

THE MANDATE OF THE PEOPLE



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by
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FOREWORD

This short essay comes from a reluctant writer who was persuaded to record some of his reminiscences and reflections from a long association with the people of Arunachal Pradesh. This dates from 1947 and spans a whole period of evolution. He has chosen to focus on the emergence of representative government and leadership out of traditional polities in which he was early to sense 'the good and the beautiful' in their ordering of human affairs. He has chosen to write under a pen-name not to conceal his identity, which will be obvious to those who know him, but presumably to put on a new 'writing personality'.

Some of his insights are novel and even provocative. He himself styles them as fragmentary and impressionistic. Yet they may awaken interest in other scholars, particularly Arunachalis themselves, to research some of the more interesting layers of thought, so that one day a full story can be told, from the viewpoint of the people themselves.

The writer was obviously deeply impressed by the attitudes and achievements of the political leadership that came together to form the first Arunachali Ministry; and with the many facets to the personality of its first Chief Minister, Shri P.K. Thungon. He concludes that in a time of stress and divisiveness, the mandate of the people assumes prime importance in the choice of stable and experienced talent to preserve a much needed stability. Change too needs its own continuities and this seems to be the message of his thoughts.

I am sure that this account will help clear a few misconceptions about Arunachali society and make for a better understanding of the contributions that it can make towards the building of a modern Indian nationhood.

(RAM NIWAS MIRDHA)

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The Councils of Creation

Long ago, before life emerged, the spirits of creation gathered together in council to consider how their restless urge could be satisfied. Out from the dark burrows of formlessness, there emerged a creature like a mole and, with it, the thought of dampness. Gradually, the image of the creature took shape, with moisture on its whiskers. It led the spirits of creation to the first moisture on a mossy rock. This then dripped into a trickle of water from which eventually all life emerged. The first creature which led the way to the discovery of the water of life was called *Kabo-Yabo* in the Galo dialect. An Adi scholar has suggested that from this is derived the word *Kebang* or council commemorating the first council of the spirits of creation. A similar creature like a mole figured in the folklore of the Tangkhul Nagas of Manipur. Here too, the supreme spirit of creation, *Kasa Akhava*, had called a council to decide on the length of the night and the day. The mole was the first to speak but was out-voted because he wanted the night and the day to be each a full year long. In the end, the rooster was chosen to crow when it felt tired, for sleeping, and when it awoke, refreshed, for another stint of work. And so the timings of the sun were regulated by the council of creatures.

The Origin and Pattern of Village Polities

To the hill people of North-Eastern India, the tradition of taking council among themselves before embarking on any new step, therefore has a very long history indeed, dating back to the creation itself ! Even among communities, whose village polities were labelled as 'autocratic' there are clear traditions of consultation among the elders before choosing a chief. The great Clan of Mizoram, the *Sailos* emerged relatively late in the tribes' traditional history, out of the need for strong leadership to take over their present homeland after long migrations. They had just reached the zenith of their power when the British conquered the present area of Mizoram. In deciding to administer the territory through them, the British, with their own cultural affinity for hereditary

able time and interest to his various responsibilities in the propagation of the Rashtrabhasha.

These are merely examples to illustrate from the personal experience of one who has had the good fortune of being associated with the territory from the early years of Independence. They are impressionistic and fragmentary. There is an immense amount of source material available to the rising generation of Arunachal Pradesh itself both in the experience of individuals who have served there at various periods, and above all of those who can now bring to bear fresh insights from within the territory itself. A pleasing aspect of the continuity is the extreme grace and courtesy with which old-timers are remembered. Only recently at the time of the inauguration of Tawang District, immense efforts were put in both by the present political leadership and administrators to locate old officers to invite them to the function. The experience of one at least who had the opportunity to attend was not only nostalgically heart warming, but encouraging for the confidence that was radiated in the new challenges that will continue to face each successive leadership. The main confidence lies in the people themselves who have shown at all times the capacity to choose from time to time the most competent representatives to meet each new challenge. From the elections of 1980, party politics began to pervade almost all aspects of Arunachali life. Some observers pessimistically lament the factionalism which has divided villages and weakened the social fabric. Their fears cannot be dismissed as groundless. Yet beneath the turbulent surface, there remains a robust ground-swell which still tends to assert itself towards the interests of the community as a whole. One recalls incidents such as the gracious function organised by a village community after a keen electoral contest. Both candidates were presented with scarves of respect on the same platform. There was also the case where public influence and mediation cut short what might have developed into a long and bitterly divisive election petition. And on the broad strategies of development, there are few differences.

At a time when social divisiveness has posed itself as a problem on the national scene, there is a hope that societies firmly rooted in innate corporate responsibility like Arunachal Pradesh can contribute something to the common endeavour; partly by the exercise of their right to choose mature representatives who can under-

stand and help heal the malady; but above all by asserting that indefinable but very real force known as public opinion, which listens soberly to all different view points and defuses ultimate dissent by moulding and incorporating them into the strength of the polity. Perhaps the most ancient Indian tradition is embodied in the well-known quotation:

“Common be your end; common be your purpose; common be your deliberation”.

Thousands of years later, this remained a living reality in Arunachali society. Only three decades ago, a traditional ritual invocation was recorded at the beginning of a council meeting. It could stand the nation in good stead today.

“Let us strengthen our customs and our council. Let the leaders who can speak best, stand up and speak for our betterment...

Let us not decide differently for different persons.

Let us decide while the dispute is fresh, lest small disputes grow big and continue for a long time...

We have come together for a council meeting.

Let us speak in one voice”.

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P.K. Thungon, Union Deputy Minister of Education and Culture and Social Welfare representing India at the Second Centennial of the Himalayan scholar Csoma de Koros in Hungary 1984.