

# Review of Studies on Bengali Settlers in the Andaman Islands: A Sociological Perspective

Gaurab Dhali

Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab

**Abstract:** *This study examines the experiences of Bengali settlers in the Andaman Islands, focusing on their socio-cultural adjustments and physical and cultural isolation. It highlights the unique challenges faced by this uprooted community and their adaptation to a new environment. The study emphasizes that the Bengali settlers, constituting 98% of the total Bengali population, consider the Andaman Islands as their true homeland, rooted in their culture rather than their ancestral regions. It explores the non-physical cultural elements that help them maintain a sense of homeland despite their detachment from their ancestral homelands. The research also investigates the ancestral identity of the Bengali settlers, revealing their origins in the marginalized community of East Pakistan. Additionally, the article reviews the political and economic influence of the Bengali settlers in the Andaman Islands and their recognition as valid migrants under the reservation policy. This study provides a comprehensive sociological understanding of the Bengali community in the Andaman Islands, contributing to the understanding of migration patterns, identity issues, and the social dynamics within and between different communities in the islands.*

**Keywords:** Bengali Settlers, Cultural identity, Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

## I. INTRODUCTION

At first this study reviews are search work titled "Bengali Settlers in the Andaman Islands" which examines the diverse aspects of Bengali settlers in these islands. Which is a study, along with commentary by Lorea (2017), highlights that their journey and history remain undocumented, and their struggles untold, even in the 21st century. That study aimed to address the challenges faced by this uprooted community as they attempted to adapt to a new environment, grappling with both sociocultural adjustments and physical and cultural isolation.

It was an attempt understand whether they assimilate with the new environment of Andaman & Nicobar Islands or not. Along with this the present review attempt to know whether the study accurately represent the composition of the Bengali community, which constituted 98% of the total Bengali settlers? The sentence seems to suggest that this community is a minority, yet it is justified by the fact that they were granted Other Backward Class (OBC) status under the reservation policy of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 2005, as they lacked any other place to call home on the mainland India. This study provides a fresh perspective on how these Bengali settlers consider the Andaman Islands, rather than their ancestors' districts of origin, as their homeland i.e., "East Pakistan", which is also explained by Zehmisch (2018) in his literary work. According to the author, the sense of homeland for these Bengali settlers is rooted in their culture, irrespective of the geographical area they inhabit or their ancestral region. The author places greater importance on non-physical cultural elements to describe the community and their existence, emphasizing their significance over the physical landscape. As one delves further into the progressive study of this article, it becomes apparent that the focus is on identifying the true ancestral identity of the Bengali community (settlers), which was the subject of investigation. It has been discovered that they belonged to the marginalized community of East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh), predominantly carrying with them non-physical cultural elements such as songs, dances, and devotional practices. These cultural aspects help them maintain a sense of homeland, despite their detachment from their ancestral homelands and the influence of their ancestors' teachings, which are reflected in their songs. Although some Bengali settlers follow a different path, this study primarily concentrates on the physical cultural landscape identity of Bengali Hindu settlers, which has been overlooked by the scholars. However, the title of the story does not clearly represent the entire concept of this study.

Another study, titled "Migration and Identity Problems among Indians: A Case Story of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands" by Swapan Kumar Biswas (2013), addresses the identity crisis faced by different communities who migrated from various parts of the Indian subcontinent to these islands. Among them, the Bengali settlers form a significant part of the community that experienced this identity crisis alongside other migrant communities. This study effectively explains the identity issues, highlighting the international and local significance of the Andaman Islands. The study also provides a well-explained chronological account of different communities and the reasons for their migration. The study mentions that over 80% of the international migrants to the islands originated from East Pakistan, with many being legal refugees and referred to as Bengali settlers. According to the study, the Bengali community is considered "new settlers" by the indigenous tribes, and they are seen as outsiders. Unlike other migrant communities, these Bengali settlers predominantly reside in rural areas of the islands and engage in agricultural activities, supplying local produce to other parts of the region. The main reasons for their settlement in rural areas are government settlement schemes and their background in farming. These facts are repeated throughout the article, even when concluding various issues. The study has successfully distinguished Bengali settlers from other non-settler Bengali communities and shed light on their unique identity and interrelationships. Moreover, it is evident that the demographic existence of the Bengali settlers justifies their political influence, which plays a significant role in shaping the political landscape of these islands. Their community vote bank holds considerable power in determining the future policies of the region. The study demonstrates how the migratory patterns and demographic composition of different communities determine social, economic, and political dominance in the islands. Additionally, it clarifies that the Bengali settlers are recognized as valid migrants and are categorized as OBC, providing them with a 38% job reservation quota as per local administration policies. However, the study also highlights that these settlers, residing in remote and rural parts of the islands, are deprived of the benefits available in urban areas. Overall, the study aims to explore the migration patterns of different communities and examine the resulting conflicts and consequences from a sociological perspective, both within and between communities. Apart from the migratory patterns, the study also touches on important aspects of the political and economic identity of Bengali settlers in these islands, contributing to a comprehensive sociological understanding of their community. It is suggested that the topic of the study should use "Islanders" instead of "Indians" as it would more accurately represent the inhabitants of these islands, who were the focus of this research.

#### REFERENCES

- [1]. Biswas, S. K. (2013). MIGRATION AND IDENTITY PROBLEMS AMONG INDIANS: A CASE STUDY OF ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 775-792.
- [2]. Lorea, C. E. (2017). Bengali settlers in the Andaman Islands. *International Institute for Asian Studies Newsletter*, (77), 4-5.
- [3]. Zehmisch, P. (2018). Between Mini-India and Sonar Bangla: The Memorialisation and Place-Making Practices of East Bengal Hindu Refugees in the Andaman Islands. *Partition and the Practice of Memory*, 63-88.