

Nicobar together with Pigeon, Megapode, Kondul, Pilo Mito, Menciah, Teris, Trak and Maroe Islands. The entire Nicobars has been declared a tribal reserve.

The islands are situated in the equatorial belt, are exposed to marine influences and have a tropical climate, which is warm, moist and equable. The temperature ranges from 18 degree C to 35 degree C and the islands receive rains from both, the North East and the South West monsoons. Average annual rainfall varies from 3,000 to 3,500 mm and humidity varies from 66% to 85%.

II) The Jarawa Tribal Reserve

In an effort to protect the forest home of the Jarawa indigenous community the Jarawa Tribal Reserve was created in 1957 under the provisions of the Andaman & Nicobar Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation (ANPATR) - 1956. Over the years the Reserve Area underwent a number of amendments, resulting in a reserve of a little more than a 1000 sq. kms spread over the islands of South and Middle Andaman.

IIa) The Jarawa Tribal Reserve - Vital for the survival of the Jarawas

The presence and protection of the tribal reserve has today become key to the survival of the Jarawa community that is made up of only about 260 members. This is only expected to become even more critical in the years to come.

Recent studies of the movement pattern of this nomadic - hunter gatherer community has given an insightful understanding of the Jarawa's notion of space and territory. At the same time the Jarawa Tribal Reserve too has come to be notified and codified as Jarawa territory by law and is seen in this light by the settlers and the non-Jarawa world. By a fortunate coincidence there appears to be a good overlap of the limits of the Jarawa territory, albeit from two different world views and perspectives.

It needs to be borne in mind at the time that this territory is also a seriously contested space - an unfair contest in which the Jarawa are a clear and vulnerable minority. It is in the protection and survival of the forests of the tribal reserve alone that the long term survival of the Jarawa can be ensured.

IIb) The Jarawa Tribal Reserve - A vital biodiversity repository in the Andamans

Other recent biological and ecological studies, including satellite mapping and GIS based work has also revealed a fascinating dimension of the forests that comprise the Jarawa Reserve. The 1000 odd sq. kms of the Jarawa Tribal Reserve are the last remaining pristine evergreen rainforests in the Great Andaman group of islands.

Biologists studying a diverse range of plants and animals including butterflies, avifauna, amphibians, and reptiles have independently come to the conclusion that the last of the richest biological diversity in the Andaman islands survives only in the Jarawa Reserve. It is the largest single belt of surviving contiguous rainforest in the island in its pristine form. If the Jarawa biodiversity of these islands is to survive, it becomes evident that the best chance lies in the protection of the Jarawa Tribal Reserve.

This is the two fold, even multiple, significance of the Jarawa Tribal Reserve. What we therefore have here is a rare opportunity of ensuring the survival of an extremely threatened community and at the same time meeting the imperatives of biodiversity conservation.

The Jarawa Tribal Reserve in the Andaman Islands clearly deserves special mention, attention and interest.