CHAPTER 12
DISCUSSION

GOVERNING THE INDIGENES IN THE ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

“The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them.”
—Michel Foucault, In ‘The Chomsky-Foucault Debate’, 1971

This chapter discusses the findings of the research. It proffers an analysis of how the six indigenous communities in the islands have been governed during the colonial and the post-colonial epochs, locates the rationality of governance and discusses its effects on the indigenes. The chapter briefly explains the Nicobarese resistance, their counter-conducts. It also discusses how the identity of the islands has undergone a sudden change, which has given rise to a new raison d'état, and how it has affected the Nicobarese communities.

12.1 Governing the PVTGs

The most contested fault line within island studies, as Hay (2006: 21) argues is “whether islands are characterised by vulnerability or resilience; whether they are victims of change, economically dependent, and at the mercy of unscrupulous neocolonial manipulation, or whether they are uniquely resourceful in the face of such threats.” The ANIs are typically characterized by “three relatively durable topological and binary relations: land and water, island and continent/mainland, and island and island” (Stratford et al 2011: 115). These islands have three distinct features: small islands, with a colonial history and inhabited by five particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs). As Baldacchino (2012) concludes in the context of small islands, the ANIs have also lent themselves to near absolute human domination in the aftermath of their repeated occupation by different colonial forces.

All societies, whether indigenous or modern, are dynamic and undergo change to meet their needs (Sillitoe 2000). Both intrinsic and extrinsic factors cause such
changes, which could be seen in all the cultural elements of the societies such as values, beliefs, norms, symbols and technology (Schaefer & Lamm 1999). Brochmann (2003) argues that the economically and politically dominating sections or classes of the society also enjoy ideological and symbolic power. They set principles for change in traditional societies, which, as Oliver-Smith (1996) reasons, destroy the socio-cultural fabric of the traditional societies. The indigenes of the Andaman and Nicobar islands have been experiencing such sociocultural change, which is being introduced to their societies by external agents.

The ANIs were colonised by Denmark, Austria, Britain and Japan before they became a part of independent India. The colonial governance in the islands was guided by a rationality that viewed its indigenous communities as primitive people. The colonial administrators, as Chandi (2010a) argues, experimented to civilise the “primitive islanders” into “civilised islanders.” The lifestyle of the indigenes was altered through befriending and drawing them into a changed system. Such civilising processes in the islands over the last two centuries decimated nine groups of Andaman islanders, while a large number of the indigenes were made dependent on external aids for survival which destroyed their traditional life (Andrews 2010; Chandi 2010a, 2010b).

Radcliffe-Brown (1922:10) in *The Andaman Islanders* points out that when the British colonisers received fierce resistance from the indigenes of the Andaman islands, they tried to forge friendly relations by opening the Andamanese Homes, where the indigenes could get free rations, lodging and medical treatment. Satadru Sen (2010) in his book *Savagery and Colonialism in the Indian Ocean: Power, Pleasure and the Andaman islanders* analyses such practices as “an exercise in the taming of the savage on the edge of the colony, in which tameness was imagined not as the end of the war but as a fleeting and renewable part of the experience of violence.”

The post-1947 engagement of the Andaman and Nicobar Island administration with its six indigenous communities is analogous to colonial rationality which found little meaning in the practices of the colonized subject. Venkateswar (2001: 207) argues that the independence of India was merely a transfer of power between two colonial regimes in the islands. The rationality of governance post-independence remained colonial in its dimensions as it kept taking the control of the indigenes from their traditional resource base.
Tribal welfare in Andaman islands, as Pandya (2012) argues, has “often meant the selective recuperation of a series of colonial arrangements with a clear objective: the containment of the hostile tribe, the exploitation of its forest resources and the expansion of the penal colony.” Pandya (2007 cited in Sekhsaria and Pandya 2010: 8) further argues that the common practice of governance in the islands is characterised by an establishment of patron-recipient relations with the indigenes. These relations envision normalisation of the indigenes by altering their “livelihood from hunting to cultivation and eventual participation in the industrialist capitalist production.”

The welfare policies of administration for the Great Andamanese and the Ongee changed their traditional lifestyle. Both the communities were relocated in permanent settlements on Strait Island (the Great Andamanese) and in two reserve camps on Little Andaman–Dugong Creek and South Bay (the Ongee). This policy, as Chandi (2010a) argues, destroyed the self-sufficiency and independence of both the communities. After relocation, the livelihood engagement of both the communities became negligible making them dependent on Department of the Tribal Welfare for ration supplies. The survival of the Great Andamanese and the Ongee in absence of external help is questionable now.

The Jarawa live in a 1,021 sq km tribal reserve (Economic and Political Weekly 2012: 9) in the western region and the coastal belt of middle and south Andaman. Despite the advice of the Anthropological Survey of India against any contact with the community (Economic and Political Weekly 2012: 9), the Island administration continued contact missions\(^\text{180}\) with the Jarawa which were started during the colonial period.

These contact missions not only diluted the hostile (protective) behavior of the Jarawa, but also made them vulnerable to exploitation as their territories, forest and aquatic resources were encroached upon by the settler communities. In its aftermath, the Jarawa suffered from many diseases that they contracted from the outsiders (Sekhsaria 2003). Pandya and Mazumdar (2012) reason that the government assumes that like the Ongee and the Great Andamanese, the Jarawa

\(^{180}\) The policy of contact mission evolved in the colonial era. A contact party consisted of government officers, medical officers, anthropologists, statisticians, government photographers and occasional special guests which visited the Jarawa territory with gifts (Pandya 2002: 3831).
could someday be settled down in a defined place where they would be encouraged to give up hunting/gathering and practice horticulture instead.

The Sentinelese and the Shompen have remained relatively uncontacted. The geographical isolation of the Sentinelese on the North Sentinel Island and their resistance to outsiders has forestalled any communication with the community. The Shompen live in the tribal reserve of the Great Nicobar Island and are categorised as coastal and forest Shompen. The coastal Shompen have no contact either with the Nicobarese or the forest Shompen, while the forest Shompen have barter relations with the Nicobarese (Arora 2010; Patnaik and Prasad 2009; Saini 2014b). Through its contact mission with the forest Shompen, the administration doles them cooking oil, utensils, rice, pulses, cloth and biscuits. Gupta (2007) argues that such practices only create an insidious culture of dependency among the forest Shompen and undermine their self-sufficiency.

Table 10 shows the population statistics of the PVTGs of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. With the colonisation of the Andaman Islands in 1858, their population witnessed a steady decline because of punitive actions, diseases and habitat destruction. The change brought in their ecological and social environment by the extrinsic agents dwindled their numbers so quickly that all these five communities are now on the verge of extinction.
Table 10: Population figures of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (ANI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Great Andamanese</th>
<th>Ongee</th>
<th>Jarawa</th>
<th>Sentinelese</th>
<th>Shompen</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1250</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>2227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>1692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>1161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>228</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>816</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The data for 1858 to 1931 is adapted from Raha (2005: 23); the data since 1951 to 2001 is taken from the ‘Basic Statistics of Andaman and Nicobar Islands 2010/2011’, Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Andaman and Nicobar Administration. The current population data of the PVTGs, ANI was collected by Sarkar from AAJVN (Andaman Adim Jati Vikas Nigam) in September 2013. The data marked ‘*’ are estimates.

12.2 Governing the Nicobarese

12.2.1 The Pre-tsunami Scenario


181 The Census 1858 did not count the population of the Sentinelese and the Shompen. The Census in 1888 does not include the population of the Ongee and the Shompen. The Sentinelese and the Shompen were excluded from the Census in 1858; the Ongee and the Shomen were excluded from the census in 1888; the Sentinelese were excluded from the census in 1951; the Jarawa and the Shompen were excluded from the Census in 1971; the Sentinelese were excluded from the Census in 1981; the current survey in 2013 does not include the Sentinelese.

182 The census 2011 shows that the population of the Nicobarese in 2001 was 28,653, whereas the official website of the Nicobar district shows the figures as 23,681.

Andamanese, the Jarawa, the Sentinelese and the Shompen, the process of sociocultural change among the Nicobarese was not disruptive to their society.

The historical process of change among the Nicobarese supports the argument put forth by Sillitoe (2000) that sociocultural change is rarely disruptive when the local communities have the freedom to make decisions about what to choose or reject from the neighbouring cultures. Sociocultural change among the Nicobarese, as Kloss (1971) argues, began with the colonisation of the islands and spread of Christianity. The Nicobarese belief system and lifestyle were contravening to the ethos of Christianity and the missionaries came to the islands with a sole purpose of spreading their religion among the animist indigenes. The Danish, Italian and French missionaries failed to spread Christianity among the Nicobarese until Vedappa Solomon, a British agent, was posted in Car Nicobar in 1859.

Solomon and Richardson ushered numerous changes among the Nicobarese through baptizing them. With the spread of Christianity, practices such as, ‘devil murder’ (a practice of killing a person considered as a menace to the society), witchcraft and beliefs in spirits waned. The change brought among the Nicobarese could be understood through this excerpt of the Superintendent at Port Blair:

Many more of the islanders have been led to abandon their savage customs, to cultivate vegetables and fruit for their own consumption, to drink tea instead of tari\textsuperscript{184}, to sew, to carpentry. Their former customs of infanticide, devil murders, falling coconut trees on the death of the owner, dragging about the bodies of deceased persons, burying them with live animals and so on, have altogether been given up in the principal village of Mus, where the mission station is (The Superintendent at Port Blair cited in Thompson 1951:647).

With the colonisation of islands by Japan (1942-45), the Nicobarese were coerced and forced to work as construction labourers. However, the community, under the leadership of Richardson, exhibited unparalleled resilience. After the Second World War, Christianity as a religion and the values preached by it rose in high esteem among the Nicobarese. The community showed keen interest in evangelization, and Richardson converted the Nicobarese to Christianity which Thompson (1951:648) explained as:

Richardson had restarted the schools, restored the old church and built many new, spread the Gospel to many once heathen villages, and baptized hundreds of converts. Car Nicobar itself was now almost wholly Christian; the other islands were asking for evangelization. The martyrs had indeed proved the seed of the Church. In 1949, 750 more candidates were ready for confirmation.

\textsuperscript{184} Toddy is an indigenous beverage
Soon after independence, all the indigenes of Car Nicobar were converted. Yet, many indigenes, who inhabited the remote islands in central and southern Nicobar, remained animists. Slowly, these indigenes were also converted. Some of them fully adopted Christianity, while others incorporated some elements of animism with it. The efforts of Richardson not only spread Christianity from northern to the southern Nicobar Islands but also imbued certain values among the indigenes that altered their lifestyle. The adoption of new religion induced sociocultural change among the indigenes, the rationality for which is reflected in an excerpt of Sir Compton, who visited the villages of Chowra Island as expressed as:

Unlike Car Nicobar the villages in Chowra are filthy. Flies were thick everywhere. Dogs abounded. Round the houses broody fowls in rectangular baskets were hung up out of the way of rats. Devilish black and red figures to frighten other devils were all over the place. The women were dressed in squalid rags: the men wore practically nothing except a long red string behind, representing the tail of the dog from whose union with a woman after the flood they believe themselves to be sprung. Everybody—men, women and children—is diseased.... John Richardson intends to convert all the islands. Then the devils that haunt the dark island of Chowra will flee and the evil in it which I felt like a physical impact will give way to good.

The sociocultural change spread among the Nicobarese by the missionaries gained momentum after the independence of India. Infrastructure development and basic amenities such as schooling, healthcare and clean water were extended to the Nicobarese by the government. The introduction of modern horticulture practices and co-operative system streamlined the Nicobarese livelihood. These changes had a positive impact on the community and while the rest of the five indigenous communities in the islands recorded a decline in their population, the Nicobarese thrived and multiplied quickly.

12.2.2 The Post-tsunami Scenario
The Nicobarese sociocultural homeostasis was disrupted in 2004 by the tsunami and the culturally insensitive humanitarian interventions initiated in its aftermath. The tsunami jolted the Nicobarese society, which virtually lost everything including human lives, material artifacts, livestock and agricultural land. Out of a total population of 42,055 (including the non-Nicobarese) in 2001; 3,449 people were reported dead or missing in the Nicobar Islands, of which 2,955 were the indigenes. Soon after the catastrophe Chowra, Trinket, Little Nicobar, Kondul, Pilomilow and Bambooka islands were evacuated and the indigenes were shifted to
relief camps set up across Car Nicobar, Teressa, Katchal, Nancowry, Kamorta and Great Nicobar islands.

Post-tsunami, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited the islands and expressed that the project of reconstruction and rehabilitation of the islands provided an opportunity for a “New Andaman” (Krishnakumar 2009: 104). The Nicobar Islands experienced substantial infrastructure development such as roads, jetties, intermediate shelters, permanent shelters, community halls, schools, medicals and so on. An aggregate of 7,001 permanent shelters were allotted to the homeless survivors (Parasuraman and Krishnan 2013; Sekhsaria 2015). On top of monetary compensation, the community received social amenities such as clean water, electricity, medical aid and free rations for a period of nearly five years.

A decade after the tsunami, the fallout of humanitarian interventions in the central and the southern Nicobar Islands is clearly discernible in terms of sociocultural rupture in the recipient communities. After spending some weeks in the relief camps, the Nicobarese were keen to retreat to their respective villages. However, the administration cajoled them to wait until the allocation of permanent shelters, which were constructed and allotted in a phased process that completed in 2011.

A multitude of factors such as sudden cross-cultural exposure, disengagement from work, protracted stay in the intermediate shelters, excessive monetary compensations, free rations and modern social amenities made the Nicobarese languid and consumerist subjects. Restricted mobility, changed food habits and adoption of a sedentary lifestyle have brought many new diseases to the community. The humanitarian interventions also undermined the livelihood practices, social structure and political organisation of the community that have serious ramifications for its people.

The post-tsunami humanitarian intervention, which intended to help the victim communities in the Nicobar archipelago, was also envisioned as a means to bring sociocultural change among the Nicobarese. The studies conducted by Chandi (2006b), Chaudhry and Thukral (2006), Gupta and Sharma (2006), Singh (2006, 2009), Fischer-Kowalski et al 2011, Wildenberg and Singh (2012), Singh and Haas (2012) and Ramanujam et al (2012) conclude that humanitarian aid administration disregarded the capacities of the Nicobarese and promoted aid dependency in the northern and the central Nicobar Islands.
The pre-tsunami social organisation of the community could facilitate self-building with initial external humanitarian assistance. However, the extended external intervention preempted such an outcome. Desperation and fear caused by the tsunami were used for radical socio-economic change. Aid programmes changed the traditional social structure and power relations, leading to a rupture in the social order, values and rules of resources use. The humanitarian aid administration by the government disregarded the local capacities of the Nicobarese and promoted aid dependency among the indigenous communities.

Humanitarian intervention in the southern Nicobar was also not merely limited to improve the material conditions, standard of living or modernise the Nicobarese apparatus of production. It was also a mechanism, which as Escobar (2005) argues, intends to teach certain rationality to people through the introduction of specific practices and forms of knowledge. These interventions were value-laden and a product or by-product of the power and knowledge of the modern society that intended to integrate an isolated indigenous community.

The rationality of the post-tsunami practices of administration was influenced by a specific regime of truth which perceives the Nicobarese as a primordial society with an outmoded cultural base. Consequently, the post-tsunami interventions, programmes, strategies and multiplicity of authorities intended to transform the Nicobarese society. The humanitarian interventions were characterised with maneuvers through which the Island’s administration sought to change the traditional cultural practices and embody a modern behaviour among the Nicobarese.

An external imposition of change on the Nicobarese by coercion could have attracted resistance from the community itself or representation of its resistance by some civil society. The reconstruction of the Nicobarese spatiality in the southern Nicobar was the most feasible means adopted by the administration to modernise the community. Since the changes were slowly designed, there was little scope for any counter-hegemonic effort from the Nicobarese. It was also the most economical way of integrating a population without any overt agenda.

The whole subjectification of the Nicobarese was a non-violent and tacit strategy where the community had little scope for resistance. Merely a continuous gaze of the settlers made the Nicobarese interiorise self-surveillance as the community became its own overseer. The interventions of the administration
seemed both neutral and independent, while it obscurely exercised its tacit agenda which was disguised by the humanitarian concerns.

The post-tsunami humanitarian intervention in the southern Nicobar has proved to be a watershed in the history of the Nicobarese. It is reminiscent of the historical debate between Verrier Elwin and A V Thakkar regarding the modus operandi of the state while intervening in the traditional societies of its indigenous communities. The Nicobarese cultural practices were perceived as an abnormal behaviour by the ANI administration which it envisioned to normalise through post-tsunami humanitarian interventions. It is this misinterpretation of the indigenous culture which necessitated the post-tsunami governmental practices to make changes in their basic structure.

As Said (1978) argues in *Orientalism*, power and imperial relations have defined the Orient, and in the process of knowing the Orientals, the discourse of Orientalism constructs and dominates the Orientals. The Nicobarese were also represented by the same relations of power and they too had little scope for self-representation. Normalisation was embodied in the post-tsunami humanitarian interventions and there was no space for primal liberty for the Nicobarese. Humanitarian interventions interwove power relations within and across the Nicobarese and the settler communities in the southern Nicobar. These interventions were also culturally insensitive, undermined local capacities and focused on diminishing cultural diversity between two societies by thrusting on the Nicobarese whatever was deemed necessary for their transformation.

The disregard towards the Nicobarese cultural practices without understanding their contextual significance had ramifying effects. Through humanitarian aid administration, the administration not only envisioned to update the Nicobarese mode of production but also maneuvered to teach them a modern rationality. However, its top-down interventions only promoted dependency, depression, institutional rupture, consumerism and unemployment among the Nicobarese. The pre-tsunami processes of change among the Nicobarese were gradual, intrinsic and self-realised. The community enjoyed the freedom to negotiate the change, it adopted some and rejected others, thereby maintained its own distinct culture which was a fusion of traditional and modern practices. The sudden top-down culturally insensitive post-tsunami interventions gave little scope to the Nicobarese to negotiate the change, which brought disruption to their community.
The aftermath of the post-tsunami humanitarian interventions in the central and the southern Nicobar Islands is depressing. The indigenes of the central and southern Nicobar Islands reason that post tsunami their islands experienced development as envisaged by the government, which was characterised by the marginalisation of the indigenous culture. These ideologically driven humanitarian interventions overlooked the ‘International Human Rights Standards on Post-disaster Resettlement and Rehabilitation’ and specific international standards relating to the indigenous people.

These standards recognise the inherent dignity and plurality of indigenous cultures and reaffirm international commitment for the socio-economic and cultural well-being of the indigenous people. They also underscore full participation of the indigenous people in the matters concerning them so that they could enjoy the fruits of sustainable development without compromising on their distinct cultural identities and social organizations (Table 11).
### Table 11: International Standards Relating to Indigenous People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>International Binding Instruments, Guidelines, Declarations and Principles</th>
<th>Specific section/principle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Principle 22 |
| 1993 | — Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, 1993, World Conference on Human Rights | 20 of section 1 |
Principle 14 |
| 1995 | — Copenhagen Declaration, World Summit for Social Development, 1995 | Principle/goal  
26m |
| 2002 | — Plan of Implementation, United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002 | 7e of poverty eradication section |
| 2005 | — Human rights and indigenous issues, 2005, Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/51  
— Protection of indigenous peoples in time of conflict, 2005, Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/52  
— Working group of the Commission on Human Rights to elaborate a draft declaration in accordance with paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 49/214 of 23 December 1994, 2005, Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/50 | | |

Source: Adapted from Batra and Chaudhry (2006: 98-99)

### 12.2.3 The Nicobarese Counter-Conducts

The southern Nicobarese have been most severely affected by the sociocultural change that has descended upon the community after the tsunami. Before the catastrophe, the Nicobarese, with a small population of 1,181 (Census 2001), lived isolated in remote pockets of the islands and had little exposure to the outer world. The tsunami perished the elderly in large numbers and the community lost its vital leadership which could negotiate or channelize the process of post-tsunami change.
Therefore, factors such as lack of leadership, magnitude of loss and uncertainty that prevailed after the catastrophe made the community only a humble recipient of aid. Even a decade after the tsunami, the indigenes of the southern Nicobar have shown negligible counter-conducts, except for the fact that the community has become sedentary and dependent, which is also a form of passive resistance.

The Nicobarese in the central Nicobar had a stronger leadership, but the community was also overwhelmed by the post-tsunami humanitarian interventions. The central Nicobarese have exhibited strong resistance with regard to the issues concerning their survival. The community asserts a stronger agency, especially since the appointment of Casper James as the assistant commissioner (AC) of Nancowry (since 2014). James is the first Nicobarese from the central and the southern Nicobar, who has been appointed as the AC. With the support of James, the local leadership has enthusiastically taken up the Navy-Nicobarese Kamorta Island land issue.

In September 2014, a dispute arose between the Navy and the Nicobarese over the ownership of Kamorta land. The Nicobarese leadership, bolstered by the AC, asserted its claim on the disputed land, which made the situation critical. It could only be assuaged through the arbitration of the chief secretary (CS) who visited the island along with the director general of police (DGP) and the deputy commissioner. The CS gave a patient hearing and reassured both parties that a speedy and amicable solution to the long-pending conundrum would be arrived at. Until then, he appealed to them to maintain peace and preserve the status quo (Saini 2015a).

The AC has been taking a keen interest in preventing the further abuse of ANPATR, 1956 in the islands. The local administrative apparatus has become vigilant in monitoring and checking the malpractices followed by the non-Nicobarese in the tribal reserve. James has been passing numerous orders to protect the traditional livelihood of the Nicobarese. For instance, a strict prohibition on fishing in shallow waters/channels and allotment of daily rated mazdoor work to the unemployed Nicobarese. The tribal councils of the central Nicobar also see it as an ideal opportunity to discuss and implement their agenda of an “eco-friendly development” in the islands. The revival of the indigenous mode of living is the thrust of this alternative development, which also intends to fuse indigenous and modern cultures. The leadership of the community is highly
critical of the fact that the government has ignored the indigenous knowledge and local resources while developing infrastructure in the islands.

The AC has been convening regular meetings wherein village captains across the islands enthusiastically deliberate upon the prospective trajectory of development for the islands. The community has decided to construct *gol ghar*\(^{185}\) (round houses) in every village, a project that it wants to undertake under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. In an effort to save its material artifacts, the community plans to set-up an eco-friendly tribal village on Trinket, an island that was fully evacuated post-tsunami. In order to prevent further exploitation of the community, the tribal leadership is also taking up the issues of the non-Nicobarese encroachments of the land in Kamorta and Katchal with the administration and lobbying for the proper implementation of the protective provisions of the ANPATR (1956).\(^{186}\)

### 12.3 The Raison D’
\textit{\'etat}

The analyses of the post-tsunami humanitarian interventions and the survival issues concerning the Nicobarese society need to be contextualised against the backdrop of the raison d’
\textit{\'etat} of the state, which is national security. This raison d’
\textit{\'etat} has been explicitly expressed in the official documents studied to analyse the two of the three issues concerning the survival of the Nicobarese in the central Nicobar Islands: ‘The Navy-Nicobarese Kamorta Island Land Conundrum’ and ‘The Tamil Sri Lankan Repatriates’ Issue’.

The earlier chapters of this thesis have discussed that the humanitarian interventions were ideologically driven and intended to modernise the Nicobarese community so that the grip of the administration on it could be strengthened. Through the post-tsunami humanitarian interventions, the government attempted to increase its control on the isolated pockets of the islands, which were exclusively inhabited by the Nicobarese. The implicit rationality of these humanitarian maneuvers was to secure the territories in the southern Nicobar, which hold utmost strategic significance for the Indian state.

Bratton (2012) argues that the strategic importance of the Andaman and Nicobar islands has been underscored at least since the 1940s. During the Second

\(^{185}\) *Gol ghar* have immense cultural and spiritual value for the Nicobarese.

\(^{186}\) Based on the agenda discussed by the tribal councils with the AC, Nancowry during numerous meetings in the months of September and October 2014.
World War, the Imperial Japanese army occupied the islands from the British for strategic reasons. Even after the end of the Second World War and the independence of India, the British leadership discussed to maintain their rule over the islands because of their apparent geopolitical value, which K.M. Pannikar (1961 cited in Bratton 2012) argued as:

The strategic area in Indian warfare was not so much Burmese frontier, as Malaya, Singapore and the neglected Andaman Islands . . . The possession of the Andamans and the Nicobars gives to India strategic bases which if fully utilized in co-ordination with air power can convert the Bay of Bengal into a secure area.

Nehru also appreciated the significance of the islands for the Pan-Asian policies of the late 1940s and the early 1950s. However, it was only in the 1960s that the islands received the attention of the government when Burma and Indonesia contested the Indian sovereignty on these islands. The islands were confronted by numerous security related issues such as poaching, encroachments by illegal squatters and usage of some islands by the Burmese militia groups for drug and arms smuggling. In the 1980s and the 1990s, the defence establishments expanded and the islands were seen as a key to the success of the Look East policy enunciated in the 1990s. By the end of the 1990s and since 2000, India took serious cognizance of the increasing Chinese interest in the Indian Ocean, especially after the Chinese military started developing dual-use infrastructure in Myanmar (Bratton 445-46).

China and India are the prominent powers in Asia with global aspirations and significant conflict of interest (Pant 2007:61). These islands are a valuable geopolitical asset not only for India’s Look East Policy (Kukreja 2013; Kaul 2015) but also for countering the presence of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), which is increasing its influence in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) (Mclachlan 2014). The IOR is one of the most strategically important areas of the world (Upadhyay 2013), which the US military strategists have also long argued as a vital “choke point” to cut off the oil supplies to China during conflict (Zora and Woreck 2005).

The Indian Ocean links Chinese sea lines of communication (SLOCs) to the European trade routes as well as to African and Middle Eastern energy supplies. The Indian Ocean region contains China’s most significant SLOCs as it imports almost 75 per cent of its oil from the Middle East and Africa. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands span 450 nautical and are strategically located in the eastern Indian
Ocean, from where “India could employ anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) weapons to create a maritime exclusion zone in the event of conflict with China” (McLachlan 2014; Map 5).

Map 5: China’s Critical Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC)


Besides China being a major threat to India in the Indian Ocean, the remoteness of the islands, inadequate infrastructure development, pervasive underdevelopment and weak coordination among security agencies are the key concerns for securing the islands (Das 2011). The Vajpayee government, especially after the Kargil war (1999), took a keen interest in the islands. In the aftermath of the Kargil war, the Kargil Review Committee (KRC) and Group of Ministers (GoM) were set up in 1999 and 2001 to address the defence issues of the country. The report of GoM emphasized on the islands and argued that “the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, far removed from the Indian mainland, are increasingly vulnerable particularly in the context of the emergence of the Islamic separatist movement in Aceh” (Bratton 2012:443).

Therefore, in 2001, the government created the Andaman and Nicobar command (ANC) in the islands and ever since then, it has been bolstering its defence establishments. Sen (2013) argues that the ANC was created following the Kargil Committee report “partly to buy peace among the three services [Army, Navy and Air Force] and partly to ensure that all three gear up to operate from the region.” Smith (2014) argues that ANC “serves as the focal point for Indian engagement with regional navies in Southeast Asia… Its tasks include maritime surveillance, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, as well as suppressing gun running, narcotics smuggling, piracy, and poaching in India’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).” However, as per Sainik Samachar the ANC’s mandate also includes:

ensuring that the eastern approaches to the Indian Ocean comprising the three straits – Malacca, Lombok and Sunda – remain free from threats for shipping’ as well as “monitor[ing] ships passing through the Six Degree and Ten Degree Channels (cited in Smith 2014).

Since 2001, the identity of the islands has undergone change. With the creation of the Andaman and Nicobar Command, the once isolated and neglected islands are now considered as one of the most significant strategic spaces of the country. Not only have the defence establishments seen an exponential rise, the overall development activities in the islands are also assessed in the context of defence maneuvers. While addressing public at Raj Niwas in July 2015, the Lt. Governor of the ANI, Lt. General A K Singh reiterated the need to maintain balance between four centers of gravity in the islands— “(1) strategic importance of the islands (2) the people (3) the indigenes (4) the islands’ ecology” (Andaman Chronicle 2015).

“Strategic importance of the islands” is the first centre of gravity in the islands that influences everything. For instance, during the post-tsunami humanitarian response, the government imposed tight restrictions on the humanitarian organisations, which Zora and Woreck (2005) argues as “in preserving a cloak of secrecy over its military operations in the archipelago, the fate of tsunami victims is clearly the last consideration.” In yet another incident in 2014, after the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH 370 went missing on 8 March 2014, China was under immense domestic pressure to find it, since, among the 239 passengers on board, 150 were Chinese. During search operations for the jetliner in the Andaman Sea, China

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188 “The ANC is India’s first and only joint tri-service command, with rotating three-star commanders-in-chief from the Army, Navy and Air Force reporting directly to the chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee” (Smith 2014).

189 A magazine published by the Indian Ministry of Defense
pushed hard to get access to the Indian waters around the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. However, India turned it down while expressing as:

China’s interest could be some domestic pressure, as most of the passengers on board the MH370 were Chinese….But it is also true that if warships and other military assets are allowed to come closer to Indian territory, it does provide an opportunity to snoop around, which India would not like (Official Communication cited in Bipindra and Mitra 2014).

Sekhsaria (2015) argues that numerous islands around the world have become mere extensions of economic, political and strategic interests; and the “Nicobar Islands appear clearly to be headed in that direction.” The post-tsunami sociocultural change among the Nicobarese and the survival issues confronting their society are intricately related with the raison d’état of the state. For securing the islands and developing them as a strong defence base, acquisition of land and cooperation from the indigenes are a prerequisite.

The Nicobarese tuhets have absolute right on their land, of which the chief captains are the custodians. Even for defence establishments, the government has to request the local leadership for allotment of land, which sometimes the community has turned down. The traditional livelihood of the community is land and labour intensive, which makes land as the most significant possession of the community. Therefore, a change in the Nicobarese traditional livelihood could ease the process of land acquisition and defence establishments in the islands.

The Nicobarese cooperation is significant in curbing the problems of poaching in the islands. The islands have long been grappling with the menace of foreign poaching, which has a long history. Poachers from the neighboring countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka visit the Andaman and Nicobar islands. They enter into the Island creeks and camp in the deep jungle for poaching turtles, sea cucumbers, corals, shells, sharks, crocodiles, dolphins and other prohibited species under wildlife protection act (Jeyabaskaran, Venkataraman and

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190 Just after the independence of India, the government required a sizeable piece of land to extend the airfield belonging to the Indian Air Force (IAF). The chief captain was approached for land, but he declined the attractive price offered for the land. Shortly, the captain, along with a group of Nicobarese visited Delhi for the Republic Day celebration and met the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru at his residence. While introducing the chief captain, the liaison officer whispered in the PM’s ear that the captain had declined to give land to IAF. Nehru requested for the said land, to which the captain agreed. On being asked about the price of the land, the chief captain asked for the jacket that Nehru was wearing in exchange for the land. Nehru gave his jacket to the captain who cherished it as a great souvenir (Tamta 1992: 75-76).
Table 12: Details of Foreign Poachers
Apprehended in the A&N Islands Territory
(2008-2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poachers caught</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>1045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessels seized</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Environment and Forests (2011)
*Data for the year 2011 is up to June.

Poaching in the islands is viewed as a major threat to the security of the islands. As per the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), poaching activities in the islands are well organised and the poachers have sound knowledge of the terrain. “These poachers know these islands well enough and with that information, they could help terrorists strategise their attacks” (Oneindia 2007). The island’s administration shared these concerns with the government. The Home Ministry also briefed the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs that settlers from Myanmar, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were settled in the islands and there is a possibility of these settlers being used “by elements from their erstwhile countries.” “The UT government is of the view that left out LTTE cadre may look for safe havens in the near vicinity and may take advantage of our uninhabited islands for their temporary hideouts” (rediff.com 2014).

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (2011) also shared its concerns over the fact that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands have a large number of ethnic people of Myanmar origin settled in, who “are believed to be often conniving with the poachers.” The officials with the coastal security agencies in the Andaman and Nicobar islands shared their observations as:

Similar incidents have been there earlier also. Most of the poachers apprehended by the Coast Guard this time are those who have been deported to their respective countries after completing their sentences here for the same offences. Those taken into custody in connection with poaching are mostly Myanmarese (cited in S. Anil 2010).

The local people of the islands play a pivotal role in helping the ANC apprehend poachers by passing on information. However, some of the local people are also
suspected of being agents of these poachers. The report of the Committee constituted by the Ministry of Environment and Forests to ‘holistically address the issue of poaching in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands’(2011) underscored the significance of local informers in leading successful anti-poaching operations.

The indigenes of the islands, especially the southern Nicobarese are an easy target of the poachers. The poachers maintain contacts with the Nicobarese, offer them gifts, and exploit their marine resources. While addressing a press conference at MP Bhawan on 24 May 2014, B.P. Ray, the Member of Parliament from the islands argued that intrusions from the Myanmarese poachers in North Andaman and Campbell Bay are posing a major threat to the islands. The MP argued that during his visit to the Nicobar Islands, he found that islands such as Tillanchong, Afra Bay, Maca Chua have become “a perfect den” for the Burmese poachers (Sanjib 2012).

Therefore, in order to check the menace of poaching and to strengthen surveillance in the islands, the government view that control over the Nicobarese is necessary. Through post-tsunami humanitarian interventions, the government intended to tighten its grip on the Nicobarese in the southern Nicobar so that they could be governed and the islands could be secured.

12.4 Conclusions
The last decade in the Nicobar Islands has been a decade of disaster, humanitarian interventions and drastic sociocultural rupture. The Nicobarese view that post tsunami their society moved backwards and has reached a “zero point” from where it must take a U-turn. There is no denying the fact that remoteness of the islands posed a major challenge to the disaster response. The islands also lacked adequate systems required for an effective management of the tsunami, which were built only after the enactment of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. However, the islands had their own strengths to launch an effective disaster response. The Nicobarese is a small, well-organised and a laborious community with strong leadership. With its active participation, the government could have undertaken a culturally sensitive humanitarian response and a positive social change among the Nicobarese could have been initiated. The post-tsunami humanitarian intervention, at its best, should have been a “catalyst for local processes” (Parasuraman 1995).
No doubt, the devastation caused by the tsunami initially subverted the Nicobarese sociocultural milieu. However, the real rupture was done by the very aid which intended to help the Nicobarese. The complex assemblage of varied forces—spatial, legal, administrative, financial, architectural and judgmental characteristics of the post-tsunami humanitarian aid have largely distressed the Nicobarese. The aftermath of the catastrophe also seems an upshot of excesses and inefficiencies of administration. In this process of transformation from a jungle community to a modern society through using space and humanitarian aid as a strategy, the Nicobarese have become vulnerable and dependent. However, if we agree that modernization has a linear trajectory, some Nicobarese have certainly trodden a few steps towards that state. But a close scrutiny of the Nicobarese situation portrays that neither are they what efforts were directed to make them, nor are they what they used to be.