

## Demographic Study of the Nepali in Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Bhagavatula Venkata Raviprasad

*Department of Studies in Anthropology, University of Mysore, Manasagangotri,  
Mysore 570 006, Karnataka, India  
E-mail: venkata.raviprasad@gmail.com*

**KEYWORDS** Demography. Migration. Nepali. Nepalibasti. People of India

**ABSTRACT** The present study among the Nepali, in Andaman and Nicobar Islands is the first report on their location and existence of this community in South Andaman District of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. One hundred and fourteen individuals in Nepalibasti of Port Blair city constitute the sample for the present demographic study. The Nepali population is demographically young and occupationally diversified. Majority can sign their name in Hindi and Nepali. They had migrated to Andaman and Nicobar Islands more than five decades ago 'voluntarily' and many stated that 'one among their kin' who already had been here persuaded and assisted them to migrate. The Nepali are yet to be 'assimilated' like Bengali or Bhanu or Moplah. The Nepali children born in Andaman and Nicobar Islands are still young and dependent on their parents economically and also emotionally.

### INTRODUCTION

Demographic studies of small communities have a lot of anthropological significance. Academicians study small populations for understanding operation of natural selection. Administrators are interested in extending welfare programs to such populations for progressing equally along with populations in the States or Union Territories of India.

The population that is chosen for the demographic study is known as 'Nepali' in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and as identified by themselves. The Census year publication of 1931 is considered as a baseline publication on ethnography of different communities in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. However, Bonington (1932), the former superintendent of Census operations did not mention the presence of the Nepali population in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The Anthropological Survey of India studied thirteen communities in Andaman and Nicobar Islands under the mega project People of India. The Nepali were not included under this project (Singh 1994; Heidemann and Zehmisch 2016). Therefore, this is the first demographic study amongst the Nepali in the South Andaman district of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The 'Nepali' is a blanket term in India for several communities who have migrated from Nepal to India. Few communities are specifically identified as Bhotia or Limbu or Gurkha. Otherwise, many communities have been identified as Nepali.

### Anthropological Studies in Nepal

Nepal was a landlocked country until the 1950s. Foreign scholars were not allowed to conduct anthropological investigations in their country because of political and geographical issues. Prior to the 1950s, Chinese and Japanese monks and scholars visited under 'Ekai Kawaguchi' and contributed on the culture and religion of the people but all such writings are non-anthropological. Few scholars mainly contributed on trans-Himalayan trade, commerce and political significance (Pradhan and Shrestha 2005). Sanskrit and Buddhist scholars from Italy studied the culture and history of this region. Haimendorf's (1978) study among them is the first anthropological study especially on religion, rituals and social values. Levine (1987) studied ethnicity and ethnic relations in Humla district, which 'are characterised by interaction, interdependence and mobility than contrasts and boundaries between groups'. Community specific ethnographies 'appear to be scanty'. An independent Department of Anthropology was started in 2015 in Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur in Kathmandu, Nepal.

According to 2001 census year, the population of Nepal was 23.15 million, however, the official sources report 1.5 million Nepali migrants in India (Kunwar 2021). Annual growth was 2.25 percent. Nepal is a country dominated by the Hindus (81%) followed by the Buddhist (11%). A few practice Islam (4.2%) and another 3.6 percent follow Kiratism, an indigenous religion of *Kirati*,

Sino-Tibetan ethnic group of eastern Himalayan region who claim themselves as indigenous people of this region.

Shrestha et al. (2019) reported age distribution of Nepali participants. Out of 464 participants, 29.5 percent were in 20-29 years, 23.5 percent in 30-39 years, 18.5 in 40-49 years, 12.3 percent in 50-59 years and 16.2 percent in 60 years and above. They also reported 35.1% of Nepali participants were in normal bodyweight. Both overweight (43%) and obese (11%) Nepali participants were reported.

### **Demographic Studies in Andaman and Nicobar Islands**

Demographic studies were conducted on tribes, settler and migrant populations in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Roy (1995) reported 'a fairly high rate of fertility' among the settlers and 'low rate of mortality' among the Karen. Sanyal (1980) reported 'the increase in the proportion of unmarried males and females among the Great Andamanese'. Bhattacharya et al. (1985) reported 11.48 percent of mortality among the migrant Oraon of Andaman Islands. The Nicobarese, a mongoloid tribe in Nicobar Islands exhibit high level of fertility and rapid growth pattern (Rao et al. 1985).

Raviprasad et al. (2020) reported demography, physique of Onge adult and children in Dugong Creek settlement of Little Andaman Island. The age and sex distribution shows that males are predominant in all age groups than females among the Onge of Little Andaman Island.

### **Migration of the Nepali to Andaman and Nicobar Islands**

'Cross border migration of Nepalese people to India has long history with unique economic, social, cultural and religious purposes' and India was the first country to attract civilian migrants from Nepal. After India's Independence in 1947, Indian Military recruited more than 50,000 Nepalese which shows that the Nepalese have good or very good body build. (Kunwar 2018). Prior to this, the British created a British – Gurkha regiment by recruiting young Nepali after the Nepal – British India war (1814-1816). This was followed by voluntary migration of Nepali people to India began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'for other employment purposes such as working in

the tea states of Darjeeling and the forest of Assam, India' (Kunwar 2021).

A retired police constable of Nayagaon Ward 12 in Port Blair city stated that the Nepali reached Andaman and Nicobar Islands as labour voluntarily after the independence of India. In those days, there was a great demand for police constables in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Several police constables were recruited and in the recruitment, a physical fitness test was the criteria for selection to the post of police constables rather than a written test. Local Andaman youth could easily pass in the written test, but could not compete with the Nepali in the physical fitness test, as the Nepali were in good physique. Hence, many Nepali joined as police constables and were ready to work anywhere on these islands. Those who could not get selected as police constables were recruited as physical education teachers in schools by the education department. Both these recruitments inspired several Nepali youth to migrate. Afterwards, the situation changed, now both written and physical fitness tests are equally important in the recruitment of police constables. Therefore, the Nepali youth could not pass the written test, and now local born children have filled the gap. Now, the Nepali work as security guards in government offices and jewellery shops in Port Blair city and earn a satisfactory amount for living and sustenance, as they are born and brought up here and few had matrimonial alliances with non-Nepali families. Migration of Nepali people to Andaman and Nicobar Islands falls under broad category of 'voluntary migration'.

### **Location of the Community**

The Nepali are specifically confined to the South Andaman District of the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar islands. They live in Port Blair city mainly in Dudhline Ward 12 of the erstwhile village of Shadipur. There are about 30 Nepali houses and their location is known as *Nepalibasti*. According to local informants, this *Nepalibasti* is the major location of the community and they are also sporadically found in nearby areas such as Wandoor, Nayagaon and Corbyn's Cove. They constructed temporary houses with tin roofs and mud walls mainly on government land lying on a hillock in the Dudhline. The informants stated that they are living in this area since 1986.

*Nepalibasti* is about 5 kilometres from the main bazar, which is called Aberdeen Bazar of Port Blair city. There is no bus facility from Aberdeen Bazar to *Nepalibasti*. However, *Nepalibasti* is well connected by three-wheelers and auto drivers charge INR 60 to 70 one-way from Aberdeen Bazar to *Nepalibasti*. This area is also known as *Shadipurkhetti* rather than *Nepalibasti*. The local born families were cultivating this piece of land, growing vegetables and paddy, therefore, this area is popularly known as *Shadipurkhetti* even now rather than *Nepalibasti*. Cultivation depends on quantum of rainfall in a calendar year.

Dudhline, the previous revenue village was added to Port Blair town on 14 August 1974 (Census of India 1991). Dudhline is now part of the Port Blair Municipal council, which comes under ward 12. The area of ward 12 is 2.27 square kilometres and population is 5,206, which is 3.70 percent of the total population of Port Blair city that is 1,40,572 as per statistics of Port Blair Municipal Council.

#### MATERIAL AND METHODS

During the data collection under the project 'The Anthropological Study of Port Blair City in Andaman and Nicobar Islands' the author had come across this population at Port Blair city. The author visited *Nepalibasti*, identified and confirmed them as 'Nepali' from nearby non-Nepali residents in the area of the Dudhline and Shadipur. Then, the author collected demographic details of household members by interviewing the head of the household. Information on the details of migration to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, age and sex of individuals, marital status, educational level, occupation and family income were collected by the interviewing head of family member in a household. The data was collected from households in *Nepalibasti* in March 2021 just after the recession of the first wave of COVID-2019 and before the beginning of the second wave of COVID-2019. COVID 2019 appropriate behaviour was followed during data collection, and all residents cooperated well and furnished demographic details of members of the family.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### Housing and Amenities in *Nepalibasti*

The Nepali are living on government land. So there are no facilities such as electricity or drinking

water to individual houses. There is no proper drainage facility in the locality. Common latrines were constructed a little away from houses by the Port Blair Municipal Council, however, few houses have constructed latrines of Indian commode within their dwelling. Some houses have small kitchens adjacent to the living room. The local municipal councillor has arranged few public taps in the entire locality, and all residents collect drinking water from public taps. Electric lines are managed from public electric poles and in few houses electric meters are also seen, but majority of them stated that they never paid any electricity bills. All the residents stated that they faced shortage of drinking water during the first wave of COVID-2019, as monsoon in Andaman and Nicobar Islands was delayed for a long time. Ward members of the Port Blair Municipal Council arranged water tanks and drinking water for them. There is no specific place in the house for cleaning utensils and washing clothes. Few residents store water in plastic drums and young children are engaged in this task of filling water in plastic drums. Men take a bath in the open area in a nearby dwelling while women take a bath in a temporarily arranged bathroom nearby the dwelling. Majority of them are seen washing clothes nearby public taps. Several residents stated that they collect rainwater and utilise it for daily use.

The Nepali cook food on gas stoves and all houses have LPG cylinders. Television is common and youngsters especially women view telefilms and serials in Hindi. All of them stated that they view films in Nepali and Bhojpuri.

In *Nepalibasti*, at the entrance, a small Lord Shiva temple is constructed and every Monday evening all of them assemble, and women sing Bhajan in Nepali language. One of Nepali residents established a small grocery shop opposite the Lord Shiva temple. Children buy biscuits and chocolates. Adult men buy tobacco products and bathing soaps.

##### Demography

One hundred and fourteen Nepali individuals, of which fifty-four are females, are living in 22 out households in the *Nepalibasti* of Port Blair city. Age-wise sex distribution shows that the Nepali is a growing population because of general tendency of the age-sex pyramid becoming narrower, as the age advances from infancy to old

age (Table 1). The base of the age-sex pyramid is broad, however, wide discrepancy in the 0 to 9 years of age cohort between male and female children in the ages may be attributed to low birth rates and high infant mortality. The present population in Andaman and Nicobar Islands is part of large Nepali *biswakarma* effective and breeding population in the country of Nepal.

As per the details about the year of migration to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which were provided by the members of this community, it is seen that 21.54 percent families had migrated between the years 2000 to 2015. Only one family had stated that they were living in Andaman since 1973 and another one family since 1976. Between the years 1980 to 1999, 34.78 percent of families migrated to Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Nepali migration to Andaman and Nicobar Islands is purely 'voluntary' and an individual 'family decision'. Sometimes one among the members of their family has already been in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and therefore, the Nepali migration to Andaman and Nicobar Islands is different from 'bulk migrations to Andaman and Nicobar Islands' such as those of Bengali or Ranchi or Moplah or Bhantu.

Another interesting feature observed in the demography of Nepali is that the first generation migrants had been born in Nepal, that is, the husband and wife. The second generation, mainly the children were born in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. 44.86 percent of Nepali out of 114 individuals were born in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Majority of them are unmarried children. The present generation of Nepali born in Andaman and Nicobar Islands is yet to become a real Nepali population, then the only identity of Nepali as an individual community would be established by them in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which may take a few decades from now. Longevity of females over males in

Nepali population in Andaman shows that the Nepali population had adapted well to climatic conditions of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

### Sex Ratio

The sex ratio of Nepali in Andaman Islands is 900 females per 1000 males, which is slightly higher than the sex ratio of Andaman and Nicobar islands (876 females per 1000 males) as per 2011 census year.

### Household Size

Thirty-one Nepali families are living in twenty-two households. The average household size is 5.2.

### Marital Status

Out of 114 Nepali individuals, 46.59 percent are unmarried. None of the male individuals are reported as widowers but 4.39 percent of women are reported as widows. One male Nepali is reported as separated, as he left his wife and children in Nepal. An elderly woman stated that if any Nepali boy or girl marries a non-Nepali boy or girl, the Nepali parents of that boy or girl abstain from the marriage function and rituals. All such marriages are usually performed in temples.

### Education

All Nepali males are literate. 25.0 percent of Nepali males had never enrolled in formal schools but can sign their names in both Hindi and Nepali *bhasa*. 25.0 percent of males in the age group of 20 to 29 years studied up to higher secondary level. None of the males in the age group of 40 to 49 years and above 60 years were enrolled in schools, however can sign their names in both Hindi and Nepali *bhasa*. One male Nepali (2.78%) completed post-graduation and two other males (5.56%) completed graduation. 13.33 percent of Nepali male children in the age group of 0 to 9 years and 26.67 percent in the age group of 10 to 19 years are studying in both primary and secondary schools in Port Blair city (Table 2). Overall educational level among the Nepali males so far as schooling is considered is moderate.

Out of 60 Nepali males, 13.33 percent are in the age group of 0 to 9 years and 26.67 percent in

**Table 1: Age wise sex distribution of Nepali in Port Blair city**

Age group	Male	Female
0 to 9	13.33	25.93
10 to 19	26.67	12.96
20 to 29	23.33	24.07
30 to 39	13.33	16.67
40 to 49	8.33	7.41
50 to 59	11.67	9.26
60 to 69	3.33	1.85
70 to 75	0	1.85

Source: Author field data. Figures are given in percentages.



**Table 2: Age-wise educational level among Nepali males in Port Blair city**

Educational level (N = 60)						
Age group	Can sign name	Pri- mary	Sec- ondary	Higher Sec- ond- ary	Grad- uation	Post- gradu- ation
20 to 29	5.56			25	5.56	
30 to 39	2.78	2.78	2.78	11.11		2.78
40 to 49	16.67					
50 to 59	11.11		5.56	2.78		
60 and above	5.56					

Source: Author field data. Figures in the table are shown in percentages

the age group of 10 to 19 years, and are students continuing their education.

When compared to males, 37.03 percent of female Nepali do not any formal education in schools but can sign their names in both Nepali and Hindi *bhasa*. One female had completed graduation. Adult women in the age group of 20 to 29 years studied up to secondary level (5.56%) and higher secondary level (12.96%), however, none of the women in the age group of 40 to 49 years and 60 years and above had any formal education, however can sign their names in Nepali and Hindi *bhasa*. One Nepali woman in the age group of 50 to 59 years and another woman in the age group of 30 to 39 years studied up to higher secondary level. 25.93 percent of female children in the age group of 0 to 9 years and 12.96 percent in the age group of 10 to 19 years are studying in primary, secondary and higher secondary levels in various schools in Port Blair city (Table 3). Overall, schooling level among the Nepali females is also moderate.

**Table 3: Age-wise educational level among Nepali females in Port Blair city**

Educational level (N = 54)				
Age group	Can sign name	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduation
20 to 29	5.56	5.56	12.96	
30 to 39	12.96		1.85	1.85
40 to 49	7.41			
50 to 59	7.41		1.85	
60 and above	3.7			

Source: Author field data. Figures in the table are shown in percentages

Out of 54 Nepali females, 25.93 percent are in the age group of 0 to 9 years and 12.96 percent in the age group of 10 to 19 years, and are students continuing their education.

**Lingau Franca**

Nepali is an Indo–Aryan language and about 49.0 percent of people in Nepal speak Nepali *bhasa* as per 2001 census year of that country. In Andaman and Nicobar islands as well people speak Nepali *bhasa* at home. Besides Nepali, they also speak ‘Andaman Hindi’, while few youngsters said that they could speak Tamil and Bengali as well. During data collection the author observed few women could not speak or understand Hindi, so youngsters translated into Nepali language. Nepali children read and write in Hindi satisfactorily.

The census of India recorded 175 males and 75 females, a total of 250 persons in the census year of 1971 followed by 140 males and 114 females, a total of 254 persons in the census year 1981 as speakers of Gorkhali or Nepali language in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

**Occupation**

The Nepali in *Nepalibasti* stated that majority of them belong to *bisawakarma* whose traditional occupation is metal smith in Nepal. But in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, they have given up their traditional occupation and both men and women have taken on any occupation irrespective of their social hierarchy. Especially Nepali women in *Nepalibasti* are working as domestic servants in the houses of Bengali and local borns. A few women are working in small hotels at Port Blair city as maidservants. Both the jobs are being done by Nepali women of *Nepalibasti* leaving aside their ethnicity and untouchability.

In *Nepalibasti*, 8.33 percent of men in the age group of 20 to 29 years are working as security guards followed by another 3.33 percent in the age group of 50 to 59 years. 3.33 percent of men in the age group of 60 years and above worked as security guards and their children (8.33%) are now working either as a security guard or in some avocation as per their skill and educational qualification. 3.33 percent of men in the age group of 50 to 59 years and 1.67 percent of men in the age

group of 40 to 49 years are working as security guards on their own or through an agency in the nationalised banks or gold and jewellery shops or hotels at Port Blair city. 13.33 percent of Nepali adult men in the age group of 20 to 29 years are working as a driver or mechanic or marketing agents or as helpers in small hotels or food stalls or in private security offices as a helper or peon. 5.0 percent of men in the age group of 30 to 39 years are working as a driver or mechanic or *lohar*. 6.67 percent of men in the age group of 40 to 49 years are working as a welder or cook in a hotel or as a helper in a grocery shop. One Nepali in the age group of 50 to 59 years established his 'own vegetable shop' in the market of Port Blair city. Another three men in the same age group are working in the transportation of goods in private carriers (8.33%). 1.67 percent of men in the age group of 30 to 39 years are working as peons in the private banks. 5.0 percent of men in the age group of 30 to 39 years and another 1.67 percent of men in the age group of 50 to 59 years are working in the defence and police in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and in Mainland India. 1.67 percent of men in the age group of 10 to 19 years and another 1.67 percent in the age group of 20 to 29 years are unemployed. 1.67 percent men in the age group of 20 to 29 years are stated as mentally disabled. Altogether 30.0 percent of Nepali male children in the age group of 0 to 9 years and 10 to 19 years are students and are continuing their studies in the government schools and colleges in Port Blair city. 6.67 percent of male children are yet to enrol in the schools are in the age group of 0 to 5 years. Overall, 43.0 percent of Nepali men comprise of students, children in the age group of 0 to 5 years, men in the age group 60 years and above and unemployed males are dependent on 57.0 percent of men who are main breadwinners of the family (Table 4).

Nepali women (33.33%) are traditionally homemakers who are reported in all age groups beginning from 19 to 59 years (Table 5). Majority of the Nepali men are working in the private sector whose income is meagre for maintaining a family in Port Blair city. Therefore, about 12.96 percent of women the age group of 30 to 39 years are working as domestic servants in the houses of Bengali or in the houses local born near Shadipur of Port Blair city, which is very close

**Table 4: Age-wise distribution of Nepali males in different occupational categories**

Age group (years)	Peon	Security W Services	White collar Jobs	Student	Other Services	Mentally retarded	Children Not enrolled In school	Unemployed
0 to 9				6.67				
10 to 19				23.33				1.67
20 to 29		8.33			13.33	1.67		1.67
30 to 39	1.67		5.00		5.00			
40 to 49		1.67			6.67			
50 to 59		3.33	1.67		8.33			
60 and above		3.33						
Total	1.67	16.66	6.67	30.00	33.33	1.67	6.67	3.34

Source: Author field data. Figures are given in percentage

to Dudhline where the Nepali habitation is presently located. Altogether 5.55 percent of women in the age group of 20 to 29 years, 40 to 49 years and 50 to 59 years have also been reported to be working as domestic servants among them. About 20.0 percent of Nepali female children are reported to be students who are pursuing their education in government schools out of which 11.11 percent of them are in the age group of 0 to 9 years. One interesting feature here is that the dropout of children from schooling is seen clearly in the present data. The Nepali children who were enrolled have declined in the age group of 0 to 9 years from 11.11 percent to 7.41 percent in the age group of 10 to 19 years to 1.85 percent in the age group of 20 to 29 years. Such women majority of them at very young age have been

**Table 5: Age-wise distribution of Nepali females in different occupational categories**

Age group (years)	House wife	Domestic servants	Hotel Services	Student	Pension	Mentally retarded	Children not enrolled in school	Unemployed
0 to 9				11.11		1.85	14.81	
10 to 19	3.7			7.41				1.85
20 to 29	16.67	1.85	1.85	1.85				
30 to 39	3.7	12.96	1.85					
40 to 49	3.7	1.85	..		1.85			
50 to 59	5.56	1.85	.		3.70			
Total	33.33	18.51	3.7	20.37	5.55	1.85	14.81	1.85

Source: Author field data. Figures are given in percentage

working as domestic servants (12.96%). About 15.0 percent of Nepali children in the age group of 0 to 9 years have been out of school and are yet to be enrolled. About 6.0 percent of Nepali women are receiving pension either in the form of a widow pension or old age pension in the age group of 50 to 59 years and women in the age group of 60 years and above. 3.7 percent of women in both the age groups of 20 to 29 years and 30 to 39 years were working as maidservants or cooks or helpers in hotels in Port Blair city. 1.85 percent of women in the age group of 10 to 19 years are reported as unemployed. One female child in the age group of 0 to 9 years has been reported as mentally retarded. Thirty-nine percent of women of all age group comprises of students, children yet to enrol in schools, unemployed women and mentally retarded children are dependent on 61.0 percent of breadwinners especially women among them.

#### Income

In the present study, 58.0 percent of Nepali men and 28.0 percent of Nepali women are categorised as workers or breadwinners of the family. 56.0 percent Nepali population are categorised as non-workers. Ratio of workers to non-workers is 1:1.28. Thirty-one Nepali families are living in 22 households. The per capita monthly income of households is INR 13,048.39 whereas the per capita monthly income of the Nepali individual is INR 3,548.25.

#### Fertility

Thirty-two married and ever-married women gave birth to 65 living children out of which twenty-two are females. The mean number of living children per Nepali women is 2.03. One male in the year 2021 and one female is born in the year 2020. Crude birth rate is 3.33 for the year 2020 and 2021. No deaths are recorded in surveyed households in year 2020 and 2021. Few Nepali individuals screened as COVID 19 positive, and none of them died because of timely intervention by medical staff at the Govind Ballabh Pant Hospital, Port Blair. The mean number of surviving children is 2.64 among the Nicobarese in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Raviprasad 1998).

#### Health and Hygiene

Whenever they become sick, they visit the Govind Ballabh Pant Hospital, Port Blair. Allopathic medicines are commonly used by them, and a few residents also stated they occasionally visit AYUSH hospital in Junglighat for homeopathy medicines. Very close to *Nepalibasti*, the Urban Primary Health Centre is situated in Shadipur. Very few residents categorically stated that they purchase medicines from medical shops and some stated that if illness is still continuing, they consult a medical practitioner, and then go back to Nepal for better treatment. Two physically challenged Nepali children are reported among them.

During the COVID-2019 first wave, all residents said that medical staff from Urban Primary Centre, Shadipur and Govind Ballabh Pant Hospital, Port Blair regularly visited *Nepalibasti*, as it is congested area and provided medicines to them. After data collection was over, Chakargaon, adjacent area to the *Nepalibasti* is declared as a containment zone of COVID-2019. The surrounding environment is clean. The kitchen is congested, and there is neither a specific area in the house for dining, and therefore children and adults eat food in the vacant space at the entrance of the house.

#### Awareness of Development Programs

The Nepali are well aware of all development programs, and all of them procure ration from the ration shop in the Shadipur. They collect wheat regularly, which is staple food for them. They eat rice occasionally. They avail free medical facilities and free education for their children. All of them have a unique identification number (in the form of a Aadhar Card).

#### Comparison of the Nepalis with Other Populations in Andaman and Nicobar Islands

The Burmese, The Karen, the Nicobarese, the Shopmen and the Nepali all look 'almost similar' in Physical features, sometimes indistinguishable by the local residents in Andaman and Nicobar islands as all of them have mongoloid physical features. The Burmese came to Andaman Islands as convicts in the year 1907, are enjoying the status of 'local' that being given by the Andaman and Nicobar

Administration. They are occupationally diversified leaving their traditional occupation of agriculture. (Singh, 1994). The Karen were brought to Andaman Islands as forest labour by the British Government of India in the year 1925. They also enjoy the status of 'local' as well as 'Other Backwards Class (OBC) status being given the Andaman and Nicobar administration. They are Christians and the Karen girls are accepted as bride by all communities in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, therefore 'the Karen become a heterogeneous group'. (Maiti 2010). The Nicobarese numerically and politically dominant Scheduled Tribe in Andaman and Nicobar Islands (27,168 as per Census of 2011) enjoy the status of Scheduled Tribe in these islands. They succeed in achieving a high status in the islands by virtue of their progress in education and employment as teachers, doctors, administrators, staff nurses, clerks and peons in the schools, hospitals, in offices of Central government and Andaman and Nicobar Administration (Raviprasad 1998; Patnaik and Raviprasad 2015). The Shompen, another Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group, numerically small in number (229 as per Census of 2011) enjoy the status of Scheduled Tribe, however, they are still semi-nomadic and their main source of livelihood is food gathering, hunting and fishing (Anstice 2016). The Nepalis on whom the present demographic study was undertaken are neither 'local nor 'Other Backward Class'. They came to Andaman Islands 'voluntarily' and their exact population number is yet to be enumerated on all inhabited islands in the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The common characteristic feature of the Karen, the Burmese, the Nicobarese, the Shompen and the Nepali is that they all eat 'pork', therefore, all these populations are in the same social hierarchy. Majority of men (17%) and women (19%) among the Nepalis are employed as security guards and domestic servants in Port Blair city. The Nepalis came to Andaman Islands for better employment opportunities especially in the police department. 68 percent of migrant Nepalis stated that better employment opportunities in India is the main reason for cross-border migration to India (Kunwar 2018).

### CONCLUSION

This is the first report on the location and existence of Nepali population in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The informants stated that *Nepalibasti*

is the largest habitation and a few families are sporadically spread over in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Because of COVID-2019 restrictions in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, this study is confined to *Nepalibasti*. As per demographic characteristics, the Nepali are a young growing population and the sex ratio is fairly good. They are yet to assimilate in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They are voiceless. When any dispute arises in their *Nepalibasti*, they first approach the ward councillor of the Port Blair Municipal Corporation. A retired administrator stated to the author categorically to 'recheck ethnic identity once again, the Nepali were never in Andaman'.

A better employment opportunity, mainly in police department is the main reason for their voluntary migration to Andaman Islands. Initially physical fitness was the criteria for selection, therefore, many Nepalis got regular job as police constable or home guards or physical education instructors, were probably at par with other local populations in economic status in the past. Now, because of change in policy of recruitment of jobs in Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Nepali could not get regular jobs mainly due to their low education level of both men and women. Being physically strong, the Nepali cleverly have taken up 'security services' as a source employment.

The Nepali are yet to become educationally, economically and a politically strong population in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. This could be possible only if they improve their educational levels. The present generation of Nepali, especially children should continue their studies for better employment opportunities in future

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The present demographic study among the Nepali population would help future researchers and policymakers to identify them on all islands of the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands for bio-anthropological studies.

### FUNDING

The author is thankful to the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi for awarding the Senior Fellowship and the present paper is a part of the fulfilment of the Senior



Fellowship grants from ICSSR, New Delhi for the year 2019 to 2021 vide File No: 2-27/19-20/SF/GEN dated 03/12/2019.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is thankful to Professor (Dr) M. R. Gangadhar, Chairman, Department of Studies in Anthropology, University of Mysore for his cooperation and logistic support during the tenure of the fellowship. The author is thankful to Andaman and Nicobar Administration, Port Blair for all cooperation and also to the Anthropological Survey of India, Andaman and Nicobar Regional Centre, Port Blair for providing library facilities. The author expresses his gratitude to all members of the *Nepalibasti* for providing their family details enthusiastically.

### DECLARATION

The author declares that no conflict of interests is involved.

### REFERENCES

- Anstice Justin 2016. The Shompen of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. In: KK Misra (Ed.): *The Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in India: Privileges and Predicaments*. New Delhi; Manohar Publishers & Distributors, pp. 669-679
- Bhattacharya S K, Dutta P C, Bhattacharya, S 1985. The migrant Oraon in the Andaman Islands: Some demographic aspects. *Journal of Indian Anthropological Society*. 20(1): 86-92
- Bonington MCC 1932. *Census of India, 1931. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands*. Vol II. Calcutta: Government of India: Central Publication Branch.
- Census of India 1971. *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Series 23*. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General.
- Census of India 1981. *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Series 24*. New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General.
- Census of India 1991. *Provisional Population Tables. Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Series 27*. Director of Census Operations, A & N Islands.
- Furer-Haimendorf Christoph Von 1978. *Caste in Nepal, India and Ceylon*. Noida: Sterling Publishers.
- Heidemann Frank, Zehmisch P 2016. *Manifestations of History. Time, Space and Community in the Andaman Islands*. Delhi: Primus Books.
- Kunwar LS 2018. Process and determinants of cross-border migration of Nepalese people to India. *Tribhuvan Univ Journal*, 30(1): 168-184.
- Kunwar LS 2021. Foreign labour migration causes and impacts in Nepal. *Patan Pragya*, 9(2): 144 -154
- Levine E Nancy 1987. Caste, state and ethnic boundaries in Nepal. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 46(1): 71.
- Maiti S 2010. The Karen-A lesser known community of the Andaman Islands (India). *Man in India*, 90(3&4): 627-642
- Pradhan Rajendra, Shrestha A 2005. *Ethnic and Caste Diversity: Implications for Development*. Asian Development Bank. *Working Paper Series No. 4*. Kathmandu: Nepal Resident Mission.
- Patnaik Rajesh, Raviprasad BV 2015. Dimensions of Indigenous People of Nicobar Islands: A Conceptual Deconstruction. In: B Francis Kulirani, Kamal K Misra, Kishore K Basa (Eds.): *Tribes and Analogous Peoples In India: Contemporary Issues*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, pp. 357-372
- Rao KR, Saheb SY, Kishan G 1985. Mortality patterns in a pre-agricultural community of India- The Car Nicobarese. *Hum Science*. 34(4): 283-288.
- Roy SB 1995. *Bio-social Change among the Karens of Andaman Island*. New Delhi: Inter-India Publications.
- Raviprasad BV 1998. *The Nicobarese of Andaman and Nicobar Islands: A Demo-morphological Study*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. Waltair: Andhra University.
- Raviprasad BV, Ghosh Amit Kumar, M Sasikumar M 2020. Survival Continuity and Identity among the Onge of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. *Journal of Anthropological Survey of India*, 69(1): 71-81.
- Sanyal S 1980. Some demographic aspects of the scheduled tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. *Man in India*, 60(3 and 4): 133-145.
- Shrestha S, Dahal S, Bhandari P, Bajracharya S, Marasini A 2019. Prevalence of osteoporosis among adults in Tertiary Care Hospital: A descriptive cross-sectional study. *J Nepal Med Assoc*, 57(220): 393-397.
- Singh KS 1994. *People of India: Andaman and Nicobar Islands*. Vol XII. Kolkata: Anthropological Survey of India & East - West Press Pvt. Ltd.

Paper received for publication in November, 2021  
Paper accepted for publication in February, 2022