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The Gift and not the Gun Ruined them: The Cultural History of Aboriginal Tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

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Abstract- While battles battering the battered the most or worst, is a run-of-the-mill story, the *gift* and not the *gun* destroying them is rather a rare tale in the human civilization when it comes to the modern history of all six isolated aboriginal ethnic tribes of Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, the Indian islands in Bay of Bengal. However, it is no less good save in the biocultural survival of one of those ethnic communities, the fiercely hostile Sentinelese of North Sentinel Island, by way of 'rescripting' its cultural story through the instrumentality of the Government's decision initiated and pushed through by the author, - who had befriended this truculent tribe in 1991, - to terminate the practice of hankering to placate and cultivate the animus natives by *gift* giving through contact expeditions. Consequently, enabling the Sentinelese, before it is too late, to revert to their age-old ferocity towards outsiders, since that being the most efficacious self-protective cover, and thus averting its decimation / fall from the Golden Age.

Keywords: *aborigines, outlanders, colonization, hostility, gift, befriending, golden age, dark age, silver age, epidemics, refugees, settlers, traders, travelers, welfarism, Benthamism, development, tsunami, WW II.*

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Abstract- While battles battering the battered the most or worst, is a run-of-the-mill story, the *gift* and not the *gun* destroying them is rather a rare tale in the human civilization when it comes to the modern history of all six isolated aboriginal ethnic tribes of Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, the Indian islands in Bay of Bengal. However, it is no less good save in the biocultural survival of one of those ethnic communities, the fiercely hostile Sentinelese of North Sentinel Island, by way of 'rescripting' its cultural story through the instrumentality of the Government's decision initiated and pushed through by the author, - who had befriended this truculent tribe in 1991, - to terminate the practice of hankering to placate and cultivate the animus natives by *gift* giving through contact expeditions. Consequently, enabling the Sentinelese, before it is too late, to revert to their age-old ferocity towards outsiders, since that being the most efficacious self-protective cover, and thus averting its decimation / fall from the Golden Age. Though the term golden age is generally used metaphorically, the modern archeologists employ it to describe the pre-agricultural societies, while the anthropologists ascribe it to depict the story of the primordial hunters and gatherers. The existing four Negrito ethnic communities of Andaman Islands lived their golden age for more than 50,000 years i.e., ever since their ancestors came here from Africa, while the two surviving Mongoloid tribes of Nicobar Islands did it for nearly 14,000 years i.e., from the time their progenitors arrived from South-East Asia. Perhaps without a premonition, five of these aboriginal communities lost their golden age one by one to the outlanders, primarily not because of the onslaught, but due to the *gift* 'offerings' made by the interlopers. The *gifts* by non-autochthons have been proved to be the Trojan Horse in the Troy of the autochthons of A & N Islands.

Scientifically documented first multidisciplinary holistic research, conducted under aegis of the Government, among Jarawas, another primeval foraging community of the islands, confirms the golden age lived by it, as did by other aborigines also who flourished in the same eco-cultural region earlier. And this article traces the phenomenon of these native islanders' downfall from their heydays, triggered by the interlopers encroaching their territory, at different historical times under the varied circumstances, set off though unwittingly, by those diverse hordes of the outsiders themselves.

Keywords: aborigines, outlanders, colonization, hostility, gift, befriending, golden age, dark age, silver age, epidemics, refugees, settlers, traders, travelers, welfarism, Benthamism, development, tsunami, WW II.

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Introduction

Gift is a material object or a service or a system of practices not earned or evolved by the people who got it from others for free. Gift giving is the manifestation of goodwill, - the opposite of belligerency, - through a process of sharing. Its genesis could be traced back to the very basis of entire living world including the plants, right from the simple unicellular organisms to the complex civilized humans. Sharing i.e., sparing of one's energy and energy products, in turn, is essentially an act of procreation resulting in perpetuation, in which the organisms use their energy first to grow and then at maturity spare it for parting off one's self through binary fission, or for formation of their own gametes and the latter recreate that organism and the cycle continues. Human species at its evolutionary stage of Homo sapiens evolved a supra-biological faculty in the form of culture standing on the base of 'cooperation' which is an extension of that very sharing. Paleoanthropologists have discovered the fossil evidences to show that the Homo sapiens could outsmart the Neanderthals, their competitors, through their own cooperative group hunting of large animals, - this art was not developed by that archaic caveman, the solo hunter, - and then share the meat in that group. Eventually, such sharing of material / muscle has taken the shape of gift giving in different communities to accomplish varied purposes within the community or with other communities.

Gift giving is not always one way transaction between giver and receiver but it would be a kind of reciprocity effected in one or other form at some point of time, may be to bring in the peace and friendship or to occupy a territory or to strike the trade relations. Nonetheless, in the post-colonial era, especially in democratic developing countries like India, the *gift* giving could be unidirectional for execution of the state sponsored welfarism. It is the common knowledge that waging a war debilitated the conquered politically, economically and socially. On the other hand, though it sounds paradoxical that the *gift* giving by the people of modern society has altered negatively the cultural

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history of not only of the long isolated primordial hunter-gatherers but even that of the settled and bit exposed major ethnic community of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Such a story of aborigines of A & N Islands wherein the *Gifts* and *Not* the *Guns* devastating them, forms probably one of the rare instances in the human history. Further, as expected, the manmade calamities like war or natural ones like tsunami, destroyed the socioeconomic fabric of that large ethnic community in the islands once, but the fallout of the atrocities committed in the battle ground or messing up the reliefs in the aftermath of the catastrophe has been bashing that community in perpetuity.

The socio-economic course that these indigenous people took during last nearly half a century is dealt here in this article. It is an anthropological documentation of the longitudinal observation of the social history of the aboriginal ethnic communities of these islands since 1977, carried out by an exceptional chance the author happened to get as mentioned hereunder. Having been trained and graduated in the university degree of Master of Science in the discipline of anthropology, the author had the rare opportunity to study the tumultuous history of aborigines of these islands for nearly five decades while working in various capacities like: a researcher of Anthropological Survey of India after having been positioned in A & N islands during the initial six years; then in course of 22 years as the state's administrator for the welfare of these aboriginal tribes after joining the India's civil service and then posting in these islands, being the Union Territory, governed by the Government of India; as an tribal expert, continued to remain associated with A & N Administration in the issues related to tribal welfare during his postings in another Union Territory i.e., National Capital Territory of Delhi; later (after superannuation), as the Director of A & N Tribal Research and Training Institute (ANTRI) located at Port Blair, the capital of these islands for five years; as the Scientific Consultant for an year and then still continuing as the member of Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) of the regional Centre of the Indian Council of Medical Research founded in the islands with major mandate to study health aspects of aborigines; and the chairman of such IEC of the Regional Ayurveda Research Institute, Port Blair engaged in medical research in alternate medicine, focusing on tribal medicaments in these islands, apart from being the member of the Expert Committee in the Ministry of Science & Technology, Government of India to consider suitability of applying the technological innovations for the developmental welfare of tribal communities in the country including those of A & N islands.

Methodology: It is necessary to spell out the specific methodology devised for this study. The strung out association of the author in the tribal affairs of A & N islands is perhaps not incidental on account of: (a) being an anthropologist by training; (b) A & N archipelago being unique territory as every public policy and action has a bearing on the life of the aboriginal tribes here; (c) hence the proposals of all the major policy actions or their impact evaluation reports being sent for scrutiny / comments of the author being the Director of Tribal Welfare in the A & N Administration, (perhaps here incidentally he served in that capacity for unusually long period), or being the Assistant Commissioner, or serving as the Deputy Commissioner in the tribal district, or being considered by the Government as the specialist in tribal issues. It was not possible to carry out the anthropological study by adhering to the classical methodology of participant observation living with the community for a couple of years. Nonetheless, the composite methodology designed was effective enough in the study of the aborigines, which comprised of: frequent visits to the tribal habitations; camping there among the aborigines for weeks together to study; making direct observations while the tribal plans/programs were implemented; interviewing the key informants and others; analyzing and deliberating on the personal anecdotes as well as of others, connected with the autochthons which were in fact like the trailer depicting the tribal picture; relying on government documents/reports; adopting the "periscopic technique" (Awaradi, 1990: 134-135) conceived to study the hostile tribe that got the immigrants, the modern people as the permanent neighbors.

I. Aborigines of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

At present there are six indigenous tribes in the A & N islands, four of them belonging to Negrito stock occupying Andaman group of islands viz. Andamanese inhabiting Strait Island, Jarawas populating the parts of Middle and South Andaman Islands, Onges settled in Little Andaman Island, Sentinelese occupying the North Sentinel Island. And two aboriginal ethnic communities belonging to Mongoloid stock inhabit the Nicobar group of islands, i.e., Shompens live in Great Nicobar Island and Nicobarese dwell in Car Nicobar, Chowra, Teressa, Bampuka, Katchal, Kamorta, Nancowry, Little Nicobar and Great Nicobar Island. These ethnic communities have been recognized as the Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution (Andaman & Nicobar Islands) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1959 of President of India and their names are spelt in this article as in that Constitutional document (different authors have spelt them differently). All of them except Nicobarese have been categorized into the particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) considering, inter alia, their small population. Their present (2024) populace is: 57 Andamanese (excluding non-tribals who have married

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Andamanese), 131 Onges, 609 Jarawas, 100 (estimated) Sentinelese, 238 Shompens. The population of Nicobarese being 29099 as per Census of India, 2011, constitute relatively large ethnic community of "proto-foresters" commonly described as horticulturists.

Furthering, the theory "of out of Africa" migration of modern humans (Homo sapiens), Thangaraj, K. et.al (2005: 996) analyzed the mitochondrial DNA sequence of five persons each from the Andamanese, Onges, Nicobarese and have concluded that the Negritos occupied the Andaman Islands nearly 50000 to 70000 years ago, while the Nicobarese immigrated from South East Asian islands during past 18000 years. Similar studies have shown that Shompens tribe is the offshoot of Nicobarese and the divergence took place about 14000 years ago (Trivedi, Rajani et. al. (2006), 51:217 - 226).

a) Golden Age of the Aborigines

The golden age, at times, known as classical era is a period considered as apotheosis in the history of a country or people where the state of affairs for certain phenomena / aspects in the society appear to have been at their zenith, stable and better compared to other periods when the natural resources required for their optimum livelihood and health are in plenty and they have evolved social organization, collective wisdom and technological innovation to utilize those natural resources as required without going for aggrandizement. Though the phrase golden age is used metaphorically or to a mythical period in the history, the modern archaeologists attributed it to the era of pre-agricultural societies and by anthropologists to the state of dispensation / affairs among the primordial foragers. They hold that hunter-gatherers lived in their original affluence, since their limited material wants are easily satisfied in their environment endowed with plenty of resources (Sahlins, 2017:2). They argue that the hunting and gathering was humanity's original and most enduring, successful, competitive adaptation in the natural world occupying at least 90% of human history (Lee, Richard B, et. al. 1999: 1 - 20).

Hunting gathering communities have generally small population and have command over vast natural resources and each have a cultural practice of strict / sacrosanct territoriality thereby avoiding the conflicts with one another so that, all of them co-exist in peace. According to the anthropologist like Clerk, Spencer Larsen, the foragers had large variety of wild plants and wild animal food resources as against few plants and animals domesticated by the farmers which have the reduced nutritional value and as on today, much of the world's population relies on just three plants viz. rice, wheat and corn. Further, raising of the farm animals led to the common zoonotic diseases that can be transmitted from animals to people resulting in rising levels of infectious diseases (Grambier, Jeff, 2023, January 16). So, the hunter-gatherers did not face the present day's waxing and nagging problem due to contagious ailments which often break out into epidemics.

Anthropologists have shown that hunter gatherers work only 3 - 5 hours in a day for their food and devote rest of their time to leisure (Sahlins, 2009: 3 - 8). Leisure is possible only if one's physical and mental health is sound and stays free from hunger and food anxiety. It is established fact that the leisure is that human ecosystem in which science, philosophy, literature, oral or otherwise and the creativity would take birth, survive and sustain in a community which is free from frequent conflicts / wars with other groups. It is also known that the leisure and leisure time activities improve physical and mental health and provide pleasant experience. The scholars like Anderson and Heyne (2012), Carrythers and Hood (2007), have identified the leisure as primary contributor to the human happiness or flourishing (Wise, J.B. 2014, 5(2): 17 - 22).

The history of aborigines of A & N islands prior to their contact with the modern societies is characterized by the above said attributes being the hallmark of their golden age. It is to be noted that the details of such golden age in respect of each of ethnic communities have not been documented except for certain observations recorded by the British colonial administrators, later by Indian officials and few anthropologists. Though, Radcliffe Brown (1964) the pioneer anthropologist did study the Andamanese during 1906 - 08 but that was nearly half a century after the end of their golden age. On the other hand, two decades back (i.e., 2001-2002), an extensive multi-disciplinary study was carried out with regard to one ethnic community that is, Jarawas which amply endorses the fact / reality of its golden age. Such findings are logically applicable to other Negrito communities of the islands as well, on two counts: first, all of them belong to one regional culture and have had similar or same nature-culture complex as they inhabited the same geographical and cultural zone, second, this study was carried out at such comparable point of time in the history of this tribe when it too was at its classical age. While the available observations on the Mongoloid tribes, that is, Nicobarese and Shompens documented in the past by the administrators, clergymen and some anthropologists do reflect the heydays lived by these aborigines too.

b) Investigation to Uncover the Golden Age of the Jarawas

A study was carried out at the behest of Indian judiciary at a critical juncture when the Jarawas of Middle Andaman and of South Andaman gave up their age-old hostility in 1997 and 1998 respectively towards outsiders and began interacting with them including tourists indiscriminately and that was perceived widely

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by the experts world over as imminent threat for the survival of this foraging community. An intense debate arose as to what measures are needed to be taken by the government for safety of this tribe. Calcutta High Court's circuit bench at Port Blair, while deciding a public interest litigation filed by an advocate, directed the Indian government to constitute a committee of experts to recommend appropriate steps to ensure the wellbeing of the Jarawas community. The Government of India then set up a committee of seven members in which the author, - then posted as the Director of Tribal Welfare, - was one of them and the Lieutenant Governor of A & N islands was its convenor. This committee held that scientific data collected through the fieldwork is necessary to suggest the appropriate measures for protection and welfare of the Jarawas and hence asked the government to raise a team of researchers / specialists from the reputed government organizations including that of the medical, public health and hygiene, Anthropological Survey of India, Botanical Survey of India, Zoological Survey of India and Forest department to carry out a holistic study of the Jarawas and the ecological status in which this ethnic community lives. It was to unearth the state of affairs particularly in respect of major and critical aspects like livelihood, availability and accessibility of food sources, other sustenance resources, status of health, healthcare, demography, society and social organization. The multi-disciplinary study teams conducted field investigation in three phases between December, 2001 and September, 2002 to cover both dry and wet seasons in the islands. Based on the scientific findings and data collected, a comprehensive report was prepared by the said expert committee and submitted it to the government in July, 2003. This unpublished report confirms the golden age situation prevailing in the Jarawas community as described below.

Livelihood and its Resources: A & N islands have the tropical climate where South-Western as well as North-Eastern monsoons bring annual average rainfall of 3180 mm, temperature ranges between 23 to 31degrees Celsius and relative humidity is 70 - 90%. The entire land surface of islands (prior to the arrival of modern people to occupy them) was covered with tropical rainforest with few grass patches in Central Nicobar region, i.e., Nancowry group of islands and mangrove swamps in the inter- tidal zones. The forest in the islands is known for its rich biodiversity. So, a large and unique variety of terrestrial plants and animals and huge coastal bio-stock was available for the indigenous people which continued to remain as their perennial livelihood resources since they had the wood based eco-friendly technology to harness it to meet their limited needs, clubbed with their astute understanding of local ecology and accordingly pursuing the appropriate livelihood activities.

It is found that Jarawas's food is predominantly based on animals inhabiting the humid forest, coastal areas, shallow waters, creeks, mudflats and mangrove thickets. The wild pig is main food resource for Jarawas as also for other aborigines. Population of the boar is fairly large (Expert Committee, 2003: 44). The monitor lizard is other substantial source of food for the aborigines, while the larvae of wood inhabiting beetle and at times the birds too constitute food stock for them. The hundreds of eggs buried / laid in each nest by the turtles in sandy beaches for hatching are enthusiastically collected by the aborigines as their one of the favorite food items. The variety of fishes, molluscs, giant clams, cowries, lobsters, prawns in addition to crabs in the mudflats and creeks, apart from brackish water fishes well-nourished in the mangrove swamps, form unfailing food sources for the aborigines.

The tropical evergreen forest in these islands has diverse and rich flora that provides ample food material for the tribes. Different parts like tubers, roots, leaves, fruits, nuts, seeds, as a case may be, of variety of plants are consumed by the Jarawas as food. The research teams could identify 58 plants as food source for them (ibid: 31). Honey is another significant food for the aborigines and they are extremely fond of this. It is the only food item that they collect in good quantity and store it in their wooden buckets for consumption in the near future. They chew the leaves of Orophea plant and spit it at beehive to repel the bees and cut the hive containing honey and larvae. Jarawas and other aborigines consume the larvae too as a delicacy.

Food Processing and Nutritional Status: The Jarawas have had healthy cooking practices using the fire intelligently to get the palatable, digestible and safe food. In the absence of cooking vessels, the ancient way of baking in the earth oven / pit oven was one of the important markers of the ingenuity of the Negritos of the islands, further, so also was the invention of the bark cooking vessel by the Shompens, described as the bobby-dazzler (Awaradi, 1990: 38). The pottery of the Chowra Island, exported to rest of the Nicobar Islands, was no less significant feature of the Nicobarese culture, since that little Chowra itself does not have the natural resources like clay for pottery and timber for making the renowned Chowra canoes and yet they have had the monopoly on these items. The required raw materials are sourced from neighboring Teressa Island. Clay pot making by coiling and beating without using the pottery wheel to shape the pot and then burning it, was the method employed in making this essential domestic earthenware widely used in Nicobar Islands, and this technique is similar to that of indigenous people of Pre-Columbian New World. Nicobarese were unaware of the potter's wheel, as it was invented by the ancient Sumerians in Mesopotamia around 3500 B.C. in West Asia, the date much later to the arrival of the Mongoloids

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in Nicobar Islands who thereafter remained beyond ancient trade routes. The large sea going Chowra canoe constitutes the other main trading item with Nicobarese of other islands.

Fire is the eternal companion of the Negritos, which is carefully preserved and carried everywhere, all the time even when swimming across the creek as they did not know how to produce fire, whereas the Shompens have devised the wooden fire generator and that is yet another example of their brilliance (Awaradi, 1990: 42). Before actual cooking, the preliminary processes like, - the hunt for example, the pig is dressed to remove the gut by cut opening the abdomen on ventral side; burning away the hair on fire; separating the head and cutting the skin with thick fat layer into pieces, - constitute the integral segments of culinary practice. Other items like monitor lizard and fish are also similarly dressed systematically before baking. The notable fact is that Jarawas and other foragers of these islands did not use salt, sugar, oil, spices in their food which is considered as healthy practice. The research team after doing the nutritional assessment declared that the Jarawas have balanced diet despite total lack of intake of leafy vegetables, milk and milk products. The micronutrients namely vitamin C, carotene, vitamin K, folic acid, calcium, sodium, iron, zinc available in leafy vegetables and calcium, phosphorus and protein found in the milk are possibly compensated by variety of animal food and wild fruits consumed abundantly (Expert Committee, 2003: 83). Although animal fat intake was very high, the serum parameters namely cholesterol, triglyceride, low density lipoprotein (LDL) and high-density lipid (HDL) remained within normal range and that points out to their better fat metabolizing capacity. Serum glutamate oxaloacetate transaminase (SGOT) and serum glutamate pyruvic transaminase (SGPT) being within the normal limits connotes the excellent functional condition of liver. A lot of animal food, rich in vitamin D and phosphorus consumed by the aborigines are expected to help efficient absorption of calcium and phosphorus and thereby better bone mineralization (ibid:84). Further, the Jarawas did not face the scourge of diabetes as denoted by normal range of blood glucose levels (ibid:87). In totality, the findings of the research teams signify not only the prevailing superb nutritional status of the Jarawas, but also the availability of plenitude of food resources and their accessibility. Such an affluence could remain in its original virgin state up to the beginning of even the current century only because it was beyond the reach of the ravagers, the modern people who were kept at bay by the fierce hostility of the Jarawas. This state of affairs is comparable to the situation that prevailed up to mid-19th century for the Andamanese, up to mid - 20th century for the Onges and Shompens.

Livelihood Tools: The aboriginal communities of these islands had devised efficient tools and crafts necessary to carry out their livelihood tasks. While Negrito men have bow and arrows to hunt and fish, their women use net basket for fishing. On the other hand, the Shompens have different spears to hunt and fish, apart from the snare they put up on the tree branch near the fully ripened pandanus fruit to trap the monkey which on approaching that fruit gets ensnared / hung to death (Awaradi, 1990: 56). Conveyance being integral to the livelihood activities, every ethnic community in the islands has semi-permanent canoes as transport craft except the Jarawas who use the temporary rafts built swiftly on the spot whenever they had to cross a creek. These entirely wood-based devices especially the hunting tools invented by man several thousand years ago have undergone modifications / upgradations. The notable improvisation in the tools has been from the time that great metal, the iron became accessible to the aborigines as a novel resource though as flotsam in these islands since 1800s AD, when the iron became a ship building material and instances of shipwrecking began. It is incredible that the aborigines could adopt this alien, hard and malleable metal by using it as the tip of arrows and spears. The iron pieces were simply hammered to required shape and sharpened its edges by rubbing against the hard abrasive stone. Interestingly enough, this very method was first used by the original discoverers of iron, the Hittites of ancient Egypt (somewhere between 5000 and 3000 BCE as held by archaeologists) who extracted it from meteorites and pounded it to create their own tools and weapons. The livelihood tools of the aborigines became their prized possession because of their enhanced utility and the intense labor involved in making them.

Health and Healthcare Practices: The qualified doctors were also the part of that multidisciplinary research teams mentioned above. These medical personnel carried out general and clinical examination of 251 Jarawas both men and women in the field (Expert Committee, 2003: 106) out of their estimated total population of 300 - 350 (ibid: 159). The overall health status has been recorded in the report of the E C (ibid: 106 - 117). The observations include: (i) Pulse rate being within the normal range of 60 - 80 per minute; (ii) interestingly, the axillary temperature being 2 degree Fahrenheit below the normal; (iii) diastolic blood pressure being in between 70 to 90 mmHg in 43% of population while being less than 70 mmHg in 57% of the populace, none of the Jarawas showing their diastolic pressure more than 90 mmHg and further most among them having systolic blood pressure within 120 mmHg; (iv) in ABO and Rh (D) blood group system, 70% of Jarawas being "O" Rh positive and 30% "A" Rh positive while Rh negative being totally absent; (v) iodine

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deficiency disorder / goitre being not found among them; (vi) congenital abnormalities being absent except for the vitiligo (patchy loss of skin color) of lips that too only in one family and the absence of innate disabilities, is due to a cultural practice, the ethno-medical termination of infirm infants (ETI) explained later; (vi) nothing abnormal being detected in their central nervous system, cardiovascular system and genito-urinary system; (vii) hepatitis B surface antibodies (anti - HBs) being noticed among 70% of the populace which means that major chunk of their population was infected by hepatitis B virus and thereby the immunity against this virus was got built up; (viii) test for hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) being positive in 49% of the population, in other words, that proportion of the community having had the hepatitis B virus in their blood thereby implying its endemicity; (ix) it is remarkable that their serum bilirubin beig found within the normal limits which signifies that they i.e., HBsAg aborigines are healthy carriers and not menaced by any sort of morbidity and mortality; (x) yet another striking feature being that the liver function tests, that is, serum glutamic pyruvic transaminase (SGPT) and serum glutamic-oxaloacetic transaminase (SGOT) tests revealed the levels that are within normal limits in 94% of the population in spite of high prevalence of hepatitis B infection; (xi) none of the aborigines was tested for syphilis, the venereal disease research laboratory (VDRL), hepatitis C virus (HCV) causing fatalities due to liver damage / cirrhosis, liver cancer and human immunodeficiency virus HIV) were found reactive, that is, Jarawas tribe is free from the above maladies. This situation would change in due course following their interface with the modern people; (xii) blood platelet counts were found to be normal in 98% of population.

Nonetheless, 42% of the Jarawas population was inflicted by skin infection mainly of fungal origin, 9% had respiratory tract infection, 5% had viral fever and 1% had malaria. It is relevant to note here that the first Settlement colony (1789 -1796) founded in Andaman Islands by British East India Company was closed because of several deaths of the settlers due to malaria and the islands were considered as inhospitable and dreaded place and hence the Colony was closed. In contrast, it appears that the Jarawas and other indigenous people had successfully adapted to the ecological conditions here including that for the frightening malaria. They did not face health related problems linked to malnutrition, undernutrition or imbalanced diet since every tribe had rich and extensive hunting ground. That is, about 5600 sq. km. Great Andaman chunk, - comprised of North, Middle and South Andaman Islands, together, - was shared by Andamanese and Jarawas; about 700 sq km of Little Andaman Island was exclusively for Onges; North Sentinel Island of about 60 sq. km. is entirely occupied by the Sentinelese; Great Nicobar Island of about 910 sq. km. majorly used by Shompens and its small patches at few coastal hamlets were for the Nicobarese; while the Car Nicobar, Chowra, Teresa, Katchal, Kamorta, Trinket, Nancowry, Pillomilo, Kondule, Little Nicobar Island together having an area of about 920 sq. km. were totally under the sway of the Nicobarese. The nomadic aborigines had enough physical exercise through routine hunting and gathering activities, while the settled Nicobarese too were active in fishing, canoeing, collecting coconuts, building and maintaining their hutments and tending their semi-feral pigs, apart from participating in the traditional games and sports. As such, all the groups of aborigines were free from lifestyle ailments or non-communicable diseases like cardiovascular problems, diabetes, stroke and cancer.

Anyway, the aborigines have evolved a traditional method to address their endemic illnesses however few and minor they might be, as the healthcare practice was one of the ways for them to flourish in the local environment. The Negritos of Andaman Islands have developed protocols to treat specific diseases by applying the parts of identified medicinal plants, animals and natural substances on their body externally, while the Shompens do go for ingestion for some health issues. The multidisciplinary research teams have observed variety of practices among the Jarawas in treating the problems like headache, stomachache, body pain, neck pain, fever, snake-bite, scorpion bite, centipede bite etc. by tying the leaves / bark of specific plants, or applying the extract of leaves / bark and red ochre on the concerned part or spot of the body (ibid: 32 - 33). The Jarawas have medicine and procedure for smooth and painless childbirth, the Shompens have medicines not only to treat themselves but to tame the wild pigs and the Onges have treatment to address the scalp baldness (Awaradi, 2022:180).

Furthermore, the age-sex distribution in the population of Jarawas as found out by the research teams reveals that about 47% of the population was below 15 years of age, 46% between 15 and 44 years, only 7% of population was above 45 years of age and overall sex ratio was estimated to be 97 females for 100 males (ibid: 27). Infant mortality is estimated at 40%. In other words, Jarawas population having higher number of young individuals followed by high proportion of reproductive and productive adults with balanced sex ratio signifying their progressive population trend despite high infant mortality for which ETI (explained later) must be the main reason, and yet not exploded but remained almost stable as the senile people are in lowest proportion.

Indigenous Wisdom to Overcome the Natural Calamities: Natural hazards like flood, drought, earthquake, epidemics or holocaust are known to be the destroyers of even great civilizations at some point of time. The indigenous people of Andaman and Nicobar archipelago appears to have escaped such mass

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destruction in the past. The islands come under the zone V, seismically the most active region and so the islands are visited by quakes of varying magnitude frequently. Since, the aborigines had hutments of timber and thatch, they did not suffer the casualties due to collapse of such structures except for some of those 'modernized' Nicobarese who had built masonry houses imitating outsiders and so lost their lives on 26th December, 2004 due to deadly earthquake which was soon followed by that Asian monstrous tsunami. While thousands of other islanders were killed in that leviathan, the Onges and other Negritos escaped from the clutches of death, since they ran away onto a high ground on seeing the inordinately excessive receding of shoreline after very high magnitude earthquake. In their traditional knowledge, such a phenomenon of unusual drop in shoreline is held as the precursor of tsunami. On the other hand, the ignorant outlanders went far down to the vastly exposed sublittoral zone to see the rarity of exotic sea bed and thereby they could not run back swiftly traversing that long and rugged costal bed to the safe place away from the coastline when unimagined tsunami giant waves lashed the shore and so, most of them met their sea burial.

Though the tropical cyclones during the monsoons are common in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, they are not as devastating here as in the eastern coast of Indian mainland and Bangladesh, except for bringing heavy rains in the islands. As there are no rivers in these hilly islands other than small ones in Great Nicobar Island, the downpour does not lead to the floods. However, the monsoons, if delayed by a couple of months may result in prolonged dry season causing scarcity of drinking water in the islands, hence for the settlers and other outsiders it becomes extremely difficult to face this crisis. On the other hand, the aborigines have developed a strategy to tide over such tough times. Thick evergreen forest especially bamboo brakes in the Andaman Islands sustain many brooks even during such protracted dry spells and the Negritos use them wisely as the drinking water source. Apart from relying on such rills, the indigenous people could survive on the super drinks of bamboo water in Andaman Islands or on the coconut water in Nicobar Islands. Infernos due to forest fires are unknown in these islands because of damp evergreen jungle, though the aborigines in the Andaman keep the burning fire with them all the time. The aborigines do not face the threat due to wild animals because: (a) there are no large carnivores in these islands; (b) aborigines have evolved certain practices to protect themselves from dangerous reptiles like few species of poisonous snakes and deadly crocodiles. For example, the Negritos sleep in the night / day close to the fireplace, while Mongoloid tribes sleep on platform raised on stilts so that snakes or crocodiles would not be able to come near them. Further, the Negritos raise pegs around the fireplace to avoid themselves slipping into the fire. Still further, while, the aborigines of Andaman Islands are highly vigilant against these dangerous creatures, the snakes and crocs, in fact, these are the game / source of food for Shompens. The following personal anecdote reveals much about the Jarawas's vigilance. Once during my tenure as the Director of Tribal Research and Training Institute, I was returning from North Andaman Island in the jeep. It was a summer late evening. On seeing a Jarawas couple on foot along the Andaman Trunk Road (now National Highway 4) in South Andaman Island, I got down to join them in their fast walk and loud talk. In course of our that speed walk and deep conversation with them regarding the drinking water issue in their area, the Jarawas lady with a heavy basket on her back hung from her scalp suddenly pulled me back uttering something, her husband also similarly carrying a big basket swiftly picked up a roadside large stone nearby and threw it with force. It took me a while to realize as to what was the dramatic episode. She could see a big snake slithering across the road, a couple of meters ahead of us even in that dark night. While she saved me from that imminent peril by holding me back, her husband could kill that poisonous serpent with a single hit which was sharp on the head of the snake even in that darkness.

The Jarawas and other Negritos of Andaman Islands avoid the deadly salt water crocodiles by taking every precaution in their foraging activities. On the other hand, for the Shompens, it is a good game to hunt. They have an ingenious way to kill this dangerous and biggest reptile on the earth. They incite the crocodile by poking it with a long and soft wood pole; the enraged beast bites that pole with its deadly crunch, due to which its teeth penetrate deep into the soft pole thereby its powerful jaws get locked together and thus it turns utterly defenseless. Then, the Shompens spear it repeatedly to maim it without endangering themselves, as neither it could run or swim away because of long pole hindrance or could move to attack them (Awaradi, 1990: 55). And lastly the research teams did not find any clue regarding past disease outbreaks in the archipelago (ibid: 115). Hence, it could safely be inferred that aborigines were not ravaged by such ailments which took the epidemic form before the arrival of modern colonizers in the islands.

Leisure and Lighter Moments: Leisure and leisure time activities generating lighter moments in the human life were expected from those individuals whose basic necessities including their food and physical security were firmly ensured and their community recognizes such activities as normal and even desirable too. The research teams observed the Jarawas men and women spending long hours in leisure (ibid: 82). Further, if the people are healthy and not troubled by frequent ailments or major outbreaks, they would be engaged in variety of aesthetic or creative or recreational activities.

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Personal body adornment, the oldest and never dying art, the man has ever invented, is pretty prominent among both women and men of the aboriginal communities. Since, there was no functional requirement to cloak their bare body in the tropical hot and humid climate here in the islands, it was but natural for the aborigines to go about naked. Further, not having body hair, the Negritos paint their face, chest, boobs, back, thighs, upper arms and other bare parts with red or white ochre mixed with animal fat. The diverse geometric line-painting designs carved out on their body reflect the painters' creative imagination. Apart from aesthetics, certain beliefs are also associated with body paintings. Furthermore, the aborigines decorate themselves with variety of ornaments made of plant fibers, bark, leaves, flowers and fruits. While Shompens women wore the bark cloth skirt, the nude Jarawas dames, at times, draped their body with green leaves. The multidisciplinary team could identify 63 plants used for body decking by the Jarawas (ibid: 35). The scalp-band, neck-band, garland, girdle, necklace, armlets, were some of their ornaments. Sea shells were also used for making a kind of jewelry by the aborigines. Some bands of the Shompens men and women decorate themselves with wooden ear studs, the wood piece in their pierced earlobe. The aborigines thus not only deck themselves but they meticulously decorate their tools and implements like bows and chest-guard too by engravings. The Jarawas wooden bucket is decked with colorful strips made of orchids.

Singing, dancing, gossiping and wisecracking are also the leisure time activities for aborigines. Andamanese had a wooden sound board, a kind of musical instrument to produce euphonic resonance by rhythmic thumping it with the foot of the player with the accompaniment of chorus. The aborigines indulge in cracking jokes and in horse laughter in every opportune situation. For instance, when we gave the urine culture transport tubes (UTT) to the Shompens and Jarawas men to collect their urine in those containers and return them to us during our fieldwork (2017 - 19) among them for disease burden study, they burst in to loud laughter asking us "will you drink it"? The Nicobarese are known for their traditional sports, like canoe race, pig-fight, pole-fight, and variety of other tribal games apart from their songs and dance. Such hilarious activities creating lighter moments, merry making or playing games, or crooning and swaying signify the happiness among the aborigines. Another remarkable aspect about the indigenous people of these islands was the absence of addictive substances and even beverages amidst them, apart from any addictive behaviors except for the Nicobarese toddy drink obtained from the coconut inflorescence. The toddy is taken as a healthy drink though it is bit intoxicating.

Indigenous Sovereign Autonomy: In their entire long history of more than 50,000 years, the Negritos in the Andaman Islands and of nearly14,000 – 18,000 years, the Mongoloids in Nicobar Islands remained largely independent in their own world till the arrival of interlopers in the modern era. Nonetheless, the aborigines did not live in absolute isolation since many sea-going travelers visited the archipelago from second century onwards, for example, Cladius Ptolemy in second century AD, I-Tsing a Buddhist monk in seventh (Temple,1903, III:47), two Arabian travelers in ninth, Marcopolo in thirteenth (Yule,1903:309), Frair Odoric in fourteenth, Nicolo Conte in fifteenth, and Master Federic in sixteenth century. These travelers did not pose any threat whatsoever to the aborigines. As against this, the East Asian slave traders from Malaya, Burma and China were menacing as they often raided the islands to capture and take away the aborigines to sell them in their countries and this is held to be the major reason for the fierce hostility of the aborigines towards all outsiders. Then the Western spice traders mainly British - who were already in that international commercial business in mainland India since the beginning of seventeenth century and subsequently indulging in political control and domination over the Indian rulers, - attempted to expand their such dominance on the aborigines of Andaman Islands too, towards the end of eighteenth century, though their original purpose was to set up a port of refuge in the islands for the safety of their merchant ships in distress due to bad weather or of the castaways during voyages in Indian Ocean / Bay of Bengal. This venture failed because of repeated attacks by the aborigines and the dreadful malaria in these islands, thereby prolonging the indigenous sovereignty of the aborigines. The Chola rulers of South India founded their forward naval base in Nicobar Islands which was used for war expeditions against the regimes in South-East Asia in the eleventh century but the Cholas did not subjugate the Nicobarese, who thus continued with their indigenous autonomy. On the other hand, the Malaya, Burmese and Chinese traders indulged in economic exploitation of Nicobarese by selling them the tobacco, cloth, iron tools, rice at premium price and procuring the coconuts at cheap rate. Later, for nearly hundred years from mid-eighteenth century, various Europeans like Danes, Moravians, Austrians, British, Italians and French tried unsuccessfully to occupy the Nicobar Islands and some of them even made futile attempts to proselytize the Nicobarese. Hence, all ethnic tribes of the archipelago, except to some extent the Nicobarese, retained largely their golden age till mid nineteenth century.

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II. The End of That Golden Age of Aborigines

The Golden Age ends in Silver Age and latter in Dark Age depending on the extent of penetration of extraneous forces and intrinsic strength of an ethnic community. Though silver age and dark ages are taken here metaphorically, certain specific and real attributes are linked to the respective Age for the purpose of describing the bio-cultural history of the aborigines of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The silver age is used in this context as the extended or short transitory phase between the golden age and dark age. The silver age can roll back in to the golden age or fall in to the dark age as the case may be, depending on the trend in the socio-economic and the population dynamics of a community in the course of its history. The silver age is characterized by: the compromised self-reliance i.e., with livelihood practices in a fluid state to an extent; cultural traditions being influenced by exotic elements; continuing under threat of epidemic diseases and hence utterly dependent on others / on modern medical care. On the other hand, the dark age would be marked by: total loss of self-dependence for livelihood; crisis in cultural identity; loss of ethnic identity; death of native language; and population decadence due to epidemic alien diseases. As a matter of fact, the ascent of a community in dark age to its golden age is improbable. Now, if one studies the history of the islands in the Bay of Bengal, it is evident that the golden age of different indigenous communities of Andaman and Nicobar Islands was wrecked by various interlopers, may it be the traders or colonizers or settlers but remarkably not by the invaders, in the diverse global historical circumstances at large and at Indian subcontinent in particular.

Age of Exploration: The world history reveals that the ancient Silk Road, the overland Eurasian trade route facilitating economic links and also politico-cultural exchange between the East, known for its spices and the West for using those spices to preserve the meat, was blocked by the Ottoman Empire in 1453. This led to disruption of that flourishing spice trade which spurred the European seafarers, pioneered by Portuguese mariner Vasco-da-Gama to discover Cape Route, the European-Asian sea route, thereby ushering in the Age of Exploration and first commercial monopoly in spices by Portuguese Empire. Later, other Europeans began to use that maritime route for spice trade with Indies. In 1599, a group of prominent English merchants and explorers set up a venture which was later known as British East India Company for trade with India and South-east Asia. English monarch, queen Elizabeth I granted in 1600 the charter to this Company for the trade in spices along with tea and cotton. The Moghul emperor Jahangir conferred the Company in 1615 with the exclusive rights to trade in India by establishing the fortified trading centers / factories at various places like Calcutta (now Kolkata), Surat, Madras (now Chennai) and other locations. This Company eventually became world's largest trading corporation at its peak having had a large fleet of merchant ships sailing between England and Indies across Indian ocean often braving rough weather with grave risk for the crew and the merchandise onboard due to shipwrecks. Taking note of such sporadic instances of scuttling / ships in distress due to frequent cyclones in Indian Ocean region, especially in Bay of Bengal thereby necessitating the need for rescue of crew and safe anchorage of the vessels in such a situation, the East India Company brought up in 1789 a port of refuge in Andaman at Port Cornwallice, now Port Blair with convict laborers. But the horrors, due to repeated ambushing attacks by the aborigines and dreadful malaria killing many of those workers and others, were so terrifying that the Company had to withdraw this *first* English Settlement in 1796 and thus the original purpose of providing safety to the merchant shipping remained unmet.

Second Penal Settlement: In the meanwhile, the British East India Company was empowered by the English king to raise its own army, wage war, sign treaties, annex and acquire the territories in India and elsewhere, when similar trading companies from Portugal, Holland, France, Spain and other European regimes were also in the race for domination in the trade. So, the British East India Company kept fighting wars with its European competitors and also with Indian rulers in series of battles. The victory in the Battle of Plassey in 1757 against the Nawab of Bengal resulted in annexing the Bengal province and the beginning of the Company rule in India. Then onwards, the Company seized control over major part of northern India, after defeating the combined army of Indian states of Bengal, Awadh and Moghul Empire in the Battle of Buxar in 1764. The Company's commercial and territorial expansion continued by winning battles, dictating the terms of treaties signed postwar and enforcing the self-serving policies like the 'doctrine of lapse' or mis-governance at the cost of princely states. As a result, many Indian rulers lost their thrones and others were obliged to pay heavy 'protection money' to the Company. Indian soldiers / sepoys (both Hindu and Muslim) serving in Company's army in large number were unhappy as the salary given to them was too less in comparison to that given to their fellow English soldiers; officers' positions were reserved exclusively for English men as Indians were eligible only for lower ranks and further the sepoys were faced with institutional racism, ruthless punishment and summary discharge from army. Such dissatisfied Indian soldiers, - enraged by the rumor that the cartridges which sepoys had to bite off its ends to load the new Enfield riffles were lubricated with the grease

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made out of the lard obtained from the cow (sacred animal for Hindus) and pig (unclean creature, *haram* for Muslims), – rose in revolt against the Company and rallied behind the deposed dynasties and simmering other princely states leading to what is variously termed as Indian Rebellion of 1857, Sepoy Mutiny, or First War of Indian Independence. This rebellion met initial success but later it was quelled brutally by the Company with deployment of huge British regular army shipped from England. Though large number of captured rebels were hanged to death and blown from cannon, still the Indian prisons were heaving with so many more prisoners of war, apart from other convicts. At this juncture, British crown, after taking over the rule from the East India Company, applied on the mutineers, the draconian punishment of 'transportation for life' to a far-flung place for setting up a penal colony in Andaman Islands in 1858. This British *second* Penal Settlement brought about the end of the several millennia old Goden Age of the Andamanese. A century later, the Indian Settlements (of course not penal ones) led to similar consequences in respect of the Onges, Jarawas and Shompens, while the British practice of befriending the hostile natives continued by the Indian authorities was instrumental for impairing the Golden Age of Sentinelese, though only for couple of years. And the Nicobarese community suffered the far-reaching debilitation in the aftermath of the natural calamity, the monstrous Asian tsunami of December, 2004. The downfall of each tribe is discussed in detail as under.

III. The Fall of the Andamanese Tribe

Colonial Confrontation and Realization: The second Penal Settlement founded with convict labors in 1858 by the British in these islands too had initial troubles. The aborigines, as expected, vehemently resisted this upcoming Penal Colony that occupied their certain territory i.e., their hunting-ground. The Andamanese, the largest ethnic group with the estimated population of more than 5000 among the Negrito tribes, though were awestruck by the fire powered weapons of the newcomers, they were not cowed down. With their superior tactical guerilla attacks, despite having just bows and arrows, the aborigines could keep the powerful encroachers on tenterhooks inflicting casualties, apart from killing the convicts entering deep in to the forest to escape from the cruelties dealt by the British in the Penal Settlement. Frequent hit-and-run gang warfare apart, a large mob of aborigines ambushed the barracks at Aberdeen locale of Port Blair in the penal colony in the wee hours of 17th May, 1859. This full-scale assault being known as the famous Battle of Aberdeen in the history would have been the Waterloo for the British in the Andaman Islands but for the traitor Mr. Doodhanath Tiwari, an escapee convict (Awaradi, 2021: 71). The heart-wrenching story, – how Mr. Tiwari, who feigned death when his co-fugitives actually succumbed to the arrows on the spot, was shown unexpected mercy by the aborigines by not killing him when they found him still alive despite fatal wounds; how he was not only allowed to live with them, partake their food, participate in their hunting and other activities but even marrying a tribal girl to him; then how he betrayed them by quietly deserting their war expedition forward camp in the forest at the outskirt of Port Blair as he learnt their strategic plan of assault and reached the Penal Settlement to alert the British officers on 16th May night about the imminent attack early next morning by the Andamanese; how the British quickly mobilized their armed forces and massacred the aborigines as the bows and arrows were not the match for the guns in such a pitched battle; and how he was rewarded at the end by the British for his treachery by releasing him from the punishment of transportation for life that he was undergoing in Andaman Islands – is well known in the islands. It is remarkable that despite a massive bloodshed on their side, the Andamanese were not deterred and continued with their sporadic attacks. Thus, the situation remained creepy for the residents of Settlement and lingered on as a burning problem for the British in running / maintaining the Penal Colony peacefully without the loss of life on both sides.

So, the British realized that their approach of retaliation hitherto through bloody punitive expeditions against aborigines was not only futile but a costly affair on account of raising and maintaining large armed police to organize such expeditions, to guard the Settlement against the tribal raids and provide protection to the convicts engaged in clearing the forest and other works. Moreover, the British were concerned with the long-standing issues relating to the safety of crews of foundering ships, as the hostile tribes attacked the castaways. Furthermore, the authorities of the Penal Settlement began to confront a new problem of desertion by convicts. The prisoners in groups resorted in series, to abscond from the Settlement to escape the grueling and inhuman daily labor / physical tasks assigned to each of them, like unreasonably hefty quota of manual extraction of coconut oil through the process of the cold-press by running the *ghani* mill and breaking the stones. Clubbed with this, they were driven by the false / unfounded hope to reach back their home in mainland India finally one day after long trekking the Andaman Forest and swimming / rowing across the narrow sea between these islands and Burma (now Myanmar), being the eastern part of Indian subcontinent. Such desertions resulted in the depletion of convict laborers in the Settlement as they were killed by the aborigines. If such trend was not curbed, the authorities conceded that the ambitious plan of raising the grand Colony by building infrastructure, that is, laying of roads, constructing water reservoirs,

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bungalows and playgrounds for English officers would have been jeopardized. As such, authorities decided to address all these issues cleverly by befriending the Andamanese who thereafter would not only not attack the people in the Settlement and shipwreck crews, but also bring back the runway convicts instead of killing them in the forest.

Shun the Gun and Give the Gifts: British adopted the strategy to befriend the aborigines instead of punitive action of gunning them down and burning their huts. The campaign of befriending the Andamanese through the *gift* giving mode began by way of: a contact party going by boat, cruising in the coastal water and dropping the coconuts on seeing the aborigines in the woods nearby; or leaving the *gifts* in the huts deserted by the aborigines on reaching there by the contact team; or capturing a couple of them, detaining them in the Settlement for certain period, treating them with food and drinks, then releasing them back in their area with lot of *gifts*. Such operations of friendly gestures for about four years, won the confidence of Andamanese, resulting in the rapport with them by 1863 (Expert Committee, 2003: 6) and thereby making the beginning of their downfall because of the fallout of their interface with interlopers. The Andamanese began to come to the Settlement and continued to do so accompanied by their women folk and children. The inhabitants of the Penal Colony were the mutineers, criminals convicted for committing heinous crimes apart from few British officials. The colony was administered by a senior officer designated initially as the Superintendent and later as the Chief Commissioner. Under this officer, a junior English official was asked to manage what came to be known as "Andamanese Home" often referred as the "Andaman Home" whereat the aborigines visiting the Colony could stay as long as they wish, get food and *gifts*. The overt purpose of Andaman Home, as reflected in the 1867 report of the British officer, Humfrey was, to "tame" and civilize the aborigines who would be an aid in tackling the issues in running the Colony and in maintaining the British suzerainty over these islands and prevent other European powers from occupying these islands (Portman, 1899: 549). No doubt, these colonial objectives were met but at the heavy cost of indigenous people.

Impact of the Gifts: With increase in the Andamanese visits to the Penal Colony, the convicts particularly the criminal perverts being notorious as drunkards, addicts of tobacco and opium, got chances to interact and strike friendly relations with the aborigines and that was the onset of the Dark Age of Andamanese. The aborigines saw the convicts consuming the addictive substances like alcohol, tobacco and opium. The convicts began to offer such substances as the special *gifts* to the Andamanese and latter accepted them as curious gifts. Soon, these *gifts* fired in both men and women, a craze around such substances, then cravings for them and finally the aborigines turned themselves as addicts and thus vulnerable for easy exploitation. In that Penal Colony of men in early days, the only women that too naked were the visiting Andamanese dames who were also given variety of exotic gifts like mirror, beads, clothes apart from the addictive substances as a lure and then were sexually abused repeatedly by the convicts. All such interactions led to the decimation of Andamanese population on account of spread of alien diseases including venereal diseases and long-term impact of narcotics especially opium.

Introduction of addictive substances to the aborigines led to the 'chain reaction' in a way that their craze for the opiates having short term analgesic and euphoria impact pushed them to visit Penal Colony often, leading to partaking more narcotics resulting in intense craving for them which drove the aborigines to the Settlement more frequently to consume the addictive substances more and more thereby turning them as hardened addicts and that was the death knell for Andamanese. These narcotic substances had the telling long term impact on the aborigines. The opium for instance, impaired the menstruation among the Andamanese women, dampened sex drive and affected the childbearing capabilities contributing to decline in the population. Recent scientific investigations have confirmed the deleterious impact of narcotics like opium on reproduction. For instance, the population-based cohort study in rural areas of Iran indicates increased risk of compromised fetus before or during labor (Paige, L Williams (2017; 5812(4): e0176588). Perhaps more catastrophic impact on the population of Andamanese due to their interface with outlanders that is, people of Penal Colony was the new diseases brought by such outsiders. Each of the alien ailments broke out into an epidemic, since the aborigines had no resistance and immunity against the exotic maladies. There were four major epidemics viz. pneumonia of 1868, syphilis of 1876, measles of 1877 and influenza of 1892 which took a huge death toll among the Andamanese thereby reducing their population to 625 by the end of the 19th century from estimated 5000 in 1858. Other diseases which broke out were ophthalmia in 1876, mumps in 1886, gonorrhea in 1892 (Tomas, 1991, quoted by Krishnakumar, 2009:111).

In addition to the initial channel of interface in which Andamanese visited the Penal Settlement, there were other ways of interaction wherein outlanders frequented the Andamanese camps. For example, few Andamanese too were recruited into the Police force by the British along with other men of Indian and Burmese origin (Burma was a province of colonial British India during 1824 -1937 and from where too the convicts were deported to Andaman) to help the colonial Administration in dealing with hostile Jarawas tribe. This

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led to regular interaction of these outlanders especially Burmese with Andamanese resulting in long term visible impact by way of love affairs / adultery / marriages, apart from the women adopting the Burmese dress pattern, - *lungyi,* the ankle-length wraparound skirt and jacket, while the blokes imitated the dress of their colleagues and thereby the half pant and bush shirt became the menswear among the Andamanese. Such style of women's costume continued till 1990s and later they especially the younger lot adopted different Indian / modern garb. Young and healthy tribesmen of Chota Nagpur region in central India brought since 1918 to Andaman Islands through Catholic Labor Bureau at Ranchi to work in forestry operation, (as the timber being the major natural resource), also had sporadic interface with Andamanese. Some of these tribesmen, colloquially known as 'Ranchis' had sexual affairs / living relations with Andamanese dames leading to spread of alien diseases. All such interactions too were leveraged on mainly through the *gift* giving.

Rehabilitation and Welfare: The population decadence of Andamanese continued beyond the end of colonial period and touched its lowest of just 19 in 1961 because of these diseases and reproductive impairments, though the ailments did not explode again into an epidemic. With India becoming a democratic welfare state, the Andaman and Nicobar Administration realized that these few surviving, distraught Andamanese dispersed in North, Middle and South Andaman group of islands, - some as solitary individuals and few in pairs, but all in miserable state, - could go in to total extinction, if the government were not to intervene with suitable rehabilitative measures. These distressed and wondering aborigines, yet speaking in their own mother tongue, and still sticking to many of their cultural practices, were rehabilitated by the Administration on Strait Island, an islet of less than 3 sq. km in 1969. The community in this new Settlement was provided with the *gift* of basic facilities like healthcare through Medical sub-center, residential houses, water supply, electricity, *anganwadi* (rural childcare center), community hall, primary school in Hindi medium and a jetty, apart from meeting their essential needs including ration items and clothes for free and cash allowances to get required consumer goods through their own Cooperative Society which however was managed by the officials of welfare agency i.e., Andaman Aadim Janjati Vikas Samithi (AAJVS), all under the State tribal welfare program. Further, the community coconut plantation, small piggery and poultry farms were also raised in their colony. Police Out Post and Police Radio Centre too were provided in the Strait Island. A set of officials like the social worker, power house operator, pharmacist, *anganwadi* worker, teacher, farm attendant, police constables and police radio operator were positioned for a period of three years or more in the colony to render the public services. Free residential accommodation for these officials and a small Guest House for touring officers were made available in the Settlement. The social worker being in-charge of the Settlement, dispensed the *gift* in the form of government *doles* and *freebies* to the aborigines.

Impact of Welfare: It was, in fact, a hard and perhaps long posting in Strait Island for all these officials accustomed to urban living. Most of them were young unmarried men living in such a desolate place where: there was no usual means of entertainment available to officials for timepass after their duty hours, as the satellite television provided by the Information and Publicity Department remained mostly out of order, since service of maintenance engineers was not easily accessible at this remote island; facilities for sports and games were not available; nonetheless the hook and line fishing, a feasible, easy, affordable and individual sporting activity could have been a good timepass, but somehow it was not picked up by the officials; no means of communication with their family and friends as there was no telephone link to the island (it was pre-mobile phone / pre-internet world), however, the police radio could be used for non-official i.e., personal purposes too by the officials for sending the telegraphic messages in their crying needs; no provision for the any day travel in the absence of inter-island shipping service to this islet in those days, nonetheless, a ship could certainly arrive at Strait Island in medical emergency for evacuation of serious patient, when such help is sought through the police radio; otherwise, the small boat owned by the welfare agency (AAJVS) under Tribal Welfare Department would provide a free lift for the approved movement of officials periodically, say once in a month, during its scheduled voyages for reaching ration articles / consumer goods to the Andamanese Settlement; and no eatery / restaurant at all on the island, hence officials had to daily labor in preparing their own food by buying groceries from the Andamanese cooperative society. Thus, the everyday life of the officials at Strait Island was undoubtedly onerous, exacting and perhaps monotonous. Hence, they would be geeked out to seize any diversion whatsoever including the vices like drinking the smuggled liquor and womanizing the tribal dames. Such employees offered the alcohol as *freebie* to the blokes, most among them were known bibulous guys and hence would readily turn addicts, while they gave the cosmetics, often drinks too as *gifts* to women folk to lure and abuse them to such an extent that many women bore love children who stood out distinctly with biological features / looks that are not at all of Negritos. Andamanese largely pandered to such officials as they became dependent on liquor given by the officials which was obtained clandestinely, since its supply was prohibited at a Strait Island, the notified tribal reserve.

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The Andamanese children witnessed the elders drinking alcohol wantonly and indulging in adultery which influenced them in their upbringing. Hindi became the lingua franca at Strait Island, even amongst aborigines themselves, replacing their tribal dialect. Few grown up boys and girls were given low jobs as welfare *gift* by the Administration and so, they came in contact with non-tribal people away from Strait Island. These contacts developed in to love affairs leading to marriages and the most of such wedlock landed eventually on the rocks, like in one case, the non-tribal husband abandoned his tribal wife after many years; in another case the non-tribal wife became notorious by her bossiness over her husband and even on other Andamanese; in yet another but much later case, the tribal husband could not endure the atrocious behavior of his non-tribal wife and ultimately committed suicide. Notwithstanding few such distressing cases of inter community marriages and exploitation by a handful of officials posted there, the Andamanese had a modicum of community life, observing certain traditional customs and practices in the Settlement for three and half decades at Strait Island with some increase in their population though at a snail's pace. Author, being the then Director of Tribal Welfare, sanctioned liberally for the tools, equipment and every other benevolent help sought by the Andamanese, apart from putting in place an effective administrative arrangement to ensure regular visit of the doctor to the Settlement to provide necessary health care in situ, and further strongly recommended for a short duration posting of the fully briefed officials mandated with clearly defined welfare specific duties, and also for regular inspection visits of the supervisory officers to the island, so that, those officials in the island perforce remained, all through their short-term posting, preoccupied in tribal welfare and salutary activities. Consequently the author could note distinctly during his periodical tours to that island, the visible replacing of the old gloom by their zest for life with a ray of hope and an elan in their day today activities like: building canoes by old people; adults going for turtle hunting; women collecting the turtle eggs, coconuts and fire wood for cooking; families comprising of husband, wife and children sailing occasionally in their canoes for more than ten hours to reach the distant Englis Island and camp there for days engaged in their traditional hunting and gathering ventures. Thus, the Andamanese would have continued in this way to live a nearly normal and happy life.

Aftermath of Tsunami and Ultimate Dark Age: But then comes the tsunami disaster of 26 December, 2004. Though the Andamanese did not suffer casualties under monstrous sea waves, - as they ran to high ground away from coast relying on their ethnic premonition of impending danger at sea shore following a severe earthquake, - the tsunami destroyed the infrastructure on Strait Island including their houses, school, jetty, powerhouse. They were evacuated to Port Blair and housed in the existing tribal transit accommodation, the Aadi Basera, which was declared as relief camp where they were to stay long with least chance to pursue their traditional activities. So, the author, - who as per the decision of the Administration, was flown to the worst affected island, the Car Nicobar, by Indian Air Force aircraft in the afternoon of the same day of tsunami bang, to manage the disaster in its immediate aftermath, in view of his earlier experience as the Deputy Commissioner of the Nicobar district, - ensured, on his return after weeks from Nicobar, that the Andamanese get the necessary raw materials and tools, so that they could keep themselves engaged in productive activity like making their traditional artefacts including variety of tribal ornaments during their stay in that relief camp instead of idling around that camp / street corners in the town. The children were given admission in Port Blair schools including private schools and the Administration footed the bill covering every expenditure under the *gift* package of free education as the school at Strait Island was not restarted since its building reconstruction took years. Later, only adult Andamanese were sent back to Strait Island after their houses were somehow renovated to a large extent, while their gullible school going children continued to stay in Port Blair and grew up among non-tribal people. Most of them had love affairs and many of them married non-tribal youths, thereby facing the consequences of troubled marriage. The exposure to non-tribals was not the only villain of the inter-ethnic matrimonies, in fact, the tiny size of the population of the Andamanese, that is, just 43 (Census 2001) was the major conspirator. The incest taboo norms did not permit marriage alliance of the youngsters within that small tribal society and so elders tacitly approved the inter-community nuptials along with silent acquiescence of Tribal Welfare department. The Administration then employed virtually all literate youths by providing them with some petty jobs in various departments without going through normal competitive process and also allotted residential accommodation out of turn as the exceptional case, which in effect was a part of the state welfare *gift.* Many unemployed non-tribal youths particularly men turned out as the suitors who found such Andamanese in government service as the propitious choice to marry and get the assured livelihood source for themselves. The employed Andamanese were all posted in Port Blair itself, though the author suggested Strait Island as the place for their positioning and further to meet the government's basic rule, recommended for shifting such low-key posts to the Strait Island in view of larger tribal interest to enable these young government servants to rejoin their parents and try to lead the community life. However, the bureaucratic tangle failed that sugestion. These

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youngsters while living in Port Blair became habitual drunkards as the alcohol was available in open in that town and the salary they got was squandered largely on liquor and some even purchased motor cars under the influence of non-tribal people on payment of instalments offered by automobile dealers and hired the drivers as they did not have the driving license themselves. The social and economic link with their parents and relatives of these employees got increasingly weakened under the impact of their non-tribal spouses and the newfound interpersonal relations with urban people. Over a period of time, they lost their tribal dialect and culture under the domineering influence of non-tribal people in that town, apart from being subjected to various exploitation especially of women. The unmistakable reality is that these government employees on their superannuation, bereft of all those *gifts,* will have to vacate the residential accommodation, thereby they would become homeless as they failed to build their own house in the town since they did not have savings. They would no longer afford lavish drinks with meagre amount of pension leading to depression along with deteriorating health. Having lost their socio-economic linkage with their aging root community at Strait Island, they would be miserable and likely to land up in vagrant pre-1969 situation, unless the preventive and promotive measures contained in the draft Tribal Policy for the Andamanese submitted by the author (as the Director of Tribal Research Institute) to the Administration in 2019 are implemented. In addition to the loss of ethnic culture, they are set to lose even their Negrito racial identity totally in the years to come and that would be the ultimate Dark Age of the Andamanese tribe and the saddest fallout of the *gift* giving.

IV. Fall of the Onges from the Golden Age

Heydays of the Onges: After the Andamanese, it is the Onges who fell from their golden age and once again the *gifts* played the trick. In the long past, it was the only Onges who populated Little Andaman Island and had the full sway over the Passage, Cinque and Rutland Islands for their subsistence. They were hostile to all outsiders whoever landed at Little Andaman and therefore, they remained insulated against all foreign ills and lived a vibrant hunting gathering way of life with large enough population. That was their long Golden Age. Later, they too faced almost similar vicissitudes like those of Andamanese, subsequent to the founding of Penal Settlement in the Andamans at Port Blair by the British. In 1867 eight members of crew including the captain of the ship, the 'Assam Valley' were killed when they landed on Little Andaman and encountered the Onges. Subsequently, British administration sent a punitive expedition of armed forces to Little Andaman and nearly 70 aborigines were massacred in fierce battle on the island and five soldiers of that battle got the highest British gallantry award, the Victoria Cross.

Despite such a gory experience in the hands of the powerful British mariners and their naval supremacy, the Onges neither turned in, nor gave up their ferocity. They continued their tradition of going to the neighboring northern islands for their routine livelihood activities. Their age-old practice of sailing in the canoes to up to Rutland Island to collect the turtle eggs was kept up without any let up. During one such trip, 25 aborigines were seized by the British in 1885; 11 of them were brought to Port Blair; were treated well and then sent them back to the Little Andaman with a lot of *gifts.* In due course, the Onges gave up their hostility under the persistent influence of such friendly overtures by the British. In furtherance of friendly relations, there were several other visits to Little Andaman by various English men and thereby some details about the Onges were gathered. Accordingly, the population of Onges was estimated in 1901 as 672, which declined to roughly 631 in 1911, 321 in 1921, 250 in 1931 and this sliding trend continued with exact headcount of 150 in 1951, 129 in 1961, 112 in 1971 (Census of India 1931, 1951, 1961 and 1971). The actual reason for such decline is not known, however, the most likely cause could have been the alien diseases spread through the sporadic contacts with the visiting outsiders, as that was the only novelty, the new situation appearing in the later part of their golden age i.e., following the founding the Penal Settlement by British in the islands.

The End of Onges Golden Age: The second chapter of the cultural history of Onges began in 1967 with the influx of the outlanders to become their permanent neighbors on Little Andaman being the fallout of partition of vast British India into two independent nations i.e., India and Pakistan at the end of colonial rule in 1947. The world's worst displacement of more than 14 million people and their cross exodus took place, as a result of which thousands and thousands of Bengalis from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) migrated to the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, apart from, even larger migration of Punjabis and Sindhis from the Pakistan to Indian states of Punjab, Delhi, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. These uprooted Bengali people were accommodated in number of the refugee transit camps waiting for their resettlement by the Government. Further, the mass migration of people in reverse direction after several decades, in the backdrop of the British colonialism, and its end in Indian subcontinent is another human agony, like in the case of repatriation of 600000 Indian origin Tamil speaking Sri Lankans to India in terms of Srimavo-Shatri Pact, 1964 (also known as Indo-Ceylon Agreement). Still further, following that uprooting, the process of resettling those repatriates led to unsettling of some others elsewhere which is, yet

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another human misery. Under such historical situation, apart from other Indian states, the suitable islands in the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar archipelago being sparsely populated were also chosen to rehabilitate these Bengali refugees and other displaced communities.

Accordingly, parts of thickly forested Little Andaman along with other sufficiently big islands were cleared to settle the uprooted families as the agriculturists. Out of 734 sq. km of Little Andaman, about 34 sq. km. eastern part of the island was deserved and notified as the revenue area for implementation of the colonization scheme drawn up by the Government to relocate: (a) 375 families of Bengali refugees (Sen, 2017:160) constituting the largest community among settlers of Little Andaman; (b) while smaller number of families of Sri Lankan Tamil repatriates; (c) the descendant families of Moplahs of South Andaman (estimated 1400 (Sasikumar, 2021: 29), about 2000 (Anderson, C, 2018) convicts belonging to Moplah, the Muslim community of Malabar region in South India involved in Moplah Rebellion of 1921 were transported to Andaman by British; in view of rampant " unnatural vice" in Penal Settlement, the Government, by easing out their punishment term, the Moplah convicts, were helped to get their families from Malabar and to settle in South Andaman by allotting them agricultural land; their population increased over the years; later, the request for land for their offsprings was considered by the Administration under the ongoing colonization scheme); and (d) 100 Nicobarese families of densely populated Car Nicobar Island (to reduce its population pressure). As such, the endings of 1960s and mid '70s with settling of all such outlanders in Little Andaman Island, made the beginning of the end of the golden age of Onges.

Government Gift Package: Concerned with well-being of the hunting gathering Onges in the context of settling of disproportionately large number of outsiders, the Andaman and Nicobar Administration, in their own wisdom to assuage this original inhabitant ethnic community, decided to give the Onges a *gift* package of welfare programs in 1976 by settling them permanently in a place. In fact, the declared purpose, as indicated by an article included in the booklet titled *Retrieval from Precipice* brought out in 1976 by the registered Society (Andaman Aadim Janjati Vikas Samithi (AAJVS), an organization 100% funded by the government and headed by the Administrator of A & N Administration), was to "provide the basic facilities of hygienic living and protection against the elements of nature." Under this *gift* package, the aborigines were persistently persuaded: (a) to settle permanently in the houses built for them at Dugong Creek in the North-Eastern part, away from settlers' villages, instead of moving from place to place in search of food; (b) to accept the monthly free ration items of rice, wheat flour, vegetable oil, spices, salt, sugar, tea powder to subsist; (c) to don garments supplied and desist moving around naked; (d) to accept the free medical care; (e) and to send children to the school opened at Dugong Creek. The other *gifts* in that package given were in the form of water supply, power supply, helipad, jetty, medical sub-center, community hall, police radio center for communication and large coconut plantation, tribal cooperative society. Like in Strait Island, a small contingent of officials, including a social worker, auxiliary nurse & midwife (ANM), pharmacist, powerhouse operator, police radio operator, teachers, a detachment of the Police force, was positioned in the Dugong Creek to render necessary services. Unlike in the case of Andamanese, these officials did not become the meddlers for Onges, except turning their men as boozers which however was no less a bane, discussed below. Administration considered the Dugong Creek Onges Settlement, founded in 1976, as a model project for welfare of nomadic tribe and made it as a routine to show it to the dignitaries visiting Andaman Islands by organizing every time a short event in the community hall and get the *gift* packets containing clothes, biscuits and such other items distributed to the aborigines through the guests on the flying visit by helicopter.

Other welfare schemes including dairy and piggery were are also *gifted* to the Onges by supplying cows, bulls and pigs by the Animal Husbandry department with a view to improve their diet. They were told to milk the cows and consume it themselves and feed the children also with milk, but the aborigines did not do so. It was beyond their imagination that the milk meant for calves could be snatched away and used by the man. In this context, the recent researches may be recalled here which show that the humans began to use the milk just 5000 years ago, long after the Agricultural Revolution (Grambier Jeff, 2023, January 16), while the aborigines of Andaman Islands have remained isolated from the rest of the world since their occupation of these remote territories more than 50,000 years ago and hence were unaware of dairy items as food. A small number of dairy animals provided as *gift* to the Onges proliferated into a big herd in few years, as there was abundant foliage in and around the Settlement to graze and further the calves could grow fast and healthy on getting their mother's milk exclusively for themselves. That is not the end. It became a common scene of the strong bulls fighting not only among themselves but also fatally charging the people in Dugong Creek including Onges. It was a tough task for this author in early 1990s as Director of Tribal Welfare to get these dangerous cattle herd shifted away from Dugong Creek by catching the ferocious bulls and cows, load them on to the ship for transporting them elsewhere. The *gift* of piggery scheme introduced among aborigines was also

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withdrawn within a couple of years as the aborigines did not like the slumbering, big Yorkshire white pigs reared in the enclosures, against the familiar wild, black pigs, oinking and trotting in the forest, those they hunt.

The *gift* of regular food supply had far-reaching consequences on the Onges. Over the years, they gave up the agile hunting gathering activities, building canoes and other livelihood pursuits by leading indolent sedentary way of life subsisting on the *gift* of ration supplied every month. This inactive living, clubbed with cereals based, carbohydrate rich diet replacing the animal-based protein and fat rich balanced paleo-diet led to the advent of alien morbidity like obesity, hypertension, diabetes and tuberculosis. Further, while some adults turned obese, the children became under-nourished and one of the reasons for this malnutrition could be the mere change in the schedule of cooking the food in the family. Onges women began to prepare *paratha*, - the oiled thick *roti* (unleavened bread) introduced along with *gift* ration - mostly late in the forenoon and not in the morning for the first meal of the day, till then the children remained hungry, thereby missing the breakfast, as against the old practice of keeping, all the time, the big chunk of pork hung from the roof over hearth for smoking, in their huts, so that the children, for that matter anybody, could grab pieces of it and eat whenever hungry. Further, the Onges aborigines have become depressing dole dependent, that too on an external agency, the AAJVS, providing them that *gift* package of largesse, which is not under their control, thereby losing their age-old and high-spirited, total self-reliance.

Gift of Liquor, Chieftain System and Associated Tragedies: Though the Dugong Creek was remote place, it was not totally isolated as the officials can trek for about three hours to reach the bustling settlers' villages and the Hut Bay, a mofussil town to rejoice with food, drinks and reboot themselves before returning to dull place, the Dugong Creek. In fact, many of them keep making some or other official visits, for example, the teacher taking students' attendance sheet to submit it to the higher authorities; constable reaching some report to Police Station at Hut Bay; pharmacist going to Primary Health Center to collect medicines or the social worker going to meet Tehsildar, the administrative head of Little Andaman. Nonetheless, some officials did take to regular drinking the liquor obtained stealthily to overcome boredom / loneliness at Dugong Creek. They began to offer clandestinely the smuggled liquor to Onges men as a *gift* initially and later in return of the domestic services, like sweeping, dishwashing etc. rendered by those Onges men in the official residences of the Government employees leading to the addiction of menfolk to the drinks and eventually turning dependent on such officials. Fortuitously, the women folk did not fall prey to liquor addiction as they were not exposed to outsiders and their tricks. Hence, they did not undergo the sexual abuse by the outlanders that the Andamanese women folk did. Furthermore, Onges did not face the serious crisis due to nonexistence of eligible and marriageable youths within their community though there were a couple of families with spouses of incompatible age. For instance, former 63-year-old widower Onges Chief married a 13-year-old girl, and parallel to this, an 18-year-old boy had to marry a widow of 46-year-old; that Chief passed away before his young wife came of age and this youthful dowager could marry another man after many years, and thus she frittered away her own reproductive age, while in the other case, that old wife also died at her mid-sixties without bearing a child for his husband. So, these twin episodes were not cheering for the small community, otherwise, that Chief's remarriage with that midlife widow would have been instrumental for some growth in the Onges population, contributed through the expected marriage of those juvenile girl and boy. The explanation for such a situation lies in the state *gift* package implemented among the Onges. Disregarding the egalitarian / non-stratified Onges society, the authorities in early days nominated an elderly man as the chief of tribe to provide a communication link between the tribe and the Administration and he was nominated as the Member of the erstwhile (1979 - 1994) Pradesh Council, the democratically elected body in archipelago as the representative of the islands' PVTGs. He got a newfound high status with dominating attitude over his fellow tribesmen and so, he could choose to marry a little girl which otherwise was not acceptable, if he were not given the position of the Chief by the Administration. So, in a way, it was a *gift* in the form of a new system imposed on the Onges by the outsiders with the tragic consequences.

The government employees on completion of their fixed tenure of 2 to 3 years at a place like Dugong Creek are generally transferred to another place. It appears that the officials posted at the Onges Settlement in 2008 were incidentally teetotalers, that means, the Onges men did not get liquor from them and further, it was not all that easy for them to go to the far away mofussil township, the Hut Bay to work there to obtain liquor and above all, no non-tribal would venture to employ Onges because of various government restriction meant for tribal protection. Thus, Dugong Creek became actually dry area in that period (in accordance with the existing laws under which prohibition should be the norm in the tribal areas). Under such dispensation, one day, two Onges men found a big brown bottle on the beach washed ashore and to their pleasant surprise, they got the smell of alcohol on opening it (practice of collecting such containers for their use is common). So, they mistook the chemical in that bottle as liquor and they guzzled enough of it. They brought home that bottle still containing a lot of liquor and shared it with other men.

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Within hours they fell seriously ill, two of them who drank first succumbed in the Dugong Creek, others were taken in the small boat to the Primary Health Centre in the settlers' village (Ramkrishnapuram) where six more of them lost their lives and two lost their vision permanently. Subsequent enquiry revealed that the chemical in that bottle was a poisonous liquid with alcoholic content. It was a major tragedy of death of eight persons resulting in grave setback for this small tribe within a couple of days.

Relevance of Schooling: Formal education through the school is another *gift* received by the Onges leading to repugnant consequences. The record is that, not a single Onges has passed out the 10th standard (equivalent to British General Certificate of Secondary Education and US Sophomore) in the nearly five-decade history of school at Dugong Creek. In the modern societies, a system has come to prevail wherein undergoing a prescribed formal education and certification to that effect is taken widely as a primary step to get a job to earn the livelihood. In that context, the relevance of such education becomes questionable in respect of the Onges tribe having their own age-old independent, sound and self-reliant livelihood. The analytical evaluation reveals that such schooling has been alienating the aborigines from their vivacious vocation as the children are bombarded with locally irrelevant information and turning their attention away from the interest in their time-tested livelihood matters. Some students have started idling / watching films downloaded in mobile phones. In fact, the schooling is doing more harm than any good as evident in the case of Ramu, a literate Onges youth. He was appointed to a lower job in the Shipping Services Department by the A & N Administration and was posted away in Port Blair where he, having enough money received as salary, began to drink alcohol excessively and so, lost his health within few years. Further, one day in a drunken state, he playfully kept on enraging the Forest Department's tusker in the Hut Bay area when its *mahout* (elephant keeper) was away. That annoyed elephant, to get rid of this nuisance grabbed Ramu by its trunk, then flung him and crushed him to death instantly. Thus, this Onges youth ended his life without leading the normal married life in Dugong Creek and leaving no offspring of his own, failing thereby to contribute in the growth of this tiny ethnic population.

Onges cultural practices, intricately connected with their traditional livelihood, are disappearing on losing the relevance in their new way of dull life sustaining on alms and the *gifts.* A separate Tribal Policy for the Onges and a concrete plan for reversing the current disconcerting way of the Onges existence and then for their rejuvenation, that is, for their transiting into the New Golden Age has been submitted in 2019 to the Andaman and Nicobar Administration by the author in his capacity of the Director of Tribal Research Institute. Now, it is high time for the Administration to work for ensuring the meaningful life for the Onges. The medical care provided to them has a positive impact to the extent of gradual increase in their population to 131 in 2023. Further, the aborigines including youths need to be persuaded to avail the traditional knowledge of old people and go for active life necessary for their healthy living by engaging themselves in hunting, fishing and gathering activities, before the exit of the old generation from the scene. The elderly people are willing to lead the youngsters and thereby revive their cultural elements to lead meaningful life and the Administration can provide the benevolent *gift* package by way of facilitating the Onges community in this direction.

V. Jarawas's Transit from Golden Age to Silver Age

Attempts to Oust the Outlanders: With the decimation of Andamanese population by the early 20th century because of their failure to realize the trap laid by the outsiders through the *gifts,* their vast territory became accessible to their neighbors, the Jarawas. The astute Jarawas could notice some of the changes in the lifestyle of their next-door co-residents, the Andamanese, for example: cloaking their body with alien material i.e., cloth *gifted* by outsiders; infrequent hunting and gathering activity pursued by them, as they frequented the habitation of that outlanders; and perhaps an eye-opener, the alarming mass fatality due to the epidemic diseases unknown to them. Further, they were wise enough to foresee the such peril in the friendship with strangers and hence, continued to use their protective shield, the age-old hostility to outsiders and stoutly rejected the friendly overtures of those outlanders. The Jarawas who themselves were not more than 300 to 350 in number mainly homed in the interior regions, -- hence they did not have canoes like those possessed by all other Negrito tribes -- enjoyed the unlimited resources available in an expanded extensive territory including coastal zone once occupied by their erstwhile neighbors, the Andamanese. Such riches of the Jarawas remained pristine till mid-20th century and then began to get poundings in 1950s to 1970s and beyond with execution of Indian government project of the rehabilitation of Bengali refugees as agriculturists mentioned earlier accompanied by a slew of development programs for these outlanders by encroaching the Jarawas territory. First Five-Year Plan approved by the government in 1952 envisaged 20,000 acres and subsequent Plan 11,900 acres of forest land for clearance (Krishnakumar, 2009:110). The flat lands and valleys, - having sea connection directly or through straits / creeks, - wherever found in North, Middle and South Andaman group of islands were selected for clear-felling the standing forest by deploying the gangs

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of workers, heavy machinery and also the elephants (for logging) under the protection of armed Bush Police. Thereafter, the displaced families were settled by allotting each of them five acres of paddy land and five acres of hilly land for homestead horticulture at the cleared land to live there as farmers. The waterways and not motorways were the lifeline for these new islanders, in otherwards, boats / ships were the means of transport for them.

At the outset, the Jarawas took these gangs manifestly as their enemies for destroying the very base of their livelihood resource, the forest and also as the devils for possessing lifeless yet powerful things like bulldozers, earthmovers and grotesque alien animals, the tuskers. Determined to fight these invaders out, the Jarawas began to shoot them from behind large tree trunks / buttresses with their bow and arrows. In return, they could hear only booming and nothing else to see, but the impact was fatal, as the bullets shot by the Bush Police were deadly. It is not known as to how many aborigines were killed during such forest clearing operations. Then the Jarawas saw large groups of people coming to live in thatched shelters raised in one corner of the cleared land, while the thick grass coming up in rest of that cleared land subsequently. Later, they saw that grass being cut and shifted to the huts (for threshing) and at this, the bewildered aborigines believed that these strange humans subsist on grass and not on games or fruits. Naturally, they were then unaware of the paddy crop (which looks like grass) grown by the farmers for food. Further, the nomadic autochthons were amused to find these strangers continuing to stay in the same location instead of shifting their encampments after certain period. On the other hand, they witnessed hordes of such outlanders indulging in similar activities in many more other areas thereby encroaching their hunting ground. In less than two decades a large number of settlers' villages for about 4000 Bengali refugee families (Lorea, 2017) came up across the Great Andaman group of islands.

The Jarawas, further noticed the newcomers not confining their activities within the cleared land i.e., villages, but continuing to exploit the forest resources by them in variety ways through frequent forays in to the jungle. The settler families were provided with facility under the A & N Islands Protected Forests, Rules, 1986 (https://forest.and.nic.in) to draw the royalty-free forest produce at the prescribed scale mentioned below for their domestic consumption: 15 cubic meter timber in round for construction of a new house once; 6 cbm once in 5 years for house repairs; 1 cbm once in 5 years for construction of agricultural implements / dinghy; and every year the Minor Forest Produce like: 2 cords of firewood; 500 bamboos; 200 canes; 100 *ballies*; 20 posts; 2000 thatching leaves. As such, settlers kept going in to forest to obtain their said quota. The fresh water resources i.e., streams flowing in the forest were taped to supply drinking water to the villagers and small dams across such streams, pipeline laid in the forest were regularly maintained. Further, the forest was surveyed to make 'working plan' by the government to extract the timber / softwood for sale, since the colonial policy of commodification of forest was still not given up by Indian government. Andaman forest was considered as the good source to meet the growing demand in timber, plywood, match, and packaging industries in the country and also to earn foreign currency (Krishnakumar, 2009: 110). Spotted deer, - introduced by British as the game animal in early 1900s, - having been proliferated freely in the absence of its carnivore predators, and being good swimmer spreading across the Jarawas territory i.e., Great Andaman group of islands, became the game for hunting by the newcomers mainly for its meat. Above all, to avoid the encounter with Jarawas, Bush Police kept firing in air intermittently along the patrolling line to scare them away from the vicinity of that line and thereby resulting in interference in pig hunting, as the boar aimed at would sprint off due to gun boom. All these actions in the forest amounted to an unending onslaught by the outsiders on autochthons and their resources. Hence, the latter were ruthless in arrowing down the former whenever found in the jungle.

The aborigines noticed yet another strange activity of the non-autochthons in clearing the long and narrow strip of standing forest along the ridges, instead of that in wide areas at valleys and plains unlike in the past, and of course, deploying the same heavy machines and tuskers for this task. It was the road construction work connecting the village settlements and laying of Andaman Trunk Road (ATR) in 1970s, overlooking the fact that it was the sea and not the road as the economical and sustainable infrastructure of transport in the islands' territory. As expected, the Jarawas tried to stall those works of ATR, now National Highway 4 connecting Port Blair in South Andaman with Diglipur in North Andaman Island cutting across the hunting ground of the autochthons. Besides shooting down the workers gang from behind the sprawling tree buttresses with their arrows in a lightning fashion giving a shocking surprise to Bush Police guard, the aborigines raised the road-blocks in the nights, despite many of them getting electrocuted because of contrivances put up by the road construction agency as the stratagem to overcome the tribal stiff resistance. Unrecorded number of such killings became a controversial public issue and the Government suspended the work of ATR construction. But after few years, the voice of settlers demanding road connectivity subserving their interest became so much more powerful over the interest of autochthons that the Administration yielded to it and finally the laying of ATR was completed and was opened for public transport. Even then, the Jarawas did not relent their fight against

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the non-autochthons and continued their attacks with their bows and arrows now on travelers / motorists i.e., buses, trucks and cars moving on the ATR. The convoy system for the safety of travelers against the fatal arrows, - allowing the vehicles with all windows fully closed to ply in limited and fixed convoys during daytime only under the armed police escort and with a set of stern Do's and Don'ts for motorists and passengers, - did not hinder the Jarawas in their attempt to oust the strange outlanders.

Befriending the Jarawas: A sizable Bush Police force was positioned at strategic camp locations for regular security patrolling along the cleared narrow path at the periphery of the villages to prevent the Jarawas attacks and also enforce tribal protection law, that is, Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation, 1956 by preventing the entry of non-tribal people into notified Jarawas tribal area, in addition to providing protection to highway travelers. Despite such tight security, the undeterred Jarawas continued their guerrilla warfare against these new outlandish neighbors and so, the latter suffered many casualties. Though ultimately, the Jarawas could not expel these encroachers, nonetheless they remained as the most dreaded people for the settlers and all other outsiders thereby the latter's safety persisted as the burning issue for the Administration. So, the Bush Police under the Andaman and Nicobar Administration intending to break this perpetual hostile situation, took an initiative to adopt the colonial British strategy of befriending the hostile tribes. Thus, began the practice of organizing friendly contact missions regularly, approaching the autochthons from the sea front by using the boats and then on sighting the Jarawas group in the coastal area, drop the *gifts* of coconuts, banana and pieces of red cloth on the beach at the safe distance from the Jarawas and retreat quickly. Jarawas readily discovered the coconut and banana as edible items, since coco palm was found in Andaman Islands though rarely and so was the wild variety of banana. Red being a prominent and clearly visible color, the cloth of that hue was taken just as a marker of the contact team. Such cloth could be easily procured from the local market and pieces of that could be wrapped conveniently around the head of the contact team members to attest symbolically the identity of the friendly contact party and also give it as a goodwill signifier *gift* to the Jarawas. Years of such efforts led in striking friendly contact with the Jarawas of Middle Andaman in 1974 and thereby, they turned affable to the visiting contact party. No such feat could be achieved in next one and half decade in respect of the Jarawas of South Andaman.

Though, this friendly contact was the first major step in addressing the hostilities, the aborigines still carried on with their unabated killing raids on villagers. Generally, such attacks took place in the witching hours of moonlit nights having no requirement of other light and further finding the enemies including the security forces asleep. Otherwise, the attacks in the dark nights carrying their burning resin torch could have been strategically suicidal as they could have been spotted from distance by someone or the other awake and alerted the Bush Police to open fire. Further, in the post-contact situation, the Jarawas began to plunder the coconuts, banana, clothes and iron implements that they found them in farms of the villagers. The aborigines were well aware of the utility of iron in making the arrow tips and knives for more than hundred years and now they could find it inland as well in addition to the coastal areas. The cloth they picked up during the raids was torn into fine strips and used them for their personal ornamentation as necklace or waist-lace particularly by women. After 1974, the Andaman and Nicobar Administration began to send a bigger vessel to Middle Andaman carrying the contact party consisting of anthropologists, linguists, doctor, and others including Police under the leadership of an officer of the Tribal Welfare department. It was not difficult for the Jarawas of Middle Andaman from Middlestrait in south to Louise Inlet Bay in north to differentiate the periodical visitors i.e., benefactor contact party from the encroachers of their territory, the neighborhood villagers, and accordingly they were friendly to contact team and hostile to the villagers.

Intelligence and Quick Learning: Though the Administration was at its wits end over the hostile attitude of the Jarawas towards settlers and friendly to contact party, the contact missions were not given up. The author, who was posted as the Director of Tribal Welfare in 1988, began to lead the contact expeditions and initiated certain new practices like: taking the pieces of iron also as another *gift,* since, this metal being useful for the Jarawas in making their implements; prolonging the time duration spent with the Jarawas on the beach and studying them; encouraging other members of the contact team also to make observations on the behavior of the aborigines and holding deliberations on them onboard the vessel during its return voyage; record their voices during the contact with them so as to enable linguists to study their dialect; ensuring that none of the team members poaching the beach to collect sea shells, driftwood and colorful floats (detached from fishing nets) as memento of Jarawas contact; inspiriting the doctor, though primarily meant for the team, to attend to the minor health issues of aborigines, particularly treating their physical injuries being quite common among them, as a goodwill gesture / *gift.* This turned out as a big hit leading to more and more Jarawas folk seeking such effective cure by approaching the doctor, on their own, in next/ subsequent visits as their wounds got healed fast and fully. It was just a primary care given by applying the

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first-aid antibiotic ointment and gauge bandage. That was highly effective since they were all non-diabetic (as revealed a decade later in the multidisciplinary study noted earlier). Jarawas were intelligent enough to assess the efficacy of the treatment and so, accepted it readily

A new type of *gift* giving system was introduced by way of carrying the coconut seedlings and banana suckers in addition to other usual *gift* items of coconuts, banana-hands and then involving the Jarawas in the demonstration of the entire process of transplantation i.e., selecting the open patches of land in the forest near their huts, digging the pits, planting the seedlings and fencing them. They were sharp enough to quickly learn and then began to plant on their own taking the material from the contact party when they understood that in near future, they need not have to undertake the hazardous raids on settler's farms to get coconuts and banana, as the seedlings planted by them would be bearing such fruits. Similarly in another situation few years later, their striking ability of fast learning was noticed when both men and women could pick up Hindi within a year following their interface with outsiders in villages and roads. As a result of active participation of Jarawas in planting the seedlings, a number of small patches of dispersed plantation came up in Middle Andaman including Spike Island within next 5 – 6 years, which were well tended by the Jarawas, as recorded during the contact expeditions. All this apart, they did not stop attacking the villagers as their attempts to boot out the outsiders were not petered out, since their problem due these outlanders persisted and hence, the Administration on its part did not let up in its efforts by continuing the practice of sending befriending expeditions. While leading such contact missions to Middle Andaman, the author accomplished the first friendly contact with three Jarawas men of Port Campbell region of South Andaman on 1st March, 1989, by landing and giving them the usual *gifts.* This was another breakthrough after 15 years, following the one in 1974 mentioned above, therefore it hit the headline news in the local Press (*The Daily Telegrams* dated 3rd March, 1989). Thereafter, purposefully no such friendly contacts with the Jarawas of South Andaman were made, because their hostility was the most effective protection against outlanders. Hence, there was no question of *gift* giving to these autochthons and thus, the entry of Trojan Horse in to the Troy of the Jarawas of South Andaman was averted.

Canniness and Communication: The Jarawas are vastly ingenious, extremely keen observers and good communicators as noticed by us on several occasions during the contact expeditions. For example, it was not unusual for the contact party at times to not to find the aborigines in the coastal areas. During one such mission, our ship kept mooring in the coastal waters, wailing the siren intermittently for a couple of hours, but our binoculars failed to show us any Jarawas around. A little later, when we began to sail back home, a faint cloud of smoke emanating through the coastal forest was noticed and so, we turned around and reached there by lifeboats to find a Jarawas couple which had spotted our ship from a hilltop and then had run to the shore to raise fire smoke signaling us about their presence and about ours to other Jarawas. Within half an hour, a large flock of them arrived there at the spot with their hunt and food collections and thereby our that expedition was also consummated. Another instance showing their candid common sense is recalled hereunder. The contact team always comprised of the bare bodied men in short pants. However, on one of occasion, a young lady officer in lose shirt and full pant insisted to accompany the team despite the admonitory of the mission leader and after knowing very well that it would be embarrassing for her as the reaction of Jarawas men towards women visitors was not known till then. After standard medical screening, our party reached the Jarawas area and landed on shore as usual. They saw, for the first time, so closely a fully cloaked curvy human, whom they readily suspected as a female. A group of women Jarawas encircled that lady officer, fondled her chest one by one to feel the boobs under her shirt and brassiere and came back giggling while the men chuckled at that. Anyway, after a short while that busty lady was sent away to board the ship to avoid likely melee at the shore.

Buffer zone for Jarawas: A large part of western region of South and Middle Andaman Islands was declared in 1957 as the tribal reserve by the Administration under the Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation, 1956 (Notification No. ANPATR/3/(1)/1 dated 2nd April, 1957, *The Andaman & Nicobar Gazette Extraordinary*) to prevent the entry of non-tribal people in to the reserve area. However, this step served a limited purpose as villagers entering the forest could not make out the notified area, since the demarcation on the ground was not done to indicate the boundary of that prohibited area. And of course, this act of outlanders was not only unknown but meaningless for the Jarawas. As such, there was no improvement in the intercommunity relation for next four decades. So, the Jarawas's hostility issue for non-autochthons and latter's trespass issue for the Jarawas were to be addressed and for this, the anthropological approach was chosen. Patchy fieldwork was done during the periodical friendly contacts to gather titbits about cultural behavior of Jarawas. For instance, Jarawas looked askance at contact team members in *khaki* (beige color) half pant i.e., Bush Policemen. They had seen the patrolling and firing Bush Police in *khaki* uniform, and hence that was an expression of derision about *khaki* clad men. Employed the "periscopic technique" (Awaradi, 1990: 134-135), to

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understand a little more about the Jarawas by analyzing the observations made by: (a) retired and serving policemen of the Bush Police, as this dedicated force created in 1905 (Singh, 1978: 164) to deal exclusively the autochthons had built up an institutional knowledge on behavior of the Andamanese and Jarawas during its nearly nine decades of operation till then; (b) old villagers having lived as the neighbors of hostile Jarawas for more than forty years and having the folklore about these aborigines. Further, the old and well-oiled practice of territoriality in the inter-tribal i.e., Andamanese and Jarawas interface was widely known, wherein both groups strictly confined their activities within the tacitly accepted boundary, the violation which would result in bloodshed.

Based on all such inputs, the author incorporated the concept of "buffer zone" in the book, *'Master Plan (1991 - 2021) for the Welfare of Primitive Tribes of A & N islands'* published under the aegis of the Administration. The buffer zone is an eight-meter-wide belt in the forest with undergrowth cleared and the trunks of the trees on its edge towards villages / revenue areas, painted with the figures of gunman in *khaki* color against white background indicating danger for Jarawas, and the trunks of the trees on its edge towards tribal reserve, painted with the figures of bowman in black hue on white background signaling grave risk for villagers. Such a belt demarcated beyond 500 meters of revenue area boundaries, leaves rest of the forest exclusively for the Jarawas as tribal reserve, while that up to buffer zone belt remains as resource base for obtaining the minor forest produce by the settlers (Awaradi, 1990: 171 - 175). It was to be a martial coexistence for peace, a tacit truce for both the communities on either side of the buffer zone for the years to come or till the drastic change in field situation. In the meanwhile, as per the mundane government practice, the author was transferred and posted as the Deputy Commissioner of Nicobar district and the Master Plan remained as the proposal only waiting for its execution. Much later, that concept was referred to in the judgement order of Calcutta High Court, while deciding on a public interest litigation filed by an advocate Shyamily Ganguly mentioned earlier and then it was incorporated in the Jarawas Tribal Policy of 2004, notified by the Government and thereafter it was embodied in that Regulation of 1956 through an amendment in 2012 but with different parameters creating perpetual practical problems and litigation.

Enmei Episode: All this while, the Administration continued the system of sending contact expeditions and the Jarawas hostility issue remained as the burning problem for government. Then one day in 1996, about 17-year-old Jarawas boy named Enmei was found by the settlers, lying immobilized with his leg bone broken in the forest at the outskirt of the village Kadamtala in the Middle Andaman. Going by the commonplace approach, the authorities decided for hospitalization of that boy and thereby provide him the welfare *gift,* not realizing that it was a misplaced one and without considering the possible alternate mode of rendering medical aid. Thereafter, the chain of events and the whole story of nearly 10 years was widely reported in Indian and international Press, social media, apart from the books like, *Jarawas Contact: Ours with Them, Theirs with Us* (Mukhopadhyay, K, et.al. 2002) and academic journals including, *The Oriental Anthropologist* (Awaradi, 2022: 22 (1) 173 - 185). The stormy story in brief is about how: (a) that boy was evacuated to the government hospital at Port Blair; (b) he was given treatment including plaster bandage, that is, orthopedic cast, hospital food, dress, several months long confinement in hospital, his interaction with nurses particularly with one who had the dark skin almost similar to his own; (c) then after discharge he was given plenty of *gifts* of clothes along with other items and brought back to set him free at the same spot from where he was picked up; (d) then after an year gap, one day in 1997, that Enmei along with a small group of boys ventured unarmed into that settler's village Kadamtala in broad day light as a big surprise to the Police and villagers who thronged around them, whom they knew only as hostile *junglee* till then; (e) overjoyed Police took them to Police Station, cooked rice in big *ditchi* (aluminium cookware for preparing a community meal) served it to those Jarawas boys treating them as the *guests* before they were sent off; (f) next and following days, Enmei came with his bigger group that included elders and women too to receive similar hospitality from the villagers and the Police in which they observed the usefulness of *ditchi* and hence it turned out as one of the items they began to ask later as the *gift* from the Administration; (g) such friendly visits of Jarawas became the major breaking news in Press and radio broadcasts; (h) then people from distant places also began to reach Kadamtala to have glimpses of the Jarawas; (i) seeing the naked aborigines daily coming out from the jungle, the commoners believed that the Jarawas must be utterly poor and facing dearth of food, and hence began to give them the *gift* of old clothes and all sorts of food items; (j) although it was the Jarawas's curiosity about the outsiders, their strange material objects and perhaps the fun time in the villages that pulled them out and not the hunger; (k) giving the Jarawas some food became soon a kind of cult, as the Indians believe and hold that, of all the charities, offering food to the hungry is supreme deed to gain the religious merit; (l) in the following year i.e. 1998, the Jarawas faction inhabiting South Andaman who after knowing the experience of their northern brethren also began to visit villages and forest camps along the ATR to get similar response from outsiders including residents of Port Blair

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town, who while travelling started throwing packs of biscuits through windows on seeing the Jarawas on ATR, as they also believed that Jarawas suffered starvation ; (m) amidst such *gift* showering interface, the Jarawas got afflicted with the diseases spread from these *gift* givers resulting in the outbreaks of pneumonia epidemic in 1998, measles in 1999 and malaria in 2000 and 2001; (n) during these outbreaks all those who could be brought to the hospitals were saved but the fate of the rest who lived in the inaccessible interior forest remained clouded; (o) bringing the ailing Jarawas to hospital, feeding them with alien food like rice here becoming routine and consequently they developing taste for such food; (p) then the Jarawas issue came under the judicial purview with filing of a public interest litigation in the Calcutta High Court by an advocate; (q) the Expert Committee submitting the report mentioned earlier and based on which the government finally drawing up the Jarawas policy and notifying it in 2004.

Jarawas Tourism: A concerted campaign – (a) by publishing Dos & Don'ts; (b) through public meetings, debates / discussions in schools to bring about awareness among the villagers and travelers regarding the danger to the Jarawas due to *gift* giving and their interaction with outsiders; (c) shifting away the forest camps from roadside of the ATR; (d) removing the eateries at Middlestrait jetty being the source of alien food given by the ATR travelers - was run by the Administration for nearly five years. The field officials were engaged to send the aborigines entering the villages and the roads back to their area in the forest by giving them the *gifts* of banana. Resultantly, the villagers could, by and large, realize the situation and thus they restrained from further giving *gifts* of food, clothes etc. But by then, the tourism wave - facilitated and encouraged through the government policies and plans for vigorous economic reconstruction of Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the aftermath of tsunami disaster of 2004 - brought another twist in the Jarawas's history. It was not just the clean, not so heavily crowded beaches, crystal clear blue sea and enchanting scenes in different islands, limestone caves or mud volcano of Baratang Island but above all, the ancient hunting gathering nude Jarawas became the attraction for the tourists. Since, interaction with the aborigines by non-tribals was prohibited, a sneaky tour circuit, that is, the journey on Andaman Trunk Road from Port Blair to Baratang island and back that goes through the Jarawas hunting ground, became popular and this was run by the private tourism operators. Tourists were prepared to spend heavy sum in taking this package with a hope that they would have glimpses of the Jarawas by chance enroute. This kind of "Jarawas tourism" - despite regulating the traffic including vehicles' moment in limited convoys and other restrictions for the travelers - began to assume ugly shape with despicable instances like: tourists offering the aborigines the food items and crazy *gifts;* indulging in breakdance dragging the naked Jarawas women into it and its videography appearing in social media. These things brought deep discredit to the Administration which came under wide spread criticism for failing in protecting the dignity of the Jarawas.

Gift Clothes: While the Administration was desperate to address above said contemptible situation due to 'Jarawas tourism', the idea of enrobing the naked Jarawas women and men was floated by an expert promoting the notion that it is the nudity that draws the tourists. Buying that proposition the authorities readily approved the plan of providing clothes to the aborigines as the *gift* without realizing its futility and the likely fall out. The field officials began to enforce this newfound decency code of dress for the Jarawas. But contrary to the plan objective, there was no letup in the popularity in 'Jarawas tourism' and in the footfall of tourists. On the other hand, clothing kicked up a series of issues impacting the wellbeing of the Jarawas, who as the population has adapted to the hot, humid, tropical island climate in the long existence of more than 50 millennia. Nudity undoubtedly is best suited to the both weather conditions of summer as well as monsoons in the archipelago for the Jarawas. As against this, the men clad in pant and shirt and women in gown perspire profusely and irritatingly in the muggy summer during their routine hunting gathering activities, apart from the clothes being unwelcome hindrance in their swift moment through bushes in the forest. Sweat dirty clothes started stinking and thereby adversely impacting their skin health, then a suggestion came up for providing the washing soap as the supplementary *gift* to the Jarawas and teach them how to wash clothes, but again without realizing the harm that the chemical in the detergent could cause to Jarawas' health when they clean their clothes during the peak summer (March to May) in tiny brooks or in puddles along the channels which would be scanty and the only source of drinking water for them. Furthermore, this *gift* of clothing became bigger liability for the Jarawas, because during the long rainy season (June to December) their clothes remained wet throughout the hunting gathering as well as while resting in their huts. They could not have so many pairs of clothes to change wet ones every now and then. (It was no less great save that none came with yet another quixotic proposal of *gifting* the raincoat or umbrella to the hunting gathering Jarawas). Prolonged wet clothing had impacted the aborigines with repeated / recuring respiratory problems, while the long-term effect on their libido, their sex life and procreation is not known yet.

Gift Clothes' Link to Scabies and Infant Mortality: The Jarawas began to develop a craze for dress which turned out as an opportunity for the poachers who were already in the clandestine business of supplying the

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venison to the consumers after collecting the deer ensnared in the traps raised by them in the forest. Hunting of deer was by then declared as illegal. Now, these pillagers began to *gift* the used clothes to the Jarawas and taught them to raise the deer trap and bring the hunt for them in return of the gift. Such *gift* brought in yet another alien disease, the scabies prevalent among the non-autochthons. The parasite causing scabies i.e., etch mite (Sarcoptes scabiei) reached the Jarawas' skin through these used clothes given by the poachers and others and caused this highly irritating skin disease which broke out into an epidemic in 2017-18 requiring the concerted attention of the health authorities to fight it out. Furthermore, this non-lethal ailment turned out indirectly fatal to little children by driving the aborigines to resort to their one of the esoteric practices which the author has termed it as ethno-medical termination of infirm infant (ETI) in his small enquiry report submitted to the Administration (Awaradi, 2022:177-178). Because of this tradition, Jarawas suffering the disability by birth are not found at all and it is a unique feature of this tribe. The ETI has been roughly equated with modern procedure of medical termination of pregnancy (MTP) -- which is resorted, if the severe abnormalities of the baby in the womb are detected through ultrasound at 18 to 20 weeks of pregnancy or carrying the pregnancy is lethal to the mother, -- but with the difference that the serious congenital deformity could be detected by the Jarawas only after the child birth / in the infant stage and the child having such disability is done away with. It is worth noting in this context that, as per medical science, the most disabilities of the humans are manifested within a year after birth. One instance has been recounted here to illustrate this tradition of ETI. A child in the South Andaman during the scabies epidemic (2017-18) suffering the worst with the impetigo scalp terrified his parents when they saw the scabies blisters all over the kid's scalp oozing the sap, that being the disease symptom. The aborigines had not seen such a scary disease before the introduction of clothing and for this ailment they did not have their ethnomedicine. So, with a strong belief and conviction, they held that the child would not be able to live the normal life of hunter gatherer and should be sent to their God, *Ankaanel* in the other world, where the child will get cured instantly and live there happily forever. In reality the child was handed over to a specified adult person who took the child to an undisclosed location and was actually done to death. During that scabies epidemic many such cases of ETI were reported and thus the *gift* of clothes and alien practice of clothing thrusted upon them resulted in infanticide among the Jarawas.

Tutoring and "Midday Meal": Despite knowing the undesirable impact of imposing the school education on the Onges, a similar *gift* of imparting the education has been thrust upon the Jarawas also by the Administration based on yet another proposition promoted by that expert (though the author in his capacity of the Director of Tribal Research Institute questioned the pertinence of this proposal when his comments were sought by the Administration) under which children are collected by the junior field officials, brought to a place likened to the school, the numerals and alphabets are taught by those field officials who are neither qualified as teacher nor had training in tutelage. Some adult Jarawas were also called to "teach" the children the traditional practices of hunting gathering and other livelihood activities in that school! And the stated purpose of such teaching was to preserve the Jarawas culture. Further, emulating the system of providing the students with the midday meal prevailing in schools elsewhere in India, three kilograms of raw rice (not meal) per child per month and a pair of uniforms to every student were given as an incentive to the Jarawas to send their children to the school. This little quantity of rice distributed in the school though not sufficient for each family to subsist upon, but nonetheless good enough to drive them to hanker after more rice and this triggered the whole underground business transaction between the Jarawas and poachers. These miscreants began to give rice to the aborigines in return of the crabs, the latter having high demand in the market, since the tourists staying in the hotels are told that the crabs from Jarawas territory are unique and so, such crab-dish is special / Jarawas cuisine in the islands. The worst part is that these scoundrels indulge in sexual exploitation of women Jarawas resulting in the birth of mulattos who were not accepted in their society in the beginning and hence they were killed by them. Further, these criminals, to circumvent the law, that is, PAT Regulation, 1956 often call the adults out of the tribal reserve territory to their homes in the villages, give the liquor to men and crazy *gifts* like small mirror, used clothes to women and sexually abuse them secretly. Still worst is that young men posted in remote Bush Police posts indulging in sexual abuse of dames by giving them the leftover food and sundry *gifts.*

Deadly infections like HIV AIDS could spread among the Jarawas community through such interface with catastrophic consequences, if the required protective measures are not taken. Further, a public opinion is already building up for arranging the *gift* of providing free ration, clothes, medical care and all the rest to this tribe too and rehabilitating it at small island / in a fixed area in Middle Andaman Island by allocating houses and other facilities under tribal welfare program, as done in the case of the Onges. And possibly, one day, applying the principle of Benthamism, the Administration may concede to such an outcry accepting the majoritarian view of keeping such a large chunk of land as exclusive tribal reserve for Jarawas as

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unjustified when the land is required for economic development in the islands. The philosophy of Jeremy Bentham has already been applied once by restricting the reserve area (through the Notification No. 16/2013, A & N Gazette Extraordinary dated 17th January, 2013) to 1 km in littoral zone instead of 5 km from high tide mark towards the seaward side on the western coast starting from Constance Bay in South Andaman to Lewis Inlet Bay (sic) in Middle Andaman, yielding to the pressure of non-autochthon fishermen, by modifying the earlier Notification No. 159/2004 through which coastal sea up to 5 km from hightide line was declared as tribal reserve which was proposed by the author as Director of Tribl Welfare in 2004.

Misplaced Welfare Gift: Medical treatment is oft-repeated *gift* given by the Administration, which in some cases brings about grief instead of relief. Because, certain medical procedures presuppose the existence of two preconditions, viz. (a) accessibility of required physical infrastructure; (b) necessary aftercare with conducive cultural milieu. Otherwise, it results in tribulation to the sick as evident in the case of a girl child of South Andaman having congenital talipes equinovarus (CTEV), a foot handicap. The parents and other Jarawas decided to send this child having that disability to the care of their god in the paradisical world in keeping with the practice of ethnomedical termination of infirm infant. However, the officials who held such ETI as an infanticide, interfered and gave that girl the *gift,* by way of getting an orthopedic surgery done in a super specialty hospital at faraway place in mainland India. But the post-operative treatment back in the government hospital at Port Blair requiring prolonged stay as indoor patient was aborted, as the parents of that girl did not remain there in the town so long, missing their seasonal livelihood pursuits like harvesting of honey. Hence, they went back home in the forest with the child, then removed the orthopedic cast, on their own, as it was inconvenient for their daughter. And this led that child growing up with that disability, thereby pushing her into lifelong agony of dependency and sufferings. She would face starvation after the demise of her parents. No one will be ready to marry her, but everyone would rush for sex with her, making her life miserable with repeated pregnancies, and that way this *gift* bringing her the perpetual *grief.* It is relevant to note that the prevalence of sexual abuse of helpless among the Jarawas was confirmed to a nurse in the government hospital by a middle-aged widow of Faul Bay area by narrating her own repeated painful experience with the randy youths running after her. (In situ healthcare delivery system proposed to the Administration in 2019 by the author as Director of Tribal Research Institute would address such issues).

Of course, the famous Enmei episode and the welfare *gift* thereto described above was a turning point in the cultural history of the Jarawas, rendering their existential future ridden with uncertainties. The recent history of this ethnic community would have a peachy recourse, only if, the decision makers at that juncture in 1996 were to refer to just a couple of pages, 176 – 177 of the *Master Plan (1991 - 2021)* brought out by the Administration itself in 1990 (mentioned earlier). Instead of hospitalizing Enmei in Port Blair for many months, a better alternate course could have been opted involving: (a) transferring Enmei to a makeshift medical hostelry at Lakralungta, in Middle Andaman -- the location where there is a Jarawas camp and whereat several friendly contacts were made with Jarawas by the expedition team, -- once the main procedure of putting a splint / orthopedic cast is performed in the hospital; (b) thereafter a medical team visiting him periodically during his long recouperation; (c) then at the end taking him to hospital for removing the cast. This would have ensured the certainty about the Jarawas future in their healthy survival after their transit to the second phase of peaceful coexistence as envisaged in that above mentioned document.

VI. Stoppage of the Sentinelese Transit from Their Golden Age

Age-old Hostility: Today, the Sentinelese continue to live in their golden age though they too were on transit from it for a brief period in early 1990s. It is the same *gift* giving in their case also that tricked them. As the British colonial administration befriended the Andamanese and the Onges, the Indian administration, on their part, continued the policy of befriending the Jarawas, compelled by the historical circumstances requiring the rehabilitation of the Bengali refugees as agriculturists and safeguarding them and their interest from the Jarawas hostility as described earlier. On the other hand, there was no such pressing need to apply that same policy to the fourth and the last Negrito tribe, the Sentinelese, having a self-contained and absolutely independent civilization of their own on the North Sentinel Island, away from other islands occupied by the mainland Indians and from rest of the world. While they did not pose any threat to those Indians and others, it is the outlanders who laid a big threat for the Sentinelese. These ethnic people are aware of the formidable sailing crafts, the ships, as against their humble canoes and incredible flying machines, the helicopters and airplanes possessed by the occasional visitors to their island territory. Further, they know about the sinister acts of violence using deadly fire arms and abduction committed by those visiting cruel humans including slave traders in the past. That is why, the Sentinelese armed with their deathly effective bows and arrows resisted all such callers from landing on the shores of their island. Despite all this, the Administration resumed the practice of carrying out contact expeditions to North

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Sentinel Island and so, it is worthwhile to decipher the motivating force behind it.

Why Befriending: Firstly, there was no review of this old policy of organizing the contact missions to Sentinelese at the government level, hence it was continued as a routine bureaucratic exercise. Secondly, for most of the officers who headed the expeditions having a contingent of armed police guard, it was an adventure to meet the hostile Sentinelese and perhaps the officers were ambitious to befriend them and at times crazy to achieve it as fast as possible and make the groundbreaking record like that of Bhaktawar Singh, a Bush Police officer who is credited with the feat of befriending the Jarawas mentioned earlier. In that process, their heavy-handed approach to strike the friendship was resolutely rejected repeatedly by the Sentinelese and often such overbearing acts turned violent. For instance, the Sentinelese came down to shores armed with bows and arrows and took positions to shoot as usual when they saw two lifeboats, - one carrying the Deputy Commissioner of Andaman district and the author, then being the researcher from Anthropological Survey of India, along with other contact party members, while the other lifeboat ferrying the Superintendent of Police, Andaman District in life-jacket, - approaching the island on 24th October, 1981. After dropping the *gift* of coconuts in the coastal water to wash ashore, that police officer, seeing the Sentinelese busy in picking up the floating coconuts, took his lifeboat about 150 meters away from that Sentinelese gang and landed there on the shore. He wanted to set a record of at least landing on the North Sentinel Island. While he could hardly walk a few steps on the beach, an arrow pierced his bulging life-jacket. Firing from his pistol in self-defense, he scrambled back to his lifeboat and retreated quickly and thus narrowly escaped the fatality. Thanks to the life-jacket, a polyester device stuffed with foam cubes that gave him a larger sized torso, misleading the Sentinelese in their targeting, who must have misjudged that, such a daring man must have a large trunk. Otherwise, they are sharp shooters at the bull's eye. Likewise, many more officers tried their hand for several years but the Sentinelese continued to rebuff them all.

First Friendly Contact: Finally, it was on 4th January, 1991 the author was able to establish the first friendly contact with Sentinelese (Awaradi, 2022:183-185). The same old technique of *gift* giving was employed by him but the difference was adherence to the anthropological methodology. The first step for an anthropologist is to establish a rapport with that ethnic community which he intends to study. He proceeds further generally, on that community accepting him as a friend and reposing enough faith in him believing that he will not inflict any harm or loss whatsoever to the community. However, for that the catch here in respect of Sentinelese was the absolute lack of communication with them and wide gap in understanding each other's intentions. As such, building the affable credibility and identity was the primary step. Hence, the approach involving ample patience and more importantly such actions that are universally comprehensible as amiable in the human world was chosen by way of : (a) expedition reaching North Sentinel Island by ship regularly on or around every full moon day (provided it is not a severe cyclone) as that being the astronomical phenomenon readily intelligible to Sentinelese, after taking adequate care to exclude from the contact party those members suffering from communicable diseases; (b) dropping the *gifts* of dried fresh coconuts near the shore of the island which would wash ashore to enable the Sentinelese to pick them up; (c) observing their behavior from a distance for three to four hours without landing and then departing from the island.

This kind of exercise was carried out for nearly three years since 1988, when the author as the Director of Tribal Welfare began to lead the contact expeditions. Every time, the Sentinelese appeared on the shore armed with bows and arrows and enacting the war dance by jumping up and down holding bow in one hand and arrows in other. But in the early morning of 4th January, 1991, they came down to the shore without bows and arrows along with women and children in big number. Reading this visible change in their action, an indication of a friendly gesture, the author took the team's doctor along and proceeded towards the shore with the *gift* of coconuts in two lifeboats, while the rest of the team members were still asleep onboard the ship M.V. Tarmugali. As the lifeboats neared the shore, a young Sentinelese began to approach our lifeboats wading through the water, and in response, our lifeboats moored ahead to reach that youth and then the author handed few coconuts to him leaning from the lifeboat. In the meanwhile, other Sentinelese too reached the lifeboat and the author (S. A. Awaradi) got down in the waist deep water and distributed the coconuts to all of them. Thus, the first ever friendly contact with Sentinelese was established (this breakthrough event was reported by the media). Then the doctor, Arun Mallik also gave away coconuts before we returned to the mother ship to load more coconuts and take other members of the team including a lady official, Madhumala Chattopadhyay from Anthropological Survey of India to give more coconuts to the Sentinelese second time. This groundbreaking episode was reported in detail on the same day by the author to the Chief Secretary of Andaman and Nicobar Administration through Police wireless message in Morse code from onboard M. V. Tarmugali, the transcript of which is delivered to the addressee by Police as per the practice (that transcript kept in the relevant file is now available in the Archives of A & N Administration). All India Radio broadcast this as the main news, while the local Press,

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'The Daily Telegrams' dated 8th January, 1991, published by the Government Press, A & N Administration, carried it as the headline news. Thereafter, such friendly contacts were repeated in subsequent expeditions, including the one in February, 1991 accompanied by T. N. Pandit from Anthropological Survey of India, as one of the members of expedition team. These officials from the Anthropological Survey wrote books and articles in the Press, gave interviews in media, presenting themselves as a first woman / first anthropologist to meet the Sentinelese, and the same is reflected in digital literacy / online open access knowledge repositories also by its contributors without verifying the facts from the records and archival material as to who was the first person from the modern world to establish the first ever friendly contact with Sentinelese. (Moreover, preoccupied with the higher responsibilities in public administration, the author could not afford to attend to academic works till his retirement from fulltime public service in 2020)

Bonhomie Hazard: The news of Sentinelese becoming friendly reached everywhere and soon it became a much sought after official tour for senior officers to accompany the contact team to give the *gifts* and get their photographs with Sentinelese clicked. Within few months, the expeditions turned out as big *tamasha* (show of enjoyment) for bigwigs in distributing the *gifts* to Sentinelese and its photo sessions. It became difficult to exclude the dignitaries having contagious ailments like common cold or influenza through medical screening to ensure the precaution against possible spread of these communicable diseases among Sentinelese. As noted earlier, it is this influenza that broke out in to an epidemic among the Andamanese killing large number of them. The rich fish wealth around North Sentinel turned out as a new fishing destination for the outlander fishermen now, who in the past did not dare to go near the island. This would have led to heavy exploitation of the only marine resource accessible to the Sentinelese, since these depredator fishers had motorized boats and advanced fishing gears as against the indigenous shallow coastal water punting humble canoes (not having oars and hence not seagoing) and simple fishing arrows. The interface with the contact expedition parties and exploitative fisher gangs posed, within a couple of years, an imminent threat for the survival of Sentinelese due to possible spread of epidemic diseases and depletion in shallow water shoal. In other words, the Sentinelese could have drifted into the Dark Age through their brief transit of friendship towards the outlanders.

Policy to Abandon Contact Missions: Armed with the above said situational analysis, the author in the capacity of the Director of Tribal Welfare mooted and pushed through a proposal to discontinue the practice of sending regular contact missions, so that newly developed friendly attitude is not nourished further, but get perished on its own and the Sentinelese go back to their age-old impregnable protective strategy of hostility towards all outsiders. Argued that, it was the high time to review the policy of organizing contact expeditions as it did not serve any public good and on the contrary, there was certainly an unpardonable and readily avoidable harm to the indigenous ethnic community. The Administration approved this proposal which included, in addition to cessation of contact missions: (a) intensification of patrolling around the North Sentinel Island by Marine Police and other security forces to prevent the poachers and other miscreants approaching the island; (b) sending the expedition team once in a while to observe the Sentinelese from distance; and (c) notifying the extension of North Sentinel Island's tribal reserve into the littoral zone too in the coastal sea up to five km from high tide mark of the island as the tribal area, entry into which by outlanders is legally prohibited.

Return to Hostility: As expected, the Sentinelese did revert back to their original state and resumed their hostility to outsiders as evident from the later incidents of killing two fishermen intruders in 2006 and slaying of the American evangelist John Allen Chau in 2018 who ventured, clandestinely taking the help of local fishermen of South Andaman, with his missionary zeal to contact them and spread the message of Jesus among the Sentinelese, the primordial lone animist community in the world. Thus, the Sentinelese have continued to live their Golden Age till now and likely to carry through, unless the modern manmade disasters like the kind mentioned below strike this tiny island: (a) an air crash on North Sentinel and subsequent armed confrontation between security forces and Sentinelese while rescuing the crash survivors / retrieving the dead, as such hazard is more likely with current increase in domestic as well as international air traffic since Andaman Nicobar islands have become the hot tourists destination and further with Great Nicobar island being developed in to a free trade zone having a mega international city with international airport and transshipment port (author in his note to the Administration has suggested to notify air space above North Sentinel Island as 'no fly zone' to head off such hazard); (b) bombardments on North Sentinel island too by the nuclear powers when these islands in Bay of Bengal turn out as the war theater which is not unlikely in the wake of recent militarization of Indian Ocean region.

VII. Transits from Golden Age to Impending Dark Age of Shompens

Golden Age: Ever since they evolved their livelihood practices harnessing the local geo-ecological resources in the Great Nicobar Island, the Shompens lived their golden age for long following their arrival here nearly 14 millennia back. As the hunters and gatherers, the

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nomadic Shompens bands each having 25 to 30 people occupied different region of this huge (910 sq. km.) tropical island covered with evergreen rainforest endowed with rich biodiversity covering numerous plants bearing edible fruits, medicinal plants, other useful and commercially valuable vegetation including rattan. They had the sole and total freehold or sway over the entire island and its resources, except small patches of land along the south-western and south-eastern coast hogged by few Nicobarese villages. Furthermore, the Shompens were known to be stronger and overpowering people and hence the Nicobarese were scared of them. Five rivers including Galathea and several streams plush with fish and prawn, traverse across highly undulating terrain of this island, and as such, it is gifted with many fertile river-valleys suitable for arboriculture of pandanus (breadfruit). Apart from planting the pandanus in such arable valleys, patches of colocasia, chillis, tobacco, lemon and other species of herbage are raised and tended by the aborigines in their camps. The island has the abundance of variety of wildlife that forms the animal source food resource from monkeys to pigs to megapodes to crocodiles to snakes to fishes to arthropod larvae, apart from the honey. Shompens in their hunting expeditions spear the adult, chubby wild pigs, their favorite game, and spare the piglets, bring them home, treat them with medicinal herbs to rear fondly like their own children and partake the cooked pandanus till they grow up. These "domesticated" hogs are slaughtered for their pork whenever needed and therefore are described as 'living larder' (Awaradi, 1990: 54). Freshwater fish, prawn and crab flourishing in the inland water bodies mentioned above constitute significant part of their diet. The aborigines are sapient enough to impound water in series of puddles by raising mud bunds with tiny exits across the channel along the streams to ensure the survival of these aquatic creatures in those pools even during prolonged dry season when streams turn into brooks with very little flow, a life threat for such fauna and thus assure themselves with fish diet round the year. They facilitate the honey bees to build their hive by way of locating the old trees with hallowed trunk due to termite action, blow a small hole in to such bole using their tools and leave it at that. Honey bees would find those trees in due course, build their hive and flourish in that sheltered hallows, and one day the tribesman would come back to harvest their much-cherished syrup. This type of apiculture along with husbandry of that "living larders" and the arboriculture would endorse the Shompens as "proto-agriculturists." All this together with their efficient tools and devices meeting their every need, mountainous habitat beyond the reach of tsunami waves, their aversion for interface with other people, efficacious ethnomedicine and their hilarious habits signify their golden age.

Wood Age: Unlike the Negritos of the Andaman Islands, the Shompens do not have bows and arrows as their hunting implements. Spears, the earliest contrivance ever made by man, is the main hunting and fishing tool for these aborigines. Today, the hog hunting wooden spear has leaf shaped dagger like iron head with a barb on one side or on both sides, while fishing multi-pronged spear has 4 or 5 slender needle like curved, out stretched and forward pointing iron tips. Nonetheless, some bands do continue to possess the ancient totally wooden spears having the shaft that tapers at one end into a singular sharp tip or slender slightly spread-out multiple tips. Their material culture had been entirely wood based in the past, may it be livelihood tools, shelters, transport craft, bark cooking vessel, water cask, bark cloth, fire generator or ear-plug and hence such an era has been described as their 'wood age' (Awaradi, 1990:48) and in fact, it can be said that the wood age was their golden age. All such items are carved out of the soft tender wood, and the molluscan shells having sharp edges must have been used to cut and shape them into required articles, which could be used once dried and hardened. Later, the iron was grafted on to the hunting and fishing tools as their tips, subsequent to the beginning of metallic ship building industry around 1800 AD. The aborigines sourced this metal from the drift iron through the "silent barter" with their neighbors, the coastal Nicobarese. Ultimately the iron was derived from wreckages as the frequent incidents of shipwrecks began with the dawn of flourishing maritime trade by the European countries with Indies mentioned earlier. The aborigines are known to be quick to adopt and use any new material that they come across which bears utilitarian value.

Silent Barter: Much before the Europeans, the people of South Asia and East Asia had established maritime trade link with each other since 11th century. For example, Chola rulers of South India used Nicobar Islands as strategic naval base (discussed later) and had control / influence over the trade in the Indian Ocean region as indicated in the Thanjavur inscription of 1050 AD. The Burmese, Malaya and Chinese sailors indulged in slave trading of Negritos of Andaman Islands and commodity trading with Mongoloids of Nicobar Islands. They brought iron tools like machete, cloth, rice and tobacco to exchange with coconuts from the Nicobarese. Further, these traders had an eye on the red and white cane available in the interior region of Great Nicobar, the Shompens' territory. But they had no contact with this ethnic community to strike the trade relations, hence they used the Nicobarese as the middlemen. The Census of India, 1931 report mentioned about the Chinese traders collecting these canes through Nicobarese for further export to Strait Settlement (Bonnington, 1932: 63). However, Nicobarese themselves did not have direct interaction, as they were jittery

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about the burly Shompens and both communities knew very well about the activities of each other from distance observation and a bit of each other's dialect too. Shompens came to be aware of the big knife, the iron machete and other foreign items that the Nicobarese got from the traders. Nicobarese must have offered these imported items of machete, cloth and tobacco initially as *gifts* to the Shompens by keeping them at the outskirt of their own village, so that the Shompens could pick them up. Once the Shompens understood the use and value of these new items, their exchange with that prized forest product, the canes began as a new item along with the traditional ones like resin, lemon and honey. Thus, it was an indirect exchange of goods through what is known as "silent barter"(Awaradi, 1990: 58). They did not meet face to face but kept their respective items at the designated place in the forest not far away from the Nicobarese villages where from they could pick up the other's items. The imported machete came to be a treasure item for the aborigines, as it was an efficacious and handy wood-cutting multifunctional tool used for various tasks from their hair-cutting to pork cutting; textile cloth was taken as a better loincloth compared to their indigenous rough bark cloth, while, the other item i.e., tobacco being an addictive substance, both men and women got badly addicted to tobacco chewing and hence all these were much sought after items. At the same time, on the other side, there was a great demand for the red and white canes, and therefore, the exchange of these local items with those foreign goods continued for long through the silent mode till it was disrupted in the Second World War.

Noisy Barter: It appears that the interruption in the supply of tobacco during the War drove the Shompens to approach the Nicobarese in their villages and the latter offered toddy to the former as the *gift,* being an alternate to the tobacco, since it is also an intoxicating substance like nicotine. In return, on their part, the Shompens brought their usual items of honey, resin, lemon for Nicobarese and this transaction brought in the face-to-face interface between the two communities. That marks the transition of the Shompens from their golden age to silver age. Thereafter, they were not taken as dreaded people and so, the Nicobarese were no longer scared of them. The Nicobarese began to get the heavy works like felling the trees, building the canoes, repairing their huts done by giving them toddy. British, who reoccupied the Andaman and Nicobar Islands at the end of Second World War, granted an Indian business house - named Jadwets, the license to carry on with trade in the Nicobar Islands to facilitate the availability of such goods that were brought by the traders earlier i.e., pre-war period to sell them against coconut / copra. The Jadwets opened their outlets in bigger Nicobarese villages in all islands including Great Nicobar. As such, the Nicobarese could once again offer the other imported items like machete, tobacco and cloth to the Shompens, apart from the toddy and in return, extract from them more and more physical works and then in due course, began to exert their domination over the Shompens.

Ex-servicemen Settlements: Indian government launched in 1969, an ambitious project of settling 2000 families of ex-servicemen by allotting them the land for agriculture along the south-eastern coast of the Great Nicobar, an island inhabited by the pre-literate Shompens and illiterate Nicobarese. The purpose was to populate this remote island situated 1200 km far off from Indian mainland with the well-informed and alert people and thereby prevent its possible occupation by the foreigners, as this border island territory being very close to Indonesia and other south-east Asian countries. The Border Roads Organization of Government of India laid 51 km North-South Road connecting Campbell Bay, the administrative headquarters of the island with six ex-servicemen villages along the south-eastern coast and 47 km East-West Road cutting through the Shompens hunting ground across the island connecting the Campbell Bay with proposed villages for 1700 ex-serviceman families on the western coast by deploying huge labor force brought from Central Indian tribal belt.

Several labor camps were set up along the East-West Road thereby opening a new window for the Shompens to barter their forest produce with laborers and get tobacco in exchange. Road construction work was completed within few years, but later the Government's grand plan of rehabilitating ex-serviceman families on western coast was given up considering the fact that it would be detrimental to the aborigines and the island's biodiversity. So, the labor force, camping along the road for its maintenance was withdrawn and disbanded. Hence most of the laborers encroached the government land and continued to live near Campbell Bay. As such, Shompens barter transactions with these laborers perpetuated and in this process inhabitants of Campbell Bay town and other villages also got involved in the trade, whereby tobacco turned out as the major exchange item superseding other costlier items like machetes and cloths. In the meanwhile, Andaman and Nicobar Administration, concerned with the well-being of the aborigines, initiated welfare program for them under the supervision of the Assistant Commissioner of Great Nicobar Sub-division and positioned a doctor, a social worker and a small contingent of supporting staff at the base camp, the Shompens Hut Complex at 27 km point on East-West Road near the Galathea upriver to provide the state *gift* of welfare measures including healthcare. As a goodwill gesture and to encourage aborigines to visit that base camp to avail such free benefits, they were fed with cooked rice, provide primary medical care at the time of their visit and give the *gift* of cloth pieces, machetes and

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tobacco too, as it was an old customary practice for the government officials to give this item i.e., tobacco to tribal people to strike rapport with them. Being familiar with reciprocal transaction, the Shompens began to frequent the base camp with their usual forest produce of honey, lemon and resin to give to the officials there. Later, during 1985 to 1988 (when the author was posted as the Assistant Commissioner), such transactions were regulated, so that only the machetes are given in exchange of their forest produce, while tobacco was totally prohibited and rice was avoided as it was unwarranted.

Dark Age: On the other side, over a period of time, the Nicobarese particularly of the Chingen village on south-eastern coast had further deepened their relations with the Shompens of the down-stream Galathia river by encouraging them to live in that village, instead of frequenting it for barter. Gradually Shompens started to stay with Nicobarese and work with them. And that marks the beginning of that Shompens band's Dark Age. Within few years, the tuberculosis, a highly communicable, deadly disease prevalent among the Nicobarese was passed on to the Shompens as they lived together with latter and it took heavy toll annihilating that band almost entirely. Other bands of Shompens would also face the same fate, if their interface with Nicobarese and outsiders becomes intense on account of similar or any other reason. Then comes the prolonged tsunami relief measures during 2004 to 2011 under which free ration was distributed by the government not only to the displaced Nicobarese but also to the Shompens, though the latter were not dislocated. Further, such *freebies* of rice to the Shompens were *not* discontinued on termination of relief operations for the tsunami affected people after six years. The field officials of Tribal Welfare agency i.e., AAJVS ask the aborigines to reach Campbell Bay every month to collect the *gift* rice and consequently the latter get chances to interact with non-tribal outsiders there and with the Nicobarese of western coast also who are resettled in Cambell Bay itself after tsunami and thus the Shompens are exposed to the tuberculosis and other alien diseases, a perfect recipe for health disaster. Finally, the controversial and fast-emerging mega 'development' project at Great Nicobar Island that involves building an international container transshipment port, international airport, a global township for 6,50,000 immigrants as against the present population of just 8500 of this island and total population of 3,80,520 of Andaman and Nicobar archipelago as a whole, apart from denuding the forest of 166 sq. km, that is, 15% of island's entire territory and further with large scale eco-tourism activities would push the Shompens into the Dark Age.

VIII. "Tsunami of Gifts" and Debilitation of the Nicobarese

Golden Age: While the rest of the indigenous tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands remained as nomadic hunters and gatherers till the present modern era, i.e., continued with man's original livelihood mode of living, the Nicobarese tribe got transformed into another category, which can be termed as the settled 'proto-forester' in the ancient times itself, because of different kind of food resources available in respective group of islands. As against thickly wooded hilly Andaman terrain, it is the extensive coco palm forest groves in the sandy coastal zones, apart from feral pigs, pandanus, yams in the flat Nicobar Islands' forests that formed the base for livelihood for the Nicobarese. This ethnic community settled down at the coastal areas after realizing the multiple use of coconut palm like: (a) it bears big nuts round the year (not being seasonal fruit) which can be plucked at any stage from its tender to ripe phase for consuming its highly nutritious flesh and drink its wonder water i.e., coconut milk; (b) nuts being not easily perishable like other fruits because of its stony endocarp encased in thick layer of fibrous mesocarp wrapped with epicarp; (c) its kernel remains as a delicacy for months and months, hence, it can be stored so long; (d) edible oil can be extracted from its dried meat, the copra through the tribal traditional method; (e) the kernel is the main pig feed; (f) coco trunk being hard timber and palm leaves being large are useful as pillars and thatch respectively in building their shelter. In addition to all that, the coastal zone being close to the sea that forms the unlimited source of fish and other marine food. Thus, such a perennial fountain of sustenance being available at a place, there was no requirement for the Nicobarese to move widely in search of food. While the pandanus and yams available in abundance formed the vegetarian staple food items for Nicobarese, the pork is their predominant animal source food. They would go into the forest, raise specific vocal sound, on hearing of which the particular group of hogs flock near the respective caller who feed them every evening with coconut meat. This is a kind of semi-domestication of pigs by providing them supplementary feed in the wild and then hook the fatty swine and slaughter it whenever required. The Barringtonia asiatica plant growing in sandy and rocky shores having icythyotoxic substance particularly in its fruits is ingeniously used by the Nicobarese for marine fishing (Ravikumar, T, 2015: 76). During the low tides, the crushed fruits of this plant would be applied in shallow water by scattering it. This then would soon narcotize fish and octopus which would start floating and the Nicobarese would handpick them easily.

Though, they did not cultivate any of the above plants or engaged in livestock farming of pigs, the large extended joint families (*tuhets*) of the Nicobarese owned

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groves of coconut palm, portions of forest land rich with breadfruit and tuber plants and droves of semi-feral pigs. Thus, they had all assured and abundant food resources close by and furthermore, they did not have to struggle hard to harvest them. They could just collect the fallen coconuts, pluck the ripened pandanus, exhume enlarged tuber and simply pick up the tranquilized fishes and octopus from shallow coastal waters or catch the pigs out of their own drift in the forest by trick. Of course, they could climb the tall coconut trees, if they wanted the tender nuts and perhaps to tap the toddy. So, they had enough leisure time that led to: the growth of various ways of beautification of their naked body with head-bands, wrist-bands, skirt made out of locally available materials like tender leaves of pandanus and sea shells; evolution of oral literature, and performing arts in the form of traditional songs and dance with participation of both men and women; variety of indigenous sports and games like pig fight, pole fight, canoe race, wrestling; celebration of grand ossuary festivals. They had medicine man, the shaman in their villages armed with ethnomedicine which was efficient enough to cure the endemic ailments. They were conscious about public health issues and every village had the community 'birth house' and 'death house' close to sea shore and away from residential houses. Thus, the Nicobarese led an independent self-contained, healthy and socially well-knit life in their golden age for long and they did not come under foreign invasion and rule till the modern era which began with British suzerainty in 19th century accompanied by "spiritual colonization" of Nicobar (Awaradi, 2021: 88) by Christian missionaries and later occupation by the Japanese forces during Second World War.

"Merchants of Venice": Nonetheless, the Nicobarese did not remain absolutely isolated since 11th century onwards. Nicobar Islands known in Tamil language as *nakkavaram* meaning the 'land of naked people' formed the forward naval base, as noted earlier, for war expeditions against the regimes in Indonesia and other south-east Asian regions in the Chola empire of south India. Unlike the traders of East Asia, the Chola rulers did not hurt Nicobarese and their culture. On the other hand, the attired Malaya, Burmese and Chinese merchants frequenting the Nicobar Islands for commodity trade brought the textile cloth, rice, tobacco and iron tools to introduce them and capture the virgin market and take coconuts applying the tricks of the trade. They illustrated before the aborigines the use of these exotic goods and offered them first as the *gifts.* Later, when the Nicobarese got convinced about the utility of those foreign goods, the traders began to exchange them with the heaps of coconuts. Pretty soon, these imported items became coveted possessions for Nicobarese too, as it is the one of the universal human tendencies to exhibit wealth / valor / philanthropy depending on the prevailing ideals in the society at a given point of time. So, they began to hanker after such articles and from that ripe stage, the traders began to indulge in profiteering. Eventually, the Nicobarese took these foreign goods especially rice and cloth as essential items in their daily life, thereby turning themselves dependent on the external resources and outer agencies to get them. That was The End of their golden age and beginning of the dark age.

These traders started to maintain the farcical 'book of accounts' to record their goods i.e., imported items in inflated lot given to the respective Nicobarese against the deflated lot of the coconuts received in exchange from those Nicobarese, resulting thereby in the 'trade imbalance' which was beyond the comprehension of the preliterate aborigines. Thereafter, the trading continued partly on credit which went on multiplying to a point when virtually all Nicobarese were pushed into deep debt. They could not have revolted against such exploiting merchants as they had already turned slaves to foreign goods and so, could not afford to disrupt the supply line. Such a state of exploitative affairs with several trading posts in the islands prevailed for long till mid Second World War. The British colonial administration apparently considering their lack of strong defense in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, packed up and deserted the archipelago in 1942 along with as many Indian mainlanders as possible for carrying them in the ship, leaving the rest and aborigines defenseless. Hence, the Japanese forces occupied the major islands in the archipelago including Nicobar group without resistance. Similarly, the traders also deserted their trading posts before the arrival Japanese and those who failed to do so promptly, were got killed.

Second Dark Spell Ends the First One: Thus, the occupation of the islands in 1942 by the Japanese forces ended the centuries old economic exploitation of Nicobarese but kick started another kind, which was much more malicious. The Japanese ordered the Nicobarese to vacate their houses in coast, so that the soldiers could occupy them as their war barracks with ready-made facilities like drinking water, canoes for fishing and coconut gardens. Hence, the Nicobarese had to live in the jungle away from the locations of their main livelihood resources i.e., coconut groves and sea that too when the supply of rice was already disrupted with departure of traders. The Japanese forced the aborigines to work in heavy tasks of building the military infrastructure like innumerable bunkers, mounting of the huge canons, roads for movement of troops, airstrip etc. Good looking young women were chosen and forced to work as the 'comfort girls' for the fighting troopers, in line with this notorious practice by the Imperial Japanese army, that was subsequently reported from other

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territories elsewhere similarly occupied by the Japanese. Those girls were *lured* and were forced, if resisted. Later, the Allied Forces spearheaded by British managed to penetrate and began to bomb frequently, thereby destroying the Japanese war assets and facilities in the islands. This led the Japanese to believe in the enemy espionage activity in the islands. They suspected that Nicobarese could be providing secretly the crucial information to the British spies about the locations of mounted guns and artilleries, which become the clear targets for British attacks. They began to round up the English knowing Nicobarese, punish them cruelly and many of them were shot dead. The accounts of such atrocities were recalled by the old Nicobarese (aged 60 -70 years, who were then in their 20s during the War) to the author at the time of his several official visits to Car Nicobar, the district headquarters and other islands when he was the Assistant Commissioner of Great Nicobar Sub-division during 1985-88 and to the other islands in central group of Nicobar archipelago while holding the charge of Nancowry Sub-division. So, the atrocious Japanese occupation of these islands (1942 - 45) is held as the dark spell in the modern history of the Nicobarese.

Beginning of the Silver Age: The Japanese forces surrendered in the Nicobar Islands also and the British reoccupied the archipelago at the end of the War. Bringing about the normalcy in the life of islanders was the priority for the administration and in that context, the British permitted an Indian business house, the Jadwet Trading Company alone to carry on the trade in the Nicobar Islands. In the meanwhile, Bishop John Richardson, the native of Car Nicobar, - having had modern education in Christian Missionary school at Rangoon, Burma, arranged by Soloman, the evangelist working in Car Nicobar, - motivated his fellow tribesmen to have shares in that trading Company. Eventually, that firm was transformed into a tribal cooperative society known as Ellen Hinengo Limited (EHL) with its area of operation in Car Nicobar. Similarly, another cooperative of the Nicobarese called Manula Mathai Limited (MML) came up in Nancowry group of islands. As the members of these cooperatives, the aborigines deposited their copra with respective Society. Then these tribal cooperatives, in turn exported that copra to mainland India for industrial use. Out of its sale proceeds, the rice, cloth, metallic tools, and other consumer goods were procured to make them available in the canteens of the said cooperatives in the Nicobar Islands. Through this system, the Nicobarese could remain free from exploitation by the external agencies. But they continued to be dependent on mainland India for rice, cloth and consumer goods. Concerned with such total dependency on mainland for food, Bishop Richerdson tried to cultivate paddy in Car Nicobar, but did not succeed because of unfavorable soil and climatic conditions in the islands.

However, the Nicobarese tribesmen remained socio-economically self-reliant, as everyone, - including youths who got free and accessible school education after Indian independence in1947, - was associated with rewarding livelihood and gainful economic activities around the coconut palm. Very few youths would go for higher education, who would get admission surely in the institutions in Port Blair or in mainland India, and then these degree holders / diplomates would get government jobs easily under the reservation policy of Indian state for the benefit of tribal communities. The social institution of *tuhet* had been pivotal for the strong and vibrant social organization under which everybody, - having certain duties and obligations, - in this large joint family was taken care and thus there were no orphans at all among the Nicobarese. Even those who lived away from Nicobar Islands in pursuit of their jobs, continued to be the integral part of their *tuhet* back home in the islands and remained under the usual social control mechanism. Every village had an elderly and highly respected headman or headwoman, popularly known as village captain, chosen by the head of every *tuhet* in that village, apart from a chief captain for the island to guide and lead the community in every situation and formed the link to the external agencies including the government. Despite whole hog embracing the Christianity, the Nicobarese retained their original tradition by observing the major customs, practices and festivities by singing the folk songs, dancing on all joyful occasions and actively participating in every community activity.

For instance, when the 'total literacy program' to eradicate illiteracy was taken up by the author in the Nicobar Islands during his posting (1994 to '96) as the Deputy Commissioner of Nicobar district, everybody -- old, young, men, women and children -- got involved enthusiastically by assembling at a place in each village every evening for learning. These literacy centers became lively, as some according to their talent, began composing songs on literacy, some took up caroling accompanied by enthralling music played on guitar, some started humming and foot tapping, while the rest including the visitors like us were enchanted by the sound of music. Thus, it was a festivity every evening and not merely picking up alphabets and numerals.

Reverting to its cultural history, this closed ethnic community got gradually opened up during the latter half of 20th century under the influence of mainland Indians who arrived in Nicobar Islands as the independent India's government servants like teachers, doctors, policemen, officials in various departments, apart from the ex-servicemen settlers of Great Nicobar and workers of rubber plantation of Katchal Island. The elders among the Nicobarese were skeptical about the impact of outsiders coming to the islands in substantial number and that was the one of the reasons for getting the government degree college shifted out in 1994

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from Car Nicobar and thereby avoid influx of non-tribal students. Anyway, the educated and exposed Nicobarese who got into government service were the first, followed by others, to "modernize" themselves and they were fascinated to the urban comforts. While the number of these mods was gradually increasing, the Nicobarese got an unprecedented terrible shock in the early morning of 26th December, 2004 when the earthquake, measuring 9.1 on Richter scale, jolted the Andaman and Nicobar Islands which was soon followed by the deadliest Asian Tsunami of Indian Ocean that killed nearly 5000 people from Nicobar Islands according to an official estimate (Rajshekhar, M, 2015), as these islands are very close to quake epicenter. Some of those mods who had built masonry houses instead of traditional timber ones, were injured due to collapse of buildings. Such wounded people along with old and infirm persons including many village captains who could not run away quickly from the coastal areas succumbed to this sea monster. These twin disasters destroyed all coastal infrastructures and assets like harbors, jetties, foreshore roads, hospitals, schools, wells, other community structures like churches, community halls, playgrounds, coconut groves and livestock apart from the canoes and houses thereby rendering the Nicobarese helpless and homeless. The survivors were rescued and evacuated by the defense forces to put them in various relief camps at Port Blair, Harmindar Bay in Little Andaman, Campbell Bay, Teresa, Katchal and Kamorta Islands.

"Tsunami of Gifts": Such a dreadful transnational However the Disaster Management Plan for the A & N South East Asian countries was unheard of it in India. though the Disaster Management Plan for the A & N Islands prepared by the author as the Deputy Commissioner of the Nicobar district in the context of: United Nation's declaration of International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction 1990 to 1999; and instructions from Government of India to the A & N Administration, and submitted in 1996 to the Administration, covered the tsunami also including preparedness against it and its management. But this plan remained unimplemented, which however, later formed the base for such a plan for the islands as mandated under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 passed by the Indian Parliament. The tsunami disaster aroused deep empathy among the people across India, philanthropic organizations, Indian Central Government and State Governments who made generous donations, grants and sent loads and loads of relief materials through the bulk carriers of Indian Air Force. It was such an immense charity pouring in, that its management i.e., receiving, store keeping and issuing of the items became one of the major tasks for the Administration. The mammoth stock of variety of articles from dry food items to bottled water to clothes to kitchen and bathroom items to electronic items and many more such things, virtually the 'tsunami of gifts' was built up and the same was distributed among the Nicobarese and other affected people. Many of the ultra-modern *gifts* disbursed were unknown and non-essential items for the tribal people living the simple life in the remote islands.

Weakening of Social Fabric: While the Nicobarese stayed in relief camps, the temporary tin sheet shelters - the small units to house the nuclear families comprising of husband, wife and their children and not their joint families - were built in few months by the Government at the selected places in different islands, as near as possible to their original habitations. And that marks the beginning of the dissolution of their strong social institution, the *tuhet.* They were shifted to such temporary shelters to live there till the permanent shelters were raised. The modernistic domestic items necessary for a family to start cooking food and live in the new house were distributed as the *gifts,* in addition to the monthly *free* ration articles. Thus, the cooking gas (LPG) replaced the locally available fire wood at no cost; gas stove displaced the traditional hearths; packed food overtook the pandanus, their popular food. Further, the government positioned the Relief Officer, one at each island to ensure proper disbursement of all such charities and for this they were to use the conventional liaison through the village captain. But the death of many captains in the tsunami had created a vacuum, so, filling those vacancies of village captains was then an urgent need. Hence, in such an emergency situation, the Relief Officers played a major role, of course with their own perspective, in picking up the young 'modernized' persons as the new captains having the ability to converse in Hindi, rather than the experienced golden agers having traditional wisdom to lead the fellow tribesmen who incidentally were rather poor at parleys in Hindi. Thus, a novel leadership of "tsunami captains" was brought in to provide communication linkage between the community and government authorities.

Gift of Assets, Monetary Windfall and Work-Shy: Government of India opted for the speedy construction of tsunami permanent shelters with the building materials like steel, tin, metallic nuts and bolts, cement and pre-fabricated bamboo boards, all brought from mainland India, instead of using local materials viz. timber, cane, bamboo etc. Considering the views of that new leaders / tsunami captains, the labor force was also brought from outside to build the shelters in Nicobar Islands. These captains and comfort loving modernized Nicobarese could not visualize the consequences of *freebies* and *gifts.* Instead of involving the able-bodied people in the construction of permanent shelters and learning the skills to handle new kind of building

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materials, they went for easy option of seeking all help from the Government. Similarly, they did not join their hands with laborers in planting coconut seedlings under the rehabilitation program launched by the Department of Agriculture. Further, the Nicobarese got the *gifts* of pigs and poultry birds and motorized fiberglass fishing boats. In addition to such rehabilitation measures, the Government handed out liberal compensation against the loss of lives and property and ex-gratia payment, being a package of colossal monitory *gift* to the head of the nuclear families and not to the head of *tuhet,* though the author as the Special Relief Commissioner advised against paying such huge sum of money to the young head of the nuclear families, reasoning that they would squander it, apart from being meddlesome in the working of *tuhet*. Simaran Jit Singh, a researcher in an article has written that paying compensation to nuclear family units was the beginning of disintegration of extended family system (Rajshekhar, M, 2015). All these generous rehabilitation measures continued for nearly six years during which most of the Nicobarese lounged around and in this process, a new section of indolent youths emerged. The age group of 15 - 20 years in 2004 missed their crucial life phase of apprenticeship, that is, occupational internship, learning the traditional life skills, undertaking the hard work and realizing its importance. But on the other hand, they were exposed to the medley of outsiders and their lifestyle, may it be the officials, businessmen, workers of NGOs and above all to the variety of modern gadgets.

Squandering Resulting in Beggaring: Further, in the aftermath of tsunami devastation, the government launched numerous reconstruction and development works including tourism linked projects in the islands pumping in enormous amount of funds. Under a special package, Government of India approved Rs. 821. 88 crore (approximately 9850 million USD) in May, 2005 for Andaman and Nicobar Islands (*ReliefWeb.int,* News and Press Release, 4 May, 2005), thereby creating substantial employment opportunities that attracted the job seekers from mainland India. All these together with whopping government handouts led to the upsurge in the purchasing power of the islanders and threw up ample business avenues in the islands. As such, a range of commercial ventures, shops including the dealerships of motor cars, motorbikes, different categories of motor vehicles mushroomed in Port Blair and other places in Andaman Islands. As against single pre-tsunami auto dealership, 15 authorized car showrooms with more than 30 car brands showed up (*ZigWheels.com*). The Nicobarese having become moneyed overnight, went on a shopping spree to possess: (a) variety of motor vehicles like motorbikes which replaced their once popular and humble bicycle; (b) motor cars, - of the kind possessed only by the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police in the past in the entire Nicobar district, - to the extent that nearly 1000 cars were available with people in Car Nicobar Island alone in 2015 as disclosed by Amin Moosa, the head of a tribal cooperative to the reporter of *The Economic Times* (Rajshekhar, M, 2015); and (c) some trucks / pick up vans of the type owned by only Public Works Department of the Administration. They squandered the bucks for possessing such inessential assets which demanded the recurring expenditure, to run them by refueling and maintaining regularly, to the tune of Rs.7000 (84 USD) per month as estimated by Samir Acharya, a local environmental activist (ibidi) thereby creating a perennial liability without generating steady income and thus landing the aborigines in beggared. The laborers from mainland India deployed in various works came with their habits like drinking and brewing hooch which was continued in the Nicobar Islands too. Some Nicobarese even learnt the procedure of making such illicit liquor, while others drank it, thereby making them vulnerable to hooch tragedies and further breeding a dangerous underground business in tribal area.

The Nicobarese idling i.e., disconnected from the livelihood pursuits for six years, finally had to enter into the turbulent times of reality with termination of Government relief and rehabilitation activities as they had to live on their own after all. They were unable to repair their houses, that is, permanent shelters due to lack of those imported costly building materials in the Nicobar Islands and the skills to renovate / restore their new found structures. They had to spend money to: (a) refuel the motorized fishing boats and motor vehicles; (b) get cooking gas; (c) drink bottled water; and (d) obtain ration articles. That new class of slothful youths (who were aged 15-20 years when tsunami struct the islands) mentioned earlier were interested mainly in the white collar / government jobs and unwilling to be engaged in the traditional occupations that had been the base of the livelihood and economy of the Nicobarese all along in the past. But the government jobs are limited, hence every aspirant would not get such employment resulting in lack of sustainable income generating activities and growing unemployment.

Social Debilitation: Simaran Jit Singh, a researcher who had studied the Nicobarese of Nancowry islands in pre-tsunami days, wrote that, if the people of Kamorta start selling the vegetables, the only means of livelihood readily accessible, by working 8 hours a day which is an increase of 6-8 times as compared to pre-tsunami scenario, they will have no time for festivities and rituals (ibidi). In other words, they have lost the space for leisure, one of the significators of golden age. According to Ajay Saini, another researcher, associated with Tata Institute of Social Science, the Nicobarese, having come in close contact with non-tribal outsiders during

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prolonged relief and rehabilitation operations, had turned 'modern' by imitating the lifestyle of those outlanders and further as described by Samir Acharya, they indulge in 'binge drinking' the hard alcohol, and do not prefer the traditional indigenous drink, the toddy (ibidi). That means, they have gone for a hazardous, consumerist and high-priced life that is unsustainable. The more serious consequence would be that the unemployed and idling youth section of the Nicobarese community becoming unrest and vulnerable to dangerous and unlawful habits / pursuits as has been noticed in the recent times. *The New Indian Express* (e-paper) dated 16th September, 2023 reported the involvement of Nicobarese in drug peddling and drug addiction. Thus, the tsunami waves had come and gone, but the ripple effect of the 'tsunami of *gifts'* has been pounding this Nicobarese tribal society pushing it to the precarious edge.

IX. Conclusion

There was no reason that the golden age of the living civilizations of the native islanders of A & N archipelago would not have continued to flourish with their own ethnoscience and indigenous technology evolved adequately enough to enable them to strike the dynamic eco-cultural equilibrium and thrive well in the physical world around them, despite the latter being frequented by natural hazards like earth tremor, cyclone, draught and tsunami of varying severity. But the industrialized Europeans and later the agrarian Indians with their modern civilization arrived here uninvited, as the bull in the China shop of the indigenous people of the islands in the Bay of Bengal. Such outlanders were instrumental for outright decimation of the Andamanese and socio-cultural destabilization of other ethnic communities.

Later, the White men went back home in 1947, after nearly a century long occupation of the islands and their exploitation, because of geo-political developments. But the Brown men, the Indian settlers did not do so, since they lost their original home as the fallout of that same geo-politics. They made these islands as their new home and working for their own progress and prosperity at the cost of the autochthons for whom the islands are the ancestral and the only home. The worst part of the story is the endless pouring in of other mainland Indians outnumbering the aborigines several times to partake in the process of that progress and in the name of national prosperity. And that being attempted by harvesting the natural resources available here and harnessing the strategic location of the islands close to the Indo-Pacific international sea route and near to the Malacca Strait, the corridor for the one third of worldwide maritime trade, in view of emerging global business and commerce, thereby posing the threat of predators to the native islanders. As such, these interlopers and their government are legally accountable for the socio-cultural damage done and still being done to the indigenous people by clinging to the Benthamism.

Therefore, these "civilized" people are morally bound to undo the damage done to the aborigines, who have neither invaded nor incited them in any manner. But the crucial matter at this juncture is the nature of social reconstruction relevant to the ethnic communities. So, here comes the ethical issue. It is to be realized and accepted that the ethnocentric approach of "mainstreaming" the different ethnic groups is unethical and fallacious, as there cannot be one domineering 'mainstream' of socio-political system in the human world to which rest all are supposed to join. In fact, there are "many-streams" in that respect, and each of them having the natural and constitutional rights to burgeon. Therefore, the welfare intervention has to conform to this ethical norm. Since, the degree and nature of damage suffered i.e., from the most as in the case of Andamanese to the least as in respect of Nicobarese, there has to be separate welfare call through specific tribal policy and programs. While the government has already notified such explicit policy for the Jarawas and the Shompens, the author has submitted to the A & N Administration, the draft tribal policy with plan for the Sentinelese in 2018, for Andamanese as well as Onges in 2019, and has published in 2021, a blueprint for the economic development of the Nicobarese (Awaradi, 2021:92-94). Such welfare approach, if adopted, will come to the aid of Indian government in meeting its constitutional obligation.

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