

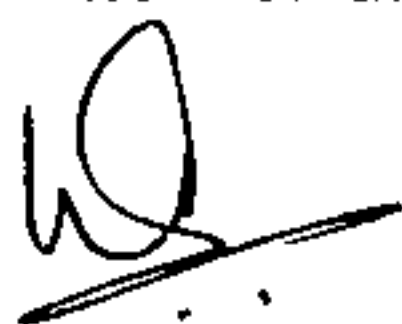
Record of Discussions and Visit to Tamil Nadu

Presentation of S.A.L.T. – Common Alphabet for all Languages; 03.02.2014

Venue: State Guest House, Chepauk, Chennai.

Secretary, AD&TW and Director, Tribal Welfare organized a presentation on Siddhartha Alphabet Language Text (SALT), a proposed Common Alphabet for all World Languages that had been developed and copyrighted by an inventor from Sivakasi, Virudhunagar district. The script was based on mouth formations for different sounds and was stated to be easily adapted to put down any language which was hitherto orally transmitted and held into a script form that could be read by others to reproduce the same sounds. Therefore, a tribal could also record another language in the script and read it the proper way that would be understood by the other language's speaker. This had apparently been proposed to the Government of Tamil Nadu by the copyright holder. The invited tribal representatives had several doubts on its utility and expressed as much. Some peculiar words spoken by them could not also be written down in the manner claimed although it was claimed to be possible. Secretary, NCST suggested that the purpose of providing a script was not merely to preserve a language form but to enable communication by way of the tribal being understood by persons interacting with him. Further, it was even more important for the tribal to overcome shyness and isolation by being able to communicate in the other persons' language for which he should have a bilingual dictionary that lists a decently sized vocabulary of commonly used words in the outsider language and the equivalent words in the tribal (oral) language with new words in the tribal language for words that have not previously received recognition. Both language words should then be written down in the new script so that effective communication by tribals to outsiders becomes possible and they can even enter into contracts intelligibly. Only such a bilingual dictionary in the six or so tribal languages without script in Tamil Nadu could be of benefit. A script alone was of no use and there may be many more that could be invited and bids compared for their technical and financial value.

A discussion was held on the need to exercise strict control on the issue of Scheduled Tribe certificates and the strict application of rules and systems in the State Level Caste Scrutiny Committee. The Secretary emphasized the need to ensure that bogus tribe groups were not classified along with unrelated Scheduled Tribes and to contest cases effectively in the courts. The Secretary reviewed briefly the action taken on the previous visits of the Commission and of the Secretary. He discussed the action taken on the case filed by a forest officer on which the High Court had stayed grant of rights to tribals both individually and to the community. He requested the Director to collect the petition and the various affidavits of respondents including orders passed by the Court in this matter for discussion during his return via Chennai.



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Secretary, NCST, thereafter proceeded to Coimbatore, Erode and the Nilgiris districts from the 5th – 7th February, 2014 (see separate minutes) and on the 6th February addressed the Regional Consultation Workshop on Tribal Development & Forest Rights Act 2006 organised by the Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association at Kotagiri, Nilgiris district.

On his return to Chennai on 7th February, 2014, Secretary discussed the case with Director, Tribal Welfare and perused the contents of the case documents. Some of the counter affidavits filed by Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Environment & Forests, DG Forests (GOI), and PCCF Forests of the Government of Tamil Nadu were not available and these were requested.

On the 10th of February, Secretary had a discussion with the Additional Chief Secretary, Environment & Forests, Government of Tamil Nadu on the matter. He brought to his attention the plight of the tribals and their need to be supported in their livelihood efforts by guaranteeing their legitimate access. It was mentioned to him that after the Advocates had visited four districts and filed their affidavit (see Chandran's affidavit), no action had been taken to set right the errors in procedure and understanding of the correct process of implementation and no action had also been taken to apprise the Court of the remedial steps taken or to dispose the petition to allow rights to be granted. Since the FRA established a stewardship role for the tribals in the forests, the fear that this would lead to unabated degradation would need to be countered by a watch that also did not hamper their rights or the process of their learning how to exercise their stewardship. In any case, the rights provided under the Act cannot be defeated. He thanked the ACS for his interest.



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