Demography India
A Journal of Indian Association of Study of Population
Journal Homepage: https://demographyindia.iasp.ac.in/

Rural-Urban Migration in Assam: Socio-Economic Drivers and Influence

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Abstract

Background and objectives: Migration is the third component of demography, influenced by a range of both demographic and economic factors. The decision to migrate is not only influenced by employment opportunities, educational aspirations, and economic betterment, but also shaped by social, cultural, and familial constraints. Rural-Urban migration plays a crucial role in shaping the economic and social structure of a particular region by redistributing labour and resources. This study aims to explore migrants' attitudes towards rural-urban migration, analyzing socio-economic factors that influence their decisions.

Data and Methods: The study is based on primary sources of data collected from 250 respondents in Jorhat and Sonitpur districts of Assam. Respondents were selected using a convenience snowball sampling method. A structured questionnaire is prepared to capture the attitudes of migrants using a five-point Likert scale. The chi-square test is used to analyse the relationship between demographic factors and attitude towards migration.

Findings: The study reveals that younger individuals tend to have a more positive attitude towards migration, driven by aspirations for better employment and educational opportunities. Male shows a stronger inclination towards migration compared to females. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to exhibit greater enthusiasm for migration. Caste and education have significantly affected migration attitudes. In contrast, religion and marital status are not. It suggests that economic factors outweigh cultural or marital considerations in migration decisions.

Keywords

Chi-Square Test, Likert Scale, Rural-Urban Migration, Socio-Economic Factors

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Introduction

Migration, a key component of demographic change alongside fertility and mortality, refers to the movement of people from one geographical area to another. Derived from the Latin word "*migrate*", meaning to change residence, migration reflects more than a physical shift—it reshapes spatial relationships and population distribution. Driven by social, cultural, economic, political, and physical factors, migration has significantly contributed to urbanization in developing countries, especially post-World War II, supporting industrial growth in urban centres (Saracoglu & Roe, 2004).

Internal migration is classified into four types based on origin and destination: rural–rural, rural–urban, urban–urban, and urban–rural (Bose, 1974). Over time, rural-to-urban migration has grown significantly, driven by widening socio-economic disparities between rural and urban areas. Historically, migration has been closely linked to economic and social development, often resulting from developmental imbalances (Sorensen et al., 2002).

Post-independence, India has witnessed rapid urbanization, largely driven by a significant influx of rural migrants into cities (Ganguly 2009; Ledent 1982). This migration is fuelled by push factors in rural areas—such as unemployment, poverty, low wages, and poor infrastructure—and pull factors in urban areas, including better job opportunities, higher wages, education, healthcare, and improved amenities (Chapman; Clarke; Bogue; Davis; Mitra; Sen Gupta; Zachariah).

Rural-urban migration significantly impacts origin areas, destination cities, and the migrants themselves (Rao 1981; Husain 2001; Mangalam 1968). Despite rising urban unemployment, this migration continues to grow, creating socio-economic and environmental challenges in cities and negatively affecting rural areas due to selective out-migration (Pearson 1963; Tucker 1976). Efforts by developing countries to curb migration have largely failed, mainly due to the lack of comprehensive understanding of the push and pull factors driving migration.

The process of migration is primarily influenced by both push and pull factors. Push factors are those factors, such as poverty, unemployment, and a lack of education, that compel people to move from rural to urban areas and are considered unfavorable situations in their place of origin. On the other hand, push factors mean that the advantages and opportunities at the destination place attract people from their original place. Both these two factors play a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic background of the migrant population.

The flow of migration in Assam has been increasing over time. The flow of migration in Assam over the time period 1991 to 2011, has increased from 24.25% to 34.10% of the total population. We all know that there are four streams of migration and. Among the four streams of migration only rural to urban migration shows a continuous increasing trend from 6.18% to 37.34% of the total migration for the census years 1991 to 2011. On the other hand, among four types of migration (i.e., intra district, inter district, inter-state and international migration) interstate rural to urban migration dominates the other streams. Although the apparent cause of rural-urban migration is the search for better work opportunity to secure their life and improve standard of

living, different other push-pull factors may also influence migration. Furthermore, migration can also affect the fertility and mortality behaviour of the migrant households. Micro level study on the migrants can provide with important insights on the causes and consequences of migration.

Although studies have been done on rural-urban migration in India, very few studies have been undertaken in Assam. This study makes an attempt to highlight the phenomenon of rural to urban migration in Assam with special reference to Jorhat and Sonitpur District.

The prime objective of the present study is to analyze the Socio-Economic background of sampled migrants and to find out the relationship between socio-economic variables and the level of attitude.

Data Source and Methodology

Data source

The study is based on primary data sources collected from two districts in Assam, Jorhat and Sonitpur, which were selected purposively. Both districts experience significant rural-urban migration due to employment opportunities, agricultural constraints, and limited educational facilities. Jorhat, located in Upper Assam, covers the Eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley. It is a commercially developed district with urban centres. The district attracts migrants from nearby rural areas. Sonitpur covers the central northern part of the Brahmaputra Valley and provides shelter for seasonal migrants from rural areas. The selection of these two districts helps in understanding the socio-economic profile of the rural-urban migrant within Assam.

Data Collection Tool

A structured questionnaire has been prepared to collect data from 250 respondents sampled using the snowball sampling method.

Data Analysis

The socio-economic background of the respondents is presented in table 1. To assess the level of attitude towards migration, a five-point Likert scale is employed. Respondents rate each statement on a scale of Strongly Agree (5 points), Agree (4 points), Neutral (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point). A higher score indicates a stronger positive attitude. In contrast, a lower score reflects a weaker attitude toward migration. Additionally, the Chi-Square test is used to determine the relationship between migrants' attitudes and various socioeconomic factors that influence rural-urban migration.

Result

Age is an important factor of migration. The reason of migration varies among different age groups. According to Yadava, 1988 and Adepoju, 1995, in their study they found that migration rates are highest among individuals aged 15 to 40 years of age. It is also obvious because younger workers are sufficient enough to work for a longer period of time. They are also preferred by the urban employers because of their experience and adaptability (Wondimagegnhu, 2012). The migration rate of middle-aged people is also satisfactory but it seems declining among the older age group. Recognizing the importance of age in migration trends, this study incorporates a diverse range of age groups in the sample.

Table 1 Socio-Economic Background of sampled migrants

Characteristics	Categories	Numbers	Percentage
Age	Up to 30	84	33.6
	31-46	53	21.20
	Above 45	113	45.20
Gender	Male	195	78
	Female	55	22
	Hindu	120	48
Religion	Muslim	95	38
	Others	35	14
	General	86	34
Community/Caste	OBC	77	31
	ST	43	18
	SC	44	17
	Illiterate	24	9.6
	LP	29	11.6
	UP	53	21.2
Education	High School	26	10.4
	Higher Secondary	18	7.2
	UG	51	20.4
	PG	49	19.6
	Married	164	66
Marital Status	Unmarried	78	31
	Others	8	3
	Up to 4	119	47.6
Family Size	5-6	104	41.6
	More than 6	27	10.8
Type of Family	Joint	228	91.53
	Nuclear	22	8.47
	Agriculture	43	17.2
	Govt Job/Private Job	44	17.6
	Labour	44	17.6
Occupation before	Self-employed/Business	5	2
Migration	Unemployed	44	17.6
	Student	70	28
Total		250	100

Source: Field Survey

Table has showed that 45.2% of sampled migrants belongs to the age group of 31-45 years, indicating the highest proportion followed by 33.6% and 21.2% included in the age group up to 30 and above 40 years respectively. Social and economic factors have affected the people to migrate from one place to another. There prevails a typical tendency of migration to vary between male and female. When we look at the migration trend then it is observed that the dominant role is played by the male migrant. Whereas the main reason behind female migration is marriage as they accompany with their husband. Some of the female also migrate due to economic reasons. Majority of the sampled migrants are male i.e., 78% while only 22% are female migrant. So, the role of gender in migration is reflected in the table. The study area divides religion in three categories viz, Hindu, Muslim and others. In the category others Sikh, Jain and Christian are included. The highest proportion i.e., 48% of the rural-urban migrants are Hindu

followed by 38% of Muslim and 14% belongs to other religion like Sikh, Jain, Christian. Migration in the Indian system is significantly influenced by social networks and capital, which are often shaped by caste-based connections (Vartak, 2016). Since caste is deeply ingrained in Indian society, it is expected to play a crucial role in individual migration decisions, particularly in rural areas. Recognizing this, an effort has been made to ensure appropriate representation of the caste factor in the sample. Table represents presents data on the sampled individuals in this context. Additionally, the distribution of migrants according to their religion, showing that 34.4% are general caste, 30.8% are Other Backward Class, 17.2% belongs to Schedule tribe and 17.6% to other Scheduled caste.

Education is a key determinant of rural-urban migration, that influence individuals' decisions to migrate. Education enhances employment prospects and access to better opportunities. So those with higher educational attainment are more likely to participate in migration streams than the uneducated, (Miheretu, 2011). In regions where the supply of young, educated individuals exceeds demand, they tend to migrate to areas where their skills are needed (Zachariah & Rajan, 2001). Migrants with lower or no formal education often find employment in the informal sector. Initially, most individuals migrating to urban areas take up unskilled jobs within this sector. The role of push and pull factors in migration also varies with education levels—push factors are more influential for less-educated migrants, while pull factors become dominant for those with higher education (Sridhar et al., 2010). The highest percentage of migrants, 21.2%, have an educational level of upper primary and are engaged in the informal sector, followed by 20.4% with an undergraduate degree and 19.6% with a postgraduate degree. Additionally, 11.6% have only primary education, 10.4% have completed high school, 7.2% have passed the secondary level, and 9.6% are illiterate. Marital status plays a significant role in migration decisions, influencing both the motivation and the nature of migration. Married individuals, who constitute the majority of migrants (66%), often migrate for economic stability, family reunification, or better living conditions. Their migration decisions are often shaped by family responsibilities, with some migrating alone to support their families while others move with their spouses and children. In contrast, unmarried individuals (31%) may have greater flexibility and mobility, often migrating for education, employment opportunities, or personal aspirations. A smaller percentage (3%) fall into other categories, including widowed, separated, or divorced individuals, whose migration choices may be influenced by social or economic circumstances. Family size plays a crucial role in rural-urban migration decisions, as it directly affects financial responsibilities, resource allocation, and adaptability to new environments. The data reveals that nearly half of the migrants (47.6%) come from smaller families with up to four members, suggesting that individuals from smaller households may find migration more feasible due to lower dependency burdens. Meanwhile, 41.6% of migrants belong to medium-sized families (5-6 members), indicating that migration might be driven by the need for better income opportunities to support larger households. In contrast, only 10.8% of migrants come from families with more than six members, possibly due to the financial and logistical challenges of relocating a large family. These trends highlight that while

smaller families may migrate more easily, individuals from larger families may feel a stronger economic push to migrate, seeking better job prospects in urban areas to sustain their dependents. Family type is classified under two categories- Joint family and Nuclear family. Nuclear family is consisted of married couple, married couple and their sons/daughters. Old mother and father of the family head are also considered as a member of single family. It is cleared from the table that majority of the migrants 91.53% belonged to joint family while the remaining 8.47% belonged to nuclear family. Thus joint family mind it more convinient to migrant from rural to urban centre.

Relationship between the Socio-Economic Variables and the Level of Attitude:

This study aimed to evaluate the attitudes of sampled migrants toward in-migration, seeking their feedback after relocating. The differences in their opinions were analyzed in relation to various socio-economic factors. Therefore, the relationship between selected socio-economic variables and migrants' attitudes toward migration has been examined as follows.

Attitude of the Migrants towards Rural-Urban Migration:

The attitudes of sampled migrants toward rural-urban migration were assessed using a weighted score derived from 22 statements reflecting their post-migration experiences. These statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The relationship between migrants' attitudes and rural-urban migration was analyzed using the chi-square test.

The attitude of migrants towards rural-urban migration was measured with the following statements:

1. There is an economic up-liftmen in the family due to migration

2. More saving due to the migration

3. Access more for the higher education of my children due to migration

4. Repaying the debt through migration

5. Can spend more for my family and religious ceremonies due to migration

6. Bought asset in the native place due to migration

7. Present work is a secured job for the entire life

8. Purchased estate in the destination place after migration

9. There is no family feud after migration

10. There is no discrimination at the workplace

11. All the family members are engaged in the work at the place of migration

12. There is no ill-treatment by the employer

13. Gained more work experience within a short period after migration

14. Very much interested in the present work

15. Present work is not a heavy work

16. We have weekend holidays.

17. More non-monetary benefits are given by the employer

18. Social freedom in the destination place

19. Enjoyed the natural and pollution free environment in the destination place

20. Migration has increased my individual status among the family members and relatives

Level of Attitude of Migrants towards Rural-Urban Migration: Based on individual scores, respondents were categorized into three levels: High, Medium, and Low. The classification was determined using arithmetic mean and standard deviation scores calculated for all 250 respondents. Those scoring above (Arithmetic Mean + Standard Deviation) were classified as having a high attitude towards migration, while those scoring below (Arithmetic Mean - Standard Deviation) were categorized as having a low attitude. Respondents with scores between these two thresholds were classified as having a medium attitude.

As shown in Table 2, the majority of migrants (72.8%) exhibited a medium-level attitude toward rural-urban migration, followed by 15.6% with a low level and 11.6% with a high level. Overall, the findings indicate that most migrants held a moderate perspective on migration, demonstrating enthusiasm for urban relocation in pursuit of a better quality of life compared to rural areas.

Table 2 Distribution of sampled Migrants according to the Level of Attitude of Migrants towards Rural-Urban Migration

Level of Attitude	Range	Numbers	Percentage
High	Above 38	29	11.6
Medium	26-38	182	72.8
Low	Up to 25	39	15.6
Total		250	100

Source: Author's Calculation

Relationship of attitude of Migrants towards Rural-Urban Migration with socio-Economic Background: The relationship between migrants' attitudes toward rural-urban migration and various socio-economic variables—such as age, gender, religion, caste, education, marital status, family size, family type, and occupation—was analyzed using a two-variable distribution. The significance of the association between each socio-economic factor and migration attitude was evaluated through the chi-square test. In this analysis, attitude was considered as one variable, while each socio-economic characteristic was examined individually as the second variable. The results of this assessment are presented in Table 3.

Relationship of attitude with Age: The chi-square value of 17.902 ($p = 0.001$) indicates a significant relationship between age and migration attitude. Younger migrants (≤30 years) show a higher positive attitude, while middle-aged (31-45 years) and older migrants (≥45 years) exhibit more neutral or cautious views**.** This suggests that migration appeal decreases with age, likely due to increasing responsibilities and stability concerns.

Relationship of attitude with Gender: The chi-square value of 6.269 ($p = 0.044$) indicates a significant relationship between gender and migration attitude. Males show a higher positive attitude**,** while females exhibit a more neutral or cautious stance**.** This suggests that men may perceive migration as a better opportunity, whereas women might face more constraints or uncertainties.

Table 3 Relationship of Attitude of Migrants towards Rural-Urban Migration with Socio-Economic Background

Socio-Economic Background	Level of Attitude						
	High		Medium		Low		Total
Age	No.	%age	No.	%age	No.	%age	
Up to 30	14	16.66	62	73.80	08	9.52	84
31-45	12	10.619	73	64.60	28	24.778	113
Above 45	3	5.66	47	88.67	3	5.66	53
Total	29		182		39		250
Chi-Square value				17.902*	df=4	P value= .001	
Gender	No	%age	No	%age	No.	%age	Total
Male	21	12.65	113	68.07	32	19.277	166
Female	8	9.52	69	27.6	7	8.33	84
Total	29		182		39		250
Chi-Square Value				6.269*	df=2	P value=.044	
Religion	No	%age	No	%age	No	%age	Total
Hindu	13	10.83	87	72.5	13	10.83	120
Muslim	14	14.73	65	68.42	14	14.73	95
Others	2	5.71	30	85.71	2	5.71	35
Total	29		182		39		250
Chi-Square value				4.255*	df=4	P value= .373	
Community/Caste	No	%age	No	%age	No	%age	Total
General	3	3.488	71	82.558	12	13.95	86
OBC	12	15.58	50	64.93	15	19.48	77
SC	8	18.60	33	76.744	2	4.65	43
ST	6	13.63	28	63.63	10	22.72	44
Total	29		182		39		250
Chi-Square value				15.916*	df=6	p value=.014	
Education	No	%age	No	%age	No	%age	Total
Illiterate	1	4.17	18	75.00	5	20.83	24
LP	1	3.35	25	86.21	3	10.34	29
UP	2	3.77	46	86.79	5	9.43	53
High School	3	11.54	17	65.38	6	23.08	26
Higher Secondary	3	16.67	12	66.67	3	16.66	18
UG	8	15.69	37	72.55	6	11.76	51
PG	11	22.45	27	55.10	19	22.45	49
Total	29		182		39		250
Chi-Square Value				21.39*	Df=12	P Value=0.045	
Marital Status	No	%age	No	%age	No	%age	Total
Married	20	36.58	118	71.95	26	15.85	164
Unmarried	8	10.256	57	73.07	13	16.66	78
others	1	12.5	7	87.5	0	0	8
Total	29		182		39		250
Chi-square value				1.743		P Value=.783	
Family Type	No	%age	No	%age	No	%age	Total
Nuclear	23	10.08	168	74.66	37	16.22	228
Joint	6	27.27	14	63.63	2	9.09	22
Total	29		182		39		250
Chi-Square				6.041*	df=2	P value=.049	
Family Size	No	%age	No	%age	No	%age	Total
Up to 4	12	13.186	91	76.47	16	13.44	119
5-6	10	9.61	77	74.03	17	16.34	104

>6	7	25.92	14	51.85	6	22.22	27
Total	29		182		39		250
Chi-Square				8.39	df=4	P value=0.078	
Occupation before Migration	No	%age	No	%age	No	%age	Total
Agriculture	5	11.62	38	88.37	0	0	43
Govt/Private job	3	6.81	35	79.54	6	13.63	44
Labour	12	27.27	32	72.72	0	0	44
Self-employed/Business	0	0	3	60	2	40	5
Unemployed	2	4.54	35	79.54	7	15.90	44
Student	7	10	39	55.71	24	34.285	70
Total	29		182		39		250
Chi Square				48.967*	df=10	P value=0.000	

Source; Field Survey, 2023, Significant at 5% level

Relationship of attitude with Religion: The data shows minor variation in migration attitudes across religious groups. Most Hindu (72.5%), Muslim (68.42%), and other religion (85.71%) migrants had a medium attitude toward migration. High and low attitudes were nearly balanced within each group. As the p-value exceeds 0.05, there is no significant association between religion and migration attitude, indicating religion does not strongly influence migration perspectives.

Relationship of attitude with Caste: The chi-square value of 15.916 (p = 0.014) indicates a significant relationship between caste and migration attitude. General and SC migrants shows a higher medium attitude, while OBC and ST migrants have a higher proportion of low attitude, suggesting greater hesitation. SC migrants exhibit a higher positive attitude, possibly viewing migration as an opportunity for socio-economic mobility.

Relationship of attitude with Education: The data reveals a strong link between education level and migration attitude. Higher education (UG and PG) accounts for 65.5% of high attitude individuals, while lower education levels are mostly in the medium or low categories. With a statistically significant p-value (0.045), the findings confirm that education positively influences migration attitudes, likely by increasing awareness, aspirations, and confidence in urban opportunities.

Relationship of attitude with Marital Status: The chi-square value of 1.743 (p = 0.783) indicates no significant relationship between marital status and migration attitude.

Across all groups (married, unmarried, and others), the majority had a medium attitude towards migration (71.95%–87.5%). The distribution of high and low attitudes is similar, suggesting that marital status does not significantly influence migration perception.

Relationship of attitude with Family Size: The chi-square value of 8.39 (p = 0.078) indicates no significant relationship between family size and migration attitude at the 5% level. However, trends suggest smaller families (up to 4 members) show more positive attitudes, with 76.47% having a medium attitude. Medium-sized families follow a similar pattern, while larger families (>6 members) show a higher proportion of low attitudes (25.92%), hinting at greater migration constraints. Overall, smaller families may have more favourable migration attitudes due to fewer burdens.

Relationship of attitude with Type of Family: Migration attitudes vary by family type. Among nuclear family migrants, 74.66% had a medium and 16.22% a high attitude, reflecting greater acceptance. In contrast, 27.27% of joint family migrants showed a low attitude, indicating more reluctance. The chi-square value of 6.041 ($p = 0.049$) confirms a significant relationship, suggesting nuclear families are more open to migration, while joint families may be restrained by stronger familial ties.

Relationship of attitude with Occupation: The chi-square value of 48.967 ($p = 0.000$) shows a highly significant link between pre-migration occupation and migration attitude. Agriculture and labour migrants mostly had a medium attitude (88.37% and 72.72%). Government/private job holders and the unemployed showed mixed medium and high attitudes. Students (34.28%) and self-employed individuals (40%) had the highest high attitudes, reflecting greater enthusiasm for migration. Overall, students and entrepreneurs are more migration-inclined, while agriculture and labour workers show a more neutral stance.

Conclusion

This study highlights key socio-economic factors shaping rural-urban migration attitudes. Younger migrants, males, and individuals from OBC and ST communities show a stronger inclination to migrate. Education emerges as a major influence, with higher attainment linked to more positive attitudes. While religion and marital status show limited impact, nuclear families and smaller households are more migration-prone. Occupation also matters—students and self-employed individuals view migration as an opportunity, while agricultural and labour workers migrate more out of necessity. Overall, migration decisions are influenced by age, education, gender, family structure, and occupation. Policymakers should prioritize skill development, job creation, and support systems to ease rural-urban transitions.

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