

# **Student Politics in Arunachal Pradesh: Examining its Impact on Society**

**Lokpa Tamang**

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Political Science, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh  
lokpatmg21@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

*The present Study attempts to throw light on the role played by Student Politics in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The state politics in Arunachal Pradesh can well be put as synonymous to its student politics. As the role of student politics is of paramount significance not only in terms of maintaining check and balance in the state but also in terms of controlling the entire political process and phenomenon of the state. As a matter of fact, since there is an absence of strong opposition political party, it is the student's bodies and organisation which truly perform the functions of opposition political parties as an effective and efficient pressure group. The study is based on secondary data and is historical and descriptive in nature. Student politics has always played an important role in every single issue that affected the state of Arunachal Pradesh, be it the refugee issue of Chakmas and Hajongs, issue of Inner Line Permit, PRC issue or the issue of boundary dispute with Assam or the Offspring issue. However, the methods adopted by student union to pressurize the State Government has always been questionable and controversial, bandh call, and strike are mostly used method. Though ordinary citizens render their support when the demands of the student bodies are genuine, many at times it is the public that get harassed in between the tussle of the state government and the student bodies. The student bodies like APPSU, ANSU, ANYA, and others mostly make the headlines in the state due to their active role in the state politics of Arunachal Pradesh.*

**Keywords:** Arunachal Pradesh, Student Politics, State Politics, Student Union, Pressure Groups.

## **Introduction**

The involvement of students in politics is not a new phenomenon and neither student is apolitical. As Aristotle has said, man by nature is political animal, and the same is also true about the student's community. Being the intellectual group of the society, the world has witnessed the role played by students in almost every matter across globes, from academic to socio-political, from campus to off campus. The term Students politics is generic in nature having diverse manifestations (Altbach, 1968, p.15). It includes dimensions like students' attitude and orientation, political behaviour and power, unrest and methods of political mobilization and organization and interrelationship between students and educational and political system. Student politics for centuries have been considered as one of the most important agents of social change. Student like any other category of the society want social and political change suitable to their perception. The role of student politics is not only limited

to developed nations, but they have also been playing equally important role in the developing countries as well.

Student Politics by and large have been studied interchangeably as youth politics and vice versa. However, if we analyse these terms, i.e., Student politics and youth politics; we find certain differences. Firstly, students as group are a part of larger group called Youth. As a member of the society the tenure of a person is limited that is maximum to university level. Secondly, youth as a group is loosely and poorly organized in comparison to students (Panyang, 2016, p.9).

Irrespective of the classification of students based on their objectives and orientation they constitute a major chunk of the population in any given society. Almost all nations have seen large scale participation of students in politics. Students have played important role in the national freedom movements in many countries of Asia and Africa. They have toppled governments in countries like Korea and Turkey. The present form of Taliban in Afghanistan also was student's unrest in the beginning. In our own country India, students participated in large scale during the freedom struggle. Post independent India also saw student's active participation in politics during the National Emergency of 1975.

The foundation of the Assamese Literary Society in Kolkata in 1867 marked the beginning of student politics in India's Northeastern area. Assamese Student Literary Club eventually took its place. This Club evolved into a forum for the discussion of social and political problems. In 1916, the Assamese Student Literary Club led to the foundation of Asom Chatra Sanmillan, which was renamed All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in 1967. The rise of a variety of student organisations based on clan and ethnicity considerations in the Northeast is partly due to the influence of AASU in Assam. The creation of the All-Arunachal Pradesh Student's Union, on the other hand, is unique; it is not an offshoot of the AASU, as many people believe. When a few educated Arunachalee students recognised the need for a student-led platform to air their complaints, it arose spontaneously. Some Adi-Mishing students established the Adi-Mishing Student's Union in 1947, with its headquarters in Pasighat. When the name of the territory was changed from Northeastern Frontier Tract to Northeastern Frontier Agency on a governmental level, this became the NEFA Students' Union. When NEFA's status was upgraded to that of a Union Territory, the name of the organisation was also changed from NEFA to Arunachal Pradesh. During this time, inspired by the role played by AAPSU in the state politics of Arunachal Pradesh led to the emergence of numerous clans and community-based student organizations like the All Nyishi Student's Union, All Mishmi Student's Union, All Galo Student's Union, All Mishmi Student's Union etc. and these students' union along with the AAPSU has been playing very important role in the state politics of Arunachal Pradesh.

During the early stages of student politics, they were more focused on their goals with zeal and devotion. The entrance of party politics and the growth of numerous political and non-political players, however, weakened the essence of student politics in Arunachal Pradesh over time. On the one hand, AAPSU is losing its sanctity and fundamental nature, while on the other; each neighbourhood is attempting to establish its own community-based organisation. Furthermore, the democratic techniques employed by these student organisations to express their

dissatisfaction with the administration have shifted to more confrontational methods such as strike, dharna, and bandh, which are usually accompanied by violence.

Due to the lack of a stable opposition party, student organisations have taken over the role of opposition in state politics. People expect student bodies to raise their voices more than opposing political parties on every subject. As a result of all of this, Arunachal Pradesh has been a hotbed of student politics for quite some time. A succession of student protests has occurred in the state over concerns of cultural identity, economic backwardness, foreign nationals, inner line permits, and other topics that have had a significant impact on society and state politics. When we look to the movements of the student organizations like ANSU, ANYA, GSU, ATSU, AdiSU, AMSU, etc we find that these organizations have raised issues which concern their ethnic communities to which they belong. Moreover, their influence has lasted for larger duration than expected.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The present study tries to study the student politics in Arunachal Pradesh. The basic objective of the study is to understand their role and impact in the State politics of Arunachal Pradesh. The study is mostly historical and descriptive in nature.

### **Methodology of Research**

The study aims to explore the history, dynamics, and issues of student politics in Arunachal Pradesh, with a focus on the role and impact of the All–Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union (AAPSU). The study adopts a descriptive and analytical method, using secondary sources of data. The secondary sources include books, articles, reports, newspapers, magazines, and online sources related to the topic.

### **Review of Literature**

Philip G. Altbach’s book “Student Politics in America” is a comprehensive account of the history of student political involvement in the United States, covering various periods and events such as the Civil War, the anti-slavery movement, the Depression, and the 1960s. The book examines how student activism in America has shaped and been shaped by the social and cultural context of the nation. The book also explores the diversity and complexity of student political ideologies, ranging from liberal to radical, and their impact on campus and societal politics.

Pankaj Bora’s book “Student Politics In India”, explores the key aspects of student politics with a focus on the Northeast India. The book provides a historical overview of student politics in India, the functions and roles of student organizations, the changing patterns, and trends of student politics in India, and the outcomes and impacts of student politics. However, the book does not provide much information about student’s politics in Arunachal Pradesh, except for

mentioning the All–Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) as one of the influential student body. The book briefly mentions the role of student's politics in the statehood movement of Arunachal Pradesh.

A.K. Baruah's book "Student Power in Northeast India" (2002) examines the political engagement of students in relation to various actors and issues in the region. The book is composed of several articles based on different papers that cover a comprehensive analysis of Student Politics in Northeast India from various perspectives. The book emphasizes the significance of the student unions, in influencing and initiating social and political movements and agendas in the other states of Northeast India as well.

Dutta, S. Students Movement in Arunachal Pradesh, according to the author All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) has been a catalyst and a source of inspiration for the students' initiatives and associations in Arunachal Pradesh and the whole northeast India. The book traces the history and development of student movements in Arunachal Pradesh and their role in the socio-political and cultural transformation of the state.

Panyang, Kuku Students Movement in Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union, is a scholarly work that analyzes the history, leadership, and issues of the All–Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU), the apex student body in the state. The work explores how AAPSU has evolved from its humble beginnings in the NEFA period to become a powerful and influential force in the socio-political and cultural landscape of Arunachal Pradesh. The book also examines the challenges and problems faced by AAPSU, such as the mushrooming of community-based student organizations, the political interference and corruption, the deviation from the core charter of demands, and the frequent use of confrontationist methods like strikes, dharnas, and bandhs. It provides a critical and comprehensive account of the student politics in Arunachal Pradesh and its impact on the society and the state.

## Findings And Discussions

1. **Role and Impact of Students Politics:** The student's union in Arunachal Pradesh, apart from playing the role of opposition party very often transgresses into the issues outside of their domain. There are multiple factors how, in Arunachal Pradesh, student's bodies have emerged as the major spokesperson of the grievances and aspirations of the indigenous people. This made the role played by the students of Arunachal distinct in many ways as compared to student's union we see elsewhere (Panyang, 2016, p. 91). The students initially held a position of prominence and power in their individual communities due to their low literacy rate. In the beginning, the administrative power used students as a communication connection between the administration and the local people, who didn't grasp the administrative policies and procedures that were adopted in the area at its beginnings. Furthermore, the absence of organised political parties for a long period, practically until 1978, made students the people's primary spokesman in relation to the administration. In the absence of popular media, such as newspapers of any type, to gather public opinion until recently, and in the absence of any other

organisation, the student union was the only way by which public concerns and ambitions could be expressed. Furthermore, due to the lack of a strong opposition party in the State Legislative Assembly, primarily due to defection, students are forced to act as guardians of the public interest to a large extent. Furthermore, due to their political neutrality, student bodies receive widespread support and appreciation.

Students have been vocal in voicing issues concerning the state and its people from the days of NEFA. The student body passed resolutions on some of the burning issues of the time as early as 1967, during the 7th session of the All NEFA Student's Union conference. Some of the important issues including the formation of a Boundary Commission to resolve NEFA and Assam outstanding boundary disputes, deportation of Chakma, Hajong, and Tibetan refugees from NEFA, shifting of NEFA Capital from Shillong to any suitable place within NEFA, and continuation of the Inner Line Permit system. Let us in brief discuss some of the important issues in which student bodies played an important role and left a paramount impact on the policies of the government both state and central.

2. **The Language Issue:** Following independence, the Central Government mandated Assamese as a medium of instruction in all NEFA educational institutions. When NEFA students learned that Assamese is a regional language of Assam, they organised a campaign to have Assamese removed as a medium of instruction from all NEFA schools and replaced with Hindi and English. In 1972, the administration listened to the students' demands and changed the medium of instruction. It's no surprise that the drive to replace Assamese with Hindi and English was led primarily by students and the upper crust of society.
3. **The Shifting of Capital:** The student organisations were also instrumental in the transfer of the capital from Shillong to Arunachal Pradesh. The demand for the capital to be relocated was met by the Central Government in 1974, when the capital was relocated from Shillong to Itanagar.
4. **Refugee Issue:** The refugee crisis is possibly the only issue on which student organisations and the state administration agree. Both parties are making every effort to deport the refugees from Arunachal Pradesh's protected territory. In Arunachal Pradesh, there are three refugee groups: Chakma, Hajong, and Tibetan. In 1982, the APPSU began the first anti-refugee agitation. Since then, the state has seen several agitations, protests, and other actions directed against the refugees by various student organisations. Many times, all the student bodies worked along with APPSU to deport refugees from Arunachal Pradesh.
5. **The Assam-Arunachal Pradesh Boundary Issue:** The question of boundary demarcation between Assam and Arunachal has always been a point of concern between the two states. All other student groups in Arunachal Pradesh, like AAPSU, are committed to maintaining the state's territorial integrity. They have always raised their voices whenever there has been a fight between citizens of two states over a territorial dispute. The state administration is now working hard to resolve the boundary issue and holding talks with its counterpart in part because of the role played by student bodies.
6. **Operation Clean Drive and Inner Line Permit:** Even though the movement was started by AAPSU to evict illegal immigrants from Arunachal Pradesh who were living

in the state's jurisdiction without an Inner Line Permit, it got widespread backing from other student organisations in the state. According to reports, the student groups were successful in driving out 5,000 illegal immigrants from Arunachal Pradesh's several districts. Such initiatives by student bodies prompted the government to supply adequate human resources as well as sophisticated equipment such as CC TV cameras at state entry checkpoints.

7. **Opposition to Granting of Permanent Residential Certificate to Non-APST:** Apart from refugees and illegal migrants, Arunachal Pradesh has various communities who have lived in the state for long years but have not been awarded permanent residency status. Mishings, Karbis, Deoris, Morang, Mottak, Gorkhas, Adhivashis, and others are among these groups. They've been asking for a permanent residence certificate for a long time. Following that, the government of Arunachal Pradesh decided to issue PRC to non-APSTs and their families, based on a 1968 timeframe. In its struggle against the state government's decision, AAPSU was joined by several other student organisations. AAPSU has received support from the All-Mishmi Students Union, Tirap Student's Union, and All Tai Khamti Singhpo Students Union, among others. Following a devastating clash in the agitations that claimed many lives, the government was forced to revoke its decision.
8. **Educational Issue:** As representatives of the student population, student groups in Arunachal Pradesh play a vital role in bringing about educational changes. Numerous students' organisations in Arunachal Pradesh's various districts deal with education as one of the most popular issues. They've been working nonstop to strengthen the state's educational system.
9. **The Offspring Issue:** Residents and student organisations in the state have expressed worry over the kid of an APST mother and a non-APST father receiving APST benefits. According to the AAPSU, children of non-APST males and APST mothers have received APST, and other benefits intended specifically for Arunachal Pradesh's indigenous communities on several occasions. When Non-APST men marry APST women, they frequently begin to retain and purchase immovable and movable property in their wives' names. In the interests of the state's indigenous people, the union has chosen to take up the issue in collaboration with a variety of community-based student organisations. A Joint Consultative Committee was eventually constituted by the state government to examine into the issue of offspring, with AAPSU as a member.
10. **Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) Paper Leakage Issue:** In the paper leakage issue, which occur in the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC), student organizations such as APPSU and the All Nyishi Students Union (ANSU) is playing an important role in addressing the issue and advocating for solutions. APPSU and ANSU are using their platforms to spread awareness about the paper leakage issue and its potential consequences. They are creating social media campaigns, organizing protests or rallies, and reaching out to the media to draw attention to the issue. APPSU and ANSU are also putting pressure on the APPSC and other relevant authorities to take swift action against those responsible for the paper leak. They are writing letters, holding meetings with officials, and organizing petitions demanding action. Student's bodies are also using the incident as an

opportunity to advocate for fair examination practices. They are pushing for more transparency in the examination process, better security measures, and harsher punishments for those caught engaging in unethical practices. They are also conducting an independent investigation into the paper leakage issue, gathering evidence, and submitting their findings to the relevant authorities. This is ensuring that the issue is properly addressed and that those responsible are held accountable.

## **Conclusion**

As a result of the foregoing, it is obvious that student bodies have played an essential part in Arunachal Pradesh's state politics. These bodies, on the other hand, do face public censure. There is a widespread belief among the general public that student union elections are influenced not only by politics but also by a large quantity of money. Furthermore, the proliferation of various student unions around the state has caused individuals to lose faith in these groups' goals. Many executive members of student bodies have been accused of being over-aged and registering as students solely to meet the criteria of being a regular student to run for election. One of the reasons why Arunachal Pradesh's student bodies are dwindling in importance is that they no longer represent the student community's interests. They're focusing their efforts on non-academic and political matters. Many people also believe that student bodies are a good place to start if you want to get involved in politics. All of these flaws have tainted the purity of student politics in Arunachal Pradesh. Given the lack of a significant political opposition party and leader, the influence of student bodies in state politics cannot be overlooked. People in Arunachal Pradesh are usually believed to have faith in student bodies if the union's leadership stays true to the union's initial ideology and goals. Their engagement in state politics is frowned upon, and they must remain apolitical and free of corruption.

## **References**

- Altbach, P. G. (1997). Student politics in America: A historical analysis. Transaction Publishers.
- AAPSU assesses situation at Dollungmukh. (2017, December 10). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2017/12/10/aapsu-assesses-situation-at-dollungmukh/>
- AAPSU demands formation of study group on APST status issue. (2018, September 22). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/09/22/aapsu/demands-formation-of-study-group-on-apst-status-issue/>
- AAPSU Demands public apology from BRO over Kimin episode. (2021, June 21). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/06/21/aapsu-demands-public-apology-from-bro-over-kimin-episode/>
- AAPSU expresses displeasure over delay in publication of draft proposal. (2021, August 24). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/08/24/aapsu-expresses-displeasure-over-delay-in-publication-of-draft-proposal/>
- AAPSU seeks calendar for competitive exam. (2018, April 17). Arunachal Times.

- <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/04/17/aapsu-seeks-calander-for-competitive-exam/>
- AAPSU seeks overhaul of health and education sector. (2018, March 16). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/03/2018/aapsu-seeks-overhaul-of-health-and-edn-sectors/>
- AAPSU seeks suspension of PhD admission at RGU. (2021, September 5). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/08/05/aapsu-seeks-suspension-of-phd-admission-at-rgu/>
- AAPSU seeks tabling of offspring issue in budget session. (2020, January 29). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2020/01/29/aapsu-seeks-tabling-of-offspring-issue-in-budget-session/>
- AAPSU serves ultimatum over offspring issue. (2019, November 6). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2019/11/06/aapsu-serves-ultimatum-over-offspring-issue/>
- AAPSU stages statewide protest over Chinese claims over Arunachal Pradesh. (2021, January 28). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/01/28/aapsu-stages-statewide-protest-over-chinese-claims-over-arunachal-pradesh/>
- AAPSU starts policing against ILP violators, illegal immigrants. (2018, August 18). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/08/18/aapsu-starts-policing-against-ilp-violators-illegal-immigrants/>
- AAPSU strongly oppose proposed draft of marriage and inheritance bill. (2021, August 21). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/08/2021/aapsu-strongly-oppose-proposed-draft-of-marriage>
- AITF, ANSU seek statement from the authorities over Kimin episode. (2020, June 20). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2020/06/20/aitf-ansu-seek-statement-from-the-authorities-over-kimin-episode/>
- Altbach, P. G. (Ed.). (1968). Student Politics in Bombay. Asia Publishing House.
- ANSU demands for school devastated by fire. (2018, December 22). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/12/22/ansu-demands-for-school-devastated-by-fire/>
- ANSU to launch ILP checking drive. (2019, October 19). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2019/10/19/ansu-to-launch-ilp-checking-drive/>
- AAPSU organize awareness program. (2019, August 5). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2019/08/05/aapsu-organizes-awareness-camps/>
- Baruah, A. K. (2002). Student power in Northeast India. Regency Publication.
- Bharadwaj, T. (2020). Role of Students Movement in Assam With Special Reference to All Assam Student Union (AASU) [M.Phil Dissertation, Department of Political Science, Rajiv Gandhi University].
- Conduct Regular ILP checking: GSU. (2018, March 24). Arunachal Times. <https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/03/24/conduct-regular-ilp-checking-gsu/>
- Deka, M. (1996). Students Movement in Assam. Vikash Publishing House.
- Dutta, S. (1998). Students Movement in Arunachal Pradesh. Itanagar.