

Inner line Permit System of Arunachal Pradesh, India

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Abstract:

The Inner Line Permit (ILP) system regulates entry into Arunachal Pradesh with the objective of protecting the socio-cultural identity, customary practices, and demographic interest of indigenous communities. Originally from the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, the ILP has continued in the post independence period as an important administrative and legal instrument. This paper briefly examines the historical background, purpose, and contemporary relevance of the ILP, highlighting its role in balancing tribal protection with development and mobility in Arunachal Pradesh

Keywords:

Inner line Permit (ILP), Arunachal Pradesh, indigenous communities, Migration control, Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873.

INTRODUCTION

The Inner Line Permit (ILP) system is a regulatory mechanism that governs the entry of non-residents into Arunachal Pradesh with the primary objective of protecting the socio-cultural identity, customary institutions, and demographic composition of the indigenous tribal communities. The origins of the ILP can be traced to the colonial period, when the British administration introduced the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 to restrict the movement of outsiders into sensitive frontier regions. Although initially conceived as a colonial administrative measure, the ILP has continued in the post-independence era as an important legal and constitutional instrument for safeguarding tribal interests.

In contemporary times, the ILP remains a subject of debate, particularly in the context of increased migration, developmental activities, and integration with the national economy. While proponents view the ILP as essential for preserving indigenous rights and cultural heritage, critics argue that it poses challenges to economic growth and mobility. This study seeks to examine the historical evolution, legal framework, and continuing relevance of the Inner Line Permit system in Arunachal Pradesh within the broader socio-political landscape of Northeast India.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

The Inner Line Permit (ILP) system in Arunachal Pradesh was introduced to control the entry of outsiders and to protect the culture, land, and interests of indigenous tribal communities. However, in the present time, the effectiveness of the ILP system has become a subject of discussion. While it is meant to prevent illegal migration and preserve local identity, problems such as weak implementation, lack of awareness, and administrative delays continue to exist.

At the same time, increasing development activities, tourism, and migration have raised questions about whether the ILP system is able to meet present-day challenges. There is limited research that explains how the ILP affects daily life, economic opportunities, and interaction between locals and non-locals. Therefore, the main problem of this study is to examine whether the Inner Line Permit system in Arunachal

Pradesh is functioning effectively and achieving its original purpose in the current social and economic context.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the historical background and purpose of the Inner Line Permit system in Arunachal Pradesh.
2. To understand the role of the ILP in regulating the entry of non-residents into the state.
3. To analyze the importance of the ILP in protecting the socio-cultural identity of indigenous communities.
4. To study the challenges and issues related to the implementation of the ILP system.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr. D. Pandey, in *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, discusses the historical background, tribal society, and colonial administration of the region. His work helps in understanding why protective policies, such as restrictions on the entry of outsiders, were introduced in Arunachal Pradesh.

M. L. Bose, in *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, explains the British frontier policy and the administrative measures adopted to control movement in tribal areas. His study provides the historical foundation of the Inner Line Permit system and its role in preserving tribal identity.

Verrier Elwin, in *A Philosophy for NEFA* (Director of Research, Itanagar, 1957), strongly supports the protection of tribal culture and limited outside interference. His ideas influenced post-independence policies and justify the continuation of protective regulations like the Inner Line Permit.

The article by Mongol Libang on the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 focuses on its impact in the Adi Belt of Arunachal Pradesh. It highlights both the positive and restrictive effects of the regulation on migration and tribal life.

While these works provide valuable historical and policy-based understanding of the Inner Line system, they mainly focus on its origin and early impact. There is limited research on the present functioning and challenges of the Inner Line Permit system in Arunachal Pradesh. This study attempts to fill this gap by examining the relevance and effectiveness of the ILP in the contemporary context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a descriptive and analytical research design. Both primary and secondary sources have been used to examine the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system in Arunachal Pradesh. Primary data have been collected through informal discussions and observations, wherever applicable, to understand local perceptions regarding the ILP. Secondary sources form the main base of the study and include books, research articles, government reports, official notifications, and relevant legal documents related to the ILP system.

Historical and qualitative methods have been adopted to analyze the origin, purpose, and evolution of the ILP system. The study also makes use of content analysis to examine policies and existing literature on tribal protection and migration control. The collected data have been interpreted to assess the effectiveness and relevance of the ILP in the present socio-economic context of Arunachal Pradesh.

DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

Inner line Permit System of Arunachal Pradesh

The Inner Line Regulation was an important administrative policy introduced by the British in Northeast India during the colonial period. It played a major role in shaping the political, economic, and social history of present-day Arunachal Pradesh and the neighboring regions of Assam. Inner Line Permit (ILP) of Arunachal Pradesh is like a special entry pass that almost every Indian (except locals of Arunachal) needs

to visit the state. Arunachal Pradesh is a beautiful northeastern state of India, full of mountains, forests, rivers, and many unique tribal cultures. Because it shares long borders with other countries (like China, Myanmar, and Bhutan) and to protect the local tribal people, their land, culture, and traditions from too much outside influence, the government made a rule long ago that outsiders need official permission to enter in Arunachal Pradesh called the Inner Line Permit or ILP. Any Indian citizen who is not a permanent resident of Arunachal Pradesh (even people from other states like Assam, Delhi, Kerala, etc.) need to make permit before entering the state.

Background and Causes of the Inner Line

After the British occupied Assam following the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, they gradually expanded their influence towards the hills inhabited by various tribal communities. Initially, the British followed a policy of non-interference similar to that of the Ahom rulers. However, this policy did not continue for long. The discovery of tea plantations, rubber, coal, oil, and other valuable forest resources in Assam changed British attitudes. Traders, tea planters, and officials began moving towards the hill areas in search of land and profit. This led to frequent conflicts between the tribal people of the hills and the people of the plains. Illegal trade, exploitation of forest resources, and misunderstandings often resulted in violence. The British administration realized that unrestricted interaction between the plains people and hill tribes was creating instability. At the same time, the British wanted to protect their commercial interests, especially tea plantations and trade routes. To solve these problems, the British decided to introduce a clear boundary that would separate the hill areas from the plains.

The Inner Line Regulation of 1873. In 1873, the British Government passed Regulation I of 1873, popularly known as the Inner Line Regulation. It came into effect on 1st November 1873. This regulation was officially titled “Regulation for the Peace and Good Government of Certain Districts on the Eastern Frontier.”

Under this regulation, an imaginary boundary called the Inner Line was drawn. British subjects were not allowed to cross this line and enter tribal areas without official permission. The regulation applied to districts such as Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills, Cachar, and Chittagong Hill Tracts. The main aim of the Inner Line was to regulate contact between tribal people of the hills and outsiders from the plains. Any person who crossed the Inner Line without permission could be fined or imprisoned. The government also imposed restrictions on land transfer, trade, hunting, and use of forest resources beyond the Inner Line.

The Inner Line Regulation was introduced mainly for economic and administrative reasons rather than humanitarian ones. Its objectives included, Regulating trade, especially in rubber and forest products, between hill tribes and British traders.

Preventing illegal land transfer and protecting tribal land from outsiders.

Protecting tea plantations and commercial interests in the foothill areas.

Maintaining law and order by reducing conflicts between hill tribes and plains people.

Limiting British responsibility beyond the Inner Line by keeping tribal areas outside direct administration. The Inner Line was not fixed permanently. It was adjusted from time to time depending on British needs. In districts like Lakhimpur and Darrang, the line followed natural features such as rivers, hills, and forests. Roads crossing the Inner Line were clearly marked.

The regulation did not restrict the movement of tribal people. They were allowed to cross the line to trade, hunt, or attend fairs organized by the British in border villages. However, outsiders required official permits to enter tribal areas.

Impact on Tribal Society

The Inner Line Regulation had both positive and negative effects on tribal society.

On the positive side, it helped preserve tribal culture, customs, and social institutions. The isolation created by the Inner Line protected tribal communities from excessive interference, exploitation, and forced cultural change. As a result, many traditional practices continued without major disruption, making Arunachal Pradesh a rich area for anthropological studies.

On the negative side, the regulation limited economic development in tribal areas. The British controlled trade and encouraged the tribal people to spend surplus income on goods like opium instead of investing in development. Opportunities for education, modern infrastructure, and administrative growth were delayed. The tribal economy became dependent on the imperial economy, and natural growth of commerce was restricted.

British Motives Behind the Regulation

Although the Inner Line Regulation appeared to protect tribal interests, it primarily served British imperial goals. It allowed the British to control valuable resources while avoiding administrative responsibility in difficult hill regions. By keeping the tribal areas isolated, the British ensured smooth functioning of their plantations and trade in the plains.

Contemporary relevance of inner line Permit

Inner line Permit (ILP) originates from the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873, a colonial measure to restrict entry into tribal region. After independence, this was retained and adapted under Foreigners (protected areas) order, 1958 to apply to area in Arunachal Pradesh. Inner Permit Protects indigenous populations from being overwhelmed by being influx, securing their traditions and culture. Arunachal Pradesh share a long sensitive border with China so, this inner line Permit plays a crucial strategic role in sensitive border regions bordering china by restricting and tracking entry support internal security protocols and strengthen the monitoring of movement in border adjoining area. Inner line Permit Controls the influx of laborers and outsiders, reducing illegal and encouragement. It also helps manage tourism impacts, ensuring that tourism is eco-friendly and does not disrupt local ecosystems.

Who Can Obtain it and How to obtain Inner line Permit (ILP)

The Inner Line Permit (ILP) can be obtained by both Indian and foreign tourists, though the process differs for each category. For Indian citizens, the permit is simply known as the Inner Line Permit. This permit allows movement within the restricted and protected areas of states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland. It is generally issued without much delay so that tourism activities are not unnecessarily affected.

In the case of foreign tourists, the permit is referred to as the Protected Area Permit (PAP). While similar in purpose to the Inner Line Permit, the procedure for obtaining a PAP is comparatively more complex and time-consuming. Foreign nationals can apply for this permit through Indian Missions abroad, the concerned state authorities, or, where necessary, the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The method of obtaining an Inner Line Permit or Protected Area Permit may be either online or offline, depending on the state being visited. Among the two options, the online process is considered more convenient, as it involves less paperwork and saves time. To apply online, applicants must visit the official website of the respective state government and submit an application for the e-ILP.

Applicants are required to provide a valid identity document such as a passport, voter ID card, Aadhaar card, PAN card, or driving licence. A passport-size photograph must also be uploaded along with the

necessary personal details. Once the application is submitted, the permit is usually issued within a few hours and remains valid for a period ranging from 15 to 20 days.

For those opting for the offline method, the permit can be obtained from designated ILP centres. The number of such centres varies from state to state. For example, Mizoram has fewer centres compared to Arunachal Pradesh. In some cases, ILPs can also be issued through state liaison offices located in cities like Delhi.

Overall, the Inner Line Permit system was introduced to regulate the entry of outsiders into sensitive regions and to protect indigenous tribal communities from exploitation, particularly in the context of tourism. By limiting unrestricted access, the system helps preserve local cultures, traditions, and social institutions.

CONCLUSION

The Inner Line Regulation of 1873 was a significant colonial policy that deeply influenced the history of Arunachal Pradesh and neighboring regions. It created a controlled boundary between the hills and plains, shaped tribal-British relations, and preserved tribal culture to some extent. However, it also delayed social and economic development in the hill areas.

Even today, the legacy of the Inner Line can be seen in the Inner Line Permit system in parts of Northeast India. Understanding this regulation is essential for studying the colonial administration, frontier policy, and socio-economic history of Arunachal Pradesh.

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