

## **Arunachal Pradesh: Political Economy of Becoming a Circumstantial State**

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*Locating Arunachal Pradesh in its own historical, geographical and political context, attempt is made to analyze the circumstantial state in its present form, and to understand the political economy of a transition from one historical type of power structure to a unit of the nation state. The paper examines the logic of developmental nationalism as the mechanism adopted for political integration of the Himalayan region with the Indian nation.*

The geographical space covering more than eighty-three thousand square kilometers of the eastern Himalayas, bounded by Bhutan to the west, Tibet and China to the north and east and Myanmar to the south-east, which touches the upper Brahmaputra valley, remained nameless until it became the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in the mid-1950s. The complex human landscape of the sparsely populated region is constituted by a large number of Indo-Mongoloid groups coping with harsh climatic conditions, difficult terrains, high altitude and niche covered with deep sub-tropical forests intercepted by powerful rivers crashing down the Himalayas. Such geographical–environmental determinants of their social life and material culture rendered them seclusion averting historical social fluidity from the plains.

This geographical space constitutes a sizeable part of the region characterized as Zomia by Willem van Schendel. Relegated to the margins of the valley-dominated states, Zomia, for its historical reasons resisted the projects of nation building and state making of the states to which it belonged (Van Schendel 2002). For James C. Scott, Zomia happens to be one of the largest remaining nonstate spaces<sup>2</sup> in the world, the great mountain realm on the marches of mainland Southeast Asia, China, India and Bangladesh, sprawling across eight nation-states (Scott 2009 : 13-14). Further, the hill populations of Zomia have actively resisted incorporation into the framework of the classical state, the colonial state, and the independent nation-state (ibid: 19). Such categorizations are undoubtedly crucial for understanding the hill societies of

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<sup>2</sup> For Scott, nonstate space points to locations where, owing largely to geographical obstacles, the state has particular difficulty in establishing and maintaining its authority (Scott2009:13).

the northeastern periphery of the Indian nation. Nevertheless, an elucidation of the processes of engagement and negotiation of the hill social formations with the state in its pre-colonial, colonial as well as present incarnation warrants more nuanced understanding. An attempt has been made in this paper to comprehend the political economy of India's integrationist triumph in making the region an integral part of the nation state system with China as 'India's shadow state in the Himalayas' (Guyot-Récharé 2016: 24).

### **Engagement, Confrontation and Negotiation with the Pre-colonial Valley State**

The everyday life of each of the scattered hill communities is still governed by traditions and customs normalized by self-governing village-based institutions. Neither the social structures nor such institutions are, however, insulated from the ubiquity of power relations, let alone patriarchy. The heads of many such self-governing institutions traditionally enjoyed certain amount of privileges legitimized by customs. For instance, the Monpa chiefs had the privilege of having free services of the villagers (Elwin 2014: 61), and the chiefs of Wanchos and Noctes received tribute from the villages under their control (Elwin 2012: 25).

With few exceptions, such as the Monpas who practiced terrace cultivation, and the Apa Tanis, the Wanchos, the Noctes, the Tangsas, the Khamtis and the Singphos closer to the valley engaged in wet rice cultivation, the predominant form of cultivation for most of the hill communities has been shifting cultivation or jhum. This low-input system of farming, a common practice in the humid and sub-humid tropics, often castigate as "primitive subsistence agriculture" constituted the core of the pre-feudal social formations. Largely determined by geography, dependency on jhum demanded close association with the forests for other necessities of life. Although individual ownership over arable land has been a long tradition, jhum land is considered to be collective property to be periodically distributed among the households. A part of the land adjacent to the village has also to be preserved for other purposes such as collection of forest products and hunting. Thus, regulating the socio-cultural life of the community and the system of production, the self-governing institutions became the nucleus of the isolated jhum-centric social formations and also instrumental in construction of an exclusivist subjectivity of the communities.

However, the exclusivist and autonomous social formations have a prolonged history of trade with Tibet, China, Burma as well as the Brahmaputra valley (Bhattacharjee 1981; Mackenzie 1884; Sikdar 1981; 1982a; 1982b). To remain more focused on the hill-valley dialectics, we may expand on only few important points. The people from the hills used to tumble down through the duars (passes) located in the north-western and north-eastern side of the Brahmaputra valley mainly to barter various forest and agricultural products for glass beads, cloth, salt, utensils and agricultural implements to supplement their subsistence economy (Sikdar 1982b). Besides the periodical markets at the duars, Sadiya was an important marketing point and annual

fairs were also held in Udalguri and Doimara. The Udalguri fair was crucial for the valley traders to trade with Tibet supplying silk, cloth, rice, iron, buffalo horn pearls etc. for rock-salt, gold-dust, woolens, Chinese silk etc. (Bhattacharjee 1981). In addition, the people of the hills also acted as intermediaries in the trade between the Brahmaputra valley and Tibet, China and Burma (Sikdar 1982b).

The interactions between the people from hills and the valley, however, must not be romanticized on the basis of the limited economic relations in the periodic markets and fairs. The valley people, through their Hinduized lens, perceived the hill communities as ontologically given spatial categories. The distance between hills and the valley appeared to be more social and cultural than geographical. A sizeable section of the hill people with a common culture was categorized as Abor, to mean 'unruly' or 'disobedient'. For the valley people, the Abors were 'extremely savage', even accused of being cannibals (Elwin 2012: 17). Another large group of hill people was categorized as Miri, perhaps meaning middle man. Plausibly, this characterization was based on the role they played in facilitating trade relations between the Brahmaputra valley and China, and also in settling conflicts between the Ahom kings and the so called Abors.

The hill communities first came into contact of the organized Ahom state in the early part of the sixteenth century in course of its territorial expansion in the north bank of the Brahmaputra. After its consolidation as a well-organized state during the three preceding centuries, territorial expansion of the Ahom state inevitably led to confrontation with the Mughals on the west and the Kacharis and the Jaintias on the west and south east. To avoid blood-spattered confrontation with the communities on the north and the north-east, the Ahom state devised relatively less expensive instrument of negotiation – the system of *posa*. The Ahom state negotiated with the autonomous hill communities allowing them to have the free services of a reasonable number of *paiks*<sup>3</sup> in the duars. The *paiks* were liable to pay the community, to which they were attached, certain necessities of life on demand. For the services they rendered, each got, a unit of four *paiks*, was given some amount of concession in the land revenue payable to the state (Devi 1968: 199-219). Negotiation with the numerically strong *Adis*, however, proved to be more difficult. Not only they claimed absolute sovereignty over the *Mishings* settled in the valley, below the land of the *Adis*, also demanded rights over fish and gold found in the rivers flowing through their territory. Accepting the demands of the *Adis*, the Ahom state acknowledged subjection of the *Mishing* to the *Adis*. In turn, they had to pay annual tribute to the Ahom state (*ibid*: 199-200). This arrangement was undeniably different from the so called *posa* given to the other communities, as the *Adis* obligated the Ahom state to share sovereignty with them. Politically, the system of *posa* was instrumental not only for avoiding conflicts, but also to bring the chiefs under the fold of the Ahom

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<sup>3</sup> A *paik* is an adult male liable to render three months of his manual service in a year to the Ahom state. A *paik* engaged in agriculture was allotted a plot of land for the service he had to render to the state.

state. Therefore, in essence, the system of *posa* cannot be equated with ‘blackmail’ or ‘tribute’ as some of the colonial officers described it (Bhattacharjee 1981).

### **Colonial (Non) Interference**

Although the geographical space referred to in colonial parlance as the “North East Frontier” had been interest to the East India Company since the annexation of the Chittogong Hill Tract from the Nawab of Bengal in 1760, and the subsequent assault on Tripura in 1761, (Chaudhuri 1999; Ganguly 2006) six decades passed without colonial interventions in the frontier. This changed with Burmese invasions of the Ahom state of the Brahmaputra valley, Manipur and Cachar plains (1817-1824). Though the Ahom state was brought under colonial control in 1826, direct colonial administration was uniformly introduced and stabilized over the entire erstwhile Ahom kingdom after exploration of various economic potentials, especially of tea, during the first decade of colonial occupation (Guha 1991). Subsequently, Jaintia, Cachar, and Khasi hills were annexed. Further annexation of the remaining hills was carried out step-by-step in the face of stiff resistance (Guha 2006). For the convenience of colonial administration, the contiguous hills and plains that were gradually annexed were also brought under the British province of Assam, which took shape in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Territorially, it included almost the entire present Northeast India, excluding the two princely states of Manipur and Tripura. The administrative arrangement in the British province was also in a flux and kept changing almost till the end of colonialism in India. The narrative of colonial annexation and fluidity of administration has been underlined by the colonial construction of the dichotomy between hills and valleys. The creation of the cultural, political and administrative binary started with the Inner Line Regulations of 1873 and continued till the Government of India Act of 1935, reinforced by many other measures in between.

The colonial construction of the hill-valley dichotomy began with characterization of the hill inhabitants as tribes, the people with an assemblage of negative elements such as primitiveness, savagery, barbarous etc., in sharp contrast to the modern, civilized, and also the Hinduized valley people. Reinforcement and social legitimization of this dichotomy was crucial for protection of colonial capital that started infiltrating into the valley economy surrounded by the hills on three sides. While the colonial state was massively restructuring the political economy of the valley, it required a redefinition of relations with the neighboring hills, instilled by the pre-colonial power structure. Setting the valley up for colonial exploitation, the first instrument that was devised to keep the “disturbing tribes” at a safe distance was the Inner Line Regulations of 1873. The area framed by the Inner Line was the territory under the political-economic jurisdiction of the colonial state. It was mainly for protection of tea estates bordering the hill people that units of armed forces were initially raised (Patil 1984). This created a divide in the existing sociocultural relations between the people of either side of the Inner Line. At the same time, the entire geographical

space beyond the Inner Line was left undefined by any “Outer Line”. In fact, the international boundary of colonial Assam and Tibet was never clearly defined until a tentative agreement was reached in Simla in 1914, and McMahon Line was drawn up on the map. The tract lying between the Inner Line and the MacMahon was considered primarily as a buffer zone between Assam and China.

The area, now framed by the “Outer Line”, was brought under colonial administration in 1914 by extending the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880 also to the hills inhabited by the “barbarous or semi-civilized” tribes. The vast natural buffer zone was divided into three administrative units. The Central and Eastern Section, and the Western Section, both placed under the control of their respective Political Officer; and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract to be controlled by the Deputy Commissioner of the colonial district of Lakhimpur. In 1919, the Central and Eastern Section was renamed as Sadiya Frontier Tract and the Western Section as the Balipara Frontier Tract. The Lakhimpur Frontier Tract remained the same. These three Frontier Tracts were brought under the “Excluded Areas” of Assam in 1935 for direct control of the Governor of Assam and to be administered through the respective Political Officers and the Deputy Commissioner. The administrative mechanism devised by the colonial state for the Frontier Tracts was significantly different from the mechanisms of colonial control over other hills demarcated as districts of the province of Assam (Sarmah 2017).

The importance of the region for colonialism was more for its strategic location than economic interests. The ethos that shaped the colonial administration as well as strategic importance of the region is well reflected in the words of Thomas H. Holdich:

*Politically, it is here that the dividing line exists between the Chinese Empire and our own. Here is the hedge over which we may look, but which we may not pass; and here we may discern what the expansion of another great empire may effect in the matter of approach to our domains, and of control over a horde of Mongoloid peoples who have direct relations with ourselves and whose goodwill as frontier neighbours we cannot ignore (Holdich 1912: 379-380).*

Although the initial efforts for trans Himalayan trade through the region proved to be ineffectual (Sikdar 1982b), the foothills rich in timber, rubber, and ivory and the adjoining fertile plains with the promise of generating enormous revenue lured colonial interests. The immediate concern, therefore, was to dislodge the “tribes” from the areas under their possession for expansion of the tea sector and settlement of ryots, and at the same time, to make them obliged to the colonial rule. Hence, the area was to be subjugated gradually, adopting myriad forms of control, and the process started with an agreement with the chiefs of the Sherdukpens in 1826 and continued till the subjugation of the Mishmis in 1920 (Chakravarty & Chakravarty 1973; Jyotirindra Nath Chowdhury 1982; Mackenzie 1884).

One of the most effective ways of controlling the “tribal chiefs” was monetization of *posa*. The chiefs, who were given the privilege of *posa* in kind, were persuaded or compelled to accept it in cash. Annual payment of *posa* was increased for the chiefs showing allegiance to the colonial rule (Bose 1979; Kar 2016; Luthra 1971). Monetization of *posa* was also instrumental for establishing a linkage between the subsistence hill economy and colonial capitalist interests in the valley. With infiltration of cash into the hill economy, Marwari traders operating in the valley as agents of British trading houses were encouraged to open shops to facilitate trade with the hill people. The essence of the frontier trade was to push European finished products to the hill societies and collection of raw products of the hills gradually replacing barter with monetary transactions. Being attracted by the European finished products and opium, the people from the hills frequented the markets dominated by the Marwari traders in the growing urban centres in the valley. Supply from the hills not restricted by the Inner Line resulted in booming of timber and rubber trade in the Brahmaputra valley (Sikdar 1982b). Therefore, rapid transformation of the subsistence hill economy to a monetized one can be seen as a corollary of the integration of colonial Assam with global capital. The consequent social implications *inter alia* provided the basis for growth of a scrounging political class in the decades to come. However, being largely untouched by the “civilizing mission” of the Christian Missionaries, unlike many other parts of the North Eastern Frontier, the loosely governed region, the ‘largest *terra incognita*’ in South Asia (Guyot-Récharad 2016) for British colonialism remained completely deprived of education.

### **Becoming a Circumstantial State**

The semi-permeable Inner Line had its own political economy. Designed essentially to proscribe movement of the colonial subjects of the valley to the hills, it allowed climbing of cash economy up to the hill societies. However, reinforced by protracted illiteracy of the hill inhabitants; it successfully guarded the ‘tribes’ against the nationalist ideologies which started influencing the adjoining Brahmaputra valley. Except for a very insignificant inception of a ‘war council’ in the early 1930s in Sadiya, the hill societies remained beyond the reach of anti-colonial discourse till the dawn of India’s independence (Pandey 1997: 90-92). After a break of nearly two decades, a handful of community leaders from Siang came into contact with the Congress leadership, and an attempt was made to organize people under the banner of the Congress on the threshold of India’s independence. It was, however, frustrated by the colonial Political Officer (ibid: 92-98).

While India was approaching independence, the political logic of the emerging nation-state warranted a well-designed policy for integrating the Excluded and Partially Excluded areas, which remained almost uninfluenced by the pan-Indian nationalist discourse. The hills, which were brought under the colonial control as districts of Assam elevated serious questions for working out an integrationist model. The question was how to reconcile their aspiration for political autonomy, clearly

perceptible in some of the hill districts. The instrument for integration designed by the Bordoloi Committee in the form of the “Autonomous District Council” with legislative, judicial, and executive powers was accepted by the constituent assembly. The primary concern was national security, although the instrument was purportedly designed to protect the cultural identity of the hill societies. Essentially, the attempt was to accommodate political aspiration for autonomy within the national political system, characterized by centralized bias, while also facilitating a process of assimilation of the tribal societies with the valley based Assamese culture as well as politics. Accordingly, Autonomous District Councils were constituted in some of the hill districts without altering the colonial map of Assam, retaining the hills under the hegemonic political control of the Assamese.

The strategy for political inclusion of the hill areas covered by the Sadiya Frontier Tract, the Balipara Frontier Tract and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, however, had to be worked out differently. As the Bordoloi Committee observed, not only had there been little education except in the fringe or plain portions, but administration had yet to be fully established. In addition to the delicate situations caused by the trade blocks set up by the Tibetans on the Indian side of the MacMahon Line, the large area in many ways was unripe for regular administration until adequate improvements were made through a five-year programme. The village councils in the tracts appeared to be ill organized, and the Committee found little material for local self-government institutions. Since regular provincial administration was not possible, except in the plains, the Committee recommended for accelerating the pace of administration by appointing separate officers. Not to jeopardize the aims of establishing administration and also to bring the tribes, who were well disposed, into the fold of civilization, the Committee recommended continuation of *posa*, the vestigial payments of sums which the tribes claim by way of *quid pro quo* for making peace. Therefore, the three Frontier Tracts were placed in the Schedule B of the Sixth Schedule to the constitution after separating the plain areas. Consequently, franchise was denied to the people of the hill tracts by debarring their right of representation to the provincial as well as central legislatures, purportedly for their low level of political consciousness.

The ‘adoption and enactment of the constitution of India by its people’ was preceded by the birth of the Peoples Republic of China, and its immediate interventions in Tibet became a matter serious concern for the Indian nationalists. With a perceived threat of “Chinese irredentism and communist imperialism” Sardar Patel wrote to Nehru on 11 November, 1950, “All along the Himalayas in the north and north-east, we have on our side of the frontier, a population ethnologically and culturally not different from Tibetans or Mongoloids. The undefined state of the frontier and existence on our side of a population with its affinities to Tibetans or Chinese have all elements of political trouble between China and ourselves. There is almost an unlimited scope for infiltration”. The infiltration, as Patel was worried about, was the infiltration of Communist ideology. Therefore, he wrote, “the Communist Party

of India has found some difficulty in contacting Communists abroad, or in getting supplies of arms, literature, etc. from them. They shall now have a comparatively easy means of access to Chinese Communists and through them to other foreign Communists. Infiltration of spies, fifth columnists and Communists would now be easier" (Chopra 1991:275-279).

The apprehension of Chinese irredentism and communist imperialism led India to occupy Tawang in February 1951 to establish its claim that Tawang belonged to India since 1914. This was followed by rapid militarization on the south of the MacMahon Line by establishing a series of Assam Rifles outposts, administrative centres and intelligence checkpoints, the process that continued unabated through the 1950s (Guyot-Récharde 2016:103-104). Militarization had necessarily been accompanied by developmentalist state agenda for the area which was in many ways unripe for regular administration until adequate improvements were made, as the Bordoloi Committee pointed out. Tokenism had its own political role to play. In 1952, Chowkhamoon Gohain, who could afford higher education in Guwahati being the son of a Khamti chief, was nominated to the Indian Parliament (Pandey 1997: 98-100). The Community Development Programme (CDP) was introduced on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti in 1952. The National Extension Service (NES) was inaugurated on the same occasion next year. Starting with 19 National Extension Service Blocks during the First Five Year Plan period, the number bloated to 45 by the end of the Fourth Five Year Plan period. With militarization deep into the "potentially troublesome frontier" and developmentalism for its people aimed essentially at establishing "loyalty or devotion to India" (Chopra 1991) the nation state prepared the ground for regular administration of the Frontier Tracts in 1954. The Governor of Assam promulgated a North East Frontier Area (Administration) Regulation by re-baptizing the Frontier Tracts as NEFA. For deeper administrative penetration, NEFA was divided into Six Frontier Divisions<sup>4</sup> placing each of them under the control of a Political Officer. Initially, a batch of officer was appointed for administration of the Frontier Divisions, and that was followed by creation of a distinct cadre, the Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS) in 1959.

Constitution of NEFA as a discrete political space with deep militarization and developmentalism along with the subsequent changes of its political structure should be seen with the backdrop of political developments in the adjoining hill districts, especially the Naga Hill District, besides the fear of Chinese infiltration. The imagination of autonomy by the Indian nationalist leadership was preceded by the growth and consolidation of Naga nationalism. The Naga Hills District Tribal Council formed in April 1945 turned into a political platform to assert the Naga

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<sup>4</sup> Balipara Frontier Division was bifurcated and renamed as Kameng Frontier Division with Bomdila as the Head Quarter and Subansiri Frontier Division with Ziro as the Head Quarter; Tirap Frontier was renamed as Tirap Frontier Division with Khonsa as the Head Quarter; Abor hill district was renamed as Siang Frontier Division with Along as Head Quarter; Mishmi hill district was renamed as Lohit Frontier Division with Tezu as Head Quarter; Naga Tribal Area was renamed as Tuensang Frontier Division with Tuensang as Head Quarter. The last one was, however, transferred to Nagaland in 1957.



identity with renaming of the tribal council as the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946. The NNC prepared to declare independence for the Nagas, and contemplated a 10-year treaty with an independent Assam (Yonuo 1974). In May 1947, the radical section of the Naga leadership unequivocally declared a sovereign Nagaland as their political goal, which led to the plebiscite in 1951 and consolidation of armed militancy in response to the military interventions of the Indian nation state.

In other hill districts of Assam, the autonomy provided by the Indian Constitution was an acceptable proposition immediately after independence. The political leadership of the hill districts, however, strived for more power by remaining within the Indian federal structure, and started mobilization for separate hill states comprising the district councils. Following the Naga leadership, political mobilization in the Lushai Hills also took a violent form with the appearance of the Mizo National Front (MNF) in the early 1960s, making its secessionist intentions clear. (Sarmah 2017). As a consequence of the political developments in different hill districts of Assam, the process of redrawing the political map of Assam started from the early 1960s and it continued till the mid-1980s. The process was inaugurated by the Constitution (13<sup>th</sup> Amendment) Act, 1962 to provide statehood to Nagaland and also to insert the Article 371A with certain special provision for the newly created state to meet the political aspirations of the Naga leadership. That was followed by the creation of an Autonomous State called Meghalaya in 1969. Further reorganization of the political units of the North East was done in 1971. Statehood was provided to Manipur and Tripura, while the Mizo district of Assam and NEFA were reconstituted as Union Territories as Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh respectively. Finally, when the Mizo nationalist movement came to an end after two decades, Mizoram became a state in 1987. Along with that, statehood was also conferred to Arunachal Pradesh, allegedly, to satisfy political desires and aspirations of the people.

The constitutional provision made for Arunachal Pradesh, however, greatly differed from that of Mizoram. The differences are, perhaps, due to the political exigencies that led to restructuring of the two units of the Indian federal structure. In case of Arunachal Pradesh, the Governor has been provided with special responsibilities for maintaining of law and order backed by enormous powers under Article 371H of the Constitution. However, the constitutional provisions made for Mizoram under the Article 371G are almost similar to that of Nagaland. Nevertheless, the nameless geographical space that was, became a part of the federal structure of the Indian nation state as Arunachal Pradesh without any strong political aspiration of the people manifested through peaceful or violent movements. The foreseeable nosiness certainly provides scope for further research.

### **Politics of Developmentalism**

With their sociogeographical specificities, the nameless nonstate space remained impervious to noteworthy influences and authority of the precolonial valley state,

as it has already been indicated. The “colonial state space” for Manu Goswami, denoting “the complex ensemble of practices, ideologies, and state projects that underpinned the restructuring of the institutional and spatiotemporal matrices of colonial power and everyday life” (2004: 8) was also not a wholesome reality in the hill societies. Nor did the *colonial nonstatespace* could be made an integral part of the pan Indian nationalist discourse. Nevertheless, geopolitics of the Nation state project demanded its integration to the “idea of India” constructed by the pan Indian nationalist discourse. Militarization was essential, but alone it might lead to estrangement as well as backfire. Therefore, success depended on aptitude to elicit allegiance of the autochthons. At this crucial juncture, the Achingmori episode came as a dreadful lesson at the cost of many lives. A column of the Assam Rifles was dispatched in October 1953 to Achingmori, deep in the un-administered area inhabited by the Tagins, without advance intelligence required for venturing into a virtually unknown territory. The strange men in khaki were massacred. Apart from other apprehensions and suspicions, the Tagins were aware of the objectives of military expansion – “how tribal villages nearer the plains were being gradually brought under closer administrative control” (Rustomji 1983: 131).

In the specific historical and regional context, developmentalist epistemology of the Nation state project required understanding of the social categories not only to redefine the purpose of development but also to make the autochthons conceptualizers of and visible agents in the process. It therefore, necessitated a space for what Escobar has termed as “hyperethnography”, allowing the ethnographer to comprehend the development network, investigating the main sites with their respective actors, cultural backgrounds, and practical appropriation of the interventions by local groups (Escobar: 1995). And at this juncture, Nehru appointed Verrier Elwin, a trained anthropologist with deep insights of the tribal areas of India, as the Adviser for Tribal Affairs, and he arrived at Shillong in 1953, as “a missionary of Mr. Nehru’s gospel”<sup>5</sup>.

The existing Research Branch, which was primarily engaged for documenting the administrative history of the frontier, was reorganized to generate a spate of understanding of the history, culture and language of the people under the guidance of Verrier Elwin. Within a short span, it produced a number of ethnographic accounts of the hill communities of NEFA to help Verrier Elwin reconstructing an integrationist approach. This appeared in the form of “*A Philosophy for NEFA*, first published in the early part of 1957 with a foreword by Nehru. As it was expected by Nehru, the officers and others working with the tribals of NEFA would read carefully and absorb the *Philosophy* to act in accordance with it. The *Philosophy* essentially proposed a mechanism for intervention of the Nation state. The people of NEFA were not to be left in their age-old isolation, nor could the political vacuum along the frontier be left unattended. The interventions must result in a “spirit of love and loyalty for India, without a trace of suspicion that Government has come into the tribal areas to

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<sup>5</sup> See, Preface to the Second Edition, the *Philosophy for NEFA*, (Verrier Elwin 2012).

colonize or exploit, a full integration of mind and heart with the greater society of which the tribal people form a part ...” yet, at the same time “avoiding the dangers of assimilation and detribalization which degraded tribal communities in other parts of the world” (Elwin 2012: 53-54). The proposed middle path for state interventions was in between age-old isolation and too obtrusive interference for assimilation and detribalization. In Nehru’s words, “to help the tribal people to grow according to their own genius and tradition; it is not the intention to impose anything on them” (ibid: 56). The core of the integrationist *Philosophy* was the five fundamental principles laid down by Nehru in the foreword to the second edition of *A Philosophy for NEFA*, published in 1958. Praise for *A Philosophy for NEFA* came from all over, the tall nationalists including J.R.D Tata (Guha 2014: 275).

The integrationist mechanism envisaged in the *Philosophy* was, however, soon overpowered by developmentalism of the Nation state. With shifting of responsibility from the Central Public Works Department (CPWD) to the Border Roads Organization (BRO), expansion of roads and communication network during the First Five Year Plan got a momentum since the Second Five Year Plan, backed by military engineering. Not only all the divisional headquarters were linked by roads, NEFA was equipped with thirteen airstrips of different sizes by the end of the Second Five Year Plan. To supplement the feeble indigenous workforce, the process required massive inflow of outside laborers. In addition to expansion of medical services and school education, CDPs were intensified through the increasing number of NES Blocks. Interventions were also initiated, especially since the Second Five Year Plan period, to ‘modernize’ the ‘primitive and wasteful’ method of Jhum. Demonstration farms started burgeoning in the hills to promote terrace cultivation of many hitherto unknown cash crops (Chowdhury 1983: 266-271). Proving their resilience to change, the hill communities auspiciously responded to such interventions being oblivious of the vicious socioeconomic insinuations.

Contesting the fundamentals of the *Philosophy*, developmentalism started exposing the exclusivist hill communities to many new forms of social interactions and economic engagements. Establishment of schools and hospitals for ensuring a ‘good life’ for the tribals and expansion of administrative networks in a situation of almost total absence of an educated section amongst the autochthons had to be carried out depending on the people from outside. While expansion of transport and communication networks brought a massive outside labor force, militarization exposed the close societies to a host of strange people in khaki. The processes of development dependent on outside expertise, technical skills and labor resulted in mushrooming of urban centres across NEFA. That attracted more and more valley businessmen to settle for ever increasing profit, manipulating the restrictions of Inner Line. The normalization of frontier settlements into towns accelerated the influx of outsiders visibly influencing the ethnic composition.

The story of Vijoynagar is well known. Discovered by an expedition of the Assam

Rifles in 1961, the area was colonized through a settlement scheme and hundreds of families of soldiers were settled there for security and stability. Yet, another demographic assault invoked by the Nation state was to provide asylum to the Chakmas in the mid 1960s in three different parts of NEFA. Being displaced by the Kapti hydraulic dam over Karnafuli river in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of the then East Pakistan, nearly three thousand Chakma families (approximately 40,000 people) entered NEFA and they were settled with five to ten acres of land allotted to each family. Subsequently, the Chakmas not only remained stateless but also became a serious political question (Singh 2010: 15-17). In view of the considerably low population density, the absolute number of outsiders settled in NEFA is not so significant. However, this has to be seen against the total population of the region and its ethnic composition. The Chakmas alone constituted nearly nine percent of the total population of NEFA in 1971. Further, during the period from 1971 to 1981, the decadal growth of Scheduled Tribe population in NEFA was 20 per cent against that of 94 per cent for the non Scheduled Tribe population. Certainly, this abnormal growth of non Scheduled Tribe population indicates the intensity of influx from outside. More importantly, according to Census data, the growth of urban population during 1971 and 1981 was 141 percent against that of 31 percent for the rural areas of NEFA. This indicates a process of urbanization overwhelmed by the people migrating from the other side of the Inner Line.

### **The Political Class in the Democratic Theater**

The historical conjuncture of the circumstantial state restricted political engagement of the communities essentially to the village-based Institutions. The developmentalist mission of the Nehruvian state, however, disregarded such institutions and also denied political representation based on universal franchise. The influential chiefs were brought closer to administration where necessary. Development engineering avowedly underpinned by security anxiety had, however, to soon fraught with a widening gap between the state and the society at large. The emerging scenario was overcastted by increasing militarization, especially after providing asylum to the Dalai Lama in 1959. It was further aggravated by the Sino-Indian war of 1962, “a performance, a demonstration meant for Indian leaders and public opinion” done by the Chinese force in NEFA. “Through their magisterial handling of the war, benevolence, and promises to return as liberators should the inhabitants demand it” (Guyot-Récharde 2016: 240-241), the Chinese force left a strong message for the people of NEFA as well as the Indian state. The aftermath of the war demanded a radical restructuring of state-society relations for reducing estrangement of the people from the statist development institutions.

The process began with evolving an apparently decentralized power structure. The Governor of Assam in May, 1964 constituted a committee headed by Daying Earing, the only Member of Parliament from NEFA. The Committee recommended an inimitable structure of local self-government. With recognition and delegations of

responsibilities to develop agriculture, education and public health by the existing administrative structure, the Committee essentially visualized the traditional village councils as the Gram Panchayats. The next higher unit would be at the Circle level to be called Anchal Samiti constituted by members nominated by the village councils. Finally, there would be a Zila Parishad at the district level, as an advisory body, constituted by the members elected by the Anchal Samitis. The Committee also recommended an Electoral College to be constituted by the non-official members of the Zila Parishad to elect the Member of Parliament from NEFA. In contrast to the recommendations of the Committee, the mechanism of decentralized administration worked out for NEFA was, however, based on recognition of the colonial construction of the “Village Authority”<sup>6</sup>. Placing the Anchal Samitis and Zila Parishads in their own hierarchy, the Act promulgated by the Indian parliament provided an “Agency Council” at the top as advisory body to be constituted by the Governor.

The façade of “democratic decentralization” an architecture of the Nation state, and the tiny dose of exotic electoral politics played a decisive role in making of the circumstantial state in the post Nehruvian era. The so-called panchayats structured on the colonial construct of village authorities and functioning as an adjunct wing of the centralized administration soon became the elementary schools of an emerging political class. The village authorities configured by the colonial administration were predominated by the recognized traditional chiefs in their ‘red coats’ given to them as insignia of authority. The most important source of their political influence was the judicial power they traditionally enjoyed. Reincarnation of the single tribe/clan based village authorities as Gram Panchayats and structuring of the Anchal Samitis with similar ethnic composition provided space for the traditional leadership for their upward political mobility backed by consolidation of powers to negotiate more with the developmentalist administration. Therefore, political articulation of clan/tribe identity in the hill societies became a mere facsimile of cast politics embedded in the main stream of Indian democracy.

The provisional Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh which was functional from 1975 to 1978, was an up gradation of the Agency Council, the apex body of Panchayat Raj. Consequently, all important portfolios of provisional Legislative Assembly, including the Chief Minister, were occupied by the members of the Agency Council. The Union Territory got a Legislative Assembly in 1978 with 33 members - 30 elected and 3 nominated. Subsequently, all the three Legislative Assemblies of the Union Territory, before it became a full-fledged state in February 1987, were also overwhelmingly dominated by members having different

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<sup>6</sup> The Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulations, 1945 provides that the Political Officer shall appoint such persons as he considers desirable to be the members of a village authority for such villages or villages as he may specify, and may modify or cancel any such order of appointment, and may dismiss any person so appointed.

positions in Panchayats.<sup>7</sup> The political leadership of Arunachal Pradesh, therefore, emanated essentially from the rural power structure dominated by the traditional chiefs who could consolidate their political position with powers and material resources accumulated in a geometric progression by becoming an integral part of statist developmentalism.

The traditional chiefs with their consolidated powers and ever-increasing command over resources emerging as a distinct political class was fostered and adopted by the Congress with its predominant hegemony at the national level till the mid-1970s. The simple mechanism was nomination, ranging from the lowest level of administration to the Parliament, to make the emerging political class an integral part of statist developmentalism. Therefore, both forms and contents of the Nation state's interventions deep into the hill societies had never been politically contested. Nor did the political class make any attempt to politically unite the diverse communities, a remarkable difference from the other hill districts of Assam. A small number of school students who formed the Adi-Mising Student Union in 1947 protested against derogatory characterization of the communities such as Abors and Miris, but it remained insignificant and confined only to Sadiya and Pasighat in absence of schools or any such educational institutes in other parts of the region. With expansion of educational facilities, the contesting voice was made creditable by the rebirth of All NEFA Student Union in 1967. The students' movement was reorganized mainly on the questions relating to territoriality of NEFA and continuation of the Inner Line, deportation of the Chakmas, shifting of capital of NEFA from Shillong, more representatives in the Parliament, expansion of road communications, and more importantly, abolition of Assamese Language as medium of instruction from all schools of NEFA (Yonggam 2015: 12-18). However, with the birth of Arunachal Pradesh as a separate state, the issue of deportation of the Chakmas became the primary concern for the students' movement under the leadership of the All Arunachal Students' Union (Prasad 2007).

Political choreography of the Congress with its unit established in 1972 had, however, to confront with contestation at the time of the general elections to the Lok Sabha in 1977. People now had the right to exercise their franchise to elect their two representatives, from the East and the West Parliamentary constituencies. Political maneuvering of the Chief Minister resulted in an uncontested return from the West Constituency (Pandey 1997: 189-190), nevertheless, the people of the East constituency elected an independent candidate. Immediately after the elections, Bakim Pertin, elected from the East parliamentary constituency convened an All Leaders Conference, which culminated in formation of a regional political party, the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA). Appearance of the regional party and

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<sup>7</sup> The first Legislative Assembly with elected members formed in 1978, which lasted for only 20 months, had 25 members who held positions in Panchayat Raj. Subsequently, the second Legislative Assembly elected in January 1980, and the third Legislative Assembly formed in January 1986 had 21 and 24 members respectively who held positions in Panchayats (Dubey 2001:81-88).

its contestation to the Congress hegemony is, however, not be accentuated as an ideological substitute. Though it immediately provided a large space for the ex-student leaders and panchayat representatives to become more visible in the electoral politics, the regional platform has always been a theater for repositioning the dominant leadership. The Janata regime headed by Prem Khandu Thungoon could remain in power for only 17 months and came to an end in September 1979 for defection of 17 members. The PPA after accommodating the defectors changed its name, now to be known as the United Peoples Party of Arunachal; and it reappeared in the earlier name at the time of the general elections to the Legislative Assembly in 1984. By and large, defection as a constitutionally legitimized political paradox to popular mandate continued to be an integral part of the democratic drama of Arunachal, irrespective of the political players. The same leadership keeps changing party affiliation to form the state government matching the party in power at the centre. The process continued till formation of the present Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in the state after defection engineered by the party in power at the centre.

The long tradition of defection is, however, not to be over generalized as a 'dependency syndrome', reflective of a deep-seated insecurity arising from the extent of neglect and indifference of the region in the mainstream consciousness (Singh 2010: 88) or just as a subjective attribute of the political leaders dictated by pragmatism rather than ideology (Bath 2009: 50). The tradition of defection is reflective of the basic characteristics of the political class that emerged in the historical context of the circumstantial state, besides being adoption of a constitutionally legitimized strategy to remain in power. Access to and possession of land in Arunachal is still guided by the old traditions and customs for the common people. However, conversion land to a productive asset requires investment. Development interventions for substituting traditional jhum with cash crops, essentially a technological intervention without the required institutional reforms, became a bonanza for the political class. Being a part of the developmentalist bureaucracy, politically influential section can easily acquire land allotment certificates required for bank finance and other institutional support to convert the jhum land to modern horticultural farms. The fertile soil, therefore, not only started producing horticultural crops, but also a landed aristocracy in absence of land ceiling or other such legal measures prohibiting accumulation. When the political class started a process of primitive accumulation in the pretext of expansion of permanent cultivation, it also inspired many for production of horticultural cash crops. Almost one third of the total cropped area of Arunachal is now under horticulture.<sup>8</sup> However, the political class remained indifferent to protect the interests of the tiny emerging capitalist farmers and to save them for market vulnerabilities.

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<sup>8</sup> With a remarkable low density of population, 17 persons per square kilometer, and significantly high forest coverage of more than 80 per cent of the total geographical area, the total cropped area in Arunachal Pradesh is little more than three per cent, and 30 per cent of the total cropped area was under horticultural crops in 2013-14. See, Agricultural Statistics at a Glance 2016 and Horticultural Statistics at a Glance 2017, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India.

Another means of primitive accumulation appeared in the guise of what is commonly understood as scams. In one of such instances, the Public Distribution System of Arunachal Pradesh was the victim. The so-called scam allegedly spearheaded by the Chief Minister almost for a decade involving Rs. 1000 crore was unearthed by a public interest litigation filed by an organization in 2004.<sup>9</sup>Subsequently, one of the most powerful political leaders who controlled the state politics for decades instrumentalizing defection, Gegong Apang, was arrested in August, 2010. Not only land or the Public Distribution System, the political class also beleaguered the rivers as a means of primitive accumulation, the potential of hydro power that lured the corporate houses. Projecting Arunachal as a ‘power house of the country’ in the early part of the last decade with capacity for harvesting more than one third of the total hydroelectricity potential of India, the government initiated the process to harvest hydroelectricity rationalizing it as a prerequisite for development. Lured by the projected potential, 159 companies including the central Public Sector Units and private companies signed MoAs and MoUs respectively with the government, and Arunachal received Rs. 1,495.62 crore as upfront money and processing fees within a period of ten years since beginning of the process in 2005 as reported by the *Economic Times* on July 16, 2015. The providence of the ‘power house’ is a matter of further research; nevertheless, the BJP projected it as a massive scam before it came to power in the state, however, it remained unaddressed after the same party came to power in the state.

### Conclusion

Keeping in view India’s integrationist paranoia and triumph in the northeastern frontiers, an attempt has been made in this paper to locate Arunachal Pradesh in its own historical, geographical and political context. Arunachal, in its present form, sets an agenda to understand the political economy of a transition from one historical type of power structure to a unit of the federal structure of a nation state uncritically accepting the logic of developmental nationalism. Developmentalism, as an ideology of political integration was instrumentalized by nurturing a scrounging political class by the nation state, the class that was implanted by the colonial power structure to serve its immediate interest. Beginning with making it acquiescent to the centralized bureaucratic system legitimized by the nation state ideology, growth of the incipient political class to its present form of political domination has always been the primary concern of Indian nationalism.

Nevertheless, with the increasing space of political domination in absence of deep rooted democratic political culture, the scrounging political class gathered its vigor to bargain more with the nation state articulating India’s strategic concerns especially after the Sino-Indian war of 1962. For instance, the Indian Prime Minister’s visit to China in 2008 was immediately followed by his frantic visit to Arunachal Pradesh

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<sup>9</sup> September 2010 issue of The Eastern Panorama provides the details of the so called scam.



to make an announcement of the biggest ever developmental package of Rs. 10,000 crore to the state. Amazingly, that was followed by the anguish expressed by the BJP Member of Parliament from Arunachal for complete absence of railway network in the state. He was willing to get one from China, if India cannot provide (Singh 2010: 5). Continuation of uncontested domination of the scrounging political class requires cultural and political insulation, preventing any questioning of the colonial logic of the Inner Line. Political integration, therefore, remains with the colonial logic of segregation. The present form political domination of the scrounging political class in the state is not a triumph of the Indian cultural nationalism, but merely an opportunistic political adjustment with the Hindutva ideology.

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