

The ASI Andaman and Nicobar Island Tribe Series

The Shompen



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Dr S. N. H. Rizvi

THE SHOMPEN
A Vanishing Tribe of the Great Nicobar Island

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S. N. H. Rizvi

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Anthropological Survey of India**

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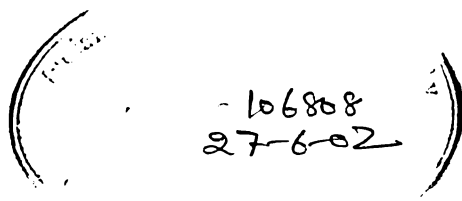


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A Note on the Series

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the homeland of probably the most primitive communities belonging to the Negrito racial stock, only traces of which are now left in the coastal areas and parts of the mainland. These communities, small in number, and sensitive and isolated, have been under stress all over South-east Asia and the Pacific. Their problem has to be seen in a wider perspective. The Indo-Mongoloid group of the Nicobarese, relatively sturdy and resilient, has accepted the challenge of the change and has even prospered and multiplied. Another Mongoloid community, the Shompen, semi-nomadic and living in small, scattered settlements, still shies away from outsiders, but they are reportedly somewhat better off than the Negrito communities of the Great Andamanese and Onge whose numbers have sharply dwindled; nor are they as remote as the Sentinelese and the Jarawa; the latter have only now started responding to administrative overtures. Even so, the Shompen deserve to be treated with equal care and sympathy.

The earliest literature on the islands belongs to the genre of colonial ethnography. The first study which dates back to 1790 is in the nature of a descriptive study of the islands. It was from 1869 that the ethnographic study of tribal communities started and came to cover geography, languages, ethnography, pre-history, etc. The well-known works of this category are : F.J. Mouat, *Adventures and Researches among the Andaman Islanders* (1863); M. V. Portman, *History of Our Relations with Andamanese* (1889), vols. 1 and 2; E.H. Man, *The Nicobar Islands and Their People* (1933), *Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Andaman Islands* (1932) and *Andaman Nicobar Gazetteer* (1908); A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Andaman Islander* (1922). Except for the last work which marked a breakthrough in anthropology, all the other works were of a general nature abounding in interesting descriptions of the exotic. Some important work was done in connection with census ethnography from 1921 onwards. However, it was only after Independence that serious research was undertaken by Indian scholars on a long-term basis. The most important agency involved in it was the Anthropological Survey of India. Its Port Blair Office, established in 1951, has produced about 250 publications including monographs, articles and reports. The Survey also built up an ethnographic museum as part of its regional office with an excellent collection of artefacts and photographs. Students

and teachers belonging to departments of anthropology have also been visiting the islands for the study of tribal communities.

The survival of all tribal communities (except the Nicobarese) is the key issue in the islands. Since 1901 their population has been declining. The Great Andamanese are facing the threat of extinction because of the incidence of high infant mortality caused mainly by diarrhoea, malaria and tuberculosis. The decline of their population has been a cause of justifiable concern. In recent years, while some satisfaction can be derived from the arrest in the decline of their populations in terms of percentages if not numbers, it is only a negative satisfaction. Their number has become very small. The maintenance of ecological balance is intimately linked with the survival of these communities which are unique in their formation. They must be preserved and helped to develop in their own way at all cost. The four Negrito communities, and even the Mongoloid community of the Shompen, must be encouraged to develop a will for survival which they have been losing over the years. This can be done only by showing a genuine respect for their culture. They remain unique in the plurality of cultures in our country of which we are justifiably proud. They also possess a profound knowledge of their ecology and concern for its preservation. Survival of these groups and preservation of ecological balance are interconnected.

Following the Prime Minister's visit to the Islands in 1987 and in consultation with the Prime Minister's Office, the Anthropological Survey of India initiated action to put together a strategy of survival for the endangered communities and drew up a plan for bringing out a series of publications including monographs on six tribal groups in the islands. This involved updating of material and generating new material, particularly for the Nicobarese in all their islands. Over the years the scholars of the Survey have been studying these communities and collecting available data on the social, morphological and genetic characteristics of these populations.

K.S. SINGH
Director General
Anthropological Survey of India

Foreword

The dominant population of the Nicobar Islands is that of the Nicobarese who inhabit twelve islands in the archipelago. But in the forest of Great Nicobar, the southernmost and the largest island in the Nicobars, lives a distinct tribe called the Shompen. Like the Nicobarese they too are of Mongoloid stock but with some minor variations. However, it is in their lifestyle and culture that they present the major contrast. They speak a different language and are semi-nomadic forest dwellers. They hunt, fish and collect forest produce. Their huts are built on poles. They use long spears with mildly poisoned tips for hunting and fishing. They also have small gardens of pandanus and rear domestic pigs. On the western coast they have an economically symbiotic relationship with the coastal Nicobarese.

Their population is reported to be only 214 (1981 census), but they have a vast resource area in the forests and the rivers and the sea coasts of Great Nicobar. They do not always look so healthy and strong as the Jarawa of Great Andaman. In recent years efforts have been made to carry health care and other welfare measures to them but no great success has been achieved so far. We have still a long way to go in studying and learning their language. They have been sometimes described as hostile but they really seem to be shy and suspicious of any close contact with outsiders. In the near future it should be possible to extend assistance to them in an effective way without causing any serious discord in their life patterns.

Dr S.N.H. Rizvi was posted at Port Blair for four years where he studied the Shompen. He produced a report on this tribe which was updated in 1987.

This monograph on the Shompen forms part of a series that Seagull Books has undertaken to publish on behalf of the Anthropological Survey of India on a crash basis. They deserve our thanks for doing so. I have every hope that the monographs will be received well by scholars, researchers, administrators and planners interested in the study and development of these communities.

K.S. SINGH

Preface

This monograph is the outcome of my fieldwork in the Great Nicobar Island during January–February 1984 and May 1987.

The objective of the study is to provide a brief ethnographic and demographic account of the Shompen of the Great Nicobar Island. The study covers a more or less homogeneous and isolated group in terms of the tribal way of life. Although the period spent may have been too short for a deeper study, it offers a descriptive account of the life of the people, on the basis of how the Shompen themselves respond to the changing trends that have come their way. Unfortunately, language was a major bar for the author. None of the neighbours of the Shompen have picked up their language, and the service of an interpreter was not available. The Shompen have a limited stock of Hindi words which was not quite adequate for my purpose. Thus there was no way but to depend upon the coastal Nicobarese who have managed to learn some Shompen words. As a result, only a descriptive account could be ventured, and a really analytical one proved beyond my scope.

This monograph was written within a short period with the willing and unstinted cooperation of all my colleagues to whom I remain indebted. A report entitled 'Ecological Adaptation among the Shompens of Great Nicobar Island', submitted to the Anthropological Survey of India by Sri S. Mukherjee in 1974, has been incorporated in this monograph.

I am very much indebted to Dr K. S. Singh, Director General, Anthropological Survey of India, for giving me the opportunity to prepare the monograph. I am thankful to Dr R. S. Mann, Joint Director, Anthropological Survey of India, Dehradun, for going through the entire manuscript. His comments and criticism have helped me considerably in improving the work.

Much of whatever little I have been able to achieve, I owe to others. Any errors in this monograph are, however, my responsibility.

Dehradun

S.N.H. RIZVI

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

According to the 1981 census the total population of India is about 685 million, of which 51 million are the tribals who constitute 7.76 per cent of the total population of the country. The total population of the Union Territory of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is 1,88,741 (*Census*, 1981), out of which 22,361 are tribals constituting 11.85 per cent of the total population of the Union Territory.

In the hilly and forested regions of India live many tribal communities who speak different languages and dialects, and have largely maintained their diverse traditions and religious beliefs, which are quite distinct from the culture of their non-tribal neighbours. These tribes are economically backward and retain their indigenous productive systems. Their standard of living is comparatively low. Under economic pressure from non-tribals, the tribal communities have often been forced into some kind of dependence on the former, and have been compelled to play a subservient role.

The Indian Constitution lays down that special provisions should be made for the educational and economic advancement of the backward communities, especially the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The State Governments/Union Territories were also directed to protect such communities from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

In the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, all the six aboriginal tribes, viz. the Great Andamanese, the Onge, the Jarawa, the Sentinelese, the Nicobarese and the Shompen have been declared Scheduled Tribes.

These communities are found in the following islands:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. The Great Andamanese | Strait Island |
| 2. The Onge | Little Andaman |
| 3. The Jarawa | South Andaman and Middle Andaman |
| 4. The Sentinelese | North Sentinel Island |
| 5. The Nicobarese | Car Nicobar, Chowra, Teresa, Bompoka, Katchal, Camorta, |

Nancowry, Trinket, Little Nicobar,
Kondul, Pilo-Milo, and Great
Nicobar

6. The Shompen

Great Nicobar

Historically speaking, the percentage of the tribal population in relation to the total population of the Union Territory has shown a progressive decline over the years, from 34.38 per cent in 1931 to 11.85 per cent in 1981. This can be attributed to (a) the settling of several people from the mainland in these islands; and (b) the influx of population from the mainland, especially of those who came to these islands in search of jobs and trade opportunities. Table 1 shows the composition of the population since 1931.

Table 1

*Percentage of scheduled tribes to total population as
enumerated at the 1931, 1941, 1951, 1961, 1971 and 1981
censuses*

Sl.No.	Census year	Total Population	Tribal Population	Percentage
1.	1931	29,463	10,129	34.38
2.	1941	33,768	12,252	36.28
3.	1951	30,971	12,095	39.05
4.	1961	63,548	14,122	22.22
5.	1971	1,15,133	18,102	15.72
6.	1981	1,88,741	22,364*	11.85

* The population figures above do not include the population of the Jarawa and the Sentinelese. The Jarawa and Sentinelese are estimated to be 200 and 80 respectively.

The task of collecting information on Shompen life and culture has not been easy. Apart from their own fear of outsiders and the constant feuds they have waged with the coastal Nicobarese, and sometimes even within their own tribe, the difficulty of reaching them and of staying with them for long enough, as well as their own frequent migrations, have all combined to make them hard to approach.

This study explores various aspects of Shompen life, including their identification, population, distribution, demographic features and state of health. Their social structure is examined in terms of the family. The life cycle of the Shompen is described from conception to death along

with the associated rituals and practices. Their economic organization is discussed in relation to hunting, food gathering, horticulture and the barter system. Through all these details I have highlighted the nature, implications and magnitude of their external contacts and the causes of change.

CHAPTER TWO

The Shompen of Great Nicobar

Location

This study describes the Shompen of the Great Nicobar, an island in District Nicobars of the Andaman and Nicobar Union Territory. The Great Nicobar Island is the southernmost of the Bay Islands. Situated between latitudes 6°45' and 7°15' North and longitudes 93°38' and 93°55' East, it is the largest in area among the Nicobar group of islands. Its area comes to about 865 sq. km and its southern tip, the Pygmalion Point, is hardly some 145 km north of Achin Head at the northern tip of Sumatra.

Topography

The northern half of the Great Nicobar Island is dominated by mountain ranges and hills while patches of flat land stretch along the coast and river valleys in the southern half. Away from the shore, the topography of the island is extremely undulating; with minor hill ranges with gradients between 50 and 60. These hill ranges serve as a barrier against outsiders who want to come in touch with the Shompen. Mount Thullier to the north of Campbell Bay is the most prominent and the highest range of the island with a height of 638 metres.

This is the only island with perennial rivers. The Galathea, Alexandra and Dagmar are the only rivers in which navigation is possible. All these rivers have their sources in the central part of the island and flow from north to south. These rivers have several tributaries in the hills, but without an adequate field survey their positions cannot be marked on the map. At places these rivers are more than 25 metres wide and are full of aquatic life, like crocodiles, turtles and fish. The sea around the island, particularly to the east, is also full of fishes and turtles.

Climate

The climate of the island is wet and tropical. It is warm and humid for most of the year; the temperature varying from 25° to 30°C. The year can be divided into the dry and rainy seasons. Extreme winter and summer are practically unknown but it is chilly during the months of

December, January and February, particularly in the interior forest. Mists hang over the forests during these months. The months of March, April, May and October can be uncomfortable from the high humidity although the temperature does not rise too high. The rainfall is anything between 90 and 170 inches annually, and is considerably more in Great Nicobar with most rain falling during the south-west monsoon, but hardly a month passes without it. The monsoon sets in at the end of May or beginning of June and strong south-westerly winds with heavy squalls blow till September. Easterly winds, usually beginning from the south-east, prevail from November till April. From February to April it is usually calm. Cyclones that traverse the Bay of Bengal originate north of the Nicobars and do not affect these islands. Humidity throughout the year is between 75 to 80 per cent.

Month-wise details of rainfall in the Great Nicobar Island are presented in Table 2, on page 6.

Soils

The quality of the soil varies from place to place. The soil near the coast is sandy. It is loamy in the interior, and there are places where it shows thick clay loam. In the interior where the soil is thick, rain water holds for a considerable period and is a breeding ground of mosquitoes. At the same time vegetable organic matter decays into it to make the soil very fertile.

Flora

The island is covered with dense forest, full of tropical trees like the white Chuglam (*Terminalia bialata*), black Chuglam (*Terminalia manii*), mango (*Mangifera silvatica*), white Dhup (*Canarium euphyllum*), Poon (*Calophyllum spectabila*), Jamun (*Schizigium sp.*), Rudraksh (*Eliocarpus gangestus*), Badam (*Terminalia procera*). Coconuts, pandanus (*Pandanus tanctoria*) and Jungli Supari (*Areca triandra*) are found in plenty, especially along the coastal belt in the west. Besides, there are certain wild edible fruits like the Jungli Am (*Mangifera andamanica*), Mohwa or hill Mohwa (*Bassia butyracea*), Gular (*Ficus sp.*), cane and bamboo that also grow profusely. Different varieties of cane, like the Jungli Bet (*Calamus longisetus*) and Lal Bet (*Kosthalsia laciniosa*) are found all over the region. Luxuriant growths of fern are seen on the banks of streams. Lush mangrove swamps and sea-grass meadows provide the necessary habitat for crocodiles and turtles.

The wood and leaves of a number of trees are used for various purposes like canoe-making, fencing, hut construction, thatching of roofs and for making fire-drills.

Table 2

Month-wise Rainfall (in cms) on Great Nicobar

<i>Year</i>	<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>	<i>Total</i>
1970	29	9	4	17	37	33	19	26	31	24	32	29	290
1971	48	10	10	10	57	31	15	21	26	37	32	63	360
1972	4	1	1	29	12	20	42	23	34	30	45	15	256
1973	20	—	9	9	43	38	23	30	33	44	35	82	366
1974	15	7	9	29	36	34	15	33	22	27	30	18	375
1975	27	10	6	1	4	8	2	4	8	43	149	21	283
1976	3	11	4	29	26	30	23	31	43	36	67	56	559
1977	5	21	—	9	24	27	26	17	38	30	67	50	314
1978	9	23	9	21	42	76	62	22	23	24	29	15	355
1979	6	3	1	13	29	29	36	24	28	21	67	14	271
1980	3	4	6	18	39	52	45	47	53	28	30	64	389
1981	11	12	—	18	34	35	28	16	16	21	—	—	191

The Shompen

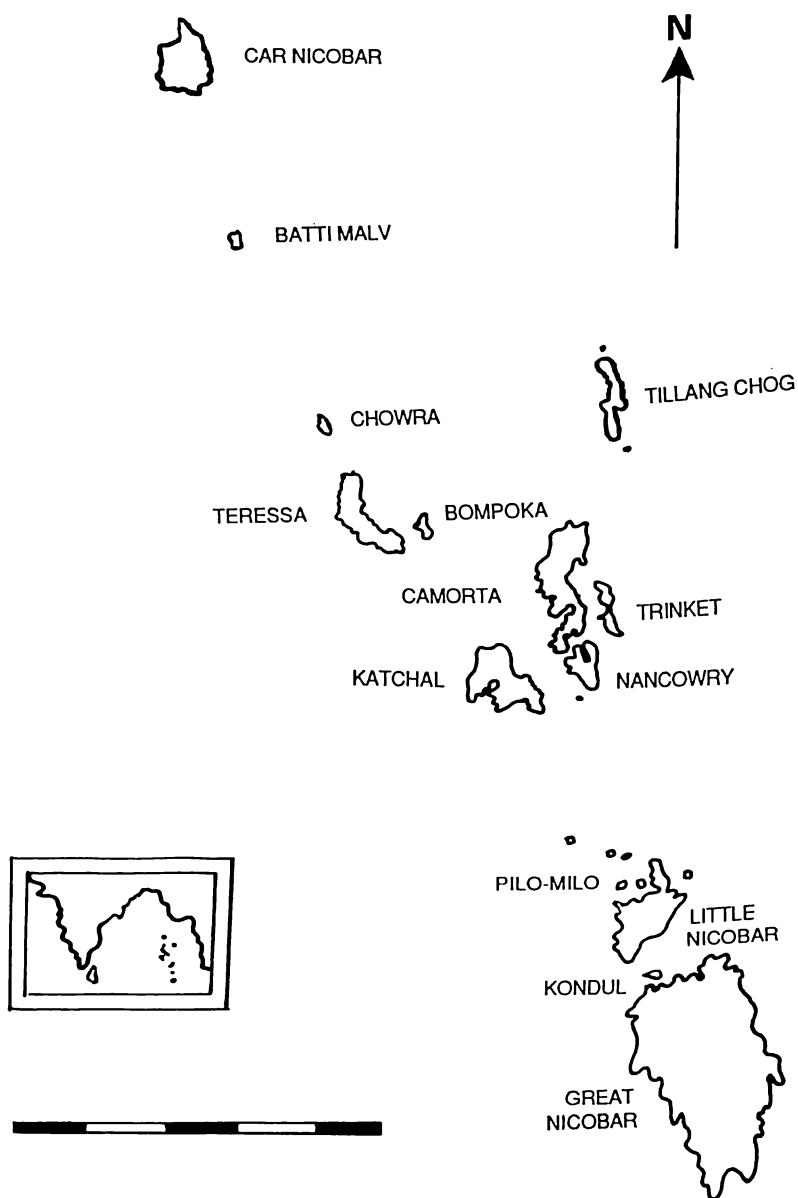
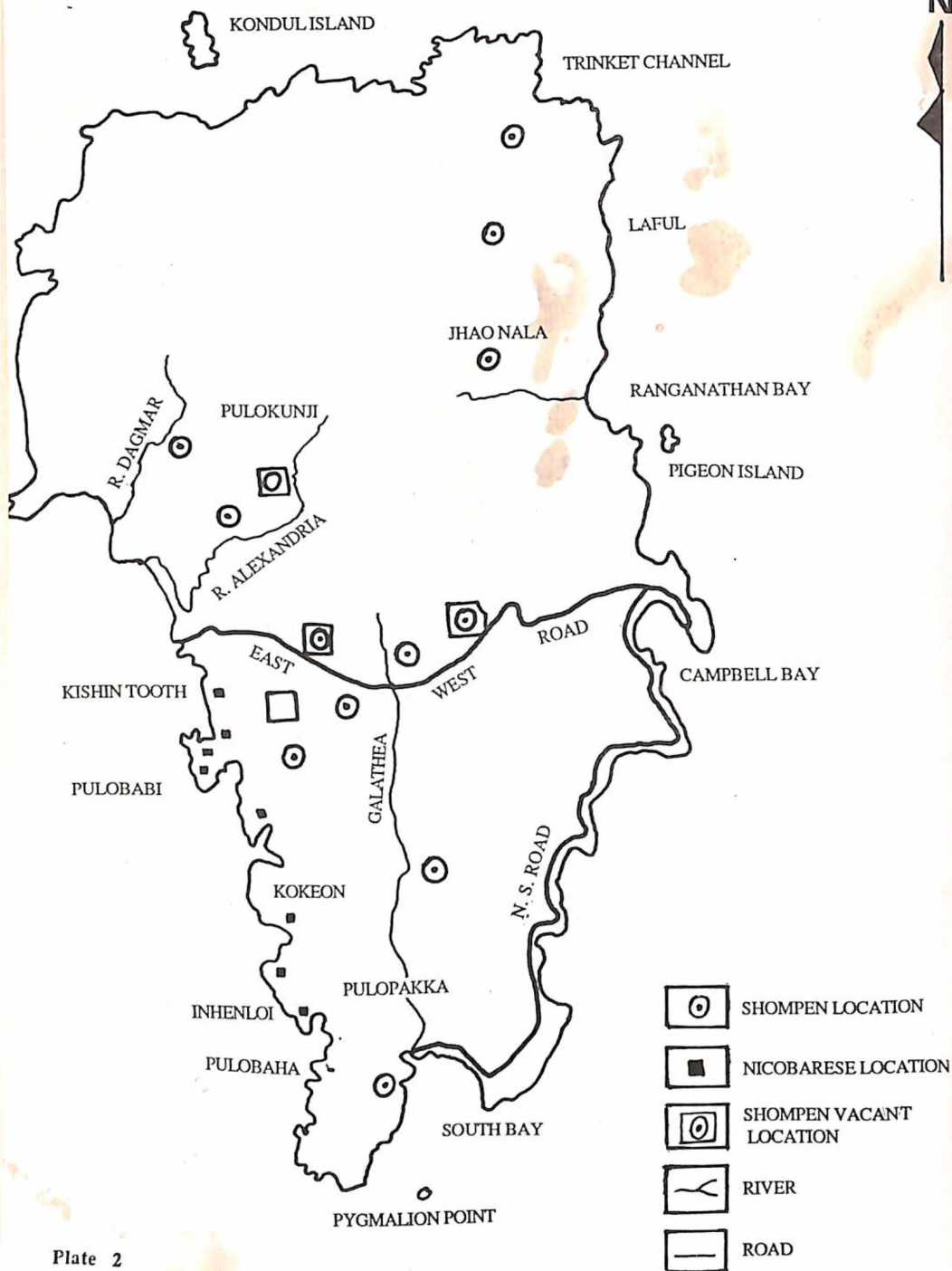


PLATE 1

NICOBAR ISLANDS

GREAT NICOBAR ISLAND

SCALE 1 INCH = 4 MILES





Shompen Spear



Iron Fishing Spears

PLATE 4 : Shompen Spears

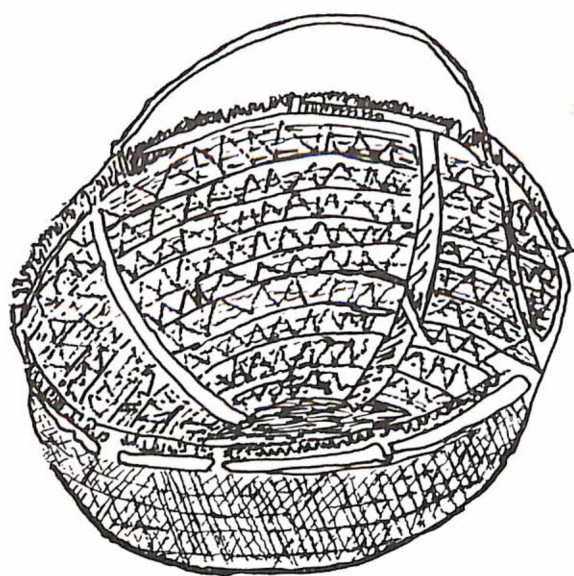
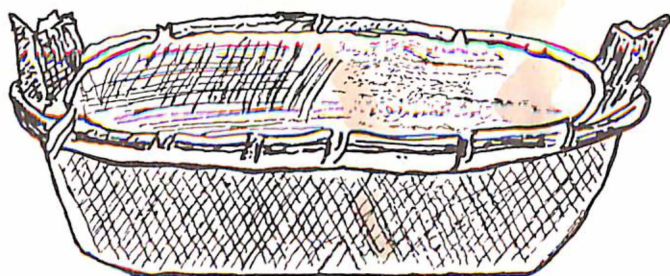


PLATE 5 : Shompen Baskets

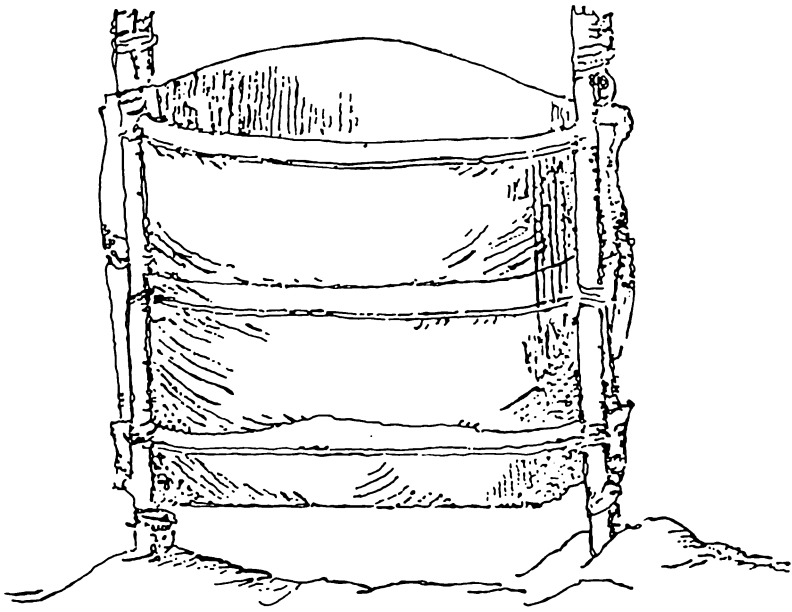


PLATE 6 :

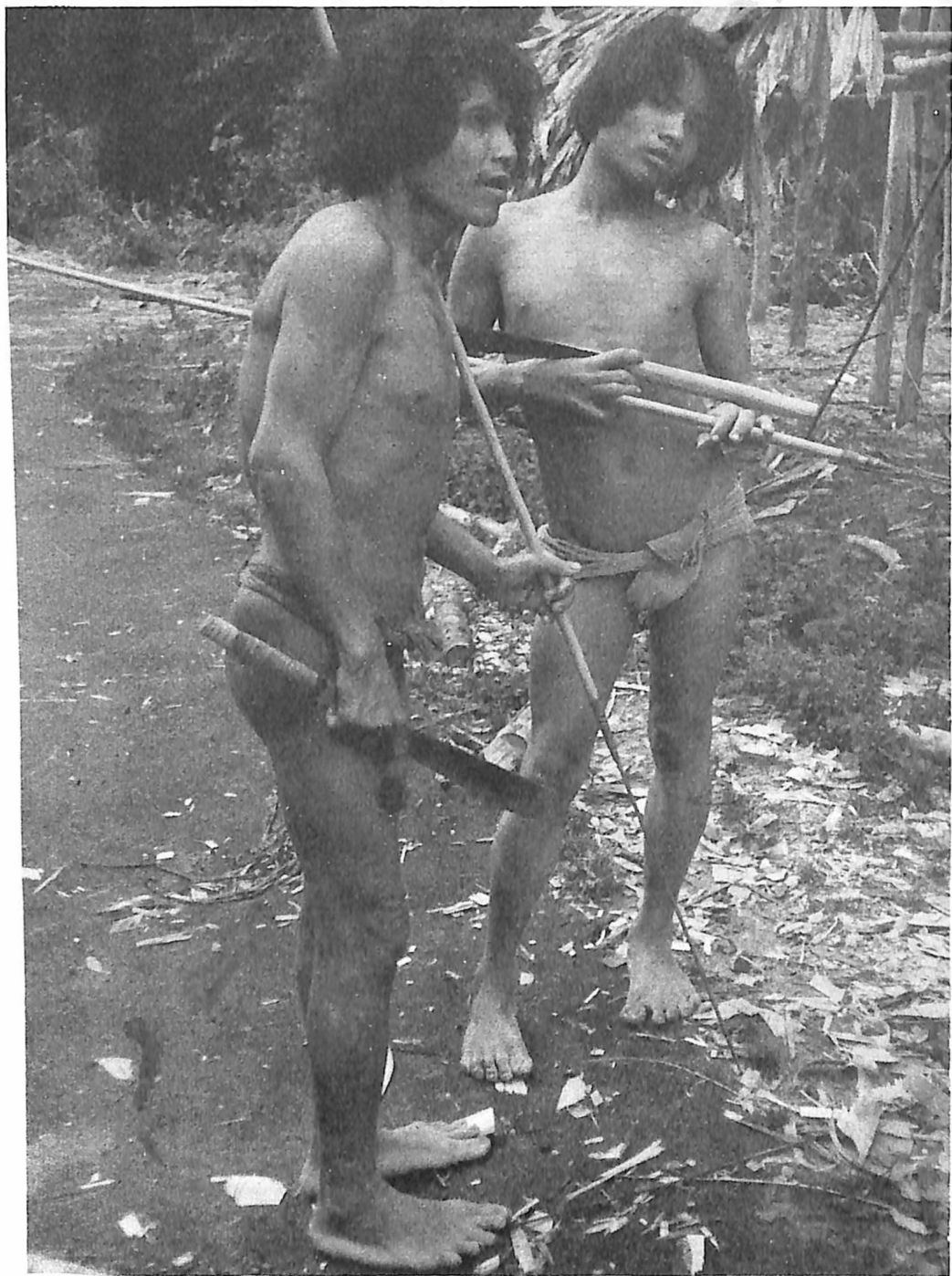
Shompen Cooking Vessel



A group of Shompen men, women and children standing in front of a hut.
Photograph taken at Laful on the west coast of Great Nicobar.



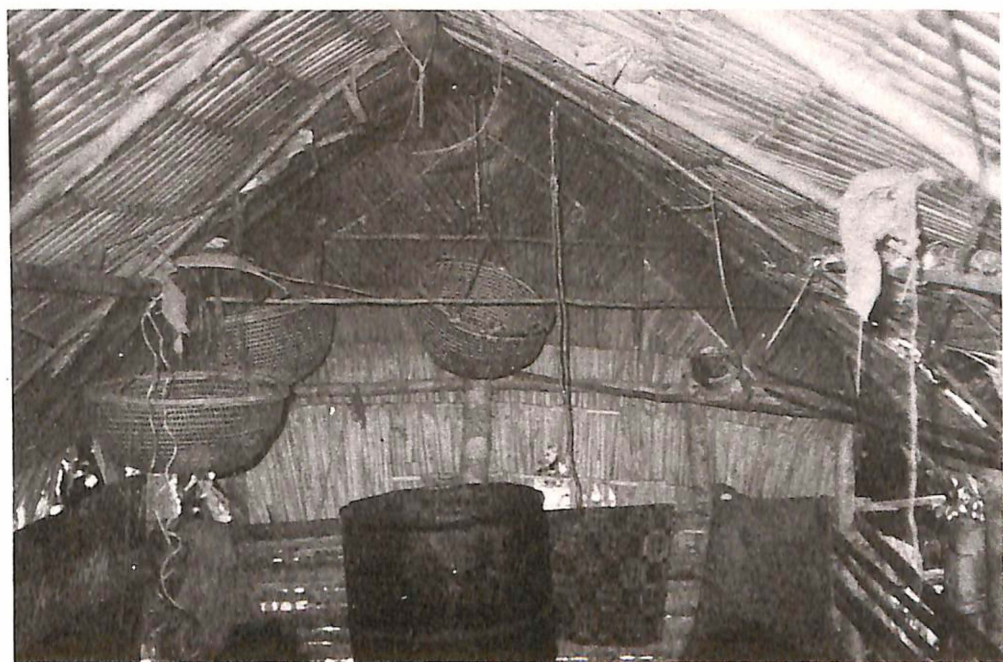
A group of Shompen men and boys.



Two Shompen males.



A Shompen village.



Interior of a Shompen hut.



A Shompen hut.



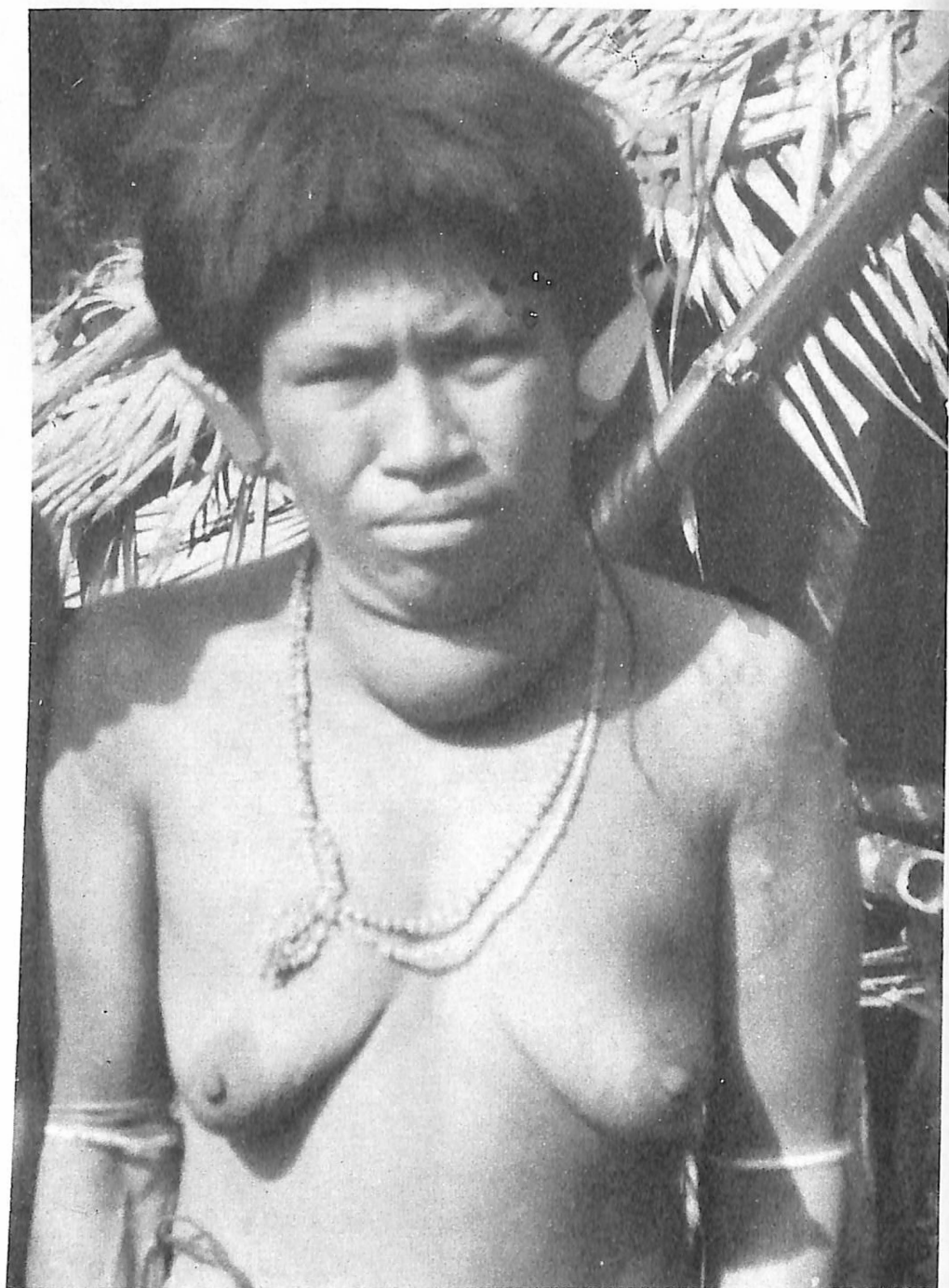
A Shompen hut with walls on all sides.



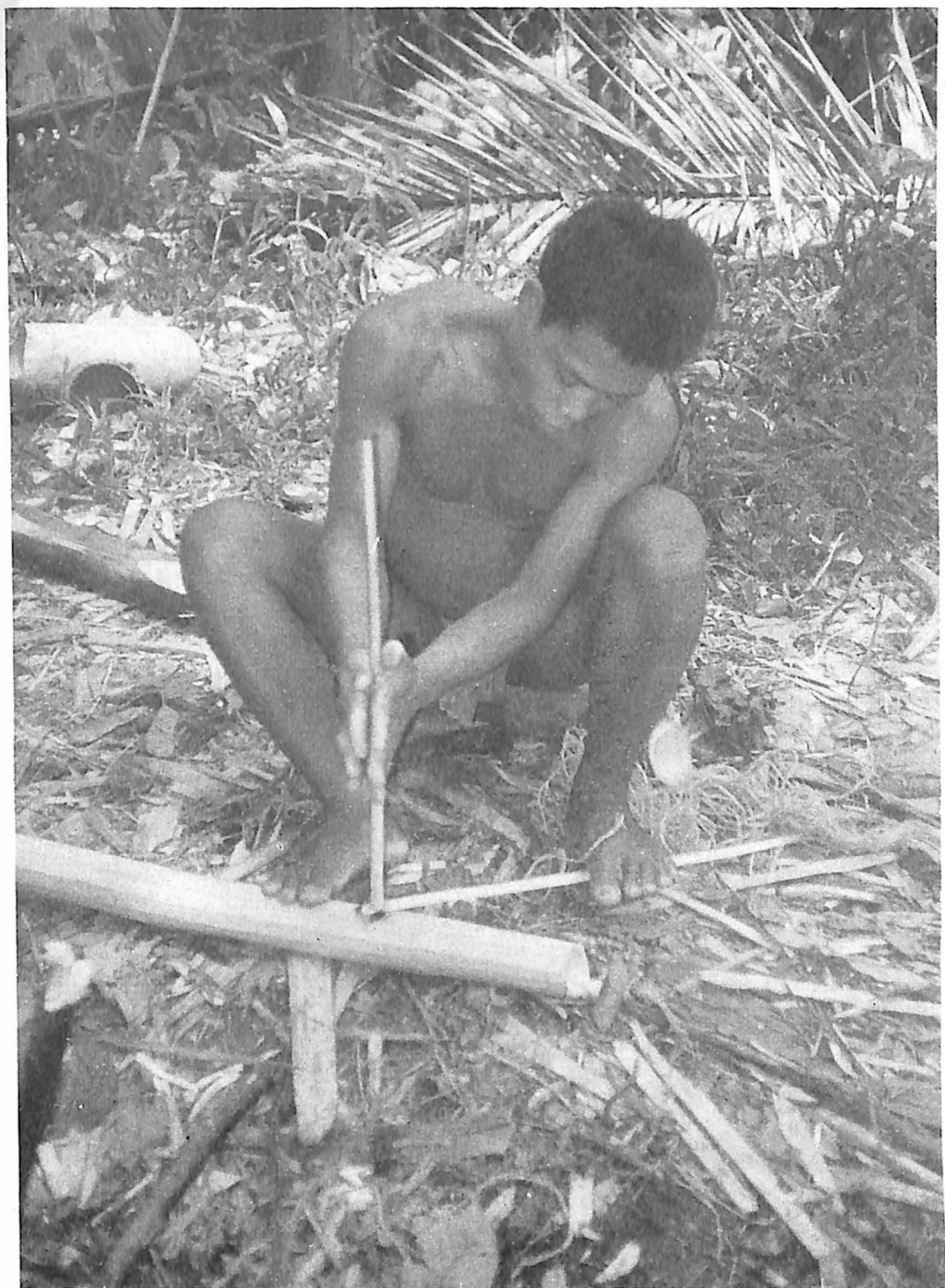
A Shompen woman using a piece of shell to take out the kernels of boiled pandanus.



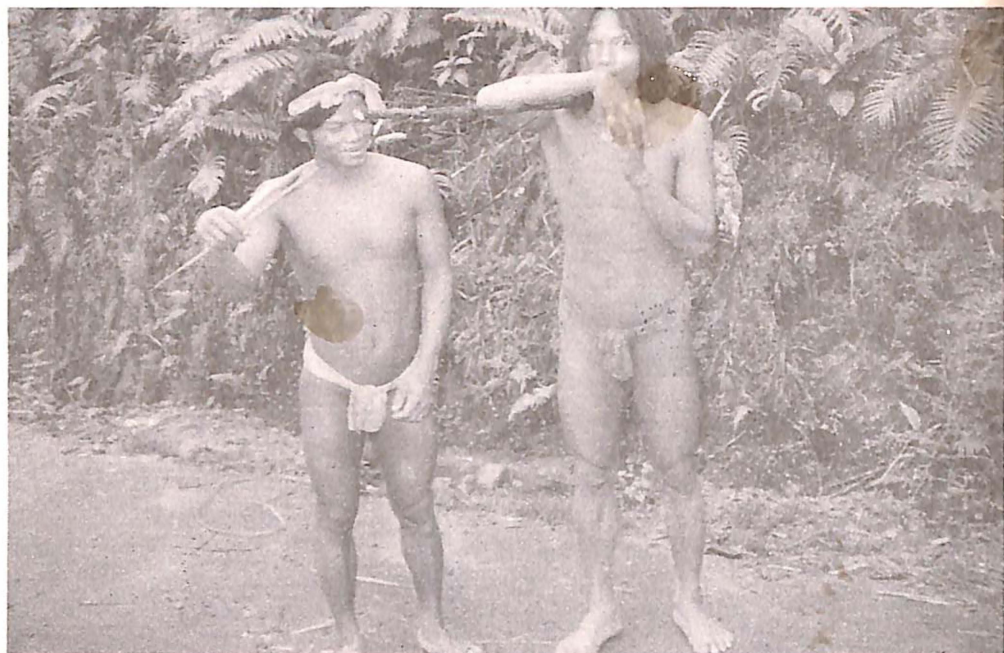
The kernel of the pandanus, ready for preservation.



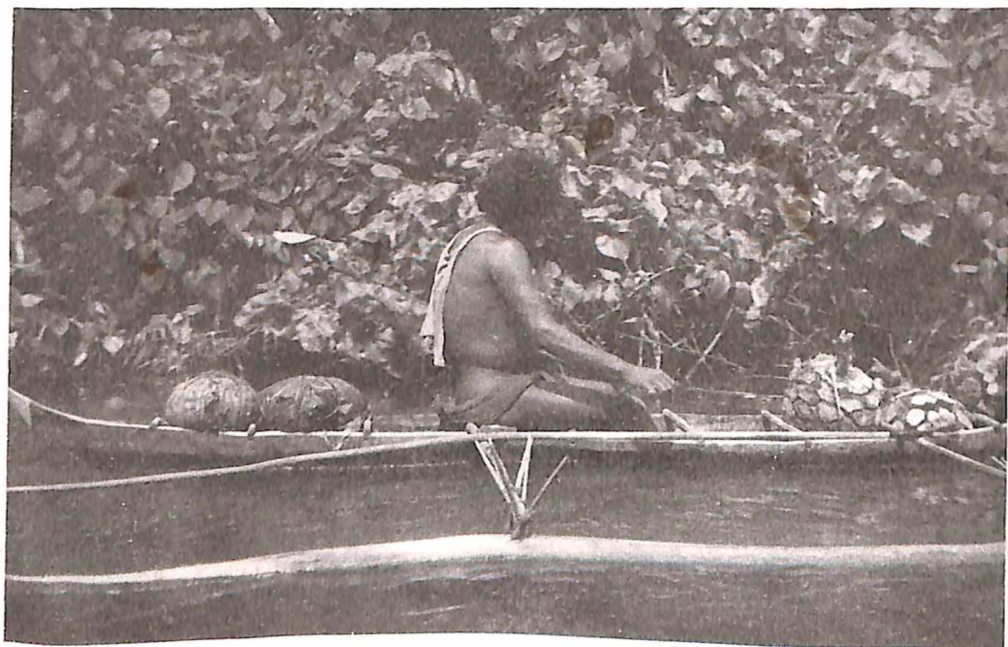
A Shompen woman, wearing traditional ornaments: the 'Ahav' (strips of bamboo) worn in the ear, 'Geegap' (armlets) and 'Naigaak' (bead necklace)



A Shompen busy making the fire with the fire-drill.



A Shompen man and a boy in traditional dress .



Canoe with outrigger at Dagmar river, Great Nicobar, carrying pandanus

Fauna

Richly endowed with flora, these islands are poor in fauna. For wild mammals they have only the pig (*Sus Nicobarensis*), and the black-faced grey monkey (*Macacus Umbrosus*). Domesticated animals found on this island are the cat, the dog, the buffalo, the cow and the goat. The birds found in this area are the pigeon (*Muscadivora aenea insularis*), the Great Nicobar serpent eagle (*Haematronis cheela Klossi*) and Oberholsar's Nicobar Megapode (*Megapodius Nicobariensis Abbotti*). Besides the above-mentioned birds, there are also hens and cocks on the island. There are a number of lizards, pythons and snakes (mostly non-poisonous), and salt water crocodiles (*Crocodilus Palustris*) widely distributed in almost all the creeks and backwaters. The water around the island is full of sharks, tuna, mackerel, sardines, ray fish, octopi and different varieties of crustacean.

Transport and communication

The canoe is the only mode of transport used by the Shompen. They make the small canoe themselves and use it to cross the creeks and to visit different localities. The same canoe is utilized for hunting, fishing and food-gathering purposes.

Table 3 enumerates the population of the Shompen over the years.

Table 3*Sex-wise Population of the Shompen (1901-1982)*

<i>Census year/ enumeration year</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
1901	192	150	342
1911	190	185	375
1921	190	185	375
1931	100	100	200
1951	-	-	20
1961	-	-	71
1971	-	-	92
1982	111	103	214
(local enumeration)			

According to the Census reports of 1981, the total population of Great Nicobar Island is 4,620; out of this the tribal population is 454, the settlers' population is 2,116 and the population of the others is 2,050. Table 4 gives details of the Shompen population distributed in

different localities of Great Nicobar Island. It is based on enumeration made in 1982 and 1984.

Table 4

Distribution of the Shompen Population in Different Localities

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of the locality</i>	<i>Population</i>	
		<i>1982 enumeration</i>	<i>1984 author's enumeration</i>
1.	East-West 24/27 km (unnamed 1)	31	11
2.	East-West 28 km (unnamed 4)	14	15
3.	Ranganathan Bay (Jhao-Nala)	18	19
4.	East-West 35 km (Unnamed 3)	22	24
5.	Alexandria river	19	7
6.	Dagmar river	10	10
7.	Galathea river	—	5
8.	Laful I/Tendrin Tikri	2	2
9.	Laful II/Trinket Channel	16	22
10.	Kokyon (Lonie)	24	19
11.	Reakinchung	9	—
12.	Buddavan	31	—
13.	Unnamed (2)	18	—
Total		214	134

The People

The Shompen are semi-nomadic people who move from place to place as and when required. Their movements are regulated by the availability or otherwise of fruits and game. They can be divided into two main bands/septs. Each band/sept is primarily territory-based and its members rarely leave the territory except when they go on a raiding expedition. The territory of one band is closer to the eastern coast while the others live close to the western coast of Great Nicobar Island.

The Nicobarese of this island call the Shompen 'Shamhap'. It is a Nicobari term meaning 'those who live in the forest'. The term

'Shompen' could very well be derived from the British mispronunciation of 'Shamhap'. The Nicobarese also call them 'Shampen', 'Shompehan' and 'Champion'.

The tribals themselves do not identify themselves as Shompen. The west-coast Shompen call themselves Kalay, whereas the east-coast Shompen call themselves Keyet. One Shompen band calls people of the other Shompen band Buaveia.

The inland tribe is split into two main divisions. The larger inhabits the interior proper, and is still hostile. (There was a man in the village with some ugly open wounds beneath the shoulder blades, who had been speared by them close to the houses a year ago); the members of the other division, who form small settlements near the coast villages, are known as 'mawas Shompen' (quiet, or tame Shompen), and are on intimate terms with the Nicobarese, fearing equally with them the wilder natives. When the latter are out on the warpath, the friendlies come down to the shore, and with the coast people, leave the district by canoe until it is safe to return. (Kloss, 1903:143)

Origin

Man (1886) observed: 'This inland tribe, only a remnant of which now remains, is more or less confined to the interior region of the one island of Great Nicobar (the largest isle of the Southern Group).' He considered this tribe to be the aboriginal stock of the Nicobarese. Their singular purity of breed, even at the present time, seems to point to this, for other sections and coast tribes even in Great Nicobar show traces of admixture with Malay and other stocks. He said :

The inference I have ventured to draw from all the information and facts that have come to my knowledge is that the presence in modern times of the Shom Pen in one island only of the group is due to the determination of those who showed themselves hostile to them in other islands, so they became fugitives, finding refuge where they could be sure to live without fear of molestation. (Man, 1886:173).

The unmixed origin of the Shom Pen appears to be indicated by the singular uniformity of type observable even among sections of the tribe so widely separated as to be ignorant of each other's existence.

He quotes Dr Garson, too, as saying:

Such close resemblances, occurring in a sufficiently large series, would indicate purity of race or, at least, isolation from other races for a long period of years . . . There is evidence, indeed, that they have been for a long time isolated from surrounding inhabitants and that by absence of the fusion of fresh blood they have come to resemble one another so closely that they now possess certain characteristics of a more or less stable nature. (Man, 1886:182-183)

Man notes that the differences are both racial and linguistic between the coastal and Pen tribes though the Shompen are fairer than the Malays. He holds that the Shompen were the original inhabitants of Great Nicobar and that at a later date they were driven into the interior by aliens more powerful than themselves who were wrecked on their coasts.

Sir R. Temple (1901) contradicts this, stating that there is no racial difference between a Shompen and other Nicobarese. The differences are merely such as exist between islands and as are to be expected among people living an almost isolated existence.

According to Kloss (1903: 215-217):

It was for long believed that the interior of Great Nicobar was inhabited by a race of Negritos akin to the Andamanese, but the Shompen are an isolated group of primitive Malayans, and although they must be regarded as the aborigines of the islands, many features amongst them point to the fact that they are no longer racially pure. Not only does the facial appearance vary greatly, but the hair, which is universally regarded as an almost infallible indication of race amongst primitive peoples, occurs in all the grades between curly and straight. To account for this latter difference, and for the dull brown colour of the skin—far darker than is usual amongst Malays—one may of course suggest remote Negrito admixture. Possibly the Andamanese, on one of the predatory voyages which it seems they were not unaccustomed to make in this direction, may have reached the island, and for some reason unable to return, have intermixed with the inhabitants.

He thinks it more probable that these peculiarities are due to a Dravidian strain, and that some mariners of this race, who from before the time of Solomon, were accustomed to make trading voyages to the Eastern Archipelago, became stranded on these islands, and incorporated

themselves with the people they found there. On the other hand, they much resemble, in appearance and mode of life, descriptions of many of the primitive Malaysians who have intermixed with Negritos. We may, therefore, consider the Shompen to be the aborigines of the group, who, although everywhere else either exterminated or absorbed by settlers from outside, have in Great Nicobar found a refuge in the forest depths, and by long-standing hostility to the intruders, arising from some unknown cause, have preserved to a great extent their natural traits and existence, although somewhat degenerated, both on account of the less favourable circumstances in which they live and of the interbreeding that the smallness of their numbers compels.

As regards their physical characteristics Kloss (1903) observed:

The colour of the skin is a dark muddy-brown or bronze (several shades deeper than the coast natives), but it is liable to slight variation, and is generally a little paler in the women and girls, who resemble far more distinctly the coarse Malayan type than the men do. The hair of the head is very luxuriant, and of all varieties between wavy and curly; but is not crisp or frizzly to any degree. No hair grows on the face, or on the body, save about the armpits, etc. The outline of the face is an oblong rectangle, and the forehead is somewhat retreating, but occasionally high and rounded, though narrow; the supraciliary arch is prominent, but the eyebrows are light. The eyes, with black pupils, are both oblique and horizontal, and when the latter, are often accompanied by the Mongolian fold, which occurs most frequently among the women. The nose is broad and flattened, with rounded tip and rather rounded nostrils, the plane of which is upward. The cheekbones and zygomatic arch are prominent, and a degree of prognathism is prevalent. (Kloss 1903: 217-218)

To account for the difference in the hair and colour of the skin of the Shompen from the Nicobarese, two hypotheses are advanced. According to the first, the Andamanese came at an early date to this island for some reason or other and, unable to return, mingled with the local inhabitants; according to the second, Dravidian mariners who came to the Eastern Archipelago for trade got stranded here and were later incorporated with the local people.

During the visit of the Census party to Great Nicobar in 1931, anthropometric measurements were taken of a dozen individuals in a Shompen village on the Alexandra river. As a type they appeared to be totally different from other Nicobarese and the men possessed distinct features. Some resembled the Papuans, while the women had

Mongoloid features, often including the epicanthic fold. Several male children on the other hand showed features very suggestive of South Indian blood.

While the coastal tribes of Great Nicobar exhibit all the characteristics of a mixed Malay race, the Shompen with their primitive culture and nomadic habits differ from the remaining groups, nor are they part of their society or economy.

Agarwal in his study, 'Physical characteristics of the Shompens of Great Nicobar', noticed:

The Shompen are short to medium in stature. The head of the Shompen is mesocephalic though the brachycephalic element is also fairly strong. The nose is misorrhine with a tendency towards leptorrhine. Hypsicephalic head occurs predominantly. All the three types of head, namely, tapeinocephalic, retrocephalic, and archcephalic are equally frequent. Euryprosopic type of face is predominating. The upper face is of the mesene type. The frequency of leptene and euryens are also quite high. In non-metric characters they are light brown to yellow brown in skin colour. Hair are either straight or wavy. Most of the subjects have flat occiput with bulbous forehead. Eye fissure is mostly oblique with traces of epicanthic fold. The nasal bridge is concave with shallow depression. They have medium type lips with slight eversion. The chin is mostly oval and neutral in projection, prognathism is slight, but present. (Agarwal, 1967: 96-97)

He observed that in terms of blood groups, the Shompen present a picture so far unknown in any of the primitive tribes of South-east Asia. All the 55 Shompen tested belong to the O group. The complete absence of *p* and *q* genes in the present Shompen population who had migrated to this island in a small group can be explained if we presume that the ancestors had a very high frequency of *O* genes. The *A* and *B* genes which were present in the ancestral population might have been eliminated by the action of a genetic drift in the process of micro-evolution.

The sickle cell trait is almost entirely absent in the Shompen population.

History

The existence of an inland tribe in Great Nicobar was first mentioned by Pastor Rosen, a Danish missionary, in 1831. In 1846 Admiral Steen Bille paid the first recorded visit. When the islands were annexed by the

British Government de Roepstorff paid three visits, and found a temporary encampment. He was accompanied on one occasion, in 1881, by the Chief Commissioner, Colonel T. Cadell. E.H. Man first visited them in 1884 and was subsequently much in contact with them. His findings together with those of Boden Kloss and Anderson are our only available data.

In 1901 Boden Kloss, on his first search of the Shompen in and around the Ganges Harbour, found only a ruined hut, heaps of shells, and split seed-cases of the *Barringtonia speciosa*. On his second attempt in Casuarina Bay on the west coast, he located and visited the Shompen of the Dagmar river. His effort at Kopenheat also met with success as he met the Shompen of the Alexandria river in this Nicobarese village. His third meeting with the Shompen was to the east of Pulobhabi at a distance of more than an hour's journey on foot and by canoe. In his last attempt, on the river Galathea, he found a deserted hut with no trace of the Shompen. In 1905, C.P.B. Anderson paid a visit to this island.

After a lapse of 47 years, in April 1952, B.S. Chengapa, Conservator of Forests, led an expedition to this island in search of the Shompen, and contacted them near the Jubilee, Dagmar, Alexandria and Galathea rivers, as also in the Bay of Trinket Channel. The exploring party made their first contact with the Shompen of the Jubilee river who were known to the guide. They were somewhere near the source of the river. The party spent a night with the Shompen. The second group, also known to the guide, was contacted at a distance of 8 km from the mouth of the Dagmar River. The third lot found some 20 to 22 km up from the source of the Alexandria river was of the hostile Shompen. Another group of the Shompen was discovered along the river Galathea, some 25 km up the river. The last group that this party met was at Trinket Bay, where they had huts on a hilltop, a few kilometres from the shore.

Sondhi (1952) observed during his expedition that the Great Nicobar Island consists of two types of people: (1) the coastal people, a mixture of Nicobarese, Chinese and Shompen blood, living in small villages of two or three huts situated chiefly around the west coast; (2) the Shompen, a wild tribe living in the hinterland of the island. The latter are descendants of the Malayan aborigines who had at one time migrated to the island. He studied the general health situation and the diseases prevalent among the people of these two groups.

The three cases of elephantiasis seen during the expedition were found at the Dagmar River basin, where the camp consisted of young married couples and the absence of children was very noticeable. This is most probably due to chronic ill health, undernourishment and asthma. These people may become extinct in another two generations. The other Shompen that he met, living well inside the island, were very healthy.

It is unlikely that venereal disease is prevalent on this island. He saw no cases of apparent syphilis, acquired or congenital.

In February 1960 M. G. Raja Ram visited the Shompen of Dagmar River. He sighted the Shompen camp visited by Chengapa in 1952, but it was now deserted. He had to go further inside to meet the Shompen.

In 1966 an expedition consisting of scientists from various disciplines visited Great Nicobar. The team from the Anthropological Survey of India was led by M.K. Nag. The party contacted the Shompen of Dakada and Dakeiya localities. These Shompen were in touch with the Nicobarese of Pulobhabi. Nag observes:

The Shompen are quite nomadic. They make very temporary shades on poles in various places of the interior forest regions of Great Nicobar and stay in small groups of 10–30 persons in each place for short periods. The length of the period depends on the amount of food available in the vicinity. They are dependent mainly on wild pandanus, fresh water fish and wild boar. They catch fish and hunt animals with spears. They know how to grow banana, yam, tare, sweet potatoes and tobacco, but these are not available in abundant quantity. They eat various kinds of larva. They are very skilful in collecting honey and are reported to use some bark-powder for killing the bees and protecting their body from stings. Honey is one of the main items they bring to the coastal Nicobarese for barter. Sometimes they bring banana also. There are no cocunut trees in the regions inhabited by them. So they are deprived of one of the main items of food of the coastal Nicobarese. They have to walk a long distance every day to collect pandanus and other foodstuff. When the food resources in the vicinity of their temporary settlement get exhausted they go to live in some other place. Sheds are ordinarily set up in sites which are well protected and which have good water resources. (Nag, 1966: 35)

In 1970, S. Raha, the Assistant Commissioner, Campbell Bay, visited the Shompen of Trinket Bay and located 25 Shompen living in the Laful Bay area along the coast.

In 1974, S. Mukherjee explored the Shompen settlement of the east coast, and visited the Shompen settlement of Laful Bay, which is about 40 km north of Campbell Bay. He noticed two deserted Shompen settlements to the south of Campbell Bay at a distance of about 15 and 32 km. In 1975, S. Mukherjee again visited the Shompen settlements,

three on the west coast around Pulobhabi and three around Laful Bay on the east coast.

In 1978, T. Lal visited Great Nicobar in connection with the study, 'Ecological Adaptation among the Shompen and Coastal Nicobarese'.

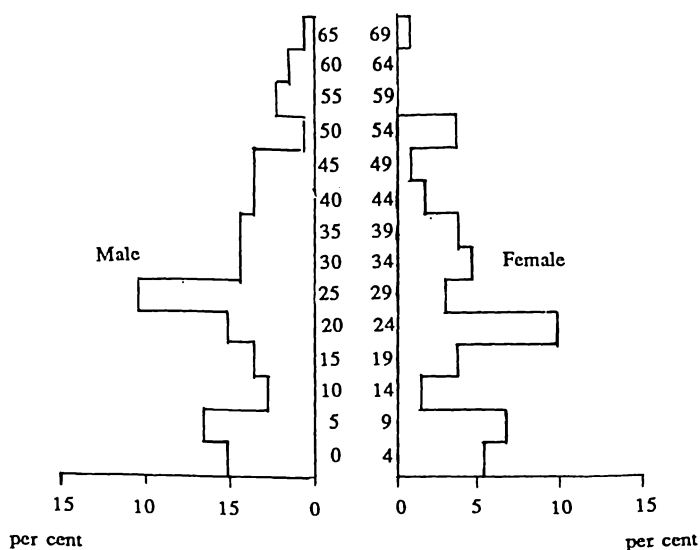


Plate 3 : Age and Sex Structure of the Shompen

Demographic features

The sample. The total sample comprised of 44 households. The distribution of the households in different localities is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Distribution of Shompen Households in Different Localities

Sl. No.	Name of the Shompen locality	Number of households	Population		
			Male	Female	Total
1.	Alexandria River	2	4	3	7
2.	Dagmar River	1	5	5	10
3.	East-West 24/27 km	4	7	4	11
4.	East-West 28 km	5	9	6	15
5.	East-West 35 km	9	12	12	24
6.	Galathea River	3	3	2	5
7.	Kokyon (Loni-E)	7	13	6	19
8.	Laful I/Tendrin Tikri	1	1	1	2
9.	Laful II/Trinket Channel	7	9	13	22
10.	Rangathan Bay (Jhao-Nala)	5	10	9	19
Total		44	73	61	134

Details of household structure by age, sex and marital status are presented in Table 6 (page 17).

Age-wise distribution. For convenience, the population is divided into fourteen groups (at five-year intervals).

The highest frequency is recorded in the age group 20–24 years (14.93 per cent), followed by the age groups 5–9 years (13.43 per cent) and 35–39 years (8.21 per cent) respectively.

Table 6

Sample household structure : Number and proportion of household members

<i>Sl.No.</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Age in years			
1.	0-4	14	10.44
2.	5-9	18	13.43
3.	10-14	6	4.48
4.	15-19	10	7.46
5.	20-24	20	14.93
6.	25-29	18	13.43
7.	30-34	12	8.96
8.	35-39	11	8.21
9.	40-44	7	5.22
10.	45-49	2	1.49
11.	50-54	8	5.97
12.	55-59	3	2.24
13.	60-64	3	2.24
14.	65-69	2	1.49
	Total	134	
Sex			
1.	Male	73	54.47
2.	Female	61	45.52
	Total	134	
Marital Status			
1.	Married	77	57.46
2.	Unmarried	51	38.05
3.	Widowed	6	4.48
Median age			
1.	Male	26.79	
2.	Female	23.08	
3.	Total Population	24.75	

The median age of males is slightly higher (26.79 years) than that of females (23.08 years). The median age of the total population is 24.75 years.

Table 7 (page 19) shows that 28.36 per cent, 70.14 per cent and 1.49 per cent are the ratios for dependent children, active population and dependent aged population respectively. The frequency is slightly more among males than females in the categories of dependent children and active population, while it is the same in both the sexes for the dependent aged. The data clearly indicate the common characteristics of a growing population.

Sex-wise distribution. The total population of 134 Shompen in 44 households is 54 per cent male and 46 per cent female, which is an unusual ratio for the country. The sex ratio of Shompen males per 100 females is 111.11 in the age group 0–14 years, 123.80 in the age group 15–64 years and 100 in the age group 65 years and above, and 119.67 in general against the sex ratio of India standing at 93 females per 100 males (1971 Census).

There is no statistically significant difference in terms of sex ratio ($X^2=0.10$; d.f.=2; $0.95>P>0.90$).

Marital status. Out of 134 persons, 57.46 per cent are married, 38.05 per cent are unmarried and the remaining 4.48 per cent have lost their spouses. The married females belong to age groups above 15 years, while the married males belong to age groups above 20 years indicating that child marriages are not common among the Shompen. Not a single female above 15 years is unmarried, while 9.70 per cent of the males above 15 years are unmarried. The latter belong to the age groups 15–19 years (3.73 per cent), 20–24 years (2.98 per cent), 25–29 years (2.24 per cent) and 30–40 years (0.75 per cent) respectively. The single status of males above 15 years is due to the non-availability of marriageable females in their territory. The details of marital status by age and sex are presented in Table 8 (page 20).

The Size of the Shompen Family. The family size ranges between one and ten persons. In general, all persons, who normally pass their nights under the same roof and share food from the same kitchen are considered members of the household.

Thirty-two families have a membership of between one and three. Eleven families have between four and seven members and only one family has between eight and ten members. The total population of the sample is 134. The distribution of household size is shown in Table 9 (page 21).

Main age categories	Male		Female		Total		Sex Ratio
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	
Dependent children (0–14 years)	20	14.92	18	13.43	38	28.36	111.11
Active population (15–64 years)	52	38.80	42	31.34	94	70.14	123.80
Dependent aged (65 years and over)	1	0.75	1	0.75	2	1.49	100.00
Total	73	54.47	61	45.52	134	99.99	119.67

Note: $X^2 = 0.10$; d.f.=2; $0.95 > P > 0.90$

Table 8*Age- and Sex-wise Marital Status*

<i>Age group (in years)</i>	<i>Unmarried</i>		<i>Married</i>		<i>Widowed</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
0-4	7 (5.22)	7 (5.22)	-	-	-	-	7 (5.22)	7 (5.22)
5-9	9 (6.72)	9 (6.72)	-	-	-	-	9 (6.72)	9 (6.72)
10-14	4 (2.98)	2 (1.49)	-	-	-	-	4 (2.98)	2 (1.49)
15-19	5 (3.73)	-	-	5 (3.73)	-	-	5 (3.73)	5 (3.73)
20-24	4 (2.98)	-	3 (2.24)	13 (9.70)	-	-	7 (5.22)	13 (9.70)
25-29	3 (2.24)	-	11 (8.21)	3 (2.24)	-	1 (0.75)	14 (10.44)	4 (2.98)
30-34	1 (0.75)	-	5 (3.73)	6 (4.48)	-	-	6 (4.48)	6 (4.48)
35-39	-	-	6 (4.48)	5 (3.73)	-	-	6 (4.48)	5 (3.73)
40-44	-	-	5 (3.73)	2 (1.49)	-	-	5 (3.73)	2 (1.49)
45-49	-	-	1 (0.75)	1 (0.75)	-	-	1 (0.75)	1 (0.75)
50-54	-	-	3 (2.24)	4 (2.98)	-	1 (0.75)	3 (2.24)	5 (3.73)
55-59	-	-	1 (0.75)	-	2 (1.49)	-	3 (2.24)	-
60-64	-	-	2 (1.49)	1 (0.75)	-	-	2 (1.49)	1 (0.75)
65-69	-	-	-	-	1 (0.75)	1 (0.75)	1 (0.75)	1 (0.75)
Total	33 (24.62)	18 (13.43)	37 (27.61)	40 (29.85)	3 (2.24)	3 (2.24)	73 (54.47)	61 (45.52)
	51 (38.05)		77 (57.46)		6 (4.48)		134 (99.99)	

Note: The figures in brackets indicate the percentage.

Table 9

Household size

<i>Size</i>	<i>Number of families</i>	<i>Population</i>
1-3	32	71
4-7	11	53
8-10	1	10
Total	44	134

The variation in the size of the Shompen family is shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Size of the Shompen family

<i>Size</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Population</i>
1	5	11.363	5
2	15	34.090	30
3	12	27.274	36
4	5	11.364	20
5	4	9.090	20
6	1	2.273	6
7	1	2.273	7
8	—	—	—
9	—	—	—
10	1	2.273	10
Total	44	100.00	134
Average size		3.04	

The table shows that the most common family size is two members (34.09 per cent), followed by the three member family (27.274 per cent) and the least common family size is of eight to ten members (2.273 per cent). The six to seven member family constitutes 4.546 per cent. The average size of the Shompen family is of 3.04 members.

Certain demographic features of the Shompen population have been worked out as follows:

Institute of ...

1.	Index of ageing	5.26
2.	Dependency ratio	42.55
3.	Crude birth rate	7.46
4.	Crude death rate	7.46
5.	Crude rate of natural increase	Nil*
6.	General fertility rate	28.57
7.	Child–woman ratio	4.00
8.	Infant mortality rate	Nil*

* Based on the number of deaths of infants (0–1 year) and number of live births during January 1983 to December 1983.

CHAPTER THREE

Material Life

Pattern of Settlement and Housing

The general lay-out of the Shompen village is irregular, the form adapted to the physical character of the ground. The Shompen prefer to build their houses either on the slopes or at the bottom of a valley not too far away from sources of drinking water. Though they do not drink stream water they prefer to have a stream near the settlement, to use for bathing and other purposes including gardening. The Shompen of the east and west coasts choose different kinds of sites for settlement. The east-coast Shompen remain close to the sea-shore or in the valleys, while the west-coast Shompen prefer the interior and the slopes of hills. The settlement pattern of the Shompen is of the fragmented type.

Man (1886) reports that Shompen

huts are smaller and ruder in construction than those found in any Nicobarese village along the coast or in other islands; such of them as are intended to be permanent structures generally partake of the beehive form (the form favoured by the coast tribes of Great Nicobar), and like these are raised on piles some 6 or 18 feet above the ground, and are entered by a primitive ladder made of rough pieces of wood lashed together with strips of cane. The space underneath these huts is so fenced in as to form a sort of cage; in this they confine any pig they may be fattening. The roofing of their huts is rather ingenious, as it consists of large sheets of bark resembling the spathe of the *Areca augusta*. If not entirely waterproof, it certainly affords a fair protection against even tropical rainstorms. Another noticeable feature about their huts is that those nearer the coast are invariably of a light and frail description, obviously not meant for long use, while those placed higher up and further inland are strong, bear evidence of care in construction, and are set in small clearings—usually on the summit of a hill. This spot is chosen evidently because it commands a view of all ways

of approach (Man, 1886:182)

Kloss (1903) reports:

huts in which the Shompen dwell, although always built on piles, show considerable differences, and vary from a well built floor with a carefully constructed roof of palm leaf at the top, to a rough platform often placed against the side of a tree and sheltered by two or three palm branches fastened to the corners. (Kloss, 1903:218)

In 1905 Anderson noticed that the sites for permanent habitation were always well chosen for defensive purpose and were surrounded by a slight stockade, which fact affords evidence of inter-sept warfare among the Shompen who would never have worried about the possibilities of an attack by the coastal Nicobarese on the inaccessible villages in the interior (cited in the *Census of India* 1931).

Mukherjee (1974) observes:

Houses are either rectangular or square with a gabled roof. There is little variation in the dimension of the floor of the huts in a village. However the huts of the east coast are more spacious, strong, and of a permanent nature than that of the west due to availability of flat land.

On the huts of the east coast, Mukherjee writes:

The huts of the east coast are of the dimension between 4 by 3 metre to 3 by 3 metre while no hut of the west coast is more than 1.75 by 1.50 metre. Some of the huts are even smaller than this.

He further observes:

the floors made over the piles are not identical on both the coasts. They vary according to the availability of the materials. The floor of the east coast hut is made out of splitted wild areca palm (*P. Kuhlii*) stalks which are properly chiseled and planed and then arranged close to each other and tied firmly with cane strip. Thus the floor of the east coast hut is plain and even. On the other hand on the west coast, due to scarcity of areca palm, plants are splitted and arranged on the platform. This makes the floor of the west coast hut quite uneven and rough. To have an approach to the raised platform of the hut a crude type of ladder is made out of pole or bamboo. On two poles or bamboos the saplings of a length of half a metre or so are tied at a distance of half metre with the cane strip to form

the steps. In spite of their casual contact with the Nicobarese the Shompens of the east coast thatch their roof in a Nicobarese style. On a five centimetre diameter rod made of the splitted wild areca palm stalk the leaf of Dhani palm (cinnamon family) is double folded and stitched with its own principal vein. The leaf-folded rods are arranged one over the other with two-third of superimposition to make the living space totally waterproof, while in the case of the west coast the leaves of the cane or other palm are simply arranged with their butts downwards and tied over the frame. The roof just affords head room at the apex and does not make the inside completely rainproof. As regards the wall too a conspicuous difference is noticed in the east and west coasts. On the east coast the wall is made either of the 'Dhani palm' leaf stitched over the wild areca palm stalk similar to that of the roof or of the drifted wooden planks. The portion of the wall in contact with the roof is invariably made of leaves. For entrance they make a door at the front while on the sides either a window or a door is made for more ventilation. Sling planks are put on the door and window to close them, while in the case of the west coast huts, some of them have a total absence of wall. The roof comes down to a low level to function more or less like side walls. On the other side walls are made of split nibong palm with a height of about 70 cm from the floor. The front and back side is kept uncovered. (Mukherjee, 1974: 11-13).

Despite the abundance of space in the Shompen area, the huts are very small. The smallness of the huts may be due to the hilly habitat, tropical climate and temporary nature of stay in a particular locality. They have to change their settlement immediately after the death of a member or whenever there is a scarcity of food. The Shompen huts are of a primitive type and differ from those found in the rest of the Nicobars. As the huts of the Shompen are situated on the hills where mud is not available and wood and leaves of different trees are found in abundance, the huts in the Shompen area are invariably built with wood, cane and leaves.

Three types of huts are noticed in the Shompen localities:

1. The simplest type of hut has no walls. The roof comes down low and there is no need of side walls.
2. The second type of hut has side walls, with the front and back uncovered.

3. The third type of hut has walls on all sides, and a door in front, with either a window or a door on one of the sides for ventilation.

In the first and second types of huts, the floor made over the piles is used by the family while the portion below is for domesticated animals. A portion of the floor space above the pile is reserved for cooking. This part is always under the roof of the hut but at a lower level than the rest of the floor. Over the space separated for the kitchen a layer of earth, 10 to 15 cm thick, is always spread to protect the floor of the hut from the hazard of fire.

The third type of hut has a big all-purpose room. A portion of this room is used as a kitchen and the rest is used for sleeping. The implements are kept on a platform below the thatched roof. The huts are built above the ground to avoid damp as well as reptiles.

The height of the huts usually range between 10 to 18 feet, the breadth 7 to 8 feet, and the length 7 to 10 feet. The Shompen names for the hut and its different parts 'Kachaam' (hut), 'Kanau' (door), 'Afva' (platform), 'Agaania' (ladder), 'Acheve' (mid-pole of the roof), 'Akaag' (front pole), 'Ada' (platform for keeping food items etc.) and 'Tavaaf' (roof).

Construction process

First the posts are implanted in a row at regular intervals, by digging the ground where the floor of the hut is to rest. The size of the poles varies from 10 to 15 feet, of which 2 to 3 feet is kept under-ground. The gaps between the posts of each row are filled by suitable logs. The floor is constructed on top of these poles with split areca trunks, tied with cane. A few poles are also fixed on the side of the hut to support the roof. Logs may be tied to these side poles breadthwise to make the structure strong.

The roof of the hut slopes on two sides and is very light. The split areca trunks are tied length- and breadth-wise on each slope. Then Lanceolate (*Nipa fruticosa*), Komba (*Pynanga coastata*) or Taarni leaves are folded in series to wrap a split areca trunk covering the whole split. These leaves are so arranged as to overlap half the lower leaf (already set) and each new leaf is joined with the previous leaf. Thus a component is formed with one split and a number of leaves set on it. The base of each leaf is folded over at a place about two-thirds of the way up towards the tip to form a double layer, while the tip projects in a single layer. The components are arranged horizontally along the hut from the lower end of the slope to the top ridge of the roof, always overlapping the two-layered surface of the previous component.

• *Dress and ornaments*

The Shompen wear a single piece of cloth that hangs over their genitals. In Dagmar, Galathea and Ranganathan Bay, however, most of the men also wear vests or even shirts. They do not use any footwear even while walking in the forest or climbing hills.

Compared to the men the Shompen women are better covered even in the interior. They wear a long piece of cloth, commonly called the 'lovea,' around the waist, coming to above the knees, but arranged in such a way as to provide cover when they sit. They wear bangles ('navaag') made of iron or plastic, bead necklaces ('naigaak') and armlets ('geegap'). Their ears are pierced to enable them to wear strips of bamboos ('ahav') measuring 5 cm in circumference, to act as receptacles for betel leaves and other small items of frequent use.

Man (1886) observed:

The Shompen males have adopted the Nicobarese fashion of wearing a Neng or loin-cloth. This is usually a strip of Turkey-red cloth about 6 feet long and 4 inches wide, and is so adjusted as to allow some few inches to hang down behind, which gives the appearance of a tail. From the clumsy fashion in which the Shompen wear this 'garment' one is led to infer that its wearing is usually reserved for special occasions, such as when visitors appear. Their women are content with a short skirt of bark-cloth, or a piece of blue calico when they can get it. Both sexes affect small bead necklaces, and usually bind a strip of spathe or piece of cloth round the head. (Man, 1886: 180-81)

Kloss (1903) noticed:

Amongst the friendly families, the clothing worn is similar to that of the Nicobarese, with necklaces of beads, and they employ a large wooden ear-distender an inch and a half in diameter. The sheets of bark-cloth are used as pillows and coverings at night, and amongst the hostile aborigines it is said the women wear short petticoats of this material, while the men go entirely clothless. (Kloss, 1903:219)

Both men and women now possess loincloths which they obtain from traders through the coastal people. Earlier, members of both the sexes wore a species of bark-cloth. To make the cloth, the bark of *Celtis vestimentaria* is obtained and subjected to repeated blows with a large stick, before it is immersed in water till the hard substance is

removed. When thoroughly pliable it is stretched out to dry, presenting a fine tissue. The length of the bark, used by the women as a skirt, is from 6 to 8 feet and the breadth from 2 to 2.25 feet, as also reported in the *Census of India*, 1931.

Weapons, in the strict sense of the word, do not now exist among the Shompen; they do not possess shields, swords, clubs, or spears. They do manufacture javelins or darts, which are used only to chase with. The dart is made of a single piece of heavy wood. The *dao*, their most common implement, is obtained from the coastal Nicobarese or from labourers working in the area, and is also provided by the Administration. It is used for various purposes, such as house-building, horticulture, canoe-fitting, etc. The spears and harpoons, used for killing pigs, hunting and fishing, are constructed by attaching a suitable haft to the variously shaped heads which are locally made. An indigenous fishing spear of the multi-pronged wooden type consists of a bunch of diverging barbed skewers spliced into a a haft with lashings of cord or rattan. Imported axes, saws, adzes, planes, and spokeshaves are used in addition to the *dao*.

Kloss describes some of these implements:

Principal amongst the articles in use were iron-pronged fish-spears, axes, and Daos, with baskets; but the most interesting object visible was an apparatus for preparing the food of pandanus paste. Some 6 inches above a clay hearth on the floor of the huts, a receptacle, about 3 feet by 3 feet by 6 inches, was formed of five sheets of thin green bark. These, two on a side and the fifth doubled at the bottom to form a trough, were inserted at either end between split stakes, which—bound tightly together with rattans—pressed the edges of the sheets against each other. The lower part was thickly luted with clay, and where the edges of the bark overlapped, a strip of cane was stretched from stake to stake to compress the join. this ingenious vessel was narrow at the bottom but gaped widely at the mouth. In cooking the pandanus, a little water is first poured in, and the fruit piled above it and steamed; when sufficiently done, the bread is prepared by the same method as practised in the coast. (Kloss, 1903: 148-9)

The 1931 Census noted:

Neither the bow nor the Nicobarese cross-bow is known among the Shompen. The only weapon is a wooden pointed spear (Hin-Yuan) of areca wood which is notched on the upper parts to serve as barbs. Of late years iron has

been obtained to make these spear heads. (1931:88)

Fire making

The Shompen produce fire by friction of wood. The dry wood of the Inbot plant (*Sterculia alata*) is split into two; one of the strips is chiselled into a cylindrical rod with a rounded butt, and the other is flattened with a small groove on it. The butt of the first piece is churned in the groove of the second till the dust raised by the churning catches fire.

CHAPTER FOUR

Health

Environmental sanitation

The Shompen gather their drinking water from different sources, like fountains, streams and ponds. This water is also used for cooking. The source of drinking water is usually 100 to 200 metres away from their dwellings. The water is dirty in areas where the Shompen use the stagnant water of small ponds contaminated by leaves and other accumulations, with mosquitoes, viruses and bacteria breeding in it. The Shompen store drinking water in plastic containers collected from the sea-shore or in indigenous bamboo containers. The stagnant water used for drinking is harmful. Animals like pigs and dogs also drink the same water.

The Shompen know that mosquitoes breed in the stagnant water as well as amidst vegetation, but they do not know of any connection between mosquito bite and diseases. In fact, they say that mosquito bites cannot be harmful. Similarly, they are unaware that diseases may be carried by flies and other insects. Consequently, no preventive measures are taken against mosquitoes and flies.

The Shompen do not have any provision for latrines. They do not defecate far from their huts. They do not wash after defecation, but clean themselves with leaves or a small piece of wood. The habit of defecating in the open, and near their huts is one of the factors responsible for worm infections which may be picked up when walking barefoot.

The Shompen do not usually go out of their huts to urinate.

Personal hygiene

The Shompen do not clean their teeth at all. At the same time they are addicted to the chewing of betel nut mixed with lime that gives a blackened appearance to their teeth.

The Shompen do not take regular baths. When they do have a bath, they pour cane (*Calamus longisetus*) water directly from the pieces of cane on to their heads and bodies and rub themselves with their hands. The frequency of baths among the Shompen is lower than among most tribals in other parts of India.

A number of skin troubles are reported among the Shompen, all arising from the fact that they do not clean their skin regularly and properly. Rashes all over the skin, scabies, eczema, itches and fungal infections are only too common among the Shompen.

The Shompen do not clean their hair regularly or thoroughly. They merely pour water on their heads while bathing, and do not bother about the accumulated dirt. A spathe band or piece of cloth is bound round the head by women to keep their hair in position. Combing and oiling of hair is unknown.

Nutrition

For their food the Shompen depend on turtles, snakes, frogs, pigs, birds, lizards, crocodiles, fresh water fish, shellfish, honey, yams, the bulb of the caladium, spathe of areca, fruits of the nipa palm, plantains, pandanus and coconut. Pigs are either staked and speared or hunted down with dogs, while the birds, such as the megapode, are snared.

The staple food of the Shompen is Kewri (*Pandanus tectoria*). Trees like the cane and Komba (*Pynanga coastata*) are quite common in the forests. Komba stem is eaten raw. The Shompen drink cane water during the months of scarcity.

Pandanus, fish, crab and reptiles are simply boiled, but may also be roasted. The use of salt, pepper, chilli etc. is unknown to the Shompen. The kernel of the cooked pandanus can be preserved for about three months. It is eaten by all members of the family whenever they feel hungry.

Pandanus and fish, and the flesh of pigs, crocodiles and reptiles are a regular part of their diet. No special food which is taken only occasionally was reported.

Diseases

In spite of the generally healthy look of the Shompen, most of them suffer from coughs, from a marked prevalence of asthma aggravated by the damp climate. A large part of the population suffers from Ascariasis which may be in many cases the root cause of the eosinophilia. The health of the Shompen was found to vary depending on whether they had come in contact with the outside world or not. The few Shompen at the mouth of the Dagmar River were extremely indolent and weak.

Morbid conditions and diseases noticed among the Shompen include anaemia, asthma, worm infestation, filariasis, gastritis, pallor plus distended abdomen, albinism, taenia infection, allergic rashes on the body, fungal infections of the nails, hands and body, malnutrition, dental caries and pyorrhoea etc. From their addiction to the chewing of betel nut mixed with lime and tobacco, they often suffer from a hideous

deformation of the lips.

Out of the 134 Shompen 47.01 per cent suffer from one or another disease. With 26.86 per cent of the males and 20.15 per cent of the females affected, the prevalence of different diseases and morbid conditions is slightly more among males (276.11) than among females (201.49).

Of the diseases and morbid conditions, the highest prevalence (97.01) is that of allergic rashes on the body followed by fungal infection of the nails, hands and body (67.16), deformity of the right eye since birth (29.85), filariasis (22.38), scabies (22.38), worm infestation (22.38) and pallor plus distended abdomen (due to worm infestation) (22.38) respectively. The details are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Frequency of morbid conditions and diseases by sex

<i>Disease</i>		<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>		<i>Total</i>		<i>Prevalence</i>
		<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Rate</i>
DISABILITIES:								
(i)	Deformity of Limbs:							
(a)	Filariasis L Leg	1	0.75	1	0.75	2	1.49	14.92
(b)	Filariasis R Leg	—		1	0.75	1	0.75	7.46
(c)	Oedema of the L foot (pitting in nature)	—		1	0.75	1	0.75	7.46
(d)	Injury on R leg	1	0.75	—		1	0.75	7.46
(e)	Left Shoulder dislocation with disuse atrophy of the muscles of that limb	1	0.75	—		1	0.75	7.46
(f)	L Index finger 1/4 cut	1	0.75	—		1	0.75	7.46
(ii)	Deformity of eye							
	Deformity of R eye since birth	2	1.49	2	1.49	4	2.98	29.85
(iii)	Lower incisor broken	1	0.75	—		1	0.75	7.46
ILLNESS								
(i)	Thyroid swelling	—	—	1	0.75	1	0.75	7.46
(ii)	Allergic rashes on the body	9	6.72	4	2.98	13	9.70	97.01

Table 11 (continued)

Disease		Male		Female		Total		Prevalence Rate
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
(iii)	Fungal infection of nails, hands and body	6	4.48	3	2.24	9	6.72	67.16
(iv)	Taenia infection	2	1.49	—	—	2	1.49	14.92
(v)	Hypo-pigmentation of the skin	1	0.75	—	—	1	0.75	7.46
(vi)	Worm infestation	2	1.49	1	0.75	3	2.24	22.38
(vii)	Pallor+Distended abdomen (due to worm infestation	—	—	3	2.24	3	2.24	22.38
(viii)	Gastritis	1	0.75	1	0.75	2	1.49	14.92
(ix)	Pain in abdomen	1	0.75	1	0.75	2	1.49	14.92
(x)	Skin infestation	—	—	1	0.75	1	0.75	7.46
(xi)	Albinism	—	—	2	1.49	2	1.49	14.92
(xii)	Scabies	2	1.49	1	0.75	3	2.24	22.38
(xiii)	Pallor	—	—	1	0.75	1	0.75	7.46
(xiv)	Asthma	1	0.75	—	—	1	0.75	7.46
(xv)	Psoriasis	1	0.75	1	0.75	2	1.49	14.92
(xvi)	Lipoma L cheek	1	0.75	—	—	1	0.75	7.46
(xvii)	Lipoma over epigastric region	—	—	1	0.75	1	0.75	7.46
(xviii)	Abscess over left pectoral area and also left axilla	1	0.75	—	—	1	0.75	7.46
(xix)	Low backache	1	0.75	—	—	1	0.75	7.46
(xx)	Multiple injuries	—	—	1	0.75	1	0.75	7.46
Total		36	26.86	27	20.15	63	47.01	470.16
Prevalence rate		268.65		201.49				

The overall higher rate of morbidity (470.15) among the Shompen may be attributed to the lack of medical facilities and their poor knowledge about diseases and their treatment. A list of diseases recognized by the Shompen is presented in Table 12 (page 34).

The data collected include height and body weight measurements of adults distributed in five-year age groups from 25 to 40 years, and the final age group of 40–50 years. These means and standard deviations are presented in Tables 13 and 14 (page 35).

Table 12*List of Diseases Recognized by the Shompen*

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Native Name</i>	<i>English Name</i>
1.	Taikaanv	Stomach-ache
2.	Taa-F-Mai-Hen	Chest Pain
3.	Taon-Koe, Kahai	Headache
4.	Tain-Ko-Raaon	Toothache
5.	Aae-Moai	Cold
6.	Kep	Body-ache
7.	Che-Enhhd	Ear-ache
8.	Koaov, Khatoy, Chem	Injury
9.	Te-Oop	Bleeding
10.	Yehvaang	Fracture
11.	Ekiy, Tohyaab	Burn
12.	Aneaan, Ekich	Boil
13.	Neaav, Taihaip	Cut
14.	Khehomay, Oonhe	Scabies

Women of 30–34 years are taller than at other ages, probably a chance occurrence due to the small sample size. The 40–50 year old men are somewhat taller. We can thus assume that there is no secular change. Similar findings were reported for the African Bantu (Burgess and Wheeler, 1970), South African Venda (Loots and Lamprecht, 1971), Kenya tribes (Shaper, Wright and Kyobe, 1969) and Brazilian Xingu Indians (Eveleth, Salzano and Lima, 1974) (quoted in Eveleth, et al., 1974).

There is a difference of 123.47 mm between adult male and female mean stature. The relative sexual dimorphism by the formula –

$$\frac{\text{male mean} - \text{female mean}}{\text{male mean}} \times 100$$

— after Tobias (1970, 1972) is 7.6 per cent, i.e. the female average stature is 92.4 per cent that of the males. Both Tobias and Hiernaux (1968) agree that in Sub-Saharan Africans sex dimorphism is on the average less than it is in Europe. They consider this to be a result of the better resistance of females to adverse conditions during growth (quoted in Eveleth, et al., 1974).

Table 13

Height and weight of adult male Shompen according to age groups

	<i>Age Groups</i>														
	25-29			30-34			35-39			40-50			Total		
	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.
Characteristic	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.
Height(mm)	14	1595.21	1.58	6	1600.33	1.61	5	1576.20	1.58	9	1611.72	2.64	34	1597.70	2.41
Weight(kg)	14	60.21	2.09	6	63.66	1.61	5	57.80	1.58	9	60.27	2.66	34	60.48	3.02

Health

Table 14

Height and weight of adult female Shompen according to age groups

	<i>Age Groups</i>														
	25-29			30-34			35-39			40-50			Total		
	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.
Characteristic	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.	N	X	S.D.
Height(mm)	4	1473.25	2.64	6	1488.33	2.19	5	1462.40	3.16	6	1470.60	3.71	21	1474.23	3.98
Weight(kg)	4	46.50	1.15	6	51.83	2.00	5	46.20	1.41	6	46.83	2.82	21	48.04	3.14

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Eveleth (1974) noticed that sexual dimorphism in stature is greater in Indians than in either the 48 African populations studied by Tobias or the 41 European populations of Hiernaux. The percentages for Indians range from 5.9 per cent to as high as 11.2 per cent, but most of the other populations fall between 7 and 9 per cent. The sexual dimorphism in stature in the Shompen is 7.6 per cent, similar to other Indian populations.

CHAPTER FIVE

Social Structure

The social organization of the Shompen is based on tradition, kinship and locality. The members of a band are related to one another through blood or marriage. There are no classes among the Shompen who are divided into small groups of men, women and children.

The family is the most important social unit in Shompen society. The major economic, social and reproductive activities are centred around the family, usually composed of husband, wife and unmarried children, constituting an economic unit. The moment a son is married, he makes his own hut in the same village and lives with his wife. When a Shompen marries more than one woman, both the wives and their children share the same hut and hearth. In addition to polygynous families, other complexities reported in the Shompen family organization related to numerous incidents of marriages after the death of the first wife or husband. Three cases of polygyny were reported (two in Ranganathan Bay and one in Laful / Trinket Channel) during the study.

A Shompen family is controlled by the head of the family. The eldest male member of the family becomes the head. All the activities carried out by the wife and unmarried children are under the direct control of this head. The wife and children follow the instructions and guidance of the head of the family. All members of a family are responsible for maintaining good relations and discipline within the band. Women are not supposed to move freely outside the settlement without the permission of the head of the family or headman of the band. It was also noticed that nobody cares for old men and women.

The husband-wife relationship among the Shompen is very informal. They eat together from the same leaf-plate and sit together or near each other even in the presence of other elderly persons of the community or outsiders.

In general, the relationship between parents and children is very informal. All of them sit together and chew tobacco and *pan*. The parent's relationship with the young daughter is equally cordial.

There is no specific law governing residence. It is not compulsory for the matri-kin-oriented to stay in the matrilocal residence, or the patri-kin-oriented to stay in the patrilocal residence. There is only one case in the Ranganathan Bay where a patri-kin-oriented man has gone

for patrilocal residence. The Shompen can stay in any locality depending on their choice.

Kinship Terms and their Usage

The kinship terms of the Shompen have been studied, though not exhaustively. It is difficult to ascertain the position of the Shompen with regard to kinship terms from our present inadequate knowledge, with practically no ethnographic data available on them.

The elder brother is called 'Nayan' by both the male and female egos. The term is used for all those men who are older than the ego but belong to his generation. A younger brother is, likewise, called 'Ukaac'; the term is used to refer to all younger brothers, irrespective of the sex of the speaker. The term 'Agat' is used to refer to all sisters, elder as well as younger.

The female ego uses the same term for her own children, the children of the siblings of the same sex and those of her parallel (female) cousins. 'Akay' and 'Agdai' are the terms used (irrespective of the sex of the speaker) for one's own son and daughter respectively. The same terms are also used for the children of the male ego's brother and for the children of the female ego's sister. The children of the male parallel cousin and female parallel cousin are, likewise, designated by the same terms as used for one's own children. In other words, no clear-cut distinction is maintained between one's own children and the children of the female parallel and cross cousins, or the children of the male parallel and cross cousins in the first descending generation of the ego.

The same distinction is observed consistently between these two categories of kins in so far as the ego's first ascending generation is concerned. Distinct terms are used for one's parents, namely 'Em' for father and 'Dit' for mother, but descriptive terms are used to designate the relatives of the siblings of the same sex of one's parents. Thus, one's 'Fa' and 'Fa Br,' and 'Mo' and 'Mo Br' are equated to one another respectively. These kins are, however, distinguished from the siblings of the opposite sex of one's parents, being termed (irrespective of the sex of the speaker and the relative age of the kin designated) as 'Ananaya' (Mo Br) and 'Ayap' (Fa Br). Thus, the two categories of kins, viz. consanguines and affines, are consistently separated by the respective kinship terms at three levels of generations.

Regarding the extreme generations of grandparents and grandchildren of the ego, a clearcut distinction is maintained between one's 'Fa Fa' ('Akaay') and 'So So' ('Alay') on the one hand, and 'Mo Fa' ('Ahuva') and 'Da So' on the other.

Distinct terms are used for one's 'So Wi' who is designated 'Darelay' and one's 'Da Hu' who is termed 'Kalgaya'. In the second

ascending generation 'Fa Si Hu' is designated 'Nyakaakaiv,' and 'Fa Br Wi' is termed 'Kaat'. While 'Wi' is termed 'Appav,' the term of reference for 'Hu' is 'Idyak'.

From the foregoing discussion of the Shompen kinship terms it is clear that the central features of their kinship system is that it implies a marriage regulation of the cross-cousin type, with the result that the affinal relations generated by marriages in previous generations should normally determine marriages in succeeding generations. But in actual practice we find that cross-cousin marriages are not repeated in the successive generations.

Certain forms of grandparent and grandchild marriage are permissible among the Shompen. Grandparent and grandchild marriage being not the first marriage for the ascending generation, it is to be viewed more as an institutionalized attempt to meet the demands of libido in old age. The practice is essentially for the elders and by the elders. The gerontocratic aspect of grandparent and grandchild marriage is as important as the aspect of sexual equality which confers similar and equal classes of choice to grandfathers as well as grandmothers.

CHAPTER SIX

Life Cycle Rituals

The life cycle of the Shompen may conveniently be studied under three main sub-heads, viz. birth, marriage and death.

Birth

The Shompen do not observe any special rite or ritual during the period of pregnancy. A woman is allowed to perform almost all her routine duties during the early phase of her pregnancy. But at a later stage she observes some restrictions on her movements and work, e.g. the expectant mother is not allowed to run or walk briskly.

A separate hut is constructed for the delivery of the child. When labour pain starts, the woman is shifted to this hut. During delivery only the old women of the locality are allowed to attend and stay inside the hut. After delivery the mother remains confined to this hut for about a month.

Except for the mother, nobody is allowed to touch the new-born baby on the first day. On the second day the child is given a cold water bath in an indigenous vessel.

Lime paste is usually rubbed on the forehead of the mother and newly born child. A cross is also made on the baby's stomach to protect him/her from evil spirits. In the late evening, before the child and mother go to sleep, a small wooden stick is burnt and waved around the child.

The Shompen do not celebrate the birth of the child. They do not make any ceremonial distinction between a male or female birth, nor do they show any preference either for a son or a daughter.

There is no fixed period for suckling the baby. Sometimes the baby suckles for more than two years; in other cases it is only for a few months (because of frequent childbirth). The first semi-solid food, given to the baby, consists of pandanus paste and honey.

Mukherjee's findings on menstruation and childbirth are as follows :

The periods of menstruation and childbirth are considered as unclean among the Shompens. During the menstruation period the woman puts on the bark-cloth though normally she wears cotton textile. There

is much restriction after childbirth on the neo-mother and the baby. The delivery takes place in a specially thatched shed with no stilt. The girl lies down on the ground under this shed at the time of labour pain and the elderly women of the village play the role of midwives. After delivery for about a month the neo-mother and the baby stay in a separate small hut with stilts of hardly a metre. The food for the neo-mother is served in this hut. An elderly lady looks after the child and the neo-mother. During this period the neo-mother puts on a bark-cloth. The bark trays and troughs made for the use of the new-born baby are not mixed up with the family basketry and discharged after their utility is over. In one corner of this small hut a stone hearth is made in which fire is kept burning. The hearth is used for preparation of herbal medicines required for the new-born baby. . . paste of some bark [is] applied on the head and forehead of the newborn baby. After a month or so the neo-mother and the baby leave this hut and stay in another hut. The neo-mother now discards the bark-cloth and puts on cotton cloth. The deserted hut is dismantled. In the second hut they stay for another month or so and then come to their own hut. During this period the husband is not permitted to stay with the wife. (Mukherjee, 1974 : 32)

Marriage

Among the Shompen monogamy is the commonest form of marriage, followed by polygyny. The latter too is socially sanctioned and hence tolerated among them. Out of the 44 families covered for the present study in ten different localities, three instances of polygynous union were reported.

The Shompen are endogamous, and inter-ethnic marriages are usually not contracted. In fact, out of 83 marital unions recorded by the author, only two marital alliances were between Shompen and non-Shompen. In the first case a Shompen girl of the Galathea river had entered into matrimony with a man from Ranchi . This union in 1984 lasted for about three months only. During my 1987 visit to Great Nicobar, I got information about another instance where a Shompen girl had entered into matrimony with a coastal Nicobarese man. No case of levirate or sororate alliance came to my notice while collecting the genealogies, though it was reported by the informants that a man was free to marry his wife's elder as well as younger sister. Similarly, it was

reported that a woman is free to marry her husband's elder as well as younger brother. In one case at Ranganathan Bay the widow married her nephew.

A Shompen acquires his mate in different ways; the traditionally approved means of entering into matrimony are through capture and negotiation. The latter form of marriage is arranged by the parents, who invite the opinion of the girl and the boy concerned.

Death

Certain rituals are performed in the event of a death. When a person dies inside the hut, the dead body is immediately taken out of the hut and placed on the ground. No hymns are recited and no alms are given on the occasion. When the person breathes his last, the members of the family start weeping and crying especially when the deceased is a young man or woman. During this time, the dead body remains on the ground.

The Shompen bury their dead. A wooden bier is prepared from a log of fresh wood. The body is kept on the bier and tied with cane or pandanus fibres. The arms are placed vertically on the sides and the hands are kept open. Before the dead body is taken away from the village a party goes into the forest to catch a pig. Only two persons carry the bier from the village to a place at a little distance from the village. The pall-bearers place the bier on the ground and come back to the village, to return to the dead body with the pig and the implements of the deceased.

Before placing the dead body inside the grave, the pig is sacrificed. The dead body is then untied from the bier, placed inside the grave on komba leaves, and covered by the same kind of leaves. All the implements are kept upside down inside the grave along with the dead body. After these rituals the grave is closed and the members return to the village. The next day they leave the locality where death occurred, and move to another place.

Economic Structure

In a population where the entire economic life rotates round food gathering, hunting and fishing, and where no other means of utilization of resources is known, the forest assumes an all-important dimension. The economic system of the Shompen is technologically primitive. They are semi-nomadic and their livelihood depends upon food gathering, hunting and fishing, domestication of pigs and a bit of horticulture.

The subsistence economy of the Shompen has a very close relation to the ecology. Besides gardening, hunting and fishing, food gathering and the rearing of animals, they also engage in basket-making and fabric making, manufactures of accessories related to economic activities, and barter. Gardening is the prime economic activity of the Shompen. The major share of their daily food comes from the garden. Generally the Shompen maintain at least one garden very close to their settlement. Their other gardens come within the radius of two to three km from the settlement, and generally along the river banks or on the gradual slopes of the hills.

All the pandanus (*Pandanus tanctoria*) gardens appear to have a natural growth. No effort seemed to be required for maintenance of the pandanus garden. The right over the gardens does not belong to an individual or a family but to the village. Both males and females collect the pandanus and carry them to the settlement, slinging one or two pandanus at each end of a pole so that the pole balances comfortably on the shoulders.

The Shompen have no modern horticultural implements. They use a pointed stick for digging and other purposes. Nowadays they get spades and other implements from the local Administration. The principal horticultural produce consists of pandanus, roots and tobacco.

After horticulture, hunting and fishing are the major activities which the Shompen practice for subsistence. They go to hunt in the forest, while fishing is done in the sea or streams that flow through their habitat.

Hunting and fishing activities continue throughout the year. Generally hunting is carried out with the help of dogs. When the Shompen go hunting, they are accompanied by dogs that help in

locating and chasing the wild boar. The wild boar is shared among the hunters as well as the neighbours. If a pig is caught, it may be kept for rearing.

The Shompen are expert in fishing. Fishing is carried out with harpoons which may have single or many iron blades. They do not know the use of fishing nets. Usually, they go out fishing in the early morning and come back by midday. Sometimes they return in the late afternoon, but in any case they come back before sunset. They do not go fishing during the night or after sunset. The catch is consumed within the family. But if it is in excess, it may be distributed among others in the village.

The east-coast Shompen, from their easy access to the sea, quite often come to the sea-shore for fishing. On occasions they use canoes to go to the mid-sea for fishing, though generally they fish along the coast. On the west coast, access to the sea is restricted. When they come to the Nicobarese villages, they go in search of octopi which are in plenty there. Otherwise, they fish with a pointed iron rod and harpoon from banks of rivulets and in running water, where they get crab and some other small varieties of fishes. On the east coast too, the Shompen fish in the rivulets and creeks with harpoons and iron rods. They fish more in streams than in the sea. The Shompen also collect molluscs from the muddy banks of streams or creeks, and the shells are used to prepare lime as well as to extract pandanus pulp.

Food gathering, another economic activity, does not have much bearing on the subsistence of the Shompen, and is thus always regarded as a secondary activity. It is only during the hard days of the rainy season that food gathering assumes an importance in the economy. In other seasons the men gather food and also hunt. The women, however, are exclusively involved in gathering. The food gathered includes honey, wild fruit, the tender inner stalk of the komba (*Pynanga coastata*), areca nut, betel leaf, eggs, and caterpillars. Summer is the most favourable season for honey collection. The honey is not immediately consumed but preserved in bottles for barter and future consumption. Similarly the yam collected and roasted is preserved for days of scarcity. The tender stalk of the komba, gathered from the forest, is not preserved and is consumed raw. The Shompen gather the eggs of the Megapode. Live caterpillars are also extracted from rotten logs. Eggs and caterpillars are consumed after keeping them for a few days. The Shompen, addicted to chewing betel leaf and areca nut, collect them from the forest whenever they go there.

The Shompen have also evolved crafts like basket-making and canoe-making. Making of baskets and bark-cloth is the exclusive job of women. Aged women are particularly adept in these crafts for which the raw materials too are collected by women. The basketwork goods are

made of cane, the spathe of the wild areca palm and the bark of a particular tree.

The Shompen collect rattan not only for basket-making but also for other purposes like housing and barter. Various types of baskets are made with cane strips though they require more time for completion. These baskets are preferred not only for their durability but also for their tiny openings through which air can pass. Edible goods like bananas, lemons, eggs and caterpillars that spoil quickly in the humid weather of the region, remain fresh for some days in the cane baskets.

Each band has its own canoes for fishing and transport. Small canoes with a carrying capacity of two to three persons are used to cross creeks and rivers. Big canoes with a carrying capacity of five to seven persons are used for sea transport. The canoes of different sizes ranging from six to ten feet, with outriggers, are made by the Shompen themselves.

The movable property of the Shompen includes loincloths, hunting and fishing implements, cane baskets, canoes and glass and plastic bottles (collected from the sea-shore). The glass bottles are used for keeping honey; the plastic bottles as well as jerry-cans are used as water containers.

In addition to these economic activities, the Shompen have also had trade relations with the coastal Nicobarese for a long time. Boden Kloss noticed bundles of rattan and betel nut hanging on small trees at the mouths of rivers or creeks, left there for barter. Now, the Shompen barter their collections with the neighbouring coastal Nicobarese and the local Administration. The canoes made by the Shompen are exchanged with the Nicobarese who give them loincloths, cooking utensils etc. Similarly honey, lemons, megapode eggs, sea shells etc. collected by the Shompen are also exchanged. From time to time, the headman and other members of the band come to the office of the Assistant Commissioner, Campbell Bay, with their collection of lemons, honey, areca nuts, sea shells, megapode eggs, etc., and take in return sugar, rice, tobacco and implements like the daos, axes etc. Sometimes the Shompen exchange honey, komba and fish with the Government Reserve Engineering Force (GREF) and forest labourers working in that area. The labourers give them tobacco leaves.

The Shompen of the west coast come to the Nicobarese villages of Pulokunji, Kopenheat, Kosintooth, Pulobabhi, Kotinjong, Kokeon and Inhenyoloi for barter. They have defined territorial authority in trade transactions. For example, the Shompen of Alexandria and Dagmar come only to the Nicobarese of Kopenheat, while the Shompen of Badueyon and Dakoyen have trade relations with the villagers living between Kosintooth in the north and Kotinjong in the south.

The Shompen do not pay visits at fixed intervals; their visits depend

upon their collections and their need for barter. It has been observed that the Shompen of the west coast generally come with honey or bundles of areca nuts when they visit Campbell Bay. On the other hand the Shompen of the east coast bring either lemons or honey or both when they visit Campbell Bay.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Political Structure

The leadership process in the Shompen society is well established. Under the traditional authority, their life proceeds smoothly and the Shompen feel a certain sense of security, believing themselves to be under the proper leadership advocated by their forefathers. Disputes are settled by themselves.

The east-coast and west-coast Shompen are divided into a number of small bands including men, women and children. These band members split and make new bands from time to time and for different purposes including food requirement, marriage and defence.

The head of a band is selected for his honesty, faith, intelligence, capacity to impose social control and good knowledge of the area.

In a settlement, the hut of the head of a band is so constructed as to serve for the main entrance to the settlement. Usually, they keep dogs in their huts to keep outsiders at bay. At the approach of any outsider, the dog starts barking and the headman knows that someone is coming. He immediately informs the others. The men, women and children then move away silently to the forest to avoid meeting the outsider. The headman never allows the band members to contact or meet outsiders or Shompen of other bands without his permission. Usually, they do not want to come into contact with others.

The headman also instructs other band members in their day-to-day activities including hunting, fishing and food gathering. The change of dwellings from one location to another is also planned and controlled by the headman of the band. During the monsoon, the Shompen of the valley move to the slopes and build their huts there.

It was observed that the Nicobarese, particularly those of the west coast, take a lot of interest in all the activities of the Shompen. This has led to a lot of Nicobarese interference in Shompen affairs. In fact, the Nicobarese influence is so strong that all the headmen are bound to obey their orders. As such, it may be concluded that most of the west-coast Shompen bands are being influenced by the Nicobarese. On the other hand the Shompen dislike all interference by their neighbours in their native affairs.

CHAPTER NINE

Trends of Change

The extent of the external contact of the Shompen is reflected in their trade relations with the Nicobarese. However, very little change at the level of institutions could be discerned as resulting from such contact. Only the Shompen of the Galathea River basin showed some such change. The Shompen receive from time to time gifts in the form of cooking utensils, cloth, tools, tobacco leaves, etc. from the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti, an autonomous organization of the Andaman Administration. Besides the above-mentioned gifts, the Shompen also periodically get food items like rice, pulses, and sugar from the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti. But these material items are too insignificant to bring about any institutional change among the Shompen.

Despite the fact that there is hardly any institutional change among the Shompen, a few changes in their dress, cooking utensils and food habits are marked. In the past, the Shompen men and women wore the indigenous bark-cloth. Nowadays women wear *lungis* and sometimes blouses as well; the men wear *langotis*. Among the Shompen of Dagmar, Galathea and Ranganathan Bay, most of the men wear *langotis* and vests or second-hand shirts, while the women wear *lungis* and vests or second-hand blouses.

Similarly, the traditional cooking vessels prepared out of bark have now been replaced by aluminium cooking vessels. The Shompen cook all their food, including pandanus, in these vessels.

Outside contact has also influenced the food habits of the Shompen who have now started eating rice, pulses, sugar, etc. in addition to their traditional staple food of pandanus. Recently, the social workers of the Andaman Janjati Vikas Samiti have started distributing salt, chillies, pepper, turmeric, edible oil and tea to the Shompen.

The influx of mainlanders has also caused some undesirable effects. Recent observations reveal that the Government Reserve Engineering Force and forest labourers working and staying in temporary camps in these areas are exploiting the natural forest resources of the Shompen localities. They go hunting and fishing in Shompen areas and create difficulties by taking away the komba and other forest produce.

The Andaman and Nicobar Administration has constructed a

residential complex for the Shompen at the point in the 27 km East-West Road, Great Nicobar. This is known as the 'Shompen Hut Complex'. It was inaugurated on 8 May 1984. Near this complex, a horticultural garden has also been developed for the welfare of the Shompen, over an area of seven acres, with plantations of banana, coconut, pineapple, guava, tapioca, pandanus, sugarcane, colocasia, areca nut etc.

An Ashram-type school for the Shompen has also been started by the Andaman Administration in this complex. During my second visit, in May 1987, I observed that there were no Shompen children enrolled in the school nor was a teacher posted there. The Assistant Education Officer visits this school once in a month or so and carries some rations for the students of this school. These are kept with a person who is posted there as Chowkidar-cum-Safaiwala who distributes them to Shompen children whenever they visit the Shompen Hut Complex with adults.

It was observed that the Shompen of the area where the Ashram-type school has been started do not want to come in close contact with outsiders. By contrast, the Shompen of other localities mix with outsiders without much hesitation. They visit quite frequently the office of the Assistant Commissioner, Campbell Bay, for barter operations.

Medical facilities for the Shompen are woefully inadequate. There is a dispensary in the Shompen Hut Complex, but the doctor posted there stays at Campbell Bay which is about 27 km away. He visits the Shompen dispensary once in a fortnight or at times once a month. Whenever the doctor visits the dispensary, and if the Shompen happen to be there, they are examined and given some medicines.

Those who do not visit the Hut Complex (especially the women, aged men and infants) are deprived of medical facilities. There are no medical facilities available to the Shompen of other localities. If need be, they have to depend on the Campbell Bay Hospital, which is about 15 to 40 km away from the Shompen localities. The doctor does not pay regular visits to these localities because of non-availability of transport and bad weather conditions. The Shompen do not want to travel long distances to avail medical facilities.

The backwardness of Great Nicobar can well be attributed to its remoteness. It is far from the district headquarters and state capital. The administrative infrastructure is very weak, and no one seems to be directly responsible for the welfare of the Shompen. Someone needs to be made responsible to gear up the development of the Shompen.

The villages of the Shompen on the eastern coast of Great Nicobar Island are far away from Campbell Bay (the administrative headquarters of Great Nicobar) which is not easily accessible by road. There is no road to reach the Shompen on the east coast, and the East-West road

does not reach the west coast. The Assistant Commissioner, Campbell Bay, has to visit the hamlets of the Shompen for various purposes, but he too faces difficulties for want of suitable water transport under his control. These localities would be easily accessible from Campbell Bay only by water transport. As such, a suitable motor boat should be stationed at the disposal of the Assistant Commissioner, Campbell Bay. This would facilitate the visits of various officials, and also help in the transport of essential commodities to the Shompen of Great Nicobar Island.

Moreover, the Assistant Commissioner, Campbell Bay, should be deeply involved in the process of Shompen development. He ought to be empowered with administrative powers in respect of the employees and activities of the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti for effective implementation of various welfare programmes.

The functioning of health and nutrition programmes, and communication and transport are not at all satisfactory. At the same time, there is a great need to provide these facilities to the Shompen, and should be given priority. Similarly, there is an urgent need to provide educational facilities to the Shompen. This will help in their upliftment. Adequate efforts should be made by the Administration to persuade the Shompen to send their children to school.

The primitive tools and technology of the Shompen need to be improved, to help develop their economy based on food gathering, hunting, fishing, horticulture etc. The Administration should take the necessary steps to distribute new implements and tools like axes, hammers, spades, and files to the Shompen. Efforts should also be made to train the Shompen in improved horticulture practices. Even though change should be gradual among a tribal community, a population like the Shompen require urgent care.

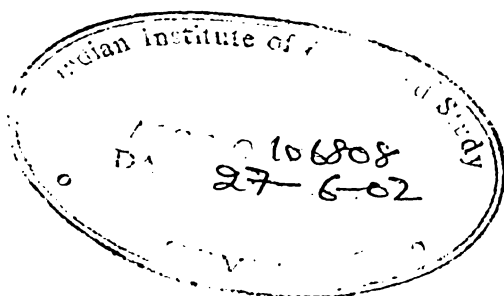
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Anthropology

The Shompen

Dr S. N. H. Rizvi

The Shompen of Great Nicobar Island are semi-nomadic forest dwellers of Mongoloid stock. This monograph by Dr S. N. H. Rizvi is the outcome of four years of fieldwork and explores various aspects of Shompen life, including their identification, population distribution, demographic features and state of health. Their social structure is examined in terms of the family; their life cycle from conception to death described along with associated rituals, and their economic organization discussed in relation to hunting, food gathering, horticulture and the barter system. This study should prove useful to scholars, researchers, administrators and planners interested in the study and development of tribal communities.

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