

The panel discussed in detail the problems of the tribes as highlighted by the papers presented during the symposium and put forward recommendations for future action. The following is a brief description of the deliberations in the panel and its recommendations.

Though each of the tribe has its peculiarities, in general the problems faced by the tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands fall under the following categories.

1. Demography

Continuous decline in the populations due to various reasons including battles and wars, epidemics etc has reduced several of the tribes into groups of small numbers of individuals with imbalanced population structures. Because of this imbalance in the population structure marriages often take place between persons of incompatible age groups and the fertility rate, though high compared to present day Indian standards, are not sufficient to maintain and expand their populations. Though there is no accurate data to support, the life expectancy among the tribes appears to be low, as the numbers of older individuals are very few.

As these unfavourable demographic features are the result of negative impacts of various factors accumulated over the past century, no easy remedial measures to drastically reverse this situation can be found out. Nevertheless, studies can be conducted to understand the specific and immediate reasons like selectively high mortality among females, prevalence of any genetic disorders, higher susceptibility to infections and infestations etc.

2. Infant and Child mortality

The papers presented during the symposium and the findings of some other studies carried out among the tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Islands have revealed a very high mortality rate among infants and children in all the tribes except Nicobarese. Further, a selectively high mortality among girls was observed among most of the primitive tribes. As these findings based on interviews of the mothers, the predominant causes of mortality have not been understood. These high mortality rates should be contributing significantly to the continuous decline in the populations of these tribes.

Since the first step should be to know the causes of mortality among the children, it was suggested that longitudinal studies on cause specific mortality rates be undertaken among these tribes. Such studies should look into associated factors like maternal health and nutrition, birth weight, breast feeding and weaning practices, health and nutrition awareness among mothers, genetic disorders, immunological status etc.