

Chapter I

The City of Siliguri: Growth Pattern

The population of Siliguri in 1907 was only 784¹, and it started increasing at such a fast rate that by 1931 the population rose up to 6,067 and in the same year it also got the urban status.

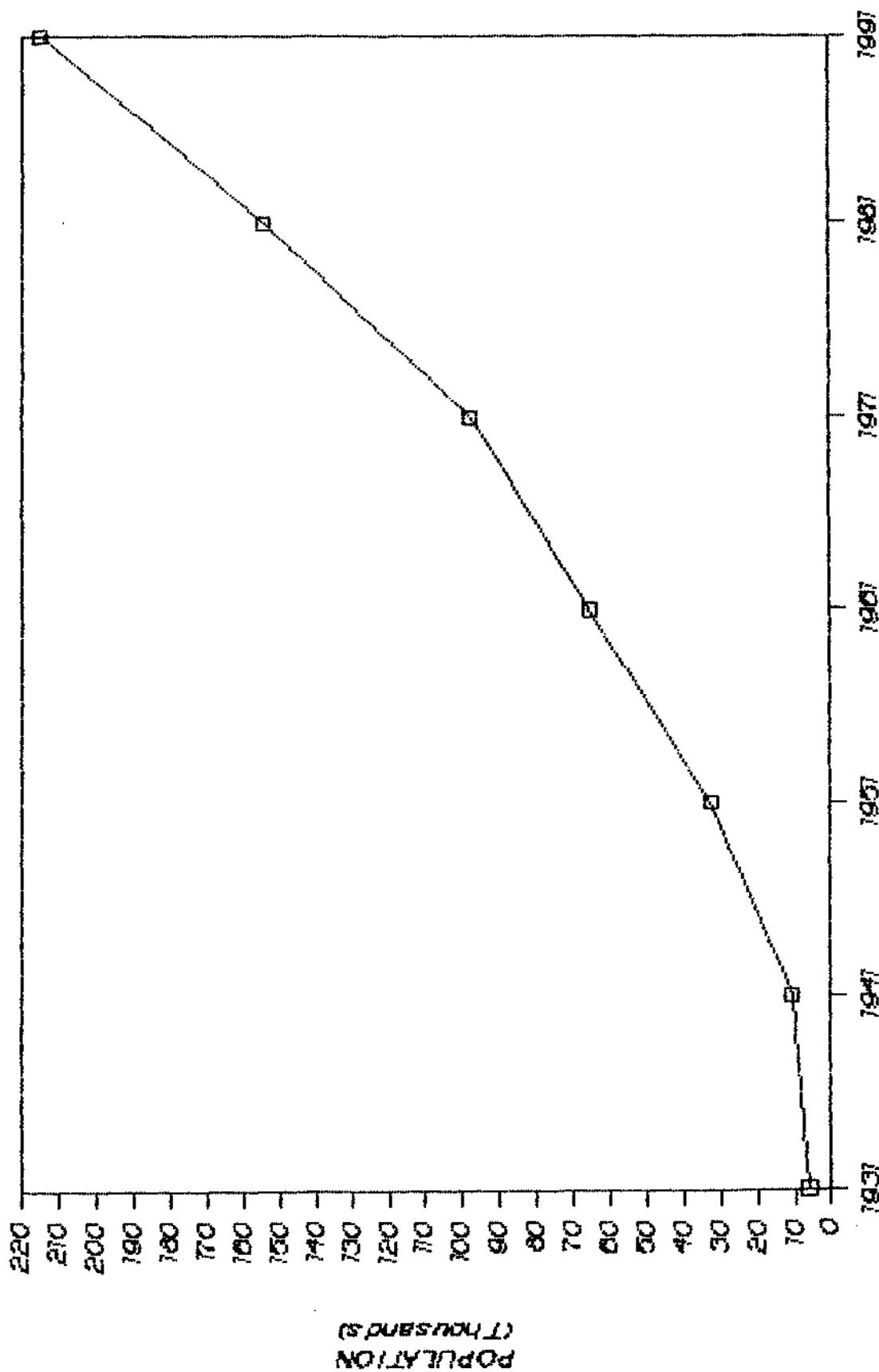
It may be interesting to note that the growth of this town since its becoming a town in 1931 has been very rapid between 1931 and 1951, recording the highest for all time in 1951², when the population more than tripled in one decade. The rate of growth however declined in the following decades, being the lowest in the last one (Table 1.1 and Fig.1).

Table 1.1
Growth of Population in Siliguri.

Year	Persons	Decadal Variation	Percentage Decadal Variation.
1931	6,067	---	---
1941	10,487	+ 4,420	+ 72.85
1951	32,480	+ 21,993	+ 209.72
1961	65,471	+ 32,991	+ 101.57
1971	97,484	+ 32,013	+ 48.90
1981	1,54,378	+ 56,894	+ 58.36
1991	2,16,950	+ 62,572	+ 40.53

[Source: Census of India 1991, Paper-I and Paper-2 of 1992, Series I, Final Population Totals and Government of India, Census of India, 1951, Vol-VI, West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore, Part-II, Table- A IV.]

GROWTH OF POPULATION IN SILIGURI



(Fig. 7)

Though Siliguri did not increase in real size the population of this town increased at a fast rate during the last five decades and in 1981 it was declared a class I town, the first of its type in the entire region of North Bengal covering all the six districts lying north of river Ganga. Dabgram now an integral part of Siliguri, was declared rural in 1971 though it had a population of 38,000 but was declared a separate town in 1981 which then had a population of 76,210³. After that due to physical and economic considerations Siliguri along with Dabgram and the railway township of New Jalpaiguri formed an integral unit which is the largest urban agglomeration in the region of north Bengal. In 1994, when Siliguri was declared a Corporation a large portion of Dabgram was annexed to Siliguri.

A comparative study of urban growth rate in West Bengal, Darjeeling District and Siliguri may further confirm the idea about the abnormal rate of growth of Siliguri (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2
Growth Rate of Urban Population in Different Decades

	Decades					
	31-41	41-51	51-61	61-71	71-81	81-91
West Bengal	63.69	32.52	35.97	28.41	31.61	29.49
Darjeeling District	33.77	62.44	53.09	24.60	55.58	40.37
Siliguri	72.85	209.72	101.57	48.90	58.36	40.53

[Source: Census of India 1981, Series 23, West Bengal and Census of India, 1991, Paper-I Paper-II of 1992, Series-1, Final Population Totals]

Growth rate of towns in North Bengal

It may be noted here that the rise of population in the decade 1941 to 51 was higher as compared to other in all urban places of North Bengal but in Siliguri it was noticeably much higher than in any other town in the region. The table given below shows the growth in different towns of North Bengal in 1941-51. (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3
Growth Rate of Towns in North Bengal (1941-51)

Name of Towns	Growth Rate
1. Siliguri	209.72
2. English Bazar	31.41
3. Coochbehar	107.76
4. Jalpaiguri	48.60
5. Darjeeling	23.44
6. Kalimpong	30.46
7. Kurseong	37.95
8. Dinhata	65.38
9. Matha Bhanga	41.54
10. Haldibari	101.66
11. Hili	20.05
12. Tufanganj	64.02
13. Mekhliganj	4.47

[Source: Census of India 1951, Volume VI,
West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore]

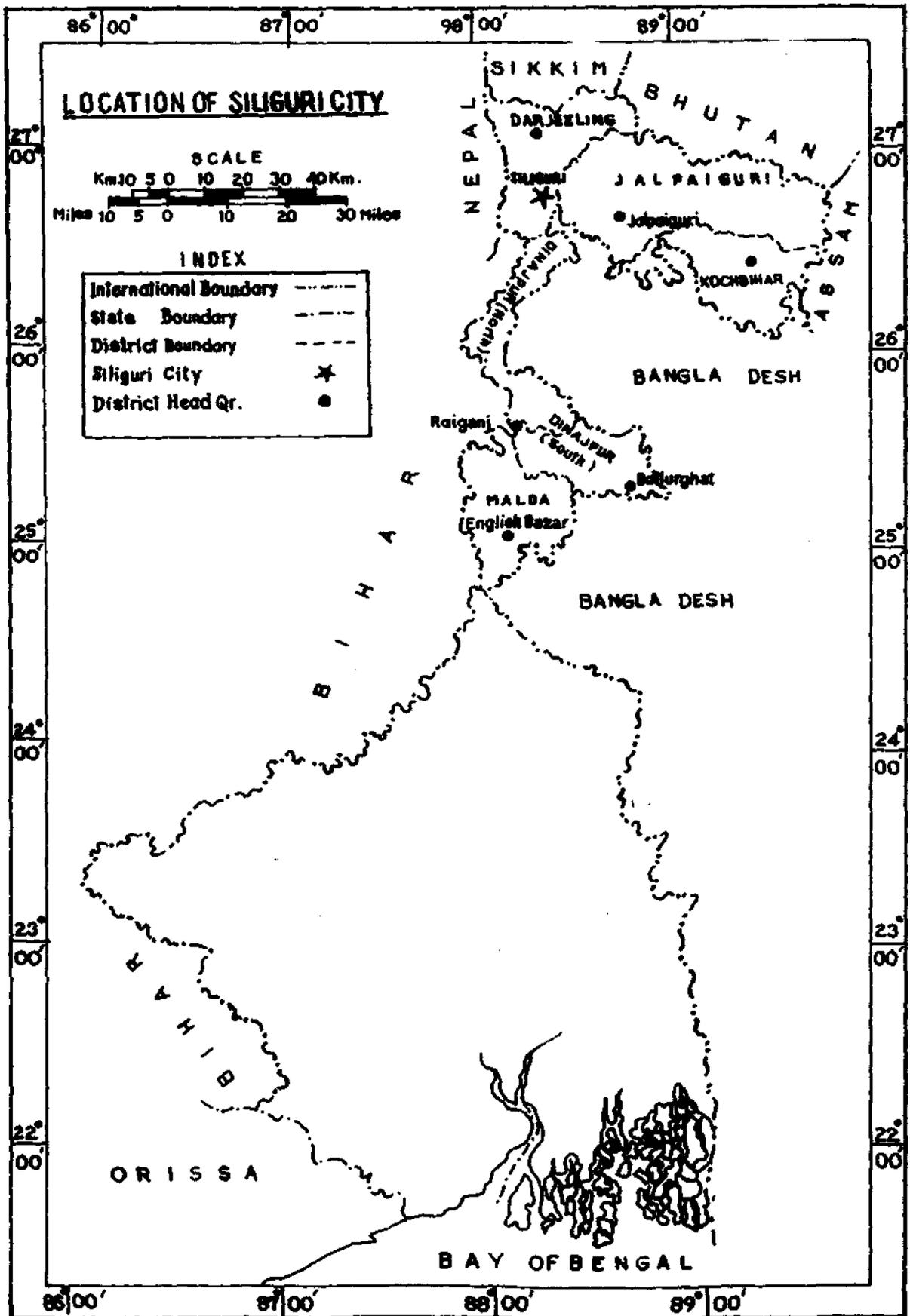


Fig. 2.

Migration

Siliguri happens to be a frontier town maintaining direct link with other North-Eastern states and after 1947 the flow of people to Siliguri increased largely due to the pull factor as it was the communicating centre and as because a new township was growing here, people of surrounding places were attracted towards this town. The following Table shows the fact:-

Table 1.4
Figures of Migration (1989)

Original Birth Place	Migration In Percentage
1. Bangladesh	52
2. Siliguri Surroundings	01
3. Other District of W.B.	16
4. Other States	30
5. Other Countries	01

[Source: Problem and Prospect of Development of Siliguri and Jalpaiguri Towns :A comparative study - Dr. Purnima Saha (1991).]

Siliguri and Balurghat

Other than Siliguri only Balurghat of North Bengal region registered a noticeable increase of population, after 1961 for the same reason and during the period 1961-71 and 1971-81 the decadal increase of population of Balurghat were higher than that of Siliguri. The following Table shows the fact (Table 1.5)

Table 1.5

Decadal Growth of Population in Two Cities of North Bengal

	Decadal Growth	
	1961-71	1971-81
Balurghat	148.48	67.74
Siliguri	48.90	57.80

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

Despite all these factors the population of Siliguri was higher than that of the other towns of North Bengal.

General Observations

Siliguri Town was formed with an area of 15.54 sq.kms. After the Siliguri Municipal Corporation was formed in 1994, the area of this town increased to 41.90 sq. km . As a result of this, population also increased greatly .

The main reason for this large growth of population was not the expansion of this town but because of the communication and transport facilities which gradually improved through the decades since independence, as a result of which people of different areas were attracted to this place.

Importance was given to surface transport and many new roads were constructed and even those bridges which was extensively damaged by flood were built with concrete pillers across rivers like Teesta,

Mahananda, Torsha etc. As a result of making up of new roads both the National Highway and State Highways were connected with Siliguri, (1950-67). After that the Farakka barrage was constructed in the year 1974 thus opening the road and railway link with the southern part of the country. Siliguri thus became a communication centre because it connected with both the southern and the north east adding to the link it had already with the hills and the neighbouring states like Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal etc. These factors all together were responsible for this great increase in population.

It is seen that those towns which are large in area have a tendency to increase its population, for eg. in North Bengal towns like Siliguri, Balurghat, Raiganj which are large in area have increased their population by 5 to 7 times in last three or four decades.

With the increase of population the demand for agricultural products and essential goods increased largely and due to this agricultural development took place in and around Siliguri i.e. North Bengal as a whole. The agricultural products began to be stored in Siliguri in big godowns which was built up then. From here the products were being transported to the neighbouring towns like Jalpaiguri, Coochbehar, Haldibari etc. and also to the hills. All these factors were responsible for converting Siliguri into a business centre.

References

1. L.S.S. O'Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers, Darjeeling, Logos Press, New Delhi (1907), Page- 40.
2. Government of India, Census of India, 1951, Vol- VI, West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore.
3. Government of India, Census of India, 1981, Series 23, West Bengal.
4. Dr. Purnima Saha, Problem and Prospect of Development of Siliguri and Jalpaiguri Towns: A Comparative Study (1991).
5. Government of West Bengal, Siliguri Jalpaiguri Development Authority.