Assam have always been under constant flux between environmental conditions, industrial production (especially of tea and oil), and the management of agrarian interests.\textsuperscript{12} Historian Arupjyoti Saikia explains that forest lands were contended by three social groups - migrants from East Bengal (now Bangladesh) - encouraged to move during colonial times for labor, Nepali cattle herders, and local Assamese Peasants.\textsuperscript{13} Forests were classified as Grazing Reserves (P.G.R.s) and Unclassed


State Forests (U.S.F.), through which competing interests of multiple social groups were managed. However, agrarian practices were understood to be against the idea of forest conservation, and by the second half of the nineteenth century, over thirty-eight percent of the total land in the region was classified as forests.\textsuperscript{14} The colonial and postcolonial Indian governments could restrict or authorize grazing by classifying lands as forests.\textsuperscript{15} As a result, social and political conflicts in the state emerged as rights over agrarian practices were embattled. Classifying the forest ordered the lands politically and spatially by managing the right to dwell amidst expanding forest boundaries, which had long-term impacts on the region.\textsuperscript{16} Therefore, turning lands into forests - as a conservation practice generated the need to manage and regulate the forest and for displacements to legitimately transpire.\textsuperscript{17}

The Kaziranga National Park received prominence for the successful and militant conservation of the One-horned Rhinos, facilitated by marking park borders. However, since colonial times, defining the boundaries of the National Park resulted from legislative acts rooted in convoluted debates over agrarian practices, hunting, or gaming and scientific knowledge of animal conservation, which sought to balance human-animal interests.\textsuperscript{18} This practice continued in postcolonial forest management and governance. However, the 1960s saw a sharp rise in Rhino killings, which made it urgent to legislate the sanctuary into a National Park in order to

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 157.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 156.

\textsuperscript{16} Saikia (2014), 167, 174; and Saikia (2011), 121.


\textsuperscript{18} See Arupjyoti, Siakia (2009) 121.
provide it with a protective status. Subsequently, the forest lands became marked by various distances. The colonial Assam government had issued grazing permits up to one mile inside the sanctuary’s southern borders, which were later revoked. The River Brahmaputra’s shifting tendency obscured the northern boundary, which created riverine sandbar islands or chars. Such volatility was used to extend the park boundaries towards these islands where many migrant communities lived, and eventually, seven such islands were incorporated into the National Park. The park boundaries were also moved when politically convenient to ban agrarian practices, and, at times, it became unclear where the park started and where the occupiable forest ended to those who historically resided in the boundary regions of Kaziranga. At the start of the twenty-first more regions were added to the park to make space for the animals and connect the National Park with neighboring ‘Protected Areas,’ which became highly contested. Adjusting the park boundaries for animal conservation, mobilizing impactful language, and composing the environment as a national heritage prepared the preconditions for militant evictions in the National Park.

Kaziranga went from a protected gaming reserve under the colonial Assam Forest Department to the Kaziranga Wildlife Sanctuary (KWLS) under the postcolonial Government of Assam. Finally, it received the status of a National Park in 1974. Such changing appellations rebranded forest dependencies such as grazing or fishing as poaching intentions. Therefore,

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19 This also recurred, because of growing international pressure on Animal Conservation over Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

20 Biswajit Sarmah, 139.


22 Saikia (2009),125 and Sarmah, 134.
with upgrading designations - a reserve, a sanctuary, and finally a National Park - it was possible to abrade the right to dwell in the bordering regions of the forest. Moreover, with each upgrade, increased power was licensed by the Assam State Government and the Forest Department, who saw emerging economic opportunities as the Rhino became a global symbol of animal conservation. Between 1947 and 1961, the forest department exported 25 Rhinos to zoos worldwide, earning more than INR 250,000.  

Meanwhile, one could simply be walking back home to their village and be shot dead by forest rangers who received unquestioned rights to use a gun upon entitling Kaziranga as a National Park. Moreover, Kaziranga’s designation as a National Park allowed the Assam Government to reap the economic benefits of successful and militant conservation through eco-tourism.

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23 Sarmah, 136.

The ‘National’ Park

In 2015, the Guwahati High Court, concerned about the poaching of one-horned Rhinoceros, delivered a judgment authorizing evictions in the fringes of the Kaziranga National Park (K.N.P.). The primary concern of this four-year-long legal proceeding was suspicions over illegal Bangladeshi migrants occupying the retroactively added regions along the edges of the ‘National’ Park (there were six added regions to the National Park as of 2015, and three more were added in 2020). Equivocal about poaching, the high court eventually authorized police commissioners from the adjoining districts to make forest land “encroachment-free” within one month of the judgment.\textsuperscript{25}

A counter-petition was filed by the villagers against this high court proceeding debating evictions in villages along the border of the ‘National’ Park. Beyond presenting valid legal documents, the writ petition argued through multiple legal provisions under which these evictions were breaking constitutional authority.\textsuperscript{26} The cases of Banderdubi and Deochurchang villages along the fringes of the ‘National’ Park were the most contested in the court proceedings. Entitled as ‘Revenue Villages,’ the counter-petition explained that residents of these villages received building construction materials through the Indira Awas Yojna (I.A.Y.), a government scheme for building houses. Lower Primary Schools, Madrassas, Iddgah, and Masjids (mosques) were built in these villages under the I.A.Y. scheme.\textsuperscript{27} Moreover, they also

\textsuperscript{25} The Guwahati High Court, PIL (sou moto) 66/2012, and WP(c) 648/2013, and 4860/2013, Pg. 8.

\textsuperscript{26} Arunabh, Saikia, “As Kaziranga National Park Spreads, Residents Tear Down Their Homes Before They Are Evicted,” \textit{Scroll.in}, Nov. 20, 2020.

\textsuperscript{27} Now, the Indira Awas Yojna has been renamed to Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojna (PMGAY).
presented to the High Court that the evictions were illegal under the protections ensured by the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 and the Forest Rights Act of 2006 (Scheduled Tribes and Other Scheduled Forest Dwellers Recognition of Forest Rights or F.R.A.). However, despite a cogent counter-petition, the High Court appropriated legal explanations to sanction an illegal eviction drive by suggesting that “individual claims of a handful of persons are in conflict with the public and national interest.”

28

The Forest Rights Act (2006) evoked in the writ petition is significant in understanding how spatiality was construed in jurisdictional logic. It is pertinent to understand how spatial knowledge was mobilized for forest management and adjudicating claims for dwelling within forest regions. The act was introduced as a corrective measure to institute rights for Scheduled Tribes (S.T.) and the umbrella group of ‘Other Scheduled and Forest Dwellers.’ While the former was verifiable through legal identification cards issued by the government, the ambiguous group of ‘Other Scheduled and Forest Dwellers’ required evidence of habitation for three generations over forest lands (or approximately 75 years) to be considered for rights under the act. Putting the burden of proof over largely poor and historically undocumented communities, the act recognized in theory any possible historical evidence, whether from the colonial or independence era, to prove habitation over claimed land inside protected forests. The act recognizes evidence such as census reports, maps, satellite images, working plans, management

28 The Guwahati High Court.


30 The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, Ministry of Law and Justice, Chapter 1, Accessed Through Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. Pg. 3.
plans, micro-plans, forest inquiry reports, leases, physical attributes like houses, huts, or permanent improvements made to land, including leveling, bunds, check dams and other such structures. Therefore, any spatial alterations made by inhabitants would qualify as evidence to claim land in forest regions.

Given the ubiquitous and free availability of satellite images, the Indian government has heavily relied on Google Earth images and Geographical Information System (G.I.S.) data to verify claims for forest rights. The government encouraged the use of Google Earth satellite imagery to verify claims for rights guaranteed by the 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA). A circular issued to Chief Secretaries of all the State Governments in 2015 emphasized that the Forest/Revenue Departments use geo-referenced data to evaluate claims made over forest land. Moreover, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs was coordinating with the National Remote Sensing Center (Hyderabad), Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geo-Informatics (BISAG), the Department of Science and Technology (Govt. of Gujarat), and various tribal institutes to make geo-referenced data available to state governments. Geographical Information System (G.I.S.) maps were encouraged to be drawn at different administrative scales - nation, state, district, block, and village. The circular even determined the acceptable resolution level of Google Earth imagery - up to 1 meter or higher resolution was required, and only maps around

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33 Circular issued by Roopak Chaudhari, the Deputy Secretary to the Government of India. No/23011/118/2015 - FRA, Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

34 Using technology, the circular also alluded that GIS could be used to maintain and update the record of forest maps that the FRA (2006) is required, to include all claims that were approved.
the year 2005 would be accepted for making claims on forest land. A latitudinal and longitudinal grid was asked to be overlaid on all maps through the G.I.S. system to number the plots in question. Satellite imagery was required to be verified through ‘ground truthing’- a cartographic analysis that verifies the authenticity of satellite images by comparing a pixel of a satellite map with on-ground reality. Such maps and images were suggested to be combined with 2011 census data, the last one available in the country, after which the census has been postponed indefinitely.

As required by law, the counter-petition presented during the 2015 Guwahati High Court proceedings included satellite photography to provide evidence of habitation in the forest. However, to verify these images, the Forest Department produced their own (as recorded in the judgment) Google Earth satellite images from 2010, 2011, and 2014, marking exact longitudinal and latitudinal points in the added regions of the ‘National’ Park. These satellite images submitted by the Forest Department recorded no habitation; therefore, the evidence presented by the villagers was invalidated. Furthermore, through observations from department field visits, the court concluded that the constructions in the forest appeared new and not organized in symmetrical plots, assuming that the petitioners had recently self-constructed houses and had no historical record to prove their right to dwell on forest land. Detailed recording of spatial conditions, down to a resolution of the image and symmetry of house plots, became authentic explanations for dismissing rights. However, such observations went against the provisions of the Forest Rights Act (2006), providing a possible rationale for why the act was dismissed by the court in 2014.

35 Point (5) of the circular -No/23011/118/2015 - FRA, Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs.
A ‘high-power committee’ was assembled comprising senior government officials to conduct fieldwork in Kaziranga and take account of illegal encroachment. Following their interactions with people on the ground, they planned to evict; Google Earth satellite surveys were used to estimate habitation in the added regions, marking the exact geographical coordinates in the High Court judgment directing evictions. The evictions that ensued in September 2016 were not officially notified, as the law required. Instead, well-armored police officers rode on bulldozers and elephants to deliver the judgment. Those displaced received no rehabilitation and subsequently constructed a makeshift camp along the new four-lane highway that passes through the perimeter of the ‘National’ Park. Moreover, during the process of evictions, the court authorized a survey to check the citizenship documents and ID cards of residents who were planned to be removed.

The ‘National’ Park in Assam is an opaque spatial variable that extends detention beyond the officially constructed prison (like the detention center constructed in 2019 in Goalpara, Assam), which transparently delivers nationalist motives. Through mobilizing the discourse of nature and wilderness containing national integrity, the Kaziranga National Park (KNP) ripened into an expanding forest, pushing out dwellers along its fringes and keeping them unrehabilitated. Among these legal documents that seek to measure, mark, border, and evict people, the forest is reformed as a built space under surveillance instead of a wild or natural picturesque landscape, as professed by the Assam State Tourism Department. Therefore,

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36 The Guwahati High Court, Pg 22.


38 The Guwahati High Court.
remodeling the discourse on conservation as a national obligation through spatial means paved the way for elephants and bulldozers to coercively evict people.

At the ‘National’ Park, environmental conservation of the one-horned Rhinos addressed the increasing visual presence of Bengali Muslims violently, and national sovereignty found its evidence in pixel resolutions of arbitrary satellite images. Unlike analog photography, where the film is composed through disturbed grains, satellite images are distributed in organized pixels of equal-sized grids that can be manipulated to suit the governance logic for denial. Architect and scholar Eyal Weitzman of Forensic Architecture explains the violence that gets confined at the ‘threshold of detectability.’ He writes, “This grid filters reality like a sieve or a fishing net. Objects larger than the grid are captured and retained. Smaller ones pass through and disappear. Objects close to the size of the pixel are in a special threshold condition: whether they are captured or not depends on the relative skill or luck of the fisherman and the fish.”39

The court proceedings and governance logic have relied on the power of satellite images to evidence some indisputable truth. However, as architectural scholar Laura Kurgan explains, such satellite images allow truth to become spatially measurable through remotely sensed data. She writes, “remotely sensed data helps us understand what has become of truth in the era of digital data stream: it is intimately related to resolution, to measurability, to the construction of a reliable algorithm for translating between representation and reality.”40 However, such technologies of spatial representation like the Global Positioning System (GPS), Google Earth, and other such satellite image providers develop images through a patchwork of images and


40 Laura Kurgan, Close Up at a Distance (New York: Zone Books, 2013) 12,13.
resolutions collected over time from different sources and motivations, assembled with pixels radioed from outer space and constructed with statistics collected by socio-political organizations on the ground. These super-panoptic technologies, in addition to surveilling by projecting a planer view onto the globe, also, as geographers Martin Dodge and Chris Perkins explain, “provide spatially consistent visual signs and ground features.”\textsuperscript{41} In other words, to provide a consistent and seamless image built from multiple data points and images, such technologies of spatial representation often delete or remove information in order to appear consistent. Therefore, as Kurgan explains, these images, rather than representations and descriptions of space, mirroring on-ground truth, are rather ‘interpretations of information.’\textsuperscript{42} Or, as media studies scholar Lisa Parks has suggested, they are also technologies of cultural and political production in addition to objects for spatial representation.\textsuperscript{43}

The Indian government has also set up the Northeast Space Application Center under the Northeast Region Council (NER) in Meghalaya. Since 2000, this institution has regularly collected and interpreted data about the northeast, whether it be forest cover, flood impact, Rhino movement, marking regional and national borders to situate military personnel at impactful coordinates, or deploying drones along the India-Bangladesh border.\textsuperscript{44} The military roots of technologies like satellite imagery, GIS mapping, and the GPS system are well known. However,

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\textsuperscript{42} Kurgan, 16.


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now that all of these technologies have become available at our fingertips and increasingly appear accurate as more people get counted in them as they interact with electronic networks, they have become admissible as evidence in a court of law. As Kurgan explains, they are presented as images without any data associated with them and are dependent on interpretation by experts.\textsuperscript{45} Expert institutions like the Northeast Space Application Center or Assam State Space Application Center interpret ways of seeing and knowing through remote sensing to shape our worldviews and, more importantly, inform governments with evidence for conflicts, histories and environmental policies.\textsuperscript{46} They conduct regular classes to cultivate spatial literacy among lawyers, government officials, forest department employees, and park rangers.\textsuperscript{47} They are taught how to input information into government databases, capture satellite data, and build their own GIS maps. Such government-trained map makers and data collectors can mobilize a politics of looking, counting, and interpreting to aid the process of disenfranchisement.

The use of spatial and visual knowledge in the 2015 Assam High Court judgment that denied the right to exist of a ‘handful few’ on their historical lands, emphasizing national concerns, requires reflection. This case demonstrates how spatial and visual knowledge is maneuvered to develop resourceful violence that can evade legal languages of rights and freedoms and produce some lucid truth that the court of law can rely on. Paul Virilio explains this ‘overexposure’ of infographic technologies, in which “functions of the eyesight and

\textsuperscript{45} Kurgan, 30.

\textsuperscript{46} See Lisa Parks, 4.

\textsuperscript{47} See, for example, classes conducted by the North Eastern Space Application Center in 2023 in Forestry and Ecology,\url{https://nesac.gov.in/events/2023/12/nesac-conducts-two-weeks-short-course-on-remote-sensing-and-gis-applications-in-forestry-and-ecology-2/}
weaponry melt into each other.”\footnote{Paul Virilio, “The Overexposed City,” trans. Daniel Moshenberg, in The Lost Dimension (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), p. 27.} Satellites orbiting in space are presumed to determine or capture objective views from a distance. As media studies scholar Aiisha Azoulay emphasizes in her work on photography as a ‘civil imagination’ - the need to distinguish between the political ontology of the photograph and the photographer, where the latter is the “eye behind the camera with ideas and emotions.”\footnote{Ariella Azoulay, Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography, trans. Louise Bethlehem (Verso, 2012).} Her work is important in recognizing that photography can be a cultural and political exchange. However, a legislative apparatus that finds evidentiary promise in satellite-produced images removes the eye behind the camera that might capture reality on the ground or even historical legal documents that record land allotment.\footnote{In her other book, Azoulay explains the work on photography as a civil contract. However, in the instances of KNP, this is a judicial contract rather than a simply civil one. See Ariella, Azoulay, The Civil Contract of Photography (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 202).} Instead, such statutes institute the role of governance to interpret satellite images, determine the thresholds that make legitimacy invisible, define resolution standards, and mobilize geo-referenced data collection. Conservation Nationalism then collects a spectrum of practices that use technology to reinforce conservation and mix it with nationalist temptations.
Conclusion

The sanctity of evictions to solve the poaching problem was never affirmed; however, the High Court assumed that habitation was a problem requiring immediate deletion. During the court proceedings, the director of Kaziranga National Park (K.N.P.) was asked to submit a report on environmental challenges facing the biodiversity of Kaziranga. In the four-hundred-page report submitted to the Assam High Court in 2012, the K.N.P. director explained many issues facing the beloved one-horned Rhinos and explicitly suggested that habitation over forest land is not their only concern. Forest policies, fragmentation of habitat, technologies, inadequate funding, and climate change were responsible for the insecurity facing the Rhinos in the sanctuary, requiring larger space than the approximately 800 square kilometer area of the K.N.P. However, the following court proceedings forced the importance of habitation over lands incorporated into the forest post factum. Detailed environmental surveys, although suggested by the director, were never undertaken; instead, demolishing permanent and temporary bamboo and straw Kuthi structures pretended to be a resolution, allowing the elimination of residents who were assumed to be migrants.

Steady violence to end the poaching problem secured thriving conditions for eco-tourism in the ‘National’ Park. Armed forest rangers now accompany Rhino and Elephant safaris. In 2014 alone, as sociologist Sanjay Barbora explains, 24 persons alleged to be poachers were killed in and around the central areas of Kaziranga National Park. As Barbora enlists, Right to Information (R.T.I.) appeals revealed as many as 636 persons arrested under the Wild Life

Protection Act, many of which are pending cases.\textsuperscript{52} As he writes, “men were picked up anytime an animal was killed” to justify such events publicly and give a religious address to environmental crimes. Barbora’s work emphasized that the ‘National’ Park remained a militarized site even after successful peace talks between the government and insurgent groups of the region.\textsuperscript{53} Meanwhile, luxurious resorts, forest lodges, golf courses, and an oil refinery encroached along the perimeter of the ‘National’ Park, sometimes even along the animal corridors, overlooking the violence that unfolds just behind their high-walled estates. Five-star establishments and government-run lodges are lined along the highway on the park’s northern end, connecting the towns of Naogon and Golaghat.\textsuperscript{54} Such eco-tourism was made possible by dismissing grains of an image that permits obscuring land rights and positioning the military to celebrate the nation’s natural heritage. Keeping the ‘National Park militarized accomplished the government’s desire to create a world-class ‘National’ Park, now badged as a World Heritage Site.\textsuperscript{55}

Images of the elephant, maneuvered by policemen, crumbling the brick walls and flattening out the straw and bamboo structures demonstrate how absolute ideas of the nation intensify on the ground. Flattening appears in many forms. The destroyed houses, which were not fully evacuated, the resolution standardized to make built structures undetectable, G.I.S. grids required on maps that number and restrict plot sizes, and the rejection of rights to valid counter-petitions in a court of law are all forms of compressions required to inflate the ideologies

\textsuperscript{52} The RTI appeals were filed by the Human Rights Law Network (HRLN). Ibid, 1149.

\textsuperscript{53} Barbora. 1155

\textsuperscript{54} See for example the Borgos Resort and the Infinity Resort of Kaziranga, which are some of the most luxurious and expensive tourist accommodations.

that define the nation. In contrast, the figure of the One-horned Rhino enlarges across cultural and political spheres to provide an environmental rationale for authorizing nationalist violence and make these compressions possible.

One conclusion that can be made is how the project of conservation is conceived through material and spatial knowledge of bordering. In other words, conservation goals are predicated on mobilizing differences to achieve sanitized forests. The ‘National’ Park is a ‘spatial product’ amalgamated into a border - between the governance that inputs ideas of Assamese identity as stewards of the Rhino and the migrants as poachers who eat away at natural/national heritage. What Indian environmental scholars V. Saberwal, M. Rangarajan, and A. Kothari called ecological imperialism, and later termed Ecological Nationalism (edited volume) by historian Gunnel Cederlof and anthropologist K. Sivaramakrishnan. These works have sought to decipher and trace the conceptions of ‘nation’ and ‘environment.’ However, another way to read these works, beyond the history of environmentalism in South Asia, is a history of chipping away at ideas on co-existence that understand human dependencies on nature as subservient to national-ideological concerns. Stewardship of the environment, enfolded in nationalist speeches, expands forest boundaries and ingratiates conservation principles in the identity politics of the region. The 2015 court judgment and the Kaziranga National Park marked a moment and place when wildlife received national membership to erode the rights of people who consider forest ecologies their home.

Another way to conclude is by looking at how the nation manifests between the Rhino and the national and international tourists that seamlessly move from the Airport to the

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‘National’ Park in Assam. The inflated image of the Rhino makes this visit to nature a patriotic exercise. As literary and environmental humanities scholar Rob Nixon calls it - “a pilgrimage of renewal” that brings politicians, citizens, and foreign diplomats with searching eyes on the safari that might spot a Rhino.\textsuperscript{57} Eco-tourism allows sovereignty to solidify. Government-run lodges just outside the ‘National’ Park, forest rangers patrolling with guns, and elephants or bulldozers evicting dwellers generate sites where the nation finds buoyancy to define state memberships by manipulating cultural icons. These rather subtle borders are most visible in the documents this essay gathers - the threshold of image resolution, the urgency to collect geo-referenced data, and the court discussions that decide on claims to rights by reading the informality of forest dwellings. These documents exhibit the ‘severance,’ to borrow Nixon’s term, of the natural from unnatural, animal from human, and the native from foreign.\textsuperscript{58} Between these severings - an inherently spatial exercise is where ideologies for the nation materialize.

How big should the house be to get recorded in 1-meter pixel resolution satellite images? How aligned or geometrically systematized should plots be - so they adjudicate the historical claim of dwelling inside forests? How close should the village be - so it can be in traditional lands, but not inside a legally expanding forest? Such questions, in addition to raising possibilities of building agency to encounter state power, also reveal the spatial knowledge that sharpens legislative arguments. Such questions might empower an activist to sketch detailed plans to avoid the police riding on elephants and bulldozers. However, such questions also allow governments to tweak their legal standards to deny rights. They can mark the doorstep or


\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Ibid}, 196.
‘threshold’ as Eyal Weitzman calls it, where detectability is obscured for legal interpretation.59 These questions and the Kaziranga National Park also represent the increasing technological determinism that marks what philosopher Fredric Jameson called ‘spaces of tensions’ in the cultural and political results of globalization.60 Or what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has identified as different -scapes of global cultural flows like ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, ideoscapes, and financialscapes, that are increasingly becoming spatially represented and materially formed.61

Much like the Rhino, another inflating political icon is the bulldozer. Evictions and demolitions have also become a prevalent political practice beyond the northeast of India. Utilizing the token of “illegal encroachment,” state governments in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and the National Capital, Delhi, have ordered to demolish houses, predominantly in Muslim neighborhoods, often homes of activists (in the case of Uttar Pradesh and Jahangirpuri in Delhi) to retaliate aggressively, and in some instances (in Haldwani, Uttarakhand) to cleanse the city of Muslims. Therefore, bulldozers act not only as state equipment for cleaning out but also as symbols for pillaging Citizenships and building images of muscular politics. As an equipment for dispossession, the bulldozer has enlarged as a famous icon in the visual cultures of Hindu Nationalism to precipitate its ideology. As a celebrated political ritual, bulldozing and evicting stands in for the detention center or the National Register of Citizens

59 Weitzman, 27.


(N.R.C. - a project authorized in 2019 to collect a list of proven and documented citizens in Assam) that challenges citizenships of proven legal citizens.
## An Incomplete Index of Evictions and Demolitions

The following index is meant to initiate a running list of evictions and demolitions that have occurred during the decade-long BJP rule in India. It is meant to communicate the sheer volume of such violence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>January 20, 2014</td>
<td>Vizhinjam Harbour, Kovalam, Kerala</td>
<td>A harbor development project took a communal turn. <strong>1,052 houses were to be demolished.</strong> However, protests and court cases eventually halted the development.</td>
<td>Times of India, The New India Express, and India Today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>April 20, 2022</td>
<td>Jahangirpuri, Delhi</td>
<td>Bulldozers demolished a string of shops in Jahangirpuri after “religious Violence” broke out in the region.</td>
<td>Al Jazeera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>October 13, 2022</td>
<td>Jhakau Port, Kutch, Gujarat</td>
<td>Gujarat government takes action against encroachment in coastal areas. <strong>700 houses and shops were demolished.</strong></td>
<td>Amnesty International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>April 15, 2022</td>
<td>Kambhat, Gujarat</td>
<td>17 warehouses and Muslim-owned businesses were demolished after a communal clash during Ram Navami (religious holiday. <strong>Estimated loss of Rs. 4,000,000</strong></td>
<td>Scroll. In.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>April 10, 2022</td>
<td>Himmatnagar, Gujarat</td>
<td><strong>At least 20 houses and shops were demolished</strong> after the</td>
<td>The Wire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 11, 2022</td>
<td>Sandhwa, Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>Homes and shops were demolished after communal clashes. Those offering prayers at the Mosque were chased with <em>stone pelting and public beating</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 7, 2022</td>
<td>Khargone, Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>49 properties owned by Muslims, a bakery, and three hotels were demolished.</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 23, 2023</td>
<td>Sagar, Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>6 Homes of Dalit families were demolished</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 31, 2023</td>
<td>Balrampur, Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>Houses and Shops in Muslim neighborhoods were demolished. Reason given - encroachment,</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 11, 2023</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>A mosque was demolished during Ramzan. It was one of the 123 Waqf properties that were pending approval in the court.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 19, 2023</td>
<td>Dehradun, Uttrakhand</td>
<td>A mosque and 50 properties around it were demolished.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 13, 2022</td>
<td>Naogaon, Assam</td>
<td>Madrassa Demolished.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 19, 2022</td>
<td>Bhumurgauri Grazing Reserve, Naogaon, Assam</td>
<td>Massive <em>demolition drives over approximately 397 acres of land.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>November 24, 2017</td>
<td>Sipajhar, Assam</td>
<td>The eviction was carried out due to the demands of local <em>Bajrang Dal activists</em> (Hindu Nationalist youth group).</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 27, 2017</td>
<td>Amchung Reserve Forest, Assam</td>
<td>The high court ordered demolition outside Kaziranga National Park, but no rehabilitation was provided. <em>283 houses were demolished. 4 elephants, 8 excavators, 1,200</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 February 10, 2018</td>
<td>Biswanath District, Assam</td>
<td>Kaziranga National Park Demolitions. Indiscriminate evictions took place in the eight-nine-kilometer stretch from Kathanibari, Kumurakati, to Silamari in Bishwanath district. About 70 settlements were demolished.</td>
<td>The Wire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 September 20, 2021</td>
<td>Darrang District, Sipajhar, Assam</td>
<td>5000 Muslims, about 800 families, considered to be “illegal migrants,” were evicted.</td>
<td>The Deccan Herald</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18 September 24, 2021</td>
<td>Dholapur, Sipajhar, Assam</td>
<td>12-year-old boy killed by Assam Police during the Sipajhar eviction drive. He was assumed to be an “illegal migrant”; however, he held an Aadhar Card in his pocket.</td>
<td>Scroll. In</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 August 4, 2022</td>
<td>Morigaon, Assam</td>
<td>The Moirabari Madrassa was demolished after a notice was sent stating that the building was small, and the electricity connection was illegal.</td>
<td>The Print</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 August 13, 2022</td>
<td>Dhakalipara, Barpeta Assam</td>
<td>Another Madrassa at Dhakaliapa was also demolished.</td>
<td>The Print</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 August 31, 2022</td>
<td>Jogigopha, Bongaigaon, Assam</td>
<td>A two-storied residential madrassa at Jogighopa was razed to the ground for violating disaster norms.</td>
<td>The Print</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 September 3, 2022</td>
<td>Chitalmari Char, Sontipur, Assam</td>
<td>Among the biggest eviction drives in Sialmari in the Sonitpur district of Assam. Homes of 299 families were bulldozed.</td>
<td>Zee News.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 2023</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>An unprecedented 1,07,449 homes were demolished in 2023, leading to forced eviction of at least 5,15,752 people, marking the highest recorded annual figure in the last seven years.</td>
<td>Clarion India and Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 December 20, 2022</td>
<td>Haldwani, Uttarakhand</td>
<td>4000 Families were arbitrarily asked to be evicted. About 50,000 people would have been affected.</td>
<td>Citizens for Justice and Peace, among</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td>Responsible Organization</td>
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<td>December 24, 2022</td>
<td>Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>It resulted in sit-in protests and a Supreme Court judgment for the evictions and demolitions to be halted.</td>
<td>many others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 10, 2023</td>
<td>Lakhimpur District, Assam</td>
<td>44 Muslim families were asked to be evicted</td>
<td>Citizens for Justice and Peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 7, 2013</td>
<td>Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh.</td>
<td>450 hectares of Pava Reserve Forest ordered to be cleared. 201 households, mainly Bengali Muslims, were evicted.</td>
<td>Citizens for Justice and Peace</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>August 8, 2023</td>
<td>Nuh, Haryana</td>
<td>150 villages were displaced after a communal riot.</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
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<td>2022</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, and other places</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh CM has won elections through his “Bulldozer Rallies” that threaten to bulldoze Muslim houses. His rally reached beyond UP and has been to Telangana and even in the US.</td>
<td>Deccan Herald</td>
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<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>Between April and June 2022, at least 617 people have been either rendered homeless or have their livelihoods destroyed through bulldozing.</td>
<td>Amnesty International, Al Jazeera</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2022</td>
<td>Shaheen Baugh, Delhi</td>
<td>A demolition drive in Shaheen Baugh – the prime is of CAA protests was halted, after members of the community protested.</td>
<td>AP News</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 28, 2016</td>
<td>Chandradlinga Hill, Dhubri, Assam</td>
<td>The forest department evicted 57 families, approximately 300 people, mainly erosion-affected Muslims, and Koch Rajbangshis. On the day of evictions people protested, and pleaded for notice period to collect belongings, however, this was denied, two women were beaten up, and eventually the army was called to bring the situation under control.</td>
<td>Land Conflict Watch</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 30, 2022</td>
<td>Assam-Nagaland Border</td>
<td>100 households were evicted and demolished. Most people held Id</td>
<td>Land Conflict Watch</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<td>July 18, 2022</td>
<td>Jhalupara, Shillong</td>
<td>30 houses and 10 shops were destroyed by the Shillong Cantonment Board. No prior notice was given.</td>
<td>Land Conflict Watch</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 29, 2023</td>
<td>Khudigaon, Dhubri, Assam.</td>
<td>197 families were evicted. Reason provided was encroachment, but the site was being prepared for installing a solar power plant by Assam Power Distribution Company Limited. Women who protested threatened to kill themselves. However, the project is underway despite protests.</td>
<td>Land conflict Watch</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2024</td>
<td>Panchatantra Village, Goalpara, Assam.</td>
<td>Approximately 250 people, and 50 households were evicted under an anti-encroachment drive by the district administration and the Forest department. Only one week notice was given, and most people had documents.</td>
<td>Land Conflict Watch</td>
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<tr>
<td>May – April 2022</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>A series of demolitions took place after a religious clash. Mainly to destroy Muslim shops.</td>
<td>The Independent</td>
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<td>June 16, 2022</td>
<td>Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>The house of welfare party leader Javed Mohammed was demolished, after he protested BJP’s hate speech against Islam. Many others who were involved in the protest had their houses bulldozed. The Supreme Court asked the UP government to show proof of whether the demolitions drives were legitimate, however they couldn’t produce anything substantial.</td>
<td>The Wire</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>February 14, 2023</td>
<td>Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>During an eviction drive, a mother and daughter self-immolated themselves. This resulted in attention on the bulldozer politics of CM Yogi Adityanath in UP and a subsequent Supreme Court Petition.</td>
<td>NDTV</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
This is, by no means, a complete list.
In India today, a shadow world is creeping up on us in broad daylight. It is becoming more and more difficult to communicate the scale of the crisis even to ourselves—its size and changing shape, its depth and diversity. An accurate description runs the risk of sounding like hyperbole. And so, for the sake of credibility and good manners, we groom the creature that has sunk its teeth into us—we comb out its hair and wipe its dripping jaw to make it more personable in polite company. India isn't by any means the worst, or most dangerous place in the world, at least not yet, but perhaps the divergence between what it could have been and what it has become makes it the most tragic.


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I wish to begin this postscript with a quote from Arundhati Roy’s 2019 essay, published in the Caravan, responding to the steady rise of Hindu Nationalism. It responds to what those of us, whether from the Northeast or not, have heard, listened to, or experienced in the past decade of Modi Regime. Through this postscript, I want to reflect on how Hindu nationalism has been incorporated into a democratic structure. India holds elections and observes almost all forms of liberal institutions, yet this ethno-nationalist violence has permeated into our democracy. This postscript is an attempt to think through this distinctive variety of nationalism. Moreover, I also wish to reflect on what drove this project.

I quote Arundhati Roy because it gives voice to our inability to put it into words or evidence our concerns about the insidious reach of Hindu Nationalism. Its doctrine of - One Nation, One Language, One Religion, One Constitution is continuously operating, yet hardly ever voiced together that way. They are often orated in different contexts, different places, different languages, and by different politicians. That is the brilliance of the BJP and its Hindu-Nationalist substructure. As the stories of this thesis presented - it is multi-headed and multi-directional, wrenching citizenship laws, border agreements, cultural symbols, and forest laws - to drill Hindutva ideology slowly but steadily on our backs.

Another important work that I have learned a lot to communicate from for this project is the Indian Marxist scholar and philosopher Aijaz Ahmed. Ahmed explains that:

"the basic trajectory of Indian political life over roughly the past quarter century, 1990 to 2015, let us say, especially as it comes into sharper relief after the elections of 2014, indicates a steady rightward shift that is both quantitatively and qualitatively so significant that it is not so much..."
the right that moves closer to the liberal center, occasional tactical concessions notwithstanding, but the liberal center that keeps moving further and further to the right.”

To do this, Ahmed explains that the Sangh Parivar (or the family of Hindutva organizations) and its factions, like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the BJP, their political vehicle, construct different facades to inoculate the liberal democratic structure of governance with illiberal forms of rule.

The inspiration for this thesis came from the need to understand the instruments through which Hindu Nationalism swindles the existing democratic structure - and, of course, the people. They are not by any means exhaustive and employ all possible options - laws, buildings, borders, infrastructure development, pixel resolutions, demolitions, and evictions. I was especially interested in understanding these instruments that deliver violence but go unquestioned. I have tried to understand- how it is that people are forced into building their own prisons, destroying their own environments through mining, or aiding dispossession within their own communities through collecting geospatial data. How is it that people who submit documents for NRC, register their fingerprints at the border, or claim land through legitimate process - get incarcerated, shot dead, or violently evicted? These stealthy techniques of building backchannels for authoritarian power are necessary to attend to because they reveal how spatial knowledge is used to authorize violence. Moreover, it is essential to keep narrating and investigating these tactics of violence because they are steadily rising, as Roy calls - "the shadow world that is creeping up in broad daylight."

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Aijaz Ahmed further writes,

"The RSS plays its fronts like pawns on the chessboard of Indian politics, mixing legality and illegality, electoral politics and machineries of violence, in full view of agencies of law and organs of civil society. This is rather a sinister variant on the famous formula: 'hegemony = consent + coercion.' And coercion has had – and will continue to have – a specific form: small doses, steadily dispensed; no gas ovens, just a handful of stormtroopers, here and there, appearing and disappearing; and a permanent fear that corrodes the souls of the wretched of the land, while the liberal democratic machinery rolls on – no formal suspension of civil liberties!\(^3\)

For this, architecture and spatial knowledge are crucial. They allow to build, contain, measure, mark, demarcate, map, reinforce, capture, immobilize, evict, and demolish. They offer the essential knowledge to determine new and expanded thresholds of violence. This has been the most important observations of this project. They allow us to formulate a response to the questions I raised. People are brought to build their own prisons - because, at its face value, constructing a building does not signify violence. It is also hard to trace on official documents who worked on the construction site of the Goalpara Detention Center and the names that disappeared on the National Register of Citizens. Similarly, park rangers participate in collecting data for the government as they patrol the National Park and aid in dispossession, often within their own communities. This is not to say that there is some quiescence through which Hindu Nationalism operates and builds a personality cult around the Prime Minister. It is instead to

\(^3\) Ibid, 185.
point to the fact that Hindutva's predatory work relies upon spatial means that allow violence to remain uncharted.

Before concluding, I want to narrate some political events that overlapped the timeline of this project.

In January 2024, The Ayodhya temple was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Building the temple has been the flagship project of the BJP and the RSS. RSS has been chanting "Mandir Vahi Banega," or Temple will be built here," since 1992 when a Hindu far-right mob organized by the BJP and Vishwa Hindu Parishad demolished the mosque into dust. The temple is a massive structure - 250 feet wide, 380 feet long and 161 feet high. Before 2014, The Ayodhya Mosque required archeological surveys, out-of-court settlements, conspiracy charges, and Supreme Court hearings. However, in 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone. In January 2024, a grand, ceremonial consecration was organized, even if the temple construction was yet to be completed. Even if the construction displaced 4000 homes, shops, and 40,000 people.  

While the temple was under construction during the Summer of 2023, the Northeastern state of Manipur made the headlines. Ethnic violence erupted between the Meitei people who lived in the Imphal Valley (capital city) and the Kuki-zo people who lived in the surrounding hill districts. It is an understatement to say that the violence that we witnessed telecasted live on our televisions and phones, was anything less than horrifying. Manipur saw the world's longest internet shutdown. Once again, men dressed in deep-green cameo uniforms descended from their cantonments, however, this time within hours. This ease of mobility and sudden suspension of

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4Ayush Tiwari, “‘Did Ram say kick out the poor?’ The discontent of the displaced in new Ayodhya,” Scroll.in, December 6, 2023.
the internet was possible through well-built highway infrastructure and well-established internet broadband towers by the BJP. However, the city, houses, and people burned for over a hundred days, and the conflict is in its 11th month and still ongoing as I write. Manipur was on everyone's mind and everyone's tongue when I was in the Northeast in the summer, yet it was surprising how quickly it disappeared from national media.

On March 11, 2024, during the final months of writing this thesis, the government finally notified the rules under the Citizenship Amendment Act. The Union ministry had asked for eight extensions to publish these rules since the law was enacted in 2019. There were discrepancies; for example, it was unclear why identity documents were acceptable beyond their expiration dates. Many have pointed to numerous such minor instances that could turn into a decoy. It is hard to tell how the rules will be interpreted and implemented. But the Goalpara Detention Center is running at full capacity.

On April 07, 2023, Chhattisgarh, a state in eastern India, made the headlines. Villagers who lived in the deep forests along the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border woke up to black bat-like objects dropping from the sky and, eventually, helicopters firing on the region. They were ariel bombs. This is a region saturated with Maoist groups, and the Indian paramilitary had not been able to make inroads in the forest. So, they flew out their helicopters and drones and started dropping bombs. It was the northeastern state of Mizoram, where ariel bombing as a tactic was first used by the Indian government against its own people in 1966. The Indian government denied allegations in 1966 and in 2024. I bring up these events because they demonstrate the broad, sweeping moves that have become the Modi government's brand identity. Demonetization in 2016, revoking Kashmir's autonomous

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5 Arunabh Saikia, “Bastar villagers allege aerial bombing by security forces. What is the truth?” Scroll.in, May 04, 2023.
status through article 370 in 2019, CAA and NRC in 2019-2020, Hijab Ban in Karnataka in 2022, attempt to make Hindi an official language in 2023, and Ayodhya temple consecration in 2024. There is a longer list; however, I also share these events that overlapped the timeline of my thesis project because they indicate the sheer volume of shock tactics that have been unleashed but gone unquestioned within a short span of time.

This thesis has repeated multiple times how Hindu Nationalism has organized violent mechanisms of capture that have received legitimacy under the force of law. It is important to keep repeating this because the difficulty of tracing this preponderance—or the amnesia that blinds us from seeing the violence at work—makes it a duty. That is the duty with which this thesis was written.
Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without my visit to the Northeast. I want to thank Prof. Arupjyoti Saikia, from IIT Guwahati, who I first met in Guwahati in the summer of 2023. Prof. Saikia offered contacts, advice, and constant support as I developed my work. He continued his support through Zoom calls and roundtable participation throughout my project. Prof. Amiya Das and Shofiul Pathan from Tezpur University were extremely generous hosts in Tezpur. They secured my accommodations, and Shofiul offered to drive me around and take me to the Tezpur Central Jail. Aditya Pathak, a student and emerging scholar himself, offered his help and time to navigate the Assam State Archives. Aditya’s mother, Prof. Moushumi Dutta Pathak, not only invited me to a delicious Assamese dinner but also offered to take me to Goalpara on my next visit.

During my time in Meghalaya, I had the wonderful opportunity to speak with Dr. Sanjoy Hazarika, a well-known journalist and scholar of the Northeast, at his beautiful Shillong residence. Our conversation, which revolved around the socio-political issues of the region,
provided valuable insights that shaped my research. I am grateful to Dr. Hazarika for his time. I also extend my thanks to Ms. Patricia Mukhim, a senior journalist at Shillong Times, for sharing with me her activist work against Cement Corporations like Lafarge Holcim, which has saturated the region with concrete structures and affected the region’s ecosystem.

I am deeply grateful to the MacMillan Center’s South Asia Studies Council, Program on Refugees, Forced Displacement and Humanitarian Response, the Center for Race Indigeneity and Transnational Migration, and the Yale School of Architecture for their financial support through research grants that made my trip possible.

At Yale, I have had the opportunity to take classes and learn from professors and students in the Anthropology, English, Global Affairs, Architecture, Art History, and African American Studies departments. I want to thank Professors – Kishwar Rizwi, Cajeta Iheka, Srinath Raghavan, Esther Da Costa Meyer, Helen Siu, and David Sadighian. Additionally, many offered their time and help during the roundtables, including Professors – Jordan Carver, Elihu Rubin, Eeva Lisa Pelkonen, and Marta Caldeira. I am also thankful to invited external readers Prof. Anooradha Iyer Siddiqui and Andrew Herscher. I am equally grateful to Prof. Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen for reading this thesis, extending her time, and supporting my work. Since I took her class on Infrastructures of Empire, she has asked essential questions about the project.

This thesis was only possible with the structure provided by the MED program. For this, I am deeply grateful to Prof. Keller Easterling for extending this opportunity and constantly supporting this project. Further, Prof. Vyjayanthi Rao’s advice and support have been critical in shaping this work. Both Keller and Vyjayanthi have offered their time, reading incomplete drafts and suggesting comments. Their advising has been formative in my academic journey and has supported the growth of my intellectual inquiries.
I also want to thank my fellow travelers – Alberto Martinez Garcia, Emily Velez Nelms, Austin Ehrhardt, George Papamatthaiakis, Juliana Biancardine and Brunno Douat. Most of all, this thesis would have been impossible without my family’s support.
Appendix 1: Detention Center Manual
(4) The Central Government may, by order, provide for regulating access to, and the conduct of persons in, places in India where internees or persons on parole are detained or restricted, as the case may be, and for prohibiting or regulating the despatch or conveyance from outside such places to or for internees or persons on parole therein of such articles as may be prescribed.”

CHAPTER – 2

INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS WITH REGARD TO DETENTION CENTRES

Instructions issued on 02.07.1998

2.1 In the letter no. 25019/3/97-F.III dated 02.07.1998 issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs to all State Governments and Union Territory Administrations, it was suggested that the State Governments/UT Administrations who have been delegated powers under section 3(2)(e) of the Foreigner’s Act, 1946 may exercise these powers to restrict the movements of the foreign nationals who are awaiting deportation after completion of the sentence awarded to them pending confirmation of their nationality. It was also provided therein that movements of such foreign nationals should be restricted in one of the detention centres/camps of foreigners to ensure their physical availability at all times for expeditious repatriation/deportation as soon as the travel documents are ready.

Instructions issued on 23.11.2009

2.2. In the letter no. F.14011/55/09-FVI dated 23.11.2009 issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs addressed to all State Governments/ UT Administrations conveying the detailed procedure to be adopted for
deportation of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, State Governments/ UT Administrations were requested to set up sufficient number of detention centres in each State/UT where the suspected illegal immigrants would be detained pending their deportation.”

21. The Manual then refers to amenities to be provided in the Detention Centres/Holding Centres/Camps in Chapter 4. The amenities referred to in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.39 of Chapter 4 of the Manual read as follows:-

**CHAPTER – 4**

**AMENITIES TO BE PROVIDED IN THE DETENTION CENTRES/HOLDING CENTRES/CAMPS**

4.1. Detention Centres/Holding Centres/Camps shall be set up outside the jail premises.

4.2. Naming of such places i.e. whether as Detention Centre or Holding Centre or Camp may be decided by the State Governments/ UT Administrations concerned.

4.3. No specific approval is required from the Ministry of Home Affairs for setting up of Detention Centres/Holding Centres/ Camps.

4.4. Pending acquisition of land and construction of building, State Governments/UT Administrations may consider hiring of suitable accommodation for this purpose. In case of non-availability of Government buildings, State Government/UT Administration concerned may look in for hiring private building, subject to production of non-availability certificate and rent assessment by CPWD/PWD. If it is decided to hire a private building for the
Detention centre/Holding centre/Camp, it may be ensured that all existing codal formalities under General Financial Rules (GFRs) are strictly followed.

4.5. The number and size of detention centres/holding centres/camps to be set up in each State/UT may be determined by the individual State Government/ UT Administration keeping in view the actual requirements based on the number of such foreign nationals to be housed (as mentioned in para 3.1 above) as well as the progress in deportation proceedings. State Governments/ UT Administrations may consider setting up of one detention centre in the city/district where major Immigration Check Posts (ICPs) in the State are located.

4.6 State Governments / UT Administrations may prescribe the authority that will be in charge of the detention centres. On completion of the sentence of the foreigner, the Jail authorities concerned may hand over the foreign national to the authority in charge of the detention centre. The jail authorities shall also send all the medical records of that particular foreigner to the detention centre.

4.7 A thorough medical checkup of the foreigner will be done at the time of admission in a detention centre. Complete medical records of the foreigner will be maintained in the detention centre.

4.8 There should be a provision for transfer of foreigners in detention from one detention centre to another due to administrative reasons or to facilitate their stay in Metros during the waiting period for issuance of travel documents or to facilitate the foreigner’s interview with their concerned Mission/Embassy/Consulate etc.

4.9 Every detention centre shall have a cell which will provide help to the detainee foreigners for contacting their concerned Mission/Embassy/Consulate or their family through proper
4.10 The detention centre/holding centre/ camp should be designed to provide all the necessary facilities for the inmates to maintain standards of living in consonance with human dignity. All basic amenities like electricity with generator, drinking water (including water coolers), hygiene, accommodation with beds, sufficient toilets/baths with provision of running water, communication facilities, provision for kitchen etc. shall be provided. There should be proper drainage and sewage facilities.

4.11 All accommodation provided for use of inmates, particularly for sleeping, will meet basic requirements of healthy living. Accommodation shall be built in a manner so as to ensure adequate cubic contents of air, floor space, lighting, ventilation and climatic protection.

4.12 It may be ensured that LPG connection is provided in the Kitchen. It may also be ensured that LPG cylinders are kept under proper security to avoid any fire hazards and misuse by the foreigners.

4.13 CCTV cameras shall be installed at various places for monitoring purposes.

4.14 Adequate fire safety systems shall be installed in the detention centre/holding centre/camp.

4.15 The requirements of administration and supervision will be taken into account while planning buildings.

4.16 There should be a proper boundary wall with dense barbed wire fencing above the boundary wall. The boundary wall should be minimum 10 ft. high with main gate, wicket gate and strict access
control measures. Proper illumination should be provided all along the wall and in the Centre.

4.17 Adequate number of security personnel for round the clock security, sentry posts and guard room etc. shall be provided.

4.18 While allotting the security personnel, the requirement for monitoring the perimeter security/ watch towers/ vulnerable / strategic points may also be kept in view. A path way along the perimeter wall may be provided for the patrol by the security personnel. Adequate Lady security may also be deployed commensurate with the women detainees.

4.19 There should be a periodic security audit by the appropriate authorities.

4.20 There should be sufficient open space within the compound for detainees to move around in a secure environment.

4.21 There should be properly segregated accommodation for male and female detainees.

4.22 It should be ensured that members of same family are not separated and all family members are housed in the same detention centre.

4.23 There should be a provision for a Safety Cell for segregation of foreigners with behavioral issues that may be criminal in nature which may be detrimental to the safety and security of other inmates or Detention Centre staff.

4.24 Strict prison regimes applicable to under trial and convicted prisoners should not made applicable to the foreign nationals housed in the detention centres/holding centres/camps.
4.25 The persons housed in the detention centres/holding centres/camps should be permitted to meet/communicate with the family members and no restrictions shall be imposed on this account.

4.26 As regards meeting visitors other than family members, the provisions in the model prison manual 2016 may be followed.

4.27 State Governments/UT Administrations/FRROs/FROs etc. may devise appropriate system for keeping records of the visitors etc.

4.28 The staff posted at the detention centre/holding centre/camp should be well trained to ensure that the detainees are treated with due dignity.

4.29 State Governments/UT Administrations may decide the complement of staff including wardens, security personnel, Superintendents, office personnel etc. to be provided at the detention centre/holding centre/camp depending upon the average number of inmates housed in the detention centre/holding centre/camp. They may also consider engagement of interpreters of different languages as and when needed.

4.30 Adequate provision should be made for medical attendance for the detainees. A mobile medical dispensary may also be made available. An ambulance facility may be provided for attending to the medical emergency 24 x 7. Posting/detailing of a staff nurse/training of some staff for giving first aid may also be considered. Any additional medical facilities to be provided may be considered by the State Governments/UT Administrations concerned.

4.31 Special attention may be given to the women/nursing mother, transgender detainees, children, etc.
4.32 Creche facilities for children may be provided.

4.33 Children lodged in the detention centre may be provided educational facilities by admitting them in local schools nearby.

4.34 A skill centre may also be provided within the detention centre.

4.35 Total area required for a Detention Centre/ Holding Centre/Camp may be decided by the State Government/ UT Administration concerned taking into account the approximate number of foreigners to be accommodated at any given point of time and various amenities to be provided. Apart from the basic facilities to be provided like living area, toilets & bathrooms, kitchen, dining hall etc., other facilities like covered lobby outside rooms, open area, library, recreational facilities, space for indoor games, space for yoga & meditation and open space for outdoor games etc. may be provided depending upon availability of space.

4.36 The scales of diet for inmates may be prescribed by the State Governments/ UT Administrations following the scales prescribed in the model Prison Manual 2016, which is drawn from the ICMR guidelines on the same. The scales may vary according to local customs and dietary habits of the inmates but should as far as possible in compliance with the prescribed standards. State Governments/ UT Administrations may also modify the scales at any time if it deems fit. They may also draw up their own procedures for supply of food items to the inmates.

4.37 State Governments /UT Administrations may consider entrusting the maintenance of such Detention Centre/Holding Centre/ Camp and for providing ancillary staff to maintain such facilities like sweepers etc. to the Social Welfare Departments in the State/UT or to any other agency as they deem fit.
4.38 A Grievances Redressal Cell may be set up. In case of complaints by the detainee, it should be investigated thoroughly by a Grievances Redressal Cell and appropriate action taken.

4.39 Besides the above, it may be ensured that amenities as incorporated in the model Prison Manual 2016, which are not specifically covered above, are also provided at the Detention Centres/ Holding Centres/Camps to the extent possible.”
Appendix 2: Assam Legislative Assembly, Unstarred Question No. 720. (Parliamentary Proceedings)
ASSAM LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 720
TO BE REPLIED ON : 26/03/2018

Sub. : Detention Camp

Will the Minister of Home be pleased to state:

(a) How many Detention camps are established in the state of Assam?
   (Please mention their location and year of establishment)

(b) What is the Act, Rule etc. based upon which these Detention camps are
    established?

(c) Please furnish Detention camp-wise number of inmates along with their
    nationality and address.

(d) Please furnish Detention camp manual, based upon which camps are running?

(e) How many foreigners have been deported from the State of Assam after Assam
    Accord?
    (Please furnish year-wise data)

(f) Please mention the procedure followed for deportation.

ANSWER

Hon’ble Minister of Transport etc. Department Sri Chandra Mohan Patowary will reply on behalf of Hon’ble Minister of Home Department Sri Sarbananda Sonowal.

(a) There are (Six) Detention Camps in Assam.
   1. Goalpara Detention Camp in Goalpara District established on 01-12-2009.
   2. Kokrajhar Detention Camp in Kokrajhar District established on 05-04-2010.
   3. Silchar Detention Camp in Cachar District established on 05-04-2010.
   5. Dibrugarh Detention Camp in Dibrugarh District established on 24-09-2015.

(b) Detention camps are established in Assam in pursuance of entrusting the
    functions of the Central Government under the provision of section 3(2)e of the
    Foreigner Act 1946 and para 11(2) of the Foreigners Order 1948 to the State
    Govt. by the Ministry of Home Affairs Govt. of India.

(c) (1) Goalpara Detention Camp
    (i) Pakistani -01
    (ii) Myanmari -01
    (iii) Nigerian -01
    (iv) Afghani -01
    (v) Bangladeshi -249
    Total - 253 (as on 12-03-2018)

(2) Kokrajhar Detention Camp
    (i) Myanmari - 01
    (ii) Bangladeshi -159
    Total - 160 (as on 12-3-2018)
(3) Silchar Detention Camp
(i) Myanmar - 08
(ii) Bangladeshi - 83

Total -91 (as on 12-3-2018)

(4) Jorhat Detention Camp Bangladeshi - 120 (as on 14-3-2018)

(5) Dibrugarh Detention Camp Bangladeshi - 48 (as on 19-3-2018)

(6) Tezpur Detention Camp
(i) Myanmar - 18
(ii) Bangladeshi - 261

Total- 279 (as on 12-3-2018)

Address of inmates are placed in the table of the House.

(d) Detention Camps are running as per Assam Jail Manual.

(e) 29738 nos. of foreigners have been pushed back / deported from Assam since 1985. Year wise data is enclosed as Annexure 'I'.

(f) Details of the persons kept in the Detention Camp are sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs Govt. of India New Delhi for Nationality verification and confirmation from concerned Government through their Embassy/High Commission. Consular access facility is provided to the Embassy/High Commission. Once Nationality verification is confirmed and travel permit prepared, the Foreign Nationals are deported/repatriated.

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Note: In 2013, out of 22; 11 nos are pushed back & 11 nos are deported.

Total Pushed back: 29663
Total Deported: 75
Appendix 3: Citizenship Amendment Act
The following Act of Parliament received the assent of the President on the 12th December, 2019, and is hereby published for general information:—

THE CITIZENSHIP (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2019

No. 47 OF 2019

[12th December, 2019.]

An Act further to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955.

Be it enacted by Parliament in the Seventieth Year of the Republic of India as follows:—

1. (1) This Act may be called the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

   (2) It shall come into force on such date as the Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint.
2. In the Citizenship Act, 1955 (hereinafter referred to as the principal Act), in section 2, in sub-section (1), in clause (b), the following proviso shall be inserted, namely:

"Provided that any person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian community from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, who entered into India on or before the 31st day of December, 2014 and who has been exempted by the Central Government by or under clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 3 of the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 or from the application of the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 or any rule or order made thereunder, shall not be treated as illegal migrant for the purposes of this Act;".

3. After section 6A of the principal Act, the following section shall be inserted, namely:

'6B. (1) The Central Government or an authority specified by it in this behalf may, subject to such conditions, restrictions and manner as may be prescribed, on an application made in this behalf, grant a certificate of registration or certificate of naturalisation to a person referred to in the proviso to clause (b) of sub-section (1) of section 2.

(2) Subject to fulfilment of the conditions specified in section 5 or the qualifications for naturalisation under the provisions of the Third Schedule, a person granted the certificate of registration or certificate of naturalisation under sub-section (1) shall be deemed to be a citizen of India from the date of his entry into India.

(3) On and from the date of commencement of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, any proceeding pending against a person under this section in respect of illegal migration or citizenship shall stand abated on conferment of citizenship to him:

Provided that such person shall not be disqualified for making application for citizenship under this section on the ground that the proceeding is pending against him and the Central Government or authority specified by it in this behalf shall not reject his application on that ground if he is otherwise found qualified for grant of citizenship under this section:

Provided further that the person who makes the application for citizenship under this section shall not be deprived of his rights and privileges to which he was entitled on the date of receipt of his application on the ground of making such application.

(4) Nothing in this section shall apply to tribal area of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram or Tripura as included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution and the area covered under "The Inner Line" notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873.'.

4. In section 7D of the principal Act,—

(i) after clause (d), the following clause shall be inserted, namely:

"(da) the Overseas Citizen of India Cardholder has violated any of the provisions of this Act or provisions of any other law for time being in force as may be specified by the Central Government in the notification published in the Official Gazette; or;"

(ii) after clause (f), the following proviso shall be inserted, namely:

"Provided that no order under this section shall be passed unless the Overseas Citizen of India Cardholder has been given a reasonable opportunity of being heard.".

5. In section 18 of the principal Act, in sub-section (2), after clause (ee), the following clause shall be inserted, namely:

"(eei) the conditions, restrictions and manner for granting certificate of registration or certificate of naturalisation under sub-section (1) of section 6B;".
6. In the Third Schedule to the principal Act, in clause (d), the following proviso shall be inserted, namely:

'Provided that for the person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian community in Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, the aggregate period of residence or service of Government in India as required under this clause shall be read as "not less than five years" in place of "not less than eleven years".'

DR. G. NARAYANA RAJU,
Secretary to the Govt. of India.
Bibliography


*White Papers*


Assam Legislative Assembly, Unstarred Question No. 720. Sub: ‘Detention Camp.’ replied on 26/03/2018 - where the subject heading itself is ‘detention camp.’


The Guwahati High Court, PIL (suo moto) 66/2012, and WP(c) 648/2013, and 4860/2013


Circular issued by Roopak Chaudhari, the Deputy Secretary to the Government of India. No/23011/118/2015 - FRA, Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs.


The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, Ministry of Law and Justice, Chapter 1, Accessed Through Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.