

## CHAPTER 4

### **Violating Indigenous Rights: Narratives on Dispossession and Marginalisation**

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

One can draw parallels with the concept of *Kaghazi Raj* or government by paper (Moir, 1993) and the burgeoning literature from South Asia on state bureaucracy and documents. This form of governance can be traced to the colonial operations of the East Indian Company in India. Later the British Empire established its authority and legitimacy by expanding the *Kaghazi Raj* through an incredibly complex and comprehensive system of writing and reporting. That the post-colonial Indian State has, in crucial respects, retained the British colonial state's institutional structure and wider legal and cultural practices of rule, has been said many times in different contexts (e.g. in Chatterjee, 2004) – as cited in (Mathur, 2015, p.3). It becomes important to locate how such a form of governance by paper manifests itself in Itanagar when it interacts with the previous discussion in chapter two on colonial and post-colonial frontier governance and contemporary developmentalism of Arunachal Pradesh.

To substantiate how such a process manifests, the chapter discusses two main stories with many subplots and backstories that unfolded in the present day Ganga Village, a census village within the Itanagar Capital Complex administrative division. Before beginning the

stories, the chapter first provides a brief introductory note on the field site and then moves to the stories. The first is the story of the Geological Survey of India (GSI), a Central Government organisation of national importance, that opened a campus in Itanagar to mark the frontier policy imperative of state-building in the region. The story discusses how land for the GSI-State Unit Itanagar campus was acquired dispossessing the local tribals of Ganga village and how the office came about, what were the challenges and opportunities and how and in what form it continues to exist in spite of various challenges.

The second story is of a Nyishi man who has been going through a prolonged struggle to acquire land in the capital to build a house for his family. In the process, his struggle had come in conflict with the law and he had to face both the police and judiciary. Yet is nowhere near to achieving the much prized formal land document to his name as the government has disputed his claims. For the purpose of this research, he has been named Mr Rakhetana, a Nyishi word meaning ‘determined to do anything’ to represent his struggles. The chapter kept his clan ‘Techi’ because it happens to be one of the biggest clans amongst the Nyishi. The chapter presents his detailed life narrative as a case study which throws light to the many layers of tribal dispossession and marginalisation experienced by the people of Ganga village.

The chapter uses official and unofficial documents that dates back to the early 1970’s when the work for capital establishment began in Itanagar. While some of these documents were collected from offices and online sites by the researcher, most of it were painstakingly and patiently collected by Mr. Rakhetana Techi over the years to substantiate his claim over the disputed land. The documents that he provided included court proceedings, different government notifications, newspaper cuttings, civil society documents and official interactions like applications and their replies, which he collected by filing many RTI<sup>1</sup> applications. On learning the research objectives, he generously shared these data with the researcher. For data corroboration, apart from the documentary evidence and in-depth interview with him, a few more interviews were conducted with residents from the village. Thus, both the story of GSI and Mr. Rakhetana Techi are used as a thread on which

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<sup>1</sup> RTI stands for Right to Information. It was passed as an Act of law in 2005 and mandates the Indian government to timely respond to citizen requests for government information. The main purpose of the RTI Act is “to empower the citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the Government, contain corruption, and make our democracy work for the people in real sense”. For more see. <https://rti.gov.in/index.asp>.

documents from early 1970's onwards are woven to present how indigenous land rights are violated by formal institutions of governance and tribal people are dispossessed in the process.

Important here is to note that the researcher has not contacted any officials from GSI, as the focus of the research was to understand narratives of dispossession and marginalisation. Further, guided by decolonial research practices, the researcher has adopted a bottom-up approach where agency and space is provided to the people's narratives than the formal official ones. For the latter the researcher has critically engaged with the content of the official documents from GSI, which includes letters, applications and notifications.

#### 4.1. A Brief Introduction of Ganga Village

According to Census 2011, Ganga is a medium size village in Itanagar Circle of Papum Pare district comprising 86 families. The total population was 569 persons including 238 males, 270 females and 61 children under 0-6 years. Based on the male and female population (table 4.1), the sex ratio of the village was 1134 which is higher than the state average of 938. However, the child sex ratio for the same period was 906, which is starkly lower than the state average of 972. In terms of literacy rate, Ganga had an average of 77.18% which is substantially higher than the state average of 65.38%. It falls under 13-Itanagar Legislative Assembly Constituency and West Parliamentary Constituency.

Particulars	Males	Females	Total
Population	238	270	508
Children (0-6)	32	29	61
Scheduled Tribe	199	227	426
Literacy Rate	83.50%	71.78%	77.18%

**Table 4.1.** 2011 Census Details of Ganga Village<sup>2</sup>

According to a latest report on Itanagar, the pattern of urban growth and development in the Capital Region is linear, with poles and nodes of commercial and related activities

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/village/262443-ganga-arunachal-pradesh.html>

along the National Highway (NH415).<sup>3</sup> The report, a draft proposal published by the Department of Town Planning and Urban Local Bodies (TPULB) in 2022, is under the AMRUT scheme and uses Remote Sensing Instruments (RSI) to formulate a comprehensive developmental plan for the Capital Region. The report identified three urban corridors, and the Chimpu-Ganga-Itanagar Corridor is one of them. In other words, although governed as a census village, Ganga has already merged with Itanagar urban areas physically. Similar to other village settlements in and around Itanagar and Naharlagun, it forms a part of the larger urban fabric with strong physical, socio-economic, infrastructural linkages.

The rural-urban continuum of Ganga village can be identified by the 2012 notification<sup>4</sup> of Itanagar Municipal area and boundary under the Arunachal Pradesh Municipal Act, 2007 (Act No. 4 of 2008) as the list includes many of its adjacent areas like New Chimi area, GSI colony and Police Headquarters and adjusted a few private houses too. A look at the Municipal ward boundary shows how Ganga village is excluded by the narrow Senki river and roads to keep it under the jurisdiction of Panchayat. There is a possibility that when the census 2021 (delayed by Covid-19 pandemic) gets released, it may recognise Ganga as urban.

The rural-urban continuum of Ganga village is a crucial factor for this chapter as it means that the formal land governance also falls within this continuum and can create confusions amongst the common public regarding its jurisdictional status. Thus, for the Ganga village proper which comes under Panchayat, the formal land document would be Land Possession Certificate (LPC) and not Land Allotment Passbook (LAP) which is issued for urban areas. But as mentioned above, the current municipality boundary already accommodates a few private houses within Ganga village as urban, creating confusion for people who want to apply for a new formal land document to the state authorities. Further, as the State is largely rural and for rural land LPC are issued, people very often use LPC

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<sup>3</sup><https://arunachaltp.nic.in/sites/default/files/Itanagar%20Master%20Plan%202022%20Narrative%20Report.pdf>

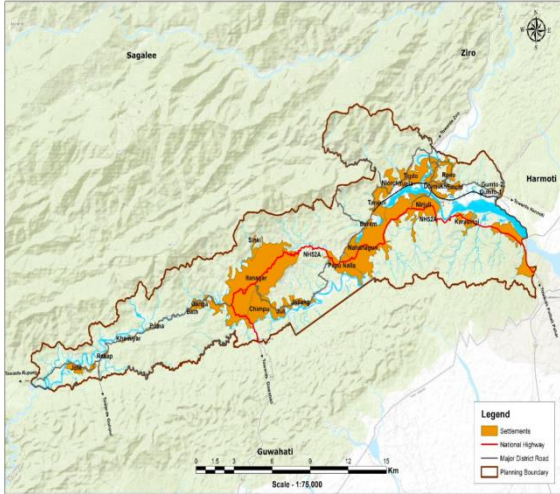
<sup>4</sup> Notification No. DTP/MUN-02/2008-09/4277-89, Issued on November 20, 2012, Published in the Arunachal Pradesh Gazette No. 234, Vol. XIX, December 7, 2012

to mean LAP too, undermining the technicalities of administrative difference between the two.

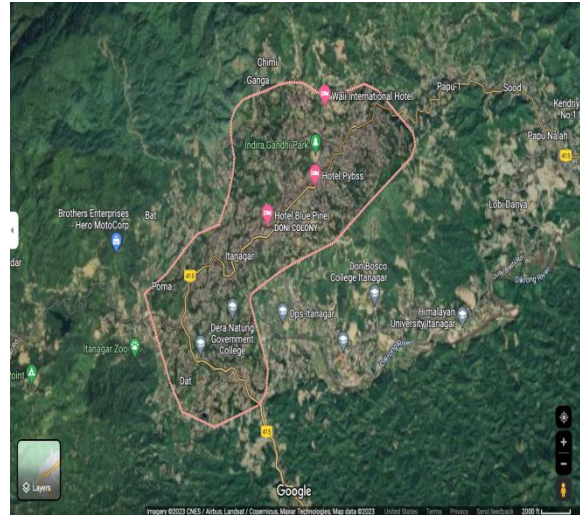
The 2011 census data on work profile too reflects Ganga's urban characteristics. According to it, out of 138 who were engaged in work activities, only 41 were cultivators (owner or co-owner) while 6 were agricultural labourers. Thus, there were more service sector employees compared to agriculture as the primary source of income. Compared to the other two corridors, Naharlagun-Nirjuli and Doimukh-Yupia which are comparatively flat, the Chimpu-Ganga-Itanagar corridor has a contoured topography. It is just around five kilometres away from the tehsil headquarter at Itanagar and 25 km away from the district headquarters at Yupia. However, after the formation of Itanagar Capital Complex District (ICC), the district headquarter is also just within reach.

The village is bounded by the Senki river (also a stream of Dikrong River) in the east, Chandra Nagar in the south and southeast, and Chimi village in the north-east and in the west and north-west lies Chimi and the Itanagar Wildlife Sanctuary (IWS). Map 4.1. taken from the draft proposal report on Itanagar by Dept. of TPULB mentioned above, locates Ganga just below Bat, and in the south of the NH415 instead of north, which is the real location. As the researcher could not procure or trace any official map of Ganga village, this study uses Google Map to explain its location. But even with Google Maps, its location is neither clearly marked nor does it show the village boundary properly. Further, as Google Maps allows public interface in introducing new entries such as stores and other landmark locations, there are two different entries in two different areas as Ganga, which needs to be corrected.

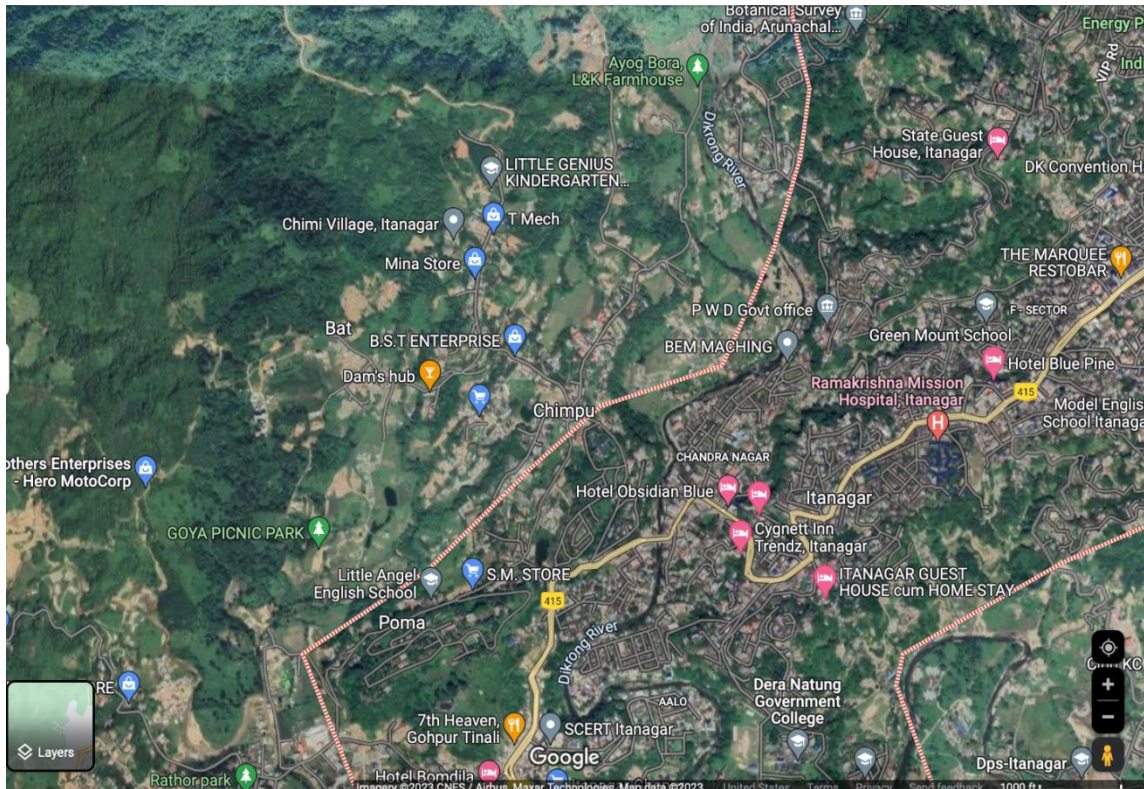
Map 4.2. is the boundary map of Itanagar urban area according to Google, where Ganga is placed below Chimi, further up north and north-east from its actual region. However, the real location of Ganga is north of NH415 as shown in Map 4.3 and Map 4.4 both above and below the Chimpu area and on both sides of the urban area demarcation line in Google Maps. Map 4.4. shows different landmarks within Ganga village like the Ganga Boxing club, GSI office compound, Ganga Basti village Church, Higher Secondary School and its playground.



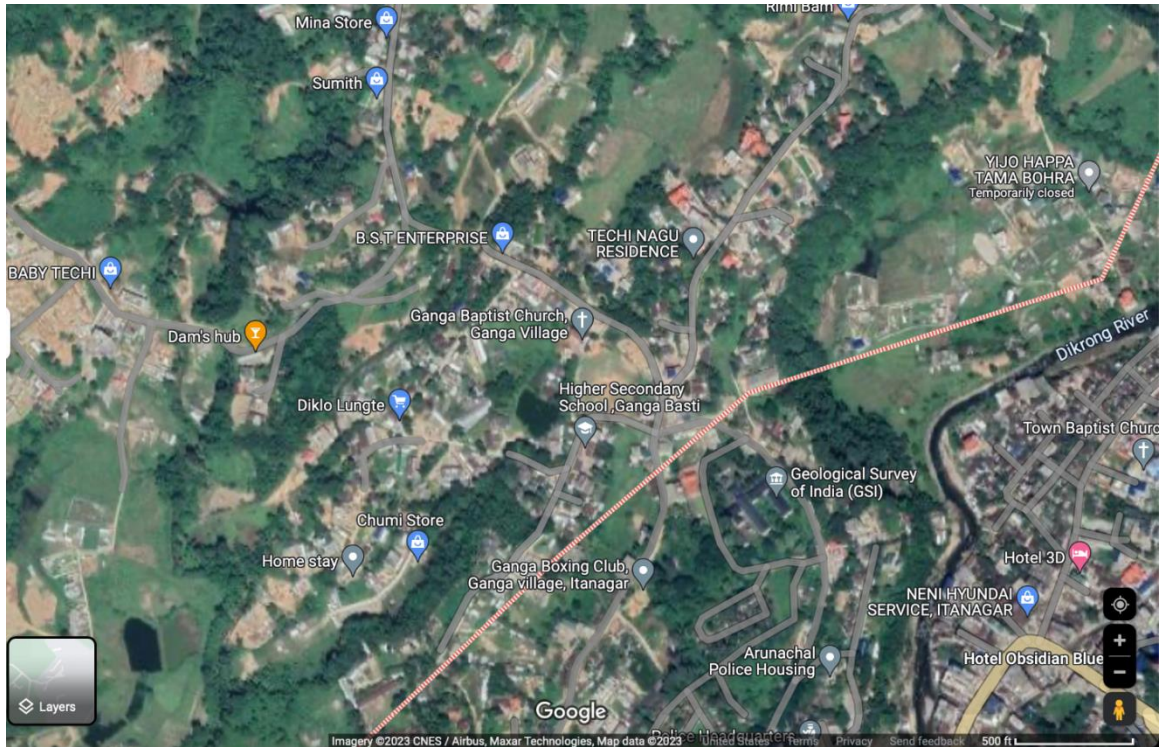
**Map 4.1.** Location Map of Ganga Village within Itanagar Proposed Plan  
**Source:** Dept. of TPULB Website



**Map 4.2.** Itanagar Area Boundary Source: GoogleMaps  
**Source:** Dept. of TPULB Website



**Map 4.3.** Zoomed Boundary between Itanagar urban area and Ganga Village



**Map 4.4.** Zoomed further with details within Ganga Village

Originally known as Gamga, meaning one that bites frequently in Nyishi, the village was named after a famed female mithun. However, when officials documented the name, they renamed it as Ganga (Das, 2023, p.62-63). As discussed, its renaming reflects the erasure of indigenous history of the place and imposition of a new culture and identity through non-indigenous nomenclature. Nonetheless, the village is dominantly tribal in composition with a homogenous population belonging to the Nyishi tribe and within the tribe too, the village mostly comprises a few particular clans, such a Nabam, Bodh, Techi.

#### **4.2. Story 1: The Geological Survey of India, Itanagar Campus**

The geological investigation in India that began with amateur British geologists in the early 19th century took the form of Geological Survey of India (GSI) in 1851 by the East India Company (EIC). Established primarily to find coal deposits for the Railways which EIC was constructing all across the country to extract resources, GSI was handedover to the Indian State once it gained independence. Today, it has become a ‘repository of geo-science information required in various fields in the country’ and ‘has also attained the

status of a geo-scientific organisation of international repute'.<sup>5</sup> According to the official website of GSI,

The main functions of GSI relate to creation and updation of national geoscientific information and mineral resource assessment. These objectives are achieved through ground surveys, air-borne and marine surveys, mineral prospecting and investigations, multi-disciplinary geoscientific, geo-technical, geo-environmental and natural hazards studies, glaciology, seismotectonic study, and carrying out fundamental research.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, it is an organisation of national importance that is attached to the Ministry of Mines and comes under the control of the Central Government of India. Its headquarter is at Kolkata with six regional offices located at Lucknow, Jaipur, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Shillong and Kolkata and also has State Unit offices in almost all States of the country.

In the northeastern region, the first GSI office was established at Shillong in 1961 for the then undivided Assam Circle. It is interesting to note that even though the engagement of GSI in the northeastern region goes back to the colonial period when its first director, Dr T Oldham conducted the boundary commission to demarcate the border between the then Burma and Manipur State, a British Protectorate in 1853, there was a long vacuum in the post-independence period. After the Assam Circle was established, systematic and detailed explorations began in the region.

In 1969, the Arunachal Pradesh (AP) Circle was established after which geological exploration of its territory began (Briefing Book, Geological Survey of India, North Eastern Region, Government of India, 2013). To note, the establishment of the Assam Circle was done just a year before the 1962 war with China and already when border tensions had begun.

Similarly, the AP Circle was established seven years after the war and that too was not within the hill territories of erstwhile NEFA. Thus, operations were conducted from a temporary office at Tezpur, district headquarter of Sonitpur in Assam that borders central

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.gsi.gov.in/webcenter/portal/OCBIS/pages\\_pageaboutus/pageaboutgsi](https://www.gsi.gov.in/webcenter/portal/OCBIS/pages_pageaboutus/pageaboutgsi)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid



Arunachal Pradesh. It was only after Arunachal Pradesh attained Union Territory status in 1972, that discussions were held regarding a permanent office for GSI- AP circle and shift from Tezpur to a site within the territory of Arunachal Pradesh was mooted. Thus, a site inspection team visited Itanagar on October 8, 1976 and a site was finalised at Ganga Camp across Sakhey river (should have been Senki river) on November 9, 1976 and tentative land was allotted by C. Rama Rao, the Chief Engineer of the Central Public Works Department (CPWD).<sup>7</sup>

Here it is important to reiterate that the formal governance in Arunachal till then was a single-line system of administration without many key departments. There was neither a land management department nor a comprehensive formal land revenue system at place. Also as mentioned, the construction work for the new capital set-up was going on in Itanagar without land being formally acquired till in 1978. With Itanagar not being an existing town or administrative centre, the CPWD, a central government department, took charge of constructing all offices and residential quarters. CPWD thus suggested GSI authorities to transfer funds, so that they can set up its campus. The GSI site inspection team toured around and saw the plan of construction for the new capital at Itanagar accompanied by the Chief Engineer and Senior Architect. But the team consulted no locals while finalising the tentative land allotment.

The GSI team again visited Itanagar to finalise their site and take possession of land allotment in February, 1977. However, the team learnt that land would be allotted to GSI free of cost but the actual site of the land is not yet allocated as the entire plan of the Itanagar capital site is under revision at the highest level in Delhi and the final decision would be taken in March.<sup>8</sup> GSI officially got two sites of approximately 20 Hectares next to each other near the Senki river on March 12, 1977.<sup>9</sup> According to the details of the map attached with the letter (signed by Chief Town Planner of Arunachal Pradesh), the site was

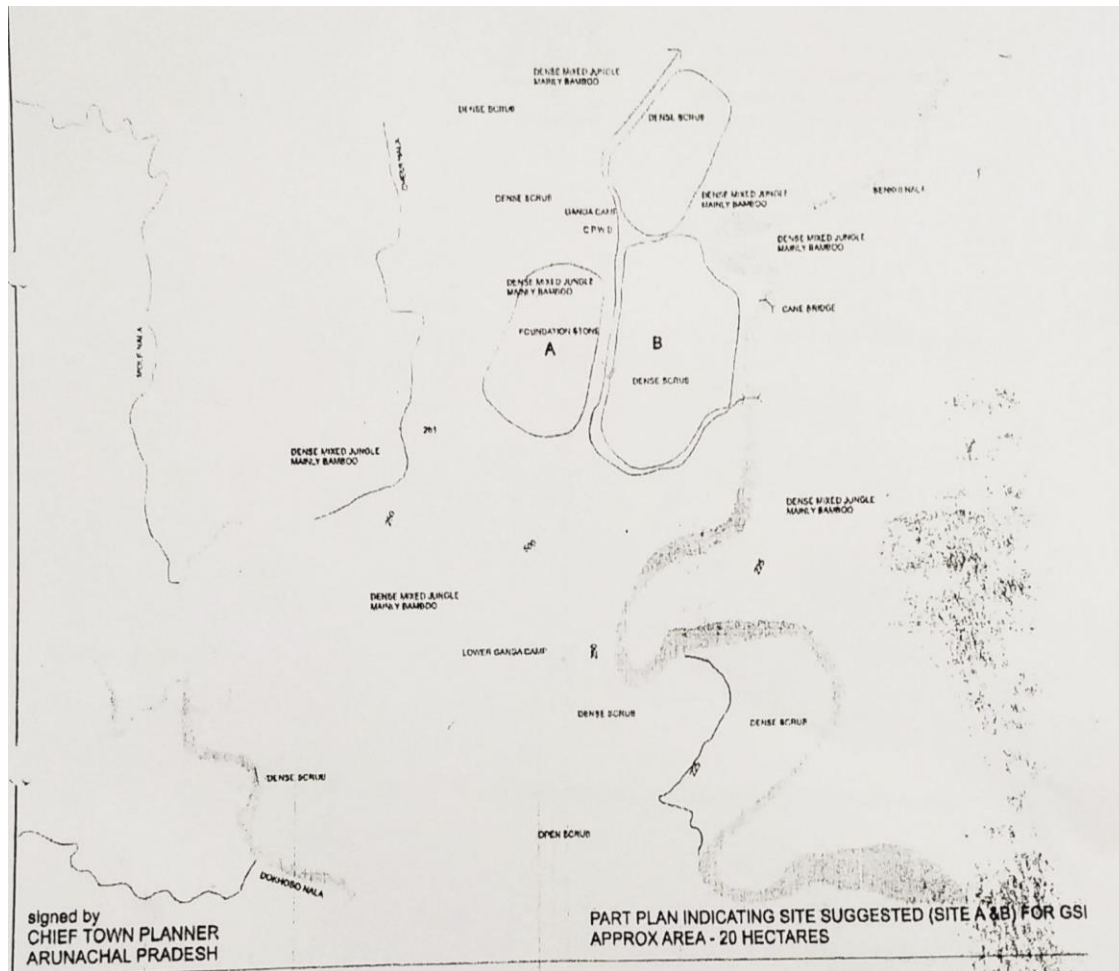
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<sup>7</sup> Letter No. 1769/63FP/APC/76, Dated Nov 12, 1976, from the Director of AP Circle, GSI to the Deputy Director General of GSI, North Eastern Region.

<sup>8</sup> Letter No. 390/D-11011/2/Est./76, Dated Feb 28, 1977, from the Director of AP Circle, GSI to the Director of Administration, GSI.

<sup>9</sup> Letter No CEAP/WB-56/76, Dated March 12, 1977, from the Office of the Chief Engineer, Arunachal Pradesh Zone CPWD to the Director, AP-Circle, GSI, copy to the Chief Town Planner, the Executive Engineer, Capital Project Division no III, Superintendent Engineer, Circle II.

filled with dense mixed jungle of mainly bamboo and dense scrub with an approximate area of 20 hectares (Map 4.5).



**Map 4.5.** GSI Land Allotment Map

**Source:** Office of the Chief Engineer (obtained through RTI by Mr. Rakhetana Tech)

As intimated earlier regarding funds to be disbursed to CPWD for construction of quarters and office, the GSI approached the Ministry of Works and Housing, New Delhi for funds.<sup>10</sup> The letter also reiterated for the record that GSI has assumed that land was allotted to them for free based on the previous letters on March 12 and 25 of 1977. Accordingly, the construction of the campus was carried out in 1978-79 which consisted of an office-cum-laboratory building and 89 nos of residential staff quarters (Type-I to Type-V) for its

<sup>10</sup> Letter No 0/0/RAO/70/77-APC (Const.), Dated April 13, 1977, from the Regional Administrative Officer, GSI, NER to the Director General, GSI, Copy to the Director of AP Circle, GSI

officers and staff members. Of the initially allotted 20 hectares, the campus used less than 10 hectares land.

One needs to reiterate to emphasise that till then, the GSI authorities had no direct communication with the local community of Ganga village area. They were neither part of the early construction process that began before land acquisition nor were part of land acquisition process later. Even when land was acquired, it has been discussed in the previous chapter as to how local people were not part of any consultative process, but the government used the colonial tool of Forests Regulations to possess community forests under state control. Although there were no recorded large scale mass protests against such crude form of dispossession, it would be wrong to assume there was no resistance on ground at all. In fact, as early as the early 1980's there were memorandums against such land usurpations by the CPWD who was in charge of all initial construction in Itanagar. The researcher got hold of one such application by the local villagers of Ganga dated on September 20, 1984 and it warrants a discussion in the context of the story of GSI (Figure. 4.1).

The application written by the villagers of Ganga under the banner of Branch Block Congress Committee (Independent), the local level political body, was addressed to the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh. Its subject was 'strong demand' for the Ganga Village boundary but the application addressed more issues. The application was written in English with thumbprint signatories and was filled with many linguistic and grammatical errors. Whoever drafted the letter surely struggled to express the concerns of the villagers in the foreign language. For them, English was the imposed tongue of office, power and rule. But they inherited the expressions of high reverence and servitude to authority well, one that the colonial powers demanded and were used to from its subjects during the long rule in India. To quote the letter begins as-

With due respect and most humbly we beg to state that we the undersigned persons are inhabitant of Ganga Village are highly request your honour for your kind necessary action please, (sic)

To,  
 The Hon'ble Chief Minister,  
 Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh,  
Itanagar.  
 (Through proper channel)  
 Dated Naharlogun, the 20th September '84.

Sub:- STRONG DEMANDED OF GANGA VILLAGE BOUNDARY.

Sir,  
 With due respect and most humbly we beg to state that we the undersigned persons are inhabitant of Ganga Village are highly request your honour for your kind necessary action please.

(1) Sir, our villager's are suffering due to boundary problem. But we have already permanently settled up at Ganga from generations to generations, where our forefather's and father settled in this place and left their souls at Ganga, in this connection, we have submitted several memorandum to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh but no action is taken us. But we are surprised to know that some Government department, such a C.P.W.D. is disturbance to our villagers as soon as Govt. plain is taken now. In this connection, we the B.B.C.C. (I), are highly requested to settle our boundary problems and your honour may be immediate necessary action please.

(2) Sir, we have already occupied some Paddy-field under the capital area. which we have already occupied such a place. We was established our paddy field since very beginning of our livelihood.

Hence, it is our strong demand before you that any cost we are not like to leave our paddy field.

(3) On 29-11-1977 we requested to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, to extended the made to us by the Govt. in 1979, than C.P.D. Shri G.M. Thungo, had sanctioned Rs.4,000/- (Rupees Four thousand) only, for construction and clearing of road for the Model village, just it is usless, in this connection. We are kindly request to provide 1 K.M. Road for model village Road.

Therefore, we are earnestly request your goodself to justified the case with immediate effect and necessary steps to materlise matter to the high authorities of Arunachal Pradesh and to provid some facilities such a water supply and electricity.

This is for your immediate necessary action please.

*Techi Panior*  
 Yours faithfully,  
 ( Shri Teli Murkhi )  
 Vice-President,  
 B.B.C.C. (I),  
 Ganga Village,  
 Itanagar,  
 Arunachal Pradesh.

1. Shri Techi Panior,  
 General Secretary,  
 B.B.C.C. (I),  
 Itanagar/Naharlogun
2. Shri Techi Pacha,  
 Jt. Secretary, B.B.C.C. (I),  
 Itanagar,
3. Shri Techi Bojum,

Figure. 4.1. Application to the CM by Ganga Villagers, Source: Mr. Takhetana Tech

The issue seemed to be the sudden takeover of the paddy fields located in the foothill plains by the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) which was in charge of the early phase of construction. There was a mention of prior memorandums submitted to the state authorities. Through this application the aggrieved villagers requested for immediate actions that could give them their wet-rice cultivation fields back. They traced their sudden loss of paddy fields to CPWD and a lack of proper demarcation of village boundaries.

To lay claim over their land, they mentioned that they have been ‘permanently settled (in) Ganga from generations to generations’ and ‘their forefathers and fathers’ have ‘left their souls’ in this village. As such they have ‘already occupied’ paddy fields in the capital area which has been ‘their livelihood’ and do not intend to leave. Finally, through the application they also wanted to inform the government that the sanctioned amount of Rs. 4000 for construction and clearing of road for the model village of Ganga has not been done satisfactorily. They requested to provide a 1km road to their village and provide some facilities such as water supply and electricity.

From the application, a few points are clear. First is that there was no mention of GSI in the application. Thus, it seems like the GSI campus had not been fully operational till 1984. As recalled by Mr. Rakhetana Techhi, it was only during 1985-86, the campus became operational. Secondly, the grievances were made against their paddy fields alone, but not for all the community forest land that had been acquired by the government for the capital establishment. A plausible explanation for it might be that the local people were unaware of the extent of dispossession that they eventually had to face. In other words, it is also reasonable to conclude that the state authorities had not taken prior informed consent through proper fair public consultative process that should be done for any form of land acquisition.

When finally, the GSI authorities took over, they started functioning from the built campus area which lacked a proper boundary wall. As the built campus used less than 10 hectares land, the remaining allotted land too was not demarcated properly and people from Ganga village could continue wet rice cultivation in their land. In other words, GSI authorities functioned with flexible boundary arrangements and entry of villagers to the allotted land within the campus were not barred. Such incursions were not dealt with the required seriousness as most of the boundary arrangements of other government premises in the early days of capital establishment functioned in a similar lackadaisical manner.

However, it is not to say that the locals faced no troubles to access their land. Sometimes they did face hurdles from GSI guards and also higher authorities. These everyday frictions and contention shaped a strenuous relationship between the GSI authorities and the local people of Ganga village. Further, as GSI authorities had not employed any local people, even at Group C and D level, the latter's resentments towards the former grew stronger. The office staff were mostly outsiders from other States of India. From time to time, some

of the everyday frictions and contentions had resulted into bigger disagreements and the GSI authorities had faced security issues from the local people.

Thus, when in 2004, the GSI authorities decided to build a wall to secure and clearly demarcate the boundary between the campus and the village, the simmering anger and grievances of the local villagers against the GSI authorities came to the fore. Villagers whose wet-rice fields were inside the campus faced the reality of losing their land permanently. Similar to their request to clearly demarcate the village boundary during the 1980's when their land was acquired by CPWD, they again made pleas to the government. The letter dated on February 3, 2004, addressed to the Deputy Commissioner, Papum Pare District requested necessary repossession and re-demarcation of GSI campus, in the light of the possible 'encroachment of village land' due to the construction of concrete boundary wall. There were seven signatories, with five ex-Gaon Panchayat members led by Techhi Necha, Anchal Samiti Member.

The same group submitted another application to the Deputy Director, GSI on March 1, 2004 with copies of the application sent to the Executive Engineer, CPWD Tezpur office and Nirjuli Sub-Division office and to the construction agency. They also attached the former application to DC. In this letter they explained how they faced land alienation as their land had been continuously appropriated with the expansion of the capital project. Citing a report named *Krishnamurthy Committee Report*<sup>11</sup> that had downsized the staff capacity of the GSI campus, they reasoned the need to redistribute the unused land to the rightful tiller of the soil. They reiterated the fact that since the establishment of the GSI campus in the site, land has been disputed between the village community and the GSI authority.

Contrary to this group, the young educated youths of the village saw the boundary construction as a possible work opportunity. They requested the authorities to allot them the boundary wall construction contract. Dated on February 2, 2004, addressed to the Executive Engineer, Common Public Works Department (CPWD) and signed by the president of Yuva Morcha and five others from the village, the application sought the boundary wall construction contract. The application is short with two small paras. They first mentioned that till then no one from the village has got any direct employment or any

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<sup>11</sup> No further information could be traced.

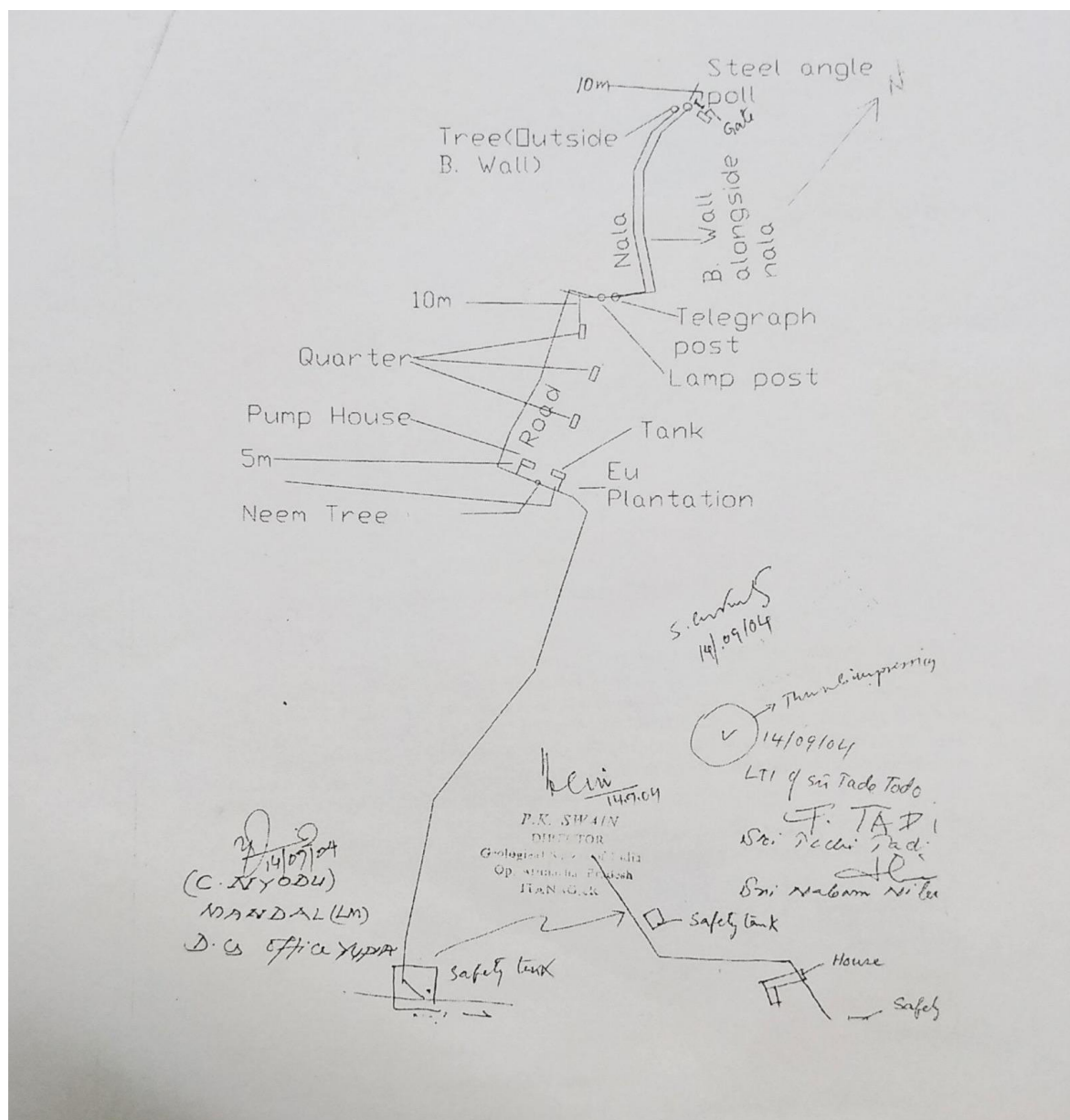
contract in lieu of the land given to GSI by the villagers. Hence, they request the contract for boundary wall construction in the second para, followed by their signatures. The letter was forwarded by the then minister of Public Works Department (PWD) supporting their case, with his signature on the 4<sup>th</sup> and finally submitted on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2004.

The youth group was also able to obtain a copy of the letter from the secretary of the GSI Employee Association addressed to the Director General of GSI requesting recruitment of Group C and D posts in the Itanagar circle written in January 2004. The application had four main points, each highlighting an issue. First, the secretary emphasised on the 'security problem' connected with the second point of lack of recruitment of local people who were the 'land donors' of the campus. Thus, the second point stressed on new recruitments at the Group C and D level, which according to his knowledge had not been done for a long time. Third, the application mentioned the need to conduct interviews in Itanagar, instead of Shillong which was the practice, in order to give the local people a chance to get recruited. Finally, he forwarded the case of three 'hardworking' workers who were placed as contingent workers from 1993-95 to 2004 and argued for their 'justice'. One amongst the three was Mr. Rakhetana Techhi and the background story of seeking justice is discussed in the next section.

The fact that the secretary of GSI Employee Association too attest that no locals have been recruited was used as attachment to the request letter for boundary contract work by the youth group. Thus, from all these communications during the early 2004, matters were made to move within different government offices. This can be gauged from a letter from the Director of the GSI to the Executive Engineer (Civil), CPWD on September 22, 2004. The letter with the subject as 'boundary line of GSI premise' stated,

As per the directive of Deputy Commissioner, District Papum Pare, District Administrative Authority, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, in consultation with the local villages, delineated the alignment of boundary wall. A plan (not to scale) of the boundary wall has been prepared according to the alignment shown by the District Administrative Authority, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh. in consultation with the villagers, engaged in cultivation in the peripheral part of GSI premise. The plan has been signed by officials of the District Administrative Authority, local villagers and endorsed by the Director, GSI.

Two copies of the map have been handed over to the Assistant Engineer, ICSD, CPWD, Itanagar for information, perusal and early construction of boundary wall.<sup>12</sup>



**Map 4.6.** Boundary Line between GSI and Ganga Village drawn in 2004,

**Source:** Mr. Takhetana Tech

The letter mentions the reference letter (No 54(300)/TZCD/2004/278, dated September 21, 2004) from the DC which was just a day before. Thus, it seems like the boundary line was drawn in a rush with a few villagers as witness, rather than through a proper consultative process involving all or at least majority of the villagers. Also, as one can see

<sup>12</sup> Letter no 700/701/BW/Wel/OPAP/GSI/04/656, Dated September 22, 2004



from the attached map for the boundary wall (Map. 4.6), it was drawn not to scale leaving much scope for future contestation. Further, it only included the west side of the campus boundary, leaving open the issues in other directions. Eventually, to the dismay of both the groups, the boundary wall got constructed, villagers did get displaced from their agricultural land and youths too were denied the work opportunity. Thus, the boundary issue continued and so did the grievances of the villagers at large.

Apart from the issues from the local people, the GSI authorities faced another problem. When the campus was built, the authorities planned to move most of the geological operations related to Arunachal Pradesh and the eastern zone of the Northeast from Shillong, its regional headquarters, to Itanagar. However, the employees who were mostly from outside the State preferred Shillong over Itanagar as the capital still lacked social and civic amenities. Further, the security issues, and the image of Arunachal Pradesh as a frontier made many officials wary and hesitant to shift. Eventually, the GSI officials managed to resist the shift of all geological operations to Itanagar. This left many houses vacant that were built as quarters for officials. With time, as these quarters remained unoccupied and hence untended, they dilapidated. When the researcher made a round of the campus on September 3, 2019, the campus looked like a ghost settlement with empty ramshackled houses (Figure 4.2-4.4).

Outside the gate, the authorities had put up a notice stating that entry to the GSI campus is restricted under the section of Article 133 of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). The article stands for 'conditional order for removal of nuisance'. In other words, the GSI authority was empowered by the District Magistrate or a Sub-Divisional Magistrate or any other Executive Magistrate on behalf of the State Government, 'on receiving the report of a police officer or other information and on taking such evidence (if any) as he thinks fit,' the power to remove the 'nuisance'. Nuisance can be any 'unlawful obstruction' to the functioning of GSI. What happened from 2004 when the boundary line got fixed to the issuing of the notice of restricted entry to the campus in the contemporary times, will be dealt with through the next story of Mr Rakhetana Techhi.



**Figure 4.2.** Unused rows of quarters,  
**Source:** Author



**Figure 4.3.** Dilapidated Quarter 1  
**Source:** Author



**Figure 4.4.** Dilapidated Quarter 2  
**Source:** Author



**Figure 4.5.** Occupied Quarter  
**Source:** Author

### **4.3. Story 2: (Part 1) Life Narrative of Mr. Rakhetana Techī**

Mr Rakhetana Techī was introduced to the researcher on September 3, 2019 by an Assamese shopkeeper, Mr. Bipul Hazarika of Ganga village. The Hazarika family, originally from Gohpur in the Assam plains, has been in Itanagar from the 80's running their family grocery shop. His family is the remnant of the past hills-plains social ties, as his parents used to be the host family in the plains for Nyishi villagers who came down for trade in the Gohpur foothill market. This old link provided them with the link and space to open a store in Ganga village. That day, Mr Rakhetana was busy with a family funeral. But he came for a short while to get introduced. In the brief first meeting, he told the researcher how important this family has been to him as they generously provided with

basic ration when his family struggled financially during his childhood. Even though the Assamese family was not related to him by blood or kinship, they were compassionate and understanding of his early days of poverty. For him, one should always be grateful to people who help in times of need. And as a fellow Assamese introduced by them, he said it was his responsibility to help the researcher. Whether it was beginner's good luck or the ethos of reciprocity which is of crucial importance to tribal societies, the researcher chanced upon to reap the benefit of a fellow Assamese person's generosity. Not only did he free-handedly give access to his entire personal folder, that includes his court proceedings and other such sensitive documents, he has also been one of the most resourceful persons whom the researcher could approach all throughout this study.

A man in his early 50's, Mr Rakhetana Techhi is married with two children, a teenage son and a daughter born in 2020. He is a person with multifarious interests and is associated with various sports organisations, student bodies and community organisations. For his livelihood, he runs a small stationary shop and sometimes deals with government tenders for stationary. All of the meetings were conducted in his stationary shop. He is also associated with state politics and holds a secretarial position in the BJP party office of Papum Pare District. His wife is a homemaker, a lovely warm lady whom the researcher met once in his shop.

His father had three wives and he was the son of the last one. As such, he remembers his father as an old man who could not support the family. Their family was dependent primarily on agriculture and engaged in other traditional means of livelihood like fishing, hunting, jhuming and foraging. When his father died, he was young and much of the family's agricultural land went to his elder step-brothers who did not give any to him. From his mother, they were six siblings- elder sister, him, two younger sisters and two younger brothers. The estranged relationship with the step-brothers also meant that they received unfair share from family cultivation and they faced financial hardship and even days of extreme poverty whereby they had to struggle to make ends meet and put food on the table. Being hierarchically lower than his step brothers, and being at a young age, he couldn't do anything against familial injustice. In the absence of a capable father figure and overburdened mother, he as the eldest son took responsibility for supporting his mother from an early age. He lost his elder sister young because of lack of timely medical

intervention. It was during these difficult times that Bipul Hazarika, the Assamese shopkeeper helped them survive.

In 1987, Mr Rakhetana Techhi started schooling at the age of 7-8 years in Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya (VKV). As discussed VKV has a leaning towards Hindu philosophy being run by a Hindu trust, they were taught many sanskrit prayers. Reminiscing about his childhood in VKV, he talked how they were made to byheart those prayers without truly understanding them. He laughed and shared how they remembered the prayers all wrong with incorrect words and how they used to mumble within the chorus. He learnt the meaning and correct version much later. He then quickly recited the Gayatri Mantra, one of the most famous universal prayers and the Bhojan Mantra, one that is offered before food. He talked about dedicated school teachers of early years from the Assamese, Bengali and Malyali community. He emphasised how his Assamese teachers were more accommodating as being from the neighbouring State they understood them better and how Malyali teachers were efficient in disciplining.

Speaking about the Assamese teacher, he again spoke of Mr. Hazarika who not only provided with ration like rice, potato, dal from his grocery store but also loaned money for school fees, and medical expenses for his father's bed-ridden by the end of his days. He mentioned how Mr. Hazarika had also helped many other tribal families like his, but many did not return money. He, on the other hand, is glad to have returned his dues. To show his gratitude, he even runs errands for Hazarika every now and then.

He joined Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)<sup>13</sup> in class 9, was the literary secretary in class 11-12 and was an active student leader throughout his higher secondary school. He also joined Indigenous Faith and Socio-Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IFSCSAP)<sup>14</sup> and took active participation in all its activities. IFSCSAP celebrates all Hindu festivals like *raksha bandhan*, *holi*, *guru pujon* with great fervour. He saw this

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<sup>13</sup> An all India level student body affiliated to the national party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

<sup>14</sup> Established in 1999, IFSCSAP is the largest pan-tribal level religio-cultural organisation that works for reviving and protecting indigenous faiths in the wake of rapid Christianisation in the State. It has close ties with RSS, the pan-Indian organisation promoting Hindutva.

phase of his life as very important as, ‘the school changed everything’ for him. To quote, ‘I got to learn about leadership, activism and about the world outside’.<sup>15</sup>

During his higher secondary schooling, he also worked as a guard at the GSI campus in the night shift. After schooling, he continued his college education through distance mode. By that time, he was already an active youth leader of Ganga village who is active in sports and other cultural activities through his continued associations with ABVP and IFSCSAP. He also started doing odd jobs to support his mother, run the household and support his younger siblings’ education. He worked as a wage labourer, sold firewood collected from forest to three local hotels and did door-to-door sales too. He also got duped by a company that used a pyramid scheme to sell its products. It was during this phase; he lost his elder sister to some stomach related ailment due to lack of timely medical treatment.

On January 3, 2003, a circular for a Group C (Technical) post of Laboratory Assistant was advertised for GSI. He applied and was called for an interview which was held at Shillong. He was asked to bring his educational certificates, experience certificates, ST/SC certificate in original and employment card and no travel allowance or dearness allowance was provided. He recalled how he went all the way for the interview but sadly did not get the job, even though he had the required qualifications. Now in retrospect, he feels that he should have been given the job as compensation for the land his forefathers gave. Instead, he had to continue with his temporary arrangement of being a guard. It was the same year he joined BJP.

Again, he happened to have good experience with people from Assam, as the secretary of the GSI Employee Association who forwarded his name to the GSI authority for a more permanent option happened to be an Assamese. The secretary ‘understood the grievances of the local people’ and Mr Rakheta saw him as a ‘good person’ and ‘not rude’ like some of the other GSI officials from the rest of India. Although his primary job was to guard the campus, he was employed as a ‘contingent worker’ from 1994 onwards, as written in the letter forwarded by the secretary. This explains the different odd jobs that he did apart from guarding the campus and earned some extra money. He credited such earnings to the secretary’s goodwill.

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<sup>15</sup> Interaction with the researcher on September 28, 2019.

In 2010, GSI authorities fired his friend who had worked as a contingent worker since 1993. His friend had to take leave for a few days due to a medical emergency. It was a genuine emergency but with their jobs not being permanent, the GSI authority could fire without giving much thought to it. Mr. Rakhetana, aggrieved by the unjust situation, went to the GSI higher ups to contend their decision and defend his friend. The exchange soon turned heated and the 'rude' officer in charge asked him to do what he could and challenged him to even 'file a RTI' if he wanted to. Thus, out of anger he decided to file an RTI for the first time and it changed the entire course of his actions thereafter. It was the year when he chanced upon the merits of the Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005, a law in India that mandates the government to timely respond to citizen requests for government information. Since then, he has filled many RTI files to different government departments and collected huge piles of bureaucratic papers. While some of the queries were to serve his personal interests, many others were filed in the interests of the public where he questioned doubtful departmental development activities. However, for the purpose of this chapter, only documents that give an understanding of land governance are used and through them elaborates the second part of Mr Rakhetana Techhi's story in the following section.

#### **4.4. Story 2. (Part 2) RTIs and Memorandums: Mr. Rakhetana Techhi's Paper Trail**

This section presents Mr Rakhetana Techhi's paper trail that begins with his first RTI filed to GSI out of his youthful anger. It follows the string of documents as he moves between filling RTIs to find new information and submitting memorandums to formal authorities seeking some form of justice against the land displacement that he and people of Ganga village had experienced. Efforts have been made to arrange all the documents into two categories- RTI and memorandums- in a chronological order from the oldest to the latest. The section also presents subplots explaining parallel developments in between RTI and memorandums to provide contexts. To highlight the progression of time, the all dates of events and documents are presented in bold.

The decision to keep all the RTIs and memorandums related to his case, makes things repetitive in some instances. Yet it was an important decision as it highlights the trials and tribulations that he has gone through with the formal institutions of governance. In a way, the repetition represents the temporal aspects an ordinary person can expect while engaging with the state bureaucracy. It shows how the meaning of time and waiting

constitutes the ‘mechanisms of power and control through which state actors and other mediators produce differentiated forms of citizenship and citizens’ (Carswell and others, 2019, p 597). In other words, the poor and the marginalised encounter the state differently through contrasting experiences of waiting and going round and round to acquire the necessary information/paperwork/welfare schemes/state benefits than the rich and the powerful.

#### **4.4.1. RTI I**

On **March 4, 2011**, Mr.Rakhetana Techu filed the first RTI to the GSI authorities. He sought information regarding the following:

1. Land allotment paper of the GSI office with a proper sketch map made under the State Government of Arunachal Pradesh
2. Documents if any pertaining to land agreement made between State authorities and local land donors
3. Compensation made to land donors if any, mode of appointment made under Grade C and D from 1994 till date
4. Employment quota for Grade C and D for GSI since establishment
5. Central Government approved wages for Grade C and D for North Eastern Region
6. Appointment criteria for skilled/unskilled labour under contingency/contract basis for GSI, Itanagar campus
7. Payment made to contingency labour with effect from 1994 till date
8. List of contingency labour employed under GSI, Itanagar campus under Master PayRoll from 1990 till date
9. Copy of Central Government letter for downsizing Grade C and D posts under GSI, Itanagar.

He found out that there was no record of their employment, and also that GSI does not appoint any labourer on contingent/contract basis.<sup>16</sup> Thus, there is no Master PayRoll maintained even though while being employed in the Itanagar campus, he had signed against the salary received. In other words, their employment was channelled through informality. He realised how lack of documentary evidence made it possible for GSI to

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<sup>16</sup> RTI Reply Letter No TC/OPAP/NER/GSI/2010, Dated March 28, 2011

casually dismiss his friend and deprive him of any employment benefits. They were being lied to that there was a downsizing of Grade C and D posts. There was no quota fixed for any local community nor was there any record of land compensation to local land donors. Even though GSI should have their copy of the official land allotment, its authorities directed him to collect land allotment papers from the office of the State Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

#### **4.4.2. RTI 2**

This led him to file the next RTI on **June 5, 2012** to the Land Management Department of Arunachal Pradesh seeking information about LAP of GSI, and details of land premium paid to the government by GSI from 1980 to 2012. The aforesaid department had no information regarding GSI and hence forwarded his query to the Public Information Officer in the DC Office of Itanagar Capital Complex.<sup>17</sup> The latter too had no information and asked him to follow up with GSI.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4.4.3. Subplot 1: Developments in Land Management in the Capital**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, it is clear how the formal land management in Itanagar was based on violations of various standard rules of governance, such as acquiring the land from the tribal community, initial spatial planning of the capital and the provision of issuing LAP for housing and commercial purposes. All of these were formulated and implemented as a rule of exception used by the State as a sovereign power. As such, it left scope for informality to thrive. In other words, the trajectory of formal land management from the time of the establishment of the capital made informality a dominant feature of land management in Itanagar. Although urban scholars argue that land informality is an inherent aspect of urban land governance, in Itanagar it has a unique history having its roots from colonial violence and neglect of the region as a frontier territory (elaborated in the next chapter).

Nonetheless, with informality thriving, the formal administration faced the challenge of land encroachment by people and land in Itanagar started to become a scarce resource. As most other administrative centres of the State adopted the same model of urban land

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<sup>17</sup> RTI Reply File No. LM/RTI-14/2006(Vol-IV), Dated May 22, 2012

<sup>18</sup> File No DC/LA(G)-354/08(Pt), Dated, May 30, 2012



management, land governance in those areas faced the same problems. Encroachment of land became a subject of public debate in Arunachal Pradesh. Through these discussions, other forms of land informalities that existed within rural areas also came to the fore.

As mentioned in Chapter 2 and 3, due to the presence of protective land regime in the State, private property was not formally recognised until the new *Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement and Records) (Amendment) Act* was passed in 2018. The State lacks a comprehensive land revenue system. Thus, the land governance in the State in practice was in a continuum between recognised collective rights and informal private property rights. The latter, not being backed by the state authorities, was made operational through various informal arrangements with the community institutions, not only for individuals but also for government institutions (Harriss-White et al 2009; Mishra, 2015). Such institutes range from military and paramilitary organisations to public-private corporations of big dam builders. It also includes non-governmental organisations like Churches, Private and missionary schools. Added to the continuum of collective and private land ownerships, was the third category comprising government land. This too is a contested category as local tribal communities have contested the land claims by the government on various developmental projects like dam building, road construction etc.

To deal with the challenge of various informal land arrangements both in the urban and rural areas, a cabinet meeting was held on **May 2, 2012**. Its decision to ‘regularise all government land under occupation of private individuals, State and Central Government establishment’ was notified by the Land Management Department on **May 24, 2012** and directed all DC and Addl. DC of Arunachal Pradesh to implement it.<sup>19</sup> The notification further mentioned that the regularisation process needs to be done ‘in a time bound manner in all districts including Capital Complex after proper survey and verification’ as per the Arunachal Pradesh (Land Settlement and Records) Act, 200 under Section 12(2) and ‘realisation of land premium and lease rent from the date of occupation’.

Secondly, all government land remaining unused under the occupation of Central Government Agencies, Corporation, Central Para Military Forces and State Government departments located in various places in the districts and outside the State were to be reverted back to the State Government which shall be taken over by the Land Management

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<sup>19</sup> Letter NO.LM-102/2010, Dated May 24, 2012

Department. Copies of the letter were also sent to the Private Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, Personal Secretaries of all Cabinet Ministers, all commissioners/ Secretaries and Head of Departments.

Here one needs to emphasise that the notification marked a defining moment of transition of Arunachal Pradesh. Through the notification, one can notice that the State Government was trying to reclaim some of the power from the Central Government which otherwise is omnipresent in Arunachal Pradesh with a security frontier perspective. The notification, in fact, was a bold act on the part of the State government as along with local people, it also sought to make central agencies, especially the military, accountable to the State Government. By focussing on a clear assessment of land, the State Government seems to have taken the first step to reclaim the power over its territory through the control over land. Such a shift in tone also came at the juncture of big infrastructure development and rapid urbanisation in the State, all of which requires land.

Coming back, the office of the DC, Itanagar Capital Complex passed an order to regularise occupied government land within the capital region on **June 20, 2012** based on the above notification.<sup>20</sup> Through it, the administration sought to deal with a host of informal practices in the capital, such as encroachment of government quarters and land, encroachment of roads, riverbeds and forests (elaborated in the next chapter). The order provided a list of documents to be submitted for land allotment in accordance with Rule 127 sub-section (i) & (ii) of the Arunachal Pradesh Land Settlement and Records Rule, 2002. They are- Permanent Residence Certificate, no land holding Certificate from respective DC/ADC/EAC/CO of the district/area for which PRC is submitted, Affidavit on stamp paper duly executed before notary/Executive magistrate regarding not possessing any land and residential building in whole of Arunachal Pradesh on the day of application for land allotment, Scheduled Tribe Certificate, Treasury Challan for Rs 100 and building permission if the land is already occupied and building is constructed on the site.

The criterias are noteworthy because they tell two things. First is that those who already possess LPC or LAP in any parts of Arunachal Pradesh ideally would not acquire new LAP for land in the capital post 2012 notification. Second is the formal admission of practices of informality by the administration, as building permissions are supposed to be

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<sup>20</sup> Order No. DC/LRB-0492/2005, Dated June 20, 2012.

granted to plots that already have a LAP. However, in practice, people build before acquiring both LAP and building permission. The notification encouraged people in Itanagar to submit applications with necessary documents in the hope that their land would get regularised and they would acquire the LAP against the occupied land. They presumed that mere submission of necessary documents will result in land allotment which in reality was subject to state's prerogative.

Mr Rakhetana Techii too, filled the application form for LAP and applied for a plot that is next to the GSI compound wall in the east side. As mentioned before, the boundary dispute between the Ganga village and GSI campus was hurriedly sorted for only on the west side and some villagers got their wet-rice fields. But the boundary dispute for all sides was not sorted and Mr Techii's land belonged to the disputed side.

#### ***4.4.4. Memorandum 1***

From the previous RTI, Mr. Rakhetana Techii already learnt that the land department neither has any information about LAP of GSI nor has any record of land premium paid by GSI to the state government. This information emboldened him and also helped him gain support from the village to seek justice from GSI. Accordingly, he submitted a memorandum on **September 6, 2012** through the office of a Aachal Samity Member of the Panchayati-Raj Institutions representing Ganga Panchayat to the Director General of GSI who was visiting the campus.<sup>21</sup>

The memorandum begins by stating that the villagers take pride in having donated land without any compensation for the development of their state and GSI could open a circle office in Itanagar. However, as time passed, they received no benefits and all employees, including the Group C and D were from outside the state. The quarters built for accommodating staff were lying vacant and hence were in a dilapidated condition. Land was lying unused and hence the application requested to revert land back to the donors. It requested to provide job opportunities at Group C and D grade under ST quota to local land donors and demanded that 80 percent of contractual labour, contract work should be awarded to the local land donors.

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<sup>21</sup> Letter No ASM/35/16/09/12, Dated September 6, 2012.

#### ***4.4.5. Memorandum 2***

After submitting memorandums to the GSI authorities, Mr Raketana Techhi waited for action. However, even after two years when no action was taken, he decided to approach the District Administration. On **May 4, 2014**, he submitted a memorandum to the District Commissioner through the letterhead of another Gaon Panchayat Member, this time representing the Lower Chimi region which is next to Ganga. The letter highlighted the grievances of Ganga village against GSI and suggested corrective measures. He began by stating the fact that land was being donated by the local people without any compensation. It was hoped that GSI would bring opportunities and development. However, to their dismay, GSI had not employed any educated youth from Ganga village. Even Group C and D jobs were filled by outsiders. He complained how many appeals made to GSI for job opportunities to locals were turned to deaf ears. He thus, requested the district administration to redress two demands of local residents of Ganga Village, 'on compensation ground'. He wrote,

- a) Unusual (should have been unused) land shall revert to local land donor form (from) your kind competent authority
- b) Exclude unused land measuring about 30 metres from the middle of the road from the PHQ to Ganga Village Link Road during the press allotment process from your good office.

The second point is the same plot for which he has applied for land allotment.

#### ***4.4.6. Memorandum 3 and 4***

After approaching the district administration in May, Mr Raketana Techhi wrote to the Deputy Director General of GSI-NER on **August 28, 2014**. He reiterated the same arguments. Added to it, he requested specific demands related to employment opportunities. First is the implementation of ST quota for state unemployed youths and local land donors of Ganga village for Group C and D grade jobs. Second, to fill vacant posts by applying for a special quota for Arunachal Pradesh recruited through the State Selection Committee (SSC). Third, the local land donors should be given priority in recruiting multi-tasking staff. Fourth, 89 percent of the contractual labourers should be awarded to the local land donors. Fifth, contract tenders should be given to local registered

contractors. Sixth, the unused land should be reverted back to the local land donors. The above-mentioned demands were again put forward to the Chief Minister on **September 3, 2014**.

#### ***4.4.7. Subplot 2: Actions and Reactions of Ganga Villagers and GSI***

In the meanwhile, through Mr Raketana and a few like-minded people, villagers were becoming conscious of their displacement and they too took initiatives to reclaim their land back. Apart from being fellow signatories in the memorandums, some tried to build unauthorised houses or claimed land as their agricultural fields in the vacant land of GSI campus. Thus, GSI was increasingly facing new ‘encroachment’ to their campus which was not fully walled, and the need to complete the boundary wall was felt. When construction began in **September 2014**, Mr Raketana again approached the authorities to stop the ongoing boundary wall work until proper land survey was conducted. Nonetheless, the boundary wall construction continued, but not based on the original land area that GSI was allotted. Adjustments were made whereby some claims of villagers were accommodated while some others were not.

The ongoing tension eventually culminated in a full-fledged confrontation between GSI authorities and the villagers whose claims were not entertained on **November 19, 2014**. As Mr Raketana had been in the forefront, he along with two others were arrested. The next day, a daily newspaper published their names and an article ‘4 persons arrested for ‘encroaching’ GSI land’ where it mentioned about their arrest. It further mentioned that their bailor has been directed to instruct them to remove the structures by themselves and the same has been agreed by them.

The same day, that is on **November 20, 2014** he was served a show cause notice from the court issued by the Chief Estate Officer-cum-Addl. District Magistrate, Itanagar Capital Complex for unauthorised occupation of public premises (GSI Complex) by constructing unauthorised structure.<sup>22</sup> He was given five days to produce supporting evidence and if he fails, according to the clause of the rules, the government will carry out eviction without

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<sup>22</sup> No. CEO/EA/DAD-001/2014, Dated November 20, 2014

further notice. Copies of the notice were sent to the District Administration and Police station for record.

He, however, did not furnish his response within the stipulated period and thus, when they were produced before the court and the court gave a verdict on **December 1, 2014** that went against them.<sup>23</sup> The court of law that goes by paper and legal definitions, saw the actions of Chief Estate Officer's notice as completely valid based on the provisions enshrined in Sub-Sections (iii), (iv) and (vii) of Section 2 of the Arunachal Pradesh Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 2003. The order reaffirmed that as they have constructed permanent structures before acquiring LAP, they are unauthorised occupants, they are to be evicted and cleared out from GSI land.

It was only on **December 30, 2014**, more than a month later he submitted his response against the show cause notice. In it, he attached documents against his arguments. They were:

1. He contested 'encroachment' on the grounds that the land in question was his ancestral land and he has been occupying it according to 'Nyishi customary ways'.
2. He attached copies of many memorandums and representations from the village that were submitted to both GSI and district administration to sort out the boundary dispute to argue how it is not a case of encroachment, but is a case of an unsolved boundary issue.
3. He argued that without land allotment or any record of revenue paid by GSI to the Land Management Department makes the GSI campus an illegal occupant on indigenous people's land. As proof he annexed copies of his RTI applications and the responses.
4. He mentioned that his occupied land is 4 metres away from the boundary wall of GSI and hence the question of encroachment does not arise. He also mentioned that he had applied for land allotment for commercial purposes in 2012. However, as land allotment process for Itanagar Capital Complex has been stopped, he hasn't received his allotment yet. He annexed the copy of land allotment application, sketch map along with the treasury challan.

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<sup>23</sup> Court Order No. WP(c) 446(AP)2014, Dated December 1, 2014.

5. He denied allegations of destroying public property of GSI and requested the authorities to revoke his show cause notice.

However, as his response was delayed, the authorities had already demolished his unauthorised structure on the said plot.

The arrests aggravated the situation which then increased security vulnerabilities for the employees of GSI. To secure the campus and to avoid any more direct confrontations, the District Administration imposed a restricted entry notice to the GSI campus under the section of Article 133 of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). To make amends and calm the situation, the Deputy Secretary of the District Administration forwarded a memorandum of Mr Techu to the Director General, GSI head office on **March 17, 2015**. The letter requested for his employment in the organisation in lieu of the land donated by the local people.<sup>24</sup> The Director-in Charge of GSI NER and AP office was directed to examine the case and take appropriate action and was asked to furnish supporting documents within 10 working days. The head office asked the matter to be treated as 'urgent'. However, as there was no record available to support the claim that local people of Ganga village donated land for the establishment of the GSI office in their village, his case was disposed of on **June 2, 2015** from the regional office.<sup>25</sup> On being informed about this, the Deputy Secretary of the District Administration wrote another letter to the Commissioner, Dept of Land Management informing that Mr Techu's case is disposed of based on lack of records. Hence, he requested the Commissioner to provide the record of land allotment to GSI by the department and asked to intimate the GSI head office.<sup>26</sup>

By this time, Mr Techu observed that many villagers constructed houses without applying LPC and their houses close to the GSI wall like he had, but they had not come to the notice of either the District Administration or the GSI authorities. He felt that the application for LPC created all the problems as his name and details were recorded and it made him recognisable and traceable. He thus, submitted an application on **May 21, 2015** requesting the DC, Itanagar Capital Complex to not process his land allotment file DC/ICC/LM/M-01-14 and DC/ICC/GL-01/014 till the GSI authority redressed the grievances. He

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<sup>24</sup> Memo No DAD-31/2009/847, Dated March 17, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Letter No 4397/88-II/F-12011/RTT/NER/2015-GC, Dated June 2, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Letter No DAD-31/2009/140, Dated June 29, 2015.

mentioned that for this, he had already written to the Chief Minister's Office and to GSI authorities. He also wrote to the Chief Estate Officer to not issue No Objection Certificate (NOC) regarding his land allotment file.

He spoke and wrote 'LPC', but the application he filled was of LAP. The confusion emanates from the fact that the vicinity of his plot area has both LAP and LPC issued for their land as with increasing urbanisation the rural-urban divide between Ganga village and Itanagar municipality areas is increasingly becoming vague and forming the Chimpu-Ganga-Itanagar urban corridor. For example, if one looks at the last municipal boundary notification, two houses near GSI campus that falls within the contiguous area of Ganga village, are adjusted within the municipality area by curving the boundary. If the same boundary notification is applicable, then his plot is part of Ganga village and hence the formal land application he should have applied is LPC and not LAP.

#### **4.4.8. RTI 3**

Having realised that none of the memorandum had borne any results and aggrieved by the arrests and the negative press coverage, Mr Techhi sought to find new information to furnish his claim over the land. He filed a new RTI on **July 7, 2015**, this time to the Directorate of Town Planning & Urban Local Bodies. He sought information about other central government organisations like Prasar Bharati (All India Radio Station) and Sasastra Seema Bal (paramilitary force) and how they were established, and whether they had any land agreement with the State Government. Before GSI, his family was displaced by Prasar Bharati and his parents came to live in Ganga. He wanted to know about the official creation of Ganga village too.

He received the reply within three days on **July 10, 2015**. However, the only document he received was the notification through which the Government annexed land to create Itanagar Reserve Forests and de-reserved parts of it and designated it as the Capital Area.<sup>27</sup> For all other queries, it was mentioned as 'Nil' in the response column. This was a revelation for him because for the first time, he got to know how the government acquired

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<sup>27</sup> RTI Reply Letter No.DTP/INF-7/2006-2007/251-252, Dated July 10, 2015



indigenous tribal land for the capital and for establishing various departments without any compensation.

#### **4.4.9. RTI 4**

Although his earlier query in May 2012 regarding the official status of the land in possession with GSI to the office of DC, Itanagar Capital Complex was met with no information, he followed up once again through a new RTI on **August 3, 2015**. In this he also enquired upon the status of his and seven other land allotment applications. As replied on **August 26, 2015**, once again it was confirmed that neither GSI holds any land allotment passbook nor any land revenue challan paid by GSI could be traced.<sup>28</sup> The approved land allotment map of GSI also could not be traced in the official records. What was available was the new application (No.DC/ICC/LM/GL-01/14) that GSI had applied for and was under process. In other words, GSI happened to apply for LAP at the same time as Mr Techhi had for his land after the 2012 notification of land regularisation in the capital region.

#### **4.4.10. RTI 5**

Filed through another person's name, Mr Techhi asked for the same information on **August, 28, 2015** to the office of the District Administration. He found on **October 30, 2015** that all their land allotment applications were stuck at the site verification stage, subject to which they may or may not be granted LAP.<sup>29</sup> It was also found that GSI's application was also at the same stage where the proposed sketch map had been submitted, similar to theirs.

#### **4.4.11. RTI 6**

In the meantime, there were news making rounds that the State Government was deciding to build a Mini Secretariat to host the district administration of the Itanagar Capital Region and a few other government departments. The unused land within GSI's possession was marked as the proposed site for the new Mini Secretariat. In order to find details about the news, Mr Techhi filed another RTI seeking details of land possessed by GSI on **September 1, 2015**.<sup>30</sup> This time, he received four new attachments as replies from both GSI AP office

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<sup>28</sup> RTI Reply Letter NO.DC/ICC/LM/RTI-01/2015, Dated August 26,2015.

<sup>29</sup> RTI Reply Letter NO.DC/ICC/LM/RTI-01/2015, Dated October 30, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Ref: 1198/46/TC/OPAP/NER/GSI/2010, Dated September 1, 2015.

at Itanagar on (dated **September 8, 2015**) and from NER office at Shillong (**September 16, 2015**). The first was the detailed budget proposal for the construction of GSI campus signed by the Chief Engineer and Surveyor of Works, CPWD on **March 29, 1977**. Under the head on land costs for the GSI office, it was mentioned as 'already available with the Government of Arunachal Pradesh'. The second was a digitally surveyed map of GSI measuring 81,437.2452 sq.mts created on **June 11, 2007**. The third was the letter of communication by the Deputy Director General of GSI, NER with the DC, Papum Pare District in the same year to formally register the land based on the digital map, copies of which were also sent to the Director of GSI, head office, and the Director of Dept of Land Management.<sup>31</sup> Fourth was the copy of order to verify/survey of land sent by the District Land Revenue & Settlement Officer from the Office of the DC in **2014**.<sup>32</sup>

From this RTI reply he learnt about the inconsistencies of record. First, there were no details of how the Government of Arunachal Pradesh acquired the land. Second, the actual land in possession with GSI is almost 1,18,563 sq.mts less than the original allotment of around 20 hectares (2,00,000 sq.mts) promised in 1976. And finally, even though a copy of the land allotment for establishment of Mini Secretariat building should be filed in the GSI office, they could not trace the letter but provided the letter no. LM-16/2008/2492.

He also happened to acquire a letter written by the Deputy Director General of GSI, AP seeking help from the Chief Secretary of the state on **April 11, 2014**. In it, along with the issue of land regularisation, GSI authorities sought help concerning issues of water supply and faulty electricity bills.<sup>33</sup> The letter enclosed the 1976 copy of land allotment mentioned before, the digital survey map of GSI and letters sent to the office of DC, and Director of Land Management with copies of this map.

From this, one could see how even the GSI authorities were making appeals to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and its land management department to clear the confusion and allot them the required LAP or LPC whichever is applicable. One also learnt that similar to the rampant increase in informal practices in the capital, the GSI authorities too were facing the problem of unauthorised occupation of Type-I and Type-II quarters.

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<sup>31</sup> Letter No. 349/Welfare/OPAP/Land/07, Dated June 11, 2007

<sup>32</sup> Letter NO. DC/ICC/LM/GL-01/14, Dated June 6, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Letter No. 349/Welfare/OPAP/Land/07, Dated June 11, 2007

Added to it were the illegal electricity connection from the single point metre system of GSI which has raised the electricity bill from Rs 5000-8000 to Rs 60,000-80,000.

This letter also explains the gap between the first request to the District Administration to formally register the land based on the digital map in **2007** and the land verification team that came for inspection on **June 6, 2014**, from the office of the DC, Itanagar Capital Complex. It was only when GSI authorities approached the Chief Secretary, was the site verification team sent.

#### ***4.4.12. Subplot 3: Proposal for a new Mini Secretariat on GSI land***

As mentioned above, the news of Mini Secretariat was true and developments were already in progress without much knowledge of it by the local people. What transpired after the site verification team is not clear, but one learns that a new Mini Secretariat was getting built in the disputed unused land of GSI. The next document available is of **July 1, 2015** where the office of the DC communicated with the Department of Land Management with the subject of 'allotment of land for establishment of Mini-Secretariat Building'.<sup>34</sup> They attached two key documents, first is the proposed land sketch map showing land details (U.O. No.PS/LM-11/14/803, dated **December 17, 2014**) and second is the official land allotment (Letter No. LM-16/2008/2492, dated **February 27, 2015**). According to this communication, land possessed by GSI was 1,03,123 sq.mtrs (10.3123 Hectares) which is more than the digital survey map measuring the campus at 81437 sq.mts in 2007. The administration planned to curb out 52,860 sq.mtrs out of the total and allot it to the government to establish a Mini-Secretariat Building.

#### ***4.4.13. Memorandum 5***

After having this detailed information about these new developments, Mr Techi wrote another joint representative letter on **September 8, 2015** to the Secretary (Land Management), the Director (Land Management) and the DC, Itanagar Capital Complex. In this, he detailed his entire struggle from 2012 and how the local people of Ganga village had submitted multiple applications for land allotment to district administration, but were denied and how GSI was continuing to encroach on their land instead. The application

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<sup>34</sup> Letter No. DC/CC/LRB(G)-102/2014, Dated, July 1, 2015, From DC, ICC to the Director, Land Management, copy to Parliamentary Secretary (Land Management), the Director, GSI.

raised the issue of land allocation for Mini-Secretariat without proper demarcation of land with local inhabitants. He wrote,

the Geological Survey of India has without acquiring a proper permission and consent of the people of Ganga village has illegally demarcated the boundary in their own interest by construing a means of method and encroaching away the land of the Ganga village which is one of the oldest and historical village of the Capital complex...Moreover, the undersigned have several times submitted a representation to the concerned departments regarding the said illegal construction and encroaching the land of Ganga village...The GSI and other department are under processing to obtain the land allotment certificate against said land including our applied land allotment plots in arbitrarily without considering out application which is clearly violating our legal rights in this contemporary time.

This letter also had land allotment files of 7 other local people of Ganga whose applications were stuck and reiterated that their applications were not processed for the last four years. He finally ended his application with a plea for justice and if they fail then it will leave no other options for him but to approach the court of law.

#### ***4.4.14. Memorandum 6 and 7***

This same application was also sent to the Chief Minister's office on **November 17, 2015** in the letter pad of Area Development Committee (ADC).<sup>35</sup> The ADC is a local non-governmental organisation with Mr Rakhetana as the Chairperson. It also provided a list of 21 people from the Ganga village whose land is occupied by GSI.

A month later on **December 16, 2015**, Mr Rakhetana again wrote to the Director General of GSI head office representing the local Area Development Committee and signature of the 22 local people.<sup>36</sup> This time the letter enclosed many of the key documents collected through the RTI filing which can support his claims. He begins by stating how the present GSI office cum residential premise was established at their village notified area without any proper land demarcation causing land disputes between local people and GSI authorities from time to time. He mentions how their repeated requests for jobs and land

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<sup>35</sup> Ref No ADC/021/17/11/2015, Dated November 17, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Ref No ADC/03/2015 Dated, December 16, 2015

disputes were not met. He then attaches the RTI reply from the Director of Land Management which says that GSI does not have land allotment papers nor has GSI paid any revenue to the State government. His application for land allotment in 2012 has been accepted by the competent authority as per the Arunachal Pradesh Land (Settlement and Records) Act 2000. The then ends with reiterating the two initial demands of job opportunities at Grade C and D level and of reverting back the unused land to the villagers. A copy of this letter was also sent to the Chief Secretary of Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

#### ***4.4.15. Subplot 4: Developments of and around the Mini Secretariat Building***

On **May 11, 2016**, a meeting and field visit was held in the GSI campus, Itanagar under the chairmanship of the DC, Itanagar Capital Complex to discuss the matter regarding earmarking of land under the occupation of GSI for construction of Mini-Secretariat intended for District Administration, Itanagar Capital Complex and C/O Central Government Officers (CGO) to be executed by the Executive Engineer, CPWD, Itanagar. Eight officers were present, starting from the DC, Executive Engineer and Asst. Executive Engineer-CPWD, Director and Deputy Director-GSI, Itanagar, Executive Engineer and Asst. Engineer-PWD and Circle Officer- Land Management.

In this meeting, it was decided that out of the total 20 acres available under GSI, 7.5 acres would remain for GSI, 2.5 acres for Central Government Office of Executive Engineers and CPWD and remaining 10 acres would be earmarked for the Mini Secretariat. New master plan would be prepared by the Executive Engineer, CPWD in liaison with the competent authority of GSI so as to accommodate the residential area and office complex for GSI within 7.5 acres and CGO in 2.5 acres. The Executive Engineer, PWD will prepare the Master Plan for the Mini-Secretariat. Finally, the requirement of office rooms for different allied departments of Capital Complex should be obtained within 15 days by the Land Branch of DC's Office and should be made available to the Executive Engineer, PWD. As attendees from GSI were from AP circle alone, a copy of the minutes of the meeting was sent to Director General of GSI, NER. Thus, one can see how decisions were made by techno-bureaucratic officials alone in the complete absence of both local representatives and local people.

As mentioned before, decisions regarding the new Mini Secretariat building were being taken from **late 2014- early 2015** onwards, without any consultation with the local people. It was natural that such news had aggravated local speculative actions in the form of encroachment. By the end of **November 2015**, the Addl. Director General of GSI NER approached the Chief Secretary to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, with copies to GSI head office, AP circle, and the Director General of Police, to inform that frequent attempts of encroachment of land at the Itanagar campus were made by the locals of Ganga Village and senior officers who were taking strict actions were receiving threat calls.<sup>37</sup> According to the letter, such attempts have become frequent since November 2014. As disturbances increased, Mr Rakhetana along with 7 others were given show cause notice again on **February 10, 2016** for encroaching GSI land and illegal earth cutting and were asked to appear before the Magistrate on **February 17, 2016**. However, this time he was wrongly charged for someone else's wrongdoings. He soon was cleared of the charges.

#### ***4.4.16. RTI 7***

Two days after the second show cause notice, on **February 19, 2016**, Mr Rakhetana again filed an RTI seeking the copy of land allotment to GSI of 1976, any document related to compensation paid to locals, copies of land revenue paid by GSI and details of job vacancies in GSI. The GSI again did not provide him with the necessary documents.

#### ***4.4.17. Memorandum 8, 9 and 10***

Disillusioned by the RTI response, he approached the Chief Secretary once again on **June 9, 2016** and requested intervention repeating the same demands of justice. Added to it, he also notified how the new land allotment for the Mini-Secretariat not only violates rights of the local people of Ganga, but it also violates the minimum road width or right of way (ROW) as laid down by the Directorate of Town Planning.<sup>38</sup> This too had 12 more signatories from the village and copies of it were sent to the Director of Town Planning, Secretary of Land Commissioner, DC-Itanagar Capital Complex, Deputy Director General-GSI AP, Executive Engineer-CPWD.

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<sup>37</sup> Letter No 1187/Constr/Shillong/Estate/NER/2015, Dated November 23, 2015

<sup>38</sup> Notification No DUD/TP-150/2005-06, Dated March 13, 2006

On **September 16, 2016**, he filed a complaint to the Labour Commissioner-cum-Director, Employment Exchange to inform that GSI is not following the rule of Central Notification Vacancy Act 1956 as the recent advertisement for Driver posts were not published in employment exchange or local newspapers of the state, thereby depriving local unemployed youths of Arunachal Pradesh.

He wrote again to the Chief Secretary on **September 16, 2016** followed by another letter to the Chief Minister's Office on **August 8, 2017**. In this, he attached all earlier drafts which finally led the Director of Land Management to write to the DC to address the pending land allotment cases of the people of Ganga village within GSI campus.<sup>39</sup>

#### **4.4.18. RTI 8**

Through another RTI filed on **February 5, 2018** to the District Administration<sup>40</sup> Mr Rakhetana learns that the government had already approved the allotment of land in favour of the DC for establishment of Government Mini-Secretariat Building subject to payment of land value @ Rs 5/sq.mtrs. as fixed by the Government from time to time. A letter from the Director-cum-Ex-Officio-Joint Secretary, Department of Land Management on **July 23, 2015** to the DC, Itanagar Capital Complex states it.

Accordingly, the Department of Land Management also prepared the challan for payment of land revenue against the plot on **September 10, 2015**. The Finance & Accounts Officer, DC's office then wrote to the Deputy Secretary (Budget) for allocation of funds for payment of revenue for the allotment of land to Mini-Secretariat, however, due to non-allocation of funds, the process of allotment for it was not cleared.

#### **4.4.19. RTI 9**

To increase the chances of receiving a response, Mr Rakhetana filed another RTI to GSI under a different person's name requesting information about the news on the proposed Mini Secretariat to be built on the disputed GSI land. To its reply on **February 28, 2018**,

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<sup>39</sup> Letter No LM-156/2011 (Vol-I)/2821, Dated September 5, 2017

<sup>40</sup> RTI Reply Letter No. 759/RT/SUAP/RTI/17, Dated March 1, 2018

the Department of Land Management attached the communications between GSI and state authorities.<sup>41</sup> It contained five letters.

First is the letter (DO No.11/65/2016-MI) to the Chief Secretary, Government of Arunachal Pradesh from the Office of the Ministry of Mines on **January 6, 2017**. This letter detailed how GSI since its inception has been conducting a wide range of geoscientific activities and generated about 300 reports on various operations in Arunachal Pradesh. It mentioned that apart from a series of classified/restricted maps, documents, and other sophisticated equipment, a seismic laboratory that monitors earthquakes real time for the whole of India is housed in Itanagar. Such emphasis was made to prove that GSI is an important organisation and it has plans to expand its important work which is why they need to retain the land and not give away to house other government departments. From this letter one also learns that the GSI authorities have faced continuous troubles from local people and have alleged them as encroachers which they also claimed that they were able to contain recently. GSI has also invested resources to develop and nurture the land which was thickly forested. Thus, considering all these aspects, the ministry requested the State Government to retain the land.

Second is from the Deputy Director General of GSI requesting the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh on **November 6, 2017** to intervene in order to retain the allocated land of 20 hectares originally promised to GSI and not give it away for Mini Secretariat set up<sup>42</sup>. It mentioned how there are plans to strengthen the office through further development of infrastructure and hence would require the land. It mentioned about GSI's land allotment application submitted following the 2012 cabinet notification regarding land regularisation. However, as the whole process of land allotment was stopped for Itanagar Capital Complex, and GSI too were waiting as mentioned in this letter to the Governor. It mentions about a letter (U.O.No.CS(GSI)-1/2016/328, dated **May 11, 2016**) from the Chief Secretary of Government of Arunachal Pradesh to the DC, Itanagar Capital Complex to resolve the matter of land allotment of GSI as promised in 1976. This must have

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<sup>41</sup> RTI Reply No. LM-RTI-14/2006(Vol-XIII)3918, Dated February 28, 2018

<sup>42</sup> Letter No DYDG/GSI/SU:AP/NER/2017, Dated November 6, 2017



followed the letter from GSI authorities to the Chief Secretary in 2014 that requested interventions regarding the processing of the land regularisation.<sup>43</sup>

Third is the letter from the Governor on **November 15, 2017** who complied with the request of GSI and forwarded the letter to the Director of Land Management.<sup>44</sup> The latter in its turn wrote to the office of the DC, Capital Complex on **November 29, 2017** to examine the representation submitted by GSI and furnish the status report of land allotted to GSI.<sup>45</sup>

And finally, the fifth is the attachment of the 1977 allotment letter (Letter No CEAP/WB-56/76, Dated **March 12, 1977**) from the Chief Engineer, CPWD to the Director of GSI. Thus, through the 8th RTI application, Mr Raketana finally received some of the documents that he had been asking for from the very first RTI.

#### **4.5. Latest Developments and the Learnings**

The GSI authorities after many requests directly and even through the Ministry of Mines to the Chief Secretary and Governor of the State could not stop the construction of the Mini-Secretariat by the District Administration of Itanagar within GSI land. The authorities could not retain all the land that was originally allotted to GSI in 1977 but had to concede the unused land to the State Government. The construction of the Mini-Secretariat got delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic but is now going on full-swing and is soon going to get over. Once the building gets ready, it is hoped to host a few government departments along with the District Administration office which now functions from a rented space. It is not yet clear if GSI finally attained formal land documents for its campus and if it has started paying land revenue to the Department of Land Management.

Recently the official website of Itanagar Capital Complex released a list of 586 LPC issued from **April 28, 2021** to **May 31, 2023** that comes under its administration, but Mr Raketana Techhi was not one of them as he filled for LAP. There were 22 new LPC issued for Ganga Village. His files are neither rejected, nor processed. Hence, parallel to the

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<sup>43</sup> Letter No DYDG/GSI/SU:AP/2014, Dated April 11, 2014

<sup>44</sup> Letter No.GS/Deptt-18/2012/5102, Dated November 15, 2017

<sup>45</sup> Letter No. LM-156/2011(Vol-1), Dated November 29, 2017

construction work of Mini-Secretariat, he too started building a concrete house on the plot. To be on the safe side, he has submitted a letter of intimation to the Deputy Director General of GSI on **September 6, 2018**. He narrated his entire story of dispossession and injustice and informed that he was going to construct a house and that the plot does not encroach upon GSI land. So far neither the District Administration nor the GSI has caused any trouble to him and he exists precariously like many others in Itanagar who have built their houses while waiting for the formal land document.

Borrowing from the concept of *Kaghazi Raj* or government by paper (Moir, 1993) and the burgeoning literature from South Asia on state bureaucracy and documents (Hull 2012; Mathur, 2015), the chapter engaged with a paper trail related to the development of formal land governance in Itanagar. The paper trail furnished the story of GSI-AP establishment in the Ganga village land and how it led to indigenous tribal land displacement and various forms of dispossession and marginalisation. It presented an ethnography of state bureaucracy by presenting the paper trail between government organisations, and between common public and the state.

Existing literature has shown how a complex and comprehensive system of writing and reporting has retained the British colonial state's institutional structure and wider legal and cultural practices of rule in many parts of post-colonial South Asia. According to Nayanika Mathur (2015), the 'profound reliance on paper/documents/files' is not only central to the Indian State but it 'is the constitutive feature of bureaucracy, as Weber has noted and the fiction of Kafka, Gogol, and Orwell has illustrated' (p.4). She argued that the ethnographies of bureaucracy in contemporary times demonstrate how widespread documentary practices are not merely a colonial reproduction. Instead, the contemporary neo-liberal dictums of 'transparency' and 'accountability' imposed on post-colonial nations exacerbate this paper state, sometimes leading to counter-intuitive results.

Her work draws on the work of Mathew S. Hull (2012) on Pakistan's state bureaucracy and corruption. He argued that 'documents are not simply instruments of bureaucratic organizations, but rather are constitutive of bureaucratic rules, ideologies, knowledge, practices, subjectivities, objects, outcomes, and even the organizations themselves' (p. 253). Hull showed how the general public and bureaucrats interact with each other through a material practice in Pakistani urban bureaucracy. In the process, the centrality of paper shapes the city which replaces the Weberian rule-based ideals of bureaucracy to take banal

Kafkaesque forms in multiple ways. He also argues how writing practices designed during the colonial era to isolate the government from society have become a means of participation in it in post-colonial Pakistan. In a way, both Hull (2012) and Mathur (2015) have observed that state bureaucracy functions with the ubiquitous materiality of documentary practices. But these are context specific and produce results accordingly. Thus, while Hull explained red-tapism and corruption in housing allocation in urban Islamabad, it was the bureaucratic life and enforcement process of two laws -- National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 (NREGA) and the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 -- in a remote town in the Himalayan borderland state of Uttarakhand for Mathur. In both these cases, the particularities of space with its own socio-cultural context produced the workings of law, development and state, rather than mere reproduction or implementation of bureaucratic rules of the concerned governments.

The findings of the chapter resonate with much of what Hull and Mathur has observed, but differ distinctively in terms of the extent of omnipresence of paper within the state bureaucracy. First, the paper trail presented showed that the formal land governance in Itanagar relied more heavily on informal processes than the ubiquitous materiality of documentary practices. It seems that the real life of a newly formed bureaucratic state in a frontier region encompasses the illegible, complex and layered socio-cultural realities more than a paper state as witnessed in mainland post-colonial spaces that have inherited the documentary practices of the colonials better. Thus, in Itanagar, paper does not always underpin action or constitute legitimised evidence.

Secondly, it becomes legitimate evidence only when the state wishes it to become one. In fact, the centrality of paper has been routinely weakened to the convenience of the post-colonial Indian nation-state in its frontier territories. The socio-political history of Arunachal Pradesh with its relatively new introduction of formal administration and existence of predominantly tribal groups with various autonomous rights makes such disruptions an inherent part of the state making exercise in the region. In other words, the Indian State is yet to reproduce the colonial materiality of paper fully in its frontier region.

Thirdly, the chapter shows how the state regularly undermined its own policy of protective exclusive land regime for tribes to accommodate the requirements for land to establish a capital and later accommodate its urban expansion. The state authorities did so, by either willfully violating its own policy of tribal protective rights blatantly or by bringing in new

policy and legislation that goes against the logic of a protective regime. The fact that the post-colonial Indian State used a colonial law of forest conservation to usurp indigenous community forests to establish the capital makes the situation even more ironic. It seems the relatively weak existence of a paper state and predominance of informality makes it easier for the state authorities to commit all these violations without much accountability. Thus, the centrality of paper becomes important when it serves the Indian State as it did for land acquisition for capital establishment and setup of different government organisations in Itanagar.

Moving on from how the state authorities used the instrument of paper, the chapter shows how the local tribal communities having come from oral cultures affect and are affected by, and adapted to the everyday workings of state bureaucracy. The materiality of written government orders and notifications are a new introduction to the social organisation of tribal communities of the region. These documents largely remain inaccessible to the masses and yet are binding on the people, as they are the instruments of state enactment. If they are accessible, then being in a formal and legalised version of a non-native language - English, they remain mostly illegible and confusing for the general public. The real meaning and intent of government orders are often missed by the public. For example, when the government issued notification regarding regularisation of land in Itanagar in 2012 to check encroachment and systematise land records, the general understanding of the notification was the opposite. It led to an increase in encroachment practices as speculative action by people in the hope of acquiring LPC and LAP in the capital. Mr Raketana too filled the application form for land regularisation having had a similar misunderstanding.

Through his narrative one witnesses how 'waiting', usually a marker of submission, was the dominant mechanism of state encounter for the people in Itanagar, as it is in most of the Global South. As mentioned, Carswell and others (2019), analysed 'waiting' as the 'mechanisms of power and control through which state actors and other mediators produce differentiated forms of citizenship and citizens' (p 597). Mr Raketana's struggle to acquire both a LPC/LAP and basic information about his place which can help furnish his claims to land seemed hopeless at every RTI reply that came with no response. Yet his persistent effort of filing new RTI applications and submitting new memorandums marked the material proof of his engagement with the State. Similar to Mathur's observation, it

elucidates how people resort to ‘documentary claims’ to make themselves visible to the state and demand their rightful share (2015, p.67).

Here it is imperative to pay close attention to the specific political discourses and historical moments through which unique and particular state-citizen relations have been produced (Redclift 2016). It is all the more important in the context of Arunachal Pradesh being a post-colonial frontier territory; because most colonised populations have achieved independence as collective groups rather than as individual free citizens within which western state bureaucracy emerged (Kabeer 2002). In that bureaucracy was supposed to materialise the redistributive social contract between citizens and the state. But when a post-colonial state is based on a collective or a nation, the state-citizen relationship developed may not guarantee the redistributive social contract to an individual. Further, when a diverse group of colonised populations become one nation-state like India, the state-citizen relationship differs within the diverse groups of people. The nature of social contract may not always be redistributive, but can be based on exploitative hierarchies of ethnicity, class, religion, and gender etc.

In other words, the transition from colonial rule to post-colonial governance where the state is accountable to the social contract may not be applicable in the same way for the smaller ethnic identities of frontier regions as it does for majoritarian communities in India. It seems the post-colonial bureaucracy, especially in frontier regions has become a tool of neoliberal state to usurp from the people in the same light as colonial bureaucracy that helped colonial expansion and exploitation. Commenting on the basic character of the Indian State, Harris-White (1997) highlighted its names such as ‘shadow state, private status state, state of last resort and spinning state’ and how it has been captured by elite interests.

The nature of the state-citizen relationship in Itanagar gets perfectly captured by Mr Raketana’s experiences. Although he began with formal processes, his later realisation about the injustices made him question it. He said,

*I made the mistake of applying for an LPC application because I am a law abiding citizen. Others have built houses without applying LPC and they are not facing any problem. Because I filled the form, they have my details and they can catch me.*

He saw the documentary practices as counterproductive and it increased his struggles to acquire LPC. He noticed how most tribal people in the capital continued with the local culture of land reclamation, whereby they cleared unused land and started using it without bothering about the order of paperwork. He saw how people have neither faced eviction notices nor faced demolitions by the land department. Here it is important to highlight that his struggle was not only because of the nature of paper state alone as he has faced exploitation from various quarters, like outsiders who were his recruiters, his own lawyer who has not explained his documentary interface with the state with clarity. Thus, it is a combined effect of local contexts.

As people have been acquiring LPC after developing plots and building houses, many believed that to be the real process of acquiring LPC. Thus, engagements with state bureaucracy to access land for housing and commercial needs in the capital involved applications and supporting documentary evidence, but not always in the right order as required by government departments. Nonetheless, people have managed to process such applications and acquire LPC against their land. Sometimes such land also overlapped government gated compounds and staff quarters, resulting in encroachment of government property (elaborated in Chapter 5). Encroachments practices in Itanagar then are what Mathur (2015) calls the product of ‘a strange combination of affect and effect’ of the ‘social life’ of the paper state at the local level. To quote,

the problem of the implementation of law in India is less a problem of corruption or of neo-liberal governmentality and more a problem of the way in which the social life of paper produces a strange combination of affect and effect at the local level. Bureaucratic rule is created through the materiality of documents, letters and written texts which implement the state rather than the law, a paradox which explains both the omnipresence of the state and its limited effects on policy.

In Itanagar, the social life of paper has been able to navigate through a protected land regime system on one hand and a society with oral culture on the other. It provides space for informality to thrive and prosper, so much so that documents do not constitute the bureaucratic processes of the state in the same way it does in other parts of India. Thus, when placed within the specific context of post-colonial South Asian governance and state-making in frontier regions where territorial control is fluid, the state is seen using

both arbitrary and surreptitious ways of enacting the state through paper and avoiding it completely when required.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

As the story of urbanisation in most places has a story of displacement and marginalisation, Itanagar too is no exception in dispossessing the marginalised and the poor. What differs are the nuances of the ways through which dispossession and marginalisation happens. This chapter shows how the state in order to accommodate rapid urbanisation continuously and persistently violates indigenous rights by undermining rules of constitutional protection guaranteed to tribal people in India. It critically examines how indigenous people continuously get displaced and pushed to margins as they increasingly are being dispossessed of their right to land. It shows how the functioning of urban land governance with the materiality of bureaucracy creates complexity for the indigenous people on one hand, and governance and implementation failure on the other. The urban land governance in Itanagar thus has to navigate through provisions of protected land regime, negotiate with an indigenous society with oral culture which is changing rapidly and meet the demands of rapid urbanisation.