

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF MIGRANT MUSLIM WORKERS IN ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS**

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### **Abstract**

*Socio-economic status (SES) is a multidimensional term. Today SES is deemed to be a hyper-dimensional latent variable that is difficult to elicit. Socioeconomic status is a latent variable in the sense that, like mood or well-being, it cannot be directly measured (Oakes & Rossi, 2003) and it is, some-what, associated with normative science. Finally, it converges to the notion that the definition of SES revolves around the issue of quantifying social inequality. However, it poses a serious problem for the researcher to measure the socio-economic status of migrant workers for short duration during the course of the year. Even in the absence of a coherent national policy on internal migration, millions of Indians are migrating from one destination to another with different durations (Chandrasekhar, 2017). The Andaman & Nicobar Islands(ANI) is no exception and a large number of in-migration is taking place throughout the year. Towards this direction, an attempt has been made to examine the socio-economic profile of migrant Muslim workers who have come to these Islands from West Bengal and Bihar in search of earning their livelihood. An intensive study has been conducted to assess their socio-economic well-being, literacy, income, health hazards, sanitation & medical facilities, family size, indebtedness, acculturation, social status, etc. This study reveals that their socio-economic profile in these Islands are downtrodden, nevertheless they are in a better state than their home town.*

**Keywords:** *Socio economic profile, health hazards, indebtedness, sanitation, acculturation.*



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**Introduction:** Prior to 1788, the history of Andaman & Nicobar Islands was centered around the aboriginals only and the literature survey reveals that there was no concrete, robust and chronological record available. The substantiated facts of Andaman Islands began to come to notice only after the arrival of Lieutenant Archibald Blair in 1789 with the objective of hydrographic survey of these Islands in compliance of the instructions of the Governor General of India, Lord Cornwallis (Dhingra, 2005). On the basis of his report, a settlement comprising about 200 mechanics, craftsmen, sepoys, and laborers, was born in September 1789. By 1791, the settlers started bringing their families from mainland. However, the settlement was abandoned in May 1796 because of adverse circumstances being faced by them. The 270 convicts and 550 free men, women and children were shifted back. The

religion-wise number of population was not indicated there. The first phase of history of these Islands came to an end here.

The second phase of history was started on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1858, when Captain Man raised the Union Jack at Port Blair for the second time with the objective of penal settlement (Dhingra, 2005). The concept of penal settlement was conceived of by the British authority due to many reasons. The most important reason was that there was lack of jail accommodation in mainland of India as the number of convicts was on increasing trend at that time because of mutiny against British administration. Thereafter, the penal settlement remained unabated and was ultimately abolished in 1942 during Japanese occupation. In 1881, the number of convicts in Andaman was 7,440 (one-third Muslims, two-third Hindus). There were 1,300 peasants; 9 Muslim and 3 Hindu money lenders; nearly 400 Muslim and approximately 600 Hindu employees; and three times more Hindu than Muslim artisans (Malik, 2016). Prior to 1881, the religion-wise number of population was not indicated in the second phase of the history of penal settlement. Therefore, it is evident that there was no doubt about the existence of Muslim population in the penal settlement of second phase.

So far as this study is concerned with the socio-economic condition of Muslim population, it becomes imperative to mention the rebellion of Moplahs and their arrival in Andamans. Since ancient times, Malabar was known as the traditional centre for trade in pepper. Sometime in 9<sup>th</sup> century, a number of Arab Muslims came and actually settled in Malabar. They got married to local Dravidian women, which gave birth to a new community to be known as Moplah. They were involved with Khilafat movement and ultimately, the movement turned primarily anti-Hindu. On 25<sup>th</sup> July 1921, a clash with the police in which 5000 Moplahs were involved, took place tremendously. As usual the British won the battle and the Moplahs were, after trial, sentenced to transportation. Thus, the Moplah community was formed in these Islands. It was predicted that a group of 1400 in number were sent to the Andamans as prisoners and they were allowed to live with their families and a new experiment, of allowing them to live in separate villages, was tried (Das, 1982). Their acculturation and adaptation with this environment took place quickly because of its similarity to that of their original home in the Malabar. They were able to achieve economic independence quickly because of their industrious nature and skill in crafts. Needless to say that presently this community plays an important role in the economic development of these Islands. In spite of being a minority community, their contribution to GSDP is, no doubt, too high in comparison to other communities of these Islands. But, no attempt has been undertaken to substantiate this fact in this study.

A remarkable ethnicity and cultural diversity among the population of Andaman and Nicobar Islands is discernible. The entire population can be divided into three categories – tribal population, descendants of criminals under sentence of transportation for life from India and Burma, and settlers under rehabilitation scheme. Apart from these, there is one more category that can be termed as recent immigrants from different states of India. Since the demand for labor is more than its existing supply in these Islands, the arrival of people from various parts of India remains unabated to find job in organized as well as in unorganized sector. The contribution of these people constitutes an important factor towards the development of these Islands. The most recent immigration of Muslim population in these Islands from the District of North 24 Parganas in West Bengal and Bihar has been the subject matter of this study. Till now, no study has been undertaken to study the socio-economic condition of these people in these Islands. There is no doubt that an improved mode of socio-economic condition is positively correlated with the productivity of workers. Since their participation in economically gainful activities of these Islands has become so significant, it becomes imperative to pay attention towards the study of the socio-economic condition of these people and accordingly, an attempt has been made in this paper.

**Literature review :** There is no consensus definition of SES. It is believed that SES is a construct that reflects one's access to collectively desired resources. It is a fundamental construct in the social and health sciences (Oakes & Rossi, 2003). The obvious reason is that people occupying lower socioeconomic positions may have difficulty accessing resources that are necessary to enable them to live lives that are considered appropriate or decent within their society. As a result, they may experience poverty (Lister, 2004; Spicker, 2007). Instead of SES, European scholars tend to use term socioeconomic position (SEP) and it refers to the social and economic factors that influence what positions individuals or groups hold within the structure of a society (Galobardes, Shaw, Lawlor, Smith, and Lynch, 2006). However, the distinction between "status" and "position" seems trivial as well as feeble.

Development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The concepts of development and SES/SEP are inter-related and inter-dependent. The basic objective of development should focus on the expansion of human capabilities which, in turn, depends on the factors determining SES/SEP. To achieve this objective, the role of well-functioning public actions in improving the overall living conditions of the people is inevitably a prerequisite (Das, 1999). If the government agencies connive over and waddle across the welfare schemes meant for the disadvantageous section, the amelioration of the people will dwindle instead. Without giving them empowerment and autarky, the inter-generational welfare will remain an

abortive attempt. The development of human capital, e.g., health, education, employment opportunities, welfare and well-being, is the important indicator of SES. It is deemed to be accepted that low levels of formal educational attainment or poor health can result in limited career opportunities and choices, and in relative levels of household deprivation and financial stress (McColl, Jacoby, Thomas, Souther, Bamford, Steen, Thomas, Harvey, Garratt, and Bond, 2001). The capacity to enhance equity and thus build social capital depends on the protection of individual well-being, which in turn, depends on the development of human capital. Thus educational attainment, employment status, income, housing adequacy, and other social and economic conditions need to be monitored over time with a view to improving social sustainability such that their collective abilities are also ameliorated.

Without sound measures of SES, it is impossible to capture and understand changes to the structure of a society; the intergenerational change of social status over time; the relationship between other important social variables, such as race or sex, etc. SES is directly related with the productivity of labor which in turn influences the development phenomenon. A large volume of literature concerning SES of people of different walks of life is available, whereas the literature on SES of Muslim workers is very limited. It is observed in a study that the Muslim majority districts in West Bengal show better performance of some socio-economic indicators like literacy and employment in government jobs than the non-Muslim population (Das & Marjit, 2016). On the contrary, a socio-economic profile of Muslims in Maharashtra indicates dismal conditions on the social, economic and educational fronts (Patel, 2013). In Andaman & Nicobar Islands, the socio-economic status of migrant construction workers irrespective of their religion is miserable and it triggers psychological distress on them (Joy, 2017). In the above context, this paper makes an empirical study to address the gap in the literature by examining the socio-economic profile of migrant Muslim workers in Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:** A detail observation on the socio-economic condition of the migrant Muslim workers has been carried out in two locations, viz. Dairy Farm and Mohanpura, where they live in clustered form. Most of the Bengali Muslim families from the District of North 24 Parganas of West Bengal adjacent to Bangladesh border use to live in two pockets of Port Blair Municipal area in clustered form – Dairy Farm & Junglighat. However, those Muslim people who have come alone leaving their families in the hometown are found sporadically everywhere from the extreme south to the extreme north of these Islands, but mostly confined in South Andaman District. Apart from it, a group of Muslim people from Midnapore District of West Bengal is engaged with the activity of plumbing, but

their nature and characteristics are different from the above group. On the other hand, a large number of Muslim people from Bihar are mainly engaged with the retail selling of fruits and they use to live in and around market area in clustered form. In addition, some people of Sivan District of Bihar are engaged in hair cutting business and like to stay in the heart of the town. Data for the present study had been collected on complete enumeration from the study area. A set of questionnaire were interviewed with almost all the people of Dairy Farm and all the fruit sellers to assess their various socio-economic parameters like health, income level, indebtedness, family size and literacy level, etc. Data collected on different aspects of socio-economic status of these people in study area has been analyzed by different statistical tests like average and correlation coefficient. The outcome of these tests could be utilized for formulating policies of this weaker section of the community and will cater as backup for identification of target people for implementing different government programs.

## **RESULTS**

**Reasons for Immigration :** The reasons for migration of Muslim population from the District of North 24 Parganas are abject poverty, indebtedness, lack of social security, low level of social status, lack of employment opportunities, political turbulence, lack of credit facilities, exploitation by muscle power, etc. On the other hand, the reason for migration of Muslim population from Bihar is mainly due to lack of regular employment opportunities and severe competition in business and other allied activities in their native place.

**Economic Activities and Income :** Income is arguably the best indicator of material living standards. The activities performed by the migrant Muslim people from West Bengal can be divided into three categories – (i) construction workers, (ii) maid-servants, and (iii) sellers of golgappa (pani puri) & rice flakes. Most of the people are working as laborers in construction sector and their wage rate is around ₹ 500 per day which is much higher than the minimum wage rate. The inflow of these people in Andaman has increased rapidly only after the devastating Tsunami which struck on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004. In order to regain the infrastructural development, the Government of India had allocated additional fund for these Islands. But the shortfall of workers has induced the contractors to bring man power from Indian mainland. As the cost of living is too high here, the female members use to work as maid servants to supplement the family's income. Thus a separate sector of economic activity has developed as parallel and prior to their arrival, this sector was least important. The income of maid servants varies from person to person depending upon their efficiency and availability of work at suitable place. It is observed that their monthly income ranges between ₹ 4000 and ₹ 8000. A few of them is engaged with the activity of making golgappa (pani

puri) and selling it at roadside. The earning of these people is above ₹ 10,000 per month. Besides this, a few people mostly below 14 years is engaged with the activity of selling spicy rice flakes at various places including park, places adjacent to school and college, etc. It is observed from an oral interview that a group comprising more than 200 people from the place of Egra in Midnapore District of West Bengal is working as plumbers and their monthly income is around ₹ 15,000 and they use to remit approximately ₹ 10,000 per month to their family members in mainland.

On the other hand, the main activity of Muslim migrants from Bihar in the 80s & 90s mostly belonging to Patna District, is retail business of fruits selling and their minimum earning on an average is ₹ 15,000 per month. This is worth noting that the migrant Muslim women of west Bengal are working as maid servants, whereas it is not found at all among the migrant Muslim women of Bihar. Besides this, a few people from Sivan District is running barber shop (hair-cutting) in and around the Port Blair town and they earn more than ₹ 15,000 per month.

From the present observation, an attempt has been made to show that income of a family is the most important index for getting an idea about the socio-economic condition of this community. Here their income depends on various parameters such as adaptation, efficiency, communication skill, honesty, weather, employment at suitable place, attitude of the employer, frequency of visiting home town, etc. However, an equitable distribution of income is observed among those who are engaged in construction sector. But, income distribution shows significant inequality among the maid servants, fruit sellers and those who are engaged in allied activities.

### **Literacy Level**

Education becomes imperative to human life. Education is an instrument of social change and transformation. It transforms the human resource into human capital, which in turn, enhances the productivity. It helps women to overcome the social, cultural and psychological barriers and enables them to participate as equal partners in development. The rate of literacy has been observed to be very frustrating. Among the literates, the maximum number has hardly completed primary level education while the rest dropout before completing primary education. It is observed that the literacy rate of women is almost negligible because most of this community has a positive attitude about education of their male children but female education beyond. It is largely due to rampant poverty, ignorance, superstition, lack of awareness, early marriage and lack of social security for female children.

It is observed from the study that most of this community wants their children to receive education so that they can have a better job and thus improve their social and economic status. But often they cannot help but pull their children out from the school and engage them in some economic activity to supplement their family income. However, as they are influenced by the prevailing environment and demonstration effect, they have changed their mentality a full circle and consequently they also use to send their children to government school where free education along with mid-day meal is provided. Some of them are also studying in local colleges and a few is so meritorious that they have got the opportunity of studying technical and non-technical courses in premier institutes like NIIT in mainland. Since there are immense opportunities of getting education free of cost along with various incentives, the children of this community are now attracted towards availing this facility in these Islands.

**Housing Condition and Family size :** Housing characteristics measure material aspects of socioeconomic circumstances. Living standard of this community seems to be unhygienic, since they cannot afford much amount for accommodation as the cost of living is too high in these Islands. Almost all the people live in rental houses which are situated in close proximity. These houses are not so spacious and in most of the cases having no drainage facilities. So far as the Bihari Muslims are concerned, the monthly rent paid by them varies from ₹ 2500 to ₹ 5000 depending upon the earning of the family. The average family size of the study area is found to consist of 8 members. The per-head availability of space is much smaller than requirement. Most of the family households are of nuclear type, but they are having joint family system in mainland. Women and children also help them in business in the domestic front and women are basically engaged in the maintenance of house. The authority of women in households, their freedom of movement, their economic, educational and other opportunities are not at all satisfactory and they have a much lower status than that of the men in the social hierarchy. However, it needs to be mentioned that their standard of living here is much better than that of native place. A gradual social transformation in all respects is taking place and psychological barrier is removing over time.

On the other hand, the rent paid by the Bengali Muslims ranges between ₹ 2000 to ₹ 3500 depending upon the earning as well as family size. The average family size of the study area is found to consist of five members, which is much lower than the Bihari family. The authority of women is similar to that of Bihari Muslims.

**Indebtedness :** Indebtedness is deemed to be one of the indicators of poverty, which in turn become the vicious circle for them. It is observed from the study area that so far as the Bengali Muslim is concerned, the most important reason of their migration being the abject poverty and indebtedness. Almost all of them have taken loan from the moneylenders at exorbitant rate of interest by mortgaging their property for the purpose of construction of house, daughter's marriage, small business, farming, etc. in their native place. Later they become unable to repay the loan because of non-availability of regular job and huge loss in small business, rather they are forced to take loan again and ultimately they become bankrupted gradually. As the demand for labor as well as the wage rate is too high in these Islands, the amount of earning here makes them able to repay loan in mainland and get back their property. Not only that, there are some people who have been able to purchase landed property and construct residential house in their native place.

On the other hand, the economic condition of Bihari Muslims is better than that of Bengali Muslims. Almost all the Bihari Muslims have their landed property and houses in mainland. The main reason for their migration is to get regular income earning activity so that they can send money to their family members to maintain and expand property.

**Health Hazards :** The study reveals that they have been facing health and hygienic problem also. As most of the Bengali Muslims are engaged in construction sector, their working environment is not so good. Very often they suffer from diarrhea, gastro-intestinal disorders, malaria, typhoid, scabies, and particularly infectious and skin diseases. The main reasons are unhealthy feeding habit & habitation and un-hygienic condition. Most of the people are ignorant of the quality and quantity of the food to be taken at different times in a day. Mostly they cook once in a day and consume it all along the day and that too does not conform to the balanced diet. They live in small low-cost houses having no drainage facilities and no approach road except narrow footpath. Some of them who are living in kutchha and semi-pucca houses are not having bathroom and latrine facilities.

**Acculturation :** The base word of acculturation is 'culture'. Culture means a way of living and a way of life, which include learning a new language, immersion, assimilation and integration. Language and immersion are the most important parts of the acculturation process. In order to adapt a new culture, one needs to learn a new language. One of the most effective ways to learn a new language is through immersion, or surrounding yourself entirely in a new culture. Assimilation involves the accumulation of information about a new culture and resulting adaptations to match the new culture. Integration means participation in societal events by the migrants in order to emulate them in the society. The *lingua franca* of these



Islands is a combination of all the languages of different provinces of Indian Union. Eventually, all the migrants from West Bengal and Bihar, are already acquainted with the colloquial language of these Islands to some extent. As a result, they are able to understand the customs, traditions, acceptable behaviors and so on. As there is co-existence of people from all states of Indian Union irrespective of caste, creed and religion, the processes of assimilation and integration do not take much time for them to experience the entire acculturation process.

**Social Status :** The social status which they are enjoying here is presumed to be at par with their local counterpart of these Islands. The Andaman & Nicobar Islands is a miniature form of India and the peaceful co-existence of people from all provinces irrespective of caste, creed, and race is an exemplary. Freedom of participation of people from all communities in social, religious and cultural events is discernible. When a person is given due status, dignity and importance, he becomes a responsible contributor towards the society where he lives. That is why the poor and neglected migrants from mainland like to settle in these Islands.

**DISCUSSION :** The results of the correlation analysis clearly reveal that income and family size is positively correlated to each other. The positive correlation clearly envisages that the more the family size, the more will be the family income. Though, the family size and monthly income varies among the Bengali and Bihari Muslims. Higher wages, large employment opportunities and shortages of local laborers make ANI a lucrative job market for workers outside the state and this situation leads to in-migration of workers unabated. Therefore, family size is an important factor in this study and maximum income means more strength of the household. Income is also interrelated with several other parameters like the consumption pattern, educational level, house type, occupational status and the general living conditions. So, income of a family is the most important index for getting an idea about the socio-economic condition of the people.

The report of the High-Level Committee under the chairmanship of Justice Rajindar Sachar to study the 'Social, Economic and Educational Status' of the Muslim Community of India is supposed to be a deviation with reference to that of the permanently settled Muslim Community of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The social, economic and educational status of Muslim Community of these Islands is deemed to be at par with the people of other community. It is presumed that no separate mechanisms are required to ensure equity and equality of opportunity for this community in these Islands in particular. Their participation and contribution in economically gainful activities being overwhelming and it constitutes a significant part of these Islands State Gross Domestic Product. However, the subject-matter

of present study is concerned with somewhat a different disadvantageous group of people of this community, who are the recent migrants from Indian mainland. As a result, their socio-economic condition is not at all comparable with that of permanently settled Muslim inhabitants of these Islands. Eventually, the existing mechanisms to ensure equity and equality of opportunity are also applicable for them. Needless to say that this group requires special attention and the recommendations made by the High-Level Committee will be beneficial for their betterment.

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