

# Students' Movements in Arunachal Pradesh and the Chakma-Hajong Refugee Problem

*The role played by student organisations in the matter of the Chakma and Hajong refugee problem in Arunachal Pradesh is directly or indirectly motivated by political factors. Political parties use these student organisations as their "vote banks". This paper discusses the role of student organisations in the Chakma and Hajong problem, which emerged soon after these refugees settled in the state in 1964.*

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Different thinkers have defined social movement differently. According to M S A Rao, a social movement is an organised effort on the part of a section of the population, involving collective mobilisation based on ideology to bring about changes in the social system [Rao 1979]. According to S P Arya, "social movement" is mostly used in common practice, as designating any collective effort on a mass scale by concerned section of society, aiming to tackle and eradicate some widespread social problems of wider dimensions among people of a region [Arya 1970]. Social movement may also be defined as a collective enterprise to establish a new order of life [Blomer 1978] and as "socially shared demands for change in some aspects of social order" [Gusfield 1970]. Movements such as those for political emancipation, peasant movements and labour movements are very old, while other social movements such as the feminist movements, are relatively new. The youth and the students' movements also belong to the new genre of "social movement" [Pandey 1970].

Students of late have started holding a significant position in any discussion on social movements. But in spite of this, students' movement as a branch of social science research remained neglected till the 1970s. In fact scholarly interest in students' movements is a rather recent phenomenon [Barua 1995]. There is no denying the fact that students' movements have played a crucial role particularly among the developing communities in their national liberation movements in the recent past in different parts of the world. For example, students' movements had played a major role in the revolution of 1848 in Germany and Austria, the Russian revolution of 1917 and the Chinese revolution. In many of the developing countries, students' movements have brought significant social and political changes in the mid-20th century.

Even in the developed countries like France, England, the US and Germany or the Scandinavian countries, students had participated in anti-authoritarianism movements at various levels and this participation had taken various forms ranging from protest against simple authoritarianism to more complex form of radicalism. Thus, participation of young people in mass movements has been common and noteworthy [Dutta 1998]. Students' movements in India also played a pioneering and important role during the freedom struggle. It began during the 1920s with

Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement and touched its zenith during the 1942 Quit India calls and subsided by 1947 after India became independent.

The students' union in the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) (present Arunachal Pradesh) first established in 1947 at Pasighat, east Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh by a few Adi and Mishing (tribes of Arunachal Pradesh) students was called the 'Adi-Mishing' Student Union (AMSU) with its headquarters at Pasighat. The students who formed this union were mostly from the Sadiya Government High English School. Daying Ering was its founding father (president) and Martin Dai, was the general secretary and Oshong Ering was its treasurer. Other founding members were Talom Rukbo, Obang Dai, Tajum Koyo, Sushen Pao, Toi Dai, Yonggam Legu and others [Dutta op cit: 4].

The regular meetings of the Adi-Mishing students' union, in fact, created awareness of social change and the importance of education in the minds of the new schools and the students organised similar activities in their respective areas and established branch students' unions. Thus, the Galong-Adi and the eastern Adi branch students unions for the eastern part of the Adi-inhabited area were formed in quick succession. After the creation of these branch students union, the name of the union was changed to All-North Eastern Frontier Agency Students Union (ANEFASU) with headquarter at Pasighat, east Siang district [ibid: 27].

After the creation of the union territory in 1972, and its naming as Arunachal Pradesh, the NEFA students' union was also renamed the Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU). With the elevation of the status of the area, the responsibility and burden of the AAPSU became heavier. AAPSU has been the strongest, oldest and the apex body having linkage with students of almost every educational institutions of the state and with students studying outside the state.

## **AAPSU Movement: (1979 to 1985)**

The year 1979 was a turning point in the history of the students movement in Arunachal Pradesh as this year showed a drastic departure from the earlier policy on strategy, tactics, style of functioning and policy towards the government [ibid: 27]. Until then the AAPSU mainly remained an elite club with a small

number of students as members in the state. Its main mode of activities was to pray with petitions and for partnership with the government to draw attention to some of the problems of the student community, in particular, the people of the state in general. In the meantime, with the creation of the union territory and its corollary side effects, the demands of the AAPSU became more specific and broad-based. Some of the important ones were as follows:

- (1) Solution of Assam-Arunachal boundary problem.
- (2) Detection and deportation of foreign nationals from the state.
- (3) Withdrawals of land allotment permit and trade licence from the non-Arunachalees.
- (4) Effective checks against further infiltration of foreign nationals.

For the first time, in early 1980 a two-day Arunachal bandh call was given by the AAPSU in support of their demands. The Arunachal Pradesh government took notice of the situation and in a radio broadcast on April 23, 1980 from the Dibrugarh (Assam) station of the All-India Radio (AIR) chief minister Gagong Apang tried to persuade the students to desist from a path of agitation explaining his government's stand on the demands of the AAPSU. Nevertheless, the AAPSU was not satisfied with the government's stand and increasingly resorted to agitations in the subsequent years [ibid: 27].

The memorandum of AAPSU had covered the old demands and certain new ones such as 80 per cent job reservation to the Arunachalees, stoppage of allotment of contract to non-Arunachalees, etc. In support of these demands, the AAPSU organised a series of district-level bandhs from August 17-27, 1982.

In the meantime, the the All-Assam Students' Union (ASSU) started an agitation in Assam against foreign nationals and had taken the shape of a widespread mass movement. This students' movement in Assam inspired the AAPSU greatly and it gave support to the Assam agitation by launching its movement in 1982 demanding the deportation of Bangladeshis from the state besides pressing the Arunachal government to accept its demands. The more or less identical problems faced by the two students-organisations of the two states on the immigrants and foreign nationals issues had thus established a concord between the AAPSU and ASSU.

Here it would be relevant to analyse the roots of the Assam-Arunachal boundary and refugee problems of Arunachal Pradesh, which have become the main planks of the AAPSU agitation. As far as boundary problem of Assam and Arunachal is concerned, it arises because of the very fact that the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram were part of the composite Assam state. The boundary was not properly defined and demarcated and to claims and counter-claims on this issue are persisting. The problem from Arunachal can be best understood from the resolutions of the AAPSU signed by its president Nabam Riba and general secretary Taban Taki. These resolutions were adopted in the meeting held in Pasighat on August 26, 1985, which was attended by the representatives of tribes from different districts and various political leaders. It was presided over by the vice-president of AAPSU Dawa Tsering Thongdok [ibid: 30-31]. Some of the most important resolutions are as stated below:

*Refugee problem no 'A'*: The meeting resolves that the refugees like Chakmas, Hajongs, Tibetans, Yobins settled permanently in Arunachal Pradesh should be withdrawn immediately from Arunachal Pradesh. It is a sensitive area and the government

restricts entrance of even Indian citizens to Arunachal Pradesh without valid inner-line permit in accordance with the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1873 (BEFRA). The meeting feels that the settlement of refugees in Arunachal Pradesh for a prolonged period may be risky to security and hamper the integration of the territory in due course. Further, in certain areas the concentration of refugees and the speedy growth of their population have threatened to change the demographic picture of the area. The government was seized with the problem and the present chief minister said in his broadcast to the people of Arunachal Pradesh on April 23, 1980, that the government of Arunachal Pradesh has taken up dispersal of these refugees with the central government. The meeting now resolves to urge the government for immediate dispersal of Tibetan and Chakma-Hajong refugees from Arunachal Pradesh, before they can destroy the demographic harmony of the territory [ibid: 32].

*Influx of outsiders no 'B'*: The meeting further resolves that the government of Arunachal Pradesh should take necessary steps to strengthen BEFRA while issuing "Inner-Line Permits" enrolment in 'voter list', land allotment and trading licences, etc. In view of the recent agreement between the Assam Agitation leaders (AAL) and the central government, it is feared that there will be an influx displaced persons (IDP) from Assam into Arunachal Pradesh. The meeting urges the government to take effective measures to prevent any such entrance and to take utmost care in issuing any inner-line permit to the people of doubtful origin [ibid].

The meetings observed that while the chief minister assured in his broadcast on April 23, 1980 that no land allotment has been made to non-Arunachalees on a permanent basis, there were cases of permanent land allotment, trading licence and other facilities granted to non-Arunachalees in violation of the Inner-Line Act. The government was therefore urged to check and withdraw such facilities extended to non-Arunachalees at an early date.

It would be appropriate now to take stock of the refugee problem in Arunachal Pradesh that has created apprehension and anger in the minds of the students, people and the government of the state. Following the eruption of ethnic riots in 1961 in Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) of erstwhile East Pakistan's (now Bangladesh), thousands of tribal people, rendered homeless, fled to India. In 1964, again the religious persecution of the Chakmas and Hajongs of the tract in East Pakistan compelled them to leave their country to join their refugee brethren in Tripura. As the Pakistan government showed no signs of taking their people back and as the Tripura government had to take a tough stand because of the heavy burden of refugees there, the refugees moved further east. Mahavir Tyagi, the then union relief and rehabilitation minister, tried to settle them in Bihar by offering cash doles. But the majority of the Chakmas refused to move to Bihar on the plea that the climate of that state would not suit them.

At that critical juncture, the government of India contemplated a plan of settling these refugees in NEFA. Thereafter, the history of settlement of Chakma and Hajong refugees in NEFA began. Even those refugees who went to Bihar for settlement at Gaya district came back to join their brothers in NEFA in 1968. Thus the flow of refugees continued from 1965-66 to 1968 and they settled in the three districts of Tirap, Lohit and Changlang.

As far as the migration of the Tibetan people to India concerned, it started in 1959 when the Tibetan religio-political leader Dalai Lama with his followers entered India via Kamang district of Arunachal Pradesh and took political asylum in India. The Indo-Chinese war of 1962 further stoked the flow of refugees

into NEFA. It was decided to allow the settlement of a limited number of Tibetan refugees distributed over the district of NEFA. Though the Tibetans were settled in Changlang and Lohit, their main concentration remained confined to Kameng and Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh.

The Chakmas, Hajongs and the Tibetans were allowed to settle in NEFA when it was under the ministry of external affairs (MEA) up to 1965 and then directly under the ministry of home affairs (MHA) until 1972. Thus while the seeds of a critical problem were sown in the area, neither the people of NEFA nor their representatives were consulted in settling refugees in the area.

### **AAPSU Movement: (1985-1990)**

The Assam Accord of August 15, 1985 seemed to have encouraged the AAPSU in its agitational path. The new twin office-bearers Nabam Rebia and Tabin Taki, the president and general secretary of the AAPSU, respectively, turned out to be more of hardliners than their predecessors. After convening a public meeting at Pasighat on August 26, 1985 they prepared and submitted a six-point memorandum to the government. Besides the government demands, a new demand urging to check the possible "infiltration" of foreigners to Arunachal Pradesh from Assam as a result of a fallout of the Assam Accord, was also included. This time the demand for job reservation was increased from 80 per cent to 100 per cent. However, the government refused to accept these demands. In response to this, the AAPSU called bandhs on January 15, 1986, which passed off peacefully with some stray minor incidents in the subsequent agitational programme. Kipa Kache, a student of Nyapin secondary school, was killed in police firing on February 3, 1986. The AAPSU reacted sharply by announcing late Kipa as the "first martyr" of Pasighat on August 17, 1986 and decided to erect a memorial for Kipa Kashe in every educational institution [ibid: 39].

The AAPSU decided to further intensify the agitation and chalked out a year-long programme for it by deciding to have a poster campaign on October 25 which was to be followed by a statewide hunger-strike on November 5, 1986 and a march to the legislative assembly on a subsequent date. Besides, they also decided to submit an ultimatum to the government to concede to their demands by September 1986.<sup>1</sup> The introduction of Arunachal statehood Bill in Parliament in 1986 added a new dimension to the students' movement. Since the Chinese aggression in 1962, the question of statehood to the union territory was gaining ground in the minds of the Arunachalees. During a visit of the parliamentary delegation to the then NEFA in 1963, the people of Arunachal Pradesh ventilated their desire in discussions [Mahanta 1984].

Arunachal Pradesh revived its demand for statehood after a gap of 10 years. The decision of the central government to grant statehood of Mizoram as per the terms of the Mizo Accord inspired the people of Arunachal Pradesh to intensify their demands, when the cabinet went to Delhi to discuss the possibility of granting statehood to Arunachal Pradesh on July 24, 1986.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile in September 1986, the government issued a clarification and explained its position. But AAPSU convinced a joint meeting of students and publics at Pasighat on December 20, 1986 to oppose the statehood proposal. It, however, adopted a number of resolutions seeking certain modifications in the statehood Bill. It was believed that the opposition of the AAPSU to the statehood proposal was mainly engineered by the state's then

opposition party, i.e., the People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh (PPAP). Interestingly, once statehood was granted to Arunachal Pradesh in February 1987, the AAPSU did not pursue its stand of opposing the bill by demanding a few amendments to the statehood till date. Thus it appears that the vehement opposition was neither called for nor with proper and calculated discourse and thought on the matter [Dutta op cit: 41].

By changing office bearers in 1988, and ensuring an assembly election, the AAPSU toned down its activities to a great extent, but it continued pursuing its demands submitted in earlier memorandums to the state and central governments. Its then president Tok Bom Borang and the general secretary Liki Ete met the home minister in December 1989 to press its demands. It also organised a dharna before the state legislative assembly in February 1990 to pressurise the state government. But till 1992, no agitation programme had been adopted by the AAPSU, although, some of its demands which were as old as students' movement in the area still remained unaddressed [ibid: 46].

### **AAPSU Movement: (1990 Onward)**

Till the end of 1993, no serious agitational programme had been adopted by the AAPSU, though its major demands like in the Assam-Arunachal boundary dispute and the refugee problem were still unsolved. But from the earlier part of 1994, the AAPSU had again come into the limelight for its serious agitational programme against the refugee problem faced by the state.

At the initiative of the Congress-I and the governments of both the states, a series of meetings were held between the chief ministers, chief secretaries and commissioners, in which many of the misunderstandings could have been removed by creating a congenial atmosphere for dialogues. A tripartite committee had also been constituted to go into the details of the problem to find out a lasting solution. In the last meeting of the chief ministers of the two states, it was resolved to constitute a boundary committee of equal ratio of representatives from both the sides by involving the local elected representatives, deputy commissioners and superintendent of police wherever it was found to be necessary. The election manifesto of the Congress-I for the election of the legislative assembly of Arunachal Pradesh in March 1995, promised to leave no stone unturned to come to the expectation of the people on the problem and convince both the central and the Assam governments the importance and urgency of coming to the negotiating table to find an acceptable and permanent solution to this burning problem.

As a result of the above, the AAPSU could concentrate on the life and death problems of the Chakmas and Hajongs in the state. In May 1994 the AAPSU organised a huge "Delhi Chalo March"<sup>3</sup> when a delegation of about 400 students went to Delhi, organised rallies and stayed there for about a month to attract the attention of the central leaders to the problem. In spite of their month-long efforts to meet the prime minister it has been reported that the prime minister refused to meet the delegates. It had been alleged that the prime minister, on the other hand, met the Chakma students' delegation. In the meantime, the AAPSU joined in the wider Regional Student Organisation (RSO) of all the seven states of the north-east India known as the North-Eastern Students Organisation (NESO). Besides demanding central attention and action for rapid economic development of the north-eastern region (NER), the main demand of this RSO was to detect and deport the illegal foreign nationals from the north-east that had

posed a serious threat to the demographic case of the other four states, i.e., Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura. The problem was critical as it required detection and deportation from states like Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland, where the Inner-line Permit System (ILP) prevailed [Dutta p 47].

The AAPSU, therefore, joined in a 11-hour north-east bandh call given by the NESO on August 15, 1994 demanding detection and deportation of the foreign nationals and expressing resettlement on centre's indecisiveness and stepmotherly attitude to the north-east. In spite of having sympathy for the cause of the students, the Arunachal Pradesh government arrested 150 of them including the AAPSU general secretary Domin Loya on August 15, on the ground of suspicion of disrupting Independence Day celebrations. It also led to the closure of two schools in west Siang district.<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime, the commencement of the process of election to state assembly in February 1995 brought a low profile to the AAPSU agitation. It was also due to the postponement of any decision on the citizenship issue by the central government.<sup>5</sup> On February 26, 1996 the Arunachal Students' Union of Delhi (ASUD) held a protest rally at Jantar Mantar to express solidarity with the people of Arunachal Pradesh. They distributed pamphlets for support against the foreign nationals who settled in Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>6</sup>

### **Question of Chakma-Hajong in Arunachal Pradesh**

The current question of the Chakma and Hajong refugees in Arunachal Pradesh is rooted in the conflicts which emerged between the reactionary ruling blocs of India and Pakistan and, subsequently, Bangladesh, which engendered the expulsion of the Chakma and Hajong people from their traditional homelands. AAPSU points out that the Indian government violated the legal provisions, which prohibit people from outside Arunachal Pradesh from even entering the state. Moreover, it rode roughshod over the wishes of the indigenous tribal people of the state who at no time were consulted in the matter of the settlement of the refugees [Prasad 2006].

The question of the deportation of the Chakmas and Hajongs, Buddhist refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan, from the state has occupied the centre stage of Arunachal Pradesh politics for quite some time now. The 'Refugee Go-Back' movement originally launched by the AAPSU, which has consistently held the view that the refugees are "foreigners" and Arunachal cannot be made the "dumping ground", gained momentum in the wake of the "people's referendum rally" held on September 20, 1995 at Naharlagun, Itanagar. It was at this rally that the AAPSU and the leaders of all existing political parties in the state including the ruling Congress-I under Gegong Apang, the chief minister of the state since 1979 set December 31 as the deadline for the centre to evict the refugees from the state. Also the leaders of all existing political parties present at the rally had vowed to resign from the primary membership of their respective parties and form a common organisation of indigenous people if their demand was not met by the central government before the expiry of the deadline [Dutta op cit p 47].

However, what happened in the post-deadline phase of the movement was only to be expected. The central government did intervene at the last minute by announcing the formation of a "high-level committee" to look into the matter. Acting on a

petition filed by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the Supreme Court in its verdict of January 9, 1996 ruled out any forcible eviction of the refugees by directing the state government to seek all possible help from the central government to protect the lives of the Chakma and Hajong refugees residing in the state. In opposition to the pronouncement of this verdict by the Supreme Court, a 15-member core committee comprising largely members from the Apang ministry and some other important leaders from the opposition parties was set up to look into the question of deportation of the refugees from the state. Expressing its resentment over the verdict, the AAPSU further hardened its stance on the refugees' issue by declaring that they were not bound by the verdict. Protesting against the verdict, AAPSU gave a 10-hour bandh call on the Republic Day making its celebration only symbolic in nature (ibid).

The Buddhist Chakmas and Hindu Hajongs were the innocent victims of Partition, originally belonging to the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Maimensingh districts, respectively, a part of erstwhile East Pakistan. Pakistan's policy of persistent religious persecution of these Buddhist tribes and the displacement caused by the Kaptai hydel power project forced them to migrate and take refuge in India in 1964. But what was it that made these refugees finally settle down in Arunachal Pradesh which had been enjoying a "Special Protected Area" status since the pre-independence period under the provisions of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873? According to this regulation, even an Indian citizen of other states could not stay in Arunachal Pradesh permanently. In other words, any Indian citizen from states other than Arunachal Pradesh, as per the rules of the regulation, could not own any piece of land or develop any permanent stake in the state. Interestingly, following an order issued by the governor-general in 1876 even the British subjects were prohibited from going beyond the Inner-Line without a pass under the hand and seal of an authorised political officer. It has, therefore, only natural for the Arunachalees to demand an explanation for the arrival and continuing presence of the refugees in the state despite all these protectionist measures adopted by the government of India [Singh 2003].

Initially, only about 57 families of Chakmas and Hajongs were given shelter in the government camps at Ledo in Dibrugarh, Assam in 1964. Thereafter, they were settled in Abhaypur block of Diyun circle of the erstwhile Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh purely on temporary and humanitarian grounds by the then NEFA administration, which was directly under the control of the central government. The indigenous people of the state perceived a danger to their identity and culture being posed by an ever-increasing concentration of the Chakmas and Hajongs in the state. According to the AAPSU, the population of the refugees had swollen to approximately 65,000 as against the 57 families originally settled in 1966 in Diyun [Prasad 2006]. It may not be fair to blame it on the indigenous people for their increasing assertiveness on the issue of eviction of the refugees from the state for they fear that rapid demographic changes in three districts since 1951 may soon see them being outnumbered with all its concomitant social, economic and political consequences. For example, according to the figures given in the 1991 Census, the indigenous tribal population of the two districts of Lohit and Changlang where the Chakmas and Hajongs were residing, was only 74,000 out of the total population of 2,02,523 (which included other Indian citizens also). The total population of the state according to the 1991 Census was 8,58,392.

The issue of granting citizenship to the refugees had also figured prominently in all debates and was being considered seriously by the central government. S B Chavan's repeated remarks in this respect met with strong opposition from all quarters in the state. The AAPSU strongly condemned Chavan's insistence on granting citizenship to the refugees and believed that it was an attempt to woo the potential voters at the cost of annoying the indigenous people of the state. Could the grant of citizenship end the helplessness of the refugees? May not, as the real issue faced by the leaders of the movement was not whether the refugees were granted citizenship or not but that they must be resettled outside the state. The state government was quite determined that even if the settlers were to be granted citizenship they would have to leave the state.<sup>7</sup>

Though the Chakmas and Hajongs have continued to stay on in the state they have suffered immensely for no fault of theirs as they themselves did not volunteer to come to Arunachal Pradesh, but were instead brought here as a policy decision. The withdrawal of basic amenities like employment opportunities, termination of trade licence and confiscation of ration cards made it quite difficult for the refugees to survive. Faced with frequent quit notices issued by the AAPSU and the centre's insincerity in finding a long-term solution, the refugees found themselves in the midst of uncertainty.

Over the course of the past few years, the state government of Arunachal Pradesh have denied the Chakmas and Hajongs access to the most basic infrastructure and opportunities. These conditions persist despite intervention on behalf of the communities by the NHRC, the ministry of home affairs, the Rajya Sabha and clear judgments in their favour by the courts. The government's inaction and inefficacy have left these communities vulnerable to threats and violence by organisations in the state such as the AAPSU.

On January 9, 1996, the Supreme Court of India, ruling in the case of National Human Rights Commission vs State of Arunachal Pradesh directed the government of Arunachal Pradesh to ensure protection of the life and personal liberty of Chakmas residing in the state, and to process their applications for citizenship in accordance with the law. The Supreme Court's judgment was followed by a positive decision by the Delhi High Court. In the case of People's Union for Civil Liberties and Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh vs Election Commission of India and others, the Delhi High Court ruled in favour of registering Chakmas and Hajongs as voters in Arunachal Pradesh. However, these court directives have been ignored.

Some historical background is necessary to understand the devastating nature of the present situation. The Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh belong to a tribal group that has for centuries inhabited the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) of Bangladesh. Despite the fact that most of the inhabitants of the CHTs are either Buddhists or Hindus, the region became a part of Pakistan with the partition of India in 1947. In 1964, communal violence and the construction of the Kaptai hydroelectric dam displaced nearly 1,00,000 Chakmas. A large number of these displaced people sought refuge in India.

Nearly 1,000 members of the Hajong tribe, a Hindu group from the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh, were also settled in these areas. For more than 30 years the Chakmas and Hajongs have been living in these areas, built up the villages, developed the land granted to them and paid state taxes on their land.

Additionally, they became integrated into the social fabric of Arunachal Pradesh and established strong ties with the region. Many of these Chakmas and Hajongs, who now number about 65,000, were born in India and have no other home.

The Chakmas and Hajongs are legal residents of India. In 1964, the government of India granted migration certificates to approximately 35,000 Chakmas and 1,000 Hajongs. The migrants were settled by the government of India in the erstwhile NEFA, an area that comprises the present-day districts of Lohit, Changlang and Papumpare in Arunachal Pradesh. These certificates indicated legal entry into India and the willingness of the government of India to accept the migrants as future citizens. Additionally, under the Indira-Mujib Agreement of 1972, it was determined that India and not Bangladesh would be responsible for all migrants who entered India before March 25, 1971 [Ghai 1998].

Many Chakmas and Hajongs also have the right to citizenship and the right to vote. Under Section 3(1) (a) of the Indian Citizenship Act, 1955, every person born in India on or after January 26, 1950 and before July 1, 1987 (Constitutional Amendment on Citizenship) is a citizen of the country. There are about 35,000 Chakmas and Hajongs who were born in India after 1964. Under the Indian Citizenship Act, they are Indian citizens by birth and, consequently, eligible to vote. However, when the Chakmas and Hajongs who satisfy the act's requirements tried to register in the electoral rolls, the concerned state government officials refused to accept their applications.

The Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCAP) approached the ministry of home affairs to remedy the situation. The ministry indicated that the election commission had been requested to include all legitimate Indian citizens in the electoral rolls. But the election commission took no action in this regard. The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and the CCRCAP filed a writ petition before the Delhi High Court in the related matters (CWP No 886 of 2000). To date, not a single Chakma or Hajong has been included in the electoral rolls.

In response to the condition of the Chakmas and Hajongs, the NHRC filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court against Arunachal Pradesh. The case arose in response to allegations of human rights abuses suffered by the Chakmas and Hajongs at the hands of the state government of Arunachal Pradesh in collaboration with private entities like the AAPSU. In September and October of 1994, the CCRCAP made numerous appeals to the NHRC, alleging human rights abuses and imminent threats to the lives and property of the Chakmas and Hajongs in the region.

Upon inquiry, the NHRC determined that the Arunachal state government was acting in concert with the AAPSU to issue "quit notices" with a view to intimidating the Chakmas and Hajongs and expelling them from the state. Because of the state government's delayed statements and lack of action in response to the inquiries and directions of the NHRC, the matter was brought before the Supreme Court. Despite the Supreme Court's clear ruling, the Chakmas and Hajongs still could not apply for citizenship within Arunachal Pradesh due to intimidation by the AAPSU, which has the support of the state government. Consequently, on February 18 and June 19, 1997, the groups submitted citizenship applications directly to the central government. The union home ministry forwarded these citizenship applications to the district collectors for necessary verification.

On May 4, 1998, 27 Chakmas submitted citizenship applications to the deputy commissioner of Changlang district, but he

refused to accept them. Perforce, the Chakmas and Hajongs had to submit applications directly to the union home ministry once again. More than two years later, the Chakmas and Hajongs were yet to be granted citizenship. Over four years after the Supreme Court judgment, the PUCL and the CCRCAP challenged the government in court once again over its continued inaction. They filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court against the election commission of India, the state election commission of Arunachal Pradesh and the union of India.

During the course of the case, the central government stated: "The central government is of the view that persons settled in Arunachal Pradesh after their migration in 1964 but before the 1986 Amendment to the Act should be citizens of India". The Delhi High Court directed the election commission of India and the state election commission to process Chakma and Hajong applications for inclusion in the electoral rolls. The directive is yet to be implemented.

The central government has also often asserted that the Chakmas and Hajongs have a legitimate claim to Indian citizenship. As a member of the opposition, the former minister for home affairs, L K Advani was exceptionally critical of the government's ineffectiveness in granting citizenship and related rights and privileges to the Chakmas and Hajongs. He raised the issue in Parliament on several occasions. During his own tenure as the minister of home affairs, however, he had failed to make the Arunachal Pradesh government comply with constitutionally binding judicial orders and directives from the ministry of home affairs.

The government of Arunachal Pradesh has systematically denied the Chakmas and Hajongs access to social, economic and political rights, to which they are entitled under Indian and international law. It has conducted a three-pronged strategy of discrimination against them – denying them political rights, economic opportunity and access to basic social infrastructure. Additionally, the state government has not checked the intimidation and threats issued by the AAPSU. In fact, on occasions it has openly supported AAPSU activities. The Chakmas have been suffering forcible eviction at the hands of the state government and AAPSU for decades – one particular village in the district of Changlang, Vijoypur, was reportedly destroyed on three occasions, in 1989, 1994 and 1995.

In 1980, the state government banned the employment of Chakmas and Hajongs. It stopped issuing trade licences to members of either community. Furthermore, all trade licences issued to the Chakmas in the late 1960s were seized in 1994. Their employment options are thus effectively sealed off, and the Chakmas and Hajongs are locked into a vicious cycle of poverty. The situation has been exacerbated by AAPSU-organised economic blockades of the Chakma and Hajong Refugee Camps.

The state government has steadily dismantled basic social infrastructure in Chakma and Hajong settlements, rendering these people ever more vulnerable. All persons legally resident in India are entitled to ration cards, if their income falls below a specified amount. In October 1991, the state government discontinued issuance of ration cards to Chakmas and Hajongs, many of whom live in extreme poverty. In September 1994, the state government began a campaign of school closing, burning and relocations that have effectively denied the Chakmas and Hajongs their right to education. Schools built by the Chakmas using local community resources were closed down or destroyed and also,

health facilities in Chakma and Hajong areas completely are all in paper.

The Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh have a verdict in their favour from the apex court and the Delhi High Court, the support of the Rajya Sabha and, ostensibly, bureaucratic compliance from the central government. The Arunachal Pradesh government, the election commission of India and the state election commission of Arunachal Pradesh must now implement the directives of the Supreme Court and the Delhi High Court to ensure that the Chakmas and Hajongs receive their full rights of citizenship. In India, students were initiators and agents in independence movements. Political and students' movements are interlinked and have advanced more or less simultaneously, the latter always being under the direction of the former. Before independence, political activities of students were focused on the issue of independence and all grievances were given political tone. From the beginning, students' movements in one way or the other aligned themselves with one party or the other and the parties have been utilising their voice and strength for political goals.

The role played by the AAPSU relating to the matter of the Chakma and Hajong refugees problem in Arunachal Pradesh is directly or indirectly motivated by political factors. Political parties are using these students' unions only as their "vote banks" and for political support, i.e., this is the reason the problem of the Chakma and Hajong refugees has not settled down even after 42 years.

The table shows the status of Chakmas and Hajongs of the various north-eastern and eastern states of India. Chakmas and Hajongs migrated at the time of Partition and were granted not only the citizenship rights, but also the scheduled tribes status in India (Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, West Bengal), but having a larger population (third largest ethnic group in Arunachal Pradesh according to 2001 Census) they got the status of "refugee" and after 42 years are still fighting for their basic fundamental rights to survive in Arunachal Pradesh.

The ruling Congress in Arunachal Pradesh suggested that the United Progressive Alliances (UPA) government in the centre should announce a Rs 200 crore package for the settlement and rehabilitation of Chakmas and Hajongs outside the state. The AAPSU, the refugees, the state and the central governments should start a dialogue on the resettlement of the thousands of the Chakmas and Hajongs who are staying in the state since 1964 and the centre should offer a financial package for the purpose. The Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) working president Takam Sanjay told a press conference here; "We feel if the central government becomes a little more serious about the issue, a solution would emerge".<sup>8</sup>

But the solution which UPA government suggested is baseless and illogical because on one side, they are not solving the problem and on the other, creating new problems by settling these refugees

**Table: Present Status of Chakmas-Hajongs in the North-eastern and Eastern States of India (2001 Census Report)**

S No	States	Chakmas	Hajongs	Status
1	Arunachal Pradesh	Refugee	Refugee	Refugee
2	Assam	Citizenship	Citizenship	ST
3	Mizoram	Citizenship	Citizenship	ST
4	Meghalaya	Citizenship	Citizenship	ST
5	Tripura	Citizenship	NA	ST
6	West Bengal	Citizenship	Citizenship	ST

in other areas which are not suitable to them. The ad hoc policy of any government is not going to solve the Chakma and Hajong problem in Arunachal Pradesh as such.

In 2002, the government of Arunachal Pradesh granted citizenship to the 90 Tibetan families of Shyo village living in Tawang district bordering China. The Tibetans had fled to Arunachal Pradesh in the 1960s. The state government cites the East Bengal Regulation Act of 1873 for forcible deportation of the Chakmas and Hajongs. The 1873 Act requires taking of prior permission (Inner Line Permit) before entering into Arunachal Pradesh. However, the Chakmas and Hajongs who fled from then East Bengal (now Bangladesh) did not go to Arunachal Pradesh on their own. They were taken to North East Frontier Agency (NEFA, present Arunachal Pradesh) by the central government with a view to permanently settle them there.<sup>9</sup>

The question is if the Tibetans who fled to Arunachal Pradesh on their own can be given Indian citizenship, why cannot the Chakmas and Hajongs, who had migrated from undivided India. The central government had settled the Chakmas and Hajongs in the state and they have the same right to all the facilities, without any type of discrimination based on social, economical, political and legal factors. It is a clear case of discrimination for political gains of a few AAPSU and core committee leaders in Arunachal Pradesh.

Undoubtedly, the Chakmas and Hajongs deserve the same rights as the Tibetans. In addition, the Supreme Court has recognised the citizenship rights to the Chakmas and Hajongs who had migrated over a period. The state government of Arunachal Pradesh and central government in the affidavit to the Delhi High Court have recognised that the Chakmas and Hajongs are indigenous like the rest of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. They share more commonalities with their immediate neighbours including a belief in Buddhism, than any other communities elsewhere in the state. The very basic logic is that one cannot use different laws for the same kind of migrants. The constitutional law on citizenship, rights to life, etc, are equal to all and one cannot wear two different glasses to solve the problem.

Finally, we can conclude by saying that a democratic solution to the problem has to be sought, one which satisfies the people of Arunachal Pradesh which at the same time takes into full consideration the humanitarian and legal requirements of the Buddhist Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh. **EW**

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## Notes

[I would like to thank Rakesh Gupta and Sudha Pai who guided and helped me on my Mphil thesis. This paper is a chapter from my thesis on the problems of Chakma and Hajong refugees in Arunachal Pradesh. I am particularly grateful to Valerian Rodrigues, whose suggestions and deep interest taken in this study cannot be forgotten.

I am also very thankful to all the friends from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh who discussed and suggested various improvements in my paper. I owe thanks to library staff of Jawaharlal Nehru University Central Library, Nehru Memorial Museum and Rajiv Gandhi University Library, as well as museum staff of Arunachal Pradesh.]

1 AAPSU Memorandum No Gs-17/84-86, dtd 18-07-1986, Itanagar.

2 *The Times of India*, July 23, 1986.

3 Procession from Arunachal Pradesh to Delhi to meet prime minister to

submit a memorandum, pamphlet issued by the AAPSU, 1994.

4 *Highland Observer*, Naharlagun, September 16-30, 1994.

5 *Arunachal Times*, AAPSU Appealed, February 26, 1995.

6 Pamphlet distributed on February 26, 1996 by Arunachal Students' Union of Delhi (ASUD), Malik Tamuk (general secretary) and Okeng Apang (president).

7 Information issued by the IPCS, New Delhi, on the Article No 1107, August 27, 2003, pp 1-11.

8 'Arunachal Pradesh: A Focus on Security Concern', displayed by IPCS, in an Article No 1107, August 27, 2003, New Delhi, p 4.

9 Information displayed by the Asian Centre for Human Rights, application written by Suhas Chakma to justice A S Anand, chairman NHRC, Complaint for full implementation of the Supreme Court judgment in the case of NHRC vs state of Arunachal Pradesh (CPW 720 of 1995) of January 9, 1996, New Delhi, p 3.

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