Chapter V
Summary and Conclusion

The beginning of students’ politics in the North East can be traced back to the formation of Assamese Literary society in 1867 founded in Kolkata by some Assamese students like Anandaram Boruah, Madhab Chandra Bordoloi, Julfur Ali Ahmed and others. This society was replaced by Assamese student literary club. This club became a platform for expression of socio-political movement. 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 or AASU in Assam was largely responsible to a greater degree for the emergence of a galaxy of students’ organizations on caste and community considerations. But the case of the emergence of AAPSU is different. Unlike many of the students’ unions in North east India, All Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union cannot be considered as an offshoot of All Assam Students’ Union.

The emergence of AAPSU has a history of its own. It has a history of its own, which basically emerged out of initiatives of the first batch of educated indigenous students. 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.
It had a natural emergence when the first batch of educated Arunachalees gradually realized the need for a students' organization. The Adi-Mishing student's union was formed in 1947 with its Headquarter at Pasighat by Adi-Mishing students like Dr. Daying Ering, Matin Dai, Osong Ering, Tajum Koyu, Susen Pao and others. Later on, it became All NEFA Students' Union which was further renamed as All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) in 1972.

The All NEFA Students' Union and its predecessors did not have constitution, emblem, Motto and flag till 1967. The new Motto, "Learn to Serve". It means that the students have to use their knowledge for the service of the society and its people. The constitution of 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 constitution of AAPSU was adopted on 15th October, 1967, which has a Preamble, and 23 articles, divided into ten parts. The preamble has 78 words and lays down the main objectives and goals of the Union. It calls for cultivation and preservation of culture, customs and traditional heritages; improving social and moral values; strengthening and safeguarding the common interests and integrity of the people of Arunachal Pradesh; improving the socio-economic and educational standards of the people; and safeguarding brotherhood, co-operation and students 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.

Since the days of NEFA, students have been vocal in raising issues concerning state and its people. The issues included refugee issue, Assam-Arunachal boundary problem; medium of instruction, opposition to the Statehood Act, 1986, problem of immigration, enhancement of stipends for the students; opposition to The Arunachal Pradesh Control of Organized Crime Act, 2002; opposition to Granting of PRC to Non-APST; opposition to Chinese Claim over Arunachal Pradesh; reservation to Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Trines in educational institutions and government jobs, etc.

As has been discussed in a preceding chapter, political parties remain indispensable to the working of any democratic society or system. A party is a mechanism through which ordinary masses have indirect say in the policies and programmes of the government. Theoretically speaking, even in Arunachal Pradesh political parties and leaders are expected to serve as a medium through which people indirectly participate in the workings of the government. In Arunachal Pradesh, however, parties become active only at the time of elections, and they often fail to raises issues concerning the people. There is a lack of stable opposition party inside or
outside the legislative assembly. Moreover, civil society organizations in true sense have not developed. Most of these organizations are rooted to their clans or communities and hence they do not represent Pan-Arunachal identity.

Given the situation, the role of opposition political parties and civil society organizations are being played by the students’ organizations. The student’s unions apart from playing the role of opposition party very often transgress into the issues outside 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 has made the role played by the students of Arunachal Pradesh distinct in many respects as compared to students’ unions we see elsewhere.

After independence, the present Arunachal Pradesh was not represented either in the parliament or in the Legislative Assembly of Assam, though it was considered as a part of Assam. The territory, as discussed in the previous chapters, was directly under the governor of Assam, who was acting as an agent to the president of India. For all practical purposes, it remained under the direct control of the Union of India till 1987, when it was made a separate state. It was only in 1977 that the first general elections to the Lok Sabha was held, followed by general elections to the Vidhan Sabha a year later in 1978.

In the initial years, after independence, political leadership could not be developed, firstly, because of lack of education and outside exposure. Second, representative democracy was not introduced, except panchayats in 1969, because of which the people could not prepare themselves for their roles as political leaders. Administration was carried mostly by the people from outside the territory. Hence, the responsibility of looking after the interests of the people and the state rested with the
‘first-generation’ educated students, who were respected also as social leaders of their respective communities. Apart from looking after the state’s issues these students’ leaders initiated social reformation movement by challenging old social order and evil practices in the society.

General public started to have more faith on the activities of the students’ associations than their representatives, even after formation of duly elected and representative government. In the absence of any opposition political party, government of the day or its chief minister would often act arbitrarily. Such actions of the government received strong protest from the students’ associations, which resulted into clash of interests between the government and the students’ leaders. In most of the cases government had to bow down to the wishes of these students’ leaders, who represented the people of the state.

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.

AAPSU’s role at present is being scrutinized thoroughly and many have accused its leaders of indulging too much in politics. The public also perceive these leaders to be involving in the corrupt practices. There are instances where AAPSU is found indulging itself in the arena where their involvement is frowned upon by both public and political leaders. There are also instances where AAPSU leaders themselves are busy in commercial activities as government contractors.

Not only the issues of corruption and involvement in politics are responsible for weakening of the significance of the apex students’ body but factors like mushrooming of community based organizations are also greatly responsible for its
declining acceptance. Issues in the state have been localized or communalized because of which the community based students’ organizations gain upper hand over the AAPSU. Moreover, students of the particular area become more loyal to their communities.

The significance of the apex body, AAPSU, is being felt by the vast majority of the respondents, which approximately represent the state. While doing so, however, most of the respondents have felt that there is an urgent need to change the working style of the AAPSU leadership, and also the pattern of representation in the executive members of the Union. The need is also felt for drastic changes in the procedures of election of the AAPSU executive members, particularly that of the president.

Findings

The respondents include 70(35%) females and 130(65%) male, out of which 60 (30%) is members of AAPSU. Only 20 per cent of the respondents attended or participated in the rallies, meetings and demonstrations organized by the AAPSU. It means that 10 per cent of the respondents, who are members of the Union, did not participate in any activities. The study shows that 90 per cent of the respondents knew/heard about the AAPSU and its activities. This is an indication of popularity of the Union throughout the state.

An interesting finding is that an overwhelming majority, i.e., 150 respondents (75%) of the total samples thinks that the “AAPSU has lost its past glory”. Only 20 per cent of the respondents did not agree and maintains that AAPSU is as good as before. The reasons they cited for decline of AAPSU vary from “Political interference” (46.6%), “Weak leadership” (33.3%) and “No sympathy from the public” (20%). There have been so many instances where AAPSU leadership got
themselves directly involved in the political affairs of the state. It cannot be ruled out that many of the leaders took the help of political leaders at the time of elections.

On a question, “if you are asked to rate the present leadership of AAPSU, how would you rate them?”, 80 respondents (40%) have rated them as “Too political”, 60 respondents (30%) as “Corrupt”, 12 respondents (6%) as “Lacks commitment” and only 40 respondents (20%) as “Genuine”. The responses show that more than 70 per cent of the respondents are not happy with the present leadership of AAPSU.

However, 71.5 per cent of the respondents still consider AAPSU as the apex students’ body of the state. Only 18.5 per cent of the respondents did not think so. 20 respondents (10%) did not answer the question. It shows that people of Arunachal Pradesh would have faith on the AAPSU provided its leadership remains stick to the original ideology and objectives. Their involvement in the political affairs of the state is frowned upon, and they must remain apolitical and corrupt-free.

There has been popular perception among the public that there is not only involvement of politics but also huge amount of financial involvement in the election of the AAPSU Executive Members. This is one of the primary reasons that the public have lost their faith on the apex students’ union. The study reveals that whopping percentage (88%) of the respondents has accepted the fact that there is monetary involvement in the election of the AAPSU Executive Members. Hence, the statistics has proved the public perception correct as only 20 per cent of the respondents say “No” to the monetary involvement in the election of the AAPSU Executive Members.

On the question of indication of approximate expenditure, 100 respondents (56.8%) of the respondents who said “Yes” has accepted that expenditure of an
Executive Member (President/General Secretary) would be more than one hundred lakhs. 60 respondents (34%) believes that the expenditure could be less than one hundred lakhs. A significant 9 per cent of the respondents gave no response, may be they did not know the actual involvement or did not want to reveal the actual expenditure.

As has been discussed before, 46.6 per cent of the respondents felt that the AAPSU is declining because of political interference. The total of 150 respondents (75%) agrees that there is involvement of political parties or leaders in the election of the Executive members of AAPSU. But 37 respondents (18.5%) did not agree to the involvement of political parties or leaders in the elections.

Opinion of the respondents is almost divided on the question of “Do you think that the president and general secretary of AAPSU should be regular post-graduate students?” The respondents who said “Yes” and “No” to the question are 50 per cent (100 respondents) and 45 per cent (90 respondents) respectively. 5 per cent of the respondents did not give any answer. There are allegations that many of the Executive Members of AAPSU are actually over-aged and register themselves as students only to fulfill the requirement of being a regular student to contest the elections.

It has been revealed that 150 respondents (75%) have accepted that the AAPSU is playing the role of opposition political party in the state. A mere 15 per cent said “No” to the question. However, on a supplementary “If yes, are you happy with this role of the present AAPSU leadership?” 66.66 percent of the respondents is not happy with the role played by the present leadership. In the midst of popular misperception about the role of AAPSU, it is significant that 33.3 per cent f the
respondents are happy with the role of the present AAPSU leadership as opposition political party.

One of the reasons why the AAPSU seems to be losing its significance is that it no longer looks after the interests of the students’ community. It has become more political by diverting its energy towards non-academic and political issues. However, a significant per cent (44%) of the respondents did not feel that the AAPSU should restrict itself only on issues related to students’ welfare. A majority, 50 per cent still feels that it needs to restrict itself only to the issues concerning students’ interests. It can be summarized that the people will have no problem even if AAPSU involves itself in other activities so long as its fights serve the interest of the state.

Many of the former AAPSU leaders may have used AAPSU as a platform for their entry into active politics. 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 became a minister, while Larbin Nasi, former general secretary, went on to become an MLA.

Around 80 per cent of the respondents think that the AAPSU remains a platform for entry into active politics, whereas only 15 per cent of the respondents think otherwise. The study further reveals that 81.7 per cent of the respondents did not approve the practice of using AAPSU as a political ladder. However, 18 per cent of the respondents have no issue even if AAPSU is used as a political platform. It is understood that those agree to use of AAPSU as a political platform may mostly be the former Executive members of AAPSU.
As was stated earlier, many of the Executive Members of AAPSU are actually over-aged and register themselves as students only to fulfill the requirement of being a regular student to contest the elections. To find out opinion in this regards a question was put to the respondents “In your opinion should there be age bar for AAPSU leadership?”. A significant majority, 76 per cent of the respondents said “Yes” to this question, and only 24 per cent of the respondents said “No” to the question.

One of the reasons for the AAPSU to be in declining position is because of the fact that community/clan based students’ unions are mushrooming in the state. Respondents were asked to respond to a question “Do you feel that the formation of community/clan based student’s unions should be discouraged to make AAPSU more powerful and relevant?” It reflects that the opinion of the respondents is almost equally divided. 50 per cent of the respondents said “Yes” to the question and 45 per cent of the respondents said “No”. The opinion gives us an impression that the community/clan based students organisations are growing their strength day by day. It is possible that the strength they gained may at the cost of popularity of the AAPSU, the apex students’ body of the state, which is not a good sign for the AAPSU.

When it comes to the question of relevance of AAPSU, majority of the respondents (69%) feel that it is still relevant. Only 25 per cent of the respondents felt otherwise. It may still be relevant but the respondents seem not to be happy with the activities of the present AAPSU leadership. Therefore, a change in the style and functioning of the AAPSU leadership is a necessity to make it more relevant.
In order to understand the actual monetary involvement of in the elections, a question was specifically asked to the present and past leaders of AAPSU: “It is generally perceived that there is huge monetary involvement in the elections in AAPSU. How much did you spend?” 50 percent of the respondents replied that they spent less than five lakhs: 25 per cent of the respondents said that they spent more than five lakhs but less than one crore. It is significant that 5 per cent of the respondents were candid in their admission, saying that they spent more than one hundred lakhs. Significantly again, 20 per cent of the respondents did not give any answer.

However, the data generated do not correspond to the public perception about the degree of financial involvement in the elections to the AAPSU Executive Members, particularly its president. It could be because many of the respondents are the past leaders and in the past elections not much of monetary involvement was visible.

Answers given by the president of AAPSU, Kamta Lapung and the president of Students’ Union Movement of Arunachal (SUMA), Biri Tabin, to a question by the Northeast Today magazine reflect the dilemma and the situation where the student’s unions are heading today. The question was “there are allegations that student unions are making money through various illegal ways, what do you say about it?” “Yes”, Biri Tabin says, “every organization is doing the money minting business. They spent crores during elections, how do they recover this amount? They don’t have any source like public offerings, donations etc. At the end of the day they run after MLAs, ministers and chief minister. They will raise an issue and then become and silent. This they do in exchange of some favours. No one can deny this, including the current AAPSU president Kamta Lapung”.
As a counter to Suma president’s accusation, president AAPSU replies, “Until and unless one can prove the allegations, I cannot accept them. We do not as or beg for donation. Whenever we pick up an issue, it’s of high importance and are backed and supported by the common people. I can’t comment about other bodies”.

Students’ Union Movement of Arunachal (SUMA) was formed basically with an aim to counter the activities of AAPSU. It gained popularity among some sections of the students’ community not because of personality or activities of SUMA but as a result of lack of confidence on AAPSU leadership. Many leaders of AAPSU have accepted that the Union is deviating itself from its original objectives and ideology. There are too much of politics and political involvement of AAPSU leadership. So long as these practices stop, it would be difficult for the Union to gain its past glory.