

DRAFT PAPER (Do not quote or disseminate)

Local Resistances to Tibetan Rehabilitation in Arunachal.
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Tibetan refugee presence in Arunachal Pradesh has become the site for contention with local identity narratives prioritizing indigenous communities over refugee rehabilitation. The announcement of the 2014 Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy saw an immediate backlash from politically powerful All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) and more recent outfits like the Students United Movement of All Arunachal (SUMAA) against providing temporary land tenure guarantees and welfare benefits to Tibetans in the state arguing that Tibetans are not indigenous to the state. This exclusionary articulation of the student groups must be contextualised within a broader history of refugee resettlement in the state, contemporary nationalist assertions that include ethnic binaries as well as local pressures of land and resource competition. This has produced worrying outcomes including attacks on Tibetan owned businesses in West Kameng district of the state. This paper will map the local resistance to the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy in Arunachal's western district of West Kameng and locate it in the broader context of long-term local resistance towards refugee resettlement in the state.

On January 3rd, 2020, a student organisation called the Arunachal Indigenous Students Union (AISU) demanded deportation of all refugees settled in the state.¹ While most of the attention at the event was focussed on Chakma and Hajong communities, speaking at the protest, the president of the AISU made it clear that Tibetan refugees too should be deported from the state. He demanded that the Inner Line Permits of all refugees should be checked by visiting their homes as they were 'illegally' settled in the state.² The preceding year in Feb 2019, a shopping complex comprising mainly of Tibetan owned shops was set ablaze in state's capital Itanagar during protests over the issue of providing Permanent Resident Certificates (PRC) to people not indigenous to the state.³ Similarly, in July 2018, the Students United Movement of All Arunachal (SUMAA), took out a protest rally in Bomdila in which some Tibetan owned shops were targeted as illegal structures and Tibetan residents threatened with eviction.⁴ These incidents are examples of the growing local resentment over the presence of refugee groups including Tibetans who were formally resettled in the erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1960s. The dominant student organisation in the state, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) has opposed the presence of refugees in the state since the 1970s. In the recent times, especially since the codification of the 2014 Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy (TRP), newer organisations like SUMAA or AISU have actively mobilized opposition to Tibetan resettlement in the state. Since 2017, political groups have adopted an increasingly confrontational stance on the issue challenging central directives on refugee welfare as illegitimate. As evident above, this confrontational politics

¹ India is not a party to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol and has no legal category of refugee. Hence, Tibetans are classified as 'foreigners' under the Foreigners Act of 1946 and the Registration of Foreigners Rules of 1992. However, in the bureaucratic and political discourse, Tibetans and other displaced groups like Chakma and Hajong are routinely addressed as refugees in India.

² <https://arunachal24.in/aisu-demands-deportation-of-chakma-hajong-and-tibetan-refugees/> accessed on 25 December 2021.

³ <https://www.tibetanjournal.com/prominent-tibetan-complex-burnt-amid-prc-row-in-arunachal/>

⁴ <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/07/14/org-takes-out-rally-against-trp/>

has at times had worrying outcomes for the Tibetan exile community as well as other refugee groups rehabilitated in the state.

This paper locates the local resistance to Tibetan rehabilitation in West Kameng in broader context of the oppositional politics to refugee resettlement in Arunachal. The paper is based on insights from fieldwork in West Kameng with interviews with local Tibetan community leaders, resident and district officials in the town of Bomdila and the Tenzingpaon Tibetan settlement in the district. This is supplemented by interviews with the officials in the Home department of the Central Tibetan Authority, the Tibetan refugee government in Dharamshala. The paper builds on my earlier work on Tibetan rehabilitation in Karnataka, Delhi and Himachal.⁵

Tibetan Settlements in Arunachal

While the first Tibetan refugees arrived in Arunachal in 1959, Tibetan presence in the region predates Indian independence. Tawang and West Kameng districts are part of Monyul, the land of the Mon, or the Monpa, who are followers of Tibetan Buddhism. In 1680, the 5th Dalai Lama proclaimed Monyul to be part of the Tibet.⁶ With the signing of the 1914 Simla Agreement and the resulting McMahon Line, Tawang and West Kameng became part of the British Indian territory. However, following the 1914 Simla Agreement, the British failed to formally delimit the border or extend their administrative control up to the McMahon Line. However, despite being south of the McMahon Line, Monyul was administered by the Tibetan government in Lhasa and continued to pay taxes to it till 1951.⁷ Since 1680, Tawang monastery had been a nodal point for Tibetan tax collection as well as Buddhist monastic hierarchy in Monyul. In addition to the Tawang monastery, the Tibetan government constructed fortresses or Dzongs in Monyul for the purpose of collecting taxes. The Dirang Dzong and the Takluk Dzong both fall in the present day West Kameng district. In 1947, India inherited a frontier with Tibet that was in flux and facilitated the movement and settlement of Tibetans in the eastern Himalayan belt south of the McMahon Line.⁸ In 1951, with the Khathing mission, India established effective administrative control over the region that put an end to Tibetan taxation from Monyul.⁹ Till the 1962 war, there was movement across the border for trade between the Tibetan and Monpas as well as pilgrimage.

However, with the flight of the Dalai Lama and the subsequent outbreak of the 1962 Sino-Indian war, things changed rapidly. With the influx of thousands of Tibetan refugees into India between 1959-1962, the Indian government set up Tibetan settlements in many parts of the country with the first designated settlements coming up in the southern state of Karnataka in 1962.¹⁰ Subsequently over the years, more Tibetan settlements were set up in Himachal, Uttarakhand, J&K, West Bengal, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Arunachal with a total of 44 settlements in India.¹¹ The first designated Tibetan settlement in Arunachal

⁵ Balasubramaniam, Madhura, and Sonika Gupta. "Disciplining Statelessness: Fragmentary Outcomes of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy in India." *Asian Studies Review* 46.1 (2022): 74-92.

⁶ Gohain, Swargajyoti. "Producing Monyul as Buffer: Spatial politics in a colonial frontier." *Modern Asian Studies* 54.2 (2020): 432-470.

⁷ Lamb, Alastair. *Tibet, China & India 1914-1950: A History of Imperial Diplomacy*. Roxford Books, 1989.

⁸ Gupta, Sonika. "Frontiers in Flux: Indo-Tibetan Border: 1946-1948." *India Quarterly* 77.1 (2021): 42-58.

⁹ Shukla, Sonia. "Forging New Frontiers: Integrating Tawang with India, 1951." *China Report* 48.4 (2012): 407-42

¹⁰ Balasubramaniam, Madhura, and Sonika Gupta. "Disciplining Statelessness: Fragmentary Outcomes of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy in India." *Asian Studies Review* 46.1 (2022): 74-92.

¹¹ <https://centraltibetanreliefcommittee.net/settlements/>

(erstwhile NEFA) was set up in Tezu in eastern part district of Changlang. Currently, Arunachal has four designated Tibetan settlements in Tezu (1962), Tenzingang (1972) Miao (1975) and Tuting (2013) with a scattered population of Tibetans in Bomdila and Tawang. According to figures provided by the Central Tibetan Relief Committee, the total population of the Tibetans in Arunachal does not exceed 10,000 spread among the different settlements and scattered communities.¹² This is a miniscule number in the total population of Arunachal which is estimated to be around 1.55 million in 2021.

While there has been local opposition to Tibetan resettlement in Arunachal since 1970s, since 2014, the issue has become more confrontational. In 2014 the Indian government, in consultation with the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), announced the Tibetan Rehabilitation policy (TRP) that broadened the scope of state welfare benefits available to Tibetans in India.¹³ Under the TRP, state governments that host Tibetan settlements were advised to uniformly extend the benefits of government funded schemes including Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS), Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and National Food Security Act (NFSA), Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Rajiv Awas Yojna (RAY), and the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) to Tibetans in India. Tibetans were also to be provided the needed facilities to set up Tibetan bazaars and were entitled for flood /famine relief under state and central policies. Qualified Tibetan professional were permitted to take up private jobs and Tibetan businesses were to be provided trade business licenses. In addition, the TRP also proposed a standardized 20-year land lease for Tibetan settlements to provide them a sense of security regarding land tenure. In 2015, responding to a question in Rajya Sabha on the TRP, the Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijiju, who happens to belong to Arunachal, stated the land on which Tibetan settlements are established “should not be disturbed” thereby making a clear statement on the continued commitment of the Indian government to continue to support Tibetan resettlement in India.¹⁴ As of now, the TRP has been adopted by four states in India and its implementation is underway in Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh. However, at the local levels in different states there has been some resentment towards this policy.¹⁵

Geographies of Anger: Resistance to TRP in Arunachal

In Arunachal, there was an immediate backlash against the TRP with student groups demanding that Tibetans settled in the state should not be extended any welfare benefits as they were not indigenous to the region. This resistance to the TRP is premised on exclusive and dominantly patriarchal assertions of indigeneity tied to blood and soil. The student groups, and increasingly the political parties, identify Tibetans as settled ‘illegally’ in the state in violation of existing laws, namely the colonial era 1873 Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act (BEFRA). This Act is the basis of the Inner Liner Permit (ILP) regime that regulates the movement of non-Arunachalis to and from the state. Over the years, the ILP regime has become integral to the state’s politico-social articulations of identity, belonging and citizenship prioritizing indigeneity over any other form of identity to the exclusion of all ‘outsiders’ including refugees. The rehabilitation of Tibetan and other refugees in Arunachal

¹² <https://centraltibetanreliefcommittee.net/settlements/tibetan-settlements-in-india/north-east-india/>

¹³ For a text of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy is available at https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/FFR_ANNEXURE_A_17092019.pdf

¹⁴ Rajya Sabha Starred Question No.69 29TH April, 2015.

¹⁵ For an examination of TRP and its impact see Balasubramaniam, Madhura, and Sonika Gupta. "Disciplining Statelessness: Fragmentary Outcomes of the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy in India." *Asian Studies Review* (2021): 1-19.

is also seen as illegitimate, done without the consent of the local population under directives of the central government at a time when Arunachal was a centrally administered territory. Consequently, in the history of political mobilization in Arunachal, refugee resettlement is juxtaposed with rights of indigenous people. Finally, student organizations and local political parties have also taken the view that Tibetan presence in the border state threaten national security with regard to the ongoing boundary dispute with China. The lack of trust between local communities and refugee groups in Arunachal has grown in an alarming manner over the years. The next section lays out the political context in Arunachal from 1947 to the present day highlighting how local anxieties over citizenship and belonging have been deployed by different groups to produce anti-refugee political mobilization in the state.

Anti-refugee political mobilisation in Arunachal

Arunachal's changing relationship from a centrally administered frontier region to a union territory, to a state has had a direct impact on the framing of the refugee issue in the region. From 1947 to 1965, the region named North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was primarily perceived of as a border region with China and accordingly administered directly by the Ministry of External Affairs. In 1965 the Ministry of Home Affairs took over the charge of the NEFA and subsequently Arunachal was made a union territory in 1972 directly administered by the Central government. In 1987, Arunachal was granted full statehood. Despite the restructuring of Arunachal's relationship with the Indian state the colonial paternalism inherent in the British policies of 'excluded regions' in treating the region as a 'wild' and 'ungovernable' continued. In the post-independence political and bureaucratic discourse, NEFA/Arunachal is predominantly categorised as a backward and underdeveloped that must join the national 'mainstream'. This discourse is often replicated in some of the academic research and writing on Arunachal reiterating tropes of mainstreaming grounded in developmentalist determinism.¹⁶ Guyot-Récharard documents the early phase of this statist discourse to argue that top down developmentalism in the region has produce counter-productive outcomes of exacerbating marginality.¹⁷ The nature and processes of political mobilisation, especially among student organisations in the state, are located in and produced by this continued experience of marginality.

However, there is complex relationship between this discourse of marginality and its organisational politics that has in turn produced exclusionary articulations of belonging that see all refugees as illegitimately living in Arunachal. Students organisations and increasingly political parties places all refugee groups including Chakma, Hajong and Tibetans resettled in the state in a mutually exclusive relationship with the local communities. With regard to Tibetans, this belies the fact that Tibetans resettled in the predominantly Buddhist district of West Kameng and Tawang share close kinship, religious and cultural ties with the local Monpa majority community in both these districts. The historical and contemporary trajectory of Tibetan presence in Arunachal is significantly different from other refugee

¹⁶ In fact, in some of the academic writing on Arunachal, the assumptions of the region as backward and unmodern are uncritically reproduced. See Dhar, Bibhash. "Modernisation in Arunachal Pradesh." MN Karna (ed) *Social Movements in North-East India*, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi (1998): 112-117. Dutta, Sristidhar, "Student Movement in Arunachal", in Baruah, Apurba K. (ed) *Student power in North-East India: Understanding student movements*. Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2002.

¹⁷ For early phase of this statist discourse see Guyot-Récharard, Bérénice. "Nation-building or state-making? India's North-East Frontier and the ambiguities of Nehruvian developmentalism, 1950-1959." *Contemporary South Asia* 21.1 (2013): 22-37.

groups in the state. In the 1960s, Chakmas and Hajongs faced forced migration from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in erstwhile East Pakistan. They first migrated to Tripura due to the displacement from the Kaptai Hydel project as well as religious persecution in their homeland. With local resistance in Tripura to this migration, the Indian government decided to resettle many of these migrants initially in Bihar but finally in the centrally administered NEFA primarily in Lohit, Tirap and Changlang districts.¹⁸ On the other hand, while Tibetans migrated to India in large numbers between 1959-1962, their presence in Arunachal historically predates this period especially in Tawang and West Kameng. At present, the Monpa and Tibetan communities are bound by the common practice of Tibetan Buddhism and often share kinship ties in both West Kameng and Tawang.

In state-level organizational politics, the issue of refugees, Chakma, Hajong and Tibetans is presented as a binary between indigenous and non-indigenous inhabitants of the state. Over the years, as the population of refugee groups, especially of the Chakmas is claimed to have increased manifold,¹⁹ the local population perceives it as a demographic threat to indigenous communities and their rightful claim over the state's land and resources. This sets up a mutually exclusive relationship between citizen's rights and refugee protection. Political groups demanding deportation of these refugee groups in Arunachal primarily contend that since the local population was not consulted in the process of resettlement in the 1960s, their presence has been foisted on the local population. During the 1960s, Arunachal was a centrally administered territory with no popular electoral representation at the state or the central levels. The presence of these communities in the state is therefore presented as illegitimate and foisted upon the local population.

As Arunachal's status has changed from a centrally administered frontier region to a union territory and finally to statehood, this has also brought an accompanying transformation in the state's political mobilisation on the refugee issue. All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) the most prominent student organisation in the state and has been at the forefront of its anti-refugee agitation. The AAPSU's history dated back to 1947 when student organisations in the erstwhile NEFA were formed on community lines initially of the Adi and Mishing communities and later expanded to Galo and others.²⁰ Between 1947 and 1972, the student body expanded to include students from the entire region. In 1967, it was renamed All NEFA Students Union (NEFASU) with its headquarters at Pasighat. In 1972, with the grant of Union Territory status to Arunachal, the organisation was renamed All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU). Till Arunachal became a state in 1987, tribe-based student organisations were the primary channel for political mobilisation. However, these student groups had limited traction as there were no state channels for participatory or electoral politics that provided them with leverage in putting forth their concerns. Accordingly, the student groups, worked primarily to petition the state to draw the attention to the developmental needs of their local communities. However, with the introduction of the UT status and later statehood the relationship between state institutions and political groups also transformed.²¹ Since 1970s, AAPSU has deployed the language of rights as opposed to

¹⁸ Panigrahi, PK. "Displacement and Refugee Issue in Arunachal Pradesh." In Samir Kumar Das (ed) *Blisters on their Feet: Tales of Internally Displaced Persons in India's North East*, Sage, New Delhi, 2008.

¹⁹ Debnath, Kallol, and Kunal Debnath. "Chakma Refugees in Arunachal Pradesh: Their Inclusion and Setback." *Refugee Crises and Third-World Economies*. Emerald Publishing Limited, 2020.

²⁰ For a comprehensive history of student mobilization in Arunachal see, Bhaskar Pegu, Student mobilization and state responses in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, PhD thesis, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, 2019. <http://gyan.iitg.ac.in/handle/123456789/1614>

²¹ Prasad, Chunnu. "Students' Movements in Arunachal Pradesh and the Chakma-Hajong Refugee Problem." *Economic and Political Weekly* (2007): 1373-1379.

their earlier strategies and language of petitioning. With statehood, their concerns widened to articulating questions of identity and belonging in the state. In this new phase of political mobilisation, the presence of refugees became a rallying point for state level political parties that wanted to harness the ground presence and organisational strength of local student bodies. In 1979, the AAPSU gave a charter of its demands to the Arunachal government demanding detection and deportation of 'foreign nationals', strengthening the inner line permit regime and cancelling of land allotment, trade and business licences of non-Arunachalis.²² In 1980, the AAPSU gave its first bandh call raising concerns about the presence of 'foreign nationals' in the Arunachal and made a demand for their identification and deportation. This was followed in the succeeding years with multiple bandhs and hartals on the issue of refugee resettlement in the state.²³

In the 1980s, as the anti-immigrant agitation in Assam peaked, anxieties about illegal immigrants spilled over into neighbouring Arunachal. Arunachal, not yet a full-fledged state, was in the process of carving out its own territorial and ethnic identities as distinct from the erstwhile composite Assam. In fact, one of the earliest demands made by the AAPSU related the issue of settlement of Assam -Arunachal boundary to the issue of refugee resettlement in the state. While the AAPSU and the AASU (All Assam Students Union) were in solidarity over the issue of immigrants to their respective states, political groups in Arunachal were anxious about a spill-over of IDPs from Assam to the state. On August 26, 1985, during a meeting of the AAPSU held in Pasighat, the organisation adopted a resolution reiterating the 1979 charter of demands categorising refugees and IDPs as threats to the indigenous population of Arunachal.²⁴ The AAPSU demanded that the 'foreign nationals' such as Tibetan, Chakma, Hajong and Yobin should be deported from the state as they posed a threat to national security, were in violation of the 1873 BEFRA and could threaten the demographic balance of the indigenous population. Secondly, the resolution demanded the strengthening of the inner line permit regime under BEFRA to prevent an influx of 'outsiders' from Assam following the Assam Accord.²⁵ The resolution demanded that the no permanent land allotments should be made to any non-indigenous groups, nor trade or business licences provided.

The state's response to the rising anti-refugee movement was to primarily address the issue as a law and order problem sometimes with disastrous outcomes. On 3rd Feb 1986, during a bandh call, Kipa Kache, a high-school student in Arunachal's Kurung Kumey district, was killed in CRPF firing. The day is since commemorated by the AAPSU as celebrated as Martyrs Day.²⁶ Over the years, there have been other students like Tobom Bam who died in 1994 during the AAPSU's *Delhi Chalo Abhiyan* or Khoda Dolu who died in Naharlargun in 2004 who are celebrated by the AAPSU as martyrs to the anti-refugee agitation cause. This discourse of martyrdom is an integral part of the rights-based assertion that privileges the indigenous inhabitants of the state and sets them in a mutually exclusive relationship with any immigrant to the state, including refugees.

²² Bhaskar Pegu, Student mobilization and state responses in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, PhD thesis, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, 2019. p. 223

²³ Dutta, Sristidhar. *Student Movements in Arunachal Pradesh*. Himalayan Publishers, 1998.

²⁴ Bhaskar Pegu, Student mobilization and state responses in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, PhD thesis, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, 2019. p. 209

²⁵ Pegu, p.225

²⁶ <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2020/02/28/aapsu-martyr-kipa-kache-remembered/>

In 1990s, local state parties began to respond to the sustained agitation by student groups opposing refugee resettlement. This period saw the crystallization of an anti-refugee articulation in popular and legislative domains in Arunachal. In 1992, the Arunachal Pradesh legislature adopted a resolution demanding deportation of Chakma and Hajong from the state. In 1994 the Arunachal Assembly passed a resolution in support of the 'Quit Arunachal' notice issued by the AAPSU to Tibetan and Chakma refugees. Local units of national parties like the Congress and later the BJP disagreed with their national counterparts in supporting the AAPSU and other student organisation in their agitation against refugees in the state. For example, on September 20, 1995, the AAPSU held a rally in Naharlagun purported as referendum on the refugee issue. The AAPSU resolution at the rally included Chakma, Hajong, Tibetans, Bangladeshis, Bhutanese and Nepalese as communities that were illegally present living in the state. Gegong Apang, the Congress party CM of the state departed against his party's position on the issue to make common cause with the AAPSU to demand eviction of all refugees from the state by the end of the year. All elected members of the Arunachal assembly had attended this rally and threatened to resign from primary membership of the respective political parties if the demand for eviction of refugees was not met.²⁷ It became increasingly clear that the issue of belonging in the state was exclusively grounded in claims of indigeneity and was in opposition to any accommodation of any displaced or immigrant population. In 1996, Apang broke away from the Congress party to form the Arunachal Congress that pushed for deportation of refugees from the state. This set the course for a divergent policies at the central and state levels that continues to bedevil the issue and the lives of the refugee populations of the state. Through the decade of 1990s and 2000s, the AAPSU continued to agitate through protests, dharnas and bandhs on the issue. By now the AAPSU had strong ground presence in high schools, colleges and institutes of professional and higher learning and functioned as an umbrella organisation with student bodies of many local communities coordinating with it to make a common cause in opposing refugee rehabilitation in the state.

Escalating Local Resistance

Since August 2017 after Arunachal formally adopted the Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy and there have been multiple protests, demonstrations and rallies by student groups to demand that Tibetans should not be accorded any land rights or welfare provisions on par with citizens by the government.²⁸ This coincided with the Central government announcement that it would comply with the 2015 Supreme Court verdict granting citizenship to Chakma and Hajong in India.²⁹ The case for citizenship for Chakma had been making its way through the judiciary since over a decade led by the Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh (CCRCAP). In 2015 the Supreme Court instructed the Central government to accord citizenship to the Chakma refugees in the country. In 2017, the Central government declared its intention to implement the Supreme Court's directive in Arunachal. The adoption of the TRP and the announcement of implementation of citizenship for Chakmas exacerbated the anti—refugee sentiment in the state.

It is essential to note that while the Chakmas and the Hajong have organised to claim citizenship in India, Tibetans have not. In fact, the official position of the CTA discourages

²⁷ Prasad, Chunnu. "Students' Movements in Arunachal Pradesh and the Chakma-Hajong Refugee Problem." *Economic and Political Weekly* (2007): p.1377

²⁸ <https://tibetexpress.net/8636/student-group-serves-3-day-ultimatum-to-rollback-tibetan-rehabilitation-policy-in-arunachal/>

²⁹ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/government-to-grant-citizenship-to-chakmas-hajong-refugees/articleshow/60494518.cms?from=mdr>

Tibetans from taking citizenship. While the CTA represents all Tibetans in exile, it can offer welfare benefits offered by the Indian government *only* to those who hold the registration certificate (RC) identifying them as foreigners in India. Significantly, the TRP also strengthens this relationship by exclusively identifying only RC holders as legitimate recipients of welfare schemes and residents of designated Tibetan settlements. Under India's citizenship laws as defined in Section 3(1)(a) of the Indian Citizenship Act, 1955, every person born in India on or after January 26, 1950 and before July 1, 1987 (Constitutional Amendment on Citizenship) is a citizen of the country. By this benchmark, most Tibetans born in India during the designated period would be eligible for citizenship. However, there have been only a handful of cases in which Tibetans have approached the courts to obtain their citizenship rights.³⁰ In each of these cases, it has been clear that it was an individual fight with no support either from Tibetan organizations or the CTA. However, the issue of some Tibetans allegedly claiming state benefits entitled to indigenous communities, or Scheduled Tribes (ST) has vitiated the issue with demonstrable lack of trust between the host and refugee communities. This issue has exacerbated the opposition to Tibetans living in the state. Student groups in Arunachal have been carrying out "Operation Clean Drive" for over many years now that are purportedly designed to ensure compliance with the ILP regime by checking the ILP documents of the visitors to the state.³¹ During these 'drives' individual and businesses are named and brought to the attention of the police or district authorities as illegal inhabitants. This has continued to create a fearful environment for refugees in the state. Some other civil society organisations like the Green Arunachal Foundation have supported these 'drives' to address the issue of fake ST certificates to non-indigenous people, including Tibetans.³²

Impact on Tibetans in West Kameng

In March 2000, in a memorandum to the Arunachal CM, the AAPSU demanded that the scattered populations of Tibetans in Bomdila and Tawang should be moved to the designated settlement at Tenzingang and their trade and business licenses examined. AAPSU also alleged that Tibetans in Bomdila and Tawang had obtained ST certificates and were drawing benefits due only to citizens.³³ This issue has caused significant tension between Tibetans and other inhabitants of especially in Bomdila and Tawang. With Arunachal adopting the TRP in August 2017, the tensions between the local population and the Tibetans in the state began to intensify. In West Kameng and Tawang, a new student outfit, Students Union Movement of All Arunachal (SUMAA) began to systematically target Tibetans as illegitimately availing welfare benefits as well as land allotments. In 2018 the All West Kameng District Students Union³⁴ demanded that the district administration constitute a committee to verify if Tibetan refugees were availing Scheduled Tribe (ST) benefits. In response to this the district administration constituted a committee to investigate whether there were cases of fraudulent use of the ST certificates. With the Tibetan and Monpa communities sharing

³⁰ For details see Gupta, Sonika. "Enduring liminality: Voting rights and Tibetan exiles in India." *Asian Ethnicity* 20.3 (2019): 330-347.

³¹ <https://www.oneindia.com/2007/05/04/aapsu-to-launch-operation-clean-drive-1178287896.html>
<https://arunachal24.in/arunachal-aapsu-launches-operation-clean-drive-against-ilp-violators-illegal-bangladeshis/>

³² <https://www.sentinelassam.com/north-east-india-news/arunachal-news/gaf-supports-operation-clean-drive/>

³³ <https://www.indiatoday.in/pti-feed/story/acs-demands-cancellation-of-st-certificates-of-tibetans-709239-2016-08-31>

³⁴ <https://www.sentinelassam.com/north-east-india-news/arunachal-news/authorities-urged-to-verify-tibetan-refugee-issue/>

kinship ties, many families did indeed include Tibetan refugees as well as Indian citizens, legally entitled to ST benefits. In addition, Tibetans have since the 1960s accessed trade licenses from locals, usually Monpas, through a power of attorney. This is an arrangement that functions with the tacit agreement of the authorities to facilitate economic opportunities for the refugees. Since 2018, Monpa community through its apex organisation Monpa Mimang Tsogpa (MMT) has increasingly articulated identity in patriarchal terms with Monpa women married to Tibetan men disinherited from their property and community rights. On the other hand, the instances of Monpa men marrying Tibetan women continue to be looked upon as favourably both in social and cultural terms.

In July 2018 the SUMAA organised a rally in Bomdila town to protest Tibetan presence which exacerbated the tensions between the Tibetan and Monpa communities. According to official accounts corroborated with interviews with local inhabitants of Bomdila, the SUMAA activists camped in Bomdila town from 3rd to 17th July. On July 13th, SUMAA took out a rally through Bomdila Bazaar raising slogans of “Tibetan Go Back”.³⁵ The rally was held under heavy police presence and primarily comprised school students bussed in from the neighbouring towns of Rupa and Singchung. One of the local Monpa respondent during an interview pointed out that most of the protestors visible on the video footage of the rally were non-indigenous.³⁶ During the rally, there were incidents of verbal confrontation with local Tibetan shopkeepers and some shops & establishments were targeted for carrying Tibetan names or the Tibetan flag.³⁷ SUMAA activists compiled a list of establishments and sent it to district authorities alleging them to be fraudulently being run by Tibetans. They demanded that these residents be either moved to the Tenzingaon settlement or their trade licences be cancelled. In a memorandum to the district authorities, the SUMAA declared their intention of taking direct action against the identified individuals if the district authorities did not respond to their demands. Given this chain of events, a general sense of unease prevailed in Bomdila town as well as Tenzingaon settlement.³⁸ All shops in Bomdila remained closed on 14th and 15th July despite assurances by the district administration. On 14th late night, SUMAA activists gheraoed the Bomdila police station. This situation was resolved by arresting the SUMAA activists. They were later released on bail the next day. In a meeting subsequent meeting held with the Bomdila Bazaar Committee, SUMAA activists threatened to return a week later to carry out evictions of identified individuals and businesses. At the same time, it was also learned that SUMAA activists had threatened Tibetan shopkeepers in a prominent shopping complex in the state capital Itanagar and extorted money from them. (As mentioned above, this complex was later burnt down in 2019 following protests on granting PRC to non-indigenous persons in the state.) A group of community based organisation of West Kameng including some indigenous student groups organised a car rally in solidarity with the Tibetans and local shopkeepers and condemned the actions of SUMAA.³⁹ Given this state of affairs, the President, General Secretary and the Convenor of SUMAA were arrested on 23rd July. This incited counter protests for the release of the arrested SUMAA activists.⁴⁰

Residents of Bomdila and Tenzingaon also recall similar incidents taking place in Kalakthang and Shergaon and Bomdila in the early 1990s when Tibetan residents were targeted for

³⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDMIY-pru_s and interviews with local respondents 17 June 2022.

³⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDMIY-pru_s and interviews with local respondents 17 June 2022.

³⁷ Interviews with local respondents 17 June 2022.

³⁸ <https://thenortheasttoday.com/states/arnachalpradesh/arnachal-pradesh-section-144-crpc-imposed-in-west-kameng/cid2524774.htm>

³⁹ <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/07/20/cbos-others-condemn-student-orgs-activities/> Interview with local student leaders,

⁴⁰ <https://arunachalobserver.org/2018/07/31/free-sumaa-leaders-unconditionally-protesters/>

residing in and running businesses in these locations. Some Tibetans running small businesses were forcibly evicted from their dwellings in Kalakthang town in the district and fled to the Tenzingaon settlement. Most never went back. This started a process of outmigration from Tenzingaon to other places of Tibetan residence in India as well as migration abroad. In 2010, the Canadian government had announced that it would facilitate the migration of 1000 Tibetan refugees from Arunachal over a period of 5 years. Many Tibetan families in West Kameng and Bomdila decided to avail of this to ensure a more stable life for their families. While this is also part of a general trend within the Tibetan exile community where many are seeking resettlement in western countries, these incidents intensified the pace of Tibetan outmigration from Bomdila and Tenzingaon.

In December 2021 the AAPSU reiterated its demand for a refugee census in the state.⁴¹ While this demand is primarily made with regard to Chakma and Hajong refugees, there have been similar demands made especially in Bomdila and Tawang to identify and verify the legal status of Tibetans both in and outside of the settlements. The demands for a refugee census have understandably given rise to the concerns among all refugee groups that this could lead to persecution and possible deportation from the state. The AAPSU's sustained campaign against Tibetan resettlement has resulted in many Tibetans choosing to migrate out of the state, either to other Tibetan settlements in India or abroad.

Since 2019, the refugee issue in Arunachal has become mired in larger national discourse on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) further intensifying the anti-refugee agitation in the state. Currently, the Tibetan exile community in Arunachal continues to enjoy the benefits of the Central government's long-term commitment to Tibetan rehabilitation. However, successive state governments since the 1990s have aligned their political interests with that of the AAPSU on the refugee issue. The rise of confrontational politics on the issue has polarised the bureaucratic and political positions within the state administration that seek to balance India's long-term commitment to refugee protection with assertive identity politics that essentialises indigeneity at the local levels. Therefore, the Indian approach to Tibetan rehabilitation in Arunachal seems to be fragmented between opposing local and central level policy impulses creating a sense of precarity for the exile community.

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⁴¹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/arunachal-students-body-demands-refugee-census-despite-pmos-veto/article37989753.ece>

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