In Search of Citizenship.

Chakmas Between Law and Ethnicity in South Asia.

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Budapest, 31.03.2022.

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the intersectional dynamics of citizenship, ethnicity and belonging. Taking the migration in the northeast region of India to focus, the project explores the question of citizenship among Chakmas, an ethnic Buddhist tribal community from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT, Bangladesh) who settled in the North-eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, India. For more than half a century, Chakmas are temporarily settled in Arunachal without citizenship. Arunachal Pradesh has a special status under the law (Bengal Regulation Act, 1873) to protect the local ethnic communities from "outsiders" such as Chakmas, which also restricts the movement of other Indian nationals to and in the state. This special status complicates the idea of belonging and political membership in the region. In this framework, Chakmas' quest for citizenship is looked through two aspects; nation-state belonging (citizenship) and ethnic cultural belonging (identity as Arunachalese/part of Arunachal Pradesh) and the relational aspect between them. With thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between October 2016-November 2017 as the primary source of data collection, this study explores the questions of belonging and citizenship for Chakmas vis-à-vis the ways in which they relate to neighbouring local communities socially, economically, and politically. Through the process of Chakmas becoming/ searching for citizenship, the study brings out the ambiguities and limitations of both nation-state belonging and ethnic belonging in the region.

Acknowledgement

The years that have gone into making this thesis, have been some of the most eventful years of my life. I have grown and expanded my horizons in ways that I had not imagined prior to beginning this journey. The credit for all this goes to people who have journeyed alongside me, through thick and thin.

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Introduction

> It occurs to me that we may get trouble between the Mizos and the Chakmas in the Mizo district. These Chakmas would be quite suitable people to go into the Tirap Division of NEFA where there is easily found vacant land in the area about which you and I have often spoken.
>
> -Vishnu Sahay, Governor of Assam in 1964[1].

(Letter to the Chief Minister of Assam regarding the issue of settling Chakma refugees from Bangladesh in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, India)

Borders and borderlands are critical to the idea of a nation state because they distinguish its political and geographical space. Yet, borders have a life of their own, often producing through- "extra-national political and social phenomenona" an ambiguous category of "extra-national lives", like refugees and stateless people (Balibar, 2005). The existence of these people poses a threat to the sovereign power of the state and the locals, for whom it becomes more difficult to classify and place them under the national order of things (Malkki, 1995). When the locals are indigenous ethnic communities, it complicates the issue further. It is in such a context that the above remarks were made by the erstwhile Governor of Assam, back in 1964. It is quite remarkable that the situation alluded to in the letter continues to endure to this day - the passage of time having only served to convolute the issue further.

The rise of postcolonial nation states in South Asia has created a large number of refugees and stateless people. The territory of British India was partitioned into independent India and Pakistan, and later Bangladesh. These partitions resulted in certain groups of people losing their identity and the right to belong anywhere. As Arendt (1979) observed, the place of origin and nationality of these people changed year to year. These stateless groups remain 'unwanted' in the borders of the nation-states. The ethnic tribe of Chakmas in the Indian state of Arunachal

[1] (D.o. Letter No.GA-71/64, White papers, State of Assam 1964).

Pradesh is one such stateless group. It struggles between its Bangladeshi origin and Indian residence without official recognition from either state.

Chakmas are ethnic Buddhist tribes originally from the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. After the formation of the Bangladeshi state, due to political persecution of minority Buddhists, the Chakmas were forced to move from the hills and seek asylum in India (Samad, 2002; Singh, 2010). In 1964, the Indian government provided them temporary settlement in the less densely populated state of Arunachal Pradesh. India and Bangladesh inked an agreement (the Indira-Mujib pact of 1972) that made the people who had migrated to India before 1972 eligible for Indian citizenship. However political instability and delayed implementation have rendered the pact null and void, leaving more than 66,000 people stateless.

Arunachal Pradesh is home to several ethnic tribes that enjoy special protection under the law and the presence of refugees is seen as threat to their ethnic identity and culture. The 'local' (or 'resident') ethnic tribes assert their identity by not allowing others to occupy their territorial space, thus rendering the Chakmas unwanted (Singh, 2010). Furthermore, the Indian state did not carry forward the settlement policy and provisions promised to the Chakmas, leaving them at risk. The state, in fact, has stopped issuing birth certificate and other documents[2] (CRG Report, 2011) - in a way refusing to acknowledge their presence in the state. Chakmas non-existence in the official records makes it difficult to understand their position within the nation state and the framework of governance that the state follows in their respect.

This study seeks to examine the position of refugees and stateless people/subjects in the state system. It will explore the same in the context of their relations with the state and the indigenous population. Further, the study will delve into the nature of the relationship between this political and administrative ambiguity vis a vis the local relationships between the ethnic tribes and these refugees.

[2] Ration cards and small trade licenses were confiscated during 196 Student agitation. http://revolutionarydemocracy.org/rdv2n1/chakma.htm

In order to contextualise the current political and ethnic situation of refugees (Chakmas) and locals in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, it is important to understand the historical and geo-political position of both Chakmas and the local ethnic communities in Arunachal Pradesh.

Brief History of Chakma Migration

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) has witnessed many major empires during the past three centuries. The geographical region was once under the rule of Mughal imperialism during the 19th century. Later, in the 19th century, CHT became a territory under British colonial rule. Part of Islamic East Pakistan from 1947 to 1971, today CHT is within the national borders of Bangladesh. As is evident from this tumultuous history, CHT is a contested territory. This land and its people, the Chakmas, are interwoven together as one — where land and identity has a hybrid history throughout centuries.

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) consist of three districts; Rangamati, Khagracheni and Banderban. These three districts cover 10% of the total land area of Bangladesh but only 1% of the total population. 350,000 Chakmas are estimated to live in this area. CHT has always been a geographically difficult terrain. This led to the rule of both the Mughals and the British taking a long time to reach these far-flung areas. And when they did finally arrive in the area, their hold remained limited and feeble at best.

These rulers viewed the Chittagong Hill Tracts as the trade gateway to Burma and other southeast Asian countries. During their rule, the Mughal empire traded cotton with the Chakmas in the hills in exchange for rice and other valuable local goods. During the British colonial rule, Chittagong was more accessible. This was unlike in the Mughal period, where trade was the only interaction between the Chittagong Hills and the plains. Earlier colonial notes describe Chakmas as being more developed in terms of social formation and structure compared to their neighbours (Serajuddin, 1984).

Chittagong was home to three circles of people, namely the Chakmas, the Bohmogs and the Mong people. They were collectively known as the three chiefs of Chittagong Hills, representing the three tribes. The Chakmas were ruled by the lineage of Chakma kings, with

Rangamati as the capital. The last king was Harish Chandra Chakma before the British took over[3].

In 1874 the British administration took the title of "Raja[4]" (King) away from Chakmas and appointed Harish Chandra as the "chief" of the tribe. Taking away the royal title of King from the Chakmas were seen as an act of colonial power restricting the autonomy of the tribes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. During the 1860s, Chittagong Hill Tracts acted as the border of the British empire. The forest was taken control of the British and the local heads no longer had any say in the regional governance of the region.

Lineage of Chakmas could be traced back to the Mongol ethnic groups (Serajuddin, 1984). However, despite their association, Chakmas claim themselves to be part of the north Indian clan of Kshatriyas (warrior clan). While the claim is unverifiable, Chakmas aligned themselves with the Indian origin more than their geographical neighbours. Until the 1940s CHT was part of colonial India and demanded to be part of India during the partition. Due to its geographical position and importance of a potential space for hydroelectric project in East Pakistan (present Bangladesh), CHT was annexed to East Pakistan. Coincidently, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) noted that the CHT is suitable for the Katpai hydroelectric project as the population density is low on the hills compared to the plains, thus accelerating the move of Chakmas from Chittagong region (Nepram, 2003). Chakmas also aligned with Islamic linkages later on (after independence) for political reasons (Serajuddin, 1984)[5]. Compared to other ethnic communities in the region, they had a relatively settled life along with practicing jhum (shifting) cultivation[6].

[3] Prior to the British rule the interaction between the Chakmas and Mughals were restricted to trade and taxes. It did not interfere with the political aspects of the Chittagong Hills. It is only during the British rule, the interference was direct, and it changed the status quo of the Chakmas king. The British also actively changed the administrative structure in the Hills.

[4] Raja meaning King is a customary ruling title among all ethnic tribes in the region. While they were not as wealthy and sovereign like mainland, they did have authority over the territory and cultural practices in the tribe.

[5] Chakmas would connect this linkage through Nawab shaista Khan army marching through hill region in 1670 and the soldiers married hill woman of that time (Serajuddin, 1984)

[6] Jhum meaning shifting cultivation is a common practice of agriculture in the South and Southeast Asia hill regions. In Jhum, the hill slopes are slashed and burned, removing the trees and other vegetation for cultivation. It is done on rotational basis between the hills. It is the oldest form of cultivation in the region. I discuss in detail about jhum and other forms of agriculture in Chapter 3.

Chittagong Hill Tracts was not only the natural border for British India but also ideological bridge between Myanmar and India[7]. During the peak of British empire, Chittagong Hill Tracts' regulation was introduced in 1900. It was popularly known as "the CHT Manual". It introduced the permit system and reserved forest status for the Hill region. The manual also prohibited land transfer from tribes to non-tribal community. In 1920, the British administration passed a regulation which made CHT an excluded area. This resulted in the entry of outsiders becoming heavily monitored[8]. Manual policies on governance were similar to the Bengal regulation Act (1873) which was used to govern Arunachal Pradesh and Northeast frontier region during that time. CHT Manual and Bengal Regulation Act both show that the region is culturally and politically perceived to be similar to each other[9]. This similarity is later reflected in the temporary settlement of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh.

During the independence in 1947, CHT remained as the only non-Muslim majority in the region and CHT became an independent district of India. But within few days it was declared to be transferred to East Pakistan Administration. At the time of partition, the hill people who are 90% Buddhists (one of the largest groups of ethnic minorities) voluntarily requested to be included in the secular India rather than Muslim majority Pakistan (Jhala, 2013). The then British Viceroy Mountbatten and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel from Indian National Congress agreed to include Chittagong Hill Tracts as the part of Independent India. Pro Pakistan politicians argued for the annexation with East Pakistan. This was because River Karanapuli, the only source suitable for a hydroelectric dam project, was located in the CHT. It was held that this project would greatly contribute to the building of new nation (Jhala, 2013).

In 1971, when Bangladesh separated from Pakistan, one of the initial policy changes by the government was the enactment of a key constitutional amendment act. This served to take away the special status of Chittagong Hill Tracts provided under the CHT Manual. The removal of special status paved the way for developmental projects in the region without any legal

[7] Singphos the 'local community' in East arunachal Pradesh region of Diyun and Miao are originally from the Chin state of Myanmar. They still have Chin- Singpho cultural interaction between these two groups.
[8] CHT manual gave administrative authorities unlimited powers over administration and judiciary in the hills, unlike in any other districts in Bangladesh. The manual was powerful instrument used the colonial administration to subjugate the tribesman, grabbing lands from Chakmas, controlling the trade and exploiting the hill people without any legal interference (Montu, 1980).
[9] CHT manual directly involves in the control of region and movement of people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, while Bengal Regulation Act restricts the entry of others in the region.

resistance. The country's largest dam project at that time 'Katpai Dam' was built in the Chittagong region. The construction of the dam is one of the main reasons for the displacement of Chakmas from CHT. The rise of the Muslim majority coupled with Bengali becoming the main language led to an alienation of other cultures and languages in the country. This only hastened the forced departure of the Chakmas.

Arrival and Settlement of Chakmas in India

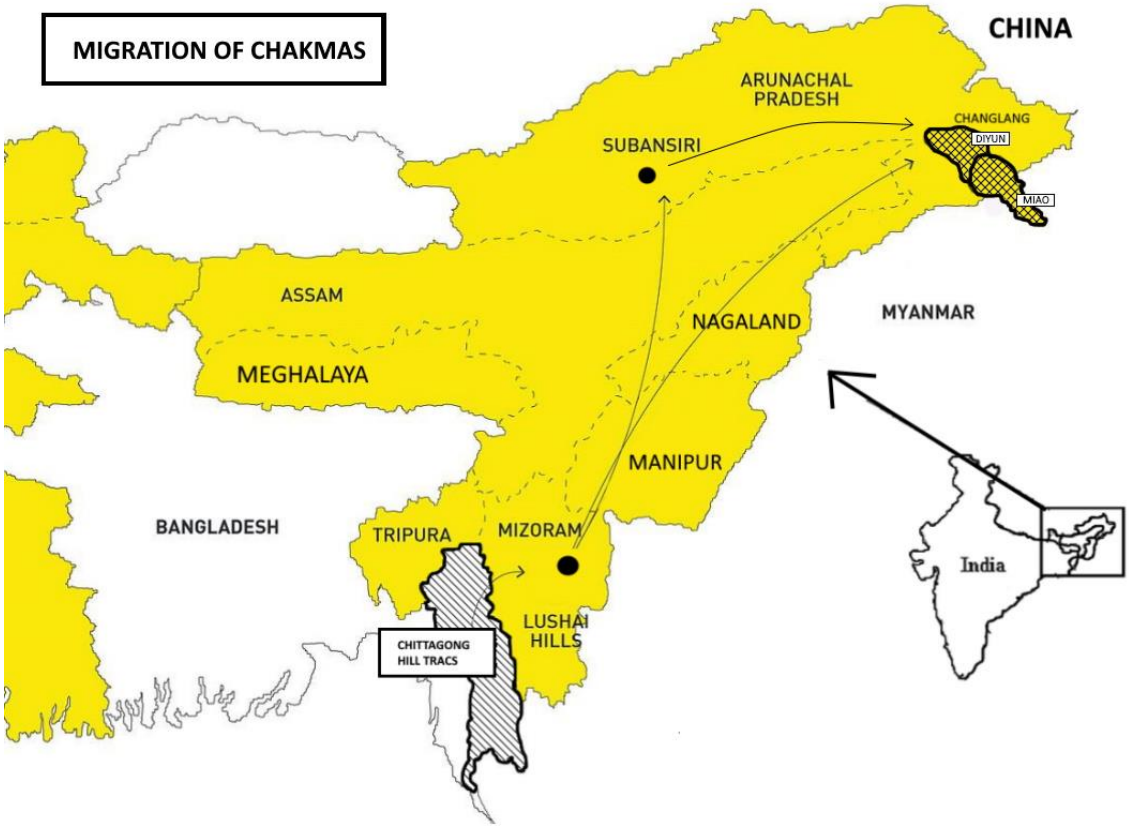

Figure 1: Map of Migration of the Chakmas

In 1964, loss of land and status led to Chakmas from the Chittagong Hill Tracts arriving at the present state of Mizoram. This was the nearest entry point to India. A total of 2478 families with approximately 14,888 Chakmas migrated to India during this time (CRG Report, 2011). The temporary settlement in Mizoram was not seen as an ideal condition for Chakmas as the state was already facing issues with the local Mizo community there. The space required to settle Chakmas without disturbing the local communities in Mizoram was a major issue. The

then Governor of Assam, Vishnu Sahay, wrote to the Chief Minister of Assam[10] B.P Chaliha, He mentioned the possible conflict between the Chakmas and Mizos in the region and stated that it is better to settle them in North East Frontier Agency (NEFA, present day Arunachal Pradesh).

> It occurs to me that we may get trouble between the Mizos and the Chakmas in the Mizo district. These Chakmas would be quite suitable people to go into the Tirap Division of NEFA where there is easily found vacant land in the area about which you and I have often spoken. (D.o. Letter No.GA-71/64, White papers).

This letter made a major impact on the lives of Chakmas for the next five decades. It determined their settlement and temporary status in the state of Arunachal Pradesh then. The letter served as a catalyst for a series of events, the ramifications of which are being felt by the Chakmas to date.

Soon after the decision to settle the Chakmas in the Tirap district (current divided Changlang district) "political officers[11]" were sent to check on the prospective settlement of Chakmas between Namsai and Miao. Political officer U. Chakma was appointed to look over this issue. U. Chakma met with various tribal leaders of Miao region, mostly Singpho tribesman. He tried to convince them to allow Chakmas to settle near Namphai. While few headsmen of local villages welcomed the decision to settle Buddhists nearby, few of the headmen were strongly against the settlement.

> As there is no uniform and unanimous agreement between the local tribals, we will not be able to allow Chakma refugees to settle near Namphai in view of the Administration's instruction. Besides, if we allow the refugees settle against the will of local tribes, we may have to face law and order problems in the future. (D.o.No. NESG/63, White papers)

To make a compromise, U. Chakma advised the governor about the legal and ethnic issues in the future if Chakmas were settled in the mentioned place. He recommended that they be givena

[10] Arunachal Pradesh was then part of North East Frontier Agency which was under the governance of Governor and Chief Minister of Assam.

[11] Political officers were initially appointed during the colonial period, who would advise the colonial administration with political dealings with the frontier region hill tribes. Treaties between the hill tribes and colonial administration were negotiated by the political officers. Later during the post-colonial times, they were heavily involved in forming the social policy for hill tribes. Verner engaged with the frontier tribes as political advisor in NEFA. He also believed political officers are essential in connecting the hill tribes with mainland India.

temporary settlement in the area after Miao.. That specific area had minimal local population and covered by vast tracts of forest cover. In his letter to the Governor (D.O. No. NESG/63) he also mentioned the willingness of Chakmas to settle down at the remote uncharted place after Miao[12].

Subsequently, the Chakmas were settled in the forest area between Miao and Namsai region, This later became the present Diyun block where the local villages were few. The decision also strictly forbid Chakmas to be settled anywhere near the local villages of Singphos. Each family was given five acres of land for cultivation and ration for a certain period to support themselves. Due to the opposition of local tribes, this settlement was seen as a temporary solution for Chakmas.

The role of the political officer U. Chakma is discussed vehemently till today by the local communities in Arunachal Pradesh. Mr. P. Singpho, is a local activist involved in meticulously gathering colonial and post-independence government White Papers in defence of locals in East Arunachal Pradesh and against the Chakmas. He notes that the role of U. Chakma in bringing the Chakmas to Diyun is immeasurable: "*He leveraged all the political power under the capacity of Political Officer to bring them here, as he is also one of them"*. Most locals believe that as the political officer to NEFA administration and Governor, he was able to convince the authorities to settle down the Chakmas illegally in Arunachal Pradesh. In all the legal proceedings against Chakma citizenship from 1990s till date, the reference and involvement of U. Chakma is always highlighted. His ethnic background as a Chakma is one of the main reasons why his policy suggestions are viewed with suspicion and are considered to be partial towards the Chakmas.

The plight of Chakmas was a consequential effect of the arbitrary partition of colonial British rule, which didn't pay any attention towards the locals and the geographical considerations at that time. The subsequent post-colonial politics of newly formed Muslim majority Bangladesh had played a critical role in the plight of Chakmas. Chakmas who are a minority Buddhist ethnic community feared political persecution and the construction of dam were critical in their plight to India.

[12] Later this region would become Diyun circle, the centre of Chakma settlement in Changlang district.

Situating Northeast India

In order to understand the ethnic, regional and citizenship issue of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh, it is essential to understand the geopolitical situation of northeast India in general. It is also pertinent to contextualize its position in the political boundaries of India and to comprehend the complex nature of socio-cultural politics within the region. The struggle of Chakmas for citizenship is deeply intertwined with the political struggle of belonging and national participation of Northeast India as a whole. Exploring the geo-politics of Northeast India through a historical approach will effectively unravel the major hurdles faced by Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh in their struggle for belonging and becoming a part of Arunachal Pradesh.

Northeast India is a general term which comprises of eight states namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and recently added Sikkim (during the northeast council in 2002). Five of the seven states (Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Assam) were part of Assam state, two (Manipur and Tripura) were indirectly ruled by princely states in colonial times (Baruah, 2001). After India gained independence, they were treated as union territories. North-eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971 created and changed the status of these territories into full-fledged states. The regulation also ensured that the rights and identity of ethnic tribes remained protected by giving special status regard to land and political participation. Northeast region is known for its cultural and ethnic diversity. This is thanks to 101 scheduled tribes (i.e. recognised tribes) calling this region home. And the fact that more than 110 languages are spoken within the seven states fondly referred to as the "Seven sisters" (Vandenhelsken and Karlsson, 2016).

The frontier region as it was called by the colonial British administration, borders China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and Nepal. Due to its ethnic and geographical significance, there are different regional provisions under the constitution to protect the ethnic status of the region. The states other than Assam were formed after Independence based on the ethnic majority and quest for regional autonomy within the region. Their demand for an independent state was inspired by the fact that if Muslims could claim a sperate state on the basis of distinct religious identity, the tribes of frontier hills could make similar claims based on their history, culture and ethnic identity (Phukon, 1996). Along with this, north-eastern hill tribes did not

identify with mainstream India. They did not have the need to be part of India prior to British rule in the region. In order to protect their distinct identity and culture from being caught in between the majority Hindu India and majority Muslim Bangladesh, each major ethnic community in the hills demanded their own autonomous states. The fear among ethnic communities stemmed from the fact that there would be an influx of Assamese from the plains after independence which would create crisis among the ethnic communities in the hills. Phukon (1996) in his work mentions that the desire for independent autonomous space has been in the agenda long before the independence and it is not just a post-independence demand.

Another reason for ethnic nationalism among the north-eastern states is the historical negligence of economic development in the region. The demands for regional autonomy were neglected in the pre- independence era and this continues to be the case even post-independence. There is a lingering sense among people here that the Indian state does not give much importance to their ethnic identity. All this, coupled with the consistent failure to address burning economic issues and exploitation of natural resources at the cost of "backward" sections in the name of development, has pushed the ethnic groups to form militant groups. The demands for independent states (like Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur) despite the statehood are due to this regional negligence and fear of ethnic identity within the region.

Arunachal Pradesh, previously known as North East Frontier Agency, was the last region to gain statehood. It was governed under the rule of the Governor of Assam in consultation with the chief minister of Assam till 1972, when Arunachal Pradesh was given statehood.

North East Frontier Agency (NEFA)

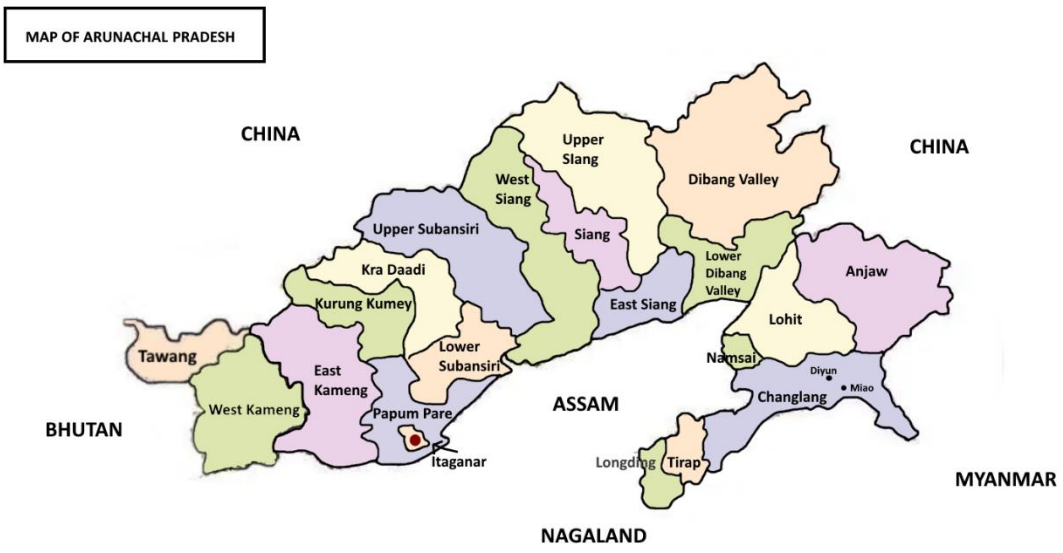

Figure 2: Map of Arunachal Pradesh

North East Frontier Agency was the uncharted final frontier of Colonial India. It was the place where expansion of colonial power had a significant hurdle in terms of geography, administration and governance of the region. In 1838 when the British took over Assam, they also took the control over the hill regions around the Assam state. Taking over the control of hill region created a unique problem of controlling the hill tribes in the region. The British government described the interaction with hill tribes as rather "unruly" and aggressive in their approach (Burman, 1963). According to the colonial administration, there was no line of authority and hill tribes are simply "ungovernable". They blamed the previous Ahom dynasty for the lack of clear control over the hill tribes. The hill region surrounding the Assam state was named as North East Frontier Tracts (NEFT) - present day Arunachal Pradesh is a major part of it. The colonial administration contacted individual tribes and made treaties and pacts delineating administration and taxation schemes. These pacts were limited to major hill tribes within the reach of Assam borders. The smaller ethnic tribes evaded the direct rule.

To further the administrative measures in the NEFT region, the Bengal Regulation Act was passed in 1874. This Act focused particularly on the movement of the people in the NEFT region. The Inner Line Permit (ILP) was introduced through this Act. It made a clear distinction

between the hill tribes and the plain people. Inner Line Permit made two clear points in its objective. One, the clear demarcation of a certain group of people as 'unworthy to govern' - they were noted as unruly and the lack of clear structure among them meant that taxation would also be problematic. Second, to monitor the movement of people between two sets of people - the governable and the ungovernable people. This segregation would play a critical role later in the formation of ethnic identity, a sense of belonging and alienation, long after independence. Thanks to the Inner Line Permit, anyone who needed to go through the NEFT region needed a permit to enter inside. Movement of permit holders would be tracked till the exit from the hill region. ILP also forbids people from the plains from settling down in the NEFT region.

After independence in 1947, the Indian administration had a massive task of handling the NEFT area. The Frontier Tracts were renamed as Frontier Agency or North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The task of formulating a social policy for the hill tribes of NEFA was entrusted to British Anthropologist Elwin Verrier. His work *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1959) is the foundational text to postulate policies towards NEFA region. The then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru wrote the foreword for the book and credited the need for such scholarly work in formulating a policy not only for hill tribes, but for all tribes in India. Verrier also functioned as a political advisor for Tribal affairs in NEFA region. *A Philosophy for NEFA* contributed towards building a general perception of tribal culture. It also provided a framework for policy changes required in the region in the immediate as well as the long-term future.

Verrier strongly recommended the need for safeguarding the region's tribal culture and the rights of the people there. The book brought attention to the economic and community health situation of tribal communities who still followed traditional methods. The recommendations of his work found resonance in Prime Minister Nehru's "*Panchasheel*" (five fundamental principles) for the administration of tribal areas. The major policy implementation tenets that emerged from Verrier's work included a) refraining from over administering these areas, b) tribal, land and forest rights of the people should be respected, and c) the development of NEFA region should not be calculated by statistics. Rather it should be planned based on the quality of human character that is evolved.

Verrier was against allowing outsiders into the tribal territory. He believed that only trained professionals (anthropologists and bureaucrats) should be allowed for administration and development purposes. *A Philosophy for NEFA* and Verrier gained a lot of attention in Arunachal Pradesh, where he was described as 'a true friend of Arunachalis'[13]. Later the text would become an important document in protecting the tribal rights and why outsiders should not be allowed inside Arunachal Pradesh.

In 1972 NEFA was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh and listed as Union Territory[14]. By 1987 Arunachal Pradesh was given statehood. The colonial acts and regulations which segregated the hill tribes and termed them as "ungovernable" had taken a different meaning and connection as "protective legislation" within the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The Bengal Regulation Act of 1874, the major act which monitored the movement of people between the hills and plains, had turned into tribal protective legislation.

These developments are reflective of a shift in the perspective of the times as well as the view with which legislations are considered. Former Miao Times (local newspaper) editor and local tribes' activist Mr. P. Singpho quips "Even the British did not disturb our way of life. They passed legislations to safeguard our tribal rights from others (India)". This sentiment is shared throughout the political spectrum in the state. The President of the Students Union would echo this same sentiment later (in Chapter 2). The British who termed them as "unruly" and culturally backward without proper political structure is praised as protector of tribal rights. This transformation and alignment with colonial administration is not through ignorance or accepting the colonial ways. The alignment with British administrative ways and laws are strategic. It is a powerful tool to protect the state from post-colonial administration. Along with

[13] Verrier became a revered figure in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. His ideas of not interfering in the local administration and keeping the outsider's ways from the tribal regions gained popularity among the politicians and people since its earlier days of publication. His birthdays are still commemorated by local newspapers. To take it bit further, a trip to his house in Arunachal Pradesh is described as pilgrimage by certain section of Arunachalis. Various anecdotes of how he was opposed to the settlement of 10,000 Punjabi farmers in 1963 and his staunch stance of keeping the region from outsiders has increased his fame as protector of tribes to sainthood. https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/08/30/verrier-elwin-the-architect-of-nefa-and-defender-of-indian-tribal-people/
https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2022/01/21/verrier-elwin-and-his-contribution-to-nefa/

[14] Union Territories are type of administrative division under the direct governance of Union of India (centrally governed areas). It is usually applied in the places where the population or geographical size is smaller. Union territories do not have independent state governance like other states. It is usually governed by Union government appointed Lieutenant governors.

the political purpose, the segregation and colonial laws also plays a critical role in identity and belonging in Arunachal Pradesh as a state and ethnic space. It is through this perspective that the Inner Line Permit and special status of NEFA is used as safeguard when there is a clash in state and union government policies.

Elwin Verrier's work and the Panchasheel policy developed by Nehru made development the key aspect of state building and integration into pan India. The idea was to inspire the tribal communities to be one with India, along with protecting their ethnic cultures. But the project failed to materialise as tribal development was not unilaterally accepted by various communities (Guyot-Rechard, 2013). The multi-ethnic nature of NEFA and the difficult terrain pose a serious challenge in convincing the communities to be part of these projects. While the developmental agenda and state building did not succeed, the prolonged failure to integrate into the mainland created a sense of self awareness among the ethnic communities. Similar to the strategic acceptance of colonial laws for the protection, NEFA also took the importance of cultural and tribal identity of hill people from the post-colonial state building process. Panchasheel and Verrier's work are recurring themes that are used to defend the unique ethnic identity of Arunachalis, especially during the legal dispute against the Chakmas.

APST and Non- APST Groups in Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes (APST) are state recognised ethnic groups who are indigenous to the state of Arunachal Pradesh. They constitute 68.9% of the total population. There are more than 50 ethnic groups and 25 of them have a population of above 5000 members (Census, 2011). Singphos, the local ethnic group in Diyun, are of one the groups who are less than 5000 in number in the state. APST groups are entitled to land ownership and ethnic claims in the state. Non – APST groups are allowed to reside in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, but they do not have land rights or right to welfare programs in the state. Non -APST includes groups such as Deoris, Adivasis and migrant north Indian communities who are allowed to settle in the state without land claims. Chakmas are considered to be different from Non- APST groups as Non- APST groups are citizens of India. The Chakmas on the other hand, are yet to be granted citizenship.

Diyun and Miao Administrative Structure

Chakmas are predominantly settled in Diyun and Miao circles, located in the eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh. As mentioned earlier, Diyun is the central place for Chakmas. Most

Chakma villages are centred around Diyun. Population of scheduled tribes in the Diyun block is estimated by around 9.5 % which includes Singphos, Khampti and Tangsa ethnic groups (Census Report, 2011). The majority in this area are the Chakmas, with a population estimated to be around 60,000 (CRG Report, 2011) (Singh, 2010).

Miao is a Sub-district place with the population of 25,921. It is the central place for local ethnic groups in the region. Chakma villages are also part of Miao circle/ Subdivision[15]. Miao and Diyun are geographically separated by Nao- Dehing river. In Miao the majority population are Khamptis and Singpho ethnic groups along with Tangsas. The population of Chakmas is less compared to local groups in Miao Sub-division.

State Perspective on Northeast and Arunachal Pradesh

Given its location and geography, 90% of Northeast India shares India's border with other countries. Hence, national security concerns play an outsized role in this region, compared to any other concern (McDule-Ra, 2008). State building to strengthen the borders is the main objective by the Indian state. The presence of military and other subsidiary armed forces in the region is well known. The interaction between the armed forces and the local population is well documented (*refer Baruah, Fernandes, Kikon). Their presence is felt in almost every aspect of life in the region.

The Indian army is given extraordinary powers to handle border issues as well as the counter insurgency operations within the region. This has been accorded to them through the notorious Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) enacted in 1958. AFSPA has been promulgated in all the seven states in the region. It is implemented in "disturbed areas". These are areas where the army has powers to intervene in the controlling of the population without judicial interference (Fernandes, 2004). The military has in its record several human rights violations in the region including rape, murder and disappearances of people in these areas. The presence and violations of armed forces have impacted on the lives of people gravely. It has contributed immensely to the negative perception of Indian state in general. This causes the people of the region to perceive any public policy proposed by the state to be dubious. They approach state

[15] Administrative setup in Arunachal Pradesh is divided into Districts, Sub-districts/divisions and further into Circles with cluster of villages. Miao is Sub-divisional place which is also a circle in the sub- division. Diyun is part of Bordumsa Sub-division

intervention suspiciously and with caution especially when it comes to issues of identity. This is especially the case when it comes to matters related to the recognition of the Chakmas. Any discussion around the settlement of refugees (Chakmas) in Arunachal Pradesh is viewed as a union government initiative that would disrupt the peace and bring in "outsiders" to the region.

Arunachal Pradesh has been a centre for various developmental projects in the region. In the last 15 years, nearly 20 projects including two mega hydroelectric projects on Siang and Sibunsiri rivers were sanctioned. Further, more than 100 small dams were approved for construction. The developmental projects, mainly the multitudes of hydroelectric projects in the state, are estimated to displace several villages and thousands of people in the region. Ironically, Chakmas were displaced by a similar hydroelectric project – the Katpai Dam in Chittagong Hills. The construction of three national highways connecting Assam and Arunachal are presently underway. The famous Sadiya Bridge was also inaugurated in 2020[16] . These developmental discourses prove the states' push to nationalise spaces in this frontier region (Baruah, 2003). While it is pushed through in the name of development, the intention in these border areas is to secure the space and assert dominance in the region.

The agenda of the union government is primarily focused on securing the national border and protecting national interests. All the development projects enumerated above involve heavy investments in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Both the armed forces and the development projects in the region primarily serve national interests rather than regional welfare. The objective to secure the national space has overtaken any other pressing issue in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The Indian state approach towards Northeast India in general and Arunachal Pradesh in particular, is more towards administration and governance than inclusive state building in approach. The state practices symbolic forms of authority, fulfilling the bare minimum in these borderlands. This has taken the form of asserting territorial sovereignty through violence and visible excessive armed forces, and developmental projects for the interest of national economy (Hansen and Stepputat, 2012).

[16] https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/dhola-sadiya-bridge-indias-longest-river-bridge-inaugurated-by-pm-modi/article62071867.ece accessed on 20th March 2022

Situating Northeast India and Zomia

While attempting to situate Northeast India in terms of its geographical and historical aspects, it is but fundamental to place it within the "Zomia" region. Zomia, the region of highlands between the Himalayan massif to the Southeast Asia covering till Indonesia, was initially grouped together as one (Schendel 2002). This grouping had become an important aspect in regional and area studies in South and Southeast Asia. Along with the regional aspect, the long historical isolation, sparse population and dominance by powerful states surrounding them shows a similar shared marginalization among them (Schendel, 2002).

There are two important works on Zomia. One is Schendel's defining work on bringing the hill space around southeast Asia and northeast India together. The other is James Scott's seminal work, Art of Not Being Governed (2009), which has transformed anthropological and political studies in the region. Schendel's view on borderlands and politics of borders especially opened up the boundaries and the hill region for a broader understanding of the space. These works have successfully brought the historically and politically marginalized, geographically alienated peripheral region into the centre of discussion. By doing so, these authors have rendered the region—usually constrained within the scope of ethnicity— to be a fluid intersectional space where national identity and political borders are also important categories. The introduction of Zomia as a aubject in area studies has expanded the understanding of trade and cultural transactions between the complex borders of the nation states in the region (Michaud, 2010). The political nature of the borders demarcating countries apart does limit the understanding of legal and political space in the region. That said, Zomia as an expansive area of study does offer the possibility to view the political and cultural nuances as well as the power relations in a broader perspective.

The idea of bringing Northeast India and Southeast Asia's highlands in the context of social organization and governance have brought forth mixed reviews among Northeast scholars. This is especially the case in the context of James Scott's work *Art of Not Being Governed (2009)* in relation to governance. The relation between the nation-state and the hill tribes of northeast India is highly contested. Scott's narrative of highlanders evading the state through the process of 'self-barbarization' is a deliberate act to remain economically minimalist. In a politically fragmented society it enables avoiding state appropriation and intervention. He goes further to

state that the complexity of elevated hill terrains or what he terms the 'friction of terrains', makes way for runaway fugitives and other communities who want to evade the state. Here I do not take the view of "ungoverned" as given, which is problematic and misleading. Contrary to Scott's idea of 'ungoverned uplands', N.K. Das (2014) argues that projecting highlands as societies of lawless and 'barbarians of choice' would only undermine the social order and kinship-based polity of highlanders. Das points out that contrary to concept of escaping the state from the valley (civilization) there was a rich social and cultural interaction between the highlanders and the valley.

It is important to bring out the political organizational structure of hill tribes and their governance in contrast to the claim that 'civilization' did not reach the hills and the presumption that Zomia was lawless and ungoverned. In the context of Northeast India, the political structure of hill tribes has been sophisticated and had social connections with the valley throughout history. It is during the British rule the idea of "ungovernable spaces/peripheries" were codified and put in practice through various regulations. The discussion about Zomia and surrounding massif focuses more on the shared social and cultural traits of the region and marginality of the highland with relation to nation-state but ignores the role of colonialism in constructing these "ungovernable bodies" and "lawless societies" which rather had serious impact on post-colonial governance in the highlands of northeast region as I have shown in the earlier sections.

The relationship between the hill tribes (highlanders) and the valley has been predominant in most of the northeast region. Clothes and accessories worn by Wanchos were made by the plains of Assam, which clearly shows a form of trade or exchange of goods between these two regions. Historical accounts point that post the harvest season, the tribes of Jaintias, Khasis and other tribes descended to a pre-determined spot in Assam for exchange and barter of goods (Bhagbati, 2009). The Chakmas had trade relation with the Mughals and other Bengal rulers during the pre-colonial times (Jhala 2013). The Ahom kingdom and the hill tribes have a long history of cultural and economic interactions. The hill tribes attacking the valleys for goods which eventually made way for a more developed exchange of goods for rice, are well documented (Luthra, 1971). Recovery of Jaintia king minted sovereigns over the plains and

coin inscriptions of 'lord from the hills' give a different view of hill and valley relations, much contrary to the claims of Scott (Wouters, 2012).

These works provide a clear picture about the political and social structure of hill tribes as well as their economic and social exchange with the valleys. They thus, disprove the presumption that the hill people actively avoided the nation state building or supposedly made themselves "ungovernable" by preferring to be 'stateless and unstructured' societies. It is a fact that trade relations were integral in the connection between hill tribes and the valley society, and they had semi democratic and lineage-based governance system. How, and more importantly when, did they become "ungovernable"? The Zomia area studies focused more on the geographical similarities and ethnic affinity between the hill tribes of the region. Further studies on Zomia are focused on the expansion of the region, like Zomia and Himalayan massif (Schneiderman, 2010) into the area studies.

The idea of differentiating the hill tribes from valley people is created only during the colonial takeover of the region. In the earlier works, the differentiation was more on the economic interaction and warfare for wealth. The social differentiation and serious discussion of differentiation the hill and valley people only became prominent during the colonial annexation of the region (Woulters, 2012). Before colonial times, the binary appears to be socially less relevant. The gradual increase in perception of hill tribes as "savages" only gained momentum during the colonial rule in India. It is witnessed through the various regulations passed in a short period of time to control and restrict the nature of interaction between the hill and valley. Northeast India became one of the most regulated areas in the entire British colonial administration of South Asia[17]. The various acts and regulations passed through this time still has a lasting and continuous impact on the politics and governance of the region. It would be a rather simplistic attempt to point out that colonial administration is the prime reason for the political turmoil in present Northeast India. From the introduction of Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation in 1873 to implementation of present day Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in 1958, the perceived notions of "uncivilized" and "difficult to assimilate" have

[17] The various regulations and acts introduced in the region includes: The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1873, The Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation of 1880, The Assam Forest Regulation Act of 1891, The Chin Hills Regulation Act of 1935 and it is continued in the post-colonial period with The North-eastern areas (re-organisation) Act of 1971.

been propagated. This has gradually reinforced the idea of a people who need constant and continued surveillance for control and governance.

Geopolitics and Cultural Belonging in Zomia

To contextualize and place the social relation between the locals and Chakmas as well as their citizenship question, it is important to have a clear understanding of the geographical (Zomia), political (Indian state) and historical (colonial administration) aspects of the Northeast Indian region.

The citizenship issue of Chakmas in Northeast India offers an inquisitive case to understand the broader aspects of Zomia. The case of Chakmas transcends the present political boundaries of Zomia: while they originate from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, their cultural and religious attributes are closer to those of the Singphos of Arunachal Pradesh (who are originally from the Chin region of Myanmar). Arunachal Pradesh shares borders with China, Myanmar and Bhutan and was the frontier region of British India. Zomia as a category of area studies offers broader scope to understand the political marginalization and the difficulties in assimilating the difficult terrain into the modern nation-state. Despite the generalization about the political system of highlanders, Zomia studies brings out the marginal peripheries to the centre of discussion which is long overdue in the region, especially in the Northeast India. Throughout this research I have placed the geographical and cultural aspects of the Chakmas and Arunachalis within the larger context of Zomia and its broader implication in the region (especially the third chapter on land and the fifth chapter on ethnic and religious belonging).

Northeast as a region and Arunachal Pradesh in particular, has imbalanced political relations with the contemporary central state of India. The failed project to integrate the hill space within the national territory has created a sense of insecurity and belonging among the north-eastern society. To counter the nationalization of border space and enforcement of national agenda, the communities have either taken up arms for liberation in the case of Nagaland and Manipur or have strongly relied on the constitutional safeguards guaranteed by the law, like in the case of Arunachal Pradesh. The reliance on constitutional rights to protest against the settlement of refugees is not just to keep the refugees and migrants away from the state. It is also primarily used as a political weapon to keep the national agenda at a distance. Thus, any idea of relaxing

the constitutionally protected rights of ethnic groups is seen as threat to existence and ethnic identity in the state. These insecurities and political marginalizations are channelled into the hegemonic power yielded by the student unions who act as the self-appointed guardians of culture and state identity (Chapter 2). They are ostensibly an unopposed and unanimous opposition against the Chakmas/refugees in the state.

As mentioned before, the colonial administration had a key role in formulating and alienating the hill space from the valley, which further added towards the isolation of Arunachal Pradesh from other regions. The Inner Line Permit (ILP) and post-colonial policies has deeply transformed into protecting the ethnic identity and ethnic status of the state in the present day.

Belonging, Waiting and Becoming Citizens

Chakmas' quest for citizenship (long process of becoming) and belonging could be looked through two aspects: nation-state belonging and ethnic cultural belonging. Both aspects could be juxtaposed to the position of Chakmas as refugees in one category and ethnic group in the another. The geographical positioning of Arunachal Pradesh in the borderland complicates the notion of territorial belonging and citizenship further. In order to understand the issue, we need to look into the relational and intersectional dynamics of citizenship (state), ethnicity (ethnic spaces) and belonging at borders, and how these three positions interlink and administer in a relational context.

The politics of refugee governing are informed by the cultural and political identities associated with them. Territorial positioning often leads to the national identification of a person. However, critiquing the notion of territory - bounded identity, Rajaram (2004) points out that different relations between space, time and identity determine the right to territorialized belonging and sovereign control. Disturbance in such relations lead to anomalies creating a group of people deprived of all the notions of identity, leaving them to a "bare life" (Agamben, 2005), as "unaccommodated human". Malkki (1995) asks that if refugees are seen as '*naked'* in the sense of culture and nationness, then how can one study them anthropologically? It is at the crossroads of cultural and political crisis that the experience of refugees offers knowledge about the limitations of the notion of nation-state. As Muller (2004) points out, refugees are both the representation of the limits of the sovereignty and also, a target of sovereign power. The case

of Chakmas lies in the midst of territorial, state sovereignty and bare life. The relational power between the state, locals and the Chakmas presents the dynamic nature of statelessness, the power relations within, and layers of interactions between them.

As explained earlier, the absence of a clear idea to encompass the peripheries into the nation state has resulted in compromises to be part of the newly formed postcolonial nations. The ethnic minorities in the peripheries want autonomy and protection, striving for 'differentiated citizenship[18]'. Along with the individual political membership in the state, they are also given membership as groups (Kymlica, 2001). This differentiated citizenship creates a rift in the universal idea of citizenship. Oommen (1997) critiques that while citizenship is an instrument of equality in a democratic state, the ethnicity and nationality invoked by the state is poised to confer or deny equality. Nationality and ethnicity as identities are always exclusive and they naturally generate inequalities. These inequalities are further complicated by the presence of refugees, who question the idea of both differentiated and universal form of citizenship in the state.

Sammadar (2010), focusing on the citizenship model in India, points out that citizenship in the Indian context is viewed with justification as consequence of nationalization of masses on the one hand, and on the other, more linked towards the local political imagination. The popular legitimacy and local sovereignty are yet to come to terms with the national citizenship. The struggle between the differentiated and universal, popular legitimacy and local sovereignty could be seen in the long winding legal dispute in citizenship issue between the locals and Chakmas. The inability of state to resolve the issue with judicial and legislative measure is explored further in Chapter 1.

There do exist persuasive arguments for the idea of universal citizenship through cosmopolitan citizenship (Benhabib, 2004) and trans-border citizenship[19] (Sammadar, 2010) to break the barriers and differentiated treatment. That said, it should be noted that in the context of Northeast India, the constitutional provisions are not just a special status. It also acts as a

[18] Constitutionally protected minority status in the region. Kymlica (2001) argues that 'differentiated citizenship' is necessary for existence of any genuine ethnic groups.
[19] Sammadar notes that trans-border citizenship is ideal in the context of Northeast India and Southeast Asia, which would benefit from the shared geography and interdependency on movements.

protective cover against the nationalization of border spaces. Given the historical marginalization and the in betweenness in the nationalization project, these provisions have limited power to restrain the further exploitation of the state. The struggle between the locals and the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh is more of what I argue as right versus right – the contestation of two different approaches for belonging. Approaching this conundrum through absolute terms does not offer much help. It needs be looked through more pragmatic everyday practices of belonging - how these diverging understandings of belonging are constantly negotiated and how these two groups interact and manoeuvre their positions through cultural and economic interaction in the region.

The geographical position of the region and the local population play a significant role in the politics and recognition of refugees. The absence of recognition not only denies the presence of refugees, it also gives an advantage to the locals to exploit refugees for labour (Allen, 2005). When the locals are indigenous communities trying to protect their culture and land from the larger (non-tribal) state, it asks for critical analysis from the perspective of both the local indigenous community and the ethnic refugee community which seeks asylum. Li's (2014) argument that indigenous people are not naturally connected to land and forest is contrary to popular belief. She offers a different way to analyse communities and their connection with land. The changing dynamics of indigenous people's relation to land and the presence of refugees as cheap labour has changed the discourse on land and ethnic relations in the region. If the relation between land and ethnic communities, which is glorified as being "rootedness" could be challenged, then the idea of ethnic belonging and its connection with land needs to be re-examined, which I tackle in Chapter 3. There I discuss the changing land relations in the region.

Uprooted and Re-rooted Notions of Belonging

The terms 'tribes', 'indigenous' and 'ethnic group' are interchangeable in Northeast India. While each term came into practice through administrative and academic spaces, it remains collective in everyday practice[20]. In the post-colonial period, the term "tribe" is categorized to denote the backwardness in the Indian administrative setup (Schendel, 2012). This categorization, later denoted as 'scheduled tribes', would be used for affirmative action based

[20] In academic spaces the shift from tribe to ethnic groups are well documented in the works of (Cohen, 1978) (Xaxa, 1999) (Jenkins, 2008), Schendel (2011)

on the social and economic conditions of the group. Xaxa (1999) in his work *Tribes as Indigenous People of India,* details the various connotations and usages of the term 'tribes' 'adivasis' and 'indigenous' – highlighting how the term 'tribe' denoted the deprived and disposed.

The move from tribes to indigenous changed the preconceived notion of backwardness and isolation from the mainstream to assert their political identity in the region. This shift in terminology in academia and other spaces had made significant impact in how indigenous people viewed themselves (Schendel, 2011). While it empowers the ethnic communities, Schendel warns that the romantic celebration of 'indigenous' might lead to disturbing and paradoxical results. It intensifies the politics of belonging and territorial identity. The postcolonial realization of historical marginalization and empowerment based on "ethnic belonging" has created numerous ethnic conflicts in the northeast region of India. From ethnic struggle between two groups (ex. Naga-Kuki conflict, Hmars – Dimasa, Karbis- Kuki, to name few) to struggle for separate nation (struggle for independent Nagaland in Manipur and Nagaland) - the region has become the centre of ethnic conflicts in the country (Kalita, 2011).

Discussion on ethnicity, the formation of ethnic identity and the politics of ethnicity is rather vast[21]. Given the complex social and ethnic situation of Northeast India and Arunachal Pradesh in particular, the discussions on ethnicity are more about the ethnic conflicts based on the ethnic identity of the indigenous group. While these studies offer a wider understanding on the ethnic politics in the region, they are eventually pulled into the ethnic and national position of the identity, hence reifying these categories. Ethnicity has a rather strange pull to devour everything under the vast spectrum of ethnic politics. Discussions centred on that would inevitably succumb into multiple and interchangeable characteristics of ethnic identity and how it is used for political and economic purposes. On closer inspection, ethnic conflicts within the region have some form of connection to the state, as most of the ethnic groups are recognized by the state. My interest in ethnic politics and ethnic identity here is more pointed towards the position of refugees and how their presence is located within the ethnic identity politics.

[21] From the primordial approach based on kinship, race and traditions, (Geertz, 1973) rational choice (Hector, 1982) in pursuit if particular material objectives (Xaxa, 1999), Instrumental approach of how emerging classes and elites within traditional communities invented traditions (Hobsbawm,1983) are articulating ethnic political differences to achieve material and economic gains.

Ethnic identity and belonging are naturally associated with territorial belonging and rootedness in a place. The idea of culture carries with it an expectation of roots - of a stable territorialized existence which is essential for its identity (Clifford, 1988). The assertion of culture is confined to the particular place, ideally adopted to their environment. The attachment is quite literal - the rootedness is both botanical and ecological (Appadurai, 1988). The notion of belonging with the rootedness seems to be basic and given. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argue that two kinds of naturalism need to be contested in terms of space. The ethnological assumption of associating cultural groups and the territory as well as the citizens of a state and territory as natural.

In the long tedious process to become part of both Arunachal Pradesh and India, the Chakma experience brings out the flaws and limitations of both the state and ethnicity as contructs. The Chakmas search for belonging as Malkki (1992) notes, brings out the complexity in ways which people construct, remember and lay claim to the place. They bring out and revaluate the social and political construction of space and place. Chakmas engage this through a process of re-rooting themselves in the local space. In the re-rooting process, they emulate and trace the similar routes of a local's identification with the land and culture. In certain aspects, the Chakmas have overtaken the locals in terms of their relationship with land.

Chakmas, in their pursuit for citizenship, do not criticize the ethnic nature of the locals or the subsequent flaws in the ethnic identity displayed by these groups. Rather they want to become a part of these ethnic belongings. By participating in national cultural events, to organizing ethnic festivals similar to the locals, Chakmas are looking for different ways to belong and make themselves part of Arunachal Pradesh. It is from this perspective I ask the question, what does it take to belong and to call someone "Arunachali", with the obvious question of national citizenship aside.

Chapterisation

This dissertation consists of five chapters focusing on the Citizenship and belonging of Chakmas, along with an exploration of the social interaction between the locals. The first chapter 'The Becoming Citizens' follows the judicial and bureaucratic mechanisms of state to

understand the ambiguous and precarious situation of the Chakmas in the state. This chapter details the long migration history of Chakmas and their settlement in the state of Arunachal Pradesh and, how they have remained stateless for the last 50 years in the state. The chapter takes the recent event of a Union government decision to give citizenship to Chakmas to honour the a Supreme Court of India judgement and the eventual retraction of the decision due to the backlash from the student union and the Arunachal Pradesh state government as a case study. Through this case study, the chapter analyses the shifts in decision-making and the role of the judiciary and the Union government. It also brings out the major function of bureaucracy in the process of denying Chakmas the citizenship of the country. Through this case I demonstrate how the State uses bureaucratic and judicial institutions for its own purpose.

The following chapter titled 'Moral Guardians of the Land and Culture: Power of Student Unions in Arunachal Pradesh', continues to elaborate on the citizenship issue of Chakmas from the perspective of the All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union (AAPSU), the major student body in the state. The protests organised by this student body is one of the major reasons for the retraction of the government decision to give citizenship to Chakmas. AAPSU plays a critical role in protecting the cultural and political aspects of the state. In this chapter I present how the AAPSU turn into moral guardians of the state and the sole representation of indigenous voice therein. The hegemonic power yielded by the student union in the state was demonstrated through the preparations for the golden jubilee celebrations of the student union and the power display it intends to show in the region. To understand how AAPSU reached current political position in the state, I trace the evolution of the student union along with the issue of Chakmas and 'illegal migrant issue' to bring out the inter connectedness between these two. I delve into the impact of the student unions in the nearby regions, particularly All Assam Student Union (AASU) in Assam. I argue that the absence of strong political presence and newfound emancipation through education is instrumental in rise of student union. I further posit that the unchecked power yielded by student union has turned into vigilantism and position themselves above the state and political institutions in Arunachal Pradesh.

The next chapter 'Negotiating Land Access' moves from the political aspect of the Chakmas becoming citizens of Arunachal Pradesh to focus on the social interaction between the locals and Chakmas. Land plays a crucial role in the lives of both the indigenous local communities

as well as the Chakmas of the state. Land is essential for the formation of identity in the local communities. On the other hand, land is the main source of survival for Chakmas who do not have right or access to the land. This chapter focuses on the relational aspect between land, locals and Chakmas with a closer look at how the interaction brings out the position of land ownership and access in the region. I bring out the political and social relevance of constitutionally protected status of land and customary land ownership model, which forms the basis for belonging and ethnic identity in the state. The case of Bijoy searching for new agricultural land in the forest area and illegal timber business operated by the locals in the same area presents a different understanding. It also serves to showcase the manner of negotiation between the locals and Chakmas in a limited way. I explore the land relation of the locals through the case of Thuing Singpho and shift from community-based land ownership to private ownership. Through the case studies I argue that the shift from community based to individual ownership and move from agrarian to commercial mode of production has drastically changed the relationship between the land and the locals. I go on to contrast this against how the Chakmas negotiate their access in a limited way through sharecropping and cultivating in forest area.

The following chapter, 'Sunday vs Friday: Weekly Market and Economic Blockades in East Arunachal Pradesh' probes the everyday interaction between the locals and Chakmas through weekly market transaction. The weekly market is at the core of Chakma economy and any disturbance in the market happenings affects the livelihood of the Chakmas. Here I present the comparative case of the Diyun Sunday Market and the Miao Friday Market and the stark difference between these market interactions. It brings out the political and economic power dynamics between these two communities. To do that, I first present the structure and spatial organisation of weekly markets in general in Northeast India region and proceed to understand the specific nature of Diyun and Miao markets. Next, I elaborate one the concept of Economic blockade and how it is used as a symbolic and economic toll against the Chakmas. I argue that the weekly market is not just an economic and social interaction between the locals and Chakmas - but a space where social tension and disagreement is displayed through economic blockades.

The final chapter 'Religious Gathering as Intercessor Between Chakmas and Locals' focuses on the participation of locals and Chakmas in religious festivals and probes the possibility of these two groups having a harmonious social relation in the locality. Moving away from the political disagreement between these community, I present two religious events. These are the *Kathina Chivara Dhana* (Robe offering ceremony), a Theravada Buddhist festival celebrated annually during the month of October and the inauguration of a new Catholic church at a Chakma village. I examine these events as a developing space where Chakmas and locals could have more amicable social relation in the region. The participation of locals in Chakma organised religious festivals offers a faint hope where the local communities and Chakmas have initiated a dialogue.

Methodology and Being in the Field

Thirteen months of ethnographic field work conducted between October 2016-November 2017 constitute the primary source of data collection. Taking Chakmas, local indigenous communities and local authorities as relational aspects, this study attempts to answer the questions of recognition and citizenship for Chakmas vis-à-vis the ways in which they relate socially, economically, and politically to neighboring communities. To understand the nature of statelessness and the question of citizenship, I look into the recent legal judgments related to the case. Having conducted interviews with local government members, police officials and other local authorities, I also collected relevant official documents in order to analyze the legal and political aspects of the case of Chakmas. In addition to this, I extensively utilized the method of participant observation and followed day to day activities of both communities (Chakmas and locals). This includes cycles of agricultural cultivation, local market exchange, and traditional festival celebrations throughout the year. I coupled this situated knowledge of Chakmas with in-depth interviews with their counterparts—local producers—about share cropping and their perceptions regarding the settlement of Chakmas in the locality.

In late 2011, I was an eager junior research fellow at Tata Institute for Social Studies, Guwahati, working on the citizenship issue of Chakmas. Eager enough that I headed off to the state of Arunachal Pradesh without any contacts on the ground there. I got into a train from the city of Guwahati in Assam to the town of Tinsukia, knowing only that this is the central hub for market and transport to East Arunachal.

It was about 1:00 in the afternoon when I reached the bus station in Tinsukia. To my utter dismay, I learned that the bus to Diyun had already left. The next bus would leave only at 5.30 – next day morning. As someone from mainland India with limited understanding about Northeast India, it was new and rather surprising to know that there is only one bus plying daily to a block level place. That day I had no choice. I had to stay the night at Tinsukia and leave the next day. And thus, began my decade long association with Arunachal Pradesh.

That bus journey took me to my first stay at Diyun and Miao. The 3 months I spent there, gave me an introductory understanding of the context and geography of East Arunachal Pradesh. During that time, I also visited most of the Chakma villages in the block.

In 2016, I went back for my doctoral field work for 13 months (October 2016-November 2017). During this time, I became more attuned to the little nuances in the field. Still, I was not fully prepared for the flow of time in Northeast India. Time functions on a plane of its own here. The short-noticed bandhs (shutdown / protests) called by student unions and political parties in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh changed my idea of travel. I understood that there are no certainties for any plans. Hence, I would always have a contingency plan and an alternate place of stay in Tinsukia. I followed the same protocol of sorts in all other places I frequented as well.

While there was five-year interval between the first visit and the next, the contacts from my initial foray were helpful in building further connections in the villages. What began as kids shouting at me crying *"bangal! bangal!"* (stranger) when I entered their villages, eventually turned into generous invitations to attend festivals, village gatherings and family functions.

The same networks from my first stint enabled me to set up base for fieldwork at St. Jude School, Diyun. This physical location was very conveniently situated for me to make extensive village visits as well as make trips to the city of Itanagar for research purposes. During my stay at St. Jude's School, I also began teaching there. They had a shortage of teachers in Science subjects. My previous education in Science came extremely handy at this time. I was thrilled to be able to contribute to the school during my stay there.

The flexible teaching schedules gave me the space to plan meetings and make visits to nearby villages in short time. Teaching at the school also helped me getting a yearlong Inner Line Permit (ILP), thus resolving a major roadblock to my travel at that time[22].

Being a teacher allowed me to connect with students from different villages and ethnic communities. This was immensely helpful, as I planned to visit both Chakma and local villages. The introduction from students eased my conversation with the villagers. The label of a school teacher also assuaged any anxieties the villagers might have had. A very good instance of this was during the *Kathina Chivara Dhana* (Robe offering Ceremony) festival. I was able to interact with different villagers and Buddhist monks because of the introduction from the students. This opportunity was crucial in understanding the festivals and the interaction between the locals and Chakmas (detailed in Chapter 5).

My stay at St. Jude School did throw up some issues initially. There was great confusion among the villagers with regard to my identity. As St. Jude's is a Catholic Missionary school, the villagers began assuming that I was part of the Church. I am from the South of India. The only South Indian people in this region who the villagers got an opportunity to engage with are those who work in the Catholic clergy. Hence, I had to keep clarifying in the first few weeks that I was a researcher and not in any way a part of the Catholic church. Through the students, their parents overcame this confusion. Eventually, people began associating me with the school rather than the Church. This was helped in no measure by the shop keepers in the marketplace identifying me as the teacher in St. Jude School who is doing research. Once the shopkeepers clarified my position, the confusion ceased once and for all.

In India, there exists a positive stereotype about South Indians. This stereotype deems all South Indians to be good natured, respectful, and good at STEM related subjects. This stereotype was surprisingly helpful while interacting with local communities. It opened many a gateway for me whilst seeking interviews with people in local government and other centres of power. My

[22] As mentioned earlier, Inner Line Permit (ILP)is necessary to enter Arunachal Pradesh and the document needs to be produced at check points every time when you cross the state, district and every block.

conversation with the Ex. Chairman of Miao and government officials in Miao was made possible only because of this stereotype.

Mobile networks are not a reliable source of communication in the hill regions, especially in the less populated villages like Devapuri. This limited the information which could be gathered from the other side of Arunachal Pradesh. The transportation issue between East Arunachal Pradesh and West Arunachal Pradesh also limited the scope of understanding the perception of locals about the issues I was researching in the state capital.

During my field work, my perceptions of the local communities as well as my political perspectives underwent a sea change. When I began work, I was looking at issues through the lens of human rights for refugees. The more I witnessed how the locals negotiated their lives around the ubiquitous presence of armed forces in their lives, the more the need for special status for the region became clear. This allowed me to sharpen my understanding of the historical marginalization of the Northeast as a region. The shift in perspective enabled me to approach the issues faced by Chakmas with greater context, nuance and balance.

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the linguistically diverse state tin the region, home to more than 30 distinctive languages and dialects. In Miao and Diyun region, Chakma, Tangsa, Singpho, Khampti, Assamese and Adivasi languages are spoken. Given the diverse nature of the ethnic communities and languages, Hindi functions as link language in the state and in Diyun- Miao locality. Arunachal Pradesh is also one of the few places in the northeast India where Hindi is widely spoken among the ethnic communities. During the research I had to interact with different ethnic communities and government officials who are from different parts of Arunachal Pradesh, I primarily communicated through Hindi with everyone.

Chapter 1: The Becoming citizens.

"Limited citizenship for Chakmas and Hajongs will be issued. Middle ground will be chosen. Supreme court order has to be honoured (2005 Judgement)"

-Kiren Rijiju (Minister of State of Home Affairs) on 13th Sep 2017

"There is no decision of government of India to grant citizenship"

- Kiren Rijiju (Minister of State of Home Affairs) on 20th Sep 2017

The Spectacle and Retraction in Seven Days

On the 13th of September 2017, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) announced to the press about the long due granting of citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Surprisingly, the news was conveyed by Kiren Rijju, Minister of State of Home Affairs, who also hails from the state of Arunachal Pradesh. His remarks proved to be optimistic and gave a certain amount of reassurance that the decision would be implemented at long last.

The announcement came on the heels of a high-level meeting between a host of high ranking government officials. The meeting took place between the Ministry of Home Affairs, the chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh and the National security advisor seemed to be the most successful agreement as the two of them were from the state of Arunachal Pradesh. In the press conference, Mr. Kiren Rijju proudly announced "limited citizenship for Chakmas and Hajongs will be issued. Middle ground will be chosen. Supreme Court order has to be honoured (2005 judgement) for Chakmas and Hajongs who have settled in Arunachal Pradesh since 1964. But the schedule tribe's status and indigenous people rights won't be diluted[23]".

[23] https://scroll.in/latest/851104/centre-will-urge-sc-to-modify-its-order-granting-citizenship-to-chakma-hajong-refugees-rijiju accessed on 23rd July 2021

For more than one decade, many announcements about the Chakmas acquiring citizenship have been made. Though it never happened, this particular announcement in 2017 received attention like no other, making even the national headlines. Perhaps the fact that the same political party (Bharatiya Janata Party) was in office at both the union level and the state government gave an assurance that the chances for conflict between the state and centre were slim[24].

The union government presented this new policy as a breakthrough for resolving the long-standing impasse in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. They also claimed that this move towards citizenship was a new beginning for more development projects to be implemented in the northeast region. On the evening of 17th September 2017, the All-Arunachal Pradesh Student Union (AAPSU) announced that there will be a state-wide *bandh* (literally translates to closure) in Arunachal Pradesh on 19th of September 2017. The bandh was clled to protest against the central government decision to issue citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs. AAPSU directed all shops, public transportation, and educational institutions to be closed on that day. The president of the Student Union, whom I met few weeks after this protest, was adamant that the announcement would not be allowed to be implemented "in the land of Arunachal Pradesh".

On the 19th of September, there was a huge protest in the capital and other parts of Arunachal Pradesh. Everything ensued as per the AAPSU's plan. Most schools were closed, obliging the call from the Student Union in the entire state. All public transit came to a halt.

Protests and bandhs in North-eastern states are common occurrences. Therefore people are ready to take the necessary precautions which they need to go about their days with minimum disturbances. During my fieldwork I encountered several bandhs & protests in the neighbouring state of Assam as well as in Arunachal Pradesh. Some of them were even declared at very short notice. The bandhs are extremely effective, thanks to the fear factor. For instance, any vehicles trying to pass or ply during a bandh will be damaged and not allowed to pass.

[24] The state and central government belonging to same party was there earlier in congress government as well, but the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh were not in cohesion like the current one.

As a result of the bandh on September 19, I was not able to go anywhere from the village where I was staying. The protest was strictly enforced and no government vehicle or private transport (like minivans) were willing to risk the consequences. Other than the transport restriction however, life in Diyun, the Chakma-dominated place where I lived, functioned as normal. Markets and shops were open. Things were as any other day. But all the private schools were closed. The government schools were kept open since the government did not support the bandh.

The school I was teaching at during my fieldwork did not have any plans to close during the bandh. This was not because they were active supporters of the protest. This was largely to do with the fact that as a Catholic institute they were more worried about the term exams which were scheduled to take place that day. But, the notice from the governing body insisted that all the Catholic schools be closed for safety reasons. I called people residing in different towns of Arunachal Pradesh to find out how the protest was going on in their respective places. All of them gave similar answers - that "everything is shut, and student union members are marching in the town areas with banners, but things will be normal in the evening".

Given that Diyun is completely dominated by the Chakmas, there were no marches or protest by any group. Even AAPCSU (All Arunachal Chakma Students Union), the official student union of the Chakma community did not do anything. It was a very puzzling situation to me, that Diyun and Chakmas were unaffected and least interested in objecting the shutdown in any way. But for security reasons few army soldiers from the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRBn) were present in the marketplace, patrolling the area. This case is only applicable to the Diyun block.

Poles apart from Diyun, the state capital of Itanagar witnessed large numbers of students marching *against* the refugees. Newspapers, especially the regional publications, reported the severity of the protest. The AAPSU secretary was reported to have said that "the support for our agitation has sent out a loud and clear message that the indigenous people will not tolerate arbitrary decisions of the centre that could change the state's demography.[25]"

[25] https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/arunachal-shuts-down-over-citizenship-to-chakma-hajong-refugees/story-5Zl1HYedOB2MkrhG85LEUK.html

During the days between the announcement and the bandh, I managed to meet Chakmas who actively participated in the legal processes leading up to the government's decision. These were mainly the members of the Committee for Citizenship Rights for Chakmas and Hajongs or the CCRCHAP. They were the people who tried to convey the message to the local people. CCRCHAP has been organising and representing Chakmas in legal and judicial cases since 1996 in New Delhi.

While a few of the Chakmas I encountered were positive about the announcement, they were more worried about the entire "limited citizenship" issue. The idea of limited citizenship, they thought, was a compromise approach to ensure both locals and Chakmas are pacified without diluting the state laws. Limited citizenship proposed that Chakmas might be given citizenship (national level), but they will not get Arunachal Pradesh state recognised tribal group status. They felt that this clause might cause a larger problem to the Chakmas than the question of citizenship itself.

Arunachal Pradesh is constitutionally protected to safeguard the tribal land culture, and this has ensured that Chakmas continue to be considered as migrants in Arunachal Pradesh rather than citizens, despite being settled in Arunachal Pradesh for 58 years. Accordingly, they cannot have any ownership over land or tribal status, which is the essential condition to be recognised as a tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. They will have to get Inner Line Permit (ILP) to cross into the state and will be treated as outsiders, which is already the case. So, the CCRCHAP was trying to organise a committee to discuss how to appeal further for complete citizenship. The President of CCRCHAP was very confident that the court judgements and legal rights are in favour of Chakmas. Hence the announcement was not a surprise to them.

It should also be noted that not all the Chakmas were excited about the government announcement. Everyday non-political Chakmas who are not aware of the political implications like Biroja, who sells vegetables in the weekly market, was not enthusiastic. She said, "They are saying this for a long time. Committee people (CCRCHAP) gather the villagers and announce like this. We fill forms and submit - and that's it". She went on to mention how Chakmas are hardworking and good to their region, but people were always complaining about the Chakmas.

On 20th September, there were conflicting statements issued by both the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh and the Minister of State for Home Affairs. The Chief Minister expressed his unhappiness and how it is not possible to compromise the rights of the indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh, which were protected by the Inner Line Permit. Contradicting his own statement, the Minister of State, Kiren Rijiju took a complete U-turn and stated that:

> "*There is no decision of the government of India to grant citizenship. It is the order of the Supreme Court. We are trying to tell the honourable Supreme Court that giving Chakmas and Hajongs the same rights as Arunachalis is not acceptable to us. People of Arunachal must appreciate that for the first time the centre has not agreed. So, we are appealing to the apex court to modify this order...to ensure that rights of the indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh are protected."*[26]

From honouring the Supreme Court and granting citizenship, within two days the government turned around to say that they will not go ahead with the decision to grant citizenship.

There are three things that stand out during this four-day spectacle. First is regarding the legal status of Chakmas and their ongoing and prolonged judicial negotiations with the Union and state governments. Second is the idea of "limited citizenship" and how it affects the citizenship quest of Chakmas and Hajongs. And third is the political power yielded by student union in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

In this chapter, I would like to focus on the two things connected with the legal status of Chakmas and the limited citizenship debate. I first look at the judicial proceedings of the last 20 years. In doing so, I explore how the judicial loopholes and bureaucratic red tape have successfully managed to keep Chakmas in the "state of waiting" for half a century. The Union government's sudden interest in fulfilling the Supreme Court order and limited citizenship compromise are not the actual intention towards Chakmas, I will show how Chakmas became

[26]https://www.oneindia.com/india/arunachal-pradesh-protest-against-granting-citizenship-chakm-2546229.html

accidental recipients of unintended citizenship policy devised by the Union government. The political power harnessed by the student union during the protest and their involvement in larger political activity is explored in detail in Chapter 2.

Regional Context and Idea of Limited Citizenship

In order to understand the idea of limited citizenship, it is crucial to explicate the geographical and political position of Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh is located in the far north-eastern part of India. It shares borders with China and Myanmar. With a vast area of 88,743 square kilometres, its population stands at 1.3 million. While the population is low compared to other states, it has around 26 major tribes and more than 100 sub tribal ethnic communities – which amounts to 69% of the total population (Census, 2011). The local indigenous communities are those who are scheduled under the status of Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes (APST) i.e. the state recognised tribal groups. These are the tribes that can claim ethnic and indigenous roots in Arunachal Pradesh[27]. The APST status is key to the functioning of political participation in the state. Only the tribes/communities with APST status can become part of political and territorial claim in the state. Non – APST communities like Adivasis and Deoris can reside and be part of the state (they are citizens of India) but it does not give them land claims or political participation in the state level. Non-APST communities do not have any claims in the tribal welfare schemes and Scheduled Tribes status within the state[28]. Chakmas and Hajongs are the third category of groups who do not have recognition from both the state level (Non- APST) and union governments (citizens of India)[29].

[27] I use the term "locals" and "Arunachalis" for the communities who have Arunachal Pradesh state recognised tribe status, who are part of the hill space before pre-colonial times. To be specific, in the region of Diyun and Miao, the Singphos, Tangsas and Khamptis are considered as locals / indigenous communities.

[28] Scheduled Tribes (ST) status is an administrative classification for the purpose of affirmative action in India, it is largely based on the Hindu hierarchy of caste system. Tribes were included in the "backward groups" along with scheduled castes. ST status allows them to avail various affirmation schemes, rights and political participation.

[29] Hajongs are Hindu ethnic minority refugee group from Bangladesh. They are also settled along with Chakmas in East Arunachal Pradesh. The Hajong population in Arunachal Pradesh is minor compared to Chakmas. The citizenship issue in Arunachal Pradesh is similar to Chakmas and both are clubbed together in all the cases. Due to their low numbers in population wise, the Chakma-Hajong citizenship issue became Chakma issue in general. Hajong group keeps a low profile in the region, Hajong settlements are close to Diyun Block place. The committee for the Citizenship rights represents both the Chakmas and Hajongs in all judicial and bureaucratic matters. As Chakmas are more visible in the region, Hajongs usually do not get the same attention as Chakmas. While the history of migration from Bangladesh to Arunachal Pradesh is similar, the cultural and religious traditions are different from Chakmas and the locals. Due to the limited scope of the research, I place Chakmas and Hajongs together in a political category on the issue of citizenship and restrain from exploring further on the other aspects.

Ethnically, Arunachal Pradesh is more diverse than any other state in the country. It is because of the diverse ethnic nature of the state, and the difficult terrain in the region, that the colonial administration was not able to govern in a unified nature. This also led to them adopting a policy of limited political intervention in the region. The colonial law implemented to monitor the movement of people in the region, turned into a protective measure to preserve the tribal traditions in the post-colonial era. Thus, Arunachal Pradesh is scheduled under the protection of Indian constitution. The state of Arunachal Pradesh is also protected under the Inner Line Permit (ILP) to monitor the movements of outsiders in the state. The Inner Line Permit was introduced by the British in the Bengal Regulation of 1873 to keep track of the North-East Frontier Agency[30]. The idea of Inner Line Permit also brings attention to how the Northeast frontiers became borders and how borders slowly progressed into rigid regional definitions which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. The provisions of Inner Line Permit restrict not only the movement of other Indian nationals in the state but also protects the tribal land from being bought or sold to 'outsiders'[31] (other Indians as well) (Singh, 2010).

Limited citizenship is formulated to appease both Chakmas and the local communities in the region without altering the existing rights of locals and Chakmas. It offers citizenship for Chakmas without the right to land in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Through this way, the land rights of the local communities would be protected and Chakmas get broader citizenship in Indian context though not in Arunachal Pradesh. Through this limited citizenship idea Chakmas won't be able to participate or contest in the local elections. They cannot buy or claim land in the state, making them second-class citizens in the state. As demonstrated earlier, inclusion in the state of Arunachal Pradesh without land rights does not change the status quo of Chakmas in the region. This aspect has become the recurring conundrum between the state, Union and judicial institutions for the last half a century, keeping the Chakmas in a state of waiting.

The argument of making Chakmas citizens of India but not part of Arunachal Pradesh was designed to end this state of waiting. It would give them a way out of this rather legal and

[30] the current states of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur were part of this north-east frontier agency.

[31] Here the term "Outsiders" is a colonial continuation from the past when Inner Line Permit (ILP) is introduced in the region. To keep the outsiders from the region to enter the frontier region. It is still used to both remind the colonial 'special status' and to differentiate Arunachalis from other Indians.

ethnic conundrum, albeit in an absurd fashion. To resettle the Chakmas who are settled in Arunachal Pradesh for more than 50 years in the state would be a second uprooting, making them refugees again in a new place. As Diwan Chakma, one of the few people still alive to remember the journey from Chittagong put it: "there are only handful of people who remember the place in Chittagong. Even then, we were small to remember most of the things*".*

The social memory of Chakmas being part of Chittagong Hill Tracts has become a distant memory for the few people who actually knew it. For most of the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh, Diyun and the cluster of villages around is their birthplace. And Arunachal Pradesh is home to them. The idea of Bangladesh and Chittagong as their 'home' and 'going back to Bangladesh' is alien to Chakmas as they do not have any connection with or memory of it. For half a century, Chakmas have nurtured the valley and plains of Diyun (previously uncharted forest terrain) as their home. They have created a sense of belonging through navigating around the local obstacles to be part of Arunachal Pradesh. Here is what Ripon Chakma, who was born in 1987 in Diyun village, had to say when asked about Chittagong Hill Tracts,

> *"I was born in Moitripur, the only place I know is Diyun and villages around here. I have no clue where Chittagong is, have heard of elders mention it. Arunachal is my home, Nao- Dehing (the river which runs along Chakma villages) is my home"*

The belongingness in Arunachal Pradesh that Ripon expresses is rather similar to how all ethnic belongingness to the land is defined. Territorial demarcation and collective memory are an essential part of ethnic identity. Memories associated with the place stimulates an emotional attachment with it, which in turn triggers the need to assert one's right over the place (Smith, 1996). The geographical belonging, as Ripon and his generation have, is completely based on the lived experience in the Diyun region of Arunachal Pradesh. Ripon's idea of belongingness resonates with what scholars like Smith and Brubaker had said about how ethnicity is formed. In the process of becoming citizens of India for a prolonged period of time, the next generation whose collective memory is based on their lived experience develops a sense of strong belonging to the place. This sense of geographical belonging that the Chakmas have is similar to how the other local ethnic communities claim their relationship with the place around them. For that matter, this is applicable to all ethnic groups (Brubaker, 2000) (Cohen, 1978).

The idea of limited citizenship takes away the sense of belonging from the Chakmas, who along with their turbulent past have gradually developed a connection to the place and belonging over time. If collective memory and geographical attachment are keys for ethnic identity, the new generation of Chakmas could only relate this way to Arunachal Pradesh. To uproot Chakmas from Arunachal Pradesh and to attempt to settle them in another part of India through the policy of limited citizenship would take Chakmas back to 1963 when they were forced to move from Chittagong to India. It would only serve to making them refugees again and marginalise them even further.

Judicial and Bureaucratic Entanglement

In the ongoing cycle of Chakmas becoming citizens, I focus on the two important state institutions which play a vital role in entangling the issue further; the judicial and bureaucratic apparatuses. The political legitimacy of state relies on the idea that the "law" is something above everything else. It also differentiates itself from the state authority and power. As Hansen and Stepputat (2001) argue, the judicial system stands above the everyday life and yields power on the fact that it could act beyond the ordinary. The case of Chakmas in the highest order of court in the country brings out the limitation of the judiciary in the state. The legitimacy that law is above everything is seriously questioned in the process. The series of judgments in favour of Chakma citizenship and the failure to implement the judgements brings out the limitation of judiciary and the loopholes exploited by the state bureaucracy in favour of local governments.

Until 1995 there was no issue of citizenship or demand for citizenship by the Chakmas. This was because there was no issue with the locals. Additionally, government schemes were in place in terms of rations, education and other welfare policies. This added up to Chakmas receiving benefits that provided them with citizenship-like provisions, including material assistance but also a sense of belonging as they were counted in the welfare and related policies. The problems began in 1995, when the AAPSU (All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union) organised protests all over Arunachal Pradesh to drive Chakmas out of the state.

AAPSU is an autonomous student organisation which plays a critical role in political and social activities in the state. AAPSU was inspired by the student union approach in the state of neighbouring Assam, where the student union AASU (All Assam Students Union) heavily mobilised against Bangladeshi migrants in the 1990s. AASU's actions in Assam gave the AAPSU a new understanding on 'indigeneity' and 'belonging' and how to these notions could be wielded as a key political narrative in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. They were therefore used to differentiate the indigenous from the 'outsiders' and create a strong political and ethnically centred sense of belonging in the state. This completely transformed the understanding of politics and economics in the state. This led to AAPSU having a firm grip on political narration of ethnic identity in the state, and more importantly, exploit these issues as a recurring theme whenever they needed to. The ripples of Assam Student Union agitation spread across the north-eastern states and Arunachal Pradesh became the first state to strategically take this approach a step further to advance it's cause against refugees and outsiders.

The protest in 1995 reached some of its goals and created economic blockades on the Chakmas. It also managed to cut access to medical and other basic amenities in the region of Diyun and Miao circle (Singh, 2012). Chakmas appealed to the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) to intervene in the matter. Through the NHRC, a case was filed in the Supreme Court. On January 9th, 1996, the bench ordered the Government of India to grant citizenship to all the Chakma and Hajong refugees who migrated between 1964-69[32]. Most importantly, the judgement clearly mentioned that "*The question of granting of citizenship is entirely governed by the Citizenship Act, 1995 and the Central Government is the sole authority to grant citizenship. The State Government has no jurisdiction in the matter*"[33]. While it was a landmark judgement for the Chakmas and Hajongs in Arunachal Pradesh, nothing was done. This, despite the clear announcement that the Chakmas and Hajongs are citizens of India and their forms (application for inclusion of their names in voters list) should be accepted and processed immediately.

[32] 1996 Supreme court Cases (1) 720,
[33] 1996 Supreme court Cases (1) 742, page 4. Central government meaning the Union government

The applications for registration were declined in the local state government offices, as there was a conflict with the Arunachal Pradesh state laws. At the same time the state government filed a writ petition against the judgement, which delayed the process further. In 1998, Chakmas were not included in the local elections due to the lack of eligibility criteria within the state. To be part of the electorate one needs to hold proper citizenship and birth certificates mandatorily for registration. Birth certificates are supposed be issued by the state government, which refused to issue them for Chakmas, making it difficult to apply for even consideration of inclusion in the voters list.

The Chakmas were not given citizenship even two years after the 1996 judgement as the state government did not accept the applications for citizenship. The state machinery which is supposed to fulfil the judicial order is simultaneously also the one blocking the entire process. Through the years, it is interesting to see the various reasons and loopholes in the law which are used repeatedly by the State Government with the help of bureaucracy, to defer the citizenship issue. The bureaucratic process is used in a systematic and methodological way to hinder any possibility to include the applications of Chakmas. The reasons for rejecting the applications were rather absurd and cynical in nature. These ranged from rejecting the application because they were received in bulk to creating new additional requirements for the applications such as the Inner Line Permit - clearly knowing Chakmas do not possess them. They even added birth certificate as required document in the next round of applications. The bureaucratic power enables certain hierarchies and political asymmetries the state wants to maintain. The local government further exploits this bureaucratic power as a tool for state propagated activities.

In the year 2000, the Election Commission of India announced the revision of voter rolls and inclusion of new voters in the Northeast region. The CCRCHAP filed a complaint in the NHRC and the High court to investigate the reasons for not enrolling Chakmas in the voters list. During the proceedings, the Deputy Secretary of Home Ministry appearing on behalf of government of India, clarified that orders had been sent to the state government of Arunachal Pradesh to implement the Supreme Court judgement as soon as possible and initiate the process of inclusion[34]. The High Court restated the Supreme Court commitment and ordered the state and

[34] Civil writ petition No.886 of 2000, High court of Delhi.

union governments to implement the same as soon as possible. In this judgement, the court also mentioned that the "judgement does not say anything about the "residency status" in Arunachal Pradesh", which gave leverage to the State Government to advance its opposition later. As discussed in the introduction, the residency status plays a crucial role in determining the citizenship status in Arunachal Pradesh. This is especially pertinent in the context of the newly introduced idea of "limited citizenship" which played a vital role in determining the residency status and the future of Chakmas in general.

In 2003, after repeated negotiations between the Election Commission of India, the national body for elections and the state of Arunachal Pradesh, 5,916 applications for voter IDs were collected from the Chakmas for consideration by the Election Commission. Of these, 1,093 were accepted from Miao and Diyun constituencies. In the Doimukh constituency (State capital region) the Election Registration Officer rejected all the 426 applications for the inclusion received via post from Chakmas on the grounds that the applications were received in bulk[35]. Within a short period of time, the State Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh and the State Government passed legislation that non Arunachalis shall not be entitled to inclusion in the electoral roll of the state unless they possessed Inner Line Permit under the Bengal East Area and Frontier Regulation, 1873, having a minimum of six months of validity. This legislation which was specifically passed to stop the enrolment of Chakmas in the voters list worked effectively as Chakmas do not possess inner line permit. This despite the fact that they have been in Arunachal for more than four decades now.

The Election Commission still insisted that the Regional Electoral Officers should accept the rejected applications again and process it to include them in the voters list in the three major Chakma populated constituencies[36]. The Chief Electoral Officer reported that in Doimukh constituency they did not receive any applications for inclusion of names. This is the same constituency mentioned earlier where 426 applications were rejected. Due to this entire bureaucratic and legislative disorder, the Election Commission cancelled the local elections. It

[35] Order No.23/ARUN/2003 dated 03rdMarch, 2004 Election commission of India.
[36] Election Commission of India (ECI) is a national body involved in processing the application for eligibility for participation but designates the state election commissions and regional electoral officers to deal with the collection and processing of applications.

also suspended all election related work, including the inclusion of any names in the voters list in the four constituencies[37].

Before the General Elections to be held in 2005, as a precautionary move, the Election Commission of India exercised the power conferred on it by article 324 of the Constitution of India and directed the State Government to include the accepted 1093 applicants from the two constituencies and 426 from the bulk rejected Doimukh constituency. Thanks to this effort, a total of 1497 Chakma and Hajong were added to the voter list[38]. For the first time after a decade of judicial processing, the Chakmas were eligible to vote.

In the 2004 general elections, 1497 Chakmas exercised their right to vote. But this did not go unprotested by the AAPSU and other state political units in the State. While 1497 Chakmas received voting rights in the 2004 general elections, it did not by default make the citizenship and the legal status of the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh a legitimate one. For the CCRCHAP it was a partial moment of victory and progress in the long judicial battle. The organisation applied for inclusion of 4823 applicants who were rejected based on various reasons. What happened to the forms were not traced until writ petition was filed by the organisation in 2007.

The writ petition was filed before the Supreme Court for the second time (not including the ones filed before the Guwahati High Court, Delhi High Court) on the same issue - the implementation of 1995 Supreme court order and the status of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh[39]. The State Government in its response said, "the stand of state of Arunachal Pradesh was that it had provided basic amenities to the Chakmas, but the state also had the right to ask the Chakmas to quit the state". The State Government made its case that settlement of Chakmas will disturb its ethnic balance and destroy its culture and identity. The Additional Solicitor General who appeared on behalf of Government of India, delivered the exact response that the earlier Deputy Secretary of Home Ministry had made in the previous cases – that they needed some time to seek instructions and resolve the issue with the Central and State Governments.

[37] Order No.23/ARUN/2003 dated 03rd March 2004 Election Commission of India.
[38] No. EN/OP/20/(VOL.1) Office of the chief Electoral Officer, Arunachal Pradesh
[39] Writ petition (Civil) No. 510 of 2007, Supreme Court of India

An interesting response came in 2012 from the Additional Solicitor General on why the applications were rejected. The reason given was that the applications were not filled in prescribed format and were not submitted to appropriate authority[40]. Most importantly the applications also did not include the prescribed recommendations from the State Government, which was stated as an essential requirement. The arguments in Supreme Court demonstrated the impossibility of moving further, given the legal obstacles and the rights of the state government. Hence it directed the Centre to form a joint high-powered committee to resolve the matter. The committee had the Joint Secretary of Home Ministry as chair and included representatives of the State Government and the CCRCHAP as members. This committee continued through the 2015 judgement and the 2017 government announcement. In 2015, after meetings and discussions, the committee recommended that the Chakmas should be given citizenship with some reservations on Inner Line Permit and settlement. The Solicitor General stated again that "the government of India will earnestly take appropriate measures in the matter, if granted some more time". The second historic judgement which was passed in 2015 stated that "The government of India and the state of Arunachal Pradesh should finalise the conferment of citizenship rights on eligible Chakmas and Hajongs" ensuring the directions of previous judicial decisions. It also directed that this exercise be completed within three months from 17th September 2015[41].

Exactly two years later, in September 2017, when the government of India announced that Chakmas will be granted citizenship, it was perceived as possibly the final verdict for the long running citizenship issue. Partially because of the different but closely related changes in the amendment to the Citizenship Act of 2016. As the Union Government is eager to implement the revised Citizenship Act 2016 to fulfil its election promises and political agenda of the right wing, it might have unwittingly advanced the case of the Chakmas.

Throughout the twenty years of legal and political dispute between the state, Union government and Chakmas, bureaucracy played a critical role in blocking any policy or judgment in favour of Chakmas. The state government relied heavily on the bureaucratic procedures and loopholes available in the Inner Line Permit to hinder any further movement for the cause. The

[40] Writ petition (Civil) No.510 of 2007- reference to 2012 response from the Government, judgment was passed in 2015.
[41] Writ pettiton (Civil) no. 510 of 2007 judgment passed on 17thsep 2015.

inaccessible rigid bureaucratic procedures to fill in the forms for minor details have had a greater impact on Chakmas than the economic and political violence threatened by the student union and political parties in the state. The political power yielded by state bureaucracy through red tape and inefficient application procedures are conveniently masked as dysfunctional administrative setup. Mathur (2016) argues that it is not the dysfunctional setup but the affective functioning of bureaucratic process that blocks the implementation. On closer look it is the administrative set up that successfully prevented any movement in the advancement of citizenship issue in Arunachal Pradesh. From not accepting the applications, creating unobtainable document requirements to rejecting filled applications for obscure reasons, the administrative set up has been engineered to stop any judicial recommendations even from the highest court in the country. Through bureaucratic tools, states render themselves capable of bypassing judicial recommendations and the principles that they themselves rest on.

The government bureaucracy in post-colonial south Asian countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have strong attachments to colonial practices. From the design of forms, offices, and hierarchical structure within the bureaucracy to filing and recording the forms has the colonial imprint in it (Gupta, 2013). This continuation could also be seen in the irrational requirements and tedious documentation required in each department. As Gupta (2006) describes the relation between the bureaucracy and state functioning, "everyday practices of bureaucracy and representation of state gives insight to the state as cultural artefacts". Often these everyday practices of bureaucracy involve made up 'informal/unofficial' regulations by the local offices along with the formal requirements. All this allows for the seamless integration of corruption as part of the documentation process (Hull, 2012). The complicated requirements make the applicant rely on the government officials to move the application without any further complications, which could be achieved by bribery.

The extra step taken by the local administration looks absurdly similar to formal rules and it passes as formal requirement. While these unofficial regulations were kept under the control of local level offices, they do offer a solution when the state is in dire need. The Chakmas application process for the enrolment in electoral roll in 2005 demonstrates how the "unofficial" rules could be presented as official rules and part of the application process without any substantive legitimacy. Rejecting the applications because they were received in bulk and

creating additional requirements (impossible) to complete the application are tricks of trade in bureaucracy which were successfully implemented to support the state agenda.

Constitutional Rights and Changing Requirements in Citizenship

As mentioned earlier, the central government has complete authority over citizenship laws, and it is not obligated to discuss it with the state governments on this matter. The central government from time to time has considered amendments to the Citizenship Act based on the issues raised by the state government and civil society.

Article 5 of the Indian Constitution in 1950 dictates three requirements to become citizen of the country; a. those who are born in the territory of India, b. either of whose parents were born in the territory of India, c. ordinary resident who lived in the territory of India for not less than five years. While this was in practice till 1955, the Citizenship Amendment Act 1955 tackled one of the issues regarding the mass influx of foreigners in the country. This was done in order to restrain the "constitutive outsiders" from attaining citizenship. The concern was that by massive influx of foreigners from nearby countries, their offspring would be able to claim citizenship by being born in the territory of India (Ashish and Thiruvengadam, 2017). To solve this problem, the amendment required proof of kinship ties to India from father or mother's side of the child to acquire citizenship. This amendment had serious consequences for the people who are living in the margins of the state. The porous borders in the Northeast India and the people who are accustomed to changing their places and living in the borderlands are the most affected by this amendment.

In the 1979 by-election of Mangaldoli parliamentary constituency in Assam, All Assam Student Union detected that the electoral rolls were compromised mostly by the foreigners in the constituency. AASU engaged in mobilising and checking the electoral rolls during that time and later from 1979-1985 to figure out the foreigners registered in the electoral system. They mobilised mass movements in the state and argued that the political landscape of Assam is being determined by the foreigners in the state. In order to address this issue, the Government of India and state representatives of Assam signed the Assam Accord in 1985. According to Assam Accord, the people of Assam were categorised into two groups. One, those who are resident of the state before Jan 1st, 1966 and they were deemed citizens of the state by merely

residing in the state. The second category was for the people who migrated between 1st January 1966 to March 25th, 1971 who are considered as foreigners. It further stated that the second category can claim citizenship, but it cannot take part in elections for the next ten years. The Assam Accord indirectly affected the possibilities of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh being considered for citizenship.

Assam Accord policies were reflected in the Citizenship Amendment Act 1986, which targeted refugees, preventing them from automatic acquisition of citizenship of India by birth (Jayal, 2016). To tackle the mass refugee influx from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka was the main objective of the amendment. It also helped in curtailing the local state intentions to provide citizenship for refugees in the state. In the case of Tamil Nadu, Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who fled from Sri Lanka- LTTE conflict were given refugee settlements by the Tamil Nadu state government. But the Citizenship Amendment Act does not allow them to get citizenship even if the state government supports the move.

The further amendments for the Citizenship acts were influenced by political and religious motives depending on the parties who were ruling in the Central government. The current BJP government focuses more on the religious line to provide citizenship to Hindu, Sikh and other minorities in the South Asia except the Muslims. As explained in the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) section that follows, the new Act nullifies the 1986 amendment act which was the main hurdle in legal sense for Chakmas.

Unintended Recipient of Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016

The Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 which is currently ratified as Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA) assures citizenship for minorities from neighbouring countries. The main requirement being that they need to have crossed the border before 31st December 2014. Under the current act, migrants from Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities from the neighbouring countries are eligible for citizenship. It extended the reason of doubt for those who could not prove their Indian origin from the above-mentioned communities and reduced the required number of years to 5 from 12 for permanent status. CAA went a step ahead in terms of guaranteeing citizenship for the minorities from neighbouring countries. This was in complete contradiction on the previous stance on refugees and citizenship for refugees.

The Citizenship Amendment Bill was a long-standing election promise by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to simplify the process of granting citizenship to minority Hindus from India's neighbouring countries. In their election manifesto, the current Prime Minister said "We have a responsibility towards Hindus who are harassed and suffer in other countries. India is the only place for them. We will have to accommodate them here"[42]. While the current amendment makes the process of citizenship simpler and easy to obtain for the asylum seekers, it only focuses on certain groups, specifically Hindus and to certain extentt for Buddhist, Christians, Jains from neighbouring countries.

Before moving into how the new changes to law are going to impact Chakmas and other refugees, it is important to look into the changes to the old Citizenship Act 1955. That is to say, it is necessary to delve into how the government was able to make massive changes to Citizenship Act within no time while all other legislations (particularly regarding Chakmas) never get to achieve the same effectiveness.

The initial and major change can be seen in the provision that reads "provided that persons belonging to minority communities namely Hindus…. shall not be treated as illegal migrants for the purpose of this Act". This gives leverage to the refugees of these communities to apply for Indian citizenship without major hurdles. The second one, is the reduction in the number of years required to stay in the country for the eligibility to apply. It is reduced to "not less than six years" in the place of "not less than eleven years". Political and judicial critics are pointing out the violations of the right to equality (Article 14 of Indian Constitution) and discrimination based on religion; how it makes certain groups of people more equal than others Chandrachud (2020). Keeping this in mind, I would like to focus on the secondary beneficiaries of the Act - Chakmas and Hajongs.

The Act was clearly not meant directly to benefit refugees other than few Hindu minorities from nearby Muslim majority nations. But it did help the case of Chakmas partially if not exactly. The Government of India was the target of human rights groups and the UN for not accommodating Rohingyas and threatening to deport them to Bangladesh. The government

[42]https://thewire.in/67272/citizenship-amendment-bill-2016/

made several restrictions to asylum seekers and gave orders to stop them at the border. The present political dispensation in India is known for its Islamophobic stance, hence this is not surprising. The Home Ministry, following the criticism from Human Rights organisations, issued a statement on 5th of September 2017 "I (Kiren Rijiju, on behalf of Home Ministry) want to tell the international organisations whether they are registered under UNHRC or not, they are illegal immigrants in India". Most importantly he mentioned "India has absorbed maximum number of refugees in the world so nobody should give India any lessons on how to deal with refugees". So, now connecting to the 17th September announcement, it is very clear that the unified voice of Central government and its announcement to give citizenship for Chakmas was actually to project how accommodating the government was towards refugees and could not accommodate anymore applications.

The idea of CAA sparked protests in different parts of the country especially in the north-eastern states as it deprived people from citizenship and articulated a new idea of belonging. The violent protest in northeast India created an unrest and demanded the repulsion of the Act in the region immediately. The overarching political power yielded by the student union once again proved to be the major obstacle in the region. Due to these protests and political unrest, the CAA was modified to include the provisions of Inner Line Permit protected under the Bengal Regulation Act and regional special rights of northeast states to be included in the act. The inclusion of Inner Line Permit in the CAA brought back the initial hurdle of Chakmas getting citizenship to where it all started.

The much-hyped government announcement and the media headlines of Chakmas getting citizenship is not actually any different from the three other Supreme Court judgments or the long list of High Court decisions announced in the last two decades. While the announcement generated a lot of talk in the region as usual, it did not contribute towards advancing the legal or social status of Chakmas in the state in any way. The Citizenship Act 2016, the actions of successive Central and State Governments belonging to same parties (or different parties) and the number of Supreme Court judgments seem to only be a vicious circle leading nowhere for the Chakmas.

Conclusion

On the 24th of September 2017, I visited Devapuri, 35 kilometres away from Diyun (Circle place) and stayed with Bijoy Chakma, my local contact in the village. He was not aware of the government announcement the week before. He told me that he vaguely remembered people discussing a possible bandh on one of those days. I explained the entire issue to him and eagerly asked him for his opinion about the four dramatic days and his view of citizenship. But he was not interested, and he simply nodded his head. After some silence he started speaking about the harvest in the field.

The disinterest shown by Bijoy, Biroja and others during the Supreme Court judgement and the eventual government withdrawal from the announcement are very telling. Such happenings are far too familiar for them. Even the judgement from the highest court in the country does not offer hope for the Chakmas. It also reflects the state of judiciary and political system in the region. The false alarms regarding citizenship, the numerous application processes and government's fickle minded approach over the decades have resulted in the Chakmas being incredibly blasé about any new announcements.

This passage of time without any clear idea of what is going to happen in the future has put the Chakmas in a state of "temporal angst". Here they are oppressed by the passage of time in a state of infinite waiting (Stepputat, 1992). The recurring legal and legislative cycle of loopholes has kept the Chakmas in "waiting" for more than half a century. This kind of chronic waiting is similar to what Chakrabarty (2000) calls prolonged waiting experienced by the colonial population. Chakmas are still ruled and restricted by the colonial laws introduced in 1873. The present condition of Chakmas is reminiscent of the arbitrary colonial practices which are actively in place till today.

Chapter 2: Moral Guardians of the Land and Culture: Power of Student Union in Arunachal Pradesh.

On 17 September 2017, the Home Ministry of India announced that Chakmas would be granted citizenship; according to the Supreme Court judgement, the central and state government of Arunachal Pradesh should come together to solve this issue. Within a few hours of this announcement, the major student body of Arunachal Pradesh - AAPSU (All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union) announced they will not allow this to happen in Arunachal Pradesh and called for a *bandh* "protest" on 19th September 2017. The bandh was an action against the central and the state's governments' intention to implement the Supreme Court judgement. Following the *bandh* staged on 20 September 2017, both the central and state governments withdrew their initial plan to grant citizenship (discussed in chapter 1). Within a day of protest, AAPSU managed to block the government agenda without any major struggle or negotiation with the state government. AAPSU plays a crucial role in determining the political and cultural aspects of the state, mainly regarding the citizenship issue of Chakmas in the state. The student union is the prime opponent both in court and in the state. In this chapter I ask, if a student union can block the government policy and supreme court judgement, then how powerful is the student union (AAPSU) in the state? How did AAPSU turn into the moral guardian of the state and sole representative of the indigenous voice and their invested interest in indigeneity and citizenship? Who are AAPSU and how did student union become so powerful in the state? And what does power means to them and how do they achieve it without any opposition?

While this chapter focuses on different aspects of student union, chakmas are the invisible entity in the dialogue as the events and decisions are made in the capital, Itanagar. Through examining the student union activities and their hegemony over questions of national identity in Arunachal Pradesh local community, I bring out the powerlessness of Chakmas to fight back for over 50 years now. In order to do this, I look into the historical origins of the student union in the state and Northeast region. I follow the two major events during my fieldwork, the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the student union (AAPSU) in 2017, and the recent "Operation Clean Drive" organised by AAPSU in 2018.

I

Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Student Union

I was introduced to Laung by Fr. Sebastian during a school event organised by catholic schools in East Arunachal. Laung was the chief guest for the event, he is one of the student union representatives or spokespersons from East Arunachal, who at the time was pursuing his master's degree. He was the youngest guest invited for the event, others being bureaucrats and politicians from the region. I was cautiously introduced by Fr. Sebastian, who said I was doing research on ethnic tribes and wanted to know about refugee issues in Arunachal. The student union representative informed us that at the time the President of AAPSU was really busy given that the Golden Jubilee celebrations of AAPSU were nearing; nonetheless, he would try to arrange a meeting for me with the President the following week.

Several days later, Laung was supposed to pick me up at 9.30 in the morning so I could meet the president of student union. I waited. After nearly 40 minutes, he arrived in a white Mahindra Scorpio, a vehicle synonymous with power in middle class India. He explained that the reason for his delay was to do with the preparations for the Golden Jubilee celebrations of student union. He was in-charge of media publicity and banners; he had been rather busy the whole previous day. In between his many activities, he picked me to meet the president for my interview. On the way he oriented me about the event and how it would be the biggest they had organised before then. They were expecting the presence of high-level ministers and organised several competitions and other activities. He also commented on the 'bad state' of state politics and added that students needed to be active and involved. Asking about what I did and about my research, he mentioned he was also interested in pursuing research: "I also want to do higher studies, but the student union work is taking most of the time. Also, I want to do something to East Arunachal Pradesh. You are in Diyun, you should know the difference in development partiality (compared to capital districts[43]). I want to get into politics and do something for the people of my region (East Arunachal Pradesh)."

[43] The capital complex comprises the major towns (Itanagar, Naharlagun and Banderdewa) in Itanagar district. The capital complex is also home to Nyishi's the dominant tribe in the state. There is also grievance among the East Arunachal Pradesh ethnic communities that western region is more developed in infrastructure and other amenities, as the state chief ministers are invariably coming from the western region (more specifically from capital districts).

By this time, we reached the printing press where the banners were being printed. He took me inside to show me the banners and mentioned that 500 of them would be placed along the highway and in other important sites in the city. He asked the workers to quicken the process, so they would be ready before the event. He got several phone calls throughout the discussion, one of which was from the vice president of the union who was asking of his whereabouts and expressed his desire to see him, so Laung took me along to meet the vice president. He was staying in a government hotel where they had booked 4 rooms for the Golden Jubilee work. Rooms were occupied by volunteers and office bearers, who were busy with invitations and finalising the time schedule for the event. They were not interested to know about my visit there. On the way, Laung asked me not to mention the Christian ties in Diyun (by which he meant the Christian school where I worked as teacher) as the union members didn't have good opinion about Christians. Laung introduced me to the vice president of the Student Union, who had just submitted his PhD dissertation in history, so he was curious about my research and asked lots of questions about my PhD, for instance, and whether it was done under University Grants Commission[44]. I didn't answer all his questions as I sensed some answers might get me into trouble, so just mentioned something about problems of refugees in Arunachal Pradesh. He was not convinced whether my work was really a PhD or a research project under some professor.

The Vice President was sceptical as to why anyone would want to station themselves in Diyun and do research for a year - *"What is there in Diyun?"* His question was a valid one as Diyun is not a particularly interesting place for anything else other than that it's densely populated by Chakmas. Laung interrupted our discussion from time to time to change the topic to the Golden Jubilee celebrations and hurried me to meet the President who was in another hotel and would be there only for a short time as he had prior commitments.

On the way, Laung commented that our general secretary was a much better orator than the vice-president and he could answer my questions but unfortunately, he was away for union work. On the AAPSU website, the description about the bearer of General Secretary post

[44] University Grants Commission is a premier funding and research body established by Central government. It is popular with all research students and academia in India.

(Tabom Tai) portrayed his achievements as having served as chairman of "Operation Clean Drive against Illegal Bangladeshis 2013" and of the "Chakma – Hajgong issue, 2010[45]". During the tenure of every new union member, there is an achievement related to Chakmas and to movements around illegal migration, such as protests or appeals to the Supreme Court against granting citizenship to the Chakmas.

We rushed to another hotel where the Students' Union had booked another 4 rooms for the preparations. The hotel was located in a prime area, exclusive to higher officials' offices and government buildings. In the parking area there were few state affiliated vehicles, mostly connected to legislative members of Arunachal Pradesh assembly. Noticing my curiosity, Laung told me this was where most of the political leaders, both from state and from central level parties, held their meetings, hence it was usually quite busy. One of the legislative assembly members was there to discuss about the guest list for the event with the student union. Once we reached the hotel, the hotel staff who seemed to be familiar with Laung briefed him about the happenings and whereabouts of the President. The familiarity and casualness of the student union with the legislative members and the interactions with people in the hotel was more similar to that of a political party member than to that of a student organisation. To simultaneously book several hotels and vehicles in the state capital also brings out how sound the student union is economically. It should be noted that student union also acts as a ladder to enter into state and local politics later. Many of the previous student union prominent figures have turned into members of legislative assembly and officer bearers in political parties after the student union days.

Laung was very hesitant about introducing me to the union members as he kept his church connections separate from student union activities. He gave me tips on how to impress the president. He asked me to tell the President about how Laung informed me about the Golden Jubilee celebrations and that people in Germany might also be interested to know about student union activities. Laung said the President would be happy to hear this[46].

[45] http://www.aapsu.org/Abouts accessed on 20th April 2020

[46] Germany is more popular and easily recognised in India, so it was easier to say I came from Germany than from Hungary. This helped avoid the distraction of explaining where Hungary is or why I went there, which usually takes the discussion to a different direction.

The AAPSU is the apex student body in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. As mentioned in the previous chapter, they hold a powerful position in the state's political and cultural affairs. The preparations I noticed for the Golden Jubilee celebrations and the invited guests for the event sends a strong message of how powerful the Student Union is in the state. The noted guests for the event were Sarbanandha Sonowal, the Chief Minister of Assam, Kirren Rijju, Minister of State for Home Ministry, Pema Kahndu, the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh and Samujjal Kumar Battacharya, Advisor to NESO (Northeast Students Organisation). The presence of Assam's Chief Minister is seen as a message by the student union about its growing power of influence in the region and also to keep the chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh in check. NESO here plays as a power broker that brings together different parties in the region towards a common goal.

The Student Union functions as a parallel to the government, or rather, more as a permanent opposition party, with its own administrative structure. The AAPSU central committee in itself encompasses 42 members from secretaries and assistant secretaries of various departments, financiers, legal advisors, auditors, convenors and senior advisors to the union etc. They have different branches to deal with different, related issues, ranging from education, law, public information & publication, culture and the women's department. The Union President and General Secretary have overall command over the Student Union. Apart from the central committee there are district level student unions at each district that acts as subordinate to the state level union and enforces all the decisions taken by the state student union (AAPSU). While the decisions are taken by the AAPSU, it is the All Students Unions which do the groundwork in the state at the district level. Despite the geographical and logistical difficulties of the state, as West Arunachal Pradesh and East Arunachal Pradesh is separated by Assam in the middle and the hill terrain in both parts of Arunachal Pradesh, AAPSU is able to reach and implement its policies through these district level unions, along with the local mobilisation of unions at district level.

AAPSU is also part of the Northeast Student Organisation (NESO) that brings together all major students' unions in the Northeast region[47]. The web of student union mobilisation under the guidance of NESO connects from the school level in remote villages to the entire Northeast as a region. NESO positions itself as a coordinator and advisory unit for all the major student unions in the Northeast region, is actively involved in the issues of illegal migration and refugees as it cuts across all the states in the region, presenting themselves as the guardian of student unions and protective of indigenous groups rights in Northeast India. NESO doesn't have direct authority over the state level student unions, but it acts as the advisory board for the student unions, bringing them together and coordinating the regional level events.

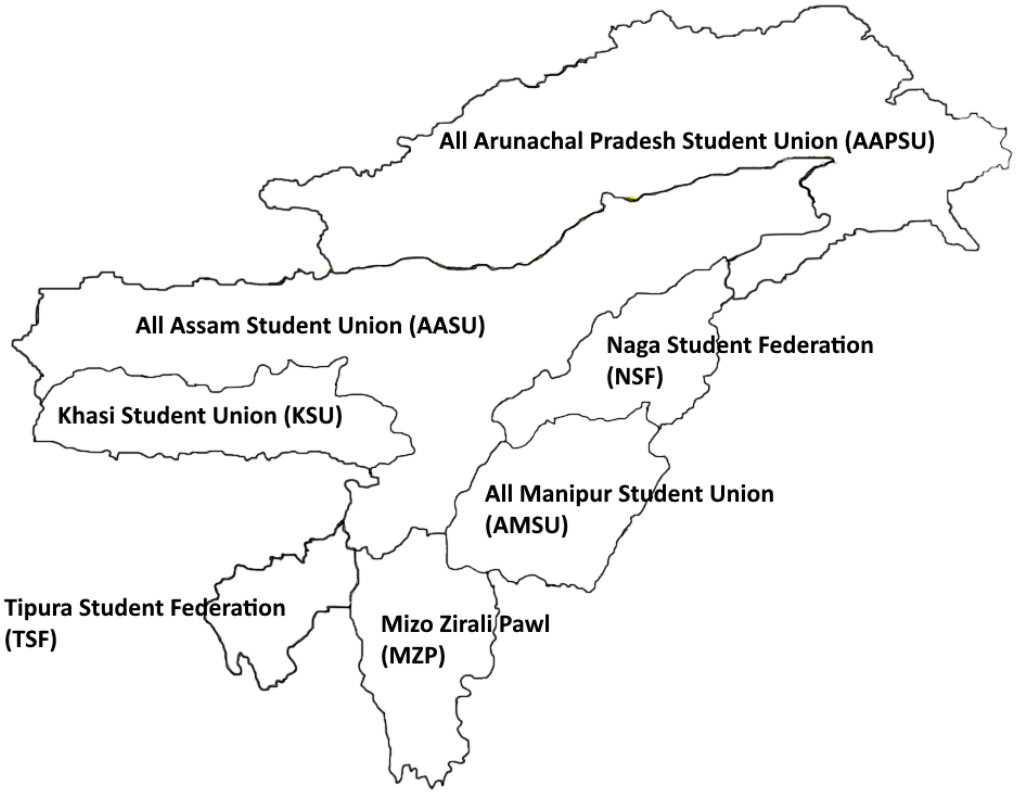

Figure 3: Student Unions presence in neighbouring states in Northeast India

[47] All Assam Students union (AASU), Khasi Student union (KSU), Garo Student Union (GSU), Naga Students Federation (NSF), All Manipur Student Union (AMSU), Mizo Zirali Pawl (MZP), Tripura Students Federation (TSF) and NESO acts as intermediator and counsellor for student unions on the issue of illegal migration and political activities in the region.

The membership of the student union is simple and restricted to Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes[48] (APST) students pursuing education in schools and colleges. Students in class XI (secondary level school education: second to last year) are eligible to be part of a student union and vote in the student union elections. These rules are similar to the rules of student unions in Assam that restrict non-Assamese people to be part of the union (Deka, 2013). AAPSU does not include Adivasis and other Non APST[49] groups (Bengalis, Deoris,) to be part of the union. Student union membership is exclusive and only 'sons of soil' are able to join and contest its elections. As entry to the union is already restricted and exclusive to scheduled tribes, the consensus of the student union is already established on issues like citizenship to chakmas and tribal rights.

Apart from AAPSU which encompasses all the recognised tribal community students, there are individual community level student unions like All Tangsa Student Union (ATSU), All Arunachal Pradesh Tai Khampti Student Union which are primarily focused on the issues concerned with their respective tribal communities and inter-community issues. At the larger state level student union, it is always dominated by assertive communities; but the others try to compete for dominance as well (Baruah, 2002). In order to make their voices heard and assert their power, the local community level student unions play a major role. The overriding power of AAPSU relies in its ability to unite and command all the youth from different tribal communities, despite their individual motives to dominantly represent their respective identities[50]. As Arunachal Pradesh is more ethnically diverse than the other states (of Northeast India), AAPSU has become a dominant voice in the state. The driving force for their unification since the inception of the Student Union has been the refugee issue, because of the fear of settlement of Chakmas and the ongoing illegal migrant issue in the nearby states in Northeast region.

The community level student unions like ATSU try to raise issues related to local and regional levels; with an effort to bring the issues to the notice of the district and state levels of the student

[48] List of ethnic tribes recognised by the state of arunachal Pradesh include Singphos, Tangsas, Khamptis, Noctes, Mishmi, Wanchos and others in East arunachal Pradesh

[49] Non APST groups do not have land rights but allowed to work and stay in AP.

[50] Each ethnic group in the state has a student union of their own, to look after their own group interests in the local level. As one of the east arunachal student reprsntative puts it "only tribal communtities from west/ capital region become key members in AAPSU". The aspirations of these student unions are to be dominant in state student unions.

union (AAPSU). It is also worth mentioning that in the district level, student unions of each tribal community get more or less good representation in the state level union, so it helps to raise their community issue in larger forums and also shows their dominance in the region. In order to organise and keep the community together, individual tribal groups organise several cultural and social events through their student unions. Apart from the APST, other groups like Chakmas and Hajongs also have their own student unions, but they don't command similar power over the society as other APST student unions do. Student union activities of chakmas are discussed at latter part of this chapter.

We waited for 30 minutes in the reception of the second hotel as the President entered in a hurry with three other union members. He was wearing a kurta and waistcoat (typical of Indian politicians) and dark goggles. He looked nothing like a university student, but rather like an active politician. On the way to the room for the meeting, the receptionist interrupted to ask about the bill; the President took out a bundle of 2000 rupee notes from his back pocket and gave nearly half of it and asked him to keep track of the bills. He didn't pay much attention to how much money he handed him over but insisted on keeping the bills in order.

The President (Kameng Tai) was very friendly and asked me what I did in Germany. He asked me to write about student union activities and the good things they did in Arunachal Pradesh in Germany, that would spread the news about the activities of Student union in Arunachal Pradesh. Before I could ask him about the issue of refugees, he began

> *"First of all, we are all Indians. Supreme court said they are alien. If Arunachalis are Indian, the country should not be in favour of foreigners and neglect Indians. They kill people there, they occupy and destroy reserve forests, but supreme court does not comment on those issues. So, to protect our rights (indigenous peoples' rights), we raise our voices within our capacity, and they arrest us. If somebody comes into your house and after some time starts ruling you, how will you feel? This is my question? Chakma Hajongs problem is not just my problem, but it is a problem of the Government of India. Since 1873 Arunachal is a restricted state under India. Even Indians take ILP[51] to visit*

[51] Inner Line Permit (ILP) is protective legislature made during British rule to restrict the entry to non- tribes in scheduled areas. Discussed in chapter 1 and 2.

the state. This rule is not made by us but by the Government of India, during the British period. Now, to look back it looks like British government was much better for us, at least they cared/thought about us".

According to the President, Indian government has done a lot of injustice to Arunachal Pradesh. He narrates the story of how in the 1962 Indo- China war, India left Arunachal Pradesh unprotected but still Arunachalis are hard-core Hindi speaking people, hardcore patriotic people of India. But despite of this, this sentiment is not reciprocated by the Indian government. This brings out the perception and hurt of not only of the student union but the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh, it stretches further to the argument of Arunachal Pradesh state against the chakmas. There are several key aspects that need to be unpacked in this. As elaborated in the Introduction, the historical injustice towards the Northeast ern states and the administration by Indian state is a troubling issue in the region. Despite this injustice, Kameng emphasized the nationalism and patriotism of the people of Arunachal Pradesh and the fact that they have embraced towards India by linguistic integration (no other state in the Northeast has Hindi as its major colloquial language). Pointing out the Indian state's failure to protect them during the Indo- China war, he made the point that they still integrated into the state. According to Kameng, these sacrifices of ethnic communities and people of Arunachal Pradesh were not acknowledged by the Indian state, which was overwhelmingly shared by tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.

While the Inner Line Permit is an ageless argument consistently referred to in every case, Kameng connected it to the significance of ethnic identity of the tribes, " Its (inner Line Permit) importance was realised and valued by Colonial Britishers, but the current Indian state doesn't seem to care for the rule*".* Given the geographical position of the state, the question of whether India considers Arunachalis as Indians is fully loaded with geo-politics and the geographical importance of Arunachal Pradesh. The position on colonial administration by Kameng and certain sections of political circle in the state of Arunachal Pradesh is also one of the rare moments in Indian history when the British rule is considered more acceptable. The student union makes use of the historical injustice inflicted upon the people of Arunachal Pradesh, and their sacrifice in the time of war and partition and point out that these have been paid back through the settlement of "illegal migrants" in the tribal state. The argument that their

patriotism expressed through integration of Hindi and other forms was not respected by the Indian state helps AAPSU to establish itself as the voice of indigenous people. It makes a compelling case on the tribal identity and the need to be protected. When the President was speaking about the 1962 war and language integration, the union members who were keenly listening to our conversation nodded their head in agreement with him. This agreement is not only limited to the student union members but the tribal communities in the state.

II

National Register of Citizens and Operation Clean Drive

The recent case of updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC) of India in the state of Assam under the aegis of the Supreme Court of India and its implications on Arunachal Pradesh would be an apt example to elaborate on the power held by the AAPSU in the state. Through the NRC updating process all citizens from the state of Assam were required to verify their proof of domicile and Assamese identity. The NRC was organised to survey the illegal immigrants in the state and is a primary clause as per the Assam Accord of 1985 (Clause 5, 5.3)[52]. The demand to count the numbers was solely raised by All Assam Student Union, with popular support from indigenous groups and local political parties.

The NRC crisis in Assam triggered a response from AAPSU. While ASSU did it through legislation, further involvement of political parties and intervention of supreme court, AAPSU did not waste time consulting and complicating the process of legalities and legislation to implement Arunachal Pradesh's own NRC. In the wake of NRC and fear that illegal migrants might enter the state of Arunachal Pradesh, AAPSU instructed its members to be vigilant and check the presence of illegal migrants in their respective districts. They created their own check points in the border districts and other areas, verifying the Inner Line Permits of people who were suspicious to them.

In the month of August 2018, the AAPSU President circulated the notice among the District Student Union (DSU) and other members that there is a possibility of illegal migrants entering Arunachal because of NRC and the union should be ready to stop any infiltration. The union

[52] Assam Accord, 1985

announced *"Operation Clean Drive"* in order to keep a check on illegal migration at the borders. The four-page notice from the central committee gave specific instructions to DSUs and volunteers on the process to approach illegal migrants if they happen to find one. Proper records including photographs and other details of illegal migrants detected/ identified were instructed to be maintained in a register and be submitted to the committee[53]. On 17th of August 2018, AAPSU set check points at the border between Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. On Facebook, volunteers uploaded pictures of their activities at zonal level as a way of reporting to the organising committee.

Picture 1: Protest against illegal migrants by AAPSU

The picture above is at the entry point to east Arunachal, at the Dirak gate. Dirak gate is the only entry and exit point for Chakmas in Diyun to cross Assam and other places. Interestingly, just a few metres away there is already a government check point administered by central reserve police force (CRPF) paramilitary unit of Indian army. But the student union still had their own check points and verified the Inner line permits and other documents of non Arunachalese crossing the point. The entire exercise is redundant in various aspects as there

[53] AAPSU order Dated 8th August 2018. Point 7 in Guidelines for Operation clean Drive.

are already check points at every entry point to the state monitored by the central forces another check post does not help in anyway. Operation clean drive was stopped after two weeks of making noise around the borders. Soon after the agitation dropped AAPSU found a new problem, namely the residence permit given for Non APST communities in the state.

From the beginning, the state government did not comment on "Operation Clean Drive" and insisted that the state would take necessary steps to prevent illegal migration into the state. The check points at the border not only undermine the authority of state and central government but also demonstrate the power of student union who position themselves above the state, as guardian of society.

'Operation Clean Drive' is a display of the performative power of the student union, whereby it exerts control over pre-existing state measures so as to gather attention to itself. The performative power that the student union yields is based on the recurring "eventness" targeted on Chakmas from time to time. These events manipulated by the expectations and emotions of local communities propel the actors (students) to channel these performances as what Reed (2013) calls "quantum of social force" to coordinate and control the actions. The check post undermining the state legitimacy to protect the territory draws attention to itself to the point of becoming a public spectacle (De Genova, 2013). This performative theatre purely organised for display gathers momentum in the student union politics to push and preform further actions, taking over the role of state.

Silence of Arunachal Pradesh Chakma Student Union

APCSU is student body of chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh that deals with student level community mobilisation, with it headquarter in Delhi. Like the Committee for Citizenship Rights of Chakmas and Hajongs in Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCHAP), the organisation that deals with citizenship issues related to chakmas and Hajongs, the student union works from Delhi and coordinates with different district and block level representatives in Arunachal Pradesh. The fact that a Chakma Students' body functioning on behalf of Chakma students of Arunachal Pradesh works completely out of Arunachal Pradesh and is based in Delhi, represents the crux of the problem faced by chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh. Within the state, they are not able to

function and mention why. Therefore, they negotiate the legal and community issues of Chakmas living in AP from outside the state.

Unlike the AAPSU, Chakma student union is not vocal and does not have strong political power in the state. In the draft constitution of the student union prepared in 2016, there is no mention of any political actions. The document elaborates more on how the union is focused on bringing the youth together and the community at large on cultural and educational aspects. The union organises demonstrations on drug abuse, health and hygiene, and awareness programmes in Diyun. They organise sports events and community engagement activities among the youth in Diyun and nearby villages.

The student union also acts as a buffer between the community and other student unions in the state. They negotiate with AAPSU and local student unions when there is a discrepancy in local issues. The student body actively communicates with AAPSU to negotiate their stands on various issues. The position of APCSU in Arunachal Pradesh is that of a mediator who tries to calm down the other major student unions, thus revealing the marginal position that the community faces in the state. The political powerlessness of the Chakma student union reflects more strongly in their inability to counter any protests or policy decision taken by AAPSU inside Arunachal Pradesh. A clear manifestation of this occurred when AAPSU called for a state-wide bandh to oppose the supreme court judgment to grant citizenship to chakmas. Despite the fact that Diyun is mainly populated by chakmas, they were not able to demonstrate their opposition in any way. This throws light to the overarching power of AAPSU even in Chakmas dominant areas.

III

To understand the present political system in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, it is necessary to understand the historical power structure and how the student union gained this power. In this section I want to elaborate on two things: one is the political power structure of the state, the position of political parties and legislative authority in contrast to student unions. The second is the development and political strategies of AAPSU over time to become a prime political

actor in Arunachal Pradesh. I focus in particular on the key events that led AAPSU to gain its unusual power.

Political power of the State

Local political parties in the state of Arunachal Pradesh emerged a bit later than the state's student union. During the Northeast Frontier agency days, Arunachal Pradesh was administered by an apex council body under the guidance of the governor of Assam. Scope for political parties were less as the decisions regarding the state development were relied on the agency council. Arunachal Pradesh got elevated into statehood status in 1971 but the All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union (AAPSU) was already a reckoning force in the state, leaving behind the newly formed political parties a lot to work and catch up with student union activities. The isolation of Arunachal Pradesh from mainland Indian politics for extended period of time and its sudden integration, long after independence placed AAPSU in a critical position to lead the way. By the time political parties came into the power, the student union who filled the political vacuum before the formation of state had polarising and commanding authority to dictate policies and the agenda for state development.

Political parties are aware of the hegemonic and encompassing power of student union could gather in the state, stayed away from student union activities and focused on developmental aspects. Any debate of authority dispute between the student union and political parties was settled long before the political parties were formed in the state. The question for the political parties and the state is how to manoeuvre and establish state power without disturbing the functions of the student union, as they did during the Operation Clean Drive in 2018.

Minimal representation with only two parliamentary constituencies reduced the significance of state representation in the Union level politics. Further weaking the position of political parties in the local level, there were no substantial opposition party till now in the state. The lack of strong political institution and absence of opposition parties to hold account of ruling party has diminished the credibility of legislative assembly in the state[54]. The student union positions

[54] The indifference to which party rules the state could be easily demonstrated by the present Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh Prema Khandu , who continues to be the chief minister from July 2016 to till now under the political affiliation of three different parties (17th Jul 2016- 16th Sep 2016 with Indian National Congress(INC), 17th Sep 2016- 31st Dec 2016 with Peoples Part of Arunachal Pradesh (PPA) and from 1st Jan 2017 with the

itself as a radical and functional institution to the chaotic and dysfunctional political space in the state.

The success of the student union in capturing the political sphere lies in its organisational structure. Student unions change in composition periodically and every new office bearer brings different dynamics to the union and different politics to the state. The changing and fresh politics of student union gives an advantage over stagnant political parties in the state. The student union does not allow any parallel or small student social movements in opposition to them. The regional and small ethnic based student unions are placed within the overarching power of AAPSU. The aspiring small student unions want to play a greater role in AAPSU than against AAPSU. The absence of resistance and strong political parties to influence the national and local level politics have created space for student unions to dominate. This in turn has attained popularity and acceptance of student union hegemony as supreme political power giving them uncontrolled power in the state, where they act as parallel and a step above the state institutions as the guardians of the culture and ethnicity in the region.

Student Union in Northeast India

Student unions in general are mostly limited to university campuses in India and they do not have any effect outside campuses. Their activities concern the direct interests of students and their needs in the university, and their ideological battles are restricted to the confined campus areas and do not have major implications outside campuses. But in Northeast India, student unions are rather society-oriented, and their activities and concerns do not stop at campus level (Dutta, 2001). The awareness and participation of students in political discussion stems from the historical marginalisation of the region and absence of cohesive voice to represent them in regional and national level. The student unions deal with broader social, political and economic issues of the communities they belong to and have direct implications in the regional/local politics. They have strong hold on ethnic issues related to their community. While the mobilisation of students happens in colleges and universities, the activities of the student union in Northeast India mostly take place outside the campuses. As student unions have been able

Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). Similar trajectory could be seen with former Chief minister Geogong Apang with three different political parties from April 2003 to April 2007. These moves have made the political parties and ideological politics redundant in the state.

to position themselves as the representatives of the culture and ethnic identity of the community, they yield more power in the society.

As education became the changing factor in the tribal society, the responsibility of the community shifted from the older generation village heads who were deprived of education. The shift of power from older to newer generation marked the dynamic changes in terms of politics as well community structure in itself. Student unions of each of the communities (as all of them by default have student unions at this point) have become the spokesperson for the community that was earlier under the tribal head and the village heads of the community.

The rapid progress in terms of education and political awareness opened the scope to explore the political possibilities other than Northeast student unions. There is a trend among the new student union representatives which are not from the region rather from Northern and Delhi political systems. The culture of driving Mahindra Scorpio SUVs and sporting Nehru jackets with dark goggles to display their power is a clear imitation of what politicians do in mainland north India.

The new weapon of education empowered the youth of Arunachal Pradesh not only to safeguard the cultural and social aspects of their community but also entrusted them to hold the state (Indian) accountable for the historical injustices done towards Arunachalis. As the president mentioned, their parents and grandparents were illiterate, but they are not, and the state of India cannot fool them anymore. This emancipation and awareness by the student union has created a strong impact among the local communities.

History and Development of Student Union in Northeast and Arunachal Pradesh

The history of student movement/union in Arunachal Pradesh has been predominantly influenced by All Assam Student Union (AASU); it's impact could be traced from the beginning in AAPSU activities. The idea of student movement and power of student union largely comes from the Assam students' agitation that played a crucial role in the formation of Assamese cultural and linguistic identity in the post-independence period. As Dutta (1998) notes, the first student union in Arunachal Pradesh was started by few Adi- Mishing students

studying in Sadiya (Assam) school in 1947. While it went through changes and inclusion of other tribes into the union, which resulted in changing the name to All Northeast ern Frontier Agency Students Union for broader inclusion of all tribes in the state. The student union as such did not receive popularity till the early 1970s. During this period, the student union only engaged itself into regional level development and education related activities.

The main breakthrough as a strong student union capable of posing serious questions took place during the 1970s. The history of student union categorised by Dutta (1998) and AAPSU themselves divides the history into three phases - Phase I (1979- 1985), Phase II (1985-1990) and Phase III (1990 to present). All the three phases are strongly connected or paralleled to the politics of student union in Assam.

The first phase (1979-1985) is not only a crucial period for AAPSU but also for building the momentum of student unions in general in Northeast India. The Assam student agitation against foreigners' infiltration in the state gained momentum throughout the state. The six year-long movement that ended with the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985 is seen as a crucial victory for the student movement and regional/local politics. As explained in detail about the Assam Accord in Chapter 1, during the 1979 by election in Mangaldoli parliamentary constituency in Assam, the student union suspected there were irregularities in the electoral roll and most of the enrolled voters were foreigners / illegal migrants. They mobilised mass movements and cross-checked the authenticity of enrolled voters by themselves (Jayal, 2016). The student union demonstrated that the political and cultural landscape of the state was being altered by the presence and participation of foreigners in the state. This independent audit conducted by the student union bypassing the state authorities or due process within the system was perceived as revolutionary act by the people of the state. As the result of the movement in 1985, the central government and members of state representatives from Assam signed the Assam Accord. Assam accord made a distinction between two groups: one who is resident of the state (before 1966) and the others who migrated after 1966. Based on this distinction electoral reforms were implemented in the state. Later the accord policies were reflected in the citizenship amendment act of 1986. Assam Accord changes were directly credited to the role of student union in the state, cementing their credibility as the voice of the people and political reason in the region.

This achievement of AAPSU and their role in Assam Accord is seen as an important cornerstone for Assam student politics, but its impact can be seen throughout the region (Baruah, 1999). The success of student union politics demonstrated and encouraged other state student unions to replicate the model in their own states. States like Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh who were earlier part of Assam took this example as an opportunity to experiment their political ambitions, respective student unions adapted it according to their needs. Meghalaya student unions with the illegal migrant and Arunachal Pradesh student's union with Chakmas.

AAPSU in 1980s had a similar agenda in the state of Arunachal Pradesh targeting the "foreign nationals" in the state, *"Detection and deportation of foreign national from the state"* and a few other demands on local economy and land permits for non Arunachalese in the state (Dutta, 1988). The movement initially started to fend off the immigrants trying to enter Arunachal Pradesh due to the protests and evacuation in Assam, later it grew to focus on the refugees within the state. While the state government tried to negotiate and drop the protests, the newfound hope from AASU kept the union protests in AP grow stronger. The protests yielded partial victory as the Chief Minister addressed the issue of land allotment permit and declared that no permits were to be given to non-Arunachalese, which would violate the Inner Line Permit. The student union managed to get the attention of people in power and tribal society in large. The key issue which connects the Assam Students Union and AAPSU is "*immigration and refugee crisis"* the issues which are base to the foundation of these two student unions.

The Second Phase (1985-1990) which begins with the signing of Assam Accord in 1985 set AAPSU to pursue rigorous ways to raise their demands to the state. It should also be noted that in every new cycle of office bearer in the Union, they try to make the agitations severe to display their commitment to the agenda/demand. The demands remained the same since the beginning, but the agitation strategies and student union power to summon large protests developed largely during this time. The killing of Kipa Kache, a student union member who was shot by police during one of the protests gained large support for the union. The union declared Kipa as the first martyr and erected memorials in every school in the state. The elevation of Arunachal Pradesh from Frontier region to Statehood in 1987 helped the student

union to become more organised and project themselves as the voice of youth and people in the state. It was even said that the statehood has brought huge responsibility/burden to AAPSU, as it is the major student union in the state.

The Third Phase (1990 onwards) brought a new and independent aspect to the union as it took centre stage without completely relying on neighbouring AASU. In the mid 1990s, AAPSU organised a series of events like "Delhi Chalo March" - students rallying to Delhi to protest against the considerations of Central and state governments to grant citizenship to chakmas in the state. In Arunachal Pradesh, "Drive away Chakma" campaigns led by the union evicted all the Chakma families from the State capital and nearby districts (known as capital complex) to the other side of the state (eastern part). While the Delhi Chalo March didn't yield the anticipated results, it propelled the student union to join with the larger body of student unions in the region, the Regional Student Organisation (RSO) union constituted of all major student unions in the seven states. Later RSO was renamed as Northeast ern Students organisation (NESO). During this time the dominant student unions in the states put forward the demand of deporting illegal foreign nationals from the Northeast through NESO (Prasad, 2007).

The three phases of student union evolution in the region brings out their gradual growth and political influence in the region. The first phase of student agitation gave recognition and demonstration of what student unions could achieve. Identifying the key problems in the state and organising students under the banner of student's union was successfully achieved through this phase. The second phase based on the initial success and recognition, gave student unions the political power to represent themselves as a key stakeholder in the welfare of the state…. During the third phase, the student unions has grown into more than a stakeholder and became the guardians of political and cultural welfare of their region. The reliance on state to resolve the issues realised were long gone, the student unions has become an independent unit, a parallel organisation to state to implement their policies. Establishing check points at the borders by student unions, while there are checkpoints run by the state already at the border is a prime example of student union development in the region. In 2018, Meghalaya student union setting up check points to check residency status of travellers, if they are illegal migrants

escaping from assam NRC [55]. During the same time, AAPSU setup check points to fend of illegal migrants supposedly fleeing Assam into Arunachal Pradesh. Coordinating and consulting with other student unions for protest and blockades in the region not only undermines the state and other political institutions but it also asserts the political power of student unions.

The student unions of different state, with the help of other student unions in the neighbouring states could draft and implement necessary actions without the major help of the any support from the state or political institutions. From 1990s the student unions, especially AAPSU has grown in leaps where now they can implement the security measures that they find necessary for the state without consultation with the state government. As the guardianship of culture and identity of the state is in the hands of student union, the recognition of AAPSU from the major student unions in neighbouring states added credibility to the student union and the power to make decisions on behalf of people became boundless.

While AAPSU heavily relies on AASU and other student union historically in its formative years, what differentiates AAPSU form other major students in the region is that, unlike in other states, AAPSU does not have any other student union which could oppose its decision or alter the nature of the functioning. In Assam (All Bodo Student Union and other tribal student unions, Nagaland – Naga and kuki student union rivalry etc) and other states there are few other student unions who function outside the major student union. In Arunachal Pradesh, AAPSU does not have any opposing force and remains the dominant voice of state.

Student Union as Prime Locus of Political Power

The student union which began to unify the culturally diverse youths in the state and become the major influencer of the student unions in nearby states, has turned itself into an entity more powerful than the state itself. Tracing their historical trajectory, laid down by themselves, the document clearly demonstrates as to how they have grown into a firm organisation by experimenting and agitating slowly. The success or hegemonic power of the student union can be seen in the lack of opposition by any groups including the civil society in the state. The two

[55] https://scroll.in/article/888840/citizen-register-in-meghalaya-student-union-sets-up-check-points-to-monitor-travellers-from-assam accessed on 7th March 2022.

cases which demonstrate the lack of resistance precisely in the Northeast are the case of KSU and AAPSU. When the student union in Meghalaya demanded traditional khasi dress for female students, civil society did not oppose or simply condemn the action rather than requesting the student union to consider the difficulties of wearing traditional dresses to schools and colleges every day (Baruah, 2001). The most recent example being of AAPSU -after the news of Golden Jubilee celebrations of AAPSU, a reader sent a letter to Arunachal times writing "*AAPSU shouldn't spend money lavishly on the jubilee celebrations rather than they should spend the money on hiring legal counsels to make sure the chakmas are sent out![56]"* The anger and critique towards AAPSU was not against them in ideological or principle terms, rather it is about the diversion AAPSU is celebrating jubilee programmes, when the main objective of clearing Chakmas from the state is unfinished.

The student unions developed in the wake of political consciousness as a result of education. All of the student unions were organised by first generation educated youth, who Baruah calls "educated elites". The political and social affairs which are looked after by the elders of the society shifted to the newly educated youth in Northeast ern society. As the AAPSU president told me *"my father and mother didn't read, they were illiterate, I am a first-generation learner, now I am aware of rights".* The newfound hope in education and awareness along the political consciousness influenced by various student movements have taken the student unions to extreme levels. Monopoly over moral and cultural activities of society are controlled by the student unions. KSU in Meghalaya, AASU in Assam and AAPSU in Arunachal Pradesh are prime example of such groups.

The geopolitical advantage of Arunachal Pradesh being the border state between India and China positions itself in advantage to negotiate the rules of law. The main argument that AAPSU places in defence of its anti- Chakma stand comes from the historical injustice inflicted on the state of arunachal and its ethnic tribes by the state of India as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The state of India settled the Chakmas without the consent of the local tribes as they were illiterate and ignorant of the implications at that time. In a sense, the argument is that, the state of India betrayed the people of Arunachal Pradesh. This argument strongly resonated among the local communities and AAPSU is able to utilise it for their political gain.

[56] https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2017/10/13/aapsus-golden-jubilee/

AAPSU does not align or affiliate with any political party for giving autonomy and credibility to the union. It helps them to continue their activities without any disturbance from the party politics and scrutiny from public or any other sources. This autonomy gives them freedom to set agendas and execute without large deliberations or accountability to other than their own. Despite not being a political party, AAPSU carries more command than any other political party in the state. As Dutta notes, political parties do not want to interfere with the work of student unions as the latter have the potential to disrupt and alienate the party.

Dutta argues that all social consciousness including those of students are closely related to the legal and political super structure that is founded upon the production of relations of that society. He argues that "hegemony" is what keeps the students in their ideological predominance over their subordinate classes. While I agree with his analysis of student union and their strong hegemonic power in the Northeast ern society, I focused on the resulting unquestionable power that the student unions yield (especially AAPSU) and its direct consequences on the marginalised communities in the region. The absence of any opposition from the civil society or any other forums in the state compared to other state student unions.

The power of AAPSU needs to be seen in the light of wider context of the politics of student unions in the Northeast Indian region.

Conclusion

The evolution of student union along with the regional politics has changed the course and way of politics in the state. The new weapon of education opened up multiple possibilities for the youth in the state. The emancipatory act to empower the local communities by the first-generation learners gathered momentum with the student movement where it exceeded all other political actors in the region. The unique nature of political development where student unions are the thriving political group before the political parties even made their way to the state, made student union the prime political actor in the state. The absence of accountability and independent nature of the union, what started as an emancipatory movement over the time became authoritative vigilantism. extending their power to topple governments and forcing central and state governments to changes its policies. The two seminal works on student union in the region by Dutta (1998) and Baruah (2002) specifically in Arunachal Pradesh, talk about

historical and political nature of student unions shy away from calling them “vigilantes”. The operations like “drive away Chakmas” and “Operation Clean Drive” targeting Chakmas show the vigilante aspect of student union, who are masked as guardians of the state.

Education and exposure to mainland social and political dynamics not only created hegemony/domination but also mimicking and imitation of others. Through the golden jubilee celebrations and “operation clean drive” the student union projects itself as the political and territorial guardian of the state. The preparations for jubilant celebrations and setting up check points next to existing check points are both performative actions, displaying the theatrics of imitation. These theatrics helps them to create a spectacle of power and performance to reinforce their political position in the state. Chakmas are the recurring victims/target of this power display by the student union.

Chapter 3: Negotiating Land Access.

Land plays a crucial role in the formation of identity in ethnic communities. In Arunachal Pradesh, land is constitutionally protected to ensure the rights of these communities from outsiders. The land holding pattern and community ownership of land system in the recent times in Arunachal Pradesh offers different understanding on Land and Identity. Booming timber and other cash crop business is one of the main factors for the changes. This chapter analyses the concept of "Customary land ownership" and its relevance in current economic and political scenario. To understand the existing land system, I look into who get to access the land and who is excluded in the process. How Chakmas, with limited access to land in Arunachal Pradesh, negotiate access to land through sharecropping and hill cultivation in the changing land system.

Search for New Land

Devapuri is a remote village in the hills bordering the Namdapha National Tiger reserve forest, separated by Nao-Dehing river valley. The village is closer to Miao by crossing the Nao-Dehing River, but vehicles can reach only from Diyun hill area. I went to meet Bijoy at Devapuri, along with Dayal, my field guide. I knew Bijoy since 2011 when I visited Arunachal Pradesh for the first time. At that time, he was constructing a new house for his family near the river banks. Bijoy's eldest son studies at the school where I was teaching. He is one of the few people who converted to Christianity in 2000s, now he is the catechist for the village (religious conversions among Chakmas is explored more in Chapter 6). We couldn't inform Bijoy about our visit earlier as network coverage in the hills are inconsistent.

We started walking around 6 in the morning and reached the village by around 10 A.M. Bijoy's house was locked and so was most of his neighbours' houses; there were very few people in the village and looked mostly empty. I went looking for anyone in the village who might give information about Bijoy's whereabouts. I was puzzled about the absence of villagers and learned later that Bijoy was cleaning unused forest land in the hills for cultivation. Other villagers were helping him to level the ground. Along with Dayal, we trekked uphill for nearly an hour and half, looking for Bijoy. We had to leave our bicycles halfway as it was difficult to cross the steams and steep hills. At the top of the hill we could see people working in the (semi-

plain) area. When we reached the place, the villagers and Bijoy were removing the stones and plants from the land. Volunteers equipped with long sickle and a stick were clearing the entire space even. Bijoy was visibly surprised to see me there, as it is a difficult to reach this place: *"Brother, you managed to reach here! You are becoming more like tribes now".* He introduced me to the villagers and informed them about my work. Mary, Bijoy's wife was busy preparing food for the villagers at the temporarily made bamboo hut. As soon as I reached the place and met Mary, the first thing I said was "*thak guri Pēṭ purrel! ('I am very hungry' in Chakma)".* Mary started laughing and quipped you haven't done any work yet. Saying you are hungry in Chakma houses makes you more welcome in the family.

In the afternoon communal meal was prepared for everyone. After finishing the work everyone had lunch together and the volunteers started going back to the village. As all the volunteers were his relatives, there was no renumeration or compensation for the work. Bijoy explained to me that the favour is usually reciprocated when they start clearing farmland or mostly during the harvest season, when you need more hands to complete the task. He is quick to say, obviously it is not free but when you are in difficult place like this, we need to be helpful to each other to survive. After the villagers left, we started packing the agricultural tools and kitchen utensils. Bijoy was running out of ration to stay in the new field, so he decided to go back to village with his family and come back after two three days to continue the work. Once we packed the kitchen utensils there was nothing left in the temporary bamboo house. He could not afford to leave any utensils here as he needed them in the village as well. Bijoy intended to cultivate hill rice (pahar kheti) and some mustard seeds in the new field. He believed it would reduce the over reliance on the small field near the village (the new field is around half an acre). According to him if everything goes well, he should be able to get 30-40 bags of paddy from the new field in five months, which is sufficient to the family and also, he can sell a few bags of paddy in the local market when the need arises.

Bijoy's father was allocated five acres of land. Bijoy has four brothers and each got their share after they got married. The land was divided into five including a share for his parents, Bijoy got less than an acre from the allotted land. As Bijoy explains why he is cleaning the forest land "I have three children and to rely on this small land is nearly impossible. I cannot do any other work other than agriculture. I have to find land like this to survive".

Bijoy's new land looks at a glance to be in the middle of uncharted territory, but he is not alone in the hills. Nearby there is a timber saw mill camp, with few mountain trucks and elephants to load the timber. Bijoy was not sure about who owns the timber mill but was quick to mention that it did not matter as they do not disturb his new agricultural field. There is an unspoken agreement between the two groups, the illegal timber business goes unhindered by the presence of Chakmas in the vicinity as long as they do not cross their paths. This mutual understanding between the illegal timber traders and Chakmas prevents the intervention of forest officials who are quite aware of illegal timber trade to inspect or take action against Chakmas from the forest.

Picture 2: Timber loading area near Bijoy's new land

Bijoy's house in the village is located near to the cliff of the hill on the riverbanks of the Nao-Dehing, another one or two floods would seriously damage the house in land slide. As soon as we reached the village little before the sunset, Bijoy went to check the small garden near his house. He got a few orange trees and cucumber creeps in the garden. Cucumber and pumpkin creeps were planted next to the orange trees and the rest of the garden divided into small squares to grow vegetables like cabbage, tomato, spinach and chillies, making optimum utilisation of

limited space. Few betel nut trees act as boundary fence for the garden[57]. This vegetable garden helped in kitchen as well as at the Sunday market to sell the excess produce. The local market organised in Diyun and Miao is the lifeline for selling and buying goods for Chakmas in the region (discussed in detail in Chapter 5).

Despite Arunachal Pradesh being the largest state geographically with less population density, Bijoy's search for new land in the remote hills, risking his livelihood, raises the question of land and land relations in the region. Why is he not able to access the land, which is closer to the village and instead, have to go kilometres out into the hills to make a living?

In order to understand the land relations and access, I explore three points of contention based on Ribot and Peluso's (2003) theory of access regarding who gets to access and benefit from land, and Hall & Li (2011) subsequent work in examining who are excluded from accessing the land. The three points of contention are: 1) existing forms of land access system 2) changing land relations and its effect on access and 3) who lacks access to land and how they are prevented from getting access.

Forms of Access and Exclusion

Ribot and Peluso (2003) define access as combination of two things, the ability to derive benefit from things and the right to benefit from the things. The ability and the right aspect bring out a wide range of social relations of who can and who cannot access resources. The important aspect of ability is to determine who can benefit from access and who cannot access the resources. They focus further on access as to who actually benefits from things and most importantly through what process they were able to achieve that. To simplify it further, who access the land and who does not access the land and the mechanism through which the access is controlled. Access to resource is controlled through various mechanisms, process and social relations. It is a combination of cultural, material, political and economic aspect of power together what Ribot and Peluso call as "bundles of power".

[57] All Chakma households would at least have couple of betel nut trees even if they don't have garden near the house.

These range of powers, exercised through various mechanisms to control the access of land, effect people's ability to benefit from the land. Certain group of people control access to land resources through right and institutional approval and while others maintain the access through those who control the resources. The people who control these accesses are in a position to command power over those who seek access to the resources. This brings down to the root of access to ability and right, the local communities in Arunachal Pradesh are able to access the resources through both ability and right.

The rights based legal access firmly supported by the customary and conventional laws gives the rights holders to assert their dominance and shape the social relations between them and those who seek access but do not have right to access. The access gained through 'illegal' means is also considered within the right based access, as "rights-denied mechanism of access". In order to profit from the illegal access there is a need for right based access is important in the first place. This distinguishes the illegality between the people with rights and those who don't have rights. Those who seek access are forced to negotiate their access through different ways, negotiating with both the legal and illegal forms of access without disturbing the existing dynamics of social relations.

Focusing closer to the region in southeast Asia, Hall, Hirsch and Li (2011) expand the idea of access to resources from the point of exclusion i.e. the ways through which people are prevented from accessing and benefiting from land. Through the examples from southeast Asia Hall and others bring out how from 1990s agriculture has become progressively less central to the livelihood of people. The rapid disappearance of agricultural land is due to de-agrarianisation in the region. This shift has changed the land relations within the communities and the others, moving from communal ownership to small holders. Moving away from the idea that exclusion is something imposed by strong on the weak, Hall and others argue that exclusion is an inherent aspect of land relations and it is primarily due to inequality and dispossession.

The different ways in which people are prevented from benefitting are based on who already has and maintain the land excluding the potential others and how people who lack access are prevented from getting it. Both play a critical role in examining the land relations in the region.

Through the analytical framework centred around power, Hall and others point out four aspects of how exclusion works in the region; regulation, force, market and legitimation. Regulation determines the access to land resources based on ownership instituted by legal and state authorities. Force excludes the potential users of the land through violence and other power relations to control the access to the land. Market changes in the nearby places and the lucrative aspects of high returns force people to have individual claim over the land. Legitimation based on ethnic territorial rights which is often the case in southeast Asia and northeast India covers up all the three aspects being the foundation for regulation of land.

Both access and exclusion to benefit from the land is interconnected to the social relations between those who can claim ownership over the land and those who cannot. It is clear that those who are in the position of claiming the power over land can alter the social relation through "bundles of power" accompanied by legitimation of land claims. Moving away from the how access is denied and excluded from the land perspective, I focus on how the excluded, those who do not have right to access in particular, negotiate access through various legal and sometimes through illegal ways. This negotiation operates in an ambiguous undefined way, it is beneficiary and symbiotic for both the parties in certain aspects and at the same time it antagonises the relation in few cases.

Land access to Chakmas

In 1964 when Chakmas were settled in the Diyun and Miao region, the government allocated 5 acres of land for each family in the forest areas. They were allowed to clear the forest areas and make it as cultivable land for their livelihoods. This was supposed to be a temporary settlement for the refugees, but in time it became permanent. For more than half a century, the land system or the limited amount of accessible land for the Chakmas did not change since 1964. During this period, the population of Chakmas have increased from 5500 to 60,000 (according to the special census), but the land available for cultivation remains the same. As the Chakma settlement is near the tribal villages, it is impossible for Chakmas to buy the land or expand the available land nearby. As the educational and employment opportunities are limited (discussed in Chapter 1) they rely on agriculture as the main source of income. This political and economic condition forces them to find new ways to access land. Despite the convoluted land systems in the state, they manoeuvre in possible ways as hill cultivators, sharecroppers or alleged land encroachers to negotiate the access to land. And these

manoeuvres for negotiating land depend very much on the prolongation of their non-recognition.

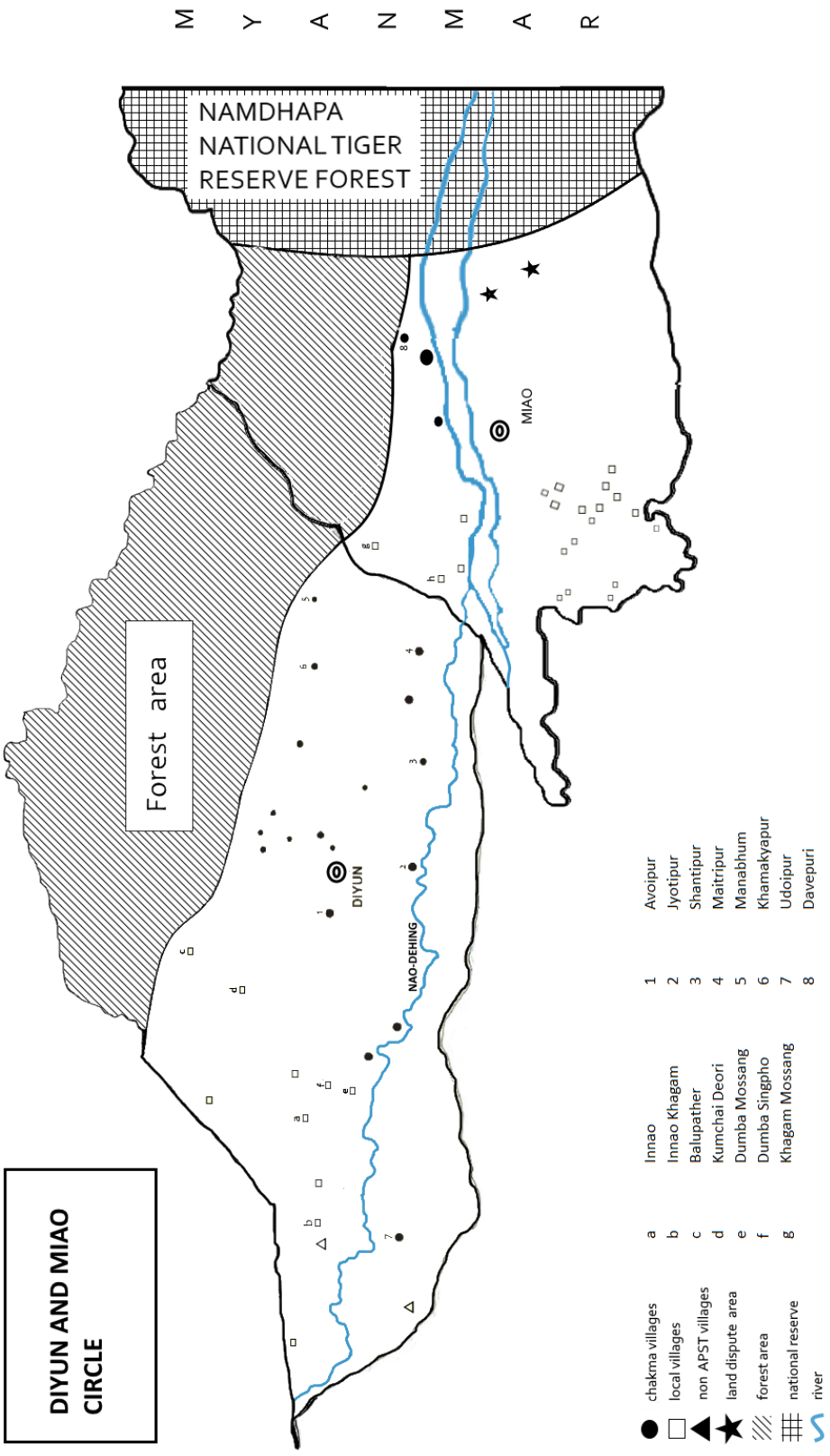

Figure 4 : Map of Diyun and Miao Circle modified from Changlang district Handbook (2011)

Land Belongs to the Community

Until recently Arunachal Pradesh is one of the few places where agrarian economy is not completely commercialised, and significant population relies upon survival agriculture. But this has drastically changed in recent times due to agrarian transformation and shift in modes of production (Barbara Harris- White et.al 2009). Harris White argues that this shift is caused by the capitalist transition of agrarian economy which is long due in the state. The delay is linked to the land holding structure of ethnic communities in the state. The lucrative market forces outside the state of Arunachal Pradesh forced the ethnic communities to abandon the concept of common ownership and move towards individual ownership. The recent shift towards individual land possession propelled the agrarian transition in the state. It also brought out the actual land holding ownership and the unequal land distribution among the ethnic communities which was earlier morphed under community land ownership. Thus, bringing out the neo elites, the new large landowners and a new direction of land relations.

The emergence of local elites within the ethnic communities, stretched out from the traditional forms of agriculture to move in two directions. One, increase in sharecropping to maximise the profit from unused land. Share cropping has raised in recent times from 9.2% in 2002-03 to 12.35 % in 2012-13 (Harris White, 2009). While it is safe in terms of return, but the scope for maximum profit is less as it is shared. The second option, the most popular in recent times is timber trade. Timber trade which gained lots of interest (and money) has propelled the neo elites to enter into forest and uncharted areas near to their land to claim ownership both in legal and illegal ways.

Discussions about land in Arunachal Pradesh predominantly begin with how historically ownership of land is with the community rather than the individual (Mishra, 1970; Sharma, 2019; Harris-White, 2011; Marchang, 2017). Land and customary land practices play an essential role in identity formation among the ethnic communities. Especially in Arunachal Pradesh where the ethnic communities are the dominant majority in the state. 68.8% of population belong to Scheduled Tribes (ST)[58], one of the highest in the country (Census 2011,

[58] Scheduled Tribe (ST) is official classification of ethnic and tribal communities by the Government. This classification gives certain provisions in the state and union laws in regard to governance and other government policies. Here I call indigenous groups who claim their roots and territorial belonging in Arunachal Pradesh as "ethnic communities/locals".

Govt. of India). Geographically, Arunachal Pradesh is the largest state in the northeast (it is about the size of Austria), bigger than the neighbouring state of Assam, but the density of population is much less compared to any other state in the country (17 per square km). Land is abundant for shifting cultivation *(Jhum),* a traditional form of agriculture in the state[59]. While the density of population is low, the diversity of ethnic communities in the state is more than any other state in the country[60]. Along with Chakmas and local tribes' religious affinities towards Buddhism, another major reason why Chakmas are settled in Arunachal Pradesh and not in any other state is the vastness and low density of population.

Land system in the state is locally constituted: each community (tribe) demarcates the region through streams, hills or some other natural boundaries—rivers being the main demarcation line (Das, 1986). From the community, each village demarcates the land in the similar way and the village head allocates the land to individual families. The state of Arunachal Pradesh acknowledges this customary form of land system. As the land is communal property and village head/council administer the land relations, the state does not have documentation of land ownership in any form. The absence of documentation and the discretionary powers of the village head gives scope for elites within the ethnic communities to claim forest and uncharted territories as their own. It also helps in avoiding any state intervention for taxation and other regulatory purposes.

This land custom practice dates back to pre-colonial period and during the colonial times it was strengthened by the introduction of The Bengal Regulation Act 1871 (*Discussed in Introduction & Chapter 1)*. The act ensures that only recognised tribes (Scheduled Tribes) of Arunachal Pradesh can own land in the state. It also monitors the movement of outsiders in the state through Inner Line Permit (ILP). This law was introduced by the British in the peripheries of Assam (British India) separating the plains from hills (uncharted territory) for administrative purposes. The law is still practiced by the current state for the protection of tribal customs and culture. In advocating against giving citizenship to Chakmas in AP, political parties and the

[59] In jhum cultivation, the hill area is cleared for cultivation and soon after the harvest, the land is cleared by slash and burn method and for the next season they move to different place for cultivation. Government actively discourages shifting cultivation and very few communities still practice shifting cultivation.
[60] There are 26 major tribes and 100 subtribes within them according to the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Discussed more in Chapter 1

student union in the state constantly mention how even the Britishers (colonial authorities) did not interfere in their tribal customs[61].

The principle of community ownership is strongly upheld not only by the local tribal communities but also the bureaucrats and local officials in the state. My attempts to get any data regarding the land ownership in the local block level to district level local administration were dismissed by this simple response typically given by Extra Assistant Commissioner (EAC) and Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC)[62] as "Arunachal does not have records on land ownership, and the control of land is under the village council".

According to customary land practices, the village chief "*Gambura*" is the chief authority over the land. *Gambura* allocates the land to each family based on their lineage and need for land. Every part of the village is demarcated and allocated to each family by *Gambura*. From cultivable land, forest area, hunting ground, streams, and river in the village is allocated to individual families. During shifting cultivation, the land was allocated to each family on a rotational basis. Now shifting cultivation is abandoned for advanced settled cultivation practices. *Gambura* has the power to govern and make changes to land ownership in the village. Land disputes among the villagers are resolved by *Gambura* as well. Transfer of land from one to another is done within the community and outsiders (other communities with Arunachal) and village council along with *Gambura* decides who can get the transfer. This internal transaction maintains the land within the community.

Customary land law is often connected with common ownership of land in Arunachal Pradesh. As most of the northeast states have Common Property Resources (CPR), it is assumed that Arunachal Pradesh also has a similar system (Kuri, 2005). But J.N. Das (1986) points out that most of the tribal communities do not actually have any common land. There is no village common land, and everything is demarcated to individuals in the village. Taking the case of

[61] Britisher is an old term for the British which is still used in the region. It is used in a way to show respect to them.

[62] The administrative setup of the districts in Arunachal Pradesh gives Additional Deputy Commissioners at sub divisional level and Extra Assistant Commissioners at block level a unified administrative power to look after judicial, land and welfare issues together

'Adis'[63] who make nearly 15% of the total population of Arunachal Pradesh, he demonstrates how even the forest area is also clearly marked to one family or the other. *"As every place of land belongs to some family or other, there is no village commons according to Adi customs"* (p. 74). He also gives the account of fishing areas, how it is individually owned, and portion of stream or river is owned by each family and demarcated through natural environment along the river. With this unique land system, Arunachal Pradesh ethnic communities can project that land is customary and its ownership is common to the community as a whole in a larger level and avoid the scrutiny of state and documentation of property in one hand. On the other hand, at a practical level, land is clearly demarcated within the communities and individual families. This ambiguous land system is pulled and pushed based on the needs and convenience of ethnic communities in the state.

The Bengal Regulation Act 1871 and customary land practices among the tribal communities played a key role in protecting the land and keeping the access within the state recognised tribes. Bengal Regulation Act ensures that the outsiders (other Indians) are kept outside of the land system. At the same time, the customary land practices recognised by the state categorically denies access to others within the state. Bengal Regulation Act was by-passed while settling Chakmas in the state of Arunachal Pradesh in 1963, but the customary land practices does not allow any scope for inclusion of Chakmas, despite their presence in the state for more than fifty years. As I have argued in Chapter 1, Chakmas struggle for becoming a part of Arunachal Pradesh is twofold. One to become an Indian (citizen) and the second, the more difficult one (nearly impossible one), becoming part of Arunachal Pradesh.

II

Land Possession Certificate (LPC) and Private Ownership of Land

The state of Arunachal Pradesh has undergone agrarian reforms in the last few decades. The major change being from shifting cultivation to more fixed form of agriculture. But it also has slowly moved from agricultural to non-agriculturally based economy. From 78.34 % in 1991 the agricultural producers have reduced to 58.4% in 2001, meanwhile in trade and commerce

[63] Adis are major Scheduled Tribe in the state of Arunachal Pradesh with 26.9 % of the state tribal population (Fernandes, 1999).

it moved from 19.2 to 30.41 during the same period[64]. The shift to non-agrarian economy would have been even more, but the customary land practices limits the interference of other community members. As mentioned earlier, land can only be transferred within the same tribe and preferably from the same village and such transaction needs to be approved by the village head— this restricts the land to be sold for any commercial purposes.

Ethnic communities are not exactly what the activists have imagined or how global indigenous narratives regarding attachment to land have portrayed (Li, 2010). Misconceptions like ethnic communities have strong cultural orientation towards community and communal use of land (Baviskar, 2010) applies in regard to land relations among the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh[65]. While land is essential and the political basis for ethnic tribes' identity formation, the limitation of agriculture to accumulate wealth has forced them to look into other ways to utilise the vast land available to them. Timber market offered lucrative returns compared to the income from hill agricultural production. The effects of the timber markets could be seen in the plains of the East Arunachal Pradesh, huge portions of forest areas are disappearing slowly despite ban on illegal timber trade[66]. In Miao and Diyun regions the timber sawmills are found in remote areas as well.

The rapid increase in timber trade and investment in cash crops like tea required more control over the land and customary land system is not equipped enough to ensure the rights over the land for individual/family. Compensations for the land acquired for development projects by the government is given to the individuals rather than to the community, this completely changes the narrative of communal land ownership idea propagated and recognised by community and the state. These factors have pushed for official recognition of private property without diluting the existing land system in the state. The introduction of Land Possession Certificate (LPC) filled the requirement for both. LPC is issued by the district level deputy

[64] Census of India (Arunachal Pradesh 1971-2001) Economic tables and abstracts, Arunachal Pradesh, 2006
[65] Amita Baviskar (2010) comment on Li's Indegenity, Capitalism, and the management of Dispossession (2010).
[66] Timber trade is not new to the state of Arunachal Pradesh, in the 1990s the communities near the plains of Assam realised the market need for timber in the nearby state of Assam and monetised rapidly. The state of Arunachal Pradesh banned timber trade to reduce the rapid depletion of trees in the plain areas of the state, but it is on rise in recent times. https://nenow.in/north-east-news/arunachal-pradesh/arunachal-villagers-up-the-ante-against-illegal-timber-trade.html

commissioners[67] for individuals after due considerations from the forest officials and village council/Gambura (Sharma, 2019).

The *Gambura's* authority over the land is not only territorial but also proprietary (Berry, 2009). He is the de-facto surveyor and guardian of the land. Gambura has the authority to determine who owns what portion of the land in the village. He plays a crucial role in issuing and supporting the LPCs, to reiterate and confirm the scale and topography of each land such as the measurements in kilometres and even small hills in a few places. Land distribution is largely uneven; Gambura/family and people who held political leverage invariably had greater share than the rest, creating a new type of "neo-elites" within the tribal community (Fernandes, 2007). This unequal distribution of land has created massive economic inequality within the tribal communities. And it could not be overlooked that the growing inequalities and lack of land resources among the local communities are channelled into animosity towards Chakmas.

The issuance of LPC gives individual the power to utilise the land at their disposal and most importantly it gives the authority to claim the land as individually owned, which was previously the function of village council/chief. The Case of Thuing Singpho versus Chakmas for the illegal occupation of land in Mpen illustrates how the utilisation of LPCs work and the leverage it provides individuals over land [68]. This land dispute case was widely covered in the news media and still has an impact on the relations between Chakmas and local tribes. Thuing Singpho, one of the richest local landlords alleges that Chakmas have taken over her land in the Mpen village and refusing to leave the land. The case was referred to Guwahati high court and the judgement was given in favour of Thuing Singpho as the rightful owner of the land and the LPC is valid. This dispute escalated after the allegation that Chakmas burned down the huts built by Thuing Singpho in the contested land. This incident is widely depicted as how Chakmas are violent and encroach the local land in the region without any conclusive evidence against the Chakmas.

[67] Deputy Commissioner is administrative head of the district, who also acts as Magistrate for the district.
[68] https://zeenews.india.com/news/north-east/chakma-refugees-and-indigenous-singpho-clash-in-ap_818795.html
https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Sec-144-in-Arunachal-town-as-peace-talks-fail/articleshow/17762859.cms

During my failed attempts to get any record on land ownership from the local administration, the Deputy Additional Commissioner (DAC) introduced me to Thuing Singpho who was incidentally there to meet him regarding the LPC. Introduction from Deputy Additional Commissioner about my work and doing research from a foreign university was an advantage to talk about ongoing dispute with Thuing. Thuing Singpho was eager to share with me the case of how Chakmas have taken over her personal land and refusing to vacate the place even after the court order. On the way to her house in the car she points from the second stream till here (nearly a distance of half a kilometre) belongs to her family. Her husband passed away few years back and she is fighting the court case by herself. Thuing mentioned that she was the representative for World level Singpho Council and also representative for indigenous people rights in South East Asia, a well-respected person in the community. In the Miao village Thuing's house is one of the biggest with two storeys and a mezzanine floor inside it, clearly distinct from other nearby houses. A jeep and a SUV were in the shed when we entered the house. The interior of the house is distinct from the local houses, it was more urban and modern in design, a surprise to find a house like this in a remote place like Miao. As soon as we entered two of the domestic helpers hurried themselves to kitchen to make tea. It is a rarity in ethnic communities to have domestic help in the house, which is steadily increasing the neo-elite's group. Thuing Singpho's family is one of the richest families in the region and a relative of C.C Singpho the long serving legislator for Miao constituency. Thuing brought folders of documents and diligently showed the LPC and various court judgments to prove how the land is legally under her name and that the Chakmas are illegally occupying her land. Thuing told me that Chakmas were good in the old days, they used to work hard and productive to the locality, but her perception about Chakmas changed after the land issue. Earlier she trusted the Chakmas and even employed them as sharecroppers in the field, but after the court case she does not trust them anymore and has stopped all connections with the Chakmas community. It is common among the rich locals to employ sharecroppers in their land to cultivate rice for consumption, as they focus more on the cash crops and timber trade.

On the other side Chakmas argued that they are settled in the land from 1964 after the land was allocated for refugees. In 1979 late father in law of Thuing Singpho had a dispute with the land and tried to encroach the area but after a protest from them, he dropped the idea. But suddenly in 2005 the local administration issued Land Possession Certificate to Thuing Singpho for the

disputed land without the knowledge of the Chakmas. The local court and the regional high court disposed the case in favour of Thuing Singpho as the rightful owner after the proof of LPC.

The case of Thuing Singpho and LPC illustrates the changing land relations within the ethnic communities of Arunachal Pradesh. The sudden interest after 2005 to obtain LPC is not due to the scarcity of agricultural land. It is motivated by the future commercial prospects of the land. This also brings out the dual nature of land laws in the state. The state and the higher judiciary acknowledge that land belongs to the individual in Thuing case, at the same time the state and judiciary have repeatedly acknowledged the fact that land belongs to the community and settlement of Chakmas would disturb the ethnic land relations in the state. While it could be argued that the community ownership does not disturb the individuals seeking LPC and ownership from the local administration, and it is still within the regulations of *Gambura* and village council. But such argument is based on ambiguous land system and laws which could be used for the benefit of both community and individual ownership of land.

The lucrative prospects of cash crops have altered the land relations in the state. The rush to obtain LPCs and claim individual land ownership has gone to such an extent that the state passed a new land law which allowed individual property rights, Arunachal Pradesh Land Settlement and Records & Amendment Act 2018[69]. This new amendment allows the cash crop cultivators to by-pass the otherwise restricted timber business in the state for long. In 2017, the forest department seized few trucks carrying timber which belongs to Thuing Singpho, but it was released after the investigation concluded that "it was generated from privately owned land of one of Thuing Singpho property"[70]. While the neo-elites accumulate wealth through land system and new laws, the people who are left behind look for other resources to capitalise like the forest area. The illegal timber cutting in the forest areas near Bijoy's new agricultural land is one of them.

[69] This Law was quietly passed in the state Assembly without any opposition from tribal communities in the state. Few NGOs and activists raised the issue, but it was largely outside the state, Fernandes (2018) among one of them. Strangely the student union (AAPSU) politically active in terms of ethnic community rights and customary land practices did not intervene in the case.
[70] https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2017/11/19/wood-based-industries-suspended/

Shifting agrarian practices in Arunachal Pradesh have resulted in two major changes in the state. One, the shift from customary land practices to more individual based property ownership through the issuance of LPCs and the recent passing of the new land law. This allows individuals to have a strong grip over the land and a say in whether and how the land is cultivated without any interference from village council or community. It also gives the individual to approach the court for legitimate claim over the land (as demonstrated in the case of Thuing Singpho vs Chakmas) which was difficult in the earlier form of land system.

Secondly, the LPC and the unequal distribution of land within the community has led to certain sections of the community in an economically disadvantageous position. In order to compete within the limited allocation of land resources, the locals who do not have sufficient land explore the nearby forest areas for timber. This quest for timber has created a symbiotic relation between them and the Chakmas who are looking for land for survival. This symbiotic relationship is mostly limited to not interfering in each other's business in the forest area. The illegal timber sawmills function without disturbing the Bijoy's new land in the hills. The rapid quest for cash crops has strongly excluded the Chakmas from the land while also giving access to the land through different ways. These new changes have created a more formal process of land allocation to the indigenous groups leading to commercialisation and informal access to new land for the Chakmas.

The Good and Bad Chakmas

Before the current unspoken agreement that Chakmas and Singphos have comes to, in regard to the co-existence of hill cultivation and timber trade in the Miao, Diyun region of AP, these communities had a rather different kind of symbiotic exchange, namely sharecropping. Chakmas actively engaged in sharecropping with the local tribes especially in the Singpho lands. With sharecropping, local tribal communities and families who held land hired Chakma families or individuals to cultivate rice on their behalf. Niro who works for the health department, reflects back that Chakmas were nice very hardworking people and they worked in the fields of Singphos, that it is during 1990s that Chakmas started encroaching village lands and became "wild". This is the general perception among the local communities who are not from the Diyun and Miao region. The local communities who are from west Arunachal Pradesh (other side of Assam) where Niro hails from, the perception about Chakmas are mostly created through media and student union politics and only government employees have visited this

region. Coincidently, during the 1990s Chakmas have started to organise in demanding citizenship (discussed in Chapter 1) rights in a larger scale. This propelled the perception of Chakmas among the other parts of Arunachal Pradesh as forest encroachers and wild.

As Thuing mentioned earlier, Chakmas used to work for Singphos, the immediate local community where Chakmas are settled now. Singphos are major landowners and have a difficult relationship with Chakmas in the past. As landowners and thus most threatened by the Chakma occupation of land, most of the cases about encroachments of land and other issues are between Chakmas and Singphos. Given the animosity between the Chakmas and Singphos, sharecropping between the two communities are today very low. But few local tribes of Khamptis, Mossang and Deoris still employ Chakmas for sharecropping.

Sharecropping fields follow a settled form of agricultural production. They are different from the hill cultivation and it requires irrigation (*Paani Kheti*). It is practised in the plain areas of the region, west of Diyun. These fields belong to Deoris[71] and Singphos, agriculture-based communities in the plain areas of Miao, Diyun and Bordumsa region. Sharecropping remains an alternate option for Chakmas who do not have enough land to cultivate for themselves. Unlike hill cultivation, sharecropping requires the trust of the landowner. It goes through a process of verification about the character of the employed worker, if he is "problematic" it could affect the production in the land. Any association with political mobilisation is deemed by Singpho employers as troublesome, making it difficult to get the sharecropping deals. Chakma political mobilisation toward recognition and their citizenship rights in Arunachal Pradesh have come to render a clear distinction between "good" and "bad" Chakmas. Those who do not create any problems politically and focused on their work are categorised as "good" Chakmas.

[71] Deoris are non APST (Arunachal Pradesh Schedule Tribes) but they are land owning community in the region. They got most of their land from Singphos and they cultivate in every inch of the land they own in the locality. While Deoris are not recognised as Scheduled Tribes by the state of Arunachal Pradesh, they are considered as locals. Deoris are mostly farmers and they do (panni Kethi) water-based cultivation. They are mostly settled near the streams and tributaries of Nao- Dehing river convenient for agriculture. Chakmas on the other hand are settled near the hilly regions. Deoris follow Hinduism and keep a low profile among the local communities.

Naindhoon is one of them; he is a sharecropper for nearly a decade now and he usually does rice cultivation in the field. Santhosh Deori, my co-teacher at St. Jude School who was aware of the research I conducted with Chakmas, introduced me to Naindhoon. Having been the landowner for ten acres of land, Santosh Deori employed Naindhoon for sharecropping. As he was already working in the school, he did not have time to work in the field. Santhosh explained to me that he did not want to leave an agricultural field near the stream barren and was looking for someone to sharecrop in his field. Santhosh made enquires among his friends to find a person and they suggested to him Naindhoon.

Since his sharecropping deal with Santosh, Naindhoon and his family live in the makeshift temporary house they made near the fields. The house is similar to Bijoy's temporary hut in the hills. When I visited him and his family, he was enthusiastic about sharing the details of agricultural cycle and harvest but was reserved to speak about his village or why he had to move to this village[72]. The general sharecropping cycle starts in April/May and ends in September/October. Naindhoon started his last cycle soon after the Chakma Bihu festival in April. He ploughed the field, filling it with manure for the planting of the seeds and every day, he kept track of the field for its water supply from the streams, performing a complete maintenance of the field. After five months, rice is ready to harvest in the month of September. The landowner usually does not interfere during the initial process of harvesting. There are two kinds of sharecropping agreement between the landowners and sharecroppers. In one agreement the share is pre-determined before the cultivation begins. For each acre of land cultivated, a certain amount of rice has to be paid to the owner, without considerations of how much of rice is produced in the field. This would mean a risk-free investment for the landowners. In the second, the agreement is made to share one third of the harvest to the landowner and two third for the sharecropper. Naindhoon is working based on the agreement of sharing one third of the harvest at the end of the season, which is a favourable option for Naindhoon as it does not have any pre clause agreement. Last season he cultivated 2 bihas of land (2 bihas = 2.6446 acres). Out of about 4200 kgs of paddy that was harvested, he paid 1400 kgs of the paddy as the sharecropping fee to Santhosh. Another 1200-1300 bags nearly one third of the harvest went to the ploughing, tractor and equipment charges, the final one third is

[72] rice cultivation requires continues maintenance and irrigation, so sharecroppers usually shift to the village /near the field, where they can be close to the field

what remains to Naindhoon for the whole season. In the current season he was cultivating in 3 bihas as he brought his family to Santhosh's land to live for labour support.

Picture 3: Naindhoon and his neighbour at the sharecropping field

As we discussed about land and rice production for each season, I asked Naindhoon regarding the citizenship issue of Chakmas. He was not interested to discuss the topic in detail and gave some generic information about the issues in the region. Santhosh who was listening to our conversation jokingly remarked, "maybe since I am around, he may not want to discuss about those things". It was clear that Naindhoon was hesitant to talk about political matters. Whether this is because he was generally not interested or avoiding these questions because of Santosh being present during my initial questions was unclear from his avoidance. However, what his hesitance shows visibly is the tension between Chakmas' access to sharecropping and their willingness for political mobilisation and action.

Conclusion

Access to land and resources in ethnic communities where it is based on communal ownership is difficult to decipher. The ethnic territorial ownership and protection from state through

legislations make it harder to understand the actual land holding pattern in the community, especially in the case of Arunachal Pradesh. Looking it through the lens of who has the ability and right to access the resources and how the access is controlled through 'bundles of power', gives a blueprint to see how access is controlled by neo elites in the region. It brings out the social relation between those who access and those who seek access to the land. The case of Naindhoon clearly brings out this relationship between the people with access to resources and others who do not have access. It showcases how they negotiate their way to get access from the landlords, and how this access is controlled and maintained through series of social and economic relations with them.

The shift from agrarian to non-agrarian based economy in the state has completely changed the land holding pattern and the relation between land and people. The delayed but inevitable shift to non-agrarian based economy, mostly triggered by the lucrative market outside the state of Arunachal Pradesh. In order to benefit from the market, the ethnic communities abandon the community-based ownership in favour of individual ownership model. This propelled the need for LPCs and surge in claiming individual based ownership of land. This individual based ownership is built on excluding others from accessing the land and resources. It also brings out the ways through which people are excluded from accessing the land. As Hall and others demonstrated regulation (legislative laws) and legitimation (communal property) play a critical role in excluding people to access resources.

The shift to timber business and non-agrarian economy brings out two important aspects of land relation in the state. First, the unequal distribution and dispossession of land which was hidden/covered up under the community ownership model in the state. This exposed the 'neo-elites' within the community and the political power they used to benefit from accessing both legal and illegal land resources in the community. The rift within the ethnic communities to access and benefit from land due to the unequal distribution of land has forced certain section within the ethnic communities to occupy forest areas illegally. Second, the question of how land is culturally oriented and traditionally rooted with nature in ethnic communities. While I agree with the argument that the idea of ethnic roots and land is romanticised and ethnic communities have moved from that notion, but the hypocritical nature of relating land to cultural roots is still in practice when it is a question of refugees accessing the land.

Within the limited scope of access and exclusion, Chakmas have negotiated their way to access land through both legal and illegal means. The nature and change of their access to land is interconnected with the development of land relations in the local community. It is both beneficial and antagonistic at the same time. Chakmas manoeuvre their ways to access between these two positions.

Chapter 4: Sunday Vs Friday. Weekly Market and Economic Blockades in East Arunachal Pradesh

"*Go and visit Diyun Bazaar on Sunday morning to see how many Chakmas are there"*

- M. Singpho

Ex. Chairman of Bordumsa-Diyun region

(when asked about Chakma population in East Arunachal)

The Diyun Sunday Market is at the core of the Chakma economy. A visit to this market gives one a sense of the Chakma population in the region. To a large extent, the Sunday market is the heart of Miao Sub-division[73] as well. Defying the stranglehold of larger global markets, such weekly markets are still the major form of economic exchange in predominantly tribal areas of Northeast India. Significant in their own right, economic transactions also provide a clear representation and blueprint of social relations, thereby highlighting the hierarchical relation between different tribes (Gell, 1982). This understanding of economic transactions suggests that the market provides an important lens through which the social and political power dynamics between Chakmas, and locals can be studied.

In this chapter, I analyse the function and symbolic nature of the weekly market in bringing out social interaction between the locals and Chakmas. Firstly, I present the structure and spatial organisation of the weekly markets in Northeast India, focussing on how it acts as the place where social relations and social structures are performed. Second, I compare two block-level markets (Diyun and Miao) to understand the stark differences in market functioning and social interaction between communities and how these affect both the locals[74] and the Chakmas. Finally, I argue that the weekly market is not just an economic and social interaction. It also functions as a space for social tension and disagreement where symbolic and economic power

[73] , A Sub- division is an administrative unit that comes below a District in the revenue administration of states in India. Sub-divisions usually consist of a few Blocks (cluster of villages). Miao is one of the Sub- divisions in Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh state and Diyun is a Block level town.

[74] Here I use locals as a blanket term for the State recognised tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. It includes Singphos (the majority landowners and ethnic tribe in the region), Tangsas, Khamptis and Adis.

is displayed. To shed light on these power dynamics I examine the phenomenon of "economic blockades[75]" in the markets of this region.

I

Structure of Weekly Markets

The weekly market system in semi-urban and rural areas of India has its own internal power structure and time frame. Every day in a week is hierarchically allocated to places based on their social power, economic transaction and accessibility to villages nearby. The allocation of market days is a traditional practice based on the accessibility of the place, combined with its social and political significance in the area. In general, the district headquarters acts as a primary market place. The sub- division level weekly market is the intermediary and the block level in the lowest in order[76]. Market days can be the same day in different places. But usually, the distance between the places are bit far so it does not clash with their own market cycle. The rhythm of weekly market is based on the rotating successive market days in the nearby places within the subdivision. This system allows vendors to move from one market to another on respective days.

Sunday is considered as an important day for the market as it is a general holiday for everyone. It allows many people to participate in the market. Usually market day for Sunday (the first order of market days, the prime place from where other market days and places are assigned) is allocated for the central geographical location which is also a sign of significant political position in the region. The rest of the days are allocated for different villages and block places based on the hierarchy. Saturday and Friday are considered as second order markets usually allocated to block level places (smaller towns) in the area.

Time and space coincide to reveal the political hierarchy of places through markets. The weekly market draws the attention of both time and space to reflect the political geography of the place

[75] Economic blockade is a strategy where one ethnic community bans all kind of economic transactions with the other community. Economic blockades can go weeks and months based on the issue. Given the difficult terrain and hilly region, the blockade of roads means the essential goods for the other communities could be severely disturbed

[76] In Indian administrative set up, District is divided into sub- division (Tehsils) and each tehsil consists of Block places. Each block has cluster of villages. Given the geographical accessibility either the district place or the tehsil takes the prime market day. In northeast and other parts of India usually, Tehsil is the most accessible place within the area.

(Gell, 1982). Market day on a Sunday adds additional importance to the place - it draws attention to the place and is indicative of the political importance of the place.

Sunday vs. Friday

The market structure in Miao locality is a bit different compared to other weekly markets in terms of geographical boundaries and allocation of market days[77]. In the Miao market circle, Bordumsa, Kharsang and Diyun are the key places where the weekly market rotates to form a cycle. As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, Diyun is a block level place, but it managed to claim the market day on Sunday which is usually reserved for the Sub-division level places. Population growth and increase in agricultural labour among the Chakma community has transformed the region and helped to make Diyun a central place for Chakmas. This change also made Diyun the marketplace for Sunday, as it attracts more people from more villages than Miao. Miao on the other hand has its market day on Friday.

While the allocation of market days is evolved based on the accessibility to the space and surrounding villages, the Sunday Diyun market positions itself in contention with Miao. These tensions between Diyun and Miao market days have been reflected in different ways. One is the citizenship issue, when a blockade was called against Chakmas by AAPSU after the Supreme Court judgement in favour of Chakmas. At that time Miao market was blocked but Diyun market functioned without any disturbance and the land ownership issue between Chakmas and Singphos Miao market was closed for Chakmas (discussed in Chapter 3). It has been a constant reference point for the locals to point out the population of Chakmas in East Arunachal Pradesh. “Go and visit Diyun Bazaar on Sunday morning to see how many Chakmas are there” is a common refrain when the question of Chakma citizenship is discussed with locals.

Diyun market is busiest during the early hours of Sunday. The market opens at 5 AM and closes around 8 AM. By 8:30 AM the entire market is empty, with all the traces of its existence

[77] Miao market structure doesn’t limit itself to sub- division (generally referred as “tehsil level”) due to the geographical proximity and accessibility to nearby places. So, the weekly market days are assigned within the places where the

promptly swept off. Such timings allow people who travel from different villages to reach their homes before the sun reaches its peak[78]. On any given Sunday the market is filled with 250 to 300 small stalls. The stalls go past the designated market space and occupy the sides of the road as well. There is no limit to how far the market will extend. This is determined by the scale of seasonal harvests on one hand and the demand for market stalls, on the other.

The rise in demand for stalls directly correlates with rising levels of prosperity among Chakmas, however marginal. This development of Chakmas is perceived as a threat by the local communities. This progress also prompts the local people to point to allege that the Chakmas' development is a result of their illegal activities and plundering of forest resources in the locality. These allegations were brought frequently by the local communities and student unions to discredit Chakmas and the Sunday market. Especially those who have never been to Diyun. The student union representative whom I met during the Jubilee celebrations of Student Union (discussed in Chapter 2) mentioned that I should visit Diyun in order to understand the issue and what Chakmas have done to the natural resources. But when I asked him if he visited Diyun before, he was quick to point that he had seen the pictures from Diyun and student union reports from Miao. The contention here is more about the highly functional aspect of market and the self-sufficient model of economy which distances the local communities from the power structure, rather than the demography and allegations made towards the Chakmas.

After a few failed attempts to visit the Diyun Sunday market, I finally managed to get there with Ranjan. He is the school's driver, who is also in charge of getting vegetables for the hostel kitchen. We reached the market around 5. 30 A.M and took a look at the entire market before buying anything. Ranjan explains it is very important to make the rounds before buying as the people in the stall change every week. Eventually we began our vegetable purchases.

Each stall is small, measuring one square metre or less. The size can be attributed to the fact that these stalls are managed by Chakma farmers. They typically bring only the surplus fruits,

[78] The actual time zone of Arunachal Pradesh geographically is along with Myanmar (+6:30 GST) but due to national integration and one time zone policy of India it is +5:30 GST. To put it in perspective, Bangladesh which is in between mainland India and northeast India has a different time zone (+6:00 GST). So, in theory the administrative set up follows Indian time zone and practical purposes it does follow approximate Myanmar time zone unofficially.

vegetables and other produce from their gardens to sell - once they have met their own needs that week. The average revenue from all the stock in each stall may not even come up to 200-300 rupees (3-4 Euros). This is the sole source of income when daily wage works are not available.

While walking in the market I realised that half of the market was comprised of Ranjan's relatives. With every turn he was greeting someone, enquiring after their families and seeking updates about the goings-on in respective villages. He tried to explain each relationship to me. If any of his relatives were selling vegetables, we would definitely make a purchase there. He also enquired about where we could find good quality vegetables and whether anyone known to him was selling it, so that we could buy it for lower rates. I was struck by how the market space is also a space of social gathering for different villagers and communities to engage with each other. Information about various events and festivals happening in different villages are shared in the market space. Update about government announcements and legal developments regarding citizenship and other issues of concern are passed onto to each other on market days.

Other than Chakmas, there are Hajongs, Singphos and Tangsas also participating in the market. Singphos and Tangsas, despite their dominance in Miao market, have limited participation as consumers in Diyun market. There is a significant shift in the power dynamics compared to Miao region. Here the market is controlled by the Chakmas - the Singphos and Tangsas do not interfere in the market system. This is not the case in Miao market.

It is easy to discern identities in the market. This can be done by merely glancing at the products they have for sale. All the fresh produce like vegetables and forest greens are sold solely by the Chakmas. The products which are not grown or reared locally, are sold by the North Indians / Biharis[79]. Things like soap, masala, onion, oil and other products are sold by the merchants from outside the area. They also sell agricultural equipment like sickles, crowbars and gunny bags. The merchant stalls are big and managed by more than two people. They always come prepared with stocks of items that might be needed by the Chakmas and the locals. Despite

[79] Small population of north Indians have established themselves as merchant class in Arunachal Pradesh, mostly dealing with agricultural and mechanical goods. They do not interfere with the local politics and comply with local communities' protest and economic blockades in the region.

their critical contribution to the local economy, they refrain from getting involved in local politics.

The agricultural stalls, as mentioned before, are very small. Hence all their produce gets sold out very quickly. As soon as this happens, the vendors rush to the nearby meat market to make their personal purchases before it gets too late. Pork is hands down the meat of choice. The number of meat stalls increase and decrease depending on the demand. There is always someone keenly assessing the demand for pork at the market. The moment they sense an increase in demand, meat is immediately fetched for sale from somewhere nearby. As is evident, the meat market is very dynamic. That said, there are times when people book the quantity they require before the animal reaches the market. This is especially the case for Mithun meat. The meat market and especially pork meat, has cultural significance in the northeast region. Pork meat is seen as a taboo in other parts of India, while in northeast most of the ethnic cuisines are based around pork.

Mithun (a species of wild cow) is rare and it is more expensive than any other meat. It is always in demand and is available in the market only once every few months. While the legality of killing Mithun is moot, the information about its availability is widely spread in advance to others. Meat shops are always the last stop to visit before heading home, making them the last stalls that wind up business.

The weekly market is maintained and administered by a market committee[80]. All sellers, irrespective of stall size, have to pay Rs. 10 to the committee whenever they set up a stall. The market is open to all, and every week sees new people setting up shop to sell their goods. The market in Diyun is very different from the market at Miao, a town at the subdivision level. Diyun is considered to be the headquarters/capital for the Chakmas. The mere mention of Diyun triggers local people in the area. It is synonymous to Chakmas and everything local people are against. The nearest non Chakma villages would associate themselves with Innao81 or Miao on the other side rather than saying they are from Diyun block. Singphos and Khamptis

[80] Market committee is headed by the Diyun Village Head (Gaon Burah) and his deputies are charged with keeping the market in order.

[81] Innao is the nearest Singho village to Diyun and weekly market is held there on Tuesdays. Innao village acts as a small hub for nearby Singphos and Khampti communities.

visit Diyun market and especially Sunday market very rarely. Miao, on the other hand, stands for everything that is opposite of Diyun as far as the locals are concerned. It is the centre for local communities, especially the Singphos. It also houses several government departments and officials. Miao acts as a gateway to Namdhapa National Tiger Reserve forest as well. No Chakma household could be seen in Miao town, despite being bigger than Diyun in terms of labour opportunities, work, and market space. The sellers in the weekly market are similar in both Miao and Diyun. The difference is in the buyers who frequent it. Miao market sees only locals / non-chakmas and government employees as buyers, with the exception of people from a few Chakma villages close to Miao. In Diyun, it is the other way around.

The contrast between the two markets and how it operates also gives an idea of segregation of villages and the market economy in both the places. The Chakma settlements near Miao moved themselves away from the town to further areas in fear of constant threat and blockades in the region.

Miao market is more heterogenic, and the interactions are more mixed compared to Diyun market. This multi-cultural interaction between the ethnic groups also makes the weekly market prone to lot of clashes and boycotts. Miao market is an important centre for nearby Tangsa, Singpho and Khampti villages. Chakma settlements across the Mpen river crossing (Devapuri, Deban) and Bijoypur, Dharmapur on the other side are also part of the Miao Weekly market. The market space is smaller and has a defined space in the bazar area, a rectangular format with the permanent shops taking the main space. The weekly market stall occupies the front area of the shops and forms a concentric rectangle within the bazar. Unlike Diyun, there was no sign of market stalls extending to the road.

Udham Chakma and Thapana Chakma are from Moitripur, Diyun Block. But they regularly go to Miao market to sell vegetables. On one Friday morning we got up at 4.30 AM. Udham started packing 35 kilos of fresh produce (15 kilos of lentils, $7\frac{1}{2}$ kgs beans, 15 kgs of cabbage). Thapana had already packed 15 kg of long beans, 7kg of radish and 2kg of turmeric for another stall. We loaded as much of the produce as possible onto the bicycle and carried the remaining on our heads. The river crossing from the Diyun side to the Miao side (Miao ghat) is a passage of

great importance to both the Chakmas and the locals. It is discussed in detail in a later section. After paying the ferry charges for luggage and cycle separately, we reached Miao market by around 5.30 AM. We immediately started setting up the stall in a free space close to the market space.

Udham and Thapana made two different stalls for the ease of selling and dividing the work. They had to pay the market charge of Rs. 10 each for both the stalls. I sat in the middle of the two stalls and joined the chorus of other marketers, shouting the price of the vegetables to hail buyers. The buyers in Miao market are completely different from Diyun market. Most of them are locals and very few Chakmas come to buy vegetables or other goods in the market. But the sellers are mostly from Chakma community and like Udham, they crossed river from Diyun side for market. Part of the reason for why there are very few Chakma villages in the locality is that the Chakmas don't want to be close to the local villages as the threat of violence and blockades are common. The market set up is organised and fixed in a way that it is accessible and less crowded compared to Diyun. There is a separate space for vehicles to park in the entrance as most of the locals own a car or pickup trucks in Miao locality. The interaction between Chakmas and locals are minimum, limited to negotiating the price for vegetables.

During this time, I met a few government employees and teachers as well. I tried to have a conversation about the markets with them. Their views on Chakmas are very similar to the local ethnic groups. Community health department employee Mary who has been working in Miao for more than a decade reflects her opinion on Chakmas as *"Diyun is already under their control, they will take over Miao as well if it continues".* She shared this without specifying the name Chakmas. This perception is shared by many other locals as well, including those who are not familiar with the happenings in Miao and Diyun.

Mary is from Papum Pare, in the western part of Arunachal Pradesh. She was a bit worried about moving to Miao initially because of the stories she had heard about the Chakmas in the media and from student union. But she was comforted by the fact that in Miao there are no Chakmas and only local ethnic communities reside here. While she never witnessed or heard about any illegal activities by Chakmas during her stay in Maio, she believes the case is different in Diyun circle. The All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union (AAPSU) president who

had never been to Diyun also shares the similar perception regarding the market in Diyun and Miao. There is a myth around Diyun and Diyun market from people who have never been to Diyun or the Sunday market. The idea of Diyun and Miao market is the reference point for people of Arunachal Pradesh to understand the issue of Chakmas in the region, especially the population of Chakmas.

Police officer Naphong had a different take on the market and Chakmas presence in Miao market. He believes that "Chakmas are hardworking people. They are known for vegetable production - without them there will be a no vegetables in any market, be it Miao or Diyun. The locals are afraid of their dominance in local markets, especially because they are more in numbers. This makes the locals become more dependent on Chakmas. So, the youth groups (student unions) call for bandhs now and then to disturb them". The 'fear of numbers' and growing influence in the market areas as vegetable producers has been a concern for the locals for a long time. The demographic aspect attributed to Diyun area and economic aspect as vegetable producers in Miao area presents two different aspects to why local communities perceive Chakmas as threat.

The difference in Diyun and Miao market can be identified by ascertaining whether or not the local communities are able to exert their political power over the Chakmas in those markets. The Miao market exemplifies the political position of both the Chakmas and the local ethnic groups in the region as it is. Herein, locals can control the market and disrupt the economic activities of Chakmas. It has been demonstrated over the period of time to show the Chakmas their place so to speak. It also serves as a reminder of the vulnerable political position of Chakmas. Market place here becomes a space to exhibit the political power of locals. Economic blockade becomes a tool to reinforce the political hierarchy in the region. Miao market along with these power displays also reminds Chakmas of the the consequences of spreading out from the Diyun region. This, as mentioned previously, is evident from the lack of Chakma settlements around Maio.

Diyun market on the other hand offers some relief from the indigenous local groups' structure of power. It gives a safe space for the Chakmas to function and trade without the interference of local groups, economic blockades and other power politics. This enabled Chakmas to grow

as prominent vegetable and agricultural goods producers in the region. The growth of Diyun market has always been a bone of contention for students' union and other political parties as mentioned earlier (and in Chapter 2). This is due to the autonomous nature of the market here – it symbolises the growth and non-interference by local groups. While Diyun market presents a case for economic independence, it was developed into the current state due to the seclusion of Chakmas and locals' hesitation to participate in the Diyun market. The presence of Innao market within the proximity of Diyun is further proof of this hesitation.

II

Economic Blockade and Market Shutdown in Miao

Miao has the notorious reputation of shutting down its weekly market unannounced. This is mostly the work of the Students Union. AAPSU and people of the Singpho community create issues in the market from time to time. They have a history of calling for instant shutdowns of the market during weekly market days.

While recounting the impromptu bandhs (blockade)[82] by AAPSU with the "Don't Buy and Sell to Chakmas" campaign in 2012 , Udham recalled how it deeply affected the day to day life of Chakmas. He was not able to sell vegetables for a few weeks. It also meant that he couldn't buy oils and groceries from other shops in the market. It was a huge loss economically, but also a constant threat to Chakma livelihoods. Don't Buy and Sell to Chakmas campaign and other blockades strictly forbid any economic interaction between Chakmas and locals, bringing down the local economy of Chakmas and isolating them from locals. The shops are open during this period but forbidden for Chakmas to avail services from. The Diyun and Miao market are the lifelines of Chakmas in terms of local exchange economically and socially. When instant market blockades are announced it disrupts the market system and all the fresh vegetables brought to the market goes waste or gets sold for cheaper prices in the village. Market blockade remains the most effective way to inflict pain and fear in the Chakma community. The impact

[82] Bandh is the local terminology for blockade, during bandh all the shops and transport will be forced to be shut including essential services. It is a way of registering protest to opposition and state authorities. Bandh is not the same as economic blockade. Economic blockade is targeted towards a specific community and bandh is general and applies to all.

of market blockade on locals and non- Chakma communities are minimal as they can still buy provisions from shops owned by locals.

Economic blockades (which typically last for a couple of weeks or more, depending on the issue raised) have been less common in recent times. But the impact and memory of every shutdown strikes the core of Chakma economy – eating away any growth or prosperity and pushing them further into poverty. Udham had a terrible experience because of the blockades in the past. Especially during the Supreme Court announcement of citizenship for Chakmas few years ago, Miao market was closed at early hours and Udham was forced to return within an hour of setting up the shop. The student union members came for rounds with banners to close the market. He had to evacuate the stall and cross the Miao river crossing before it was shut too. He recalls it was a dreadful phase. The blockade went on for more than a month. Udham had to bring all the vegetables and spinach back to his village. He was forced to try selling all the produce to the neighbours. It was a difficult task for him as they were also growing spinach and vegetables in their garden. He shared half of the vegetables with his relatives and few with the neighbours. The more troubling part was to find a way to sell the vegetables in the coming week. He lost Rs. 400 (6 euros approximately) during the first week of blockade. The subsequent week he took the vegetables to Diyun market but the overwhelming sellers in the market due to Miao blockade meant he had to sell the goods for cheaper prices.

Normalisation of Economic Blockades in Ethnic Conflicts in the Northeast

In order to understand the fear and recurring impact of economic blockade experienced by Udham, it is important to understand the concept and wide use of "economic blockades" in Northeast region. Northeast India is a region where multi-ethnic communities are common. These ethnic communities try different methods to get the attention of the powers that be on their demands in terms of development, social and economic power.

Economic blockade is one of the methods used to achieve their demands and bring attention to various issues. A powerful tool to display their power, and these blockades act as a bargaining chip between ethnic tribes or with the State. The National Highways passing through the hill areas are targeted in instances where they are the only way of connectivity to other regions. Given the difficult terrain and limited connectivity, highway blockades can bring the blocked

region to a standstill. The Kuki blockade in 2011, where essential supply of goods was blocked completely, lasted for 123 days. This created unprecedented chaos and suffering in the region.

Economic blockade as a strategy is commonly used by ethnic groups against each other in the north-eastern states (case of Naga- Kuki in Manipur, Khasi- Garo in Meghalaya, Meiti- Naga in Nagaland, Mizo- Chakma in Mizoram, Ahom, Bodos and Adivasis in Assam, etc assert dominance and inflict economic violence over rival groups (Baruah, 2003). The imposition of power over the other groups and demonstration of political clout to the rival groups is a consistent motive. When both the tribes are in similar social and political standings, the damage and consequences of the economic blockades are mutual, affecting both the communities in similar magnitudes. In the case of infamous Naga- Kuki conflict in Manipur, both the ethnic communities have political and insurgent support. Whereas the Nagas are supported by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), the Kukis are supported by the Kuki National Army (KNI). These political supports keep the economic blockades among the local communities in check.

In contrast to economic blockades in other areas, in Northeast India economic blockades are normalized as part of the ethnic conflict between communities. Studies on Northeast India largely focus on ethnic conflicts, Assam and northeast (Baruah 2003), Zomia and Meghalaya (Karlsson 2013), Assam ethnic conflict (Barbora 2004), Nagaland (Kikon, 2005), insurgency (Kipgen 2013, Kolas 2017, Kalita 2011) and underdevelopment of the region. Due to the political and cultural plurality of the groups and ongoing insurgent movements in Northeast, economic blockade is seen as a part of the larger scheme during the protests and not as a primary form of economic violence. Absence of substantial work on economic blockades can be alluded to an academic understanding that views the larger conflicts between ethnic groups as a series of violent encounters that makes the economic blockade seem like a minor occurrence in the larger scheme of things. Despite economic blockades being a part of nearly every ethnic conflict in the region, it only gets mentioned as a side note or as an event in the chronology of a conflict's history. A case in point is the Kuki blockade described earlier, which finds mention only in the series of events during the ethnic conflict by Kipgen (2013). Another instance of this is when Singh (2010) talks about the economic blockade against Meiti in 2004 as one of the many consequences of ethnic violence between insurgents and the state.

The case of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh and the frequent economic blockade against them by locals presents a clear account of economic blockades and the impact it has on communities. Unlike the other states in the northeast region, Arunachal Pradesh does not have any major armed insurgent groups or major violent ethnic conflicts among the local tribes. This gives one a unique opportunity to examine the symbolic and structural power that economic blockades exert over the communities they are imposed on. It goes without saying that such a focus on economic blockades is in no way intended to diminish the violence and impact of continued ethnic conflicts between the tribes, insurgents and state. The objective is to call attention to the impact of economic blockades as they stand, and how they are wielded to change the existing socio-political tensions and power games.

This widespread use of economic blockade as a strategic tool is seen as first response to any objections towards the State or rival ethnic communities. As mentioned in Chapter 1, "bandhs" (blockade) and "economic blockades" are used as first response to any disagreement or rage towards the disapproving group. Bandhs are called for to demonstrate the disagreement with the State while an Economic blockade is directed towards specific ethnic communities.

Asymmetric Blockades and Display of Power

The political and social position of locals in Arunachal Pradesh is unquestionable. The special provisions in the law and unanimous support from entire north-eastern states (detailed in Chapter 2 - Power of Northeast Student Unions) make the locals position firm in their cause. In such a context an economic blockade between locals and Chakmas is extremely one sided and, the victims are invariably Chakmas. Compared to the economic blockades in other regions between the ethnic tribes where both the communities can be affected by the blockade, there is no careful consideration in Arunachal Pradesh before the economic blockade is called for. This is because there is no fear of retaliation or counter blockades from Chakmas. In the case of locals and Chakmas, the economic violence is always directed towards the Chakmas. The political position of Chakmas makes them powerless against the economic blockades imposed by locals. Here the economic blockade is used not as a means to negotiate or settle the rival claims of the boundaries. The blockades are called for purely to demonstrate the political and social power of locals. This exercise to "show them their place" particularly intensifies whenever the Chakmas case for citizenship is heard in courts or supported by any group.

Economic Blockade is used as symbolic power over the Chakmas. It brings rupture in the everyday activities of the Chakmas. It induces fear and uncertainty in them, whereby they are not aware when the next blockade will be imposed. Udham and Thapana's recollection during the previous economic blockade is due to the recurring yet uncertain nature of the economic blockades. Udham shares that when there is a major event or issue related to Chakmas there is a probability of economic blockades. Even then, they cannot be certain when it would be.

The dissimilarity between the other economic blockades in the region and those in Arunachal Pradesh can be identified with ease, given who calls for economic blockade. In other parts where the economic blockade is typically called by both rival communities. In Arunachal Pradesh it is always imposed only on Chakmas. Despite being the sole supplier of vegetables and essentials in the Diyun and Miao regions, the Chakmas have never called for Economic blockade in the Miao region. There is a glaring disproportion of economic and political dominance in the region.

The absence of retaliation and counter economic blockade by Chakmas is due to the fact that Chakmas rely on the locals for the market access and sell vegetables. The lack of political clout to support them in Diyun only exacerbates this imbalance of power. As discussed in Chapter 1 all the political activities of Chakmas happen in New Delhi and not in Diyun. This is due to the fear of immediate backlash back in Arunachal Pradesh. This fear too is reflected in the the absence of counter economic blockade by Chakmas. On the contrary to the demographic advantage (of Chakmas) propagated by the Student Union and political parties the numbers do not reflect in the political action due to the absence of citizenship rights and political marginalisation of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh.

The effects of the blockades are seen in the conscious planning of Chakmas while engaging with the market in Miao. They relay information about the Miao market happenings through the boatman at the river crossing. Any news regarding the citizenship from government too is relayed in a similar fashion, as it is the strongest trigger for an economic blockade on Chakmas. River Dehing divides the Diyun and Miao block villages with few exceptions. Distance between Diyun and Miao is 17 kilometres by crossing the river by boat ferry. The distance becomes more than 70 kilometres when traversed by bridge. Hence this point of access is

crucial. It is also a point of weakness that is only too easily exploited by the locals. For one, ferry crossing is seasonal. Heavy rains and inclement weather render the river crossing unusable during the monsoons. Given its economic and social importance this crossing also is targeted frequently by bandhs and economic blockades.

Frequent economic blockades and bandhs in the Miao market has created constant fear and precarity in the lives of Chakmas those who are close to Miao. Uttam narrates till in 1990s the Chakmas used to live in the Miao market area and nearby places. But the constant and unannounced bandhs and call for "Chakma go back" campaigns made them to move to Mpen and Devapuri, across the river, where access to markets and other important places is difficult.

Economic blockades bring out two major aspects of interaction between the local ethnic groups and Chakmas in the region. First the fear and uncertainty it brings out in the market space, thereby destabilising the economic prospects of Chakmas in Miao. While the actual blockades called for is less, the uncertainty and spontaneous aspects of these blockades have a serious impact on the Chakma vendors in the market. Second, the performative power of blockades. Along with the economic aspect, blockades also bring out the performative aspect of power employed by locals in the locality. The local groups in Miao use economic blockades as a show of power to demonstrate the hierarchical and political power position in Miao locality. This is similar to the performance of power used by student union during the protests and the setting up of parallel check points on the borders. While the performative power of student union is at the state and regional level, the blockades at Miao market are specific and targeted towards Chakmas.

Conclusion

Diyun weekly market presents itself as an embodiment of the Chakmas' struggle and hard work to form a sense of belonging and economic independence. They have done this without the help of locals in the region. This marginal development of Chakmas, which has been possible through the weekly market, has been misrepresented by the locals and even state authorities. They see the small progress made by the Chakmas as a display of economic development through illegal means and plundering of local resources. The self-sustaining market function at Diyun is perceived as a threat to the local community. The relative numerical dominance of

the Chakmas in that region and their growing economy has attracted attention from the outside - mainly from the state capital (student union and political parties).

Miao market, on the contrary, brings out the political vulnerability of Chakmas. It is a constant reminder of their precarious political position in the region. Despite being the major contributors in the market, the absence of political power could be seen through the constant marginalisation of Chakmas through economic blockades. Economic blockades in Miao acts as a deterrent creating recurring fear among the Chakmas. Along with the local political power relation, I posit that blockades are a way to control economic power of a group that is seen as having more economic power than what is politically and morally acceptable in the eyes of local groups and student union in the state. This also brings out the nature and severity of economic blockades, independent of other forms of ethnic violence in the region.

Economic blockade is part of a wider political power politics in the state. As I argued previously, the state government utilises the bureaucratic power to curtail the scope for any judicial and political mobility of Chakmas in the state. The student unions competing with the state political power demonstrate their power and opposition against Chakmas through protests and parallel check points. As a parallel continuation of the performance of power showcased by student unions, the economic blockades are employed by the local community in Miao.

Despite the complex political power struggle and spectacles of power in the region, there is still scope for meaningful social relation between the locals and Chakmas. The Buddhist festival of Kathina Chivara Dhana and Church inauguration in the Chakma village offer a different possibility for harmonious social relation between the Chakmas and locals. In the next chapter I explore the possibility of Chakmas and local ethnic groups having amicable social relationship through religious festivals.

Chapter 5: Religious Festivals as Intercession Between Chakmas and Local Ethnic groups

In the previous Chapter, I discussed the social interaction between the locals and Chakmas in the everyday activities, based on the weekly market happenings. It focused on the economic aspect of the interaction and the social power dynamics that emerge during the same. The negotiation between the Chakmas (sellers of vegetables and forest products) and locals (mostly buyers) through the market space and the economic blockades which were used against chakmas as controlling mechanism brings out a difficult social relation between these two communities. In this Chapter, I step aside from the animosity and grim social relation between these two. I investigate the possibility of more amicable social interaction/ relationship between Chakmas and locals.

There are two major religious groups in the region, namely the Buddhists and the Christians. The festivals and gatherings celebrated by them, offers a faint scope of bringing Chakmas and locals together in the locality, despite their difficult political situation. Through the case of *Kathina Chivara Dhana* (Robe Offering Ceremony) the major annual religious festival of Buddhists, and the opening of the new Divine Mercy Catholic Church in the Chalma village of Khamakyapur, I present two different ways where Chakmas and locals have initiated a more harmonious social interaction via religion.

I

Theravada Buddhism and Chakma Settlement in Arunachal Pradesh

Chakmas were settled in Eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh mainly due to their similarity in religion with the locals in the area. In the White Papers of the then Assam administration and North East Frontier Agency, it is clearly argued that Chakmas would fit right into the less populated regions of Diyun as the nearby ethnic groups are also Theravada Buddhists[83]. There is a similarity in culture and religion which would eventually help Chakmas to assimilate further in the region. Singphos and Khamptis of the Diyun region are also followers of

[83] White papers of North East Frontier Agency and Assam during 1960s (L.no. DRS- 36/69 on 25th May 1964)

Theravada Buddhism.[84] While the population density and sparse land in the region was a perfect fit for the settlement of Chakmas in the region, the religious similarity that the government officials assumed during that time proved to be completely wrong. A closer look at the Theravada Buddhism and ethnic identity in the Zomia region and Sri Lanka gives a perspective about the rigidness they have among themselves in order to maintain their own customs and culture (Keyes, 2016). Soon after independence in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, political narrative took strong roots in Buddhist nationalism alienating the minorities. Similarly, in Thailand and Cambodia, Buddhist traditions and rituals were strictly enforced during the 1970s. The Buddhist monk's involvement in each of the uprisings and their active participation in violent activity is well documented by Thambiah (1976), Keyes (1978) and others.

These political assertions in the region by Buddhist populism started to happen before the Chakmas were considered to settle in Diyun region of Arunachal Pradesh. The regional political developments during that time gives a precursor to the eventual issue in Arunachal Pradesh.

In Arunachal Pradesh both sects of Buddhism are followed, In the Western Arunachal Pradesh the Mongpas and the Tibetan ethnic groups follow the Mahayana tradition largely followed in Tiber, Japan and Korea. Whereas the groups in the eastern region, namely the Singphos, Khamptis and Chakmas, follow the Theravada tradition largely influenced from Myanmar, Cambodia and Thailand. Singphos, Khamptis and Chakmas all have their roots in Myanmar. The Anthropological Survey of India notes that Singphos migrated from Chin region of Myanmar during the 17th century to the eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh, along the Neo-Dehing river in Maio- Namsai region (Barua, 1991[85]).

Despite the fact that Chakmas, Singphos and Khamptis follow the same sect of Buddhism they differ completely when it comes to tradition and festivals. There is very little evidence that

[84] Theravada Buddhism is the oldest sect of Buddhism and followed widely in South East Asia (Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Burma) and Sri Lanka. The Mahayana Buddhism is followed in Tibet, China, Korea and japan. Theravada Buddhism is claimed to closer to the original teachings of Buddha and path to attainment of nirvana.

[85] Barua, S.N (1991) Tribes of Indo-Burma border. A socio-cultural history of the inhabitants of the Patkai range, Mittal publications, New Delhi

both the tribes follow the similar tradition. There is a huge difference between the Singpho and Chakma when comes to rituals and traditional festivals. Singpho traditional festivals are closer to the Tai-Khampti and Chin traditions from Myanmar and Thailand (Elwin, 1964). They have an ethnic connection and various events have been organised to commemorate that lineage in the recent times.

The Chakma Buddhist tradition is an amalgamation of local festivals from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and major Theravada Buddhist festivals. Festival of Bihu celebrated in Assam and few places in Bangladesh is the only traditional aspect that the Chakmas have carried from the Chittagong Track Hills to Arunachal Pradesh. It could be argued that the Chakma Bihu is the only reminiscence from their place of origin which they continue to celebrate in Arunachal Pradesh. Along with Chakma Bihu, *Kathina Chivara Dhana* (The holy robes offering ceremony) is the major festival celebrated by Chakmas. *Kathina Chivara Dhana* displays the rich tradition and brings a sense of togetherness in the community. If Sunday market is the site to measure the Chakma population, this festival brings out the population in multiple folds. To give a perspective of number of people participating in the festival, it is threefold the market gathering on a Sunday market in Diyun. The organising committee claims that more than 20,000 Chakmas participate every year in the robe offering ceremony in Diyun.

Kathina Chivara Dhana. Festival of Hope and Gratitude

The holy robe offering ceremony is celebrated in the month of October after the harvest and the monsoon rains. It is the biggest festival among the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh. It is a month-long festival that is celebrated across villages which culminates with a concluding ceremony in Diyun. Each village take turns to commemorate the festival within the month. Each village commemoration is organised by the local Buddhist temples. This allows relatives and other villagers to participate in the festival organised by each village.

According to Buddhist texts, during the *pathmabodhi* period (twenty years after the attainment of Buddha) the early monks had to make their own clothes (traditional brown robes). The monks robe needs to be pure and made from scratch by themselves. The weaved robe is boiled

and purified with the leaves and barks giving the robe the distinctive brown colour[86]. A group of thirty monks from Patiala tried to reach the monastery where the Buddha was residing before the start of monsoon. They were unable to reach in time and got caught in the monsoon rain. They were stuck in the nearby village for three months. When they finally reached the monastery, their robes were rugged and muddy. Looking at the condition of monks, the Buddha asked the other monks to offer robes to them. Since then it has become a tradition *"I allow you, monks, to make up Kathina-cloth when monks have completed the rains[87]".* During the three-month monsoon period, Buddha asked the monks to meditate. At the end of the monsoon period they were allowed to accept or make *kathina*. In the earlier times monks were not supposed to receive clothes from lay people. Later, the Buddha relaxed the rule designating specific days that were exempt from rules like like accepting robes from lay people and participating in group meals. These practices are at the core of Kathina Chivara Dhana festivals.

> *"I allow you, monks, householder's robes. Whoever wishes may be a rag-robe wearer; whoever wishes may consent to (accept) householders' robes. And I, monks, commend satisfaction with the one or the other".* (Book of Discipline, p. 397 quoted in Khunakaro)

The incident of monks travelling during monsoon and the commemoration of the three month long secluded meditation (*vaasa*) later become the basis for Kathina Chivara Dhana among the Theravada Buddhists.

According to Buddhist canon, both the receiver and giver of robes will be benefited and blessed during the Kathina Dhana. Especially for the giver, the deed will be reciprocal as they offer food and clothes to monk, they will receive abundance of food and clothes. They also believe it will bring strength, life, beauty, happiness and wisdom to the giver. Chakmas believe that robe offering will bring good harvest and blessing from Buddha.

[86] Mahatthanadul (2018) Kathina Robe In Theravāda Tradition JIABU

[87] I.B. Horner (tr.), The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka), Vol. IV (Mahāvagga), (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1962), p. 352.

Chakma way of Kathina Chivara Dhana

Keeping the main aspects of the festival in traditional way, Chakmas add their cultural aspects to the festival. The two-day event at the end of the month celebrates these cultural aspects and the togetherness among the Chakmas. The event is organised by all the Chakma villages in the Diyun and Miao region. The Monastery at Diyun is the centre for all the activities. The Chief Bikhu (Monk) invites various delegates from different Buddhist monasteries to participate in the event.

Picture 4: Kathina Chivara Dhana festival at Diyun

On the first day of the event, various ceremonies are performed to initiate the festival. The chief monk leads the prayers and participants are asked to join the mediation during this time. In the evening the most anticipated weaving ceremony and competition is scheduled. This event was creating a buzz from late summer in August among the Chakma students at St. Jude school. I was invited to this event by the students to attend in their respective villages. I was looking forward to this festival as it attracts more than 20,000 Chakmas in one place. At the main event in Diyun, Chinton who is part of the organising committee invited me to participate as this would be a great opportunity to see the cultural aspect of Chakmas. Chinton is also part of the Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh

(CCRCHAP) which organises and brings news to Chakmas about the latest developments in the citizenship issue from New Delhi.

A series of long temporary tents were erected near the Monastery. Sections were allocated to different village teams participating in the weaving ceremony. The initial capacity of the event was for 1500 participants. Food was prepared and distributed for the participants and observers at the communal kitchens at different locations around the monastery. After a small prayer the weaving ceremony began around 7 pm.

A group of six to nine woman form a team and register to participate in the weaving ceremony. Teams from different villages participate in the ceremony. In 2017, the year I attended, and more than 100 groups participated in the weaving ceremony at the Diyun Maha (Great) Kathina Chivara Dhana. The objective is to weave a robe from scratch, from thread to robe, overnight and offer it to the monks in the morning for the grand robe offering ceremony. They start around 7pm in the evening and the process continues till the dawn. Backstrap looming method is used to weave the robes. This method is common among all the Chakma households[88]. Each team member takes a certain task - untangling the threads, arranging the backstrap loom, taking turns in weaving when the process begins etc. The entire process is considered as a sacred act and those who are not participating are restricted from entering the weaving area. Along with the spiritual side, the organising committee also encourages more teams to participate. The first team that finishes the weaving the robe by dawn is given prizes and felicitated in the day's ceremony. The grand nature of the festival has attracted attention from other Buddhist communities around the region. Around 1000 women weaving together for the robe offering

[88] The backstrap loom is a simple instrument with sticks and batons to weave clothes. Every household in Chakma villages has a backstrap loom attached to the side of the house. Weaving is a continuous process and part of everyday activity among Chakma women in the house. Any spare time is quickly focused on weaving and it also provides economic support to the family. The blue and red Chakma dress is well known in the locality. Barring the younger generation, all women wear the Chakma dress and most of them are woven by the women themselves. Backstrap looming is common among the other local tribes in the region as well. The Singphos weave a dark blue, brown and silver chequered square traditional dress.

ceremony has been noticed by Singphos and Khamptis, and recently they too have started to attend these festivals.

Picture 5: Chakma women group weaving robe at the festival

In a different corner from where Chakmas were weaving I noticed that a group of women with different ethnic attire were also weaving. It is easier to identify the difference as all the Chakma participants were in the traditional red and blue clothes. The group I noticed was a team of Khampti women in their traditional chequered blue, green and white, who were also participating in the weaving ceremony.

Chinton Chakma reflected that it was a surprise when two years ago the Singpho women group participated in the ceremony. He adds that *" I don't know whether they like us or not, but at least they have started believing in the same faith as we do and participate in our festivals".* While this participation of few women from the local community may not be taken as a ground-breaking achievement in inter community dialogue, this gesture was taken as a beginning of social acceptance by many Chakmas. The Khampti group who were weaving at the ceremony were not keen to have conversation with me as I was a complete stranger to them. But in the limited interaction I had, they believe the sheer number of groups weaving and praying together gives them a hope that prayers are powerful and it will be answered. I tried to pivot the

discussion to Chakmas living in Diyun and what they think about it. But they were uncomfortable to discuss politics and wanted to continue the weaving process.

Picture 6: Local Khampti group participating in the festival

The change in attitude among the local community and their relationship with Chakmas is not limited to the Khampti group. The change is also coming from the local political parties.

When the weaving process is completed the next morning, the women groups and the lay observers participated in the grand ceremony where they finally offer the robes to the monks. They receive blessings from all the monks assembled together on the stage. This event is attended by many important people in the region and the state. The year before I attended, (2016) the Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Chowna Mein, (who hails from Khampti ethnic community) participated in the closing ceremony and urged for peaceful

coexistence of ethnic local community and Chakmas in the region. This year's ceremony was inaugurated by the head of the Forest Monastery (*Bana Vihara*) in Diyun. Every year various dignitaries from across the political and religious spectrum participate in the festival. Monks from Sri Lanka, Thailand and other parts of India are also invited.

The then MLA (member of Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh) of Diyun - Bordumsa constituency Nikh Kamin, participated in the festival the year I was there. In his address, he reflected on his student years. He recounted how he participated in the AAPSU organised protests against the Chakmas and shouted slogans against them during that time. After having served the constituency for the last four years, he shared that he regrets his previous actions. There is a widespread misinformation about Chakmas in the state, especially in Itanagar. He told all those gathered there that he takes personal responsibility as the MLA of the constituency to clear the misinformation to the people in Itanagar[89]. He is also hopeful that in future there will be a policy where both the groups can be accommodated in the state. This sentiment was shared by other leaders who were present in the festival.

The change in perception of local political parties and participation in Chakma festivals could viewed with cynicism. It could be seen as mere vote bank politics in the region, given that there are already more than 1300 Chakma voters in the parliamentary election list. But the stories and local media coverage about the festival as well as the participation of political leaders did send a more favourable message about the Chakmas and their hard work in the region. The MLA's reflection and regret of his time during his student days in AAPSU created a positive message among the Chakmas. While Chinton was a bit cautious in his praise about the MLA's speech, he believed that it was definitely a radical shift from the earlier MLA (C.C. Singpho), who was not this active in Chakma issue, but without concrete actions and progress in citizenship issue the speech made by the current MLA means nothing.

Kathina Chivara Dhana festival brings together the present and past political leaders in the region to participate and initiate dialogue about Chakmas and local's relationship in the region. Despite the larger negative propaganda spread about Chakmas in the state level, these minor

[89] https://arunachal24.in/12th-maha-kathina-civara-dana-celebration-at-diyun-bana-vihar-concludes/ last accessed on 10th September 2021

participations in the locality are changing the perception of Chakmas among few locals. In the line of religious interaction between the locals and Chakmas, Christianity offers a more nuanced interaction and participation between the two.

II

Christianity in Arunachal Pradesh

Religious groups in Arunachal Pradesh falls in two groups, Bodic and non -Bodic followers. Bodic groups are those who follow Buddhism. Both Hinayana and Mahayana sects of Buddhism are followed in Arunachal Pradesh. Ethnic groups like Monpa (Mahayana), Khampti, Singphos and Chakmas (Hinayana- theravada) follow Buddhism.

Non-Bodic groups (Doni-Polo[90]) are who profess faith and belief centred around nature worship. They believe in primordial worship, followed by many ethnic groups in Arunachal Pradesh. Nyshi, Apatani, Adi, Tangsa, Nocte, Wanchos and Mishmi, to name few, are those who base their faith around nature. Christianity is widely accepted in the animist followers from colonial times, due to the missionary activities in the region. In Diyun region Christianity is popular among the ethnic groups of Khamptis and Tangsas. Christianity is now the major religious group in the state having more than 31% of total population in the state (Census report, 2011). It should be noted that Arunachal Pradesh is not an exception in embracing Christianity in Northeast India. In Nagaland (87%), Mizoram (87%), Meghalaya (74%) and Manipur (41%), a majority of the populace follows Christianity. The prominence of Christianity in the region could be summarised by the popular slogan of Nagaland which is "Nagaland for Christ" (Longkumer, 2017). This is contrary to other parts of India where the conversion to Christianity began with the marginalised communities. Equality and social mobility were seen as a prime factor for the move. Whereas in this region, Christianity has been embraced by the powerful ethnic groups to begin with.

Among the Bodic followers, Chakmas are one of the few who are slowly moving towards Christianity. The inclination towards Christianity can largely be attributed to the social mobility that comes along with the conversion. Conversion to Christianity have already made a deep

[90] Doni- Polo meaning Sun- Moon is indigenous religion followed mostly in the western region of Arunachal Pradesh by Adis, Nyshis, Apatanis and other ethnic groups in the region (Chaudary, 2013).

impact among Chakmas. Education for children, health care and wider scope for various livelihood options through conversion is one of the strongest pulls towards Christianity. Diyun is hotspot for various evangelical congregations including Baptists, Protestants and Catholic missionaries. While the ethnic tribes in the region have a long history of engaging with Christian missionaries from the colonial times, the Chakmas have only recently begun to make this transition.

This late transition among the Chakmas is due to strong religious structure within the Theravada Buddhism where every day activities are intertwined with religious activities[91]. To break away from the religious structure is also breaking away from the social norms in the village.

As pastor John puts it,

> *"Conversion in Northeast is mostly targeted on a community or village as a whole which works with ethnic groups who follow animist and nature-based worship. If a village converts, there is a complete transition and it flows from the village head to all other members. With Chakmas its more difficult to approach as a village".*

Conversion among the Chakmas are mostly individual and family based. As of 2017, there were around two thousand five hundred of them according to the church database (local estimate by St. Jude church).

St. Jude Parish of Catholic Church in Diyun is one of the first congregation to enter in the Diyun region. They established the St. Jude School in the locality, primarily focusing on converting Chakmas to Christianity. St. Jude School also acts as a centre for education for locals and chakmas alike. The parish has six sub- stations in different ethnic communities like in Khampti, and Mossang villages[92]. One of the sub- stations is located in Devapuri which

[91] For example, In Chakma villages, each household take turns to offer food for the local monks in the monastery and it is a continuous process throughout the year. This creates a strong connection between temple and the families.

[92] Sub stations are minor churches in the village level for the convenience of local parishioners as they cannot commute to Main parish church every week. Sub stations also acts a base for evangelical activities to attract more people to church.

Bijoy is part of (Chapter 3). The church places the school as an entry point to bring more people into its fold. Of course, the school also provides education for Catholic and other families in the region. Most of the Sunday masses happen in the respective sub stations. But for special occasions all of them gather at St. Jude Church for the service.

St. Jude Catholic Parish and School present a more diverse environment for Chakmas to interact with local ethnic groups than the other congregations. The administrative structure of Catholic Diocese is interconnected throughout the East Arunachal Pradesh. St. Jude School is part of 40 other catholic schools in the region. This set up gives the Chakma students an opportunity to interact and participate in interschool competitions that are held annually. All of this gives the students the unique opportunity for greater exposure, which others in their may not receive. Due to the independent nature of other congregations, interaction with local communities are less likely. Hence the church activities are limited to Chakmas in Diyun. For this reason and as I was already part of the School, I focused on St. Jude School and parish activities to explore the inter community participation on the regional level.

Sunday Mass

Every Sunday the main service is held at the St. Jude Parish at 10 AM. The parish priest and assistant parish priest take turns to celebrate the mass at Diyun,. While one celebrates mass at Diyun, the other goes to one of the other sub stations to celebrate mass. I was not obliged to participate in the church activities, but whenever I did, I was more than welcome to be a part of it.

Being a teacher and resident at the school was very helpful. It gave me an opportunity to interact with the parishioners and develop a rapport with people from different ethnic backgrounds. Every other week I accompanied the priests to the sub stations to see the difference between the local and the Chakma church services. In Diyun church the parishioners are from Chakma community. The locals are mostly government employees from different parts of Arunachal Pradesh (Tangsas, Wanchos) and couple of South Indian families. Diyun church is multi-ethnic and sees participation from different communities, especially Chakmas and locals. This is one of the key aspects of this church.

The substation churches are community oriented in the villages, as most of the villages are based on ethnic groups. While Diyun church brings out the inter communal interactions and scope for amicable relations, sub stations display the stark economic and social difference between the Chakma and local communities.

Despite Diyun being the centre and the head parish church, the local community sub stations of Kaham Mossang (Khampti ethnic group) and Balupathar (Tangsa ethnic group) are popular among the seminarian brothers and the driver. This is mainly for the elaborate lunch after the church service. In the Chakma villages the food served after the service were basic and minimal in nature, usually rice and pork or vegetables with lentils. Sometimes food is skipped altogether as people are busy with work earlier in the day. The difference between the Chakmas substation and the local's substation is easily identified based on the church building. While the Diocese and church institution gives funds for building the church, contributions from the parishioners makes an overall difference in the building. As most of the local community parishioners are employed in the state services or privately employed elsewhere, the offerings and contributions to the church by local community members are always on the higher side.

With the help of a donor from abroad, the Parish had started to build a concrete church in Khamakyapur, first of its kind in a Chakma village. Khamakyapur is located around 6 kilometres east of Diyun and has more than 20 catholic families in the village. It is the third village to get a proper church after Balupather (Tangsa, Khampti village) and Khagam Mossang (Khampti). The foundation work started soon after Christmas celebrations in 2016. Moses Chakma is in charge of the construction of the church. He is one of the village elders in Khamakyapur. I know Moses from my field work in 2011 when I first visited Diyun to study the citizenship issue of Chakmas. He was my field interlocutor for three months (Nov 2011-Jan 2012) as we travelled covering most of the Chakma villages. Although he has converted to Christianity, Moses has a good reputation among the Chakmas and the local administration in Diyun region. Moses worked on the church construction from the beginning and made significant contribution in bringing local ethnic parishioners to participate in the church activities.

In June 2017 the parish priest invited all the catechists and elder parishioners to decide the dates for the inauguration of Divine Mercy Church in Khamakyapur. Moses shared the agenda and what needs to be done before the inauguration. During the discussion all of them contributed equally in terms of work to be done and the monetary donations needed for the program. The local community was little hesitant to bring up new initiative in the meeting and largely agreed on Parish priest's delegation of work with the exception of Sengmai. Sengmai, the catechist for Balupather and Innao, suggested that the MLA of Miao constituency should be invited for the inauguration as it would attract more people to attend the inauguration. He also mentioned that MLA is inclined towards Christianity and would make a good impact in the locality.

Sengmai is in his mid-twenties and hails from Khampti local community. He completed his bachelor's education and was waiting to clear the government civil services exams for further employment. He did not want to be involved in politics and avoided student union meetings during his school and college days. He believes that Chakmas are minding their things but the politics in Itanagar (state capital) is what causing the whole problem. Asked about his position on Chakmas getting the citizenship, he is little reserved in response, saying that he is too young to have strong political opinions on topics such as citizenship. This was surprising to hear as it is the students of his age and the younger ones who have and make strong political opinions regarding the question of Chakmas and citizenship in Arunachal Pradesh. He further states that "*We (Chakmas and locals) all believe in the Lord and I think we are all equal in front of Him. They are just like us; I don't see any difference".* While his answer is measured and away from the main question, he believes there is no difference in the eyes of the church. That was not the case during the early days of conversion.

After the meeting, I asked the parish priest about the hesitancy and involvement of other local ethnic communities in the program. The priest believed that this was the biggest involvement in the church activity as far as he knows during his time in Diyun. During his predecessors' time, there had been difficult times where the local communities were not happy about going to the same church with Chakmas. The parish priest explains that the changes among the locals and Chakmas in the church has been gradual. From not sharing the church to participating and contributing to the church activities in a Chakma village, things have come a long way. He

believes the occasional inter community retreats at the Diocese level[93] played a vital role in bringing them all together. Diocese has strong roots among Wanchos, Noctes, Mishmis, Khamptis and Tangsas among the local communities and gathering at diocese level offers a space for interaction with Chakmas. Especially for Wanchos and Noctes, who have only heard about Chakmas from news and student union propaganda.

The Bishop of Miao Catholic diocese Fr. George Palliparambil, who is also an anthropologist working in East Arunachal Pradesh for 30 years shares a similar view while recollecting the various blockades and protests against the Chakmas. Even at the diocese level, it is difficult to discuss about this issue as it might antagonise local communities. He believes the Chakmas are portrayed in bad light in the region despite their hard work and peaceful nature.

> *"In late 1990s when I first visited Diyun for missionary work, the condition of Chakmas were really horrible. The housing, the layout of the village, children in the streets - you could visibly see the poverty levels. But things have steadily changed in the Chakma community despite political oppression. They worked hard. Now, when I go to Diyun, I am struck by how much they have developed without the support of state and local communities."*

9th August, Wednesday was decided as the day for the inauguration of church and that Bishop Fr. George would celebrate the inaugural mass in the church. On the day of the inauguration, Sengmai and a group of local Christians arrived early in the day to decorate the church and look after the seating arrangements of the programme. The local women group who were responsible for garlands and welcome needed space for preparation. Jesinta (Moses's wife) took them to her house so that there was enough space for them to prepare. The young girls who had never been to a Chakma household before were hesitant to go. The church sisters had to persuade them to go with Jesinta. Since these girls were also studying at St. Jude school, I

[93] Miao diocese is comprised of 8 districts (Dibang valley, lower Dibang valley, Anjaw, Tezu, namsai, Changlang, Tirap and Longding) covering the east arunachal Pradesh. According to the church data there are around 60,000 Catholics in east Arunachal Pradesh under the diocese of Miao. http://www.miaodiocese.com/history/

knew them. So I quipped *"Don't steal the dry fish near the fireplace, maybe you guys shouldn't go there!"* This light remark served to to ease the hesitation[94].

More than 500 people were gathered for the inauguration and it was more than the number anticipated for the programme. Many had gathered on a whim to see the spectacle of priests in cassocks, mass attire and the rituals. Bishop George was there accompanying Mr. Somlung Mossang, brother of Miao constituency MLA Kamlung Mossang. As Miao MLA was busy elsewhere, Somlung was invited for the programme. Somlung was planning to stand for legislative assembly elections in Diyun constituency in the future (which he won from Diyun-Bordumsa constituency during the last state elections in 2019).

While inaugurating the church, Somlung Mossang spoke about the Chakmas and what this new church means to both Chakmas and local communities alike. He reflected on how religion could be a powerful tool to mend peace between Chakmas and the locals. He praised the Chakmas for their hard work and how that aspect is being admired by other communities in the locality. Somlung assured that the peaceful nature of Chakmas will not go unnoticed and the issue of the citizenship will be solved soon. After the speech he donated money to the village and the church to be utilised for developmental purposes. After the inauguration and church service, food was served to all the participants. Chakmas and locals all shared the meal in the church verand. Chakma pork curry was the most favoured dish of the day. Sharing a meal at the same place and the interaction between them was a new experience for both the Chakmas and the locals.

The speech by Somlung at the church and the one by Nikh Kamin, MLA of Diyun during the Kathina Chivara Dhana had a similar tone and held some promise for the the Chakmas with regard to the issue of citizenship. This was rather curious, given that there is a unanimous opposition from the state assembly regarding the citizenship issue of Chakmas.

[94] Smoked meat and fish stored near the fireplace is common among all ethnic households in the locality.

Religious Institutions as an Avenue for Social and Educational Mobility

It is imminent to discuss the conversion and evangelical nature of Christianity in the region. The colonial roots of conversion and the work by salvation army and missionaries by different congregation of church has a long history in northeast India. During the course of time, Christianity has played critical role in bringing out social and cultural identity of indigenous group in the church (Fernandes, 2009), similar to their contributions in south India through linguistic cultural identity. The amalgamation of church and ethnic culture of communities is one of the major reasons for the growth of Christianity in northeast India. Arunachal Pradesh which is one of the last spaces where Christianity found its way due to the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) laws but has quickly become one of the strongest growing Christian population (from 0.79 % in 1971 to 30.29% in 2011[95])in the region.

While there are arguments regarding what propelled the change, it is the possibility of embracing Christianity without losing indigenous nature of the ethnic groups is one of the major reasons for the shift Goswami, 1980). The social and educational mobility aspect which comes along is the key feature in conversion to Christianity. Especially in the case of Chakmas where basic necessities are denied by the state.

Moses when he was contemplating converting to Christianity, his first grandson was born with cleft lip, the local medicine and hospitals were not able to fix it in the locality. He even thought that the kid is not normal and maybe he will useful to look after the cattle when he grows up. The parish priest of that time took measures and send them to hospital in Assam and arranged for surgery. This act made him attracted to Christianity and believe that God intervened and helped his grandson. Moses's grandson is now studying at St. Jude School in class II. Moses's son and his son-in-law both are working in South India through the contact of parish priest. The job is temporary in private sectors, but it gives them an opportunity to move from the dependence of land and local communities for employment.

[95] https://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/c-01.html

This economic mobility aspect and possibility to get good education in the Christian schools are the major factors among Chakmas to embrace Christianity. Education aspect is not only limited to Christianity but also from the Buddhist missionary organisations in the locality.

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, Chakmas struggle for education is intertwined with their struggle for citizenship and belonging. In 1994 the first wave of agitations against Chakmas, after the wake of Union government possible plan to issue citizenship for Chakmas sparked outrage in the region. The state government and AAPSU burned down primary schools and educational facilities where majority of students were Chakmas. The protest enforced that Chakmas will not be admitted in any government schools in the state (CRG Report, 2011).

During the early 2000s "Operation Clean Drive" focused on evacuating Chakmas from Diyun and Miao region heavily affected the scope for Chakma students' studying in government school in Maio. During the protest, AAPSU violently threatened Chakma students in the School and barred them to study in the government school (Singh, 2009). Miao government higher secondary school was the only secondary school at the time (Diyun government school was promoted to higher secondary later), it was the nearest and accessible school for Chakmas in the region. Result of the agitation, Chakma students till now do not study at the government higher secondary school in Miao, in fear of frequent agitations by student union. Either they go to nearby places in assam for education or Diyun in the recent times.

Diyun the safe space for Chakmas started to overcrowd in the schools due to fear of going to schools in other places in the locality. During the academic year 2007, ratio of student and teacher overcrowded to 1350 to 18 in Diyun higher secondary school (ACHR Report, 2007).

Religious missionaries and Non-governmental organisations started schools in Diyun to cater the educational needs of the Chakmas and others in the locality. The two main schools in Diyun are Mahabodhi School (run by Buddhist educational trust) and St. Jude School (run by Diocese of Miao). Both the schools play a critical role in education of the chakmas and most importantly plays a vital role in bringing together the locals and Chakmas through various religious events. The annual kathina chivara dhana celebrations at Maha bodhi school acts as a neutral space for

local communities to participate in the religious process. St. Jude parish and school participation in the diocesan level educational and religious events creates space for chakmas to be involved with other local communities in the east arunachal region [96] .

Conclusion

The festivals and cultural events are important for ethnic communities as it gives them an opportunity to distinguish themselves from the other ethnic communities with similar ethnic traditions in the locality. The grand nature of Kathina Chivara Dhana is also part of the cultural display and togetherness among the Chakmas amidst the perpetual uncertainty of their political status in the country.

Both the religious events, Kathina Chivara Dhana and Divine Mercy Church inauguration brings out two aspects of local communities participating in Chakma events which was not the case in the past. First, the participation of Khamptis and Tangsas in both the festivals. As Chinton recollected, the locals may not like the presence of Chakmas in the locality, but the initiation towards believing in the same religion is a miniscule change which could be developed further. Second, the political parties and local leaders' shift in perception of Chakmas in the recent times especially in Diyun - Bordumsa constituency needs caution. The shift from supporting "Operation Clean Drive" and curtailing all welfare policies for Chakmas to support them in religious gatherings is down to the inclusion of 1300 Chakmas in the parliamentary elections. Despite the blatant political intent in the shift, the participation of Deputy Chief minister of the state, reflective speeches of local politicians have attracted media and the locals attention towards Chakmas in a positive way.

The political situation of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh is the centre of ethnic politics in the state. The ethnic identity and special status of the state has been the primary contention against the citizenship issue of Chakmas for the past 58 years. During this period, several judgements have been passed. Implementation of all these judgements has failed due to the political mobilisation of students' union and political parties in the state. The idea of limited citizenship

[96] Radiance- the cultural and sports programme conducted by the Diocese and catholic schools annually in east Arunachal Pradesh brings together students from more than 50 catholic schools. Students perform various ethnic cultural dance and St. Jude school students participate and represent Chakma culture and perform in the cultural events. This is one of the few rare occasions where Chakma cultural dance is performed along with local traditional dances.

to give partial recognition in the state to economic blockades to control the economic rights in the marketplace, the presence of Chakmas has been viewed as the major hurdle in the state politics. The spectacles of power by AAPSU and political parties in the state annihilated and marginalised Chakmas since their settlement in the state. Despite these struggles to be part of belonging in the state, the participation of locals in the robe offering ceremony and church inauguration in the Chakma village offers a glimpse of change in perception and acceptance in the locality. It presents a scope for further development in the social relationship between the Chakmas and locals in an amicable way.

Conclusion: They Have No Right to Seek a Permanent Place.

On June 4th, 2020 during the first wave of COVID pandemic, AAPSU issued a statement to district and state authorities not to include Chakmas cases in the state tally and their numbers should be added in a different refugee list[97]. They also demanded that the Diyun circle should be declared as contamination zone. AAPSU went further to state that Chakmas who are infected have right to avail health care facilities and treatments, but they cannot be added in the list of cases in Arunachal Pradesh as it might include them as part of 'Arunchalis'. The relaxation to access health care was stated as good will measure of AAPSU by the General Secretary as "we might have differences, but it is about humanity"[98]. There was no logical explanation given as to why Diyun should be declared as contamination zone, given that the number of infected cases from Diyun was not recorded at that time. It was presumed that Chakmas who went as migrant labourers to other parts of country are returning back and it must be controlled. Human rights organisations in Delhi raised their opposition to this illogical move from the student union. But in the state and local level there was no recognisable opposition to the student union statement and demands.

This incident reminds of the reaction during the opposition for Supreme Court judgement and union government's decision to give citizenship for Chakmas in the state during September 2017. There is a recurring aspect to the spectacle of student union in the state. An event followed by a strong and obnoxious demand by the student union, limited opposition from the

[97] https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/coronavirus-row-over-inclusion-of-Chakmas-in-arunachal-infection-tally/article31766235.ece
[98] https://www.news18.com/news/india/aapsu-demands-separate-covid-19-tally-for-Chakmas-in-arunachal-pradesh-2656597.html

mainland human rights organisations and complete silence from the state and political parties in Arunachal Pradesh. These series of occurrences could be applied for any major event in the region. The surprising aspect is the ability of the student union to connect and target Chakmas even before the issue could be identified. The recurring political marginalisation of Chakmas through different ways is a part of rituals of provocation, where fear is constantly reinforced in the community (Spencer, 1990).

The legal case of Khudiram Chakma vs the state of Arunachal Pradesh (1992) was the major issue during that period. That judgement is still relevant and most importantly, it reflects the recurring aspect of Chakmas' struggle for citizenship. Throughout the last thirty years, the judgement had been centring around the lives of Chakmas. Chakmas were allocated land by the then Singpho king in 1979 at the border of his agricultural land so that they could cultivate and most importantly, prevent wild animals from entering the King's agricultural land [99]. In 1992, after the death of the King, his descendants and local villagers filed legal case against Chakmas for illegal encroachment of land. The High Court judgement nullified the ownership claim of Chakmas as they do not have right over land in the state. The judgement also went further to state that the Chakmas are not citizens of India, therefore they are not entitled to any fundamental rights, especially land claims, in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, "they have no right and claim to have a permanent abode in place". The local community further went on to claim Land Possession Certificate (LPC) and block land access to Chakmas.

The cases of the past and, and recent events in state of Arunachal Pradesh, have a recognisable pattern in the nature and the form in which the events unfolded. Most important of these patterns is the constant political marginalisation of Chakmas in different forms and time. In this research I have brought out this ethnic and political tension between the Chakmas and locals while also exploring their everyday interactions in negotiating the same.

It has been more than ten years now from the first time I visited Diyun and Arunachal Pradesh to research Chakmas. I was in touch with friends and people in the field around Diyun after my

[99] Khudiram Chakma Vs State of Arunachal Pradesh, (AIR 1992, 105 Gau).

prolonged absence since the completion of my field work in 2017. I learned about the COVID and student union protest from Thomas who called to update me on the recent happenings in Diyun. While friends update me on the political situation in Diyun, I get updated on student union activities by following their social media pages and news bulletins on their websites. The local newspaper "The Arunachal Times" was an important source to follow the political developments from the state capital. This newspaper never missed the opportunity to bring out the news regarding Chakmas from Diyun.

During this period of time, there were several changes and developments in the field, and at the same time there was no significant change in the political position of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh. My enthusiasm to see any positive developments about the citizenship issue of Chakmas has gradually diminished due to the fact that what happens next could be anticipated. That is, the protest by student union and subsequent retraction by the government. This reminds me of Biroja, the vegetable seller in Diyun market (discussed in Chapter1) who was unamused by the 2017 supreme court judgement to grant citizenship rights for Chakmas, as he had witnessed similar false hopes and premature celebrations in search of citizenship for more than 30 years now in Arunachal Pradesh (from the initial judgement in 1990s).

Throughout this research I explored two aspects of the Chakmas search for citizenship in the state of Arunachal Pradesh as central theme - nation-state belonging (becoming citizens of the country) and ethnic cultural belonging (identity as part of Arunachal Pradesh). I demonstrated how both of these aspects are intertwined and necessary to become part of the geographical and nation belonging, by examining a series of historical and political events in the region. I also brought how the Chakmas, in their search for belonging, demonstrated the limitations of both the nation state and ethnic identity. To further this argument, I presented the struggles of becoming citizens of the country through the case of Supreme court judgement of 2017 and its aftermath of the political mobilisation of student union against the judgement.

The role of colonial administration in governing the border spaces and uncharted peripheries had consequential impact on the formation of post-colonial nations in the Zomia region. The former colonial laws to segregate the hill and plain regions of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) had transformed into protective measures to safeguard the minority ethnic

communities in the region through the Inner Line Permit (ILP) and constitutional measures. This created an unequal citizenship model of universal and differentiated citizenship (Kymlica, 2001). The case of Chakmas in Supreme Court brought out the inconsistences and unequal nature of citizenship model in the region and the discrepancy between the judicial and legislative implementation of the orders of the highest court in the country.

The constitutional provisions to safeguard the territory of ethnic minorities and the absence of strong local political parties have created insecurities and political vacuum in the state. The new generation of youths who are empowered through education have filled this political vacuum as both the guardians and representation of indigenous voice in the state. The political mobilisation of student union in the state is powerful enough to block and retract the Union Government's policy. As I argued earlier, the uncontrolled power yielded by the student union have turned them from guardians of the state to vigilantes against "illegal migrants and refugees" thereby establishing themselves as bring above the state institutions.

The ethnic and social interaction between the locals and Chakmas presents a more promising scope for dialogue and conversation than the political aspect where the power relationship is only one sided and targeted against the Chakmas. Chakma interaction with land and agriculture had opened up the concept of land and ethnic relations in the region. The concept of identity and ethnic belonging as being essentially linked to land is critically questioned by the Chakmas' search for land as a source of survival. The interaction between land, locals and Chakmas uncovered the changing land relations and land ownership in the region. As I elaborated in chapter 3, the shift from agrarian to non-agrarian modes of production has changed the traditional land ownership system. The move towards individual land ownership model and Land Possession Certificate for commercial use of land from community land ownership model has opened up the questions of land and ethnic identity in the region. The idea of rootedness and attachment to land by ethnic communities (Appadurai, 1998) and the constitutionally protected status based on the community land ownership model needs fresh evaluation. Through the cases of Bijoy and Thuing I argued that the changing land relations has changed the connection between land and people in the region. I also point that if ethnic identity is based on relation between land and people, the case of Naindhoon Chakmas as sharecropper is closer to land than the locals.

When I initially started following the weekly market and social interaction in Diyun, I was anticipating that the weekly market would be the space where locals and chakmas would have more cordial interaction. That there will be a scope for bringing the two communities together at the micro level. Especially in Miao where the locals and government officials rely on Chakmas for vegetables and forest goods. But to my dismay, weekly market turned out to be the major space for contention and assertion of dominance and economic blockade in the region. This precarious economic interaction and fear of economic blockades contributed is nothing but economic violence targeted on Chakmas. In Northeast India economic blockades are common among the ethnic conflicts between two communities. But such economic blockades are part of a larger conflict wherein they play a smaller part. In the case of Chakmas, the economic blockade by locals does not have any consideration of retaliation from Chakmas. The political position of Chakmas makes them powerless against the economic violence/ blockade imposed by locals. It also brought out the symbolic and structural power that economic blockades have over the communities which they are imposed on, the aspect which is largely overlooked as a minor occurrence in the larger scheme things in Northeast India.

The final point is related to the aspect of religious gatherings and the possibility of these two groups having cordial social relation in the locality. While it is hard to envision the possibility of Chakmas and local communities having a harmonious interaction given their political animosity in the locality, I did witness a faint glimmer of hope through the beginning of acceptance in the way of participation in religious gatherings. Keeping aside the political disagreement between these two communities, the Kathina Chivara Dhana (Buddhist Robe offering ceremony) and the Church inauguration events display the glimpse of social acceptance through faith. The religious festivals have cultivated a new sense of belonging and acceptance among the Chakmas. This possibly paves ways for further amicable social relation between these two communities.

The general findings and arguments of the dissertation could be summarised in the duality of the refugees' struggle to become and belong in the contested border spaces of South Asia. The historical and political marginalisation of border spaces have created a highly sensitive ethnic belonging and identity which lead to seclusion. There is fear in victim regarding the broader

nationalisation project of the border areas. These fears and insecurities of ethnic communities in the region have transformed into a rigorous opposition to the presence of 'others'. This in turn has given the student unions uncontrolled political power under the guise of protecting and safeguarding the rights of ethnic communities.

The presence of Chakmas and their search for citizenship brings out the conundrum of nation state belonging and ethnic belonging It brings into sharp relief the limitations and arbitrary nature of both state and ethnicity. The everyday interaction between the locals and Chakmas in their struggle for survival unravelled the foundations of ethnic belonging and the changing relations between land and ethnicity. As mentioned earlier, there have been significant transformations and political changes in the last fifty years of Chakma struggle for citizenship. But the political marginalisation of the Chakmas as well as their search for citizenship and belonging remains more or less the same.

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