

# Plight of the Chakma Community in India: Analysing Legal Protection and Bilateral Agreements

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**Abstract:** *The 1971 influx of refugees from Bangladesh into India marked a significant moment in South Asian history, as Pakistan's military operation in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) led to the mass displacement of individuals, including the Chakma community. This was not the first occurrence of such mass migration, with a previous wave of refugees arriving in India from East Pakistan during 1964-65. This paper examines the challenges faced by the Chakma community in India and the legal initiatives undertaken by the Government of India and the Supreme Court to safeguard their identity. Additionally, the study explores the impact of Bilateral Land Boundary Agreements in shaping refugee settlements and policies. Based on qualitative data drawn from secondary sources such as research papers, articles, and annual reports published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) regarding refugee settlements in Northeast India, this research presents an in-depth analysis of the community's plight. The findings highlight the persistent difficulties faced by the Chakma Community for over six decades, with ongoing struggles in the present era.*

**Keywords:** Chakma Refugees, Statelessness in India, Refugee Protection Policies, India-Bangladesh Relations, Migration and Displacement.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 1954 Convention's Status of Stateless Persons (Article 1) defines a stateless person as someone who "is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law." Resettling refugees is a critical process to reduce their population in cramped quarters, as prolonged displacement is intolerable. Many refugees, due to the possibility of ongoing persecution, are unable to return home. In such cases, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitates their relocation to third countries. The three primary approaches employed by the UNHCR are settlement, integration, and voluntary repatriation (Bhangar, 2017). The Chakma community, among others, sought refuge in camps in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Mizoram, eventually settling in these regions. The complex political turmoil in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), witnessed by the Chakmas between the two countries-Pakistan and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan and West Pakistan)-left them homeless and stateless. This loss of identity in their country of origin further became a curse in their host country. Over time, their history as refugees has undermined their rich traditions and sense of self, leaving them in Northeast India, struggling with issues of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and political marginalization. These issues demand assistance from the Indian government, the Mizoram government, human rights commissions, social organizations, the Supreme Court, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Despite the support, the Chakmas still exist as refugees, lacking basic amenities and rights. Various landmark judgments by the Apex Court of India and State Courts have urged the Government of India to address these issues and avoid forcing repatriation due to the risk of continued persecution (UNHCR, 2007). This article aims to shed light on the sociocultural and human rights challenges faced by the Chakma community due to political and legal marginalization, advocating for legislative changes to address these concerns and offering potential solutions.

Following Pakistan's acquisition of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) after the country's partition, widespread opposition to Pakistani policies led to the suppression of the Chakma people. Consequently, many Chakmas fled to India and Burma seeking safety. In 1960, the Pakistani government launched the Kaptai Hydro Electric Project, which displaced a significant number of people from the CHT region. Despite the absence of India's ratification of the UNHCR agreements from 1954 on the "Status of Stateless Persons" or the 1961 agreement on the "Reduction of Statelessness," India welcomed the displaced population, providing them with camps in the Northeast (Vijayakumar, 2001). The majority of these refugees were Hajongs (Hindus) and Chakmas (Buddhists), with the Chakmas making up a larger portion of the population. It is estimated that the current Chakma population stands at approximately 550,000,

although the exact figure remains uncertain due to the city's continued expansion since 1964. The construction of the Kaptai Dam led to the flooding of a large portion of the Chakma community's homeland, forcing thousands to flee the region. This displacement was further exacerbated by violence in CHT and inadequate protection from both the government and local Muslim organizations, pushing many Chakmas to seek refuge in India and Burma.

After a prolonged struggle for autonomy in CHT (now Bangladesh), the Chakmas won autonomy for the region. However, the Pakistani government subjected them to oppressive measures during this movement. As a result, many descendants of Chakmas fled their homeland and settled in India, predominantly in the northeastern states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura, and Meghalaya. The Chakmas initially sought refuge in camps in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Mizoram, eventually establishing permanent settlements (Nandi, 2018). Upon arriving in Mizoram, the Chakmas faced further challenges. As Buddhists, they faced hostility from the Mizos, who had converted to Christianity, as the region had a strong desire to spread Christianity. Baptist missionaries heavily invested in attempting to convert the Buddhist Chakmas, fuelling the ongoing conflict (Oberoi, 2000).

Before the establishment of Bangladesh, the Chakma refugees fled persecution in their home country and sought refuge in India. By mid-1964, approximately 140,000 refugees, including both Hajongs and Chakmas, had arrived in Assam, representing 2,902 families. The influx of refugees overwhelmed the Assam administration, leading to the relocation of many families. The Indian government recognizing the availability of land in the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA, now Arunachal Pradesh), had decided to settle them there. Between 1964 and 1968, 2,902 Chakma and Hajong families were relocated to NEFA, in the districts of Lohit, Tirap, and Subansiri. A centrally sponsored rehabilitation project allocated plots of land ranging from 5 to 10 acres, depending on family size, for cultivation purposes (Chimni, 1994). Since their arrival, the Chakma community has faced socio-political issues regarding integration, resource distribution, and heritage preservation, particularly in states such as Tripura, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Despite efforts by the Indian government, UNHCR, and NGOs to address the basic needs of the Chakma community, such as education, health, and livelihood, challenges persist. One major issue that remains unresolved is the denial of citizenship, as the Chakma people continue to live as stateless individuals. The 2015 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) between India and Bangladesh, which included exchanges of territories such as the Chitmahals, failed to provide citizenship to the Chakma families, either in India or Bangladesh.

## 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the historical and contemporary challenges faced by the Chakma community in India, focusing on issues of statelessness and political marginalization.
- To analyse the role of the Indian government, international organizations (such as UNHCR), and the judiciary in addressing the legal and humanitarian needs of the Chakma refugees.
- To explore the social and economic impact of the refugee status on the Chakma community, particularly in terms of their cultural identity, access to resources, and socio-

economic development.

- To propose policy recommendations aimed at improving the living conditions and human rights protections for the Chakma community.

## 3. HYPOTHESIS:

The Chakma community in India continues to face severe socio-political and legal marginalization despite several legal interventions and international support. This marginalization has been exacerbated by the community's statelessness, lack of citizenship, and ongoing political struggles.

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing secondary data from a variety of sources, including academic papers, government and NGO reports, court rulings, and publications by international organizations such as the UNHCR. The research will focus on historical documents, legal texts, and socio-cultural analyses to assess the impact of legal frameworks, bilateral agreements, and the socio-political environment on the Chakma community's plight. The study will also engage in content analysis of relevant case studies, focusing on the integration of refugee policies and their implications for the Chakma people.

## 5. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Chakma community, originally from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), faced systematic and violent attacks by the East Pakistani government. As part of a rehabilitation initiative, the Indian government provided asylum, transportation, and relocation in the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) between 1964 and 1969. The Indian government extended significant support to assist them in rebuilding their lives. Each Chakma family was initially provided with five acres of land, free food rations, and a daily hand-out consisting of 20 paise, 400 grams of rice, and 15 grams of salt. Additionally, the community received animals, seeds, and saplings to assist them in beginning farming. For self-defence gun licenses were granted, and individuals wishing to open businesses were issued trade licenses. To gain access to the government's food supply, ration cards were distributed. Despite the assistance, the refugees were forced to seek different sources of income, primarily through manual labour. Locals typically charged Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 per day for labour during farming season, while refugees would accept as little as Rs. 10 or Rs. 5. This income disparity often led to disputes between refugees and locals. Some refugees engaged in selling essential goods and products cultivated within the camps, while social education centers were opened to teach health-related methods for disease prevention and provide vocational training for women, children, and young girls in the camps. Seeking to improve their standard of living, many began vending fish and vegetables outside the markets. These activities, however, made local residents of NEFA fearful for their safety (Chimni, 1994).

In 1980, the State Government ceased granting trade licenses to Chakmas and Hajongs and imposed employment restrictions. Following anti-foreigner protests, NEFA became a full-fledged state, Arunachal Pradesh, and several limitations were placed on the Chakmas. This led to their eviction from positions of employment, the implementation of economic restrictions, and the exclusion of Chakma students from schools and colleges. The Chakmas were now labeled as "unwanted foreigners" and "refugees."

In October 1991, the government discontinued issuing ration cards to Chakmas and Hajongs, leaving many in extreme deprivation. By 1994, the government also revoked the commercial permits previously granted to them. Following blockades organized by the All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union (AAPSU) against the Chakma and Hajong refugee camps, the State Government began demolishing essential structures in the camps (Sarker, 2018). The government further sought to hinder the education of the refugees by destroying and closing schools established by the Chakmas. In 1995, AAPSU in the Changlang district placed the Chakmas under an “economic blockade,” urging locals not to purchase goods from the refugees.

Initially, 10,799 acres of land were granted to the refugees. However, as the Chakma population grew, they began to encroach on nearby territories and forest reserves. The indigenous population developed a climate of mistrust and animosity toward the refugees due to this expansion. As a result, a significant portion of the Diyun Reserved Forest area, approximately 400 hectares, was reclaimed between 1993 and 1994, as the Chakmas had been occupying this land unlawfully since 1986 (Debnath, 2021).

## 6. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND CHALLENGES

In recent years, regional consultations on refugee issues have increased, often spearheaded by international agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), working alongside non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local experts. These initiatives include the Third Meeting of the Asia/Pacific Consultations (APC), the Fourth Informal Consultation on Refugee and Migratory Movements in South Asia, also known as the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), and the annual sessions of the Asian-African Legal Consultative Committee (AALCC). Furthermore, regional NGOs in South Asia have started hosting their own discussions on these matters. One notable example is the 1998 Regional Consultation on Refugees and Forced Migration (RCRFM) held in New Delhi, India, which emphasized the need for regional collaboration and national regulations. This consultation, led by regional human rights NGOs, marked a significant step in fostering a shared understanding of South Asian norms for refugee protection. Such initiatives play a vital role in advancing both official and unofficial measures to support regional refugee protection in alignment with international standards (Oberoi, 1999).

Concerns regarding the Chakma community's plight were raised with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) by the People's Union for Civil Liberties in Delhi on September 9, 1994. In response, the NHRC recommended an investigation and sent letters to the Home Secretary of the Government of India and the Chief Secretary of Arunachal Pradesh. The Chief Secretary of Arunachal Pradesh responded on September 30, 1994, stating that the situation was under control and that the Chakmas had received adequate police protection. The NHRC emphasized that India is a country that upholds the rule of law, and every individual is entitled to the rights guaranteed under the Indian Constitution. Article 21 of the Constitution ensures the right to life and personal liberty, which applies to all people, regardless of their citizenship status. The Court clarified that neither the State Government nor organizations like the All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union (AAPSU) had the authority to expel the Chakma community. On October 15, 1994, the Committee for 1995,

Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas (CCRCAP) filed a complaint with the NHRC, (referencing a report from The Telegraph-1994), that stated AAPSU was threatening to expel suspected foreigners, including the Chakmas, by September 30, 1995, following a “quit notice.” This matter was formally addressed as a complaint by the NHRC. Subsequently, the CCRCAP sent urgent petitions to the NHRC in October highlighting the immediate threats to the lives of the Chakmas (Ghosal, 2018).

In response to these petitions, the Ministry of Home Affairs announced on November 22, 1994, that the Chakmas would be granted Indian citizenship. Despite this, the State of Arunachal Pradesh contested the claim that the Chakmas were in danger of losing their lives. The Supreme Court, however, recognized the threats posed by AAPSU, which had threatened to force the Chakmas into neighboring states, where they would not be accepted. The Court acknowledged the dangers faced by the Chakma community and directed the State of Arunachal Pradesh to protect the lives and freedoms of all Chakma citizens. It further asserted that any attempt by organized groups, such as AAPSU, to expel the Chakmas or evict them would be dealt with severely. The Court emphasized that the Chakma's right to live and engage in domestic life could only be revoked under legal circumstances (MCRG, 2004).

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019, which amended the Citizenship Act of 1955, grants citizenship to persecuted minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who entered India on or before December 31, 2014, including Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians. However, Muslims were excluded from the provisions of the Act. Under the CAA, these six categories of undocumented migrants are exempt from deportation or imprisonment. Despite this provision, certain areas, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland, are excluded from the amendments under the “Inner Line” permit system, which was established through the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations of 1873. These regions, along with the tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, are governed by the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which provides special protections for indigenous peoples. The Inner Line Permit system controls access to these states, including for Indian nationals, and restricts the settlement of migrants, further complicating the citizenship status of the Chakma community in these areas.

## 7. REFUGEE PROTECTION POLICIES IN INDIA AND THE LANDMARK JUDGEMENTS

Despite various attempts to address the citizenship issue in Northeast India, religious and ethnic minorities continue to face violence, derogatory labels such as “termites” by some Indian officials, and limited civil and political rights. Several landmark court rulings have shaped the legal framework for the rights and citizenship of Chakma refugees in India. The Supreme Court, as the highest judicial authority, plays a critical role in protecting the rights of these individuals, even though there are differing opinions on recognizing the stateless Chakma people in the Northeast and safeguarding their identities from harm. Some of these landmark judgements are outlined below:

### 7.1. *State of Arunachal Pradesh v. Khudiram Chakma (1994)*

This landmark case, heard by the Indian Supreme

Supreme Court, was the first major legal confrontation regarding the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh, who were labeled “foreigners” by the government (Singh, 2002). The appellant argued that, under Section 6 of the Citizenship Act, 1955, as amended in 1985, they should be considered citizens due to their extended residence in Assam and subsequent transfer to a camp in Miao, Arunachal Pradesh, in 1966. They were given land in villages such as Gautampur and Maitripur, alongside 56 other families.

The Court rejected the appellant’s claim to permanent residency in the region, stating that they did not meet the requirements set out in Section 6 of the Citizenship Act. Despite this, the Court directed the State Government to provide fair compensation if the Chakmas were forced to leave. The Supreme Court ruled that the contested notice was not unlawful and emphasized that non-citizens are protected by the principles of natural justice, particularly under Article 21 of the Constitution. It also affirmed that decisions regarding the settlement of immigrants are a matter of national policy (CaseMine, 1993).

### **7.2. NHRC v. State of Arunachal Pradesh and Ors. (1996)**

In this case, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) under Article 32 of the Constitution to protect the rights of approximately 65,000 Chakma/Hajong tribe members, invoking Article 21. The petition claimed that some Chakmas were being harassed by sections of the local population in Arunachal Pradesh.

The Court, led by Chief Justice A. M. Ahmadi, ordered that the State of Arunachal Pradesh ensure the security and autonomy of every Chakma within its jurisdiction. The Court rejected any attempts by organized groups, such as the All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union (AAPSU), to forcibly expel them from the state. If necessary, the Court instructed that paramilitary or police forces should be deployed to protect the Chakma people’s lives and freedoms. The Court also directed the State Government to seek assistance from the Union of India if additional forces were needed (Indian Kanoon, 1996).

### **7.3. Sarbananda Sonowal-I v. Union of India (2005)**

In this case, Sarbananda Sonowal challenged the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act (IMDTA) of 1983, claiming that it was discriminatory and arbitrary. Sonowal argued that the IMDTA unlawfully prevented Assamese residents from identifying and deporting foreigners, a right available to citizens in other Indian states. He contended that, under Article 355 of the Indian Constitution, the government was obligated to protect states from external threats and domestic unrest (Simon, 2005).

The Supreme Court, in a ruling by a three-judge bench comprising R. C. Lahoti, G. P. Mathur, and P. K. Balasubramanian, found that the IMDTA was arbitrary and discriminated against Assamese citizens. The Court noted that the IMDTA did not include a clause clarifying the “burden of proof,” which made it difficult for authorities to identify illegal immigrants. The Court ruled that the IMDTA was unenforceable and that the Foreigners Act of 1946, which had stronger provisions for identifying illegal immigrants, was more effective (CaseMine, 2006).

### **7.4. Sarbananda Sonowal-II v. Union of India (2006)**

In a follow-up petition, Sarbananda Sonowal sought

to invalidate key provisions of the IMDTA, 1983, on the grounds that they were unconstitutional. The petition argued that the IMDTA violated Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees “Equality before the Law.” It also challenged the validity of the IMDTA Rules of 1984 and requested that Assam enforce the Foreigners Act, 1946, instead.

The Court concluded that it was unconstitutional to amend the Foreigners (Tribunal) Order, 1964, to exclude Assam, finding that this change violated the principle of equality under Article 14. The Court also ruled that the IMDTA’s provisions, as applied to Assam, were unjust and unreasonable. It ordered the Indian government to establish a sufficient number of tribunals under the 1964 order within four months to handle cases involving illegal immigrants in Assam (Indian Kanoon, 2006).

## **8. BILATERAL RELATIONS AND IMMIGRATION POLICIES**

Unregulated illegal immigration, involving both economic migrants and refugees, remains an ongoing issue between Bangladesh and India. Although the exact number is difficult to ascertain, demographic trends from the last four census years (1981, 1991, 2001, and 2011) suggest that the number of illegal immigrants could be as high as 15 million or more. Many initially settled in the border states of India before migrating further across the country, including more remote areas. A large proportion of these migrants do work in low-skilled jobs in India’s major cities (Tripathi, 2016).

India has raised the issue of illegal immigration from Bangladesh through diplomatic and political channels numerous times, though with limited success. Bangladesh has not acknowledged the problem nor implemented a practical solution to curb the influx. India has attempted to strengthen border surveillance and constructed a barbed-wire fence along the border, but these efforts have not yielded the desired results. The challenge of repatriating illegal immigrants and halting their migration is complex, requiring an integrated approach within a legal framework. Key measures include the establishment of a bilateral arrangement between India and Bangladesh for the return of individuals unlawfully residing in each other’s countries, subject to appropriate verification, and the creation of national refugee regulations that clearly differentiate between refugees and illegal immigrants.

In 1993, Bangladesh faced pressure to repatriate the Chakma refugees. However, despite promises of improved living conditions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the refugees were reluctant to return. A delegation of Bangladeshi lawmakers visited India in May 1993, but the refugees remained unconvinced. The Refugee Welfare Association, led by Upendralal Chakma, emphasized that the refugees would not return unless their 13-Point Charter of Demands was met. These demands included greater political autonomy for the tribal population, the removal of Muslim settlers from tribal lands, and the withdrawal of military forces (Chimni, 1994).

The Indian government has consistently opposed forced repatriation of refugees, but an agreement was made for the return of 400 families following negotiations between the Indian government, the refugees, and Bangladesh. Bangladesh agreed to provide each returning household with a subsistence allowance of Rs. 1,600 (approximately US\$50) for the first six months. On February 15, 1994, 2,500 refugees

began the process of returning home. Although some expressed concerns about being manipulated, the majority appeared to be returning voluntarily. However, upon their return, many refugees felt unsafe due to the presence of several Bangladesh Army camps near their ancestral lands and the failure to regain their homes and lands. Despite these challenges, the Chakma leadership decided in July 1994 to repatriate another 752 families by August. Each returning family was provided Rs. 2,500 (approximately US\$80) by the Indian government. Although Tripura's District Magistrate, Chandra Shekar Chattopadhyay, claimed the repatriation was voluntary, questions remain about whether the process was truly free from coercion (Chimni, 1994).

A more recent development in bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh occurred with the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA). On June 6, 2015, the two countries reached a historic agreement that resolved the issue of shared enclaves (Chitmahal) between them. This agreement came after the introduction of the Constitution (119th Amendment) Bill, 2013, which met strong opposition from Assamese nationalist groups who feared the loss of approximately 10,000 acres of land. Despite this opposition, Prime Minister Narendra Modi supported the bill, which sought to streamline border control with Bangladesh. After receiving approval from the Standing Committee on External Affairs in November 2014, the Rajya Sabha passed the bill on May 6, 2015, and President Pranab Mukherjee gave his assent on May 28, 2015.

The agreement, which amended the 1st Schedule of the Indian Constitution, facilitated the exchange of territory between the two countries. Under this agreement, 51 Indian enclaves (spanning 7,110.02 acres) were transferred to Bangladesh, while 111 Bangladeshi enclaves (spanning 17,160.63 acres) were transferred to India. The agreement, which respected the preferences of the local populations, allowed individuals to choose whether to relocate to Bangladesh or remain in India. The Government of India allocated Rs. 1,005.99 crore for the development of infrastructure and the rehabilitation of returnees. Of this, Rs. 898.50 crore was dedicated to infrastructure, while Rs. 107.49 crore was earmarked for housing and rehabilitation efforts. The West Bengal government carried out the implementation of this program (Guha, 2017).

## 9. CURRENT STATE OF REFUGEE POPULATIONS IN INDIA

As of 2024, India's approach to refugees is shaped by a complex interplay of humanitarian concerns, legal institutions, and social forces. The country is home to a diverse population of refugees, including those from neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Myanmar, particularly the Rohingya. However, India lacks a cohesive national refugee policy, resulting in a fragmented system where refugees often face challenges in obtaining legal status, work permits, and access to basic amenities. Many refugees live in precarious conditions, especially in urban areas, where they endure discrimination and have limited access to healthcare, education, and employment. The recent rise in anti-immigrant sentiment, coupled with stricter border controls, has exacerbated these difficulties.

Despite these challenges, numerous civil society organizations are working to preserve and advocate for refugee rights in India. While the country continues to provide shelter to many refugees, the absence of a consistent policy framework significantly limits their integration and

well-being. Among these vulnerable groups, the Chakma refugees in India face particularly difficult circumstances. Many Chakmas, primarily residing in the Northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Tripura, remain in a state of legal uncertainty, unable to secure citizenship rights or recognized refugee status. The ongoing ambiguity surrounding their legal status has prompted calls for policy reforms that would safeguard their rights and facilitate their integration into Indian society. Nevertheless, the perseverance of the Chakma community persists as they continue to seek recognition and better living conditions, striving for a more secure future in India.

India continues to extend a warm welcome to those seeking refuge, especially from its neighboring countries. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) closely collaborates with the Indian government, NITI Aayog, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and local NGOs to ensure refugees have access to protection, solutions, and humanitarian aid. The goal of "Leave No One Behind" drives civil society organizations to lead the refugee response in collaboration with UNHCR, ensuring that aid reaches those most in need. There are agreements with eight national NGOs to support this effort.

India has a long history of hosting refugees from various ethnic backgrounds, including those from Pakistan during the 1947 partition, Tibet in 1959 when the Dalai Lama fled Chinese occupation, Chakmas and Hajongs in 1964-65 from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladeshis during the 1965 and 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka in the 1980s, and Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in 2022. As of 2024, UNHCR India has registered 46,000 refugees and asylum seekers, the majority of whom live in urban areas. Among these, approximately 43% are women and girls, 36% are children, and the rest consist of men and elderly individuals. While UNHCR India has been successful in providing humanitarian assistance according to refugees' needs, there is still a sense of insecurity regarding access to basic necessities such as food, shelter, education, and employment (UNHCR, 2024).

## 10. CONCLUSION

The Chakma refugees in Arunachal Pradesh face significant challenges in acquiring citizenship or legal status. Granting citizenship involves complex decisions that extend beyond legal considerations, and such processes can heighten political tensions. Even if the Chakmas have a legitimate claim to citizenship, building strong social ties and mutual trust with local communities is essential for finding a viable solution. Fostering these relationships is a more effective approach than pushing for forced assimilation, which could exacerbate the problem. Administrative decisions should aim to bridge gaps between indigenous populations and the Chakma community.

The core issue is the conflicting rights of indigenous tribes in Northeast India and those of the Chakma people. Any proposed solution must be accepted by all parties involved. A fair solution on paper may not necessarily be accepted by every group, so it is essential to have ongoing dialogues to reach a mutually agreeable resolution. While the process may take time, it is important for middle- and lower-level government officials to be actively involved in these discussions. In a situation where the Chakma community has struggled for recognition and identity for decades, even engaging these leaders could be a step toward progress.

The Chakma community in India is grappling with issues of identity crises and statelessness, which require a comprehensive approach. The Indian government should prioritize granting citizenship to the Chakmas by expediting the necessary paperwork for legal recognition. Providing administrative and documentation support, including helping them obtain identity documents, will be crucial in resolving their legal status. Additionally, increasing the Chakma community's access to economic and educational opportunities and empowering them to participate in public policy creation can significantly improve their socioeconomic standing.

To foster social integration, it is necessary to eliminate discrimination against the Chakma people and promote inclusion through public awareness campaigns. Mobilizing global support and raising awareness can also help secure financing and pressure lawmakers to enact reforms. By implementing these steps, the Chakma community's statelessness and identity crises can be resolved, leading to their full integration and recognition within Indian society. Ultimately, the key to resolving the issue lies in fostering a spirit of inclusion, which would allow the Chakmas to feel truly at home in India. However, this approach will only succeed if the Government of India (GoI) and higher authorities appeal to the local populations in Northeast India, encouraging them to embrace the Chakma's right to life and liberty. This remains a challenging task due to the alienation the Chakma community from mainstream society.

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