CHAPTER – V

CHAKMA ISSUE AND ETHNO-POLITICS IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

In the foregoing chapter the conflicting views of the Centre and the Government of Arunachal Pradesh on the Chakma citizenship issue resulting in Centre-State conflict have been examined and it has been seen that the Centre-State conflict prompted the process of ethnic polarization in Arunachal Pradesh. In this chapter, the nature of ethno-politics in Arunachal Pradesh developed in relation to the perceived threats posed by the Chakmas has been examined. The role of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union (AAPSU), the Peoples’ Referendum Rally and the various political parties in ethnic mobilization programmes by politicizing the perceived threats of the Chakmas has also been examined. However, before the discussion of ethno-politics in Arunachal Pradesh in relation to the perceived threats of the Chakmas, a brief discussion is also essential on the meaning and definition of ethnic politics in order to better understand the nature of ethno-politics over the Chakma citizenship issue in Arunachal Pradesh.

As discussed in the first chapter that ethnic politics is an art of ethnic political mobilization often in a relational framework between the native ethnic groups and the outsiders such as refugees. Ethnic politics has been shaped by constraints imposed by outsiders. Thus, the internal ‘we’ (ethnos in Greek) has been distinguished from the external ‘aliens’ (ethnikos in Greek). Where no relevant outsiders existed, the necessity for ethnic politics disappeared. The need of ethnic politics arose only when the strange,
threatening, competitive outsiders had been confronted.\(^1\) Ethnicity as politics has been meaningful only in such a relational framework. Further, in ethnic politics, outsiders have been viewed negatively as threats to generate political interests and internal coherence. In that sense, ethnic politics meant cultural mobilization of the *ethnos* or ‘we’ in relation to *ethnikos* or ‘others.’\(^2\) On the other hand, ethnic politics also referred to politics of assertion on the part of ‘others’ protesting the domination of the native elites.

Ethnicity has been referred to a state of common consciousness of shared origins and traditions.\(^3\) It is a sense of ethnic identity, which has been defined by George de Vos as consisting of the ‘subjective, symbolic or emblematic use’ by a group of people of any aspect of culture in order to differentiate themselves from other groups.\(^4\) An ethnic group that used cultural symbols is a subjectively self-conscious community that establishes criteria for inclusion into and exclusion from the group. The movement from ethnic category to community is a process that may involve such changes as the creation of a self-conscious language community out of a group of related speakers, the formation of a caste association from a caste category or a community of believers from the followers of a particular religious leader. The final stage in the transformation of ethnic groups involves the articulation and acquisition of social, economic and political rights for the members of the group or for the group as a whole. In so far as an ethnic community succeeds by its own efforts in achieving and maintaining group rights

through political action and political mobilization, it goes beyond ethnicity and community to establish itself as a nationality.\(^5\)

Ethnicity can incorporate several forms of collective identity, including cultural, religious, national and sub-cultural forms. A distinction may be drawn between cultural ethnicity and political ethnicity. The former refers to a belief in a shared language, religion or other such cultural values and practices. The latter refers to the political awareness or mobilization of a group on a real or assumed ethnic basis.\(^6\)

**Ethno-Demographic History of Arunachal Pradesh**

Arunachal Pradesh is presently inhabited by about twenty two major tribes and numerous sub-tribes who are said to be Sino-Tibetan by origin.\(^7\) All of these tribes are Scheduled Tribes.\(^8\) But they are distinct from each other due to their separate geographical, social and religious boundaries. Each of them evolved certain distinctive characteristics in language, dress and customs.\(^9\) As far as language is concerned, there are as many as fifty distinct languages in addition to innumerable dialects and sub-dialects. Although boundaries between their languages often correlated with their divisions, for example, the Apatani and the Nishi are both socially and linguistically distinct, but alterations in their identity and grouping over time have now led to some complications, for example, the Galo is and has seemingly always been linguistically distinct from the Adi, their earlier grouping and alignment made them emerge as the

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\(^9\) For details see, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, [http://arunachalpradesh.nic.in/peole.htm](http://arunachalpradesh.nic.in/peole.htm).
Adi Gallong tribe, the problem of which has only recently been dissolved. The majority of languages spoken in Arunachal Pradesh today belong to a single branch of Tibeto-Burman language family called Tani. The Tani languages are not only spoken in Arunachal Pradesh but also in modern-day Assam and Tibet.

### Table 5.1 District-wise Total Population and Scheduled Tribe (ST) Population, 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>DISTRICTS</th>
<th>TOTAL POPULATION</th>
<th>TOTAL (ST) POPULATION</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>West Kameng</td>
<td>63,302</td>
<td>41,963</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>East Kameng</td>
<td>42,736</td>
<td>37,286</td>
<td>87.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lower Subansiri</td>
<td>112,650</td>
<td>87,605</td>
<td>77.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Upper Subansiri</td>
<td>39,410</td>
<td>36,131</td>
<td>91.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>West Siang</td>
<td>74,164</td>
<td>62,323</td>
<td>84.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>East Siang</td>
<td>70,451</td>
<td>50,720</td>
<td>71.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dibang Velley</td>
<td>30,978</td>
<td>15,044</td>
<td>48.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lohit</td>
<td>69,498</td>
<td>30,130</td>
<td>43.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tirap</td>
<td>128,650</td>
<td>79,957</td>
<td>62.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>631,839</strong></td>
<td><strong>441,167</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total:</strong> 69.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As shown in Table 5.1, Arunachal Pradesh is predominantly inhabited by the Scheduled Tribe population. During 1981 Census, the proportion of Scheduled Tribe population may be accounted for in relation to final total population in Arunachal Pradesh. Table 5.1 transpires that the proportion of Scheduled Tribe population to total population is 91.68 per cent in Upper Subansiri which is the highest amongst all the nine districts. The lowest percentage proportion of Scheduled Tribe population to total population is noted in the district of Lohit. In Dibang Valley also the Scheduled Tribe population is noted to be 48.56 per cent only. In two districts of East Kameng and West

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Siang, the scheduled tribe population is noted 87.25 per cent and 84.03 per cent respectively during 1981 head counting. Keeping the above point in view, the districts of West Kameng and Tirap may be bracketed together with 66.29 per cent and 62.15 per cent Scheduled Tribe population to total respective populations. Similarly, the scheduled tribe population enumerates 77.77 per cent in Lower Subansiri and 71.99 per cent in East Siang to respective total population. In view of the above, the percentage of scheduled tribe population in relation to total population works out to 69.82 in Arunachal Pradesh during 1981 census.

Arunachal Pradesh can be roughly divided into a set of semi-distinct cultural spheres on the basis of tribal identity, language and religion: the Tibetic area bordering Bhutan in the west, the Tani area in the centre of the State, the Mishmi area to the east of the Tani area, the Singpho and the Tangsa area bordering Burma, and the “Naga” area to the south, which also borders Burma. In between there are transition zones, such as the area of the Aka, the Miji and the Sherdukpen, which provided sort of a “buffer” between the Tibetan Buddhist tribes and the animist Tani hill tribes. In addition, there are isolated peoples scattered throughout the state, such as the Sulung.\textsuperscript{11}

Within each of these cultural spheres, there are populations of related tribes speaking related languages and sharing similar traditions. In the Tibetan origin area, one finds large numbers of the Monpa tribes, with several sub-tribes speaking closely related but mutually incomprehensible languages. Within the Tani area, major tribes include the Nishi, the Bangni, the Tagin and even the Hill Miri. The Apatani also live among the Nishi, but are distinct. In the centre, one finds predominantly Galo people,

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., pp. 23-35.
with the major sub-groups of Lare and Pugo. In the east, one finds the Adi, with many sub-tribes including Padam, Pasi, Minyong, and Bokar, among others. Milang, while also falling within the general “Adi” sphere, are in many ways quite distinct. Moving east, the Idu, Miju and Digaru make up the “Mishmi” cultural-linguistic area, which may or may not form a coherent historical grouping.12

Moving on to the southeast of Arunachal Pradesh, the Tai Khamti are linguistically distinct from their neighbours and culturally distinct from the majority of other Arunachalee tribes; they are religiously similar to the Chakma refugees in the districts of Lohit, Changlang, Dibang and Papumpare. They also exhibit considerable convergence with the Singpho and the Tangsa tribes of the same area, all of which are also found in Burma. Finally, the Nocte and the Wancho exhibit cultural and possibly also linguistic affinities to the tribes of Nagaland, which they border.13

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12 Ibid., pp. 25-34.
13 For details see, Usha Sharma, Discovery of North-East India, (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2005), pp. 55-65.
Table 5.2 Major Ethnic Groups of Arunachal Pradesh and their Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ETHNIC GROUPS</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adi</td>
<td>82,357</td>
<td>24.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aka or Hrusso</td>
<td>2,257</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apatani</td>
<td>10,949</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangni</td>
<td>26,436</td>
<td>7.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bokar</td>
<td>2,472</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digaru</td>
<td>5,149</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill Miri</td>
<td>2,533</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idu</td>
<td>2,207</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khamti</td>
<td>2,556</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khamba</td>
<td>1,133</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memba</td>
<td>2,497</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miji</td>
<td>2,079</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miju</td>
<td>7,719</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monpa</td>
<td>21,982</td>
<td>6.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nishi</td>
<td>35,089</td>
<td>10.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nocte</td>
<td>19,353</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherdukpen</td>
<td>1,154</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singpho</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulung</td>
<td>1,519</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagin</td>
<td>24,283</td>
<td>7.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangsa</td>
<td>10,396</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wancho</td>
<td>23,393</td>
<td>6.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In table 5.2, the names and population of the major ethnic groups of Arunachal Pradesh have been figured out. It is to be noted here that the identification of tribes in Arunachal Pradesh varied from time to time. The 1961 report of the Commission for Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes mentions of about 29 main and 41 sub-tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.\textsuperscript{14} The Census report of India, 1961, put the figure at 22 major and over 60 sub-tribes, whereas the Census of 1971 recorded a collective of 110 tribes in total existed in the State, while again the Census of 1981 put the figure at 106 in total.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} For details see, Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, Vol. 1, 1960-61, p. 476.

\textsuperscript{15} For details see, Census of India, 1961, 1971, 1981.
The Government of Arunachal Pradesh maintains that there are only 20 major tribal groups in the State. However, the number of tribes produced in the table 5.2 is on the basis of the Census report of India, 1961.

According to the provisional Census report of India, 2011, the total population of Arunachal Pradesh is 1,382,611 of which male and female are 720,232 and 662,379 respectively and are scattered over 12 towns and 3649 villages. In 2001, the total population of the State was 1,097,968 in which males were 579,941 while females were 518,027. The State has the lowest density of 17 persons per square kilometre which was 13 persons per square kilometre in 2001. The total population growth during this decade is 25.92 per cent while in the previous decade it was 26.21 per cent. The population of Arunachal Pradesh forms 0.11 percent of India in 2011 almost equal to the figure what was in 2001.16

Thus, it may be noted that the tribes of Arunachal are so numerous and are culturally so distinct from one another that each of them can at best be termed as a distinct ethnic group. These tribes are yet to develop a common consciousness of shared origins and traditions, self-conscious and cohesive entities like communities as defined. Nor can they claim to have established themselves as a nationality since a distinct Arunachali identity has not emerged because of the cultural diversities within the State. The absence of complex networks of kinship and marital alliances at wider territorial level of Arunachal Pradesh are also typical features of caste societies deterred ethnic nationality formation in Arunachal Pradesh.17

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Keeping ethno-historical and demographic background of the Arunachali society in view, now the role of the AAPSU, the Peoples’ Referendum Rally and the various political parties in ethnic mobilization by politicizing the perceived threats of the Chakmas has been examined hereunder.

**AAPSU Movement and Ethnic Politics**

Politics of student movement in Arunachal Pradesh often followed an ethnic path, particularly in relation to the Chakma issue. The ethnic role of the AAPSU is rooted in its history itself. In fact, the very reason behind the emergence of the AAPSU is to raise the grievances and aspirations of the indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh. Scholars have observed that the role played by the AAPSU is distinct in many aspects. One aspect is that it has not been stereotypical to students’ interests within the college campus only. It has engaged itself in social cause and politics to bring transformation. One of the fundamental premises to be considered is that although the AAPSU is an organization of students, it is at the same time exposed to the dominant tribal intelligentsia of the State. In most cases, the dominant class of Arunachal Pradesh exert their hegemony to motivate students under the banner of the AAPSU to act in a particular manner for ethnic mobilization, as in the case of the perceived threats posed by the Chakmas.

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To begin with, the Preamble of the AAPSU Constitution declares that the objective of the AAPSU is to promote unity and fraternity among the students in particular and the people of the State in general, to explore and exploit the energy of the student community of the State in the greater interest of the society and to preserve and promote the tradition and culture of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. It appears that the phrase ‘people of Arunachal Pradesh’ has been used in a loose manner because the state is inhabited by 26 major tribal communities, each with a distinct tradition and culture as well as non-tribals from various parts of India. The AAPSU cannot claim to be a champion of the interests of all these communities. Rather, it seems to represent the interests of the dominant ethnic groups in the state. It may be argued, therefore, that an element of ethnicity is implicit in the Preamble to the AAPSU Constitution, even though it might not have been spelt out explicitly.  

The factor of perceived demographic threat of the Chakmas brought a drastic change in the nature of the AAPSU movement and politics. Initially, the AAPSU movement was development oriented and its demands were centred around problems like establishment of higher educational institutions, change of the medium of instruction from Assamese to English, to upgrade the NEFA administration to Union Territory, and reservation of seats in various Science and Technical Institutions. As Talom Rukbo, one of the founder members of the AAPSU, remarked, “it must be remembered that the students union of the early days never launched strikes in the present manner…they used to give thumping pressure to the Government on any

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20 Ibid., p. 40.
21 S. Dutta, n. 19, p. 205.
demand if not satisfied, but in a reasonable and peaceful manner.” However, in 1979, the AAPSU altered its objectives. Unlike before, it started to draw attention to such problems like the State boundary dispute with Assam, cultural integrity of the tribal people of the State and the presence of non-Arunachalee residents in the State, particularly fear of demographic subjugation by the larger number of Chakma refugees in the State. In April, 1980, a 48-hour bandh was called by the AAPSU on the following charter of demands:

1. Solution of boundary disputes between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh;
2. Detection and deportation of foreign nationals from Arunachal Pradesh;
3. Withdrawal of land allotment permit and trade licences from the non-Arunachalis; and
4. Effective check against further infiltration of foreign nationals.

Another factor that influenced the AAPSU to launch its movement on ethnic direction over the Chakma issue was the famous Assam movement on the foreign national issue. In the early 1980s, ethnic issues started to dominate the politics of Assam when the All Assam Student’s Union (AASU) launched its ethno-cultural movement against the foreign nationals in Assam. Having influenced by the ethnic movement in Assam, the AAPSU too launched it movement on the Chakma issue in 1982 which marked the beginning of ethno-politics of the AAPSU movement in Arunachal Pradesh. On August 26, 1985, the AAPSU adopted a detailed resolution on the

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22 Ibid., p. 206.
23 N. K. Das, n. 18, p. 249.
24 Ibid., pp. 209-10.
demographic threat posed by the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh and submitted a memorandum to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh demanding immediate withdrawal of the Chakma refugees stating the reason that the steady growth of the Chakma population has threatened the demographic picture of the area.

Considering the fact that the Chakma migrants formed a sizeable non-local population as compared to the rather small indigenous population of Arunachal Pradesh all of whom are Scheduled Tribes, it seems that migration may have led to certain demographic changes in the State. Such changes are both real and perceived. For an understanding of the demographic structure of Arunachal Pradesh, we propose to take a glance at the density of population in North-East India as well as a look at the percentage of Scheduled Tribe population in Arunachal Pradesh. In this context, it is important to note that among all the states in the North-East, Arunachal Pradesh is the largest in terms of area, but the density of population in the State is only 17 persons per square kilometre as per the 2011 Census which not only ranks lowest in the North-East, but also in India. This may be interpreted to mean that the overall impact of Chakma migrants may not be devastating as perceived by the native population in Arunachal. It may also be noted that in 1981, indigenous tribals constituted the majority of the population of Arunachal in all the districts except in Lohit and Dibang Valley. In contrast, in 1991, Scheduled Tribes were not in a majority in Lohit, Dibang Valley and Changlang districts. This indicates some changes in the population structure during 1982-1991. Moreover, there was a slight, but steady decline in the tribal population in all the districts. The most spectacular development, however, was the sharp fall in the percentage of tribal population in Changlang district. It appears, therefore, that the presence of the Chakmas has brought about a significant change in the demographic
structure in Changlang district only, not in the State as a whole. While there is some confusion about the exact number of Chakmas and Hajongs settled in Arunachal, it appears that the threat posed by the Chakma migrants on the demographic balance in the State has been exaggerated to some extent.

But the fact remains that the threat, whether imagined or actual, on the demographic structure in Arunachal is considered to have consequences for the culture of the indigenous people. This was highlighted by resource persons in a workshop on right of self-determination and self-government of indigenous peoples held in Itanagar on April 1-2, 1995. It was observed that indigenous people who have their own distinctive identity, culture, ethos, own way of life and self-governing system, were suffering from political, economic and social discrimination and were being systematically marginalized and pushed to non-dominant entity in the present political system of India which is alien to them. It was also felt that the unabated influx of foreigners and also internal migration from other parts of the country and settlement of refugees in traditional homelands of indigenous peoples were increasingly threatening to outnumber the indigenous population in their own homelands. The speakers emphasized that the Chakma and Hajong Refugees were diluting the indigenous character of natives to the great danger of extinction. It was therefore recommended that in order to save the natives and their identity, all the migrants must be expelled from Arunachal Pradesh. On the other hand, one cannot dispute the contention that it was the Government of India which settled these refugees in the then NEFA in the mid 1960s. So four decades of continuous stay have led the Chakmas to claim what they call an

“occupational right”. It appears, therefore that even if the nationality of the Chakma is questioned, but their right to sustain themselves cannot be disputed, at least on humanitarian ground. But the problem arises when this right comes in conflict with the right of indigenous tribes who have a distinct way of life.\textsuperscript{27}

The factor of demographic threat of the Chakmas dominated the grass roots ethno-politics of Arunachal Pradesh again in 1994 when the AAPSU embarked on an agitational programme against Chakmas. Things reached a flashpoint when on August 1, 1994 the AAPSU issued “Quit Arunachal Notice” to the Chakmas to leave the state peacefully by September 30, 1994. As a follow-up of their notice, the AAPSU organized rallies in different parts of the state including Kokila and Miao, where Chakmas are concentrated.\textsuperscript{28} In that connection, the General Secretary of AAPSU, Domin Loya, once pointed out that the Chakma foreign nationals should be made aware that they were given shelter on humanitarian grounds and that they should not take undue advantage of the hospitality shown by the people of this State. It appears that the AAPSU leadership is aware of the compulsions that led the Government of India to accommodate the Chakmas in the then NEFA. At the same time, an intolerant attitude towards the Chakma migrants is clearly perceptible. Such an attitude may perhaps be accounted for by two factors. First, in the perception of AAPSU, the migrants form a sizeable non-local population vis-à-vis the small indigenous population and secondly, the AASU seems to have articulated the concern of the indigenous tribal society about protection of its rights to land and resources and its natural aversion to sharing these with non-locals. Viewed in this context, the ethnic issue taken up by the AAPSU acquired the dimension of a nativist movement because it highlights the conflicts

\textsuperscript{27} Susmita Sen Gupta, n. 20, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{28} For details see, “Amnesty urges Rao to protect Chakmas,” \textit{The Statesman}, New Delhi, October 10, 1994.
between the sons of the soil or natives and the Chakma migrants. Expressing disapproval of the manner in which the migrants have been asserting their rights, the AAPSU President, Takam Sanjoy, stated, “When we have fed them, they want to sleep. When we allowed them to sleep, they want to extend their claims.” The Student leader was critical of the fact that the Chakmas could dare demand citizenship by approaching the Supreme Court.

Some of the allegations of the AAPSU against the Chakmas are that they are creating serious law and order problems, threatening the demographic balance, peaceful coexistence and the very identity of the indigenous people of the State. Their illegal settlement in the State, demand for permanent citizenship rights and misrepresentation of facts and figures to various forums, the AAPSU alleged, have created fear among the indigenous Arunachali people and tarnished the image of the State. The AAPSU further alleges that the Chakmas have dishonoured the verdict of the Supreme Court which is highly objectionable.

The AAPSU’s allegation regarding the illegal settlement of migrants sounds paradoxical because it was the Indian Government which accommodated the Chakmas and Hajongs under a specific scheme in the then NEFA. It is interesting to explore the grounds on which the Chakmas have demanded citizenship rights. It was pointed out by the Chakma leaders that the Assam Accord of 1985 (Section 6-A of the Citizenship Act of 1955) on the foreigners’ issue clearly stated that all persons of Indian origin who have settled in Assam on or before January 1, 1966, are deemed to be citizens of India. By pointing out that the Chakmas and Hajongs came to India way back in 1964, they argue that there is no reason as to why the provisions of the Assam Accord should not
be made applicable in the State of Arunachal Pradesh also and citizenship conferred to the Chakmas and Hajongs accordingly as Arunachal Pradesh was constitutionally a part of Assam till 1972. The Chakmas, therefore, asserted that they have the legitimate right to Indian citizenship.  

On the other side, it may be noted that protests against the granting of citizenship to Chakmas spearheaded by the AAPSU seemed to have been based on the ruling of the Gauhati High Court and the Supreme Court on the Constitutional status of the migrants. Referring to the fundamental rights enjoyed by the foreigners, the Supreme Court held in its judgement in the State of Arunachal Pradesh versus Khudiram Chakma in paragraph-33 that even a foreigner has a fundamental right, but that right is confined only to Article 21 and does not include the right to move freely throughout and to reside and stay in any part of the territory of India as conferred under Article 19 (1) (d) and (c). Such a right, according to the Supreme Court, is available only to citizens. It held that foreigners cannot invoke Art 14 to get the same right denied to them under Article 19 since Article 14 cannot operate in regard to a right specifically withheld from non-citizens.

The difference in the rate of literacy between the Chakmas and natives played a crucial role in the ethno-politics of the AAPSU movement. A look at the literacy rate of the Chakmas vis-à-vis the natives will make it clear. According to one estimate, the literacy rate among the Chakmas is 70 to 75 percent as compared to 52 per cent of the natives of Arunachal Pradesh. If this estimate is treated as authoritative, it may be

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argued that the Chakmas with their high literacy rate are likely to emerge as serious competitors on the employment front.

Economic factors also appeared to be an important determinant of the conflict between the Chakma and the natives. The Chakmas grow rice and wheat in the fertile low-lying areas of Miao Sub-division and maize, vegetables and horticultural products in the uplands. They are also the main suppliers of agricultural produce to Miao and other towns in Changlang district. Thus, the Chakmas appeared to be highly enterprising and are doing reasonably well in the field of agriculture. Resentment of the locals against the prosperous migrants was articulated by the students when the Changlang district unit of AAPSU enforced an “economic blockade” upon the Chakmas calling upon the natives not to buy anything from the refugees. Such a step taken by the AAPSU had a negative fall-out on the economy of the State and the most visible consequence was a shortage of fresh vegetables in market.31

As discussed in chapter two, a new phase of the AAPSU movement on the Chakma issue began from 2004 when 1,497 Chakmas have been conferred citizenship rights and were allowed by the Election Commission of India to participate in the Assembly elections held on May 5, 2004, in response to which the AAPSU called for a civil disobedience movement and urged upon the people of Arunachal Pradesh to boycott the elections followed by a 48-hour bandh all over the State.32 In 2009, the AAPSU has filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in Gauhati High Court terming the

31 Susmita Sen Gupta, No. 20, p. 44.
Election Commission’s guidelines to include the names of Chakma refugees in the electoral roll for the Lok Sabha elections as illegal.33

It appeared from the discussion that the ethnic issues taken up by the AAPSU over the Chakma issue sustained by several factors that vary from an actual threat to indigenous identity to a perception of fear that the AAPSU seems to have injected in the popular psyche. The actual threat emanated from the fact that the Chakmas by their higher literacy rate vis-à-vis the indigenous tribals and by their entrepreneurship appeared to have earned a place for them in Arunachal. As things stand at present, the natives are facing a stiff competition from Chakmas in the field of education, employment and productive activities, particularly in agriculture. Viewed in this context, apprehensions expressed by the AAPSU have a genuine basis. But, on the other hand, Census figures about the population structure and the density of population in Arunachal suggest that the demographic balance in the State has not been affected to an alarming extent due to the settlement of Chakmas and other migrants in Arunachal Pradesh. As noted before, the Union Government cited the Indira-Mujib Pact of 1972 as the basis for the proposal of granting citizenship to the Chakmas. On the whole, the Chakma issue has got entangled in too many legal complexities and has been fuelled by allegations and counter allegations from both the Chakmas and the Arunachalis. The humanitarian angle of the Chakma issue has been relegated to the background as a consequence. Under the banner of the AAPSU, the educated elite in Arunachal, seemed to have utilised their hegemony for mass mobilization by not simply raising the ethnic issues, but also by arousing popular sentiment against Chakmas who are alleged to have emerged as stiff contenders in the field of education, employment, and other

33 For details see, “Students’ union files PIL against Chakmas.” The Telegraph, Guwahati, June 11, 2009.
economic pursuits. Such a posture adopted by the AAPSU is also likely to benefit them most in the sense that by projecting the Chakmas as a rival community vis-à-vis indigenous Arunachalis, they may hope to gain considerable political mileage over political parties in Arunachal, particularly the Congress and its subsequent reincarnation, the Arunachal Congress. Ethnic issues have thus become an important component of grass-roots politics in Arunachal Pradesh and the AAPSU has certainly emerged as a major player in this politics in the absence of any significant organization capable of articulating demands of the society on such issues vigorously and effectively.

Peoples’ Referendum Rally of Arunachal Pradesh

The demand made in an Appeal by the Peoples’ Referendum Rally of Arunachal Pradesh on September 20, 1995, as, “The refugee problem is a burning issue in our peaceful State of Arunachal Pradesh. Their demand for permanent citizenship rights is creating panic among the bona fide people. Considering the serious nature of the problem .... We demand Chakma refugees to quit Arunachal Pradesh,” reflected ethno-politics by the native Arunachais.

Table 5.3 Unity among the Native Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh over the Chakma Issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Unity of native Arunachalis</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Has Chakma issue brought unity among Arunachalis?</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Has Chakma issue brought disunity among Arunachalis?</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Both of the above</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Any other: Chakma issue provided opportunity for the tribal elites of Arunachal Pradesh to fulfil their political interests.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 5.3, 58 percent of the respondents expressed that the Chakma issue played a positive role in creating a feeling of oneness among the Arunachalis to resist the demographic and political threats posed by the Chakmas. No respondent expressed that the threat of the Chakmas brought disunity among the native Arunachalis. No respondents expressed that the Chakma issue led to both unity and disunity among the native Arunachalis. However, 42 percent said that the Chakma issue provided opportunity for the tribal elites of Arunachal Pradesh to fulfil their political interests.

Thus, the perceived threats of the Chakmas have been politicized by the tribal elite of Arunachal Pradesh under the banner of the AAPSU for ethnic mobilization to serve their interests as the Peoples’ Referendum Rally provided the evidence.