

# Justifying the title Mini India to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands: A Sociological Perspective

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**Abstract:** *This research article explores the cultural and demographic dynamics of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, particularly focusing on the integration of tribal and non-tribal communities. The study highlights the classification of the island's population into non-tribal and tribal groups, tracing the historical settlement patterns and the influx of various communities. Its an attempt to explain the socio-economic characteristics and cultural diversity of the islands, drawing parallels with mainland India. The composition of the non-tribal population is analyzed, encompassing individuals from diverse backgrounds such as convicts, refugees, repatriates, laborers, and job seekers. The article emphasizes the integration of different ethnicities, languages, and castes, resulting in the formation of new communities referred to as "local-born" and "Mixture." The presence of tribal communities, including the Great Andamanese, living alongside non-tribal populations is acknowledged, while other tribes like the Jarawa, Ongee, and Sentinelese maintain their traditional way of life. The study further examines the limited research on the Nicobar group of islands, highlighting accessibility challenges and the influence of the Andaman & Nicobar Aboriginal Tribal Regulation. The rapid integration of the Nicobarese community into non-tribal society is noted, along with their simultaneous preservation of ancient cultural practices. The existence of conflicts within and between tribal and non-tribal communities is acknowledged, challenging the notion of a harmonious "Mini-India." Overall, the article emphasizes the need for peace, harmony, and tolerance among all communities to maintain the unique cultural coexistence present on the islands.*

**Keywords:** Mini-India, Co-existence, Socio-cultural integration, Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The People of the Andaman Group of Islands can be classified into two main groups: non-tribal and tribal people. The significant inhabitation of the non-tribal population began in 1858 after the first Battle of Independence in India. The earlier settlements were established as penal colonies in these islands, and later people from different backgrounds were brought or came for various purposes. A book entitled "Mini India: The Politics of Migration and Subalternity in the Andaman Islands" by Philipp Zehmisch (2017) attempted to explain the causes and resultant socio-economic features of the islands' demography. In this study, he also tried to justify the name Mini-India for these islands, highlighting the cultural diversity akin to mainland India. According to him, the non-tribal population mainly consists of convicts, refugees, repatriates, laborers, and job seekers. The peculiar reasons and patterns of migration have made these islands an integrated form of cultural ethnicities from different regimes, domains, castes, classes, languages, and ethnicities. The non-tribal population of the Andaman Islands mainly comprises Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Malayali, Ranchi, Karen, and small communities like Bhatu, Karen, Moplah, and people from the UP and Bihar communities. The mixture of people and integration of their communities has given birth to a new community titled "local-born" before Independence (Dhingra, 2005), and the recent cultural integration of different communities has given birth to a new community known as "Mixture," as they are a blend of two or more categories of ethnicity. On the other hand, some of the autochthons or tribal communities have begun to join the mainstream of society, while others still enjoy their traditional way of living. Thus, it can be said that cultural integration exists through both the tribal and non-tribal populations of these islands. The low crime rate, cultural exchange, integration, and presentation of tolerance present a unique feature of cultural coexistence, earning the title of "Mini-India." However, the main question remains whether complete non-conflict and co-extensiveness exist among the communities on the ground recently. The book is a good attempt to answer this question by presenting facts and evidence to examine the ground reality of the Andaman &

Nicobar Islands as a miniature representation of cultural coexistence and integrity. Apart from the mainstream society of the islands, some tribal people also constitute the present demographic makeup. Among the tribal groups of the Andaman Islands, the Great Andamanese mainly live with the non-tribal society, while other tribal groups such as Jarawa (Ang), Ongee, and Sentinelese reside in their natural habitats.

While reviewing the cultural and demographic studies of these islands, it has been observed that most studies do not focus on the Nicobar group of islands for reasons such as physical, cultural, and political accessibility issues. Connectivity is one of the issues due to the lack of efficient means of transportation and infrastructure (Dhali and Dar, 2019). Additionally, the Andaman & Nicobar Aboriginal Tribal Regulation restricts the entry of non-tribal people into this region. However, some studies of the community in the Nicobar group of islands have been conducted by Bera (2014), Ghosh (2014), Man et al. (1932), and Montgomerie (1922), which are major literary works. The tribal population of these islands mainly consists of the Nicobarese community, which has joined the mainstream of non-tribal society at a fast pace. They are eager to learn Indian traditional culture, global trends, and carry their ancient cultural essence along with their lifestyle. Many of them leave their villages to go to Port Blair and other parts of India to learn different skills, find jobs, access health facilities, and seek employment. In other parts of the Andaman group of islands, they mostly go to perform their government job duties and contribute to the islands being called Mini India. On the other hand, the Shompen community, another tribal group, is more reserved in nature. They reside in and enjoy their physiographic isolation. The non-tribal population resides in some patches of these islands, mainly in Katchal and Great Nicobar Islands.

Many scholars have suggested various reasons for socio-cultural integration, such as the law of social coexistence due to geographical remoteness, the growth of nationalist values due to the freedom movements, and inter-caste marriages, among others. However, some studies have also found conflicts between tribal and non-tribal people, between different communities, and within communities due to various reasons (Zehmisch, 2023; Biswas and Bannerjee, 2023), raising questions about the ideology of Mini-India for these islands. In conclusion, it could be said that these islands are having a unique cultural amalgamation of tribal and different non-tribal communities which makes these islands an ideal place for co-existence. In order to maintain these features, there is a need for peace, harmony, and tolerance among the all communities of these islands.

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