

CHAPTER 3

Making of a Capital: Urban Planning and Development in Itanagar

Continuing from the previous chapter where the context of Arunachal Pradesh as a frontier and its developmental discourse was discussed, this chapter focuses on its capital, Itanagar. The chapter dwells on the selection of Itanagar as the capital for the newly formed state of Arunachal Pradesh and how it emerges as an important capital where control over its territory, politics and its people is of paramount significance to the post-colonial Indian nation-state. The chapter presents how the administrative set-up marked the beginning of urbanisation in Itanagar and how such an imposed and hurried change led to its rapid transformation to become the largest and fastest developing urban centre of the state. It discusses urban planning and governance of Itanagar and how the frontier policies of the Indian State are implicit in its nature and form.

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

The chapter then discusses what planning and governance model of the capital in its early days of establishment was vis-à-vis how it is changing in the present. It locates the changes within the ever-evolving frontier discourse of the state and how the changing urban planning and governance is adapting to it or vice-versa. In doing so, the chapter briefly highlights issues around land and housing governance which are two of the central themes of this research elaborated in successive chapters. It examines the economic and socio-

cultural changes brought by the administrative set-up and how these changes trigger rapid urbanisation on one hand, and on the other how the indigenous tribe, Nyishi and their land becomes the theatre for contestation. It discusses the hopes and aspirations of the local people, how they witnessed and describes the change from its early years of capital establishment and its contemporary urban form and briefly flags different urban challenges and issues. The chapter uses data from ethnographic fieldwork and archives from various government and non-governmental sources. It also uses data collected through life narratives and in-depth interviews.

3.1. Itanagar: A Brief Background

Located in the Lesser Himalayan zone at an average altitude of 320 metres above sea level, Itanagar is the largest and fastest growing town of Arunachal Pradesh. The capital can be reached through the National Highway (NH 415) that has two entry points from Assam, one at Banderdewa in Lakhimpur District and the other at Gohpur in Biswanath District. The nearest railway station is at Naharlagun which is around 15 km and has been operational from April 2014. With the Donyi Polo Greenfield Airport at Hollongi which is around 25 km away, Itanagar recently got air connectivity from November 28, 2022 (Airport Authority of India, 2023).

As mentioned, administratively Itanagar falls within the jurisdiction of Itanagar Capital Complex (ICC) district formed in 2008. With a population estimate of around 81,000, the town is spread across 200 sq.km. As the latest census data is still not released due to the delay of COVID-19 pandemic, these are the estimates based on the growth rate of the last census of 2011. According to the Census of 2011, Itanagar population was about 59 thousand, while the entire sub-district (ICC) was home to about 65 thousand people with 51 percent male and 49 percent female. Within the Itanagar circle, the majority of its population, nearly 91% (about 59,00) live in Itanagar urban areas and 9% (5811) live in rural areas. The area of the capital is slowly expanding into new areas, most of which are officially governed as villages; but they are characteristically more urban than rural.

Based on the 2011 Census, the religious demography of Itanagar is divided into Hinduism (40.94%), Christianity (29.51%), Donyi Polo (21.17%), Islam (4.52%) and Buddhism (2.88%). Linguistically the divisions are Nyishi (17,896 speakers) followed by Bengali (8,125), Adi (8,102), Apatani (4,256), Nepali (3,721), Hindi (3,641), Assamese (3,538)

and Bhojpuri (1,987). Colloquially known as Nefamese, a mixed language borrowing heavily from Assamese, used to be the lingua franca which is increasingly getting replaced by Hindi, the language of the Indian State’s heartland. In fact, Hindi is increasingly proliferating from the public to private spaces and is seen replacing native languages to the extent that today many of the younger generations do not know their mother tongue (Roychowdhury 2018). In terms of constitutional category, 41% of the total population are from general caste and 59% are scheduled tribes (ST) in the capital. It means, almost half of the town’s population is non-native as only native tribes of the State are recognised as its ST. The capital still has a long way to reach cent percent literacy as its average literacy rate is 66.95% where 73.69% of males are literate as opposed to only 59.57% of females.

Population	59490, 53% Male, 47% Female
Literacy Rate	Average 66.95%, 73.69% Male, 59.57% Female
Religions	40.94% Hindu, 29.51% Christian, 21.17% Donyi Polo, 4.52% Muslim, 2.88% Buddhist, 0.98% Others
Languages	30.08% Nyishi, 13.65% Bengali, 13.62% Adi, 7.15% Apatani, 6.35% Nepali, 6.12% Hindi, 5.95% Assamese, 3.34% Bhojpuri
Category	41% General, 59% Scheduled Tribe

Table 3.1. Census 2011: Profile of Itanagar

Being in a tectonically active zone, Itanagar is exposed to multiple geo-hazards like landslides, flash flood, soil erosion and earthquakes (Acharjee, 2015). The experience of extreme physical phenomena due to both changing climate change and haphazard ecologically destructive urban growth have made the flash floods more frequent and destructive, and leaving the town blanketed with dust for most of the year. With an average elevation of 32 metres above sea level, its hills made up of loose red soil thus makes erosion easier. Further, the climate being subtropical with long hot humid and wet summers and warm winters, it is not one of the pleasant towns of the region. In fact, the recent Swachh Survekshan surveys of all capitals and smart cities of India from 2016 onwards by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs have always put Itanagar within the ten lowest performing towns of India under one lakh population (*India Today*, 2016; *The Arunachal Times*, 2020). Its urban livability index, assessed on the basis of four parameters of ease of living- governance, social, economic and physical infrastructure, is

thus amongst one of the lowest in the country (*The Times of India*, 2018). This result is not surprising as the region has experienced rapid haphazard urbanisation that is unable to fulfil the basic urban facilities. Nonetheless, in January 2018, Itanagar was chosen as one of nine new Smart Cities, a flagship urban renewal programme called ‘Smart City Mission’ launched in 2015 under the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India (*The Economic Times*, 2018).

As mentioned, the urbanisation process in Itanagar began with the establishment of the capital and the subsequent changes that the formal administrative set-up induces. Understanding why and how it was selected to be the capital became the starting point of the research. It is one of the main objectives. A brief review of literature showed that Itanagar had no glorious past full of accolades nor did it play any role of consequences to the region or to mainstream India at large. Known as ‘Itayope’ by the local Nyishi tribe, it was a place of no importance, hence not marked on any map before it became the capital. In fact, there is no mention of the place in any historical writing of the region. Thus, from being a non-existent place of historical importance within the traditional territory of Nyishi to being selected as the capital of newly created Arunachal Pradesh and to its present-day urbanised form, Itanagar has taken the urban leap in just a few decades. For instance, its population was just around 5000 in the 1981 Census which rose to around 59000 in 2011 and is soon going to become the first city of Arunachal Pradesh with more than a lakh population.¹ It has witnessed massive changes in all aspects of society starting from demography to spatial organisation and geography, culture, religion and is creating new forms of urbanism.

So, the question is what are the different imperatives which led to the founding of a new town instead of establishing the capital in an existing urban centre? How does the frontier governance and security perspective (as discussed in the previous chapter) manifests in Itanagar and its urban planning and governance? How does such a policy interact with the capitalist market penetration in the region? Does it have an effect on the urbanisation process as a whole and urban planning and governance in particular? Important is the question of land and land acquisition for the setup of administrative state apparatus as Itanagar is within a protected land regime system. What are the various changes for the

¹ When a place has a population of a lakh and above, Census of India considers it as a city.

Nyishi tribe to whom the territory of Itanagar belonged to traditionally? How does the new influx of people of different tribes and communities shape Itanagar and its urban culture? How has the change in the demographic landscape of Itanagar affects the inter-community relations? Accordingly, the research began in search of answers to these questions.

3.2. The History of Itanagar: Its Many Narratives

When fieldwork began in May 2018, the question on Itanagar's pre-capital history was one of the first questions asked to people. It was interesting to note that most of the respondents during the initial phases of fieldwork were not sure of what Itanagar was before it became a capital. It was perplexing as to how people were unaware and unsure of a recent past which also happens to be a part of some respondent's own lifetime. Some guessed that there were a village or two, but when asked about more details, they were unable to answer or gave unsure answers. For most, it was what colonisers termed *terra nullius*, or no man's land that was wild and uninhabited jungle. There was a general agreement that Itanagar fell within traditional Nyishi territory but they considered the 200 sq.km centre which is the Itanagar Urban proper as forested uninhabited land. An interaction with Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU) students revealed that the young adults also had no knowledge of the history of Itanagar, which is the capital town of their native State.

For the researcher, such a loss of public memory about the recent past of Itanagar was both fascinating and intriguing. On reflection, one realised that most of these respondents came to Itanagar after it was selected as the capital or were born later as in the case of RGU students. The field of memory studies that began with Hugo Van Hofmannsthal coinage of the term in 1902 to Maurice Halbwachs's seminar work *On Collective Memory* (1952/1992), has come a long way to establish that there are varied and broader socio-political dimensions of collective memory. As a socio-political construct, it holds a version of the past which is defined and negotiated through the changing socio-political power circumstances and agendas (Neiger et al., 2011).

It was clear that in the subsequent fieldwork reaching out more respondents who are from the older generation and are also locals will be needed for the research. In the meanwhile, the documented history, both official and unofficial, was traced out. It was found that there was more than one narrative about the pre-capital establishment period of Itanagar. Even the official narrative varied in different official sources. By September 2018, with the researcher's entry to the Ganga village, one of the oldest settlements in Itanagar, contacts with some local Nyishi inhabitants were made. Their life narratives presented another version of history. The following sections elaborates on these many narratives in phases, beginning from pre-colonial to colonial to post-colonial and up until the selection of Itanagar as the capital.

3.2.1. The Pre-Colonial and Colonial Era

According to the government district website, the ancient history of Itanagar is 'too scanty and fragmentary to give a connected historical account. The archaeological relics of later times discovered in the area do not provide any key to the ancient period of history' (Itanagar Capital District Administration 2024). What is accepted today is that the hills have been frequented and inhabited by the Nyishi tribe, but no one knows for sure since what century they controlled this region. Tracing oral histories and material culture, historians have argued that there has been a gradual migration from north to south and Nyishi too might have followed a similar route and dominated central Arunachal Pradesh (Huber and Blackburn, 2012). It is important to note that the migration 'has probably not been a single, fixed and long-distance event', but it is 'more likely that they have moved in a series of short journeys, over a long period of time, eventually arriving in present-day Arunachal, where they continued to migrate, down river systems and over highlands, until they reached the areas where they are settled today' (Blackburn, 2003/2004, p.19). And even today, one can see a micro-migration down from isolated hills towards roads and administrative centres. The main reason for this internal migration has been the need for more forest area, pull factor of trade in the plains of Assam, push factor of Tibetan taxation (ibid.).

As Nyishi lacks a written script, the documented repository of ancient and pre-modern periods about them is by outsiders. The *Buranjis*, the official chronicles of the pre-colonial Ahom state, recorded them from the 14th century when the former expanded from the south bank of Brahmaputra to the north bank and came in contact with the latter. After the Ahom state were the writings of colonial administrators.

Nonetheless, both pre-colonials and colonials wrote about Nyishi from their respective civilisational/racial/colonial positions which today can be contested. For example, they recorded the Nyishis as Daflas and sometimes were divided into Eastern and Western Daflas. Today, the term 'Dafla' is contested for its derogatory connotations and such a categorisation is refuted too. In reality, it is difficult to clearly demarcate the tribe as two distinct culturally homogeneous ethnic groups. The Nyishi are internally diverse with sub-tribes and clans whose identities at times may overlap with one another or one of the identities may override the others. Today for administrative convenience, they are categorised as one scheduled tribe (ST) constitutionally. But when it comes to identities, for most instances, the clan lineage and family networks are stronger than the larger Nyishi identity as their oral histories to the tribe is traced through clan lineages. They are numerically the largest tribe in the State that dominates the central region (Pereira, et.al, 2017).

Similar to most tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Nyishi too were a small-scale, self-governing society with their own traditional social systems of polity, economy and culture. The *Buranjis* mentioned how the Nyishi engaged in various raids of plains villages and during the reign of Pratap Singha (1603-1641), Daflagarh was constructed as a defence fort. It mentions about the Posa system and also how Nyishi had helped the Ahom state in fighting the invasion from Bengal. While Daflagarh, an archaeological site present in the region, is testimony to the strained relationship of the Nyishis with the valley states of Assam, the foothill markets like Harmuti tell the story of mutual exchange. However, it is important to note that like most hill communities, despite varying levels of engagement with the state societies of the plains of Assam, they never came directly under their political control (Huber and Blackburn, 2012; Michaud, 2006).

Another archaeological site which throws light to the ancient history of the region is the Itafort. Covering an area of over one square km having two brick-built ramparts, three gateways and two natural ridges and located at the centre of Itanagar town, it is believed to be built around the 12-13th Century (Raikar, 2014). There are different stories and legends around the fort, but all accounts conclude it as a story of patricide and consequent suicide of a king. However, what is important is the fact that there must have been a kingdom powerful enough with resources and architectural knowledge to build the Itafort in such difficult terrain. Scholars such as N.N. Acharya, Edward Gait and D.N. Das have roughly attributed it to king Arimatta, whose kingdom extended from Bhalukpung to Majuli and may have emerged after the central authority of the Kamata kings was sufficiently weakened (ibid).

Out of the two Nyishi legends, the first one recorded by D.N. Das in 1941 mentions the story of Arimatta. But by the 1970's when B.B. Pandey recorded the legend, it had Nyishi names. Instead of King Ramchandra/Mayamatta, the father was named Polo Dulia and was a chief of Ita, and Arimatta became Narribo, while the name of the wife remained the same as Harmati, which also happens to be the name of a place in the foothills (ibid). Nonetheless, the presence of Itafort is indicative of either the extent of control of kingdoms of the plains which was till the low-lying hills of Arunachal Pradesh or they were only places of refuge for kings of the valley areas in times of crisis. This may also mean that the Nyishi's presence and control of the region have happened at the same time as the decline of that kingdom and increased reach of the Ahom from the south to the north bank of Brahmaputra.

As mentioned, when the British entered the region in the early 19th century, they first took over the valleys and as they gradually expanded, they came in contact with the hills of Arunachal Pradesh. However, it was only by the beginning of the 20th century that the colonials could begin to penetrate administratively, even though it was minimal and a form of frontier governance as discussed in the previous chapter. The area of present-day Itanagar fell under the administrative unit called Western Section of North-East Frontier Tract in 1914. In 1919, it was renamed Balipara Frontier Tract, which then was divided into Sela Sub-Agency and Subansiri Area in 1946 and Itanagar fell under the latter.

These frontier tracts had political officers who reported to the British frontier administration. Their reports documented such contacts with the hills, most of which mentioned how the coloniser faced various troubles in dealing with the Nyishi. There are reports of both raids and punitive expeditions. It also recorded Posa payments which were changed from kind to cash and paid through the colonial administration directly. It distanced the Nyishi from the plains communities as old relationships were severed with the imposition of the Inner Line system as. As the British failed to make Nyishi to comply with direct colonial administrative rule, they created a colonial racialised and hierarchised social order. The Nyishi as the 'barbarian' 'unruly' 'tribal' were below the British subjects of the plains, thereby increasing the divide further.

As the colonials expanded resource extraction through mercantile capitalism, similar to other hill tribes, the Nyishi too were subjected to colonial exploitation. To sum it up, colonial rule induced an economic, social and cultural disruption by creating borders (Mishra, 2013, p.143). On one hand, the British administration isolated the tribes from the plains but took control of the traditional trade routes and foothill markets. On the other hand, they promoted 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 (Sidkar, 1982).

3.2.2. The Post-Colonial Era

Similar to the colonial period, the post-colonial phase too had territorial juridical changes. The newly independent Indian State continued with ILR but made changes to the frontier divisions. Subansiri Frontier Division within which Itanagar fell was bifurcated into the Kameng and the Subansiri in 1954. Simultaneous to these territorial rearrangements were the commissioned anthropological research on the Nyishi by Haimendorf who was hired by the Indian State to understand the hill societies of Arunachal Pradesh. Prior to him even though the British had conducted exploratory expeditions into the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, they lacked any comprehensive study on the Nyishi. Haimendorf's *Ethnographic notes on the tribes of the Subansiri Region* (1947), *Himalayan Barbary* (1955), *The Apa Tanis and their Neighbours* (1962) were thus, the first major body of anthropological work depicting the conditions among the Nyishi more than half a century ago.

Even though they were written from the position of an anthropologist trained in colonial school of thought, they were accurate in the description of the material culture of the Nyishi, such as housing styles, dress and ornaments. They were also clear in pointing out the social structure of the Nyishi which is comparatively individualistic and lacks an organised traditional social institution similar to that of village councils that many other tribes in the State have. Their villages did not have concentrated large settlements, but had long houses that accommodated more than one family within one roof. These longhouses were farther apart, and each was independent of the other. The eldest man of the family acted as the head of the unit. Beyond the institution of extended family, clans were and still are important for the Nyishis. Clans are exogamous and hence marriage within a clan is not allowed. Clans have considerable power in deciding access to resources like land and forests. Clan land usually is non-transferrable to other clans, even when they are within the same tribe and act as the marker of ethnic identity.

They have an institution of Gingdungs or intermediaries through which the Nyishi rely to settle many of their intra-tribal disputes. These are usually learned individuals well-versed with tribal jurisprudence and have good oratory skills, some of whom also succeed in establishing a reputation over a wide area. Their service is usually paid by both the parties involved in conflict thereby maintaining neutrality. They have no political power nor can they enforce their decisions. Their powers lie in the success of persuasion and debating skills.

B.K Shukla (1959) cites the role of Gingdungs as one of the reasons for the absence of chiefs and the council of elders. The other reason, according to him, is the coexistence of several clans and groups of people in the same area. Further shared social sanctions provide another means to maintain order. Shukla argues that for the Nyishi, the sources of cohesion were their feeling of oneness through blood and the clan spirit, similar religious belief system centreing on indigenous faith of *Donyi Polo* and hosts of good and bad *Iyus* or spirits, and the same pattern of subsistence life. Elwin (1965) in his work on traditional democratic institutions amongst the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh discusses the institution of Gingdung. He looks at the working of the Nyishi mel and how the Gingdungs settle disputes. He documents details of customary laws regarding various crimes and its punishments and how these laws accommodate fines depending on the status and ability of the offender.

As mentioned, the next drastic changes were imposed to the region after the Indo-China War of 1962 when the government of India started to consolidate stronger territorial control of the region. It introduced new administrative changes, wherein the five frontier divisions were changed into Districts in 1965. The Subansiri Frontier Division within which the area of Itanagar fell became Subansiri District with its headquarters at Ziro, which is east of the Nyishi area and belongs to the Apatani tribe. All this while, the territorial boundaries were not in congruence with the Nyishi territory as it fell between Kameng and Subansiri District. The administrative headquarters of both these districts were dominated by other tribes. The distance from administrative centres meant weak formal governance and also weak access to basic social developmental facilities like education and healthcare in Nyishi-dominated areas like the present-day Itanagar. Thus, while developmentalism played a part in filling the gap in state-making and nation-building in Arunachal Pradesh (Guyot-Rechard, 2013), much of the traditional Nyishi areas seems to have been left behind. It is no wonder that in 1971 when Census was conducted, the circles in both these districts that were Nyishi-dominated areas had the lowest literacy rate (below 4.38%) in the State, whereas some of the headquarters had a literacy rate of 24-37% (Chowdhury, 1983, p. 321-323). In other words, the Nyishis continued much of their traditional livelihood practices.

Soon after the creation of districts, the Panchayati Raj Regulations of 1967 were introduced. It provided NEFA with a three-tier administrative system 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 (Chaube, 1999). The very first session of the Agency Council discussed the selection of a site for locating Headquarters of NEFA administration. Held on December 3, 1969 at Raj Bhawan, Shillong and inaugurated by B.K. Nehru, then Governor of Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya, the first session was also attended by the then Chief Minister of Assam, B.P Chaliha and his Cabinet colleagues and Officers of NEFA administration (ibid) (Figure 3.1). The session recommended that

a committee should be constituted to visit the proposed sites at Likabali and Basar and select finally one of the two sites for locating the headquarters of NEFA Administration. The committee may include Agency Council Members from each district. A representative of the NEFA Administration and an officer from the Town Planning Department of Government of India (Hina, 2017).

A committee under the chairmanship of Development Commissioner, NEFA was formed with 13 members of the Agency Council. The committee visited Basar, Likabali, Banderdewa, Luke Sipak and Yachuli as probable sites (ibid).



Figure 3.1. Agency Council Session, **Source:** (Hina, 2017, p. 11)

It is interesting to note that the agency council members were neither paid any salary nor were they deciding the agendas. The agendas were fixed by the Government of India and they had only the right to give suggestions. Beyond the fixed agenda they were not allowed to ask questions. The lack of decision-making power and agency was also because of the fact that they were not elected representatives, but were nominated ones. They were informed that the Government of India was actively considering Union Territory status for NEFA and hence looking for a suitable headquarter. Nonetheless, the Agency Council members played an important role in the transition of the NEFA from a centrally administered region to representative form of governance and eventual statehood.

The second session (10-11 Aug 1970) discussed the option of names for the territory of NEFA. The council has three alternatives- Arunachal, Udayachal and Bramha Mandal. The council unanimously adopted Arunachal Pradesh and also resolved that English should be the medium of translation for NEFA. For the purpose of the 1972 general election, it was decided that the Member of Parliament (MP) from NEFA should be indirectly elected. Opening of public schools and consolidation and expansion of education in NEFA were urged by the council (Dubey, 2005).

The third session (6-7 Feb 1971) unanimously decided to form a consultative committee consisting of the sitting members of Zilla Parishad and four additional members to be nominated by the Governor, two each from Seppa and Namsai area of Kameng and Lohit district respectively. The final nomination of the MP will be made after obtaining the view of this committee. In terms of the selection of the headquarters, a high powered committee consisting of B.K. Nehru, Governor of Assam, P.N.Luthra, advisor to the Governor, K.A.A. Raja, Security Commissioner and recommendations will be placed before the council. The fourth session (12-13 Aug 1971) took up the agenda of deciding on administrative reorganisation of NEFA, selection of NEFA capital, introduction of house tax and preservation of local culture and tradition of people. Agency Council members like Wangmai Rajkumar, Hengwang Lowang, Khongman Longsam, all from Tirap district, rejected the introduction of house tax in the first session (ibid).

It may be noted that the first urban centre of the State was Pasighat located near the foothills of eastern AP. It was founded in 1911 by the British as a gateway to the greater 'Abor Hills' inhabited by the Adi tribe for their administrative convenience. An Assistant Political Officer (APO) was posted here. Subsequently, with the shift from colonial to

national government, Pasighat witnessed a process of urbanisation with the coming up of several administrative establishments and other institutions. Pasighat was one of the earliest choices for the capital because of its existing infrastructure and formal administration. Similarly, within central AP too, the first administrative centre was opened at Kimin in 1947 and soon after at Doimukh and Sagalee in 1949 (Hina, 2017). These too were considered for the capital.

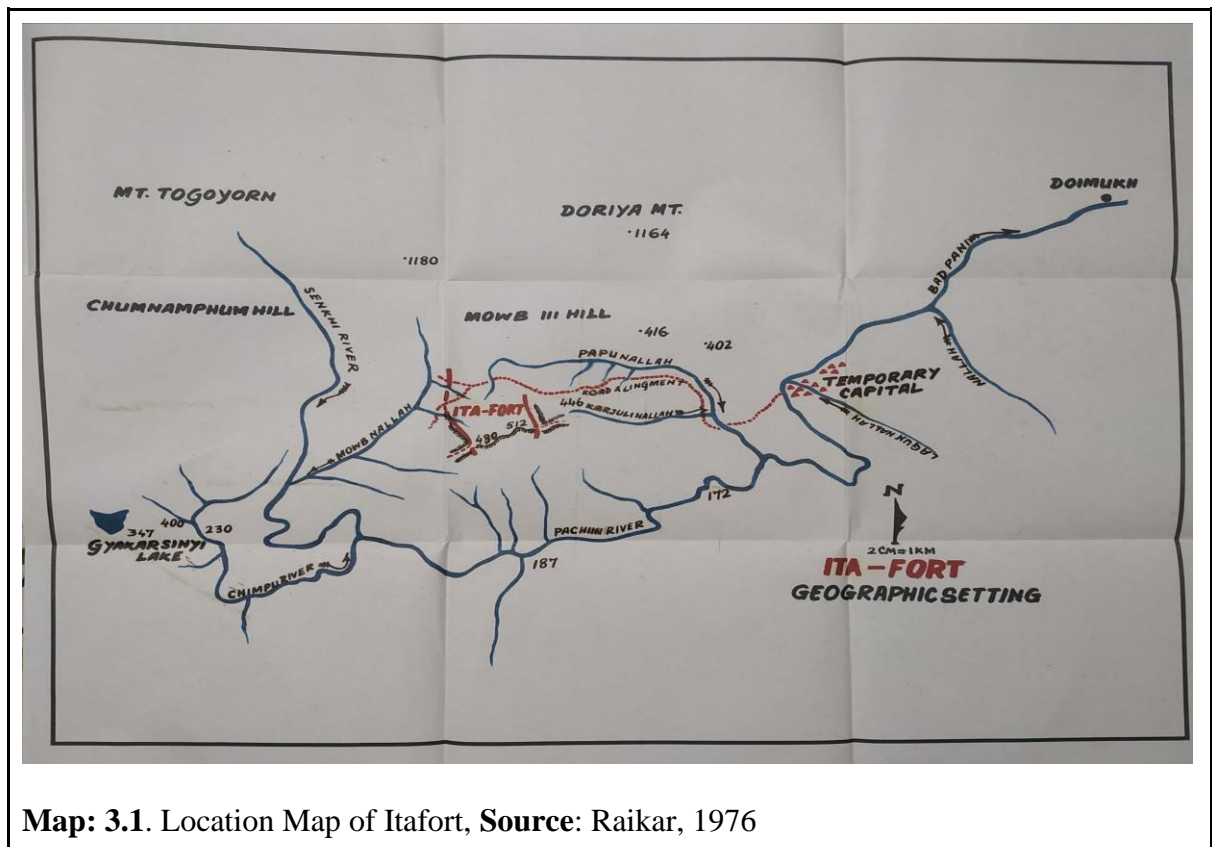
However, the high-powered technical committee for the selection of site for the new headquarter rejected Tezu, Basar, Lekang and Pasighat owing to land compensation demanded by local people (ibid.). These regions which form the easternmost frontier for British India, the communities were exposed to formal administration of the British and later the Indian State more closely than the area of Itanagar and Naharlagun. Hence, there was a level of awareness about their rights to land compensation. The committee also discarded the suggested site at Mising area in Pasighat sub-division, but suggested two places, Banderdewa and Yazali. The council thereafter recommended that the Governor of Assam might make a factual scrutiny of the report and select any site out of these two (ibid.).

After the decision to take final selection of site for NEFA capital was vested on the Governor, he deputed a technical committee led by Mr. Joshi, who was the then Director of Panchayat and three other engineers to make on spot assessment of the two chosen sites. Yazali was rejected due to its difficult terrain and they narrowed down on Banderdewa. But as the latter was at the foothills of Assam-Arunachal boundary, the committee enquired if there was any alternative nearby (ibid.).

Nabam Runghi, a Nyishi from the Nabam clan who was one of the Agency Council Members from Subansiri District suggested Itayope (present day Itanagar) which was nearby his native village. He informed the presence of Itafort, which is indicative of a glorious past and hence suitable for a capital and Gyekar Senyik lake as the source of water. To convince the authority at Shillong, he carried a brick from Itafort and smoked fish from the lake to Shillong as evidence to substantiate his arguments. On the very next day he returned to his hometown and shared the news with his people. After a few days, an air survey was conducted and Itayope, the proposed area was finalised as the site for the new capital and nearby Naharlagun (around 10 km away from Itanagar) would act as the temporary capital (ibid.).

Naharlagun, which was only 20 km from the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh boundary, could have been the permanent capital. It had a bigger plains area than Itanagar, which could have been practically more feasible in terms of physical space. But, for the government, Itafort was an important marker. To quote, V.V. Giri, the then President of India, who came to Naharlagun to lay the foundation stone for capital establishment on April 20, 1974 said,

Taking rebirth in the ruins of an ancient capital, in the hoary past, the capital complex is symbolic of the determination of the four lakhs and sixty seven thousand people of Arunachal Pradesh to build a new life for themselves. There could not be a more attractive location for a capital than Itanagar (Raikar, 2014).



Map: 3.1. Location Map of Itafort, **Source:** Raikar, 1976

Itafort gave much needed historical sanctity to Itanagar as the new capital for Arunachal Pradesh. Archaeological research was commissioned right after, which was able to shed its colonial image of being an unadministered frontier territory and link the territory to Ancient Hindu civilisations in Assam. To quote,

It would be worthwhile to see the Ita fort in comparison with the other historical forts in Arunachal Pradesh...(A) number of canons laid down by the classical Sanskrit texts on fort architecture are marvellously applicable to these forts...According to the classical terminology, the Ita fort is a giri durga, vana-durga and ishtika durga all in one, ie, hill fort, forest fort and brick fort (Raikar, 1976).

By constructing a glorious past, it was hoped to instil a new sense of pride that could go with the new name Arunachal Pradesh and its identity formation from that of NEFA. Archaeological work at Ita Fort was compared to other research on forts in foothill Arunachal Pradesh which were commissioned during the same period, all of which highlighted the applicability of classical Sanskrit texts (Raikar, 1978).



Figure 3.2. Farewell of Agency Council Members, **Source:** Nabam Runghi Memorial



A Group Photo of Pradesh Council Member on 02-10-1972
Who were elected in the month of May 1972



V.V Giri, President of India visit Itanagar on 20th April 1974

Figure 3.3. Pradesh Council Members and President's Visit, **Source:** (Hina, 2017, p. 28)

After the site was finalised, on 20th January, 1972, Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India arrived at Ziro, the headquarter of Subansiri district and declared NEFA as an UT, renamed it as Arunachal Pradesh. The name for Itayope was also changed to Itanagar. Two months later, on 28th Feb, 1972, all agency council members were invited to the declaration

function at Shillong which is where they were eventually dissolved and given farewell (Hina, 2017).

Agency Council got replaced by Pradesh Council which had all new faces except for two. The new members mostly were young educated men from different tribes who replaced the traditional leadership. The two Agency Council members who remained in the Pradesh Council were again from eastern Arunachal Pradesh, the region which was relatively advanced. Nabam Runghi was not part of it and thereafter for most part of his life, he remained distant from the State, and rather took up other social roles. It was only by the end of his life in his 70's, when he was officially facilitated as the founder and architect of Itanagar by the State Government of Arunachal Pradesh. Nonetheless, his life bears testimony to the various developments of 'Itayope' which today we know as Itanagar.

3.3. The Narrative of Nabam Runghi

Born on 20th April 1940 at Bobia Village under Leporiang administrative Circle in Papum Pare District, Nabam Runghi belonged to a Nyishi family. It is said that when he reached adulthood, he became a learned person of the tribe after having a vision about it². The Nyishi belief system has elaborate meanings associated with visions and dreams as they consider it as the means of divine communication. Thus, while some visions and dreams can bring bad omen, some others help the community to choose Nyibu (traditional priests) and Gingdungs (mediators). The dreams and visions thus become the source of legitimacy for the chosen ones on one hand, on the other their belief in the divine selection makes them take the new role sincerely. Nabam Runghi too transformed from a simple young man to a respected person of his clan. When the Indian State was on the lookout for young tribal people from NEFA on exposure trips to New Delhi and other parts of India, Nabam Runghi was identified as one.

The exposure trip was one of the initiatives of the Indian State for NEFA in line with the post-1962 policy shifts (Guyot-Réchar, 2013). As mentioned, the government of India had started consolidating the region with the rest of India through administrative, juridical and territorial rearrangements. The exposure trip was supposed to add to the nation-building efforts of the Indian State in the frontier and help integrate and assimilate the

² Interview with a cousin of Runghi, Dated Feb 23, 2020

people of NEFA with the rest of the country. Administrators and businessmen from mainland Indian communities such as Marwari, Bihari, Punjabi were given the task to identify potential youths and adults who can take lead for their respective tribes in NEFA. Thus, in 1966, when the first batch of tribal people were taken for an exposure tour to attend the Republic Day Parade at New Delhi and other places in North India, Nabam Runghi was selected as one amongst the 40 (Arunachal24, 2020).

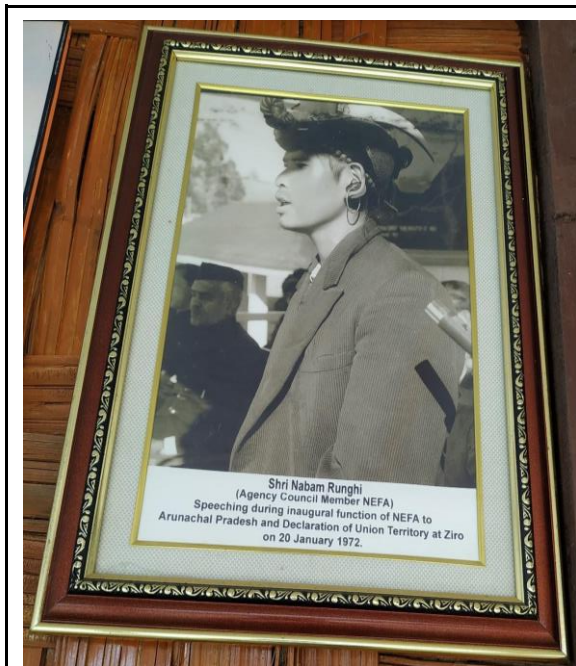


Figure 3.4. Young Nabam Runghi

Source: Nabam Runghi Memorial

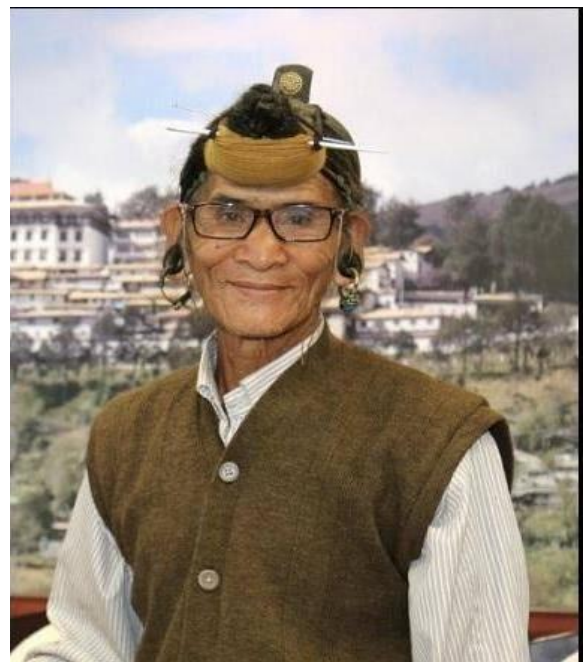


Figure 3.5. Old Nabam Runghi

Source: CM Pema Khandu Tweet on Feb 13, 2020

This was Nabam Runghi's first exposure to a world outside his native place. As a young man of 29 years, the exposure to the national capital got him interested in political participation. So, when the Panchayati Raj Regulation was introduced in 1967, he became a gram panchayat member. He actively participated and his existing social reputation added to his favour. Thus, before being selected as the Agency Council member for Subansiri District, he was an Anchal Samiti Member and then a Zilla Parishad Member. He was also selected as the District Chairperson for the lower Subansiri District (Kumar, 2018). When in the Agency Council Sessions discussions were around a new headquarter for a new future of NEFA, he took active interest in it. His exposure to New Delhi made him visualise benefits for his clan and tribe, if the new capital gets established in his native

place. Unlike the already existing administrative centre where people and their leaders negotiated for compensation, he did not argue for any form of compensation in lieu of the land. He presumed that once the place gets developed, his people will automatically reap its benefits.

Parallel to these administrative changes, the State was also witnessing changes in other social aspects. One of the most discernible changes was witnessed in the religious demography of the region. Different tribes of the State, especially ones with their traditional territories near the foothills experienced a process of Christianisation. The Nyishis too increasingly started converting from their indigenous faith of Donyi Polo to Christianity. Here it is important to note that unlike other hill regions of Northeast India, Christian Missionaries were not allowed during the British period and long after India's independence too, they were barred. Hence, proselytisation in NEFA was conducted through missions based in the foothills of Assam like Tezpur, Hamuti, and North Lakhimpur. They slowly penetrated the low-lying hills and were able to gradually convert the landscape. To put it in perspective, in the first Census for NEFA in 1971, the Christian population was a mere 0.79% which increased to 4.32% in 1981. While 4.32% is a small minority when the whole State is considered, the change was massive for specific communities that were nearer the foothill missions such as Padam, Adi, Nocte, and Nyishi (Centre for Policy Studies, ND).

Nabam Runghi too was moved by this wave of Christianisation and converted himself. As he was an influential community leader, his conversion led many others to convert too. Further, being a devoted convert, he completely gave himself to the proselytising mission of Christianity. This apparently was not taken positively by the Indian State and officials as high as the then Governor himself who tried to persuade Runghi against his proselytising activities. It is alleged that he was even offered a government quarter, car and plot for business to leave Christianity and come back to his indigenous faith.³

Here it is important to reiterate that the Indian policy towards this region had changed from the philosophy of Elwin and Nehru to a more pronounced security perspective vis-à-vis China. To ensure the security, there was an increased focus on state-making through

³ Interview with a cousin of Runghi, Dated Feb 23, 2020

administrative penetration. There was also a project of cultural assimilation and homogenisation as an exercise of nation-building amongst the frontier tribes, which borrows heavily from the ideals of religious nationalism (Borgohain and Dodum, 2023). Thus, a series of cultural organisations based on Hindu spiritual leaders' teachings were approached by the Government of India to help in nation-building through educational and welfare missions. For example, Ramakrishna Mission (1966) that runs both hospital and school and Vivekananda Kendra (1977) that runs schools were two of the early organisations that were welcomed in Arunachal Pradesh. These organisations are part of the larger Sangh Parivar led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the main Hindu majoritarian nationalist organisation in India. Today, scholars have argued that the RSS acts as the deep state of contemporary India that is increasingly transforming into an ethno-religious Hindu majoritarian populist state (Chatterji et.al, 2019).

Nonetheless, apart from the state resistance to conversion to Christianity based on the above-mentioned policy imperatives of the government, there were also indigenous leaders who were conscious and were wary of such a rapid religious conversion. They were concerned about loss of indigenous culture and tradition and mobilised people against conversion. Eventually, on April 24th, 1974 anti-conversion riots broke out in the capital region (*Arunachal24*, 2020). Nabam Runghi being an influential person actively converting people became one of the targets and his house was burned. He fled to Don Bosco Mission School in North Lakhimpur.

It is said that from 1972-74, Runghi was able to establish around 54 churches amongst the Nyishi in the Sagalee area of Subansiri District. He was the president of Subansiri Baptist Christian Association (1974-77) and actively raised Anti-Christian persecution issues to state authorities. He even went to New Delhi and met then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to apprise her of the rising persecution of Christians in the State (Kumar, 2018; *Arunachal24*, 2020). It is said that the then Lt. Governor K.A.A. Raja had tried to persuade Runghi to stop his proselytising mission and leave Christianity and even bribe him with offers of a truck and bus for business, 1000 hectares of land free and a government bungalow in Itanagar. But Runghi continued his work with the support from missions in Assam. Finally, when he returned to his State, he settled in Bormai village in the Tarasso

Circle of Papum Pare District.⁴ Although he remained an active missionary, his return to the State was inconsequential politically as he stayed away from direct political participation. His social engagements thus shifted completely from politics from his early years to religious activities.

As the whole process of establishing the capital, from the selection of site (discussed above) to the way it was carried forward (discussed later) was very top down, the general public of the State were not aware of the role of Nabam Runghi in the selection of the capital. His immediate exit from politics and his long absence from the State itself helped to erase his role completely. However, towards the end of his life, he was finally given his due recognition. The first recognition came from the Nyishi Elite Society (NES)⁵, the pan-Nyishi civil society organisation on April 22, 2005. It was followed by a few other civil society organisations and Christian forums for his social and missionary work, which finally led to the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh facilitating him on June 29, 2013. On February 20, 2016, the 30th statehood day of Arunachal Pradesh, he was facilitated for his 'service rendered towards pioneering the delivery of democratic governance through the Panchayati Raj in the State' (*Arunachal24*, 2020). However, he was not officially recognised as the founder of Itanagar till then.

Following this, in December of the same year, two organisations of his clan viz, Nabam Welfare Society (NWS) and Nabam Youth Association (NYA) accompanied by Runghi himself, submitted a memorandum detailing his contributions to the Chief Minister's Office for official recognition as the founder of Itanagar (*Arunachal24*, 2016). The NWS had earlier proposed for a state-level felicitation on a day of state importance, life-time honorarium and land allotment within the capital city for Runghi. The proposals were considered and on February 20, 2017, on the 31st Statehood day celebrations, the State government felicitated Runghi with a gold medal in recognising him as one of the first Agency Council Members of NEFA and as the Founder of state capital.

⁴ Interview with a cousin of Runghi, Dated Feb 23, 2020

⁵ Initiated by a few like-minded Nyishi individuals, the NES was formed on October 24, 1987 to work for the upliftment of the Nyishi as the tribe even though being the largest demographic was lagging behind other major tribes. For more see (Begi, 2013).

Apart from the above, it is said that Runghi's state recognition in 2017 was influenced by the power tussle between two political leaders of the State (Late Kaliko Pul and Nabam Tuki) for the position of Chief Minister. In 2016, a few months before his mysterious suicide, Late Kaliko Pul honoured Runghi with a SUV car and cash of Rs 2 Lakhs to highlight how Nabam Tuki belonging to the same Nabam clan neglected Runghi and his contributions towards establishing the capital in Itanagar.

Nonetheless, today his story is promoted by the government. When Runghi died on November 18, 2018 at the age of 84, his death was honoured by state authorities. Posthumously in 2020, the State government had named the bus terminal of Itanagar after Runghi and a statue of his has been unveiled by the Chief Minister (*The Press Trust of India*, 2022). There is a short biography focusing only on Runghi's early years with the Agency Council and how he led to the selection of Itanagar published by NWS. Following this, a short biographical video was also made by the same group and released on YouTube on Nov 22, 2022.



Figure 3.6. The Nabam Runghi Memorial,

Source: Author

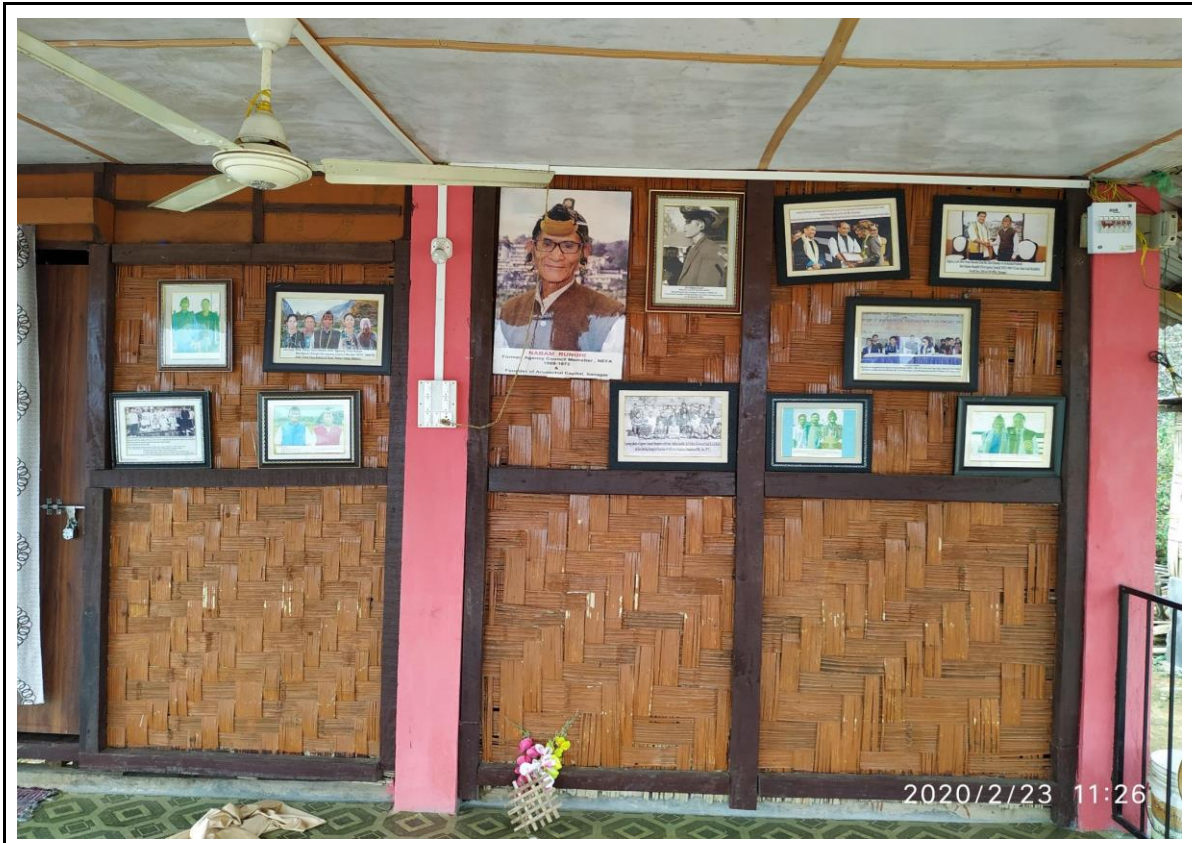


Figure 3.7. Framed Photos in the Nabam Runghi Memorial, **Source:** Author

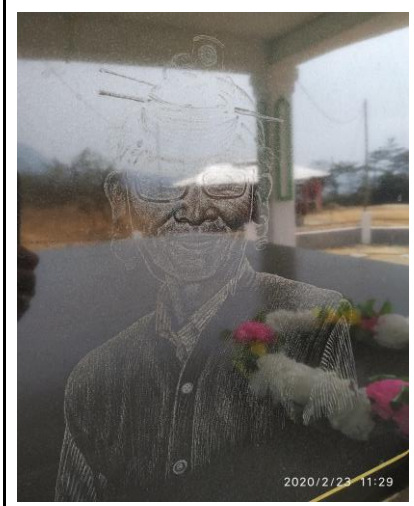


Figure 3.8. Portrait on the Tombstone of Nabam Runghi
Source: Author



Figure 3.9. Full Tombstone of Nabam Runghi
Source: Author

There is a small memorial site near the district headquarters of Papum Pare District at Yupia. The researcher visited this site in 2020 which was under-construction and was very ill maintained. The compound walls were incomplete and had no gate. The road to the plot was muddy and there was no security. On entering the compound, one sees a toilet first to the left and to the right is his burial in black marble. It has a small house which was locked but had framed photos of Runghi's Agency Council days and felicitation photos of his later years that were hung outside on its wall. The site felt abandoned and desolate, and in a way unworthy of a memorial for a founder of capital. In a way, it can be said to be strangely imitating Runghi's initial dream for his people, who were cast aside and pushed to the margins by the in-migration of other tribes from within and non-tribals from outside the State.

On interacting with some of his kin and clan members, one found that people both praise and criticise him for bringing the capital to their land. For some it is beneficial for their people as the capital brought in new opportunities and modern facilities. While some others feel aggrieved that he gave away community land without negotiating for any form of compensation. To quote his distant cousin, "humlog ka zameen aise hi chala gaya. Bohot log idhar udhar basti mein chala gaya" (our people's land has been lost in vain. Many people left here and there to other village areas). His quote ascertains that here too, tribals retreated as opposed to the dominant perspective of assimilation/sanskritization as proposed by the early anthropologists and sociologists like NK Bose and M N Srinivas. Apart from the direct development-induced displacement, tribals across the country have also lost their land as they retreat further into the hills and jungles to move away from such aggressive process of development in their land. It was one of the ways of resisting and protecting their culture and ways of life which unsettles the unilinear view of Hindu method of tribal absorption promoted by the ideology of the privileged class (Guha, 2018).

Nonetheless, Nabam Runghi's story is getting accepted by the people and he is considered as its founder. In fact, it was found that whoever knew the story of Nabam Runghi, they believed that land for the capital was donated by him and hence he is known as its founder. This however is not completely true as land was acquired through the colonial law of Assam Forest Regulation 1891 (VII of 1891) through which community forests were acquired as Reserved Forest and then a part of it was de-reserved for the capital. Runghi's role was limited to the proposal of the site and convincing the authorities that it would be

a good place for the new capital. He may have been a mediating instrument between the Indian State and the local clans to whom land of Itanagar belonged to. For example, today's Mob-II area which houses some government offices and government quarters belonged to some of his clan members and was known as *Mowb Putu*. Thereafter, it was the Indian State and the use of its state apparatuses, such as formal laws, military forces and welfare measures to penetrate and control the newly established capital.

3.4. The Other Narratives

Even though there were no recorded compensation demands from Itayope, the Government of India did not take any chances for future troubles. Thus, it issued a notification under the Assam Forest Regulation 1891 (VII of 1891) through which community forests can be acquired as Reserved Forests. As a colonial law this has been notorious in usurping forests and tribal land and dispossession of tribal communities in the name of conservation. The underlying principle of such a law is drawn from Roman law on ownership of land. According to it, land that is *terra nullius* is an eminent domain of the State and the latter may use its absolute right over such land and decide its best use, such as conservation, mining, drilling, rail and road construction, dams, settle other communities, etc. According to a UN press release on the minutes of the eleventh session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, history is replete with cases across the world, where both colonisers and dominating nations have used eminent domain and various laws based on it to expropriate indigenous and tribal land. Such laws fail to recognise varied and dynamic realities of indigenous people's relationship with their territories that goes beyond mere ownership rights (UN Press Release, 2012). In other words, it has been a travesty of justice for tribal communities induced by conservation law that is based on cultural and socio-economic violence towards them.

The notification (No.FOR.118/68) was issued on February 20, 1978 issued from the Secretary of Forests, Government of Arunachal Pradesh. It states,

In exercise of the powers conferred by Sec17 of the Assam Forest Regulation 1891 (VII of 1891) Arunachal Pradesh is hereby pleased to declare that the land described in the schedule here to be annexed shall be a Reserved Forest from the date of publication of this notification and was named as Itanagar Reserve Forest.

The notification mentioned that land annexed for Itanagar Reserve Forest was 140.3 sq/km in erstwhile Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh. The same notification after defining the boundary in the north, south, east and west direction adds to refer to survey sheet no. 83 12/E and mentions the existing village names and area for Itanagar Capital as N.B. ie, *Nota Bene* information. Accordingly, a total of 17.92 sq km were excluded from the reserved forest area to accommodate the existing village- Tarajuli, Boram, Shod, Kanka, Bat, Puma and Jolang whereby each village was granted a 2.5 sq.km and given minimum rights to passage, pasture and collect minor forest produce for their own consumption only. The Itanagar Capital area of 11.25 sq km is also excluded from the reserved forest.

After six months, by another notification (No. CP/EVC/77, dated Aug, 10, 1978) issued by the General Administration Department, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh published that,

The Lt. Governor, Arunachal Pradesh is hereby pleased to declare that the area described in the schedule hereto annexed shall be the administrative jurisdiction of the Capital Project areas of the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh... The area lies between longitude 90-15 to 94 degree and Latitude 27 -15 and grid lines -5 in the north and '2 in the south; 7 in the west and 12 in the east.

The notification while mentioning the boundary of the administrative jurisdiction of the capital project area mentions that in the north

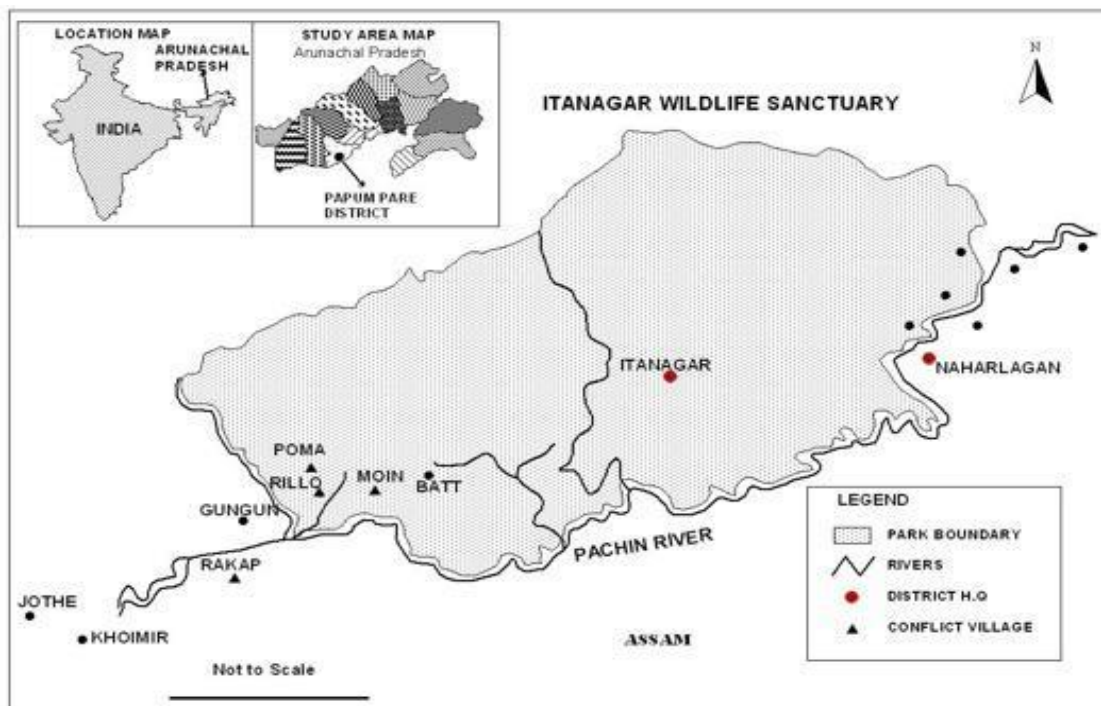
From the junction point of Nyorchi Nallah with Pachin Nallah then along the left bank of Nyorchi Nallah towards West up to its source; then an artificial line at a bearing of 271-13' till it meets the source of Pachin Nallah, then along the right bank of an *unknown rivulet* (italics added) up to the *abandoned Sokao and Teipu village* (italics added) i.e, this is on the bank of a tributary of Poma Nallah.

Here too one can see the mention of two more village names which were apparently abandoned. It is difficult to ascertain now as to whether the villages were abandoned as a retreat from the formal state penetrative processes by the tribal villagers or they had abandoned for other reasons. The Itanagar Reserve Forest soon was upgraded to a Wildlife Sanctuary, thereby transferring the direct control from the State to the Centre. However, there seems to be a discrepancy about the date of upgradation as the government website

listing wildlife sanctuaries in India dates it to 1978, but the notification of 1978 mentions it as Reserve Forest.

Contrary to the information on these two notifications, the ICC District official website publishes a different history note. According to the website,

Till 1974, the administration of the territory was carried out from Shillong, which was then the capital of the state of undivided Assam and later on the capital of Meghalaya state. It was felt that for the rapid development of the territory, the administrator should come near the people and the search for a site for the capital of Arunachal Pradesh started. The choice for capital finally fell on Itanagar, which was a small village. Initially the capital was shifted to Naharlogun and the foundation stone was laid by the then President of India, late V.V Giri on 20th April 1974. The government had defined the area of the capital complex vide its notification thus (Itanagar Capital District Administration, 2024).



Map 3.2. Itanagar Wildlife Sanctuary, **Source:** Verma & Ayadurai, 2010

The contradictory information is noteworthy as it might be indicative of two things. First is that it was an honest mistake by cogs in the wheel of formal administration and had been missed by higher authorities. Second is that the government willfully wants to hide an unpleasant truth and promote a narrative conducive to the State. In that case, the positive

beginning about the State in the note sets the tone perfectly. It begins with how the search for a new capital was to bring the administrator ‘near the people’ ‘for the rapid development of the territory’. It conveniently misses the 1962 Indo-China War or any of the security imperatives of the Indian State. It then provides a false idea that Itanagar was a ‘small village’, which surely was more than one as from the notification mentioned above, one can see that there were seven villages for which land and passage was accommodated by the Itanagar Reserve Forest. It then follows with some factual data (President of India laying the foundation stone) and finally ending with a mention about the notification. But it does not give away any details or content of the notification. The note also does not mention anything about why and how Itanagar was selected for the capital, for it was not an existing town or centre which could suitably accommodate a new capital.

In September 2018, when the researcher made contacts with some local Nyishi inhabitants of Itanagar and got entry to present-day Ganga village, it was found that there were more settlements in and around Itanagar. According to Tara (47, name changed), within the Ganga area itself there were two villages namely, Gamga (Kanka as per the notification) and Senki. But when the capital was established people moved to other areas. He showed a government notification issued from the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Papum Pare District in which the Government of Arunachal Pradesh recognises 12 clans as bonafide inhabitants of the Papum Pare District. These are: Taying, Taba, Gyamar, Kholie, Mallo, Tech, Tana, Tao, Tang, Nabam, Tah and Gollo. These clans are spread across the district in various places and villages mentioned below: Darya, Kojum, Tongchi, Samo Gaping, Poim, Lepar, Miring Gaping, Nyrik, Mopop, Rayi, Hostalam, Borum, Nyorch And, Torajuli, Itaorpo, Mob, Garu. The notification further lists names of people from these 12 clans and states the following-

In the grains of truth, all the lands including the Hills and the Mountains situated in between the left bank of the Chengkhi the very upper part source of the Pachin river and the right bank of the Nyorch river, ie one of the tributaries of the Pachin river i.e, in close vicinity to the aforementioned villages mostly belong to the descendents of the Taying

clan. In other words, the descendants of all the forefathers mentioned as above are now scatterly living permanently in and around the capital complex Itanagar.⁶

Thus, it is clear that the popular public narrative of Itanagar being a no man's land is false as there were villages housing different clans of tribal people. While the State recognised seven villages and provided them with minimum rights to passage, pasture and collect minor forest produce for their own consumption only, it won't be false to assume that a few villages might be left out from this official documentation. In all likelihood, these few villages might have silently been displaced and pushed to the margins. Added to it are the ones who abandoned villages or retreated to hills and forests themselves as the capital establishment brought in a new alien culture and socio-economic system. One can argue that such a tribal retreat adds a nuance to the ways tribal communities interact with administrative penetration in Arunachal Pradesh and offers a critique to the nature of developmentalism adopted by the India State. Such a position is in line with calls by tribal scholars like Bodhi (2022) to reformulate the predominant assimilation, isolation and integration modality of positioning tribal communities to freedom, negotiation and adaptation (as cited in Bori, 2023). It can lead to the development of a truly decolonised indigenous social sciences and help shed some of the colonial, classist and casteist constructs that continue to underpin the existing epistemology.

The establishment of the capital engaged in both physical and socio-cultural displacement of tribal people, adding to the many stories of tribal displacement in India. In fact, Itanagar Reserved Forest was not the only one for the district of Papum Pare. For the establishment of a temporary capital in Naharlagun, the same colonial tool was used. The Drupong Reserved Forest was created on August 16, 1978 and from its 420. Sq.km area, an area of 2 Sq.km was excluded for Naharlagun. It mirrored the way the British colonisers used the Forests Act to their advantage rather than for conservation goals. For example, Dulung Reserve Forest created in 1913, Ranga and Kakoi Reserve Forest created in 1919 stretches most part of the foothill boundary between the Nyishi territory and plains of Assam. These reserve forests added to the new fixed boundaries created by the Inner Line and served both as a buffer zone between the administered and the un-administered and were able to protect their commercial investments like the Harmutty Tea Estate. In fact, a brief review of all the reserved forests created in Arunachal Pradesh can illuminate if it goes hand in

⁶ Notification No. Misc/Ap/DC/01/2007, dated Dec 12, 2005

hand with the consolidation of its administrative control by the Indian State. A detailed study on them can reveal other aspects of conservation politics and make a commentary on the nature of state-building exercise conducted by the Indian State on its frontiers.

Even as latest as Oct 22, 2019, the government of Arunachal Pradesh is seen issuing notification (No DAD-62/96/2091) through which a new administrative circle is being created without the fair process of land acquisition. It says,

In the *interest of public service*, (italics added) the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh is pleased to order the creation of Param Putu Administrative Circle with camp Headquarter at Loth under Lower Subansiri District with immediate effect for *administrative convenience subject to fulfilment of* (italics added) following terms and conditions:-

1. Land for construction of Circle Office and residential requirements shall be *donated by people of the area free of cost* (italics added).
2. Construction of residential and Non-residential O.B. Type building with maintenance shall be done on *self help basis* (italics added) by the villagers for the administrative centre initially for the period of three years.
3. *No claim for compensation or employment or any other facilities* (italics added) shall be claimed by the people for any reason whatsoever.

The jurisdictions of Administrative Circle of Param Putu shall include the following villages with their traditional boundaries within Arunachal Pradesh namely:-

1. Kasing Putu 2. Loth 3. Momputu 4. Lending 5. Paa 6. Balam 7. Rip Rinya 8. Sith Lanka 9. Tadarko 10. Norbing 11. Raka 12. Triaging (Tajgi) 13. Gench 14. Peet (Upper 22) 15. Kuth 16. Probing 17. Kuding

With it, new villagers will be displaced and dispossessed of their land and livelihood. The language is more direct and is clear about its intentions of not paying any form of compensation. The State uses its sovereign power to create new administrative units and authoritatively demands not only free land donation but also residential and non-residential office buildings from the people. Such a shift in the tonality and language of the State also needs to be located within the recent phenomenon of increasing demands for the creation of new districts by a section of people from the tribal communities themselves. These demands are rooted in the new identity consciousness of smaller tribes who now demand

their share of the developmental pie as they were left behind the bigger tribes who are dominant in each district. These new developments forward Guyot-Récharde's (2016) argument that the local communities of Arunachal Pradesh living under the 'shadows' of India and China have found an 'acceptable' or 'even welcomed' 'a certain kind of state presence'. It adds a new layer to local agency in shaping state-building in frontier regions.

Secondly, it represents the changed nature of governance which has shed its earlier form of welfare developmentalism based on the goals of state-making in the frontiers and accepted the neo-liberal capitalist mode of development. In this, good governance through Weberian bureaucracy and formal administration is neither a given, nor a basic role of a modern state, rather citizens are asked to pay for it through their land and resources. Finally, while land dispossession is not a new story for India's tribal population, being a frontier affair, here it goes unnoticed from both state-level and national civil society.

3.5. The Urban Planning and Development

The above sections presented what the process of selecting and establishing the capital in Itanagar entailed. An equally fascinating and interesting journey began after the capital was established. It brought in an administrative apparatus consisting of different departments and public housing colonies to run the system. This led to a sudden demographic change both in terms of population density and diversity as new migrants came as administrators to run the formal governance system and associated paraphernalias such as service providers and market. All of these changed the spatial arrangements and demographic composition of Itanagar. On one hand, it marked the beginning of rapid urbanisation in Itanagar and its nearby areas led by formal administration. On the other hand, it sets off a series of drastic changes to the socio-cultural milieu of the Nyishi, the local tribe of the region. In a way, Itanagar in playing its role as the capital town, can be said to have witnessed total transformation in a very short period of time.

As mentioned above, with a population estimate of around 81,000 and spread across 200 sq.km, today Itanagar is the largest and fastest growing urban centre in Arunachal Pradesh. If one concentrates on the hosts of urban issues that the capital faces, ranging from overcrowding, lack of affordable mass housing, lack of adequate civic amenities like water, sanitation, properly maintained roads, street lights and sustainable garbage management, one can also say that it is like any other city in the Global South. From its

background of being an unadministered colonial frontier territory, Itanagar is transforming into a rapidly growing urban centre connected with the global flow of capital and goods. The capitalist shift is reflected in the increase in the number of multinational brands for clothing, shoes and food chains that ornate the town. However, its seemingly dead past of being a colonial frontier has taken a new life in the form of ethno-territorial politics which contests power in both everyday lives and in larger structural spaces of Itanagar. This in turn shapes the way Itanagar urbanises leaving its mark on the various manifestations of urbanisation. The following sections elaborate on the processes of change witnessed by Itanagar and while doing so, contextualise it within the context of larger urbanisation processes of Northeast Indian in general and Arunachal Pradesh in particular.

3.5.1. Initial Years to Early 2000s

After the selection of Itanagar as the site for the new capital, the next task at hand was to build a capital and a future city from scratch. It was a difficult task on many counts. As mentioned, due to the credits of the British who left the territory unadministered for a long time, firstly, there was a lack of trained Indian officers with the experience of administration in Arunachal Pradesh; and secondly, there was practically a complete absence of core services such as education, health and public engineering works (Chowdhury, 1983). This meant that building a future city from scratch was in the most literal sense of the term. There were no roads, no human resources, no basic socio-economic services available. There were also no local experts who could be part of the planning and execution of capital establishment.

3.5.1.1. Expanding the administrative System

As mentioned, the newly independent Indian Government that took over the governance of Arunachal Pradesh had to develop human resources who could make inroads to the interior of the remote territory, establish formal administration as the legitimate authority, and deliver socio-economic development through social welfare measures such as education and health, building roads for better connectivity etc. Thus, to begin with, the government of India initially focussed exclusively on increasing the administrative reach and only from 1953 onwards, different development programmes were put into place with definite financial allocation. A Single Line Administrative system was adopted where the Governor of Assam who acted on behalf of the Government of India was at the top

followed by Advisor to the Governor, District Commissioners, Extra Assistant Commissioners and Circle Officers. The latter three were the prime positions in the field who along with civil administrative duties were also responsible for different social welfare and developmental services.

Apart from this basic administrative structure, there were two important departments, namely the Community Development Department and Public Works Department. While the former engaged in the development of agriculture, veterinary services, engineering, village and inter-village roads, cottage industries and co-operatives with the Circle Officer who also acted as the Block Development Officer, the latter focused mainly on motorable road construction connecting administrative centres as well as mule and porter tracks, airstrips and ferries, and had a Chief Engineer. The formal administration and community development department were supported by the three-tier Panchayati institutions from 1969, whose members were traditional leaders at the village level from amongst whom the anchal samiti and zilla parishad were either locally selected or were nominated by the government.

Thus, the nature and extent of administrative penetration in the region was still at its nascent stage when the task of planning and developing Itanagar as the first capital came about. It was the time when the entire territory was experiencing rapid structural transformation in its economy, polity and society. On one hand, foundations for a modern participatory and representative government were laid down by the Panchayati institutions followed by formation of the Pradesh Council in 1972 for which first elections were held, a Legislative Assembly by 1975 with a selected five-member ministry and first general elections for two Lok Sabha seats in 1978. On the other hand, the economy was rapidly changing 'through increasing diversification of the workforce, emergence of a modern non-farm economy, rapid urbanisation and gradual integration with the regional and national economy' (Mishra and Upadhyay, 2004). It was a dynamic period where the Indian State was figuring out the ways of governing Arunachal Pradesh and its people on one hand and securing the territory, increasing state presence and integrating the region with the rest of India on the other.

3.5.1.2. Creating New Infrastructure and Land Acquisition

On the ground, soon after the finalisation of Itanagar as the site for the capital, the primary task of developing the land with motorable road connectivity fell on the Public Works Department. It was converted into the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) after 1956 and its functioning was overseen from the centre at Delhi (Chowdhury, 1983). The Chief Engineer (C. Rama Rao) along with the Surveyor of Works (K. Francis) of CPWD was in charge of overseeing the developments, and were important persons who were part of the planning and execution of the capital establishment. Other key members were the District Commissioner (Jagar Singh) of Subansiri District, Extra Assistant Commissioner (B C Namasudra), the Chief Town Planner (Anonymous), the Senior Architect (Mr Thare), Chief Secretary (I P Gupta), and the Advisor to the Governor who later became the Chief Commissioner (K.A.A. Raja) of Arunachal Pradesh, once it became a Union Territory in 1974.⁷ CPWD, thus, started its construction from 1972-73 both in Naharlagun and Itanagar, and by 1974 when Union Territory was declared, administration could shift from Shillong to Naharlagun. The 40km road connecting Itanagar to North Lakhimpur was built during 1974-75 (Das, 2008). Parallel to it, land in Itanagar was developed by clearing jungles, cutting hills and filling gorges with land. Enough flat surfaces were created to construct buildings for offices of the state administration and quarters for housing the government staff. Natural courses of waterways were engineered to construct drains and roads. The initial planning and development of Itanagar, thus, adopted a techno-managerial approach heavily shaped by engineering solutions.

Here it is important to note that the CPWD started its construction work before land for both the permanent and temporary capitals were officially acquired by the State. In fact, by the mid-1970's, administration shifted to Naharlagun and substantial level of work to develop Itanagar was done and different departments were allocated land. For example, the Geological Survey of India (GSI- State Unit) was allocated land in 1976. Whereas the notification through which Itanagar Reserved Forest was created (No.FOR.118/68) from which a part was de-reserved to acquire land for Itanagar Capital Region (ICR) by issuing

⁷ These were the authorities who were signatories of most important early government notifications.

another notification (No. CP/EVC/77), both were issued in 1978. Similarly, for Naharlagun, the Drupong Reserved Forest was also issued in 1978.



Figure 3.10. Government Quarters in Chandra Nagar in the early 1980's

Source: Personal photo album of Field Resource Person

Here it is important to reiterate that during that period, Arunachal Pradesh lacked a comprehensive formal land governance system. Apart from the Assam Forest Regulation 1891 and Inner Line Regulation that had provisions on land governance, much of the State land was regulated through the Jhum Land Act of 1947. The state authorities whose focus and main intent was to make administrative inroads into this colonial frontier territory, were yet to formulate a comprehensive formal land governance system.

A search for recorded information about the process of surveying, boundary demarcation of government land, consultation with the local people if any led to no concrete records. It seems that the boundaries between ICR, existing villages and Itanagar Reserved Forest

have been drawn using the same discretionary power of the State without the involvement of any local villagers whose jhum land and community forests it acquired. The first map that was published with the notification was not to scale with natural features like river, stream, ridge as the boundary marker. In other words, land was arbitrarily acquired using a colonial tool without the participation and knowledge of the local communities that complemented the top-down approach adopted for the initial planning and development of Itanagar. The Chief Town Planner, the Chief Engineer, and Chief Commissioner who were important in the planning of the first Master Plan, all were people from mainland India.

Thus, it is not surprising that the master plan emulated a sector-wise planning followed in the cities of India which were mostly located in plain areas. The planning did not take into account the geographical specificity of a hill town and it neglected the socio-cultural considerations too. In later years, when Itanagar grew rapidly to become the largest urban centre for Arunachal Pradesh, these oversights metamorphosed into issues affecting its urban governance (elaborated in the next two chapters).

Further as the initial planning and development of Itanagar was executed before the official land acquisition, it was seen that the boundaries were kept unclear for the local people as was the case of Ganga village which is discussed in the next chapter. It left community members unaware of the extent of dispossession as a group, as displacement happened gradually. As their settlement patterns were not concentrated but were dispersed spreading across a wide area, the immediate displacements were more at the level of individual families whose land were used for the first stage of construction than that of entire villages. People could access their forests or wet rice cultivation land, even when it fell within the ICR which the state authorities acquired on paper. But, as Itanagar developed and the government needed land for new construction, new people were displaced.

Added to the delayed and diluted sense of displacement as a group due to the practice of flexible boundary arrangements, was the lack of a traditional governance structure among the Nyishi at the tribe level that can negotiate and organise resistance. Nonetheless, there were some efforts at group level voicing the takeover of their plains land, which did not bear any results to their favour (elaborated in the next chapter). Finally, with enough forest land nearby and sparse population, they were not left with much choice of reclaiming their wet-rice fields but were forced to move to a nearby area. Shifting and starting all over

again was a less difficult option than resisting the state authorities for such displaced families.

3.5.1.3. Changing Topography, Demography and Economy

The marked beginning of urbanisation in Itanagar brought in a change in its topography. Prior to the capital establishment, the region had dense forests rich in biodiversity. The streams had fresh water supporting a rich variety of fishes, both big and small. The forests hosted a rich variety of wildlife, specifically elephants were found in large numbers. The region also had bamboo forests tended by local villagers and wet-rice cultivation fields. The establishment of the capital replaced this natural landscape with a built environment of offices, markets, roads and housing colonies. The landscape was also engineered to suit the needs of the capital, such as diversion of natural streams and filling up gorges to create open space for markets.

Secondly, the next phase for Itanagar began with the in-migration of people from different communities both from within and outside the State that changed its demography. When the administration shifted from Shillong to Naharlagun in 1974, it required educated people to run the system. As mentioned, the local Nyishi tribe lagged behind other major tribes like Adi, Sherdukpen, Apatani where formal administration and education reached much before. Their traditional territory being far from the district administrative headquarters, Ziro and Bomdila, their educational status remained low. Thus, the need for educated and skilled people to run the administration and the associated paraphernalia was met mostly by outsiders. From neighbouring Assam, people joined as school teachers and administrators. The Bengali community served both as administrators and petty businessmen. Communities from North India such as Marwari and Punjabi came as traders. There were also South Indian traders and teachers from States like Kerala and Tamil Nadu (The then-Governor and some senior government officials hailed from these States). From within Arunachal Pradesh, tribes such as Adi, Sherdukpen, Apatani and Galo joined in.

To cater to the needs of the new service class, other institutions like schools and hospitals were established. For example, the Government Higher Secondary School, Naharlagun was established in 1975, a year after Naharlagun became the temporary capital. In 1979, the Government College Itanagar, which now is known as Dera Natung Government

College was established. Ramakrishna Mission Hospital located at the heart of Itanagar with a campus of around 26 acres began in 1977 and inaugurated in 1979. Markets started to emerge first in Naharlagun and then in Itanagar and both grew rapidly. It marked the beginning of urbanisation as with the capital establishment, there was a rapid demographic change and a shift in occupational pattern from agriculture to the service sector.

Here, it is important to note that the urbanisation process in Itanagar and nearby areas reflect the larger trend of urbanisation in Arunachal Pradesh. It is not led by factors such as industrial growth, economic transition, population explosion which dominates urbanisation processes in various parts of the world. Instead, urbanisation in the State has been largely led by the growth of formal administration. Thus, in 1971, when the Census decided to consider the pronounced urban characteristics and the occupational pattern instead of population (which was above 5000) in the district and sub-divisional headquarters (Barthakur 1975), the State got its first four towns- Bomdila, Pasighat, Aalo (erstwhile Along) and Tezu. By the 1981 census, both Itanagar and Naharlagun were added.

During the 1991 census, this number increased from six to ten with the addition of four more census towns in the state—Ziro, Roing, Namsai and Khonsa. In 2001, the number of census towns further rose to 17, and as per the census figures of 2011, the number of towns in Arunachal Pradesh increased to 26 (Government of India 2011)... In fact, between 1991 and 2011, there was a rapid increase in the number of towns (from ten to 26) because of the creation of a number of districts, blocks and circles (Debnath & Mitra, 2020, p. 226-227).

If one locates the urbanisation of Arunachal Pradesh with the context of Northeast India, one can see that it mirrors the larger region. While there were a few commercial towns during the colonial period centred around the trade of tea, coal and oil, the larger urbanisation process in the region both in the colonial and post-colonial period has been led by formal administration. The urban centres of the region are administrative centres, townships based on natural resource extraction such as oil and coal, and military garrisons. In other words, the urbanisation process has largely been asymmetric, concentrated mostly on State capitals and district headquarters, and strategic military bases. According to Singh and Singha (2020) such a pattern is not surprising due to the demographic-spatial aspects of the region which differs from the rest of India. The diverse topography of hills and

valleys, geopolitical environment of armed conflicts and heavy militarisation and relatively sparse density in most hills are some of the other factors that affect the urbanisation process.

3.5.1.4. Emerging land Use and Governance System

Following the demographic and economy changes is the change witnessed in traditional land use and management. As discussed above, land for the capital was acquired by the State using Assam Forest Regulation, 1891 that invoked the right of the government to claim uninhabited forests as absolute as per the principle of eminent domain. Firstly, the control and management of forests that were managed by local clans as jhum land and traditional clan territory shifted immediately to the forests department. With only limited access and use of forest resources, it abruptly changed the existing traditional land use and management system. Secondly, the land that was de-reserved from the forest reserve to accommodate the new capital, came directly under the state administration. The local villages faced a process of continuous displacement and were replaced by both the institutions of the State and in-migration of outsiders. In the process, land in Itanagar which belonged to the local Nyishi clans turned into a contested and scarce resource amongst the government, new migrants, and the Nyishis, both the local and nearby clans.

Apart from the government requirements, land was needed for the increasing housing and commercial needs by the new migrants. It created conditions for the administration to formulate new regulations that could provide *de facto* private ownership of land without the *de jure* ownership rights. Thus, an administrative instrument, *The Arunachal Pradesh Allotment of Government Land Rules, 1988* was introduced which provided tribal individuals from within the State with government land allotment for private and commercial use for the capital and other administrative centres like district headquarters. Issued with the consent of village councils and a clearance from forest department that the land does not fall under reserved forest, it stipulated that the allottee shall pay lease money annually at rates fixed by the government from time to time (Sinha, 2017).

A search for any such prior regulations from the 1970s and early 1980s yielded no results. Even *The Arunachal Pradesh Allotment of Government Land Rules, 1988* is an accidental discovery for the researcher. It was mentioned in a Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) Report on the State's revenue sector for the year 2019 with not much details.

Another simple mention was made in a high court judgement and another mention by G.N. Sinha (2017), who was the Chief Forest Conservator in the State. No officials from the government land department could give any detailed information and could not furnish a copy of it. Similarly, the public who had acquired land in the capital also had no knowledge about the Rules. Only the 2012 Rules based on the *Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement Records) Act, 2000* are available, as it is in use now.

It seems that the State issued land allotments to individuals arbitrarily in the same way it did for the different government departments. The Chief Engineer was especially instrumental in deciding land allotments in the early years of the capital establishment. Also, it is important to note that with complete statehood, the in-migration to the capital increased drastically and the government eventually got this rule. In all probability, this rule was introduced in retrospect to the requirements of the field reality; which has been the case for most of the Acts and Regulations, starting from the establishment of the capital to many other laws brought to deal with rapid urbanisation and growth.

This explains why in practice, most people continued to develop empty land and build houses before applying for Land Possession Certificate (LPC) and Land Allotment Passbook (LAP), the two kinds of legal documents present in the State currently for rural and urban areas respectively, based on the land Act of 2000 and its 2012 Rules. In fact, many even believed that to be the proper order to acquire the legal documents, LPC and LAP. Such informal practices, when adapted to increasing demand for land to accommodate the growing population, gave the capital a unique practice of government quarter encroachment. The practice entailed people acquiring LPC and LAP for the government quarter or part of it to their name creating duplicity of records and contested ownership rights between individuals and the government (elaborated in Chapter 5).

Nonetheless, the 1988 instrument of government land allotment for private use was an interesting departure from the existing formal land management and governance systems in practice. For the first time, the state authorities were officiating a process of formal recognition of private land ownership in practice without giving away the total ownership rights. Till then *The Balipara/Tirap/Sadiya Frontier Tract Jhum Land Regulation, 1947*, was the only regulation on matters of land in Arunachal Pradesh. This regulation recognised customary rights of tribes to land use, or easement rights over land for jhum alone and left a lot of ambiguity for privately-held land like wet-rice fields, terrace

cultivation, homestead land etc. The 1947 Regulation retained the absolute ownership rights of all lands to the government; but in practice land ownership lay in the ‘continuum between collective and private property rights’ (Mishra, 2018, p.66). Many informal practices emerged to accommodate private property rights within such a protective legal framework of recognising collective rights alone.

Thus, with the 1988 Rules a clear departure was made from recognising community right to operationalising private property ownership in the administrative centres and urban areas of the State. Later, similar instruments were developed to circumvent the government's non-recognition of private property rights and protective land laws through informal arrangements with traditional institutions and customary laws, sometimes supported by state authorities. This eventually led to the *Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement Records) Act, 2000* and its Rules in 2012 and an amendment Act in 2018 which finally recognised private ownership of land in the State (Elaborated in Chapter 5). However, these recent land management changes were implemented without completing a comprehensive land cadastral survey which is a prerequisite to streamline private property rights, and reducing informal practices in the State's land.

3.5.1.5. Changing Socio-political and Cultural Landscape

With the changes in both the spatial arrangements and governance of land, which is the locus of tribal society, other socio-political and cultural changes followed. Amongst these changes, the first was renaming of places. It ensured that the envisioned identity formation of Arunachal Pradesh by the Indian State got reflected in Itanagar as its capital. Not only was Itayope renamed as Itanagar, the planners divided the capital into different sectors and each was given a Hindi or Sanskritised name, such as Chandra Nagar, Van Vihar, Vivek Vihar, Ganga village, Niti Vihar, Panchali or English names such as CRPF Cantonment/Area, BSNL Colony, Raj Bhawan Complex, Indira Gandhi Park, Bank Tinali, 0 Point Tinali, Sector A, B, C, D, E, F etc.

Reflecting on names (person, clan/surname, community/tribe, place, rivers) in Arunachal Pradesh, political scientist Nani Bath (2022a, 2022b) wrote how they have travelled divergent trajectories and encapsulates history. He argued that with the intention of claiming Itanagar as ‘no man's land’, the administration either deliberately neglected or totally distorted native nomenclatures of places such as *Mowb Putu* to Mob-II, *Chenkhi*

river to Ganga, *Gyekar Sinyi* to Ganga Lake, *Solum Hapa* to Ganga market and so on. It added to the discontent of Nyishis who after getting educated were realising their dispossession and marginalisation within the capital. Begi (2013), who was the first person to acquire higher education from the tribe and became University professor, discusses how the Nyishi Elite Society was formed in 1987 by a few dedicated like-minded people like him to voice these cultural as well as socio-economic dispossessions and to work towards unifying and uplifting the tribe.

Bath's charges are not made in vacuum, as both the planner and initial migrants to the capital were mostly outsiders. Along with the imported model of urban planning and governance, they also imposed a new identity through non-native names. For the Indian State, both Indira Gandhi and Ganga are names with national resonance that is essentially mainland. Renaming thereby reinforces the territorial identity of India in Itanagar as the capital of a contested frontier territory.

Secondly, with a mixed population, the language of the local Nyishis got affected. Even though migrants included Assamese, Bengali, Marwari, Punjabi, Nepali, Bihari, Tamil, Malyali, etc, Hindi emerged as the lingua-franca which was also promoted by the Indian State. Loss of linguistic identity was real for many Nyishis as the younger generation were shifted out of their home space and put to boarding schools for their formal education. With school education being controlled by the Central Government, unlike other States where it is a state subject, Hindi was promoted. Further, the Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalayas Arunachal Pradesh Trust (VKVAPT) formed in 1977, which runs many schools throughout the State also promoted Hindi. The effect of popular culture, such as Bollywood and Hindi movies, cable TV with Hindi soap-operas further accentuated the process of acculturation that went beyond just language. The influences ranged from food choices and religious practices to overall way of life. Modern educated tribal youths aspired for a government job, to become part of the development story being casted, and benefit from it by being part of the larger bureaucratic state-machinery.

In 1987, the Subansiri District was bifurcated into Upper Subansiri District and Lower Subansiri District and Itanagar fell in the later. Again in 1993, the Papum Pare District was carved out of the Lower Subansiri District and Itanagar fell in the former. With it, modern education reached many backward clans of Nyishis who gradually became part of the formal administration. It is important to note that from within the different Nyishi clans,

the ones from Doimukh and Sagalee areas which had administrative centres established in 1949 and of present day East Kameng district (they identified themselves as Bagnis, but now accepts Nyishi as their larger tribal identity) who were close to Bomdila (the headquarter of then Kameng District) were amongst the first in-migrants to Itanagar as they were more advanced than the clans of Itanagar region. Thus, within the tribe itself, the Nyishis of the local clan of Itanagar were the most marginalised as they got left out from formal education and other developmental benefits of the early post-Independence era and then faced the burden of dispossessions after the capital establishment.

The next phase of Itanagar starts as it experiences an accelerated process of urbanisation with the continuous in-migration and demographic change. To put it in perspective, the decadal population growth of Itanagar during 1991-2001 was over 111 per cent (Acharjee, 2015). This growth was recorded at 169 percent during 2001-2011 (Census 2011). Thus, it is no wonder that the Papum Pare district (54.93 percent) was the most urbanised district of Arunachal Pradesh, followed by East Siang (27.88 percent) and Dibang Valley (27.55 percent) (Debnath & Mitra, 2020 p. 227). Accommodating such rapid growth will be difficult for any other small town. However, being located at a seismically active hilly area, Itanagar faces the problem of vertical expansion. Further, the Itanagar Wildlife Sanctuary limits horizontal expansion as Itanagar is located within it. As unearthed in the above sections, it seems that the arbitrary planning of the early years did not take into account the various practicalities of future expansion. The next section elaborates on the urban developments post-2000 and its challenges.

3.5.2. Post-2000s to Contemporary Times

Any passenger who goes to Itanagar through the National Highway (NH15) via Banderdewa would notice the shift from valley to hills. The public transport would change from decent buses to ramshackle rickety ones whose exhaust seems to flout the pollution regulating standards and noise. Contrary to small private cars in the plains, one would notice more private SUVs suitable for all kinds of difficult hilly roads. After crossing the check-post where the Inner Line Permit is checked, one would notice a non-tribal migrant population entering the State. These migrants offer various visible and invisible services in the capital and many are absorbed by the infrastructure projects such as highways and dam building. One would notice broadening of roads by chopping the hills baring its red soil, marked by walled compounds claiming individual ownership on both sides of the

road. The hairpin curve road slowly opens up to the towns of Naharlagun and Itanagar, both sharing similarity in terms of its continuous concretisation. One would hardly find any infrastructure that is built from local means like bamboo or wood.

At the outset, it looks like any other small town in India which is opening its market to global consumer goods chains of fashion, grocery and eateries. One can hardly find any specificity of it being a town protected as a tribal area. The condition of roads within the town resembled the same dilapidated condition of the public transport, which recently have been improved. In between one witnesses a distinct contrast of sight in the form of beautiful gated properties accommodating big western styled duplexes and bungalows. The roads are filled with private cars, mostly SUVs and it keeps the road congested with traffic jams. If one is not saved by luck, on most days at most hours of the day, one needs more than an hour to cross this 30 km stretch.

3.5.2.1. Changing Political Economy and its Impact

Framed within the discourse of globalising and modernising the city, Itanagar in recent years is readily transforming every day. It is becoming a rapidly urbanising space within the rapidly urbanising Northeast. However, when asked to early settlers and senior local inhabitants about when and how Itanagar changed, they agreed on a similar turning point. According to both, the early years were marked by ‘planned development’ with less people. They explained how the town was divided into different sectors with neat rows of government quarters and government offices, similar to other big cities in India. Roads were not congested and only a few government jeeps and buses plied. There was enough greenery with many big trees. The Senkhi river had clean water, and the residents could fish and have picnics with their families by the river. And then all of a sudden, the town changed with the turn of the century. While the term ‘neo-liberalisation’ did not come up directly in the interactions, the changes described by them pointed towards it.

They all talked about the sudden increase in the number of motor vehicles, concrete houses and buildings, and rapid expansion of the market. In other words, there was a drastic change in the landscape of the town that disrupted the natural ecology and replaced it with an infrastructural growth. The river and streams became narrower, so did the roads which were being eaten up by continuous process of concretisation. Trees were cut to clear land and build more houses and buildings. Mai (name changed, Age: 50+), one of the key

respondents of this research, identified the sudden salary hike of government employees recommended by the Sixth Pay Commission⁸ as a key reason for these changes. She explained how her husband, a government bureaucrat and herself, a government school teacher both were suddenly able to afford a better quality life as their salaries increased drastically and they had more disposable income. She said it was the same time, when many of their friends acquired material possessions like cars and motor bikes and started building concrete houses.



Figure 3.11. Zero Point Then (1980's-90s)
Source: (Arunachal Today 2020).

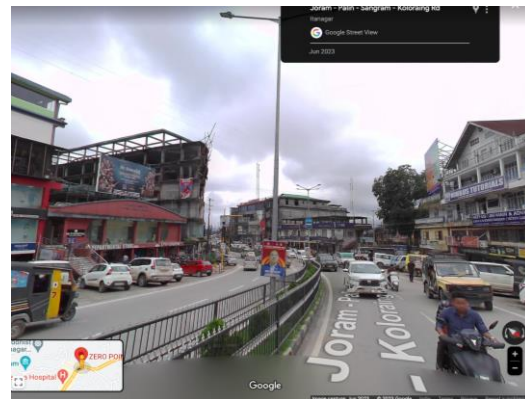


Figure 3.12. Zero Point Now (Google Street View, June 2023)⁹

As the urbanisation process of Itanagar is led by the administrative growth of the capital administration, her observations seem plausible. To put it in context, the Sixth Pay Commission recommendations were released in 2006 and came into effect by 2008. It suddenly increased the salaries of government employees almost by 40 percent (Government Employees Online Portal 2015) and they also received arrears for 18 months released in two instalments, divided into 40 and 60 percent.¹⁰ Added to it is the fact that

⁸ The Pay Commission was set up in 1947 by the Government of India to give recommendations periodically regarding changes in salary structure of its employees. From its inception till date it has released seventh pay commissions. For more, see <https://doe.gov.in/central-pay-commission>

⁹ <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Hotel+Moomsie+Itanagar/@27.1019142,93.6298582,3a,75y,90t/data=!3m8!1e5!3m6!1sAF1QipNDwVFav4NBWbw62nlxX2MOEZ-5htBQmfGtOTz!2e10!3e10!6shttps:%2F%2F1h5.googleusercontent.com%2Fp%2FAF1QipNDwVFav4NBWbw62nlxX2MOEZ-5htBQmfGtOTz%3Dw203-h114-k-no!7i1280!8i720!4m12!3m1!1s0x3744070d1fbd70e1:0xf528f75d5a8109f2!5m2!4m1!1i2!8m2!3d27.1019142!4d93.6298582!10e5!14m1!1BCgIgARICEAI!16s%2Fg%2F1hm4913lp?hl=en&entry=ttu>

¹⁰ Notification Number: G.S.R.622(E), Dated: August 29, 2008, Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance. For more, see <https://doe.gov.in/sites/default/files/6cprevised.pdf>

tribal people residing in Arunachal Pradesh and earning an income are exempted from paying income tax.

It, thus, instantly brought in new disposable income through which government employees, especially from middle to higher pay scales could acquire material possessions. Here it is important to note that the hike was not bestowed upon to the people by the government on its own merit. The Sixth Pay Commission was the result of prolonged demands and much protests by government employees as they were drawing much less salary compared to the private sector ones. The higher salaries in the private sector were mainly offered by multinational companies and big corporations who could enter the Indian economy after the neo-liberal changes of 1991. A new middle class was emerging who could afford a life that was exclusive to the upper caste and upper class who ran the Indian bureaucracy.

The neoliberalisation of the Indian economy was a turning point for the country as it led to a series of changes. The Indian State shifted from the rhetoric of socialist pattern of development to capitalist market economy. In the process, the Indian State became the promoter and facilitator of the private sector that prioritised economic growth and production through the market (Kohli, 1987, 2006). Such a shift in the nature of the State was visibly pronounced in the changes in the political economy of land (Nayak, 2013). Land reforms abandoned its socialist redistributive policies and adopted a rightward shift facilitating the growth of the land market (ibid.). It had adverse effects on the larger rural mass of poor tillers of sharecroppers and tenants and benefitted big landlords. In a way, liberalisation created two India- one with booming economic growth, markets flooded with foreign and indian goods and an advanced quality of life, and the other which was getting displaced, marginalised, impoverished. Thus, with a poor rural economy, there is a sudden growth of rapid urbanisation which reflects both high-end enclaves with fancy supermarkets and housing societies and urban sprawls with slums and ghettos.

The availability of foreign and Indian goods in the Indian markets, the rise of new consumerism slowly was visible in Itanagar too. Markets in Itanagar and Naharlagun expanded with more stores selling a variety of goods starting from grocery stores with fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) to clothes, shoes and electronics. It also led to the proliferation of concrete houses as construction materials, especially cement which was scarce, became available. The consumption patterns starting from food to clothing started

to change. For example, according to a grocery store owner, there was a demand for millet, required to prepare the local fermented drinks, which does not exist anymore. Moreover, with the rapid conversion of the local people to Christianity, such foods are prohibited. Christian conversion along with the economic changes, the tastes and preferences were increasingly getting westernised. In other words, along with the rapid urbanisation, a new urban culture was emerging.

As mentioned, through the use of *The Arunachal Pradesh Allotment of Government Land Rules, 1988*, the tribal settlers from within the State could acquire land in the capital to build homes and own commercial buildings. The new concretisation was happening in such acquired land. Here it is important to note that acquiring government land allotment was a bureaucratic process that required paperwork. Like the trajectory of the capital till then, this rule too was arbitrarily implemented where informal relations and networks were important. Thus, initially, the larger proportion of people who acquired land were government employees working at the capital administration. This meant that the tribes who had access to formal education before the Nyishis, acquired land. Visibly dominant amongst them were the Adis, Apatani, Galo, etc. But gradually, elites of respective tribes of the State started acquiring properties in the capital along with their new middle class. The relatives and kins of all these groups too could acquire land through the informal networks.

The arbitrary land allotments along with the lack of basic urban governance rules and acts, like building by-laws or town planning acts, until then, led to unplanned concretisation of the town. Further, with informal practices as a defining feature of land governance due to the lack of any comprehensive land laws in the State, it was no wonder that the capital region too shaped its own form of urban land informality. It was the basis for various forms of land encroachments, such as government quarters, government land, forests, roads, riverbeds and led to various challenges to urban planning and governance (elaborated in the next two chapters).

3.5.2.2. Emerging Neo-liberal Governance

Parallel to and in response to these changes and rapid urbanisation of the region, a separate Directorate of Town Planning was established in 2005.¹¹ It was later converted into a Department of Town Planning in the same year. Later *the Arunachal Pradesh Urban and Country Planning Act, 2007* was passed. The Act was meant ‘to provide for planning the development of urban areas and use of urban and rural land and to prevent encroachments of public lands and to lay down regulations for building constructions in urban areas’.¹² Following this, the *Arunachal Pradesh Municipal Act, 2007* was passed. Other Acts and Rules that were passed during this phase were the *Arunachal Pradesh (Conversion of Agricultural Land for Non-Agricultural Purposes in Rural Areas) Rules, 2011*, Right of Way for different roads, and Building-Bye Laws.¹³

These changes were also in accordance with the new push from the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM),¹⁴ an urban flagship program launched in December 2005 by the then United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the centre. JNNURM with an aim to ‘encourage reforms and fast track planned development of 63 identified cities’ that included all the major cities and the state capitals, focussed on ‘efficiency in urban infrastructure and service delivery mechanisms, community participation and accountability of ULB's/Parastatal agencies towards citizens’ (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Govt. of India, ND). It consisted of two sub-missions, urban infrastructure and governance, and Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP).

It is noteworthy that, JNNURM was launched to deal with the rapid urbanisation as a result of the liberalisation policies and hence dealt with wide-ranging urban sector reforms to ‘meet the development objectives’ of post-liberalisation. Thus, these reforms promised to ‘create an investor-friendly environment’ and ‘catalyse investment in urban infrastructure’. In doing so, it actually strengthened municipal governance which was

¹¹ Notification No. SUD/E-135/2005/189, Dated: June 7, 2005

¹² Notification No. LAW/LEGN-6/2007, passed on March 7, 2007, published in Arunachal Pradesh Gazette No. 18, Vol. XV, Naharlagun, Dated: March 14, 2008.

¹³ For more see, <https://itanagar.nic.in/document-category/notification-acts/>,
<https://arunachaltp.nic.in/devpactivities.html>

¹⁴ For more see, [https://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/1Mission%20Overview%20English\(1\).pdf](https://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/1Mission%20Overview%20English(1).pdf)

increasingly adopting a standardised top-down techno-managerial bureaucratic structure conducive to the policies of the elites (Hazarika and Sharma, 2022).

Coming back, in 2008, a new district with a separate District Commissioner (DC) was created for the capital.¹⁵ Named as Itanagar Capital Complex (ICC), it has three circles- Itanagar, Naharlagun and Banderdewa- within its jurisdiction. The Papum Pare district administration was moved to Yupia, a new location. Apart from the District Rural Development Authority (DRDA), Office of District Election Officer and role of Session Judge, the DC of ICC was assigned with all the powers and functions ordinarily enjoyed by all DC.¹⁶ By 2010, in exercise of the powers conferred within the Municipal Act of 2007, the municipal areas and its boundaries were notified¹⁷ followed by which municipal wards were notified on June 1, 2012¹⁸ which eventually led to the formation of the Municipality Council in 2013.

Thus, one can see how after much of the town was concretised, the laws and regulations on the built environment came in. In fact, the entire state apparatus for urban planning and governance came into being after the capital was already urbanised. Similar to the initial process, the planning and governance of Itanagar was continuing the practice of bringing in laws in retrospect. As a result, it was obvious that Itanagar faced a lot of urban challenges. For example, in the absence of a municipal body until 2013, the disposal of urban waste products was generally done by the Urban and Housing Department. Even after it was taken over by the local municipality, Itanagar is yet to manage its waste appropriately.

Currently, there is an open landfill in the outskirts of Itanagar where the wastes of the town are dumped. There are constant complaints by the residents of the town about irregular and untimely garbage collection. This makes many residents and restaurant owners to

¹⁵ Memo No- DAD-36/2007, District Administration Department, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Dated: July, 18, 2008.

¹⁶ Memo No- DAD-36/2007:240, District Administration Department, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Dated: July, 29, 2008.

¹⁷ Notification No- DTPMUN-02/2008-2009, issued on September 14, 2010, published in Arunachal Pradesh Gazette No. 124, Vol. XVII, Naharlagun, Dated: September 20, 2010.

¹⁸ Notification No- DTPMUN-02/2008-2009/340-51, issued on June 1, 2012, published in Arunachal Pradesh Gazette No. 114, Vol. XIX, Naharlagun, Dated: June 19, 2012.

simply throw their everyday waste on the roadsides, drains or open piles. Besides, waste segregation is not a common practice of the people of the town, which makes adequate solid waste management all the more difficult for the local municipality that is hugely underfunded and under-staffed. Similarly, the problem of encroachment of public land persisted, so did the construction of buildings without permissions and in violation of building by-laws. The informal ways that were ingrained in the initial process of the capital establishment became more deep-rooted. In fact, when new Acts and rules were brought in, informality got embedded in them.

As mentioned, the rapid urbanisation of Itanagar needs to be contextualised within the larger urban growth in the northeastern region and in the country witnessed after the 1990s neo-liberal changes and the steps taken to deal with it. The JNNURM that created a path to make Indian cities investment friendly by introducing structural changes through various projects was followed by successive governments. With the change in political power in the centre in 2014, JNNURM was replaced by the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT). Launched on June 25 2015 by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), AMRUT was introduced in 500 cities and towns across the country.¹⁹ The Smart City Mission (SCM) was another flagship project introduced in 2015 which aimed at ‘city improvement (retrofitting), city renewal (redevelopment) and city extension (Greenfield development) plus a Pan-city initiative in which Smart Solutions are applied covering larger parts of the city’.²⁰ To be selected under the SCM, the State governments and cities were made to compete with each other, and in the process made the bids more investment friendly for the global capital. Thus, aimed at infrastructure creation through big capital investments, the larger intent of both the missions remained the same as the JNNURM. They advanced techno-managerial form of urban governance pushed by the neoliberal policies further through the added emphasis on ‘smart’ information technology solutions.

An online search on the work done under JNNURM in Itanagar leads to no single consolidated report, but unclear and dispersed data. What one finds is that a cost of Rs 73 crore has been sanctioned under the mission for the State of Arunachal Pradesh (*The*

¹⁹ <https://mohua.gov.in/cms/amrut.php>

²⁰ <https://mohua.gov.in/cms/smart-cities.php>

Economic Times, 2015).²¹ According to Report No. 15 of 2012-13 – Performance Audit of JNNURM, it was found that

Against an allocation of Rs. 66,084.65 crore by the Planning Commission envisaged for JNNURM during the Mission period 2005-06 to 2011-12, a budgetary allocation of Rs. 45,066.23 crore was made during this period. Against this allocation, only Rs. 40,584.21 crore had been released in respect of UIG, UIDSSMT, BSUP and IHSDP, up to 2011-12.

In a written reply provided by the Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs for the Lok Sabha on the status of urban infrastructure development scheme (published by PIB on March 23, 2023), it has been found that only those projects under JNNURM in

which 50% or more of the CA had been released and physical progress was 50% or more as on 31st March, 2014 or were sanctioned during the Transition Phase (1st April, 2012 to 31st March, 2014) of the Mission, were approved for funding under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) up to 31st March, 2017. After closure of the Mission, all the projects were handed over to the States/UTs.²²

Thus, with the change from JNNURM to AMRUT, many projects remained incomplete as central assistance got stopped and expenses incurred were left redundant. For example, in Itanagar a water supply plant remains unused as pipes and outlet taps were not installed. The change in missions also led to change in the structure of governance and implementation and in some cases even officers in charge were changed, thereby providing scope for informality and unaccountability. Further, even when the funds were transferred, there were long delays, which then were parked in accounts and remained as unused balance.

The scope for accountability is seriously challenging, as apart from documents that provide roundoff figures of big capital sanctioned and spent, there is an acute lack of information regarding the progress at the ground reality. For example, according to the latest press release on AMRUT on December 22, 2022 from Public Information Bureau (PIB)

²¹ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/centre-urged-to-make-itnanagar-a-smart-city/articleshow/48860468.cms?from=mdr>

²² <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1910166>

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has approved State Annual Action Plans (SAAPs) of all the States/Union Territories (UTs) amounting to ₹77,640 crore for the entire Mission period, which includes committed Central Assistance (CA) of ₹35,990 crore. So far, States/UTs have taken up 5,873 projects worth ₹82,222 crore, of which 4,676 projects worth ₹32,793 crore have been completed, and another 1,197 projects worth ₹49,430 crore have been grounded which are at various stages of implementation. Further, overall works worth around ₹66,313 crore have been physically completed and expenditure of ₹59,615 crore has been incurred.²³

However, another government document uploaded by the same Ministry shows Rs 66,750 crores as the total funds allocation for project under (AMRUT) 2.0 of which Rs 225 crores is for Arunachal Pradesh.²⁴ Thus, public information is not only inaccessible, but is also confusing with different figures. Nonetheless, the move towards techno-managerial top-down urban governance is making relentless progress. This is not to say that such a governance model is able to make progress in appropriate forecasting and management of growth. Instead, it is just shifting its approach to planning of cities, in a way that dynamic processes of informality become inherently part of it (Roy, 2005).

In the bid to become ‘smart’ and attract big capital investments, Itanagar too participated in the SCM and was selected in the fourth round in 2018. Similar to JNNURM and AMRUT, there is little public information available for the Itanagar SCM project. When this researcher visited the office for the SCM in Itanagar on September 6, 2019, the CEO was yet to take charge and begin functioning. The researcher learnt that the implementation of the SCM is done by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) set up under the Companies Act, 2013 with joint 50:50 equity shareholding by the State and the Urban Local Body (ULB). The SPVs then convert the smart city proposals into projects through Project Management Consultants by calling tenders.

A survey on the India Investment Grid, the website that hosts information regarding investment opportunities in India to attract foreign and private capital shows how most of

²³<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1885837#:~:text=Atal%20Mission%20for%20Rejuvenation%20and,and%20towns%20across%20the%20country.>

²⁴ https://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/AMRUT-2_0-Fund-Allocation.pdf

the consultants for Itanagar Smart City project were private firms from outside the State.²⁵ For example, the Beautification of Indira Gandhi Park (Project Id 22252) under the Smart City Project is implemented by Rudrabhishek Enterprise Limited (REPL).²⁶ It is an ‘Integrated Urban Development & Infrastructure Consultant’ from Uttar Pradesh. According to the project details, the project aims at ‘renovation and modernisation’ and comes at a cost of Rs 12 Crores.²⁷ A private firm that has close associations with different Government flagship projects like the SCM, REPL has a few other projects under the same head of ‘renovation and modernisation projects’ and ‘open space management projects’ in Itanagar, with a budget ranging from 2-3 to 75 crores.

Right after the selection of Itanagar in SCM, the Itanagar Municipal Council that came into operation in 2013 became a municipal corporation from 2019. The shift from council to corporation increased top-down bureaucratisation of urban governance, again in line with the above discussed changes. Gogoi (2020) observes similar bureaucratisation of Guwahati city. By analysing the change in the institutional framework of land governance, she argues that the process of land governance operating through ambiguous bureaucratic policies and practices have led to a systemic structural violence against the people in the form of eviction and dispossession from traditional spaces in Guwahati (ibid).

Advertising all the flagship projects, starting from Swachh Bharat Mission, the SCM and AMRUT, a video hosted in the government website of Itanagar Municipal Corporation presented different sanitised clean glimpses of Itanagar and aerial views of express highways, airports and big infrastructures like the imposing and grand Legislative Assembly building. It highlighted how there has been a new focus on information education and communication to make the public aware about the waste segregation and keep Itanagar clean. It mentioned that both the engineering wings of Itanagar Municipal Corporation and Itanagar Smart City Project Corporation are working relentlessly to enhance the beauty of the town.²⁸

²⁵ <https://indiainvestmentgrid.gov.in/opportunities/aranachal-pradesh?type=3%2C0&district=17%2C19%2C20%2C21%2C22%2C856%2C802%2C23%2C24%2C803%2C25%2C26%2C27%2C804%2C28%2C29%2C800%2C30%2C801%2C18%2C31%2C32%2C33%2C34%2C35%2C36>

²⁶ <https://indiainvestmentgrid.gov.in/opportunities/project/22252>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ <https://www.imc.arunachal.gov.in/>

Similarly, the open space management projects under SCM in Itanagar too seem to convert urban commons to public spaces which are privatised and regulated to earn revenue, as witnessed in Guwahati, the largest city in the Northeast (Hazarika and Sharma, 2022). Such an exclusionary form of urban governance caters to a specific class of citizens, but emanates from ‘the rubric of urban development for the “public”’ (ibid., p. 126). To sum up, these projects, similar to Smart City projects in other Indian cities are premised on the aesthetic sensibilities of a ‘world-class’ city, which inevitably are gentrified ideas of urban space creation that caters to an exclusive public generally comprising the new middle class and the elites, thereby marginalising the people’s ‘right to the city’ (Hazarika, 2022). It is thus, not surprising to see that these projects focused on beautification of certain gentrified gated spaces like the State Legislative Assembly compound or the Indira Gandhi Park.

The news of Itanagar being selected as the smart city is celebrated as a ‘clear and positive’ sign of ‘the Centre’s intentions in developing the frontier state of Arunachal Pradesh’ (*The Arunachal Time*, 2018).²⁹ It reflects McDuire-Ra and Lai’s (2019) observations regarding smart city bids in the Northeast. They analysed ten smart city bids from the region and argued that these bids are a continuation of the relation of patronage and dependency between the Centre and the State. Further they accelerate the process of integration of these frontier spaces within the ambit of the national territory. In the process it opens new avenues for the neoliberal economy.

As discussed, the region has experienced the latest neoliberal thrust of roads and railways infrastructure building. While the environmental feasibility of such projects has been highly contested, they nonetheless have greatly improved the communication to the capital. The Naharlagun Railway Station, the nearest rail-road to Itanagar became operational from April 2014. The National Highway (NH 415) that starts from Banderdewa in Lakhimpur District of Assam which has been the main entry point to the capital for the longest time, now ends at Gohpur in Biswanath District of Assam. Thus, from the plains of Assam, Itanagar is connected through two entry points. The 30 km stretch was an old road that was taken over by the National Highway Authority (NHA) for four-lane expansion in order to connect to the new airport at Hollongi. Named after the indigenous faith of Donyi Polo, it is around 25 kms away from Itanagar towards Gohpur,

²⁹ <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/01/20/itanagar-is-finally-smart/>

and the first commercial flight has been operational from November 28, 2022. The airport being powered by solar power has been highly advertised as the first greenfield project and with it, the four-lane expansion in connection with the airport was greenwashed. This has been a recent trend in the larger global carbon politics where false greenwashing is used by multinational corporations and national governments to earn green credits, instead of making sincere efforts at climate change mitigation.

To sum up, the urban development of Itanagar from 2000 onwards has been more drastic, driven by the state authorities and private finance involving big capital and infrastructural push. It has increasingly adopted an exclusionary form of governance that focuses on revenue generation from the public and benefits the private investors. It pushes the tribals to the margins while a section of the tribal elites benefits from the process of accumulation through continuous dispossession and marginalisation. As discussed by many urban scholars, it also provides scope for informality to thrive as policies and rules offer ambiguity which is seen used by both the rich and powerful and the poor and marginalised as they make the city their home.

Conclusion

The chapter tried to present a decolonial history of Itanagar by critically presenting the way its history has been wilfully misrepresented. It highlighted the inherent epistemic bias in the documented formal history of the capital. Such a history does not give due recognition to the various levels and degrees of injustices committed by the British colonists and the post-colonial Indian State against the local people, the Nyishi tribe. Even though the logic of both the parties were different, the extent of epistemic bias and misrepresentation mirrored each other. The chapter then presented alternate narratives whereby local sources and Nyishi voices were given space, thereby providing a scope for a decolonial discourse on Itanagar.

The chapter discussed the transition of Itanagar and its rapid urbanisation. It underlined the capital's different transitory phases from its early selection process to the administrative set up, marking the beginning of urbanisation, rapid growth thereafter and contemporary changes. The chapter contextualised these transformations within the changing political economy of the State of Arunachal Pradesh and larger forces and processes of national and transnational transition.