

BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF

‘DIARIES FROM THE DETENTION CAMPS OF ASSAM’

Diaries from a Detention Camp is a multimedia (audio, video, photos, text) project that was shot in September 2019, soon after final list of the Assam NRC was announced.

The NRC had left out more than 19 lakh people and ever since the final list came out, everyone has been asking that one critical question – **WILL THESE 19 LAKH PEOPLE END UP IN DETENTION CAMPS?**

Assam already has almost 1000 people in the 6 temporary detention camps operating out of district jails. I was really keen to know what happens to those who are incarcerated to spend their life in a detention camp. What about their families? Can they ever live a normal life when they are released from the detention camp?

To seek these answers, I travelled to Goalpara district in Assam and met three families. Ravi Dey was released from a detention camp after spending 4 years. While in the camp he just didn't lose his freedom, he also lost his hearing. Ravi gave a real insider's perspective of what life is inside a detention camp.

InBaksa district, Aatab Ali and Habibur Rehman have done their time in the detention camp, they are eligible to be released. But the family is so poor that has not been able to arrange for the basic guarantees for their release. The family told me how both the inmates crave for basic good food, but the detention camp authorities deny them even that. Almost treating them like criminals.

10-year-old Sawata Dey's father Subrata Dey was put in a detention camp in 2018 because there was a mismatch in the name in his voter ID card. He was declared a foreigner and eventually arrested. Within two months Subrata died inside the detention camp. The official reason cited was cardiac arrest. Little Sawata always believed her father would be released. Every time she visited him in the detention camp, she took apples for him with the pocket money she had

saved. But one fine day they brought back home her father's dead body. Sawata refused to see the dead body and she still hasn't come in terms with the fact that her father is dead.

Sawata loves dancing, she used to go for dance classes, but everything stopped the day her father died. She craves for new clothes, but no one buys her anything new to wear any longer.

It is a very timely and relevant documentary in the context of post-CAA India. It questions the rights we have as citizens of India and highlights what happens when your citizenship is stripped away. As doubts and suspicion looms over CAA and a nationwide NRC, this documentary revealed what happens to people and their families who lose their citizenship and are thrown inside a detention camp. And poses that essential question – AS A CIVILISED NATION AND WORLD'S BIGGEST DEMOCRACY WHY DO WE EVEN NEED DETENTION CAMPS?

THE IMPACT:

It was little Sawata's story that struck a chord with the audience across the world. And they reached out to The Quint to somehow bring back some normalcy and joy in Sawata's life. Soon the contributions poured in from world over. Sawata has joined a new school, her fees being paid by some generous readers of the quint. She has even resumed her dance, again supported by the readers who were moved by this documentary.