CHAPTER 1

Introduction

What is the nature of urbanisation in a territory that has been both a colonial and a post-colonial frontier with minimum formal governance? Do such frontiers experience the process of urbanisation differently? What happens when such a territory also has a protective exclusive land regime for its indigenous tribal communities? As the world is undergoing an unprecedented urban growth, it is transforming physical space in two ways. On one hand, cities are expanding to become mega-cities and large metropolitan areas that are absorbing more and more peri-urban areas; on the other hand, new areas of the globe which were largely rural are transitioning rapidly to give birth to new towns.

The emerging literatures on urban studies have increasingly focused on new urban sites in frontiers, borderlands, and such other 'peripheral' areas. These smaller, less global, and relatively more peripheral urban areas are of recent origin but are experiencing rapid growth as it becomes part of the latest shift in the thrust of neo-liberalisation (Peck, 2013). These new studies have shown how urban sites in the frontier regions develop (Hirsch, 2009), how local communities engage with the process of change brought by rapid urbanisation and how different actors like state, market, elite and poor control, contest and co-opt the process in return (Beall & Ngonyama 2009; McDuie-Ra, 2016, Kikon & McDuie-Ra, 2021). The shift in urban studies came as global cities failed to offer holistic perspective on urbanisation and urbanity (McCann, 2004) and calls were made to focus on third world cities (Roy, 2005).

The present study is based on Itanagar, a new urban site within a post-colonial frontier territory in Northeast India (NEI). Located in the Eastern Himalayan region, Itanagar is the capital of Arunachal Pradesh, a predominantly indigenous tribal state of NEI which has a long history of protective land regimes. Its territory, having a contested border with China, has also had a contested history of state power and control as formal governance has been introduced to the region only in its post-colonial period. Itanagar gained significance after it became the capital in the 1970s. It urbanised rapidly in subsequent years triggered by the sudden administrative growth. The study examines the process of urbanisation in Itanagar, with the primary focus on its changing urban land governance and emerging informalities within it. In doing so, it investigates the historical background

of the emergence of Itanagar as a capital town, its changing land governance system, the specific nature that bureaucracy assumes and the ways the local population negotiates with the emerging system of governance in this frontier state.

1.1. Statement of the Purpose

The governance of NEI has been distinctive as a region with a history of continuous transition. The pre-colonial history of being a continental crossroad made the governance of the region a mix of feudal societies of major civilisations of the continent and tribal social systems of the Himalayan and Southeast Asian Highlands. In the west was the Indian civilisation with various communities following Hindu, Islamic and Buddhist religious traditions; numerous tribal cultures of indigenous as well as Hindu and Buddhist faiths were there in the east and south-east. To its north was the influence of Sino and Tibetan kingdoms and to its south was Bengali Hindu and Islamic traditions. The socio-political systems of the region, thus, inculcated elements from each of the dominant national identities like Indian, Burman, Tibetan, Bhutanese to which it was a frontier to. The region became the melting pot of various cultures, ethnicities, languages and religions. This confluence of identities along with the difficult geographical terrain of hills and valleys provided isolated spaces to the indigenous communities to form a range of distinct identities with its distinct forms of self-governance.

When the British colonisers entered the region after the Yandaboo Treaty of 1826, the region comprised of a few valley kingdoms that were semi-feudal, semi-tribal in nature along with numerous self-governed tribal principalities that either existed as fully independent entities or accepted suzerainty of the valley kingdoms paying minimum taxes. Based on the colonial logic of maximum exploitation and minimum governance, the British colonisers introduced formal administration to 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 rule over the people. The British enforced indirect rule in the hills by demarcating them as excluded and semi-excluded regions leaving the hill communities to govern themselves but restricted their movements to plains and thereby safeguarded British commercial interests. Thus, the foothills became semi-excluded regions and as terrains and communities became 'unruly' they became excluded territories. In other words, much of the Northeast became a buffer

zone between Tibet, China and the rest of Southeast Asia and a frontier to British India.

In the wake of Independence, the newly formed Indian nation-state faced some serious challenges of governance as it witnessed the Partition and needed to deal with numerous royal principalities and their status in post-colonial India. In the Northeast, demands for autonomy and sovereignty came from hill tribes such as Nagas and many other tribes and plains communities expressed their anxieties for the future and demanded special protection. Thus, governing the country as vast and as diverse as India along with maintaining territorial integrity was a herculean challenge for the nationalist leaders. For the Northeast, unlike the colonials, the Indian government had the task of building a pan-Indian ideal of nationalism in the region and maintaining its national boundaries.

However, the post-Independence Indian nation-state continued to treat the region as a buffer and military frontier. It also continued much of the administrative arrangements of the British of dividing the region into plains and hills, where the tribal communities of the latter continued to enjoy much autonomy and protective exclusive land regimes. Rather than nation-building whereby communities of the region become equally integrated to the larger Indian nation-state as the rest of the country, what was observed here was increased penetration and entrenchment of direct administration and militarisation to the remotest corner. Big infrastructure development such as dams, highways became the visible marker of the Indian State and its state-making in the frontier. The military frontier perspective shaped the development of the region and its governance.

To sum up, all throughout the socio-political history of the region, its governance got tempered to suit the needs of ruling regimes, be it the British coloniser or the post-colonial Indian State. This history continues to contour the contemporary governance of the entire region in some way or the other, but it manifests differently based on hill-valley, indigenous and non-indigenous, tribal and non-tribal and rural-urban divide.

This study is based on Itanagar, the capital town of Arunachal Pradesh, a state located in the northeastern-most frontier of India. With the primary focus on Itanagar's land governance, the study seeks to understand and explain the changes witnessed by the capital town, as it is rapidly urbanising and growing into the biggest urban centre in Arunachal Pradesh. The capital is transforming so abruptly that within the very duration of this study (from the first field visit on a hot summer day in May 2018 to the last visit in February

2022) the research could witness some of the contrasting changes in terms of roads and other urban infrastructure developments. The study, thus, intends to capture the transformation of Itanagar led by the rapid urbanisation process by analysing the emerging land governance regime and practices of informalities.

Map 1.1. Itanagar Location Map within Northeast India,

Source: www.mapsofindia.com

Itanagar gained its prominence after it became the capital of Arunachal Pradesh in 1978. Prior to being the capital, Itanagar was not a prominent place with any noteworthy historical significance. It falls within the larger traditional territory of the Nyishis, one of the largest Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Arunachal Pradesh. It was a place off the map that existed within a colonial and then post-colonial frontier. The territory of Arunachal Pradesh transitioned from being fully excluded areas in colonial period to a centrally administered area in early post-Independence era to being a full federal state of India. In other words, it went through a peculiar colonial and post-colonial history of formal administration that shaped its land laws, as much of the state was treated as a security frontier and a buffer zone both by the British administration and the newly independent Indian nation-state.

In fact, the attainment of statehood by Arunachal Pradesh is to be understood in the context of its geographical location of being the north-eastern most frontier of India that shares international border with China with whom India fought a border war in 1962 and the subsequent security developments in the region aftermath of it. Further, the border remains disputed with parts of the State's territory still being claimed by China and refuted by India. Thus, Arunachal Pradesh occupies a contested frontier space between two of the largest Asian nation-states. The study engages on how urban land governance manifests itself as Itanagar urbanises and locates the change within the dominant prism of nation-building and security perspective as is evident in the very existence of the state in the first place.

With more than 80 percent forest area cover, the state has been theorised as being part of 'zomia' landscape that Willem van Schendel (2002) describes as a distinctive political and geographic transnational space in Southeast Asia. For James C. Scott's (2009), the region is part of the anarchist state-evading highlands with historically isolated, sparse and ethno-linguistically diverse population. However, as the state witnesses rapid urbanisation and becomes part of the latest shift in the thrust of neo-liberalisation and global capitalism, the notions of being a 'zomia' landscape, 'frontier space' 'state-evading highlands' gets challenged. It becomes pertinent to study the process of urbanisation and how it unfolds, and how it challenges or adds to the existing body of knowledge about the region.

The founding of the capital in Itanagar meant establishing the paraphernalia of an administrative set-up, demographic change, and eventual rapid urbanisation. It meant land in Itanagar that fell within the larger traditional territory and control of the Nyishis, became a contested resource among the government, new migrants, and the Nyishis. It also meant that the exclusive community land rights of the Nyishi by virtue of the protective land regulations were getting challenged by the rapid urban growth and changes it brought. Thus, the study concerns the changes that are set off by the abrupt penetration of a new system of governance that the formal administration brought to the existing traditional social and economic relations and the forces of urbanisation. In other words, the indigenous tribal society, all at once, is faced with an onslaught on both their traditional socio-cultural and socio-economic aspects because the formal governance and urban social system introduced to them have the inherent frontier imperatives of state-making and nation-building. Further, in recent years this new system of governance also brought in an incomparable penetration of capitalist consumerism of a monetised economy in the form of neo-liberal nation-state.

Thus, the study wants to draw attention to the effects of rapid urbanisation on a rapidly transitioning indigenous society in a frontier region. The study 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 concentrates on land rights and changing land relations, urban housing, and emerging informalities within urban land governance of Itanagar.

1.2. Literature Review

The thesis has engaged with literature from across disciplines such as, urban sociology, anthropology, history and polity. It has focused readings on both development discourses, especially of Northeast India and on the region's contemporary rapid urbanisation processes. The thesis has deliberated on relevant literature on urban governance, particularly the ones that focus on frontier regions unfolding with rapid urban development. Based on the review of literature, this section is divided thematically discussing only the key theoretical concepts and debates that the thesis has engaged with.

1.2.1. Northeast India and Arunachal Pradesh

As a region for study, Northeast India has generated interests of scholars from across social science disciplines like anthropology, sociology, history, polity, along with missionaries and administrators working in this diverse region, producing a vast repository of knowledge. Being a dynamic region with diverse ethnicity, languages, cultures, religions, reading and writing about Northeast India has not been easy. Scholars have studied the region as a colonial and post-colonial frontier which has witnessed continued resource exploitation and decades long ethnic insurgency, counter-insurgency and militarisation (Karlsson 2011, Kikon 2019). The region has endured 'durable disorder' (Baruah 2007) that promotes contested models of development and democracy and disrupts the entire socio-cultural and natural ecology of the region through large scale infrastructure building (Sharma 2018), all in the 'name of the nation' (Baruah 2020). pushes an unsustainable ecologically destructive model of development.

On the other, the resistance/adaptation/negotiations of different communities of the region have ensured fragmented and at times weak presence of the Indian State by asserting an ethno-territorial politics (Kikon & McDuie-Ra 2021, McDuie-Ra 2016, Prasad 2018). This in turn has shaped the way neo-liberalisation of development policies has taken the form of 'identity economics' in the region, creating tribal elites and a structure of accumulation (Harris-White, Mishra & Upadhyay, 2009; Mishra, 2013). It has led to layers of divergence as people debate around the notion of development and identity as they continuously try to make sense of their varied fluid boundaries of identity within the fixated ideals of ethnic, state and national boundaries (Sharma & Banerjee 2021).

In recent years, the region is witnessing rapid urbanisation and has caught academic attention (McDuie-Ra 2016, Saitluanga 2017, Singh & Singha 2020, Kikon & McDuie-Ra 2021, Xaxa 2021, Hazarika & Sharma 2022). It has emerged as a new area of research demanding a space in Indian urban studies by informing new understanding on urban space, urban growth and expansion in tribal protected land, and urban planning and governance. These existing works have highlighted how urbanisation interacts with the existing dynamics of the regions such as militarisation, identity, politics, state power, non-state resistance and conflicts on one hand, and the global forces of capitalism such as flow

of goods, capital and infrastructural thrust. It has examined the process and trends of urbanisation in the region.

While being an integral part of NEI, Arunachal Pradesh shares much of the above-mentioned characteristics. The state being a security frontier vis-à-vis China and an active site of state-making (Guyot-Rechard, 2013; 2017) adds a layer to the complexities. Located in the Eastern Himalayas, the state hosts a unique mountain ecosystem of both alpine mountains (Northern AP) and tropical rainforest (Central and Southern AP). The difficult geographical terrain of high mountains and dense forests imposed natural boundaries in ways that ethnic diversity could flourish, which explains the linguistic, cultural and religious plurality, making it one of the most multi-ethnic landscapes in South Asia. To name a few, some of the ethnic groups are viz., Adi, Aka, Apatani, Galo, Hrusso, Idu, Khampti, Mishmi, Miji, Monpa, Nocte, Nyishi, Puroik, Sajolang, Sherdukpen, Singpho, Tagin, Tangsa and Wangcho. In official records, these groups are often presented as distinct cultural entities enumerated as major tribes and sub-tribes. But in practice, these categories are not culturally homogenous distinct ethnic identities but are internally diverse and at times overlap with one another. Their identities are based more on the primordial social organisation, folk traditions, lineage and clan traced to their oral histories (Modi, 2022).

In terms of socio-political and economic organisation, the majority of the tribes are small-scale, self-governing societies with their own traditional social-cultural and land management systems. Despite varying levels of engagement with state societies, most hill communities never came under their political control (Huber and Blackburn 2012; Guyot-Réchard 2017). The culturally diverse clusters of hill societies were governed by local power structures like clan, kinship, village council, chief, or head of a household (Modi, 2022). Similar to the fault lines of official categorisation of ethnic identities, it is difficult to capture the complex religious reality of the state as it is home to syncretic and diverse religious traditions and ritual practices (Barkataki-Ruscheweyh 2017).

Finally, as most of the tribes are indigenous to the state alone, their numerical strength is very weak ranging from a few hundreds to a few thousands (Centre for Policy Studies ND). This makes AP also one of the global hotspots of endangered languages, indigenous cultures and faiths. Further, the rapid changes due to both imposed and natural ruptures is

8

transforming the region from being a Zomia' (Schendel, 2002) and a 'state-evading zone' (Scott, 2012) with small-scale self-governing communities to rapidly urbanising heterogeneous contested state-space that is fast integrating with the global capitalism and market. The onslaught of global market forces, change in socio-economic structures and traditional livelihood practices is further accentuating the process of loss of culture, faith and language. It is within this changing context, that the rapid urbanisation of Itanagar needs to be located.

1.2.2. Urban Informality

Informality has been traditionally represented as a sphere of unregulated, even illegal, activity, outside the scope of the state. With its roots in economics and the theory of dual labour markets studying the informal sector, it was understood only in terms of the duality of formal-informal (Hart 1973). It mostly dealt with the informal sector that includes "all economic activities by workers and economic units that are –in law or in practice– not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements" (ILO 2002, 5).

Urban informality too has been understood in terms of duality- 'a localised informal and a globalising formal, or an informal resistance and a formal neoliberal control' (Acuto et al. 2019, 476). By studying the informal sector and informal settlements in the urban areas, it became the particular marker in theorising urban poor and cities of the Global South that either focused on the various dysfunctionalities and problems (Robinson, 2006; Rao, 2006) or hailed the informal practices as subaltern revolution (Soto, 1989; Payne and Majale, 2004). Both ways, legalist (problem, illegal, unauthorised) and structuralist (pro-poor, subaltern, innovation), usually sought to deal with the urban poor and cities of the Global South. Informality frequently got invoked in relation to its regulation and took a normative approach to direct policies.

However, as the majority of the world's population produces and trades through the informal sector and informal settlements continue to increase drastically along with the rapid urbanisation of the world, informality transcends the duality of formal-informal (Acuto et al., 2019). McFarlane (2019) argues that one has to go beyond the binaries and understand informality as a continuum; one cannot reject the duality of formal-informal entirely as a category. Until a "more radical provincializing" of urban theory structure of thought with "a more thorough-going postcolonial grammar, set of epistemologies, and

institutional formations" is seen in urban studies, the categories of formal-informal will continue to make sense in understanding cities in the Global South (ibid.)

Urban informality has for a while now been underscored as a critical means of understanding the urban economy and life and its various structures and processes. It has been seen as a spatial categorisation, an organisational form, a form of governmentality and as a negotiable value in the neoliberal market. In fact, informality is 'at the heart of the pluralist field of urban studies' (Acuto et al., 2019, p 485).

1.2.3. Informal Housing and Settlements

According to Roy (2009), informal housing can include any form of shelter or settlement (or lack thereof) which is illegal, falls outside of government control or regulation, or is not afforded protection by the state. Informal settlements are residential areas that generally lack security of land-tenure or dwelling, lack urban infrastructure and basic services with modalities ranging from squatting to informal rental housing (UN-Habitat 2015). As informal settlements require a complex *continuum* of legality and illegality, it includes both affluent neighbourhoods formed through legal ownership and market transaction but in violation of land use regulations and poor settlements such as slums formed through land invasion and self-help housing (Roy & AlSayyad, 2004).

Globally one in three people live in slums, but the share of the urban population living in slums is drastically more in developing countries with variations ranging from 30 to 90 percent (Ritchie and Roser, 2018). In India, around 34 percent (1.34 million) of its total population lives in urban areas (Ministry of HUA, GoI 2019). According to the global databank of the World Bank (2023), 49 percent of the total urban population in India lives in slums. The Foundations Strategy Group (FSG) estimated in 2016 that between 26-37 million households live in informal housing in India (Batra, 2021). Harvey (2019) argues that the increasing replacement of welfare measures with neo-liberal policies of governance and development creates a global crisis of urban housing. Even officially socialist states like China are undergoing the change from welfare housing to marketising home ownership deepening its housing inequality (Lee, 2000). The increased marketization creates unaffordable housing for the larger masses and reproduces and reinforces existing inequalities. In other words, the lack of affordable housing as well as

public housing, the larger share of urban housing then is pushed through the route of informality.

1.2.4. Urban Planning and Governance

According to Roy (2009), the planning of Indian cities cannot be understood as the forecasting and management of growth. Instead, urban planning in India has to be understood as the management of resources, particularly land, through dynamic processes of informality. She defines informality as a state of deregulation, one where the ownership, use, and purpose of land cannot be fixed and mapped according to any prescribed set of regulations or the law. Thus, the law itself is rendered open-ended and subject to multiple interpretations and interests, the 'law as social process' is as idiosyncratic and arbitrary as that which is illegal (Berry 1993, Holston 2007). There are two important ways in which such informality comes to be actualized in the processes of urbanisation and planning. First, informality is inscribed in the ever-shifting relationship between what is legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorised and unauthorised. This relationship is both arbitrary and fickle and yet is the site of considerable state power and violence. Thus, production and regulation of informality is not outside planning or planned development but is an integral part of it. It is a technique of rule, which Roy calls 'spatial mode of governance' (Roy 2009).

Bhan (2013) critically analyses each kind of settlements- planned colonies, urban villages, regularised-unauthorised colonies, rural villages, JJ resettlement colonies, unauthorised colonies, slum-designated areas, JJ clusters- in Delhi and explains how informality in housing is not planned but is a result of planning. He finds that the difference between different kinds of settlements is the status of tenure and their relationship to the Master Plan, thereby linking all (legal-illegal, planned-unplanned) to the planning process. The traces of planning- its legacies of both historical and contemporary and its presence in the contemporary city- shows how within housing in Delhi, planning plays two roles, viz, determination of spatial patterns and production and regulation of illegality. He asks, "what could be a greater indictment of planning than more than nearly 75% of the city living in housing that is apparently 'unplanned'?" Thus, housing informality in Delhi is what he termed as 'planned illegalities'.

Bhan's findings are in line with Roy (2005, 2009) who argues that informality as a form of governance because it is the state's ability to suspend order defines what is informal and what is not, which informality will thrive, and which will cease to exist. He quotes Roy (2003) "(informality) is a new spatial vocabulary of control, governance and territorial flexibility" (157). Bhan, thus, deconstructs the common idiom of 'planning failure' associated with informality and makes a case for better engagement with planning as a site of subaltern and urban politics. Dismissing planning as a site of state rule or a high modernist elite domain alone and associating informality with illegal, poor and outside the state domain would only be 'counter-revolutionary' in David Harvey's terms. Because it will not only ask the wrong questions but will also prevent one from asking the real question.

1.2.5. Legal Pluralism and Institutional Multiplicity

Intertwined with informality in urban planning and politics is the issue of legal plurality and institutional multiplicity in post-colonial societies. Legal pluralism generally has been defined as a situation where two or more legal systems co-exists in the same geographical and social space. Derived from anthropological analyses of the meeting of indigenous and colonial laws (Galanter 1981, Griffiths 1986, Sally 1988), legal pluralism explains how the colonial power superimposed a European legal system over an existing indigenous system. The imposed law, forged for industrial capitalism, overlooked the complexities of the latter based on tribal or village agrarian and pastoral way of life, as both had very different principles and procedures.

Legal pluralism is now understood as a fundamental characteristic of all contemporary societies as different informal legal practices continue to function along with the formal judicial system. However, its practice and implication have marked differences between advanced capitalist states and colonial and post-colonial states. It has been used to discuss issues pertaining to conflict resolution, state formation and governance in post-colonial societies (Fearon & Laitin 2004, Swenson 2018). Similar to legal pluralism, some scholars preferred to use the term institutional multiplicity (existence of both traditional customary institutions and bureaucracy and the formal state institutions) and employ it to understand systemic corruption, weak state and contested governance, conflicts, social work and aid

practices, environmental governance, urban development (Carson & Prado 2016, Golooba-Mutebi & Hickey 2016, John 2008, Simelane 2016).

1.3. Conceptual Framework

Borrowing from the above literature review, the thesis uses the theoretical 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, land governance, urban planning and housing and in turn shapes the urbanisation process. Thus, the research is informed by the frontier discourse established by scholars like Baruah (2007, 2020), Sharma (2018, 2020) for NEI and how such a discourse manifests in the urbanisation process in the region as explained by scholars like McDuie-Ra (2016), Prasad (2018) and Kikon & McDuie-Ra (2021) mentioned above. Added to it, is the discourse of active state-making in Arunachal Pradesh by Guyot-Rechard (2013; 2017) which has a bearing on its urbanisation process.

As this thesis is an exploration of the urbanisation process of Itanagar through the changing urban land governance and practices of informalities within it, the concept of 'urban informality' gains significance. This study borrows Ananya Roy's definition of urban informality to understand the urban planning and development of Itanagar. As mentioned above, Roy emphasises on understanding the management of resources, particularly land, through dynamic processes of informality to understand urban planning and governance. She defines informality as a state of deregulation, one where the ownership, use, and purpose of land cannot be fixed and mapped according to any prescribed set of regulations or the law. Thus, production and regulation of informality is not outside planning or planned development but is an integral part of it. It is a technique of rule, which Roy calls 'spatial mode of governance'. While Roy's theory on informality was based on studying metro cities of India, this research employs it to a small emerging town located in a post-colonial frontier with security imperatives.

Intertwined with informality in urban planning and politics, the concept of 'legal plurality and institutional multiplicity' in post-colonial societies become important as customary practices of land management co-exists with the formal governance in Arunachal Pradesh. The study seeks to understand colonial legacies behind such co-existence of customary

practices with formal governance, how both shape each other and the urbanisation process in Itanagar.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

With no prior in-depth sociological work to guide, the study began as an exploratory research with four broad objectives. They are as follows-

1. *To study the historicity of the process of urbanisation in Arunachal Pradesh*

This involves tracing the historical background of urbanisation in Arunachal Pradesh in general and the Itanagar Capital Region (ICR) in particular. The researcher explores the pre-British links, colonial influence and post-independence developments that eventually lead to statehood of Arunachal Pradesh and how administrative growth corresponded with the urban growth in the State.

To understand the traditional tribal socio-political and economic relations and their emerging forms

As tribal socio-political and economic relations are entrenched with land, the thesis historicises the traditional land relations and explores its emerging changes. The focus is on finding answers to when these changes emerged, why and how they are unfolding, and what these changes are leading to. Thus, attention is given to processes of land acquisition for administrative and urban development, how land laws were amended, changes if any in terms of land use and governance practices, how migrant populations are accommodated, what are the new socio-political and economic relations that emerged, issues of hierarchy, inequality, social exclusion if any, etc.

To examine the impact of urbanisation on the traditional demographic landscape and the intra-community and inter-community relationships

Through this objective, the researcher examines the changes in socio-spatial relations in Itanagar and explains what changes are emerging within the community and with other communities which have migrated due to urbanisation.

2. *To understand the impact of urbanisation on the environment*

It involves understanding how rapid urbanisation has transformed the ecological space of Itanagar from thick forest to concrete jungle. It also involves the understanding of land laws and environmental laws in this urbanisation process.

As the researcher was completing the data collection on the first two objectives, the world was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and strict lockdown measures were imposed in the country. The pandemic lockdown thus forced the researcher to abruptly end the ethnographic fieldwork. The forced closure of fieldwork was a turning point for the study as it made the researcher reflect on the data collected so far. Until then, like many doctoral students, the researcher, immersed in ethnographic fieldwork, was having over-ambitious goals of studying every aspect of the urbanisation process in Itanagar. As an early career researcher, the lure to document everything was real. Thus, while the lockdown hampered the data collection process, it also gave a new direction to the study by narrowing its focus.

Upon organising the data, a few core issues emerged that can be presented within the larger theme of urban land governance. These developments were shared with the supervisor, doctoral committee members and department faculties in the six-monthly progress seminar. As conducting more fieldwork was uncertain at that period of time, a decision was made to work on developing the thesis around these emerging themes. A new set of objectives were also formulated to keep the research focused on the emerging themes and guide the data analysis and the writing process. These are as follows:

1. To explore the historicity of urbanisation in Arunachal Pradesh with special reference to Itanagar;
2. To understand the traditional land relations in Arunachal Pradesh;
3. To examine the emerging urban land governance in Itanagar;
4. To examine the unfolding urban informalities negotiating with the new land governance system.

1.5. Research Questions

Based on the objectives, the research questions are

1. What is the urbanisation process in Itanagar and in Arunachal Pradesh in general?

2. What are the traditional land relations in Itanagar? How are they changing due to urbanisation?

3. What is the emerging urban land governance in Itanagar? How is it impacting the local people?

4. What are the unfolding urban informalities negotiating with the new land governance system?

1.6. Methods of Data Collection

Being an exploratory research that makes an attempt to examine the rapid urbanisation process of Itanagar and the subsequent changes it unfolds, this study employs field ethnography as its main method of data collection. Urban sociology being a new field of study in NEI, there were very limited studies on the region as a whole and negligible work on Arunachal Pradesh in particular. Thus, to guide the ethnographic fieldwork broad objectives were formulated.

The researcher, having prior experience of doing social research in NEI and being a native of the region, had a few contacts in Itanagar. Through these key contacts and a few more persons through the help of the supervisor, the researcher's initial entry to the field in May 2018 was not very difficult. The study began like most ethnographic works where the researcher began interacting with the first few key contacts and then slowly reached out to new people through them. The primary data, thus, was collected both formally and informally from a purposive sample using the snowball technique to identify the respondents. In-depth interviews were conducted to collect life narratives of some of the earliest settlers of Itanagar who witnessed the change of the town.

The researcher interacted with people in their everyday life, participated in local events and festivals, and explored the hot-spots of the capital town. The researcher took public transport (tempo, bus, and sumo rides) to reach and travel within the capital. Leisurely walks were made around the city centre and key road junctions to just soak in the mix of local, national and multinational brands available and the space occupied by each. The many hoardings of festivals, coaching centres, political schemes, new stores and restaurants were read attentively to have an idea of dreams sold and promised. The foodscape was explored by visiting high end bars and restaurants, local cuisine hotels, bakeries and cafes, and Korean food restaurants which have become the latest fad amongst

the youngsters. Lazy strolls were made to local street markets exploring the varied local foods that ranged from wild mushrooms, herbs, vegetables and fruits, beans, lentils and grains to utensils, ethnic jewellery, the traditional wrappers and headgears and fast fashion goods. All of the above gave the researcher a sense of Itanagar and its urban space and culture. These spaces and interactions with people therein gave the researcher a measure of idea about the emerging urban class in Itanagar and the issues surrounding the process of its urbanisation.

The major part of fieldwork was conducted from May 2018 to Feb 2020 until the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly halted the data collection process. The researcher stayed at the home of a friend from another State who works in the State, at local people's home, at Catholic Missionary hostel and at Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya guest house. Over the course of the fieldwork, the researcher has also attended different events and festivals.

As mentioned above, the forced end of fieldwork due to COVID-19 pandemic lockdown was a turning point for the study as it made the researcher reflect on the data collected so far. Until then, there were more than 100 one-on-one interactions with people which included journalists, academics, research scholars, social activists, lawyers, school teachers, artists, bureaucrats, government employees and common local citizens of Itanagar. Apart from the data generated from these interactions, the researcher had data collected from the archives of Directorate of Research in Itanagar, Tribal Research Centre and the Central Library of Rajiv Gandhi University and Tribal Law Research Centre in Guwahati. Visits were made to most government offices that were of importance to the study, like the District Administration, Department of Town Planning, Itanagar Municipal Corporation, Department of Land Management, Smart City office, Legislative Assembly, etc to collect official data.

As mentioned, upon organising the data, a few core issues emerged and a decision was made to develop the thesis around it keeping the uncertainty of future fieldwork into consideration.   A new set of objectives were also formulated to keep the research focused on the emerging themes and guide the data analysis and the writing process. However, as the writing process began, the researcher found gaps in data. However, as COVID-19 pandemic continued with no scope of immediate fieldwork, key contacts were reached out telephonically. The research resorted to documentary evidence such as government

notifications, Acts, Regulations, Rules on one hand, and narratives from key contacts, public views from newspapers and social media on the other hand. The researcher made a final field visit to Itanagar for two weeks during February 2022 which helped the study to both reach data saturation and fill the gaps.

1.7. Universe and Period of the Study

The universe of the study is Itanagar, the capital town of Arunachal Pradesh. Located in the Lesser Himalayan zone at an average altitude of 320 metres above sea level, it is the largest and fastest growing urban centre of the State. Administratively, Itanagar falls within the jurisdiction of Itanagar Capital Complex (ICC) district formed in 2008 (also known as Itanagar Capital Region). With a population estimate of around a lakh, the town is spread across 200 sq.km.
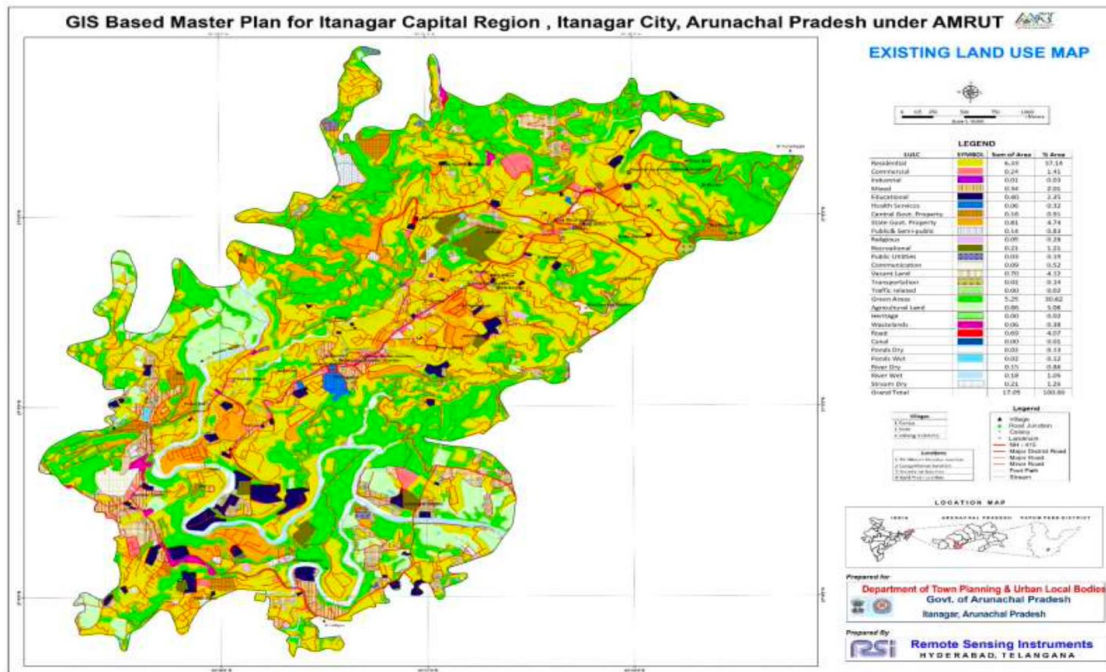
Initially, the tentative plan for the research aimed at studying the entire Itanagar Capital Region (ICR) that comprises three circles, namely, Itanagar, Naharlagun and Banderdewa, all of which are urban areas. However, once the data collection began, it was decided to stay focused on Itanagar itself as it is the capital of the State. Further, when the theme of urban land governance emerged from the field data, focusing on Itanagar alone could substantiate the arguments of the thesis, as being the capital, it was the model followed by the other district headquarters. The latter experiencing a similar pattern of administration led urban growth has replicated the developmental and governance policies of Itanagar.
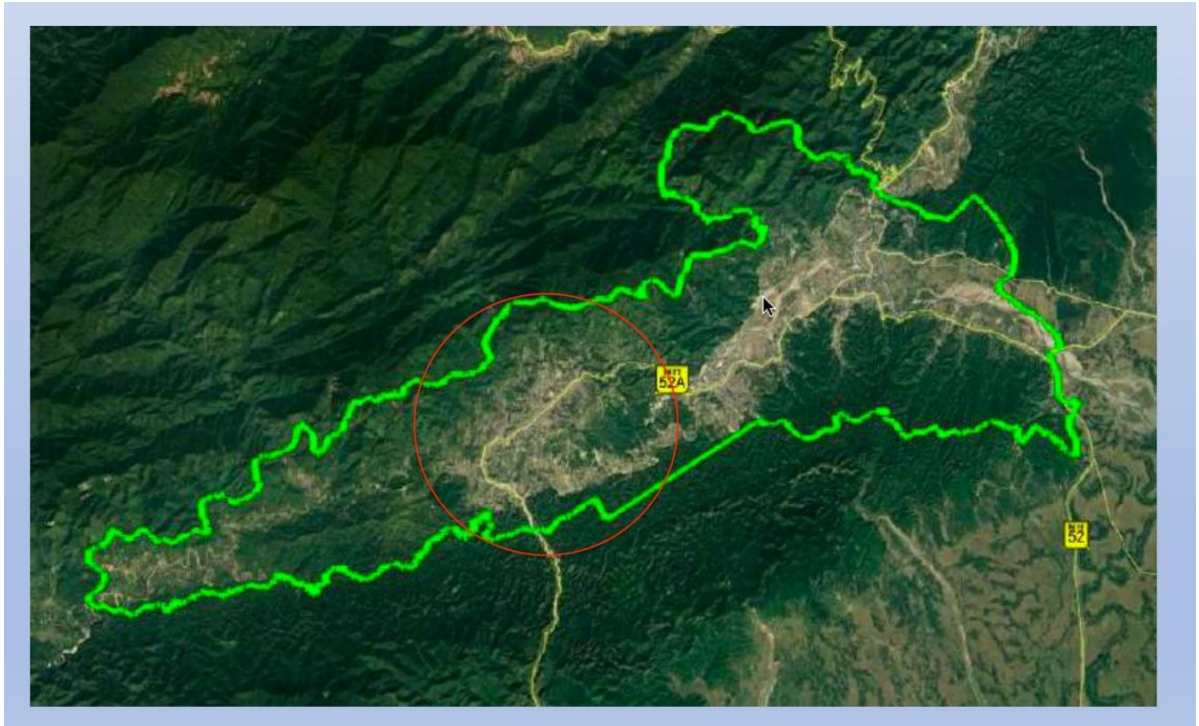
Map 1.2. Boundary Map of Itanagar Capital Region (Itanagar is circled in red), **Source:**
https://amdaindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Master-Plan-Itanagar.pdf
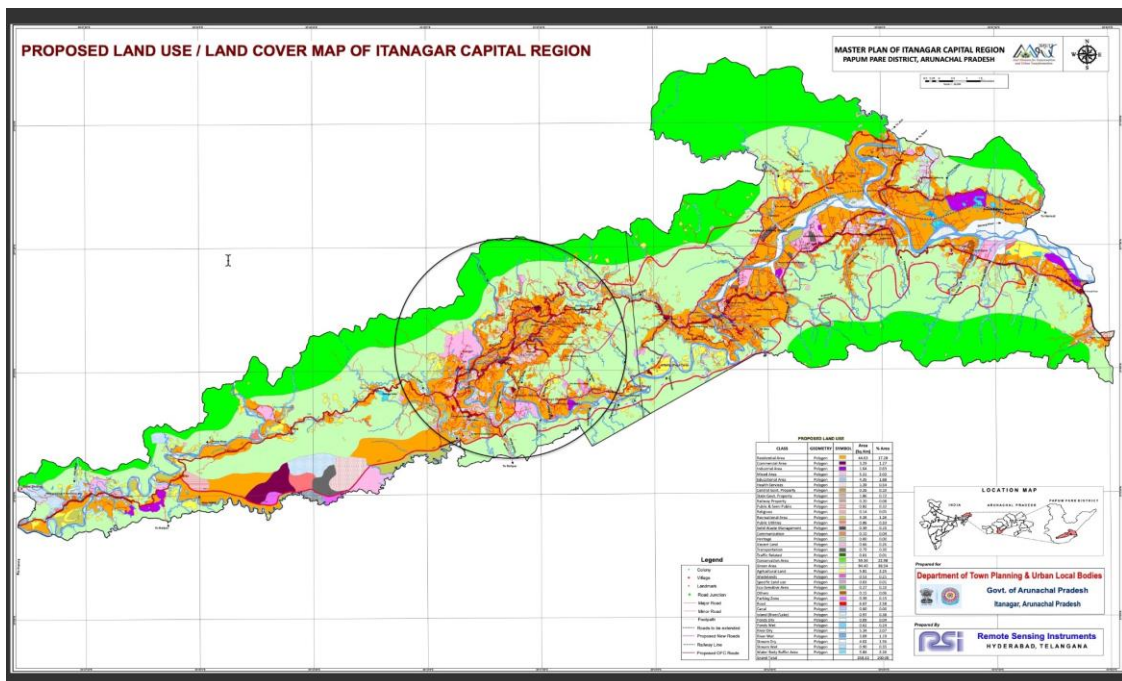
Map 1.3. Latest Proposed Master Plan Map of Itanagar Capital Region for 2031, **Source:**
https://amdaindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Master-Plan-Itanagar.pdf

Map 1.4. GIS based Master Plan for Itanagar **Source:** https://amdaindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Master-Plan-Itanagar.pdf

With the establishment of the capital of Arunachal Pradesh in Itanagar, the entire area experienced tremendous changes which subsequently marked the beginning of its urbanisation. As mentioned, from being part of a centrally administered area called NEFA to achieving Union Territory and statehood status, Arunachal Pradesh has gone through considerable formal administrative growth which subsequently induced a process of urbanisation across the State. Being the newly selected capital for the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh in 1972, its early developments in the subsequent years of establishment of the capital in the 1980's, its population rapidly grew from just around 5000 to around a lakh at present. In short, Itanagar has taken the urban leap in the last two decades. Owing to its rapid urban growth, Itanagar has been in focus for various urban schemes, like Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), now rechristened as Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), and the Smart City Mission (SCM). Under these schemes, infrastructural projects have been planned such as 124.4 kms of existing road widening, construction of 61.4kms of new roads, building of new interconnecting bridges and flyovers, junction improvements and footpaths, for the development of the capital. Many of these projects were implemented during the tenure of

this study itself, whereby the researcher could witness the spatial change brought by infrastructure development.

With the rapid and continual urbanisation of Itanagar, the capital is in a transition from being a traditional territory of the Nyishi to being a cosmopolitan urban centre. Studying the urbanisation process of Itanagar, thus, presents an opportunity to explore the changing land governance of a region that has protective land regulations and security imperatives of a frontier, but is rapidly changing as it adjusts with the latest thrust of global neoliberal forces. The study was carried out through intensive fieldwork in the course of multiple field visits during 2018-2020.

1.8. Limitations of the Study

The present research focuses on the urban land governance in Itanagar and the emerging forms of informalities within it to study the urbanisation process of Itanagar. Thus, the present study focuses on only one aspect of the urbanisation process, leaving many other areas of research like urban culture, spatial characteristics, inter-intra community dynamics, in-migration, civic amenities, urban ecology and environment, etc.

As a relatively new urban centre of the country located in a frontier space, there has not been any comprehensive study on the urbanisation process of Itanagar. Studying Itanagar, however, can be crucial for urban studies as it is representative of all other district headquarters of Arunachal Pradesh that is experiencing a similar form of administration-led urbanisation process. Being located in the Eastern Himalayas, it can also shed light on the process of rapid urbanisation and development experienced in the larger Himalayan range, a crucial global biodiversity hotspot, which sustains millions of people.

1.9. Outline of the Chapters

This thesis has six chapters including the introduction and conclusion. The outline of the chapters are as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion on frontier urbanisation which has been one of the recent focuses of urban studies to locate this study. It then explains the statement of the problem of the research followed by a brief review of relevant literature used in the thesis.

Drawing on the review of literature, the chapter contextualises the study within the conceptual framework of urban informality which underpins the urbanisation process in a neoliberal world order and is presently unfolding in the new towns and cities in the frontier regions. Thereafter, as an introductory chapter, it outlines the objectives, research questions, methods of data collection, universe, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2: Arunachal Pradesh: State-making and Development Discourses

This chapter presents a brief account of the State of Arunachal Pradesh that includes its demography, geography, history and polity to provide a contextual background of the study. It reviews the constitutional and administrative growth of the region from being an un-administered colonial frontier to one of the federal states of India. It provides a context to the developmental paradigm and the state-building process undertaken by the State within the broader framework of frontier governance and the corresponding urban development in the State.

In doing so, the chapter traces how frontier governance evolved in the region in the colonial period, what were its pre-colonial traces and how post-independence the Indian state inherited and continued frontier governance. In the process, the chapter gives an overview of the history of state formation of Arunachal Pradesh. It then goes on to discuss how such a frontier governance model is the dominant development model adopted at different stages of the state formation process- early post-Independence India, post-1962 Indo-China war to Union Territory status and post-Statehood period. The aim of this chapter is to provide a contextual understanding of Arunachal Pradesh which is crucial to understand the empirical realities of urban governance in the State as discussed in this study. This chapter mostly uses existing literature on the State, and a few government reports and archival data.

Chapter 3: Making of a Capital: Urban Planning and Development in Itanagar

This chapter focuses on Itanagar and its making as a capital for Arunachal Pradesh. It presents how the administrative set-up marked the beginning of urbanisation in Itanagar and discusses its urban planning and governance as the town rapidly grows to become the largest and fastest developing urban centre of the State. In doing so, the chapter discusses how as opposed to organic pathways, the development and evolution of Itanagar and its

subsequent urbanisation is an imposed and hurried change led by the introduction of formal administration and its associated paraphernalia.

The chapter begins with a brief socio-political history of Itanagar before it was selected as the capital. It highlights the indigenous Nyishi narrative vis-à-vis two official State narratives about the selection of the capital. The indigenous Nyishi narrative as the name suggests presents the history of Itanagar from the positionality of the Nyishi, the predominant tribe that traditionally controlled the territory of the region. The first official narrative is that of Nabam Runghi, an agency council member who is regarded as the founder of Itanagar. It is the formally acknowledged and promoted discourse of the State. The second is the archival narrative which throws light on the actual processes of land acquisition by the government to establish the capital. The State used the Assam Forest Regulations Act of 1891, a colonial instrument of land acquisition through which community forests were brought under government control and used for capital establishment and its subsequent urban expansion.

The chapter then discusses what planning and governance model of the capital in its early days of establishment was vis-à-vis how it is changing in the present. It locates the changes within the ever-evolving frontier discourse of the state and how the changing urban planning and governance is adapting to it or vice-versa. In doing so, the chapter briefly highlights issues around land and housing governance which are two of the central themes of this research elaborated in successive chapters. It examines the economic and socio-cultural changes brought by the administrative set-up and how these changes trigger rapid urbanisation on one hand, and on the other how the indigenous tribe, Nyishi and their land becomes the theatre for contestation. It discusses the hopes and aspirations of the local people, how they witnessed and described the changes from the early years of capital establishment and its contemporary urban form and briefly flags different urban challenges and issues. The chapter uses data from ethnographic fieldwork and archives from various government and non-governmental sources. It also uses data collected through life narratives and in-depth interviews.

Chapter 4. Violating Indigenous Rights: Narratives on Dispossession and Marginalisation

This chapter focuses on land in Itanagar and its governance systems. In doing so, the chapter first briefly engages with the traditional land management system of the Nyishi and how with the establishment of the capital a new system of formal land governance was introduced. It discusses how such an imposition changes the existing land relations and produces new forms. The chapter engages with the various impacts of the formal system on indigenous land rights and how it dispossesses and marginalises the poor and weaker sections of the society. While land dispossession of the poor and vulnerable communities is not a new phenomenon in Indian cities, the context of Itanagar being in a region with constitutionally protected land regime adds new layers to the usual dispossession story. Further, urban studies on tribal areas is a new emerging area of research that has new perspectives to offer.

To substantiate, the chapter discusses two main stories with many subplots and backstories that unfolded in the present-day Ganga Village. It is a census village, but falls within the urban corridor of Itanagar circle, and thus becomes an important site representing the dispossession story. First is the story of how Geological Survey of India (GSI), a Central Government organisation of national importance opened a campus in Itanagar to mark the frontier policy imperative of state-building in the region and displaces the local inhabitants of Ganga village. Second is the story of a local leader and an inhabitant of Ganga and his documentary interface with the state authorities regarding access to land rights. His story throws light to the local struggles and resistance offered to the process of displacement and dispossession. The chapter uses in-depth interviews with the local leader and interactions with some of the local villagers and some of the early settlers in the nearby region. It uses a trail of official documents that dates back to the early 1970's to the present day as documentary evidence to substantiate the arguments of the chapter.

Chapter 5. Negotiating Land Governance: Urban Informality in a Post-colonial Frontier

Moving from the narratives of displacement and marginalisation, this chapter focuses on the practices of negotiations within the urban land governance used by the indigenous tribes in Itanagar to reclaim their rights and power. To do so, the chapter explores how

government quarter encroachment, a unique form of encroachment practice witnessed rampantly in the capital region, began in Itanagar and how encroachers transfer property rights from government to themselves within the watch of the formal land governance system. It asks questions on rules and regulations to prevent such violations and how they are manoeuvred by the people.

In the process, the chapter sheds light on the nature of land and housing governance in Itanagar, and how it manifests itself in the capital governed within a dominant context of post-colonial security frontier. Focusing on encroachment as a form of urban informality, the chapter re-engages with the emergence of Itanagar as the capital and its subsequent rapid urbanisation. It locates the encroachment practice within the urban housing crisis of Itanagar and engages with a discussion on the changing housing policies and informality practices in the larger national and international contexts on one hand and debates on the emerging land governance in the larger context of contemporary shifts towards land titling on the other hand.

The chapter draws on both from interactions with people and secondary data such as media reports, government notifications, reports and gazettes, documents from the archive collected from different government offices and their websites.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This chapter concludes the findings of the core chapters. It engages with the debates raised by each chapter as it seeks to contribute to an urban ethnography of Northeast India.