

## ABSTRACT

The governance of Northeast India has been distinctive as a region with a history of continuous transition. The pre-colonial governance of the region was a mix of semi-feudal state systems in its Brahmaputra valley, tribal principalities both in the valley and the surrounding hills, and clan-based tribal governance in the hills. The British colonisers entered the region after the Yandaboo Treaty of 1826. They introduced formal administration in the Brahmaputra Valley where their commercial interests were located. The formal administration was based on western form of governance that imposed direct control over the territory and the people. However, the British did not extend their direct control to the hills as it was economically not rewarding, but instead turned the hill areas into their zone of influence as ‘excluded’ and ‘partially excluded’ areas from colonial governance. Much of Northeast India in the process became a buffer zone, a frontier, between British Indian territory and Tibet, China, and rest of Southeast Asia. In the wake of Indian Independence, the newly formed nation-state faced some serious challenges of governance. For the Northeast, unlike the colonials, Indian government had the task of nation-building in the region. However, the post-Independence Indian nation-state continued to treat the region as a buffer and security frontier which shaped the development of the region and its governance. This continues to contour the contemporary governance of the entire region in some way or the other.

The primary focus of this study is Itanagar and its urban governance, the capital town of a predominantly indigenous tribal and frontier state of Arunachal Pradesh, sharing international border with China. The State’s territory transitioned from being ‘excluded areas’ during colonial period to a centrally-administered area in early post-Independence era to being a full federal state of India in 1987. These changes in governance of Arunachal Pradesh have to be understood in the context of its geographical location and the security developments in the region post-1962 Indo-China war. The area still remains disputed with parts of the state’s territory still being claimed by China. This study, in the context of dominant prism of nation-building in a security frontier, seeks to examine the nature of urban governance in Itanagar.

Prior to being the capital, Itanagar was not a prominent place. It was a place off the map that fell within the larger traditional territory of the Nyishis, the largest Scheduled Tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. The founding of the capital meant establishing the paraphernalia of an administrative set-up, demographic change, and eventual rapid urbanisation. The study is concerned with the changes that are set off by the abrupt penetration of a new system of formal governance into the existing traditional indigenous social and economic relations of the Nyishis. It thus, also seeks to draw attention to the effects of rapid urbanisation on a rapidly transitioning indigenous society in a frontier region. The study further emphasises how the urban governance in turn is contoured to meet the local specificities, underlining the fact that no change is unidirectional, but is dialectical. It highlights the various negotiations by the people which add distinctive characteristics and shape everyday governance in the region. To elaborate all of the above-mentioned effects and changes, the study focuses on the concept of land and land rights within the changing urban land governance.

Thus, the theoretical background of the research is informed by multi-disciplinary readings. Borrowing from relevant literature, the thesis uses the framework of frontier governance to understand the urbanisation process in Itanagar. It seeks to understand how frontier governance interacts with different aspects of urbanisation, like informality, state bureaucracy, land governance, urban planning, and housing and in turn shapes the urbanisation process.

The study begins by historicising frontier governance and its evolution in Arunachal Pradesh which is crucial to understanding the empirical realities of urban governance in the State. It discusses how and why Itanagar was selected as the capital of the state and how subsequently it experienced rapid urbanisation. It discusses the nature of planning and governance model adopted in the early days of the establishment of the capital and how it is changing with the ever-evolving frontier discourse of the state. The study uses land as its focal point and presents how a protected tribal land regime is violated by the urban land governance. Scholars have argued that urban planning in India has to be understood as the management of resources, particularly land, through dynamic processes of informality.

As urbanisation in Itanagar is administration-led, the study draws parallels from the burgeoning literature from South Asia on state bureaucracy, whose foundation lies in colonialism. The study shows how the post-colonial Indian state has, in crucial respects, retained the British colonial state's institutional structure of bureaucracy and wider legal and cultural practices of rule where documents or government papers commands authority and legitimacy over traditional and local practices. The study illustrates how such a form of governance that has colonial logics of rule and subjugation embedded in it, interacts with urban informality, security frontier perspective and contemporary developmentalism of Arunachal Pradesh. On one hand, it dispossesses and marginalises local indigenous people, on the other, the latter also negotiate, manipulate, and subvert the urban land governance.

To elaborate the latter, the study identifies a unique urban housing practice in Itanagar whereby local people encroach government staff quarters and eventually transfer their legal ownership rights to themselves. Based on ethnographic data, the study examines the practice within the context of urban housing and land governance in Itanagar that had a peculiar colonial and post-colonial history of formal governance. The thesis argues that the practice is a form of urban informality produced by the interplay of political and socio-cultural factors endured by a lenient post-colonial Indian State seeking legitimacy in a previously un-administered borderland, dominated by indigenous people. These factors shaped by the frontier imperatives inform the everyday governance practices in Itanagar generating different logic of production and regulation of informality. The study thus adds a frontier perspective to the existing literature on urban informality in Global South.

Further, for understanding the emerging land governance in Itanagar, the study engages with the land laws of the state. It highlights the various gaps and inconsistencies in these land laws which in turn shape the land governance practices in the state. In this context, it discusses the Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement and Records) (Amendment) Act, 2018, the latest land act that accords individual land ownership rights to people of the state for the first time. It argues that the new act has to be contextualised within the changing discourse around land rights in India and in Global South whereby there is a growing emphasis on land titling. The latter has become necessary within the contemporary development discourse and rapid urbanisation in the state where community ownership of land has been the traditional norm.