

The Structure and Role of All Gauhati Students' Union

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The All Gauhati Students' Union is one of the oldest student bodies of Assam which was established in 1957. This parent organization of the All Assam Students' Union was initially formed as a common platform of the student bodies of the educational institutions of Guwahati. Constitutionally, the AGSU is an Anchalik or Regional Unit of All Assam Students' Union, under All Guwahati Sub-division Students' Union and All Kamrup District Students' Union. But as it is based in the capital city of Guwahati, the AGSU enjoys a unique and advantageous position among all the other Anchalik units across the state of Assam. As per provision made in the AASU Constitution during the Barpeta Convention on February 10, 1999, the AGSU today enjoys the special status of having two executive members in the central executive of the AASU, which had hitherto been the privilege of a district unit only. It was during the early period of Assam Agitation in 1980 that the AGSU formed its first unit at Noonmati to carry out its agitation programme like oil blockade at Noonmati Refinery. The AGSU has now become a full-fledged organization with four units and 29 sub-units spreading all over the city of Guwahati. The member base of the AGSU is some 36 schools and 17 colleges in Guwahati including the Assam Engineering College, Gauhati Law College, J.B. Law College, Nursing College and Ayurvedic College as well as the Gauhati University. There is an All Guwahati School Students' Union under the AGSU with one executive member each from the 36 schools. The AGSU has its Head Quarters at Cotton College, but for operational convenience it has another office at Swahid Nyas, near Latasil playground.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives have been formulated to carry out the Study:

- I. To examine the organizational structure of AGSU
- II. To examine the role of AGSU in Assamese society in general and Guwahati city in particular.

Methodology

Both primary and secondary data have been used for the present study. Primary data have been collected from respondents and secondary data have been collected from various sources such as records of the said organization, memoranda and resolutions of AASU, and other sources such as books, journals, periodicals, publications et cetera.

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The universe of the study is the city of Guwahati, and the respondents have been chosen from two different categories – executive members of the AGSU and general members of the AGSU. To collect primary data from the respondents, interview as well as observation method have been used. The respondents have been chosen by the method of purposive sampling. A total of 100 respondents were chosen, out of whom 30 are executive members and the other 70 are general members from all the units and sub-units of the AGSU. Of the 30 executive members five are AGSU advisors who also happen to be past office bearers of the AGSU.

The Organisational Structure

Ahuja (1978; 1990) is of the opinion that organizational structure is important for the success of an organization. According to him organizational structure is “a group of people working together to attain the desired objectives. People in an organization do not start working together automatically unless they are provided with some mechanism of co-ordination and control. One of the mechanisms is the organization structure. It reveals who has authority over whom in the organization. It provides an invisible framework to integrate all the people working together towards a common goal. Organization structure is essential for exercising leadership. Organization structure provides an indispensable sort of co-ordination in an organization”.

The All Gauhati Students' Union does not have a separate Constitution; it follows the AASU Constitution. The AGSU is an Anchalik or Regional Unit, the fourth in the hierarchy from the top under All Guwahati Sub-divisional Students' Union, All Kamrup District Students' Union and All Assam Students' Union. According to the Constitution, the Anchalik unit comprises the primary units of a particular region. The jurisdiction of an Anchalik unit is decided by the State executive committee in consultation with the sub-divisional and district students' units. The executive committee members of the local units decide on the executive committee of the Anchalik unit, which is named after the region (AASU Constitution). As mentioned above, the AGSU has four local or primary units. They are (a) South Guwahati Students' Union, (b) East Guwahati Students' Union, (c) West Guwahati Students' Union and (d) Central Guwahati Students' Union. The four units of the AGSU are further divided into several sub-units. They are mentioned below:

- (a) South Guwahati Students' Union: Khanapara Students' Union, Beltola Students' Union, Betkuchi Students' Union, Kahilipara Students' Union, Dispur Students' Union [with Hatigaon-Sijubari sub-unit], Hengerabari Students' Union, Christian Basti Students' Union, Lutuma Students' Union [now defunct], Zoo Road Students' Union [now defunct].
- (b) East Guwahati Students' Union: Satgaon Students Union, Narengi Students Union, Zoo-Narengi Students Union, Noonmati Students Union, Bamunimaidam Students Union, Chandmari Students Union.
- (c) West Guwahati Students' Union : Azara Students' Union, Dharapur Students' Union, Maligaon Students' Union, 1 No. West Guwahati Students' Union [including University and Garigaon], Lower Kamakhya Students' Union, Shantipur-Bharalu Students' Union, 11 No. West Guwahati Students' Union
- (d) Central Guwahati Students' Union: Ulubari Students' Union, Panbazar Students' Union, Athgaon Students' Union, Madhya-Pub(Central-East) Students' Union, Uzan Bazar Students' Union, South Sarania Students' Union, 1 No. Central Guwahati Students' Union [Birubari area].

During our study it was found out that all of the 30 executive body members of the AGSU are aware that there are four units and several sub-units of the AGSU, whereas only 47(67%) of the general members are aware of such organizational divisions. All of them believe that such division is necessary for the administrative and operational convenience of the organization. It is interesting to note that the area defined for each sub-unit is fixed and one sub-unit cannot infringe upon

another sub-unit's jurisdiction while carrying out their activities. All the activities of the units and sub-units are carried out in consultation with the All Gauhati Students' Union. The total strength of the executive body of the AGSU is 47. The portfolio break-up of the executive body is same as the central executive or the sub-divisional or district units, which is: one President, three Vice Presidents, one General Secretary, three Assistant General Secretaries, one secretary each in the portfolios of Education, Culture, Information and Publicity, Finance, Organising and twenty nine Executive members from the primary units. There are six advisors of the AGSU. The AGSU sends one member as representative to the executive body of the All Kamrup District Students' Union, two members to the executive body of the Guwahati Sub-Division Students' Union and two members to the central executive committee of the All Assam Students' Union. It was also found that there are four women members in the executive body of AGSU, and one of them is the cultural secretary. There is one All Guwahati School Students' Union under the aegis of the AGSU, which serves as a sister organization for the school students of Guwahati.

The AGSU holds its annual conference where people for different portfolios are selected. The AGSU also holds a Representatives' Meet annually where the Presidents and Secretaries of each unit and sub-unit along with minimum of five members are present. Disciplinary actions and other relevant issues regarding the members of the AGSU are discussed and resolved in the Representative Meet. The AGSU executive body meetings are also held at regular intervals, usually every month, to discuss various issues and activities of the organization. All the decisions of the AGSU are to be passed in the Executive body meeting. 'Workers' meet' is also organized from time to time for orientation and motivation of the general members of the AGSU. For our convenience we shall discuss the organization of AGSU under several headings.

Decision-making process

Normally one third quorum is required for any decision of the AGSU to be passed in the executive committee meeting. A decision, which is taken in the executive committee meeting, is forwarded to the four main units of the AGSU, viz. (a) South Guwahati Students' Union, (b) East Guwahati Students' Union, (c) West Guwahati Students' Union and (d) Central Guwahati Students' Union. The Units in turn ask their respective sub-units to take necessary steps for proper implementation of the decision. Word-of-mouth is the most popular method of disseminating information and decision to the units and sub-units, according to the majority of the executive body members and general members, that is, 18(60%) and 44 (64%) respectively, which is followed by telephone (according to 33% of executive members and 34% of general members). 22(73%) of the 30 executive members and 50(71%) of the general members interviewed agree that telephone is a convenient means of communication for the purpose of information dissemination. The general members were asked about their opinion regarding the decisions taken from time to time by the executive body. All of the general members are satisfied with the decisions of the AGSU regarding various activities. 45(64%) of the 70 general members are of the opinion that they get sufficient time to prepare for an activity; while 21(30%) think that sometimes more time is required for preparation of the same. 6% of the general members chose 'can't say' on this issue. The AGSU members (both present and past), it is found, are satisfied with the overall communication process within the organizational hierarchy. They also think that AASU is a democratic organization with a democratic way of decision making process and a time-tested management system with proper grievance settlement procedure.

Commitment to the Organization

All the respondents, both from the executive member and general member category say that they are 'fully committed' to the AGSU. All the 30 executive members and the general members

are proud for the special status enjoyed by the AGSU and they feel privileged to be associated with the organization. All of them will also advise others to join the student organization. All the respondents believe that the levels of commitment of the members help fully realize the aims and objectives of the organization.

Efficiency

As far as efficiency is concerned, 20(66%) of the 30 executive members and 38(54%) of the 70 general members think that leadership quality is the most important quality for becoming a President or Secretary of the AASU, which is followed by commitment (23% of executive members; 26% of general members) and honesty (11% of executive members; 20% of general members). All of the 30 executive members say that the present batch of AASU leaders are 'highly efficient', while 48(67%) of the 70 general members think so. The other 33% of the general members consider the AASU leaders just 'efficient'.

All the respondents believe that sound leadership leads to smooth functioning of any organization. The overall planning and management of the AASU is 'highly effective' according to a staggering 28(93%) of the 30 executive members, and 54(77%) of the 70 general members. There are no response in respect of 'Less effective' and 'Not at all effective'.

Finance

Regarding source of finance majority of the executive members and general members, that is, 24 (80%) and 46 (66%) respectively, say that major portion of the finance come from 'well-wishers' in terms of cash donation and help in kind. Companies working in Guwahati and traders are also approached for such donation or help. The general membership fee of Rs. 5.00 per student, which is taken during admission into various educational institutions of Guwahati, and a corpus fund of the AGSU also help in organizing of various activities. The AGSU has a joint account at The Assam Co-Operative Apex Bank Limited, Guwahati branch, with the AGSU President, General Secretary and the Finance Secretary as joint signatories.

A transparent audit mechanism is followed by the organization as in the AASU. The appointed auditors verify all documents regarding income and expenditure of the organization during a year, which is presented in the annual convention for general approval. It is found that all the executive body members and 62 (89%) of the general members are satisfied with the audit mechanism of AGSU.

Grievance Settlement Procedure

Grievances about the general members of a sub-unit or unit are amicably and informally resolved within the organisational unit. Interestingly all the 30 executive members and a majority of the general members, that is, 52 (74%) are satisfied with the grievance settlement procedure. The other general members are clueless about the procedure. When there is complaint about the President, Secretary or any other important members of the executive, the issue is referred to the next level in the hierarchy, that is, the grievance about the leaders of a sub-unit is referred to the unit under which the sub-unit falls. If the concerned unit fails to redress the grievance, then the matter is taken up by the executive body of the AGSU for redress. In an extreme case, however, the AGSU executive committee may refer the matter to their two representatives at the central executive, who can consult the AASU President or General Secretary for necessary disciplinary action.

Role and Activities of the AGSU

According to the 'Dictionary of Social Sciences' (Ed. Craig Calhoun, OUP, 2002), "*The word 'role' is used mainly to refer to the typical expectations, rather than individual enactments.*" In

simple terms, behaviour or patterns of actions expected of a person or organization is called 'roles'. Scholars like Ralph Linton (1981) and Talcott Parsons (1991) focus on roles as relatively fixed bundles of expectations, responsibilities, and relationships that indicate one's place in the social structure. To quote 'The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology' (Ed. Gordon Marshall, OUP, 1994) 'role' is *"a key concept in Sociological theory. It highlights the social expectations attached to particular statuses or social positions and analyses the workings of such expectations."* According to Gerth and Mills (1954) 'role' is a key term in our definition of institution, and *"just as role is the unit with which we build our conception of institution, so institution is the unit with which we build the conception of social structure."*

As a pioneering student body the AGSU takes up important activities from time to time in the city of Guwahati. The four units and the sub-units help it carry out these activities smoothly; agree all the 30 executive members interviewed. The activities are carried out taking in view the aims and objectives of the AASU, and all the 30 executive members and 44 (62%) of the 70 general members are aware of the AASU aims and objectives. All the 100 respondents are satisfied with the social, political, economic or educational issues the AGSU takes up from time to time. Some of the important activities of the All Gauhati Students' Union round the year are as follows:

Silpi Divas on January 17, Amulya Kakoty Memorial Award in February, Late General Secretary of AASU Bhriku Kumar Phukan's death anniversary on March 20, Central Bihu celebration at Latasil playground, Student Integration Day on June 10, Rabha Divas on June 20, Summer Camps for school students in the month of July, Martyrs' Day on December 10, Folk singer Pratima Pandey Memorial programme on December 27 and ending with 'Ashar Asom' — a programme during the last three days of the year where the members discuss the positive aspects of politics, education, sports, economy, culture and literature during the year to end it in a positive note. Apart from these regular activities, the AGSU organizes career camps and free computer courses for the students of Guwahati.

During our interview, the executive members reveal that during major crises or extraordinary situations, the President, General Secretary and the Advisors decide about the action-plan; but this has to be passed in the next executive meeting. The AGSU executive body meeting is held at regular intervals. The GS mentions about the activities during the interim period between two such meetings in his speech. One third quorum has to be there for a decision to be passed in executive meeting. When asked about their involvement in the local issues, all the AGSU executive members (100%) and 48(69%) of the general members say that the AGSU always give prominence to the local issues of the Guwahati city. 12 (40%) of the 30 executive members say that recruitment of the local educated youth in various organizations and companies is on the top of their agenda. For other issues they cited examples of the recent incident at the Gurukool Grammar School where a girl student was punished for not speaking in English, the AGSU took up the issue and made the school authority apologize; as they did for the October 30, 2008 Guwahati serial blasts, where they organized rally and blood donation camp. The AGSU also has a Student-Artist-Litterateur Welfare Trust for the benefit of the needy.

Summery and Findings

1. During our study it was found out that all of the 30 executive body members of the AGSU are aware that there are four units and several sub-units of the AGSU, whereas only 47 (67%) of the general members are aware of such organizational divisions. All of them believe that such division is necessary for the administrative and operational convenience of the organization. It is interesting to note that the area defined for each sub-unit is fixed and one sub-unit cannot infringe upon another sub-unit's jurisdiction while carrying out

their activities. All the activities of the units and sub-units are carried out in consultation with the All Gauhati Students' Union.

2. The AGSU sends one member as representative to the executive body of the All Kamrup District Students' Union, two members to the executive body of the Guwahati Sub-Division Students' Union and two members to the central executive committee of the All Assam Students' Union.
3. It was found that there are four women members in the executive body of AGSU, and one of them is the cultural secretary.
4. Normally one third quorum is required for any decision of the AGSU to be passed in the executive committee meeting. A decision, which is taken in the executive committee meeting, is forwarded to the four main units of the AGSU, viz. (a) South Guwahati Students' Union, (b) East Guwahati Students' Union, (c) West Guwahati Students' Union and (d) Central Guwahati Students' Union. The Units in turn ask their respective sub-units to take necessary steps for proper implementation of the decision.
5. All of the general members are satisfied with the decisions of the AGSU regarding various activities.
6. The AGSU members (both present and past), it is found, are satisfied with the overall communication process within the organizational hierarchy.
7. All the executive members and the general members are proud for the special status enjoyed by the AGSU and they feel privileged to be associated with the organization.
8. 20 (66%) of the 30 executive members and 38 (54%) of the 70 general members think that leadership quality is the most important quality for becoming a President or Secretary of the AASU, which is followed by commitment (23% of executive members; 26% of general members) and honesty (11% of executive members; 20% of general members).
9. Regarding source of finance majority of the executive members 24 (80%) and general members 46(67%) say that major portion of the finance come from 'well-wishers' in terms of cash donation and help in kind. A transparent audit mechanism is followed by the organization as in the AASU. The appointed auditors verify all documents regarding income and expenditure of the organization during a year, which is presented in the annual convention for general approval.
10. Grievances about the general members of a sub-unit or unit are amicably and informally resolved within the organisational unit. A majority of the general members, that is, 52 (74%) are satisfied with the grievance settlement procedure.
11. During major crises or extraordinary situations, the President, General Secretary and the Advisors decide about the action-plan; but this has to be passed in the executive meeting.
12. All the 100 respondents are satisfied with the social, political, economic or educational issues the AGSU takes up from time to time. Apart from taking up regular activities and emergency local issues, the AGSU organizes career camps and free computer courses for the students of Guwahati.

Conclusion

In this study we have tried to cover certain aspects of the organization of the AGSU and the role this old and prestigious student organisation has been playing in Guwahati in particular and Assam in general. It is hoped that the study will lead to more substantial research in the area.

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