

Student Mobilization and State Responses in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

BHASKER PEGU

ROLL NO. 126141001



**DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI**

GUWAHATI, ASSAM, INDIA

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Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**Student Mobilization and State Responses in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh**” is the result of investigation carried out by me at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the supervision of Dr.Pahi Saikia. The work has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university/ institution for a research degree.

IIT Guwahati
February 2019

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Mr. Bhasker Pegu has prepared the thesis entitled **“Student Mobilization and State Responses in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh”** for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The work was carried out under my supervision and in strict conformity with the rules laid down either in whole or in part to any other university/ institution for the purpose. It is the result of his investigation and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university/ institution for a research degree.

IIT Guwahati
February 2019

Dr. Pahi Saikia
Supervisor

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Abstract

Student mobilization has been an important aspect of social movement studies. Student mobilizations for political reforms have taken place in different parts of the world. The student movements of Hong Kong and Taiwan for political and economic reforms have renewed the interest of studying student mobilization in the contemporary period. Comparative perspective of student mobilization and the state responses holds importance for theoretical and empirical research.

In Northeastern part of India, student organizations have been involved in contentious politics concerning the identity of indigenous people and citizenship. Mobilization of student organizations in the region is based on citizenship frame. This study uses citizenship as a popular frame for mobilization following social movement literature by taking two case studies. This dissertation examines the two cases of student-led mobilization concerned on citizenship issues in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Student organizations claiming to represent the indigenous people of the region mobilized due to perceived threats to identity. This study focuses on the framing processes of student mobilization in the northeastern states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh on the issues of citizenship of illegal immigrants and refugees. Student mobilization has resulted in contentious politics in the region. Demands for identification, disenfranchisement and expulsion of foreign nationals were raised by All Assam Students' Union (AASU) since the late 1970s. Similarly, there has been opposition from All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) in Arunachal Pradesh against the process of granting Indian citizenship rights to refugees expressing threats to indigenous identity and socio-economic concerns.

Student-led mobilization adopted various tactics and strategies to oppose the citizenship of refugees and illegal immigrants. Student movements have influenced the local politics of the states in the process. In the course of mobilization-led by the student organizations in these states, the state and movement organizations interact in different ways. This study thus focuses on the nature of state responses to student-led mobilization. Using political opportunity structure from social movement literature, this study examines the varying responses of the state in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh on the citizenship issues raised by the student organizations.

The study has been conducted following a qualitative approach. The process of data collection constitutes in-depth interviews with people associated with student organizations and refugee groups mobilizing to secure Indian citizenship in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Multiple techniques of data collection have been applied to understand the social movements led by the student organizations in the two states. The student mobilizations in both the states have been analyzed with the help of data from media sources, interviews, published government reports, pamphlets and memorandum of student organizations and judicial judgments linked to the issues of identity and citizenship rights.

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ABBREVIATIONS Full Form

AACTA	All Assam College Teachers' Association
AAGSP	All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad
AAMSU	All Assam Minority Students' Union
AAPSU	All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union
AASU	All Assam Students' Union
ABSU	All Bodo Students' Union
ABUXX	Asomiya Bhaxa Unnati Xadhini Xabha
ACS	Assam Chatra Sanmilan
ADISU	Adi Students' Union
AISA	All India Students' Association
AJD	Asom Jatiyotabadi Dal
AMSU	Adi Mising Students' Union
AMSU	All Manipur Students' Union
ANAYA	All Namsai Area Youth Association
ANEFSU	All North East Frontier Agency Students' Union
ARSU	All Rabha Students' Union
ASS	Asom Sahitya Sabha
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CCRCHAP	Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas and Hajongs in Arunachal Pradesh
CRPF	Central Reserved Police Force
GSU	Galo Students' Union
GSU	Garo Students' Union
IM (DT)	Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal)
INC (I)	Indian National Congress (Indira)
INC (U)	Indian National Congress (Urs)
INC	Indian National Congress
IRBN	Indian Reserved Battalion
KSU	Khasi Students' Union
MZP	Mizo Zirlai Pawl
NEFA	North East Frontier Agency
NEFT	North East Frontier Tract
NSF	Naga Students' Federation
OIL	Oil India Limited
ONGC	Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited
PLP	Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad
SAKP	Sadou Asom Karmachari Parishad
SFI	Students' Federation of India
SSB	Swechha Sevak Bahini
TMPK	Takam Mising Porin Kébang
TSF	Twipra Students' Federation
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Asom

Chapter 1

Introduction

Student-led mobilization has attracted the attention of scholars due to the role played by students in political and social changes in modern states. Students have influenced political systems sometimes destabilizing governments. Mobilization has often been organized on ideological lines and paved the way for social, economic and political reforms beyond the student-centric matters related to education. Over the last several decades, student-led movements have engendered mass mobilization in Asia, Europe, North America and South America impacting government policies on socio-economic and political reforms. More recently, the student protest movement in the streets of Taiwan and Hong Kong in 2014 drew attention to the role of students as agents of political change in the contemporary world (Bosco 2016) ; (Rowen 2015). The protest movements for democratic reforms led by student organizations against the Chinese-run Hong Kong authorities underscored the importance to study student mobilization with renewed perspectives.¹ The demands made were democratic elections as opposed to state-led electoral reforms proposed by the Chinese state. Similarly, the student-led mobilization in Taiwan drew the attention of scholars to examine mobilization from newer dimensions.² The mobilization of students therefore, has implications on the social, political and economic phenomena of modern states. However, despite continuing visibility of student activism, relatively less theoretical or

¹ The student-led mobilization was known as Occupy Central or the Umbrella Movement due to symbolic use of umbrella by movement participants.

² Students in Taiwan in 2014 occupied the Parliament for twenty-four days against trade agreements known as the Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement (CSSTA) with China.

comparative research has been conducted exploring the determinants and the impact of such movements on policy reforms. There is also a dearth of literature in the field of social movement studies involving students in India, particularly North East India.³ India's Northeast covers about 8 per cent of the Indian landmass and about 3.8 per cent of population inhabit the landlocked region. The region's geostrategic positioning has been gaining importance in India's discourse of regional policy towards Asia. The region is bounded by politically unstable and aspiring states bordering South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia.

Student mobilization in the region raises questions as to *why* students' mobilization takes up issues beyond matters of education; *how do* they mobilize? What strategies and framing processes are used during mobilization and how do states *respond* to the process of mobilization? The dissertation addresses these interrelated questions to understand the processes of student mobilization, the networks that shape collective action and the state responses towards student mobilization. The study further examines the question as to how and to what extent, student led movements may act as autonomous agents in the interface of state and society.

With the help of social movement literature this dissertation examines the framing processes of the student-led mobilization. It also examines the mobilization of resources and collective motivation of participation of the '*indigenous*' communities in student initiated mobilization in the region. Finally, the dissertation examines the interaction between the state and social movement organizations throughout the process of mobilization. While trying to examine

³ The term North East (NE) India instead of Northeast, here at times, is capitalized to denote the significance of geographic location in transnational sense beyond the border of Indian state in the chapters.

student mobilization in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and drawing parallels from Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and Tripura towards the concluding chapter, the study examines how state responses may vary and how varying state responses within a movement shape the strategies and the trajectory of student-led movements. The study argues that mobilization involves master frames like ‘citizenship’, and inter-related issues like ‘land and forest resources’ that triggered mobilization organized by student-led movements. The study further argues that apart from the framing processes and mobilization of societal resources, leadership bargaining tactics and the interaction with the state at the federal level as well as with the center, shape the strategies and the trajectories of the student-led movements in both the cases.

Student-led movements and organizations in the northeastern states such as Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland and Mizoram claim to represent the interests of the ‘*indigenous*’ people. Student-led movements in the northeastern region raised contentious issues like undocumented migration, citizenship claimed by refugee groups and resource sharing, particularly, land and forest resources. These movements challenged the state policies on citizenship and influenced local politics since the post-colonial period.

The student organization and its allies in Assam mobilized against state policies of migration in the post-colonial period. State and movement interaction ended up with a formal agreement to settle some issues raised during the student-led mobilization against immigration in 1980s. However, the most contentious issues of citizenship and resources remained unaddressed and the responses varied over time.

Similarly, the mobilization led by student organization and its supporters in Arunachal Pradesh on issues of protecting the '*indigenous*' identity have met with varying state response within the movement over time. The most contentious issues of citizenship of the refugees and resource sharing remained unaddressed over time. Nevertheless, much along the lines of Assam, student-led mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh influenced local state politics since 1980s. Apart from the framing process and mobilization of societal resources, leadership bargaining tactics and the interaction with the state at the federal level as well as with the center shaped the strategies and the trajectory of the student-led movements in both the cases.

General definitions of terms used in the thesis:

Social movements may be broadly defined as collectively organized efforts by a group of persons or organizations in order to challenge or effect change in policies within a political system or beyond relating to resources (land and cultural resources such as language), rights (political rights such as voting and representation), privileges (indigenous status), opportunities (trade, employment opportunities in the public and private sectors) (McCarthy and Zald 1977) (Shah 2013 , p. 29). Social movements encompass a wide range of socio-economic, cultural and political aspects with temporal and spatial variations within a political system since issues affecting the communities may be different from one place to another (McAdam and Snow 1997, XVIII).

Social movement organizations (SMO) are organized collectives or bodies that raise the issues in public domains while claiming to represent the concerns and

grievances of people (Zald 1979). Social movement organizations may adopt various tactics in the process to mobilize the people (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

Student mobilization is an act of social movement which commonly involves students as well as its supporters belonging to colleges and universities as well as other centers of learning and varied social strata that form social movement organizations (SMOs) to address their collective concerns and grievances (J. C. Jenkins 1983) (McCarthy and Zald 1977). They organize through various tactics like protest rallies, human chains, demonstrations, procession, public shutdown (*bandh*) in public spaces such as streets, public squares, playgrounds, cultural halls, government offices and private establishments such as firms and industries. Student organizations in the northeastern states of India such as the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) draws its members from various educational institutions like the colleges and universities across the respective states. The supporters include people from various social sections who felt that the issues raised by these student organizations may resonate with common claims. The contentious issue of granting citizenship rights to refugees and voting rights to illegal immigrants in the above cases, resonated with the claims for the protection of the identities of '*indigenous*' people. It may be noted that the terms student-led movement and student mobilization are interchangeably used in this particular study.

Framing processes refer to adopting objective issues, tactics and strategies to resonate and substantiate with the claims pursued in the process of social movements. Scholars have conceptualized that 'framing' involves meaning construction in social movements which denotes an 'active, processual

phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction (Benford and Snow 2000).’

Indigenous identity and citizenship questions

The study of student activism and mobilization in North East India revolved around contentious issues ranging from the safeguard and security of cultural identities of ‘*indigenous*’ people, granting of citizenship to illegal migrants as well as control and exploitation of resources like land and forests. Ethnic symbols like language, culture and identity of the ‘*indigenous*’⁴ people were asserted as common frames for purposes of mobilization. However, the term indigenous in the context of northeastern region of India may refer to those groups of people who claim to be original settlers/ inhabitants of the region. The politics of indigeneity gained prominence in 1980s and 90s.

There are different views and approaches on the definition of the term *indigenous* people. These two approaches can be broadly classified as relational and essentialist approaches. These two approaches are crucial to understand identity politics in several countries in Asia, Canada, Latin America and New Zealand. According to the essentialist approach groups of people have fixed, given and essential qualities, properties, or aspects that are not influenced by cultural, political, social and historical conditions (Dudgeon and Fielder 2006). Supporters of this approach construct identities of groups into ‘dominant and inferior’ or ‘natives and settlers’ identities to justify differences. A relational approach on

⁴ There are differences of opinions on the usage of the term ‘indigenous’ in the discourses of Assam and other Northeastern states of India.

indigenous people focuses on relations between groups of people on fundamental issues of symbolic and material concerns like power and dispossession; social, economic and religious practices; land and resources whereas essentialist approach 'racializes these relationships, caricaturizes indigenous people and contributes to claims-making by indigenous groups' (Kenrick and Lewis 2004); (McCormack 2011). Essentialist perspective has emerged as useful approach to build strategies among indigenous people to assert cultural identities in opposition to the 'dominant others' (Dudgeon and Fielder 2006). Scholars argue that the emergence of indigenous movements have taken place in response to a processes of discrimination and dispossession (Ibid). Indigenous rights movements for instance, in many parts of Asia, oppose the insistence on the creation of majoritarian policies and the creation of cultural homogeneity (e.g. Javanese versus the Dayaks in Indonesia). Indigenous movements claim that equality has to be based on recognition and negotiation of differences due to increasing inequality in multi-ethnic societies (Tully 2000). *Indigenous* identity reflects a combination of cultural distinctiveness and effective strategies of assertion in the political and economic contexts (Igoe 2006).

Scholars have pointed out that the notion of *indigenous* peoples is contentious in India. Therefore, the term *indigenous peoples* has not been defined or identified officially by the Indian government to any category of people in India due to the fear of divisive politics and the apprehensions that this might fuel ideas of 'self-determination and secessionism' (Karlsson 2003). However, this has not prevented groups of people from mobilizing themselves as *indigenous* and claiming rights on the basis of indigenous identities (Ibid.). In India, the claim of indigenous status is made by both Scheduled Tribes (STs) and communities that have not received the

state recognition as STs (Ibid.). Indigenous people in India also referred as *Adivasis*, seek collective rights and privileges ranging from political rights to land resources on the basis of their settlement history and cultural identities. Student organizations in the northeastern states in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, as this study shows, have mobilized on the basis of claims to represent the identity of *indigenous* people. These organizations articulated the *indigenous* grievances on issues of citizenship. The notion of granting political rights and citizenship status in India to foreign nationals and refugees from neighboring countries have been contested by the student and indigenous organizations on the grounds of identity construction, original settlement and other socio-economic concerns.

There is an emerging debate on the indigenous rights and politics involving *indigenous* people in Asia. In Indonesia, the Suharto regime denied the recognition of indigenous people in early 1990s. However, the *penduduk asli* or *masyarakat adat* as the *indigenous* people are sometimes referred locally in Indonesia, have mobilized for rights over resources, distinctive identities, culture and distinct ways of life (Li 2000). *Indigenous* communities have thus contested the state-defined land and environmental management policies. In Malaysia, since 1980s indigenous ethnic groups such as the *Orang Aslis* have mobilized for cultural identities, customary rights over ancestral land and resources against state's exploitation in indigenous land (Aiken and Leigh 2011). In New Zealand, government-led land and coastal laws discontented the Maori indigenous people in 1990s. The Maoris have raised demands for customary rights to control their land and resources in consistence with their worldview (McCormack 2011).

In North East India, *indigenous* identity has been used to classify between immigrants, settlers and groups that claim to be original inhabitants. *Indigeneity* influenced identity politics of the region since 1980s. In contemporary Northeast India, indigenous assertion has been used to articulate collective identities, territorial interests and socio-economic grievances of the *indigenous* groups. Student organizations in Assam during the Assam movement in 1980s, mobilized public support on collective frames around issues of *indigenous* identity. Language, culture, land and legal citizenship were used as master frames to mobilize around issues of *indigenous* identity in the state. The movement led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) was based on fears and anxieties over the identity of *indigenous* people in Assam. AASU used collective action frames on issues like protecting the *identity of the indigenous people* or the *khilonjiyas*⁵, the greater Assamese nation or the *Brihattar Asomiya jati*, the socio-economic concerns like land, forest and claims to other natural resources. One of the master frames and the narrative used during the movement was the issue of native or *indigenous* identity versus the '*bohiragotos*' the illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The term '*Khilonjiya*' gained salience in the Assamese discourse of sub-nationalism and contentious politics in 1970s, and 1980s, with contestations and claims for rights, privileges and security (political, economic and cultural) from the state in this particular historical context.

As an outcome of the movement, in the recent decades, the Government of India made attempts to make reform to the citizenship laws. In 2014 General Elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) made commitments to provide citizenship to

⁵ The word '*khilonjiya*' is used to refer to the indigenous people in Assam.

accommodate religious minority groups --Hindus, Sikhs, Christian, Jains, Buddhists and Parsis immigrants (both legal and illegal) from neighboring countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. In 2016, Indian citizenship reform was proposed by the central government of India through Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016. However, the legality and constitutional validity of these reforms have been challenged by All Assam Students' Union and other indigenous groups in Assam. Scholars and activists view that the initiative to amend the citizenship laws by accommodating some religious minorities, particularly the Hindu Bengali immigrants from Bangladesh, violates the secular principles of the Indian constitution.⁶ Mobilization against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, particularly, by accommodation of the Hindu Bengalis from Bangladesh and their settlement in Assam has been a contentious issue over the past few years in the state.⁷ The accommodation and settlement of Hindu migrants and legalizing their citizenship rights through the amendment of the citizenship laws is considered a threat to the existing cultural identity and the demographic composition of Assam. As a result, the AASU supported by twenty eight organizations representing various ethnic communities of the state of Assam have been demanding withdrawal of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.⁸ The student and ethnic bodies along with the civil society members are of the opinion that the bill violates the Assam Accord. The student bodies expressed that the immigrants would be an additional burden on the state. The Indian citizenship

⁶ Mehta, Pratap Bhanu. *The Seething State*, *The India Express*, New Delhi, May 23, 2018.

⁷ The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 amend the Citizenship Act, 2016 was introduced in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Parliament of India on July 15, 2016 by Rajnath Singh, Home Minister of India , with the objectives of easing the process of acquiring Indian citizenship for non-Muslim minority communities of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Through this bill, the Indian government proposes to relax the eligibility conditions of Indian citizenship based on period of residence from eleven years to six years to the religious minorities of the three countries with exemption from the provisions of Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and Foreigners Act, 1946 where applicants will not be treated as illegal migrants.

⁸ *Forum, AASU, 28 ethnic groups hold talks , The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, May 1, 2018.

laws and attempts to reforms are entangled with cultural identity issues in Assam and North Eastern states where the voices of protest are more witnessed than other parts of India. These contested aspects of identity and citizenship claims requires a systematic study.

The student-led mobilization intensified and continued for six years from 1979 to 1985 until the accord was signed with the government. The Assam Accord is a tripartite agreement between the central government of India, state government of Assam and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in the aftermath of six-year long anti-foreigners movement in Assam from 1979-1985. Through the accord, new citizenship provisions in case of Assam were added to the original Citizenship Act, 1955 that governs the Indian citizenship rules. The new citizenship laws were enacted in 1986 for the state of Assam based on the accord. The cut-off date for determining the citizenship is March 24, 1971 in Assam. State responses on the above contentious issues varied from time to time. The accord was the product of bargaining and complex state-movement interaction during the course of the movement. What is therefore also important to examine is the effect that state responses can have on contentious politics like the student-led movement' and the regional politics in the Northeastern states including Assam.

Another example can be drawn from Arunachal Pradesh. The All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) is a leading students' body in Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh experienced student-led movements on contentious issues of citizenship of refugees settled in the state since late 1960s. AAPSU gathered significant local support over the issue of citizenship which the student

body intrinsically related to perceived threats to the indigenous identity, land and other resources as well as threats to demographic change. Like Assam, the contentious issues raised by AAPSU met with varying state responses. Although the AAPSU-led movement has not led to any accord or agreement unlike Assam, the mobilization has highly influenced the local politics in the state and the citizenship policies at the state and the central level. State responses in turn, influenced the trajectory and the strategies of mobilization during the AAPSU movement.

Therefore, the two cases of student-led movements in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are interlinked to issues of identity and competition for resources such as land and employment which generated support toward political consciousness and public campaigns engendering popular mobilization in the 80s, 90s and 2000s. The methods and strategies of mobilization are more or less similar in nature with the student organization adopting institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of protests through its network of supporters in the respective states. Institutionalized campaigns and protests took the form of petitions to the judiciary and state administration both at the central and the provincial level. Non-institutionalized forms of protest took the forms of public procession, *bandhs*, meetings, blockades and protest rallies. In this backdrop, the student organizations of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have been systematically studied within the framework of contentious politics and social movement literature. The study conducts a multilayered analysis within each case.

Objectives

The main objectives of this research were to understand individual and collective motivation to participate in student mobilization. The aim was also to understand the kind of resources that were mobilized during the movements. The study found that the demands and goals are either partially met or still remain to be addressed. It was also observed that the student organizations manage to mobilize through social networks. This begs an important inquiry in social movement participation. The strategies, goals and outcomes of the student movements are highly influenced by state responses. Therefore the study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- a) To understand how the student organizations mobilize resources for collective action on issue-based mobilization.*
- b) To examine how the states responds and to what extent the responses of the state within a case vary over issues and over time.*
- c) To examine the process of mobilization of student-led movements with a focus on Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.*

The study makes an attempt to contribute to two sets of literature: (a) mobilization and (b) state responses.

Research Questions

- a) How do student movements mobilize resources for collective action?*
- b) What strategies and framing processes are used during mobilization?*

c) *How do states responses to the process of mobilization?*

These questions will be examined in the context of student mobilization in the Northeast region.

Rationale of the study

Student organizations in the states of Northeast have been involved in political activism. Unlike other states in India, students organizations in the states of Northeast, have not entirely mobilized along the lines of conventional party membership or ideology. The activities of these organizations have not been restricted to formal electoral politics. The alliances of student led bodies have been politically calculative and shifted from time to time. Nonetheless, political activism of students has been aimed at influencing policy choices at different socio-economic and political levels. By political participation or activism we do not refer to direct linkages with the machinery of party politics but as linkages between the state machinery and the society with which the student organizations claim to engage.

Student mobilizations in the selected Northeastern states have been characterized by radical political activism. Issues of local importance such as citizenship, refugees, immigration and resources have been a part of the collective framing process. The student organizations of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh raised the issues concerning citizenship and resources. The similarities are based on the

organizational pattern, the framing process and the process of networks and resource mobilization.

There are some similarities and differences in the selected cases. Comparability in the selected cases is the rationale for the selection of cases. There are similarities in the state of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in the following ways. (a) Both states are characterized by student activism (b) Issue of indigenous claims, citizenship and resources are used as collective frames in the student-led mobilization (c) State responses within a case are similar with features of bargaining, selective concession and co-optation.

However, they differ in terms of their outcome and state responses across cases with instances of accommodation, repression and on issues of citizenship and protection of indigenous identity. It is observed that even within a case there are variations in ways states respond to specific issues across time. The strategies and trajectories of mobilization have varied depending on the nature of bargaining between state and social movement organizations, organizational strength and networks, and how states respond to issues raised in movement. The two case studies have also been selected based on the feasibility of research and available resources.

Case Selection

Student activism in North East India has been a matter of contentious politics. Student mobilization in the region influenced local politics in the post-colonial

period and led to important socio-economic and political changes in the form of policies pursued by the government. Nevertheless, in-depth studies on student mobilization in the region are under-researched. There is a lack of systematic analysis examining the pattern of student mobilizations and state responses. The research aims to fill this particular gap in the literature.

Methodology

The research uses a qualitative method. The data was drawn through field studies. The study engaged in in-depth investigation and micro-level analysis of two cases: student-led movements in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh on issues of citizenship. In-depth research considers disparate kinds of data collected with the help of local participants in multiple sites in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. A close attention has been paid on the data generated and collected along with careful consideration of the types of data that support and helped in analysis of the research problem.

The respondents have been chosen using a purposive sampling method. Respondents included individuals directly involved in student mobilizations, retired police officials, members of civil society organizations and local residents in selected districts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The study also used the method of observation through participation in public meetings and rallies organized by the respective student bodies, AASU and AAPSU, from time to time, in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. In this study, qualitative method includes in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews lasted from one hour to two hours and formal interactions sometimes lasted up to two hours. The interview process was open-

ended in nature that allowed sufficient space to the respondents. The aim was to understand the process of mobilization: resource mobilization, individual motivation, collective action, objectives of movements and state responses. The study used methods of interpretation to analyze the data collected during fieldwork. The research also incorporated data from primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources like distributed pamphlets by student organizations during mobilization, memorandums, articles, media reports, published government documents, press releases and the existing literature were used as important sources of data.

Note on the fieldwork and interview participants

Fieldwork in Assam

In Assam, the fieldwork was conducted in Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Vishwanath Chariali, Dudhnoi, Boko and Guwahati between 2012 (December) to 2017 (June). Interview participants mostly comprised of people who experienced mobilization. The participants were student activists, civil society members, academicians and members from different communities in Assam. Fieldworks were conducted in various parts of Assam.



Figure 1 : Map showing various regions Assam: Upper Assam and Lower Assam regions comprise of Brahmapura Valley. Barak Valley Region lies down to the Southern part of the map. The Hills are in the Central Assam. Source: Envis Centre, Ministry of Environment & Forest, Government of India.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the student activists belonging to All Assam Students' Union in Guwahati, All Bodo Students' Union in Kokrajhar, All Rabha Students' Union in Dudhnoi, *Takam Mising Porin Kebang* (All Mising Students' Union) in Gogamukh and leaders from Muslim minority communities in Goalpara.⁹ Members from various communities such as Rabha, Mising Bodo, Garo, Koch-Rajbongshi were involved in the formal interactions in places like Gogamukh, Boko, Goalpara, Dudhnoi, Kokrajhar and Udalguri in Assam. In-depth interviews were also conducted with retired police officers and academicians in Guwahati to gather data on student mobilization.

In December, 2012, I visited villages in Kokrajhar district and interacted with people affected by inter-community violence.¹⁰ I interacted with members of the Bodo, Koch Rajbongshi and Muslim communities. Muslims communities affected by violence were perceived as foreign nationals. Bodos and Koch Rajbongshis are

⁹ Interview conducted in between December 2012 and April 2013 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011-December 2013.

¹⁰ Ibid.

indigenous communities in Assam. I had the opportunity to interact with bureaucrats of the Kokrajhar district administration and members of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) in Kokrajhar. I also attended a public meeting organized under the banner of Bodo National Conference (BNC).

In March, 2013, I visited Goalpara district. The field sites included villages affected by inter-community conflict and violence due to the contentious boundary issues of Rabha Hashong Autonomous Council (RHAC).¹¹ I spoke to displaced people taking shelter in various makeshift camps in schools in different locations in the district. I took interviews of the student leaders of All Rabha Students' Union (ARSU), All Assam Bengali Students' Federation and the community leaders from various communities. They included members of Rabha, Garo, Muslim, Adivasi and Assamese-speaking social groups in Goalpara as well as adjoining Kamrup districts.

I was also a participant observer in a conference organized by the All Assam Students' Union in Dudhnoi in Goalpara district in March 2013.

During December, 2013, I travelled to Upper Assam in Dhemaji and Lakhimpur districts. I visited villages governed by Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) and interacted with members of the indigenous Mising community. I had the opportunity to interact with the members of *Takam Mising Porin Kébang (TMPK)*, (the All Mising Students' Union) and officials of the MAC in Gogamukh.¹²

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

In November, 2015, I travelled to Dudhnoi in Goalpara district to attend a conference organized by the central committee of AASU. I attended a public meeting organized by AASU where leaders of various community organizations as well as civil society members were invited. Student leaders from various other student organizations of the North Eastern states delivered speeches in the conference. The public meeting held during the conference helped me to understand the views of various organizations on the issues of indigenous identity and citizenship in the region. In January 2017, I travelled to Biswanath Chariali and took an in-depth interview of a former student leader. In June, 2017, I attended a mass rally organized by AASU and twenty eight other organizations in Guwahati on the issue of indigenous rights and citizenship issue in Assam. In May, 2018, I visited Khanapara in Guwahati and observed the process of hearing on the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 during the visit of Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to Assam.

Fieldwork in Arunachal Pradesh

In Arunachal Pradesh, fieldwork was conducted in 2014, 2015 and 2016. The fieldwork was spread into different phases between December, 2014 and April, 2016. I conducted in-depth interviews in Kokila, Itanagar, Diyun, Namsai, Mahadevpur and Bordumsa during the period from 2014 to 2016. In December 2014, I visited a Chakma village called Kokila in Papumpare district. I also visited Itanagar, the state capital of Arunachal Pradesh in 2015. From April 11 to 20, 2016, I visited the districts of Changlang and Namsai covering the circles of Diyun, Lekang, Bordumsa and Namsai town. The ethnic composition in these districts is diverse. Ethnic groups like Khampti, Singpho, Nocte, Nyishi, Adi, Idu

Mishmi, Mising, Karbi, Deori, Moran, Chakmas, Hajongs and Adivasis mostly, inhabit these districts.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH



Photo 2: Map of Arunachal Pradesh showing the districts of the state. Source: Envis Hub, Department of Environment and Forests, Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

I conducted in-depth interviews with student activists of All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU), Adi Students' Union (ADISU), All Namsai Area Youth Association (ANAYA), Arunachal Pradesh Chakma Students' Union (APCSU), village chiefs, civil society members from the Committee for Citizenship Rights of Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRHAP), academicians and government employees in these areas. In September, 2015, I also participated in one of the protest rallies organized by student organizations in Arunachal Pradesh against the Supreme Court verdict on Chakma and Hajong citizenship issue. I also interacted with the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRBn) involved in the maintenance of law and order during protests.

I travelled to Arunachal Pradesh for the first time as a research scholar in December 2014. I visited a Chakma village in Papumare district in central-western

Arunachal Pradesh. I took the help of an acquaintance to reach Kokila village, the Chakma village. Kokila is located in the border areas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It is close to Gohpur town of Assam. The neighboring communities of the Chakmas in this part of Arunachal Pradesh are Nyishis and Karbis. Nyishis are the indigenous tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and numerically largest communities in the state in Arunachal Pradesh. They inhabit various districts in Arunachal Pradesh including the capital region of Itanagar. Nyishis are Scheduled Tribes as listed in the Indian Constitution. Karbi villages are spread along the Arunachal Pradesh side of the border. They are not recognized as Scheduled Tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. However, Karbis are considered as Scheduled Tribes in Assam.

Kokila (Part 1) village in Papumpare district had nearly 50 households. This information was shared by the headman of the village. The village headman narrated that he settled in the village in 1960s with his parents. His parents came as refugees from former East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. The headman was well-versed in Assamese and we interacted in Assamese language. The Chakmas in Kokila village, as he expressed, were settled by the central government of India. I interacted with other Chakma people living in the village. It was the month of December and many people were busy cleaning the harvested paddy in their courtyard. Most of the houses were stilted made of bamboo. The headman of the Kokila village provided me with further information on the Chakmas living in other parts of Arunachal Pradesh. He expressed that I could gather more information on Chakma people and their conditions from another district called Changlang district, located in the eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh. This had a snowballing effect on the selection of samples for the later part of the interviews conducted in Arunachal Pradesh

In January 2015, I went to Itanagar. A friend of mine who was also a student activist, the Information and Publicity Secretary of All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU), assisted me during this visit to Itanagar. The student activist belongs to the Nyishi tribe. He is originally from East Kameng district but stays in the capital city. With his help, I collected important documents and information relating to the student mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh. He was educated at Rajiv Gandhi University in Journalism and Mass Communication and occasionally contributes his writings and field reports in the local newspapers of Arunachal Pradesh. The activist took me through extensive field tours in the Nyishi villages in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh. I had the opportunity to interact with the villagers in his native village in Seppa, the district headquarters town of East Kameng district. I also attended a public meeting organized by the state government of Arunachal Pradesh in a place called Lumdung near Seppa in January, 2015. The meeting was attended by the then Chief Minister Nabam Tuki and few other Members of the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh. The Chief Minister visited the place to promote developmental activities. Tuki inaugurated road and school projects in the area after the meeting.

In September, 2015, the Supreme Court of India gave the judgement that the Chakmas and Hajongs should be granted Indian citizenship within a period of three months. I was informed by the student activist in Itanagar that AAPSU was against the citizenship of Chakmas and Hajongs. I travelled to Itanagar in September, 2015 again. I had the opportunity to witness a mass rally organized by AAPSU in protest against this initiative. I observed the mass rally from beginning to end. It was observed that the rally was attended by college and university students to protest the Supreme Court verdict which they said was against the

interest of the indigenous peoples of Arunachal Pradesh. I also visited the premises of Rajiv Gandhi University, the only central university in Arunachal Pradesh in February, 2016. I stayed in one of the university residences where I had the opportunity to interact with academicians and students from Arunachal Pradesh. Interactions and observations helped me to gain a perspective on student movement in the state. The library of the university provided me with a lot of valuable information.

In April, 2016, I visited Diyun, Namsai and Bordumsa in the eastern parts of Arunachal Pradesh. I stayed for a night in Tinsukia, an urban area near the district of Dibrugarh in Assam. Next morning, I proceeded towards Diyun. Diyun is an administrative circle under Changlang district. Diyun has highest concentration of Chakma and Hajong population. The Indian citizenship demands made by these two communities have been opposed by AAPSU and other indigenous tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. Diyun is almost three hours journey from Tinsukia town. Since I had no contact in Diyun, I decided to take help of the administrative offices to get access to Diyun. I met a local bureaucrat who belonged from the indigenous Adi tribe. The bureaucrat helped me arrange my accommodation for the next five days in a guest of the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRBN). I also met the Indian Reserve Battalion (IRBN) personnel who shared their experiences about the area and their involvement in managing the law and order of the place.

I met people from Chakma and Hajong communities in Diyun. I also had the opportunity to interact with the members of the Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRHAP) who provided me with documents and information relating to the citizenship issue.

On my return journey, I stayed at a place called Mahadevpur in Namsai district. I visited Namsai, Nongkhon, and Bordumsa areas. Namsai has been newly carved out of the district of Lohit district in Arunachal Pradesh. The district comprises of mostly Khampti, Singpho, Adi, Deori and Mising communities. I took interviews from these communities. The respondents belonged to diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Some were village chiefs, some were student and youth activists, and some were government employees. The interactions with diverse range of people enriched my understanding on the subject and my experiences as a researcher.

The interviews and participant observation enabled me to conduct this study and analyze the research problem in a systematic way. The **approach** that is used in this study is descriptive and analytical. The thesis uses a case study method the comparison is based on similarity on the issues raised during student mobilization and differences on the processes of mobilization, mobilization trajectory, state responses and movement outcomes.

Organization of the chapters

The second chapter is a review of literature on social movements and key concepts of social movements that are used in this particular study. This chapter offers a detailed review of literature on collective mobilization, the framing process and state responses. The chapter ends with a brief analysis of the writings on student mobilization in Assam and other states of Northeast India. The third chapter discusses the historical background and the origins of student mobilization in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam and other parts of undivided Assam.

The fourth chapter is a case study chapter on student mobilization and state responses in Assam. The chapter examines the evolution and development of

student activism in post-colonial Assam. The chapter also analyses political activism of social movement organizations in post-colonial Assam followed by an analysis of mobilization led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU). The chapter also examines the various ways the state responded to political activism and student mobilization in post-colonial Assam and how this had an impact on the strategies and the trajectory of mobilization. This is followed by analyzing the contentious action in the past two decades and the state responses to the student-led social movements.

The fifth chapter deals with the second case study on student mobilization and state responses in Arunachal Pradesh in the post-colonial period. The sixth chapter offers a brief analysis of mobilization by student bodies in Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura on citizenship and resources. This chapter also provides a summary of the findings of the study. The chapter also outlines the, relevance, contribution, limitations and further scope of study.

Chapter 2

Approaches to Study Student Mobilization:

Understanding Mobilization Process and

State Responses

Introduction

A review of literature shows that mobilization is a significant subject of social movement studies. Mobilization refers to collective action motivated by socio-economic and political grievances. Mobilization involves various resources for participation. It is linked to collective motivation of individuals. Students' mobilization has long been a prominent feature of movements for political reform around the world. Despite continuing visibility of student activism, relatively little theoretical or comparative research has explored the determinants and impacts of such movements (Weiss, Aspinall and Thompson 2012). What kind of *policy impact* these kinds of mobilization can have? What are the outcomes of student-led movements? This thesis addresses some of these questions while trying to *understand the processes of mobilization* of student organizations, the networks that shape collective action; and the *responses of the state*. These questions will be addressed in the context of India's Northeastern states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh that witnessed a series of mobilization led by student organizations on issues related to citizenship, socio-economic development and natural resources. A sincere effort will also be made to draw peripheral examples from contemporary student movements in Meghalaya, Manipur and other states in North East India

where involvement of students in politics has been notable. The study seeks to engage in the larger debates on contentious politics, political mobilization and participation of students (college and university graduates) and state responses.

Understanding Social Movement

There are two major schools of thought in social movement literature, one that focuses on macro-structural impact on the social and political contexts; and another that emphasizes micro level factors and examines the relationship between cultural change and processes of construction of identity and meanings. There is an emerging focus on actor-oriented approaches in social movements, where the emphasis is on micro-level analysis. The study of actors, the participants, which make a movement, have to be considered more intensively to understand the success and failures that are involved in collective action (Klandermans and Roggeband 2010). According to McCarthy and Zald, a social movement is a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Other scholars like Ghanashyam Shah writing about social movements in India, classifies social movements in terms of the objectives or the quality of change (Shah, 2013, p.29). He classifies movements as revolt, rebellion, reform and revolution to bring about changes in the political system. Shah (2013) says that reform does not challenge the system per se but it attempts to bring about changes in the relations between the parts of the system in order to make it more efficient, responsive and workable. T. K. Oommen argues about social movement in these words, “The movements will neither have the potentialities to root out the existing system completely nor will they succumb to the traditional structures entirely. Essentially then, the social movement provides

the stage for confluence between the old and new values and structures (Oomen 1977).”

Scholars have also debated about the outcome of social movements. Social movement also refers to the organizations, actors involved and the outcome. In classical social movement literature, social movement is defined as the expression of relationship between actors’ inputs and outputs in an organization or of their relative deprivation.¹³ The level of actor inputs in relation to rewards or outputs can lead to collective behavior. The probability of contestation increases if the level of input is higher than the level of outputs / rewards (Olson 2002). When both input and output are high, competition will replace grievances. On the contrary, a low input associated with low reward is likely to produce withdrawal from collective action, and a low input which receives high rewards leads to passive conformity. The actors here are defined by positions on a hierarchical scale, and the stakes of the contestations are organizational rewards.

Social movements serve as a vehicle to articulate grievances and pressing collective concerns. This theory assumes that there is a conditional effect of grievances on collective action. There is a ‘multiplicative relationship’ between the preferences for public goods and influence on providing the goods and collective actions (Olson 2002); (Hardin 1982). In large groups it is assumed that preferred public goods do not affect social movement participation. Social movement literature also discusses how resource mobilization takes place. Mobilization of resources constitutes of two types: tangible and intangible resources. A tangible resource in McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) approach to resource mobilization

¹³ Touraine, Alain. *An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements*, Social Research, Volume 52, No. 4, *Social Movements*, (Winter, 1985), pp. 749-787.

emphasizes resources beyond membership consciousness and manpower that may become available to the potential movement. Members of social movement organizations provide the infrastructure of the movement such as money, work (time and energy), sacrifice (death or prison), and leaders. These resources support the growth and vitality of movements and movement organizations. It is claimed that grievances and deprivation are important factors behind social movement participation (SMP) but their effects depend on the social structure (Opp 1988). Most resources have multiple uses. Freeman (1979) distinguishes resources into tangible assets such as money, facilities and means of communication and intangible or human assets that form the basis for movements. Intangible assets include both specialized resources such as organizing skills and the unspecialized labor of supporters. Supporters include people from different professions like lawyers, doctors and professors sympathizing with the movement.

Social structure determines the position of people in terms of cultural values and norms. The quantitative properties of a social structure are indicated by the structure of social association, size of groups and the number of incumbent social positions; status; organization and political institutions (Blau 1977). Social structures provide the opportunities for participation and may lead to social movement participation (Walsh 1981); (Walsh and Warland 1981) ; (Law and Walsh 1983); (Useem 677-688). Thus, grievances and social structures have multiple effects on social movement participation.

Frames of Collective Action

To articulate grievances, the social movement organizations frame the activities to resonate with the common culture they claim to represent. These claims may be

directed against opponents or the state. Frames assist the movement organizations to mobilize the movements, to draw resources as well as to strike a chord with its supporters, sympathizers and networks toward achieving their goals and objectives they struggle for. Theoretical literature suggests that frame theory is helpful in understanding how a collective identity pervades the life of social movement. A frame is a schemata of interpretation that enables individuals to see and understand the surroundings (Goffman 1974).

From a social movement perspective, frame brings people together by accomplishing three core tasks: diagnosis of social problems, prognosis of movements and motivation for social action. If it is to blend the individual to a larger whole, a collective identity must also resonate with stories, myths and folk tales that are part and parcel of one's cultural heritage, inform events and experiences in the immediate present (Benford and Snow 2000). Framing denotes an active phenomenon of the process that implies agency.

Framing activities result in collective action frame. Collective action frames are constituted of two sets of characteristics: one is action oriented function known as core framing task and the second one refers to the interactive, discursive processes that attend to the core framing tasks (Snow and Benford 1988). Collective action frames are based on shared understanding of problematic condition or situation that are in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, or urge others to act in concert to affect change. Snow and Benford (1988) divided core framing tasks as *diagnostic framing* which means problem identification and attributions, *prognosis framing* that includes refutation of logic or efficacy of solution advocated by opponents and *motivational framing* that provides rationale for engaging in collective action. By

pursuing these core tasks, movement actors attend to the inter-related problems of mobilization that fosters collective action. Consensus mobilization foster or facilitate agreements whereas action mobilization fosters action of the people (Klandermans 1984). The cultural narrative used as frames played an important role in mobilization in social movements like democracy movement of China (1989) (Zuo and Benford 1995) and the eighteenth century slavery abolitionist movement of Great Britain (D'Anjon and Male 1998).

Resource Mobilization

Having said, are frames sufficient for social movement mobilization? In order to understand the process of mobilization, we have to understand how resource mobilization takes place. Resource mobilization is instrumental to the framing process. Mobilization of supporters for expressing discontent, tactical choices and alliances; infrastructure are important components of resource mobilization.

The resource mobilization approach as articulated by social scientists deals with the dynamics and tactics of social movement. It deals with both societal support and constraints of social movement phenomena. It also refers to a variety of resources that has to be mobilized, the external support for success and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Resource mobilization theory also focuses on a set of contextual processes such as the organization dynamics, resource management and political changes that condition the realization of movement goals. This also refers to the aggregation of resources like money and power, minimal form of organization, involvement of individuals and organizations and represents the flow of resources, costs and rewards of individuals. From resource mobilization perspective, social

movement may or may not be simply based upon the grievances of the presumed beneficiaries (McCarthy and Zald 1977) Individuals and organizations which may not have any commitment to the values that underlie specific movements may provide major sources of support like money, facilities and even labor. The social movement organizations have a number of strategic tasks that include mobilizing supporters, neutralizing or/ and transforming groups and individual actors into sympathizers, achieving change in targets. Dilemmas may also occur in the choice of adopting tactics due to conflict in behavior of movement participants. Moreover, tactics are influenced by inter-organizational competition and cooperation (McCarthy and Zald 1977).

The most distinctive contribution of resource mobilization theory has been to emphasize the significance of outside contribution and the cooptation of institutional resources by contemporary social movements. McCarthy and Zald (1977) have argued that the movements of the sixties and seventies such as Vietnam war, civil rights, women's liberation movements have mobilized a constituency of the affluent and wealthy middle class including college students and co-opted institutional resources from private foundations, social welfare institutions, mass media, universities, governmental agencies, and even business corporations. Social movements therefore shifted from classical social movement organizations to professional social movement organizations.

Resource mobilization theory focuses on the dynamics of social movement by identifying the types of resources and organization features that condition the movement; and the relationship between the movement and political systems. By focusing on social networks organizational dynamics and political processes, the resource mobilization theory successfully identifies relations between collective

actors. Melucci argues that the approach is useful to explain 'how' social movements; strategies, decisions and resources are combined to determine the emergence of social movement. Both individual and collective decisions are critical in understanding the dynamics of resource mobilization. Perceived effectiveness and risk of action influences individual decisions to participate in the movements. Formal and informal ties (e.g. interpersonal ties) influence the intensity of participation. It is argued that both informal and formal networks can be established through common cultural frames which facilitate the socialization of individuals embedded in these networks. (Passy and Giugni 2001).

According to rational choice, individuals are driven by costs and benefits of calculation when participating in collective movements. A homeless person might join a housing rights movement in order to secure his right which would be based on rational choice. Mancur Olson's theory of collective action is useful to analyze individual motivations from the perspective of rationalist assumptions. According to Olson, rational self-interested individuals will not contribute to securing collective goods (i.e. non-excludable benefits) because of the problems of free riding. Mobilization occurs only when selective benefits are offered in the form of distinct divisible benefits or when the group is sufficiently small that the benefits to individuals are greater than the cost of securing collective good, or the group is privileged.

Olson's solutions to the problems of collective good have come under critical attack. The theory postulates that the members are motivated for collective action due to selective incentives thereby creating a cycle of collective action and further mobilization. The major challenge came from scholars who argued that individual and collective may not be centered on selective benefits but could be ideological or

based on personal and social commitments. Empirical studies conducted by Tillock and Morrison (1979) found that moral commitment may be the sole motive of support for resource mobilization.

Other approaches argue that when an individual identifies herself with a group, there is no calculation of cost and benefit. A group of homeless people would join housing rights movement despite knowing that the incentives of outcome might not benefit them individually. Such actions are driven by collective identity because the individual simply belongs to that group. Melucci argues while constructing collective identity and protest, it is useful 'to consider collective phenomena as the result of multiple processes' (Melucci 1996). He is concerned with collective actions based on individual participation in movement. There are also situations in movements where individuals cooperate without any incentives; empirical research suggests that perception of repression, social rewards and the belief that personal participation in collective action matters. Therefore, resource mobilization also depends on non-economic incentives.

So the questions arise: If selective incentives are not the only motivations, why are social movement participants attracted to the appeals of the movement entrepreneurs? What motivates the groups and individuals to participate in movements? The next section discusses these questions to examine the motivation of people to participate in contentious collective action.

Collective Network and Mobilization

Network analysis will tell us more about this dimension. Scholars dealing with social movement studies tried to explain the interconnection of organizations and groups through network analysis. Social movement organizations develop network

with potential individuals and organizations during the process of mobilization. Granovetter's social network analysis holds that social ties promote the regular flow of information in differentiated structures (Granovetter 1983). The sentiments of solidarity and mutual trusts are encouraged through social network that facilitate co-ordination and communication where dilemmas of collective action are resolved (Putnam 1995). Network serves as cohesive phenomenon in social movement which help in circulation of resources and ties as well.

Once movement takes place, how do state institutions respond? According to social movement literature, the leadership and participants of mobilization are directed against the challenger, that is, the state often becomes the prime institution to redress the grievances. The responses of the state institutions to mobilization are significant to understand the trajectories and strategies of social movements and the social movement organizations (SMO). Therefore, one of the objective concerns of the social movement studies is examining the political opportunity structure and the ways states respond to mobilization.

State Responses

The relations between the state and social movement have been studied from various dimensions by scholars analyzing the dynamics of contention. The politics of protest and mobilization is interspersed between the social movement organizations and state responses. Both social movement organizations and states are political actors that adopt strategies and tactics. Social movement, for this particular study, would be understood as a sustained series of interactions between the state and the challenging groups (Tilly 1984). Student based organizations considered as significantly organized actors forming a collective identity of 'social

movements', are a subject of focus in this study. Identities not as students but a wide ranging collectivity of interests tied to *indigenous* ethnic identities, resources, socio-economic grievances are important to stir up mobilization.

State and movement interaction determines the outcome of mobilization. Social movements have varying outcomes at the social, economic and political level. Meyer (1993) considered public policy as the outcome of social movement. Scholars argue that political actors may encounter constraints or may be presented with opportunities commonly referred in the social movement literature as the political opportunity structures. This has an influence on the outcome of mobilization (Rootes 1999). Kitschelt used the framework of political opportunity structure to examine the confrontation between the state and anti-nuclear movement actors in several Western countries (Kitschelt 1986).

This study investigates the interaction between student organization leaders as social movement actors and the state both at the state/provincial level and the central level. The study tries to examine the complex set of interactions, closure as well as political openings between the state, movement leadership, the mobilized as well as the non-mobilized groups that affect movement outcomes.

While examining the outcomes of social movements, studies have underlined the significance of understanding social movement beyond the binary of success and failure. Success and failure are immaterial so far as the leadership, participants and supporters are attached to the intangible elements of values and collective efforts. Intangible elements of values can be self-respect, pride, worth and emotive self-satisfaction of participating in a particular movement for the causes and grievances they share collectively. Scholars such as Wagner and Cohen (1991) who studied

the movement of homeless people of Maine state in the US found that there were radical effects such as emergence of homeless grievances committees despite the continued presence of structural causes of poverty and homelessness (Wagner and Cohen 1991). They also found that there were participants who never joined politics but felt proud of being identified as homeless and emphasized his worth of involvement in protest march for the homeless people as it was a matter of dignity and self-respect.

While it is agreed that protest activities raise the awareness of the public on various political issues, scholars have noted that changes in public opinion can also help in realizing goals of movement effecting responsiveness in the institutional levels to the demands of the movements (Giugni 1998). Protest can have real impact especially on the electoral-representative systems (Fox and Cloward 1979).

Gamson classified four possible social movement outcomes which are as follows: full response, pre-emption, co-optation and collapse (Gamson 1990). Scholars have also viewed the outcome of social movement in terms of impact on government policy or legislation (Giugni 1998). However, participants and external observers of social movement may have varied perceptions on the success or failure of the policies and legislations implemented based on state responses and the movement outcome. Giugni (1998) argued that the notion of success or failure is problematic in the studies of social movement. Efforts to bring about change through social movements may sometimes, lead to unintended consequences that are not related to movements.

Student Mobilization: A Social Movement Perspective

Student mobilization constitutes an integral part of the social movement literature. An analysis of the existing literature suggests that student mobilization in both developed and developing countries were mostly issue-based. Issues like wars and civil rights were actively taken up during mobilizations led and joined by students groups in the US in 1960s. Mobilization of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) engaged in the movement against racism and segregation as well as civil rights of black people in America in 1960s is an example (Murphree 2009, p. 11). Student organizations such as the Students for a Democratic Solidarity (SDS) in the US stood against American foreign policies during the Cold War world and condemned America's role in the Vietnam conflict (Heineman 1994, p. 1). The May Fourth Movement (MFM) of 1919 gave birth to Chinese Communism that witnessed huge student demonstrations in Peking (now Beijing) (Chen 1970). In Czarist regime of Russia in the end of nineteenth century, students spearheaded protest movements in the university campuses. St. Petersburg University was an important center of revolutionary activities of students (Morrissey 1998, pp. 17-38). In other Asian and African countries, students were key actors in anti-colonial struggles (S. M. Lipset 1968). Students in Korea in 1980s opposed the authoritarian rule and forced democratic reforms with the help of middle class support (Lee 1993).

In Indonesia, students were at the forefront clamouring for change of the authoritarian regime through street demonstrations in 1960s. In 1998, students played key roles in dislodging the military regime of President Soeharto, one of the most important and consequential waves of student protest in modern history (Aspinall 2012). In Iran, during the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iranian students

mobilized against the regime and seized the US embassy in Tehran against the grant of political asylum to Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Menashri 2009, pp. 142-143). In Malaysia, student activists in 1960s joined forces with peasants and workers and presented a challenge to state-led development policies. Students also mobilized around international issues such as the Vietnam War and the conflict in the Middle East (Weiss 2012).

Suneet Chopra, in his work on political consciousness of student movement in India, while pointing to student movements in Gujarat and Bihar contended that the movements had a democratic content and partially raised democratic issues of the society at large (Chopra 1978). Chopra further argued that the movement outcomes could be analysed in terms of effective mobilization and concessions. Teresa Wright's article on student mobilization in Taiwan, illustrated the role of student mobilization played an inevitable role in the transition from a single party state to a multiparty state in 1980s (Wright 1999). She further noted said that the National Taiwan University was brought to reform by student activism while most other campuses remained under strict political control.

Lipset and Altbach were of the view that students' exposure to new ideas and ideologies can play powerful role in lesser developed societies where the number of educated is relatively low (S. M. Lipset 1967); (Altbach 1967); (Altbach 1989). In developing countries, according to Altbach, students are often viewed as spokespersons for a broader population and a conscience of their societies, which can facilitate movements originating among students expanding to mobilize larger populations (Altbach 1989, p.14).

Studies in India have found that students participate in collective action for larger political issues related to university autonomy, national language, corruption in politics, authoritarian and corrupt states, exploitation etc. Students have played important roles in the Telengana movement and the Naxalite movement in West Bengal in 1960s (Custers 1987); (Shah 1977) ; (Barik 1977) ; (Ostergaard 1985). Ghanashyam Shah argued that students' agitations are part of the overall ongoing economic and political crisis and the changing of the social order and they can be called political as they raise issues related to government policy or action (Shah 2013, 213-215).

The existing literature reviewed in this chapter hardly focused on processes of student mobilization. This dissertation draws from some of these writings and argues that besides ideology and anti-colonialism student mobilizations in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have revolved around issues of citizenship, natural resources and cultural identities. The trajectories of these movements changed from time to time and there are significant variations in the political opportunity structure in these movements. Earlier literature failed to address these aspects on student activism in India. This dissertation tries to address these gaps in the literature. The next sub-section discusses the citizenship frame.

Citizenship Frame

The idea of citizenship evolved in Europe. Scholars argue that citizenship is a historical construction. The classical notion of citizenship proclaimed in the American and French Revolutions provides for equal rights and responsibilities guaranteed and sanctioned by law without making any distinction on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, social or economic characteristics (Schnapper and

Dedios 1997). Citizenship bestows upon individual members with rights and privileges in the national political community (Howard 2009, p. 3) The idea of national citizenship creates a boundary that separate citizens from potential immigrants and foreigners / foreign residents (Ibid.). Citizenship, therefore, revolves around the paradox of internal inclusion and external exclusion of the people (Brubaker 1992, p. x). This refers to the rights and privileges accorded to people (citizens and non-citizens) within the boundaries and territorial limits of a state based on political membership (Howard 2009, p. 3). Rights and privileges thus become a matter of inclusion and exclusion of people when it comes to citizenship. Scholars have also studied citizenship from the perspectives of multiculturalism. There are differences over issues of language rights, regional autonomy, political representation, educational curriculum, land claims, immigration, naturalization policies, and national symbols between minority and majority populations in a state (Kymlicka 1995, p. 1). Kymlicka argues in favor of group-differentiated rights for ethnic groups and national minorities based on cultural diversity and historical disadvantage.

In some countries in Southeast Asia, citizenship is sometimes tied to religious interpretation and practices. Public expression of religious practices for example, Islam in countries like Malaysia or Indonesia; Buddhist in Myanmar or Thailand; Christianity in Philippines are more visible in the citizenship practices of these countries (Berenschot, Nordholt and Bakker 2017, p. 19-20). The nature of citizenship in Asia has been debated at different levels. There are debates on the secular nature of the state. Scholars have argued whether the state should play a bigger role in enforcing religious morality and controlling the private spheres of citizens (Ibid.).

Scholars like Niraja Gopal Jayal have studied the evolution of Indian citizenship from a historical perspective. She outlined three perspectives on citizenship debates in India. These are: citizenship as a legal status, citizenship as rights and entitlements and citizenship as sense of identity and belonging (Jayal 2013, pp.2-3). Jayal argues that contestations over citizenship are tied to social and political contexts. The history of citizenship in twentieth century India is the history of relationship between individuals and the state with the combination of colonial, constitutional and post-colonial philosophy. Jayal discusses the citizenship principles of *jus soli* (right of the soil/ place of birth) and *jus sanguinis* (right of blood/ blood based descent) debates in the Indian context. After independence, as Jayal argues, citizenship in India was focused on the principle of *jus soli*. Thus, *jus soli* became a legal status for the claiming of citizenship. In the post-colonial period, the citizenship debates have traversed through constitutional amendments of citizenship laws and policies. Rules and procedures of citizenship moved towards the principle of *jus sanguinis*. There is a tension between *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* principles of citizenship in India due to divisive legacies of partition, as Jayal points out (Jayal 2013, p. 14). There were also attempts to accommodate the interests of the Indian diaspora by making provisions for limited rights for the People of Indian Origin (PIO).

Indian citizenship policies have been amended on the questions of Bangladeshi immigrants in the post-colonial period in response to mobilization. The assertion of citizenship based on caste, religion, ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation called for application of inclusive policies for equality. Such claims of citizenship give a sense of identity and belonging. This has been reflected in the participatory nature for claiming rights and public goods in the Indian citizenship

framework. Indian citizenship has been debated from dualistic perspectives. Anupama Roy speaks of ambivalence in the aspects of Indian citizenship laws in the recent times. Roy argues that claims of citizenship in Assam is graded between Assamese citizens and migrants (Roy 2010). In trying to address the concerns of Assamese identity in Assam, there is an emergence of differentiated citizenship in India through the amendment of citizenship laws in the 1980s. Immigrants identified after March 24, 1971 are illegal immigrants or foreigners in the state of Assam. This is different from the rest of India, where immigrants identified after July 19, 1948 are considered illegal migrants or foreigners. The creation of different levels of identification for citizens and non-citizens through negotiated settlement between government and mobilizing groups is thus a reflection of contradictions in the process of granting citizenship in India

Voting rights and citizenship to foreign nationals is however contested in India which has led to the anti-foreigners movement in Assam. In this context, citizenship has been used as a popular frame during the anti-foreigners movement in Assam. Similarly, the emergence of movement against the citizenship of Chakma and Hajong refugees due to concerns on indigenous identities in Arunachal Pradesh emerged as the popular frame of citizenship.

The issues of identity and citizenship are contentious issues in countries like India. Citizenship issues are linked to the protection and security of *indigenous* people in the North Eastern region of India. Social movement-led by student organizations for protecting *indigenous* identities in North East India have influenced the citizenship policies in India. This study will try to address the gap by taking two cases of student mobilization in Northeastern part of India to understand how processes of mobilization have influenced the citizenship issues. The attempt of

citizenship claims by refugees and political rights for illegal immigrants have been contested by student organizations in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. This has in turn influenced the local politics on the questions of rights and privileges being encroached upon by illegal immigrants and refugees. Illegal immigrants and refugees are seen as perceived threats to the identities of *indigenous* people in North East India. Student mobilization in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have been engaged in collective action claiming to represent the collective interests of the *indigenous* identities of the communities.

This thesis therefore examines how student organizations such as AASU and AAPSU frames their collective action opposing the citizenship of illegal immigrants and refugees to protect the *indigenous* identities. The thesis will also examine how state has responded to contentions of citizenship claims by illegal immigrants and refugees while addressing the concerns raised by student organizations in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Citizenship provisions of India in context of Assam

The Indian citizenship rules and laws framed by the Indian Parliament from time to time also has several important provisions relating to Assam. There are legal provisions governing the citizenship status of persons residing in Assam specifically. One of the earliest Assam specific statutes linked to the identification and expulsion of immigrants framed in the national citizenship laws was “The Immigrants (Expulsion From Assam) Act, 1950”. The act provided for expulsion of certain immigrants from Assam on based on the following grounds that any person from India or outside settled in Assam was liable to be expelled from Assam or the country if the government felt that it was detrimental to the interests

of indigenous tribes, that is the Schedule Tribes or general public of Indian state. The government at the centre or the state was empowered to direct or remove such residents or persons from Assam to their country of origins as per expediency.¹⁴ However, it was not applicable to persons migrating or displaced from the erstwhile area that comprise the then state of Pakistan if they have settled on the ground of fear of unrest and civil disturbances in the state. The expulsion law for immigrant was extended to the whole of undivided Assam especially the present states of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram.

The National Register of Indian Citizens (NRC) was first prepared in Assam in 1951. The NRC of 1951 is considered as important base year to determine the citizenship status in Assam. The presence of illegal migrants in Assam in post-colonial decades had fuelled mobilization for protection of identity of the indigenous peoples in by the student organizations and social groups. In order to meet the demands and oppositions to the citizenship provisions, the Government of India had added new provisions to the citizenship acts. Therefore, there have been several amendments to the citizenship provisions of Indian citizenship act--Citizenship Act, 1955.

The Citizenship Act, 1955 of India defines “illegal migrant” as a foreigner who entered into India (a) without a valid passport or other travel documents and such other documents or the authority as may be prescribed by or under any law in that behalf; or (b) with a valid passport or other travel documents and such other

¹⁴ The act came into effect from March 1, 1950. The Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam), 1950

document as prescribed by or under any law in that behalf but remains therein beyond the permitted period of time.¹⁵

The significant legal provisions relating to Indian citizenship status in the context of Assam constitutes the two statutes: The Citizenship Act, 1955 (Amendment of 1985) and the Citizenships (Registration for Citizens and the Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003. The Amendment of 1985 to the Citizenship Act, 1955 is based on the Assam Accord. The Assam Accord, 1985 resulted in introducing Section 6 A in the Citizenship Act, 1955 with new provision to determine Indian citizenship applicable only to persons living in Assam.¹⁶ The provisions was that 24th March midnight, 1971 was to be considered as the deadline of determining the validity of Indian citizenship for the state of Assam due to the presence of illegal migrants while addressing a major issue of student-led Assam movement in response to the six year-agitation by the central government which is final authority in India to make statutes, rules, provisions and amendments concerning the citizenship policies.

Besides, the Citizenship Act, 1955, Rule 4 A and Schedule of Citizens, 2003 is another important statute that governs the citizenship rules of Assam and the National Register of Indian Citizens update. The Assam specific provisions contains in The Citizenship (Registration of Citizens & Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003 with effect from November 9, 2009 is crucial to the exercise of citizenship count as per the NRC 1951 and the electoral rolls published by the Election Commission of India. Rule 4A states that:

¹⁵The Citizenship Act, 1955, Act 6 of 2004 (w. e. f. 3.12.2004).

¹⁶ It was inserted by Act 65 of 1985, sec. 2, (w. e. f. 7.12.1985). See The Citizenship Act, 1955

The central government, for the purpose, of National Register of Indian Citizens in the state of Assam, cause to carry out throughout the state of Assam for the preparation of National Register of Indian Citizens in the state of Assam by inviting applications from all the residents, for collection of specified particulars relating to each family and individual, residing in a local area in the state including the citizenship status based on the National Register of Indian Citizens 1951 and the electoral rolls up to the midnight of the 24th day of March, 1971 [The Citizenship (Registration of Citizens & Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003].

This Assam specific provision differentiates from the rest of India as the process of household enumeration in national count of citizens in India is replaced with invitations and receipts of applications to ascertain the status of citizenship of all persons residing in the state of Assam. In the process of examining the validity of receipts and applications for citizenship status filed by the residents of Assam, the two government documents stand significant, that are, the national Register of Citizens 1951 and Electoral Rolls up to March 24, 1971. The special provisions of National Register of Citizens 1951 in this context of examining the citizenship status means the register of details of Indian citizens residing in Assam as mentioned in the National Register of Citizen that was prepared along with 1951 census under the directive of Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. While the electoral rolls up to the 24th day of March, 1971 means the electoral rolls containing the details of voters prepared by the Election Commission of India or the State Election Commission of Assam in a relevant period up to the midnight of 24th day of March, 1971.

The applications are scrutinized and authenticated by the Local Registrar of Citizen Registration of the government at first and then a consolidated list is published as draft National Register of Citizens by the District Magistrate. There are also provisions for objections and suggestions on the draft list where an additional list can be published by the government. However, the objections and suggestions have to be done within a period thirty days. The Local Registrar of Citizen Registration has to verify the information relating to individuals, families,

children, descendants and inter-district migration. The District Magistrate has also power to investigate matters relating to applications of citizenship status in case of doubt. The local registrar also can take into account the complaints on instances of undue harassment in the process of verification. The verification reports of citizenship status are subject to examination by the District Magistrate, the administrative head of particular district. There are provision of claims and objections where persons are given reasonable opportunity for claims or raise objection on the draft list regarding the inclusion or deletion of names. The local registrar of citizens can prepare a supplementary list after the disposal of claims and objections. The final National Registrar of Citizens in the state of Assam has to be published by the Registrar General of Citizens Registration. However, any person can appeal in a period of sixty days if one is not satisfied with the outcome of claims and objections order in the local registrar of citizens in a designated tribunal constituted under Foreigners (Tribunals) Orders, 1964. The names can be included or deleted based on the disposal of cases in Foreigners Tribunals.

Another significant point in the citizenship rules applicable in Assam is the inclusion of original inhabitants of Assam in the NRC whose citizenship cannot be doubted.¹⁷ However, this term “original inhabitants” (OI) triggered debates in the state as to who constitute the “original inhabitants” (OI) and who are the communities that will be included as OI in the NRC. However, it was clarified by the state NRC coordinator Prateek Hajela in November 1, 2017 that no community will be categorized as Original Inhabitant (OI) in the draft or final list of NRC.¹⁸ The Supreme Court of India directed the government and state authorities involved

¹⁷ Government of Assam, Office of the State Coordinator of National Register of Citizens, Assam website; http://nrcassam.nic.in/rule_2003.html (Accessed January 5, 2018).

¹⁸ *Original inhabitant category ruled out*, November 1, 2017, *The Telegraph*, Guwahati.

in updating the NRC on November 30, 2017 that a draft list must be published by December 31, 2017 while rejecting to the request from the Attorney General of India K.K. Venugopal for extension of deadline of publication.¹⁹

The existence of doubtful voters in electoral rolls in Assam is also another peculiar feature connected to the citizenship issues of Assam. The Election Commission of India in January 5, 1998 instructed the state government of Assam to remove non-citizens from the electoral roll.²⁰ The letter 'D' meaning doubtful was marked against the voters who could not prove their citizenship status in the revised voter's list prepared for the elections in 1997. The voters whose identity or documents are said to be either disputed or doubtful in terms of citizenship claims at the time of verification by officials were marked as D and were barred from participating in the electoral process. The doubtful voters are denied to cast their votes as well as contest elections. Thus, the presence of illegal migrants prompted the Election Commission to categorized voters as doubtful which also led to disenfranchisement and declaration as foreigner based on examination and verification by the Foreigners Tribunals (FT) set up under Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964. Detection and disenfranchisement of foreign nationals was one of major demands in the Assam movement led by the AASU. On January 2, 2018, the central government disclosed in the Lower House of the Parliament of India in New Delhi that 19,612 'D' voters were declared foreigners by Foreign Tribunal (FT) until October, 2017 and only foreigners are kept in detention centres.²¹

¹⁹ Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Rohinton Fali Nariman, the two judges bench of Supreme Court of India directed state co-ordinator of NRC Prateek Hajela to publish the name of 2.37 crore people in the draft list by December 31, 2017 while dismissing the plea for extension on the ground of pending enumeration, verification of family tree and panchayat documents. SC rejects Centre's plea on NRC deadline, *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, December 1, 2017.

²⁰ 'D' Voters, p. 23, 'White Paper on Foreigners Issue, October 20, 2012, Home and Political Department, Government of Assam.

²¹ This was informed by the Union Minister Kiren Rijiju in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Indian Parliament) on January 2, 2018. 'D' Voters, *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, January 3, 2018.

Elector photo identity card had also been issued in elections of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry, and West Bengal by the Election Commission for the mandatory identification of voters in polling booth in 2011 but it could not be started in Assam.²² However, elector photo identity card has been issued in Assam from the 2014 election onwards. Doubtful voters are not included in National Register of Indian Citizens without clearance from the Foreigners Tribunal. The removal of non-citizens from the electoral rolls can be considered as an important step in redressing the grievances of political insecurity and existential crisis of indigenous population of Assam.

The Assam Accord is thus a major document which determines the validity of citizens in Assam. There are protests in Assam against any attempt that would either dilute or undermine the content of citizenship timeline of the tripartite agreement between the movement organizations and the government. The amendment proposal of the citizenship rules introduced by the central government in July, 2016 is opposed by the indigenous organizations and student organizations of Assam in the backdrop of having such existing accord which provide provision for security of identity of Assamese people. The modalities of updating the National Register of Indian Citizens in Assam were prepared by both the central and state governments in 2017 and 2018.

A review of literature on student mobilization in North East India

Scholars writing specifically on student mobilization in Assam conducted case studies on student movements in the colonial and post-colonial period. Shiela Bora's work on student mobilization (movements) in Assam, entitled *Student*

²² Press Notice regarding schedule of general elections in legislative assemblies of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and West Bengal, Election Commission of India, March 1, 2011.

Revolution in Assam: A Historical Survey, 1916-1947 (1992) is an in depth study on the origins and development of student organizations during the colonial period. Bora's work covers the period from 1916 to 1947 and traces the history of the formation of student organizations in undivided Assam. The formation of various student organizations, *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* in 1916 and Assam Muslim Students Conference in 1918, are well recorded in the book. It also throws light on the role of students in the Surma Valley, Shillong and even Manipur in the pre-independence period. The book provides an important overview of the participation of students and youth in various phases of anti-colonial struggles in the Indian sub-continent with a special focus on undivided Assam. The book discusses the role of students who volunteered for programs organized by the Assam Association during the Non-Cooperation movement (1920-21), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-32), and Quit India movement (1942) led by the INC. Shiela Bora also discusses about factional politics involving the student organizations in undivided Assam and Sylhet district (now in Bangladesh). Bora discussed the influences of Marxist and Leninist ideologies on these student mobilizations. Due to ideological influence, the *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* was affiliated to the All India Students Federation (AISF) in April 1939. A section of students opposed the Congress and formed the Assam Provincial Students' Federation (APSF) (Bora 1992, pp. 112-115). The book dedicated a chapter detailing the role of students in establishing the higher educational institutions like Gauhati University.

Meeta Deka's work on *Student Movements in Assam* (1996) explored the student protests of Assam from the colonial period to the days of the Assam Accord, 1985. She attempted to identify the factors behind the political action of students using

social movement theories and ideas of various social scientists. The work covers the history of students' movements; narrated in a periodic manner until 1980s but it is limited only to Assam. Although the author explored different phases of student movement it has not provided the responses of the state in Assam. The work is, undoubtedly, a significant contribution to the history of student movements in Northeast India that documents the pre-independence and post-independence period but one of the shortcomings in the book is that there is less attention to the ways of mobilizing resources for issues of social importance and the consequences of the movements.

Student movements have also been examined by other scholars like Apurba K. Baruah. Baruah in his book *Student Power in North East India* (2001), an edited volume, comprised of contributions from various authors and their work on student movements in the region. Apurba K. Baruah tried to contextualize the student movements in the region in the Gramscian conceptual frame of hegemony. According to Baruah, student organizations that exist among the various communities in North East India take an ideologically predominant position to gather support from members of various social strata. The work extended the Gramscian conceptual framework to study the student movements. The aspects of collective action such as resource mobilization and political opportunity structure of the student movements have also been examined.

Ningthoukongjam Urmila's *The Student Movement in Manipur* (2007) is another work on student mobilization. Urmila deals with the student organization of Manipur the All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU). Urmila's work traces the emergence of the student body and the role of AMSU in the public life of the state on issues of education, language, migration and the issue of 'outsiders'.

‘foreigners’ and local politics in the state. The book provides a description of the activities carried out by AMSU in the post-independent period. *Student Movements in Arunachal Pradesh* (1998) by Srishtidhar Dutta is another significant book on student movement which focuses on the frontier state of Arunachal Pradesh. Dutta’s book has covered the history of formation and growth of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union (AAPSU) and the various phases of student movements until 1990s. The book discusses how the AAPSU was involved in mobilization on issues like education, health infrastructure, reservation for jobs, inter-state boundary dispute and refugees. Similarly, Pascal Malngiang’s *Students and Politics in Meghalaya* (1994) deals with a case study of student mobilization in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. The book traces the historical development of ethnic Khasi student organizations. The book also discusses the role of Khasi Students’ Union (KSU) in the socio-economic and political life in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya till the period of early 1990s.

The analysis of the existing literature on students’ movements in Northeast India shows that student mobilization has played an important role in determining the regional politics and the relations between the state actors and various local communities in the region. However, there is an absence of studies that tries to establish a link between these aspects and examine mobilization of students from a social movement perspective. The above studies made sincere attempts to trace the history of movements led by student bodies. These studies provide a historical analysis. One of the major shortcomings in these studies is that they focus mostly on the student organizations in the states of Manipur, Meghalaya and Assam leaving aside a systematic analysis of the process of mobilization in each of these cases.

Existing literature on student mobilization in North East India hardly focus on issue-based mobilization of students mobilization in the states of Northeast India. Moreover, very few studies explored the ways in which these student organizations mobilize resources for collective action and also the different ways in which states respond to these movements. The aim of this dissertation is to fill up these gaps in the literature and to contribute to the broader literature of student mobilization, social movements and contentious actions.

Explaining factors of mobilization

Dependent Variable

Student Mobilization: The dependent variable of this study as evident from the above discussion is student mobilization. The organization of students is basically formed by college and university educated youth drawing network of units and supporters from various educational institutions at the district and sub-district levels. Student organizations may mobilize on a range of socio-economic issues in an organized way by forming organizations of students. In this particular case study, we examine how student organizations have mobilized on the claims of indigenous rights in the North East India. Student organizations that claimed to represent the interests of *indigenous* people and adopted various tactics and strategies in the process of mobilization in the North East. State responses may influence the trajectory of the student-led mobilization which is also examined in this study.

Independent explanatory factors to understand mobilization:

1) Framing process:

Citizenship issues: Drawing from social movement literature and the citizenship debates, the study considers issues of collective importance. Frames are used as a medium to create a collective meaning to mobilize masses. The issue of citizenship has been used as a common frame. The citizenship issue has both local and national importance connecting to strategic, political, economic and cultural issues of the state. This variable is used to examine individual and collective motivation to participate in the movement. Drawing from social movement literature and the citizenship debates, the study examines the citizenship issues of the 'illegal' immigrants in Assam and the 'refugees' in Arunachal Pradesh. The framing process also includes issues related to control and distribution of natural resources. The study examines how contentious politics and collective motivation is linked to the issue of frames like citizenship. The objective is also to understand how issues of citizenship, indigenous politics and distribution of natural resources like oil, land and forests are perceived by the state actors as well as non-state actors.

2) Political Opportunity Structure

In social movement studies, political opportunity structure (POS) constitutes a key component in understanding various outcomes and dimensions of mobilization. Political opportunity structure (POS) would mean accommodation and partial accommodation of the demands in different phases of the social protests. Accommodation means the conceding of some of the demands made by the social movement organizations (here in this study, the student organizations) by the state in response to mobilization. Partial accommodation means co-optation or

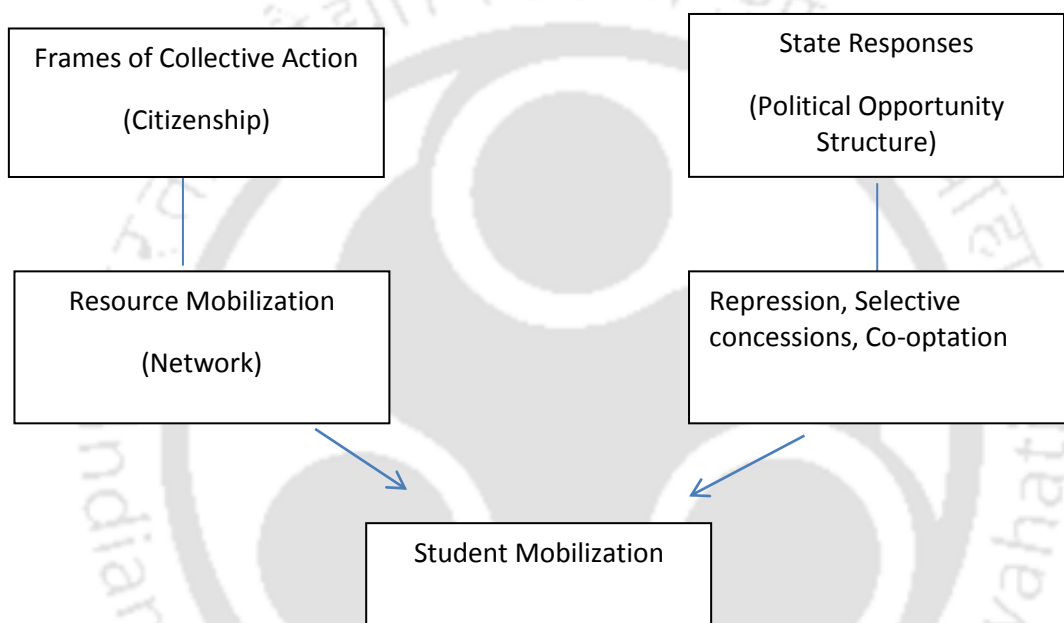
sometimes refusal to accept the demands made by the social movement organizations by the state. The process of student mobilization is also responded by state repression. In this study, repression means police action, arrest or detention of leaders and activists, imposition of preventive laws and censorship of press. The table below (Table I) provides the details of the political opportunity structure and the nature of interaction between the state and the mobilizing organization. The political opportunity structure in this dissertation would thus be understood in terms of accommodation, partial accommodation and repression. The study also uses the terms repression, denial and mixed responses

Table I: Nature of state responses within political opportunity structure

Nature of responses	Explaining factors
Political access/opening	1. Interaction & bargaining: Number of meetings/talks between social movement organizations, and government (central/state). 2. Institutional agencies: The creation of new state agencies (committees, commissions); changes in existing institution to deal with the contentious issues of citizenship and resources.
Political closure	1. Incidents of repression, arrest, targeted police action against the movement leaders and participants.

Policy formulation	1. Legislation and judicial intervention; state decisions advancing or rejecting movement demands 2. Repeal of acts. E.g. Illegal Migration (Determination by Tribunals) [IM(DT)]
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Figure 1: Framework of the study



Summary

The chapter examined previous works on student mobilization in Asia and elsewhere. While drawing lessons from these works, the chapter argues that mobilization emerged due to certain historical, social, political and economic conditions. In order to understand the mobilization process, these studies used an analytical framework ranging from the framing processes to network ties to political opportunity structures and resource mobilization. This chapter draws the lesson that mobilization may happen with the motivation for social change or reforms. The student-led movement in Hong Kong was motivated by liberal

democratic reforms. Similarly, the Sun Flower movement in Taiwan in 2014, was motivated by the policies of the ruling Kuomintang regime. Further, we learnt that resource mobilization drive people into collective action and has an impact on the political opportunity structure. Also the political opportunity structure is influenced by state-society relations, mobilizing and the non-mobilizing actors.

The aim of this chapter was to examine the approaches on social movements, contentious politics and collective actions drawn from the existing social movement literature. Some of the key concepts used for this particular study are the framing process, resource mobilization, collective action, motivation, collective network and political opportunity structure. The chapter also discusses the alternative 'frames' on mobilization. Citizenship debates examined in this chapter help me examine student mobilization in some parts of South Asia; particularly North East India. The chapter analyses the existing citizenship debates. The chapter also makes an effort to examine the existing case study literature on student mobilization in Assam and other states of North East India. The next chapter discusses the historical background of student mobilization in undivided Assam. The chapter focuses on the origins and rise of student-led mobilization since the colonial period.

Chapter 3

Tracing Origins of Student Mobilization in Undivided Colonial Assam

Introduction

This chapter traces the origin of student mobilization in undivided Assam. The chapter examines mobilization in general in colonial Assam with a particular attention to the involvement of student organizations. The chapter then discusses student mobilization in the post-colonial period in undivided and divided Assam.²³

Using historical records, the chapter begins with an analysis of the colonial encounters with the Burmese. Colonialism began with the commercial motive as it was evident from the exchanges of communication between Christian Missionaries and the colonial administration in the initial days of colonial occupation in Burma and India's Northeast. The aim was to gain access to trade with China and other states in Southeast Asia. The chapter also outlines the origin and the course of nationalist imaginings, ethno-linguistic nationalism and mobilization in the Brahmaputra Valley.

²³ Except the states of Manipur and Tripura, the North Eastern states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya were once a part of Assam. These were hill districts of Assam with ethnic denominations such as Naga Hills district, Mizo Hills district, United Khasi and Jaintia and Garo Hills districts. Arunachal Pradesh, formerly North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was also administered by the Governor of Assam delegated by the President of India. Nagaland was created in 1963; Meghalaya in 1972; Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh were accorded statehood in 1987. All the former districts that were once part of Assam together can be called undivided Assam.

The Decline of Ahom Kingdom and Colonialism (1800s-1826)

The political decline of Ahom rule in Assam was accompanied by internal rivalry, Burmese aggression and the weakening of Ahom territories due to the Moamoria insurrection. This was followed by the British occupation. The British gained a foothold in the region when the declining Ahom kingdom called for British assistance during the Moamoria insurrection. The devastation of Assam by the Burmese intruders that began in 1817 was engraved in the minds of the people of Assam as *Manar Upadrab*²⁴, meaning the oppressions of the Burmese. Colonial administrator and historian Edward Gait (1906) described this experience as “appalling atrocities on the helpless inhabitants” (Gait 2017, p. 335). The abatement of Burmese intruders from the areas of Bhutan and Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) concluded with a treaty in Yandaboo in 1826, a place located near the Irrawaddy river in Sagaing region of central Myanmar. Subsequently, the British established the administration in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, annexed smaller kingdoms of Tripura, Jaintia and Garo hills and consolidated colonial power in the North East region (A. Guha 1977).

Borrowing Feur’s classification of the variants of imperialism, viz. regressive imperialism, progressive imperialism; the chapter argues that the British Empire followed a combination of progressive and regressive imperialism.²⁵ The setting up of educational institutions in colonial Assam could be considered as an example of progressive imperialism as these policies were aimed at ‘civilizing’ the allegedly

²⁴ For a more apparent elaboration of the Ahom monarchy, Burmese oppressions, and Anglo-Burmese war, see Edward Gait’s *A History of Assam*, Grantham, Guwahati, 2017. *A History of Assam* by Edward Gait was first published in 1906 by Thacker, Spink & Co., Calcutta. Also, see Major John James Snodgrass’ *Narrative of Burmese War*, John Murray, London, 1827.

²⁵ Lewis Samuel Feur had obscured upon what he called basic truths of constructive character of imperialism although he claimed not to be absolute and sharply demarcated. His social classification positioned various imperialist societies in the history of the world which may vary in many respects. See Feur’s *Imperialism and Anti-Imperialist Mind*, Transaction Publisher, London, 1989.

backward opium-consuming Assamese indigenous population.²⁶ Another effect was the impact of colonialism on raising political consciousness, and the formation of organized association and groups for social, cultural, economic and political causes.

Scholars argue that the annexation of Assam had the imperialist design of exploitation through extraction of resources like tea and oil (A. Guha 1977). To meet the commercial purposes in these enterprises, particularly tea, the British embarked on a policy of migrating people from Central India to work as laborers in the gardens. The British also embarked on the task of making policy changes to run the administration. After a decade of signing the Yandaboo Treaty (1826), the British passed a legislation imposing Bengali language in the courts and schools of Assam in 1836. These policies were later resented by the growing middle class educated Assamese-speaking elite. Assamese intellectuals like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan resisted the imposition of Bengali language and raised concerns about the future of the Assamese language.²⁷

In 1853, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan submitted a memorandum to the visiting Bengal Presidency Commissioner appealing the restoration of Assamese language in the courts and schools of Assam. The language that Anandaram Dhekial Phukan used later turned into a text of power creating a wave of ethno-nationalism among

²⁶ See C.F Andrews' *The Opium Evil in India: Britain's Responsibility*, Student Christian Movement, London, 1926.

²⁷ Anandaram Dhekial Phukan went to Hindu College Calcutta for higher education (1841 to 1844). He discontinued his studies and joined the administration of the British in Assam. He was inspired by "Bengal Renaissance". Dhekial Phukan's education was taken care of by Captain James Matthie, a British deputy commissioner. European officials in Guwahati encouraged the education of Assamese students by distributing prizes occasionally and for higher studies as well. See Nanda Talukdar's *Assam and the 19th century*, Bhabani Books, Guwahati, 2012, pp.107-133.

the Assamese educated class.²⁸ Dhekial Phukan also urged the British government to end the opium cultivation which had a negative impact on the Assamese society at large (A. Guha 1972). Dhekial Phukan's nationalism can be clubbed under *Eastern-type of nationalism* in John Plamenatz's words as the Assamese peoples were drawn into a civilization hitherto alien to them, whose ancestral cultures are not adapted to success and excellence by these cosmopolitan and increasingly dominant standards.²⁹

Assamese demand for restoration of their mother tongue as a medium of instruction and a court language was re-instated with the help of Christian missionaries. British policies were therefore, met with opposition which marked the beginning of the debates on linguistic and nationality questions in colonial Assam

Colonialism, Christian missionaries & rise of nationalist consciousness (1826-1900)

The complex relationship between colonialism and missionaries has been debated among scholars in India and other countries. Francisco Frejes (1784-1845), a Mexican historian discussed the complex relation between the Spanish colonialism in Latin America in his article *Essay on the Conversion and Colonization of the Continent's Barbaric Tribes* (originally written in 1820).³⁰ Frejes showed how the Spanish colonizers granted land to its subject in indigenous tract through a policy

²⁸ The texts of powers can be understood based on Partha Chatterjee's discourse of nationalism in post-colonial world's articulated interpretative language in Bengal's context on the formative role of English-language education producing an emerging intelligentsia and modernizing movements and nationalism at the time when Western modernity was first encountered in India (Chatterjee 1995)..

²⁹ John Plamenatz talked of two types of nationalism, one Western; and another is Eastern nationalism (Plamenatz 1976).

³⁰ Frejes, Francisco. *Essay on the Conversion and Colonization of the Continent's Barbaric Tribes*. Translated by Gauthereu-Bryson, Lorena, 1820. From Woodson Research Center, Rice University, Francisco Frejes' Ensayo Sobre La Reduccion Y Colonizacion De Las Tribus Barabaras Del Continente, 1820-1840, MS 42, 1820.

known as *encomiendas*, where the receiver of the grant could either exploit the services of labor or exact tributes from the natives as payment for instructing in Spanish and evangelizing in Catholic faith. This expansive civilizing mission was carried out by the Christian missionary in the occupied territories. Similarly, on the role of missionaries during colonialism in Africa, Ranger wrote that missionaries can be construed as agents of imperialism (Ranger 1978).

In Assam, the officials of the East India Company engaged in evangelistic activities in 1783 (Mayers 1887). A decade later, William Carey, known as the father of modern mission began his journey to explore India in 1793 (Mayers, 1887, pp. 33-34).³¹ He set up his first base in Srirampur in Bengal as the head quarter of missionary activities which was indirectly responsible for the spread of Christianity in a number of provinces in India including Assam.³² Carey also worked in Burma. The missionaries took the task of translating the Bible to a number of Indian languages including Assamese. Translation of the bible into Assamese language was initiated in 1811. The New Testament was completed in 1819, and the Bible was translated and printed in 1833.³³ The translated works carried out by Carey however, met with criticism. According to the accounts of A.K. Gurney and F.W. Sword, early Christian Missionaries who worked in Assam, Carey's first ever print Assamese linguistic project was rendered practically unintelligible and useless due to overloaded Sanskrit usage and incompatible

³¹ In John Brown Mayers; *William Carey: The Shoemaker*, Fleming and Rebell Company, Chicago, 1887

³² See Victor Hugo Sword's *Baptists in Assam: A Century of Missionary Service (1836-1936)*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1992.

³³ See A. K. Gurney's *The Bible in Assamese*, page 113, *The Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1992. Also see Victor Hugo Sword's "Baptists in Assam", page 34, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1992.

Sanskrit theological terms. Gurney also added on to remark that it cannot be said that the Assamese possess a whole Bible in Carey's version.³⁴

The Srirampur Baptist Mission Press was established in the year 1800 in Bengal. The missionary press provided the impetus to print and publish books in Bengali.³⁵ In the following decades, the Bengal based missionary press, translated and published various Assamese books such as the *New Testament* (1823), *Assamese Pentateuch* (1822), *Assamese Prophetical Books* (1832), *Assamese Historical Books* and *Assamese Hagiographa* (N. Talukdar 2012). Miles Bronson published the first Anglo-Assamese dictionary in the 19th century with the name and style, *A Dictionary in Assamese and English* in 1867 (Bronson 1867, iv).

The first Christian converts under Carey, Krishna Chandra Paul went to Khasi hills and baptized the hill tribes. Besides, spreading Christian theological teachings, Reverend John Mack made the Church Mission Society of London aware about the commercial prospects particularly about the cultivation of tea and promising highway of commerce between China and the East India Company (Sword 1992, p.35). He also wrote: "The barrier against intercourse between our subjects and Chinese....would be broken down...and an open door afforded into the celestial empire (cited in Sword, 1992, p. 35)." Sword conceded the idea that the early thought was to possess Assam for Christ and then to use it as a means to greater ends, namely as highway into China (Ibid., 1992, p. 35).

In fact, the British government invited the English Baptists of Calcutta to the region. One of the members from Christian Missionaries, Judson was very

³⁴ See A.K. Gurney's *The Bible in Assamese, The Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1992, p. 113.

³⁵ Laird, M.A. , *The Contribution of Serampore Missionaries to Education in Bengal, 1793-1837*, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies , Vol. 31, Issue 1, 1968, pp. 92-112.

delighted when Sadiya was proposed to be the first mission station in the northeast part of Assam. Judson dreamed of establishing various stations in the territory north of Burma and south of China as Sadiya was perceived to be the intervening stations located in the frontiers of China and Ava (Sword 1992). Captain Jenkins, Governor General's agent and commissioner in Assam, wrote to a civil servant to commence a mission in Sadiya which was considered to be the borders between two Shan tribes such as Singphos and Khamptis. Thus, the purpose of establishing a base in Sadiya was to connect the frontiers of China and Burma in the hope of evangelizing tribes in adjoining Ava as well. It was also assured to the missionaries by Captain Jenkins that they would be under the protection of government and would not be liable to checks which the Rangoon mission has constantly suffered from the jealousy and barbarity of the Ava government.³⁶

Nathan Brown, one of the pioneers of missionaries, wrote about Assam mission as the most important and encouraging fields in the east.³⁷ On arriving at Sadiya, he had the first impression on Assamese as a dialect of Bengali.³⁸ It was thought that the Assamese used Bengali characters at first but the missionaries in short time begun learning Assamese.

Thus, the Christian Missionaries that were involved in crafting the geostrategic design of Assam was soon engaged in not only with the religious conversion but also with intercultural exchanges with the tribes in the region.

³⁶Missionary Magazine, 1835, March 10, p.20, publisher: Not stated. Cited in Victor Hugo Sword's *Baptists in Assam: A Century of Missionary Service (1836-1936)*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1992 (Reprint), p. 42.

³⁷The Whole World Kin, p. 131, publisher: Not stated. Cited in Victor Hugo Sword's *Baptists in Assam: A Century of Missionary Service (1836-1936)*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1992 (Reprint), p. 48.

³⁸ Missionary Magazine, Vol. 16, p. 295. According to Sword, Brown changed his mind on this score in following years and insisted Assamese as "a latent language". Brown was one among all the missionary workers who worked very hard to save Assamese language's originality, *Baptists in Assam: A Century of Missionary Service (1836-1936)* Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1992 (Reprint), p. 152.

From the above brief analysis, one can argue that the commercial importance of Assam coincided with missionary influences. The province of Assam gradually grew more important after it was made a separate province in 1874 with an independent administration under a Chief Commissioner (Gait 2017, pp. 387-389). Economic exchanges and cultural exchanges due to colonialism and missionary influence later led to rise of nationalist consciousness.

Language issue and contention for cultural identity

The Bengali language was imposed in 1836 a decade after Assam was annexed to Bengal Presidency (N. Talukdar 2012). The Act of XXIX of 1837 and section 337 of the Criminal Procedure Code envisaged that the language of the soil was officially allowed to be used in the judicial and revenue proceedings in colonial India by virtue of which Bengali later was adopted as a court language in Bengal from 1837. The reasons for the imposition could be many. Some argue that it had to do with the proper functioning of the administration as there was an absence of local personnel to help the British. Therefore, the British brought Bengali officials from Bengal to Assam. The Bengali officials were ignorant of the local language and it was likely that they pushed for the introduction of Bengali (N. Talukdar 2012, p. 40). Another opinion is that since the officials of the headquarters and the central secretariat in Calcutta were mostly Bengali speaking, the language was preferable for transactions in the administration (N. Talukdar 2012). As a result, Assamese language was relegated to the margins. When Bengali became the official language in colonial establishments including the schools in Assam, there was a considerable resentment and discontent especially among the Assamese educated elite. There were various efforts from the educated section of the

Assamese community in the colonial nineteenth century to restore the native language as it was considered to be different from Bengali.

The contribution of Christian Missionaries towards the growth of Assamese language was also significant in generating ethno-national consciousness during this initial phase. As the local inhabitants were ignorant of English language, the Missionaries realized their obstacle in spreading the message of gospels in the region. To further their objective, the missionaries started their preaching in the native language. Nanda Talukdar (2012) argues that there were influences from Christian Missionaries and various personalities that led to re-introduction of Assamese language in colonial Assam. He argues that Miles Bronson construed the continued suppression of mother tongue as a deterrent to the elevation of masses (N. Talukdar 2012). Christian Missionaries also started schools in the vernacular medium and run newspapers like *Orunodoi* (The Dawn) from 1846 to 1882. Besides religious texts, they also published grammar, dictionaries and other works in Assamese (Guha 1991); (Bora 1992).

The denial of rightful recognition of Assamese language evoked popular resentment among the people of Assam. This was reflected in a petition submitted by Anandaram Dhekial Phukan to A.J. Moffat Mills in 1853. Phukan urged the substitution of the vernacular language in the schools in lieu of Bengalee and publication of a series of popular works on the different branches of native and European knowledge in Assamese language.³⁹ Mills submitted the report to Government in 1854 contending that just as an English youth is not taught Latin until he is well-founded in English, in the same manner, the Assamese should not

³⁹ Mills, A.J., *Report on the Province of Assam*, Appendix J.

be taught a foreign language until he knows his own.⁴⁰ To support his point, Mills also quoted Nathan Brown, who was a missionary in Assam in early colonial days, that Assamese language was a beautiful, simple, differing in more respects than agreeing with Bengalee, and we made a great mistake in directing that all business should be transacted in Bengalee, and that Assamese must acquire it its place.⁴¹ On March 7, 1872, a memorandum signed by a group of educated Assamese people headed by Miles Bronson was submitted to the government for restoring the Assamese language. With mounting pressures, the government finally responded to the demands by re-introducing Assamese in the schools and courts in the Brahmaputra Valley on April 9, 1873 subject to the condition that if a class of twelve or more boys wishes, Bengalee may be taught as a language of instruction.⁴²

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-1859) made an effort to regenerate the Assamese language with the publication of book titled *A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and on Vernacular Education in Assam* in 1855. Through his writings, Dhekial Phukan demonstrated that the vocabulary and the syntax of the Assamese language were adequate for use in administration and legal matters.⁴³ He contested the view that the language spoken in Assam is essentially the same as that of Bengal. In his critical analysis in *Kabita Ratnakar* (Jewels of Poem), he established that Assamese language was not an offshoot of Bengali. Dhekial Phukan emphasized that language understood by all classes of people should be the medium of instruction (N. Talukdar 2012). He also prepared a textbook for

⁴⁰ Ibid,

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² A.S., Assam Commissioner, File No. 471, Assamese Language 1862-73, Bernard, C. Officiating Secretary, Govt. of Bengal to the Commissioner of Assam, 17 May 1872.

⁴³ Hazarika, A., (ed.) *Bhasanmala*, p.3

Assamese students called *Asamiya Lorar Mitra* (A Guide to Assamese Children).⁴⁴ Later, Assamese educational elites and a few Bengali speaking elites signed another memorandum that was submitted to Nathan Brown, an American Baptist Missionary official, in March 9, 1872 (N. Talukdar 2012). In the following year, on April 9, 1873 Lieutenant Governor Sir George Campbell announced the decision to reinstate Assamese language in courts and educational institutions (N. Talukdar 2012). The restoration of Assamese language in the colonial period was a significant move in the history of Assamese nationalism. Recognition of language marked the recognition of separateness of cultural identity of the people of the region. Scholars like Nandana Dutta examined the narratives of American missionaries and the British officials on Assamese language vis-à-vis the Bengali language from the days of colonialism in the 19th century. Dutta located the Assamese identity, the cultural politics of resistance and identity-making process to early polarization of discourse between the British and the American missionaries (N. Dutta 2009). The identity narrative of resistance and resentment of the Assamese people against the Bengalis and the British officials in the colonial period is compared and contrasted to the colonial practice of exploitation of natural resources and siphoning away of profits from the region while American Missionaries especially Nathan Brown's infusion of claiming separateness of Assamese language and subsequent works for development of language and literature have historically been recorded as a source of empowerment and pride for the Assamese people (N. Dutta 2009). These disparate narratives of 'resistance' and 'empowerment' are, sometimes, ironically contrasted in post-colonial public life and social movement in Assam.

⁴⁴Neog, Dimbeswar. *New Light on the History of Asamiya Literature*, p. 350.

The Assamese national consciousness therefore arose due to spread of education, printing press, circulation of periodicals, publications of textbooks, dictionary, grammar, primer and literary works contributed by educated elites in the 19th century. Jaduram Deka Barua (1801-69), Haliram Dhekial Phukan (1802-1832), Jajnaram Phukan (1805-38), Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-59), Gunabhiram Barua (1834-94), Rajani Kanta Bordoloi (1867-1940) and Kanaklal Barua (1872-1940), made important contributions to the Assamese society. The emergence of the middle class Assamese in the mid-19th century became a permanent and positive legacy of British rule that marked a rupture with the past social classes such as the priests, the peasants and the pensioners of the old nobility (R. Saikia 2000). Scholars like Rajen Saikia termed the Assamese middle class as a compound product of three components: colonial bureaucracy, English education and tea industry (R. Saikia 2000, p. 166). The new intellectual class of Assam germinated as a result of consolidation of Assam into British rule which had influences from other parts of India especially Bengal (Mishra 1986). To sum up, the restoration of Assamese language in 1873, separation of Assam from Bengal in 1874 and the role of Assamese educated middle-class in the 19th and early 20th centuries led to the formation of Assamese nationalist consciousness.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ According to scholars like Manorama Sharma, an Assamese middle class emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of twentieth century which led to the emergence of western liberalism and influence on Assamese society as their ideas became the ideas of a hegemonic class. She argues that the ideas of *Assam Chatra Sanmilan*, the student organization that emerged in early twentieth century Assam, run almost parallel to the development of middle class perceptions such as emphasis on spreading of Assamese literature and language, nationalism, dignity of individual and self-reliance. *Asom Sahitya Sabha*, the early literary organization of Assam in that period, was considered a frontal organization of the Assamese middle class whereas the student organization, the Assam Chatra Sanmilan, was the articulate exponent of the middle class ideology. For further details, see Manorama Sharma's *Students and Nationalism: An Assessment of the Assam Chatra Sanmilan, 1916-1939* in Apurba K. Baruah's *Student Power in North East India* Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2002.

From national consciousness to the rise of students' movements in Assam (1900-1947)

The origin and rise of the students' movement in Assam can be traced back to the colonial period. With the recognition of Assamese language, on August 25, 1888, a group of Assamese students in Calcutta formed the *Axomiya Bhaxa Unnati Xadhini Xabha* (Association for the Development of the Assamese Language) to develop the Assamese language and literature. Lakshminath Bezbarua, Chandra Kumar Agarwalla, and Hemchandra Goswami were the three leading members who contributed to the Assamese literature along with the effort to standardize Assamese language. The *Jonaki* (The Moonlight) periodical brought out by these intellectuals imprinted the idea of national identity towards the last decade of the nineteenth century. This development may be regarded as another manifestation of ethno-linguistic consciousness kindled by the efforts of students supported by the Assamese middle class. The role of students and educated middle class towards the construction of Assamese nationalism and identity is important to understand the beginning of student activism in undivided Assam.

The Assam Association, an organization formed in 1903 also contributed to the emerging middle class political consciousness. In 1907, the organization submitted memorandum to the Secretary of State for British India to retain the status quo of Assam. They opposed the move to club Assam into East Bengal to create a single province (S. Baruah 2013). Rajen Saikia argued in these words, "The middle class for the first time developed a political ambition and learnt the art of politics through this Association which later became a party machinery in 1916 (Saikia, 2000, p.173)." The Association assertively placed demands before the colonial state to ventilate the grievances of the people by taking up key issues relating to

social, economic and commercial questions (Saikia 2000). Manik Chandra Baruah, one of the pioneers of the association, urged the British government to establish a college and also opposed the amalgamation of Assam into East Bengal. In 1920, the association took the first initiative to set up a university in the province of Assam before finally merging with the Congress the same year for attainment of *Swaraj* (self-rule) through non-cooperation. In 1916, the *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* (Assam Students Conference), a student body was formed in Assam (Bora 1992) (R. Saikia 2000). According to Amalendu Guha, the Assamese students developed their nationalism in the national level as well as at the regional level based on linguistic aspirations to what he called little nationalism (A. Guha 1977). The political importance of the student community grew during the anti-colonial movement led by the Congress. Towards the end of World War I, the formation of *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* marked the beginning of student based movements in undivided Assam. Scholars like Shiela Bora held the view that this organization played a pioneering role in rousing popular consciousness as well as associating the region with the nationalist movement of India (Bora 1992). She also argued that the first ever student organization of the region attempted to bring about social, economic and political regeneration in the Brahmaputra valley through their annual sessions. The ethno-linguistic assertion of the Assamese society died down in the wave of anti-colonial nationalism as student leaders led by the *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* joined the anti-colonial struggle.

The *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* laid the objectives to work for the welfare of students through the development of literary activities (Bora 1992). The student organization also pledged that they have nothing to do with any political

propaganda or political movement.⁴⁶ The objectives also had secular content which explicitly mentioned that there will be no discussions of any religious controversy (Bora 1992). This shows that the student bodies in the colonial period defined themselves primarily as students as a collective identity and aimed to contribute to language and literature in Assam. They remained as active catalysts in the political and social movements in the initial period of twentieth century nationalist struggle. The ideas and activities of the *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* found expression in their mouthpiece *Milon* (Union) (Bora 1992). Thus, there was a strong nationalist awakening among the students of the region in the anti-colonial movement.

Student Activism in the colonial and the beginnings in the early post-colonial period (1940s-early 1960s)

By 1940, the Left student organization of India, became a confederation of three other student bodies: Surma Valley Students' Conference, the Shillong Students' Federation and Manipur Students' Conference (Bora 1992, p.113). In July 1940, the student federation of Assam adopted an anti-imperialist resolution in the Shillong session condemning the contribution of the Assam government to the colonial War Fund. Students protested and mobilized people about the consequences of war through public debates, lectures and discussions in study circles. The Shillong session of the student federation took an important resolution for the cause of higher education. The demand for a full-fledged university was formally raised for the first time by a student body in the region. The Quit India movement launched in August 1942 against the British rule had the enthusiastic participation of students across Assam. Many students in Assam courted arrest in the movement. Students also organized themselves by forming the *Shanti Sena*

⁴⁶ See Shiela Bora's *Students Revolution in Assam*, p. 282, Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1992, p. 282.

(Soldiers of Peace) to guard their villages and prevent police arrests. Students like Kanaklata of Gohpur sacrificed their lives in the anti-colonial struggle.

Student activism was also on the rise in the hills of undivided Assam. During 1937-46, student organizations such as the Assam Students' Federation, the All Assam Students' Union, Muslim Students' Conference and the Assam and Hill Tribes Student Movement jointly mobilized to collect funds to set up a university in Gauhati. Student activists forged alliances to raise funds for the construction of the university. Gauhati University was ultimately set up after one year of India's independence in 1948.

Apart from the *Assam Chatra Sanmilan*, mobilization activities were also carried out by the Communists. Communist bulletins, leaflets and propaganda dissuaded the public to contribute to the war fund. Left student leaders like Bishnu Bora also went on organizational tours in Jorhat in November 1940 and organized several meetings. Students supported the Communist League and enrolled as members into the students' federation (A. Guha 1977, p. 205). The student organization Assam Students' Federation (ASF) also expressed solidarity with the working classes, especially the tea garden labourers of Assam. Students also protested against state repression. Student activism before the independence therefore raised many issues ranging from students welfare to nationalism. In March 1946, the students' group such as the Assam Provincial Students' Congress published a students' charter demanding free and compulsory education for all (Bora, Students Revolution in Assam 1992, p. 234-36). The charter also advocated collective farming and nationalization of key industries. The Assam Students' Federation (ASF) campaigned for improvement in educational facilities.

Towards mid-1940s, students also joined the Congress party in various parts of the Brahmaputra Valley. They protested against the scheme of grouping of Assam with East Pakistan. The mobilizers raised slogans like - “*Aami Moriboloi Prostut!* (We are ready to die!)” showing their cause for maintaining separate identity for Assam (Bora 1992, p. 255). The protesters in Assam were also supported by various tribal students’ unions in places like Khowang, Jorhat and Golaghat. In a meeting organized by the Golaghat District Tribal Students’ Union in July 1946 Bipin Pal Das, a student leader of the Assam Students’ Congress, appealed the tribal leaders to join their struggle for the cause of Assamese nationalism. Pal said in the meeting, “The tribal people were the backbone of the Assamese nation (cited in Bora, 1992, p. 250).”⁴⁷

Despite these efforts made by student-initiated mobilization in Assam, by 1946-47, the erstwhile coalition of student organizations broke down and the students groups drifted apart along religious lines. The Muslim Students’ Federation came out in support of the cause of the Muslim League for a separate Muslim nation for Pakistan. Contentious politics involving these student groups also revolved around the issue of Sylhet, an administrative district constituted of both Bengali-speaking Hindus and Muslims.

Thus, the traces of student mobilization can be found with the formation *Asomiya Bhasa Unnoti Xadhini Sabha* (ABUXX) in 1888, in Calcutta with the efforts of Assamese students. The ABUXX was formed to bring awareness of Assamese language and identity in colonial Assam. This was followed by the formation of a number of socio-political organizations in the colonial and post-colonial period. The Assamese Students Literature Club was formed in 1903, the *Ekta Sabha*

⁴⁷ *Asamiya*, July 13, 1946.

(United Forum) in 1905, *Assam Chatra Sahitya Sanmilani* (Assam Students' Literary Conference) in 1916; the All Assam Progressive Students Conference were formed in 1934; the All Assam Students Federation in 1939 and the All Assam Students Congress in 1940. In the post-colonial period, the All Assam Students Association was formed in 1950 and finally, the All Assam Students Union was formed in 1967 (Deka 1996, p. 227). AASU proclaimed political neutrality as an organization of students without allegiance to any political party. What led to student mobilization in the post-colonial period? Below we discuss the political context which led to intensive political activism of students in Assam after the British left and after power was passed into the hands of the Assamese political elite.

The Political Context: Migration and its post-colonial impact

Discovery of tea in Assam and expansive tea plantation brought large scale labor migration from the Chotanagpur (Bihar and Jharkhand) region. Bengalis from Bengal also came as subordinates and Nepalis as colonial armies from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The immigration policies favored by the colonial regime also led to migration of Bengali-Muslim peasants in search of land for cultivation. This was followed by migration of refugees from neighboring East Bengal (subsequently became Bangladesh in 1971) in the twentieth century. Migration as scholars argue, had a deep impact on the demographic map of Assam (Weiner 1978, pp. 82-83); (Hussain 1993, pp. 45-46). There were also Marwaris from Rajputana who came with the colonialists to establish their business in Assam. According to scholars like Monirul Hussain, the new major social groups who migrated to Assam in colonial Assam were engaged in civil administration (Bengalis from East Pakistan) and the army (Gorkhas), in the tea plantations

(Santhals and others), farming (Muslims from East Bengal), trade and commerce (Marwaris). (Hussain 1993, p. 47). Hussain said that migration altered the social composition of Assam and the society became more heterogeneous and complex as the region began to link with the capitalist world.

Demographic changes in Assam were also the result of colonial policies like the incorporation of Sylhet into Assam. The populous Bengali inhabited district of Sylhet was incorporated into Assam province in 1874 while Assam was amalgamated with the districts of Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi Commissionerships of Bengal for a brief period in 1905 (Gait 2017, pp. 388-389). However, Assam was accorded the status of a separate province under a Chief Commissioner in 1912. Sylhet remained a part of Assam till 1947 until the partition of India on religious line. Despite several appeals from Hindu and Muslim delegation in 1917 to Edwin Montague, Secretary of State for British India and the resolutions in the Assam Legislative Assembly (also known as the Third Reformed Council) in 1926 to stop the transfer of Sylhet and merger with Bengal, the British government continued with its policy of transfer (A. Guha 2014, pp. 135-136).

Subsequent government policies in 1930s under the Muslim leader Mohammad Sadulla also affected the demographic composition in the province of colonial Assam. A policy known as the Line System, was introduced by the British government to prevent the encroachment of tribal lands by immigrants of East Bengal was introduced by the British government. However, this policy was often violated in the colonial period with alacrity and impunity in collusion with Assamese and non-Assamese revenue officials and police (Gohain 1985). The Line System was doomed by the new policy of Grow More Food campaign introduced by Mohammad Sadulla-led Muslim League government in early 1940s in Assam.

Grazing reserves of Kamrup, Darrang, and Nowgong districts were opened for settlements and cultivation of land by immigrants. These policies hugely affected the protected lands, livelihood and ways of life of the predominant Assamese as well as tribal peasants (Gohain 1985, p. 49). As a response to the growing fears of the indigenous tribes, Gopinath Bordoloi, the leader of Assam Congress Committee, who later became the chief minister of Assam, made promises that non-tribal people would not be allowed to hold or buy land belonging to the indigenous tribes. (Gohain 1985, p. 60). Migration policies also raised debates on the increasing population and the question of Assamese nationalism. In 1946, Congress envisaged the questions of Assamese nationalism vis-à-vis Bengali inhabited Cachar and Sylhet region. The Congress manifesto stated in the following words:

*“Unless the province of Assam be organized on the basis of Assamese language and culture, the survival of the Assamese nationality and culture will become impossible. The inclusion of the Bengali-speaking Sylhet and Cachar (plains portion) and the immigration or importation of lacs of Bengali settlers on wastelands had been threatening to destroy the distinctness of Assam, and has, in practice, caused many disorders in its administration. For an appropriate solution and redress of this big problem, the Congress party should be installed as the majority party in the Assembly.”*⁴⁸

Another important political context which led to students’ mobilization in postcolonial Assam was the proposed boundary demarcation in 1946 by the Cabinet Mission Plan. One of the key features of the ‘Plan’ was the proposed grouping of the regions of the country into three categories---Group A: United Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bombay and Madras; Group B: Panjab, North West Frontier Province and Province of Sind; Group C: Assam and Bengal.

The proposed demarcation of boundary stated the inclusion of Sylhet in the province of Assam. This raised fears that induced the people of Assam to think that

⁴⁸ Gohain, Hiren. *Assam: A Burning Question*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1985, p. 51.

the province might be included in the Muslim dominated Bengal (Das 2005). There was vehement opposition from political leaders in Assam. Gopinath Bordoloi, also mobilized against the grouping plan. The plan was also opposed by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, one of foremost leaders of anti-colonialism.

The Cabinet Mission Plan finally collapsed. The new Viceroy to India, Lord Mountbatten proposed a new scheme. Accordingly, the subcontinent including Bengal was divided on religious lines. The Congress and Muslim League leadership agreed upon the division of the Indian sub-continent based on religious lines. Due to the presence of sizeable Muslim population, the question of the inclusion of Sylhet into Assam became an issue of discord and contention. To resolve the situation, the Interim government decided to conduct referendum in Sylhet. The results of the referendum was declared as 56.6 per cent who voted for joining with Pakistan (East) and the rest 43.3 per cent voted to remain in India. The territorial divide clearly reflected the Hindu and Muslim division during partition (S. Baruah 2013, pp. 42-43). Barring few Hindu-inhabited pockets in Sylhet and half of Karimganj, the rest of the areas became part of Pakistan. The separation of Sylhet from Assam triggered conflicts and sub-national politics in post-colonial Assam where students' organizations took active part.

To sum up this section, despite differences over distribution of resources and drawing of political boundaries, end of colonialism brought hopes to the people of Assam. This feeling of hope however, did not last very long and Assam entered into another phase of mobilization in 1950s and 60s. The issue was language and the involvement of students in the contentious politics of language marked a new beginning in the political history of mobilization in Assam, particularly student mobilization in Assam.

The movement for the assertion of Assamese language and mobilization took place in late 1950s and 60s. The aim was to make Assamese the sole official language of Assam. The official language movement witnessed participation of students in huge numbers. The movement led to riots which led to casualties. The movement was met with state repression. Ranjit Barpujari, a student activist of Cotton College died in police repression during the protests carried out by students groups in the language movement in 1962. The movement had consequences. The Bengali-speaking people expressed their differences and grievance against the Assamese language policy. Similar feelings of grievance were expressed by the tribal people in the hill areas of undivided Assam. What were the consequences of language agitation? What kind of impact did it had on local politics in Assam requires further examination.

Summary

To summarize, the chapter discussed the colonial annexation of Northeast India. The chapter discussed the interplay of colonialism, Christian Missionaries and the intelligentsia. The chapter tried to locate the rise of nationalism in Assam in the colonial period. While locating the origins and growth of nationalism, the chapter traces the role of the middle class and student organizations in the formation of Assamese cultural identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The chapter also uncovered the origins and the formation of, *Assam Chatra Sanmilan*, the student organization in 1916, which became the first student body formed in Northeast India. The chapter also elaborated the activities and the role of the student organizations since its formation until India's independence in August, 1947. The chapter briefly discussed the beginnings of mobilization of students on issues of language in postcolonial Assam in 1960s. The next chapter will discuss

the post-colonial developments, student mobilization in Assam and state responses in the post-colonial period Assam in greater detail.



Chapter 4

Student Mobilization and State Responses in Assam

Introduction

On the midnight of December 31, 2017, the first draft of National Register of Citizens (NRC) was published on five websites maintained by the government of Assam with the names of verified citizens. Out of a total 3.29 crores of the population living in Assam, nearly 1.9 crores people applied for the NRC.⁴⁹ The final draft of the NRC was published on July 30, 2018 with the names of 2, 89, 83, 677 Indian citizens living in Assam out of 3, 29, 91, 384.⁵⁰ Individuals numbering 40, 07, 707 were left of the final draft of NRC.⁵¹ The identification of *bona fide* Indian citizens based on the NRC 1951 and the Assam Accord, 1985 have been a longstanding demand in the state of Assam made by student and other social organizations. The publication of the final draft of NRC rekindled the sub-nationalist aspiration in Assam. It raised the demands for the secured political future and the safeguard of cultural identity of the indigenous peoples of Assam, a long-standing demand made by student-led organizations in 1980s' anti-foreigners agitation.

⁴⁹ First NRC draft list published, *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, January 1, 2018.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

This chapter discusses the socio-economic, political and cultural issues raised by student organization particularly the AASU, mobilization around issues of citizenship and migration of people from the other parts of India as well as from neighboring countries like Bangladesh. The discussion in the historical chapter showed how student organizations in Assam were at the forefront of anti-colonial nationalist movement. Student activism in the Brahmaputra Valley began with the activities of the *Asom Chatra Sanmilan* in 1916. In the colonial and post-colonial period, student activism was tied to contentious politics and the discourse of Assamese nationalism during the language based mobilization in the 1960s. The emergence of AASU in 1960s provided a common platform for students to raise issues of socio-economic and cultural concerns representing the state of Assam.

In the post-colonial period, the northeastern region witnessed mobilization by student organizations, ethnic bodies and various social organizations on the perceived threat and encroachment of identities and resources by ‘outsiders’. Identity politics in Assam led by student organizations and supporting organizations represented collective frames on issues of indigenous identity and contentious ethnic relations. Contentious politics led by student mobilization also revolved around issues of Assamese language, access to socio--economic resources and political representation. Sometimes mobilization took the tone of xenophobic claims, by groups who reacted to and mobilized against the presence of migrants and other ethnic groups (Statham 1997, p.14).⁵² The claimants demanded that the state should enforce measures that would exclude such groups

⁵² Xenophobic claims are regarded as strategic intervention in public domain that can be verbal or non-verbal. This view is cited in *Contested Citizenship: Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe*, Ruud Koopmans, et al. 2005, p. 180 from Paul Statham’s who use the term “xenophobic claims” in his work entitled “*Migration Policy, Public Reactions and Collective Action around Ethnic Difference: Lesson from Southern European Case of Italy.*” Paper for the Conference of the European Sociological Association, Essex, UK, August 27-30, 1997. Later published as “The Political Construction of Immigration Politics in Italy: Opportunities, Mobilization and Outcome,” *Wissenschaftszentrum FS III*, 98-102 (1998): 1-60 .

from social, political and cultural rights in the state. As a result of contentious politics, the ethnocultural landscape and the institutional state politics in Assam have been shaped by issues of immigration and occupation of land by the ‘outsiders’.

To begin with a brief background, the post-colonial period of Assam was characterized by the movement for refinery followed by mobilization for linguistic rights that were directly linked to the indigenous consciousness over resource distribution and cultural rights. It was followed by a mass movement led by student organizations for safeguarding the indigenous identity which was perceived to be under threat due to illegal immigration from neighboring countries like Bangladesh and Nepal.⁵³ The state showed mixed responses by setting up a mini refinery in Assam in the initial period despite strong public opinion against government decision to establish refinery outside the state. The demands for linguistic rights and recognition of Assamese as official language as well as medium of instruction in universities and schools were conceded by the state. Towards late 1970s the interaction between ethnic organizations led by student leaders and social organizations such as the *All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad* (AAGSP) (All Assam People’s Resistance Council) led to radicalization of the movements. Contentious politics intensified on issues of citizenship rights, illegal migrants and refugees. The student-led movement became militant. The movement ended with the Assam Accord that was after a period of six years of mobilization.

⁵³ Letter to the Prime Minister of India on the problems of presence of foreign nationals and influx of foreigners by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President, All Assam Students’ Union, Guwahati, January, 18, 1980.

This chapter discusses the student movements that took place in Assam in the post-colonial period. The chapter also discusses varying state responses to the student movements that emerged in post-colonial period in Assam.

Student activism in Assam in the post-colonial period (1947-1967)

Scholarly works suggest that the activities of the student organizations in Assam represented the aspirations of the Assamese middle class as discussed in the previous chapter (A. K. Baruah 2002); (M. Sharma 2002) ; (P. Sharma 2016). In the post-colonial period, students gradually began to take the centre stage of representing the grievances of the ‘indigenous’ Assamese people through the medium of protests ranging from peaceful means of mobilization to militant campaigns on various issues of identity, socio-economic problems and local politics.

Student organizations participated in contentious politics even before the formation of AASU in late 1960s. Students participated in huge numbers in the Refinery Movement in 1956-57, the Language Agitation in 1960, the Food agitation in 1966, the Agitation against the reorganization of Assam in 1967-68, the Second Oil Refinery Movement in 1969, the movement for the medium of instruction in 1972 and the anti-foreigners agitation from 1979 to 1985 (P. Sharma 2016).

The All Assam Students’ Association was succeeded by All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) at a conference in Tezpur held in August 1967. AASU established itself as a formal organization and adopted its constitution during the conference.⁵⁴

The All Assam Students’ Union was formed by the All Assam Inter-College Students Union and the All Guwahati Students’ Union. Lakshmi Kanta Saikia and

⁵⁴ See AASU Website, <http://www.aasu.net.in/about> (Accessed June 21, 2016)

Dilip Kumar Bhattacharya became the first president and general secretary of the student organization. AASU took the pledge to stay away from any political party; to engage in socio-economic services to the people.⁵⁵ With these objectives, AASU raised issues of social, economic, political, cultural, linguistic and academic concerns in Assam.

The issues mobilized during these movements were wide ranging but mostly pertaining to the issues on socio-economic grievances, citizenship and issues on Assamese nationalism which also had an impact on the local politics in Assam. Rising aspirations of politically conscious middle class with the rise of civil society groups, uneven socio-economic development and over-centralizing public policies were probable causes that fuelled the Assamese ethnoseparatist sentiments leading to violent as well as non-violent mobilization in Assam during the 70s, 80s and 90s (P. Saikia 2015).

The refinery movement and student activism (1956-57)

In the post-independence period, the first major discovery of oilfields in India took place in Naharkatiya in Upper Assam. On January 10, 1961, the Assamese daily *Natun Asomiya* reported that about 700 square miles of oil was discovered in Upper Assam.⁵⁶ The pipelines were built with the capacity to transfer 4 million tons of crude oil from Nahakatiya oil field to the government-owned refinery at Barauni via Noonmati.

⁵⁵ Cited in Hitesh Deka's *All Assam Student Union's and its impact in politics of Assam*, Chapter II, *Origin, Growth and Activities of AASU*, p. 33-34, from Sushil Chandra Goswami, General Secretary of The Cotton College Union Society and All Assam Inter-College Students' Union issued in an appeal entitled "*An Appeal for the formation of All Assam Students' Union*", 1st July, 1966, Guwahati", Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Gauhati University, 2004.

⁵⁶ It was estimated that thirty crore barrels (40 to 50 million tons) of oil were present in the oil field of Upper Assam. *Natun Asomiya*, January 10, 1961.

Oil became a rallying point for mobilization on indigenous rights in Assam. Udayon Mishra argued that the movement for the first oil refinery in the public sector in Assam was the first populist mobilization in the post-independence period which was supported by all political parties in the state (Misra 2013, p. 128). Thus, the question of exploitation and utilization of crude oil for the benefits of the local population became a public debate in Assam. Street protests, public processions and shutdowns were observed for making demand for a refinery in Assam.

The legislators of the Assam assembly in Shillong also moved a resolution to install the oil refinery in Assam. Biswadev Sarma who represented the Balipara constituency pointed out in the following words about the refinery movement in Assam:

“It is needless to say that the public mind in Assam is greatly agitated over the question of location of the proposed Oil Refinery in Assam to refine the expected crude oil said to be of the order of 1.5 million tons per year. From rational, strategic and economic points of view and from the point of employment potential, the obvious choice must be a place in Assam from where the crude oil will be drilled. In this connection Calcutta in West Bengal and Baruani in Bihar were suggested by some interest which perhaps inadvertently could not appreciate the full implication of the project (June 17, 1957).”⁵⁷

The movement for a refinery in Assam started with the formation of the Assam Refinery Action Committee (ARAC) under the leadership of Hem Baruah and Hareswar Goswami who belonged to the Praja Socialist Party (D. M. Baruah 2011). A resolution was passed in the Assam Legislative Assembly that a refinery should be established in Assam on April 3, 1956. The central government however, proposed that the refinery for the production would be set up in Barauni in Bihar instead of Assam. This led to protests in mid-1950s which drew popular support in both plains and the hill areas of Assam. The retention of oil refinery in Assam was raised by the members of the legislative assembly like Hareswar

⁵⁷ Assam Legislative Assembly Debates (ALA) Official Report, Assam Government Press, Shillong, 1958, p. 477.

Goswami who considered it as a matter of regional development (A. Saikia 2011). People were mobilized through public meetings, general strikes (*bandh*), picketing, *satyagraha* in various parts of the state. Business establishments and educational institutions remained shut down due to protests. Railways and state transport services were forced to shut down due to public pressures (Baruah 2011). The refinery movement supporters also resorted to petitions, forming of assemblies, meetings, public marches and forming of committees as modes of protest. Bulletins and pamphlets were also distributed among the people for support. These kinds of collective action were used to draw attention of the governments in the state and in the centre. They also asked the members of the Parliament (MP) elected from Assam to boycott the Parliament. In June 1957, Assam Refinery Action Committee (ARAC) also planned to expand its mass-base in several districts and subdivisions.

The refinery movement of mid-1950s was responded by the central government partially. The government proposed the establishment of a toy refinery with a capacity of 0.85 million tones annually at Noonmati in Guwahati while partially accommodating the public demand for a refinery in Assam (Misra 2013, p. 129) . The centre set aside the actual demands and argued that the refinery has to be established in Barauni because of security reasons. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Defence Ministry of the central government wrote to the Chief Minister of Assam, Bishnuram Medhi citing national security as the reason for setting up the refinery in Bihar (Misra 2013, p. 128-129). It was resented by the Congress party unit of Assam. The party members petitioned the central government for an integrated defence system for refinery, oil fields and transport keeping in mind the national interests (Misra 2013).

Students also formed the “Student Action Committee” (SAC) in various places such as Shillong, Guwahati, North Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh and Dhubri to press the demand for the setting up of the refinery. Students of various educational institutions of Guwahati also organized themselves to protest against the government plan to set up the refinery outside the state. The main protest tactics adopted by the students during the mobilization of the refinery movement were public meetings, organized processions and sloganeering in the streets of Guwahati, Digboi and Nagaon. Students also courted arrests in places like Dibrugarh. On August 2, 1956, about 800 students organized a public meeting at Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Hall in Guwahati on the issue of setting up a refinery in Assam. The meeting was chaired by Praneswar Das and attended by PSP leader Hareswar Goswami. The attendees criticized the central and the state governments for the inefficiency to industrialize the underdeveloped state (M. Deka 1996, p. 159). The student protests bolstered the ongoing mass campaigns for the refinery in Assam.

To summarize the above discussion, centralized public policies like the establishment of the refinery in Barauni with the raw materials transported through pipelines from Assam to cater the urban areas of the northern belt at the cost of expropriation of resources from the marginal zones in Assam generated discontentment against the central government on the issues of disproportionate shares of revenues, local employment and income generating opportunities of the rising middle class (P. Saikia 2015). These kinds of socio-economic grievances and discontents by the middle class section of the Assamese society further created the sentiments for sub-nationalist identity assertion and contentious politics in the later years in Assam.

Language mobilization and role of students (1960-1972)

The language movement of 1960 in Assam was organized by the literary body Asom Sahitya Sabha (ASS) with active participation of students in the campaigns. The literary body and political elites such as the then chief minister of Assam, Bimala Prasad Chaliha felt that the adoption of Assamese as an official language was a “logical step towards safeguarding the Assamese identity and culture” (Misra 2013, p. 129).

The movement witnessed clashes between the Bengali-speaking and Assamese-speaking people of Assam. In April 1959, Asom Sahitya Sabha (ASS), the literary organization made an appeal to the legislators of Assam that Assamese language should be made the sole official language in Assam. The Sabha also demanded that the issue should be taken up in the following session of the state assembly. The demand was subsequently taken up by the Assamese legislators of the Brahmaputra Valley during the budget session of the Assam legislative assembly held in Shillong in 1960.⁵⁸ Opposition legislators demanded that the issue should be addressed in the session.

In the legislative assembly debates over the official language bill in 1960, A. Thanglura representing the Aijal-West constituency, raised his concerns on the minority ethnic tribals in the following words:

“I just want to know whether we are more concerned with declaration of Assamese as the official language of the state or the integration of the state. Sir, actually I have no ill feelings towards the Assamese brethren. I do respect their sentiment. Sir, now the Assamese brethrens are speaking about their apprehension that they might be wiped off by the Bengalee. If the Assamese people who are quite advanced and who have got facilities and security could entertain such apprehensions, then what about the tribals who have less security and facility. At least in the Constitution, there is

⁵⁸ It may be mentioned here that then Assam’s jurisdiction of administration was constitutive of various hill districts of northeastern region except the states of Tripura and Manipur and Shillong was its state capital.

*provision for the Assamese language, but so far as the tribals are concerned there is no such provision. There is no security for their language like the Assamese language.*⁵⁹

Similarly, Capt. Williamson A. Sangma of Phulbari constituency, argued in the assembly debates that he appreciated the desire of the people of the Brahmaputra Valley to have their own language, namely Assamese, declared as the Official Language of the state but he raised the concern whether the state would be able to provide the equality of opportunity to different sections of the people of the state as guaranteed under Article 16 of the Constitution of India if such a bill was passed.⁶⁰ It was perceived by the hill leaders that Assamese language speakers will have better access to government employment with the advantage over the official language. Capt. Sangma also remarked in the following words:

*“There is no use to talk about integration when we cannot have common meeting ground. Assam is a frontier state. It should therefore be a strong state from the point of security and defence. It can become a strong state not merely by integrating large geographical areas but by our being in a position to maintain emotional integration among the different sections of the people of the state. Emotional integration among the different sections of the people is what is needed most in this frontier state. Having failed to maintain that integration the only course left is to separate from each other peacefully. Let us therefore part in a friendly manner. Let every one of us have the opportunity of enjoying fully our respective fundamental rights.”*⁶¹

Gopesh Namasudra, an elected legislator from Patharkandi constituency of Barak valley, raised the concerns regarding the Bengali language and disintegration of Assam in the following words:

*“Domination over the minorities is one of the cornerstones of this Bill. Assurance of safeguards for the rights of the minorities are there but all the same Bengali schools were burnt down and forcible conversions of Bengali schools into Assamese by the official channel is going on even today. Sir, government harps on the slogan of “bringing administration nearer to the people” but the Bill does not admit of even such a mild demand as making the laws, decrees, circulars and important documents of the State available in Bengali, though it will be available in Hindi. You have kept English only in the Public Service Commission examination for the present. You remain mum over the question for the future but we know what some people or the Government want to do. Thus you put burden on our youth for the present and also in the future. You are keeping silent over the medium of instructions in the University level. How can you explain this to the minorities? They will be simply frustrated and feel neglected if this Bill is passed as it is.”*⁶²

⁵⁹ Assam Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report, October, 1960, p. 42.

⁶⁰ Assam Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report, October, 1960, p. 51.

⁶¹ Assam Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report, October, 1960, p. 58.

⁶² Assam Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report, October, 1960, p. 69,

The Congress government under the chief minister, Bimala Prasad Chaliha, while responding to the debates on Official Language Bill, October 18, 1960 in the Assam Assembly stated in the following words:

*“Unfortunately, the people of our state have not been able to come to an agreed solution on this official language issue. The people of the Brahmaputra Valley hold one view, the people of Hills hold another and the people of Cachar hold still another view. We consulted the representatives of various parties, but nobody advised us, in view of all that had happened in our state and in view of the tense atmosphere prevailing in the state, that this issue be delayed. Therefore Sir, when the different sections of our people have not been able to come to an agreed solution on this matter we cannot delay the decision on this issue and we have to take a decision. All these three things combined have put us into a very difficult position. We tried our best and as a matter of fact we left no stone unturned to bring about some adjustment of these different views. We tried our best but I am sorry to tell this House that we did not succeed.”*⁶³

Both the Assamese and the Bengalis mobilized on the contentious issue of official language. Meetings, demonstrations and processions were carried out by both the groups in various places like Shillong, Guwahati, Silchar, Mariani, Lumding and other hill districts. The protest activities grew with increasing participation of students and the youth.⁶⁴

A report of the parliamentary delegation regarding the disturbances and the nature of inter-community relations between the Assamese and the Bengalis during the language mobilization of 1960s mentioned thus:

*“There is no disagreement among the any section of the people of Assam that the immediate cause of disturbances was the language issue and there is also near unanimity among the Assamese and the Benagless of the Assam that there existed deep-rooted and long standing dislike and suspicion between them, which prepared the ground for creation of a situation, in which the language controversy acted as a detonator for causing explosion.”*⁶⁵

The mobilization of the two opposing groups led to violence and protest demonstrations in various parts of the Brahmaputra Valley as well as Barak Valley. Prohibition orders and curfew were clamped in sensitive locations in the

⁶³ Debates on The Assam Official Language Bill, 1960. Assam Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report, p. 78, Autumn Session, Volume II, No. 41, The 18th and 20th October, 1960, Guwahati.

⁶⁴ Assam Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report, 1960, p. 41-42.

⁶⁵ Quoted by Hiralal Patwari in Assam Assembly in the floor of the House on October 7, 1960 regarding the July disturbances in Assam over the official language issue. Hiralal Paatwaryi was an elected Member of Legislative Assembly from Panery assembly constituency during the period. Assam Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report, 1960, p.37.

state. Guwahati was put under curfew but several violent incidents and burning of houses targeting Bengali Hindus took place. On July 4, 1960, police firing killed Ranjit Barpujari, a student of Cotton College in Guwahati in the language riots. Barpujari is considered by the activists as the first martyr for the struggle of language (S. Baruah 2013, p.105). The movement was intense in the Brahmaputra Valley. The intensity of campaigns were evident from the incidents of police firings on students in Guwahati and the clashes between the two communities, Assamese and Bengali, in places like Goreswar (now in Baksa district).⁶⁶ In 1960s, educational institutions such as schools in various places were occupied by the security forces in order to control the law and order situation in the state. In January, 1961, it was also argued by the state government that it was not in a position to withdraw the security forces from the schools or other institutions in Assam despite the requests from different district administrations.⁶⁷



Photo 1: A memorial stone of Ranjit Barpujari in the premises of Cotton University (formerly Cotton College), Guwahati, the student who died in police firing during the language movement in 1960. The literal translation of the epitaph written in Assamese is as follows: This is the very spot where Ranjit Barpujari, the first martyr to the mother tongue faced a policeman's bullet and laid down his life on the fourth of July 1960 Christian Era. May Ranjit remain immortal! Photo: Bhasker Pegu

⁶⁶ *Goreswar gathanar tadanta, etiyaloike sarkari pakkhyar 45 jonor sakkhya graham* (Inquiry into Goreswar incident, Government take views of 45 witnesses till now), *Natun Asomiya*, January 11, 1961, Guwahati. The report mentioned about inquiry into the circumstances of incidents of clashes and fire at Goreswar by one-man committee under Shri Gopal, Judge of Guwahati High Court, instituted by the government. Goreswar was a part of Kamrup district in northern bank of Brahmaputra valley in Assam. Goreswar currently falls under Baksa district since the creation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in 2003.

⁶⁷ *Asomor bibhinno jilat thoka samorik dal sunkale apahaaron nakarar siddhanta* (Decision against withdrawal of security personnel from various districts in Assam), *Natun Asomiya*, January 13, 1961, Guwahati.



Photo 2: An Assamese newspaper, *Natun Asomiya*, with the headline “Police firing of July 4 in Guwahati was necessary, views of the judicial inquiry commission report”. The report mentioned about the circumstances leading to police firing and dead of Ranjit Barpujari which also left six other students injured during the period language mobilization. *Natun Asomiya*, January 8, 1961.



Photo 3: “Congress workers participated in language dispute of Assam, Jain’s report submitted: the names of some Congress workers disclosed”, a news headline that appeared in *Natun Asomiya*, January 12, 1961.

While participating in the assembly debates over the official language issue and disturbances in the month of July, 1960 in Assam, Mr. Phani Bora, a Member of

the Legislative Assembly (MLA) representing Nowgong constituency, said the following words:

“Sir, some people have sought to characterize this shameful episode as due to an aggressive and oppressive character of the Assamese Nationality. I beg to differ with them. I assert that the outburst is borne out of frustration and fear. Frustration is there--- there is no denying the fact. Did our young men fought against the British imperialism to be frustrated? They fought the British imperialism with the noble idea that they would have their own language; their culture would flourish and bloom. They fought the British imperialism with the expectation that they would get land, they would get employment and they would get facilities for education. Those simple young men saw in Assam a bright future that they would be able to earn livelihood, they will not be required to loiter hither and thither for land, employment and for a morsel of food. Sir, during the course of last 14 years, the Government have not been able to fulfill their desire. October 22, 1960.”⁶⁸

Another legislator, Debeswar Sarma, a political leader from the Jorhat constituency stated his opinions in the following words:

*“I beg to assert that this problem of the language is not merely political. It is not a mere political move to discredit the Leader or even to throw out the Party in power. To obtain for the Assamese language its rightful place in this State is the long cherished aspirations of the entire community concerned. It is an emotional upsurge cutting across party lines and failure to recognize it as such and dub it as a mere gambling move of politician is a great harm to the solution of the problem. I would remind that this is a delicate question and has to be treated as such to find out the most suitable solution to the interest of all the communities of this frontier State”*⁶⁹

Socio-economic grievances were the primary motivations for the participation of young people in the movement. They had grievances due to lack of representation in the central government jobs and government undertakings. Assamese educated middle class considered Bengalis to be a threat. A noted academician in an interview describes the level of socio-economic grievances during the language agitation in these words:

“In order to understand the current tensions and the state policy of language one has to go back to history and the days when the movement evolved. There were plywood factories in upper Assam that required managerial positions. The qualification sought was high school graduate (matriculation). Very few Assamese qualified for those jobs. The Jorhat Sarbanik Sabha took a resolution that the eighteen Extra Assistant Commissioner (EAC) posts lying vacant under the state government should be filled in by indigenous candidates. There were a high number of non-Assamese officials in Assam during that period. Therefore, the movement demanded that Assamese must be made an official language in order to secure government jobs. That was why the language issue was taken up by the middle class which turned into linguistic nationalism. The ethnic movements seen among Bodos, Misings, Karbis and others today also learned from the Asomiya and pushed toward linguistic nationalism. During colonial days, the Asomiya wanted to become

⁶⁸ Assam Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report, October, 1960, pp.45-46.

⁶⁹ Assam Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report, October, 1960, p. 54.

like the Bengali “Bhadralok”. They wanted to imitate the life and style of Bengalis of Calcutta in the nineteenth century as they were educated there. Even Lakhsminath Bezbaruah had matrimonial ties with the family of Rabindrath Tagore. But due to competition for jobs in the later period tensions grew. There were contradictions within the educated elite of Assam that triggered the language movement. As far as the sentiments of the tribes were concerned, they were included in the Assam Sahitya Sabha. Sitanath Brahma Choudhury, a Bodo served as the General Secretary of Asam Sahitya Sabha in 1957-58 and until recently Rong Bong Terang, a Karbi was the president of Asom Sahitya Sabha. Rajani Kanta Bordoloi wrote the Miri Jiyori because they wanted inclusion of smaller nationalities into the Assamese fold.”⁷⁰

The above interview also shows how language became a tool for mobilization of ethnic and socio-economic grievances not only during the language agitation of 1960s but also later on when the minority ethnic tribes raised their demands for separate identities in Assam.

Despite opposition from the Bengali community predominantly in the Barak Valley and the indigenous hill tribes in different districts of Assam, the Assam Official Language Bill was considered by the Assam Legislative Assembly. Fifty four members upported the bill and seventeen other legislators stood against the bill. In October 18, 1960 the Assamese language was made the only official language of Assam.⁷¹ Safeguards and provisions were made for the use of existing languages in the autonomous territory of the hill districts (Khasi, Jaintia, Garo Hills, Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao) of Assam and Bengali language in the Cachar district of the Barak Valley. Scholars considered this step as hegemonic linguistic nationalism, sponsored and propagated by the Assamese provincial State that was primarily pitched vis-à-vis the Bangla language and the Bengalis, the largest linguistic minority of the province.⁷² The imposition of Assamese language as the official language triggered protests in the Barak Valley. Scholars argue that the relations between the Assamese and Bengali communities were affected (Misra 2013, p. 129). The protests led by the Bengali organizations demanded for the

⁷⁰ Interview with a retired professor, January 8, 2017, Guwahati

⁷¹ Assam Legislative Assembly Debates Official Report, October, 1960, p. 82-83.

⁷² Bhattacharjee, Nabanipa. *Language of Love and Death: Fifty years of Assam's Language Movement*, Mainstream, Vol. 1, No. 9, February 18, 2012.

official status of the Bengali language in Assam. On May 19, 1961, nearly eleven protesters were killed in a railway station by the security personnel in Silchar. Students, community leaders and intellectuals were part of the mobilization opposing the implementation of the Assamese language act under the banner of *Bhasa Andolan Samiti* (Language Movement Committee) in the region.⁷³ The mobilization by the Bengalis finally led to recognition of Bengali as one of the official languages in Assam by state government in October 1961. The escalated disturbances certainly led the state government of Assam to accept Bengali as one of the official languages in October 1961.

Linguistic nationalism and socio-economic reasons thus have been the reasons why students were motivated to participate in mobilization activities in the 1960s. . Legislation of Assamese language policy was perceived as a cultural threat to the Bengalis and hill tribals from Khasi-Jaintia, Garo, Mizo, Karbi Anglong (formerly Mikir Hills) and Dima Hasao (formerly North Cachar Hills) districts of Assam. These groups voiced their concerns against the policy of making Assamese an official language. To summarize, students from both the Assamese and Bengali communities participated during the language movements in the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys.

It is evident from the views expressed by legislators and the educated middle class of the Brahmaputra Valley as discussed in the previous sections that the language movement of 1960 had multi-dimensional causes. The participation of young people in the mobilization took place due to a combination of cultural, economic and psychological factors. Economic factors such as the fear of employment and

⁷³ Since then, May 19 is observed as the *Bhasa Shaheed Divas* (Language Martyrs Day) to commemorate the martyrs of the movement in the Barak Valley.

livelihood issues; and psychological factors such as fear and frustration due to cultural insecurities and socio-economic uncertainties together led to mobilization of youth and students in the language movement in 1960s.

Student mobilization in 1960s and 1970s

Mobilization continued in the 1970s. Student organizations led the demand of Assamese language as a medium of instruction in Assam in the colleges and pre-college educational institutions in 1970s. All Assam Student' Union (AASU) launched the movement for the medium of instruction on June 6, 1972. With the support of the Assamese elite, the AASU demanded Assamese as a medium of instruction in Assam including the Barak Valley (Boruah 2009, p. 9).

The literary organization such as the *Asam Sahitya Sabha* (Assam Literary Association), the Post Graduate Students' Union (PGSU) of Gauhati University and the Teachers' Association called Assam College Teachers' Association (ACTA) joined the AASU-led movement to press the demand for medium of instruction (Boruah 2009, p. 9). This caused further tensions between the Bengali and Assamese speaking communities.

In 1970s, there were a considerable number of colleges in the Barak Valley where Bengali language is predominantly spoken including the neighboring states of Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh which were under the administration of the Gauhati University (Kamrupee 1972). Bengali was one of the recognized official languages in the districts of the Barak Valley. It was included in the original official language policy of 1960 through Section 5 in 1961. The Bengali speakers demanded that their language should be retained as a constituent language for the medium of instruction in the educational institutions in Assam.

The movement started in June 6, 1972 on the very day when the Academic Council of the Gauhati University declared Assamese as the medium of instruction in the pre-university and college education along with English under its jurisdiction.

The competing claims made by the Bengali elites for Bengali as the medium of instruction led to dissensions among the Assamese and the Bengali speaking population. Bengali speaking people of Barak valley reacted to the decision of the Academic Council of the Gauhati University leading to further demands for the resignation of legislators and ministers representing the valley. The mobilization under the leadership of AASU eventually led to the introduction of Assamese in Gauhati University which was approved by the Academic Council as a medium of instruction for Assamese students in 1972.

Student mobilization in 1960s and 1970s were not only confined to language issues but other socio-economic issues as well. To illustrate with an interview with Sushil Goswami, a former student leader, conducted during the course of this study, about the background of student mobilization in 1960s, Goswami said:

*“At that time (referring to 1960s), there was a sudden hike of price of rice grain. It increased from 1 or 1.4 rupees to 3.5 rupees. (Recalling his involvement as the Debating, Symposium and Magazine Secretary in Cotton College in 1964-65) Students could not afford the rise in prices which led to rise in the hostel dues particularly the rise of food grains like rice which is a staple diet in our hostels. There was a scarcity of rice in Assam, a society based on agriculture. There was hoarding. As a students’ union leader and as a General Secretary of Cotton College, we, with many other students, called a meeting and started the agitation on August 4, 1966. All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) had not yet formed at that time. We, the Cottonians, led a protest and appealed to all the students of Assam to mark the day as “students’ protest day.” There were some responses from other places in Assam. In Guwahati, many students from schools and colleges stayed away from their classes, took out procession and organized a protest meeting at Judge’s Field. Since it was an issue that was related to the common people we also received co-operation from the public. This was just an example of the socio-economic situation. Perhaps they gave us the background to join later movements.”*⁷⁴

On August 4, 1966, All Assam Students’ Protest Day was organized against the rising prices and the scarcity of essential food items in the state of Assam. Students

⁷⁴ Interview with Sushil Kumar Goswami, January 18, 2017, Biswanath Chariiali, Assam.

organized in various parts of Assam based on the appeals made by the Inter-College Students Union of Guwahati. The movement was supported by other student and youth organizations such as the *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* (Assam Students' Conference) and *Sadou Asom Jubak Santha* (All Assam Youth Association). Protest activities were relatively peaceful.⁷⁵ The student organizers like Sushil Kumar Goswami also made it clear that the student protest was not organized due to incitement from any political party and it had no political intentions (or) conspiracy.⁷⁶ The leadership felt that students had to be organized for protests against food scarcity, floods and rising prices of essential commodities of daily use.

The complex problems of food crises, floods, rising prices and black marketeering activities affected the student community at large and therefore, these issues appealed students to take resolutions during the protests while demanding permanent solutions to flood problems, supply of food items in fair price shops and strict action against corrupt traders.⁷⁷

Student protests continued. On August 4, 1966 protests were organized at various places in Guwahati, Shillong, Dibrugarh, Barpeta, Nalbari, Golaghat, Kampur and Palasbari mainly in the forms of processions in the streets and public meetings. A local newspaper *Natun Asomiya* reported that law and order in various places of Assam were grim; curfew was clamped in some places in Assam; business

⁷⁵ *Natun Asomiya*, August 4, 1966, Guwahati.

⁷⁶ 4 August: *Chatro Pratidbad Diwas* (August 4: Student Protest Day). Translation (mine). *Natun Asomiya*, August 2, 1966 and Interview with Sushil Kumar Goswami, January 18, 2017..

⁷⁷ 4 August: *Chatro Pratidbad Diwas* (August 4: Student Protest Day). Translation (mine). *Natun Asomiya*, August 2, 1966

establishments were shut down and tear gas was smeared to disperse student protesters where more than fifty persons were arrested.⁷⁸

In places like Shillong, students took out processions in the main road of the city and staged demonstrations in front of the Secretariat, the capital of Assam. Local newspaper reported that protests continued for two and half hours with the slogan demanding *Amak adhik chaul lage* (We want more food grain).⁷⁹ Subsequently, a student delegation met the Chief Minister Bimala Prasad Chaliha in Shillong. The government assured the student delegation that the state would respond to the demands of the agitators regarding the increase in the price of food grain. The Chief Minister assured of action to stop illegal trading and check food scarcity in the state.

According to a report in *Natun Asomiya*, on August 5, 1966 the student protesters gathered in Judges Field near the Gauhati High Court and organized a meeting. Lakhi Kanta Saikia chaired the meeting who was the General Secretary of the Gauhati University Post Graduate Students' Union. Public speeches relating to the students' protest were delivered by Sushil Kumar Goswami, Secretary of Inter-College Students' Union, Mahananda Medhi, Secretary of local Medical College Students' Union and Chandan Gogoi of Engineering College Students Union.

Students participated in huge numbers. The following resolutions were adopted by the student protesters in the meeting organized by the Inter-College Students' Union of Guwahati: (a) To make demands to curb the unnatural rise of prices in food commodities (b) Demands for strict action against persons involved in

⁷⁸ *Dibrugarh sandhya aain aru 144 dhara bolobot, Pratibad divasost bikhyubhot ashanta* (Curfew clamped in Dibrugarh and Section 144 imposed, disturbances due to demonstration on the protest day) .Translation (mine). *Natun Asomiya*, August 5, 1966.

⁷⁹ *Churang karbarir biruddhe byowosta, Chalihar assawas* (Action against black marketer, assures Chaliha), Translation (mine). *Natun Asomiya*, August 5, 1966.

hoarding, black marketing, profiteering and anti-national activities (c) Co-operate with the government to crack down on the black marketers and anti-social elements.⁸⁰ The protest meeting also drew attention to expressed concerns over the lack of durable measures to control annual floods in the state. Demands were also made for unconditional release of students arrested during the food movement.

Besides socio-economic issues, students also raised their concerns on the boundary demarcation and reorganization of Assam in 1960s and 70s. The boundary of the state of Assam was remapped in 1960s in response to the Naga movement. The Naga aspirations were accommodated by the Indian state under the Federal Plan and the state of Nagaland was formed on January 26, 1962. The federal plan of the central government of India was strongly opposed by students and other activists of Assam.⁸¹

Mobilization led by students on socio-economic issues other than citizenship continued throughout 1960s and early 1970s. In 1974 and 1978, AASU came up in a more organized way with a charter of demands. These charters of demands included both the aspirations of the Assamese urban middle class and the rural population dependent on agriculture.

The 21 Point Charter of Demands (1974) and 18 Point Charter of Demands (1978) is termed by AASU as a move towards on socio-economic issues which laid the foundation for later phases of mobilization in a more organized way.⁸² Among the charter of demands made in 1974, the key issues were (a) establishment of

⁸⁰ *Chatro pratidbad divas upolokhye Guwahatit birat samadal, churang karbari biruddhe byosta grahanar dabi* (Massive rally in Guwahati on student protest day, demands action against black marketers), *Natun Asomiya*, August 5, 1966.

⁸¹ Cited in Meeta Deka's *Student Movements in Assam*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996 p. 190 from K.C. Barua's *Critical Days of Assam*, p. 264).

⁸² See Souvenir, NESO, *All Assam Students' Union- A Brief History*, Kohima, 2012, pp.18-21.

economic equality, (b) implementing land reforms and land ownership to actual tillers, (c) increased production of hydro-electricity, c) control of flood and erosion, (d) removal of impediments in issuing licenses on the extraction of raw materials (natural resources) in Assam.

The main demands made in the charter of 1978 were: (a) hundred per cent reservation of jobs in the public sector for the indigenous people of the state (b) shift of headquarters of major public and private sector enterprises to Guwahati such as tea and oil industries such as the Oil India Limited, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited, railway division at Rangia, (c) adequate flood control measures, (d) free education for children in government schools up to class X. The charter of demands also included the issue of immigration. The document listed the demand on the detection as well as deletion from electoral rolls and deportation of illegal settlers from Assam.

The charters of demands raised by the AASU in 1974 and 1978 thus became the rallying points for political mobilization in the elections of 1978 and 1983 during the Assam agitation. The issue of *bohiragoto* or the immigrants/foreigners was intensively raised by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and other social organizations through the charter of demands. The Chief Minister of Assam, Golap Borbora, responded and issued a statement in March 2, 1979 in the state legislative assembly:

"The influx of bohiragota has concerned us. Therefore, we are taking necessary steps in hand. Because we cannot always give our land and homestead to the migrating bohiragoto. The government has set a deadline since 1971 in relation to this purpose. Those who have come after March 25, 1971 are considered as bohiragoto. The central government has told that those coming from Nepal after 1976 have to take entry permit. A consultation would be made with the central home ministry so that a due judicial process could be adopted to expel these Bangaldeshi bohiragotas. We have asked the department of law of state government to examine the matter. Respected Speaker, there is an order from the central government that those who came here before March 25, 1971 shall not be expelled. Those who came after March 25, 1971 will only be expelled

in the lines of bohiragotos. In so far as, I have discussed with officers of Supreme Court during the assembly session itself."⁸³

Immigration remained a key issue of mobilization in the electoral politics in the by-elections of 1978 for the Lok Sabha (the Lower House of Indian Parliament) seat in the constituency of Mangaldai in Assam. The by-poll was held due to the demise of an incumbent Member of Parliament (MP) Hiralal Patowary. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and its allied organizations alleged that there was large scale tampering of the electoral rolls.⁸⁴ In 1979, the electoral rolls showed an increase of eighty per cent compared to an average forty two per cent that was recorded in the year 1971 in Mangaldai Lok Sabha constituency. There was an increase of about 99,000 voters in the enumerated voters' list of 1979 compared to 55,000 in 1971. It was suspected that illegal immigrants had enrolled in the parliamentary constituency.⁸⁵ The All Assam Students Union (AASU) raised the concerns of identity and began to mobilize the indigenous people on the ground that a large number of foreign nationals had enrolled themselves as voters to vote in the ensuing by-poll where the political outcome could be influenced by the illegal immigrants. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) called for a state wide twelve-hour general strike—Assam *bandh*—on June 8, 1979 to protest the bye-election and demanded the detection, disenfranchisement and deportation of foreigners (S. Baruah 2013, p. 121). The bye-election was proposed to be held in December, 1979.

⁸³ Annexure-9, Extract from the Chief Minister's Statement dated 2-3-1979, White Paper on Foreigners Issue, October 20, 2012, Home and Political Department, Government of Assam.

⁸⁴ Scholars like Kaustavmoni Boruah opines that anti-foreigners movement was started under the joint leadership of All Assam Students Union (AASU); All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP); Purbanchal Lok Parishad (PLP); and Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal (AJD); All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) claimed to be a socio-political-cultural organization and it can be called political by-product from its style of functioning, "*Foreigners in Assam and the Assamese Middle Class*, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 8, No. 11, 1980,, p.44-57.

⁸⁵ Gupta, Shekhar. *Assam: Revising the rolls*, July 15, 1985, *India Today*, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/election-commission-offers-intensive-revision-of-electoral-rolls-in-assam/1/354309.html> (Accessed November 1, 2017).

Citizenship Issue: Assam Movement and Student Mobilization (1979-1985)

The Assam movement was led by student organizations and its allies from 1979 to 1985 on the issue of migration. The protests and campaigns were led by organizations like the All Assam Students Union, All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad and the Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal (Kalita 2007, p. 7). Other organizations like the *Sadou Asom Karmachari Parishad* (All Assam Employees' Association), *Asam Sahitya Sabha* (Assam Literary Association), the All Assam College Teachers' Association also took part in the mobilization.

Citizenship and the issues of illegal immigrants formed a part of the mobilizing frame of the movement. The immigrants were perceived as threats to the identity of *indigenous Asomiya* people. The issue of migration became a contentious issue. The movement led by the student organization in late 1970s was primarily directed against "*bohiragatas*" (literally meaning outsiders). There are other views to the factors behind the movement. According to some analysts, the movement was fuelled by ethnic chauvinism and started as an anti-outsider movement, mainly targeted at both Muslim and Hindu Bengalis and Marwaris.⁸⁶

Other scholars like Monirul Hussain argued that rising popular discontent and potential threat to political leadership accumulated the growing tensions of the Assamese middle class which led to the Assam movement. Moreover, it was observed that in 1970s and 80s, there was a decline of the high caste *Asomiya* people (mostly comprising the middle class) in the leadership positions of Assam. Congress party encouraged Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes, Muslims, Bengalis,

⁸⁶ Gupta, Shekhar. *Assam's 35-year saffronisation*, *Business Standard*, April 8, 2016.

and Adivasi people working in the tea gardens of Assam to join the Congress party (Ibid. p. 97). Tribal politicians such as Chatra Sing Teron, a Karbi leader; Lalit Kumar Doley, a Mising politician and Dharani Dhar Basumatari, a Bodo leader, held leadership positions in the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC). Some of the tribal Congress leaders even served as ministers during that period.⁸⁷ Tribal politicians too had occupied political leadership in the parliamentary politics of Assam along with the dominant caste Hindu Assamese leadership. The ethnic politics of plain tribals in Brahmaputra Valley was moderate in nature so far as the identity politics in Assam was concerned. The Plains Tribes Council of Assam (PTCA), a political party, was formed with the aim of securing tribal homeland in the Brahmaputra Valley. PTCA was engaged in democratic movement through participation in the parliamentary politics. Some scholars hold the view that the imposition of national emergency from 1975 to 1977 under Indira Gandhi's Congress regime and the subsequent defeat of the Congress in the Lok Sabha and Assam Assembly polls in 1977-78 also contributed to the anxiety among the middle class Assamese people as it limited the scope of the political leadership (Kalita 2007, p. 8). Moreover, there was a rise of support of the Left wing political parties in the state. For instance, in the election of 1978 there were twenty four elected legislators from the Leftwing political parties. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) alone had eleven Members of the Legislative Assembly in the 126-member Assam Legislative Assembly. The regional parties such as the Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP) and Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal (AJD) did not get any representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly (Ibid.). The failure of the

⁸⁷ See website of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee's Past Presidents section, Chatra Sing Teron in 1966, Lalit Kumar Doley was the president of APCC in 1972 and 1980; and Dharanidhar Basumatari in 1983 1992 and 1980. This fact is brought to focus as Congress was the party in power who ruled Assam and the subsequent tribal autonomy movements sprang up significantly after the movement organizations reins the state political seat post-1985. <http://www.assampcc.org/pastpresidents.html> (Accessed April 12, 2017)

regional political parties to get representation in the 1978 election in the Assam Legislative Assembly led to further political competition. Regionalist aspirations of the Assamese middle class increased under these circumstances.⁸⁸

The by-poll announcement was made the following year in 1979 in the Mangadai Lok Sabha constituency. This became the ground for mobilization. The unusual rise in the number of voters and the attempt of enfranchising foreigners was turned into collective frame by the middle class political leadership and its supporters. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) supported by the middle class leaders raised the concerns of survival of Assamese identity in the face of large enfranchisement of doubtful voters.⁸⁹ The fear was the increase would marginalize the *indigenous* from powers and affect their political interests. The doubtful voters of the electoral rolls were suspected to be foreign nationals. These foreign nationals were mostly perceived as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

Student organizations protested against the conduct of elections until the electoral rolls were free from doubtful voters. The agitators considered the unusual increase in the number of voters in the electoral rolls as a part of vote bank politics by the Congress party.

The mobilizing frame thus began on the issue of protection of the Assamese identity that evoked mass support on the questions of citizenship rights and the probable socio-economic impact on the indigenous peoples. The *All Assam Gana*

⁸⁸ Golap Borbora, elected from the Janata Party, was the first non-Congress Chief Minister of Assam. Borbora held the office of the Chief Minister from March 12, 1978 to September 4, 1979.

⁸⁹ Doubtful voters or D voters are a category of voters in Assam who are denied voting rights in elections due to their disputed Indian citizenship status. The D voters are identified by the Election Commission of India. The process of identifying D voters began in July, 1997. The cases of D voters are tried in Foreigners Tribunal under the Foreigners (Tribunal) Order, 1964.

Sangram Parishad (All Assam People's Resistance Council), a common organizational platform was formed in Dibrugarh Law College on August 27, 1979 in district of Dibrugarh in Assam under the initiatives of Assamese middle class with the objectives of protecting and securing the interests of the *indigenous* Assamese people.⁹⁰

One of the major aims of the AAGSP was to protest against the enrollment of *foreigners* in the voters' list in Assam. The enrollment of the doubtful foreign nationals in the electoral rolls meant participation in the electoral processes conducted by the state and reinforced the claims of citizenship rights which antagonized the rights and privileges of the Indian citizens in the state of Assam. With the formation of a common platform like AAGSP against the enfranchisement of doubtful voters, the mobilization became intense. AASU together with AAGSP launched an intense and organized movement with the Government of India to detect, disenfranchise and deport the *doubtful voters/foreign nationals* from Assam. The student organization and their supporters adopted various strategies and tactics in the course of the mobilization against *foreign nationals*.

Proposals and Demands of AASU

The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) drew the attention of the federal government on the issue of citizenship through a letter addressed to the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi. On January 18, 1980 AASU wrote about the problem of foreign nationals in Assam and continued influx of foreigners into

⁹⁰ *Asom Andolon 1979 to 1985 Dinpanji*, Special supplement on Assam Movement to mark the publication of first draft of National Register of Citizens (NRC), *Asomiya Pratidin*, Guwahati, January 1, 2018.

Assam from Bangladesh and Nepal.⁹¹ The letter addressed to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi stated:

“This letter to draw your attention to the alarming situation created by the unabated infiltration from the neighboring countries, particularly from Bangladesh and Nepal. The problem in fact, requires no introduction. It exists from the days of independence. It is now agitating the minds of the people of the entire North East region. The situation has assumed such magnitude that the very existence of the indigenous population is threatened. But we are determined to preserve our identity, our culture and heritage. The Constitution of India certainly guarantees each Indian nationality to do so. We are now firm to free Assam and India from the grip of the foreign nationals. The number of foreign nationals in Assam has already been explosive. The problem must be tackled. The problem, Madam, does not defy solution. The foreign national must be removed from the voter list. It s our duty to prevent foreign nationals from determining the destiny of our state and our country Electoral roll of every constituency must be thoroughly revised before the ensuing elections. This is a ‘must’ for the interest of a free, fair and democratic election (Letter to the Prime Minister by AASU, dated January 18, 1980, Guwahati, p. 22, White Paper on Foreigners’ Issue, Government of Assam, October 20, 2012).

The letter addressed to the Prime Ministerr also cited the variations in the growth rate of the population in Assam. The census reports showed that the rate of growth of population in 1961 in Assam was 34.98 per cent and in 1971 it was 34.95 per cent. This was higher than the national average which showed an increase from 21.64 per cent in 1961 to 24.80 per cent in 1971.⁹² The decadal growth rate of population of Assam and the all-India from 1901 to 2011 average is given below

Year	Assam	India
1901-1911	16.99	5.75
1911-1921	20.48	-0.31
1921-1931	19.91	11.00
1931-1941	20.40	14.22
1941-1951	19.93.	13.31
1951-1961	34.98	21.51
1961-1971	34.95	24.80
1971-1981*	*23.4	24.66
1981-1991	53.26	23.87
1991-2001	18.92	21.54
2001-2011	17.07	17.70

Table 1: Decadal growth rate of population of Assam and the all-India average. Source: Status Abstract, Assam, 2005. Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam GuwahatiandCensus of India website

⁹¹ Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, February 2, 1980 by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President , AASU and Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Secretary, AASU. Annexure 9 (B), White Paper on Foreigners Issue, October 20, 2012, Home and Political Department, Government of Assam

⁹² Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, February 2, 1980 by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President , AASU and Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Secretary, AASU. Annexure 9 (B), White Paper on Foreigners Issue, October 20, 2012, Home and Political Department, Government of Assam

In 1980, the organizations involved in the Assam movement, particularly the student body, forwarded proposals to the federal government for an effective solution on the issue of the foreigners and influx. One of the proposals included the preparation of an updated National Register of Citizens based on 1951. In order to determine the Indian citizenship status of doubtful voters and immigrants, AASU demanded the Government of India that National Register of Citizens (NRC) be updated based on the names of 1951. The NRC was prepared in Assam for the first time in 1951.

Scholars, however, argued that the assessment of Election Commission of India on the electoral rolls was just used as a trigger (Hussain 1993). The movement had a background in the colonial policies especially the fear and a sense of insecurity of the Assamese people due to the demographic transformation. C.S. Mullan, an Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer, served as the superintendent of census operations in 1931 in Assam during the colonial period. In the Census Report of 1932, Mullan wrote:

“What of the future? As far as can be foreseen the invasion is by no means complete: there are still large areas of waste land in Assam in the North Lakhimpur sub-division—and Kamrup in spite of the large number of immigrants which it has absorbed in the last ten years, is, of holding many more. The Mangaldai subdivision is also capable of holding further development. Now that most of waste lands of Goalpara and Nowgong have been taken up the trend of immigration, should more and more towards Kamrup, Mangaldai and North Lakhimpur. The latter subdivision should prove a veritable “El Dorado” if news of its empty spaces awaiting the hoe and plough of the colonist reaches the ears of the main body of trekkers. It is sad but by no means improbable that in another thirty years Sibsagar district (ICS) will be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home.”⁹³

Scholars argued that the decadal growth of the immigrant population of the Muslims was more than the growth of the indigenous population in Assam.⁹⁴

Gohain argued that due to these reasons there were attacks on immigrant Muslims during the anti-foreigners movement which destabilized the democratic establishment in Assam.

⁹³ Chapter III: *Birthplace and Migration*, Census of India, 1931, p. 52, Volume III, Assam, Part I Report by C.S. Mullan, M.A, I.C. S, Printed by the Superintendent, Assam Government Press, Shillong and published by the Government of India, Central Publication Branch, Calcutta, 1932.

⁹⁴ *Anupraweshei abhibasi musalmanor jonosonkhyā briddhir mul karon nohoi* (Infiltration is not the main reason behind the growth of immigrant Muslim population), Asomiya Pratidin, April 24, 2017, Guwahati.

Thus, the future insecurity and uncertainty of Assamese identity and possible outnumbering of the indigenous population in Assam by the British official played a pivotal role in framing the movement in the post-colonial period against illegal migrants. The student organization and its supporters mobilized on these perceived insecurities and threats of demographic changes in Assam.

On January 18, 1980, AASU sent another set of proposals to the Prime Minister of India to address the problems of foreign nationals in Assam and the continued influx of foreigners from Bangladesh and Nepal. The following demands were made: (a) *The National Register of Citizens (NRC) of 1951 should be made up-to-date by including the increased members of each family since the time of compilation of the Register.* (b) *Comparison of the NRC with the successive electoral rolls since 1951 in the process of update.* (c) *The entire Indo-Bangladesh border must be demarcated at the earliest and free zone devoid of houses and trees should be created all along the border and anyone crossing it from either side must be shot at. We attach great importance to this suggestion. We have reached a stage when threat to the state of Assam and to the country can no longer be ignored* (d) *Identity cards must be issued throughout the North East Region. The process should start immediately and all the states and union territories simultaneously. This has been successful in Sikkim and we insist upon implementation in North East region. We are glad that Chief Election Commissioner has recommended this step to the Home Ministry. We urge upon the concerned Ministry to immediately implement it.* (e) *Birth and death certificates at all blocks and village level should strictly be maintained in order to prevent future infiltration into voters' list.* (f) *Additional number of armed police battalions should be raised to help the Border Security Force (BSF) to check fresh infiltration into our territory. A River Police Force may also be raised to check infiltration through the riverine portion of the border.*⁹⁵

AASU stated in the letter that the problem needs immediate attention from the central government.⁹⁶ The same letter also said that the problems of foreign nationals were a national problem and the student organization condemned the communal forces that were trying to discredit the movement.

On February 2, 1980, AASU submitted another memorandum to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The following 'demands' were made: (a) *Foreign nationals must be detected and deported from the country.* (b) *Names of foreign nationals must be removed from the concerned electoral roll before holding any election in Assam. Inclusion of names of foreign national in the electoral rolls in the future must be made impossible with the help of adequate and strong election machinery.* (c) *Border of India with the neighboring countries must be fully protected to check infiltration.* (d) *Indian voters residing in Assam should be issued identity cards with photographs affixed.* (e) *Necessary constitutional safeguards should be provided to the people of the North Eastern Region for the next 15/20 years by making necessary constitutional provisions*

⁹⁵ Letter to the Prime Minister by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President, All Assam Students' Union (AASU), January 18, 1980, Guwahati, Annexure 9 (A), White Paper on Foreigners Issue, October 20, 2012, Home and Political Department, Government of Assam.

⁹⁶ Letter to the Prime Minister by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President, All Assam Students' Union (AASU), January 18, 1980, Guwahati, Annexure 9 (A), White Paper on Foreigners Issue, October 20, 2012, p. 22, Home and Political Department, Government of Assam.

for the protection of the identity of the indigenous people in this region. (f) The Government of Assam should be free to reject certificates issued by the district authorities of West Bengal and Tripura. (g) The authority to grant citizenship certificate delegated to the State Government should be withdrawn by the Central Government immediately from all State Governments, so that these foreigners who are detected and deported from Assam do not come back with citizenship certificates issued by other States. (h) Fresh nominations must be invited when election for Karbi Anglong and North Cachar is announced after the detection of foreigners and their deportation.⁹⁷

It was also pointed out in the memorandum that there was a threat to the existence of the tribal people in Assam due to pressures on economy, land and depleting forest resources due to encroachment on land. The memorandum pointed out that 33 belts and blocks reserved for the tribals were on the verge of extinction due to encroachment.⁹⁸ The condition of the tribals of Tripura was taken as an example to draw the attention of the government on the issue of migration and land in Assam. The issues of land crises and the forest resources of indigenous tribes in Tripura resonated with the tribal population of Assam. Demographic change and threats to indigenous land drew the support base of the tribal people in Assam for the AASU agitation against foreigners.

Although the movement gathered a lot of support, there were others who opposed it. Scholars like Hiren Gohain argued that the actual demands of the Assam movement were impracticable, inhuman and dangerous. Instead of resorting to aggressiveness and intolerance, Gohain argued that the genuine and longstanding fears of the Assamese people must be set at rest when peace returns to the state.⁹⁹ He also argued that the backbone of the movement was the rural militant youth. There were many occasions when the provincial leadership of Assam disagreed with the national leadership in the colonial period (Gohain 1978).

⁹⁷ Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, February 2, 1980 by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President, AASU and Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Secretary, AASU. Annexure 9 (B), *White Paper on Foreigners Issue*, October 20, 2012, Home and Political Department, Government of Assam.

⁹⁸ Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, February 2, 1980 by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President, AASU and Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Secretary, AASU. Annexure 9 (B), *White Paper on Foreigners Issue*, October 20, 2012, Home and Political Department, Government of Assam

⁹⁹ Gohain, Hiren., *Assam Agitation: Blind Hostility is no Solution*, Sunday, Vol. 10, Issue 33, 6-12, 1983, Kolkata.

Despite opposition from certain sections, the period from 1979 to 1985 was marked by various protest activities in Assam. There were economic blockades against the transportation of crude oil from Assam to other parts of India, extraction of forest resources in plywood and bamboo industries, and the intensified demands for identification and deportation of foreign nationals. The protest activities led to disruptions in the public life and the government machinery. The movement ended with a formal agreement with the social movement organizations. We discuss the process of mobilization and the strategies adopted during the anti-foreigners movement of Assam in further detail in the following sections.

Protest against the election and the imposition of President's Rule (1979)

The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) began the movement for the identification and the expulsion of illegal migrants and foreign nationals with the announcement of statewide general strike, the Assam *bandh* on June 8, 197. AASU and the newly formed AAGSP began to organize protest and public meetings in the Judges Field in Guwahati. Students from various educational institutions joined the protests organized by AASU.

In response to the call for the identification and disenfranchisement of foreigners, the Home Minister at the centre invited the leaders of the organizations and convened a meeting on November 21, 1979 to discuss the problems. Representatives of the *Asam Sahitya Sabha*, *Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal* and *Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad* participated in the discussion on the issue of contentious voters' list with the government. The AASU leadership boycotted the meeting.

In the midst of the agitation, the dates for holding the seventh Lok Sabha election in Assam were scheduled on January 3, 1980 and January 6, 1980.¹⁰⁰ AASU and AAGSP announced a series of *bandh* calls and picketing from December 3 to 10, 1979 opposing the elections. The movement organizations protested the filing of poll papers of the candidates contesting the scheduled elections. On December 3, 1979, AASU and AAGSP announced a 34-hour Assam *bandh* to oppose the polls. On December 10, 1979 at Bhabanipur in Barpeta district on the last day of filing the poll papers by the contesting candidates, student activists of AASU opposed the filing of nomination papers of Begum Abida Ahmed, a Congress candidate, for the elections. In an attempt to disperse the protesting student activists, the police repressed the students obstructing the poll activities. The police action in Barpeta led to death of Khargeswar Talukdar, a student activist. The death of the student activist gave rise to a stronger call for boycotting the elections. The movement organizations honoured the death of the student activist as *jatiyo swahid* or the national martyr who laid down his life for the causes of the Assamese people.

Due to protests, elections were suspended in eleven parliamentary constituencies in the Brahmaputra Valley. Elections were held in three constituencies in Silchar and Karimganj in the Barak Valley and Autonomous District constituency comprising of the Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao districts in Assam. Annual examinations in schools had to be deferred due to the protest activities in Assam. On December 12, 1979, President's Rule was declared in Assam in response to the student-led movement. The state legislative assembly of

¹⁰⁰ Assam has fourteen parliamentary constituencies which elect Members of Parliament in the Lok Sabha, the Lower House of Indian Parliament.

Assam was dissolved. The state government headed by Chief Minister Jogendranath Hazarika had to step down from the government.¹⁰¹

Industrial blockades; failed talks and repression (1980)

The second year of the Assam movement witnessed continued protests and strikes in the form of *bandh*, *gherao*, blockade, picketing, election boycott and boycott of government offices. The state responded through repression against the student activists and their supporters. The government began enforcing curfews, arrest warrants and detention of the movement supporters. In order to dispel the anti-foreigners movement, there were police firings leading to casualties of student activists and the supporters in various parts of Assam. In between there were few attempts to conduct talks with the student leaders. Differences over the key issues of identification and expulsion of foreign nationals suspended these efforts.



Photo 4 An AASU leaflet on the issue of foreign nationals published in *Dainik Asom* newspaper, October 25, 1980. The translated version of the texts is given below:

¹⁰¹ Under Article 356 of Indian Constitution, the President's Rule can be proclaimed in a state when the federal government felt that the state was unable to function according to the constitutional provisions. In such circumstances, the provincial Governor exercises the power and functions of state on behalf of the President of India which could be either ended or renewed in six months upon approval from the Parliament. President's rule was declared for first time in the post-colonial state of Assam in December 1979 due to the protest activities of student organization and its supporters.

All Assam Students' Union believes in

* Who is a foreigner---this cannot be determined by any political party. The constitution of the country, the citizenship acts and foreigners-related acts alone will determine it.

* By homogenizing the categories of foreigners and minorities through religious and linguistic bias, a secular (?) government introduced itself as visionless which is completely unsolicited and unreasonable.

* A foreigner is a foreigner. The Indian constitution has not defined citizenship on the basis of language or religion. Therefore, foreigners cannot be divided on the basis of language and religion.

* The members of the Legislative Assembly of Assam and the members of the Parliament from Assam should come out into the streets and raise the demand for identification of foreigners and expulsion along with the Students' Union and the Gana Parishad. Through this, they should prove that they are not of the foreigners, by the foreigners (elected) and for the foreigners (interest).

* The members of the Legislative Assembly of Assam and the members of the Parliament from Assam should come out into the streets and raise the demand for identification of foreigners and expulsion along with the Students' Union and the Gana Parishad. Through this, they should prove that they are not of the foreigners, by the foreigners (elected) and for the foreigners (interest).

* It is not right of the central government to claim the right of monopoly over the entire natural resources of a state. Every Indian has the right to raise voice against this kind of exploitation.

* Use of force and suppressive policies cannot block the

Figure 2: The translated text version (translation mine) of an AASU leaflet titled "AASU believes in" that appeared in *Dainik Asom* on October 25, 1980.

The Election Commission of India made it clear that elections could be held only in three parliamentary constituencies in Assam. Elections were finally held only in two constituencies, in Silchar and Karimganj on January 3 and January 6, 1980 in the Barak Valley despite the continuing protest and strike in the Brahmaputra Valley. Santosh Mohan Dev and Nihar Ranjan Laskar of the Indian National

Congress-Indira Gandhi (INC-I) faction won the elections in the two constituencies with 66.54 percent and 41.83 percent respectively.¹⁰²

Meanwhile, at the centre the Seventh Lok Sabha elections led to the return of the Congress party led by Indira Gandhi.¹⁰³ AASU expressed their resentment that the Election Commission undermined the public opinion of the people of Assam by holding the election in Cachar. The movement organizations said that the Election Commission had given priority to the opinion of foreign nationals in Cachar rather than the rights and identity of indigenous people of Cachar.¹⁰⁴ AASU and AAGSP continued their protests against the elections in the two parliamentary seats of Assam. The movement organizations observed January 21, 1980 as a black day to protest against the oath-taking ceremony of the two Members of the Parliament from Assam

AASU announced a 58-hour *bandh* to protest the holding of elections until the issues of foreign nationals was resolved. The *bandh* started on January 1, 1980 and lasted till January 3, 1980. The government responded by taking a decision to penalize the government officials who co-operated or took part in the protests by deducting the salary of the officials. The student body thus expressed their opposition to the elections and justified that their agitation was necessary in order to protect the identity of the indigenous people of Assam and character of the Indian Constitution.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² *Statistical Report to the General Election, 1980*, The Seventh Lok Sabha, Volume I, p. 131 published by Election Commission of India, 1981. The other faction of Indian National Congress was led by D. Devaraj Urs. It was known as INC (U).

¹⁰³ *Statistical Report to the General Election, 1980*, The Seventh Lok Sabha, Volume I, p. 131 published by Election Commission of India, 1981 pp. 85-86.

¹⁰⁴ *Sakdhere Cacharor khilonjiya rajior astitwa aukan korile* (Sakdher undermined the identity of indigenous people of Cachar), Translation mine. *Dainik Asom*, January 3, 1980.

¹⁰⁵ *Ajir pora prohiloi 58 ghonta Asom bondho* (58-hour Assam bandh from today to day after tomorrow), Translation (mine), *Dainik Asom*, January 1, 1980.

In January 1980, the student activists and its supporters enforced a blockade against transportation of oil resources and its products from the industrial corridor in Duliajan. Duliajan is the head quarters of the public sector corporate Oil India Limited (OIL), a town in Dibrugarh district located in the northeastern part of Upper Assam. The industrial blockade affected the supply of crude oil to the refineries located in Digboi, Noonmati, Bongaigaon and Barauni. The state police therefore warned the protesters of action and use of force but the activists were adamant and protested against resource extraction and transportation.



Photo 5: 58-hour Assam bandh from today to day after tomorrow, reads this headline in *Dainik Asom*, January 1, 1980.

On January 18, 1980, in an attempt to disperse the student activists, the police fired on the protesters. Police firing led to casualties of four persons. Nagen Deka, Kumut Kotoki, Ajit Neog and Nripen Bora died due to the police action.¹⁰⁶ As an immediate response against the state repression, AASU observed a black day on January 21, 1980 to protest the killings in Duliajan. AASU and other movement organizations also boycotted the Republic Day of India in 1980.

¹⁰⁶ *Duliajanot picketingkarir uporot guli salona, nihotor sangkhya 15 buli ashongka* (Firing in Duliajan on picketers, 15 might have been killed) Transaltion (mine), *Dainik Asom*, Guwahati, January 19, 1980.



Photo 6: Firing on picketers in Duliajan, 15 persons suspected to be killed. The underlined headline reads: Black day on 21 January: Appeals for complete non-cooperation. Translation (mine). The picture on the left side is about a protest meeting against repression held in Guwahati. Dainik Asom, January 19, 1980

As a response to the agitation, on February 2, 1980, the central government led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi invited the student movement leadership for talks in New Delhi. The first talks between the leaders of AASU and the government failed to reach at any solution. The government's stance on the determination of the Indian citizenship status in Assam was 1971 while that of AASU was 1951. Following the creation of Bangladesh, in March 19, 1972 in Dhaka an agreement was signed between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman known. The agreement known as the Indira-Mujib Agreement was aimed at strengthening peace and friendship between the two nations for a period twenty five years. The Indian government does not have any agreement with Bangladeshi government either to repatriate or accept the illegal immigrant/refugees as citizens. There were differences over the year of identifying the citizenship status. On February 4, 1980 agitators observed a public funeral organized by the AASU to commemorate the victims of police firing in Duliajan.



Photo 7: Students' union leader invited by Prime Minister, the headline read. The right side column headline in smaller texts reads: Picketing continues at Oil India, Translation (mine), Dainik Asom, January 23, 1980.

In February 13, 1980, agitational activities continued with the participation of government employees in the protest movements. The participation of government employees emboldened the movement further. On February 14, the movement organizations temporarily suspended the protest activities anticipating some response from the state. Suspension of the movement did not yield any favorable response. This led to another round of protest with the call for Assam *bandh* on March 26, 1980. The *bandh* was followed by a public meeting organized by AASU and AAGSP in the Judges' Field, Guwahati on March 28, 1980, to discuss the future mode of protest activities. Soon thereafter, AASU and its supporters announced another series of protests against the government. On April 3, 1980, picketing programs were organized by the student activists in front of the administrative offices of sub-divisions and deputy commissioners located in Assam. On April 10, 1980, the government employees organized a mass *satyagraha* in front of the deputy commissioner's office in the district of Kamrup. Meanwhile, on April 5, 1980 the central government declared the state of Assam as a disturbed area.

On April 12, 1980, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came to Guwahati and held talks with the leaders of the movement organizations. The talks did not yield to conclusive results. Due to continued industrial blockade the functioning of the Guwahati Refinery located in Noonmati was affected. On April 19, 1980, to stop the blockade the government enforced Section 144 which prohibits public gathering. Protest marches against curfew were carried out in different localities in Guwahati city such as Narengi, Chanmari, Panbazar, Bamunimaidam and Zoo Road.¹⁰⁷ On April 20, 1980, the General Secretary of AASU, Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad leader Nibaron Bora were arrested by the police.



Photo 8 Women and students resorting to blockade in the gate at Oil India Limited pipe line pumping center in Narengi, Guwahati. *Dainik Asom*, January 5, 1980.

Narengi was one of the biggest protest sites that witnessed mass gathering of activists and supporters.¹⁰⁸ More than one hundred protesters were injured due to the use of force and tear gas shell by the security personnel. Activists and supporters were detained from joining oil blockades in Narengi. Protesters defied

¹⁰⁷ *Guwahatit janasamudrar juwarot sandhya aain uti gol* (Curfew swept away by the waves of sea of people in Guwahati), Transaltion (mine), *Dainik Asom*, Guwahati, April 21, 1980.

¹⁰⁸ Narengi is a locality close to the refinery in Guwahati.

curfew orders of the Kamrup Deputy Commissioner Kamaleswar Borah in Guwahati.¹⁰⁹



Photo 9: Activists resorted to mass squatting to protest repression in Chanmari, Guwahati, *Dainik Asom* April 21, 1980.

Protesters resorted to squatting in Chanmari after the police blocked their way to Narengi. Government employees joined these protests. Picketing took place in the government offices on April 22, 1980. Offices were also boycotted by the central government employees. Fifty eight gazetted officers were suspended by the government due to boycott observed by the employees in the month of April, 1980. Hundreds of government employees were suspended due to their absence from the offices. AASU activists further led a series of protests in Guwahati with the slogan: “*Hoi, bideshik bohiskar korok, nohoi amak korayokto korok*” (Either expel foreigners or arrest us) (Translation mine). The Assam Preventive Detention Act, 1980 was invoked in order to contain the rising mobilization and blockades. Under

¹⁰⁹ *Guwahatir pothot CRP ir borbor atyachar: Bohu sangkhyok mohilau ahoto* (CRP represses brutally in Guwahati road: many women injured); *Nibarok nirudh aain bolobot: Satadhik neta greptar* (Preventive Detention Act invoked: More than hundred leaders arrested), Translation (mine), *Dainik Asom*, April 20, 1980; April 21, 1980.

this Act, several leaders of AASU, AAGSP, SAKP, PLP and other allied organizations were arrested by the state police.

On April 28, 1980, AASU and AAGSP, the two main movement organizations, organized another public meeting at Judges' Field in Guwahati where they announced a protest program called *Ron Shinga* (Battle Cry). The mass gathering witnessed musical performances by participants in the site of the protest. Local musical instruments like cymbals, drums, flutes, *khols*, *manjari*, *nagar* and *pepa* for were played in the protest site.¹¹⁰ The *Ron Shinga* protest program culturally resonated with the participants and invigorated the public spirit of the participants of the anti-foreigners movement. The protest movement grew spontaneously and the student leaders began to reconnect with participants with an appeal for peace and harmony. AASU observed May 1, 1980 as the Peace and Harmony Day by wearing white badges.

Meanwhile, continuous blockades and boycott resulted in the scarcity of petrol, diesel and kerosene in various parts of Assam and the North East region. The workers of various oil depots rejoined their work with a condition that oil resources could not be supplied outside the North East region of India.¹¹¹ After a series of bargaining with the government, the workers resumed their work on May 2, 1980. Movement organizations called for suspensions of the curfew imposed by the government. Chanmari which is an important intersection in Guwahati city became a major protest site during this time. On May 2, 1980, a student activist named Dulal Sharma wrote the slogan with his own blood in Assamese on the road at Chanmari during the protest gathering: *Tej dim, tel nidiu* (We will give our

¹¹⁰ The musical instruments are used in Assamese cultural traditions and rituals such as Bihu festival, Borgeet and Naam Kirtan.

¹¹¹ *Picketing abhyahoto* (Picketing continues); *Kharuwa tel sarborah bondho thakibo* (Supply of crude oil would be stopped), Transaltion mine, *Dainik Asom*, January 17, 1980.

blood, yet not our oil.) (Translation mine). The slogan drove the spirit of the protests further. While responding to the appeals made by the student organization large number of protesters gathered in Chanmari. The slogan “*Tej dim, tel nidiu*” became a ‘mass slogan’ of resistance against the extraction and transportation of resources like oil together with the clamour to safeguard the Assamese identity. The protest site in Chanmari was encircled by *gamocha* to mobilize people in the following days of the movement.¹¹²

The *Sankalpa Shikha*, meaning Flame of Determination was another symbol of mobilizing the people on the issues of foreigners and oil resources. The *Sankalpa Shikha* relay began in Saikhowa in Upper Assam on May 1, 1980. The *Sankalpa Shikha* was carried through the districts in Assam with a resolve to continue the struggle. The *Sankalpa Shikha* ended with a public gathering in Judges’ Field, Guwahati on May 3, 1980.

The month of May was again marked by protest activities. The movement organizations protested against police actions and arrests of the leaders by observing Anti-repression Day on May 13, 1980. Torch rallies and public meetings were organized in the Assam Engineering Institute, Chanmari ground by the AASU and AAGSP on May 16, 1980. A non-cooperation movement was again launched by the government employees of Assam in May, 1980.

As a mark of support to the movement organizations, many freedom fighters returned their honor of *Tamra Patra* (Copper Honorarium) to the government.

Among the most prominent persons who returned the *Tamra Patra* was Matiram

¹¹² Gamocha, a kind of towel, occupies a significant place in Assamese culture and tradition woven by Assamese weavers. It is considered as symbol of national pride. Gamocha is generally used these days in public programs and activities in Assam to honor and felicitate respectable persons and meritorious achievers.

Sutia of Dibrugarh district on May 25, 1980. He was a well known Congress worker and a freedom fighter. In Barpeta district, eleven persons returned their honor of *Tamra patra* to the government to express their solidarity with the AASU-led movement.

There were also counter mobilization activities against the anti-foreigners mobilization of AASU and its allied organizations. The All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) organized protests in various places of Assam such as Bijni, Barpeta, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Rupahi and Samaguri on May 26, 1980. Twenty supporters and activists of AAMSU lost their lives due to police firing. Violence broke out in these places. Curfew was imposed due to violence in the following days.

AASU-led movement continued with clashes and violence in various places in Assam. Meanwhile, the government of Assam asked two leaders of AASU Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bharat Chandra Narah to surrender before the police within June 5, 1980. On June 19 and June 21, 1980 protests organized by the AASU and its supporters in districts of Tinsukia and North Lakhimpur in Assam led to the imposition of curfew. On June 26, the movement organizations called for Assam *bandh*. In the following month, on July 4, 1980, activists tried to stop disrupt the activities at the Guwahati airport. Student activist and supporters also obstructed the running of passenger trains in Assam. On July 7, 1980, the student activists organized another series of picketing in central as well as state government offices.

The economies of neighboring states were also affected due to the continuous student-led movement in Assam. After some negotiations, the movement

organizations lifted their economic blockade on the transport of bamboo, timber and plywood on July 25, 1980.

Due to the continuous protest activities and disturbances in Assam, the central government again announced the imposition of Assam (Disturbed Areas) Act, 1955 and Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (Assam and Manipur), 1958 from August, 1980.

On August 18, 1980 talks were held at Shillong. The talks were mediated by the Manipur chief minister Raj Kumar Dorendra Singh between the movement organizations leaders, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Nibaran Borah and the representatives of government, the Governor of Assam, Lalan Prasad Singh, Adviser to the Governor, H.C. Sarin and Union Minister of State home affairs, Yogendra Makwana. The movement organizations demanded the release of imprisoned leaders in different jails in Assam and lifting the salary cut of government employees (Thakur 2014, p. 34).

On October 11, 1980, the central government convened a talk in New Delhi to find a solution to the issues raised by the AASU leaders. The talk, however, remained inconclusive without any solution. On returning from New Delhi, the AASU called for Assam *bandh* on October 27, 1980. Blockades against transportation of oil continued in various parts of Assam. The student leaders also announced a *gherao* program against the legislators who were not supporting the movement on October 30, 1980. Clashes broke out during the *gherao* program in Howly in Lower Assam which led to imposition of curfew.



Photo 10: Activists stopping a goods train transporting crude oil in Guwahati. Source: *Dainik Asom*, October 5, 1980.

On November 2, 1980, the movement organizations took out a procession called *Dispur Chalo* (March to Dispur). Clashes broke out between the movement participants and the police. An employee of the state forest department of the Assam secretariat Dilip Chakrabarty lost his life. As a result of the clashes, curfew was declared in the Dispur area. The movement organizations and employees' union demanded for compensation of the victim who lost his life. The movement organization later observed a public funeral at Judges Field in Guwahati for Madhu Baishya who died in the Howly clashes and Dilip Chakrabarty who died in the Dispur clashes. On November 11, 1980, they were declared as *Swahid* (Martyrs).

The month of November was marked by *bandh* calls. During a 36-hour bandh call on November 17, 1980 there were clashes in Dalgaon in Darrang district between the activists of AASU and AAMSU. The clashes between the activists led to imposition of curfew in the area. Curfew was imposed as a preventive measure for six hours the following day in the district. On November 28, 1980 more than four hundred students of the college were brought to Panbazar Police Station in Guwahati for questioning.

Meanwhile, on December 6, 1980, the state government was formed by Syeda Anwara Taimur who took the oath as the chief minister. As an immediate reaction to the installation of Anwara Taimur's government, the movement organizations announced a series of protests. The non-cooperation movement was supported by the employees of the state government. State responded with force. In Patacharkuchi in Lower Assam, a student lost his life due to police firing while taking part in protest organized by AASU.

The month of December, 1980 witnessed the imposition of restrictions on newspapers by the government. On December 23, 1980 and December 31, 1980, *The Assam Tribune* and *Dainik Asom* and *Dainik Janambhumi* were censored by the government of Assam.¹¹³

Failed negotiations, differences over base year (1981)

On January 6, 1980, the censorship of newspapers was struck down following an order of the Guwahati High Court. In the month of January, 1981 the movement-led by student organizations continued in various parts of Assam. There were interventions through appeals, talks and meetings in 1981 with AASU leaders and leaders from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over the identification and expulsion of foreigners from Assam. The student leaders demanded that the base year for detection, deletion and deportation of foreigners should be 1961. However, the central government did not accept the demand raised by the AASU and the allied organizations.

AASU demanded the government to identify the illegal migrants who came to Assam between 1961 and 1971. AASU leadership was of the opinion that these

¹¹³ *Asom Andolon 1979-1981: Din panji, Asomiya Pratidin*, Guwahati, January 1, 2018.

sections of migrants were illegal since they did not file the applications for Indian citizenship.¹¹⁴ The student organization demanded that the illegal migrants should be identified and declared as foreign nationals. The central government constituted a study on January 24, 1981 comprising of central minister and high-level officials on the issues of foreign nationals raised by AASU. The Governor of Assam, Lalan Prasad Singh recommended that 1967 should be treated as the base year for detection and deletion of foreigners from electoral rolls. The government felt that the anti-foreigners movement, were being taken over by radical elements.



Photo 11: *Impasse in talks*, reads this headline on the left side. The other headline in right side reads: *Protest against arrests, repression, Translation (mine)*. *Dainik Asom*, August 22, 1981.

Towards the end of January, 1981 the Assam Disturbed Areas Act, 1955 was further extended for two months. The freedom of press was restricted with imposition of banning of publications of two local Assamese presses namely--a fortnightly call *Mahajati* from Tezpur and a weekly, *Agradoot* from Guwahati under the Assam Special Powers (Press) Act, 1960 on February 26, 1981. On

¹¹⁴ *Alusona asol: doh dinor pisot punor boithak* (Impasse in dialogue: Meetings after 10 days again), *Dainik Asom*, Guwahati, July 16, 1981.

March 5, 1981 the Assam College Teachers' Association (ACTA) organized a citizens' meet that appealed Home Minister Zail Singh to resolve the issues of the foreign nationals through tripartite talks involving the student organization, state and central government.

State politics was soon in turmoil. On March 19, 1981, the state government led by Anwara Taimur faced crisis in the budget session in the Assam Assembly. The Assembly session was boycotted by the Communist Party of India (Marxists). The CPI (M) held the government responsible for the failure to provide orderly governance during the President's Rule. A no-confidence motion was moved against the Taimur-run Council of Ministers by two independent legislators. It won the no confidence motion because of the support of four legislators of the Plains Tribes Council of Assam (PTCA). However, the Taimur government had to step down later after they lost the majority support as the twenty three CPI (M) legislators and four PTCA legislators withdrew their support to the government on June 28, 1981. The state government under Anwara Taimur was not recognized as a legitimate government by the student activists as they considered that the government was elected by illegal voters who were foreign nationals.¹¹⁵ AASU said that the hopes and aspirations of the indigenous people of the state had been suppressed by the state. The students' union was of the opinion that the state government came to power by crushing democracy and it was ruling with a communal agenda dividing people on the basis of language and religion. AASU stated that the government was responsible for police atrocities and killing of the

¹¹⁵ *Samprodaiyik shoktisomuhok Asomor raije proshoi nidiye: chtro santha* (People of Assam will notshelter communal forces: student union). Translation (mine), *Dainik Asom*, June 29, 1981.

student activists.¹¹⁶ On June 30, 1981 President's Rule was imposed in Assam for the second time due to the collapse of state government under Congress (I) rule.



Photo 12: This headline reads: People of Assam will not shelter communal forces: student union, Translation (mine). *Dainik Asom*, June 29, 1981.

On April 6, 1981, the Commissioner of Assam Plains Division, E.S. Parthasarathy was killed in a bomb blast at his office in Jorhat. The killing of Parthasarathy marked a phase of radicalization of the anti-foreigners movement. Government forces felt the hardliners faction of the student activists and supporters of the movement resorted to violence and the process of negotiation was delayed. There were incidents of blast in oil pipelines in the district of Barpeta as well as explosion in railway tracks in various parts of Assam.¹¹⁷ On August 14, 1981, student organizations called for a statewide *bandh* due to the lack of response from the central government. The movement organizations called for the boycott of the Independence Day in 1981. In the months of November and December, 1981, AASU and AAGSP resumed the movement by calling *bandhs* and public

¹¹⁶ *Sampradayik shoktisomuhok Asomor raije proshoi nidiye: chtro santha* (People of Assam will notshelter communal forces: student union). Translation (mine), *Dainik Asom*, June 29, 1981.

¹¹⁷ *Dainik Asom*, June 29, 1981.

meetings. AASU and AAGSP called for a public meeting in Judges' Field in Guwahati on November 10, 1981 but the state government denied permission. Due to inconclusive nature of the bargaining and negotiations between the government and student leaders over the base year of identifying and deporting of foreigners, the mobilization continued in various parts of Assam. Mobilization continued through rail and road blockades as well as *bandh* calls in various places of Assam

On November 19, 1981, a student named Dhrubajyoti Nath died at Dhing during a rail blockade in Nagaon district. On November 20, 1981, businessmen in Guwahati were arrested by the police for supporting the 72-hour *bandh* call of AASU and AAGSP. The Guwahati Chambers of Commerce protested the arrest of the businessmen and called for *bandh* in Guwahati on November 21, 1981. The movement organizations again resorted to civil disobedience campaigns through road blockades. During the civil disobedience campaigns, the student organization appealed for boycott of travel tickets in state-run buses, ferries and trains. The movement organizations called for a 12-hour road blockade on November 30, 1981. Police resorted to firing in Beseria in the Darrang district and used force to suppress the movement supporters at Bhelauguri in Nagaon district. During this phase, movement organizations called for 36- hour *bandh* on December 14, 1981 and police resorted to tear gas in order to disperse protesters in various places of Assam.¹¹⁸ Towards the end of December, 1981, the student activists organized poster campaigns in Assam for two days. On December 31, 1981, the movement organizations called for another 36-hour road blockade.

The leaders of the movement organizations were invited for talks in Delhi. AASU and AAGSP leaders Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Bhritgu Phukan, Arup Bordoloi and

¹¹⁸Dainik Asom, December 15, 1981.

Pabindra Deka took part in the talks in New Delhi on August 17, 1981. The talks failed. Towards the end of August, 1981, the central government invited the student leadership again for negotiation to New Delhi. On August 31, 1981, the student leaders held talks with the representatives of the government. However, there was no precise settlement and differences between the government and social movement leadership continued.

Political instability amid continuous movement (1982)

The civil disobedience campaigns and *bandh* calls by student organizations and its allies continued in 1982. The government and student leaders sat for several rounds of negotiation to find a solution to the foreign national issues. The talks however remained inconclusive in 1982 as well. Congress (I) was reinstated in January, 1982 but the government was dissolved in March, 1982. President's rule was again imposed.

The civil disobedience movement led by student activists and its supporters continued in January 1982. Congress (I) leader Keshab Chandra Gogoi took the oath as the Chief Minister of the state on January 13, 1982. The Keshab Chandra Gogoi-led Congress (I) government lasted for less than three months. Gogoi resigned from power that led to dissolution of the government on March 18, 1982. This led to a renewed phase of President's Rule in the state of Assam.

The Republic Day of India was again boycotted by the movement organizations in protest. The movement organizations called for public curfew known as *Janata Sandhya Aain* on the day of Republic Day in 1982. The lawyers association of Assam too boycotted their courts in support of the demands of the student-led movement.

The government, student movement leaders and members of the opposition political parties in New Delhi sat for tripartite talks from April 7, 1982 but the negotiation remained inconclusive. The movement organizations called for 24-hour Assam *bandh* on May 6, 1982. In the following month on August 7, 1982, the Chief Election Commissioner of India announced that elections will not be held in Assam until the issues of foreign nationals were addressed in the state. On August 15, 1982 a *bandh* call was again announced by the movement organizations.

There was another round of negotiations between the student movement leaders and the government on August 25, 1982. The negotiations, however, did not resolve the issues. On November 2, 1982, the central government convened a meeting to introduce a bill in the Parliament of India to extend President's rule in Assam for more than one year. On November 29, 1982, AASU and AAGSP asked its members and supporters across Assam to remain vigilant about the activities of political parties.¹¹⁹ AAGSP took the decision to oppose the election after an executive meeting in Tezpur. The movement organizations were of the opinion that government was imposing the elections unilaterally without addressing the concerns of foreign national issues. To protest the holding elections in Assam, the student organization and its supporters announced their agitation by calling for *Assam bandh* on December 2, 1982.¹²⁰ AASU and AAGSP leaders Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Atul Bora were arrested by the police in Guwahati during the day of *bandh* on December 2, 1982.¹²¹ The student organization also called for public rally in rural areas on December 6, 1982. The movement organizations also asked its

¹¹⁹ *Nirbason byorto koribologi Sangram Parishad sangkalpa* (Sangram Parishad determined to foil elections), *Dainik Asom*, November 30, 1982.

¹²⁰ *Andulon susi ghukhona: 2 Decemborot Assom bondho* (Program for movement announced: Assam *bandh* on December 2), Translation (mine). *Dainik Asom*, November 26, 1982.

¹²¹ *Bhrigu-Atul promukhye 7 jon netak greptar, mardhor: probol protikriya* (7 leaders along with Bhrigu, Atul arrested, vehement reaction), Translation (mine), *Dainik Asom*, December 3, 1982.

members and supporters to visit the residents of state employees to stop them from joining office during the day of *bandh* call.



Photo 13: The headline reads: Program for protest announced: Assam bandh on December 2, Translation (mine). Dainik Asom, November 26, 1982.

In December, 1982, the anti-foreigners mobilization witnessed a campaign called *Nispradeep* (Blackout) by the student organizations and its allies which advocated switching off their lights in homes. Volunteers were engaged in household campaigns to keep lights off at home in various parts of Assam. The *Nispradeep* campaign was an innovative symbolic protest to involve the people while living indoors to keep the movement alive in the public minds despite absence from direct involvement in the social movement. The *Nispradeep* was observed on December 8, 1982 for two hours. AASU resorted to slogan shouting to protest the repression and the government's plan to conduct election in Assam. AASU appealed to the people of Assam for participating in slogan shouting on the evening of December 15, 1982.¹²² The movement organizations said that the

¹²² Godhuli dhwoni diyok, Chatro Santha, Sangram Parishador ahban (Raise slogans in the evening: appeals student union, Sangram Parishad), Translation (mine). Dainik Asom, December 14, 1982.

agitational program was organized to protest the government move for conducting election against the public opinion of the people of Assam.

Movement leader Joynath Sarma was arrested by the police on December 6, 1982. AASU leaders abstained from sitting another round of negotiation with the government until the release of Joynath Sarma.¹²³ Joynath Sarma was arrested under the National Security Act, 1980. The act provide for preventive detention in certain cases. Joynath Sarma was the leader of the *Swechha Sevak Bahini* (SSB), a volunteer wing of AASU that was alleged to have been involved in the militant activities during the mobilization. AASU leadership said that in order to resolve the problems of foreign nationals in Assam there was a need to establish a cordial atmosphere to sit for talks with the government. The student leaders and the allied organizations continued with the poster campaigns in public in support of the demands raised in the movement. On December 15, 1982, the activists took to slogan shouting for fifteen minutes in the evening. The following slogans were raised: *Asom morile amiu morim* (If Assam dies, we'll also die); *Tej dim tel nidiu* (We will shed our blood, yet not oil); *Morile mori jam deshar sake mori jam* (We'll die for the country if we're to die); *Torile desh morile swarga* (Defend the country, death in the heaven); *Jai Aai Asom* (Victory to Mother Assam) which resonated the sentiments of the mobilization and the supporters.

¹²³ *Ejonok jabo nidiyat kali netriborgo Dilliloi nogol* (Leadership did not go to Delhi yesterday as one was not allowed); Translation (mine). *Dainik Asom*, December 5, 1982.



Photo 14 Raise slogan in the evening, appeals Student Union, Gana Parishad, Dainik Asom, December 15, 1982.

The renewed campaigns of the movement in December 1982 led to clashes between the protesters and the security forces in Hajo. A security personnel belonging to Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was killed.¹²⁴ A sub-inspector of police was also injured leading to imposition of curfew for an indefinite period in the area. Over 120 persons in Hajo in the district of Kamrup were arrested following the clashes between protesters and security personnel.

¹²⁴ Hajot sandhya aain: 1 jon CRP nihoto (Curfew in Hajo, one CRP dead), Translation (mine). Dainik Asom, December 17, 1982.



Photo 15: Curfew in Hajo 1 CRP dead, Translation (mine), Dainik Asom, December 17, 1982.

Anti-election protest; violence and repression (1983)

The year 1983 witnessed the most intense and violent campaigns during the period of agitation led by AASU and AAGSP. Due to the absence of an elected government, the President's Rule in Assam necessitated assembly elections. On January 4, 1983, the representatives of the central government and the leaders of movement organizations--AASU and AAGSP sat for another round of discussions in New Delhi to resolve the issues of the agitation. However, the discussions did not yield any affirmative outcome as it was suspended midway. The suspension of talks in Delhi led to immediate reaction in Assam. Movement organizations called for another round of protest through *bandh* call on January 7, 1983. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Bhriugu Phukan, Atul Bora, Joynath Sarma and Biraj Sarma were arrested by police at Guwhati airport. The local newspapers--*The Assam Tribune*, *Dainik Asom* and *Janambhumi* were again restricted from reporting news on agitation of students and its allied organizations in January, 1983.

On January 6, 1983, the Election Commission of India announced that phase wise polls will be conducted in Assam in the dates of February 14, 17 and 20, 1983. The AASU and AAGSP called for the boycott of the elections. The arrests of leaders of the student organization and its allied body were responded with a series of protests such as slogan shouting, torch rally, *bandh* calls and blackouts in various districts of Assam. The student organization and its supporters called for *bandh* in Nagaon district on January 8, 1983. The movement organizations also called for observing black out in the dusk.

Slogan shouting, torch rally, black out and other activities of protest were observed in the Brahmaputra Valley by the student activists and movement supporters demanding release of the leaders and suspension of elections. The call for boycott of elections was also responded by the employees association known as *Sadou Asom Karmachari Parishad* (SAKP) of the government with non-cooperation movement. The SAKP members refused to perform election duties despite the orders given by the government. Curfew was imposed in the localities of Guwahati and Nagaon to restrict public processions and protest activities of the movement supporters. There were police firings against protesters in Barpeta and Darrang districts. On January 24, 1983, one person was killed in Darrang district. Curfew was imposed in Darrang district in the following days due to continuous protests. The Republic Day on January 26, 1983 was met with non-cooperation by the movement organizations who appealed the people to abstain from participating in

the government organized events.¹²⁵ AASU leadership also appealed to the tea plantation workers to boycott the elections.¹²⁶

Protest against the 1983 elections intensified in Kamrup and Darrang districts. Places like Baihata in Kamrup district witnessed pelting of stones on vehicles by the activists. Curfew was imposed in Sipajhar in Darrang district due to protest activities. Agitators also burnt down bridges and cut down trees for road blockade in highways to obstruct the electoral process in Tangla, Sipajhar and Baihata areas.¹²⁷



Photo 16: This headline read: Public curfew today, Translation (mine). *Dainik Asom*, January 26, 1983.

From February 5, 1983, the AASU and AAGSP began the 18-day non-cooperation movement in order to counter the electoral process. During the period of non-

¹²⁵ *Aji janata sandhya aain* (Public curfew today). Translation (mine). *Dainik Asom*, January 26, 1983.

¹²⁶ *Chah shromike nirbasonor birudhita korok: AASU* (Tea workers should oppose the election: AASU), Translation (mine). *Dainik Asom*, January 29, 1983.

¹²⁷ Kalbag, Chaitanya. *Anti-election fire burns Assam as Indira Gandhi tries to impose her brand of politics*, India Today, February 28, 1983.

cooperation, government stepped up the repressive measures against agitating leaders of AASU, AAGSP and SAKP with arrest warrants under National Security Act, 1980, the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), 1968; and the Assam Executive Magistrates (Special Powers) Act, 1983. These laws were used to arrest thousands of supporters of agitation and employees refusing to obey government orders and put in jail arbitrarily. It was estimated that 1.5 lakhs armed security personnel was deployed to maintain law and order in Assam which was calculated as one armed man for 57 persons.¹²⁸ Additional security forces were brought from Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Section 144, which prohibited gathering of more than five persons as per the codes of Criminal Procedure of India, was imposed all over Assam in that period. The arrest of the top leaders of the movement organization prompted another set of leaders to take charge of mobilizing the people and continue the movement against holding of elections. Leaders such as Nagen Sarma, Nurul Hussain, Girindra Kumar Baruah, Arup Bordoloi, Nikibur Zaman, Pabindra Deka, Atul Goswami, Kamala Kanta Kalita, and Bijon Kumar Mahajan took charges in organizing the movement to obstruct the polling process.

Social unrest became the order of the day where movement organizations and their supporters resorted to various means of protests such as civil disobedience campaigns and non-cooperation movements. The district units of the student organization and allied agitationists co-ordinated with each other through cyclostyled bulletins and word of mouth to communicate the protest strategies of black outs and public curfew (*janata curfew*) due to the press censorship imposed

¹²⁸ Kalbag, Chaitanya. *Anti-election fire burns Assam as Indira Gandhi tries to impose her brand of politics*, India Today, February 28,, 1983

by the government on local newspapers.¹²⁹ The continued co-ordinated protest through strategic obstruction to accessibility of roads, *bandh*, and public curfew by the agitating organization hindered the electoral campaigns of political parties as well. In the span of ten days from February 2, 1983, the toll of violence reached to 70. The student activists and supporters in Guwahati gathered near the rail-cum-road bridge in the evening near Brahmaputra river where they pledged to fight the last battle of Saraighat in a symbolic remembrance to legendary Ahom general Lachit Barphukan who repulsed the invading Mughal army in the seventeenth century.¹³⁰ The mass mourning of the victims of firings and atrocities in public places ignited the mobilization of people to gear up against the election.

The mobilization against the elections triggered confrontation between the security personnel on duty and supporters of movement in places like Tezpur, Mangaldai, Sipajahar and Tangla. Black flags were put up in business establishments in Howly of Barpeta as a mark of protest against forceful conduct of election. During the protest against elections, large scale violence was reported from places like Samaria, Gohpur and Nellie on February 12, 14 and 18, 1983 respectively. On February 18, 1983, large-scale violence at Nellie (in Morigaon district) killed many persons¹³¹ mostly Muslim of East Bengal origin. AASU called for Guwahati *bandh*

¹²⁹ Kalbag, Chaitanya. *Anti-election fire burns Assam as Indira Gandhi tries to impose her brand of politics*, India Today, February 28., 1983

¹³⁰ Kalbag, Chaitanya. *Nellie massacre: Assam's image as multi-cultural and secular state lay shattered*, India Today, March 15, 1983.

¹³¹ Kalbag, Chaitanya. *Nellie massacre: Assam's image as multi-cultural and secular state lay shattered*, India Today, March 15, 1983. There are differences of estimate regarding the number of persons killed in Nellie. The local newspaper Dainik Asam put the figure as 500 on February 21, 1983 but said it could be a thousand as per eye witnesses while officials put it between 500 to 600 (February 21, 1983). It is also estimated by other sources that more than three thousands were killed during the Nellie violence (*Asom Andolon 1979-1985: Din panji Asomiya Pratidin*, January 1, 2018).

when Indira Gandhi visited violent affected areas in Assam on February 21, 1983.¹³²

The physical violence upon Muslim immigrants was allegedly committed by mostly Tiwa tribals and lower caste Hindu social groups of the area, who supported the anti-foreigners campaigns. It was claimed that indigenous communities faced land alienation and pressure on land resources due to settlement of Muslim peasants over a long period time dating back to the pre-independence era. However, recent narratives suggests that the immediate cause of violence upon Muslim immigrants was their participation in the Assembly Elections of 1983 despite the boycott call given by the movement organizations together with the spread of word of kidnapping of female members of the Tiwa community.¹³³ Immigration itself was seen as a fundamental problem and the issues of land alienation were focused as a dominant narrative led by the movement organizations.



Photo 17 Non-cooperation of employee begins. Translation(mine). Dainik Asom, February 6, 1983.

¹³² Dainik Asom, Guwahati, February 21, 1983.

¹³³ There are various local narratives as expressed by immigrant Muslim, Tiwas and caste Hindu Assamese communities in connection with Nellie massacre. Each of the communities has own version of narratives. For further reading of the narratives on Nellie massacre, please refer "Memories of the Massacre" (115-134) in The Nellie Massacre of 1983 by Makiko Kimura, Sage, New Delhi, 2013.



Photo 18: News headline reads: *Thousands killed by imposing elections, 40 more killed yesterday; 500 in Nellie*, Translation (mine). *Dainik Asom*, February 21, 1983.

The 1983 assembly elections faced mass boycotts in the Brahmaputra Valley. The demand for identifying and disenfranchisement of foreign nationals from the electoral rolls prior to the elections was kept aside by the state and central governments which agitated the movement further. Political parties such as Bharatiya Janata Party, Janata Dal, and Lok Dal (C) too joined the protest and demanded that polling should not take place until the voters' lists are made free from the dubious electors. Political leaders like Jaswant Singh, Bansilal Soni, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and S. N. Mishra alleged that the electoral rolls were prepared in 1970 which did not enlist the indigenous voters but bigger number of foreigners (K. Deka 2007, p. 85). Printing press and publishing houses in Assam refused to print the electoral rolls. The government had to print the electoral rolls in Kolkata. The election of 1983 was termed as “illegal” by the movement organizations and its supporters. Employees working under the central and state governments responded to boycott calls by abstaining from duties. The workers from industries, cinemas, public transports, co-operative societies, and business establishments expressed their solidarity through non-cooperation to the causes of the movement. Trainee officers from all India services such as Indian Administrative Service

(IAS) and Indian Foreign Service (IFS), employees from 35 central ministries and Bihar Government were put into electoral duties due to non-cooperation from the state government employees.¹³⁴ Government servants were imprisoned, suspended as well as dismissed from service during the period of agitation for being involved in anti-foreigners campaigns. Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharya, an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, who was serving as the Deputy inspector general (DIG) of police (borders), involved in the tasks of identifying the illegal migrants in electoral rolls in Mangaldai Lok Sabha constituency in 1979 and other parts of Assam, was also suspended from his office due to his alleged support to the movement. During the process of identification of foreigners, the Chief Minister of Assam was Golap Borbora from the Janata Party. Bhattacharyya was imprisoned for one year under National Security Act (NSA) in 1981 for his alleged involvement with leaders of the agitation after the change of government under Anwar Taimur from the Congress.¹³⁵ The government either suspended or dismissed 425 employees for refusing to perform electoral duties and failing to report to work in offices that included the dismissal of 50 gazetted officers and 30 non-gazetted officers and the suspension of 362 temporary employees.¹³⁶ The actions against employees were taken by the government under the Essential Services Maintenance Act, 1968. These employees were involved in the non-cooperation movement as a part of the anti-election campaigns led by the student and allied bodies.

¹³⁴ *India Today*, February 28, 1983.

¹³⁵ Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya was first entrusted with the responsibility to detect illegal immigrants/foreign nationals in Mangaldai constituency by the Janata Party Chief Minister Golap Borbora on May 9, 1979. In an interview with *India Today*, Bhattacharyya stated that he detected 47, 658 foreigners in Mangaldai Lok Sabha constituency. He found 14, 406 foreigners in Anwar Taimur's Dalgao constituency alone. By early 1980, Bhattacharyya located 5, 87, 000 foreigners in Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Jorhat Lok Sabha constituencies following the National Register of Citizens, 1951 and the electoral rolls for successive elections. According to him, 55 per cent of the detected foreigners were Hindus. His alleged involvement with movement leaders led to his imprisonment under National Security Act for a year in 1981. *India Today*, February 28, 1983.

¹³⁶ *Dainik Asam*, February 20, 1983.

In the run-up to the elections, anti-election protest led to intense public-police confrontation during the month of February, 1983. February 1983 might have been one of the bloodiest chapters in post-colonial period in the history of Assam. The movement took many people to streets and clashes with police and other enforcing persons that killed 35 persons in a span of 24-hours.¹³⁷ Incidents of police firing and clashes leading to deaths in anti-elections protest were reported from places like Sipajahar (Darrang district), Mangaldai (Darrang), Nowboicha (Lakhimpur), Sadiya (Tinsukia), Sivasagar, Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Nalbari, Bongaigaon, Bilasipara (Dhubri), Rangia (Kamrup), Mushalpur (Baksa), Tihu (Nalbari), Kenduguri (Jorhat), Dhing (Nagaon), Patacharkuchi (Barpeta), Damdama (Nalbari), Barpeta, Boko (Kamrup), Samaria, (Kamrup), Chaukhowa (Darrang), Tamulpur (Baksa), Juria (Nagaon), Gogamukh (Dhemaji), Gohpur (Biswanath), Bihpuria (Lakhimpur), Jorhat, Teok (Jorhati), Lahowal (Dibrugarh), Chabua (Dibrugarh), Rohmaria (Dibrugarh), Titabar (Jorhati), Lakwa (Sivasagar), Amguri (Sivasagar), Sootea (Sonitpur), Goreswar (Baksa), and Bhabanipur (Barpeta) in the month of February, 1983. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited violent affected places in Nellie and Gohpur on February 21, 1983.¹³⁸

Despite stiff resistance against the state machinery, the assembly election was held. The election witnessed widespread inter-group clashes and violence in various other places in Assam like Digboi, Tamulpur, Jagiroad, Gohpur, Goreswar, Dhing, Mangaldai, Kampur where large number of people were dead and rendered homeless due to burning down of houses. Thus, the repressive measures of the government during the Assam movement accelerated intensive mobilization and

¹³⁷ *Dainik Asam*, February 17, 1983.

¹³⁸ *Gohpur, Nelliet prodhanmontri* (Prime Minister in Gohpur, Nellie). Translation (mine). *Dainik Asom*, February 22, 1983.

engendered more violence. As far as the election results were concerned, the Congress faction led by Indira Gandhi secured 90 seats out of the 108 contested constituencies. Local newspapers and other reported that voter turnout was very low.¹³⁹ Hiteswar Saikia took the oath of office as the chief minister. A retired Air Vice Marshal named Manmohan Bahadur, who was a pilot and assigned with many election-related flights in 1983 in Assam recalled as follows:

*“Assam bandhs were very frequent, with road transport vehicles and railway trains not allowed to ply. There was no power most of the time and it was a hideous and alarming sight to see processions of thousands of people holding mashaalsshoutings ‘Indians go back, go back, go back. The election bought in a government with a 52 per cent vote-share of the 32 per cent electorate who exercised their franchise—this meant a ‘popular’ government was to come to power with only 16 per cent population backing it! The pressure on the elected government was enormous, as indicated by press reports of people indicating not to take charge.”*¹⁴⁰

Protest campaigns against elections in 1983 also created a rift between the Bodo tribals and the Assamese leadership. There were inter-community clashes between Bodos and Assamese at Gohpur over a longstanding issue of land resources. Clashes and violence in Gohpur area led to deaths and rendered people homeless.¹⁴¹ A local newspaper *Dainik Asom* on February 16, 1983 reported that group clashes and police firing (to control violence) killed 167 people and 6,500 people homeless. Another report in *The New York Times* estimated that in February, 1983 nearly 21,000 Bodo people were displaced and took shelter in Arunachal Pradesh.¹⁴² PTCA was one of the advocates of a separate tribal state called Udayachal which was demanded for the plains tribes in 1960s. Plain Tribal

¹³⁹ *India Today* estimated that the voter turnout was not more than a fifth of total 86.7 lakhs voters. It also projected except in the 15 constituencies of Cachar areas as normal as there was opposition to the agitation and other 61 constituencies of Nagaon, Kamrup, Goalpara and Karbi Anglong with high countries of immigrant Bengali Hindus and Muslim could filled the 126-member assembly (*India Today*, February 28, 1983). The national news magazine *India Today* described Assam election were held under violent circumstances and said Indira Gandhi was trying to impose her own brand of politics. On February 20, 1980, polls were held in 15 constituencies but saw very low turnout except in tea gardens and minority areas (*Dainik Asam*, February 21, 1983).

¹⁴⁰ Bahadur, Manmohan. *Why I'm thinking of Assam 1983 elections this poll season*, *Mail Today*, March 7, 2017.

¹⁴¹ *Gohpur ancholor nihotor sangkhya 167 jon* (167 person dead in Gohpur area), Transaltion (mine). *Dainik Asom*, February 16, 1983.

¹⁴² Hazarika, Sanjoy. *Mrs. Gandhi on a Tour of Assam Blames 'Agitators' for Massacre*, *The New York Times*, February 22, 1983.

Council of Assam (PTCA) was founded in 1960s but soon PTCA joined party politics and fought the elections of Lok Sabha and Assam assembly. The PTCA which commanded sizeable tribal supporters in Assam had actively participated and campaigned for assembly polls in 1983. The activists and supporters of anti-foreigners movement were against PTCA's move to participate in the elections.

AASU leaders stated that the February 12, 1983 incidents at Gohpur (then Darrang district) took place due to the conspiracy of political parties. The student body stated that the political parties triggered the incident to sideline the issue of encroachment of tribal land by the foreigners. In a press statement issued by President in-charge Nurul Hussain and General Secretary in-charge of AASU published in February 16, 1983 in a local newspaper *Dainik Asom*, the leaders said that the Indira Gandhi-led Congress and Left alliance political parties were continuously trying to divide the people of Assam on the lines of Hindu-Muslim and tribal-non-tribals over the last three years. This was done to weaken the movement through spread of misinformation thereby creating doubts in the minds of people. The main purpose of dividing the people of Assam into tribals and non-tribals by the political parties was that there were large numbers of foreigners who were illegally settled in protected tribal belts and the parties led by Indira Gandhi-led Congress and Left wanted to secure and safeguard these groups of foreigners.¹⁴³

Bharatiya Janata Party leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Assam in February, 1983. He held the Prime Minister of India responsible for the violent situation in Assam. Vajpayee said that there was irregularity in the conduct of elections. Therefore, the 'illegality' was not just confined to the electoral papers but in the

¹⁴³ *Dainik Asom*, February 16, 1983.

process of holding the elections too.¹⁴⁴ Members of Parliament from three political parties- Janata Party, Lok Dal and Bharatiya Janata Party—boycotted the Presidential speech in the Parliament of India on February 18, 1983 to protest against the forceful conduct of elections and repression in Assam.¹⁴⁵ In the month of April, 1983, there were killings of seven activists in Golaghat district on April 3, 1983. The death of activists was known as *Sapta Swahid* (Seven Martyrs) by the movement organizations. It was considered as extra-judicial killings as the persons were arbitrarily arrested from Panka village of Golaghat district and were killed by the security personnel.¹⁴⁶

AASU and AAGSP took their protest to New Delhi with 72-hour hunger strike on June 1, 1983. In July, government denied permission to the SAKP to organize a public meeting at Latasil ground of Guwahati on July 24, 1983. AASU activists were arrested in Guwahati while attempting to organize the SAKP meeting. In the month of August, there were incidents of police firing at Goreswar where two students were killed. AASU declared the two students as martyrs who laid down their lives for the cause of the agitation. AASU and AAGSP also took a series of protest programs in the month of August, September and October such as road blockades, *bandhs*, slogan shoutings and black outs. AASU observed the “black day” in protest against the budget session of the Assam state assembly on September 1, 1983 along with slogan shouting program. AASU called for *bandh* in Barpeta and Kamrup districts on October 26, 1983 to protest police atrocities against its activists and supporters. On November 11 and 12, 1983, AASU

¹⁴⁴ *Asomor ei poristitir babe prodhan montriyei dayi: Vajpayee* (Prime Minister is responsible for current situation in Assam: Vajpayee), Translation (mine), *Dainik Asom*, February 20, 1983.

¹⁴⁵ *Asomot lua byowostar protibadot tini ta rashtriya dalar rashtropotir bhakhon borjon* (Three national political parties boycott Presidential speech to protest against the steps taken in Assam), Transaltion (mine), *Dainik Asom*, February 19, 1983.

¹⁴⁶ Barua, P.J. *Sapta Swahids of Panka, 12 years of Assam Accord* , *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, August 14, 1997..

observed road blockade and black out program when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi came to Assam to inaugurate the Naranarayan Setu, a bridge over Brahmaputra river in Lower Assam. Movement organizations demanded timely solution of the issues raised in the movement. In the month of December, 1983, AASU and its allied organizations sat for statewide hunger strike on December 5 protesting against the repression of police on student activists and supporters.

Continued protest, unsettled movement (1984)

In 1984, the movement organizations continued the protest by adopting various strategies against the presence of foreign nationals in Assam as the state did not respond with a formal solution. The AASU, AAGSP and its network of supporters continued the mobilization through rally, public meeting, *bandhs*, *satyagraha* and blockades in 1984.

The protests continued throughout the year of 1984 with road and rail blockades, black outs, public rally and *bandh*. There were also attempts at negotiation between the state and movement organizations on the issues of determining illegal migrants and citizenship status of the people in Assam.

In the month of February, 1984, AASU organized blockades and *satyagraha* demanding solutions to the problems of foreigners in Assam. AASU called for a 36-hour road blockade on February 3, 1984 and February 4, 1984. AASU organized *satyagraha* and appealed for mass participation in February, 1984. Students in Guwahati boycotted their classes in support of the demands of the movement. On February 4, 1984, the blockade affected railway operation in Assam. Train coaches were derailed in Pathshala in Barpeta district. There was also

a bomb blast on the railway track between Dekargaon and Tezpur stations in Sonitpur district on the day of blockade announced by AASU.¹⁴⁷



Photo 19 : A headlines in a newspaper reads: *Class boycott, work abstention, protest slogans today*. Translation (mine). *Dainik Asom*, March 16, 1984.

On March 15, 1984, participants of mass *satyagraha*, mostly college and university students in Guwahati, were detained and suppressed by the police. AASU and AAGSP leaders like Biren Baiishya, Atul Bora and Tapan Deka were arrested on the day of organizing *satyagraha* in Guwahati.¹⁴⁸ Students in Guwahati protested against repression of police on activists and supporters in March 16, 1984 by boycotting classes in the educational institutions.¹⁴⁹ Students appeared their examination wearing black badges as a mark of protest against repression. AASU also organized slogan shouting program in the evening to protest the atrocities of police committed on the student activists and supporters. The employees of state government under the SAKP supported the protest program of

¹⁴⁷ *Phisplate khulat rel durghotona: rel pothot buma bisphuron* (Train accident due to opening of fishplate: bomblast on railway track), Translation (mine), *Dainik Asom*, February 5, 1984.

¹⁴⁸ *Satyagrohik nirmombhabe mardhor aru atyachar medicaletu rehai nai* (Satyagrahis mercilessly beaten up and suppressed, no respite in medical also), Translation (mine), *Dainik Asom*, March 16, 1984.

¹⁴⁹ *Aji shreniborjon, kormo biroti, protibad dhwani* (Class boycott, work abstention, protest slogan today), Translation (mine), *Dainik Asom*, March 16, 1984.

AASU by suspending their work for one hour in their office hours. AASU and AAGSP took out public rally demanding solutions to the issues of identity and illegal migrants in Assam.

On February 27, 1984, the Hiteswar Saikia-led Congress (I) government was celebrating the one year anniversary of his government in power at Judges Field, Guwahati. The movement organizations responded with *bandh* calls in Guwahati city and blackouts in the evening.

AASU called for road blockades on June 25, 1984. There was continued protest against repression in various districts of Assam. AASU called for Nalbari and Kamrup districts *bandh* on July 21, 1984 to protest the custodial death of student leader Subhash Sarma in Nalbari district. Public curfew (*janata curfew*) was also enforced by movement organizations to protest the visit of Chief Minister at Tezpur on July 27, 1984. On August 15, 1984, the movement organizations again called for boycott of the Independence Day celebration along with eight hour Assam bandh due to the lack of response from the government.

On August 23, 1984, the government convened another round of talks with the leadership of movement organizations. There were discussions among the political parties for determining the citizenship status and illegal migrants residing in Assam. There were debates among the political parties such as Congress (I), Communist Party of India (Marxist), Lok Dal, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Janata Party. Some demanded that the base year for identifying the illegal migrants and citizenship status should be 1979 while others demanded that it should be 1971. The Election Commission of India later held that electoral rolls would be prepared taking 1971 as the base year in Assam.

Moderate phase of mobilization, towards peace agreement (1985)

The year 1985 showed moderate protests in the state. The long years of mobilization had already affected the economy of the state, law and order and the normal political processes in the region. The student organizations and the allied bodies stood for a negotiated settlement. The need was to end the mass mobilization and bring the state to normalcy. The movement continued until the mid August of 1985.

On 26 January, 1985, AASU and AAGSP called for boycott of the Republic Day of India. The movement organizations also attempted to enforce road blockades. On January 29, 1985, the leadership of movement sat in New Delhi for another round of negotiations with the government.



Photo 20: This newspaper headline reads: *End of six year movement: accord concluded*, Translation (mine). *Dainik Asom*, August 17, 1985

On February 20, 1985, All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) representing the linguistic and religious minorities of Assam met the Home Minister of India. They did not accept the the offer of the government that 1971 would be accepted as the year to detect foreigners in Assam. AAMSU protested

the year of deadline—1971—to determine the citizenship status of people residing in Assam. Meanwhile, a series of negotiations began in New Delhi with AASU and AAGSP leaders towards finding a solution of the foreign nationals and citizenship issues from the month of April to August, 1985. On April 8, 1985, the Home Secretary R.D. Pradhan sat for discussions with the leadership student organization and the supporting bodies. The negotiations between the government and movement organizations did not reach at any agreement until May 8, 1985. On July 29, 1985 the Home Secretary held talks with the leaders of the movement organizations. This was followed by a negotiation with the student leaders led by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan on August 9, 1985. AASU and AAGSP leaders went to New Delhi on August 14, 1985. The series of negotiation paved the way for an accord to end the anti-foreigners movement between the government and the movement organizations. The accord known as *The Assam Accord* was signed at 2.45 a.m. in New Delhi which was signed by the Home Secretary of Government of India, R.D. Pradhan; P. P. Trivedi, Chief Secretary of Government of Assam; Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President, AASU; Bhrigu Phukan, General Secretary, AASU; Convener of AAGSP Biraj Kumar Sarma in the presence of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.¹⁵⁰ The agreement also led to dissolution of the government of Assam led by Hiteshwar Saikia which was accorded the status of a caretaker government.¹⁵¹ The government agreed to suspend the voting rights of foreign nationals who migrated to Assam between January 1966 and March, 1971. The date and base year to identify foreign nationals and citizenship status in Assam was fixed at March 25, 1971. The Prime

¹⁵⁰ *Chobosoria andulonor samoroni: suktit uponito* (End of the six-year of movement: accord concluded), Transaltion (mine). *Dainik Asom*, August 17, 1985.

¹⁵¹ *Bidhan Sabha bhangga: Saikia totwobodhayak mukhyomontri* (Legislative Assembly dissolved: Saikia is caretaker Chief Minister), Translation (mine), *Dainik Asom*, August 19, 1985.

Minister of India formally announced from the ramparts of Red Fort on August 15, 1985 in the Independence Day speech about the Assam Accord in New Delhi.

Contentious debates between state and movement organizations on IM (DT) Act, 1983

The Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act enacted in 1983 by the central government generated criticism amongst the student organizations and its supporters due to the contentious content over determining the citizenship status of perceived illegal migrants living in Assam. The IM(DT) Act was enacted in the Parliament of India when there were only two elected representatives from Assam belonging to the Indian National Congress (Indira) from Barak Valley. There was no Member of Parliament (MP) in the Lok Sabha from the Brahmaputra Valley, the region where the anti-foreigners campaigns was widespread. The movement organizations demanding the detection and deportation of illegal migrants termed the IM (DT) as an act to protect and shield the foreign nationals of Assam.

The IM (DT) act enacted in the backdrop of massive student-led movement in Assam was applicable only to Assam whereas the rest of India was governed by the Foreigners' Act, 1946. The IM (DT) Act was applied with protective provisions to perceived illegal migrants as the responsibility of giving proof lied with the complainant whether a suspected person is an Indian citizen or not. The Act put restrictions on the investigating official from inquiry such as checking of identity document in the premises or homes of suspected foreigners. In addition, the IM (DT) Act also had the provision of application fee of ten rupees for each and every complaint sworn with affidavits by at least two persons provided that the suspected foreign national lives within the jurisdiction of police station

(Bhattacharyya 2001, p. 154-156). The movement organizations and its supporters called the IM (DT) Act as an impediment to the objectives of the anti-foreigners agitation as well as discriminatory in nature since it was applicable only to Assam. Under the IM (DT) Act, out of the 9625 cases of expulsion orders, 5667 could be served the notice whereas 1467 persons were traced for actual physical deportation which was blamed on the cumbersome judicial process and its shielding provisions against inquiry on the suspected illegal migrants (Bhattacharyya 2001, p. 153).

In the years following the Assam Accord, 1985, there were demands for striking down the IM (DT) in Assam by student organization AASU and its supporters as the law was claimed to be partisan towards foreign nationals and was creating procedural impediments against detection and expulsion of illegal migrants. AASU engaged in legal battle in the judiciary to determine the validity of IM (DT) Act. The case of IM (DT) Act reached to the apex court of India, the Supreme Court, which reviewed further regarding the validity within the Indian jurisprudence based on the Constitution of India. The IM (DT) Act of 1983, introduced by the Congress government with the objective to prevent harassment of genuine Indian citizens in the name of foreigners or illegal migrants, was viewed by the student-led movement leadership and supporters as a deterrent and obstruction to their anti-foreigners campaigns.

The IM (DT) Act was struck down by the Supreme Court of India in July 2005 following a petition filed by former AASU president Sarbananda Sonowal in 2000 after a long series of judicial process. The Supreme Court in its verdict held that IM (DT) was unconstitutional as it negated the constitutional mandate contained in Article 355 of Constitution of India with duty of protecting every State from external aggression and internal disturbance by the federal government and termed

that it was the biggest barrier in identification and deportation of illegal migrants.¹⁵² The Supreme Court also observed that the presence of illegal migrants was an aggression on the State of Assam causing internal disturbances such as insurgency and had hampered the growth of Assam despite the availability of vast natural resources.¹⁵³

States Responses to Student Movement in Assam

Student movements in the post-colonial period in Assam mobilized on the socio-economic issues and *indigenous* identity. The movement led by the student and social organizations in Assam had also raised questions on the control and use of natural resources of the state. The AASU-led mobilization on illegal immigration and citizenship influenced the dynamics of local politics. The anti-foreigners movement led a section of youth to take up armed movement against the state for the protection of identity and control of resources.¹⁵⁴

Our analysis reveals that the first part of the movement from 1947 to 1960s, the student-led movement was mostly based on socio-economic issues and demand for protection of linguistic identity. The movement for setting up the refinery in Assam instead of Barauni in 1950s was led by political parties such as the Praja Socialist Party (PSP). As a response, the Government of India announced the establishment of refinery with production capacity in smaller scale in Noonmati in Guwahati while relenting to the demands of the oil refinery movements.

¹⁵² Judgement of Sarbananda Sonowal versus Union of India, Case No. Writ Petition (Civil) 131 of 2000, Date of Judgement: July 12, 2005, Supreme Court of India.

¹⁵³ Judgment of Sarbananda Sonowal versus Union of India, Case No. Writ Petition (Civil) 131 of 2000, Date of Judgement: July 12, 2005, Supreme Court of India.

¹⁵⁴ We can cite the example of emergence of United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in late 1970s. For further details on the ULFA movement in Assam, please see Pahi Saikia's *The political economy and changing organizational dynamics of the ULFA insurgency in Assam* in Jugdep S. Chima's *Ethnic Subnationalist Insurgencies in South Asia*, pp. 41-60, Routledge, New York, 2015.

The movement for medium for Assamese language in the colleges under Gauhati University in 1972 was largely led by the AASU that was supported by the middle class section of the Assamese society. The language based mobilizations in 1960s and 1970s brought about conflict between Assamese and Bengali nationalists in Assam. In both the cases, mobilization was based on the questions of protecting the identity and cultural heritage. The mobilization of Assamese as the official language of the state and medium of instruction was accommodated by the state. In the same way, the concerns of Bengali nationalists over the recognition of Bengali language as the official language were accommodated by the state with the recognition of Bengali as official language in the districts of Barak Valley during the same period in 1960s.

Political opportunity structure and the movement outcome

In social movement literature, political opportunity structure, as this study argues, is related to the degree of openness and closure of the state in response to mobilization. The political opportunity structure in the context of student mobilization in late 1970s and early 1980s in Assam was a mixture of conciliatory moves, bargaining and closure in the form of denial or concessions. The interaction between the state government and the movement leadership sometimes led to bargaining.

Due to the rising instances of violence during parliamentary election in early 1980s, the state engaged in violent tactics to quell the agitation against the illegal immigrants. The student activists and supporters faced repression in the form of violent suppression such as open firing on protesters, clamping of curfew, arrest warrants and detention of student leaders which affected the public life at large.

Besides, the academic life of students was disrupted during the movement due to disruptive activities. Even the census for 1981 could not be conducted in Assam due to the non-cooperation movement led by state government employees in support of the student-led agitation. State, central and semi-government employees who supported the anti-foreigners movement had to face suspension and orders of dismissal from the state. These employees were later reinstated as per the amnesty procedure that emerged in the end of movement as the understanding between the state and the movement organizations. The state adopted repressive measures by invoking laws such as the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) to discourage the state employee from supporting the movement.

The disagreement over the nature and conduct of elections between the state and social movement organizations led to violence in various places of the state which disrupted the normal political process of conducting free and fair elections in the state. Repressive laws like the Assam Disturbed Areas Act were promulgated to put down the student-led anti-foreigners movement. During the period of student mobilization, there was instability in the state legislative assembly. The provincial government of Assam was considered by the social movement organizations as illegitimate because the majority of voters did not participate in the electoral process due to the calls of boycott of polls in 1983. Finally, the provincial government led by the Congress Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia was dissolved in 1985.

The state also tried to co-opt the leaders of the student mobilization during the intense phase of mobilization in 1980s through bargaining and negotiations. After a series of bargaining and dialogues between the movement leaders and the state, the movement ended with the tripartite agreement known as the Assam Accord.

The central and provincial governments were the party to the state on one side and the AASU and the AAGSP were party to the social movement organizations on the other side. Both the parties accepted a time frame to identify the foreigners and illegal migrants after a series of negotiations. Socio-economic and political grievances were raised by the social movement organizations. The aim was to protect the interests of indigenous Assamese people. A separate clause was also added to the Citizenship Act, 1955 which stated that March 25, 1971 would be the deadline to determine the citizenship of the people living in Assam for all purposes as per the Assam Accord concluded in 1985. Clause 5.8 of the Assam Accord goes thus:

Foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law. Immediate and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigner (Source: Foreigners Issue, Assam Accord, 1985).¹⁵⁵

Clause 6 of the Assam Accord mentioned the following words regarding the safeguards of identity:

Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people (Source: Foreigners Issue, Assam Accord, 1985).¹⁵⁶

There were also political measures, most importantly the disenfranchisement of migrants for ten years who came to Assam from former East Pakistan (i.e. Bangladesh) between 1966 (January 1) and 1971 (March 24 deadline) as per the Foreigners Act, 1946 and Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964. This category of persons, if detected as foreigners in the process of registration in the respective districts, would be deleted from electoral rolls and disenfranchised for a period ten years. However, citizenship would be restored after the ten year period as per the provisions of the Indian laws such as the Foreigners Act, 1939 and The

¹⁵⁵ *Assam Accord and Its Clauses*, Implementation of Assam Accord: Government of Assam, <https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in> (Accessed February 20, 2018).

¹⁵⁶ *Assam Accord and Its Clauses*, Implementation of Assam Accord: Government of Assam, <https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in> (Accessed February 20, 2018).

Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1939. Those who came to Assam by January 1, 1966 and whose names were registered in the electoral rolls of 1967 were accepted as Indian citizens as per Clause 5.2 of the Assam Accord. They were allowed to stay but the voting rights were suspended for ten years. However, the terms of the citizenship conditions such as the rights over land, trade, commerce, industry, employment opportunities, and acquiring passport remained unchanged (Sinha 2007).

Apart from the above partial concessions, the state also applied repression. The student activists and supporters faced repression at the hands of the state. Police and military tried to repress the violent student campaigns. The movement organizations estimated that state repression led to deaths of more than 800 activists and supporters during the six-year period of the Assam movement.¹⁵⁷

The year 1983 showed high intensity of mobilization as it was evident from the large number of deaths of activists and security personnel owing to the electoral exercise. There was a decline in mobilization gradually in 1984 although public protests through black outs, boycott calls of government events such as Independence Day and Republic Day celebrations and, bandh calls persisted. The decline of the movement in terms of continuous public support for such a long duration covering more than five years perhaps brought to the negotiation table with moderately agreed clauses of determining the citizenship status of illegal immigrants. It may be mentioned that the Assam Accord has resulted in citizenship

¹⁵⁷ *Martyrs of Assam Agitation*, <https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in/portlets/martyrs-of-assam-agitation> (Accessed February 20, 2018)

provisions applicable to Assam in the interest of protecting the indigenous identity which is different from the all-India citizenship laws.¹⁵⁸

The increasing deployment of military forces during boycott of calls for the 1983 elections accelerated AASU's mass mobilization. In order to repress the movement, the government resorted to strict security measures in important public places such as an absolute ban on organizing procession, public meetings and rallies. There was also censorship on the circulation of newspapers during the Assam movement. Assamese press was regarded as the means which spread the campaigns against illegal migration and other issues raised by the students-led movement organizations. Local press played an important role in disseminating the information on the incidents of violence and police acts of the state. This also helped AASU in mobilizing larger support for the Assam movement.

The movement organizations such as the AASU and AAGSP representatives were signatories to the Assam Accord but there were organizations and parties who stayed away from the agreement such as the local regional party *Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad* (People's Council of the Northeast) and *Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal* (Assam Nationalist Party) who were also collaborators to the anti-foreigners movement since the beginning of late 1970s. These organizations who refrained from signing the accord had differences in the content laid down in the agreement especially on the deadline of identifying the illegal migrants and determining of

¹⁵⁸ The cut-off date of determining the citizenship status for persons living in Assam has been 25 March, 1971 as per the Sect 6A of Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 1985 while the rest of India is governed by other provisions. The validity of Assam specific citizenship law with the insertion Section 6A has been challenged by organizations such as Asom Sanmilita Mahasangha, All Assam Ahom Association and other organizations relating to the issue of illegal migrants in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has referred to the Constitution Bench to examine the validity of Section 6A of Citizenship Act. The Assam Tribune, Guwahati, February 6, 2018.

the citizenship status. The co-optation and partial negotiation restored the stability of the state of Assam but it left few parties discontented.

In 1990s, the Governor of Assam S.K. Sinha wrote to the President of India K.R. Narayanan with a report entitled Report on Illegal Migration into Assam to undertake measures to thwart the silent demographic invasion of Assam which was termed as grave threats both to the identity of the Assamese people and to national security. The Report also mentioned that illegal migration into Assam was the core issue behind the Assam student movement and prime contributor to the outbreak of insurgency in the State.¹⁵⁹ The Governor also recommended the repeal of the IM (DT) Act and computerized record of the Indian citizens based on NRC and stateless persons as well. The recommendations of the Governor of Assam were in tandem with the Assam Accord which drew further attention from the central government on the issue of demographic transformation due to immigration. The Governor recommended that a new legislation should be provided for a just, fair and expeditious detection of illegal migrants. Those identified should be declared stateless with neither voting rights nor the rights to acquire immovable property. Thus, the report on illegal migration of the Governor of Assam tried to attract the attention of the Indian state further in 1990s.

In terms of responses on the issues of education, industrialization and socio-economic grievances expressed by the student-led mobilization in Assam, the state has has used methods of co-optation through a tripartite pact between movement organizations, the centre and the provincial government. Among other negotiated settlements, the opening up of the political opportunity structure led to the

¹⁵⁹ *Report on Illegal Migration into Assam*, Governor S.K Sinha's letter to President K.R. Narayanan, dated November 8, 1998, Guwahati.

establishment of educational institutions of national importance (E.g Tezpur University and Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati), oil refineries (E.g. Numaligarh Refinery Limited in Golaghat district), increase in the royalties of natural resources such tea and oil, infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges (E.g. Bogibeel-Kareng bridge connecting Upper Assam districts across Brahmapura river), industrial units (E.g. Brahmapura Crackers and Polymer Limited in Dibrugarh) in Assam over longstanding claims of deprivation and neglect by the successive governments at the centre.¹⁶⁰ It may also be mentioned that AASU-led movement that demanded for barbed wire fencing in Indo-Bangladesh national border has either been partially implemented or responded by the state. Out of the 3,326 kilometers of Indo-Bangladesh border, 2746.44 kilometers of the fencing project has been completed.¹⁶¹ Land acquisition and natural conditions such as extended rainy season, difficult terrain conditions in the northeastern region affected the pace of the work. Multi-pronged approach has been adopted for security arrangements such as deployment of border guarding force, border fence, border road and flood lights to tackle the influx of illegal immigrants.¹⁶²

One of the key demands of AASU led-mobilization has been the identification and deportation of foreign nationals from Assam. In response to the continued demand, the National Register for Citizenship Registration (NRC) has been updated by the government which is based on Clause 5.8 mentioned in the Assam Accord.

¹⁶⁰ For further information on action taken on Assam Accord, see Government of Assam, Implementation of Assam Accord website: <https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in/portlets/assam-accord-and-its-clauses#Clause%206%20:%20Constitutional,%20Legislative%20&%20Administrative%20safeguards> (Accessed February 22, 2018)

¹⁶¹ *Slow land acquisition delaying border fencing works*, Special Correspondent, The Assam Tribune, February 8, 2018, Guwahati.

¹⁶² Ibid.

The issue of citizenship became the centre point of debates in state politics of Assam. AASU consistently opposed citizenship of either illegal migrants or refugees from all religious shades since 1980s that violates the clauses of Assam Accord. AASU called the Assam Accord a national promise. In one of the leaflets published on the occasion of 25 years of Assam Accord, it has stated that the political parties belonging to Congress, Asom Gana Parishad, BJP, CPI, CPI (M) have been in powers in both Delhi and Dispur over the last twenty five years yet it did not implement the clauses of the accord. AASU termed Prafulla Kumar Mahanta who was the leader of Asom Gana Parishad and ruled Assam as the chief minister for a period of ten years as a traitor.¹⁶³ In May 5, 2005, the student organization negotiated with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on the implementation of Assam Accord.¹⁶⁴ Indo-Bangladesh border and update of National Register of Citizens figured in the talks. The student body also termed the amendments of citizenship laws in 2003 violated the Assam Accord.¹⁶⁵ The student body stated that IM (DT) was repealed but the barriers to identify foreign nationals remained the same.

In July 2010, four activists belonging to All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) were killed in police firing who were protesting the pilot project of National Register of Citizens that began in Barpeta district of Lower Assam which

¹⁶³ *Asom suktir 25 bosor* (25 years of Assam Accord), p. 2, Dr. Samujjal Kumar Bhattacharya, Adviser, AASU..

¹⁶⁴ *Asom suktir 25 bosor* (25 years of Assam Accord), p. 2, Dr. Samujjal Kumar Bhattacharya, Adviser, AASU..

¹⁶⁵ The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2003 laid down a fresh procedure regarding the eligibility for Indian citizenship by birth. The amendment mentioned that every person born in India between January 26, 1950 and July 1, 1987 will be a citizen of India if both parents are citizens of India or one of the parents is an Indian citizen provided the other is not an illegal migrant at the time of his birth. AASU stated that the citizenship amendment of 2003 legitimizes the claim of Indian citizenship of children of foreign nationals by violating the deadline set in the Assam Accord, that is, March 25, 1971.

led to suspension of the exercise.¹⁶⁶ AAMSU opposed the process of updating NRC on the ground that the names of genuine Indian citizens would be deleted whereas the AASU blamed the state government of Assam for succumbing to pressure from the minority student organization for the sake of vote bank. The process of NRC updation began under the supervision of the Supreme Court of India in December, 2013. The partial draft list was first published on December 31, 2017. AASU termed the publication of NRC as a historic event and it was a tribute to the martyrs who lost their lives in the anti-foreigners agitation.¹⁶⁷

The Assam Accord was arrived at with representatives of AASU and AAGSP by the government without required consensus of the terms of reference such as Clause 6 which says “the constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards as may be appropriate shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.”¹⁶⁸ The outcome of the movement and the political opportunity structure is the complex nature of identity politics in the state. Despite the efforts under the National Register of Citizens, this has compounded the process to arrive at consensus of realizing the “constitutional, legislative and constitutional safeguards” to Assamese people.

Summary

This chapter tried to locate student-led issue based mobilization and state responses in the social movement literature. The analysis in this chapter reveals that the student bodies engaged themselves against the challengers through

¹⁶⁶ *The Hindu*, July 22, 2010. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/Normal-life-hit-by-bandh-in-Assam-govt-suspends-NRC-update/article16206291.ece> (Accessed February 21, 2018)

¹⁶⁷ *The Assam Tribune*, January 1, 2018, Guwahati.

¹⁶⁸ Implementation of Assam Accord, Government of Assam, <https://assamaccord.assam.gov.in/portlets/assam-accord-and-its-clauses#Clause%206%20:%20Constitutional,%20Legislative%20&%20Administrative%20safeguards> (Accessed February 22, 2018)

institutionalized and non-institutionalized tactics. The analysis of the process of student mobilization discussed in the chapter was divided into various phases. The 1950s witnessed a movement which revolved around socio-economic issues mostly concerning the use of crude oil extracted from Assam. This led to the refinery movement. This movement marked the beginning of articulation of socio-economic grievances by the student bodies in the state. The lack of industrialization despite the presence of mineral resources became a longstanding grievance thereafter which surfaced in the Assam movement in late 1970s. The official language movement that was hugely participated by students in 1960s and its further ramifications in the political landscape of undivided Assam has also been discussed in the chapter.

The chapter also examined the debates and process of mobilization using citizenship and indigenous identity as the master frame. The chapter also examined the political opportunity structure of movement organizations in Assam which engaged in a series of bargaining and failed talks with state institutions finally leading to the tripartite Assam Accord. The issue of safety and security identity of *indigenous* Assamese people vis-à-vis the identification and deportation of undocumented migrants has been analyzed in the light of identity politics in the state. The chapter also touched upon the recent political developments and the outcome of the Assam movement. The next chapter will focus on student mobilization and state responses of Arunachal Pradesh.

Chapter 5

Student Mobilization and State Responses in Arunachal Pradesh

Introduction

In February, 2018, All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) stated their continued opposition against the citizenship of Chakmas and Hajong refugees and the rehabilitation policy for the Tibetans in the state.¹⁶⁹ AAPSU, the apex students' body which claimed to represent the collective identity and interest of the indigenous ethnic groups of Arunachal raised their concerns on the increase in the numbers of population among the refugee population. AAPSU felt that the growth of the refugee population is a major threat to the demographic balance of indigenous tribes such as Khampti, Singphos and Tangsas. The student organization holds the opinion that refugees have encroached upon community land of the indigenous tribes and the Namdhapa National Park and allegedly engaged in anti-social activities like murder, kidnapping and extortion.¹⁷⁰

The AAPSU in Arunachal Pradesh has been engaged in contentious politics in an organized manner directed against state policies on the citizenship of refugees in the state. The refugees settled in Arunachal Pradesh for more than five decades have been demanding full citizenship rights through judicial intervention. There has been organized

¹⁶⁹ The Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy, 2014 of the central government of India laid down guidelines for extending government-sponsored socio-economic development schemes for housing, employment, health, land lease and trade licenses to the Tibetan refugees settled in various states of India. AAPSU protested the implementation of the rehabilitation policy in Arunachal Pradesh on the ground that it would affect the identity, culture and socio-economic interests of the indigenous communities. AAPSU argued that the Tibetan rehabilitation policy would dilute the constitutional safeguards for the indigenous people. See *AAPSU reiterates stand against citizenship status of refugees*, *The Arunachal Times*, Itanagar, February 15, 2018.

¹⁷⁰ AAPSU reiterates stand against citizenship status of refugees, *The Arunachal Times*, Itanagar, February 15, 2018.

opposition from the students and social organizations representing the indigenous communities. The movement organizations of the indigenous groups opposed the citizenship demands of the refugees. These organizations have raised the issues like resource scarcity, demographic change, and socio-economic interests that are considered to be linked to the issue of citizenship of refugees.

The activism of student and indigenous groups in Arunachal Pradesh raises the following questions: Why are student organization and indigenous groups mobilizing against the citizenship of refugees? What are the patterns and trajectory of the student-led movement? How does the student organization mobilize resources in their movement on the issue of citizenship? What are the state responses to the movement against citizenship? These questions will be analyzed in the context of Arunachal Pradesh from various aspects of social movement literature. Student groups of Arunachal Pradesh have mobilized on the collective concerns representing the *indigenous* ethnic identities.

Student mobilization took place in Arunachal Pradesh in 1980s on the issues of inter-state Assam-Arunachal boundary and the demand for withdrawal of refugees like the Tibetan, Chakmas, Hajongs and illegal migrants from Arunachal Pradesh. Refugee issue was at the forefront particularly on the issue of settlement of Chakmas and Hajong ethnic groups in various districts of Arunachal Pradesh. AAPSU adopted resolutions in a meeting held in Pasighat on August 26, 1985 demanding the Government of India for withdrawal of refugees like Chakmas and Tibetans settled temporarily in Arunachal Pradesh. AAPSU claimed that the refugee population threatened the demographic profile of the state.¹⁷¹

There are varying estimates to the number of refugees who came and settled in India's frontier state of Arunachal Pradesh which was earlier known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). NEFA was under the administration of the Governor of Assam. NEFA was thinly populated and it was designated as frontier tract since the colonial period.

¹⁷¹ Copy of "Resolution adopted in the meeting convened by the All Arunachal Pradesh Students" Union held at Pasighat on 26th August, 1985.

Chakma and Hajong refugees were settled in NEFA between 1964 and 1969. One estimate says that the number of families who came initially constituted 2748 families comprising 14,888 members.¹⁷² The displaced people were rehabilitated based on the recommendation of the adviser of the Governor of Assam, P.N. Luthra, in places like Chowkham, Miao, Bordumsa, Diyun and Balijan in a period 6 years (1964-69). By 1979, the population of the refugees rose to 21, 494. There are varying estimates of the communities. A White Paper of the Government of Arunachal Pradesh published in 1995 estimated that there were 60, 000 refugees while the census report of the year 2001 estimated the number as 42, 313.¹⁷³

This chapter discusses the historical process of state formation in Arunachal Pradesh, the colonial annexation and post-colonial politics. The chapter also discusses the history of the student organization, issues in student mobilization and the state responses to the student activism in Arunachal Pradesh in the post-colonial period. Although varied issues have been taken up by the student organization and other socio-cultural organizations, the student activism of Arunachal Pradesh largely emphasized on the issue of citizenship of Chakma, Hajong and Tibetan refugees. Citizenship and rehabilitation claims made by these refugees have been contested by the student organizations. The chapter discusses the multiple complexities of student mobilization, regional politics and the issues of citizenship of the refugees in Arunachal Pradesh.

Brief note on the ethnic demography of Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh is a home to myriad ethnic groups such as the Nyishi, Monpa, Adi, Galo, Mishmi, Tagin, Apatani, Puroik, Wancho, Nocte, Tangsas, Hrusso, Sajolang, Bugun, Singpho, Khampti, Sartang, Sherdukpen, Memba, Khamba, Meyor and Yobin. Arunachal Pradesh is the largest state in the Northeast in terms of geographical area covering a total area of 83,743 square kilometers. Arunachal Pradesh became a state in

¹⁷² Gamlin, Jarpum, *Arunachal dilemma*, *The Statesman*, October 15, 2015, Kolkata.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

India on February 20, 1987. It was earlier known as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) till 1972.¹⁷⁴ It was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh on January 20, 1975. Prior to this, Arunachal Pradesh was a Union Territory.¹⁷⁵ Arunachal Pradesh shares the international borders with Bhutan which to the west, China to the north and northeast, and Myanmar to the east.¹⁷⁶ As per the statistics of the 2011 census, the total population of the state was calculated as 1, 383,727 with 17 persons per square kilometers and the literacy rate is 65.38 per cent. The decadal population growth of the state was 26.03 per cent. So far as the political representation is concerned, Arunachal Pradesh has two Members of Parliament (MP) in the Lok Sabha (the Lower House), one Member of Parliament (MP) in the Rajya Sabha (the Upper House), and sixty members in the Legislative Assembly of the state. The state comprises 17 districts with its capital situated in Itanagar

Arunachal Pradesh is rich in oral history with diverge cultural heritage. The disparate tribes have their own folklores and stories, myth of origins and settlement. Majority of tribes belong to the Mongoloid stock speaking Tibeto-Burman variants of languages. The religions followed in Arunachal Pradesh are Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and other traditional beliefs such as Donyi Polo and Rangfra are also practiced by different tribes in the state. The tribes are dispersed in various parts of the state classified as western, central and eastern regions of the state. The western region is mostly inhabited by tribes such as Monpa, Sartang and Sherdukpen; the central region is inhabited by Hrusso, Bugun, Sajolang, Puroik; Tani ethnic groups such as Nyishi, Apatani, Galo, Tagin, Adi and Mising. The upper part of Siang region is inhabited by Memba and Khamba tribes. They mostly follow Buddhism. Mishmi ethnic groups such as Idu, Taraon (Digaro) and Miju are found in the hills and valleys of Dibang and parts of Lohit region. The Dibang region towards the Chinese border is also inhabited by Meyor (Zhakring). Khampti, Singpho, Nocte, Wanchos, Tangsa, Tutsa, and Yobin live in the eastern plains and hilly terrains

¹⁷⁴ See Government of Arunachal Pradesh official website <http://www.arunachalpradesh.gov.in/at-a-glance-2/> (Accessed March 12, 2018)

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

towards India-Myanmar border. Deoris, Ahoms, Morans, Adivasis and Gorkhas mostly live in the eastern districts in the state. Ethnic groups such as the Tibetans, Chakmas and Hajongs are scattered in the eastern, central and western regions of the state. These groups came as refugees from neighboring Tibet (currently part of People's Republic of China) and Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) in the post-colonial period in 1950s and 1960s.

Tribes and ethnic groups	Refugee groups
Monpa, Sartang, Sherdukpen, Hrusso, Sajolang, Bugun, Puroik, Hill Miri, Memba, Khamba, Nyishi, Apatani, Tagin, Galo, Adi, Meyor, Mishmi, Khampti, Singpho, Wancho, Nocte, Tutsa, Tangsa, Zakhing, Yobin, Mising, Deori, Ahom, Moran, Adivasi, Gorkha	Tibetan, Chakma, Hajong

Figure 3: Ethnic composition in Arunachal Pradesh.

Historical overview of colonial annexation of Arunachal Pradesh (1826-1900)

There are various colonial accounts on state formation in Arunachal Pradesh. Colonial policy towards the people of present day Arunachal Pradesh was different from the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. This section will shed light on the accounts of the colonial administrators and other scholars on the frontier territory in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

John M'cosh, a British surgeon, who authored the *“Topography of Assam”* (first published in 1837), wrote about the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, the Akas, Duphlas, and Koppachors. M'Cosh gave a description on the tribes as follows ,

“Of these three tribes but little is known, more than that they are a warlike ferocious people, who make plunder their profession, and live in a good measure by levying black mail from the cultivators in the plains. But Government have lately commuted the blackmail to an equivalent in cash paid out of the Public Treasury. Not long ago a party of Duphlas suddenly surprised a

Havildar's guard of the Assam Light Infantry stationed on the Chardwar frontier, and cut almost every man, woman and child to pieces" (M'Cosh 2000, p. 141, Reprint).

M'cosh wrote about the habitations, social practices, migration and trade practices of the tribes in these words:

"Abors, Bor-Abors, and Mishmis" inhabit an extensive range of mountainous country, along the southern exposure of the great Himalaya chain, from the 94th degree to the 97th degree of east of longitude, and border with Thibet and China. It is difficult to form a conception of the extent of these tribes but they are not to be despised; for during the insurrection of the Muamarias, no less than 17,000 Abors joined to drive that tribe out of Assam. It is probable that at no ancient period these two tribes were unconnected, but the Mishmis, are now considered by the Abors as dependent upon them, and treated as slaves". Besides the Mishmis here mentioned as subservient to the Abors, there are several tribes of them, such as Muzu Mishmis and Taen-Mishmis inhabiting the extreme branches of the Lohit or eastern channel of the Brahmaputra, who are probably independent. These tribes possess one of the lowest grades of civilization; they occupy numerous villages along the precipitous shores of the two great northern branches of the Brahmaputra, the Dihang or Sampo, and the Dibong." (M'Cosh 2000, p. 141-142, Reprint)

Augus Hamilton, a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of British government, wrote an extensive account of the colonial expedition titled *"In Abor Jungles: Being an Account of the Abor Expedition, the Mishmi and the Miri Mission"*, published initially in 1912 by Eveleigh Nash, London. Hamilton wrote *"the land of the Abors"* was *"hitherto almost unknown to white men."* He described the precarious nature of geography in the region in the following words:

"Aborland is only few miles square, but it comprises between the slopes of the snow-clad northern uplands and the jungle-covered banks of the mighty river are some of the most difficult country in the world for purposes of war. Varying very much in character, it reveals between north and south extremes of heat and cold, vast stretches of dense jungle, deep barren valleys, patches of alluvial plain and many ranges, the lower rising seven thousand feet, while the higher ones, snow clad and wooded from base to summit, exceed to ten thousand feet" (Hamilton 1983, p. 13-14, Reprint)

Hamilton also wrote about the independent nature and the dwelling pattern of the Abor villages. He wrote:

"An Abor village is an entirely independent entity over which the Gam or headman exercises absolute authority. The houses are laid on piles and raised some few feet from the ground. The roofs, like the walls, are made of plaintain leaves placed one upon the other like the tiles in our own houses. The floors are bamboo. The space beneath is used as latrine or as a lumber store, and also provides accommodation for poultry, pigs and mithun: a much prized species of cattle, strong, handsome, white legged, and resembling both the ox and the bison in shape and size" (Hamilton 1983, p. 22-23, Reprint).

In 1911, a significant development took place in one of the expeditions to the Abor country by the British government officials. The land which was hitherto rarely known generated much curiosity for the Europeans for deeper exploration in order to establish

contacts with the tribes toward the Tibetan border. The Assistant Political Officer stationed in Sadiya, Noel Williamson, who was also the scientific cartographer, and his companion, Gregorson, along with several other porters, servants, interpreters and military men were killed in their official tour to the Abor country in the villages of Komsing and Panggi near Pasighat (Hamilton 1983, p. 42-70); (Holdich 1912).

Alexander Mackenzie's work on the frontier tribes of Northeast India originally entitled *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of North-East Frontier of Bengal*, first published in 1884, gave vivid narratives of the hill tribes such as the Akas, Duphlas, Abors, Miris, Mishmis, Khamptis and the Singphos. Akas, according to Mackenzie who called themselves as Hrusso were in the eastward of the Bhutias by the Bhoroli river, known as Kameng. He wrote as follows:

"The Akas are of two clans—(1) the Hazari-Khawa or eaters at a thousand hearths, and (2) the Kapachors, or "thieves who lurk amid the cotton plants". These are a most energetic and savage tribe, who for twenty years were the pests of Char Dwar. With the aid of the Migis, a fierce and cognate race in the interior, they long defied the power of the Towang Deo in the hills. Both clans of Akas together did not, however, in 1844 number over 260 families. Of the Migis there were from three to four hundred households. The Hazari-Khawas were the only branch of this tribe to whom the Assamese conceded formally any right to share in the produce of the Dwars. The Kapachors had no such rights, and anything that they received from the cultivators was simply extorted from their fears. To the Hazarikhawas the Assam Government had granted the right of posa, or as it is often rather inaccurately called, "blackmail". Certain sets of paiks were assigned to the hillmen, and made liable to pay to them instead of the State their fixed annual contributions (Mackenzie 2013, p. 21, Reprint)."

In 1842, Frans Jenkins, an agent of the Governor General, entered into an agreement with the chieftain of Akas known as the Taghi Raja of the Aka Hills. The agreement was to cease the act of oppression on the British subjects in the plains, British territories and never to take law in own hands (Mackenzie 2013, p. 24). The agreement led to a peaceful settlement of disputes between the tribe and the British government in order to stop the raids and plunders in the plains of Assam which were already a British territory. It was also agreed that Akas would settle their disputes through negotiation and judiciary without resorting to force with the colonial government and their subjects.

Inter-community relations existed through a form of trading between the hill and plains communities that were called '*dwar*' in local parlance. From Mackenzie's account, it is

also clear that there was a system of tributes that was conceded to hill tribes by the Assamese subjects of the foothills to prevent plundering and raids in the plains. This pre-colonial system of exchange of tributes between the hills and the plains communities in order maintains peace and amicable relation was known as the '*posa*' system that was introduced by the Ahom kings.¹⁷⁷ The annual tributes were in the forms of rice and other materials to the tribes. The duty to pay tributes were assigned to the '*paik*', a group of Ahom subjects providing manual labor to contribute to the agricultural economy as well as through conscription.¹⁷⁸

The agreement of 1842 contained five terms which also included that the hill men would confine themselves for "trade exclusively in the market places of Lahareebaree, Baleepara and Tezpor" (Mackenzie 2013). The colonial government agreed to provide regular pensions of a total sum of 120 rupees to three Rajas of the tribe, Seemkolee Aka Raja, Soomoo Raja, Nesoo Raja with 32 rupees, 32 rupees, 26 rupees, respectively. Mackenzie's account mentioned that the Akas did not give trouble in the later years which was seen as a successful policy pursued by the colonial government in dealing with the tribe.

In 1873, the colonial government gave the Hazari Khawas a grant of 49 acres of land in the plains. There were some disagreements between the Kapachor Akas and the colonial government as they refused to recognize the line between Bhoroli and Khari Dikrai rivers before the final demarcation of boundary between the British territory and the Akas in 1873-74. In January 1882, a large number of Kapachor Akas and Duphlas came down to set up boundary marks in the forests at Potashali, Diju, and Naminimuk, declaring that they would allow no one to pass those points which were all within their territory (Mackenzie 2013, p. 24-26). It was later understood by the British government as Mackenzie wrote,

¹⁷⁷ Ahoms were the dynastic ruling classes of Brahmaputra Valley who established their kingdom from 1228 to 1826. They belong to Tai stock of the Shan race that has roots in Yunnan province of China and Myanmar. They continuously ruled most of the parts of the Brahmaputra Valley until the British annexed Assam into their colonial empire through the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826) at the end of Anglo-Burmese War.

¹⁷⁸ For elaborate account on the *paik* system of Ahom kingdoms, please refer to Amalendu Guha's *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Polity and Economy*, Anwesha, Guwahati, 2015.

“A number of Nepalese were trying to get passes from our officers permitting them to go into the Aka hills to collect rubber; it was supposed that the movement of the tribesmen was directed against them. The passes desired by the Nepalese were refused” (Mackenzie 2013, p. 25-26, Reprint).

Mackenzie also devoted a section on Duphlas in his work on the northeastern frontier region and described as follows:

“Duphlas inhabited eastward of the Bhoroli river, and occupying the hills north of Naodwar (the Nine Passes) in Durrung, and Chedwar (the Six Passes) in Luckimpore, as far east as the upper courses of the Sundri, lie the numerous cognate tribes of Duphlas. They are, however, not so much a single tribe as a collection of petty clan independent of each other, and generally incapable of combined action” (Mackenzie 2013, p. 27-32, Reprint).

Two hundred and thirty-eight *gams* or chiefs of Duphlas were in receipt of compensation for loss of *posa*. Mackenzie added,

“Their form of Government is oligarchical, there being thirty or forty chiefs in a clan. The Duphlas called themselves only “Bangni”, meaning “man”. The tribes on the border of Durrung are now called ‘Paschim’ or Western Duphlas; and those on the border of North Luckimpore, Tagin Duphlas (Mackenzie 2013, p. 27, Reprint)”

Duphlas exacted *posa* from the *Duphla Bohotea Khel* or *paik*, a section of the Assamese cultivators who were originally assigned to the Duphlas as responsible for their dues. The system was replaced by monetary payment in 1852. From 1852, the Duphlas began to settle down in the plains as British subjects which brought relief to the local officials and devoted their attention to agriculture (Mackenzie 2013, p. 28-29). The hill Duphlas committed atrocities on the plain Duphla dwellers in 1870. The Administrative Report of 1872-73 by Sir G. Campbell gave the following accounts regarding the Duphlas:

“The tribes have no unity of organization; every village is separate, and if one is hostile, the next may be friendly. They have not fire arms, and for some years, as above remarked, they have not shown hostile to our Government, but have yearly drawn allowances for loss of their practice of making collections from the Assamese ryots of the Dwars or passes, and have done much profitable trade with our bazars and markets (Hamilton 1983, p. 32, Reprint).”

The British also reached at another agreement with the Meyong Abors on November 5, 1862, at Camp Lalee Mukh to establish peace and trade relations while recognizing the territorial frontier of each other (Mackenzie 2013, p. 43). The above historical accounts suggest that there was an absence of political institutions such as bureaucratic administration and structure of government except a few contacts with colonial administration due to exchange of trade and occasional disturbances in the civilian areas

controlled by the British. The Khamptis and Singphos in the eastern part of Assam borders (parts of current Lohit, Namsai, and Changlang districts in Arunachal Pradesh) too played a significant role in the pre-colonial and colonial period in the frontier history. The Khamptis are described as not strictly a plain tribe by Mackenzie. Mackenzie wrote:

“The Khamptis are originally immigrants from Bor Khampti, the mountainous region which interposes between the eastern extremity of Assam and the valley of Irrawaddy. They are of Shan descent and adhere to Buddhist religion (Mackenzie 2013, p. 57, Reprint).”

The colonial account suggests that Khamptis were quite active in the Sadiya region that ousted the local Ahom Governor known as the Sadiya Khowa Gohain in 1794 (Gurdon 1895); (Mackenzie 2013). In 1824, Khamptis helped the British in the campaign against the section of hostile Singphos. Some of the Khamptis from the Sadiya region were forcefully settle in Naraianpore area of North Lakhimpur, Maijan and Debroogurh in 1839 by the British “owing to their misbehavior” which however, was a policy to weaken their collective power of resistance from the villages of Tengapani, Makoo Derack and Sadiya, where they were mostly concentrated before relocation (Mackenzie 2013, p. 60). Singphos, who were divided under various chieftains known as ‘gam’ caused several disturbances to the British Government and its subjects in the nineteenth century even after the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826). Singphos were well known for introducing the British to the indigenous tea plant originally in the Brahmaputra Valley as early as 1823 (Gait 2017, p. 404, Reprint). Some of the Singpho *gams* developed working relationship with the Ahom kings in the pre-colonial period as well as the British in the nineteenth century while some remained hostile until the turn of the twentieth century. The Singphos were described in the following words:

“The Singphos have, for several generations, been the terror of the wretched Assamese, and were in the constant habit of making irruptions into their country, sometimes as far as their capital itself; of plundering their temples, laying waste their country, and carrying off the inhabitants into slavery. Since the British troops have had possession of Assam, these inroads have been prevented; but as might be expected, they are somewhat impatient of that restraint, and have once or twice endeavoured to resort to their old habits. To give an idea of the extent to which these devastations were carried on, the late Captain Neufville, received from the Singphos alone 7,000 Assamese captive slaves; and, perhaps, there are 100, 000 Assamese and Manipuris still in slavery throughout the dominions of Ava” (M'Cosh 2000, p. 150, Reprint).”

The occasional nature of disturbances from the tribes in the foothills was carried out in the form of raid and plunders in the villages with a degree of impunity until the formal understanding was reached either through negotiation or after the subjugation of the tribes. However, the British political administration remained in a state of flux without full control over the tribes excluding the terms of terminal tributes, gifts and taxes which were mostly material in content. There were understanding for mutual amicable relations and commercial activities but rarely trade had been carried out to that extent with the hill tribes. The British government concentrated on the Brahmaputra Valley while keeping the frontier territories excluded from the modern political experience of the colonial government. These hills were kept isolated as Verrier Elwin, an anthropologist and administrator of the tribal policy in post-colonial India, stated that the British government followed a leave them alone policy for the tribesmen (Elwin 2009, p. 1-2). He wrote:

“This policy was partly because the task of administration, especially in the wild border areas, was difficult and unrewarding, partly from a desire to quarantine the tribes from possible political infection, and partly because a number of officers sincerely held the view that the people were better and happier as they were (Elwin 2009, p.1, Reprint).”

Unlike the neighboring plains, the revenue administration was different in the hill areas in the colonial period. There was no enforcement of regular revenue and taxes in the areas inhabited by the tribes like that of neighboring plains of Brahmaputra Valley which was already flourished with administrative, trade and commercial activities. From the colonial accounts, it is clear that the colonial government machinery had limited outreach and influence over the tribes inhabiting the hills. In fact, the British annexation of the Abor Hills took place as late as 1911 after the killing of the British political officer and tea estate medical officer in Komsing village in the central part of the frontier region near Pasighat in East Siang district of the present state of Arunachal Pradesh. As a result, the punitive expedition of the British along the Siang river in the early twentieth century brought about more contacts and administrative foothold in the territory of the hill tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.

Regulation and Administration of Arunachal Pradesh in the Colonial Period (1900-1947)

The state of Arunachal Pradesh had been inhabited by various tribes without direct administrative and political control from the colonial government. The tribes were autonomous of each other within the sphere of inhabited land. They normally exercised their powers and control over the hilly terrains as well as the foot hill. The British kept most of the territory of Arunachal Pradesh under a separate regulation. It was known as the Assam frontier. Three regulations governed the frontier territory: Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act of 1873; Assam Frontier Tract Regulation, 1880 and The Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945. The first regulation dealt with the enactment of the historic Inner Line in the frontier districts of hill areas in the northeastern region of British eastern frontier of Assam and Bengal. The second regulation was responsible for the creation of tribal areas known as the North East Frontier Tract in 1914 and the third was related to the maintenance of the indigenous judicial system in the hill areas under the supervision and control of the government.

The colonial policy towards the frontier tribes, according to Mackenzie, was “a policy of coercion and contemptuous devastation, but a firm and kindly policy of defence and reconciliation (Mackenzie 2013, p.55).” The Inner Line Regulation was prescribed as the summary legislation for backward tracts under the Government of India Act, 1870 (33 Vict., C.3) which was extended to the executive government of Assam in 1872-1873 for the frontier districts.¹⁷⁹ The Inner Line policy was formulated by the colonial administrators with aim that there was a “pressing necessity of bringing under more

¹⁷⁹ The Government of India Act, 1870 gave the provisions of making laws and regulations for certain parts of India to the Governor General of India in Council whereas it was expedient. Accordingly, when the act was extended to Assam in 1870s, the Inner Line Regulation policy was prescribed by the Lieutenant Governor of Assam which was then approved by the Governor General of India. Governor of India Act, 1870 (33 Vict., C.3), *South Asia Archive*, <https://southasiaarchive.com>, Taylor and Francis, Accessed July 4, 2018; Mackenzie., Alexander. *The North East Frontier of India*, (originally published in 1884), Mittal Publications, New Delhi 2013 (Reprint).

stringent control the commercial relations of our own subjects with the frontier tribes living on the borders of our jurisdiction (Mackenzie 2013, p. 55).”

The special regulation for frontier areas was arrived at by the British due to the complications in revenue generation from the rubber forests and spread of tea garden beyond the zone of fiscal limits (Mackenzie 2013, p. 55). The expanding commercial cultivation under the colonial government found itself in a difficult situation as it experienced disturbances from the hill tribes. The Inner Line Regulation was mapped by the Lieutenant Governor that was approved by the Governor General in Council. The regulation prescribed an imaginary line in the frontier districts beyond which the British subjects or foreign residents were disallowed without a pass or license from the government (Mackenzie 2013, p.56). It laid down rules regarding the possession of land, trade practices and wildlife (such as catching of elephants) beyond the prescribed line set by the colonial government. The Regulation of 1873 was a distinctive legislation in protecting the emerging British economic interests and politico-administrative policies with regard to the hills tribes in the northeastern frontier. The administrative affairs of the frontier hilly tracts along the northern frontier of Assam was under the control of the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur. The administrator of Lakhimpur district in Upper Assam was responsible for negotiations with the hill tribes for maintaining peace and governance along the frontier of the Brahmaputra Valley.

In 1914, the hill tribes inhabited the frontier areas of Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. These areas were later separated to create the North East Frontier Tract by promulgating the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation, 1880 by the Foreign and Political Department of the colonial government. The North East Frontier Tract consisted of three tribal inhabited administrative sections in the Central and Eastern sections with headquarters at Sadiya, the Western section with headquarter at Charduar and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract under the Deputy Commissioner of the Lakhimpur district of Assam (Karlo 2005, p. 30). These three sections were renamed into Balipara Frontier

Tract; Lakhimpur Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract. These tracts were declared as Backward Tracts under the Government of India Act, 1919. As such, the backward tracts were kept out of the political reforms (such as introduction of responsible central and provincial legislatures) of the colonial government.

The Government of India Act, 1935 again led to reforms of administrative structure in 1936 by which the frontier tracts were collectively known as the Excluded Areas under section 91(1) (Reid 1944). The Excluded Areas were under the direct charge of Governor who was empowered with the discretionary powers and administered the frontier tracts through the political officer and the deputy commissioner of the Lakhimpur district. The Government of India Act, 1935 also created a new administrative tract called the Tirap Frontier Tract in 1942 in the eastern side that was carved out of the Sadiya Frontier Tract (Reid 1944). The tracts were divided into “Partially Excluded Area” and “Excluded Area” with provisions of degree of applicability of British laws. The “Excluded Area” was fully relieved of legal provisions of Government of India Act, 1935 but the areas were put under the administration of Governor denying any role of elected representatives whereas the “Partially Excluded Tract” had the degree of application of provisions as the elected representatives of legislature was responsible for administration. However, the special responsibility was entrusted with the Governor for peace and government even in “Partially Excluded Areas.”¹⁸⁰

According to Robert Reid, who served as the Governor of Assam, “Excluded Areas’ and Partially Excluded Areas” were legislative expression in consistence with earlier “Backward Tract” which were included in the Indian Constitution Act of 1935 and the areas included under the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order. Reid described these areas in the following words:

¹⁸⁰ In addition to the three tracts of North East Frontier Tracts, the “Excluded Areas” were Tirap Frontier Tract, Naga Hills District, North Cachar Sub-division of Cachar district and the Lushai Hills. Manipur State was princely Indian state which was also tagged as “Excluded Area”. The “Partially Excluded Area” were Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills and Mikir Hills (Reid 1944).

“These areas which I have enumerated differ markedly among themselves but they have this one characteristic in common, that neither racially, historically, culturally, nor linguistically have they any affinity with the people of the plains, or with the peoples of India proper. It is only by historical accident and as natural administrative convenience that they have been tacked on to an Indian province (Reid 1944).”

The British policy was, however, seen as a policy of isolation of the tribes for furthering their commercial interests. The policy of designating the frontier areas into excluded and partially excluded areas limited the historical social interactions that were taking place between the plains and the hills communities. The Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945 was another administrative reform targeted at the village level for the control and maintenance of the frontier hill tribes. The regulation provided for the formal appointment of village chieftains or ‘gam’ in rural areas that extended to the new areas. Scholars like Nabam Nakha Hina are of the opinion that although the regulation of 1945 recognized the authority of the village councils, this led to more interference in the administration of justice that was provided through the customary laws of the people (Hina 2013, p. 18). The village councils and the *gams* that were functioning autonomously lost their independence due to the promulgation of the Assam Frontier (Administrative of Justice) Regulation, 1945. The regulation covered various aspects that included rules, appointment and oath relating to chief (*gam*) and their village councils. It also introduced the judicial system of evidence in adjudicating justice under the customary laws of the village councils. The regulation mandated the co-ordination of village authorities with administrative officials and police in matters of civil as well as criminal proceedings. Thus, this regulation of 1945 brought about political and administrative intervention with modern institutions such as the bureaucracy, police and the judiciary among the frontier hill tribes.

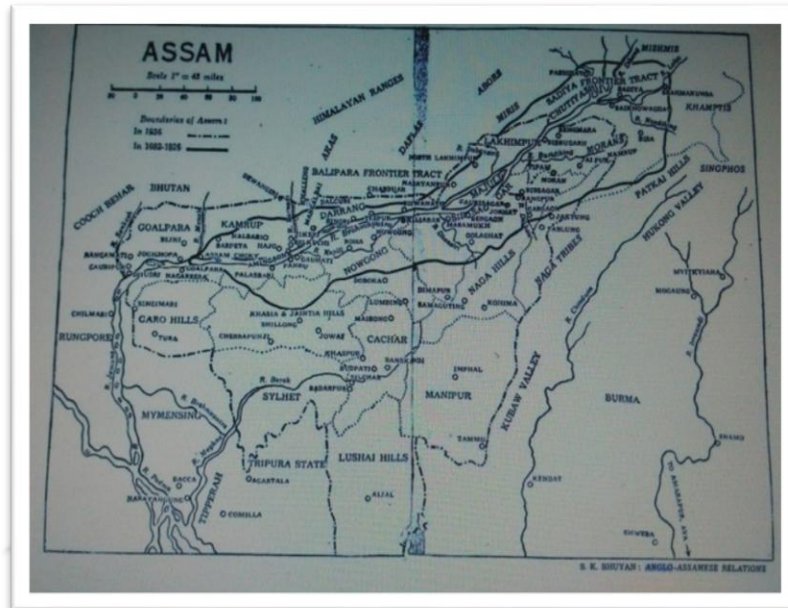


Photo 21: Map showing the boundary of Assam in pre-colonial and colonial period along with the habitations of tribes in frontier areas. Source: *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, Surya Kumar Bhuyan, Guwahati, 1949..

State formation in Northeast India in the post-colonial period and the birth of Arunachal Pradesh (1947-1987)

The state formation process of the North Eastern region needs to be understood before one proceeds to discuss the political developments in Arunachal Pradesh. In 1947, the North Eastern Region of India comprised of three states of Assam, Manipur and Tripura. Manipur and Tripura were the princely states of British India. The Naga Hills District, Lushai Hills, Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills comprised of the districts in undivided Assam. The North East Frontier Tract which became Arunachal Pradesh included the Balipara, Lakhimpur, Sadiya and the Tirap Frontier tracts. These frontier tracts were administered by the Governor of Assam.

Northeast was divided into several other states in 1960s and 1970s to reconcile the goals of democratic accommodation and security arrangements (Chadda 2002). There were demands of autonomy, statehood and secession from competing ethnic groups of the region. The present federal units of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya were once

districts of Assam. The people of Arunachal Pradesh neither participated in any electoral activities nor did they enjoy franchise like the rest of India until 1972 (A. Talukdar 1985). Therefore, the creation of new states unit was a strategy of one of strategies of containment used by the Government of India in the post-colonial period in response to ethnic and regional movements (Chadda 2002).

Political differences broke out in the Naga Hill District at the juncture of independence of the Indian subcontinent with Naga leaders mobilizing for secession from the Indian Union claiming the right to become independent for the Naga ethnic groups. The Naga National Council (NNC) led by Angami Zapo Phizo organized the Naga ethnic groups even before independence of India and met Mahatma Gandhi on the issue of Naga independence in July 19, 1947 (Misra 2013). The NNC led a popular movement alongside underground armed struggle in 1950s on the issue of independence with support from the village councils and chieftains. In the post-colonial period, the Naga movement included campaigns for plebiscite and boycott of India's First General Election in 1952.¹⁸¹ The Nagas also launched civil disobedience campaigns such as resignation of teachers, boycott of government events and refusal to pay taxes in the Naga Hills until the government of India reconciled with the moderate faction of the Naga political organization. In order to resolve the Naga political movement, the Government of India conceded for the creation of state of Nagaland after negotiations with the Naga leaders in December 1963. The state comprised of Naga Hills and Tuensang division that became the sixteenth state of India under a Constitutional Amendment with special provisions for control over resources and protection of customary laws.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ For an elaborate details regarding the Naga struggle for independence, please refer Udayon Misra's *The Periphery Strikes Back: Challenges to the Nation-State in Assam and Nagaland*, IIAS, Shimla, 2013.

¹⁸² The Parliament of India under its Thirteenth Amendment Act, 1962 inserted Article 371 (A) which provide for special provisions for Naga customary laws, religious or social practices, ownership and transfer of land and resources unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution decides. See Udayon Misra's *The Periphery Strikes Back : Challenges to the Nation-State in Assam and Nagaland* , p. 65, IIAS, Shimla, 2013.

There were rulers of smaller states of Khasis known as the Federation of Khasi States comprising twenty five semi-independent states. The Khasi states were in the partially excluded category. The rulers signed instruments of accession to integrate with the Indian Union under the Government of India Act, 1935. The states were integrated to the Indian state under the Instrument of Accession through a Standstill Agreement on December 15, 1947 which was later accepted by the Governor General of India, C. Gopalacharya in August 17, 1948 (Giri 2012, p. 228, 237). In the post-colonial period in 1950s and 1960s, the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU) and All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) played vital roles in raising the political consciousness in the hill areas of present day Meghalaya.

The United Khasi-Jaintia Hills as well as the Garo Hills districts were under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Sixth Schedule provided the provisions for ethnic-based decentralized bodies with powers and functions over land and protection of social practices and customary laws. The chief architect of Sixth Schedule, J.J.M. Nichols Roy, a Khasi, was instrumental in putting the proposals for autonomy before the Constituent Assembly. The APHLC mobilized public protests following the Official Language policy adopted in Assam that made Assamese a state official language (Sawian 2012). The protest against the Official Language policy was also joined by student community under the banner of the Eastern India Hills Frontier Union. Tribal politicians such as Williamson A. Sangma opposed the language policy in the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1960. Meghalaya remained an autonomous state within Assam based on the Assam Reorganization (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 which came into effect from January 1970 for a brief period until its statehood in January 21, 1972 following the North Eastern Reorganization Act, 1971 passed by the Parliament of India (Sawian 2012).

As far as the integration of Mizoram was concerned, the socio-economic conditions, public policies and the political mobilization in the then Lushai Hills districts led to the

creation of the state of Mizoram. In late 1950s, famine broke out in Mizoc Hills District.¹⁸³ This famine affected the socio-economic conditions of the Mizo society leading to shortage of food in the area (Pachau 2014, p. 128-130). Inefficient public policies taken by the government of Assam in dealing with the condition of famine of 1959-60 invigorated the self-determination movement and nationalist struggle in the former Lushai (Mizo) Hills District of undivided Assam. State response was delayed. The Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF), formed in the backdrop of famine, promoted its own agenda of nationalism even though relief material was sponsored by the government of Assam at the time of the crisis (Nag 2008, p. 252-253). The lack of proper supply of food grains in the interior villages became a point of mobilization against the government by MNFF. The Mizo Union, one of the political organizations, also raised the issue of language. The Mizo organization raised their concerns that making Assamese as the state language would result in undue benefits of the plains people of Assam thereby causing disadvantages to the hill people (Nag 2008, p. 258). The Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU) also raised the demand for a separate state for hill tribes carving out of Assam in 1950s. In October 28, 1961, the MNFF was renamed as the Mizo National Front. Under the leadership of Laldenga and Vanlawma, the MNF was involved in an armed mobilization with the secessionist agenda in 1960s and 1970s. The MNF armed movement continued for twenty years until it reached a negotiated settlement. The MNF ended its armed struggle after a series of negotiations with the central government of India that concluded with the Mizo Accord in June 30, 1986. The Lushai (Mizo) Hill District was granted as a Union Territory along with Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya in January 21, 1972. Mizoram was later accorded a full statehood in February 20, 1987.¹⁸⁴

As mentioned earlier, the states of Manipur and Tripura remained princely states in the British period. In Manipur, the political groups were divided on the issue of merger with

¹⁸³ The famine took place due to bamboo flowering which increases the rats that eat up the bamboo seeds and turned towards the paddy field causing shortage of foods. Locally, this was known as mautam in the Mizo Hill District.

¹⁸⁴ See Government of Mizoram website, About Mizoram-History: <http://mizoram.nic.in/about/history.htm> (Accessed March 27, 2018).

India. The Praja Sangh party wanted an independent Manipur with own constitution, parliament and cabinet based on socialistic principles while the Manipur Congress was in favor of integrating with the Indian Union. Manipur established itself as a modern state through the formation of representative government by universal adult franchise with its own constitution under a constitutional monarchy before merging with the Indian state (Akoijam 2001). The Governor of Assam, Hydari visited Manipur to explore the situation and the issue of merging with India after the independence of India (Haokip 2012). Manipur was put into Part C state of the Indian Union under the “Merger Agreement” with India on September 21, 1949 which was enforced on the Maharajah of Manipur, Bodhachandra by Akbar Hydari, the Governor of Assam (Haokip 2012). The contentious episode of merging with India generated insurgent movements in Manipur in the post-colonial period. Insurgent groups claimed the merger was illegal and unacceptable. In 1960s and early 1970s, the All Manipur Students Union (AMSU) and the political parties mobilized on the issues of statehood, language and lack of industrialization. Student organization raised the demand for inclusion of Manipuri (Meitei) language in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution. On September 6, 1970, the central government announced that Manipur and Tripura would be granted statehood (Urmila 2007, p.56). The North Eastern Area (Re-organization) Act 1971 was passed in the Parliament of India in December, 1971. It was enforced accordingly on January 21, 1972 which led to the formation of Manipur as a full-fledged federal unit of India.

Tripura is another northeastern state integrated with the Indian Union in the post-colonial period. Tripura was a tribal kingdom ruled by the Manikya dynasty. Tripura remained a princely state until India’s independence. It was integrated to the Indian Union under the Tripura Merger Agreement in September 9, 1949 which was signed by the Maharani Regent. Tripura was categorized under Part C state of India (Haokip 2012). Tripura remained a Union Territory from November 1, 1956. An elected government was formed

on the basis of universal adult franchise on July 1963.¹⁸⁵ It was announced in the Parliament on September 6, 1970 that Manipur and Tripura will be granted statehood. The North Eastern Area (Re-organization) Act, 1971 was passed in the Parliament in December 1971 and Tripura was granted statehood on January 21, 1972.

The North East Frontier Tract was renamed as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1954. North East Frontier Agency was replaced with Arunachal Pradesh in 1972 that was accorded the status of Union Territory. It was elevated into full statehood along with Meghalaya and Mizoram in 1987 under constitutional amendments.

The territory of NEFA witnessed administrative transformations in the post-colonial period. Earlier, it was also known as North East Frontier Tract (NEFT). In 1946, the Gopinath Bordoloi Committee of the Constituent Assembly of India recommended minor changes in the administrative set up for the North East Frontier Tract (NEFT) (Karlo 2005, p. 35). The recommendations led to administrative remapping. The Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into two administrative sub-units, the Sela sub-agency and Subansiri area that extended up to the Mac Mahon Line until 1954. The Sadiya Frontier Tract was divided into Abor Hills and Mishmi Hills with headquarters in Pasighat and Tezu respectively in the following two for further administrative convenience. The Tirap Frontier Tract had its head quarters in Margherita.

In 1954, the North East Frontier (Administration) Regulation was promulgated in the Parliament of India which brought about significant changes in the administration of the frontier areas. The tract was renamed North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) and the Frontier Tracts were named Frontier Divisions each under a Political Officer as local administrators. Thus, NEFA was overhauled with six frontier divisions namely (a) Kameng Frontier Division (b) Subansiri Frontier Division (c) Siang Frontier Division (d) Lohit Frontier Division (e) Tirap Frontier Division (f) Tuensang Frontier Division. The

¹⁸⁵ See Government of India Archive, Tripura-Historical Background https://archive.india.gov.in/knownindia/state_uts.php?id=90 (Accessed March 27, 2018).

first four names derived its name from the local rivers that flows through the region while other two derived its name from the prominent localities within the geographical territory.

1914	1919	1943-46	1954
Central and Eastern Frontier Tract	Sadiya Frontier Tract	Sadiya Frontier Tract Tirap Frontier Tract	Lohit Frontier Division Siang Frontier Division Tirap Frontier Division Tuensang Fronteir Division
Lakhimpur Frontier Tract	Lakhimpur Frontier Tract	Lakhimpur Frontier Tract Subansir Area	Subansiri Frontier Division
Western Frontier Tract	Balipara Frontier Tract	Balipara Frontier Tract Sela Sub Agency	Kameng Frontier Division

Table 2: Table showing the colonial names and the post-colonial administrative divisions of Arunachal Pradesh with the corresponding years, names and areas.

The Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS) was especially created for the administration of Indian border areas of NEFA with an approach for delivering sympathetic and friendly administration to the tribes in 1956 by Jawaharlal Nehru.¹⁸⁶ The IFAS was the outcome of Nehru's philosophy for NEFA which was influenced by British anthropologist Verrier Elwin. Verrier Elwin wrote the book "*A Philosophy for NEFA*" (1957) that recommended various policies for the North East Frontier Agency. He advocated that the officials serving in NEFA should get rid of the urge of feelings of cultural superiority but to be guided by actions of humility while serving among the hill tribes (R. Guha 2014). Elwin also stressed the importance of self reliance and independence of the tribal communities free from commercial exploitation by traders (Elwin 2009, p.3-4, Reprint). The IFAS was drawn from the local tribes, administrative

¹⁸⁶ IFAS was also created for the border areas of Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet. For further details on IFAS, see Claude Arpi's *Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS): Romanticism and Hostile Borders*, Article available at Personal Blog, Claude Arpi is a French-born journalist who worked in Northeastern region. His personal portal is <http://www.claudearpi.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/IFAS.pdf> (Accessed April 9, 2018).

officers and Indian Army to serve in the frontier areas. It was, however, merged into the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) in mid-1960s.

Until 1960s, there was no trace of mobilization organized by the people of NEFA. This may be attributed to the absence of elected political representatives. The hill tribes of NEFA did not participated in the first general election of 1952 held in India. The tribes of NEFA had no representatives in the provincial legislative assembly of Assam which had members of legislative assembly from other hill tribes such as Khasi, Garo, Mizo, Karbi and Dimasa. Some of these hills tribes had representatives in the Legislative Assembly of Assam even before India's independence in 1947. The central government of India made the first attempt to introduce an elected body through population participation in 1950s.

In 1954, the Daying Ering Committee was constituted by the Government of India to explore the feasibility of introduction of decentralized institutions in the frontier region. Daying Ering served as Indian Frontier Administrative Service officer. He was among the first educated from Adi community in Arunachal Pradesh. Ering was the first nominated Lok Sabha Member of Parliament from NEFA by the President of India.¹⁸⁷ The Ering Committee recommended for the introduction of three-tier Panchayati Raj System under the North East Frontier Agency (Panchayat Raj) Regulation Act, 1967. The Ering Committee also recommended that the administration of NEFA be handed over to the Home Ministry from the External Affairs Ministry (Karlo 2005, p. 32). The administrative divisions were renamed as Districts instead of Frontier Divisions and the designation of administrators such as Political Officers and Assistant Political Officers were discarded. The administrative designations were renamed as Deputy Commissioner and Assistant Commissioner respectively. The Daying Ering Committee became a watershed moment in the history of Arunachal Pradesh as it led to the introduction of decentralized democratic institutions where universal adult franchise was introduced in the elections. An Agency

¹⁸⁷ Obituary Reference, Proceedings of the Second Session of the Provisional Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, 21-09-1970.

Council modeled on the State Legislative Assembly was constituted in 1972. Scholars like Rejir Karlo are of the opinion that with the introduction of three tier democratic decentralization under the framework of Ering Committee recommendation, the previous policy of isolationism ended and NEFA was brought under the national mainstream (Karlo 2005, p. 33).

With the enactment of the North Eastern Areas (Reorganizations) Act, 1971, the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) became a Union Territory on January 20, 1972. NEFA was renamed Arunachal Pradesh from NEFA, a Sanskrit term that can be translated into “the land of the dawn-lit mountains.” The Reorganization Act of 1971 trifurcated undivided Assam into Meghalaya as a state, Mizoram as a union territory and the rest remained as Assam constituting Brahmaputra and Barak valleys with North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong districts.

The North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was administered under the Governor of Assam and an Agency Council. NEFA used to be under the administrative control of the Governor of Assam acting as the agent of the President of India until the attainment of the status of a union territory (P. T. Nair 1985, p. 3). In 1972, the Union Territory was constituted and the Agency Council was replaced with Provincial Legislature (also called Pradesh Council). The Pradesh Council became a provisional Legislative Assembly with 23 members from 1975 to 1978. Elections for regular Legislative Assembly on the basis of universal adult franchise were held for the first time in 1978 (Singh, Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India 2010, p. 70). The first Arunachal Pradesh State Legislative Assembly had thirty three members where three members were elected and three members were nominated. The Provincial Legislature with a Council of ministers headed by P.K. Thungon as the Chief Minister was constituted on March 4, 1978.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Official website of Government of Arunachal Pradesh, <http://www.arunachalpradesh.gov.in/655-2/> (March 29, 2018).

Arunachal Pradesh experienced the popular elections for the first time under the 37th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1975 with the Lieutenant Governor as head of the state appointed by the President of India.¹⁸⁹ It is said that although there was a unit of Indian National Congress in 1972 there was no party politics in the initial period. Electoral politics began in the state of Arunachal Pradesh with the formation of People's Party of Arunachal (PPA), a regional political party that witnessed ups and downs with defection and merger in the state politics of the state. The people of Arunachal Pradesh participated in the national electoral exercise of India in the 6th General Election in the post-emergency period where Janata Party emerged victorious and installed the first non-Congress government under Morarji Desai. There was also a shift in the state politics due to the change in the centre. P. K. Thungon along with his council of minister defected to Janata Party in the State Legislative Assembly. In the following year of 1978, the first assembly election of Arunachal Pradesh was conducted in the month of February where P.K. Thungon took oath of office in March, 1978 as the Janata Party emerged triumphant in the closely contested election against the regional party People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) (Karlo 2005, p. 34). Another regional party called Arunachal Congress was formed by Gegong Apang, who remained as the chief minister for nineteen years continuously from 1980. There have been cases of instability in the state politics from 1999 onwards until recently (2014-16) either due to en masse defection by elected legislators or changing political scenario in the federal government.

The absence of institutions like the State Legislative Assembly, the elected political representatives and lack of consolation with the indigenous organizations have been a point contention in the debates of granting citizenship to refugees in Arunachal Pradesh. There was no popular body or political party in the NEFA territory except the traditional village councils. The members of Parliament of NEFA were nominated by the President of India as delegated by the Parliament during those times. The state transited from semi-

¹⁸⁹ Ibid

colonial phase to become a part of India under the British territorial mapping for India. Electoral politics in the modern and truly democratic sense was a new experience for the tribal peoples of Arunachal Pradesh and the franchise right was not extended until 1977. In 1977, franchise was extended by a special provision of the Representation of People's Act, 1951 (Bath 2004). According to Bath, the Gopinath Bordoloi sub-committee found that the level of political consciousness among the tribals was quite low, therefore the people of Arunachal Pradesh (then NEFT/NEFA) franchise right was deprived (Bath 2004). In the history of the state formation processes and subsequent reorganization of federating units, Arunachal Pradesh became the last state in the post-colonial India to participate in the electoral politics though the universal adult franchise was granted in the first general election of 1952 in India.

The Northeast Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act of 1971 passed by the Parliament on December 21, 1971 transformed the status of NEFA to Arunachal Pradesh (P. Nair 1985, 2). It was given the status of a union territory which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The administration was looked after by the Lieutenant Governor of the territory. The district administrations were carried out by Deputy Commissioners who were formerly called the Political Officers.

Emergence of student organizations and rise of mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh

The emergence of student organizations is dated back to the early days of independence when ethnic student bodies were formed on the basis of ethnic tribal identities by the educated sections of the Adi and Mising tribes in the North East Frontier Agency. The Adi-Mising Students' Union had its headquarters at Pasighat in East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh.¹⁹⁰ The Adi-Mising Students' Union was formed mostly by the students of Sadiya Government High English School. Daying Ering and Martin Dai were the President and General Secretary respectively. The other founding members were

¹⁹⁰ All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU)- A Brief Note, pp.16-17, Souvenir, NESO, Kohima, 2012.

Oshong Ering, Talom Rukbo, Obang Dai, Tajum Koyo, Sushen Pao, Toi Dai, Yonggam Legu and others. Regular meetings of the Adi-Mising students created awareness of social change and importance of education among the people in Arunachal Pradesh. They also encouraged the opening of new schools and meetings that were organized by the students in their respective areas. Students set up various branches of the students' union in Adi-Mising areas and later extended up to Galo inhabited areas.¹⁹¹

The student body gradually expanded with an increase in the level of organization and creation of branches in the respective ethnic Adi and Galo inhabited belts. With the formation of student units across various places in NEFA, the name of the union was changed to All North East Frontier Agency Students Union (ANEFSU) with its headquarters at Pasighat, East Siang district in 1967 (Singh, *Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India* 2010, p. 129). The ANEFSU finally gave birth to the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) when the border territory was renamed as the Arunachal Pradesh after central government accorded Union Territory status in 1972. The student body was renamed as the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU). AAPSU claimed itself to be the strongest, oldest and the apex body having linkages with students of almost every educational institutions of the state of Arunachal Pradesh and with students studying outside the state.¹⁹² AAPSU also closely co-ordinates with ethnic student bodies of the state. The ethnic based student bodies from Nyishi, Adi, Galo, Monpa, Khampti, Singpho, Mishmi, Tangsa, Nocte, Apatani, Tagin, Hrusso, Sherdukpen are also represented in the meetings and conferences organized by the AAPSU. AAPSU has been at the forefront of contentious politics in Arunachal Pradesh since 1970s and the advent of political parties on the issues of indigenous identities and socio-economic issues.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

AAPSU has been raising the issue of citizenship of refugee groups such as Chakmas, Hajongs and Tibetans since the 1980s. The opposition of AAPSU to the citizenship of Chakmas and Hajongs refugees began in late 1970s and early 80s. In 1982, the AAPSU organized demonstrations and *bandhs* demanding expulsion of Chakma and Tibetan refugees settled in the territories of Arunachal Pradesh in 1960s.¹⁹³ Refugee issue was taken up in the late 1970s by the People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh, the first regional political party formed during the days of the union territory. The legislative assembly of Arunachal Pradesh adopted four resolutions from 1979 to 1994 on refugee problems (S. Dutta 1998, p. 106).

The phases of student mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh can be divided into three phases. The first phase of mobilization activities of students includes spreading awareness among the people on social issues like education, preservation of traditional culture and cleanliness in the days of NEFA, which was under the control and administration of the Ministry of External Affairs (1947 to 1965) and the Ministry of Home Affairs (up to 1972) of the Government of India. Student units organized cultural programs among Adi, Mising and Galo ethnic communities to raise awareness on various socio-economic issues. The ethnic habitats were the recipients of the awareness program of the student organization. The second phase of the student movement from 1985 to 1990 was marked by the agitation program by mobilizing students in Arunachal Pradesh (S. Dutta 1998, p. 39). The third phase from 1991 to the present witnessed intense mobilization on the issues of refugees becoming in the state accompanied by judicial intervention and government responses from time to time.

Framing citizenship and student mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh

With the opening of schools and meeting of ethnic students in Sadiya and the increasing representation of Adi, Mising and Galo students of North East Frontier Agency in the

¹⁹³ See Deepak K. Singh "Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India" (2010, Sage, Delhi) from Business Standard, n.d., 1982.

educational institutions, the formation of student organization became a common platform for exchange of ideas and spreading awareness among the respective communities.¹⁹⁴ The Adi-Mising Student Union (AMSU) formed in 1947 was the first common platform among the students of North East Frontier Agency who identified themselves representing their communities collectively.

AMSU changed into All North Eastern Frontier Agency Students Union (ANEFASU) in 1967 which became a larger association of students comprising of the entire North East Frontier Agency. This was the first phase and the formative stage of the student organization which adopted moderate methods of mobilization and mass awareness programs that continued till 1980. Petitions to the government on a range of issues such as education, development infrastructure for roads and connectivity were used as method of mobilizing people. From 1947 to 1980, the student body raised the issues of development like opening up of educational institutions, healthcare facilities roads and communication. Hindi was demanded as the second language in the state. ANEFSU also demanded the upgradation of the frontier agency into a union territory with a Lieutenant Governor in charge of the union territory. They also demanded that the headquarters of the state should be shifted from Shillong to a place in NEFA. ANEFSU asked for the creation of more administrative centers in the state as well as reservation of seats for students from Arunachal Pradesh in science and technical institutions in other states of India. The government responded to some of the demands for shifting of administrative headquarters, setting up of educational institutions, health care facilities and road connectivity in a phased manner (S. Dutta 1998, p. 25).

¹⁹⁴ Adi is an ethnic community in Arunachal Pradesh. Galo were once part of the Adi ethnic group but recently they have asserted themselves as a separate ethnic community. Although majority of the Misings are in Assam, parts of the Mising tribe inhabited in Murkongselek. Murkongselek was a part of Sadiya Frontier Tract in the territory of North East Frontier Tract before its transfer to Assam in 1951. The three communities share linguistic and cultural affinities. Mising tribe is also scattered in other parts of Arunachal Pradesh bordering Assam. Field visit, 2015.

The process of mobilization of ANEFSU was conducted in a relatively peaceful manner in regards to the demands for the medium of instruction; shift of administrative headquarters; establishment of educational institutions; stipends and reservations for students.

In 1972, when NEFA gained the status of a Union Territory, the territory was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh by the government. Subsequently, ANEFASU was renamed as the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU). Since its formation, AAPSU has been mobilizing on various issues ranging from education to problems of immigration and citizenship concerning the frontier state. In 1975, the presence of Chakma refugees and their right to political participation was questioned in the first popular election to the Agency Council (Pradesh Council) by the People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh (PPA) (Singh, *Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India* 2010, p. 84). When the popular election was due it was felt by the regional party that the Chakmas would be deciding factor in one of the constituencies in Changlang district. The regional party feared the refugees might have been accorded citizenship status and voting rights (Singh, *Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India* 2010). Out of the five assembly constituencies in Changlang district, Bordumsa-Diyun constituency is the only unreserved constituency in the 60-member Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly. Other constituencies in the state are reserved for the Scheduled Tribes. Most of the indigenous communities of Arunachal Pradesh are categorized as Scheduled Tribe in the Constitution of India. The Bordumsa-Diyun, being an unreserved constituency, all categories of electoral candidates including non-Schedule Tribes are eligible to contest elections to become the member of the Legislative Assembly. Most of the Chakma and Hajong refugees are settled in this constituency. Chakmas along with Hajongs have a sizeable population in Diyun-Bordumsa constituency although all of them were not accorded the voting rights. Regional political parties, AAPSU and other indigenous organizations of the state fear that refugees will outnumber the indigenous communities if citizenship status was granted. The indigenous communities of these areas are Khampti,

Singpho, Nocte and Tangsa who are also classified as Scheduled Tribe in the Constitution of India.

The second phase of activism in 1980s was marked by demands through protests and *bandhs* in Arunachal Pradesh. The radical phase of the student mobilization witnessed a dramatic rise of aggressive protests. The political and social organizations of Arunachal Pradesh began to oppose the citizenship of refugees in their state. Organization such as All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU), All Tai Khampti Singpho Students' Union (ATKSSU), All Namsai Area Youth Association (ANAYA) and ethnic bodies of the Khamptis, Singphos, Tangsas, Noctes, Wanchos, Nyishi, Monpas supported the mobilization. The three refugee groups whose citizenship status and settlement is opposed by the student organizations and ethnic organizations are the Chakmas, Hajongs and Tibetans inhabiting the state of Arunachal Pradesh. Social movement organizations claiming to represent and protect the *indigenous* cultures and identities have mobilized in Arunachal Pradesh since the 1970s against the settlement of the refugees and their citizenship claims supported by the Indian government. As a result of the mobilization and contentious politics, a majority of the Chakma and Hajong refugees remained stateless in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Chakmas, Hajongs and their settlement in Arunachal Pradesh (1964-1969)

The Chakmas are an ethnic group living in Arunachal Pradesh. Chakmas and Hajongs were displaced from erstwhile East Pakistan due to the construction of the Kaptai hydro power dam in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of present day Bangladesh. The Chittagong Hill Tracts shows the interplay of nation-building and development vision combined with militaristic pursuit of national security agenda of the state. Autonomy struggles of the ethnic minorities caused challenges to this nation-building process (Chakma 2010). The penetration of the hegemonic agenda in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh resulted in marginalization of indigenous communities and destruction of their culture and

identities since the partition of India. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) which is mostly inhabited by the indigenous communities such as Chakmas, Marmas, Chaks, Khayangs, Hajongs, Tangchangyas, Tripuras, Pankhus, Banjogis have a distinct culture and heritage in contrast to the Bengalis in Bangladesh. The CHT was administered separately from Assam and Bengal in the British period by a representative of the Governor-General-in-Council of India where the administrative staffs and police were recruited from the local communities. The Chittagong Hill Tract (also known as Hill Tracts Manual) of 1900, a colonial law for the administration provided the protective provision that empowered village headman regarding settlement of outsiders in the hilly region. The CHT Regulation that was amended in 1920 kept the tract as “excluded area” and subsequently under the Government of India Act, 1935 placed the entire region as “totally excluded area” (Chakma 2010).

They migrated to India with the approval of entry by the Government of India through the northeastern states such as Tripura and Mizoram bordering East Pakistan between 1964 and 1969. The hydropower dam was developed during the military regime of Pakistan before the formation of Bangladesh. The Kaptai dam was built in 1962 with an installed capacity of 230 MW. Due to rise of water level in 1964 in the reservoir of the Kaptai dam, the nearby villages were inundated. The disaster displaced nearly 100, 000 people (Parveen and Faisal 2002). Thousands of Chakmas crossed over the international border as refugees. Along with the Chakmas, a smaller ethnic group called the Hajongsalos crossed over the international border. The Chakmas follow Theravada Buddhism while the Hajongs are Hindus. These ethnic groups are also known as the Jumma people, which is a common term used to refer the indigenous peoples who inhabited the tract of Chittagong Hills, located in southeast Bangladesh. The displacement of the indigenous communities such as Chakmas and Hajongs from erstwhile East Pakistan was the consequence of the one-sided national development agenda of the ruling elite that excluded the ethnic minorities (Chakma 2010). Unlike the Tibetans, the Chakmas and Hajongs who became

refugees with uncertain nationalities, are neither a group of war victims nor are they a group of asylum seekers but victims of a hydro-power development project.

The refugees have been struggling for citizenship in the frontier state of Arunachal Pradesh for a long period of time. The refugee communities have no citizenship rights even after their settlement in the region for more than five decades. The attempt to acquire citizenship rights by the refugees has been met with resistance from the indigenous communities and their organizations in Arunachal Pradesh. The protests against citizenship of Chakmas have been taking place for a long period of time ever since the frontier territory began the exercise for elections to the state assembly (formerly Pradesh Council) in 1977. The protests movements against citizenship of the refugees in the sparsely populated state have been an influencing and emotive factor in the local politics of the region since 1977. The Chakmas and Hajongs approached the judiciary unceasingly in their quest for citizenship rights in India despite the continuous protests from the student and ethnic organizations of Arunachal Pradesh

The settlement of Chakmas and Hajongs were influenced by socio-cultural and political conditions emerging in 1960s. The political factors conditions suggested by scholars arose from national security dimension where it is suggested that Chakma refugees were settled as a buffer population in the event of future skirmishes with China (Singh, *Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India* 2010, p. 69). Other scholars observed that the Government of India contemplated the settlement of Chakmas in NEFA for the utility of the Indian army and the intelligence agencies to deter the Mizo and Naga insurgencies in the northeastern region of India. (Chaudhury and Biswas 1997). Thus, the Sino-Indian war of 1962 as well as insurgent movements are considered to have played an important role in settling the refugees in Arunachal Pradesh in 1960s. Some accounts held that the settlement of Chakmas and Hajongs in NEFA was considered to be based on easily available land in the Tirap division (Singh, *Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India* 2010).

The All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) argue that the refugees were settled in 1960s without the consent of the indigenous people under the initiative of Vishnu Sahay, the Governor of Assam; Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the chief minister of Assam and Utonkomoni Chakma,¹⁹⁵ the political officer of the Siang Frontier Division, on temporary basis for a period of ten years.¹⁹⁶ The role of the then political officer of Pasighat U. Chakma in settling the refugees (who belonged to his own community) had been a point of contention. On July 17, 1964, it was warned by P.N. Luthra, Adviser to the Governor of Assam to the Political Officers U. Chakma for his "over enthusiasm" in settling the Chakma refugees without the approval of government as well as explicit and written consent from the indigenous villagers on long term basis (Singh 2010, p. 143).

The state government of Arunachal Pradesh viewed the settlement of refugees Arunachal Pradesh as temporary arrangement. However, the plan of the central government to grant citizenship rights to the Chakma and Hajong refugees settled in Arunachal Pradesh of India was made public in 1993. In 1993, it was informed to the Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh, Nyodek Yonggam, that the central government was in favor of granting citizenship rights and permanent settlement to Chakmas and Hajongs. This led to vigorous agitation by the AAPSU and the political parties of the state. Thus, the settlement of Chakmas and Hajongs in Arunachal Pradesh is a combination of emerging statecraft for the frontier territory from security perspective and national interests influenced by bureaucratic intervention as well.

AAPSU drew from the example demographic change and effect on tribals in Tripura in forming their mobilization against citizenship rights of refugees in Arunachal Pradesh.

Student activism emerged in 1990s against the central government's plan of according

¹⁹⁵ Captain Utonkomoni Chakma wrote his name as U. Chakma, U stands for Shri in Burmese, prefix before a name like Mr. U Chakma was described was amongst the first batch of administrator for frontier region of Indian Administrative Service (IFAS) who was absorbed from the Indian Army. Capt. Chakma was described as a colorful person who knew Burmese and Bengali. Lt. Col. Rashid Yusuf Ali and K.C. Johorey along with U. Chakma were in charge of administration of Siang Frontier Division. See Claude Arpi's *Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS): Romanticism and Hostile Borders*, Claude Arpi is French-born journalist who worked in North East India. The article has been referred from his personal website. <http://www.claudearpi.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/IFAS.pdf> (Accessed April 9, 2018).

¹⁹⁶ See *AAPSU against citizenship to Chakma-Hajong refugees*, Arunachal Observer, May 23, 2017.

citizenship status of the refugees. The student organization and its supporters expressed their concerns on constitutional entitlements and land rights. The citizenship policy was contested on the ground of perceived threat to *indigenous* identities and culture. The perceived dominance of the non-indigenous groups in the foreseeable future in Arunachal Pradesh is considered as a threat to the *indigenous* communities and culture. AAPSU cite the example of Tripura where indigenous population has been decimated due to immigration after the partition of India and liberation of Bangladesh. The alarming rise of non-tribal population in Tripura since the beginning of the twentieth century until recent decades is considered to be a threat to indigenous identity by the student organizations.¹⁹⁷

One of the significant elements that student organizations like the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) and other social organizations considered during the popular mobilization on citizenship issues in Arunachal Pradesh is the cultural frame. Goffman argues that culture generates primary frameworks for collective action. Cultural frames refer to the shared meanings held by individuals that shape their understanding of situations and guide their actions within an organization (Howard-Grenville and Hoffman 2003). Cultural symbols are used for agenda setting that resonate with the population. Some of the common frames were used during mobilization of AAPSU. Cultural insecurity and threats to identity of the indigenous ethnic groups such as Tangsa, Wanchos, Idu Mishmi, Singpho and Khampti have been a part of the cultural frame of AAPSU's mobilization. The absence of political representation during the settlement of refugees in 1960s has been one of the major political frames on the citizenship issue used by student organizations and other groups in Arunachal Pradesh. The framing processes are attached to identity, political insecurity and resource scarcity of the indigenous communities among the advocates of the indigenous interest. The competition for land and

¹⁹⁷ The tribal population Tripura in 1901 was 52.89 per cent of 1.73 lakh population. By 1941, the tribal population was 50.09 per cent of 5.13 lak population. The tribal population in 1981 came down to 28.44 per cent of the total population of 2.05 million due to various socio-political developments. According to 2011 census, the state's total population is 36.74 lakh of which 11.66 lakhs are tribals. The percentage of tribal population is 31.76 per cent. Data are taken from official website of Government of Tripura <https://tripura.gov.in> (Accessed April 10, 2018) and *Tripura Profile*, Census of India Report, Government of India, 2011.

locally available natural resources such as forest produce like logs for timber business and quarrying of sands gravels, pebbles are significant issues that resonate with the collective action frame. The resources are not only considered for economic value but forest lands are also valued as community land by the indigenous communities. The student organization and its adherents frame the contexts of resource scarcity as an important frame.

In welfare states, many of essentials are catered to the citizenry by the state. Schools, hospitals, rations, land allotments, trading licenses, reservations for ethnic minorities through positive discrimination are provided in India. These are the public goods which are availed by the Indian citizens. In the context of Arunachal Pradesh, the idea of public goods becomes a crucial issue in mobilizing space where majority of the population are ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities are recognized as Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Indian Constitution. Scheduled Tribes are provided reservation in educational institutions and government run services sector. The indigenous communities are recognized as Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. The movement organization contextualized the issue that state's affirmative action in education and jobs would be affected when refugees are granted Indian citizenship status. The Chakmas and Hajongs are also contender of Scheduled Tribe in the state. The citizenship status along with Scheduled Tribe status to the refugees could constrained the existing the indigenous communities from climbing the socio-economic ladder. The access to public goods is projected with contesting and competitive theme of indigenous versus refugees which resonates with the indigenous population.

Political insecurities are also used as collective frames by AAPSU. The representatives of legislative organs of Indian state are elected through the process of universal adult franchise in the state legislative assembly election and parliamentary elections in the state. In a democratic country like India, the right to vote is an inalienable tool of political participation for its citizens. The enfranchisement also empower the citizens the right to

contest and elect representatives to the state's legislature and Parliament. When the refugees are accorded citizenship status, the heterogeneous ethnic groups who share the same constituencies would be pushed to the brink of uncertainty. The movement organization claimed that refugees with citizenship status will control the political destiny of the indigenous population due to the higher numerical strength. The threat of being outnumbered by the refugee population has drawn adherents and supports to the mobilizing processes of the student organization. It has political appeals of future insecurity to the indigenous ethnic tribes in Arunachal Pradesh.

The student organizations in their movement on refugee issue often claimed that the state has either overlooked or neglected their problems calling central government's role as a step-motherly attitude toward resolving their contentious problems. In a memorandum submitted to the Chief Election Commissioner of India in New Delhi in June 17, 1994, AAPSU wrote that reflected the feelings of marginalization of indigenous tribes:

*"The state of Arunachal Pradesh which has been considered an island of peace since Independence seems to be drifted away from the mainstream of National Unity due to step motherly, indecisive and mishandling of nearly two lakhs population of foreigners viz. the Chakmas of the then East Pakistan, Tibetans, Hajongs, Nepalese and recent influx of Bangaldeshi migrants. Despite stringent protests from the indigenous local tribals since North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) time, the Govt. of India is yet to take or give firm commitment to the people of the state for their immediate deletion from the electoral roll of the state, thereby detecting and deporting them to their home country. Moreover, illegal enrolment of more than 50, 000 foreign nationals into the total of hardly 4 lakh electorate of the state has created political mess in the state which is a vindictive violation of the political rights of the genuine Indian citizens."*¹⁹⁸

Mobilizing resources and social network in AAPSU movement

Resources are an essential part of mobilization. The growth, decline and change of movement depend on dynamics and tactics adopted during social movement. Resource mobilization theorists like McCarthy and Zald (1977) examined how resources are mobilized, linkages of movement groups, and dependence of external support and tactics of social movements which are essential parts of mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Resources in social movement studies are divided into intangible and tangible resources

¹⁹⁸ Ref No. AAPSU/M-3/94, Copy of Memorandum to the Chief Election Commissioner of India at New Delhi by AAPSU, Dated 17.5.1994. Collected during field work in Arunachal Pradesh in January, 2015.

(McCarthy and Zald 1977). Resource mobilization theory emphasizes the significance of outside contributions and co-optation of institutional resources by social movements (J. C. Jenkins 1983).

Scholars hold that mobilization potential of a group is largely determined by the degree of organization of the groups (J. C. Jenkins 1983). Groups sharing distinctive identities and interpersonal networks are highly organized and readily mobilized (Tilly 1978, p. 62-63). Student groups of educational institutions and indigenous tribes internalized the values and sentiments of AAPSU through the collective programs. The group level organization among the indigenous students generated solidarity and commitments on issues of collective concerns such as the threat to the identities of indigenous ethnic groups due to the citizenship of refugees. Student supporters were recruited and organized through district units, educational institutions and indigenous student bodies which provided the resources for collective action through various conferences, meetings and workshops. AAPSU-led mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh too has the support from outside the organization. Money, members, supporters are tangible assets of social movement organization. Intangible resources include use of symbols, identity, ethnic and cultural elements. Based on these theoretical considerations one can argue that the resource mobilization in the case of mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh reveals both these elements. Mobilization of resources was dependent on the structure of the student organization in Arunachal Pradesh. AAPSU is structurally divided into the following: a federal body known as the Central Committee of AAPSU; District Students' Unions; Assembly constituency-based students' union and Branch Students' Unions external to Arunachal Pradesh.¹⁹⁹ Besides the structural division at the organizational level, AAPSU also has units in colleges and higher secondary schools, the Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU) and

¹⁹⁹ The organizational units of AAPSU work as network units during the time of bandh, public rallies, demonstrations and strikes called by the central committee of AAPSU who come from their respective places in Arunachal Pradesh. The AAPSU movement against refugees in 2015 and 2017 witnessed participation of students from colleges and university in uniform. This was witnessed to 2015 rally organized by AAPSU at Itanagar on September, 2015 against the Supreme Court verdict in favor of granting Indian citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs

the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST). The general secretaries of the college and student unions of school are members of the district units of the AAPSU. All the student issues relating to schools and colleges are addressed by the respective district student body. The branch student units are confined to cities in different parts of India.

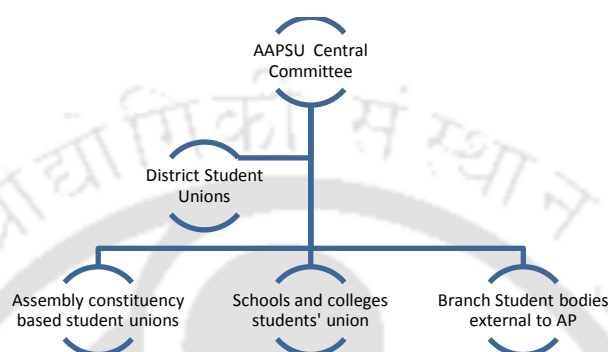


Figure 4: Illustration of the organizational structure of All Arunachal Students' Union (AAPSU)

Besides, the affiliated district student unions, the All Arunachal Students' Union (AAPSU) comprises of students of university, higher secondary and secondary schools, colleges, community based on student organizations and recognized branches of student units formed outside the state.²⁰⁰

AAPSU holds a general conference every four years. This is accompanied by the election of a new federal body of the student organization. The venue of the meeting is decided on the basis of the executive meeting of the student union held ahead of the conference. The conference cum election is open for all university students. Delegates of secondary schools are restricted to five including a composition of three males and two female members. The number of higher secondary school and college delegates is restricted to seven including four males and three females and twenty five including fifteen males and ten females. The affiliated organizational units such as the district students' union and branch students'

²⁰⁰ Notification of AAPSU, Ref No. AAPSU/XX?GNL-CONF/01, September 20, 2001. Collected during field work in Arunachal Pradesh, January, 2015.

union are allocated ten (six males and four females) and five (three males and two females) delegates respectively. However, there is no such gender specific allocation for delegates of community based students unions such as Nyishi, Adi, Galo, Tagin, Apatani, Khampti, Singpho, Nocte, Monpa, Wancho.

The delegates take part in the internal session of a conference.²⁰¹ The delegates are empowered to voice their concern on issues and decisions concerning the working of the student body. They have the right to participate in debates and discussions in the deliberation in a democratic manner. The delegates have the right to exercise their votes in the election of a new federal body. Students affiliated with political party are denied registration as delegate in conferences and meetings. Members of student bodies are asked to come in traditional attires along with the student union's flag to the conferences. The student organization also accepts resolution from the delegates which is addressed to the President of the AAPSU. The federal units are entrusted with the responsibilities of spreading the words on the meetings and conferences in the educational institutions.

The AAPSU units spread in the several districts acts as supporters during strikes and *bandh* calls organized by AAPSU on the Chakma and Hajong citizenship issues. Tangible assets in the mobilization against citizenship of refugees are gathered from different sections and classes of society in Arunachal Pradesh. Supporters and sympathizers are drawn from elite classes of the society ranging from school teachers to university professors.²⁰² Often educators are invited to lecture on the movement goals and objectives. Meetings and workshops organized by student organizations are filled with cross section of leaders of community organizations and teachers.

²⁰¹ The notification of AAPSU states: "The Central Conference Committee will not entertain any delegates unless recommended/ certified by the respective Head of Institutions/ the Presidents/General Secretaries of DSU and BSU with valid Identity Card duly countersigned with office round seal and stamp of the institutions and organizations. This must be strictly adhered to." AAPSU document collected during field work in Arunachal Pradesh, January, 2015.

²⁰² This is drawn from interaction with one of the office-bearers of apex committee of the All Assam Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union during the field work in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh in January, 2015.

Mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh against the citizenship of refugees (1980-2017)

As mentioned earlier, AAPSU has been in the forefront of protests since 1970s against the claim for Indian citizenship rights of the Chakmas and Hajongs. The two ethnic groups were settled in various parts of Arunachal Pradesh from 1964 to 1969. They were displaced due to hydropower development in the Kaptai dam in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. AAPSU also stood against the entitlement of benefits and illegal procurement of Schedule Tribe status provided to Tibetan refugees by the government authorities due to concerns over resource scarcity and economic inequalities in Arunachal Pradesh. The Tibetans refugees came to Arunachal Pradesh as political asylum seekers. I will discuss the protest that had taken place in Arunachal Pradesh on the issues of refugees and Indian citizenship by the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) since 1980 to contemporary period. The process of mobilization against the citizenship status and permanent settlement of refugees in Arunachal Pradesh began most vigorously in 1980s and 1990s. The mobilization was led by the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) raising indigenous concerns of identity, culture and resources due to the presence of refugees and claims of Indian citizenship status in Arunachal Pradesh.

In 1979, AAPSU prepared the Charter of Demands and submitted to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. The Charter of Demand includes the demands for detection and deportation of the foreign nationals, withdrawal of land allotment permits, trade license from the refugees and non- indigenous persons, effective checks against infiltration of foreign nationals. These were considered by the AAPSU to be the corollary sides-effects with the creation of the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh (S. Dutta 1998, pp. 28-29). In 1980, AAPSU declared a two-day state wide Arunachal Pradesh *bandh* demanding solution of the charter of demands. This was the first instance of a general strike enforced by the AAPSU. AAPSU organized strikes led to an immediate response from the state government of Arunachal Pradesh. The Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh Gegong Apang broadcasted his radio address from the All India Radio Dibrugarh station on April

23, 1980 where he tried to persuade the agitating students to end the movement (S. Dutta 1998). However, AAPSU did not concede to the appeal from the state government of Arunachal Pradesh. The student body continued with the program of *bandhs*. Student activism thus began to take a confrontational path against the state while demanding identification and deportantion of foreigners from Arunachal Pradesh.

In 1985, AAPSU took a resolution at Pasighat on August 26 regarding the issue of Chakma and Tibetan refugees in Arunachal Pradesh. The resolution stated as follows:

“The meeting resolves that the refugees like Chakmas, Tibetan settled temporarily in Arunachal Pradesh should be withdrawn immediately from Arunachal Pradesh. It is a sensitive area and as it restricts entrance of even Indian citizens to Arunachal Pradesh without valid Inner Line Permit in accordance with the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act 1873. The meeting feels that the settlement of foreigners in Arunachal Pradesh for a prolonged period may prove security upon and hamper the integrity of the territory in due course. Further in certain areas the concentration of refugees and the speedy growth of their population have threatened to change the demographic picture of the area. The Govt. was created with this problems and the present Hon’ble Chief Minister said in his broadcast to the people of Arunachal Pradesh on 23rd Aril 1980, that the Govt has taken dispersal of these refugees with the Central Govt. The meeting now resolves to urge the Govt. for immediate dispersal of Tibetans and Chakmas refugees from Arunachal Pradesh before they can destroy the demographic harmony of the territory.”²⁰³

In the same meeting, AAPSU also asked the government to apply the provisions of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations Act, 1873 while issuing the Inner Line Permit, enrollment in the voters’ list, land allotment and trading licenses. AAPSU feared that there could be influx of displaced persons from neighboring Assam following the Assam Accord, 1985²⁰⁴ signed between the All Assam Students’ Union and the government. AAPSU urged the government to resort to preventive measures in the border areas of Assam while issuing Inner Line Permit. AAPSU called for effective measures so that Inner Line Permits werec not issued to the people of doubtful origin. There was thus demonstrative impact of Assam agitation led by the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) in the neighboring state of Arunachal Pradesh in the method and activities of mobilization

²⁰³ Copy of Resolution Adopted in the meeting convened by the All Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union held at Pasighat on 26th August, 1985. Collected during field work in January, 2016 in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.

²⁰⁴ Assam Accord took place in New Delhi on the eve of Independence Day of Indai, 1985. For further deatisl, see previous chapter on the section of Assam movement.(1979-1985)

of AAPSU which also raised similar concerns over demographic disorder in future due to continued presence of refugee groups and illegal immigration into the state.

In the following year in 1986, the agitation drew more support from the student community. AAPSU mobilized students under the leadership of Nabam Rebia and Tabin Taki that resorted to vigorous methods of agitation. Government remained less responsive in fulfilling the demands of the student organization. The intensified protest movement led by AAPSU in 1986 led to the killing of a student named Kipa Kache on February 3, 1986, as a result of firing by the Central Reserve Police Force at Nyapin (in Kurung Kumey district) located in the central-western part in the state (S. Dutta 1998, p. 39). AAPSU declared Kipa Kache as the first martyr in a meeting at Pasighat on July 17, 1986 and decided to erect memorials in his memory in the educational institutions across the state. AAPSU intensified the agitation with poster campaigns on August 25, 1986; Arunachal *bandh* on October 7, 1986; districts-wise *bandh* from October 15, 1986 to October 25, 1986 and state wide hunger strike on November 5, 1986 (S. Dutta 1998).

The student body continued the agitation through submission of memorandums to the state and the central governments under the leadership of Tok Bom Borang and Liki Ete in December, 1989. AAPSU also organized a demonstration in February, 1990 to press the state government demanding solution on the issues of refugees. However, the state was less responsive to the refugee issues raised by the student body. The mobilization of AAPSU intensified in 1990s opposing the attempt of granting citizenship to Chakma and Hajong refugees by the central government. The mobilization led by the AAPSU enforced economic blockades in refugee settlements. There were vigorous campaigns against the refugees to quit the state. In 1995, as a response to the student mobilization there was a shift in the state politics on the refugee issues. The mobilization led to the formation of the regional political party of Arunachal Congress under the leadership of Gegong Apangwho became the Chief Minister of the state.

In 1992, the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly adopted a resolution demanding the deportation of Chakmas and Hajongs from the state due to the central government plans to confer Indian citizenship to the Chakmas.²⁰⁵ AAPSU protests grew stronger when a central government minister informed the Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament Nyodek Yonggam about the consideration of Indian citizenship for the Chakmas and Hajongs. In 1994, AAPSU started the Quit Arunachal movement that set the deadline for the Chakma and Hajong refugees on September 30, 1994 to leave the state.²⁰⁶ During the process of Quit Arunachal campaigns in Arunachal Pradesh, AAPSU activists in an attempt to forcefully drive out the refugees served notices to Chakmas living in Kokila village in the district of Papumpare.²⁰⁷ Meanwhile, the state government of Assam expressed that it will not accommodate any refugees and sealed the certain sections of the Assam-Arunachal borders with shoot-at-sights order to discourage the influx of Chakmas.

In May 1994, AAPSU along with 400 supporters organized the *Delhi Chalo* (Let's March to Delhi!) to draw the attention of the central government on the threat to identity and culture of indigenous tribes due to the presence of Chakma and Hajong refugees in Arunachal Pradesh. However, the Prime Minister did not respond to the AAPSU activists in New Delhi (S. Dutta 1998, p. 46-47). AAPSU organized protest rallies in Itanagar against the Indian government's plan of granting citizenship to the refugees and the movement led to the eruption of violence in Changlang district where over 100 Chakma households were burnt down.²⁰⁸ AAPSU declared a ten-hour *bandh* when Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao visited Itanagar to campaign for candidates of the Congress party on February 27, 1995 before the state assembly polls. AAPSU opposed the electoral

²⁰⁵ This was revealed to Nyodek Yonggan, the Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh by the Union Minister of State for Home P.M. Sayeed. India Today, October 15, 1994.

²⁰⁶ Banerjee. Ruben *Arunachal residents intensify campaign to drive out Chakmas, refugees determined to stay on*, India Today, October 15, 1994.

²⁰⁷ Kokila has Chakma population which falls in Papumpare district. The place is adjacent to the state capital of Arunachal Pradesh-Itanagar.

²⁰⁸ Banerjee. Ruben *Arunachal residents intensify campaign to drive out Chakmas, refugees determined to stay on*, India Today, October 15, 1994.

campaigns of leaders of all-India political parties.²⁰⁹ Similar *bandhs* were enforced by AAPSU during the visit of former Prime Minister V.P. Singh and Shatrughan Sinha during the electoral campaigns in Pasighat, Tezu and Namsai on March 4, March 7 and March 8, 1995 respectively (S. Dutta 1998, p. 51).

In 1995, a Referendum Rally was organized by the AAPSU where all the legislators of the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly, Members of Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha from Arunachal Pradesh, elected representatives of panchayats, leaders of various political parties, voluntary organizations and the indigenous organizations were invited to Itanagar. It was organized with the objective to openly share and debate on the issues of refugees which was termed as massive explanation-cum-public rally. AAPSU virtually dictated all the elected political representatives for mandatory presence as it was evident from their letter addressed to a Member of Parliament from Arunachal Pradesh as it goes:

*"We on behalf of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union invite you explanation on the issue positively and without fail. The details of the programme will be made available on your arrival at Itanagar. Further, it is to inform you that the Union has decided to take political action through public mobilization against the MPs and MLAs absenting from the proceedings."*²¹⁰

AAPSU campaigns for mobilizing public opinion against the refugees in Arunachal Pradesh was, organized on September 20, 1995. The Referendum Rally resolved that the refugees should be unequivocally deported by January 1, 1996. The resolution was adopted with the presence of all the sixty elected members of the Legislative Assembly of Arunachal Pradesh including the Chief Minister Gegong Apang.²¹¹

AAPSU stated in their memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh on March 7, 1997:

"The illegal settlement of Chakma-Hajong under the patronage of ill-willed politicians at Centre has resulted in marginalization of indigenous tribes like Noctes, Wangchoos, Khamptis, Singphos and Tangsas in the eastern-most part of Arunachal Pradesh, while in the Western-most part the Tibetans, Bhutanese and Nepalese have dominated over the indigenous tribes Monpas,

²⁰⁹ *The Arunachal Times*, 2.3.1995

²¹⁰ All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union letter addressed to Mr. Nyodak Yonggam, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Dated 30.08.1995

²¹¹ *The Arunachal Times*, 21.9.1995

Sherdukpens, Akas and Mijis. In the central part of Arunachal Pradesh, there is floating population of Bangladeshis causing serious social tension among the tribes of Nishis, Adis, Apatani and Tagins and it is possible that these fanatic Bangladeshi Muslims population might exploit the innocent tribal of this region as I.S.I., the very nefarious agent of Pakistan is already actively in operation to terrorize the region."²¹²

AAPSU demanded the total removal of Chakma-Hajongs including the Tibetans, Bhutanese, Nepalese and Bangladeshis from the state to protect the indigenous culture and identity of the people of Arunachal Pradesh.

Mobilization against the Tibetans, Chakmas and Hajongs refugees re-emerged in 2000 and 2001. AAPSU launched the movement in a phase wise manner demanding the action from the government on the refugee issues. Mass processions were carried in the state capital Itanagar, district head quarters, sub-divisional offices, offices of the extra assistant commissioner and circle officers by the student activists on October 3, 2000 which was followed by six hour peaceful *dharna* in front of the Civil Secretariat and district administrative offices in the state on October 11, 2000.²¹³ The series of agitation continued with *bandh* calls on October 18 and October 23, 2000. AAPSU announced its agitation programs by calling for 48-hour Arunachal *bandh* on January 19, 2001. The demands included re-concentration of Tibetan refugees in the Tibetan resettlement camp, Chakma-Hajong refugees and strict checking of influx of foreign nationals in the state.²¹⁴ Indigenous tribes such as Monpas complained that Tibetans were illegally procuring the Scheduled Tribe certificate thereby limiting the scope of educational and job opportunities of indigenous communities. It was also brought to the notice that the Tibetans have been leaving the original settlement camps allotted by government and were beginning to dominate the businesses in Tawang and Bomdila region in Arunachal Pradesh. In a memorandum addressed to the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh on March 22, 2000, AAPSU raised the demand for immediate cancellation of Scheduled Tribe certificate issued to Tibetan refugees by Deputy Commissioners of Bomdila and Tawang including

²¹² Copy of Memorandum to the Chief Minister, Arunachal Pradesh by AAPSU, Dated March 7, 1997. Collected during field work in Itanagar, January, 2016.

²¹³ AAPSU Notification, 6.9.2000. Collected during fieldwork, January, 2015.

²¹⁴ AAPSU Notification for Bandh call, 10.1.2001. Collected during field work in January, 2015

the re-concentration of Tibetan refugees at Tenzingaon.²¹⁵ The Chakmas and Hajongs too faced the similar allegations of occupying the land beyond their original settlement demarcated by the government which was seen as an encroachment of forests and indigenous land in eastern Arunachal Pradesh.

The mobilization became intense in 2004 when the Election Commission of India included 1497 names belonging to Chakma and Hajong communities into the electoral rolls based on the orders of the Delhi High Court. AAPSU called for the removal of the Chakma and Hajong names from the voter's list and the boycott of parliamentary elections (Bath 2004). However, the boycott call was not effective as the parliamentary polls to the two Lok Sabha seats of the state were won by the candidates of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with 53.9 per cent votes. The state cabinet adopted a resolution on May 14, 2003 which stated that non-indigenous persons shall not be entitled to be enrolled in the electoral rolls in the state unless they possess Inner Line Permits. This was overruled by the Election Commission. The Election Commission stated that it was not in consonance with the provision of the Constitution and acts and rules governing the matter.²¹⁶

The All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) district unit known as the All Papumpare Students' Union (APDSU) and the ethnic student body called the All Nyishi Students' Union (ANSU) jointly carried out anti-migrant movements in 2007 and 2008. The student-led movement concentrated mostly in Itanagar and Naharlagun areas of Arunachal Pradesh. AAPSU launched the Operation Clean Drive movement by serving quit notices to migrants without the Inner Line Permits (ILP) working in the capital region of Itanagar in September 12, 2008 that led to the exodus of nearly 2000 to 3000 people from Arunachal Pradesh.²¹⁷ The Operation Clean Drive was, however, met with a backlash

²¹⁵ AAPSU Memorandum to Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, 22.3.2000. Collected during field work, January, 2015.

²¹⁶ Bath, Nani *Chakma Hajong Issue: Democratic Solution is Possible*, *The Arunachal Times*, September 28,, 2015.

²¹⁷ Blockade over influx drive-Assam union flays Arunachal clean up', September 18, 2008 , *The Telegraph*, Guwahati, https://www.telegraphindia.com/1080918/jsp/northeast/story_9851240.jsp (accessed April 10, 2018)

by the All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU). This led to economic blockades on National Highway-52 as well as in the check gates of inter-state border (of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh) at Banderdewa and Kimin against Arunachal Pradesh. The blockade was lifted after a series of negotiation and conciliation within the student bodies of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

In September 2017, when the central government announced its plans of implementing the Supreme Court verdict of granting citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs, AAPSU declared its protests by calling a dawn to dusk 12-hour Arunachal Pradesh *bandh* on September 19, 2017.²¹⁸ The central government in compliance to the Supreme Court verdict in September 17, 2015 that ruled in favor of granting Indian citizenship status to Chakmas and Hajongs refugees inhabiting in Arunachal Pradesh, explored the possibilities of implementing the judicial pronouncement. The judgment of the Supreme Court of India was pronounced following the writ petition for Indian citizenship filed by the Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRHAP) in 2007. The Writ Petition (Civil) No. 510 of 2007 categorized as Civil Original Jurisdiction in the Supreme Court of India was petitioned under Article 32 of the Constitution of India. It was petitioned by the CCRHAP to seek direction regarding the grant of citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs settled in Arunachal Pradesh who migrated to India from 1964 to 1969. In the judgement delivered by the Supreme Court on September 17, 2015 in the case of *Committee for Citizenship Rights of Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh versus State of Arunachal Pradesh*, the Supreme Court remarked in the following words:

“It is well known that the Chakmas and Hajongs were displaced from the area which became part of East Pakistan (now in Bangladesh) on construction of Kaptai dam and were allowed to be rehabilitate under the decision of the Government of India. As earlier held by this court, the Delhi High Court and Gauhati High Court, they need to be protected and their claims of citizenship need to be considered as per applicable procedure. They could not be discriminated against in any manner pending formal conferment of rights of citizenship. Their status also stands duly acknowledged in the guidelines of the Election Commission of India. Accordingly, we allow this petition and direct the Government of India and the State of Arunachal Pradesh to finalize the conferment of citizenship rights on eligible Chakmas and Hajongs and also to ensure compliance of

²¹⁸ See AAPSU declares state wide bandh, *The Arunachal Times*, Itanagar, September 15, 2017. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2017/09/15/aapsu-declares-state-wide-bandh/> (Accessed April 9, 2018)

directions in judicial decisions referred to in earlier part of this order for protection of their life and liberty and against their discrimination in any manner. The exercise may be completed at the earliest preferably within three months from today."²¹⁹

However, there was no immediate step to confer citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs within the three months from the date of judgement. The central government attempted to begin the process of granting of citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs in 2017. The Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India which was entrusted the responsibility of looking after the citizenship issues of refugees in Arunachal Pradesh. The government recommended limited citizenship to the Chakmas and Hajongs.²²⁰

Limited citizenship although not defined anywhere in the Indian Constitution and statutes, was a specific formula worked out by the Indian government for the Chakma and Hajong refugees of Arunachal Pradesh. The government wanted to accord Indian citizenship to the two refugee groups with access to Inner Line Permit (ILP) for travel and work but without land rights and Scheduled Tribe status. Arunachal Pradesh has a protected status under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873. Outsiders (Indian citizens from other states) has to obtain Inner Line Permit in order to enter the state. Outsiders are also restricted from owning land and property in the state under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873; the Chin Hills Regulation, 1896 and the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945. In this context, the idea of limited citizenship was worked out by the government while complying with the judgment of the Supreme Court vis-à-vis the protected status of Arunachal Pradesh. However, the idea of limited citizenship was opposed by the student organizations like AAPSU and ethnic tribes' student bodies from Khamptis and Singphos as well as indigenous social organizations. AAPSU opposed the granting of citizenship in their state citing threats and insecurities for indigenous ethnic communities.

²¹⁹ Judgement of Supreme Court of India in *Committee for Citizenship Rights of Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh versus State of Arunachal Pradesh*, Writ Petition (Civil) No. 510 of 2007, September 17, 2015.

²²⁰ See *Chakmas, Hajongs to get limited citizenship*, The Assam Tribune, Guwahati, September 14, 2017.

Many indigenous organizations came out in support of the AAPSU-led movement against the process of granting citizenship to Chakmas and Hajongs in September, 2017. The state wide *bandh* called by the AAPSU on September 19, 2017 witnessed support from indigenous communities and organizations in Arunachal Pradesh on the day of *bandh* call. In Namsai districts, the district students unit such as the All Namsai District Students' Union, Arunachal Pradesh Students' Federation-Namsai unit, community based student bodies such as All Tai Khampti Singpho Students' Union; Joint Action Committee on Chakma-Hajong Issue-Namsai unit, youth associations from Chongkham and Lathao areas; members from All Changlang District Students' Union, Longding Districts Students' Union participated in the protests by burning tyres to cause blockades on the roads.²²¹

The protest of AAPSU activists was more intensive in Itanagar with incidents of stone pelting on police vehicles and government personnel on duty, clashes with security personnel; road blockades and burning of tyres. Student activists set fire to government owned Arunachal Pradesh State Transport Service (APSTS) buses as well as private vehicles. It was reported that protesters were heading to the Chief Minister Pema Khandu's residence but were restrained by the police forces.²²²

Three activists of AAPSU were detained in the police station at Itanagar in September 19, 2017. It was reported that four cases were registered by the police in Itanagar during the day of *bandh* called by AAPSU.²²³ Simultaneously, protests were held by the members of Arunachal Students Union Delhi (ASUD) at New Delhi in Arunachal Bhavan where students appealed to the elected representatives, bureaucrats, technocrats and the people to stand up in solidarity against the citizenship of Chakmas and Hajongs as well as the

²²¹ See *Arunachal erupts against centre's decision to grant citizenship to Chakma-Hajong refugees*, The Arunachal Times, Itanagar, September 20, 2017.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

Tibetan Refugee Policy (TRP), 2014 to safeguard the interest of the indigenous people.²²⁴

The Shillong based Arunachal Students Union too expressed their support for the *bandh* and demanded to withdraw the Supreme Court decision to grant the citizenship of Chakmas and Hajongs. Ethnic student bodies of the Galo tribe such as the Galo Students' Union (GSU) said that they would continue to support the AAPSU and appealed the government to evict the refugees. Protests in the form of shutdowns, burning of tyres on roads and road blockades were organized in Roing, Pasighat, Ruksin, Sille, Nirjuli, Naharlagun and Daporijo.

Student mobilization and the refugees in Arunachal Pradesh: Local politics and counter mobilization by Chakmas and Hajongs

The student mobilizations against refugees in Arunachal Pradesh had an impact in the local politics of Arunachal Pradesh. The consequences of the student mobilization upon the refugees and the impact on the state politics in Arunachal Pradesh are discussed in this section. During the field work for this study, one of the respondents in Diyun, where majority of Chakmas are settled by the government shared the predicaments of refugees in Arunachal Pradesh as follows:

*"We had a hard life. I was born in 1971, six years after parent's 'migration. It is a very hard life. Our life is very horrible life, if you can say that. One can only feel when people survived without political background. We have no access to basic rights or facilities. Even our kids get no birth certificates. In 1994, very unfortunate thing took place; forceful drive was done by the AAPSU. In 1994, all schools were closed down by withdrawing the teachers and burnt down many villages like Mpen, Bijoypur, Mudoideep. In 1994, September 30 was the deadline. The state machinery set a deadline for Chakma and Hajongs refugees. They burnt down self-help basis hostels in 1994 and even Diyun Higher Secondary School was burnt down. In 1994, I don't know how to say. Economic blockade was imposed. Neither we could buy nor could we sell. I think no one should do this in life. Once economic blockade is done, it is difficult to survive."*²²⁵

The Chakma and Hajongs shared their experiences during the intensified AAPSU movement in 1990s during the fieldwork in the Diyun area of Changlang district in eastern Arunachal Pradesh. The heightened mobilization of the Quit Arunachal movement led by AAPSU against the Chakma and Hajong refugees had its repercussions. The Chakma and

²²⁴ See *Arunachal erupts against centre's decision to grant citizenship to Chakma-Hajong refugees*, The Arunachal Times, Itanagar, September 20, 2017.

²²⁵ Interview with Dilip Chakma, Principal, Mahabodhi School, Diyun on April 12, 2016.

Hajong communities began an organized resistance through quasi-judicial bodies and voluntary organizations such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India and People's Union for Civil Liberty (PUCL). The communities who were on the verge of getting Indian citizenship in 1993-94 under the initiative of central government were stalled by AAPSU-led anti-citizenship campaigns.

The Committee for Citizenship Rights of Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRHAP) was formed in 1991 with the objective of advocating for Indian citizenships rights by the Chakma and Hajongs refugees of Arunachal Pradesh in Diyun in 1991. The CCRHAP is the rights body of the two communities in Arunachal Pradesh. The CCRHAP approached the National Human Rights Commission and petitioned the Supreme Court of India for the Indian citizenship status of Chakmas and Hajongs. The organized campaigns of the CCRHAP also received attention from various rights groups in Delhi. The CCRHAP approached the Members of Parliament (MP) to intimate them of the humanitarian crises the refugees were facing due to the AAPSU campaigns. During the course of the field study, Subimal Bikash Chakma, one of the founders of the CCRHAP expressed in the following words:

*"The Chakmas then realized that it will be difficult to survive without citizenship in Arunachal Pradesh. The AAPSU even tried to expel the Chakmas from Arunachal Pradesh. We thought that without citizenship we could be expelled. Therefore, we formed the Citizenship Rights Committee. After forming the Committee, we started approaching the Members of Parliament (MP), Ministers, and Secretaries. This continued from 1991 onwards."*²²⁶

The Chakma and Hajong settlements in Papumpare and Changlang districts faced economic blockade which affected the normal lives of the refugees even in procuring basic needs like food and access of health care. Members of the communities were intimidated by AAPSU activists to leave their villages which also bear the worst crises in the way of burning down of houses in eastern part of Arunachal in 1990s. During the field study, a Chakma who experienced the hardships recalled the days of 1990s as follows:

²²⁶ Interview with Subimal Bikash Chakma, Diyun, April, 2016.

“Today the appointments for jobs were cancelled, tomorrow someone would be tortured. In 1994, ration cards were stopped. We complaint all these issues to the NHRC. The NHRC gave show cause notices to the central and state governments. Then the state government said that the Citizenship Rights Committee was lying and they have no public mandate and many others. By doing this and that, the year 1993 went. The torture and arson increased with pressures. AAPSU organized rallies and bandh in various places. Our Chakma movement has so many problems. There was threat to lives and property ours.”²²⁷

The Chakmas and Hajongs members in public places experienced physical assaults and were threatened to quit before the deadline set by the student body AAPSU and its supporters. The entitlements such as ration cards and student scholarships which the communities received from the government were withdrawn by the state government of Arunachal Pradesh due to the pressure from All Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union (AAPSU). The recruitment of Chakma and Hajong people to the state government services were restricted after the AAPSU led movement. The system of appointment of village chief known as *gaon burah* in Chakma and Hajongs villages was also discontinued due to heightened campaigns by AAPSU. Rights and privileges of the Chakmas and Hajongs were thus curtailed due to AAPSU-led anti-citizenship movement in Arunachal Pradesh.

The role of AAPSU on the issue of citizenship of the Chakmas, Hajongs and Tibetans refugees has been met with counter petitions by rights groups of Chakmas and Hajongs as well as human rights bodies. As stated in the earlier section on the framing processes, the AAPSU has viewed the issue of refugees as a ‘problem’ from socio-economic and political perspectives. The mobilization against granting of citizenship or state-sponsored benefits by the central government of India to the three refugee groups has been seen as threat a demographic threat to the indigenous peoples. The AAPSU has not taken the citizenship issue of refugees as a humanitarian problem. The state government of Arunachal Pradesh expressed reservation regarding the citizenship of Chakmas and Hajongs. In the National Human Rights Commission versus the State of Arunachal Pradesh (1996), the state government mentioned before the Supreme Court that it had reservation regarding the grant of citizenship and the state government responded

²²⁷ Interview with a Chakma respondent, Diyun, April, 2016.

*The sue queriers Constitutional position of the State debars it from permitting outsiders to be settled within its territory, that it has limited resources and that its economy is mainly dependent on the vagaries of nature; and that it has no financial resources to tend to the needs of the Chakmas having already spent approximately Rs.100 crores on their upkeep. It has also been stated that the Union of India has refused to share its financial responsibility for the upkeep of the Chakmas.*²²⁸

The intervention of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the judicial verdict of the Supreme Court of India was a turning point in the struggle for citizenship of the Chakmas and Hajongs. The National Human Rights Commission's intervention helped the Chakmas and Hajongs to place their case for judicial reading and interpretations. The NHRC which approached the Supreme Court in 1996 made the state government and the central government responded on the alleged persecution from a section of citizens of Arunachal Pradesh and sought enforcement of Article 21, that is, protection of life and personal liberty, under the Indian Constitution. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution is entitled to both citizens and foreigners as per judicial interpretations in India. The People's Union for Civil Liberty in Delhi and the Committee for Citizenship Rights of Chakmas and Hajongs of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRHAP) made complaints to NHRC. The complaints to National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) were based on the quit notices served by the AAPSU to the refugees on October 9, 1994 and October 15, 1994. The National Human Rights Commission felt there were immediate threats to the lives of these communities in Arunachal Pradesh. One of the leaders of Chakma and Hajongs during the course of this study narrated the circumstances of that period in the following words:

*"Malaria spread in 1995. Many people deceased. Even two members from single family succumbed to malaria. To get treatment outside, we faced problem in the check gates in the border. We filed complaints in the NHRC. Even the state government replied that all these were lies. In later period, the NHRC came and took seriously in 1995. We met the NHRC Chairman Ranganath Mishra. We had a meeting with the board. And they said they would file a case. The NHRC also send a person from Assam to visit us who submitted a report to the NHRC. In 1996, the Supreme Court gave an interim judgement which ruled that the Chakmas and Hajongs could not be forced out."*²²⁹

The Supreme Court directed the state government of Arunachal Pradesh to ensure the life and personal liberty of each and every Chakmas and Hajongs and to protect them from

²²⁸ Judgement of Supreme Court of India, National Human Rights Commission Versus State of Arunachal Pradesh, January 9, 1996.

²²⁹ Interview with a Chakma and Hajong community leader, Diyun, April, 2016.

forcible eviction by organized groups such as AAPSU.²³⁰ The Supreme Court also directed the central government of India to provide additional forces to maintain the law and order situation to protect the lives and liberty of Chakmas and Hajongs residing in Arunachal Pradesh. During an interview conducted for this study, a respondent recalled how the order of the Supreme Court led to the gradual decline of student mobilization against the citizenship of Chakmas and Hajongs in Arunachal Pradesh. He said:

“In January 1995, there were Supreme Court orders. The Supreme Court passed the orders to the central and state government relating to the lives and security of the Chakma and Hajong people. If the AAPSU creates terror, the judgement said the government was obliged to protect through the use of security forces. There were some problems. For sorting out the problems, Supreme Court said that citizenship could be done by registration for those who came from East Pakistan under the Citizenship Act, 1955 section 5 (1) (a). It was also said that the pending applicants for citizenship shall not be evicted. After the order of the Supreme Court, the situation became gradually normal. The people and the government here came to know that it cannot be done. The agitation of the students also gradually decreased.”²³¹

The Supreme Court directed the central government for consideration of Indian citizenship of the Chakmas and Hajongs under Section 5 (1) (a) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 in accordance with law. Section 5 (1) (a) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 laid down the provision to secure Indian citizenship by registration. According to this section, those residents who lived in India for seven years or were born to persons of Indian origins or whose parents were either born in undivided India or such other territory that became part of India after August 15, 1947 can become the Indian citizens.²³² The Supreme Court judgement in the NHRC case of the Chakmas and Hajongs, thus ruled that by virtue of the their prolonged stay in Arunachal Pradesh and those born in the state, the Chakmas and Hajongs are thus eligible to be conferred Indian citizenship under the relevant section of the Citizenship Act, 1955. The judgement of the Supreme Court in the *National Human Rights Commission versus State of Arunachal Pradesh (1996)* brought about relief and confidence among the insecure Chakmas and Hajong communities in Arunachal Pradesh. This can be understood in the words of one of respondents during the field study:

²³⁰ Judgement of Supreme Court in 9. 1.1996. National Human Rights Commission versus State of Arunachal Pradesh (1996).

²³¹ Interview with a member of Chakma and Hajong communities, Diyun, April, 2016.

²³² The Citizenship Act, 1955. Section 5 (1) (a).

“After the judgement of the Supreme Court, our Chakma people gradually tried settling down. The areca nut gardens you see here now were not there once. Jack fruits and mangoes were not planted. Even the banana trees were not planted. Because it was thought that even it was planted the people were unsure when they have to leave the place. After the 1996 judgement, it was understood by the people that they could not be expelled and they would stay permanently. So with whatever land they have, they are farming these days.”²³³

The judicial interventions from the Supreme Court and High Courts have been crucial in acquiring rights to Chakma and Hajong communities in Arunachal Pradesh. The activism of Citizenship Rights Committee of the Chakmas and Hajongs in pursuing the citizenship questions in the recent decades thus provided relief to the refugee communities in the face of mobilization of the AAPSU.

On the other hand, the judgment of the judiciary and intervention of human rights bodies on Chakma and Hajong citizenship issue in Arunachal Pradesh generated political shifts in the state politics. Political shifts were experienced due to mobilization of the AAPSU in the state against the process of providing Indian citizenship to the refugees along with permanent residential status in Arunachal Pradesh. The AAPSU movement created political shifts in the state politics in 1990s. There were instances of political instability over the citizenship of refugees in 1995 when Gegong Apang led the government. The local politics in Arunachal Pradesh has been dominated mostly by the Indian National Congress since the inception of popular elections in the state in 1970s. The state politics has experienced one party dominance and lack of strong opposition in the 80s and 90s. Scholars pointed out that the oppositions in Arunachal Pradesh existed only in name (Singh, *Stateless in South Asia: The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India* 2010, p. 85). States like Arunachal Pradesh has minimum sources of earning revenues for self-reliance and the state depends solely on the largesse of the central government. Arunachal Pradesh, being a strategic border state receive special financial grants and concessions from the central government of India that include infrastructure grants for development projects such as surface roads, railways, telecommunication, education etc.²³⁴ Any confrontation

²³³ Interview with a Chakma respondent, Diyun, April, 2016.

²³⁴ Arunachal Pradesh, along with others states of northeastern India, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are clubbed under special category states by the central government of India. Special

with central government tend to create problems. The politics in the state, therefore, involved switching loyalties of political representatives from one party to another depending on the political party in power in the central government.

In 1996, the Arunachal Congress was formed under the leadership of Gegong Apang. Arunachal Congress raised the demand to the central government for deporting the Chakmas and Hajongs from Arunachal Pradesh. The central government, however, was against such demands of Arunachal Congress. The formation of the regional party, Arunachal Congress, took place amid the mobilization of AAPSU demanding deportation of Chakmas and Hajongs. The central government declined the demand of Arunachal Congress and the differences on the Chakma-Hajong citizenship issues with the central government led another shifts in the state politics. The central government was led by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao of the Indian National Congress. The regional party which was established based on the demand of deportation of Chakmas and Hajongs, succeeded in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. This victory of Arunachal Congress led to alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which was in power at the centre. The Arunachal Congress party did not last long in the electoral politics due to internal rivalries within the party leadership. The demand for deportation of Chakma-Hajong refugees from Arunachal Pradesh died down with the declining performance of Arunachal Congress and shifting of loyalties to national parties either to Indian National Congress or Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) by its own leadership. The key issue of contestations against citizenship and state entitlements of Chakmas, Hajongs and Tibetans are still raised by the student organization and indigenous organizations such as AAPSU.

category states, for example Arunachal Pradesh, are given 90 per cent funding for supporting higher educational institutions. Arunachal Pradesh received 3, 35, 25, 000 INR in December 2015 for infrastructure development of colleges and faculty recruitment support. See Ministry of Human Resource Development file: http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/grant-in-Aid/HE/FY-2015-16/Dec_2015/Sanction307.pdf (Accessed April 17, 2018)

The Congress-led Gegong Apang government in Arunachal Pradesh had to succumb to the intensified anti-citizenship movement of the AAPSU in 1995 and 1996. AAPSU gave a deadline for deporting the refugees from Arunachal Pradesh by December 31, 1995. A respondent from the Chakma and Hajong communities narrated the following in an interview in Arunachal Pradesh:

*“The issues of economic blockades and rallies against Chakmas and Hajongs came up in the newspapers. Apang, the chief minister, himself got involved in helping the AAPSU. AAPSU was given resources to organize rallies and meetings. It was decided that by December 31, the Chakmas will be expelled. If they were not expelled, the politicians would resign from the membership of the political parties. This was in 1995. In 1995, we also approached Hiteswar Saikia, the Chief Minister of Assam. We submitted a memorandum. Those who were expelled from Arunachal have to face problems in Assam. It was told that there was already the foreigners’ problem in Assam and shoot at sight was ordered.”*²³⁵

A referendum rally was organized on September 20, 1995 in Naharlagun for mobilizing support on the issue of citizenship and deportation of refugees. The rally, organized by AAPSU, was attended by sixty Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) across party lines including Chief Minister Apang. The meeting arrived at a consensus to deport the Chakma and Hajong refugees by December 31, 1995. The then Chief Minister Gegong Apang supported the All Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union (AAPSU) demand for the deportation of all Chakma and Hajong refugees from the state of Arunachal Pradesh.²³⁶

Apang took up the issues before the Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao-led Congress government. Apang did not receive any concrete response from the central government. Meanwhile, mounting resentment from the AAPSU and the indigenous public opinion on the Chakma-Hajong issues in Arunachal Pradesh finally led to formation of a regional party—Arunachal Congress—in 1996. In September 1996 in Itanagar, Gegong Apang along with his party legislators broke away from the Congress over the Chakma-Hajong refugee issues to form the Arunachal Congress. The demand for the deportation of Chakma–Hajong refugees thus triggered between the P.V. Narasimha Rao-led Congress government at the centre and the state government of Apang leading to the formation of a

²³⁵ Interview with a member from Chakma and Hajong communities, Diyun, April, 2016.

²³⁶ Banerjee, Reuban. *Gegong Apang: A shrewd survivor*, India Today, New Delhi, April 15, 1995.

regional political party with regionalist ideology.²³⁷ The Arunachal Congress won the two parliamentary seats of state in the Lok Sabha elections of 1998 and allied with the Bharatiya Jnata Party-led National Democratic Alliance.

The regional political party, Arunachal Congress, was however, short-lived due to the dissidence within the party. In 1999, a breakaway faction of the Arunachal Congress was formed under the leadership of Mukut Mithi. The party was named Arunachal Congress (Mithi). The party merged with the Indian National Congress later to form the Congress government in the state. The Arunachal Congress headed by Gegong Apang was decimated in 1999. He became the lone Member of Legislative Assembly as the Indian National Congress won the majority of seats in the state assembly election (S. Talukdar 2004). Apang discontinued as the leader of the regional party party Arunachal Congress. Apang formed another party called United Democratic Front in 2003 with dissident members of the legislative assembly of Mukut Mithi-led government. These leaders shifted their loyalty to Bharatiya Janata Party in 2003 and the Indian National Congress in 2004.

The regional party Arunachal Congress remained as a political party without much influence in the state politics. The party was originally formed with the agenda of demanding the central government the deportation of refugees from Arunachal Pradesh. The issue of according Indian citizenship and deportation of Chakmas and Hajongs refugees is still an electoral issue in the state politics where the state level leaders of even the national political parties like Indian National Congress (INC) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) differ from the central government attempting to accord Indian citizenship rights to the refugees in the state.

²³⁷ See *Apang returns to head Arunachal Govt for 21st year*, Hindustan Times, New Delhi, October 16, 2004. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/apang-returns-to-head-arunachal-govt-for-21st-year/story-isZTN30do39CzyQvkTPaaM.html> (Accessed April 12, 2018)

State responses to student-led mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh

The analysis of the framing processes and resource mobilization in the previous section helped us to understand the student-led mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh. This part examines the role of the state in terms of responses to student mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh. The interactions of the state and social movement organizations have been explained by social movement studies. Studies show that political opportunity structure may have an impact on the trajectory of mobilization. State repression, an example of state closure of political opportunity structure, affects social movement. Repression may lead to more mobilization when social movement organizations resort to larger demonstration and intense protest rallies. Thus, the closure or opening up to movement organizations is significant to the rise and the decline of social movements. Issues raised in social movements might be addressed through accommodation or co-option of the leaders by the state.

In the case of AAPSU led movement, the provincial government, sometimes, responded in varied ways on the issues raised by the social movement organization in Arunachal Pradesh. There is a variation in the responses from the state government in Arunachal Pradesh and the central government of India on the same issue of citizenship. There is less repression in the context of Arunachal Pradesh as compared to Assam.

During AAPSU's "*Delhi Chalo March*" (Let's March to Delhi) in May 1994, the centre denied any interaction with 400-delegates carving the way for intense mobilization on the refugee issues in the subsequent period. In that year, the AAPSU mobilized the masses on a number of issues ranging from citizenship, inter-state boundary problem and amendments in statehood clauses. In 1995, AAPSU-led intense mobilization brought the political parties in Arunachal Pradesh under common platform on the issues of citizenship of refugees. Members of the legislative assembly of the state and political parties expressed the support for AAPSU. The chief minister Gegong Papung categorically opposed to the

granting of citizenship to Chakmas, Hajongs and Tibetan refugees in Arunachal Pradesh. In 1996, the chief minister Apang expressed his opposition to the permanent settlement of refugees in the state. Apang supported the demand of the AAPSU to deport the refugees from the state by raising the issue with the central government. The Chakma students in Delhi protested the action of the chief minister by burning his effigy in Delhi. This aggravated the problem leading to further mobilization and counter mobilization. In 1995, AAPSU also called for a 10-hour shutdown of state capital during Narasimha Rao's visit for campaigning in the assembly polls. Similarly, the student body also protested during former prime minister, V.P. Singh's campaign for his party candidates in the state.

In 2004, a significant political development took place in the citizenship movement of Chakma and Hajong refugees in the interface of mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh. The inclusion of 1497 persons of Chakma people in voters' list by Election Commission of India (ECI) paved the way for the provision of political rights and their citizenship status. In December 2014, when the head man of Kokila village was interviewed in Papumpare district, he said that they have voted twice in the elections. He also stated that there was no problem in the inclusion of Chakma names in the voter's list in Papumpare district but the communities have faced problem in Changlang and Lohit districts. The Delhi High Court issued an order in 2004 stating that the Chakmas who were born in India after settlement in Arunachal Pradesh but before 1 July 1987 became citizenship by birth under section 3 (1) (a) of the Citizenship Act even if their parents were not citizens of India at the time of their birth. Following this order the ECI recommended the eligible names in the electoral rolls although there was opposition from AAPSU in Arunachal Pradesh. Nevertheless, the efforts of the Committee for the Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas and Hajongs in Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCHAP) mobilized through judiciary and legal mechanisms for the rights of the community yielded success despite odds in the path to achieve political rights. In their long struggle, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India too played an instrumental role towards upholding the rights of the refugee groups.

In August 2010, a joint High Power Committee (HPC) was set up under the initiatives of Ministry of Home Affairs comprising members of the AAPSU, CCHRCAP, and officials of the state government including Deputy Commissioners of the refugee settlement districts such as Papumpare, Lohit and Changlang. This HPC was chaired by Shambhu Singh, the joint secretary of Ministry of Home Affairs of Government of India. In the second sitting of the HPC at Itanagar in 2011, the following terms were agreed between the student organization and refugee rights body in presence of the government officials: (a) Conduct a visit by the HPC to the designated blocks where Chakmas were consigned in order to substantiate and verify the ground realities. (b) Maintain the status quo of dwelling within their designated blocks/territories. (c) To grant settlement to only those Chakmas and Hajongs who came to Arunachal Pradesh between 1964 and 1969.²³⁸

The refugee rights body agreed to uphold the points spelt out in the meeting and assured to co-operate with the initiatives of the committee. However, one of the leaders of the refugee rights body stated during an interview conducted for this study that the survey to ascertain the original refugee settlers and their lineage had to be conducted by themselves (CCRHAP) instead of a joint survey and it remains to be verified by the government.²³⁹ In 2017, AAPSU raised the demand for reconstitution of HPC and further dialogue when the central government announced the plan of granting limited citizenship status to Chakma and Hajongs.²⁴⁰ AAPSU claimed that there has been an exponential rise of population in a short period of time which is grave danger to the identity of indigenous population. AAPSU demanded the government to apply the provisions of Inner Line Permits for the Chakmas and Hajongs as they considered the refugees to be outsiders. AAPSU also called for curtailing of the political rights of the Chakmas and Hajongs in Arunachal Pradesh. The student body reiterated that the refugees should remain at the designated blocks allotted by the government and identify the genuine number of original settlers

²³⁸Tatung, Takam. *Chakma Hajong refugee issue and Arunachal*, The Arunachal Times, Itanagar, May 17, 2017.

²³⁹ Interview with Subimal Bikash Chakma, April, 2016

²⁴⁰ Tripathi. Rahul *Chakma Hajong refugees set to get citizenship*, The Indian Express, New Delhi, May 19, 2017.

listed by the government.²⁴¹ The student body expressed that it would not accept the decision of the central government that would jeopardize the dignity, integrity and security of the indigenous people. AAPSU proclaimed that the student organization would take the steps to safeguard the sentiments of the indigenous people of the state. It also demanded the state government should implement the refugee card for the Chakmas and Hajongs.

The student organization is not only against citizenship in the Arunachal territory but it has opposed granting of political right and lifting of Inner Lines Permit (ILP) in the wake of the central government's move to grant citizenship to Chakma and Hajong refugees. The central government has been planning to accord full Indian citizenship status to the two ethnic groups without the Schedule Tribe status and land rights.²⁴² The student organization also claimed that the Chakmas and Hajongs are vitiating the peaceful ambience of the state in contrast to the Tibetan refugees who are settled 'peacefully' in the allotted land.²⁴³ Tibetan refugee settlements are spread in various districts which are mostly contiguous to indigenous Buddhist tribes such as Monpas and Sherdukpens. They are in Miao and Tezu in eastern Arunachal Pradesh close to the districts of Chakma and Hajong settlements. Other Tibetan settlements are located in Tenzingang, Bomdila (both in western Arunachal) and Tuting (south of central Arunachal) where indigenous tribes such as Monpa, Sherdukpen and Memba professing Buddhism are its inhabitants. It may be noted that the total Tibetan population in the state of Arunachal would be less than 10,000.²⁴⁴ In the context of Chakmas, Hajongs and Tibetans, the AAPSU seems to be more vocal against the claims of the Chakmas as their population is estimated to be

²⁴¹ See *AAPSU opposes move to grant citizenship rights to Chakma and Hajong refugees*, *The Arunachal Times*, Itanagar, May 23, 2017.

²⁴² Tripathi, Rahul. *Chakma Hajong refugees set to get citizenship*, *Indian Express*, New Delhi, May 19, 2017. <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/chakma-and-hajong-refugees-set-to-get-citizenship-rajnath-singh-kiren-riji-4662947/> (Accessed May 24, 2017).

²⁴³ *AAPSU opposes move to grant citizenship rights to Chakma and Hajong refugees*, *The Arunachal Times*, Itanagar, May 23, 2017, <http://www.arunachaltimes.in/aapsu-opposes-move-to-grant-citizenship-rights-to-chakma-and-hajong-refugees/> (Accessed May 23, 2017)

²⁴⁴ This figure is estimated based on the data provided for various settlements located in Arunachal Pradesh in the website of Department of Home, Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamshala, India. Miao- 2818 (2008-09 annual report); Dargyeling, Tezu-2943; Tenzingang-1717; Tuting- Data Unavailable; Total-8476 <http://centraltibetanreliefcommittee.org/doh/settlements/india/northeast/northeast-india.html> (Accessed May 24, 2017)

highest in numbers that may touch 35,000 mark while that of Hajongs and Tibetans would stand in the range of 7,000 to 15,000.²⁴⁵

Summary

This chapter analyzes the student-led movement from a perspective of social movement literature with the help of various primary and secondary data. An attempt has been made to study the student organization of Arunachal Pradesh, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) and their mobilization against citizenship of Chakma and Hajong refugees. The framing process examined in the chapter underlines how the movement organizations organize their activities and draw support from the indigenous population by mobilizing tangible and intangible resources having symbolic and cultural appeals to the indigenous population. The political opportunity structure is used to examine the state responses to the issues raised by student organization. Issues of identity and citizenship are used frames. The perceived threats of endangering the identity of indigenous people due to citizenship and residential claims are also interlinked to alleged encroachment of land and forest resources. There has been a continuous opposition from the indigenous student organizations on the issues of contentious citizenship. The refugee rights body for citizenship relentlessly led the support for their rights by approaching the judiciary of the country. The judicial intervention into the citizenship issues of refugees has put the identity struggle to legal manifestation and mobilization from student and indigenous organizations in Arunachal Pradesh.

²⁴⁵ The number of persons who returned Chakma as their mother in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh is 32,977 while the whole of Arunachal Pradesh is 39,953. There are 2,413 Hajong speakers in Changlang district while there are 2,454 speakers in total in Arunachal Pradesh. The figures are of 2001 census. District Census Handbook, Changlang, Directorate of Census Operations, Arunachal Pradesh, 2011. The Delhi-based Asian Center for Human Rights put the Chakma and Hajong population together in Arunachal Pradesh at 47,471 based on 2011 census. The Chakma and Hajong organizations in Arunachal Pradesh put the figure at about 54,500.

Chapter 6

Summary of the Study

This study was carried out with the objective of analyzing the process of mobilization launched by student organizations in two northeastern states, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The mobilization of student organizations revolved around issues of identity and resources of the *indigenous* people which the movement organizers claimed to represent. The student bodies framed issues that resonate with the local indigenous population on questions of perceived threats, competition for land resources and employment opportunities due to the presence of illegal immigrants, refugees and granting of political rights. This study also makes an attempt to examine whether the movements of student organizations act as agents of social change particularly in the context of northeastern region.

Chapter 2 discusses the literature on social movements. The chapter begins with the key concepts of social movement literature used in this study on student mobilization such as framing process, resource mobilization and political opportunity structure. The issue-based movements led by student groups involved framing on citizenship of the *indigenous* (*khilonjiyas*). The motivation for participating in collective action is driven by perceived threats to socio-economic and political opportunities, land and other natural resources from being encroached by illegal immigrants and refugees.

The fear of being outnumbered due to unabated immigration was one of important frames of student organizations in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The process of

student mobilization takes place through the network of units in district and sub-divisional levels of the student bodies. Student-led movements faced both repression and accommodation. The outcome of student mobilization and the trajectory of the movements were influenced by state responses.

Chapter 3 examines the historical background of student mobilization in the colonial period in undivided Assam. The Assamese student in late nineteenth century played a significant role in creating an interest on Assamese language and literature among the students. The *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* (ACS), which became the oldest and first student organization in North East India, was formed in Guwahati in 1916 with support from the Assamese middle class. It began its activities with a focus on literary contribution, spreading awareness on cleanliness and curbing social evils like consumption of tobacco. One of the primary features of the student body founded in early twentieth century was to abstain from political activities or association with political parties. However, in practice the student organizations were supported by left leaning socialists and middle class intellectuals.

Due to influence of the Left-leaning student body, All India Student Federation (AISF), students in Assam engaged in anti-colonial struggles from late 1930s. Student activism was evident in World War II in Assam with participation of students in public protests and demonstration. Students were active in voicing their protests against the grouping plan of 1947. Thus, student activism of the colonial period, particularly *Assam Chatra Sanmilan*, can be divided into two phases. In the first phase, student organization was concerned about the literary and socio-cultural issues while in the second phase, the student bodies involved in the anti-colonial struggle.

What was the role of student organizations in post-colonial Assam? What were the processes of mobilization? What were the issues raised by the student activists in the post-colonial period in Assam? What were the responses of the state to these student-led movements in Assam? These questions have been addressed in Chapter 4 on student mobilization and state responses in Assam that deals with the issue-based mobilization of the students in the post-colonial period. The chapter discussed the student participation in the refinery movement (1956-57) and the official language movement (1960). 1960s witnessed the resurgence of radical participation of students in Assam. These movements were met with police repression. When Assam witnessed bifurcation for the first time in 1960s due to the creation of Nagaland (1963), there was moderate opposition from the student communities of the state. The chapter discussed the formation of AASU and the mobilization in 1970s and 1980s. The All Assam Students' Union (AASU), formed in August 1967, mobilized with renewed vigour and organization. AASU-led mobilization by the students from universities and colleges in the state exclusively raise their concerns on language and educational institutions.

With passage of time, AASU became the common platform of the educational institutions in Assam with the objective to work for collective interest of students in the fields of culture, sports and literature. Student organizations like Inter-College Students' Union, Gauhati Students' Association (GSA) that existed before the formation of AASU, were formed with the objectives to build a non-partisan student movement and to maintain cordial relations with the student unions and other student organizations of the country.

With the formation of AASU in 1960s, student activism took an organized turn in 1970s in the state. Assam witnessed another phase of involvement of students on

the lines of linguistic identity in the form of the movement for the medium of instruction in 1970s. Students' involvement in the language issue is the reflections of the concerns on identity of community they claimed to represent. The participation of students was based on networks of student organizations at different levels. Some of the respondents, as the study shows, contended that the language movement emerged out of the middle class aspirations for jobs in the government sector. Thus, unemployment of the indigenous Assamese people led to local assertions on linguistic lines in 1960s.

Student-led mobilization in the 1970s resonated on popular grievances on food crisis, farmers' problems, unemployment, floods and erosion problems. The voices of public grievances with socialist underpinnings were raised through the medium of charters of demands by the student organization, AASU. Two notable charters of demands were raised in 1974 and 1978 respectively. The 1978 charter was the prelude to the Assam movement, the struggle to save the Assamese identity. The charter included concerns on illegal immigration and citizenship. The charter raised the demands for detection, deletion and deportation of foreigners from the electoral rolls in Assam as it was considered to be threat to the *indigenous* identity. These issues were closely related to the fears of demographic change, crisis of identity and the distribution of resources.

The perceived crisis of identity was framed on the line of the indigenous/ natives versus the *bohiragata*/ outsiders being overwhelming the natives of the region. In 1970s, the movement was framed as anti-outsiders campaigns (locally outsiders were known as *bohiragata*). Increasing number of settlers and the domination of trade and businesses by the outsiders was perceived as a threat. Encroachment of land was another issue which added to the threats to *indigenous* identity. The

mobilization led by students on these issues culminated in the Assam Movement which lasted for about six years. The campaigns led by AASU were supported by *All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, Asom Sahitya Sabha, Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal, Purbnachliya Lok Parishad, Sadou Asom Karmachari Parishad* and other organizations. The movement also experienced multiple cleavages with divisions and contradictions amongst the middle class population and indigenous native identities in the movement.

The chapter also examines varying state responses to student mobilization in Assam. The Assam Movement concluded in a tripartite agreement. The state also responded with varying levels of repression in early 1980s. This period witnessed selective incentives and co-optation of leaders from the regional political parties. Partial concessions were made in 1985. This had unintended consequences and radicalization in the state politics of Assam. Although, there is no final solution to the issue of illegal migration and citizenship, there were amendment to the citizenship laws and repeal of IM (DT) Act.

The trajectory of the movement shifted from relatively peaceful phases of mobilization to radical and violent phases. State repression compounded the violence and militant activities in 1980s. There were examples of police atrocities and inter-group clashes in some parts of Assam. The Gohpur clashes over land resources between the Assamese-speaking people and the Bodo ethnic tribe is an example. The Nellie massacre of 1983 is another example of intense violence and inter-group clashes during the Assam Movement. The rallying point of protest was the contentious enfranchisement of foreigners and the elections in 1983. The PTCA, the political parity representing plains tribal communities, participated in the election process. The election year of 1983 witnessed intense violence and

state repression of the student-led mobilization in Assam. The repression of protest movements during that period led to the banning of public rallies and meetings, censorship of the press and militarization of public spaces to prevent public gathering.

Meanwhile, there were also attempts at negotiation. The state also engaged in negotiations with the leaders of the student organization and its supporting organizations which speak of the mixed nature of political opportunity structure. As the literature suggests, although state repression are inalienable features of political mobilization, the openness of state institutions to the leadership of movements can alter the course of the movement. The violence and disruptive activities may decline due to repression or possible concession of the demands. Several rounds of talks between the student-led movement organization and the state took place in 1980s. This paved the way for memorandum of settlement and a tripartite agreement involving the central government, state government and the AASU, known as the Assam Accord in August, 1985. The student leadership formed the regional political party known as the *Asom Gana Parishad* (Assam People's Council) which captured power in the state assembly in the elections in December, 1985. The accord provided safeguard of indigenous Assamese identity. However, it led to debates on the definition of the Assamese people and terms of the safeguard of cultural identity of the indigenous population. Another important outcome of the movement is the enumeration of the National Register of Citizens in Assam.

Chapter 5 examines the student mobilization and the state responses in Arunachal Pradesh. The chapter began with the discussion in the frontier territory and its inhabitants. The chapter draws from the colonial writings and other sources.

Although the British annexed the plains of Assam into their empire, the colonialists demarcated imaginary lines to keep away the frontier tribes and to pursue their commercial interests. The hilly terrains of North East Frontier Tract inhabited by the tribes were designated as excluded area where the provincial laws of the British administration were inapplicable. The excluded areas which came into effect in 1875 consisted of the areas in the Balipara frontier to Tirap tracts of present day Arunachal Pradesh. In the post-colonial period, the North East Frontier Tracts came under the administrative jurisdiction of the government of Assam and the governor had discretionary powers over the region under the Indian Independence Act, 1947. The Gopinath Bordoloi committee constituted by the Constituent Assembly, to study the future of administration of the frontier regions recommended direct administration of these areas under the government of Assam but the recommendations was not accepted due to security reasons.

There were various changes in the administrative jurisdiction and the mapping of the frontier territory in the post-colonial period. In 1950s, the plains were ceded to the Assam government. In 1954, the frontier state was officially designated as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) by the Indian government. In 1965, the administrative affairs of the frontier territory were under the supervision of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) of the government of India until it was declared a Union Territory in 1972.

In 1975, the 37th Amendment Act in the Constitution of India brought about a legislative body to be administered by the Lieutenant Governor as head of the union territory of Arunachal Pradesh. The provincial legislative assembly was provisionally formed for the first time in 1975. However, the election to the assembly was conducted for 33-member legislative assembly with the formation of

state government in 1977. The government lasted for twenty months. Arunachal Pradesh gained full statehood in February, 1987. The strength of the assembly was raised to 60 members based on the demands of the political leaders later in 1990. The state politics of Arunachal Pradesh since then witnessed instability and dissolution of the Assembly. The Tibetans, Chakma and Hajong refugees migrated to the Indian territory in late 1950s and 1960s prior to the formation of elected legislative bodies in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The Governor of Assam, during that time who acted as agent of the centre determined the settlement of the refugees. The regional politics in the state during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s were highly influenced by the questions of citizenship rights of the refugees in Arunachal Pradesh.

The AAPSU, the apex student body, engaged in sustained campaigns against the citizenship of the refugees, particularly Chakma and Hajongs, in Arunachal Pradesh. Resource scarcity and perceived threats to indigenous identities were the master frames of the student mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh. AAPSU and its local allies alleged that the refugees were encroaching the land in the reserved forests and were therefore creating pressures on natural resources in the region. AAPSU also claimed that there was continuous infiltration of Chakmas and Hajong immigrants from other parts of India such as Tripura and Mizoram or even from Bangladesh were creating pressures on the demography of the state. Stiff opposition of settlement and the provision of citizenship to the refugees stalled the process of granting citizenship despite the directives from the Supreme Court of India in 2015.

Student mobilization in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh emerged in different phases in the colonial and post-colonial period. Student mobilization in Assam had demonstration effects on mobilization in other northeastern states.

Student mobilization in Meghalaya on issues of indigenous identity triggered anti-outsiders campaigns in 1980s. Khasi student body, the Khasi Students' Union (KSU), has been leading movements on local identities and protection of natural resources especially uranium mining. There are demands for introduction of Inner Line Permit (ILP) in Meghalaya to regulate migration of people in Meghalaya.

Student mobilization in Manipur was witnessed in 1960s. Late 1960s marked the beginning of movements led by students on the issue of shortages of food grain in Manipur. All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU) was formed at this time. AMSU and other student groups have been at the forefront of student movement mobilizing on the issues of identity, resources, and language. Students took active part in the statehood movement of late 1960s when several activists were arrested and jailed. AMSU also mobilized for the recognition of Manipuri language under the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution. In the recent years, AMSU and other organizations made demands for introduction of Inner Line Permit (ILP) and the legislation of new land laws. This added to contentious politics in the state. The issues triggered mobilization and counter mobilization in Manipur.

Mobilization of students in Nagaland is mostly led Naga Students' Federation (NSF). NSF mobilized on issues of protecting the indigenous identity and immigration. The NSF, which acts as a common platform of the students of the Naga tribes, also made demands for the expansion of the scope of inner Line Permit to Dimapur due to perceived threats of immigration.

In Mizoram, the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) is the leading student body in the state mobilizing the students and young people on issues of protecting the Mizo identity. The MZP had protested against the migration and permanent settlement of non-Mizo population in the state as it considers Mizoram to be a homeland for the ethnic Mizo. The student groups questioned the government policy of reservation to the Chakmas and other non-Mizo ethnic groups in the state. There has been a contention over the indigenous identity of other non-Mizo ethnic groups in the state. There are also demands from the MZP and other organizations claiming to represent the interest of the Mizos that the restrictive system of entry, that is, the Inner Line Permit (ILP), should be continued in the state.

In Tripura, the Twipra Students' Federation (TSF) is the indigenous student group that has mobilized on issues of language, ethnic identity and land resources. TSF claims to represent the causes of indigenous tribes of the state. Student organizations in Tripura use marginalization of tribal identity as a frame to mobilize people against the migration of people from Bangladesh. Migration of Bengali-speaking population in Tripura led to demographic changes. The case of indigenous marginalization and demographic change in Tripura had been one of the core frames used by student organizations to mobilize. Student and other organizations representing tribal communities therefore demanded that the land should be restored to the tribals and there should be prohibition of land purchases and sales to non-tribals in the autonomous tribal region of the state. Thus, the mobilization led by student organizations in Tripura is centered on the safeguard of distinct indigenous identity, language, land and other resources.

The political opportunity structure, that is, the openness and closure of the state to social movement organizations, in the cases of student mobilization in northeastern

India has been a multi-pronged process. AASU-led Assam movement ended with accommodation and co-optation of the student leaders in the state politics after the Assam Accord. The Assam movement ended with the formal accord but the contentious issues of citizenship are still key determinant of state politics. Accordingly, the political opportunity structure of the state has shown both closure and openness.

Relevance of the study

The study covered social movement organizations led by student organizations in North East India. Student-led mobilization had implications in the contentious politics of the states and policy making in the region. Student organizations supported by ethnic organizations gathered sizeable social bases and networks during different phases of mobilization in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Mobilization strategies were intrinsically connected to identity, language, culture and resources. A range of studies have been conducted on student-led movement in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Yet, none of these studies examined student mobilization from theoretical perspectives. This study makes an attempt to examine student-led mobilization from a social movement perspective. Thus, the study makes a contribution to the understanding of student mobilization in the field of contentious politics and social movement studies through specific in-depth, descriptive and analytical case studies on Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

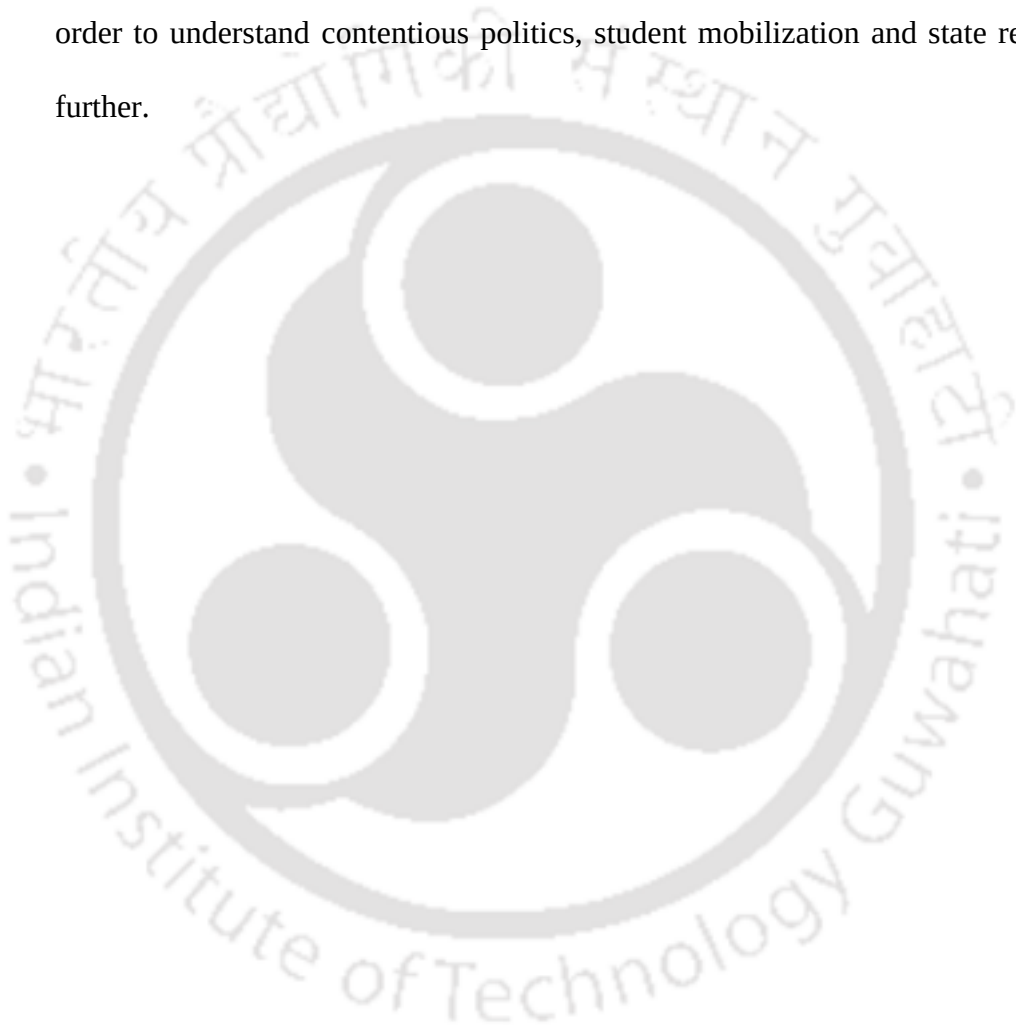
Limitations of the study

The study is limited to two case studies in the northeastern region of India. Access to respondents particularly, the bureaucrats and the police officials who held important positions in the state during 1980s and 1990s for the purpose of

conducting interviews was another limitation of this study. The nature of repression in the state-movement interaction could have been examined with the help of police records and government documents in a more systematic way.

Further Scope of Research

Similar cases of student mobilization could be studied by taking more cases in order to understand contentious politics, student mobilization and state responses further.



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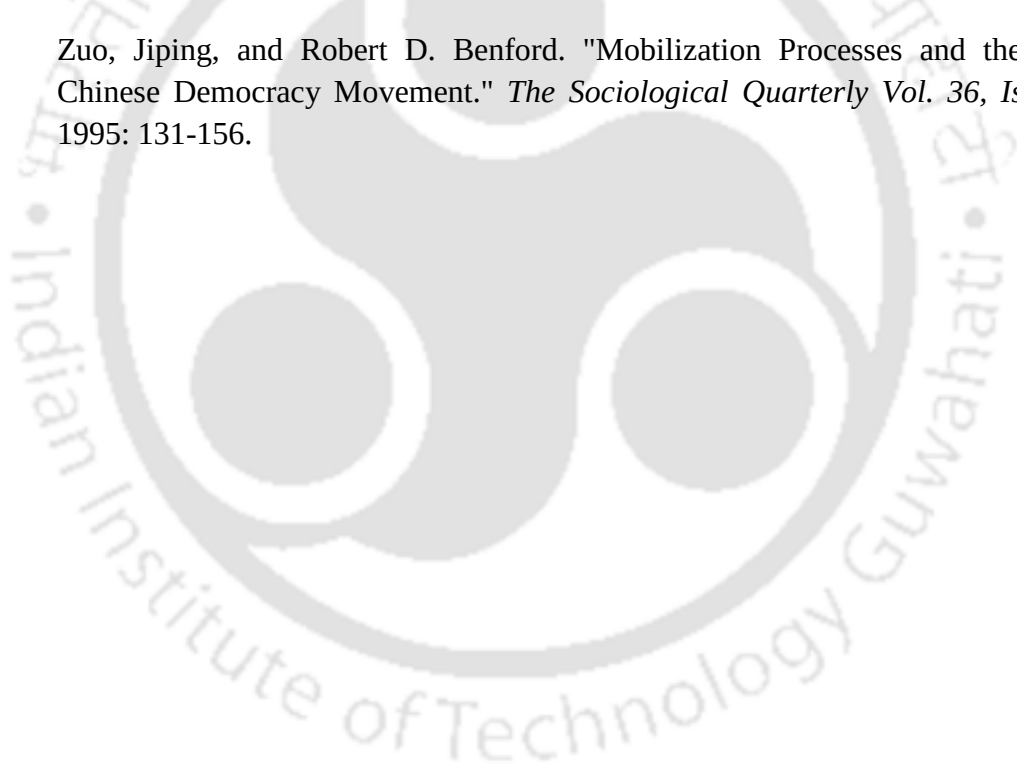
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Appendix

Photographs taken during fieldwork in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam



Photo 1: A Chakma old woman seen in her stilted bamboo house in Kokila, Papumpare district, Arunachal Pradesh, Photo: Bhasker Pegu, December, 2014.



Photo 2: Women folk seen in a local market in Piyong in Namsai district. Arunachal Pradesh. Photo: Bhasker Pegu, April, 2016.

Appendix



Photo 3: Subimal Bikash Chakma, second from left, leader of Chakma and Hajong citizenship movement in Arunachal Pradesh, along with other residents in Diyun, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh. Photo: Bhasker Pegu, April, 2016.



Photo 4: The Inner Line Permit (ILP) check gate in Dirak in Namsai district in Arunachal Pradesh bordering Assam. Photo: Bhasker Pegu, April, 2016.

Appendix



Photo 5: A stilted Chakma house in Dharmapur village, Diyun, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh. One can notice the tall areca nut trees which are important source of income. Photo: Bhasker Pegu, April 2016.



Photo 6: People gathering outside the venue of hearing on the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, during the visit of Joint Parliamentary Committee in Guwahati in May, 2018 in Guwahati, Assam. Photo: Bhasker Pegu, May, 2018.