

ANDAMAN ISLANDS COASTAL TRIBE-THE ONGES MATERIAL CULTURE AND TREND OF CHANGES

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Introduction

The land of sea, sun, and sand- the Andaman Island was once a tribal island devoid of any contact with the mainland. The Andaman group of Islands are a chain of over 572 small Islands and ricks, running about 370 Km north in the Bay of Bengal, 1000 Km east of the east coast, but around 38 are inhabited. In 1973, the Dhebar Commission created Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) as a separate category, who are less developed among the tribal groups. In 2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) and Onge tribe of Andaman Island is included in this list along with other aboriginal Nigrity tribes of Andaman. In the earlier age, the Negrity tribes traditionally spread and occupied almost all the parts of Andaman group of Islands and the strength of the population was considerably good. The 'Negrity' tribes are believed to have inwards in these islands from Africa up to 60,000 years ago. After the advent of British and the establishment of Penal Settlement in 1858, the Nigrity tribes started to reside in a particular area which was not approachable and the population was started to decrease. These Negrity tribes of Andaman had several sub groups but most of them disappeared over a period of time. Now only four categories of Negrity tribes are exist in the Andaman group of Islands.

Population of Negrity Tribes Inhabited areas					
Negrity Tribes		Onges	Andamanese	Jarawas	Sentineles
Inhabited Area/Islands		Little Andaman	Strait Islands	M & N Andamans	Sentinel Islands
Sl.No.	Year				
1.	1901	672	625	468	NA
2.	1911	631	455	114	NA
3.	1921	346	209	114	NA
4.	1931	250	90	70	NA
5.	1941	NA	NA	NA	NA
6.	1951	NA	23	50	150
7.	1961	150	19	500	129
8.	1971	112	24	275	112
9.	1981	100	27	200	97
10.	1991	101	28	250	95
11.	2001	100	43	250	96
12.	2011	101	44	308	15

Source: Censes A&N Administration 2011
 NA-Not Available

Limitation of the Discussion

Andaman Islands are the land of Negrito aboriginal tribes. History reveals that, the aboriginal Negrito tribes occupied and settled in these Islands long before 6000 years ago¹.(M.Selvam, Government and Administration of Andaman and Nicobar Islands-M.Phil thesis, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 2002, P.14) The investigation and discussion of the article ignored all other Islands as well as tribes and focused on only one Island-Little Andaman, particularly Dugong Creek village and South Bay and the only one tribe- the Onges. It is the exclusive discussion of the Onges Material Culture Trend and Changes.

Methodology: Material Culture of a tribal community refers that things which are created by the concern tribe, in other word the physical objects created by them through which they reflected their behaviours and perceptions.

On the basis of the above meaning, the natural material like stone, wood, shell etc. and the manmade objects like tools, weapons, utensils, ornaments, art, huts, religious images, cloths etc. made or used by the Onges are taken in to account to analyse the culture of the primitive tribe-Onges.

To get the result of the investigation, interview and talks were conducted with the social workers who were worked for long time for the betterment of the primitive tribe-Onges and known about their way of life. Books, magazines, news papers, journals and reports of Andaman and Nicobar Administration were used for the collection of secondary data. All the data were compiled and presented the investigation in a descriptive manner.

Focal Points of Discussion

The full discussion of the paper is cracked in to three parts. That is (I).The Onges and Material Culture. In this first part, an exclusive focus is given on the Traditional Material Cultural of the Onges. (II).Onges life and Changes. In this middle part, a discussion is made available regarding the implementation of various development programmes and actions taken by the Andaman and Nicobar Administration which are contrasting to the Traditional Material Culture of the Onges. (III). Conclusion and Suggestions. In this final part, efforts are made to discuss the effects planted in the life of Onges and also presented suggestions for future course of study and actions.

The Onges and Material Culture

The Onges

The Onges are one of the very important prehistoric tribe among the indigenous tribes of India. They are also known, the descendents of ancient tribes. The Onges settled on a busy sea rout coastal area. Initially the Onges were scattered all over the Little Andaman Island in different bands. Later they have been settled at two places viz. Dugong Creek and South Bay in Little Andaman Island. The material culture of the Onges, reflect their virginity in all sphere of life.

Sl.No	Ground of Classification	Category
1	Geographical Zone	Isolated Zone (Little Andaman)
2	Racial Affinity	Nigrito
3	Source of Subsistence	Food-gatherers & Hunters

1. On the basis of Geographical distribution, the whole tribal land of India is classified in to five regions or zones. They are (a).North-Eastern (b).Central (c).Southern (d).Western and (e).Isolated Zone.

The Onge belong- Isolated region/zone

The isolated zone consists of the Andaman and Nicobar islands in the Bay of Bengal. The Onge, inhabited and live in this zone exclusively in Little Andaman.

Little Andaman

Little Andaman is an island almost has a flat land surface covering an area about 730 sq. Km. situated at a distance of about 96 Km. south of Port Blair-the capital city of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and separated by the turbulent Ten Degree Channel from the Nicobar group of Islands further south. Little Andaman provided a sort of comfortable isolation to Onges over the centuries. Hut Bay in Little Andaman is the entry and exit point of Little Andaman. At present, the surviving members are confined to two reserve camps on Little Andaman, Dugong Creek in the northeast and South Bay.

Dugong Creek

Dugong Creek Village is located in Little Andaman Tehsil of South Andaman District. It is situated 34 Km away from sub-district headquarter Little Andaman and 154 Km away from district headquarter Port Blair. At present, there are about 23 houses in Dugong Creek Village.

2. On the basis of racial association, Dr.B.S.Guha has classified the Indian tribes in to four categories. They are (a). Negrito (b).Proto-Austroloid (c).Mongoloid and (d).Nordic Group

The Onges-Negrito Race

The Negrito racial type is characterised by the physical features comprising of very short height pigmy stature, dark black skin colour, woolly and frizzy hair, and brood nose and thick lip. Onges of Andaman Islands belong to this physical racial type.

3. On the Basis of the Source of survival difference and economic set up, the Indian tribals are classified into four types. They are (a).Food-gatherers and hunters (b). Pastoral People (c).Shifting Cultivators (d).Permanent Settled Cultivators

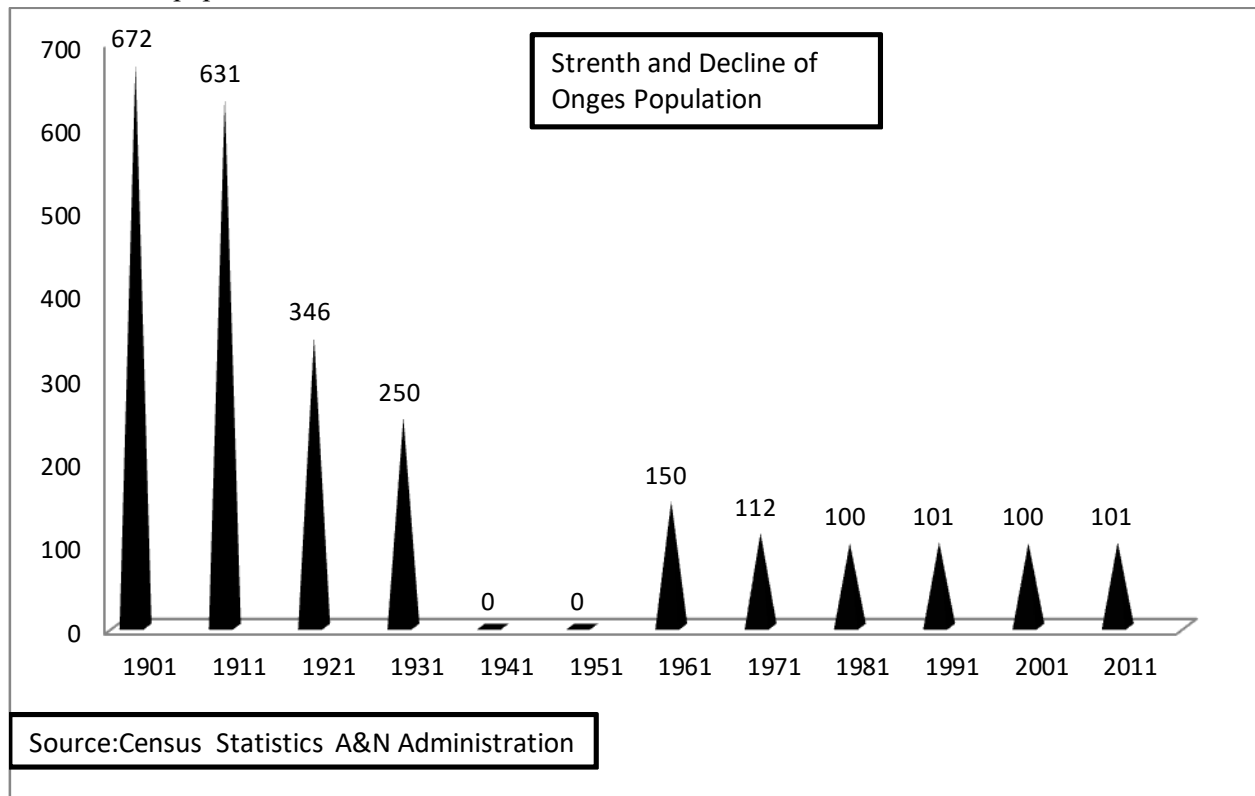
The Onges-Little Andaman Coastal Guards

They had incredible knowledge of sea, forest and its resources. The Onges are world-renowned hunters and fishermen. They reacted, opposed and attacked many occasion against outsiders and saved their land from the encroachment by the foreigners. They are the great warriors and saviours of their coastal are and their home land. 133 years ago, in the year 1885 the Britishers succeeded to maintain responsive contact with the Onges. In the initial stage they never allowed unknown people or foreigner to reach their coastal area of Little Andaman. They followed a method of spy system to protect their coastal area. The elderly members depute some young men to observe the movements of outsiders along with coast of Little Andaman. The elders were informed according and the secret information was kept undisclosed. The method of spy system, movements and internal matters were not to be disclosed to any outsiders². **(R.S. Mann, Andaman and Nicobar Tribes Restudies-Counters and Concerns, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2005, P.82)** In April 1867, a vessel "Assam Velley" was anchored on shore at south end of Little Andaman. The Onges treated it, threaten to the coastal security of Little Andaman and conduct an organised attack and killed the captain and seven crew members of the vessel only to provide security to the coastal area and save their own community.

The Onges attack pushed the British authorities in the state of angry. Again a vessel "Arracan" reached the coastal area of Little Andaman along with some Andamanese and a small military force³. **(Priten Roy&Swapnesh Choudhury, The Last of the Bay Island Tribes, Farsight Publishers, New Delhi, 2000,P.41)** The Onges again jumped in to the war against the foreigners and attacked the outsiders. The intension behind it was to save the coastal area. In this war of coastal security, they sacrificed more than a hundred soul from their own fellow community member. In an occasion the Onges killed five Burmese crews who landed informally in Little Andaman. Prior to 1885, the onges struggled, sacrificed and continued their hostility towards the outsiders to provide coastal security and to save their home land, Little Andaman.

Population

The contact between Onges and outsiders started more than a century back and first friendly contact established with Onges was in 1885. The Censuses chart shows the strength of inhabitants and also the rapid decline of the population



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Material Culture

Family unit: the family is the constituent unit of the bands. Most Onges families are of the nuclear type, comprising of husband, wife and their unmarried sons and daughters.

Hut: The home of Onges is called "Gaiborale Beyra" which means forest. They construct beehive model home using wood, cane and palm leaves similar to a large cosy umbrella. Onges construct and use three kinds of huts for halting purpose. The first one is known as the principal or everlasting permanent hut or communal camp. Each communal group or band, comprising the descended members of same male ancestor used to have one beehive shaped communal hut. A large number of days they live in this principal hut in general and the whole rainy days in particular. Therefore they used it as a monsoon dormitory, rain-proof home. The communal hut is the common resident for whole band or same communal group. They use the communal hut for organising important event in their life like birth, marriage and death etc. The second one is temporary hut. It is a simple shelter of a palm leaf roof supported on poles. This temporary camps, built up when the group is compelled to leave their permanent camp on the death of any member. The temporary huts are made in the form of a village. (Amitava Sengupta, Magic Islands-Andaman and Nicobar, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2012.p.29) The last halting place is called hunting camp. The activity of hunting is known one of the most important

major activities of their life. To keep the hunt substance and halt the party throughout hunting stage they erect such type of huts and stay in for a few days when they away from the permanent home.

Simple form of mat making was known to each and every person. The framework of a mat was made with bamboo or cane strips. Strips of same size were placed parallel to each other. Inhabitants of Little Andaman used bamboo-mats to sleep on them. Traditional huts of the Onges were also made with mats. For making such a mat at first a strong mat had to be made with strong palm leaves. That was placed on a rafter and tied with strips of cane. Even the hunting shelters of the Onges at the top of the trees often utilized these huts.

Food: The Onges do not manufacture any food item. They generously use the natural wealth for their survival, but do not use any right of possession or control over the resources. The Onges are principally non-vegetarian. In the hot season from March to May they start collection of honey Jack fruit, roots and tubers etc., which supplement the main food items. During the rainy season from May to September they carry out the hunting activities in the forest and hunt animals like pig, deer, birds etc. and consume fleshy tissue of different animals of forest world. They also like to eat sea foods like fish and shells and also herbivorous sea animals and to catch or collect such items from sea they select the cool and warm season from September to March. However their main diet is frequently supplemented by fruit, roots, tubers, honey. They adopt baking, frying and boiling procedure for processing the food items. Some foods are banned for women during their pregnancy period. For example diet like pork, turtle and honey are prohibited to them. They do not have the culture of storing any food for future consumption.

Fire: Onges do not have the knowledge of making fire. Due to the absent of knowledge regarding fire they always preserves fire in its own fire place. They carry smouldering wood along with them when they move one place to another place in night hour, moving for hunting and changing one hut to another hut.

Disease and Medicine

Hygiene is almost unknown to them. They are far away from washing and cleaning practices. Under this impure and harmful circumstance, the Onges suffer from disease and health problems and stayed awkwardly. All the unhealthy, unsafe, polluted and damaging practices, invited numerous diseases in their life. Apart from this, the weather and environmental situation also played a key role in causing such diseases. Diseases like malaria, fever, ring worm, dysentery, tuberculosis, bronchitis, influenza, chest-joint and muscular pain, and diseases of skin are quite common among Onges. **(Robin D.Tribhuvan, Health of Primate Tribes, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 2004, P.28)** To cure the diseases, the Onges use their indigenous medicines and apply their traditional methodology. The Onges use clay as medicine for patients. The most frequent practice of treatment, widespread among Onges, is to employ clay. They believe that, clay, ochre, honey and turtle fat have more medicinal values. They used it for cure as well as prevent the diseases.

Weapon and Tool: Bow, pointer and arrow are the preferred hunting kit of the Onges. They had knowledge to make spears. They use it predominantly in the stage when they started to utilize the dogs for the function of hunting. To catch turtle and big fishes they still choose arrows and harpoons with a float and nets for small fishes. They use to thrown the bow, arrow, and net from the shore or canoe to catch the big and small sea animates. They adopt the traditional methodology to remove the inconsumable poison parts from the sea and forest food items. Onges use the digging sticks as an effective implement to digging the roots. They employ hooked pole for tearing the fruit from the high branches and tall trees. Adze, a tool similar to axe is some time used to get molasses and to cut honey comb. They use string or thread for many purposes.

Onges life and Changes

The two terms "Tribal Development" and "Tribal Welfare" are not synonyms. The concept "Tribal Development" is associated with the designed move towards to make the tribal confident and self-dependent and to steps forward on their own as equivalence with the other citizens of India without disquieting their sentiments and ethnicity, whereas the idea "Tribal Welfare" is chiefly concerned with free assist actions. (Basu 1964)

The Andaman and Nicobar Administration with the unique aid of the Government of India, constituted "Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti (A.A.J.J.V.S.) on March 25th, 1976. The tribal welfare agenda was started by Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti from the middle of the Sixth Five Year Plan with the intention of defending the health and preventing the destruction. Like other tribal of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Onges of Little Andaman are also availing the amenities provided through different tonal (tronal) wellbeing programmes by the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti

TABLE:

The Sixth Five Year Plan for the Development of Onge Tribes

Sl.No	Items	Amount in Rs.
1	Agriculture	18,400.
2	Stationing of Domestic Animals and Poultry	67,100.
3	Health and Medical Facilities	1,21,600.
4	Education	1,25,050.

Domestication of Animals:

The Onges lived and transformed their life without domestication of any animal. In the year 1880, the Britishers introduced dogs among the Onges tribal community. The dogs played a major role in the hunting life of the Onges. With good intension and to establish comfortable life, domestic animals were placed in the Dugong Creek Village. In the year 1978, pigs were introduced and a piggery form was started with 50 white pigs. In 1986, cows and calves were introduced. For the utilisation of this purpose an amount of Rs.67, 100 allocations were made in sixth Five Year Plan.

Health Service facility:

The Onges adopted and accepted the conventional medicines and herbs. Even today also, they depend on some of the herbs and traditional medicine for the improvement of their health and curing diseases. After the colonisation and rehabilitation, allopathic medicines were familiarised among the Onges tribes. In 1978, a medical sub centre was opened with a doctor, a nurse and a ward attendant. The Administration tried to create awareness among the tribal community about the allopathic medicines and its benefits. They carried out and implemented a systematic modernised treatment through the health workers. For the eradication of diseases and improvement of health condition, a total amount of Rs.1, 21,600 was separated in the Sixth Five Year Plan for health and medical facilities.

Education: In the year 1978, a nursery school was started with a number of sixteen onge children and also introduced adult education under non-formal education programme by the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti. The objective behind, starting of nursery school and introducing adult education was to literate and cultivate awareness among the Onge community. A teacher was appointed by Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti. Along with imparting education, arrangements were made to teach for stitching, plastic basketing, and making craft items. Due to lake of interest and awareness, they fail to register their presence in the school every day and also avail the benefits of school service. In the Sixth Five Year Plan, an amount of Rs. 1, 25,050 allotted for this purpose (**but there was a poor result or output of all the**

effort. No one is considered fully educated or literate. Only eight people know to write their name with mistakes. Therefore the total effort is known to be failed.)

Conclusion and Suggestions

It is essential to review seriously, the present day education system to the Onges. Bounding them in class rooms to teach Hindi is fundamentally want changes. It is needed to focus on their history, culture, tradition and on skills which are relevant to their lifestyle and also need inclusion in the contents of teaching. Instead of bounding them in the class room and teach Hindi, it is require arranging a demarcated safe open space in their natural surrounding and also in their own language.

Reference

1. M.Selvam, Government and Administration of Andaman and Nicobar Islands-M.Phil thesis, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 2002, P.14.
2. R.S. Mann, Andaman and Nicobar Tribes Restudies-Counters and Concerns, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2005, P.82
3. Priten Roy & Swapnesh Choudhury, The Last of the Bay Island Tribes, Farsight Publishers, New Delhi, 2000, P.41