

THE REPORT

Andaman islands have been home to a number of Negrito tribes of whom four survive in varying strengths. They are the Great Andamanese, the Onge, the Sentinelese and the Jarawa. Of these, the Jarawa tribes inhabit the western side of South and Middle Andamans. Lately, they have also moved to the eastern side; they keep shifting location within the Reserve. Their mode of subsistence is through hunting and gathering, using simple and eco friendly technology. Until recently, the Jarawa lived in isolation and were hostile to outsiders who made incursions into their territory, exploited their resources and interfered with their way of life. In October 1997, they first came out of this isolation and within this short span of over nine years have become exposed to the outside world.

This happened suddenly. Administration was unprepared for the likely impact of this contact on the Jarawa as well as on the settlers. They were also unprepared for the contingencies that arose. The Calcutta High Court had to intervene and a Jarawa Policy was drafted. Increasing contact has brought out its adverse impact on the Jarawa given their vulnerability to social and economic exploitation as also to new diseases. The question before the sub group, therefore, is how to ensure dignified survival of the Jarawa tribe.

The Jarawa are among the very few classic communities of foragers left in the world. They still pursue their traditional way of life, though lately processes of modernization have been to adversely affect their lifestyle. Worldwide attention therefore is riveted on the protection of this most unique and precious human heritage. Their survival is the country's pride as well as the pride of the administration and other inhabitants of the islands. Their dignified survival in fact is not just an acid test of vindicating the policies of Government of India towards such groups, but presents a historic opportunity of demonstrating sensitivity and concern towards First People. If we succeed with the Jarawa, there might be hop for the other beleaguered communities both nationally and internationally.