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A DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE NICOBARESE

ABSTRACT: *The Nicobarese of Car Nicobar Island were studied to describe their demographic characteristics. It is revealed from the present study that the overall sex ratio among the Car-Nicobarese is 98.5 females per 100 males. Marital status by age shows that majority of the unmarried persons are in the 20 – 29 years or lower age groups in case of males, and 15 – 19 years or lower age group in case of females. Among married individuals, on the other hand, the majority belong to the 20 – 29 years or higher age groups in both sexes. The percentage of sterile women among those who are 45 or older is 10.0 %. The average number of live births per married woman is 3.9, which indicates moderately high fertility. The mortality rate among the Car-Nicobarese is fairly low, as out of 3,578 children born to 811 mothers of all ages only 491 (13.7 %) are dead.*

INTRODUCTION

Most of the models of the genetic structure of human populations are strongly influenced by the demographic features. Genetic differences and polymorphisms came into existence under very different circumstances probably when economy was based on hunting and food gathering supplemented by simple agriculture and when social organisation was in the form of bands and villages which were loosely knit as a tribe. Although India provides a unique opportunity for such studies, only a few attempts have been made so far (Basu 1969 and Basu 1972). In the present study an attempt has been made to describe some of the demographic characteristics of the Nicobarese of Car Nicobar Island. It is hoped that these data may eventually be used in interpreting biological studies among these people.

The Nicobarese are spread over as an endogamous population in twelve islands: Car-Nicobar, Chowra, Terressa, Bompoka, Katchal, Camorta, Trinket, Nancowry, Pilomilo, Little Nicobar, Kandol and Great Nicobar. According to the 1971 census there were 18,000 Nicobarese, of whom about two-thirds inhabited Car-Nicobar which is the most progressive of all the islands of the Nicobar Group. This island covers an area of 49 square miles and is at the extreme north of the islands.

The Nicobarese inhabiting Nicobar islands belong to the Mongolian stock and the differences existing in culture, language and morphology among these people have been attributed to their life in isolation in different islands (Temple 1901). According to Kloss (1903) and Man (1885) the Nicobar islands were originally inhabited by Malayans who were gradually driven south by immigrants from the coast of Burma. They speak their own language which belong to the Mon-Khmer group of languages. Slight differences from island to island have been noted.

Car-Nicobar is essentially a coral island whose flora includes extensive coconut grooves and areca palms. The Nicobarese are not agriculturists, although they grow yam in considerable quantities as an item of food. They are largely dependent on coconut palms which is the main item of their trade, they grow areca nut trees and export betle-nut in large quantity.

They also raise plantations of banana and papaya. Another item of their food is pandanus. They rear pigs, they keep poultry and do some fishing.

The common prevalent diseases among the Car-Nicobarese are tuberculosis, malaria, filariesis, skin diseases and gastroenteritis.

The Car-Nicobarese live in dome-shaped or rectangular huts with sloping roofs. The houses raise 5 feet above the ground level. They are made of local material such as timber, bamboo, cane and grass. Villages consist of clusters of houses with an open space in the centre.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The material for the present study is based on the population data of Nicobarese collected from March to May 1976 from five villages of Car-Nicobar. They are Arong, Sawaii, Tes-Top, Perka and Tamaloo. Demographic information per household was obtained with the help of household census and genealogies, including such items as total number of individuals in the household and their occupation, pregnancy by pregnancy listing of the reproduction and mortality. The information collected has been verified on a number of individuals in order to reduce the error in reporting. The age of children and of a percentage of adults was cross-checked from the available school and church records. In other cases the age was estimated by referring to the events remembered by the informers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Age and sex distribution

Table 1 shows the distribution of the Car-Nicobarese by age and sex and marital status. The total population of the Car-Nico-

TABLE 1. *Distribution of Car-Nicobarese population by age, sex and marital status.*

Age group	Male	Female	Total	Married		Unmarried		Widow/Divorced	
				Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
0–4	331	376	707	–	–	331	376	–	–
5–9	394	367	761	–	–	394	367	–	–
10–14	305	260	565	–	–	305	260	–	–
15–19	241	258	499	2	33	239	224	–	1
20–29	445	513	958	196	275	245	235	4	3
30–39	337	295	632	314	268	10	12	13	15
40–49	210	182	392	200	161	2	3	6	18
50–59	99	78	177	87	46	–	1	12	31
60–69	32	27	59	22	18	–	1	10	16
70–	4	4	8	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total:	2398	2360	4758	825	793	1526	1479	45	88

TABLE 2. *Age group and sex ratio of females per 100 males among the Car-Nicoberese.*

Age group	Male No.	%	Female No.	%	Total	Females per 100 males in age groups
0–4	331	6.9	376	7.9	712	
5–9	394	8.3	367	7.7	751	87.7 (under 15) 99.2 (under 20)
10–14	305	6.4	260	5.5	565	
15–19	241	5.0	258	5.4	499	
20–29	445	9.5	513	10.8	958	
30–39	337	7.1	295	6.2	632	97.7 (20 to 70) 101.2 (15 to 50)
40–49	210	4.4	182	3.8	392	84.8 (40 to 70)
50–59	99	2.0	78	1.6	177	
60–69	32	0.7	27	0.6	59	
70–	40	0.2	4	0.1	8	
Total:	2398	50.4	2360	49.6	4758	98.5

TABLE 3. *Distribution of marriages of both partners from the same village, one partner from another village, and inter-island marriages.*

Car-Nicobar villages	Both partners from one village	One partner from another village	Inter-island marriages	One partner from another ethnic group	Total number of marriages
Tee-Top	96	72	–	–	168
Sawaii	301	31	2	2	336
Arong	288	46	–	–	254
Tamaloo	358	13	–	–	371
Perka	370	58	2	–	430
Total:	1333 (85.5 %)	220 (14.1 %)	4 (0.3 %)	2 (0.1 %)	1559

TABLE 4. *Distribution of mothers according to birth orders of surviving children.*

Sibship size	Frequency of mothers	
	Number	%
1	159	19.60
2	138	17.02
3	121	14.92
4	117	14.41
5	78	9.63
6	80	9.86
7	54	6.66
8	28	3.45
9	18	2.22
10	12	1.48
11	5	0.61
12	1	0.11
Total:	811	99.97

TABLE 5. *Distribution of mothers aged 45 years and above by sibship size.*

Sibship size	Frequency of Mothers	
	Number	%
0	14	9.3
1	20	13.2
2	20	13.2
3	19	12.6
4	24	15.9
5	15	9.9
6	11	7.3
7	7	4.6
8	8	5.3
9	7	4.6
10	3	1.9
11	3	1.9
Total:	151	99.97

TABLE 6. *Average number of live-births per mother. Surviving offsprings per mother, net reproductive index and children-women ratio among the mothers aged 45 and above.*

Age of mothers (in years)	Number of mothers	Live births			Dead			Grand total	Average number of births per mother	Average number of surviving offsprings per mother	Net reproductive index	Children/ /women ratio
		M.	F.	Total	M.	F.	Total					
45 +	151	344	308	652	86	56	142	794	5.2	4.32	1.78	51.50

TABLE 7. *Surviving sibships size by number of married mothers.*

Number of surviving children														Total	Average number of children	Variance
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12				
No. 70	159	138	121	117	78	80	54	28	18	12	5	1		881	3.50	5.59

TABLE 8. *Mortality information among the Car-Nicobarese.*

Age group	Total number of births			Number of surviving children			Number of dead children		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
0 – 1	216	238	454	124	130	254	92	108	200
2 – 3	301	254	555	185	170	355	116	84	200
4 – 5	189	188	369	165	156	321	24	24	48
6 – 7	378	336	709	350	324	674	23	12	35
11 +	768	725	1493	762	721	1483	6	4	10
Total	1847	1731	3578	1586	1501	3087	261	230	491

barese in five villages at the time of investigation was 4,758 individuals. The population consisted of 2,398 males and 2,360 females showing the overall ratio of 98.5 females per 100 males. The age composition is given by 5 years age groups for younger individuals, by 10 years groups for adults. Of the total population 38.6 % are under 15 years of age and 1.5 % are over 60 years of age. From *Table 2*, it is apparent that the ratio of females to males shows a general decreasing tendency with age. The ratio is 87.7 for children under 15 years of age, 101.2 for sub-adults and adults of 15 years and over, but not reaching 50 years, 99.4 for adults of 20 years and above, and for adults of 40 years and above it is 84.8.

Marital picture

From the marital status by age, it is evident that the majority of unmarried males are in the 20 – 29 years or lower age groups and in the 15 – 19 years or lower age groups in females. Among married individuals the majority belong to the 20 – 29 or higher age groups in both the sexes, but the frequency of married persons in the lower age group is greater in females than in males. *Table 3* shows the frequency distribution of marriages within the villages, between the villages, and inter-island marriages. It is clear that marriages within the villages are more frequent (85.57 %) that marriages between the villages (14.1 %). Inter-island marriages and those with other groups seem to be quite uncommon (0.3 % and 0.1 % respectively).

Fertility

Tables 4 to 7 present the fertility information on the Car-Nicobarese. The number of mothers with four or less than four surviving children is 66.0 % of the total number of mothers in the samples. From the category of four children onwards the percentage frequency of mothers is diminishing. The average number of surviving children per mother is 3.4, with a range varying from 1 to 12 children.

The percentage of sterile women who attained the age of 45 years and above is about 10.0 %. The incidence of mothers with up to six children is 72.1 % in completed fertility. The percentage of mothers with seven to eleven surviving children is 18.3 % of the total sample. The mean number of children per woman of completed fertility is slightly above four children. The average number of live births per married woman has been taken as a measure of fertility. The mean number of live births per married woman over the age of 15 is 3.9. It indicates that fertility is moderately higher, which is identical with observations among the Pahira (3.5 after

Basu 1969) but lower than fertility observed among the christian Khasi (4.6) and non-christian Khasi (4.4 after Nag 1965). The number of livebirths in completed fertility is of 5.2, which is slightly lower than observed among the non-christian Khasi (5.7 after Nag 1965), but clearly lower than Phira's (6.0 after Basu 1969), Irula (6.5 after Basu, 1965), Maharastra in Brahmans (6.1 after Rakshit 1962), Muslim peasants of East Pakistan (7.1 after Neel 1958), Bengali Brahman (6.7), Bengali Veidyas (8.0), and Bengali Kayasthas (8.7 after Sen 1953).

The fertility according to the children – women ratio shows that the number of children under five years of age per 100 women aged 15 – 49 is 51.50, which seems similar to Papage (51.26), but is comparatively low as found among Phaira (72.4) and Tir (78.0). The net reproduction index among the Car-Nicobarese is 1.78.

Mortality

Table 8 shows the mortality picture among the Car-Nicobarese. It is evident that 3,578 children were born to 811 mothers of all ages, and 491 (13.7 %) were dead. This means that the mortality picture among the Car-Nicobarese is not high. It is also evident that the percentage of infant mortality, i.e. deaths occurring at the age of 3 years or below, is 11.1 %, which is very low in comparison to Kanikkar (78.3 %after Nag 1954) and Kotas (60 % after Basu 1972).

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