

**Deepak K. Singh, *Stateless in South Asia ; The Chakmas between Bangladesh and India*, Sage Publication, India, 2010, Page; 289,**

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The *Stateless in South Asia* by Deepak K. Singh compiled with nine chapters is the only book I could say from India on stateless refugees as a central theme. It is forwarded by Ramchandra Guha, suggest that, most of the people who are writing on the issue related to northeast are mainly outsider and never born in the particular state. Indian scholars have tended to work on their linguistic or geographical regions. This book focus on the Myron Weiner, thesis on how Chakmas become rejected people in Chittagong Hill Tract (Bangladesh) and unwanted people in Arunachal Pradesh (India)<sup>2</sup>. The study is mainly examines the interactions between the displaced Chakmas and the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Book historically explored the human predicament of one of the earliest episode of mass displacement in the history of modern South Asia which made a very holistic study of what turned out to be one of the most intractable refugee issues.

India has been the home for a large number and different types of refugees throughout the past<sup>2</sup>. India has dealt with the issues of refugees on a bilateral basis. India's refugee regime generally confirms to the international instruments on the subject without, however, giving a formal shape to all practices adopted by in a form of separate statute. The current position in India is that they are dealt with under the existing Indian laws, both general as well as special, which is applicable to all the foreigners who came to India over a period of time. This is only because there is no separate law and policies to deal with refugees. India does not have on its statute book a specific and separate law to govern refugees.

The Chakma influx into India can be traced to the partition of the sub-continent from the beginning, inconsistency and political expediency governed India's CHT policy. Until the 1970's, its policy vis-à-vis Chakmas was lackadaisical and short-sighted. The first influx of the refugees took place shortly after partition when 40,000 Chakma families fled to India. Having housed and absorbed a large number of non-Muslims Chakmas from East-Pakistan. India rehabilitated them first in North Indian states and latter to the North Eastern states of India. The manageable number of the Chakmas, their widespread dispersal in the sparsely populated Northeast and their ethnic proximity largely mitigated any potential for opposition from the state government and civil society groups. Further more, absorption was feasible partly because ethnic consciousness in the Northeast was still in its infancy. In the region human rights violation is also in peak, and very common. For example Chakmas children have no right to get admission in schools, not allowed to get government jobs, public distribution system properly stopped, trading license being cancelled, markets are not allowed to sell their goods, medical facilities completely stopped, as well as electricity, drinking water roads etc are completely blocked<sup>3</sup>. India's refugee regime is yet to evolve a transparent framework linking rights, laws and policies. It results in great prevarication between policies and practices. Treatment of refugees widely differs in India from state to state and is subject to much pressure from civil society groups.

Though Singh by training is a Political Scientist but he also draws innovatively upon the work of anthropologists, sociologist and historian. His first take is to show the case of Chakmas as the first victims of environmental/developmental displacements. He mainly focuses on the political and religious persecutions which effecting the lives of displaced persons. This book shows that how the issue of citizenship is being played in the democratic country like India. Book suggests very strongly the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh do not want to be the second class citizens like the Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims<sup>4</sup>. Equally important on the issue of hosting Arunachalees relating

to their growing fears of cultural annihilation in the wake of Chakmas are politically glorified in the region. Chakmas are largely settled in the three districts of Arunachal Pradesh particularly, Changlang, Papumpare and Lohit sub-divisions. In 2004 some 1,497 Chakmas were included in the voter list during BJP regime but latter withdrawn by the Congress regime due to All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union (AAPSU's) protest<sup>5</sup>. In 2002, the State Government of Arunachal Pradesh granted citizenship to the ninety Tibetan refugees' families of Shyo village living in Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh bordering China who came very late then Chakmas. The State government cites the East Bengal Regulation Act of 1873 for forcible deportation of the Chakmas and Hajongs. The 1873 Act requires taking of prior permission before entering into Arunachal Pradesh. However, the Chakmas who fled from CHT did not go to Arunachal Pradesh on their own. They were taken to NEFA (present Arunachal Pradesh) by the Central Government with a view to permanently settle there<sup>6</sup>.

Most of the refugee studies rarely go beyond the concerns of the displaced people who are doubtless of genuine care and understanding. However, the fact is that it is rarely acknowledge and assume centre stage in all dialogue and negotiation with the states from where the refugees arrive. Some of the very key issue of the study shows that the stateless peoples and refugees in South Asia in general and Arunachal Pradesh in particular are solely responsible for the status of refugees in the region. Today modern nation-state in South Asia rarely gives any attention to solve the problem to restore peace in the region and allow both the groups to live with dignity. Singh provides in all his chapters the detail account of the conflicts between the Chakmas and the Arunachalees. The authenticity of the book is mainly lies with the methodology particularly the primary data's, personal interviews, reports published and court cases.

One can disassociate from the book by saying that, the data work is not done properly or some where missing in the whole chapters of the book. It is lacking on the part of the issue related to citizenship and various citizenship amendments. It does not have any comparative study of other stateless refugees within India and Bangladesh. He also did not touched much upon the role of UNHRCR and NHRC on the issue related to the Chakmas and their rights in the region. Newcomers may get lost in the sophistication, subtleties and details of chapters that sometimes lose touch with Indian realities. But some time this type of study brings a very concrete and clear understanding about the excluded community in relation to the issue of citizenship.

What ever the case may be I have a firm belief that this book defiantly going to help researchers of different streams and subjects to explore and know the areas which always isolated and unknown to other parts of the states of northeast India. He wrote this book, keeping in mind to be useful resources for scholars and students of politics, international relations, sociology, anthropology, history, policy makers and lawyers to critically think on the issue related to statelessness, citizenship, migration, displacement and so on so forth. Also as an outsiders point of view Singh effectively accomplished the task of hopes to both the Chakmas and Arunachalees and open a very strong debate by questioning why there is no solution even after 50 years of refugee hood. However, the book remains very rich which illuminates the real aspects of Indian society, past and present particularly to the India's Arunachal Pradesh is concerned.

## **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Weiner, Myron (1993), Rejected Peoples and Unwanted Migrants in South Asia, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38 (34): 1737-1746.

<sup>2</sup>UNHCR (2000), *The State's of the World Refugees*, Oxford University Press.

- <sup>3</sup>Judgment of Supreme Court of India (1996), Original Civil Jurisdiction, Writ Petition (Civil) No. 720 of 1995, Between NHRC versus State of Arunachal Pradesh, 9th January, New Delhi.
- <sup>4</sup>Guru, Gopal (2005), Citizenship in Exile : A Dalit Case in (Ed.) book by Rajiv Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld, Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perspectives, Sage Publication, New Delhi, Pp. 260-276.
- <sup>5</sup>Prasad, Chunnu (2006), Migration and the Question of Citizenship: People of Chittagong Hill Tract in Arunachal Pradesh", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. LXVII, No. 3, July-September, Pp. 471-490.
- <sup>6</sup>Prasad, Chunnu (2007), Student Movement In Arunachal Pradesh: A Case of Chakma-Hajong Refugee Problem " *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLII, No.15, April 14-20, Pp.1373-1379.