THE VISIT

We visited Andaman and Nicobar Islands from May 12 to 15, 2006. Our visit covered the Jarawa. We also sought and spoke to another "mainstreamed" tribe, the Great Andamanese. Three months earlier, co-chairperson of the sub-group had visited the Onge settlement in Dugong Creek. Through her experience we were able to look at the Jarawa from the Onge lens as well. During this visit, we met senior officials of Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration, settlers who lived in the vicinity of Jarawa Reserve, and representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions and NGOs working among tribals.

Jaunt with the Jarawa

It was an interesting lesson in contrasts. In one day we experienced two contacts with Jarawa. The first time we saw them was in PHC Tusnabad. They were sitting on hospital beds, clothed in ill-fitting garments of ridiculous colours and shapes, staring vacantly at the visitors. Cut to a different scene. In the natural environment of their "*Chaddha*", the rain forests of South Andamans at Poona Nullah. We saw them, vital and energetic, unencumbered with clothes, holding babies, making hunting implements, celebrating the arrival of a fresh *shikar*. These then were the original inhabitants of the Islands; the scene could have been lifted straight from 100,000 years ago. What lingered in our mind was how proud and happy they looked, unlike the cowering, subaltern scene of the hospital.

Jarawa Survival and the Question of ATR

All the people of Andamans to the last person, want the ATR which connects Port Blair to Mayabunder. These are settlers who are backed by a capable and supportive administration. Everyone has learnt the word 'lifeline' which they use with passion to convince decision makers that it is a matter of their life and death. The present status of ATR is that the Supreme Court order for its closure given in 2002 has still not been complied with by the Administration; they have filed a review petition, which has been admitted by the Court. But three years down the road, and

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