



HAQ: Centre for Child Rights  
Presents...

# The Children of Assam

In Times of National Register of Citizens (NRC)

We bring to you ten stories centred around children of different ages, gender, and ethnic backgrounds, navigating the NRC in Assam.

**From Ground Zero.**

A fact finding effort by HAQ: Centre for Child Rights, Development and Justice Initiative (DAJI) and The Action Northeast Trust (The Ant), with support from terre des hommes (Germany) and coordination assistance from the North-East Affected Area Development Society (NEADS) in Jorhat, Sanatan Unnayan Sangstha (SUS) in Silchar and Dr. Abdul Azis Memorial foundation in Karimganj.

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**One Story a Day Beginning 28th July, 2020**

**\*All names are fictitious**



# The Children of Assam

## In Times of National Register of Citizens (NRC)

"I was in the 9th Class when they came and took my mother to the detention centre. My younger sister kept on crying for two days after they took her. I had to go reach school and also prepare meals for my sibling and feed them before leaving for school, all this was very difficult for me. I felt very bad at that point in time as I was forced to do all household chores at such a young age. In order to distract my siblings from thinking about our mother, I used to give them some money and ask them to go and eat something from the market. I have faced a really hard time managing finances for the family when my mother's case was going on. I could not give enough time on education, sometimes the examination schedule coincided with the time when paddy had to be plucked from the field. As money was urgently needed, I had to give up on my examination and work in the paddy fields. I dropped out after class 9th. I visited my mother 3-4 times during her incarceration in the detention centre. Whenever I saw my mother at the detention centre I could only cry seeing her state and never gained enough strength to start a conversation. After a while, I realised that if the only thing I could do was cry on seeing her there was no point in visiting her in detention centre. My father used to beat us up as he got irritated from not being able to get my mother out of detention centre. We have spent 8-lakh rupees on the case and that has completely dried up our savings and also took whatever we earned." - Fatima, now a young woman.

Their mother spent ten years in detention centre.

Fatima took a decision to never cry so that her younger siblings remained strong. She and her brother dropped their education to support the legal expenses of their mother's case and ensured the education of her younger siblings continued. The children would meet their mother on either side of an iron gate. The family stopped attending all social functions in grief and loss. We asked Fatima what her aspirations were. She said,

"I want to re-enrol myself in school and everyone also encourages me to do so. I feel happy that my mother has returned back home."

**Story One, Day One: 28th July, 2020**

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## In Times of National Register of Citizens (NRC)

One day Zehra, an adolescent girl in Karimganj, overheard a conversation between her parents about the NRC that left her disturbed and stressed for years to come..

Zehra shared,

“Mera naam NRC list mein nahi aaya hai, aisa maine papa se suna jab woh mummy ko bata rahe the. Jab maine papa se pucha toh woh koi baat nahi hai, sab theek ho jayega. Aas pas ke log mujhe tease karte hain, kehte hain mujhe Bangladesh bhej denge aur mere parents yahin rahenge. Mein jitna bolne ki koshish karti hun utna hi mujhe log yaad karte hain ki mere naam NRC me nahi hai. Mujhe acha nahi lagta hai, dar lagta hai. Maine apne teacher se bhi baat ki, woh bhi yahi boli sab theek ho jayega.”

“(I heard papa tell mama that my name has not come in the NRC list. When I asked papa he said never mind, everything will be fine. People around me tease me, they say I will be sent to Bangladesh and my parents will remain here. The more I try to speak, the more people remind me that my name is not in the NRC. I don't feel good, I feel scared. I spoke to my teacher also who also said that everything will be alright.)”

**Story Two, Day Two: 29th July, 2020**

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## In Times of National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Pariya and Shafa, two sisters aged three and nine years, respectively, spent nine years in Kokrajhar detention centre with their parents. They were released on February, 2019 along with their mother. Their father remains in detention.

The family depleted all resources in defending their citizenship in the Foreign Tribunal (FT) so when, post trial, they were declared foreigners, they did not have the money to approach the High Court and remained in detention for nine years.

In 2018 they approached Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), which filed a writ petition challenging the order of the FT. Thereafter, the High Court noticed that a reference had been made only against the father, not the mother and children. The HC set the order of the FT aside and released the mother and the children.

During this detention period, both children were deprived of their fundamental rights to liberty, and free and compulsory education under Articles 21 and 21A of the Constitution of India.

Two children spent nine years were spent inside a detention centre without any official reference or legal ground.

**Story Three, Day Three: 30th July, 2020**

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In Times of National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Tara lives in Char, Assam. She is seven years old. She has heard that those who don't make it to the NRC are taken away by the police. And her father's name has not come in the NRC.

Tara's mother shared:

“Meri beti kayi baar yeh soch ke rone lagti hai ki kahin uske dadi ji ko police le kar na chali jaye. Kayi baar woh so bhi nahi pati aur neend se uthkar rone lagti hai dadi ji ke liye. Khaana bhi nahi khaati ache se. ”

(My daughter frequently starts crying with the thought that the police might take her father away. Very often she is not able to sleep and wakes up in between and starts crying for her father. She doesn't eat properly either.)”

**Story Four, Day Four: 31st July, 2020**

**\*All names are fictitious**



# The Children of Assam

## In Times of National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Three children in Bongaigaon lost their mother suddenly when, without any notice or intimation, she was taken to the detention centre. While visiting their mother at the detention centre, the children were not allowed to speak to her. They had to look at her from a distance with two iron gates in between. While their mother was in the detention centre, the oldest daughter became an adult got married. Their uncles fought the case and sold their land and shop to meet its expenses. When she returned, her youngest son failed to recognise her. She is still a D-Voter. The children's names are also excluded from the NRC. Their family resources have depleted.

Their mother recalled (translated),

“I was three-months pregnant when the police took me to the detention centre in Kokrajhar... Seeing no signs of release, I revealed to the authorities that I was pregnant. During the 7th month of my pregnancy, the authorities at the detention centre took me to a different room where they injected me with an unknown substance. On asking what I had been injected for, they replied it was important for the health of the baby I was carrying. After 3-days, I gave birth to a stillborn baby. I was forced to sign on a paper that I could not understand and even after that the body of the child was not taken to the hospital for the next 2-days. I was released in December of 2019 after spending 10-years and 6 months in the detention centre. Upon release, I came to know that my husband had passed while I was in the detention centre and I was not allowed to attend his last rites. I have spent a decade within the detention centre without committing any crime and still have to go to the police station every week to mark my attendance. Even if I want to relocate somewhere far from this place and its memories, I cannot.”

**Story Five, Day Five: 1st August, 2020**

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Shafiq, an adolescent girl in Bongaigaon, shared her observations on the stress and challenges of the NRC upon children of her age. In her opinion, a key stress point for children was when they had to choose between either taking an exam or visiting the NRC Kendra. Shafiq recounted the experience of her friend,

“Aisa bhi hua meri friend ke saath ki school mein exam tha aur ussi din usko hearing ke liye bhi jaana pada. Ab woh bahut pareshan ho gayi ki kya kare, agar hearing mein jaati hai toh pura saal kharab jayega, aur agar nahi jaati toh humko desh mein bhi rehna hai. Usko bahut bura laga. Teacher se baat ki toh woh bole ki passing marks de denge bas, but woh toh humesha bahut ache marks lati toh usko bahut mushkil hui.”

“(This also happened with my friend that there was an exam in school and, on the same day, she had to go for a hearing. Now she got very worried about what she should do; if she goes to the hearing the whole year will get ruined, and if she doesn’t go then they won’t be allowed to live in the country. Upon speaking to the teacher, the teacher said they’ll give passing marks that’s all, but she always got very good marks so she had a lot of difficulty.)”

**Story Six, Day Six: 2nd August, 2020**

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## In Times of National Register of Citizens (NRC)

"I want to become a lawyer so that I can help people in getting out of their troubles." - 8 year old Baidik studying in 5th grade

Bright and interactive, Baidik was the life of our discussion with children on the topics of hobbies, interests, and aspirations. But the moment we brought up the topic of the NRC, the children became quiet. Their teacher explained that the topic was so stress inducing that it had produced silence. While other children slowly began to speak up, Baidik remained silent. Baidik remained silent till the end of the discussion. We spoke to Baidik separately and he shared,

"After having dinner, I heard my parents discuss about my and sister's name not coming on NRC. They seemed to be quarrelling about this. Later my mother came up to me and told me that my name was not enrolled on the NRC list while their names had come up... I was a bit nervous about it and went to my father about what would happen now. He reassured us that he'll manage to get our names on the NRC list soon and it would be fine afterwards. I was scared that if my name does not come up, I might have to drop out of school. I keep hearing that I would be sent to Bangladesh while my parents would remain here which frightens me."

**Story Seven, Day Seven: 3rd August, 2020**

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"We were never informed in a proper manner about NRC and what all was required from us to enroll ourselves on the list... The case against my mother had started much before all this began. We were supposed to attend court-hearings at a very far-off place and I was the one to accompany my father to these hearings. We were spending a lot on these hearings. The travel to-and-from court hearing was a costly affair as was the money being charged by the lawyers. Very soon we lost all our savings and had to sell off our livelihoods in order to meet these legal expenses. As we could not afford the legal help for long, the case stopped midway. As there was a significant burden on the household, I had to drop-out from my school and started working with my father on the fields. Earlier I had some time to play with my friends but nowadays most the time is spent doing domestic or agricultural work. Till date, we have not managed to get my and my sister's name on the NRC list. I have heard people saying that we would not be allowed to live here and would be sent to Bangladesh very soon." - Siddiqua, an adolescent girl in eighth grade.

Inquiry against Siddiqua's family began in 2003. In 2009, both parents were declared foreigners. After an eight year battle, in 2016, the FT ruled in favour of her father but issued deportation orders against her mother. Siddiqua's father approached the High Court. Her family lacked awareness regarding available legal aid and, thus, hired a private lawyer. Despite selling land, jewellery, and livestock, their family, was unable to support the costs so the lawyer stopped representing them.

When we met Siddiqua in 2020, she her younger siblings were all devoid of education.

**Story Eight, Day Eight: 4th August, 2020**

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Faiza became silent as soon as we brought up the NRC in a focussed group discussion with adolescent children in Bongagaon, Assam. The entire group became less talkative and more tentative. Soon enough, Faiza's peers shared that her name was not in the NRC.

We spoke individually to Faiza and asked her how she was. She said,

"Bahut bura lagta hai. Sabka ho gaya, mera nahi hua hai. Maine dekha tha ek budi aurat ko paas wale ghar se police ghaseet kar le gayi. Hume bhi toh lekar jaa sakti hai."

"(It feels very bad. Everyone's name has come, mine has not. I saw an old woman in a nearby house was dragged and taken away by the police. We can also be taken away)"

**Story Nine, Day Nine: 5th August, 2020**

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## In Times of National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Nine-year old Supurna was at a Puja fair in Guwahati with her parents when suddenly, she got lost in the crowd. She found herself at an observation home where the police asked her details about her family that she couldn't remember. The police couldn't trace her family and she was placed in a shelter.

Many years passed. One night in 2006, twelve girls at the shelter decided to run away. Supurna, now one of the oldest girls at the home, had the keys to the main gate, and successfully escaped with her friends. Soon after, Supurna met a man, fell in love, adopted Islam, changed her name, and married him.

HAQ met Supurna in Bongaigaon where she now lives with her husband and infant baby. Her identity has undergone multiple transformations. Firstly, she could not prove her parentage. Secondly, having suddenly run away, she had no proof of her childhood at a shelter home. And finally, she never registered her religious conversion during marriage.

During the first phase of the NRC, Supurna's husband cited her as a daughter of his uncle. At the stage of verification, the uncle refused to verify her as his daughter, and her name was excluded from the first NRC. During the second phase, she approached the Superintendent of the shelter where she had spent most of her childhood. Supurna claims that her signatures are in the registers of the home along with documents that can prove her identity. However, she shared that despite some of the old staff duly identifying her, the Superintendent refused to provide any documents.

Supurna is very apprehensive about being separated from her husband and baby and locked in a detention centre. She is severely traumatised, and was praying vehemently for someone to help her. Supurna told us that if the police comes to take her away, she would prefer to have poison and die rather than leave her family for a life in a detention centre.

**Story Ten, Day Ten: 6th August, 2020**

**\*All names are fictitious**