

RECOMMENDATIONS ON ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR POLICY FOR PVTGS, 2014

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The Andaman and Nicobar administration has opened up a rare window for civil society to provide inputs on policy regarding the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of the islands. We appreciate this new openness and sincerity and would like to thank the administration for creating this invaluable opportunity. We also feel that a remarkable consensus was reached in the December 2014 conference, laying the ground for further interaction between the administration and civil society on our common goal of improving the well-being of the Andaman and Nicobar PVTGs.

We further applaud the creation of the Andaman and Nicobar Tribal Research and Training Institute, which we hope will provide a platform for ongoing research that can help in guiding policy. Another welcome initiative is the development of a sea route that promises to reduce the pressure of traffic on the Andaman Trunk Road. Since the road passes through the Jarawa Reserve, it nonetheless retains the potential to increase Jarawa contact with outsiders and thereby threaten their health, lifestyle, and survival. Notably, the Supreme Court order to close the road still stands.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To proceed, we would first like to recall three basic principles of governance of vulnerable tribes that were articulated at an earlier Andaman and Nicobar conference in 2004, because they remain as relevant as ever. We also include two other principles on which there appears to be broad agreement, Autonomy and Transparency. These five principles provide useful guidelines for the administration in designing policy, and also for us in influencing our specific recommendations and our critiques of existing practice.

A. **Sensitivity**: All individuals dealing with the PVTGs must be adequately and periodically trained and sensitized as to the uniqueness and rationale of PVTG lifestyles, social organization, and cultural values. Outsiders must not denigrate aboriginal practices or seek to impose foreign practices except for such cases as are essential for their survival in the face of new dangers, now that their former isolation has been breached.

In keeping with this stricture, we will henceforth refer to the Jarawa by their own name for themselves, the Ang.

¹ A fourth, and key, contributor to this paper chooses to remain anonymous.

B. **Minimality**: To minimize chances of abuse, the least number of outsiders may deal with the PVTGs. To begin with, only the least possible number of outsiders should be allowed to enter the reserves designated for the exclusive use of the PVTGs. Stringent care must be taken to ensure that such authorised outsiders who do interact with the PVTGs do not transmit disease or introduce inessential programs. Programs and other activity involving the PVTGs, including medical intervention, must be kept down to the absolute essentials and accomplished with minimal exposure to outside influences.

The Sentinel Islanders must be left completely alone and no attempts can be made to establish contact with them. Vigilance from a distance is in order, however.

C. **Accountability**: Mechanisms must be put in place to swiftly and firmly deal with abuse of PVTGs by outsiders, especially if these outsiders are personnel who are entrusted with provision of services to, and other responsibilities regarding, the PVTGs. Individuals who have negative dealings with PVTGs must be suitably punished and never allowed near them again. Justice must not only be done but also be seen to be done.

D. **Autonomy**: Also known as Self-determination, this means that the Andaman and Nicobar PVTGs should be free to choose their lifestyles and determine the pace of any changes to these lifestyles. They have to be the ones who decide whether or not, and in what specific ways, to integrate with the mainstream population. This implies that programs, including educational programs, must be responsive to their articulated needs and, unless absolutely necessary for their safety, introduced only upon their request. No programs should attempt to force the pace of integration.

E. **Transparency**: Information on the Andaman and Nicobar PVTGs needs to be systematically and automatically available to civil society so that it can monitor the situation on the ground and make suggestions for improvement. Without adequate information it is impossible for civil society to provide constructive inputs or indeed to help enforce accountability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With these guidelines in mind, we go on to make an extensive set of suggestions. Although they are difficult to categorize, the first 24 suggestions generally derive from the imperatives of Sensitivity, Minimality, and Autonomy, whereas the remainder pertain to Accountability and Transparency.

1. Anthropologists and other experts who have prior experience of working with PVTGs need to provide sensitivity training to AAJVS staff, medical personnel, police, and all other staff members who come in contact with the PVTGs. The aim is to ensure that all personnel coming in contact with the PVTGs have adequate comprehension of aboriginal practices, as

well as of the relevance of such practices for the long-term survival of PVTGs in the island and forest environment.

Sensitivity training includes introducing a sense of respect for the PVTGs, as well as for their value systems, social organization, and customs, so that the interaction between service providers and the PVTGs is not authoritative and disrespectful. Given that the value systems and social organizations of PVTGs are radically different from ours, sensitization needs to include contextualizing their practices and behaviour, as well as describing the problems encountered by the PVTGs, such as from their recent contact with the outside world, through their prism rather than our own.

Ideally, the training should inculcate eagerness in trainees to learn from the tribes and appreciate the reasons for their practices.

2. The ANTRI should work with local and national educators to design a curriculum that will teach Andaman and Nicobar history, geography, and indigenous culture in public schools. This curriculum will endeavour to inculcate in the mainstream population a sense of pride in local heritage and an awareness of the fundamental rights of the PVTGs.

It needs to be widely understood that the PVTGs are NOT primitive--that in many ways theirs are very highly developed cultures (such as in their knowledge of nature and medicine, their egalitarianism, their myths and stories--which encode their moral philosophy--and especially in their ecological principles of sustainability). Such education is essential for ensuring long-term harmony between the PVTGs and the dominant groups, enabling the latter to treat PVTGs with respect rather than condescension.

3. Tribal peoples' voices need to be heard routinely and systematically, not only by the administration but also by civil society. This dialogue needs to be institutionalized and its pace and mode modulated to suit the pattern of communication in their culture. The imperative of transparency requires that civil society interactions with PVTGs be conducted freely, without monitoring by the administration. In the seminar, for instance, it would have been helpful to hear directly from those of the Great Andamanese who were willing to speak.

4. Balancing the interests of the dominant community with those of the PVTGs is important, making the Andaman Trunk Road a sensitive issue. The enforcement of convoys is excellent, but as we noted earlier the Supreme Court order for dismantling the ATR still stands. Widening the ATR and building bridges, even if these do not initially apply to the 58 kms through the Jarawa Reserve, will further establish the primacy of the road and lead to greater dependency on it. It would therefore increase the danger of contacts with outsiders, with attendant adverse impacts. So the alternative routes should be prioritized.

5. Programs for the PVTGs, including those for education, supplies of food, and so on, must be responsive to their articulated needs and, unless absolutely necessary for their safety, introduced only upon their request. Furthermore, these programs must be

introduced only after the community in question has collectively deliberated over the change over a period of time. Individual members of the PVTGs may sometimes desire what they see of the commodities and practices of the settler community, without comprehending the adverse impact of such commodities and practices on themselves. Therefore, their deliberations must be facilitated by anthropologists, who would lay bare the pros and cons of specific changes to them.

6. Any interface of PVTGs with members of the dominant community involves power relations that can lead to a sense of inferiority. In addition, a demand among PVTGs for "objects of desire" that can only be obtained by interaction with the dominant society also leads to dependence on outside forces, and thereby undermines their self-esteem and autonomy. Sensitivity therefore includes an awareness of the danger of causing PVTGs to depend on outsiders and on goods that can only be obtained from the outside world.

Historically, the Andamanese were introduced to alcohol by the British so as to create addictions and therefore dependence on the dominant society. But as has become clear, other objects of desire (such as cooked rice introduced to the Jarawa by the contact parties of the 1970s and 1980s) can also lead to such dependence. Furthering such dependence is inherently damaging to the self-esteem, autonomy, and ultimate survival of aboriginal groups.

Caution is therefore called for in introducing the Jarawa to items such as iPads that may create such dependence and erode self-esteem. Exposure to such high technology can have unintended adverse impacts that are difficult to anticipate, apart from being difficult to integrate into their existing lifestyles. Moreover, computers are not as "value neutral" as they are sometimes portrayed, and addiction to computer games, mobiles, pornography, etc. can be as serious as addiction to alcohol or tobacco, cutting across classes.

7. Except for the Great Andamanese, the PVTGs should be enabled to access essentials with the products of their labour, without exposure to the market. The respective communities should collectively decide what additional commodities they need and when and what work they can do, consistent with their cultural practices, to obtain these commodities.

In this context, we applaud the program of encouraging Ang women to make baskets that they can exchange for the clothes that they want, as a substitute for free supply, because it avoids the debilitating consequences of dependency and maintains self-esteem. Nonetheless, such decisions need to be taken after the PVTG in question has had a chance to deliberate the pros and cons within the community, a process duly facilitated by anthropologists and implemented only after broader consultation with civil society experts.

8. We are alarmed by the consensual poaching in the Jarawa Reserve, with the Ang exchanging food items and other commodities from their territory with poachers for certain items that are not supplied to them, and which may be harmful to them. This is a very difficult situation, initially brought about by the "objects of desire" introduced by contact

trips of an earlier era and exploited by poachers, and has no easy solution. Apart from strict vigilance and enforcement of PAT regulations, it may be helpful for ANTRI anthropologists to try and explain to the Jarawa the deleterious effects of such exchanges, such as on their resource base, their autonomy, and their health.

9. Any attempt to provide coconuts or other provisions to the Sentinelese, as proposed, will be a gross violation of the minimality principle, which the administration accepted in 2004. It will certainly lead to the Sentinelese following in the footsteps of the Jarawa and the Onge.

This provision is based on ignorance of the history of isolated and semi-isolated tribes everywhere. Supposedly well-meaning "friendly contacts" invariably had unintended unfortunate consequences. In Latin America, for instance, time and time again contact with the best of intentions eventually led to the rapid and dramatic decline in the population as well as the cultural vitality of formerly isolated groups. Closer to home, it is clear from settlers' and others' accounts that the items the Jarawa were given--coconuts, bananas, rice, cloth, utensils, etc.--opened the door to, first, their raids for such items on settlers; second, for less innocent items such as alcohol and tobacco to be introduced; and, third, to sexual encounters. It is clear that venereal disease has been a main killer of all the Andamanese tribes, and the sexual encounters that facilitate exposure to dangerous germs are very hard to stop once the fear of outsiders is removed. The policy of "hands off but eyes on" seems excellent if geared towards protecting the Sentinelese from poachers and adventurers, but not if it involves looking for ways to make contact.

It is to the immense credit of the Government of India that the policy of hands off has been maintained for the Sentinelese. Changing this policy through "friendly contact" approaches would be likely to discredit this history. This must not be done.

10. We would like to take this chance to point to a serious problem we perceive with regard to the surveillance protocol for the Jarawa. The provision for surveillance of the Jarawa territory by land violates the principle of minimality and will set up unmonitored contact points that are likely to be exploited by the supposed protectors. Surely adequate intelligence as to intruders can be obtained by interviewing the Jarawa at the "hot spots" that have already been established.

If the administration insists on having these patrols, however, we further note that one person of higher rank, such as an anthropologist from ANTRI, needs to be present at all times. Having an ANTRI researcher present is also desirable during interactions in the hot spots. A designated person of higher rank will also have to be held accountable if sexual or economic abuse is subsequently discovered at these interaction points.

11. In this context we would like to point to what appears to be a lack of sensitivity in the administration to the possibility of abuse of the PVTGs by AAJVS, medical, and police personnel. (In the surveillance protocol, for instance, little attempt has been made to ensure minimality and accountability among the teams that will patrol the Jarawa territory.) We

further note with dismay that no accountability is evident in the operations of the AAJVS. Although some personnel may be doing good work, sexual and economic exploiters continue to be part of the system. Such practices need to be demonstrably changed by enforcing zero tolerance of offences, which will also serve as a deterrent.

12. The Ang need to be encouraged to once again become active agents in their own protection, including the defense of their territorial resources. They have to be made aware of the possibility of alcohol consumption leading to alcoholism, and of disease transmission through sex.

The Ang also need to be made aware, to the extent possible, of the value systems of the non-tribal society, in particular of how sexual offenders take advantage of the different cultural and sexual practices of the PVTGs, or how would-be exploiters try to induce addictions to serve their own ends.

13. Those arrested for suspected sexual interactions with the Ang need to be tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. The dominant population also needs to be made aware of the danger of disease transmission through sex and other close interactions with the PVTGs. (The settler population may, for instance, be vulnerable to Hepatitis B, which half the Ang reportedly carry, and which is also transmitted through sex.)

14. There is need for in-depth deliberation on the nature of food supplied to the Ang and its impact on health and survival, taking into account their different metabolism. Foreign foods such as rice and salt have long-term adverse implications for their health. The supply of foreign food needs to be periodically reviewed so that adverse impacts on their health can be checked in time. Adequate steps must be taken to ensure that no one other than service providers supplies such food.

Instances are reported of the Ang asking for food from outsiders, and anthropologists need to confer with them on whether or not their existing supplies are proving inadequate. (Having biologists evaluate their resources is likely to be of limited use, because the Ang use foods and medicines that mainstream scientists would not recognise as foods or medicines.) If supplies turn out to be inadequate (in the estimation of the Ang as a community), adequate quantities of safe food need to be supplied to the Ang to prevent them consuming undesirable foods, as well as to avoid friction with the settlers.

15. At present the medical system for taking care of the Ang appears to have broken down. We do not know the situation with the Onge or the Shompen, but there is no reason to believe these are any better. We applaud the administration's effort to reorganize the system of medical care for the Ang by placing it under the control of sensitive, committed, and accountable personnel. A similar effort needs to be made for the other PVTGs as well. In addition, the PVTGs need to be monitored, using sensitized and trained personnel and to the extent possible, for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Medication should be given to PVTGs only when prescribed by a doctor, and each dose should be personally administered to the PVTG patients by doctors, pharmacists, or other adequately trained personnel. Antibiotic resistance is a serious problem in mainland India, and it is fostered by careless use of these essential drugs. Moreover, all medicines, including seemingly benign ones such as analgesics, are dangerous in excess doses.

16. In contingencies where extensive medical intervention is necessary for saving life, it should be done after thorough consultation with anthropologists and medical experts, and such decisions should be taken at the highest level.

In particular, we would like to recommend that two or more medical anthropologists, of national and international repute, be consulted on the issue of whether or not to vaccinate the Ang and the Shompen. Vaccination of semi-isolated peoples is a delicate matter because it can have adverse long-term consequences, and it therefore needs specialized expertise. If the expert consensus is that vaccination is needed, further consultation is required on choosing vaccines that are essential and safe. This choice may also depend on the medical history of these PVTGs, i.e., on the epidemics they have already experienced.

17. Little information is available on the Onge or the Shompen, who are for the most part out of sight and out of mind. Over the years it has become clear that there are many untimely deaths among the Onge, which are not reported to the public. Analogous information is not even available for the Shompen. Both these groups need more sustained attention, and to that end we suggest that competent anthropologists be invited to work with them.

18. The work of the ANTRI and Anvita Abbi provide blueprints of how textbooks can be developed for the PVTGs. We applaud the study by the ANTRI showing how the educational content of current textbooks is irrelevant to the experiences of the Onge, as well as the institute's attempt, which appears to be sensitive and conscientious, to develop an alternative curriculum. Immediate reforms in the curriculum, text books, and pedagogy in teaching materials for the PVTGs should be carried out after consultation with educationists and anthropologists, in particular with those experts having experience of extending education to PVTGS in a way that is relevant and interesting to them.

Any plan that requires Ang/Jarawa, Onge, or Shompen children to regularly attend school may interfere, however, with their traditional lifestyles, and is therefore likely to be counter-productive.

An effort must be made to revitalize the Great Andamanese language.

19. Giving jobs to some of the Onge or the Great Andamanese, or otherwise privileging certain individuals among the PVTGs as the British did (by, for instance, designating Rajas in tribes that were in reality egalitarian) will create jealousy and internal fissures. In every case,

the entire community needs to be dealt with as a unit when it comes to offering inducements or rewards.

20. Improving the protection of the Onge Reserve would help maintain the resource base and traditional lifestyles of the Onge, and thereby aid their survival. We urge that attention be paid to this issue. The administration may also consider enlarging the reserve, as suggested by Dr. Bhatt.

21. Alcoholism among the Great Andamanese is the result of the multi-faceted insecurity they face, the lack of respect they experience in their interactions with the larger society, and the insensitivity of administrative workers who come in contact with them. These concerns need to be brought out upfront in a continuing dialogue with the Great Andamanese, mediated by sensitive anthropologists, and addressed systematically.

22. The ANTRI should also explore the possibility of designing de-addiction therapy that is culturally appropriate, in consultation with experts and anthropologists who have had exposure to addressing alcoholism in other PVTGs in the past. This de-addiction therapy will probably have to be different from that administered to non-tribal addicts in mainland India. The work should involve all adult members of the community in question. The program should be designed in consultation with anthropologists and other experts, and its effect should be periodically reviewed.

23. Given the extent to which the Great Andamanese have already become integrated, policies regarding them appear to require extensive rethinking, via consultation with them as well as with a broad spectrum of experts. It appears to be time, for instance, to free the Great Andamanese of restrictions on whom to marry and where to live. At the same time, financial aid and particular attention to health (such as the aforementioned issues with alcoholism) will probably need to be continued.

The Great Andamanese may perhaps collectively be granted the status of "freedom fighters" for the heroic resistance their people put up to British invasion, and the vast price they paid. Such public recognition of their contribution to independence would be helpful in according them a measure of respect from the public.

24. The Nicobarese are not of course PVTGs, and are in a position to articulate their needs. When they do so, we can only hope they will be listened to. We were all moved by Rasheed Yousuf's plea against excessive Navy takeovers of land in the Nicobars and we trust the administration will take such concerns into consideration. The 2013 Land Acquisition Law also checks acquisition of tribal land.

25. On the A&N Islands, maintaining accountability is a particularly difficult proposition because senior administration personnel tend to get transferred frequently, and as a result there is no continuity in policy. As a former tribal secretary has noted, whenever a senior

official introduces reforms, lower level personnel simply bide their time and get the policy changed when the proactive person is replaced. For that reason, accountability needs to be built into the regulations, so that it survives changes in senior administrators. Regulations must be designed with Murphy's Law in mind: if something can go wrong, it will. Observing minimality and providing sensitivity training to the staff will make the task of accountability easier. For this reason, we suggest that surveillance and other protocols be designed with close attention to these stated principles.

Also, before a new incumbent, however senior, joins a position which deals with PVTGS, he or she must be made aware of the policies adopted and must not be allowed to introduce any change--unless the need to adopt such a change has emerged through the institutional mechanism of consultation with the PVTG in question, broader civil society and other experts. After such consultations, the necessary decision should be taken at the highest level.

26. Accountability in government tends to be diffuse. As the 2004 submission by independent experts noted, "To enforce accountability it is necessary to stop not only the proliferation of personnel in the tribal reserves but also the proliferation of departments." It is difficult to assign responsibility and enforce accountability when several different departments--the ANTRI, the AAJVS, the tribal welfare department, the medical department, and the police--all bear a small part of the overall responsibility. For this reason, responsibility for any given activity (such as medical care) needs to rest with a single person who will also have the power to choose personnel and discipline them as required. A system of checks and balances are also required to ensure that these designated individuals remain accountable.

27. Lack of coordination between different departments causes serious bottlenecks in translating policies into outcomes. In respect of PVTGS, whatever decisions are taken should be enforced by all departmental officials, and necessary institutional mechanism should be devised to ensure such coordination. Possibly, the issuance of orders by the Chief Secretary or the Lieutenant Governor will be required to ensure that decisions regarding PVTGs are enforced by all departmental officials. The person issuing such orders must direct the concerned departments and review the outcomes. The effectiveness of this arrangement should be periodically reviewed.

28. Experience has shown that transparency improves accountability. All too often long-standing problems (such as the proliferation of Ang dancing videos in Port Blair) get fixed only when the press points it out. Institutionalizing transparency will therefore aid the administration in improving accountability, not only now but years from now. To this end, we request that all ANTRI reports, the AAJVS reports to the administration, the Ang documentary, and other papers be placed online, as well as all submissions made at the 2014 conference. Police reports on incidents involving the PVTGs, in particular the report on the 2008 Onge liquor tragedy, also need to be publicly available.

29. The press has a duty to the public, which also gives it a responsibility to speak truth to power. Reports in the press that shed an unflattering light on the administration should not be taken as attacks but as pointing to problems that deserve attention.

30. New policies having to do with the PVTGs (such as the Shompen policy) need to be discussed with civil society experts before implementation, possibly by inviting comments through the ANTRI website. We are concerned, for instance, that the surveillance protocols were announced days before the conference. This timing would seem to defeat the purpose of the conference, which was presumably to seek civil society participation in decisions regarding the PVTGs. Similarly, we were informed of ANTRI initiatives after the conference, whereas to be able to comment on these we would have needed to see these early on the first day.

We would stress that these ANTRI initiatives should be subjected to wider consultation and mere mention of them before a small gathering after the seminar was over should not be taken as an endorsement.

31. In our view, the welfare system for the PVTGs would benefit from consistent and institutionalized civil society supervision. Responsible and aware individuals nominated by civil society, who are outside the control of the administration, need to be authorized to make unannounced spot checks, for instance, on the Jarawa hot spots and other interaction sites. (At present there is no mechanism for making spot checks; all visits are mediated by the AAJVS.) If the administration agrees to this provision, some of us can consult with broader civil society to nominate such individuals.
