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Itanagar - 791 113, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Ph: +91 360 2212516 Fax: +91 360 2212516

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## **Emergence of Indian National Congress and Its Role in State Politics of Arunachal Pradesh**

**Dr. Nyajum Lollen**  
Assistant Professor  
Institute of Distance Education  
Rajiv Gandhi University

### **Abstract**

The political activities in Arunachal Pradesh are of recent origin as it remains unexposed to outer world for long time. Traditional socio-political institutions of various tribal communities were primarily responsible for managing people's day-to-day affairs. People of Arunachal (erstwhile NEFA) were ignorant about the party politics and election system for a long time since independence but it doesn't mean that they have no idea about the Indian National Congress. Before the emergence of modern polity in NEFA, some sections of people have an idea about the INC because of its active participation in Indian struggle for independence. However, the initiation of political party formation in the state started with the visit of Kumarasami Kamraaj, then president, AICC in 1967, at Pasighat where he talked about the necessity of foundation of Congress party in the state.

With this backdrop, the paper aims to trace the emergence and growth of Indian National Congress, popularly known as "Congress" in Arunachal Pradesh. The data for the study were gathered through already available literature on state politics in Arunachal Pradesh and through face-to-face interview with some of the eminent political personalities of the state who played vital role in political development of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Keywords :** NEFA, Arunachal Pradesh, State Politics, INC, AICC

### **Introduction**

The political activities in Arunachal Pradesh, in strict theoretical sense, are of recent origin as it remains unexposed to outer world for long time. Traditional socio-political institutions were primarily responsible for managing day-to-day affairs of the tribal communities. Even after two decade long of Indian independence, political parties

and party politics remained alien to the people of state. Understanding the history of this frontier land shows us that various factors are responsible for the late entries of political activities in the state. The Ahom rulers followed the policy of appeasement towards tribal communities and introduced 'Posa' system which restricted them to the hilly areas. During British period, Inner Line Regulation of 1873 was introduced, which separated hilly areas from plain areas and political and other developmental activities were not extended to the tribal Areas. After Indian independence, The Government of India followed the policy that the tribals should be left to 'develop on their own genius'. However, with the setback in Chinese aggression, the Government of India changed the policy of isolation and undertook several measures to bring the area into national mainstream. The Daying Ering Committee was constituted and on the recommendation of the Committee, the government of India introduced the Panchayati Raj institution in 1967. Later on, it paved the way for the development of political activities in the State.

### **Birth of Indian National Congress in Arunachal Pradesh**

Indian National Congress which dominates and shapes the party system in India was founded in 1885 at Bombay (now Mumbai) in the name of Indian National Union. Later on, it was renamed as Indian National Congress as it became synonymous with the Indian National movement and party system in India. The party system in India can be said to have started with the foundation of Indian National Congress as later on it played an important role in the party politics in the country (Mehra, Khanna, and Kueck, 2003, p. 24). People of Arunachal erstwhile NEFA were ignorant about the party politics and election system for a long time since independence but it doesn't mean that they have no idea about the Indian National Congress. Before emergence of modern polity in NEFA some sections of people have an idea about the INC because of its active participation in Indian struggle for independence. The oral history has confirmed that the Indian National Congress was active in the frontier land during the Indian freedom movement. All the policy and programme of the Indian National Congress was formulated and executed from Shillong, Meghalaya. Many elite people mostly from the foothill areas of NEFA were associated with the Indian National congress. Personality like Moji Riba, who played active role during freedom struggle, was associated with INC during Indian struggle for freedom and has carried out various policy and programme of congress at that time. But at that juncture Indian National Congress was not a political party. Even after the Indian independence, the Indian National Congress, after establishing itself as political party at centre, did not extend its presence as a political party in the tribal land.

The initiation of political party formation in the state started with the visit of Kumarasami Kamraaj, then president, AICC in 1967, at Pasighat where he talked about

the necessity of foundation of Congress party in the state. However, NEFA Sangham, then leading organization of intellectuals, reacted to his idea and opposed the foundation of Party in the state. The educated and elite people of NEFA wanted to form a political party called NEFA Sangham which stands for Unity in diversity. However, the idea of forming own political party vanished into thin air with the introduction of NEFA Panchayati Raj regulation, 1967. The persons who were associated with the NEFA Sangham became the members of Agency council. With the graduation of NEFA to status of Union Territory with a name Arunachal Pradesh in 1971 under the North East Areas Re-Organization Act, 1971, the Agency Council at territorial level established under the provisions of NEFA Panchayati Raj Regulation was upgraded to Pradesh council. At that juncture, the Political party made its first entry in the state on October 1972 with the foundation of a unit of Indian National Congress. With the surfacing of INC, the members of Pradesh council began to identify itself with the ideology of first political party and became the members of Indian National Congress under the guidance of late Todak Basar and Late C.K. Gohain, the then nominated Members of Parliament .

During that time the party activities were operated through the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee. Since the functioning of party activities was inconvenient, as the head office was set up at Shillong, a proposal was mooted during General Yazi's visit to Shillong, then General Secretary AICC sometime in November/December 1972, to relocate the party office from Shillong to Arunachal Pradesh by party workers like P.K. Thungon and Wangfa Lowang, the then Councillor of the Agency Council. However, the proposal was accepted only in principle. A year later, P.V. Narasimha Rao, the then General Secretary, AICC, visit to Shillong as a representative of AICC, the proposal was once again brought into the notice by P.K. Thungon, Wangfa Lowang, C.C. Gohain, and Sobeng Tayeng. Rao, after going through the details of the proposal and accepting the feasibility of shifting the party office to Arunachal Pradesh, had ordered for setting up of an independent Party office. But he did not ascertain who the office bearers were to be .

With the setting up of Party Office, the process of nominating office bearers began. C.C. Gohain, the then nominated Member of Parliament was appointed as provisional President. P.K. Thungon and Wangfa Lowang were appointed as Vice-President and Treasurer respectively. At that point of time district and block units could not be opened as the capital of union territory was still functioning from Shillong .

The Congress party, during its initial stage, faced tremendous problems as at that time no proper transport and communication facilities were available in the state. With

the shifting of capital from Shillong to Naharlagun in 1974, the establishment of Party office in Arunachal Pradesh got full momentum. At that juncture, Shri Tomo Riba, then important leader of the state opposed the foundation of party or Party office in the State. He was of the view that the ideology of the Congress is not congenial for tribal people and he favoured the formation of Regional Political Party in the State. However, keeping aside his view the congress leaders held a meeting at Central School Naharlagun, and inaugurated the office of Indian National Congress Arunachal unit at Naharlagun. With the foundation of party in the state again the party portfolio was assigned. The party members unanimously elected late Gora Pertin as the President to spear head the party activities in the state. The congress party became active during his regime as the first ever Parliamentary Election took place. The active members of the party at that time were P.K. Thungon, C. C. Gohain, Sobeng Tayeng, Wangfa Lowang, Gora Pertin, Ita Pulu, and Boken Ete. All of these leaders are considered as the founders of the Congress Party in the state.

With the foundation of the Party office in the state, Congress (I) began to accelerate its works of promoting its influence in all the nook and corner of the state. In 1975, the then Pradesh Council was upgraded into Provisional legislative Assembly. The post of Chief Councillor, and Members were designated as Chief Minister, Ministers and MLA respectively. Shri Prem Khandu Thungon became the first Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers included Tomo Riba, Tadar Tang, Sobeng Tayeng, and Wangfa Lowang. Immediately after becoming as Chief Minister, Shri P.K. Thungon along with other members started visiting different districts of the state to boost the prospect of INC. Up to 1976; Block Congress Committee and other village level subordinate committee were established in almost all the districts. Along with this all Frontal Organizations like Arunachal Pradesh Mahila Congress Committee, Arunachal Pradesh Congress Seva Dal, Arunachal Youth Congress, and National Student Union of India Arunachal Unit were established . In 1977, Arunachal Pradesh witnessed first ever General Election where Congress (I) was the lone political Party which participated in the in this election. However, it was in Legislative Assembly election of 1980, that the Congress party formed the first ever popular government in the state. Since then the Indian National Congress is playing a dominant role in the politics of the state.

### **Indian National Congress' Role in State Politics:**

Political parties are indispensable for the working of modern democratic government. They are the legitimate agents of interest articulation and interest aggression, and have a critically important role in the functioning of a democratic political system. The policy formulation, leadership recruitment, organize decision making, communicate

upward and downward between leaders and the public, promote consensus, enforce responsibility are the role played by the parties across the world (Bhuyan, 2006, p. 24). Numbers of political parties are operating in the state. However, the comprehensive study on the role of political parties in the state has always been a very complex one. The party activities are very minimal as role of maximum political parties are confined to the electoral politics only. Indian National Congress is the first political party to emerge and remain undisputed party in the state for a long time. It has been able to penetrate the minds of people and has wider acceptance in the state. In fact, it is considered as the one which has shaped the modern Arunachal Pradesh. Keeping in view an attempt has been made to analysis its role in state politics.

One of the significant roles of the political party is recruitment of party members. Every political party has certain ideology and goals and to achieve that membership is required. Members are the base of party and every activity are carried out smoothly through the members. Members are recruited as per the guidelines of the party enshrined in their constitution. With the introduction of party politics in state on 1972 by Indian National Congress, the political recruitment in the state was initiated. Since then the Indian National Congress act as a platform for the grooming of various prominent leaders in the state.

Political socialization is that important function whereby a political party educates society politically by inculcating in it's the norms and values that will enable it to strive for the optimal pattern of power relationship in the relation to its task (Sirsi-karand Fernandes, 1984, p. 18). The INC has played a significant role in creating political consciousness among the people of the state. Before the emergence of INC as a political party in the state, people have no idea about the main stream India and modern political process. The socio-cultural life of the people was managed by the traditional self-governing institution. Every tribal group had its own type of village council with different nomenclature but with similar functions. The introduction of Panchayati Raj Institution in Arunachal Pradesh paved way for the political change and constitutional development as it enabled the people to participate in the political process. However, the emergence INC as a first political party in the state has helped in broadening the outlook of the people in the state. The emergence of party brings along with all the element of modern participatory democracy. "Earlier there was no legislative assembly to make laws for the good government of NEFA. NEFA was represented by one member in the Lok Sabha, nominated by the president. Laws made by the Assam Legislative Assembly were not Applicable to NEFA unless there were specific orders against the application... there was no representative institutions in Arunachal Pradesh" (Rao, 1977; Satapathy,



1990, p. 35). The membership recruitment drive, participating in state elections and parliamentary elections, holding Public rallies, organizing protest march, strikes, distribution of Badges and leaflets are the prominent role played by INC in the state which enable the people to understand the meaning of politics.

Socioeconomic development of the society is always influence and shaped by the political party. Political party acts as a voice of people in the representative democracy by formulating policies keeping in mind, the interests of people. The process of overall development of the present Arunachal Pradesh is highly contributed by the various leaders of the congress Party since from Indian independence. The contribution of Nehru- Gandhi family towards the development of state is worth mentioning in this regard. Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, P.K. Thungon, Gegong Apang, etc. has contributed immensely for the development of Arunachal Pradesh. In fact, the journey of Arunachal Pradesh from the status of NEFA to the statehood was undergone under the aegis of INC.

The representative government in the state was first initiated by Indian National Congress. With the conversion of Agency Council to the provisional legislative assembly in 1975, Indian National Congress grabs the privilege to form the government with P K Thungon as its first chief minister of the state. All the members of Agency Council who were a member of INC became the ministers and members of provisional legislative assembly. Thus, the first democratic government came into existence in Arunachal Pradesh.

The politics in state is played in electoral lines. The activities of political parties in state are mainly confined to the elections only. The introduction of modern democratic process in 1967, does not extended the adult franchise rights to the people. The electoral was first introduced in the state in 1977 general election Lok Sabha where Indian national congress was the lone party to contest election. In nutshell INC can be considered as the first political party to introduce the electoral politics in the state.

The emergence of Indian National Congress in the state is itself a long history. Since from the Indian Independence movement, it has been in touch with the frontier state. Before and after its emergence it has always acted as a pillar stone in the overall development of state. Development of state in the line of social, political and economic front was initiated by the INC. Today it can be considered that whatever Arunachal Pradesh has become it is the because of the role played by INC in the state politics of Arunachal Pradesh.

### **Endnotes**

- i) Personal interview with Shri Marcchi Doye, retired Political Interpreter, Seren Village, on 15th September 2014.
- ii) Personal interview with Shri Gegong Apang, former chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh at his residence on 20th December 2015.
- iii) Personal Interview with Shri P.K. Thungon, former Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh at his official Residence on 1st November 2010.
- iv) Personal Interview with Shri P.K. Thungon, former Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh at his official Residence on 1st November 2010.
- v) Personal Interview with Shri P.K. Thungon, former Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh at his official Residence on 1st November 2010.

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