



Indigenous People Of Andaman And Nicobar Islands

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ABSTRACT –

This paper attempts to evaluate the life style of indigenous people in Andaman and Nicobar archipelago . Andaman and Nicobar Islands is a important union territory of India comprising 572 Islands of which only 38 are inhabited. The islands are situated between Bay of Bengal to the west and the Andaman Sea to the east . The Andaman and Nicobar islands , a tropical paradise with pristine beaches , vibrant coral reefs , lush green forests , diverse ecosystem and distinctive tribals create an idyllic backdrop that provides unforgettable escape . This islands are two group of islands – the Andaman islands and the Nicobar islands , covering an area of 8,249 sq. km. Both group of Islands are separated by Ten Degree Channel . The islands extend from 6° to 14° North latitudes and from 92° to 94° East longitudes. These islands of India in contribute to the nation's economy through tourism , fisheries and agriculture .

KEYWORDS – Indigenous , archipelago , primitive

INTRODUCTION –

However , the essence of Andaman and Nicobar in not just in its scenic beauty or diverse flora and fauna . The heartbeat of these islands lies in its indigenous tribal groups . Andaman and Nicobar are home to the various indigenous tribal groups . These tribes have unique lifestyle , distinct from each other in various aspects . The islands have a mixed culture and semi – nomadic hunter – gatherers . These tribal communities are a window into our past , a reflections of the primordial roots of human existence .

Tribes can be thought of as “uncivilized” by a societal definition but what’s impressive to note is that these people have knowledge of the area and biodiversity like no other. They can look at a coconut and tell apart the variety, the amount of juice and the taste of it. They can shoot down the fastest of fishes and birds* in one attempt. Their skills will forever remain unmatched. It is safe to boast that the original population of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands consists of aboriginal indigenous people, i.e. tribal people. These indigenous tribal groups, the original inhabitants who have inhabited these lands since long before the arrival of the so-called “civilians” that only came later, earliest a few hundred years ago.

They have lived in isolation for thousands of years now and some still continue to do so. Their presence offers a glimpse into humanity’s ancient past, characterized by a reliance on hunting and gathering and a harmonious coexistence with the natural world, relatively untouched by external influences. Hence , the tribal communities serve as a living link to our ancestral heritage, offering insights into the earliest forms of human existence. Their traditions, ceremonies, and daily practices fascinate us everyday and spark curiosity.

OBJECTIVES -

This study fulfils the following objectives :

- i. To know the different primitive group in Andaman and Nicobar islands
- ii. To analyze the distribution of tribals
- iii. To evaluate the physical , cultural lifestyle of tribal
- iv. To analyze the challenges face by tribal

METHODOLOGY –

The sole purpose of the study to analyze the indigenous people in Andaman and Nicobar Islands . The collection of data is secondary data which are collected from statistical office and secondary source . The collected are processed and analyzed in a proper way . The analyzed information has been represented by using suitable table .

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS –

The Andaman and Nicobar islands are home to six indigenous tribes belong to two major groups . They are Negrito and Mongoloid .

• NEGRITO GROUPS -

The Negrito tribals inhabit in the different parts of Andaman islands only . The Negrito populations today are small and geographically restricted . The four major tribes of these groups of Andaman islands are –

1. Andamanese
2. Onge
3. Jarawa
4. Sentinelese

• Mongoloid Groups –

The tribes of Mongoloid groups which inhabit in Nicobar islands . The mongoloid tribes characterized by their Mongolian features are believed to have journeyed to the islands from the coasts of Malaya – Burma settling here several millennia ago . The two mongoloid groups are included in –

1. Nicobarese
2. Shompen

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

Serial Number	Tribe	Population (in 2011)	% to total tribe population	% to the total population of A & N Islands
1	Great Andamanese	44	0.16	0.01
2.	Onges	101	0.36	0.03
3.	Jarawas	380	1.36	0.10
4.	Sentinelese	15	15	0.00
5.	Nicobarese	27168	97.25	7.14
6.	Shompens	229	0.83	0.06
Total		27937	100	7.34

Source : Census of India 2011

1. ANDAMANESE –

The Great Andamanese tribe stands as one of the original inhabitants of Andaman islands . Andamanese live in a permanent settlement in Strait Islands an area of 3.11 sq . km , which has been provided to them by the Andaman and Nicobar Administration . They are semi nomadic tribes and fully dependent on the food provided by nature .

- **Physical features** -The Great Andamanese are short scattered Negrito tribes of Andaman . The average height of their women and men are respectively 4 and 5 feet approximately . Their skin color varies from black to dark brown . Some women were seen with heavily frizzy hairs and some are seen with long curly hairs . Their lips are not very thick .
- **Food Habit** -Their important sources of food are variety of fish , crabs , prawns , turtle all obtained from sea . These are supplemented by roots , seeds , wild bore , honey etc . They smoke beedi , cigarettes and chew bettle leaves and tobacco . Pigs are killed by arrows and brought to the camp and roasted on open fire .
- **Dressing Style** - The Great Andamanese tribe traditionally wore minimal clothing made from readily available natural materials like leaves, bark, and plant fibers, reflecting their simple, sustainable lifestyle and connection to nature. Men wore girdles made of hibiscus fibre , which served as a practical way to carry tools. Women wore leaf skirts or dresses often held by belt .

2. ONGES –

The Onges , a negrito tribe are inhabiting the little Andaman Islands in Andaman district . The islands has a geographical area of 731.5 sq. km is situated between 10° 30 ' and 10° 56 ' north latitude and 92° 28' and 92° 35 ' east longitude at a distance of about 100 km from the capital Sri Vijaya puram . The Little Andaman islands is almost flat and there is no mountain with no river. The Onges were nomadic primitive people living in groups or bands .

- **Physical Features** - The Onges belong to the negrito sub-race of the primary race, negroid. They exhibit the distinctive negrito characters such as pygmy stature(less than 150cm) and pepper-corn type of hair . The skin colour is dark skin colour .
- **Food Habit** – Onge like to eat fish , meat of wild bore , roots and turtle . In recent years they have been relishing rice as staple food . They have liking for tea also .
- **Dressing Style** – The Onge tribe , traditionally wore minimal clothing made from natural materials like leaves , bark and fibres .

3. JARAWAS –

The Jarawa live in the dense forest of south and middle Andaman. They are quite hostile and do not like any contact with outsiders. They prefer to remain alone as they have turned down most of the offers of contact . They enjoy a free independent and nomadic life . They are unable to speak any language other than Jarawa . The Jarawa areas have been notified as Tribal reserves .

- **Physical Features** – The Jarawa are characterized by physical features of short stature , dark skin colour and wooly hair , and broad to round head shape . The average height of adult Jarawa men is just under 150 cm , while for adult women it is around 137 cm .They are also considered to have a gracile build .
- **Food Habit** - The Jarawa tribe, as a nomadic hunter-gatherer group, relies on a diet primarily consisting of animals, including wild pigs, fish, crabs, and turtle eggs, supplemented by wild fruits, roots, and tubers. They have a liking for coconuts , bananas and boiled rice . They collect honey ,meats and roots .
- **Dressing Style** -Typically they don't wear clothing but will adorn themselves with objects taken from nature , such as leaves , flowers and shells . Clay is sometimes spread on the body and engraved with geometric designs .

4. SENTINELESE –

The Negrito Sentinelese live in North Sentinel Island which is a small island with an area of about 23 sq. miles . These tribes are the most isolated community of the islands . Being very hostile in nature not much is known about them . They have derived their name from the Island in which they live in .

- **Physical Features** – They are known for their dark , shining black skin , well – aligned teeth and prominent muscles with no signs of obesity . Researchers have noted their height as being between 5' 3" and 5' 5 " .
- **Food Habit** -Sentinelese continue to follow the hunting and food gathering way of life and resist any contact from the outside world . They hunt the wild pig and collect honey from the forests . They have been reported to have canoes , bows and arrows .
- **Dressing Style** – Sentinelese remain naked . They are known for their essentially nude lifestyle with both men and women rarely wearing clothes . Traditionally they wear minimal clothing, with men and women using bark strings or leaves as decorations, and men often wearing a thicker waist belt with daggers tucked in .

5. NICOBARESE –

The Mongoloid tribals of the Nicobar Islands inhabit in most of the islands of Nicobar group . Nicobarese are distributed in almost all the inhabited islands of Nicobar group excepting Great Nicobar which is traditionally the domain of the Shompens . The Nicobar islands constitute a land mass of 1,841 sq . km . Of the twenty – four islands in the Nicobar, twelve are inhabited . Due to their geographical isolation , the Nicobarese have maintained their genetic minimal external influence.

- **Physical Features** – They have pale or light pale skin , short height , flat face and broad nose . The average height of Nicobarese people is generally considered to be around 160 to 165 cm . They are also known to have well – aligned teeth .Nicobarese skin colour may vary from a saffron to yellowish brown .
- **Food Habit** – At times they still go hunting and gathering. Nicobarese are non – vegetarian and relish pork . Their traditional diet consists of fish , dugong , turtle eggs , crabs , roots and tubers . Nicobarese are horticulturists and grow banana , mango , jackfruit , coconut . Rearing of pigs and eating its meat is very common . Tobacco chewing is very common among them .
- **Dressing Style** - The traditional attire of the Nicobarese people consists of colorful loincloths made from cotton or bark, with women wearing a wrap-around skirt called "papai" and men wearing a "lungi" or "dhoti".

6. SHOMPENS –

The Shompens of Great Nicobar belong to the Mongoloid stock . They reside in the interiors of Great Nicobar islands . It is the biggest islands , 1045 sq . km area in the Nicobar group . They are the only mongoloid primitive tribes of these islands . They are semi – nomadic people shifting their camps from one location to another depending on the availability of food and water . They were believed to be hostile earlier but in recent decades they have not shown any hostility towards others . In fact there are trade relations between Shompens and Nicobarese .They are most isolated tribes on earth . They are one of the least studied **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)** in India .

- **Physical Features** – Shompens are medium height with mongoloid features . They are of short to medium stature , have a round or nearly broad head shape , narrow nose , a broad facial profile , and distinctly exhibit Mongoloid features such as light brown to yellow brown skin and oblique eye features .
- **Food Habit** – The main activities of Shompens are hunting , food – gathering and fishing . They love to hunt pig with their spears and domesticated dogs . Besides , they collect wild yams , roots , fruit ,honey and larvae of insects . Pandanus fruit (Larop) is their staple food , collected from the rainforests.
- **Dressing Style** – The Shompens people , an indigenous group in Great Nicobar islands , traditionally wear minimal clothing , with men typically wearing a short , thin loincloth made of bark cloth, covering only the genitals without a tail of cloth in front . Women wearing a knee – length skirt of bark cloth , sometimes with a shawl . They are also barefoot .

AREA OF TRIBAL PEOPLE IN ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS -

SERIAL NUMBER	TRIBES	AREA / REGIONS
1.	Great Andamanese	Strait islands
2.	Onges	Little Andaman
3.	Jarawas	Middle and South Andaman , Baratang
4.	Sentilenese	North Sentinel Islands
5 .	Nicobarese	Car Nicobar Nicobar, Chowra , Teressa , Katchal , Nancowry , Kamorta , Little Nicobar
6.	Shompens	Great Nicobar

CHALLENGES FACED BY TRIBES –**1. Population Decline –**

It is major problems of tribes in our Islands . Some tribes , like **Great Andamanese** have experienced significant population decline with their numbers dwindling from thousand to just a few dozen . The population of these tribes has dwindled from 5000 in the 1850 to just 44 individuals in 2011 census .

2. Increased interaction and potential exploitation –

Development projects such as the **Andaman Trunk Road (ATR)** have led to increased interactions between the tribes and outsiders , potentially exposing them to exploitation and diseases .

3. Invasive species –

The introduction of invasive species from the mainland , including plants and animals , pose a threat to the delicate ecosystems of the islands , which are vital for the survival of the tribes .

4. Exploitation of their natural resources

The govt. policies of liberalization and globalization prioritize using resources for economic growth , which clashes with the traditional tribal view of resource utilization . This has led to extraction of resources from tribal territories , causing ecological damage .

5. Health and Diseases –

Health related issue are among the most serious problems these tribes encounter . The tribes have little to no immunity to diseases brought in by outsider contact . Infection like smallpox , influenza , and others can still be dangerous and have disastrous effects from the past .

6 . Environmental Threat -

These tribes face a constant threat to their natural habitat from deforestation , climatic change and illegitimate practices .

7 . Globalization – Globalization has worsened the situation , exacerbating social exclusion and vulnerability for the downtrodden tribes . This has even led to sub – national movements seeking greater autonomy or recognition for tribal areas .

DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS –

1. Rehabilitation and Protection –

The administration of Andaman and Nicobar has implemented programs to rehabilitate and protect the tribes , including housing , food and healthcare .

2. Education and Healthcare –

The administration has introduced informal education system for Jarawas and Onges children, and efforts are being made to improve healthcare access for all tribes .

3, Preservation and Cultures -

Efforts are being made to preserve the traditional culture and way of the tribes , while also promoting their integration into the broader society .

4 . Restriction on Contact with outsiders -

The administration faces the challenge of balancing the need for development and integration with the need to protect the tribes from the negative impacts of contact with outsiders, such as disease and cultural disruption .

CONCLUSION –

Tribal in Andaman and Nicobar are an important part of the nation . Andaman and Nicobar islands are home to the several indigenous tribes . In these islands there are five particularly vulnerable tribal group are found except Nicobarese . They do face a number of challenges . By implementing the above mentioned measures and promoting a comprehensive approach to tribal welfare. It is essential to foster an environment where tribal communities can thrive and enjoy the same opportunities and rights as other citizens of country .

SUGGESTIONS –

To protect tribals in Andaman and Nicobar islands and safeguard their rights and well being several measures and policies need to be implemented . Some key steps are –

- ❖ To preserve the unique cultural heritage of tribal communities .
- ❖ Encourage traditional practices and crafts and protect their sacred sites and cultural spaces .
- ❖ Take necessary precautions to protect isolated tribes and their habitat .
- ❖ Properly rehabilitate tribal communities affected by development projects .
- ❖ Improve access to quality education and healthcare services in tribal areas .

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