

ended and their contact with outside world began. This could have marked the beginning of a historic process of interaction and mutual learning. Instead it resulted in grave implications for the Jarawa who were suddenly exposed to diseases, practices and substances, they had neither seen nor understood. Like in the case of the other Negrito tribes of Andamans, here again there was no moderating mechanism that enabled this contact to be on equal terms, ensuring that the culture, practices and lifestyle of the minority are not overwhelmed by the perceived superiority of the majority, further disempowering them and reducing them to mental inferiors without any self esteem; no medium which could enable the Jarawa to understand our world and us to understand theirs. Consequently, an uneasy journey where fellow travellers neither knew nor appreciated each other began, spelling discomfort and suspicion for the vocal settlers and threatening the very existence of the 'voiceless' Jarawa.

Several committees in the past few years have studied the situation and made recommendations to Andaman administration regarding the manner in which this matter should be handled. One such study was undertaken at the instance of Calcutta High Court on a PIL filed by a local lawyer Shymali Ganguly. She was appalled at seeing the Jarawa in their primitive state and demanded that they be provided with all modern amenities and be rehabilitated like the Onges and the Great Andamanese. The HC directed that further research should be conducted on why the Jarawa were emerging from their areas and whether they were suffering from food shortages. Expert Committees were constituted to provide more information to the courts. A High Powered Committee was entrusted with the responsibility of identifying the reasons for behavioural change among the Jarawa and for suggesting remedial measures. Its report was submitted in 2003. As per court directions, the report was discussed in two seminars in which outside experts and local representatives were also present. On the basis of feedback from this consultation a policy on the Jarawa was formulated, and handed to the Court. The Court approved the policy, and it was notified by Government of India on December 21, 2004.

The policy sought to protect the cultural identity, natural habitat and health status of the Jarawa through minimum and regulated intervention. It stated that no effort be