City profile

City profile: Shimla

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ABSTRACT

Shimla is one of the 80 hill stations which were established on preferred locations during British rule in India. It is the summer capital of pre-independent India, planned and developed for a maximum population of 25,000 in a picturesque hill setting. Presently, Shimla is capital of the state of Himachal Pradesh, one of the most preferred tourist destinations in the country and the most important administrative and educational center in the region. It houses a population of 169,000, as per 2011 census, which is much more than its planned capacity. As a result, to meet the demand of residential, commercial, educational, work and recreational facilities for this ever increasing population; Shimla once famous for its natural settings, beautiful buildings and marvelous townscape; has undergone tremendous change and has numerous issues and problems of development. It is one of the very few examples of tremendous urban development in environmentally sensitive and picturesque hill settings.

An attempt is made to understand the context of development in Shimla, by highlighting the pattern of development along with different planning interventions made to achieve regulated development in the form of development plans, land-use plan/s and building regulations.

1. Overview of development in hill stations

During British rule (from 1750s to 1947), 80 hill stations were established on preferred locations in India to act as summer retreats and resorts and to protect the British personnel from the harsh sun of the plain regions. These hill stations in India were developed in the picturesque settings and cool climates which can be classified into four regions depending upon their location as northern hill stations e.g., Shimla Mussourie; north eastern hill stations e.g., Shillong, Darjiling; western hill stations e.g., Poona, Mahabaleshwer; and southern hill stations e.g., Ooty, Coonoor (King, 1976). Different locations prior to their development as hill stations were either small hamlets or remained undiscovered in the hinterlands, where people and material has to be transported up through steep and difficult terrain. Mitchell has also proposed the following five categories of station, as the official multifunctional hill station, the private multi-functional hill station, the single-purpose hill station, the minor hill station, and the satellite hill station (Kennedy, 1996; Mitchell, 1972).

Major constraints for development in hill stations at that time were insufficient accessibility, fragile ecology and high seismic vulnerability, absence of any infrastructure, acute availability of construction materials and skilled workmanship and adverse climatic conditions. In spite of all these constraints, hill stations developed during the pre-independence period are unique examples of architecture and townscape on sloping terrain. Initially, these hill stations were only meant for the ruling class and service sector people required for serving them. These hill stations were exclusive in nature, were maintained quite well and developed to the administrators’ desires (Pathak, 2003). Hill stations were initially developed as health resorts, but later became important summer retreats, a favorite destination for the elite class to spend their summer vacations away from high temperatures of the plains. Various interrelated cultural, social, political, technological and psychological factors played a vital role in successful development and transformation of hill stations as unique examples of colonial town planning and architecture (King, 1976).

The development in hill stations/towns of India can be grouped into four stages—first stage of colonial dominance; second stage after independence in 1947 when power had been exercised by local elites; third stage when these hill stations became a center of socio-economic development; and a fourth stage comprising the present scenario of development, when hill stations are under tremendous pressure of new development (Banta, 2005) (Fig. 1). After independence, various hill towns became main centers of administration, tourism, commerce, healthcare and education, and attracted large populations from surrounding regions due to economic activity and employment opportunities. Thereafter, tremendous increases of population due to improved accessibility to hill towns and transport facilities, rise in domestic tourism, and huge development activity in hill stations have transformed these picturesque hill stations into settlements with numerous problems such as congestion, overcrowding, pollution and inadequate infrastructure.

The present scenario of development is most critical in hill towns, as they have been experiencing tremendous pressure for development.
from the last three decades of growth which has changed their morphology. The existing pattern of development is inadequate to support the increased demand for residential, work places, recreational, commercial and educational areas for both residential and floating populations, and as a result there is a shift in development patterns from the low rise buildings to the mid-rise buildings (Kumar & Pushplata, 2012). Shimla is one of the most famous hill towns of India, which is experiencing very high pressure for development in the present context (Fig. 2).

### 2. Shimla: the research context

Shimla is the capital of state of Himachal Pradesh and the former summer capital of India during the British period. It is one of the best

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<th>Post independence Till 1970s</th>
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<th>Present scenario</th>
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<td>Small hamlets on preferred locations</td>
<td>hill towns and preferred tourist locations (low rise and low density development)</td>
<td>Population growth</td>
<td>High density development having mid-rise buildings</td>
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<td>Britisher’s established hill stations (Shimla, Nainital, Dalhousie)</td>
<td>regional commercial centres and employment generators</td>
<td>Migration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low rise cottages for Europeans shop cum residential buildings</td>
<td>small houses, narrow streets, lack of amenities, unhealthy living condition</td>
<td>congestion, overcrowding, improper constructional technology</td>
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Fig. 1. General development pattern in hill stations of India.

Fig. 2. Location of the Shimla towns.
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