

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

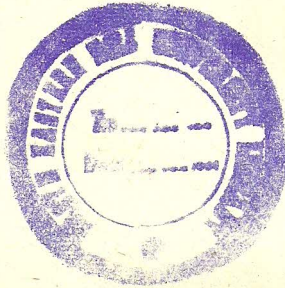
A Case Study of  
North-Eastern Council's Role

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ARUNACHAL PRADESH**  
A Case Study of North-Eastern Council's Role



P.S. DATTA



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*For*  
**PROFESSOR B.K. ROY BURMAN**  
*who inspired the whole lot of our generation in*  
*at least India's North East to*  
*take interest in our tribal world*

## Preface

The middle-sized town of Dibrugarh in Upper Assam, from where I hail, has always been not only physically close to NEFA but also an important trade centre for the innocent people from NEFA who used to visit our town in groups during our childhood. We used to observe them with all inquisitiveness. Their traditional dress with a headgear and a *dao* used to make us imagine all child-like stories. Then came India's China war and my parents decided to try for my admission in one of the premier residential educational institutions of the country and in a cold evening of December 1962 ultimately I had to take a train with my father to Howrah and finally to Narendrapur, far away from my colourful multi-lingual surroundings rooted in a soil blessed by the red river and the blue hills. There, at Narendrapur, one of my forgotten childhood desires was however fulfilled unexpectedly when (probably in 1964) the first batch of students from NEFA came to join our school. They brought back to me my lost memories that I had in my pre-teen days at Dibrugarh and ultimately I had the opportunity of being intimately exposed to the sons and brothers of the same NEFA people whom we used to see visiting our town in groups in those colourful traditional dresses and with all those 'mysterious accessories'. My knowledge of Assamese made me even closer to them and for about four years since then I was fortunate enough to watch from very close quarters their transformation and their inherent capacity to adapt to a different set of norms in an altogether different social setting. In each class room, in each *Bhavan* (hostel), in the sports ground, in the NCC and in every other sphere of our community life at Narendrapur I witnessed natural acceptance of their leadership by all of us. In the process, I do not

know exactly when, I found someday that I have developed considerable admiration for my friends—the first batch of young ambassadors of NEFA outside north east. We hardly knew then the extent of isolation and backwardness of the place they came from neither we would imagine that in NEFA in 1947 there were only 3 jeepable roads of a total length of 170 km, only 2 lower primary schools and only 13 health units or till 1954 there were only 6 post offices for the whole territory. I am sure, had we known it then, our admiration for them would have been much more.

The admiration that I developed for my friends from NEFA during my days at Narendrapur, however, did not motivate me sufficiently to take up any research project on NEFA (by now Arunachal Pradesh) when I decided to join my not-so-rewarding profession of a researcher. Though in course of time my research interest got extended from Assam to Meghalaya to Mizoram yet, I do not know why, I maintained a distance from Arunachal. When I look back today, it now appears that probably I was destined to come closer to NEFA/Arunachal always via West Bengal. In 1989 when I was sincerely looking for a (short) respite from ICSSR work-load to concentrate on some personal study and research, the authorities of North Bengal University kindly considered me suitable for an offer to join the research staff of their Centre for Himalayan Studies (CHS) and subsequently my superiors in ICSSR favourably considered a *lien* to enable me to respond to that offer. In May 1989 I joined the CHS which as one of the seventeen Area Studies Centres of the UGC concentrates on the Eastern Himalaya covering Nepal-Bhutan Tibet and Sikkim-Darjeeling-Arunachal. My north eastern *obsession* naturally prompted me to opt for Arunachal as my area/region and Professor B.P. Misra, a noted scholar and the then Director of the CHS advised me to begin from the beginning and consequently I was encouraged to take up two projects, *NEC In Arunachal Pradesh* and *Electoral Dynamics in Arunachal*. Needless to say that the present exercise is entirely the product of my work in the CHS during 1989-90. An earlier draft of the same was presented in CHS for discussion and some

of the important suggestions mooted out then by my colleagues are accommodated here.

Naturally this exercise owes a lot to a number of scholars and others. In North Bengal University Professor Shanti Swarup, Professor M. Dasgupta, Shri Dyutish Chakravorty, Dr. R.N. Bhattacharjee, Dr. R.S. Mukhopadhyay, Shri A.K. Roy and Dr. Saswati Biswas took a keen interest in the work. In the CHS Professor B.P. Misra was a never failing source of guidance and encouragement; Shri Gurudas Das and Dr. R. Sahoo were the constant companions ready with all references and details; and Shri J.M. Majumdar and Shri D.P. Boot were immensely helpful in sorting out various academic odds. Shri Boot also prepared the maps for use here.

At Shillong in the NEC Secretariat I drew a lot of sustenance from the help and guidance of particularly Shri M.P. Hazarika, Director of Information and Shri J. Dutta, Research Officer in the Planning Cell. Besides, two young scientists of the NEC Seismological Cell, Shri Mahitosh Chakravorty and Shri Manojyoti Dey, were kind to share many of my exasperating moments. Shri Debashis Choudhury of St. Anthony's College helped a lot, as usual, in sorting out various academic and related tensions.

At Itanagar I frequently depended on the indulgence of Shri R. Bhattacharjee, Research Officer in the Arunachal Government Planning Department and Dr. Parul Dutta, the then Director and Dr. D.K. Dowerah, the Assistant Director of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh. At Naharlagun I was fortunate enough to have the hospitality—academic and otherwise—from the young members of the staff of *Arunachal Times*. Among them I must mention Shri Tasso Grayu, the editor, Shri Pradeep Kumar, Shri S. Basu Roy, Shri H. Thakuria and Shri N. Goswami. Here I would also like to mention Shri Amit Kumar Nag of *Amrit Bazar Patrika*, Shri Arup Chanda of *The Statesman* and Shri Rabijit Choudhury of *Eastern Press Service* who accommodated me in some of their professional trips to Arunachal. Shri Rabijit Choudhury and his EPS also helped a lot in shaping my perspective by making available some otherwise

unavailable material.

Finally, at home, Sutapa ungrudgingly shouldered the entire load of extra responsibilities towards our scattered family during my absence for the year knowing fully well that that would be seriously affecting her own academic schedule.

I do not know if at all it will be possible for me to ever repay the debt that I owe to all of them.

This has been totally a compilation work and as such I do not pretend to have attempted at any scholarly discovery of Arunachal in the following pages. I only sincerely tried to understand in my own way the pathology and the suggested therapy and the following pages should be taken in that spirit only. Many of the first batch of Arunachalese who joined Narendrapur in the 1960s are now important decision makers in their own society. Shri R.K. Khirmey and Shri Mukut Mithi are the honourable members in the Cabinet. Others too are holding equally responsible position in life. If they find this exercise of any relevance in their task of evolving a truly people-oriented development-policy, I would feel my ambition fulfilled and labour rewarded.

*Shillong*

**P.S. Datta**

# Contents

*Preface*

*List of Tables*

*List of Maps*

I. Birth of NEC	15
II. Evolution of Arunachal	20
III. Development Pathology	31
IV. Development Therapy Role of NEC	48
V. In Lieu of a Conclusion	76
<i>Annexure I</i> The North Eastern Council Act, 1971	83
<i>Annexure II</i> NEC Seventh Five Year Plan (As approved by Planning Commission)	89
<i>Annexure III</i> Status of NEC Seventh Plan (1985-90) in Arunachal Pradesh	103
<i>Annexure IV</i> New Proposals for NEC Eighth Plan from Arunachal Pradesh	112

## List of Tables

<i>Table 1</i>	Territorial Adjustments in NEFA/ Arunachal Pradesh	26
<i>Table 2</i>	Changing Pattern of Administration in NEFA/Arunachal Pradesh	28
<i>Table 3</i>	Plan Outlays of India, North-Eastern Region and Arunachal Pradesh	41
<i>Table 4</i>	Sectoral Distribution of Plan Outlay in Arunachal Pradesh	42
<i>Table 5</i>	Sectoral Outlays of NEC During 1973-1990	44
<i>Table 6</i>	Sectoral Allocation of Plan Outlays of NEC and Arunachal Pradesh During Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Plan	46
<i>Table 7</i>	Percentage Distribution of Plan Allocation between Groups of Sectors — Arunachal Pradesh and NEC	47

## List of Maps

<i>Map 1</i>	Arunachal Pradesh — Districts	29
<i>Map 2</i>	Arunachal Pradesh — Major Districts	30
<i>Map 3</i>	Arunachal Pradesh — Agriculture and Allied Investment by NEC (Selected)	74
<i>Map 4</i>	Arunachal Pradesh — Power and Industry Investment by NEC (Selected)	75

INDIA'S NORTH EAST has since 1947 been a constant challenge to the system as a whole. The units within north east were brought under British rule at different points of time and except the three valleys (Brahmaputra, Barak and Imphal) the region and the people thereof were in a sense never brought under the general administration unlike the rest of the country. Post 1947 history has seen attempts at breaking this isolation and insularity through integration of the people with the rest of the country.

Internationally the most sensitive zone in India's north east, Arunachal Pradesh presents a very interesting case of transformation of a backward and hitherto unintegrated area in the post-Independence period. Arunachal's backwardness may be understood to an extent if one remembers that till 1947 for the whole area there were only three jeepable roads of a total length of 170 km and only two lower primary schools and even till 1954 there were only six post offices for the entire territory.

Transforming such a backward area was no mean a challenge. An all-out effort was called for and consequently initiatives at various levels were to be released. One serious set of such initiatives were released by the North Eastern Council which in itself is a unique case in the post-1947 era towards creating and sustaining regional development through *understanding* in an otherwise zone of tension and conflict.

The present volume makes a modest attempt at understanding the evolution of Arunachal Pradesh, creation of North Eastern Council and contribution of North Eastern Council towards developing this backward zone of our polity. This is the first such attempt by any scholar and as such

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brings to a sharp focus certain serious dimensions of our development policy and it is expected that dedicated researchers will be inspired to take up the clues thrown up by the present exercise for further in-depth investigation.

DR. P.S. DATTA had his schooling in Narendrapur R.K. Mission Vidyalaya followed by Collegiate & University education in Dibrugarh. He obtained his M.A. in Sociology (1973) and was awarded a UGC Junior Research Fellowship to work on *Social Mobility & Political Behaviour in Upper Assam* for which Dibrugarh University awarded a Ph.D. (1980). He was also a recipient of UGC Post Doctoral Fellowship (1981) to work on *Muslim Political Behaviour in Assam*.

He taught in Regional Engineering College, Silchar (Assam), St. Edmund's College, Shillong and North Eastern Hill University. In 1987 he joined ICSSR North Eastern Regional Centre as its first full time Deputy Director, the post that he till now holds. During 1989-90 he was on *lien* from ICSSR to join the research staff of the Centre For Himalayan Studies at the University of North Bengal as a Reader.

DR. DATTA is frequently invited by neighbouring universities to deliver talks in various academic departments. He has contributed articles in a number of volumes on north eastern society and polity and has already published *Electoral Politics in North East India* (Edited, 1986), *Ethnic Movements in Poly-Cultural Assam* (VIKAS) (Edited, 1990) and *North East—A Study of Mobility and Political Behaviour* (1991). His forthcoming publications include *Autonomy Movement in Assam : Documents, Ideology of Change in Hills—the Case of Meghalaya, Electoral Dynamics in Arunachal Pradesh and India's North East—Essays on Its Transition*.

DR. DATTA frequently writes for the regional press.