

CHAPTER 2

Arunachal Pradesh: State-making, Development and Frontier Discourses

This chapter provides a contextual background of the field-site of the study. It presents a brief account of the state of Arunachal Pradesh that includes its demography, geography, history and polity. The chapter 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 as a post-colonial frontier and its corresponding urban development.

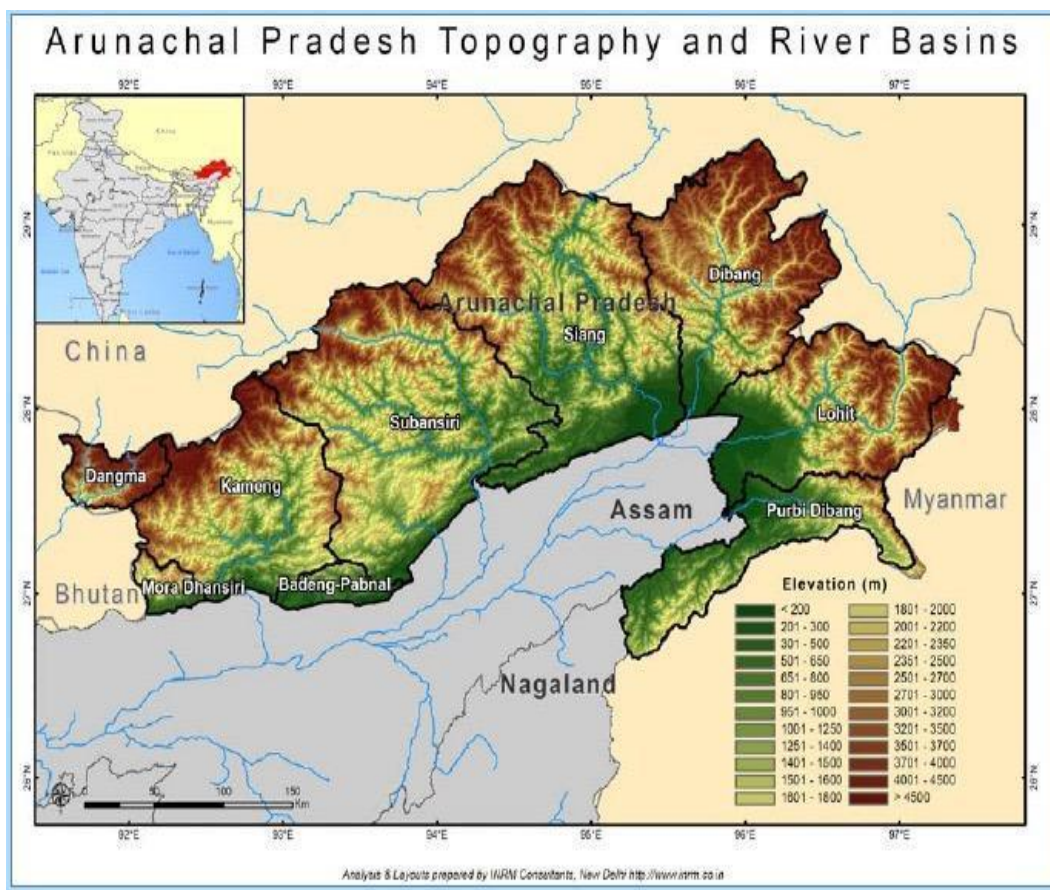
In doing so, the chapter gives an overview of the history of state formation vis-a-vis the construction of Arunachal Pradesh as a colonial and post-colonial frontier territory. It traces the conception and evolution of frontier governance in the state. It then goes on to discuss the dominant development model adopted at different stages of the state formation process- early post-Independence India, post-1962 Indo-China war to Union Territory status, attainment of Statehood and the contemporary times. The aim of this chapter is to provide a contextual understanding of Arunachal Pradesh which is crucial to understanding the empirical realities of urban governance in the state as discussed in this research.

2.1. Context of Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh is the largest state amongst the eight in the northeastern region of India with a total area of about 84,000 sq.km. Earlier known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) which was a centrally administered territory, it became a Union Territory in 1972 and finally attained full statehood in 1987, making it the 24th federal state of India. The State shares a long international boundary with Bhutan to the west and Myanmar to the east and is separated from China (Tibet Autonomous Region) in the north by the McMohan Line.¹ To its south, lies the Indian states of Assam and Nagaland. The state stretches from

¹ It is the disputed boundary line between India and China on the ridge of the Himalayan range that forms the northern boundary of Arunachal Pradesh administered by India but claimed by China. It was signed by Henry McMahon, foreign secretary of British India and Lonchen Satra on behalf of the Tibetan government at the 1914 Shimla Convention. Post-Independence, India accepted it as the boundary, while China rejected it contending that Tibet was not a sovereign State

snow-capped mountains of the Great Himalayan range in the north to the plains of Brahmaputra valley in the south, with a decreasing altitude from west to east and from north to south and a varying elevation range of 100-5500 metres. The topography is mostly mountainous, along with river valleys, plateaus and plains with criss-crossed mountain ranges comprising Eastern Himalayas from west to east, Mishimi Hills in the east and Patkai range in the south. The state has many big rivers such as Kameng, Subansiri, Siang (Brahmaputra), Dibang, Lohit and Noa Dihing, all of which have numerous tributaries and streams joining them. The climate and vegetation vary between humid subtropical, subtropical highlands and alpine based on the elevation. With a forest cover of around 79 percent² of its total area and the state is characterised by a rich ecosystem that falls within the Himalayan biodiversity.



Map 2.1. Topographic Map of Arunachal Pradesh
 (Source: http://www.apclimatechange.in/PDF/EOI_NAFCC_14July2020.pdf)

and hence did not have the power to conclude treaties. The area was the focus of 1962 Indo-China War when much of the territory of present-day Arunachal Pradesh was captured by the Chinese Army. But China unilaterally called for a ceasefire and retreated back to the McMahon Line after two weeks leaving NEFA under India’s control. For more see (Choudhury, 1978; Lamb, 1964; Maxwell, 1970; Mehra, 1974).

² See <https://arunachalforests.gov.in/about-the-department/geographical-distribution>

The difficult terrain of hills prevented easy intercommunication between different river valleys and plateaus and provided isolated space for ethnic and linguistic diversity to flourish. Thus, the state is ethno-linguistically diverse with several major tribes and as many as 100 sub-tribes, such as Nyishi, Adi, Galo, Apatani, Monpa, Sherdukpen, Idu Mishimi, Nocte, etc to name a few. They largely belong to the Tibeto-Burman ethno-linguistic family. The major ethnic division corresponds to the major river valleys of the State with transitioning zones in between. The ethnic and linguistic divisions are not watertight compartments but are fluid entities where there are many overlaps between and variations within identities. The enumeration of ethnic and linguistic division thus has been open-ended with each census presenting a different list of names. Overall, Census defines the state as tribal majority with 64.58 percent of its total population as Scheduled Tribe (Census 2011).

As Census of India 2021 is delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the latest demographic details available for the State are of the 2011 Census. According to the Census of India (2011), the total population of Arunachal Pradesh is 1.38 million (13.8 lakhs) which comprises 0.11 percent of India's total population. The state is overwhelmingly rural with 77.06 percent of its population living in villages. With an average density of 17 person/sq.km the average density of population is way below the national average (370 persons/sq.km), although it is not very low compared to some other mountainous regions in India. The density varies considerably within the state as it is higher in districts that are closer to foothills and plains compared to uphill and high mountainous areas.

The urban population of Arunachal Pradesh is of recent origin but is rapidly growing over the years. Prior to the 1971 Census, no place of the state was accorded the status of an urban area. From zero percent urban population in the first census of 1961, it grew to 3.70 percent in 1971, 6.56 percent in 1981, 12.80 percent in 1991, 20.75 percent in 2001 and 22.94 percent in 2011.³ Numerically, the urban population grew more than double in each decade (17,000 in 1971 to 3,17,000 in 2011).⁴ The decadal growth rate is 26.03 percent in 2011 which is substantially higher than the national average of 17.7 percent. High decadal growth rate is not because of high birth rate, rather it shows the extent of in-migration of

³https://arunachalilp.com/about_arunachal.html

⁴<https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/Publications/PDFs/3TABLE3853D8DB4F244F00BFCFCEDA774D7030.PDF>

outsiders to the state, which is also reflected in the decrease in the indigenous tribal (ST) population from 88.50 per cent in 1961 to 64.58 percent in 2011. Based on the decadal growth rate and other projections, the population is estimated to grow to 1.6 million⁵ to 1.7 million⁶ (16-17 lakhs) by 2022.

The total literacy rate of Arunachal Pradesh has increased to 66.95 percent in 2011 from 54.74 percent in 2001. The male literacy (73.69%) is higher than female literacy (59.57%) by 14 percent. Arunachal Pradesh has the third highest infant mortality rate (IMR) of 21 deaths per 1,000 live births among the north-eastern states, but is better than the national average of 28 as per the Sample Registration System (SRS) bulletin, 2020 published by Registrar General of India (RGI) (*The Arunachal Times* 2022). The IMR has decreased substantially from 37 in 2018 to 29 in 2019 and 21 in 2020 (*The Arunachal Times* 2021).

The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) for Arunachal Pradesh is not available as India monitors MMR in only 18 of its 36 States/Union Territories (UT) that is provided by periodic SRS. But a recent first ever district-wise study covering all States and UTs puts Arunachal Pradesh as the worst at 284 deaths per 100000 live births (Goli et al. 2022). The study analysed maternal deaths reported during 2017-20 at the Government of India's Health Management Information System (HMIS) portal and found that 115 districts out of a total of 640 districts in India registered a maternal mortality ratio greater than or equal to 210 and most districts of Arunachal belonged to this category (ibid). The sex ratio has improved from 926 females per 1000 males in National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4: 2015-16) to 979 females in NFHS-5 (2019-21) which is better than the Indian average of 919 and 929 respectively (Press Information Bureau, Delhi 2021). Similar to MMR, the life expectancy for Arunachal Pradesh too is not available in the SRS which notes the national average as 69.70 years (Press Information Bureau, Delhi 2022). According to Global Data Lab, it is 72.42 years for 2019 which is higher than the national figure of 69.70 years.⁷ The latest life expectancy available for the State amidst other national data repository is for 2016 that records females (72.7 years) marginally higher than males (68.2 years)⁸.

⁵ <https://uidai.gov.in/images/state-wise-aadhaar-saturation.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/arunachal+pradesh.html>

⁷ <https://globaldatalab.org/shdi/table/lifexp/IND/>

⁸ https://ncdirindia.org/All_Reports/NorthEast2021/resources/NE_chapter2.pdf

A brief overview of different socio-economic indices of Arunachal Pradesh, thus, shows that the state is in a continuous flux, where both its society, polity and economy are rapidly changing. Even though the state still has a long way to achieve optimum levels of social development goals, its transition from a colonial hinterland to being a consolidated part of the Indian nation-state has been a hurried journey. The colonial construction of 'impenetrability', 'inaccessible' and 'remote' is rapidly changing as building of roadways as well as highways through massive infrastructural projects have penetrated deep inside the state up to the high mountainous border.

The rushed competition to build infrastructure within a territory that does not even collect data on many crucial social development indices shows the perpetual peripheral status of Arunachal Pradesh within the states of India. While the former highlights the need to increase the presence of state in tangible physical form, the latter shows the nature of governance which relegates social development as secondary to securing the territory and military imperatives of the Indian nation-state. The following section elaborates on the history of state-making and frontier-making in Arunachal Pradesh along with the development paradigm adopted at the various phases.

2.2. History and Polity of Arunachal Pradesh

As mentioned earlier, the state-making process of Arunachal Pradesh is shaped by its colonial and post-colonial history. When the British colonists entered Northeast India after the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, they took immediate direct control of the plains. Much of the hill areas and its tribal communities were autonomous from the colonial administration as they were beyond the control of the plain's kingdoms. Throughout British rule in the region, the colonial administration made many efforts to penetrate the hills to expand its territory and control. It faced fierce resistance from the tribal communities, the tribes in return too faced the colonial brutality of death and destruction through military expeditions. Eventually, the colonial administration adopted a differential policy of governance for the hill areas through which the British maximised economic gains and control, and minimised direct administration. It was a policy of governance for frontier regions as the hills acted as a buffer against China, Bhutan and Myanmar. It severed old routes of trade and commerce beyond borders along with which it also disconnected old relationships and ties of the tribes. It increased the divide between hills and plains and introduced new animosity and differences.

In a way, it shaped the history and polity of the entire Northeast to the extent that many of the contemporary problems of the region have its roots in this colonial policy and its various rules and regulations. Arunachal Pradesh being the north eastern most State of India sharing a larger part of its international border with China, the relevance of such a frontier policy is paramount for its governance. To understand the state-making process of Arunachal Pradesh, it is important to have an engagement with the colonial policies and its lasting impacts in the post-colonial era. Equally is it important to have an awareness about its pre-colonial past that inspired the colonials to adopt different administrative policies. One needs to learn how it changed in the post-1962 era, what are its changes and its contemporary manifestations.

2.2.1. Pre-Colonial Period and Advent of Colonialism

It is difficult to give a definite account of the ancient history of Arunachal Pradesh as there are “practically no material, written or unwritten, relating to the history of this area other than some oral literature and a number of historical ruins lying in the foothills” (Chakravarty 1973, i). Its ancient history is “shrouded in myths and legends” (Dutta & Ahmad 1995, 10). On one hand, there are Sanskrit texts like Kalika Purana and Mahabharata that mention ‘Prabhu’ mountains of Puranas which are believed to be the present-day Arunachal Pradesh. On the other hand, there are various indigenous legends of origin and stories of migration from different parts of high mountains of Tibet, Bhutan and highlands of southeast Asia passed on through oral culture. Scholars of oral literature, cultural and folk studies have traced the histories of some of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh to both high mountains of Tibet and Bhutan and to the highlands of southeast Asia. Either way, these sources have not ascertained when or why or by what route the people of Arunachal Pradesh came to their current homeland in definite terms.

Prior to the British records, there were two main sources that mentioned the tribes of the State. First are the “Tibetan texts that mention contact, beginning in the fifteenth century, between Tibetans and tribes along the northern border of present-day Arunachal Pradesh” (Blackburn 2003, 15). Second are the Ahom Buranjis, the royal courtly chronicles of the kingdom of Brahmaputra valley in Assam that mentions tribes along the southern border of the state from the seventeenth century (ibid.). These interactions were sometimes one of conflicts, and other times it was of inter-dependence and barter trade.

For the Ahom kingdom, the tribes across the southern frontier of Arunachal Pradesh such as Adi, Hill Miri, Hrusso, Mishmi, Nocte, Nyishi, Sherdukpen, Tangsa, and Wancho frequently raided villages in the plains and foothill regions who were Ahom subjects. There are references of such raids and steps taken by the Ahom kings to stop such attacks (Barua 1930). Although the Ahom kingdom established itself in the Brahmaputra valley in the twelfth century, it was only during the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-1641) that a frontier policy was adopted to deal with the frequent raids and develop a cordial relationship with the neighbouring tribes (Baruah 1977, Sharma 2017). First was the *Posa* system, a form of compensation offered to the hill tribes by the Ahom state in lieu of the dues they were entitled to the territories they had conquered through raids in the foothills. The Ahom administration earmarked a few villages in the foothills who paid an annual payment to the tribes instead of the taxes to the king. These payments were mainly in kind consisting of basic necessities such as rice, cloths, utensils and salt. The tribes of the southern frontier such as Nyishi, Hrusso, Miri and Sherdukpen were part of the *Posa* system (Bhuyan, 1933). Second was land grants, known as *khats* in the foothill areas which were given to Naga tribes such as Nocte, Wanchos of south-eastern Arunachal who in turn paid tribute to the Ahom king and accepted suzerainty. To monitor the implementation and check violations of such a peace agreement, the Ahom state instituted a system of political officers called *Kotokis*. *Kotokis* were learned men who were well-versed with tribal languages, customs and rules and helped the Ahom state to negotiate with the tribes (Bose, 1973).

Either way, the Ahom state did not interfere in internal matters and everyday governance and could not annex any tribal territory fully. With a frontier policy of peace and conciliation, resorting to force only under exceptional circumstances, they succeeded in keeping the hill tribes in good relations and maintaining peace in the region. The goodwill also helped the Ahom state in receiving military support from the tribes in times of external threats to the region like the Mughal attacks and Burmese incursions (Baruah, 1977). The *duars* or the traditional passages to the hills in the foothills were vibrant markets where barter trade relations were maintained. The foothills acted as a 'buffer zone' which, unlike the modern-day hard boundaries, were 'fluid soft boundaries' between the hills and valleys (Sharma 2017, 5). Similar to the southern border of Arunachal Pradesh with the plains of Assam, the northern border with Tibet too was a fluid boundary. The tribes of the northern

frontier mostly remained autonomous, apart from the western part who paid taxes to Tibet through the Tawang monastery.

The administrative structure of villages differed based on tribes, but most had some form of village councils that had either hereditary heads or democratically selected heads or a mix of both (Elwin 1965). A few tribes such as the Nyishi and the Hill-Miri were comparatively individualistic where clan-based joint-family households are the autonomous unit rather than the village. Their villages were usually smaller, comprising a few households compared to Wancho and Nocte which had many households (ibid.).

In other words, '(t)he region acted as a continuum in the economic and cultural space that linked present-day Assam and Tibet' through various established trade routes (Mishra 2013, 144); but its socio-political organisation and governance was autonomous. Most tribes existed independently outside the control and beyond the interests of the civilisations and empires surrounding them. They had a relatively isolated, subsistence-oriented, nature-based economy where the main livelihood was shifting agriculture and animal husbandry. Even though most tribes practised both private and community ownership, most of the crucial means of production, such as land and forests were collectively owned and managed through customary practices (ibid).

Land was and remains intrinsic to their culture, identity and economy. The territoriality attached to tribal land was of paramount importance as the tribes have been fierce in defending it. The advantage of geographical knowledge of the difficult terrain helped them maintain its impenetrability by outside forces even though their tools of warfare were less advanced. Thus, even when at times, the Ahom state was able to inflict heavy casualties to a tribe due to their superior army, the possibility of continuing control over their territory was bleak and futile (Baruah, 1977).

When the British took over the Brahmaputra valley in 1826, much of the hills of Arunachal Pradesh remained outside its direct control. Even though the foothills and hills had commercial potential in terms of valuable forest produce such as timber, ivory and fertile land for surplus production, the colonials too limited their direct control to the plains. The British incursions into tribal land in the hills were met with the same kind of fierce resistance as faced by the Ahom state. Being the last frontier added to British India to the existing Presidency of Bengal and ruled from the geographically and culturally distant

erstwhile Calcutta, the administrative control was stronger in lower Assam which was closer to Bengal. Much of the stretch of upper Assam where the contact with the hill tribes of present-day Arunachal Pradesh happened, had few British personnel (Blackburn and Tarr 2008).

The colonial administration continued the frontier policy of the Ahom and maintained the status quo for the hill areas. They restricted their commercial interests and control to the plains where they established tea plantations and explored coal and oil. They sustained the *Posa* system, but made changes to exert more control. First, they changed the payment from kind to cash and second, it was paid directly by the colonial administration instead of the foothill villagers. This replaced the earlier relationship between the plain's communities and the tribes of the hills. When sometimes there were raids, the British used to stop the payments or restricted their movements to the *duars* and thereby deprive the tribes of essentials like salt, clothes, rice exchanged in the foothill markets. While such measures headed some villages of the hills, it aggrieved the others. Foothill skirmishes were not stopped completely and uncertainty of attacks on colonists loomed large (Bhattacharjee, 1975).

The early period of British rule in the region, thus, was limited to the plains and much of the hills of present-day Arunachal Pradesh was outside the purview of the colonials. Nonetheless, this period is of paramount importance to the region as it lost its own centrality and became the periphery for the first time (Sharma, 2021). The incomprehension and bafflement regarding the vast diversity of ethnicities, languages, cultures got reduced to or clubbed together to a bewildering troubled frontier. The mystique related to Tibet and the unexplored high mountains of Himalayas added more to the incomprehensibility of its northern frontier, Arunachal Pradesh. As the last appendage to British India towards its north-eastern direction (even though the term was not coined then as it was only Eastern Frontier to Bengal), this period led to the inception and conceptualisation of the terminology of 'Northeast India' and provided the background to frontier governance.

2.2.2. Colonial Period and Conception of Frontier Governance

As the colonial enterprise of tea gardens, rubber plantation, timber trade expanded in upper Assam, the British administration needed to safeguard its economic resources. The need

for stronger administrative control over territory became even more stronger after the establishment of the oil industry that began by digging the first oil well in 1889. It required the British to push their boundary of control from the plains to the foothill and also penetrate into hill regions. But their expansionist efforts were faced with resistance from the tribes. Here it is important to note that the British experienced similar forms of resistance such as tribal warfare and guerrilla attacks, to colonial penetration into tribal territories all across the rest of India. There were tribal insurrections opposing exploitative colonial taxations and usurpation of forests and tribal land, be it in Central India from the late 1770's to all throughout 1800 by tribes such as Mal Paharia, Oraon, Kol, Munda, Khond, Gond, Santhal, etc., or in the Southern and Western parts of India by Koya, Kurichiya, Koli, and Bhil (Sharma and Borgohain, 2020).

In fact, the disparate tribal resistances and the general discontentment against colonial exploitations eventually culminated into the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 (Majumdar 1963, Hibbert 1978). It is also considered as the First War of Indian Independence against colonial rule due to its widespread geographical reach and intensity. It was a turning point for colonisers in India, for it marked the end of company rule and establishment of the British Raj taken over by the Crown through the British government. The East India Company was dissolved and the administration of India was streamlined through the *Government of India Act of 1858* which reorganised the army, the financial system and the general administration (Wolpert 1989).

The pan-Indian context of the 1857 insurrection is important, as it made the British administration cautious of governance in general and of troubled territories like Northeast India in particular. The varied experience with the tribal resistance till then had made the colonial administration to experiment with different systems of governance. For example, the Non-Regulated System of 1822 for North East Rangpur drafted by David Scoot, first British political agent for Assam Province, was able to bring the Garo tribe under the control of the British (Bhattacharjee, 1975). Under the new system, on one hand, Garo chiefs who were loyal to the old zamindari system were brought into the internal administration headed by a commissioner and were given charge of maintaining peace and order. The British did not interfere in the internal matters of everyday governance and left the chiefs to govern based on their customs. On the other hand, the powers of the collector, magistrate and judges were concentrated in a commissioner subject to the supervision of

a superior authority, making the system simple and directly well within the reach of the people (ibid). It was a differentiated system of governance whereby by safeguarding tribal customs and providing a sense of autonomy, the British were able to incorporate tribal chiefs to the formal system which in turn safeguarded their commercial interests from tribal raids.

The success of Scott's system opened the road map for more experiments of differential governance. The first regulation for the Northeast came in 1873 called the *Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR)*, added as an annexure to the *Government of India Act of 1858*. Commonly known as *Inner-Line Regulation (ILR)*, it was passed for 'the peace and Government of certain districts on the Eastern Frontier of Bengal' viz., Cachar, Darrang, Kamrup, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Lakhimpur, Naga Hills, Nowgong, and Sibsagar. These districts are to demarcate areas resided and controlled by 'natives' that will fall beyond a boundary called Inner Line. It prohibits entry of outsiders (British subjects and citizens from other parts of India) into the native areas beyond the Inner Line without a pass issued by the competent authority which contains details of the entry and exit conditions. The regulation further put restrictions on owning land in native areas by outsiders and controlled trade of jungle products (ibid.). The territory of present-day Arunachal Pradesh fell under ILR of Lakhimpur and Darang districts.

As clearly mentioned in the regulation, it was 'for the peace and Government', and not necessarily as a protective measure for the benefits of the indigenous tribes. It was the result of a continuous correspondence by the Government of Bengal with the Government of India regarding frontier governance (Mackenzie, 1884). In the words of Alexander Mackenzie (1884), the governor of Bengal Province, its purpose was to bring 'under more stringent control the commercial relations of the British subjects with the Frontier Tribes' and to 'prevent encroachment of tea gardens beyond the fiscal limits of settled areas, and lay down rules for the possession of land and property beyond this line' (as quote in Chowdhury 1983, p. 229). In other words, it is more appropriate to conclude that the regulation was for the protection of colonial economic resources and ensuring smooth functioning of the exploitative governance system without much conflicts with the tribes, rather than the former which is used by the present-day proponents for expanding ILR system to new areas of the Northeast.

It is important to mention that the ILR did not restrict the entry of the tribes to the plains. They could come down to the plains and in fact, the British encouraged them to trade in the foothill trade fairs. The *duars* which acted as border markets in the Ahom period were revived. In the process, the British had greater monitoring and control over the trade, and also better economic gains. It was, thus, an isolationist approach that thwarted the organic pathways of social development in the hills. Otherwise, how does one make sense of the restriction of introducing ‘any book, diary, manuscript, map, picture, photograph, film, curio, or article of religious or scientific interest’ to areas beyond ILR as mentioned in the section 5(1) of the regulation.

The imposition of ILR was not favourably accepted by the tribes. Commenting on the real cause of the objection to the ILR by the Akas in Darrang district, Captain Maxwell had an interesting observation regarding the nature of tribes. According to him,

(t)he demarcation of the boundary, and the gazetting of the forests as forest reserves, at once precluded them from following the usual pursuits as regards this tract of country; and for the purpose of hunting the most valuable preserves lie at the foot of the hills. Whatever the grievance may be worth, it is certain, I think, that in the savage mind a grievance did exist, and an experience of hill tribes teaches me that a ‘land’ grievance is the most deeply rooted of all grievances and is next to impossible to smooth’ (as cited in Chowdhury, 1983, p. 112).

This regulation was one of the landmark colonial laws that shaped the evolution of the territorial and jurisdictional pattern of formal governance in troubled areas. The colonists used the tactic of divide and rule as they categorised and segregated troubled territories from that of relatively controlled areas of British Raj. Similar system was introduced in the Madras Presidency in 1839, and Bombay in 1856 (ibid. 230). However, it was the ILR system that paved the way for more specific legislation to adjudicate the different troubled areas and eventually shaped the concept of ‘frontier governance’ in Northeast India.

The ILR is the result of what the British Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon (1907) in his Romanes Lecture, described as the Empire’s way of administering frontiers. It was threefold: first an administrative border, then a frontier of active protection, and finally an outer or advanced strategic frontier. The direct administration with modern legislations and property rights was limited to the territories located within the administrative border.

His lecture was a clear insight into the colonial ideology of frontiers which were not mere boundaries between nations but were theatres for the imperialists to display their power. In the words of Lord Curzon, frontiers are ‘the razor’s edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace’. He distinguished between

between “natural” (sea, desert, mountains, rivers) and “artificial” frontiers (borders, buffers and their accoutrements of passports, taxes, etc.), and between “frontiers of separation” and “frontiers of contact.” He elaborated upon the theory of the “scientific frontier,” a form of territorial consolidation that united “natural and strategic strength” through monopoly over the control of passage (Saraf, 2020).

While Curzon’s lecture was inclusive of all colonial frontiers, the writings of colonial administrators of this region such as Alexander Mackenzie's *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal* (1884), R. Boileau Pemberton’s *Eastern Frontier of Bengal* (1835), John M’Cosh’s *Topography of Assam* (1837), John Michell’s *North East Frontier of India* (1883), or Lawrence Waddel’s *The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley* (1901), and Robert Reid’s *A History of Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam* (1942) is reflexive of their ideas of Northeast India as a frontier.

The region as a frontier was ‘not merely a matter of boundaries drawn or disputed’ for the British colonists but was a set of socio-spatial relations informed by ‘anthropological and colonialist presumptions of society and social relations’ (Baruah & Sharma, 2013, p iii-iv). For example, through these accounts it was clear that the colonials were aware of the difference in ideas about territory that were both shared and distinct among communities and that they co-existed as part of inter-community mapping (ibid). They were also aware of the different forms of social relations that the tribes had across borders as they documented trade details, inter-tribal conflicts as well as peaceful inter-tribal relationships. The significant exchanges and contacts with Tibet in the north and Assam in the south by the tribes of AP, the continuous migration flows from both Tibet and Myanmar into the hills, their continued strong kinship ties with their relatives living beyond the borders were confounding to the colonial notions of international boundary. For the tribes, the fixed borders were artificial constructs imposed by distant powers. As chronicled by anthropologists, what ‘mattered to most indigenous tribes were village boundaries or the moral and social boundaries of the community’ (Mishra, 2013, p 143).

Thus, while the Northeast being substantially bounded by Bhutan, Tibet, China and Myanmar was an important colonial consideration, what made the region a frontier was also ‘the use of space by the people, something which the colonial state found difficult to classify territorially and vis-à-vis its own (colonial) notions of international boundary’ (Baruah & Sharma, 2013, p. viii). The pre-colonial spatial and social relations were far more dynamic than what could be dealt by the colonial state or was beneficial for the colonial interests. The colonial state, instead of dealing with the socio-spatial reality of the region with sensitivity focussed on ‘dismantling the pre-colonial spatial domains’ and replacing it with ‘institutions of territorialised communities’ (ibid., iv). It formed part of transforming the continental crossroad that the region was into a colonial frontier.

2.2.3. Evolution of Frontier Governance

While the notion of Northeast as a frontier was evolving, the idea of having a different form of governance for ‘troubled territories’ was taking shape. In this light, the colonial administration introduced the *Scheduled District Act of 1874* that dealt with those territories where people still resisted colonial rule. Under this Act, the colonisers categorised troubled territories which were mostly tribal areas as ‘remote tracts’ of British India. These areas were excluded from the operation of General Acts and Regulations that formed the colonial formal governance system. Under the *Part X* of this Act, the north-eastern region that formed some of the eastern districts of Bengal Province was separated to constitute the Chief Commissionership of Assam and was declared a scheduled district by 1877 (Luthra 1971(2017), 43).

With the separation of Assam from Bengal, more new policies were introduced. The segregation of frontier areas became more pronounced with the next instrument of *Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation (AFTR) of 1880*. It provided for the ‘removal of certain frontier tracts in Assam inhabited or frequented by barbarous or semi-civilised tribes from the operation of enactments in force therein’ (ibid. 51-52). The first frontier tract created was that of Dibrugarh that came into being in November 1882 and was under the charge of the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur District. Mr J.F. Needham was appointed as the Assistant Political Officer, a newly created position at the outpost of Sadiya. It was the farthest outpost of colonial administration where three rivers join to form the Brahmaputra and is the foothills for tribes of the respective river valleys. With it, the loose political

control marked by an absence of direct annexation and a policy of non-interference till then slowly shifted to a forward policy (Choudhury 1970, 1978).

While initially the prospect of prosperous trade with Tibetan, Burmese and Chinese through Arunachal Pradesh seemed bright to the British, their repeated failure to get entry through tribal territory made them adopt a policy of non-interference directly. But with the introduction of ILR and AFTR, the British were gradually able to exert control over the hill tribes and bring in many tribal chiefs to be part of the colonial governance system. The substitution of traditional *posa* payments from kind to cash to tribal chiefs too had its integrating effect. On one hand, monetisation infiltrated finished British products into the hill subsistence economy, on the other it created a collaborative class of tribal chiefs under British control (Sikdar 1982). It created a process of economic invasion of the indigenous economy which can be gauged through the volume of trade and profits earned by the colonial administration in the foothill trade fairs (ibid).

Further, commenting on the British capitalist interventions in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikdar (1982) showed how the tribal social system was ruptured without necessarily replacing it with a better form. She argued how more than its resources, strategic trans-Himalayan trade considerations made the British interested in the hills in the first place; but as it failed to materialise due to the resistance of the tribes, the British tried capitalist penetration through an increased indispensability of the market for the hill economy. The markets that passed through well-established business communities of the plains, and controlled by the British eventually ended up exploiting its natural resources, created a tribal elite and infiltrated a network for credit, all of which marginalised the larger tribal society.

While these gradual steps of consolidation of colonial power in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh made the internal situation conducive for the British to adopt a forward policy, it was external factors that made them change their approach. The British anxiety over Russian expansion to Tibet made them engage in the imperial 'great game' that recognised Chinese advances into Tibet. However, with the changed relations of the British with China in the beginning of the 20th century as it took over Tibet in 1910, increased Chinese presence and activities in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh made British colonists wary of securing its boundary and protecting its economic investments in Assam (Nayak 2007). Thus, the strategic location of Arunachal Pradesh came to the forefront and the policy of

governance was changed from non-interference to gradual consolidation of formal administration. The British felt the need to bring the tribal areas under some sort of political control so that region continues to be the buffer safeguarding colonial interests in Assam.

The culmination of this policy change led the British to commission expeditions to the hills of Arunachal Pradesh such as Miri Mission, Mishimi Mission and Aka Promenade during 1911-1914 to survey and fix the outer boundary with Tibet (Luthra 1971). These expeditions were followed right after the success of the brutal military expeditions in the Adi hills which captured the Adi stronghold village. In the process, the latter expeditions were able to establish British authority as supreme over the territory. They warned tribal villages to not form alliances with the Chinese, or they may face military consequences (Chowdhury 1983).

Parallel to the expeditions in the hills was their effort to engage in diplomatic negotiations with Russia, China and Tibet regarding the boundary of northern British India. Led by the Chief British negotiator, Sir Henry McMahon, tripartite negotiations between Tibet, China and British India were held at Shimla from October 1913 to April 1914 to decide on a fixed boundary of Tibet (Lamb 1964, Maxwell 1970, Mehra 1974). When the negotiations between the Chinese representative Ivan Chen and Tibet's Lonchen Shatra, a leading minister of the Government of Dalai Lama could not come to a conclusion, McMahon was requested for his suggestions. Having already anticipated such an impasse, the British were prepared with a tentative boundary, 'McMahon Line' the sketch for which had culminated through the various expeditions into the tribal areas of Arunachal Pradesh. It is a boundary of about 885 km that runs from the eastern border of Bhutan along the crest of the Himalayas until it reaches the great bend in the Brahmaputra River (ibid.).

It followed the 'natural frontier' of mountain peaks and rivers of the Himalayan range where north of the ridge fell under Tibet and to its south was British India. While the British and Tibetan representatives agreed to sign with minor changes to accommodate some culturally significant holy sites, China resigned to sign and accept McMahon Line as it divided Tibet into Inner and Outer, leaving the latter fully autonomous. However, to its effect, China pursued no boundary incursion immediately, which in a way made the British imperialist strategy to push forward their Indian frontier on the North East towards

Tibet and China a success. Further, as the First World War broke out in 1914, the boundary dispute was relegated to the background (Chowdhury 1983).

British India continued to adhere to the McMahon Line as the fixed boundary and continued implementing the changed administrative policy for the Northeast. With the new insights about the hills of Arunachal Pradesh from the expeditions, new frontier tracts were created through notifications in the Foreign and Political Department of British India issued under the provisions of *Section I* of the *AFTR, 1880*. For example, the first notification⁹ defined the extent of the tracts inhabited and frequented by Abor, Miri, Mishmi; the second notification¹⁰ defined Singpho, Naga and Khamti areas and the third¹¹ separated hills inhabited by Bhutiya, Aka, Dafla, Miri and Abor. This eventually led to the formation of the North East Frontier Tract (NEFT) in 1914 comprising the following three administrative units- Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, the Central and Eastern Sections, and the Western Section. While the former remained under the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur District, the latter two were in charge of a Political Officer each. In 1919, the Central and Eastern Sections were renamed as Sadia Frontier Tract and the Balipara Frontier Tract and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract remained the same (Luthra, 1971).

With the creation of NEFT, which corresponds to the present-day territory of Arunachal Pradesh, the idea of outer line got formalised. Even though it was kept outside the purview of the usual laws of the land such as *Indian Penal Code, 1860, Police Act, 1861, Bengal Regulation Act, 1873, Assam Frontier Regulation, 1891, Code of Civil Procedure and Criminal Procedure and the Transfer of Property Act, Registration Act, the Indian Succession Act*, for many, the inception of formal administration of Arunachal Pradesh can be traced to NEFT (ibid.).

By this time, other political developments were in process for the whole country. In 1915, the British Parliament passed the *Government of India (GOI) Act* which consolidated all prior Acts into one containing 135 sections and five schedules (Mukherji 1915). In the wake of ongoing freedom movement, the British tried to appease the Indian people by promising increased ‘association of Indians in every branch of Indian administration, and

⁹ Notification no 977EB dated 20/5/1914

¹⁰ Notification no 978EB dated 20/5/1914

¹¹ Notification no 979EB dated 25/9/1914

for the gradual development of self-governing institutions’ on one hand, and on the other the British retained political control by reiterating ‘British India as an integral part of the empire’.¹² The preamble of the Act thus, promised ‘progressive realisation of responsible government’ and thereby tried to weaken the freedom struggle (ibid.). It was a period where imperial policy tried to buy Indian loyalties through rewards and held out promises of reforms (Ganachari 2005).

However, many sections of the *GOI Act of 1915* were reformed by the *GOI Act of 1919* which emerged from the Montagu-Chelmsford Report of 1917. Following the suggestions of the report, the provisions of *Section 52(a)* of the *Act of 1919* authorised the Governor General to declare any territory in British India to be backward areas. Added to this was the Instrument of Instructions to the Governor of the new province of Assam, which gave him exclusive charge to initiate measures of social welfare and development of backward areas (Chowdhury 1983).

Thus, in 1921, all tribal areas in Assam that included the NEFT were declared as ‘backward tracts’ and while being a part of Assam politically, the government of Assam that had Indian representatives was denied direct participation in its administration and governance. In effect, the governance of NEFT continued with the provisions of the Scheduled District Act of 1874 and the AFTR of 1880 until the *Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order of 1936* was made effective (Luthra, 1970). Through the order passed under the provisions of Section 91(1) of the *Act of 1935*, the administration of NEFT was vested in the Governor of Assam who administered them at his discretion through Political Officers and the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur. The backward areas thus, were renamed as ‘Excluded’ and ‘Partially Excluded areas’ and to assist the Governor, a post of Secretary for tribal affairs was created in 1937 (Chowdhury 1983).

The context of the Order of 1936 was laid by the discussions and debates during the Simon Commission of 1928, the Round Table Conferences of 1930-32 and the *GOI Act of 1935*, all of which laid the foundations of the Indian Constitution and paved the road for India’s total independence from colonial rule. It was a transitional period, where the Nationalist

¹² [https://lawsisto.com/Read-Central-Act/1001/GOVERNMENT-OF-INDIA-ACT-1915#:~:text=\(1\)%20Subject%20to%20the%20provisions,%2C%201858%2D%2C%20had%20not%20been](https://lawsisto.com/Read-Central-Act/1001/GOVERNMENT-OF-INDIA-ACT-1915#:~:text=(1)%20Subject%20to%20the%20provisions,%2C%201858%2D%2C%20had%20not%20been)

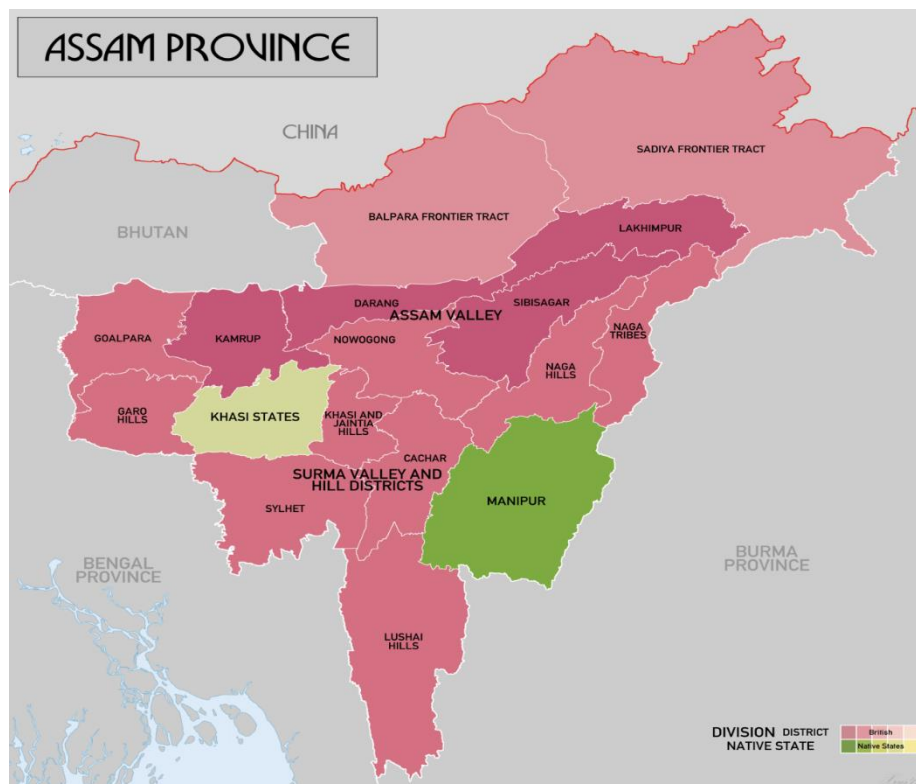
leaders needed to find ways of governing the vast diversity of India into a nation-state (Masselos 1991). For the British, the Order of 1936 laid down the rules for scheduling tribal people and delineating tribal land for whole of India guided by anthropological position of protective isolation and political motive of ‘Crown colony’, both of which were vehemently opposed by the nationalist leaders led by the Indian National Congress (Sanders 1993). However, the position changed during the period of 1937-1950 when the Indian Constitution was formally adopted, and Fifth and Sixth Schedule became the defining administrative tool to define the tribal question in post-colonial India (Tiwari 2022). The change was bought by political factors like communist-led tribal movements and their collective agency from the tribes of Central India that contributed in shaping the Fifth Schedule (ibid.) and developments in Northeast India that shaped the Sixth Schedule (Fernandes and Borgohain 2017).

While the northeastern region was represented by Assamese leaders like Gopinath Bordoloi, Chandradhar Barua, Bishnuram Medhi, for most Indian nationalist leaders, their imagination stopped at Bengal as they lacked much understanding of the region which fell vaguely between divided Bengal and the Burma province. As a result of the way the nationalist leadership was structured, tribal discourses from the Northeast got excluded from the entire process of nation-building. Finally, to counter the British policy of divide and rule based on religion, which eventually led to the Partition, the nationalist leaders even though adopted a federal structure of states, kept a centralised power at the union (Fernandes and Borgohain, 2017).

New identity consciousness was forming amongst the tribes in Naga hills, Lushai hills, Garo hills forming pan-tribal identities like Naga, Mizo, Garo respectively and forming tribal councils. Thus, on one hand, these councils representing the hills submitted memorandums to the British with demands ranging from autonomous governance to right to self-determination and on the other, the leaders mainly from the plains of Assam who were involved in the freedom movement argued for an eventual assimilation of the hill societies. In their study, Fernandes and Borgohain (2017) contextualises the centralising tendency of the union government and neglect and apathy towards tribal discourses of the region as foundational to the autonomy, self-determination and sovereignty movements in post-colonial Northeast India.

Parallel to these developments both at the national and regional level, there were changes in the international arena too. Tibetan incursions to the hills of NEFT to collect taxes in the 1930-40s, the threat of the Communist China's takeover of Tibet, the Japanese conquest of Burma in 1942 and the subsequent decisive battle of World War II fought in the Naga hills of Northeast, all reinforced the frontier identity of the region. In fact, such a frontier identity added to the existing confusion amongst the nationalist leaders about whether the Northeast should be included to India or partitioned to be included in East Bengal (present day Bangladesh) (Baruah 2005). Various groups of migrants either came to Assam or were brought by the British as traders, petty officials in colonial administration, as labourers in tea gardens, and as peasants to 'grow more food' in the floodplains which the British considered as 'wastelands' (Sharma 2021).

While the indigenous groups of the region had issues with all migrants as the latter were part of the colonial system, the immigration of East-Bengal origin Muslim peasants triggered serious contestations and conflict around land. Their specific livelihood practices put more pressure on land and natural resources as they exploit it commercially as opposed to subsistence systems prevalent in the region (Sharma 2012).



Map 2.2. Assam Province. **Source:** Wiki commons: Map of Assam Province in 1936. Imperial Gazetteer of India (Digital South Asia Library, University of Chicago).

Further, by then, there was a substantial growth of the immigrant Muslim population in Assam who were peasants of East Bengal origin due to the designs of Muhammad Saddulah, a Muslim League leader and the then Prime Minister of Assam under British rule encouraged immigration to suit their communal political goals (Hazarika 1994, Borpujari 1998). Unlike other groups, their continued immigration made demographic and socio-cultural changes more visible, which added to the process of identity consciousness amongst the indigenous communities of the region (Sharma 2012).

For the coloniser, there was an effort to keep the region as a Protectorate of the British Government and continue their economic interests. With this as a possibility, the British continued new administrative changes to the region such as creation of Tirap Frontier Tract with a separate Political Officer at Margherita as the headquarter in 1943 and the post of Advisor to the Governor was created (Chowdhury 1983). Both these changes aimed at bringing more areas of NEFT under direct administration by a policy of gradual penetration. By the introduction of the *North-East Frontier Tracts (Internal Administration) Regulation*, 1943 and an Amendment in 1944 through which the Inner Line was pushed for the British interests (ibid.).

While the British increased their political control, they left the tribes to maintain their social, cultural and legal affairs through indigenous legal system. This was done through the *Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945* that consolidated and amended all the laws governing the administration of justice in the frontier tracts (Luthra 1971). On one hand, it recognised the traditional authorities such as village councils, chieftainship to adjudicate both civil and criminal cases relating to themselves, on the other it hijacked their erstwhile supreme power by bringing them within the administrative structure as they report to their respective Political Officers. It vested a lot of power and authority to the Governor who acted through the Political Officers and village authorities on the ground. The arrangement is aptly summarised by historian J.B. Bhattacharjee (1975) as

The traditional institutions were not disturbed, and the tribesmen were allowed to feel that they were still governed by their hereditary chiefs. But the concept of a free man was completely lost and the Chiefs were no better than Government servants (427).

To realise it, further administrative divisions were made such as Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into Sela-Sub Agency and Subansiri area in 1946.

However, by 1946, the initial confusion of the nationalist leaders regarding the fate of Northeast had changed as people of Assam led by Gopinath Bardoloi opposed the Cabinet Mission Plan to group Assam with East Bengal which put the region at the risk of being partitioned from India. The provincial autonomy of the Northeast was regained once again and it became a part of independent India. Thus, at the time of Independence, the Northeast comprised the plains of old Assam Province, NEFT, hill districts, the Princely State of Manipur and Tripura, both of which merged with the Indian State. The administration of partially and fully excluded territories was transferred to the Government of Assam by virtue of the provisions of the Indian Independence Act, 1947 (Chowdhury 1983).

2.2.4. Colonial Modality of Knowledge and Governance

The above sections show how from the entry of the British as mercenaries establishing trade relations in the Northeast, they went on to become colonisers subjugating the people of the region. This transition, however is not spontaneous but rather is the result of a calculated colonial modality of knowledge and rule. It helped the British in establishing an extractive economy based on a specific form of frontier governance. As discussed in the above sections, it is evident how the British had experimented with different ways of administering the region and its people, especially the tribal hill areas like NEFT. It has been a slow and steady process of consolidating power through introducing legislations, one at a time.

All these legislations are not conceptions of colonial administrators' expertise alone. They were the results of expert knowledge of social research especially by colonial anthropology aligned with bureaucracy and state power. These researches were in the form of colonial expeditions by both anthropologists and administrators commissioned by the colonial government to 'discover' and 'civilise' alien cultures. In order to continue their rule, socio-cultural knowledge was of paramount importance as that would help the colonists to subjugate the people on one hand and create discourses that would help perpetuate colonial rule as just and emancipatory.

For the western metropolitan anthropological associations like the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI), it was an opportunity to freshly engage with alien cultures and help the colonial administration building the social and administrative infrastructure in the Empire's highland and frontier tribal areas. Das (2010) has documented how ideals of

development and reconstruction caught the attention of RAI in post-World War II and had set up collegiums of experts to engage anthropologists for practical research.

Being the last frontier to be added to British India, the colonials lacked the necessary information and knowledge about Northeast India, especially its hill areas and its people. The colonials found it challenging to make sense of the region and its people. On one hand, they were unable to penetrate into the hills due lack of all-weather roads and difficult geographical terrains. On the other hand, the diverse socio-cultural realities and predominance of oral culture that had many variations of history was confounding for them. The region was what Scott (2009) terms as a 'shatter zone' ideal for evading state control and appropriation. By having a social system that has appropriation-resistant forms of agriculture and residence, fluid history through the dynamics of orality, the various tribes in the region were difficult for colonial appropriation. In Scott's words, such forms of social organisation create the notion of tribality 'invariably coded (as) "barbarian", "primitive", and "backward" by the lowland padi civilizations' (2009, 208) as they fail to govern or rule them. It was part of the larger Southeast Asian highland massif or what Van Schendel (2002) terms as 'Zomia'.

Tribality then is defined by the relation of a community to the state rather than by any exclusive ethnic identity, which colonial anthropology would like to assert. Thus, one of the distinctive features of colonial writing on North East India was their focus on geographical and anthropological surveys (Baruah & Sharma 2013, iii). Expeditions were made to 'explore' and 'discover' unknown areas and routes as well as 'primitive' customs and beliefs, languages of tribes. Surveyors accompanied these expeditions to map and mark the reach of British India.

Although the first exploratory survey into Arunachal Pradesh was in 1825 to explore the possibilities of commerce in the Eastern Himalaya, it was not until the beginning of the 20th century when the British could finally explore the region properly. For example, in the Subansiri region, the first expedition was in 1911-12 known as the Miri mission, concentrating mainly on topography. It was only in 1944-45 colonial anthropologist Dr. C.V.F. Haimendorf could enter the Apatani territory and stay long enough to conduct an ethnographic study (Kani, 2018). Eventually with time and tactic of differential frontier governance as elaborated in the above sections, the British administration was able to negotiate with the tribal leaders and gain their protection to conduct exploratory

expeditions in the interior hills. Thus, anthropology that supplanted history as the principal colonial modality of knowledge and rule for post-1857 British India (Dirks, 2001) could be implemented here only from the 1900's.

Today, the vast rapporteur of such colonial explorations forms the base of social science knowledge about the region. The othering of the unknown shaped the ideas of tribes as 'primitive', 'exotic' and 'simplistic' when they were friendly and 'dangerous', 'barbarous' 'unruly' 'uncivilised' when they opposed control and domination. Such colonial conceptualisation continues to shape social scientists even in contemporary times, a result shaped by 'captive mind' (Alatas, 1972, 1974). The captive mind creates a belief that non-western knowledge cannot compete with western knowledge, thereby helping the perpetuation of a colonial knowledge system that has been engaging in cultural and intellectual violence. Thus, generation of new knowledge just becomes a mere exercise of reproduction of colonial writings (ibid.).

For example, today many tribes in the Northeast are trans-frontier communities as they are divided between sovereign states. However, if the positionality is changed from the state to society, one can witness traces of colonial cartography, anthropology and governance in creating the concept of trans-frontier (Zou & Kumar 2011, Pau 2020). Thus, from a post-colonial position, one can see how the idea of state-centric, sovereignty-oriented, and territorially bounded entity is violent towards indigenous tribal societies (ibid.). In fact, the very idea of the frontier as a bounded and precisely defined/demarcated boundary and its societies as primitive and stagnant is a colonial construct (Baruah 2005, Baruah & Sharma 2013, Sur 2015). Scholars have established how frontier are enduring sites of dynamic exchanges producing syncretic cultures (Leach, 1960, Gellner, 1969). Today, although sovereign states are epitomised as the sacrosanct and *jus cogens* rule of international law, it is important to point out that it represents a global order derived from the Westphalian ideology based on the European regional system of governance and imposed to the rest of the world through colonialism. Richard Falk (2002) argues that such a world order contains an inevitable degree of incoherence by combining "the territorial/juridical logic of equality with the geopolitical/hegemonic logic of inequality" (312). Thus, while looking at governance issues in frontier territories like Arunachal Pradesh, it is important to trace the colonial legacy and challenge its persistent effect on contemporary ways of governing places and its people.

Parallel to the knowledge production that created the colonial discourse and justified its rule, its implementation was done ‘through an incredibly complex and comprehensive system of writing and reporting’ tracing back to the East Indian Company producing a form of governance called the *Kaghazi Raj* or government by paper (Moir, 1993) as cited in (Mathur, 2015, p.3). As written words superseded orality, governance could be forced upon through the concrete physical form of a paper. Thus, acts and regulations passed by the colonial officers in India or in the distant British parliament went on to become the established norm without the participation and consent of the local people. Any violations committed then were punished through punitive military expeditions. Through these new rules the colonial state claimed legitimacy of authority as well as use of violence. It was in a way a classic case of a colonial military bureaucracy in formation and operation (Baruah and Sharma, 2013). The following report can be a case in point to substantiate how the system of writing and reporting helps to govern.

Titled as ‘Annual Report on the Frontier Tribes of Assam for the Year 1916-1917’, it is a seven pages brief submitted by the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Secretary of the Foreign and Political Department of British India.¹³ The report incorporates the extracts of both the Western, and Central and Eastern section political officers’ reports to the Chief Commissioner. The report begins as (italicised by the author to add emphasis)

During the year under report *no operations beyond the frontier were undertaken with the exception of a short visit which was paid by the Assistant Political Officer, Pasighat, to the Tai khel of the Galong Abors, and a tour across the Sibsagar frontier in connection with the payment of compensation to certain Naga chiefs owing to the alteration of the inner line in 1910. The Political Officers, however, continued to improve relations with the tribes under their control.*

Every effort was made to *cut down expenditure* and to carry on the *work of the frontier as quietly as possible*. No visits were made into the hills except a very short tour into the Sherdukpen country with the Conservator of Forests. Although we were unable to carry out any *active forward policy*, yet we made some *slight progress*, as the increasing numbers of hill men who came to see me and the cases brought by them for settlement will testify.

¹³ <https://indianculture.gov.in/archives/annual-report-frontier-tribes-assam-year-1916-1917>

From the italicised words of the very first paragraph of the report, one can draw two important ways through which the colonials ruled the hills. First is economics, where the cost of frontier administration was to remain low with limited interference. It mentions the alteration of Inner Line and payment to Naga chiefs, both are ways to secure the plantation economy as discussed before. The second is politics that reflects the importance of Political Officers and their role in slowly penetrating the hills and consolidating administrative control for the British. The second para, reported by the Political Officer of the Western Section, shows how he was able to make only ‘slight progress’ in carrying out the ‘active forward policy’, which was the changed strategy of the British regarding NEFT and its administration from its earlier rule of non-intervention.

After placing their primary positions, the report then moves on describing their encounters with the various tribes of the frontier region such as raids, expeditions, resolving inter-village/tribe conflicts, and payment of *posa*. Based on the behaviour of the tribes, they were assigned different adjectives. The larger policy imperatives both in terms of expansion of administrative control and economic resource exploitation guide the work of the administrators on the ground.

The Daflas concerned in these *raids* have *never been visited* and, *as soon as circumstances permit, a friendly expedition* to their village should be made. I believe they would welcome us, for they have no grievance against the Sirkar.

The behaviour of the Hill Miris, Western Daflas, Akas, Monbas and Tibetans has been *excellent*.

These people (Aka) show more *signs of improvement* than any of the other hill tribes. They are very *intelligent* and *wish to go ahead*. When I visited them in 1913-1914, I gave them *English vegetable seeds and potatoes* and they now grow quantities of excellent vegetables. Much of the country is suitable for potatoes and I believe with a little encouragement it could be made a *profitable industry*.

The exasperation of the colonial officers both in understanding tribal way of life and their failure to control can be seen too (para below). Their disdain for tribal agency in settling where they like shows the colonial anxiety of losing control over the plains by the influence of the tribes. Jhum cultivation which is difficult to tax thus is condescended as ‘wasteful’, a notion which is pervasive even now in the dominant discourses of agriculture, environment and development. Such understanding violently wipes out indigenous

knowledge systems embedded in jhum practices that protect, conserve and restore complete ecosystems in the region.

They come down and settle *where they like* and often leave considerable property in the hills. When they settle in the plains, they *do not leave the old life behind* them. They *do not improve*, but carry on the *wasteful habit of jhum cultivation* and intermarry with the hill men and bring their old quarrels with them and keep up the hill customs. They bring their cases and grievances to me, but really, they are *out of my control* and I have *none but moral authority* over them. They should, I think, be *collected into settlements* and brought under my jurisdiction. I think they might then gradually be trained into *useful citizens*.

Critically analysing such colonial administrative reports, social scientists across disciplines have shown how different parts of the world were subjected to similar colonial modality of rule, be it in Africa (Mamdani 1984, 1996) or India (Radhakrishna, 2001; Sen, 2011). It has led to ‘the production of various alternative discourses like the subaltern studies, Dalit discourse, South Asian perspective and Third World feminism’ which presents the various challenges and issues faced by the ongoing decolonisation and indigenisation processes of post-colonial nations (Sharma and Borgohain, 2023). One needs to be wary of colonial administrative patterns that continue to be part of contemporary governance and can be especially illuminating in terms of understanding urban governance, which the thesis focuses on.

2.2.5. Early Post-Independence Period and Nehruvian Policy

As mentioned above, the north-eastern region became a part of the newly independent India State whose national leadership lacked ample knowledge about its intricate and varied social realities. Their ignorance mixed with lack of adequate sensitivity made them continue with the colonial policy of isolation, thereby treating the entire Northeast differently from that of the rest of India (Savyasaachi 1998, Inoue 2005). The Indian National Congress (INC) that formed the newly created government with Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru as the first Prime Minister, had active members from the plains of Assam, but the hill areas, especially the territory within NEFT lacked any form of representation. In their absence, the Assamese political leaders were representative of both the plains and the hills.

The governance of NEFT fell under the jurisdiction of the Government of Assam on the advice of his cabinet and according to his discretion till January 26, 1950 when the Constitution of India came into effect. While a sub-committee headed by the then Chief

Minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi recommended that the reins of the territory be taken over by his cabinet, the Government of India decided to govern NEFT as an 'excluded area' with the Governor of Assam acting as the agent of the President of India (Bath and Babin 2021). Under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution that contained special provisions for the administration of tribal areas, the tribal areas in the Northeast were divided into two-Part A and Part B. Most hill areas fell under Part A as Autonomous Districts administered by the Government of Assam with a limited representation in the State Legislative Assembly, but the NEFT placed under Part B had no such representation, leaving it outside the protective provisions of the Sixth Schedule (Chowdhury 1983).

By 1951, the Tibetan Foreign Bureau was informed of India's intention of taking full control of the forward areas up to the McMahon Line. To implement it, the government through the introduction of the *North East Frontier (Administration) Regulation, 1954*, first excluded and transferred the plain portion of NEFT to the administrative jurisdiction of Assam and renamed the remaining portions of the Tracts as North East Frontier Agency, for short NEFA.¹⁴ Although it was a Regulation introduced by the Indian State, apart from changing nomenclatures its essence remained the same as the previous ones of the colonial period. By defining the boundary of NEFA, the Indian government reaffirmed its acceptance of the McMahon Line as the international boundary to its north. Secondly, it renamed administrative units with redefined boundaries as five Frontier Divisions and then shifted the headquarters in the foothills to the newly constructed ones in the interior of the hills. Thus, the tribes of NEFT lost on two counts, first was their control over the fertile foothill region and secondly, they had to accommodate the new administrative penetration. The new headquarters moved from Sadiya to Tezu in the Mishmi Hills (Lohit Frontier Division), from Pasighat to Along in Abor Hills (Siang Frontier Division), from Kimin to Ziro in Subansiri Frontier Division, from Chardwar to Rupa in the Sela Sub-agency (Kameng Frontier Division) and from Margherita to Khela in Tirap Frontier Division. The last was later shifted to Bomdila (Chowdhury 1983). Today all these are burgeoning urban centres of the State whose urbanisation can be traced back to the establishment of administrative set up.

¹⁴ Notification no TDA/R/35/50/109 dated 23/2/1951

It is important to note that while understanding the strategic importance of NEFA, India on one hand continued to consolidate formal administration, on the other hand it adopted a policy of non-intervention and espoused a gradual development model. It was a policy designed by Verrier Elwin, an Oxford origin missionary who later became a Gandhian anthropologist and gained fame through his work on tribes in Central India and was appointed as the adviser on tribal affairs to the administration of NEFA in 1954 by the Prime Minister, Nehru (Modi, 2022). Nehru inspired by Elwin proposed five fundamental principles of development in the tribal areas, viz., avoid outside imposition and allow tribal people to develop according to their own genius, protect tribal rights over land and forests, avoid entry of too many outsiders, avoid over-administering by outsiders but rather work through indigenous institutions and train tribal people to govern themselves.

Combining a mixture of development and welfare schemes together with measures to protect and revive ‘tribal’ culture and lifestyles, (the Indian state tried to)... not only to embed the state on the frontier, but also to ‘inspire [frontier communities] with confidence and to make them feel at one with India, and to realise that they are part of India and have an honoured place in it’ (Nehru 1985, 151) as cited in (Guyot-Rechard, 2013, p.23).

To implement it, there were two types of cadres for the administration of NEFA. First was the NEFA Civil Service which encompassed the posts of Circle Officers and Extra Assistant Commissioners, and second was a new cadre called the Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS) created in 1953. The latter functioned as Political Officers (and thereafter as Deputy Commissioners) in charge of a frontier division vested with the powers of a District Magistrate and were the ultimate authority in their division to examine and implement development schemes (Arpi, 2020). These administrators guided by Elwin’s philosophy for NEFA were asked to find a balance between necessary socio-economic development and protection of tribal way of life. To assist and guide further, Elwin revived anthropological research under the Directorate of Research (DoR), an Indian version of the Directorate of Ethnography which helped British administrators in colonial India (Modi, 2022). For example, his *Democracy in NEFA* was written as a source book prepared “to assist the officials of the Administration as they try to strengthen and develop the Tribal Councils” (Elwin 1965, xi). Further, he produced many anthropological works on culture, folk stories, socio-political organisations of various tribes of NEFA, all with the intention of educating the administrators and people of the rest of India.

This however was not an easy task for them as they faced persistent difficulties in both establishing territorial control and law and order enforcement (Guyot-Rechard, 2013). The majority of the first batch of the IFAS, such as Colonel Pran Nath Luthra, Major Bob Khating, Major S.M. Krishnatry, and Har Mander Singh were military men and had the training to endure the inhospitable conditions of NEFA, but they lacked knowledge about the people they were tasked to administer (Modi, 2022). The DoR failed to provide the desired ethnographic support as they too were made of the same class as colonial ethnographers, i.e., administrator and soldier. Their objective of administering NEFA superseded their genuine efforts at conducting research to understand the varied groups of people and their varied realities. Nonetheless, the monographs produced by post-colonial ethnographers are important as the second batch of information on the people of Arunachal Pradesh after colonial writings (ibid.). Finally, the NEFA authorities who responded to the External Affairs Ministry in distant New Delhi relied heavily on the vocabulary and practices of welfare and development for state-making. Such a state-making process, according to historian Guyot-Rechard (2013), did little for NEFA's integration into the Indian nation, rather resulting in the disintegration of the links with its regional hinterland. It was in fact, warned and opposed by many leaders of Assam which the centre did not heed to (Arpi, 2020).

To note, the policy of non-intervention of the Indian government is different from that of the British administration. For the British administration, it was an isolationist approach convenient to their economics of resource extraction. They were able to exercise indirect control over tribal communities without spending resources on direct administration and social development. But for the Indian government, NEFA as a part of the newly independent country, introduction of formal administration was important for the social development of the region. A policy of non-intervention was used as a protective measure for the tribal communities of the region that guaranteed a collective inalienable land-tenure system. It also corresponded with the affirmative action guaranteed by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for tribal and other marginalised communities. Nonetheless, it was paternalistic in its approach as the region remained represented and governed by others.

However, such a policy of non-intervention changed after the 1962 Indo-China War which saw China capturing, though briefly, parts of the territory of the present-day Arunachal Pradesh. A new security perspective came to dominate the policies of the Indian State

toward Northeast India in general and Arunachal in particular. This resulted in a series of administrative changes like upgrading the erstwhile NEFA as a Union Territory in early 1971, which was rechristened as Arunachal Pradesh in 1972, and then declaring it as full State in 1987. It triggered not only militarisation of the State but also building of various physical infrastructures (Sharma 2018, 2020). Along with the state-making, the Indian nation-state also launched a nation-building process amongst the indigenous communities of the region deepening its socio-cultural reach and gradual appropriation and assimilation of the excluded autonomous communities (ibid.).

2.2.6. 1962 Indo-China War and Policy Shifts

For Arunachal Pradesh, the 1962 Indo-China War was a significant event as it marked a prominent policy shift. The war added NEFA as the new security border for the Indian State and exposed its general vulnerability in the region. As young nations, both India and China failed diplomatically to attain a mutually agreeable boundary solution. Here it is important to note that China has not always claimed NEFA as their territory as there was Tibet in between. However, after the Chinese takeover of Tibet, they rejected the latter's power to make international treaties and thereby rejected the Shimla Accord (Maxwell 1970). Their position was further emboldened by India's formal acceptance of Tibet as part of China in 1954 when both Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India and Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier signed a trade and mutual cooperation agreement popularly known as the Panchsheel (Ministry of External Affairs, 2005).

In fact, the diplomatic relationship between the two nations were the best during that time, as Panchsheel was not only a trade agreement, but it also laid the principles of peaceful co-existence and diplomatic relations between the two. Even though the principles were, 'mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence' (Ministry of External Affairs, 2005), there was no discussion on the specific details of each other's territory.

While India considered McMahon line as the boundary with Tibet, China pushed the boundary further south to include all areas influenced by Tibetan Buddhism, by virtue of Tibet being part of China and thus considered NEFA as South Tibet. Further, the idea that 'an international boundary cannot be fixed solely by the administration act of one of the adjoining States' (Cukwarah 1967, 159) was used to nullify India's administrative

penetration in NEFA even though the latter did nothing to thwart the process. China continued to consider the international boundary as undefined.

In the meantime, China published maps that represented the changed cartographic boundaries and names of places. There were also many trespasses across the borders and the relations were slowly deteriorating. In order to establish better military control over Tibet, China constructed the Tibet-Xinjiang road through Aksai Chin which falls within India's Ladakh region in the northern-most border (Pletcher 2023). With it the promise of Tibet's autonomy was compromised and Indo-China relations took a clear turn towards military hostility. The military clash between pro-independence Tibetan and Chinese Army led many to flee as refugees to India, including the Dalai Lama, the Lamastic leader of Tibet in 1959. India provided shelter which was not received positively by China. Since then, there were many border clashes and many rounds of talks and diplomatic letter exchanges, failure of which finally led to Chinese attack on the eastern frontier in November 1962 and India's colossal defeat with an understaffed and underprepared army retreating from NEFA. However, without any explanation, China after a week retreated its army back to north of McMahon Line, thereby leaving NEFA to India (Maxwell 1970, Mehra 1974).

Thereafter, a new security perspective came to dominate the policies of the Indian State towards NEFA and its formal governance. One of the first steps was to bring administrative changes in NEFA through which military developments, state-making exercises and nation-building amongst the tribal communities can be engaged in a more robust way (Sharma, 2020, 2021). In 1964, a four-member committee for administrative reforms in NEFA was set up by the Government of India under the chairmanship of Daying Ering, the then nominated Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) (Siga 2014). The committee proposed extension of the local self-government system at the level of village through the establishment of a representative form of government with a three-tier administrative structure at the village, circle and district levels. It further suggested that no external, non-indigenous system should be imposed, and that elections to the Panchayats should be in accordance with tribal custom (ibid.).

Accepting the recommendations, the North East Frontier Agency Panchayat Raj Regulation (Regulation 3 of 1967) was passed and the first election of Panchayats were

held in 1969. It introduced a three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) with Gram Panchayat at the village level, Anchal Samiti at the Block level, Zilla Parishad at the District level and an apex advisory body known as the Agency Council with the governor of Assam as its Chairperson. Although the first general election in India was held in 1952, the adult franchise was not extended to NEFA because of a special provision of the Representation of People Act of 1951 on the grounds that the level of consciousness among the tribals was very low (Chaube 1999, 193).

It is also important to note that while elections were held for Achal Samiti and Zilla Parishad, there was no election for Gram Panchayat members as existing traditional leaders who were already part of the existing system, were inducted to the Panchayat. Nonetheless, the PRI of local democratic governance introduced the people of NEFA to modern participatory political processes for the first time (Mishra 2013, 148).

Prior to that, in September 1965, the *North East Frontier Tracts (International Administration) Regulation, 1948* was amended and the control of NEFA was transferred from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), thereby marking the region as an integral part of India administratively. The five divisions based on the major river valleys were converted into districts¹⁵.

The emphasis on the security perspective was also laid out in the first National Administrative Reforms Commission report for the 'Administration of Union Territories and NEFA' in 1969. The report mentioned,

The continuing hostility on the Indo-Pakistan border in Tripura and the Sino-Indian border in NEFA has made the defence arrangements for these territories a matter of particular concern to the Centre. Although the Indo-Burma border in Manipur is comparatively quiet, a large part of this Territory is subject to depredations of Naga bostiles. National security is, therefore, as much a problem in this Territory as in the other two. Parts of Tripura are also subject to sporadic disturbances by elements of the Mizo underground movement. In parts of eastern NEFA, which borders Nagaland, there are reports of activities by the Naga 'underground movement. The security needs of the north-eastern region as a whole make it essential that whatever administrative arrangements are devised for the Centrally

¹⁵ Administrative geographical units in India that is headed by a deputy commissioner, an officer belonging to the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and a superintendent of police, an officer belonging to the Indian Police Service (IPS).

administered areas must subserve the needs of national security (Government of India Press, 1969, p. 12).

Thus, the report highlighted that in devising an appropriate administrative set-up for NEFA, one has to factor in the ‘predominant tribal character of the population’, ‘comparative remoteness from Delhi’ and persistent autonomy demands in neighbouring tribal areas. The six suggestions of the report are summarised by the Recommendations and Conclusions of Administrative Reforms Commission: A Compendium (1970) (Pic.2.1).

From time to time there have also been voices demanding the shifting of the NEFA secretariat from distant Shillong to a location in NEFA itself. The parliamentary delegation led by S. V. Krishnamurthy Rao, Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha (1962-67), which visited NEFA on May 22-29, 1966, also made a proposal to this effect (Rahul 1969). In 1971, NEFA (Administration) Supplementary Regulation was passed that provided for replacement of the Agency Council with Pradesh Council and appointment of five Counsellors, one from each district in charge of various developmental departments. The same year also passed a regulative enactment known as *North Eastern Area (Reorganisation) Act, 1971* that upgraded NEFA from a centrally administered territory to a Union Territory (UT). With it, NEFA was completely separated from the State of Assam. This Act provided NEFA with one seat in the Rajya Sabha (upper house) and another in the Lok Sabha (lower house) in the Indian Parliamentary Legislative Assembly, to be filled by presidential nomination (ibid.). From NEFA, it was renamed as ‘Arunachal Pradesh’ a Sanskritised sobriquet which means land of the dawn-lit mountains. A temporary capital was established in Naharlagun located near the foothills of central Arunachal Pradesh in 1974 which eventually shifted to adjacent Itanagar, the present capital in 1978.

Following this, demand for a Legislative Assembly came to be pressed by the Pradesh Council, and with the enactment of the *37th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1975*, the Pradesh Council was constituted as a separate Legislative Assembly and Lt. Governor was appointed as the head of the UT.¹⁶ The Pradesh Council became a provisional Legislative Assembly with 23 members (1975 to 1978) while the first elected Legislative Assembly consisting of 33 members (30 elected & 3 nominated) was formed in 1978. The final step

¹⁶ <https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/constitution-india/amendments/constitution-india-thirty-seventh-act-1975>

towards administrative integration of the region with the rest of India was sealed with the enactment of *The State of Arunachal Pradesh Act of 1986* that bestowed full statehood status to Arunachal Pradesh with effect from February 20, 1987.¹⁷ It became the 24th State of India with ten districts.

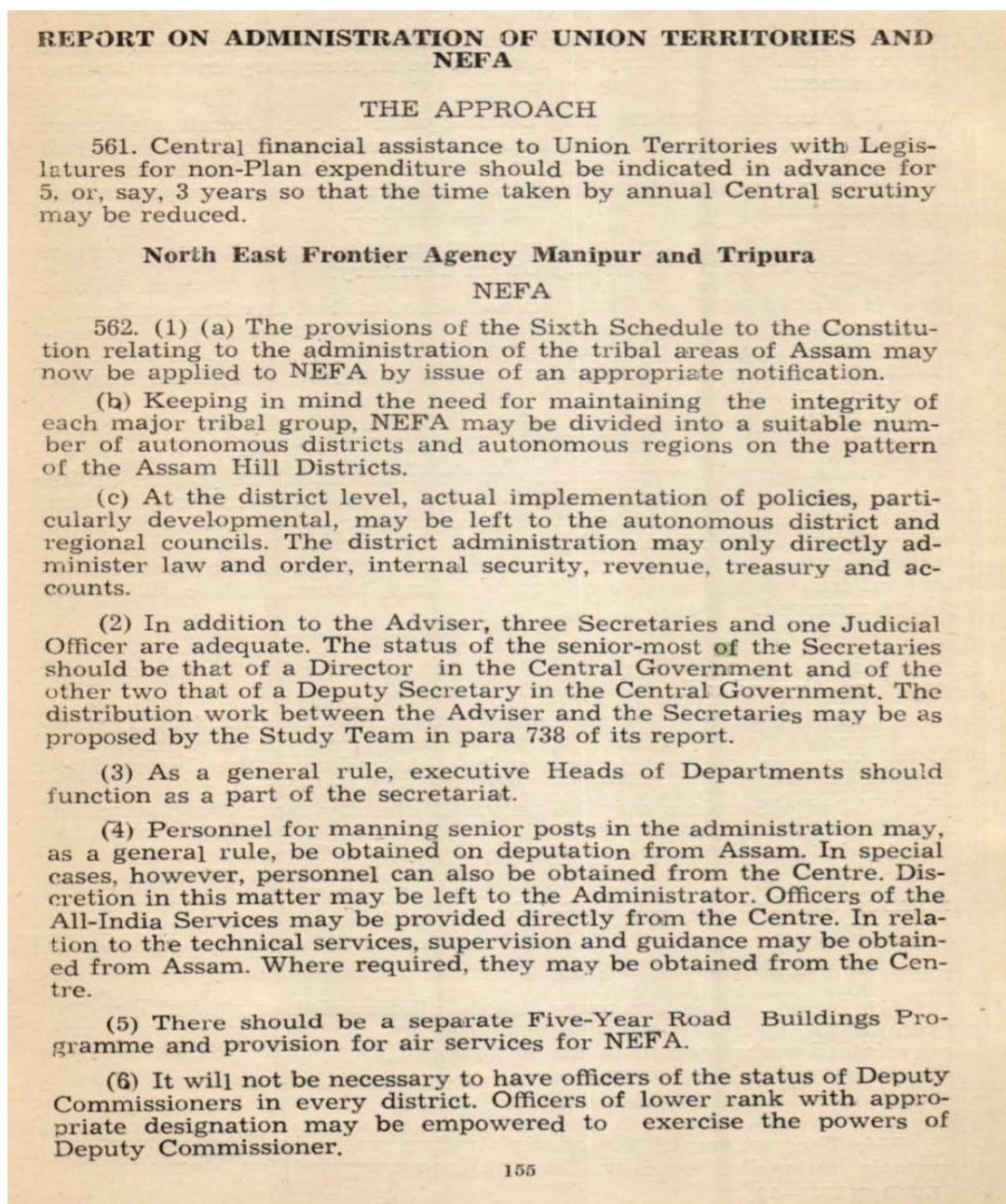


Figure 2.1. Screenshot of p. 155 of *Recommendations and Conclusions of Administrative Reforms Commission: A Compendium*, The Administrative Reforms Commission (Secretariat), July 1970. Source: (retrieved from: https://darpg.gov.in/sites/default/files/Compendium_FirstARC.pdf).

¹⁷ <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/1878/1/198669.pdf>

| Administrative and Political Growth of Arunachal Pradesh: From Colonial Entry to Full Statehood | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Year | Act/Regulation/Notification | Changes made |
| 1873 | Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation | Demarcation between administered areas and 'native' areas beyond Inner Line in some districts of Eastern Bengal. |
| 1874 | The Scheduled Districts Act | Creation of Chief Commissioner's Province of Assam by separating the north-eastern districts of Bengal Province, extension of ILR to Scheduled District areas |
| 1880 | Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation | Separation of frontier tracts from districts of Assam, creation of Dibrugarh frontier tracts under the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur District. |
| 1914 | Government of India Act | Administered by the Government of Assam. Creation of three Frontier Tracts- The Central & Eastern Section and Western Section, and Lakhimpur Frontier Tract- which jointly was known as North-East Frontier Tract (NEFT). First two Frontier Tracts were put under a Political Officer each and a District Commissioner was put in Lakhimpur. |
| 1919 | Government of India Act | Administered by the Government of Assam with special safeguards. The Central & Eastern Section was renamed as Sadiya Frontier Tract and the Western Section as Balipara Frontier Tract. The Governor-General in Council declared NEFT as 'Backward Tracts'. |
| 1936 | Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Area) Order | Frontier Tracts came to be known collectively as the 'Excluded Areas' of the province of Assam and came under the direct charge of the Governor who administered through the Political Officers and District Commissioner |
| 1937 | Government of India Act | The Governor's Secretariat was established. |
| 1943 | The North-East Frontier Tracts (Internal Administration) Regulation | Post of Adviser to the Governor of Assam created. Administered by the Governor of Assam acting in his discretion independently of the Provincial ministry. Tirap Frontier Tract was created bifurcating Sadiya and put under a separate Political Officer. |
| 1945 | The Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation | Formal law and judiciary were expanded to NEFT for select crimes and personnels, leaving most of civil and criminal cases to be adjudicated by traditional codes of tribal communities. |
| 1946 | The North-East Frontier Tracts (Internal Administration) Regulation | Balipara Frontier Tract got divided into Sela Sub Agency and Subansiri Area |

| | | |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1947 | Indian Independence Act | Administrative jurisdiction passed from Governor to Government of Assam |
| 1948 | The North-East Frontier Tracts (Internal Administration) Regulation | The Sadiya Frontier Tract was divided into Abor Hills Districts and the Mishmi Hills District |
| 1950 | The India (Provisional Constitution) Order Representation of the People's Act | Discretionary power was re-invested to the Governor of Assam NEFA was represented by one member in the Parliament nominated by the President of India |
| 1951 | Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, Para 20, Sub-para 3 | The Plains portion of Frontier Tracts were transferred to the administrative jurisdiction of the Government of Assam. |
| 1953 | - | Indian Frontier Administrative Service was created. District Headquarters were shifted to new locations. |
| 1954 | The North-East Frontier Tracts (Internal Administration) Regulation | NEFT became North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) Panchsheel was signed between Chinese Premier and Prime Minister of India |
| 1957 | The Naga Hills- Tuensang Area Act | Tuensang Frontier Division was separated from NEFA. |
| 1965 | The North-East Frontier Tracts (Administration) Regulation | The five frontier divisions were renamed as districts, administration of NEFA was transferred from the Ministry of External Affairs to the Ministry of Home Affairs. |
| 1967 | North-East Frontier Agency Panchayati Raj Regulations | Panchayati Raj Institutions were introduced. |
| 1971 | The North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act | Pradesh Council was formed, adult franchise was introduced, Chief Commissioner to nominate members of the Pradesh Council as Counsellors. |
| 1972 | The North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act | Became a Union Territory |
| 1975 | 37th Constitutional Amendment Act | Provisional Legislative Assembly with council of ministers formed |
| 1987 | The State of Arunachal Pradesh Act 1986 | Attained full Statehood |

Table 2.1. Administrative and Political Growth of Arunachal Pradesh: From Colonial Entry to Full Statehood (Source: Author)

One can see (Table.2.1) how from the entry of the British in the late eighteenth century to the region to early post-Independence and post-1962 Indo-China War era, Arunachal Pradesh has been through various territorial adjustments and changes in administrative patterns and finally culminated into a full federal State of India. The statehood ushered in a new process of rapid transformation of Arunachal Pradesh. First by granting the State a special status in the Constitution, the Indian State entitled it to a liberal flow of government funds. Economist Deepak K. Mishra (2013) categorised these grants into three kinds; the statutory transfers made on the recommendation of the Finance Commission, the plan assistance by the Planning Commission and different centrally sponsored schemes by different ministries of the Central Government. It constituted about 80 percent of the total revenue of the State which was used to develop the civil and military infrastructure. It expanded the service sector drastically making the public administration a major source of employment in the State as more and more districts were carved out, establishing new administrative headquarters. In the process, unlike other sectors like industry, technology, finance which leads to socio-economic growth in other parts, the government sector in general and public administration in particular occupies a central position in shaping the growth trajectory in Arunachal Pradesh (ibid.). It also led to rapid urbanisation of Arunachal Pradesh concentrated in the headquarters, thus, led by administrative growth, which is engaged elaborately in the next chapter.

However, such heavy financial dependence left little scope for local control over the development process of the State as power was centralised with the India State. Further, as the sudden need for administrators was met by people from the rest of India due to the lack of educated people from the State, the way everyday governance was structured and implemented was also shaped by non-native people. Such an in-migration of workers from the rest of India along with the increased presence of military influenced the socio-cultural milieu of the State, with its effect most visible on their choice of language. Both the military personnels and other migrants in the form of traders, administrators, teachers from rest of India brought in Hindi. The local tribals increasingly picked up Hindi and soon Assamese was replaced with Hindi as the lingua franca (Misra 2007). From the earlier three-language policy, where formal education began with Assamese at the primary level, Hindi was introduced at upper primary and English at high school with Assamese as the medium of instruction, it was changed to two language policy with English as the medium

of instruction and Hindi was made a compulsory subject. In the process, with the linguistic connection severed, the old connection with Assam was further ruptured (ibid.).

No changes were made to the Inner Line system. While the government website issuing Inner Line Permits (ILP) continues to explain it as a means to “protect the indigenous tribes from exploitation” and preserve “their fragile cultures and traditions”,¹⁸ in the new military perspective it served the added purpose of surveillance and control over the entry and exit of outsiders to the State. It naturalises a fact of political geography that rejects the fluid history of boundaries. Further, ‘protection’, when seen in the background of rationales behind approximate boundaries and policies of spatial transformations, appear more as instruments of negotiating the ambivalences in the making of and governance of frontier than ‘protection’ being a distinct conceptual tool. The idea of ‘protection’ was used more for the communities inhabiting the intermediate zone of influence rather than for those already within the ‘inner line’ or those which lay beyond the ‘outer line’ (Baruah and Sharma, 2013).

The idea of fragility of indigenous culture represents the paternalistic attitude of the State. It defined the broader context of land possession and ownership practices in the State. On one hand, land is non-alienable to non-indigenous people in the State; on the other, the State left enough scope and power to itself to manage land through land regulations. Thus, on one hand, land can only be transferred to persons who belong to Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribes (APST) and usually within the same tribe and barely to members from other tribes. On the other hand, the government kept simple rules of land acquisition and interfered with the indigenous tribal land management system through Regulations on jhum, forest conservation, etc.

Land being non-alienable to outsiders gave a sense of exclusive land rights shaping an indigenous entitlement regime, as it provided a sense of ownership through the colonial ethno-territorial frame (Prasad-Aleyamma 2014). But in practice, the indigenous tribes enjoyed much less autonomy compared to their counterparts in the neighbouring hill States like Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura who were protected under the Sixth Schedule areas. Along with the exclusive land regime, the traditional grassroot political institutions too continued and remained important in determining access to crucial

¹⁸ <https://eilp.arunachal.gov.in/actDetails>

livelihood resources such as land and forest (Mishra, 2006, 2018). It marked the formal governance in Arunachal Pradesh with institutional multiplicity and legal pluralism as both traditional and formal institutions coexisted with different levels of integration.

Thus, the local elites continued to remain important as they were able to draw a share from the State's liberal funds as well as extract a rent both from the State and from outsiders. It has created a rentier class from within each tribe who are usurping community land and are converting it to informal private ownership (Harriss-White et al., 2009). The prevalence of widespread informality in land governance in the State was also because of the fact that until as recently as 2018 when the *Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement and Records) (Amendment) Act* was passed, the State did not formally recognise private property (Sharma & Borgohain, 2019). Further, no land cadastral survey has been conducted in the State yet.

As a result of such informal conversions of commons, inequality in land ownership is increasing (Roy and Kuri, 2001; Salam, 2013) and landlessness is also emerging and is on the rise (Mishra, 2002, 2015). It is also transforming the political economy of rural Arunachal Pradesh as from a largely subsistence economy based on jhum cultivation is shifting towards permanent cultivation (Mishra 2001, 2006, Planning Commission, 2009; Teegalapalli and Datta, 2016). Commercialisation has made substantial inroads with the entry of cash crops (Harriss-White et al., 2009). In fact, many government policies and even Army initiatives have been to promote cash crops in the State.

The local elites continue to perpetuate the politics of ethnicity and difference which sustains a discourse of 'de-facto ethnic homelands' (Baruah, 2020) where tribal communities can 'have near-exclusive access to public employment, business and trade licences, rights to land ownership and exchange, and the right to seek elected office' (p.89-90). And their capacity to represent their respective tribes adds advantage in the competition over tangible and intangible resources of the State.

Thus, while the State has been influential in initiating the capitalist transition and also in changing community institutions in diverse ways, the overall framework of ethnic politics has created the context in which the politics of democracy and state intervention is being played out today (Mishra, 2013, p 157).

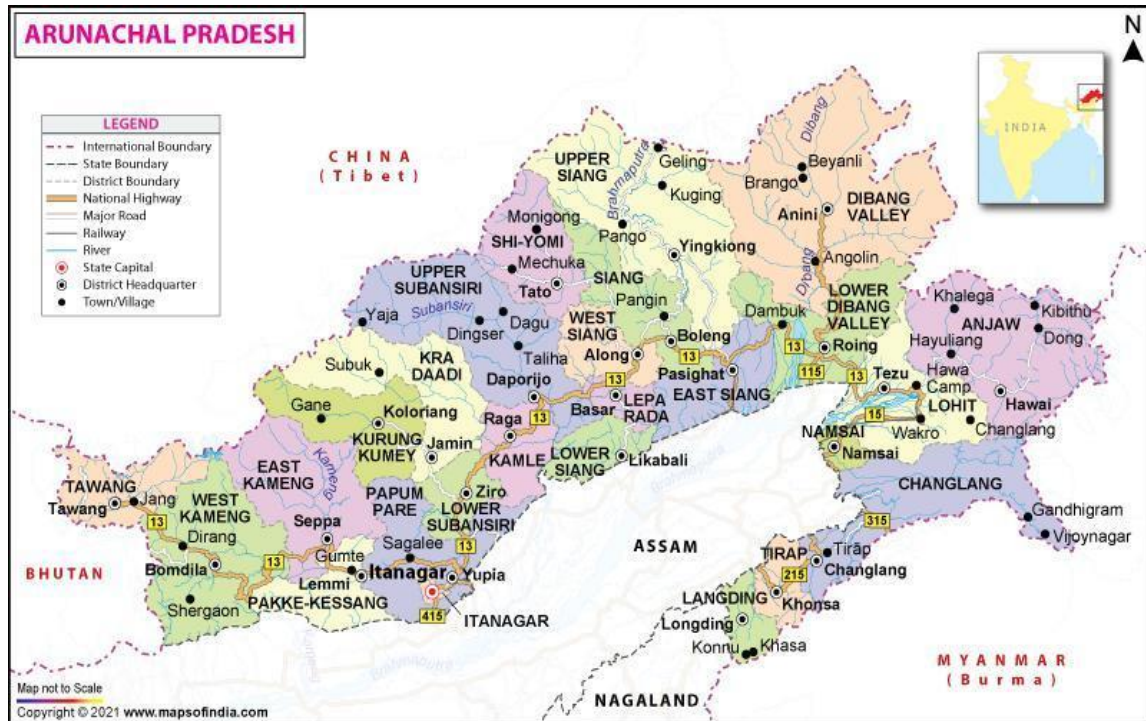
Such an ethnic politics can in turn shape the everyday practices of rules of law and governance, which is possible also because of the structural reality of institutional multiplicity and legal pluralism. It provides ample scope for informality as formal governance leaves space for ambiguities. For the Indian State, treading between formal and informal becomes crucial. It treads carefully in consideration with the long un-administered and lightly administered socio-political history of Arunachal Pradesh and its continuing security imperatives as a frontier state. The political class of elites then becomes the means through which the socio-economic development and the security imperatives of Arunachal Pradesh are implemented.

2.2.7. Contemporary Developments

The contemporary developments of Arunachal Pradesh too need to be understood within the broader security perspective and the frontier governance model adopted by the post-colonial Indian State discussed above. The penetration of formal administration has reached the remotest corner of the international border of the State. At present the State is divided into 26 districts, that include a separate district for the capital administration named as Itanagar Capital Complex (ICC) formed in 2008 (Table 2.2). With the increase in population and the continued implementation of a security perspective, there are more proposals for creating new administrative units, with the last being announced on August 30, 2018.

With the shift in the Indian economy from the 1990s towards liberalisations and neo-liberal policies, there are many visible changes across the country. In Arunachal Pradesh, along with the expansion of administrative control, there is a push for big infrastructure projects, which are projected as a new 'development paradigm' adopted by the Indian State for the region (Ramesh, 2005). First is the construction of mega dams across the State's perennial rivers and second is the constructions of new roadways and expansion of highways. Arunachal Pradesh was visualised as the 'new Indian powerhouse' and since 2007 the government has signed memorandum of understanding (MoUs) with public and private investors for about 140 big dams. Similarly, many new highways were announced for the State from 2005 onwards. The 1,840 km long trans-Arunachal highway connecting all districts of the State, seven strategic artery roads along the Indo-China border and two roads leading to Indo-Bhutan and Indo-Myanmar borders are some of the major road

projects. The international border is increasingly getting militarised through new security establishments.



Map 2.3. District Map of Arunachal Pradesh

One can locate these developments in Arunachal Pradesh vis-a-vis the developments in China across the border within the techno-nationalist framework of infrastructure, as China is seen increasingly investing on high-speed railroads and hydroelectric dams within the country and trans-national highways like Belt and Block Road Initiative. However, Liu & Shen (2023) proposes that critical infrastructure studies need to transcend the way big infrastructures are defined as only an instrument of state power and superpower competition. While one cannot deny the techno-nationalist framework of infrastructure, (in this case India and China and all the recent developments of border skirmishes between both) what is also true is the role of local/regional agents that reproduces and generate hierarchy, class caste inequality, and social disruption as benefits of road development are experienced unevenly by the people (Heslop and Murton, 2021). Commenting on the road building in the hills of Manipur, another State in Northeast India, Zilpao (2022) argues that the Indian State’s approach has ‘always been an act of power, which has at different times been leveraged at smoothing of relationships, securing borders, (dis)connecting

people, enabling trade, creating spaces of contestation, or diluting boundaries between varied ethnic groups' (p.14).

| Consolidation of Formal Administration: District Formation Timeline | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Year | Name and number of Districts | Details of Districts |
| 1965 | 1. Kameng 2. Subansiri 3. Siang 4. Lohit 5. Tirap | The frontier divisions were renamed as districts. |
| 1980 | 1. Lower Subansiri 2. Upper Subansiri 3. Dibang Valley 4. Lohit 5. East Siang 6. West Siang 7. West Kameng 8. East Kameng 9. Tirap | Subansiri was bifurcated into Lower Subansiri and Upper Subansiri Districts, Dibang Valley was carved out of Lohit District, Siang was divided into East and West Siang Districts, and Seppa and Bomdila sub-divisions of the Kameng district were transformed into East Kameng District and West Kameng District, respectively. |
| 1984 | 10. Tawang | Tawang was separated from West Kameng District. |
| 1987 | 11. Changlang | Changlang was carved out of Tirap District. |
| 1992 | 12. Papum Pare | Papum Pare was carved out of Lower Subansiri District. |
| 1994 | 13. Upper Siang | Upper Siang was carved out of East Siang District. |
| 2001 | 14. Lower Dibang Valley 15. Kurung Kumey | Lower Dibang Valley was carved out of Dibang Valley District and Kurung Kumey was carved out of Lower Subansiri District. |
| 2003 | 16. Anjaw | Anjaw was carved out of Lohit District. |
| 2008 | 17. Itanagar Capital Complex | Itanagar Capital Complex was carved out of Papum Pare District. |
| 2012 | 18. Longding | Longding was carved out of Tirap District. |
| 2014 | 19. Kra Daadi 20. Namsai 21. Siang | Kra Daadi was carved out of Kurung Kumey District, Namsai from Lohit District and Siang, East Siang, West Siang were made into districts. |
| 2017 | 22. Kamle 23. Lower Siang | Kamle was carved out of Lower Subansiri and Upper Subansiri, and Lower Siang was carved out of West Siang and East Siang Districts. |
| 2018 | 24. Pakke-Kesang 25. Lepa-Rada 26. Shi-Yomi | Pakke-Kesang carved out of East Kameng District, Lepa-Rada created by bifurcating the Lower Siang District and Shi-Yomi created by bifurcating the West Siang District. |

Table 2.2. Consolidation of Formal Administration: District Formation Timeline (Source: Author)

Infrastructure, especially big dams in Arunachal Pradesh has generated protests and debates around the ideals of such developmentalism which ‘would spell disaster to the river ecosystem and the livelihood and cultural heritage of the people of the region’ (Sharma, 2018, p 317). Such developmentalism amounts to creation of il/legal economies of dams which are produced and sustained through a crime-governance nexus participated by political parties, corporate houses and local ethnic competition (Mishra, 2019). He further argues how they engage in both violations of customary norms to access watercourses, forests and land, and breaking of various state laws such as on land, environment, forests, wildlife, international waters, and manipulation of loopholes within them which he terms as ‘hydro-criminality’ (ibid).

Mishra’s notion of ‘hydro-criminality’ seems to have acquired new power after the government of India decided to declare mega-dams as a ‘renewable’ source of energy in 2019 which earlier was reserved for only projects smaller than 25MegaWatt (Kumar and Jairaj, 2019). With one swift act, the government could enforce restarting of construction of dams by August 2019, many of which were halted for various reasons, such as massive public protest and environment clearance. It also provided ‘incentives to developers such as easier debt repayment terms and funding for associated infrastructures like roads and flood defence’ (Lopes, 2021).

Thus, hydro-criminality is imposed at many levels. It is towards local people who are displaced and are affected, and also towards the future generation as climate funds are getting used for false climate solutions. That the mega-dams are not environmentally friendly and have enormous financial, environmental and human costs has been established from 2000 by the World Commission on Dams, and many other national and international civil society organisations thereafter, says a lot about the nature of governance adopted by the Indian State. Big infrastructure projects dominate governance in the contemporary world, as it involves transnational global capital, sovereign funds and the interests of the powerful corporations, many of which are bigger than most national economies of the planet. They drive the world at the cost of the future of humanity which can be gauged by the latest record-breaking climate change news of 2023 across countries. Arunachal Pradesh being part of Eastern Himalayas makes it one of the most vulnerable regions in terms of impending global climate change.

Today, the elites in Arunachal Pradesh have monopolised both political and economic power by supporting the statist bureaucratic and communitarian structure which is increasingly opening up to global finance and the capitalist market-economy while ignoring climate change. The increased market penetration is introducing a new material and individualistic culture amongst the tribal communities of the State, and in the forefront of it is its tribal elites. The interconnections between state politics and economic power can be seen in the change of profiles of politicians and the power lobbies supporting them. It began with the timber traders until the Supreme Court banned felling of trees in 1996, and got shifted to government contractors especially the ones for the Public Distribution System which was a big corruption scam in the State. When in recent times, the State shifted to big infrastructure projects like the construction of the Trans-Himalayan Highways and expansion of other highways, and big dams, the new power lobby in the State shifted to government engineers (Kumar, 2019).

The nexus of contractors and engineers is so powerful in contemporary politics that during the data collection a senior government officer quipped to the author that “Arunachal Pradesh is a kingdom of contractors run by a government of engineers”. In fact, many candidates who contested in the last State Legislative Assembly elections held in 2019 and won are ex-government engineers. While increase in engineer state legislators is a sign of internal elite nexus, the practice of ‘turn-coat’ politics whereby the entire State changes political loyalties based on the party in power in the Central government is indicative of the nexus of the state elites with the Indian State (Kumar, 2019).

It is within this emerging political economy in the State as manifested in the various infrastructure projects, rapid urbanisation and cash crop plantation and the nexus amongst the state politics and tribal elites that one needs to locate the new *Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement and Records) (Amendment) Act, 2018* (Sharma and Borgohain, 2019). The Act recognises private property in Arunachal Pradesh for the first time and opens avenues for formal credit, lease and land acquisition. It is also in line with the new push for land titling in the country in order to facilitate neo-liberal economic growth (elaborated in Chapter 5).

For anthropologist Anna Tsing (2003), a frontier is an imaginative, travelling project capable of moulding both places and processes. She observes that her field site, Southeast Kalimantan in Indonesia, a frontier, was being changed by the military and the neo-liberal

economic reforms of the 1990s through markets as the central feature. Similar to her findings, here in Arunachal Pradesh too, the frontier discourse is transitioning from its colonial gaze of isolation and increasingly becoming fluid with multiple stakeholders intertwined and overlapping through the interface of market, State and its local people.

Conclusion

Before discussing the particularities of urban development in the State, a broad understanding of the State's unique socio-political history was essential to contextualise the study. Thus, this chapter dealt with a detailed social history of frontier discourse in the State. It discussed how a frontier model of governance was conceived, developed and sustained through the various phases of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial phases. The chapter engaged with new insights and recent debates raised by contemporary scholars who have moved beyond the colonial reproduction of knowledge and rely on second-hand accounts which were frozen in time. Rather, they directly collected data from the field and contextualised their findings in the backdrop of rapidly changing society (Modi, 2023). The effort was to present a picture of Arunachal Pradesh and its communities beyond the essentialist notions of 'authentic/exotic cultures, as sensitive spaces, as remote peripheries to be developed, as realms of cultural deviance that need assimilation' (Wouters and Heneise, 2023, p. 2) but as fluid frontiers where the State and the society is rapidly changing. It is within this backdrop the next chapter on Itanagar, how it was selected as the capital and its subsequent urbanisation needs to be located.