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Compassion, Classification, Closure: Media Discourse and the Regime of Truth of India's Citizenship Amendment Act

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Abstract

India's 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) made religion a criterion for expedited naturalization, granting a fast track to citizenship for non-Muslim migrants from three Muslim-majority countries while excluding Muslims. This article examines how such a law came to be normalized in public discourse. Analyzing 60 articles published between December 2019 and December 2024 in three influential English-language media outlets—*The Times of India*, *The Wire*, and *Organiser*—the article examines how the CAA was made to appear legitimate, even as its religious logic remained contested. Drawing on Foucault's concept of "regime of truth," it identifies three interrelated mechanisms through which this normalization occurred. First, humanitarian appeals and civilizational narratives created a hierarchy of suffering that made some lives more visible and grievable than others. Second, this hierarchy was recast in administrative terms, presenting religious exclusion as a matter of procedure rather than politics. Third, dissent was narrowed through prohibition, epistemic disqualification, and the privileging of authorized knowledge. Religion, in this process, was discursively reconfigured as a humanitarian criterion, civilizational claim, administrative category, and security marker. The article finally reveals that the CAA's religious logic was normalized through the seemingly secular languages of law, governance, and compassion.

Keywords: regime of truth; Foucauldian discourse analysis; Hindu nationalism; citizenship and religion

1. Introduction

How does religion shape law while still being presented in public as something else? This question is central to India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019. The Act creates an expedited route to citizenship for Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, but does not extend this religion-specific provision to Muslims. Indian citizenship has never been free of ethno-religious assumptions. Nevertheless, the Constituent Assembly rejected religion as a formal qualification for citizenship, and the post-independence legal order was framed, at least normatively, around equality and secular citizenship (Jayal 2013; Chandrachud 2020). The CAA therefore gives explicit statutory form to religious differentiation in a domain formally governed by secular principles. Yet arguments advanced in support of the Act presented this differentiation not as a sectarian departure but as humanitarian protection, administrative necessity, and redress for historical injustice.

Existing scholarship has established the CAA's discriminatory character and situated it within a longer transformation of Indian citizenship. Constitutional scholars argue that the Act violates guarantees of equality (Ahmed 2020) and conflicts with the Constitution's basic



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structure (Chandrachud 2020). Political theorists locate it within the consolidation of what Jaffrelot (2017) calls an “ethnic democracy,” while Jayal (2013, 2019) traces the progressive restriction of citizenship along ethno-religious lines. Read alongside the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the CAA forms part of a broader reorganization of belonging on religious grounds. These studies clarify the Act’s legal implications and political genealogy. They do not fully explain, however, the discursive process through which a religion-differentiated law was rendered reasonable, legitimate, and administratively necessary.

Media scholarship provides a way into this question. Studies on Indian media show that media institutions have not simply reported Hindu nationalism but have helped produce its public forms (Rajagopal 2001; Udupa 2015, 2018). At the same time, the growing political incorporation of major media institutions has made them increasingly receptive to official narratives (Neyazi 2018; Kumar 2018). Comparative studies of nativist and authoritarian politics likewise show how exclusionary political projects acquire legitimacy through routine media discourse, rather than only through overt propaganda or ideological advocacy (Krzyżanowski 2020; Krzyżanowski and Ekström 2022). The CAA places the Indian case within this wider discussion by raising the question of how a religion-based citizenship regime was made publicly intelligible across ideologically different media.

This article addresses that question through a Foucauldian discourse analysis of 60 articles published between December 2019 and December 2024 in three influential English-language media outlets: *The Times of India* (TOI), representing the commercial mainstream; *The Wire*, representing a critical-liberal counterpublic; and *Organiser*, which is closely linked to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This relationship is important here because the RSS occupies a central position within the institutional landscape of Hindu nationalism. *Organiser*’s coverage connects the CAA to wider narratives of historical injury, religious persecution, and national belonging. Reading *Organiser* alongside TOI and *The Wire* makes it possible to examine how claims about the CAA were articulated, reformulated, and challenged from different institutional and ideological positions.

Drawing on Foucault’s (1980) concept of “regime of truth,” the article uses normalization to refer to the production of the discursive conditions under which religion-based citizenship could appear as justice. It identifies three interrelated mechanisms through which this occurred: the production of deserving and undeserving subjects, the recasting of political questions in administrative and technocratic terms, and the marginalization of dissent through discursive exclusion. Rather than treating the three outlets simply as competing positions for or against the Act, the analysis examines how media discourse organized the terms in which suffering, citizenship, and dissent could be understood.

2. Literature Review

2.1. CAA, Citizenship, and the Crisis of the Secular State

Debates over Indian citizenship since independence have consistently turned on political membership and the terms of belonging. Jayal (2013) shows that although Indian citizenship was initially shaped largely by *jus soli*, it became increasingly restrictive over time under the pressure of ethno-religious anxieties. As she notes, the “natural” citizen in the Indian political imagination was “usually Hindu and male” well before these assumptions were given explicit legal form (p. 53). Under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), especially since 2014, this tendency has become more visible. Citizenship has been tied more closely to religious identity, moving away from the constitutional principle that belonging should rest on territory rather than faith (Jayal 2019). The CAA of 2019 gave this shift a clear legislative form by offering an expedited path to naturalization for non-Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

The Act has drawn extensive criticism in constitutional and legal scholarship. Ahmed (2020) argues that the CAA violates Article 14 in two respects. First, it creates an arbitrary distinction among persecuted minorities. Second, it places Muslims in a subordinate civic position by implying that they are less entitled to protection. Chandrachud (2020) develops this argument through the lens of secularism, contending that the Act violates the Constitution's basic structure by bringing religion back into citizenship, a domain that the Constituent Assembly had deliberately insulated from religious qualification. From the perspective of transformative constitutionalism, Bhatia (2019) similarly reads the CAA as a rejection of the Constitution's emancipatory commitment to dismantling caste, gender, and religious hierarchies.

The significance of the CAA, however, cannot be understood apart from the wider administrative apparatus of citizenship verification in which it operates. In Assam, the NRC excluded nearly 1.9 million people and established an institutional model for broader forms of citizenship control. Barbora (2019) shows how the NRC's documentary requirements produced widespread precarity, particularly for Bengali-speaking Muslims. Bhat (2025) conceptualizes this condition as "irregularization," a juridical state in which individuals remain subject to the law while being deprived of substantive rights. Read together, the NRC and the CAA form a mutually reinforcing mechanism: the former identifies populations as excludable, while the latter offers selective inclusion on explicitly religious grounds. In this arrangement, Muslims become especially vulnerable to denationalization.

The CAA has also reopened debate on the character and limits of Indian secularism. Bhargava's (2009) influential idea of "principled distance," in which the secular state may engage religion in context-sensitive ways to secure liberty and equality, provides one normative framework for assessing the Act. Yet scholars have questioned whether this model ever described political reality as much as constitutional aspiration. Jaffrelot (2017) argues that under BJP rule India has moved toward an "ethnic democracy," where democratic institutions remain formally intact but are increasingly used to consolidate Hindu majoritarian dominance. From this perspective, the CAA is less an exceptional departure than an explicit expression of a broader political shift. It forms part of what Chatterji et al. (2019) call the emergence of the "majoritarian state."

Taken together, this scholarship has clarified the legal, constitutional, and political implications of the CAA. It has shown that the Act institutionalizes religious discrimination, challenges constitutional commitments to equality and secularism, and forms part of a wider Hindu-nationalist reworking of the state. What remains less examined, however, is the discursive process through which such a law came to be publicly defensible. This article addresses this question by examining the conditions under which religious exclusion could be rendered publicly intelligible and legitimate.

2.2. Media, Discourse, and the Construction of Political Legitimacy in India

Scholarship on Indian media has long made clear that media are not just channels for reporting political developments but also active participants in the production of political meaning. Rajagopal's (2001) study of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement is especially important in this regard. His analysis of Doordarshan's broadcast of the *Ramayana* in the late 1980s shows that state television did more than circulate religious imagery. It helped establish a shared public idiom of Hindu religiosity and, in the process, reshaped how political claims could be articulated. In other words, political legitimacy does not emerge outside discourse and then appear in the media; it is formed, negotiated, and stabilized through media discourse itself.

The contemporary Indian media landscape, however, differs markedly from the era of state-controlled broadcasting. Udupa (2015) describes this landscape as shaped by the

intersecting forces of globalization, linguistic nationalism, and middle-class aspiration. Her ethnographic work on Bangalore's news industry suggests that journalistic practice is shaped by ownership structures or institutional routines as well as the social dispositions of journalists. Many of these dispositions converge with the developmental aspirations and cultural anxieties that Hindu nationalism has mobilized. In later work, [Udupa \(2018\)](#) develops this line of argument through the concept of "enterprise Hindutva," showing how digital media enable Hindu-nationalist mobilization through entrepreneurial activism, affective intensity, and the normalization of "gaali culture" as a way of policing discursive boundaries. [Pohjonen and Udupa \(2017\)](#) extend this discussion by proposing the concept of "extreme speech," arguing that the vocabulary of hate speech alone cannot fully capture the culturally embedded and politically productive forms of online hostility visible in India.

These shifts in media culture are inseparable from changes in the political economy of the media under the Modi government. India's ranking of 159 out of 180 countries in the *Reporters Without Borders* World Press Freedom Index ([Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\) \(2024\)](#)) points to a sharp decline in media autonomy. As [Neyazi \(2018\)](#) argues, this deterioration cannot be understood only in terms of direct censorship; it also reflects the political incorporation of the media through concentrated corporate ownership, dependence on government advertising, and forms of access journalism that reward editorial compliance. In such a setting, many media institutions function less as independent watchdogs than as extensions of state power, a tendency widely captured in India through the phrase "godhi media" ([Kumar 2018](#)). Any attempt to understand the public mediation of the CAA must therefore attend to the structural location of the media outlets through which it was interpreted and debated.

Research on media discourse surrounding the CAA remains relatively limited. Existing studies have focused largely on communicative practices of resistance, including the use of Twitter by anti-CAA protesters as a counter-public sphere ([Edingo 2021](#)), the role of placards as vernacular media of dissent ([Saxena 2023](#)), and variations in mainstream coverage of protest sites such as Shaheen Bagh ([Ravikumar et al. 2024](#)). This scholarship has been valuable in showing how opposition to the Act was articulated and circulated. Yet, what received less attention is the discursive processes through which the CAA itself was rendered legitimate in mainstream public debate, namely how media outlets across different ideological positions represented a citizenship regime organized around religious difference and, in doing so, helped normalize exclusion. This study addresses that gap by examining how *TOI*, *The Wire*, and *Organiser* discursively constructed the CAA.

3. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

This study adopts a Foucauldian approach to discourse rather than the more linguistically oriented model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) associated with [Fairclough \(1992\)](#). The difference is both conceptual and methodological. CDA typically examines how textual features such as lexical choice, transitivity, and modality reproduce ideological relations within and across texts. A Foucauldian analysis asks a different question. Its concerns not what a text means but how certain statements become possible, credible, and effective in the first place ([Foucault 1972](#); [Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2017](#)).

This distinction matters for the present study. The normalization of the CAA cannot be adequately explained through the rhetoric of any single text. What requires analysis is the broader discursive formation through which religion-based citizenship came to appear reasonable, humanitarian, and administratively necessary. As [Bacchi and Bonham \(2014\)](#) argue, a Foucauldian perspective shifts attention from language as an instrument of politics to discourse as constitutive of the objects, subjects, and problems it names. In this sense,

media discourse surrounding the CAA did not simply defend an exclusionary citizenship regime; it helped constitute the terms in which exclusion could appear justified.

3.1. Regime of Truth and Normalization

The analysis is organized around Foucault's (1980) concept of "regime of truth," which he defines as follows:

types of discourse which [a society] accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (p. 131)

More than a set of beliefs, the concept refers to the procedures through which statements are authorized, circulated, and made consequential, establishing what counts as true, who may speak with authority, and which exercises of power may appear legitimate (Foucault 1980, pp. 131–33). The concept is useful for analyzing the CAA because the Act was not legitimized through a single argument. Its religious distinction acquired meaning within a wider discursive field in which claims about persecution, historical obligation, constitutional classification, administrative procedure, and public order were accorded different degrees of credibility.

Within this framework, normalization refers to the discursive process by which religion-based citizenship could appear as justice. It does not imply that the CAA ceased to be contested. Rather, normalization can be identified where media discourse reorganized debate around categories that took religious differentiation as their premise: which populations counted as victims deserving protection, how eligibility should be classified and administered, and whose objections could be recognized as credible. These questions correspond to the three dimensions examined below: subjectification, governmentality, and procedures of exclusion.

Subjectification refers to the ways discourse constitutes the subjects it appears merely to describe. For Foucault (1982), subjects are produced both as objects of knowledge and regulation and as subjects who come to inhabit those categories. At the level of populations, this process is tied to biopower, which differentiates between lives to be protected and lives that may be exposed to abandonment, a logic Foucault (2003, p. 241) summarizes as "make live and let die." In media discourse on the CAA, this dynamic is visible in the differential construction of populations: some are represented as vulnerable minorities in need of protection, while others appear primarily as threats, intruders, or suspect claimants. These distinctions do not simply describe social reality but organize it in moral and political terms.

Governmentality names the rationalities and techniques through which conduct is directed, and populations are managed (Foucault 2007). It is where political distinctions are recast as administrative procedures. As Lemke (2002, p. 55) notes, bureaucratic mechanisms, instead of simply implementing prior political decisions, actively produce categories of belonging through documentation, verification, and eligibility rules. Rose et al. (2006) likewise draw attention to the technical instruments through which governance operates. In the case of the CAA, media discourses often recast a political question, who is being excluded and on what grounds, as a procedural matter of documentation, classification, and implementation. The effect was to give a deeply contested political project the appearance of technical neutrality.

Procedures of exclusion stabilize this process by regulating the boundaries of legitimate discourse. Foucault (1981, p. 52) describes discourse as something "controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed" through mechanisms that determine what may be said, by whom, and with what authority. He identifies three such mechanisms: prohibition, the division between reason and madness, and the will to truth. As Mills (2003) observes, these

mechanisms often operate less through direct censorship than through structural limits on what can be thought and said in a given conjuncture. In this study, they help explain how criticism of the CAA could be cast as irresponsible, irrational, or politically suspect, while state-aligned accounts acquired the status of common sense.

These three dimensions are analytically distinct but empirically intertwined. Subjectification establishes the moral categories on which governmental rationalities depend; governmentality translates those categories into administrative form; and procedures of exclusion narrow the discursive space in which such constructions may be challenged. Together, they form the discursive infrastructure through which citizenship is redefined not as a constitutional entitlement but as a culturally and religiously mediated privilege.

3.2. Methodology: Media Selection and Analytical Procedure

The study examines reports published by three outlets occupying different institutional positions within India's English-language media field. *TOI*, a leading commercial English-language daily, operates within mainstream journalism and addresses a heterogeneous readership (Rajagopal 2001). *The Wire* is an independent digital platform whose critical-liberal orientation and adversarial relationship with the BJP-led government place it within a counterpublic sphere (Reporters Without Borders (RSF) (2025)). *Organiser* is closely linked to the RSS and provides a movement-aligned site in which Hindu-nationalist positions are articulated with relative explicitness. These institutional positions shape both the authority with which each outlet advances its claims and the publics it addresses. Media discourse does not simply reach pre-existing audiences; through forms of address and circulation, it also helps constitute publics (Warner 2002; Udupa 2015). The reports examined here are therefore situated within multiple, partly overlapping English-language publics.

The study covers the period from December 2019 to December 2024, spanning the passage of the Act, the ensuing protests, the delay in rule-making, and its administrative rollout in 2024. Articles were retrieved through each outlet's internal search function using the terms "Citizenship Amendment Act" and "CAA." Articles were included if they fell within the study period and treated the CAA as their primary subject. Because the platforms differed in their search functions, the default search order was used across all three, and the first twenty qualifying results from each outlet were retained. This produced a corpus of 60 articles. The ordering of results was used only to construct the corpus. The sample is purposive rather than exhaustive because the analysis concerns how representations of the CAA were constituted and authorized, not how frequently they occurred (Kendall and Wickham 1999). The publicly visible reader comment discussed in the analysis is treated as a supplementary trace of on-page engagement rather than as part of the primary sample. A complete list of the sampled articles is provided in Appendix A.

The analysis followed an iterative Foucauldian discourse-analytic procedure (Aribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2017; Willig 2013). The first stage involved open coding to identify how key objects, subjects, and problems were discursively constituted—for example, the CAA itself, citizenship, persecution, refugees, Muslims, protesters, the state, historical injustice, security, and misinformation. The second stage grouped these constructions into broader thematic patterns, attending both to their internal organization within each outlet and to their recurrence across outlets. The third stage traced how these patterns recurred, were reformulated, and were contested across the reports, examining how differently positioned media sites contributed to, or at times disrupted, a wider discursive regime. Three themes emerged from this process: the production of deserving and undeserving subjects; the translation of political conflict into administrative reason; and the foreclosure of dissent through authorized knowledge. These themes developed through an iterative movement between the conceptual framework and the textual material.

4. The Discursive Production of “Deserving” and “Undeserving” Subjects

A central feature of the CAA’s regime of truth is the production of a hierarchy of suffering that determines which displaced populations are recognized as legitimate objects of state protection. This hierarchy is constituted through a humanitarian register that moralizes inclusion, a recasting of citizenship from constitutional status to civilizational entitlement, and the erasure of Muslim suffering. Together, these discursive operations produce a biopolitical division between lives deemed worthy of protection and lives rendered politically unintelligible. In Foucault’s (2003, pp. 254–55) terms, they mark the line along which some are sustained while others are “disallowed to the point of death.”

In *Organiser*, this hierarchy is articulated through the language of humanitarianism. As Fassin (2012) argues, humanitarian reason converts structural violence into individualized suffering and reframes claims of justice as appeals to compassion. This logic is evident in the outlet’s treatment of the CAA. Jayswal (2024), for instance, presents opposition to the Act as opposition to “compassion and inclusivity” itself, displacing legal and political disagreement into an affective register. Similar formulations—such as the CAA as “a beacon of humanitarian leadership” (Pawa 2024) and protection for persecuted minorities as “the duty of all humans” (Bora 2022)—cast the state as a moral guardian rather than as a sovereign power instituting selective exclusion. Within this frame, the question of why Muslims are excluded is not answered so much as foreclosed: the discourse admits pity and gratitude, but not claims articulated in the language of rights or discrimination.

This humanitarian framing constructs persecuted Hindu, Sikh, and Christian minorities as deserving subjects through two recurring strategies: historical narration and testimonial authentication. The first draws on the political afterlife of Partition. Hansen (1999) describes Partition as a “foundational trauma” repeatedly reactivated in contemporary politics, and *Organiser* mobilizes this memory directly. Chaturvedi (2024), for example, describes non-Muslims in Pakistan as having been “brutalized” and “forced to flee,” while lamenting that “for 67 years, the voices of millions of refugees reverberated within the corridors of power, yet went unheeded.” Singh (2024) likewise presents the CAA as “an act of historical justice,” extending citizenship to those once regarded as “residents/citizens of this country.” Citizenship is thus framed not as an impartial legal status but as redress for a civilizational wrong. Thakuria (2024) reinforces this logic by describing the Act as “finally justice for victims of religious persecution” and linking it to the unfulfilled promise of the Nehru–Liaquat Pact¹.

The second strategy is testimonial. Persecution is individualized through first-person accounts that make suffering morally immediate and publicly legible. Butler’s (2009) concept of “frames of recognizability” is useful here, as it draws attention to the conditions under which certain lives become visible as injured lives. Ketkar’s (2024) interview with refugee activist Kiran Chukkapalli offers one such example: “58 percent of the Hindu girls in Sindh province have never been educated.” Payne (2024) similarly quotes gang-rape survivor Purnima Rani Shil: “being Hindu can become a curse at the whim of a Huzoor.” These accounts exemplify what Fassin (2012) calls “biolegitimacy,” whereby political claims acquire force through the display of bodily suffering. The persecuted non-Muslim refugee thus emerges as a grievable subject in Butler’s (2009) sense.

This recognition depends, however, on a parallel redefinition of citizenship. Rather than a constitutional entitlement grounded in territorial belonging, citizenship is recast as a form of civilizational protection. The state is represented as the bearer of a historical civilization and therefore as having a special obligation to protect non-Muslim minorities from neighboring states. Jayswal (2024) states this explicitly in arguing that “the State is the successor of a historical civilization and cultural identity.” Civilizational affinity and constitutional duty are thus treated as mutually reinforcing rather than potentially contradictory. This convergence reflects what Chatterjee (2004) identifies as the enduring

tension in postcolonial India between universal citizenship and ethnocultural particularism. The trope of homecoming further consolidates this shift: “The origin and fatherland of Hindus has always been India” (Chaturvedi 2024). On this logic, the Hindu refugee is not a new claimant to citizenship but an already-belonging subject whose recognition has merely been delayed. The CAA therefore appears not as the introduction of a religious principle into citizenship law but as the correction of a historical wrong (Singh 2024).

The production of deservingness simultaneously produces its opposite. Those outside the civilizational community are denied comparable claims to protection. Muslim migration is routinely coded as economic rather than political and therefore as undeserving of humanitarian recognition. *Organiser* describes such migrants as “economic refugees” rather than victims of religious persecution (The Citizenship Act and the need for it explained 2019; Constitutional sanctity of CAA 2020). Even Ahmadi Muslims, despite their documented persecution and their legal classification as non-Muslims in Pakistan, are excluded from the category of legitimate victims. Ketkar (2024) dismisses their claims by invoking their association with the founding of Pakistan, displacing present vulnerability with inherited historical blame. At the same time, this selective exclusion is framed as lawful and benevolent. The CAA is described as “positive discrimination” consistent with Articles 15 and 16 (Breaking misconception of Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019), while its selectivity is justified through civilizational comparison: “only Islamic nations are selected” because of “systematic persecution of non-Muslims in the name of Islam” (India’s CAA & US Lautenberg Laws: Similar still different 2024). Compassion here does not simply respond to suffering; it organizes the field in which some suffering is recognized and other suffering is disqualified.

The erasure of Muslim suffering also enables a second move: the construction of Muslims as threatening political actors. Once excluded from the category of the persecuted, their public presence can appear only as a menace. Student protests at Jamia Millia Islamia and Aligarh Muslim University, for example, are dismissed as expressions of “universal Islamic brotherhood” led by “Islamists” (CAA violent protests—Manifestation of Muslim brotherhood 2019). Foucault’s (2003) account of biopolitical racism helps clarify this shift. Racism, in this formulation, does not simply separate populations; it organizes political life through a caesura in which the containment of the marked population is made to appear necessary for the well-being of the social body. In this sense, the “refugee” and the “rioter” are not descriptions of different populations but subject positions produced within the same discursive order: one becomes visible as worthy of protection, the other only as a threat.

The Wire functions in part as a counter-discourse by foregrounding what this humanitarian frame excludes. Varadarajan (2024) points to the gap between official rhetoric and state practice, noting that Pakistani Hindus have at times been “forced to return home because of hurdles placed in their way by the government,” while Rohingyas fleeing documented persecution have been actively deported. Kapila (2019) similarly amplifies voices excluded from the dominant narrative: “We Hazaras have a history of being targeted. . . But what about us?” Yet counter-discourse alone does not displace the broader regime of truth. As Section 6 shows, the normalization of the CAA depended not only on explicit ideological endorsement but also on wider discursive conditions that limited which claims could attain legitimacy. The next section examines how this moral ordering was translated into the technocratic language of governance.

5. Administrative Reason and the Absorption of the Political

Administrative reason does not eliminate political questions; it reformulates them in terms that make them appear technically manageable and, in turn, politically unavailable. Ferguson’s (1994, p. 256) notion of the “anti-politics machine” captures this pro-

cess: bureaucratic apparatuses translate questions of power, inequality, and distribution into technical problems suited to administrative intervention, thereby “depoliticizing everything it touches”. Li (2007) describes this as the practice of “rendering technical,” through which a domain is framed so that some elements become visible—procedure, legality, classification—while others, notably structural and political questions, recede from view. In the media discourse examined here, this process operates at two closely related levels: first, through the legal–constitutional recasting of the CAA’s religious criterion in administrative terms; and second, through the bureaucratic procedures by which eligibility is implemented and enforced.

In *Organiser*, coverage of the CAA largely elaborates its constitutional justification without interrogating its political implications. Several articles invoke the doctrine of “reasonable classification” in order to assimilate the Act’s religious distinction into familiar constitutional language (Thakuria 2024; *The Citizenship Act and the need for it explained* 2019). By presenting religion-based exclusion through the jurisprudential logic of classification, and by linking it to claims of “positive discrimination” under Articles 15(4) and 16(4), the discourse translates a politically contentious distinction into a legally legible one (Galanter 1984). Once recoded in this way, exclusion appears less as a matter of ideological choice than as an issue of constitutional design.

TOI’s explanatory coverage provides a related example of what Li (2007) identifies as the pedagogic dimension of rendering technical. Headlines such as “Here is all you need to know about the Citizenship Act” (*What is Citizenship Amendment Act?* 2019) and “What is CAA and how did it come into effect?” (*CAA: JNU issues advisory for students to maintain peace, while protest breaks out in Jamia against Citizenship Amendment Act* 2024) position the reader primarily as a recipient of procedural clarification rather than as a participant in political debate. By treating the CAA as a matter of explanation rather than contestation, this ostensibly neutral mode of reporting shifts attention from the normative question of religious exclusion to the informational question of how the law works. The same distinction is visible in the reader discussion attached to the former report, where Aniruddha Deshmukh described the CAA as “very clearly spelt out,” denied that it threatened Indian Muslim citizens, and claimed that Congress was “purposely confusing people.” The explanatory frame thus takes on a partisan corollary: once the law is treated as self-evidently clear, continued disagreement can be attributed to political actors deliberately producing confusion.

The Wire, by contrast, seeks to restore the political dimension that technocratic framing suppresses. Its repeated focus on “citizenship rights and definition” resists the reduction of the issue to procedure alone. Roy (2024) identifies a central contradiction in the Act: it claims to protect victims of religious persecution while institutionalizing religious discrimination. He further situates this contradiction within a longer genealogy, linking the CAA to the 2003 amendment and to the NRC as part of a broader restructuring of the terms of belonging. The same tension emerges in legal reporting. When senior advocate Kapil Sibal asks, “By excluding Muslims, does the CAA breach Article 14?” (Thapar 2024), the question is at once doctrinal and political. The response—that Article 14 does not apply to “illegal migrants”—illustrates the force of administrative reason: a population marked through political and religious exclusion is redescribed as a legal category lying outside the reach of equality protections.

Administrative reason, however, does not operate only through legal argument. It is also embedded in the material procedures through which citizenship is processed. As A. Gupta (2012) argues, bureaucratic systems often enact structural violence through routine procedures rather than overt coercion. The implementation of the CAA reflects this logic. Citizenship acquisition is represented as an e-governance process conducted

through an online portal that generates “a digital certificate of registration or naturalization” (Manivannan 2024). Yet this apparent procedural rationality rests on conditions that are far from neutral. As Manivannan (2024) notes, the system assumes digital access and literacy, while also raising concerns about privacy and accessibility. Exclusion thus appears not as direct state violence but as procedural failure: an inaccessible portal, an unavailable document, an unmet evidentiary requirement. As Guha (2024) observes, the requirement that applicants furnish documentation from Afghan, Bangladeshi, or Pakistani authorities may be impossible for those who fled persecution without papers. Within the administrative frame, however, such obstacles register merely as deficiencies in processing.

The institutional structure governing adjudication further reveals the security logic embedded within this ostensibly humanitarian process. Intelligence Bureau officers sit alongside government nominees, and decisions may proceed with a quorum of only two members, creating what Manivannan (2024) describes as “an uncertain and unfair system of authentication and evaluation.” This fusion of welfare and surveillance is characteristic of what Foucault (2007) identifies as modern governmentality, in which sovereignty, discipline, and administrative management operate through the same apparatus. In this context, religion functions not merely as a symbolic marker but as an operative biopolitical category: it shapes who is recognized as eligible for protection and who remains administratively invisible. The National Population Register extends the same logic. As Vombatkere (2024) notes, door-to-door enumeration and Aadhaar-style data practices intensify concerns over privacy and surveillance, even as the bureaucratic language of “updaten” and “enumeration” obscures the political consequences of the data infrastructure being assembled.

Taken together, these examples show how administrative reason reorganizes the CAA’s politics as a matter of law, procedure, and implementation. Across constitutional argument, explanatory journalism, and bureaucratic design, religious exclusion is reformulated as a technical problem rather than a contested political project. Yet the persistence of criticism indicates that depoliticization alone is insufficient. Administrative reason must be supplemented by processes that discredit rival interpretations and secure authorized truth. The next section therefore examines these procedures of exclusion.

6. The Foreclosure of Dissent and the Machinery of Authorized Knowledge

A regime of truth depends not only on the production of authorized knowledge but also on the delimitation of legitimate contestation. In the CAA media field, the three procedures of exclusion outlined in this section—prohibition, the reason/madness division, and the will to truth—operated in mutually reinforcing ways.

The first of these, prohibition, worked not only through formal censorship but also through the regulation of what could be publicly said and done within the emerging discursive order (Foucault 1981). In the CAA context, this took the form of a convergence between security management and speech suppression. *TOI* reported the use of drones and pre-emptive surveillance to monitor “potential troublemakers” in “sensitive areas,” largely Muslim-majority neighborhoods, thereby coding political mobilization as a security threat in advance (Delhi police and agencies on alert after CAA rules notified 2024). The Uttar Pradesh director general of police’s warning of “severe repercussions” (Chakraborty 2024) similarly transformed the right to protest into a conditional privilege, subject to prior restraint.

This logic extended beyond the state’s coercive apparatus and was reproduced by auxiliary institutions. Jaffrelot’s (2021) notion of “vigilante democracy” is useful here: formal democratic procedures remain in place, while dissent is curtailed through dispersed institutional action. Jamia Acting Vice-Chancellor Eqbal Hussain’s declaration that “no protest against the CAA will be allowed by students or outsiders near the campus” (CAA:

JNU issues advisory for students to maintain peace, while protest breaks out in Jamia against Citizenship Amendment Act 2024) exemplifies this anticipatory closure. The prohibition was also enforced physically. Students were assaulted in the Jamia library in December 2019; medical assistance was reportedly withheld; and organizers faced prolonged legal precarity under the UAPA (Ara 2021). As the People's Union for Democratic Rights concluded, the police response aimed less at preserving order than at "maim[ing], terroriz[ing] and inflict[ing] maximum harm on students" (Ara 2021). When a Delhi court rejected Jamia's FIR application against the Delhi Police, this boundary was further consolidated through legal procedure.

Physical repression alone, however, cannot sustain a regime of truth. The second procedure, the reason/madness division, works by disqualifying dissent before coercion becomes necessary. The issue, for Foucault (1981), is not simply the distinction between truth and falsehood, but the prior determination of whose speech is admissible as rational. *Organiser* performs this move explicitly. Protest is attributed to "misinformation around the Act" spread by "so-called intellectual groups," with the scare quotes marking epistemic demotion in place of substantive engagement (Breaking misconception of Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019). S. Gupta (2024) extends the same logic by attributing nationwide protests to opposition-led "misinformation campaigns." Modi's 2019 Ramlila Ground speech similarly cast critics as actors "spreading all kinds of rumors, misleading people and stoking their emotions" (Citizenship law & NRC have nothing to do with Indian Muslims: PM Narendra Modi 2019). In each case, dissent is not rebutted on its merits but explained away as the product of confusion, manipulation, or affective excess.

In the Indian case, this delegitimization often exceeds epistemic disqualification and takes on an ontological dimension. Whereas Wodak (2015) shows how European right-wing discourse frequently portrays opposition as manipulated by elites or foreign interests, the CAA discourse often casts dissent as external to the national community itself. Protests at Jamia and AMU, for instance, were reframed not as constitutional opposition but as expressions of "universal Islamic brotherhood" (CAA violent protests—Manifestation of Muslim brotherhood 2019). Rajnath Singh's claim that "people are being misled over the CAA" (People being misled over CAA; nobody's citizenship will be snatched: Rajnath Singh 2024) further inverted the relation between state and citizen, positioning governmental speech as corrective truth and popular dissent as evidence of cognitive failure. Dissenters thus appeared not merely mistaken but misaligned with the national order in whose name truth was being asserted.

These two procedures converge clearly in *Organiser's* call for those spreading "misinformation" about the Act to be "identified and punish[ed] for their offenses with due process of law" (Breaking misconception of Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019). Here, epistemic error is recoded as a juridical offense. The irrational dissenter becomes at once an uninformed subject and a punishable one.

The third procedure, the will to truth, operates more positively. Rather than excluding speech outright, it produces and authorizes knowledge through institutional mechanisms that make certain statements appear self-evidently true (Foucault 1981). In the CAA discourse, this machinery worked through parliamentary authority, the category of "misinformation," and the deployment of public figures whose credibility appeared to stand above partisan politics. *Organiser's* defense of the Act illustrates the first mechanism: its expectation of Supreme Court approval rests less on constitutional argument than on the claimed thoroughness of parliamentary debate, as though procedural completion itself guaranteed substantive legitimacy (S. Gupta 2024). The legislative process thus functions as a truth-conferring ritual.

The BJP's #IndiaSupportsCAA campaign demonstrates this process in digital form. *The Wire's* analysis of Facebook advertising data showed a sharp gap between paid impressions and organic engagement, indicating that the campaign's visibility depended substantially on paid promotion (Halder 2020). The campaign also drew on the public authority of Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, a prominent Indian spiritual leader and founder of the Isha Foundation. Although Sadhguru acknowledged that he had not read the Act in full, BJP leaders circulated a video of his comments as an authoritative explanation of the law. Union Home Minister Amit Shah shared the video while urging citizens to "stop believing lies and half-truths on CAA" (Halder 2020). As Udupa (2018) argues in her discussion of "enterprise Hindutva," paid amplification can be made to appear as spontaneous endorsement.

The three procedures form a closed circuit. Prohibition narrows the space of permissible dissent; the reason/madness division disqualifies dissenting speakers in advance; and the will to truth supplies the authorized knowledge that makes these exclusions appear natural rather than political. Their force lies not in any single mechanism but in their combined operation across outlets with different ideological orientations. *The Wire's* counter-discourse exposed important contradictions, demonstrating that normalization remained contested. Yet counter-discourse alone did not displace the institutional mechanisms through which official claims were amplified and dissent restricted.

7. Conclusions: Religion, Governmentality, and the Conditions of Belonging

The three analytical themes examined above—the production of "deserving" and "undeserving" subjects, the translation of political conflict into administrative reason, and the foreclosure of dissent through procedures of exclusion—together constitute, in Foucault's (1980) sense, a regime of truth. This regime did not simply legitimate the CAA; it produced the discursive conditions under which religion-based citizenship could appear as justice. Its force lay less in repression than in productivity. Humanitarian appeals and civilizational narratives produced a hierarchy of suffering in which some displaced populations appeared as legitimate objects of protection while others were rendered ungrievable. Administrative reason translated this hierarchy into the procedural language of law and governance, recasting religious exclusion as technical necessity rather than political choice. Procedures of exclusion, in turn, secured this arrangement by narrowing the space of intelligible dissent. Each operation depended on the others. Subject formation supplied the affective basis for governance; administrative rationality converted that affect into categories of rule; and exclusion stabilized the epistemic field in which the entire arrangement could pass as natural. *The Wire's* counter-discourse exposed what this regime obscured, demonstrating that normalization did not eliminate contestation.

What emerged was not merely a new legal instrument but a reconfigured epistemology of belonging. The normalization of the CAA required religion to operate simultaneously as a humanitarian criterion of protection, a civilizational basis of entitlement, an administrative category of classification, and a security marker of suspicion. That these functions could coexist without their contradictions becoming fully visible was itself a central achievement of the regime. Religion was not simply deployed in support of a pre-existing political agenda; it was reconstituted discursively as a category capable of organizing biopolitical differentiation while appearing as compassion, constitutional reason, and historical redress. In this sense, the CAA did not simply defend religious exclusion. It helped establish the conditions under which such exclusion no longer appeared to require defense.

These findings carry broader implications for the study of religion and the secular state. The Indian case suggests that the crisis of secularism is inadequately understood as a straightforward erosion of secular norms by resurgent religiosity. Rather, following

Asad (2003), the secular is understood here not as the absence of religion but as a mode of state power that defines and regulates it. In the CAA case, the state's ability to classify populations by religion depended on institutional forms and discursive registers that claimed to stand above religious particularity. Secularism was not displaced by religion but reworked to accommodate a project whose operative distinctions were unmistakably religious.

Viewed in this light, Foucault's concept of "regime of truth" clarifies the broader significance of media as sites of translation. In the CAA case, media discourse did not merely transmit or amplify majoritarian claims; it recast a religion-based legal distinction as humanitarian protection, constitutional classification, administrative procedure, and public order. Beyond India, this suggests that authoritarian and majoritarian projects may be legitimated not only through coercion or overt exclusionary rhetoric but also through ostensibly universal vocabularies that make exclusion appear compatible with public reason. For scholars of religion, the political force of religious categories may therefore be greatest precisely where religion appears least explicit.

A final question remains. If regimes of truth structure the conditions under which claims become intelligible, then critique itself cannot be assumed to stand outside those conditions. This study has shown how the CAA's religious logic was normalized through discursive forms that rendered it difficult to name. Yet the analytical language used to expose that process is itself historically and institutionally situated. This is not a reason to abandon critique but a reminder that discourse analysis is implicated in the very problem it diagnoses. Any critical use of these tools must therefore remain reflexive about its own conditions of possibility.

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Appendix A

Appendix A.1 Organiser

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3. <https://organiser.org/2019/12/17/125834/bharat/caa-violent-protests-manifestation-of-muslim-brotherhood/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
4. <https://organiser.org/2024/03/14/125766/bharat/dr-ambedkar-and-cab/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
5. <https://organiser.org/2024/03/12/226881/bharat/indian-muslims-should-welcome-caa-they-arent-affected-by-this-law-all-india-muslim-jamaat-president/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
6. <https://organiser.org/2019/12/30/125968/bharat/citizenship-amendment-act-correction-of-a-historical-mistake/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)

7. <https://organiser.org/2024/03/13/227163/opinion/believers-in-humanity-will-never-oppose-cao/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
8. <https://organiser.org/2024/03/17/227958/bharat/cao-act-of-historical-justice/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
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11. <https://organiser.org/2019/12/30/125970/bharat/breaking-misconception-of-citizenship-amendment-act/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
12. <https://organiser.org/2020/12/21/132543/bharat/cao-a-game-changer-in-bengal-polls/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
13. <https://organiser.org/2024/03/18/228078/bharat/cao-championing-humanitarian-leadership-on-global-stage/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
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16. <https://organiser.org/2020/01/13/126139/bharat/gilgit-baltistan-is-an-integral-part-of-bharat-says-activist/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
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19. <https://organiser.org/2019/12/17/125832/bharat/the-citizenship-act-and-the-need-for-it-explained/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
20. <https://organiser.org/2024/03/22/228903/opinion/why-is-the-citizenship-amendment-act-necessary/> (accessed on 30 November 2025)

Appendix A.2 Times of India

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13. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ludhiana/pak-ex-legislator-backs-new-india-law/articleshow/108574261.cms> (accessed on 30 November 2025)
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Notes

- ¹ The Nehru-Liaquat Pact (1950) was an agreement between India and Pakistan concerning the protection of minorities after Partition. It remains a significant historical reference in discussions of India–Pakistan relations and minority politics in South Asia.

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