Chapter - VIII
CONCLUSION

Introduction:

The Assam movement, spearheaded by the AASU, was a watershed in the history of Assam, not only for the issues it espoused but also for the fact that it touched all aspects of the lives of the people of Assam. An attempt is made in the thesis to establish, once and for all, the genuineness of the cause that the student leaders upheld while leading the agitation, and the inevitability of it.

The thesis begins with an attempt to establish the socio-political basis of student movements across the globe. It also attempts to understand student movements against the backdrop of the entire environment encompassing the educational, political, social and economic situations. The chapter also delves into the two types of student movements—norm-oriented and value-oriented—and tries to analyze in what category the movement led by AASU falls into, if at all. It traces the history of students activism in India in general and Assam in particular. It establishes a solid base for the raison d'être of the movement launched by the AASU.

At times, the movement was also characterized as secessionist in nature, a charge which the AASU always protested against. It said, “We declare unequivocally that we are not secessionist. Our main aim has been to maintain the territorial integrity of India and to thwart the evil designs of those who want to create instability through infiltration. On the other hand, those who allege us of being secessionists, have many skeletons in their cupboards.”

The origin and growth of the AASU justifiably shows that it is the deserving heir to the glorious tradition that Assamese students had preserved since the formation of the Asomiya Bhasar Unnati Sadhini Sabha, and later the Asom Chatra Sahitya Sanmilani and the Asom Chatra Sanmilan in 1916.

In fact, student activism is nothing new as far as Assam is concerned. Be it on the issue of establishment of a college or the use of a language in the administrative
affairs, students, rather than politicians, have been in the forefront. So much so that
the refinery in Guwahati, the Saraighat Bridge over the Brahmaputra, the 111 at North Guwahati, and many more establishments of importance, have been the direct
collection of the students’ force. Thanks to Assam’s geography and polity, students
here have always played a bigger role in the State compared to students in the rest
of the country.

Also, history testifies that whenever Assamese students have raised pertinent
issues, the powers that be at Delhi and Dispur had been forced to take notice.
Needless to add, legitimacy of the issues has been evident to all and sundry. In the
1960 language issue, Lal Bahadur Shastri was deputed to find a solution, while in
the 1972 medium issue, the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had to ask the agitationists
to call-off the issue, while Chief Minister Sarat Chandra Sinha was forced to take
back an Assembly resolution seeking the establishment of a separate university in
Cachar.

The formation of the AASU was more on the ground of economic and social
issues than on educational ones. But since its inception at the Tezpur convention, and
the adaptation of its constitution, the AASU has worked on all conceivable spheres—
economic, social, political, cultural and educational.

Beginning with the medium movement of 1972 to the submission of economi<
charter in 1974, the AASU has shown remarkable degree of organizational and
mobilization skill which will even put any political party to wonder.

The movement period from June 8, 1979, to August 15, 1985, defended
justified and clarified the AASU standpoint with regard to the status of lakhs of
Bangladeshi immigrants to Assam. It was the death of Lok Sabha MP from
Mangaloi constituency—Hiralal Patwari—that brought to light the impending
danger of large-scale migration to the social, cultural, economic and political status
of indigenous Assamese on their own land. When electoral rolls were revised and
updated for a by-election, there were as many as 70,000 names of foreigners in the
rolls out of which 26,900 were detected judicially. It triggered a spate of protests and
forced the AASU to take the cudgels on behalf of the people of Assam to prevent
the foreigners from turning the indigenous Assamese into a non-entity.
It led to the boycott of the 1979 parliamentary polls in all but two constituencies. This also led to a great deal of political instability, crippling of economic and educational institutions, and a total break down of law and order.

Being struck in a whirlpool, the Centre held dialogue with the movement leaders on several occasions, thereby giving the AASU-AAGSP the legitimacy of being the representatives of the Assamese people. The dialogue failed to break the impasse as the Centre insisted on 1971 as the cut-off year for detection, deletion and deportation of illegal immigrants to Assam while the movement leaders insisted on 1951 and later 1961 as the cut-off year. If the Government had 'international' commitment to cite as the reason for 1971, the AASU was committed to the people of Assam and hence justified 1951 as the cut-off year.

When dialogue failed, force and coercion became the Centre's tools to bring 'peace' and 'democracy' in Assam. It imposed elections in Assam in 1983 in the name of democracy whereas it was one of the most undemocratic acts in independent India's history. Streets were littered with bodies, while democracy was being sacrificed at the altar of 'autocracy'. The 1983 polls saw communal clashes of the worst types hitherto unknown in the proud and secular history of Assam.

If it was a slur on Assam, certainly the Central Government cannot abdicate its responsibility in bringing to Assam this dubious distinction. It was oblivious of its role in protecting the interest of its constituent unit, from where it gets its legitimacy. By the time, it was out of its inaction, it was too little too late.

After the installation of a ministry headed by Hiteswar Saikia in 1983, which the AASU never recognized it as a constitutional one, there was a lull as far as the movement was concerned. If the Saikia Ministry was beginning to feel relatively comfortable, it was soon proved wrong. The AASU came back with a renewed vigour after its national convention in January, 1984. On June 15, 1984, it declared an Assam bandh and the Centre was quick to take notice. Even though Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated, her son and the next Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi wasted no time, and initiated fresh parleys with the movement leaders, which resulted in the signing of the historic Assam Accord, which brought to an end the six-year-long Assam Movement on August 15, 1985.
Meanwhile, based on the Jorhat national convention decision, the AASU set about its task of forming a political entity to champion the cause of the indigenous Assamese through a regional political party, and thus formed the Asom Gana Parishad in its Golaghat political convention of 1985. But all along, the AASU kept on reiterating its apolitical stand. The AGP fought the 1985 polls, barely two months after its formation, and come to power riding on a massive emotional support that the AASU generated in the six-year-long Assam movement.

On the other hand, the euphoria of the Accord died down very soon after its signing. After three rounds of negotiation with the Centre, there was a seven-year hiatus in talks on the implementation of the Accord.

The heart and soul of the Accord were Clause 6 and Clause 7, the implementation of which could have set the house in order. But that was not to be, and the Accord merely remained a piece of document. Several governments were formed at the Centre but the Accord was never implemented. There are even views that the Accord was never meant for implementation. Except for touching the periphery of the Accord, the Centre and to a large extent, the State Government, displayed their insouciance to the historic document.

Nothing hurt the AASU more than the fact that with each passing day, the Bangladeshi population in Assam had been increasing. They were everywhere.

No Government at Dispur saw it, because they did not want to see it. For one government they formed the vote bank, for another they were prospective vote banks. Except for two universities, one IIT, a petrochemical refinery and a few other peripheral benefits, the Accord has been by and large a big let down, and has formed an integral part of Assam politics since 1985.

The AASU, since the very beginning of signing the Accord, has been forwarding various suggestions to the Central Government on the way of implementing the Accord. And time and again, the Centre has failed to implement these ideas in letter and spirit.

The AASU's repeated pleas literally fell on deaf ears, even after more than 20 rounds of negotiation and formation of a number of committees and subcommittee both at the State and at the Central level.
Basically, the Centre’s nonchalant attitude regarding the Accord has further alienated Assam and its people from the Centre, just the way it did during the Assam movement. One of the most striking examples of this has been on the IM (DT) Act front. Firstly, the law was passed by Parliament when only two parliamentary seats in Assam were represented and none representing the ethnic Assamese areas. Secondly, the number of people determined to be illegal aliens, has been a minuscule percentage of those against whom cases have been sent to the 16 Tribunals set up for the purpose. The IM (DT) Act was a blatant piece of legislation, discriminatory to those very people whom it was bound to protect. After repeated protests over several years, the Centre had agreed to repeal the Act.

Again, it was the non-implementation of the Accord which many felt was responsible in legitimizing the genuineness of ULFA’s militant subnationalism. It is all the more surprising when one considers the fact that at one point, the AGP was part of a coalition Government at the Centre and yet the Accord remained unimplemented.

The six-year-long Assam movement saw AASU’s organizational skill at its zenith. The post-Accord period saw AASU’s ability to draw on the intelligentsia throughout the country to uphold the issues that it had been championing. The AASU also united students’ organizations from other parts of the country on some common issues like the establishment of a truly Federal Constitution as well as the protection of indigenous population’s economic rights.

It was not that the AASU leadership had the advantage of wealth and Western education, two ingredients, many wrongly, think necessary, to bring about social reformation. As most of the students leaders were from humble background, doubt over it being a truly democratic organization was never raised. It also projects the fact that most of AASU leaders are aware of the expectation the people of the State are having from it.

It has played its role in the region to perfection. Holding of talks with the Nagaland Students’ Federation, the Arunachal students’ body, the Karbi Students’ representatives, the All Bodo Students’ Union, etc., on a broad range of issues ranging from solution of border problem to autonomy and economic development, has been a hallmark in the growing maturity of AASU leadership.
At the same time, being an apolitical entity, the AASU is aware of its limitations. The AASU has also worked in tandem with leading intellectuals in the society. The Asom Unnati Sabha has also been an AASU brainchild, which has helped it to expand its activities, drawing on the experiences of others in society.

The AASU today, with more than 350 units at all levels, has established itself firmly in the society. It is in a position to bring about tremendous changes at all levels in the society.

Despite all odds, the AASU has brought about a metamorphosis in all aspects of Assam’s polity. Right from generating political consciousness during the time of movement, to mass mobilization on key issues, it has gone about its task in a very matured way.

It gave birth to a regional dream through the formation of the Asom Gana Parishad to fight for political and economic freedom of the indigenous Assamese. Yet, it kept a check on the party getting out of rails knowing full well that the mass support it got during the movement period was a support to a non-political entity. The fact that the AGP got 64 seats in the 1985 Assembly polls did not lull the AASU into complacency. Rather, it took its lesson well, knowing that the immigrants are ensconced in Assam.

Never for a movement has the AASU let its guards down, going to the extent of total non-cooperation with its own progeny—AGP. For the AASU, the State and its people have always been accorded top priority.

The AASU has also played a major role in toning down the All Bodo Students Union’s demand from a separate State to autonomy within the State. The ABSU has drawn its lessons from the AASU in a perfect manner that befits a students organization.

The AASU, has, to a large extent, played its role to perfection notwithstanding the distortions that characterize the politics of Assam. It is a testimony to the fact that people of the State have come to expect from it so much that even the minor flaws in the organization disturbs them. The criticism that the AASU faces in the media too, are but a part of this sense of expectation.
OBSERVATION

The thesis establishes the fact quite clearly that the Centre has continued to 'bestow' step-motherly treatment to Assam. Virtually nothing concrete has been achieved without resorting to agitation. Political parties and politicians of the State have also failed Assam.

It is the AASU which has been leading the people of the State on major issues of State's interest. On the Refinery question, the Medium movement, the food crisis and the Emergency; the AASU has always been at the forefront.

The threat to the indigenous people and the culture of Assam, coming from the illegal infiltration of lakhs of Bangladeshis and Nepalis, was recognized by the AASU, and was placed by it at major national and international fora.

The six-year-long Assam movement was a democratic agitation of the highest order in post-Independence India, staying true to the Gandhian legacy of truth and non-violence, and mass participation.

The 1983 polls thrust down upon the throat of Assam in the name of democracy was undemocratic and unconstitutional. Ironically, the Centre wanted to justify the polls in the name of democracy and the Constitution. Finally, belated though, the Centre agreed that it was a costly mistake.

The signing of the Assam Accord was but a bestowal of recognition that millions of Bangladeshis were present in Assam, and that they are a threat to the Assamese people and its culture.

That the problems, meant to be eradicated through the Accord, still exist and that the Centre as well as the State Government have utterly failed in ensuring Assam's all-round development. The Assam-Bangladesh border is still wide open and infiltration continues with consummate ease.

The Centre has also recognized AASU's legitimacy in being the representative of Assam's people and interests of the State. The various rounds of bipartite and tripartite discussion, it has conducted with it, is a testimony to the fact.
The Centre has acknowledged, albeit quite late, that the IM (DT) A is discriminatory and needs to be repealed.

A closer coordination between various students' organization in Assam and the North-east has been established by the AASU. The North East Students' Organization (NESO) which is today acting as a pressure group on the governments of the north-eastern States as well as the Centre, was established at the initiative of the AASU. The AASU, on the other hand, has been acting as a pressure group on the political parties and the State Government. It has maintained vigil on all aspects—political, social, economic and educational—of the people of the State.

The AASU has been able to unite all educational organizations to force the State Government to adopt an academic calendar to streamline education in the State.

The AASU has changed electoral politics in Assam for good. With the AASU's arrival on the political firmament of Assam, the elderly national politicians have lost the trust of the Assamese, since they were found to be unresponsive to issues of real concern to Assam. A new wave of youthful politics have now taken centre stage. The advent of students' force to political power is an unprecedented development in the world history.

The AASU has ushered in a new era of regional politics in the State. Economic and social issues in the State have been pushed to the forefront of politics in Assam. The AASU has been able to establish indubitably the fact that migration from Bangladesh has eroded, to a large extent, the economic growth of Assam and, if unchecked, has the potential to swamp Assam's political fortune for good.

The AASU has also been able to establish the fact that the Centre's obliviousness towards Assam, and its economy has eaten into the social fabric of the State. There are increasing signs that a very tolerant and secular State has become increasingly irritant on minor issues affecting its people.

The issue of ethnicity has also come to stay in the politics of Assam for good. Championed first by the AASU, political parties are jumping in the bandwagon of
spearheading campaigns for indigenous Assamese. The issue of autonomy has received a major impetus, thanks to the AASU. The formation of the BAC, Rahja Mising Council, the KAAC are but part of AASU's efforts.

But the biggest contribution of the AASU has been to establish the danger of unceasing flow of Bangladeshi immigrant to Assam as well as the North-east and the political mobilization against it during the Assam movement from 1979-85. The AASU, by taking the cudgels on behalf of the people of State, has been enormously successful in bringing the issues concerning the State to the notice of the Centre.

SUGGESTIONS

With changing political scenario, a time has come for the AASU to reflect on its role—from the time it led the foreign national movement to its future.

First of all, AASU needs an introspection. It may give the AASU a new direction to organize the people of Assam once again. The situation on the ground has not changed for the better, the flow of illegal immigrants has remained unchecked. With the presence of several million Bangladeshis, the entire exercise from 1979-1985 may have to be reinvigorated on a much wider scale due to compulsions of the unabated demographic changes. The new generation of AASU leaders should scrutinize all the aspects of the Assam Accord to devise new strategies and action plans. Since both the Central and the State Governments are signatories to the detection and deportation process of the post-71 illegal immigrants. The AASU has no option but to organize the masses to force both the governments to honour their commitments to implement the Assam Accord.

The AASU will have to strive much more to persuade the State representatives as well as the Union Government about the content and extent of constitutional safeguards promised in the Assam Accord. The constitutional and administrative safeguards were envisaged in the Assam Accord to offset the socio-cultural and political consequences which follow from AASU's acceptance of the burden of the 1951-71 immigrants.
Stable political equations in the State can be achieved only after names of post-1971 illegal entrants from Bangladesh and their descendants are removed from the electoral rolls of Assam. The politics of vote-banks continues to determine political strengths of the parties. The AASU may have to wage another battle to put an end to the politics of vote-banks.

A proposal has also been aired both in Assam and in New Delhi to grant work permits to the immigrants. The proposal has the possibility of legitimizing the stay of the illegal Bangladeshis and encouraging more of them to come to the State in near future. Assam is yet to reach a state of richness to afford the luxury of comparatively cheaper labour. Moreover, this work permit will, in future, lead to vote permit, i.e., citizenship rights. The AASU should also bear in mind that Assam's unemployment rate officially is 10 per cent. The AASU should weigh all the aspects before agreeing to the proposal.

It is from here, that the AASU can continue to exert pressure on the Centre and the State Government to take effective steps along the border, ranging from strict vigilance to construction of fences with live electric wire to even the use of Army as suggested by them to deport the aliens.

Moreover, under no circumstances should the AASU consider that its role in the State's socio-political and economic future has diminished. In fact, a person none other than Assam's former Governor S. K. Sinha, during his tenure, said that influx is the chief cause of Assam's backwardness. So, the responsibility on the AASU has increased all the more since 1979 on this count. The AASU, too, realized soon after the Accord that the character of its struggle against the influx of immigrants must change from relying merely on popular sentiment to actions on the ground.

The present crop of AASU leaders and members, who were not directly part of the great struggle then, may find the burden too heavy to handle. They may think: It is time to abandon the modus operandi of the stir against influx because nothing is happening on the ground practically. They may also decide, because practically nothing is happening on the ground, it is high time to intensify the stir and start the movement all over again because of its raison d'être and because of the future that...
State and its people. They will also do well to remember that the presence of almost seven million Bangladeshi infiltrators on the streets of Assam does not mean the failure of the movement. On the contrary, it goes to the credit of the student leaders that they foresaw this situation, a quarter-of-a-century ago.

Nothing but the issue of influx will judge the AASU in future. Realizing this, it must continue its relentless struggle against the illegal immigrants in the State. Here, the AASU needs to mobilize its local and primary unit members to organize community boycott of all illegal immigrants. This will act as a twin sword. It will discourage future immigrants to Assam, once the message of an economic boycott reaches out to them on the border, and secondly, it will force the present batches of foreigners either to look out for greener pastures or to retreat to the country of their origin.

The AASU should oppose tooth and nail any such scheme of granting work permit to the illegal migrants with a view to legitimizing the stay of the illegal Bangladeshis ultimately and encouraging more of them to come in near future.

The AASU, in its struggle against influx, has to simultaneously match its policy and action with other ethnic and tribal students' bodies. The AASU's efforts on the tribal students' front have been on the rise and it is destined to benefit the State as a whole. Any collective effort of all the students' bodies will produce tremendous psychological impact in the minds of the people of Assam.

There is no doubt that the AASU has become an integral and most dominating and all pervasive voice in the socio-political and cultural life of Assam. The AASU has remained a steadfast friend of all sections of the society in times of crisis and despair. It has become an inescapable duty of the AASU to keep watchful eyes on the activities of political parties of the State. The AASU has emerged, in the last few decades, as the most powerful social organization of the State of Assam. The enormous duties and responsibilities have placed a heavy burden on the AASU. It must strictly maintain its apolitical identity.

The AASU's endeavour to work for the improvement of the educational scenario of Assam should continue. The AASU has clearly formulated the policies.
encompassing all the stages and aspects of school and college education. The Academic Calendar, formulated in a comprehensive manner for the first time, has been accepted by the Government of Assam. The AASU has to relentlessly engage itself for acceptance and fruitful implementation of its policies.

As far as its organizational structure is concerned, the AASU should open doors to new bloods along with new ideas in every three to four years. Nothing is more dangerous to an organization than stagnancy. The AASU should constantly invite opinions of all about its policies and action. Study of history of successful organizations all across the globe will also help it. The new AASU members must be taught about the glorious past of the organization, and they must be infused with pride of being the torch-bearers of that legacy. The State executive leaders and other office-bearers should be trained in organizational skills once they are elected. The virtue of accountability in financial matters should be a pre-requisite of any post in the organization. The AASU’s financial management has left much to be desired.

The AASU, in near future, should also seriously consider an increasing role for women in the organizational hierarchy. This will help the AASU to understand some critical social issues in a better way, and expand its social base all the more.

Employment scenario of the State is really dismal. The concept and necessity of self-employment is gaining ground among the educated youths of the State. The AASU has rightly taken up the issue of employment of the indigenous qualified youths in the Central Government undertakings. Social tension will be a natural consequence if qualified youths are ignored to fulfil political expediency. The AASU should pursue the issue to its logical conclusion, removing, at the same time, any misunderstanding which may unnecessarily develop among the different communities of the State. It is also heartening to see that the AASU has, of late, started training programme for the self-help groups of the State.

AASU’s relation with other students’ organizations in the region also needs to be defined clearly. The formation of the NESO has been a step in the right direction. The NESO, coupled with the AASU, has really taken key issues of the region to the national level. In the context of the changing political scenario in the North-east
where regional parties are forming governments, the NESO-AASU combine can also effectively coordinate a common strategy against infiltration and other regional issues.

The AASU also needs to fight wholeheartedly the menace of corruption which has, of late, come to characterize life in general in the State. It has also started eating into the vitals of the State’s economy. It must resort to social boycott, as it did during the first AGP rule, of ministers, bureaucrats and other officials and should leave no stone unturned to make them pay for it. Corruption, needless to say, has stalled development activities in the State, including education. Even sectors like health has been badly affected. The primary units of the AASU should raise consciousness at their respective levels to build a society ready to take on the scourge of corruption.

The AASU should also continued to concentrate its energy on economic uplift of the society and the State. This was even the very rationale of the formation of the AASU. A revolution has to begin at the agricultural-level to transform the State. Assam’s key to growth will lie in the farms and at the village-level which would surely drive growth for mechanized products. The AASU may create an atmosphere conducive to agricultural farming and cooperative movement.

All these steps laid out, call for some concrete measures, because the maladies are too important to ignore or pass over. Basically it is a question of survival of the people of Assam in the land of their birth with self respect. It is the AASU with its well branced-out network that the people of the State are looking forward to, in the coming years, to keep alive the spirit of the Assam movement on a much larger and grander scale.

Reference :
1. AASU in 'Save Assam Today to Save India Tomorrow : An Appeal from the People of Assam.