



# The Role Of Regional Political Parties In Shaping Arunachal Pradesh's State Politics

**Dr. Man Norbu**

Assistant Professor (Guest Faculty)

Department of Political Science,

Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hills, Doimukh,

Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India

## Abstract

Regional political parties constitute a crucial yet underappreciated component of India's federal political system, particularly in peripheral and ethnically diverse states such as Arunachal Pradesh. This article examines the historical evolution, political functions, and contemporary relevance of regional political parties in shaping the state politics of Arunachal Pradesh. By situating the analysis within theoretical frameworks of federalism, regionalism, and identity politics, the study explores how parties such as the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) and Arunachal Congress (AC) have influenced governance, leadership formation, electoral competition, and centre-state relations. The article argues that although national political parties have increasingly dominated electoral outcomes in Arunachal Pradesh, regional parties continue to play a vital intermediary role by articulating sub-national interests, enabling elite mobility, and mediating political stability. The study contributes to the broader literature on Indian party systems by highlighting how regional parties in frontier states shape democratic representation beyond electoral dominance.

**Keywords:** Regional Political Parties, Arunachal Pradesh, Indian Federalism, Northeast India, Ethnic Politics, State Politics

## 1. Introduction

India's political system has undergone profound transformation since independence, evolving from a predominantly centralized and Congress-dominated polity into a highly competitive, multi-party federal democracy. Central to this transformation has been the rise of regional political parties, which have challenged national parties' dominance and redefined centre-state relations (Chhibber & Kollman, 2004). While extensive scholarship exists on regional parties in major Indian states, relatively limited academic attention has been paid to their role in smaller and strategically significant frontier states such as Arunachal Pradesh.

Arunachal Pradesh presents a distinctive political case within the Indian Union. As a border state with significant ethnic diversity, low population density, and a history of administrative isolation, its political institutions developed under conditions markedly different from those of mainland India (Baruah, 2005). The emergence of regional political parties in the state must therefore be understood within the broader

context of identity formation, tribal representation, and negotiated integration into the Indian federal framework.

This article examines the role of regional political parties in shaping Arunachal Pradesh's state politics from the late twentieth century to the present. It seeks to address the following questions: How did regional political parties emerge in Arunachal Pradesh? What political functions have they performed within the state's evolving party system? And how have they interacted with national political parties in influencing governance and policy outcomes? By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of political representation in India's peripheral regions.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature on regional political parties in India broadly attributes their rise to structural features of Indian federalism, socio-cultural diversity, and uneven economic development (Riker, 1964; Brass, 1994). Scholars such as Yadav and Palshikar (2008) argue that regional parties represent a response to the inability of national parties to adequately accommodate sub-national identities and regional aspirations.

In the context of Northeast India, existing studies emphasize the region's distinct historical trajectory marked by colonial administrative practices, delayed political integration, and persistent centre-periphery tensions (Baruah, 2003). Regional parties in the Northeast are often seen as vehicles for ethnic assertion and political autonomy rather than purely ideological organizations (Hausing, 2013).

However, Arunachal Pradesh occupies a somewhat different position within this regional discourse. Unlike states such as Nagaland or Mizoram, where regional parties emerged from mass-based ethnic movements, regional parties in Arunachal Pradesh developed largely through elite-driven political mobilization. Scholarly work on Arunachal Pradesh has tended to focus on tribal identity, development challenges, and electoral volatility, with limited attention to the institutional role of regional parties (Sarmah, 2017).

This article builds upon and extends existing scholarship by offering a comprehensive, longitudinal analysis of regional political parties in Arunachal Pradesh, examining both their symbolic and strategic roles within the state's political system.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Federalism and Asymmetric Integration

India's federal structure is characterized by significant asymmetries, particularly in the treatment of border and tribal regions (Arora, 2012). States such as Arunachal Pradesh have historically been administered through special constitutional and administrative arrangements, reflecting concerns over national security and cultural preservation. Regional political parties operate within this asymmetric framework, often acting as intermediaries between local demands and central authority.

### 3.2 Identity Politics and Tribal Representation

Identity politics remains central to political mobilization in Arunachal Pradesh. With more than two dozen major tribes and numerous sub-tribes, political legitimacy is frequently tied to ethnic representation and customary authority (Béteille, 1998). Regional parties often derive their support from claims of cultural authenticity and proximity to local social structures, distinguishing them from national parties perceived as externally driven.

### 3.3 Party System Institutionalization

Mainwaring and Scully's (1995) concept of party system institutionalization provides a useful lens for analyzing Arunachal Pradesh's political volatility. Weak party roots, frequent defections, and personalized leadership characterize the state's party system, creating opportunities for regional parties to function as flexible political platforms rather than stable ideological institutions.

## 4. Historical Evolution of Politics in Arunachal Pradesh

The political evolution of Arunachal Pradesh must be understood against the backdrop of its administrative history as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA). Prior to statehood, governance was largely bureaucratic, with minimal electoral participation. The transition to Union Territory status in 1972 and statehood in 1987 marked the formal integration of the region into India's democratic framework (Sarmah, 2017).

During the early decades, the Indian National Congress dominated the state's politics, benefiting from its association with the central government and its ability to distribute patronage. However, this dominance also generated dissatisfaction among emerging local elites, who sought greater political autonomy and recognition of regional interests. These conditions created the structural space for regional political parties to emerge.

## 5. Emergence and Evolution of Regional Political Parties

### 5.1 The People's Party of Arunachal (PPA)

The People's Party of Arunachal (PPA), founded in 1977, represents the earliest attempt to institutionalize regional political identity in the state. Emerging during the post-Emergency political climate, the PPA articulated a platform centered on regional autonomy, tribal rights, and local leadership. Although the party's electoral success has been limited, its symbolic importance lies in its assertion of Arunachali political identity distinct from national party frameworks (People's Party of Arunachal, 2019).

### 5.2 Arunachal Congress (AC)

The Arunachal Congress emerged in the 1990s as a breakaway faction from the Indian National Congress. Its brief tenure in power demonstrated the potential of regional parties to govern the state. However, internal divisions and dependence on defections undermined its long-term viability, highlighting the structural weaknesses faced by regional parties in Arunachal Pradesh (Sarmah, 2017).

## 6. Regional Parties and Government Formation

Regional political parties in Arunachal Pradesh have played a disproportionately influential role during periods of political instability. While rarely winning absolute majorities, they have often acted as coalition partners or catalysts for government formation through strategic realignments. This role underscores their importance as political brokers within a fragmented party system.

Frequent changes in government, often triggered by defections, reflect the personalized and opportunistic nature of state politics. Regional parties provide alternative platforms for political elites seeking leverage in negotiations with national parties (Yadav & Palshikar, 2008).

## 7. Electoral Politics and Voter Behavior

Electoral competition in Arunachal Pradesh is characterized by high volatility and constituency-specific dynamics. Regional parties tend to perform well in constituencies where local leadership, kinship networks, and tribal affiliations outweigh broader ideological considerations. Their presence enhances electoral pluralism and prevents the complete monopolization of political space by national parties.

## 8. Influence on Policy and Governance

Despite limited electoral dominance, regional parties have influenced policy outcomes through legislative bargaining and participation in coalition governments. Key areas of influence include land rights, cultural preservation, and development planning in remote districts. By framing development within the context of local customs and ecological sustainability, regional parties offer alternative governance perspectives (Baruah, 2005).

## 9. Interaction with National Political Parties

The relationship between regional and national parties in Arunachal Pradesh is primarily pragmatic. Regional parties often align with national parties to access resources and political stability, while national parties rely on regional actors for local legitimacy. This interaction reflects the negotiated nature of Indian federalism (Arora, 2012).

## 10. Challenges Confronting Regional Political Parties

Regional parties face persistent challenges, including organizational fragility, financial constraints, leadership-centric structures, and vulnerability to defections. These challenges limit their capacity to emerge as enduring alternatives to national parties.

## 11. Conclusion

Regional political parties have played a complex and multifaceted role in shaping Arunachal Pradesh's state politics. While their electoral strength has fluctuated, their significance lies in their ability to articulate regional identity, mediate elite competition, and influence governance outcomes. The experience of Arunachal Pradesh highlights the continued relevance of regional parties in sustaining democratic pluralism within India's federal system.

## References

1. Arora, B. (2012). *Federalism and the politics of regionalism in India*. Oxford University Press.
2. Baruah, S. (2003). Citizens and denizens: Ethnicity, homelands, and the crisis of displacement in Northeast India. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 16(1), 44–66.
3. Baruah, S. (2005). *Durable disorder: Understanding the politics of Northeast India*. Oxford University Press.
4. Béteille, A. (1998). The idea of indigenous peoples. *Current Anthropology*, 39(2), 187–192.
5. Brass, P. R. (1994). *The politics of India since independence*. Cambridge University Press.
6. Chhibber, P., & Kollman, K. (2004). *The formation of national party systems*. Princeton University Press.
7. Hausing, K. J. (2013). Regionalism and ethnic politics in Northeast India. *Asian Ethnicity*, 14(4), 451–468.

8. Mainwaring, S., & Scully, T. (1995). Building democratic institutions: Party systems in Latin America. Stanford University Press.
9. People's Party of Arunachal. (2019). Party constitution and ideology. Itanagar.
10. Riker, W. H. (1964). Federalism: Origin, operation, significance. Little, Brown and Company.
11. Sarmah, N. (2017). Electoral politics in Arunachal Pradesh. Indian Journal of Political Science, 78(3), 567–582.
12. Yadav, Y., & Palshikar, S. (2008). Ten theses on state politics in India. Seminar, 591, 14–24.

