

their habitat. Prior to 1900, the Jarawas were known to occupy the interior areas of the South Andaman Island as well as parts of the Rutland Island. The group on Rutland Island were resisting contact during the British era and were soon pushed to extinction before more could be learnt about them. British punitive expeditions carried out during 1902 discovered many Jarawa camps on both coasts of South Andaman, especially at Pochang, Puttatang, Jatang and at places near Port Campbell. The expeditions traversed the forests to reach the west coast from the east and came upon many old and new camps of the Jarawas, most of which were destroyed to teach the people a lesson. An area six miles west of Port Meadows near the Puttatang Creek was soon identified to be one of the main Jarawa haunts and camping grounds. It can very well be understood that the Jarawa resistance to the construction of the road was primarily due to its passing directly through their territory and disturbing their way of life. To add fuel to fire, the development of the road through South and Middle Andaman Islands also brought about forestry operations further aggravating the condition of the Jarawas and destroying their forests. One notification issued by the Chief Commissioner of the Islands in 1957 virtually declared the whole of the northern part of the South Andaman Island as a Tribal Reserve. The same authority later amended the notification in July 1979 to exclude areas east of the Andaman Trunk Road from the Tribal Reserve and opened the forest to logging as well as for construction of the road. The eastern portion of forest along the trunk road beyond Jirkatang was felled in suitable areas and regenerated with commercial species of timber including plantations of padauk, teak, didu and other wood species. This had definitely caused great distress to the Jarawas as it has ruined their former hunting grounds and reduced the diversity of food species due to raising of timber plantations, extraction and hunting by non-tribals etc. The forestry operations included setting up of temporary camps at Pochang, Katora, Poona Nallah, Puttatang and even a forest depot at Port Meadows. Forestry operations were finally stalled after March 1996 when about 60 to 70 Jarawas ambushed extraction workers of the Forest Department from three sides, killing two and injuring three of them. Till date the Puttatang camp has not been abandoned, a skeletal staff has been kept there to maintain a token presence.

Many incidents of conflict had taken place on the road since the 1970s and increased over the years till 1998, when the situation changed. The number of Jarawas killed during the road construction will never be learnt, be it by electrocu-

tion, bullets or other means. Attacks on labourers, Bush Police, trucks and buses were all resistive of the intrusion into their lives and territory, which today is seemingly complete. The road on the other hand in recent times has been the camping ground of some Jarawas and also points of official and non-official contacts. Disease and illness are just beginning to surface like the recent epidemic of measles*. In September 1999, there was an outbreak of epidemic among the Jarawas of South and Middle Andamans, which was identified as measles. The diagnosis of the measles had only been done on the basis of clinical symptoms and if the process continues, will probably end with the extinction of the people. Usually women and children are seen on the road or on jetties with most men out hunting or gathering food; or otherwise admitted in the hospital. Of the whole group, it is the children who seemingly are enjoying the situation, as it is novel and they probably are unaware of the situation of enmity that existed before. They mix with all and sundry exposing themselves to illnesses and cultural practices that they may well find difficult to cope with in future. It is thus important for us to use alternate routes of transportation as the road poses the severest threat today to the existence of the Jarawas in many ways.

Water transport is accepted to be the cheapest mode of transport world over. Inter-island communication in all archipelagos in the world is by ships and boats. While the traditional islanders like the Nicobarese and the Onges are excellent navigators and seafarers, the immigrant population came here with a continental mind-set and even after settling here permanently, has retained it. To make the economy of the region viable and self-sustaining, it is essential that we learn to be seafarers and look to the sea for our major resource gathering activities.

A direct boat to Rangat or Mayabunder from Port Blair actually takes less time than the bus. It also consumes less fuel per passenger/per ton of cargo and does not need a road to be maintained at a very high cost, both financial and environmental, and is subjected to fewer accidents.

The ships and boats available with the island administration today are more than sufficient to take care of the present day traffic. Twenty-four more passenger ships/boats are also expected to join the fleet shortly. Each boat can comfortably

* In September 1999, there was an outbreak of epidemic among the Jarawas of South Andamans, which was identified as measles. The diagnosis of measles had only been done on the basis of clinical symptoms.