



CENSUS OF INDIA, 1951

VOLUME XVII

THE ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

PART I—REPORT
PART II—TABLES

A. K. GHOSH, I.C.S.,
Chief Commissioner
and
Ex-officio Superintendent of Census Operations,
Andaman & Nicobar Islands

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P R E F A C E

THIS REPORT should really have been written by Shri S. K. Gupta, I.A.S., who was Deputy Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands from 1948 to 1951, and who as Census Superintendent organized and carried out the census operations up to the stage of enumeration in March 1951. Shri Gupta, unfortunately, was transferred on the completion of his three years in March 1951. He was, therefore, unable to study the detailed figures after tabulation in order to write the report in the form indicated by the Government of India a few days before he made over charge. He did, however, write an introduction to the report. As that is not in the form required by Government, it has been published as Appendix 'A' to this report. The credit of organizing these census operations and carrying them through up to the difficult stage of enumeration is entirely his.

On the departure of Shri Gupta I took over census work. There was no other alternative, as I had been in these Islands then for two years, and as Shri Gupta's successor did not arrive till October, more than six months after he had left the Islands. Being pre-occupied with my normal work, I have, unfortunately, not been able to spare very much time for census work. That is why this report has been delayed. I have been able to complete it just in time, on the eve of my own departure. I suggest that as census work is becoming more and more important, and in these Islands becoming more and more complex, a full-time Superintendent should be appointed for the 1961 Census. Although more economical, it is an unsatisfactory arrangement to saddle an officer who already has a full-time job to be part-time Superintendent in addition to his own other work.

It only remains for me to thank all those who have helped to carry this Census to a

successful conclusion. I must make particular mention of Bishop John Richardson, M.P., who (himself a Nicobari) organized and ably carried out the census of all the Nicobar Islands under the able guidance of Shri Gupta. Bishop Richardson and his assistant Abednego crossed the seas in small sailing vessels and canoes during February and March 1951, and carried their labour of love to a successful conclusion. I must also mention Shri P. Sundaramurthi, Treasury Officer, who acted as Deputy Superintendent of Census Operations in addition to his other duties throughout, except for a brief period when he was posted elsewhere. My Secretary, Shri K. C. Banerjea, ably carried on the work of Deputy Superintendent during Shri Sundaramurthi's absence. Shri V. Sadasivan has ungrudgingly and without any remuneration given help whenever required in preparing tables and in studying the statistics. Shri V. Gurumurthi as clerk in charge of the Census Department was responsible for the able management of the office side of the work. My Personal Assistant, Shri P. J. Samuel ungrudgingly spared time from his numerous other duties to look after the census papers, and to type the report out of office hours at odd times. Last of all come a host of others, too numerous to mention, without whose willing help these censuses would not be possible—people who, because they work for the love of the work and without any payment, make our censuses so economical.

I am indebted to the writers of the previous Censuses, particularly to Sir Richard Temple, Mr. R. F. Lewis and Mr. M. C. Bonnington for the information contained in their reports. I have freely drawn upon this information in writing my own report.

A. K. GHOSH,
Chief Commissioner

&
*Ex-officio Superintendent of
Census Operations.*

PORT BLAIR,

Dated the 20th July, 1953.

PART I
REPORT

CENSUS OF INDIA, 1951

REPORT

ON THE

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

INTRODUCTION

IT IS USUAL in Census Reports to give detailed information about the history and geography of the area covered. But as information about the Andaman and Nicobar Islands can be found in previous Census Reports (noticeably in those of 1901 by Sir Richard Temple and of 1931 by Mr. M. C. Bonnington) I do not propose to give a detailed description of these Islands. But as conditions here are so unlike anything to be found in the rest of India, it is essential that a brief general description be given so that this report may be self-contained.

2. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, though they form one administrative unit, and in this and previous Censuses were taken as one district, consist of two separate groups of islands with entirely different populations with their separate problems, and living under very dissimilar conditions. The Andamans consist of a chain of islands stretching from Landfall Island in the north to Little Andaman in the south, in an arc stretching over some 200 miles of sea. About 80 miles to the south of Little Andaman is Car Nicobar, the northernmost of the Nicobar group of islands, continuing in an arc for another 200 miles to Great Nicobar, which is only some 120 miles distant from the northern tip of Sumatra.

3. The Andaman Islands consist of five islands lying so close together as to form for all practical purposes one land mass, with Little Andaman some 40 miles to the south, but connected by a chain of little islands, which form stepping stones across the sea to Great Andamans. From time immemorial the Andaman Islands have been inhabited by a small Negrito people divided into several groups and tribes hostile to each other. Recent anthropological studies, both social and on their blood groups, tend to show that these Negritos are an extremely ancient people, who probably occupied the whole of South-East Asia in pre-historic times. They have cultural connections with the Semang of Malaya and the Aeta of the Philippines, as the recent researches of Professor Cipriani (an anthropologist who during

1951, 1952 and 1953 did valuable work in these Islands) will show. His note on the origin of these peoples may be seen in Appendix 'E'. These people continued in undisputed position of the Andamans (except for sporadic raids by Malays and Chinese who came here in ships to collect slaves) for countless generations until the first recorded attempt to colonize the Andamans was made in 1789, when Captain Archibald Blair, R. N., established a settlement under the orders of the Government of India at what is now known as Port Blair. A few years later this colony was moved to the north, to what is now known as Port Cornwallis. But the colony did not prosper because of malaria; and had ultimately to be closed down in 1796.

4. About sixty years later the question of opening a naval station in the Andamans to protect the crews of ships wrecked off these Islands was again mooted. While this was under discussion, and papers and despatches were travelling between London and Calcutta, the people of India made their first major attempt to throw out their alien conquerors in 1857. The ruthless suppression of the Mutiny resulted in problem of finding accommodation for a vast number of prisoners; and it was decided to send these men to the Andamans. The old settlement at Port Blair was revived; and the first batch of convicts arrived in 1858. The newcomers came into conflict with the original inhabitants, who naturally resented the coming of these strangers into their country; and there were several affrays between the aboriginals and the new settlers. In course of time one group of the aboriginals, the Andamanese, were won over and induced to come into the settlement, where they were not only boarded and lodged free but were given gifts. The result of this kind treatment has been the elimination of this tribe, who have decreased from an estimated four or five thousand in the 1860s to only twentythree in 1951. Such are the effects of the gifts of civilization (tobacco, alcohol, venereal and other diseases) to these primitive peoples! The

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Jarawas, another group, have fortunately for themselves remained hostile ever since the foundation of the penal settlement,—nearly a hundred years ago. Previous Census reports—those of 1901, 1911 and 1921—give details of expeditions led against these people. Such tactics have not endeared us to the Jarawas; and they have remained implacably hostile. It was therefore quite impossible to visit their camps and enumerate them; and only an estimate can be made of their numbers—an estimate based on the information obtained from Forest Officers who have been serving in these Islands for the last 20 or 30 years and know these forests intimately. The Jarawas number perhaps three or four hundred in all to-day. In 1901, Sir Richard Temple estimated their total at about 600. This shows that during the last fifty years this tribe at least has been more or less stationary in numbers—both Sir Richard Temple's figures and mine are only estimates. The third group of aboriginals lived in Little Andaman, and were saved from interference because of their isolation. They as well as the Jarawas continue to be in the same state of civilization as they were perhaps 10,000 years ago. Dr. Cipriani lived with the Onges for three months between February and May 1953, and succeeded in enumerating over 400 of them. He estimates their total number to-day at about 600. According to him these people are still living in the paleolithic (or the Old Stone) age. The Onges have, unfortunately for them, recently acquired the habit of coming from Little Andaman to Port Blair in their little canoes to obtain tobacco, sugar and other luxuries not to be found in their native forests. If this continues, they will go the same way as the Andamanese in the course of next hundred years. As the numbers of the aboriginals declined, so the strength of the penal settlement increased, until it reached its zenith at the beginning of this century. It was ultimately abolished in 1945.

5. The people of the Nicobar Islands are entirely different racially from the aboriginals of the Andamans, whom they displaced many hundreds of years ago. They, unlike the Andamanese, are a vigorous and thriving people, who have adapted themselves to their changing conditions, and who are rapidly increasing in numbers now that hospitals and other medical aids have been made available to them. Their origin is a little doubtful: possibly they came from Burma originally. But as we travel to the south an increasing amount of Malayan and Chinese blood is noticeable. The people of all the Nicobar Islands have been enumerated for the first time in this Census—all of them except a few semi-hostile people who live in the interior of Great

Nicobar, the Shom-Pens. Shri B. S. Chengapa, Conservator of Forests led an expedition to Great Nicobar in 1952, and travelled extensively over that island for two months. He came into contact with practically all the Shom-Pen settlements; and he estimates their total number to-day at about 200.

6. The decade 1941 to 1950 has been of tremendous importance to the Andaman Islands. It has marked the ending of an epoch with the abolition of the penal settlement in 1945. It witnessed the occupation of the country by an alien force—the Japanese—between March 1942 and October 1945, during which occupation the islands were very short of food because only military stores could be brought in due to the Allied blockade—and these only in submarines. The Allies landed a commando party by submarine in the Andamans, and the Japanese came to know of their presence, though they never succeeded in capturing the men. In order to extort information about these spies the Japanese troops inflicted severe and prolonged torture on many people, particularly people who knew English; and as a result of these tortures an unknown number of men, women and children died. When food was running short the Japanese Commander decided to take drastic steps: ruthlessly eliminate the old and the infirm, and leave only those who could work for the foreign invaders. As a result of this policy many hundreds of people were shot, and many more hundreds drowned in seas. By these and other methods the population of the Andamans was reduced by over 3,000 during the three years and a half the Japanese occupied the Islands. And had the Allies not come in October 1945, bringing with them supplies of food and medicines and clothes, the number of deaths would have been very much greater.

7. With the abolition of the penal settlement in 1945 a free pardon was granted to all convicts; and they as well as ex-convicts were all offered repatriation to their homes in the mother country at Government expense. Nearly 4,000 souls took advantage of this offer, with the result that by 1946 the population of the Islands had fallen below 14,000, whereas in 1941 it was over 21,000. But newcomers have been coming in at an increasing rate to replace these losses. Sporadic efforts have been made between 1949 and 1952 to resettle refugees from East Bengal on the lands abandoned by the repatriated convicts; and over 1,500 people have been so settled during these four years. These 1,500 people have occupied all the old available lands. But as the Andaman Islands are still definitely underpopulated, and have to rely on the mother country both for labour and for food, a proper plan has

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been made to settle 20,000 people in these Islands during the next five years; and the first lot of about 400 pioneers under this scheme have already come to the Andamans in May and June 1953. They are but the forerunners of a great stream of immigrants who will more than double the population of the Andamans before the next Census is taken in 1961. As the present intentions are to continue the settlement of people—not all refugees—in these Islands even after the implementation of the first Five Year Scheme, the population of the Andaman Islands will continue to grow steadily until it numbers about a lakh of souls. After that there should be a pause, and a detailed survey made to find out how many people these Islands can support with-

out danger to their very existence. As a glance at the maps (facing pages xLi & L) will show, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands are narrow, and no place is more than 10 or 12 miles from the sea. The country which is very hilly, is at present covered with dense forests. Indiscriminate destruction of these forests, and the conversion of the land into paddy fields may result in such soil erosion that in the course of a few generations the soil built up during millions of years will all be washed into the sea, and nothing but a chain of barren rocks in the sea will be left behind. That this is not an idle nightmare will be evident from a visit to several areas that have been indiscriminately deforested within the last hundred years.