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Culture and society: On **upholding** Section 6A of the Citizenship Act

Supreme Court of India verdict on citizenship law for Assam helps avoid fresh problems.

In provision introduced in 1985 to give effect to the core feature of the Assam Accord, the Supreme Court of India has helped preserve the existing legal regime for determining citizenship and identification of foreigners in Assam. Striking it down would have had the undesirable consequence of **turning the clock back** on the process laid down in **statutory** provisions and rules for the purpose. In its 4:1 decision, the Court has rightly seen the provision in the light of historical developments. While on one hand, Section 6A conferred deemed citizenship on all those who entered Assam from areas in **erstwhile** East Pakistan before January 1, 1966, it created, on the other, a system of registration for those who immigrated from that day to March 25, 1971, the day Pakistan began Operation Searchlight, a military drive to suppress the Bengali nationalist movement. The latter category of people had to be ordinarily residing in Assam and declared to be a foreigner by a tribunal before they could apply for registration as citizens. However, they would be ineligible to be on the electoral rolls for 10 years from the date of detection.

Section 6A, as the Chief Justice of India, D.Y. Chandrachud, says in his **concurring** opinion, was aimed at **finding a middle ground** between a humanitarian approach towards the immigrant population in Assam and ensuring that large-scale immigration does not result in the loss of the cultural, economic and political rights of the Assam people.

The majority has rejected the **notion** that the provision is unconstitutional on the ground that it treats Assam differentially from the rest of the country. It has noted that the citizenship provisions in the Constitution referred to 'citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution' and Parliament was not deprived of the power to introduce provisions on citizenship for a different category of people from a different date. In his main opinion, speaking for himself and two other judges, Justice Surya Kant has acknowledged the petitioners' "demographic anxiety", but did not believe that the idea of **fraternity** in the Constitution was threatened by a mere change in demography. It is not a misplaced fear when he says accepting the argument that demographic change could lead to an erosion of the cultural rights of a section of society may **open the floodgates** for similar challenges to **undermine** inter-State migration in the **guise** of protecting **indigenous** culture.

At a time when the exercise to finalise a National Register of Citizens for Assam is in [limbo](#) — 19 lakh people have been identified as non-citizens, but there have been no further developments — any decision invalidating Section 6A would have created fresh complications.

Summary –

The Supreme Court of India upheld Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, introduced in 1985 to implement the Assam Accord. This provision grants citizenship to those who entered Assam from East Pakistan before January 1, 1966, while those who entered between 1966 and March 25, 1971, must undergo registration and be declared foreigners before applying for citizenship. The Court rejected claims that this section discriminates against Assam and emphasized the need to balance humanitarian concerns with protecting the cultural and political rights of Assam's people. Striking it down would have complicated ongoing processes like the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Vocabulary –

1. Uphold(Verb) समर्थन करना, बनाए रखना, or पालन करना

Meaning – It refers to the action of supporting, maintaining, or defending something.

Synonyms – Support, Endorse, Advocate.

Antonyms – Oppose, overturn, Abandon

Example – The judge vowed to uphold the law despite public pressure.

2. Statutory (adj) (वैधानिक)

Meaning= required, permitted, or enacted by statute)

Lawful

Synonym: Legal, legislative

Antonym: Illegal, unauthorized

Example: The statutory regulations prevent the company from dumping waste into the rivers.

3. Fraternity (noun)(भाईचारा)

Meaning = a group of people sharing a common profession or interests

Synonym: Brotherhood, guild

Antonym: Rivalry, antagonism

Example: He joined the fraternity of writers, which met monthly to discuss literary trends.

4. Notion (noun) (धारणा)

Meaning= a conception of or belief about something

Synonym: Idea, belief

Antonym: Reality, fact

Example: His notion of what makes a good leader differs significantly from traditional views.

5. Concurring (Verb) (सहमत)

Meaning: Agreeing with a decision or opinion.

Synonyms: Agreeing, supporting, endorsing

Antonyms: Disagreeing, opposing, dissenting

Example: The judge wrote a concurring opinion, agreeing with the majority decision.

6. Undermine (Verb)(कमजोर करना)

Meaning: To weaken gradually or destroy the foundation of something.

Synonyms: Weaken, sabotage, subvert

Antonyms: Strengthen, support, bolster

Example: Constant criticism can undermine a person's confidence.

7. Guise (noun) वेश, छिपा हुआ

Meaning= an external form, appearance, or manner of presentation, typically concealing the true nature of something

Synonym: Appearance, facade

Antonym: Reality, genuineness

Example: She arrived at the meeting in the guise of a journalist, eager to gather information unnoticed.

8. Erstwhile (Adverb, Adjective) पूर्व, ,भूतपूर्व

Meaning – former or previous.

Synonyms – Former, Previous, Bygone

Antonyms – Current, Present, Future

Example – The erstwhile king lived in exile after being dethroned.

9.Limbo (noun) अनिश्चितता की स्थिति

Meaning= an uncertain period of awaiting a decision or resolution; an intermediate state or condition.

Synonym: Transition, suspension

Antonym: Resolution, conclusion

Example: The legislation is currently in limbo as lawmakers debate its implications.

10. Indigenous (Adj)स्वदेशी

Meaning – something that is native or originating from a particular place or environment, especially in relation to the original inhabitants of a region.

Synonyms – Native, Aboriginal, Endemic

Antonyms – Foreign, Introduced, Alien.

Example – The indigenous peoples of the Americas have rich cultural traditions that have been passed down through generations.

Idioms & Phrases-

1. Turning the clock back –

Meaning To return to an earlier way of doing things.

2. In the light of –

Meaning - Taking into consideration.

3. Finding the Middle ground-

Meaning – A compromise or a position between two extremes.

4. Open the floodgates –

Meaning – To allow something to happen a lot or allow many people to do something that was not previously allowed.

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