

CAA Protests: Show of solidarity at Valluvar Kottam

Published: 📅 Dec 20, 2019 ⌚ 10:27 AM by Mohammed Hidayat

Updated: 📅 Dec 21, 2019 ⌚ 03:54 PM

Hindi slogans, an oppari and a call for a rally - here's how a 1,000-odd strong crowd gathered at the heart of Chennai to register their protest peacefully.



Image credit: Mohammed Hidayat

Chennai: Scores of students, civil rights activists, members of non-governmental organisations and political personalities voiced their collective support against the new citizenship law here on Thursday afternoon.

Holding placards and waving the tricolour, the protesters demanded the withdrawal of the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and expressed solidarity with students of Jamia Millia Islamia who were allegedly assaulted by the Delhi Police.

The event at Chennai was visibly calm with law enforcement personnel paving way for a safe, unintrusive protest.

Initially, only a few people had arrived at the venue of protest. While some were doubtful, others were hesitant to join given the fact that the city police had denied permission for a demonstration. However, after messages spread about the gathering, a slew of participants emerged out on the streets. By evening, the crowd grew multi-fold.

From 3pm to 6:45pm, students poured out their dissent in the form of slogans and raging speeches. From castigating Home Minister Amit Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to calling out BJP's policies as divisive and targeting Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) agenda of a Hindu nation, the agitating students raised slogans such as '*CAA murdabad*' (Down with CAA) and pointed out that the exclusion of Tamil refugees who had fled persecution in Sri Lanka.



Muslim men, part of the protests, offer evening namaz (prayer)

The crowd also slammed the AIADMK government and held it complicit for enabling the passage of bill in Rajya Sabha. Voices echoed against state BJP leader H Raja and the likes of VD Savarkar. One such quote went, '*We are not Savarkar. We are Periyar, Ambedkar, Tipu Sultan. Fascism will be defeated.*' One section of the crowd staged a mock '*oppari*' (a folk eulogy) lamenting the death of secular ideals and mourning the constitution. Subramanya Bharathi's '*acham acham illai*' (There is no fear) and '*Inquilab Zindabad*' (Long live, revolution) became the mainstay of the protests.



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CAA: Protests continue across Tamil Nadu. Scenes from #ValluvarKottam, Chennai on Thursday. (Photos: @zmhsrk)

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'Raghupathi Raghava' flowed syrupy amongst the crowd when Carnatic singer TM Krishna took to stage. He also urged people to unite and not bow down to 'BJP's divisive politics'.

Chants of '*azadi*' (freedom) dominated the scene. Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) leader Thol Thirumavalavan also joined the agitation. Actor Siddharth, in a brief interview with the media, said, "The youth have every right to object undemocratic laws."



One of the slogans that received many a cheer was 'Hindu, Muslim Bhai Bhai, Narendra Modi Bye Bye'.

Youth activists sought the repeal of the CAA and spread pamphlets regarding NRC and asked why citizens should produce documents to prove their citizenship.

By 7 pm, the crowd had dispersed with a resolution to carry out a rally in the coming days against CAA and NRC.

The amended Citizenship Act allows citizenship to people from six communities - Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis who entered India before 2015 following religious persecution in three neighbouring countries (Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh).

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