



DEVELOPMENT AND ETHNOCIDE

COLONIAL PRACTICES IN THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

SITA VENKATESWAR

For Cileme of course!
And for Appa on his seventy fifth.

DEVELOPMENT AND ETHNOCIDE:
COLONIAL PRACTICES IN
THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

by

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DEVELOPMENT AND ETHNOCIDE: COLONIAL PRACTICES IN THE ANDAMAN ISLANDS

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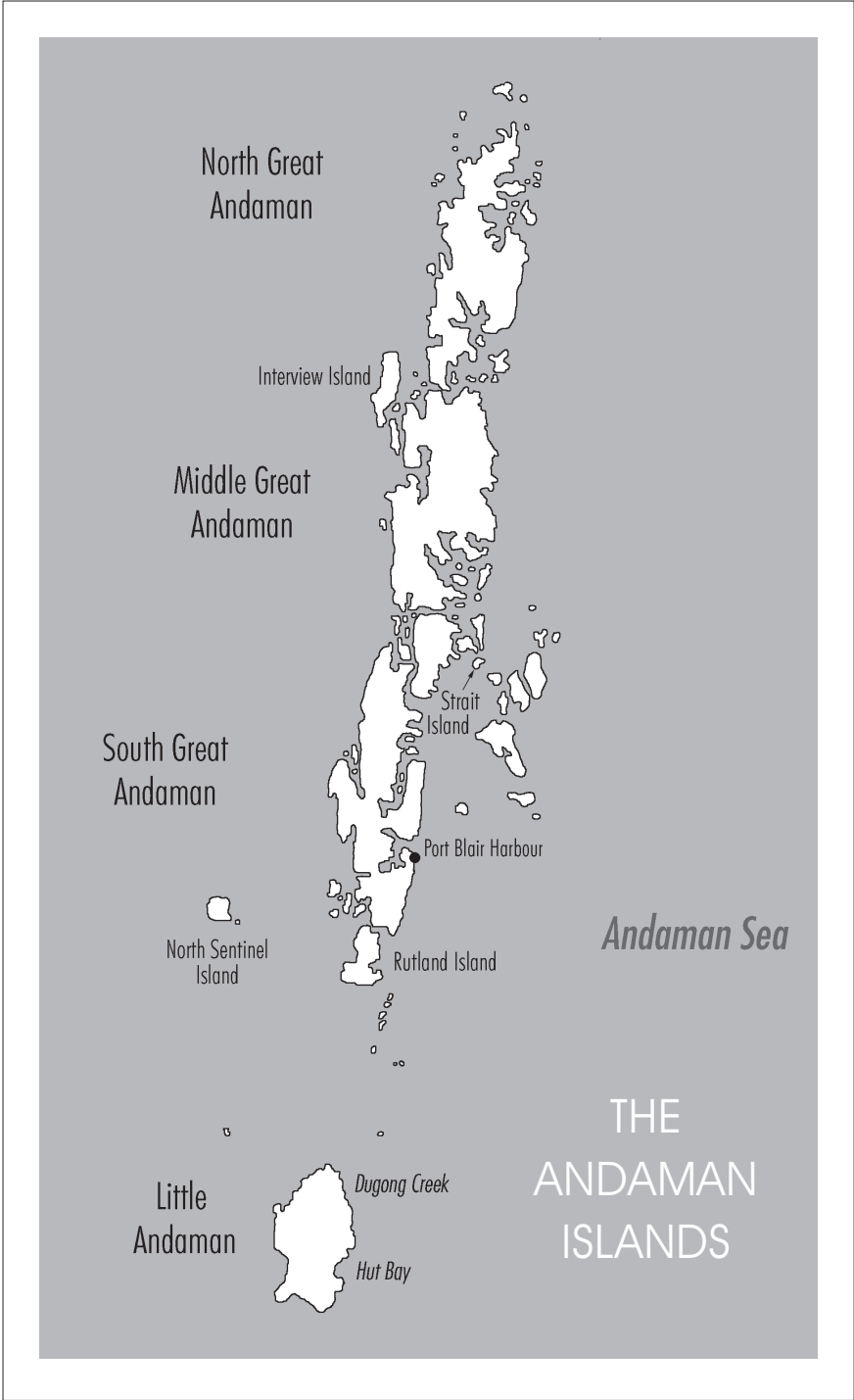
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PREFACE

This ethnography is a comparative analysis of three groups of Andaman Islanders with very diverse experiences of colonialism, based on my research and experience in the islands from 1989-1992 and, then again, in 2004. The ethnography examines the links between colonialism and 'development', and the many continuities between the policies of the earlier British colonial administration and the ongoing Indian colonization of the Andaman Islands. Within this framework, the situation of the Andamanese, Onge and Jarawa is analysed as integrally intertwined with and affected by shifting agendas of 'development'. The book goes on to analyse how 'development' and the welfare policies of the present Indian administration are a fundamentally gendered process with profound albeit uneven effects on local gendered relations of power. Ethnographic data is explored to explain how impositions of particular masculine identities on the Andamanese and Onge have reconfigured gender relations in these groups, manifested as mundane but protracted struggles over power between genders. Finally, the book considers the location of the anthropologist in both constructing and determining the research process.

The situation of the Andaman Islanders is one that has been experienced by indigenous peoples across the world, brought about by the twin processes of colonialism and capitalism, destroying countless lives in their wake. The accounts of dispossession, disease and death are familiar ones, having been retold over the centuries in line with global patterns of colonialism.

The structure of the narrative to follow juxtaposes ethnographic encounters of the everyday alongside a discussion and analysis of the historical and contemporary administrative interventions in the islanders' lives. I scan the documents compiled by the fascinating figure of Portman, the late nineteenth century administrator-cum-anthropologist, to read between the lines a continuum in the on-the-ground reality as well as to unearth ways in which the islanders may have resisted British interventions. In the light of their earlier experience with indigenous groups elsewhere, I assert that the British colonial administration in the Andaman Islands was complicit in unleashing a process of genocide in the islands.

I repeat the procedure for the contemporary period using the policy document of the tribal welfare agency, which provides a charter for the Indian government's experiment with "planned change". This is a mandate for a process of ethnocide that leads to a different kind of death, one that erases cultural groups and extinguishes lifeways, over-



*Looking into a bleak world. Onge couple at the window of their house in Dugong Creek.
Photo: Sita Venkateswar*

seen by the Portman-like figure of the current Director of Tribal Welfare, yet another administrator-turned-anthropologist. The discussion then leaps forward to include the compelling turn of events in the final years of the twentieth century and into the next millennium, recounting some of the significant developments that have ensued in the affairs of the islands and its peoples. The judicial interventions by the High Court of Kolkata and the Supreme Court of India, brought about by a coalition of non-governmental organizations and activists taking the Andaman administration to court, has highlighted the significance of forging new coalitions within civil society and the potential for effecting change that lies therein.

Finally, the book includes a section of appendices consisting of a selection of policy documents that have played a crucial role in the unfolding of recent events in the islands. □

PROLOGUE: A SENSE OF PLACE

The lush, verdant rainforests of the Andaman Islands are the abode of a small group of people, some of whom practise a way of life that is both threatened and has come under increasing scrutiny¹ over the latter part of the twentieth century as well as into the new millennium. The indigenous people of the Andaman Islands are a part of the dwindling, semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer, Negrito populations of South and Southeast Asia. They consist of four groups inhabiting different islands of the archipelago. These groups have been separated long enough to have developed substantial linguistic differentiation and are now referred to in the literature as four distinct tribes.²

The **Sentinelese**,³ named after North Sentinel Island, the island they inhabit, are the most isolated or the least known of the islanders, and continue to present a militant front to the outside world, usually thwarting any attempts to approach their island.

The **Jarawa**,⁴ who have been steadily pushed to the very margins of their former territory, at present occupy the western borders of Middle and South Andaman Islands. Over the past thirty years, the island administration has initiated "contact" with the Jarawa, and claims to have established some degree of rapport with the people. During the past five years, the Jarawa have been the focus of international attention, largely spearheaded by the efforts of Survival International (an international advocacy group for indigenous rights), as they battled major epidemics of measles, pneumonia and directives to assimilate them into the dominant Indian majority. Currently, their future hangs in the balance awaiting the outcome of a series of judicial interventions.

The **Andamanese**, who are referred to in the literature as the Great Andamanese⁵, are the survivors of a former population consisting of ten territorial and linguistic groups spread out across North, Middle and South Andaman Islands. They are reduced to approximately thirty-five⁶ people who can claim Andamanese descent. The Andamanese are at present settled on a small island called Strait Island, which has been given over to them, although it remains doubtful as to whether there are any legal documents to that effect. The ravages of the earliest and longest duration of "contact" have been borne by the Andamanese. Their resettlement on Strait Island is perceived by the Andaman government as some measure of reparation for the historical injustices that they have undergone.

The last group is the **Onge**, some coastal populations of whom were *pacified* by M.V Portman in 1886-87 during his tenure as a British ad-



A Jarawa girl on the beach during "contact" Photo: Andaman Administration

ministrator in the islands. Subsequently, coast-dwelling groups in the north of Little Andaman were in the habit of making voyages to Port Blair in their dugout canoes, to obtain tea, sugar⁷ and tobacco from the Andamanese. After 1952, with the establishment of a research substation of the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) in Port Blair, there were Indian research teams frequently visiting Little Andaman. But the Onge were unhindered in their hunting-gathering-fishing way of life until the mid-sixties. A program for the development of Little Andaman was announced and, over the years, the former inhabitants have been sequestered in two permanent settlements at two ends of the island: Dugong Creek, the larger settlement in the north, and South Bay at the southern tip of the island. Their population too has dwindled steadily, and they now number approximately a hundred⁸ people.

At present, the islands form a part of the Union Territory of India, which is administered by the central government from New Delhi and does not exist as a separate "state" with an autonomous bureaucratic structure. The four indigenous groups are under the charge of a government-controlled welfare institution known as the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS), Committee for the Enlightenment of Primitive Peoples. Both the Andamanese and the Onge currently lead a sedentary life and have rations allotted to them by the AAJVS. But the Onge, more than the Andamanese, continue to hunt, gather and fish. They have coconut plantations planted for them, as part of a program to interest them in cultivation. They are paid wages for keeping the settlement cleared of undergrowth, and for picking coconut. The proceeds from the sale of the coconuts go into a co-operative society that is operated on behalf of the Onge and the Andamanese. There is an ongoing effort to interest the islanders in working for wages, and some talk of dividing the settlement between individual Onge and Andamanese in the future.

The island ecology

The Andaman Islands, comprising of a cluster of 204 small and large islands in the Bay of Bengal, extends over 350 kms in length and 52 kms in breadth, covering a land mass of 8393 sq. kms (Chakraborty 1990). Port Blair is the administrative capital of the Andaman and Nicobar group of islands, situated at a distance of 1200 km to the east of Madras, and 1090 km south-east of Calcutta. The islands are situated much closer to the Burmese than the Indian coastline, about 520 kms due west of Mergui, and 600 km from the northern tip of Sumatra (Majumdar 1975). The islands are an extension of the Burmese Arakan mountain range, and are believed to have been connected to the mainland dur-

ing the Pleistocene⁹. They are now separated from the Burmese coast by shallow continental waters (Sanctuary Asia-Resources, n.d.).

The Andaman group of islands is divided into a) Great Andaman and b) Little Andaman. Great Andaman is made up of three main islands, North, Middle and South Andaman, and includes Richie's Archipelago, Interview Island, Rutland Island and several adjacent lesser islets. They consist of about four-fifths of the total area of the Andamans. North Sentinel Island lies 18 kms off the west coast of South Andaman (Basu 1990). Great Andaman is covered by a series of hills separated by narrow valleys, carpeted by dense tropical forests. The hills rise to a maximum of 732 metres (Majumdar 1975). The coasts of the Andamans are deeply indented, and have a large number of harbours and tidal creeks, often surrounded by mangrove swamps. Approximately 70 kms south of Great Andaman, and midway between Great Andaman and the Nicobar group of islands, lies Little Andaman. It is a single island, 44 km in length and varying in breadth between 16 to 25 km, with an area of 731 sq. km. Little Andaman is mostly flat, except for a small hilly section in the north. There are no rivers, but a few perennial streams.

The forests of the Andamans are mainly of three types, namely: evergreen, deciduous and mangrove. In both Great and Little Andaman, lumber industries have developed where there are easily accessible forests. The exploitation of timber began with the establishment of a penal settlement in the islands, and a Forest Department was started in 1883 (Majumdar 1975).

Thus forests form the major ecosystem in the islands and developmental activities directly and indirectly affect the forests (Nair 1989). Perhaps 70% of the forests of Andaman Islands are still forested but much of it is degraded, secondary growth. Over the past thirty years, soil, meteorological, land-use and forestry experts have stressed the need to keep the islands under forest cover, despite which large clear-felling and plantation projects are underway (Whitaker 1985). Accelerated immigration from mainland India and the growth of a number of forest-based industries have led to extensive settlements and the conversion of forest areas into revenue and agricultural lands (Nair 1989). There have been repeated warnings stressing the islands' incapacity to sustain agriculture. A direct outcome of the growth in population is the problem of encroachment and illegal settlements in areas that have been demarcated as "tribal reserves"¹⁰.

With the improvement in access to and around the islands, economic activities in the Andamans have been integrated with the economy of the mainland, by the cultivation of cash crops, particularly oil palm and rubber. In view of the limited local market, these plantations are primarily aimed at the mainland market (Saldanha 1989).

A series of reports compiled over the past five years document the devastation that has been wreaked on the islands' fragile eco-system and landscape. Over the years, the destructive consequences of sand mining for construction is readily visible in the disappearance of several beaches, with its effects on wildlife in that region, as well as a steadily increasing coastal erosion that even newly installed sea walls are not sufficient to control (Ali and Andrews n.d.). As anticipated, agricultural yields have fallen, the efforts towards regeneration of degraded forests have not proved successful, while accumulating evidence indicates the sharp decrease in mangrove cover, together with the destruction of coral reefs as a consequence of the run-off from land-based activities such as logging, agriculture and unchecked use of pesticides (Sekhsaria 2002).

Tourism has been identified as a potential source of revenue but it is also a cause for concern since the islands cannot sustain it at its current rapidly growing rate unless there is a shift in strategy to a high value, low intensity, environmentally friendly eco-tourism.

Surprisingly, the abundant marine resources remain under-exploited, even though a Department of Fisheries was set up in 1955. The actual utilization of this resource remains far below potential due to the lack of necessary infrastructure required to tap the marine wealth. Since the islands did not have a "non-tribal" population of local fishermen, a "fishermen settlement scheme" was initiated and families of fishermen from the states of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh in India were transported and settled in the Andamans (Saldanha 1989), adding to the jostling mix of ethnicities residing in the islands since the era of the British empire.

This ranges from the numerous and varied descendants of the ex-convicts of the former penal colony; to the descendants of the 200-250 Karen Burmese, primarily nomadic foragers brought in 1925 by the British government with the help of Christian missionaries. They were brought to work in the Forest department and then subsequently provided with land for their own settlements (Sarkar and Pandit 1994); to the mix of refugees from former East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and the Tamils fleeing the civil war in Sri Lanka; to the numerous tribal groups from the state of Bihar fulfilling the labour needs of both the British and Indian colonial regimes. The continuous inflow of a diverse mix of populations from mainland India has strained the islands' capacities beyond sustainable limits. The current ratio of the remaining groups of Andaman Islanders to the surrounding Indian population stands at approximately 500:500,000, a stark testimony to the scale at which the dominant majority has outnumbered them.

According to Nair (1989), and endorsed by many others over the years (Whitaker (1984, 1985), Sekhsaria (2001,2002, 2003), Ali and An-



Andamanese boy at Strait Island. Photo: Sita Venkateswar



Botale's habitual quizzical expression. An Onge at home at Dugong Creek. Photo: Sita Venkateswar

draws n.d.), the Andaman situation is a classic example of an unplanned natural resource exploitation, disregarding basic ecological principles. It is primarily an economy determined by the prerogatives of mainland development. In the process, the indigenous islanders, have succumbed to a “proletarian dependence” on the island administration, “whose commercial transactions and territorial control now determin[e] their daily routine and mode of existence” (Guha and Gadgil 1989:149).

The passage to the field site

There are several alternative routes to arrive at Dugong Creek, the place where the Onge live. My first trip to the Andaman Islands was in 1989 during the national elections in India. In the course of this exploratory voyage to the islands, I became acquainted with the most frequented procedure for travelling to Dugong Creek, where the majority of the Onge lived. I availed myself of the transportation arranged for the election officers who were travelling to the reserved “tribal areas” to ensure that the “tribals” exercised their electoral rights along with the other citizens of India. From Port Blair, the administrative capital of the Andaman Islands, the largest and more comfortable of the ships ferrying passengers between islands, the *Sentinel*, was commissioned for election duty to the southern islands. The *Sentinel* was scheduled to travel from Port Blair to Great Nicobar, the final destination, discharging the appointed election officers at various islands along the way. It would then return from Great Nicobar, collecting the election officers carrying the ballots back to Port Blair. The round trip from Port Blair to Great Nicobar was a week of sea travel.

I procured a ticket for travel to Little Andaman with the assistance of some anthropologists from the Anthropological Survey of India at Port Blair. Before boarding the *Sentinel*, the anthropologists who accompanied me to the docks introduced me to the election officers whose destination was Dugong Creek. The officers were reminded that I was to be included in all the arrangements for travel to Dugong Creek. The first halt at Hut Bay on Little Andaman was an eight-hour journey. It was also my first on board a ship. While the election officers retired to their cabins to doze away the hours, I amused myself identifying the smaller islands en route and following the schools of dolphin that frolicked alongside the ship, until the long, curved outline of Little Andaman filled the horizon.

At Hut Bay, where a breakwater was built to provide a safe harbour for ships, the entire administrative machinery had been harnessed to take charge of the electoral process. A fleet of jeeps and pick-up trucks

stood waiting at the jetty. I squeezed into one of the jeeps that would take me to the center of town where the guest houses and marketplace were located. I carried with me several letters of introduction given to me by the Deputy-Director of the Anthropological Survey of India. I was instructed to make my way to the Forest Guest House, and to speak to the Agricultural Officer or the Forest Officer. Obedient to the letter of my instructions, I soon found myself in a very pleasant guest-house set on a small hill, away from the crowded market. After some conferring between the Forest Officer and the *chowkidar* or watchman, I was allotted a room. But I was warned that I would likely have to share the room with any other single females in need of shelter. As it turned out, I had the room to myself for the two days that I was told would be spent at Hut Bay, while the election officers undertook the necessary arrangements for travel to Dugong Creek.

I spent the next two days exploring Hut Bay, and keeping an anxious eye on the movements of the officers on election duty. They were accommodated in a different guesthouse some distance away from where I was housed. Their offhand tone of voice in all conversations with me suggested that I was somewhat a nuisance. The officials conveyed the fact that they had more pressing matters to concern themselves with than remembering some inconsequential female who wished to stay in Dugong Creek for a month. The night before the scheduled departure for Dugong Creek, I received word that I was to be ready by 6 am the following morning.

A jeep was sent for me at the guest house, picking up everybody else along the way to transport us to 22 kms point, where the roadway ended. We disembarked and awaited the group of daily wage laborers who were hired to accompany the officers travelling to Dugong Creek, carrying the provisions and the luggage.

A short stretch on a well-trodden muddy path through the forest led to a creek. A number of country boats, some fitted with outboard motors, were secured to the gnarled roots of rotting tree trunks. The conversation around me, which only partly registered at the time, concerned the timetable of tides and the appropriate time to take the boats down the creek. The significance of that discussion became clearer in later years. I, too, learned to chart the tides in order to wade through streams, and realized the necessity of timing one's journeys according to the movement of tides, to ensure that there was enough sand to walk on along the sea-shore.

The two boats sat low in the water as they were loaded with passengers and provisions. The motor sputtered fitfully as we proceeded down the deep tidewater creek lined with mangrove forests on both shores. Two of the boatmen set to baling the water seeping in from the bottom of boat but, despite their efforts, there was a growing pool of

water at our feet. The forty-minute journey down the creek was accomplished without any mishap, allaying my fears of capsizing and being consumed by crocodiles and, therefore, never reaching Dugong Creek. We disembarked at the mouth of the creek before it merged with the sea, marked by swelling breakers crashing ahead of us. Here an Onge awaited us.

Extract from field notes:

November 22nd, 1989

The first Onge I met was Totanange, who was waiting for us by the side of the creek. He was given the two largest and heaviest sacks containing vegetables for the residents of Dugong Creek. Neatly and efficiently, he stripped a branch from a nearby shrub, peeled off the skin, which formed a strong and sturdy rope, tied the two sacks together, leaving a loop to go around the forehead, and hefted the sacks on his back. With this weight he walked the 11 kms to Dugong Creek.

Totanange set a steady pace, seemingly unmindful of the humid heat. As the sun moved higher in the sky and the sea receded, exposing more sand to the sun, I became steadily more dehydrated. The frequent swigs I took from my water bottle very quickly depleted my water supply. Moving closer to the shade of the dense forest that skirted the sand meant sinking into deep, dry sand rendering walking more difficult. The damp, packed sand along the sea line was easier to walk on but directly in the path of the sun. A weary group of stragglers finally reached the shores of another creek, *Lebanare*, Dugong Creek, across which lay our destination.

We sat on the sand and waited while Totanange hailed people on the opposite shore. A couple of dug-out canoes made towards us and beached close to where we sat waiting. In turn, four at a time, we climbed aboard the canoes rowed by more Onge, who took us to the opposite shore to the settlement of Dugong Creek. And thus I reached my first field site the very first time that I came to the Andaman Islands, and travelled that same route alone on several subsequent occasions between 1991-92.

On those other occasions, I knew about the public transportation that was available on Little Andaman to take me from the jetty to the town. There were public buses that awaited every arriving ship at Hut Bay, as there were buses between Hut Bay and all the other villages on Little Andaman up to 22 kms. I discovered the tea shops where I would find the owners of the boats that travelled down the creek, known locally as *Bada Nala*. I also learned whose boats were seaworthy enough to brave the churning cauldron of dangerous waves at the mouth of

the creek, which had capsized many a boat. Or which boatman's skills could be trusted to gauge the waves and temper the power of his out-board motor to ride them. But no matter how sturdy the boat, or how adept the boatman, every boat with its passengers had, on occasion, overturned. Hence, one of the direct routes to and from Dugong Creek, which could render the journey much less arduous, had its moments of danger when entering or leaving the creek that opened into the sea. I travelled that route on some occasions, but never when I was carrying supplies or my field notes, tapes and film, finding it easier to risk my life if necessary, but never daring to hazard essential resources. To retrace that itinerary, rather than disembarking at the mouth of the creek and walking the rest of the way to Dugong Creek, the boat would continue onwards into the sea.

Some preferred to sit with their backs to the waves. I always chose to face them during the tense moments when the boat first bounced along into the breakers, then becoming sharply vertical as huge wave after wave buffeted the low lying craft, the boatman shouting instructions to his helpers to adjust the baling or the power of the motor. Everyone else would grip the sides of the boat and remain silent, eyes glued ahead. As we reached deep water, the fury of the sea would abate, and the voyage become somewhat smoother. But, no matter what the season, the Andaman Sea is never calm enough to provide an eventless ride, the motion of the sea apparent even in relatively large vessels like the *Sentinel*. The journey does have its enjoyable moments as the boat skims the crests of the waves, fine sea-spray on your face--and the convenience of avoiding the long walk in the dense heat of the scorching sand.

There are other more direct routes from Port Blair, depending on one's importance in the hierarchy of government office. In December 1991, while I was living with the Andamanese at Strait Island, I was invited by the AAJVS to participate in a workshop on Tribal Development in the Andaman Islands. Most of the other participants were anthropologists, scientists and policy-makers from mainland India. The workshop was to be held aboard ship, the *Tarmugli*, the special vessel of the Lieutenant-Governor, while travelling to the "tribal areas," namely, Strait Island, Dugong Creek and the Jarawa areas.

This was to be my most comfortable journey to the settlement at Dugong Creek. From Port Blair, rather than sail towards Hut Bay, the *Tarmugli* headed further north directly towards Dugong Creek. But since it was too large a vessel to enter the shallow creek there, it anchored mid-sea, while the passengers disembarked into a smaller boat that was lowered from the ship, which then traversed the creek. Most dignitaries visiting Dugong Creek travelled this route, enduring the un-

nerving descent down a ladder into a rocking boat. It added the spice of adventure that was packaged into a visit to the “tribal areas”.

When I returned to Dugong Creek at the end of January 1992, I accompanied a group of linguists from the Central Institute of Linguistics in Mysore on mainland India, commissioned to transcribe the Onge language into Devanagiri script. Their scheduled stay at Dugong Creek provided me with yet another vehicle to reach the field site. This time, the AAJVS boat, the *Milale*, a much smaller vessel, more prone to absorbing and transmitting the motions of the sea was requisitioned for these lesser-ranking government officials. After a rough and slow passage, the highest speed of the *Milale* never rising above three knots, a shaky and somewhat sea-sick group staggered off at the jetty at Dugong Creek. As a much smaller vessel, the *Milale* could sail right into the creek at high tide, and deposit its passengers at their door.

The final path to Dugong Creek, the one most often used by the Onge going into town, was through the forest to 22 kms (literally, the point at which the paved road started or ended, depending on the direction of travel). It was not a route that I ever travelled. My ventures into the forest with the Onge had taught me immense respect for their sure-footed navigation through the vines, roots and furrows where boars had rooted for tubers, setting traps for the unwary. Even with my eyes glued to the ground, watching every step forward, I would trip and stumble constantly as I tried to keep up with the unflagging pace set by the Onge who accompanied me. Moreover, every trip that I made into the forest during the dry season was followed by at least five days spent shedding my person, clothes and belongings of ticks. For the Onge couple, removing ticks from each other’s bodies was an element of their daily intimacy. But as I single-handedly battled the ticks burrowed in the long hair I had at the time, every determined excursion into the forest meant days of domestic chaos thereafter. And during the monsoons, even the Onge demurred from taking me through the muddy slush of the forest that they so nimbly manoeuvred barefoot, leeches and all.

Yet another factor deterred me from ever taking this route to and from town. The tributaries of the same deep tidewater creek, *Bada Nala*, which I had traversed by boat on my way to Dugong Creek, required crossing on foot as they wound their way through the forest. The Onge had placed logs across the deepest parts. But the thought of balancing my way along a slippery log, across a creek known to be home to crocodiles, was enough to render this particular line of travel the least attractive to me.

Setting up residence

My arrival at Dugong Creek with the linguists provided a number of advantages that was missing during my earlier trip in 1989. For one, in view of their projected extended residence at the settlement, the AAJVS had made arrangements to accommodate the linguists at Dugong Creek. One of the buildings was converted into the official "guest-house". In 1989, it had housed the wireless operator and his family but, since then, there were other quarters allocated for each appointed wireless operator. During my earlier month-long stay in 1989, I stayed with the medical officer and his family. Their hospitality had become strained by the time I left. I was determined that, on resuming fieldwork there, I would organize some means of maintaining separate and independent domestic arrangements. Hence the advent of a "guest-house" at Dugong Creek, with a kitchen attached to it, was a veritable gift from my point of view. The AAJVS had even mustered frames for beds, some mattresses, and equipped the kitchen with basic utensils and other implements. I was delighted at the changes since my last visit.

After some conferring between the three linguists and myself, we decided that they would share one room, and I would take the other. The long veranda in front, facing towards the sea, was converted into a working area with some tables and chairs. We set up a daily mid-morning routine of preparing the meals for each day, which left each of us free to organize the rest of the daylight hours according to our own interests. The three linguists considered me too diminutive and slight to be safe standing on the precarious stool that I used to reach the large utensils placed on the leaping flames of the oven. Instead, I was assigned to chopping or peeling the quantities of vegetables for the daily meals,¹¹ or cleaning the rice, while they took over the actual cooking of the meals. Every other week, someone from Dugong Creek was sent into town to replenish groceries and the expenses shared equally between us.

But there was one nagging problem that was never quite resolved between us, and which remained an area of tension for all the inhabitants at Dugong Creek (except the Onge, although they too were a part of it). This was the issue of the daily supply of water. There was no piped water at Dugong Creek. Any water for daily use had to be carried from one of the four functioning wells, each one located some distance from the cluster of buildings occupied by the welfare staff and the Onge. Replenishing the water from the well was an arduous chore since there were no conveniently sized buckets available that could be easily carried to and fro. The usual mode was to fill two smaller diesel drums attached by a rope to a bamboo rod, which was then bal-

anced on the shoulder and carried to each dwelling. Despite all my efforts, this was a task that was impossible for me to execute. I even had trouble hauling the full bucket out from the low water-line of the long, deep well, let alone carrying the drums the entire distance between the guest-house and the well.

For all the other welfare staff, an Onge was assigned to come in every day and fill to the brim the large, empty diesel drums found in every quarter. These were the "helpers," whom I discuss in greater detail in a later chapter. In view of the fact that the appointed social worker was responsible for the well-being of all the inhabitants at Dugong Creek, it devolved to him to arrange this daily chore. It was a dependence that the social worker prized, obstructing any efforts to hire a daily wage-labourer for the job. As and when he remembered, he would whimsically assign some Onge to the "guest-house" to fill the drum.

I objected strongly to this arrangement on the grounds that it was not possible to establish a working relationship with the Onge and use them as servants at the same time, regardless of whether they were paid or not. I suggested that we bathe¹² at the well, and, working together in pairs, fill the drum. We contrived something of a routine as we dealt with the chronic shortage of water, and did daily battle with the social worker about employing someone for the task. And thus the linguists and I fell into a pattern of living at Dugong Creek for the next two months, devising a working interaction which was to our mutual benefit. When they left, much to the social worker's consternation, I finally obtained permission from the AAJVS to employ one of the wage-labourers contracted for construction work at the settlement to fill the drum at the guest-house with water every alternate day. For the rest of my stay at Dugong Creek, the water situation eased considerably, although there were periods of crisis when the men I employed took time off to go to town, or visit their families.

Linguistic initiations at Dugong Creek

In the midst of these domestic improvisations, I also commenced my research with the Onge. After the first week spent refamiliarizing myself with faces and names, and renewing the tentative links established during my earlier trip, I settled into a routine that was focused on learning the language. Equipped with my notebook and camera, I would go into the settlement as soon as I awoke in the morning, which became progressively earlier as the heat steadily escalated. I learned to treasure the all too brief, cool respite of daybreak, with the dew still wet on the grass, to plan my activities for the day.

Leading away from the stretch of quarters housing the welfare personnel at Dugong Creek, constructed and segregated according to the hierarchy of office, the winding dirt path reached the Onge "colony". Here the track straightened out, stripped bare of any tree or grass, and was flanked by the two rows of houses, thirteen on each side, accommodating all the Onge residents of Dugong Creek. These asbestos and corrugated sheet roofed, wooden planked, elevated dwellings were constructed on four posts/stilts. They consisted of a single room attached to a veranda reached by a set of stairs. Most of the Onge families had covered the three open sides of the veranda with thatched *pandanus*,¹³ thereby converting the space into an additional room. Unlike the predilection for cross-ventilation and open verandas that most Indians share, the Onge preferred sheltered, enclosed spaces. Some families had extended their living area by building an additional thatched space in front of their houses. Breaking the monotony of the line of dark brown houses were two low, upside down, bowl shaped, circular thatched constructions. Some families resided in these during the monsoons, or alternated periodically to get respite from invasions of ticks and fleas.

The interiors of all the Onge dwellings were warm and smoky from the fire that was lit at all times. Platforms made of cane placed at varying heights from the floor spatially organized the room. These served to contain all their objects of everyday use. There was always one placed at a height above the fire for meat to smoke. Strung across a corner of the room were rows of jawbones, trophies of earlier hunts, sometimes painted with red ochre, usually of wild boar, turtle or dugong. Cooking, eating, living and sleeping occurred within the same space in most homes, each one sheltering several human and canine inhabitants. There were some exceptions to this arrangement, notably in the houses of a few of the "helpers," who separated the sleeping area from the cooking and living section. These houses were also less prone to the smoke-filled atmosphere of the others, and were organized according to more conventional norms of order and tidiness.

Entering the Onge part of the settlement meant braving the pack of barking, snarling dogs that sprang into instant activity at the sight of a non-Onge, ready to snap at the ankles at the merest indication of hesitation. Over time, I learned to say "Tchoo" with sufficient authority and venom to disperse the dogs, and to keep handy pieces of stone to fling at them. After negotiating these formalities, which unfailingly shattered the early morning calm, and warned the Onge of the presence of an intruder, I slowly walked down the path noting who was awake, exchanging greetings as I passed, or lingering if anyone seemed inclined to chat. In the ensuing first couple of weeks after my arrival, I was reluctant to encroach upon their privacy so early in the morning.

But as the days went by, I felt they had become more accustomed to my presence. I walked into the houses of those awake, perched myself on a plank of wood or the railing of the veranda with my notebook and pen poised to phonetically record everything that was voiced around me. During my first visit in 1989, I had compiled lists of vocabulary that I cross-checked at this time, attempting tentative phrases constructed after consultation with the rudimentary book on Onge language published a few years earlier. These enlarged steadily as the Onge responded or prompted me with further words that I recorded.

As families gathered around large, simmering cauldrons of black, sweet tea, (regularly diluted with water through the whole day), children waking up and nursing, dogs scratching and being kicked out of the way, adults desultorily eating leftovers from the night before, I sat in a corner quietly, alert to new sounds and phrases. Habituated to the steady stream of anthropologists coming and going over the years, the Onge never questioned my presence there, although I felt compelled to explain. But, as I discovered, I was already assigned a category. I was a *tomolukwa*, one who writes, and a *tineabegi*, a female. Hence, *gulukwenene*, I was reminded frequently, write it down, if I failed to record in my notebook a meaning or a term that was explained to me. *Minyacekamema*, I would respond, I won't forget, *mi koralei tomolukwenene*, I will write it all down when I go back to the "guest-house".

And thus commenced a period of learning and practice of the Onge language, a process to which the presence of the linguists contributed immensely. They rarely ventured into the Onge settlement except in the course of an evening walk to stretch their limbs. But they organized a schedule of regular sessions with individual Onge at the guest-house, for which the Onge were paid hourly wages.¹⁴ Their method was to elicit from the Onge a large vocabulary, then deduce syntax and eventually the grammar by presenting an array of pictures of objects, activities and sequential processes. The Onge were expected to repeat their responses to these materials several times into a tape-recorder. This was intended to capture the varying pronunciation by and between individuals. Such a systematic procedure was in marked contrast to my own more intuitive method of language acquisition, which followed the needs of the moment and the imperatives of communication.

Every evening for a couple of hours before lights out,¹⁵ liberally anointed with mosquito repellents, with a large fire lit nearby to ward away the other prolific insect life, the linguists and I sat together on the veranda. We pooled the material collected during the day and pored over it. By the end of a month's stay at Dugong Creek, to everyone's surprise – my own, the linguists, the welfare staff and the Onge – I had made rapid progress in my speech and comprehension of the language. I was constructing sentences independent of the language manual, dis-

tinguishing between tenses and could explain the semantic context for the vocabulary accumulated by the linguists. For instance, I could identify how verbs changed depending on the type and location of activity, whether it occurred in the forest or the sea-shore, and when it denoted a return from or an advance towards the particular site.

The linguists quickly took advantage of my progress, and hired me as a “consultant” to obtain culturally significant information and vocabulary for the “primer,”¹⁶ the final goal of their project. The next one and a half months sped by during this period of intensive collaboration as the primer took shape. The Onge were mildly interested spectators to our immersion in their language, attending to and correcting constructions and pronunciations, volunteering alternatives and explaining semantic contexts. But the one product of our efforts that was the greatest success with the Onge were the nursery rhymes. These were short rhymes consisting of the primary vocabulary for each chapter of the primer, which I set to the lilting melodies of folk tunes of India. They were appropriated and sung by adults and children alike, just as I hummed the refrains¹⁷ with which the Onge punctuated all their activities.

In the midst of these transactions, all the linguists in turn succumbed to an attack of malaria, which by some strange quirk¹⁸ passed me by. As a result of their illness, they delayed their departure by another two weeks, leaving in the middle of April rather than the end of March as originally planned. Weakened by the intensity of their illness, they all looked forward to their return to more comfortable environs back on mainland India. They entrusted me with a draft of the primer to work with, and the linguists bade me farewell. In the days following their departure, I realized the extent to which their presence and intellectual companionship had buffered me from the trials that accompany the inception of fieldwork in an unfamiliar place. I was finally on my own at Dugong Creek, to make what I could of my time with the Onge. □

Notes

- 1 In anthropology, hunter-gatherers have been the focus of interest since the landmark *Man the Hunter* (1968) conference. The ongoing interest in hunter-gatherers is affirmed by the four-yearly international conferences that have occurred since 1968. As representatives of the “original affluent society” (Sahlins 1973), with long hours of daily leisure, whose values of sharing (Lee 1968, 1994) stand in stark contrast to much that is perceived as lost to modern, Western, capitalist society, they continue to evoke nostalgia. A revisionist trend in hunter-gatherer studies (Schrire 1984, Headland and Reid 1989) has sought to dispel the ahistorical view of hunter-gatherers as a timeless people, living in complete

isolation until “discovered” by the colonial powers, and testimony to a way of life that has survived unchanged for millennia.

- 2 In India, “tribe” is a legal referent rather than a social category, to designate those groups who are believed to be indigenous or autochthonous to a region. It also serves to distinguish such people socially and economically from the “caste” society characteristic of settled agriculture.
- 3 In the case of the Sentinelese, their designation is an arbitrary and artificial one derived from the name conferred on the island by the British, and it continues unchanged to this day. We do not know how they refer to themselves or to their island.
- 4 The term “Jarawa” is derived from the *Aka-bea-da*, one of the linguistically distinct Andamanese groups whom the British first encountered on South Andaman Island, and who ceased to exist before the British left the islands. The *Aka-bea-da* employed the term to refer to any other groups with whom they did not share territorial, affinal or kinship rights and obligations. It is still not completely clear how the *Jarawa* refer to themselves.
- 5 From the Great Andaman Islands, consisting of North, Middle and South Andaman Islands.
- 6 Andamanese numbers vary between 25-35 according to the births and deaths of young children.
- 7 Thus, following Mintz (1985), as sugar production peaked in the Caribbean, the Onge risked their lives in their frail canoes to obtain that valuable commodity from a different outpost of the British empire. And the same holds for tobacco and tea, linking widespread areas of the world as never before.
- 8 The Onge population teeters between 90-100, varying according to the mortality rates of the very old or the very young. However, in the last few years, there have been a series of inexplicable deaths of young Onge men in circumstances that have not been investigated sufficiently.
- 9 “The Pleistocene epoch is part of the geologic time scale usually dated as 1.8-1.6 million to 10,000 years before the present, with the end date expressed in radiocarbon years. It covers most of the latest period of repeated glaciation, resulting in temporary sea drops of 100 metres or more.” (From Wikipedia, the encyclopedia on the internet).
- 10 This is particularly noticeable in the areas demarcated as *Jarawa* reserve forests, resulting in poaching and degradation of the islanders’ forest resources.
- 11 The huge quantities of food cooked every day included the meals for the Onge informants as well, who were invited to join us when they stopped by at the guest-house.
- 12 As it finally resolved, the linguists bathed at the well while I used the small, enclosed space in the guest-house, but washed my clothes at the well. None of the other Indian, female residents at Dugong Creek bathed within public view, and it was inappropriate for me to attempt it. I had to make do with approximately a bucket of water a day to wash in, all the while envying the linguists’ freedom to pour several buckets over themselves, twice, sometimes thrice a day as the heat intensified.

- 13 Pandanus sp. is a tropical plant, also known as screwpine. The fibres from several kinds of Pandanus are used to make rope, baskets, fans etc, as well as flavouring in many south and south east asian cuisines.
- 14 The payment of wages to the Onge for performing their role as informants was introduced by the linguists, and about which I had mixed feelings. It disrupted my notions of an anthropologist-informant relationship, since I had not envisioned it as a commercial transaction. I regularly brought the Onge gifts – clothes, knives, mosquito nets, bags, umbrellas, the occasional watch, jewellery, toys – everything that they unabashedly demanded of me. Most of my trips to Port Blair were brought about by the growing list of “goods” for the Onge, about which I was reminded whenever they accosted me in the settlement. I distributed these impartially to anyone who asked me to bring something for them, in addition to the wages that I paid them (after this was instituted by the linguists) for formal interview sessions with me. In addition, whenever any Onge stopped by at the guest-house they ate with me.
- 15 There was no regular supply of electricity at Dugong Creek. At dusk, usually between 5 and 5:30 in the evening, a generator was turned on which ran until 10 pm. Hence evenings were a scramble to finish cooking and eating, keep available a few hours for writing notes, as well as some amount of time to spend with the Onge before darkness enshrouded us all.
- 16 The “primer” was an elementary pedagogical tool designed primarily for the Onge, both children and adults, and written in Onge. Their oral language was to be transcribed in the Devanagiri script, the same script used to write Hindi, the national language of India. Thus, the primer was intended to provide the Onge with the necessary instruments to read and write in their own language, and thereby guide them towards literacy.
- 17 One of my most pleasurable memories of Dugong Creek is of the voices of the Onge women and men rising strong and clear, interspersed with sporadic birdcalls, which seemed to provide the perfect foil for the human voices raised in song.
- 18 Perhaps my “DEET” based insect repellents that I carried with me from the US conferred more efficient protection than the local varieties.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

"In this work I sought to formulate some hypotheses and test them by the simple culture of the Andamans"

(Radcliffe-Brown 1932, cited in Tomas 1991: 101)

This is an account of three groups of Andaman Islanders, the Onge, Andamanese and Jarawa based on my research and experience with them between the period of 1989 and 1992. The discussion then shifts to the events and processes that accelerated towards the end of the last century and into the present one, propelling the Jarawa along a trajectory that was unimaginable at the time of my research in the islands.

The narrative that follows in the ensuing pages takes a somewhat discrete perspective from the variety of tales¹ that have been recounted over the course of several centuries about the Andaman Islanders. Within a space demarcated as the 'present,' I interrogate the ways in which relations of power have shaped the lives of the Andaman Islanders. By exploring the junctures of sustained interaction between the three aforementioned groups and the majority Indian population who have come to surround the indigenous peoples of these islands, I examine the exercise of power at two different planes. First, as it is deployed in terms of policy, and second, as relationships of power are inscribed in the texture of everyday encounters. Within that broad sweep, I further define shifting fields of power configured across lines of gender, the islanders' and my own, the anthropologist's.

I shift between the institutional and the quotidian contexts in my consideration of power. This foregrounds the ways in which these spheres are intimately intertwined in any analysis of the contemporary situation of the Andaman Islanders. The domain of the institutional impinges upon the lives of the various groups of islanders in the mode of government policies. The interventions that follow from these policy initiatives pervade the circumstances of the daily existence of the Andamanese, Onge and Jarawa. Thus, social relations embedded within networks of power specific to each context, are realigned or "policed" by government interventions, conspicuously so in the case of the Onge and Andamanese. Such administrative strategies recast gender relations, thereby "governing" the terrain of gender which emerges as a contentious site for the constitution of power. The figure of the gendered anthropologist, complicit or contesting according to situation, is located at the margins, but never entirely outside any of these overlapping webs of influence and control.

Envisioning resistance to the mediations of the Indian government has to include a recognition of the sheer inescapability of the Indian presence in the islands. It must also acknowledge the ways in which the islanders have appropriated or internalized social forms and patterns of consumption, (even as they resist some impositions). By transforming subjectivities and aspirations, the very terms of the engagement have been ineluctably altered. To map the possibilities and forms of resistance under the existing circumstances is a parallel but dual endeavor, arbitrarily drawing together the islanders and I in a project that "re-imagines" resistance.

I want to dispel at the outset any notion of homogeneity implied by my inclusion of the three very different situations of the Andamanese, Onge and Jarawa within the frames of a unified discussion of "the islanders." The individual circumstances of each group is the product of a unique constellation of historical and political imperatives. But I link the three groups along a continuum according to the intensity of exposure or propinquity to British and Indian colonial interventions. Such a conjoined and comparative perspective is important for arriving at an understanding of the contemporary situation of the islanders. A singular vision of each in isolation tends to obscure their complex yet precarious position within the boundaries of the Indian, colonial, nation-state.

The three categories "Indian," "colonial," "nation-state," essentially political in their implications, draws attention to the existence of the islanders within larger processes. Many of these occur elsewhere, far removed from the actual locale of daily activities, but impact their lives in unforeseen ways. To juxtapose these terms is intended to convey a series of distinctions. They serve to differentiate the Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa from a dominant majority population who occupy the islands, to stress the nature of the occupation, and, explain the political rationale for such an occurrence. It is also to point to the historical and political trajectories which have marked and altered the tenor of life, of the original inhabitants of a chain of islands in the Bay of Bengal.

Caught within the sweep of "global" events over which they had no control, the Andaman Islanders trod the path of bloodshed, disease and dispossession. Such a route links them with other peoples elsewhere who traversed similar paths. They are connected by the global reach of colonialism and the capitalism that follows in its wake, bringing people in far-flung corners of the world closer together, while simultaneously pushing them out of the larger picture altogether.

In the equation for power which lies at the center of the process, if we follow a chronological derivation in the case of the Andaman Islanders, they were never factored into the calculation. From the British competing with the Danes who had established a mission in near-

by Nicobar Islands in the eighteenth century, to securing the Indian Ocean during the wars between the British and the French in the nineteenth. WWII and the Japanese occupation of the islands in the twentieth century. Or the tussle between the newly independent nations of India and Pakistan with Britain for control over these islands during the transfer of power. The thousands of displaced refugees from the harrowing aftermath of Partition, to the war in Bangladesh, or the civil strife in Sri Lanka. People from everywhere hungry for land and stability, all to be accommodated in the Andaman Islands. Wars with Pakistan spawning naval bases in the islands. With each solution to the problematic scenarios listed above, for the islanders it meant more bloodshed, more disease or more dispossession. What was clear was the fact that through a series of historical contingencies, their destinies were integrally intertwined with that of a nation that was constituted as India. And that composed the larger picture of the global reach of world capitalism for the Andaman Islanders, with its episodic moments of colonialism, nationalism, ethnic, religious and civil wars.

Politically marginalized within the existing globalized economy, the Andamanese the Onge, and now the Jarawa, to varying degrees, are enmeshed yet anew within a new global cultural economy of commodities and images. An earlier version of the colonial economy was one that trafficked in the circuit of tobacco, tea, sugar, opium and alcohol, bringing the islanders firmly within the ambit of the British Empire. But the new variant, also colonial in its dimensions as it pertains to the islanders, is more complex in its flow of goods and meanings. The contemporary landscapes of the islanders defy any easy generalizations, challenging the anthropologist to account for and explain the paradoxes that constitute the individuals who have been defined as the "traditional hunter-gatherer-fishers of the Andaman Islands."

What are the cultural frames of reference that can describe Bara Raju, an Onge man, who adroitly navigated the forest as he hunted wild boar, smearing his own face and the muzzles of his dogs with clay to prevent their odours from reaching their prey? Who kept a set of clothes wrapped up on a high branch of a tree on the outskirts of town and changed into polyester "safari suits" Indian "bureaucratese" style when he entered town. Who seriously discussed the prospects of speaking to the Prime Minister of India about building the Onge "pucca" houses like the Bengalis. Demanded that I bring him swiss knives and a walkman radio from the US. And, who was intrigued by the microcassettes and colognes smuggled into Port Blair. Or Tinai, (a female this time), who was disdainful of the gaudy "welfare clothes" given to them by the Indian government. Who clamoured for the kind of outfits that I wore on occasion during fieldwork, a styled "salwar-kameez"

that was all the rage across India. But, discarded clothes altogether for three months of mourning when her husband died. And Tai, another male, who angrily stalked a crocodile with his bow and arrow along the banks of a creek, because it grabbed his dog as it swam behind his dugout canoe. Then, went on to discuss the kind of handbag and the appropriate undergarments for his wife that I should select for them. Perhaps, as Hannerz suggests, this kind of involvement with a wider world is merely “a matter of assimilating assorted items into a fundamentally local culture” (Hannerz 1992:238).

But what about Ramu² then, another male Onge whose seasonally guided activities and movements had been transposed into a different cycle of travel? As an employee aboard a ferry plying passengers and provisions between islands. Who perceived himself a “cosmopolitan” in comparison to the more “provincial” Onge who had settled into a sedentary lifestyle. Whose “openness towards divergent cultural experiences” (Hannerz 1992:239) rendered him unable to “feel at home” any longer with other Onge. And, who took pride in his attraction for and exploits with women of various cultural traditions, Nicobari, Ranchi tribal, Karen Burmese, even Jarawa.

These brief sketches illustrate the difficulties of conceiving of individuals as “self-evidently linked to particular cultures.” (*ibid.*). Additionally, these anecdotal snapshots also imply the varying degrees of “competence” manifested by the Onge, making each of them “cosmopolitans” of different orders, as they made their lives surrounded by various peoples and traditions.

We are confronted with another set of conjunctures in considering the Andamanese. How do we assess the life-history collected from Lichu, an Andamanese woman, that was modeled on the latest Bollywood films screened in the theaters of Port Blair? What did the weekly variations in her account of herself, changing according to the films playing in Port Blair, reveal to us about her past, her present and her future? Were these fictions, figments of the imagination, or fractured reality itself? And hence, at every turn, in attempting to discuss the provenance of individual lives of the Andaman Islanders we are reminded of similar cultural complexities sweeping across the globe.

What of the “fierce” Jarawa who eluded the grasp of the British colonialists, keeping them at bay with their bows and arrows? They wielded the same weapons, stronger, reinforced with iron arrowheads to defend their territorial boundaries as it was continuously re-mapped by the Indian colonists. Who were lured to remarkably staged encounters by the promise of coconuts, bananas, rice, cloth, plastic buckets, beads, pieces of iron. And who are currently confronting a different set of challenges as the seduction of “goods” and the lure of the globalized economy is poised yet anew, to shatter the Jarawa’s fragile life-world, still

mostly embedded within the seasonal cycles of the forest and the surrounding seas.

In the face of such contradictory trends, especially as these emerge in the practices of people like the Andaman Islanders, whose descriptions are usually framed by the “traditional,” anthropologists are often impelled into a blind search for cultural manifestations that conform to expectations of “authenticity.” The documentation of unique cultural forms is a noteworthy project in itself. But, the tendency to focus on those particularities to the exclusion of the more complex medley within which elements of the “authentic” are to be discerned, distorts the ongoing circumstances of the Onge, Andamanese and Jarawa. Or, the concerned anthropologist feels compelled to bemoan the passing of “traditional” ways as the steadily accumulating changes obscure the outlines of a more “pristine” past. Hence, we begin to suspect and “conclude that the [Onge] are no longer themselves” (Geertz 1988:12). Both these strands have inflected my own research and writing, and are likely to surface occasionally despite attempts to check either drift.

Geertz goes on to prescribe that we must “contrive somehow to shift our attention to other pictures” (*ibid.*). To resolve the dilemma, I have bypassed the realm of the “classic monograph,” a genre of anthropological writing that was constituted on the basis of research conducted on peoples like the Andaman Islanders. It legitimated a mode of inquiry “in which a human group is drawn and quartered along the traditional categories of social, economic, religious and other so-called organizations, and everything holds together” (Dumont 1978:12). Instead, I have explored mundane, quotidian contexts, namely the domain of everyday interactions to derive explanations for issues that arose from particular encounters. I have defined the kinds of influences that shape situations of daily contact, and included the ways in which they can be considered significant or suggestive.

Thus, within the context of the ongoing ethnocide of the islanders, I examine the links between colonialism and ‘development,’ and the many continuities in the policies of the earlier British colonial administration with the Indian colonization of the Andaman Islands. Against this backdrop, I analyze the situation of these groups as affected by shifting agendas of ‘development.’ The construction of the islanders as ‘rare’ and ‘endangered,’ legitimizes interventions by the government to sedentize the islanders, which in effect deprive them of the forest resource-base formerly under their control.

I go on to examine how ‘development’ and the welfare policies of the current Indian administration has profound effects on local gendered relations of power. By incorporating ethnographic incidents, I explore how administrative strategies have reconfigured gender relations among the Onge and the Andamanese. They manifest as mun-

dane, quotidian and protracted struggles for and over power between genders.

The discussion then leaps forward to include the compelling turn of events in the final years of the twentieth century and into the next millennium, recounting some of the significant developments that have ensued in the affairs of the islands and its peoples. The judicial interventions by the High Court of Kolkata and the Supreme Court of India, brought about by a coalition of non-governmental organizations and activists taking the Andaman administration to court, has highlighted the transformative potential of forging new coalitions within civil society and the possibility for effecting change that lies therein.

My account of research then, charts both an emotional as well as an intellectual journey. The perspective that I offer, cannot be separated from my own subjectivity as it was constituted during the period of my residence in the islands. Emerging in all its uncertainty, the contours of my personality inflected my perceptions, merging my research and experience with the particularities of my person. Such a process has another productive dimension, whereby, I have countered my inscription of the islanders with an exposure of the limits of my perceptions. Hence, I “police” my prerogative to advance a certain view of the islanders, within the text that I have constructed of my research and experience with them.

Thus, this account offers a “partial”³ view, located in the historical conjuncture that I define as the “present,” tracing how that moment came to be for the Andaman Islanders, and the colonial practices that have governed their lives since their islands were incorporated within the global economy. □

Notes

- 1 I use the word “tales” here deliberately, to accentuate the constructed qualities of any account, regardless of whether it is a so-called product of scholarly endeavor, or a work of fiction. Hence, the account that follows should be read as one more tale amongst many others that have also been told. This brings to mind James Clifford’s (1986b) oft-quoted comment that what anthropologists write are fictions, which, however, does not mean they are fictitious.
- 2 In 2003, as I revised my account of my research for this monograph, I discovered that Ramu had died in June 2001. Ramu was killed in the forest during a stampede of elephants belonging to the timber industry, and his death in this manner, according to his stepbrother, was one more illustration of Ramu’s alienation from the ways of the forest (Pandya 2002).
- 3 For more discussion on the “partial” and situated perspective see Haraway (1988).

A RECORD OF FIELDWORK

"Faces daubed with clay or painted in designs – a face mild and good-humored instantly transforms into something unfamiliar and mysterious, even somewhat menacing"

(Extract from field notes, May 6, 1992)

Introduction

In my rendering of research in the islands, along with the "ongoingness" of daily existence there, I want to convey the fragmentation and uncertainty inherent to the quotidian tasks of fieldwork. To accomplish this I have interspersed the narration with extracts from entries in my field journal, and relied on transcriptions of taped interviews. The interviews have been incorporated as recorded, with minor editing where there are repetitions. I have maintained the dialogic format to impart the back and forth process of deriving knowledge. The many obscurities and incomprehensions. The mutual talking at cross-purposes. And the arbitrary directions of the ground covered during discussions. In other words, these are open-ended interviews without neat and tidy answers to questions. But, they do conjure the texture of the interaction with the Onge.

The course of fieldwork was as contingent on the specificities of my person and personality, and I elaborate on the strategies for acquiring information, i.e. the specific incidents and ethnographic encounters that defined the framework for me to act/react/interact, forging the basis for my research.

The photographs included in this section intimate the initiation of research and "discovery," viewed through the lens of a camera. The use of photographs is deliberate here since the camera performed a dual function. Both an alibi and a security blanket in the early part of my research, my camera served to mask my anxiety. It reassured me that the many reels of exposed film that I was sending away for development were "data," an essential component of anthropological practice. Moreover, the medium of photography served to maintain a vital continuity to my presence in the islands. The photographs that I carried on my person during my long stretch of fieldwork starting in 1991 were those from my earlier visit to Dugong Creek and Strait Island in 1989. I distributed these to everyone who requested a copy, while initiating conversation on the events that had occurred in the intervening period. Births, deaths, marriages, change of welfare personnel, gossip

on the scandals surrounding these changes, and other such ice-breakers. More importantly at the time, my skills with the camera, as evidenced by the copies that I brought back, were summoned to document what the Onge or the Andamanese thought I should record for my research. "*Gitangalenene*" was the crisp imperative from the Onge if I was not as trigger happy as they deemed appropriate, or "*photo khichiyena*" from the Andamanese, mostly the children, who took infinite delight in posing for me.

It should be noted that in the case of the Onge, the images of a lifestyle that I attempted to capture were predominantly of a hunter-gatherer existence. I tried to accommodate my "data" into a mould assembled from everything that I had read previously about hunter-gatherers. The three months that I spent with the Andamanese in Port Blair and Strait Island as soon as I arrived in the Andaman Islands in November 1991 appeared barren because any traces of such a unique lifeway had long vanished. They were like many other marginalized groups of people that I could encounter in the streets of Calcutta. By contrast, when I arrived at Dugong Creek, the Onge offered a veritable panoply of rich "ethnographic" material, which I aspired to scrupulously document. It is in this mode that my research was inflected by the search for the "authentic," whereby everything that did not conform to my expectations of the "traditional lifestyle" was discarded as extraneous or not "truly" ethnographic. As a result, when I first arrived in Dugong Creek in 1989, I noted the incorporation of the Onge into the electoral processes that constituted them as citizens of India. But to foreground that detail diminished my perception of them as "archetypical hunter-gatherers", whose "unique" way of life I sought to record for posterity. This chapter contains the tensions generated by my expectations of the ethnographic and the desire to "exoticize", challenged by the Onge's evasion of the easy slots into which I tried to assign them. Moreover, the day-to-day reality raised other issues that I was forced to reckon with in my research.

The bulk of my dissertation research was conducted with the Onge at Dugong Creek, from the end of January through June of 1992, and then again from September to December of the same year. I left the Andaman Islands in June when the south-west monsoons rendered living conditions extremely difficult. As supplies ran low, replenishment was virtually impossible with the heavy rain and high seas, and transport of supplies between islands became unpredictable.

Reflecting the predominant duration of my research with the Onge, this chapter focuses on my interactions with them. They provided, as it were, 'legitimate' grounds for anthropological enquiry. During the months with the Andamanese, I was hard pressed to justify, even to myself, what I was doing with them. As the entries in my field jour-



Tai preparing a bow. Photo: Sita Venkateswar



*Groups of Onge women accompanied by children setting out for the forest in the middle of the day.
Photo: Sita Venkateswar*



Entogegi rubbing clay paste on his face after a meal of pork. Photo: Sita Venkateswar

nal mirrored the daily occurrences, noting who was on which binge of drinking, or accusations of who was sleeping with whom, I became doubtful as to whether I could declare any of this as bona fide anthropological "data". In addition, the scepticism with which my claim to be doing research with the Andamanese was treated by those to whom I mentioned it – at the Anthropological Survey of India, administrators at Port Blair etc., – resulted in my tending to silence the Andamanese portion of my research. I have broken that silence as I write about them where these issues can be addressed, but the seed of doubt lingers on.

My four encounters with the Jarawa are dealt with in a separate chapter entitled "Strategies of Power". The first time was as an invited participant at a workshop on tribal development in December 1991. A visit to all the "reserved¹ tribal areas" was presented as a novel agenda on the program. The trip to the Jarawa reserve was the high point of the workshop. The next three visits occurred a year later in December 1992 as I was winding up my research in the islands. As will become clearer later, these encounters produced a decisive finale as I reached the end of my field research with the Andaman Islanders.

Fieldwork among the Onge

April 17, 1992

The linguists and the video team left yesterday. Have been almost continuously occupied with the filming of the primer. Went into the forest with Bara Raju and Oroti. I realize even more intensely now what a mistake the settlement has been, and just how taxing on them. The korale they have built for themselves by the stream – cool, pleasant and pretty. Have never heard Ramesh sing while in the settlement, but his singing could be heard from the distance, ringing through the forest as we advanced towards the korale. The only drawback here are the ticks! Almost all the men have gone into the forest for hunting. Mohan, Entogegi and Langoti brought back tambonuya. Everyone appeared surprised that I actually went to the forest with them, and on successive occasions. They seem pleased, perhaps that denotes a further level of acceptance.

(Extract from field notes)

An extended conversation

The linguists left Dugong Creek in the middle of April 1992 with the onset of the honey collecting season. Many of the Onge families had

set up camp in the forest and Dugong Creek was emptied of about half its occupants. I often accompanied them into the forest, on day trips, since the Onge ensured my return to the settlement before dusk. The heat was intense at Dugong Creek but the forest camp, always constructed near a freshwater stream, was surprisingly cool and airy. I thought longingly of the imminent monsoon and consulted with the Onge as to when it was likely to arrive. The Onge obligingly raised their chin towards the south-west, as if their faces were a gauge for the wind, and reassured me that the *Dare* was on its way, it was less than another lunar cycle away. Then Chogegi, smiling mischievously in my direction added, *Dare* would come dancing along, riding on the wind, with *alame* (red clay) mixed with the fat from the *eyuge* (monitor lizard) rubbed on the head.

Preoccupied with their forest-related activities, it was difficult to persuade any of them to engage in interview sessions with me that I could record on tape. When I finally cornered Bara Raju, it proved to be a session that extended over three hours, uninterrupted through lunch and evening tea. We zigzagged through a range of topics but, as the transcription below suggests, Bara Raju kept stern control over the topics discussed and the information that he was willing to divulge.

Extract from field notes:

29 April 1992, at the guest house

Okay, I'm placing the tape here in the middle, so that both our voices can be recorded. I want everything to be in there so that if I forget, or if I haven't written down everything, it will be stored inside.

– *During the rains, it becomes very difficult for you?*

Yes, everything is wet, or damp, it is very difficult, and people fall sick and die. That's why when it is very wet, it's hard to do anything. A little rain would be good though. Too much rain is not good.

– *Nowadays you live in the settlement, so even if you don't hunt there is food for you to eat, jatto jatto, oroti, (rice, chapati). Earlier, what would the Onge do, when they used to live in the forest? There was no ration then, what would they eat? Do you remember, what did your parents do?*

During the dry season, they would get jackfruit, *bulundange* and store it. They would fill up big baskets, *tole* with fruit, cover it with leaves, tie it up and hide it in the forest. So when there is a lot of rain there is food. They would also hunt, and bring back pork, and when that fin-

ishes they will also eat *bulundange*. There was no tea then, they would only drink water. They would store a lot of dry wood, because once it gets wet it is very difficult to get wood. That's why during *torale*, the dry season, all the wood is obtained and stored. Then before the rain begins, the big *tokabe* (communal hut) is built and during the rains it is very comfortable inside.

– *It remains completely dry inside?*

Yes. That's how it was. In the past there was no wage work, we had all the time to build our houses, get pork, prawns. In the creeks, in the forest, there is so much fish, we would get fish with the prawns, _ a_a, eat pork rich in fat. Then when *kwalokange* (the north-east monsoon) starts the boar becomes thin, they have no fat, and they are not tasty. Then they go elsewhere and get pork, and it has a little more fat. They didn't have any utensils, they would make and use clay pots. I have seen those, they were used to cook the pork. They were made like this (gesturing with his hands).

– *Who used to make them? (very excited)*

Ask Tilai, Tilai knows how to make them.

– *Tilai gets the clay and still makes bucu? He goes and gets the clay?*

Yes, he mixes different kinds of clay and makes them, he makes *bucu*.

– *Small ones?*

Small ones and very big ones as well.

– *Where are they?*

In the forest.

– *Take me there, I want to see them.*

How can I do that? I don't know, it is Tilai who knows where the particular clay can be found.

– *Does he still have any pots with him that I can see?*

No, they were taken away.

– *Who took them away?*

Oh that person from Delhi...

– *Who came from Delhi?*

There was another woman who came here, and she took away the clay *bucu*.

– *Who was this woman?*

It was a woman from Delhi. There are always people who keep coming here and taking things away. One goes, another one arrives.

– *(laugh) Oh, I'm here to stay.*

Okay, but when your work finishes you will leave.

– *It won't finish that quickly...*

Another will come.

– *...because there is much to be done here. All these entale (government officials) here, they are like ticks, _a_age, getting fat on blood, they take your things and become rich. If anything is to be done about that, then there is much work here. Even if I finish one part of my work now, I will keep returning.*

So, Tilai still makes bucu of clay, there is still one person who does that. None of you make them?

No, nobody else, he's the only one, he's one of the old-time Onge.

– *In the past, everyone used to make clay bucu?*

Yes, different kinds of clays were mixed for that.

– *Does Tilai have any left?*

Oh he will make more soon, during the dry season.

– *So now that he's living in the forest, is he making any now?*

How do I know, who will tell me, whenever he feels like it, he will make them.

– *Okay, so when Tilai returns from the forest, will you tell him I want to see how they are made? I also want to take photographs. You see, everyone thinks that Onge don't make any clay utensils any more, they have forgotten everything. In the past, they used to make them, but now none of the Onge do. So I want to show people that there is still one person who knows how to make them.*

Okay I will tell him to make a small one, and you can take it with you to Port Blair.

– *Why don't you learn how to make it?*

I'm a lesser Onge, how can I make them?

– *Lesser Onge? He's a more important Onge?*

He's an important one, he's one of the old-time Onge, that's why he knows how to make them.

– *Why don't you learn from him?*

It will break if I make one.

– *But if you learn properly it won't break? It won't break then. Otherwise, when Tilai dies...bencamebe*

Nobody will make them.

– *Ekwa totota minyacekame, everybody else would have forgotten. So isn't it important that others learn from him before that happens? And you can also teach your children? And all your knowledge will be passed on. Otherwise everything will be forgotten.*

(Agrees). The children will forget.

– *Like the warrior Onge of the past, there are none left now. But if there were any now, there wouldn't be any entale who could steal from you, they would cut them up.*

(Agrees) Hmm. What can I do? All the old-time Onge are gone, dead, all the big eaters are gone.

– *You should teach your children to fight, all of you adults are old, and won't do anything, teach them.*

All the Onge of the old times are all gone, are all dead. The Onge of old times didn't know any better, that's why they used to fight.

– *What do you mean they didn't know any better?*

Killing people, shooting arrows at one another, cutting each other up with knives. That's how we are so little now, this is how we have been so quickly finished off. We used to be so many...

– *(interrupting) Accha, you used to be so many...?*

...Filling up all the corners of the place.

– *What happened?*

Everybody was fighting...

– *Who was fighting?*

One another, the Onge of one *bera* (territorial division) fighting the others, cutting each other up.

– *How did you become so little?*

That's why. If Onge die one at a time, that's how we can keep increasing. But with arrows large numbers are killed all at once. All the Onge of one *bera* would come, they would go at night, and ambush the Onge of another *bera*, shoot arrows at them in the dark and watch them all try to run in different directions, arrows raining on them all the while.

– *Have you seen this?*

I know, Tilai told me about this. Everybody would be killed off, then piled up inside the *bera*, and then set on fire. They would cut off a piece of the little finger, or from the wrist and then take these as trophies to show to the women, see how many I've killed. They would string all these hands on a bamboo, and show them to the women, see how many I've shot. Then their kin from another *bera* would get angry and make preparations, make arrows, more arrows to kill the Onge who shot their kin. They would do all this secretly, so that those Onge would not get any hint of these preparations. The Onge of the olden times were very tricky and secretive. They would let many days go by, making arrows and spears all the while. There was no iron then, we would use the wood from the areca trees....(laughing)

– *So when did you start using iron? Where would you get it from?*

We would get iron from the sea, when it washed ashore. And use the resin from the forest to sharpen it. Otherwise, we would use the wood from the forest. We would make *dange* (dugout canoes) using a different wood, but when it was taken to the water it sank (laughing) so we knew that this wood was no good. So we tried a different wood, took it to the water and saw, yes, it stayed afloat. So that's what we used afterwards. That's how we learned things. In the old days, there was no rope, the fibre used to kill turtles now. We would get into the water and crowd the turtle, we used the incense from the forest, made a torch with *kuendeve* (rattan leaves) and lit it with the incense, as we crowded around the turtle. The light would blind the turtle and that's how we used to catch turtle. We were a lot of Onge then, and that's how we would hem in the turtle. We didn't harpoon the turtle then, we only used arrows to hunt boar.

– *How did you hunt dugong, tineabone?*

And that's how we caught *dugong* as well. We would wait for low tide and then go to hunt turtle and *dugong* at night. Not when the tide is high, then we would drown. Then when that was done, we would go to the forest again, and get more incense, and light it, and go search for boar.

– *You mean you would hunt even at night? I thought you don't venture out at night, you are afraid of Tommanyo?*

No, we were a lot of Onge then, we were not afraid of Tommanyo, and we would go into the forest at night. We had no fear then. At that time there were Onge everywhere, many bera all over. There were so many of us then. The boars would go to sleep at night, and that's when we would hunt them. It was so easy then (laughing). We would come back during the day, and go look for the boar we hunted the previous night. Then we would take it back with us, smoke it and cook it. And that's how we lived (swatting a mosquito). Its not that things are difficult now. We get rations, and many other things, so these are also easy times.

– *Are these good times, you are such a small group now?*

We used to be many more then, but the Onge of the old days killed each other off. I have told you how that happened.

– *But now you don't fight one another any more, there aren't any fighting Onge now, why are you still decreasing?*

It was the doing of the Onge of old times, they shot arrows and finished each other off. And then we became less and less. Or they sicken, get fever and die.

– *Didn't you have any of your own medicines?*

We have our own medicines ² too, medicines from the forest. *Torelulu*.

– *Torelulu? What is that?*

It is one medicine.

– *Is it a leaf?*

Yes. The doctors who came from Delhi, took some with them, they took some of the medicines of the forest. They will make it in Delhi they said, and bring it back. But nobody brought back anything.

– *So, among you, who is there who knows a lot about such medicines?*

Torolulua.

– *Yes, besides torolulu...which Onge is best versed about these things?*

Shishidangagna is another medicine, *mushinya*; we still get all these in the forest.

– *Can you still find these medicines in the forest?*

Yes.

– *When you go to the forest...*

Oh, when we go hunt we can find them.

– *Will you bring some back for me? Little by little? See, so much of your forests have been destroyed by outsiders. There are many things that are valuable, like your medicines. So when they clear the forest, they are also destroying your medicines, isn't that so? Not only do all these outsiders hunt your boar, they finish off your medicines. I will take all these medicines to the Lieu-*

*tenant Governor*³ and say, see, these are all the Onge medicines. If the forests are cleared any more, even these will be gone...

Yes...it is all finishing.

– *So, you can take all these medicines to the LG and say these are our medicines. Find out what medicines are contained in these leaves. If they think these are all valuable things, maybe they will stop clearing the forest.*

Okay, I will bring them, and I will come with you when you go to Calcutta and take them to the LG. They have cleared so much forest now, the forest they took from us on this side (pointing south) they can keep. But the forest there (pointing west) they should leave alone. The forest south they can clear, make a road, it will make it easier for us to get the things we need. The boars are also gone, all these other people also eat boar now. But the forest west still has everything we need, the medicines, the food we eat, that should remain.

– *What will you do if all the forest goes?*

What can we do? We will eat fish (sombrelly).

– *When the first inenele (non-Onge) came to Hut Bay, how big were you?*

When Shukla⁴ babu came?

– *Yes when Shukla came? How big were you?*

This big (indicating with his hand). Shukla was also very young.

– *Yes, now he is quite old.*

Then, when he roamed with us in the forest he was a boy.

– *Okay, when you were young, or when your umari (father) was young, there was a white man who came here... his name was Cipriani? Do you remember him? A white man? He also roamed the forest with the Onge? Before Shukla?*

Yes, I remember, he roamed the forest with the Onge, and he brought some Burmese with him. He was a white man, I have heard. He roamed all over. When another *inene* came, a tall one, a *bada saab*, they first came and brought goods for us, and tobacco, we thought they were bringing all this to make it easier for us to live.

– *So at that time, were the warrior Onge still alive?*

Yes, they were alive but old men at the time, they didn't fight anymore.

– *What did your father think when so many people started coming here?*

Oh they would come and take photographs...They would leave all these goods by each *bera*, but also take away things from our *tokabe*, from each *tokabe* they would take things away. They would come in a big ship laden with goods. They came to *Deshenghri* (on the west of Little Andaman) in a big ship, full of goods. The big man was a good man, he brought knives, sugar etc.

– *What was the name of that bada saab?*

How do I know? Tilai will know... Etonoye, we called that big man Etonoye.⁵ He brought many goods for us, tea, sugar, rice, wheat, knives, clothes, matches, he gave all this to everybody. He was a good man, he would hunt his own food. It used to be more difficult earlier, to make rope, to make arrows, he also brought knives. He noticed what we needed and he brought these things. He would take photographs. They anchored the big ship near *Deshenghri* and came ashore on a smaller boat. They told us they would give us many things, bring goods for us and go away to Port Blair. Then they would return with more goods for us. And they would take away things from us. They would load all the goods on the smaller boat and come ashore and call us. They would say, see what we have brought, do you like this? What are the difficulties you have, what do you need? We didn't say anything, a lot of times we didn't understand what they were saying. We would say aha! and walk away. (laughing) Tilai told me all this.

– *Your father and others used to go far in the dange, right up to Port Blair...?*

Etonoye was angry with us, he stopped bringing goods for us. That's why we started making *dange* that we could take all the way to Aberdeen. We shot one of the *inene* who came with Etonoye. The Onge who shot the *inene* was from *Totibui*, the same *bera* as my wife. That's why Etonoye became so angry, he came quietly in a boat at night. We knew he would come and bring guns with him and start shooting at us with guns from the boats. We lay low on the ground. (laughing) They shot big iron balls into the forest. And we took all this iron and put it to our own use. The Onge from *Totibui* was told to hide in the

forest. We knew Etonoye would return and demand to know where he was. Where did he go? Where did he go? Go bring him! That's what Etonoye would say. The Onge would say, no, he died (further laughter). They wouldn't tell him where he was. They would say he died. How did he die, Etonoye would ask angrily, go bring him to me. And he would come with policemen.

– *Etonoye would talk in your language, in Onge?*

He would come and speak in the language of the white man, and over time, hearing it often enough, we learned to understand the language of the white man. There was one person whom Tilai mentioned who understood the language well.

– *Okay, one day we will sit with Tilai and talk about all these things with him. Do your children know all these stories, do you tell your devai and dabai (daughter and son) all these stories?*

The *ale* (children) hear all these stories from us and grow up, they hear and hear everything and know it well when they grow up. We don't have to teach them anything, they know by hearing all this. That's how they know. My daughter knows everything. We only teach them how to shoot arrow, how to make *dange*, but we don't have to teach them anything about *totekwata* (the past, days of yore).

– *You teach your dabai to make arrows, make dange, what do you teach your devai?*

When I was this big (gesturing with his hand), my *umare* would say, don't go there now, you'll have difficulties, don't go too far, play nearby, that's what he would teach me. Don't go near the creek now, *toyge* (crocodile) will get you. Play away from the water. When you are big you can go near the creek. That's how he would teach me. Go bring wood, even the young have to work. That's what he would say.

We didn't have clothes then, we would wear the bark from the forest. The girls would make them with *kuendeve*. Those are some of the things we would do. When we speak with Tilai, you will hear more about us. More about us, much more about us. Yes, it will not finish. He has so much to tell about us. Then you can take all this back with you and everybody who has come before will say, I don't have all this, the Onge have told her everything. That's what they will tell you.

– *When I write all this, I will say I talked with Bara Raju. Bara Raju told me all these things, so then I will write all the things you have told me. Then*

when I speak with Tilai, I will write, this is what I heard when I talked with Tilai and Bara Raju. Tilai told me all these things. Then I will write all those things down. That's how I will write.

Yes you will get to know a lot, and in all that time, I will also earn a salary.

– *Are there any spirits to whom you pray or talk to?*

When Onge die of arrow wounds, then they go up and become *Ongegi Onkoboykwo*, but when they sicken and die they go down and become *Tommanyo*. As they go up they are *Tineabogalangle*, when they reach *Benange*, they are *Onkoboykwo*. *Ongegi gaikwambagi gaikwambanka. Kurangegega gaikwambagi bencamemba Tineabogalangle. Onkoboykwo tineabogalangle ikoinene.* They are one and the same, *Onkoboykwo* and *Tineabogalangle*.⁶

– *Why are you all afraid of Tommanyo, why do you say don't go there, Tommanyo will get you? Why are you afraid?*

We are afraid, *Tommanyo* are evil, they prey on little children, take them down below to eat them. They don't return, *Tommanyo* eats them up.

– *What does Tommanyo look like, have any of you seen him?*

It was the work of the Onge of olden days, a very long time ago. It was the work of the one that walks in the forest, that's who made humans.

– *Eyuge?*

You have seen the *eyuge* (monitor lizard) in the forest, it was his work to make Onge.

– *How did that happen, how did eyuge make humans? With what were humans made? With mud? Clay?*

Not mud, a kind of wood.

– *Which kind of wood?*

Talaralu is what the *eyuge* used to make Onge. I'll show it to you.

– *Okay, bring it for me, or take me there. So how was this done?*

It was done by *eyuge* (in tones of 'I've told you already!').

– *How was the first Onge made? Why did eyuge make a human?*

First there was one Onge who was to live in the forest. Then that Onge went to the forest and brought more *Talaralu*. The Onge made a clearing in the forest, then made a sleeping place and a *kame* (sleeping mat) to sleep on, and then planted the *Talaralu* all around. And the Onge went away to hunt. And *eyuge* said, before you leave say “*oohoyi, tu aatbo...*”.(breaking into laughter)

– *Who said that, eyuge? (intent on getting this right)*

No, the human, the one human said that. “*Tu aatbo, otapisha.*” And that was what the human did. And then left to hunt. And then when the human returned they all called out and the Onge said in astonished delighted, “*Arre, there are so many.*” They were all very happy and they helped with the boar and they cooked it, and at night it was so much fun with many Onge men and women to enjoy each other’s company.

– *Wait, wait, I didn’t understand. First, eyuge made one human, okay, then built a korale for that human, and where did all the other humans come from?*

From the same place, it was the doing of that one human.

– *What do you mean, how was it the doing of the human?*

(Patiently) By planting *Talaralu*,

– *Oh I see, so that human planted the Talaralu and made other human. So eyuge made the first human, and then that human made other humans. What was the name of that human?*

That human is Onge.

– *So, Onge made other Onge, with Talaralu.*

(Relieved that I had finally got it) Yes, with *Talaralu*, then made *kame*, and then cleared the forest, and cleared off all the undergrowth, and then placed the *kame* there, and placed it inside a shelter, and put the *kame* with the *talaralu* within that space. And then went off to hunt. And before going, told all the planted *talaralu*, say this, do this, and I will hear from afar.

– *Onge told the talaralu? (in disbelief)*⁷

(Simply) Yes, *talaralu* understands everything. And that's how Onge came to live here. It was the work of one human.

– *But where did the women come from?*

The women too, the *talaralu* were planted in pairs.

– *So, the women are also created from Talaralu? From the same kind of talaralu?*

Yes, it was the same kind. And that's how there were Onge and more Onge, who filled all the corners. They made their homes and they married and increased in numbers, and there were Onge everywhere, *jaba jaba* Onge, who went to all the islands.

– *I see, that was a incredible piece of work by that human.*

(As Bara Raju murmured that Onge increased and increased and were everywhere)

– *So eyuge was responsible for creating the Onge, but where did people like me come from, who made the inenle?*

That I don't know, it's not for me to know that.

– *Who made the Jarawa, the Andamanese, the other people who are like you and live at a distance from you. Who made them?*

That's not for me to know either.

– *They are different?*

Yes they are different, only Onge were made in this way.

– *Okay, think of this whole earth, the mud below, the sky above, the trees, who made all that, where did all that come from? The sea..., the food we eat, the frogs, the tamarind trees, the sun, the moon, how were all these things created?*

The sun...that was the doing of *Kwalokange, mekange*, it was their doing.

– *It was the doing of the spirits?*

Yes, they are the people who live with *tonkulu*, the sun.

– *Which people?*

Onkoboykwo.

– *So Onkoboykwo lives with the sun?*

Yes.

– *So, then, why is it that every day, the sun comes up from that side, (pointing east), and then moves across the sky and goes down? What happens to the sun at night?*

Gagyakunuwa, it's like a machine below the ground. And that's how *tonkulu* moves (gesturing the direction of movement), far below the ground, below the sea and much further below, and *Onkoboykwo* moves with it. And when *Onkowboykwo* is angry s/he shuts up the sun.

– *Oh, so when Onkoboykwo is angry s/he shuts up the sun and it becomes dark?*

Yes, it becomes dark during the day. And when s/he is calm again *Onkoboykwo* lets the sun out.

– *What about cileme, the moon, why is it that every so often the moon becomes big and round and then slowly becomes smaller and disappears completely and slowly becomes big again?*

When the moon's work is finished, it becomes smaller and smaller and disappears.

– *Then where... how does it come back?*

Onkoboykwo makes another moon.

– *But why does cileme become so small?*

After it becomes full, its work is finished so it becomes small and disappears.

– *I don't understand.*

– *I don't understand why cileme becomes small and then becomes big again, does someone eat it up?*

How can anyone eat it? After it is full, its light finishes, so it becomes small, and another one is made. It is the doing of *Onkowboykwo*.

– *How about the stars, koyekoyele?*

They are all the children of *cileme*. They are all the family of *cileme*. The parents of *cileme* are the big stars, and the children are all the small ones. *Cileme*, brothers, sisters, children.

– *Why do we only see them at night? Why don't we see them during the day?*

(He laughed). How can that happen? It is only at night.

– *So at night, when tonkulu is asleep all the stars come out and play?*

Yes, *ekwi cholomba*, they all play. *Cilemega ecelele*, all the children, of the moon, she is the *uteddi*, the mother of the stars.

– *Who is the father of the stars?*

There is no father.

– *So tell me about the tides, why are there high tides and low tides. Why does that happen?*

(Hesitating) When there is low tide the fishes go away and with high tide there is a lot of fish.

– *Why does that happen?*

I've forgotten, I used to know. *Tilai* knows. There is a hole at the bottom, and the water drains out, that's why the level of water drops. Then all the water comes back. It is the doing of *bulundangle*, the jackfruits. It is the path of the *bulundangle*, that's the path that the water follows. *Ekwacile*, *bulundangle acile*. *Wa ingegi uttukeaki*, *ingele*. *Tilai* knows all this. There is turtle also below. It is full of turtles below. When the level of water falls, the turtles disappear into the hole, and when the level of water rises the turtles return. Its a huge hole below. But the water does not enter the path of the *bulundangle*. The *nareangle*, turtles, stay there, *belakwebe*, and wait to eat, *ilokwalebe*.

– *What do the turtles eat?*

Tojye!

– *What is Tojye?*

Tonoetta, the little fruit that you see at low tide.

– *Do you eat it as well?*

Yes, we also eat that. And it is to eat these fruits that the turtles come into the water. All these waters have the fruits (gesturing around). Tilai told me all this.

– *Tai told me that when they hunt turtles, they pray to Tineabogalangle, because Tineabogalangle lives in the moon, and when the moon becomes full, the narelange come out of the hole and fill the seas. And this is all the doing of Tineabogalangle.*

He doesn't know anything, what does he know? I see now that he knows nothing.

– *Are there any spirits in the forest? In the seas?*

(Hesitating) No there are no spirits in the forest, but there is a spirit of the turtle, that lives in the water, *Ingenamkwe*. When the *dange* overturned and the people were tipped over into the water, *Ingenamkwe* ate them up. *Ingenamkwe* comes out at night. *Onglei, dangegianka, dange-gilimeagi ekriove* became *chogegi barime etitokwatemdege. Wa lekriova*. And that's how it ends, *ingenamkwa mame*. *Ingenamkwe* lives with the turtles, dugongs, crocodiles.

– *Is that why you all don't go far out in the dange any more?*

We used to go in the past. They used a different kind of wood, the Onge whose *dange* overturned. One of the Onge was angry, and he pierced it with a spear, and the water entered the craft and filled and everyone drowned. There were children and women and men, and lots of goods...things to eat...young men and women...

– *(abruptly interrupting) How do you refer to fire⁸ in Onge?*

Nobody will tell you that.

– *(surprised) Why?*

That is the name of *Tommanyo*.

– *What do you mean?*

That was the name of *Koira's* father. All his children will get angry if you mention that name. That's why I can't tell you that.

Okay, that's fine. I don't want to know that.

– *Among you, is there one who can talk with the spirits? I have heard that there are Onge who go into the forest and can converse with the spirits? Is that true?*

Silence.

– *I have heard this from people who have been here earlier, like Shukla etc., that there are some Onge who are exceptionally good people, and they have this power to talk with the spirits. Is this true? Are there still such Onge among you? And I have also heard that such Onge can never have any children? Is this true?*

How did *Shukla* know all this? Onge don't talk about such things.

– *I think he perhaps saw something, he roamed about with you in the forest for so many years.*

I can't talk about these things, the spirits will get angry. These are not to be discussed with the *inenle*.

– *I understand. You don't have to tell me anything that is not permitted. All I really want to know is, are there still such people among you? I don't want to know any details beyond that.*

Tilai told me that I should not reveal the names of those who can hear and talk with the spirits.

– *What are such people called, kwa gatiba? I have heard that there are three Onge who can still talk with the spirits.*

No, there are no such people any more.

– *Yes, I heard, Kwerai, Moroi...*

Moroi has become mad that's why he says such things, it's a lie!

– *It's a lie?*

Yes (vehemently) it is a lie! I went with him and asked him where are the spirits, show me. And he said they will come. And I asked him when will they come, aren't they here as yet? No, he's mad. In the past there were such people, there are none left at present. In the past, when Onge would go into the forest to hunt, the spirits would call them, *chera*, come.

– *It doesn't happen anymore?*

No, not any more.

– *Why? Is Onkoboykwo angry with you? Why don't they call you any more? Isn't it true that it is at present that you most need the spirits since there are so few of you?*

Oh, *Onkoboykwo* sees everything from above, but he will not come near us. In the past there were many, that's why *Onkoboykwo* had to hear us. Now *Onkoboykwo* cannot hear us.

– *What can you do that Onkoboykwo will hear you?*

Onkoboykwo will come with the rain, not during the heat of the summer. *Onkoboykwo* stays far during that season. *Onkoboykwo* comes in a *dange*, I have seen it myself in the sea, the *dane* of *Onkoboykwo*, a big *dange*. It was a long time ago. It only happens during the rain, I will show you if it happens when it rains. Tilai has also seen this.

– *(Abrupt change in direction) Where do children come from?*

From *Ongega Onkoboykwo*.

– *How does your wife know that she is pregnant?*

By the bleeding, (or more literally, by the congestion of blood)

– *You mean when the bleeding stops?*

No, by the bleeding, that's how women know.

– Do you mean there is bleeding when the child is born? But before that happens, when the child is in the abdomen, when for a long time the child sleeps inside, *ale omokabe*, how does your wife first realise that she is with child? That's when the *chenga* (blood) stops, doesn't it?

In the beginning the blood comes, and that's where it remains, doesn't go away.

– (Trying a different avenue) Why do adolescent girls start bleeding?

The bleeding stops, all that blood, the child is of blood, it is a child of blood. And it gets bigger in the abdomen. The blood remains in the abdomen and nourishes the child, and drains off the blood, and becomes human. The eyes are formed first, and slowly the rest of the face and body. And when that is all complete, the child is born, *uttukeba*.

– Why do girls bleed every month? Why is it that boys don't bleed?

Boys are different, for them we have a *tamale*.

– What do you mean?

Tanagirua.⁹

– Oh *tanagiru*. No, but why is there *chenga* from girls at every new *cileme*?

The spirit gives the girls blood.

– Which spirit?

Ongega Onkoboykwo, gives *chenga* as well.

– Why?

There is a big bucket, *ukua tukkotota*, full of blood, and *Onkoboykwo* opens it and the blood pours into the girls, and that's when they bleed. A young girl doesn't bleed, *Onkowboyko* looks to see when they are grown and then opens the blood. It's like a pipe with a tap that opens and the blood pours out. It comes from very far, that's why the blood trickles slowly.

– But how does it get inside the girls?

I don't know how that happens. *Tilai* would know, he didn't tell me that. He told me it was *Onkoboykwo* who gives the blood. Like a pipe

for carrying drinking water, there was a pipe of blood. And when the tap is opened, the blood flows, it comes from very far above. And it stores inside the girl's abdomen. Where does it come from? It comes at night when the girl is sleeping, and it is very warm, and girls don't realise when it starts, and they become very weak and continue to sleep. Others see the *chenga* and exclaim, "Arre, the girl's *chenga* has arrived! Shut her eyes, and her eyes are kept closed. And the girl will keep her eyes closed and hear everything around her. They will tell her to be a good woman, and to not go out, her *chenga* has arrived. To stay in the *korale* and sleep on the *kame*. And after five days (gesturing with his fingers) there will be a ceremony. They will get *batage* (a variety of soft, fleshy leaves) from the forest, and tie it around her crotch, and it will staunch the flow of blood, which will continue to flow for five days and then stop. And the girl will get up. They will get tea for her. In the old days there was no tea...

– *So what was given to the girl?*

Water, a kind of gruel, and *bulundange*. That's what was given to the girl. *Bulundange ejebo* (literally, the eyes of the jackfruit).

– *But bulundange is only available during the dry season, what happens when chenga comes during kwalokange? How will you get bulundange during that season?*

We store it.

– *Oh you store it and keep some in stock?*

When the dry season ends what will we eat during the rains? That's why we store *bulundange* to eat during the day. We will store it in a *uku*, (bamboo container) and it doesn't go bad, it keeps well.

– *Okay so you feed the girl with bulundange and then what happens?*

We feed her *bulundange* and prawns, *_a_a*, but no fish or pork, *tambo-nuya*. Pork is taboo then, and when the *chenga* stops her father goes to hunt. Then he brings back the pork, cuts a little piece and puts a small piece in her mouth. The girl swallows it. Then he takes some fat and rubs it on her (laughing). The girl lies prone on the *kame* and everyone sits around her. Then he tells the others to bring the clay and he rubs it. Then all the women one by one rub the clay on her.

– *Which clay, the white or the red?*



Decorated with alame (red clay), one of the Onge women during the ceremony to celebrate Cikwegi's tamae angabe, (her first menstruation), thereby becoming "one within whom a spirit as a child can find residence". Photo: Sita Venkateswar

We, the white one, *wega ouebe*. *Ga tullebe omokabe, katita tineage omokabe*, she lies down and remains asleep. And that's how it is done. Then in the evening, the girl gets up, opens her eyes and sits up. She asks them to bring *kuendeve* from the forest to make *nakuinege*.¹⁰ It is very long drawn out...in the past they didn't wear clothes.

– So, when the *chenga* comes the girls start to wear the *nakuinege*? When do they start to wear the *nakuinege*?

Small *nakuinege* are made, the *batage* is placed below and the *nakuinege* is fastened on top.

– Then what happens?

Omokamokaka, she sleeps for three days (gesturing with his fingers). She eats *bulundange* when there is *chenga*, then when it finishes, when it stops completely, she eats pork. And that's how it is done.

– What is the meaning of *chenga*? What does it mean for the girl and for the Onge?

Tolayu...tolayu.

– *Tolayu*?

Mangagi, yes.

– What does that mean?

Matellabege.

– So, you call or refer to her as *tolayu*?

Mangagi, chengaianka, ka beje, yes, when the blood starts to flow..

– No, what I'm trying to find out is this: amongst us, the *inenle*, when a girl starts to bleed, she is considered to have become a woman, and if she does marry she can have a child. If she gets married before her *chenga* starts, then she cannot have a child until it starts.

First (in the beginning), if she is not married, the *chenga* remains trapped, but after marriage the blood of the child arrives in the abdomen. It is the doing of the spirit for the girls.

– *But what is it that you believe, when the chenga starts what does it mean?*

There is no *chenga* made for those who are unmarried, the *chenga* is given later. It will not be alive until then. How can it be alive until that happens? Until the *chenga* is given there can be no life, it will die.

– *Who will die?*

Unnatimbo.

– *The girl will die?*

Mangagi, yes. Chenga moba bencame. Chenga ingyana membabe tineage. The blood is like drinking water for the girls, they cannot remain alive without it. What else?

– *They will die without it?*

Or else what? It was all the doing of the ancient Onge. If the *chenga* does not come the girl will die, they need the blood. That's why *Onkoboykwo* releases the blood for the girl. We say *jogemaame*.

– *Jogemaame?*

Jogemaame, it is the name of the blood, *gatibe chenga*. For you also that has happened.

– *That's right, its the same for me as well. Okay, why do you have a tanagiru for boys?*

Girayewa.

– *What's that?*

When a boy becomes tall, and he goes to hunt, and if he is afraid... (breaking off) it's going to start for Gulame.

– *(very excited) It's going to start?*

Yes, shortly, in a while.

– *How long?*

It will start soon.

– *When? when?*

It will begin, arre, it will begin soon. I've told them to make the arrows, *cenokwa* for Gulame's *tanagiru*...

– *Who is making the cenokwa?*

Oh Koirai.

– *Cenokwa? Why Koirai?*

Koirai will also make it.

– *But why Koirai in particular?*

Cenokwa!

– *Why isn't anyone else making the cenokwa?*

Oh the others will also make it. Why should it take everybody to make *cenokwa*? When it finishes, more will be made. The boar will break the arrows, so there will be a need to make more. The arrow head will be tied with a rope to the stem, and when it breaks, more are made. That's how it is. So, the *cenokwa* will be made and kept in the *korale*, and replenished as required.

– *So this tanagiru will be for Gulamegi and Prakash¹¹?*

Yes, it will be for Prakash too. But how can I go to Prakash's ceremony, I have work here in Dugong Creek.

– *Yes, he is in South Bay (pondering the problem).*

If I go and stay there, how can things function here?

– *Talk to Palaiyan.¹²*

I can, but he will say, don't go, there is a lot of work here, we need you here. Palaiyan will only get agitated and insist that I not go. There aren't enough people here to manage all the work...(laughing)

– *But for a ceremony as important as a tanagiru..?*

Yes...(switching track)...the *tanagiru* for Ramesh and Mohan, you couldn't see that!

– *I did, I saw the photographs, you want to see them, I have them here in a book?*

Yes show it to me. The ceremony for the boys will start. The mother will call the boy and tell him to sit beside her. She will say, there is a girl, will you marry her? And he says, of course I will! When? And the mother will say, she has to grow a little more.

– *So, in the case of your daughters, Sakuntala and Lily, how were their marriages arranged? Did Sakuntala come and tell you that she liked Oroti? Or was she too young?*

No, she is young. I saw Oroti in South Bay and approved of him and I thought he would be good for my daughter. I asked the old man there...

– *Dagule?*

Yes, Dagule. I told him, give me this boy for my daughter. And Dagule said alright, in a short while, and then you can take him. Then when the time came Dagule told me take him with you now to Dugong Creek, and marry him to your daughter. And so I took him with me. Oroti's mother told me take my son with you, and marry him to your daughter. And that's why I gave them my daughter, they gave me the boy and I gave them back my daughter.

– *You mean your other daughter, Lily? You gave them Lily for Prakash?*

Yes, for Prakash. But she is still too young, she needs to grow bigger.

– *So then, Lily will go to South Bay?*

No, I won't let her go to South Bay. There are no proper medical facilities in South Bay, she will stay here. Who will look after her if she goes there? Conditions are difficult there, and there is a lot of work here. That's why I look after my son-in-law here, I told him to be in charge of taking the children here to school and back. They won't stay in South Bay. My brother is there now, he has been staying and working there for a long time now.

– *But South Bay is very beautiful, much more so than Dugong Creek.*

Yes, but when the rains come living there becomes difficult. Now during the dry season it is very nice there. It is still very forested there, and you can't see anything until you come up close. During the rains, they stay away from the sea, they move further inland into the forest. There is too much wind from the sea. It will start soon. We will fish during the rains, not hunt, that's why I have made and kept a *dange* ready.

– *For fishing?*

Yes.

– *So, who at Dugong Creek has independently liked someone and decided to marry the person? Is there anyone who went and told their parents, their umeri and kairi, look I like this person, I want to marry this person?*

Oh, all that is the doing of the others. My daughters were married differently. Children are too young to know their minds.

– *Who do you prefer more, a son or a daughter?*

Oh, the youngsters don't know any better. It is up to their mothers to decide. When they grow older they will realise that. We will explain it to them.

– *No, what I meant was, when a child is born, do you have any greater preference for a girl or a boy?*

It is all the same, we want a daughter and a son. (then returning to the earlier discussion) I decided to marry my daughters to the boys from South Bay, I decided to not marry them to anyone here. I didn't like anybody here.

– *Why?*

My wife decided that. That's why I went to South Bay and brought them here. I went to South Bay and conferred with the people there, with my wife's brother...

– *Botale?*

Botale. And he said alright.

– *Why didn't you like anybody here? There is Titooi, Rajkumar...? You didn't like them? Santosh?*

No, now they won't come near my daughters. Otherwise, they would have taken my daughter to the forest and ...(laughter). Now they are married, so the boys stay away.

– *Yes, I know. The children have been telling me stories about all the things they do, playing and fucking...*

Enge choloate, they are playing...

– *So, you don't have any restrictions about this, that before marriage there should be no ketolo, only after they marry? Do you have any such rules?*

Yes, there is. We scold them, but we don't punish them or anything, we only make a row sometimes.

– *So you tell them, all you adults tell the children, don't do these things, it is not right?*

Yes. The mothers scold the children. She will say, I know what you are up to, I know you are going into the forest for *ketolo*...(laughing) that's what they will say (more laughter). You're only pretending you are going to play...that's how they will say...you are all up to mischief, I know. That's how she scolds them. The children see the others doing all this and they ask their mother, what are those children doing, I don't understand? (laughter). The mothers then scold those other children.

– *Does it ever happen that after marriage, one or the other goes away with someone else?*

Among the other Onge?

– *Yes?*

How can I tell you that? Yes of course it happens, but I'm not going to tell you about that.

– *Why not?*

They will get angry.

– *Who will get angry?*

It's their business, it is not my concern, all those lesser people do things like this, it's not for me, for more important ones.

– *But it's just these kinds of intrigues between you that has always been ignored by other people who come here. It's the sort of thing that happens everywhere, but everyone pretends it doesn't exist.*

Will you be afraid?

– *Why would I be afraid?*

They won't do anything to you. If I talk about these things the others will get angry and abuse me.

– *How will they know?*

It will all be inside that (pointing to the tape).

– *How will they hear that? My bajagegarena (tape recorder) remains inside my suitcase. And how will anyone else know what I discuss with you? You do this all the time, all the places that I'm really trying to understand, you keep saying you won't tell me. How will I ever understand anything about you if you refuse to tell me the most important things? Okay, I'm turning this off.*

May 10, 1992

Naboralegi's imminent delivery has provided much "food" for discussion. From all the women gathered around, it seems the soul of the child enters the womb through some food that is eaten. When a woman eats some food at someone's house and spits it out or/and throws up, either she is supposed to have conceived at that moment, or the spirit entered the womb through that particular food eaten on an earlier occasion. Therefore, the child is supposed to be the "gotechele" of that food, and the person in whose house the food was eaten becomes the "gutarandi". The denotative term for the child then is, for instance, "tanjai otechele", "titoreve otechele", "tambonuyya otechele" etc., according to the specific food associated with it. The relationship between the gutarandi/allankare is that of a parent/child, which suggests that it is a form of godparental relationship.

(Extract from field notes)

October 7, 1992

Quite unexpectedly, Totanange and family trooped into the guest-house, braving the rain. His explanation was simple, the children wanted to come. Then he settled in for a good, long session, obligingly drawing a map of the differ-

ent routes in the forest, marking out the “bera,” and the different kinds of terrain, as they perceive it. There are four, which keep alternating through the territorial divisions:

butu- forest with pathways cleared of undergrowth

tambojoko- dense forest with no paths

totijalo- along the sea shore

Tontebui- alongside the creeks

His response to why they shared their food was “*ekwa kotota mijejille*,”: so how can we eat if somebody else goes hungry?

He says that in the past, Onge fighting was usually over a woman, people from one bera refusing to give a girl in marriage to another bera, so she was kidnapped. Then fights would ensue, with much killing and burning of their tokabe.

(Extract from field notes)

The conversation with Bara Raju came to an end on an irate note. Despite my dissatisfaction with his adamant refusal to be persuaded into divulging what he perceived as best kept away from me, the interview with him proved to be a richly informative blueprint for further research. Later interviews with him and other Onge fleshed out some details, but some areas remained impervious to any negotiations on my part. Aside from the actual content of the discussion, a number of interrelated factors arise from the interview transcribed above, and others that occurred over the months with Bara Raju, Tai, Totanange, Ramesh and Tilai, which I will discuss sequentially below. Foremost among these is the issue of secrecy, and the possible reasons for its existence.

The power of secrecy, the right to withhold

Ehrenreich (1985) remarks on a set of behaviors among the Coaiquer of Ecuador that he defines as a strategy of secrecy and dissembling:

“[T]o project an impenetrable ‘false face’ image to non-Coaiquer...the intensification of this strategy, long employed by Coaiquer people, is a direct response to the racism and prejudice which has characterized their treatment at the hands of outsiders...Through concealment, manipulation, denial and meticulous efforts at control, Coaiquer create an impression on outsiders which is a carefully constructed sociocultural illusion. They rarely permit outsiders to witness anything but this purposefully misleading and elaborate cultural mirage.” (p.300)

He goes on to describe his experience with the Coaiquer as:

"[N]ever an easy group of people to work among. The essence and core of their culture are in direct conflict, culture encourages silence, secrecy and dissembling from its members as the quintessential responses to inquiries from outsiders." (p.20)

This exposition can very well be transposed to my own fieldwork experience. On the face of it, they were remarkably friendly and obliging, but the moment my inquiries moved beyond the visible, and teetered on the edges of an interior and personal realm, threatening exposure of that world, there was a perceptible withdrawal and silence even though they remained smiling all the while.

Very often, the interactions took on the proportions of a game, hints and cues that were teasingly proffered, but when I eagerly followed in search of more, there was an immediate laughing withdrawal, and I was left to decipher what I could from the glimpses that I had received. On reflection, and by distancing myself from the immediacies of the problems that I encountered at the time, it becomes evident that I probably represented what could conceivably be the worst nightmare of perpetual scrutiny. There I was, this "outsider,"¹³ with my notebook, tape-recorder and camera, at any hour of the day or night, perennially questioning, subjecting the Onge to unflagging investigation. There was nothing that they did or thought that did not provide scope for further probing. Moreover, my presence in their midst, my very assumption of admittance, was a declaration of the profound asymmetry of the condition of the Onge with respect to the Indians who surrounded them. I had access to the islanders by virtue of being Indian—the disparity of power that my Indian identity conveyed was an integral feature of their daily lives---and I was engaged in an endeavour "to render all things visible". How else could such a condition be warded off if not by resorting to the strategy of secrecy? As Scheper-Hughes (1987) has so perceptively observed of her own experience of research with the Irish and the Pueblo Indians:

"Secrecy often serves as an effective form of resistance, especially among peoples whose honesty or hospitality has frequently been violated or abused by outsiders" (p.69).

I fully "appreciate[d] the magic and the power of words, and the mighty right to withhold them" (ibid.:73)(cf. Berreman's (1962) account of the problems that he underwent when conducting research in a Himalayan village in India).

Adrienne Rich's passionate evocation of women's silence enriches Schep-er-Hughes' insights into the assertive power of withholding speech:

*"Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed*

the blueprint to a life

*It is a presence
it has a history a form*

*Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence"*
(Rich, cited in Visweswaran 1994: 31).

I want to assert that resorting to secrecy is a strategy that has developed over the years, and is linked with the intensification of the Indian presence in the Onge lives. It has never been mentioned in the accounts of earlier anthropologists, who were explicit about other problems of research in Dugong Creek. Pandya (1993: xxii) admits of his experience of research that *"it should not be assumed that native exegesis [was] ebulliently and effervescently forthcoming"*. But his extended analysis of the very spheres that Bara Raju, Totanange and others were reluctant to discuss with me implies a shift in the attitudes of the Onge since Pandya's stint with them in the early eighties. The weariness that could be inferred from Bara Raju's comment on the comings and goings of anthropologists is suggestive of a realization of the futility of exposing themselves to temporary initiates, who took what they could and then left, rarely to return. The eighties saw the effective entrenchment of the Indian government's welfare efforts, with the Onge steadily incorporated into a cash economy. As the thinly-veiled contempt with which many Indians regard the islanders was grasped by the Onge, there was a simultaneous strengthening of secrecy as the most effective means at hand for keeping the intruders at bay.

This analysis is given support by the events surrounding my efforts to live amidst the Onge. My initial delight in the guest-house had worn thin. I resented the constant back and forth in the scorching sun resulting from the need to coordinate the demands of my own domestic existence with the Onge cycle of daily activities. To my mind, the problem could be solved by actually living with the Onge, in their midst. Being with them all the time, and thereby easily correlating my existence with theirs. One of the houses constructed for the Onge had become empty, the former inhabitants, (Shiela and her children) having

moved in with another family since the death of Kanju, her husband.

When I broached the idea to some of the Onge whom I felt I had most access to, the initial response was one of puzzlement as to why I would leave the more comfortable environs of the “guest-house” for the house that I had in mind. The children were astonished that I would want to live alone in that house, especially since the former inhabitant (Kanju) had died – *Tommany* was bound to come and get me. I pointed out that I lived by myself¹⁴ at the “guest-house” as well. Kanju had not actually died *in* the house, and I was sure that *Tommany* would not bother me. Observing that I was undeterred, the Onge that I talked with smilingly agreed to my proposal, in the same way that they always gave consent to everything that I asked of them.

I had to get approval of my plan from the social worker, Lakra, who was officially responsible for my welfare while I was at Dugong Creek. Lakra registered his disapproval of my idea, and flatly refused to have anything to do with it. He listed every possible inconvenience that I would suffer if I were to foolishly undertake such a course of action. He also prohibited the removal of any furniture from the “guest-house” to set up the house that I had in mind.

I went back to the Onge and informed them of Lakra’s displeasure, hoping that would spur them on to back my plan. I then asked if somebody could make me a bed-like structure, something like a raised platform¹⁵ on which I could place my sleeping bag. Again, several people agreed, pointing out the individuals who could make one for me in the coming weeks. I was determined not to let anything come in the way of my plan, and immensely relieved that I would soon be able to pursue my field research “properly”. To indicate that I meant business, I set about vigorously cleaning the house.

Every day I went to the house, desultorily cleaned it and made inquiries as to when my bed would be ready. Within the next few weeks it was apparent that there was no bed being made, although everyone, as if on cue, reassured me about its imminent completion. Then Bara Raju, told me that the Onge, on reconsidering, did not think it was a good idea for me to sleep in their settlement. There were many of them who were drunk nightly who would bother me, and not permit me to sleep peacefully. Taken aback by this unexpected withdrawal of support, and seeing my dream of doing fieldwork in the time-honoured fashion of “living with the people” receding into the distance, I tried desperately to salvage some part of the plan.

I agreed that it was probably not such a good idea to stay the night in their settlement under these circumstances. But I could still live in the house through the day – write and cook there, spend time with them. It would be so much easier for me to coordinate going to the forest with them. And then, at night I could go back to sleep at the “guest-

house". Bara Raju was at a loss for words. The next day I went to the Onge settlement and, with renewed vigour, tried to sound people out on this new plan of mine. To my surprise, whoever I talked with remained singularly unenthusiastic to the change. Unfazed, I was resolute that I was going to do it, with or without anybody's help.

There was some ongoing construction work at Dugong Creek, and many different kinds of workers hired for the work. For what I had in mind, I required a carpenter – I needed a work-table, a rudimentary bench, and perhaps a shelf. There were large quantities of leftover planks of wood from previous constructions lying around, and it would be very easy to nail some planks together. So, I went to the supervisor in charge of the construction workers and asked if he could spare one of his carpenters to make these few items for me, and I offered to pay the person for his time. The supervisor brushed aside my suggestion of payment, and readily volunteered one of his workers for the task within the next few days. As the days passed by and no bench or table materialized, I made diffident enquiries about the progress of my request. Eventually, the supervisor disclosed that the social worker, Lakra, had told him to disregard any request that I made that would enable me to live in the Onge settlement. I was to receive no encouragement for such a venture.

I finally gave up. I never did get to live with the Onge. Hurt by what I perceived at the time as a rebuff from the Onge, I withdrew from them and decided to leave Dugong Creek for a while. I intended to explore the possibilities of living in the other Onge settlement at South Bay. It was only much later that I started to grasp what was at stake, for the Onge, and for the social worker.

I had understood the implications of the social worker's rejection of the plan at the outset. He did not want anybody like me on the spot who would be witness to his and the other welfare personnel's dealings with the Onge. This was the avenue for the traffic in alcohol, and there was too much at risk for him to permit me the possibility of acquiring direct evidence of its existence. But for the Onge it was an entirely different issue. They did not hide from me these individual pacts that existed between the welfare staff and themselves. It was almost in the nature of a joke that they shared this information with me. For them, however, the settlement was *their* domain, the only one still left to them. Even though they later nominated me as an *ijejille*, one of us, I would remain an outsider to that domain, which they would keep protected in their gentle, inoffensive way from my constant vigilance and interest.

A related aspect of secrecy is Ehrenreich's (1985) discussion of what he terms as "dissembling" behavior, the essence of which is:

"[R]estraint of emotions and concealment of activities, e.g. disguise and

simulation, not lying, deviousness or manipulating, although deceit and manipulation may be involved.” (p.28)

Ehrenreich goes on to explain this as:

“[A] behavioral security response employed by individuals and groups in cultural maintenance. Taken together, secrecy and dissembling are defined as mechanisms of sociocultural and political process.” (p.29)

This definition provides a framework for understanding the Onge’s response to my proposal to live with them. It is by employing a range of dissembling behaviors that the Onge evade the demands of wage-work (or other kinds of labor) that are made on them, and which direct their energies away from the activities that are of greater significance to them. By avoiding direct confrontation and rejecting an outright refusal, the Onge present a smooth, unperturbed front that permits them to maintain untouched those aspects of their lives that sustain their existence.

Gossip and anthropological practice

April 9, 1992

“This evening when the video team had packed up and were leaving the settlement, the kids called me back and indicated that I should sit with them on the sand. They have obtained a square board, on which they have poured sand, and are using it as a “blackboard.” Dalda, rather quick and creative, represented Tommanyo, and then erasing it, drew a dange with two people on it, and other roughly constructed dange lying around.

Then, most unexpectedly, Dalda drew the outlines of a vagina, and gestured with her fingers to indicate the act of copulation to explain what it was. She further elaborated by pointing to Shanti, Meena Rani and herself, then me, to show that we are the ones to possess it, meanwhile drawing more vaginas of varying sizes to indicate its enlargement with age. Then, she and all the other children gathered around her explicitly demonstrated how copulation occurs between various couples, both children and adults, embellishing their actions with the appropriate sounds that accompany each couple’s activities. All this was within hearing of Choiboi and Bebai, neither of whom hushed the children or appeared embarrassed by the discussion.

The children wanted to know who among all the men presently residing at the “guest-house” I was sleeping with. I had to tell them, regretfully, that my man was far away.

(Extract from field notes)

In his ethnography of Nicaragua during the Sandinistas, Roger Lancaster (1992) unabashedly reveals that gossip was a significant source of his data. Lancaster suggests that, as a form of face-to-face interaction, “gossip established a true collectivism of language. It is all give-and-take. Nothing truly belongs to anyone; it all circulates in the form of information, speculation, between and among us” (1992:71-74). By its essential “tackiness,” such that “it sticks to us all,” it includes within its reach the anthropologist, who does not stand apart from the quotidian round of gossip that is generated in the field. She, too, is bound “in tangible ways” to the circuitry of gossip as “speaker, spoken to, and spoken about”.

By the children’s spontaneous disclosure of the ongoing speculation about my sexual activities while residing at Dugong Creek, I became aware of my own inclusion as both participant and subject within the circuitry of gossip. During my stay there, the “guest-house” often housed visiting officials and administrators. Sometimes, the large numbers of people arriving together meant that the two rooms in the “guest-house” had to be organized to accommodate everybody. Maintaining strict gender segregation was not always possible under these circumstances. It struck me that whenever there was a heavy onslaught of visitors to Dugong Creek, I had a stream of Onge suddenly arriving to inspect the “guest-house,” and to question me about the existing sleeping arrangements. By the same token, on entering the field of gossip as “gossiped about,” I also became privy to information that had been earlier held away from me.

From my discussion above, it is apparent that there is an uneven disjunction between “secrets” and “gossip”. There were levels in the flow of information, some of which were permeable to boundaries, while some others remained inflexibly sealed off. Negotiating between these discrepancies is the task of long-term fieldwork. But, whatever the duration of one’s relationship to “the people”, it must be acknowledged from the outset, with all humility, that one’s knowledge is “limited, partial, and one-sided” (ibid.: 74).

The Andamanese at Strait Island and Port Blair

I made a brief visit to Strait Island in 1989 during my first trip to the Andaman Islands. The island was deserted except for one old couple in residence. The narrative that follows below is a transcription of an interview with Nao (the elder)¹⁶, estimated to be about 80 years of age at the time. Unlike my sessions with the Onge that were to occur later, this was a monologue conducted with minimal prompting on my part. Habituated to being recorded,¹⁷ Nao spoke with practised ease,

meandering from one topic to the next, covering all the ground that he inferred to be of interest to me. All conversations with the Andamanese occurred in Hindi.

December 20, 1989

I am of the Jeru, we (indicating his wife Bowa) are from Mayabunder. All the Andamanese, the different groups, we used to meet at Mayabunder. We didn't always understand each other. The British brought us to Kalapahar. They would send us to the forest to bring things for them, or from the sea. They gave us rations and clothes in return. I was a little boy when the forests of Mayabunder were cleared. After the British won the big battle at Aberdeen, they started cutting down the forest everywhere. We were at least a thousand at the time. We have dwindled to such a small group by eating all kinds of things---alcohol, ganja, opium. The British used to give us many of these things. Before all that, we may have numbered as many as 2000-3000 people. I don't like to think of how little we have become, even we are old. I don't like to think of what will happen afterwards, all my family are dead.

Jirake (the current Raja) and his family, they are Aka-bo, they are from Diglipur. There used to be a different Raja for each group. The Raja was one who was the oldest, who knew the most. He was the wisest, he could advise everybody. Jirake doesn't know anything. He doesn't bother to teach the children anything, their language, their songs, stories. Everyone goes all over the place in search of alcohol. Jirake doesn't do anything to stop it. I am the only one who protests, but no one listens to me anymore. Previously, we had to struggle a lot to get one meal a day. Now we have food, shelter, everything is readily available. But no one works any more. Even when I shout at them and scold – I say, cultivate, look after the cows – I am the only one who tends my plot. Everyone else is only interested in drinking.

We are more comfortable now, we used to fall sick because of the drought and rain. We would treat illnesses with medicinal plants (Tao). We would dry the plant and powder it, then mix it with water and drink it, it was cooling. We used to mix clay with water and apply it all over when you had fever. It would cool the body, and take away the pain. There used to be one among us who knew how to cure all illnesses. He was like a doctor.

The sun, moon and the stars are all made by Biliku, she is a woman, she lives in the east. Tharaye is male, he lives in the west, but Biliku is stronger than him. Dik is the god below Biliku. Dik brought pig for us, and the pig went into the water. He made a small fish and then cut it up, and filled the oceans with fish. Dik has one leg placed in Diglipur and the other in Calcutta. He made the land and stones, previously everything was water. Dik made land, he made mud from his own body, then brought seeds. Dik took a rib and planted it into the soil and made man.

We have a week of fasting during Raja,¹⁸ when we worship Biliku. We used to only drink water, and eat wild roots, or fruits soaked in water. Then

at the end of the week we would eat tanten (a tree like the jackfruit). We ate the seeds. It sustains hunger for a long time. We would hunt turtles, fish with arrows and spears. We hunted turtle at night, lit by the phosphorescence and the moonlight.

I have seen the Shaitan,¹⁹ I know what Lau looks like, he looks and speaks like a man. He comes during the day and even in the evening. Your hair stands on end when he comes near. But, I am not scared of him. I don't scare easily.

This is how a marriage took place in the past. The parents selected the couple. The girl and the boy sat together, and the Raja would give them a long talk. He told them what to do, how to live. We made necklaces and bracelets with shells and flowers, there was a great deal of singing and dancing, everyone would come. Two Andamanese boys married Hindustani girls. It didn't last, the girls left. The Raja didn't do anything to advise and prevent the break-up.

(Sighs) I don't like it now, we have become so little. Maybe our girls should marry the Onge boys. The two Rajas should speak to each other about that. Did you know, the Onge used to come by boat and frequently visit us in the past? We have a long relationship.

(Transcription of interview)

Some notes on a distressing field trip

When I returned to the Andaman Islands in 1991 to undertake my long stretch of fieldwork, I met Lichu in Port Blair. She was living at "Adi Basera," the "guest(rest)-house" for the "tribal" peoples, recently renovated by the AAJVS. She was there with her children, and some more Andamanese women. They had all gathered there at the time to be with Surmai, wife of Jirake, who had just delivered twins at the Port Blair General Hospital.

My entry into "Adi Basera" had interrupted something, as I realized from the simmering tension around me. Golat, Lichu's husband had made an unexpected visit to Port Blair that morning. Suddenly, I was in the midst of a domestic brawl, a blur of fists and knives, with choice expletives flying around me. My dismay and discomfort at witnessing such a scene, as I groped for a way to extricate myself and make an unobtrusive exit, was allayed by Lichu's unperturbed insistence that I remain there.

I spent all my waking moments during the next month with Lichu, roaming the streets of Port Blair with her, convinced that I had found my "Nisa". She was going to be the subject of my dissertation. Lichu was articulate and humorous, a streetwise and irreverent urchin, and we hit it off right away. As the weeks went by, while I took copious notes of her "adventures",²⁰ I realized that Lichu had made a shrewd

assessment of just how financially rewarding it was for her to “work” with me. She was going to hold out for the highest bidder. Better yet, Lichu informed me, she would write her life-history herself, with the backing of the Anthropological Survey of India. She would be guaranteed an advance of several thousand rupees from them, she assured me, and that would enable her to live comfortably in Port Blair. Meanwhile, Lichu courteously offered me the use of her house in Strait Island, when I decided to live there with the rest of the Andamanese.

Strait Island is a small island, north-east of South Andaman, a five-hour journey from Port Blair on the bi-weekly ferry service. It is a small, comma-shaped forested island, known for its caves of bird’s-nest, and plentiful deer. Unlike the Onge settlement at Dugong Creek, the Andamanese settlement was a pleasant and shady environment, conveniently constructed like a model village in India. Slate-roofed houses, reinforced with concrete, were organized as two large rooms, with a separate kitchen space and a large porched veranda in front. The houses were arranged in a circle, with the Andamanese occupying one half of the semi-circle, and the welfare personnel the other. All around the houses were coconut palms, swaying in the breeze, alternating with tamarind and mango trees.

Availing of Lichu’s offer, I actually lived *with* “the people” in this particular field site, surrounded by them on all sides. At night, I shared my room with Lichu’s and other children, who were sent to keep me company. Hence evenings and nights erupted into games or quarrels that I was often called upon to adjudicate. But ironically, while I found a way to live with “the people” here, most of the Andamanese themselves were scarce, departing on the bi-weekly ferry to Port Blair, Long Island or Mayabunder, where they had friends among the “Ranchis”²¹ and the Karens.

In 1970, when the meagre remnants of the Andamanese population were resettled on Strait Island, it was in tangible ways a rehabilitation, providing the small group with some access to a means for survival that had been appropriated from them. Subsequent to their treatment for various addictions (mostly opium), or other chronic ailments like tuberculosis or syphilis, it was assumed by the Andaman administration that with a stable resource base provided to the Andamanese, they would shortly thereafter revert to their former hunting-gathering-fishing mode of existence.

Generally speaking, three generations can be observed as existing on Strait Island where the Andamanese have been resettled, with striking differences exhibited by each, wrought by their separate historical experiences. The oldest generation, at present comprising four members, distinctly “Andamanese” in their physical appearance, have recollections of another time characterized by a different way of life.



Three generations of Andamanese at "Adi Basera", Port Blair. Photo: Sita Venkateswar

All remember a time in the forests of North Andaman²² where they lived until they came to Port Blair, and retain habits of work and activity related to a daily procurement of food. These are the people who are never idle, even though at periodic intervals they indulge in binges of drinking. They have survived the ravages of opium addiction, alcoholism, tuberculosis and syphilis, none of which destroyed the core of having to work²³ for their survival, testifying to their strength and resilience. They form the backbone of the community.

The next generation, consisting of about eight individuals, are the ones in flux, bearing the scars and living the consequences of administrative bungling. Cast off and adrift, their lives are a battleground for their changed circumstances of existence. This generation grew up under the auspices of the welfare system and were raised, relatively speaking, in a time of plenty. Assured of a daily supply of food without any individual effort, retaining none of the skills typical of an "Andamanese" or any that would find them a place in mainland society. Habits of work inculcated during childhood were lost because of schooling in Port Blair, which inevitably none of them completed, dropping out within a few years of high school. Now, they are content to be idle, alcohol and affairs with *lau*²⁴ providing the only diversion for the men and women respectively. Their ambiguity of identity is related to ambiguity in physical appearance. While claiming an "Andamanese" identity, they are uncertain as to what the markers are for such an identity.

The present generation of children ranges in age from a few months to eighteen years. The boys have been introduced to alcohol either by their fathers or the welfare staff, and the girls have only to attain puberty to be seduced (sometimes with their parents' consent), usually by the welfare staff appointed at Strait Island.

Throughout the intervals that I spent in Strait Island, or when I met with them at Port Blair, I was frequently reminded of the imminent ceremony that would be held to mark the coming of age of some of the adolescent Andamanese (a separate one for the boy and girl in question). As time went by, the ceremonies were as regularly postponed to the next season. Meanwhile, Munni became pregnant and underwent an abortion, without any perceptible dent in the proposed grand ceremony for her. All the Andamanese that I spoke to persisted in their promise of an elaborate ritual for me to document before my return to the US.

Invoking a ritual that has ceased to impart any relevance to their ongoing existence seems a pathetic attempt by the Andamanese to assert some semblance of structure and identity to an otherwise meaningless or disconnected lifestyle. Their claim to an Andamanese identity is propped up by reference to a misty past that exists in the mem-

ories of only a few surviving members. For those Andamanese as well, their recollections were already divorced from any basis in an ongoing lifeway that could sustain such an identity.

Extract from transcription of discussion with Jirake

December 15, 1991, Strait Island

I have ten children, five girls and five boys. The government tells us to have more children. They tell us we should increase our numbers. We were about 80-90²⁵ people when I was young. We have dwindled because of various illnesses. We used to stay with the Karens, we learned to take opium from them. I get Rs. 475 and my wife Surmai get Rs. 75 every month from the government. We get free rations. I like it here now, we have lights, electricity, a fan when it's hot. We have become used to living like this, eating food cooked with salt, masaa etc. In the past, we used to heat stone until it was red hot, put leaves on top, then put the meat on top and cover it over with more leaves, add a layer of mud, and that's how we would cook meat. We would dry the meat by placing it on a bamboo platform over the fire, it would keep for several weeks.

I wonder how long the government will continue to help us, nobody is interested in doing anything.

Conclusion

This chapter is an immersion into the “local,” focusing narrowly on some key individuals among the Onge and the Andamanese, and the substance of my interactions with them. The context and the content of the encounters between the two groups are radically different. But they are juxtaposed by my insertion into these sites, and the ways in which my expectations, perceptions and, hence, my experience of each was inflected by the other. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, I arrived in the Andaman Islands in search of hunter-gatherers. My disappointment with the Andamanese non-conformity to these expectations led to an over-attribution of “authenticity” to the Onge lifestyle. As demonstrated in my questions in the interviews conducted with the Onge, my field of vision (revealed in the photographs included here) encompassed solely those “unique” characteristics that were affirmative of a hunter-gatherer existence. These photographs, divorced from the contradictory complexities of daily existence, perpetuate a certain representation of the Onge as “Stone Age Tribals” (Mukherjee 1995) living in a “timeless” world (Mason 1994), to which I have been unwittingly complicit. However, neither

the Onge nor the Andamanese were easily amenable to the polarities by which I constituted them, and this chapter is riddled with the tensions of my disjunct expectations and experience of each of the two groups of people.

As the interview with Bara Raju and the extracts from my field notes suggest, all my questions were directed towards eliciting information that would render them more "Other". My increasing concern and anger about their situation is also evident, but the predominant leitmotif that runs through my interactions with them is my efforts to capture and synthesize an "exotic" worldview.

But what is also apparent in the response of the Onge is a distinctly pragmatic view of affairs. "What will you do if the forests are gone?" I ask Bara Raju. I hoped for a tragic lamentation of the centrality of forests to their existence. His uncomplicated response was, "We will eat fish." It left me at a loss for words.

Likewise, my queries to Totanange as to why they shared food elicited an answer, equally lucid in its simplicity. "We are all one people," he said, "how can we eat if someone goes hungry?" Bara Raju's response was more practical. "If I don't share my food, how can I get anyone to do work when I want them to?" I was disbelieving of such an obvious explanation, which challenged the basis for the elaborate charts that I had set up to document the distribution of food. Hence, over several months I kept detailed records of who hunted, who apportioned the meat, how many people came to take it, how often, who ate the meat after it was cooked etc. At the end I was forced to conclude that everyone ate everywhere. If anyone was hungry, they just walked over to where there was food. It applied to any kind of edibles, from tobacco and areca nuts to pork and honey.

But food had to be demanded, otherwise the Onge simply concluded that it was unwanted. During my stay at Dugong Creek, I tried to separate myself from the other Indians around, namely the welfare staff, by never asking or taking anything from the Onge, unless it was offered to me. Whenever the Onge returned from a hunt, or with a large catch of fish, crab or shellfish, even before they reached their own houses, the welfare staff waylaid them and demanded a share for themselves. I was scrupulous, I thought, by refraining from following suit, even when I was coping with a very low supply of provisions. I hoped I was making a point that was duly noted by everyone concerned.

One day, after a long trek through the forest, we reached the camp late afternoon, tired and hungry. Ramesh had hunted a large tusked boar, an *olonga*, and the appetizing smell of meat cooking directed us to where the camp was located. Everyone walked up to the cooked meat smoking over the fire, helped themselves to a large chunk, and fell to eating with great gusto. I sat and watched them, getting hungrier by

the minute, salivating at the smell, waiting for someone to think of offering me some. I waited in vain.

Finally, unable to bear it any longer, I started a long wail of complaints. I reminded everyone present of all the times that they had stopped by at the “guest-house” and eaten with me. Of how lavish I was in my hospitality, freely offering of my scarce and infrequently replenished supply of food. And here I was sitting beside them, watching them eat, and nobody thought of giving me any. The Onge stopped eating to stare at me in surprise, lips glistening with grease. “We thought you didn’t want any,” said Oroti. “We thought you don’t eat pork cooked the way we eat it,” chimed in Entogegi. “You’ve never asked us for some,” added Kokeyile, “how do we know you want it unless you ask for it?” “Take it if you want it.”

By that time, the meat had been sitting awhile, and the flies and the dogs had started settling on it. I couldn’t bring myself to partake of any.

My persistence in attempting to unearth an “authentic and “native” exegesis of all issues was exposed during a discussion with Berogegi. Returning to a question that I had asked of everyone, I wanted to know how he interpreted the decline in their population. What were his views on why their numbers had diminished drastically? Did he, like Bara Raju, lay the blame on the “old-time” Onge, fighting and killing each other off? Berogegi’s response was that people started falling sick, getting fevers more frequently and dying. My dissatisfaction was writ large on my face. There was nothing quintessentially “Onge” to this response.

Reading my expression, Berogegi smiled knowingly in my direction. He had surmised what I wanted. “It was *boorage*,” he began. “*Boorage* got us. He lives under the ground, this frightful monster. He comes out at night and creeps upon the unwary. He preys on little children and the elderly. Sometimes, when he is very hungry, he even grabs the strong. He is stronger than any Onge, twice as strong as *Tommany*. That’s how it happened.”

Satisfied by my excited scribbling, he turned to leave. “*Boorage* is what you call malaria,” was his parting shot. I wrote a note to myself to check for a similar correspondence with other Onge “spirits”.

To make such discordances more explicit, and to elucidate the actual process of research, simultaneously fragmentary and uncertain, I have engaged in a variety of writing strategies in this chapter. These are predominantly simulations of dialogue, and a polyphony of voices, including my own, from my field-notes. I have found it a useful strategy to present the very problematics of attempting to engage in dialogue, under conditions that delimit in some instances, or foreclose in others, the possibilities of “open” communication. □

Notes

- 1 Reserved means off-limits to the general public. A special “tribal permit” is issued by the Andaman administration for a specific duration on provision of sufficient grounds for seeking entry to these areas. The permits are available solely to Indian citizens.
- 2 A recent report in a journal in India mentions the discovery of a “magic” plant extract used by the Onge, found to be an effective cure against cerebral malaria. The report goes on to discuss the consequences for the Onge of “patent-hungry profiteers jostling their way down there” (Dasgupta 1996:13).
- 3 The Lieutenant Governor is the highest executive authority in the Andaman Islands.
- 4 In the early sixties, Janardhan Shukla, a newly trained compounder, decided to live in Little Andaman with the Onge, roaming the forest with them and living as they did for several years. He is now a retired but honorary employee of the AAJVS.
- 5 It is unclear who Etonoye was, it is possible he is an amalgam of several people. He may have been Portman or Temple who visited Little Andaman in the early part of this century. Cipriani, as Totanange informed me, was referred to as Koshaiangegi.
- 6 A later discussion with Totanange clarified that while Onkoboywo/Tinea-bogalangle were one and the same, Tineabogalangle was the form of women’s respectful usage when referring to the spirit.
- 7 The disbelief was a consequence of the incompatibility of this account of Onge origins with the version discussed by Pandya 1993, based on his research with the Onge in 1983-84. Clifford Geertz’s prescient comment about such differing renderings of the same people suggests that the situation is integral to anthropological inquiry. “One can go look at the Azande again, but if the complex theory of passion, knowledge, and causation that Evans-Pritchard said he discovered there isn’t found, we are more likely to doubt our own powers than we are to doubt his--- or perhaps simply conclude that the Zande are no longer themselves” (1988: 5).
- 8 The question about fire was brought about by the abrupt change of subject whenever I tried to initiate conversation on the symbolic significance of fire, discussed extensively by Pandya (1993).
- 9 The rituals surrounding a boy’s rite of passage into the world of adult men, marking him as a fearless hunter. These rituals were the focus of Pandya’s (1993) research.
- 10 The tassel of dried cane worn around the crotch by Onge women.
- 11 Prakash was to be married to Bara Raju’s daughter. He was a resident of South Bay, the other Onge settlement at the southern end of Little Andaman. Bara Raju was affinally related to some of the territorial groups of South Bay.
- 12 Palaiyan was the AAJVS appointed Plantation Officer for South Bay, as well the temporary social worker for Dugong Creek, while the earlier appointee, Lakra was under investigation on charges of financial mismanagement.

- 13 Abu-Lughod (1991:141) makes a critical point when she notes that the outsider does not simply stand outside, but always in a certain relation “with the Other of the study...within a larger political-historical complex.”
- 14 In the Andamans and in many parts of India, living alone is considered peculiar, the spontaneous question being, “Why would anyone want to be alone?” When I lived with the Andamanese, I always had a few children sent to sleep with me.
- 15 Due to the danger from snakes and other rather venomous insects, it was a wise precaution to avoid sleeping on the floor.
- 16 During a recent trip to Port Blair in May 2004, I learned of Nao (Chacha’s) death some years earlier.
- 17 Despite my explanation of who I was, and what I was doing there, Nao was convinced that I was a representative of All India Radio, Port Blair, since they often wanted to record his stories.
- 18 *Roja* is the period of fasting observed by Muslims during Ramadan.
- 19 The Hindi word for the devil.
- 20 After I accompanied Lichu to a few Hindi films playing in Port Blair, I began to suspect that the “stories” that I had eagerly and meticulously taken notes of were, in large measure, scripted from the scenes enacted on screen.
- 21 The “Ranchis” are “tribal” people from mainland India, from the state of Bihar, one of the largest “tribal” belts in India. They were usually brought to the islands as laborers.
- 22 The remaining Andamanese trace their origins back to North Andaman groups, mostly *Jeru*. North Andaman is the northern extreme of the Great Andaman group of islands, and the groups of Andamanese who inhabited that island were the last of the various groups of Andamanese to be affected by the consequences of British presence in the islands. By the time the British left the islands in 1947, the Andamanese of Middle and South Andaman were extinct.
- 23 Here “work”, for want of a better word, refers to the subsistence activities that the Andamanese engaged in, prior to receiving monthly rations from the Indian administration. This generation of Andamanese continue to supplement these rations with regular resources from the sea or the forest.
- 24 *Lau* is how the Andamanese refer to non-Andamanese, formerly also alluding to the “evil” spirits.
- 25 Jirake is mentioned by Cipriani (1966) when he was in the islands in the early fifties. Jirake was a young boy at the time. This makes Jirake’s estimate of their population an exaggeration, since the Andamanese numbered about 23 people at the time.

THE ISLANDERS IN HISTORY ¹

"With lots of winds from all direction all the spirits came down and they had a war (kugebe) with the Ongees [sic]. After the war ended all the Ongees [sic] were made into stones (kuge). Many of the white men followed the rocks formed in the sea due to kugebe and they all came in the big boats to Bomilla Creek"

(Pandya 1993: 7-8)²

"Wherever the European has trod death seems to pursue the aboriginal"

(Darwin cited in Arnold 1988:4)

Introduction

This chapter and the next expands the purview of inquiry from the immediately local context of specific interactions, to interrogate how the "locale" (Probyn 1990) has been influenced, articulated and produced through historical interventions. The Onge tale of dispossession, unlike the Andamanese, begins not with the arrival of the "white man" but with the advent of those of a different hue, the "brown man". But the brush with the "white man" did bring about the "pacification"³ of both the Onge and the Andamanese, marking a cessation in the struggles by the warriors of yore mentioned by Bara Raju to retain control over their land. "What seldom, if ever emerges, are the opinions and feelings of the dispossessed," says Schrire (1995), "[i]t is not that they were silent...[i]t is simply that they went unrecorded" (p.58-59). Hence we are forced to work with the reports of those confrontations as chronicled by the colonists.

"Natives had plenty to say, but they were for the most part illiterate... and one price illiterates pay to history is prejudice. Ignorance of the other person's view brings with it a disinterest, a contempt for the history, and even for the sufferings of those who could not write. Where invasion is concerned silence blunts the impact of the newcomers on the lives and spirit of colonized people." (p.3)

Schrire confronts this void in her book and seeks to redress the silence in "a series of chronicles of colonial contact" (p.9). Given my focus on policy as a site for the deployment of power, I will not attempt to emulate Schrire but leave another interested historian or archaeologist to

render for the Andaman Islanders what Schrire has attempted for the *Khoikhoi*⁴ – to re-enact the moment of encounter, and reinscribe into the record the missing voice, the voice of the colonised.

The location of the Andaman Islands at the crossroads linking many of the major civilizations of the East (situated, as it was, at the center of a flourishing sea trade between India, east and south-east Asia and Australia) has been crucial in shaping the documented history of the islands. But, in view of its location, it appears curious that the islands should have remained isolated from the booming trade networks that surrounded it on all sides. Cooper (1989) addressed this question and investigated the archives for traces of non-European contact with the Andaman Islands and its people. She was forced to conclude that it was the Nicobar Islands (the group of islands immediately south of Little Andaman) that was drawn into the Arab, Malay, Burmese and Indian trade networks of south-east Asia over the course of the first millennium. Here again, geography was a major factor. As a result of the direction of currents in the Indian Ocean, the Nicobar Islands were directly *en route* to the passage between the east and the west. Ships reached the shores of the Andaman Islands only when they were blown off course by storms, or shipwrecked.

Despite these factors, the Andaman Islands became central to British strategic interests in the region. In view of the Dutch hegemony over the East Indies, and the establishment of a Danish mission in the Nicobar Islands in the early eighteenth century, the extension of British dominion over the Andaman Islands was important in consolidating British presence in the aforementioned commercial traffic.

Aside from the political manoeuvres of the major colonial powers, trade in Andamanese slaves thrived in these parts, many of whom were supplied to the Rajah of Kedah, part of whose tribute to the King of Siam consisted of these slaves. It was acknowledged by the British writers of that era that the reputed ferocity of the islanders was a probable consequence of being taken captive to be sold as slaves. The trade in Andamanese slaves continued long after the British had established a strong presence in the islands.

Although the islands and its inhabitants had long been a subject of European fascination and dread, very little was known of the islanders. But the myth of the Andaman Islands and its fearful inhabitants was kept alive by the various travellers' tales that existed prior to Colebrooke's report of 1795. The view of the islanders that prevailed was that the Andamanese were barbarously cruel cannibals, "the least civilized perhaps in the world, being nearer to a state of nature than any other people" (Colebrooke 1795, cited in Portman 1899:68).⁵ Some information of uncertain accuracy was obtained during the first, unsuccessful British settlement in the islands in 1786-94, and additionally from

marine survey ships and other subsequent observers. They correspond with early attempts by the British to secure a strategic location and a safe harbour on this major cross-road of south-east Asian trade.

This chapter examines the span of British control over the Andaman Islands, as made known by the records compiled by Portman (1899), who is the main source of information for this chapter. M.V. Portman is best known for establishing contact with the Onge, in the course of which he completed a coastline survey of Little Andaman. His two volume *History of our Relations with the Andamanese*, comprises letters, official reports and orders, as well as his own commentaries on the islands and the people. They document the history of British relations with the Andamanese (here inclusive of all the indigenous groups in the islands), spanning the period from the first British settlement in the islands in 1789 until 1899, and provide the framework for tracing British policy in the islands.

Unlike other major British writers on the Andaman Islanders at the time, notably E.H. Man who preceded him, or Radcliffe-Brown who followed thereafter, Portman is distinct in taking a more self-aware and critical position in terms of British policy in the Andaman Islands. His voice emerges as sometimes sympathetic, more often caustic, all the while mediating between the directives of the Government of India and the reports sent by the local officers and administrators. It is especially interesting to follow the period when he was himself an administrator in the islands, when his procedure of detailing events and documents takes a marked turn such that the chronicle thereafter is as revealing by its omissions as by what Portman actually reports. For example, while he is critical of the repressive measures employed by his predecessors in their dealings with the Andamanese, when it is his own authority that is challenged by particular individuals or groups, Portman's method of teaching those Andamanese "a lesson" is mentioned without any further comment. His passing reference to the Andamanese objection to the clearing of their forests, alongside his own policy for stepped up deforestation as he tracked down the *Jarawas* is another case in point. His narrative also includes the early travellers' accounts, tracing the itinerary of these tales as they reappeared in later writings on the islands and their inhabitants.

The interactions between the British and the islanders followed a familiar trajectory, one that had been repeated earlier in many different parts of the world. Schrire's (1995) inimitable and trenchant prose recapitulates such a trajectory when:

"Tasmania was deemed the perfect place to hold the most recalcitrant British convicts. The shock of contact reverberated in bullets, brutality, and disease as the Royal Navy dumped its unsavory load into the

Aboriginal land. Sterility and death followed fast as reproductive tubes and lungs were strangled with foreign pathogens. Half-crazed European prisoners escaped from the fortresses that were built to protect and contain them and plunged barbarically into the world of so-called savages. It took around seventy-five years for the British authorities to declare the Aboriginal Tasmanians extinct" (p.170-71).

This section traces the development of British colonial policies with respect to the Andaman Islands, particularly as these are interpreted and executed by the administrators who set up and oversaw the settlement and penal colony. Attention to the ways in which British colonial experience elsewhere intersects with their intent in the Andaman Islands exposes the attenuation of their policies in the aftermath of Tasmania,⁶ Australia and the Fiji Islands.

I maintain a thematic rather than a strictly chronological consistency, weaving between years to link similar events separated in time. Broad demarcations of intervals are denoted in the form of distinct sections that separate the period of the first settlement from the second. The chapter is divided into two parts. Part one, the bulk of the chapter, deals with the Andamanese, since they were the groups who were primarily exposed to the British presence in the region. Part two includes a discussion on the *Jarawa* and the *Onge*.

The ten territorial and linguistic subdivisions of the Andamanese were at the time spread out over the main land masses of North, Middle and South Andaman Islands as well as the other outlying islands. Observers at the time (Portman 1899, Man 1884) note that territorial demarcations were maintained between linguistically distinct groups. All the groups opposed the slow British advance north and westwards from their initial site of colonization on South Andaman. North, Middle and South Andaman Islands were referred to comprehensively as Great Andaman. Throughout my account Andamanese refers only to those groups who inhabit Great Andaman and the smaller islands around it. My term "islander" is inclusive of the Andamanese, the *Onge*, the *Jarawa* and the *Sentinelese*).

The Andamanese and the first British settlement: 1789-1796

From the middle of the 18th century, a number of events in the region of the Indian Ocean underscored the strategic importance of the Andaman Islands. With the establishment of a Danish mission on Nicobar Islands and the steady consolidation of Dutch control of the East Indies, a strong British presence in the region became crucial for control of the trade networks. Successive incidents of shipwreck and piracy on the Andaman Sea further emphasized the security of this sea

route for British ships. In 1788-89, the Government of Bengal sought to establish a penal⁷ colony associated with a harbour of refuge. Lieutenants Colebrooke and Blair were sent to survey and report. The result of their report was that a settlement was established by Lieutenant Blair in September 1789 on the south-east bay of South Andaman, now called Port Blair but then called Port Cornwallis.⁸

The little colony appears to have “flourished” until it was shifted further northwards in 1792, for reasons of superior strategic location. The second settlement, also named Port Cornwallis, proved to be extremely unhealthy, and the high mortality rate resulted in a quick abandonment of the decision to consolidate a settlement on these islands. But the seven years of British and convict presence on the islands, from 1789-1796, is likely to have had a long and insidious impact on the islanders.

Ferguson’s (1990) discussion “exploring the multiple interactions between aspects of indigenous culture and the changes wrought by contact” (p.248) offers some means of filling the gaps in the record. As early as 1791, Lieutenant Blair reports that, “the aborigines occasionally visited Chatham Island for the purpose of begging for some scraps of iron or a little food” (Portman 1899:84), suggesting that the process of obtaining “Western goods” was already underway. If later events can be read as a mirror for this period, we can infer the conflicts generated by the “race” to obtain valued metal goods and implements: the fights that erupted, the intensification of prior hostilities between territorially differentiated groups, repeating a pattern described by Ferguson (1990) in Amazonia, North America etc., of the ways in which Western contact transformed the practice of “native” warfare.

The first settlers on the islands were unaware of the several territorial and linguistic divisions of the Andamanese, or of the existence of a further distinction between inland forest-dwelling and coastal populations. From analysis of the vocabulary and material culture collected by Lieutenant Colebrook during this period, it was later surmised that the population inhabiting the region around the first settlement were, in all likelihood, the people referred to as “*Jarawa*”⁹ by the *Aka-Bea-da*. As the forest was cleared for the first colony, it is very probable that the *Jarawa* (when their efforts to repel the advances of the white¹⁰ intruders were found to be of no avail) were displaced and forced into the territorial boundaries of the neighbouring group the *Aka-Bea-da*. This, in turn, is likely to have exacerbated any enduring conflicts between the two groups. Portman (1899) writing at the turn of the century acknowledges the possibility of such a scenario:

“Of what took place between 1794 and 1858 we have no knowledge, but when we re-occupied the Andamans in the latter year, the Aka-Bea-

da were by far the stronger and more numerous tribe (p.704)...it appears to me quite possible that some disease was introduced among the Jarawas by the people of Lieutenant Blair's Settlement which reduced this tribe considerably in numbers, and thus enabled the Aka-Bea-da to obtain the upper hand."(p.703)

Extrapolating from the course of events in subsequent years to an earlier undocumented interval, the three years of British presence in South Andaman before shifting further north were sufficient for the transmission of diseases. The probable introduction of "virgin soil" (Crosby 1988) epidemic diseases, to which native peoples had little or no resistance, may have initiated the drastic demographic alterations that were to manifest themselves more acutely in later years in all the groups brought into contact with the settlement. A consequence of such changes as noted by Ferguson (1990) for the Amazon tribes (many of whom were also forest-dwelling foragers) seems plausible in the Andaman case.¹¹ Raiding to capture women and children to compensate for the local demographic imbalances, in turn, compounded the hostilities between groups.

Unbeknown to the sincere British officers, efforts to convey their "goodwill" to the islanders were in all likelihood an important factor in the transmission of diseases. Some islanders were detained aboard ships in semi-captivity for a prolonged period when the officers hoped to impress upon them their "friendly" intentions, and then released with gifts, comprising:

"[U]seful articles of peace, such as carpenter's tools, knives, cotton cloth, cords, axes, metal pots and pans, as well as with beads, looking glasses and such like objects of savage¹² finery" (Portman 1899:217).

A memo from the Govt. of India approves of these practices and hopes that the captives will give "assistance in reclaiming them from the state of profound and primitive barbarism in which they now exist" (Portman 1899:216). Schrire (1995) captures the essence of these exchanges when she describes colonialism as:

"[A] chronicle of betrayals...the exchanges were a mere preamble to the big takeover, namely the loss of native land, labor, reproductive capacity, and power, in exchange for nothing at all... perhaps not quite nothing. For after all, there was the exchange of pathogens between parties--air-borne viruses and semen-borne bacilli, tick-borne fevers, and rat-borne plagues. The effects on the indigenous populations were striking." (p.51-52)

The penal colony: 1858-1899

Numerous incidents of shipwrecks on the Andaman Sea, and the “Sepoy Mutiny” on mainland India some sixty years later, reinitiated the significance of maintaining a strategic base in the Andaman Islands. The Sepoy Mutiny also referred to often as “The First Indian War of Independence” was an important turning point in British colonial policies in India. It was only after this event that the British consolidated their holdings in India, becoming an overseas empire.¹³ The East India Company was abolished and its administration was decisively taken over by a Court of Directors in London directly under the Queen. R. C. Majumdar (1962) notes that in appreciation of Lord Canning’s able handling of the Mutiny, Queen Victoria appointed him as the first Viceroy and Governor-General of India.

A continuous record of the islands and its inhabitants begins when a permanent settlement in the form of a penal colony was established in 1858 on the Andaman Islands, following the Mutiny in mainland India against the British in 1857. The Mutiny brought up the question of accommodating thousands of mutineers sentenced to life imprisonment. Indian historians writing about this period imply that the sole motive for setting up a penal colony in the Andaman Islands was to transport the mutineers to a place where they would pose no political threat to the British. But the documents compiled by Portman indicate otherwise. From 1855 onwards, a rising tide of protests ensued from the increasing incidence of shipwrecks. The subsequent killing of castaways by the islanders, in a region that was considered a part of British dominion, re-opened discussion of the suitability of the Andaman Islands as a safe harbour for ships. Portman comments:

I have often heard it asserted that we occupied the Islands after the Mutiny in order to have some distant and safe place across the sea to send our rebels and criminals to, when in the state of the country it would not have been safe to keep them in India; and that the Andamanese have been killed off as a natural result of the occupation, and the country taken from them without their consent and for no fault of their own. But such was not the case. Long before the Mutiny the conduct of the Andamanese¹⁴ had made it imperative that the Islands should be occupied, and friendly relations established with the Aborigines, and this would have been done sooner had the Mutiny not broken out. (p.186)

The timing of the Mutiny was both coincidental and fortuitous in terms of providing the steady flow of convict labor crucial to the success of the proposed settlement.

British Policies: the ideal and the reality

Much of British policy with respect to the Andaman Islanders was directed towards treating the islanders “with every kindness,” as long as they recognized British superiority or did not stand in the way of British interests. It is instructive to note at this point that the earlier genocide and rapid extinction of the Tasmanians was a stark example for the British of the devastation unleashed on small, isolated populations by a penal colony. The Andamanese were repeatedly compared to the Tasmanians whom they appear to have resembled, many theories imputing them to the same race of people. Portman asserts:

“[T]he English have nothing to reproach themselves with regarding the Andamanese, whatever may have been the case in Tasmania; and, having the unfortunate experiences of that penal colony, and our treatment of the aborigines there, before them, the Government of India adopted a policy towards the aborigines of the Andaman Islands which has made them, above all races of savages, the most carefully tended and petted.” [my emphasis] (p 209-210)

Between the years of 1858-70 any strategy, if even faintly reminiscent of Tasmania, was firmly deflected. As Portman contends:

“[A]nything savouring of cutting off portions of land, or, as formerly proposed... driving the Andamanese out of a portion of the Great Andaman, too closely resembled our treatment of the aborigines of Tasmania to be acceptable to the Government.” (p.470)

But yet again British colonial interests in the Andaman Islands stood in the way of directives for “humane” policy, as suggested in the passage cited below:

“[B]oth the Government of India and the Court of Directors, repeatedly, and in the strongest terms, ordered that the Andamanese were not to be injured, ill-treated, or allowed to suffer in any way from our occupation of their Islands, and when very occasional cases of improper behavior towards the Andamanese occurred, the Government expressed their extreme displeasure with the parties in fault.” [my emphasis] (p.186)

Portman then goes on to detail numerous instances of ill-treatment of the Andamanese, directing his disapproval towards the Naval officers, some administrators, the European residents, guards etc. Except when the Andamanese took matters into their own hands, remarkably little punishment was meted out to the perpetrators.

Questions of ownership: looting

Across all the levels of hierarchy within the settlement, there were no exceptions to the practice of taking and carrying away Andamanese goods – implements, weapons, household articles, canoes – whenever the opportunity presented itself. In the early days, “bows, arrows, nets and such of their utensils or weapons as were calculated to throw light on their customs, were taken, their canoes and dwellings were respected, and presents were invariably left” (Portman 1899:231).

But, every visit thereafter to an Andamanese camp meant that the visitors returned “laden with bows, arrows and shells etc.”. Over the years, the officers remarked on the Andamanese habit of hiding their belongings in the forest if they received warning of any intruders.

While there is some recognition of the reasons for this behavior, there is no awareness that the propensity to carry away objects from the huts may be construed as “stealing” by the Andamanese:

“[S]o many canoes have been taken from them in former times, that they are now afraid to shew them, and draw them up creeks, and hide them in the jungles when they see us coming, and while these fears last our visits must always occasion them inconvenience and anxiety.” (p.411)

It was only if the violation was in terms of British notions of property that the identical practice by the “savages” was defined as “plundering” or “looting” of metal implements or tools, and for which they were dealt severe reprisals. According to Man, the founding of the settlement in 1858 met with “serious difficulties... in consequence of the harassing attacks on...working parties by the aborigines, whose cupidity was excited by the iron tools and other implements which in their eyes presented an appearance of adaptability as weapons of the chase”. The “Government Gardens” were “likewise freely robbed, until at length stern repressive measures had to be adopted whereby they were instructed for the first time in the laws of private property” (Man 1885: 262). Portman, looking back over the years with a mixture of remorse and censure remarks:

“People in those days (an indeed even now) never seem to have realised that the Andamanese objected to strangers coming to their villages and taking away their property, quite as much as we should do, and that such conduct on our part could only provoke ill-feeling and hostility on theirs.” (p.299)

Questions of justice: rape/murder

An incident that revealed the gap between the ideal of humane policy as posited by the Court of Directors in London and its application by the Andaman administration in the islands occurred in 1862. Naval Brigadesman Pratt was killed by an Andamanese for attempting to rape his wife. The other officers with him at the time lied about the incident, describing it as a “cold-blooded act of treachery” and the Andamanese as “murderers assuming the garb of friendship for the purpose of carrying out their diabolical plans” (p.360-361). Two Andamanese men, “Jumbo” and “Snowball”,¹⁵ were imprisoned and kept in irons and fetters for some months before the truth came to light. “Snowball” was released but “Jumbo” languished in prison for some years as punishment for murder. Not surprisingly, a couple of years later when Major Ford became the Officiating Superintendent of Port Blair in 1863 and further investigated the matter, it came to light that it was not “Jumbo” but “Jacko” who had killed Pratt.. His report to the Government of India in 1864 reveals that:

“When Pratt was killed a prow was here, and the Malay crew were sent over with a promise of reward to catch the Andamanese supposed to be concerned. They went, and in four days brought over eighteen people, from whom were picked two; the original “Jumbo” was of the party, but one Hamilton, Colonel Tytler’s orderly, pointed out another man as “Jumbo,” who with “Snowball,” (since drowned), were made prisoners, and the original “Jumbo” with fifteen more, was released.”

Portman’s comment added in parenthesis states:

“This ‘original Jumbo’ was afterwards known to Mr. Corbyn¹⁶ as “Jacko,” and was the man who really murdered Pratt for trying to rape his wife.”(p.471)

All subsequent allusions to the Pratt affair in official correspondence were couched in terms such as “the melancholy tragedy” or “tragedies like Pratt’s murder”. Portman cites a comment made by Mr. Corbyn, who most often referred to the incident as an “unprovoked tragedy”. According to Corbyn:

“[T]here will, in the progress of their intercourse with us, be frequent cases in which the aborigines may be unfairly represented, and offences imputed to them of which, if the truth could be divulged, they would be found not to have been guilty.” (Portman 1899:440)

It was a pity that having grasped the situation so clearly, Reverend Corbyn did not apply it in his later dealings with the Andamanese, of which more details will be discussed below in connection with the "Andaman Homes".

Portman issues a strong condemnation of the manner in which the Pratt affair was handled, then goes on to concede that:

"[T]he only possible good that the whole affair can have had was that it overawed the Andamanese, showing them that we were the masters, and they the subject race,¹⁷ and that, whatever we might do to them, any unfriendly action on their part would lead to speedy and severe punishment. In this manner, and by our contact with them throughout the affair, they possibly obtained a knowledge of us which smoothed the way for friendly relations afterwards."[my emphasis] (p.369)

It is obvious that, according to British perceptions, there were simply two diametrically opposed behavioral options open to the "savages": "hostile" and "murderous" if they resisted the British presence in the islands, and "friendly" when the demoralized and devastated populations became resigned to their loss. The propensity of every British colonial officer, in turn, to converge the diversity and range of their objectives in any colonial situation within the expression "friendly," and then to go on to also describe their relationship with the colonized populations as "friendly" neatly displaces the burden of consequences that are notably "unfriendly" onto the "subject" populations.

Despite the claims of the administrators at the time with regard to the progress made in establishing a relationship of understanding and mutual tolerance with the Andamanese, the Pratt incident demonstrates the barriers to communication within the designated categories of "subject population" and their "masters". It also problematizes the authoritative ethnological texts that emerged from this period, E. H. Man's and Radcliffe-Brown's for example, all based on information obtained from a "subject" people with whom they claimed they had established a rapport.

Colonial ethnology

It is worthwhile at this stage digressing briefly to consider Man's scholarly research conducted on the Andamanese during this phase of British intervention in the islands. E.H. Man arrived in the Andaman Islands in 1869 as a colonial officer, joining his father Colonel H. Man. In 1858, Colonel Man (Captain Man at the time) was commissioned to reclaim the islands for the British in the name of the East India Com-

pany. In 1875 E.H. Man was appointed Officer in Charge of the Andaman Homes.¹⁸ Edwards (1991) suggests that this appointment may have posed a conflict of interests for Man,

[A]s he enforced the official policy of 'taming' the Andamanese, both morally and physically. The meticulous recording of their traditional culture was perhaps an attempt by Man to come to terms with this insoluble dilemma and his way of accepting the moral responsibility he felt to recompense the Andamanese for their sad fate. (p.109)

During his thirty-year appointment to the Andaman Islands, Man wrote extensively on Andamanese culture, learned the language of the *Aka-bea-da*, and his collection of material artifacts can still be found in many European museums. David Tomas (1987), notes that this mode of anthropological appropriation of the Andamanese was merely an extension of their political appropriation, in both cases established by the existence of the "Andaman Homes".

Man's mode of ethnological enquiry was based on the system developed in *Notes and Queries in Anthropology*,¹⁹ a method of data collection and documentation devised by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1874. He gathered his information such that it could be compared, quantified and classified according to the demands of contemporary method. Tomas, citing anonymous sources, describes the published product of Man's research as:

On the Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands was regarded as "a model for ethnologists," because it followed throughout "the lines laid down in the British Association volume of 'Notes and Queries on Anthropology'...In contrast to the conventional form of narrative or anecdotal accounts, its systematic layout, coupled with Man's extended period of study in the Homes, produced a formidable claim to scientific veracity. The monograph's authority was predicted on its ability to answer the series of "leading questions" posed in the British Association handbook; as one reviewer of Notes and Queries observed in regard to its questionnaire form: "Well asked is half answered. (Tomas 1991: 88)

His ethnological work was restricted to the *Aka-bea-da* and *Pucikwar*²⁰ groups around the Homes, and hence was contingent on the British presence in the islands. He was inordinately sensitive to criticism of his scholarly interests, as indicated by Portman's comment to E.B. Tylor in 1899:

Man is very much hurt by the way he thinks I have criticised him...I adhere to my opinion that much of the Notes on their [Andamanese]

Anthropology is incorrect...His work is chiefly written on the information of a few boys of different tribes and two convict Jemadars. This is not my idea of accurate scientific research and the results, though good for 1881 will not do for 1899 (cited in Edwards 1991:113).

Edwards (*ibid.*) offers a compassionate reading of Man, discerning his need for recognition and approval from both the academic and colonial establishment, as well as:

[A] sense of power over, affection and deference from and obligation towards the Andamanese in what was, after all, a lonely station. It was also perhaps a response to the predicament in which he found himself as a primary agent in the orchestrated destruction of a culture about which he felt deeply. (p.113)

It should also be noted that it was Man more than anybody else whose research provided the groundwork for some understanding of Andamanese culture and, thereby, the realization of British policy in the islands.

The local and the metropole

In the Andaman Islands, there were multiple levels of incompatibility between the dispensing of orders and their translation into practice. One such contradiction that emerged right from the outset between those who had to administer the "savages," on the one hand, and their superiors "in the metropole," on the other, is revealed by the following example. In 1858, Captain Man²¹ was ordered by the Government of India (in mainland India) to take possession of the Andaman Islands and prepare a Settlement to which the convicts would be sent. He was told that it might be necessary to arm a small number of convicts with muskets "to keep off the savages" (p 209), thus demonstrating that the Government of India was cognizant of "the hindrance and annoyance that the Andamanese would probably cause". But the Court of Directors (in London) did not approve of the proposal to arm the convict sepoys against the aborigines, and ordered that every precaution be taken to protect the Andamanese from "collisions" with the convicts since it "must end in the extermination of the weaker race".

At the level of articulated policy, it is evident that the colonial officers were distressed by the inability of the islanders to appreciate their "benign" intentions. As they "strove" to establish "friendly relations", the British officers vainly hoped that "their advances would at length be met in the spirit in which they were offered" (p. 232).

Even when the servants of the Government of India would appear to have been provoked almost beyond endurance by the implacable hostility and treachery of the Andamanese, the higher authorities in England and India have always insisted on a leniency and consideration being shown to them, which is certainly much in excess of their deserts. But the Government appear to have thought, and rightly, that the Andamanese are more in the position of irresponsible children,²² than of reasoning enemies, and have treated them accordingly. (Portman 1899:209)

While I am critical of the unfolding of colonial practices, I should not underestimate the magnitude of the task of setting up a penal colony. The state of siege that the officers frequently experienced during the early years of the settlement can be envisioned with some degree of compassion. Surrounded as they were, on one side, by desperate convicts who were “almost maddened by their horror of the Andamans, and the tales of the dreaded savages” (Portman 1899:257), and for whom even capital punishment was not sufficient deterrent to escape. And on the other by “aborigines who appear to be not less hostile to the natives of India than they are to Europeans”. In view of this situation, the directives from the Government of India to protect the Andamanese who “were the weaker²³ race from the effects of our occupation of their country” (p.265) were treated with some degree of scepticism. Portman concurs with the officials in Port Blair that it was *they* and *their ships* that required protection from the Andamanese. So great was the fear of the Andamanese at the time that no attempt was made to explore the creeks running off the harbour, and supplies of thatching leaves were obtained all the way from Moulmein, even though they grew in great abundance by the creeks.

These fears, taken together with the rising sickness and mortality from the heavy rains, including malaria from the newly cleared forest, provide some basis for the measures of excessive severity imposed on the convicts, or the scale of revenge exacted on “the savages” for their attacks on the settlement.

For the convicts:

[T]he customs of the Tasmanian discipline were enforced, convicts were handcuffed together in pairs, and these handcuffs were never opened. During working hours the worst²⁴ characters were taken to the sea beach, and, an iron bar was being passed through the fetters of a number of them, they were thus fastened to the earth, and made to do what work they could in a sitting posture. (Portman 1899:257)

and in the case of the Andamanese:

[A] collision appears to have taken place between the officers and men of the surveying brig Mutlah, and the Andamanese. The quarrel seems to have been commenced by the imprudent conduct of a midshipman, whose promotion was accordingly stopped, and one of the officers of the Mutlah was killed by the Andamanese... forty Andamanese huts were destroyed by the men of the Mutlah in revenge. [my emphasis] (ibid. 265)

It is evident from the response of the Government of India, following orders from the Court of Directors in London, how remote they were from the situation as experienced by their local officers. After coldly calling attention to their policy, which absolutely forbade the use of aggression on the Andamanese, the missive adopted a more conciliatory approach:

The President in Council fully appreciates the difficulties of your position. But the aborigines of the Andamans are apparently unable to conceive the possibility of the two races co-existing on the islands, except in terms of internecine hostility. This idea is assuredly strengthened by every attack we make upon them, and can only be driven out of their minds by a course of persistent conciliation and forbearance on our part. [my emphasis] (ibid.272)

The personalities of the administrators who were appointed to the Andamans, particularly the prior experience that they brought with them before taking charge of the settlement, were crucial in determining their attitudes to both the convicts and the Andamanese. One example of such a misfit was Dr. Walker. In 1858, Dr. James Pattison Walker was selected to be the first Superintendent of the Penal Settlement of Port Blair. Dr. Walker had considerable experience as a Jail Superintendent, and bore a high reputation for his excellent management of convicts. Due to various technicalities, Captain Man was unable to make the periodic visits of inspection to the Andamans as was first proposed. It was during Dr. Walker's term of office that many of the more repressive measures described earlier were employed. He tried to implement the same kind of regulated and stern penal discipline that he had been accustomed to in the Agra Jail,²⁵ never realizing the impossibility of adhering to that code under the frontier conditions that existed in the Andamans. It was only if the administrators had served some years in places like Burma or Malaya, also tropical forests, that they were more successful in adapting to the specific circumstances of the Andaman Islands.

Within the settlement itself the levels of hierarchy that operated, with the concomitant delegation of authority and responsibility, effec-

tively subverted the stated policy of “forbearance” and “conciliation” with respect to the islanders. The Naval Brigademen who formed the principal garrison of the settlement were, for several years, directly involved in the task of initiating and establishing contact with the Andamanese. Portman bluntly characterizes them “as a body, lawless, undisciplined, and quite unsuited to such work as the protection of a penal settlement” (p.259). These men were the principal “looters” of Andamanese goods, and provoked numerous retaliatory attacks from the Andamanese for their misbehavior with Andamanese women, not to mention for the looting itself.

In later years, other Europeans in the settlement posed as much of a danger, bribing the Andamanese with liquor and tobacco in exchange for products from the forest. Portman admits to the mistake of not taking any precautions against misconduct by the guards and others with whom the Andamanese had any contact. He admonishes his predecessors for “not having considered that the Andamanese required to be protected against us, quite as much as we required to be protected against them” (p.481). And, of an historical bent himself, Portman chides his fellow officers for not being better versed in the history of British relations with the Australian and Tasmanian aborigines, or the narratives of travellers in the Pacific Islands. A perusal of these would have shown the inevitable consequences of the mixing of merchant sailors or convicts with “savages”.

Civilizing the savage: the “Andaman Homes”

The Andaman Homes played a significant role in assimilating the various groups of Andamanese to British colonial practices, and played a strategic role in reinforcing and extending their sphere of influence within the islands. Similar institutions existed throughout the British Empire to “civilize” the various indigenous groups to the mores of the British, and teach them skills that would be of use to the British in their administration of the islands. Such a role evolved over the years, but in the initial stages, the Homes served as a means to hold the Andamanese hostage during British efforts to “pacify” the various groups whom they encountered.

In 1863, during Colonel Tytler’s Superintendship, the “Andaman Homes” were founded, and Mr. Corbyn became the first Officer in charge of them. The Home functioned as the center of “a system of entire pacification”, a “foundation stone for civilizing a people hitherto living in a perfectly barbarous state, replete with treachery, murder, and every other savageness”. In order to make an example of the hostages and to protect them from “cultural recontamination”, Andama-

nese who were “fresh [in their] ungovernable state of wildness” were prevented access to the Andamanese in the Homes (Tytler cited in Portman 1899: 376-377). According to Pandit (1985:111) the purpose of the Homes was to teach the Andamanese “good manners, to wear clothes, use a fork and knife, practise cultivation and to learn new trades and handicrafts, along with the English language”. But, as emerges from the records, there were more immediate and strategic concerns involved in the founding of the Homes than the mere discharge of the “white man’s burden”. Mr. Corbyn, who was instrumental in setting up the Homes, clearly explains that while the “civilizing” mission was a more distant ideal, the immediate purpose of the Homes was a means to hold some Andamanese hostage since:

[U]nless we forcibly detain hostages of all the tribes we shall give free licence to a reckless and unreasoning people to damage and destroy wherever their impulse leads them, and to continually provoke bloodshed (Portman 1899:472).

Corbyn goes on describe the fear that the “savages” have of Europeans and of their capacity for destruction, “the widespread havoc we could carry into their homes, the slaughter of their wives and children” (p.396). In a different context (but of equal relevance here), Berkhofer (1978) discusses European representations of the Native American Indians. He draws attention to the use of “counterimages of themselves to describe Indians, and counter-images of the Indians to describe themselves” (p.27), thereby defining European identity and superiority over the worst fears of their own depravity. Corbyn’s explanations support Berkhofer’s analysis of the colonizer’s ascription of the worst attributes of themselves to the colonized, whereas any virtuous traits were acclaimed as a credit to their own influence.

Apart from a meagre sum of money sanctioned by the Government of India for the Homes, the expenses involved in the upkeep of the Homes were borne by the “savages” themselves. The task of “civilizing the savages” was paid for by the collection of forest products or the handicrafts that women and children were coerced into producing for sale. Eventually, “a trade was established for them, weapons, curiosities, etc., being brought in and sold, the proceeds being use to defray the cost of tobacco and other luxuries, by which their hearts were won” (Portman 1899: 470).

While at the Homes, the Andamanese were not permitted to either tattoo or paint themselves as was their wont, since Colonel Tytler, Superintendent of the settlement at the time, “very properly considering this a degrading and barbarous practice, had prohibited it” (Portman 1899:397). They were forced to don clothes as there were “Chris-

tian women" at the settlement who would be offended. Another method used to "wean" the Andamanese from their "wild habits" and create "artificial wants to supply, which should involve the necessity of frequent visits to the settlement, and thus form as it were the nucleus of increasing intercourse with a superior race" (Tickell 1864 cited in Portman 1899:169). The islanders were fed "condemned grain" or cargo rice intended for Government elephants, gifts of mouldy biscuits, tobacco and, for a few years, rations of rum.²⁶ They were also expected to perform a scavenger function for the settlement, by eating the meat of animals dying of disease "or other natural causes" (p.462).

By the early 1880s, the Homes housed "besides a large number of sick and convalescents...a certain quantity of people belonging to different tribes" who were kept "for six months at a time, in order that by their labor in selling the produce of the gardens, diving for lost articles, rowing boats, etc., they may keep up the funds of the department", as well as serving as "hostages for the good behavior of the tribe to which they belong" (Portman 1899: 476). Under the onslaught of the monsoons, the temporary shelters that were constructed for the Andamanese were in ruins, after which they were housed in sties with cattle and pigs. For several years they were forcibly restrained at these "Homes", often chained in irons if they attempted to leave. Having rendered the Andamanese "tractable" and "submissive" by these methods, "reclaimed out of their present state of barbarism" (p.426), Corbyn asserts that they could henceforth be of essential service to the interests of the settlement "by removing the obstacles which are at present opposed to the development of the great natural wealth and advantages of these islands" (p.426).

By the late 1880s, the South Andamanese, in turn, could serve as intermediaries in British attempts to establish "friendly relations" with the Onge of Little Andaman. With these developments, as "the Homes function[ed] to homogenize and transform the indigenous population...[they also] became the generative locale for hybrid intertribal identities, simply because they provided the only stable context for communication and marriage" (Tomas 1991: 81 citing anonymous sources).

The convicts and the savages

Keeping in mind that the context for the events narrated up to this point is a *penal* colony, I have said very little about the convicts, or the interactions between the convicts and the islanders. The situation of the convicts in the Andaman Islands demands a more systematic elab-

oration (cf. Sen 2000) but is outside the purview of this work. I will touch on them briefly, to the extent their condition impinges on the islanders and the argument here. I have mentioned in passing the "horror" that the Indian convicts experienced when transported to the Andamans. Their dread of the "cannibalistic savages" who inhabited these islands was nurtured through generations of Indian lore. Despite the heavy traffic in human labor during this period, mostly as indentured laborers sent to work in the colonial plantations in the Fiji Islands, Malaysia and the West Indies, according to conventional rhetoric circulating in India, there was no greater punishment for an Indian than to be sent across the "black waters". A person condemned to such a fate was considered lost forever to the families left behind. The initial batches of convicts transported to the Andaman Islands were political prisoners who were involved in the Mutiny of 1857, not ordinary criminals, and whose desperation to escape at any cost was driven by the injustice of a fate that punished them so cruelly.

Portman narrates a series of encounters between the Andamanese and the convicts in 1859 when "the general hostility of the Andamanese towards the settlers was as great as ever, and working parties were continually being attacked by them" (p.276). On one occasion:

Out of the 446 convicts present, 12 had fetters on, and these the savages selected, and having removed their fetters, carried them off into the jungle, and they have not been seen since. (ibid:277)

And on another:

[T]he convicts described the savages as showing no disposition to attack any one with a mark of imprisonment (such as the iron ring round the ankle), unless opposed, but as anxious to attack and murder the section gangsmen, the sub-division gangsmen, and the division gangsmen, who do not wear the ring, and are marked by wearing a red turban, badge, and coloured belt...they beckoned to the convicts to come and dance with them, and they from fear complied. Ludicrous groups of savages with a convict on each side, with arms entwined, were engaged in stamping motions which appeared intended for dancing. (ibid:277)

As a consequence, the guards and gangsmen begged to have their distinguishing marks taken off, and to have an axe or a tool in their hands so that they would not be singled out by the Andamanese.

Portman later relates that the Andamanese had objected to the convicts' destruction of the forest. They had noticed that the convicts did not want to work but that the gangsmen made them, and hence they

had attacked all the people who were in authority. From the incidents narrated it may be conjectured that the Andamanese had demonstrated a willingness to enter into some kind of alliance with the convicts, whom they appeared to classify separately from the other inhabitants of the settlement. But, as the case of Dudhnath Tiwari illustrates, despite the repressive measures instituted by the British who held them prisoners, the convicts perceived themselves as more allied to the British than to the islanders.

Dudhnath Tiwari, Life Convict No. 276, was among the first batch of convicts sentenced to life imprisonment on the Andamans. Within a few weeks of his arrival in 1858, he escaped with a large group of convicts in an attempt to reach Burma and, eventually, make their way back to mainland India.²⁷ Tiwari was the only survivor from the group.

After living for one year and twenty-four days in the Andaman jungle with the Andamanese, he voluntarily turned himself in to the British authorities, warning them of an impending attack on the convict station at Aberdeen. This was later known as the "Battle of Aberdeen" (14th May, 1859), the most serious and concerted bid by several groups of Andamanese to oust the British from the islands. The event marked a turning point in British relations with the Andamanese, at least the South Andaman groups who, thereafter, realized that the British were too powerful for them to fight and overcome, and that the settlement was to be a permanent feature in their lives.

During the year that he was with the Andamanese, Tiwari lived with the group that had spared his life, learnt their language, wandering about with them and living as they did in the forest. They had even offered him a woman to live with, Lipaia, whom he "left in an interesting condition" (Portman 1899:285) when he returned to the settlement. Tiwari's account of his adventures with the Andamanese was the first accurate picture of their customs, and many of his observations were later corroborated by other more professional studies of the islanders. Despite his year with the Andamanese, it appears Tiwari felt little allegiance to the group he travelled with, exposing them to the British military in an effort to win freedom for himself. As he anticipated, Tiwari was later granted a free pardon for his "good service" to the Government of India.

In later years, the convicts were placed as guards at the "Andaman Homes". Successive administrative officers, in turn, doubted the propriety of any convicts appointed as orderlies or watchman at the Homes since it was here that the convict guards, placed in a position of power over the Andamanese, were often found to ill-treat the "savages".

Disease and the islanders

Predictably, the close contact with the British and the Indian convicts in these efforts to “civilize the savages” led to the spread of a number of infectious diseases, wreaking havoc among all the different groups of the Andamanese. The following observation in the Gazetteer of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is noteworthy:

The cause of diminution of the population is infectious and contagious disease, the result of contact with an advanced civilization. Epidemics, all imported, of pneumonia (1868), syphilis (1876), measles (1877) and influenza (1892), together with exposure to the sun and wind in cleared spaces, the excessive use of tobacco and overclothing, have been the chief means of destroying them. Disease has worn down the actual numbers of the tribes and has apparently rendered the union of the sexes infructuous in many cases. (1909:2)

With the onset of the epidemic diseases, issues of “hygiene” and “control” became key terms in British administrative policy. Arnold (1988) contends that “medical intervention impinged directly upon the lives of the people, assuming an unprecedented right (in the name of medical science) over the health and bodies of its subjects” (*ibid.*: 18). When syphilis was detected at the Homes, precautions were taken to segregate and keep the patients “clean”, with a separate hospital built for them. On enquiry, it was found that the Andamanese had been suffering from the disease for three to four years prior to its detection, but were prevented from reporting it by the convicts, who were afraid of being punished. The coercive measures to segregate and restrain the Andamanese at these hospitals often replicated the efforts to “tame” them in the early years of the “Andaman Homes”. The futility of these measures is attributed to the ignorance and unhygienic practices of the Andamanese. Portman laments the fact that:

[T]he Andamanese were too thoughtless and helpless a race to benefit by the precautions...their filthy habits, their custom of sleeping together in a heap, so that the abrasions on the skin of one became inoculated with the syphilitic poison from the open sores of another, and their immorality, all tended to spread the infection. [my emphasis] (p.610)

On the subject of Andamanese morals,²⁸ General Barwell writes in the Annual Report for 1875-76 that:

"[T]he opinion hitherto prevalent regarding these people, that they are free from any taint of immorality, is entirely unfounded...though they deem chastity a virtue, it is by no means rare for some of them to form improper connections; but in this they assert that they do not differ from the tribes of the other islands." (Portman 1899:604)

Man, during whose tenure many of the major epidemics occurred, took "stringent measures" and "enforc[ed] restrictions" which "the Andamanese, blind to their own interests, resented, and endeavoured to escape from" (p.621). More surprisingly, and apparently subverting his own efforts, Man was also tireless in his exertions to establish "friendly relations" with the Andamanese living in the more distant reaches of North Andaman, and to bring them in contact with the settlement. Portman, who succeeded Man, seemed as blind to the implications of his actions when he took several Andamanese and Onge with him on a tour of Calcutta while there was an outbreak of smallpox in the city. Meanwhile, Portman claims to be astounded by the indifference of the medical authorities, to whose "extraordinary neglect" he attributes the "partial extermination of the race" (p.614). However, despite the attempts to displace responsibility elsewhere, "the connection between the Homes and the spread of infectious disease was acknowledged by administrators" (Tomas 1991: 81). Portman concludes his account of the history of relations with the Andamanese with an explanation for why the Andamanese race was dying out:

"The Andamanese have had no fresh blood for many centuries, and continued in-breeding has weakened their constitutions. The savage, far from being, as people often suppose, a robust man, is generally very delicate...he cannot compare with a European in his endurance of new hardships and altered circumstances. Had the Andamanese been left entirely alone, no doubt they would have continued to exist for many centuries...but when we came amongst them and admitted the air of the outside world, with consequential changes, to suit our necessities, not theirs, they lost their vitality, which was wholly dependent on being untouched, and the end of the race came." (p.875)

Such a rationalization firmly places the burden of consequences back on the Andamanese. In view of the dominant evolutionary currents of the time, the predicament of the Andamanese could be shrugged off as the inevitable consequences of the pressures of natural selection: the "stronger" would prevail over the "weaker" races. Moreover, as Arnold observes:

"As Europe began to free itself from its own epidemiological past, it was forgotten that diseases like cholera, malaria, smallpox and plague,

though increasingly banished to the tropics, were part of Europe's own recent experience. Disease became part of the wider condemnation of African and Asian 'backwardness' just as medicine became a hallmark of the racial pride and technological assurance that underpinned the 'new imperialism' of the nineteenth century. (Arnold 1988: 7)

The subjection of the Andamanese

It is an instructive exercise to note the specific individuals whom Portman finds reasons to single out for special mention in his record of the Andamanese. The individuals marked for attention are those who are perceived as leaders, or "chiefs" of a particular territorial group, distinguished by the influence they appeared to have over other members of their group. Many of these people quickly grasped the situation *vis-à-vis* the British and came to an arrangement mutually beneficial to both. Such an understanding meant the person was relied upon by the British to track escaped convicts, to act as a liaison between the British and other groups who remained distant, and to accept the compact of "friendly relations" with the British officers. In return, the title of "chief" was conferred on these individuals, with an acknowledgment that these were men of "exceptional abilities". Maia Biala, the "chief" of Rutland Island was one such person. Major Ford remarks regarding him:

He is very different to any Andamanese I have yet seen. His bearing is so different, so superior to any of them, his demeanour at all times quick and composed. He has a very intelligent countenance, and his gentleness of manner, so different from the somewhat boisterousness of the Andamanese, is as remarkable as it is engaging. (p.494)

Portman goes on to add that succeeding officers like Man, Protheroe and others were similarly impressed by Maia Biala. His death in the epidemic of measles in 1877 was much regretted. Reading through these descriptions of Maia Biala, "King John" and others recalls Turnbull's remarks about the "highly skilled opportunists" among the Ik, who became "chiefs," or "go-betweens with the administration, thereby benefiting from the resulting hand-outs" (cited in Leacock 1982:163). Some of the other changes that he details in Ik society parallel those that were occurring among the Andamanese brought within the sphere of the Andaman Homes:

[S]ecret and individual hunting which had become poaching; direct prostitution as well as marriage liaisons with outsiders [in this case

the convicts] that were all but prostitution...spying, thieving,...wage work for the police. (ibid: 163)

Tomas (1991), notes that the surviving Andamanese were assimilated into a number of European roles “in addition to their roles as cultural brokers, interpreters and jungle police” (p.81). These roles, as recorded by Portman, are notably those of domestic servants, gardeners, waiters, navigators, Jinricksha drivers and photographic assistants (Portman 1899:670-71,864).

If “subjection” in its links with power opens up “new avenues of enablement” (Biolsi 1995) then it can be conceived as a process of availing of short-term returns which, in the long-haul, can have detrimental consequences (and which may remain imperceptible at the time). By this argument then, many Andamanese had undergone that process to become “new kinds of individuals with specific practical, recordable, and predictable identities and self-interests”²⁹ (Biolsi 1995:29).

A summary of events

I have approached Portman’s collection of records by extracting from them certain themes for emphasis, commonalities that existed despite the changing circumstances in the islands throughout those years. I have found this a useful method for bridging the lengthy span of time involved in this account. Hence, I have followed a thematic rather than a strictly linear chronological development in my narration of events. During the years encompassed by this account, as the British extended their sphere of control, all the groups of Andamanese were brought within their fold. Thus the effects of “contact” spread across the entire extent of the Great Andaman group of islands and, as we enter the twentieth century, according to one observer, there were no Andamanese found around Port Blair. It was only in the Andaman Homes that any of the local population was visible (Dobson 1874). Portman notes:

Twenty years ago the Andamanese resented living in the Homes for long, and preferred the free sporting life in their jungle encampment. Now the only encampments of the Andamanese in the South Andaman are the Homes, which contain nearly 250 Andamanese, against under 100 of 20 years ago. (Portman 1899: 700)

As early as 1885 Man concedes:

It cannot, however, be contended that our attempts to reclaim the Andamanese from their savage state have produced unmixed beneficial re-

sults, for it is found that in proportion as they gain in intelligence and tractability, the more fat and indolent they become, and having no incentive towards exertion frequently lose in great measure their quondam skill in hunting;— availing themselves of the privileges of free board and quarters, they spend their days together in singing, dancing, and feasting; the spirit of independence becomes thus less conspicuous, as they learn to depend upon others for the supply of their daily requirements, instead of being compelled to make such provision for themselves. (1885: xxiii)

Turn-of-the-century anthropology

It was at this juncture that we have to mark the advent of Radcliffe-Brown in the Andaman Islands in 1906, during a period when:

[E]verybody is agreed that the Nicobars will afford much more invaluable materials than the Andamans where all the natives except the Onge and the Jarawa have become mere hangers-on to the settlement... such Andamanese as were in the neighbourhood... [had] so far left their own mode of life (having lived for years in the Settlement) that they do not remember 'the things of old time'. (Radcliffe-Brown cited in Tomas 1991:95-96)

Despite the “range and magnitude of [his] litany of failures” detailed by Tomas (*ibid.*), Radcliffe-Brown went on to produce the magisterial work published as *The Andaman Islanders* in 1922, based on his research into the Andamanese between 1906-1908. When he undertook the study, in keeping with the prevailing historical line of enquiry, Radcliffe-Brown attempted an hypothetical reconstruction of the history of the Andaman Islands, and the Negritos in general. In the course of this work, he became convinced that speculative history could not give results of any real importance for the understanding of human life and culture. The influence of the French sociologists, particularly Durkheim, is evident in the radical shift in interest from the origin of institutions to the “structure” and “function” of social “systems,” relatively novel terms in anthropology at the time, and containing the gist of Radcliffe-Brown’s influential concept of social anthropology. He sought a “function” for various elements of culture “in terms of its role in the maintenance of the present sociocultural system – knowledge that was inaccessible to the native, as it was to the observer intent on hypothetical historical reconstruction” (Stocking 1984: 156). Thus, along these lines, Radcliffe-Brown went on to explain the “meaning” of myths and rituals with reference to their “social function”, which was “to main-

tain and transmit from one generation to another the emotional dispositions on which the society (as it is constituted) depends for its existence" (*ibid.*, 234). He asserts:

It therefore seemed to me necessary for ethnology to provide itself with a method of determining meanings as effective and free from 'personal equation' as the methods by which a linguist determines the meanings of words or morphemes in a newly studied language. (Radcliffe-Brown 1932: ix)

Hence, while "tak[ing] into account the explanations given by the natives themselves", these exegeses were not deemed "scientific explanations", they were simply "data" (*ibid.*:234-235) to serve as "grist for the functionalist mill" (Tomas 1991:102).

Radcliffe-Brown is represented as very much a British gentleman visiting the colonies. His apparent lack of concern or censor for the "punitive" expeditions that were sent to "quell" the "hostile" Jarawa suggests that he, like Portman and Man who preceded him, was also one who upheld the colonial machinery. His account is a record of the rapidly disappearing Andamanese of North Andaman, and provides a wealth of ethnographic details of groups who, within the decade, would cease to exist. Unlike either Portman or Man, in whose writings emerge the conflicts engendered by the academic and the colonial worlds that they straddled, Radcliffe-Brown does not appear to perceive any contradiction between his scholarly endeavours and the structures of power, of which he was an integral part, that had brought the islanders to the brink of extinction.

Tomas states:

In the end, when the Andamanese in the vicinity of the colonial settlement had been almost wiped out or assimilated into the everyday life of a penal colony, the meaning of Andamanese culture could be authoritatively reconstituted, even in the aftermath of a relatively unsuccessful fieldwork sojourn, by a university-trained anthropologist attuned to the latest developments in French social theory. We may even say that while the image of Radcliffe-Brown's "benevolent autocracy" over "the simple Andamanese" remains problematic, there are perhaps grounds for attributing to Radcliffe-Brown – and to the functionalist method he helped promulgate – an epistemological and interpretive authoritarianism, the culmination of a richer and more extensive interrelationship between colonial and ethnographic practices in the Andaman Islands. (1991: 76-77)

The Jarawa

Posing a contrast to the trajectory of events detailed with respect to the various groups of the Andamanese, a different dynamic of interaction was underway between the British and another group of islanders. At this point I want to switch my attention to an alternate set of people, who provide a case in counter-point to those islanders discussed so far. They are the people known as the *Jarawa*.

Who are the Jarawa?

The query as to who the *Jarawa* are is difficult to answer with any certainty. Through time, the people nominated by the term have served as the mysterious, unknown, hostile “other” for those who have named them as such. *Jarawa* means stranger in the language of the *Aka-bea-da*, the Andamanese with whom the British, over the years since the establishment of the penal settlement, first became acquainted. As mentioned earlier, the British administrators in the Andamans were unaware of the various territorial and linguistic divisions of the Andamanese. Or, of a further distinction between forest-dwelling and coastal populations, namely the *eremtaga* and *ar-yauto* groups.³⁰ Reflecting on the course of events, Portman (1899) comments:

When the present Settlement was first opened we were not aware that there were different tribes of Andamanese speaking different languages, nor did we know of the divisions of the race into Ar-yauto and Eremtaga; Lieutenant Colebrooke’s account of the Jarawas, and his vocabulary, was supposed to apply to all parts of the islands...[w]hen all the Andamanese were equally hostile to us it mattered little whether they quarrelled amongst themselves, and notice was not taken of one Sept more than of another. (p.704)

From analysis of the vocabulary and comparison of the material culture collected by Lieutenant Colebrooke during this period, it was later surmised that the population residing in the region around the first settlement were, in all likelihood, the people referred to as *Jarawa* by the *Aka-bea-da*. An interesting anomaly resides in the fact that the people whom Lieutenant Colebrooke describes used both canoes and rafts, but those who were later known as the *Jarawa* did not possess canoes. They only constructed rafts to cross streams or travel short distances between islands, a practice characteristic of the *Jarawa* to this day. One possible explanation is that it was the coastal-dwelling *Jarawa* who used canoes but that the technology

was unknown to the inland groups. As I have suggested previously, it is probable that some disease was introduced among the coastal groups by Lieutenant Colebrooke and Blair's first settlement in 1789, resulting in a marked reduction of their population. The four years that the British occupied their initial site on the south-east of South Andaman were sufficient to have decimated the coastal populations of the groups referred to as *Jarawa* by the *Aka-bea-da*. It was solely forest-dwelling, raft-using *Jarawas* who were encountered in the interior of South Andaman when the penal colony was established, during the second span of British possession of the islands. Sarkar (1990) suggests that it was the depopulated coastal *Jarawa* who were pushed into the forest by the numerically stronger *Aka-bea-da*, and over the course of half a century of forest existence forgot the craft of canoe-building and use.

It would be instructive at this stage to explore this particular appellation of *Jarawa* by the *Aka-bea-da*, who used it as an inclusive term when referring to the Onge of Little Andaman, as well as the inhabitants of North Sentinel Island. Other groups that the *Aka-bea-da* were unfamiliar with in Middle and North Andaman were never specified as *Jarawa* but by the name by which they designated themselves. Portman's conclusion, which appears to be substantiated by current linguistic research, is that there were two major branches of indigenous people in the Andamans. The Great Andaman branch comprised all the North, Middle and South Andaman groups. The Onge branch included the Onge on Little Andaman, the *Jarawa* on South Andaman and the people on North Sentinel Island.

According to Portman (1899), all the area north of Little Andaman up to the site of Port Blair was, at some time, inhabited by the "Onge Group of Tribes". It was his view that these groups:

[H]ad passed from one island to another freely; the people on Rutland Island would make excursions in their canoes during the calm weather to the North Sentinel and form a small colony there, as that island has fine, open and easily traversed forest, with plenty of pig, and sheltered lagoons in which fish and turtle could be caught. (p.702)

But these groups came into conflict with the southward movement of the South Andaman Group of Tribes who, over time, occupied all the islands south of Port Blair up to Rutland Island. The Onge, in response, retreated southwards:

[N]ot often venturing farther north than the Cinque Islands on account of the hostile encounters with the Aka-bea-da they met with...

The Ar-yauto Sept of Onges naturally abandoned the South Andaman, but the Eremtaga Sept remained in the interior of that Island, and on Rutland Island, and, not having canoes, only moved by land, or occasionally crossed the creeks on bamboo rafts, as Lieutenant Colebrooke describes, and as I have seen them do now both in the Great and Little Andaman. (ibid., p.703)

Portman goes on to suggest that these developments curtailed the movements of the people on North Sentinel, who no longer dared to visit Rutland Island, “and the various Septs of the Group thus drifted apart and became inimical; their bows, altering more or less, but their languages remaining allied though so altered as to be mutually unintelligible” (*ibid.*, p.703).

Throughout the entire British period, there is much ambiguity as to who in fact were referred to as *Jarawa*. At various points, canoe-using *Jarawa* were captured whose language was incomprehensible to purported raft-using *Jarawa*. In some instances, captured Onge were sometimes conversant with captured *Jarawa*, and at other times their languages were found to be mutually unintelligible. Modified versions of Portman’s view were reiterated by subsequent writers on the Andamans. Radcliffe-Brown (1964) was of the opinion that:

[The Jarawa] are the descendants of emigrants who at some time in the past made their way across from Little Andaman and thrust themselves in upon the inhabitants of Rutland Island and the South Andaman maintaining their footing in the new country by force of arm. (p.13)

On the basis of his observation of the seasonal northward migration of the Onge located in the northern parts of Little Andaman, the Onge knowledge of and names for all the islands north of Little Andaman, Cipriani (1966) concludes that the *Jarawa* and the Onge are one and the same people, some of whom migrated to other islands in the north as a result of demographic pressure on Little Andaman or tribal warfare.

At present, the only recourse is to designate by geographic location – the people inhabiting the 700 sq km reserve demarcated in 1920, on the western margins of Middle and South Andaman being specified as the *Jarawa*, the islanders on North Sentinel being designated as the Sentinelese. Whether these are the same people who were cited as *Jarawa* in the past is a matter for conjecture. It is somewhat ironic that to this day we remain unaware of how the *Jarawa* actually allude to themselves, though some indications from my research suggest that they too speak of themselves as Onge.

Aggression and hostility

Today the word Jarawa is synonymous with hostility. And hostile they are, but defensively hostile. Knowing their history, it is acceptable that they should have turned to violence with the outside world as a means of self preservation. (Whitaker, 1985:66)

In 1931, Bonington of the British government in the Andamans, at the end of a punitive expedition against the *Jarawa* expostulates: "This expedition did not stop Jarawa raids; like the Bushman of South Africa, the Jarawa is implacable and will continue to fight to extermination" (cited in Whitaker 1985:13). In the light of these comments, it may appear surprising that, during the initial era of British occupation of the Andaman Islands, there was a very different picture painted of the *Jarawa*. When Lieutenant Blair first encountered them in the 1790s, he considered them more timid than hostile, and had less difficulty with the *Jarawa* than with the "savage" *Aka-bea-da*, with whom friendly overtures were never successful. Moreover, Portman's comments draw attention to the fact that:

As we became on friendly terms with the Aka-bea-da they prejudiced us against the J̄arawas whom they described in the blackest terms, and the latter seeing us allied with the Aka-bea-da against them, resented or distrusted our friendly overtures, from timidity at first, and finally from downright hostility. (Portman 1899:704)

Portman is remarkably perspicuous when he notes:

"The J̄arawas [sic] seem to be very much what we have made them. They were much less timid at the time of this [Lt.Colebrooke's] visit than they are now, and were merely given a bad name by our Andamanese because the latter were at enmity with them, and ignorant regarding them." (ibid: 711)

The first mention of the *Jarawa* as "troublesome aborigines" is made in 1865 when Major Ford, Superintendent of Port at the time, was engaged in making a road from the settlement in Port Blair south-west through the forest to Port Mouat on the west coast. Gangs of convicts employed in clearing the forest around the settlement at Port Blair were often confronted by the *Jarawa*. The convicts reported to the administrative officers that these people (the *Jarawa*) were not nearly as hostile as the other aborigines but merely took the weapons and utensils the convicts had and then dismissed them without further harm. During this phase, expeditions were sent out in search of the *Jarawa*, any

dwellings that were found were stripped of all belongings, with “quantities of unsuitable presents” left in their place. Man directed some of the expeditions sent into *Jarawa* territory. In his opinion, such presents would more than compensate the *Jarawa* for the loss of their property. He remarks that “our” Andamanese are afraid of the *Jarawa* and is unable to understand this, as he considered the latter quiet and inoffensive “never molesting or annoying us, and only desirous of keeping away from us, while we were constantly annoying them” (cited in Portman 1899:718). Portman avers:

“It was unfortunate that, at the outset, the J̄arawas’ [sic] huts should have been looted thus, and the presents left, being such things as matches, pipes, tobacco and looking-glasses, the uses of which were unknown to these savages, were useless to them, and by no means compensated them for the articles taken away.” (ibid:718)

This state of affairs continued until the 1880s, after which there was an escalation in the extent of forest clearing by the British. It was when Portman was appointed in 1879 that the pace of deforestation in what was already known as *Jarawa* territory was increased, so that:

“Expeditions in search of J̄arawas [sic] were able to move rapidly along these tracks with rations, etc., and thus I established headquarter stations in the J̄arawa country, and saved much time and toil by not working through the thick jungle.” (ibid:726)

As the *Jarawa* steadily retreated in the face of these incursions, the British stepped up their efforts to “know more” about them and “befriend” them. Every time a *Jarawa* camp was discovered in the forest, tracks would be cut from the nearest British clearing to the site, “in order to use it as a headquarter station from which the *Jarawas* could be searched for” (ibid:729). In his Annual Report for 1882-83, Mr. Godwin-Austin acknowledges that:

“The J̄arawas [sic] have given more trouble during the past year than hitherto, which I am able to account for only in one way. During the past year much has been done in the way of opening out tracks through their country... which they probably took to be a move on our part to hem them in and so capture them on their first appearance.” (cited in Portman 1899:735)

Not surprisingly, a beleaguered *Jarawa* response to this kind of harassment changed from retreat to one of outright attacks on anyone encountered in the forest. Exacerbating the situation was the Andama-

nese encroachment into these parts. Emboldened by the protection conferred on them by the British control of the islands, the Andamanese visited and occupied parts of the forest into which they would never have ventured without risking an encounter with the *Jarawa*. From this point onwards, convicts and Andamanese working or hunting in the forest were regularly attacked and killed by the *Jarawa*. Deploring the state of relations with the *Jarawa*, and the hopelessness of trying to track them in the dense forest, Portman appraises the situation:

“At the same time the present state of affairs is not without its advantages, and though I fear that the J̄arawas [sic] will continue for some time to be a source of annoyance to the Settlement, yet they will certainly shoot any runaway convict they may meet, and the knowledge of this acts, I think, as a deterrent to convicts who think of escaping.” (ibid:750)

As the *Jarawa* relocated from their former territory further northwards, into the forest previously occupied by groups of the *Aka-bea-da* who had become extinct, expeditions were sent out in their pursuit. If the rationale for such a course of action appears inexplicable, Portman is at pains to elucidate in his Annual Report for 1893-94:

“Our only chance of becoming acquainted with the J̄arawas [sic] who at present appear to be hopelessly hostile, is by capturing some of the young men, as was done with the Onges of the Little Andaman, and keeping them apart until they are really friendly. At present any meeting between them and the other Andamanese ends in a fight, and I have, therefore, instructed the latter in the Middle Andaman to capture such J̄arawas as they may meet, if possible without wounding them, and bring them in to me.” (ibid:756)

Even at the risk of further transmitting the epidemic of measles, these relentless efforts to bring the *Jarawa* within the British fold did not cease.

“I am of the opinion that the only way to catch the J̄arawas [sic] will be by sending out armed parties of Police and convicts, as was done on former occasions when they have been caught, and using our Andamanese merely as trackers, as they are too afraid of the Jarawas to make any real effort to catch them when alone and unsupported with fire-arms. There are few Andamanese now alive who are acquainted with the Jarawa territory, and those few are old.” (ibid:761)[my emphasis]

No dissonance is perceived in acknowledging the dwindling Andamanese population with the efforts to bring yet another group within the domain of British control. Portman's final word on the *Jarawa* is as follows:

"In order to tame them, they must be caught, and it is this catching which is so difficult... Once caught, they might be kept with the Officer in charge of the Andamanese until they are to a certain extent tamed, and learn a little Hindustani; they might also be taught to smoke, thus establishing a craving³¹ which intercourse with us can alone satisfy;... Possibly, after this treatment, some of them, if returned to their own homes, might be the means of inducing the others to become more friendly. The principal difficulty, after they have been caught, in carrying out the above policy, is, that in captivity, the J̄arawas [sic] sicken and die." (ibid:766)

The situation steadily deteriorated with a corresponding increase in the number of mortalities on both sides. At every census operation conducted by the British, (starting from 1901, and repeated at ten-year intervals), large-scale punitive missions were mounted against the *Jarawa*.

Towards the tail end of the British control of the islands, *Jarawa* retaliation took the form of raids and attacks on the settlement itself. The Japanese occupation of the islands (1942-1945), and the death of four Japanese soldiers, prompted indiscriminate bombing and shooting in several parts of the islands, including the *Jarawa* territory, which is believed to have further compounded the situation.

The Onge

There were some important differences in the history of British relations with the Onge. The most significant of these was that there was never any question of occupying Little Andaman since:

"[T]here is nothing on it to tempt a settler, and there are no harbours, so beyond visiting the people in order to keep in touch with them, and prevent them from massacring the crew of ship-wrecked vessels, we have no duties there." (Portman 1899:844)

Despite their proclaimed disinterest in Little Andaman, it was important to decisively establish British control over *all* the islands, and assure the safety of British ships travelling in these waters. Throughout the 1880s, the several "punitive missions" to Little Andaman subsequent to the deaths of a series of shipwrecked crews in the island re-



The road to take. Onge child deep in thought, perched on a fence cum gate marking the boundaries of the Dugong Creek settlement from the surrounding forest. Photo: Sita Venkateswar

sulted in mortalities on both sides. Portman is finally credited with having successfully “pacified” the Onge and for establishing “friendly relations” with them. The Onge were encouraged to visit Port Blair, and on several occasions were taken on tours of Calcutta to impress upon them that:

“[W]e are the strongest race, and are to be obeyed. On this point no doubt should be permitted, and obedience must be enforced and all wrong-doing sternly punished, for the Andamanese are a forgetful race.” (p.845)

There is ample photographic documentation³² of the period, aseptic moments captured on film after “pacification” had occurred, devoid of the blood, sweat and tears that marked the violence of those moments.

The Jarawa at North Sentinel Island

The islanders who inhabited North Sentinel island, about whom even less is known, were also referred to as *Jarawa* by the British. Like the *Jarawa* on Great Andaman, they were thought to be similar to the Onge. A number of expeditions were made to North Sentinel Island. There was some talk of converting the whole island into a coconut plantation and much discussion on the “taming” of the inhabitants. Nothing came of the idea, and the Sentinelese (as they are commonly referred to today) remained undisturbed by any large-scale development plans for their island.

Population counts: a table of estimates

The first census operation conducted by the British throughout their sphere of control in the Indian subcontinent was undertaken in 1901. The table below indicates the enumeration of population through the British period, specifying those that are estimates and those that are based on an actual counting of heads. By 1931³³ the number of Andamanese had dwindled to 90. Bonington, Superintendent of Census Operation notes, “This devastating fall in the numbers of the Andamanese in less than 75 years³⁴ of contact with the administration paralyses comment” (cited in Whitaker 1985:9). The relative isolation of the Onge partly shielded them from the lethal effects of “contact” but they too succumbed to disease. In 1901 the Census estimated their numbers at 672 and in 1931 at 250 (Whitaker 1985).

CENSUS YEARS (*Estimated figures)

ISLANDERS	1901	1911	1921	1931
Andamanese	625	455	209	90
Onge	672*	631*	346*	250*
Jarawa	468*	114*	114*	70*
Sentinelese	117*	117*	117*	70*

Conclusion

There is a marked disjunction between the stated intent of British colonial policies in the Andaman Islands as these pertained to the islanders, and the consequences of their policies as they were implemented in the islands. On the one hand, it was clear right from the outset that unlike Australia, Tasmania or elsewhere, the Andaman Islands were never conceived as a site of permanent European habitation, even convicts of European origin being sent back to be imprisoned elsewhere. Their control of the Andaman Islands was guided by strategic motives, ensuring commercial profits from the extraction of timber³⁵ etc., and safeguarding it from occupation by other European powers.

On the other hand, the contrast between Tasmania and the Andaman Islands with respect to British interests in the two regions has no correspondence in any differences in the effects of their presence on the two populations. In terms of the consequences to the Andamanese, they differed very little from the Tasmanians. Despite the imputed distinctions between a settler and a tropical dependency, these are merely semantic quibbles, of little or no significance for either the Andamanese or the Tasmanians.

It can be argued that it is *intent* that distinguishes genocide, and there was no large-scale, systematic, planned slaughter of the Andamanese that occurred. Insofar as it was disease that finally wreaked such devastation on the Andamanese population, it can also be claimed that British policies cannot be held culpable for the extinction of the various groups of the Andamanese. But the links between disease and colonial interventions had been, even at the time, too often reiterated, in too many contexts, for explicitly stated intent in the formulation of policies to be the sole criteria for the determination of genocide. In the case of the Tasmanians, it was not the planned shooting of thousands like so many jack rabbits that finished them. It was their final confinement in various squalid settlements, notably on Flinders Island where a series of epidemics “systematically” killed off all the inmates (Schrire 1995). Likewise, the single-minded ardor of Portman, Man and others to convey their “friendly intentions” to the Andamanese by bringing them within the munificent reaches of British control at the “Andaman Homes,” can be dismissed as not explicitly genocidal in intent.

But how does one characterize one such as Portman who admonishes his predecessors for not being better versed in history but then exhibits a wilful blindness in taking groups of Onge and Andamanese to Calcutta to demonstrate British power while there was an outbreak of smallpox in the city? Or bringing captive *Jarawa* to the Homes while there was an epidemic of measles raging there? Or one such as Man, meticulously recording arcane details of a dying people even as he strove

to bring more of them within the detrimental sphere of his administration? Perhaps they were merely zealous functionaries executing orders dispensed elsewhere, but the translation of those orders in the context of their actual implementation was genocidal in its consequences to the Andamanese. Despite their prior experience with the Tasmanians, the replication of British colonial interventions as deployed on the Andamanese within almost exactly the same span of time is too much of an historical congruence to ignore.

In 1876, when Trucanini, “the last Tasmanian” died, several groups of Andamanese were in the process of extinction. Hence, the tragedies of history are repeatedly re-enacted in different locales. If British colonial interests in the Andaman Islands are held to be of primary import while human lives are expendable to the consolidation of such an agenda, then the colonial project has to be designated as genocidal in my “partial” reading of history. □

Notes

- 1 Sections of this chapter have been published in *Indigenous Affairs* 2/2002:32-38
- 2 My own discussions with the Onge suggest a more pragmatic view of human affairs, placing greater emphasis on human agency and its consequences, rather than a perception of hegemonic control of Onge existence by the interventions of the spirits who inhabit their universe.
- 3 “Pacification” is a military term often used during the colonial period to denote the silencing of resistance of a conquered people.
- 4 The Khoikhoi of South Africa and Namibia are popularly referred to as the San or the Bushmen.
- 5 For a view of the Andamanese as inscribed in literature see Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Sign of the Four” or Marianne Wiggins’ “John Dollar”.
- 6 The case of the Tasmanians has been described as “the swiftest and most complete case of genocide in history” (Haydon and Jones 1978). The British first colonized Tasmania in 1803 when an estimated population of 4000 inhabited the island. By 1830, after a period of the most brutal savagery at the hands of convicts and sealers, following an edict to “wipe off every black man on the face of the earth” (*ibid.*), with over a million sheep invading prime hunting and foraging land, there were less than 100 left in the settled region. These few were driven away from the mainland of Tasmania into the smaller outlying islands. Finally a handful of frail survivors were confined on Flinders Island where they met their death from various diseases.
- 7 The reason why the settlement should include a penal colony is clearly explained in terms of providing a cheap source of labor “which would otherwise be the

chief source of expense, if indeed it could be procured at all on any terms however exorbitant" (Portman 1899:192).

- 8 The British practice, as that of any other colonial power, of "naming" every place that they "discovered," is to be noted. The implication is, of course, that the place did not exist prior to such an act by the colonizer. These names have continued to the present day. Some later administrators also incorporated the names by which the *Aka-Bea-da* (the Andamanese group first encountered by the British in South Andaman), or the Onge referred to places, notably Portman, but only if they were not already conferred a British name.
- 9 Jarawa means "stranger" in the language of the *Aka-Bea-da*, the group that most fiercely opposed British occupation during the second settlement in the islands and, bearing the brunt of "contact," the first to become extinct.
- 10 Here "white" is used quite deliberately to highlight how color was important in constructions of the *human* for the islanders, as it was in representations of the *savage* by the British (cf. Sahlins 1994). The ways in which these differences were construed as revealed by Portman is supported by my research. My research with the Onge and the Andamanese suggests that for them *human* is defined in terms of color, and a lack of color is described by a term that encompasses all of the following meanings: stranger, foreigner, enemy, not-human, devil.
- 11 This line of reasoning is endorsed by the Onge accounts in which they mention the increased hostilities between groups following on the heels of demographic imbalances.
- 12 Across the world, the construction of the "savage" as a social evolutionary category hinges on the absence of clothing or permanent structures of habitation, and dependence on wild resources. The more romantic ascription of the "savage" as being in "a state of nature," and hence "wild" and "free" is at the level of rhetoric. All these components also provide the rationale for dispossessing such people of their land, since they are perceived to have forfeited their rights by neglecting to leave permanent and visible marks of their claims to that land.
- 13 Jenny Sharpe (1994) uses the term colonialism to discuss pre-Mutiny Indo-British relations and imperialism to mark the post-Mutiny era.
- 14 A series of wrecks of British ships in the Andaman Sea, the *Briton* and *Runnymede*, the *Emily* and the *Flying Fish*, together with the death of the surviving crew at the hands of the islanders, were influential in providing an explicit rationale for a British base in the Andaman Sea.
- 15 All the names conferred on the Andamanese by the British administrative officers are reminiscent of circus animals. These were individuals of the *Aka-bea-da* whose Andamanese names were Tura and Lokala.
- 16 The Reverend Henry Corbyn, Chaplain of Port Blair was a zealous functionary of the Crown. He was the first appointed Officer in charge of the "Andaman Homes". The good Rev. Corbyn is commemorated to this day. His name has been bestowed on an exclusive beach resort area in Port Blair known as Corbyn's Cove

- 17 The racialization of these categories is to be noted.
- 18 The Andaman Homes were set up to “civilize the savages” and assimilate them to the mores of the British. They are discussed at greater length in a later section of this chapter.
- 19 “*Notes and Queries* was specifically designed to guide the non-specialist, to legitimate the knowledge-gathering activities of “self-taught” students like Man” (Tomas 1991: 99).
- 20 Another linguistic and territorial group who became extinct over the course of the British control of the islands. Strait Island, where the current Andamanese population have been resettled was probably included within the *Pucikwar* foraging area. Loka, the former Andamanese *Raja* was of *Pucikwar* descent.
- 21 Later known as Colonel Man, and in 1869 he was appointed as Superintendent of Port Blair. As mentioned already, he was also the father of E.H. Man. In 1859, when the plans for a penal colony in the Andaman Islands were finalised, Captain Man was the Executive Engineer and Superintendent of Convicts at Moulmein.
- 22 The prevailing notions about the “primitive” races were that they embodied the childhood of mankind. Such a view reinforced notions of “the white man’s burden” and provided the justification for colonial policies as paternalistic responsibilities.
- 23 At this stage of British occupation, “strength” and “weakness” with respect to the Andamanese were assessed in military terms, and the vulnerability of the islanders to disease was not yet a factor for consideration. Also instrumental to such a definition of the islanders was the perception of “primitive” races as similar to children, and hence “weak”.
- 24 Here, characterizations as “best” and “worst” characters were based on the extent of opposition expressed toward the British.
- 25 Climate was an important factor here, those unused to the excessive humidity of tropical rainforests wilted under these conditions. The Agra Jail was located in a hot but dry climactic region.
- 26 The value of alcohol in furthering the cause of “friendly” relations, especially as it applied to the interests of colonialism was well known by this time. The Native American Indians are a case in point.
- 27 The convicts sent to the Andamans thought there existed a land bridge between the islands and Burma, and that the capital of Burma was within ten days march through the forest.
- 28 “Man clothes his cosmos in a moral cloak” observes Arnold (1988: 7, citing Paul 1977), “and in every society, present as well as past, disease, especially epidemic disease, takes on wider social, political, and cultural significance.” The extent to which endemic yaws was mistaken for sexually-transmitted syphilis is a matter that affords some conjecture here. In later years, the Onge were diagnosed as “constitutionally afflicted with syphilis”, subsequently found to be yaws. Arnold goes on to argue that besides pointing to medical misdiagnosis, these statements are also suggestive of presumptions of promiscuity.

- 29 It is of interest to note here that during World War II when the Japanese occupied these islands, a number of Andamanese worked as spies for British armies who were running an underground guerrilla operation at the time, tracking and reporting on Japanese movements in the islands. One of them is still alive today in Strait Island, Nao (the elder) more often referred to as "Chacha".
- 30 These terms too are derived from the *Aka-bea-da*.
- 31 It is not unduly harsh to characterize the British colonial effort as the first of the major drug-trafficking networks to have taken the form that we see today.
- 32 Man, Portman and Radcliffe-Brown were particularly active in this aspect, and have left large collections in museums in London.
- 33 1931 was the last census conducted by the British before the outbreak of WWII. The next one was in 1951 after independence from the British.
- 34 The number of years involved almost exactly parallels the time-frame of extinction in the case of the Tasmanians.
- 35 Guha and Gadgil (1989) trace the links between the development of British colonial forestry management in mainland India with the boom in the construction of railway coaches and the market for timber. As an area for future inquiry, it would be valuable to search the annals for the history of British forestry operations in the Andamans. The Chatham Saw Mills and the WIMCO match factory are modern-day extensions of British commercial enterprises in the islands.

ISLANDERS IN “INDIA”: POLICIES OF “PLANNED” CHANGE ¹

“It is flat, bright and very hot. Like everything that has happened at Dugong Creek. All the trees are gone, the forest is disappearing, everything will become flat and hot. Everything will dry up like death.”

(Totanange, commenting on the solar plant installed at Dugong Creek.)²

The “independent” Andaman Islands

In 1947, when the British transferred control³ of the Andaman Islands to the newly installed Indian government in mainland India, these islands were designated as “Union Territories”. As mentioned earlier, “Union Territories” are administered by the central government from New Delhi, and do not exist as a separate “state” with an autonomous bureaucratic structure. The administration within the islands, as in mainland India, maintained the bureaucracy inherited from the British, with minimal alterations to the structure of government.

In the years preceding independence from the British, as the nationalist movement gathered momentum in India, many of the “freedom fighters”, i.e. those most radical and active in their opposition to colonial rule, were incarcerated in the Cellular Jail⁴ in Port Blair. At independence, the “liberation” of these “heroes” received wide publicity from the press in India, with several months of newsprint devoted to the story of each “hero”. The Andaman Islanders themselves did not get much attention from the government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru in New Delhi after independence. However, Nehru travelled extensively to other “tribal”⁵ areas in mainland India, to make himself known to the indigenous⁶ peoples in these regions, and discuss his plans for assimilating them as citizens of India.

With independence in 1947, the former British colonial territory was partitioned into two nations, India and Pakistan. Pakistan was further divided into an eastern and western bloc, each located across the diagonal extent of India. Many thousands of displaced refugees had to be accommodated in the newly independent country of India. This situation coincided with the emerging plans for a policy of strategic colonization of the Andaman Islands, with the objective of attaining self-sufficiency in terms of food. Displaced Hindu families from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) were sent to the Andaman Islands and allotted tracts of land on South and Middle Andaman in the vicinity of

Jarawa territory. The large-scale deforestation, as land was cleared for agriculture, villages and roads constructed, with a greater influx of people entering the remaining forest cover for hunting and firewood, led to a marked increase in the frequency of “*Jarawa incidents*”⁷ (Pandit 1989, Sarkar 1990).

Post-independence anthropology

During this phase, Lidio Cipriani was commissioned by the Indian government to set up a substation of the Anthropological Survey of India at Port Blair. A sub-regional office of the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) was established at Port Blair in the early fifties. It included plans for a special unit on Little Andaman, to gain more knowledge of the Onge and “to assist them in any manner desirable and feasible” (Pandit 1989:88). In 1953, on advice from the ASI, a substantial coconut plantation was established at Dugong Creek, a large Onge camp on Little Andaman.

Cipriani was the first anthropologist to conduct fieldwork among the Onge. The English translation of Cipriani’s *The Andaman Islanders* was published posthumously in 1966, the material having come into the publisher’s hands only after Cipriani’s death. The book represents a brief account of his observations during a period of nearly two years between 1952-54 that he spent on Little Andaman with the Onge.

According to Cipriani, he was beckoned by the mystery of the unknown interior of the island, as well as the prevailing lack of information of any kind about the Onge. One of his first tasks was to establish contact with the Onge and survey Little Andaman, marking the routes that the Onge took through the forest, and locating the territorial divisions of the various communal huts dotting the length and breadth of the island. Cipriani admits to a longstanding interest in the question of the origins of the pygmies. He spent some years studying them in Africa, Asia etc. He arrived at the conclusion that the peoples of the Andaman Islands represented the “purest” living example of Negrito stock and culture, having remained in complete isolation until very recently. He makes frequent comparisons with the Semang of Malaya, the Aeta of the Philippines, the Mbuti of Africa, as well as the “Bushmen” of the Kalahari, in terms of their somatic and cultural characteristics.

Based on conclusions derived from his excavations of the kitchen middens in the different islands, Cipriani viewed the islanders as “involuting” rather than primitive, having regressed culturally, physiologically and psychologically. According to Cipriani, because of their prolonged isolation from the outside world, “they now represent the last and decadent expression of a very lengthy stage of biological and

cultural development, a point of arrival, and not one of departure" (1966:67), and a process that inevitably led to extinction. As a self-professed humanitarian, Cipriani sought to avert this inevitable decline through "scientific" intervention.

Cipriani set up camp close to the communal huts of every territorial group that he visited on the island. Since the island was teeming with game, wild fruit and edible roots, food was never a problem, and it was even unnecessary for Cipriani to bring with him any provisions. He appears to have partaken of everything that the Onge ate since he is able to vividly describe these culinary experiences. Living so close to the Onge, he was in a position (unlike Radcliffe-Brown, who conducted much of his investigation on the Andamanese who lived close to the civilized center of the colonial administration) to witness intimate details of their everyday activities.

Shocked by "the rampant homosexuality" of the Onge men when they travelled in the forest, he went on to view the Onge as "decadent", and also attempted to ensure that the Onge men who accompanied him brought their wives with them. But their unabashed and unbridled sexual activities with either sex led him to label the Onge as "child-like" with a child's lack of shame, or the absence of any sense of modesty, a complete lack of hygiene, "an infantile vanity," a child's thoughtless cruelty and a child's abandoned pleasure in obscenities. Extending such a view, he believed the Onge had remained virtually unchanged since the Paleolithic.

A number of parallels can be drawn between Man and Cipriani. Man, too, had an obvious affection for the Andamanese, which was both paternalistic and condescending. He viewed the Andamanese as "wayward but attractive children" (Prain 1932:21), conforming to the prevailing ideas about primitive races as embodying the childhood of mankind. But more importantly, both Cipriani and Man played significant political roles, in the ways in which their scholarly work served to endorse official policy. In the period after the departure of the British from the islands, and the transfer of the Andaman Islands to the newly installed Indian government, Cipriani's research with the Onge, together with his appointment as Director of the research sub-station of the Anthropological Survey of India at Port Blair, paved the way for the colonization of Little Andaman and the confinement of the Onge in permanent settlements.

Two decades of policy

The old British tradition of inviting parties of Onge to pay periodic visits to Port Blair and call on the Chief Commissioner was encouraged. In

turn, the Onge were given gifts of tobacco, tea, sugar etc. and “offered official hospitality” (Pandit 1989:88). A Chief Commissioner during the fifties, Mr. A.K. Ghosh remarked at the time, “If this continues, they will go the same way as the Andamanese” (cited in Whitaker 1985, p.10).

Of the 23 Andamanese enumerated in the Census of India 1951, the first census operation in independent India, the adult men retained their earlier occupation from British days in the “Bush Police” force, stationed in and around the forest in *Jarawa* territory. The “Bush Police,” originally created to protect the British settlement from the *Jarawa*, performed the same function after independence, and remained a potential employment option for male Andamanese.

The sixties and seventies marked a turning point for the islands, with a large influx of settlers from mainland India, comprehensive schemes for the development of the islands and the first enunciation of plans and policies for the islanders. Venkatesan (1990) traces the contours of land allotment on Little Andaman from the late sixties, when the government of India passed a resolution under the Special Area Development Program to resettle refugees⁸ on Little Andaman. Almost 30,000 hectares of forest was cleared by the early seventies for settler villages, most of it encroaching on the territories of the remaining Onge groups in the island. Throughout the seventies, intensive clearance and commercial exploitation of the forest was initiated under the supervision of the Andaman and Nicobar Forest and Plantation Development Corporation (ANFP-DC), encouraging private traders to extract timber, with no effort made to control illegal logging. In an attempt to restock the cleared forest, a regeneration project called Red Oil Palm Plantation designated 2400 hectares for regeneration with red oil palm monocrop species. The construction of roads, government offices, private industries, a harbor, a sub-naval base, an agriculture farm and a helipad all added to the large-scale deforestation, pushing the Onge into ever smaller pockets in the northern and southern parts of the island. Bodley (1988) observes that:

[T]he most intense arenas of conflict between tribals and national governments involve the development of natural resources on tribal lands by outside interests. Tribal populations invariably occupy territories that are but lightly exploited and then only for local, tribal use. National governments... are understandably eager to extract as much wealth as possible from their entire national territory. Thus we see highways, mining operations... lumbering, agri-business, and planned colonization projects, all intruding on tribal territories. (p.135)

The rationale for such a course of events is provided for in the ambiguous status of “tribal” peoples in the Constitution of India. On the one hand, according to Article 46 of the Constitution of India:

"The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker section of the people, and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes,⁹ and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation." (cited in George 1991:22)

But on the other hand, the constitution also maintains that the traditional rights of "tribals" over natural resources and forest lands is a privilege or a concession granted to them, and can be "terminated at the will of the Sovereign" (*ibid*:22). Thus, as George (*ibid.*) points out with some irony, while "India would like to see her tribal people retain their religion, culture, ethos and institutions", the conditions that would ensure their distinct identity, namely the guarantee of a stable resource base, is imperilled by the terms of the same constitution. Bodley's survey on "tribal" peoples notes that:

[T]he most obvious detrimental impacts are caused by a weakening of the subsistence base due to resource depletion and/or breakdowns in the social organization of subsistence activities. Pressures on natural resources may increase immediately as outsiders begin to compete for them or as tribal peoples themselves begin to harvest for the market. The territorial base may be drastically reduced as official policy restricts tribal access to make tribal resources directly available to outsiders. (p.209)

The strategic monopoly over forest lands is clearly a legacy from British days. Guha (1991) notes that a prolonged debate had ensued within the colonial bureaucracy over a customary use of forests that is based on "rights" as opposed to "privilege". The debate was settled by an ingenious use of precedent, by citing the principle that "the right of conquest is the strongest of all rights---it is a right against which there is no appeal" (Amery 1876 cited in Guha 1991:38).

This language, formulated in the context of colonial rule, was carried over without any alteration into the constitution of the "independent" India, as it defined the status of the "tribals" within the country. As regards "tribal" access to forests and traditional rights of use, the policies of the British and the Indian government are formulated identically---the forest is always perceived as "virgin terrain", available for alternative commercially profitable use. Such sharply opposed perceptions of the forest was perceptively framed by a colonial officer in mainland India as:

[T]he struggle for existence between the villagers and the Forest Department; the former to live, the latter to show a surplus and what the department looks on as efficient forest management. (Percy Wyndham 1921 cited in Guha 1991)

The special provisions for the protection of the “tribals” were also inherited from the Government of India Act of 1935, Articles 91 and 92. By this Act, “enclaves” were produced, i.e. areas in which the “tribals” were concentrated, outside of ordinary administration, where they would be “insulated” from “exploitation or demoralizing contact with sophisticated outsiders” (Galanter 1984:147). Concurrently, the colonial government maintained rigorous control over the forests customarily available for “tribal” use.

Such a paternalistic framework for the treatment of the “tribals,” first drafted during British colonial rule, then further elaborated by the Indian government, lends some salience to a recognition of the situation of “tribals” in India as one of “internal colonialism”.¹⁰ Colby and van den Berghe (1969, cited in Whitten 1976:18) distinguish as “internal colonialism”, a situation whereby an independent country has, within its boundaries, given special legal status to groups that differ culturally from the dominant group, and created a distinct administrative machinery to handle such groups. Such groups are usually referred to as “tribes”¹¹ by the state for administrative purposes.

It is not merely coincidental that the plans for the re-population and development of the Andaman Islands was repeatedly alluded to as a program for “colonization” by the Indian government. With their long experience of colonial rule, it is curious (or revealing) that the term should be brought back into administrative currency promptly after shaking off the shackles of colonial dominance. It does suggest that the former colonial subjects have flipped the situation over, and in turn, become the colonizers.

For the Andaman Islanders, it was merely a transfer of power between two colonial regimes, with very little to differentiate the two, except perhaps the colour of the skin. The colonizer changed from the “white man” to the “brown” one after 1947 who, like the former, proceeded to shoulder the “the white man’s burden” of undertaking to “uplift” the “backward” “primitives”.

The significant factor to be noted here is that, when schemes were proposed on behalf of the islanders, there was concurrently a second agenda implicated: of development plans for the mainland Indian population, which involved the increased clearing of the forest for agriculture, forest-based industries, villages, roads etc. Thus plans for the islanders did not occur in isolation but were mobilized within a larger context that was contingent on reducing the extent of forest available to them. The strategy for colonization of Little Andaman with settlers from mainland India coincided with the program for sedentization of the Onge.

The situation of the Jarawa

As in the earlier British period, the specific situation of the *Jarawa* presented a set of conjunctures that was not as readily resolved as in case of the Onge or the Andamanese. When the British left the islands, about 765 sq km of South and Middle Andaman were decreed as *Jarawa* Reserve¹² forest. I have noted earlier that when displaced refugees were resettled on South and Middle Andaman, it led to a marked increase in the frequency of "*Jarawa* incidents". According to the Census of India 1961, there were as many as 89 cases of raids between 1946 and 1963 (cited in Sarkar 1990:48).

The 340 km construction of the Andaman Trunk Road through South Andaman, linking Diglipur in North Andaman with Port Blair, brought large numbers of laborers into *Jarawa* territory, and disturbed the area by way of felling of trees, blasting by explosives, the construction of labor camps etc. The entry of large numbers of people into the area also resulted in an increase in the incidence of poaching (Sarkar 1990). The road building was brought to a halt in 1976, when several members of the road-building crew of the Public Works Department died from arrow wounds. The engineers had aligned the road well into the eastern edge of the reserve (Whitaker 1985). The road construction was resumed from a different section, renewing the scale of conflict with the *Jarawa*.

In the last 20 years, the Andamans have been increasingly ravaged for resources and used as a dumping ground for the landless; since 1960, the population has expanded from 50,000 to about 180,000, and over 100,000 hectares of forest have been cleared and 600 km of road constructed. (Whitaker and Whitaker 1984:16)

Whitaker (1985) goes on to assert that the most serious threat to the *Jarawa* in the present is the increasing human pressure on the islands, and the continued encroachment into their territory, which is prime hunting and fishing land. He observes that the *Jarawa* use metal for their arrowheads and undertake considerable risks to obtain it, raiding road-building camps, forest ("bush" police) camps and farms. As the number and scale of "*Jarawa* incidents" indicated, receiving media attention only if there were deaths on the Indian side, the settlers, illegal encroachers and the "Bush" police, without formal government approval, took it upon themselves to launch a mini-war against the *Jarawa*. In this connection, a former Lieutenant Governor was heard to remark that the *Jarawa* "menace" could be ended once and for all by rounding them up and holding them in some place where they would be unable to "cause trouble". Meanwhile, the administration contin-

ued to allot land to settlers, or legalize encroachments along the borders of the contested forest tract. For the *Jarawa* too, as Mukerjee (1995) recognized, it was a declaration of war. She reported an incident early in February 1995 when “the tribe attacked a forest outpost, impaling a woman and slaying a calf” (p.20). Dogs and elephants, which were associated with settlers, were regularly killed but “in the process they have protected the pristine forests of their territory, along with its unique wildlife” (p.20).

The “breakthrough”

The following are a series of commentaries made by anthropologists and other observers on the perceived major turning point in the ongoing ambivalent relations with the *Jarawa*. The continuity with earlier British policies is remarkable. More astonishing is that these connections are cited as an affirmation of present policy.

“In 1968, 3 Jarawa boys were captured...and brought to Port Blair, where they were kept¹³ for a month under the observation of 2 anthropologists of the Anthropological Survey of India. They were treated well and then set free near their area with a large quantity of gifts.” (Pandit 1974 cited in Sarkar 1990:51) “...In fact, the method adopted by Portman 1879-1894 was followed.”[my emphasis] (Sarkar 1990:51)

Sarkar (1990) describes the “momentous” occasion when some kind of “connection” seemed to have been made with the *Jarawa*.

*“There was a major breakthrough in February 1974 when a few Jarawa made friendly gestures towards a contact party led by members of the Bush Police, who used to visit the area from time to time. A Jarawa man swam across and came on board the *dungi* and collected the gifts... Perhaps this had some positive impact and thereafter the Jarawa came forward on their own to greet the Contact Party, as happened in the case of Colebrooke during the first penal settlement.” [my emphasis] (Sarkar 1990:51)*

Whitaker and Whitaker (1984) are more wary, urging caution in considering the utility of these developments.

“From 1974 onwards regular contact has been made with the Jarawa at their coastal camp at Chotaling Bang (Middle Andaman). In 1981, another group in South Andaman was contacted using the Chotaling

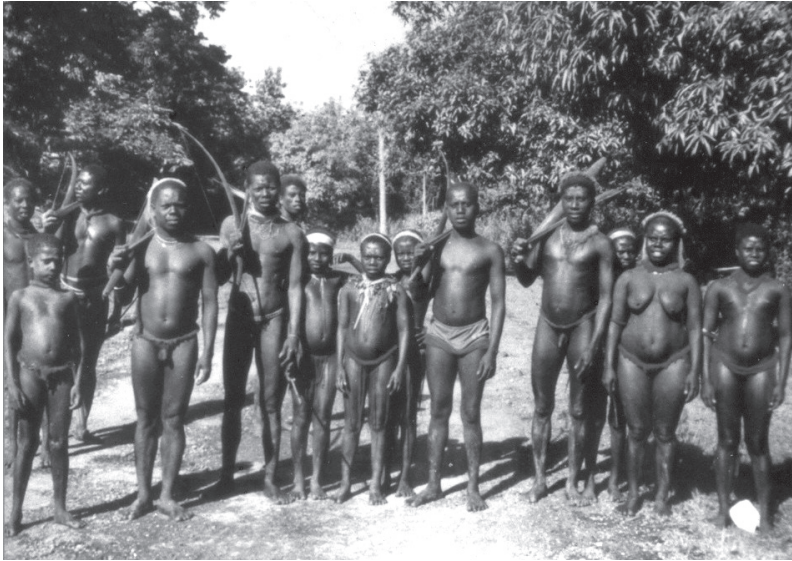
Bang Jarawa as go-betweens. The latter were taken to Strait Island and shown¹⁵ the Andamanese settlement there.” [my emphasis] (ibid.:13)

A more critical assessment of these policies is drowned in the flood of acclamatory comments on the government’s breakthrough efforts. The health hazards of such contact with outsiders is blithely ignored, and the enormity of the risk of taking the *Jarawa* to Strait Island where one or more Andamanese chronically suffer from tuberculosis, is alarming. As Zai Whitaker (1984) urgently points out, “even an influenza virus could prove fatal to people with no immunity to civilization’s diseases” (p.70). She goes on to remind those who have become rashly forgetful of the tragic consequences of such imprudent tactics in earlier times:

“The post-independence policy toward the Jarawa mimics that of the British administration in trying to appease and buy the Jarawa’s friendship. In a typical display of bureaucratic short-sightedness, we have yet to learn our lessons from the tragedy of the Andamanese extermination. Regular patrols are still sent out with gifts such as cloth, plastic buckets and matches; one group of Jarawa has been in contact with these parties for 10 years, and another group has now joined in. These “gift patrols” may spell the end of the Jarawa; the government should take heed and leave them alone. Isolation is apparently the best policy in the delicate Andamans situation until we can be sure our friendship won’t kill them...The government’s maneuvers look alarmingly like the practice of scattering rice to attract birds to the snare.” (ibid.:16)

On the flip side of the “breakthrough in the situation” has been the continuing sequence of “*Jarawa* incidents”, when trespassers or poachers encountered in *Jarawa* territory were usually attacked and killed. Or the periodic raids that were made on nearby villages every month around full-moon, for metal implements and utensils, bananas, coconuts and cooked rice (all of which were customary gift items carried by the “contact” team). Vishwajit Pandya (1992), with some amusement, referred to these incidents as “the bad guys riding into town, to raise hell, and engage in some duty-free shopping”.

Some salutary lessons may be drawn from recalling the early days of British contact with the Andamanese, when similar “plundering” by night and acceptance of gifts by day were regular occurrences. Portman cherishes no illusions when he observes, “we must admit the unflattering fact that it is not any particular love of us, but chiefly the greed for [goods and] food which tempts them to the Settlement” (Portman 1899:412).



*Caught on the road. A group of Jarawa on the Andaman Trunk Road.
Photo: SANE (Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology)*

“Retrieval from Precipice”

The following is a close reading from a document entitled “Retrieval from Precipice”, published by the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS), the Committee for the Enlightenment of Primitive Peoples. The document is a compilation of cumulative reports and the measures adopted for a program of “planned change” that was proposed for the islanders by the Andaman administration in 1976. The “exciting experiment”, also named “Retrieval from Precipice”, to “retrieve these rare racial groups from the path of extinction down the precipice of death” was conceived as an endeavour that was in keeping with “the noblest tradition of the Indian Civilization”.¹⁶ The document gives insight into the strategies followed in the “unique experiment”, as well as an explicit rationale for the undertaking.

A committee named “The Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti” was constituted to monitor the project, with the help of an advisory “Committee on Primitive Tribal Groups” comprising “experts,” mainly anthropologists, an eminent geneticist and other government officers. These were heady days for the group, as they responded to the “clarion call” of the former Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in her “20-Point Economic Programme”, which laid “great emphasis on the weaker section of society”. With immense faith in the possibilities offered by the

advances in science and medicine, buoyed up by good intentions and the excitement of “experimenting” on human subjects, the committee set about their task.

The preface lays out the framework for the project “for the amelioration of the tribes”, the “purest forms” of the “few endangered remnants of the negrito race” who “still survive in their stone age glory” and who are “not cannibals or inhuman” but “weak, hapless” and in need of the Indian government’s “magnanimity and protection”. The AAJVS is therefore:

[E]ngaged in a task which shows that they can be befriended, their health and life protected and their living conditions gradually developed into an economic pattern which can, at an appropriate stage, merge with the economic and living patterns of these islands. In the years to come they will survive, develop confidence and a will to live and become useful citizens of India.

In contradiction to the agenda stated here, the former Prime Minister¹⁷ Morarji Desai’s message registers a different intent:

It should therefore be our duty to let these tribes live their lives as they would like to while providing them with such of the amenities of life to which all citizens of our country are entitled. We do not want the tribes to be ethnological exhibits; nor do we want to lose their distinctive personality under pressure. We need imaginative policies rooted in wider sympathetic knowledge of the tribes.

These two mutually contradictory strands alternate in the document with respect to the policies to be followed, i.e. whether to permit the islanders to maintain their distinctive lifestyle or to integrate them with the other populations. Although the former is asserted at the level of political statements, the latter is the program that is in operation.

The strategies to achieve these projected goals required that:

These remaining specimens of bygone races...be looked after closely, watchfully and carefully in their small population if their survival is to be ensured. Their future can now only be nurtured in a sort of controlled demographic laboratory till they have been regenerated to come once again into their own. (p.31) [my emphasis]

In the case of the Andamanese, described as “all intermixed and indistinguishable in their ethnic identity”, the criteria by which their *success* as a population was to be assessed included: literacy, which was “practically absent,” work participation rate “as low as 8.3% (13.3% among

the males and practically nil among females)” and a dismal reproductive rate as a consequence of “their males having lost their vitality and the females their fertility.” (*ibid.*:30)

The Onge “are a shade better off than the Andamanese” but persist at a “pre-agricultural stage of food gathering in jungles and pig hunting” (*ibid.*:31). In contrast to the Andamanese and the Onge are the Jarawa “who retain their virility and vitality and are of excellent physique” (*ibid.*:32). The future envisaged for the *Jarawa* through the “goodwill” generated by the “plan-of-action” proposed for them: “survi[val] as fully conscious Indian citizens in not too distant a future” (*ibid.*:32). As for the Sentinelese, who “appeared beyond doubt to be fully virile” (p,32), apart from the “occasional dropping of gifts to augment their resources” and to “infuse goodwill”, there was little else that was planned.

The program included plans for the appointment of a “suitable, senior and experienced social worker who could exercise his good judgement[,] and a medical officer preferably gynaecologist together with a lady doctor[,] preferably wife of one of the workers” (AAJVS 1978:39).

There were small modifications in the details of the program as it related to the Andamanese and the Onge, based on their separate historical circumstances. In the case of the Andamanese, the primary task at hand was the recuperation of a group of derelicts existing in a state of utter degradation and ill-health. But, after rehabilitation of “these children of nature” and providing the “grown-ups” with a “modest pocket-money allowance” (AAJVS 1978:36), other schemes were proposed to inculcate *useful* work habits. It was resolved that the Andamanese should be engaged in making canoes and ropes. All the necessary tools and materials would be supplied to them free of cost. It was a matter of some excitement for the committee that soon the Andamanese would be “busy in their traditional vocations” (p.45). In addition, a “piggery unit” was set up, and a calf for breeding purposes. Vegetable and fruit seeds were provided free of cost to help raise kitchen gardens.¹⁸ A system of “passes”¹⁹ was instituted, which meant that the Andamanese could leave Strait Island only when they obtained a pass issued for a specific purpose. A report submitted a year after these schemes were underway concludes:

“The impact of all these welfare activities initiated by the Samiti has been very encouraging. Not only the Andamanese who used to loiter in Port Blair and other places have gone back to their settlement in Strait Island, there are visible signs of their being hopeful to live. A sense of belonging is more dawning on them. No wonder, if the tempo of developmental efforts is further stepped up with more welfare amenities,

the Andamanese may again turn out to be a thriving community as they were a century before.” (AAJVS 1978:46)

With the Andamanese satisfactorily re-settled, it was next the turn of the Onge. In 1976, development plans with the professed intention of providing the Onge with “mainstream amenities” were set in motion. The scheme involved the “rehabilitation and resettlement” of the Onge in the north-east corner of Little Andaman known as Dugong Creek.

The “self-contained settlement” that was constructed for the Onge included individual houses for each couple, with asbestos, corrugated roofs constructed by the Public Works Department. The Public Works Department is responsible for government sanctioned constructions in India. They have several categories of “quarters” that are determined according to the official status of the government officers who will live in these houses during the tenure of their appointment. These are classified as Type I, Type II etc. For the Onge, the lowest of these categories was considered appropriate. An interesting additional influence determined the design of the houses intended for the Onge. The Commissioner of the Andamans at the time, who was also the director of the welfare scheme, had returned from an appointment in the remote North-East region of India, in the state of Manipur. In that region, the people lived in raised houses, built on four posts that functioned as stilts. The Commissioner was much taken with this design, and decided to transplant the homes of one group of “tribals” to a different one – after all, there was not much to distinguish one “tribal” from another.

Other “civic amenities like medical care, water, hygiene, general provisions, marketing, recreation etc.,” were part of the “Package Scheme” (*ibid.*:39). Here too, “a piggery unit” was established, and “goat rearing” was to be attempted. And, to underscore the sincerity of these intentions, a reward of Rs. 500 was offered to those who acquired a working knowledge of the Onge language.

Food for the islanders

Food aid in the form of rations is distributed to the Onge and the Andamanese every month. Rations²⁰ were started as an emergency measure after a cyclone in 1976 when the forests of Little Andaman were ravaged by storms, but were continued subsequently as an important element in the administrative strategy for sedenterization.

A striking feature of the ration items is the inherent ethnocentrism with respect to food. It was unthinkable that a people could survive on



Onge woman going about her domestic chores. Photo: Sita Venkateswar

a diet devoid of rice and wheat staples or spices. These introductions have been extremely deleterious to a people who had subsisted on a predominantly meat/protein diet, and for whom the question of preserving or storing²¹ food was never an issue. The introduction of milk powder may have contributed to the unabated infant mortality even after settlement, and the periodic deaths of children from diarrhoea/dysentery.²² A connection can be made between sedenterization and the introduction of foods without associations or learned rules of consumption. Fischler (1980) suggests the term *gastro-anomie*²³ to describe the characteristic state of normlessness and ignorance about food selection and food use in situations of rapid change. The outcome is illnesses²⁴ and maldigestion of a kind not previously encountered and hence not treatable in known, traditional ways.

The power of representations

It is obvious from the discussion so far that national discourses that medicalize the islanders as “rare” and “endangered” contribute to the formulation of government policies that seek to either “preserve” an “authentic” *way of life*, or a unique *people*. These discursive formations are problematized by the contradictory policy options that follow from such representations. Since the islanders have been labelled as “rare,” the administration is compelled to make available a substantial forest resource base for the islanders’ use, to maintain their unique lifeway. But, because the Onge are also designated as “endangered,” they are considered in need of administrative protection. This is to be delivered in the form of medical care, aid in food and reproductive incentives. All this is only possible if they are located within a circumscribed area²⁵ for the efficient functioning of the medical staff appointed to oversee their health. The representations have legitimized the Indian government’s attempts to deploy a policy of sedenterization overseen by social and medical welfare providers. Thus, the medicalization of the islanders reinforces the necessity to sedenterize them, eliding the primary fact that these people are endangered only through the encroachment onto their territory.

As past events have demonstrated with the Andamanese, when the British extended their colony across North, Middle and South Andaman and the neighbouring islands, there is a recurrent pattern to these shifting representations of the islanders and the policies that follow thereafter. As soon as plans are finalized for large-scale utilization and a more commercially profitable use of the islanders’ territory, government policies are clearly resolved in favor of sedenterization of the islanders. In the years after independence, the forests of Little Andaman

became the target for another round of development efforts. And, at present, the same process is visible with the *Jarawa*: the administration periodically proclaiming them a rare people, and espousing the unique way of life of the *Jarawa*, while in the same breath declaring their intention to include the *Jarawa* as “full-fledged citizens of the country”. The Sentinelese are assured of a certain degree of security, by occupying a small, isolated island, to which access remains difficult.

Berkhofer (1978) examines how imagery conflates with policy in the case of the Native American Indian, particularly in the context of arguments over rights to land. It mattered little whether the efforts were towards reform of the “deficient” Indian or the taming of the “blood-thirsty savages”. Or whether the policies followed were the General Allotment Act or the New Deal for Indians. The ultimate consequence for the Native Indians was the loss of land held collectively by them. Reiterating the justification that what was good for the whites was also good for the Indian, the general perception was that any policy followed had mutually beneficial outcomes.

Likewise, in the Andaman Islands no matter how the policies are framed, for the islanders the consequences are a steady dwindling of territory under their control. This is particularly noticeable in the case of the Onge and *Jarawa*. But the few, remnant Andamanese are the exception to this norm. Barely surviving in the appalling conditions that they were reduced to by the time the British left the islands, the government’s plan did result in an improvement in the material conditions of their existence.

An assessment of the welfare system

The “welfare” program was ostensibly designed to benefit the islanders, to arrest their mortality, assure them of health and gently assimilate them into the dominant population. In the intervening years since the program went into operation, these ideals have given way to disillusionment and cynicism. The essential features of the system are presented as I observed its operation between 1989-1992. The general organization of the program is similar for the Onge and the Andamanese but, while the Onge, at the time, appeared mostly unaware of the exploitation they were undergoing, the greater worldliness and sophistication of the Andamanese made them active collaborators in a system that they used and bent according to the situation.

An assessment of the program requires a dismantling of its constituent parts, to permit an analysis of the different levels at which it operates. The first level of appraisal is the primary level at which the pro-

gram exists, i.e. in the person of the implementers, those who mediate between the islanders and the policy-makers, translating the policies on paper into quotidian practice. These are the welfare personnel who are appointed by the Andaman administration to oversee the scheme to assimilate the islanders into “fully conscious citizens” of the country. The various positions created for this task include a social worker, a teacher, an auxiliary nurse-cum-midwife, a medical attendant, a wireless operator, a generator operator and two guards (a euphemism for “all-purpose functionaries” who are expected to make themselves available for any kind of work). Their term of appointment varies from anywhere between 3 months to 8 years.

The distinctive personalities of individual members of the welfare staff have been significant in determining the ups and downs, swings and shifts in the fortunes of the Onge and the Andamanese, ever since their destinies were placed under the control of the Indian bureaucracy. Most of the welfare staff manage these settlements as if they were their private fiefdoms. Their lowly, ill-paid status in the hierarchy of government office undermines the lofty ideals attributed to their assigned duties. This means that the general attitude of these “government servants” is to appropriate as much as possible during their tenure and “to hell with the *jungles*”. Most feel that the islanders are beneficiaries of a largesse that is undeserved and, therefore, it is only just that they direct a share to themselves.

In addition to the welfare staff, there is a medical officer who is a separate appointee of the Directorate of Health Services. At Dugong Creek, the medical officer is the highest paid functionary in the settlement, usually fresh from medical school, and has a term of appointment of 6 months. Every medical officer who has left Dugong Creek at the end of his tenure has made a small fortune from varied means: the medications sent for the Onge, the milk-powder, the rations²⁶ and the wages that he is responsible for distributing in conjunction with the other welfare staff,²⁷ the coconuts collected by the Onge and, last but not the least, the ambergris that washes up on the shores of Dugong Creek during the monsoons. At least two former medical officers have been held responsible by Onge elders for introducing alcohol to other Onge as inducements for procuring ambergris for them. In their defense, it is usually conceded that it is the officers’ inexperience, together with the loneliness and isolation of the appointment at Dugong Creek that makes the situation difficult to cope with. Hence all succumb to the blandishments of corruption, which is equated with justifying the hardships endured at Dugong Creek. But the situation has proven no different even when senior, more experienced officers are appointed along with their families, so that this particular line of reasoning loses any credibility.

Apart from the long litany of vices of the welfare staff implementing the program, they are as callous in the actual discharge of their duties. Infants continue to die at regular intervals. Most of the Onge and Andamanese are under treatment for tubercular and other respiratory diseases. And every adult and child suffers from anemia and recurring skin infections. Thus, the most conspicuous feature of the welfare system in terms of its execution is that all the personnel are in cahoots with each other in order to prosper from the varied means available for amassing wealth during their appointment.

A government appointment in India is a permanent position, with minimal risk of dismissal. There is no penalty for an unsatisfactory discharge of responsibilities or reprehensible conduct, especially in places as remote as the Andaman Islands. Because of this lack of accountability, and the large sums allocated for "tribal welfare," corruption is an endemic feature of government bureaucracy.

To illustrate these assertions, I will offer some examples of inappropriate conduct by the welfare personnel that came to my attention during the period of my research. The first one occurred at Strait Island where I ascertained the reasons for the odd behavior of Pejeye, one of the Andamanese men. His behavior was the manifestation of symptoms of extreme addiction to a "cocktail" of sedatives, with a shot of methylated spirit for good measure, given to him over several months by the "compounder,"²⁸ as inducement for procuring "birds-nest" and ambergris for him. This discovery led to the transfer of the "compounder" to a different "tribal" posting in the Nicobar Islands but there was no question of terminating his employment. The explanation offered was that the "compounder" would be coming up for retirement shortly,²⁹ and it was "unethical" to deprive him of his job at this stage of his employment.

Similarly, the medical attendant at Dugong Creek had a stash of alcohol, regularly replenished during her visits to the nearest town, in exchange for honey, ambergris and incense from the Onge. She too was transferred elsewhere, and this time the justification was the large family she supported. Hence, although her conduct was not to be condoned, it was to be forgiven.

Finally, the medical officer at Dugong Creek assaulted a young, attractive Onge woman, who defended herself with a knife. His behavior was simply laughed away, to the outrage of other Onge. When I queried the Onge as to why they did not take matters into their own hands, they indicated their tenuous control over any situation by confessing their inability to take any strong action against the officer.

This diatribe against the welfare personnel with respect to their dealings with the Onge or the Andamanese has to be juxtaposed against my own personal experience of them during the period of my research in

the islands. My memories of the exchanges of hospitalities, small courtesies, the many kindnesses that went a long way towards mitigating the loneliness and hardships of life in these remote outposts, are to be included in my inscription of these people here. These disjunctions problematized day-to-day practices, and the only means out of the impasse was to finally separate (as I did) the sphere of my own interactions with the welfare staff from their conduct with the islanders. It did not make my own daily existence any easier as I negotiated these disjunctions, but such contradictions constituted my experience in the islands and forged the framework for my research there.

It can be argued, as it is by “higher” authorities in the government, that corruption in the lower ranks has deviated the original intent of the program. But the extent of corruption cuts across all levels of the hierarchy as a consequence of the inherent structure of government, and the large profits at stake. Such a situation is typical of government bureaucracies across south and south-east Asia. In my presentation of the contemporary situation of the Andaman Islands, I do not assert that the forms of bureaucracy or scale of corruption is unusual to the islands. It is a feature of nation/states across the world. But that does not make a discussion of such characteristics, or its inclusion here, any less pertinent. The point is to delineate the ways in which the islanders are inextricably linked to larger processes that are globally widespread.

The program, as charted by several anthropologists, the eminent geneticist and some idealistic “top” officials, had very little bearing on the reality of its implementation. But what of the original intent of the program? Can it pass muster without comment? The well-intended policies for the “uplift” of the “primitives” can also be viewed as a charter for the ethnocide of a distinct group of people, albeit, a *benevolent* ethnocide.

The content of policies: ethnocide/benevolent ethnocide

In recent years, the term ethnocide has increasingly come into prominence as a framework for describing the condition of indigenous peoples across the world (Barabas and Bartolemé 1973; Lizot 1976; Whitten, Jr. 1976; Ehrenreich 1985; Escobar 1989; George 1991). As defined by Whitten, Jr. (1976:24):

[T]he concept of ethnocide is taken from genocide, and refers to the process of exterminating the total lifeway of a people or nation, but in the ethnocidal process many of the peoples themselves are allowed to continue living.”

The starting point for this process in contemporary nation/states is very often a situation that I have defined earlier as internal colonialism. By that process, indigenous peoples are deprived of any control over a traditional resource base, are sequestered within "enclaves" where they are rendered dependent on a dominant majority who have taken over their lands, and are left without any alternative means for survival. The dominant majority then proceeds to improve the condition of such "hapless" "primitives" by destroying all the elements of their "backward" lifeway, thus resulting in the ethnocide of a distinct group of people.

Ehrenreich (1985) offers a more nuanced understanding of the ethnocide of contemporary indigenous peoples by associating two apparently irreconcilable terms, namely that of *benevolent ethnocide*. His conceptualization of "benevolent ethnocide" is drawn from his work with the Coaiquer of Ecuador and, in large measure, denotes the condition of indigenous peoples in varied parts of the world. While on the surface policies of "planned change" "are propelled by positive and 'enlightened' humanitarian concerns", Ehrenreich demonstrates how the process is "steeped in racism and basic contempt for indigenous tribal peoples, no matter how well-intended particular proponents in any given case might prove to be" (p.17).

An examination of such policies reveals that they are premised upon the assumption that the lifestyle of indigenous people is inherently inferior, and hence must be supplanted by a different and better one. Moreover, it is also presumed that indigenous peoples are incapable of envisioning or planning their own future, therefore it is "outsiders" who know what is best for them (*ibid.*).

But a careful scrutiny of the entire context in which such policies are formulated reveals that the motives for the amelioration of the condition of the "tribals" is usually suspect. As the example of the Andaman Islanders suggests, the assimilation of the islanders into "the mainstream" benefits primarily the well-intentioned "outsiders". In view of the ambiguous intent underlying policies of "planned change", despite their well-meaning appearance, their ultimate objectives distinguish them as sanctioning a process of ethnocide.

The initiation of ethnocide through policy intersects with a different process, that of "subjection", whereby the islanders become increasingly enmeshed in a trend that effaces their existing way of life. The consequence of such a two-way sequence of events is the destruction of a viable lifeway, and the induction of the islanders into the swelling ranks of other dispossessed marginals of mainland Indian society.

A matrix for subjection: individual autonomy

Biolsi (1995) traces the history among the Lakota of what Foucault (1983) calls "subjection", which Biolsi interprets as the process that constituted the Lakota "as social persons who could fit into the American nation-state and the market system of metropolitan capitalism" (Biolsi 1995:30). The series of administrative techniques deployed to construct these "new individuals" shares a startling resemblance to the welfare program administered by the Indian government, which is also intended to assimilate the Andaman Islanders into the dominant population.

Like the Lakota, the Onge are a particularly individualistic society "in which political power [is] not centralized but tend[s] to cohere around self-made leaders...[b]ut this form of individuality emerged in the context of social relations profoundly different from those of...industrial capitalism" (*ibid.*:29). Individualism³⁰ as understood in the context of the Onge should be regarded as a marked self-sufficiency. Each individual is autonomous, free to pursue his or her self-interest, and is not subservient to any structure of authority within the community. Therefore the relationship between each individual is that of equality regardless of age or gender.

The Onge's relationships with each other manifests itself on a day-to-day basis in the form of sharing of food, of which the most overt example is the sharing of pork. It is this transaction between individuals that maintains the notion of a "community". Therefore, the atomistic, fissioning tendency as a result of each individual's freedom to pursue his or her self-interest in whichever direction he or she chooses is countered by the strong pull inwards towards the community, which is reinforced everyday by the sharing of food. This is what has maintained the integrity of the community despite the heavy mortality and the disruptions of settlement.

The same characteristic is visible among the Andamanese as well, who can also be described as individuals who are self-sufficient and free to pursue their interests. But in contrast to the Onge, they live in an environment alien to them, a universe that has lost all meaning and significance, and hence there is no possibility of any relationship with and within this universe. Having lost their focal center, and without any basis for transactions between themselves, the Andamanese have splintered into individuals moving outwards and away from each other.

Other reports on the Onge (Basu 1990) have interpreted this quality of individualism as a form of selfishness, where no-one goes to the aid of another person. But as early as 1952, Cipriani comments on the Onge attribute of self-sufficiency as characteristic of other foraging groups as well, while noting the help and generosity extended if a man is in-

jured or his wife is ill. All food is provided and the person relieved of any duties. I concur with Cipriani that it is more accurate to describe the Onge as self-reliant, an attribute that is inculcated at an early age. Children are allowed to play with knives and other implements and become proficient in handling them. Even infants are permitted to clamber about the scaffolding of the *tokabe*, the Onge communal huts, while their fathers are engaged in the construction.

The issue is one of labor. No Onge gives nor expects to receive help in the form of labor, i.e. an activity that can be included within the range of domestic responsibilities, for someone else. In this context, the nuclear family unit is very important in the sharing of labor. It is essential to have a husband or wife and children to complement one's tasks in the quotidian round of activities.

The distribution of domestic tasks is both shared and divided along lines of gender and age. The condition of Nabekutti and Shiela (both recently widowed at the time of my research) is illustrative of the importance of first, a spouse, and next in order of importance, children, to keep the "home fires burning". Nabekutti had lost his wife some years ago and, without any surviving offspring, had abandoned his house in the settlement. He roamed around the forest and the nearby Bengali villages, selling everything that he gathered from the forest for alcohol. During the entire period of my stay in Dugong Creek, even when he occasionally stayed in the settlement, he never cooked in his house but partook of food in other people's homes.

Shiela, on the other hand, with six children to care for, even with the help of her older children, had difficulties organizing her household. She could not count on assistance from her male kin since they were responsible for their own homes. The specific tasks that a husband would have shared with her remained undone, with nobody else who could permanently take over those responsibilities.

It is against such a "matrix of individualism" that the "subjection" of the Onge through the welfare efforts must be assessed. The most significant development that has emerged in recent years is the notion of individual property – objects that are not a product of an Onge's singular effort are now accommodated within the frame of individual ownership: money accumulating in the bank the real value of which is still unintelligible; locks placed on doors and suitcases –this is an impressionistic rendering of a trend that is at odds with other values of sharing, the open give and take, also observable among the Onge. The new attribute of ownership is ascribed by the Onge to objects that they have purchased with money – transistors, tape-recorders, watches that they cannot read etc. But objects that have been given or gifted to them, including their rations of food, as well as things that they have made themselves, still freely circulate between them.

More important, however, are the conflicts over power that have hardened over the years, as a consequence of the individual relationships that have been struck with the welfare staff and other officials of the administration. These in turn, have opened up “avenues for enablement” and privileges not available to everyone else.

Subjection and power

In my discussion of the Andamanese during the period of British control of the islands, I noted the incidence of specific individuals who were singled out by the British officers and conferred certain privileges. Similar observations have been made in the case of the Ik, the !Kung or Native Americans (Turnbull 1972, Wilmsen 1990, Berkhofer 1978 and Biolsi 1995).

I retrace the trajectory of a similar process as it developed in the case of the Onge in my discussion below. Until the breakwater was constructed in the sixties, Little Andaman was surrounded by notoriously rough seas, making landing on the island a risky and difficult undertaking. Dugong Creek was one of the routes to easy access because of the deep, tidewater creek that opened out to sea. Hence the territorial groups of Onge who lived in the Dugong Creek area and its vicinity³¹ have historically had more access to outsiders than the groups living in the interior and other coastal parts.

When the settlement at Dugong Creek was constructed, there were a number of different territorial groups of Onge who were accommodated in that area, including all the groups around Dugong Creek itself. Typically, when the welfare program was initiated, Tambolai,³² an intelligent and personable young man fluent in Hindi, was appointed *Raja*. The other³³ territorial groups around Dugong Creek were allied through affinal relations with Tambolai’s group. As a result of their longer duration of “contact”, first with the British and then the Indians, members of these groups were more proficient in Hindi than the Onge from the more distant regions of Little Andaman. Young men drawn from these groups were appointed as “helpers”³⁴ to the welfare staff. Thus, Berogegi, Tai and Totanange were the next rung³⁵ of Onge with structured links with the Indians. Tambolai was also appointed as member of various executive bodies of the Andaman administration, receiving a large salary, and having to appear for periodic “meetings” in Port Blair. He was flown in as a special guest of the Prime Minister for Republic Day parades in New Delhi and was exempt from all wage-work. The exemption from the tedious grind of wage-work also extended to the other “helpers” who, over the years, have learned to negotiate their duties with the *entale*.³⁶

In view of the lack of any permanent, institutionalized structure of authority prior to these events, a three-tiered, hierarchical structure was installed on a purported decentralized, pluralistic and egalitarian³⁷ people. The rumblings of dissent soon became apparent as members of the other³⁸ territorial groups voiced their claims to the same privileges. Nabekutti from *Deshenghri*, with the support of all his affinal allies, sought to replace Tambolai as *Raja*. But Nabekutti did not have the same presence of personality nor the linguistic abilities of Tambolai. As a gesture of appeasement by the Andaman administration he was made *co-Raja*, but the position did not carry the same weight – he was only a “titular head” in the sense that the welfare personnel referred to him as *Raja* together with Tambolai.

There was yet another basis for the shifting of power over to Tambolai’s group. The *torale* or the spirit communicators are purportedly very powerful figures for the Onge, since they alone have the ability to mediate between the human and spirit realms (Pandya 1992). The two extant *torale* were Kwerai of the Chamale group, and Moroi.³⁹ Moroi was territorially allied with the rival camp, but married to a Chamale woman. Tambolai claimed both as his allies to endorse the position of authority conferred on him by the Andaman administration.

Meanwhile, over the years, another contender to the position of *Raja* had emerged from the rival camp, in the person of Bara Raju. The route that he chose to follow was as a hard-working, reliable recruiter of labor for wage-work. The welfare personnel could always depend on Bara Raju to round up the men required to perform any work in the settlement. Bara Raju had dreams of flying to Delhi for Independence Day or Republic Day parades, attending meetings at Port Blair, and having the ear of the Lieutenant-Governor of the Andamans. The increasing trust placed in him by the authorities in Port Blair enabled him to use it as a lever to negotiate with, and check the excesses of, the welfare personnel at Dugong Creek. Bara Raju was also proficient in Hindi, with an appreciation for the colloquialisms and the flavor of invectives in that language. His claim that he should rightfully displace Tambolai as *Raja* found a growing body of support at Port Blair, since Tambolai, over the years, had also acquired a reputation for drinking. More pertinent, for my purposes, was Bara Raju’s agreement to work with me based on his appraisal of the extent to which I could influence the direction of his aspirations, by endorsing his claim to *Rajaship* with the right authorities.

Alongside these power moves, constituted by the entry of the welfare system into Dugong Creek and the incorporation of the Onge within relatively new dimensions of privilege, the “traditional” structure of authority remained invested in the person of Tilai, the last of the “old-time” Onge.^{40 41} He remained distant from the maneuvers of ei-

ther Tambolai, Nabekutti or Bara Raju, although both Nabekutti and Bara Raju could claim him as a territorial and an affinal ally.

The narrative above clearly illustrates the process of “subjection” that has “seduced” some Onge by offering to them certain privileges that are available by taking the routes to power opened up by the Indian government. The process described here demonstrates the ways in which informal modes of authority have been recast into more permanent, hierarchical structures of power endorsed by the Indian government. The situation exhibits many similarities to Biolsi’s work with the Lakota, as they moved into the spaces of power made available by the administration.

But the Andaman administration has met with little success in the other schemes that were also initiated at Dugong Creek, namely the attempts to direct the Onge away from subsistence practices rooted in the forest. “Piggery units”, vegetable gardens, dairy cows, goat-rearing projects – have nourished and sustained the welfare personnel. For many years they presented these programs as a great success, until some higher officials came to investigate. The Onge have remained indifferent to these particular efforts to “civilize” and lure them from the forest.

Some observations on anthropology at Dugong Creek

In the early eighties, as the Onge settled into the welfare system, Vishvajit Pandya, a graduate student from the University of Chicago, conducted his dissertation research on the Onge at Dugong Creek. Based on his fieldwork between 1983-84, Pandya’s work was published in 1993 as *Above the Forest: A Study of Andamanese Ethnoanemology, Cosmology and the Power of Ritual*. Pandya’s study of ritual among the Onge is a densely detailed presentation of the cultural content, cosmological structures and hierarchical system of the Onge. His monograph can be viewed as a model of an earlier era of ethnographic writing in anthropology, with the ethnographer’s presence inserted into the preface or introductory chapter, followed by an authoritative exegesis of “native” categories of thought throughout the succeeding chapters.

Using the case of initiation of young males and the role of the spirit communicators, Pandya interprets the belief system of the Onge, examining the changing power relations between humans, animals and the spirits in the transformation of nature and culture. Pandya’s success, as Tomas observes in the case of Man’s work, is “derived from its power to salvage an authentic image of the ‘primitive’ from the intense contradictions that existed in an observed reality” (1991: 88). His work also recalls Mintz’s (1985) comment that:

"By some strange sleight of hand, one anthropological monograph after another whisks out of sight any signs of the present and how it came to be." (p.xxvii)

The "intact" worldview of the Onge that Pandya presents belies their incorporation into the welfare system and the changes that were already underway in 1983, posing a perplexing conundrum that does not surface in Pandya's smooth account. A couple of paragraphs in the introductory chapter touch upon the current situation of the islanders before moving on to their belief system, recovering⁴² and freezing them within an unarticulated present. But these beliefs have to be affected by the conditions of the islanders' existence, which is not visible in his rendition.

His research is strongly influenced by Radcliffe-Brown's work and Pandya admits to bringing that text into this context. The changed context itself is of minimal significance for Pandya as he seeks convergences with Radcliffe-Brown's inscription of the Andamanese, constructing a new text that presents yet again "a closed timeless picture of the integrated organic life of Andamanese culture" (Tomas 1991: 103).

But, as Renato Rosaldo (1989) incisively notes, we all bear witness, since "processes of drastic change are often the enabling condition of ethnographic field research, and herein resides the complicity of the missionary, constabulary officer, and the ethnographer" (p.87). With the intense problematization of ethnographic practice over the past two decades, the fact that a work published in 1993 elides these disjunctions is a curious feature, and one that is itself a problem to be pondered.

Some alternatives?

Tennant and Turpel (1986) point out that the post-war process of decolonization has passed over the claims of indigenous peoples. They stress the fact that the claims of indigenous peoples for sufficient autonomy to ensure their continued existence as culturally-distinct collectivities is a political claim that challenges the territorial sovereignty and nationality of a state. As Maybury-Lewis (1981) notes:

"Land, and the struggle for it, is at the heart of the problem of cultural survival, for the guarantee of their lands is what tribal peoples need most." (p.73)

Since indigenous claims pose a challenge to the state, they have met with little success in resolving their claims domestically, where such claims are both decontextualized and depoliticized into questions of minority rights, language rights etc. International human rights fora,

however, provide an environment in which the political aspects of indigenous claims can be discussed. But here too, claims to collective existence as a people cannot be readily accommodated within the existing human rights norms and tend to become fragmented and decontextualized. Falk (1988) suggests that what indigenous peoples can hope to achieve through international human rights norms and procedures is to expand the discussion of their claims, and to underscore the unfinished nature of the decolonization effort.

Arguably such a scenario is not relevant to the existing condition of the islanders, because of their inability to participate to any significant degree in the public institutions of civil society. But the significance of international fora like the United Nations lies in providing the space for developing alternative standards, which can then serve as a point of reference in policy initiatives. The politicization of the islanders, if ever, to avail of such standards and make a bid for an opportunity to define their own rights is a later phase.

Lesser (1968, cited in Ehrenreich 1985:324) argued in the context of the assimilation pressures on the Native American Indian that the “decision to become fully assimilated and to give up Indian identity and community life was not for the nation or the government to make, but the Indians to make for themselves” (1968:591). Such a statement succinctly challenges the patronizing presumptions behind much of the decisions made on behalf of people like the Andaman Islanders. The first step then, as an alternative mode for policy initiatives at the local level, is to acknowledge that the islanders are capable of envisioning their own future, whatever its configuration and trajectory of unfolding.

Conclusion

This chapter traces the development of policies proposed for the assimilation of the islanders after the Andaman Islands became a part of the Republic of India. I argue that the situation of the islanders and other “tribals” in India can be characterized as internal colonialism. The policies of planned change for the “uplift” of “primitives” are initiating a process of ethnocide, erasing a sustaining lifeway as it divests them of their resource base.

The presumed “failure” of the welfare system merits further discussion here. Steeped in the paternalistic, linear, evolutionary and economic rationality characteristic of development interventions everywhere (Escobar 1995), the welfare system has had other “side effects” that should be made “legible” (cf. Ferguson 1990).

I have shown how the medicalization of the islanders is an integral element of a profoundly political process that divests a people of their

land but is simultaneously depoliticized by the deployment of representations that elides the fact that such a process is underway. Moreover, despite the lamented “failure” of the welfare system, and its deviations from the purported “ideals” as originally formulated, for all the reasons discussed above, it has ensured the incorporation of the Onge and Andamanese into the bureaucratic structures of the state, with the entrenchment of state power into their daily lives. □

Notes

- 1 A modified version of this chapter has been published in *Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies Volume 6, Tribal Situation in India*, ed., D. Behera and G. Pfeffer, pp. 17-48. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company. Sections of this chapter have also been published in *Scientific American* (1999) May:82-88.
- 2 The comment was made during a discussion between Totanange, an Onge man with whom I had extensive discussions, Vishvajit Pandya an anthropologist, and myself at Dugong Creek. Totanange was asked about his views on the new solar plant that was being installed at the time.
- 3 An Indian newspaper article discusses the prolonged negotiations between Britain and the new national governments of India and Pakistan over rights and control over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Singh 1995).
- 4 The Cellular Jail, which grew out of the former penal colony, is a landmark and a major tourist attraction on the Andaman Islands.
- 5 I have defined “tribal” in an earlier chapter. It is a legal referent, distinguishing such people from “caste” society.
- 6 Here *indigenous* is understood as the original inhabitants of their territories. It can be more precisely used in this sense in the Andaman Islands than on mainland India.
- 7 These are encounters between the “*Jarawa*” and the Indian population, usually violent, resulting in injury or death to one or both parties
- 8 The issue of refugees crossing over into India from Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) has been a matter of some concern since independence. With the ongoing violence between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations in Sri Lanka, this is another continuous source of refugees. The Andaman Islands is perceived as the last bastion where all such displaced people can be accommodated.
- 9 Scheduled tribes are defined as those groups who are characterized as “primitive,” isolated, and “backward,” thus making them deserving of special treatment (Galanter 1984).
- 10 As discussed by Blauner (1972), the concept of “internal colonialism” or “domestic colonialism” was introduced into political analysis with reference to the situation of Afro-Americans in the United States. He traces the development of its use as it gained currency and respectability. Hechter (1975) applies a Marxist analysis and draws on world-system theory to identify the situation of the Celts as one of internal colonialism. Both Blauner and Hector dwell on racial

differences as a basis for the economic and political dominance of one group of people by another.

- 11 The propensity for the administrative use of the term “tribe” with reference to indigenous/aboriginal peoples across the world is to be noted.
- 12 In the absence of any communication with the “*Jarawa*” there is a certain absurdity to declaring a portion as *their* reserve and expecting “*Jarawa*” comprehension of such a demarcation.
- 13 It should be mentioned that for want of any other alternative accommodation, the captives were housed in the Cellular Jail.
- 14 *Dungi*, which is a modification of dinghy, is the Andaman word for a boat with an outboard motor.
- 15 These gestures are reminiscent of Portman’s or other British officers’ policy of taking the Andamanese and Onge to Port Blair or Calcutta to impress them with the “wonders and pleasures of civilization”.
- 16 This is a part of the congratulatory message sent to the Andaman administration from Charan Singh, the Home Minister at the time, which appeared in the published version of the document “Retrieval from Precipice” 1978.
- 17 The political situation in India was tense at the time, and there were a number of quick turnovers of the government, headed by the leaders of different political parties.
- 18 All this is reminiscent of the schemes set up for the Andamanese in the Homes that were created for them by the British. See discussion in chapter 2.
- 19 The system of “passes” was discontinued some years later and did not exist at the time of my research in the islands.
- 20 Tobacco was included as one of the ration items and was eliminated recently. However, tobacco, areca nuts and alcohol continue to be used as bribes by the welfare staff and others to obtain forest products from the Onge or as an inducement for extracting labor from the Onge.
- 21 The tropical climate and the necessity of transporting all ration items by sea hastens the process of spoilage and vermin infestation in the sodden sacks that arrive at the settlement. Moreover, analogous to the earlier British period, the most inferior quality supplies are obtained for the islanders. This is true even in the case of the edible “gifts” carried during “*Jarawa*” contact.
- 22 Besides the possibility of lactose intolerance, there is also the issue of awareness of the importance of hygienic practices, proper sterilization of milk bottles etc.
- 23 The situation assumes tragic proportions when such anomie means that potentially harmful substances are offered to children. There is no cognizance of the detrimental effects that alcohol or tobacco can have, and everything that adults like and enjoy is also considered good for children.
- 24 See Joos (1984) for a discussion on obesity and diabetes among the Florida Seminole Indians, and Fitzgerald (1980) for the effects of dietary change on the Cook Islanders.
- 25 During the early years of the settlement at Dugong Creek, when their houses were still in the process of construction, the Onge continued to roam about at

will in the forests of Little Andaman. The first few medical officers appointed to the post at Dugong Creek refused to search for the Onge in the forest. They insisted that they could not fulfil their medical responsibilities until it was ensured that the Onge were accessible within a circumscribed area.

- 26 Many Onge and Andamanese have nowadays taken to selling their rations to obtain cash for the purchase of alcohol.
- 27 Conflicts between the welfare personnel arise when one or more feel they that they have been left out of their due share of the pickings.
- 28 The “compounder” is an appointee of the Directorate of Health Services, usually with some pharmaceutical training.
- 29 Here, “shortly” should be read as a few more years to perform his nefarious activities elsewhere.
- 30 See Gardner 1991 for a discussion on current theories to account for foragers’ individual autonomy.
- 31 Dugong Creek and its vicinity is referred to as *Lebanare* by the Onge.
- 32 From the territorially defined group belonging to Dugong Creek.
- 33 The Tokebui, Chamale and Titaje groups.
- 34 The term “helper” is a euphemism for a domestic servant for the welfare staff. The appointment has undergone some modifications since it was first conceived by the formulators of the welfare system. These assignments were to enable the Onge to receive training in the specific areas of appointment of the welfare personnel. At present, the duties of a “helper” include the transport and storage of water for daily use, the collection of firewood, scouring of vessels and scrubbing the lodging where the particular staff member is housed.
- 35 At present there is a back-up crew of other Onge, Ramesh, Chogegi, Kimboi, Kokegile to take over the more disagreeable tasks from this rung of appointees.
- 36 The Onge word for “officer”.
- 37 Previous reports on the Onge (Portman, Cipriani, Basu etc) especially those prior to their settlement, endorse the egalitarian quality of their social relations.
- 38 The Tochieddi and the Togonalange groups.
- 39 Bara Raju’s vociferous repudiation of Moroi’s abilities to communicate with the other world in chapter one should be recalled here. Bara Raju belonged to the same territorial group as Moroi, Togonalange, and barely concealed his chagrin when Moroi shifted his allegiance to the affinal allies of his wife’s group.
- 40 Nao’s description of the qualities that singled out a person as an informal leader in the ‘old days’ narrated in chapter one should be recalled here.
- 41 At the time of revising this manuscript, I was saddened to discover that Tilai, as well as Moroi, the purported *torale*, had both passed away.
- 42 This is a form of engagement that Clifford (1986) refers to as “salvage ethnography”.

"The husband cannot interfere with the decision of women"

(Cipriani 1954 :72)

Introduction

This chapter considers gender relations in the Andaman Islands in the specific forms visible among the Onge and the Andamanese, against the context of the interventions of the Indian government. The chapter is organized into two sections, each one separately addressing the issue of gender *vis-à-vis* first the Onge then the Andamanese. The framework for each section is dissimilar: in the case of the Onge, I interrogate the efforts of the Onge women to maintain a domain autonomous from the infringements of the Indian welfare administration; with the Andamanese, I examine gender relations in terms of their links to the sites of power within the group. In each instance, I appraise the basis of my interpretations, exploring these constructions as a product of my specific positionality to each group.

Gender relations among the Onge

The gendered anthropologist

A significant dimension of my relationship with the Onge was predicated solely on the basis of my gender. In an earlier chapter I detailed the obstacles to physically living with the Onge. I explained the problems I underwent as an aspect of Onge dissembling behaviors related to the maintenance of a domain exclusive to themselves. Such a conclusion is imbricated onto my own efforts at dissimulation, and the reasons for resorting to a measure of secrecy.

After my first, preliminary trip to the Andamans in 1989 to explore the possibilities of undertaking research there, I decided that when I returned I would present myself as a married woman. This seemed to me a practical strategy that would eliminate many of the problems that I had encountered during my initial trip. Hence, when I returned in 1991, I wore on my person some of the signifiers that convey marriage in India. The strategy proved effective by deflecting any unwanted attention from the Indians around me. In the case of the Onge, however, it was another matter. As I realized to my dismay later, my presen-

tation of myself as a married woman was crucial in determining the course of my fieldwork experience.

The Onge found it hard to understand how I could remain there alone, separated from my family, for such a long time. It seemed unthinkable to them that a parent, at least a sibling, if not my husband, was not with me for some part of that time. This was a matter that elicited some comments from the Indians as well but it was shrugged away as "Oh, she's from America" and that was reason enough. I was at pains to explain that I had travelled to America to pursue my graduate studies quite recently, that my family lived in Calcutta, and that I still considered Calcutta *home*. But that made my solitary existence more puzzling, and the only possible reason that could be attributed for the bizarre situation was the "American" connection.

On interrogation by the Onge women as to how long I had been married, I surmised that it was less of a misdeed to be away from one's husband after several years of marriage, and I responded accordingly. But that led me into deeper waters. I was asked how many children I had, and I countered with a none, since I gauged accurately that to have children and not bring them with me was the greatest offence of all. That didn't let me off the hook either. I received a long harangue from more than one woman castigating me for my strange behavior: to be married for as many years as I admitted to being, and not have produced *one* child!² I weakly promised to do my best as soon as I finished my work with them and returned to my husband. And that was followed by another long rebuke of my errant husband who consented to my living alone, so far from any family. I was frequently reminded that I should send for my husband soon, to ask him to come and take care of me.

The matter did not end there. Well into the months of my stay at Dugong Creek, I realized that, at some level, the Onge women felt a certain alienation from me by my persistence in living alone at Dugong Creek. It was not an issue that I could resolve in terms that would make any sense to them. More frustrating was the behavior of the Onge men, who broke appointment after appointment with me after having assured me that they would meet me at a certain time³ at the "guest house". Towards the latter part of my fieldwork, when it was almost too late to rectify matters, Bara Raju confided that the men did not show up because they were unwilling to spend long hours alone with me interviewing them at the "guest-house". Such an action on their part would be considered a transgression, and may have given offence to my absent husband. Even though he was so far away, it was necessary that the men show him adequate respect.

I was relieved that I finally had an answer for what had been an inexplicable element of my interaction with them. But, seizing upon an

opportunity to berate them about something that I had not yet forgiven them for, I shot back that all these problems could have been avoided if I had been permitted to live in the empty house in their settlement. There would always be children and other Onge in and out of my house, and the issue of any man spending time alone with me would never have arisen. This, in turn, revealed to me yet another tier of protocol that would have been violated had any of the Onge men constructed the furniture that I needed to live in that house. As a married woman, it was a task that was to be undertaken only by my husband, or other male kin. The Onge men were cognizant of the respect befitting my husband and family. At that moment, I would have forsworn husbands several lifetimes over if I could have retraced my steps and amended my marital status.

A view of Onge gender relations

In the day-to-day unfolding of Onge gender relations, the Onge's experience of colonization, with its typical sharp exclusion of women from the domain of "official" politics and the more formal decision-making bodies of the administration, has challenged and shaken the basis for Onge women's traditional structure of authority within the community (Cipriani 1954). The loss of Onge territory has simultaneously corresponded with the fragmentation of their hunting-gathering modes of subsistence. These were wedded to patterns of rituals that reaffirmed and endorsed the complementary roles of Onge women and men within their conceptual world (Pandya 1993). All of these factors have inflected the conduct of gender roles and relations among the Onge.

Intersecting on these quotidian practices is the Indian administration's penetration of their domestic space, in an attempt to assimilate the Onge into the mores of Indian society. In the aftermath of sedentarization, with its consequent displacement and marginalization, this is a project in which Onge men are complicit. Sometimes willing, occasionally unwilling, the men's collaboration with the welfare authorities is shifting and fluid.

To maintain their independence and autonomy in the face of the many incursions by the Indian administration and the welfare authorities, the Onge women have resorted to diverse strategies that are discussed below. As Okely (1991) notes, "specific incidents, anecdotes, individual acts or in some cases clusters of women, revealed an awareness, albeit fragmented [of the ways in which they were subordinated]" (p.8). I will go on to discuss the particular incidents that mark the Onge women's claim to autonomy, despite the displacement of

their sphere to the periphery, away from the site of decision-making as drawn by the welfare authorities.

I argue that with the use of language as well as other prosaic strategies, Onge women assert a separate and autonomous space for themselves. An intriguing offshoot is the developing awareness among Onge men of the contradictions between Onge and Indian perceptions of gender. The assertion of independence by Onge women, purportedly established in Onge traditions (Cipriani 1954, Pandya 1993), appears to have accrued a connotation of diminished masculinity for Onge men. In the throes of intoxication, the behaviors exhibited by Onge men suggest that alcohol is a means to subvert or recast the pattern of gender relations extant in Onge society. Since drinking usually occurs outside the settlement, in the forest or nearby towns where the men often disappear to, through drinking Onge men appropriate a space from which Onge women are excluded. Simultaneously, the men assert a masculinity that attempts to replicate the Indian patterns of gender behaviors.

Language and power

Onge women never speak Hindi but their comprehension of the language is never in doubt, since all communicative events suggest that their knowledge of the language is inclusive of even the colloquialisms. However, a question posed to an Onge woman in Hindi will, in every instance, only bring forth a response in Onge, even when the woman knows that her interlocutor may not follow a word of that language.

Likewise, Onge men also comprehend Hindi, but their speech exhibits different degrees of proficiency, a range of variation that we are not given a chance to detect among the women. A question posed in Hindi to an Onge man may initially bring forth a response in Onge, but on indicating difficulty with that language, an attempt is made to respond in Hindi, however halting. Onge women, on the other hand, insist on a grasp of their language since any communication with them *has* to be always conducted in Onge, thus subtly underscoring their control over the interaction.

A number of interpretations may be given to this behavior. One, Onge men are more obliging and willing to help out when someone has difficulties with their language. Or Onge men perforce had to engage with an outside world within which there was never any possibility of setting the terms of the discourse. Following this line of argument, it is an alternative rendition of the British term *pacification*. Onge men relinquished any semblance of control over their lives after their resounding defeats in battles with the British. But their post-defeat collaboration with the colonial administrations⁴ through the medium

of Hindi provided entry into the domain of the colonizers. Knowledge of Hindi had the potential for more power/material rewards, since successive colonial administrations have consistently recognized and rewarded linguistic ability. Hence language becomes the primary vehicle for the process of "subjection", as discussed earlier, making available new opportunities and routes to power. This analysis is given support by recalling that the appointment of "chief" or *Raja* (in Hindi) by, first the British and then the Indian administrations, by virtue of which authority and power is vested in an individual, has been determined by linguistic ability.

A third interpretation, often offered by Onge men, is that the women are shy and feel bashful about speaking in Hindi. Though this explanation does give me pause, it is not corroborated by other elements of women's behavior.

In the case of both men and women, there was some modification to their speech when chewing *bebe* (betel leaves) or *cibari* (areca nuts). The excessive salivation produced during this process confers a greater guttural sound to their language. But there was a further marked transformation effected in the speech of Onge women according to whether they were conversing among themselves or they were in mixed company. Speaking with greater rapidity and apparently adding an additional consonant to every syllable, speech among women acquired a coded quality that appeared to be indecipherable even to the men. When summoned to translate, the men's standard response was that the women were conversing among themselves. Further prodding as to what the content of the discussion was produced the same answer, namely, that the women were conversing among themselves. Repeated occurrences of this phenomenon led me to suspect that the men did not completely follow the women's discussion when they spoke to each other. Alternatively, by virtue of the women's marking-off of a private domain, even if the men comprehended the conversation, they were reluctant to divulge the contents.

Such a closing of ranks never occurred with the men, whose language I could follow despite the throaty inflection acquired because of mouths engorged with *bebe* or *cibari* and spittle. The additional option of switching between two languages (Hindi and Onge) provided greater fluidity and ease of conversation with the men. Concurrently, such a practice inserted an additional impediment⁵ to my efforts to engage in and maintain a separate interaction with the women.

The obstacles⁶ posed by these attenuations to women's conversation meant that I was always "outside" the anthropological invocation of empathy with "the people", within an historical conjuncture that, in this context, linguistically implicated me with the colonizer. Thus, my naive assumption of a facile rapport premised on shared gender was quickly dispelled by the exigencies of fieldwork at Dugong Creek.

Clothes make/(un)make the Onge woman

Conversations with Onge women conveyed their dissatisfaction and resentment with the intrusions into their domains of everyday living. An example that several mentioned was the issue of clothing. Clothes appear to have become a sensitive issue at various levels. Every Onge is given two sets of new garments every year as an item within the welfare system of which they are beneficiaries. During the period that I was at the settlement, everyone received one of these yearly hand-outs. All the Onge women were given identical sets of printed skirts and blouses, and the men shorts and shirts, with some variation between them of color, print and texture.⁷ Soon afterwards I noticed that some of the men tried on their new attire, but none of the women were to be seen in theirs. When questioned, some hawked and spat, or others simply shrugged, and in tones of great contempt said "*gibiti ga*", they're bad, and demanded that I get other outfits for them. Many women made repeated demands for new apparel, like the ones I wore, until finally, in exasperation, I replied that they already had a set of new garments, which the administration had gone to some expense to make for them. Moreover, anything that I obtained for them would be purchased from the limited stocks available at the same stores from where their much maligned clothing had originated.

I was instructed on the niceties of discernment and good taste, perceived as lacking in the welfare administrators. I was told that I could be relied upon to exercise the same discrimination that they showed when selecting outfits for themselves. I would keep in mind their likes and dislikes, their individual personalities, and get items specific for each person, not the uniform trash that the *entale* had given them. Furthermore, they, the womenfolk, should be granted the prerogative of choosing clothes for their families.

A different but related aspect of the vexed subject of apparel is linked to the Indian construction of the "savage". The Onge are often described as *jungle*, which approximates to "forest-dweller", on a par with the other creatures inhabiting the forest. Both the British and the Indian constructions of savagery as a social-evolutionary category were founded on the absence of clothing. Therefore, the first step *en route* to civilization was the donning of cloth.

Onge women were mostly bare-bodied except for a girdle around their hips with a tuft of dried rattan leaves, the *nakuinege*, in front of their genitals. There is a certain delicacy and modesty in the women's comportment such that the genitalia are always concealed. Most women now have some covering of cloth on their bodies, and many continue to wear the *nakuinege* underneath.⁸ But the use of external garments has not become completely internalised, as apparent by its elim-

ination when they are completely relaxed and feel their privacy will not be intruded upon. Privacy is, however, something that is hard to establish for the Onge. Friends and family of the welfare staff, government officials of various denominations, arrive to gawk at the *jungles*. They demand that the Onge shed their garments so that the visitors can take back “authentic” photographs of the Onge in their “traditional” attire.

The power of women

One day, late afternoon at Dugong Creek, most of the Onge men were engaged in wage-work. It was around 3:30 pm and the settlement was deserted except for groups of women sitting together and talking. Suddenly, a crowd of militant Onge women, armed with brooms, congregated at the place where the men were working, and set about sweeping vigorously around the area where the men were gathered. Each woman in turn railed and stormed about the lack of *tambonuya* (wild boar), *choge* (fish), that they were “*tambonuya mando ulecebe*” (famished for pork), but all the while the men were engrossed in *totale*⁹. The men broke into smiles and soon put away their implements and made their way back to the settlement, expecting their wives to follow. But the women continued their vigorous cleaning. Each Onge, in turn, went up to his wife and tried to talk her into returning with him. But the women collectively ignored the men and continued their sweeping for at least another hour.

A disconsolate group of men trailed a slow retreat back to the settlement. I followed the men back and found them sitting in front of their houses, calling out as I walked by that they were very hungry. I suggested that they start eating, and they replied that they were waiting for their wives to return, so that they could eat their meal together. The next morning, shortly after daybreak, I arrived at the settlement and found that all the men had left for hunting at dawn. Wage-work at Dugong Creek came to a halt in the ensuing weeks.

During my stay at Dugong Creek, I can recall one incident that exposed the convergence of the various conflicting domains at the settlement. Shiela was a recently widowed woman with several children. One of the children, “Rocky,”¹⁰ had been ailing since birth and had always remained frail. From the beginning of my fieldwork at Dugong Creek he had been ill, and six months after my arrival there he seemed to sink to a point where his death appeared imminent. Meanwhile, the medical officer appointed during this period had chosen to ignore the child’s condition until the child’s precarious health alerted the medical officer to the possible consequences for himself.



*Wage work. Carrying sacks of rations to the settlement store at Dugong Creek.
Photo: Sita Venkateswar*

Due to the Andaman Islanders labelling as an “endangered people,” every birth of an Onge child is rewarded with a sum of Rs.1,000 to the parents, and every death has to be explained to the highest authorities in the government. The person held accountable for each life is the medical officer, and the possibility that he would be found negligent in the discharge of his duties produced a flurry of panicked responses on his part. He signalled to the Directorate of Health Services at Port Blair that the child was critically ill and had to be removed to Port Blair immediately for more specialised treatment. Then he convinced all the other welfare staff that they too would be held responsible if “Rocky” died. Therefore, they should all help persuade Shiela to take “Rocky” to Port Blair. Only then would they be let off the hook. This was a particularly formidable task since Shiela’s husband had earlier been sent to Port Blair for treatment and not returned alive. All the welfare staff in turn coaxed, cajoled and pleaded with Shiela. Shiela and her family were offered every kind of inducement, an advance of money, new clothes for the whole family, any gift that they wanted and a new suitcase to carry everything to Port Blair.

For Timai, Shiela’s father and one of the heaviest drinkers among the Onge, this was an opportunity to avail of money that could be spent on alcohol. For Tambole the *Raja*, who, coincidentally, was also the son of Shiela’s late husband by a former marriage, the situation was more equivocal. On the one hand he still grieved the loss of his father, and perceived Port Blair as a place of death; on the other, as *Raja* he had to hold his end up and endorse the welfare authorities.

Shiela, troubled by the pressure on all fronts, was reluctant to leave. At a loss for any further excuses that would justify her refusal, and somewhat tempted by all the inducements offered, she appeared to give in.

Meanwhile, the fact that something else was afoot was suggested by the small knots of Onge women who were conferring together. Later that night I asked Shiela about her decision. In a tone that brooked no further argument, she replied that she was not going. All the older women had rebuked her and there was nothing further to be said. Then I went to the welfare staff who told me that everything was arranged. Shiela had agreed to take “Rocky” to Port Blair. The medical officer would accompany them, and the helicopter would arrive early the next morning to take them there.

Next morning, at 6 a.m. the helicopter arrived. It landed with much difficulty, since Dugong Creek is a particularly rough terrain. This is why each such trip costs the administration as much as Rs.50,000. The medical officer, carrying his suitcase, accompanied by the other welfare staff and the helicopter crew, trooped to Shiela’s house to get her. Shiela had locked herself inside her house and refused to come out or



*Wage work for women at Dugong Creek. Keeping the settlement clear of undergrowth.
Photo: Sita Venkateswar*

talk to anyone. Everyone in turn banged on her door, offering blandishments and threats, but Shiela remained mute inside. Finally, the helicopter got ready to leave and the medical officer, enraged and embarrassed, viewing the situation as a personal affront, was told that he would have to send explanations for the debacle.

All the Onge were vastly amused by the spectacle. When charged by the welfare staff with duplicity, they shrugged and replied that the women had decided that it would not be appropriate for Shiela to go to Port Blair, and therefore, there was nothing further to be said about the matter.

Meanwhile, as a result of the medical officer's attempts to ingratiate himself with the Directorate at Port Blair through his assiduous attention to his duties at Dugong Creek, "Rocky" recovered. But the medical officer was transferred shortly afterwards on other charges of misbehavior.

The merriment provoked by the medical officer's discomfiture kept the Onge in good humor for a while. But over time, the occasional jibes and taunts from the welfare staff that they were all dominated by their women, stung. The mood among the men changed to disquiet. The Onge men who seemed most vulnerable to such jeers were the "helpers" assigned to the welfare staff. The dilemma posed by the demand for a simultaneous negotiation between two discordant sets of expectations exposed some of the pressures that these men were un-

der as they dealt with their wives and the *entale*. The several derogatory variations (in Hindi) of a “henpecked husband” tried the customary agreeable dispositions of the men, leading to an increasing stand-off with their wives, as they sought to match an alter image made available with alcohol.

Pleasure as subversion

I have mentioned in passing the growing incidence of drinking among the Onge. Here I want to draw attention to the various registers at which the practice of drinking, with its attendant intoxication, is enmeshed within the Onge social landscape.

The overriding impression that I obtained from talking to the Onge men about drinking was the immense pleasure and fun that they derived from it. The experience of intoxication was described as *tikitikige*, which in Onge means “like a spinning top”, and the sensation invited repeated attempts to rediscover it. When recounting their drinking exploits, their manner took on a mischievous air, as if they had indulged in an enjoyable prank. But it was an enjoyment that was cultivated, which they slowly learned to relish. All described their initial experiences with alcohol as disastrous, and it was only over time that the sensations changed and was recognized as pleasurable.

The Onge were aware that their drinking behavior provoked disapproval at all levels of the Andaman administration. I read the traces of subversion in this act of drinking, manifest in their delight at not conforming to the image of the “good”,¹¹ docile Onge (in contrast to the more “wilful” Andamanese) that the authorities would like to promote. Moreover, the pleasure that they derived from the consumption of alcohol, negated the efficacy of any morality constructed around abstinence. Hence the “moralization” of the issue, (Escobar 1984-85) applied or invoked as a form of coercion, was ineffective in this context. And therein lay the tragedy and the perpetuation of the practice.

But, besides its embodiment as pleasure, the itinerary that I have traced for drinking in the context of the ongoing discussion above suggests that it was also intimately intertwined with power as deployed between genders.

The path to collusion

Onge women were vehement about their exclusion from any decisions regarding the supplies stocked in the small shop in the settlement. The designated “helpers” to the welfare staff were frequently consult-

ed about what they wished to buy from the shop but the women were never asked to indicate their preferences. While individually within the domestic space Onge men concurred with their wives' grievances, as a group they tended to keep separate this area of interaction with the welfare personnel. This was the arena of collusion that provided access to alcohol, and with alcohol they could all be "men" together. A dramatic transformation¹² is effected in the behaviors of Onge men once they have consumed alcohol.

The remarkable feature of this change was how closely they mimicked the behavior the Onge had seen displayed by the welfare staff or the drunken exhibitions they had witnessed in the nearby towns. When drinking, Onge men spoke only Hindi, the most halting speaker discovering an amazing facility for the language. In that language, their conversation acquired certain lewdness and the kind of discussion they engaged in was one they shied away from when sober. All tended to gossip about the sexual dalliances of the Onge and a certain pattern emerged from these discussions. In each case, the men who were involved in these extra-marital affairs were married to older women beyond child-bearing age, who had either never borne any children or lost those from earlier marriages. The women who were purportedly indulging in affairs with such men were relatively young, and had several children. How much of this talk had some truth to it and to what extent they were fantasies is debatable. But the element that stood out was that, to a great extent, these accounts mirrored the escapades of the numerous welfare staff that had stayed at the settlement over the years.

For the Onge women, who in other respects tended to keep a firm check on their men, drinking and alcohol became spheres through which the men evaded and eluded them. The deference shown to them by their husbands in their daily lives was erased at a single stroke with alcohol.

A note on generalizations

I want to digress briefly at this stage to qualify the homogeneity implied by the use of generalizations such as "the Onge men" or "the Onge women", since there is substantial variation between individuals, both women and men. Each person's correspondence to the main elements of my representation is a matter of degree, some more, some less.

I have highlighted certain trends, but every single Onge is *not* subsumed by the principle features of my depiction, which exist as a composite. For instance, as I have noted, among the Onge men there are those who have a specified level of propinquity to the welfare au-

thorities, based on their fluency in Hindi. Much of my representation above applies to this group of people. But, here too, there were striking dissimilarities. Tambole, fluent in Hindi, the incumbent *Raja*, a heavy drinker, married to an older woman, but *not* one of those perceived as dominated by his wife, yet was one of the men gossiped about by other Onge. Tambole's explanation for his induction into drinking was, "The 'LG' ¹³ always has a glass of whisky by him when there are meetings at Port Blair. I'm the *Raja*, I also drink." But Bara Raju, articulate in Hindi, a claimant to the position of *Raja*, never drank, always deferred to his wife, was not vulnerable to any jeers from the welfare staff, nor was there any hint of gossip attached to him.

On the other hand, there was Tai, a "helper," at ease in Hindi, married to Kakeyi, who never conceived again after the death of their child, a sly drinker, and as portrayed by the welfare personnel, always at his wife's beck and call. He was one of those presumed to be in an extramarital relationship. Then there was Berogegi, or Totanange, or Kimboi etc., all of whom had a distinct permutation and combination of the attributes listed above.

In the case of the Onge women, too, there were similar variations in terms of the authority they wielded among other women or with their husbands. Or the extent of resentment expressed towards the welfare staff and their husband's drinking. Botalai, Kamegi, Koilaboi, Kwankitui, Nabimboi, Bagali etc., were all older women, most of who were married to younger husbands, some of whom drank, of whom only Botalai and Bagali had any surviving children, and who comprised the core group of women who influenced Shiela. But the common thread that tied together all the women, without any deviation, was their eschewal of Hindi.

Before concluding my disclaimer on the use of generalizations in this account of the islanders, I want to allude to the tension that exists between the particular and the general. Even Abu-Lughod's (1991) call to an "ethnography of the particular" does not elude the demand for those particulars to make a statement that harks towards the general. Hence, my generalizations are a shortcut, avoiding the necessity of nominating in every instance specific individuals, and a claim to legitimacy.

Towards some explanations

To return to my narrative on the politics of gender among the Onge, is it possible to arrive at some framework that accommodates the incidents described earlier? Are these stray events that have no relevance beyond the telling of a tale?

At the outset, it is clear how the system of welfare that regulates the lives of the Onge, with its attendant concern to assimilate the Onge into a more mainstream “Indian” lifestyle, has penetrated into the “private” domestic existence of the Onge. The disparate positioning of Onge women and men *vis-à-vis* the welfare system and its practitioners gives rise to the complexities that are evident in their everyday actions, and in the contrasting behaviors of women and men. Moreover, their distinct positioning within the welfare system also throws light on the forms of “subjection” (Foucault 1983) and the ways in which Onge women and men are implicated in them. As I have stated earlier, the social classifications conferred on the Onge men, i.e. *Raja*, “helper,” etc., in its linkages with nodes of power, “opens up avenues of enablement, that seduces [the Onge to conform] to its rules, and thereby shapes new outlooks and behavior patterns” (Biolsi 1995:30). But there are no new routes to power that are available to the Onge women within such a perspective. In addition, with the dismissal of women from the sphere of “official” politics, and the accompanying lack of awareness of women’s influence and participation in decisions that affect the Onge, the “traditional” stature that the women have enjoyed is placed at risk.

The final element that remains unsettled by this argument is the process by which alcohol appears to have reconfigured gender relations among the Onge. An easy response is to dismiss the transformation effected in men’s behavior as a release of inhibitions. It may feature as an element of the whole, but I believe drinking has a more complex signification within that totality. Mbembe’s (1992) discussion of the *banality* of power offers some resolutions. According to Mbembe, the trappings of power typically involve a conspicuous consumption of food and alcohol, and are inclusive of a demonstration of sexual prowess. For the Onge men, these manifestations have become integral components of their “subjection”. In emulating these practices, they can elide the lived reality of colonization and aspire to membership within the larger world of men with power.

A brief note on the Andamanese

It is not insignificant that the last anthropological research conducted on the Andamanese dates back to the seventies, soon after they were re-settled on Strait Island (Chakrabarty 1974). After documenting the standard anthropological categories of kinship, ritual, material culture etc., which permit the compilation of “exotic” details, what is there left to say about 30 odd people whose most prominent attributes are excessive drinking and sexual promiscuity, uncertain health and an as-

tute eye towards material advantages? This is my attempt to take cognizance of the uncomfortable and distressing elements of the lives of the Andamanese, and find a way of articulating and explaining those factors.

Alcohol and the Andamanese

In the Andaman Islands, there exists a culture of drinking among men that cuts across class, regional and the “tribal” mainland divide¹⁴. All men drink. It is a hobby, a pleasurable activity and a practice that is often enforced among men. To be a man, one must drink. As suggested in the case of Onge men, and perhaps for Andamanese men as well, consuming large quantities of alcohol has become an integral component of their male identities. Andamanese boys are inducted early into the practice of drinking, often by their fathers, or by other older males.

Anthropologists have studied constructions of masculinity in many parts of the world and have tried to analyse the implications of the consumption of alcohol on cultural definitions of male identity. Mac Marshall’s (1979) research on drinking among Trukese men revealed that the ostentatious, obnoxious comportment of Trukese young men was inextricably interwoven with basic Trukese beliefs about strength, courage and manhood. Beverly Chiñas’ (1992) work on the Zapotec, and David Gilmore’s (1990) cross-cultural survey “on the subject of manhood” confirm heavy drinking and sexual aggressiveness as closely linked to notions of male *machismo* in many parts of the world.

An additional strand of complexity in the symbolic power of alcohol emerges in gender relations among the Andamanese. As demonstrated by the married Andamanese men, the consumption of alcohol is also an admission of impotence.¹⁵ It is an expression of awareness that they have been cuckolded, have lost control over their wives and, thereby, the future. Andamanese women seek to have children by non-Andamanese men, often plying their husbands with large quantities of alcohol before going to their current paramours.

Producing more children is a recurrent theme in the community, justifiably so in view of the fact that there are only 35-40 people who can claim some “Andamanese” descent. Except for the children of one couple, all the other children have been fathered either by non-Andamanese men or by “illegitimate unions”¹⁶ from within, but every offspring is listed as “Andamanese,” by the community as well as the welfare authorities¹⁸. Such a course has some immediate monetary returns, since the couple (namely, the “legitimate” couple even if the child is born of an “illegitimate” affair) is “rewarded” by the Andaman administration with Rs.1000 for every birth. The money, in turn,

leads to bitter altercations between the registered couple over who has greater rights to it.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1985,1990) discussion of a "generative habitus" provides the guidelines for contextualizing the behaviors of the Andamanese. Through practices guided by a practical logic, in pursuit of objective interests, social formations tend to reproduce themselves. In the interests of reproducing themselves, to exist as a viable community the Andamanese have generated an infinite variety of sexual strategies. Their "feel for the game, for a particular, historically determined game" (p.62) has produced the practical sense of both playing in conformity with the rules and bending those rules. The simultaneous existence of "legitimate" and "illegitimate" unions allows the promise of more offspring, with immediate monetary gains thrown in for good measure. But such a "double strategy" also has its repercussions on social relations among the Andamanese, between genders, across genders, further complicated by the ambiguities of alcohol abuse, whereby battle lines become sharpened between men and women.

They are further exacerbated by the interventions of the welfare authorities in Strait Island and Port Blair, many of whom have intermittently been involved in affairs with the Andamanese women. The "moral" and righteous stance assumed by these men is raucously challenged by the Andamanese women, who then proceed to expose the hollow morality that the *lau*¹⁵ are incapable of affirming in their practice.

The predicament in which the Andamanese men find themselves is somewhat similar to the Onge men, but the pressures are different in each case. The standards of "good" behavior that they prescribe for their wives are drawn from the norms set by non-Andamanese. By stigmatizing the behaviors of their women, they collaborate in the representations of Andamanese women as women of "bad" character, with "loose" morals. This precipitates the wrath of their wives, in turn leading to violent scenes with them. Concurrently, the men's animosity for the *lau*, many of whom they know are engaged in affairs with their wives, finds expression when they are intoxicated. Intoxication gives the Andamanese men the license to vent their hostility and aggression towards the women and the *lau* without penalty. Such behavior, in turn, perpetuates their own stigmatized representations, by the Andamanese women and the *lau*, as "shiftless alcoholics". Many of the Andamanese men sidestep a sober confrontation with the problematics of these alternatives by adopting a perennially hazy state, from one alcoholic binge to the next, the monotony periodically broken by the scenes with their wives or the *lau*.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the landscape of gender relations among the Onge and the Andamanese, as manifest in their everyday behaviors and practices, against the backdrop of the interventions of the welfare authorities. I have traced the shifting fields of power deployed between and across genders in quotidian ethnographic contexts. In linking the dynamics of gender to an analysis of subjection, I have demonstrated the imbrication of the administrative strategies of the welfare system with the processes by which the Onge and Andamanese are incorporated within specific structures of power. The differential and multiple articulations of Onge and Andamanese men and women to these linkages inflect the mode of complicity and extent of contestation. The more marginal or excluded from the routes to power, the greater the resentment expressed and opposition to the government initiatives. But of greater significance are the ways in which the terrain of gender has been recast, thereby reconstituting it as a bitterly contentious site for/of power, as acutely evident in the case of the Andamanese. Williams' (1994: 595-600) reformulation of Gramsci's concept of hegemony makes possible an interpretation that is at once more comprehensive and attentive to the ambiguities of power. This leads to an understanding of the ambivalence and contradictions of Onge and Andamanese men's re-forming masculinities, as constituted by structures of power, yet neither totally complicit nor entirely contesting in their articulations with power. □

Notes

- 1 A modified version of this chapter is published in *Senri Ethnological Studies* (2001)56:207-226. Sections of this chapter have also been published in *Crosscurrents, Journal of Graduate Research in Anthropology* (1999)Vol. VIII.
- 2 I didn't have the heart to point out that there were many among them who had been married for longer but were childless.
- 3 Time was determined by the position of the sun in the sky.
- 4 The reference to the colonial administrations here is inclusive of the British and the Indian regimes. As argued earlier, for the islanders the experience of colonization continued after the British left the islands.
- 5 I have suggested that my solitary existence in Dugong Creek was a factor that led to a certain amount of alienation from the Onge women.
- 6 While I could engage in banter with the Onge women, or serve as a recipient for complaints about the welfare authorities/system, I was not privy to intimacies that could establish the grounds for an awareness of any woman as a personalized individual.

- 7 This mode of constructing a gendered homogeneity/heterogeneity in the execution of the welfare system is striking.
- 8 This led to some problems when, as requested, I purchased a *salwar-kameez* for them, after approximating the sizes that they would wear. They were unable to get into them with their *nakuinege* on. It occasioned much laughter among the women. Finally, they discarded the *nakuinege*, and with their new outfits proudly paraded the length of the settlement.
- 9 All the work that is performed for non-Onges is referred to as *totale* by the Onges, which translates as "cleaning". However, there is a specific term for every other kind of activity that they perform that is not related to wage-work. The sweeping by the women lends greater weight to their ironic subversion of the men's work.
- 10 All the names of the children in the settlement have been conferred by the welfare staff after some popular Indian film star, although these names are never used by the Onge among themselves. Forms of appellation are on the basis of kinship categories or some unique characteristic of the individual that distinguishes the person from others. I, too, had a personal nickname conferred on me: *orananjaba*, one with a long nose.
- 11 Despite the widespread practice of drinking among the Onge, both in Dugong Creek and South Bay, a recent demographic survey of the Andaman Islands published by the Anthropological Survey of India (Pandit and Sarkar 1994) makes the bland assertion that the Onge do not drink, which is a gross misrepresentation of the existing state of affairs.
- 12 A somewhat similar transformation is noted by Kennedy (1978) among the Tarahumara, although the context in which their altered behavior occurred is very different.
- 13 The "LG" stands for Lieutenant-Governor, the highest executive authority in the Andaman Islands.
- 14 The place of origin on mainland India is maintained in the Andaman Islands, so that people are referred to as "the Tamilians," "the Moplahs," "the Bengalis" or "the Ranchi tribals".
- 15 For some of the men, impotence exists at the level of actuality, as a consequence of addiction to opium in the past or hereditary syphilis.
- 16 Despite the proscriptions against marriage between particular degrees of relatives, sexual liaisons exist across the board, between generations, between close relatives, within the community. Also contributing to the state of crisis is the inability of the Andamanese to maintain permanent stable relationships with non-Andamanese of the opposite sex.
- 17 The Indian administration registers these births as the benefits accrued by the Andamanese from the welfare efforts for them.
- 18 The Andamanese term that refers to non-Andamanese, formerly also alluding to "evil" spirits.

“They know how to make a fire, which shows they aren’t really that backward. Similarly, the way they interacted with us during our trip offered glimpses of the friendly nature that lurks beneath their exterior.”

(Chattopadhyay 1992: 5)

Introduction

Maintaining the general theme of power that is foregrounded in my account of the Andaman Islanders, this chapter explores strategies of power as these intersect with race, class and gender. I go on to argue that gender, in some circumstances, becomes an instrument for collusion between men, across race, in maneuvers that are deployed on/over the bodies of women.

This assertion is made within the context of ethnographic encounters with the *Jarawa*. Their historical and contemporary situation presents an intriguing aspect to my comparative vision of the indigenous people of the Andaman Islands. At the time of my research, the *Jarawa* displayed an unpredictable front, despite the concerted efforts made over the previous twenty years by the Indian administration to initiate and maintain “friendly contact”.

The politics of “contact”

An integral feature of “*Jarawa* contact” was its connotation of “momentous”, “historic”, media-grabbing possibilities. What remained hidden was the scrambling and competition involved in ensuring inclusion in the team that was assembled for every “gift-dropping” occasion. To illustrate what this means, I will present the example of the “historic” contact with the Sentinelese early in 1991.

As meagre as the extant knowledge about the *Jarawa* is, the paucity of information about the Sentinelese is of much greater magnitude. Along with the *Jarawa*, the Sentinelese were also the beneficiaries of the “gift-dropping” trips organized by the Andaman administration. For the first time in 1991, a contact party was received without the customary barrage of arrows. In this connection, an interesting piece of information was unearthed² offering some explanation for the enigma of

why, in January 1991, the Sentinelese came forward to receive coconuts from the “contact team” rather than shower them with arrows. A few years earlier there had been a shipwreck off Sentinel Island. During the fair months of the year, the wreck was salvaged by a scrap-iron dealer and his workers. It was this dealer and his crew who established the “first contact”³ that, over time, led to the Sentinelese accepting coconuts from the “contact team” organized by the administration. This was of course never made public by the Andaman administration, who did not consider such an “historic” moment worthy of a mere scrap-iron dealer and his crew. Nor did anyone find it curious that the Sentinelese suddenly happened to know the Hindi word for coconut, repeating *narele, narele* while indicating the coconuts.

I will not go into the details of the behind-the-scenes maneuvers that occurred among the anthropologists of the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI), already mentioned in the media attention surrounding the event. Or the efforts to ensure that they were included in subsequent teams, which were immediately sent out to consolidate the momentous “breakthrough” with the Sentinelese. Twenty years of “contact” with the *Jarawa* has not diluted the possibilities of an “historic” moment emerging from the tried routine of a regularly scheduled “gift-dropping trip”. Any number of “first-time” occasions was potentially lurking in the wings. As many as 200 *Jarawa* sighted. Or the team invited to feast on pork with the *Jarawa*. The team permitted to stay the night with the *Jarawa* in their huts – the list of possibilities was exciting. The point of this exposition is that the excitement and the romance attached to a *Jarawa* “contact trip” remained as potent as it ever was when “first contact” was made. The romance coloured all interactions between anthropologists and others, as they vied with each other to be included in the team, no matter how many prior trips they may have made when nothing of any “significance” had occurred.

As a graduate student in anthropology from the United States conducting research in the Andaman Islands, it was this setting that I was confronted with when I happened to be in Port Blair. As I shuttled back and forth between Dugong Creek and Strait Island, dividing my time between the Onge and the Andamanese, I was sometimes unwittingly informed of the organization of a *Jarawa* “contact trip”. I have been present on four such trips, and on each instance my inclusion led to some discord with other anthropologists of the ASI. I will focus on the third trip during which there were three encounters with the *Jarawa*, and which had “momentous” implications at many registers.

For the duration of my research in the Andaman Islands, I had formally affiliated myself with the Anthropological Survey of India, at Port Blair. When I first arrived in the Andaman Islands in 1989, I did not let it be widely known that I was attached to a university in the

US. Elections were to be held shortly thereafter in the islands, and many rumours of a foreign “hand” in Indian’s political instability floating around. Although it seemed rather far-fetched, in view of the prevailing mood in the country, I was warned that I could very easily be perceived as a “foreign agent”, up to no “good”. On the advice of the former deputy-director of ASI, I did not actually withhold the information, but, by attaching myself to the ASI, I did not have to volunteer the information that I was in a graduate program in the US. As the Indian government’s premier research institution on the spot, I could avail of the Survey’s unquestioned access to all the reserved tribal areas in the islands, including the resources accumulated over forty years of investigation in the islands.

Vishvajit Pandya, who had conducted his dissertation research with the Onge at Dugong Creek between 1983 and 1984, was also in the Andaman Islands during this period, with funding for a project on the *Jarawa*. On a brief visit that he made to Dugong Creek where we met, he suggested working with him on some part of his project. Collaborating with a senior, male anthropologist, affiliated⁴ to an institution in a foreign country, lent me greater credibility in the Andaman Islands. As a lone, Indian, female, without any links to the Andaman bureaucracy, my attempts to gain entry into the closed circle of participants in the *Jarawa* “contact” efforts had met with little success. Given the limited time that I had, awaiting my turn at the ASI was not a sound strategy. The minimal priority given to my inclusion in the “contact trip” became evident whenever I was next on the waiting list. There was always a very good justification offered for someone else (from the ASI) to jump the line.

Pandya’s strategy had been to bypass all the lower levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy in the Andamans and go straight to the top. He had directly approached and negotiated a connection with the highest executive authority in the islands, the Lieutenant-Governor. The “LG” was also the director of all the tribal programs, and had the final veto on who could participate in the *Jarawa* contact trips. Through Pandya, I was able to meet the Lieutenant-Governor and, independent of the ASI or the administration, make a bid for an opportunity to participate in the trips. Much to my surprise, since it was accomplished so easily, I was successful. This was rather unpopular with the other anthropologists from the ASI and the lower rungs of the administration. They let it be known that I had out-manuevered them by directly approaching the “LG”. The perception was that these “foreign” anthropologists were given preference over the “in-house”, “rightful” claimants to exclusive access to the *Jarawa*.

Pandya’s project (or as much as I gathered of it) was designed to consistently build on all prior knowledge of the *Jarawa* language. His plan was

to infer relationships and movements between different groups of *Jarawa* inhabiting various parts of Middle and South Andaman. Most importantly, he intended to include Onge as intermediaries and interpreters on these occasions. This was meant to confirm once and for all Portman's long-cited theory of the relationship between the Onge and the *Jarawa* – their purported common origins reflected in their linguistic practice. For all these reasons, the proposed trip to the *Jarawa* area held the promise of a pivotal occasion, with all the ingredients for an "historic" encounter.

The Onge

Hoping to rely on his recollection of the relationships that he had established with the Onge during his fieldwork in Dugong Creek in 1983-84, Pandya tried to ensure the inclusion of those Onge with whom he had worked most closely. His preference was for Totanange or Tambolai, including their families, to participate as interpreters in the *Jarawa* contact. He had a message sent to that effect by wireless to Dugong Creek, requesting that these Onge travel from Dugong Creek to Hut Bay⁵ where we would await them in the *Tarmugli*,⁶ the ship commissioned by the administration for this trip to the *Jarawa* area. It remained unclear as to what had transpired at Dugong Creek, or the content of the message that was conveyed to the Onge, but it was Bara Raju and his brother Kokegile, along with their respective families, who boarded the ship at Hut Bay. An earlier attempt to send for Totanange from Dugong Creek, by means of a message transmitted to the social worker at Dugong Creek, had resulted in Chota Raju and his family arriving at Port Blair instead. Thus, we had three Onge families in Port Blair, but not the ones whom Pandya had anticipated working with him as interpreters.

A number of different explanations may account for the substitution of personnel. The welfare staff may have misinformed the Onge about who was required to travel to Port Blair. Substantiating such an inference was the fact that Totanange was the "helper" assigned to the medical officer at Dugong Creek, responsible for replenishing his daily supply of water from the nearby well. Totanange's duties also included the other domestic and sundry tasks that the medical officer deemed beneath his dignity to undertake. It was unlikely that the medical officer would permit Totanange to leave for an indefinite period, even if his departure had the sanction of the "LG's" approval. It was also reported that Totanange was unwilling to travel to Port Blair, hence the welfare staff had tried to send someone else in his stead. This was how Chota Raju happened to arrive at Port Blair.

On the second attempt to involve Totanange in the process, either the same scenario was repeated, or Bara Raju had inserted himself into

the proceedings. As explained earlier, Bara Raju has been informally legitimated in his claim to be *Raja* of Dugong Creek by the welfare staff and several administrators at Port Blair. Assessing the situation as one that could work in his favor,⁷ it is likely that Bara Raju took advantage of the ensuing confusion⁸ at Dugong Creek and volunteered himself and his brother as likely candidates for the trip.

Unable to shake off his preoccupation with notions of the “authentic” even eight years later, and despite the very contrived qualities of the situation as conceived, Pandya envisioned that the meeting between the Onge and the *Jarawa* would follow the lines of a “traditional” reunion between allies. With a view to an exchange of “traditional gifts”, the Onge were told to bring with them *alamé*, the red ochre that is used on ritual occasions, and honey, which is always a prized food. Accompanied by a large crowd of Onge who, on the pretext of seeing off Bara Raju and Kokegile could indulge in a rollicking binge of drinking at Hut Bay, and bearing the gifts that had been asked of them, a merry and tipsy throng gathered at the ship at Hut Bay.

The anatomy of “contact”

The following photographs depict some of the phases of “contact” with the *Jarawa*. The years of experience that the captain and the crew of the *Tarmugli* have acquired in the process have made it possible to pinpoint certain areas along the west coast of South and Middle Andaman as likely places where the *Jarawa* can be found. As the ship cruises along these locations, frequently signalling with long blasts on the ship’s horn, the contact team lines the deck, intently scanning the shore and the dense forest beyond for the thin spiral of smoke denoting the presence of *Jarawa*. As soon as smoke is spied and suitable anchorage found, preparations are made to load and lower the boats that will transport the team. The gifts of green coconut and banana piled up in one, the stripped⁹ down “contact” team with strips of red cloth¹⁰ in another. A third boat with plain-clothe¹¹ policemen, their weapons hidden in the base of the boat, hovers at a distance from the shore throughout the “contact”.

Shortly thereafter, the *Jarawa* are observed emerging from the forest, carrying large nets and baskets, running along the shore following the direction of the boat. As the boat nears the shore, the *Jarawa* wade into the water, scrambling aboard before the boat is beached. Piling their baskets high with coconuts and bananas, snatching the red cloth, a rough and tumble of bodies, pushing and shoving as each individual grabs as much as possible of the “gifts” brought for them.

“Friendly contact”

As the initial excitement of obtaining the bounty offered to them by the “contact team” subsides, the *Jarawa* set about methodically collecting all the goods from the boat. Each individual or family group arranges their share of the “goods” in neat mounds at separate locations along the beach. At this stage in the proceedings, more attention is paid to the people who have offered of this largesse. Usually, members of the team attach themselves to particular *Jarawa*, assisting in the unloading of the boats, dragging the weighty baskets and nets heaped with coconuts and bananas along the sand to the assorted familial piles. Throughout this process, small, mobile enclaves are formed, where other performances are enacted, the nature of which retains elements of the unpredictable and, sometimes, the ominous.

Jayanta Sarkar (1990) and Madhumala Chattopadhyay (1992) wax lyrical about the bond of “trust and friendship” cemented over the years of “contact” with the *Jarawa*. Reporting on his participation as member of the “contact team” in 1988, Sarkar describes the occasion:

“While we stayed back ashore, all the adult males and females left the shore for our boat. Leaving their children with us was a clear gesture of faith and trust in us. The children were talking to us, touching us, which was also very heartening.” (p.55)

Going on to describe another instance of “friendly contact”, which had followed on the heels of a “Jarawa incident”, Sarkar (1990) concludes:

“They [the Jarawa] did not equate the members of the Contact Party with other hostile non-Jarawa. They did not misbehave or extract revenge from us. On the contrary, they demonstrated their trust and faith in us. They did not show any signs of hatred or hostility towards the others. They responded to affectionate gestures with affection.” (p.56)

Chattopadhyay (1992), who assigned for herself a kind of Florence Nightingale role during the “contact”, carried with her a supply of ointments and bandages to minister to the *Jarawa*. Discussing her experiences, Chattopadhyay narrates:

“With time they began to show me their injuries; the men and women kept calm while I applied medicines and ointments on them. The presence of a woman in the “contact” team had apparently worked wonders in disarming the Jarawas: it could well be that these native people

believed that a woman among the visitors meant that the latter posed no threat to their security.” (p.5)

She concludes that:

“[P]opular conceptions of their being hostile are ill-founded. Admittedly, civilization, in the sense that we understand it, has bypassed them: they still rely on bows and arrows to hunt for food just as early man used to. Nevertheless, they possess many of the basic human qualities--love, sympathy, understanding---that we sometimes mistake to be the hallmarks of civilization.” (p.5)

Both of these accounts elide the tension coursing through the duration of “contact” or an awareness of the likelihood of something, anything, triggering a violent confrontation with the *Jarawa*. The boat with the policemen hovering nearby serves as a reminder of that possibility. Chattopadhyay (*ibid.*) touches on it in passing, more to draw attention to her gender in the composition of the “contact team” than to delve into some explanation for the incessant cognizance of danger during the “contact” process:

“On earlier occasions, women members of visiting teams had been attacked by the Jarawas; this had prompted the local administration to prohibit the inclusion of women. Thus it was after a very long time that a woman member – that is, I – had been granted permission to visit the Jarawas.” (p.5)

In this context, it should be mentioned that the demographic features of the *Jarawa* who are sighted was an important consideration in determining the extent of precautions or alertness to the unpredictability of the “contact”. There was a perceptible sigh of relief when the *Jarawa* group was composed largely of women with children, or adolescent boys. Over the years, veterans of the contact process had identified some adult, male *Jarawa* as potential “troublemakers”, i.e. those who indulged in rough-housing, or were aggressive in their interactions with the team. Chattopadhyay posited that “the women kept the men in check, especially if any of them tried to stir up trouble” (p.5). However, other reports obtained from members of the team, as well as my own experience, renders such a statement problematic.

It is worthwhile at this stage examining some aspects of the behavior of the “contact team” that may be significant in delineating the encounter with the *Jarawa*. First, the gender composition of the contact team is usually all-male: women are rarely included. But during the period of my research in the islands, when Chattopadhyay was one of

the research staff at the ASI, her participation became more frequent. On such occasions, she was the sole female present, as was the case when I was included in the team. By and large though, it was mostly men who were involved in making "contact" with the *Jarawa*.

The *Jarawa* women and children are inclined to exuberance, and are physically expressive in their approach to the "contact team". Clambering onto people's laps, embracing, taking "piggyback" rides, namely, behaving in a manner that can be construed as demonstrative affection. It should also be noted at this point that the *Jarawa* are naked. Confronting a bevy of unclothed bodies, in easy intimacy with them, can be disturbing to Indians. In general, they tend towards constraint in their expressions between genders. It is also significant that the male members of the "contact team" have assumed an easy familiarity with the *Jarawa* women which, on occasion, veers towards the prurient.

Second, *Jarawa* women and children, in turn, often proffer their "gifts" to the team, taking off the ornaments they wear on their person and conferring them on particular members of the team. Such a gesture has, on the occasions when I was present, translated into a forcible appropriation of such items from the *Jarawa* by Indians¹² eager to acquire souvenirs: "tokens" of "friendship" from the *Jarawa*.

Finally, a singular characteristic of the Indian men participating in the "contact" is the marked passivity that underscores their interaction with the *Jarawa* men who are present during the "contact". To the more pugnacious, sometimes physically assaultive actions of the *Jarawa* men, the Indian men on the team present a consistently submissive demeanor. Definitively marking a contrast with the hostile bearing of the Indians whom the *Jarawa* encounter in the forest, or in the nearby villages bordering their territory, while the *Jarawa* men appear to test the limits that will eventuate a belligerent retaliation from the Indians.

The attributes discussed above bear on Chattopadhyay's prior observation that Indian women, if included in the contact team, would be "attacked" by the *Jarawa*. This use of the term "attack" is ambiguous, necessitating a deconstruction of its meaning. A number of different interpretations suggest themselves. One, the physical familiarity displayed by Indian men in terms of their interactions with *Jarawa* women has its counterpart in the behavior of the *Jarawa* men towards Indian women on the team, which is then construed as an "attack". Or, the instances of inappropriate behavior engaged in by Indian men have been noted by the *Jarawa*, who then retrieve an opportunity to retaliate in kind when there are Indian women on the team. Another possibility, suggested by the marked gentleness with which the *Jarawa* responded to the Onge who were present during the "contact" that Pandya engineered, is that the aggressiveness displayed by the *Jarawa*

men, to both Indian men and women on the team, is a deliberate ploy to provoke a response from the Indians.

Having sketched an overview of the various elements that comprise “friendly contact” with the *Jarawa*, I want to set up the categories of difference that were constitutive of the encounters in which I was a participant.

Markers for difference: race and culture

The racialization of the indigenous population of the islands by way of the attribution of an innate inferiority of genetic stock has been an integral feature of any discourse involving the Andaman Islanders. The racial construction of the islanders forms the unarticulated but pervasive backdrop against which the situations occurred. In the context of the *Jarawa*, as elsewhere, race connotes difference by virtue of a distinction in physical appearance. Unlike its relevance on mainland India, the dark skin of the *Jarawa* is not usually included in the construction of difference. The Andaman Islands has a large population of people from the south of India with equally dark skin. Hence racial distinctions are seldom posited along lines of color. But the small stature of the *Jarawa*, their distinctive variety of hair type in association with their dark skin, manufactures a separate racial identity for them. All these elements, in turn, converge as signifiers of associative cultural backwardness. The primary marker for their imputed “primitive” condition along the continuum of cultural evolution is the *Jarawa*’s unclothed body. This factor comes up repeatedly in any discussion of the *Jarawa*. Interestingly, their nakedness was an issue of some consternation for the Onge as well, who tried to teach the *Jarawa* men to fashion a loin-cloth with the red strips of cloth carried by the “contact team”.

Markers of difference: gender and clothing

Gender distinctions are made obvious in the absence of clothing. Within the context of “contact” with the *Jarawa*, the most glaring disparity between the members of the “contact team” and the *Jarawa* is based on the fact that the Indians conceal some part(s) of their bodies, while the *Jarawa* expose all. As mentioned earlier, the Indian men strip down to their bare minimum, while the women remain fully clothed. Most women who participate in the contact wear the long Indian shirt, the *kurta*, and loose trousers, the *salwar*---my standard garb during field-work in the islands. However, such a differentiation in attire, as became evident on several occasions, does not denote a separate gen-



Onge loading coconuts harvested at Dugong Creek for transport to Port Blair. The coconuts are used as gifts during Jarawa "contact". Photo: Sita Venkateswar



Loading baskets with "goods" during Jarawa contact. Photo: Andaman Administration

der identity to the *Jarawa*, even with the insertion of the typical long hair characteristic of most Indian women. Unless the outfit that an Indian woman wears leaves no scope for ambiguity,¹³ for all the *Jarawa*--women, men and children---designating gender entails the verification of breasts on the Indian women which, when located, are repeatedly squeezed by everybody present.

To summarize the argument up to this point, the differences in physical appearance based on biology have been expanded to include cultural markers such as clothed/unclothed, with its associative differences in lifestyle. Racial distinctions and cultural attributes become enmeshed and inseparable, with values assigned to these features along a hierarchy of cultural significance.

Constructions of difference: gender, class and the anthropologist

I have discussed some of the categories constituting the observed differences between the *Jarawa* and the members of the "contact team". Bearing on these considerations is the issue of how the construction of my gendered identity, and my location in terms of class, were instrumental in defining a position for me that separated me from the other members of the "contact team".

In an earlier chapter, I mentioned that in order to deflect attention from Indian men during my fieldwork, I resorted to the strategy of presenting myself as a married woman. Along the same lines and, I suspect, partly influenced by my experience of presenting a "professional" mien in the United States, which involved an obvious suppression of "femininity," my attempt to carve out a "professional" identity for myself in the Andaman Islands also involved playing down my gender. My loose, form-concealing garments, the removal of any kind of adornment from my person, my dismissal of any special privileges that I was offered as a woman, isolated me in a way that I was to be made aware of later, and eliminated some of the protections that I took for granted.

Further marking and separating me was my fluency in three Indian languages, which enabled me to interact with ease and move fluidly between various regional¹⁴ groups in the islands. My delight in the ensuing bewilderment as to which part of India I originally "belonged" to contributed to a "betwixt and between" location for me, by virtue of which nobody could claim me as one of "theirs".

Intersecting with these ambiguities was my class/caste position, according me access to some social groups within the islands but asserting a concurrent distinction between myself and other members of

the “contact team”. Nita Kumar’s (1992) discussion of her upper class position as a determinant of her identity during fieldwork in Banaras was, in some respects, similar to how I was defined during my field research. My reluctance to announce the fact that I was currently based in the US was, to a great extent, founded on my alertness to the class privileges implied by that information. I aspired to maintain a broad, safe, “middle-class” homogeneity which, as I later detected, was subverted by other aspects of the personality that I projected during my research. I was also made aware, for the first time during my fieldwork in the islands, of how easily I could be located in terms of my caste: by my speech, my appearance, etc. Chris Kaplonski’s (1994) experience of research in Mongolia, where his appearance (white, male) signified a Russian identity to the Mongolians he met on the streets, thus leaving him open to physical attack, provides another insight into how appearance constructs one’s identity during fieldwork.

Fields of power

Imbricated with all the elements that I have identified as relevant to contextualizing the *Jarawa* “contact” situation are shifting fields of power, with conflicting constructions of who, at any moment, exercises that power. On the face of it, the Indian team backed by the police boat with the hidden weapons, has the upper hand. But, as is made explicit through the duration of “contact,” it is the *Jarawa* who orchestrate the process, with the Indians thrust into a predicament of inadequacy as they attempt to gauge and adjust to the temper of the interaction with the *Jarawa*.

If the police back-up were truly set up to deploy their weapons, the context would be transformed into a “punitive expedition”, reminiscent of turn-of-the-century British relations with the *Jarawa*. Despite the other disjunctions discussed earlier, the Indian administration has attempted to maintain some distance, at least officially, from that particular colonial legacy. Moreover, as became evident on more than one instance, it was the “Bush” police in the boat, even without their *khaki* uniforms, who were fearful of being recognized by the *Jarawa*. Their skittish behavior if the *Jarawa* showed any interest in their boat, bobbing at some distance from the scene of contact, firstly, placed them outside of firing range and, secondly, posed more of a liability for the team than a protection.

I will now recount one of the instances of “contact” in which I participated, which brought to a head all of the elements that I have posited above. Each existed to varying degrees in every “contact” that I was associated with. But it was the one situation I discuss below that

exposed the problems inherent in the process and imperiled any hope of evading the problematics of gender as acutely brought to bear during fieldwork.

The *Tarmugli* cruised along the western coast of Middle Andaman, with the ship's captain and crew intermittently scanning the shore for signs of the *Jarawa*. A sudden cry from one of the crew called everyone to attention. The contours of a raft emerged against the blue horizon, with some children perched on top. It was propelled by four swimming *Jarawa*, as they crossed the sea between the islands dotting the western shore of Middle Andaman. Standing at a vantage point on the island, in the direction in which the swimmers were headed, was a *Jarawa* man signalling to the ship with a white object¹⁵ tied to a long stick that he held up as he waved. The ship immediately slowed down, and embarked on the usual routine of dropping anchor, lowering and loading the boats, while the "contact team" made their own preparations to meet with the *Jarawa*.

By what appeared later as a strange coincidence, the policemen who accompanied every "contact team" were not on board at the time but were to rendezvous with the ship later in the day. Thus this "contact team" sallied forth to meet the *Jarawa* without the presumed security of a police back-up. As we approached the shore where the raft had landed, we observed that it was a small group who awaited us, one adult male, two women, the rest infants, children and an adolescent boy. I remained seated in the boat during the usual flurry of activity as the *Jarawa* gathered the "gifts". I observed that the unloading was executed by the two women and children, while the *Jarawa* man sat impassively on one side of the boat in which I waited, along with Pandya and some other crew from the ship. The rest of the team were on shore assisting the women unload the boats.

The *Jarawa* was a middle-aged, well-proportioned man, with a certain commanding presence, made prominent by the conduct of the other *Jarawa* as they deferred to him. His manner, as he made his way along the boat – pushing one of the crew into the water, snatching the camera from another, his eyes roving from one person to the next on the boat – rendered everybody present somewhat uneasy. I was later informed of an encounter between the *Jarawa* man and another member of the team on the second boat, when the *Jarawa* had grabbed his camera, gripping his (the team member's) wrist and bruising him. I missed this particular confrontation as I was coping with the routine examination of my person and verification of gender conducted by the women and children.

Pandya voiced his apprehension by suggesting that we hasten the unloading of the boats and return to the ship. But the other members of the team were out of earshot and were engaged in exploring the is-



Observing the rites of "contact": affirming gender. Photo: Andaman Administration photographer



*Anthropologist in the field: playing back a recording during Jarawa "contact".
Photo: Vishvajit Pandya*

land. I, too, became increasingly tense as the *Jarawa* eyes settled on me more frequently as he moved progressively closer to where I was seated in the boat. Intending to dispel the growing atmosphere of unease on the boat, I unobtrusively disembarked, and waded ashore to where the others were gathered, somewhat at a loose end, having finished emptying the boat. Meanwhile, the administration photographer who always accompanied the "contact team" was occupied in photographing the various clusters of *Jarawa* and team members that was intermittently forming and dissolving. I noticed that the flash from either the photographer's camera, or from another team member's "aim and shoot" variety, annoyed the *Jarawa* women, who gestured abruptly in the direction of the flash.

Shortly afterwards, I realized that the *Jarawa* man had also proceeded ashore and, duplicating his stratagem on the boat, moved from one small group to the next on shore. Suddenly, he was beside me, holding my wrist and tugging at one end of my *kurta*. Simultaneously, one of the women positioned herself on my other side and pulled at a different end. I struggled to unfasten the grip on my wrist and hold down the *kurta*. He then shifted his grip to the nape of my neck, holding it down firmly as he commenced to rip the back of my *kurta*, separating it from the seams on the shoulder and along one side. The thick, coarse material could not be detached from the other side, snagging at the seam despite the force applied to it by the *Jarawa*. One of the team, who had carried a knife for cutting the green coconuts, helped cut it away. The *Jarawa* woman had not let go of her hold on the front end of the *kurta*, which was now the target of their concerted efforts. The major portion of the front side gave way, leaving a small strip on top to which the gaping sleeves remained attached. The event was brought to a halt when Bakhtawar Singh,¹⁶ an elderly veteran of "*Jarawa* contact", nearly blind, walked into the scene. Literally blundering into the ensuing proceedings, he terminated it by grasping the *Jarawa* and forcing him to release his grip on my neck. The woman, however, continued to pull on the remaining piece but, with my neck free, I was in a position to ward her off.

The tableau occurred in complete silence, the other team members gathered around in a semi-circle, the photographer engaged in not missing a shot, and Pandya and the crew still on the boat some distance away. I made my way back towards the boat in silence, holding down what was left of my *kurta*, and climbed back on board. Pandya handed me his shirt, which I gratefully accepted. The two boats receded from the shore, where the *Jarawa* stood watching as the Indians waved a cheerful farewell to them. It was all in a day's work for the team.

Assembling the elements

It should now be possible to assemble all the different pieces that I have separated in the preceding pages in order to attempt to understand, or offer some interpretations, for what actually transpired during the “contact” that I have described. The first point that I want to assert here is the *Jarawa* domination of the entire encounter with them. They set up the “contact”, and orchestrated the entire proceedings from start to finish. This is the case in every encounter but becomes camouflaged, or buried under the flurry of activities that constitute the various sequences of the confrontation with the *Jarawa*. It is *they* who decide if and when to make themselves visible, by announcing their presence with the smoke signal, which then initiates the routine schedule of “friendly contact”.

The absence of the police back-up was, I feel, merely coincidental, not altering the situation in any substantial way. Such incidents, perhaps not in the same configuration of events, have erupted in the past and are a perennial feature of any “contact”. This is what I meant earlier when I referred to the small enclaves that are formed in the course of contact, which retain within them elements of the unpredictable and the ominous.

In the unlikely event that the policemen revealed their weapons, the possibility of escalating violence, and the exposure of the “contact team” to the risk of death, was enough deterrent to have rendered the policemen redundant as a measure of security. Earlier contexts of “contact” have demonstrated that, at the slightest suspicion of anything untoward, the *Jarawa* melt within seconds into the surrounding dense gloom of the forest. With the “contact team” sitting ducks for the extended range of the long, lethal *Jarawa* arrows, the probability of the *Jarawa* retaining control over any escalating situation remains strong. Thus, it is important to note that the context can only be altered in any substantial way by changing the very terms of the engagement with the *Jarawa*, i.e. by transforming “friendly contact” into an “unfriendly” one. This necessitates the elimination of any “contact team”, currently conceived as innocuously offering some of the “goodies” of civilization to the naked *jungles*, whereby “friendly contact” is recast into a “punitive” mission to end the “menace” of the *Jarawa* once and for all.

But in the situation as constituted during the period of my research, whatever the illusions the “contact team” or the Andaman administration may have cherished, it was made explicit that it was the *Jarawa* who held power and wielded it continuously through the entire duration of “contact”. This view is given credence by the conduct of the *Jarawa*, which has its antithesis in the behavior of the “contact team”: the *Jarawa* challenge the assignment of the bland attribute of “friendly” to the encounter with them at every step.

In terms of the strange immobility of the “contact team” during the incident, it may be that they were too startled by the turn of events to organize a coherent response. But they had enough presence of mind to offer the *dao* to the *Jarawa* to assist in releasing the sides of the *kurta* from the seams. And the photographer was sufficiently alert to the possibilities of a “scoop” to continue photographing the sequence of events. Those photographs, *not* included here, and for which I went to some lengths to obtain all existing copies with their negatives, communicate details that I was not cognizant of at the time. The expressions on the faces of the team as they stood grouped in a semi-circle around me register their awareness of the portions of my unclothed body becoming visible as segments of my garment were hacked away.

Intruding on such a reaction, or lack of it thereby, were the factors that I have enumerated, that were contingent on the personality that I brought to bear during my fieldwork in the Andaman Islands, along with all the ways in which I was positioned in terms of gender and class. By challenging the conventional modes of the “feminine” as defined by the Indians with whom I interacted, I also forfeited many of the protections that are offered to women who conform to the norm. Straying outside of the gender norms effected a greater vulnerability for me in the context of “*Jarawa* contact”. As I was intensely made to realize, I could not avail of any of the ordinary shields that I took for granted but which tend to be offered to women who present themselves as in need of protection.

My demeanor subsequent to the incident further estranged me from the norms specified for my gender. I was very composed, and did not succumb to the tears that were expected of me. They would have earned me more sympathy in the circumstances as defined above. Also relevant to my distancing from the other members of the “contact team” is my earlier mention of my class/caste background, enabling me to mingle at ease with the likes of the “LG” at the same time earning the antagonism of my “team-mates”.

For the *Jarawa* who met with the “contact team” during the encounter that I have related, and the others¹⁷ that I also participated in, it was quickly evident that I was *with* the team but not really a *part* of the team. In their efforts to find a chink in the docile front presented to them by the Indians, I was an easy target. By their actions, the *Jarawa* clearly signaled who was *puissant*,¹⁸ and explored the limits to which their domination could be extended.

A firm handling of the situation, as manifested in Bakhtawar Singh’s¹⁹ effective application of force, could have brought the proceedings to a speedy halt. But for all the Indians grouped around me, this was a moment of collusion with the *Jarawa* to strip me of the strengths that both isolated and sustained me. For all the men gathered



Surveying the scene. The Jarawa man who directed the "contact". Photo: Sita Venkateswar

there, this was an enactment of power, deployed on/over the body of a woman. For the one, it was a testing of the limits to which that power could be exerted. For the other, it was to exact a reprisal for all the ways in which I maintained my independence or refused to submit to the conventional. And in the case of the *Jarawa* woman, whose role belied Chattopadhyay's (1992) contention that the women hold the men in check, hers was an expression of the anger accumulated by the intrusive behavior of the "contact team". Her response revealed the profoundly disjunct contours of power as historically and politically constituted by race and gender. Or the perils of presuming alliances on the basis of one without negotiating the shifting dimensions and ambiguities posed by the inextricable intertwining of both.

A different option can be explored if the removal of my *kurta* is construed as a "social leveler". As the only fully clothed person in the group, by that act I was rendered one with the rest of the team. Hence, the *Jarawas'* actions may be interpreted as a playful gesture, one of curiosity even, to ascertain and establish conclusively that I was, in fact, female. But their facial cast belied such a construction of the scene. As

the women's expressions flashed their anger at the incessant and obtrusive photography, the man's roving eyes appropriated the terms of the "gaze". Reversing the direction of the scrutiny that I deployed on the Onge, the prolonged stare of the Jarawa both extended a challenge and unleashed the force of a blow. In the context of "contact", it was the team who flinched and submissively lowered their eyes. Such gestural interplay eliminated any hint of the ludic in the proceedings, making explicit the more ominous underlying dynamic of power that the *Jarawa* appeared willing to push to whatever limit.

The question then arises as to what some of the alternatives would have been had Bakhtawar Singh not walked into the scene, or arrived a little later than he did. It is likely that I would have been divested of my remaining piece of *kurta*, and walked back to the boat bare-breasted until offered Pandya's shirt. It is unlikely that I would have been "dragged off to the forest by the Jarawa and ravished". Despite the later insinuations of the team, as they pondered whether the *Jarawa* (male's) response could have been construed as sexual arousal, the scene was not sexual, at least not where the *Jarawa* were concerned. In view of all the bodily exposure, there was no scope for any doubt on that matter. Moreover, the participation of the *Jarawa* woman suggests otherwise, and clearly leads in the direction of the argument elaborated above. But such a conclusion by the team is in itself revealing, and perhaps intimates their own responses to the scene as it unfolded before them.

A postscript on the Onge

Apart from noting the remarkably gentle *Jarawa* response to the Onge, I have not embarked on any further details of their encounter. Those particulars are not relevant to the argument I make here. Chota Raju and his wife Betibegi were on board the ship when the incident that I have narrated above occurred. He was unwell and did not feel inclined to participate in the "contact". When I related the incident to them, they found my account hilarious and reported it to all the other Onge at Dugong Creek. It was a subject of much merriment for them as well. It remained unclear to me whether it was my matter-of-fact narration of the affair that was funny or if it was the image of my clothes being ripped apart that provoked so much laughter.

Conclusion

The incident that I narrated above and the subsequent laughter of the Onge brought the long emotional journey that I had traveled during

the many months of research in the Andaman Islands to a culmination. Unlike my response to the Indians, whom I could easily brush aside, the laughter of the Onge perplexed and hurt me, as I puzzled over its meaning. The barriers to striking a relationship of mutual understanding with “my people” loomed as large at the end of my research as they had when I first arrived at Dugong Creek. Shared laughter is a fundamental moment of empathy, a space of connection that can transcend other disparities. But, at that moment, the laughter of the Onge marked a fundamental expression of irreconcilable differences, one that rendered futile any claims to “rapport” on the eve of my final departure from Dugong Creek.

While I despaired of any resolution, Kwankitui, wife of Moroi the *torale*, nominated me as *ijejille*, “one of us”. This was perhaps in response to the reports she had received of my diligent attention to the needs of the Onge during the trip to the *Jarawa* area. Yet again, a comment from one of the Onge challenged the ways in which I construed a situation. It also suggested contrasting views of “connection:” for the Onge it was a recognition of my concern for them, while for me it was the ability to intuitively know them. But, as stated earlier, this *is* a “partial” perspective, and is riven with all the ambiguities inherent to such a view. □

Notes

- 1 A modified version of this paper has been published in *Qualitative Inquiry* (2001)7(4):448-465.
- 2 This information was published in the local newspaper by Madhumala Chattopadhyay (1992) but was brought to our attention during an informal discussion with Vishvajit Pandya who, after receiving some inkling of a salvage operation off Sentinel Island, interviewed the scrap-iron dealer and his workers.
- 3 A perusal of recent reports and articles on the *Jarawa* and Sentinelese emerging from the islands (Chattopadhyay 1992, Pandit 1991, Pandit and Chattopadhyay 1989) suggests that the issue of “first contact”, and who was actually present at that moment, is a matter of some concern for the Andaman administration, the anthropologists and others who comprise the “contact team”.
- 4 I too, was affiliated to a foreign institution but, in my case, it did not confer on me any greater importance. On the contrary, for me it created an aura of distance from the realities and immediacies of the Indian situation.
- 5 Hut Bay is the largest town and harbour in Little Andaman. The original plan was for Pandya and I to travel by ship to Dugong Creek, pick up the Onge from there and return to Port Blair. The rough seas near Dugong Creek rendered it dangerous to send a smaller boat from mid-sea into the settlement, such that Pandya and I were unable to reach Dugong Creek and directly intervene in talking to the Onge.

- 6 The *Tarmugli* was the “LG’s” ship, usually made available only to VIPs visiting the islands. In view of the exciting possibilities offered by the trips that Pandya proposed, the “LG” decided to grace the team with his presence at some point in the proceedings. Ordinarily, the *M.V. Milale* was the ship used for the “contact trips”, a more utilitarian and far less comfortable vessel than the *Tarmugli*.
- 7 All the expenses that the Onge incurred during their stay at Port Blair, and on the trip to the *Jarawa* area, were to be borne by the Andaman administration. Bara Raju would also have the opportunity to directly negotiate his claim with the “LG”.
- 8 Dugong Creek was inundated with wireless messages: from the ship at mid-sea unable to send a boat out to pick up the Onge; from the office of the AAJVS at Port Blair and from the “LG’s” office. The welfare personnel at Dugong Creek were hard pressed to understand what had warranted so much wireless time.
- 9 All the men in the team are usually bare-chested, and disrobe to their underwear or shorts. Elderly men prefer to keep their trousers on. Any woman present is fully clothed: Indian prudery discourages the exposure of legs or, for that matter, any part of one’s body. This is especially the case in small towns or places distant from urban centers.
- 10 I am not certain how or why the color red was deemed attractive to the *Jarawa* but bolts of red cloth, which are then cut into small strips, are now a regularly purchased gift item. The *Jarawa* use the colored string from the cloth to embellish the ornaments they wear about their bodies. Pandya’s project incorporated this feature in order to trace the movements of the *Jarawa*: differently patterned and colored cloth would be coded and given to each group that we met at a specific location. On subsequent trips, the specific kind of cloth (or, more precisely, the strings from the strips) found on a *Jarawa* group, would be correlated with the location where the original cloth of that color/pattern was given to the *Jarawa*.
- 11 The Andaman administration believe that the “Bush” policeman’s *khaki* uniform is easily identified by the *Jarawa*, and liable to provoke aggressive behavior from them.
- 12 Nowadays, a trip to the *Jarawa* area is offered to VIPs visiting the Andamans: Cabinet Ministers, top government officials and other visiting dignitaries. Such one-time visitors are observed to be typically negligent of the consequences attendant on their inappropriate behavior with the *Jarawa*.
- 13 The potential ambiguity regarding my gender identity was made known to me by the team leader during another “contact” trip, this time through the forest rather than the usual sea-route. Discussing the possibility of meeting some *Jarawa* in the forest, it was joked that an attack by the *Jarawa* could be averted by placing me in front, to draw attention to the presence of a woman in the team. I was then informed that such a strategy would probably fail since I was not immediately recognizable as a woman, and would more likely pass as a boy.
- 14 As already mentioned elsewhere, regional identity on the basis of place of origin in mainland India is maintained in the Andaman Islands as well.

- 15 The white object was later identified as a piece of Styrofoam packing material that had obviously washed ashore.
- 16 Bakhtawar Singh, formerly of the “Bush” police force in the Andamans, is credited with laying the groundwork for, and establishing, “first contact” with the *Jarawa*. Now retired, he is called upon as an “expert” to occasionally accompany the “contact teams”. On this occasion, he had wandered away to another side of the island, and was therefore unaware of the occurrence.
- 17 I have discussed one instance of “contact” in detail since that was the occasion that clarified for me many of the conundrums that had emerged in the course of the other encounters with the *Jarawa*.
- 18 I use the French synonym here rather than “powerful”. To my mind the French word conveys more nuances than the English equivalent.
- 19 The dynamics of my interaction with the Indian team excluded Bakhtawar Singh. He remained outside of the undercurrents described above and, for the most part, unaware of them.. He was an honoured guest on board, sufficiently secure in his standing with the administration, with enough publicity attending on his role with the *Jarawa* not to be perturbed by my inclusion on the team.

THE END OF FIELDWORK

*"There are more things on heaven and earth Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy"*

(Hamlet, Act 1, Scene V)

*"'There must be some way out of here,' said the joker to the thief,
'There's too much confusion, I can't get no relief'"*

(Bob Dylan, All Along the Watchtower)

My account of the Andaman Islanders has been inextricably interwoven with my own subjectivity as it was constituted through the process of research in the islands. My multiple positioning during the period of residence in the islands inflected my perceptions, and hence my experience of the various groups whom I encountered and interacted with in the course of research. Such shifting locations are typical of any anthropological research endeavour, and I do not claim that it is unique to my inquiry. But it does engender a partial and fragmentary perspective that does not lend itself to an authoritative exegesis of a "culture".

The issue also becomes one of the extent to which we are willing to bring our subjectivity to the fore, and expose and articulate the contours of our person and personality in all its uncertainty, as it structures our imperfect vision of the world. To establish and engage in an "hermeneutics of vulnerability" (Dwyer 1977), our own as much as for the subjects of our research, is to risk calling into question our authority to speak, and our presumed right to inscribe a certain view of a people (cf. Clifford 1983). Thus, my prerogative to impose a particular perspective of the islanders is countered by my exposure of the ways in which my perceptions were delimited in some instances or foreclosed in others. I have then, "policed" my own power in the text that I have constructed of my experience of/and research in the Andaman Islands.

Relations of power are emphasized in this monograph, and each chapter is constructed around particular dimensions of power as they are constitutive and constituting of ethnographic contexts. Foremost among these are government policies, in the colonial variants of the British and Indian regimes of control over the Andaman Islands. Both historically and in the ongoing Indian jurisdiction of the islands, political power invested as government policies has made significant invasions into the everyday existence of the islanders. This is more pro-

nounced in the case of the Onge and Andamanese but less so where the Jarawa and Sentinelese are concerned only because their very different situations render impossible (as yet) any direct intervention into their quotidian lives. Such an intimate impingement of political power upon the spheres of daily existence has impacted on social relations by articulating them with the structures of government. Through the process of subjection, whereby individuals participate voluntarily in the new opportunities for power made available to them, lines of authority are reconfigured, a process that I refer to, extending its origins in policy, as the "policing" of power.

The same process has profound outcomes in contestations between men and women, as particular forms of masculine identities take root, redefining gender identities and recasting gender relations. The insidious reaches of political power on the terrain of gender leads to my perception of how that site is "governed" by successive administrative strategies, which seek to assimilate the islanders with the dominant Indian population. Gender is also the crucial site of my own disjunct positioning, enabling and disabling according to context but ineluctably constitutive of my experience of research in the islands. As it intersects with class, my gendered location is additionally problematized, and is critically determining of my interactions with various sectors of the Indian population in the islands.

My perception of the islanders has also incorporated a third dimension that exists, at one register, independent of the actual context, and more in my "desire to find a resistant presence" (O'Hanlon 1988), at least in the figure of the Onge women. Resistance remains an "unmarked and unnamed category" (Spivak 1988) that has to be wrested from mundane expressions of opposition to the administrative strategies of the Indian government. Whether as dissembling behaviors or forms of secrecy, expressions of anger and resentment of the welfare system and personnel, reading resistance is a project that exists as much in my own imagination as in the practices in which I search to find it: of discovering a cognizance of and repudiation of colonial control.

The interpenetration of their lives with the Indian administration and population, the ways in which subjectivities have been ineluctably transformed, blurs the possibilities of a clear trajectory of resistance. Moreover, the sheer numbers ranged around them renders the task of negotiating a future separate from the political maneuvers of the Indian nation impossible to envision. "When the *inenle* first came and brought goods for us, and tobacco, we thought they were bringing all this to make it easier for us to live," said Bara Raju. It must be recognized that to a great extent such a view still colours their perception of the Indians, at least, of those with power: that they are available to provide the Onge with "goods" to make life easier for them. The

“potlatch” that I held before my final departure from Dugong Creek, to give away to the Onge all of my belongings, which many of them had requisitioned for themselves over the months, was an ironic underscoring of their enmeshment within a world of consumption.

The question then arises as to whether the islanders even want such an existence apart from Indians. Where the Onge or the Andamanese are concerned, the answer can only remain ambiguous. But in the case of the Jarawa or the Sentinelese, their clear stance of challenge, their engagement with the Indian population on no other terms but their own, is an obvious articulation of independence.

The next, and to my mind, the more crucial political-tactical question is, “What is to be done” then? In view of the purported “failures” of the Indian government’s policy initiatives, what alternatives can I suggest? I respond as James Ferguson (1994:279) does, that I neither intended to nor presume to prescribe. And like him I agree that the issue is a political one, necessitating a political solution. My articulation of the situation in the ways that I have in this account is the only means I have available of de-naturalizing and re-politicizing the Indian control of the islands and their interventions into the lives of the islanders. I do, however, admit to attempting some alternatives, brought about by the recognition of the significance of political empowerment. It is related to my participation in the project of developing a primer for the Onge.

My interest in anthropology developed from reading Paolo Friere. My desire to work with indigenous peoples derived from the avenues opened up by Freire for participating in altering the conditions of existence of the most marginalized peoples. Developing a primer for the Onge was at the core of Freire’s methods for *conscientization*, a process which could only be engendered through the active participation of the Onge in the project. Excited by these possibilities, I communicated that intent to the team of linguists. I thought it essential that they too become involved in working along these lines. I was somewhat chagrined to find that my excitement in the means offered to actively involve the Onge in the project did not find very receptive ears. They pointed out the limited time they had to show a product from their stay in the islands. I read into that response a certain rigidity developed from years of working on government commissioned projects. Despite many attempts, the project could only be executed as per the guidelines laid out by the linguists, developed through their years of experience working with other such people. Including the Onge throughout the process, according to the linguists, would only delay the work. *Conscientization* was not the goal, but a finished primer.

Somewhat disheartened by such a bureaucratic view of things, I nevertheless decided to single-handedly endeavour to follow through



An Onge girl. Photo: Sita Venkateswar

on the project. After all, I was the one who would be around long after the linguists left. And, they depended on *me* to go through the trial phase with the Onge. In the months after the linguists' departure, I struggled to communicate to the Onge the significance of literacy, the importance of learning to read in their own language, and how imperative it was to know how to count. It was the first step to power according to the terms of the world as it existed at present. It was crucial that they too were *tomolukwele*, those who wrote. After many months spent pleading, coaxing and quarreling, all of which I hoped would convey to the Onge what was involved in their active engagement in the process, I decided to give up. It occurred to me, at that crucial moment, that I had my own research to accomplish. I could not stay on at Dugong Creek for ever. *Conscientization* was time-consuming, and I wanted to leave.

What I did not want to acknowledge at the time, as I groped for various justifications for arriving at such a conclusion, was that I was no different from the linguists. In fact, they were more clear-sighted than I was in comprehending the limitations of their time and interests. They had their work cut out, and did not want to meddle with any problematic areas that could hinder the progress of what was expected of them.

Ultimately, I too had to concede the same thing. I was there on a research grant, for certain duration, for which I had to show some concrete output. I had set out to address some defined questions, according to which I had to organize my time and efforts. Anything beyond such a goal was beyond my abilities. Moreover, by that time, I was tired and I wanted to leave. Neither Dugong Creek nor the Andaman Islands ever became an environment that constituted a "home". And so I left.

I end my account of my fieldwork with the Andaman Islanders with Kamala Visweswaran's passionate and eloquent articulation of ethnographic practice. It has been a "process of sundering and reconstitution, of retraction and assertion that I want to foreground as a radical method of feminist ethnography. Of course, I cannot claim total success for this maneuver. Experiments, after all, risk failure" (1994: 15).

Postscript

The questions raised by the encounter with the Jarawa and its aftermath continue to haunt me years after leaving the islands. I am no closer to knowing for certain what really happened on that beach with the *Jarawa* or, more critically for me, why the Onge laughed, apparently not with me but at me. The narration of the incident has become

one more instance of what Wiener (1999) described as “the particulars of a certain ethnographic encounter...[as] affected by pre-existing social formations” (pg.99). Yet, it is only in precisely mapping the historical and political terrain in which my fieldwork occurred that one can identify some clues.

For the Andaman Islanders, it has been a continuous history of colonization since the mid-19th century, when the British consolidated a penal settlement on the islands. It may be argued that the prefix *neo* may be added to mark a break from one colonizer to the next (in Anthony Appiah’s [1991: 348] sense of a “space-clearing gesture”), when India took control of the islands in 1947. However, it can be argued that the basic form of control has remained no different from the earlier British period, if dispossession, repopulation and external control are identified as some of the commonalities in the two phases of colonization. Some alternatives are suggested by Arnold Krupat’s (1994) use of “domestic imperialism” to define the situation of Native Americans because the conditions of Native American groups largely resemble the situation in the Andaman Islands. To maintain some consistency in the context of a discussion of Indian policies, since the Andaman Islanders are classified as “tribal” groups, I will apply the term “internal colonialism” to describe the form of control exerted by India with respect to all “tribal” groups under Indian jurisdiction. But the underlying reality of colonization should be brought to the fore, whatever the particular prefix used to qualify its content.

The question of my location in the context of these historical processes is somewhat more contentious. As an Indian currently residing in the metropolitan West, I can claim the currently fashionable status of a “postcolonial”, which serves to redefine my identity in academic circles by reinvesting the privileges of class-based in India into different orders of entitlements. In terms of its relevance to the conduct of anthropological research in the Andaman Islands, identity translates into advantage that grants me access denied to non-Indians. At the same time, my entry into the reserved “tribal areas” of the islands is also an expression of the asymmetric relations of power with respect to the islanders, thus problematizing a transparent view of the anthropologist-research participant relationship in this context. Elsewhere, Henrika Kuklick (1991) has noted that the political conditions created by colonialism directly affect the relationships that anthropologists form with their research participants.

In noting the historical and political conjunctures of my particular and personal location in this context, I also recognize the limits of my purview from these positions. I should, then, view this step as a milestone in a much longer process and muster the courage to return to the Andaman Islands in search of answers. □

THE FATE OF THE JARAWA: THE END OF THE ROAD? AN EPILOGUE

*“Me titiro whakamuri tatou
Kia mohio ai
Me pehea haere ki mua”¹*

(Māori saying)

In April 1996,² an adolescent *Jarawa* boy named En Mei was found immobilized and nursing a fractured leg along the edges of the forest close to the village of Kadamtala in Middle Andaman. He was taken by the local authorities to the G. B. Pant Hospital, the main hospital at Port Blair and treated there for his injury. The reasons attributed to the cause of his fracture have been varied,³ from being hit by a truck on the Andaman Trunk Road (Mynott 2004) or his foot getting caught in an animal trap (Anthropological Survey of India n.d.) to a fall from a tree (Mukhopadhyay 2004).

Six months later in October 1996, En Mei was dropped off near the forest where he had been found, laden with gifts and stories of his time spent at Port Blair. Exactly a year after En Mei returned to the forest, an unprecedented event occurred: a group of *Jarawa* including En Mei in their midst, appeared at a jetty in Middle Andaman during the day, having shed their “hostile” demeanour, and presenting a “friendly” mien instead.

En Mei’s injury and the subsequent entry of the *Jarawa* into the settler villages has become the starting point of a new origin story currently in circulation in the Andaman Islands: the story of the sequence of events that led to the *Jarawa*’s transformation from a “hostile” people existing in a “state of war” with the neighbouring settler population to a “friendly” one, with the *Jarawa* indicating their willingness to enter into a compact of “peace” with them.

Similar incidents continued to occur in the ensuing months, during which gestures used by the *Jarawa*, pointing towards their bellies, were understood as expressions of hunger and therefore a request for food. Sekhsaria (2003) reports on the decision to airdrop packets of food into the *Jarawa* forest. This was in response to the growing belief by the Andaman administration that the emergence of the *Jarawa* from the forest was a consequence of increasing hunger resulting from food and resource shortages. He goes on to describe an occasion witnessed by him in April 1998 when a large group of *Jarawa*, including women and children, arrived at the same jetty in Middle Andaman. The ina-

bility of the local settler community or the administration to respond with sensitivity to such a situation is noted by Sekhsaria. The underlying tension of the encounter as reported by Sekhsaria is similar to my discussion in an earlier chapter, belying the complacent assumption of “friendly relations”, and pointing to the fragility of the accord of “peace” as interpreted by the administration and the settlers.

The interpretation of food shortages have been countered by anthropologists at the ASI, who tend to highlight the role played by En Mei in bringing about the transformation of the *Jarawa* from “hostile” to “friendly. But speculation is rife as to what actually transpired between the *Jarawa*, or the discussions that may have ensued amongst them during the lapse of a year since En Mei was released into the forest. In a recent discussion, Mukhopadhyay (2004) is more sceptical. According to him, and purportedly based on conversations that he had with En Mei, the very first instance of the *Jarawa* emerging from their forest cover during the day came about when En Mei was promised food by some of the settlers if he brought other *Jarawa* to the jetty in Middle Andaman. En Mei agreed, went on to comply and the rest is history.

Samir Acharya of the Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology (SANE), who became a central figure in the events to come and whom I quote at length below, makes the following scathing critique regarding En Mei’s sojourn in Port Blair:

- 1) *EN-MAI, glorified as Ambassador of Goodwill, was excommunicated from his own community (Tirur). He is known to have killed the suitor of the lady who is now his wife.*
- 2) *A ‘Cargo-cult’ has been establishing with En-Mai at the centre. The importance and attention given to him by the authorities, like giving him a separate room in the Hospital, lavish gifts, permitting him a car or jeep to travel in when lesser mortals ride on the back of a truck, etc. This has built up his image among impressionable youngsters and young women.*
- 3) *In a hunter-gatherer society, the leadership is always with the older people because they are the repository of all knowledge and skills of survival accumulated through experience. Establishing En-Mai as a cult figure has created rifts in the traditional Jarawa Society.*
- 4) *It is known to all travellers on ATR (Andaman Trunk Road) that the Jarawa encountered on the road are mostly minors with an occasional young woman among them. The able-bodied males and older people are conspicuous by their absence.*
- 5) *The older people are actually busy in their traditional hunting-foraging activities. The youngsters on the road are losing valuable experience and lessons in survival by their absence from the forest. They would, if they continue in the same path, soon become unfit to survive in the forest.*

- 6) *The contact parties' only notable success is in making the Jarawa proficient in the choicest Hindi slang. While many years' work of experts and many tens of lakhs [of rupees] later, we are yet to have a Jarawa Primer that would permit us to have a dialogue in their dialect, the Jarawa youngsters on road today puts a veteran sailor or a policeman to shame in a slanging match. So much for acculturation.*

(<http://www.andaman.org>, The Jarawa case)

Meanwhile, in a bizarre turn of events leading from the perception that the *Jarawa* were suffering from starvation, a local lawyer in the islands filed a legal suit against the Andaman administration. She claimed that, under the Indian constitution, the *Jarawa* had the same right to receive and enjoy "the fruits of civilization" as any other "Indian" but instead had been denied the benefits of civilization by the administration in the islands. She then went on to demand that the *Jarawa* be immediately provided with all modern amenities and rehabilitated like the Andamanese and the Onge. As Sekhsaria (2003:22) comments, this was a "classic example of a move undertaken with the right intentions but seeking the wrong solutions".

In response to the writ petition, an awareness and petition campaign coordinated locally by Samir Acharya of SANE and internationally by Survival International⁴ resulted in a flood of outraged and condemnatory letters to the administration from noted anthropologists across the world, drawing attention to the dangers of rendering the *Jarawa* sedentary.

A grimmer and more foreboding set of outcomes was to eventuate from the increased interaction of the *Jarawa* with the local populations. The warnings that had been issued over the years by the Whitakers and others, and which had been consistently ignored by the Andaman administration, finally manifested from July-August of 1999 when a series of illnesses became visible among the *Jarawa*. The intensified "contact" with the *Jarawa*, and the continuing extension of the Andaman Trunk Road right through the heart of *Jarawa* territory with its associated clearing of forests, finally took its toll in outbreaks of epidemics of measles and pneumonia, tuberculosis and conjunctivitis among the *Jarawa* (Ali 1999, Bedi 1999, Sekhsaria 1999). Madhusree Mukerjee (2003), a former journalist with the *Scientific American* who had been conducting research in the islands over the past seven years, notes the bus loads of tourists brought by tour operators up the Andaman Trunk Road to visit the *Jarawa*. She also reports on the increasing incidence of coughs and colds among the *Jarawa* prior to the epidemics, noted in passing by anyone who encountered them.



*A Jarawa enjoying a banana. Goods from the Andaman Trunk Road.
Photo: SANE (Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology)*

The public outcry that followed threw the spotlight on Indian government policies in the islands, and spurred the efforts of the islands' medical establishment to control the spread of the diseases among *Jarawa* populations in the forests. The numbers who remained in the forests and succumbed to the epidemics and other related illnesses remain unknown.

Court cases and committees

The High Court interim order on the case filed by Shyamali Ganguly, the local lawyer, prohibited all entry into *Jarawa* areas and further directed that the *Jarawa* be protected from any encroachments into their reserve, calling for severe penalties for civil servants who failed in their duties. The court directive also required further research to be conducted into why the *Jarawa* were emerging from their forest areas and to ascertain whether they were subject to food shortages. Expert committees were constituted to provide more information to the courts, the second of which was entrusted with the responsibility of researching and formulating a plan of action to deal with the *Jarawa*. Sekhsaria's (2003) recent book, comprising of a compilation of his observations on the islands over the years, details the directives of the High Court and the prevailing mood of optimism that ensued among environmental and indigenous rights activists.

It is instructive at this stage to pay closer attention to the process by which the committees who were responsible for providing more information to the Court were constituted, the chronology of events that led to committees being formed and dissolved and, more significantly, the personnel appointed to serve on the committees.

In May 1999, the High Court appointed Special Officers from *within* the Andaman administration to submit a report on the problems relevant to the *Jarawa*, and to suggest some means for their welfare-cum-rehabilitation. In a surprisingly speedy response, given the slow and protracted process of usual government functioning within the islands, the officers submitted a report within a month. The report was deemed unsatisfactory and was unacceptable to the Court. In February 2000, the entire matter was handed over to an Expert Committee, constituted by the Court itself. Moving its range slightly further than it had in the previous instance, the High Court appointed 6 members, *all* of whom were functionaries of the Government of India, namely the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) and the Health Services in the islands, with the Chief Judicial Magistrate of the Session Court of Port Blair serving as Member Secretary to the committee. On submission of their report six months later, the Court identified a number of key issues, as detailed below:

- "a) Whether the Jarawa should be isolated from the rest of humanity and left to themselves to lead their own way of life as they did a few years back, or
- b) Whether the Jarawa should be brought into the mainstream of "civilization", or

- c) Whether to ensure their peaceful co-existence as suggested in the Master Plan⁵ for the Welfare of the Primitive Tribes of the A&N Islands prepared by Mr. Awaradi, Director of Tribal Welfare" (Expert Committees Report, Government of India)."

These issues were to be settled as a matter of policy by the Government of India after consultation with national and international experts on the subject. In the 60-page judgement that was delivered in April 2001, the Court "ordered that the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, should constitute [yet another!] Committee of Experts to spell out in clear terms:

- a) Reasons for the sudden change in behaviour of the Jarawa, ie. shedding their hostility, coming out of their forest abode in broad daylight and accepting exogenous items from non-Jarawa and,
- b) To suggest remedial measures for the welfare of the Jarawa" (*ibid.*).

Pankaj Sekhsaria (2003) also notes that the report submitted by the ASI based on the studies they had conducted indicated that there was no shortage of food for the *Jarawa* in the forests, but highlighted their vulnerability to various infections, and the scale of illegal poaching that was occurring within the forest and surrounding coast.

Responding to the Court Order, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, constituted for the third time a "Committee of Experts". The composition of this particular eight-member committee was significant and went on to play a crucial role in the events to come. Yet again, the personnel chosen were various functionaries of the government, some were repeated from the earlier committee but a few surprises were in store in the final report, which was the outcome of their research and deliberations.

While these developments are significant, and are an indication of the efficient functioning of the Indian judiciary, of concern are the terms of reference of the directives. There is no suggestion that the *Jarawa* are offered any agency in the decisions being made about them, nor is their autonomy ever really under consideration. All of the choices listed in terms of future policy require active intervention on the part of the administration, and welfare measures are always on the cards. They also underscore the contradictions inherent in a process whereby the radical potential of the Indian judiciary is countered by other arms of the government executive, determined to maintain an undisturbed status quo. Moreover, the reality on the ground is foreboding and tells a somewhat different story. In an email communication after a visit to the islands in 2002, Mukerjee notes:

I learned that a massive team of anthropologists, zoologists, botanists, nutritionists, medical researchers, foresters, social workers and their assorted helpers, a total of sixty to ninety heads, was camped on Jarawa territory. "Its a picnic," reported one policemen. Cooks provided meals at three campsites, while other assistants fetched water, washed up and ran errands. (The Jarawa, if no one else were surely learning about social structures). Trash disposal was into the forest or the sea, and although toilet tents had been set up, most of the men preferred the beach, trusting the tide to cleanse it of their droppings.

Mukerjee (2003) goes on to observe, "[t]he judges could scarcely have expected their thoughtful verdict to be put in place on such a thoughtless scale" (p. 212).

At the end of her visit Mukerjee despairingly notes:

I was told the Jarawa were getting just about every substance. Some of the women would vanish into the jungle with truckers who stopped on the road, for rewards unknown (and taking a generic route for the spread of AIDS), while young Jarawa men routinely begged for sukka, the popular form of chewing tobacco... I heard the aboriginals were getting alcohol and tobacco in exchange for their takings [from the forest], which were discreetly sold back to the public (p.218).

In a parallel set of developments, Samir Acharya of SANE together with Kalpavriksh, an environmental action group and the Mumbai-based Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) had filed another public interest case to stop the illegal harvesting of trees in the Onge reserve areas, documenting the deteriorating state of the environment throughout the entire islands. The wide-ranging Supreme Court verdict,⁶ communicated to me in a celebratory email message from Sophie Grig of Survival International, delivered a blow to commercial forestry business interests in the Andaman Islands and, according to Mukerjee (2002), made Acharya the most hated man on the islands. Prior to issuing the ruling, the Supreme Court appointed an environmental expert, Professor Shekhar Singh, "to look into the state of the islands' forests and other related matters". At the end of the six weeks allotted to him to submit his report, Singh made extensive recommendations, which included many of Survival's key campaign objectives, namely, "removing the settlers from all the tribal reserves and forests, stopping all logging on the islands and the closing of the Andaman Trunk Road which had been built illegally through the Jarawa's reserve" (Grig 2002).

In an unforeseen move, the Supreme Court endorsed all of Shekhar Singh's recommendations. Sophie Grig conceded that while much had been achieved with the Supreme Court ruling, there were still ma-

major obstacles to overcome in terms of the actual implementation of the order, which Survival International would continue to monitor.

But, as Sekhsaria (2002) notes:

The court order comes at a significant juncture in the context of the ongoing preparation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). Coordinated in the islands by the Andaman and Nicobar Island Environmental Team (ANET), the NBSAP has the potential to create a broad framework in which the future of the islands can be discussed, debated and planned... allow[ing] for extensive multi-stakeholder participation... the challenge now is to find a creative way forward (p.4).

On a more sober note are Sekhsaria's (2003) re-considerations in his epilogue, as the time frame given for the implementation of two of the key directives of the Supreme Court of India has passed without any hint of future implementation by the Andaman administration. Appraising the ongoing situation in the islands, Sekhsaria highlights what is at stake for the *Jarawa* and the future health of the island system in the Andaman administration's non-compliance with the orders. The closure of the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR) in the sections where it transgresses the *Jarawa* reserve, the declaration of the islands as an Inner Line Area with the issue of Islander Identity Cards, are central to protecting the indigenous groups and the fragile island environment, already strained well beyond its capacity.

Of origins and genetics

To add to the already complicated state of matters in the Andaman Islands, at the end of 2002 and early in 2003, a number of papers were published almost simultaneously in the journals *Current Biology* and the *American Journal of Human Genetics*. The articles published brought together various lines of evidence suggesting that the Andaman Islanders were the descendants of the earliest populations of modern humans who migrated out of Africa into Asia approximately sixty thousand years ago, remaining genetically isolated for tens of thousands of years through the cataclysms of the Ice Age and its aftermath. Musing on these developments, Samir Acharya of SANE expostulates:

Dr. Erika Hegalberg extracted mitochondrial DNA from the hair roots of some Andamanese hair collected by a British Civilian in the first decade of the last century, and compared it to the mDNA of other negrito people of the world. She found that the Andaman Negrito are closer to the East African bushmen than to the Asian or Australian Negritos.

Dr. Erika Hagelberg believes that the Andaman Negritos being one of the earliest migrants from Africa probably hold the key to the very question of human ancestry. She postulates that the Andaman Negritos had arrived in the Islands at least 40,000 years ago.

The Jarawas and the Sentinelese are the last two tribes that had maintained racial and genetic purity and avoided cultural contamination. They hold the key to the mystery of human evolution. Allowing contamination of their genetic and cultural purity would be like burning the library of Babylon again. Experts today recognise that the New World did not fall to the might of Spanish arms, it fell before the onslaught of European germs. Once again we are exposing a pristine race that is defenceless to our civilised pathogens. Extinction through an epidemic is a reality just a single infection away. The Jarawa has survived the measles epidemic but would they survive if the epidemic was of Syphilis, Hepatitis B or C or AIDS? Continued survival and well being of the Jarawa can only be ensured by banning all contact with the Jarawa, banning attempts like teaching them agriculture, fishing techniques and Hindi(!), evicting all encroachers from within the Jarawa Reserve. Banning construction of any facility near the reserve in the name of "tribal welfare" (<http://www.andaman.org> The Jarawa Case).

Leaving aside the heated debates that these publications have generated among scholars around the world, we have yet to discern the impact of this information on the existing state of affairs in the islands and on "the last of the planet's first humans" (Mukerjee 2003, p.241). It may provide the final springboard to accelerate the implementation of the Supreme Court order, or in a replay of the scenario described earlier by Mukerjee, bring in its wake scholars of various ilk clamouring for a piece of the action.

Collaborative anthropology: policy initiatives and new coalitions

I did return to the Andaman Islands in May 2004, a decade after I finished my fieldwork there, a trip that was unforeseen, brought about by reasons very different from my earlier visits. At a point in my life when my research in the islands was being archived into my past, while I embraced other issues in different locations, I was catapulted back into active engagement with the islands and its peoples once again.

The narrative of how this came about is located in a different site, in the networks of communication that exist in cyberspace, where scholars, journalists, activists and concerned individuals have shared infor-

mation and kept abreast of events in the islands. Initiated and moderated by Pankaj Sekhsaria, this cyber forum was to play a crucial role in shaping events over the course of 2004.

To pick up the threads of the narrative from the preceding section, the Committee of Experts constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs submitted their report in July 2003. The contents of the report were posted by Sekhsaria on a website⁷ that included other reports, along with his own articles on the islands over the years. This ensured public and widespread access to a document that was deeply provocative in part, and presented a challenge to the Ministry in its efforts to maintain unchanged its administrative operations in the islands. Sekhsaria's actions countered government efforts to suppress the document, as well as to maintain tight control over and hence restrict the participants involved in the next stage of the High Court directives, namely a seminar convened to formulate policy on the *Jarawa*. According to the Court's directives, as evidenced in the quote below, the seminar(s) were to be convened after widespread public notification and were to include a large cross-section of participants.

For the aforesaid purpose, the Central Government shall arrange seminars and open discussions of the different experts, National and International on the line, Anthropologists, sociologists and others as also individuals and non-governmental organisations having knowledge and experience in the matter inviting them by issuing public notification in widely circulated news papers and sending them letter of invitation and thereafter shall frame the policy decision within the stipulated period after deliberation and discussion on such opinions with the approval of the concerned Ministry. The Central Government shall also publish the papers, discussions and deliberation of such seminar, at its cost, for future reference. The cost for such seminars shall be borne by the Central Government and the cost of travel, boarding and lodging of such experts, organisations and persons and of such research, survey, field work etc. shall also be borne by the Central Government.

It is made clear that for the aforesaid purpose, individuals as also organisation, governmental or non-governmental will be at liberty after issuing of such notification to submit their own opinion, views supported by cogent reasons and materials, in the said seminars also to be considered by the Central Government. (<http://www.andaman.org>, The Jarawa case).

In a typical display of bureaucratic bravado, the Ministry dragged its feet about publicly announcing the dates for the seminar that was to be convened in the city of Kolkata, cancelling the first proposed dates,

and leaving sufficient uncertainty about the next ones in an attempt to stall and discourage potential travellers to the venue.

It is at this point that I was inserted into the narrative by an email from Madhusree Mukerjee, alerting me to the significance of the proposed seminar. As an active participant in Sekhsaria's discussion group, Mukherjee had been following the events in the islands since she completed her research there, and had kept me periodically informed about the most important developments. Initially dismissive of any significant outcomes from such a gathering,⁸ I quickly changed my mind as I followed the discussions and comprehended the implications of government efforts to muzzle opposing voices by restricting those invited or permitted to speak at the forum. Exploring the possibility of obtaining funding for the travel from the university where I was located in New Zealand, I finalized my plans to attend the seminar and make myself heard at the proceedings.

A core sub-group developed within Sekhsaria's web-based discussion group of those who had taken the time to read the expert committee reports and who were determined, at whatever cost, to storm the seminar if necessary and strategize to ensure that their views would be made known at the proceedings. Coordination with representatives from Survival International meant that they too were apprised of the implications of the forum and could respond accordingly.

It is useful at this stage to pause and examine more closely that part of the report submitted by the Committee of Experts that posed a problem, and the reasons for the consternation it generated within the Ministry and the government bodies whose operations it regulated. The member of the committee who created the stir was Mr. K.D. Saxena, former Secretary in the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. As a retired but respected civil servant with a reputation for his personal integrity, his inclusion within the 8-member committee did not merit any comment. However, the dissenting note that he submitted revealed the lack of consensus within the committee and, more disturbing, the dynamics of power among its members that impacted on its democratic operation. His note with a separate draft policy attached to it, went on to critique the basis for some of the conclusions arrived at by the Health team and proposed a radical overhauling of the tribal welfare organization (AAJVS). He strongly endorsed the closure of the stretch of the ATR that directly traversed the *Jarawa* reserve, and proposed a constitutional amendment to guarantee for perpetuity the rights of the *Jarawa* to their forest base. His dissenting stance enabled another member of the committee from the ASI to finally put in writing his opposition to the ATR and recommend its closure too.

Far-reaching in its sweep and intent, Saxena's note provided the peg to rally together all the opposing voices and give them a blueprint for

an alternate and humane policy. The fact that such a policy had emerged from within a committee constituted by the Ministry posed a problem of sufficient magnitude for the government to attempt to suppress the document and limit its dissemination.

The sub-group of 5 that emerged from Sekhsaria's discussion group, of whom I was one, consisted of an interesting mix of academics, activists, journalists and NGOs, located in India and overseas. Brought together by our research and writing about the islands and its peoples, we were energized by our awareness that here was an opportunity to finally make a difference to the lives of the islanders, and one group in particular, the *Jarawa*.

Our presence at the Kolkata seminar, despite attempts to block our entry, completely changed the tenor of the proceedings. We were the only ones present who had actually read the report or were familiar with its content and, as a coordinated pressure group, raised questions and insisted that we be permitted a space to speak to the proceedings. Hence, the challenge provided by Saxena's report could not be hidden from public view. At a gathering that received coverage by the national media, our presence changed the agenda of the conference and ensured that the forum had to take note of the dissenting reports and the alternate policy framework proposed therein. Furthermore, the press conference that we organized for the following day meant that the issues we raised continued to be covered by the media in the ensuing weeks, and reminded the government that we were serious about making ourselves heard.

The conclusions from the Kolkata seminar, which are listed below, fell well short of the recommendations contained in Saxena's draft policy, or those pressed for in Survival International's campaign. Some significant gains had been achieved, particularly in the last two points listed below, but it was clear that the government reserved for itself the right to intervene in the lives of the Jarawa, and would not condone the closure of the ATR. While grudgingly admitting the need for more accountability within all the administrative bodies pertaining to tribal welfare, the framework of welfare itself remained unaltered. Hence, there was much more work yet to be done, and it would have to be accomplished before the next proposed seminar, at which the final policy recommendations were to be hammered out.

1. *Since the Jarawas, numbering only 266, are in an unparalleled situation, they should be perceived and treated as a unique human heritage.*
2. *In the background of the historical experience of dealing with the aboriginal tribes, especially Great Andamanese and the Onges, the approach of maximum autonomy to the Jarawas, and measured interven-*

tion by the Government will be practiced towards the Jarawas. Bringing them to the mainstream and assimilation will not be desirable at this stage of their social development. Rehabilitation of Jarawas in separate islands/locations will not be desirable.

- 3. A reconstituted AAJVS will advise the Administration regarding the Schemes and measures for the protection and welfare of all aboriginal tribes including the Jarawas.*
- 4. The quality of intervention will be carefully managed through suitably trained and re-oriented personnel, in consultation with and evaluation by anthropologists and experts. The objective will be to avoid dependency syndrome and to ensure their development as a vibrant social group. The personnel working for Jarawas would be provided proper training and sensitized.*
- 5. Periodic health survey of the Jarawa community will be organized through a standing team of health professionals. Only cases needing intensive care may be brought to the hospital but they will be kept in separate enclosures. Appropriate food will be provided instead of the hospital meals. Whenever female Jarawas come or are brought to hospital, female police will be posted invariably.*
- 6. Permanent residence of Government employees/non tribals in the Jarawa reserve will not be allowed.*
- 7. Provisions of PAT Regulation will be used more effectively. Accountability of officials of different Departments dealing with Jarawa issues may be ensured.*
- 8. Tourists will not be allowed to visit/interact with them so that curious intrusions are avoided.*
- 9. Nutritional and food security survey of the Jarawas will be conducted every year.*
- 10. Codification of the language of the Jarawas may be done with the advice and involvement of ASI. Documentation of their families may also be maintained.*
- 11. Use of Andaman Trunk Road (ATR) will be strictly regulated, thereby limiting the traffic to the essential purposes of supplies and emergency evacuation of patients and persons.*
- 12. Documents about aboriginal tribal policies and events etc. may be properly kept.*
- 13. Periodic review of this policy may be done so that the policy is dynamic and takes into account changing needs and circumstances.*
- 14. A suitable empowered arrangement for enforcements and monitoring the implementation of the policy may be created.*

Return to Port Blair

The next seminar, to be convened 6 weeks later, was to be held in Port Blair. And that is how I returned to Port Blair just as the monsoon arrived in the Andaman Islands late in May 2004. But this time with a formal invitation from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and as a guest of the Andaman administration, along with the others who had stormed the first seminar in a bid to present a united but opposing front there. It meant making a second trip from New Zealand, a point that generated a degree of amazement from the authorities, who also noted the determination to ensure that our views and recommendations be documented and heard.

We were still enthused by an awareness that the situation presented an important opportunity that should not be lost. Thus, the group that crystallized prior to the first seminar continued to work together and in tandem with each other. Madhusree Mukerjee, in consultation with Saxena, drafted an alternate policy framework for the Jarawa and the other islanders, which was to be submitted jointly at the Port Blair gathering. The rest prepared individual submissions that built on the points contained in the alternate framework, and continued to strategize on how best to insert them into the proceedings if we were not allotted individual slots as speakers within the forum.

As the flight skidded to a halt on the runaway at Port Blair, I noted the first point of difference, the runaway had been extended: the hill that had stood at the end of the earlier much shorter one had disappeared. There was no further need to sit nervously at the edge of one's seat wondering whether the brakes would be applied in time before the face of the hill loomed before the nose of the aeroplane. I scanned the streets and buildings trying to reconcile my mental map with the current configuration of the town. Port Blair had been enormously built up over the decade since my departure from its shores, it was virtually unrecognizable. I had 4 days in Port Blair, two of which would be spent at the seminar, and the other two planning strategy with the others of the group, in order to once again ensure that we presented a coordinated and coherent set of interventions at the seminar. I wondered whether I would run into any of the Onge as I walked around Port Blair, perhaps Lichu would still be living somewhere in town.

Lichu, too, was an invited guest at the seminar and I puzzled over the role she would play at the proceedings. She appeared a much sadder and more subdued person, not as voluble as she used to be, wiser perhaps, more resigned, the years had taken their toll. I asked her what her thoughts were about the *Jarawa*, what would she suggest as the best course for them. Her answer shook me: the *Jarawa* should be transported from where they were in Middle and South Andaman and

relocated elsewhere, on some other island, just like the Andamanese had been earlier. The Andamanese were none the worse for it, so the *Jarawa* would be fine too. This would solve all the current tensions around the ATR, and put an end to the unending round of conflicts between the settlers and the *Jarawa* once and for all.

My initial stunned silence was followed by a spate of reasoned arguments to demonstrate to her how disastrous such a course would be for the *Jarawa* and then I checked myself. Did I have the time to convince her otherwise in the few minutes I had before the seminar commenced; had she been schooled by the administration, was that why she was invited to the proceedings, to demonstrate to the rest of the world how much at odds the views of one of the “tribals” were with those of the well-meaning proponents of the *Jarawa*’s rights to their forest?

I cast worried glances at her from across the room where I was seated, wondering when she would be asked to say her piece. Meanwhile, in a shrewd move calculated as a pre-emptive strike, the organizers had filled the entire morning’s agenda with speakers and elected representatives from the settler communities on the islands, everyone of them arguing, vehemently and loudly against the closure of the ATR. If the extent of resistance to that recommendation was to be demonstrated by the volume of sound generated, and the numbers stacked against it, the administration had succeeded very well.

In another surprising move over the course of the rest of the proceedings, the Ministry accepted in its entirety the Alternate Policy Framework drafted by Mukerjee and submitted jointly by us, as well as the draft policy recommendations drawn up earlier by Saxena in his dissenting note. The 3 key concepts of sensitivity, minimality and accountability that had informed the joint submission, and around which the policy recommendations had been constructed, became the administration’s new catch phrases for referring to their future plans for the *Jarawa*. Perhaps that should have warned us but the bubble of euphoria that buoyed us along as we savoured our success at the seminar was to evaporate slowly only later, as reality crept in with the other developments in the months to come.

Lichu never spoke at the seminar; she was the token “tribal” present during the proceedings to demonstrate how inclusive the administration was in its list of invitees. In yet another gesture, she was asked to close the proceedings in the couple of minutes she was given, after the lengthy speeches from the stalwart luminaries also present at the concluding session.

The battle ahead

Sekhsaria's cyber forum remains active, keeping abreast of the developments on the islands. Its membership has swelled to about 400, many actively involved in debating and articulating their views. And there is much to debate in the subsequent months, with the government announcing its plans for tourism developments in the islands, followed by a proposal to embark on oil exploration. "It's an all-out assault," despaired Mukerjee in a recent email. The Ministry's strategy of co-opting and silencing the opposition was demonstrated in its announcement of the new board for the tribal welfare agency, which entailed a mere expansion of the existing board with a chosen few who could be relied on to speak the administration piece and not cause too many ripples. The new structure for the overhauled organization proposed in the joint submission and in Saxena's recommendation, which would ensure that it remained accountable and efficient, is never mentioned and has disappeared altogether from the administrations plans. Saxena, who remains grimly watchful of these developments, cautions that the only recourse is to go back to court. Samir Acharya, too, is waiting and biding his time, wary of the shape of things to come.

And what of the *Jarawa*, who remain invisible and distant from the scene of these strategies and maneuvers that, will impact on their lives and determine their futures? While unwilling to tolerate the closure of the ATR, the administration has increased the area allocated to the *Jarawa* by including a section to the right of the ATR, in another typical gesture that looks good on paper but resolves nothing.¹⁰ But what of their day-to-day lives and their futures? Or the Sentinelese, how safe are they in their remote island 'strong-hold'? My brief visit to Port Blair allowed me access to some recent and revealing footage that underscored the continuing vulnerability of both the *Jarawa* and the Sentinelese, despite any decisions that are being taken in the political centre-stage. One showed the ongoing clearing of a section of the denoted forest¹¹ within the *Jarawa* reserve by a forest officer who, when queried about his actions, responded that he was only following orders from higher authorities within the administration. The other footage, equally gut-wrenching in what it presages, was taken when the former Chief Secretary to the islands commissioned a trip for his visiting family and friends to North Sentinel islands, the sound track recording his voice urging the boatman to go closer ashore where the Sentinelese were lined up, while observing that there was nothing to fear from them any longer, the fierce Sentinelese were harmless.

As matters stand, the Andaman Islanders, and in particular the *Jarawa*, are poised on the threshold of a precarious future that could utterly destroy them. But, if the coalitions that have been forged over

the past months can withstand the several battles that lie ahead, the *Jarawa* may yet have another lease of life, perhaps finally on their own terms, as they venture into the new millennium.

I want to end this account of the Andaman Islanders, spread over more than a decade, with a proverb that garners the wisdom of another indigenous people, the Māori, whose own ongoing battles provide an example of what *can* be achieved:

*Hutia te rito o te harakeke
Kei hea te k_mako e ko
Ki mai k_ ahau
He aha te mea nui o t_nei ao
Maku e ki atu
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata*

This proverb translates as: *if you pull out the central stalk of the flax plant, (so that it dies),¹² where will the bell bird sing?¹³* If you were to ask me, what is the most important thing in this world, I will say to you, it is the people, it is the people, it is the people.

Extrapolating this proverb to the context of the *Jarawa*: if we fail to protect the forest in which the *Jarawa* live, the forest they have kept intact for thousands of years, we destroy not only the forest but also all that which confers beauty on this world in which we live; namely the songs of the birds, as well as the most important *taonga* or treasure we are given in this world: we destroy a people. □

Notes

- 1 The saying translates as: We should look backwards, so we can determine how to go forwards.
- 2 In the same week that I revelled in successfully defending my PhD thesis, which is narrated in the preceding pages, and went on to celebrate the continued hostility projected by the *Jarawa*, a small act of kindness faraway in the forests of the Andaman Islands was to prove to have profound long-term consequences.
- 3 Thus, pointing to the continuing lack of clarity in communication with any of the indigenous groups in the islands, despite claims to the contrary.
- 4 An organization based in London that advocates for the rights of indigenous peoples (<http://www.survival-international.org>).
- 5 Mr. Awaradi's Master Plan had been gathering dust within the tribal welfare agency for the past 2 decades. It is interesting that it should be referred to at this time by the High Court as a basis for future policy. It also makes one wonder about the directives emerging from the courts, simultaneously progressive but also limited in their terms of reference where policy pertaining to the *Jarawa* is concerned.

- 6 See Seksaria (2002) for a more detailed discussion of the various cases brought to court pertaining to forestry in the Andaman islands, and the court rulings on the matter.
- 7 The informative website is an excellent public source of reports from the various committees.
- 8 I reminded her of the junket I had participated in during my research and the futility of taking such events seriously. "This one is different," she insisted, "there will be people listening and taking note of what is said."
- 9 The Andaman and Nicobar Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulations of 1956.
- 10 As noted by Sekhsaria recently in an email communication,, the change merely reinstated the area previously demarcated as *Jarawa* reserve forests.
- 11 Sekhsaria's presentation at the Port Blair seminar using satellite imagery was a stark illustration of the extent to which the only original and intact forest cover left in the islands was the area demarcated as the Jarawa reserve. Hence, as he demonstrated in his compelling argument, the twin needs of environmental protection and the protection of the Jarawa life-world neatly coincided.
- 12 The flax is a very important plant for the Maori, it has sacred, medicinal and very practical uses, and many protocols for how the plant is harvested. The leaves that are used are always taken from the sides of the plant, never from the centre, because that is the heart of the plant.
- 13 The song of the bell bird is one of the most beautiful and haunting sounds of the NZ native bush and forest.

A Final Word From Samir Acharya

Many complain, and not without reason, that the treatment meted out to the Jarawa by our welfare state is not in accordance with the maxims of democracy, equity or the declared principles of a welfare state. 266 people out of a nation of 1,020 million would have no political clout even if they were street-wise, adept in the technique of walking the corridors of power.

The Jarawa are the most misunderstood community in the Andamans. An average Islander considers them to be a race of savage, ferocious, wanton killers. In 2002, we had a long dialogue with En Mey, the Jarawa ambassador of goodwill. We asked him why they used to attack the non-tribals. En Mey told us that the Jarawa believed that we would have killed them otherwise. So, they appear to have killed in self-defence. And when we look at the record of our shooting, electrocuting and setting fire to their huts, we cannot blame them.

The Jarawa do not know that they are the constituents of a thriving democracy. Or that there are special laws to protect them. They do not know how to use our legal system to obtain relief by utilizing an adversarial system of criminal jurisprudence. So, when a Jarawa is injured in a road accident in their own territory by a vehicle that entered the Reserve illegally, he does not get the compensation that all Indian citizens are entitled to. When a Jarawa woman was purportedly raped in a government hospital where she was undergoing treatment, most of the legal provisions were violated. The law demands that an officer of the rank of Deputy Superintendent or above should investigate, she should be paid compensation immediately and should be medically examined. Each of these provisions was flouted. A mere Assistant Inspector "recorded" her statement. The officer could not speak the Jarawa dialect and the victim could speak neither Hindi nor English. The Jarawa do not know that they have an exclusive habitat called the Jarawa Reserve. So, they do not lodge a complaint when someone enters their area illegally. A long list of the victims of Jarawa atrocities is available from the Police. But there is no record of the countless Jarawa killed by the "civilized", as the Jarawa never file a FIR (First Information Report) in the nearest Police Station.

Our welfare state, driven by a guilt complex, makes ever-larger allocations for the welfare of the Jarawa. Money that gets spent buying

air-conditioners that do not cool a Jarawa body, computers they do not use, carpets they have never stepped on, cars they do not travel in, ships and boats they have never sailed on board.

In an experiment performed by the Expert Committee appointed by the Calcutta High Court, scientists made a few Jarawa and a few Indian policemen run up and down some steps quickly and recorded the pulse, respiration rate and blood pressure of the subjects before and after the exercise. While the data pertaining to the policemen showed a marked increase, that of the Jarawa hardly varied. I strongly believe that the physical survival of the Jarawa will not be in doubt in their own habitat if we stop infecting them with our 'civilized' germs and allow them to maintain their territorial integrity. We must close the Andaman Trunk Road.

Raising awareness among the Andamanians is of prime importance. People such as Dr. Sita Venkateswar are trying to achieve this. She is one of the few who has studied them over a period of time. We need people like her to come forward and take up the challenge of raising awareness among the Islanders and administrators, and mobilizing public opinion, both national and international.

The Roman Emperor Claudius the God is known to have said, "Wise birds do not foul their own nests, not even nests captured from other birds". The Jarawa had been practising this for millennia before him. A recent study of the Andaman forests by the Forest Survey of India found the Jarawa Reserve to be the best preserved forest in the islands with a high bio-diversity. Claudius the God was also known as Claudius the Fool. Perhaps, that is why we have managed to foul the forests and the territories captured by us from the Andaman Tribes.

The Jarawa have the custom of putting an infant born out of wedlock to death, particularly if sired by a non-Jarawa. We know of at least three such cases during the last four years. Destroying one life in a community of just 266 is alarming. We are so concerned about the high rate of female foeticide in some parts of India, yet a much higher rate of Jarawa infanticide has failed to attract our attention. We know of 5 Jarawa who have become disabled in road traffic accidents, which equates to 2% of their population. And yet, the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR) remains open.

In recent times, certain positive steps have been taken by the Administration, such as enlarging the Jarawa Reserve, removing encroach-

ers, inducting some experts into the AAJVS, etc. But much more needs to be done. The ATR needs to be closed. In order to oversee the overseers, a small group of non-officials with the authority to access records and oversee the officials engaged in Jarawa welfare or administration of the reserve is essential. It is very important for such a group to be totally non-official in order to ensure avoidance of political pressure.

India does not consider the tribes alone to be indigenous. We say that all Indians are indigenous. But in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, the continued presence of non-tribals has a history of only one hundred and sixty years. In the Islands, the tribes are the only indigenous community. They are the first people. If we fail to protect them, History will not forgive us.

Samir Acharya

SANE (Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology)

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APPENDICES

DRAFT POLICY ON JARAWAS FRAMED BY SHRI K.B. SAXENA, ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEE ON JARAWAS

With reference to the notings at page 149-150 of the Report of the Expert Committee on Jarawas of Andaman Islands submitted to the Hon'ble High Court of Calcutta, Government of India and Andaman & Nicobar Administration, the draft policy as framed by Shri K.B Saxena one of the Members of the Expert Committee is circulated by placing it in the Andaman & Nicobar Administration's website:
www.andaman.nic.in.

(S.A.Awaradi)
Director (TW)
09.10.2003.

F.No. 11-27/AAJVS/2003(PF-III)

1. INTRODUCTION

Andaman Islands have been home to a number of negrito tribal groups of whom four survive in varying strength. Of these four, the Jarawas are inhabiting the western side of South and Middle Andaman. Their mode of subsistence is through hunting and gathering using simple and eco-friendly technology. The Jarawas until recently lived in isolation and displayed 'hostility' to outsiders who made incursions into their territory, exploited their resources or interfered with their way of life. However, since October 1997 they have come out of this isolation and within a short span of more than five years have been thoroughly exposed to the outside world. This happened so suddenly that the Administration had not thought out the likely situations this contact of the Jarawas with larger non-tribal population would produce and, therefore, had not made any prior preparations on how various contingencies arising therefrom could be handled. The intervention of the Honourable High Court in the context of a PIL triggered the process of working out an approach to deal with them. As the situation began to get unfolded, multifaceted adverse impact on the Jarawas and their vulnerability to social and econom-

ic exploitation began to emerge. This has caused anxiety about their well being. It has, therefore, become necessary to deal with the problems and predicaments faced by them comprehensively, lest it hurts the tribe irreparably and even threatens their survival. This exercise has produced a policy for protection of the Jarawas, the first ever policy for a hunter and food gatherer tribe.

2. REASONS FOR MAKING A POLICY?

After witnessing the impact which the contact with the outside world has produced on the Jarawas, it was realized that ad-hoc measures for dealing with the problems arising therefrom would neither be sufficient nor effective. It would be necessary to tackle the situation in its entirety. This called for efforts to articulate whole gamut of issues and designing of measures to address them. This exercise in policy making on the Jarawas has been the outcome of this process. There are several reasons why a detailed policy concerning the Jarawas inter-face with the outside world is necessary. These are:

- The Jarawa tribe is coming out from its erstwhile 'hostile' response to outsiders entering into their territory, extracting resources from it or otherwise interfering with their life. This may remove the deterrence to such action that has existed so far.
- The sudden exposure to multi-faceted contact with outside world has created such enormity of adverse and harmful impact on them that they may suffer slow and early extinction if corrective measures are not taken.
- The Jarawa Tribal Reserve has been created for exclusive use of the Jarawa tribe considering their social, organization, mode of subsistence, way of life and cultural values. But this territory is being violated by outsiders for encroaching upon their land, accessing forest produce and fishing in the coastal waters for extracting marine resources. This has threatened the life supporting system and survival base of the Jarawas and, therefore, needs to be stopped.
- Ever since their exposure to the outside world, the Jarawas have been sucked into the vortex of social and economic forces unleashed by the glare of attention, curiosity, commercial interests, tourism, which have already produced damaging consequences for the people of the tribe, their way of life and their future. Measures are necessary to insulate them from these influences.

- A great deal of ecological degradation has been taking place in and around the Jarawa habitat on account of number of factors such as human settlements, encroachment, indiscriminate and unauthorized extraction of forest produce and marine resources, extraction of sand from the beaches, hunting of animal'S for meat, etc. The land use policies and the forestry operations carried out have also had damaging impact on the environment. This affects the Jarawas vitally since the source of their subsistence gets adversely affected. The restoration of ecological balance is required for their sustenance.
- Going by the past experience in relation to other tribes, in particular the Onges, the Jarawa tribe could also become intended or unintended victim of certain policies and programmes undertaken by the Govt. for development of the islands and/or meeting the social and economic needs of the neighbouring population. As the Jarawas constitute a very tiny social group they do not possess the necessary clout and power to influence such policies and programmes in their favour. Therefore, a mechanism of protection against such policies and processes is essential.
- The Jarawas are among the very few classical communities of foragers left in the world who are still pursuing their traditional way of life unspoilt by the processes of modernization. There is, therefore, world wide attention to protect this most precious heritage of mankind. This protection is also a matter of pride for the country as also for the other inhabitants of the islands. It would be an acid test for vindicating the policies of the Govt. towards such groups.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

The following are the objectives of the Policy

- To insulate/protect the Jarawa from harmful and potentially disastrous effects of sudden and multi-faceted exposure and contact with the outside world.
- To preserve the social organization, mode of subsistence, cultural identity, life style and value system of the Jarawa community against direct or indirect, intended or unintended pressures on them to conform to 'mainstream' society.
- To protect the Jarawa community from policies and programmes which may turn out to be detrimental to their survival and dignified existence.

- To reach medical help to them to prevent mortality and morbidity in case of their sudden affliction to diseases which their system is unaccustomed to.
- To conserve the ecology and environment of their territory and strengthen their life supporting systems in order that they could pursue their traditional mode of subsistence and way of life.
- To prevent any measure which directly or indirectly subjugates the Jarawas to the demands of the larger social aggregates or the authority structures of the Govt, pressures them to conform and lowers their self esteem and confidence.
- To ensure that policies and programmes concerning the larger population and the nation do not disturb the Jarawas in any manner or has any adverse/damaging effect on their survival with dignity.
- To ensure that situation and circumstances experienced by other hunter and food gatherer tribes, in particular Onges, are not repeated in case of the Jarawas.
- To sensitize settler communities around their habitat and other non-tribal population about the need to preserve such an ancient community as the Jarawas in its traditional form and to appreciate their unique culture and values.

4. POLICY: THE CONCEPTUAL FRAME

The Jarawas are a tiny community of less than 300 persons. Within their own society they are well-knit, cohesive and self-reliant. But their social organization is very fragile when confronted with societies built around modern technology and complex social organization. This inequality is also reflected in the thought processes and behavioural responses of the two communities. The policy to deal with the vulnerability of the Jarawas in this situation needs to be dealt around elaborate protection. This protection would encompass three aspects:

- It would secure their territory and subsistence resource base against continuing attempts at reduction of their territory and ever increasing attempts at poaching, smuggling and encroachment.
- It would insulate them to the extent possible against outside contact which threaten the autonomy of their social and cultural life

- It would put in place effective institutional arrangements so that any assault on their interests can be resisted.

The Jarawas have been afflicted with some diseases unknown to them through their contact with the outside world. Their existing knowledge and technology are not in a position to meet health hazards which can cause sudden demographic collapse. They have also acquired some harmful practices which pose health hazards or are detrimental to the pursuit of their way of life. Therefore, in some of these areas, minimum interventions may become necessary.

Both protection and intervention would call for adequate capacity and organization within Govt. to discharge this responsibility. Governance, therefore, emerges as key to pursue these objectives.

Thus the policy on the Jarawas is built around the pillars of Protection, Intervention and Governance.

PROTECTION: THE RESOURCE BASE

TERRITORY

1. Securing rights to territory

A Tribal Reserve has already been notified for exclusive use of the Jarawas through notification issued in 1956 and revised in 1979. State shall fully secure the rights of the Jarawas to this territory, their unhindered movement in it and pursuit of - their sustenance derived from its resources. It shall also create stringent legal foundations for embedding these rights.

2. Incorporating the area used for foraging outside the Reserve

It shall identify through appropriate surveys consistent with their social organization and mode of subsistence activities, and mode of movement areas outside this Reserve which the Jarawas still use for their foraging activities and other needs and shall secure their rights to such territory so that they can carry on with their traditional life style without any infringement.

3. **Demarcation of the Jarawa Reserve** State shall ensure that the Jarawa territory is fully and effectively demarcated and cadastral maps prepared accordingly. The boundaries of the Jarawa tribal Reserve shall be depicted on the ground by erecting sufficiently high and brightly coloured pillars so that they are clearly visible to any person approaching the area as well as the enforcement agencies.

4. **No curtailment of the Reserve territory** State shall not curtail or reduce the Jarawa Tribal Reserve. It shall not acquire any land which pertains to the territory secured for the Jarawas and central to their survival either for its own needs or for the needs of larger segments of population of Andaman islands or outside groups whether for security, development or economic growth.

5. **Removal of encroachment** State shall identify, with the help of non-official organizations, public spirited citizens, conservation experts, social activists, areas of Jarawa Tribal Reserve which have been encroached upon. It shall remove forthwith all such encroachments and restore the land to the Jarawa Tribal Reserve. It shall also make stringent arrangements to ensure that such encroachments do not take place in future.

6. **Empowered Authority to deal with infringement of rights** State shall constitute an authority which would have within its governing structure eminent anthropologists and other experts who have knowledge of social organization, economy and culture of the Jarwas and empathy with them. This body shall be empowered to look into complaints or instances referred to it or initiate suo-moto action on matters which allege

interference with the rights to territory or have the effect of reducing the territory, restricting their movement or interfering with pursuit of their subsistence activities and take whatever measures necessary to protect interests of the Jarawas expeditiously and effectively.

FOOD SECURITY

- 7. Mechanism for monitoring status of food resources** State shall put in place a mechanism to estimate periodically the status of food resources the Jarawas consume and the rate of their depletion in respect of the three regions which the Jarawas inhabit. It shall also determine to what extent this resource depletion is affecting their food security and nutritional requirement and posing a threat to their survival and health. This assessment shall be used for undertaking appropriate interventions, if, when and where necessary, after adequate consultation with and consideration by experts and discussion in the public domain, as prescribed.

- 8. Arrangement for meeting water stress** State, in consultation with anthropologists, shall encourage and facilitate the process of the Jarawas taking up, in harmony with their social organization, necessary eco-friendly measures for storage of perennial sources of uncontaminated water in their area of foraging and encampment with a view to eliminating the 'water stress' experienced by them in the sununer season. It shall also help the Jarawas develop simple and locally manageable methods for making the water

available in their area clean enough for drinking purposes.

9. Natural regeneration of food resources

The State shall pursue natural regeneration of food resources endemic to the area used by the Jarawas for their subsistence without any outside interference. It shall not introduce any species, floral or faunal to the area. Activity, if any, undertaken in the past for establishing horticultural plantations, etc. shall be discontinued.

POACHING AND SMUGGLING

10. Safeguarding the Jarawa Reserve

State shall rigourously safeguard the Jarawa Reserve territory against any activities, whether by locals of Andaman islands or outsiders, for occupying the land or extracting various items of forest produce, meat animals and marine resources. It shall pursue effective action against unscrupulous elements who manipulate to involve innocent Jarawas into those activities. It shall creatively engage the Jarawas in this process of protection as partner and source of valuable information and vigilant surveillance.

11. Strengthening enforcement efforts against poaching

State shall undertake at the earliest in-depth review of existing legal and regulatory provisions for protection of the Jarawa territory and resources and the status of their enforcement with a view to tightening efforts for stopping poaching and smuggling activities. It shall make existing laws and regulations more stringent and shall strengthen the infrastructure

of enforcement machinery in different organizations with mobility and adequate resources, both financial and manpower. It shall also revamp justice delivery system to obtain expeditious and deterrent punishment to the offenders. It shall look into the existing arrangements of surveillance and shall reinforce them suitably.

12. Institutional Structure for coordination and monitoring

The task of enforcement is handled by multiple agencies, Forest, Coastguard, Defence, Police, Tribal Welfare, Fisheries, etc. and requires a great deal of co-ordination to be pursued effectively. A very high powered authority in A&N Administration headed by the Lt. Governor shall be created to effectively accomplish this task. A sharply focused monitoring mechanism shall be designed by this authority to fix responsibility of each agency to assess on a continuing basis the impact of their performance in respect of tasks assigned to it. The authority shall issue directions to enforcement agencies and undertake such other interventions as necessary to achieve the objectives outlined in this policy. Where intervention at the level of Govt. of India is required, the Lt. Governor shall take up the matter with the concerned Ministry or Organization.

It is recognized that the work relating to enforcement requires high degree of public cooperation for getting satisfactory results. The Administration shall create institutional arrangements for peoples' participation and modalities of information sharing with them. This task shall be handled with transparency to get good results.

PROTECTION - CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

- 13. Closure of ATR for traffic** Andaman Trunk Road passes contiguous to, and in some cases through, the Jarawa Tribal Reserve. This road has increased access to the Jarawas, poses the greatest threat to the Jarawas as well as THE forest that they have protected for so many years. After the Jarawas have come out of their isolation, this road has increased contact with outsiders enormously resulting in the most damaging impact on their lives. State shall, therefore, close the road to all vehicular and other traffic as per recommendations of the Shekhar Singh Committee approved by the Honourable Supreme Court and shall proceed to develop alternative means of transport for convenience of the population and the administration. This step would help in check-mating the harmful effects which the current exposure of the Jarawas has created on account of the ATR and persuade them to go back to their territory to pursue their traditional way of life unhindered by pressures to the contrary generated by it.
- 14. Restriction on entry in the Jarawa Reserve** State shall make stringent provisions to ensure that no person except for the Jarawas is allowed to enter the Reserve by any means unless he/she is permitted by the competent authority designated by the A&N Administration for this purpose. No such permission shall be granted unless the person is proceeding on bonafide work relating to the welfare of tribals or protection of the area.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME

15. Identity and autonomy to be maintained

State fully recognizes that contact of the Jarawas with the outside world poses serious threat to their survival which has also been borne out of the recent experience. It also shares with the perception of national and international experts that such contact would exert direct and indirect pressures on the Jarawas to conform to the norms of behaviour and values of dominant communities around them and may result in their demographic collapse like some of the other tribes of the Andaman islands. The constitution of India and Govt. policies enunciated for the tribes from time to time have guaranteed freedom to such groups to preserve their distinct identity, cultural values, way of life, social organization, mode of subsistence and the manner of pursuit of their interests. State is, therefore, committed to preserve and protect the rights of the Jarawas in this regard and firmly believes that the future of the Jarawas is entirely for them to decide. It shall ensure that the Jarawas are allowed fullest autonomy which would enable them to choose the way they would wish to develop their relations with the rest of the world. As their social organization is inseparably linked to their physical environment and the resource base therein, they would be allowed unhindered access to resources of their necessity and maintain social and economic system they have developed in the course of long human evolution.

16. Jarawas to be left alone to decide their future

State is deeply conscious of the vast gap that separates the Jarawas from the rest of the society in respect of

mode of subsistence, social and cultural organization, value system and norms of behaviour. In the current state of their existence, therefore, they are not in a position to strike a balance between their traditional way of life and the pattern of living which the larger society surrounding them practices. The Jarawas cannot exercise a rational and informed choice about the elements of other cultures they should adopt and in the process discard some of their own. This has been demonstrated by the harmful practices on their pattern of behaviour which the recent interface of the Jarawas with the non-Jarawas has produced. State shares the view that the Jarawas have the necessary wisdom to work out what is best in their interest. But they need time free from pressures and interference to deepen their understanding of the outside world in the detached life of their traditional environment. State shall, therefore, strive to promote this process by creating objective conditions in which the Jarawas can be persuaded to go back to their life and creatively contemplate on their experience of the recent contact as also their future.

17. Need for sensitizing non-Jarawas

State is aware that the task of protecting the Jarawas cannot be accomplished without adequately sensitizing the larger population which surrounds them. It would, therefore, strive to comprehensively educate the non-Jarawa population about the need for and pride in allowing an unique group of foragers like the Jarawas to survive and grow without any interference in their way of life, social organization and system of subsist-

ence. It would also seek their active cooperation and creatively engage them in this endeavour.

PROTECTION - INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS CHECKMATING ADVERSE PRESSURES AND DECISIONS

18. High Power Body to scrutinize projects from Jarawa angle

State appreciates that certain development, economic and security related activities intended to be taken up in the Andaman islands may have adverse impact on the Jarawas and the pursuit of their traditional way of life. State shall, therefore, set up a high powered, strong and effective body with statutory sanction. This body would be empowered to scrutinize all such projects and programmes in Andaman islands in terms of their likely impact, long-term and shortterm, on the survival of the Jarawas and autonomy to pursue their way of life and also to mobilize opinion for undertaking necessary corrective interventions. This body shall also be authorized to issue clearance in respect of such projects/programmes from the 'Jarawa' angle. Where, after consideration this body establishes/confirms that impact of such activities on the Jarawas is likely to be adverse, State shall ensure that such schemes, programmes and projects are revised, replaced or abandoned in order to accommodate concerns regarding the Jarawas.

19. Advisory Body for A&N Administration

State shall constitute a, standing body of experts not belonging to Govt. organization, who have knowledge and experience regarding tribes in the Andaman islands, desired sensitivity and possess impeccable reputation for their integrity to advise A&N Administration in mat-

ters concerning the Jarawas referred to them or initiated suo-moto to protect their interests.

20. Policy making process to be embedded in Governance This policy on the Jarawas has been made through an elaborate process which involved seeking advice of experts, subjecting such advice to a thorough discussion in the public domain and thereafter designing this policy as a transparent exercise. State agrees to follow this sequence for policy making on hunter and food gatherer tribes of A&N islands in future. Accordingly, it shall direct that this process be embedded in the structure of governance of the Island Administration. This process shall also be adopted for initiating and scrutinizing regulatory, development and welfare programmes for the Jarawas so that authentic advice concerning them is available to the Administration.

21. Non-Govt. pressure group for advocacy State would welcome emergence of any organization consisting of eminent citizens and experts who share the concern for the Jarawas as an entirely Non-governmental Watch group for advocacy to convey frank and genuine views to Govt./Administration on matters concerning the Jarawas. It may also bring to their notice any decision/action taken in respect of them which may rum out/has turned out to be harmful along with suggestions for corrective action. The A&N Administration shall cooperate with such a group in discharging this responsibility and furnish necessary information to it for this purpose.

INTERVENTION - HEALTH & NUTRITION

- 22. Study on the impact of modern medicine on Jarawa Immunity System** State shall have in-depth study carried out with the help of experts from anthropology and medicine regarding the impact of modern medicine on the physiology of the Jarawas, with a view to evolving an approach to diagnosis and treatment of various diseases Jarawas suffer from which does not do any damage to their immunity system and enables them to strengthen their resistance to diseases.
- 23. Standardization of diagnostic methods and prescription drugs** State shall also direct experts to standardize diagnostic approach, treatment regimen and prescription of drugs in case of common pattern of diseases observed among the Jarawas so that experimentation by individual doctors and conflicting assessments among them can be avoided. Medical care records shall be mandatorily prepared in case of all the Jarawas seeking treatment.
- 24. Multi-therapy approach** Taking their unique situation into view, a multi-therapy (Homeopathy, Ayurveda, Ethnomedicine) approach would be tried under expert supervision to determine which system would suit the Jarawa constitution better for which complaint and would also be safer and convenient to administer in the overall interest of maintaining their sound health.
- 25. Consultation with experts for introducing immunization** The overall thrust of this policy is to drastically reduce the possibility of contact of Jarawas with the outside world and promote their return to their habitat and traditional way of life. State shall, therefore, undertake

consultation with medical and anthropological experts about the suitability and desirability of introducing prophylactic measures, such as Universal Immunization and mass vaccination for Hepatitis-B as well as preventive measures in case of communicable diseases like Malaria, in the case of the Jarawas which are routinely administered to the target groups in the population.

26. Weaning away the Jarawas from addiction State shall make all efforts to wean away the Jarawas from tobacco and alcohol addiction acquired by them as a result of contact with the outsiders. Suitable strategy would be evolved in consultation with experts for this purpose. It would be explored if any plant material in the Jarawa Tribal Reserve has de-addiction properties which can be used for this purpose.

27. Arrangements for medical treatment of the Jarawas State shall ensure that for various diseases the Jarawas suffer from, the routine treatment would be given in their habitat itself and they would not be encouraged to come to the dispensary or doctors to seek it. A group of doctors would be identified who alone would be involved in treating the Jarawas with a view to developing comprehensive understanding about their health related problems and approach to their treatment. State shall organize effective mobile health teams to visit the Jarawa habitat periodically for routine health check up and medical attention. Serious cases observed during these visits would be shifted to the dispensaries and the hospitals Whenever the Jarawas need to be so

hospitalized, effective arrangements shall be made to segregate them in a separate ward to protect them from the curiosity of and contact with the outsiders. During their hospital stay their cultural practices, such as those in relation to food, pattern of living, inter-personal relations, etc., would be respected except where demand of treatment itself warrants any deviation. Certain locations would be identified where dispensaries and wards exclusively catering to the Jarawas would be maintained to attend to serious cases of hospitalization and where a culturally safe and friendly environment for the Jarawas can be provided.

28. Development of ethno-medicine

State shall develop ethno-medicine of the Jarawas with a view to encouraging some degree of self-reliance among them, reducing their dependence on outside help, and for using it as the first stage of promotive and curative treatment in respect of their health related complaints of a less serious nature. It shall promote documentation of medicinal properties of forest flora and other resources used by the Jarawas and scientific validation of their potential for treatment of various diseases for this purpose. The knowledge of the Jarawas in relation to their ethno-medicine shall be protected as intellectual property so that it is not pirated and patented by any commercial organization in its name.

29. Nutritional balance through food consumption

Nutritional deficiency, if any, among the Jarawas shall be addressed by augmenting their food consumption from natural resources within their environment. The prescription

of drugs as nutritional supplement would be avoided.

30. Safeguarding genetic profile of the Jarawas

State shall create a strong and effective mechanism to ensure that the confidentiality of genetic profile of the Jarawas is maintained and it is not used for commercial exploitation by pharmaceutical companies and scientific and medical research organizations. The norms of scientific and medical research would be suitably redefined and reformulated to make them more stringent in the context of their situation.

31. Longitudinal research in medicine

State shall promote longitudinal research in respect of health related problems of the Jarawas, particularly focusing on their immunity system, endemic diseases, concept of a balanced diet in their context, differential way in which their metabolism functions and reasons why their physiology does not manifest adverse clinical symptoms of various diseases associated with their food consumption pattern, such as heavy fat, lack of leafy vegetables, salt, sugar, oil and spices, etc. in their diet. The agenda of research shall be drawn up in consultation with experts. The system of medicine other than allopathy shall also be allocated areas of research taking into account their respective strengths.

COUNTERACTING HARMFUL PRACTICES

33. Weaning away Jarawas from harmful practices

Over a period of time various practices have entered the life of the Jarawas, some introduced as intervention by the Administration while others acquired through contact with

outsiders which have produced adverse effects on the Jarawas. These practices include free distribution of food and other articles, use of metal and plastic containers for cooking and storage, horticultural plantation in the Reserve area, wearing of used clothes without washing, use of synthetic and cotton material for making adornments, use of inappropriate technology for resource extraction. It shall scrutinize these harmful practices and shall wean them away from them in a manner that does not hurt them and their environment. Appropriate strategy for this purpose shall be designed based on the advice of experts.

34. Developing methods of communication with the Jarawas

State shall take help of anthropologists and communication experts to develop methods of conveying to the Jarawas the harmful effects caused by polluting agents, consumption of alien food, poisonous tubers, unclean water, intoxicants, use of garments gifted by others, pet dogs, etc. to their health and ability to forage for their survival in a manner that the community itself deliberates on these issues and takes decisions.

GOVERNANCE

35. Preparing a manual

A&N Administration shall prepare a Manual, with the help of experts duly approved by the apex Advisory body constituted to guide it, which will incorporate details of the Govt. policy on the Jarawas and the manner in which it will be implemented. It shall lay down detailed tasks for each agency, set up the structures of monitoring and specify mechanism

for enforcing accountability of officials in respect of tasks assigned to them. The manual shall also indicate norms of behaviour to guide officials in their inter-face with the Jarawas.

36. Strengthening Tribal Welfare set up

A&N Administration shall create appropriate structures within its organization for ensuring that priority attention is given to the problems of the Jarawas amidst pressures of multifarious tasks it handles. The Administration shall also undertake, with the help of Anthropological Survey of India, programmes to sensitize officials likely to come in contact with the Jarawas on how delicately they should handle matters concerning them. The set up of Tribal Welfare Deptt. would be appropriately streamlined and equipped with requisite capacity and status for this purpose so that it is in a position to command attention within the Administration in respect of problems faced by the Jarawas and matters connected to them. It shall be ensured that official heading the Dept. is selected with care, possesses necessary aptitude and commitment for this work and has a stable tenure. The deptt. shall have competent personnel with good track record, requisite sensitivity and adequate experience relevant to the work to provide assistance to senior officials in dealing with matters relating to the Jarawas.

37. Social audit of programmes taken up for the Jarawas

The State shall set up necessary arrangements to carry out, from time to time, social audit of the measures introduced for the Jarawas, both of a regulatory nature as well as those which provide certain services to

them in order that critical and realistic feedback from an independent agency is available to it. The frame of this social audit shall be consistent with this policy and the methods for carrying it out shall be laid down in the manual. This social audit shall be carried out by non-official agencies which have people of high reputation and public spirit and possess necessary experience and orientation for this work.

38. Learning the Jarawa language

Officials of the A&N Administration who may be coming in contact with the Jarawas, particularly those of Health and Welfare, shall be mandated to learn their language so that they are able to communicate with them and understand their perceptions, reactions and problems.

39. Personal policy for handling the Jarawas

The stature, qualification and orientation of persons in Tribal Welfare agency, who may come in contact with the Jarawas, is very crucial as they would be the source of vital information concerning them to the Administration. Therefore, only adequately qualified, trained and sensitized anthropologists with aptitude for this work would be engaged in this task. They would be selected with care. Only a minimum number of such personnel shall be engaged. As for the personnel of other departments engaged in providing services to the Jarawas such as Health, detailed procedure shall be prescribed for their selection to ensure that they are suitable for this work and possess necessary sensitivity towards the tribe and aptitude for work concerning them.

40. Maintaining official Memory

Appropriate arrangement shall be made by A&N Administration to store and preserve all official documents and papers which relate to major decisions concerning the Jarawas so that this official memory could constitute a reference point for future decision-makers.

41. Action against abuse of rights

State is committed to safeguard, with all possible vigour, the Jarawas' right to their territory, resources for subsistence, good health and their unique way of life. It shall, therefore, sincerely and effectively implement this policy in letter and spirit so that this precious heritage of mankind is preserved. State shall, therefore, strongly deal with any abuse of their rights whether by Govt. or private agencies and shall take corrective measures most expeditiously and with the knowledge, consent and participation of the Jarawas themselves.

(CF: TS-Draft Policy on Jarawas (KBSaxena))

May 27, 2004

Submitted at the Jarawa Seminar, May 27, 2004, Port Blair

AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR JARAWA POLICY

Submitted by a Group of Independent Experts & Observers

Drafted by Madhusree Mukerjee

The crisis of existence facing the Jarawa, combined with the Honourable High Court's directive to produce a thoughtful and well-considered policy for dealing with this exigency, provides an extraordinary opportunity. For the first time in India, and likely in the world, many heads-administrators, experts and concerned individuals-are coming together to think about how best to deal with a hitherto isolated tribal group, and, most important, to put a just and humane policy in place.

We hold that the premise in this discussion must always be that the best interests of the Jarawa have to be served. Lively debate exists on the means by which this might be accomplished-isolation or integration-and the present proposal does not claim to have all the answers. We take as a given, however, that the territorial rights of the Jarawa must be secured, in law and in practice, so that they have as much forest and coastline as they need to live well. Territorial and cultural integrity appears to be essential to the physical and mental health of a hunter-gatherer group. Let us not forget that thousands of years before we came, the aboriginals lived on the Andamans; their moral rights to the archipelago's resources outweigh ours.

Any final policy on the Jarawa should allow them a large measure of independence in choosing their own future. However, until a long-term vision for the Jarawa is finalized, we hold that the Jarawa need to be shielded from harmful outside influences. All dealings with the Jarawa, and indeed the other Andaman aboriginal groups, must therefore meet three criteria:

a) Sensitivity: All individuals dealing with the Jarawa and other Andaman and Nicobar aboriginals (including the Onge, Great Andamanese and the Shompen) must be trained and made aware of their cultural practices. These personnel must have respect for the validity of aboriginal practices as a means of survival in the island and forest environment. Outsiders must not denigrate ab-

original practices or seek to impose foreign practices except for such cases as are essential for their survival.

b) Minimality: To minimize the chances of abuse, the least possible number of outsiders may deal with the Jarawa and all other aboriginal groups of the Andamans. Only the least possible number of outsiders should be allowed to enter the Jarawa reserve. Adequate care must be taken to ensure that outsiders do not transmit disease. Programs and other activity involving the aboriginals, 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 may be in order, however.

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

With these principles in mind, we submit the following policy guidelines for dealing with the Jarawa. We further take this opportunity to suggest reform in other Andaman and Nicobar tribal regions. If this proposal passes muster, we would like to recommend in addition that a **Policy Panel** be formed to work out its detailed implementation. This Panel will preferably contain only three members: a senior member of the Andaman administration, a knowledgeable anthropologist and a senior, independent and concerned administrator as chairperson.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Honourable Supreme Court's recommendation on Inner Line regulations must be implemented on a war footing. The Andaman Islands are facing immense problems, most immediately water shortage and unemployment, because of unchecked immigration. Overpopulation impedes tribal security by increasing pressure on resources in the tribal reserves.
2. The Honourable Supreme Court's Order to close sections of the Andaman Trunk Road must be immediately implemented. In addition, the section of Jarawa forest east of the Andaman Trunk Road that was denotified in the 1970s may be restored to the Jarawa re-

serve. A suitable process for identifying this land should be initiated immediately. Increasing the territory of the Jarawa will better ensure their survival, help regenerate the forest and likely also improve the water situation on South Andaman.

3. An **Integrated Security Force** headed by the Lieutenant Governor needs to be formed to defend the Jarawa Reserve and other tribal reserves from poaching by land and sea. This Force needs to incorporate the principles of Sensitivity, Minimality and Accountability. It should include representatives from relevant departments such as Forest, Coast Guard, Defence, Police, Fisheries and others. Further, the boundaries of the Jarawa and other reserves need to be clearly demarcated. No authority can have bases within the Jarawa reserve. Strict guidelines need to be worked out on the extent to which personnel from any authority can enter the reserve in pursuit of poachers. Possibly the Jarawa themselves can assume to an extent their old task of defending their forest.
4. The administration must close legal loopholes that impede prosecution of poachers. Strict, effective penalties, including prison terms, must be introduced for poachers, for others who extract resources such as sand from the tribal reserves, and also for those having harmful dealings with the aboriginals such as offering intoxicants.
5. Strenuous efforts must be made to sensitize local populations to the rights of the Jarawas and other aboriginals, and to the dangers posed by harmful contact. Support for the Jarawa among the local population will be invaluable.
6. The AAJVS must be replaced by a new, streamlined organization that is passionately dedicated to serving the Jarawa and other aboriginal groups. For the moment let us call this organization the Andaman Adivasi Service Agency or AASA, which may be registered as a trust.

We postulate the following structure for the AASA to incorporate the principles of sensitivity, minimality and accountability. The AASA will be run by an Executive Council of five members. The Council will have no ChairTnan but a Convener. Two of its members will be government officials, including the Lieutenant Governor, while three will be non-governmental. Council members will be required to make at least two unannounced spot checks a year of each and every tribal reserve served by AASA. In early stages, Council members will meet once in three months to resolve problems, and in later stages once in six months.

The Executive Council will hire an Executive Officer who will be responsible for running the AASA. This Executive Officer will

need to be not only sensitive but dynamic: this will not be a desk job. He or she will be in charge of hiring, training, deploying, overseeing and if necessary firing all employees. To enforce accountability it is necessary to stop not only the proliferation of personnel in the tribal reserves but also the proliferation of departments. To this end, the Executive Officer should be responsible for hiring and overseeing not only anthropologists and welfare personnel but also doctors and all other staff posted at tribal reserves.

To ensure minimality, we recommend that the Jarawa be served by three teams, one posted at Kadamtala, one at Baratang and one at Thiroor. Each team will contain a highly qualified and competent anthropologist, chosen by a nation-wide competition, who will serve as an interface between the Jarawa and the outside world. The team will also contain a highly trained and sensitized doctor. For the present moment we see no need for welfare staff serving the Jarawa. Only members of the Executive Council and Policy Panel, the Executive Officer, the resident anthropologist and the resident doctor may enter the Jarawa reserve. The staff requirements at other tribal reserves may be worked out by the Policy Panel.

7. An **Advisory Body** must be constituted with adequate expertise, including knowledgeable anthropologists, to advise the Executive Council on long-term policy regarding the Jarawa. The Advisory Body will be charged with developing a visionary and humane long-term policy regarding the Jarawa and other aboriginal groups. It will determine what the principles of Sensitivity, Minimality and Accountability mean in practice. The policy formulated by the Advisory Body will provide a framework allowing the Policy Panel, the Executive Council and the Integrated Security Force to solve day-today problems in a rational, consistent and guided manner. At present many questions remain unanswered, most importantly that of isolation versus integration. The Advisory Body is also entrusted with developing a long-term plan for research that meets the criterion of minimality but that can generate sufficient information to enable the Executive Council to formulate and revise policy periodically. The Advisory Body must within a year develop a long-term vision plan that incorporates not only questions of human rights but also the ecology and development of the Andamans as a whole. Until the Advisory Body is constituted, the Policy Panel will determine the implications of Sensitivity, Minimality and Accountability.

The proposal outlined above was formulated by Dr. Madhusree Mukerjee in consultation with a senior administrator who remains unnamed. It bears the consensus of a number of concerned individuals, experienced administrators and anthropologists who have looked far and wide for information and guidance relevant to the task at hand. We believe that, barring minor modifications, it will hold up to scrutiny and earnestly hope that it will be adopted as the policy toward the Jarawa and other threatened aboriginals on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

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