

# **Structural Analysis of Pachhunga University College Students' Union**

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## **Abstract**

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*The Students' Union, (S.U) a body established to help promote the welfare of students and a body which is considered to be divorced from political influences of outside forces have at times succumbed to its manipulative aura. Consisting of a very large mobilisable population has often served as a catalyst for various social movements. This union body also provides an important platform for nurturing political consciousness and political education. It also serves as a tool for promoting democracy at the grass-root level where students learn the art of self-government. Occupation of leadership position in the union help shape students to become eminent politicians as shown in the case of Pachhunga University College (PUC). This paper will be a micro study of the Pachhunga University College Students' Union (PUCSU). It will also be an analysis of the structure and functions of the Union.*

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## **Introduction**

Politics is said to be all pervasive. For the promotion of accountability, it requires the attention of citizens. A large portion of that population of vigilant citizenry is provided by the educated youthful students. Legislation bill passed today can affect their future so, it is fitting for students to be aware of their political environment, the procedure of election and the working of the system. Universities and colleges have provided a platform for political education from the grass root through the establishment of Students' Union (S.U). The Students' Union is a body where leaders are elected from themselves and actively function as a self-governing body. It nurtures political consciousness and has also been a very important platform that help shape and promote many student body leaders to eminent politicians. This paper is a micro study of the Pachhunga University College Students' Union (PUCSU). It studies the structure and function of the Union.

Organized and unorganized activities of students is centered around various organized groups. One vital group being the Students' Union. They help in the administration of the college. This paper seeks to study the formation of Students' Union in Pachhunga University College- its structure and function. The Students' body as mentioned earlier, serves as a grass-root level for political education, study will also be made as to whether it

serves as a platform for the making of Student's Union leaders to future politicians.

The function of Students' Union is to aid in the administration of student activities and should remain devoid of influences from outside. However, it is no secret that such a representative body with active youths as members cannot remain divorced from the influence of various organizations (political or not) outside the walls of the campus. To quote Roy, *“For the political parties, students constitute an attractive power contingent and a strategic base for political operations.... the students are also easily mobilisable population”* (1977, p. 185). Universities have often been a catalyst for social and political movements like the free speech movement at the University of California, Berkeley, 1964, the anti-war (American intervention at Vietnam) social movement held at the University of Michigan which was a “teach-in” protest, 1965, women's' activism at the University of Georgia which was a three-day sit in protesting the unequal treatment of males and females, 1968 to name a few. The Indian scenario proves no difference. Student movement in India has a luminescent history. First there was the Independence movement, then the anti-Emergency movement, then the Mandal movement for reservation, and over the decades, many more. The ongoing student campaigns adorn the same altruistic and fearless banners that their predecessors carried. However, more often than no student activism leads to suspension of Students' Union.

Student activism in Mizoram under the umbrella of the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) (established on the 27<sup>th</sup> October,

1935) and the Mizo Students Union (MSU) (established on the 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2001) is also a common factor. Mizo students contributed tremendously to bring about peace during the troubled years of Mizo history which eventually resulted in the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement between the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Government of India on the 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1986. Till date, they continue to push for issues promoting the interests of the Mizo students thereby making themselves a very important pressure group for the state government.

### **Origin of Pachhunga University College (PUC)**

The wish for the establishment of a higher educational institution by the first educated Mizo people resulted in the tireless efforts and generosity given by luminaries like Lawrence Sing Ingty, H.K. Bawichhuaka, J. Malsawma, Pachhunga and many more resulted in the establishment of the first college in Mizoram known as the Aijal College on the 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1958. It was later renamed as Pachhunga Memorial College (PMC) in 1962. PMC was provincialized by the Govt. of Assam on the 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1965 and named it Pachhunga Memorial Govt. College (PMGC) and with the attainment of Union Territory (U.T) by Mizoram on the 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1972, PMGC was taken over by the Govt. of Mizoram. On the 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1979 with the signing of ‘Deeds of Agreement’, PMGC was handed over by the Govt. of Mizoram to NEHU as a constituent college of NEHU in Mizoram and came to be called as it is today- Pachhunga University College (PUC). In 2001, Mizoram University (MZU) was established which led

to NEHU handing over PUC to MZU. Today, PUC stands as the only Constituent College of MZU.

Located in College Veng (since June 1965), PUC, the oldest college in Mizoram have had quite an experience with the management and working of Students' Union. The Students' Union in PUC under the guidance of the Principal as the Ex-Officio President began functioning since its establishment with only the Evening Shift. Official elections of Secretarial posts of the Union began in 1963 according to M. Lalmanzuala<sup>1</sup>, the first Magazine Editor (1962-64) and Rev. Lalrinmawia. Magazine Editor post existed prior to the existence of the Students' Union body in 1963. It later had two batches of students- the Day Shift and the Evening Shift. Hence, there existed two batches of Students' Union- the Day Shift Students' Union and the Evening Shift Students' Union. The Evening Shift came to a close with the centralization of PMGC under NEHU in 1979 (The Pachhunga College Magazine, 1977-78, p. 2). So, the closure of Evening Shift led to the existence of a single body of Students' Union in PUC till date.

### **Structure of Pachhunga University College Students' Union (PUCSU)**

Members of the Union consist of all the college students and hence its jurisdiction is confined to the institution itself. The burning of the college library in 1981 have made the availability of the written constitution impossible<sup>2</sup>. However, recollection of memoirs and pictures of past College Magazines have confirmed

the composition of the Executive Committee Members(1968-69 College Magazine) prior to 1968<sup>3</sup> consisting of the Principal as the President, General Secretary, Assistant General Secretary, Cultural Secretary, Magazine Editor, Assistant Magazine Editor, Cultural Secretary, Games and Sports Secretary, Common Room Secretary, Class Representatives from each year of students, Teacher-in-charge of each departments and College Representatives (one boy and one girl). Post 1975 memoirs of the College Magazines have shown the addition of posts such as - Vice President, Debating Secretary, Assistant Debating Secretary, Assistant Cultural Secretary and Assistant Common Room Secretary. Today, the structure remains almost the same with the exclusion of Class Representatives from the Executive Committee Membership. This structure followed by PUC remains the same with other colleges in Mizoram.

### **Democracy at the grass-root level**

Sensitization of students to democratic values begins from the simple process of electing class representatives. The procedure of electing Students' Union leaders further educates them of the larger framework of elections at the state and the national level as well. This has also led to the development of their own '*line up tradition*' which is considered to be a winning strategy for the union election.

**1. Election of Class Representatives:** Education on democracy begins in the class room with the election of Class Representative (CR) and Assistant Class Representative (ACR).

The norm being that a boy is elected as CR and a girl as ACR. Class CR and ACR elections are conducted by teachers. Students themselves are given the freedom to nominate their representatives. Students usually nominate candidates who are good natured, approachable, studious, sincere, active and a well-known figure in the class. The ones unanimously elected as CR and ACR provide his/her services to the class in return. Through this simple procedure of electing CRs, students learn to promote and elect the best from themselves and become imbibed in the process of democracy at the very root, the classroom. Earlier Class Representatives were members of the Executive Committee. The increase in the number of subjects offered by the college resulted in the number of CRs and ACRs and the change in the structure of the Union have resulted in the exclusion of Class Representatives from the Executive Committee. Today, with the implementation of the Semester System, their role has been replaced by the Semester Representative (S.R) and Assistant Semester Representative (ACR) in the Union, however, they remain excluded in the Executive body.

**2. Students' Union Election:** The Students' Union elections are held at the beginning of each academic session. Candidates file their nominations to the Returning Officer (R.O) who is appointed by the President of the Union, the Principal. The R.O is assisted by the Assistant Returning Officer (A.R.O). The appointed A.R.O holds the post of R.O the following year. The date, time and venue of election is left to the discretion of the R.O. Students' Union elections are held in the campus, a total of

21 polling booths are established for all the 21 constituencies<sup>4</sup>. A division of constituency is made based on the core subjects. Polling Booths are supervised by teachers appointed as Presiding Officers (one for each polling station) and Polling Officers (two for each polling station). Specific time frame is allotted for the casting of votes and candidates for the post of secretaries with majority votes are declared elected along with their running mates<sup>5</sup> viz., their assistants. The elected candidates hold position for one academic year until the formation of a new Executive Committee. To ensure free and fair election, elections have always been conducted under the supervision of teachers through secret ballots. However, elections in PUC have become automated since 2013 with the introduction of Electronic Voting System (EVS). In 2015 election, 87.55% votes were polled (total number of voters: 2153, votes polled: 1885). In 2016, candidates were unanimously declared elected since posts went uncontested and in 2017, 88.81% votes were polled (total number of voters: 2360, votes polled: 2096). Today, Students' Union election is organized on the basis of Students' Union Election Rules 2017. The Union election rules are discussed as under:

- a. Eligibility:** Eligibility criteria for Students' Union election has been set for the purpose of having good candidates. Interested students have to have attended P.U.C for at least one academic year, a student with back paper(s) is considered automatically disqualified he/she must have cleared all papers in the University Examinations. A candidate must have good attendance; he/she must have satisfied the University norm of attaining 75% attendance in the preceding semester (s).

- b. Reservation for women:** Women’s participation in the Students’ Union election in their capacity as candidates and elected union leaders is not uncommon. However, the 2017 Students’ Union Election Rules clearly ensure their participation with reservation of posts for women. Although all eligible students regardless of sex can contest for any post, the post of Cultural Secretary and Debating Secretary (with their counterpart secretaries) has been reserved for women. This reservation is however done on rotational basis. If Cultural Secretary is reserved for one tenure, then the post of Debating Secretary will remain reserved for the next term but not at the same time.
- c. Election Procedure:** Nominations are filed and submitted to the Establishment Section of the office. Campaign and canvassing inside the classroom is allowed two days prior to election duty only with the permission of teachers. On the day of election, attendance is taken and students produce their identity card/registration card at the time of casting votes. Casting of votes is done through PUC Vote Casting software. Candidates with their running mates with the most votes for each post are declared winners of the election and results are announced on the day of election itself.
- d. The Line-Up Tradition:** Students’ Union election consists of posts for secretaries including the post for Magazine Editor and its assistant. Students participation for the union election as candidates for various posts are meant to be filed as independent candidates to avoid the possibility of a line-up

politics amongst themselves. Hostel students represent quite a large and solid percentile of students votes. They represent around 17% of the entire students vote<sup>6</sup> which is considered to poll in solid votes for candidate line up. An unwritten tradition for the number of hosteller candidates allowed to participate in the election is 4 posts (any) for Secretaries and 3 posts (any) for Assistants. The tradition also runs that senior hostellers scout for candidates and their selected list then requires the approval of the hostel warden. They then align themselves with their choice of potential day scholar candidates. Students are encouraged to participate in their best capacities as independent candidates along with their running mates. However, candidate line-up exists and campaigning is done on the basis of their line-up despite vehement discouragement from the establishment.

### **Functions of the Students' Union**

The Students' Union stand to work for the welfare of the students. They exist to help create and enrich healthy corporate life in the College and to protect the rights of students. They also help to create and develop academic atmosphere through disciplined approach to the pursuit of higher studies. They organize co-curricular activities and maintain good public relations. On being elected, the S.U. organizes the election of Semester Representatives (SR) and Assistant Semester Representatives (ASR) for the Arts, Commerce and Science streams. This is done so to facilitate the efficient working of the Union. They serve as a medium of communication between the SU and CRs and help disseminate

information. They function on the directives of the S.U and report their work to the Union. They implement the decisions of the Executive Committee. The functions of the President and the Secretaries elect with their Assistants are discussed below:

- 1. President:** The Principal is the ex-officio President of the Union and presides over the meeting of the Union and authorize expenditure out of the Union's fund. He decides and orders as to how and when election will be held and appoints the teachers-in-charge who will attend the Executive Committee meeting. The President has the power to dissolve the Executive Body if he is satisfied that it cannot function according to the directives and its existence to be detrimental to the interest of the college. However, such actions have not been taken by the President since the inception of the Union.
- 2. Vice-President:** The Vice-President (V.P) who is elected by the students acts as the President in the absence of the President. The V.P presides over the meetings of the Union in the absence of the President and supervises the works of other office bearers.
- 3. General Secretary:** The General Secretary (G.S) calls meetings of the Union under the directive of the President and maintains records. The G.S guides and gives directions to the Office Bearers and coordinates their activities. He submits annual reports to the Executive Committee.
- 4. Cultural Secretary:** The Cultural Secretary post was earlier termed as the Social and Cultural Secretary. He along with

his running mate organizes cultural functions, competitions on cultural items etc.

5. **Games and Sports Secretary:** The Games and Sports Secretary organizes the annual sports, inter-college competitions and teams to represent the college.
6. **Debating Secretary:** The Debating Secretary organizes debates, essay competitions, painting competitions, elocution etc. and selects teams to represent the college on the like areas.
7. **Common Room Secretary:** The Common Room Secretary develops indoor games and organizes competitions. They attend to the welfare of the students in the Common Room and looks after its properties.
8. **Magazine Editor:** The Magazine Editor along with his running mate does article collection, editing and compilation of the college magazine ‘Buannel’ and the annual journal ‘Campus Talk’.
9. **Assistant Secretaries:** The Assistant Secretaries are to assist their respective Secretaries and to perform their duties in their absence.

Each department have teacher-in-charge who guides and supervises the work of their respective Secretaries and Assistants. A good working condition between the teacher-in-charge and the Union representatives is vital for the successful fulfillment of their duties.

## Students Activism

Students' Union has served as a platform for the making of great political leaders. As highlighted in '*Memorabilia, Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1958-2008*', 30 former students of the college have rendered their valuable services to the state in their capacities as ex-MLA, ex-Speakers and ex-Ministers. Some names of political figures that occupy the list have at some point served the college as in their capacity as union leaders or as active members viz., K. Sangthuama, Vanlalnghaka, Vanlalzawma, P.C. Zoramsangliana to name a few. Affiliated to the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) the union has served as a catalyst for activism for various causes. This affiliation is inclusive of all Students' Union in Mizoram. The MZP back then functioned for the fulfillment of students' welfare, welfare of the society and social welfare and reviewing governmental policies and decision<sup>7</sup>.

Students' activism for '*Peace*' during Mizoram's troubled period which stretched for two decades from 1966 to 1986 even resulted in the banning of the MZP due to their Anti-Governmental activities. The volatile situation of the troubled times had made students more aware of their political environment. This particular movement for peace probably the most vehement one even resulted in the burning of the College Library<sup>8</sup> on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, 1981 as a means of protest against the government. To quote P.C. Zoramsangliana, "*Students thirsted for peace, we wanted peace and we were mobilized by the politics of the times; the mobilization of the students at the time was beyond party politics. We wanted peace*". Today, students under the umbrella

of MZP and the MSU continue to stand activated on various issues like frequent transfer and sacking of Governors, technical entrance quota for Mizo students, influx of illegal foreigners etc. This tug and pull between the students and the government for the promotion of Mizo students welfare has made it a very important pressure group for the government as Lipset had said “*In many developing countries, students are one of the key modernizing elements in the society as the students’ objective are often taken seriously by the government officials*” (Lipset,1967, p. 32). “*For more than a century, students’ movements have had an important place among the agents of social change, in some places; students have succeeded in toppling Government of changing policies. In other place, they have been instrumental in various kinds of cultural revivals*” (Lipset,1967, p. 74). They are easily mobilized and have come to occupy a very important role in bringing about change (social and political) in the Mizo society.

## **Conclusion**

The Students’ body leaders have helped promote the interests the students and have tremendously helped in the administration of the University College, however, at times they have played the role of a pressure group functioning in alignment with the MZP and MSU. The state of the union highly depends on the orientation of the leaders. It can be said that students in the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s were more politically inclined than students today. Many of the Union leaders during 1960’s to 1980’s (many now still actively involved) had either joined the Mizo

National Front (MNF) or the Congress Party and a few of them the Peoples Conference Party (P.C). It can be said that political condition of the troubled years had made them more active and more involved in politics. Younger generations have yet to carve a space for themselves in the political arena. Some may argue that the existence of the union is detrimental to the proper functioning of the college when the elected leaders have inclinations to tilt towards the influences of forces from outside the campus. However, when a union operates actively within its allotted purview, its existence becomes a very important medium for the promotion of an efficient administration of students' activities.

### **Notes**

1. Lalremsiama was formally appointed as Magazine Editor and M. Lalmanzuala the Assistant Editor in 1962. However, on reconsideration, M. Lalmanzuala came to be appointed as Magazine Editor by the then Principal Rev. Dr. Alwyn Roberts in 1962 itself. So, M. Lalmanzuala is formally recognized as the first Magazine Editor in PUC.
2. The burning of the College Library in 1981 have rendered the physical acquirement of the SU Constitution, PUC booklet impossible. However, Prof. Darchhawna, Ex-Principal, PUC (1980-83) recalls having written the Students' Union Constitution with Dr. B.P. Baruah, Department of History, in 1963. The Constitution was replicated by the Aizawl College under the then Principal of the college H. Thansanga which resulted in their 1977 Students' Union Constitution,

Govt. Aizawl College. Hence, the usage of Students' Union Constitution, Aizawl College of 1977 as a reference has been justified. However, amendment was made by them (GAC) with regard to election where the process of running mate was introduced and then this process was in turn followed by PUC. To quote Prof. Darchhawna, "*Being the first college in Mizoram, whatever the college did became a trend followed by other colleges.*"

3. The oldest Magazine found as a result of the burning of the College Library was the 1968-69 issue alone with a wide gap followed by the 1975-76 issues thereafter.
4. PUC offers 21 subjects which results in the establishment of 21 constituencies.
5. The nominees of the successful candidates in the election for the posts of secretaries including editor of Magazines are deemed to have been elected for Assistant Secretaries or Assistant Editor of Magazines as the case may be. This procedure of having a running mate is practised till date.
6. Total number of students' enrolment in 2018 was recorded as 2135. P.U.C has two boys hostel: Chhinlung Hostel and Zawlbuk Hostel which has a total capacity of 170 hostellers and two girls hostel: Senhri Hostel and Zamzo Hostel with a total capacity of 194 students.
7. MZP Constitution Article No. XIV.4, (1977 Amendment).
8. The college library was then reputed as one of the best library in the North-East region besides the Cotton College in Guwahati.

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