

# AN ENDANGERED TRIBE

Relevant for: Indian Society | Topic: Population and associated issues incl. Tribes

## Who are they?

The Sentinelese, a negrito tribe who live on the North Sentinel Island of the Andamans, have not faced incursions and remain hostile to outsiders.

The inhabitants are connected to the Jarawa on the basis of physical, as well as linguistic similarities, researchers say. Based on carbon dating of kitchen middens by the Anthropological Survey of India, Sentinelese presence was confirmed in the islands to 2,000 years ago. Genome studies indicate that the Andaman tribes could have been on the islands even 30,000 years ago.

## How are they protected?

The Govt. of India issued the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956 to declare the traditional areas occupied by the tribes as reserves, and prohibited entry of all persons except those with authorisation. Photographing or filming the tribe members is also an offence. The rules were amended later to enhance penalties. But restricted area permits were relaxed for some islands recently.

## Have they made contact?

The Sentinelese have been fiercely hostile to outside contact. But in 1991 they accepted some coconuts from a team of Indian anthropologists and administrators.

Some researchers argue that the Sentinelese have been mostly left alone even from colonial times, unlike other tribes such as the Onges, Jarawas and Great Andamanese, because the land they occupy has little commercial attraction.

## How many are there?

From 1901 to 1921 they were estimated to be 117 people. In 1931, the number dropped to 50, a figure used for the 1961 Census too. In 1991 their head count was put at 23. Census 2001 counted 39 inhabitants.

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