CHAPTER – III

CHAKMA ISSUE AND POLITICAL PARTIES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

There was no antecedent of party politics in Arunachal Pradesh in relation to the Chakma issue until the beginning of the 1980s. Party politics in Arunachal Pradesh began with the first ever Lok Sabha Elections and Legislative Assembly Elections being held in the State in 1977 and 1978 respectively. These elections were contested mainly on development issues. It was only during the second general elections of the State held in 1980 that a political issue like the Chakma issue was adopted for mass mobilization by the political parties of Arunachal Pradesh, particularly the Congress led by Gegong Apang who subsequently came to power on January 18, 1980. On April 23, 1980, the then newly elected Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Gegong Apang announced through a radio message to the people of Arunachal Pradesh from Dibrugarh station of Assam that his Government has taken up the deportation question of the Chakma and other refugees in Arunachal Pradesh with the Central Government. This marked the beginning of party politics in Arunachal Pradesh in relation to the Chakma issue.¹

Party Politics and Elections in Arunachal Pradesh

Politics and political socialization in Arunachal Pradesh started with the introduction of Panchayat system way back in 1967.² The Agency Council was the apex

¹ For details see, Memorandum No. AAPSU/GS/-7/81-83/56, Pasighat, February 12, 1982 and the Message of Gegong Apang, Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, broadcast from AIR, Dibrugarh, on April 23, 1980.
decision-making body of the Panchayat system. The Agency Council was replaced by Pradesh Council in 1972. Arunachal Pradesh has undergone constitutional changes in its evolution to attain statehood. The then NEFA became a Union Territory on January 20, 1972.\(^3\) It was only in 1975 that the Pradesh Council was declared as a separate Legislative Assembly with 23 members through the 37th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1975 and a Lieutenant Governor was appointed as the head of the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh. The first elected Legislative Assembly consisting of 33 members (30 elected members and 3 nominated members) was formed on 4th March 1978, which lasted only for about 20 months. In November 1979, the Assembly was dissolved and President's Rule was imposed which continued till January 1980. The Second General Elections were held in January, 1980. The Third General Elections for Legislative Assembly were held simultaneously with the General Elections for the Eighth Lok Sabha in December, 1984, and the Assembly was constituted in January, 1986. The Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh became a State with effect from February 20, 1987. The total numbers of seats in the Legislative Assembly were raised to sixty during the General Elections of 1990.\(^4\)

Party politics found its root in Arunachal Pradesh only when the first Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly elections were held in 1977 and 1978 respectively. The first regional political party in the State, the Peoples’ Party of Arunachal (PPA) was formed in 1977. The Janata party entered the State as early as in 1977. A unit of the Indian National Congress was established in Arunachal Pradesh in 1972. As stated Arunachal Pradesh became a Union Territory in 1972 and was granted a Provisional


Legislative Assembly in 1975 in place of the Pradesh Council. On the eve of the Lok Sabha elections of 1977, all the members of the Pradesh Council joined the Indian National Congress en masse under the leadership of P. K. Thungon, the then Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh. During the Lok Sabha Elections of 1977, the Congress was the lone political party in Arunachal Pradesh to contest in the two constituencies of the Union Territory namely Arunachal East and Arunachal West. While in the West Constituency, the Congress candidate, Rinchin Khandu Khirme, was declared elected unopposed, the other Constituency was won by an Independent candidate, Bakin Partin. When the Janata party came to power in the Centre in the wake of the Parliamentary Elections of 1977, P. K. Thungon changed his political coat and joined the Janata party with all his followers in March 1977.

Table 3.1 Position of Different Political Parties in Assembly Elections, 1978

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested</th>
<th>Seats won</th>
<th>Voters polled (in Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janata Party</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>00.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent (32)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In February, 1978, the first Legislative Assembly elections of Arunachal Pradesh were held in which the Janata party won majority seats, and on March 4, 1978, the first ministry of Arunachal Pradesh was formed under the leadership of P. K. Thungon. The position of different political parties in the Assembly elections of 1978

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has been shown in Table 3.1. But soon P. K. Thungon’s Ministry had fallen prey to defections succeeded by the Tomo Riba’s Ministry of the PPA which accommodated certain defectors from the Janata party leading to P. K. Thungon’s resignation. The changeover was not very smooth. After P. K. Thungon resigned, Gegong Apang, who was a Minister in the Ministry of P. K. Thungon claimed himself as the leader of a newly formed political party called the Arunachal People’s Conference (APC) and submitted a list of 22 MLAs claiming them to belong to the Arunachal People’s Conference, and staked his claim to form a new government. But within 24 hours of the formation of the APC, many of them defected to PPA.

Table 3.2 Position of Different Political Parties in the Assembly Elections of 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested</th>
<th>Seats won</th>
<th>Candidates polling nearest votes</th>
<th>Percentage of votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress (U)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>04.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>40.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent (2)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>11.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election Commission of India, *General Election, 1980 to the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh*, New Delhi, p. 5.

Table 3.3 Position of Different Political Parties in Lok Sabha Elections, 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested</th>
<th>Seats won</th>
<th>Percentage of valid Voters polled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>44.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress (U)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>04.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result of frequent defection from one party to another, the first elected Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh was dissolved within 20 months and President’s Rule was imposed in November, 1979. Just ahead of the 1980 elections, Gegong Apang along with his former Janata colleagues joined the Congress and came to power in January the same year. The position of different political parties during the Assembly elections of 1980 has been shown in Table 3.2 and position of the 1980 Lok Sabha elections has been shown in Table 3.3.

In the wake of the Lok Sabha Elections of 1977, the newly elected Independent Member of Parliament, Bakin Pertin convened an all Leaders Conference at Pasighat in April, 1977. The Conference was attended by leaders from all over Arunachal Pradesh including the then Minister of Agriculture in the P. K. Thungan Ministry, Tomo Riba. The Conference decided to form a regional political party called the Peoples’ Party of Arunachal (PPA) with ‘mithun’ as its electoral symbol. Bakin Partin was elected as the President and Wanglat Lowangcha, a student leader was elected as the General Secretary. Tomo Riba resigned from the Ministry of P. K. Thungan to become its Vice-President. After the formation, the Peoples’ Party of Arunachal (PPA) pledged to the people of Arunachal Pradesh that it would ‘work ceaselessly for the good of many and for the happiness of many.’ The Election Manifestos of the PPA for the 1980 and 1984 elections pledged to “build an egalitarian society” and a “welfare government” drawn from the visions of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

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8 A. C. Talukdar, n. 3, p. 292.
But the very purpose behind the PPA’s formation was to promote tribal interests and welfare of the people of Arunachal Pradesh.\(^9\) Given the regional agenda of the PPA, it pledged to defend the ‘regional identity, preservation of traditional culture and identity, modernization of agriculture, solution of boundary dispute with Assam, and resistance to ‘alien culture’ of refugees as that of the Chakmas.\(^{10}\) The PPA described itself as a party regional in character and national in outlook. According to the President of the party, Bakin Partin, this character of the party provided for the ideal basis of cooperation between the PPA and national parties in pursuit of a national objective and was highly welcomed by the student community.\(^{11}\)

### Table 3.4 Position of Different Political Parties in Assembly Elections, 1984

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested</th>
<th>Seats won</th>
<th>Percentage of votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>43.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janata Party</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>07.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>36.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent (63)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>42.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


During the 1980 elections, as shown in Table 3.2, although PPA’s overall performance was even better than Congress, it could not form the Government because four of its legislators defected to Congress immediately after the elections were over. After the formation of the ministry by the Congress under the leadership of Gegong Apang, many other PPA legislators, including its founder General Secretary, Wanglat Lowangcha joined the Congress. In the 1984 elections, the Congress own the majority,

\(^9\) Bijan Mohanta, n. 5, p. 185.
\(^{11}\) A. C. Talukdar, n. 3, p. 293.
while PPA-Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) alliance failed to return any candidate in the Lok Sabha elections but won only 5 seats in the Assembly elections four for PPA and one for BJP as shown in Table 3.4.

From what has been described, the nature of regional and national political parties in Arunachal Pradesh may be summarized as follows:

1. Both national and regional political parties in Arunachal Pradesh encouraged politics of defection;
2. There was a general tendency among the leaders and people of the State to support the ruling party in the Centre;
3. Too much intra-party differences;\(^\text{12}\) and
4. The regional political party, PPA was of dual character – ‘regional at state level and at national level it floats in the mainstream of national life.’\(^\text{13}\)

**Chakma issue and Political Parties**

The party politics in Arunachal Pradesh developed rather through intra-party differences, defection and the influence of national ideology to build an egalitarian society than on socio-political issues like the Chakma issue. Although the PPA pledged for the preservation of traditional culture and identity of the indigenous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and resistance to alien culture, party politics in Arunachal Pradesh was mostly concerned about development issues.\(^\text{14}\) However, in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, party politics with ‘foreign national’ issue had already taken roots in the 1980s which soon influenced the politics of other States in North East India including

\(^{12}\) Bijan Mohanta, n. 5, p. 188.

\(^{13}\) A. C. Talukdar, n. 3, p. 293.

\(^{14}\) Bijan Mohanta, n. 5, p. 201.
Arunachal Pradesh.\textsuperscript{15} The Congress party in Arunachal Pradesh under the leadership of Gegong Apang did not lose time to engage the Chakma issue for political mobilization in the State. However, the Chakma issue did not become prominent in the party politics of Arunachal Pradesh until the Centre declared to grant Indian citizenship to the Chakmas in 1992.

The Union Government of India decided to grant citizenship to the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh only when two members of Parliament, Kabin德拉 Purkayashtha and Lalit Oraon raised the question on the ‘grant of Indian citizenship to the Chakma refugees in Arunachal Pradesh,’ in the Lok Sabha in 1992. The question was answered in the Lok Sabha on February 27, 1992 by the Union Minister of State.\textsuperscript{16} The then Union Minister of State, M.M. Jacob answered to the House that the Chakmas would be granted citizenship on the basis of the Assam Accord of 1985. The Assam Accord provided provisions for grant of citizenship to all those persons who came and settled in India prior to January 1, 1966. The Chakmas had migrated to Arunachal Pradesh in 1964, almost two years before this dateline. On this ground, Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh were eligible for Indian citizenship.\textsuperscript{17} As a reaction to the Union Minister’s answer, Laeta Umbrey, a Congress Member of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh pointed out in the Lok Sabha on October 5, 1992, that as a ‘matter of urgent public importance’ Chakma settlers needed to be deported immediately from Arunachal Pradesh. In a reply to Laeta Umbrey on September 23, 1992, the Union Minister of State, M. M. Jacob stated that:

\begin{quote}
“According to information given by the State Government, present population of the Chakma and Hajong refugees who were settled in Arunachal Pradesh during...
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} For details see, Lok Sabha, Unstarred question No. 522, February 27, 1992.
\textsuperscript{17} Rajya Sabha Committee on Petitions, \textit{Hundred and Fifth Report}, (New Delhi: Rajya Sabha Secretariat, August 14, 1997), p. 7.
60s is around 30,000. These refugees were settled in Arunachal Pradesh in consultation with the State Administration under a definite plan of rehabilitation. No reports have been received regarding involvement of these refugees in anti-national activities. The presence of these refugees in the areas has also not resulted so far in any major law and order problem…A Central Team which visited Arunachal Pradesh in 1982 to study the problems of these refugees expressed the view that the grant of citizenship would introduce an element of responsible social behaviour in these refugees. Being “new migrants”, viz., refugees from Bangladesh who came to India between 1964 and 1971 (March 25, 1971), they are eligible to the grant of citizenship. Further, a very large proportion of these refugees would have been born in India, therefore, would be automatically entitled to the grant of citizenship.

Keeping the above in view, there is no question of deporting these refugees from the State of Arunachal Pradesh. The general public in the State of Arunachal Pradesh will have to be convinced that the burden of rehabilitation of these refugees will have to be shared by the country as a whole including Arunachal Pradesh.”

The statement of the Union Minister underscores two important aspects: first, the Chakma issue became politically more significant than ever before with the Centre’s declaration of granting citizenship to the Chakmas, and second, the issue has become a potential ground for party politics in Arunachal Pradesh.

On March 4, 1992, the then opposition leader in the Lok Sabha L. K. Advani wrote a letter to the Home Minister S. B. Chavan in which he said, “I fail to understand why Chakmas living in Arunachal Pradesh are being treated differently when the Chakmas living in Assam, Tripura and Mizoram have been given recognition as Scheduled Tribes. This is unfair and unjust…I shall be grateful if you could see that due justice is given to the Chakmas living in Arunachal Pradesh?”

On March 31, 1992, Somnath Chatterjee, a member of Parliament wrote a letter to the then Prime Minister of

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18 Letter D. O. No. 12/16/92/-MZ, Minister of State for Home and Parliamentary Affairs, India, North Block, New Delhi, September 23, 1992.
India, P. V. Narasimha Rao, stating that the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh are facing serious difficulties in the matter of employment and educational facilities. He earnestly requested the Prime Minister to consider the appeal of the Chakmas sympathetically.\(^{20}\)

On April 8, 1992, the Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao, replied to Somnath Chatterjee that he had received his letter enclosed with a representation of the Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh. The Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao, stated in the reply that he had asked the Home Minister to look into the matter.\(^{21}\)

In September, 1992, the Peoples Rights Organisation (PRO) in Delhi presented a report on “The Question of Indian Citizenship Rights of the Stateless Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh,” to the Government of India and in relation to that the PRO also staged a ‘dharna’ in Delhi protesting against the alleged atrocities over the Chakmas by the local Singhphos, the Tangsas, the Nishis, the AAPSU, the Arunachal Pradesh Police (APP), and the Government of Arunachal Pradesh.\(^{22}\)

On December 3, 1992, the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh witnessed a furor over Jacob’s statement. The former opposition leader from the PPA, Wanglat Lowangcha who joined the Congress after the elections of 1984, called upon the attention of the House by saying, ‘the day is not far when Chakmas will become members of our Assembly’ and soon their growing population will create problems for tribal identity in the State. The former Congress Minister, Mukut Mithi, blamed the

\(^{20}\) Letter of Somnath Chatterjee, Member of Parliament, to the Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, New Delhi, dated March 31, 1992.

\(^{21}\) Letter of P. V. Narasimha Rao, Prime Minister of India, Government of India, to Somnath Chatterjee, Member of Parliament, Leader of CPI (M), Lok Sabha, New Delhi April 8, 1992.

\(^{22}\) Peoples’ Rights Organization (PRO), *The Question of Indian Citizenship Rights of the Stateless Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh*, (New Delhi, September, 1992), p. 15
Central government for delaying the deportation of the refugees. The Home Minister, Neelam Taram said that Chakmas are detrimental to the State. Shri Gegong Apang, Chief Minister, said that the East Bengal Frontier Regulation Act 1873 was to be enforced. The Chief Minister further added that a corrigendum must be given by the Union Minister, M. M. Jacob because granting citizenship to the Chakma refugees might lead the youth of the State to taking up arms to check the inflow of Chakmas. 23

Over the time, Gegong Apang became most influential leader of the Congress in Arunachal Pradesh and managed to rule the State almost uninterruptedly since the State was introduced to electoral politics in 1977 and 1978. In the Assembly debate of December 3, 1992, Gegong Apang argued that the State Government in particular and people in general could not reconcile with the frequent pressure from the Centre to absorb the Chakmas in the local milieu. The people here have been urging the Centre to send back those refugees and are apprehensive of demographic imbalances and serious socio-political implications. The Congress government in the State has adopted a few resolutions during the last decade, urging the Centre to deport these refugees either to their native land in Bangladesh or to any other part of the country. A delegation led by him submitted a memorandum to the Centre, highlighting the various implications of this problem. The Centre was, however silent and non-committal on the subject, since it was also in a dilemma, as no other state would accept them. The refugee issue was frequently raised in the State Assembly and several resolutions were already adopted demanding the deportation of these refugees from the State. Our party is under tremendous pressure from all sides and is compelled to move resolutions by voice votes.

The party had already registered objections to the Central team which visited the State earlier in 1982.\textsuperscript{24}

Given the anti-Chakma sentiment already flourished by the AAPSU movement as examined in the second chapter, the centrality of the Chakma issue as political capital further intensified in the party politics of Arunachal Pradesh before the Elections to be held in 1995. Since the 1980 Assembly elections, Gegong Apang had been using the AAPSU platform as support base for mass mobilization.\textsuperscript{25} As discussed in the Second Chapter, on the eve of the elections to be held on March 11, 1995, P. V. Narasimha Rao, the Prime Minister of India was scheduled to visit the capital to address a campaign meeting in favour of his party candidates. On January 25, 1995, the AAPSU launched “Quit Certificate Movement” against indecisive stand of the Central Government on the deportation of the Chakmas. The AAPSU opposed the visit of the Prime Minister and called a ten-hour bandh in the State. The reason for calling the bandh was that the Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao refused to meet the AAPSU delegation during their ‘Delhi Chalo Movement’ (Delhi March) in 1994. When asked about that, the Prime Minister said he was not informed about the AAPSU delegation.\textsuperscript{26} However, the Prime Minister assured from his personal level to find an amicable solution to the Chakma issue soon.

During the 1995 elections, the election manifesto of the Congress was mainly centered around the Chakma issue and the boundary dispute with Assam which were

\textsuperscript{24} For details see, “Chakma issue in Arunachal Assembly, Government reiterates demand for immediate repatriation,” \textit{The Sentinel}, September 26, 1993.
\textsuperscript{25} Sanjoy Hajarika, “The Chakmas’ flight to nowhere,” \textit{The Indian Express}, New Delhi, October 17, 1994.
focused even during the Prime Minister’s campaign programmes. The other contesting parties, the Janata Dal (JD), the Janata Party (JP), the Bharatya Janata Party (BJP), and the Independents all pledged to the people to resolve the Chakma issue once they come to power. The main regional party of the State, the PPA, joined the Janata Dal in 1989. The peoples’ verdict again came in favour of the Congress and Gegong Apang having elected with absolute majority with 43 seats in the 60 member Assembly. The Independents won 4, the Janata Dal won 3, and the Janata Party got 2, while the BJP returned with nil. In Table 3.5, the position of different contesting political parties in the 1995 Assembly elections has been shown.

Table 3.5 Position of Different Political Parties in Assembly Elections, 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested</th>
<th>Seats won</th>
<th>Percentage of votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janata Party</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>15.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janata Dal</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>17.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent (59)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>26.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Considering the serious nature and complexity of the Chakma issue, an All Party Legislative meeting was held on September 6, 1995, under the Chairmanship of Honorable Chief Minister, Geong Apang, in which it was decided to organize a Peoples’ Referendum Rally in Rajiv Gandhi Stadium at Naharlagun on September 20, 1995 demanding immediate deportation of the Chakma and Hajong refugees from the State. After the rally, a-six point resolution was passed on the demand of deportation of
refugees. In the Rally Chief, Minister, Gegong Apang and his party members said that they would resign from the primary membership of the Congress if the Centre did not take measures over their appeal to deport the Chakmas from Arunachal Pradesh.

Again on December 21, 1995, the debate on Chakma issue took place in the Second Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh. The Janata Dal legislator, T. C. Teli made an intervention on the Chakma issue demanding ratification of the resolution taken on September 20, 1995 vis-à-vis the Chakma issue. He reiterated his persuasion with the Central leaders in Delhi like S. R. Bomai, V. P. Singh and Rambilas Paswan to do something on the Chakma issue. The Janata Party had the same stand. To keep some clarification on records, the Chief Minister, Gegong Apang rose and said that all the parties, 60 members of the Assembly and the people of Arunachal Pradesh are inseparable on the Chakma issue. But he requested all the members of the Assembly to wait until the Supreme Court judgment to be given on the Chakma issue soon and explained the provision in rule 123 of the Procedure and Conduct of Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly that it was not permissible to take further resolution on an issue pending in the Supreme Court.

Chakma issue and Formation of Arunachal Congress

The Arunachal Congress (AC) was formed in September 1996 by the then Chief Minister, Gegong Apang and is said to be the direct outcome of the Peoples’ Referendum Rally of September 20, 1995 which was organized for demanding immediate deportation of the Chakma and Hajong refugees from Arunachal Pradesh.

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29 Ibid., p. 77.
his first press conference after the swearing-in ceremony, Gegong Apang said his new party’s policy would be to deport the Chakma and Hajong refugees from the state without creating a human problem. The indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh had high expectations on him and the party. As stated earlier, the Chief Minister, Gegong Apang, declared in the Peoples’ Referendum Rally on September 20, 1995, at Naharlagun, that he and his party members would resign from the primary membership of their party if the demand for the deportation of the Chakmas was not accepted by Delhi.\(^{30}\) The Rally was organized with the initiative Gegong Apang himself because he was losing popular support for not being able to bring a solution to the Chakma issue.

The creation of the Arunachal Congress is also a direct result of Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao’s failure to resolve the Chakma issue. As stated, during his visit to the State capital of Itanagar in 1995 to campaign for his party candidates, the Prime Minister, P. V. Narasimha Rao committed to find an amicable solution to the Chakma issue. But nothing happened over a year or so, Gegong Apang revolted against P.V. Narasimha Rao, and then along with his Cabinet colleagues resigned en masse from the Congress party and thereafter formed regional party called Arunachal Congress. Gegong Apang took with him 54 legislators out of total 60 in the Arunachal Assembly to his new party. In the Lok Sabha elections of 1998, the Arunachal Congress won both the seats of Arunachal Pradesh. The party made an alliance with the Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) and became a founding member of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Gegong Apang’s son, Omak Apang who had been elected from the

constituency of Arunachal West, was later made a Central Minister in the NDA Government in Delhi.31

However, the Arunachal Congress did not last long. Soon after the 1998 elections there was an intra-party squabble. Wangcha Rajkumar, who had been elected to the Lok Sabha twice from the Arunachal East Constituency in 1996 and in 1998, alleged that Gegong Apang had resorted to nepotism when his son Omak Apang was made a Central Minister in place of him. As a result, Gegong Apang expelled Wangcha Rajkumar and five other State Ministers who had sided with him. One of the ex-ministers, Mukut Mithi also split from the Congress and formed the Arunachal Congress (Mukut Mithi). The Arunachal Congress of Mukut Mithi was able to gather 40 members of the State Legislative Assembly which eventually led him to form the Government. Initially, both the Arunachal Congress of Gegong Apang and Arunachal Congress of Mukut Mithi supported the Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s NDA Government in the Centre. As Wangcha Rajkumar was not allotted any ministerial posts in the NDA Government, Mukut Mithi and his Arunachal Congress merged with the Indian National Congress ahead of the 1999 Assembly elections.32

On the eve of the mid-term Lok Sabha elections of 1999, Gegong Apang and his Arunachal Congress made an alliance with the BJP. The Arunachal Congress-BJP alliance lost in both Parliamentary Constituencies of Arunachal Pradesh to Indian National Congress (INC) in the mid-term Parliamentary elections of 1999. Gegong Apang’s son Omak Apang lost from Arunachal West Parliamentary Constituency to the Indian National Congress candidate, Jarbom Gamlin who scored 131483 votes (55.87%

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32 Ibid., p. 13.
percent) out of the 235319 total voters in the Constituency while in the Arunachal East Parliamentary Constituency, the BJP candidate, Tapir Gao lost to the INA candidate Wangcha Rajkumar, who scored 110792 votes (58.21 percent) out of the 190344 total voters in the Constituency.

In the Legislative Assembly Elections of 1999, except Gegong Apang, no other candidate was elected from the Arunachal Congress of Gegong Apang and the BJP. About 38 candidates from the Arunachal Congress contested in these elections. The reasons behind the gross defeat of Arunachal Congress-BJP alliance included Gegong Apang’s failure to resolve the Chakma issue and the threat from the National Socialist Council of Nagaland of Isak and Muivah group (NSCN-IM) in the area not to vote for them.\(^\text{33}\)

On the eve of the Lok Sabha elections 2004, another split had taken place in the Indian National Congress (INC) in Arunachal Pradesh. The then President of the INC unit in the State, Kameng Dolo left the INC on July 25, 2003, and thereafter formed another party called the Congress (Kameng Dolo). With the split in the INC and the formation of the Congress (Kameng Dolo), Gegong Apang formed a front called United Democratic Front consisting of himself, Congress (Kameng Dolo), the expelled Congress legislators and two Independents. In total, Gegong Apang was able to gather 41 Legislators with him. On August 3, 2003, Gegong Apang formed the Government and was sworn in as the Chief Minister of the State. On August 30, 2003, Gegong Apang joined the BJP along with 41 Members of the Legislative Assembly. On Gegong

Apang’s joining the BJP, Arunachal Pradesh became the first BJP ruled State Government in the North East.\(^{34}\)

The Arunachal Congress earlier formed by Gegong Apang did, however, continue to exist as a party even after its founder, Gegong Apang had joined the BJP. On the eve of the 2004 Lok Sabha Elections, the Arunachal Congress called for a boycott of the elections as a protest against the enrollment of Chakma and Hajong refugees as voters in the electoral rolls. Finally, the Arunachal Congress decided to contest the Lok Sabha elections of 2004 in alliance with Indian National Congress. However, The Arunachal Congress-INC alliance lost in both the Parliamentary Constituencies of Arunachal Pradesh.\(^{35}\)

**Chakma issue and Political Parties after 2009**

In 2009 Assembly Elections, the Congress came to power in Arunachal Pradesh by with a two-third majority. Dorjee Khandu became the new Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh. The Election Manifestos of the Congress and other political parties in the 2009 Assembly Elections pledged for development, security and peace in Arunachal Pradesh. The Chakma issue was not included in these manifestoes like before. However, on August 12, 2010, Chief Minister Dorjee Khandu wrote to the Election Commission of India requesting it to reinvestigate the inclusion of Chakmas and Hajongs as voters in the electoral rolls. He also constituted a nine-member high level committee under the Chairmanship of a representative of the Union Home Ministry in June 2010 to study the Chakma and Hajong settlement report.\(^{36}\)


\(^{35}\) Ibid., p. 13.

Table 3.6 Role of Political Parties in relation to the Chakma issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Role of Political Parties</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Speak in favor of the Chakma people</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Use the Chakma issue for political mobilization</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Keep the Chakma issue alive for political interest</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Raise the Chakma issue only around elections</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>All of the above except number 1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Any other: political parties played double standards over the Chakma problem</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 3.6, No respondents expressed that political parties spoke in favor of the Chakmas. 26 percent of the respondents said that political parties rather used the Chakma issue for political mobilization pledging that they would resolve the issue once they come to power. 24 percent expressed that the political parties kept the issue alive to make political benefit out of the Chakma issue while 30 percent said that political parties raised the issue only during the elections. 7 percent of the respondents agreed with all of the above views. However, another 13 percent of the respondents said that political parties played double standards over the Chakma problem, for example, when they failed to resolve the issue, they put the blame on the Centre.

Going by the development in party politics in the state as discussed in this chapter, it is clear that the Chakma citizenship issue not only brought changes in the
nature of party politics in Arunachal Pradesh but also led to the creation of a regional political party in the State namely the Arunachal Congress. Prior to the emergence of Chakma issue in party politics, it was the development issue which was seen to have created the first regional political party namely, the Peoples’ Party of Arunachal in 1977.