

The Ramos of Arunachal



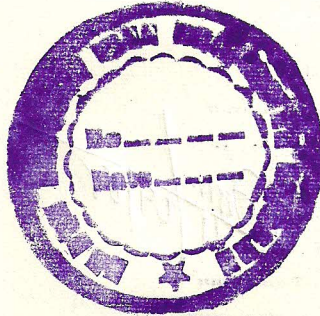
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THE RAMOS OF ARUNACHAL

A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY



M. M. DHASMANA



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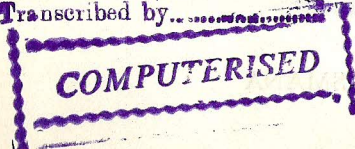
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To
My Guru
V. Venkata Rao

Preface

THE RAMOS are a glamorous people dwelling in an unbelievably beautiful abode blessed by nature. The splendour of the Himalayan heights, the torrential streams, the glittering snowclad peaks, and the densest of lush green forests make the area magnificently resplendent. It was this enchanted fascination that haunted me and resulted in a long association with the Ramos. Like all other inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh they were separated from Tibet by a line of unending snow peaks, tortuous rocky terrain and deep impenetrable forests. Their contacts with the Brahmaputra valley were also restricted by impregnable rivers, a hostile climate, marshy swamps, thick jungles and a lack of transport. Secluded and left to themselves, the people in these areas lived in splendid isolation which resulted in the emergence of various tribes and clans. Since each tribe lived in a distinct area, each developed distinctive traits, a distinct dialect, a different faith, and customs influenced by geography, economy and ethnology.

The Ramos of Arunachal is a maiden attempt to present original information of a hitherto unknown tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. They are not a big tribe like the Gallongs or the Minyongs, nor have they confined themselves to one particular area. They are spread out in various sub-valleys.

The Ramos share the Manigong area with the Bokars. Some of them live in the Memba and Pailebo areas and many have migrated to other areas during the last one hundred years. The people occupying the present Mechukha valley and its extension up to Tato are popularly and more widely known as the Ramos and this work is based mainly on them.

The exact population of the Ramos is not known but they are not a very populous tribe. These ethnographic sentinels of the "cane and bamboo cultural group with shifting cultivation" were frequently thwarted by strong gusts of acculturation from the Tibetan plateau.

This work is an empirical study and the result of a long association with the Ramos. It deals with the origin of the Ramos, their pattern of settlement, social institutions, economic pursuits, administration of justice, customary law and religious rituals. It deals mainly with their history, their present area of settlement, their socio-economic life and their relationship with the neighbouring Tagin, Pailebo, Bokar, Bori and Memba Tribes and the present day cultural turmoil.

I had the rare privilege of working under the guidance of Dr. V. Venkata Rao. It was due to his encouragement and constant inspiration that I could bring my association with the Ramos to light. I am grateful to the eminent, internationally known anthropologist Professor Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf on whose suggestion I have incorporated a number of modifications.

The Ramo country has rarely been visited by anthropologists in the past. Except for a brief mention here and there, no systematic account is available on them or on their neighbouring tribes. While trying to understand their way of life I have relied mainly on field work and empirical studies. The dates regarding their historical past are derived from conclusions based on oral accounts and evidences gathered in Ramo and Memba villages.

I have entered the domain of anthropology from the faculty of political science. Having been a student of a different science in the past, how smooth this venture into the new disciplines of ethnology and anthropology will be, only the reader can tell. And in this respect, not only have I omitted technical

anthropological terms at times, but have also coined new terms and usages.

A representative instance where I took the liberty of coining my own terms is in the classification of spirits. I agree to the anthropological terminology of classifying spirits as malevolent and benevolent spirits. But in describing them in detail and explaining their ritualistic codes I have also used the term "Lord" for these spirits. Since they control their respective spheres of activity and are its complete masters they can be described as the guardian spirit or controlling spirit or, as per Indian astrolo-etymological terminology, the presiding *swami* (Lord) of that particular activity. The fact remains that they are supernatural beings and, depending on their benefaction and wickedness, I have classified them as Angelical Lords or Devilish Lords. Another reason I prefer the name Devilish Lord and not malevolent spirit is that the latter is an evil wisher by nature and no help or assistance can be expected from a malevolent spirit. A Devilish Lord can be appeased and can be of help to someone while bringing misfortune on others. Similarly, I have used the term exophagous for the Ramos. They are not cannibals nor are they headhunters, but they did administer human blood for curative or immunisation purposes. While using human blood they made sure that the person hunted for immunisational killing belonged to a distant tribe and was not a member of their own class or related clan.

While amidst the Ramos I became a part and parcel of that splendid tribe and even today can claim to belong to them. Their hospitality and affection cannot be weighed in words. Their matchless frankness and innocence stands fresh in my mind. I owe so much to my friends in Gapo Inko, Rego, Rapum, and in fact to all the Ramos that no gratitude can do justice to their altruism and generosity. To count all the names will not be easy, but I will be failing in my duty if I do not record a few of them. I am specially indebted to my young friend Tanya Mosing, B.A. of Gapo Inko who accorded me all the necessary assistance and took the trouble of travelling with me to all the villages while conducting a field study of the area. Equally helpful was Lampusang of Rapum village.

I am also thankful to Tajen Mosing, Gilok Hangong, Tajen Koje, Tateng Koje, Narpu Koje, Kadung Pupper, Yari Komi Ango and Duyor Komi for the information they gave me about their community.

Finally, this book has attempted to study the Ramos in particular, leaving other neighbouring tribes to future researchers in the field.

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HARYANA

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India, the anthropologist's paradise, is the home of innumerable tribes, both colourful and unique. Ensnared in the mountain fastnesses of the north-east, the Ramos, a hitherto unknown tribe, inhabit the areas known today as Arunachal Pradesh.

Blessed by nature with an incredibly beautiful country, the Ramos may well be designated as the ethnographic sentinels of the "cane and bamboo" cultural group practising shifting cultivation. Frequently thwarted in their ways by strong gusts of acculturation from the neighbouring Tibetan plateau, theirs is a curious amalgam of customs and beliefs ranging from the near exophagous to the litholatrous.

The author had the unique experience of living among this picturesque people and this work is thus an empirical study and an end product of a long association with them. A well illustrated volume, it deals extensively with their origins, their pattern of settlement, social institutions, economic pursuits, law, justice and religious rituals.

Lastly, it attempts to interpret the present day cultural turmoil in the light of its historical background. The book deals with a frontier area peopled by a sequestered tribe which alone should recommend it to the researcher in this field. Dhasmana's work makes fascinating reading for the layman as well.

M.M. DHASMANA (b. 1939) graduated with honours from Punjab University. After completing his master's degree at Allahabad University he took his doctorate from the University of Gauhati. A distinguished scholar in several disciplines, his wanderlust led him to seek untrodden paths in the north-eastern region. The fruits of his long stay in the areas, his close association with the tribal people, and his knowledge of their dialects and socio-cultural environment, gave him the rapport needed for a socio-anthropological study of the little known tribes of the far-flung north-eastern regions.

His other interests include high altitude trekking, orographic photography, Himalayan dialects, and ritualistic therapy.



Other Books of Interest

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