

The Threat of Development: The Shompen and the Great Nicobar Development Project

Ms. Vertika Misra

Post Graduate Student,
Master of Arts in Anthropology,
School of Social Sciences,
Indira Gandhi National Open
University, Lucknow
Email id: misvtika@gmail.com

Abstract

The Great Nicobar Island Development Project, spearheaded by NITI Aayog and implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO), proposes significant changes to the Great Nicobar Island. While the project is framed as a means of economic growth, its implementation raises profound concerns regarding the Shompen, an indigenous semi-nomadic tribe whose survival is deeply intertwined with the island's pristine environment. This paper critically examines the potential socio-environmental impacts on the Shompen, exploring issues of genocide, cultural preservation, environmental disruption, and the ethical implications of the project. Furthermore, it delves into the broader debate on indigenous autonomy, the imposition of external values, and the commodification of indigenous cultures in the context of modern development.

Keywords: Great Nicobar Island, Shompen, Great Nicobarese, The Great Nicobar Development Project.

Introduction

The Great Nicobar Island is the southernmost island of the Nicobar Islands group with an area of 921 sq kilometers. The Shompen are a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group residing in the Great Nicobar Island of the Andaman and Nicobar group (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2019). As per the 2011 census the total population of the Shompen was 299 with 141 males and 88 females. The total population of the island is 8367 people (Census, 2011). They share the island with another tribe, the Great Nicobarese with whom they share a barter relationship. As per genetic research by Trivedi, R et al. the Shompen diverged from the Nicobarese ~14,000 years ago. They trace their origins to mainland or island Southeast Asia with no discernible admixture. Sasikumar (2020) reports that until the 1960s these tribes were the only groups living on the island. Between 1969 and 1980, the Indian government undertook a rehabilitation initiative that relocated approximately 330 ex-servicemen families from various regions of mainland India to Great Nicobar Island, motivated by the island's perceived strategic importance. In addition to these planned settlements, other groups including Ranchi-origin laborers, small-scale traders, and government employees also migrated to the island voluntarily over time. They live along the east coast. As per the 2011 Census data, Great Nicobar Island had a total population of 8,046 individuals. Among them, 229 were members of the Shompen tribe, 669 identified as Nicobarese, and the remaining 7,148 were categorized as settlers or others (Sasikumar, 2020).

The Great Nicobarese are coastal dwellers while the Shompen reside in the jungle. As such the Great Nicobarese have access to materials like tobacco, cloth etc which they barter in exchange for the forest products like honey, resin, rudraksh etc. made by the Shompen (Ghosh, A.K., & Sasikumar, M. 2017). The Shompen are a semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer community organized into small bands with defined territories (Elanchezhian et al., 2007). Unlike the tribes of the Andamans, they do not use bows and arrows but rely on spears for hunting (Sasikumar, 2020). Their subsistence is based on horticulture, animal husbandry, and foraging. They keep dogs for hunting wild boar, the region's only large game, and also raise cats, chickens, and pigs. Inland rivers are crucial to their diet, providing fish, turtles, crocodiles, and aquatic species. Their protein intake includes small animals, birds, eggs, and species like monitor lizards and pythons (Sasikumar, 2020).

The Shompen extensively use local plants for food, medicine, shelter, tools, and ornaments. Their traditional knowledge is used to treat ailments like fevers, fractures, and digestive issues, and they make natural stimulants and narcotics (Elanchezhian et

al., 2007). They cultivate bananas, tapioca, yams, and coconuts, with pandanus fruit being a dietary staple. Boiling is their primary cooking method. They are the only Andamanese tribe skilled in beekeeping and canoe-making, which aids their inland and coastal mobility (Sasikumar, 2020). Linguistically, the Shompen language belongs to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austroasiatic family (Driem, 2008).

The Shompen people identify their clans through the rivers that flow through the rainforest, called *ruhi* in their language. This forms the foundation of their migration patterns, marriages, and subsistence activities (Survival International, 2025). According to M. Sasikumar, Deputy Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, one notable demographic feature is the imbalance between the number of Shompen men and women, with many adult men remaining without partners. Researchers noted that "marriage by capture" which is a practice involving the taking of women from other groups or sub-groups, is a traditional custom among the Shompen and may contribute to inter-group tensions (The Hindu, 2015). The Andaman and Nicobar Administration with the Directorate of Tribal Welfare in their 2015 notification recognises four groups residing in different geographical regions of the island. This notification reveals that these groups live in the New Chingheny region, Laful region, East-West Road region and the Kokeon/Galathea region.

Table1: Total population and literacy rate amongst 3 Shompen villages, 2001

Level	Name	Total population	Total Male	Total Female	Literate Males	Literate Females
Village	Shompen Village A	103	62	41	2	2
Village	Shompen Village B	106	70	36	1	1
Village	Shompen Hut	28	23	3	17	2

Source: Census 2001. Reference id- PC01_TOT-35-02

Table 2: The total population and literacy rate among 3 Shompen villages, 2011

Level	Name	Total population	Total Male	Total Female	Literate Males	Literate Females
Village	Shompen Village A	10	8	2	0	0
Village	Shompen Village B	44	33	11	0	0
Village	Shompen Hut	63	35	29	0	0

Source: Census 2011. Reference id- PCA_CDB-3501

According to the 2001 census, a large population inhabited 2 villages, but as of 2011 they have all but emptied out.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands Shompen Policy, 2015

This policy came into force on the 22nd of May, 2015. It established a few rules of interaction, development and preservation of the people. It also mentions how there is already an alarming dependence of the Laful group on rice and 'other market goods. The Shompen policy outlines a multifaceted approach aimed at protecting the welfare, autonomy, and cultural integrity of the Shompen community in the face of growing developmental pressures. It recommends training female Shompen as intermediaries to support visiting women at hospitals and improving healthcare outcomes. Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS) workers are to be trained to visually identify symptoms requiring medical intervention, and field staff must acquire basic linguistic skills in the Shompen language to enable respectful communication. Andaman and Nicobar Tribal Research Institute (ANTRI) is tasked with creating culturally appropriate educational tools following language training. A bilingual education

program was proposed for Laful and New Chingeh Shompens to facilitate interaction with non-Shompens. Research is prioritized in areas such as food availability and self-reliance, socio-cultural and economic practices, and traditional medicinal knowledge, which will be maintained in a secure database. To counter rising market dependence among Laful Shompens, the policy recommends developing targeted strategies. On land and environmental safeguards, it calls for clear demarcation of Tribal Reserve boundaries especially along the East-West Road, along with a ban on eco-tourism in Shompen areas and the installation of signage outlining legal protections. Monitoring field stations were to be built. Ultimately, the policy emphasizes building a two-way communication channel, eliminating practices that undermine Shompen dignity or self-efficacy, and prioritizing their welfare and integrity as large-scale development plans unfold, with support mechanisms channeled through AAJVS.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO), established in 1988, aims to foster holistic and sustainable development in the Union Territory. It has managed petroleum supplies since 1991, runs a milk division producing about 8,000 litres daily, and has held exclusive rights to sell Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) across the islands since 1996, operating 17 outlets and supplying around 150 bars—though sales data hasn't been updated since 2019. ANIIDCO also oversees key tourism properties, including Megapode Resort (near the airport), Dolphin Beach Resort (Swaraj Dweep), and Hornbill Nest (Corbyns Cove). The organisation is chaired by Dr. Chandra Bhushan Kumar, IAS, and managed by Shri A.S.P.S. Raviprakash, IAS (ANIIDCO, 2015).

ANIIDCO's CSR policy allocates 2-3% of net profits toward education, health, sanitation, safe water, environmental sustainability, and welfare programs. Tourism remains a priority, with the administration promoting activities like scuba diving and snorkeling. Beachfront lands have been leased to private companies for luxury tourism development (ANIIDCO, 2023).

The Great Nicobar Island Development Project

Launched under NITI Aayog's "Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island" initiative, ANIIDCO was appointed as project proponent in July 2020. The ₹72,622 crore plan includes an International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), a Greenfield Airport, a township, and a power plant. Initial steps included denotifying Galathea Bay

and Megapode wildlife sanctuaries on January 25, 2021. Environmental Clearance was granted on November 11, 2022, by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. At the time of its appointment, ANIIDCO lacked both an environmental policy and an environment cell. Recruitment of planners and environmental experts began only in 2022 (Sekhsaria & Pardikar, 2024).

An overview

International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT) worth an investment of ₹35,959 crore. Designed to handle 14.2 million Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs) annually upon full completion. An airport named Greenfield International Airport with an investment of ₹8,583 crore is to be built. It will be able to accommodate 4,000 Peak Hour Passengers (PHP). A township worth ₹28,080 crore for the development of residential and commercial infrastructure to support the anticipated population growth and economic activities associated with the project. Its purpose is to support a large number of settlers as well as tourists. A Power Plant with the capacity of 450 MVA is planned.

Environmental and Social Concerns

The Ministry of Environment has approved the felling of approximately 850,000 trees to facilitate the project with compensatory afforestation to be carried out in the Aravallis in Haryana. The pre-feasibility report outlined that the first phase of the project would span from 2021 to 2036, with the second phase extending from 2037 to 2051. However, the container terminal is expected to become operational by 2027-28. A total of 166 square kilometers will be designated for development, with 72 square kilometers allocated for the initial phase of the project, as per the plans reviewed by the Environmental Appraisal Committee (AECOM, 2021).

The site of the designated power plant overlaps with the area frequented by the Shompen of the Kirasis band and Buja yae band in the forests of the Galathea river basin. Some of the land marked for development also includes areas where the Nicobarese lived before the tsunami in 2004. In August 2022, the chairman of the Tribal Council gave clearance to the project, only to withdraw it three months later claiming they hadn't been informed of the acquisition of the lands the tribes lived at priorly. The Nicobarese have expressed the desire to go back to their traditional way of living (Constitutional Conduct Group, open letter to the NCST, 2023; Rathore, 2024). Most lack space to grow their own crops and work as “daily rate majdoor” according to Mr Anstice Justin, an anthropologist (Moole, 2024). They have not been allowed by the

administration to return (Rathore, 2024; Rishika Pardikar/ Article 14, 2023). The Nicobarese have asked for their land back as well as dialogue with the concerned authorities but this has repeatedly been denied to them. The Shompen on the other hand, lack any voice whatsoever about the proposed development plan. They do not have the required literacy like the Nicobarese nor a representative on the AAJVS committee or in any group for tribal welfare since they are a heavily uncontacted group. (Rathore, 2024; Rishika Pardikar/ Article 14, 2023; V. Pandya et al., letter to NCST, April 15, 2024)

In 2022, Conservation Action Trust filed a petition before the National Green Tribunal challenging the forest clearance granted to the project. In response NGT created a 'high powered committee' (HPC) to investigate. The composition of the High-Powered Committee (HPC) raises concerns regarding impartiality and potential conflicts of interest. The committee was chaired by the Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Government of India – the same ministry that granted the original Environmental Clearance (EC) for the project. Other members included representatives from the NITI Aayog, which conceptualized the development plan; the Chief Secretary of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, who is also chairman of the board of directors of ANIIDCO, along with an official from ANIIDCO, the agency responsible for executing the project; and representatives from Zoological Survey of India, Botanical Survey of India, Central Pollution Control Board, a nominee of Secretary, Ministry of Shipping and Director, Wildlife Institute of India (National Green Tribunal, 2023, p. 63). In effect, the entities tasked with implementing the project were also involved in reviewing and approving its environmental implications. The HPC gave the clearance to continue the project despite noting that there were some unanswered deficiencies that could be revisited (NGT, appeal no 29 to 31/2022, point no 33). It did not make public its methodology or a final report because the project is of national importance with strategic and defense dimensions (Yadav, 2024).

Evident disregard for the tribes

There have been multiple instances where actions by administrative bodies appear to reflect a lack of adequate consultation with or consideration for the Indigenous communities of Great Nicobar. The absence of tribal representation in the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti (AAJVS), an institution meant to safeguard tribal interests, raises questions about inclusivity. Despite decades of engagement, the Shompen language has not been incorporated into official study or communication

frameworks. Following the 2004 tsunami, the Nicobarese were assured the right to return to their original villages, yet parts of these areas are now designated for development.

The Tribal Council claims it was not fully informed when the No Objection Certificate was issued, learning later that ancestral Nicobarese lands will be taken away and the NOC was withdrawn three months later (J. Ramesh, Letter to MoEF&CC, Aug 27, 2024). Despite this, the Ministry of Environment continues to say no objections were raised (B. Yadav, Letter, Aug 21, 2024, para 16).

Former Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh noted that during the Sub-Division Level Committee meeting, an AAJVS officer had raised concern over the Kokeon Shompen group. These objections were omitted from the final records. Yet, the Forest Rights certificate was still issued and cleared by the District Level Committee (J. Ramesh, 27 Aug 2024, para 14 & 15).

Further, a letter from the Directorate of Tribal Welfare dated 12 Aug 2021 admits that exemptions from laws or policies will be sought “wherever required,” signaling a clear tilt towards development over ecological or tribal protection.

Lack of consent

Due to being uncontacted, the Shompen have been entirely excluded from decision-making processes concerning the project. As per the MoEF&CC the AAJVS is representing both the tribes and no objections were raised by them. Contrary to this claim, the Nicobarese have for the past 16 years demanded return to their pre-tsunami lands and have been refused. The Tribal Council withdrew its no-objection certificate on 22 November, 2022 citing details were withheld from the tribal communities as some part of this same ancestral land will be impinged upon by the development (Pardikar, 2023). The AAJVS lacks any representation from the Shompen themselves. The AAJVS field staff, as per the 2015 notification, is not skilled in the language of the Shompen. According to inquiries by Rathore (2024) no tribal member, even a Nicobarese, is not a permanent part of the AAJVS. One Nicobarese is included on a contractual basis to facilitate communication between the samiti and the Shompen tribe, as of 2012. Development project proceeds without securing Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) from either the Shompen or Nicobarese communities, a clear violation of international Indigenous rights standards. These include ILO Convention 169, which mandates consultation with Indigenous peoples before initiating any development

affecting their lands and livelihoods, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which recognizes FPIC as a fundamental right (ILO, 1989; UNDRIP, 2007).

During a conversation facilitated by an interpreter, anthropologist Dr Vishvajit Pandya asked a Shompen man for his thoughts on the proposed development. The man responded firmly: *"If you must cut the jungle, cut it along the coast. Do not come near our hills. Do not climb our hills."* (Mukerjee, 2024). This same video was submitted with a report which has not been recorded. The project moves forward ignoring this, the revocation of the no-objection certificate, and concern about the Kokeon group raised at the SLDC meeting by AAJVS.

Concerns over Genocide

The Shompen have no immunity to outside diseases and are at risk of being completely wiped out. According to Levene (2024), the demographic resilience of the Shompen "was tested to the nth degree through contact with outsiders, primarily settlers in the coastal area." Citing historical accounts, he notes that "estimates of up to 100 Shompen deaths from disease in the 1980s have led to a degree of self-imposed quarantine." Historically isolated tribes haven't fared well after contact with outsiders. Data from the Amazon Basin illustrates the devastating impact of such contacts: between 1875 and 2008, 117 epidemics affected 59 Indigenous societies, resulting in over 11,000 deaths, primarily from measles, influenza, and malaria. These outbreaks were often triggered by initial contact with outsiders, leading to mortality rates that declined only with time and improved healthcare interventions. (Walker, R. S., Sattenspiel, L., & Hill, K. R. 2015). The island's administration has allocated a budget of Rs. 201.98 crores for tribal welfare which includes a hospital and special medical unit (Yadav, 2024). The Shompen still rely on their traditional medicine and it is unclear what level of trust AAJVS has managed to establish since 2015. A collective April 2024 letter by a group of Indian anthropologists' remarks that instead of creating a special medical unit, the Shompen should simply not come into any situation where the need for such an intervention should arise. An open letter signed by 39 scholars from 13 countries, many of whom happen to be genocide scholars, warned that the development could be catastrophic for the Shompen tribe and urged the Indian government to shut down the project (Drury, 2024). The government's own Social Impact Assessment, ignoring the existence of the Nicobarese and Shompen, identifies the chances of a pandemic (Probe Research and Social Development, 2024, pp. 39). It also highlights increasing pressure

on the natural resources due to the proposed growth of the population (Probe Research and Social Development, 2024, pp. 40).

Genocide is often understood as the systematic extermination of a people through mass killings or other physical methods. However, scholars and international legal frameworks recognize that genocide also encompasses actions that deliberately destroy the cultural, social, and physical foundations of a group's existence. As defined by the United Nations Genocide Convention (1948), genocide includes causing "serious bodily or mental harm," "deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about a group's physical destruction," and forcibly transferring children. We understand how a drastic change in their ecology and restricted movement over land they understand as their own, integration of concepts such as money, private property, restricted areas, and other aspects of settlers' behaviour such as teasing, jeering, exploitation etc may cause the Shompen extreme mental harm. While the devastation of the island's pristine wildlife coupled with disease outbreaks might bring about the physical destruction.

Cultural genocide happening through displacement, forced assimilation, environmental destruction, or the erasure of Indigenous knowledge can be just as deadly. Making traditional ways of life unviable by disrupting ecosystems, severing ties to ancestral lands, or imposing alien systems of education and governance constitutes a form of systemic erasure, even if it does not involve direct killing. Since their numbers are so small, the eventual death of these people is a rightful cause of concern. Levene writes that the Indian government cannot claim innocence of this result since they have been advised in advance what the outcome will be.

Exploitation

In the case of the **Jarawa**, studies have documented that settlers and poachers frequently lure tribe members with items such as biscuits, tobacco, and alcohol in exchange for forest produce, access to their land, or even sexual favors (Sekhsaria, 2010). These exchanges not only disturb their traditional lifestyle but also create dangerous dependencies. Reports have emerged of "*human safaris*", where tourists illegally enter Jarawa territory, offering them food or cigarettes in exchange for photographs, dances, or even sexual intercourse (Survival International, 2017). The construction and continued use of the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR), despite a 2002 Supreme Court ban, has exposed the Jarawa tribe to severe exploitation. Running through their territory, the road enables "human safaris," where tour operators drive tourists hoping to see Jarawa individuals, especially women and children, treated as spectacles (Survival

International, 2017; Chakraborty, 2014). Private operators commodified the tribe, offering food, biscuits, and tobacco in exchange for dances or photos, stripping particularly the women of dignity (Chamberlain, 2012a; Times of India, 2013). This continues a long practice of objectification and dehumanisation of indigenous people, tracing its roots to the human zoos of colonial times, just repackaged (Blanchard and Al, 2008). Videos of semi-naked women circulated online, drawing racist comments and highlighting the objectification of tribal bodies (Chamberlain, G. 2012a; Halder & Jaishankar, 2014). Though an alternative sea route was introduced in 2017, the road remains the main path, and poaching, tourism, and sexual exploitation continue (Survival International, 2017).

The Shompen have already been exposed to this. Unauthorized entry into Tribal Reserve areas and the filming of Shompen individuals has already occurred. Recently during a tourist encounter they were given snacks and recorded, with the video later shared online. (V. Pandya et al., letter to NCST, April 15, 2024, pp. 8). Such portrayals risk turning Indigenous lives into caricatures for public consumption, exposing the community to racism and violating their right to dignity and privacy. Given this pattern, the state and settlers cannot be trusted to protect the Shompen despite numerous assurances. Taking into account this example and the Shompen policy notification, it becomes apparent the people will accept food from outsiders. This mindset of the Shompen leaves them vulnerable to settlers who may foster dependency for online content or forest goods. The Shompen's tools and crafts could further attract collectors, museums, and researchers, incentivizing unauthorized exchanges and trade.

Effects on the environment

The project proposes the cutting down of millions of trees and the construction of a permanent city with a population of 650,000, increasing the island's current population by a staggering 8,000%. Information regarding the Kirasis Shompen and other bands shows they rely extensively on the Galathea river. Any alteration to the river system, whether through pollution, leakage from infrastructure, or thermal discharge from the proposed power plant risks disrupting their traditional use of these vital ecological resources. Also, the massive influx of settlers will likely lead to further encroachment into the Shompen's rainforest territory, well beyond the initial project zone. Planned activities such as blasting, excavation, and large-scale earth movement will disrupt ecosystems and devastate the Shompen's hunting and foraging grounds. The site of the designated power plant "overlaps with the area frequented by the Shompen of the Kirasis band and Buja Yae band in the forests of the Galathea river

basin” (V. Pandya et al., Letter to the NCST, April 15, 2024). Moreover, restricting the Galathea River’s mouth by 90% to construct the mega-port is expected to cause a silt backlog upstream, destroying vital floodplain vegetation, including pandanus trees that are a staple in the Shompen diet (Sekhsaria, 2023). These changes may force the Shompen closest to the project site to migrate into other areas, potentially causing the collapse of the *ruhi* system and the disintegration of their social and cultural structures (Survival International, 2025; Ramesh, 2024). Though the Shompen are described as reclusive, such large-scale activity might draw out the curious and initiate contact. Considering the Jarawe and the Onge, this will have a disastrous impact on the Shompen. The long-term emissions originating from the city are likely to degrade the pristine environment, resulting in ecological disruption, including disturbances to the food chain. Such changes may lead to food insecurity, potentially compelling them to initiate contact with settler populations. This interaction could render them vulnerable to exploitation. The introduction of packaged foods featuring flavors that differ significantly from those naturally available on the island may alter the traditional palate of the indigenous tribe. This shift in taste preferences could lead to a decline in the consumption of locally sourced foods, thereby undermining traditional food practices and knowledge systems. Over time, increased reliance on imported, processed foods may contribute to negative health outcomes, such as malnutrition, obesity, or diet-related non-communicable diseases. Furthermore, the erosion of culinary traditions could weaken cultural identity and intergenerational knowledge transfer within the community, as seen with the Jarawe. There is also no estimation of long term impact on the environment caused by tourism, emissions from the new population, waste etc.

Holistic development

ANIIDCO claims to pursue “sustainable and holistic” development. Its CSR policy mentions “promoting education including employment enhancing vocational skill” (ANIIDCO, 2023). Yet, the Shompen are already well-equipped for their own way of life. With no publicly available policy or detailed plan, such development ideas often reflect external, imposed visions of progress. The lack of updates on AANJVS linguistic efforts further obscures the current status and future direction of tribal initiatives.

Anstice Justin, a Nicobarese and former deputy director of the Anthropological Survey of India, critiques the project for ignoring the Shompen’s cultural values. Their reverence for nature, he explains, is rooted in belief systems that are incompatible with imposed models of development. “We will be imposing on the Shompen community who have no idea of such development as we understand it to be,” he says (Rathore,

2024). This underscores the dissonance between official plans and the Shompen's spiritual-ecological way of life.

The Social Impact Assessment notes that "local people will be deployed for jobs to be accomplished" (Probe Research and Social Development Pvt. Ltd, 2023). While this mostly refers to settlers, it opens the door to exploit Shompen knowledge and labor for corporate, tourist, or personal gain. Meanwhile, geo-fencing and watchtowers are planned this will restrict Shompen mobility (ANIIDCO, 2023). Yet, unless the island becomes a strict surveillance zone, determined outsiders may still make contact drawn by the tribe's mystery, as seen in past interactions with the Jarawe (Halder & Jaishankar, 2014).

Further cultural degradation

Uncontacted tribes often attract outsiders, raising concerns about missionary efforts by settlers or tourists. According to Triloknath Pandit, former director of the Anthropological Survey of India, the Shompen once encountered French missionaries, whom they killed (Koshy, *The Hindu*, 2024). Given the persistence of racist views and the tribe's 'primitive' label, they remain vulnerable to conversion attempts, sensationalism, or intrusive study. Any contact risks destroying their immunity and disrupting their way of life. Such exposure commodifies them and invites global scrutiny. Over time, this creates a divide: one side calls for preserving their lifestyle, while the other engages out of curiosity or a civilizing mission. These conflicting views threaten their autonomy and identity. Considering ecological fragility and indigenous rights, the development project must be relocated off Great Nicobar Island. No project can proceed there without endangering the Shompen.

But as advancement of the project despite widespread concerns goes ahead, this research identifies critical areas requiring immediate attention and reform. The following actions are recommended:

1. **Relocate ecologically harmful sites.** Shift construction zones that threaten natural resources vital to the Shompen, particularly Galathea Bay, which is central to their subsistence and culture.
2. **Return Nicobarese ancestral lands.** Halt land acquisitions lacking free, prior, and informed consent. Restore lands unjustly taken from the Nicobarese and relocate infringing projects.

3. **Disclose skill development plans.** Clearly outline any current or planned tribal education and vocational programs. If none exist, co-develop them with the Anthropological Survey of India, the Tribal Council, and local communities.
4. **Report on Shompen Policy (2015).** Release a public report detailing actions under the policy to ensure accountability and transparency.
5. **Sensitize all project personnel.** Mandatory training must be provided to ANIIDCO staff and contractors on tribal rights, respect, and ethical conduct.
6. **Prevent encroachment.** Set up monitoring posts along access routes to block unauthorized entry into Shompen areas and prevent "human safaris."
7. **Mandate ethical conduct.** Require all third parties to sign enforceable agreements prohibiting harm or disruption to the Shompen and Nicobarese, with strict penalties for violations.
8. **Ban exploitative relationships.** Prohibit any sexual or reproductive relationships between settlers and the Shompen. Also ban all gifting, trading, or selling involving the Shompen.
9. **Enable grievance redressal.** Establish accessible, multilingual complaint systems for tribal members to safely report violations and seek quick remedies.
10. **Create independent oversight bodies.** Form unbiased institutions, separate from NITI Aayog and ANIIDCO, to monitor biodiversity, construction impacts, and tribal rights.

Conclusion

The Great Nicobar Island Development Project is as national progress but each step reflects a deeper disregard for Indigenous rights and ethical responsibility. The large-scale deforestation and ecological disruption are not only destructive but proceed without the genuine consent of either the Shompen or Nicobarese. The Shompen's survival is intimately tied to the forest and isolation. Their sustainable way of life risks being replaced by displacement and dependency.

The condition of the Nicobarese, once self-reliant but now pushed into daily-wage labour after losing ancestral land, signals the likely future for the Shompen if they escape death. With statutory safeguards ignored and tribal consent misrepresented, the

project exemplifies systemic exclusion. Rather than protecting Indigenous autonomy, it prioritizes corporate and strategic interests, pushing forward despite repeated warnings. If unchallenged, this development will erase cultures rooted in the land for generations.

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