

Food Security

Villagers said that the Jarawa were demanding certain food articles from settlers and visitors. They were stealing fruit from orchards of settlers and midday meals were attracting Jarawa children to schools. Food shortage was due to the severe depletion of game in the Reserve. Food, they claim, was the primary reason why an entire family came along with the patient to the hospital.

The other side of the picture as given by NGOs and field workers of the Adam Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS) is that there is no dearth of food in the Reserve. Poaching by settlers and others has resulted in depletion of food reserves, but even that has not taken the Jarawa to the brink of starvation. Stealing fruit from the orchard may be partly true but could also be a settler tactic to get compensation out of the Government. Further, there is no concept of personal property among the Jarawa; they do not regard taking fruit from orchards surrounding their forests as stealing. Children are curious about schools but have never expressed any interest in mid-day meals or attendance. One evidence of their food security is that AAJVS workers bring lunches which lie in full view but are never touched by the Jarawa. Finally, their reasons for visiting the hospital in groups are more by virtue of their being a social unit than their quest for food.

It may be added that experts have warned against the introduction of new foods to the Jarawa and against provision of free food. Administration assured us that foods like banana and coconut were provided only on demand of the Jarawa, and not pro-actively. These new food items, however, have been introduced without any scientific study of the impact of the change in food habits on the metabolic processes and overall health of the Jarawa.

Two parallel views exist about planting bananas and coconuts to give food security. Environmentalists say that it is harmful to introduce alien species of plants or animals in an area of such biodiversity. We learnt that when the British administration introduced spotted deer to augment the forest resources available to the Jarawa, it was left untouched by them; it only attracted the poachers. From administrators we heard that small areas were cleared and successful plantations of bananas and