V. Pandya

Contacts, images and imagination; The impact of a road in the Jarwa reserve forest, Andaman Islands

In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, On the roadThe social impact of new roads in Southeast Asia 158 (2002), no: 4, Leiden, 799-820

This PDF-file was downloaded from <http://www.kitlv-journals.nl>

VISHVAJIT PANDYA

Contacts, images and imagination

The impact of a road in the Jarwa reserve forest, Andaman Islands

To build or not to build

Tremendous labour and resources are organized to construct a plain tarred road winding through dense unending forest. Planners conceive of its construction, administrators facilitate its coming, and society is motivated by the idea that the road will bring modernization and development. The inception of the road is regarded as a signifier of culturally constructed control, and of order over the disorderly expanse of nature. Consequently, the road becomes an instrument of transformation and acquires a symbolic and ritual role as things, ideas, and individuals move back and forth on it. The road's impact is evaluated and those who visualized its meanings make adjustments for those who inhabit the boundary-marked space through which the road was laid. This process makes up the very biography of a road, a discourse of history in which visualizers and builders of roads are often forced to consider if the road was really worth building, if one takes into account its impact on people.¹ Will trees ever grow back, covering the places that were cleared? Can the movement on the road be stopped?

This article, based on fieldwork in the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal, discusses the road as experienced historically by the remaining 300 'primitive' Jarwa negrito hunters and gatherers in the South and Middle Andamans.² The 250 km Andaman Trunk Road connects the southern point

¹ This process has also been the case with many other massive civil engineering impositions and penetrations within the 'naturally' given space, such as the construction of dams or even the colonial plantation economy in South and Southeast Asia (Anderson and Huber 1988; Arnold and Guha 1995; Dentan et al. 1997; Eder 1987; Gadgil and Guha 1992).

² 'Primitive' Jarwa tribe is the Indian government designation for the small-sized tribal groups who are regarded as needing special assistance due to their precarious demographic and economic profile. The local administration translates 'primitive' as *adim jan jati* (ancient human group), but the people on the island refer to Jarwas as *Jungleey* (people from the forest). However, it has yet to be confirmed whether all existing Jarwas regard themselves as Jarwas.

Map 1. Andaman Islands

of Port Blair (district headquarters) to the northern port of Mayabunder. About 35 km of this road, a key signifier of modernization, cuts right through the designated Jarwa reserve forest of 765 km² in the region of Middle Straits (see Map 1).

The persons who visualized the road cutting through forest now feel that perhaps it should stop functioning, since it is a wrongful imposition in that space. However, the Jarwas, who have been in the forest the longest, see the road not as the imposition of outsiders, but rather as a resource found in their forest. For the Jarwas, the road has become part of their world-view, like the trees in the forest. So, the road and its meaning are constructed both by those who usher the road through a given space and those who were contained in that space prior to the road's existence. The process of building a road reveals the very meaning-making process in Andamanese culture and history. This culture and history subsume the indigenous tribe as well as the colonizers and post-independence settlers who entered from outside the island. This is a process of making meaning in a 'placeless place'.³ This process has made the road a location and site where a distinct form of interaction takes place, forming what Foucault (1986) regards as a place of 'heterotopia type'. A location where rules are broken, emotions are mixed, and where roles and intentions are often reversed or misunderstood. In the past, when the road was still absent, the contact between tribal people and outsiders was often 'mutually resented' and regarded by the non-tribals as bloody and hostile.

Early colonial accounts of the Andamans frequently record the difficulty faced in clearing the forest for roads as well as in expanding the colonial administration. Often this involved pitching the Andamanese tribal people against prison labour and the prison authorities, with various forms of violent encounters. For example, in the early morning hours of 17 May 1859, one party of tribal Andamanese proceeding along the shore was stopped by the naval guard's gunfire, but another party reached the convict work station and occupied it in spite of gunfire. Fresh British troops arrived and half an hour of plundering was brought to an end, with several Andamanese killed and wounded and some taken prisoner. This attack was subsequently dubbed the Battle of Aberdeen. It was the Andamanese tribes' first organized, large-scale attack on convict settlers and their British guards. However, opinions and interpretations of the incident differ. Some regard it as an insignificant attack of the usual kind such as the natives often made for plunder, except that in this particular case, an escaped prisoner might have organized the

³ This road perpetuates the location of the tribes in a placeless place, like the place between two mirrors that can be reflected to infinity – a place that is there without being there. It is a site but not a real place on or in a landscape, a site that Foucault calls space of the 'heterotopia type', in which all the 'real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault 1986:24).

large-scale assault (Pandya 1997). Reverend Corbyn, the surgeon at the settlement, referred to the clash as a ludicrous skirmish. However, administrators like M.V. Portman attached great importance to it. Far from being a ludicrous skirmish, he saw it as a most desperate and determined attack with the intention to exterminate the settlers (Portman 1899:279, 288, 422). In August 1859, convicts clearing the forest were attacked for the second time that month by tribal people. About 1,500 Andamanese, armed with small adzes, knives, and bows and arrows, suddenly attacked two divisions of about 446 convicts who were cooking in the forest. They killed ten convicts. The convicts then retired to the coast and a naval guard boat, moored off the landing place, and escaped under the guards' protecting fire. Twelve convicts wearing fetters were carried away by the tribesmen and never found again. These fetters made them particularly important for the Andamanese, who coveted the metal. The attacking group even danced merrily with the convicts during the two hours they were in possession of the encampment.

According to Portman, the Andamanese asserted that they objected to the jungle being cleared.⁴ The prisoners who cleared the forest and made paths through it often worked with North Andamanese tribal guides. These tribals were from the group of the Aka Bea and Kol, associated with North Andaman. Jarwas frequently attacked the people they saw as invading their territory (Haughton 1861; Temple 1903). In retaliation, Andamanese and Burmese forest workers and sepoys were often ordered to make 'punitive expeditions'. Vacant Jarwa campsites deep in the forest were invaded, ransacked, and set on fire by armed people. Reports suggest that face-to-face confrontation resulted in casualties on both sides and in the capture of Jarwa women and children, who were then taken to Port Blair. Gunfire and arrows were frequently exchanged at close range, with loss of life on both sides. A 'great deal of blood' of Jarwas was found after the firing ceased, but the Jarwas themselves were seldom traced. In a 1925 expedition, 37 Jarwas were reported dead, reflecting the extreme nature of such 'punitive expeditions'.

In the past, Jarwas, devoid of any pathway, were regarded by settlers and outsiders on the island as being wild, hostile, and violent. Today Jarwas are not seen as primitive anymore but as 'ex-primitive' (*Kabhi jungleey hote they*). This change in the image and imagination of the tribal is tied inextricably with the planning and inauguration of the road. A concerned local NGO explained the transformation of the Jarwas and the perception of Jarwas in the last six years as follows:

We should let trees grow back on the road through the Jarwa reserve territory! Let the few remaining Jarwa live a life of dignity instead of making them like all those

⁴ National Archives of India, New Delhi, Records of Home Department Judicial Branch OC No. 32, 29 July 1859; see also Portman 1899:277-8.

who use the road, visit them, gawk at them, give them things, and try making Jarwas like themselves – is this democracy?

However, does a solid, categorical, clear-cut division of 'primitive' and 'ex-primitive' really exist for the Jarwas? The road, originally intended for the transport of resources, has now enabled the coming and going of tourists and settlers.

Outsiders travel through the forest just to see Jarwas; they regret the loss of a culture or are overwhelmed by the primitives who still remain in the forest. Like the tourists who visit the forest, Jarwas also use the roadside and the traffic flow to visit district headquarters and be ex-primitive tourists. Both tribal and non-tribal people going back and forth over the road have dislocated the very fixity of the image of primitive and modern. Ideas, individuals, and identities are dislodged, transposed, and relocated in relation to places connected by the road. Hence, the road in the Andamans is now a setting for the acting out of the script of modernity. Much as a map connects perceived space and experienced place (Pandya 1989), the movement on the road connects two world-views, that of the tribal and that of the non-tribal.

If modernization is more than just changes at the political and economic level, and also a desirable image which must be attained or replicated, then the road is an instrument for the very visualization of modernization. Modernization, as an imagined construct, utilizes the road to generate ideas of what is not modern and what has become modern. Therefore, the existence of roads fosters an inevitable transformation of images that are imagined and actualized. This makes roads and modernization like the Durkheimian notion of 'collective conscience', by which a society has a set of beliefs and sentiments about 'modern' and 'primitive' in the Andamans which 'form a determinate system that has its own life' (Durkheim 1933:79-80). The Andaman Islands, now a union territory of India, have imagined modernization. This modernized society includes dominant non-tribal people as well as the Jarwa tribal minority, who live in a forest protected and administered by the Indian government.

This article is an analysis of the tribal and the non-tribal Andamanese, linked by imagination and the representation of Jarwa as primitive (non-modern) and as ex-primitive (modern). I will present this reconstruction of primitive and hostile Jarwas of the Middle Andamans with regard to the marked presence of roads through the forest in the post-independence phase of the Andamans. This phase is marked by a decline in the use of waterways and coastline for contact with Jarwas on the western side of the island (AAJVS 1977; Awaradi 1990; Pandya 2000). Instead, what has become increasingly common is contact via the road, with Jarwas who inhabit the forest on the eastern side of the island. This historical shift in the very nature of

contact and location has generated an increasing resentment among outsiders and settlers, who dislike the fact that 'primitive' Jarwas have been totally transformed into what was imagined and intended as they became 'modern'. When considering historical reports and more recent ethnographic observations from the Andamans, it is clear that the road has become meaningful for the Jarwas. Jarwas have learned to use the road to their advantage – in spite of the fact that growing opinion among outsiders is that the road, originally intended only for non-tribal persons, is detrimental to the Jarwas. Perhaps the road can not be removed from the field of Jarwa experience and perception. For the tribal Jarwas, the road has become essential, as they are now aware of the fact that it is possible to be 'primitive' as well as being 'modern' or 'ex-primitive', the opposite construct. By means of the road, Jarwas have constructed images and imaginations that have enabled them to move between places and to live in two worlds. These worlds are imagined images for both the residents of the reserve forest and those outside the forest.

Historical meanings of Jarwa in the changing Andamans

In 1947 the 700 aboriginal negrito hunter-gatherers⁵ and 19,000 non-tribal residents of the Andaman Islands became citizens of free India. At the time, the islands were known for the penal settlement created by the British in 1858 (Mathur 1985; Majumdar 1975; Pandya 1997). After 1788, the British established a base and administrative centre at Port Blair. The isolated location of the island, inhabited only by a hostile tribal population, made the islands a perfect location for a prison. Prisoners from Southeast and South Asia were first brought to the Andamans in 1857. By 1858 the process of clearing the forest for a penal settlement was complete. Captain John Campbell argued in favour of selecting the Andamans as penal settlement: 'Convicts cannot be prevented from escaping when working on the mainland, but they will only escape into the jungle and cannot get away from the Andamans, as the savages are far too hostile to allow one to escape them' (quoted in Portman 1899:265). The belief was that prisoners could not escape from the Andamans and even if they did break out, the dense forest, the tribal people, or the surrounding rough sea would claim any who were not recaptured. In fact, within the first ten months 240 out of the 733 convicts were found dead⁶ in

⁵ This is only a rough estimate, as a standardized total enumeration is only available for the Ongees and the group called great Andamanese. The two other tribal groups of Jarwas and Sentinelese have remained purely conjectural statistical estimates in the Indian census records till today.

⁶ National Archives Delhi, Letter No. 1079 from J.P. Walker to C. Beadon, Secretary to the Government of India, 12 July 1859.

the vicinity of Port Blair, killed by native (Jarwa) arrows. The Jarwas of the Middle Andamans, who had remained hostile since 1870 (Radcliffe-Brown 1964:10), continued to be a major obstacle in the process of settlement during the colonial occupation of the island.

The Andamans, like the rest of India, became a part of the development program under the five-year plans. By 1955 20,000 acres (8,100 ha) of forest had been cleared for 4,000 families to settle. In the second five-year plan an additional 1,500 families increased the total number of families settling on the islands, with impetus being given to agriculture, small-scale industries, and the construction of roads.

By 1965, the infrastructure of the island had undergone significant changes. The total population of the island had reached 200,000, and the total number of the Andamanese tribal population had decreased to about 450. With 'growth' and 'modernization', the emphasis of development was on island tourism. Increasing forest area cleared for agriculture implied economic development. With the ongoing development more settlers moved to the island and demanded use of the roads that were intended only for moving resources (Vidyarthi 1976). The culmination point was the inauguration of the Andaman Trunk Road (A.T. Road) in 1978.

With the opening of the road, bus and truck traffic soon increased, also including private vehicles bringing tourists. In the last 25 years, the total length of road construction on the Andamans only increased by 35 km, but the revenue generated by traffic has increased by more than 50 per cent (*Handbook* 1991). Against this backdrop, settlers on the island, forest contractors, and developers viewed the primitive Jarwas as an obstruction in the Indian state-endorsed planned image of modernity. The Andaman Trunk Road trajectory lay through the designated Tribal Reserve Territory created in 1956. This reserve protected the forest area traditionally occupied by the Jarwas from exploitation by surrounding settlers. The constitutionally endorsed notion of 'Tribal Reserve' guaranteed protection of a tribal culture by judiciary and administrative power in a 'non-interference' and 'non-impositional' manner (Protection of Aboriginal tribes, Article 243, Clause 2, June 1956). What the early colonizers could not accomplish in terms of clearing the forest for pathways was now unavoidable, and a road had to be made to connect Port Blair with growing settlements in Middle and North Andaman Island. However, in 1975, for the further protection of the Jarwas, the central government of India allocated a budget and formed the Andaman Adim Jan Jati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS, Andaman Primitive Tribal Welfare Association) within the administration of the Union Territory of the Andaman Islands. AAJVS started looking after the future of the 'primitive' tribes of the Andamans (AAJVS 1977; Krishnatry 1976; Sharma 1981).

The main objective of AAJVS is the welfare of the aboriginal groups designated as 'primitives', who need to be protected and especially provided for. The small size of the Jarwa population and their pursuit of hunting and foraging made them unique compared to other tribal cultures of the Indian subcontinent, hence the term *adim* ('primitive') was a prominent component. The then prime minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, saw this program for the 'primitive' as a special priority in relation to the process of modernization of the islands. The role of AAJVS was to oversee a number of measures and processes with the stated objectives being: 1. to protect health and prevent extinction of primitive tribal groups; 2. to promote economic and social development; 3. to take a comprehensive view of the problems faced by primitives and selectively promote national programs for their development; and 4. to develop measures for the protection of the economic and social environment essential to their survival and growth (Krishnatry 1976:25). The construction of the Jarwas as a 'primitive tribe' was seen as an important way of dealing with the problem generated by the 1956 Regulation of Aboriginal Protection Act (AAJVS 1977).

From colonial days on into the post-independence period of the Andamans, AAJVS interacted with Jarwas. AAJVS continued contacting Jarwas in a controlled ritual way (Pandya 1999). The contact party, consisting of government officers, anthropologists from Survey of India, medical experts, statisticians, administration photographers, and occasionally specially invited guests, was allowed to visit the Jarwa territory with boatloads of gifts. Every third month, at a predetermined location on the western coast, gifts of coconuts, metal implements, pieces of red cloth, and bananas were dropped or distributed. This quick haphazard 'contact work' staged by diverse conflicting government authorities was regarded as a first step in establishing friendly relations. In spite of growing unrest among the settlers around the eastern side of the Jarwa reserve territory, contact expeditions continued on the western coast. The unrest was because the small settlements had experienced raids by groups of Jarwa, who came out of the forest, collected coconuts and metal utensils, and destroyed the settlers' gardens. The items collected by the Jarwas were the same items provided as gifts by the contact parties as part of the friendly contact event (Pandya 1999). People and livestock were often killed in Jarwa attacks. The government compensates the loss of any life monetarily; today about \$700 is paid out for each individual killed by Jarwas. In spite of the rules and authority of the local Bush Police, who try to keep the settlers and the Jarwas separate, the number of illegal intruders and poachers within and around Jarwa territory kept increasing. Villagers believed that Jarwas came to their settlements and destroyed the area driven by a shortage of food in the shrinking forests. Jarwas have become addicted to commodi-

ties and food items introduced to them through contact expeditions.⁷ The growing feeling in government circles was that Jarwas were desperate and destitute, and so it was out of pity and mercy that their incorporation into mainstream society was to be facilitated.

From 1947 to 1963 there were no less than 46 violent encounters with Jarwas, in which mostly non-tribal settlers were killed (*Census of India* 1971: 121-4). The administration felt that the only way to conciliate the Jarwas was to capture them in large numbers, tame them, and then send them back as 'messengers of peace' (*Census of India* 1971:104). In a way, this policy of pacification and giving gifts to transform the Jarwas shows a continuity between the colonial policy (Portman 1899) and the island's post-independence administration (Mathur 1968:307, 1985). Since 1960, the practice of gift-giving was stepped up, and whenever possible, Jarwas were captured around villages of Middle Andaman and brought over to Port Blair by the Bush Police. Jarwa individuals were provided with abundant gifts and dropped back at the site of their capture (Singh 1978:300-1). The operation was managed by AAJVS and the superintendent anthropologist at the Port Blair Anthropological Survey office. Through the re-instituted policy of gift giving, the Jarwas were 'induced to appreciate and accept a policy of coexistence' (Pandit 1985:123). Sounding strangely like the nineteenth-century British administrators, S. Sarkar, an anthropologist with the Anthropology Survey office at Port Blair, said: 'the people (Jarwas) appear very timid and it seems not unlikely that if they are approached frequently with presents, they will become friendly of their own accord' (S. Sarkar 1962:672).

By 1988 A.T. Road construction was completed, but it had a history of hostile reactions from Jarwas as well as settlers, much like in the colonial past when attempts to make pathways through the forest were given up due to Jarwa hostility and waterways were preferred over forest roads. Records since 1979 indicate that the frequency of hostile Jarwa attacks increased each year. On average, about two dozen non-tribal forest workers and construction labourers were killed within the 765 km² of Jarwa reserve every year. In order to deal with this growing problem, traffic on the road was controlled, limited, and provided protection by special 'Bush Police'.

Since the completion of the Andaman Trunk Road, it has been possible for people and commercial traffic to travel by road up to Mayabunder in North Andaman. After a bus enters the Ferargunj district immediately north of the Port Blair region, it stops at Jhirkatang Number Two Checkpost. This

⁷ During fieldwork in 1998, one of the village council members from Tirur expressed the following sentiments to me: 'We pay taxes! We work and cast our votes – the government should work for us, not protect the "primitive" (*jungle*); they need to be made into productive citizens of the nation – like the other tribes they should be educated and made to clear the bush; teach them to wear clothes, cultivate crops, settle down, and live in peace with all other settlers.'

is a compulsory stop, but usually nobody gets off. Instead, an armed escort from the Bush Police under the Andaman Nicobar Police Force authority is assigned to travel with the bus. In some buses, the glass windows in the front are reinforced with wire netting. The driver shows his permit and enters the required information in a log book and, after checking that all the windows are shut, ensures the guard gets a front seat and is comfortably installed. The guard gives an all-clear sign, and the bus moves slowly forward and waits for a barrier to rise. A sign states that one is entering the Jarwa reserve forest. Drivers of vehicles are expected to refrain from sounding their horns loudly. This is to ensure the Jarwas can continue hunting in the forest without the sound of horns disturbing their tracking. Buses are still restricted from travelling at night or without a Bush Police escort. This escort is provided in the belief that the noise of gunfire will scare Jarwas away, should Jarwa attack the bus or try to stop it. In the past, there have been incidents when Jarwas tried to stop the bus and other vehicles by shooting arrows at the windscreen.

Ever since the construction of the A.T. Road, incidents of surprise attacks by Jarwas on non-tribal people and traffic passing through have been on the increase (J. Sarkar 1990). Settlers started expressing their frustration through criticism of the administration's unsuccessful policy towards Jarwas. Villagers frequently presented questions like 'Why should a heavy cost be paid to provide gifts, with some people having the privilege to visit and have a good time with the primitives?' to the member of parliament who represented the Andamans in national parliament. Settlers questioned the real gain of the policy of protecting Jarwas. Occurrences of hostility on the eastern side, associated with the forest road, kept increasing, and on the western coast, contact frequency kept decreasing. Villagers felt that it would be better to incorporate Jarwas into the mainstream of society. NGOs and pro-environmentalists were keen on imposing a policy of 'no contact' with the primitive tribes. This politicization and awareness led to a situation with some of the settlers near the Jarwa territory starting their own illegal tourist businesses, taking tourists to see the Jarwas, and enticing them with gifts.

The Jarwa population was no longer a force to contend with, but simply a nuisance. Within local politics and administration, the non-tribal people are significant because they cast votes. The naked, primitive tribals would never come out of the forest with their baskets and bows and arrows to line up at voting booths. In the view of non-tribals on the island, AAJVS became a corrupt organization, over-funded by the central government to conduct 'exotic' picnic trips in the name of contacting the hostile Jarwas. Giving them gifts was not accomplishing anything, but making them dependent. They felt that Jarwas should be transformed into ex-primitives, *sudhrey junglee*, from foragers to productive citizens of the state. The forest should be utilized better. By 1996 the Jarwa restricted area had become not only a place for admin-

istration-sponsored officials to visit in the name of 'Jarwa expeditions and friendly contacts', but also a destination for many approaching via the road through protected tribal territory.

By the 1990s, an increasing number of visitors as well as settlers had become interconnected by the road, effectively creating a 'work of the imagination' (Appadurai 1996:3) within Andamanese culture. The road facilitated the reconstruction and mediation of more visible Jarwas. As Jarwas could now be seen on the roadside, those visitors and settlers who had only imagined Jarwas could now use the road to visualize the actual Jarwa. With the increase in visitors and settlers utilizing the road and encountering Jarwas, transformation of Jarwa culture itself was inevitable. Primitives were no longer represented as hostile, but seen rather as only attacking the settlement because they faced food and water shortages in the traditionally designated forest. The public sphere, in which Jarwas were restricted to a reserved territory, rapidly expanded to contacts with those outside the reserve, along the roadside. The imagined Jarwa and the Jarwa images now had 'its own life' for people and authority (Durkheim 1933:79-80). The administration was no longer the only essential and silent agent of important social change and modernization. Primitive Jarwas were also dependent on continuing gifts supplied by non-administrative contacts. This set the stage for encounters in which the line of distinction between primitive and ex-primitive Jarwa became blurred. The notion of modernization, while protecting primitive Jarwas, was now counter-posed. People on the islands were demanding the modernization of the protected primitive, as the category of 'once-were-primitives' or 'ex-primitives' came to be called. Settlers, as well as some administrators and tourists, were keen to see the Jarwas brought into the main fold of society and made to fit into their collective imagination of ex-primitive, who had become non-foraging, disciplined, decipherable, and controllable. As the non-tribal became a 'community of sentiments' (Anderson 1983) brought together to express their own notion of modernity, Jarwas also started to participate in the collective imagination. They started to represent themselves as primitives in order to gain the sentimental receiving of 'aid and benefit', but also presented themselves as ex-primitives to continue receiving sentimental attention from the administration.

Recent events and cultural reconstruction of the road in the forest

Since 1997, Jarwas can be seen on the roadside near the Kadamtalla and Baratang region wearing sunglasses and shirts, along with every other item of traditional attire including body paint, baskets, and bows and arrows. In the late morning of 31 October 1997 about 25 Jarwas 'came out' of the forest

with the full intention of contact rather than confrontation, much like the friendly contact organized and structured in the past by the Indian administration. The Jarwas, for all practical purposes, were visiting the Uttara Jetty at Middle Strait to check out the scene, the people, and the goods at the market. The significance of the Jarwas coming out, especially near Uttara Jetty at Middle Point, is evident from the records kept at AAJVS headquarters in Port Blair. These records are maintained, because AAJVS has to pay the local administration for expenses incurred when Jarwas visit the Kadamtalla region and encounter bus passengers. Individual Jarwas, for instance a certain Enmey, have succeeded in conducting fellow Jarwas to the outside world as tourists. In 1996, Enmey was brought to Port Blair hospital as a patient. Enmey's five-month stay at the hospital was significant in relations between Jarwas and non-tribals. Enmey learned the outsider's language, and saw the world as presented by the hospital and other concerned agencies. Enmey was seduced and bedazzled by all that the outside world could offer. Loaded with new experiences and capabilities, Enmey became an individual with a certain degree of influence on both non-tribal authorities and a certain section of Jarwas. Since October 1997, Enmey has conducted many trips involving other Jarwas coming to the roadside and carrying on to Port Blair. Enmey was perceived as being capable of bringing the worlds of non-Jarwas and Jarwas together. In a way, Enmey's structure of events pertaining to his treatment in Port Blair has constituted and structured the history of contact as practised by Jarwas.

Jarwas who come to the road adorn themselves with ornaments made from the forest's plant material as well as from material given or discarded by non-tribal people. They wait for the bus loaded with passengers or vehicles carrying tourists. Jarwas come out from the roadside bushes and block the traffic. As the vehicles come to a stop, curious tourists hand out items such as food and clothing to Jarwas and start photographing them. Instead of the old exclusive controlled event of contact with Jarwas by outsiders, Jarwas themselves have now taken the initiative of contacting outsiders. For the bus passengers, the whole episode is a show that lets them feel good about themselves as occupants of the island and all they do for the island's progress on the road to modernization. Shopkeepers have set up small trinket and food stands where bus passengers wait for the connecting boat ride to cross the Middle Strait between South Andaman and Middle Andaman. People spend money at these shops to buy things for the Jarwas. Over the last three years, this practice has become so institutionalized that shopkeepers have in fact trained Jarwas in a new form of foraging. The Jarwas carefully bring back whatever the passengers give to them, to deposit with the shopkeepers. On occasion, Jarwas point out to passengers what they want from the shops

and get them to pay for it. In the course of the day, the same things are sold repeatedly to different passengers.⁸

Of course, all this is a problematic situation, and AAJVS has now posted workers at strategic points to minimize the chaos. Prominently displayed large signboards stipulate that travellers on the road should not stop or interact with Jarwas in any way. In spite of all the efforts, brief halts at the roadside are inevitable, and brief interaction between the passers-by and Jarwa forest residents persists. Jarwas and outsiders communicate in pidgin Hindi.

In the last three years, Jarwas have become so dependent on this new roadside lifestyle that temporary shelters have been set up close to the roadside. For the traditionally translocating Jarwas, the road and the traffic have become a much more reliable resource area to gather from. This is not a simple situation of negative consequences induced by changes. In fact, as foragers, Jarwas have been subject to rapid changes since early colonial occupation of the islands (Mouat 1863; Portman 1899; Radcliffe-Brown 1964: 10-9; Ritchie 1787). Historically Jarwas have been pushed consistently by the expanding settlements around them. However, for Jarwas today it is not an issue of resistance to what they confront in the form of the A.T. Road, nor are they insisting on autonomy and human rights. Jarwas have become capable of deciphering and comprehending the changing situations, brought about by the political economy and their own visibility, to align with the imagination and image of the primitive. Jarwas now embody and exhibit the capacity to visualize the image the outsiders have visualized for them. What Jarwas present, and what visitors represent them as, are both due to the road.

Jarwas have realized that visitors want to see them in a particular mode. Jarwas play up to the expected image by coming out with all their fierceness, as if they were attacking with their cutting blades as well as demanding generosity from passers-by. So the hostile image of the primitive is sustained by Jarwas in the ritual of roadside contact. In a way, the road transcends the restricted territory of the western coast. This has created a rapidly transforming, de-territorialized viewing platform of power within the forest. In a way this is no different from Ritchie's (1787) account of how, in 1771, the Jarwas demanded metal from the sailors on the Andaman coasts. The administration has also become used to the visibility of Jarwas at these roadside points. Often groups of Jarwas come out and block the road, demanding that vehicle or bus transport be arranged to drop them off at the place they desire, for

⁸ Unlike bus passengers, most tourists who want to see Jarwas pay about \$150 to gain permits that allow them to travel all the way by car. Nevertheless, the permit to go to Kadamtalla is falsely procured to bring the tourists up to the point where Jarwas interact with bus passengers. After a two-and-a-half-hour ride on the rough A.T. Road, the tourists get a quick glimpse of Jarwas by the roadside.

whatever reason.⁹

As a result of the rapidly increasing roadside contact, between 27 September and 15 October 1999, 90 Jarwas were brought to Port Blair following an outbreak of measles, an epidemic attributed to their weak immune systems (see also Radcliffe-Brown 1964:17).

Utilizing the road and contact situation, Jarwas frequently visit Port Blair as tourists and return to the forest. At the hospital, their demands are promptly met. Jarwas stay in the public hospital's special ward with attendants to look after them. Outside the ward people stand around in order to see the Jarwas in their colourful clothes and caps singing old Hindi film songs, 'If we are dark skinned so what? We have a loving heart yearning for you and none other!' Spectators feel delighted by the fact that they have played an important role in 'taming' the 'wild and hostile primitive savage'. They have finally made Jarwas into disciplined, calm ex-primitives. Often the groups are accompanied by individuals who have been to Port Blair in the past for medical care. Often these individuals are the central organizers of roadside contacts and play the role of 'Jarwa tourist guide'.

The above-mentioned Enmey who was detained in Port Blair hospital for five months is an individual who has frequently brought other Jarwas out of the forest into Port Blair. Therefore, I asked Enmey and his close associates, who have spent considerable time in Port Blair and have conducted roadside contacts, 'What attracted Jarwas to the road and to Port Blair?' For Jarwas the hospital, the road to the hospital, the trees in the forest, the road in the forest, and all the interconnecting paths were constantly referred to as trees (*pepeyh*) of different places. According to Jarwas the road is a *pepeyh*, a term that can also mean a tree. They elaborated further:

By following trees one finds different places full of honey, fruits, home, and pigs in different places. By climbing a tree, you can also see different birds, lizards, snakes, and different places. Following the road is just like the tree leads to one finding new things – like food and metal – and shows us places like Port Blair. By coming to Port Blair we get things at the hospital, just like by climbing up the tree we find the irritating fly but we also find the honeycombs. In Port Blair we see you and become like you; just like those who gather around to see us. If we try to be like you then we will be left to see freely and find more things. Why not come to Port Blair, we always get something!

⁹ This has become a major administrative problem, as the settlers around the Jarwa reserve often complain that because of a shortage of 'food supplied to the Jarwas by the government, they attack the settlers' plantations for plantains and other items'. In fact, the reaction was so intense that on 19 December 1999, the settlers decided to stop all traffic passing on the A.T. Road as a protest. They wanted the administration at Port Blair to pacify the Jarwas near Kadamtalla immediately.

Figure 1. 'Forest like a huge tree with branches, including the branch with bus on it and different places with honeycombs and pigs, huts and Jarwas'

Jarwas occasionally wander out into the markets of Port Blair, but by virtue of still being 'primitive', they are exempted from paying money for goods. This makes Jarwas special in Port Blair, as a source of amazement and a resource to exploit. For the locals in the markets, Jarwas are 'magicians who trick government and economy'.

Interconnecting places and pathways are conceptualized like following the branches and the trunk of a huge tree. The hospital is a place where the authorities come together, to transform the Jarwas: a transformation desired by both Jarwas and non-Jarwas. When asked for clarification of the word *pepeyh* (used frequently for tree and road)¹⁰ Enmey explained: 'by climbing up a tree different things can be seen and gained, so by the road to Port Blair and hospital we gain different things!' This notion of the Jarwas, in which tree and road both are places to find different things, is concretized further in the way Enmey drew his vision of the forest and Port Blair. The drawings were made at Port Blair in December 1999 (Figures 1 and 2). Enmey's bird's-

¹⁰ According to classic ethnographic accounts, in many of the tribal dialects the word for cane is *penjhey*, which also stands for rainbow. It is believed that a large cane connects this world with the world of spirits, and dead ancestors stand on it to become spirits. After they have been transformed, and move over to the other world, the cane 'bridge' becomes light and visible in all its colours.

Figure 2. 'Port Blair and hospital with different rooms connected by different branches, some have fans and bulbs, some have only doctors and windows and beds to be found!'

eye perspective depicts the forest and Port Blair as large trees with branches as roads and pathways. Things happen or are found in different places.

Over a period, Jarwas have changed in their response pattern and interaction with the outside world. Perhaps the world around the Jarwas has transformed them, as was envisioned. Jarwas are now participating in a multi-locale ethnographic presence (Clifford 1997; Marcus 1995), and deal with moving in between the local and imposed global world-view. Years of increasing interaction between Jarwas and the outside world have resulted in a recognizable cultural process, a formation of hybrid (Bhabha 1994) relations, brought about by the encounters between Jarwas and the outside world – all made possible by the A.T. Road to modernity.

Contemporary context and emerging questions

On 28 December 1999, a group of 26 Jarwas was discharged from Port Blair hospital. Under AAJVS supervision they were to be taken back to the roadside residence at R K Nallah (Middle Strait) and I accompanied them. The

Jarwas were provided with new clothes, farewell gifts, iron implements, water bottles, sunglasses, oral tonics, and ointments to apply. A weight record was taken of each individual. Colourfully clothed Jarwas were the sight the teary-eyed medical staff bid farewell to, and the Port Blair residents and tourists at the hospital stood gawking and photographing. After the three-hour ride, the Jarwas got off, and the huge load of plantains and coconuts provided by AAJVS was unloaded. At the drop-off point, a group of about twenty Jarwas in their traditional attire came out to receive the returning group. Immediately the returning group distributed some of the gifts they had brought with them. All the food items were carried to the nearby campground and stashed up for communal consumption. Individuals from the returning group went to separate shelters arranged around a campground and removed all the clothing they had on. The Port Blair identity was removed and hung on the shrubs and undergrowth. Individuals made sure new possessions were not mixed up. Newly acquired body ornaments were retained, and wearing just a waistband, Jarwas came down to the edge of the road and waited for the next convoy of vehicles to come by.

When the Jarwas return to the forest from Port Blair, it is very clear to them that they are now in a different place. Jarwas change and deconstruct the image of self to reconstruct themselves as primitives in the forest, particularly for the people who use the road. The roadside is a location where Jarwas are not expected to be seen by outsiders as Jarwas who have just returned from Port Blair. Instead, they must be seen as primitives. This reverting from ex-primitives to primitives at the roadside makes it easier for Jarwas to gather items from bus passengers and tourists. In a way, Jarwas practise a new form of gathering, both at the roadside and in Port Blair. They are conscious of the fact that if they appear as they are supposed to be or imagined at different locations, signifying primitive and ex-primitives, this all works to their advantage. They perpetuate the process of being recipients of material goods, which would, ideally, change them into what they should become in the modernization process. Some younger Jarwas who frequently accompany Enmey describe this transformation from being not primitive to primitive as follows: 'In Port Blair we need to look like you and it works! But this is the forest and the road has brought you all near to us so we should be here, in the forest, as we always are in the forest!'

This contemporary changing representation has an interesting parallel in history. We have images from colonial times of Jarwas who were dressed up while they were with the colonial administrators (Ball 1874), even though there was great apprehension about how to treat or deal with the Jarwas' fearsome and unpredictable nature (Man 1883:92).

Visits to Port Blair and encounters at the roadside are not about a history of uncertainty of being in one or the other place of experience. It is now an

historical outcome of reconciling and realigning local tensions, involving Jarwas and outsiders in the process of modernization created by the road.

Jarwas have configured the meaning of the road for themselves. But the administration now thinks that the waterways are cheaper than the road and that they could prevent the rapid loss of Jarwa culture and natural resources, which was triggered by the road built to usher in modernity. The opinion on the island is growing that Jarwas should be protected from the rapid transformation and corruption of exploitative modern ways. In fact, in mid-1999 the Andaman administration released findings of the Banerjee commission report. According to the report, appropriate policy and procedures are in place for contacting and dealing with Jarwas. The report concludes by stating that: 'We think since Jarwa are part of nature, let them remain there so long they can. We should not be hurried to bring them with the main stream of life (Banerjee 1999:127)'. 'It would perhaps be appropriate if the Jarwas are allowed to grow in due course of time. The administration should not take any hasty, ill-conceived program that may be counter-productive and would have an effect on the self-reliance and culture of the primitive Jarwas.' (Banerjee 1999:33 [v].)

However, a contradiction stems from the fact that the report outlines how the Department of Horticulture, Fisheries and Animal Husbandry is going to introduce forms of plants and animal life in the forest so that Jarwas can gather and hunt them in the future. The Construction Department is to build huts within the reserve territory where the government agency and Jarwas can meet.

The visibility of Jarwas articulates not only settlers' collective action; individual feelings also effervesce. In July 1999, in a case filed against the administration, Ms. Ganguly, a lawyer on the Andaman Islands, asked what the administration was doing to help the Jarwas settle down. She also asked why Jarwas were begging on the roadside, something Ms. Ganguly had seen herself while passing over the A.T. Road. The case *Ganguly vs. the Union of India* quickly gained international attention.¹¹ It was of particular concern to organizations like Cultural Survival,¹² and generated various points and counterpoints across international boundaries. On 9 April 2001 the Calcutta High Court at Port Blair instructed the government to look into the situation of the Jarwas and the road and to see how the impact of the road can be reduced. Now the issue is how the road can be stopped from functioning. It may be a good idea, but Jarwas use the road much like other resources in the forest.

¹¹ *Ganguly vs. the Union of India*, W, P No. 48, under Article 226 of the constitution of India (entered in the High Court of Calcutta-Jurisdiction Circuit Bench at Port Blair).

¹² See <http://www.survival.org.uk/newandamanuab.htm>, <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/cfhr/ljarl.htm>, and <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/cfnr/rptjara.htm>.

The plastic bags found by the roadside today are more practical than woven cane baskets. Free industrial-market food from outside is easier to get than food hunted and gathered in the shrinking forest. Jarwa and non-tribal interaction has mutually reinforced the process of an oscillation between notions of primitive and ex-primitive. Will the Jarwas be able to survive without the resources in the forest that have become available because of the road?

Currently, with the tourists on the A.T. Road and Jarwas waiting for the traffic, modernization on the island is a reality for all. Because of the road, Jarwas are now visible to all. Jarwas perform their presence at places connected by the road to reify the idea of progress, protection, and development. Visitors and residents of the island have their own point of view on what Jarwas now appear to be. The general feeling among non-tribal outsiders is that Jarwas in the forest are unable to satisfy their hunger within the forest, and so need to join mainstream society outside the forest. The construction of the A.T. Road through the forest was the start of this transformation, and today roadside contacts have taken the shape of a dialogue between those who visualized 'primitive' and those who imagined modernity. Jarwas have now translated for themselves the non-tribal idea of primitive. The past representation of the primitive Jarwa, held by non-tribals, is now communicated back to non-tribal residents by Jarwas. For Jarwas, the road and the traffic have made the construction of new meanings possible. In the non-tribal essentialist view, this Jarwa accomplishment is a painful blow to the very image of the primitive. Politicians now want Jarwas' 'purity' to be protected further; they want the administration to contain and control the 'coming out' process.¹³ Borders were created for the protection of Jarwas and non-tribals. However, along with the borders, contact zones were created like the shoreline and the Andaman Trunk Road. Imposed contact with Jarwas created a homogenized image of 'primitive', to be comprehended and protected from the rapid forces of acculturation.

Out of the road, which was a symbol only of and for non-tribals, Jarwas have constructed a meaningful practice for themselves. Today roads have become part of the Jarwa world-view, while outsiders now question it and wonder if the A.T. Road is a wrong imposition on Jarwas and their space. Roads connect places but they are also placed in a space and have the capacity to occupy a place in the world-view and history of any social group. Borders once created for the protection of Jarwas and non-tribals also establish contact zones. Boundaries have collapsed, and created the A.T. Road as the very location for perpetuating imagination of primitive and ex-primitive. The roadside is now a real situation that connects series of displacements and

¹³ <http://www.survival.org.uk/jarwa.htm>

dislocations in between the forest reserve and Port Blair. The road has made the primitive Jarwa visible to bus passengers and tourists. The same road has made the Jarwa the modernized ex-primitive visible in Port Blair. How Jarwas existed and how they should exist, both imagined, have now become relatively fluid images in present times. Today, the road through the forest reserve and Port Blair are no longer just places or locations of simple primitive nativism or tourist naiveté. They are new scenes of contact ritual.

References

- AAJVS [Andaman Adim Jan Jati Vikas Samiti]
1977 *Retrieval from precipice*. Port Blair: AAJVS.
- Anderson, Benedict
1983 *Imagined communities; Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Anderson, Robert, and Huber, Walter
1988 *The hour of the fox; Tropical forests, the World Bank and indigenous people in Central India*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun
1996 *Modernity at large; Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Arnold, David, and Ramachandra Guha, (eds)
1995 *Nature, culture, imperialism; Essays on the environmental history of South Asia*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Awaradi, S.
1990 *Master plan 1991-2021 for welfare of primitive tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands*. Port Blair: Andaman Nicobar Administration.
- Ball, V.
1874 'A visit to the Andaman home', *Indian Antiquary* 2:171-3.
- Banerjee, A.
1999 *Report on the problems faced by the Jarwas*. Port Blair: Andaman Administration.
- Bhabha, Homi K.
1994 *The location of culture*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Census of India
1971 *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Part XIII-A&B*. Port Blair: Director of Census Operations.
- Clifford, James
1997 *Routes; Travel and translation in the late twentieth century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dentan, Robert Knox, Kirk Endicott, Alberto G. Gomes
1997 *Malaysia and the 'original people'; A case study of the impact of development on indigenous peoples*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

- Durkheim, Emile
1933 *The division of labor in society* [translation of *De la division du travail social* (original 1893)]. New York: Macmillan.
- Eder, James F.
1987 *On the road to tribal extinction; Depopulation, deculturation, and adaptive well-being among the Balak of the Philippines*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foucault, Michel
1986 'Of other spaces', *Diacritics* 16-1:22-7.
- Gadgil, Madhav, and Ramachandra Guha
1992 *This fissured land; An ecological history of India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Handbook*
1991 *Handbook on Andaman District 1991*. Port Blair: State Statistical Bureau, Secretariat.
- Haughton, J.C.
1861 'Papers relating to the Aborigines of Andaman Islands', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 30:251-8.
- Krishnatry, S. (ed.)
1976 *The Prime Minister and the Andaman Nicobar Archipelago*. Port Blair: Government Press.
- Majumdar, R. C.
1975 *Penal settlement in Andamans*. New Delhi: Ministry of Education and Social Welfare.
- Man, E. H.
1883 'On the Andaman Islands and their inhabitants', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 12:69-116.
- Marcus, G.
1995 'Ethnography in/of the world system; The emergence of multi-sited ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24:95-117.
- Mathur, L.P.
1968 *History of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, 1756-1966*. Delhi: Sterling.
1985 *Kala Pani; History of Andamans and Nicobar Islands with a study of India's freedom struggle*. Delhi: Sterling.
- Mouat, Frederick J.
1863 *Adventures and researches among the Andaman Islanders*. London: Hurst and Blackett.
- Pandit, T.N.
1985 'The tribal and non-tribal in Andaman Islands; A historical perspective', *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society*. 20:111-31.
- Pandya, Vishvajit
1989 'Movement and space; Andamanese cartography', *American Ethnologist* 17:775-97.
1997 'Sacrifice and escape as counter-hegemonic rituals; A structural essay on an aspect of Andamanese history', *Journal of Social Analysis* 41-2: 66-98.

- 1999 'Contact or not to contact; Questions about Jarwas of Andaman Islands', *Cultural Survival Quarterly* Winter:59-65.
- 2000 'Making of the Other; Vignettes of violence in Andamanese culture', *Anthropological Critique* 20:359-91.
- Portman, M.V.
1899 *A history of our relations with the Andamanese; Compiled from histories and travels, and from the records of the government of India*. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A.R.
1964 *The Andaman Islanders*. New York: Free Press. [First impression 1922.]
- Ritchie, J.
1787 *A hydrological journal of a cursory survey of the coasts and islands in the Bay of Bengal by Cpy. Jon. Ritchie 1770 and 1771* [second edition]. London: Dalrymple.
- Sarkar, J.
1990 *The Jarwa*. Calcutta: Seagull Books.
- Sarkar, S.S.
1962 'The Jarwa of the Andaman Islands', *Anthropos* 57:670-7.
- Sharma, S.
1981 *Brief resume of the activities of the AAJVS*. Port Blair: Government Press.
- Singh, N. Iqbal
1978 *The Andaman story*. New Delhi: Vikas.
- Temple, R.
1903 *Census of India*. Vol. 13(3). Calcutta: Government of India Publications.
- Vidyarthi L.
1976 'Development plans of the tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands; An action oriented report', *Journal of Social Research* 19-2:74-85.