Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences **ISSN 2347-5374 (Online)**
Sch. J. Arts Humanit. Soc. Sci. 2014; 2(5B):694-700 **ISSN 2347-9493 (Print)**

(An International Publisher for Academic and Scientific Resources) DOI : 10.36347/sjahss.2014.v02i05.0015

Occupational Diversification of Muslim Livelihoods: A Case Study in Murshidabad District, West Bengal

Chandan Singha[1], Debashis Sarkar*[2]
[1]Research Scholar, [2]Associate Professor, Institute of Agriculture, Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan, Birbhum-731236, West Bengal, India

***Corresponding Author:**
Debashis Sarkar.
Email: debashis.sarkar@visva-bharati.ac.in

Abstract: The minority system i.e. a system of elaborately stratified society distinguishes India from most other societies. Among the most distinctive factors of the minority is the close link between minority and occupations, especially in rural India. Along with the other backward castes, the Muslims have the highest incidence of poverty in India, with poverty rates that are much higher than the rest of the population. Since independence, the Indian government has enacted affirmative action policies in educational institutions and employment programmes for Muslims. Thus, efforts have been made by using the primary data to assess whether these actions have led to a weakening of the relationship between minority status and occupational segregation that has existed historically in India. It is evident that the occupational structure of the Muslim households is converging to that of the non-scheduled households.
Keywords: Occupation, Diversification, Rural, Muslims, West Bengal

INTRODUCTION

The livelihood patterns in an area often depend on its prevailing economic, social and geographic characteristics. Household is the basic economic decision making unit in rural society. It is essential to understand householder's livelihood strategies in order to make sense of what they are doing and understand how they perceive opportunities for change. The objective of the livelihood analysis is to learn about the lives of people living in a particular area. In the process, we can aspire to learn about the intricacies of the economic structure of village economy, coping strategies, aspect of daily life, gender roles. Similarly a concrete effort in relation to micro level study on rural livelihood can unfold the causes of poverty, rural unemployment, migration, degradation and other ecological hazards under different location specific agro-ecological systems conditioned by different socio-cultural fabrics.

Extensive literature has been produced on livelihood diversification since the 1990s with the introduction of the livelihood framework. After case studies verifying the diversity of rural livelihoods strategy [1], several issues have received attention. These are determinants of diversification[2], its distributional effects [3], favourable and unfavourable factors for diversification[4] and its relationship with agricultural productivity [5]. In general, a large body of literature argued that the occupational shifting of rural households is seen to be more in favour of non-farm economic activities. Further, a mixed response has been observed that these livelihood options are associated with casualization of labour, a response of new risks, seasonality, changes in broader macro-economic policy or global environment. Almost all literature of livelihood diversification describe the same logic that agriculture become relatively disadvantageous compared to other sectors as the principal means of constructing a viable livelihood and therefore occupational diversification is pursued to overcome this disadvantageous.

Two fundamental causes of occupational diversification are seasonality and risks. Similar consideration applies to pull and push reasons for diversification. However these causes have further elaborated which lead to occupational diversification. These are decreasing farm size caused by sub-division at inheritance. Farming can only provide a part livelihood. The better-off tend to diversifying in form of non-farm business, while the poor tend to diversify in form of casual work[6]. Diversification is also a response to new risks, especially those related to a trend towards smaller landholdings and increasing landlessness as population pressure increases and growing environmental risks due to persistence drought, falling ground water level etc. [7].

Sustainable development of rural economy gets distorted due to increase in man-land ratio which influences the occupational behaviour and livelihood pattern of rural poor irrespective of caste, class, religion and gender. However, the gravity of the problem of sustainable development of Muslims in West Bengal in particular is more relevant in these days since the economic conditions of Muslims in general is very poor. The Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee report [8] has highlighted the deplorable socio-economic plight of the mass of the Muslim community in India. It has served to highlight the urgent need to adopt special measures for the upliftment in their social and economic conditions. It has also effectively rebutted the false and motivated propaganda about "minority appeasement". Similarly most of the literature, studies, published reports described and unfold the backwardness and marginalization of Muslim community in socio-economic and political spheres in comparison with non-Muslim people in different location specific agro-ecological zones of India and aboard. On the other hand, Muslims in West Bengal need to diversify their occupations as farming in general is rain-fed and, therefore, seasonal. This is to enable them to acquire additional income to take care of economic responsibilities during off-season periods.

Most of the literatures and study on the occupational diversification in rural livelihood in a particular rural sector has focused to explore oversee the changes in rural livelihood activities in response to vulnerability context, especially those related to failure of agriculture, environmental risks, effect on macro policy change and climate variation and also identified, classified the causes of diversification and effective management of vulnerability in global, national and local levels. A process of departure/not-departure from traditional occupation exists in almost all societies and there is nothing warrants that the same is not true of Muslim in India to a greater or lesser degree. The reason regarding departure from traditional occupation and its broad perspective does not indicate much result from existing literature or study elsewhere. For example, Habibah *et al.* [9] just touched the reason that younger generation no longer showing their much interest on doing their traditional occupation of building new house. He described that the local knowledge among the younger generation was slowly disappearing.

In view of the above, now the question arises that even different dimensions of occupational diversification in livelihood are exists, what types of occupational diversification is feasible at this stage. With this background, an attempt has been made in this paper to study the occupational diversification in Muslim community in Murshidabad district, West Bengal. The specific objectives of this study are (1) to identify the existing livelihood pattern of Muslim community in the study area; (2) to measure the gender-wise work participation rate and the extent of occupational diversification among the Muslim people.

DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY

According to the Population Census (2001), about 64 per cent of the total population belongs to Muslim community reside in Murshidabad district, West Bengal. Thus, out of 19 districts in West Bengal, a district dominated by Muslim community has been selected purposively. In the next stage, all blocks in Murshidabad district have been stratified into three homogeneous strata in terms of the relative size of the Muslim community i.e. the blocks consisting of more than 80 per cent (Cluster-I), 50-80 per cent (Cluster-II) and less than 50 per cent of Muslim population (Cluster-III). According to these criteria, there are 3 blocks in Cluster-I, 19 blocks in Cluster-II and 4 blocks in Cluster –III. Thereafter six (06) blocks have been selected by employing the method of proportional allocation. Thus one block each from high and lower concentration and four blocks from medium concentration have been selected. In the next stage, two villages from each block have been selected by employing the method of random sampling. The list of households of each selected village has been collected and stratified into different categories according to the land holding status i.e. landless, marginal farmers (up to 1 ha), small farmers (1.01 - 2.00 ha), medium farmers (2.01 - 4.00 ha) and large farmers (4.01 ha & above). Finally, 25 households from each village have been selected by employing the method of proportional allocation**.** Ultimately 300 households have been selected as the ultimate sample unit of the study. The survey period was 2012. Secondary data has been collected from Population Census, National Sample Survey and other published statistics of governmental agencies. Tertiary information has been collected from various research works published in different national and international journals, literature, books etc.

There are various indicators and indices to measure livelihood diversification. In this study Simpson index, Herfindahl Index, Ogive Index, Hirschman Indices are used because of their computational simplicity, robustness and wider applicability which are expressed as follows:

(1) Simpson index of diversity

$$SI = (1- \sum_{i=1}^{N} P_i^2)$$

Where, N is the total number of occupation and Pi is the proportionate number of household members employment coming from source i. Index value lies between 0 and 1. 0 indicates perfect concentration, where, 1 represents perfect diversification. If there is just one source of income, Pi=1, so SID=0. As the number of sources increase, the shares (Pi) decline, as does the sum of the squared shares, so that SID approaches to 1. If there are k

sources of income, then SID falls between zero and 1-1/k. accordingly, households with most diversified incomes will have the largest SID, and the less diversified incomes are associated with the smallest SID. For least diversified households (i.e., those depending on a single income source) SID takes on its minimum value of 0. The upper limit for SID is 1 which depends on the number of income sources available and their relative shares. The higher the number of income sources as well as more evenly distributed the income shares, the higher the value of SID. The Simpson Index of Diversity is affected both by the number of income sources as well as by the distribution of income between different sources (balance). The more uniformly distributed is the income from each source, the SID approaches to 1.

(2) Herfindahl index

$$HI= \quad (\sum_{i=1}^{N} P_i^2)$$

Where, N is the total number of occupation and Pi is the proportionate number of household members employment coming from source i. Index value lies between 0 and 1. 0 indicates perfect diversification, where, 1 represents perfect concentration.

(3) Ogive index

$$OI = N * \sum_{i=1}^{N} \left\{P_i - \left(\frac{1}{N}\right)\right\}^2$$

Where, N is the total number of occupation and Pi is the proportionate number of household members employment coming from source i. Index value lies between 0 and 1. 0 indicates perfect diversification, where, 1 represents perfect concentration.

(4) Hirschman index

$$HI = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{N} \left(\frac{x_i}{X}\right)^2}$$

Where, N is the total number of occupation and $\left(\frac{x_i}{X}\right)$ is the proportionate number of household members employment coming from source i.e. Index value lies between 0 and 1. 0 indicates perfect diversification, where, 1 represents perfect concentration.

Work participation rate is calculated as the percentage of total workers (main and marginal) to total population and expressed as follows:

$$\text{Work participation rate} = \frac{\text{Total Workers (Main + Marginal)}}{\text{Total Population}} \times 100$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

West Bengal is one of the four high percentage Muslim populous states in India. According to 2011 Census report the total number of Muslims in West Bengal is 20,240,543. Muslims are considered as the principal minority in this state constituting about 96 per cent of the entire minority population in West Bengal. Muslims are distributed in each and every district of West Bengal in diverse proportion. There are twelve districts in West Bengal where Muslims population represent about 25 per cent of the total population. Muslim population represents more than 50 per cent of total population in North Dinajpur, Malda and Murshidabad districts.

Table 1: Occupational diversification by different categories of Muslims (In per cent)

Size of farm	Diversified households	Un-diversified household	Total
Landless	70.48	29.52	100.00
Marginal	94.05	5.95	100.00
Small	89.39	10.61	100.00
Medium	93.33	6.67	100.00
Overall	84.67	15.33	100.00

Note: Diversified household = Earns income from more than one activity, Un-diversified household = Earns income only from single activity

Source: Field Survey (2012)

The minority system i.e. a system of elaborately stratified society distinguishes India from most other societies. Among the most distinctive factors of the minority is the close link between minority and occupations, especially in rural India. Along with the other backward castes, the Muslims have the highest incidence of poverty in India, with poverty rates that are much higher than the rest of the population. Since independence, the Indian government has enacted affirmative action policies in educational institutions and employment programmes for Muslims. Thus, efforts have been made by using the primary data to assess whether these actions have led to a weakening of the relationship between minority status and occupational segregation that has existed historically in India. It is evident that the occupational structure of the Muslim households is converging to that of the non-scheduled households.

Pattern of diversification of Muslims is very prominent in marginal farmers followed by medium and small farm (Table -1). Diversification in multiple activities is less in landless in comparison to other categories of Muslim.

Table 2: Occupational features of the Muslim (In per cent)

Particular	Size class			
	Landless	Marginal	Small	Medium
Exclusively farming households	-	4.76	6.06	6.67
Household with farming + one non-farm occupation	-	36.90	45.45	35.56
Household with farming + two non-farm occupations	-	32.14	16.67	11.11
Household with farming + one non-farm + two off farm occupations	1.02*	9.52	-	-
One non-farm occupation	25.90	1.19	16.67	22.22
One non-farm + one off farm occupations	49.04	10.71	15.15	24.44
Two non-farm + more than one off farm occupations	24.04	4.76	-	-
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

*Leased-in land

Note: (1) The non-farm income includes income from business, service, industrial labour, begging and collection
(2) The off-farm income includes income from hired agriculture labour

Source: Field survey (2012)

Table 3: Income due to diversification vis-a-vis non-diversification (In Rs.)

Size of farm	Diversified income				Non- diversified income			
	Farm income	*Non-farm income	**Off-farm income	Total	Farm income	*Non-farm income	**Off-farm income	Total
Landless	857.14***	51462.29	5846.76	19388.73	-	17951.43	268.57	6073.33
Marginal	10781.07	69714.52	10083.81	30193.13	1255.95	1030.96	-	762.30
Small	35608.33	150807.58	825.00	62413.64	6489.39	9775.76	-	5421.72
Medium	70311.11	304577.78	-	124962.96	7304.44	-	-	2434.81
Overall	21699.20	116396.20	5051.13	47715.58	2875.00	8722.33	94.00	3897.11

Note: Diversified household = Earns income from more than one activity, Un-diversified household = Earns income only from single activity

*The non-farm income includes income from business, service, industrial labour, begging and collection

**The off-farm income includes income from hired agriculture labour

*** Income from leased-in land

Source: Field survey (2012)

Occupational feature of the households has been sub-divided according to their nature of occupation and presented in Table- 2. It has been found that majority of the Muslim households have adopted farming along with one additional occupation. Muslim households with three other occupations are confined to marginal farm only. Similarly, majority of the non-farming households have two occupations.

The picture relating to generation of income through diversification vis-à-vis non-diversification of occupation is presented in Table- 3. The overall income (farm, non-farm and off-farm) of diversified household is very high than that of non-diversified households. Both farm and non-farm income increases with the increase in diversification.

Table 4: Occupational diversification indices of traditional and present occupations

Size class	Indices			
	Simpson index	Herfindahl Index	Ogive Index	Hirschman Index
Traditional occupations				
Landless	0.76	0.24	0.95	0.49
Marginal	0.72	0.28	0.99	0.53
Small	0.33	0.67	1.00	0.82
Medium	0.37	0.63	0.88	0.79
Present Occupations				
Landless	0.74	0.26	0.84	0.51
Marginal	0.78	0.22	0.57	0.47
Small	0.66	0.34	1.00	0.58
Medium	0.66	0.34	0.01	0.58

Source: Field survey (2012)

Occupational diversification indices of traditional and present occupations by size classes are presented in Table- 4. It has been observed that diversification in case both present and traditional occupations are very high in all categories. It seems that there are ample opportunities in non-farm employment in the study area.

Table 5: Work participation rate of male and female by size class

Size of farm	Work participation rate (WPR)		
	Male	Female	Total
Landless	66.15	22.86	46.01
Marginal	78.96	15.63	49.14
Small	49.36	4.17	29.71
Medium	41.61	3.57	24.90
Overall	59.69	10.92	38.02
Rural Murshidabad based on Census data (2001)	51.30	14.70	33.50
Rural Murshidabad based on Census data (2011)	54.74	17.38	36.46

Source: Field survey (2012)

Table- 5 presents the Work Participation Rate (WPR) of male and female by size class. As per the field survey it has been found that WPR for male and female and overall are 59.69, 10.92, 38.02 respectively. WPR for male is highest (78.96) in marginal and lowest (41.61) in medium. Female WPR is highest (22.86) in landless and lowest (3.57) in medium category. As per census report (2001) it has been found that WPR for male and female are 51.30, 14.70 and total are 33.50 respectively for rural Murshidabad district. However, this has improved in the census period (2011). As per census (2011), the WPR for the male, female and total are 54.74, 17.38 and 36.46, respectively.

Table 6: Activity wise work participation rate by size class

Occupations	Landless		Marginal		Small		Medium		Overall	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agricultural labour	15.25	2.15	14.65	0.39	0.96	-	-	-	9.28	1.22
Industrial labour	24.59	10.74	17.70	3.55	0.64	-	-	-	12.61	6.92
Agriculture	-	-	29.30	-	15.09	-	13.63	-	18.17	-
Allied agriculture	0.31	1.43	-	1.18	-	1.25	-	-	0.31	1.28
Service	8.09	3.58	7.33	2.76	9.63	1.25	11.53	3.12	9.54	2.65
Business	17.43	2.15	10.07	0.79	24.40	2.08	16.77	0.45	17.43	1.25
Begging	0.31	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.31	-
Collection	0.31	2.86	-	1.97	-	-	-	-	0.31	2.39

Source: Field survey (2012)

As evident in Table- 6 that the activity-wise WPR both for male and female in landless is highest in industrial labour activity followed by business and service. WPR for male in marginal is highest in agriculture followed by industrial labour and for female it is highest in industrial labour followed by service. However the activity wise WPR both for male and female in small farm is highest in business.

Table 7: Month-wise work participation rate of male and female by size class

Month	Work participation rate											
	Landless			Marginal			Small			Medium		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
January	48.69	22.56	36.54	72.31	10.93	45.52	46.82	4.95	28.59	40.72	3.61	24.43
February	50.00	22.56	37.24	73.08	10.93	45.95	46.61	4.95	28.47	40.57	3.61	24.34
March	50.33	22.93	37.59	78.08	10.26	45.66	46.82	4.95	28.59	41.19	3.61	24.69
April	51.63	22.18	37.94	72.05	10.26	45.09	48.52	4.95	29.55	41.19	3.61	24.69
May	50.65	22.18	37.41	73.33	10.26	45.81	46.61	4.95	28.47	41.19	3.61	24.69
June	50.33	22.56	37.41	72.05	10.26	45.09	46.82	4.95	28.59	41.19	3.61	24.69
July	50.00	21.80	36.89	74.10	10.26	46.24	48.09	4.95	29.31	41.51	3.61	24.87
August	51.31	21.80	37.59	73.59	10.93	46.24	48.31	4.95	29.43	41.51	3.61	24.87
September	50.33	21.05	36.71	73.59	10.93	46.24	48.94	4.95	29.78	41.04	3.61	24.60
October	48.37	21.43	35.48	72.56	10.93	45.66	46.82	4.95	28.59	39.94	3.61	23.99
November	49.67	22.18	36.89	73.85	10.93	46.39	4873	4.95	29.67	40.57	3.61	24.34
December	49.67	22.56	37.06	72.31	10.93	45.52	46.82	4.95	28.59	40.72	3.61	24.43
Overall	50.00	22.18	37.06	73.08	10.60	45.81	47.46	4.95	28.95	40.88	3.61	24.51

Source: Field survey (2012)

The month-wise WPR both male and female by size class is presented in Table- 7. It has been observed that the overall month-wise WPR is highest for male in case of marginal farm followed by landless, small and medium farms, respectively. Month-wise WPR decreases with the increase in size of holding as in case of female for all sub-categories. Overall month-wise WPR is highest in case of marginal farm followed by landless, small and medium farms respectively. Highest WPR has been observed in the month of November in case of marginal farms. WPR is less in the month of February in case of medium farms.

CONCLUSIONS

Poverty rates among Muslims households in India are significantly higher than among other households. A key contributory factor is occupational structure i.e. most Muslims are employed as agricultural labourers, an occupational grouping which has by far the highest incidence of poverty in rural India. The high prevalence of agricultural labour among Muslims households can be traced in part to the Indian social system. Since independence, the Indian government enacted large-scale affirmative action policies in educational institutions and employment programmes to help provide routes out of poverty for Muslim households. Thus, efforts have been made by using the primary data to assess whether these actions have led to a weakening of the relationship between minority status and occupational segregation that has existed historically in India. It is evident that the occupational structure of the Muslim households is converging to that of the non-scheduled households. It has been found that there is a direct effect of minority identity on occupational segregation over time, separate from other indirect routes by which minority status may determine occupational structure, and from other determinants of occupational choice, such as education, land ownership and demographic characteristics of the household.

It has been found that there is a discernible direct effect of minority identity on occupational diversification, and this effect is observed all through different size classes. It has been also found that much of the movement away from agricultural labour has been to self-employment in non-agriculture and to the more diversified income portfolios, rather than into being farmers, where both economic and social barriers to land acquisition may still be strong.

REFERENCES

1. Reardon T; Using Evidence of Household Income Diversification to Income Study of the Rural Nonfarm Labour Market in Africa. World Development, 1997; 25(5):735-747.
2. Smith DA, Gordon A, Meadows K, Zwick K; Livelihood Diversification in Uganda: Patterns and Determinants of Change across Two Rural Districts. Food Policy, 2001; 26: 421-435.
3. Ellis F; Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2000.
4. Hussein K, Nelson J; Sustainable livelihood and livelihood diversification (IDS working papers 69). Brighton, UK. 1998.

5. Ellis F; The Determinants of Rural Livelihood Diversification in Developing Countries. Journal of Agricultural Economics, 2000; 51(2):289-302.
6. Ellis F; Occupational Diversification in Developing Countries and implication for Agriculture Policy (Project No. WB0207). Overseas Developing Groups (ODG), University of East Anglia, Norwich, U K. 2004.
7. Deshingkar P; Livelihood diversification in developing countries, overseas development institute. Paper presented at the DAC POVNET Agriculture Task Group Meeting, Overseas Development Institute, London. 20-21 September 2004.
8. Sachar R, Hamid S, Ooman TK, Basith MA, Basant R, Majeed A, Shariff AS; Social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community in India, Prime Minister's High Level Committee, Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India, Sardar Patel Bhawan, Parliament Street, New Delhi 110 001. 2006.
9. Habibh A, Hamzah J, Mushrifah I; Sustainable livelihood of the community in tasik chini biosphere reserve: the local practice. Journal of sustainable development, 2010; 39:185-196.