



"ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF TRIBALS OF ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS"

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Abstract

This is brief study of tribes cultural educational changes in two decade in 21st century. The Author analyses that a general trend in most of the societies, more so among those of the Third World, which is cut off from the main stream of society, the issues involving major population groups alone have been comparatively more bothered for in terms of attention, as also resource allocation. For various reasons, the smaller groups, closer to the polar position of more or less primitive isolates, have remained neglected. Such a phenomenon has been true at wider level even when, in certain cases, the people of smaller and outlying communities kept on suffering as a result of gigantic problems faced by them. In the context of situation, prevalent in India, the Andaman and Nicobar aborigines present such a case. For decades, certain sections of these Bay islanders have been facing serious problems like 'depopulation', 'hostility', and aggressively primitive living. Can we do something to check the persistence of such problems? The answer is yes. There are remedial measures.

The author has thoroughly analysed the problem perspective of the Scheduled tribes of Andaman and Nicobar islands. Simultaneously the suggestions for betterment, as highlighted by the author in respective chapter, form integral part of this account. A unique feature in this study is that the 'holistic' profile of islanders' culture has been searched, as far as possible, to account for specialised knowledge of problems faced by the aborigines, and the relevant steps for solution thereof.

An Introduction

An Introduction' accounts for diverse ethnic groups constituting the population of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, also gives, in a nutshell, the nature of population composition. A little mention of the way of living of each of the groups and the problems faced by them form part of it. A mention of the racial and cultural levels, in respect of each group, is made.

This research paper pertains to the current life and culture of the Scheduled Tribes of Andaman and Nicobar islands. Barring Sentinelese and the Great Andamanese, rest of the four tribes, two of Andamans and two of Nicobars, have been thoroughly researched and presented in the latest context of their existence. Continuities, discontinuities and additions in diverse aspects of lifestyles find glaring mention. And all of these have been analytically interpreted in the background of strong empiricism. What has happened to these aborigines since 1970s, where do they now stand and what are they heading for are the areas well highlighted, more so in their survival matrix. Observations and revelations also pertain to the mind-sets which have taken shape in the light of situations grown of late. New channels promoting hostility among the Jarawas vis-a-vis others find special mention. It is obvious that the important issues have not been taken care of as desired. One does not really find coherence at the level of thinking and philosophy vis-a-vis Jarawas. Empirical facts support that the Jarawa situation has gone from bad to worse. Onges' dwindling number continues to be cause of concern and worry.

And no seriousness seems to have been imported to control the population decline. On the contrary the rise of new ventures and trends added insult to the injury. While the Jarawas do not tolerate any



outsider in close vicinity, the Onges' expressions certify that their fate is sealed and the extinction is not far. Indifferent attitude of aliens has not only come hard on the Jarawa and Onge tribes but is also proving fatal to both. For various reasons the priority of tribal interest has been put aside. The scientific policy and approach, once suggested, in respect of hostility and population decline could not be made use of in right perspective. There is no stopping to harm-causing ventures though the quantum of loss is well realised in all concerned quarters. The treatment meted out to the Negritos of Andamans is being extended to the Shompens of Great Nicobar, though the Shompens themselves are trying to avoid the chase. However the harming effects have started appearing on the surface. And in this sense the Shompens may ultimately join the same unfortunate stream in which the Negrito tribes landed or are being persuaded to land. Ultimate result is likely to be disastrous. Seriousness at the level of thought and implications is not being cultivated in the relevant echelons. Case of Nicobarese, more so of Car Nicobar, is conspicuously different. Underlying factors too differ. Some healthy alien influence and remarkable initiatives from within the community proved rewarding. But then some alienation of the Nicobarese of southern islands cannot be undermined. Unhealthy inter-tribal equation between Shompens and the Nicobarese continues to be a source of many ills which make Shompens suffer from. Philosophy, strategy and approach pertaining to Andaman and Nicobar tribes need to be context specific. Mapping in common perspective has yielded no good.

Research Methodology

In any anthropological research, the anthropologist has to seek help and co-operation from a number of persons. He or she totally depends on his or her informants for the collection data regarding the project he or she is undertaking. His or her informants are his or her most important helpers. Again while he or she collects data from some other sources like Government officers, panchayats, schools, market etc., he or she depends on different persons. Similarly, during tabulation, analysis of data, typing etc, even during library or he or she may take help from more than one person. In our case also from the stage of formulation of the research paper on the Tribes of Andaman Islands....

Explanations involved in problem-complex, and in approach to the same, have been given in the background of diverse elements existing in the respective cultural matrix of the tribes. Further, this analysis exposes wrong approaches, adopted by the concerned ones, directly or indirectly, in the development of the islands. Some instances of carelessness in respect of scientifically prescribed national policy to tribal people have also been reported, Further the descriptions, in the light of certain limits, of customs, rituals beliefs, values, sentiments and superstitions, connected to the social, economic, political and religious life of these islanders are enriching to the knowledge of one and all who keep interest in such ventures.

Ethnic Composition

1. The People of Andaman can be broadly categorized into two groups viz. Indigenous or Aborigines and Immigrants or Settlers. Prior to 1858, the Andaman Islands were inhabited by Autochthons only and with the founding of Penal Settlement at Port Blair after Indian Mutiny, Non-autochthons came to inhabit these Islands. Indigenous People of South Andaman Particularly vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs) who have been identified in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. They are:-
 1. Great Andamanese of Strait Island
 2. Onges of Little Andaman
 3. Jarawas of South and Middle Andaman



4. Sentinelese of Sentinel Islands
5. Shompens of Great Nicobar

The Great Andamanese



The great Andamanese is also known for their brave History in the past where they fought with bows and arrows with the English men who tried to occupy their land. The Great Andamanese is a collective term used for 10 different tribes that lived in most of the large islands in the Andaman. These tribes spoke different but related languages were of Negrito origin and were related by culture and geography.

Until the late 18th century, the Andamanese peoples were preserved from outside influences by their fierce rejection of contacts (which included killing any shipwrecked foreigners) and by the remoteness of the islands. But after the coming of the British, things changed.

When the British first tried to enter the island in around 1788-89 the Andamanese tribes, with their total population of 5000-8000, were able to resist them, resulting in the British to move to Port Cornwallis and withdraw from all attempts to obtain Port Blair and Ross island for about 60 years. However, they made another attempt to capture Port Blair in 1858 and succeeded, only to be met by the soldiers of the Great Andamanese tribe in 1859. The battle between the great Andamanese and the British regime is known as ‘The Aberdeen war’.

On 14th May 1859 great andamanese having a soldier strength of 400-600 people bravely fought the British soldiers who had modern equipment’s, thus has its impression in the history as “The Battle of Aberdeen”. The Andaman Government setup a statue for these Brave Soldiers in the Sea Shore of Marina Park as a memorial as it brings the spark of first freedom movement in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The tribe organized a well-planned attack on the high-ranking British officials but they were betrayed by an escaped convict Dudhanth Tiwari who had lived with the tribals for several months. As a result of the betrayal, the great Andamanese suffered heavily. They were fighting with bows and arrows against guns and artillery. Most of the young male population was killed in the battle. The population dwindled as and threatened the genes for the future survival of the



tribes. Imported diseases, to which the islanders had no immunity, further affected the population and by 1901 only 625 great Andamanese were left.

The Great Andamanese tribe is settled presently on the Strait Island by the Andaman & Nicobar Administration. This was the largest tribe earlier before the establishment of Penal Settlement in Andaman Islands. Various diseases including influenza etc. took large toll and the population was reduced to present 43 as per the census 2001. The Administration has provided houses and raised Coconut Plantation for the upliftment of Andamanese. Further free ration including cloths is also being provided to them. As such, Andamanese are no longer a nomadic tribe. However, they do sometime go for hunting and fishing.

As they shifted base to Straight island and that is where they live today. Today only two tribes (Jeru and Bo) remain insignificant number; the other 8 have been mostly extinct. The cultural and linguistic identities of the individual tribes have largely been lost; their members now speak mostly Hindi.

Although the Great Andamanese on Strait Island still obtains some of their diets from hunting, fishing, and gathering, they now consume rice and other Indian food and are dependent on support by the Indian government for survival. They now practice some agriculture and have established some poultry farms.

The tribe-wise population of Scheduled Tribes in Andaman and Nicobar Islands as per Census 2011 is given below: -

Tribes	Population
Andamanese, Chariar, Chari, Kora, Tabo, Bo, Yere, Kede, Bea, Balawa, Bojigiyab, Juwai, Kol	44
Jarawas	380
Nicobarese	27168
Onges	101
Sentinelese	15
Shompens	229

Based on information received from the Directorate of Tribal Welfare, Andaman and Nicobar (A&N) Administration, Nicobarese follow Islam and Christianity.

Great Andamanese: Population 44. The tribe that has suffered most from contact with outsiders: 99% have been wiped out since the British first colonized the islands. Before the tsunami they lived in a government settlement and were dependent on government aid. They have just been moved to the islands' capital, Port Blair, as their village was badly damaged in the tsunami.



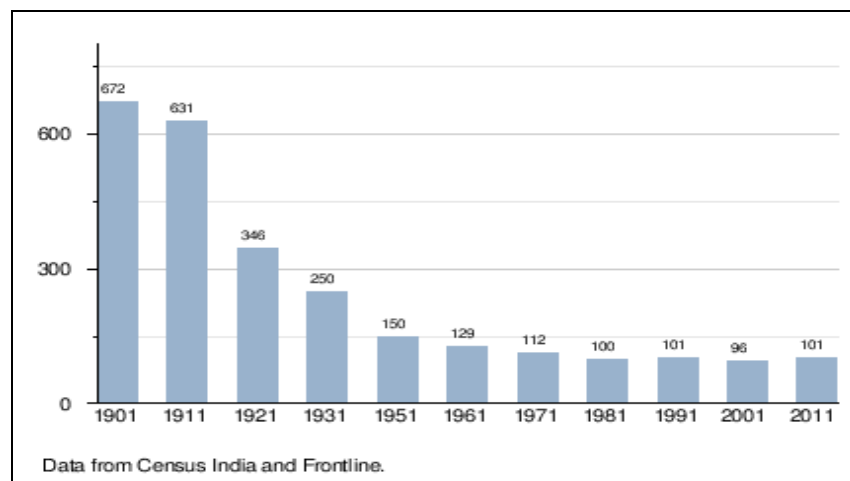
The Onges



Onges are one of the most primitive tribes in India. They belong to the Negrito racial stock and they have been mainly seen near the Dugong creek in Little Andaman. They are dependent on the food provided by nature and are a semi-nomadic tribe. Coconut plantation has been raised for the benefit of Onges Medical care, free ration etc. Are being provided by the Administration. Onges go for hunting and fishing occasionally the onge population fell post British colonization from 672 in 1986 to 92 in 1901 but has remained stable since.

At present the Onge populations have opened up to the locals in the island. They have now experienced the impact of outsiders, as efforts at befriending them have proved successful. They have been provided with pucca houses, food, clothes, medicine etc. by the Administration. They eat turtle, fish, roots and jack fruits etc. They have developed artistry and crafts. The Onges can make canoes. A primary school has also been functioning at the Dugong Creek settlement of Onges. The population of this tribe is stable and is at present 110. A major drawback is the addiction of the Deugong mails to alcohol. 6 deaths have been reported because of this already. Enquiries into ways of controlling this addiction are taking place.

The population of Onges in first decade of 21st Century is 96 as per the census 2001. The present population in second decade of 21st Century of Onges is 101 as per the census 2011.





The Onge (**Date of event 18.11.2021**) tribe living in Dugong Creek of Little Andaman participated in the festivities by performing their traditional games, dance and cultural programmes organized on 18.11.2021. Painting competition for children, sensitization on hygiene & health camps were organized for Onge women for creating awareness on health hazard of consumption of tobacco etc.

Sports and games activities viz., Koko, gymnastics, swimming, archery was also conducted, in which, large part of Onge children participated enthusiastically. Cleanliness drive under Swatch Bharat Mission was also conducted in Dugong Creek involving Onge tribe, as part of the events.

The Jarwas



The Jarawas inhabit presently the Western coast of Middle Andaman and South Andaman Islands. They are hostile and, at times, enter into areas where the Bengali and other people have been settled by the Government. The Andaman & Nicobar Administration have started the Contact Expeditions periodically to Jarawas to befriend them. The first friendly contact was made in 1974 and since then the Jarawas are not hostile to the Contact Team which go with gifts like Coconut, Banana and other fruits. For centuries this tribe has shunned all interaction with outsiders and therefore their name means “The hostile ones” or “people of the earth”.

The Jarawa are still at the primitive stage of life on earth. They entirely depend upon forest and sea for food. Wild boar and monitor lizard are consumed. Various kinds of fruit, honey, and tubers are parts of their diet too. The Jarwas of both sexes goes completely naked. However, some ornaments made with shells and palm leaves are worn by them but these are not in the sense to cover their nudity.

This tribe has lived in the southeast part of Andaman but after the British regime, they shifted to the western region of the island. They have forever been hunter-gatherers in the true sense however things have changed since the 1990’s especially after the building of the old trunk road. Jarawas continue to be hunting and gathering nomadic tribe. They hunt wild pigs, monitor lizard with bows and arrows. Tips of the arrow are made of Iron. Unlike Onges and Andamanese, Jarawas do not use dogs for hunting. Men fish with bows and arrows in the coastal waters while women catch fish with basket. Molluscus constitute major part of their Pisces food. Jarawas collect fruits and roots including honey from the forest. They build temporary huts in their camps. They use crude rafts to cross creeks and streams.



With a population between 250 to 400, the Jarawa tribe is one of the largest tribes in the Andaman Islands. The population of Jarawas is 240 as per the census 2001.

The great Andaman trunk road is a 360 km long road that connects Port Blair to the western regions of Andaman. Though it proves beneficial for tourism and business, it has proved life-threatening for the Jarawas. This trunk road cuts through the jungles that are home to the Jarawa community.

Jarawa events (*Date of 16.11.2021, 17.11.2021 to 18.11.2021*) Traditional dance & song programmes organized in Jarawa settlements. Interaction programme with the tribe of Jarawa community was organized at their settlements to create awareness for perseverance of their traditional value and food habits. Archery competitions were organized for Jarawa tribe of Lawaital, Tirrur and Kadamtala tribal settlements, which saw enthusiastic participation by them by making their own bows & arrows, Jarawa Population about 270. Have only had peaceful contact with outsiders for six years. They live on the west coast of South and Middle Andaman, and are believed to have survived the tsunami. They are still completely independent and live entirely by hunting, gathering and fishing. The main threat to their existence comes from the highway running through their territory: the Indian government was ordered to close this by the Supreme Court in 2002, but it has ignored the order.

The Sentinelese



The Sentinelese is the inhabitants of North Sentinel Island. The area is about 60 Sq. Kilometers. They are probably the world's only Paleolithic people surviving today without contact with any other group or community. They are considered as an off-shoot to the Onge Jarawa tribes which have acquired a different identity due to their habitation in an isolated and have lost contact with the main tribes. The Sentinelese is very hostile and never leave their Island. Very little is known about these hostile tribes. They also are hostile like Jarawas to outsiders. The Contact Expeditions of Andaman and Nicobar Administration go to the North Sentinel Island periodically. A breakthrough was achieved when the Contact team of the Administration led by Shri S.A.Awaradi, former Director of Tribal Welfare could establish the first ever friendly contact with the Sentinelese on 4th January 1991. Since then the Sentinelese have accepted gifts from the Contact Party. However, the Sentinelese continues to be skeptical about the outsiders including the Contact Expedition Team.

Sentineleses are the hunting, fishing and gathering tribe. They fish in the coastal waters with bows and arrows and hunt wild pigs available on North Sentinel Island. Sentineleses have dug – out Canoe which is used to move in the shallow coastal waters. They do not have the oars and therefore Canoes are



propelled with long poles. Sentinelese also builds temporary huts in their camps. Sentinelese, both men and women do not wear cloths. The population of Sentinelese is 39 as per the 2001 census.

It is safe to say that the original population of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands consists of aboriginal indigenous people, i.e. tribal people. They have been dwelling in the forests and jungles of the islands for centuries, lead a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, and appear to have lived in substantial isolation for thousands of years. The so-called “civilians” or city/town dwellers only came later, earliest a few hundred years ago.

The Andamanese and Nicobarese can be split into two broad tribal groups mainly based on their place of origin. The Andaman Islands are home to four ‘Negrito’ tribes were as – the Great Andamanese, Onge, Jarawa, and Sentinelese. Whereas the Nicobar Islands are home to two ‘Mongoloid’ tribes – the Shompen and Nicobarese.

The ‘Negrito’ tribes are believed to have arrived in the islands from Africa up to 60,000 years ago. All are nomadic hunter-gatherers, hunting wild pig and monitor lizard, and catching fish with bows and arrows. They also collect honey, roots, and berries from the forest. The ‘Mongoloid’ tribes probably came to the islands from the Malay-Burma coast several thousand years ago. The Sentinelese people are said to be so hostile that their home has been named the ‘hardest place to visit in the world.

They inhabit the North Sentinel island and are the only remaining tribe in the Andamans to still maintain their isolation from the rest of the world. Nobody knows exactly how they look, the population, or how they live. Since 1967, the Indian governments with the help of anthropologists have tried to make contact with the tribe. They tried giving gifts of food, coconuts, etc but they were always met with hostility. The tribe showers arrows and stones at whoever comes near the island.

In 2006, 2 fishermen who were fishing illegally near the island were shot by Sentinelese archers. The helicopters which were sent to retrieve the bodies were also greeted by arrows. After the tsunami, the government again tried to help them by sending a few employees to the island with gifts but again, the same response followed. Presently the policy of the Indian government is to leave the Sentinelese alone. Any access to North Sentinel island is strictly forbidden.

The Shompens





The habitation of Shompens is the Great Nicobar which is the largest among the Nicobar Group of Islands. Like the Nicobarese, they belong to the Mongoloid race. The Shompens have two divisions, the smaller division being known as Mawa Shompens. They inhabit areas very close to the coastal region along the river valleys. They are very shy. They are quite intimate with the Nicobarese. The major group of shompens are the hostile Shompens living in Alexendra and Galathia river areas and also on the east coast of the area in the interior of the island. In the past, frequent attacks are believed to have been made on the Mawa Shompens by the hostile Shompens. But now such hostility has stopped. It is probably because they have been largely reduced in number due to various diseases. The Shompens are the victims of disease, and physically very weak. With the establishment of the settlement at Campbell Bay in Great Nicobar, Shompens have been visiting the settlers and they are gradually shaking off their shyness and indifferent attitude towards the civilized people.

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