

Chakma Refugees and Indigenous People of Arunachal Pradesh: A Field Report on Perceptions

By

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It has been more than fifty years since the migration and settlement of Chakma refugees in Arunachal Pradesh. Despite such a long stay, they have not been accepted by the Indigenous people in Arunachal as one of them. There has been a constant demand for the deportation of refugees from the State by the Indigenous people under the leadership of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) since the early 1990s. In a society, assimilation among different communities requires a healthy perception towards each other and perhaps the fault line in rebuilding this natural bond of assimilation between these two communities resulted in the non-acceptance of Chakma refugees as part of the Arunachali Society by the Indigenous people. This report is an attempt to know the perception of Chakma refugees and Indigenous people towards each other in the light of a long pending refugee issue. The study is primarily based on empirical data obtained from a field study in which an equal number of refugee and Indigenous respondents have been purposefully selected from eight villages each in the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh where a maximum number of refugees are found.

The negative perception of host communities towards refugees around the globe is a well-known phenomenon. The host population often perceives and considers refugees as ungrateful, creating social problems, threats to security, causing environmental degradation, and having an incompatible culture.¹ Like any other part of the world where refugees are found, the refugee issue in Arunachal Pradesh is also to a great extent determined by how indigenous people and Chakmas perceive each other. Chakmas along with Hajong and Tibetan refugees are some of the longest-settled refugees in Arunachal Pradesh, living as stateless entities since their migration from

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erstwhile East Pakistan in 1964.² Chakmas along with Hajong refugees migrated from erstwhile East Pakistan between 1964–69 and were accommodated in the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) by the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India in collaboration with the NEFA Administration. Their original homeland is in the Chittagong Hills Tracts of present-day Bangladesh.³ Fellow Chakmas who migrated along with Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh have successfully integrated themselves with the host population and settled without any hue and cry in states like Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, etc., and have become part of their respective societies and States. However, in Arunachal Pradesh, the story is altogether different and Chakmas have not been embraced by the host populations i.e., Indigenous people, therefore their absorption remains problematic as Arunachalis have never approved of their presence in the state permanently.⁴ It is imperative to mention here that till 1972, the North East Frontier Agency (now Arunachal Pradesh) was under the administration of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, with the Governor of Assam acting as the Agent to the President of India.⁵ Since the territory was under the administration of the Government of India, it was easy to settle Chakmas without much administrative and legal hurdles and there was no opposition over their settlement as the host population neither had any representation anywhere to voice their concern nor were aware of the future implications and also the area was thinly populated. The host population started opposing only in the post-1972 years or to say post-settlement, especially in the early 1990s.

The host-refugee dynamic in Arunachal Pradesh is largely determined by the perception towards each other. Perception can be understood as how something is regarded, understood, or interpreted. Perception driven by the apprehension of being marginalised in its homeland by the outsiders (refugees) in social, economic, and political spheres is what the Indigenous people of the state are worried about. The Committee for the Citizenship Rights of Chakma and Hajong of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCHAP) and the Arunachal Pradesh Chakma Students' Union (APCSU) keep on denying such apprehension by stating they are not against the rights and protection given to the Indigenous people of the state but are demanding their basic rights enshrined in law of the land. The AAPSU, however, held the fact that Arunachal Pradesh is a "protected" state under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, and therefore the settlement of the refugees violated the said law and thus the settlement itself was illegal and arbitrary. The CCRCHAP believed that they were forced to migrate to India leaving behind everything in East Pakistan due to the anti-Jumma regime of East Pakistan. They alleged that their people were deliberately targeted by the Muslim majority regime through religious persecution and manmade environmental disasters caused by the construction of the Kaptai Dam. They state that they did not come to NEFA by themselves rather were taken and settled by the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, and NEFA Administration under the five settlements schemes, and therefore, they are not illegal immigrants or settlers. They also validate their settlement by citing the Indira-Mujeeb Agreement of 1971. However, no such provision was found by the author after going through the said agreement. The

CCRCHAP held the opinion that since they were legally settled by the Government of India in collaboration with the NEFA Administration, after staying for decades, they deserve to be recognized as citizens of India along with other basic rights available to citizens of this country. On the refugee issue, the State Government is inclined towards the demands of the AAPSU and has been requesting the Union Government to deport refugees from Arunachal Pradesh. From time to time, the State Cabinet Ministers, including the Chief Minister, have been giving public statements on the deportation of refugees. However, the Union Government on multiple occasions has shown its willingness to grant citizenship to the refugees in Arunachal Pradesh. The CCRCHAP members too have mentioned on various occasions that the Union leadership has assured them of resolving the issue within the territorial jurisdiction of Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, the Centre and State seem to have different opinions on the issue. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has often voiced for the protection of the rights of the Chakma refugees and has often been alleged by the AAPSU as being “one-sided” in their approach as they have never taken cognisance of the rights and protection of the Indigenous population and rather ignored their genuine apprehension of being marginalised on their soil by the alien population in future. On multiple occasions, the AAPSU has also alleged the Union Government harbouring a “step-motherly” attitude towards the apprehensions and concerns of the Indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh. The CCRCHAP, however, thought otherwise and alleged the Government of Arunachal Pradesh of discriminating against the refugees thereby by not complying with the court’s directives. The AAPSU is also being alleged by the CCRCHAP of physical assaults and damaging properties like houses, and granaries of the refugees. The AAPSU on the other hand alleged Chakmas of indulging in criminal activities such as murder, theft, rape, extortion, etc., against the Indigenous people which of course has always been denied by the Chakmas. Since there are allegations and counter-allegations between the refugees and Indigenous people, the perception towards each other remains unhealthy and also proves as a stumbling block on the path of amicable resolution of the issue. It is important to mention here that this unhealthy perception towards each other is driven by the popular understanding of “sons of the soil”⁶ versus the “unwanted outsiders.”

In this study, an attempt is been made to extract the opinions of both the Indigenous and Chakma respondents to know how they perceive each other and suggest measures that could pave the way for the amicable resolution of the long-pending refugee issue. A total of 190 respondents including 95 respondents each from Chakma refugees and Indigenous people were purposefully selected considering the convenience and purpose of the study. The study was conducted in the four circles of Changlang district inhabited by Chakma refugees and from each circle two Chakma villages were purposefully chosen. These four circles were Bordumsa, Diyun, Kharsang, and Miao and the eight Chakma villages are: a) Bijoypur-I, b) Bijoypur-III, c) Gautampur, d) Dumpathar, e) Milonpur, f) Ratnapur, g) Anandapur, and h) Devapuri. The eight Indigenous villages, two each from four circles, selected for the study are

a) Wakhetna, b) Magantong, c) Dumba Singpho, d) Dumba Mossang, e) Kharsang HQ-I, f) Balinong, g) Neotan and h) Pisi. The refugee respondents are categorised into four groups, namely: a) common people, b) APCSU leaders, c) CCRCHAP leaders, and d) Gaon Buras. The Indigenous respondents comprised of the following groups: a) common people (80 respondents); b) All Changlang District Students' Union leaders (5 respondents); c) Panchayat leaders (5 respondents); and d) Gaon Buras (5 respondents). From every Chakma and Indigenous village, 10 common people were selected along with 5 APCSU leaders, 5 CCRCHAP leaders, 5 Gaon Buras (Chakma), 5 District Students' Union leaders, 5 Panchayat leaders, and 5 Gaon Buras (Indigenous).

Legal Protection and Perception Towards Each Other

The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 holds an important place in the discourse of refugee issues in Arunachal Pradesh. This was passed by the British Government, and a boundary line was drawn in 1875 between Assam and the North East Frontier (now Arunachal Pradesh) to ensure security and peace in Assam.⁷ The boundary line was known as the "Inner Line" and it prohibited the plain people from going beyond the Inner Line without proper documentation/pass. Any non-native who went beyond the Inner Line without a valid pass was liable to conviction with a fine of Rs.100 for the first offense and for subsequent offenses fine up to Rs.500 or simple or rigorous imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months or both.⁸ When India gained Independence, the same law was continued under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru and was carried forward by his successors. Therefore, the Indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh under the leadership of AAPSU have always held the opinion that the very act of bringing and settling the non-native Chakmas and Hajongs violated the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, and thus illegal. Citing this law, the AAPSU still holds the opinion that Chakma and Hajong refugees are illegal immigrants and therefore they should be deported back from Arunachal Pradesh either to their homeland or somewhere else.

To understand the awareness of the refugees regarding this 1873 Regulation, the refugee respondents were asked: *Are you aware of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873?* To this question, 39 respondents, out of 80 common people (Chakma) which is 48.75 per cent answered "Yes" and 40 per cent of the respondents said they were not aware of any such regulation or law. 3 out of 5 Gaon Buras (Chakma) were aware of the law and 100 per cent of APCSU and CCRCHAP leaders answered "Yes" (Table.1).

Table.1: Responses to the Question: “Are you aware of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873?”

Respondents	Responses						Total
	Yes		No		No Answer		
	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	
Common Public	39	48.75	32	40.00	9	11.25	80
APCSU	5	100.00	0	0	0	0	5
CCRCHAP	5	100.00	0	0	0	0	5
Gaon Bura	3	60.00	2	40.00	0	0	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022, © Authors

The AAPSU has always believed that the casual decision of the then Governor of Assam to settle the refugees in Arunachal Pradesh (then NEFA) did not take into consideration the legal protection of the Indigenous tribal people and their tradition, culture, customs, and identity.⁹ However, the refugee communities do not agree with the opinion and demand of the AAPSU to oust them from Arunachal Pradesh. The interviews also shed light on how refugees view their settlement in NEFA although the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, prohibited the unregulated entry and permanent settlement of non-natives. No Chakma respondents out of 95 agreed with the opinion of the AAPSU. A good number of respondents accounting for 44.22 per cent of the respondents said that their settlement was not in violation of any law as it was done by the Government of India. One CCRCHAP member expressed his opinion in this regard saying,

When our people were settled in NEFA there was no independent or separate administration of NEFA rather it was under the control of the Government of India through the Governor of Assam. We were settled in NEFA by the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, in collaboration with the NEFA administration. Thus, the Government of India was the only competent authority to decide concerning NEFA and had decided to settle the Chakma-Hajong people. Therefore, the question of violating the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 does not arise.¹⁰

Approximately 53.68 per cent had no idea whether their settlement violated the regulation or not (Table.2).

Table.2: Responses to the Question: “Was the settlement of Chakma and Hajong refugees in violation of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873?”

Respondents	Responses						Total
	Yes		No		Do Not Know		
	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	
Common Public	0	0	30	37.50	50	62.50	80
APCSU	0	0	5	100.00	0	0	5
CCRCHAP	0	0	5	100.00	0	0	5
Gaon Bura	0	0	2	40.00	3	60.00	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022, © Authors

Various groups of Chakma respondents in response to the question regarding their perception of Indigenous people in their day-to-day relations with Indigenous people of nearby villages gave a positive image of peaceful habitation. 60 out of 80 common people (Chakma) which is 75.00 per cent answered that their day-to-day relations were friendly, and about 25 per cent of the respondents from this category considered their relations “Neither hostile nor friendly”. No respondent answered their relations “Hostile”. A respondent from Ratnapur village of Kharsang stated,

Indigenous people as our brothers and sisters. We have lived together for the last many many years. We use the same roads, sit in the same marketplaces, and also establish matrimonial relations over the years. Hence, our relationship has been friendly.¹¹

Table.3: Responses to the Question: “How would you describe the day-to-day relations of your community with Indigenous people of nearby villages?”

Respondents	Responses						Total
	Friendly		Hostile		Neither Hostile Nor Friendly		
	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	
Common Public	60	75.00	0	0	20	25.00	80
APCSU	5	100.00	0	0	0	0	5
CCRCHAP	4	80.00	0	0	1	20.00	5
Gaon Bura	3	60.00	0	0	2	40.00	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022, © Authors

The Arunachal Pradesh Chakma Students’ Union (APCSU) also answered in tone describing their relations with the Indigenous people as “friendly”. 4 out of 5 leaders of CCRCHAP which constitute 80.00 per cent considered their relationship with Indigenous people friendly and the rest of the 20.00 per cent answered in “Neither friendly nor hostile”. So far as Gaon Buras (Chakma) were concerned, 60.00 per cent considered their relations to

be friendly and the rest of the 40.00 per cent answered “Neither friendly nor hostile”. (Table.3).

The AAPSU is one of the important stakeholders of the Chakma-Hajong refugee issue in the state and has been leading the protest movements against the permanent settlement of the refugee communities on behalf of the Indigenous people for many decades. For the first time in this protest movement, the AAPSU served a “Quit Arunachal” notice to all the outsiders/non-natives, including Chakma refugees in August 1994, and urged them to leave the State by September 30, 1994. They kept on insisting that refugees have to be deported back to their original homeland (Bangladesh) or should be resettled in other parts of India. They stick to the point that refugees cannot be settled forever in Arunachal Pradesh as the State and its native people are being protected by the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, of 1873. They held the opinion that the said law does not permit non-natives to settle permanently in the northeast frontier State. Since the AAPSU are important stakeholders of the refugee issue in the State and have always been vocal against their permanent settlement, an attempt was made to know what Chakma respondents think about the AAPSU (Table.4). Out of 80 respondents (common people), 72 which is 90.00 per cent considered the AAPSU as hostile to the Chakma community, and 8 respondents which accounted for 10.00 per cent considered the AAPSU as neither friendly nor hostile. Interestingly no respondent from this category considers the AAPSU friendly to the refugees. Out of 5 APCSU leaders, 60.00 per cent consider the AAPSU to be “Hostile” and the rest of the 40.00 per cent answered “Neither friendly nor hostile”. Among the 5 CCRCHAP leaders, 80.00 per cent stated the AAPSU as “Hostile” but 20.00 per cent of them answered “Neither friendly nor hostile”. Out of 5 Chakma Gaon Buras, 60.00 per cent consider the AAPSU as “Hostile” and another 40.00 per cent said their relation was “Neither friendly nor hostile”. No respondent out of the total considered the AAPSU and its attitude as “Friendly”.

Table.4: Responses to the Question: “How would you rate the attitude of the AAPSU towards the Chakma Refugees?”

Respondents	Responses						Total
	Friendly		Hostile		Neither Hostile Nor Friendly		
	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	
Common Public	0	0	72	90.00	8	10.00	80
APCSU	0	0	3	60.00	2	40.00	5
CCRCHAP	0	0	4	80.00	1	20.00	5
Gaon Bura	0	0	3	60.00	2	40.00	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022, © Authors

The Indigenous people of the State perceived that once citizenship is granted to Chakma refugees in Arunachal Pradesh, Chakmas from across the international borders will migrate to Arunachal Pradesh to take advantage of citizenship. In such a situation, the State with already a huge Chakma population, would be flooded by hundreds and thousands of Chakmas from outside of India and the situation would arise where the “Sons of the soil” would be reduced to a minority in their homeland. Once they (Indigenous people) are outnumbered by the non-native refugee population, there will be negative social, economic, and political implications for the Indigenous people which most probably would be a disaster for their (Indigenous people) progress and development because there will be competition for already scarce resources and opportunities. Taking into account such perceptions of Indigenous people, a query was made to know the opinion of Chakma refugees (Table 5). To this perception, 92.50 per cent of the Chakma respondents (common people) disagree while 7.50 per cent answered do not know. Respondents who do not agree with this perception believe that under no circumstances they would welcome fresh people from any part of the country or world since they are already facing landlessness issues for both cultivation and residence. A respondent from Devapuri said that “there is no question of welcoming anyone from outside of our State (Arunachal Pradesh) because we (Chakma) have not had sufficient land since our settlement days. Many of us cultivate the agricultural lands of local landowners.”¹² No APCSU, CCRCHAP, and Chakma Gaon Buras agree with such a perception. One of the CCRCHAP leaders said that “this perception is wrong. Neither will they come from Tripura and Mizoram, nor outside of India (referring to Bangladesh). In these States, they are citizens as well as ST (Scheduled Tribe) with separate political and administrative setups. Even if they want to come for any reason, we would not welcome them because there is no land to welcome them and also, we do not want to disturb the already fragile relationship between our community and the AAPSU and State Government.”¹³

Table.5: Responses to the Question: “If citizenship is given, will it encourage the Chakmas from other states and country (Bangladesh) to migrate to Arunachal Pradesh?”

Respondents	Responses						Total
	Yes		No		Do Not Know		
	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	
Common Public	0	0	74	92.50	6	7.50	80
APCSU	0	0	5	100.00	0	0	5
CCRCHAP	0	0	5	100.00	0	0	5
Gaon Bura	0	0	5	100.00	0	0	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022, © Authors

Citizenship is the core of the refugee issue between the refugees under the leadership of the CCRCHAP and the AAPSU on behalf of Indigenous people. It is important to mention here that even the State Government intends

to resettle the refugees outside Arunachal Pradesh. The question of whether the Chakma and Hajong are citizens of India or not surfaced in a writ petition filed by Khudiram Chakma of Diyun Circle in the Gauhati High Court known as “Khudiram Chakma vs. Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh.”¹⁴ This writ petition was filed against the eviction order issued by Circle Officer, Diyun, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, on February 15, 1984. The judgment was pronounced on April 30, 1992, when the court did not recognize Chakmas as citizens of India. Against this judgment, a civil petition was filed in the Supreme Court of India. The State Government also filed a counter-petition. The former was dismissed and later was admitted under the title “State of Arunachal Pradesh vs. Khudiram Chakma, 1993.”¹⁵ Meanwhile, the central government intended to grant citizenship to refugees. Amidst this legal battle, in August 1994, the AAPSU urged refugees and other outsiders to leave Arunachal Pradesh by September 1994. Apprehending the violation of rights and forceful deportation of refugees, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) filed a petition in the Supreme Court. This petition was known by the name “National Human Rights Commission vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh and Another.” To deal with the contingency that was arising in the wake of the anti-refugee movement in the State, the Supreme Court passed an interim order in November 1995 in which the state government was directed to safeguard the rights and liberties of refugees by preventing the AAPSU from taking coercive action. In 2007, another civil writ petition was filed in the Supreme Court titled “Committee for C.R. of C.A.A.P. and Ors. vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh and Ors.”¹⁶ and the judgment was pronounced in September 2015, in which the State and Union Governments were directed to confer citizenship to eligible Chakma and Hajong refugees within three months. Requesting the Supreme Court to reconsider the said judgment, a Special Leave Petition (SLP) was filed by the AAPSU which was admitted by the same court. Since then the issue of citizenship for Chakma and Hajong refugees is still pending in court.

Table.6: Responses to the Question: “Should Chakmas be given citizenship on humanitarian grounds considering their settlement in Arunachal Pradesh for about six decades?”

Respondents	Responses						Total
	Yes		No		Can't Say		
	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	
Common Public	9	11.25	61	76.25	10	12.50	80
ACDSU	0	0	5	100.00	0	0	5
Panchayat Leader	0	0	3	60.00	2	40.00	5
Gaon Bura	1	20.00	3	60.00	1	20.00	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022, © Authors

Considering the significance of the demand for citizenship by the Chakma and Hajong refugees and the strong opposition by the AAPSU, a query

was made during a field survey on whether Chakma and Hajong should be granted citizenship on humanitarian grounds or not considering their historical plight and settlement in Arunachal Pradesh for about sixty years (Table.6). To this question, 61 Indigenous respondents (common people) which is 76.25 per cent out of 80 answered negative, and 13.68 per cent answered: “Can’t Say.” There were 9 respondents which accounts for 11.25 per cent of the total respondent group who agreed to grant citizenship to Chakma and Hajong refugees on humanitarian grounds. No District Students’ Union leaders agree on this question. The General Secretary of All Changlang District Students’ Union (ACDSU) stated,

We are strongly against the permanent settlement of Chakma and Hajong refugees in our district and State. Therefore, no consideration should be made on any ground. They should be deported out of our State. After deportation, let the Government decide on whether to grant them citizenship or not. Our only concern and demand is they (refugees) should not be settled permanently in the State¹⁷

Out of 5 Panchayat leaders, 60.00 per cent responded with “No” and the rest of the 40.00 per cent stated, “Can’t say”. So far as Gaon Buras was concerned, out of 5 respondents, only 20.00 per cent agreed to grant citizenship to Chakma refugees on humanitarian grounds while 60.00 per cent did not want to grant citizenship even on humanitarian grounds and another 20.00 per cent answered: “Can’t Say.” In aggregate, there was only one respondent who thought that citizenship may be granted on humanitarian grounds and the vast majority of the respondents either were not in support of granting citizenship on humanitarian grounds or were not sure.

Table.7: Responses to the Question: “What is your opinion on the deportation of Chakma refugees from Arunachal Pradesh?”

Respondents	Responses						Total
	Practical		May Not be Practical		Can’t Say		
	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	
Common Public	20	25.00	28	35.00	32	40.00	80
ACDSU	5	100.00	0	0	0	0	5
Panchayat Leader	0	0	4	80.00	1	20.00	5
Gaon Bura	0	0	3	60.00	2	40.00	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022, © Authors

Deportation of refugees from Arunachal Pradesh has been the principal demand of the AAPSU and therefore, the non-natives including refugees served a “Quit Arunachal” notice in August 1994¹⁸. They believe that since the state is protected by the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, the very act of settling refugees in Arunachal Pradesh (then Northeast Frontier

Agency) was in violation of existing law and hence they must be deported from the State. Therefore, a question was asked during the survey to know the opinion of the Indigenous respondents on the practicality of the deportation (Table.7). Out of the 80 common people (Indigenous), 25.00 per cent of the respondents believed that Chakma-Hajong refugees can be deported back to their original homeland or some other States of India whereas 35.00 per cent of the respondents thought that deportation may not be practicable after such a long stay and acquiring private properties in Arunachal Pradesh. The majority of the respondents accounting for 40.00 per cent did not know whether deportation is practicable or not. One of the respondents from Magantong village who thought that refugees could be deported back said,

If there is a strong political will of both Central and State Governments and want to protect the rights and interests of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, it can be done. There is nothing that a government cannot do, especially when one party is in power at Centre and State.¹⁹

A respondent from Dumba Singpho who thinks that deportation may not be practical expressed his opinion saying,

Looking at their villages, houses, agricultural fields, and properties like land holdings, it may not be that easy to deport them. I do not think they (refugees) would agree to their deportation considering their stay for about 50–60 years and properties they have acquired.²⁰

All Changlang District Students' Union (ACDSU) are firm in their stand that refugees can be and must be sent back to their original country. However, Panchayat leaders and Gaon Buras are not very sure about deportation.

It is usually perceived that refugees are hostile towards Indigenous people. Hence, an attempt was made to know the ground reality of their day-to-day relations by eliciting information from Indigenous people who live adjacent to the Chakma villages (Table.8). To this question out of 80 common people (Indigenous), 13.75 per cent stated that they have friendly relations with Chakma refugees and 7.5 per cent of the respondents considered Chakmas to be hostile towards them. However, the vast majority of the respondents of this group which account for 78.75 per cent thought that their day-to-day relation with refugees is "Neither friendly nor hostile". Respondents from the All Changlang District Students' Union and Gaon Buras stated that their day-to-day relations were "Neither friendly nor hostile". Among the Panchayat leaders, only 20.00 per cent considered the daily relations of Indigenous people with refugees as friendly and the rest of the 80.00 per cent replied: "Neither friendly nor hostile".

Table.8: Responses to the Question: What/How is the attitude and behaviour of Chakmas towards the Indigenous people in day-to-day relations?

Respondents	Responses						Total
	Friendly		Hostile		Neither Hostile Nor Friendly		
	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	
Common Public	11	13.75	6	7.50	63	78.75	80
ACDSU	0	0	0	20.00	5	80.00	5
Panchayat Leader	1	20.00	0	0	4	80.00	5
Gaon Bura	0	40.00	0	0	5	100.00	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022, © Authors

The AAPSU believes that if citizenship is granted to the Chakma refugees within the territorial jurisdiction of Arunachal Pradesh, many Chakmas from outside including foreign country (Bangladesh) will infiltrate Arunachal Pradesh to take advantage of the citizenship which in turn will pose a threat to the Indigenous people in many ways such as demography, resources, politics, employment opportunities, etc., and the very survival of Indigenous people in their homeland will be at risk. Considering this perception, a query was made from the Indigenous respondents of the study area (Table.9). To this question, 75.00 per cent of the common public (Indigenous) agreed that in case citizenship is granted to refugees in Arunachal Pradesh, Chakmas from outside would come to take advantage of the situation and the rest of the respondents answered: “Can’t say”. All respondents of the District Students Union and Gaon Buras stated that Chakmas from outside of the State and country will infiltrate Arunachal Pradesh. 80.00 per cent of Panchayat leaders also held the same opinion while 20.00 per cent were not sure and answered: “Can’t Say.”

Table.9: Responses to the Question: “Would granting of citizenship encourage the Chakmas from other states and countries (e.g.Bangladesh) to migrate to Arunachal Pradesh?”

Respondents	Responses						Total
	Yes		No		Can’t Say		
	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	
Common Public	68	85.00	0	0	12	15.00	80
ACDSU	5	100.00	0	0	0	0	5
Panchayat Leader	4	80.00	0	0	1	20.00	5
Gaon Bura	5	100.00	0	0	0	0	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022, © Authors

There is a common understanding among the Indigenous people of the State that if citizenship is granted to Chakma and Hajong refugees in the future within Arunachal Pradesh, they will not stop citizenship but shift their

demand to demand the rights of Permanent Residential Certificates (PRCs) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) status which as of now are not available to them. It is important to mention here that these rights (PRC and ST) are enjoyed only by the Indigenous tribes of the State and are not available to non-native or non-indigenous communities. This question is not imaginary as well in the light of the following statements of the Chakma refugees and cannot be ignored. For instance, then Vice-President, APCSU, Ajay Chakma once said,

The Primary issue for us at the moment is citizenship and the question of grant of Scheduled Tribe status to the Chakmas will come later. If we continue to face similar kinds of discrimination despite being citizens of India then certainly we will have to ask for other things also.²¹

Another statement that supports the above statement is of the Gaon Bura of Dharmapur, Upendra Lal Chakma which runs as follows,

CCRCHAP is demanding citizenship, permanent residentship, and APST status together. Once we are given citizenship, other things like APST status, etc., will automatically follow.²²

Dina Lal Chakma also expressed a similar kind of opinion,

Citizenship alone will not do. We also need to be recognised as APST without which we cannot have access to land, schools, employment, and other facilities that are enjoyed by the locals.²³

Table.10: Responses to the Question: “If citizenship is given to the Chakma refugees, do you think they would also demand Permanent Residential Certificate (PRC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) Certificates?”

Respondents	Responses						Total
	Yes		No		Can't Say		
	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	No. of People	Per Cent of People	
Common Public	77	96.25	0	0	3	3.75	80
ACDSU	5	100.00	0	0	0	0	5
Panchayat Leader	5	100.00	0	0	0	0	5
Gaon Bura	4	80.00	0	0	1	20	5

Source: Field Survey, 2022, © Authors

Therefore, during the field study questions were asked of Indigenous respondents in this regard (Table.10). Out of 80 common people/respondents, 96.25 per cent believed that once citizenship is granted, Chakma and Hajong refugees would demand the PRC and ST status. The All Changlang District Students' Union Leaders have no doubt in this regard. The General Secretary was found stating,

Once citizenship is granted, a floodgate for other demands, especially as PRC and ST status will automatically erupt and it will further put the Indigenous people's future at risk. Many of our jobs will be snatched by them (refugees)

and many of our people will not get employment as refugees will have rights at par with Indigenous people which means more competition for scarce resources and limited job opportunities.²⁴

The Panchayat leaders too felt the same and stated that once they got citizenship, their next demand would be Scheduled Tribes status and Permanent Residential Certificates. In this regard, a Panchayat leader from Pisi village, Miao, said,

Granting citizenship to Chakma refugees means giving away our rights to them. With citizenship, there will be a huge jump in their enrollment as voters and once they have enough voter strength, they would exert pressure on the government for other rights like ST and PRC and because of their voter strength, the Government could succumb to their demand.²⁵

So far as Gaon Buras was concerned, 80.00 per cent agreed to the question, and another 20.00 per cent stated: "Can't Say." There was no respondent (indigenous) who did not agree with the question rather vast majority of the respondents (Indigenous) thought that granting citizenship would lead to demand for the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status and Permanent Residential Certificates (PRCs).

Conclusion

The data of the study suggest that though Chakmas want the Indigenous people to accept them as part of Arunachal Society, however, the Indigenous people seem not ready to accept and embrace them as fellow Arunachalee. A vast majority accounting for 75.78 per cent of refugee respondents considered their day-to-day relationship with the Indigenous people friendly and there was no single respondent who considered their relationship to be hostile whereas only 12.63 per cent of the Indigenous respondents considered their day-to-day relations with Chakma refugees friendly. The majority of the Chakma respondents constituting 86.31 per cent considered the attitude and behaviour of the AAPSU hostile towards people. The same question was asked to Indigenous respondents to know how they look at the AAPSU in relation to Chakmas. To this, they stated that the activities of the AAPSU were necessary for their rights and protection of fellow Indigenous people as accorded by the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873. The apprehension or perception regarding the possible entry of Chakmas from Bangladesh or states like Tripura and Meghalaya, if citizenship is granted to Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh, 93.68 per cent of the refugee respondents disagreed to such anxieties, but when a similar question was asked to the Indigenous respondents, about 86.31 per cent agreed to such apprehensions. Thus, their perceptions and apprehensions are contrary in this regard. The demand for the grant of Indian citizenship by CCRCHAP in Arunachal Pradesh is the core of the refugee issue in Arunachal. Neither the AAPSU nor the Indigenous people of the state are in favour of granting citizenship to Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh. Hence, taking into account the historical plight and their stay in Arunachal Pradesh for about sixty years, a query was made from the Indigenous respondents to know their

opinion of whether refugees should be given citizenship on humanitarian grounds or not. To this, 75.79 per cent of the Indigenous respondents did not want to grant citizenship to Chakmas on any ground, including humanitarian and only 10.53 per cent answered "Maybe." The usual opinion of the Indigenous people and the AAPSU is that refugees should be deported out of Arunachal Pradesh, either to their original country or resettled in other Indian states because the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, which is still in force and does not allow even bonafide Indian citizens to enter without a valid document in the form of Inner Line Permit (ILP) or settle permanently, the settlement of Chakma refugees was in violation of this law and cannot settle make Arunachal Pradesh their permanent abode and thus they will have to leave the State. Now, the bigger question was whether deportation was practically exercisable or not, considering various factors such as the accumulation of immovable wealth in the form of permanent houses, agricultural and settlement lands, businesses, etc. after about sixty years of settlement. To this, 26.32 per cent of the respondents believed that Chakmas can be deported out of Arunachal Pradesh provided there is strong political will of the Government. However, 36.84 per cent of each of the respondents thought that it may not be practical considering their long stay and looking at their villages and thus were not sure in this regard. Regarding the possible demand for PRC and ST status in the future if citizenship is granted in Arunachal Pradesh, 95.79 per cent of Indigenous respondents believed that they (Chakmas) would demand the same, which would be an encroachment upon the legal protection given by the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1873. An attempt was also made to know whether Chakmas were aware of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873. 56.84 per cent stated that they were aware of the said law while 35.78 per cent said they were not aware of the same and the rest 9.47 per cent did not answer the question.

When the question was asked on whether the Chakma settlement violated the said law, 44.21 per cent answered that their settlement did not violate the law rather they were resettled by the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Government of India, under a proper resettlement scheme. A majority of the refugee respondents accounting for 55.78 per cent have no idea in this regard and answered: "Do Not Know." However, the Indigenous respondents including the ACDSU held the opinion that the settlement itself was in violation of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873. They also considered the decision to settle refugees arbitrary because they believed that before settling refugees indigenous people's consent was not taken into account. Thus, the opinions and perceptions of the Indigenous people and the refugees towards each other are contrary and unless this is addressed by both the central and state governments by taking the stakeholders namely, AAPSU, CCRCHAP, APCSU, DSUs of affected districts, and other civil societies representing Indigenous and refugee population on board, it would not be easy to solve the long pending refugee issue. The court judgments are not going to bear much fruit unless the affected parties are on the ground and their grievances are addressed by the governments amicably taking into account the rights of both the parties (Indigenous people and Chakma refugees).

Notes

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- ³ Lakshmi. Bhusan Chakma, *Chakmas of South-East Asia: Anthropological, Social and Cultural Study* (Jaipur: Yking Books, 2022).
- ⁴ Partha. S. Ghosh, *Migrants, Refugees and the Stateless in South Asia* (New Delhi: SAGE, 2016).
- ⁵ Paritosh Chakma, *Chakmas: Indigenous Peoples of Mizoram* (Delhi: Bluerose Publishers, 2019).
- ⁶ Anna Getmansky, Tolga Sinmazdemir, and Thomas Zeitzoff, “Refugees, Xenophobia, and Domestic Conflict: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Turkey,” *Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 4 (2018): 491–507.
- ⁷ N. Lego, *History of Arunachal Pradesh* (Itanagar: Jumbo Gumin Publishers and Distributors, 2006).
- ⁸ Lego, *History of Arunachal*.
- ⁹ Aditya Prakash, *Chakma Refugees* (New Delhi: Sumit Enterprises, 2013).
- ¹⁰ CCRCHAP Member at Diyun, interviewed by the authors on May 5, 2022.
- ¹¹ Chakma respondent (Common people) from Ratnapur village, Kharsang, interviewed by authors, May 11, 2022.
- ¹² Chakma respondent (Common people) from Devapuri, Miao, interviewed by authors, June 27, 2022.
- ¹³ CCRCHAP Member at Gautampur, interviewed by authors, June 29, 2022.
- ¹⁴ Gauhati High Court, *Khudiram Chakma vs. Union Territory of Arunachal*, 30 April 1992.
- ¹⁵ Supreme Court of India, *State of Arunachal Pradesh vs. Khudiram Chakma*, 27 April 1993.
- ¹⁶ Supreme Court of India, *Committee for C.R. of C.A.P. & Ors vs. State of Arunachal Pradesh & Ors*, 17 September 2015.
- ¹⁷ Vice President, All Changlang District Students’ Union Member, Kharsang, interviewed by authors, June 13, 2022.
- ¹⁸ Deepak. K. Singh, *Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India* (New Delhi: SAGE, 2010).
- ¹⁹ Indigenous respondent (common people) from Magantong village, Bordumsa, interviewed by authors, July 3, 2022.
- ²⁰ Indigenous respondent from Dumba Singpho village, Diyun, interviewed by authors, July 17, 2022.
- ²¹ Deepak. K. Singh, *Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India* (New Delhi: SAGE, 2010)
- ²² Singh, *Stateless in South Asia*.
- ²³ Singh, *Stateless in South Asia*.
- ²⁴ General Secretary, All Changlang District Students’ Union, Kharsang, interviewed by authors, June 14, 2022.
- ²⁵ Panchayat Leader from Pisi village, Miao, interviewed by authors, May 23, 2022.