

Editorial

Tuesday, June 5, 2018

Shifting tide

The Government of Manipur, or more precisely, the Health Department of the State Government was honoured for being the most successful state in terms of maintaining the lowest infant mortality rate in the country about few years ago and now the department is honoured for its innovative scheme called the Chief Minister's Health Care (CMHT) recently.

The achievement was no mean feat by any yardstick, and indeed, it can be said that the state, though nestled in one of the most remote and geopolitically challenging corner of the country, yet there has been tremendous improvement in the field of medical advancements. The news is also a moral booster for the numerous public with limited means and accessibility who would otherwise have had to endure torturous journeys to places outside the state for seeking better treatment: or so everyone thought.

The mild euphoric feeling, like all good things, soon came to an abrupt ending with the premier medical establishment in the State having had to start battling demons, mostly the ones which are its own making. The rosy picture faded, and soon enough, the public began to see the reality behind the smoke screen. And while one needs to really experience the atmosphere before making any assumptions, the journalistic fraternity indeed had the unenviable experience of going through the descriptions which until that very day was considered over reacting by the worried near and dear ones of those sick and injured. The firsthand experience of the indifferent attitude of a couple of kid doctors, presumably interns, and their apparent feeling of newfound self-importance which clearly overshadowed their need for display of kindness and understanding to the infirms, the injured and the sick left a very strong feeling of pity and frustration by a number of media persons and journalists who happened to be present to enquire and keep vigil for a very good friend and acquaintance who sustained serious injuries due to an unfortunate mishap. It is another matter altogether that a major tragedy was averted due to the keen observation of the friends and family and timely shifting of the injured to a nearby private hospital whose doctors, within minutes of arrival of the patient, detected a serious internal bleeding and decided on an emergency operation during which almost two litres of blood was taken out. What is more appalling than the unethical and pathetic attitude of the doctors is the fact that the facilities and machineries utilized inside the emergency block is acutely short of the required number and quality to meet the pressing demands.

There has been a spate of renovations and constructions inside the RIMS campus of late, and there must obviously be a reason for doing so. But it does escape common sense when the most important aspect of the whole exercise of saving lives, where the most critical and first aid emergency care is to be given is apparently neglected, as much as the sense of service and help is lacking in those who are supposed to be easing the pain and distress of others. The visible shift in focus is a cause for concern for the people in the state who are still hoping for affordable healthcare service without compromising on the quality. For now, the acute apathy and disregard for social needs on the part of the Government and officials are driving the sick and wounded to seek out costlier but more trustworthy and courteous options.

This would also meant that due to inefficiency of the government machineries there is a possibility that the good work may turn out to be another room for criticism.

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Our Common Crisis: What are We to Do? (Part-2)

BY- NIKETU IRALU

With June 10, 2018 just 5 days to go Imphal Times is reproducing the series of lectures delivered by different eminent personalities on the Arambam Somorendra Memorial Lecture on the day every year organised by the Arambam Somorendra Memorial Trust .

About 25 years later I was privileged to meet Rajaji briefly when his grandson Rajmohan Gandhi introduced me to him in the home of the publisher of Kalki, the Tamil magazine, in Chennai. Rajaji was resting lying on a cane bed. I think recuperating from an illness. When Rajmohan said he had brought a Naga friend to see him, even before he could see me from his reclining position, Rajaji replied, "Tell Phizo to keep fighting. Delhi understands and respects only those who fight boldly for what they believe in". I sensed that he was completely fearless and free in his mind and spirit.

The declaration by Pforhitsu, "I am a man!" made in defiance and desperation lest it failed to capture the attention of the Head of State from Delhi conveys well what the Naga struggle has been about.

I have narrated this account because Pforhitsu's assertion can be said to explain what has energized the Naga struggle. And Rajaji's sensitive understanding and respect for the Naga leader and his authentic conviction about himself and his people regardless of how far India would be able to go to meet the Nagas to solve the longest lasting conflict in South Asia, shows the attitude and body language Delhi would do well to understand and adopt if an honourable and acceptable solution is to be reached.

"The high ideals, and not long after, the dark, dead-end of man-made schemes". This was how English author and playwright, Peter Howard, described what so frequently happens to noble human struggles for freedom and other aspirations. The ideals and dreams are stirring and worth fighting for. But they most easily collapse into unimaginable destructiveness when wrongs are rationalized and allowed to become acceptable in the pursuit of the struggles. I do not know enough about the issues the people are wrestling with here. I can only share what Nagas are asking about their crisis. In our discussion of our crisis it is important we keep in mind the truth that every crisis is made up of dangers and opportunities. In Chinese the word 'crisis' is represented by two characters, danger and opportunity. If we respond correctly to the opportunities and the dangers we break through to something better and the dangers become a part of our strength and wisdom.

The Irish poet W.B. Yeats wrote: "But, I being poor, I have only my dreams; I have spread my dreams under your feet; Tread softly because you tread on my dreams".

These lines movingly describe the common crisis of all leaders of highly vulnerable peoples and societies who find themselves compelled to protest and fight the threats they perceive to be coming to their people from the changing world all around them.

There is desperation in the words because the odds are overwhelming. But there is also unyielding defiance because not to fight is not an option. What King Porus said to Alexander comes to mind. Then the names, images and memories of a host of others flood in from the past and from the present. For us here some of them are - Neta Irbot, Jadonang, Phizo and all who with him launched what became the Naga struggle. Isak, Muivah, Khaplang, so on, and of course Arambam Somorendra, whose life and contributions to his people we are commemorating today.

I am inspired by the decision of Arambam Somorendra's family, friends and supporters to build on the fire and conviction that burnt in him during his lifetime. The Lecture

series created in his name is bringing people together to listen to one another to find solutions to the challenges that we need to confront together.

These memorial lectures are expected to provide "insights on issues of the Northeast". Seeing the issues together will help our people to realize that whatever our differences we are on the same perilous boat taking us to the future. There is growing realization now that unless we reach out and learn to help one another in response to the changed paradigms our boat will take us all down to the bottom.

I shall try to contribute some thoughts to the discussion by drawing from the struggle of my people which has been our most important common experience. I acknowledge that those who have actually carried the terrible burdens of the struggle are more qualified than I am to talk about it. But our situation demands that all who are concerned do not stay silent and watch something that is so important for our journey into the future destroy itself and us. That is why I do value this opportunity to reflect together and to develop mutual understanding, goodwill and compassion, the only way to create the security we all need for our region.

The struggles our leaders and fighters launched and sacrificed for have run into problems that were not anticipated and therefore they and we were not prepared to handle them. Serious mistakes have been made and are being made- as happens in all human struggles for aspirations. And the people who applauded and supported the struggles are now starting to condemn the struggles and their fighters. This is fully understandable because all are suffering the consequences of the mistakes made.

In such a situation it is important that we the people get involved, acknowledge where and how we too have contributed to what has gone wrong; and work together to restore the things that must not be lost in a struggle; and to reject the things that should have no place in it. This involves transparent expression of our deepest fears and doubts through honest conversations. When people thus begin to breathe freely again, vital spiritual dynamics also start to function that heal and restore relationships opening the way to unexpected solutions. Of course all this is beautiful theorizing only unless we will dare to step out, be still, and be true to our deepest thoughts and questions and be led by what they say to us. This is the missing factor in our crises.

I believe the Naga leaders did the right thing before the British left in stating clearly what they believed to be the right stand for their land and people in the given situation of the day. They did not count the costs involved when they decided to fight to defend their position. I believe if Nagas had not taken the stand they did, the damage that would have been done to their identity and spirit as a people would in the long run have produced a far more dangerous problem than what we have today. The price the Naga fighters ended up paying was brutal and heavy beyond words. The villagers across the Naga homeland bore the brunt of the sacrifice. We can only be humbly grateful for the costly legacy they who suffered so greatly have given to us. Our part is to learn to selflessly build our future on the foundation they have laid.

But today some harsh realities rebuke and challenge us to wake up to what we are doing to ourselves. Why have the Naga struggle "underground" and the State Government "overground", started to destroy themselves and the

people for whom both were supposedly launched? This is our most baffling question and we dare not ignore it.

After almost six decades of struggle the early vision still beckons, but the struggle has become a nightmare. The vengeful divisions within the struggle have paralyzed our whole society. At a time when we urgently need to start to develop our economy, ruthless opportunists exploit our slogans and our dividedness to enrich themselves, behaving like leeches, making it impossible for our business community and entrepreneurs to create wealth.

Much cash has flowed down the pipe from Delhi to Kohima. We are told more is needed. Perhaps that is true? But the fact that in the last Nagaland Assembly election, the candidates who contested for 60 seats spent more than Rs.500 crores clearly shows that the greed and irresponsibility of our society has become unmanageably destructive. Has not destructiveness become the "Common Minimum Programme" of our society, and we do not seem to be bothered by the inescapable long-term consequences because we are now so used to it, or a part of it?

"It is not that they do not see the solution, it is that they do not see the problem". G.K. Chesterton thus once described a group of people in a crisis. It seems this applies to us also and our crisis, jointly created by the "underground" and "overground" of our society. We think the solution to our crisis is simply a matter of more cash for economic development, and "giving peace a chance" as we so blithely say.

Of course we need all these things. But how can reconciliation, unity, peace and development be achieved if our selfish thoughtlessness ways prevent them? It is said "A nation's thinking is in ruins before a nation is in ruins". In our case it will be, "A society cannot be developed if the people are irresponsible and their thinking is shallow, irresponsible and limited to instant success and gratification".

What do we do with the struggle, the vision and the nightmare of our society? This is the most difficult question for us. And we must answer it together with mature wisdom and unquestionable transparency where there is no room for blaming of others and treating one's own wrongs and failures lightly.

The nightmare of lawlessness, corruption, extortion and all other forms of selfishness presently paralyzing our society is too familiar to need detail discussion.

The problems we are wrestling with are the problems of a people who have just started their journey. This perspective is needed. We need to know from history that problems and challenges become the common strength and wealth of a people or nation if they are clearly identified, acknowledged and tackled adequately. This challenging responsibility is always understood and accepted only by a few individuals at first. In many cases this battling to solve society's problems by individuals can go on for years, even generations, without visible results, often actively opposed by those in positions of power and influence. But if the individuals who see the roots of the problems do not give up and fight on, wanting nothing for themselves, the soul and conscience of the public are impacted, and opinion changes. Finally the tectonic shift of society for constructive change takes place. The fight to abolish the Slave Trade and slavery started in Britain in the 18th century. The victory won there under the leadership of Wilberforce powerfully shaped the thinking and

fight of Abraham Lincoln and others in the USA. The difficult, costly fight has now culminated in an African-American entering the White House in triumph for the first time with his wife and their two daughters, to be the President of the most powerful nation on earth in the 21st century! This historic non-violent change would not have come about if individuals had not accepted the challenge to their soul and conscience down the generations. Alexander Solzhenitsyn of Russia said what is called for is individuals who will say "The lie may come into the world and even dominate it, but not through me", and stay true. Mahatma Gandhi's own fight and the triumph that followed are of course the most powerful example in modern times of how a nation's toughest problems become its strongest assets if the methods and means adopted to solve them are free from selfish motives of any kind. Mankind finding hope in the changes his life demonstrated is in his triumph.

On the other hand problems ignored, denied or selfishly exploited multiply into more intractable problems which eventually bring total destruction. "Hurts not transformed are always transferred". History is full of such examples. So God and Satan are both intensely interested in how we respond to challenges that life brings to us.

My sincere desire and humble commitment is to so live that the present generation of Nagas and of all the other communities may decide to do what needs to be done to help solve our problems which are still fresh, comparatively speaking, so that our worst weaknesses and failures may not cause our downfall but they will become the dependable foundation on which we will build our society. Is this not the reason why our weaknesses and problems are so plentiful all the time? Why shouldn't we become known not for greed and irresponsibility as is starting to be, but for sound thinking, our rejection of short-cut wrong methods that do not work any way, and our intelligent, sustainable solutions?

"An unexamined life is not worth living". Socrates' observation holds true also for the struggle of a people for aspirations and dreams. God and life allow all sorts of aspirations and ideas to inspire individuals and peoples to grow to their fullest potential. But unless the methods and values adopted to achieve the goals are truthfully examined, and the needs and challenges that come with changing situations are correctly responded to, things go wrong very soon, and our efforts become worthless and unsustainable. And this has happened to the various political struggles in our region also. Why and how?

Our vision or conviction to be a people and a nation is a normal mental, spiritual urge or compulsion that, as with others, we too have grown with from way back in our past. But if we are to grow as we should, we must know ourselves and the world we are a part of, be realistic and learn to grow intelligently by responding correctly to the opportunities and dangers that life brings to us all the time. Arnold Toynbee said, "All of history can be written in two small words: Challenge and Response. Each society progresses only to the extent it meets its challenges". This principle decides whether a people grow or remain stagnant and turn decadent and violent. The quality of the response decides the quality of the outcome. If we want to succeed as a people we too cannot treat this truth lightly. The arithmetic of this boils down to how each one of us actually thinks and acts daily.

(Contd. on Page 3)