



## **Asylum Seeker And Refugees: A Study Of Chakmas In The Changlang District Of Arunachal Pradesh**

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### **Abstract**

The words migration and refugees were gaining importance day by day in the national as well as international level because the problem of refugees, statelessness, deprivation, and Asylum were quite common in most of the countries. In the different countries refugees were represented in different way such as Vietnamese refugees, Bangladeshi refugees, Rohingya refugees and Venezuela refugees etc. but their deprivation level is share almost similar. The word refugees bring itself, stateless, lack of basics right, harder to survive and instability of life etc. similar types of problems facings by Chakma community in the Arunachal Pradesh. Chakmas were basically original inhabitant of Chittagong hill tract of Bangladesh. They were fled to India in the year 1964 and then NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency) through Lushai hill of Mizoram due to construction of Kaptai dam (Hydro project) on Karnaphuli river which was submerge the area of Chittagong hill tract of Bangladesh (specially submerge the area of Chakmas inhabitant), which make thousands of Chakmas people displaced from Chittagong hill tracts to NFFA (presently Arunachal Pradesh) and sought asylum and branded as refugees in Arunachal Pradesh. Since three generation had been passed the community migration from Bangladesh to NEFA and the community is still suffering from their basic rights as well as continuously fighting for the status of citizenship right. The present study focused on the Chakma Community residing in the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh with the objectives such as different causes of displacement from Chittagong hill tract of Bangladesh to NEFA, different reason to opposed by Arunachali indigenous tribes to settle in the state and what are the active role playing by government to granting them citizenship status. The study concluded, the active role of Chakmas development leaders contributing towards society, and the role of Supreme Court, central government protect them in the state.

**Key words:** - Asylum, Displacement, Refugees, Migration and Rehabilitation.

### **Introduction**

The words such as Asylum, displacement, migration and refugees, conflict, violence etc. were became popular in the world-wide since the end of world war-II in a tremendous way. The trend of these picture raising continuously till today and there were 89.3 million people forcibly displaced world-wide at the end of 2021 (UNHCR Report 2021). As per the UNCHR Report 2021, among the total displaced people, there were 27.1 million refugees, 53.2 million internally displaced people, 4.6 million asylum seekers and 4.4 million Venezuelans displaced abroad. There were also others many people in the world-wide those who have been denied from their access to basic right such as education, healthcare, employment etc. because displacement

bring itself all the pathetic situation and mainly displacement is the main causes of converting towards refugees and makes people became stateless, homeless and pushing them to survive with the identity of refugee. But in the humanity ground no one can want to survive with the tag line of refugee which is actually happened in the case of Chakmas residing in the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The North-eastern region comprise of eight states and Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh also be a part of the region hence after independence (1947) of India the whole Northeastern region organized in such a way that they almost share similar ethnic, culture, and livelihood and they became tied up in a one identity. But the regions has continuously experience the problems of migrations, displacement, settlement and refugees problems with the emerged of independence including displacement of Chakmas refugees migrated from Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh to the North-east India and then to NEFA (Northeast Frontier Agency/ Now Arunachal Pradesh). The Chakmas were rehabilitated in the Diyun Circle of Changlang district after the displacement from the Chittagong hill tract of Bangladesh in the year 1964. The Chakma community is still depriving from their basic right in the district as well as state and they are also considered to be a part of Stateless (Rahman &Das, 2015), Landless (Rahman, 2020), surviving with identity crisis (Chakma, 2018) in the state. Hence the study has a great significance in these context.

### **Methodology**

The data has been collected from the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The district has chosen intentionally and purposively because majority of Chakmas population rehabilitated in the Changlang district as compare to the other district of Arunachal Pradesh (Census 2011). To fulfill the objective of the study data has been collected from both primary as well as secondary data, adopting multi-method approach such as descriptive, and historical to collect the relevant information for the study. The primary data has been collected through a well prepared interview scheduled and considering the respondents from the Chakma community those who are literate, having knowledge about the culture, history and polity etc. The data also cross-checked from the having proper knowledge of early inhabitant population of others indigenous tribes of the state. The secondary data has been collected from different source such as reputed journals, relevant book, and authentic website also taken into consideration to fulfill the aim of the study.

### **Objective of the study**

- (a) To find out the major causes of displacement, migration and rehabilitation of Chakmas in the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh.
- (b) To find out the different causes to oppose by Indigenous Arunachali tribes against rehabilitated of Chakma community in the district.
- (c) To study the role of Chakma community and Government to settle the resolve dispute and citizenship issue.

### **A brief discussed on Changlang District**

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Changlang district is one of the richest district in mineral and forest resources among the other district of Arunachal Pradesh. Changlang district is covered with picturesque hills lies in the southeastern corner of Arunachal Pradesh, is the eastern most part of India having sharing international boundary with Myanmar (Burma). The total area of Changlang district is about 4,662 sqr.km and a population of 1, 48,226 persons as per 2011 census. Changlang district has reached the stage in its present set up through a gradual development of Administration. Prior to 14<sup>th</sup> November 1987, it was a part of Tirap District. In the year 1987 under the Arunachal Pradesh Reorganization of District Amendment Bill, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, formally declared the area as a new district on 14<sup>th</sup> November 1987 and become 10<sup>th</sup> district of Arunachal Pradesh.

### **Causes of Displacement, Migration and rehabilitation of Chakmas in the Changlang district**

The word migration related with both positive and negative impact on both host and origin countries but migration due to displacement is always related with negativity, which is actually happened in the case of Chakmas. The Chakmas originally belongs to the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh and the area inhabited by the Chakmas people in the Bangladesh is called Chittagong hill tract. The Chakmas continuing inhabitant community of Bangladesh up to the end of 1964. But they were displaced from their original homesteads land

due to construction of Kaptai Dam (Hydro project) on the Karnaphuli river in the early 1960s by the help of Pakistan government with the assistance of the United States Agency for International Development to provide electricity for much of East Pakistan, the hydro project, which was submerge the area specially inhabited by the Chakma community and there was no rehabilitation and compensation policy exist. About 40% Chakmas fled to India without any compensation, at that time India used NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency, presently Known as Arunachal Pradesh) as a resettlement area for the Chakma Refugees.

After the collection of data from the Chakmas respondent, it was found that, Chakmas were the main victims of partition (India and Pakistan and then Bangladesh). The Chakmas were basically inhabitants of Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and they were the follower of Buddhism and Hinduism during partition (1947), despite of Chittagong hill tracts people were the followers of Hinduism and Buddhism including Chakmas people, the area was given to Pakistan by the Boundary Commission Cyril Radcliffe in 1947 (Prasad 2007). The decision taken by Radcliffe is a way for future war. Thereby Pakistan government decided to construct a Kaptai Dam (Hydro-electricity project) over Karnaphuli River in 1959 with the collaboration of United States Agency for International Development which is the way to harassed Chakmas residing in the Chittagong hill tract area, including facing religious discrimination and various inhuman atrocities committed on them, thereby the Chakmas abandon their fore-father's land forever and migrated to North-East India. The Chakmas were permanently left East-Pakistan presently known as Bangladesh due to insecurity of life, loss of land and others various religious political persecution and then sought Asylum in NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency, presently Arunachal Pradesh) as a refugees. Since three generation had been passed after migration from East-Pakistan to NEFA but till yet Chakmas are staying at the district with the identity of refugees and Arunachali indigenous tribes continuing treat to Chakmas as a second class citizen of the state.

#### **Pathetic condition of Rehabilitation of Chakmas in NEFA**

Chakmas were migrated from East-Pakistan to undivided Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (Earlier NEFA) through Lshai hill of Mizoram with hopeless and pathetic situation. But Arunachal government accepted to settled down at NEFA due to poor condition of Chakmas and even government showing sympathy towards the community, even in 1964 Governor of Assam also refused to settled at Assam and Mizoram (undivided Assam and Mizoram) due to get trouble in future between the Mizos and Chakmas in the Mizo district. These Chakmas would be quite suitable people to go into Tirap division of NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) where there is easily found vacant land, so in this way Chakmas were settled at NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh) even continuing their livelihoods in the state. According to the state (Arunachal Pradesh) published white paper report on Chakmas and Hajongs issued in 1986. The white paper mentions that between '1964-1969, about 2,748 families of Chakmas and Hajongs comprising of 14,888 person approximately went to the NEFA. The district wise figure of Chakmas and Hajongs population residing at the state were Lohit district (1,192 Chakmas), Subansiri (1,133 Chakmas), and Triap district of Arunachal Pradesh (at Present Changlang district) (Chakmas-11,813 and Hajongs-750) in the year 1986. According to the Chakmas local leaders (Subhaman Chakma) of Diyun circle of Changlang district, said that during the time of interview, the government of India settled Chakmas and Hajongs in between 1964-1969 under the Definite Rehabilitation Scheme in North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA now Arunachal Pradesh) with the consultation of local indigenous population by allotted 5 acres land to each rehabilitee family.

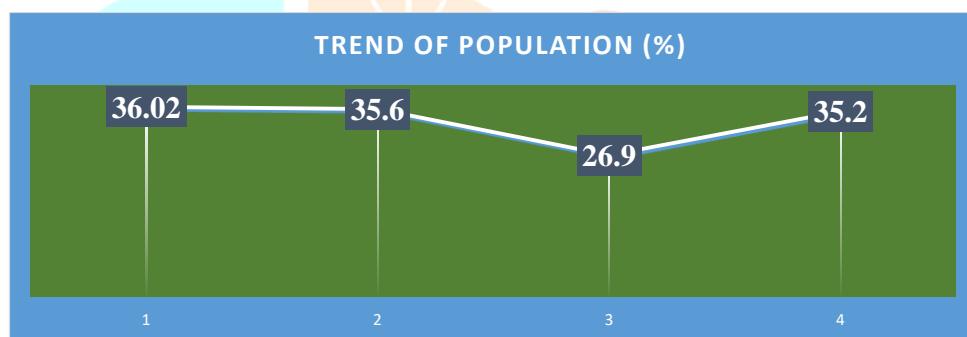
#### **Intention of Government to Rehabilitation of Chakmas in NEFA**

The Government of India settled Chakmas and Hajongs refugees in NEFA with the intentions to save the state from outer attacks because Chakmas and Hajongs (said by Shubhmangal Chakmas leaders of Chakmas of Changlang district) settled with the identity of a No man's land in NEFA after the Indo-China war in 1962. At the mean time the Indian Government in a process to nation building and integration and was under the threat of foreign aggression, which ushered India to fill the vacant land. Since at that time Indian Sovereignty was under the threat of Chinese's aggression and Arunachal Pradesh (Earlier NEFA) share the international boundaries with China, Myanmar and other international countries, thereby government of India decided to settled (Refugees) them in NEFA. The Government also given training with arms and ammunition to these refugees (Chakmas and Hajongs) to safeguard the borders (trained by SSB or Seema Sashastra Bal) from the international threat.

### **Rehabilitation of Chakmas and their issues in livelihoods at Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh**

The Chakmas continuing staying at the Diyun circle of Changlang district after the migration from Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, but the issue of rehabilitation of Chakmas in the district become a headache for the Arunachal administrative as well as for local Arunachali indigenous tribes because at the time of migration both Chakmas and Hajongs accommodated their relief camps constructed in the vacant land of different district of Arunachal Pradesh such as Lohit (Presently Namsai district), Tirap (Presently Changlang district) and Subansiri district of erstwhile of NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency) with a total population of 14,888 (white paper published by Arunachal Administrative on Chakma and Hajong refugees in 1996s). The main reason is to oppose them to rehabilitee in the district by local and regional political parties as well as indigenous tribes is due to raising population of refugees and it might changes the demography of the state and also to share the limited resources available for them. The total population of Chakmas and Hajongs was 60,000 as per 2011, census and their population continuously increasing at the increasing rate but the population of local indigenous tribes gradually decline from 1991 to 2011 and this is not due to the natural causes but due sharp increasing in the population of these refugees population (Chakmas & Hajongs). The Causes of sharp increasing population of Chakmas and Hajongs after the 1969 is due to the cause of illegal migration from Bangladesh to Arunachal Pradesh (Report published by Arunachal Government in special survey with the attachment of Deputy Commissioner of district in 2017).

Figure-1 shows the trend of indigenous population of Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh



Source: Census 1982, 1991, 2001 & 2011, (in fig, 1= indicate 1982, 2=1991, 3=2001, 4=2011)

### **Restricted and banned of different scheme for Chakmas refugees in the district.**

Various types of steps taken by the local indigenous tribes to depart these Chakmas and Hajongs refuges from the state even various types of strike had been done even it continuing to depart these refugees from the state. In 1995 (30<sup>th</sup> September) the ruling political parties with mass involvement of local indigenous population started movement against these refugees (Chakmas & Hajongs) under the ruling chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh (Gegong Apong ji Congress-I) request central government to immediate deportation of Chakmas and Hajongs from the state and make settlement in any others parts of the country. The movement was started also involvement of AAPSU (All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union), the general secretary of AAPSU Tobom Dai defended their stance by saying that" the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) of 1873 and Chin Hill Regulations Act of 1896 amply protect the tribal and their right he also mentioned that they are not against Indian Citizenship (for Chakmas) it's a union subject but refugees cannot be settled in the state. The community become more threatened of their life as well as in case of survival and there is a full fear of instability of the community that whether we are got opportunities to staying at these state or deport to others parts also be a serious kind of phase for them. The movement was started at 1995 but the planned to deport these refugees from the early when NEFA was converted into Arunachal Pradesh (1975). The Arunachal Government totally banned any kind of employment to these Chakmas and Hajongs refugees in the year 1980s with the government vide letter No. POL 21/80 on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1980s. The earlier basic documents

provided by Arunachal government is RPC (Residential Proof Certificate) to the Chakmas and Hajongs to get admission in educational institution and to get job especially in the defense force but recently abrupt cancellation of these two marginalized communities would deprived them more to earlier.

### **Problems of getting Citizenship status**

The problems of getting Citizenship status for Chakmas (refugees) in the state is likely try to breaking stone from hand. As state moving towards development phases it's became more critical to getting the status because due to development of different organization were established such as Union, NGOs, political parties were in favour of Arunachali Indigenous tribes and definitely against granting citizenship status to Chakmas. Recently the problem is raising much more as compare to earlier and many more indigenous tribes against due to capturing indigenous tribes land and others valuable resources with the physically raising capability of these refugees (statement by Thinanong Singpho of Changlang district) population in the state. As a result recently on August 15, 2021, the Chief Minister (CM) of Arunachal Pradesh announced in his valuable speech that all illegal immigrant of Chakmas will be move and settled out from Arunachal Pradesh with the respective honour, again the Chakmas facing in dilemma whether they are getting opportunities to stay in the state or may deported them in others district or other nations. After that all the Chakmas in attachment with Chakma Rights and Development Organization (CRDO) opposed the statement of CM of Arunachal Pradesh and revealed that it's true that our ancestors will came from Bangladesh but now we are staying at Arunachal Pradesh since three generation had been passed and presently about 90% of both the communities (Chakma and Hajong) were Indian by birth. CRDO President (Mahendra Chakma) of Chakma clearly expressed that the fear of immediate deportation of Chakmas and Hajongs cannot be taken into consideration because our ancestors did not came to India by their own willingness. They were brought by Indian Government under a centrally sponsored scheme 'definite plan of Rehabilitation'. The Chakmas and Hajongs already in depressed due to withdrawal of basic rights such as employment opportunities, electoral right, and cancellation of trade licenses, cancellation of ration card and the deportation statement of CM put them more problems for the settlers to survives in the district. The CRDO of Chakmas reviled that now Chakmas are facing continuously more uncertain and fragile future. The CDFI (Chakma Development Foundation of India) also revealed that the deplorable condition of Chakma and Hajongs in the state is due to the Arunachal government and in addition CDFI also expressed that the deplorable economic conditions and extreme poverty have been creates by the state by denying all the rights and facilities in the past 60 years.

### **Strengthen of All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union (AAPSU) and the Role of Government to protect security to Chakmas**

In 2015, the Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh had filed a petition with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) alleging persecution of Chakmas and Hajongs settled in the state. The committee stated in its petition that the two groups are tormented by poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and political identity crisis. The NHRC asked the state government and home ministry to submit a report on this matter. In response, the state government assured that there was no threat to the lives and properties of the two communities in question and that an adequate police force was deployed to protect them. The home ministry, on its part, asked the state government to ensure normalcy in the law and order as well as to supply essential commodities and medical facilities to the Chakmas and Hajongs refugees. The apex court in 1969 and 2015 ruled in favored of granting citizenship to the members of the two communities settled in Arunachal Pradesh in the 1960s after the displaced by a dam in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The NHRC issued the directive after hearing a joint complaint from the Chakma and Hajong Elders Forum of Arunachal Pradesh (CHEF) and the Chakma Development Foundation of India (CDFI). The Centre and the state government were asked to complete the exercise within three month. But the CHEF and CDFI had complaint with the NHRC said none of 4,637 citizenship applications from the Chakmas and Hajongs during 1997-2003 had been processed despite two Supreme Court order.

In September 2017, protests in the state against proposed citizenship to the Chakmas and Hajongs turned violent. During statewide bandh (strike) called by the AAPSU, protesters damages several vehicles, torching a state vehicle bus, and private vehicle.

Meanwhile, the All Arunachal Pradesh Chakma Gaonburha Association a press release stating, "More than 90 percent of these people were born here are citizens by birth. They will live and die here with dignity and honour and cannot suffer through another mass migration to start a fresh outside Arunachal Pradesh. In 2016 the CM of Arunachal Pradesh (Prema Khandu ji) discussed on this matter of Chakmas and Hajongs in the Assembly and CM of Arunachal Pradesh directly said that the matter of their Citizenship (Chakmas and Hajongs) was sub-judge. He also shared that the state government had already submitted a special leave petition (for Chakmas & Hajongs) in the Supreme Court was accepted on 14/September/ 2016. Considering these statement of CM of Arunachal Pradesh, Right activists Suchas Chakma who also belongs to Chakma deprived community raised the voice that Chakmas and Hajongs are the main xenophobia of the state. Because many of the others tribes were settled in the state by the government of India and then NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh & parts of Northeast) along with the Chakmas and Hajongs to beef up the security following the 1962 Indo-China War, only the issue of the Chakmas and Hajongs is raised while the rest of the community continue to enjoy all rights as citizens of the country (said by Suhas Chakma).

AAPSU continuously strengthen to deportation of these Chakmas and Hajongs refugees even recently, in August, 2021 AAPSU and State unit of Nationalist People party (NPP) explicitly expressed that the Arunachal Pradesh will never accept the Chakma and Hajong refugees. Expressing concern about their population growth of refugees in the state. The NPP president (Mutchu Mithi) reviled that at present (2021) their population was in between one 1.5 lakh which is much higher than the Arunachali Indigenous tribes and this is a serious issue going on the state. Granting them the Citizenship right is a way to drastic demographic change as well as political change in the state and thereat for indigenous culture, traditions and customs etc.

#### **Political Inclusion of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh**

Arunachal Pradesh has a total population of 65,875 comprising of both Chakmas and Hajongs but only 5,097 of them have voting rights in the state. The figures was emerged from a special survey conducted by the deputy commissioners (district magistrates) of Changlang, Namsai and Papumpare district in 2015-16. The complete figure shows in the table 1.1.

Table 1.1 shows the political inclusion of Chakmas in the state (Arunachal Pradesh)

Chakma inhabitant area under Changlang district	Enrolled in voter list In the year 2004	Enrolled in voter list 2015-16
Doimukh (Papumpare )	0	619
Chowkham	323	511
Maio	10	569
Bordumsa-Diyun	1,164	3,398

Sources: Election Commission of India in the year 2004, & Special survey conducted by the Deputy Commissioners (district magistrates) of Changlang, Namsai and Papum pare district of Arunachal Pradesh in 2015-16.

#### **Recent development of the community**

Since till the 1980s, the Chakma and Hajong community of Arunachal Pradesh enjoyed government job, ration cards, and access other right and privileges just like Indian Citizens. However, since the 1990s they were branded as "illegal migrants". In addition Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh also support the concern and labelled Chakmas and Hajongs as "illegal migrant", who needed to be shifted out of the state because they were not original inhabitant of state which was confirmed by sitting Law ministers of India Kiren Rijiju. But the decision of development in case of citizenship of both Chakma and Hajong community is quite complex because the Indian government had back in 1972 decided to grant citizenship status to the Chakma and Hajong refugees following a joint statement by the PMs of India and Bangladesh. The movement had been opposed by the North-East Frontier Agency government (now Arunachal Pradesh government) at the time saying that it would not permit outsiders to settle in the territory as it would affect the demography of the state. Even though different types of strike had been done to remove this refugees from the state. In 2015, Supreme Court of India and National human right commission directed the union government and the

Arunachal Pradesh government to confer citizenship to the Chakmas and Hajongs refugees who had migrated India in between 1964-69 and were settled in the Arunachal Pradesh and state government should protect the life and liberty of Chakmas and Hajongs under Article 21 of the India constitution and confer citizenship to them. But several civil society and various organization were against the order because the decision of the Supreme Court would change the demography of the state and affect the minority status of the tribal population. The Chakma and Hajong community did not directly come into the ambit of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) because Arunachal Pradesh is among the state exempted from CAA since it has an Inner Line Permit to regulate entry of outsiders.

### **Importance of the present study**

The present study has a great significance at national and international level in the context of Chakmas refugees inhabited in the Diyun circle of the Changlang district (AP), related with the problem of stateless, questioning of Citizenship right, identity of refugees etc. the relevance point stated below.

1. The study pointed out that there are many unique factors attached with the reason towards displacement of Chakmas from the Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh to India and then NEFA, data collected from different source like, journal, books, website and primary surveyed data.
2. The study also tries to focused on the identity crisis or refugees of Chakma community inhabited in the Diyun circle of Changlang district and the role of AAPSU, Government, indigenous tribes in opposed/handling the issue of Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh.
3. The study also the pave way to introduced a well refugee's law at least to protect the refugees in the humanity ground and to provide a stable livelihoods. The present study is the way to indicate the refugee's problem including Chakma community within in the country and outside the country. Therefore there is a need of well-organized refugees law to protect at least to some extent without hampering indigenous/ or local population of the District/state.
4. It was also observed that during the field survey, the way of living condition of Chakma community in the study area is much more complicated or pathetic situation because they are surviving with different kind of unethical pressure. The field surveyed also observed that the community is affected by poverty, illiteracy and many more issues along with identity crisis.
5. The study also tries to draw attention, of society, community, different development organization and government etc. for eradication of their problems such as eradication of deprivation, identity crisis, statelessness, poverty, up gradation of literacy level and tries to resolve the inter-community conflict in the state and bring the Chakma community into the mainstream without disturbing culture, ethics and religion of the indigenous population of the state.
6. The study also encourage the researcher for further investigate on this deprived community inhabited in Changlang District with different objectives link with the present study.

### **Conclusion**

The Chakmas were original inhabitant of Mymensingh district of Chittagong hill tract of Bangladesh and since three generation had been passed residing at Arunachal Pradesh after migration from Bangladesh. It was also observed that Chakmas were not came to India by their own willingness but they were came into India with the proper consultation of India government and settled at NEFA (presently Arunachal Pradesh) with the proper discussion of Arunachal Government and willingness of local indigenous tribes. In the year 1959 thousand of Tibetan Refugees fled in to Arunachal Pradesh can granted citizenship status of India but till yet Chakma community deprive from basic right and the word citizenship status is far from them which is direct violation of refugee's laws. More interestingly indigenous tribe of the state and different active strengthen group also opposed to grant citizenship right to Chakma community even state government actively working in this matter. So central government need to play an active role in this matter and tries to protect the community in the humanity ground and also tries to remove the tag line of branded illegal migrants and also provide them at least basic human right without hampering the Arunachal Indigenous tribes.

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