

## Stone Age Cultures and the Tsunami (Dec 26<sup>th</sup>)

[http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6786476/ns/world\\_news-tsunami\\_a\\_year\\_later/t/stone-age-cultures-survive-tsunami-waves/#.UjTN\\_rWd7i8](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/6786476/ns/world_news-tsunami_a_year_later/t/stone-age-cultures-survive-tsunami-waves/#.UjTN_rWd7i8)

[Tsunami, a Year Later](#) on

### Stone Age cultures survive tsunami waves


#### Indian islanders apparently heeded ancient lore



Indian Coast Guard / AP

A Sentinelese man aims his bow and arrow at an Indian Coast Guard helicopter as it flies over his island on Dec. 28, surveying for tsunami damage. Circumstantial evidence suggests the indigenous tribes of the southern archipelago of Andaman and Nicobar used ancient know-how to save themselves from the catastrophic tsunami.

By Neelesh Misra

 Associated Press

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[PORT BLAIR, India](#) — Two days after a tsunami thrashed the island where his ancestors have lived for tens of thousands of years, a lone tribesman stood naked on the beach and looked up at a hovering coast guard helicopter.

He then took out his bow and shot an arrow toward the rescue chopper.

It was a signal the Sentinelese have sent out to the world for millennia: They want to be left alone. Isolated from the rest of the world, the tribesmen needed to learn nature's sights, sounds and smells to survive.

Government officials and anthropologists believe that ancient knowledge of the movement of wind, sea and birds may have saved the five indigenous tribes on the Indian archipelago of Andaman and Nicobar islands from the tsunami that hit the Asian coastline Dec. 26.

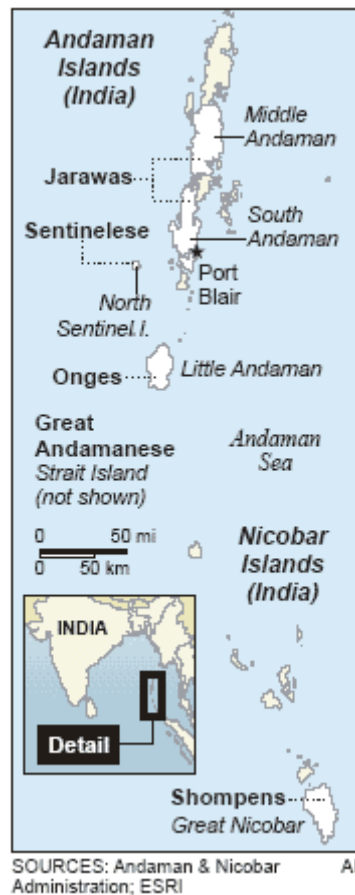
"They can smell the wind. They can gauge the depth of the sea with the sound of their oars. They have a sixth sense which we don't possess," said Ashish Roy, a local environmentalist and lawyer who has called on the courts to protect the tribes by preventing their contact with the outside world.

### **Frozen in the Paleolithic past**

The tribes live the most ancient, nomadic lifestyle known to man, frozen in their Paleolithic past. Many produce fire by rubbing stones, fish and hunt with bow and arrow and live in leaf and straw community huts. And they don't take kindly to intrusions.

Anil Thapliyal, a commander in the Indian coast guard, said he spotted the lone tribesman on the island of Sentinel, a 23-square-mile (60-square-kilometer) key, on Dec. 28.

"There was a naked Sentinelese man," Thapliyal told The Associated Press. "He came out and shot an arrow at the helicopter."



According to varying estimates, there are only about 400 to 1,000 members alive today from the Great Andamanese, Onges, Jarawas, Sentinelese and Shompens. Some anthropological DNA studies indicate the generations may have spanned back 70,000 years. They originated in Africa and migrated to India through Indonesia, anthropologists say.

It appears that many tribesman fled the shores well before the waves hit the coast, where they would typically be fishing at this time of year.

After the tsunami, local officials spotted 41 Great Andamanese — out of 43 in a 2001 Indian census — who had fled the submerged portion of their Strait Island. They also reported seeing 73 Onges — out of 98 in the census — who fled to highland forests in Dugong Creek on the Little Andaman island, or Hut Bay, a government anthropologist said.

However, the fate of the three other tribes won't be known until officials complete a survey of the remote islands this week, he said. The government reconnaissance mission will also assess how the ecosystem — most crucially, the water sources — has been damaged.

### **'Islands of the cannibals'**

Taking surveys of these areas is dangerous work.

The more than 500 islands across a 3,200-square-mile (8,288-square-kilometer) chain in the southern reaches of the Bay of Bengal appear at first glance to be a tropical paradise. But even one of the earliest visitors, Marco Polo, called the atolls "the land of the head hunters." Roman geographer Claudius Ptolemaeus called the Andamans the "islands of the cannibals."



Anthropological Survey of India / AP

Three boys from the Jawara tribe in India's Andaman and Nicobar archipelago pose in a photo released by the Anthropological Survey of India.

The Sentinelese are fiercely protective of their coral reef-ringed terrain. They used to shoot arrows at government officials when they came ashore and offered gifts of coconuts, fruit and machetes on the beach.

The Jarawas had armed clashes with authorities until the 1990s, killing several police officers.

Samir Acharya, head of the independent Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology, said the Jarawas were peaceful until the British, and later the Indians, began encroaching on their territory. Thousands of bow-wielding Jarawas were killed by British bullets in 1859.

### **Improving relations**

Over the past few years, however, relations have improved and some friendly contacts have been made. The government has banned interaction with the tribes, and even taking their pictures is an offense. Many tribe members have visited Port Blair, capital of the Indian-administered territory, and a few Great Andamanese and Onges work in government offices.

Outsiders are forbidden from interacting with the tribesmen because such contact has led in the past to alcoholism and disease among the islanders, and sexual abuse of local women.

"They have often been sexually exploited by influential people — they give the tribal women ... sugar, a gift wrapped in a colored cloth that makes them happy, and that's it," said Roy.

One of the most celebrated stories of a tribal man straddling both worlds is that of En-Mai, a Jarawa teenager brought to Port Blair in 1996 after he broke his leg. Six months later, he

looked like any urban kid, in a T-shirt, denim jeans and a reversed baseball cap. But he is back on his island now, having shunned Western ways.

"He took to the ways ... out of a certain novelty," said Acharya. "It's like eating Chinese food on a weekend."

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