



Migration For Sustenance: An Account Of Siliguri Urban Area

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Abstract:

Siliguri is a tier 2 city in the Indian state of West Bengal. Familiar as the "Gateway of Northeast India", the city is located at the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas pervading the districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjiling. Owing to its international strategic importance, the city has prospered immensely in recent decades due to the prevalence of the 3Ts- Tea, Timber, and Tourism. Being the commercial hub of Northern West Bengal, in-migration from the nearby towns, villages, neighbouring states as well as the adjoining countries like Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, has been a major factor for such an accelerated growth of the urban agglomeration. The objective of the research was to study the structure of the population, to investigate the proportion of migrants in the city, and to scrutinize the reasons in addition to the duration of migration. The inquiry is based mainly on primary data collected by survey through a structured questionnaire, and subsequently quantifying the results through software like ODK Collect and MS Excel. The sample size was calculated through a simple sample size calculator, error rate = ± 6 , and confidence level = 95%, nearing 250 surveyors. The study contemplates the socio-economic profile of the inhabitants, their place of origin, the main motivation for migrating to Siliguri, type of employment, and job tenure together with the challenges faced after migration. As established in the analysis, the majority of the immigrants belong to either of the two groups, the tea garden labourers-employed in large tea plantations owned by some affluent resident, or the wealthy merchants-engaged in any sort of self-owned trade. The Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) has been utilized to gauge the main cause of in-migration in the most urbanised city of Northern West Bengal.

Keywords: *Siliguri, Importance, Commercial, In-Migration, AHP.*

Highlights:

- **Siliguri as a Migration Hub:** Siliguri's unique position as the 'Chicken neck Corridor' and its connection to the neighbouring countries and all the Northeastern states attracts a diverse influx of migrants from nearby areas, rural and semi-urban alike.
- **Explore Migration Drivers:** Analyses the key factors for migration especially in-migration in search of livelihood and sustenance.
- **Socio Economic Challenges:** Highlights the socio-economic challenge faced by the migrants, be it job insecurity or any other problems

like public services or language barrier or housing.

- **Economic Opportunities and Livelihoods:** Discusses the major pull factors in Siliguri such as the employment opportunities in both formal and informal sectors, business opportunities and service industries which draw a large number of migrants into the city.

Introduction:

Migration refers to the movement of people from one place to another for various reasons ranging from economic to political or environmental to social. Migration can be either long-distance or short-distance – international or national (inter-state or intra-state). From a different perspective, migration can either be permanent, temporary, or seasonal. Migration generally depends on two factors – push factor or pull factor. The push factors are necessarily negative aspects that help people move out of a particular place like war, poverty, droughts, floods, rising crimes, lack of employment, lack of services, or safety. The pull factors refer to the positive aspects that attract people to move to a particular area like higher employment, better lifestyle, peaceful environment, lower risk of natural hazards, political stability, and better facilities like healthcare and education. Migrants moving to a new place are termed “immigrants” and the migrants moving out of a place are termed “emigrants”.

Located in the heart of Northern West Bengal, the city of Siliguri has been ever-expanding both in terms of population and quality of life. It has shown a consistently high population growth rate since independence. The overall decadal population growth rate of the city has been approximately 40% which is far higher than the overall population growth rate of India at around 17.7% for the previous census decade. The city has a relatively high literacy rate of 85.91% against the national average of 74.04% (according to the Census 2011).

Due to its strategic location, the proximity of international borders, and the Siliguri corridor, the city has witnessed its growing importance since the Bangladesh war of 1971. The Siliguri Corridor (also known as the Chicken’s Neck) is a narrow stretch of land that acts as a geo-political and geo-economical corridor between mainland India and the 8 North-Eastern states. It also serves as a central transfer point that connects Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Thus, known as the gateway of North-Eastern India, it acts as the commercial capital of the region. The advantageous location of Siliguri has made it an ideal centre of tourists, trade, and commerce, giving it a cosmopolitan character. Despite such unprecedented overall growth of the city, the expansion of urban infrastructural facilities has failed to keep pace with the rapid increase in population growth.

Immigrants from the neighbouring states as well as the neighbouring countries have changed the cultural and economic landscape of the city of Siliguri.

A rapid urbanization trend has resulted in an influx of migrants and transformed the city into the commercial hub of Northern West Bengal, with its main prominence in the 3Ts- Tea, Timber, and Tourism. The city of Siliguri has been flourishing thereafter.

Objectives:

The following objectives were kept forward for the study-

1. To study the structure of the population and investigate the proportion of migrants in the city.
2. To scrutinize employability and reasons for migration.

Study Area:

The city of Siliguri, situated at a height of about 400ft above sea level forms the foothills of the Darjiling Himalayan range, with coordinates 26.7271° N and 88.3953° E. Located in the terai region and surrounded by tea gardens, the city is drained by the rivers Teesta and Mahananda. It covers an area of 117.54 sq. km (68.90 sq. km in the Jalpaiguri district and 48.64 sq. km in the Darjiling district). The city has a population density of over 6000 people/sq. km. and experiences a humid subtropical climate to a warm temperate climate with around 3340 mm of precipitation per year. It consists of 1 Municipal Corporation (Siliguri Municipal Corporation) and 4 development blocks namely Matigara, Phansidewa, Naxalbari, and Khoribari.

Data and Methods:

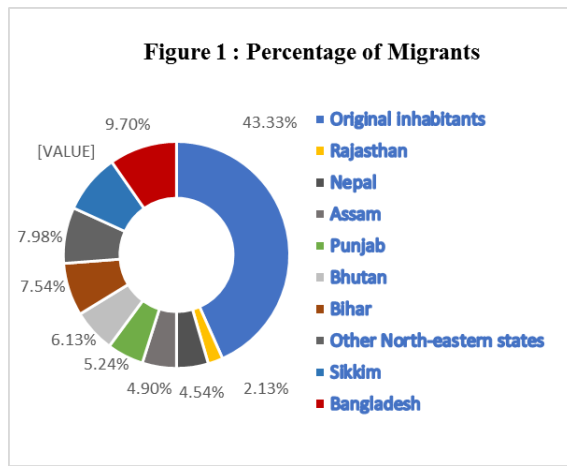
Most of the study is conducted through intensive fieldwork for primary data collection. A few articles, journals, reports, and the census data of 2011 have been used.

A structured questionnaire based on the socio-economic profile of the inhabitants of Siliguri city was prepared, which included the place of last residence, duration of residence, reasons for migration to Siliguri city, and the problems faced after migration as well as other socio-economic factors. The sample size of 250 surveyors was calculated through a simple sample size calculator keeping the error rate at ± 6 , and a confidence level of 95%. The survey had been conducted with the help of the ODK Collect application, where the surveyors were selected through purposeful random sampling. The results have been quantified using Microsoft Excel. The Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) has been utilized to gauge the main cause of in-migration in the most urbanised city of Northern West Bengal.

Results and Discussion:

Number of Migrants: 43.33% of those interviewed identified Siliguri as their hometown and were the original inhabitants of the area, which mostly includes the Rajbanshis of Siliguri and neighbouring areas. The remaining 56.67% of the people are migrants with various origins, especially from Bangladesh (Bengalis), Nepal (Nepalese), Sikkim (Lepchas), Assam (Bengalis and Assamese), Bhutan (Bhutanese), Bihar (Biharis), Punjab (Punjabis), Rajasthan

(Marwaris) or from other North-eastern states.



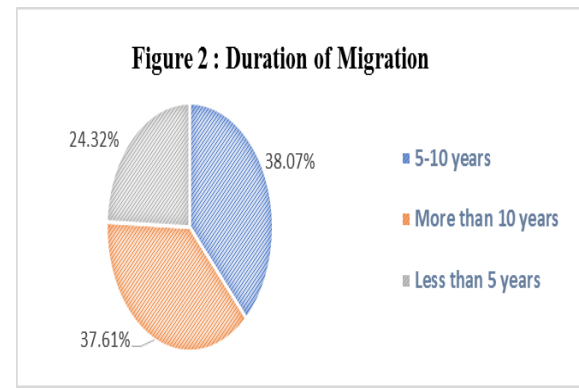
Age Structure of Migrants: Most of the migrant surveyors, about 61.53% of the population belong to the working age group of 14-59 years, followed by the dependent ages of '0-14 years' and 'above 60 years', which occupy 23.16% and 15.31% of the population respectively, reflecting the potential workforce of the city as a whole.

Gender: Over half of the migrant population (57.94%) identified as males and the remaining 42.06% identified as females, making the males predominant immigrants in the city.

Number of Members in The Family: A little more than half of the surveyors reported having 4 to 5 members in the family. Only 7.48% have more than 5 members family and the remaining 40.03% have a smaller family of 3 persons or less.

Duration of Migration: Most migrants moved to Siliguri either between 5-10 years (38.07%) or more than 10 years ago (37.61%). People who migrated less than 5 years ago concern 24.32% of the migrated population, which even if lesser

than their counterparts is quite high in percentage.



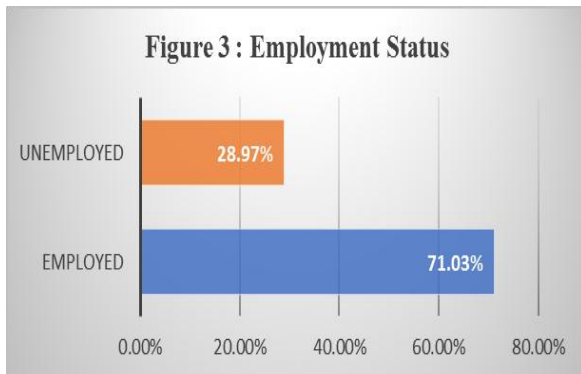
Place of Last Residence: Most of the migrated people have come from nearby villages mostly in search of a livelihood, relating 71.75% of the immigrants, The remaining 28.25% have migrated from smaller towns to the city of Siliguri. There is no migration to Siliguri from big cities.

Distance from Siliguri: More than half of the migrated population, around 57.41% have migrated from within 200km. The next big chunk of the migrated population (31.04%) has migrated from distances between 200km to 500km. Only 11.55% of the people have migrated from more than 500km mostly from places like Rajasthan and Bangladesh.

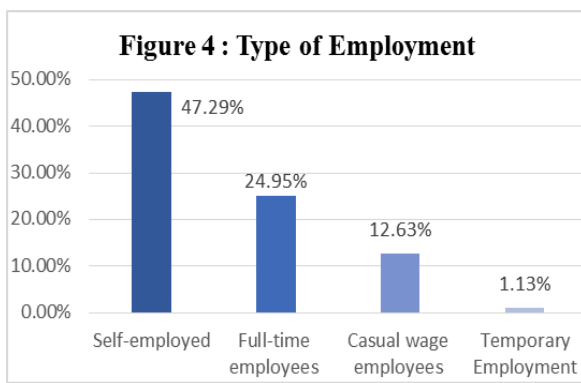
Type of Residence: Most of the migrated people of Siliguri tend to occupy rented places for their stay in the city, which accounts for about 68.32%. The remaining 31.68% of immigrants have their own house in the city.

Employment Status: More than half of the residents of Siliguri who are in the working age group have a source of income, which pertains to about 71.03%. The remaining 28.97% of the population

is unemployed. Again, out of the migrated lot, most of the people (more than 80%) have some kind of employment.

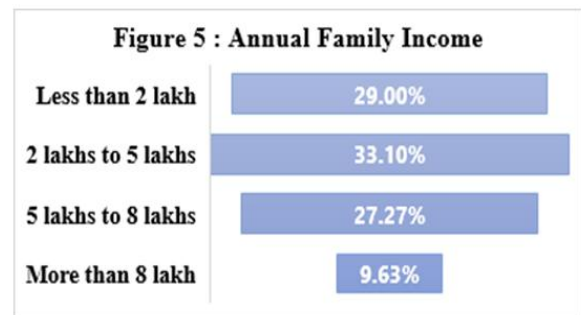


Type of Employment: Around 47.29% of the employed population claim to be self-employed, mostly in businesses or some professional services. Full-time employees consist of 24.95% of the employed people and casual wage employees consist of 12.63%. The remaining workforce of 1.13% work on a contractual or temporary basis.

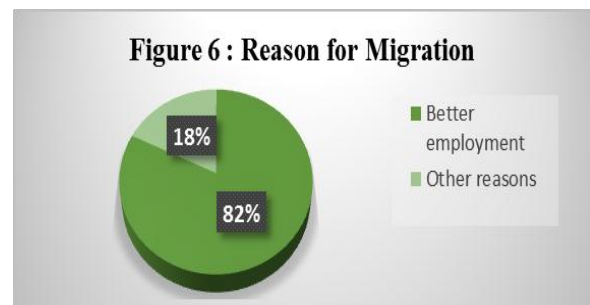


Annual Family Income: The maximum number of residents of Siliguri fall under the income group of 2 lakhs to 5 lakhs per annum associating to about 33.10%, followed by people earning less than 2 lakh rupees per annum pertaining to about 29.00%. People have an annual household income of around 5 lakhs to 8 lakhs per annum relate to 27.27%. Only 9.63% of

the population has a yearly income of more than 8 lakh.



Reason for Migration: More than 80% of the migrated population claimed to have migrated to Siliguri in search of better employment opportunities be it jobs or businesses. Only 18.05% of the population have moved into the city for other reasons like better facilities in health or education, ease of living, or a better climate.



Problems faced after Migration: Around 73.14% of the population reported of not facing any major problems after migrating to Siliguri. Only a mere 7.54% of the migrated lot complained of some kind of language barrier and the remaining 19.38% had faced issues related to the cost of housing, congestion, or water supply.

AHP Method: The Analytical Hierarchy Process, by Thomas L. Saaty, has been used to understand the reasons for migration in relation to the present study. Various criteria corresponding to pull factors were taken into consideration like employment, better healthcare or educational services, political stability, or

better overall lifestyle. By calculating the pairwise matrix, critical weight, consistency matrix, and the final weight (ranging from 0 to 1) for the process of AHP, the final answer revealed that the immigrants of Siliguri have mostly migrated for sustenance since the highest value of 0.34 is attributed to the same.

Conclusion:

From the aforesaid study, it is clear that the city of Siliguri has proved to be a profit-making core trade axis in the Northern part of West Bengal and the ever-increasing population has further accelerated the growth of this city. The geopolitical importance of the city also plays a crucial role in bringing about its dynamic nature. It is noticed that the migration is mostly male-dominated and of the working age group who might have migrated solely for different sources of employment and income and might have settled in the city later on. Most of them have migrated from shorter distances of less than 200 km or intermediate distances of 200 to 500 km. Most of the migrants are employed, mostly on their own (i.e., self-employment) or in any kind of full-time service. Most of the migrants have a family income that can be considered adequate, and only some of them can be considered very well to do in terms of annual family income. Most of the migrants who have come from the nearby villages or towns into the city of Siliguri in search of better employment facilities and a better livelihood did not face much difficulty in settling down after migrating to the city owing to its cosmopolitan nature. By the AHP method, the cause of migration to Siliguri was appropriately gauged, which accounts for the sustenance of people i.e., better employment and various sources of income.

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