CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Shimla has been changing its function since its establishment. It started off as a sanatorium. The sole reason for establishing this town was its pleasant climate that pleased the British colonists. Even though Shimla was located in a geographically constrained region, it did not stop the British from establishing the town here. As its official importance grew, from sanatorium Shimla became a hill station. It also became 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 Himachal Pradesh. Thus Shimla has been in the limelight throughout its history. It has always had more than its share of attention. Along with the significance, Shimla has also had more than its share of problems. So much so that the town which started off as a ‘Sanatorium’ has almost turned into a ‘Pestilentarium’. With its changing function its population increased manifold. The increasing population brought many problems to the town, the major one being the shortage of basic amenities. The post-Independence period further witnessed an enhancement in its importance as well as the problems. From a hill station Shimla became a multifunctional city and from sanatorium it has turned into a pestilentarium. Presently Shimla is a city with overflowing population and an old structure.

The present study has been an effort to study changes in Shimla city since its establishment. Investigation has been made into the changes in demography, environment, administration, economy, and the peoples’ perception of the problems. Since the study is to a large extent historical, considerable amount of information was collected in the form of municipal archives, office documents, memoirs, various published and unpublished sources like travelogues, historic books, maps and photographs.

Secondary data were gathered from various government departments. Since the major characteristic of urbanization is the increasing population, the population figures were obtained from the Directorate of Census Operations, Himachal Pradesh. Other than this qualitative data were also gathered from secondary sources like old documents from the Himachal Pradesh State Archives, reports and documents of Shimla Municipal Corporation and the Himachal Pradesh Town and Country Planning Department. Besides this, satellite imageries and the Survey of India topographic maps were consulted from Himachal Pradesh Remote Sensing Cell, Department of Science and Technology, Government of Himachal Pradesh, and were used to study the changes in the pattern of landuse / landcover in Shimla.
However, lack of uniformity in the quantitative data (available parameters) and their temporal consistency with the Shimla Municipal Corporation and the Directorate of Census Operations, Himachal Pradesh has been the major constraint in the present work.

The analysis of the quantitative data was done using a few spatial statistical techniques. These included: Index of Primacy, Lorenz Curve, Index of Concentration and Location Quotient.

Primary data of qualitative nature was obtained from the field survey. Questionnaires were administered and information and data about the present state of affairs and the peoples' perception was also collected. Qualitative data was converted into quantitative data by coding the responses. Statistical techniques of correlation coefficient (using the SPSS software) and chi square were utilized to analyze thus quantitative data. Interviews with the people, who have been staying in Shimla for long and who have seen the transformation of the city over the decades were conducted. Their views about the growth and problems of the town were noted down.

Along with the records obtained from various government departments, pictures, maps, and newspaper cuttings which show the growth of Shimla over a period of time, its problems and changes that have taken place were rather very important sources of information consulted for this study. Photographs of various time periods have been compared to give an idea about the changes. They are the testimony of the transformation which has taken place in Shimla over the years. Photographs depicting various changes and problems of the city were taken for the study.

The present analysis of the history of Shimla has been done in the following phases: in the first phase Shimla started off as a sanatorium; the second phase marks its journey from sanatorium to hill station and pestilentarium; and finally is the third phase of post-Independence period, that is characterised by the escalation of problems started in second phase. In the first phase of history of the town, Shimla was discovered as an unadulterated virgin piece of land. It got recognized for its beauty and climate, which was believed to be recuperative. This also was a phase of nostalgia. The climate of the place was compared with that found in the British Isles. With this role Shimla started becoming famous amongst the British. The British including officers, women and children started migrating, leading to the increase in the population of the town. Efforts were made to create a replica of a British town on the hill top.
After the revolt of 1857, the role of Shimla as a health resort and a recreational place got converted into a hill station with strategic importance. With this its political importance grew. Now developmental activities, which were earlier slow, speeded up. The physical appearance of the town started changing. Many buildings, residential as well as official, came up. British and the Indian population, both increased in the town. Shimla was growing in all respects. But the growth was unsustainable as the number of problems was also increasing. The major reason for most of the problems was increasing population. Shimla had started deteriorating and was on its way to become pestilentarium. The post-Independence period inherited the character and problems of the pre-Independence town.

Since the beginning of the town urbanization has been at play in the town. Urbanization in most Indian states has been mainly a phenomenon of the 20th century. The pace of urbanization, however, has accelerated during the post-Independence period. Development and aggravation of primacy has been the major feature of the century. The state of Himachal Pradesh, which is the least urbanized of all Indian states, has also been experiencing a constant increase in urban population and primacy throughout this period. Shimla, its capital, has maintained its primacy in all decadal censuses conducted so far and the index of primacy has mostly been increasing. Presently its population is four times as large as that of the second largest city of the state. Thus our first hypothesis which states that Shimla has experienced tremendous expansion ever since the establishment of the town stands vindicated. Major factor conducive to the development of primacy has been the concentration of the social, physical as well as economic amenities in the town. In addition to resulting in primacy this has also given rise to many problems in the city. Problems prevalent in Shimla 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.

Congestion has been an age-old problem in Shimla town. It has been increasing year after year. Shimla town, during the pre-Independence period, was already in many places dangerously overcrowded, mainly its bazaar area. It had been noticed by the British that the town was undergoing both internal as well as external expansion. As the population in the city was increasing, the number of buildings was also increasing. The congestion mainly in the bazaar area was due to the excessive clustering of the buildings. Many recommendations, during the British period were made to even demolish some of these bazaars. But it never happened. This overcrowding led to unsanitary conditions in the area. This character of pre-Independence era was inherited by the post-Independence period. The
present analysis also shows that the centre of the city is still the most crowded part of the city. The households are not distributed evenly with respect to the area of wards. Rather they are concentrated in a few wards, thus increasing the congestion.

Congestion and overpopulation have been related to the spread of unhygienic conditions in Shimla. The town has had more than its share of disease outbreaks and epidemics. The outbreak of many diseases has been associated with the prevalent unhygienic conditions. Enough antecedents of bad health conditions in the city were found from the old documents of the Municipal Corporation, Shimla. It is clear that the unsanitary conditions arising out of overcrowding in the bazaar area, which is still the most congested area in the city, has been the main reason for many earlier diseases outbreaks and epidemics. During the post-Independence period increase in population has led to increase in the phenomena of developmental activities and construction. This has led to overcrowding in areas other than the centre and higher pollution levels resulting in deteriorating health conditions.

Deforestation is not a new problem in Shimla. The town is located on a ridge and used to be a forested area. These forests were cut either to make land available for houses or to obtain timber for use in construction. Although the British tried to ensure systematic exploitation of the forests of the hill states yet deforestation took place anyway. Timber was not only used for local building construction, but was also exported. Forests were cut in a ruthless and irregular manner. In the post-Independence period the same trend has continued. The tree cover in and around Shimla city is reducing at an alarming rate. Even though a new forest policy came into force in which no felling is to be allowed, still the right holders are being supplied with green timber. Deforestation is resulting from the constant increase in the population and the developmental activities. This along with other processes like overcrowding, overconstruction, cutting of hill slopes for construction purposes etc. are making the ecology of the place very week. The profound affect of deforestation is visible on the physical appearance of the hill station.

Shimla has been a water deficient place since its establishment. The geographical location of Shimla on The Ridge, makes it prone to problems of water shortage and its supply. There is no perennial source of water in Shimla and water has to be lifted from far off streams, or other sources, before it can be supplied to the city. This is done through artificial means. With these artificial means limitations of both capacity and mechanical failure are associated. Initially Shimla’s population was mainly dependent on the local
springs for its water supply. With the increasing population of the town, the daily requirement of water was also increasing. Water through springs didn’t suffice the increasing demand of the growing population of the town. Various sources of water were tapped at different time periods. Even in the post-Independence period with the manifold increase in population the demand for water also has increased many times. Municipal Corporation runs short of water throughout the year. Besides the per head domestic water requirement Municipal Corporation also requires water for fire brigade, public taps, public toilets, general cleaning of the city, water tankers etc. The problem of shortage of water intensifies during the summers due to the large size of floating population (tourist and commuters). Another problem of water in the town is its quality. With the onset of monsoon season and during other periods of inclement weather the problem of bad quality of water aggravates.

The problem of garbage disposal is very acute in Shimla. It is one of the major causes of the environmental degradation. The problem of throwing garbage on the hill slopes which has its antecedents in the past is spoiling the environment of Shimla. Initially a few incinerators were installed in the town for the disposal of the garbage. But their working was not satisfactory especially during the rainy season. With the increasing population the garbage generation also has increased. These incinerators were too small to handle the increasing amount of garbage in the town. Then a system of dumping the garbage was brought out. Garbage was dumped in an area near Jutogh. Later in 2001 a Garbage Composite Plant was installed on Shimla Dhalli by-pass road. Presently the population of the city is so high that the generation of garbage is higher than its rate of disposal to the Garbage Composite Plant. The problem is compounded also because of the inadequacy of the garbage pick up and processing facilities available with Municipal Corporation to ensure a clean environment.

Shimla has a circular pattern of roads. Most of the roads were constructed during the British period for pedestrian and animal driven traffic. Others were constructed at different time periods to increase communication in the town. Most of these roads were originally village tracks which were later widened where and whenever required. In the British period, traffic congestion, however, was conspicuously absent in Shimla. In the post-Independence period the mode and pattern of transportation both have changed. Currently Shimla has immense traffic problem. The number of vehicles in the city has increased tremendously. Traffic increases manifolds in apple and tourist seasons (summer and winter) resulting in immense congestion on the Shimla roads. The problem of increasing number of vehicles is
being aggravated by the narrow roads in the city. Roads are almost of the same width as they were when constructed. There are also other traffic related problems like that of parking, increasing ambient air pollution and number of road accidents which are associated to the increasing number of vehicles in the city.

Sewage drainage and its disposal has been one of the most intimidating tasks in the town since the beginning. Initially no uniform system was followed in the town. Several methods were adopted during different periods. By late 19th century the problem of sewage had been recognized by the British. With the increasing population and thus the increasing number of buildings the problem intensified. By 1880’s a new sewerage system was laid down that was designed for a small population. Till very recent time, in the post-Independence period, this same sewerage system was being continued in the city. Later in 2001 this sewerage system was upgraded and New Sewage Treatment Plants (STP) were established. Even though a little per cent of people face problem of blockage in the present sewerage system, some residents say that the present sewerage system is defective and inadequate. Others say that there is a problem of the inadequate utilization of the present system.

Increasing construction has been another problem in the town. It has been increasing ever since the establishment of the town. Construction has been a major reason for the deteriorating environment of the city. Most of the construction taking place in the city is unregulated and haphazard. Degree of slope is not considered for constructing a building. Especially alarming is the construction of high-rise buildings by both government agencies and private owners in highly vulnerable areas. Due to the mountainous terrain, construction in the town is mostly done by excavating of the hillsides. This weakens the understrata and ecology of the place. Thus human induced landsHde is a common phenomenon, especially during the rainy seasons. Construction of the multi-storey buildings puts further burden on the hills. Increasing construction is also posing threat to the heritage features as well. Shimla’s location in a highly earthquake-prone part of the Himalaya (zone IV and V) makes heavy construction even more dangerous. Even an earthquake of moderate size can cause considerable damage in this area, especially to increasing number of high-rise buildings.

Increasing urbanization and the progressive increase in the concentration of population has entirely changed Shimla’s environment. These processes are putting undue stress on the environment. Many species of plants and animals are becoming less abundant. Wildlife has been affected by human encroachment of the forest area. A major share of the
deteriorating environment of the city is due to the increasing atmospheric and noise pollution. The amount of dust is increasing in the city due to the increasing construction activities. Large number of vehicles and domestic fuel burning are other important sources of air pollution in the city. Increasing number of vehicles is also increasing noise pollution.

Climate of the city is also gradually undergoing change. Erratic climatic behavior has been observed to have increased in the recent years in the city and the state. Mean temperatures are going up. Reasons for this are global warming, deforestation, vehicular emissions, rising population etc. Population explosion is resulting in increasing overcrowding and tremendous pressure on the basic amenities. Many parts of the old town are fast turning into areas of decay. Slum conditions were the characteristic of the greater part of the bazaar area in the British period also. In addition to this, there have also come up slums in many other parts of the town. An important indicator of urban decay is the rise in the crime rate.

In the final analysis it can be concluded that the hypotheses proposed in the first chapter of the thesis mostly stand vindicated. Most of the problems prevalent in the present Shimla are increasing with increasing population and thus the expansion of the city. Thus our second and the third hypotheses which state that with expansion are associated many problems which are being faced by the town and the root cause of all the problems being faced by Shimla is overpopulation holds true in the present analysis. As the town grew the number of problems increased and the existing problems intensified further.

These problems have been mostly inherently associated with Shimla. Shimla was not at all a site suitable for the establishment of a town according to the Indian norms which required accessibility to reliable and perennial source of water, availability of enough and good agricultural land, and strategic (protected) location. The British solely selected this site because of its cool climate which reminded them of their homeland. It is a transplant of a British town in India. With this our fourth hypothesis which states that the problems of present-day Shimla have historical and geographical antecedents and fifth hypothesis that these problems have been with Shimla ever since its establishment due to the fact that the site was not appropriate for the establishment of the city, stands vindicated.

In the end, it needs to be emphasized that with its enviable history, geography and all these problems the town of Shimla presents to urban planners an enigma which needs to be handled with great care. The historical (though colonial) heritage and natural beauty
have to be preserved at all costs, but the people at large have to be provided all civic
amenities and facilities of urban living at reasonable cost. This is a challenge.

Dilemma before the planners, administrators, and politicians concerned about Shimla
is how to meet this challenge. Answer lies in identifying the root causes of all the problems
that the town currently faces. This has been very aptly and succinctly done by Sanan
(2009, p. 108) in the following paragraph:-

Shimla’s problems stem from sheer numbers. Its population jumped from 18,345 in 1941 to
46,150 in 1951 and then to over 1,50,000 in 2001. Add to this the daily commuters from ever-
widening feeder zones and the tourists, and you have a recipe for urban nightmare. While its
permanent population increased almost six times compared to ideal of ‘25,000 souls’ for which the
British planned it, basic infrastructure and facilities have failed to keep pace. Shimla residents and
planners seem to have almost forgotten that the city lies in a highly seismic zone. Utter disregard to
nature, despite existing rules prohibiting felling of trees; congested, expanding hodge-podge of
suburbs that starve for civic facilities are putting tremendous pressure on Shimla.

I think it appropriate to conclude and close this work with this quote, and hope that a
‘pestilentarium’ that Shimla has become would soon be a part of the history.