Kerala's Nativity Card Bill

Mains: *GS II – Issues pertaining to federalism| Government policies and interventions*

Why in News?

The Kerala Assembly has referred the Kerala Nativity Card Bill, 2026 to the Subject Committee on Land Revenue and Devaswom. The Bill seeks to provide legal backing to the State government's proposal to issue a Nativity Card as an authoritative identity proof for Keralites.

What is a Nativity Card?

- **Background –** The move comes in the backdrop of the **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls undertaken by the Election Commission of India, which has triggered concerns and debates over citizenship and identity documentation across the country.
- **Context** At a time when issues relating to identity, citizenship, and documentation have led to socio-political debates in various parts of India, the Government of Kerala has proceeded with the proposal to introduce a legally valid 'Nativity Card.'
- The State Cabinet had granted in-principle approval to the proposal on **December 24, 2025**.
- The Bill was tabled in the Assembly session that resumed on **February 23, 2026**.
- The Revenue Department, in consultation with the Law Department, drafted the legislation to provide statutory validity to the card.
- The Bill aims to transform an existing administrative document (nativity certificate) into a legally recognized, permanent identity instrument.
- **Proposed Nativity Card** – It is a permanent identity document establishing one's identity as a *native of Kerala*.
- Modelled on the existing **nativity certificate** issued by the Revenue Department.
- Equipped with the beneficiary's photograph.
- Designed to be legally valid and authoritative.
- Currently, nativity certificates are issued based on government orders, not statutory law.
- **Proposed legislation** – It seeks to:
    - Provide a clear legal framework.
    - Standardize eligibility conditions.
    - Ensure uniformity and permanence in documentation.
- The government also envisions the card as promoting a sense of pride in being both an Indian citizen and a Keralite.

What are the Objectives and Benefits of the Nativity Card?

- **Legal Backing –** To provide statutory validity to nativity identification, replacing reliance on executive orders.
- **Permanent Identity Proof –** Unlike nativity certificates that must be repeatedly obtained for various purposes, the Nativity Card will function as a consolidated, permanent document.
- **Access to Government Services –** The card will serve as:
  - A beneficiary identification document.
  - A proof for availing State government services, assistance schemes, and social requirements.
- **Administrative Efficiency**
  - Reduces duplication of documentation.
  - Streamlines verification procedures.
  - Enables better record maintenance at the taluk level.

What is the eligibility?

- **Definition of 'Native' –** The Bill defines a **'native'** as:
  - A person born in Kerala who has not accepted foreign citizenship.
  - A person with a Kerala-born ancestor who has not accepted foreign citizenship.
  - A person born outside Kerala to parents or ancestors who were outside the State for work or livelihood-related reasons and who have not obtained foreign citizenship.
- **Ineligibility –** Individuals who have relinquished Indian citizenship.
- If a cardholder subsequently acquires foreign citizenship, the Nativity Card becomes null and void.
- This clause seeks to align the card strictly with Indian citizenship status.

What is the Application Process?

- **Application Authority –** Applications must be submitted in the prescribed format.
- The **Tahsildar** is the designated authority to sanction the card.
- **Procedure –** Submission of supporting documents and prescribed fee.
- Applications to be processed within a fixed time frame.
- A register of issued cards to be maintained at the taluk office.
- **Updates and Corrections –** Cardholders may apply for changes with supporting documents.
- In case of loss, damage, or destruction, a duplicate card may be issued after verification and payment of a fee.
- **Appellate Mechanism –** The Bill establishes a multi-tier grievance redressal system:
  - **First Appeal** – Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) against rejection by the Tahsildar.
  - **Revision Petition** – District Collector against the RDO's decision.
- The Collector may review, modify, or cancel the order after providing the applicant an opportunity to be heard.
- **Penal Provisions –** Furnishing false information may attract:
  - Imprisonment up to three months, or

    - Fine up to ₹5,000, or
    - Both.
- **Timeline for Implementation –** After passage by the Kerala Assembly:
    - The Bill must receive the Governor's assent to become an Act.
    - Rules will be framed.
    - Software and administrative systems will be developed.
- The government aims to begin issuing cards before the completion of its current term.

What are the Constitutional and Governance Dimensions?

- **Federalism –** Identity documentation is often linked to citizenship (Union List – Entry 17).
- However, residency and welfare delivery fall within the State's administrative domain.
- Raises questions about the scope of State power vis-à-vis citizenship.
- **Administrative Reforms**
    - Digitisation and consolidation of identity records.
    - Standardisation of eligibility and procedures.
    - Improved service delivery mechanisms.
- **Socio-Political Context**
    - Emerges amid national debates on identity, documentation, and electoral rolls.
    - Could influence discussions on domicile, migration, and welfare targeting.

What lies ahead?

- The Kerala Nativity Card Bill represents a significant administrative initiative aimed at institutionalising nativity identification through statutory backing.
- While primarily conceived as a welfare and administrative reform measure, its introduction amid national debates on citizenship and electoral verification gives it broader political and constitutional relevance.

Reference

[The Hindu| Kerala's Nativity Card Bill]

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