

‘Those Who Before the Partition of Pakistan and India Were Citizens of This Country’: Negotiating Citizenship to Inform Nation-States

Rahul Sambaraju¹, Suryapratim Roy²

[1] Department of Psychology, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom. [2] School of Law, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland.

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Corresponding Author: Rahul Sambaraju, 7 George Square; Department of Psychology, The University of Edinburgh, EH8 9JZ, UK. E-mail: leo.sambaraju@gmail.com

Abstract

In much of social psychology, citizenship has been examined and understood in terms of how it proceeds from nationhood and how various versions of nationhood can be mobilised to exclude others. In this paper, we deviate from this line of scholarship to identify and examine practices by which constructions of citizenship are developed to inform nation-formation. We examine how versions of territory, national belonging, and history are intertwined in the construction of citizenship through a discursive and rhetorical examination of debates on Indian citizenship at two momentous occasions for India: the drafting of India’s constitution (1946-50) and the Citizen Amendment Act 2019. Analysis shows that citizenship policies were evaluated in terms of whether they realised the rights and entitlements of Hindus to the territory of India outside of the Indian nation-state. The findings then show that belonging to a territory is a salient resource in negotiating citizenship, and this can in turn work to support or undermine the idea of a nation-state.

Keywords

citizenship, India, CAA, discursive psychology, rhetorical psychology, Hindu Rashtra, territory

National belonging and citizenship are complex issues that carry significant relevance for individuals. Social psychological research has shown that understanding of nation informs citizenship both in a broader legal and policy sense (Kadianaki et al., 2018) and in more locally situated aspects (Gibson & Hamilton, 2011) (see Stevenson et al., 2015 for an overview of social psychological approaches to citizenship). Social and political psychologists have also shown that citizenship policies are devised to engage in national projects and shape national polity in ways that inform the values of a nation-state (Andreouli & Chrysochoou, 2015). Here, we argue that a central aspect of negotiating citizenship in a nation-state is the engagement with social group membership apparently unrelated to the nation. We show that religious categories were constructed and used in ways to develop normative inferences about belonging and entitlement to the territory of the nation in ways that develop alternative national projects.

We deviate from studies of citizenship and nationhood in largely Euro-American or other settler-colonial contexts (Andreouli, 2019; Andreouli & Chrysochoou, 2015) to focus on a postcolonial setting: India. India offers unique opportunities to study citizenship and nationhood: one, citizenship deliberations are bound to socio-political migration (Jayal, 2019), and two, the tenuous relations between territory, nation, nation-states, and belonging that operate in South Asia (Chatterji, 2012).

Green (2024) argues that nation-states have a tenuous relationship with nations. While some nation-states represent a homogenous national polity, such as those in Europe after World War I, for others, a diverse community of peoples was wrought together to develop ostensibly homogenous nation-states (Guibernau, 2004b). Several post-colonial states



are examples of the latter. Pakistan and Israel are exceptions since the efforts in these cases have been to offer citizenship based on religion and thus develop homogeneity. Notably, Green offers contemporary India as a similar exception for attempting to force-fit religious homogeneity. Other scholars have argued that belonging to a nation is not necessarily limited to the territory of the nation (Knott, 2017).

For scholars and activists, the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 signals a radical shift not only in citizenship policy but citizenship as informing the Indian nation-state (Bhatia, 2022; Rehman, 2024; Verma, 2020). The implications of changes to citizenship as informing nations are not unique to this context. Similar features are seen in the White Australia Policy, the US Immigration Act of 1924, and the Constitutions of Pakistan and Israel (Roy & Sambaraju, 2023). The formation of India and Pakistan as nation-states offers complex ways for individuals to be construed as belonging to one or the other of the nation-states (Jayal, 2019). Guibernau (2004a), for instance, has argued that national identity does not necessarily imply only a sense of belonging to a nation-state and can be relevantly the case for nations without a state.

Social Psychology of Citizenship, Migration, and Nations

Social and political psychologists have made notable contributions to the understanding of citizenship and belonging (Condor, 2011; Stevenson et al., 2015; Xenitidou & Sapountzis, 2018). Two points are noteworthy here. First is the salience of social groups for citizenship. While citizenship status in a nation-state can itself be a source of membership into categories like ‘citizen’, ‘migrant’, ‘refugee’, and so on, citizenship is routinely negotiated in terms of membership in other categories like those based on religion, race & ethnicity, or nation (Scully, 2025). Condor (2006), for instance, has argued that nations can be constructed as social categories to derive a sense of identity. Problematically, however, these constructions can be made to exclude non-nation others (Bowskill et al., 2007). For Condor (2006), the construction of nation-as-category can posit a sense of homogeneity of the national polity (Billig, 1995).

Alternatively, nations can also be constructed in territorial terms (Abell et al., 2006; Wallwork & Dixon, 2004). Abell et al. (2006) show that constructions of the UK as an island allowed individuals to manage to come across as positing a homogenous polity while indicating unity and distance from Europe. Territorial aspects of a nation are salient since these are routinely understood as the ‘home’ of the nation, the site of its foundations, and allow for the full expression of national identities (Goemans, 2006; Smith, 2013). Constructions of place and one’s relations with it can be mobilised to negotiate not only their presence but also the form of actions that can be legitimately taken up (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000, 2004). Barnes et al. (2004), for instance, show that Travelers’ mobile lifestyles could be developed in ways to delegitimise their rights to state benefits. Stevenson and Sagherian-Dickey (2018), however, show that differing versions of citizenship can inform different understandings of territory.

Second, citizenship is unique for the role of the nation-state and its legislative bodies to ascribe or withdraw an individual’s membership (Andreouli, 2019; Andreouli & Howarth, 2013; Sambaraju et al., 2017) or for the possibility that the majority group members can downgrade the citizenship of marginalised others (Gibson & Hamilton, 2011). At the same time, marginalised individuals themselves might negotiate their citizenship (Hopkins, 2022; Hopkins & Blackwood, 2011).

A related distinction has been made between ‘lay’ and the more ‘formal’ accounts of citizenship. The former is concerned with everyday understandings and enactments of citizenship, such as those where citizenship is earned by paying taxes (Barnes et al., 2004), taking up effortful employment (Gibson & Hamilton, 2011), or is enacted in public (Durrheim & Dixon, 2005; Gray & Manning, 2014). Joyce et al. (2013) show that Travelers in Ireland could foreground their Indigenous status in contrast to migrants to complain about their liminal belonging to the Irish state. These aspects of negotiation are salient even for those who might have more proximal relations with the nation-state. Scully (2025) has shown that members of the Irish diaspora post-Brexit might legitimise their claims to Irish citizenship by foregrounding their efforts instead of a ready entitlement to citizenship based on descent.

The latter is more concerned with official accounts of who is to be a citizen and what practices determine this. Researchers have shown how constructions of nations in legislative settings are used to negotiate giving refuge to migrant-others (Every & Augoustinos, 2008). Gray and Griffin (2014) examine the British Citizenship Test to show that this test implicates specific versions of what it means to be a citizen, including not merely an allegiance to the nation

but also certain practical aspects. [Andreouli and Howarth's \(2013\)](#) study offers a complex analysis of policy documents and interviews with recently naturalised British persons to argue that these distinctions between 'formal' and 'lay' are perhaps not concrete. They also argue that citizenship policies are routinely embedded in and respond to socio-political contexts, and so are ideological.

Religion and Citizenship

Religious group membership is one means to downgrade citizenship ([Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007](#)). [Bhatia and Ram \(2009\)](#), for instance, have shown how religious identification informed belonging in the US before and after 9/11. Focusing on the South Asian diaspora, [Bhatia and Ram \(2009\)](#) examine how Sikhs had to manage being seen as Muslim in ways that impacted their sense of belonging in the US. [Hopkins \(2011\)](#) found that for some British Muslims, others' denial of their Britishness was not only hurtful because it questioned their national belonging but was doubly hurtful because it questioned their understanding of the religious identity as being able to accommodate itself to national particularities (such that one could be Muslim in a British way). [Hopkins et al. \(2003\)](#) have shown that enacting a routine feature of citizenship – voting – is a matter of much contestation and negotiation for Muslims in Britain. Instead of a straightforward implication that not voting is to not enact citizenship, Muslims could offer alternative views of citizenship by withholding their vote. Other research in the Indian setting similarly shows how religious group membership (non-Hindu religions) informs public citizenship ([Fernandes, 2020](#); [Srivastava, 2023](#)).

The above findings suggest that religion might inform participatory forms of citizenship, despite not being a legal arbiter of citizenship. In cases where religion becomes a legal means of ascribing citizenship, everyday life is only likely to become more problematic, which is the case in contemporary India. We then examine legislative deliberations on Indian citizenship on two occasions, where religion is a prominent feature. In both cases, scholars have argued that the ideological aspects of Hindu nationalism are involved ([Golwalkar, 1939](#); [Jha, 2024](#)).

Our study departs from earlier studies in three ways: first, we focus on instances where citizenship discussions are about constituting a 'citizen' with implications for those who are already domiciled within the territory and migrants. Second, we aim to relate practices of deciding who is to be an Indian citizen across two instances where the concern is with the salience of group membership that is not derived from citizenship or nationality, i.e., religion. Third, the focus is on extending citizenship instead of withdrawing or limiting access to citizenship.

The Present Study: Partition, India, and the Hindu Rashtra

Legal citizenship in India has been subject to much deliberation, mostly in contexts of migration, either at the time of its independence in 1947, the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, in the intervening period to address migration from Bangladesh, or ostensibly, in 2019 ([Joyal, 2019](#)). The Indian Independence Act of 1947 resulted in the dissolution of British India and mapped two separate dominions – India and Pakistan – separated by the Radcliffe Line (the 'Partition'). Partition was characterised by raging communal violence: death toll estimates ranged from 200,000 to two million, innumerable rapes, loss of property and homelessness, disease, and several years of trauma ([Nair, 2011](#)). Deliberations about who is to count as an Indian citizen were had in this context in the Constituent Assembly, a legislative body that was set up in 1946 to draft India's constitution adopted in 1950.

While the Assembly initially preferred the *jus soli* principle of birth on the soil of the state over ethnicity-based citizenship ([Chatterji, 2012](#), p. 1053), after Partition in 1947, discussions on citizenship in the Constituent Assembly reflected mass migration across the Radcliffe Line. Assembly members were wary of persons being denied Indian citizenship if they were found across the border in Pakistan, which led to incorporating a descent-based idea of *jus sanguinis* citizenship, in addition to *jus soli* ([Chatterji, 2012](#)). Citizenship deliberations and outcomes at that moment were directed at the more immediate concern of constituting a nation-state and did so to portray India as a 'secular' nation ([Joyal, 2019](#)).

Citizenship Amendment Act 2019

In December 2019, the Indian parliament, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) under claims that Hindus are increasingly facing persecution in its neighbouring nations ([Rehman, 2024](#)).

This act relaxes the naturalisation requirements for Hindus and other non-Muslim Indians facing religious persecution or seeking refuge from only three neighbouring nations: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. The Act extends Indian citizenship to those who are not Indians, based on their religion and geopolitical location: Islamic states in South Asia (Guibernau, 2004a; Knott, 2017). The Act was complemented by the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), an attempt to draw up a register of Indian citizens, which prioritised documentary evidence in proving citizenship in the Indian Union. Together, these make it easy for non-Muslims to access citizenship, while Muslims who cannot prove their citizenship face the problem of becoming stateless. In the state of Assam, several Indian Muslims were treated as ‘illegal immigrants’ (Zaman, 2024).

At the same time, unlike the context of 1946-50, migration is not a similarly notable concern. In more recent times, people from Bangladesh have made their homes in various parts of India, especially in the border states of Assam and Bengal. In Assam, a movement for the Assamese in distinction to ‘illegal migrants’ routinely targets Muslims, even resulting in mass violence like the Nellie Massacre of 1983. Despite this, net migration into India has largely remained negative since the 1960s (World Bank Open Data, n.d.).

Despite being India’s largest religious minority – around 204 million or 14.09% of India’s population – Muslims are increasingly marginalised (Sharma, 2024). The rising anti-Muslim ethos of Indian legislative, political, and public life has found an extremely useful tool in this Act (Bhat, 2024; Zaman, 2024). Scholars argue that the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 has effectively transformed a *jus soli* system of citizenship to one based on *jus sanguinis* bound to religious identity (Ramnath, 2021). This was widely protested across India by students, housewives, and celebrities, in marches, vigils, and protests (Reuters, 2020). The protests involved practices such as showcasing the Preamble of the Indian Constitution and reading it aloud (Ibrar, 2019), partly because the Preamble includes the term ‘secular’, which goes against the relevance of religion for citizenship as foregrounded in this Act.

It is this salience of religion that motivates our examination here. In both cases, the issue is that of ascribing citizenship to those who had not been born in the territory of the Indian nation-state. In the present case, the focus was on the nature of Indian citizenship itself, instead of a more directed focus on ostensible ‘illegal migrants’, which has been much examined by social and political psychologists (Stevenson et al., 2015). We then ask, what are the practices of extending citizenship to potential incomers based on their religion, and what are the outcomes of doing so for the idea of a nation-state?

Method

Data

The data for this study come from two sets of debates in legislative settings: Constituent Assembly Debates in 1946-50 and debates in the Lok Sabha¹ about the Citizenship Amendment Bill in 2019. These debates were accessed from online archives located at: <https://sansad.in/lc>. The archives are digitised in ways to serve as a public record of what took place (Slembrouck, 1992).

The Constituent Assembly Debates that took place over 140 days are organised as transcripts along twelve volumes (I through XII). The debates took place in English and several regional languages, which in the archives are available as translations into English². We searched each of these (140 days) available as .html files for the term ‘citizen’, using the CTRL+F function on a Google Chrome browser. The issue of citizenship was first discussed intermittently in April–May 1947, but in anticipation of Partition, it did not yet feature concerns on migration and refuge-seeking and therefore was not finalised. These issues were subsequently taken up in a more focused manner after Partition and were discussed primarily over three days – 11, 12, and 18 August 1949. At the end of this discussion, the constitutional text on citizenship was adopted.

1) Lok Sabha is the lower house of the Indian parliament.

2) Those sections where speech is translated into English are marked as such.

The Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 was discussed in the Lok Sabha on two occasions: January 8, 2019, and December 9, 2019. Though the Bill was passed on January 8, 2019, the Rajya Sabha (upper house of the Indian Parliament) did not adopt the Bill, and the term for which the BJP government was elected ended shortly after that. The government was subsequently re-elected, and the Bill was tabled again in December 2019. Debates on both dates were accessed from the archives, where they were stored as .html and .pdf files. The debates took place in English and other regional languages. We translated Hindi statements into English for our analysis.³

We read through these debates repeatedly and selected those segments that included discussions about territory and place, citizenship, and religion, and selected those where the ascription of citizenship was treated as problematic by speakers themselves or co-present interlocutors, and consequently justified. This resulted in 27 segments for analysis. In this paper, we use an overall of 6 extracts (3 extracts from Lok Sabha and 3 extracts from Constituent Assembly Debates) for fine-grained analysis. These 6 were identified for showcasing how religion and territory were constructed in the talk about migration for informing a citizenship policy.

Analytical Strategy

This way of collating and analysing data side-by-side is not routinely done in discursive research (although analysts in different ways have brought together data from different contexts: see [Sambaraju et al., 2017](#); [Whitehead & Lerner, 2009](#)). Not only are present data separated by time, but also in terms of contexts – social, geopolitical, economic, and territorial, among others. However, the discussions relate to who is to be legislated as an ‘Indian citizen’; that is, about the Indian citizenship itself. We examine data from these settings side-by-side to draw parallels for the reader about how negotiations of citizenship involving religion and migration are framed as informing similar ends: nation-formation. Ultimately, we wish to argue that since religion, migration, and territory were closely intertwined during 1946-50 to inform the formation of the Indian nation-state, a similar intertwining is *being attempted* in 2019. Analytically, the joint focus allows for treating citizenship claims as relevant for contesting versions of nations.

Analytic Procedure

The data were analysed using procedures of discursive psychology ([McKinlay & McVittie, 2008](#); [Potter, 1996](#)) combined with rhetorical psychology ([Billig, 1996](#); [Gibson & Hamilton, 2011](#)) as applicable to political and policy discourse ([Demasi, 2020](#)). The analysis focused on descriptions of agents, actions, and events as situated accomplishments developed *in situ* in the service of social action.

We were primarily concerned with the constructions of social groups based on religion (Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims), national or territorial belonging (natives, migrants, and refugees), and their intersections that are used to justify or challenge certain forms of citizenship. Since these constructions were made in distal contexts of a socio-political upheaval (the Partition (1946-50) and a relatively calmer time when the ruling BJP was re-elected (2018-19), we were interested in how these contexts and their salience were constructed and mobilised as rhetorical resources in deciding on ‘citizenship’. Of direct analytic salience are the salience of broader socio-political and ideological aspects and the more immediate interactional concerns.

First, we were careful to frame the analysis in ways that are respectful of the broader context while not treating the context as a direct account of what was said ([Ilie, 2006](#)). Elements of ideology regarding nation formation as secular or religious were of direct concern for speakers on both occasions. Specifically, the historical past of India and future possibilities of the Indian nation-state were variously relevant for the speakers. We then examined the constructions of modality that mobilised obligations and moral concerns of legislators related to political, policy and ideological contingencies in debating Indian citizenship. In that, criticisms and support for citizenship policies were examined for their basis in these broader concerns. Our analysis was focused on examining how positioning claims about citizenship were presented and oriented to as ideological in being evaluated ([Billig, 1996](#)).

3) These are presented in *italics* in the transcripts.

Second, given that these interactions are taking place in the interaction contexts of legislative settings, the analysis considered the unique institutional organisation of such interactions, that is, to treat these as forms of political rhetoric (Finlayson, 2012; Tileagă et al., 2020). The analysis examined how proposals for citizenship were made in ways to manage the implications of explicitly excluding Muslims. The analysis considered how speakers negotiated the possible salience of religion for citizenship. Given the immediate relevance of religion for the Partition and a measured distance from religion as a citizenship policy since the Partition (Jayal, 2019), making religion salient is likely to be seen as problematic. The territorial constructions of religious groups were considered in this light.

We examined how speakers treated Indian territory as distinct from the Indian nation-state. The development and use of this difference allowed for justifying straightforward citizenship rights to Hindus and non-Muslims and the evaluation of citizenship policies in this regard. We are particularly concerned with the salience of territory, since the Partition and the recent avowed efforts to create a Hindu Rashtra are both imagined as territorial projects: a loss in the former and an effort to reshape in the latter (Jha, 2024).

In examining these aspects across the two settings, we aim to show that despite the formation of India as a nation-state, the relevance of territory and religion remains a potent resource for negotiating citizenship to inform the Indian nation-state.

Results

The analysis below examined discursive practices that treat belonging to a territory as superseding belonging in a nation-state. We identify three practices of doing this across contexts of the Partition and subsequent constitution of India (1946-50), and the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019. First is the construction of Indian territory as tied to religious groups, second is to construct normative relations between the Indian nation-state and Hindus, and third is to undermine the rights and entitlements of Muslims to the Indian nation-state. Across the three speakers, orient to a distinction between Indian territory and the Indian nation-state.

Indian Territory and Religion

In [Extracts 1](#) and [2](#), speakers are concerned with treating Hindus as normatively and unquestioningly belonging to the territory of India despite their location and presence elsewhere (Knott, 2017). [Extract 1](#) comes from pre-transcribed debates of the Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol IX, dated August 11, 1949. Dr P.S. Deshmukh was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the Central Provinces & Berar. Here he is criticising the citizenship policies that require unique provisions for Hindus and Sikhs coming from Pakistan, similar to other individuals.

Extract 1

Hindus and Sikhs Are Always Indian Citizens

1	Deshmukh	Citizen of any other State shall be entitled to be a citizen of India. We
2		have seen the formation and establishment of Pakistan. Why was it
3		established? It was established because the Muslims claimed that they
4		must have a home of their own and a country of their own. Here we are
5		an entire nation with a history of thousands of years and we are going to
6		discard it, in spite of the fact that neither the Hindu nor the Sikh has any
7		other place in the wide world to go to. By the mere fact that he is a Hindu
8		or a Sikh, he should get Indian citizenship because it is this one
9		circumstance that makes him disliked by others. But we are a secular
10		State and do not want to recognise the fact that every Hindu or Sikh in
11		any part of the world should have a home of his own.

Deshmukh's support for citizenship for Hindus and Sikhs in India is offered based on their religious group membership: 'By the mere fact' (Line 7). This is accomplished through an initial rejection of the pluralist ethos at Line 1 for its indiscriminate nature. The use of the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) – 'any other State' – indicates that rights and entitlements to Indian citizenship do not include specific criteria. In contrast, Deshmukh introduces an alternative arrangement where belonging is affirmed in terms of religious nationhood. He does this by citing Pakistan as an example (Lines 1–4): 'Muslims claimed that they must have a home of their own and a country of their own'. Deshmukh then develops a normative framework for national polity and nations: members of specific religions bounded in a territory constitute a nation. This normative framework allows Deshmukh to introduce similar claims about the constitution of India by prioritising Hindus and Sikhs. Notably, however, this type of claim has a broader salience in being an ideological extension of the claims of RSS (Jha, 2024), as also seen in [Extract 2](#).

Deshmukh constructs India in terms of history and culture: 'we are an entire nation with a history of thousands of years' (Lines 4–5) (Guibernau, 2004b). There is then a distinction between the Indian nation-state being constituted and the nation that has continued to exist long before British colonisation and other forms of political formations (Condor, 2006; Obradović & Bowe, 2021). Deshmukh then supplies India as the nation-state that can be 'home' to Hindus and Sikhs, just as Pakistan is for Muslims. This is developed as a rhetorically self-sufficient argument (Billig, 1996): 'By the mere fact that he is a Hindu or a Sikh, he should get Indian citizenship' (Lines 7–8).

However, using the second-person plural – 'we' – Deshmukh indicates that the realisation of a 'home' for Hindus and Sikhs is being abandoned: 'we are going to discard it' (Lines 5–6) (De Fina, 1995). Deshmukh then treats the ongoing nation-formation (1946–50) as going against normative considerations of nation-formation, where specific groups by their group membership retain rights to their 'homeland' (Goemans, 2006; Guibernau, 2004b). This involves two reasons. First, there is the rejection of possible claims that Hindus and Sikhs can find residence in other places: 'has any other place in the wide world to go to' (Lines 6–7). Here, the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) – 'any other place' – rejects possible explanations for why Hindus and Sikhs can find residence elsewhere. Second, the references to contingent aspects justify the conferring of ready citizenship to Hindus and Sikhs. This takes the form of references to victimhood because of their religious group membership: 'disliked by others' (Line 9). Together, Deshmukh offers a normative rejection of possible assertions that Hindus and Sikhs can find a 'home' in places other than India.

Deshmukh's normative binding of India to Hindus and Sikhs resonates with the description of the formation of Pakistan at Lines 3–4: 'every Hindu or Sikh in any part of the world should have a home of his own'. The breach in realising this normative bind is attributed to a specific policy position: 'we are a secular State' (Lines 9–10). Deshmukh develops the inference that the ongoing efforts to constitute India as a secular nation imply the dislocation of the territorial claims of Hindus and Sikhs. Again, the use of 'we' in referring to the nation-state projects a sharedness of community or belonging (De Fina, 1995). In doing so, Deshmukh challenges the formation of the Indian nation-state that would not honour religious claims to citizenship. Later in his speech, he proposed citizenship policies that would remove qualifications for Hindus and Sikhs to gain Indian citizenship (not shown here).

Features of developing normative forms of belonging (with or without citizenship) based on religion and attributing barriers to secularism were used in 2019 by Lallan Singh, an MP from Munger constituency of the Janata Dal United party, to support the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019. Singh here is concerned with the loss of rights to territory for Hindus. [Extract 2](#) is from a speech in support of the Citizenship Amendment Bill on December 9, 2019, in the Lok Sabha.

Singh's concern here is similar to that of Deshmukh, which is that citizenship rights based on religious claims to territory are undervalued in a secular or pluralistic approach to citizenship. In supporting the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019, on behalf of his political party, Singh introduces a description of pluralism, at Lines 2–4. As is routine in political rhetoric (Condor et al., 2013), Singh treats others' references to and use of religious pluralism as indiscriminate: 'in their own way' (Line 6). The definition offered is noteworthy because it indicates a position of being equidistant from religious group membership. Other MPs' claims are treated as somehow violating this in preference for one religion over others, through, for instance, treating this Bill as favouring a majority over a minority in the ongoing context (Line 7). The Bill is being read through, and claims about religious indifference.

Extract 2*Citizens Before the Partition*

1 Singh *Honorable Speaker, today the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2019 is being*
2 *discussed and Janata Dal (United) is in its support. Religious indiscriminatio*
3 *(pluralism) means to follow all religions, to spread all religions, and to respect*
4 *members of all religions. This is the definition of religious indiscriminatio*
5 *(pluralism). Here religious indiscriminatio (pluralism) is being defined by*
6 *people in their own way. The definition of religious indiscriminatio (pluralism)*
7 *and this Bill is being attached to the majority and minority populations in this*
8 *country and presented to us, which does not seem to me to be the right definition*
9 *of religious indiscriminatio (pluralism). This Bill has been brought forward for*
10 *those who before the partition of Pakistan and India were citizens of this country*
11 *and during this country' fight for independence had scarified and after*
12 *Pakistan-India partition had left to Pakistan, which has divided now into*
13 *Bangladesh, people left Pakistan and took refuge in Afghanistan it is for this*
14 *type of people with honor to bring them back into this country that this Bill has*
15 *been brought. This Bill is not to honor some special individuals.*

Note. (Italics – speech in Hindi-Urdu translated by the authors into English).

Instead, Singh proposes a selective focus on religion that ties religious group membership to territorial membership. On this account, the changes to citizenship are to redress a problem in the past marked by the ‘partition of Pakistan and India’ (Line 10). The problem is for a set of unspecified persons, who were ‘citizens of this country’ before the formation of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Singh then anchors their relationship with the pre-partitioned territory (Goemans, 2006). The inference developed is then that these persons must be able to retain such a relationship in the form of citizenship. The vagueness of his reference – ‘this country’ – is notable. This reference is again seen at Line 14 in offering this Bill as addressing this problem. While the reference to ‘this country’ is vague, Singh indicates this as the territory that subsequently underwent Partition. Similar to Deshmukh in [Extract 1](#), Singh treats as relevant that some social groups have an unmediated right to ‘this’ territory, which has since been untethered.

Singh offers descriptions of contingency to treat this Bill as addressing this dislodgement. This involves descriptions of these persons as those who fought for independence and had moved to Pakistan, and then sought ‘refuge in Afghanistan’ (Line 13). These people, however, are unlikely to be still alive, given that the Partition happened 69 years earlier than this speech and that for those to have participated in the freedom struggle, they would have been of some age. These claims are developed in ways to justify the citizenship claims of Hindus and other non-Muslims who might seek citizenship in India. This micro-narrative has two features of interest: one is to construct these persons who had taken up praiseworthy actions, as subsequently being displaced in moving from one place to another. Two, relatedly, is to treat them as having suffered a loss of citizenship (Roy & Sambaraju, 2023). Singh presents the Bill as introduced to address this loss of citizenship because of changes to territory in terms of the formation of nation-states like India, where their citizenship was compromised.

At Lines 13–15, Singh’s description of the reasons for introducing the Bill makes it explicit that the Bill will confer citizenship to such persons. Noteworthy, however, is the formulation ‘back into this country’, where the mundane referent ‘this’ addresses issues of their legitimacy in belonging (Billig, 1995). This allows Singh to paper over claims that the Citizenship Amendment Bill is downgrading Muslim citizenship. Below, speakers are constructing Hindus as uniquely entitled to citizenship in the Indian nation-state.

Indian Nation-State and Hindus

In [Extracts 3](#) and [4](#), speakers treat Hindus as those who have some stake in the citizenship processes of the Indian nation-state (LeCouteur et al., 2001). Of note then is the ready implication that religious group membership is relevant to negotiating belonging and citizenship in the Indian nation-state. [Extract 3](#) comes from the transcript of a debate in

the Constituent Assembly on August 12, 1949. The speaker is Sardar Bhopinder Singh Mann, a Sikh representative to the Constituent Assembly. Here he is making a speech opposing citizenship policies that would require those coming from Pakistan to be subject to the routine practices of acquiring Indian citizenship.

Extract 3

Hindus and Sikhs as Owed Inclusion

1	Mann	Sir, in the 'definition of citizenship' which covers fairly extensive ground the
2		viewpoint of Hindu and Sikh refugees has been met to some extent by the
3		Drafting Committee whom I congratulate on that account. But, as usual, a
4		weak sort of secularism has crept in and an unfair partiality has been shown
5		to those who least deserve it. I was saying that the Hindu and Sikh refugees'
6		viewpoint has been met to some extent, but not wholly. I do not understand
7		why the 19th July 1948 has been prescribed for the purpose of citizenship.
8		These unfortunate refugees could not have foreseen this date; otherwise they
9		would have invited Pakistan knife earlier so that they might have come here
10		earlier and acquired citizenship rights. It will be very cruel to shut our
11		borders to those who are victimised after the 19th July 1948. They are as
12		much sons of the soil as anyone else. This political mishap was not of their
13		own seeking and now it will be very cruel to place these political
14		impediments in their way and debar them from coming over to Bharat Mata.

Mann introduces 'Hindu and Sikh refugees' as stakeholders in the citizenship policies (LeCouteur et al., 2001), in treating their concerns as only partially met. Simultaneously, Mann also orients to the constituent assembly and the to-be-formed Indian nation-state as the legitimate authority in addressing the needs of these refugees. This is delivered in the form of an apparent concession (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999) to concede that certain citizenship provisions for 'Hindu and Sikh' refugees as favourable (Lines 2–3). The combination of religion and 'displacement-related' descriptors is relevant in indicating that members in these religious groups are suffering and need full attention, and to lay the ground for the oncoming complaint about religious (dis)preference. Mann's criticism regarding limited help is attributed to a 'weak sort of secularism' and a consequent 'unfair partiality' (Line 4). Mann has made it commonplace that religion is relevant for discussions of citizenship.

Mann's criticism is specific to a proposal that the date of '19th July 1948' is offered as a cut-off for availing citizenship for those who moved from Pakistan. However, since this mobility is characterised as fleeing persecution, the specification of this (or other) date is made out to be inconsiderate: '[i]t will be very cruel to shut our borders to those who are victimised after the 19th July 1948' (Lines 10–11). Mann animates the wishes of those refugees in heightened terms to suggest that to avail of Indian citizenship, they would voluntarily face persecution, indicating that they would rather die than stay in Pakistan. This construction of an extreme hypothetical formulation brings up the then-ongoing bloodshed and violence in the Partition to heighten the role that the present proceedings and a citizenship policy might play. Mann further criticises the citizenship policy that does not fully realise their rights in India.

Like Deshmukh, Mann offers versions of relations between individuals who are fleeing persecution in Pakistan and the territory of India: 'as much sons of soil as anyone else' (Lines 12–13). This comparative formulation, including the extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) – 'anyone' – treats their rights to belonging as legitimate as rights accorded to other social groups. The kinship idiom – 'sons of soil' – packages complex relations inclusive of rights and entitlements, care, and longing, to suggest that denying such rights is incorrect. This is used in proximity to another idolising phrase, 'Bharat Mata'. Specifically, Mann treats citizenship rules in place as 'political impediments' (Lines 13–14), targeting those who want to rightfully realise their belonging: 'coming over to Bharat Mata'. The descriptor Bharat Mata translates to Mother Goddess of Bharat – a deification of Bharat. Its use treats Hindu and Sikh refugees as coming 'home' to their mother. Mann then develops 'Hindu and Sikh refugees' as legitimate stakeholders in India because of their relationship with the Indian territory outside the formation of the Indian nation-state and its citizenship policies.

The above rhetorical aspects of constructing Hindus and Sikhs as stakeholders, the Indian nation-state along with its legislative apparatus as legitimately implicated in addressing their concerns, and treating Hindus (and Sikhs) as merely returning to their rightful 'home', are again present in the speech examined below. While there are notable differences, like the absence of explicitly mentioning religious groups, the commonality is to evaluate a citizenship policy based on the outcomes for Hindus (and non-Muslims). In [Extract 4](#), Sushil Kumar Singh, an MP from the Aurangabad constituency, Bihar, is from the Bharatiya Janata Party. Singh is giving a speech in support of the CAA/B 2019 on December 9, 2019, in the Lok Sabha.

Extract 4

CAA as Correcting Historical Errors

1	Singh	Today through the medium of Citizenship Amendment Bill the wrongs that
2		happened the mistakes that happened during partition because of greed to
3		form and run the government transfer of power was accepted that is not
4		independence. History says that in the form of transfer of power you took it
5		and you accepted the membership in the commonwealth and till today you
6		have made the country serve them. It is to correct this that the Citizenship
7		Amendment Bill under the leadership of the honourable Prime Minister that
8		the Home Minister has introduced this in the House today. This is Bharat's
9		commitment that the division of India that happened the partition that
10		happened the basis on which partition happened if anywhere they are in
11		trouble anywhere Bharat will stand with them and give them shelter Bharat
12		will give them refuge and safety. This happens to be our responsibility today
13		we are becoming economically strong in front of the world. We are in the
14		queue to become the number one country in the world. Every descendant of
15		Bharat in whatever corner of the world they may be we will give them
16		security.

Like Lalan Singh in [Extract 2](#), Sushil Singh supports the Citizenship Amendment Bill to counter the main political party in the Opposition: the Indian National Congress party ([Condor et al., 2013](#)). Sushil Singh ascribes to the Congress party mistakes during and after the Partition, amounting to servitude and selfishness in contrast to caring for India (Lines 5–6). Singh has then slipped in a historical justification for this Bill.

Singh introduces the proposed changes to citizenship via the Bill as a course correction and a 'commitment' (Line 9) to specific groups. Here, Singh uses the term 'Bharat' instead of India, which works as a form of linguistic posturing as Bharat is a Hindi/Sanskrit term for India and is variously associated with efforts at indigenising India, rejecting constitutionality, and harking back to an ancient territory ([Clémentin-Ojha, 2014](#)). Singh ascribes a commitment to Bharat to address wrongs related to the 'division of India' (Line 9) and makes salient religion in specifying the 'basis on which partition happened' (Line 10). Singh then indicates that restoring rights and entitlements must engage with religion and go beyond the formation of the Indian nation-state since partition is widely seen as motivated by religion ([Chatterji, 2012](#)).

Singh's description of Bharat's duties, at Lines 8–16, describes states of trouble and needing refuge. The descriptor 'they are in trouble anywhere' does not directly name the social group that is to be protected by Bharat. Instead, the adjoining description of them as those who are 'descendant[s] of Bharat' (Lines 14–15), coupled with claims of being targets of religious persecution, allows for inferring the Hindu religious denomination of this group. Here, the extreme case formulation ([Pomerantz, 1986](#)) – '[E]very descendant of Bharat' – allows for treating it as normative that Bharat must and will offer help. To Bharat, Singh ascribes normative responsibilities and duties such as giving 'shelter', 'refuge and safety', and 'security' to Hindus: 'this happens to be our responsibility'. The three-part listing ([Jefferson, 1990](#)) of these responsibilities develops a commonality of presenting Hindus as being persecuted and Bharat as normatively responsible for addressing this persecution. Singh has then mobilised similar rhetorical resources as Mann in [Extract 3](#), which indicates that Hindus have a ready entitlement to belong as citizens (or not) in the Indian nation-state.

Indian Nation-State and Muslims

In Extracts 5 and 6, speakers are concerned with Muslim migration in ways that construct migration as intending to effect specific changes to the territorial integrity (Green, 2024). Extract 5 comes from a debate in the Constituent Assembly Debates on August 11, 1949. Jasprit Roy Kapoor was elected to the constituent assembly from Uttar Pradesh, General and Brajeshwar Prasad was elected from Bihar, Gaya. This discussion takes place in the context of policy, where rights to claim citizenship in the Indian nation-state were altered post-July 19, 1948.

Extract 5

Muslims as Loyal to Pakistan

1	Kapoor	Why is it, Sir, that I consider it obnoxious? It says that those persons who
2		migrated from India to Pakistan if, after 19th July 1948 they came back to
3		India after obtaining a valid permit from our Embassy or High
4		Commissioner, it should be open to them to get themselves registered as
5		citizens of this country. It is a serious matter of principle. Once a person
6		has migrated to Pakistan and transferred his loyalty from India to Pakistan,
7		his migration is complete. He has definitely made up his mind at that time
8		to kick this country and let it go to its own fate, and he went away to the
9		newly created Pakistan, where he would put in his best efforts to make it a
10		free progressive and prosperous state. We have no grudge against them...
11	Prasad	May I ask my honourable Friend whether it is true that all those persons
12		who fled over to Pakistan did so with the intention of permanently settling
13		down there and owing allegiance to that State? Is it not a fact that they fled
14		in panic?
15	Kapoor	My honourable Friend Mr. Brajeshwar Prasad even today, on the 11th
16		August 1949, doubts as to what was really the intention of those persons
17		who migrated to Pakistan. I do not want to refer to this unpleasant subject,
18		because the sooner we forget the bitterness of the past the better. But do
19		we not know that Muslim Leaguers wanted division of the country and
20		exchange of population, and that the number of persons belonging to the
21		Muslim League was tremendously large? To our misfortune, only a
22		handful of nationalist Muslims were opposed to the idea of Pakistan. The
23		vast majority of the Muslims and most certainly those of them who went
24		away to Pakistan immediately after Partition had certainly the intention of
25		permanently residing in Pakistan. May be that some of them or quite a
26		good number of them went to Pakistan at that particular time because of
27		the disturbances here: but has my honourable Friend any doubt that even if
28		there were no disturbances, many of them, almost all of them, would have
29		gone away to Pakistan, because they were themselves demanding that
30		there should be a transfer of population?

Kapoor constructs migration of those who have gone to Pakistan and are categorised as Muslims, in ways that are different from Hindus who are to come into the Indian nation-state (see Extracts 1, 2, 3, and 4). He identifies an issue with the relaxation of citizenship rules around a specific date: '19th July 1948' (cf. Mann in Extract 1). Kapoor argues for a restriction on the movement of those who had migrated to Pakistan from India and are perhaps returning by ascribing specific dispositions to those who had migrated, such as shifts in 'loyalty' (Line 12), making up their 'mind' (Line 7), and abandoning 'this country' in favour of Pakistan. This last is further developed through ascriptions of actions and 'effort' (cf. Gibson & Hamilton, 2011) in building a new nation: a 'free progressive and prosperous state' (Line 10). Kapoor also manages possible implications that his proposals for restricting citizenship rights to these persons arise from problematic views about them (Goodman, 2014): 'We have no grudge against them' (Line 10).

At this point, however, Kapoor has not explicitly treated religious group membership as mediating entitlements to belonging. At Lines 11–14, Prasad challenges Kapoor’s version of migration by offering another reason for such travel, namely ‘panic’. For the audiences present and overhearing (Billig, 1996), it is hearable that the times of Partition posed severe problems for minorities and expectedly resulted in panic. Prasad has mobilised a specific version of the Partition in ways to complicate Muslim migration to Pakistan, as that which was merely an effort to get away from the Indian nation-state.

In response, however, Kapoor introduces religion as a reason for questioning policies that would readily accord citizenship. Kapoor, at Lines 15–25, constructs events around the Partition as those that were motivated by religion, where actions of Muslims led to the making of Pakistan. Kapoor constructs actions of ‘Muslim Leaguers’, ‘nationalist Muslims’, and ‘Muslims’ in ways that treat travel to Pakistan as intended to develop a particular type of nation – a nation based on Islam.

First, Kapoor treats it as commonplace – ‘do we not know’ – that ‘Muslim Leaguers’ intended to divide the country, and effect an ‘exchange of population’ (Billig, 1996). This makes salient the intentions of forming a new nation-state out of an existing national territory. Second, he treats opposition to the formation of Pakistan from another set of Muslims – ‘nationalist Muslims’ – as insufficient because of their numerical position. Third, he ascribes to Muslims’ support for Partition and intentions to form Pakistan. This allows Kapoor to reject Prasad’s claims that migration to Pakistan was outside the intentions to form a religious nation.

While Kapoor concedes to Prasad that some Muslims would have travelled because of ongoing disturbances, the concession is tokenistic (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999) since he goes on to ascribe similar intentions to them: ‘many of them, almost all of them, would have gone away to Pakistan’ (Line 35). The upgraded description from ‘many’ to the extreme case formulated (Pomerantz, 1986), ‘all of them’ treats it as expected that Muslims wanted to form Pakistan. This is supported by ascribing to Muslims, demands for a ‘transfer of population’ to create a homogenous nation-state (Condor, 2006). Kapoor then treats ‘Muslims’ as a category that has loyalties elsewhere than India through ascribing intentional acts of moving to form a distinct nation-state – Pakistan (Rehman, 2024).

These elements of treating Muslims as having chosen to move away from the Indian nation-state in preference for an Islamic state are used to downgrade Muslims’ claims to Indian citizenship. In [Extract 4](#), similar constructions of Muslims as those who naturally transform a territory into an Islamic area are used in the more current context to limit Muslim inclusion in the Indian nation-state. Migrants from Bangladesh are characterised as wanting to take up territory in Assam, India, and change India’s composition by diminishing India’s Hindu population while increasing their own. As mentioned earlier, the issue of Muslim migration in Assam and other North-Eastern states is complicated by the other Partition, which resulted in the formation of Bangladesh. [Extract 4](#) comes from a speech made by Shrimati Vijaya Chakraborty, who was an MP from Guwahati, Assam, from the Bharatiya Janata Party, on January 8, 2019.

Extract 6

Muslims as Creating an Arab Region in India

1	Chakraborty	It is reported that the Bangladeshis have carved out a map out of Assam
2		and have called it the ‘Arab of the East’. It has appeared in different
3		newspapers. Under the present circumstances, we have to now find out
4		in the map where lies the State of Assam. After 10 years, I think, it
5		would be difficult to find the indigenous Assamese people if it
6		continues like this.
7		Sir, the population of the illegal migrants grows geometrically. A
8		family of a migrant has six to seven persons. The woman of a migrant
9		family gives birth to minimum six to seven children and maximum the
10		number can vary from ten to twelve. The woman of the family goes on
11		giving birth to children till the time she no longer is able to give birth
12		to children. Although it is not nice on my part to say this but I am saying
13		it. Steep rise in population of the migrant families is the root cause for
14		dwindling Hindu population in the State of Assam

Chakraborty constructs migrants from Bangladesh as problematic for Hindus and India. She treats changes in one as intertwined with changes in the other: the migrant population has altered the polity and, in doing so, impacted how the territory is to be considered. This is done in ways to manage her position as hating Muslims through distancing herself from these claims ('It is reported that') and managing her stake ('Although it is not nice on my part to say this but...') (Potter, 1996).

First, Chakraborty ascribes to Bangladeshi actions of altering the territorial representation of Assam ('carved out'), by renaming it as the 'Arab of the East' (Line 2). The significance of this alteration is heightened through the description that the State of Assam has disappeared from all but maps. The use of this formulation allows Chakraborty to smuggle in several possible inferences, such as that about the Islamification of a region in India, a comparison with places in West Asia on matters of jurisprudence or women's rights, and ultimately an alienation with the local cultural practices of South Asia. Utterances such as this can work as 'sound bites' or transgressive utterances (Lee, 2012) and then be repurposed for use in other contexts. In the more immediate setting, however, Chakraborty indicates that outside of pictorial representations, what constitutes Assam is no longer so. It is here that Chakraborty offers changes to the polity of Assam, like the loss of 'indigenous Assamese people', resulting in changes to its territory.

Chakraborty explains this through ascribing to migrants, strange practices regarding population growth: 'grows geometrically' (Line 7). She describes the birth practices of the 'migrant woman' to suggest that giving birth is their main purpose: 'goes on giving birth to children till the time she no longer can give birth to children' (Lines 10–12). Here, the use of the extreme case formulation – 'no longer' – works to treat it as routine that 'migrant women' keep giving birth to children (Pomerantz, 1986). It is this that she treats as the reason for the '[S]teep rise in population of the migrant families' (Lines 13–14). Further, she attributes this increase in the population of a social group to severe problems for another social group: the 'Hindu population' (Line 14).

Although the description is about the growth of the migrant population, the displacement is attributed to Hindus. The juxtaposition of 'migrant' with a religious category ('Hindu'), then, is suggestive of treating migrants as non-Hindu and the indigenous people of Assam as Hindus. Chakraborty then indicates that Hindus are coterminous with the territory of Assam. Overall, Chakraborty treats Bangladeshi Muslims in India as figuratively and literally altering the polity of India and consequently its territory.

Discussion

The analysis shows that religious categories were constructed and used in ways to develop normative inferences about belonging and entitlement to the territory of 'India' as a nation in ways that develop alternative national projects. Territories like India, Pakistan, or Assam are constructed not merely in geographical terms but as constituted by the types of social groups that are entitled to these (or not), populated by these (or not), or are participated in (or not). Across the data examined here and, in these contexts – the Partition (1946–50) and the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 – religion was treated as the relevant aspect of social group membership over other possibilities (ethnicity, caste, merit, and so on).

Religion and Territory in Citizenship

In the data above, religious categories are constructed and used to address belonging. Hindus and non-Muslims are constructed as essentially Indian (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2017) – their efforts at claiming Indian citizenship are treated as unnecessary or as earlier problems that will now be reversed through the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019. Speakers constructed the Indian territory as a Hindu religious figure of the Bharat Mata, Hindus as in kinship relation to the territory, or the Indian nation-state as owing normative duties to Hindus (Obradović & Bowe, 2021).

Speakers here were less concerned with the effort or deservingness of Hindus and Sikhs for Indian citizenship (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013; Scully, 2025). Extract 4 is an exception where Lallan Singh is explicitly making salient the fight for Indian independence. Instead, it is the non-contingent connection with the Indian territory that is indexed to extend Indian citizenship to those Hindus and non-Muslims who are outside of India's borders (Knott, 2017).

This is what is precisely striking about the deliberations in 2018-19, where possible deservingness might be salient because this is much later in the history of the Indian nation-state. These constructions involved versions of migration. Hindu migration was constructed as rightful and correcting previous errors, and Hindu migrants as refugees fleeing persecution. Muslim migration, however, was constructed as problematic for intentionally wanting a separate state and altering the territorial and demographic features of the Indian nation-state (Extracts 3 and 4) (Roy & Sambaraju, 2023).

Condor's (2006, 2011) arguments about nations as categories are instructive, since the citizenship policies in this instance, 2019, are attempting to realise the Indian nation-state as constituted by Hindus. Doing this, however, involved treating the nation as territory to which Hindus have unconditional rights and entitlements. The focus on Hindus' and Sikhs' rights to return to their 'homeland' instead of a commonality with other Indians indicates that religious categories are considered in terms of territory. Extending citizenship on the 'religion-territory' basis offers a cover under which attempts to alter the polity of the Indian nation-state can be undertaken (Abell et al., 2006). The Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 then extends Indian citizenship beyond its territorial boundaries, through making salient a form of belonging that goes beyond the territory of the nation-state (Guibernau, 2004a, 2004b).

Instead, speakers were more concerned with secularism as an obstruction (Jayal, 2019). Sushil Kumar Singh in Extract 4 articulates the deservingness in terms of duties and responsibilities owed by the Indian nation-state or Bharat to Hindus. In Extract 1, Deshmukh explicitly blames secular practices for obstructing Hindu rights to Indian citizenship (also Extract 6). When challenged, either explicitly as in Extract 5 or implicitly as in Extracts 2 and 4, speakers could bring up the omnirelevance of religion for the Partition and subsequent displacement and migration of persons.

Speakers developed a distinction between the Indian territory and the Indian nation-state: the former is the place that is the 'homeland' of Hindus (and Sikhs), whereas the latter is the legislative entity that can extend or withdraw citizenship. Across 1946-50, when the Indian nation-state was being constituted, this distinction is likely to have more relevance than in 2018-19. In the latter context, too, speakers drew on this distinction to evaluate citizenship policies. This distinction allowed speakers to bypass the principles of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* by introducing religious group membership as a criterion (cf. Scully, 2025).

Speakers oriented to the salience of the Partition not only in the Constituent Assembly Debates of 1946-50 but also in 2018-19. The Partition was constructed as a loss to the Indian territory at the expense of gains for an Islamic Pakistan (Extracts 1, 2, and 4). The formation of an Islamic Pakistan was used to develop a normative account of nation-states as a homogenous polity, marked by religion in this instance (Extract 5) (Green, 2024). This suggests that the issues at stake are less about fulfilling duties or demonstrating competent membership in the polity and more about religious group membership. Or, in other words, competent membership in the polity is based on religion. It is what makes the present findings unique: the salience of religion for polity membership is achieved and maintained by maligning secularism.

The findings of this paper are relevant to social and political psychologists in two ways: one is to show how citizenship policies are evaluated and justified. The second is the outcomes of justifying certain citizenship policies over others. It is here that we would suggest the salience of undermining secularism or pluralism. Targeting secular policies is bound to the more distal contexts of these deliberations. In 1946-50, the Partition with the extreme and bloody violence had brought to bear the severity of the role of religion in the Indian nation-state (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013; Scully, 2025). The final citizenship clause rejected the salience of religion as part of adopting a constitution that constitutes a secular Indian nation-state. In 2018-19, however, there is no immediate and present concern with religious violence, nor is there a historical necessity like in 1946-50 to form a new constitution for a nation-state. We then contend that using similar forms of constructions of Muslims, Hindus, and non-Hindus informs the transformation of the Indian nation-state from a secular to a Hindu ethnonationalist.

The methodological choices made in this paper need some explication. Analysis of deliberations from distinct contexts side-by-side allowed for showing the continued relevance of treating religious group membership as central to negotiating citizenship and belonging. The side-by-side analysis then allows for suggesting that speakers in 2019 orient to the Citizenship Amendment Act as similarly informing nation-formation: undermining a secular nation-state in favour of a religious nation, what many scholars and activists identify as the Hindu Rashtra (Rehman, 2024; Verma, 2020). This way of presenting, conducting, and relating the analysis has allowed us to show that religious group membership plays a notable role in the formation of nation-states and negotiating belonging in these, in part, through

the exclusion of those in certain religious groups. Citizenship here has less to do with external others like in the Global North and more about those already in Indian territory, thus reshaping the Indian nation-state.

Earlier research has indeed suggested that citizenship policies are made in respect of national image and homogeneity (Andreouli & Chrysochoou, 2015). What we have shown here is that the rhetorical management of citizenship policies was aimed at specific forms of nationhood: a secular nation-state vs. a religious nationhood. Social and political scientists have argued that there is value in examining ‘top-down’ accounts of nationalism and citizenship (Knott, 2017). This is largely owing to the capacity of elites and institutions to propagate or give language and grammar to myths, ideas, and dreams of belonging (Callahan, 2017). The present examination has a similar aim to identify the discursive and rhetorical practices that are used to inform the legal and, problematically, everyday negotiation of citizenship and belonging.

Limitations and Conclusions

The data come from a specific postcolonial setting, which has specific geopolitical considerations: the Partition meant that issues of territory and nation-state are various and can be exploited for political gain. Further, we have examined citizenship in formal settings, and future research can examine similar contestations of citizenship in other settings where newer nation-states are being forged. Similarly, studies can examine lay accounts of citizenship. There are instances in the corpus that speak to other aspects, such as illegal immigration, violence against Muslims, and comparisons with other geopolitical settings. These aspects are being developed elsewhere.

Overall, we suggest that there is some merit to examining legislative practices from across different contexts in instances where nation-formation is salient. Here we have shown that citizenship policies can be negotiated in ways that inform nation-formation.

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