



# FORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH AS A STATE: A POLITICAL HISTORY

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**Abstract:** This paper delves into the political history of Arunachal Pradesh from ancient times to its attainment of statehood within the Indian Union. It offers a comprehensive overview of the region's journey through various political epochs, examining the dynamics of governance, administration, and socio-political developments. Beginning with the ancient tribal origins and pre-colonial governance structures, the paper navigates through the impact of British colonization, the integration of Arunachal Pradesh into independent India, and the formation of its political institutions. By tracing the evolution of political systems, tribal councils, and administrative mechanisms, this study illuminates the intricate interplay of historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors that have shaped the political landscape of Arunachal Pradesh. Through a nuanced exploration of key events, policies, and transitions, the paper provides valuable insights into the region's rich political heritage and its trajectory towards statehood, offering a deeper understanding of Arunachal Pradesh's place within the broader Indian political mosaic.

**keywords – Arunachal Pradesh, Statehood, Indian union, Governance, Administration, Transitions.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Nestled in the northeastern corner of India, Arunachal Pradesh stands as a testament to the country's diverse geography and cultural tapestry. Bordered by Assam and Nagaland to the south and southeast, and sharing international boundaries with Bhutan, China, and Myanmar, this state is renowned for its stunning landscapes and ethnic diversity. Aptly named the "Land of the Dawn-Lit Mountains," Arunachal Pradesh boasts a varied terrain, from lush valleys to snow-capped peaks, making it a haven for adventurers and nature enthusiasts alike.

Arunachal Pradesh's strategic location renders it of immense importance in India's geopolitical landscape. Situated near international borders, particularly those with China and Myanmar, the state assumes a critical role in safeguarding India's territorial integrity and security interests. Furthermore, its vast biodiversity, encompassing subtropical forests, alpine meadows, and high-altitude glaciers, underscores its significance as a global biodiversity hotspot. The state's cultural diversity, with numerous indigenous tribes each preserving their unique heritage, adds another layer of richness to its identity.

Within the broader Indian political landscape, Arunachal Pradesh occupies a prominent position, embodying various facets of national interest and discourse. Its journey from a Union Territory to a full-fledged state within the Indian Union reflects not only the aspirations of its people but also the complexities of India's federal structure. The state's political representation, manifested through its legislative assembly and the dynamics of political parties, contributes to the larger narrative of democracy and governance in the country. Additionally, Arunachal Pradesh's natural resources, including its rivers and forests, are integral to debates surrounding sustainable development and environmental conservation.

### OBJECTIVE OF THE PAPER:

1. Provide a comprehensive understanding of the administrative history of Arunachal Pradesh before the British colonial era.
2. Examine the administrative developments, policies, and governance structures implemented by the British authorities in Arunachal Pradesh.
3. Analyse the evolution of Arunachal Pradesh's administrative framework and its impact on the region's socio-political landscape.

## II. EARLY HISTORY AND TRIBAL GOVERNANCE

The history of Arunachal Pradesh extends back hundreds of years into the mists of tradition and myth. Local tradition identifies the region around Sadiya as the ancient Vidarbha, and ancient Puranas like the Kalika Purana describe the Upper Lohit Valley in Arunachal Pradesh as "Praabhu Kutar." The first recorded history of Arunachal Pradesh can be traced to the time when the Ahom kings began to rule Assam. Historian PC Choudhury includes Arunachal Pradesh as part of the ancient kingdom of Kamrupa. During the 18th and 19th centuries, Arunachal Pradesh existed as a region distinct from the influence of major neighbouring powers like China, India, and Tibet. It was inhabited by a multitude of indigenous tribes, each with its own unique cultural and social structures. These tribes, though lacking the organization and size to form centralized states, inhabited rugged mountainous terrain that provided natural defences against external encroachment. As a result, they remained relatively independent and resistant to assimilation by more developed civilizations to their north (Tibet) and south (the Indian subcontinent). Despite the scarcity of written records from this era, archaeological findings and oral traditions offer glimpses into the intricate political organization of ancient Arunachal Pradesh. The region is home to numerous indigenous tribes, many of which formed confederations or alliances based on kinship ties, shared cultural practices, and mutual defence agreements. These confederations fostered cooperation and collaboration among tribes, particularly in matters of external defence and resource management. For example, the Adi tribe, one of the largest ethnic groups in Arunachal Pradesh, comprised several sub-tribes that often united to address common challenges and pursue shared interests. Clan-based societies were prevalent in ancient Arunachal Pradesh, with familial relationships forming the foundation of political organization. Extended families and kinship ties played pivotal roles in maintaining social cohesion and governance. Clan elders or heads of families wielded significant influence in decision-making and conflict resolution, ensuring stability and harmony within the community. Among the Nyishi tribe, the village council system was structured around clan affiliations, with representatives from different clans convening to address communal issues and uphold traditional norms. Political authority in ancient Arunachal Pradesh often rested with chieftains or village heads, chosen for their lineage, wisdom, and leadership qualities. These chieftains presided over matters of governance, justice, and community affairs, guiding their villages through times of peace and adversity. The Mishmi tribe, for instance, had hereditary chiefs who served as focal points of leadership and decision-making within their respective communities. Councils of elders played pivotal roles as forums for deliberation and consensus-building in ancient Arunachal Pradesh. Comprising respected members renowned for their wisdom and experience, these councils convened to address disputes, adjudicate conflicts, and uphold customary laws. Among the Galo tribe, the "Gonya" served as a council of elders responsible for maintaining social order, resolving disputes, and preserving traditional values. Rituals and ceremonies held profound political significance, serving as occasions to reaffirm social hierarchies, alliances, and leadership roles. Festivals like the "Dree Festival" among the Apatani tribe functioned not only as harvest celebrations but also as platforms for political negotiations, alliances, and dispute resolutions. These rituals reinforced community bonds and affirmed the legitimacy of leaders and institutions within tribal society. Village councils, such as the "Kebang" among the Adis and the "Yargam" among the Nyishis, continue to serve as pillars of local governance, deliberating on issues vital to the community's collective well-being. Traditional chiefs, known as "Gaon Burahs" or "Miris," uphold their esteemed positions, overseeing administrative matters and cultural preservation efforts within their villages. Each tribe maintains its unique form of village council, tailored to its cultural and social norms, ensuring the transmission of traditional knowledge and values to future generations.

## III. BRITISH COLONIZATION

Following the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, which ended the Anglo-Burmese War, the East India Company took control of Assam. Initially, they maintained the Ahom policy of tribal relations in Arunachal Pradesh, which included implementing the *posa* system. However, in 1852, this system was replaced with cash payments, with the company handling these payments directly. The Ahoms had instituted the *posa* system during the reign of King Pratap Singha (1603-1641 CE). This policy involved delineating boundaries between the Ahom kingdom and the territories of various tribes in present-day Arunachal Pradesh using earthen embankments called Rajgarh Ali. Entry into Ahom territory was regulated through designated gates called *duars*. Each tribal chief or group, known as *Bohotia* (e.g., Dafla *Bohotia*), was assigned a number of *paiks* in the adjacent area of the *duars* (e.g., Char *Duar*, Chhey *Duar*, Na *Duar*) to fulfill their respective tribal lords' annual requirements. In exchange, the *paiks* of the *Bohotia* paid only 1/4th of the tax to the Ahom king, with the remaining 3/4th given to their tribal masters.

During the colonial era, the British conducted several expeditions into what is now Arunachal Pradesh, primarily aimed at establishing control, mapping the terrain, understanding indigenous populations, and occasionally enforcing punitive measures against perceived hostile tribes. These expeditions were significant in shaping the region's history and laying the groundwork for future administrative and developmental activities. One notable expedition was the Lohit Valley Expedition of 1886. Triggered by raids on newly established tea gardens by local tribesmen, this expedition marked the British Empire's initial foray beyond the confines of the Brahmaputra Valley into the rugged terrain of Arunachal Pradesh. Led by survey officers and military personnel, the expedition sought to suppress raids and assert British authority in the region. Another significant campaign was the Abor Expedition of 1911-1912. This military expedition targeted the Abor tribes inhabiting the northeastern frontier of India, including parts of present-day Arunachal Pradesh. Led by survey officers and military commanders, the expedition aimed to establish British control over the region and punish the Abor tribes for alleged attacks on British subjects. Concurrently, the Assam-Tibet Border Expedition of 1911-1912 sought to survey and demarcate the border between Assam and Tibet, traversing the challenging Himalayan terrain of Arunachal Pradesh. Survey officers and military personnel faced numerous challenges, including hostile encounters with local tribes and harsh environmental conditions, as they worked to establish the border. One tragic event associated with these expeditions was the murder of survey officers and their escorts by hostile tribes. For example, during the Abor Expedition, several officers, including the survey officer Noel Williamson, and his party were ambushed and killed by the tribesmen. Such incidents underscored the dangers and complexities of operating in the remote and often hostile territory of Arunachal Pradesh.

During the British colonial period, Arunachal Pradesh, underwent various administrative transformations aimed at regulating and controlling the region. The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation introduced in 1873 marked the formal beginning of administrative control over Arunachal Pradesh, as it implemented Inner Line Permits (ILPs) to regulate entry into tribal areas. The McMahon Line, also known as the external line, was established during the 1914 Simla Convention. Led by Henry McMahon, the foreign secretary

of British India, the convention aimed to negotiate the northern boundary of present-day Arunachal Pradesh. This boundary, spanning approximately 890 kilometers, extended from the corner of Bhutan to the Isu Razi pass on the Burma border, largely following the crest of the eastern Himalayas. Named after Henry McMahon, the chief negotiator, the line became known as the McMahon Line. Subsequently, in 1880, Arunachal Pradesh was included in the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation, bringing areas inhabited by various tribes under Assam's administrative jurisdiction. This inclusion led to the implementation of administrative control measures, including the establishment of administrative headquarters in key locations such as Pasighat in 1912, Tezu, and Dibrugarh. Under the NEFT Plan of 1914, Arunachal Pradesh was divided into administrative divisions, including the Western Section with a political officer (P.O.) at Charduar, Central Section with P.O. at Sadiya, and Lakhimpur Frontier Tract under administrative command of Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur with HQ at Dibrugarh. The administrative divisions underwent renaming in 1919 through the NEFT amendment Act, with the Western Section becoming Balipara Frontier Tract and the Central Section becoming Sadiya Frontier Tract. In 1935, the Government of India Act excluded NEFT, including Balipara FT, Sadiya FT, and Lakhimpur FT, from Assam, placing them under the direct charge of the Governor of Assam. Subsequent territorial re-arrangements in 1943 led to the creation of the Tirap Frontier Tract, carved out from Lakhimpur Frontier Tract. Further division occurred in 1946, with Balipara Frontier Tract being split into Subansiri Area and Sela Sub Agency. NEFT's inclusion in part B of the sixth schedule of the constitution in 1947 affirmed its status as tribal areas of Assam.

#### IV. POST INDEPENDENCE

Post Independence the administration of the North East Frontier Tract (NEFT) was directly under the Assam government, removing the discretionary power of the governor of Assam. Subsequently, in 1948, the NEFT (Internal Administration) Regulation divided the Sadiya Frontier Tract into the Abor Hills district and the Mishmi Hills district, with headquarters at Pasighat and Sadiya, respectively. In 1950, the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Area Committee, also known as the Bordoloi Committee, recommended the transfer of certain areas to Assam. Consequently, parts of the NEFT were integrated into Assam, while the remaining NEFT areas were designated as excluded areas. In 1952, various administrative headquarters were relocated as part of a forward policy initiative. A significant development occurred in 1954 with the passing of the North East Frontier (Administration) Regulation, which reorganized the frontier tracts into a single administrative unit named the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The NEFT was renamed as NEFA, and various frontier tracts were rechristened as frontier divisions. In 1957, a commissioner's post was created to assist the governor of Assam. In 1965, following lessons from the 1962 Chinese conflict, the territory came under the Ministry of Home Affairs, leading to the renaming of frontier divisions as districts and political officers as deputy commissioners. The introduction of popular government took place in 1967 with the promulgation of the North East Frontier Agency Panchayat Raj Regulation, establishing a four-tier local self-administration system. The most significant milestone occurred with the passage of the North-East Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, which granted union territory status to NEFA, renamed as Arunachal Pradesh from January 20, 1972. The territory's administration was overseen by the president of India through the chief commissioner. Development accelerated after attaining union territory status, leading to the territorial capital's shift from Shillong to Itanagar in 1974. Arunachal Pradesh saw further advancements, including the establishment of a provisional legislative assembly in 1975 and the upgrading of the post of chief commissioner to lieutenant governor. Finally, with the 55th amendment of the Constitution and the State of Arunachal Pradesh Act, 1986, Arunachal Pradesh became the 24th state of India, with a fully-fledged legislative assembly and elected government. On 20 February, 1987 Arunachal Pradesh was inaugurated as a state.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In tracing the political history of Arunachal Pradesh, it is imperative to explore its trajectory across three distinct eras: pre-British, British colonial rule, and post-independence. During the pre-British era, Arunachal Pradesh existed as a region inhabited by numerous indigenous tribes, each with its own socio-political structures and cultural practices. These tribes inhabited the rugged terrains of the Eastern Himalayas, forming small communities and often engaging in inter-tribal conflicts over resources and territory. The absence of a centralized authority led to a decentralized governance system, with local chieftains exercising authority within their respective domains. The advent of British colonial rule in the 19th century brought significant changes to Arunachal Pradesh's political landscape. The British established administrative control over the region, introducing policies aimed at regulating tribal areas and asserting colonial authority. The implementation of the Inner Line and Outer Line systems, along with the introduction of the posa system, marked attempts to govern the region while respecting tribal autonomy. However, these measures also sparked resistance and conflicts, including punitive expeditions and border skirmishes with neighboring regions. Post-independence, Arunachal Pradesh witnessed a transition from colonial administration to Indian governance. The Indian Independence Act of 1947 brought the region under the direct control of the Assam government, leading to the establishment of the North East Frontier Tract (NEFT) and subsequent administrative changes. Challenges persisted, including territorial disputes with China, culminating in the Indo-China War of 1962, which had a profound impact on the region's security and governance. Despite these challenges, Arunachal Pradesh continued its journey towards statehood. The North-East Areas (Reorganisation) Act of 1971 conferred union territory status upon NEFA, renaming it as Arunachal Pradesh. The subsequent decades saw efforts to promote development, democracy, and local self-governance, albeit amid ongoing security concerns and socio-political complexities. The state's journey culminated in 1986 with its elevation to full statehood, marking a significant milestone in its political evolution. In conclusion, the political history of Arunachal Pradesh reflects a dynamic interplay of indigenous traditions, colonial legacies, and post-independence aspirations. The region's resilience in overcoming challenges and conflicts underscores its determination to chart its own course towards progress and prosperity within the framework of the Indian Union.

In present-day Arunachal Pradesh, the political situation is characterized by a vibrant democracy and a growing emphasis on development and infrastructure. As a state within the Indian Union, Arunachal Pradesh has its own legislative assembly and chief minister, elected through democratic processes. The state is also represented in the Indian Parliament by Members of Parliament. One notable aspect of Arunachal Pradesh's political landscape is its diverse ethnic and tribal composition, with various indigenous communities playing a significant role in the state's governance. The state government is committed to preserving and promoting the cultural heritage and rights of these communities while also fostering inclusivity and integration. Economic development is a key priority for the state government, with initiatives focusing on sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and hydropower. Efforts are underway to improve connectivity through the construction of roads and bridges, enhancing access to remote areas and stimulating

economic growth. However, like many other regions in India, Arunachal Pradesh faces challenges such as infrastructure deficits, unemployment, and issues related to governance and corruption. Ensuring equitable development across the state, particularly in remote and marginalized areas, remains a significant concern for policymakers. In recent years, the political discourse in Arunachal Pradesh has also been influenced by regional and national dynamics, including debates over issues such as territorial disputes, environmental conservation, and resource management. Despite these challenges, the overall political climate in Arunachal Pradesh remains largely stable, with a strong emphasis on democratic values, governance, and development.

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