

ALL ARUNACHAL PRADESH STUDENTS' UNION: A STUDY OF ITS HISTORY AND LEADERSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

The AAPSU movement in its earlier phases was very focused on their objectives with utmost zeal and commitment. But by the passage of time and changes in political scenario and emergence of various political and non-political actors, its movement no longer remains undiluted. There is mushroom growth of community based student's organization. It is eroding the sanctity and integral nature of AAPSU. One or the other community try for the promotion of their respective community based organization. Further the motive and orientation of AAPSU is also seemed to be changing gradually. The recent AAPSU leadership is said to be political and non-committal. They are no longer confined themselves to student centric issues. They take up and give press releases on all issues undermining their established aims and objectives. They are seemed to be deviating from their core charter of demands. Another thing that creates ripples in AAPSU is the conspicuous electioneering sponsor by the politician. Huge amount of money is financed by the politician for one candidate or the other in AAPSU elections with a motive to gain favour in the general election. Furthermore, the prominent AAPSU workers remain active with a strong inclination towards joining political parties. A number of AAPSU workers have joined in party politics. Even some active political party workers have been placed by the politicians in AAPSU leadership. So there is clear vindication of political interference in the working of AAPSU. Finally, the matter of corruption and money making by political leaders and bureaucrats have not been highlighted in a vigorous way. So there is possibility of having tacit understanding between the student leaders and politicians.

AAPSU which evolved during the NEFA period has tasted active movement in pursuance of its various charter of demands. But the history and various phases of the emergence of AAPSU is not well documented. There is heavy dearth of literature on this topic. The only work available on student movement in Arunachal Pradesh is, *Student Movement in Arunachal Pradesh* by S. Dutta. AAPSU in its humble existence has acted as the mouthpiece of student interest in particular and other socio-economic and political issues of the state. Due to absence of stable opposition party, it has been playing the role of opposition in the state politics. The Union on many occasions resented the state and central government on their policies and programmes. It has spearheaded the movement against proposal for grant of citizenship to the Chakmas and Hajong refugees in the state. It is against the move for grant of ST status to the Non-Arunachalee/ General Category residents in Changlang and Lohit district.

Its democratic method of prayer and petition has been changed to more confrontationist methods like Strike, *Dharna* and *Bandh* very frequently coupled with intermittent violence. AAPSU activities are said to be politically motivated at times. AAPSU leaders may have tacit understanding with the political leaders and their election expenditures are seemed to be borne by the political leaders. Surprisingly, the issue of corruption in the public domain has never been taken up by AAPSU in a vigorous way. Hence, there is a need for comprehensive introspection on the role and activities of AAPSU.

OBJECTIVES

The basic objectives of the study are:

- (i) To understand the historical background; and
- (ii) To analyze the leadership pattern of AAPSU.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts descriptive and analytical method. Information has been collected mostly through interviews, discussions, questionnaires etc. Necessary references have been reflected from booklets, pamphlets, leaflets, petitions and memoranda of AAPSU to the state and central governments. Newspapers, Magazines and archives also were used as per requirement. However, secondary sources have been relied upon in accordance with the demand of the descriptive chapters.

THE HISTORY

The beginning of students' politics in the North East India traces its history back to the formation of Assamese Literary Society in 1867 founded in Kolkata by some Assamese students' including Anandaram Boruah, Madhab Chandra Bordoloi, and Julnur Ali Ahmed. This Society was replaced by Assamese Students' Literary Club. The Club became a platform for socio-literary, and in a way political expression of Assamese people. Assamese Literary Club paved the way for the formation of Asom Chatra Sanmilan in 1916 which was subsequently renamed as All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in 1967. The role of AASU in Assam, in many ways, has been held responsible for the emergence of a galaxy of students' organizations on caste and community considerations.

The case of AAPSU presents a different picture. Unlike most of the students' unions in North east India, All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union cannot be considered as an offshoot of All Assam Students' Union. It has a history of its own, which basically emerged out of initiatives of the first batch of educated indigenous students.

As has been discussed in a previous chapter, the state of Arunachal Pradesh lacked any educational institutions prior to 1947. It was only in this year (1947) that a primary school was established at Pasighat with thirty students. In the absence of educational facilities, students from the state were forced to seek admission in schools in Assam, located in the periphery of Assam-

Arunachal boundary. Some of the students belonging to belonging to Abor (now Adi), Galong (now Galo) and Miri (now Mishing) communities were admitted at Sadiya Government High School, Assam.

Students of the school desired to have a platform to express their grievances in a stronger and united way for the greater interests of the students in particular and community members in general. Thus, Abor-Miri Students' Union was born to be headquartered at Pasighat. The students' leaders were opposed to nomenclature such as Abor and Miri being given by colonial rulers without understanding the sentiments of the local communities. They considered the terms as derogatory and wanted the use of Adi and Mishing instead of Abor and Miri. The Abor-Miri Students' Union took up the issue seriously and represented to authorities (Yonggam, 2015: 1).

After a serious discussion by the students' leaders, it was unanimously decided to change the name of Abor-Miri Students' Union to Adi-Mishing Students' Union in 1947. Students' leaders who actively participated in the establishment of Adi-Mishing Students' Union included Daying Ering, Matin Dai, OsongEring, Tajum Koyu, and Susen Pao. Late Dying Ering and Matin Dai, both from Adi community, were elected as the first president and general secretary respectively of the union. Tamik Dabi, Tajum Koyu, Talom Rukbo, Toi Dai, Gebang Dai, Yongom Lego, Obang Dai and Oshong Ering (from Adi-Galo community), and SushenPao, Magor Tayung, Lolit Doley, Takap Medok, Jotin Doley, Dewai Medok, and JugeshKuli (from Mising community) were included as Executive Members of the Union.

The Union compelled the school authorities to change the names Abor-Miri to Adi-Mishing. OshongEring recalls how the students pulled down a Notice Board of a school where Abor-Miri was written. Later they got it replaced as Adi-Mishing, instead of Abor-Miri (Yonggam, 2015: 3).

Both social and educational objectives could be associated with the formation of the Adi-Mishing Students' Union. The social objective was for the unification of the Adis, Galos and Mishings under one socio-cultural identity. The Union also intended to bring about educational consciousness to the people at village level by convincing illiterate parents to send their children to schools. In order to spread their message, the Union had organised public meetings and cultural functions at various parts of the then Abor Hills. The leaders of the Union organized social services in various rural areas in far-off places. They educated the villagers about ill effects of drugs, smoking, etc, considering them as social evils. They did spread the message of significance of protection and preservation of their own traditional values and culture.

The Union received tremendous support from the students and general public. Because of such encouragement and supports, the students' union had gone some steps further by taking up various developmental issues, e.g. opening of more schools, health centers, construction of roads, improvement of communication, etc. In the absence of political class, the students were mostly responsible for advising and guiding the government. The NEFA administration responded accordingly and the demands made by the students for opening more schools in the interior areas and upgrading the existing schools were accepted.

The activities of Adi-Missing Union had gradual but positive impacts in the society and hence the Union was primarily responsible for a gradual rise in the number of branch students' unions. A decision was taken by the Adi-Mishing Students' Union for extension of

their activities with the formation of branches of the Union in different Circles. Thus, Adi-Galo branch Union was formed in western part of the then Abor Hills under present Nari-Koyu, Likabali, Basar, Aalo, Karka, Bogums and Lodu circles. In Central and Eastern parts of Abor Hills Adi-Minyong and Adi-Padam branch Unions were formed. In the southern part of the then Abor Hills, Mising Students' Union was formed for the students of Mising community (Yonggam, 2015: 4).

The activities and positive role of Adi-Mishing Students' Union started to spread across Abor Hills (Siang District) up to Subansiri and other districts. Subsequently Subansiri Students' Union was formed by the students of Apatani and Nyishi communities. However, these student's unions confined themselves to their respective areas and their activities were limited to a certain territorial boundary. In due course of time, feelings emerged for a Pan-Arunachal Union to cater the need of the entire people of the then North-East Frontier Agency (www.arunachalpradesh.nic.in). Moreover, more educational institutions were opened by the government, which gave rise to number of students throughout the Territory.

The changed socio-political and educational scenario of the Territory had compelled the Adi-Mising Students' Union to convene a meeting at Pasighat on December 1959. Two significant resolutions were adopted in the meeting:

- (i) To change the nomenclature from Adi-Mishing Students' Union to All NEFA Students' Union.
- (ii) To restructure the Union with new office bearers.

As a result, a common platform was formed in the name of All NEFA Students' Union with Talom Rukbo and Bakin Pertin as president and general secretary respectively. The newly formed Union did not have written Bye-Laws and hence no electoral system could be introduced. It was neither represented by educational institutions across NEFA, confining itself to Pasighat. Hence, ALL NEFA Students' Union remained almost defunct till 1967.

There were numerous issues that confronted tribal people of NEFA but the newly created Students' Union could not rise to the occasion. The issues included demarcation of Assam-NEFA boundary issue, deportation of Chakma, Hajong and Tibetan refugees from NEFA, shifting of NEFA Capital from Shillong to a suitable place within NEFA territory, and abolition of Assamese language as medium of instruction in NEFA schools, etc.

NEFA then was represented in the Parliament by a nominated Member in Lok Sabha. As such, important issues could not be raised in the Parliament to bring it to the notice of the Members and government. Although many efficient officers were drawn mostly from Armed Force personnel to serve in NEFA to bring about infrastructural and other developments in the Territory, but many officers often failed to understand the psychology of the tribal communities. There were no active social organizations and strong student unions either to act as pressure groups to work for the people and against "the mal-administration in NEFA". "The student union which was formed in 1959 was inactive and defunct student union in all fronts. Hence, it was felt urgent need of a strong student union in NEFA who can deliver goods to student community and

the public as well” (Yonggam, 2015: 7). NyodekYonggam describes the circumstance that led to the revival of All NEFA Students’ Union formed in 1959:

Based on above mentioned facts, we the all Guwahati NEFA student union which was formed in December 1967 decided to reorganise existing defunct All NEFA Students’ Union of 1959 with new bloods to act as whistle blowers against maladministration of NEFA. Having this in mind we formed a "High Power Committee" consisting of University students of NEFA in Guwahati University under the Leadership of Late Lummer Dai whom we used to addressed as Lummer (Dai), meaning respected uncle Lummer. He was made as Chief Adviser while this writer was made as co-ordinator with the students of schools, Colleges, University and with the students who were outside of NEFA region studying in various colleges of India. The committee also requested Lummer to draft a constitution of proposed new student union. Further, the committee also proposed to organize a General Conference at College, Pasighat of All NEFA student Union which was formed in 1959. As scheduled, all students, representatives of schools, Colleges and university arrived at IN College, Pasighat. After two days’ hectic deliberations the representatives of students decided not to waste time but to hold elections of Office bearers of student union in democratic process on 16th October 1967 to elect new office bearers on the ground that due to communication bottleneck it will not be possible for students coming from far flung areas of NEFA to gather again in future. Accordingly, elections were held under the presiding president Late C.A. Gohain Retd, EAC of Namsai town who was a well-wisher of student committees. I was elected as President unopposed while Late Sobeng Tayeng was elected as Vice-President and Rinchin Norbu, a medical student of AMC, Dibrugarh was elected as General Secretary and seven others members were elected for various portfolios. Thus, second Birth of All NEFA Students’ Union took place on the historic day of 16th October 1967at IN College campus, Pasighat (Yonggam, 2015: 7-8).

The constitution¹of the revived All NEFA Students’ Union had 16 Articles. It was federal in structure. The main objectives of the constitution were to promote unity and fraternity among the students in particular and the people of the State in general; to exploit the energy of the State for greater interest of the Nation; and to preserve and promote the indigenous culture and traditions of the people of NEFA.

The All NEFA Students’ Union and its predecessors did not have constitution, emblem, Motto and flag till 1967. The new Motto, "Learn to serve", which was proposed by Nyodek Yonggam, was accepted. It means that the students have to use their knowledge for the service of the society and its people.

"The flying Eagle", as its emblem, reminds the students to fly higher and higher till it reaches the goal.². It contains "The Two Arrows" intersecting each other, symbolizing the direction of the Eagle with sharp destination. "The Five Stars" indicate five mighty rivers of the state namely, Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Dibang and Lohit.

In 1972 political status of the then NEFA was changed with its up gradation as a Union Territory. NEFA was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh, and the capital was shifted from

¹The constitution of the revived All NEFA Students’ Union was drafted by Lumar Dai and Nyodek Yonggam.

² Suggested by C. T. Manpoong and TajumRiba.

Shillong to Itanagar in 1974. It is but natural that nomenclature of NEFA Students' Union was also changed to All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union. The decision to this effect was taken in the 8th general conference of NEFA Students' Union held at Doyin Gumin Hall at Pasighat in 1972.

NEFA Students' Union did not perform to the expectations of the students and people of the state. The Executive Members "could not hold any election for more than 5 years 4 reasons best known to them" (www.facebook.com/jamesl.wanglat). The responsibility of conducting elections and reviving the Union once again were forced upon the students of Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat. The first conference of All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union was conducted at Pasighat under the leadership of James L. Wanglat and S. Ngemu, who then were serving as the president and general secretary respectively of Jawaharlal Nehru College Students' Union. In the words of James L. Wanglat:

APSU was formed with d active support of Siang District in general & Pasighat public in particular. Leaders like late Tagoli Jamoh, late Orying Moyong, Late Kabong Borang (Ex Minister), Late Sutam Tasung (Ex MLA), late BakinPartin (Ex MP & MLA), late Talo Kardu (Ex MLA), late Kotik Moyang, (First Political Assistant of Siang District) late Opang Moyong, late Omam Moyong Deori, (Ex MP & MLA), late Tadak Gara Ex Director AIR (my colleague & friend), Dagi Bagra and Takosing Boko Ex director of Education (both were GS & Monitor respectively of JNC). Late Bojang Jopir, late Tajum Kayu, Obek Ering (brother of late Dr D Ering), late Tumpak Koyu, Toggom Lollen, Raiching Parme, Khoda Tana Tara, late PadiYube (GM APST), Tengam Ngemu (Ex Minister) late Tesa Tangjang, Tashi Lama (IPS), Tapum Jamoh (Ex MLA), late Bia Lollen (Dy SP) & late Onyak Romey (Ex MLA) were pillars during the conference. The generosity of the people & leaders of Pasighat now East Siang District will always live warm in our heart (those of us who constituted the APPSU.)

The second APPSU conference was held in ALONG. The people of Along were equally generous & helpful if not more. Boken Ette (Ex PA & MLA) the grand old man of Along was in the forefront to support upcoming student community called APPSU. We received donation from villagers, late Tomo Riba (Ex CM & MP), late Todak Basar (Ex Minister & MP) Lijum Ronya (Ex Minister) was the GS of Along Govt HS School. He & his team did commendable job in making the first APPSU conference a grand success; of course my friend Eken Riba being the President was d overall in charge.

LEADERSHIP OF AAPSU

The first administrative centre during colonial period was established at Pasighat in 1912. The British government was least interested in the introduction of formal education in erstwhile North East Frontier Tracts. These tracts which letter became North East Frontier Agency were practically the only area in North East India where the western missionaries had not been around and hence did not get the benefit of the spread of education brought by the missionaries. There were only two lower primary schools at Pasighat and Sadiaya prior to 1947. Pasighat was the headquarters of undivided Siang Frontier Division. Hence the people of this area became first-

generation educated people in the state. It is but natural that students' movements were initiated by Adi (including Galos) students, the inhabitants of Siang district. Establishment of a college, Jawaharlal Nehru College in 1964, the only institution of higher learning in the state then, at Pasighat has provided the people of this area an added advantage.

In any phase of the historical development of a society, a particular class always comes to hold the dominant position in it that can be loosely termed as leadership. It is usually the ruling class that exercises the dominance, but very often in special circumstances; even a non-ruling class might rise to a dominant position and maintain hegemony over the society. The emergence of elite is in evident in all societies as a result of the spread of English education a one of the factors that got greatly influenced by the ideas of western liberalism. With the emergence of this class with western ideas, they begin to influence all sections of the society, as these ideas became the ideas of the hegemonic class. The aims, aspiration, values and interests of the dominant class become the ideas, aims, aspiration and values of the students. More than any other section of the society, the students as receptive members of the intelligentsia, as persons constantly engaged in studies are exposed to this hegemony. Thus students in most societies are believed to articulate the ideas of the dominant classes in the society. The general assumption is that the movements are essentially based on the economic and political interests of the rising hegemonic elite class who wish to monopolise their dominance over a region and mobilise the relatively passive tribal and peasant masses to fulfill their limited class aspiration.

In the context of North East India, A.K. Barua has raised an academically significant question: how is it that very often student movements activate almost an entire student community? Or, how can student organisations master support from their members who come from widely varied social strata? The answer to these questions can be traced in what Gramsci called the "hegemony", as quoted by Baruah. The concept of hegemony as developed by Antonio Gramsci is: "... linked to the way in which the interests of the dominant class are represented ideologically as those of society as a whole and, to the organisations of concept to that end" (Baruah, 2002: 16).

The mobilisation of traditionally deprived categories for their welfare is used as a strategy for the pursuit of instrumental goals. These mobilisations play an important role in the social emancipation of these social categories. Baruah maintains that the possibility of small elite emerging from these social categories as a vested interested group, monopolising the benefits coming from the Government and other sources, is a real danger. This section seeks to conceal its exploitative character by focusing people's attention on certain equally important problems by pausing to defend and promote the interest of the masses. For example, in the issue of non-tribal and outsiders, all the ills of society and its lack of rapid progress in Hill areas and other regions are sought to be explained away by the presence of a continuous entry of non-tribal and exploitation in trade and industry and as job hunters. While the domineering and exploitative tendencies on the part of the 'Outsiders' should be discouraged, the locals should be encouraged to think that both the Social categories – tribal and non-tribals are partners in common effort of development of the region.

A.K. Baruah says that "it would therefore be necessary in the study of a student movement not merely to locate the class which apparently rules but to locate the class or combination of

classes which exercises hegemony in that particular society at that particular phase of history” (Baruah, 2002: 16).

The non-elites class that dominated the society and state of Arunachal Pradesh in early years of state formation got to be represented by students’ community. It happened basically because of absence of established political parties and leadership.³The present leadership of AAPSU, though is not as powerful as the previous ones, still plays a significant role in the policies and politics of Arunachal Pradesh.

In the initial years of the formation of students’ organizations representations were mostly from the Siang belt, as the administrative and educational centres were first in this side of the territory. Students’ leaders from Adi community were the first to organize and lead students’ organizations in the state. Leaders like Daying Ering, Matin Dai, Talom Rukbo and Bakin Pertin(all Adis) laid the foundation of students’ organizations. Thereafter, the AAPSU saw mixed representation from different communities, majority being from Galo community. The trend of mixed representation continued till 1991. Post 1991, all the president’s posts have been elected from a particular community, the Nyishis, and most of the general secretaries are from Galo community. The detail is reflected in table 2.1.

Table 1
Community wise representation of Presidents and General Secretaries of NEFA Students’ Union

Sl. No	President	Community	General Secretary	Community
1	TalomRukbo	Adi	BakinPertin	Adi
2	NyodekYonggam	Galo	RinchinNorbu	Monpa
3	SobengTayeng	Adi	RinchinNorbu	Monpa
4	TahumTaipodia	Galo	ShamchonNgemu	Tangsa

Source: NyodekYonggam, 2015

Table 2
Community wise representation of Presidents and General Secretaries of AAPSU

Sl. No	President	Community	General Secretary	Community
1	Talom Gao	Adi	IkenRiba	Galo
2	IkenRiba	Galo	WangniaPongte	Nocte
3	HaijenPonglaham	Wangcho	Hage Batt	Apatani
4	Racho Tama	Apatani	Tanya Dabi	Galo
5	JarbomGamlin	Galo	LarbinNasi	Tagin

³The territory was under the Ministry of External Affairs till 1965, when it was transferred to the Ministry of Home Affairs. It was directly under the control of the president of India, the governor of Assam acting as an agent to the president of India). It was only in 1977 that the first elections to the Legislative Assembly was held, which led to formation of a popular government.

6	TakoChangriang	Nyishi	TabinTaki	Adi
7	NabamRebia	Nyishi	TabinTaki	Adi
8	TabinTaki	Adi	TokbomBorang	Adi
9	TokbomBorang	Adi	LikiEte	Galo
10	Tater Kipa	Nyishi	LikiEte	Galo
11	TakamSanjoy	Nyishi	DominLoya	Galo
12	Tage Lampung	Nyishi	DominLoya	Galo
13	NabamJallow	Nyishi	PongsaSoham	Wangcho
14	Dominic Tadar	Nyishi	MajiMarging	Tagin
15	Byabang Taj	Nyishi	GumjumHaider	Galo
16	KanuBagang	Nyishi	OjingTasing	Adi
17	Takam Tatung	Nyishi	TujumPoyong	Galo
18	KamtaLapung	Nyishi	BiruNasi	Tagin

Source: <http://www.aapsu.com/readers.plip>

As seen from the table...., Nyishis represent 11(61%) out of 18 presidents elected so far after the change of nomenclature from NEFA Students' Union to All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union. Since 1992 there has been no gap in the continuity of their representation in the president's posts. The Adis and Galos are represented by four and two presidents respectively, and the Wangchos and Apatanis have one each representation.

In the general secretary's posts, the Galos is in majority with 44.4% (8) representation. They are followed by the Adis with four and Tagins with three representations. The Apatanis, Wangchos and Noctes have one post each representation.

CONCLUSION

Since student's associations, particularly All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union, posed serious challenge to the government and the Congress party, the then chief minister changed his tactics- from confrontation to appeasement. The selective policy of appeasement was offered to some of the top leaders of AAPSU by inducting them in the party and the government. The chief minister, Gegong Apang, adopted such policy to achieve twin objectives- to get rid of his political opponents by replacing them with young leaders; and to weaken the AAPSU movement by offering political opportunities to its leaders.

Many of the former AAPSU leaders were initiated into political arena through this policy. Former AAPSU presidents Jarbom Gamlin and Takam Sanjoy went on to become the state's chief minister and Member of Parliament respectively. Nabam Rebia, another former AAPSU president, presently a legislator, was the speaker of Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly. Tater Kipa, a former president was a minister in Apang's Council of Minister, while Larbin Nasi, former general secretary, went on to become an MLA. However, it must be clear that some of them did not have the blessing of Gegong Apang.

We must also accept the fact that many of the positive contributions displayed by student's unions cannot and must not be ignored. AAPSU had strongly objected to Centre's move to grant statehood to Arunachal Pradesh till it attains desired level of socio-political development. AAPSU leaders condemned corrupt leaders and officials on many occasions. At one point of time AAPSU was at the forefront, voicing every issues concerning the state and society, be it refugee issues, Assam-Arunachal boundary problem, Chinese claim over Arunachal Pradesh, stapled visa issue, fair recruitment, enhancing stipend of students, proper implementation of Right to Education Act. Recently, AAPSU had gone to the extent of "seeking Chinese help" if the Government of India fails to bring indigenous-friendly solution to the refugee issues.

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