

## Mega Tourism in Andaman and Nicobar Islands: Some Concerns

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**ABSTRACT** Tsunami has changed lives of thousands of people in the islands of Andaman and Nicobar (A & N) Islands, India since it struck on 26.12.04. The tsunami has posed certain uncertainties in the minds of people about the kind of houses they are going to stay in, the kind of neighbourhoods going to form, the kind of livelihood they are going to indulge in. Providing livelihood to the Tsunami affected is going to be the top most agenda of the administration. The Administrators see this as an opportunity to rebuild the profile of islands, starting from the rebuilding of livelihoods to building of infrastructures, and also reviving and expanding tourism. It is being anticipated that developing tourism at a massive scale would by default generate employment. It would also rebuild the economy, especially matching its scope with the some of the well known international island tourist spots. As per the information obtained from the Information, Publicity and Tourism Department of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, IPNT, a proposal of Rs 5000 crores for developing tourism in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is submitted to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India for consideration. It is worthwhile to take stock of the current ecological state of the islands, socio-economic and demographic profile of the people living in these islands. Accessibility to these islands and how far these islands can take the possibilities and pressures of tourism? Whether the fragile ecosystem of the islands can sustain the pressures of the above development? Whether the environmental degradation due to the development can be balanced with the growth in economy? With the proposed pattern of development what irreparable damages will occur to the environment, impact on lives of people and their habitat, their culture and their health?

### BACKGROUND

Tsunami has changed lives of thousands of people in the islands since it struck on 26.12.04. The islanders may not have the same life for years to come. For people who have lost their family members, the loss is irreversible. For those who lost their livelihood, houses, the process of rebuilding is arduous. The tsunami has posed certain uncertainties in the minds of people about the kind of houses they are going to stay in, the kind of neighbourhoods going to form, the kind of livelihood they are going to indulge in and about the viable alternatives they would have in case they are not able to pursue their previous livelihoods. Tsunami has completely shattered the livelihood of about 10,000 households, directly affecting about 50,000 people. Its indirect impact has been much more. All 38 inhabited islands have been affected by this great tragedy. Almost entire population of this territory has been directly or indirectly affected. However, the farmers, fishers, and the daily wage earners are the worst hit (Digal, 2005).

For past two years, post tsunami, there has been a lot of activity in and around the Andaman and Nicobar islands. The local Administration, defense personnel with the support of a few

NGOs have taken up a tough challenge of recovery and reconstruction in the islands. Beginning with, the disposing of dead, evacuating the people to safer places, setting up and managing the camps providing relief, supplying food and shelters immediately, and construction and moving people to intermediate shelters, before the monsoon set in 2005 have been a daunting task. There has been lot of criticism on the kind of intermediate shelters which were handed over, made of CGI sheets, which are unbearably hot and too congested with only one room. Nicobarese are not using these shelters, however, non-tribal who lost their homes have no other alternative. Official view is, due to heavy monsoon in the islands that was the only structure which could be built in short time and which can withstand the strong monsoons.

All these activities were done with the limitations of manpower, infrastructure and several logistic problems due to the distance from main land, severe damage to the ports and jetties apart from the low spirits of people ravaged by the tragedy. After construction of 10,000 intermediate shelters by April 2005, the main focus now is restoration of livelihood of affected people to bring about normalcy. Government of India has sanctioned the 'Rehabilitation Package' for

agriculture, animal husbandry and fishery sectors which are under implementation in full swing. The Rehabilitation package for industry, Business and Tourism sectors is under active consideration of the Government of India.

### TOURISM PROPOSAL AND LARGER CONCERNS

Providing livelihood to the islanders is going to be the top most agenda of the administration. The Administrators see this as an opportunity to rebuild the profile of islands. Lot of recommendations, and suggestions have been put forth, starting from the rebuilding of livelihoods to building of infrastructures, like housing, schools, hospitals, markets, and also reviving and expanding tourism. Tourism prospects have gained lot of attention. It is being anticipated that developing tourism at a massive scale would by default generate employment, which is the need of the hour. It would also rebuild the economy, especially matching its scope with some of the well known island tourist spots in Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia.

According to a report in Singapore's *The Strait Times*, officials of Thailand's foreign and tourism ministries have actively set their sights on promoting a possible tourism link between the country's Phuket Island and Port Blair, the capital of India's pristine Andaman Islands. Plans include the introduction of jet skis, adventure sports like parasailing, water safaris and establishment of treetop houses in protected forests. It has been proposed that the CRZ regulations may be relaxed upto 50 metres to promote tourism. The administrative authorities in the island are also serious about CRZ regulations imposed there and have taken up this matter to the Centre to abolish the same. In a joint statement issued in this regard, Jha and C R Garg, director tourism, A&N mentioned that, the main strength of the islands are the unpolluted beaches and the investors in hospitality industry must be given permission to construct resorts in the beaches safe water zone. They opined that CRZ regulation if barred, would leave them more scope for attracting large number of inbound tourists (Anand, 2002). Mohammed Jadwet, president, Chambers of Commerce, Andaman &

Nicobar too feels that the Government should exempt A&N from CRZ regulations (Express Travel and Tourism, 1-15, Nov. 2001). However, India notified "coastal stretches of seas, bays, estuaries, creeks, rivers and backwaters which are influenced by tidal action (in the landward side) up to 500 meters from the High Tide Level (HTL) and the land between the Low Tide Level (LTL) and HTL as the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)". Further, activities such as industries, disposal of hazardous substances, fish processing, effluent discharge, land filling, land reclamation, mining, harvesting ground water, construction and landscape alteration are banned within CRZ with a few exclusive exceptions.

Prospects for economic links between Phuket and Port Blair, particularly for tourism and fishing, are considered to be bright. The vast beaches and beautiful corals are surviving due to absence of large scale fishing activity, with massive development and fishing activity all these precious natural resources will disappear. Twin-city agreement (twining) between the two cities, Phuket and Port Blair has been agreed up on and charter flights between Phuket and the Andamans, are also being planned. However, it is feared that 'Twining' will lead to unregulated influx of people further pressurizing and exploitation of resources. Environmental groups in both countries are also voicing their concerns about this proposal, saying that it could sound the death knell of indigenous tribes.

As per the information obtained from the Information, Publicity and Tourism Department of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, IPNT, a proposal of Rs 5000 crores for developing tourism in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is submitted to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India for consideration. It is worthwhile to take stock of the current ecological state of the islands, socio-economic and demographic profile of the people living in these islands. Accessibility to these islands and how far these islands can take the possibilities and pressures of tourism needs an assessment. Hence, lots of questions arise with regard to future planning on the islands.

- Whether the fragile ecosystem of the islands can sustain the pressures of the above development?
- Whether the environmental degradation due to the development can be balanced with the growth in economy?
- With the proposed pattern of development

what irreparable damages will occur to the environment, impact on lives of people and their habitat, their culture and their health?

- Who are going to benefit from the tourism development, the indigenous tribal groups, the settlers, or the outsiders?
- For whom the tourism will cater to? Limited to national tourists or open to international tourists too?
- What would be the problems which one can foresee with a huge influx of people, especially in to the reserved lands and forests of the people?

The above questions may appear as unfounded fears and reaction of environmentalists by the neo-liberal development thinker. But let us scrutinize this proposal of expanded tourism, in the light of historical facts and figures, the intrinsic contemporary tribulations of the islands, some development programmes and policies which have already caused irremediable and irrevocable damage to the environment and impacted the lives of people and the environment. And what would be the best possible sustainable tourism, which is pragmatic and constructive?

#### **GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF ISLANDS**

Andaman and Nicobar islands shimmer like emeralds in the Bay of Bengal, a total of 572 islands, islets and rocks, with only 38 inhabitable islands. The total geographical area covered by Andaman and Nicobar Islands is 8249 sq. km. The Andaman district have an area of 6408 sq. km while the Nicobar district covers 1841 sq. km. The total Forest cover in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is about 6964 sq. km. Out of which 2929 sq. km is reserve forest and 4242 sq. km is protected forest. That is about 86% of the total area is reserved and protected forest area and 36% of the reserved forest has been earmarked as primitive tribal reserve. Contact with the local tribals is restricted. About 18% of forest area is covered with mangroves at coastal area. The mangroves cover in Andaman and Nicobar islands is about 22% of the total mangrove coverage in India. Andaman and Nicobar islands have unlimited ecological treasures, are endowed by finest tropical evergreen forests in the world and are home to a large number of rare and endangered, even undocumented species of flora and fauna and the forests are a treasure house of

biodiversity. It has been suggested that the total number of coral species in these islands should touch around 400. Islands are repository of immense variety of ecosystem and wildlife. The biodiversity reserves of islands is impressive with over 2200 flowering plants, 120 ferns, 58 mammals, 242 birds, 83 reptiles, 10 amphibians, 750 fishes, 320 coelenterates, 407 crustaceans, 941 mollusca, 1500 insects and no. of medicinal herbs and plants (Sircar, 2004).

Geologically the Andamans and Nicobars represent the highest peaks of an under-water mountain range which is an extension of the Arakan range in Burma and the Sumatran Barisan ranges to the south. The islands lie parallel to a geological fault line to the east, crossing the Andaman and sea from north to south. The line marks two tectonic plates rubbing against each other; the eastern plate, an extension of the huge Eurasian plate, is stationary while the Indian plate to the west is moving north to northeast at the rate of a few centimeters a year, taking the Andaman islands with it. These movements cause earthquakes and volcanic activity in around the islands. Indian's only active volcanoes, on Barren and Narcondam islands, are sitting directly on the faulty line. Earthquakes are common features, Post tsunami more than 500 shocks on the Richter scale 4 and above and around 380 shocks of Richter scale of 5 and above were felt till date as per the Indian Meteorological Department, IMD reports. Three papers published in the May 20, 2005 issue of the journal *Science* by an international group of seismologists provide a comprehensive scientific analysis of the December 2004 and March 2005 earthquakes, and discuss future earthquake potential near Sumatra and the Andaman Islands. The new analysis gives the Sumatra-Andaman earthquake a seismic magnitude of at least 9.1, and possibly as high as 9.3. Earlier estimates had put it at magnitude 9.0 (National Science Foundation, June 1, 2005). This puts the Islands in a fragile state and increased vulnerability to natural disasters.

The history of the islands itself shows the influx of people who abused and maneuvered the native people and the environment for their own advantage. The indigenous people of Andaman Islands whose habitat for thousands of years have been invaded by British and colonized and later after independence was taken over by Indian Union with policies with which many have reservations and do not consider as

of any relevance with respect to the tribals (Venkateshwar, 2004). CCMB, Hyderabad study published in *Science* of DNA samples of Onges and Great Andmanese matched the types believed to have evolved around 65,000 years ago, making them representative of the earliest known humans.

**Tribes:** The tribals like Sentinelese, Great Andamanese, Onges are settled in isolated islands, in Sentinel island, Strait Island and Little Andaman respectively. As on 2001 out of total A & N island population of 356,265, there are only 92 Onge, 43 Great Andamanese, 350 Jarawa, 100 Sentinelese and over 250 Shompens who constitute Primitive tribes (Sircar, 2004). The livelihoods of most of the tribal are based on forests, which have been encroached, and some developmental programmes like the construction of Andaman Truck Road (ATR). The Jarawas heartland has been torn for building ATR. The 340 km long ATR from Port Blair in South Andaman to Diglipur in North has been constructed through the heart of the very forests the Jarawa home and Tribal Reserve. This road has increased access to the Jarawas, poses the greatest threat to the Jarawas as well as THE forest that they have protected for so many years. After the Jarawas have come out of their isolation, this road has increased contact with outsiders enormously resulting in the most damaging impact on their lives. 57 miles of ATR passes through Jarawa Reserve area. Huge amount of money, (over Rs. 15 crores) and timber are used annually to maintain the road. Environmentalists estimates that this maintenance consumes a minimum of 12,000 cu. m. of timber from the evergreen forests. Compare this with the 80,000 cu.m. of timber that is officially logged from these islands annually and one gets a sense of the destruction being caused by the ATR (Sekhsaria, 2003).

Further, the policies to integrate the tribals, like the 'contact programme' with Jarawas, Onges, Great Andmanaese have proved to be disastrous from an anthropologist point of view. These contact programmes with the tribal are criticized the most, which are intruding into their lives, natural habitat, addicting them to vices like alcohol, gutka and tobacco and introducing various diseases and sexual exploitation. Addiction to alcoholism by the tribal is now used by settlers to exploit forest produce. Poaching and encroachment inside the Onge reserve too,

are ever on the increase. Tribal people have incredible knowledge of the forests and the sea. Insensitive development policies and logging operations have, brought them to the brink of extinction today.

**Settlers:** After independence in order to safe guard the territories of these islands, Indian government made special efforts to settle people from different parts of the country, to see that regional separatism doesn't exist, thereby making the island mini-India in nature. The Bengalis are the major population group which came to the Andamans after Independence. They came as 'settlers' under the Government rehabilitation scheme, which started as early as 1949 and continued till the 1970s. All these groups migrated to the Andamans from different districts of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The Bengalis are primarily distributed in the different villages of North, Middle and South Andamans. The rehabilitated settlers of Great Nicobar are the Ex-servicemen. Ex-servicemen were rehabilitated according to the rules of the District Soldier, Sailor, Airmen Board, formerly known as the Ex-servicemen Association and the Indian Ex-servicemen League. The first batch of Ex-servicemen came to the island in 1969. Others, from different parts of the mainland followed in 1970, 1974, 1977, 1979 and 1980. These settlers include among others, Punjabis, Marathis, Malyalis and Tamilians. The current ratio of the remaining groups of Andaman Islanders to settlers<sup>1</sup> is approximately 1:1000, a stark testimony to the scale at which the dominant majority has outnumbered them (Venkateswar, 2004). The total number of primitive tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands constitutes below 1% of the total population.

Though the settlers on these islands themselves were from the marginalized section in the mainland. The settlers of these islands are mostly in to government services, and are small entrepreneurs to meet the local needs. Due to historical reasons, and lack of facilities and institutions, the people here in the islands have been always remained marginal, with hardly any scope and opportunity to develop and become entrepreneurs within an environmentally sensitive planned economy. However, the attitudes of most of the settlers who today live on the land that belongs to the tribals ridicule the tribal as uncivilized, 'junglees'. Though the islands have taken a mini- India composition, and the all

pervasive caste hierarchy practiced in the main land is not so visible here. There are inter-caste, inter-religion and inter-region marriages happening. Though, at a macro level there is a conflict, more so a constant tiff between the tribals, non-tribal settlers and even the government officials, especially those who come from mainland to serve for two years. And above all the administration has an upper hand in taking decisions, most of the time top down approach.

**Forests:** Forests form the major ecosystem in the islands and developmental activities directly or indirectly affect the forests (Nair, 1989). The exploitation of timber began with the establishment of a penal settlement in the islands, and a Forest Department was started in 1883 (Majumdar, 1975). Though 70% of the forests of Andaman Islands are still forested but much of it is degraded secondary growth. Over the past thirty years, soil, meteorological, and forestry experts stressed the need to keep the islands under forest cover, despite that large scale clearing and plantation projects are underway over the period with legal and illegal settlements. Thus, clearing the forests for cultivation and encroaching of land. Accelerated immigration from mainland India and the growth of a number of forest-based industries have led to extensive settlements and the conversion of forest areas into revenue and agricultural lands. Over the time, there has been a growth in population from 14628 in 1881 to 356152 as per 2001 census, largely made possible due to encroachment and illegal settlements in areas that have been demarcated as "tribal reserves". Large areas of forests have been lost to the timber and plywood industry. Expanding settlements and commercial logging for over a century have destroyed large areas of the islands forests.

Over the years the destructive consequences of sand mining for construction is readily visible in the disappearance of several beaches, with its effects on wildlife on that region, as well as steadily increasing coastal erosion that even newly installed sea walls are not sufficient to control. Accumulated evidence indicates the sharp decrease in mangrove cover, together with the destruction of coral reefs as a consequence of the run-off from the land-based activities such as logging, agriculture and unchecked use of pesticides (Sekhsaria, 2002). The Andaman situation is a classic example of unplanned natural resources exploitation, disregarding basic

ecological principles. It is primarily an economy determined by the prerogatives of mainland development behaviour and pattern ignoring the sustainability.

With the above background on the history and the richness of the island, the answers to the above raised questions or concerns will follow. Before that a glance on the damages that Tsunami has caused needs attention.

**Tsunami and Its Impact on the Islands:** Tsunami caused huge loss to the lives and the infrastructure in the islands. The loss of lives as per the latest report is 3553 including dead and missing though earlier reports indicated loss of lives over 6000. The loss of life in the Nicobar Islands is immense, leaving lot of vulnerable sections like widows and children. It is difficult to assess the psychological anxiety, depression and emotional distress among the survivors who have lost their kith and kin.

The disaster had a severe impact on livelihood of the thousands of inhabitants. Fisherman living on the coast lost their boats, and fishing nets. Due to ingress of the sea water in to the low lying cultivated fields, the soil become unfit for cultivation in large tracts of these lands. Large number of coconut, areca plantations has been affected. Mangroves are drying and dying. Most of the dug wells got contaminated causing acute scarcity of drinking water. Now the high tide is on an average about one meter higher than the pre-tsunami situation and some areas are still getting flooded during high tide. The disaster caused an enormous environmental impact that will affect the region for many years to come.

The impact on agriculture sector due to earthquake/tsunami is immense. About 10,000 hectares of agricultural land got affected. Standing vegetable/paddy crop has been damaged in about 3950 hectares. The estimated loss @ Rs. 30000/- per hectare is Rs. 11.85 crores. Plantation in about 7060 hectares has been damaged. The loss has been estimated at Rs. 586.50 crores. Around 116000 nos. of livestock have been lost which includes cattle, goats, pigs, birds etc. Livestock Losses has been estimated to 1,51,844. The other major loss is to the fishermen. 413 traditional boats, 376 Engine fitted boats were lost or fully damaged and 201 traditional boats and 411 engine fitted boats partially damaged. Other major losses were; Ships (9), powerhouses (20MW) & power infrastructure, 21 out of 49 Jetties, which are the life

line for transportation, along with related shipping infrastructure, road network were damaged extensively (Goel, 2005).

Severe impact on housing and habitat of the inhabitants. More than 70% of the houses were damaged in the southern islands. The southern islands of the archipelago, mainly Chowra, Teressa, Bompoka, Katchal, Kamorta, Nancowrie and Trinket, Campbell Bay were the worst affected. Three islands viz. Chowra, Bompoka and Trinket have to be abandoned though now people are keen to move back.

Post tsunami, there has been some major ecological changes, the coral reefs have been affected, the agricultural lands have been salinated, badly affecting the produce, crop plantation like areca, and coconut. The beaches have been engulfed and submerged. Hardly the beaches are visible, during high tides, the water comes on to the roads, like the famous Corbyn Cove beach, Chidiatapu, Wandoor beaches in Port Blair. The houses on the coastal areas have been submerged. Even the houses and plantation in the creeks have been badly affected, displacing the people and livestock.

#### **VIABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF TOURISM**

More than a decade ago a study by Ghosh (1994) reports that there are quite a number of very good reasons which deters the growth of tourism in the islands territory as lack of information, poor tourist transportation, communication facility, in adequate hotels and tourists accommodation facilities, other infrastructural deficiency. There is a strong view held by an influential section of the administration staff also and by some outsiders that any attempt to develop tourism on a large scale in these islands would have harmful effect on the islands ecology. It is argued that the opening up of the islands to tourists may cause an indiscriminate destruction of many unique and valuable species of flora and fauna some of which as alleged have already become extinct.

There is also the question of maintaining the ethnic balance of the islands. An unfettered development of tourism requiring the setting up of an elaborate infrastructure of hotels and other entertainment joints etc. would, it is argued, lead to an influx from the main land a large number of fresh migrants which would disturb the delicate

ethnic balance that exists between tribals and settlers from the mainland. It is also stated that tourism brings with it, a whole gamut of alien cultures, influences and modes of living. It has to be decided how far the consideration of security and the needs of environmental protection should take precedence over the need to develop Andaman and Nicobar Islands as a tourist resort (Ghosh, 1994)

Another study by Rajavel (1998) reports various problems which are deterrents in the expansion of tourism in the islands, like, most of the accommodation do not have proper catering facility, some guest houses have canteen facilities but charge exorbitant prices for the meals. This problem is more acute in inter islands. There is a lack of accommodation in other islands. Most of lodges do not have laundry, protected drinking water, proper ventilation, lavatories, mosquito net facilities and these lodges are in unhygienic conditions. There is no proper control facility etc. inside the ships, lack of passenger waiting hall at the mainland ports. Getting tickets is another problem. No lighting facilities at beaches, like Wandoor, Chidiatapu, and other beaches at Havelock and Car Nicobar, Cambell Bay.

The beaches are dressed with empty liquor bottles, cow dung's, rotten animal bodies, some iron nails, waste of coconut trees etc. Some residing near the beach use the beaches for their open toilet purposes. There is no seating arrangement on the beaches. Handicraft products are quoted at extraordinary high price. Public toilet facility is totally absent in the important beaches like Corbyn's Cove, Wandoor etc. There is no 'pay and Use' toilet unit in these islands.

Though Andaman and Nicobar receive an average annual rainfall of little more than 3000 mm. During summer season the rain fall is scanty and there is an acute shortage of water supply even drinking purpose. Apart from this there are parking problems, narrow roads, high taxi fares, etc.

It is necessary to offer some valuable suggestions for the tourism planning, tourism development, and to promote tourism in the context of environment protection and its conservation in the Andmana and Nicobar Islands by taking its carrying capacity and other sensitive areas (Rajavel, 1998).

**Water Scarcity:** Most serious concern in the islands is scarcity of fresh water. Despite the hilly terrain and abundance of rain, there are, sur-

prisingly, on any of the islands of the Andaman group save Little Andaman, no perennial streams or underground storage of any substantial size. In the Nicobars as well, except for Great Nicobar, there is a general absence of fresh water streams. Rainwater runoff is extremely high, at places almost 90 per cent, and *nallahs* rush downhill in torrents that carry a great deal of the topsoil and mud to the sea with them, making the land, wherever the protective trees and undergrowth have been cleared, infertile and unsustainable in the space of one or two monsoons. Come a change in season, though, and they dry up quite abruptly, forcing the population, human and animal, to depend for water on the limited rainwater storage ponds and dug-wells. By April, the lack of water makes itself felt quite uncomfortably, and the Islands appear to wait as much anxiety for the rains as the parched plains of the mainland.

The town of Port Blair, dependent mainly on the Dhanikari Water Storage Dam, which has had its height raised since it was built, resorts to supplementing its supply from the Dilthanman Tank (now converted into an amusement ground and renamed Mahatma Gandhi Park), and faces rationing of water till the rains descend again. The other island similarly stressed is Chura, where the traditional method of rain water collection is pots still continues, but under pressure of increasing population is proving extremely inadequate (Dhingra, 2005).

***Carrying Capacity of the Islands:*** Attempts have been made several times, to estimate the carrying capacity of the Islands and contain the population to a sustainable level. One, which takes into account land, climate, water resources, and levels of agricultural technology, and calculates population supportable on the basis of potential of the land to meet protein- calorie demand, places the figure at 1.6 lakh at a density of 3 persons per ha of agricultural land with intermediate levels of agricultural technology. The maximum, with highly advanced levels, could go to 5 persons, per ha, and 2.50 lakh population.

However, another study takes the potential of the sea in to account, and places the carrying capacity at 8.5 lakh- one person per sq. km of the 6 lakh sq. km of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and a few thousand on the rich coastal, marshy areas by exploiting the potential for fish cropping. The same criticism holds here as well, that the figure is really the maximum that can live

here at a point in time, but not the figure that the Islands can sustain over an extended period, environmentally or economically (Dhingra, 2005). The current population of 4 lakhs has crossed the threshold of the former estimation.

***Prioritizing Reconstruction:*** Compensation and large scale rebuilding of infrastructure and livelihood is under consideration. The reconstruction of infrastructure, especially the government building, institutional buildings like schools, dispensaries, hospitals, the housing, and reconstruction of jetties, buying and repairing of boats, ships, fishing nets is slowly picking up. Employment generation, compensation for the agricultural losses and livestock loss, is under process. The whole process of rebuilding and rehabilitation is huge challenge in itself. Now the greatest concern should be to ensure that every individual affected by tsunami gets his or her right to food, shelter, education and right to health. It is essential to restore the housing of the people affected, the livelihood which are feasible, practical and within their capacity to restore. Rebuilding institutions like schools, offices, banks, hospital and making them functional. Renovating of roads and jetties, boats are the prime concern. Meeting the requirements of the people, who have been displaced and who have lost all their belongings.

There are other problems with the expansion of tourism in these islands. Basic consumables like rice, wheat, vegetables, fruits, milk etc. are expensive than the mainland as it has to be transported from the mainland. The cost of transportation hikes the prices of simple consumable items. One can imagine what would be the state in case of more number of people coming in as tourist and to meet their demands of food, water and shelter. Waste disposal will be a challenge especially when the islands are cut off miles away from the mainland. There are currently no measures either at the panchayat level or municipal level to dispose the garbage and this is much neglected inviting great trouble for coming times. The need of the hour is to make the islands self sufficient in terms of production, with the introduction of sustainable practices which needs a holistic action plan.

The basic premise to promote large scale tourism is that the growth of tourism in the islands will improve the economy and also will generate employment for the local people. It is highly uncertain that the opening up of these islands

for large scale tourism will in any way going to help the tribal population, especially so called Primitive Tribal Groups or the settled local population who are neither equipped with knowledge nor with the skills to get absorbed in to the new avenues of employment. They may remain at the verge doing the menial and unskilled labour jobs. It would be the outside, entrepreneurial companies and industries like, hotels, tour and travel operators who will come in a big way and reap the benefits at the cost of the labour of the local population and the natural resources. The employment opportunities to the local people and more so tsunami affected people will remain to the extent of extracting the labour. No efforts would be made to augment their skills and employ them in a better position. And lack of capital and lack of skills will not make the local population entrepreneurs.

The precious resources of the islands which are already depleting like, timber, sand, flora, fauna, coral reefs, and mangroves will be severely affected further. And the most important of all is to assess whether the fragile ecosystem of the islands; the coral, the limited beaches, most of which have been submerged after tsunami, can sustain the pressures of tourism.

The tourism proposal plans to introduce, high speed ships, boats, helicopters, water sport equipment, like jet ski, etc. investing crores of rupees. The question is what about its maintenance? Under the Protection of Aboriginal Tribes (PAT) Act 1957, foreign nationals are prohibited to visit the Nicobar islands and tribal reserve areas. The serious concern will be more violation of forest regulations and encroachment into the indigenous tribal reserved areas. Further, paving way to more vices like alcoholism, drugs, and prostitution in these islands. Matching with other foreign tourist's attraction will bring its own share of troubles.

Tourism can be a potential source of revenue but it is also a cause of concern since the islands cannot sustain it, unless there is a shift in strategy, to a high value, low intensity, environment friendly eco- tourism. Keeping in view the history of people settled here, the topography, the geography, the environment, and most important the fragile nature and the wide spread location of the islands- it would be appropriate to limit the scope of tourism to a much smaller scale, local and national in character. The islands are the repository of unexplored, undocumented

sources of knowledge, plethora of information is waiting to be deciphered and understood for various scientists and social scientists, and linguists. And it is already late for them to preserve and protect these vanishing knowledge systems.

However, post Tsunami has brought lot of funds for rebuilding and rehabilitation. New thoughts, ideas, programmes are put forth to rehabilitate and rebuild the lives of people. But it is yet to be seen how far these plans and proposals goes in the interests of the tribal population and the settlers. However, it may not be out of context to mention that such large scale tourism promotion must precede the understanding of ecological sensibilities and hence feasibility studies and environment impact assessment must be done to chose among the most viable venture which can be integrated for economic growth of the people and yet maintaining ecological balance.

The concern here is how the expansion of tourism is going to improve the lives of the people with out damaging the ecological balance. It can be concluded that from an ecological perspective, an expansive tourism will invite a bigger man made disaster. It will not necessarily bring back all these primary issues in forefront and will not meet the immediate demands of the people. Any planning without considering the past experiences, the potentials and vulnerability of the people, will have serious implications on their lives, livelihood, and on their health. The grandeur proposal of tourism is insensitive to people's needs and environment of the islands, and the whole proposal needs to be rethought and reworked.

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