CHAPTER – VI
Conclusion

The trends of urbanization in India indicate urban growth at selected areas (mostly those which had some beginning in the past). Masses of people are migrating to such areas either from the small towns or the rural areas. Migration is also found in stages as observed by Bose (Ashish Bose 1974). The large cities are expanding in terms of population and areas, whereas the rural areas still accommodate a very large proportion of population; but there is a great disparity as defined by the economic indicators. In the west, however, such redistribution of population and economic activities in the big cities is associated with lesser and lesser population on the farms. Therefore, the observation is that the cities grow and rural areas lose their population. It is also observed in India, that not only is the population being concentrated in larger cities, but the problem of rural poverty and under-development is simply flowing into the urban areas. The large cities are thus growing in the number of poor people rather than through economic activities (P,B. Desai, 1968). Conditions of living in the urban areas are also not as they should be. The cities are overcrowded, congested and lack of housing and various amenities. (Balsara. 1970).

The majority of the people are still in the rural areas, and it is quite natural that the thinking in India should be oriented to the rural areas since the aim of any planning will be to benefit the maximum number of people with the available resources. While thinking of industrialization as a tool for economic development, it would be quite natural to think of avoiding large-scale concentration of
economic activities particularly of industries. However, the experience is that industry is largely concentrated at a few locations mostly in the big cities, but still as observed by Peach (G.C.K. Peach, 1968), industrialization and urbanization, so stably married in the West, are often divorced in India. Peach points out that the match-makers of policy have aimed at industrialization without urbanization and have achieved urbanization without industrialization. It could even therefore be said that, in a way, India is experiencing slower urbanization and rapid urban growth trends in the last six to seven decades. But the question is not that simple. It is necessary to examine the economic development and urban growth patterns simultaneously and more critically. To quote Peach again, the economic growth in India after the gaining of independence is spectacular, but it has not been the cause of urbanization or urban growth. Though industrialization has created large employment, it has not been sufficient to alter the occupational structure of the country's work force. The proportion of population living in urban areas has somewhat increased, but the proportion working outside the primary sector has not increased.

It will be seen from the above that the occupation pattern at the all India level has hardly changed. Urban growth and urbanization is thus not as much a product of industrialization and occupational changes, as of population shift from the poverty-stricken hinterland to the big cities, with which people have been identifying their hopes for the future. Not only industrial development and business, but also the Five-Year Plans and the various planning programmes such as housing and social amenities sponsored by the Government have generally been found to benefit the rich rather than the weaker sections of the society.
On the whole, the urbanization pattern and the development trends benefit a few and are tilted in favour of those who can control the resource allocation and generation. The rich and the new rich have quietly amassed wealth through land speculation, luxury housing, black market operations and tax evasion (Bose, 1974). The growing disparity in society (Dandekar and Rath, 1971; Bardhan, 1974) and the gap between the economic growth and social amenities put a strain on the lower strata of the society. The pattern of industrial and urban development in such circumstances is described by many as over-urbanization (UNESCO, 1957), bourgeois industrial and urban pattern. As Bose (Ashish Bose, 1974) points out, the problems of urbanization and urban development have not, however, received adequate attention. The Five-Year Plans leave it as a subject for local administration, though national issues are also involved. Bose also expresses that the municipal administrations are not in a position to deal with these problems as they are not strong enough to carry out necessary functions and are also centres of political pressurization, corruption and administrative inefficiency and are weak in resources (Ashish Bose, 1974). The issues involved in urbanization and urban development are really complex and are not just the matters of investment in urban infrastructure or just regulating the flow of migration to cities. The whole subject has to be understood in the wider context of the economic growth and the social and the political change.

While considering the problems of economic growth and urbanization, it has to be noted that by and large the Indian society is still a rural one. However, a process of rapid urbanization is already before us. On one side, we have the
metropolitanisation trends in the form of the growth of big cities and urban agglomerations, and on the other, we have large rural tracts with vast and growing rural population living on traditional farming with age-old beliefs and living patterns. A sort of dual society, thus, continues to exist with problems on both sides, and there are also the conflicts and clashes on the course to be followed for development and modernization of society as a whole. The western course of industrial and urban growth in the recent past is also before India and the other developing countries, but neither can they get a long gestation period for transforming their societies into modern-urban societies, nor can they pass on their burden to the other countries like the colonial powers (M.Ş. Gore, 1973). These countries are, thus, caught up in the trends of unplanned, imbalanced urban growth and many of them have adopted planned approach to their developmental problems to avoid or correct the inconsistencies, imbalances and inequalities. Some countries are ahead and others are watching them, but by and large all are sailing in the same boat with their eyes towards the developed countries and their sophisticated modern-urban societies.

Because of the high proportion of rural population and yet inadequate food production, arguments are always made that, countries like India should concentrate on agriculture, rural development and cottage industries rather than on the western type of industrial-urban development. This argument comes from two quarters. The western experts, especially the economists, think that industrialized countries should continue to produce industrial goods and agricultural countries produce agricultural produce for economic reasons, and others, essentially from Gandhian and Sarvodaya groups, who are opposed to the big cities because of their
association with the colonial rule. Thinkers like Jawaharlal Nehru, tried to take both viewpoints together, thus, trying to develop basic industries and improvement in agriculture. This thinking and the policies that followed, have led to a peculiar pattern of growth in India.

To briefly state again, the colonial rule in India laid the foundations of a particular development pattern in which urban and industrial growth took the typical shape in a capitalistic pattern. But a full-fledged capitalistic pattern was also not allowed to develop as industrialization was severely restricted and the urban-based administration was oriented to the needs of the colonial rule. The impetus to urbanization in India came from (1) centralization and modernization of the administration, and (2) opening up of the foreign trade. The resulting pattern was quite different from the pre-industrial society. Different types of urban areas such as railway towns, hill stations, revenue administration centres, civil and military cantonments, new trading and manufacturing centres etc., were created by manipulating the forces of growth. The municipal bodies were also developed as subservient bodies. Different new occupations and classes of people were created.

The British rule had another effect, which carried important implications for urbanization and urban growth trends related to modernization and social change. The new administrative system, educational system, transport and communication systems and industrial growth (whatever limited nature it had, and the restrictions on it) all had influence on the social organization here. In a way, the colonial rule was also responsible for the rise of political and social reformers coming forward and trying to introduce changes in the society.
With the increase of urban centres in the North East India, scholars got attracted to study the growth of these emerging new towns. Some aspects of urban phenomena which we have tried in this study have been studied by various scholars, but no one has attempted to study the urban social structure of Shillong. Though definition of a town differs from country to country and from time to time within a country, definition of town given by the Indian census 2001 has been used in this study. Thus, demographically, Shillong has been classified as Class I town by the census of India (2001).

Shillong today is an integral part of the urban system of North-east region, which is in nexus with metropolis of Calcutta urban system developed around the port. The growth of the city can be attributed to the peculiar location of the city in a predominantly tribal and hill areas with limited sedentary agricultural practices and inadequate transport linkages within and surrounding region. It is located at about 5000 meters above mean sea level, and its location provides relief for exasperated administrators, the planters and other fortune seekers from the oppressive climate and often hostile social life of the plains. No doubt, the British colonial rulers had reasons to call it as the “Scotland of the East”. The objective of the present study was to understand the urban social process conceptually and empirically. Apart from reviewing the relevant literature and identifying the nuances of colonial heritage in Shillong, we tried to uncover the quality of modernity found in the city empirically from two select localities.
The influx of the various ethnic groups in Shillong has had both positive and negative effects. From the positive side, the influx has brought about development in the field of education, business and other activities. It brought about a sense of unity and integrity among the locals. It makes the local people to work and strive harder, and to have a healthy competition. This would definitely raise their standard of living. The Khasis are believed to have had a healthy interchange of ideas and cultural values through the past years. Whatever problem that has come about is not because of the influx and their intermingle, but because of the failure of one’s determination, breakdown of the family, norms, mores and values in the society. Anti-social elements are present everywhere, and they exist in whatever existing population.

On the negative side, the scene is different. The influx of the ‘outsiders’ (all the other ethnic groups, not belonging to the Khasi community) have caused nothing but antagonism. Many Khasis believe that they would be better off without the intrusion. The various social evils like drugs, alcoholism etc. have all been brought about by other neighbouring groups, for example from Manipur, or Nagaland. Though there is no hard evidence for this claim, but one thing that is sure is that it never existed in the indigenous society. Also, due to the influx, unemployment is rampant, admission into colleges has become more difficult, more drop-outs, and to get easy money, outsiders lure the local youths into all kinds of anti-social activities like drug peddling and the like. Lastly, the failure of the state law machinery and religious institutions to check on this have also been thought off.
The various ethnic groups in Shillong are being treated equally amidst ethnic diversities. Their relationship in day to day life is being maintained in a cordial manner. What is expected from this relationship is a friendly environment. For a ‘Khasi’, he would prefer safety, security and peace with the other members, and this happens likewise too for other ethnic groups.

Shillong city from time to time organises sports events, shows, tournaments, competitions etc. All are expected to be given a fair chance in such events. For example, the Laitumkhrah Sports Social and Cultural Club, which opens up door for people of all ethnic groups to participate. In social gatherings like a ‘get-together’ of every locality, or during Christmas, pujas, diwali or marriage ceremonies we find members from different ethnic groups participating. Similarly, during cultural programmes like the Shad Nongkrem (Khasi religious dance) at Smit for example, Khasi folk would always invite friends from other communities to attend. They too would always co-operate. Cultural programmes that are sometimes organized, give a fair chance to all the groups to participate.

The cultural relationship that exists in Shillong is the kind of relationship that Simpson and Yinger call pluralism. The pluralism that is reflected in Shillong is when both the majority, and the minority value their distinct cultural identity, while seeking at the same time economic and political unity. The minority group members cherish their cultural heritage and do not wish to loose it, and the dominant group is willing to accept cultural variations. In Shillong, groups live and let live; they respect one another’s differences, but no one tries to change anyone
else or make them conform to a conception of 'correct' culture or life-style, adding to lusture to the ethnic mosaic of the city of Shillong.

Shillong, is not only of diverse ethnic group, but also of diverse religious beliefs. There are ‘Christians’, who include the Presbyterians, the Catholics, the Baptists, the Seven-Day Adventist, and other non-denominational faiths; the Muslims, the Hindus, the Buddhists, the Sikhs, the indigenous religions, which do not come into the limelight much. Every religion is expected to be treated at equal level. What is amazing in Shillong is that, there has been an adoption of each other’s religion amidst the differences in ethnic identities, i.e., a Khasi becoming a Hindu, and a Hindu becoming a Christian. Further more, this adoption does not deprive them from any sense of achievement. Majority say that he or she is identified and accepted from both sides, both as a Khasi and a Hindu, or as a Hindu and a Christian at the same time. But then, we cannot ignore that both sides have their share of negligence. One would say, a Hindu becoming a Christian should be thrown out of the group, or for a Khasi becoming a Hindu likewise. This kind of development has agonised the youth, as reflected in ethnic identity or communal conflicts.

The post-independence period envisaged a total re-organization in the power structure of Shillong. The all important British bureaucrats had gone away and the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution ensured certain legal guarantees to the scheduled tribes. The new bureaucrats turned out to be the plainsmen, more familiar but less acceptable. The presence of new rulers, the national political parties – was hardly noteworthy in the city. There was emerging
a rudiment of more aggressive tribal middle class. The newly introduced
development and welfare schemes needed personnel and skills at all levels. The
small administration was enlarged. A better infrastructure – roadways, buses, posts
and telegraph, banks, schools - was introduced in large numbers. In such a
situation, Shillong turned into a place of opportunities. All these resulted in the
swelling of the urban population (Sinha A. C. 1993).

In Shillong, apart from Shillong Municipality, the tradition authority of the
Durbar Shnong (local council) has the most important function and role to play.
The functions of the Durbar Shnong is to look into the problems and affairs of the
people irrespective of ethnic diversities, and to create a peaceful relationship
amongst them. Slight tension that may creep up is being dealt with in a very proper
and smooth way. Anti-social elements are being dealt with fairly. Whether it is
related to drugs, alcoholism or extortion of money, persons found indulging in
such activities are being severely punished.

From the foregoing analysis of the chapters, the following broad findings can
be highlighted;

(i) Shillong was established mainly for administrative purposes.
Throughout the history of its evolution, it has ascribed a certain degree
of specialisation to its service and functions which seems to continue in
future as well.
(ii) The overall position of Shillong Urban Agglomeration within the total urban population of the state is overwhelming. Whereas the total urban population of the State constituted less than one-fifth of the total population of Meghalaya, a disproportionately large share of the urban population of the state resides in Shillong, which accounts for about 72 percent of the total urban population of the State.

(iii) The city has undergone a radical change from a hill resort to a multifunctional service city, catering to a host of administrative and other service functions not only for the State but for the entire north-east region.

(iv) Shillong has also developed as a commercial centre, stretching its hinterland to the neighbouring States of South Assam, Mizoram, Tripura etc., as an important transit point in trade and commerce. With location of various types of market, and offices of the various financial and business houses, the town has emerged as an important commercial centre operating as an outlet for products of this region to various other states of the north-east and vice-versa. Shillong has been attracting people as an important tourist center and health resort.

(v) The distribution of housing in space produces its social differentiation and specifies the urban landscape. The distribution of residential location follows the general laws of distribution of products and services, and, consequently, brings about regrouping according to the
social capacity and affiliation of the citizens, that is to say according to their income, education levels, ethnic composition etc., resulting in social stratification in the urban system. Thus, distinct ethnic groups by their concentration in a particular locality have acquired particular characteristics.

(vi) On the basis of economic conditions of the inhabitants, age of buildings, amenities and degree of congestion, the residential area of Shillong is classified into four categories, namely, high class, middle class, low class and slums. It is interesting to note that these residential areas have followed some definite trends with the expansion of the town, which incorporated most of the fringe areas as intermediate zones, while new fringe area developed recently will serve as periphery.

(vii) Of the total area of 17400 hectare in Shillong, 31.58 percent is developed, 9.04 percent underdeveloped and 4.62 percent under urban agriculture. The total area under administrative use is 117.93 hectare or 0.68 percent of the total plan area. There has been tremendous pressure on land and land value has increased manifold within the municipal area, during the last decade. Further, due to non-availability of buildable land within the municipal area, the development of residence has sprawled along the major arteries of the capital.

(viii) The upcoming satellite urban centres like Madanyrting, Nongthymmai, Mawlai, Nongmynsong have higher pace of intensification in
comparison to Shillong Municipal area. This indicates the steady
development of fringe settlement, than the core of the city.

(ix) Traditional law pertaining to the land, forest are for preservation of the
tribal right against the encroachment by non-tribals. By definition, the
process of urbanization cannot be ethnic specific. So urban
development will mean emergenc of multi-ethnic, social mozaic.

(x) The participation by its citizens in Shillong suggests a political culture
which has a split image. It is pre-dominantly a Khasi tribal town in
which display of Khasi cultural traits is pronounced. At the same thime
the tribesmen appear to be reluctant to participate and share with the
non-tribals the formal political structures, associations and institutions.

Shillong is mainly administrative and residential in its functional character
and this character has been maintained basically. Its commercial and educational
functions have developed more or less in proportion with the increase in the
population, whereas the defense function has assumed much greater significance
during the last few decades. Shillong is also the centre for employment, a
collecting and marketing point for products of the surrounding areas, a distribution
centre for incoming goods, a centre for providing higher education and specialised
health services for the whole supporting area providing entertainment and cultural
contact facilities, a centre dissemination of information through various
communication media, and above all, a centralizing point for the local as well as
sub-regional thoughts and feelings. It is a place of refuge to surrounding people and their ideas as well as a reservoir of new ideas.

The most significant point in respect of the influence of the city is its functional linkages with Brahmaputra valley on the north and the Barak valley and the adjoining states of Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura on the south, south-west through Silchar, the largest town in that valley. Its interaction with the plain areas in terms of people, goods and ideas is an important as the city’s interaction with its own hinterland in the surrounding areas.

If modernity is defined purely in descriptive terms such as high rate of urbanization, predominance of non-agricultural source of income, interpersonal relation not based on kinship and ethnicity in terms of profession and other group interest, then Shillong perhaps is not very modern. The large majority of the population of Shillong are the Khasis and their personal relationship is governed mainly by ethnicity and cultural identity. Electoral politics in Shillong is not free from this consideration. The Church and Khasi traditional Durbar play a very important role in Shillong among the Khasis. Regarding the source of income, majority of its citizens in Shillong prefer government jobs, as both large and small scale industries being almost non-existent in Shillong. A small section of citizens are managed to reckoned their livelihood in trade and commerce like whole-sellers and other consumer goods. It is true that high rise of RCC buildings are replacing the Assam type houses very fast.
The claim of modernity and modernization in Shillong has already created visible problems, that is the evils of so called modernity. The Shillong town is not a planned town; it grew and developed on its own. The roads of Shillong were not made for maintaining and adjusting so many vehicular traffic. Shillong is perhaps one of those State Capitals in the country, where National Highway passes through the middle of the town. As a result, it has given rise to traffic jams, congestion and so on. It has been observed that many people have become rich by way of getting contracts from the Government, wholesale dealership, setting of medical nursing homes etc. This section of people may claim to be modern on the basis of their income and occupation. Another group of people, who are in government service, lead a life closer to the above segment of the population.

It is true that like any other big cities in India, luxury hotels including restaurants, cinema halls and up-to-date fashion shops are coming up but these cater only a small set of urban population, like big businessman, beaureaucrats and politician. But this can not be treated as a sign of modernity. Shillong cannot be regarded as a modern town in terms of education. Various colleges in and around Shillong including North Eastern Hill University impart education mainly in traditional subjects in arts and science. There is no professional and technical institution worth their names like medical, dental, engineering, and other professional institutions in Shillong.

Undoubtedly, these, “non-tribal towns in the tribal settings” (such as Shillong) were not established with active tribal participation. The non-tribal institutions such as public buildings, corporations, schools, libraries, clubs etc. are
considered as alien, strangers and unwelcomed industries. As such distant forces created the cities and provided them with some of the historical landmarks, the same paternalistic attitudes continue to be relevant. In case one asks “whom do the city belong” and “who governs it”, the answers are not obvious. This city do not belong to the common citizens, in the sense that they control the urban affairs; governs its establishments; plan for its development and feel proud of being its citizens. It is still, by and large, the formal state bureaucracy, which governs the city. But the days are not far when acute urban problems, such as housing, transportation, slum-clearance, environmental pollution, vagrancy, intoxication, urban crime against property, ethnic conflicts etc. will go beyond reasonable limits. These will be the heritage arising out of urbanization without industrialization.

“The dominant ethnic groups of this city appear to have an ambivalent attitude to the city in which they live. It seems that in the ultimate analysis, they identify themselves less with the city and more with the particular tribal traditions, in which urban experience is a new phenomena. They are masters of the affairs on the exclusively ethnic platforms, but their own city, which is decidedly ethnic plus provide an arena beyond their past experience. The civic problems are complex and demand specific care. The common impression one gets that even knowledgeable and concerned citizens do not like to take all the possible advantages of the urban living, but in their own involvement in the civic affairs they follow the ‘haat’ ethic” (Sinha, A. C. 1993).

The constitutional provisions of safeguarding the tribal customary laws come on the way while implementing many of the above decisions taken at the
formal level with a view to solving at least some of the urban problems. There is even impressive Master Plans for future development of Shillong. They are excellent example of good intentions, but will and commitment to improve the quality of life appears to be missing. Thus, the city of Shillong may be condemned to remain a tribal enclave with modern trappings and citizens may be subjected to the ills of a chaotic town.