

Tirur Jarawa Reserve: 'Hotspot' of Negligence

Tirur, Oct. 27 (By Zubair Ahmed): On 21st Oct 2013 Andaman Chronicle reported an incident of clash between two Jarawas in Tirur under the influence of alcohol in which one of them was severely injured and hospitalized. The news drew a blank as the incident which took place on 18th October, only reached the corridors of Tribal Welfare Department and AAJVS.

forest staff is doing to stop poaching in the Reserves?

In fact, as reported earlier pertaining to the Kadamatala incident, in which Jarawas were tutored to parrot a few lines by the Pradhan and a set of poachers, this incident too is multi-dimensional. It has been established and confirmed now what conspired between the Police and the set of officers who investigated the Kadamatala incident. The Pradhan was initially kept out of the loop to avoid political pressures and controversies. The pressure from the media forced the Admn to review their stand and the Pradhan was booked on some minor charges and bailed out within hours.

In both cases, media played a vital role in bringing to light the incidents. It doesn't mean that the officials working for Jarawas - AAJVS, Police and Forest are ignorant about the happenings. All of them try to keep things under wraps as much as possible to keep controversies at bay. In the last five years, not a single case was suo moto identified by the concerned agencies and cases booked.

Tirur is more vulnerable and sensitive than Andaman Trunk Road and Kadamatala, as the level of interaction between the Settlers and Jarawas are very high. While speaking to a shopkeeper in Tirur, he pointed out that Jarawas frequently visit the settlement and take whatever they want from the villages. Recently they had raided a few

headquarters, after it appeared in the press. And, they continue to feign ignorance as if nothing has happened.

As the matter pertained to infighting among Jarawas, which itself was very rare, there was not much to be done. However, what was grossly neglected was the fact that the Jarawas were in inebriated state. In fact, the Admn claims to have fully set up three

utensils and clothes. When asked about their visit to the shops, he blatantly denied it saying they don't buy anything from shops.

When we spoke to a few poachers, they said that the Jarawas understand the value of money and they do visit shops and buy whatever they want. When we asked them about availability of alcohol to Jarawas, they denied such things saying that they are not aware of it. When asked about people visiting the Reserve, once again they feigned ignorance.

The unconcerned and apathetic stance of the villagers speak volumes about the kind of relationship they have with the tribes. Everyone plays safe while dealing with the issue of Jarawas keeping themselves at a safe distance from the issue.

"Jarawas have started speaking Bengali and Tamil," said Mohan Halder, Pradhan, Tushnabad Panchayat. Mohan is now a bit cautious and wary after the Kadamatala incident. Earlier, he used to reel out a list of demands by Jarawas and also used to send regular petitions to the authorities demanding compensation for the damages caused by Jarawas. "We need to be very careful dealing with the Jarawas, as it's a very sensitive issue," he said.

"We need to form Village Task Force as suggested by former LG Vakkom Purushottaman, comprising of youth who will act as watch groups to check poaching by the settlers," he suggested. The changed stance of the Pradhan is

hotspots, which becomes the point of contact for Jarawas, whether supply of liquor is also part of the hotspot business needs to be investigated. Or, how come the Jarawas got alcohol when the Administration claims to have foolproof mechanism everywhere.

It is learnt that the Dept is trying to hush up the matter and

be properly channelized to bring a meaningful change at the village level. "There are a few poachers, who spoil the name of the village and they are identifiable too," he said. "If the Forest and Police personnel do their duty properly, this can be easily checked," he added. Moreover, he also blamed the AAJVS posted in Tirur who are hardly available in the village for a couple of hours.

A water supply scheme is coming up at the fringes of Jarawa Reserve at Tirur, the foundation stone of which was laid by P K Singh, Chief Engineer cum Secretary, APWD last week. The project will help more than three villages to get safe drinking water. However, if the Admn becomes casual, this spot will turn to be another hotspot for Jarawas. Without proper watch and vigil, there are chances of increased interactions between labourers and Jarawas. "The project should not be stalled for this issue," Mohan said. "We are taking all necessary steps to avoid any kind of interactions," he said.

With the injured Jarawa discharged from hospital, and back in their Reserve, and with the cock and bull story invented by the Dept finding place in the file, the issue may be deemed closed. However, if an independent agency investigates, the truth might spill out which may pave way for a proper recourse to the never-ending saga of poaching

a report has also been cooked up as per convenience saying that the wound was due to fall from a tree. It seems to be a befitting report to avoid any further controversies. Or many inconvenient questions will have to be answered. How and from where did the Jarawas get alcohol? What were the AAJVS and Police staff doing? What the

Continued on P3.