

Christian Demography of Two Northernmost Districts of the State of West Bengal : A Statistical Investigation in Post-Colonial Period

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The study of Christianity and the Christian demography has been remained an eminent issue in sociocultural research field. In historical discipline it became more significant issue with the evolution of the demographic study in the discipline. In this respect the two Northern districts of the State of West Bengal, particularly in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri belt became highlighted as numerically the Christian population were significant there in post-colonial era in compare to the precolonial period. This transition continued progressively during the last decade of the twentieth century. But there is no such academic study over the issue either in national level or in regional level. In context of the region of my study I have not found any voluminous work over this issue. Here, in this paper, an effort will be made for the statistical analysis of transition of Christian demography in the region and during the period of the study.

Distribution of Population in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri Districts in Reference to Religious Community For the year 1941 (Reference to Christian Community)¹

District/State/Province	Christians (Inidan)	Percentage to Bengal	Percentage to North Bengal
Bengal	111426	-	-
Jalpaiguri	2589	2.32	35.51
Darjeeling	2599	2.33	35.66
Total of North Bengal	7289	-	-

Source: Compiled from Census of India, 1941, Volume IV, Bengal, Tables, R.A.Dutch, Manager of publications, Delhi, Government of India Press, Simla, 1942, Table-XIII, Community

Distribution of population in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri Districts in Reference to Religion For the year 1951 (Reference to Christian Community)²

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religion	Darjeeling	Percentage to total N.B	Jalpaiguri	Percentage to total N.B	Total NB
Christian	12310	29.22	25481	60.47	42135

Source: Union Table D II-Religion, Census of India, 1951, West Benal, Sikkim,& Chandernagore,Volume VI, Part-II Tables, Mitra, A., Manger of Publications, Delhi, Government of India Press, Calcutta,1953

The tribal religious people had numbered 672373 in 1941 census which came down to only 91964 in number. On the other the Christians grew in a magnificent number from 7289 to 42135 in number. The Buddhists also grew from 45172 to 68761 in number in North Bengal. Bothe the increase in Christians and Buddhists might have been returned by the Tribal people in more number in 1951 than the previous decade. The issue of this religious distribution may be more satisfactorily discussed district wise. The following table will show the strength of each religious community among per 10000 of total, rural and urban populations in each of the district of North Bengal.

Distribution of the strength of Christian community per 10000 of total, rural and urban population respectively 1951³

District	Christian	% to the Christian population of the district
Jalpaiguri	(T)279	2.79
	(R)298	-
	(U) 27	-
Darjeeling	(T) 277	2.77
	(R) 270	-
	(U) 301	-

Source: Census of India, 1951, Volume VI, West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore, Part IC-Report, A. Mitra, Manager of Publication, Delhi, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1953, Statement VI.I

There was great rise in the Christianity in the districts of Jalpaiguri from 2589 persons to 25481 persons returned as belonged to Christianity during 1941-51 periods and in Darjeeling a good number of people returned their religion as Christianity during 1951 numbering 12310 persons who had been 2599 persons in number during 1941.

Distribution of Christian community in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri Districts per 10000 of total rural and urban population of West Bengal 1951⁴

State and District	Christian	% to the Christian population of the State
West Bengal	(T) 10000	

	(R)10000 (U)10000	
Jalpaiguri	(T)1456	14.56
	(R)3566	35.66
	(U) 17	0.17
Darjeeling	(T) 703	7.03
	(R) 1333	13.33
	(U) 274	2.74
North Bengal	(T)2408	
	(R)5496	
	(U)301	

Source: Census of India, 1951, Volume VI, West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore, Part IC-Report, A. Mitra, Manager of Publication, Delhi, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1953, Statement VI.I

As regards of the Christian population North Bengal had a great share in the total Christian population of the State in 1951 with a share of 24.08 percent. This was only 9.78 percent in 1941. So there was a great increase in Christian population in 1951 in North Bengal districts among which the districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling contributed much. Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling with a share of 14.56 percent and 7.03 percent respectively among the total Christian population of the State of West Bengal ranked third and fourth respectively in 1951.

Up to 1941 all the enumeration used to be done on the basis of religion. This resulted in availability of data and information of demography village upwards based on religious differentiation. But afterwards since 1951 religious sorting or classification of demographic data was substituted by the economic sorting or economic classification. As a result "The information extracted at the 1951 and 1961 Censuses on Religion" had been restricted "to the ascertainment of numbers only." However, though there was no record of district wise breakup of the religious demography, a good deal of data we have from the Census Report of 1961 concerning male-female, rural-urban distribution of the population in each district based on religion, comparative data of strength of population of each major religions in the State of West Bengal on the one and its districts on the other. There is also information of the religious distribution of the people based on caste and description of the minor religious group of people in different districts. This will obviously help us to form an idea about the transition of religious demography during the decade of 1951-61 and more clearly from pre-partition period to post-partition period up to 1961. The following is the table of description of the major religious communities in the districts of North Bengal during 1960s.

**Distribution of Population by Christian Religion in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri Districts
For the year 1961⁵**

State/ district/ Region	Christians	% of total population	Percentage to West Bengal	Percentage to North Bengal
West Bengal	204530	-	-	-
Jalpaiguri	48570	3.57	23.75	60.47
Darjeeling	20475	3.28	10.01	25.49
Total of North Bengal	80321	-	-	-

Census of India 1961, VolumeXVI, West Bengal and Sikkim, Part-II(i), Social and Cultural table, Datta Gupta, J., 1965, Table C-VII-Religion

There was a heavy rise in Christian people in the district of Jalpaiguri during this period. The people returned Christianity as their religion increased 90.61 percent over its numerical strength of 1951 and constituted 3.57 percent population of the district in 1961 census year. In the district of Darjeeling there was increase of 66.33 percent of Christian population numbering 8165 persons increase over the Christian population of 1951 in the 1961 census year. Thus the Christians numbered in the year 20475 having constituted 3.28 percent of the total population in the district.

It has been said in earlier that during pre-independent period religion had been considered as the basis of classification of the people in all the census records and the data of the demography had been provided in the same way. But the post-independent period census gave trace on the economic classification of the population. But data on religion continued to be very important for the demographic analysis of the population. So information was collected on religions of the people in 1971 and was recorded as returned by the respondents. As a result the data on six important religions of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Islamism and Sikhism were recorded. In other cases under the heads of 'other religions' and 'religion not stated' were recorded. During this time we also have the details of that religious information for the different police stations of the districts of the State of West Bengal. So we may form an idea of religious demography of North Bengal very apparently for the period of 1961-71.

**Distribution of Population in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri Districts by Christian Religion
1971⁶**

District/ Subdivision/ Police station	Christian	Percentage to West Bengal	Percentage to North Bengal
West Bengal	251737	-	-
Darjeeling	28037	11.14	26.43
Jalpaiguri	55707	22.13	52.52
North Bengal	106062	-	-

Source: Census of India 1971, Series 22, West Bengal, Part-II-C (i), Social and Cultural tables, Tables C-VII and C-VIII, Bhaskar Ghose, pp.14-19

The Christians had 106062 persons by number in North Bengal constituted 1.43 percent of total North Bengal population. But in case of the Christian population the growth rate in North Bengal was 30.05 percent in compare to the 23.08 percent growth of the State's Christian population during the decade of 1961-71. The religious practices and beliefs in the district of Darjeeling should be seen in the light of the religious demonstrations and worshipping of the diverse people belonged to both the hilly tract and Terai region of the district. The Christians and Buddhist were also found in those both tracts. Another important religion of the district the Christianity had 28037 numbers of followers in the district that constituted 3.59 percent of the total population of the district.

**Distribution of Population By Christian Religion
Darjeeling District
1971⁷**

State/District	Christian	% to the Christian population of the district
West Bengal	251737	
Darjeeling District	28037	3.59
Sukhiapokri	124	
Pulbazar	116	
Darjeeling	1486	
Rangli Rangliot	556	
Jore Bungalow	181	
Kalimpong	8060	

Garubathan	1257	
Kurseong	2193	
Mirik	85	
Naxalbari	2023	
Siliguri	1362	
Phansidewa	8204	
Kharibari	2330	

Source: Census of India 1971, Series 22, West Bengal, Part-II-C (i), Social and Cultural tables, Tables C-VII and C-VIII, Bhaskar Ghose

A good number of Christians were found during this time in the police stations of Pansidewa (8204), Kalimpong (8060), Kharibari (2330), Kursiong (2193), Naxalbari(2023), Darjeeling (1486), Siliguri(1362) and in Gorubathan (1257). Thus the district of Darjeeling had four major groups of religious followers namely the Hindus, the Muslims, the Buddhists and the Christians. The growth of the Christians was high having 36.93 percent growth over the Christian population of the previous decade being much high than the State's average growth of Christian population of 23.08 percent.

In Jalpaiguri district also Hinduism, Islam and Christianity were the main religious persuasions of the people. The most important was the number of the Christians who represented 3.18 percent of the total population of the district having numbered 55707 persons. However, the following statistical table will elaborate the scenarios of the Christian religious demography of the districts.

**Distribution of Population By Christian Religion
Jalpaiguri District
1971⁸**

State/District	Christian	% to the Christian population of the district
Jalpaiguri	55707	3.18
Rajganj	883	
Jalpaiguri	1218	
Mal	6989	
Mitali	2769	
Maynaguri	55	
Nagrakata	2199	

Dhubguri	4258	
Birpara	2800	
Falakata	937	
Madarihat	1808	
Alipurduar	11412	
Kalchini	11241	
Kumargram	9168	

Source: Census of India 1971, Series 22, West Bengal, Part-II-C (i), Social and Cultural tables, Tables C-VII and C-VIII, Bhaskar Ghose

The highest number of Christians was found in the police station of Alipurduar police station having 11412 numbers of Christians followed by the police stations of Kalchini having 11241 numbers of Christians and Kumargram having 9168 number of Christians in the district. The Christians showed a growth of 14.69 percent with a rise of 7137 persons on the Christian population of the previous decade. Among the total Christians of the State more than one third resided over in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts having 33 and 36 Christians per 1000 people in total. West Dinajpur ranked fourth in this respect with 6 Christians per 1000 people after Calcutta (18 per 1000).

The transition of demography in size and number also should have cultural say. In this context religion has much to say regarding composition and nature of demography. During the decade 1971-81 transition in line with the previous decade went on in religious demography of the State of West Bengal as well as North Bengal. In the 1981 census, question on religion was included in the individual slip filled in for every person and the Household schedule filled in for a household. According to the question no. 8 in the slip the religion of a person was to be recorded as it was returned by the interviewer. That is the actual religion returned by the respondent was to be depicted by the enumerator. On the other in question no. 2 the religion of the head of household was to be recorded by the enumerator as the religion of the concerned household. In this context following the earlier line 'B' for Buddhist, 'C' for Christians, 'H' for Hinds, 'J' for Jains, 'M' for Muslims and 'S' for Sikhs and for 'Others' the actual religion returned by the respondent were recorded. In this way the religious structure for the Stat of West Bengal was formed from which we are to compile the religious stature of North Bengal for the decade 1971-81.

Distribution of population of Christian Religion in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri Districts 1971-1981⁹

State/ District	Census year	Christians	% to the Christian population of the state
West Bengal	1981	319,670	-
	1971	251,737	-
Jalpaiguri	1981	63,555	19.88
	1971	55,707	22.13
Darjeeling	1981	47,161	14.75
	1971	28,037	11.14
North Bengal	1981	135550	42.40
	1971	106062	42.13

Source: **Census of India 1981, Series-23, West Bengal, Paper-I of 1984, Household Population by Religion of Head of Household (Up to Police Station & Town Level), S.N. Ghosh, IAS, Director of Census Operations, West Bengal, Calcutta, 1985**

The Christians contributed a good proportion in North Bengal districts. Numbering total 135550 persons belonged to Christianity in North Bengal in 1981 they constituted 1.43 percent of the total population of North Bengal and constituted 42.40 percent of the total Christian population of the State of West Bengal. The increase of the Christian population in North Bengal from 1971 to 1981 was 27.80 percent. The Christians in Darjeeling district numerically developed from 28037 persons to 47161 persons during the period. It grew by 68.21 percent and constituted 4.60 percent of the total population of the district. The following table may highlight over the description of the religious demography of the district.

**Distribution of population of Christian Religion in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri Districts '1981
District of Darjeeling¹⁰**

District/ Subdivision/ Police station	Christians	% to the Christian population of the district
Darjeeling District	47,161	4.60
Sadar Subdivision	5,092	
Sukhiapokri	676	
Pulbazar	316	
Darjeeling	2,771	
Rangli Rangliot	815	
Jore Bunglow	514	
Kalimpong Subdivision	12,532	
Kalimpong	10,950	

Garubathan	1,582	
Kurseong Subdivision	2,602	
Kurseong	2,527	
Mirik	75	
Siliguri Subdivision	26,935	
Naxalbari	5,516	
Siliguri	4,200	
Phansidewa	16,033	
Kharibari	1,186	

Source: **Census of India 1981, Series-23, West Bengal, Paper-I of 1984, Household Population by Religion of Head of Household (Up to Police Station & Town Level), S.N. Ghosh, IAS, Director of Census Operations, West Bengal**

The largest number of the Christians were found in the police station of Phansidewa (16033) constituting 34.00 percent of the total Christian population of the district. The Christians were also concentrated in the police station of Kalimpong 23.22 percent of the total Christian population of the district.

In case of the Christian population the Jalpaiguri district had a share of 19.88 percent of the total Christian population of the State which was 22.13 percent in the last decade. With this the Christian population constituted 2.87 percent of the total population of the district. There was 14.09 percent increase of Christian population in compare to the preceding decade. However, the detail description of the Christian religious demography may be observed from the following the table.

**Distribution of population of Christian Religion in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri Districts
1981¹¹
District of Jalpaiguri**

District/ Subdivision/ Police station	Christians	% to the Christian population of the district
Jalpaiguri	63,555	2.87
Sadar Subdivision	27,993	
Rajganj	3,219	
Jalpaiguri	2,329	
Mal	8,909	
Mitali	2,810	
Maynaguri	77	

Nagrakata	1,581	
Banarhat	8,746	
Dhupguri	322	
Alipurduar Subdivision	35,562	
Birpara	2,930	
Falakata	1,547	
Madarihat	772	
Alipurduar	13,610	
Kalchini	1,192	
Kumargram	10,214	

Source: **Census of India 1981, Series-23, West Bengal, Paper-I of 1984, Household Population by Religion of Head of Household (Up to Police Station & Town Level), S.N. Ghosh, IAS, Director of Census Operations, West Bengal**

The large number of the Christians were found in the police stations of Alipurduar(13610), Kumargram (10214), Mal(8909) and Banarhat (8746). The police stations of Rajganj, Jalpaiguri, Mitiali, Birpara had good number Christians during the decade.

During the decade following 1981 there was a great development in religious demography happened both in Bengal and its part North Bengal. The Christians in the State constituted 0.56 percent of the total population whereas the Buddhists constituted 0.30 percent.

Distribution of population in Darjeeling-Jalpaiguri Districts by Christian religion, 1991¹²

State/District	Christian	% to the Christian population of the district	% to the Christian population of the state
WEST BENGAL	383477	0.56	-
Jalpai guri	107969	3.86	28.16
Darjiling	65605	5.05	17.11

Source: **West Bengal Religious Table, Table for India, C-9, downloaded from censusindia.gov.in/Digital Library/Archive..., Tables, Social & Cultural Tables – (C-Series), C-9, Religion**

A very large number of Christians with a large percentage of increase were witnessed by the district of Darjeeling during the decade 1981-1991. There were 65605 persons of Christian religion in the district in 1991 with an increase of 18444 persons having growth rate of 39.11 percent. Thus the Christian population constituted 5.05 percent of the total population. This was the largest proportion Christian population in the

districts of North Bengal. Even the Christians of the district of Darjeeling contributed 17.11 percent of the total Christian population of the State of West Bengal.

There was large number of Christians in the district of Jalpaiguri in 1991 census year. Having 107969 persons of Christian religion it constituted 3.86 percent of the total population of the district. Most importantly the district of Jalpaiguri contributed 28.16 percent to the total Christian population of the State of West Bengal. The Christians in the district increased greatly by 69.88 percent having 44414 persons increased during the decade. There was also proportional increase of 0.99 percent of the Christian population in the district.

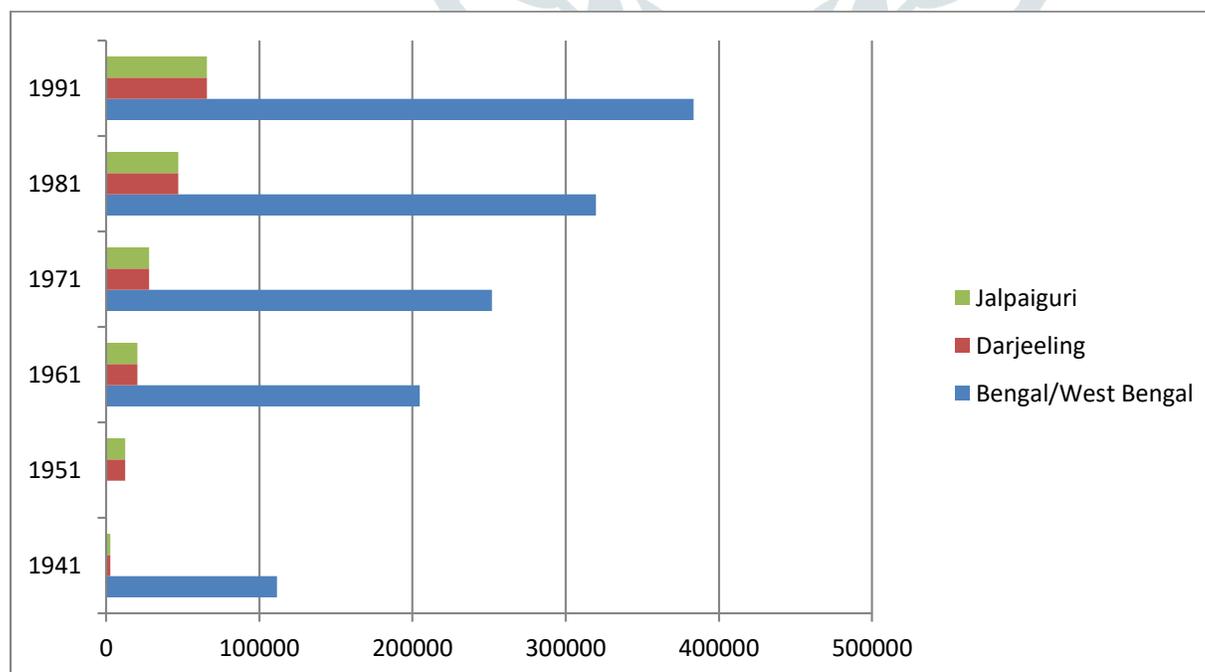
Christianity in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri:

1941-1991

Year	Bengal/West Bengal	Darjeeling	Jalpaiguri
1941	111426	2599	2589
1951	-	12310	25481
1961	204530	20475	48570
1971	251,737	28037	55707
1981	319,670	47161	63555
1991	383477	65605	107969

Source: Compiled from relevant Census Reports

Christianity in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri (1941-1991) In Bar-graph



So, from the above table and the above bar-graph it is clear that a huge amount of demography increased both in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling district as it happened in the State of West Bengal in regards to the Christian religion. The bar-graph is showing that when the Christian demography was almost invisible in the two districts in compare to the province of Bengal it become prominent within a half of century or fifty years. The increase in Christian demography in the both the districts was very gradual and chronological. In percentage of increase it always remain high even sometimes it crossed the percentage of increase in the State. It must have a great impact in the society, economy, culture even politics of the region under discussion. However, for lack of space we shall take the issue elsewhere.

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