

# Shompen Tribe

March 22, 2021

## About Shompen or Shom Pen

- “Shompen” is possibly an English mispronunciation of “Shamhap”, the Nicobarese name for the tribe.
- The Shompen are a designated Scheduled Tribe.
- **Location:** The Shompen or Shom Pen are the indigenous people of the interior of Great Nicobar Island, part of the Indian union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- **History of contact:** Danish Admiral Steen Bille was the first to contact them in 1846 and Frederik Adolph de Roepstorff, a British officer who had already published works on the languages of Nicobar and Andaman, collected ethnographic and linguistic data in 1876.
- **Participation In India’s Election:** A polling station was set up in their area for the 2014. Shompen people for the first time participated in the democratic process.
- **Population:** In 2001, the population was estimated at approximately 300. Before the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, the villages were home to 103 and 106 Shompens respectively. By the time of the 2011 census, only 10 and 44 people were left in these villages respectively.
- **Economy:** They practice a hunter-gatherer subsistence economy. The main weapons are the bow and arrow.
- **Society:** In keeping with the tropical climate of the islands, traditional attire includes only clothing below the waist. Shompen huts are built to house 4 people, and villages are made up of 4 to 5 families. The lowland Shompen build their huts on stilts and the walls are made of woven material on a wood frame and the roof of thatched palm fronds, and the structure is raised on stilts.

- **Language:** The Shompen languages, They may constitute a language isolate. Paul Sidwell (2017) classifies Shompen as a Southern Nicobarese language, rather than a separate branch of Austroasiatic.

### **Tribes of Andaman & Nicobar**

- There are 6 aboriginal tribes in Andaman & Nicobar islands belonging to two broad groups of Negrito and Mongoloid.
- Except Nicobarese (Mongoloid), the rest 5 are recognizes as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) i.e. Sentinelese (Negrito), Great Andamanese (Negrito), Ongs (Negrito), Jarawas (Negrito) and ShopPings (Mongoloid).
- **Sentinelese:** They are the only remaining tribe in the Andamans to still maintain their isolation from the rest of the world and live like hunter gatherers. They are connected to the Jarawa on the basis of physical, as well as linguistic similarities. Both Sentinelese men and women do not wear clothes.
- **Great Andamanese:** The great Andamanese is a collective term used for 10 different tribes that lived in most of the large islands in the Andaman. They are also known for their brave History where they fought with bows and arrows with the English men who tried to occupy their land (The Battle of Aberdeen). Today most tribes are extinct and their cultural and linguistic identities have largely been lost. (e.g. their members now speak mostly Hindi).
- **Jarawa:** Jarawas continue to hunt and gather nomadic tribes and are often hostile to outsiders. Men fish with bows and arrows in the coastal waters while women catch fish with baskets.
- **Onges:** They are a hunting and gathering tribe settled at Dugong Creek and South Bay on Little Andaman Island.
- **Shompen:** The Shompens are primarily hunter-gatherers and also practise a little bit of horticulture and pig

rearing.

**Nicobarese:** They are the largest of tribes and are primarily horticulturalists