



## Kebang: Traditional institution of Adis, its relevance and effectiveness

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### Abstract

The ultimate goal of development is to build human capabilities and enlarge human choices: to create a safe and secure environment where citizens can live with dignity and equality. Increasing a country's GNP is one of the essential means towards achieving over all development. But holistic and participatory development requires much broader policy interventions. The main reasons for human deprivation are not just economic. These problems go hand in hand with social and political factors rooted in poor governance.

Governance, if it is to promote development, has to be not just pro-people or people-centered; it has to be owned by the people. The people have to shape their own governance, have to be protected and have to be saved from all types of humiliation in their daily life. Government has to be accountable to people. Every branch of government – executive, legislative, judiciary, forces of law and order, employees of public services – has to be civil and accountable.

**Keywords:** Governance, democracy, tradition, panchayat, accountability, civil society

### Introduction

Humane governance is good governance, which is dedicated to securing human development. It requires effective participation of people in state, civil society and private sector activities that are conducive to human development. It further enjoins the state, civil society, and the private sector to help build capacities, which will meet the basic needs of all people, particularly women, children and the poor. It will also ensure that human development is sustainable.

In recent years, the concept of governance has been evolving from the narrow definition used by the World Bank as 'the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources', to the broader definition adopted by the Commission on Global Governance as 'the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action may be taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest' (Planning Commission, 2002) <sup>[29]</sup>. Good governance must enable the state, the civil society, and the private sector to further broad-based economic growth and social development as a means to greater human development and increased human welfare.

Governance must be:

- Seen by people as participatory and in their own interest – 'ownership';
- Conducive to building of a society in which none feel humiliated – 'decency'; and
- Embodied in structures, which are transparent and accountable to the owners, i.e. the people – 'accountability'.

Thus, ownership, decency, and accountability are the main principles underlying governance. While good governance

must reduce transaction costs and enforce contracts, humane governance must be based on both real and perceived ownership, decency and accountability for and by all citizens. People's active participation is the guiding force behind the concept of humane governance. Another key aspect of humane governance, particularly in the context of conflict-ridden societies, is human security for all sections of the people. Human security refers to freedom from hunger, torture, and imprisonment without a free and fair trial, discriminations against minorities and women, and domestic violence (Kim and Hyun, 2000: 39) <sup>[20]</sup>. For governance to be humane, the basic freedom from all these diverse forms of violence, along with the positive freedoms that allows each human being to enjoy life to the fullest without imposing constraints upon others engaged in the same pursuit, have to be guaranteed for all sections of the society (Upadhyay, 2002) <sup>[37]</sup>

Governance is conceptualised in three interlocking dimensions: good political governance, good economic governance and good civic governance. *Good political governance* emphasizes the rule of law, accountability, and transparency. It seeks to achieve these goals through a constitutional framework that is not easily amendable, free and fair multi-party elections, and a clear separation of powers among the executive, judiciary and the legislative branches of the government. On the other hand, *good economic governance* emphasizes the role of the state not only in securing macro-economic stability, guaranteeing property rights, removing market distortions and eliminating rent-seeking opportunities, but is also concerned with investment in people and basic infrastructure, protection of natural environment, and a progressive and equitable fiscal system to promote economic growth with social justice. The third dimension of governance is *good civic governance*. The realisation of the importance of civil society in good governance is relatively recent and owes a great deal to the efforts and success of non-governmental and grassroots self-help organisations. The broader civil society groups, including households, media, professional groups and

business, are increasingly seen as vital in securing the fundamental human, political and economic rights. These rights are implicit in good economic and political governance but are rarely available to those excluded from the formal structures of power. These are the women, the poor and the ethnic and religious minorities. The informal structures of the civil society are important not only in supporting formal processes and keeping the rulers accountable to fend for themselves through creating trust and cementing community relations (MHHDC, 1999).

### **Traditional Self-Governing Institutions and their Transition in Arunachal Pradesh**

The tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh have a strong tradition of self-governing institutions. Among all its 26 major tribes and more than 100 sub-tribes, some system of a traditional self-regulating institution exists. These traditional self-governing institutions have undergone certain changes in their operative mechanisms. The difficulties imposed by the historical factors as well as the geographical compulsions had encouraged these tribal groups to confine themselves to a particular area and to develop strong isolationist tendencies. Besides, traditional acrimony among some of them and a simple pattern of primitive economy had kept the inter-tribal and even inter-village interaction at a minimal level. The tribal societies living in the state therefore evolved their own system of self-governing institutions for maintaining social order and preserving their religious traditions in order to ensure collective economic activities and for delivering justice.

Although common descent, kinship, and blood relations generally form the basis of political union among the tribal people, territorial compactness appears to be the dominating factor of political union among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. There are as many types of traditional self-governing institutions in the state as there are tribes. The most prominent among them are the *Kebang* of the *Adis*, the *Buliang* of the *Apatanis*, the *Nyele* of the *Nishings*, the *Mele* of the *Hrussos*, the *Tsorgan* system of the *Monpas*, the *Jung* of the *Sherdukpens*, the *Abbala* of the *Idu Mishmis*, the *Pharai* of the *Kaman Mishmis*, the *Mockchup* of the *Khamtis*, the *Ngojowa* of the *Wanchos* and *Mungphong* or *Nockthung* of the *Tangsas*. It has been seen that they do not present any uniform pattern. Some of them are monarchical, while others are Republics, some are democracies of direct type, and others function through a Chieftain or a small representative body. A few bodies are oligarchic in nature, limiting the choice of membership of the council to certain houses or clans. The *Kebang* of the *Adis* represent a sort of direct democracy while the *Tsorgan* of the *Monpas* or the *Mele* of the *Hrussos* is a representative democracy. The *Apatani Buliang* or the *Sherdukpen Jung* provides a clan oligarchic model. The village council systems found among the *Singphos*, *Noctes*, *Wanchos*, *Khamtis* and the *Tangsas* can be called Chieftaincies (Dutta, 2003) <sup>[10]</sup>. The oligarchic or the chieftaincy systems have some elements of democracy in them.

Further, it has been seen that the constitution of all the systems are gerentocratic in character. The *Monpa Tsorgan* system is theocratic in nature as its elected head also acts as the religious head in the village. Most of these institutions emerged in response to needs of each tribal society. Thus the tribe, which was called upon to fight frequently, evolved a chieftaincy system, while the tribes who had a

comparatively placatory society evolved a council type of institution. Those tribes, whose lives were governed by religious ethos, had a theocratic type of institution. Further it was found that the authority in all these models was based on the twin principles of ethnic loyalty and customary law. Conflicts are usually resolved within the frame-work of orally transmitted tribe jurisprudence with the help of invocation of supernatural powers, public ordeals based on superstitious beliefs, the threat of excommunication and the use of force sanctioned by the community. The pattern of leadership is not instantaneous but the result of an ambiguous and prolonged process of acquiring command over a large corpus of customs and jurisprudence and gaining confidence of the fellow villagers. Thus, till the introduction of modern democratic institutions, Arunachal politics was intrinsically embedded in traditional tribal political ethos (Talukdar, 2002 <sup>[34]</sup>; Pandey *et al*, 1999) <sup>[27]</sup>. Introduction of modern participatory democracy, spread of education, improved means of communication, initiation of industrialization and increasingly rationalized structure of administration were responsible for the process of change and transition in the existing system of governance of Arunachal Pradesh. The modern representative democratic institutions were introduced in two phases in Arunachal Pradesh, namely, universal adult franchise and democratic decentralization. Unlike in the other parts of the country, the Panchayat Raj and the establishment of a Legislative Assembly preceded the introduction of universal adult franchise. A three-tier Panchayat Raj system, namely Gram Panchayat at the village level, Anchal Samiti at the Block level and Zila Parishad at the district level came into existence in 1969 in accordance with the provision of the North-East Frontier Agency Panchayat Raj Regulation, 1967. An Agency Council was also created as an apex body in the whole of the territory. It was later that the Agency Council was converted into a Legislative Assembly in 1975 and a five-member ministry was formed under the chief ministership of P.K. Thungan without elections to the legislative assembly being held. The first assembly election in the state was held in 1978. The introduction of the Panchayat Raj brought about a significant change in the traditional village councils of Arunachal Pradesh. It gave a new orientation to politics in the state and helped towards the formation of an Arunachal civil society instead of a group of fragmented tribes and communities. It has also changed the outlook and broadened the political horizon of the people by forcing them to look beyond their community. It was in 1978, that electoral politics was first introduced in the state and the Assembly elections paved the way for the introduction of a modern participatory and representative government. The phase of socio-political development in the state is still in the process of evolution and is characterized by certain transitional trends such as: localized nature of leadership; minimal participation of women in governance; a strong tendency on the part of the opposition leadership to join the ruling party soon after the election and failure of any regional party to create a reasonable political base in the state (Talukdar and Tado, 1998) <sup>[33]</sup>. The 73rd Amendment Act gives a new status and new orientation to the panchayats in Arunachal Pradesh. Apart from providing 33 per cent reservation for women, for members as well as chairmanship of the panchayats, they are to be more development oriented instead of being regulatory in nature. The success of this experiment to

empower people through decentralized, local-level, participatory institutions of governance, however, heavily depends on the actual devolution of financial and other resources, creation of responsive support-systems in terms of technical and administrative skills, capacity-building as well as horizontal coordination among various governmental agencies working at the grassroots. Given the widely observed use of money power during the election campaign itself, it can be safely concluded that the gains from the decentralized governance would be fairly modest. Nevertheless, the recently concluded panchayat elections have made some positive impact on the political process through greater participation of women in politics. Since one of the fundamental drawbacks of the political process in the state has been the marginalisation of women in politics, even these modest gains, in the long run may prove beneficial for deepening democracy at the grassroots. In the new scenario the panchayats should be more powerful and should be responsible for rural planning, mobilization of resources, managing of finance etc. While the transition to the Panchayat Raj system has been relatively smooth, the simultaneous existence of a multiplicity of institutional mechanisms – both modern and traditional – at the village level without any clear-cut demarcation of their functions, may lead to ‘institutional crowding out’.

### **The Political Economy of Development**

Given the historical legacy of relative isolation and underdevelopment, the progress made by Arunachal Pradesh on the economic front, in a comparatively short span of few decades is quite impressive. During the entire period of 1971 to 2001, for which data is available, the Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) has registered an average annual growth rate of 7.34 per cent per annum. Although the growth rate was much higher in the seventies (7.07 per cent) and in the eighties (7.81 per cent) than in the nineties (4.54 per cent), given the low levels of initial development, difficult ecological pre-conditions and geo-political constraints of being a border state, the development of the economy, in overall terms, may seem satisfactory.

The structural transformation of the Arunachal economy gets manifested through increasing diversification of the workforce, emergence of a modern non-farm economy, rapid urbanisation and gradual integration with the regional and national economy. However, it is important to note that in the last three decades, the contribution of manufacturing has never exceeded seven per cent of the state’s income. The share of the secondary sector has gone up from around 20 per cent in 1970-71 to only 23.65 per cent in 2001-02, while that of the tertiary sector has increased substantially during the same period – from 20.48 per cent in 1970-71 to 41.68 per cent in 2001-02. The share of the primary sector has decreased from around 60 per cent to 35 per cent during the same period. The key aspect of the changing sectoral composition of the state is that the expansion of service sector has been almost entirely driven by government-sector activities. Public administration alone contributed around 14 per cent of the NSDP of the state in 2001-02.

The decade of the nineties seems to have reinforced the structural imbalances of the state’s economy. Apart from the relatively slow growth of NSDP during this decade, the dependence of the state on service sector in general and public administration in particular increased substantially. As such industrialisation never really had a firm footing in

the state’s economy, but the restrictions on timber trade imposed by the Supreme Court of India, led to closure of many of the timber-based industries. Although agriculture has been growing over the years, it is primarily expansion of area under cultivation, rather than improvements in yield rates, which have contributed to its growth (Roy, 1996) <sup>[31]</sup>. Like many other states of North-East India, Arunachal Pradesh continues to remain heavily dependent upon central government’s assistance. During 1990-91 to 1998-99, the ratio of annual net transfers to NSDP remained as high as 78.05 per cent in the case of Arunachal Pradesh. In 1998-99, only 1.5 per cent of the revenue expenditure of the state could be generated from its own tax revenue (Sachdeva, 2000). The predominant role of the state as the prime economic actor and the dependence of the state government on central government aid and loans have crucially conditioned the pattern of development of Arunachal Pradesh over the past decades.

Although a comprehensive analysis of the development process in Arunachal Pradesh is beyond the scope of the present paper, some aspects of it can be selectively looked at to have a better understanding of the challenges before the state. *Firstly*, along with monetisation of the exchange process and gradual commercialization of the economy, interpersonal inequalities in the distribution of income, assets and opportunities have grown manifold. While the elaborate networks of redistribution and reciprocity prevented the emergence of inequality in the traditional economy of the communities, under the mutually reinforcing influences of the market and the State, the gradual economic differentiation of the indigenous population has led to the emergence of a neo-rich, upwardly mobile class in Arunachal Pradesh. Occupationally this group belongs to the trading and business community, contractors or government services – but the most important aspect of their emergence is their access to the resources of the State.

*Secondly* the spatially uneven process of development in the state has created new challenges and constraints. Typically, the districts or areas bordering Assam, and within the districts areas near the urban, administrative centres have better infrastructural facilities than the interiors. Arunachal Pradesh has been the home of a number of tribes and sub-tribes, and many of them had limited mobility beyond their well-defined local boundaries. Inter-regional disparities in the state, therefore, has an additional implication – in many cases, up to an extent, it may reflect inter-tribal disparities. *Thirdly*, although Arunachal Pradesh until recently has been relatively free from secessionist violence and insurgency, its development performance, particularly in terms of the human development indicators, has not been satisfactory. Among the eight northeastern states, Arunachal Pradesh occupies fourth position in terms of per capita NSDP and third position in terms of consumption expenditure, but according to the National Human Development Report, it was at the bottom in terms of Human Development Index (Table: 1). In terms of the Human Poverty index, barring Mizoram, its position is the worst in the region. In 2001, Arunachal Pradesh had the lowest literacy rate among all the northeastern states, as well as the highest urban-rural gap and the highest gender gap in literacy. In terms of enrolment, drop-out rates and school availability the states’ performance, in a comparative perspective, has hardly been satisfactory. (Table: 2). In terms of health status of the

population, Arunachal Pradesh has the second highest Under Five Mortality Rate and the third highest IMR among the northeastern states

### **The Crisis of Governance: Manifestations and Challenges**

Arunachal Pradesh has undergone the transition to electoral democracy in comparatively short period of time. As elsewhere in the developing world and particularly in the tribal world, the establishment of formal institutions of liberal democracy has neither been smooth nor uniform in all parts of the state. Given the absence of insurgency and militancy, high level of participation in elections, smooth change of governments in the state, it would be probably correct to conclude that democratic processes and institutions have taken a firm root in Arunachal Pradesh. Nevertheless, many key aspects of good governance are clearly absent in the state. Some of these problems are common to all developing societies; few others are generally found in almost all states of the northeastern region while some others are unique to the state.

### **Property Rights and Contract Enforcement**

First and foremost, it is important to point out that some of the fundamental aspects of the market-enabling role of the state i.e. demarcation and safeguarding of property rights and an efficient contract-enforcement mechanism are not being given due importance. Given the heterogeneity of property right formations in the state, the transition to private property rights have not been complete, but more importantly, the privatisation of communally held property has, by and large, proceeded without any legal backing of the state. In this *informal* transition to private property rights over land and forests, for example, one section of the population has been able to use the institutional vacuum to their advantage. They have acquired wealth in the form of urban land, land for plantation, and cultivation purposes or have been able to use village commons like forests for private benefits (Mishra, 2001) <sup>[24]</sup>. The inadequate demarcation, recognition and safeguarding of communal property has ultimately resulted in increasing concentration of income and wealth as well as weakening of the traditional institutional mechanisms.

The contract enforcement mechanism in the state is weak not only because of the thin administrative and policing apparatus, but also because of the fact that the effective separation of the executive and the judiciary has not yet been completed. Even in the capital city of Itanagar, the government has not been able to stop mass encroachment of government land.

### **Corruption and Rent-Seeking**

Given the negligible presence of industrial sector in the state, and low levels of development of the private enterprises, access to government jobs and contracts are the only means to a better living standard. The overwhelming dominance of the government sector has created, along with other factors, a thoroughly unproductive rent-seeking economy in the state. The political economy of development administration can perhaps be best described as a *distributional coalition* of varied and competing interests. Political entrepreneurs routinely distribute favours like contracts etc as a means to secure support bases or to create

channels of patronage. The small size of the electorate, particularly in assembly constituencies, puts an extra pressure on the politicians to cater to the demands of the people. In democracies such a situation should encourage accountability to the citizens. However, since accountability structures and rule enforcement mechanisms are weak, politicians find it convenient to garner support by distributing favours. Over a period of time, along with the well-known problems of 'government failure', corruption in general, and appropriation of public resources for private benefits has become the hallmark of government sponsored schemes in the state.

### **Fiscal Accountability and Discipline**

The perpetual financial dependence on the centre has several implications for the governance in Arunachal Pradesh. Firstly, the inability to mobilize resources has meant that many of the developmental programmes in the state have not been conceived at the state level. Inadequate attention to local specificities and peculiarities in the designing and implementation of centrally sponsored schemes has not only resulted in failure of these programmes, but has also reduced the faith of the people in the government machinery. Secondly, the central and the state governments have paid inadequate attention to monitoring the spending of public money. Although development expenditure constituted 72.98 per cent of total public expenditure in 1998-98 in the state, lack of transparency, ineffective monitoring coupled with the politics of populism has resulted in mounting dead-weight losses and an ever-expanding administrative apparatus. Another aspect of the problem is the popular misconception of government activities as 'job creation' activities rather than developmental initiatives.

### **Lack of Credible Opposition**

The electoral politics in the state, until recently, has been characterized by dominance of a single political party. The tendency of members of opposition parties to join the ruling party and en-mass switching of loyalties has ensured that there has been virtually no opposition to question and scrutinize the decisions of the ruling party. If the state-funded development initiatives have resulted in the unholy nexus between politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen, the absence of a strong opposition and public scrutiny has strengthened the black economy of corruption. The government-sponsored schemes, for all practical purposes, have been treated as a mechanism for generating private benefits at the cost of the public.

### **Freedom of Press**

A key requirement for ensuring accountability and transparency in governance is the presence of a free and fair press or mass media. In Arunachal Pradesh the number, circulation and impact of mass media in general and the print media in particular are severely limited. However, the existing newspapers have not been able to act objectively and without fear. There have been frequent cases of intimidation, physical attacks and violence directed against the media by many powerful organizations. This has seriously undermined the freedom of the press and has also weakened the scope for democratic accountability and transparency.

### Community Participation

In relation to the much talked about question of 'community participation in governance', Arunachal Pradesh provides a rather unusual case where the emphasis on integrating community in administration, at least in rhetoric, predates the current emphasis on the term in the overall framework of neo-liberal reforms. In fact, it was one of the key elements of the Nehru-Elwin framework for tribal development particularly in the erstwhile NEFA. The framework was unambiguous in its emphasis on the democratic content of traditional institutions and the need to strengthen these institutions rather than replacing them with new, alien structures (Elwin, 1957). To what extent the invocation of community participation in development was matched by the effective participation in governance is of course a pertinent question. It is important also to note that without democratising the community-based institutions, community participation, in an increasingly differentiated and fragmented socio-economic milieu, may just result in participation of elite in the name of peoples' participation. The pluralisation of the state, in the sense of increasing role of non-state entities in the process of decision-making and implementation of developmental programmes, in the absence of adequate mechanisms for democratic accountability, is not always an unmixed blessing (Chandoke, 2003).

### Democratic Governance and the Politics of Identity

A key aspect of the development process in the entire northeast is the complex interrelationships between the crisis of identity, security and underdevelopment (Madhab, 1999) [22]. The politics of identity and difference has an overwhelming significance in this multiethnic region (Pakem, 1990 [26]; Gohain, 1996 [14]; Fernandes, 1999). Without venturing into an analysis of the underlying causes and manifold consequences of the prolonged, and more often than not, violent conflicts surrounding the politics of identity in the Northeast India, the following analysis is limited to some aspects of it which have vital implications for the governance and development of the region, particularly focusing on Arunachal Pradesh.

At the outset, it is important to note that 'ethnicity is not a primordially given essence, but the outcome of complex socio-cultural and political processes of labeling and identifying people' (Peters, 1998: 400) [28]. The politics of identity and difference in Arunachal Pradesh, like elsewhere, is not just a relic of the past, but a product of the state-led drive for modernisation and growth. As Dasgupta observes in the wider context of India, 'it is the developmental activity of the centre conducted in a democratic setting of political competition that initially reinforced the politics of identity' (Dasgupta, 1991: 150) [9]. The creation, popularisation and consolidation of an Arunachalee identity, from amongst the numerous tribal communities who inhabited the region, whose official nomenclature itself has undergone few changes, have been facilitated as well as moulded by the progressive modernisation of the economy, polity and the society itself.

An important paradox noticed in the governance of Northeast in general is the apparently strong presence of the Indian state, reflected through the heavy military and financial presence on the one hand, and its relative weakness in safe guarding the basic rights and security of the people in their everyday life (Baruah, 2004b). The

relative weakness of the state in safeguarding property rights and enforcing contracts, typically creates a scope for the emergence of ethnic groups to provide private means of securing property rights (Bates, 1998) [5]. Unlike in many of the northeastern states, where this has resulted in the proliferation of numerous insurgent groups defending the interest of specific ethnic communities, in the case of Arunachal Pradesh, it has led to competitions and bargaining among different tribal groups to acquire a larger share of government's resources – a form of 'quite pressure' exercised from within the system. Nevertheless, the relative weakness of the state in strictly enforcing the rules of the game has given ample scope for non-state sources of power and authority to exercise considerable control over the everyday politics of survival and accumulation.

The politics of identity in the state in terms of its impact on governance, can be analysed at two distinct levels – firstly, the politics of difference that clearly distinguishes the indigenous tribal people of the state from all other 'outsiders', including migrants from neighbouring countries and different states of India and secondly, the inter-tribal distinctions among the indigenous communities of the state. The implications of these two forms of identity politics on the development process, though interrelated and overlapping in some aspects, are different from each other.

The anxieties of the indigenous tribal population regarding the changing demographic composition of the state (the share of the tribals in total population was 63.66 per cent in 1991) and also the contentious issue of settlement of Chakma-Hajong and other refugees in the state, has led to a strong articulation of 'son-of-the-soil' demands on many issues. Key to the development process in the state is the constant inflow of migrants not only as government servants, but also as construction labourers, tenants, traders and workers in different sectors. While migrant workers, both skilled and unskilled, have played an important role in the economic development of the state, with increasing educated and youth unemployment in the state, the demand for local control over jobs, contracts and other resources of the state has been intensified. Historically, these aspirations, to some extent, have been accommodated within the broad parameters of democratic governance, and have also helped in protecting the interests of the local population. However, the politics of affirmative action by the state in the presence of such politicisation of ethnicity and ethnic difference has led to a replacement of civic rules by rules of difference – a process that, according to Sanjib Baruah, has created a 'crisis of citizenship' in the Northeast3 (Baruah, 2003; 2004a).

At another level the competitive politics of ethnic difference among the different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh has led to a complex and multi-layered process of articulation of collective identity at various levels. The establishment of hundreds of associations, groups and institutions on the basis of community and territorial aspirations has further consolidated this process. This has led to competitive pressure on the State for recognition and fulfillment of these aspirations. On the positive side, it has led to an awareness and active participation by non-state agencies in governance, but at times, it has also led to mutual antagonisms between various groups as well as increasing burden on the administrative apparatus, affecting its efficiency as well as productivity. The spirals of identity-based politics of recognition, beyond a point, are bound to

be in conflict with the universalistic principles of citizenship and democratic governance.

Again, as it has happened elsewhere, the benefits of the identity-based mobilisation of public opinion have not necessarily been shared equitably within the groups, in whose name the demands for more resources from the governments have been placed. Ethnic claims and ethnic action, although claimed to be designed to serve the ethnic collectivity, may in practice serve the mobilizers more than the collectivity for which they speak (Dasgupta, 1991: 145-6) <sup>[9]</sup>. It is generally the traders-politicians-bureaucrats within the groups who have cornered a substantial proportion of gains of such collective articulation of demands<sup>4</sup>. Often, the principles of democratic rights, equality and justice, which are invoked at the time of demanding benefits for such ethnic or identity-based groups, are not necessarily considered legitimate while discussing the rights of underprivileged groups of individuals within the ethnic group itself. The systematic privileging of ethnic or community-based demands over individual rights is not necessarily conducive for deepening democracy or ensuring civic governance.

Another significant implication of such circles of difference and identity for good governance is that 'ethnic fractionalization' undermines economic performance by inhibiting the development of social capital and trust, thereby, raising transaction costs, although, to some extent it may help build trust within the ethnic groups. As the resources of the State become scarce, competition intensifies and for multi-ethnic states like Arunachal Pradesh, such competitive politics of recognition and difference will have grave implications in future. The consensual mode of decision-making that has been followed in the past by the ruling political combinations to keep inter-ethnic conflicts under check, will lose its relevance in the context of rising costs of consensus-building among groups having heterogeneity of interests, some of which might be mutually exclusive, or at least, conflicting.

The role of civil society in checking autocratic and undemocratic tendencies within the state apparatus and also in democratising governance is well recognised. The civil society in Arunachal Pradesh is still in its early evolutionary phase, and, in this fluid and transitional stage, only some tentative comments can be made about some of the manifested tendencies. Firstly, it is important to note that in terms of sheer number of publicly announced civil society institutions (CSIs), Arunachal Pradesh has perhaps one of the highest per capita incidences of such institutions. Superficially, it gives an impression of a vibrant civil society tradition. But most of these institutions are particularistic in their objective, exclusionist in terms of their membership and narrow in terms of their concerns and aspirations. The politics of identity – community-based or geographical – forms the basis of many of these institutions. Quite a few of them are formed in the context of specific issues and concerns but some of the CSIs like the Arunachal Pradesh Women Welfare Society (APWWS) have not only been active for a long time, but also have been engaged in sustained campaigns for gender justice and democratisation of governance.

Secondly, though not all, many of the CSIs in the state, deliberately or otherwise follow the state's agenda as well as *modus operandi* – a fact that is perhaps common in case of many 'dependent societies'. Commenting upon the northeast

in general, an observer notes 'militarisation itself implies systematic dissolution of the civil society and its reconstruction in the image of the military, and correspondingly, fostering upon the population, the ideology and culture of the military' (Barbora, 2002: 1291). Given the dominance of the State apparatus in different spheres, the CSIs to some extent follow the language and logic of the bureaucracy.

### Conclusion

The fundamental challenges facing the government and the civil society in Arunachal Pradesh today include the tasks of secularizing governance and democratizing development. The goals of building capabilities, expanding choices and safeguarding freedoms cannot be achieved unless the development process is made more inclusive and participatory in nature. The often talked about but least implemented, bottom-up approach to development is likely to suit the aspirations of the people in this state with so much cultural and ecological diversity. However, there is an urgent need to develop a transparent and non-discriminatory framework for governance, which in turn requires effective monitoring mechanisms and accountability at all levels. While there is always a scope for enhancing public investment in the development of physical and social infrastructure, mere announcement of financial packages, without an institutional strategy that ensures proper utilization of the fund will only reinforce the existing cycles of corruption, inefficiency and perpetual dependence. The role of civil society in this transformation can hardly be overstressed.

The question of identity and cultural distinctiveness of the indigenous people in the state is an issue that needs urgent attention and its relationship with the political economy of development has to be examined at greater detail. As Dipankar Gupta has argued, 'since the demand for cultural protection carries legitimacy only in the constitutional democratic regimes, the resolution of these issues can also be done only within a modern liberal democratic structure. Tradition is not a reliable ally in such circumstances' (Gupta, 1999: 2313) <sup>[15]</sup>. The task is obviously complex and requires a group of 'cultural entrepreneurs' with a vision for the future and a belief in democratic principles. 'Finding a way to liberalise a cultural community without destroying it' is the task that the liberals face in a number of multi-ethnic contexts (Kymlicka, 1989: 170 <sup>[21]</sup>, quoted in Gupta, 1999) <sup>[15]</sup>. In Arunachal Pradesh, the key challenge in developing a non-discriminatory framework for governance, without compromising with the basic collective rights of the indigenous population, is to be able to address particularistic demand within the framework of universal norms. This, by all counts, is a tough challenge before the decision-makers of today and tomorrow.

### Notes

1. Commenting upon the settlement pattern of the tribes in Northeast India, Mipun and Nayak observe, 'most tribes have developed knife-edged boundaries between and among themselves with a core of their concentration, often without a periphery or a transition over space where the presence of one tribe gives rise to the dominance of another. It is this geographical patterning of the tribes which creates neatly defined tribal habitats exclusive to each other...' (Mipun and

- Nayak, 1999) [23]. Roy Burman, however has drawn attention to the fact that tribal communities generally existed in contact zones of two or more dominant politico-cultural entities, frequently playing the roles of bridge or buffer between the dominant entities. He feels that the stereotype of isolation of tribal communities should be rejected without going to the other extreme of denying the prevalence of considerable self-governance among them (Roy Burman, 2002: 24-25) [30].
2. During 1990-91 to 1995-96 the share of manufacturing in NDP at current prices declined from 5.11 per cent to 3.27 per cent, while that of Public Administration increased from 13.52 per cent to 14.15 per cent (Bezbaruah and Dutta, 2001) [7].
  3. Baruah argues that 'the time has come to consider ways of breaking away from the ethnic discourse of the existing protective discrimination regime that, in effect, involves the state forever categorizing groups of people in ethnic terms and making descendants of immigrants into perpetual outsiders' (Baruah, 2003:1626).
  4. This in fact is a general feature in Northeast India, where 'emerging regional elite and newly formed middle class tend to utilize the existing conflict potential for more share in power. Under the circumstances, dividing rather than compromising elements become the primary means of agitation towards this goal' (Karna, 1999) [19].
  5. Baruah (2003) [2], for example, has argued that the politics of affirmative action by the state is clearly at odds with the developments in political economy of the region. Sachdeva (2000), who basically advocates a shift towards a market-led strategy of development, has identified a number of issues – such as restrictions on labour mobility, land transfers – which act as constraints in the development process in the region.

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