ABSTRACT

Shimla is a city located in a geographically constrained region. Shimla has been changing its function since its establishment. The sole reason for establishing this town was its pleasant climate that pleased the British colonists. Shimla started off as a sanatorium and soon became a hill station, then the summer capital of the British Indian Raj, the summer capital of pre-partition Punjab, capital of the post-Independence Punjab, and the present-day capital of the state of Himachal Pradesh. With Shimla’s changing functions its importance kept growing. With increasing importance there was a manifold increase in the population too. The increasing population brought many problems to the town. Presently Shimla which started off as a ‘Sanitorium’ has almost turned into a ‘Pestilentarium’.

In the present study an effort has been made to study the changes in Shimla city since its establishment. Investigation has been done into the changes in demography, environment, administration, economy, and the peoples’ perception of the problems. For this, both primary and secondary data have been utilized. As the study is mostly historical, information has been collected from municipal archives, office documents of various departments, memoirs, various published and unpublished sources like travelogues, historic books, maps, photographs and newspaper cuttings.

Shimla started off as sanatorium. The climate of the town was believed to be recuperative and it reminded the British of their homeland. By the mid-nineteenth century, other than the health benefits the political and strategic importance of the town also was realized. This led to further growth of the town, especially in terms of the population. The increased population led to an increase in the number of problems in the town. The hill station kept growing and its problems kept increasing. Even in the post-Independence period the same trend continued. Presently Shimla has a number of problems. These include increasing congestion, deteriorating health, deforestation, shortage of water, problems related to garbage disposal, increasing traffic, sewage disposal problem, deteriorating physical and social environment, etc. Most of these problems have geographical and historical antecedents in the past.

Shimla was not at all a site suitable for the establishment of a town according to the Indian norms. A typical Indian town requires accessibility to reliable and perennial source of water, availability of enough and good agricultural land, and strategic (protected) location. The British, selected this site because of its cool climate which reminded them of
their homeland. Presently Shimla has neither the people who established the town nor the function for which it was established.

It has been hypothesised in the present study that most of Shimla’s problems are associated with the town’s unprecedented expansion, overpopulation, and its location in a geographically constrained and unsuitable terrain. It has also been hypothesised that the present-day problems of Shimla have historical antecedents that go back to the time of town’s establishment.

The hypotheses proposed in the present work stand vindicated. Shimla has experienced tremendous expansion ever since the establishment of the town. Most of the problems prevalent in the present Shimla are increasing with increasing population and thus the expansion of the city. As the town grew the number of problems increased and the existing problems intensified further. Most of the problems of present-day Shimla have historical and geographical antecedents. These problems have been with Shimla ever since its establishment as the site was not appropriate for the establishment of the city.