

Chapter IV

Religion and Language

The social structure of the city has already been discussed. The diversified composition of different communities adds particular significance to the study of this urban area. The structure and function of different social groups have already been taken into consideration. The result of these studies is reflected in the urban behaviour of different communities which is elaborately discussed in Chapter II.

Language and religion are two other important factors responsible for the growing social diversity. They are helpful in determining the degree of social cohesion as well as diversity and the importance of city in its relation with other cities of West Bengal.

Religion

Religion happens to be one of the most important social factors affecting the behaviour of a community. In a city there are different religions playing an important role in this respect, quite often reflected in the social behaviour of the people.

A Comparative Study

Before going into that it may be worthwhile to make an assessment of the religious composition of the city population and its position as

compared with that of the district in which it is situated and the state of West Bengal to which it belongs. The census data available for this is of 1981 and 1991.

The Table 4.1 shows the differential count of the religious communities compared with that of the Darjeeling district and with that of the state of West Bengal as a whole. Table 4.1 shows that as per 1981 census¹, Hindus represented by 94.58% of the total urban population in Siliguri city formed the brute majority followed by the Muslims, hardly constituting 3.96% of the total city population. The picture as

Table 4.1

Religious Communities 1981 in West Bengal

Religious Communities	West Bengal Urban Population(in%)	Darjeeling dist.Urban Population (in%)	Siliguri(m) Population(in%)
1.Buddhists	0.31	8.74	0.48
2.Christians	0.67	2.15	0.48
3.Hindus	86.24	84.79	94.58
4.Jains	0.22	0.20	0.07
5.Muslims	12.24	3.61	3.96
6.Sikhs	0.30	0.51	0.43
7.Other Religion and Pursuation	0.02	Insignificant	--
8.Religion not stated	Insignificant	--	--
Total -	100	100	100

[Source: Census of India, 1981.
Series- 23, Paper- 1,
West Bengal.]

compared with that of Darjeeling district on the one hand and the state of West Bengal as a whole on the other for 1981 appears to be slightly different. For instance, in the district the Hindus were in majority, no doubt, but the percentage has dropped to 84.79% followed by a rise for the Buddhists comprising 8.74% of the urban population and making it the second important religion while the percentage of Muslims is slightly less than that of Siliguri city. However, the situation changes when the picture is compared with that of the state which shows Hindus forming the largest majority among the urban population in the state as a whole (86.24%) is followed by the Muslims comprising almost 12.24% of the total urban population, being much higher than that of the district as well as the city itself, whereas other religions represent a very insignificant position, none of them constituting even 1% of the urban population as far as the state is concerned.

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The data available for 1991 census show a detectable change in the pattern of religious composition, the urban population considered for Siliguri city, Darjeeling district and state of West Bengal. It is highly significant to note that- (a) though the Hindus still form the majority of the urbanites, its percentage appears to be on the decline in all the three cases. However small it may be, the trend is not ignorable when it has in the state, the district as well as in the city commensurate with an increase in the percentage of the Muslim population in each of them between 1981 and 1991. (b) This happens to be the most visible difference in the religious composition of the urban population taking place within the space of a decade when the percentage of the

Table 4.2**Religious Communities 1991 in West Bengal**

Religious Communities	West Bengal Urban Population(in%)	Darjeeling Dist.Urban Population (in%)	Siliguri(m) Population(in%)
1.Buddhists	0.28	9.18	0.51
2.Christians	0.51	2.33	0.50
3.Hindus	85.02	83.54	93.08
4.Jains	0.15	0.14	0.18
5.Muslims	13.52	4.46	5.42
6.Sikhs	0.26	0.18	0.26
7.Other Religion and Pursuation	0.14	0.12	0.03
8.Religion not stated	0.12	0.05	0.02
Total -	100	100	100

[Source: Census of India, 1991
Series- 1, Paper- 2.]
West Bengal.]

Buddhist population similarly increased both for the district and the city though not for the state as a whole (Table 4.1 and 4.2). As regards the position of other religions, such as the Christianity, the Jainism, the Sikhism- taking a very minor role- the percentage is far from steady in each of the cases.

Language

Besides religion another very important sociological factor of an urban centre is the language spoken by the city population. Tables have

been prepared from the census of 1981 on the basis of households and households population by language mainly spoken in the household (inclusive of variants where grouped) as specified in Schedule - VIII of the Constitution of India. In this connection it needs to be mentioned that similar data have not been published by the census authorities for 1991 census till date or made available to the researcher by them on the plea of maintaining secrecy. Hence it was not possible to use data for 1991 census and there is no other source providing data of this type.

A Comparative Study

It may be interesting to compare the status of Siliguri city in this respect with that of the state of West Bengal as a whole by taking the percentage of people speaking different languages. This is shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Languages spoken by the Urban Residents 1981 (in%)

Language	Percentage spoken in West Bengal (Urban)	Percentage spoken in Siliguri city.
1. Asamese	Insignificant	0.02
2. Bengali	75.20	70.80
3. Gujrati	0.23	0.03
4. Hindi	15.24	22.99
5. Kannada	Insignificant	Insignificant
6. Kashmiri	Insignificant	--
7. Arabic/Arbi	Insignificant	0.01
8. Bhotia	0.01	Insignificant

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Table 4.3 (Contd.)

----- Languages -----	----- Percentage spoken in West Bengal (Urban) -----	----- Percentage spoken in Siliguri city. -----
9. Kharia	Insignificant	--
10. Khasi	Insignificant	Insignificant
11. English	0.05	0.02
12. Nepali	0.96	4.61
13. Bodo/Boro	Insignificant	--
14. Dogri	Insignificant	--
15. Konkani	Insignificant	--
16. Kurukh/Draon	0.02	0.05
17. Lepcha	Insignificant	--
18. Lushai/Mizo	Insignificant	--
19. Malto	--	--
20. Munda	0.02	Insignificant
21. Malayalam	0.06	0.05
22. Marathi	0.04	0.02
23. Oriya	0.66	0.08
24. Punjabi	0.38	0.60
25. Santhali	0.26	0.01
26. Tibetan	0.01	Insignificant
27. Sindhi	0.04	Insignificant
28. Tamil	0.13	0.02
29. Telegu	0.60	0.03
30. Urdu	6.02	0.62
31. Total of Other Languages	0.07	0.04
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Total-	100	100
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[Source: Census of India, 1981. Series- 23, Paper- 1,
Table 1 to 31, West Bengal.]

As mentioned in Table 4.3, the stock of 31 languages has been taken as the languages spoken by people residing in the urban areas of West Bengal on the one hand and Siliguri city on the other for the census year 1981 and in the absence of similar data for 1991 census till the time of writing this thesis, the former forms the only basis of study of this particular social factor.

It appears from the Table that Bengali by and large enjoys absolute dominance as the spoken language of the people of the urban West Bengal, representing as much as over 75% of the total urban population and having almost the same status in Siliguri city where nearly 71% of the population speaks this language. The next important language is Hindi in both the state as a whole and the city of Siliguri but here the picture is rather reversed, the percentage of Hindi speaking people being higher (over 22%) for the city than that of the state (over 15%) unlike that of Bengali speaking people where it is higher for the state than in Siliguri city.

Thus, language more than religion brings out the heterogeneity of the urban population in a strong profile adding to the complexity of sociological characteristics of the urban population of Siliguri city.

One, however, feels interested to compare the picture in this regard between the urban areas of the District of Darjeeling as a whole and Siliguri city to find out if there is any difference between the two. The first difference that emerges from such a study as revealed in

Table 4.4**Comparison between Darjeeling District and Siliguri
Speaking different languages (in%).**

Language	Percentage Spoken in Darjeeling District (Urban).	Percentage Spoken in Siliguri City.
1. Asamese	0.03	0.02
2. Bengali	43.56	70.80
3. Gujrati	0.02	0.03
4. Hindi	17.19	22.99
5. Kannada	Insignificant	Insignificant
6. Kashmiri	Insignificant	--
7. Arabic/Arbi	Insignificant	0.01
8. Bhotia	0.61	Insignificant
9. Kharria	--	--
10. Khasi	Insignificant	Insignificant
11. English	0.09	0.02
12. Gorkhali/Nepali	35.66	4.61
13. Bodo/Boro	--	--
14. Dogri	0.01	--
15. Konkani	Insignificant	--
16. Kurukh/Draon	0.09	0.05
17. Lepcha	0.06	--
18. Lushai/Mizo	Insignificant	--
19. Malto	--	--

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Table 4.4 (Continued)

Languages	Percentage Spoken in Darjeeling District	Percentage Spoken in Siliguri City.
20. Munda	Insignificant	Insignificant
21. Malayalam	0.15	0.05
22. Marathi	0.02	0.02
23. Oriya	0.09	0.08
24. Punjabi	0.42	0.60
25. Santhali	0.03	0.01
26. Tibetan	0.65	Insignificant
27. Sindhi	Insignificant	Insignificant
28. Tamil	0.02	0.02
29. Telegu	0.03	0.03
30. Urdu	1.09	0.62
31. Total of Other Languages	0.18	0.04
Total-	100	100

[Source: Census of India, 1981, Series- 23, Paper- 1, Table- 1 to 31.]

Table 4.4 is that there are at least 3 languages- Kharia, Bodo and Malto- not spoken in the district in comparison to 8 languages unrepresented in Siliguri city. Second difference is rather more striking than that of the first. For instance, though Bengali is the major language in the district, its dominance is very much dwarfed by Nepali as a spoken

language among the urbanites, representing 35.66 % as against Bengali with 43.56%. However, Hindi taking third place as a spoken language among the district population has a less significant place than it enjoys in Siliguri, in the latter 22.99% speaking this language as against 17.19% in the district. The three languages- Bengali, Nepali and Hindi- together are spoken by 96.41% of the district's urban population as against 98.40% in Siliguri city where as in the state as a whole Nepali is replaced by Urdu as the third language while it takes the fourth place in Darjeeling district as well as in Siliguri.

The case is also different about the third language which is Urdu for the urban areas of the state comprising more than 6% of the total number of urbanites while in Siliguri city the third major spoken language happens to be Nepali, constituting nearly 5% of its population.

The three languages together comprise respectively 96.46% for the state and 98.4% for the city, having hardly 3% of the remaining population speaking other languages the number of which is 28 for the state and 20 for Siliguri and this is not even 1% in respect of any other language in each case. Out of the remaining languages only one, namely Nepali (0.96%) is spoken by a little less than 1% of the state's urban population, while others are not of any significance as spoken languages in the state. Thus, as it appears the position of the other languages out of the remaining 27 is insignificant in the state. To be more precise, as the Table shows, besides three languages- Bengali, Hindi

and Urdu- 16 other languages namely Nepali, Oriya, Telegu, Punjabi, Santhali, Gujrati, Tamil being some of the languages among them have an insignificant position while the position of 11 other languages such as Kannada, Kashmiri, Arabic, Dogri etc. are spoken by even less people to feature on the percentage column taken upto two digit after decimal point. There is at least one language of the 8th schedule - Malto - not spoken by any people in West Bengal. In comparison, in Siliguri city Urdu(0.6%) and Punjabi(0.6%) take this place relegating other languages to more insignificant position. But what is more significant as revealed by the fact of the highly cosmopolitan character of the urban areas of West Bengal where as many as 30 languages are spoken and this character is no less significant even for a small city like Siliguri having people representing more than 23 language groups.

References

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