

State: Mizoram

Period: Lok Sabha elections 2014

Assembly Constituency: Vervek, Aizawl District

Polling Station: if possible

Title: AN EYE-OPENER - A SICK CHILD's FATHER's DEVOTION TO DEMOCRACY

The other day I was chatting with an old friend of mine when suddenly the topic of election came up. He had often been appointed for countless election duties and had many stories to tell. When I requested him to tell me an incident which struck him as heartwarming and emotional, he gladly told me about this incident, in his own words:

My appointment letter read that I was appointed as Presiding Officer for Vervek, Aizawl District, Mizoram. I had only heard of the name but had never visited that village. Even though the thought of having to spend two nights in a small village with EVM and other materials, and with a team of strangers filled me with anxiety, I was at the same time excited to see a new place, to travel in a new direction which I had never travelled before. My wife was surprised to see me so eager to go on election duty that November of 2008. "Of all the times you have to go for election duty, I have never seen you this excited," she remarked while I was leaving the house.

Vervek, the name itself promised adventure. My team and I arrived safely and without any incident, though the bumpy roads made us ache all over. We were warmly received by the Booth Level Officer (BLO) who was in charge of the polling station and by the people of the village. Time passed quickly as we took turns exploring the village, and the hospitality of the people pleasantly surprised us.

Poll day dawned, and right from the time of starting the poll people trickled in continuously to cast their votes. It was a small village, and by noon almost all the people had come to vote. We requested the village crier to inform anyone who was left to come before it gets late and poll closes.

It was close to 2 o'clock in the afternoon when the village crier came running to us, out of breath. "I have relayed the message to the village, but there is one person still yet to vote," he said.

"So did you tell him to come?" I asked.

"He is not in the village," was the reply.

I was dumbfounded. I enquired if he was in the fields, in another town, or if he'd gone on a journey. The village crier offered to call the man's wife.

The wife arrived, looking tired and worn-out. She was in her early-30s and carried a crying child in her arms.

"Sir," she said carefully, "this is my youngest child; he has three older siblings who are sitting at home."

I was growing curious, wondering what this was all about.

"My eldest daughter has been sick since the day before yesterday, and we have tried everything and given her all the medicine in the house, but her fever is not going down," she continued, "My husband had gone to the next village where there is a PHC and he is going to get some medicines for our daughter."

"Has he cast his vote yet?" I asked, immediately regretting my words, which smacked of not caring about the sick child but only about the election.

"No sir. But he has every intention to vote, and before leaving he specifically said that he will be back in time to vote."

I was humbled. I offered to help her in any way I could, but there was not much I could do since medicine was a field I know little about. The wife went home, and we continued our wait in the polling station.

3 o'clock came and went, and the flow of people had stopped. The BLO provided us refreshments and told us about the family of the sick child. Honest and hardworking, but poor, was his summary of the family.

It was November, and the days were short. The poll was supposed to close at 4, and I was worried that the man might not reach us in time. He did not own a mobile phone and there was no way of knowing his whereabouts. However at a few minutes before 4, he arrived at the village, exhausted because he was in a hurry. Without visiting his house he came directly to the polling station determined to cast his vote. The BLO relieved him of his medicines and immediately sent a boy to deliver them to his house.

When the poll closed, every voter who was present in the village had cast their votes, and my team and I were happy for such a good turnout. We finished our remaining tasks, and I left the village a happy voter, my faith in humanity restored."