

## **A Study on Socio-Economic Status and Social Contact of the Elderly Muslims of Rural West Bengal**

Sk. Siraj Ali

*Research Investigator at Cultural Research Institute, Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal, Ambedkar Bhavan, P-1/4, C.I.T. Scheme No. VII(M), V.I.P. Road, P.O.-Kankurgachi, Kolkata-700 054, West Bengal, India.*

---

**ABSTRACT:** *The present researcher intends to carry out social gerontological studies among the Muslim elderly living in rural areas of a particular district Purba Medinipur of West Bengal in India. Objective of the present study is to get an idea about socio-economic characteristics and living arrangement of the elderly rural Muslims under study. For the purpose of the present study, 10 villages were selected randomly, from each selected village 10 male and 10 female Muslims of age 60 years & above were considered respectively. The data was collected by adopting pre-tested structured schedule. The study shows that majority of the elderly are belong to the young old age group (60-69 years), are illiterate, married, marginal worker, and majority have no agricultural land property. When considering their living arrangement it is revealed that most of the respondents are live in joint family system with average family size 4 to 6 members, mostly living with their sons and spouse, proximity is more with sons and during any illness, care has been received from their respective spouse.*

**Keywords:** *Gerontology, Elderly Muslims, Backwardness, Problems.*

---

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The term 'ageing' refers to the process of growing old. It begins from the embryo and continues until death. In Indian perspective generally the person aged 60 years and above is refers to the older population. Ageing of population is a by-product of demographic revolution which is a consequence of industrial revolution, change in public health and education. The world is graying and this process is accelerated and intensified by the decreasing birth rate and mortality rate and increasing longevity.

The India's aged population is currently the second largest in the world after China. The proportion of elderly persons in the population of India rose from 5.63 per cent in 1961 to 6.58 per cent in 1991 (Irudaya Rajan, Mishra and Sarma, 1999) and respectively 7.5 and 8.6 per cent in 2001 and 2011. The Decadal growth rate among elderly population during 2001 to 2011 is about 36 per cent double than the general population growth of 16 per cent. The percentage of elderly in India has increased from 5.5 per cent in 1951 to 6.4 per cent in 1981 and further to 8.6 in 2011. So, rapid increasing of life expectancy is greatly influenced on the demographic scenario of many developing countries like India. Simultaneously, industrialization, urbanization and westernization in India bring changes in values and life styles. It is true that family ties in India are very strong and an over whelming majority live with their sons or are supported by them. This familial tie in the form of joint family system is found in all religious groups of Indian continent. Responsibilities or duties of the children towards their parents are also prescribed in the holy sacred texts of different religious group like Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist etc.

In Islam, it is not enough that the children only pray for their parents, but they should act with limitless compassion for their great effort to nurture them, especially mothers are particularly honored. When Muslim parents reach old age, they are treated mercifully, with kindness and selflessness. In Islam (The Qura'nic provisions), serving one's parents is a necessary duty and it is the right of the parents to expect it because of their life experiences, wisdom and hierarchical position within the family unit. Children are valued because they provide parents with a higher social status, a purpose in life, and connectedness within the family system. Children are socialized to obey their parents, respect their elders, be loyal to their family, and demonstrate devotion to their parents (Ahmed, 2009). Conventionally, the Muslim family organization is comprehensive rather than nuclear as extended family members may or may not occupy and reside in a common residential unit (Mahmood, 1989). Within the intergenerational roles prescribed by Islamic theory, older people have a place of honour in which the 'security, protection, and comfort' of the elderly are 'guaranteed by the behavioural norms and obligations' placed on younger members of the family (al-Sheha, 2014).

It is reported that the aged people in India are more backward in respect of economy, literacy, employment, dependency and health status than any other age group (Ara (1995; Bagga 1994; Bali, 1997; Bhingradiya, 1997; Biswas, 1985; Joseph, 1988; Kumar, 1991; Lakshminarayan, 1997; Marulasiddaiah, 1968; Mishra, 1989). The aged residing in rural areas are comparatively lead more substandard life than the urban

aged. However, due to the impact of several social, cultural, religious and developmental factors, the position of a large number of older people especially those are Muslim by faith has become more vulnerable than any other religious groups.

From the review of literature, it may state that in India there are a good number of studies on the various aspects of the elderly residing in both urban and rural areas. However, such types of studies on the Indian Muslim elderly living in either urban or rural areas are very little or absent. In view of the above situation the present author is intended to carry out social gerontological studies among the Muslims elderly living in rural areas of a particular district of West Bengal with the objective to explore demographic, socio-economic characteristics and living arrangement of this section of aged people.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the purpose of the study the present researcher was selected 10 villages randomly (simple random sampling without replacement) from Nandigram Police Station of Purba Medinipur district, West Bengal. From each selected village the researcher was again selected 10 male of age 60 years & above from the latest voter list of the respective villages /booth published by the Election Commission of India. In similar way, 10 females also selected from all selected villages randomly. Data was collected from those who were voluntarily participated with the help of pre-tested structure survey schedule. Before collection of information from the prospective respondents, the researcher collects their prior consent; so, they voluntarily participated during data collection. The data was collected by adopting standard anthropological methods like census survey, participation observation method, and pre-tested questionnaire-schedule method. All collected data were scrutinized, coded, entered and analyzed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Characteristics

The present study was conducted among altogether 200 rural Muslim elderly comprising of 50% male and 50% female (see table I). The study population are characterized by age ranges between 60 years to 92 years; mean age of the total number of study population is 68.69; mean age of the female respondents (68.85) is slightly higher than their male counterparts (68.52). Similarly, sd (Standard Deviation) of the population under study is 5.90339; whereas in case of male it is 5.40572 and 6.38555 for female. Age group wise distribution of the respondents shows that maximum (62%) of them belong to the age group 60 to 69 years followed by 34% in the age group 70 to 79 years and only 4% respondents belong to the age group 80 years and above. The table under discussion further reflects that there is no such gender discrimination in respect of different age groups.

**Table I: Demographic Characteristics Of The Respondent**

Demographic Characteristics	Elderly Respondents		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Total	100 (50.00)	100 (50.00)	200 (100.00)
Mean age	68.52	68.85	68.69
Sd of age	5.40572	6.38555	5.90339
<b>Age-Group</b>			
60-69	62 (31.00)	62 (31.00)	124 (62.00)
70-79	34 (17.00)	34 (17.00)	68 (34.00)
80 and above	04 (02.00)	04 (02.00)	08 (04.00)

### Socio-economic characteristics:

Table II shows that majority of the respondents are married. Out of total married respondents percentage of female (36.50%) is higher than male (34.50%). Among the widowed respondents (29%) majority are males (15.5%) than females (13.5%). It is also observed that there is not a single unmarried respondent irrespective of their sex. While dealing with the educational status of all the respondents across both the sexes, it is seen that out of the total number of respondents across both the sexes 46% are literate and 54% are illiterate. Total number of illiterate respondents is more found among the females (30%). The table 02 also depicts that among the total number of literate respondents, primary level of education have been completed by 66.30%; secondary education completed by 22.83% and 10.87% respondents completed their higher secondary level of education. Out of the total literate females majority (97.5%) has been completed their primary education. It is evident that out of the total number of respondents across both the sexes respectively 19% are workers, 50.50% are marginal workers and 30.50% are non-workers. The table 02 also suggests that female non-workers (19%) are more than male non-workers (11.50%). Majority (54.50%) of this rural section of elderly has no agricultural land property and in respect of absence of such land, females (40%) are in more backward than males (14.50%).

**Table II: Socio-Economic Characteristics Of The Respondent**

Socio-Economic Characteristics	Elderly Respondents		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Married	69 (34.50)	73 (36.50)	142 (71.00)
Widowed	31 (15.50)	00 (00.00)	31 (15.50)
Widow	00 (00.00)	27 (13.50)	13 (13.50)
<b>Literacy Status</b>			
Literate	52 (26.00)	40 (20.00)	92 (46.00)
Illiterate	48 (24.00)	60 (30.00)	108 (54.00)
<b>Level of Education</b>			
Primary	22 (42.31)	39 (97.50)	61 (66.30)
Secondary	20 (38.46)	01 (02.50)	21 (22.83)
Higher Secondary	10 (19.23)	00 (00.00)	10 (10.87)
<b>Working Status</b>			
Worker	23 (11.50)	15 (07.50)	38 (19.00)
Marginal Worker	54 (27.00)	47 (23.50)	101 (50.50)
Non-Worker	23 (11.50)	38 (19.00)	61 (30.50)
<b>Ownership of Agricultural land</b>			
Present	71 (35.50)	20 (10.00)	91 (45.50)
Absent	29 (14.50)	80 (40.00)	109 (54.50)

**Present living conditions and family support:**

From the table III, it is revealed that more than ¾ of the respondents (78.50%) reside in traditional joint family followed by nuclear (13.50%) and extended family (08%). Comparatively there are more female (40.50%) who are living in joint family than male (38%). However, slightly few more number of male respondents (08%) residing in the nuclear family in comparison to female (05.50%). Average household size of the respondents is 5.2. The household size in case of 29% of the respondents is comprised by up to three members, most of the cases wife and husband living together. Whereas, majority of the respondents (35%) live with 4 to 6 members in a household, 19% respondent's household comprised with 7 to 9 members and only 12% with 10 or more members. On the other hand 20.5% male respondents living only with their respective wife but in case of females the percentage is 10.5%. Parent-child proximity is found more (56.5%) with married and/or unmarried sons followed by with spouse (24%), 08% with married and/or unmarried daughters and 07.5% have no such proximity because they are living alone. The table also shows that during any illness of the respondents, in most of the cases (55.5%) spouse took the responsibility whereas 20% respondents stated that their married or/with unmarried children look after them, 11.5% by friends and 08.5% by neighbor.

**Table III: Characteristics Of Living Conditions Of The Respondent**

Characteristics of Living Conditions	Elderly Respondents		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
<b>Family Type</b>			
Nuclear	16 (08.00)	11 (05.50)	27 (13.50)
Joint	76 (38.00)	81 (40.50)	157 (78.50)
Extended	08 (04.00)	08 (04.00)	16 (08.00)
<b>Household Composition</b>			
1 to 3 members	30 (15.00)	28 (14.00)	58 (29.00)
4 to 6 members	28 (14.00)	42 (21.00)	70 (35.00)
7 to 9 members	21 (10.50)	17 (08.50)	38 (19.00)
10 and above members	11 (05.50)	13 (06.50)	24 (12.00)
<b>Living Arrangement</b>			
Alone	05 (02.50)	10 (05.00)	15 (07.50)
With Spouse	41 (20.50)	21 (10.50)	62 (31.00)
With married and/or unmarried sons	42 (21.00)	43 (21.50)	85 (42.50)
With married and/or unmarried daughters	08 (04.00)	10 (05.00)	18 (09.00)
With other relatives	04 (02.00)	16 (08.00)	20 (10.00)
<b>Parent Child Proximity</b>			
Proximity with married and/or unmarried sons	56 (28.00)	57 (28.50)	113 (56.50)
Proximity with married and/or unmarried daughters	16 (08.00)	00 (00.00)	16 (08.00)
Proximity to Spouse only but married son live nearby	08 (04.00)	00 (00.00)	08 (04.00)
Proximity to Spouse only and no children live nearby	15 (07.50)	33 (16.50)	48 (24.00)
Living Alone	05 (02.50)	10 (05.00)	15 (07.50)
<b>Sources of Care during Illness</b>			
Spouse	62 (31.00)	49 (24.50)	111 (55.50)
Children	13 (06.50)	27 (13.50)	40 (20.00)
Friends	10 (05.00)	13 (06.50)	23 (11.50)
Neighbours	09 (04.50)	08 (04.00)	17 (08.50)

#### **IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The present study investigated demographic, socio-economic, living conditions and family support of the elderly rural Muslims under study. In brief the study suggest that majority of the respondents under study are married (71%), illiterate (54%), marginal worker (50.5%), absence of agricultural land property (54.5%). Most of the elderly respondents are not capable to do some economic activities due to their physical impairments and mobility. On the other hand, out of the total number of rural Muslim elderly 78.5% are reside in joint family system and the average household size indicates that the study population are living with multigenerational family set up. A large number of respondents are living with the married and/or un-married sons and daughter. So, it is concluded that the children of the respondents took certain initiative for the betterment of their parents. This type of co-residence with children is a reliable assistance and support for the elderly's well being. The absence of spouse is the significant for living with sons. It is also interesting to note that majority of the respondent are currently living in joint family system and the family comprising by 5 members in average though they are not economically solvent. It indicated that break-down of Indian joint family system is slow in rural areas and especially in Muslim society.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am thankful to all elderly respondents and Block Development Officer, Nandigram-I Block under Haldia Sub-Division of the district of Purba Medinipur of West Bengal for their kind cooperation during field work. I also thankfully acknowledged to the University Grants Commission, Government of India for providing financial assistance for pursuing Ph.D. work.

#### **REFERENCES**

- [1]. Abdul-Rahman Al-Sheha. 2014. Human Right in Islam and Common Misconceptions, Dar Foundation, <http://www.darfoundation.com/Human%20Rights%20in%20Islam.pdf>, at 2 (last retrived June 30, 2014)
- [2]. Ahmed. 2009. Rights of Parents. Haq Islam; <http://www.haqislam.org/rights-of-parents>
- [3]. Ara, Shabeen; 1995. Old age Homes: The Last Resort. Research & Development Journal; 2(1); pp.3-10.
- [4]. Bagga, Amrita; 1994. Health Status of Women in Old Age Homes. Ageing & Society: The Indian Journal of Gerontology; 4(3&4); pp.11-21.
- [5]. Bali, Arun P; 1997. Role of Family in Elderly Care in N.K. Chadha; Ageing and the Aged: Challenges Before Indian Gerontology. New Delhi: Friends Publications; pp. 185-204.
- [6]. Bhingradiya, Punita; Kamala, R.; 1997. An Inter Generational Study on the Situation of the Elderly in Rural Saurashtra Indian Journal of Gerontology; 11 (3 & 4); pp. 78-84.
- [7]. Biswas, S.K.; 1985. Dependency and Family Care of the Aged in Village India: A Case Study. Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society; 20 (3); pp. 238-257.
- [8]. Ranjan, I, Mishra and Sarma. 1999. India's Elderly: Burden or Challenge? New Delhi: Sage Publications and London: Thousand Oaks.
- [9]. Joseph, Joni C; 1988. Interaction between the Old and the Young. Social Welfare; 35 (6); Sept; pp. 17-19 & 23.
- [10]. Kumar, Vijaya S; 1991. Family Life and Socio-Economic Problems of the Aged. New Delhi; Ashish Publishing House; p. 155.
- [11]. Lakshminarayan, T.R.; 1997. Comparison of Institutionalised and Non-Institutionalised Aged in their Health and Emotional Problems. Ageing & Society: The Indian Journal of Gerontology; 7 (1 & 2); pp. 1-8..
- [12]. Marulasiddaiah, H.M. 1968. Old People of Makuntii. Dharwar, India: Karnatak University
- [13]. Mishra, Saraswati. 1989. Problems and Social Adjustment in Old Age: A Sociological Analysis. New Delhi: Gian.
- [14]. Tahir Mahmood. 1989. Law and the Elderly in the Islamic Tradition- Classical Precepts and Modern Legislation, IX Islamic & Comp. L. Q; 33(33).