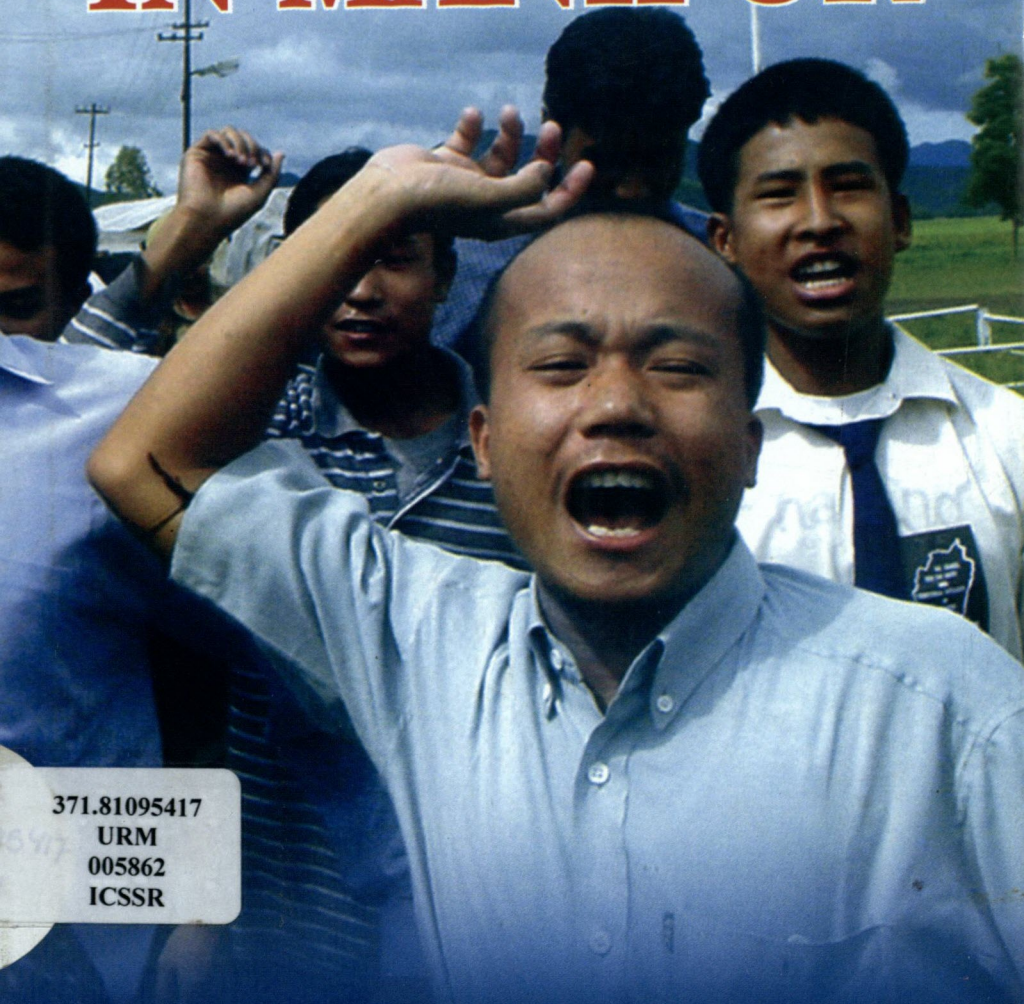


THE STUDENT MOVEMENT IN MANIPUR



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Ningthoukhongjam Urmila

The Manipuri students took part in various political movements of both national and regional nature. Their political actions in political system of Manipur cannot be considered as students' response to emerging issues only, nor can they be seen as for regional interests. The book is on the nature of student body (All Manipur Students' Union) and its political interests. This book not only analyses permanent interests of the Union but also temporary interests. By doing so, it shows the deeper issues of the political issues, AMSU brings out.

It is the first book on any student body in Manipur. It covers first 25-years of AMSU's existence.

Rs. 600/-



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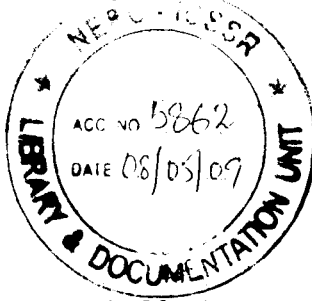
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1

INTRODUCTION

I

The lexical meaning of 'Student' is usually given at two levels:

1. anyone who is learning a subject matter;
2. anyone who is enrolled in a formal educational institution.

Generally, the 'student' is taken as of the second meaning. But, there are various other connotations of the word, 'Student'. In many works on the history of social conflicts, contemporary social problems, the *Students* are not as simple as its lexical meaning.

To Alain Touraine¹, the students are a new force comparable to the labour class. He says, *If it is true that knowledge and technical progress are the motors of the new society, as the accumulation of capital was the motor of the preceding (industrial) society, does not the university then occupy the same place as the great capitalist enterprises formerly did? Thus, is not student movement, in principle, at least, of the same importance as the labour movement of the past?*

On the other hand, students are seen by some bureaucratic orthodoxy, as the 'traditional middle class'. To them, any

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separate student strategy or movement would merely reflect its petit-bourgeois provenance².

These views are over-generalized. While defining students, we should consider (a) the origin, (b) the situation, and (c) the social destination. These factors are related with the historical experience of a 'historical bloc' (in the Gramscian sense). As the origin and destination of the students are similar in the developing countries, the student situation is more important. Except for a few student bodies functioning as wings of political parties, majority of the individual students in Manipur are rebellious by nature to the existing political authority, although without a long term political goal. Considering such historical realities, we can safely say, in a sense, *students are not a class, but a temporary occupation: they are apprentice workers who no sooner become conscious of themselves as a community they tend to be dispersed - and hence neutralized* ³.

The students' role in the polity system emerged actively in the 19th century. The German student body of *Burschenschaft*, founded in 1815, sought to influence the government for liberalizing its machineries and for unifying the German states into one nation. It also aimed to eliminate the out-of-fashion medieval practices in the University so that an academic freedom in learning and teaching could be attained. Many student bodies came up in history with different aims and objects since then. Some of them were highly charged with political ideology; many other bodies acted as pressure groups or interest groups with or without a definite political ideology. *By the twentieth century the cumulative experience of generations of fighting students had produced a very high level of political consciousness in Latin American University students. It was they who succeeded in reforming their universities from 1918 onwards*

to a level which was unsurpassed during the following fifty years in America, Britain, France or Germany⁴. It was the Cordoba Manifesto of 1918 that had charged the students actively to act with political interest in twentieth century political scenario of Latin America.

The Manifesto was the first declaration of student rights. It denounced the old administration in which there was no reform of curricula, and no reform of rules, for fear that someone might lose his job because of the change and it announced: we want to eradicate from university organization the archaic and barbarous concept of authority which in university is a bulwark of absurd tyranny⁵. The movement soon gained momentum to spread across the South American countries — in Peru they were made in 1919, Colombia in 1924, Paraguay in 1927, Brazil and Bolivia in 1928, Mexico in 1929 and Costa Rico in 1930s⁶. All these movements were but a legacy of active political involvement of the students in 19th century politics. *Latin American University youth played a leading part in the wars of independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and have gone on struggling against tyranny ever since*⁷.

The students in United States have quite a different tradition. The first student union was established in 1896 at the University of Pennsylvania; but major unions came up only in 1930. *This growth is the result of general acceptance by educators of the concept that leisure-time activities have educational value - that much development of students takes place outside the classroom*⁸. In the 1960s, students started to demand and often get a much larger share in shaping policies than the Universities traditionally allowed them to. *Notable changes were evident in the scope of the student government. Nearly all US campuses have had for years some form of student government to help the*

*administration maintain effective relations with the student body and to give students direct experience in self-government.*⁹

The most radical student group, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) came into existence in 1960. Thomas E. Hyden, a student of the University of Michigan, published his famous **Port Huron Statement** in 1962; basing on the statement, SDS declared that *the American political system had failed to achieve social or international peace or end poverty and exploitation, and called for a **participatory democracy** in which individuals could share in social decisions that directly affected their lives*¹⁰. The SDS involved actively in Civil Rights movements at its initial stage; later, the group was in the forefront of the Anti-Vietnam War movement. It tried to mobilize the blacks, the poor, and the exploited to transform society by revolution and its ideology was direct confrontation with the American capitalist system.

*In 1969, SDS split into three factions. The Progressive Labour faction, a pro-Mao group, tried to divert campus members of SDS away from Campus politics and into the working-class movement. The Revolutionary Youth Movement-II sought to transfer the University into an area of Revolutionary action. The Weatherman faction, also known as Revolutionary Youth Movement-I, considered itself the vanguard of violent revolution, with students, workers, and blacks presenting a united front. They endorsed terrorism as part of an armed struggle and conducted workshops on explosives and sabotage. At its 1972 convention SDS was clearly controlled by the Progressive Labour faction, doctrinaire and disciplined but opposed to violence*¹¹.

Many countries of the third world produced various

militant student movements in the twentieth century. In Cuba (1958), Czechoslovakia (1968), China (1919) students played vital roles in changing the existing political order. In 1933, the students in Cuba *were mainly instrumental in bringing down the Machado dictatorship in alliance with a group of rebellious army sergeants; and under Batista's second dictatorship, in 1952-58, they played a leading role in both the urban and the rural resistance movements. In March 1957, they organized an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Batista and several of their leaders were killed; subsequently they participated in sabotage in Havana and many went to the mountains of Oriente to fight with the Rebel Army*¹². Even after the Castro's revolution, the students participated in every sphere of state politics.

The China scene is more interesting in the sense that students' action preceded the Chinese Communist movement. The Peking University, founded in 1898, was the academic centre of the Chinese Revolution. The Peking students staged a gigantic demonstration on 4 May 1919 against Japanese imperialism, its expansion into Manchuria. *In the civil war between the Koumintang and the Chinese Communist Party, the majority of the students opted for Mao Tse-Tung and supported the Chinese Revolution of 1949*¹³. *Upto 1925, the students were more powerful than the Party itself. The first Party secretary, Chen Tu Hsiu, was a professor at Peking University. Mao Tse Tung himself was initiated into politics through student movements in Peking and Changsha, and one of his first political experience was a student strike in sympathy with 4 May movement, in June 1919*¹⁴. The students in China too took major roles in carrying out Mao's unique cultural revolution¹⁵.

The Japanese experience is, however, slightly different from others. The Japanese students started to perform

political actions in an organized way in 1960. They rallied against the renewal of the Security Treaty between Japan and US. There were a series of demonstrations over this issue. In addition, there were two equally important issues in 1960s. The three separate issues of the struggle were the resignation of Kishi for his action of 19 May, the cancellation of Eisenhower's visit, and the prevention of the Security Treaty¹⁶. But, there was tension between the different student bodies in Japan. The most serious conflict was between Private Universities and National Universities. At the ideological front, though All Japan Federation of Student Self Government Association swept Japan for about 20 years in post war period, Japanese students started to leave aside the Communist Party in 1955-56, In 1958, *two new organizations were set up which were to exercise a great influence over the students - the Kakukyodo (which was a political organization) and the Shagakudo (which was a purely student body_... The JCP groups or **anti-mainstream** faction regarded the US as the main target; whereas the mainstream were more concerned with internal Japanese issues and the overthrow of the existing power structure*¹⁷. In spite of these conflicts, the student movement has played a historic role in any world perspective. It pioneered mass revolutionary action in an industrialized country, years before it was achieved in Europe and America... it has demonstrated that students can forge effective links with the most oppressed classes in society - workers and peasants¹⁸.

Student movement in South-East Asia emerged out of the anti-colonial political movements. Though political consciousness of the students were shaped by the nationalist movements, the students in the region was not able to develop as a community. This is because of the fact that there were only a limited number of educational institutions. But they had been associated *with nascent political elements*

*outside the University community. The students were articulated in discussion groups, youth congresses, women's congresses and in politically oriented articles published in a variety of newspapers and journals*¹⁹.

In Burma, the students started taking part in political movements since the 1930s. The trouble was started by the announcement of Secretary Montagu in 1917-18. The Montagu-Chelmsfold recommended that Burma's case should be reserved for special consideration, since her people were of a different race, having different problems. The storm of protest which suddenly arose in Burma when the nature of the alternative proposals for her political development became known took everybody by surprise. Burmese national sentiments flared up to a fever pitch²⁰. In the meantime, the opening of University of Rangoon in December, 1920 made room for a widespread student strike instigated by the politicians. Discontent focused on the efforts of the British-appointed University governing agencies to stiffen preparatory standards and to free the University from political interference²¹. But it was in 1930s, that the students could act for a movement of wider perspectives. By 1936 the Rangoon University Students Union (RUSU) became the headquarters of student agitation for the entire country. The aggressive spirit of the student movement owed much to the frustration experienced by the vast majority of the students in their efforts to obtain diplomas and suitable employment... The sophisticated atmosphere of the University alienated many of Burma's youth from parental authority. The student movement was, therefore as much a product of an artificial and ill-adapted educational regimen as it was an expression of the rising tide of political disaffection. Many students developed a genuine interest in contemporary aspects of world affairs and in socialism, which were excluded from the curriculum²².

Another force which helped shape the student movement in Burma was the **Dobama Asiayone** (We Burmans Association). This Association was formed by amalgamating two national student organizations, the Dobama group and the All Burma Youth League in 1935. The members addressed each other as **Thakins** in youthful defiance of British rule and an affirmation of faith that Burmese were destined to be masters in their own country. The Thakins were, as a rule, dedicated nationalists, disdainful of fellow students who aspired for entry into the civil service and also hostile to middle classes politicians who mouthed nationalist slogans for enhancing their own political fortunes²³.

Though the memorable strike of February 1936 was led by the Rangoon University Student Union, it was precipitated by the Thakin leaders who had control of the RUSU. History tells that *The Thakin associates in the 1936 strike became the champions of Burmese nationalism against both the British and the Japanese, and they took over the political leadership of independent Burma after 1948*²⁴.

After the military seizure of power in 1955, RUSU and ABSU acted in alliance with the Burma Communist Party (BCP). Many Karen, Shan and Kachin students left the university to fight with their respective insurgent groups against Burmese Government. This was the beginning of the student action in free Burma²⁵.

In Indonesia, some students who had been educated in Holland became conscious of the disparity between colonized and free nations. *In the early 1920s, they consolidated their strength by transforming the existing Indonesian student organisation into a militant organization promoting unity and solidarity among people native to the Indonesian archipelago but stressing exclusiveness with respect to non-*

*Indonesian students. This small but highly active student association, the **Perhimpunan Indonesia** (Indonesian association) was one of the first organizations to openly advocate an independent Indonesia* ²⁶.

After the short drama of political powers in 1942-43 the Netherlands transferred sovereignty on 27 December, 1949. The political scenario of the independent Indonesia was dominated by a political confusion. President Sukarno became in time an advocate of a centralized program of **guided democracy** in an endeavour to exploit the revolutionary fervour of Communist partisans, who also opposed particularism and multiparty rule. His **Pantja Sila** ideal included faith in Allah and devotion to nationality, humanity, democracy and social justice; but the precise meanings were unclear, and implementation was sadly lacking. Sukarno's attempt to bridge the chasm between Islam and communism incurred the inevitable-risk that he would alienate both sides and thus compromise the achievement of exposed objectives²⁷. His proposals were strongly objected to by the Muslim parties and thus started the chronic conflict between the Islamic and leftist groups. This had a strong impact on the student politics in 1960s.

The student politics in 1965 was dominated by the conflict between Islamic groups (especially HMI) and leftist groups (CGMI). On October 25, 1965, a group of representatives from virtually all student associations (the major exceptions being CGMI and two other communist-oriented organizations) acted on the proposal of the Minister of Higher Education and Sciences and formed a new federative student organization. The new organization was called the Indonesian Students' Action Front or KAMI... The fate of KAMI assassinations carried out by the **30th of September movement** was revealed in the importance which students

*attached to the distinction between what they labelled the **older order** and the **new order** toward they were working. The three-fold demand of KAMI hinted at a broad reform orientation: (i) dissolution of the Indonesian Communist Party (ii) dismissal of cabinet members and formation of a new cabinet, (iii) reduction of prices²⁸. This was the starting point of a new beginning of student politics in post independence era of Indonesia.*

Indian students entered politics, like many other colonized countries, with the emerging and growing nationalist movement. In 1928, a student organization was formed in Punjab under the leadership of Lala Lajpat Rai. In the same year, an All Bengal Students' Association was presided by Jawaharlal Nehru. In 1936 an All India Students' Federation was established... The Congress leaders, in 1945, established... All India Students' Congress, In 1950, this organization was dissolved²⁹. But after India got its sovereignty in 1947, student bodies were widely charged with different (even state-based) student organizations. Some notable national level bodies are All India Students' Federation, Students' Federation of India, National Students' Union of India, Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad. Assessing the present student politics, as quoted in Babul Fadia³⁰, Philip G. Altbach says, *The student movement had lost its sense of militant unity and ideological purpose... The nationalist fervour of the pre-independance period has been replaced by generally unorganized and sporadic agitation usually aimed at specific grievances. The four grievances are (a) demands upon non-university authorities on issues (b) Student demands by students upon universities on issues of special concern (c) sporadic, generally unorganized outburst by students only vaguely associated with concerned demands, (d) activities associated with larger political*

movements in the areas surrounding the school, college or university.

There are many student organisations operating in Indian states, charged with regionalism or regional oriented ideology. For example, the student politics started in Assam was in nationalistic line during the colonial period. The pre-independent student organizations were affiliated to political parties. But, after independence, *a feeling was developed among the students to organize students more on no-party line. The Assam Students' Association which came into existence in September 1959 was organized on non-partisan, non-political and democratic foundation. It came to stand by the larger and collective interests of the students of Assam as well as to solve the problems common to the students of Assam as well as to promote the spirit of culture, literature, sports etc... (But) because of its participation in Refinery movement and Language movement it was branded as partisan and politically motivated. Therefore, there was mounting pressure for the organization of a student union whereby the students of all classes irrespective of language, religion, hills or plains could take a common platform*³¹. After this, a new student organization, All Assam Students' Union, came into being in 1967 with a different political colour.

Like other states of India, Manipur students have been engaging in their own political action. But, unlike many others, the student politics in Manipur did not originate from the nationalist or independence struggle. It was only in post-independence period that some political parties like the Manipur Pradesh Congress and the Socialist Party tried to rally the students in their party activities. But, during the mid-60s with the formation of All Manipur

students' Union, the state witnessed a new turn in student politics. The history of the All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU) reflects not only the different activities of youth and students in the state, but also, the changing political ideas which have penetrated the collective mind and the psyche of the student community.

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