

I, as a member of the Expert Committee on the Jarawas submit the following recommendations regarding the closure of the Andaman Trunk Road as I feel this issue has not clearly and directly been dealt with in the report submitted by the Expert Committee on the Jarawas. Besides, the Committee's report has not attempted any straightforward solution to the problem that the Jarawas face due to this thoroughfare through their abode. I would appreciate if my recommendations are considered worthy.

Recommendations for the closure of the portion of the Andaman Trunk Road passing through the Jarawa territory:

It is difficult to turn back the hands of the clock and this is true especially in the case of the ATR that serves us in many ways. However, after long and serious deliberations and first-hand experience the following are the points that should be kept in the forefront of all future decisions:

1. The ATR passes through an area that contains an important aspect of cultural heritage of mankind and this highway disturbs the heritage in probably irreversible ways. We are seriously committed to preservation and maintenance of culture and heritage and the human component of culture and heritage is something that we cannot overlook or ignore. The ATR is like a public thoroughfare through one's private courtyard.
2. The issue is what culture and heritage we are trying to preserve and maintain. The Jarawas have been able to survive and continue their traditions for millennia because they have had at their disposal a territory that did not face the problems of encroachment or of being reduced. The ATR has truncated their area of habitat. The ATR runs north-south and the Jarawa territory extends both along and on either side of the highway. Their economic system that is dependent on hunting and gathering requires a large area and as a result of the ATR, the eastern part of the territory is almost out of bounds of these people. This has resulted in more indiscriminate poaching and the eastern part is like a no man's land.
3. The ATR has brought a reduction in the resource base of the western part of the territory too. The western part adjacent to the highway is no longer a hunting ground for the Jarawas because of the non-availability of animals. Over time with continuous use of the highway this shortage will become acute.
4. Our steps in closing the highway going through the Jarawa territory would not only restore the earlier strength of the Jarawa economy and their social and cultural autonomy but would also help us in preserving the biosphere of the fast denuding and diminishing rain forest of the islands.
5. The maintenance of the ATR further depletes the natural resource of the area.
6. The people who are engaged in the regular maintenance of the highway bring with them diseases against which the Jarawas are not immune. This has been shown very clearly in the case of outburst of malaria among a section of the Jarawa population. We are yet to ascertain the other diseases that may affect them through contact. As a result it is difficult to take prophylactic steps for intervention.
7. The ATR brings the Jarawas into contact with a highly transient population, often the curiosity value about the Jarawas results in indiscriminate voyeurism.
8. The regular commuters, like vehicular drivers, cleaners, tourist touts and police personnel deployed for maintenance of law and order on the ATR are in constant touch and interaction with the Jarawas. They have introduced the addictive habit of chewing tobacco among the Jarawas for which they are ready to barter items procured from the forest or made by them. The

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- exchange is obviously loaded against the Jarawas. Tourists coming to see the Jarawas give them alien foods of all kinds and thereby causing health hazards like caries in teeth, diarrhoea and other food borne diseases. These conditions of health and hygiene need to be controlled urgently before the Jarawas are incapacitated.
9. The Jarawas often are found taking a ride on the roofs of overloaded buses or in trucks transporting heavy loads to go from one point to another. This is a highly dangerous practice, as even one accident will wipe out a sizeable percentage of the existing population that is deplorably small.
 10. The Jarawas will still have scope for continued interaction with the villagers settled in nearby villages. This interaction can be more easily regulated and monitored as well as this could be used as a means of mutual learning about each other. This would also provide the ambience of gradual adaptation and adoption. The interaction with the transient commuters and tourists on the ATR at present is in sharp contrast to this, in fact there is very little positive outcome.
 11. There were some objections from many quarters including some from the government regarding the proposal of laying of the ATR. We understand the wisdom of those objections. During the construction of the ATR, the Jarawas expressed their protest through severe display of hostility. Ultimately, this marginalized community of hunters and gatherers was forced to withdraw into deeper forest leaving large area of their territory, as it was no longer tenable for them to use it freely. In the whole of human history we find that the dominant group for their own advantage has always won over the minorities not always paying attention to the issue of ethics. Closure of the ATR would perhaps be the first gesture of goodwill on the part of the dominant towards an acutely marginalized group almost on the verge of extinction.
 12. We have experience of relocating tribes, viz. the Great Andamanese and the Onges. The experience has not been encouraging, rather there has been permanent damage caused to their heritage and autonomy. The feeling among these people is that they have been abandoned though the government is under the impression that they have done their best. There is need to audit the outcomes of the schemes and development strategies that are adopted and executed. This strongly suggests that there is very little alternative but to restore their territorial rights in the existing habitat.
 13. There is ample scope for reparation of economic setbacks caused due to the closure of the ATR. Alternatively, the sea routes could be proliferated and could be developed into an employment generating and attractive way of transportation. If we did a cost-benefit analysis we may be surprised to find that maintaining the ATR with ferries at two points is costlier than developing the sea routes. Also, sufficient funds need to be earmarked for maintenance of the road surface of the ATR, the deployment of guards/police force as well as the AJVS for protection and welfare – closure of the ATR will make it possible to cut down on the costs. I draw attention to Samir Acharya's "ATR and the Jarawa situation" in *Jarawa Contact: Ours with them and theirs with us* (2002, Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata) for a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the above.
 14. Apprehension regarding "shock" of the Jarawas due to the sudden closure of the ATR "one fine morning" is really unfounded. There are many instances of tribes "overcoming" quite comfortably even prolonged periods of interaction with non-tribes. The Jarawas, comparatively have had limited interactions, in terms of language and economics (just to mention the two very significant areas), with non-tribes. The Jarawas till now have not shown any particular proclivity to prolong their stay in "alien" territory (in this case, hospitals); rather they seem very well adjusted to their forest habitat. They are very conscious of poaching and other kinds of encroaching on their lands and this also indicates that they are motivated to guard their territory.

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