

## NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCHEDULED TRIBES

**Sub: Summary record of the 14th meeting of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes held at 1200 hrs. on 02.09.2009.**

The 14th meeting of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes was held at 1200 Hrs. on 02/09/2009 as scheduled. The meeting was held in the Conference room of the Commission in Lok Nayak Bhawan New Delhi and was presided over by Smt. Urmila Singh, Chairperson, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes. List of participants is enclosed at **ANNEX**.

2. There were 2 Agenda Items for discussion. Discussion was held on both the Items. Summary record of the discussions held in the meeting, **item-wise**, is given below:

### **Agenda Item I**

#### **2.1 Proposal for inclusion of 'MEDARA' community as a synonym of MEDA' community in the ST list of Karnataka**

2.1.1 The Commission discussed the proposal of the State Government of Karnataka for inclusion of 'MEDARA' community as synonym of 'MEDA' community in the ST list of Karnataka at length.

2.1.2 Secretary, NCST referred to the observations made in the judgment of the Madras High Court and pointed out that unlike the 'MEDA' who were hillsmen, the 'MEDARA' community are bamboo workers living in the urban areas and speak a variety of languages including Marathi and Telugu. The Commission noted that the State Government of Karnataka first recommended inclusion of four communities namely MEDARA, MEDARI, GAURIGA, and BURUD as synonyms of MEDA community in the list of Scheduled Tribes of the State vide their letter dated 19-10-1995. The proposal of the State Government was considered by the Government of India. It was, however, found that while the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 2002, notified on 07-01-2003, included MEDARI, GAURIGA and BURUD as synonyms of MEDA in the ST list of Karnataka, it did not include MEDARA community as synonym of MEDA community. This omission was pointed out by the State Government vide their letter dated 19-03-2003. The State

Government stated that in case the omission was due to oversight, action might be taken by the Government of India to include MEDARA also as synonym of MEDA. Apart from the State Government's above mentioned letter, the Commission took into consideration the following documents/inputs in support of its decision to agree to the proposal of the State Government :

- (i) Letter dated 27-12-2006 from the office of Registrar General of India, New Delhi specifically recommending inclusion of MEDARA as synonym of MEDA in the ST list of Karnataka.
- (ii) Additional inputs provided by the State Government vide their letter dated 05-06-2008 in reply to the Commission's letter dated 21-09-2007 regarding social customs, dialects, way of living, occupation, religious practices and practice of inter-marriage among the people belonging to MEDA and MEDARA communities.
- (iii) Additional inputs provided by the report of the Hon'ble Member of the Commission (Shri Tsering Samphel) dated 05-03-2008 after his visit to the districts of Dharwar, Belgaum, Haveri and Uttara Kannada regarding the social customs, dialects and educational & economic status of the people belonging to MEDA, MEDARA and MEDARI communities.

2.1.3 The Commission noted that in his report dated 05-03-2008 (referred to above), the Hon'ble Member, inter-alia, stated that some of the members of 'MEDARA' community, as in the case of any other Scheduled Tribe community, had shifted to urban areas due to educational needs and in search of source of livelihood, but their original family members continued to live in the original tribal habitats, mostly in hills and therefore, the fact that some of the MEDARA community members were inhabiting in urban areas and to that extent were not geographically isolated, could not be a valid reason to deny them their due rights admissible as Scheduled Tribes. The Commission, therefore, expressed its agreement to the proposal for inclusion of 'MEDARA' community as a synonym of 'MEDA' community in the ST list of Karnataka.

## **Agenda Item II**

### **2.2. Draft policy for Shompens, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (Primitive Tribal Group) of A&N Islands**

2.2.1. The Commission noted that there were 5 Primitive Tribal Groups (now called Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) in A&N Islands, namely; (i) Great Andamanese (ii) Jarawas (iii) Onges (iv) Sentinelese and (v) Shompens and that the population of these communities had been diminishing at a fast pace over the

years. As per 2001 Census, the population of these communities was 44, 240, 96, 39 and 398 respectively.

2.2.2. The Commission noted that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs had set up an Expert Committee in May, 2007 under the Chairmanship of Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs to monitor and review the implementation of the Jarawa Policy, 2004, and to prepare separate policies for (a) the Shompens, (b) the Onges, (c) the Andamanese and (d) the Sentinelese to save them from total extinction or the danger of losing their identity or culture. The Commission further noted that on the basis of discussions held by the Expert Committee (which consists, inter-alia, of well known experts in the field of anthropology), the Ministry of Tribal Affairs had prepared the draft policy for Shompens.

2.2.3. The Commission also noted that the population of Shompens was stated to have declined from 398 in Census 2001 to 297 as per a recent survey conducted by the UT Administration of A&N Islands. Since Shompens were spread over a very long hill belt of Great Nicobar Island in the Nicobar district and shunned contact with outsiders, it was very difficult to count the heads of Shompens sparsely dispersed in the forest belt of the Nicobar island. The Commission noted that in case the above referred population estimates are accepted as reliable, there is every reason to feel concerned about the pace at which their population has been dwindling; and to deliberate on the reasons for such decline in their population to find out reasons whether this phenomenon is due to hunger, lack of safe drinking water, high level of infant mortality, effect of living in bad weather and climatic conditions, and lack of medi-care support for any illness or disease due to isolation from rest of the world, or the effect of any infection transmitted from the outside world by persons who might have come in contact with the Shompens.

2.2.4 The Commission noted that the thrust of the draft policy, based on the views of the expert members of the Committee, was directed at restricting banning outside intervention in the life and culture of Shompens. A view had also been expressed that if interaction with outsiders was not banned, the Shompens way of living would die out too. The Commission also noted that unlike the Jarawas who are bound to come into contact with outsiders because of their location in the central islands, the Shompens are likely to remain relatively isolated in Great

Nicobar, having very few conventional tourist attractions. It had further been stated that eco-tourism, as and when it picked up, would become a major area of concern for Shompens and if such a situation is arises, how much contact should be encouraged between the Shompens and the outside world. The Commission shared their concern, but at the same time felt that, while any obtrusive intervention which might interfere with their habitat and their way of living should not be allowed, it would not be in their best interest to withhold support and assistance which would help them survive extinction. The Commission also felt that the proposed policy was in digression from the objectives of the national policy in respect of tribals which aimed at accelerating the pace of development in the remote tribal areas with a view to bring them into the mainstream of life.

2.2.5 The Commission further observed that the history of human civilization was a chronicle of transition from barbarism to civilized way of life through the development of science & technology. It has, in fact, been a progressive march from darkness to light, from stagnation to progress and development, and from ignorance to knowledge and from obscurantism to enlightenment. The case of Shompens and other PTGs of the Islands needs to be seen in the light of this perception suitably informed by the human rights perspective. The Commission further felt that in the name of preservation of culture, we cannot afford to make human beings mere living specimens of our heritage. The Commission, therefore, felt that the proposed policy of almost complete isolation was justified only to the limited extent of protecting them from undesirable exploitation. It was, however, not defensible to forever deny the community i.e. Shompens and other PTGs, the fruits of various development processes which are available to the mainstream population. The Commission, therefore, suggested that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs may be informed as under:

- (i) The number of Shompens has been estimated to have been decreased from 398 in 2001 Census to 297 as per recent survey conducted by UT Administration. The reason for reduction in population has to be studied.
- (ii) The policy should aim at the development of the PTGs including Shompens PTG while protecting them from cross infection and exploitation by the outside world. They should be regularly provided with food items and health services

beside special schools for education of their children. The following measures may also be suitably incorporated in the draft policy :

- (a) The number of regulated contact points may be increased suitably.
- (b) Instead of keeping Shompens entirely dependent on forest for livelihood, they may also be introduced to settled agriculture (by supplying them improved seeds, agricultural kits, plough bullocks, bullock carts etc.), horticulture and animal husbandry (by supplying them crossbreed cows, she buffaloes, sheep/piggery units etc.) and providing suitable training therefor.
- (c) Efforts may also be made to provide education and play way/ sports activities to children of Shompens community in special residential schools for which the staff and officers of AAJVS may have to make special efforts to make sporting contacts with them and persuade them to send their children to the special schools where every need of the children should be fulfilled free of cost. This may also help in checking the trend of diminishing population. This would certainly need careful selection of the staff and giving them suitable training for enabling them to have peaceful and fruitful relations with the PTGs. As and when possible, local eligible and suitably trained youth/women should be appointed as Teacher in the special schools.
- (d) The Primary Health Centres (PHCs) are generally located far away from the inhabitations of sparse PTG population and, therefore, they are not in a position to avail of medical facilities in the time of emergency. In order to provide emergency and regular treatment facilities, one Medical Mobile Van equipped with primary treatment facilities and medicines along with minor surgical equipments should be arranged at each contact point for the PTGs.
- (e) The local administration may be advised to arrange free distribution of food and consumer items available under PDS to needy persons.

2.2.6. The Commission noted that Ministry of Tribal Affairs provides Special Central Assistance for development of PTGs (including Shompens) and felt that there was an imperative need to treat the five PTGs of A&N Islands on a special footing and to make special provisions under that scheme for development of these

PTGs having regard to their diminishing population. The Commission further felt that the operation of the proposed policy may be reviewed after every 5 years instead of 10 years as proposed.

2.2.7. The population of other PTGs of A&N Islands is also very small and there is urgent need to take suitable and effective measures to achieve the desirable growth of their population. Therefore, the proposed draft policy in respect of Shompens as amended after incorporating above suggestions may also be made applicable in respect to other PTGs of A&N Islands.

3. The meeting ended with vote of thanks to the Chairperson.

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**ANNEX**  
(w.r.t. Para 1 of the Summary Record)

**National Commission for Scheduled Tribes**

Meeting of the Commission held on 02.09.2009 at 1200 hrs. in the Conference Room of the Commission- List of participants.

**S.No.**    **Name and Designation**

1. Smt. Urmila Singh, Chairperson (In chair)
2. Shri Maurice Kujur, Vice-Chairperson
3. Shri Tsering Samphel, Member
4. Shri Oris Syiem Myriaw, Member
5. Shri R.S. Sirohi, Secretary
6. Shri Aditya Mishra, Joint Secretary
7. Shri R.C. Durga, Director
8. Shri Vinod Aggarwal, Director
9. Shri R.P.Vasishth, Deputy Secretary
10. Shri K.D. Bhansor, Deputy Director
11. Shri K.N. Singh, PS to Chairperson