



Pattern of Social Integration Among the Bihari Slum Dwellers in Siliguri City, West Bengal: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

This study focuses at the difficulties of Bihari slum dwellers in Siliguri city have integrating into urban society. As one of the North Bengal's fastest-growing cities, Siliguri has witnessed significant in-migration from nearby states, especially Bihar, which has led to the growth of informal settlements and a rise in sociocultural diversity. The study investigates the degree to which Bihari migrants are assimilated into the city's larger social structure and how they manage their social, economic, and cultural identities in metropolitan settings. The study employs a sociological approach to examine issues like social exclusion, housing insecurity, occupational risk, limited access to healthcare and education, linguistic and cultural disparities, and inadequate civic amenities. It also looks at how local institutions, social networks, and community organizations might help or impede integration. It explores their patterns of migration, employment, access to education and healthcare, participation in community activities, and interactions with the local population. The study also investigates the challenges they face, including social exclusion, discrimination, inadequate housing, limited access to public services, and economic insecurity, which influence their integration into urban society. Using a combination of primary and secondary data, the research seeks to assess the extent of their social integration and identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the integration process. The findings are expected to contribute to a better understanding of migrant integration in medium-sized Indian cities and provide policy recommendations for promoting inclusive urban development, social cohesion, and equitable access to basic services. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions that strengthen social integration while improving the overall quality of life of marginalized urban communities and reducing socio-economic inequality in the city and promoting inclusive urban development require such initiatives.

Keywords: Social Integration, Bihari Migrants, Slum Dwellers, Siliguri, West Bengal.

1. Introduction

Socio-economic integration is the way by which different people and communities are socially included and financially connected to the mainstream society. The general well-being of citizens can be enhanced by planned and appropriate development. However, these developments-whether natural or caused by humans planned are really highly erratic and incomplete. Various planning techniques are used to develop any location, but the outcomes are never favorable. When it comes to general growth, several aspects constitute obstacles. Uncontrolled and unmanaged expansion resulted in several obstacles for the town's development due to geographical, economic, sociocultural, and even political differences (Sarkar, 2013). India's urban population increased by about 32% in just ten years following economic liberalization in the early 1990s, placing tremendous strain on the country's infrastructure. The state, the commercial sector (both official and informal), and community self-help initiatives have failed to satisfy people's needs in recent decades due to inefficiencies, financial issues, poverty, and market failure. Every day, millions of people go to cities to work in informal professions, including street selling, construction, and household chores. A number of barriers impede the correct integration of migrants in various parts of the city, making it difficult to carry out social and economic activities (Bagheri, 2012; Das, 2020). Socio-economic is affected by several challenges such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, environmental degradation, Gender inequality, lack of education etc.

The word 'slum' is defined as an unorganized or informal settlement within major cities with inadequate and poor infrastructure and miserable living conditions (Sarkar, 2022 & Goswami, 2013). Urbanization implies the expansion of cities and towns, but numerous studies show that in developed nations, urbanization led to industrialization and economic growth, while in developing nations like India, urbanization led to greater population growth relative to economic development, which resulted in the expansion of slums (Das, M. 2022). The phenomenon of slum development is not new. In the developing world, it has been a feature of nearly every city (Sarkar & Kar, 2022). The growth of slums in metropolitan areas and the various health risks they bring with them are among the biggest issues facing urban planners worldwide (Goswami & Samita, 2013). People from rural and less developed regions move to cities in quest of employment and to take advantage of the superior facilities and contemporary amenities available in metropolitan areas (Das, M. 2022). Squatter and informal housing have thus begun to grow quickly in developing world cities (Sarkar & Kar, 2022). During the period of 1990 to 2014, the number of slum residents in developing nations grew from 689 million to 880 million (World Cities Report, 2016).

Over the past three decades, the number of people living in slums has significantly increased in India as cities and towns have grown. Thus, the expansion of slums and urbanization occur together. Rapid industrialization and urbanization lead to tremendous population expansion through widespread rural-to-urban migration, which in turn causes slums in and surrounding cities to rise significantly. The public utility systems in India's major cities are frequently severely strained by the constant influx of migrants. People without access to inexpensive housing are compelled to live in the slums since the local authority is unable to handle the problem (Chimankar, A., 2016). The main issues facing residents of slums are subpar housing and a dearth of both public and private sanitary facilities. People's health is therefore directly impacted by such unclean living conditions in slums. In India, millions of slum dwellers frequently struggle with poor sanitation conditions, a lack of clean water, and sewage or waste disposal facilities. Each of them adds to the growth of urban issues. Water and sanitation accessibility are therefore seen as prerequisites for a healthy lifestyle, and as such, they are crucial for enhancing health and quality of life (Sarkar & Kar, 2022). Bihar is known for the phenomenon of outmigration (Verma, 2021). According to the census of India 2011, Out-migration from the state of Bihar was 74,53,803. It appears that over 9.3 million Biharis left the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh during the intercensal period between 2001 and 2011 (Census of India, 2011).

Regarding the current research area, Siliguri is the third largest city in West Bengal, behind Kolkata and Asansol, and it is a fast-expanding metropolis. The present study is an attempt to understand the prevailing scenario of availability of jobs, robust infrastructure, modernized health care system, and many other facilities, which are attracting huge migrants from rural areas to Siliguri city. Rural poor come to Siliguri town in search of productive work with a perspective of betterment of their future and to secure better education for their children (Roy, 2011).

2. Study Area

Siliguri is one of the sub-divisions the Darjeeling district and headquarters of the same sub-division as well, West Bengal. After Kolkata and Asansol, it is the third-largest city in West Bengal and the fastest-growing metropolitan area in North Bengal. Siliguri comes under the category of class I Urban Agglomeration or towns, as per the census of India 2011. Siliguri is governed by Municipal Corporation, which comes under the Siliguri Metropolitan Region. In 2011, there were 705,579 people living in Siliguri's metropolitan area, with 362,523 men and 343,056 women. Hinduism is the predominant religion in the city, with 92.0% of the population. Islam is the second most popular religion with around 5.4% of adherents (Siliguri City Census 2011 data).

Geographically, Siliguri city is located at 26°42' N latitude and 88°26' E longitude with an area of 41.90 km². The city got municipality status in 1949 (Barman, 2025). Because of its advantageous location, it is referred to as the "Chicken's Neck" and serves as the "Gateway of North-East India," "A Transit Town," etc. It is located in a small corridor that links Bhutan to the north, Bangladesh to the south, and Nepal to the northwest (Barman, 2025). Numerous migrants are drawn to Siliguri City, a prominent tourist destination that serves as a nexus for trade and services throughout all of Northeast India. Under its administrative control are four Community Development Blocks (Matigara, Phansidewa, Naxalbari, and Khoribari) and one Corporation area (Siliguri Municipal Corporation) (Sarkar & Kar, 2022; Das, 2022). Rapid urbanization of the city is largely the result of its advantageous location, fast economic growth, and population expansion. Due to its strategic position and communication significance, the city is progressively expanding throughout North Bengal.

Siliguri is a unique city with 47 wards of Siliguri Municipal Corporation. From the study area, 154 notified slum areas have been recognized out of which the city is categorized into three zones, like Core Zone, Intermediary Zone and Periphery Zone. From the given zones 6 wards i.e. Dharam Nagar (Ward 1), Maharaj Colony (Ward 4), Mazdoor Colony (Ward 28), Durga Nagar Colony (Ward 40), Paswan Bustee (Ward 43), Rajib Nagar Colony (Ward 46) have been taken under consideration for the study and research of Bihari migration effect upon socio-economic integration over the city with marking other parameters also into consideration such as agglomeration of huge migrated population, labour market, income, education, housing condition, social interaction etc. This slum area is upon government land, each slum land is categorized as Dharam Nagar (State Govt.), Maharaj Colony (State Govt.), Mazdoor Colony (Railway Land), Durga Nagar Colony (State Govt.), Paswan Bustee (State Govt.), Rajib Nagar Colony (Railway Land). Dharam Nagar is located in ward no 1 with 1189 slum dwellers, where total slum population is 9644, Maharaj Colony is located in ward no 4 with 950 slum population where total slum population is 9635, Mazdoor Colony is located with 1656 slum residents where total slum population is 8344, Durga Nagar Colony located in ward no 40 with 659 slum people where total slum population is 5809, Paswan Bustee is located in ward no 43 with 758 slum population where total slum population is 7007, and Rajib Nagar Colony is situated in ward no 46 with 653 slum people where total slum population is 14045 according to the 2011 Census. These numbers are still growing as of right now. Because of its many socioeconomic characteristics, Siliguri City has drawn immigrants from surrounding areas. In just three decades, Siliguri City's built-up regions have rapidly expanded due to excessive population growth. Consequently, the city is growing in an uncontrolled and haphazard way.

Siliguri is a growing city with a variety of socioeconomic and physical features, although it is not part of the Indian government's smart city project. Siliguri City has now become as much a centre of socio-cultural activities as the town is cosmopolitan in nature (Chakraborti et al., 2018; Das, 2011). A study on the community composition of Siliguri's slums found that, of the 154 slums examined, 22 (or roughly 14.3%) had a preponderance of Bihari inhabitants. The remaining slums were either mixed-community, Bengali-dominated, or Nepali-dominated. Although they do not make up the majority in most of the slums in Siliguri, Bihari migrants are a noticeable migrant population that predominates in 14–15% of the slum areas under study. We have taken some slum area population of Siliguri city for analysis of Sample size, from the above data, we have identified the sample size in

Table 2. Through Slovin's equation (Robert Slovin, 1960), we have calculated the appropriate sample size from a given population and margin of error.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

n = Required Sample Size

N = Total Population Size

e = Margin of error (14%)

Table 1. Study Area Information

Ward No	Category	Ward Slum Population	Slum Population in Percentage (%)	Selected Slums	Selected Slum Population	Sample Size
1	State Govt. River Bed	9644	50.95	Dharam Nagar	1189	49
4	State Govt. River Bed	9365	45.14	Maharaj colony	950	48
28	Railway Land	8344	94.43	Mazdoor Colony	1656	50
46	Railway Land	14045	45.8	Rajib Nagar Colony	653	47
40	State Govt. Others	5809	23.01	Durga Nagar Colony	659	48
43	State Govt. Others	7007	42.89	Paswan Bustee	758	48
Source: Calculated by Author					$\Sigma = 5865$	$\Sigma = 290$



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Present Study

3. Methodology

A stratified random sampling technique is used to select slum areas with a significant population of Bihari migrants. Within these areas, snowball sampling is applied to identify respondent households. The study is based on a sample of 290, ensuring representation across age, gender, occupation, and duration of residence.

Data are collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data is gathered through structured household surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The survey collects information on socio-economic variables such as social interaction, financial support, primary self-identification, relationship with local Bengali community, local participation, change in lifestyle and maintaining of local self-culture. Interviews and FGDs are conducted to understand lived experiences related to social integration, identity, discrimination, and adaptation strategies. Additionally, participant observation is used to gain insights into daily life, community interactions, and living conditions.

Secondary data is obtained from government reports, census data, and records of Siliguri Municipal Corporation, along with relevant academic literature on migration and urban poverty.

For data analysis, quantitative data is processed using statistical tools such as percentages, averages, and tabulation to identify patterns and trends. Qualitative data is analyzed through thematic analysis to interpret key issues such as social exclusion, economic vulnerability, and integration processes.

Table 2. Using Parameters on Social Indicators

To analyse the impact of migration on the social integration and identity of Bihari migrants	Percentage share on Likert scale					Sum	Sum of Total
	1: Strongly satisfied (100-80)	2: Satisfied (80-60)	3: Strongly dissatisfied (60-40)	4: Dissatisfied (40-20)	5: Can't say (20-0)		
1. Interaction with Local Bengali Community:	1	2	3	4	5		
Daily	15	7	3	2	0	27	100
Occasionally	31	9	0	4	0	44	
Regularly	12	5		3	2	22	
Rarely	5	2	0	0	0	7	
2. Source of Support in Emergencies:	1	2	3	4	5		
Relatives from Bihar	9	6	0	2	1	18	100
Other Bihari Migrants	13	10	0	0	0	23	
Local Siliguri Neighbours	23	13	4	3	2	45	
Local Leaders	8	5	0	1	0	14	
3. Primary Self-Identification:	1	2	3	4	5		
Bihari	23	3	0	0	2	28	100
Resident of Siliguri	11	0	0	2	0	13	
Both equally	46	2	5	4	2	59	
4. Do you maintain Bihari cultural practices (e.g., Chhath Puja/ Eid)?	1	2	3	4	5		
Yes, strictly	61	18	0	5	1	85	100
Partially	8	2	0	0	0	10	
Not at all	0	0	0	3	2	5	
5. How would you rate your relationship with the local Bengali community?	1	2	3	4	5		
Very Friendly	12	3	0	1	1	17	100
Friendly	15	4	0	1	3	23	
Neutral	29	8	8	0	2	47	
Can't Say	0	0	0	0	13	13	
6. How often do you participate in local festivals (e.g., Durga Puja) compared to traditional festivals (e.g., Chhath Puja)?	1	2	3	4	5		
Only traditional Bihari festivals	9	2	0	0	1	12	100
Mostly Bihari	0	6	0	0	3	9	
Occasionally local Bengali festivals	8	0	0	0	0	8	
Equally participate in both	43	12	0	2	5	62	
Mostly local Bengali festivals	5	0	2	0	2	9	

7. Do you feel comfortable communicating in the local language (Bengali) for daily activities?	1	2	3	4	5		
Very comfortable	33	8	1	0	0	42	100
Comfortable	18	13	2	0	2	35	
Somewhat comfortable	0	8	5	4	1	18	
Not comfortable (rely on Hindi/Bhojpuri)	0	0	5	0	0	5	
8. Do you participate in local clubs or community organization activities?	1	2	3	4	5		
Very frequently	39	4	4	6	0	53	100
Frequently	14	9	3	0	4	30	
Sometimes	8	3	1	5	0	15	
Can't Say	0	0	0	0	2	2	
9. To what extent has your lifestyle (dress, food, language at home) changed after moving to Siliguri?	1	2	3	4	5		
No change	19	11	0	4	2	36	100
Slight change	26	14	1	3	0	44	
Significant change	8	4	0	1	0	13	
Complete adaptation to local culture	0	3	1	3	0	7	
10. Do you cast a vote at Siliguri?	1	2	3	4	5		
Yes	49	0	0	0	18	67	100
No (Voter ID is still in Bihar)	33	0	0	0	0	33	
Source: Field Survey 2025-26							

4. Results & Discussions

4.1 Interaction with Local Community

The percentage of frequency of interactions between members of the local Bengali community in Siliguri City and residents of the Bihari slum is shown in Figure 2. According to the results, 44% of the respondents engage with the local Bengali community on occasion, followed by 27% who do so every day, 22% who do so every month, and just 7% who do so infrequently.

The majority of infrequent interaction indicates that there is social engagement between Bihari migrants and the host Bengali community, but it is mostly limited to situational and functional contexts including public spaces, workplaces, markets, neighborhood interactions, and educational institutions. Even while there are opportunities for engagement, strong community integration and close social relationships are not always the results of these contacts. The comparatively smaller percentage of respondents who reported everyday engagement suggests that there are still few long-term interpersonal connections between immigrants and locals.

The fact that almost one-fifth of the respondents only communicate with the Bengali community once a month and a smaller percentage do so infrequently, suggests that social boundaries still exist. Restricted social participation may result from a number of factors, including residential concentration within slum settlements, occupational marginalization, linguistic disparities, and cultural distinctiveness. The growth of mutual understanding, reciprocity, and trust between the host and migrant populations may be hampered by such little interaction.

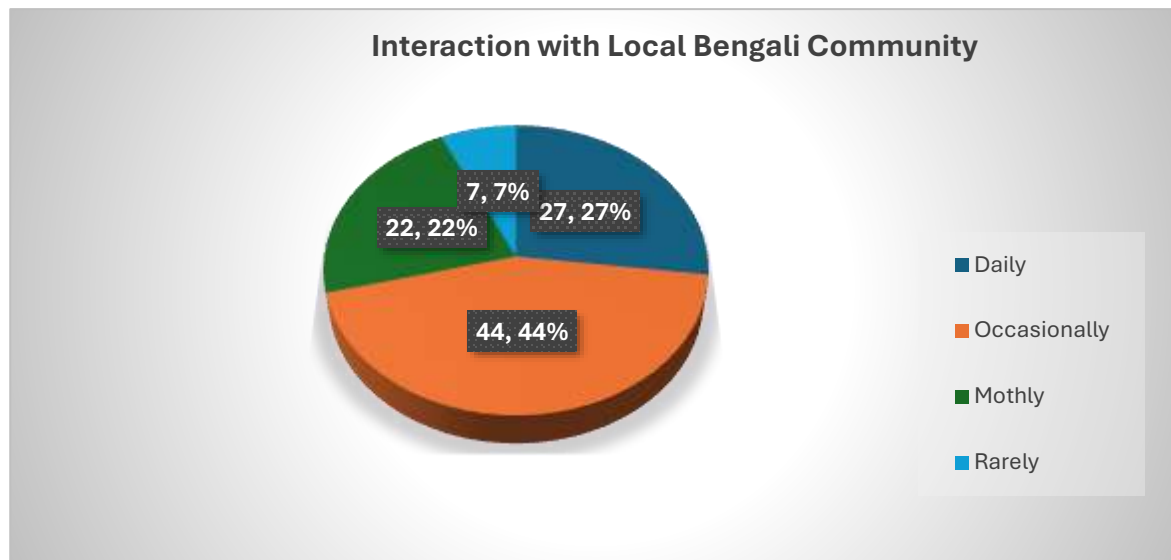


Figure 2. Interaction with Local Bengali Community

4.2 Source of Support in Emergency

Figure 3 presents the distribution of respondents according to their primary source of support during emergencies among Bihari slum dwellers in Siliguri City. The data indicate that 45% of the respondents depend on local Siliguri neighbours for assistance during emergencies, while 23% seek support from other Bihari migrants, 18% rely on relatives residing in Bihar, and 14% obtain assistance from local leaders.

The predominance of local Siliguri neighbours as the principal source of support suggests that Bihari migrants have developed substantial social connections with members of the host community. Dependence on neighbours during times of crisis reflects the emergence of trust, reciprocity, and mutual cooperation, which are important indicators of social integration. The willingness of local residents to provide assistance to migrant households also demonstrates a degree of acceptance and social inclusion within the neighbourhood environment.

At the same time, nearly one-fourth of the respondents depend on fellow Bihari migrants, indicating the continued importance of ethnic solidarity and intra-community networks. Such relationships provide emotional security, financial assistance, and practical help, particularly for migrants who face economic vulnerability and uncertain living conditions. The reliance on relatives in Bihar by 18% of respondents suggests that trans local familial ties remain significant despite migration, highlighting the persistence of social and emotional connections with their places of origin.

The findings reveal that local neighbours constitute the most significant source of emergency assistance for Bihari slum dwellers in Siliguri, indicating the development of bridging social capital and neighbourhood-level integration. Nevertheless, continued dependence on fellow migrants and relatives in Bihar demonstrates that ethnic and kinship networks remain vital components of migrants' coping strategies and social support systems.

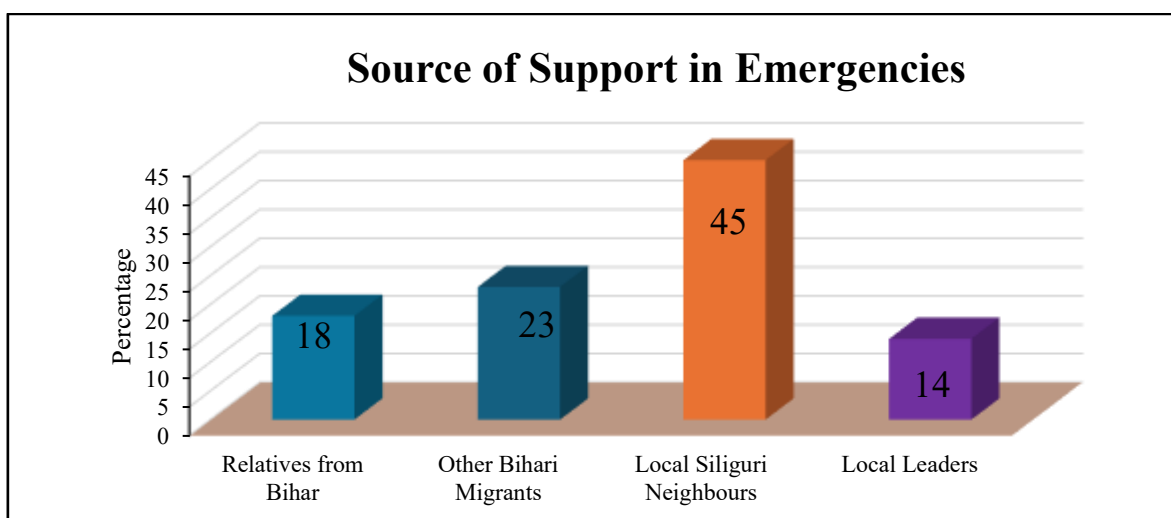


Figure 3. Source of Support in Emergency

4.3 Relationship with the Local Community

Figure 4 depicts the perceptions of Bihari slum dwellers regarding their relationship with members of the local Bengali community in Siliguri City. The findings show that 46% of the respondents perceive their relationship with the local Bengali community as neutral, while 25% describe it as friendly, and 19% consider their relationship to be very friendly. The absence of responses indicating hostile or unfriendly relations suggests that overt social conflict between the two communities is minimal.

The predominance of neutral relationships indicates that interactions between Bihari migrants and local Bengalis are largely characterized by coexistence rather than deep social attachment. Such neutrality may arise from routine encounters in neighbourhoods, workplaces, markets, and public spaces without the development of strong interpersonal ties. This pattern reflects a situation in which migrants and host populations share common urban spaces but maintain distinct social networks and cultural identities.

The proportion of respondents reporting friendly (25%) and very friendly (19%) relationships demonstrates the existence of positive social connections and mutual acceptance between the migrant and host communities. These relationships may have developed through prolonged residence in Siliguri, participation in local cultural activities, economic interdependence, and everyday neighbourly interactions. Friendly relations contribute significantly to reducing social distance, enhancing trust, and fostering a sense of belonging among migrant populations.

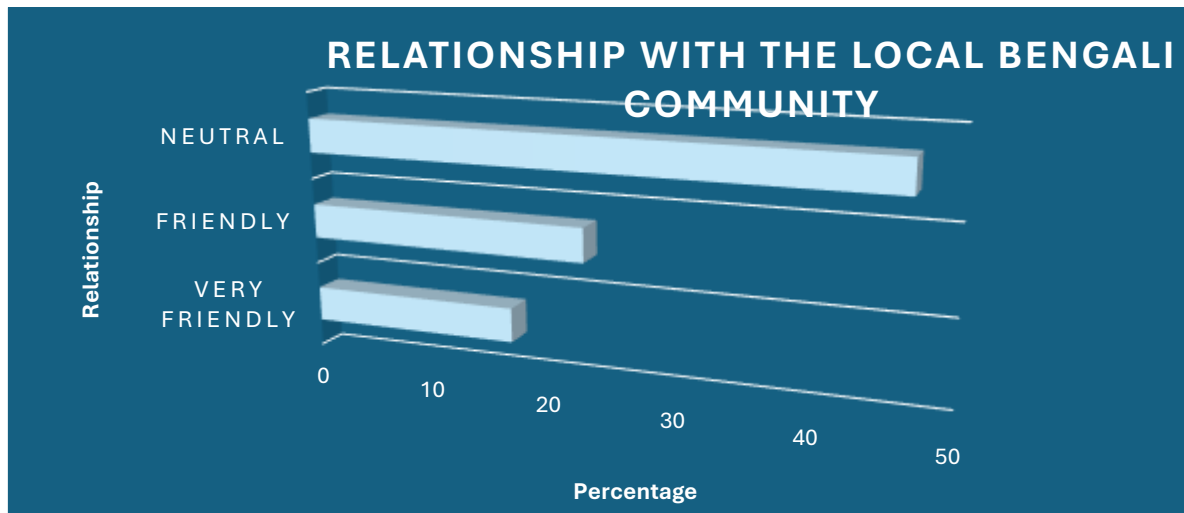


Figure 4. Relationship with the Local Bengali Community

4.4 Primary Self-Identification

The predominance of respondents identifying both equally (59%) suggests the emergence of a hybrid identity among Bihari migrants. This indicates that a majority of migrants have successfully negotiated between preserving their ethnic and cultural roots and developing a sense of belonging to the host city. Rather than abandoning their original identity, migrants appear to incorporate elements of the local urban culture into their self-conception. Such a dual sense of belonging reflects an adaptive strategy that allows migrants to maintain emotional attachment to their place of origin while simultaneously participating in the social life of Siliguri.

The finding that 28% of respondents primarily identify as Bihari demonstrates the continued significance of ethnic identity among a considerable section of the migrant population. Strong identification with one's place of origin often results from shared language, customs, kinship networks, and collective memories. The persistence of ethnic identification may also be reinforced by experiences of marginalization, discrimination, or limited opportunities for social mobility within the host society. Ethnic identity, therefore, serves as an important source of social support, security, and solidarity among migrant communities.

Conversely, only 13% of respondents identify themselves mainly as residents of Siliguri, indicating that complete assimilation into the host society remains relatively limited. This comparatively lower proportion suggests that despite long-term residence and interaction with local communities, many migrants still retain stronger attachments to their ethnic heritage than to the urban locality in which they reside.

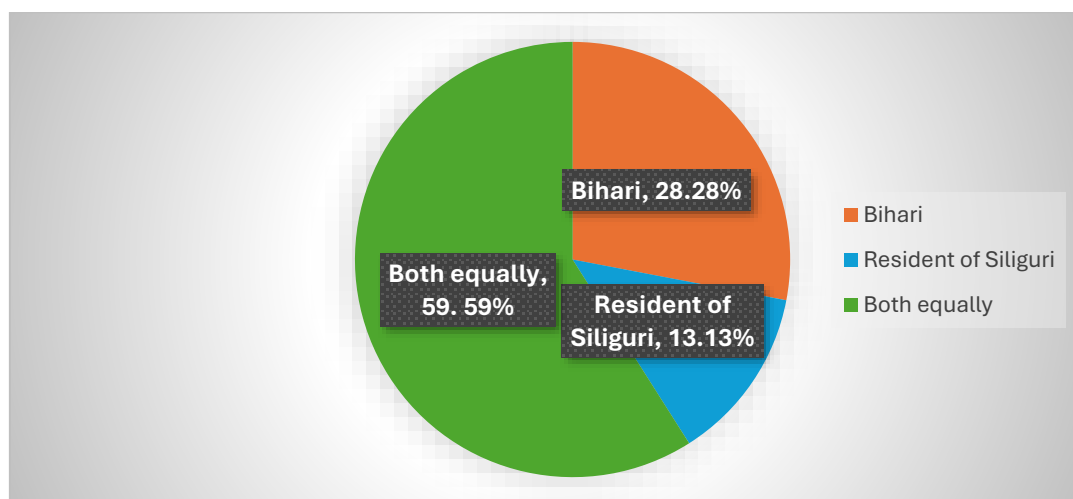


Figure 5. Primary Self-Identification

4.5 Participate in Local Festivals

Figure 6 demonstrates the extent to which Bihari slum dwellers participate in both their traditional festivals and the festivals of the host Bengali community in Siliguri. The findings reveal that a substantial majority (62%) of respondents participate equally in both Bihari and Bengali festivals, while 12% participate only in traditional Bihari festivals, 9% participate mostly in Bihari festivals, 8% participate occasionally in local Bengali festivals, and 9% participate mostly in local Bengali festivals.

The predominance of equal participation in both cultural traditions suggests a significant degree of cultural integration and mutual accommodation among Bihari migrants. Participation in local

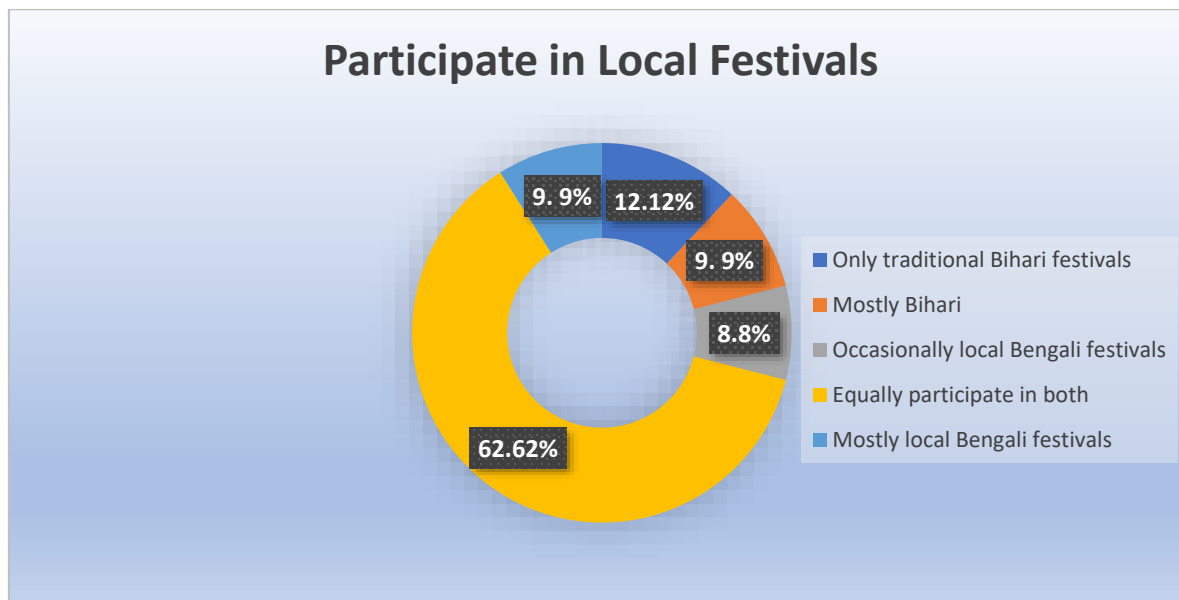


Figure 6. Participate in Local Festivals

Bengali festivals such as Durga Puja, Kali Puja, and other community celebrations provides opportunities for social interaction, strengthens neighbourhood relationships, and fosters a sense of belonging to the host society. At the same time, continued observance of traditional Bihari festivals reflects the preservation of ethnic identity and cultural heritage.

4.6 Communicating in the Local Language for Daily Activities

Figure 7 presents the level of comfort among Bihari slum dwellers in communicating in Bengali for daily activities in Siliguri City. The findings indicate that 42% of respondents feel very comfortable communicating in Bengali, while 35% are comfortable, 18% are somewhat comfortable, and only 5% are not comfortable and primarily rely on Hindi or Bhojpuri for communication.

The results suggest that a substantial majority (77%) of Bihari migrants possess a high degree of linguistic adaptability, enabling them to communicate effectively in the local language. Language proficiency facilitates access to employment opportunities, healthcare services, educational institutions, markets, and public offices, thereby enhancing migrants' participation in the socio-economic life of the host community. The ability to communicate comfortably in Bengali also promotes everyday interactions with local residents, strengthens neighbourhood relations, and reduces social distance between migrant and host populations.

However, the presence of respondents who are only somewhat comfortable or not comfortable communicating in Bengali indicates that linguistic barriers continue to exist for a segment of the migrant population. Such barriers may limit participation in local organizations, reduce access to information, and reinforce dependence on co-ethnic networks, thereby slowing the process of social integration.

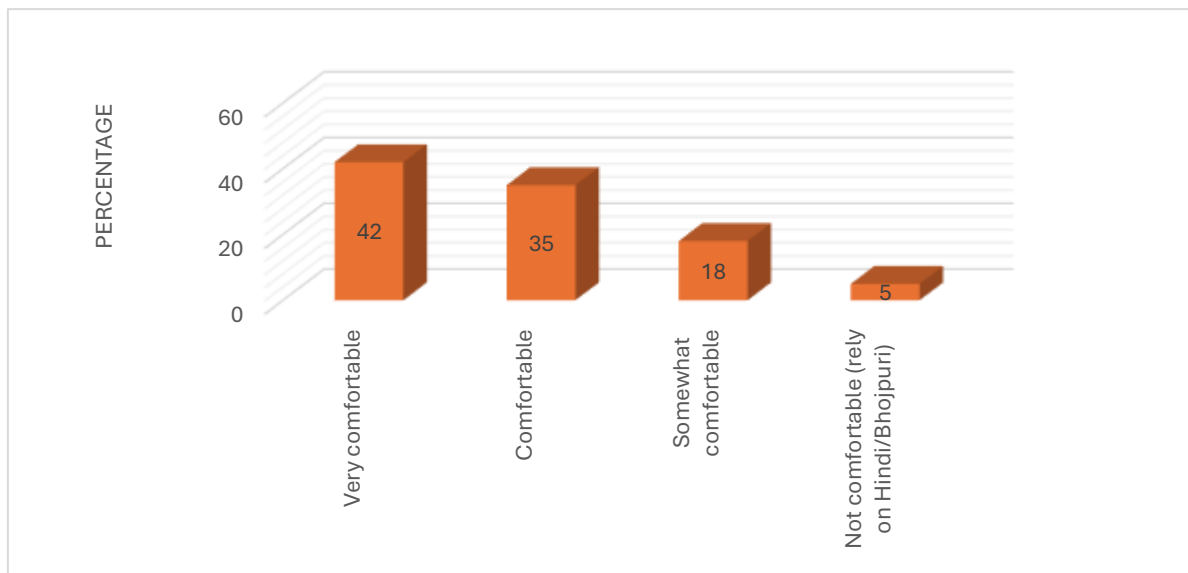


Figure 7. Comfortable Communicating in the Local Language for Daily Activities

4.7 Lifestyle Changed after Moving

Figure 8 illustrates the extent of lifestyle changes experienced by Bihari slum dwellers after migrating to Siliguri. The findings reveal that 44% of respondents reported a slight change in their lifestyle, while 36% experienced no change, 13% reported significant changes, and only 7% indicated complete adaptation to the local culture.

The predominance of respondents reporting slight lifestyle changes suggests that migration to Siliguri has influenced certain aspects of everyday life, such as food habits, clothing patterns, language use, social interactions, and leisure activities, without fundamentally altering traditional cultural practices and values. The substantial proportion of respondents experiencing no change demonstrates the persistence of ethnic identity and strong attachment to Bihari customs and traditions despite prolonged residence in the host city. Relatively a small percentage of respondents reporting significant changes or complete adaptation indicates that the process of cultural assimilation remains limited. Instead, migrants appear to adopt selected elements of the host culture while maintaining their original cultural identity. This pattern reflects a process of selective adaptation, whereby migrants adjust to the urban environment according to practical necessities while preserving core cultural values and social norms.

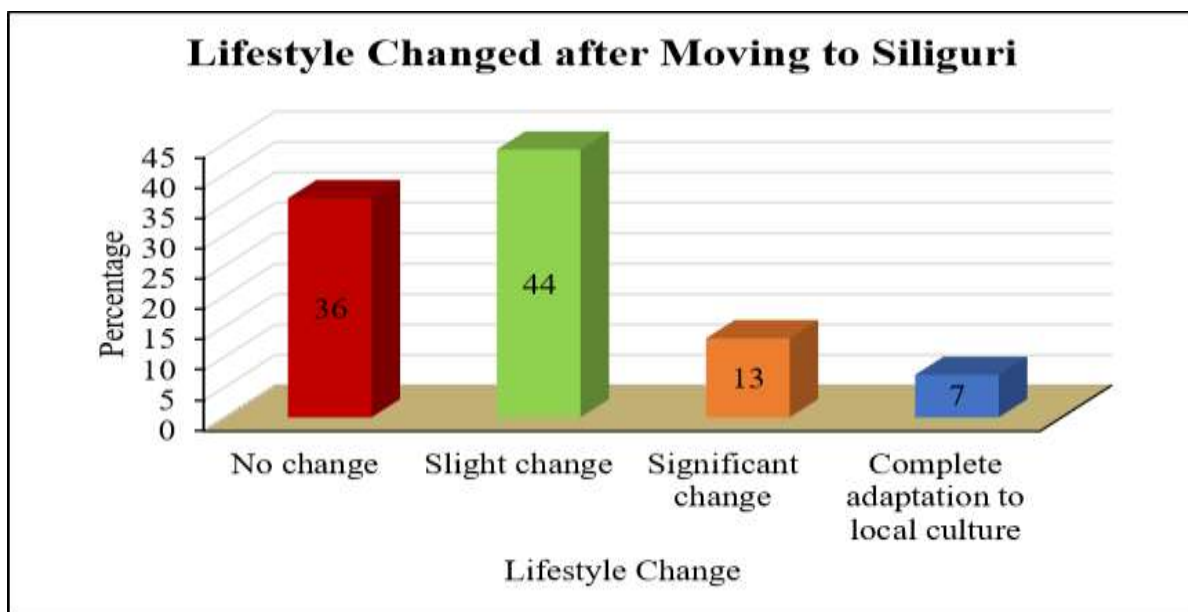


Figure 8. Lifestyle Changed after Moving to Siliguri

4.8 Local Community Organization Activities

Figure 9 illustrates the findings, indicating that participation in local community organization activities among Bihari slum dwellers in Siliguri is notably high. A majority of respondents (53%) reported participating very frequently in community activities, while 30% participate frequently, and 17% participate sometimes. And 2% of the respondents reported their participation in different activities.

The high level of involvement (83% participating either very frequently or frequently) suggests that Bihari migrants have become actively engaged in neighbourhood associations, cultural committees, religious groups, and other community-based organizations. Such participation facilitates regular interaction with members of the

local Bengali community, strengthens social networks, and promotes a sense of belonging within the host society. Overall, the findings demonstrate that local community organizations serve as significant platforms for fostering social inclusion, mutual trust, and inter-community cooperation among Bihari slum dwellers in Siliguri.

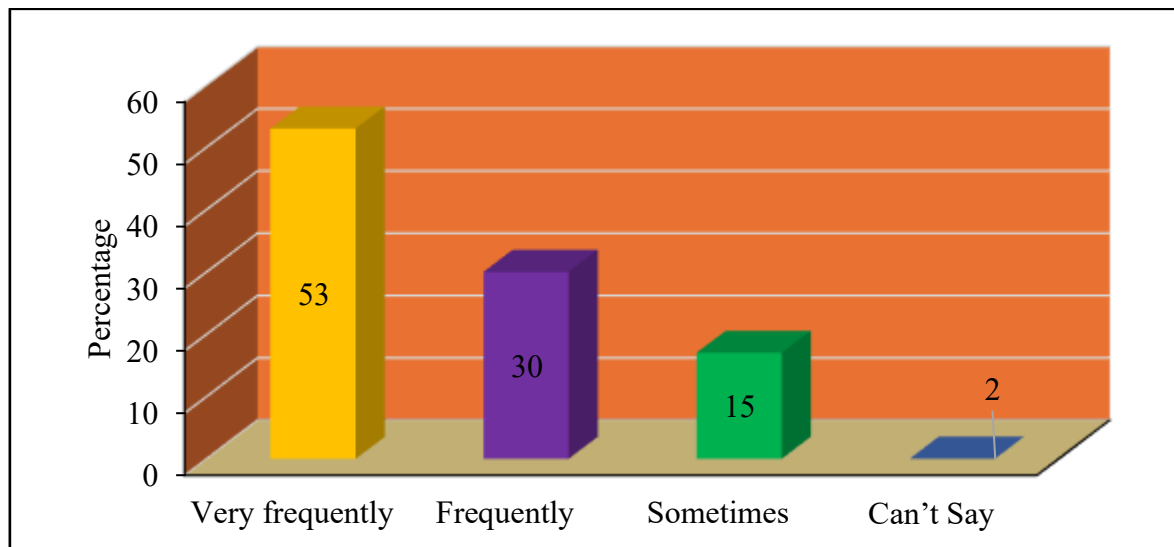


Figure 9. Participate in Local Community Organization Activities

From a sociological perspective, active participation in community organizations contributes to the development of bridging social capital, which helps migrants establish relationships beyond their own ethnic group and enhances social cohesion. It also reflects an important aspect of social integration, as migrants become involved in the social and civic institutions of the receiving community while maintaining their own cultural identity.

4.9 Cultural Practices

Figure 10 illustrates the extent to which Bihari slum dwellers in Siliguri continue to practice their traditional cultural customs and rituals. The findings reveal that a substantial majority (85%) of respondents strictly follow Bihari cultural practices, while 10% practice them partially, and only 5% do not follow these traditions at all. The predominance of respondents who strictly adhere to Bihari cultural practices indicates a strong sense of ethnic identity and cultural continuity among migrant households. Traditional customs, festivals, religious ceremonies, food habits, language, and kinship practices continue to serve as important mechanisms for preserving community solidarity and maintaining emotional ties with their place of origin. The persistence of these cultural practices demonstrates that migration to Siliguri has not significantly weakened migrants' attachment to their cultural heritage.

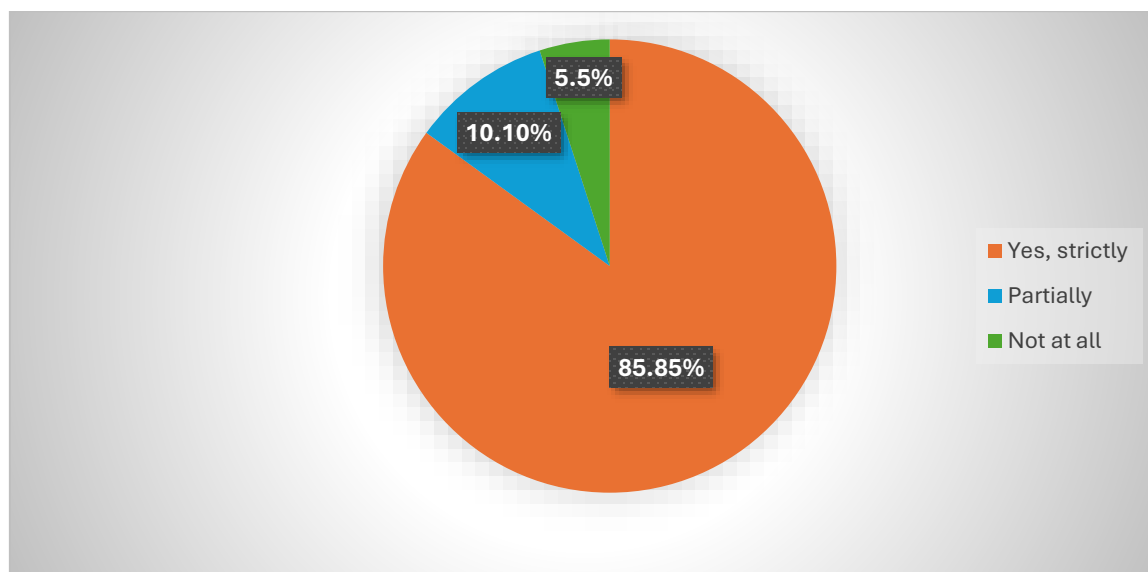


Figure 10. Bihari Cultural Practices

4.10 Cast a Vote at Siliguri

Figure 11 depicts the political participation of Bihari slum dwellers in Siliguri through their voting behaviour. The findings indicate that 67% of respondents cast their vote in Siliguri, whereas 33% do not participate in local elections because their voter identification cards remain registered in Bihar. The predominance of respondents participating in elections in Siliguri suggests a considerable degree of political integration and civic engagement among Bihari migrants. Voting in local elections reflects not only legal and administrative incorporation into the

host city but also the development of a sense of belonging and attachment to the local community. Political participation enables migrants to voice their concerns, influence decision-making processes, and strengthen their claims to urban citizenship.

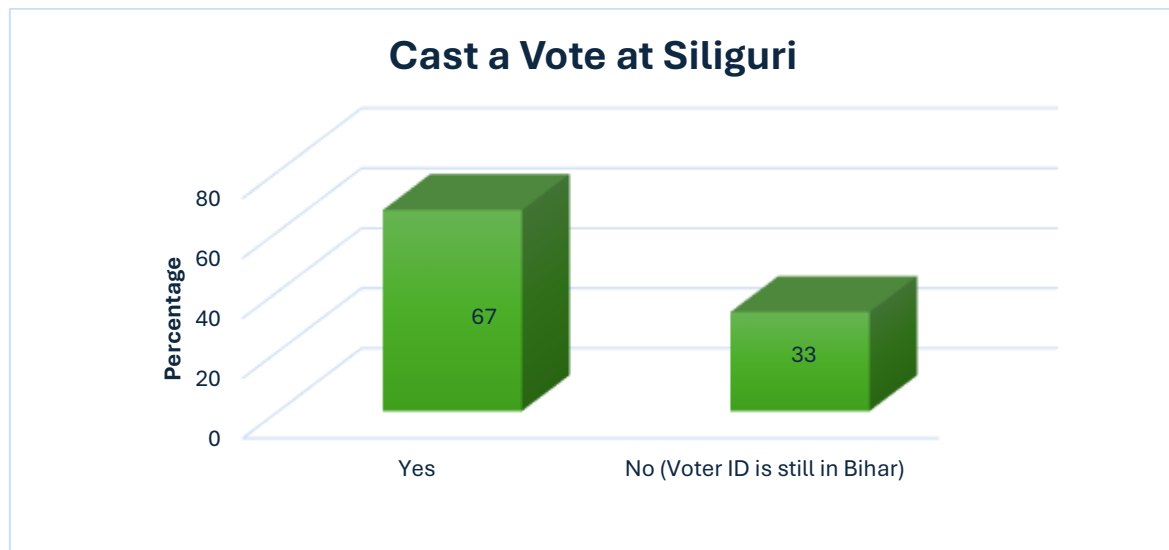


Figure 11. Cast a Vote at Siliguri

However, the fact that one-third of respondents do not vote in Siliguri due to the retention of voter registration in their native state indicates the existence of administrative and institutional barriers to full political integration. Maintaining electoral ties with Bihar may also reflect enduring emotional attachments to places of origin and the continuation of trans-local identities. Such barriers may limit migrants' ability to participate fully in local governance and reduce their representation in urban political processes.

Conclusions

The findings collectively suggest that Bihari slum dwellers in Siliguri have achieved a moderate to high level of social integration. Respondents maintain regular interaction with the local Bengali community, depend significantly on local neighbours during emergencies, participate actively in community organizations, and engage in local political processes. At the same time, they continue to preserve strong ethnic identities and cultural traditions, as evidenced by their adherence to Bihari cultural practices and dual self-identification as both Bihari and residents of Siliguri. These patterns indicate that social integration among Bihari migrants is better understood as a process of integration through cultural pluralism and selective adaptation, rather than complete assimilation into the host society.

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