

# Pandemic Threat To Indigenous People Of Andaman And Nicobar

February 1, 2021

**In News:** Licho, one of the four last speakers of the Great Andamanic language family, died of tuberculosis and other multiple diseases in Port Blair on South Andaman Island in the Bay of Bengal. Great Andamanic is one of India's six language families, alongside Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, Austroasiatic and Tai-Kadai.

## People of Andaman and Their Language

- She was the last speaker of Sare language. The nation had lost the last speakers of Khora and Bo in 2010. Another ancient language died with Licho this month.
- Now that the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has reached the remote Andaman Islands, with 18 individuals from mainstream society having tested positive (of whom 11 are reportedly virus-free, as of April 22), its indigenous peoples are indeed in grave danger.
- So are the exceedingly rare languages they speak. In particular, the Jero language of the Great Andamanic language family, now spoken by only three individuals, two males and one female – all of whom are more than 50 years old and suffer from a variety of ailments – is at imminent risk of extinction. The archipelago is also home to roughly 670 Onge and Jarawa tribes people, whose languages belong to the Ang family.
- Population geneticists believe that the Andaman islanders descend from one of the founder populations of modern humans, which migrated out of Africa some 70,000 years ago to populate South Asia, Southeast Asia, New Guinea and Australia.
- For tens of millennia, they protected themselves from the diseases and other harm that outsiders could inflict

by killing anyone who landed on their shores.

## **The Great Andamanese**

- The Great Andamanese are an indigenous people of the Great Andaman archipelago in the Andaman Islands.
- Historically, the Great Andamanese lived throughout the archipelago, and were divided into ten major tribes.
- Great Andamanese are one of five PVTGs that reside in Andamans archipelago.
- Origin: The Great Andamanese are classified by anthropologists as one of the Negrito peoples.
- The Andaman Negritos are thought to be the first inhabitants of the islands, having emigrated from the mainland tens of thousands of years ago.

## **Population Status**

- Their number stands at 51 (some sources say 57) as per the last study carried out by Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti in 2012.
- As per an anthropologist at the Anthropological Survey of India, in the 1850s, the Great Andamanese numbered between 5,000 and 8,000.
- Then a penal colony was set up and diseases like syphilis, gonorrhoea, flu and others spread.
- By 1901, their population had dropped to 625, and by the 1931 Census, only 90 Great Andamanese were left.
- By the 1960s, they were down to a mere 19, and were settled on Strait Island of the Andaman islands.
- This persistent decline in their population is because of their vulnerability to illnesses.
- Other reasons for population decline include- alcohol, colonial warfare and loss of hunting territory.

**According to a 2011 UNESCO report,** India is home to 197 endangered languages. Of these, 156 are spoken by fewer than 10,000 people and 42 are critically endangered – meaning that only elders speak them, and only partially and infrequently.

Most of the critically endangered languages will die when the elders do.

### **T.B Naik has given the following features of tribes in Indian context**

- A tribe should have least functional interdependence within the community.
- It should be economically backward (i.e. primitive means of exploiting natural resources, tribal economy should be at an underdeveloped stage and it should have multifarious economic pursuits).
- There should be a comparative geographical isolation of its people.
- They should have a common dialect.
- Tribes should be politically organized and community panchayats should be influential.
- A tribe should have customary laws.

### **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)**

#### **Identification**

- In 1975, the Government of India initiated to identify the most vulnerable tribal groups as a separate category called PVTGs and declared 52 such groups, while in 1993 an additional 23 groups were added to the category, making it a total of 75 PVTGs out of 705 Scheduled Tribes, spread over 18 states and one Union Territory (A&N Islands) in the country (2011 census).
- Among the 75 listed PVTG's the highest number are found in Odisha (13), followed by Andhra Pradesh (12).

#### **The criteria followed for determination of PVTGs are as under:**

- A pre-agriculture level of technology.
- A stagnant or declining population.
- Extremely low literacy.
- A subsistence level of economy