

## 2 Improving visions, troubled landscapes: the legacies of colonial Ferrargunj

---

*Madhumita Mazumdar*

### **Introduction**

Recent historical writing on the Andaman Islands has sought to move beyond the study of the colonial penal settlement and explore the shifting trajectories of the colonial project on the Islands and its ambivalent legacies on the lives of those who were forced to make their homes there.<sup>1</sup> Anthropological writing, on the other hand, has focused more compellingly on the British colonial encounter with the Islands' indigenous peoples. One study has underscored the embedded projects of 'ethnocide' in the colonial encounter, while another has sought to understand the complexity of the colonial encounter by looking at it from the perspective of the Islands' indigenous communities themselves.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars have begun to study the lives of the Islands' migrant communities, many of whom came to the Andamans either as forest labour or as post-Partition refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan, and later from Sri Lanka. There are stories of many others who migrated more freely from the rest of mainland India in search of better livelihoods.<sup>3</sup> In all these connected histories of colonial and post-colonial projects of colonization and development of the

<sup>1</sup> On the penal settlement in the Andaman Islands, see Clare Anderson, *Legible Bodies: Race, Criminality and Colonialism in South Asia* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Clare Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857: Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion* (London: Anthem, 2007), chapter 5; Satadru Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Satadru Sen, *Savagery and Colonialism in the Indian Ocean: Power, Pleasure and the Andaman Islanders* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010); and Aparna Vaidik, *Imperial Andamans: Colonial Encounter and Island History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Sita Venkateswar, *Development and Ethnocide: Colonial Practices in the Andaman Islands* (Copenhagen: IWGA, 2004). Vishvajit Pandya, *In the Forest: Visual and Material Worlds of the Andaman Islanders, 1858–2000* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Swapan Kumar Biswas, *Colonization and Rehabilitation in the Andaman Islands* (New Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, 2009); Sabyasachi Basu Roychowdhury, 'Exiled in the Andamans: The Refugees of East Pakistan', in Pradip Kumar Bose (ed.), *Refugees in West Bengal: Institutional Processes and Contested Identities* (Calcutta: Calcutta Research Group, 2000); and Udit Sen, 'Dissident Memories: Exploring Bengali Refugee Narratives in the Andaman Islands', in Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee (eds.),

Andaman Islands, one finds the workings of a singularly ‘mainland’ imagination. More precisely, perhaps, it is a distinctively settler colonial imagination that derives its ideological legitimacy from a broadly implied notion of improvement. Although never explicitly stated in these terms, arguments and the idea of ‘improvement’ find expression in the myriad ways in which the Islands have been imagined as *terra nullius* or empty space and the radical terms on which its landscape has been shaped, altered and selectively populated. Vishvajit Pandya argues that the idea of *terra nullius* lay at the heart of the colonial imagination of the Islands from its very inception in the eighteenth century. Unlike in other British settler colonies, such as Australia where the doctrine was enshrined in law, the notion of *terra nullius* in the Andaman Islands was subtly and insidiously invoked through survey reports, administrative policies and schemes for colonization and development.<sup>4</sup> This chapter draws upon this argument to put the colonial developmental imaginary that took shape in the interwar years into larger historical perspective.

It argues that after the 1920s, when it was decided to abolish the penal settlement and initiate a free colony, there was a distinctive push towards developing the Islands through a vigorous programme of agricultural extension and a search for suitable colonists. This new colonial agenda became the cornerstone of all subsequent development projects on the Islands and the harbinger of a political, economic and spatial order that redefined the Islands’ social relations forever. This overarching argument frames the broad terms of this chapter, yet it looks more specifically into the shaping of a colonial ‘improving’ vision as it took shape through the policies of Colonel Michael Lloyd Ferrar, Chief Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands between 1923–31. It focuses on the trajectory of Ferrar’s policies for the colonization and development of Islands and the clues it offers in exploring the ideological charge of ‘improvement’ and ‘agrarianism’ in the interwar years. It builds upon both archival and ethnographic resources to understand the legacy of the Ferrar years on the contemporary history of the Islands.

In her explorations of governmentality, development and practices of post-colonial politics in the highlands of Indonesia, Tania Murray Li argues that ‘the will to improve’ embodied a distinctive governmental rationality underpinned by a notion of ‘trusteeship’. ‘Trusteeship’ is

*Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 219–44.

<sup>4</sup> Vishvajit Pandya, ‘In Terra Nullius: The Legacies of Science and Colonialism in the Andaman Islands’, Public Lecture Series, ‘Science, Society and Nature’ (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, 22 May 2013).

defined as ‘the intent which is expressed by one source of agency to develop the capacities of another’. It included programmes to rationalize the use of land, to move populations from place to place, to divide farms from forest and to introduce larger programmes of education and modernization.<sup>5</sup>

The chapter argues that from the mid 1920s it was the ‘will to improve’ and the certitude of ‘trusteeship’ that informed mainland India’s colonial relations with the Andaman Islands and legitimized its contentious interventions in its landscape, history, memory and identity. It argues that the ‘will to improve’ articulated itself in complex and even conflicting ways. It mobilized what Li describes as both calculation and *bricolage*.<sup>6</sup> Its programmes could be planned as well as be contingent. The ‘will to improve’ could be both benign and violent. To govern, as Li quotes Foucault, was to seek not one dogmatic goal ‘but a whole series of specific finalities’.<sup>7</sup> The ‘will to improve’, in other words, included radical interventions on the land on the one hand and the formulation of projects aimed at the settlement, containment and management of populations on the other. It fitted in well with what Satadru Sen describes as a specifically British ‘Indian’ model of settler colonialism (see Chapter 1).

The chapter’s initial focus is on the early 1920s, the period soon after the publication of the Jail Committee’s recommendations and the changes wrought by the decision to close the penal settlement. It explores the political changes on the Islands during this period through the career of Ferrar, who presided over a major change in the Islands’ land regulations. It draws attention to the *darbar* of 1926 wherein Ferrar handed over *sanads* or deeds of occupancy, to more than 2,000 self-supporters (convict ticket-of-leave holders) and free colonists in the hope of inaugurating a new phase of agrarian expansion in the Islands. It then follows Ferrar’s pursuit of an ‘improving’ agenda on the Islands premised on the notion of a ‘redemptive rurality’, understood as the power and reach of a project of agricultural colonization into the moral discourse of the redemption of ‘fallen subjects’ – in the case of the Andamans, the convict population and their descendants.<sup>8</sup> While the chapter follows whatever

<sup>5</sup> Tania Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (Durham NC: Duke, 2007), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Li here invokes the arguments of James C. Scott in *Seeing Like the State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Li, *The Will to Improve*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Ferrar’s ‘improving vision’ invoked a whole range of ideas and sensibilities associated with the agricultural revolution, industrialization and the Age of Reform in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For a discussion of some of these ideas, see Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783–1867* (London: Longman, 1959); Richard Drayton,

remains of the official records of Ferrar's developmental projects on the Islands, it looks more closely and comprehensively at his personal correspondence with his mother during these years. It may be noted, however, that what goes by the name of Ferrar correspondence in the archival collection at the Cambridge South Asian Studies are largely letters from Ferrar to his mother and not his mother's letters to him. The letters constitute a window into the mind of a colonial administrator on the Islands at a critical period of transition. Ferrar's letters to his mother during these years testify to what Ferrar himself described as the five major projects that absorbed his mind: 'colonization, malaria, lumber sales, dredgers and Jarawas'.<sup>9</sup>

The chapter moves on to explore the legacy of the Ferrar years as they played out in the plans for the colonization and development of the Andamans in the aftermath of the Partition and the renewed claims for a deeper penetration of the Islands through an extension of the agrarian frontier. It concludes by suggesting that the pushing of the agrarian frontier, changes to land regulations and the vision of redemptive rurality ushered in by the colonization and development programmes of the 1920s has had enormous implications in shaping ethnic relations on the Islands today. Indeed, the project embodied violence, for both the redrawing of the agrarian landscape and the agenda of colonization legitimized the forced relocation of the indigenous communities of the Islands and the fixing of territories along ethnic lines. The forest and field today constitute not merely two segments of a seamless landscape but operate as historical markers of a colonial developmental agenda marked by violence, segregation and prejudice. The colonial development project, as it took shape in Ferrargunj, was paradigmatic of the making of new spatial configurations whose troubled legacies continue to define the political relations between the Islands and the Indian mainland.

### **The penal colony in transition**

There is little memory, historical or otherwise, of a man who lent his name to the largest *tehsil*, or local administrative unit, in the Andaman Islands. Few in the Islands today remember either Chief Commissioner

*Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the Improvement of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000). Also, see R. A. C. Parker, 'Coke of Norfolk and the Agricultural Revolution', *Economic and Social History Review*, 2, 8 (1955), 155–66; and more recently, Susanna Wade Martins, *Coke of Norfolk, 1754–1842* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 20 November 1926, Ferrar Collection, (small box collection 10), CSAS.



Figure 2.1 Colonel Michael Lloyd Ferrar, Chief Commissioner of the Andaman Islands 1921–33. Ferrar collection, courtesy of Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge.

Ferrar or the history of the village and district that bear his name, Ferrargunj, in South Andaman. This is partly due to the fact that the original inhabitants of the erstwhile Ferrargunj village have been pushed to the margins of the village where they were once settled. Although technically the original inhabitants, the Bhantus live within the administrative bounds of the larger Ferrargunj *tehsil*, and their settlements are no longer identified with the name of Ferrar. The original village named Ferrargunj is now in the possession of Bengali refugee settlers who came to the Islands in 1949 in the aftermath of the Partition of India, most under a refugee rehabilitation scheme meant specifically for those from East Pakistan.<sup>10</sup>

In December 2009, I visited Ramtibai, then in her late eighties and one of the few old timers in her community who remembered not Ferrar, but

<sup>10</sup> Ferrargunj today is the largest *tehsil* of the Andaman Islands. According to the 2001 Census of India, its population was 48,626. Andaman and Nicobar Administration, 'Basic Statistics of Andaman and Nicobar Islands 2010–1', [www.and.nic.in/stats/BasicStatistics/basicstat%20PDF/03%20Demography.pdf](http://www.and.nic.in/stats/BasicStatistics/basicstat%20PDF/03%20Demography.pdf).

a certain Francis Sahib, Chief Officer of the *Mukti Fauj* (the Salvation Army). On prodding her rapidly faltering memory, she told me that Francis Sahib had brought her and several other families from a village in Gorakhpur in the United Provinces to be settled in what she remembers as *kala pani*.<sup>11</sup> She was a very young girl at the time of her arrival in the Andaman Islands, and remembers little of the circumstances that made her family follow the Sahib across the Bay of Bengal.<sup>12</sup> Yet it is in the diffuse memories of Ramtibai's early life in the Islands and Adjutant Sheard of the Salvation Army that there emerge possibilities of locating the links that tie up the story of Ferrar to the histories of the shifting imperatives of the colonial penal settlement, the agenda of agrarian colonization and the making of a contemporary refugee diaspora in the Andamans. For one of the things that Ramtibai remembered clearly about her family's eager acceptance of the arrangements made for their new life in the Andamans was the promise of possessing land. After years of being hounded by the colonial police, and fleeing from village to village, her family was promised land, occupancy rights and material assistance in cultivation, if they accepted settlement in the Andaman Islands under the protection of the Salvation Army. Ramtibai's failing memory could not remember the actual year of their arrival to the Islands, but her insistence on the 'land question' made it clear that her family was brought in as part of a larger scheme of agrarian colonization that was being tentatively worked out by Chief Commissioner Michael Lloyd Ferrar in the years between 1923 and 1926.

The ravages of the Japanese occupation of the Islands (1942–5) and the destruction of the colonial headquarters in Ross Island has meant that virtually nothing remains of Ferrar's papers. Fragments of the record of Ferrar's fairly long tenure have, however, survived in the short biographical pieces and memoirs written by those who either knew him personally or through their families, and by a smaller group of natural historians, who remember Ferrar less for his achievements as colonial administrator and more for his enormous collection of butterflies.<sup>13</sup> The biography of Ferrar as it takes shape in this historical archive reveals an interesting trajectory. Ferrar, we are told, 'was a slightly built man' with a

<sup>11</sup> The 'Francis Sahib' Ramtibai mentions probably referred to Brigadier Francis of the Salvation Army, who came later to the Islands and not exactly at the time Ramtibai seems to suggest. The Bantu settlement in the Andamans in the 1920s, as we know, was undertaken by Edwin H. Sheard of the Salvation Army.

<sup>12</sup> Conversation with Ramtibai, 17 December 2009. Ramtibai died in 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Prashanth Mohanraj and K. Veena Kumar, 'Lt. Colonel M. L. Ferrar: The "Butterfly Mad" Chief Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands', *Current Science*, 87, 10 (2004), 1467–9.

passion for ‘languages and butterflies’.<sup>14</sup> Born in 1876, Ferrar was a contemporary of Winston Churchill at Sandhurst, and joined the Indian Army at the age of twenty. He soon opted for a transfer to the Civil Service and was inducted into the Punjab Commission. During the five years he spent in the army, Ferrar acquired proficiency in Urdu, Persian, Punjabi and Pashto. Thus he earned distinction as a linguist during his early career.<sup>15</sup>

Ferrar won reputation among colonial naturalists as an avid butterfly collector. His collection was hailed not merely for its size, but because of the range of new species he was able to identify during his travels with the army and later in his capacity as a civil administrator in the Punjab. The scale of his collection was said to have grown rapidly during his stint as Chief Commissioner of the Andaman Islands. It was during this period that Ferrar was able to add nearly 4,000 new species to his collection. He travelled extensively along the length and breadth of the Islands and developed a deep understanding of its terrain and topography.<sup>16</sup>

It was perhaps fortuitous that his knowledge of the Andaman landscape intensified precisely at a time when the British penal settlement was poised for a major structural shift. The event that marked this historical conjuncture in the administrative records as well as in the personal files of the Chief Commissioner was the institution of a new policy of settlement on the Islands. This was a response to the recommendations of the Jails Committee that visited the Islands in 1920 and proposed a new land rights regime. Soon after Ferrar’s arrival, the land reform programme acquired momentum. The impact of these reforms, as I will argue later, was felt not just in the Andamans, but far away in a small village in eastern United Provinces, from where Ramtibai along with other Bhandu families set sail in the hope of acquiring land and a new home in the Islands – or what Ramtibai noted as ‘the promise of *zameen*’.<sup>17</sup>

In March 1921, Sir William Vincent, member of the Viceroy’s executive council, proposed the formal abandonment of the penal colony, but gave no clear indications about the future of the Islands. Although the causes for such a decision remain varied and open to debate, the process of implementation, as Taylor Sherman argues in a recent study of this phase of penal liberalization in the Andamans, was halting and uncoordinated.<sup>18</sup> The process was marked by tensions, particularly

<sup>14</sup> Raleigh Treveleyan, *The Golden Oriole: The Two Hundred Year History of an English Family in India* (London: The Long Rider’s Guild Press, 2007), 230–32.

<sup>15</sup> Treveleyan, *The Golden Oriole*. <sup>16</sup> Treveleyan, *The Golden Oriole*.

<sup>17</sup> Conversation with Ramtibai, 17 December 2009.

<sup>18</sup> For details of these new government policies for the Islands, see, Taylor. C. Sherman, ‘From Hell to Paradise? Voluntary Transfer of Convicts to the Andaman Islands,



over conflicting demands of imperial development and punishment. Provincial governments put pressure on penal policies that had little to do with imperial strategies or disciplinary objectives. Sherman argues that the practice of transportation was somewhat anomalous in the 1920s, and there was little ideological justification for the retention of the penal colony. The settlement at Port Blair, she proposes, 'remained in use not because of its exemplary disciplinary regime, but because no compromise could be found between the centre and the provinces which would facilitate the transformation of the settlement into a free colony.'<sup>19</sup>

A two-fold process was contemplated, firstly the evacuation of those convicts who wished to return to India and the construction of a free colony from a nucleus of self-supporters augmented by voluntary convicts from India and Burma. It was part of a pragmatic solution offered in the context of official anxieties over the proposal for the summary abandonment of the penal colony. At the time of the proposed closure of the settlement, the convict population was 11,532, of whom 1,168 were self-supporters. In October 1925, Sir Alexander Muddiman, member of the Executive Council of the Governor General, was sent to review the condition of this population as a sort of preparation for the next stage of colonial policy on the Islands. Muddiman witnessed a vast change in convict demographics. In December 1925, out of a total convict population of 7,740, there were 2,105 self-supporters drawing wages from the government, and 2,272 self-supporters employed in agriculture and other occupations. Moreover, the proportion of self-supporters in the Islands' population had increased dramatically in a period of just five years.<sup>20</sup> This development would have important implications on colonial thinking on agricultural development in the interwar years.

But by the time Ferrar assumed office in 1923, the optimism that framed the Home Department's call for 'voluntary colonization' seemed to have receded considerably. The recourse was to generate conditions for those who were already in the Islands and persuade them to make it their permanent home. It is in the context of this administrative dilemma that the push for a 'free colony' in the Andamans in the 1920s needs to be understood. The idea of forming a free colony on the basis of colonization by the 'unfree' meant that the political initiative of these years had to be redefined, directed and deployed by the state over

1921–40', *Modern Asian Studies*, 43, 2 (2009), 357–68. See also, Vaidik, *Imperial Andamans*, 161–86.

<sup>19</sup> Sherman, 'From Hell to Paradise?', 375.

<sup>20</sup> Sherman, 'From Hell to Paradise?', 375.



multiple sites of intervention. From physical interventions in the landscape to moral investments in patterns of land use, the ideology of the new course of colonization demanded the simultaneous deployment of a whole new range of material and discursive tools of persuasion and control. The disciplinary agenda of colonization, in other words, had to be dispersed more widely and entrenched more deeply into the Island landscape. It is here that the role of Ferrar and the making of Ferrargunj assume historical significance.

Although the idea of abolishing the penal settlement was welcomed by the colonial authorities, Ferrar was clear that the establishment of a free colony required the provision of various incentives to potential settlers. Considerable press was given to debates about settling the Islands with domiciled Europeans and Anglo-Indians, yet it was clear the Government of India was apprehensive of these schemes.<sup>21</sup> The model of colonization it had in mind required a different kind of colonizer. The government said that it would encourage applications from European or Anglo-Indian communities, but also carried a warning that the climate of the Islands was tropical, agriculture would be possible only through hard labour, and so it would not be congenial for those not used to such physical exertion in moist heat.

Ferrar was prepared to take the view that if he failed to bring in genuine settlers, his administration would be inclined to initiate a process of what could be described as 'colonization from within'. To consolidate this model of colonization it was necessary to formulate a new land regime and to encourage the expansion of the self-supporter base. More importantly, it was necessary to persuade well-behaved convict volunteers from the mainland to undergo their sentences in the Islands by creating the conditions for agricultural development and announcing family emigration schemes.

Ferrar presided over the promulgation of the historic Andaman and Nicobar Islands Land Tenure Regulation III of 1926 that conferred security of tenure on small as well as large landholders, and enabled convicts to acquire occupancy rights on release.<sup>22</sup> That he was an enthusiastic votary of the land reforms was clear from the very outset. In a letter to his mother written shortly after the promulgation of the new land regulations, he wrote:

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of these schemes and the political economic argument that informed them, see Vaidik, *Imperial Andamans*, 161–86.

<sup>22</sup> For a full official report on the 'Ferrar durbar', see: *Report of the Administration of the Andamans and Nicobar Islands and the Penal Settlement for 1925–6* (Calcutta: Government of India Publications Branch, 1927), 3–4. A total of 290 *sanaads* or deeds of occupancy were given away on this occasion.

The Government Of India having approved of my land proposals, I yesterday held a durbar, really more an organized public meeting, out [at] Garacharma about six miles from here, to about [a] thousand free and ticket of leave men [self-supporters], moneylenders and local born [convict descended] government servants and delivered a long speech in Urdu which was followed with rapt attention. Also I had handbills distributed with a resume of concessions. They amount to giving everyone occupancy rights over their land and secure incentives to improve their land and houses. I hope good will come of this. It certainly has created a stir but the whole settlement is only about forty odd villages, a potty little show from the agricultural point of view.<sup>23</sup>

In his formal speech delivered at the durbar and attended by a range of economic and political stakeholders in the Islands, Ferrar delineated the advantages of the new regulations. The durbar was a huge congregation of gazetted and commissioned officers, plantation lessees, village heads and prospective tenants. In a speech delivered half in Urdu and half in English, Ferrar began by stating that although the penal settlement would be converted into a free settlement, it was clear that until a sufficient free population had come into being, well-behaved convicts of the casual and accidental class were to be encouraged to volunteer to undergo their sentences in the Andamans and were encouraged to bring their wives and families. All those with wives would have a definite promise of land within five years of their arrival, many of them sooner if convenient for the government. In the meantime, the severe restrictions with regard to land which were necessary formerly but which constituted an insurmountable barrier to agricultural progress would be removed. Two classes that would benefit most by its provisions would be the lessees of plantations, who would obtain a tenure of sixty years, and small tenants, who would obtain occupancy rights on very simple terms. The rates of land revenue on plantation land would be brought in line with those obtained in Burma.<sup>24</sup> In his own words:

It is my sanguine hope that with the security thus obtained coupled with easier land revenue terms would bring in capitalists from outside into these Islands and would induce tenants to develop their holdings and improve their dwellings. This would lead to great improvements in the methods and standards of agriculture and add to wealth and happiness of the King's subjects in Port Blair.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 22 March 1926, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>24</sup> 'Proceedings of the Durbar Held by the Chief Commissioner', 13 March 1926, *Andaman and Nicobar Gazetteer Extraordinary*, No. 3, Port Blair, 18 March 1926, 11–12, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>25</sup> 'Proceedings of the Durbar', Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

Beneath Ferrar's optimism at the durbar, however, there lurked a deep sense of anxiety about the successful outcome of the new regulations. For the problem was not only the availability of labour to work the land on terms of occupancy, but the capacity of the land itself to respond to the demands of agrarian expansion. In a *Memorandum on Agriculture* written soon after the promulgation of the new land regulations, Ferrar reflected on the causes of the limits of agriculture in the Andamans. The Islands, he observed, prior to the founding of the penal settlement in 1858, were covered by a 2,508 square mile area of unbroken tropical forest. After the establishment of the penal settlement in Port Blair in South Andaman, and after almost sixty-eight years of occupation, only 250 square miles were declared developed 'for the use of civilized men'. Adding a more significant observation, he wrote that the early days of the penal settlement agricultural operations were carried out by convict labour. But such convict labour proved to be of uneven use as convicts came from various parts of India with varied aptitudes for agricultural work.<sup>26</sup>

In the following paragraphs, Ferrar documented the initiatives undertaken by Lord Mayo, the Viceroy of India, who had taken up the question of agriculture in the Andamans with a remarkable sense of purpose. This was particularly evident in the several agricultural experiments undertaken during this period. The results of such experimentation were startling. About 520 acres were put under tea, 1,400 under coffee, and about 500 acres under Hevea rubber. Apart from this plantation phase, the settlement gardens also experimented with cultivating a range of tropical fruit and vegetables.<sup>27</sup>

Many of these agricultural experiments were supported by the introduction of new structures of land holding for the convict population. The ticket-of-leave men, who were often employed in these activities, were themselves allowed to hold land as 'tenants at will' of the government. The usual holding was two to five acres of valley land on which the tenant could grow enough paddy and not only subsist but also sell to the government, which bought locally approximately Rs 100,000 worth of agricultural produce per annum. Despite these conditions of land holding much agricultural activity and enterprise occurred in fits and starts. At times the more energetic among the self-supporters would take up hill land in the blocks and plant these with sugarcane, maize and turmeric. After making a degree of profit from such land for three to four years, they would abandon it. In the early years, these abandoned fields

<sup>26</sup> See Ferrar, 'Memorandum on Agriculture', March 1926, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>27</sup> Ferrar, 'Memorandum on Agriculture', CSAS.

would turn to grass, but later on the increasing prevalence of weeds both indigenous and exotic would prevent the formation of grass, leaving the plot almost unsuitable for recovery. Thus all the effort put into the land for the previous three to four years would be rendered useless. Ferrar rationalized the behaviour of these 'enterprising' yet 'unreliable' agriculturalists in terms of the prevailing land rights regime. An improving agriculture was not possible, he believed, within the constraining conditions of a penal colony.<sup>28</sup>

Yet the necessity for safeguarding the interests of the government in a penal settlement made it imperative that no rights adverse to the government of a penal settlement should accrue to any tenant. For Ferrar, therefore, the institution of a new structure of land rights amenable to the disciplinary imperatives of the penal regime had to be the primary precondition for the new programme of colonization. The pre-reform penal system with its crowds of 'bachelor convict cultivators' merely awaiting release and its many restrictions on the free population created what Ferrar saw as 'make believe' settlements. He hoped that with the great change in conditions, visibly improving the status, self-respect and general well being of Port Blair agriculturalists, there would necessarily come an improvement in agriculture. It was this 'improving impulse' that was to drive the agricultural agenda under his tenure and generate a new moral and political aesthetic investment in the Island landscape. His interventions into the Andaman landscape might be interpreted as a new phase in the relocation and moral/productive organization of the Islands' local-born population earlier in the 1910s, described by Clare Anderson in Chapter 5. Both phases drew on knowledge of canal colonization in the Punjab – in Ferrar's case, acquired through his prior membership of the Punjab Commission.<sup>29</sup>

Letters written to his mother during the early months of his arrival in the Islands are replete with references to the richness of the Island landscape. Shortly after he took over as Chief Commissioner he remarked that the settlements and rice fields were far hidden from view, and it was the dense forests that dominated the view from his summer residence at Mount Harriet:

The view from here is wonderful, the harbor and its creeks all running up into the mainland. Outside the mouth of the harbor, Ross Island, half a mile from the

<sup>28</sup> Ferrar, 'Memorandum on Agriculture', CSAS.

<sup>29</sup> William J. Glover, 'Objects, Models, and Exemplary Works: Educating Sentiment in Colonial India', *Journal of Asian Studies* 64, 3 (2005), 539–66; Ian Talbot, 'The Punjab Under Colonialism: Order and Transformation in British India', *Journal of Punjab Studies* 14, 1 (2008), 3–10.

shore. The mainland is all forest and indented with creeks, and beyond again, small islands, the three thousand or so hectares of cultivated areas are invisible from here.<sup>30</sup>

The comment acquires special significance in the context of Ferrar's later interventions in the landscape, when the mangrove swamps and the rice fields would become the constitutive sites of his vision of improvement. For Ferrar as much as for many of his generation of administrators who were either in charge of reviving national communities or overseas colonies, the vision of an Arcadian rurality was often creatively invoked as a counterpoise to the disillusionment with urban decay.<sup>31</sup> Although far removed from the reach of industrial modernity and therefore ostensibly unsuited for comparison with the more obvious sites of the Western imagination, the investment in the vision of a rural utopia in the Andamans acquired specific meaning in this phase of colonization. For the focus of colonization was agriculture and the creation of permanent bonds with cultivation. Ferrar was aware of the fact that the aim of sustaining an improving agriculture in a terrain as complex as the Andamans was a challenge that he would have to accept.

### The improving vision

At the heart of Ferrar's vision lay the search for flat lands for rice cultivation. In the Andamans this was a critical challenge, for much of the terrain was hilly. Lord Mayo's 1870 minute on the penal settlement had directed that efforts were to be made to develop the Islands' agricultural resources in all possible ways in order to make the settlement self-supporting.<sup>32</sup> In furtherance of that object and in the absence of sufficient flat land above sea level, successive administrations cleared many hundreds of acres of mangrove swamp, built protective bunds and sluices and brought the land so reclaimed under rice and coconut cultivation. These early efforts at swamp reclamation however, died out as the tides, rain and crabs damaged the breaches and allowed water to collect in the rice fields and convert the newly cleared land into malarial marshes.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 11 April 1923, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>31</sup> For an interesting recent discussion on the subject, see Kate Murphy, 'The Modern Idea is to Bring the Country to the City: Australian Urban Reformers and the Ideal of Rurality, 1900–1918', *Rural History* 20, 1 (2009), 119–36.

<sup>32</sup> Ferrar, 'Memorandum on Agriculture', Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>33</sup> M. C. C. Bonington, *Census of India, 1931, Volume II: The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Part 1-A 'Reclamation Works: Report on the Andamans'* (Calcutta: Government of India, Central Publication Branch, 1932).

In this context, Ferrar's anxiety about the new scheme was not misplaced. For even among those groups who were to be brought to the Islands as part of the settlement schemes and with the promise of occupancy rights over land, the response to the offer was deeply ambivalent. Apart from the stigma of *kala pani* that discouraged any voluntary colonization, prospects for any long-term settlement remained constrained by the reputation of the insalubrious airs of the Islands. The scourge of malaria and the high rates of mortality during these years were key to the negative propaganda that the Islands received from people who remained opposed to the new schemes of convict colonization. Ferrar's engagement with the epidemiological literature on malaria is well known.<sup>34</sup> His specific response to the challenges malaria represented to his agenda of colonization was his early realization of the need to invest greater amounts of capital and technology in the draining of swamps and the reclamation of land for agriculture. Malarial morbidity in the Andaman Islands remained a recurring concern within colonial administrative circles and continued to pose huge challenges to any attempts at Island improvement. Administrative recommendations for malarial control were made in five major reports, including the Napier report of 1865, the Cadell Committee report of 1880, the Lyall Lethbridge report of 1890, the Christopher Covell report of 1911 and the Indian Jails Committee of 1919–20. Most made recommendations to drain the swamps and reclaim land for agriculture.<sup>35</sup>

The investigations of Colonel Covell proved that the *anophele* *ludlowii*, the primary malaria-carrying mosquito in the Islands, bred in these brackish swamps.<sup>36</sup> Commenting on the significance of Covell's visit to the Islands, Ferrar wrote to his mother:

I spoke to you of Mr. Covell the 'malaria man'. He works from 6 am to 11 pm. He is entranced with his opportunity here. He finds overwhelming confirmation of Colonel Christopher's theory regarding malaria in the Andamans published in 1912. We are in the singular and fortunate position of having no fresh water mosquitoes that carry malaria. Our only carriers are the *ludlowii* that breed in the brackish water and this is the kind of swamp we are eliminating from all important areas by the dredger.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The Ferrar papers include a heavily marked copy of Major C. Covell's paper, 'The Anopheles Mosquitoes of the Andaman Islands', 1926, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion of these reports, see G. Dennis Shanks and David J. Bradley, 'Island Fever: The Historical Determinants of Malaria in the Andaman Islands', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 104, 3 (2010), 185–90.

<sup>36</sup> Ferrar's own thoughts on the subject were reflected in a typescript, 'Swamps and Reclamations in the Andaman Islands', 4 April 1931, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>37</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 14 August 1926, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

Ferrar was certain that what was clearly needed for the new plan of colonization was the generation of a sustained moral and material investment in land. The rice fields hidden behind the wooded forests that he had earlier spoken of needed greater visibility and the deadly swamps that surrounded them along the coastline needed to be drained. The free colony required a new generation of productive labour and healthy conditions to ensure its steady reproduction. In a letter to his mother during the early days of his arrival in the Islands, he had observed:

There are no horseflies here in Ross and no malaria. But there is a mosquito that lives in salt water and breeds in tidal mangrove swamps of the mainland. Where possible these have been filled . . . that particular mosquito cannot fly more than a mile. But works like swamp clearing can never be undertaken by convict labour and of course the provision of labour is going to be one of great difficulties in future.<sup>38</sup>

By the time the new land regulations were promulgated, and Ferrar more confidently ensconced in his position, he presented to the colonial authorities in Delhi a proposal to station a dredger in the Islands for a sustained period of two to three years and engage in a systematic process of swamp reclamation. He would often complain to his mother that, his best intentions notwithstanding, the Home Department seemed to be interested in the Andamans only in a 'patronizing way'. In one of his letters to her he wrote:

They ought to be pleased to have little real administration in the province . . . but they prefer thinking how best they can please Gandhi or Lajpat Rai and placate some other implacable. Of course I may be a bit too slow and move in fits and starts after periods of apathy or disgust culminating in anger. Were I Frank Swettenham or George Lloyd, I would have now got the Government really galvanized into developing this place and I would have sized up the position here much quicker.<sup>39</sup>

Ferrar's invocation of Frank Swettenham (Resident General of the Federated Malay States, 1896–1901) acquires significance in the light of the similarities they shared in their engagement with the tropical landscapes under their control. As one scholar observes, Swettenham's evaluation of the Malayan landscape was essentially based on its potential economic rewards, its natural resources and its remunerative returns.<sup>40</sup> His appreciation of scenes could be likened to the appreciation of a

<sup>38</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 14 August 1926, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>39</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 28 June 1925, Ferrar papers, CSAS.

<sup>40</sup> See Robert S. Aiken, 'Images of Nature in Swettenham's Writings: Prolegomenon to a Historical Perspective on Peninsular Malaysia's Ecological Problems', *Asian Survey* 11, 3 (1973), 135–49; H. S. Barlow, 'Swettenham, Sir Frank Athelstane (1850–1946)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).



landscape painting; a visual representation of forms, colours and textures. While there is no doubt that Swettenham was attracted to landscape aesthetics, it did not distract him from what he saw to be the ultimate end of colonialism: landscape changes and ‘improvements’. Hence, even while he aesthetically enjoyed the tropical forests, he was emotionally detached from them, equating them with ‘fallow’ land awaiting agricultural replacement. Ferrar admired Swettenham’s capacity to work through his projects of improvements with great success.<sup>41</sup>

Taking recourse to a spirit of self-deprecation, Ferrar would often look at the outcome of his own efforts with a tinge of sadness. On 12 December 1925, he expressed his deepest misgivings about the project at hand. He wrote:

This morning I have had to send a two hundred and forty word telegram to Delhi, over the dredger scheme which they are trying to shelve for another year and make contingent on a good monsoon – another way of letting the whole thing drop. I find it difficult to settle for anything until I get an answer – I feel pretty sure that if I don’t get a dredger this year then it will never come . . . how I long to see those flat raised lands emerging from the black and stinking swamps!<sup>42</sup>

The dredger did arrive a couple of years later and Ferrar was able to convince before authorities in Delhi that it needed to be stationed in the Andamans initially for one year. In that time Ferrar believed that 120 million cubic feet of silt would be sapped through its pipes and almost 700 acres of swamps turned into flat paddy land. And more importantly, he added, malaria would be eliminated from large tracts of land adjoining the harbour.<sup>43</sup>

By the end of 1929, the ‘good old Ronaldshay’, as Ferrar put it, had changed the face of the harbour. More than twenty-five malarial swamps around Port Blair, including Aberdeen, Phoenix Bay, Janglight, Dhanikhari, Mithakhari, Chouldhari, Port Mouat East and Stewartgunj, had been reclaimed and converted to flat paddy land.<sup>44</sup> On 3 March 1929, Ferrar wrote triumphantly: ‘I have got my fourteen lakhs again for swamp reclamation and that will make a total of twenty lakhs in my time’.<sup>45</sup> Almost a year later, the mood was more introspective:

Fifty-four I am today and we have exactly one more year in front of us and so much left undone and much of the progress rather dubious. However my name is not mud but rather will rest in the future on the millions of cubic feet of mud that

<sup>41</sup> Barlow, ‘Swettenham, Sir Frank Athelstane (1850–1946)’, 146–7.

<sup>42</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 14 December 1925, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>43</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 11 December 1928, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>44</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 11 December 1928, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>45</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 3 March 1929, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

is being dug out of the harbour and poured on the swamps to render great areas of this settlement safe to live and prosper in. When I first took up my trip around the harbour road just seven years ago and saw those dismal derelict swamps, I never thought I should be here to see them wiped out, many hundred scores of them forever and changed into high land.<sup>46</sup>

And then, more evocatively, writing from his desk at Mount Harriet: 'From up here, I watch the good Ronaldshay five and a quarter miles away and twelve hundred feet below me pouring a huge black jet of mud and water on the Mithkhari swamp, she is doing very well, though much behind her time'.<sup>47</sup>

Notwithstanding the delays, Ferrar could feel a certain degree of satisfaction at the way in which his larger project of improving the Islands by the institution of a whole range of public works was shaping up. If improving the health of the colony and expanding agriculture were two of the major projects he undertook during the first half of his tenure, then the improvement of road communication vied for his attention during the later years. Real life villages, bustling bazars, busy traffic and the ceaseless flow of goods and people between the Islands and the mainland were to him the true signs of development.

Ferrar was convinced that in order push the Islands beyond self-sufficiency in food production, he would have to adopt a model of development from other successful tropical possessions of the British Empire. Commenting on an article he read in the *Journal of The Royal Society of Arts*, that made the comparison between the developmental achievements of British Guiana and British Malaya, Ferrar wrote that the article made him think a great deal on the development of the Andamans.<sup>48</sup> In his own words:

There is a school of thought which says no tropical country can run any big developmental schemes without minerals and another which says Ceylon, Jamaica, Uganda and Sumatra none of which owes much to minerals. We have nothing conceivably exportable beyond timber and forest produce (cane, resin, oil) and plantation products, tea, coffee, coconuts and rubber. Of these coconuts have grown in quantity – tea and coffee at about one hundred and fifty acres each, rubber unworked at present. We get a few thousand rupees on tortoise shells, bird nest, trepang and green snail – otherwise nothing to be got from the sea. Pearl oysters do not exist here and conches and green snail, which in Mergui and Madras fetch some revenue, are not sufficiently abundant . . . There is a marble quarry long neglected and I have sent blocks to be evaluated in Calcutta – may get

<sup>46</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 13 April 1930, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>47</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 13 April 1930, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>48</sup> This argument was elaborated in Ferrar's letter to his mother, 28 June 1925, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

the quarry taken over by private enterprise. Have thought of lime . . . the coral affords an unlimited yet limited source. It is hard to say what it would cost to produce large quantities. Anyhow the immediate certain products are coconut and timber. It seems we have to increase the peasant holders of rice land and increase local staples of food – rice and dal and a get a bigger rural population . . . The local people want something more than my promise and I'm longing to convey the first gift of occupancy with my own hand. Once they really have it, there will be a great fillip to agriculture. Also we have to get the convict villages to look like real villages with lots of women and children about the place.<sup>49</sup>

It was this vision of a rural arcadia that prompted the search for the good colonists and the making of a new settlement in his name. The idea was to create the appearance of what was evocatively described as 'real villages' on the Islands with happy homesteads, and men, women and children all working together in the great collective enterprise of developing the Islands. Colonel Ferrar's papers are replete with references to these images of rural development. He wanted to reinvigorate the family emigration scheme for convicts using new incentives and to encourage more convict volunteers and their families.

### **The search for colonists**

The family emigration scheme initiated many years before the arrival of Ferrar proved to be a deeply ambivalent exercise both at the level of official thinking and the response it generated among the convict population. In her study of the scheme during its early period of operation, Aparna Vaidik argues that family emigration was part of official thinking from the very early years of the penal settlement.<sup>50</sup> The success of the colonial enterprise in the Andamans, it was argued, rested on transforming the transported felons into 'law-abiding and gainfully employed citizens of the empire and converting the island space into a flourishing agricultural colony'. The outcome of this enterprise, however, depended on the success of the government's efforts to persuade convicts to make the Islands their permanent homes. It was important to try and create a life somewhat akin to their earlier lives on the mainland. Within the colonial administration it was believed that matrimony and domesticity were two redemptive institutions that worked to eliminate the possible social anomalies that might arise in the predominantly male penal settlement.<sup>51</sup> The family emigration scheme was meant to strengthen the

<sup>49</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 28 June 1925, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>50</sup> Aparna Vaidik, 'Settling the Convict: Matrimony and Domesticity in the Andamans', *Studies in History*, 22, 2 (2006), 221–50.

<sup>51</sup> Vaidik, 'Settling the Convict'.

self-supporter system and sustain the productive base of the settlement particularly in agriculture. The importation of convict families was thought to be the most prudent mode of ensuring a regular supply of labour in the colony. The government, however, had to walk a tricky tight rope while introducing the scheme. Initially it encouraged the scheme for all; however, in course of time it was widely acknowledged that in order to sustain the identity of the Islands as 'a penal settlement' rather than 'a colony of emigrants', it was important to institute the emigration scheme judiciously for those with proven character.<sup>52</sup>

Notwithstanding the promises that the government held out in favour of the scheme most convicts remained unconvinced and the motivation to bring in families was very low. Even when some of them did try to bring in their wives and children, the response from the mainland was most often discouraging.<sup>53</sup> By the early 1920s, when the decision was taken to abolish the penal colony and to encourage its conversion into a free colony, the family emigration scheme was revived with a new sense of urgency. The demand for voluntary emigration and the expansion of agriculture meant a renewed effort at encouraging convict families to settle on the Islands, not merely for the duration of the penal sentence but permanently.

Ferrar's first initiative in this direction came in response to the challenge of encouraging the voluntary settlement of Moplah (Mappilas) transportees on the Islands. The Moplah Uprising had taken place in Malabar (Kerala) in the context of the Khilafat agitations. The Moplahs were Muslim peasants of the region who periodically took to armed resistance against their exploitative landlords. Their uprising in 1921 acquired a wider resonance as it invoked the political discourse of the all-India Khilafat movement led by Gandhi. After six months of decisive guerrilla assaults on the government, the Moplah rebels were brutally subdued and the movement died out.<sup>54</sup> It may be noted at this point that the attempt to 'settle' the Moplah convicts in the Islands, notwithstanding the official position on the abolition of the penal settlement and the

<sup>52</sup> Vaidik, 'Settling the Convict', 225. See also Satadru Sen, 'Domesticated Convicts: Producing Families in the Andaman Islands', in Indrani Chatterjee (ed.), *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 261–91.

<sup>53</sup> Vaidik, 'Settling the Convict', 226.

<sup>54</sup> For a meticulously researched history of the Moplah Uprising, see K. N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State: Religion and Peasant Uprisings in Malabar* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990). See also Conrad Wood, 'The First Moplah Rebellion Against British Rule in Malabar', *Modern Asian Studies* 10, 4 (1976), 543–56, and P. K. Zubair Ahmed, [http://vehicleferry.blogspot.in/2012/09/the-moplah-rebellion-and-andamans\\_2.html](http://vehicleferry.blogspot.in/2012/09/the-moplah-rebellion-and-andamans_2.html).

abandonment of the policy of transportation, was eventually based on a compromise. Indeed, it was at the request of the Madras government that a decision was taken to encourage the Moplah to serve their sentences on the Islands. This move proved to be controversial because of an organized opposition to the policy staged by sitting legislators of the Madras Legislative Council. In the debates that raged within the Council, it was insinuated that the government had resorted to false propaganda in their desire to induce the project of Moplah colonization. References were made in particular to a series of articles written for the *Madras Mail* by Colonel James Barker, an officer of the Indian Medical Service who had visited the penal settlement in the early 1920s and who had prepared a note on its overall climatic and health conditions. Major Barker's report was placed before the Council for discussion on the ground that it was biased and therefore open to debate.<sup>55</sup>

According to the Barker report, the adverse observations of the Jail Committee's report on the Andamans needed to be interrogated in the light of the many steps taken to introduce new and better health and sanitary conditions on the Islands. Barker also pointed out that the Andamans would be an ideal location for the Moplah settlers on account of the similarities of the weather in the Andamans and in Malabar. On the specific issue of the recurrence of malarial mortality on the Islands, he made it clear that it varied over time and was contingent upon the availability of medical facilities. He also pointed out that there was nothing peculiar to the malarial fevers in the Andamans as malaria was a common scourge across the Indian subcontinent and the Malabar in particular. The only difference was, he claimed, that 'malaria in the Malabar being inland at the foothills of the Wynaad whereas that of the Andamans was on the sea!' On the specific issue of livelihood opportunities in the Andamans, Barker maintained that the rich valleys lying within the virgin forests in the Islands were waiting to be cultivated by a range of agricultural produce. The Moplahs would have the opportunity to engage in fishing and forest work and hence carry on similar subsistence activities as they did in Malabar.<sup>56</sup>

Barker's report, however, scarcely impressed the members of the Madras Legislative Council and, as Sherman writes, the debate on settling the Moplahs continued until the government was forced into a compromise.<sup>57</sup> In a letter to his mother, Ferrar responded angrily to the

<sup>55</sup> Major Barker's Report, 20 July 1925, Law (General) Acc. No. 485, A&N Archives.

<sup>56</sup> Major Barker's Report, A&N Archives. <sup>57</sup> Sherman, 'From Hell to Paradise?', 384.

delaying of the Moplah immigration project by over eighteen months. He wrote:

The Indian politician is a parrot and a dishonest man. Yet it (the Moplah immigration) has started again with renewed strength as it is purely voluntary and 840 free people have chosen to come here and live with their convict relatives. The politician may as well go shut up and acknowledge himself to be wrong.<sup>58</sup>

On 4 October 1926, the Moplahs in the Andamans were given the choice to return to jails in Madras while those imprisoned in Madras were offered the opportunity of serving their sentences in Port Blair. Notwithstanding the early discomfiture he might have felt at this proposal, Ferrar was relieved to report that 448 convicts in Madras had elected to settle in the Islands while the option to return to Madras was made use of by only eighty single men.<sup>59</sup> The Moplah settlement, however, continued to generate debate and reflected the misgivings that prospective convict volunteers had about life in the Andamans. Ferrar's desire to transform the dull villages of the settlement into a full-fledged rural society meant that a new ideological investment had to be made in the promotion of the image of the Islands as a place for healthy habitation. At the end of his first term as Chief Commissioner, he sought another five-year extension. He conveyed this to his mother in a letter soon after:

There is a great deal of ploughing in the sand here, but the place progresses and I have the excitement of being here long enough to see whether my policy is going to be a success even if a modified success. There are plenty of times when I have felt we are getting on rather indifferently with the fixing of a permanent population but we are steadily eliminating the dread of this place by the rest of India.<sup>60</sup>

Ferrar's letters to his mother during this phase reveal an undercurrent of frustration at the slow progress of his schemes, yet there was a sense of achievement too. It is important to note in the paragraph quoted above his express conviction that the 'dread' associated with *kala pani* was being gradually eliminated. It was a key condition for the establishment of the free colony in the Islands. Yet notwithstanding this optimism, the search for voluntary convict colonists remained elusive. Ferrar had to evolve a different strategy.

<sup>58</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 8 February 1927, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>59</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 8 February 1927, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>60</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 25 May 1927, Ferrar Collection, CSAS.

### The birth of Ferrargunj Colony

Ferrar turned to another group of convict-colonists and encouraged them to settle on the Islands. Several letters to his mother reflect the anxieties and hopes he had pinned upon his pet schemes of dredging the marshes of Mithakhari and settling the community of the Bhantus under the aegis of the Salvation Army. The formulation of a rehabilitation scheme for the Bhantus, an officially designated criminal tribe, marked one of the high points of his schemes of improvement. The Bhantus may not have proved to be the ideal agriculturalists Ferrar wished them to be, but he celebrated the perceived success of his scheme by naming the Bhantu colony, Ferrargunj. The ‘successful’ settlement and moral rehabilitation of a ‘criminal tribe’ through agriculture was meant to underscore the ultimate legitimacy of his ‘improving’ vision.

The Bhantus were an officially designated ‘criminal tribe’ from the United Provinces. For at least fifty years, these so-called hereditary criminals had been rounded up and resettled in specially designated mainland colonies, where they were supposed to be reformed and taught productive labour, frequently under the auspices of the Salvation Army.<sup>61</sup> Descriptions of the Andaman Bhantu colony as they are revealed through accounts in both the Ferrar papers and the Andaman administrative records reveal the character of the colonization process as an extension of this correctional, rehabilitative project, carefully instituted to address the chronic shortage of labour on the Islands and to attempt to reorganize/reform the penal regime according to the demands of productive expenditure.<sup>62</sup> Apart from the official record of the early Bhantu settlement, the memories of a people forced to relocate and redefine their lives as a settled community are few and fragmentary.

As I spoke to old Ramtibai, prodding her to tell me more about her family’s arrival on the Islands, she said she had scarcely known of the momentous decision her family was to take in 1926. She was a very

<sup>61</sup> Sanjay Nigam, ‘Disciplining and Policing The “Criminals By Birth”, Part 1: The Making of a Colonial Stereotype – The Criminal Tribes and Castes of North India’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 27, 2 (1990), 131–64; Sanjay Nigam, ‘Disciplining and Policing the “Criminals By Birth”, Part 2: The Development of a Disciplinary System, 1871–1900’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 27, 3 (1990), 257–87; Meena Radhakrishna, *Dishonoured by History: ‘Criminal Tribes’ and British Colonial Policy* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2001); Rachel J. Tolen, ‘Colonizing and Transforming the Criminal Tribesmen: the Salvation Army in British India’, *American Ethnologist*, 18, 1 (1991), 106–25.

<sup>62</sup> See also Major Edwin H. Sheard, ‘Reforming Robbers in the Andamans’, *The Officers’ Review* (November 1937), 535–40; Edwin H. Sheard, *Sergeant-Major in the Andamans: Kanhaiya Gariba* (St Albans: Campfield Press, 1957).



young girl at that time and remembered little of their first few years on the settlement. Her father and uncles were perhaps more aware of what their new life would entail. They had, she recalled, known of the *Isai Sena* or the Mukti Fauj, the name they used to refer to the Salvation Army. It had brought many of their brethren under their settlement schemes elsewhere in mainland India and introduced them to the correctional habits of cultivation and prayer. Her family was ready for their new life; perhaps, as she said, they were the descendants of the fiercely courageous Sultana Daku, a famous early twentieth-century Indian *dacoit* (gang robber).

Ramtibai's genealogical claims find corroboration in a 'Note on the Bhantus' prepared by a government official in 1946. According to this document, the majority of the Bhantus were 'Hindus' belonging to the Beria, Aheria, Sainsi, Dom, Kanjar and Karwal castes. In the United Provinces all these are castes classified as Criminal Tribes, and for them Criminal Tribes Settlements existed at Moradabad, Lucknow and Bijner. According to the note, they claimed to be descendants of Rana Pratap of Chittor (a sixteenth-century Rajput ruler) or descendants of the Pindaris (eighteenth-century Maratha plunderers). In 1922, a large gang under the leadership of one Sultana, known also as Jungle King, was arrested. Subsequently the whole gang was convicted. Sultana was sentenced for capital punishment and hanged. In 1926 the Government of India decided to send his followers, these Bhantu convicts, with their families to Port Blair with a view to settling them permanently under a Salvation Army Officer.<sup>63</sup>

The charge of settling the Bhantus in the Andaman Islands provided the Salvation Army with a new port of entry to their expanding field of operations in British India. In her discussion of Salvation Army work among other 'criminal tribes', Meena Radhakrishna writes that settlement for the Yerakulas of Guntur district was set up under one of the provisions of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1911.<sup>64</sup> Similar settlements for the other notified 'criminal tribes' were formed in the United and Central Provinces, in accordance with one of the clauses of the act, which stated that a section of those declared criminal could be interned in special settlements set up under a special government-approved agency. In the 1910s, when the criminal tribe settlements were established in the Madras Presidency, itinerant communities were singled out for settling by policy. The official directive was that 'worst characters especially

<sup>63</sup> Note on the Bhantus, File No. 11-4-49, A&N Archives.

<sup>64</sup> Meena Radhakrishna, 'Colonial Constructions of a Criminal Tribe: Yerakulas of Madras Presidency', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35, 28/29 (15-21 July 2000), 2553-63.

wandering gangs must be settled'.<sup>65</sup> The Salvation Army was entrusted with itinerant communities and sedentary criminals were to be responsibility of the police.

Stuartpuram, as Meena Radhakrishna writes, became the literal site where the British administration and the Salvation Army together decided to have what they called an 'experiment in criminocurology'.<sup>66</sup>

The Bhantus who were brought to the Andaman Islands in 1926 were the objects of a similar experiment, although the project to settle them was part of penal reform and internal colonization in the Islands. In accordance with these objectives, an officer of the Salvation Army was deputed to take charge of the Bantu settlement in the Andamans. Chief Commissioner Ferrar's enthusiasm for the project was evident and land was allotted for the settlement in the outskirts of Port Blair. Writing to his mother in 1927, Ferrar expressed deep satisfaction at the thought that the new settlement for the Bhantus would be named after him. He mentions this categorically in the letter, where he writes, 'I have agreed to the Bantu village, a real life village of seventy families being called Ferrar-gunj. There is a place by the same name in Gorakhpur. (the name being given there by my father, M. L. Ferrar).'<sup>67</sup>

The understanding between him and Adjutant Sheard, the officer in charge of the settlement, was that Ferrar-gunj would be primarily agricultural in its orientation. Although other skills would be imparted to the settlers, the main objective would be to train them into becoming good cultivators. At the end of Ferrar's tenure there were several hundred families in the settlement. Unlike the controversy and the problems that accompanied the Moplah emigration scheme during the same period, the Bantu family emigration was relatively smooth. Under the stewardship of Adjutant Dr Sheard and his wife, the Bantu settlement evolved into a sort of Boothite farm colony, based on what was generally believed to be the Bible's Ten Commandments combined with common sense and socialism. Its aim, in Boothite terms, was in 'redeeming men by the eternal remedies of labour and discipline'.<sup>68</sup> Although the initial flow of

<sup>65</sup> Radhakrishna, 'Colonial Constructions', 2556–57.

<sup>66</sup> Radhakrishna, 'Colonial Constructions', 2557. See also Frederick Booth-Tucker, *Criminocurology or the Indian Crim, and What to Do with Him: Being a Review of the Work of the Salvation Army amongst the Prisoners, Habituals and Criminal Tribes of India* (Simla: Liddell's Printing Works, 1916).

<sup>67</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 5 June 1927, Ferrar Papers, CSAS.

<sup>68</sup> H. Ausubel, 'General Booth's Scheme of Social Salvation', *American Historical Review*, 56, 3 (1951), 519–25. William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army. See D. C. Lamb, 'Booth, (William) Bramwell (1856–1929)', Rev. L. E. Lauer, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, September 2012), [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31969](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31969), accessed 17 September 2014.

Bhantu settlers in 1926 was relatively slow, it picked up momentum in 1928 when women and children joined their husbands. Women in particular were said to have added value to the settlement by involving themselves in a range of agricultural, craft and artisanal work. They took to weaving and became, in course of time, the prime suppliers of hand-woven fabric for use in the prison establishment. Bhantu men took great pride in their agricultural skills. Not only were they able to clear forests and prepare the soil for cultivation, they succeeded in fulfilling their paddy production targets in little time.

In yet another letter to his mother, Ferrar observed with much satisfaction

Ferrargunj prospers. There are 260 inhabitants, no unmarried men, 61 children of school age and 350 more are to arrive in January and two more smaller villages on each side of Ferrargunj are to be built. They are starting a drum and fife band and I am going to present them with a big drum!<sup>69</sup>

Ferrar took great pains to see that the colony not only prospered but was also protected. This was because the security of Ferrargunj colony and the surrounding areas that were being reclaimed for agriculture had become the targets of attacks by the Islands' indigenous people, the Jarawas; Ferrar's letters to his mother during this period are replete with references to the Jarawas who, according to Ferrar, seemed to be at that point the greatest enemies of the settlement. In one of these letters written soon after the dredging operations had begun and the new villages in the South Andaman were being settled, he wrote:

There are two thousand square miles of country teeming with food for the Jarawas and unoccupied by any human being. Why must they keep coming over to our hundred square mile settlements and keep killing our wretched convicts?<sup>70</sup>

Ferrar genuinely believed that Jarawa attacks on the settlements were wanton acts of mischief, or what he described as a 'sport and a pastime'. The Burmese and other convicts were for them easy prey for their targets of *shikar* (hunting as a sport). He was convinced that such attacks had to be retaliated with equal amounts of force, and the Jarawa quelled if the settlement was to survive. In a letter on May 1930, he wrote:

The Jarawas have at last had their go at Ferrargunj and killed a man at about midnight in a sugarcane machan. The arrow fastened his arm to his side and

<sup>69</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 13 September 1927, Ferrar Papers, CSAS. The two villages referred to in this note would be present-day Aniket and Caddelgunj.

<sup>70</sup> Ferrar to his mother, 15 March 1926, Ferrar Collection, CSAS.

passing through the lung, the sharp wooden point was embedded in his spine. I have sent out a party of some six rifles, forty slug guns to beat up their rains quarters and kill as many as possible during a week's hunting. There is nothing else to do. They are implacable and their outrages without any object of sense.<sup>71</sup>

A whole series of punitive expeditions against the Jarawa marked the term of Ferrar's chief commissionership. Although the campaigns were often brutal and generated controversy in British administrative circles, Ferrar remained unapologetic. The colonization scheme had to be carried through and Ferrargunj, its showpiece, had to be protected at any cost.

As administrative reports of the period noted, after a decade the colony of a 'notorious criminal tribe' had indeed proved to be a definite success. Although there remains little in contemporary administrative records describing the steady growth of the settlement during these years, an Andaman administration report of 1936 is quite explicit in its positive appraisal of the Bhantu settlement. According to its assessment, Bhantu settlers at Ferrargunj for that year numbered 466, of whom 88 were convicts, 75 free men, 108 free women, 91 boys and 104 girls.<sup>72</sup> In their new homes, the colonists had shown no inclination towards indulging in any criminal practices and had developed into 'hardworking' members of the community engaging in agriculture, hand weaving and forest clearance work.<sup>73</sup> The report goes on to say that it was understood that when the colony was established it was intended to move most of India's Bhantus to it. There was a considerable area of vacant arable land in the three villages in the colony and a dozen families of newcomers could be absorbed easily.<sup>74</sup> At the time of his departure from the Andamans, Ferrar was happy to see the colony flourish and the Bhantus apparently reformed. His push for an agricultural colony and a moral space within the degraded environs of the penal settlement seemed to have borne fruit.

But what about the Bhantus themselves? The Ferrargunj colony that gave them a new life on the Islands faced a period of severe crisis in the years following the Japanese occupation between 1942 and 1945. The Bhantus were amongst many of the settlers who remained in the Islands during the most difficult times of the occupation. Although their

<sup>71</sup> Ferrar to to his mother, 18 May 1930, Ferrar Collection, CSAS. A *machan* was a platform erected in a tree, for the purpose of hunting.

<sup>72</sup> *Report on the Administration of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Penal Settlement of Port Blair for 1937–38* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1938), 1–2.

<sup>73</sup> *Report on the Administration of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Penal Settlement of Port Blair for 1936–37* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1937), 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Report on the Administration of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the Penal Settlement of Port Blair for 1936–37*, 3.

economic situation declined drastically during these years, many Bantu families continued to hold on to their homes in Ferrargunj with few expressing the desire to return to the mainland. In 1946, soon after the end of the Japanese occupation, however, the British administration decided to repatriate the Bantus to the mainland. Several Bantu survivors of the Japanese occupation welcomed this decision and left their homes in Ferrargunj to return to their villages in the United Provinces. Within a year of their departure, however, a veritable tide in favour of their return became evident. The administration received hundreds of petitions pleading to take them back. It is in these petitions that the Bantus sought to represent themselves as the icons of settlement schemes of the 1920s.<sup>75</sup> The irony of their tryst with life in the Andamans, however, was that notwithstanding their ardent petitioning, they were received back into the Islands with a certain degree of scepticism.

An official note commenting on the Bantus' desire to be resettled on the Islands in the wake of the reoccupation of the Islands following the Japanese aggression made it clear that Bantus would no longer be fit for the new schemes of settlement on the Islands then being considered:

[I]f the idea is that the Andamans be made a colony of middle-class and other people having no taint of crime, then the Bantu settlement would not be in consonance with such scheme . . . When the Bantus were sent to the Andamans between 1924–7 some of them had life or lesser sentences. Taking into account one-third remission usually given to convicts who went to the Andamans the ex-convict Bantus must have become free men by the time the Japanese came. Like other free convict settlers they may continue to remain in the Islands, but it is clear that no fresh Bantu settlers will be taken. In 1927 it was Lieutenant Colonel Ferrar then Chief Commissioner who was mainly responsible for the experiment of settling the Bantus has sent a note saying that the scheme had been a success.<sup>76</sup>

### **The changing fate of Ferrargunj**

It was on the strength of this reputation that the repatriated Bantus were allowed to return to the Islands. It was with one such returning group of Bantus that Ramtibai's family came back to the Islands in late 1947. The irony of their return, however, lay in their discovery that the lands they cultivated in the Ferrargunj settlement were no longer theirs.

<sup>75</sup> For a cache of these petitions see, 'Bantu Petitions for Return', File No. 11–4–49, A&N Archives.

<sup>76</sup> Note from District Commissioner Kishen Singh, 20 July 1945, File No. 11–4–49, A&N Archives.

Their homes, their lands and the houses and workshops built by the Salvation Army had now been taken over by the Local Born Association. A note from the Deputy Commissioner's office recorded this change of hands vis-à-vis the Bhandu lands in a spirit of bureaucratic detachment. It said that the Bhandus were brought to the Andamans in 1926 and settled in Ferrargunj and two other neighbouring villages of Aniket and Caddelgunj. In a group, they surrendered their holdings in June 1946 and on their 'persistent' request were repatriated to the mainland in March 1947. It was further noted that as a class they had a good reputation as cultivators and expert weavers. On their return to the Islands they were seemingly 'advised' by the government to settle on the land in the whole of Manglutan and Craikabad but not Ferrargunj. This was because, as the note said, 'the whole of Ferrargunj colony (which included Aniket and Caddelgunj) had been allotted to the Andaman Indians on license for thirty years on a cooperative basis.'<sup>77</sup>

The Bhandus responded to this with several petitions demanding the restoration of their lands. They felt that notwithstanding their surrender of these lands in terms of the repatriation programme of 1946, their attachment to these remained as deep as before. 'Kindly go through our tales of sorrow and take action', wrote one petitioner. 'We got this land in 1926 and had to undergo many difficulties in clearing the jungle and making the land cultivable. Many of our men died for the sake of this land.'<sup>78</sup>

There were negotiations with the Andaman administration, but the land issue for the Bhandus remained unresolved. They had to give up their claims on Ferrargunj. The 'good colonists' who had reformed themselves and cultivated the lands allotted to them were now deemed unfair claimants on a right they had willingly forfeited. For the Andaman administration, however, the land issue in general remained a huge source of concern. All that was achieved in terms of clearance and cultivation in the pre-occupation era had to begin all over again in the changed circumstances. The search had to begin for a new class of colonists and a new plan of colonization put in place. On 4 February 1946, the *Hindustan Times* carried a news item that suggested that the British government was planning to invest Rs 1.5 crore (million) to reconstruct the Islands following the Japanese occupation. The newspaper asked if the investment of such a huge sum of money was necessary and whether alternative ways could be thought of to make the Islands

<sup>77</sup> Note from District Commissioner Kishen Singh, A&N Archives.

<sup>78</sup> Petition for the restoration of lands, 1946, File no. 11-4-49, A&N Archives.

self-supporting.<sup>79</sup> Although the archives of this period are scant and largely fragmentary, a cache of petitions from private businessmen to the Chief Commissioner of the Islands during this time seem to indicate that there were plans of leasing land to private developers for plantation work as well as other infrastructural developmental work.<sup>80</sup>

By all indications, however, plans for the reconstruction of the Andaman Islands on the lines conceived by the colonial government in the immediate aftermath of the reoccupation remained unfulfilled. With the formal departure of the British, the political turmoil in the subcontinent and the large influx of refugees into India in the aftermath of Partition provoked the developmental discourse on the Andaman Islands to take on an entirely new turn. A new trajectory of colonization was proposed in the wake of the plans for refugee rehabilitation on the Islands, though it would be different from the one proposed by the colonial government under Viceroy Lord Wavell. Instead of leasing out lands for agriculture to private capitalists, the new colonization plan would be premised upon the new supply of refugee labour.

In October 1948 an exploratory party headed by the Minister in Charge of Refugee Rehabilitation visited the Andaman Islands with a view to examine the possibility of resettling displaced families from East Pakistan in the Islands. After a careful survey the party was unanimous in its opinion that the Islands were admirably suitable for colonization by displaced persons.<sup>81</sup> Part of this favourable appraisal for colonization by Bengali refugees from East Pakistan was based on the fact that most of the families were agriculturalists. A more formal statement on the colonization of the Andamans was prepared a year later by H. Shivdasani of the Department of Home Affairs, Government of India. Many of the recommendations of this report were based on an internal consideration of the possibilities of colonization prepared by the Chief Commissioner of the Andamans. The Shivdasani Report, as it came to be known, endorsed the view of the local administration: that the refugees who were to be brought in to colonize the Andaman Islands were to be given special concessions. Apart from free passage from Calcutta, each head of family would be given ten acres of land free of cost with remission of revenue for the first two years. Additional incentives would be the grant of plough cattle, milch cattle, seed paddy, agricultural implements, and manure

<sup>79</sup> Clipping from the *Hindustan Times*, in File No. 1-225-46, A&N Archives.

<sup>80</sup> These petitions are from businessmen based both in India and Burma. Copies of their letters are available in File No. 1-34-46, A&N Archives.

<sup>81</sup> Kiran Dhingra, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Twentieth Century: A Gazetteer* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69-120.



free of cost. Non-agricultural families would be given half an acre of land for construction of houses and financial assistance admissible to agriculturalists for a period of three months.<sup>82</sup>

The most significant aspect of these plans for refugee rehabilitation scheme as worked out in the Shivdasani report was the view it held about land-holding rights. On the specific subject of local tenure laws, it said:

Provision will have to be made to ensure that in course of time, the zamindari system does not grow up. Cultivators should be proprietors of their land which should be heritable, transferable but limitations will have to be imposed on transfers and sub-leases as to prevent the cultivator acquiring in course of time so much land that his sub-leasees become his tenants and he becomes a landlord paying taxes to the government.<sup>83</sup>

It was also decided that in order to impart a feeling of security to the cultivator, it would be desirable to introduce a term such as *malik kashtkar* instead of occupancy tenant. But the report made elaborated 'it should be made perfectly clear that this right has been given away in perpetuity on certain conditions. The ultimate proprietary right was vested in the state.'<sup>84</sup>

Clearly, then, the plans for refugee rehabilitation took over some of the key ideas of the colonization scheme of the mid 1920s. For the scheme not merely included a programme of rehabilitation based on the extension of agrarian expansion through use of quasi-coerced labour, but it also instituted a regime of limited land rights aimed a creating a society of peasant proprietors tied to the land but enjoying no sovereign ownership rights over it.

It was on the basis of this report that the Andaman Administration welcomed hundreds of refugee families on to the Islands, particularly in the years after 1949, when large-scale riots in the deltaic districts of East Pakistan forced a huge exodus of agrarian labouring families into refugee camps in West Bengal in central and eastern Indian states.<sup>85</sup> It was during this period that Ferrargunj district, including the former Ferrargunj settlement, went into the possession of the families from East Pakistan. The Local Born Association that had taken over the settlement on lease evidently moved elsewhere. For the first few batches of Bengali

<sup>82</sup> H. Shivdasani, 'Report on the Possibilities of Colonization and the Development of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands', Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 5 March 1949, 60, IOR V/190/65.

<sup>83</sup> Shivdasani, 'Report on the Possibilities of Colonization and the Development', 61.

<sup>84</sup> Shivdasani, 'Report on the Possibilities of Colonization and the Development', 5–6.

<sup>85</sup> Joya Chatterji, 'Dispositions and Destinations: Refugee Agency and "Mobility Capital" in the Bengal Diaspora, 1947–2007', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 55, 2 (2013), 273–304.

refugees, it was the Ferrargunj region along with a few other areas in South Andaman that appeared to be cleared and somewhat ready for cultivation. The Bhantus who had worked on large swathes of those lands were resettled in villages on the fringes of the earlier settlement. Several petitions followed in which they expressed their resentment of the new arrivals on their lands, but much of these were ignored on the grounds that arrangements had been made for their settlement elsewhere in the vicinity of their former lands. The 'good colonists' who had once set up the village of Ferrargunj were now forced to live outside it.

Old Ramtibai was witness to the changed circumstances of her life as well as those of several others of her community, but she remains grateful for the fact that they were given the opportunity to return to the Islands. Her memories of the Ferrargunj settlement were kept alive through the impression she retains of Mr and Mrs Francis of the Salvation Army (who came to the Settlement soon after the Japanese surrender), of the relics of Ferrar's guest house in the village and of the newly spruced-up church wherein they received their social entry into a world from which they had been politically and socially excluded. The improving ethos of Ferrargunj had pushed the Bhantus out of their original settlement. But



Figure 2.2 The late Ramtibai in her home in Aniket village near the erstwhile Ferrargunj Colony, the only person who vaguely recalled the times associated with Ferrar. Photograph: Madhumita Mazumdar.

the new scheme of colonization and development demanded a new agrarian order and a new and more rigorous pace of settlement that perhaps the Bhantus would find hard to keep pace with.<sup>86</sup>

### Conclusion

If the new will to improve shunted the Bhantus out from their lands in Ferrargunj on the plea that the new agriculturalists from erstwhile East Pakistan would make even better colonists, the schemes for colonization and development drawn up in the early 1950s and 1960s also made the implicit argument that the Islands' indigenous peoples too would have to give up their present locations and move deeper into the forest recesses. The 1949 Shivdasani Report betrayed a remarkable continuity with the scheme of colonization of the Ferrar era in its implicit espousal of a renewed 'will to improve'. It underscored the pressing need to initiate a fast track programme of forest clearance and a rapid extension of agriculture with the labour of Bengali refugees. In the Ferrar years, such a programme hit a roadblock as a result of irregular supplies of labour and the ambiguities surrounding official thinking on the penal settlement. It also had to contend with what Ferrar unequivocally described as the 'Jarawa menace'.<sup>87</sup> Ferrar's response to what was perceived to be a serious impediment to his schemes of improvement was a resort to a campaign of unrelenting violence. Although at one point he was placed in the embarrassing predicament of having to explain and subsequently delete the term 'extermination' as the objective of one of his campaigns against the Jarawa to the Viceroy in Delhi, he remained firm in his resolve. In the aftermath of Independence, this policy of violence was completely and decidedly abandoned by the Indian state, but the demands of the post-colonial scheme of colonization were based on a similar ideological premise that saw the indigenous peoples of the Islands as an ambivalent presence in a predominantly settler society. The carving out of an agrarian landscape from the pristine forests of the Islands introduced a new cultural cartography wherein the boundary between the historical/civilized and the prehistoric/primitive is perpetuated by both the politics of tribal welfare and the unceasing reserves of social prejudice. It is this element of the Ferrar legacy that survives, even today, in the very place that bears his name. It is here that the Jarawas residing in the Tirrur area

<sup>86</sup> For a detailed study of the shifts in Bhantu society in the Andamans, see Palash Chandra Coommar, *Migration and Social Change: A study of the Bhantus of the Andaman Islands* (Calcutta: The Anthropological Society of India, 1997).

<sup>87</sup> Trevelejan, *The Golden Oriole*, 238–39.

on the fringes of the Ferrargunj settlement live uneasily with the peasant refugees of erstwhile East Pakistan and the Bhantus of Aniket.

The project of colonization and settlement initiated by Ferrar saw its logical conclusion in the political regime of the Indian state, which supported the slow and gradual ruralization of an overwhelmingly forest space, and the peasantization of its social fabric. Within a span of forty years a large segment of the virgin forests of the South and Middle Andamans were cleared and thousands of acres put under the plough. Swamps were drained, mangroves dredged, coconut plantations carved out from reclaimed land and paddy fields extended all along the valleys and the terraced slopes. And within these reclaimed landscapes were planted a community of settlers and 'colonists' who were meant to supply the Islands with a permanent labour force and unique ethnic identity.

Apart from the uneven consequences this has had on the Island ecology, the inscription of an agrarian landscape in the depths of the forest has created deep and irrevocable divides between the local-born community (convict descendants), the Islands' indigenous people and peasant settlers. The redistribution of the physical space in the forest between the tribal reserves and the settler villages has meant the demarcation of two potentially conflicting 'temporal spaces' – one marked by the seemingly 'frozen' time of the indigenous hunter-gatherer communities, and the other, the 'continuous' time of sedentary settler culture. As Vishvajit Pandya argues in Chapter 7, this demarcation has produced three further consequences: the positioning of the inhabitants of the tribal reserve as unchanging primitives, the settlers and local borns as their civilized 'other' and the state as a constant presence and arbiter between the two. The stories of their quotidian struggles of existence may go unrecorded in the historical archives of the state but remains forever etched on the borders of the paddy fields and forest reserves of South Andaman Island.

If Ferrar wanted to 'improve' the Islands into an ideal self-supporting agricultural settlement with a steady supply of labour and a healthy moral environment, the Indian state perpetuated that policy by integrating the project of 'improvement' with that of 'nationalization'. Such projects of nationalization not only sought to reappropriate and improve the Islands' territorial space but also to define its historical imagination, its social identity and its political future. The following chapters, by Clare Anderson and Vishvajit Pandya, explore how the contentious ramifications of these 'mainland' projects are reflected in the myriad material and symbolic inscriptions on the Island landscape. Clare Anderson begins the discussion by looking at the aftermath of the Second World War and the period of the Japanese occupation to show how mainland histories and local identities collided and configured one another.