



The Inquisitor's Song

Any day now, any way now, that man who may or not be wearing a mask, will be knocking on your door and asking all sorts of probing questions to prove you are who you are, or not, as the case may be. Between CAA, NRC, NPR and other energy-sapping acronyms, there is also the Census and something called House Listing. It's a complex exercise in intimidation and enumeration and here's how the inquisition could be conducted.

Inquisitor: I am from the government.

Delhi Citizen: In our household, we call it *maa, baap*.

Inquisitor: Yes, we are here to ask about your mother and father and great grandfather. Where was he born?

Citizen: In a hospital.

Inquisitor: I meant in which country.

Citizen: My grandfather? He was born in the sub continent as it was then.

Inquisitor: Any proof? Hospital records, birth certificate, nurses or neighbour's testaments, was he a malcontent, anti-national, part of a *tukde tukde* gang?

Citizen: I have no clue. I was born 100 years after his death so how am I supposed to produce all that evidence? We were under the British as I recall...

Inquisitor: So, a foreigner, as I will note.

Citizen: That's nonsense, I object.

Inquisitor: So, you are a serial objector. Do you frequent Khan Market? Did you study at JNU?

Citizen: Cradles of excellent products as far as I know, I did go to Khan Market once to buy some cereal.

Inquisitor: I knew you were a cereal objector. That's my next question, what cereal do you have? Indian or foreign?

Citizen: Cheerios

Inquisitor: Are you trying to eject me from your house?

Citizen: It's a brand of cereal, for that you are going to brand me a traitor?

Inquisitor: We shall soon see. Is this your house? Who lives here? Any urban Naxals, or women tenants holding up banners against the CAA? I need proof of residence and residence of proof? What is your source of income? Any foreign contributions?

Citizen: This is getting quite confusing, and alarming. These are hard times for everyone...

Inquisitor: That brings me to the next question, what is the source of your water? Is it soft or hard? How much water do you consume, and what is the quality?

Citizen: We drink bottled mineral water and it is ISI certified.

Inquisitor: So, you admit being a supporter of ISI, which is a terrorist outfit out to break up this country.

Citizen: I think you are doing that without their help, things are really going down the toilet...

Inquisitor: That was my next question. What sort of toilets are there in the house, Indian or Western?

Citizen: That's a tricky question. If I say Western, I may be sitting on a time-bomb...

Inquisitor: Don't get smart. Which brings me to the next question to be ticked on my list, do you own a smartphone? Who is on your contact list? Who are your Facebook friends? Do you TikTok? What is your mobile number?

Citizen: This is an invasion of privacy, as ordained by the Supreme Court. My identity is now defined by my social media accounts, like WhatsApp.

Inquisitor: Yours is not to question what, who or why, yours is just to provide proof of life and limb. What building materials were used in the construction of this house? Who is the head of the household?

Citizen: My humble self

Inquisitor: Sex?

Citizen: Well, I have three children, all natural births.

Inquisitor: I asked male or female.

Citizen: I am standing in front of you, or I could kneel if you prefer. In any case, my life is an open book.

Inquisitor: Which brings up my next question, what books do you read?

Citizen: My reading is quite eclectic.

Inquisitor: That was my next question. Who pays your electricity bill? How many TVs, radios, computers, internet, landline, cooking method, LPG cylinders, washing machines, spin driers...

Citizen: It's my head that is spinning. I took part in the 2011 census and house listing and no one asked me these sorts of questions, or so many. It's like undressing before a stranger.

Inquisitor: We live in a new India now, so you need to change quickly and quietly obey the master's voice, which leads to my next question, who do you pray to?

Citizen: I am an atheist but after all these questions, I will definitely be on my knees, praying to a higher being.

Inquisitor: Correct answer. He is all knowing, all seeing and the savior of the nation.

Citizen: As I said at the start of this inquisition, *maa baap*.

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