

Transcript of Report by Ambassador of Russia L. Moiseev at ANU Indigenous Dialogue

The Saami in Russia

The Saami are one of the indigenous people of the Russian Federation, Sweden, Norway and Finland. The Saami who live in Russia are the eastern branch and are often referred to as the Kola Saami. They call themselves - *saam* or *same*. The old name is *lopar*. The linguists believe that the word "lopar" comes from the Finnish words *lape* or *lapea* ("side", "place"). In Russian sources the words *lop* and *lopari* are first mentioned in the end of the 14th century and are most likely taken from the Scandinavians. The Swedish and Norwegian Saami call themselves *samer*, and the Finnish - *saamit*.

The Saami are not homogenous in anthropological context and belong to the Laponoid type of the Europeoid race. They speak in the Saami language that belongs to the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language. The Saami language is closely related to the Finno-Baltic languages. The language of the Kola Saami has four dialects (the *lokang*, the *Kildin*, the *Notozer*, and the *Baben*) and a number of local pronunciations. The written language is based on Russian letters.

The Saami descend from the most ancient population of northern Europe. Two main components formed the Saami ethnos: the indigenous descendants of the Sperrings culture (the Finno-Ugric language substance, some cultural and anthropological features) and migrants from areas between the Volga and the Oka rivers. In result, by the 1st millennium AC the northern Europe saw a rather homogenous ethnos who were the ancestors of the Saami.

Numbers and geographical distribution. The eastern group of the Saami lives on the Kola peninsula in Murmansk oblast. A small group of eastern Saami (*skolt-saami*) lives in Heiden (north-eastern Norway) and in *Sevettiyarve* (north-eastern Finland). Their ancestors came here from the Pechenga River when this areas became Russian after the World War II.

In the past the Saami occupied rather large territories to the south and the east from where they live now. However they were gradually forced out to the north by other peoples and partially assimilated.

Russian sources of the beginning of the XVII century distinguished 4 tribal groups among the Kola Saami: the *Terp Lop* (region of the *Ponoya* and *lokang* rivers), *leshaya* (forest) *lop* - the region of the *Kand* and the *Kovdozero* rivers, the *Upper Lop* (the region of *Notozero*) and the *Konchan Lop* (*Kildin*, *Motka*, and the *Pechenga*). These groups differed considerably in languages and in households. There were about 15 Saami settlements on the Kola peninsula, and 17 by beginning of the XX century. Each had own hunting and fishing areas, that the Saami from other settlements did not penetrate.

The total number of the Saami is by various estimations about 50-60 thousand persons. There are 30 thousand Saami in Norway, 15 thousand in Sweden, and about 5 thousand in Finland. The Soviet census of 1989 recorded 1,890 Saami in the USSR, including 1,835 in the Russian Federation. 88% of the Russian Saami (1,615 persons)

live in Murmansk oblast. They concentrate in 11 settlements that they share with the Russian, the Komi-Izhem, the Nenets and other peoples. The largest Saami communities (see the table) are in 6 villages. The policy of consolidation of the settlements had significant impacts on the Saami. Under Soviet administration, 22 Saami settlements were closed, the population was moved the settlement of Lovozero that is at present a cultural centre of the Kola Saami. Here half of the Saami live. Areas of traditional land use reduced as well. The new cities (Murmansk, Kirovsk, Apatity and others), industrial enterprises, and geological surveys in the mountains took hundreds of thousands of hectares of reindeer pastures and hunting grounds, especially on coast.

The Saami settlements

District	Rural administration	Settlement	Total Population	Indigenous Population
Lovosero	Krasnozhelskaya	Krasnozhelye	664	149
	Lovozero	Lovozero	3480	795
Kola	Pushnov	Loparskaya	329	85
	Tulom	Tuloma	2450	77
	Verkhnetulomski	Verkhnetulomski	2579	67
Kovdor	Ena	Ena	425	167

Way of life and life support. Traditional occupations of the Kola Saami are reindeer herding, hunting, fishing, and gathering. The Saami reindeer herding differs by small herds, free pasturing on summer pastures, use of huskies and hedges. In the past the reindeer herding was not the main occupation of the Saami. It became the basic component of their culture in the second half of XIX century, when in result colonisation of the Kola Peninsula livestock of fish and hoofed animals reduced. The Saami reindeer herding is semi-nomadic, with stationary seasonal camps in summer (by tundra lakes and rivers or on the sea coast), and in winter pastures (in the forest tundra).

The Saami hunted wild deer, fur animals (fox, polar fox, and marten) and sea mammals (mainly seals). By the end of the XIX century, the terrestrial hunting lost its importance and at present is an auxiliary activity. Production of sea mammals on the coast of the Barents Sea reduced significantly, since few Saami live here.

The main object of fishing is salmon. Fishing salmon in the downstreams of large rivers, and fishing it in the lakes is important at present as well. Many Saami families due to economic turmoil became active gatherers again (mushrooms, berries etc.). The development of tourism and contacts to the Scandinavian Saami promotes revival of traditional arts and crafts.

The basis of the modern Saami economy is reindeer herding. At the end of 80s almost half of the adult Saami were engaged with reindeer herding. There were about 70 thousand deers on the Kola Peninsula, concentrated in two state owned farms. At present, they are transformed into joint-stock companies. Private reindeer facilities are established with a few hundred deers each (the village of Loparskoe). Some Saami families have a small number of deers. The Saami obtained rental rights to 180 thousand hectares of reindeer pastures and hunting grounds. The Saami, as well as other indigenous peoples, have right of priority on contracts and permits to use bioresources.

Reindeer herding experiences tough challenges. The transition to market economy, inadequate governmental aid make their work unprofitable and reduce the livestock of deers. By the middle of the 90s, collective reindeer herding facilities have essentially ceased activity. In the recent years the situation improved a bit due to foreign investments.

The Saami are not significantly involved in any other traditional trade. They work mostly in health care, education, culture, and in municipal utilities where most of them take low-paid positions. Less than 0.6% Saami are employed in any managerial capacity. At present possibilities for employment have significantly reduced. The well-being of urban Saami is not better than of the rural, many have to live off humanitarian aid.

Destruction of reindeer herding resulted in a sharp decrease of employment, of level and quality of life. In 1992-1997, the rate of unemployment among the indigenous peoples of the North in Murmansk oblast grew 2,9 times. In Lovozero district where most Saami live 60% of the indigenous have no full-time jobs. The main source of subsistence is fishing and gathering.

Ethno-social situation. The Saami made less than 0,1% of the total population of Murmansk oblast in 1989. At present, due to outflow of immigrants the share of the Saami increased up to 0.2%. Most Kola Saami are rural inhabitants (66,3%). Their share in the rural population of the oblast is more than 1%. Other local reindeer herders are the Nenets (about 200 persons) and the Komi-Inzhen (2,167 persons) who came to the peninsula at the end of the 19th century. The competition for pastures effected inter-ethnic relations. Culturally and socially, the Komi-Inzhen became the dominant group and influenced the reindeer herding and the material culture of the Saami. During collectivisation of reindeer herding in the 30s the social and the cultural distinctions between the Komi and the Saami were largely flattened, however even today social status of the Komi is quite higher of the Saami. The ethno-political situation in Murmansk oblast is relaxed, there are no inter-ethnic tension and conflicts, as these ethnic groups are not numerous and are not capable to compete with the prevailling Russian population.

Demographic situation at the Saami in the recent years was typical for all northern peoples - rate of birth falls, rate of mortality grows, natality reduces. However, in comparison to other indigenous peoples of the North the demographics of the Saami are more favourable. In any case, official demographic reports of the last years did not place the Saami in the risk zone. The number of the rural Saami in the Russian Federation was higher in 1999 than in 1989 (1,140 persons). However, the growing numbers cannot be explained with natality or migration from urban areas. Unfortunately, no relevant data is available..

Excessive alcohol consumption, and related morbidity and mortality present a serious problem for the future of the Saami in Russia. The number of alcoholics and psychopaths related to alcohol in Murmansk oblast is 78 and 209 per 10,000. This is almost twice more than the Russian average. Excessive alcohol consumption promotes spread of venereal diseases. From 1993 to 1999, the number of Saami and other peoples of the North in Murmansk who suffer these diseases grew from 149 to 274 persons.

The state of men outside families causes great concern. For example, in the largest Saami village of Lovozero 70% of Saami men are under 40 years and single. Saami women who have higher educational and professional status do not wish to connect their lives with tundra where most Saami men work. This is the reason behind growth of mixed marriages that advances the progradation of the Saami ethnos.

Young Saami leave villages due to their social discomfort - shabby dwellings, fuel shortages, underdeveloped industrial and social infrastructure.

Ethno-cultural situation. In contrast to the state of economy, the spiritual life of the Saami experienced a true Renaissance. The basis of spiritual life of any nation is the language. The Saami language has certainly incurred significant losses in the previous years. In 1989 only 42% Saami spoke it. Today large efforts are made to revive the language by Saami NGOs. TV and radio offer broadcasts in the Saami language. The language is taught in the first classes of schools in Murmansk oblast, and in pedagogical educational institutions of Murmansk and Skt. Petersburg. Some Saami dictionaries and about 30 textbooks have been published. A more effective solution to the language problem is prevented by disagreements among experts on phonologic system in the language of the Kola Saami, and graphic images for some sounds. At present two Saami alphabets are used.

Applied art develops, many traditional crafts have been revived, dancing and music groups were created. An ethno-cultural centre opened in Lovozero, a museum of Saami culture, one of best not only in the country, but worldwide, functions. Large aid to revival of culture is rendered by the Saami Council, and the Norwegian city of Karashok that has a twinning agreement with the village of Lovozero.

Administration and self-governance. The Kola Saami do not have own administration. An issue of establishment of a Saami national district was raised, however this initiative did not find support with the administration of the oblast. The Saami live in various administrative districts, and due to small numbers cannot influence the decision-making process on relevant issues. There is a committee on indigenous affairs in the administration of Murmansk oblast that is engaged with problems of assistance to the Saami and other indigenous peoples economic and public issues.

Self-governance is a new phenomenon in the public life of the Saami. Here important functions are carried out by the Association of the Kola Saami, a Murmansk regional NGO under leadership of Ms. N.A. Afanasyeva. The Association was created in 1989 in order to assist development of the Saami, and preservation and development of their cultural and spiritual inheritance. The Association has local divisions. The Association works on the language problems and education, on social, economic, health and environmental issues. It supports close contacts with the Saami in the Scandinavian countries, and is a collective member to the International Saami Council that uniting the Saami of all northern countries.

A parallel NGO, the Organisation of the Saami in Murmansk oblast (OOSMO, under leadership of Mr A.A. Kobelev) is another member to the International Saami Council.

Laws and regulations. The legal status of the Saami is determined by the following regional legal acts:

1. The Charter of Murmansk oblast (adopted by the regional Duma in 1997) guarantees the Saami right on preservation and development of the native language, national culture, traditions and customs; establishes areas of traditional land use; and defines support to traditional economy as a basic economic policy of the oblast.

2. The law of Murmansk oblast "On the rate of land tax with regards to reindeer pastures" (1996) provides a tax incentive (0,55 roubles per 1 hectare) to the Saami.

The regional administration decided to provide the peoples of the North preferential permits to fishing and hunting hoofed animals, as well water fowl. The law "On legal status of the indigenous peoples of the North" is drafted.

State of environment. The areas of reindeer pastures are reduced with industrial expansion. Many are polluted with industrial waste from the enterprises of Murmansk, Monchegorsk, Kirovsk and other cities, as well as in result of military tests. Radioactive pollution of pastures takes place from the nuclear waste processing facility. Poaching and larceny of deers is a serious problem as well.

Perspectives for ethnic preservation of the Saami. Despite small number and deep transformation of the traditional culture in the XX century, the Saami maintain ethnic self-consciousness. The future of the Saami depends in many respects upon the state the Saami themselves. Two basic relevant policies may be indentified: governmental support to traditional economy and demographic policy. Democratisation of public life in Russia opens good opportunities for the Saami. Further, close public and cultural connections of the Saami in Russia to the Saami in northern countries is another positive factor.

(The report is compiled by RAIPON)