

**ALL ASSAM CHUTIA STUDENTS' UNION (AACSU) AND STUDENT POLITICS IN ASSAM: ITS MOVEMENT FOR THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHUTIA COMMUNITY****Dr. Pankaj Bora,**

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**Abstract:** The All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) is a student organization that advocates for the rights and welfare of the Chutia community in Assam, India. The Chutia community is one of the indigenous communities of Assam, and the AACSU has been working towards preserving and promoting its language, culture, and heritage.

The AACSU has been active in student politics in Assam and has played a significant role in the politics of the state. It has been instrumental in bringing attention to the issues faced by the Chutia community and has been involved in various protests and movements to demand their rights.

This paper will examine the history of the AACSU and its role in student politics in Assam using secondary sources. It will also look at the various movements and protests initiated by the organization for the rights and welfare of the Chutia community. Additionally, the paper will discuss the challenges faced by the AACSU and the Chutia community. Finally, the paper will highlight the importance of student organizations like the AACSU in advocating for the rights of marginalized communities and promoting social justice in the region.

**Keywords:** Chutia community, student politics, protests, movements, rights, welfare.

**Introduction:**

During the British rule in Assam, student politics emerged and played a significant role in the national movement. The first student organization in Assam, the Assam Students' Literary Conference, was formed in 1916, followed by many others such as the All-Assam Bodo Students Union, All Assam Chutia Students' Union, and All Assam Tie-Ahom Students Union. These student organizations have become influential in Assam's political landscape and have advocated for various socio-political issues that affect the people of Assam. For instance, they have raised concerns about food shortages and language issues, fought for the use of the Assamese language as the state language and medium of instruction, and demanded the detection and deportation of illegal foreigners. They have also advocated for the economic development of the state and alternative political attire, including autonomous state, separate state, Sixth Schedule administration, and ST status. All Assam Chutia Students' Union has been actively involved in the politics of Assam for the past two decades and has worked towards the betterment of the Chutia community in various areas, such as socio-political and economic issues. This paper examines the significant contributions made by All Assam Chutia Students' Union to the socio-political life of the Chutia community in Assam.

**The All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU):**

Chutia community is an indigenous community in the Indian state of Assam. They have a rich history and culture and have contributed significantly to the development of Assamese literature, music, and art. The Chutia community was once a powerful kingdom that ruled

over parts of present-day Assam. All Assam Chutia Students' Union is the students' organization of the Chutias living in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and other parts of North East India.

The All-Assam Chutia Students' Union was formed in 2005 in a meeting held in the Golaghat district of Assam, India (Chutia, 2013). The organization aims to uplift the socio-economic, educational, and cultural conditions of the community. All Assam Chutia Students' Union has been working for rejuvenating the lost history of the community and its historical monuments. The organization also wants to protect the community from the evils of modernity, globalization, and other such challenges (Bora, 2013, p. 78). The organization has a constitution and the aims and objectives of the organization is stated in the constitution of the organization. The stated aims and objectives are-

- A) Strive to promote the holistic growth of Chutia students and contribute to the progress of the larger Assamese society.
- B) Foster harmonious relations with diverse ethnic and religious groups in Assam as a means of building a stronger Assamese community.
- C) Create awareness among Chutia students about their history and cultural heritage.
- D) Initiate various measures to uplift the socio-economic, educational, and cultural status of the Chutia community.
- E) Identify and safeguard the different monuments, temples, and other historical artifacts of the Chutia community while promoting them as tourist attractions.
- F) Organize conferences, discussions, and social gatherings, and publish journals and magazines in line with the organization's goals and objectives.
- G) Assist to financially disadvantaged but academically proficient Chutia students (Patiri, 2013).

The All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) has several objectives as mentioned above, that reflect its commitment to promoting the well-being of Chutia students and the wider Assamese society. In addition to focusing on the socio-cultural and economic aspects of the community, AACSU aims to contribute to the development of Assam as a whole. Patiri (2013) rightly observed that the organization's objectives demonstrate a healthy mix of nationalist and welfare-oriented values (Bora, 2013, p. 79). Therefore, AACSU strives to be a student organization that is dedicated to serving its members while also contributing to the progress of the greater Assamese community.

The AACSU Constitution states that individuals between the ages of 14 to 37 who identify as Chutia can become members of AACSU by paying a joining fee and annual contribution and renewing their membership every two years (Constitution of AACSU, Article 4). AACSU has a hierarchical structure with four tiers - Sakha Somiti (Branch Committee), Anchalik Somiti (Regional Committee), Jila Somiti (District Committee), and Kendriya Somiti (Central Committee), with the Sakha Somiti and Kendriya Somiti at the bottom and apex, respectively. Each committee has an executive body and a general body, with members of the general body of Branch Committee responsible for selecting or electing the executive body of the branch. The Branch Executive Body consists of a President, General Secretary, two Assistant General Secretaries, two Organizing Secretaries, Finance Secretary, Cultural Secretary, Sports Secretary, Educational Secretary, Office Secretary, Magazine Secretary, and seven to ten executive members. The President and General Secretary of a Branch Executive Body also serve as members of the Regional General Committees.

The Regional Executive Committee within AACSU is made up of various members, including a President, General Secretary, two Assistant General Secretaries, two Organizing

Secretaries, Finance Secretary, Cultural Secretary, Sports Secretary, Educational Secretary, Office Secretary, Magazine Secretary, and seven to ten executive members. Additionally, the Presidents and General Secretaries of each Regional Executive Body also hold positions as members of the District General Committees.

The AACSU Constitution, Article 5, outlines the various committees and individuals who comprise the AACSU organization. One such committee is the District Executive Committee, which is made up of a dedicated team of individuals who work together to achieve the goals and objectives of AACSU. This committee is composed of a diverse group of leaders, including one President, one Working President, three Vice Presidents, one General Secretary, three Assistant General Secretaries, one Finance Secretary, one Education Secretary, one Office Secretary, one Magazine Secretary, two Publicity Secretaries, one Cultural Secretary, one Sports Secretary, four Organizing Secretaries, and eight executive members.

Similarly, the Central Executive Body of AACSU is another important committee, composed of a total of 31 members, also as per Article 5 of the Constitution. The team is made up of various individuals who hold key positions, including one President, two Working Presidents, three Vice Presidents, one General Secretary, four Assistant General Secretaries, one Finance Secretary, one Education Secretary, two Office Secretaries, one Magazine Secretary, two Publicity Secretaries, one Cultural Secretary, one Sports Secretary, four Organizing Secretaries, and a minimum of seven executive members. The Central Executive Body is responsible for overseeing the operations and goals of AACSU and holds its position for a period of two years. These committees and individuals play an integral role in the functioning of AACSU, ensuring that the organization can carry out its mission and serve its members.

#### **AACSU's Advocacy for the Rights and Welfare of the Chutia Community:**

The AACSU has put forward several demands over the years, which have been centered around the welfare and development of the Chutia community. The All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) has been vocal about a range of issues affecting the Chutia community. To promote the community's development, the organization has been actively pressuring the government through democratic means. AACSU has submitted petitions, demand letters, and proposals to the government in the interest of the community. Some of the demands made by the organization to the government include:

- A) Granting ST status to the community and creating an autonomous council under the sixth schedule of the constitution.
- B) Reserving seats for Chutia students in various educational institutions across Assam, including in Ph.D., M.Phil, medical, engineering, and other technical and professional courses.
- C) Providing government scholarships to academically sound Chutia students for their higher education.
- D) Establishing a university in the Sadiya subdivision of the Tinsukia district.
- E) Preserving historical monuments, temples, and other antiquities of the Chutiya community and developing those areas as tourist places.
- F) Naming the fourth bridge over the Brahmaputra as 'Beerangona Sadhoni Setu'.
- G) Declaring the death date of Queen Sadhoni, i.e., 7th Bohag (21st April), as a government holiday.
- H) Reserve 5 seats for Chutia candidates in the exams of Assam Public Service Commission.
- I) Creating a documentary that covers the past and present of the Chutia community.
- J) Establishing a museum in Sadiya to preserve the culture and history of the Chutias.

Apart from advocating for the rights and development of the Chutia community, the All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) has also raised demands for the greater Assamese society. Some of these demands are:

- A) Handing over land rights to the indigenous people of Assam.
- B) Seeking a permanent solution to the flood and erosion problems in Assam.
- C) Forming an Upper House in the Assam legislature where all communities in Assam can have their own representatives.
- D) Settling inter-state and international border disputes.

One of the key demands of the All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) has been the creation of a separate autonomous council for the Chutia community in Assam, which would have powers to make decisions on matters related to the community's language, culture, and development. The All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) recently staged a protest demanding the creation of an autonomous council for the Chutia community.

Another important demand made by the AACSU is for job opportunities and educational facilities for the Chutia community. They have argued that the community has been historically marginalized and deprived of these opportunities, and have demanded affirmative action and policies to address this imbalance. Additionally, the AACSU has demanded the implementation of various government schemes and policies for the welfare of the Chutia community, including land rights, health care, and access to basic amenities.

Overall, the demands made by the All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) reflect the need for greater representation and empowerment of the Chutia community in Assam, as well as recognition and preservation of their language and culture.

#### **Few activities of the AACSU:**

The All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) engages in a variety of activities beyond demanding the inclusion of the Chutia community in the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list. In recent years, AACSU has protested against discriminatory practices by the government and other institutions, submitted memorandums to government officials, expressed resentment towards Oil India Limited for lack of developmental activities in Chutia-dominated areas, demanded ST status and reservation for the Chutia community in educational institutions, and blocked a national highway for two hours in support of their cause. Additionally, AACSU has collaborated with other organizations such as the All-Assam Student Union and the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti to address issues like the Big Dam Project and illegal migration. These activities demonstrate the organization's commitment to advocating for the welfare and development of the Chutia community, as well as the greater Assamese society. Recent activities of AACSU are listed below-

- a) Chutia students for ST status: In March 2010, the All-Assam Chutia Students' Union demanded immediate declaration of the Chutia community as a Scheduled Tribe and threatened to take intense democratic action against the government if their demand was not fulfilled. The demand was made at a protest meeting held at the office of the DC of Dhemaji District, where a memorandum was submitted to the Deputy Commissioner of Dhemaji addressing various issues such as the installation of one seat in the name of Sadhani in each school, ULFA-Govt talks, and permanent solutions to the flood and erosion problems of Dhemaji. The demand for the naming of Bogibeel Bridge as 'Sati Sadhani Setu' was also included in the memorandum. (REPORT, 2010).
- b) AACSU expressed resentment on OIL: In October of 2013, the All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) held a press conference to express their dissatisfaction

with Oil India Limited (OIL) for not initiating developmental activities in the oil exploration areas dominated by Chutias. The organization announced a series of agitation against OIL to draw attention to this issue. (AACSU expresses resentment on OIL).

- c) AACSU on Facebook: On March 10th, 2012, the All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) expressed its concern about a social networking site that had blocked thousands of accounts belonging to members of the Chutia community, suspecting them of being fake and fabricated. The organization also announced its intention to burn an effigy of the social networking site in five districts of Assam, namely Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, and Golaghat. Furthermore, the AACSU demanded that the social networking site issue a public apology for its actions. (Facebook faces flak over surname mess).
- d) Demonstration in Guwahati: On May 10, 2012, the All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) declared that they would organize a sit-in demonstration in Guwahati to urge the government to meet their 26-point charter of demands. Among these demands were the call for Scheduled Tribe status and reserved seats in educational institutions for the Chutia community. Additionally, they demanded the preservation of historical monuments related to the Chutia dynasty.
- e) AACSU blocks national highway at Lahoal: On May 3, 2013, the All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) organized a demonstration at Lahoal to demand the scheduling of their community. As part of the protest, the organization blocked the National Highway, causing a disruption in the vehicular movement for approximately two hours. The police intervened and arrested the demonstrators, taking them to the Lahoal police station to control the situation. (AACSU blocks the national highway at Lahoal).
- f) AACSU on CAA: The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) passed by the Indian government in December 2019, which seeks to grant citizenship to non-Muslim refugees from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who entered India before 2015, was met with widespread protests across the country. The All-Assam Chutia Students' Union (AACSU) also opposed the CAA, arguing that it would undermine the existing safeguards for indigenous communities in Assam and threaten their cultural and linguistic identity. The organization participated in the protests against the CAA in Assam and other parts of the country (Correspondent, 2019).

Over the past few years, the organization has been involved in several activities that demonstrate its nature. These activities include advocating for the welfare and development of the community, as well as raising its voice for the betterment of the greater Assamese society. Additionally, the organization has collaborated with other groups, such as the All-Assam Student Union and Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, to address issues like the Big Dam Project and illegal migration. The organization has been exerting pressure on the government and other stakeholders to take action on these matters.

### **Challenges before AACSU:**

AACSU is a relatively new student organization, having been formed in 2005. Despite some successes, the organization has faced mixed experiences, encountering several internal and organizational constraints that have impeded its progress. Some of the challenges it faces include:

- a) AACSU's name implies that it represents all Chutia students in Assam, but its activities are primarily concentrated in middle and upper Assam, leaving out other regions.

- b) AACSU has been facing financial constraints, which have hindered its ability to carry out its activities effectively.
- c) Internal conflicts have arisen within AACSU, with some district office bearers expressing dissatisfaction with the central executive at a recent conference. Such conflicts can create internal strife and weaken the organization.
- d) The absence of sub-committees and weak regional committees are significant limitations of AACSU, which can adversely impact the organization's ability to function effectively.
- e) Other community organizations, especially the All Assam Chita Sanmilani, have attempted to exert control over AACSU, which has limited the organization's ability to function smoothly and independently.
- f) In the past, AACSU did not have an intellectual group to guide its members. This meant that the organization lacked a formal system for seeking advice and direction on important issues. Without an intellectual group, the organization may have struggled to develop a coherent and effective strategy for achieving its goals. Having access to knowledgeable and experienced advisors can be critical for the success of any organization, particularly one that is relatively new and may be navigating unfamiliar territory. An intellectual group could provide valuable insights and perspectives on issues ranging from organizational structure and management to political strategy and advocacy. By tapping into the expertise of such a group, AACSU could potentially avoid pitfalls and make more informed decisions. It is unclear whether AACSU has since established an intellectual group, but doing so could be an important step toward enhancing the organization's effectiveness and impact.

Overall, these are the major challenges that AACSU faces as it seeks to achieve its goals.

#### **Recommendations for strengthening AACSU:**

AACSU is currently facing various challenges that hinder its ability to achieve its objectives effectively. In light of these challenges, the following suggestions may be put forward:

- a) To increase the organization's effectiveness and reach, it is essential to expand its activities beyond middle and upper Assam and try to establish a base in lower Assam. The organization should undertake initiatives to engage with students from other regions of Assam and involve them in its activities.
- b) Financial constraints have been a significant challenge for AACSU. To overcome this challenge, the organization should try to develop diverse funding sources. The organization can also engage with corporate sponsors or reach out to individuals who support their cause.
- c) Internal conflicts can harm the organization's effectiveness and reputation. To avoid such situations, the organization should establish a grievance redressal cell that can help resolve conflicts and create a harmonious work environment. It is also essential to maintain transparency, accountability, and democratic working methods in the organization.
- d) The organization should form all the sub-committees and regional committees as soon as possible. These committees can help in carrying out specific tasks and function more efficiently and effectively.
- e) AACSU should strive to maintain its independence and political neutrality. It should not allow external organizations to control or influence its activities. This will help the organization to work independently and achieve its objectives without any bias or external pressure.

By implementing these suggestions, AACSU can overcome its challenges and work more effectively towards achieving its aims and objectives.

**Conclusion:**

The AACSU has been actively involved in various socio-economic and political issues affecting the Chutia community, including land rights, employment opportunities, education, and cultural preservation. The organization has also been vocal in demanding the inclusion of the Chutia language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Over the years, the AACSU has organized various protests and demonstrations to draw attention to the issues faced by the Chutia community. The organization has also been actively involved in relief and rehabilitation efforts during natural calamities like floods and earthquakes.

The AACSU has a strong presence in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Golaghat, and Tinsukia in Assam. The organization has been successful in creating awareness about the issues faced by the Chutia community and has played a significant role in mobilizing support for their cause.

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