
STUDENT POWER IN NORTH EAST INDIA

Editor

APURBA K. BARUAH

In the sixties of the twentieth Century Student movements generated great interest in some western countries. Two decades later, students seemed to have taken over the political space, in India's northeast. Though student organizations have become major political players in some states of northeast India making or marring fortunes of Governments yet there has hardly been any attempt at studying these organizations and movements from a social science perspective. The papers presented in this volume discuss some important methodological issues of student movement studies and provide excellent historical accounts of student movements in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya—the three states that experienced major student movements in the twentieth century. The ethnocentric tendencies of student movements of the *Bodo*, the *Asomiya* and the *Arunachali* communities are discussed in great details.

The book should interest students, teachers and researchers of social movements, ethnic politics and student power. The general reader will find a useful introduction to the politics of the youth that overwhelm the societies of the region.

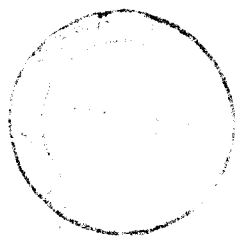
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Apurba K. Baruah, Professor of Political Science in North Eastern Hill University and coordinator, Lokniti North East was educated in Dibrugarh and Punjab. He has authored many books, important among which are *Systems Analysis in Political Science: A Marxist Critique of David Easton* and *Social Tensions in Assam: Middle Class Politics*. He has been contributing to journals like *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Frontier*, *Punjab Journal of Politics*, and *Indian Journal of Human Rights* and a large number of edited volumes. He co-edited *North East Quarterly*, a journal of Social Science Research from 1982 to 1987 and is currently on the editorial board of *Indian Journal of Human Rights*. His current interests are student movements, ethnic conflicts and democratic politics.

Student Power in North-East India

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT MOVEMENTS

Editor
Apurba K. Baruah



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Email: regency@satyam.net.in

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Approaches to the Study of Student Movements in North-East India

Apurba K. Baruah

North-East India has been a hot bed of student politics for quite some time now. Students of this region have been launching massive movements on issues of cultural identity and economic backwardness, at times with secessionist overtones.¹ Politics and societies of all the states in North-East India are today greatly influenced by these movements. In fact in most of these societies students and youth have been closely connected with the emergence of the socio-political processes of the present kind. It is well known that prior to the coming of the British, this region hardly had any groups that could be called students. Formal education itself was a rare phenomenon. Literacy was restricted to a very small number of persons engaged in the services of the courts of the relatively developed kingdoms of the plains. The hill tribal communities did not even have scripts of their own. Most of these communities and even some plain tribal communities are now adopting Roman scripts. It is true that many tribal communities of the area had ways of training young people to become useful members of their own societies.² But education in the modern sense of the term was a rarity. Hamlet Bareth has said about the Khasis, "The Khasis in the past had no written literature. The modern Khasi script with Roman characters was introduced as late as A.D. 1841."³ The situation was similar

in the case of most of the hill peoples of the region. Even in the relatively advanced Assam, under the Ahom rule, schooling was minimal and restricted to training individuals interested either in employment in the royal court or in membership of religious institutions and traditions. S.N. Sarma says about the medieval Assam that the formal education imparted in *tols* and *pathsalas* was not widespread as to cover all sections of the population. It was mainly confined to the upper stratum of the society—to the Brahmanas, the Kayasthas and the Kalitas.⁴

Formal education of our kind began in this region only with the initiatives of the western missionaries and the colonial administration. At the initial stage the attitude of the British administration towards the tribal areas was wavering between the policies of annexation advocated by the officers in Assam and non-intervention dictated by authorities in Fort William.⁵ In the early period of their rule the British Administration was not interested in spreading education among the tribal people. C. Wolflang had rightly pointed out that it was the Christian missionaries who started to teach the tribals how to read and write.⁶ But during the later part of the British rule and the post independence period formal education spread rapidly and now Mizoram, where education, involving reading, writing and arithmetic, began with Christian missionary initiative as late as 1894 has the highest literacy rate in the country. In the other states too literacy spread in remarkable rates resulting in an appreciably high rate. (See Table I)

The rates of literacy do not reflect the actual status of education in these states. As shown in Table II, the percentage

Table I: Literacy in North-East India

State	% of literacy
Arunachal Pradesh	41.59
Assam	52.89
Manipur	59.89
Meghalaya	49.10
Mizoram	82.27
Nagaland	61.65
Tripura	60.44
All India	52.21

Source: *Basic Statistics of North-Eastern Region 2000* (North-Eastern Council, Shillong 2000) p. 126.

Table II: Student population in North-East India

State	Population	Students High School & Above	% of Students to Population
Arunachal Pradesh	865,000	21,890	2.53
Assam	22,414,000	7,60,520	3.4
Manipur	1,837,000	92,399	5.02
Meghalaya	1,775,000	67,039	3.77
Mizoram	690,000	28,096	4.07
Nagaland	1,210,000	30,239	2.5
Tripura	2,757,000	85,706	3.1

Source: Computed from figures available in *Census of India*, 1991.

of students educated to high school standard and above is not really remarkable. But considering the fact that most of these states had seen formal education in late nineteenth century only these figures are rather impressive. Moreover, introduction of a political system requiring the abilities of reading and writing, created conditions in which the newly educated young people found themselves more equipped to participate in politics than their illiterate elders. It is interesting to note that almost all the socio-political organizations of the early modern period were organized and led by the first generation of the newly emerging educated elite. Most of these young men and women had just completed their studies, often outside their own states, and had joined the learned professions that began under the British administration. This elite found their eager supporters in the high school and college students. The history of the Assamese Students' Literary Club, *Asom Chatra Sanmilian*⁷ and the *Jorhat Sarbojanik Sabha*⁸ is illustrative of this trend.

It was under such conditions that students started organizing themselves and began to intervene in matters that have remained till then preserves of the elders in society. In recent times all the states in the region have experienced powerful student movements. Some of those have toppled governments, forced governments both at the center and the states to enter in to agreements involving policies affecting polity and society.⁹ Some student organizations even claim monopoly over the moral and intellectual values affecting the life of the people. The claim of monopoly over moral and cultural life of the people made by the student organizations of the region is reflected by the moral and cultural codes often

sought to be imposed by such organizations on particular communities. In Meghalaya recently the Khasi Student's Union (KSU) found itself in the thick of a debate when they insisted that All *Khasi* girls must wear the traditional dress. There were protests. But none of the protesters questioned whether the student organization had any moral right to make such demands. The members of public who participated in this debate seemed to suggest that while setting such standards for the girls of the *Khasi* community the students should not overlook the practical problems faced by the guardians of *Khasi* girls. In a letter to the editor of *The Shillong Times* one Dora Syieming while pointing out the practical difficulties in following the dress code imposed by the KSU urged the organization to see that institutions of technical education were established in Meghalaya and that the state was free from drug trafficking.¹⁰ Similar situations do occur in other communities too. During the famous Assam agitation led by the All Assam Students Union dress codes were sought to be imposed on Asomiya girls by the activists of the Union. This is of course another matter that while these organizations controlled basically by boys try to enforce such codes on girls and the boys themselves carry on with their western dresses. But the point to be noted here is that organized students' attempt to behave as guardians of their societies and societies too tend to accept them as such.

In spite of the obvious importance of the student movements attention of scholars has not been sufficiently focused on this phenomenon. There are some attempts at stating historical facts, in the form of assembling official information of one or the other kind, but attempts at explanations and theoretical formulations are almost non-existent. In this context of the poor state of social scientific research on student movements of North-East India it becomes imperative to reiterate the otherwise widely accepted position in social research that facts, themselves, do not enable us to explain and understand events and processes. It is necessary to order them in some way to see their connections. Explanation itself is dependent on ordering of and clarification of relations among facts about the events under study. Social scientists of repute have always been reminding us that reliable scientific knowledge have to be, by

definition, theoretical. It is necessary to keep in mind that a theoretical framework is essential for an adequate analysis of any social phenomenon because it is only by an identification of the significant variables and an analysis of their mutual relations that such a phenomenon could be understood. It is impossible even for 'empirical' research to avoid a theoretical perspective. Once a researcher becomes aware of the mutual relations of the key variables of a social phenomenon he develops a plan for research. Without such a plan no meaningful research can be carried out except documentation. And documentation itself does not help us understand any social phenomenon. It merely enables researchers to locate useful materials. Theory adds to the reliability of the results of both new and old research.¹¹ It is therefore necessary to take the theories of student movements seriously to enable us to produce a body of lasting scientific analyses of student movements of the region. Unfortunately most of the scholars pursuing the study of student movements here in this region do not reflect any familiarity with the contemporary discussions on the approaches to the study of student movements. They have merely been collecting facts and that too often from official sources.

A look at the situation in Assam should make the point clear. Two major books by two historians have been published on the activities of the students in Assam. S. Bora in her book *Student Revolution in Assam*¹² states the facts about the involvement of the students in the Congress led anti-British struggle in Assam from 1917 to 1947. The information based mostly on official records, Newspaper reports of the time and occasionally supported by publications of the student organizations and political parties and groups are more or less accurate. The author also gives us some information about the participation of students in the move for establishment of the Gauhati University. The book remains a chronological account of the events and it makes no attempts at conceptualization or theorization. Her work is conceptually so innocent that she does not even use conceptually pregnant terms carefully. So much so that Bora neither explains why she used the phrase *student revolution* nor marshals data to show that a revolution did take place in the time and sphere under study. She appears

to be completely unaware that the term revolution has a predominant and specialized political meaning involving a major social upheaval often followed by a wholly new social order¹³ and that therefore any agitational activity can not be termed as revolution. Her conclusions border narrowly with elaboration of the obvious. For instance, in the conclusion of the book while talking of the student participation in the Quit India movement, she says "Although the 'Quit India movement' could not drive the British from India, the students retained the same militancy until the end of the independence struggle."¹⁴ There is no asking why and how! The author does not try to examine even the social background of the student activists or their leaders to see how and why they got interested in an issue which should normally have been left to mature sections of their society. Who does what and when, in the context of student activism, remains the focus of her work. There is no effort in asking why they do what they do! It must however be made clear that Borah knew what she was doing. She failed to bring her project to fruition because of a methodological debility. While stating the objectives of her work she said, "This project was intended as an attempt to *examine* (emphasis added) the role of the students of Assam as an organised community in bringing about cultural, social and educational changes as well as their role in the freedom movement".¹⁵ She further states "that the study traces the role played by the students of Assam in the struggle of the Assamese people to preserve their identity and culture as well as the role the students played during the National Freedom Movement."¹⁶ These statements make it clear that Borah believes that as a historian her task is only to chronicle. She completely misses the implications of using the word examine in her objectives of the work. The distinctions between terms examine and describe seemed to be lost on her. Moreover, though in the first part of this statement of objectives she uses the words "To examine the role of the students of Assam as an organised community", yet there is no attempt on her part to show that the students of Assam acted as a 'community'. The significance of the term community is also lost on her.

Meeta Deka,¹⁷ another historian of student movements in Assam, covers the entire period from 1853 to 1985. She proposes

an analysis of the political, cultural and socio-economic roots of student protests in Assam. The stated objectives of her book also include identification of the factors that motivated students in to political action and highlighting "the intensity, continuity and special features of student movements in Assam" and to "compare the same with student movements elsewhere in the world". Deka begins the book with a fairly comprehensive statement of the theoretical perspectives on student movements but ignores these in the main part of her work on the students of Assam. In the epilogue of the book she asserts that student movements in Assam can be seen as social movements¹⁸ but there is no attempt on her part to examine the activities of the students in a movement framework. There indeed is an effort to show that the students in Assam have been greatly influenced by the major political trends of their time. In the epilogue of her book she writes,

"The discussion in the foregoing chapters attempted to focus on the origin and growth of the student movements in Assam in the colonial conditions and in the post-independence period. In the primary societal conditions, under colonialism, the Indian National Movement played a significant role in moulding student movements in Assam."¹⁹

She however does not show that the participation of the students of Assam in the "Indian National Movement" took the shape of a student movement. She merely records the participation of the students in that movement. She too remains firmly with the tradition of history writing where mere statement of facts is considered enough. This does not surprise a reader familiar with the trends of history writing in the region because the dominant trends in Assam and also the rest of North-East India have been plagued by theoretical innocence and a tendencies of chronologically arranging officially recorded facts. For instance in the works of the most celebrated historian of Assam H.K. Barpujari one does not find any discussion about method or concepts except for some assertion that the historian should seek the truth.²⁰ Another well-known historian Amalendu Guha's famous book *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, too did not bother to discuss methods and approaches. In a prologue

to this book Guha candidly admits that his "chief task has been to build the narrative chronologically for the century and a quarter under review and, at the same time, to treat it thematically as well".²¹ There is no attempt whatsoever to inform the readers of the approach he takes. The most of the important scholars trying to understand the role of students in the societies of North-East India are greatly influenced by this tradition and therefore there appears to be a theoretical void in the discussion of student movements in North-East India.

To say this is not to imply that in the rest of India and the world, theoretical frames always guide scholars in discussing student movements. In fact scholarly interest in student movement itself is a rather recent phenomenon. As a branch of social science research student movements remained neglected till the 70s of this century. The reason for this neglect is not difficult to find. Till then student activism largely remained part of the socio-political movements and only in the seventies of the twentieth century, real student movements started. When we look at the literature on political activities of the students we find that political socialization researchers made the earliest important contributions. Despite the refrain of the establishment politicians and intellectuals that students should not be active in politics young people in their own ways have always been interested in politics. Political socialization research has been drawing this conclusion repeatedly that even very young children are not only interested in politics but are also politicized at a very early age. Such politicization may build a supportive attitude towards the political authorities in the minds of young children, or it might generate hostility towards such authorities. It is argued by political socialization researchers that to be supportive or hostile towards authorities it is necessary that they become politicized enough to differentiate parental authority form of political authority and that they make personalized contact with figures of authority so as to learn whom to hate rather than idealize.²² It is true that political socialization research often begins with questionable assumptions and arrives at doubtful conclusions.²³ However, that does not nullify the finding about politicization of children. If even small children are politicized it is only natural that students in senior schools, colleges and

universities would be active in politics in one way or the other. An understanding of major theories in the field would enable the researchers to decide as to how to look at the available data and would often direct their attention to important hitherto neglected sources of data.

All through modern history and particularly since 19th century participation of young people in mass movements has been very common. Students have exercised important influence on national movements in Asia and Africa and have toppled governments in countries like Korea and Turkey. In our own country, India, during the "struggle for freedom" students participated in a very large scale. Historians of India's struggle for independence have shown that when Gandhi started the non-cooperation movement in 1920 the students came out of their schools and colleges and joined the movement in thousands. Participation of students in revolutions in Russia, China, Cuba and Vietnam are well documented. Germany before the proclamation of the empire, Italy from the early 19th Century through the seizing of power by the Fascists to the resistance against the Fascists, had seen large-scale participation of students in politics. Students have been active agents of social change for over a century now. However, such participation of students in revolutions and mass movements did not draw particular attention of social scientists mainly because of the fact that in most cases, in such movements students were drawn into larger struggles where the issues involved were of general nature and were not specifically related to the students as such. Moreover, the leadership of such movements was in the hands of other sections of society and students were involved in those only as activists and supporters. They were not leading; they were being led. In Italy for instance students participated in the rising of 1820 to 1861. By 1833 Mazzini's Young Italy movement attracted over 60,000 thousand supporters.²⁴ Students fought in the Italian War of Independence and participated in the nationalist activities in the pre-world war I period. They were active both in Fascist and anti-Fascist movements. In Russia and Bosnia students were participants in struggles led by intellectuals and communists. In England the national Association of labour students and the union of liberal students were organized by national

parties. Conservatives had their own student wing, Federation of Conservative and Unionist Organizations. The German students formed the General German Student Association in the 19th Century itself. In 1833 a party of the German students and Polish exiles overawed the Diet leading to the rise of the Young German movement.²⁵ A student proclaimed the Constitution of the free German Republic but even that was a part of a bigger German Project articulated by Fichte in 1807.

In the 60s of this century a number of university campuses, in the west, were rocked by student unrest. This series of unrest began in Berkely in America in 1964 with the Free Speech movement and it came to a climax in the revolt of 1968 in France when the student movement mobilized thousands of students and acted as a catalyst of a chain reaction which eventually bought 10 million workers out on strike, thus precipitating a situation in which for the first time in the history of an advanced capitalist country, a revolution might have been possible.²⁶ Bottomore says that the student movement of 1960s broke away sharply with the past. He identifies two most prominent differentiating features of these movements: (1) its claim to be an independent political movement and (2) its concern with the structures and generation of the university itself.²⁷ While the student movements of the earlier period were only particular aspects of wider political mobilization the movement of the 60s in the western countries directly involved students as students. Statera rightly points out that, "the new student politics distinguishes itself from the traditional pattern mainly because of its separation from institutionalized national politics. Moreover, it is characterized by a considerable and highly emphasized autonomy of students by their making politics, as students, their search for new demythizing Utopias".²⁸ The movements led by the students of such western countries were directed against the dominant social structures, resulting in a mass base for protest. These protest movements challenged the consumer culture based on inequality and exploitation and raised the issue of just and fair path of social development once again. They shattered the claim of the social integrationists that by generating sufficient surplus and percolating at least a part of that to the lower

strata of society capitalism was in a position to create conditions for stability.

The intellectual climate in which these movements emerged was distinguished by a crisis in the western Industrial societies which was generated by their confrontation with a new set of theories developed by scholars painting a dismal picture of these societies and drawing the attention of the intellectual world to some disturbing aspects of these societies. Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, *Eros and Civilization*, and *Essay on Liberation*, exposed the paradoxes of the contemporary capitalist society.²⁹ This line of thinking was a common feature of the Frankfurt school which included philosophers like Jurgen Habermas, Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, Ernest Block and Max Horkheimer.³⁰ A most formidable philosophical influence contributing to the climate of critical evaluation prevalent in that period was Jean Paul Sartre who participated actively in the student protests in France. Critical evaluation of the economic performances of the western capitalist societies too contributed to that intellectual climate. J.K. Galbraith while developing his ideas on 'Industrial Society', laid bare the pitfalls of the corporation dominated economy and society.³¹ He had once said, "Unequal development, inequality, frivolous and erratic innovation, environmental assault, indifference to personality, power over the state, inflation, failure in inter-industry coordination are part of the system as they are part of the reality. Nor are these minor defects, in the manner of a misshapen wheel on a machine, which once identified and isolated, can then be corrected. They are systematic. Such theories reflecting the both the crisis of capitalism and the crisis of bourgeois ideology might have given the students of the developed western capitalist countries some idea about the ills of their own societies and the urge to look for an alternative. In such a situation they could have been attracted towards Marxism which represented a radical alternative to capitalism. But that was also a period when this philosophy itself was subjected to the scrutiny of a debate carried on by thinkers like Jean Paul Sartre, Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm, C. Wright Mills, Jurgen Habermas, Stanislaw Ossowski, Leszek Kalokowski and many others. The intellectual climate of the western universities were influenced greatly by this debate and the

student community began raising some critical questions about their respective societies which could not be answered by the existing body of thought.³³

This series of autonomous student movements, which shook many advanced capitalist countries of the west, entered a phase of decline by the autumn of 1968. In a penetrating analysis—Statera points out that though different specific causes can be identified to account for the diversity of the pattern of decline in the various countries yet the reasons of the decline itself seem to be similar. Among these reasons he sights (a) repression exerted by the establishment, (b) failure of the student movements to establish close links with the working class (despite the workers strike in France). (c) The leadership's inability to nourish and consistently develop the anti-authoritarian strains of Utopia of protest. These led to a tendency to set up small sects of highly politicized militants to develop new strategies.³⁴

These reasons are of course specific to the situations prevailing in the movements in 1960s. Bottomore on the other hand maintains that students and youth movements in general too have some weaknesses. Asserting that the student movement is a youth movement he argues that a younger generation may influence the process of assimilation of new approaches in a society but it is improbable that the ideas and the aspirations of its very young members will be able to determine the structure and course of development of any society. This itself should make student movements a short-lived affair in any society. Such movements are both led and carried out by participants who may come from various socio-cultural backgrounds—and therefore lack cohesion of nationality, economic interests, class membership, and religious belief. Their only bond of unity appears to be age, institutional affiliation and intellectual situation, which need not acquire any permanence. The occupational span of students is shorter compared to the other occupations in society and as a result the membership of any student movement circulates rather rapidly leading to frequent change of political attitude and organizational style.³⁵ But whatever may be the causes it is a fact that the decline of student movement of the 60s was as meteoric as its rise. However, this phenomenon of student unrest disturbed the

social scientists so much that the outbreak of 60s has been taken as a sign of the inadequacy of sociological researches on youth in Industrial societies. This realization followed serious efforts at developing approaches to study student movements. Some of these looked at student movements as problems; other dismissed these as fashions. Still others viewed them as means of fighting authoritarian influence of the traditional family. Some scholars draw our attention to the physiological and psychological peculiarities of adolescence and their repercussion on social and political attitudes of the students. Influence of alienation and its politicizing effect on the students and their actions have also been of interest to scholars trying to understand student movements. Another major approach examines intellectual interests and their ideological implications for student agitations. Julien Nagel summarizes such treatments of student movements and critically evaluates the major approaches to the study of this phenomenon and shows that such movements could neither be dismissed as fashions nor can they be explained in terms of youthful rowdyism. He notes that very often student movements are believed to be handy work of the opponents of established regimes. This according to Nagel is only a partial explanation and if taken as a total explanation it merely distorts the matter. Students generally participate in the dual structure of the administrative power structure and the educational structure while the former regulates his formal duties and obligations the later facilitates learning and develops complementary qualities. The peculiar conditions created by their participation in this dual structure are at times taken as causes of student agitations. But Nagel points out that this approach too fails to explain the situation in which students take up issues which are not connected with such structures. Nagel's discussion also refers to an explanation that the dramatic increase in the number of students in the seat of higher learning leads to student unrest. But such increase itself is a manifestation of significant changes in socio-economic structure. Through a careful analysis Nagel shows that these approaches give one-sided pictures and need to be integrated to a total image.³⁶ He therefore, aims at building a framework, which will encompass all student unrest all over the world. He calls this approach

the conceptual framework of world cultural revolution. He argues that a Cultural Revolution that penetrates all our concepts and values are being questioned today and under the impact of this revolution the university students are questioning the status quo. But such an approach is too general to be able to help us understand specific student movements because it does not seem to examine student movements in determinate societies and substitutes such societies with the ideas of a general society.³⁷

Some scholars have tried to use the Parsonian model, which focuses on formation of distinctive groups based on similarity of age, to understand student movements. This approach highlights the differentiation of the family from the occupational structure, break between the values within and outside the family, and break between the values within and outside the family and the resulting discontinuity in role expectations. These authors believe that student movements combine some features of the family and occupational structure. They therefore view student movement as a process that helps transition to adulthood and maintain that sharpness of the disjunction between the values of the family and the larger society determines the rebelliousness of the students. They therefore expect students of societies where traditional authorities are breaking up to be more active in student movements. From this perspective it would appear logical to expect the students of stable democracies like USA, France and England to be less rebellious. But the empirical reality of these countries doesn't confirm this. This approach fails to answer why in a particular society students agitate over particular issues, especially, when such issues are not directly relevant to discontinuity of values and role expectations. It further fails to explain why students in some societies muster massive support while in others they operate only in the spheres covered by educational institutions. This realization should make one look closely at socio-political causes of students of student movements and explore the possibilities of using a framework that can encompass student movements generated by both the student specific and general issues. Such a framework should be able to explain movements in which only students are involved and also the ones in which they become the part of a general struggle. This is of

particular interest to us in the North-East because here often campus issues fail to generate strong student movements like the student movements of the 60s of the West. For instance the agitation periodically launched by the Khasi Student Union on the issue of admission policies of the colleges of Shillong, the most important seat of higher education in Meghalaya, generate only limited interest and none of these agitations last for a long time or could create a major upheaval. But the same organization has been able to mobilize a large part of the Khasi society on the issues related to their ethnic identity and politically sensitive issues like immigrant labour, conditions for granting trade licenses and measures for protecting Khasi culture.³⁸

When we look at the All Assam Student Union, Khasi Student Union or the Bodo Student Union we find that these organizations, and the ones like them in other communities of the North-East India have been raising issues which concern ethnic communities to which the members of these student organizations belong. Student movements of the North-East India seem to have acquired longer duration compared to the intense short-lived agitations of the West. Contrary to the belief of many western scholars that the students may influence society only for a specific period but fail to shape their value structure, in many societies of North-East India they seem to be shaping the consciousness of a whole society. This, however, do not imply that we can't have a common framework for understanding student movements. It only indicates that the framework we choose should be in a position to take care of the specificities of the situations. As we have explained in another context such a framework may be available in the now much maligned Marxist tradition. But the opponents of Marxism may argue that since it examines all social questions from a class perspective and students do not themselves constitute a class it will be difficult for the Marxist perspective to explain student movements. But to use a Marxist perspective to study student movements it is not necessary to claim that the students constitute a class. It is necessary of course to recognize that they come from various classes and that their social and political activities are generated largely by their class interest. However, it is not to be claimed that the consciousness of the

students of any particular class will always reflect the interest of their own class because as persons involved in intellectual activities they might overcome their class constraints. Consciousness, denoting the sum total of mental processes that actively participate in man's understanding of the objective world, takes its origin in socio-productive activity of people which involves social relations with one another. Such activity and relations are part of social development. Therefore consciousness is a product of social development. The consciousness of the students is not determined only by what they study and the experience they exchange with other students. All social consciousness, including those of students is closely related to the legal and political super-structure that is founded upon the production relations of that society. These relations of production lead to a division of society into classes. The position of each class and their consciousness in the final analysis is determined by the position of these classes within the process of production. With minor exceptions, it is this consciousness which ultimately motivates the human beings to act. Students belonging to various classes in a society cannot therefore have similar consciousness. The consciousness of a student from a bourgeois socio-economic background will, of course, be strikingly different from that of a student who comes from a proletarian or peasant background. A legitimate question that can then be raised is: how is it that very often student movements activate almost an entire student community comprising students of various classes? Or, how can student organizations muster support from their members who come from widely varied social strata? Some scholars have been arguing that in certain cases students acquire almost class like consciousness.³⁹ But the fact that students remain students only for a short duration should open our eyes to the difficulties of accepting such a view. An attempt at answering the how can student organizations muster support from their members who come from widely varied social strata takes us to what Gramsci called the "hegemony". By hegemony of the dominant classes in civil society Gramsci meant their ideological predominance over the subordinate classes.⁴⁰

More than any other sections of the society, the students as receptive members of the intelligentsia, and as persons

constantly engaged in studies are greatly exposed to this hegemony. This hegemonic position is not synonymous with the governing fraction, which staffs the top levels of the state apparatus, or the groups, which elaborate and reproduce dominant ideology. Nor should it be located in those groups which visibly exercise political and ideological leadership in society but rather in the effects of dominant forms of political and ideological practice, the particular social relations they reproduce. It is therefore necessary to look in greater details at the ways in which, in a particular society, a particular class exerts hegemony to motivate students to act in a particular way. *It would therefore be necessary in the study of student movements not merely to locate the class which apparently rules but to locate the class or the combination of classes which exercises hegemony in that particular society at that particular phase of history.* This would provide an indispensable point of approach to the study of the student movements and their consequences for the societies in which they take place.

In the context of the student movements of the North-East India even the term society as used in the discussions on hegemony becomes problematic. A quick look at the social science literature on movements and particularly student movements reveals that most scholars are in the habit of accepting the corresponding politico-administrative units as societies. Studies of student movements of countries or politico-administrative units within countries are common. Student movements in India, student movements in Bombay, Student movements in Assam, student movement in Meghalaya etc. are common titles.⁴¹ But the socio-political realities of North-East India are such that identification of societies on the basis of political or administrative units may not be fruitful for analysis of hegemonic forces. In most cases the political units include more than one assertive communities. In certain cases, like the Bengalis and the Asomiyas in Assam, rival communities have been competing with each other for dominance.⁴² Each of these communities often acts as politically coherent groups, particularly when issues of importance are taken up by these communities. Each of these communities has student organizations of their own.⁴³ It is therefore necessary here to conceptualize hegemony in terms of communities rather than

states or politico-administrative units. Such communities are in many cases linguistic communities. For instance it is simple to identify the Asomiya, Bengali or Khasi. But one needs to be a little more careful while studying the tribal communities. In such communities the scope of the tribal community may or may not coincide with linguistic identity. The framework for the study of student movement in North-East India must therefore carefully examine the particular context in which the term community is used and then examine the hegemonic aspect. The conceptual frame based on "hegemony" should help us understand the situation much better because it should be able to direct us to the real forces and interest that motivate the student movements and there politics.

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2. Mizos for instance has a traditional institution, the Zawlbuk, in which the young men of their society learn the ways of life. See, Brigadier C.G., Verghese R.L. Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos*, (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997) pp. 18-20. See also V. Zathang, 'Youth organizations of Mizoram' in A.C. Sinha (ed.) *Youth Movement in North-East India*, op. cit., pp. 92-100.
3. Hamlet Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People* (Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 1985) p. 2.
4. See S.N. Sarma, 'Education' in H.K. Barpujari (ed.) *The Comprehensive History of Assam* Vol. III. (Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1994) p. 299.
5. See, H.K. Barpujari (ed.) *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. IV (Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1992) p. 152.
6. See, C. Woflang, 'Tribal Education: Attitudes and Aspirations', in Ashish Bose et al. (ed.). *Tribal Development and Demography in North-East India*, (BR Publishing, Delhi, 1990) p. 164.
7. For history of some such organizations see, S. Bora, *Student Revlution in Assam*, (New Delhi, 1992) Meeta Deka, *Student Movements in Assam*, (Delhi, 1996).
8. For a discussion on Jorhat Sarbojonik Sabha, See Shruti Dev Goswami, "The Jorhat Sarbojonik Sobha: Its Role in Socio-Political Awakening of Assam", *Proceedings of North-East India History Association*, sixth session, (Agartala, 1985), pp. 316-322.
9. Evidence to this effect is rather common in this part of India. The most famous of such student-government agreement is the Assam Accord signed between the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, led

- by the student organization, All Assam Student's Union, in 1985. For the text of this accord See, Appendix I. Another major accord was signed with the Bodo students. See Appendix II.
10. See, *The Shillong Times*, January 3, 2000. The student organizations are thus viewed as guardians of the society.
 11. For arguments on these lines see, David Easton, *The Political System an Inquiry into the State of Political Science*, (Calcutta 1971).
 12. S. Bora, *Student Revolution in Assam*, (New Delhi, 1992).
 13. For a discussion on the evolution of the present meaning of the word see, Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, (Fontana, Glasgow, 1977) pp. 226-230. See also Peter Calvert, *Revolution*, (Macmillan, London, 1970) pp. 63-114
 14. Borah, op. cit. p. 277.
 15. Ibid., p. viii.
 16. Loc. cit.
 17. Meeta Deka, op. cit.
 18. Ibid., p. 213.
 19. Ibid., p. 212.
 20. See, Apurba K. Baruah, "On Approaches to the Study of History", *Proceedings of North-East India*, Eighteenth Session, 1998, pp. 21-25. Manorama Sharma, *History and History Writing in North-East India*, (New Delhi, 1998) pp. 21-24, 31-33.
 21. See, Amalendu Guha *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, (Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1977) pp. ix-x.
 22. For a discussing of this theme see, David Easton and Jack Dennis *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy*, (New York, 1989), particularly p. 417.
 23. A.K. Baruah, *Systems Analysis in Political Science* (New Delhi, 1987), pp. 135-154.
 24. See, David Thompson *Europe Since Napoleon* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966) p. 171.
 25. Ibid.
 26. For a chronology of student unrest in the West during 1964-68 see, Julien Nagel (ed.) *Student Power* (London 1969).
 27. T.B. Bottomore, *Sociology as Social Criticism* (New York 1974), p. 194.
 28. Gianni Statera, *Death of an Utopia*, (New York, 1975), p. 49.
 29. For a discussion of Herbert Marcuse's ideas see, Alasdair Macintyre, *Marcuse*, (Fontana, London, 1970).
 30. For discussion of such ideas see, Paul Connerton (ed.) *Critical Sociology* (Penguin, New York, 1978).
 31. See, J.K. Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*, (Boston, 1967); *Economics and the Public Purpose*, (New York, 1973)
 32. J.K. Galbraith, *Economics and the Public Purpose*, op. cit., p. 204.
 33. Bottomore, op. cit., p. 207.
 34. Statera, op. cit., p. 217.
 35. Bottomore, op. cit., pp. 205-07.
 36. For a discussion of various approaches and Nagels' critique of those see, A.K. Baruah, *Social Tensions in Assam: Middle Class Politics* (Purbanchal, Guwahati, 1991) pp. 97-101.

37. For a discussion of this approach, See Baruah, op. cit., pp. 100-101.
38. The local press in Meghalaya reports the activities of the Khasi Students' Union. Pascal Malngiang discusses these activities in some details see, Pascal Malngiang, *Students and Politics in Meghalaya*, (Sevenhuts Enterprise, Shillong, 1993)
39. See Bottomore, op. cit., p. 194.
40. As Professor William points out "(It is) an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society and all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religions and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotations" G.A. Williams, 'Gramsci's concept of Egeomnia' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 21, No. 4, p. 587.
41. For instance Philip Altbach, *Turmoil and Transition; Higher Education and Student Politics in India*, (Bombay 1968) S. Borah, op. cit. Meeta Deka, op. cit.
42. See, Baruah, *Social Tensions*, op. cit., pp. 65-74.
43. In the North-Eastern states of India, more often than not, students are organized on ethnic lines. For evidence of ethnic community orientations of the student organizations of the region see, Apurba K. Baruah, *Youth and Student Organizations in North-East India*, (Shillong, 2000) Report of a project submitted to the ICSSR, NERC.