

Physical and Socio-cultural Setting and Urban Growth in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Physical setting and socio-economic characteristics have an impact on growth of an area in general and similarly population growth in an area is also the outcome of fertility, mortality and migration in particular. The urban growth rate in Himachal Pradesh is moderate. The present paper attempts to study the growth of urban population in Himachal Pradesh. The hill state of Himachal Pradesh urban centers evolved at different periods, at different location and with different objectives. Besides, these urban centers have diverse physical characteristics and their different economic base. The basic premise is that there are differentials in population growth of town in term of size and other characteristics of towns. It is analysed that higher order administrative centers, such as district headquarters are growing relatively fast due to considerable immigration. By contrast, growth rate of cantonment towns has been slow because of their exceptionally low rate of natural increase.

Keywords:Urban Centers, Towns, Hill State, Physical Characteristics, Urban Growth

Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is one of the hill states of India and it lies in western Himalaya. In 1991, the state covering an area of 55673km and recorded a population of 5,111,079 persons, distributed in 16997 inhabited villages and 58 towns. Shimla the state capital, is the largest urban center in the state. The growth rate of the state is moderate. Its entrance in the group of class 1 town (100000+ population) in 1991 makes a land mark in urban history of the state. The urbanization as a socio-cultural process led to the transformation of the society. (Mandal Chanchal & Dr. Bhattacharya Dahlia, 2014)

Himachal Pradesh is one of the youngest states of India. On April 15, 1948 it came as a centrally administered territory, with the amalgamation of 30 odd princely states which were merged together for this purpose. On January 26 1950 it was raised to the status of a part 'C' state in the constitution. On July ,1954, Bilaspur, another princely state and latter a part C state was also merged with it.

On November 1,1966 when Panjab was reorganized lingual basis, its Hindi speaking hill area s were merged with Himachal Pradesh. This played an important role in giving compactness, necessary for administrative efficiency.

On January 25th, 1971, Himachal Pradesh was conferred the status of full statehood. This state provided the necessary autonomy in managing the administrative and developmental affairs.

The state is divided into 12 districts and 101 tehesils/sub-tehesil. Among 58 towns in the state, are administrative headquarters of varying importance as state/ district/ tehesi/sub-tehesil/development block headquarters.

Objectives

1. To study the physical setting and socio-economic characteristics of towns hill state of Himachal Pradesh.
2. To study the growth of urban centers in term of size, status and site.

Research Methodology

The information for the present study is collected from the Census of India, 1981 and 1991 and government documents and website. The towns are grouped on the basis of size, status and site. The association between size and growth rate, status and growth rate and site and growth rate are worked out by calculating their growth rate as a group. Some hypotheses are tested and validity of these hypotheses has been testified through the analysis of data on town growth during 1981-91.

Research and Discussion

Physical Setting

The state displays a wide variation in its relief ranging from 300 to 7000 metre above the mean sea level. More than one-third part of the state is higher than 3000 metres in elevation. The state can be divided into four physiographic regions: (i) Shivalik hill and intervening dunes (ii) the outer Himalayas and the Pirpanjal, (iii) The greater Himalayas (The Zaskar range); and (iv) the trans- Himalayas.

The basins and lower reaches of the Satluj valley are located between Shivalik hills and the Dholadhar from Pirpanjal range. The upper reaches of the Satluj and the Spiti valley are located in the trans- Himalayan tract.

The climate ranges from sub-tropical to alpine, corresponding with elevation and aspect. Areas at an altitude of around 2000 metres experience snowfall during winters, above 5000 metres there may be perpetual snow. Vegetation follows relief, climate and rock types. Pineforests abundant at an altitude of 1000 to 2000 metres, deodars and oaks are more frequent at 2000 to 3000 metres. These are replaced by alpine forests at higher altitudes.

Briefly, Himachal Pradesh is endowed with physical resources typical of a hill state water, forest and scenic beauty. A variety of climate, admirably suited to fruit cultivation and off-season vegetables is experienced. Climate plays a negative role also in higher altitude. It acts as a hindrance in agricultural and infrastructural developments.

Socio-Economic Characteristics

Overwhelming majority of population is Hindu (96.0 per cent). The remaining small proportion is nearly equally divided among the Muslims, Sikhs and Buddhists. Tribal population accounts for about 5.0 per cent of the total population. It is confined mainly to Kinnaur and Lahul & Spiti districts as also to parts of Chamba district. Important tribes include Kinnauris, Lahulis, Pangwals, Gaddis and Gujjars.

Population is sparsely distributed. Population density was 92 persons/km² as compared to 267 for country as a whole. The higher parts of the state, falling in trans-Himalayan region, are almost devoid of population.

Rural population is distributed in hamlet types of settlements. Population is mostly concentrated in river valleys where soils are fertile and water is available, both for drinking and irrigation. The Jaswan and Poanta dunes are also densely populated.

A large majority of towns are located in river valleys amidst the rural population concentration. However, quite a number of these were developed on hill tops or spurs by the British for defence and health point of view.

With 68.69 per cent of the main workers directly dependent upon agriculture, Himachal economy is predominantly agriculture. Interestingly, however, there is quite equitable and ubiquitous distribution of landholdings in the state. Overwhelming majority of the holdings are small in size and more than 95.0 per cent out of the agriculturists are owner cultivators.

Majority of holdings being small to very small, open the way to outmigration of male-selective migration stream from the way state to towns down below in the plains of Haryana, Punjab and other parts of north India left behind family members to look after the land.

Over a half of the state income comes from primary sector including crop production, animal husbandry, etc. Secondary sector contributed hardly one-sixth of the total income and service sector shared one-third of the total Income (Table 1).

Table 1

Himachal Pradesh and India : Net State/National Product at factor cost by Industry of Origin, 1981-82 (at 1970-71 Prices)

India/State	Contribution made by		
	Primary Sector	Secondary Sector	Tertiary Sector
Himachal Pradesh	51.16	16.58	32.26
India	41.86	21.23	36.91

It shows that service sector and manufacturing sector in the state are not moving concomitant with each other. This is because of poor industrial base due to uneven topography and peripheral location of the state.

All this has a bearing on the urbanisation process in the state. There is thus little scope for rapid growth of urban centres. Relatively fast growth of administrative centres is in line with the expansion of the tertiary/service sector.

The state is yet to see the emergence of big industrial concentration. However, in recent years some efforts done by the government in this direction are paying some dividends. In lower parts of the state, industrial centres at Parwanoo, Baddi-Barotiwala, Mehtpur, Barog, Poanta valley, Kala Amba are coming up under the government policy of wooing the industries.

Some hypotheses on urban growth in Himachal Pradesh

The study intends to test some hypothesis on urban growth in Himachal Pradesh. The premise is that the growthbehaviour of towns is associated with their population size, administrative status and site/location.

1.Size and town growth

A positive relationship between the size and growth rate of a town is hypothesised. Bigger the size of a town, higher the growth rate. Places enjoying urban status, both in 1981 and 1991, were listed and their population noted for both the census decades. The relationship between size and growth rate was worked out by grouping the towns on the basis of their size and by calculating their growth rate as a group.

Table 2 reveals that class V towns had the highest growth of 49.35 per cent followed by Shimla with 44.73 per cent, the only class town of Himachal Pradesh as per 1991 Census. Class IV towns recorded 35.94 per cent growth. Class III towns had the lowest growth of 19.94 per cent. In this category, there were four towns of Mandi, Nahan, Solan and Sundernagar. Former three are district headquarters and the latter one is a hydel project township. Their growth behaviour widely differs. Solan registered a high growth rate of about 66.0 per cent while Sundernagar registered decline by 1.8 per cent. Excluding Sundernagar the growth rate of the category comes to about 29.0 percent. With upward movement of Shimla, no town was left in class II category of towns. The class VI towns experienced only 21.13 per cent growth. The result reveals that urban growth in the hill state of Himachal Pradesh was not related directly to size of towns.

Table 2

Himachal Pradesh: Growth rate of towns/urban agglomerations by population size category, 1981-91

Category of town by size class	Number of towns	Growth Rate in Percentage (5)
Class I (100,000+)	1	44.73
Class II (50,000 - 99,999)	-	-
Class III (20,000 - 49,999)	4	19.94
Class IV (10,000 - 19,999)	7	35.94
Class V (5,000 - 9,999)	9	49.35
Class VI (less than 5,000)	26	21.13
New town	11	-
All categories	58	37.80

Source:(i) Census of India (1981): General Population Tables, Part II-A, Series 7, Directorate of Census Operations, Himachal Pradesh, Shimla.

(ii) Census of India (1991): Primary Census Abstract, Part 11-B, Series 7, Directorate of Census Operations, Himachal Pradesh, Shimla (Memeograph).

2. Status and town growth

The growth of urban population of a town varies with its status and importance.

Table 3**Himachal Pradesh Growth rate of towns and their status, 1981-91**

Category of towns by their status	Number of towns	Growth rate in percentage (%)
District	9	38.40
Tahsil	18	22.29
Defence	5	35.48
Tourism	2	105.20
Religion	1	25.17
Others	12	33.80
New towns	11	-
All categories	58	37.80

Source: As in Table 2.

All the towns are classified into six categories on the basis of their status in 1991: (i) district headquarters, (ii) tahsil headquarters, (iii) defence headquarters; (iv) religious places; (v) tourist places; and (vi) towns without any status are placed as 'others'. The status of a town in 1981 was taken as same as in 1991. A town was designated by its highest status only. For example, if a town was both religious place and tahsil headquarters it was listed as tahsil headquarters only. Again taking into account all those towns which existed both in 1981 and 1991.

The finding reveals that tourist place (Dalhousie UA) recorded highest growth rate of 105.20 per cent, district headquarters of 38.80 per cent, religious of 25.17 per cent and tahsil headquarters of 22.29 per cent growth.

It is to be noted here that towns having higher administrative status recorded much higher growth than that of lower order ones. The growth rate of towns acting as district headquarters was distinctly higher (38.40 per cent) than those acting as tahsil headquarters (22.29 per cent).

The relatively high growth of urban population was a characteristic feature of tehsils/sub-tehsils of Kullu, Sirmaur, Shimla and Solan districts which had higher degree of urbanisation and higher employment opportunities. By comparison, low growth of urban population marked those parts of the state, which are known for general backwardness, like Chamba, Lahaul-spiti and Kinnaur districts of the state. (Kumar Rajesh, Mohan Prince and others, 2014) The army station-cantonments, hill resorts and health resorts- sanatoria, educational centres created by the British ruler later contributed to the growth of urbanization. (Pant B.R., 2020)

3. Site and town growth

The growth rate of towns at different sites has also been worked out. All the towns are classified on the basis of their sites into the following four categories: (a) valley town; (b) hill top town; (c) spur town; (d) gap town. Their growth rate was calculated as a group accordingly.

The results reveal that gap towns recorded the highest growth rate of 68.77 per cent, followed by hill top towns by (40.35 per cent), valley (28.78 per cent) and spur (19.92 per cent) towns, in order.

Shimla, by virtue of being state capital was the most dynamic town in the state. If we exclude it from the group of hill towns, the growth rate of hill towns gets considerably reduced. In that situation valley towns show edge over hill top towns in regard to growth. The number of other category of towns is quite small. In fine, we can conclude that valley towns have higher growth rate than other category of towns.

Table 4

Himachal Pradesh: Growth rate of towns and their site, 1981-91

Category of towns by their site	Number of towns	Growth rate in percentage (%)
Valley towns	30	28.78
Hill top towns	11	40.35
Spur towns	2	19.92
Gap towns	4	68.77
New towns	11	-
All categories	58	37.80

Source: As in Table 2

Conclusion

In the light of above discussion, it is observed that higher order administrative centers, such as district headquarters are growing relatively fast due to considerable immigration. By contrast, growth rate of cantonment towns has been slow because of their exceptionally low rate of natural increase.

Population size of towns finds some association with their site. Valley towns are relatively large, spur towns of medium size and hill top and gap towns small. Shimla is an exception. This hill top town enjoys primacy because of its status as the state capital, and international repute. a tourist center of international repute.

In contrast, size of a town and its growth did not find association with each other. This goes with peculiar physical, and socio-economic conditions prevailing in hill areas.

Finally, the major hypothesis that urbanisation and economic development find positive association with each other could not be substantiated with the available data on urbanisation and regional economic development in Himachal Pradesh. It could also not be possible to establish the validity of this hypothesis for hill states as a group. However, the validity of the

hypothesis was fully established from the state level data for all the states in India. Hence, at this point we can neither outrightly reject nor can fully endorse the hypothesis.

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