

(71)

G

make at least one round trip every day.

Why don't we, then, use this much more viable alternative to the Andaman Trunk Road, the sea route? What is lacking is only the political and administrative will, impaired by the superstitious continental mind-set. Or is it that, "At the heart of the state policy is an unstated desire to drive the Jarawas out of the forest, so that extraction of timber and sand can proceed without hindrance", as observed by a researcher? We should not forget that as early as in 1952, the then Chief Commissioner wanted a small aircraft to bomb the Jarawas. Mr. D.S. Negi, IAS, a former Secretary of the Administration in 1991 had remarked, "Building of this road (the Andaman Trunk Road) was a cardinal folly." Even in 1980, an environmental impact assessment done by the Centre for Taxonomic Studies criticised this road and suggested use of alternative waterways. Anthropologist Jayanta Sarkar opined, "No habitations whether official or private should be located in the vicinity of the borders of the Jarawa Reserve and certainly not within the Reserve." But while we know what is right, we often do what is wrong.

Mr. Bakhtawar Singh, a former member of the Police Force and the person instrumental in establishing friendly contact with the Jarawas, had repeatedly spoken of the Jarawas as *azad* or free people since the second-world-war years. He lamented that they did not appear to be *azad* today.

Our constitution guarantees us and the Jarawas the right to life. Honourable Supreme Court's interpretation of right to life is not merely to remain alive but to enjoy a certain quality of life. We should bear this in mind while framing our course of action.

Senior administrators expressed reservations in this seminar about media reports and sensationalising by the press. The media can scoop only when the administrators try to hide facts. In a transparent administration, media will find nothing to scoop. Mature democracies allow their media full independence in reporting and even in reporting badly. Let us do likewise. Who is to be the judge in deciding what is good or bad? Even if the press is doing badly, muzzling the press is not the solution.

The scientists, including the social scientists, should write for the people avoiding jargons so that even the uninitiated can understand the issues involved. One remembers Margaret Mead, Bronislaw Malinowski, Stephen Hawking and Carl

Sagan.

The taxpayers pay for the services of administrators and even anthropologists and doctors. Surely the taxpayers have the right to know what is being done with their money. Who is to inform them but the media? The taxpayers are neither adolescents nor imbeciles. They deserve to know the whole truth, not a censored or watered-down version, as was attempted while reporting the recent epidemic of measles in the Jarawa population.

Most extractable timber from the available forests in Andamans stand already removed. The Forest Department declared that further extraction of sand in South Andaman is not possible. Covetous eyes of the timber industrialists and builders are on the Jarawa Reserve. The road permits a means of gathering resources illegally till it is legalised in course of time, which seems inevitable. Let us close the road and remove this temptation. Our technological society of today creates more needs than can be met. A bit of self-restraint will be welcome.

A huge responsibility rests on us. No mere mortal should be asked to decide the question of life and death of an entire tribe. I only hope that thirty years from now, one of us sitting on a seaside bungalow, sipping a cup of coffee or a drink, should not have to sigh and say "If only I had decided otherwise at that time, the Jarawas would have been alive today!"