CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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The importance of investigation of cities and towns has been increasingly recognised during the last few decades and the cities are evidently the focii of modernization and regional economic development. Besides, they are the centres of large-scale employment especially in secondary and tertiary services. In the introductory part of this thesis, the problem of research has been stated and its aim and significance have been outlined. Then follow the chapters, six in number (excluding the present one), dealing with the various aspects of the subject.

The first chapter of this thesis deals with the geographical background of the region under study. The North Eastern India with an area of about 2,55,050 sq.km. and a population of 31.4 million is strategically of great importance. It has international boundaries with China, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The region shares 7.8 percent of the area of the country but has only 3.5 percent of the population of the Indian Union. Comprising the states of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh, North-Eastern India is a major economic region of the country.
The remoteness of the region from the centre and her geographical location are among the reasons why its economic development including transport has failed to keep pace with the tempo of progress in the rest of India. Difficulty of terrain, a large number of rivers, shortage of skilled labour and imbalance between export and import are some of the major hindrances to the rapid growth of urbanization in the North Eastern India.

However, the region's irrigation schemes, power generation, mineral wealth and forest resources forecast a bright future. In fact, there is scope and need for the further improvement of the transport and communication systems, as the region is experiencing all round development, especially in the fields of agriculture, mining and forest resources. The construction of rail-cum-road bridges over the Brahmaputra has brought a tremendous change in the roadways of the region. It is necessary to integrate and utilise the potentials of all elements of transport systems - railways, roads, waterways and airways to the maximum and develop them in an
integrated fashion. To sum up, the development of proper transport system is highly essential for proper and speedy development of the entire urban and economic scene of the north eastern India.

The settlement system of North East India has been analysed in Chapter - II. In 1991, 78.77 percent of the total population of the region was living in rural areas and the remaining 21.23 percent was in the urban centres. Thus the region has continued to demonstrate its traditional rural character. It is very clear from the foregoing analysis that the distribution of rural and urban population in the region is very uneven. According to the 1991 Census, the percentage of rural population to total population in Arunachal Pradesh is 87.20, in Assam 88.92, in Manipur 72.48, in Meghalaya 81.40, in Mizoram 53.90, in Nagaland 82.79 and in Tripura 84.70. The North East India, therefore, remains basically agricultural and rural (See table 2.1).

Thus it is apparent that the region has subsistence agricultural economy and the overwhelming majority of population is rural, scattered over 35,765
villages representing 78.77 percent of the whole nation. This means that 21.23 percent of the total population of the entire North Eastern India lives in urban areas against 26.13 percent of the country as a whole. The urban-rural ratio, urban population density, and urban per capita area indicate the position of urbanism in the region, which is much lower than the average for the country. Thus the North East India is very poorly urbanised with only 8 Urban Agglomerations (UA city with a population of more than 100,000) out of 299 UA of the country. It is also observed that a majority (52.67%) of the entire urban population of the region is concentrated in 181 urban centres with a population of less than 50,000 each. This shows that the region continues to be predominantly rural in character. It is also a fact that amongst 7 unit States, except Mizoram and Manipur, the proportion of urban population to total population is lower than the national average of 26.13 percent. The urban proportion is the lowest in Assam (11.08%) followed by Arunachal Pradesh (12.80%) and Tripura (15.30%).
It has been noticed that there are 8 Class I towns, 6 class II towns, 33 class III towns, 57 class IV towns, 50 Class V towns and 29 class VI towns in the region under study (Appendix - I).

Chapter - III deals with the evolution and urbanization trends in the North Eastern India during the period from 1901 to 1991. Urbanization is a relatively recent phenomenon dating essentially from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The proportion of urban population to the total, often called 'degree of urbanism', is a good measure to decide the level of urbanization. The process of urbanization is said to be on the march if the proportion of urban population to the total is increasing.

Peach1 rightly remarks that urbanization in India is different in many respects when compared to that in the West. One main difference is that the urban areas in India are growing mostly because of the exodus of rural population into the urban areas for employment.

The case of the North Eastern India is not different. Since urban growth is numerical growth and urbanization is proportional growth, this study has included the features of urbanization, like the relative growth of total, rural and urban populations and the progress of urbanization.

It is observed that urbanization in the present context is relatively a recent development. In 1901, there were 1,68,437 persons living in 16 urban centres which accounted for 3.36% of the total population of the region against 10.84% of the country. The subsequent decades were marked by a small change from 1,68,437 to 1,90,459 or 3.76% of the total population of the region. In 1921 a higher increase in urban population has been registered and the number of towns rose from 16 in 1911 to 26 in 1921 with a total urban population of 2,34,846. The decade 1931-41 further witnessed a remarkable increase in urban population from 2,86,845 or 3.99 percent of the total population in 1931 to 3,67,175 or 4.26 percent in 1941. Almost similar trends were found in the 1941-51 decade and only a new urban centre of Aizal was added in Mizoram.
The most spectacular increase of urban population took place in the decade 1951-61. The number of urban centres shot up from 30 in 1951 to 72 in 1961 and the proportion of urban population went up to 7.60 percent in 1961 from 4.48 percent in 1951. This is mainly due to the fact that the impact of partition of the country was very much significant in the growth of urban population in the region. In 1971 there were 101 towns with the proportion to the total population of the region rising from 7.60 percent in 1961 to 9.43 percent. During this period, numerous towns like Thoubal, Kakching, Moirang, Churachandpur, etc. in Manipur grew with very limited commercial and administrative functions.

The most remarkable increase in urban population took place in the last two decades of 1971-81 and 1981-91. The number of urban centres have increased from 101 in 1971 to 145 in 1981, and to 183 in 1991 and the urban population went up from 29,08,213 in 1981 to 43,82,005 in 1991 (Table 2.4).

This development owes primarily to increasing commercial activities consequent upon the increasing pressure of population on agricultural land on the one
hand, and the improved road communication connecting these urban centres on the other. Thus the urban development in the region shows an interesting trend from the beginning of this century (1901) when it was under the colonial rule to the present era of independence which is experiencing great stresses, and strains in spatial organisation.

To sum up, the progress of urbanization in the region is manifested in the following ways: Firstly, the number of urban centres in the region has progressively increased. Secondly, the proportion of urban population to the total has increased. Thirdly, the urban centres of higher order have grown faster than the smaller ones. Finally, several new urban centres have come up in the region.

The patterns of spatial distribution of urbanism in the region is discussed in Chapter - IV. Urbanism, like any other geographical feature, is unequally distributed over the earth's surface; the same is true in case of the North Eastern India too. The analysis of distributional aspects of urbanism is of great
significance in urban studies and it refers to the spatial dimension of the process of urbanization. Hence, the distribution of urban features like the urban settlements, urban population and its density, urban-rural ratios etc., are examined.

On the 7 states of the region, Mizoram has the highest percentage of urban population as it contains 46.10 percent as against the 21.23 percent of the entire region as a whole (Table 2.5).

The concept of potentially urbanisable areas has immense application value in regional planning. Hence, the Census of India has introduced two such concepts, one in 1961 and another in 1971. The concept of 'Standard Urban Area' introduced in 1971, will help in the further understanding of the urbanization trends in the region, since the limits of standard urban Area (SUA) are not going to be disturbed for at least another thirty years to come. In all the regions there are eight standard Urban Areas, the largest being the Guwahati SUA with a population of about 5,84,342 in 1991.
The study of the spatial variation in the distribution or urban-rural population ratios corroborates the views expressed earlier. In fact, the areas that have industries, good transport network and favourable topographical conditions for urban growth have shown a high degree of urbanism. However, it was observed that no clear-cut pattern in the spatial distribution of degree of urbanism is discernible. It has also noticed that most of the urban centres are located along the sides of the main river or main road of the region. The large size cities and towns have emerged as administrative headquarters, commercial centres and transport focii in the region.

To sum up, the transportational isolation, physico-cultural diversities, lack of encouragement for any outside capital investment on industrial output are the basic causes for the hindrances in the growth of urbanization of the region.

Chapter - V underlines the occupational pattern and functional nature of the urban centres of the region. The study of occupation patterns of the urban centres of the region, as per 1991 census figures, has brought
to light certain significant aspects which have a bearing on their functional nature. It is only about one-third of the region's population that can be categorised as 'workers'. The small population of working force may be one of the reasons for the slow economic growth in the region. The urban working population forms only 17.92 (Table 5.3) of total urban population of the region. However, its distribution among the urban centres of the region is highly uneven. It is significantly high for a few states like Mizoram (39.37%), Manipur (27.88%) and very low in Assam (7.52%) and Tripura (9.27%).

The study has revealed a strong rural setting for most of the urban centres of the region. As has already been mentioned, the percentage of non-workers to the total population of the urban centres of the region are comparatively high (82.08%). While this is the picture of the urban centres of the region as a whole, the spatial distribution of the non-working population at the regional level varies widely from one state to another. The highest number of percentage of non-workers is concentrated in Assam (92.48%),
followed by Tripura (90.73%) and Arunachal Pradesh (88.05%) vide Appendix - VI. In addition, a large number of females do not earn their living and are therefore, economically only semi-active or inactive.

The study of the functional classification of urban centres of the region is made on the basis of the occupational data of 1991 census. Webb's method of functional analysis is applied to reveal the functional characters of the urban centres of the region. The analysis has revealed that most of the urban centres of the region, especially the smaller ones have agriculture as a significant function. These are mostly the towns which are either located near the river banks or the road sides of the plains.

On the basis of the functional specialisation the urban centres of the region have been classified into seven categories and the number of towns attaining a high functional specialisation is quite small.

The theme of the Chapter - VI is to bring out a comparative picture of the pattern of urban growth and urbanization trends at the zonal level of the country of which the region under study is a part.
A detailed study in depth, at the zonal level is made. As pointed out earlier in India, 26.13 percent of the total population are concentrated in urban centres. Regarding the inter zonal patterns of concentration of urban dwellers in the country, the analysis of the table 6.1 reveals that the percentage of urban population to the total population amongst the zones of the country varies very disproportionately.

The highest percentage of urban population of 41.31 percent has been recorded in Northern Zone followed by southern zone (36.47%), Western Zone (33.89%), Central Zone (21.51%), North East Zone (21.23%) and Eastern Zone (17.96%).

Level of urbanization has been taken as an index of economic growth. The low degree of urbanization of N.E. India is obviously indicative of the relative backwardness of the region. However, from 1921 onwards the region had experienced a continuous urban growth which is also an accelerated one. With the completion of a number of major and minor irrigation projects in the region, its economy is gaining stability.
Since the region is endowed with rich mineral wealth, the development of mining and mineral-based industries is necessary and it will stimulate urbanization. The increase in the number of urban centres and subsequent increase in the urban population clearly indicate the progress of urbanization in the region. Further the increase in the average size of the urban centre in the region and the change in the proportion of urban population living in the class-I cities are the salient features of urbanism in the region.

To conclude, since several aspects of the distribution of urbanism and urbanization trends for the region as a whole has been studies it can be confidently observed that the N.E. India has a bright urban future.