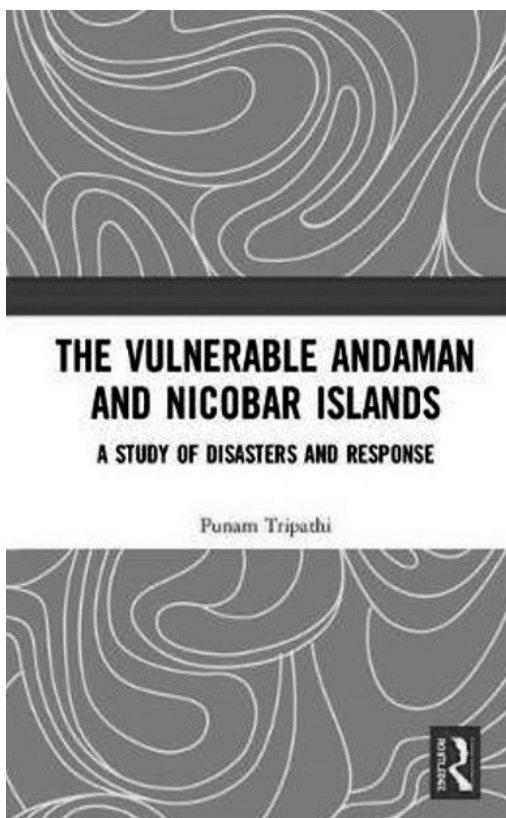


Book Review - 1

The Vulnerable Andaman and Nicobar Islands

by Punam Tripathi, Routledge Publication: South Asia Edition, 2018, pp 334,
Price Rs. 1095.



‘The Vulnerable Andaman and Nicobar Islands’ is a rigorous, systematic and comprehensive compilation of extensive and in-depth academic research work related to disasters in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, India. The book conceptually limits itself to disasters and geographically to Andaman

and Nicobar Islands for a designated contour drawn fulfilling the objectives of this book. In this ambitious work, Poonam Tripathi endeavours to ascertain umpteen dimensions of vulnerability and disaster, its identification, impact, response and recovery in the Andaman and Nicobar islands. The author bases her investigations and conclusions on a detailed examination of the British Records, literary sources, reports of different research institutes and government agencies and an in-depth and intensive field study of selected households. In these accounts, she finds evidence of historical evolution of the concept of settled habitation initiated by the Britishers who made Andaman & Nicobar a penal colony which was an archipelago of nomadic tribes.

The work displays traits of a prolific writer who has been in the research for quite a long time and the author has proved her mettle in the compilation of such a masterpiece in a very simple and lucid fashion. The book promises to be instrumental in understanding multiple dimensions of vulnerability and disaster of Andaman & Nicobar for students and researchers across different disciplines. It seems to be work beyond Ph.D. research and is much better in many ways where the author’s in-depth research and gleaning of references are a feast for the entire academic fraternity.

The book categorically and methodologically uncovers the layers, lacunae, and strength of the disasters and their management in India, Andaman and Nicobar in particular.

The content of the book is highly rich and sourced from authentic literary and research centres. The very beginning of the first chapter has the missing name of Barren Island which has been mentioned in other chapters but if mentioned at the inception phase, shall help readers to connect with the peculiar geography and geology of Andaman & Nicobar. Maps used in the book are quite illustrative where the rest of the maps cover required geographical outreach according to the book except the main map of the study area. The prime map of the study area needs to be a bit larger incorporating more geographical outreach including Cocos Strait, Great Channel, the southern tip of Myanmar and northern tip of Indonesia respectively. It shall enrich the geographical location and display of adjoining territory across Andaman & Nicobar.

Sources of almost all the references are mentioned in the text and in the bibliography section. However, it would have been more authentic when the quantum of vessels and magnitude of trade as mentioned in the preface is supplemented with its reference sources which shall enrich the information given in the book. Geographical description of the Ten Degree channel needs to be verified as it seems that there is an error in the numerical extent of it.

The chapter on epidemics where Syphilis is reasoned for the eradication of more than ninety percent of the population can be strengthened with relevant references at least from literary sources. The evidence for post incidents is well mentioned in the chapter

as well as in the book. Compilation of this chapter with various diagrams, flow charts and figures put the quantified data in an easy format for readers to understand and deduce various facts. The third and fourth chapters are a blend of Human Geography, Settlement Geography, Geography of War, Freedom Struggle of India and a tinge of disaster and its management. These two chapters give an overview of World War II, Independence of India and its impact on Andaman & Nicobar. Concrete study of vulnerability, disasters and their management starts from the fifth chapter i.e. The Tsunami. Fifth and sixth chapters have well-documented details of tsunami and damage caused by it across the Sunda trench in general and Andaman in particular. Well depicted map of Burma microplate and progression of tsunami envisages geographical insight of earthquake and tsunami-related phenomena. The opinion of the Onges tribal people on tsunami has been penned down in this book with the help of translators where these people believe in metaphysical force operating in nature and their ferocity results in devastations such as tsunami.

Disaster management in India and the world over has largely been viewed as a responsibility of the government where millions of rupees are spent each year for conferences and symposiums and the end products are not that academically productive. With the help of quantitative data collected across the globe regarding natural disasters, an analysis of socio-economic dynamics can be easily done. If ecological damage was more quantified with the help of reliable sources in terms of damage to the coral reef, aquatic life, coastal landforms and forest cover, it would have been highly

informative. The chapter on vulnerability and the tsunami has well-articulated dimensions. Measurement of vulnerability has been explained in a simple and lucid language. Assessment of vulnerability needs an extensive survey whereas the sample size for this research appears to be inadequate, squeezed to only hundred only. If number of respondents had been a little more, it would fetch more vivid interface of the intended assessment. Nevertheless, assessment of vulnerability contains a high standard of understanding of the problem, its impacts, the community affected, its quantification and its presentation in a highly systematic format.

The Chapter 'Response and the Tsunami' implicitly mentions rescue operations where due credit is given to the Armed and Para forces who played a significant role in the wake of the devastation. The chapter on 'Compensation and recovery' incorporates huge government data. It acknowledges tremendous work done by different agencies to bring life back on a normal track. Anomalies of reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes have been highlighted by the author which can be cited as excellent example of reconstruction for different government and non-government agencies to better their execution and implementation strategies if it is still due in Andaman and Nicobar.

The title of this book is quite compact and is highly appropriate unlike over-ambitious titles failing miserably to meet the purpose of their study. The language of the book is

eloquent, simple and understandable devoid of complex jargon. Texts are used liberally to illustrate the content, thereby providing a balanced and well-documented piece of work which is simultaneously resplendent and read-worthy. A tint of weakness is outweighed by the magnanimous content of the book which is well illustrated, systematic and synchronised and a trans-disciplinary work propitious for academicians and strategists. This piece is indispensable to graduates and postgraduate students of Geography, Sociology, Environmental Science, Disaster Management as well as researchers, academicians, disaster managers, institutions and policy-makers who are passionately involved in research, the management or in providing solutions to disasters not only in India but across the globe. This piece, going by most parameters of book writing project, is an excellent contribution and can be read, understood and grasped across multiple disciplines.

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