Urbanisation is a very recent phenomenon in Sikkim, noted for the first time in 1951 with Gangtok appearing as the lone town and the rest of the seven towns appearing only in 1971 on basis of "having Notified Bazar Committees". In 1981, they are again treated as towns "in order to maintain a similarity and comparability". The towns are situated in the southern part of the state where all the settlements are concentrated. In Sikkim only 16 percent of the total population living in the urban areas and majority of them is still concentrated in capital town, Gangtok (72 percent). The rate of growth of urban population has been high during the last decade. In general, the proportion of females is low and the rate of literacy among the male is higher than the females though it is steadily increasing in the female section. The scheduled tribe population, mostly Buddhist, constitute a sizeable portion of the urban population and their percentage is comparatively high in the towns which are located on the highlands. The majority of population belongs to Hindu religion which is followed by the Buddhists and Christians. The majority of the working population is engaged in the tertiary sector where trade and commerce together with transport, storage and communication hold the major part of the working population. About one-fourth of the workers are engaged in the secondary sector and majority of them are engaged in construction works. Industrially, Sikkim is very poor where a small number of workers are engaged in industrial activities. A section...
of workers is still engaged in primary sector though their number is gradually decreasing. The newly-born towns of Sikkim have received a large number of migrants which has a direct impact on increasing the rate of growth as well in changing the entire composition of population. The urban areas have received majority of its migrants from the surrounding areas of the state and neighbouring states like West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The majority of these migrants have settled during the last decade, particularly after the merger of the country. The migration is male-dominated and particularly belong to the working age group. Employment is the main reason for male migration which is followed by movement of the family.

The land use and morphological pattern of these Himalayan towns, whatever might be the size and location, are guided by the topography. In the highland towns the land use pattern is influenced by the ground stability, sunny face, and other altitudinal aspects. On the contrary the land use pattern is simple over the flat surface in the valley site towns. Most of these small towns covers only less than one sq km (except Gangtok) where about 30 to 80 per cent of the land is occupied by different urban activities and rest of the land by different non-urban uses like agriculture, forest, etc. But during the recent years land under agriculture and forest and the open spaces are gradually being eaten up by different urban establishment in spite of heavy cost on land reclamation. Residential uses cover the major part of the developed land followed by commerce and other uses.

The internal structure or the morphology of the town is very simple as the towns perform very simple functions. The size
and emerging functional character together with the phases of growth of these newly born small towns have given rise to the development of imperfect morphological zones. Generally, in the highland towns urban use occurs in several detached, small pockets usually strung along the major roads. On the contrary, the valley site town offers more compact structure. The structure of the small towns generally consists of commercial-cum-residential area, residential area with school, hospital and sometimes administrative buildings together with their staff quarters. The urban expansion has taken place both in horizontal and vertical direction over the three-dimensional topography. The urban scape in the administrative town is characterised by an indigenous shopping area which is surrounded by residential houses when other establishments like the hospital, the school and the district level offices and their staff quarters have developed in isolated manner. The non-administrative towns make a contrasting scene where the indigenous shopping area is surrounded by residential houses and other establishments located in and around the shopping area. In Sikkim, the functional segregation has just started to surface only in Gangtok and it is totally absent in the other small towns.

In Gangtok, the spatial distribution of the residential area is controlled by the topographical features and communication lines which is again guided by the topography. In the absence of any sizeable land, large compact residential area is absent. The majority of the residential houses are concentrated on the western slope of the Gangtok ridge as it offers gentle-sunny surface. In Gangtok, residential segregation by socio-economic classes has not yet appeared in true sense but it just started in some of the lo-
calities which is again controlled by the topography.

There is a number of shopping centre, in Gangtok but there is no well-developed Central Business District and the main market consists of two 'business streets' and the shopping row consists of both residential and wholesale shops and there are no clusters or segregations of the same variety of shops like cloth, medicine etc.

Considering all the functional establishments and the functional character of the working population, the small urban centres of Sikkim have a strong base for marketing activities and at the same time the pull of the administrative function of the headquarters towns is undeniable. These small centres perform very simple functions where the rural areas need a focal point for exchanging their little surplus and this basic role is played by the towns with their shops including hat or weekly market, banks, offices and similar institutions, the sum of which form the urban character. The types of services offered by these towns show that the size of population of a particular town is not the basis for the location of many functions in them as the towns depend on demand of the surrounding rural population. The functional character of the town is strongly influenced by their location. For instance, the valley towns function as commercial centres by virtue of their transport nodality while the highland towns thrive on the support of administrative functions. The extent of the 'service area' depends on the transport facilities and functional dominance of towns. Besides, a number of factors influence the extent of service-area in this Himalayan state which is characterised by thin distribution of population, poor transport facilities strongly guided by
the topography, limited purchasing capacity, unidirectional flow system, and strong extra-regional dominance. The economy of this small Himalayan state is not yet strong enough to sustain any large centre except Gangtok, the capital. Gangtok made the entire state its 'complementary region' in terms of economic, social, cultural and even sentimental attachment. No other town of this state takes this role though few of them are commercially linked up with a large number of rural settlements and thus exerting some influence over them. The rest of the towns are nothing but rural service centres.

In the Himalayan territories settlements play a diverse role in their spatial interaction pattern and the so-called hierarchical system is totally absent due to the uneven distribution of population. The region having a typical interaction pattern under the 'downflow' or 'gravity flow' system of commodities, is dependent on other regions where the higher order centres are generally located in the southern border of the region, and the lower order centres appear in the interior northern part. The pattern is further complicated by the unidirectional flow system together with higher transport charges where the lower order centres of the region may not be commercially dependent on the higher order centres of this state. There are strong extra-regional forces which effect the interaction pattern between the centres. Besides, the spatial interaction pattern is again complicated by the concentration of administrative functions in the lower order towns and poor concentration of functions in the non-urban market centres (bazar or rural market place).

At present, all the powers and functions relating
The problems of urban development is very complicated in this Himalayan state as the entire human habitation is largely controlled by the natural environment. The unstable nature of the Himalayan terrain not only creates a series of problems in the distribution and physical development of the urban settlements but at the same time it complicates the situation in many ways by changing the nature of problems in long run. Many of the problem related to urbanisation in Sikkim may be traced to the uneven distribution, unbalanced growth and disparity in the size of these small towns. The structure, irrespective of size, of these small towns is strongly influenced by the terrain over which the towns have developed. The unplanned growth of these fast growing towns has resulted a series of land degradational processes by destroying the pr-
otective forest cover which cannot be stopped by just expensive engineering measures. On the other hand, the lack of favourable space increases the intensity of land use which further puts pressure on the limited land, inviting a series of environmental problems. In fact, the spread of urban establishments changes the entire geomorphological character and it is very difficult to formulate any traditional land use plan for these small towns.

The urban problems are closely related to large concentration in small places where the rate of population growth is higher than the growth of housing, civic amenities and such other facilities. The problem is very serious in the capital town of Gangtok, the size of which is too big considering the settlement size of this Himalayan state. The rapid growth during the recent past has put enormous pressure on residence, civic amenities and existing public institutions.

Any development of civic amenities like water, drainage and sanitation is highly influenced by the surface configuration and the unstable topography together with heavy and long rainy season makes the cost of maintenance works very high. At present, there is no local self-government in the urban areas of Sikkim and different government departments look after them essential for the communities. The ecological background of this state needs regular maintenance and any small damage of road, drainage, water pipe or buildings may create a host of other problems.

The post merger-plan had a boosting effect on the process of urban development along with the overall development of the state and at the same time development of different social and public institutions and public utility services were encouraged.
During the post-merger plan period several schemes have been taken into consideration for the improvement of the quality of life of the urban population. In many cases the schemes are taken in isolation and coordination between different government authorities is very poor which limits the progress of such schemes. In this connection different government institutions like Town Planning Cell, Housing Department etc have started functioning. In spite of several development no master plan has so far been prepared for these towns including Gangtok. Even there is no specific administrative boundary for these small towns except Gangtok.

In this Himalayan state, urbanisation is still, mainly concentrated in Gangtok and other seven towns are very small in size, even remaining below the minimum level prescribed by the Census. These small towns are nothing but rural market centres though some of them function as headquarters of the districts which makes them different from many of the bazars (rural market place). The commercial and administrative activities are largely responsible for the growth and development of towns in Sikkim and both of them continue the process of urbanisation in this state. Restructuring of the administrative setup, since merger of the state in 1975, have encouraged the process of development in the district towns where concentration of several administrative institutions together with the emergence of a host of social and cultural institutions not only has increased the size but also has contributed to the increase in the nodality of these centres. In contrast, the commerce based valley towns have increased their nodality with the support of post-merger development in transportation system. It is true that urban character has not yet appeared in the towns of Sikkim.
except in Gangtok. By virtue of its administrative function Gangtok not only accommodates the bulk of living amenities but also the largest number urban population. In fact, the socio-economic level of this tiny Himalayan state could not support too many towns. The seven small towns are able to exert very limited influence on their rural surroundings but in no case they compete with Gangtok. But their role in the spatial interaction pattern is very strong and commercially most of them are not at all dependent on Gangtok due to the unidirectional flow system of this bordering state. Besides these towns, the bazars (rural market place) play a dominant role in the interaction pattern.