



## Migration, population and literacy growth in Darjeeling town in the colonial period: A historical study

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### Abstract

This study examines migration, population growth, and literacy development in Darjeeling town during the colonial period. It argues that migration was the primary factor behind the demographic expansion of Darjeeling from the mid-nineteenth century to 1947. The establishment of tea plantations, administrative institutions, and military recruitment centers attracted large numbers of migrants, particularly from Nepal, along with smaller groups of Bengalis, Marwaris, Biharis, and Europeans. These movements transformed Darjeeling from a small hill settlement into a service-oriented colonial urban center. The study highlights the role of push and pull factors, including socio-economic hardship in Nepal and employment opportunities in plantations, administration, and trade. It also demonstrates how migration reshaped the occupational structure, residential patterns, and spatial organization of the town. Educational institutions established by missionaries and the colonial state promoted literacy growth and enabled selective upward mobility, particularly among clerical and middle-class communities. However, plantation laborers and marginalized groups remained largely excluded from these benefits. Overall, migration not only increased population but also restructured social classes, urban space, and cultural identity in colonial Darjeeling.

**Keywords:** Migration, Darjeeling, population growth, demographic growth, urban population

### Introduction

The Darjeeling district exemplifies significant population expansion mostly due to immigration from outside India. A migratory trend emerged between this area and the less pristine territories to the west, initiated by the centralization of Rana governance in Nepal at the century's onset. The population surge in this area was clearly attributable to significant labor migration from Nepal after the establishment of tea estates by the British. Migration is a worldwide phenomenon driven not just by economic factors, but also by several other features including social, political, cultural, environmental, and educational influences. Population growth is influenced by migration, as well as birth and death rates, altering the demographic character of certain locations. The Darjeeling hill subdivisions have varied ethnic and cultural features, serving as a habitat for a wide array of populations. The current district exhibits significant population increase, accompanied by a trend of migration towards this area and less developed territories to the west. The centralization of Rana power in Nepal began around the beginning of the century. The area under question is Libuan, located west of Sikkim, across the Mechi River and south of the Kunchenjunga massifs. The Limbu, once a Sikkimese tribe, were estranged from the Sikkim monarch Gyurme Namgyal and gradually fell under the Hindu influence of Nepal<sup>[1]</sup>. Sikkim thereafter faced encroachment in the Kalimpong Daling-kote area by Bhutanese forces and from the west by the Nepalese king, Sinhapratap Shah, together with his generals, Jor Singh and Damodar Pande. The political centralization of Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah, the progenitor of the Gorkha dynasty, resulted in conflicts between Nepal and Tibet, along with its subordinate ally,

Sikkim, as well as the British Empire in India, particularly in the Western Ceded Provinces, later known as Uttar Pradesh. The immigration of Nepalese individuals mostly occurred due to British inducements for employment in tea gardens<sup>[2]</sup>.

The rise of Darjeeling in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was increasingly marked by the settlement of a small number of Bengali middle-class individuals from the plains in administrative, academic, and clerical roles within the tea plantations. In the early twentieth century, Bengali legal practitioners predominated the social landscape of the hill regions of Darjeeling. A separate commercial community included the Marwaris, Tibetans, Biharis, and other Nepalese merchants. A multitude of causes contributed to this transition, with English education being the most significant. The Christian missionaries were pioneers in the advancement of English education in the hilly regions of Darjeeling<sup>[3]</sup>. It was also around this time that the Biharis and the Marwaris started to settle there as suppliers in the wholesale and retail trade businesses of the area. When the year 1941 rolled around, the population numbers of the Bengalis, the Biharis, the Marwaris, and the other people who came from the plains did not account for more than 5.1% of the total population in the three hill sub-divisions of the Darjeeling. Despite the fact that Nepali was spoken by 86.8 percent of the population, the other hillmen and reserved castes made up just 8.1 percent of the population. In Nepal, the 'Khaskura' language mostly persisted within the higher castes of Brahmin-Chetris even after the Gorkha supremacy under Prithvinaryan Shah, unable to establish a connection for linguistic or cultural affinity with the many low-caste ethnic groups of Nepal. Another population in Nepal used Tibeto-Burman languages. However, in the three

hill subdivisions of Darjeeling, the circumstances were quite different. The low-caste Nepali migrants, including the Rais, Limbus, Pradhans, Gurungs, Tamangs, and Kirats, communicated in Tibeto-Burman languages and acquired a secondary language, 'Khaskura' Nepali, spoken by the upper-caste Brahmins and Chetris. Despite their religious and linguistic disparities, the Lepchas and Bhutias finally adopted Nepali as the language Franca in Darjeeling. The predominant demographic majority of Nepalis, established by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, facilitated the acceptance of Nepali as the lingua franca. A significant aspect was the continuous process of Sanskritisation among the low-caste Nepali refugees.

As the population of upper-caste Chettri and Brahmin migrants from Nepal steadily grew, Hindu places of worship began to emerge in Darjeeling. The impact of Buddhism on the low-caste Nepali groups such as the Tamangs, Rais, and Limbus started to wane, leading many to gradually adopt Hinduism. A segment of the Lepchas was likewise unable to evade the process of Sanskritisation. The settling of several retired Nepali officers from the British Indian Army and Nepali police personnel in Darjeeling further solidified ethnic identity and togetherness. This was an element of the deliberate British strategy to establish a sector of "loyal" immigrants in the hill subdivisions of the Darjeeling district.

### Push-pull factors

During these instances, identity assumes a significant significance. Identity is the awareness of a group of individuals, fundamentally arising from the notion of shared origin to get benefits and possibilities for using the nation's resources. Furthermore, the collective identity of certain groups may lie dormant until they encounter another group. Ethnicity entails competition for resources to advance 'we' and exclude 'them'. "Migration fosters an awareness of ethnic identities <sup>[4]</sup>." The yearly summer transfer of the whole administration of the government of Bengal from

Calcutta to Darjeeling was a contributing factor in the growth in population in Darjeeling. This shift occurred throughout the summer months <sup>[5]</sup> such motions are included under the overarching concept of the 'push-pull hypothesis'. It posits that migration results from socio-economic disparities across areas, with some forces 'pushing' individuals away from their origin and others 'pulling' them toward their destination. In his edited volume "Migration, Sociological Studies, Oxford University Press, Volume 2, March 4, 2010," J. A. Jackson employed the concept of 'international migration,' categorizing geographical population movements into two types: a) those driven by necessity or obligation; b) those motivated by the economic demands of host countries. The interaction of certain external and endogenous causes resulted in a significant population influx in the Darjeeling hills. These may be classified as 'push' and 'pull' factors. The migration of Rai-Limbu and other Tibeto-Burman communities may be ascribed to the following "push" factors: social and religious tyranny, land eviction, and the presence of slavery accompanied by severe punishment. The social and economic climate, recruiting opportunities in the military and police, and more liberal agricultural facilities than those in Nepal served as the 'pull' incentives for migration. A recruiting center was established in Darjeeling as early as 1857. Consequently, we are clarifying the Nepali caste system to comprehend the social structure of the labor force, with particular emphasis on the stringent taboos surrounding intercommunity contacts. The inflexible caste system, along with the fragmentation of territory affecting certain ethnic groups, resulted in a significant migration to adjacent territories <sup>[6]</sup>.

### Growth of Population

A total of 22607 people were recorded in the 1869 census as residents of the Darjeeling, which corresponds to the land initially granted by the Raja of Sikkim in 1835.

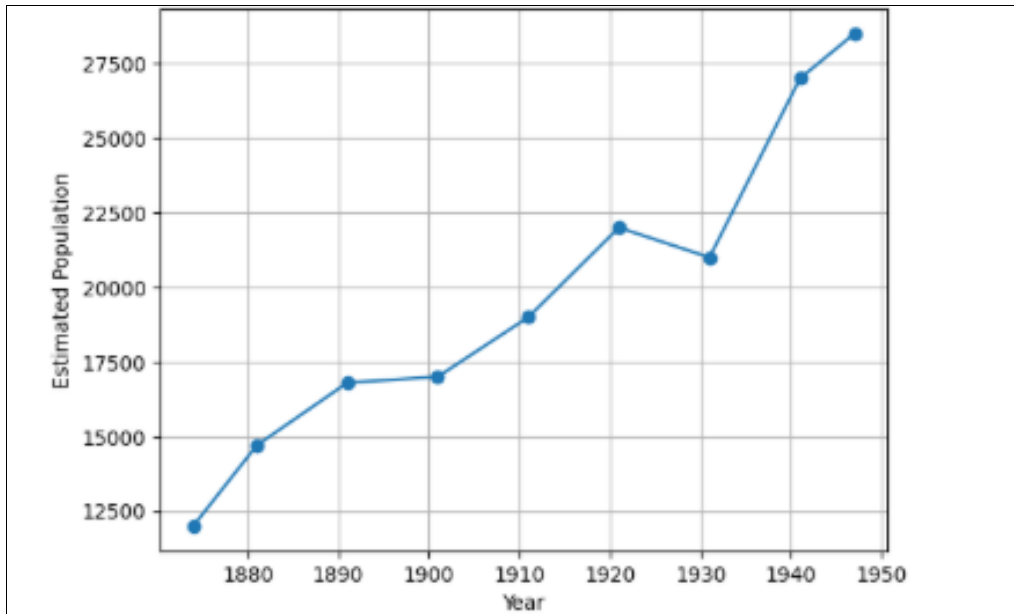
**Table 1:** Urban Population Growth of Darjeeling Town <sup>[7]</sup>

Year	Estimated Population	Growth (%) vs Previous	Context & Interpretation
1874 (est.)	~12,000	—	Early hill sanatorium demography; British settlement begins
1881	14,700	+22.5%	Initial migration and early service class growth
1891*(est.) *	~16,800	+14.3%	Continued migration; expansion of commercial activity
1901	17,000	+1.2%	Formal census figure; administrative consolidation
1911	19,000	+11.8%	Growth linked to clerical & trade migrants
1921	22,000	+15.8%	Bazaar and service expansion
1931	21,000	-4.5%	Epidemic and economic stresses
1941	27,000	+28.6%	Pre-war institutional
1947 (est.)	~28,500	+5.6%	Post-war consolidation; near independence

Source: Mitra, Census of India (1951, 548-549) <sup>[8]</sup>

This growth of population in Darjeeling in the period between 1874 and 1947 was not linear and involved the migration, expansion of administration and urban functions as opposed to industrialization. The sudden increase in the 1880s is an indication of early consolidation after the settlement of the British. Between 1901 and 1921, there is an increase in growth that is incremental which is associated with migration to clerical, commercial and service, and a decline was seen in the 1930s that is linked to the disruption

to public health and the economy. The number of people in Darjeeling increased by approximately 138 percent; up to a high of 28,500 (1947) having a population of about 12,000 (1874). The significant rise was in 1874-1881 (+22.5) and 1931-1941(+28.6) and all of this was due to administrative and institutional growth. The irregular and function-based, rather than industrial, growth is indicated by slow growth in 1891-1901(+1.2) and a decline in 1921-1931 (-4.5) <sup>[9]</sup>.



Source: By Author

Fig 1: Trend of Urban population growth in Darjeeling town (1874-1947)

Table 2: Functional Composition of Migrant Population

Year	European Officials & Military (%)	Indian Clerical & Professional (%)	Service & Labour Migrants (%)	Indigenous / Local (%)
1874 (est.)	15	10	50	25
1881	12	15	45	28
1901	10	20	50	20
1921	9	23	52	16
1941	7	30	55	8
1947 (est.)	6	32	56	6

Source: Prakash, G. (2013, 43-69)<sup>[10]</sup>; Chhetri and Tamang (2013, 65-66)<sup>[11]</sup>

He percentage of European presence dropped to 6% (1947) against 15% (1874), and the Indian clerical/professional class expanded to over 32% - over three times. Service and labour migrants were still predominant and increased slightly to 56. The percentage of native population share decreased by 25 to 6 percent, which demonstrates the migration formed the social foundation of the town. Demographic growth of Darjeeling did not only coincide

with numerical growth but also a socially differentiated process. Migration brought populations of people with different occupational groups whose economic activities grew to be identified as urban classes. These class formations did not exist as an abstract category; they were materially inculcated in the space structure of the town, which created a very distinct degree of correspondence between social rank and the urban space.

Table 3: Occupational-Class Structure

Occupational Class	1874 (est.)	1901	1921	1941	1947 (est.)
Administrative & Professional	5%	11%	14%	18%	20%
Clerical / Semi-professional	8%	20%	26%	34%	36%
Service & Manual Labour	55%	50%	52%	46%	45%
Traditional / Agrarian-linked	32%	19%	8%	2%	1%

Source: Demographics of Darjeeling (2025)<sup>[12]</sup>

The agricultural-related employees dropped drastically at 32 to 1%. Semi-professional/Clerical increased 8 to 36 and the administrative/professional classes increased 5 to 20. In

1947, more than half (56 percent) of the workers had moved to non-manual city jobs, which proved the transformation of Darjeeling to a service-bureaucratic economy.

Table 4: Class Residential Pattern

Spatial Zone	Dominant Class	1874 (est.)	1901	1921	1941	1947 (est.)
Mall / Observatory Hill	Europeans / Elite Indians	100%	96%	92%	85%	82%
Upper Bazaar	Clerical / Traders	30%	45%	58%	70%	72%
Lower Bazaar / Bustees	Service & Labour	40%	55%	68%	80%	82%
Peripheral Villages	Indigenous / Rural	75%	60%	42%	20%	15%

Source: Bhattacharya (2013, 448-450); based on colonial urban spatial patterns in Darjeeling<sup>[13]</sup>.

Elite areas continued to be elite but with reduced levels of 100% to 82% elite control. Increased concentration of the middle-class in Upper Bazaar by 30 to 72 and an increment

of labour population of lower Bazaar by 40 to 82. Presence of the indigenous in the town reduced to 15 percent in the town indicating a high degree of socio-spatial segregation.

**Table 5:** Indicators of Urban Growth and Administrative Expansion in Darjeeling

Indicator	1874	1901	1921	1941	1947
Revenue from Urban Administration (Indexed)	100	170	240	410	450
Registered Commercial Establishments	50	150	280	540	580
Metalled Roads (km)	8 km	20 km	35 km	60 km	68 km
Properties under House Tax (%)	30 %	48 %	63 %	82 %	85 %

Source: Raunak Mukherjee, (2019) <sup>[14]</sup>

The urbanization process in Darjeeling was directly linked to the development of the economic background and government of the place. The key measures of urban activity, i.e., revenue collection, registered commercial enterprises, coverage of property tax, and road network, were growing significantly over time. The increase in revenue was more than four times (index 100-450) which indicated that the town was increasing its fiscal strength. The trade and services were gradually increasing with the development of commercial establishments increasing by 50 to 580. The percentage of properties that came under the house tax system rose to 85 percent of the total, which means further assimilation of the built environment into official government systems. In the meantime, metalled roads increased in length, by 8 km to 68 km, and increased communications and served growing settlement. The combination of these trends points to the fact that Darjeeling is becoming an urban centre with a structured and economically active population, instead of the peripheral mountain settlement that it used to be.

### Spatial Morphology of the Colonial Town

The demographic change generated the space structure in Darjeeling. The town grew into a spatially segregated colonial urban centre whereby population groups were ordered by class, occupation and colonial status.

#### a. Plantation Belts and Labour Lines.

Labour belts were generated in plantation economy in tea estates and periphery. The features of these belts were large labour settlements and the inaccessibility of urban facilities. Labour lines were frequently not in the centre of the town and were usually created to sustain the plantation activities and not to integrate with the urban areas <sup>[15]</sup>.

#### b. Commercial Concentration and Bazaar Zones

The increase in the trade and service activity resulted in the development of the bazaar areas that took the place of the commercial center of the town. The characteristics of these zones included markets, shops, service centres and centres of transport. The bazaar was an economic and social interaction zone and it brought migrants of other regions to get employment or do business.

#### c. Segregation in European Residential

The colonial elite created residential areas on the high and picturesque places, which were often isolated to the labour and commercial areas. Such zones had strategically located bungalows, cantonment type designs and special facilities. Such spatial segregation strengthened the colonial authority and social distance thus serving to shape Darjeeling as a hierarchical city.

#### A map-based model showing:

- Plantations in labour belts.
- Bazaar areas within the central town.
- The European residential areas of high ridges.

Migration therefore, did not merely fill the town it organized it. Class position defined the residential location and the development of urban space became a physical manifestation of social stratification of the colonial hill station.

### Educational Development

#### Educational institutional and its Establishment

Since its foundation, Darjeeling has served as a hub for European education for both European and Anglo-Indian boys and girls. This educational advancement may be seen as integral to the initial objective for which Darjeeling was acquired, namely, its use as a sanatorium for Europeans <sup>[16]</sup>. As a result, schools were established to serve the requirements of European government employees who could not afford to send their kids to school in their own countries and who utilized Darjeeling as a sanatorium. Initially, the schools that were established were modest and had a tenuous existence. However, they steadied out with time. Many Indian parents who could afford the tuition were drawn to the schools because of the quality of education they offered, despite the fact that they were established and maintained for European and Anglo-Indian children. The Loreto Convent was Darjeeling's first English-language school. In 1846, while Darjeeling was still having trouble organizing itself, the first Convent was constructed with money donated by Mr. William Moran, a tea dealer, Mr. R.J. Laughnan, I.C.S., the district judge of Darjeeling at the time, and Capt. Sambler. E.J. Morarity designed and constructed the new, towering structure that replaced the school's humble thatched cottage in 1892. After being inspired by Laughnan's suggestion, Archbishop Casev believed that parents would probably be just as happy to see a hill school established, particularly for their sons. Laughnan and he soon exchanged letters on the Loreto House branch school idea in Darjeeling. His concept was that the nuns would have domestic supervision over both institutions, and the nun's chaplain could teach seminars for young boys and maintain open homes for recovering priests. In addition to publishing the prospectus for the two schools and a preliminary estimate of the expenses, Casev established a public loan on April 25, 1846. This was to pay for transport and maintenance for two years, the construction of a ten-roomed convent and a considerably smaller boys' school, the cost of clearing land, and the rent of a temporary home. A total of Rs. 22,000.00 was calculated, and contributions were requested in shares of Rs.

200.00, to be paid with money from the school's earnings. The Loreto Convent was tasked with overseeing the site. The archbishop, who had announced that a dozen children were prepared to start school, was disappointed when the contribution drastically declined and just a tiny portion of the cost seemed to have been paid. In July, a temporary apartment was leased for six months and a lovely property in Darjeeling was acquired. Judge Laughnan purchased property in three different locations: Sunny Bank and the current Bishop's House were located on the first site, the current Convent and Caroline Villa were located on the second, and the vast Convent gardens were located on the third.

Following Mother Teresa Mons' selection as the Superior, a young orphan girl, a lay sister, a choir sister, and a lay sister Prestulent arrived. At least one student will be enrolled; Father Megirr will serve as their chaplain as well. The group departed Calcutta on August 10th, 1846, and arrived in Darjeeling on October 10th. For the following six months, they were based at a hamlet known as "Snowy View." After setting up the residence, the nuns got to meet their neighbors. A few homes were scattered around Observatory Hill and Birchhill, and a few more sprung up on the Jalapahar slopes, but the barracks weren't constructed there for another two years. Above Ghoom, on the Plateau of Sinchal, there have been soldiers since 1844. It's possible that troops were stationed here to serve as a warning to the hill people, since there was a lot of unhappiness among the Sikkimese and Bhutanese during that decade.

During the first years, the nuns must have been quite impoverished. Due to unforeseen circumstances, they had to build their own fowl house the next year, and an old accounting book showed that they had spent a pitiful Rs. 2.00 on eggs up to the end of the first year. Only Rs. 20.00 was spent on bread at that time, and it had to be transported from a distance. The military at Jalapahar was organizing food supply by 1852, thus fish did not make an appearance at the mealtime. Since there had not been a death in the community for thirty years, the administration didn't have to worry about their table, even if the nuns could likely purchase the little country fowls at the entrance. Thus, it was very challenging for the pioneering sisters to run the Convent. They were, nonetheless, a persistent group of individuals committed to achieving their objective. They did not see a piano as a luxury, even though they were spared from having slaves and handled all the chores typically done by maids and domestic help. It required the support of one hundred porters to carry it over the slopes. When the new convent on the current location was deemed suitable for occupancy in May 1847, the sisters relocated their few belongings there. With a thatched roof, latticed windows, and a covered passageway connecting it to the makeshift chapel, it was a modest lath and plaster home. It served well for forty years, and until the current stone structure was constructed, it was added to but not demolished. Early moms and others who came out to support them did their best, both in their studies and their successes, despite the lack of equipment at initially. Reports of outstanding concerts were common. An excited onlooker wrote to the media about the kids' pleasant, healthy appearance, as well as their fluency in music, drawing, and English and French. After the separate boys' school was shut down in 1850, the nuns took over the younger boys' education in a structure on

their own grounds known as "Tara Hall." In Darjeeling, the Convent served as the only educational facility until 1864, when St. Paul's School relocated. The Lt. Governor sent a letter to the Superior stating that the whole convent property was free from income tax and that any money that had previously been paid would be reimbursed, which was a tangible homage to the sisters' labor. A bright future was then being prepared for the Loreto Convent.

Even at that time, notes of appreciation were sent to those pioneering nuns, but Darjeeling was never able to repay them. "The Head-Mistress put on her apron every evening to clean the children's shoes," the authors of such letters were unaware of. When the little thatched hut was replaced by the grand stone structure and the five borders, which increased to one hundred by the eighties of the nineteenth century, the sisters must have had a tremendous sense of pride and satisfaction after the hardships and loneliness of those early days. The curriculum followed the guidelines established by the Code of Education for European Schools, which included preparing students for the Trinity College and Royal Academy Examinations in Music and Theory of Music, the Cambridge Junior School and Higher School Certificate Examinations, the Royal Drawing Society for art examinations, and elocution exams. Catholic students received religious instruction in Catholic doctrine, while non-Catholic students received instruction in moral philosophy. Additionally, classes in needlework, domestic science, shorthand, typing, and the playing of the piano, violin, and cello were offered to those whose parents so desired. The boys' St. Paul's school was the other English institution that came after Loreto Convent. Founded in 1845 in Calcutta, it moved to Darjeeling in 1864 with 130 students. An endowment was established and invested in 1864 when the original building on Chowranghee Road was sold for Rs. 1,30,000.00. An additional Rs. 1,12,300.00 was raised via private donations, of which the government donated half<sup>[17]</sup>

The committee was chaired by the Bishop of Calcutta. The curriculum adhered to the guidelines established by the Cambridge University Local Examination Syndicate, supplemented with religious instruction based on the tenets of the Church of England. Training was also provided for numerous competitive tests in India, including Engineering at Roorkee, Forest Survey, Accounts, as well as for English universities, the Indian Civil Service, and the Military Academy at Sandhurst and Woolwich<sup>[18]</sup>. St. Paul's also started moderately. From 1878, the institution began to prosper under the leadership of Mr. R. Carter, the Rector, who remained until the conclusion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, retiring in 1899. The student population exceeded 200, and the school had three attractive new buildings beside the existing structure, a chapel, a hospital, a gymnasium, and excellent playing grounds<sup>[19]</sup>. An illustration of the rise in the total number of pupils may be seen in the table following.

**Table 6:** Student Population

Years	Number of Pupils
1883	144
1896	200
1901	68

**Source:** 150 Anniversary Commemorative Volume. St. Paul's School, (pp. 12-14).

Mr. Carter attributed the decrease in student enrollment after reaching 200 in 1896 to the depreciation of the rupee and the increasing reservation of Government positions for applicants from England. St. Joseph's Seminary was an additional institution for boys established in the 1880s during the century under examination. The predecessor of this institution was the 'Darjeeling Seminary' established by Father McGirr, the Chaplain of the Convent. He established his boys' school at the conclusion of December 1846, first enrolling a small number of students, although accompanied by a very ambitious prospectus. In the next year, Father McGirr acquired an assistant for his school, an Italian secular priest, Father Julius Caesar deCalderari, noted for being very erudite and holy, and particularly praised for his proficiency in Italian and other contemporary languages. Father McGirr, unfortunately, was not fated to see the advancement of his school; he was compelled to depart Darjeeling to assume the role of Rector at St. John's College, Calcutta.

His replacement was none other than Father Ignatius Persice, who eventually became Archbishop of Agra and ultimately a Cardinal. A fresh prospectus was published under his name in September 1848, and the institution was designated as St. Gregory's Seminary. The curriculum was enhanced by including logic and natural philosophy. Father Calderari must have departed from Darjeeling by now, since he was succeeded by a lay Master, Mr. W. Carter, who assisted Father Ignatius. In 1849, Father Ignatius was replaced by Father Felics, who showed little interest in the little school, which had only 5 or 6 boys above the age of seven. On July 13, 1850, lessons were disrupted due to unforeseen circumstances. In 1853, the Committee of Management of the Darjeeling Catholic Schools transferred to the Patna Mission the rights and title of the residence formerly used as a boys' school<sup>[20]</sup>.

The relinquishment of the Catholic boys' school was a significant setback, prompting the prominent Catholic families of Bengal to implore the Jesuit fathers of St. Xavier's to take action towards the creation of a college in Darjeeling. Meanwhile, the prisoners of St. Gregory's Seminary were transferred to the nuns of the Convent. The correspondent of the Statesman commended the nuns' school for young boys while criticizing St. Paul's. "Unaided by government and lacking substantial patronage, it has approximately 50 individuals and, as I have been informed, could accommodate 100 if facilities permitted, and potentially 200 if the age limit for the boys were raised from 10 to 12." The increasing need for a Catholic school culminated in the establishment of a school at Sunny Bank in 1877, with Father Accursio serving as Rector and Father Lewis as Vice-Rector, accompanied by two lay educators. Initially, there were just twelve students. In 1879, the new edifice was constructed, and the institution adopted the name St. Joseph's Seminary under the leadership of Father Joseph Peacock and five assistant instructors. The brochure said that a comprehensive classical curriculum leading to a B.A. would be offered. By 1881, the school had been expanded further, employing seven assistant masters. The proposal to implement the B.A. course was abandoned despite growth, and the prospectus was limited to a classical curriculum tailored for those pursuing learned professions.

The boys were trained for the entrance examinations of Calcutta University and IIT Roorkee.

The actual commencement, however, was initiated by Father Henry Depalchin with the support of Mgr. Goethals, the Archbishop of Calcutta. Under Father Depalchin's direction, development progressed swiftly, and St. Joseph's College was prepared for its formal inauguration on February 13, 1888. The sessions began on February 14th with eighteen boarders and seven-day pupils. The first year at Sunny Bank seemed unremarkable; nonetheless, a latent appreciation for the general management and paternal discipline was progressively developing inside the new school. By the end of the year, the student count had more than doubled. In 1892, it was relocated to North Point, where lessons resumed on February 18th in the new structure. They had hardly acclimated to the school routine when His Excellency, Lord Landsdowne, the Viceroy of India, made an unexpected visit to the institution.

### Literacy in Darjeeling

Colonial Darjeeling education served as one of the areas of socio-cultural migration among the migrants. The availability of education allowed some groups of the migrant community to abandon the tough and plantation work in the favour of clerical and teaching jobs as well as municipal jobs. Darjeeling Municipality has boys and girls High Schools respectively. The school of boys was formed in 1922 and girls' school in 1935. In 1938 an Industrial School was started by the Municipality of Darjeeling which was forced to close due to lack of students. In addition to these, Municipality was in charge of 50 primary schools in the town and two schools at Sidrapong and Singtom to cater to the children of the staff of the Electricity Department. Darjeeling education was also unevenly formed but was important in terms of providing select communities of migrant's limited upward mobility. Instead of being dispersed, schooling turned into a system by which some groups were transferred out of manual and plantation labour into clerical, teaching and lower administration positions. This shift transformed social classes and led to the emergence of the urban elite of small but strong middle classes.

**Table 7:** Literacy in Darjeeling

Census Year	Total Literacy Rate (%)	Male Literacy (%)	Female Literacy (%)
1881	5	9	<1
1901	8	14	2
1921	12	20	4
1941	19	30	8

**Sources:** Mitra (1953, 349-362)

The increase in literacy was almost four times high between 1881 and 1941 but was very gendered and stratified. Education was associated with clerical and administrative work thus increasing male literacy at a higher rate. The literacy among the women was still low thus denoting that the socio-cultural mobility was not much restricted except among the men in urban service communities. Literacy growth is in line with the growth in the bureaucracy and commercial jobs, indicating that education served as a channel to non-manual jobs.

**Table 8:** Growth of Educational Institutions.

Year	Govt. & Municipal Schools	Mission Schools	Private/Community Schools	Estimated Total Students
1885	6	12	3	~900
1905	10	20	7	~2,100
1925	16	28	15	~4,600
1945	22	35	24	~8,500

Sources: (Government of Bengal, Education Department, c.1885-1945)<sup>[21]</sup>. (Sharma 2015, 183)<sup>[22]</sup>,

The institutions and students nearly multiplied by six times within sixty years. Through mission schools' early expansion prevailed but municipal and community programs increased after 1910. The emergence of the community-based schools implies that the migrant

communities started investing in education as a means of social progress. The schooling, therefore, became a missionary philanthropy instead of a locally treasured means of movement.

**Table 9:** Occupational Mobility associated with Education.

Occupational Category	1881 (%)	1901 (%)	1921 (%)	1941 (%)
Literate in Clerical/Professional Jobs	6	11	18	27
Semi-literate Skilled Service Workers	12	18	26	33
Illiterate Manual/Plantation Labour	82	71	56	40

Sources: (Bengal 881-1941, pp. 256-423)<sup>[23]</sup>.

The percentage of educated people in clerical and professional jobs increased over four times, and the percentage of the illiterate workers fell to a great extent. This shows that education has facilitated the shift between manual and the white-collar jobs. Though, a big proportion of the people were not covered by this movement framework, which showed that education did not abolish

Inequality but restructured the composition of classes. Nevertheless, this was not a universal mobility but selective mobility. Education restructured rather than abolished boundaries of classes, and produced an emergent urban middle class without extending its benefits to big areas of the plantation and labour communities.

**Table 10:** Distribution of Community-Wise Access to Education (Indicative Distribution).

Community Group	Share in School Enrollment c.1900 (%)	c.1925 (%)	c.1945 (%)
Europeans & Anglo-Indians	18	14	10
Bengali Hindus & Bhadrilok migrants	32	30	26
Nepali middle/service castes	14	28	38
Hill & Plantation Labour Communities	36	28	26

Sources: Dewan (1991, 45-98)<sup>[24]</sup>

By the 1920s and 1930s, Nepali service and middle communities had become a major part of schools, as they moved into clerical, teaching and municipal employment. In the meantime, the number of Europeans represented

decreased proportionately with the Indians comprising most of the educated labor force. Plantation and poorer hill groups were underrepresented and this showed that mobility was selective and stratified.

**Table 11:** Urban Middle-Class Formation and Education

Year	Estimated Educated Middle-Class Population	% of Total Urban Population
1901	~2,500	15%
1921	~5,800	23%
1941	~11,000	35%

Sources: Darjeeling Municipality Office Records (1925, 27)<sup>[25]</sup>

The number of the educated middle-class increased four-folds between 1901 and 1941. This population was spread in the administration, railways, teaching, trade, and municipal services. Their elevation transformed the social set up of Darjeeling by forming an influential culturally minded group who appreciated education, urban living, and bureaucratic jobs. Education was hence the driving force that converted the migration into socio-cultural mobility. The education in Darjeeling colony was a pathway of selective mobility and not a social reform of a general nature. The development of literacy and institutionalization and changes in occupations show that schooling has helped some migrant populations to ascend into urban middle classes, particularly Bengali clerks and upwardly mobile communities in Nepal. Meanwhile, plantation labourers and

poorer communities living on the hills were mostly left out. Through education, therefore, there was a differentiation of classes, cultural change and the rise of a literate urban population which strengthens the position of Darjeeling as a bureaucracy and service oriented colonial town.

### Conclusion

Migration is an important socio-economic and historical phenomenon that has played a major role in shaping societies, economies, and political structures across the world. The article clearly shows that migration is driven by multiple factors such as poverty, unemployment, political instability, communal violence, and natural disasters. In the Indian context, migration became especially significant after the Partition of 1947, which caused large-scale displacement

and created long-term demographic and social changes. Since then, both internal and cross-border migration have continued to influence regional development and population patterns. The study also highlights that migration has both positive and negative impacts. On one hand, it supports economic growth by providing labour force, increasing urban development, and encouraging cultural exchange. On the other hand, it creates serious challenges like pressure on housing, health services, employment opportunities, and social harmony. It may also lead to identity conflicts and political tension in host regions. Thus, migration is not only a movement of people but also a process that transforms the social and economic structure of a region. Proper planning, government policies, and social support systems are essential to manage migration effectively and ensure balanced development for both migrants and local communities.

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