

Heterogeneity and Group Dynamics among the Shompen of Great Nicobar Island

Anthropological Survey of India

Ministry of Culture, Government of India
Kolkata

The Shompen are one of the least studied Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India.

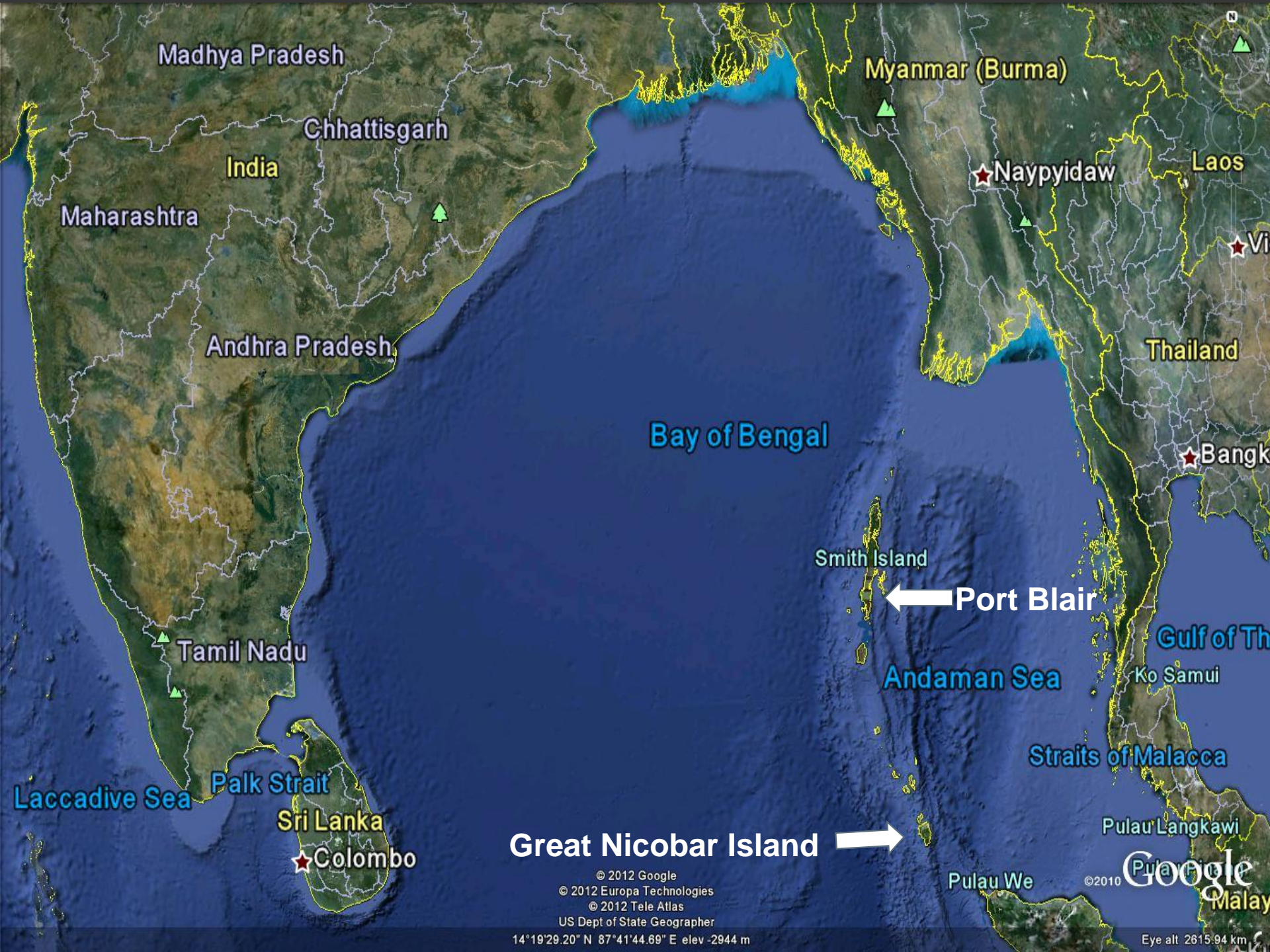
This very little known tribal community reside in dense tropical Rain forest of Great Nicobar Island of Andaman and Nicobar group of Islands.

The Shompen habitat is also an important biological hotspot and there are two National Parks and one Biosphere Reserve namely Campbell Bay National Park, Galathea National Park and Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve.

Though according to Census (2011), the estimated population of Shompen is 229, the exact population of Shompen is unknown till today.

They are semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer and their main sources of livelihood are hunting, gathering, fishing and little bit horticultural activities in a rudimentary form.

Primarily, they used to hunt wild pig, python, monitor Lizard, crocodile, sea turtle etc.



Madhya Pradesh

Chhattisgarh

India

Maharashtra

Andhra Pradesh

Tamil Nadu

Sri Lanka

Colombo

Myanmar (Burma)

Naypyidaw

Laos

Thailand

Bangkok

Bay of Bengal

Smith Island

Port Blair

Andaman Sea

Gulf of Thailand

Ko Samui

Straits of Malacca

Pulau Langkawi

Pulau We

© 2010

Google

Malaysia

© 2012 Google

© 2012 Europa Technologies

© 2012 Tele Atlas

US Dept of State Geographer

14°19'29.20" N 87°41'44.69" E elev -2944 m

Eye alt 2615.94 km



Man (1884)

NANDOWPY.	GREAT NICOBAR.
1 Dai-ta-henk	1 Lafai
2 Ianoaga	2 Tania
3 Mattai-ta-see	3 Savanga
4 Anava	4 Metaita-ania
5 Hendaha	5 Enjawa
6 Itoe	6 Lokafan
7 Dai-ta-menk	7 Henhaka
LITTLE NICOBAR.	8 Pulo-data
1 Ileya	9 Nenpala
2 Enderiga	10 Pula-bael
3 Puloak	11 Kapekhaad
4 Temala	
5 Tiden	

Source: Man (1884)

GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND

SCALE 1 INCH = 4 MILES

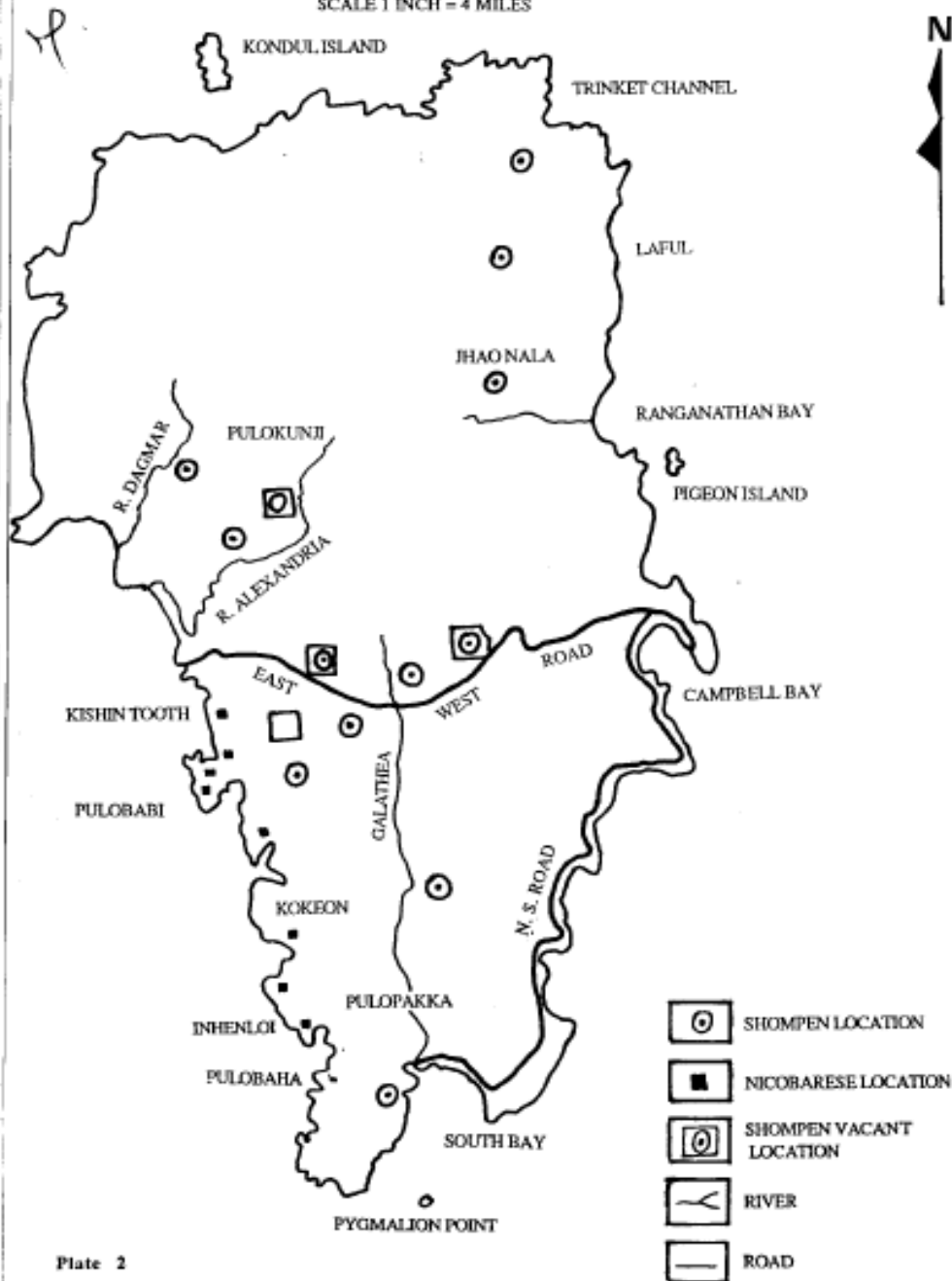


Plate 2

Source: Rizvi (1990)



Source:
Forest
Department











Though few peripheral and sporadic studies on some selected groups of Shompen are available, the ethnographic information on Shompen is till scanty.

Much of our understanding of the community is based on the narratives of the Great Nicobarese tribe, their immediate neighbour. The intermittent reports by early travellers and academicians and the imaginary stories as told by local people, based on hearsays.

As two tribal communities (Shompen and Great Nicobarese) are reciprocally coexisting in different parts of the Great Nicobar Island from hundreds of years, any study on Shompen cannot be perceived in isolation. It must be viewed reciprocally in any historical specific and contextual specific situations.

Perhaps, there are two contradictory term i.e. '*Sam-hap*' and '*Kom-hap*' co-exist simultaneously among both the Shompen and Great Nicobarese.

The first one is the Great Nicobarese term to refer Shompen which means jungle dweller and the second term (*Kom-hop*) is the Shompen term to refer Great Nicobarese. In Shompen dialect the *Kom-hop* refers to the coastal dwellers or Great Nicobarese.

Moreover, the tragedy of Tsunami in 2004 is one of the immensely influencing factors to be considered for any contextual ethnography.

As perceived by the Great Nicobarese, the reciprocal relationship between Shompen and Great Nicobarese may broadly be categorised the three different phases viz.

- a) Period of mutual hostility,
- b) Pre-tsunami period of symbiotic relationship,
- c) Post tsunami period of symbiotic relationship.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands Shompen Policy, 2015 admit and reveal the following aspects-

No. 89/2015/F. No. 1-892/2009-TW/557.— The policy towards the Shompens Tribe recognizes socio-geographic variation within the community, varying requirements of different groups of Shompens, and the need to address various gaps in our understanding of this somewhat less known community. The policy seeks to ensure the social, economic and cultural integrity of the entire community. It also recognizes the need to improve the mechanisms by

2. OBJECTIVES :

2.1 Recognize the social, ecological and economic diversity among Shompens.

- The Policy clearly reveals that **there is a need to address various gaps in our understanding about this somewhat less known community.**
- **It also recognises socio-geographical variation within the community.**

So, in view of above circumstances, the present study of Anthropological Survey of India may be of immense importance for both the researchers, academicians and Policy makers.

The earliest mentioned report about the existence of an inland tribe in Great Nicobar was first mentioned by Pastor Rosen, a Danish missionary, in 1831. After that different administrator, researchers, scholars and travellers studied and mentioned varied superficial aspects about the Shompen. The little we know about the Shompen from the work of Man (1884), Temple (1901), Kloss (1903), Bonnington (1932), Chengappa (1955), Lal (1977) and Rizvi (1990).

Often most of the authors have generalised different groups of Shompen spread in a vast geographical area. **Intra-group and inter-group relationship were not looked into in details.**

Most of the earlier ethnographers like Man (1884), Kloss (1903), mentioned Shompen as a homogeneous group of inland tribe. They were also mentioned Shompen as the aboriginal stock of the Nicobarese and singular purity breed compared to the others. Perhaps, till date they were supposed to be a uniform homogeneous group spread in a geographical territory.

Even more recent authors like Lall (1977) and Rizvi (1990) also didn't give much emphasis on heterogeneity and group dynamics among different groups of Shompens

Feasibly, the present study reveals that Shompen is not a homogeneous group.

There are different aspects of heterogeneity among different groups of Shompen in terms of their dialect, appearance, group dynamics and different level of reciprocity with the Great Nicobarese etc.

Group dynamics of Shompen includes dynamicity of their relationship with the Great Nicobarese, Intra-group and Inter-group relationship among the Shompen.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands Shompen Policy, 2015 recognises the following geographically spread distinct groups of Shompen -

3. THE DISTRIBUTION AND VARIATION IN REQUIREMENTS AMONG SHOMPENS :

3.1 The policy towards the Shompens community recognizes four distinct groups of Shompens, geographically spread on the island of Great Nicobar with varying degrees of contact. They are at (a) New Chingenhy, (b) Laful Region, (c) East-West Road Region and (d) the Kokeon/Galathea Region (map in Annexure). The policy towards the Shompens will document and respond to the variable contact and varying requirements from outside of the groups.

Considering different historical evidences/circumstances and contextual specific situations, the Shompen may broadly be categorised in four geographical groups. Each group is also divided in different sub-groups based on affinity and reciprocity Following are the Different Groups and Sub-groups of Shompen-

1. North-Eastern Group

- a. Lawful area sub-group
- b. Jhawnalah area sub-group
- c. Trinket area sub-group

2. Southern Group

- a. Kokeon area sub-group
- b. Chingen/New Chingen and Southern Galathea river area sub-group

3. Western Group

- a. Alexendria river area sub-group
- b. Dogmer River area sub-group

4. Central Group

- a. Interiors of 24 km EW road sub-group
- b. Interiors of 27/28 km EW road sub-group
- c. Interiors of 35 km EW road sub-group



1. The North-Eastern group is one of the most visited and studied group since 1884 when E.H. Man mentioned about his trip to the interior inland tribes of the Lawful and existence of 14 Shompen there. Broadly there were three sub-groups in that area namely Lawful area sub-group, Jhawnalah area sub-group and Trinket area sub-group. As the population of these sub-groups different become numerically weak, they merged together and at present most of them are staying at interiors of Lawfull area having their population 23 (male-13, female-10). Another sub-group is staying at interiors of Trinket Bay area along with the tributaries of Jublee river and their population is 5 (male-2, female-3).

1. Southern group

Historically, the Southern group consists of many sub-groups. The few remnants of such Shompen who are can be traced till today are

- a) Shompen of interior of Kokeon area,
- b) Chingen/New Chingen and Southern part of Galathea river area sub-group.

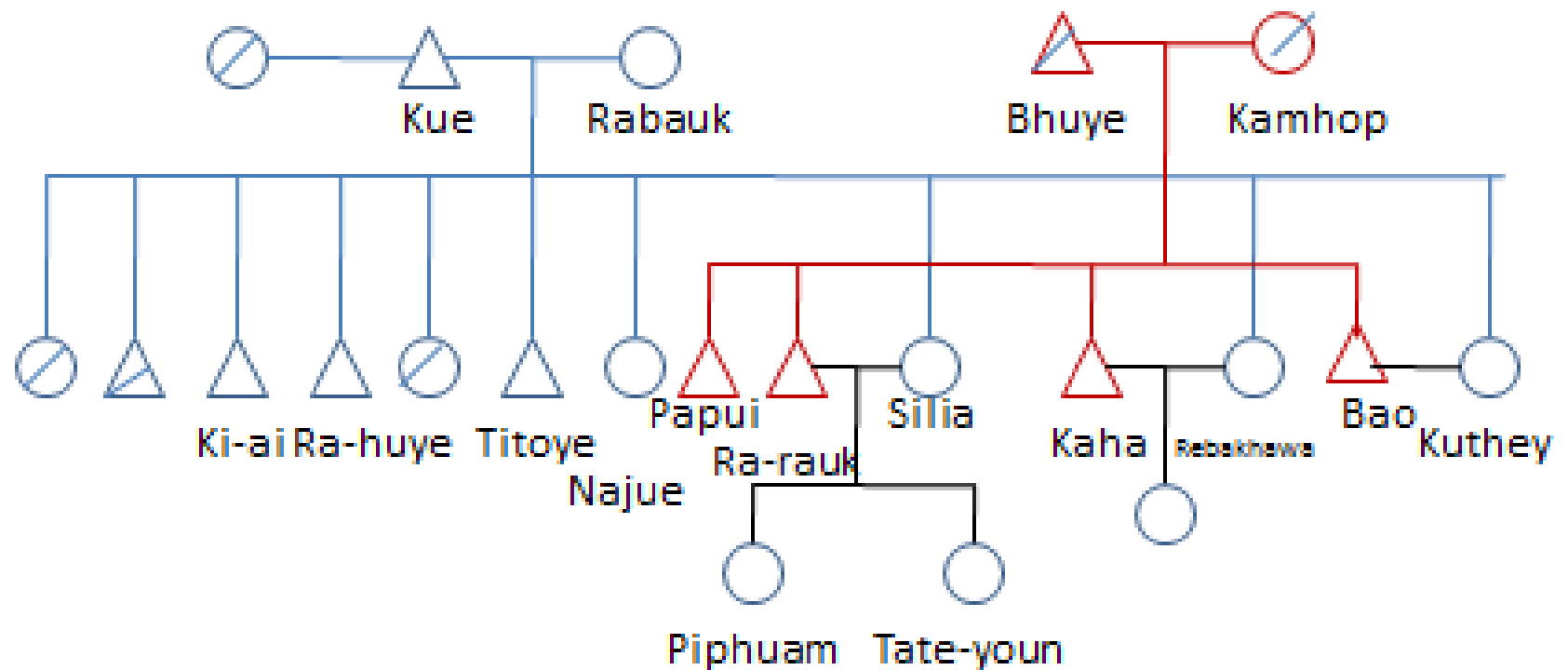
Traditionally the Shompen of interiors of Kokeon areas used to maintain bartering relationship with the Great Nicobarese of Kokeon and Impochi villages.

There were different camp sites or settlements of the Shompen of this area and they used to roam around these settlements in search of food and livelihood.

- During of the present study the Shompen were found at the *Po-giao* camp site.
- Some other camp sites of this sub-groups are *Poiling*, *Rakamaya* and *Rabakhao* etc.
- Due to post tsunami resettlement of all west coast Great Nicobarese at Rajib Nagar (near Campbell Bay), now-a-days this Shompen are coming to the Campbell bay for their bartering urges. Presently, for their different bartering need and to collect rice/ ration items from the Great Nicobarese and Andaman Adim Janjati Vikash Samity (AAJVS).

- They used to walk more than two days from their settlement and after crossing different tributaries of Galathea river, hillocks in the dense tropical rain forest, they used to come out from the Laxmi Nagar areas (24 km North-South road).
- Remarkably, their first preference of bartering partners is those great Nicobarese of Kokeon village who are now staying at the tsunami shelters at Rajib Nagar. They often stay overnight at those Great Nicobarese houses.

Genealogy of Shompen of Kokeon Area



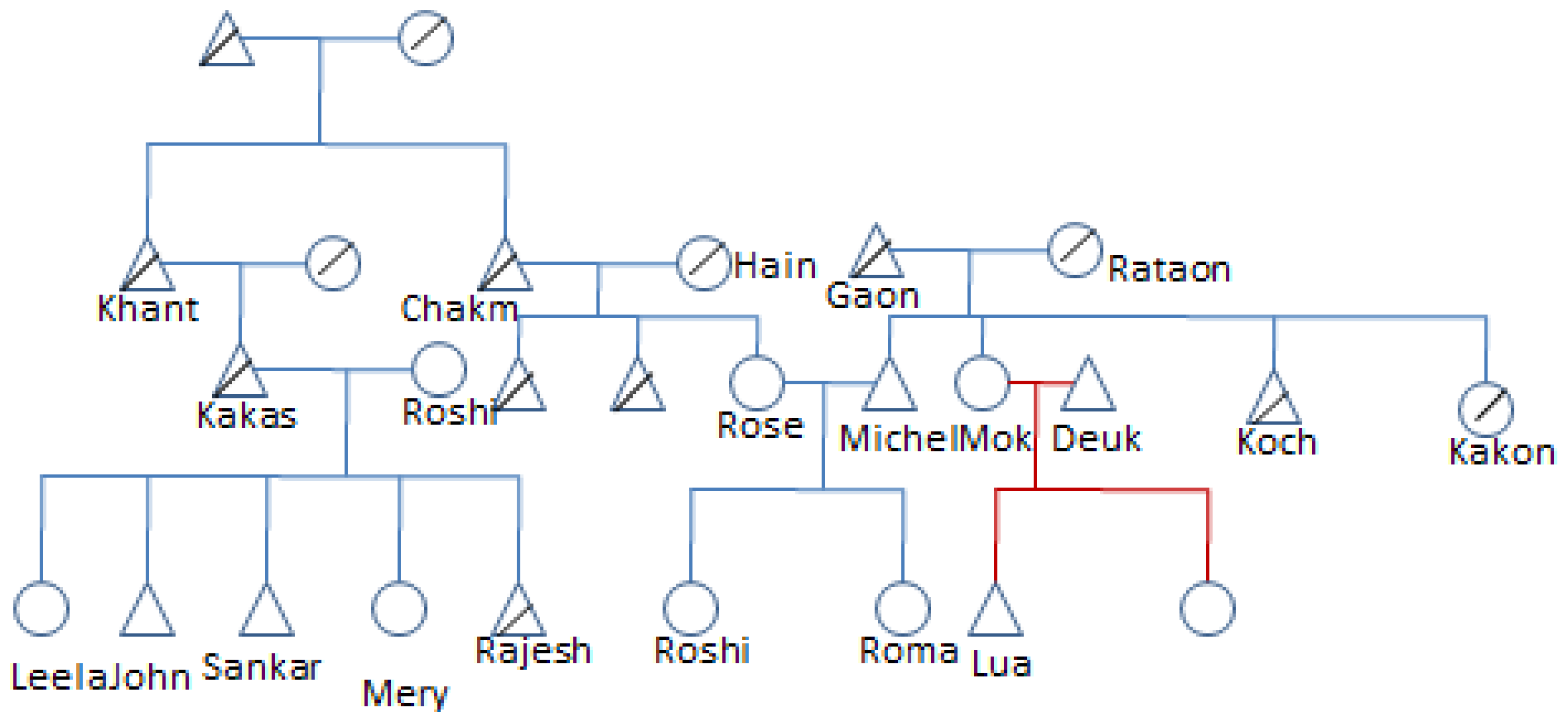
3. The Shompen of Chingen/New Chingen and Southern Galathea river area sub-group

It is notable to mention that during pre-tsunami period, in extension of their bartering relationship, few Shompen started to stay along with the Great Nicobarese of Chingen village.

After tsunami in 2004 when survived Great Nicobarese of Chingen were settled at New Chingen area (near 7 km North-South road), those Shompen also came with them and settled at New Chingen.

Now all of them adopted Christianity and came in the fold so called 'main stream' society along with the Great Nicobarese. At present 9 number of Shompen (male-6 and female-3) of this subgroup are staying at Chingen village. Few Shompen of this group are still staying at the interiors of the southern Galathea River areas (highlighted in the genealogy). According to the Shompen and Great Nicobarese informant of New Chingen, their population is only 4 (male-2, female-2).

Genealogy of Shompen of Chingen and Galathea area



4. The western group of Shompen may be divided in two sub-groups namely

- a. Alexandria river area Shompen and
- b. Dogmer river area Shompen.

Different authors like Man (1884), Kloss (1903), Lal (1977) and Rizvi (1990) mentioned about the existence of Dogmer river area Shompen who were in a symbiotic bartering relationship with the Great Nicobarese of Pillo Kunji village of West Coast. They also mentioned about their numbers restricted from 15-20. Now only two of them are surviving and staying at New Chingen village. Their name are Kaken (male-22) and Aho (male-19).

4. The Central Group of Shompen

- They are may broad by categorised in three sub-groups are the most mysterious and little known among the all. These three sub-groups are a) Interiors of 24 km EW road sub-group, b) Interiors of 27/28 km EW road sub-group and c) Interiors of 35 km EW road sub-group.
- These three sub-groups are roaming around three different geographical territories. Notably, it was also observed that often they are coming to Campbell Bay by making a combined group of different grown-up male members of different sub-groups. During the present study the team has interacted with the 15 members of this central group of Shompen.
- Now-a-day, they are predominantly bartering with the different settler communities of Campbell Bay area. The often come with different forest produces like honey, resign and rudraksh etc. In exchange with those forest produces the used to demand for tobacco, cloths, iron implements and rice etc.

Table-1: Area wise name of different group of Shompen in Great Nicobarese dialect as perceived by them

Sl. No.	Name	Area	Having pre-Tsunami/ Traditional bartering relation with	Present / Post-Tsunami bartering relation with
1	Samhap Rakaia	24 km EW Road	--	Different communities of Campbell Bay area and 10 km EW road areas
2	Samhap Ratawe	Alexender River Area	Pilo Bhabi, Kopenheat, Kesindon	Occasionally with the different communities of Campbell Bay area
3	Samhap Ragare	37 Km EW Road/ Kesintooth area	Great Great Nicobarese of Kopenheat and Kesintooth and Pillobhabi area	Occasionally with the different communities of Campbell Bay area
4	Samhap Rawch	Kokeo Area	Great Nicobarese of Kokeon area	Occasionally with the Great Nicobarese of Kokeon area settled at Rajibnagar (Campbell Bay area)
5	Samhap Lagamang	Lawful area	Great Nicobarese of Kondul Island	Great Nicobarese of Kondul Island (settled at Afra Bay) and different communities of Campbell Bay area
6	Samhap Kochnom	Chingen Area	Great Nicobarese of Old Chingen area	Settled at New Chingen village along with the Great Nicobarese presently not involved in bartering relationship.
7	Samhap Bhutney	35 Km EW Road	Great Nicobarese of Pillobhabi area	Occasionally with the different communities of Campbell Bay area

To reveal the heterogeneity and affinity between different group of Shompen, information on different linguistic aspects were collected viz. pronunciation of different numerical numbers, Colour cognition, name of flora fauna etc as perceived by them were systematically recorded.

Remarkably, traditionally the Shompen can count only unto 10 with the help of the fingers of the both hands.

To analyse the degree of linguistic similarity along with their immediate neighbours i.e Great Nicobarese, the same information was also collected and analysed from the Great Nicobarese.

Table-2: Pronunciation of different numerical numbers (1-10) in Shompen and Great Nicobarese dialect as perceived by them

Name of Numeric in English	Name of Numeric in Shompen dialect (Lawfull group)	Name of Numeric in Shompen dialect (Chingen group)	Name of Numeric in Shompen dialect (Kokeon group)	Name of Numeric in Great Nicobarese dialect (Kokeon area)	Name of Numeric in Great Nicobarese dialect (Chingen area)	Name of Numeric in Great Nicobarese dialect (Kondul Island)
One	Heing	Heing	Haing	Hayet	Heich	Hai-yan
Two	Aaa	Aaa	Aaa	Aaa	Aaa	Aan
Three	Lagge	Lagee	A-lenge	Lawee	Lawee	Lawee
Four	Hu-ai	Fuet	Thaua	Faat	Faat	Foat
Five	Taa	Taa	Away	Taney	Tanay	Tanaye
Six	Thewa	Logao	Aligay	Takal	Takao	Kafual
Seven	Magay	Aay	Ninge	Iset	Iset	Isat
Eight	Nangi	Thuaya	Aaye	Infon	Infan	Infoan
Nine	Thay	Ningi	Hayat	Hanyat	Hayat	Hayan-hata
Ten	Hot	Tey	Taye	Sap	Sap	Sam

Table-3: Pronunciation of different names of fauna in Shompen and Great Nicobarese dialect as perceived by them

Name of fauna in English	Name in Shompen dialect (Lawfull group)	Name in Shompen dialect (Chingen group)	Name in Shompen dialect (Kokeon group)	Name in Great Nicobarese dialect (Kokeon area)	Name in Great Nicobarese dialect (Chingen area)	Name in Great Nicobarese dialect (Kondul Island)
Wild Pig	Noung	Noung	Noung	-	Saral	Saroal
Domesticated Pig	Ai-ai	Me-ai	Mein	-	Pakoy	Nou-taha-aa-ha
Yellow Snake (viper)	Keo	Keo	-	-	Pula	-
Sea Snake	Ameo	Mea	Ai-og	-	Kaleng	-
Frog	Athankhoy	Puab	Keo	-	Amekoita	-
Crab	Aihai	Taho	Taog	-	Kantaptee	Kintao
Megapod	Aaa-wat	-	Ka-ue	-	-	Pikiye

RGB Color Wheel



Akai

Humb

Yan Han

Aher

Angelo

Aniob

Haniob

Black
Aniob

Agiob

Table-4: Pronunciation of name of different colours in Shompen and Great Nicobarese dialect as perceived by them

Name of colour in English	Name of colour in Shompen dialect (Lawfull group)	Name of colour in Shompen dialect (Chingen group)	Name of colour in Shompen dialect (Kokeon group)	Name of colour c in Great Nicobarese dialect (Kokeon area)	Name of colour in Great Nicobarese dialect (Chingen area)	Name of colour in Great Nicobarese dialect (Kondul Island)
Red	Akhait	-	Neeo	Omka	Umkao	Aha
Yellow	Haub	Aa-ua	Inyombe	Umla	Umla	Laob
Blue	Haniob	Aa-hau	-	Kaiye	Onkai-yanai	-
Green	Ahai	-	-	-	Omgaiya	Kahiya
Black	Aaib	Aa-aib	-	-	Ulli	Awal
White	Agiob	Amoy	-	Thaiya	Teyea	Taihe

Conclusion

Contrary to the earlier perception, the present study of Anthropological Survey of India reveals that the Shompen is not a unique or homogeneous group. There are different aspects of heterogeneity among different groups of Shompen in terms of intra-group and inter-group relationship, territory and territoriality.

Prominent dialectical difference may be observed among different groups of Shompen.

Recently, the policy on Shompen tribe of Great Nicobar has been issued by Andaman and Nicobar Administration in 2015.

- The Policy clearly reveals that **there is a need to address various gaps in our understanding about this somewhat less known community.**
 - **It also recognises socio-geographical variation within the community.**
-

The Socio-geographic groups of Shompen as mentioned in the Shompen Policy may be recognized in terms of new research findings of Anthropological Survey of India.

What is the relationship (level reciprocity) between different group of Shompen...? Inter-group and Intra-group relationship...

How they perceive this different groups among themselves... ?

Why these groups exists..... when they are sharing the same geographical territory connected through land.

- 4.1 The Shompens families at New Chingenh are integrated with Nicobarese and are dependent on rice in the absence of their own food resources, and, therefore, are an exception. Rice and dal may continue to be distributed to New Chingenh and Laful communities. Requirements in sustainable livelihood options will include enhancing their dietary profile through land allotment for cultivation of tubers and other traditional crops through their active participation. Since these groups are known to practice arboriculture/horticulture, these should not be discontinued through free distribution of external foods.
- 4.2 For the other groups (East-West road and Kokeon/Galathea region), the degree of requirement of or dependence on rice, is not clearly established.
- 3.3 The most evident problem identified is the lack of sufficient information and rationale with regard to the periodic and variable contact made by some community members for articles such as rice. Also the need for rice has to be assessed in terms of nutritional loss since traditional foods are possibly abandoned.

When the Shompen Policy 2015 advocates to adopt group specific intervention programmes / developmental initiatives for different Shompen.....how much ethnographic information do we really have in this regard to execute the policy at the ground level...

We can not decide the fate of such a vulnerable community based on our assumptions and suppositions regarding their requirements and necessity.....

We must have to consult the community members and have to conduct adequate research before taking such a decision...

Acknowledgement

Logistic supports, help and cooperation provided by A & N Administration especially Director, Tribal Welfare; Secretary (TW); Executive Secretary of AAJVS; Tribal Welfare Officer of AAJVS at Campbell Bay, Forest Department are highly appreciated. Most importantly we are thankful to the all Shompen and Nicobrese of Great Nicobar Islands for accepting us and sharing their views.









18.04.2015 08:3













17.04.2015 15:47













THANK YOU