International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

An Analysis of Major Issues in Student Activism in Arunachal Pradesh

Ahidi Molo[1], Mige Kambu[2]

[1,2]Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Arunodaya University, Lekhi, Naharlagaun Arunachal Pradesh

Abstract
Student activism has played a decisive role in shaping the socio-political landscape of Arunachal Pradesh. Student organisations, particularly apex bodies like the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) and various community-based student unions, have emerged as powerful agents of change, voicing concerns related to education, identity, territorial integrity, demographic security, and governance. This paper examines the major issues driving student activism in Arunachal Pradesh, analysing the nature, causes, and implications of these movements. Using secondary sources such as newspaper reports, official documents, and existing literature, the study highlights how student activism in the state goes beyond campus politics and functions as a form of socio-political mobilization rooted in indigenous rights and regional aspirations.

Keywords: Student Activism, Arunachal Pradesh, AAPSU, Indigenous Rights, Youth Movements

1. Introduction

Student activism has historically functioned as a vital force in shaping democratic discourse, political participation, and social transformation across societies. From anti-colonial movements to contemporary struggles for rights and representation, students have often emerged as a politically conscious and morally assertive group capable of articulating collective grievances. In India, student movements have played a crucial role in influencing public policy, mobilising civil society, and acting as watchdogs of governance. Within this broader national context, student activism in Arunachal Pradesh exhibits a distinctive character shaped by the state's geographical location, tribal composition, historical marginalisation, and strategic significance.

Arunachal Pradesh, as a border state with immense ethnic diversity and a predominantly tribal population, presents a unique socio-political environment. Issues such as protection of indigenous identity, preservation of customary land rights, territorial integrity, demographic security, and uneven development have historically defined the political discourse of the state. Student organisations in Arunachal Pradesh have stepped beyond conventional campus-based activism and have positioned themselves as key actors in public life. Organisations such as the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU), All Nyishi Students' Union (ANSU), and several district- and community-based student unions have emerged as influential pressure groups engaging directly with the state machinery.

Unlike student politics in many other parts of the country, student activism in Arunachal Pradesh is not primarily driven by ideological affiliations or party politics. Instead, it is deeply rooted in indigenous consciousness, collective identity, and regional aspirations. Student unions often function as

intermediaries between the state and society, articulating public grievances, mobilising mass participation, and compelling governmental accountability. Their interventions span diverse issues ranging from education and employment to border disputes, Inner Line Permit enforcement, Permanent Residence Certificate controversies, and questions of tribal identity.

This paper attempts to analyse the major issues that have shaped student activism in Arunachal Pradesh and to examine the broader implications of these movements for governance, society, and democratic participation. By focusing on issue-based mobilisation rather than organisational history alone, the study seeks to understand how student activism has evolved into a sustained socio-political force within the state.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the major issues influencing student activism in Arunachal Pradesh.
2. To analyse the role of student organisations in addressing socio-political and developmental concerns.
3. To understand the broader implications of student activism on governance and society in the state.

3. Methodology

The study is based on secondary sources of data. Information has been collected from newspaper reports (particularly *The Arunachal Times*), official notifications, government portals, and existing academic literature. A qualitative and analytical approach has been adopted to interpret the nature and impact of student activism in Arunachal Pradesh.

4. Major Issues in Student Activism in Arunachal Pradesh

4.1 Education

Education constitutes the most persistent and extensively mobilized issue within student activism in Arunachal Pradesh. Student organisations view education not merely as an academic concern but as a foundational instrument for social transformation, empowerment of indigenous communities, and long-term development of the state. Chronic infrastructural deficits, shortage of qualified teachers, irregular academic administration, and unequal access to higher education have continuously drawn the attention of student bodies.

The All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU), as the apex student organisation, has consistently demanded increased budgetary allocation for education and health sectors. In 2018, AAPSU appealed to the state government for a one-time special grant to improve educational infrastructure, highlighting the deplorable conditions under which many government schools function (AAPSU, 2018). The union strongly criticised the Smart Classroom Programme, labelling it one of the most unsuccessful schemes due to the absence of basic amenities such as electricity and internet connectivity in rural and remote areas (The Arunachal Times, 2018a). AAPSU instead recommended that the funds allocated for such schemes be redirected towards repairing dilapidated school buildings and ensuring minimum infrastructural standards.

Student organisations have also been vocal against administrative inefficiency in conducting competitive examinations. Repeated postponement of examinations by the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission created widespread frustration among aspirants. In response, AAPSU demanded the

formulation of a fixed examination calendar, arguing that uncertainty disproportionately affects students from economically and geographically marginalised backgrounds (The Arunachal Times, 2018b).

Beyond policy advocacy, student unions have actively intervened at the grassroots level. Organisations such as the All Nyishi Students' Union (ANSU) have provided relief and rehabilitation support to educational institutions affected by disasters, including the fire incident at a government school in Lower Siang district. During the COVID-19 pandemic, student bodies highlighted issues of overcharging of admission fees, limited intake capacity in colleges, and lack of digital access, leading the state government to increase seat capacities in several institutions.

Another major dimension of educational activism relates to representation and equity in higher education. Protests against low selection of APST candidates in PhD programmes at Rajiv Gandhi University reflect broader concerns regarding institutional bias and inadequate protection of indigenous students' interests (The Arunachal Times, 2021a). Through sustained mobilisation, student organisations have thus emerged as crucial stakeholders in shaping educational policy and accountability mechanisms in the state.

4.2 Boundary and Territorial Issues

Boundary and territorial integrity issues occupy a central place in student activism in Arunachal Pradesh due to the state's sensitive geopolitical location. Student organisations perceive territorial disputes not only as administrative matters but as existential threats to the political identity and security of the state. Consequently, student unions have frequently acted as pressure groups whenever interstate or international boundary issues arise.

Student activism gained prominence during incidents of alleged eviction and destruction of properties in border areas such as Dollungmukh, where student bodies condemned the actions of Assam officials and accused the state government of inadequate response (The Arunachal Times, 2017). Such interventions underscore the role of student organisations as defenders of local populations residing in disputed border zones.

At the international level, student activism has been particularly visible in response to Chinese territorial claims over Arunachal Pradesh. AAPSU has organised statewide protests condemning incursions by the People's Liberation Army and the construction of infrastructure across the Line of Actual Control. These protests not only asserted India's sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh but also criticised the central government's perceived lack of urgency in accelerating development in border regions (The Arunachal Times, 2021b).

Another significant episode was the controversy surrounding the depiction of Kimin as part of Assam during an official road inauguration. Student unions such as AAPSU and ANSU strongly condemned the incident, demanding public apologies and legal action against the responsible authorities. Such mobilisations reflect the heightened territorial consciousness among student organisations and their role in safeguarding the symbolic and political identity of the state (The Arunachal Times, 2021).

4.3 Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC) Issue

The Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC) issue represents one of the most intense and emotionally charged movements led by student organisations in Arunachal Pradesh. The controversy emerged prominently in 2018 when the state government proposed granting PRC to non-APST individuals in select districts. Student unions viewed this move as a direct threat to indigenous identity, constitutional safeguards, and customary land rights.

AAPSU, along with various district and community-based student organisations, mobilised large-scale protests across the state. The unions argued that the proposal violated the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, and undermined the authority of the Joint High Power Committee constituted to examine the issue. Student leaders accused political elites of attempting to exploit the PRC issue for electoral gains, thereby aggravating public anxiety (The Arunachal Times, 2018c).

Through sustained demonstrations, consultations, and representations, student organisations successfully compelled the government to withdraw its proposal. The PRC movement highlights the capacity of student activism to influence policy decisions and reflects deep-seated concerns regarding demographic change, cultural dilution, and political marginalisation of indigenous communities.

4.4 Inner Line Permit (ILP) Issue

The Inner Line Permit (ILP) system occupies a pivotal position in student activism due to its perceived role in protecting indigenous land, culture, and employment opportunities. Student organisations argue that weak enforcement of ILP provisions has facilitated illegal migration, resulting in demographic pressure and socio-economic insecurity.

AAPSU has consistently demanded stricter enforcement mechanisms, including improved infrastructure at check gates, deployment of adequate security personnel, and use of technological tools such as biometric verification. In 2018, the union launched 'Operation Clean Drive' to identify and deport ILP violators, an initiative that brought student activism into direct engagement with administrative functions (The Arunachal Times, 2018d).

Student organisations have also accused influential political and economic actors of shielding ILP violators for personal benefit, thereby exacerbating demographic imbalance. The ILP movement illustrates how student activism in Arunachal Pradesh extends beyond protest to active surveillance and enforcement, reflecting both the urgency of the issue and perceived governance gaps.

4.5 Offspring and APST Status Issue

The offspring issue, concerning children born to APST mothers and non-APST fathers availing Scheduled Tribe benefits, has emerged as a complex and sensitive subject within student activism. Student organisations argue that the absence of a clear policy framework has allowed misuse of constitutional safeguards meant exclusively for indigenous communities.

AAPSU has repeatedly demanded the formation of empowered committees and the enactment of stringent legal provisions to regulate the issuance of APST certificates. According to student leaders, unchecked practices related to offspring status have facilitated acquisition of land and resources by non-APST individuals, posing long-term threats to the socio-cultural fabric of the state (The Arunachal Times, 2019).

Persistent mobilisation by student organisations compelled the state government to constitute consultative committees to examine the issue. However, delays in policy formulation and legislative action have drawn criticism from student bodies, which continue to view the issue as unresolved. Opposition to proposed bills on marriage and inheritance further reflects the apprehension that such measures may weaken indigenous rights. The offspring issue thus exemplifies how student activism intersects with questions of law, identity, and social justice in Arunachal Pradesh.

5. Implications of Student Activism

Student activism in Arunachal Pradesh has generated wide-ranging implications for governance, political culture, and civil society. One of the most significant outcomes has been the strengthening of

participatory democracy. Through protests, memoranda, consultations, and public campaigns, student organisations have expanded spaces for citizen engagement and ensured that grassroots concerns reach policy-making forums. In many instances, sustained student mobilisation has compelled governments to reconsider, revise, or withdraw contentious decisions, as seen in the PRC issue and admission-related reforms.

Another important implication is the emergence of student organisations as de facto pressure groups. In the absence of strong civil society institutions in remote and rural areas, student unions often assume the role of representatives of public opinion. Their involvement in issues such as ILP enforcement and boundary disputes reflects both the trust reposed in them by local communities and the perceived inadequacies of formal governance mechanisms. While such activism enhances accountability, it also blurs the boundary between civil society action and administrative authority.

Student activism has also contributed to the consolidation of indigenous identity and political consciousness among the youth. Movements around PRC, offspring status, and ILP enforcement have reinforced awareness regarding constitutional safeguards, customary laws, and the long-term implications of demographic change. This heightened consciousness has helped preserve cultural integrity but has also raised concerns about exclusionary politics and social polarisation.

From a governance perspective, student activism acts as both a corrective and a challenge. On one hand, it highlights policy gaps, administrative inertia, and implementation failures. On the other hand, frequent protests, bandhs, and direct action can disrupt public life and strain state capacity. The implications thus underscore the need for institutionalised dialogue mechanisms between student organisations and the government to transform confrontational politics into collaborative governance.

6. Conclusion

Student activism in Arunachal Pradesh represents a distinctive and deeply rooted form of socio-political engagement shaped by indigenous identity, regional concerns, and developmental challenges. Unlike conventional student movements that focus narrowly on academic or campus-related issues, student activism in the state encompasses a wide spectrum of public concerns, including education reform, territorial integrity, demographic security, and protection of constitutional safeguards.

The analysis reveals that student organisations such as AAPSU and other community-based unions have evolved into influential actors capable of shaping public discourse and influencing policy outcomes. Their sustained mobilisation around issues like PRC, ILP enforcement, and offspring status demonstrates the capacity of organised youth to act as guardians of indigenous rights and regional interests. At the same time, educational activism underscores the demand for equitable access, institutional accountability, and long-term human capital development.

While student activism has significantly strengthened democratic participation and accountability, it also presents certain challenges. The increasing reliance on protest-based politics points to gaps in formal governance and grievance redressal mechanisms. Addressing these gaps requires constructive engagement between the state and student organisations, grounded in mutual respect and institutional dialogue.

In conclusion, student activism in Arunachal Pradesh should be viewed not merely as episodic protest but as an integral component of the state's political process. Harnessing the energy, awareness, and commitment of student organisations through participatory frameworks can contribute to inclusive governance, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Future research may further explore the long-

term impact of student activism on political leadership, policy formation, and youth empowerment in the state.

List of References

1. https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/marian-wright-edelman-quotes
2. AAPSU seeks overhaul of health and education sector (March16, 2018) Arunachal Times. https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/03/2018/aapsu-seeks-overhaul-of-health-and-edn-sectors/
3. Smart Classroom prog the most unsuccessful ever: AAPSU (April 30, 2018) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/04/30/smart-classroom-the-most-unsuccesful-ever-aapsu/
4. AAPSU seeks calendar for competitive exam (April 17, 2018)Arunachal Times. https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/04/17/aapsu-seeks-calander-for-competitive-exam/
5. APPSU organize awareness program(August 5,2019) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2019/08/05/aapsu-organizes-awareness-camps/
6. ANSU demands for school devastated by fire (December 22, 2018) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/12/22/ansu-demands-for -school-devastated-by-fire/
7. Increase intake capacity of students in govt colleges (September 2, 2021) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/02/2012/increase-intake-capacity-of-students-in-govt-colleges/
8. AAPSU seeks suspension of PhD admission at RGU (September 5, 2021) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/08/05/aapsu-seeks-suspension-of-phd-admission-at-rgu/
9. Unions oppose high admission fees (August 1, 2020) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2020/08/01/unions-oppose-high-admssion-fees/
10. AAPSU assesses situation at Dollungmukh (December 10, 2017) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2017/12/10/aapsu-assesses-situation-at-dollungmukh/
11. AAPSU stages statewide protest over Chinese claims over Arunachal Pradesh (January 28, 2021) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/01/28/aapsu-stages-statewide-protest-over-chinese-claims-over-arunachal-pradesh/
12. AAPSU demands public Apology from BRO over Kimin episode (June 21, 2021) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/06/21/aapsu-demands-public-apology-from-bro-over-kimin-episode/
13. AITF, ANSU seek statement from the authorities over Kimin episode (June 20, 221) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2020/06/20/aitf-ansu-seek-statement-from-the-authorities-over-kimin-episode/
14. https://itanagar.nic.in/service/inner-line-permitilp/
15. Take preventive measures (September 25, 2018) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/09/25/take-preventive-measures/
16. AAPSU starts policing against ILP violators, illegal immigrants (August 18, 2018) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/08/18/aapsu-starts-policing-against-ilp-violators-illegal-immigrants/
17. State's big shots shielding ILP violators: AAPSU (August 23, 2018) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/08/23/states-big-shots-sheilding-ilp-violators-aapsu/

18. AAPSU demands formation of study group on APST status issue (September 22, 2018) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/09/22/aapsu/demands-formation-of-study-group-on-apst-status-issue/
19. AAPSU serves ultimatum over offspring issue (November 6, 2019) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2019/11/06/aapsu-serves-ultimatum-over-offspring-issue/
20. AAPSU seeks tabling of offspring issue in budget session (January 29, 2020) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2020/01/29/aapsu-seeks-tabling-of-offspring-issue-in-budget-session/
21. AAPSU strongly oppose proposed draft of marriage and inheritance bill (August 21, 2021) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/08/2021/aapsu-strongly-oppose-proposed-draft-of-marriage-inheritance -bill/
22. AAPSU expresses displeasure over delay in publication of draft proposal (August 24, 2021) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2021/08/24/aapsu-expresses-displeasure-over-delay-in-publication-of-draft-proposal/
23. ANSU to launch ILP checking drive (October 19, 2019) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2019/10/19/ansu-to-launch-ilp-checking-drive/
24. Conduct Regular ILP checking: GSU (March 24, 2018) Arunachal Times.https://arunachaltimes.in/index.php/2018/03/24/conduct-regular-ilp-checking-gsu/