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Director



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16/4/99

Indian Museum  
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1999, Filed April 12, 1999

Respected His Excellency, Lt. Governor, Shri J.P. Gupta,

According to our discussions held on 6th and 7th April, 1999 I am sending to your Excellency the points which I made for your Excellency's kind attention perusal.



During the last 53 years, it is to be noted, that the Andamanese and Onges have not dwindled in numbers nor have they experienced any serious threat from outsiders. In comparison, the first half of the 20th century saw the rapid and devastating decline among these people, as is evident from census reports. It may appear that the construction of the ATR (Andaman Trunk Road) has provoked hostility on the part of the Jarawas (never been estimated accurately in any census) which has not been retaliated against by the administration. Rather, consideration, sympathy and tolerance consistently adopted as the administrative approach to Jarawa hostility has resulted in re-allocation of territory and preservation of life.

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In the contemporary world, no community remains isolated and it is to be expected that the Jarawas and the Sentinelese will increasingly find it difficult to maintain their seclusion. There is intrusion by poachers and inquisitive outsiders which in some way obstructs the efforts of the administration in building links. However, very recently, the Jarawas have been showing interest in coming out of their territories to explore neighbouring ones and possibly (?) to interact or enter into interaction with the neighbours. It is in this area that administration has a special role to play. The Jarawas, a vulnerable minority, speaking a language that is confined to them, are in disadvantaged position of being misunderstood, resisted and repulsed by their neighbours. Showing hostility on the part of the Jarawas may be a way of adjusting to their situation. The administration will have to strive for smoothing over this difficulty so that the encounter does not devolve into mutual hostility.

Sustaining hunting and gathering or foraging communities require large tracks of land with a good amount of wild flora and fauna. It is difficult in a country like India to keep unutilized space and natural resources given the pressure of population. Under these circumstances, maintaining the Jarawas or the Sentinelese with their subsistence level economy is either too romantic to be taken seriously or a luxury that can hardly be entertained in a country under a firm grip of population pressure and where resources are geared towards development of the country's economy. It may be mentioned that the Jarawas and the Sentinelese are protecting the natural resources of their terrains, but in the face of increasing traffic, it is doubtful how long they shall be able to do so without experiencing serious threat to their lives.

The hiatus between these tribes with their subsistence level foraging way of life and people oriented to modern technology and science is unbridgeable. Natural process of assimilation of these people in the latter world could never provide the former with any position of honour. It is an undeniable fact, however, that these tribes are biologically contemporary as other non-tribes of the modern world and possess the same potentialities. It is this fact that is to be borne in mind by the modern world so that they are considered as human as the others are. They are in no way backward in the measure of their own way of living. They are pursuing an economy that is ancient but serves needs in their contemporary situation, the one too cannot be termed underdeveloped.