

Impact of Tourism on Vernacular Houses in Shimla, India

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Abstract

It is well known that tourism industry is an engine of economic growth and produces change in the socio-cultural activities by exchanging cultural ideas. In India, same can be observed. For example, tourism of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla is making substantial contributions in the generation of employment and earning foreign exchange. However, it also leads to significant transformations of housing of the natives. In this context, this study examines the changes in the housing style of the native community resulting from the tourist activities.

This study employs a quantitative methodology, and ascertains this impact of tourism on housing styles of the natives by employing tourism as an independent variable and impacts on housing and aspect of quality of life as dependent variables. Primary data is collected through a sample survey that generates quantitative data. From each municipality ward of Shimla, 100 households are surveyed.

Research shows that the changes on Housing Style of Shimla, arises due to tourism. It reveals that the prime reason behind the transformations of the styles of vernacular housing is the fact that the houses are rented to tourists as accommodation. Undeniably, people make money and there is economic development. It is observed that increased tourism tends to change the lifestyle as well as the culture of the natives and also the places. It is noted that the physical, socio-economic and environmental conditions undergo changes of vivid nature and directly or indirectly impacts the livability of the native settlements. It is also noted that, many businessmen and the government agencies concerned with tourism have only recently begun to pay serious attention to its implications on quality of life of the natives. It thus concludes that planned interventions are needed to address this issue.

Keywords: Tourism, Native Community, Social Impact, Housing Styles, Shimla, India.

Introduction

It is understood that pilgrimages as well as travel arising from tourism create good potentials all over the world. This is also true in India where there exist many religious shrines and a large number of trekking routes. On these pilgrimages and tourist spots, people gain a lot in terms of employment and increased incomes, elevating their economies. However, they also lead to transformations of their vernacular settlements. Thus, housing may acquire either positive or negative traits.

With the growth of the tourism industry, native people come into contact with each other extensively under different settings. In the process, they exchange knowledge and ideas with each other: tourists learning from the natives and the people learning from the tourists. Undeniably, these new ideas and new knowledge leads to changes in quality of life, particularly of the natives. Growth and the changing demands emanating from the the cities over a period of time with urban environments is also responsible for the changes of traditional structures into modern ones. In fact, present day cities are changing because of the dynamic socio-economic characteristics of these places inundated with tourists. However, these socio-economic characteristics are themselves changing because, new population trends emerge, while the populations themselves change over a period of time. Unfortunately, however, there is a lack of awareness among the people regarding their rights at both the national and local levels allowing the changes to gather momentum over a period of time. These will also lead to changes in the cities.

Himachal Pradesh: An Overview

Himachal Pradesh stands apart from the its neighbors in terms of its sheer topographic diversity viz. from high altitude, snow-capped high mountains to dense green deodar forest, apple orchard, cultivated terraces and shining rivers. In fact, it offers breath taking pristine beauty. Availability of natural resources makes the state suitable for investments in sectors of tourism. In the 'Himachal Pradesh Tourism Policy (2005)' the aim is declared as "to make tourism the prime engine of economic growth by positioning the state as a leading global destination by the year 2020"¹. To promote tourism in the state, the State Tourism department has created a new slogan: Himachal for all seasons and reasons. According to the State Tourism Policy 2005, it further attracts tourists.

Tourism in Himachal Pradesh

Tourist arrival statistics of Himachal Pradesh indicate that there has been a steady increase in tourist arrival to the state over the years. The total tourists have increased from only 0.35 million in 1981 to 18.46 million in 2015 and there have been many ups and downs in these numbers. After 2005, In fact, the Indian tourists have increased very rapidly (Fig. 1). This shows that the tourism industry has started increasing after 2005 at a very high speed, which is impacting the Quality of Life of the native people of the state. This increase has used the local infrastructure and has also created some extra pressure on the local infrastructure.

In comparison, domestic tourists by far have outnumbered the foreign tourists in the state. Statistics reveal that the foreign tourist arrival, which was only 4.5 thousand in 1981, has gained only a slight momentum in the year 1995 when it reached 47.5 thousand. However, since year 2000, foreigner tourist arrivals have shown a steady increase and have touched 48.5 thousand in 2010. Nevertheless, it has then decreased in 2015 47.2 thousand.

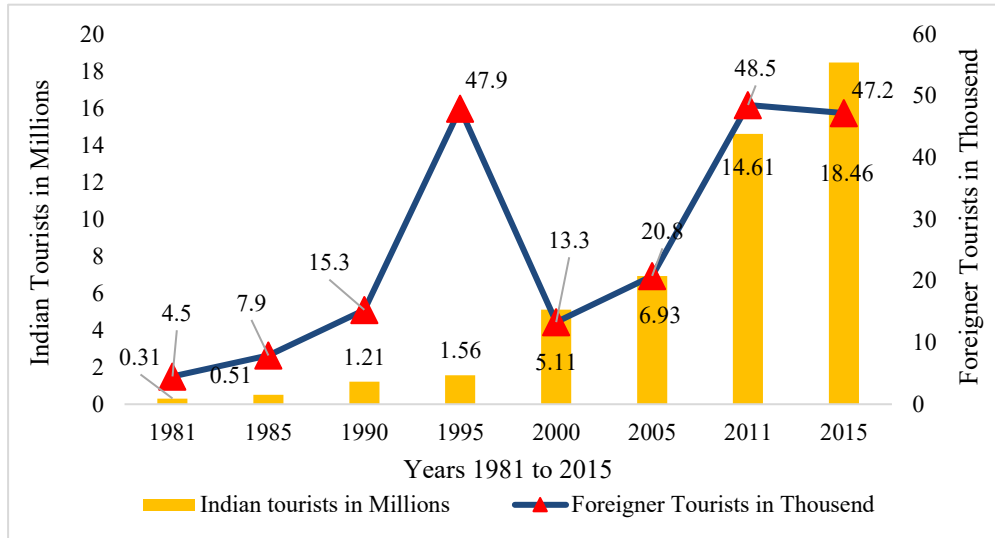


Fig. 1: Combination Graph of Indian and Foreign Tourists (1981 – 2015)
Source: Tourism Department Shimla Himachal Pradesh

Interestingly, the tourist industry concentrates markedly on a few selected districts because of the infrastructure development and good connectivity, with the development of infrastructure on these destinations. Although there are still a lot of potential in the tourism industry, most of the tourist destinations are not developed yet. There is low connectivity, lack of infrastructure etc.

Shimla an Overview

Shimla of Himachal Pradesh is the embodiment of heaven on the earth, replete as it is with lush green forests, high snow-covered peaks, beautiful valleys, gushing streams and unpolluted rivers. Shimla has a very rich religious and diverse culture heritage. This is reflected through its myriad traditionally carved wooden temples. It comprises 7 sub-divisions, 17 tehsils and sub tehsils. Climatic conditions of the Shimla district vary according to the elevation of the area. December, January and February are severe cold months, when the winter season is at its peak³. Snowfall generally occurs in December and continuous till mid-March. Due to large difference in altitude and precipitation, the vegetation types in this region range from tropical to alpine.

Shimla is situated in the range of the Outer Himalaya and the Lesser Himalaya with an average altitude of 2206 meters above the mean sea level. The highest point in Shimla is the Jakhoo Hill, which is at a height of 2453 meters (Shimla-Wikipedia, 2020). It is spread over seven spurs viz., Summer Hill, Jakhoo Hill, Bantony Hill, Inverarm Hill, Elysium Hill, Observatory Hill and Prospect Hill (refer fig. 2).

Shimla is characterized by rugged topography, steep slopes, deep valleys and elongated spurs. Shimla town is situated on the rocks, shale, slate quartzite greywacke and local conglomerate that is why it has a rugged topography. Due to its geological features and the location, Shimla is exposed to various natural hazards like earthquakes, landslides & sinking, cloudburst, and thunder light, etc. It is worth noticing that Shimla falls under the earthquake zone IV which is the high damage risk zone as per the earthquake hazard zoning of India.

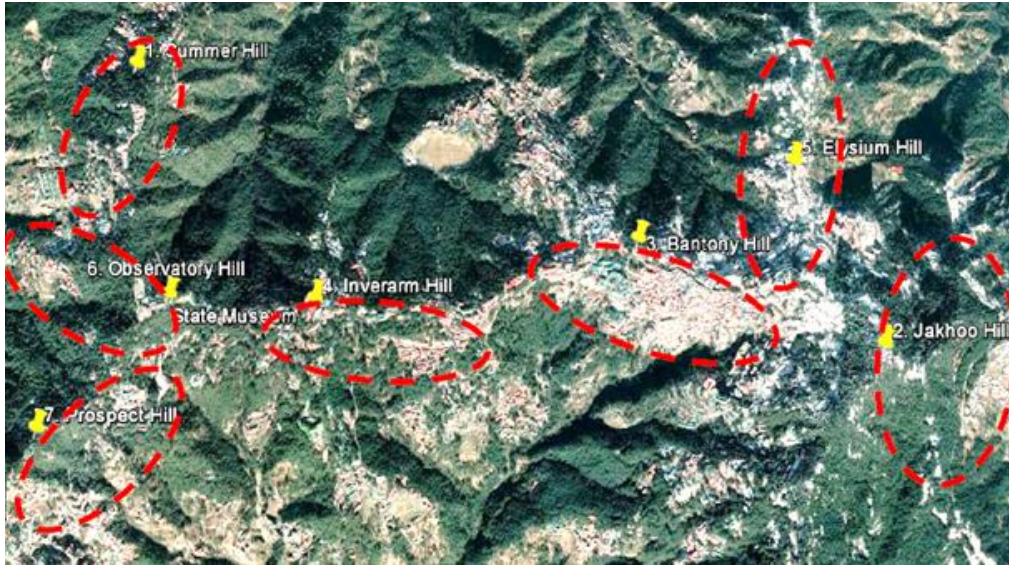


Fig. 2: Physiographic Conditions of Shimla

Source: Twon Planning Deptmnt, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Shimla Planning Area

Source: Town and Country planning Department, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

Settlements	No. of Households	Total Persons
M.C. Shimla	46306	169578
Ghanahatti Special Area	2450	10715
Kufri Special Area	2956	12550
Shoghi Special Area	2758	12417
Total	54470	205260

With the growth of Shimla, recent developments have started along the hilly spurs in the Northern direction i.e. Summer Hill, Kaithu Area, Elysium Hill, Bharari Area. On the other hand, Eastern side it has extended to Sanjuali, Dhalli, while on the Southern slope it has extended to below Cart Road Nabha Estate, Phagli and Tutikandi etc. On the East side of the town, same can be observed round Chhota Shimla, Kusumpti and Boileauganj – Chakkar on the West and Totu–Jutogh area along with a cantonment located at North -west. In fact, a small hamlet has attained the status of a city over a period of time due to its tourist potentials and other multifunctional activities. This way, Shimla has spilled over its municipal limits and has sprawled on seven hills covering at least four urban local bodies: Municipal Corporation Shimla, Ghanahatti Special Area, Kufri Special Area and Shoghi Special Area.

Demographic Facts of Shimla

It is fair to claim that Shimla is a hub of almost every department. For instance, Shimla city is an administrative hub of Himachal Pradesh and the capital of the State referred to as Himachal Pradesh. Shimla city is also a world-famous tourist destination, and an educational hub. The Himachal Pradesh University, IGMS Medical Institute and some other major Institutes exist in Shimla. Indeed, it is also a ‘work-as-fruit collection center’ acting as the Apple Collection Center and the collection center of some other local fruits. It is also a hub of small-scale factories is like the charcoal factory. With all these different departments established in Shimla city, a significant labour force is needed to run the system. That labour force has come from different districts of the state and even from different parts of the country and understandably, all these activities have generated in-migration in Shimla.

Thus, all of these recent in-migrations to Shimla city has shot up the population of the city to a shocking 1, 69,578 persons (MC Shimla-Census of India 2011). It is around 12% of the total urban population of the state. The population of Shimla Planning Area is 2, 05,260 which is 25.21% of total population of the Shimla District as shown in the able 1 (Demographic Characteristics of Shimla Planning Area,2026). The Simple fact is, Shimla planning area has the highest no. of urban population which makes this the only Class-I city of Himachal Pradesh.

Tourism in Shimla

Tourism in Shimla has focused on two alternative scenarios. The first one focuses on the high tourist areas, where there are a large number of tourists. The second pressure is on managing the tourists and maintain the urban quality of life. Undeniably, tourism provides a huge wealth and a boost for the economy while also promoting the exchange of ideas and cultural activities. It is observed from various sources that housing conditions as well as the quality of life in Shimla has been adversely affected by tourism.

In Shimla, tourism is a prime source of the economy because of tourism. For example, in the year 2010, there have been 2,169 hotels having a total bed capacity of 55,928 registered with the State Tourism Department. In 2015, the total no. of hotels, home stay & guest houses excluding sarayen are 3605. The bed capacity is approximately 80,000 persons. These are only the registered figures. As the tourism industry is growing at a rapid speed, it might have some impacts on the quality of life of the native people and their vernacular settlements in Shimla city. Therefore, the tourism industry of Shimla has a great potential in the future if this industry develops in a planned way, because the tourists are pouring in to Shimla day by day.

The Figure 2 Graph shows the trends of Domestic and International tourist inflow. This graph shows that the value of tourists is increasing year wise, and in 2015, the value has increased to 18.04 % and in 2016 the value has gone up to 24.28 % (Fig. 3).

This shows that Shimla city is gaining increasing importance in the tourism sector. Today, Shimla city is world famous and almost all the tourists from all the countries appear to visit Shimla. The increasing trends of tourist growth can be taken as a potential for the city in-terms of generating employment, increasing the income and ultimately leading to a better housing condition.

As said, the tourism industry of Shimla hill station is growing rapidly; a simple fact for the growth is that, on the weekends, more than 8000 vehicles enter into the city. This means that almost 20000-25000 tourists enter into the city on the weekends. Following this, problems such as traffic congestions, parking problem and accommodation problems have arisen. In this context, there is no doubt that the tourism industry has a great potential in Shimla city although the geographical conditions are a constraint for the development.

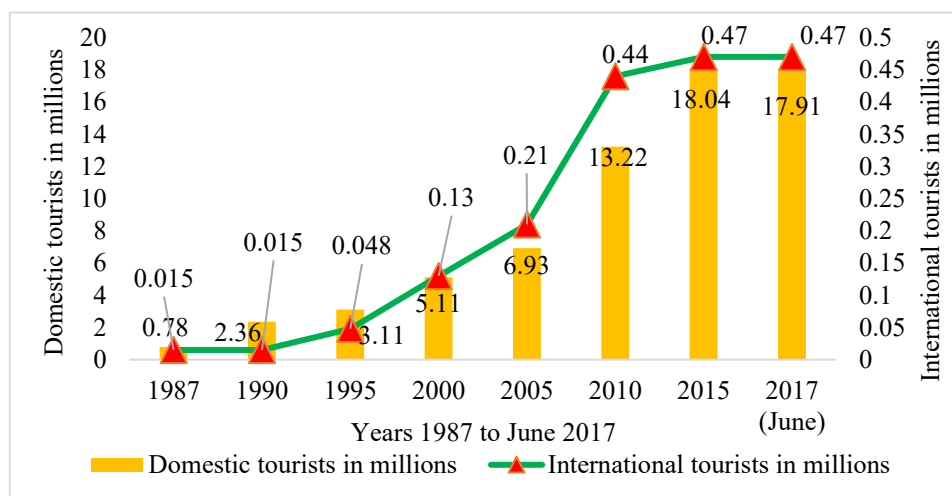
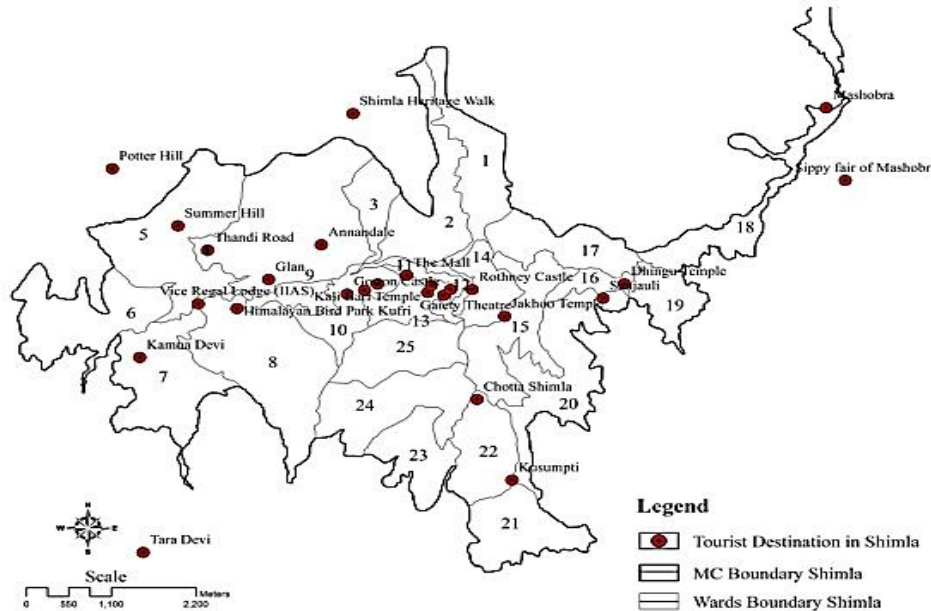


Fig. 3: Graph shows the trends of Domestic and International tourist inflow
Source: Tourism Department Shimla Himachal Pradesh

Tourist destinations in Shimla

Shimla is gifted with many natural and manmade tourist destinations and these all the tourist destinations are visited most of the time by tourist. The natural features are gifted with scenic beauty, fresh natural air, lush green orchard of apple & pine etc. and the mighty forest land, water bodies & valleys. The man-made features are gifted with beautiful Architectural style of traditional and British's. The map 1 shows the different tourist destinations within city and outside city with importance and significance marking (refer map 1).



Map 1: Tourists Destination in Shimla

Source: Author

In Shimla, all the tourist spots are having their own importance and significance and these tourist spots are visited according to that importance and significance. On average, the tourist spots within the MC limit are visited most by the tourists instead of outside MC limit because according to the table 2, the MC limit get 122 points with 26 tourist spots. In contrast, the outside MC limit get only 45 points with 9 tourists spots. The increasing tourists and demand of the tourists at these destinations have some impact on housing in Shimla.

At the present time, the surroundings of these tourist destinations are covered with some domestic commercial shops as well as residential units. Some of the impacts are visible in the change in construction materials and construction styles of these commercial units and the residential units. In other words, the earlier style was domestic but now, they use more modern materials.

Research Methods

The surroundings of Shimla and its physiographic conditions are environmentally very sensitive. The core areas of the city generally become over-crowded and much congested. Every old settlement like Chhota Shimla, Chakkar, Sanjauli and Old Kusumpti are crowded as well. Now it is a major imperative to ensure that there might be planned developments taking place as new nodes. In order to ensure planned and regulated growth of Shimla Planning Area, Government of Himachal Pradesh has extended the Himachal Pradesh Town and Country Planning Act, 1977 as amended vide Amendment Act No. 14 of 2015. These changes invariably also affect the housing: both the urban housing as well as the vernacular in a significant manner.

This research employs a survey which is conducted with 100 families from each ward. There are 25 wards in total in the Shimla MC. At the present time, there are 34 wards in Shimla MC.

Findings

It is found from the survey that the population of Shimla is increased due to migration from the nearby areas. The reason for migration is the source of income. Most of the people have migrated because they are somehow linked with some of the activities related to the tourism industry. Thus, at the time of the peak season or the tourist season, people migrate from the upper areas to Shimla and this leads to an increase in the income of the migrants (Fig. 4).

Changes in the Housing Profile of Shimla

Generally, in Shimla, there are houses popularly known as Kutchha Houses which are constructed with the use of traditional material and locally available materials. After the increase in the income of some of the individual households, the status of house changes from being a Kutchha House to a Pucca House which is constructed with the use of modern materials. The figure 3 shows the housing profile of Shimla city, which shows that the percentage of pucca houses are 67 %, while the kutchha houses using traditional values and traditional materials are only 14 %. The semi-pucca or the houses that have mixed the characteristics of kutchha and pucca houses are only 19 % (Figure 3). This shows that the percentage of modern material user is increased than the traditional material use. Undeniably, the changes in the housing structures have some impacts on traditional culture of the city too.

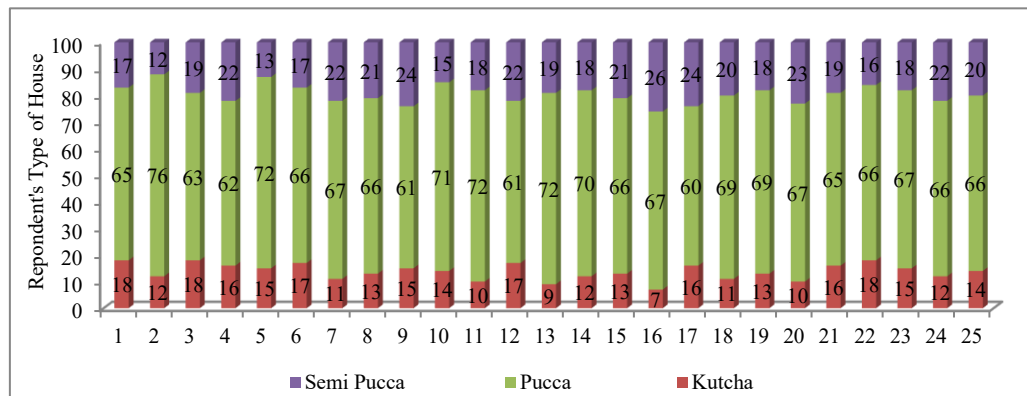


Fig. 4: Types of Houses Ward wise
Source: Primary Survey by the Author: 2018

The housing sector of Shimla thus needs to conduct a feasibility study because of the climatic conditions and the physiographic conditions. The materials used in such conditions is different than other areas, but now days the percentage of Pucca houses has increased rather than semi pucca and kutchha houses (Fig. 5).

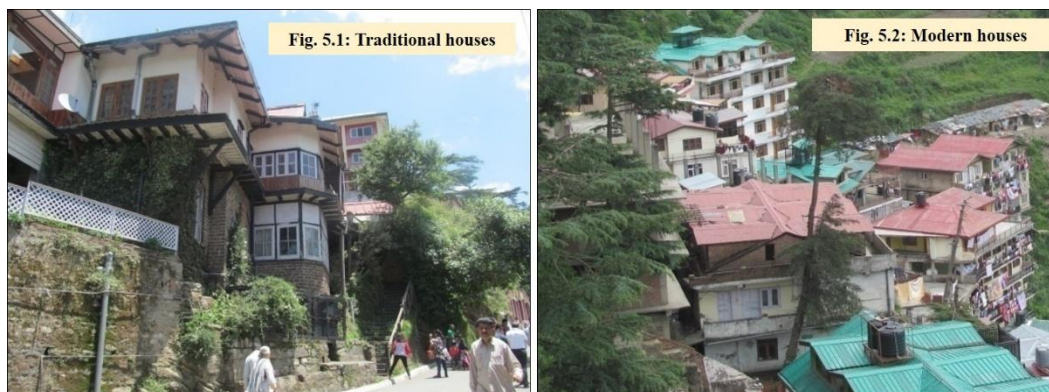


Fig. 5: Traditional construction & style used houses (Fig 5.1) and Modern construction & style used houses (Fig. 5.2)

Source: Author

The figures 4 and 5 show the traditional style of house units and modern style house units. The traditional houses are particularly for single residential units while the modern style houses are converted into different parts. Even their floor use is different i.e. residential, for rent-use, home-stay and for commercial use.

Impact on Housing Style

Use of Floors in the Housing Units

Interestingly, physiography has played a significant role in the use floors of housing structures, because it depends upon the terrain of the area and the slope. According to the families surveyed, the basement units are given on rent (Table 2 and Figure 6). The change in the use of floors show that the basement is used for residential purpose by 44 % of the families, while 6 % of the families use them for residential cum commercial purposes. 7 % of the families use the basements for home-stay purpose. 26 % of the families are using the ground floor for residential purposes, while 32 % of the families use the ground floor for residential cum commercial purposes. 40 % of the families use the ground floor for residential & home stay purposes (Table 2).

This shows that many changes are taking place. Previously, the ground floor was used for residential purpose only. Now a days however, as the demand increases, the use of the floor is also changed. 14 % of the families thus use G+1 for residential purposes, while 25 % of the families use them for residential cum commercial purposes. 22 % of the families use them for residential cum home-stay purpose. G+1 is a modern addition because today, it is very common that the rooms which are on the road sides or the pedestrian sides will be used for commercial purposes.

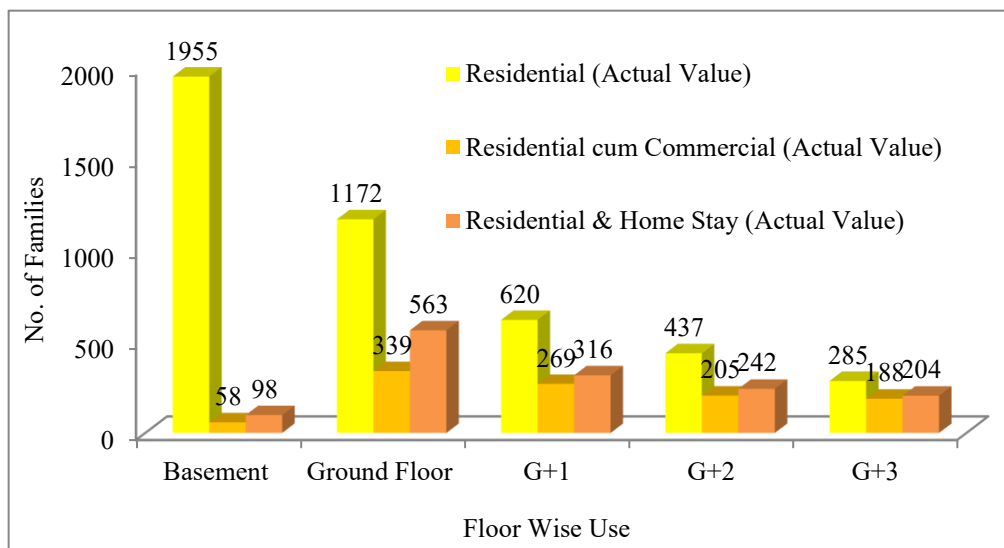


Fig. 6: Floor Wise use of Housing Units
Source: Author (Primary Survey-2018)

As the graph shows, 10 % of the families use G+2 floors for residential purposes while 19 % of the families use them for residential cum commercial purpose. On the contrary, 17 % of the families use them for residential cum home-stay purposes. G+2 floors are however, mostly used for Commercial such as domestic use and for the tourists as well as Home Stay purposes for the tourists. G+3 floor is not so common. Nevertheless, 6 % of the families use G+3 floors for residential purposes while 18 % of the families use them for residential cum commercial purposes. 14 % of the families use the G+ 3 floors for residential cum home-stay purposes.

It is thus notable that at present, people like to live in high status and important locations. This is primarily because such locations play a crucial role in deciding whether the houses is used for touristic or for native purpose. Undeniably, the housing profile has changed from kutchha houses to pucca houses. To further validate this statement that there is a significant impact and change of the housing profiles in Shimla due to the tourism industry, a 'One Way Annova' test was applied with Quality-of-Life statements on 5 points Likert Scale as follows (Table 3):

Impacts of Housing Style due to Tourism Industry (One Way Annova)

The table 3 shows the changes in the housing status from kutchha to pucca due to the tourism industry. Their impacts on the quality-of-life statements on the Likert scale at 5 % significance level, produce the following results.

- Significance of changes in the housing status from kutchha to pucca and their impacts on Land Use Changes due to Tourism Industry is (F=8.78, P=0.003).
- Impact significance of changes in housing status from kutchha house to pucca house and it's impacts on Natural Water Bodies (indirectly) in locality is (F=6.46, P=0.011).
- The impact significance of changes in housing status from kutchha to pucca and its impacts on changes in the Building Style is (F=6.28, P=0.012).
- The impact of significance of changes in the housing status from kutchha to pucca and it's impacts on Native Cultural Profile due to tourism industry is (F=6.28, P=0.012).
- The impact of significance of the changes in the housing status from kutchha to pucca and it's impact on Socio Economic activities due to tourism is (F=7.67, P=0.006).

Therefore, on the basis of the above results, it is concluded that, there are possible differences in the mean score of incomes increased due to the tourism industry. The Quality-of-Life Statements are impacted by the Tourism Industry. Those statements are, Land Use Changes, Impacts on water bodies, Change in Building design Styles, Changes in Native Cultural Profiles and Change in the Socio-Economic activities. These are all happening due to tourism. Hence, the hypothesis is proved i.e. increased tourism industry changes the housing styles of Shimla and adversely impacting the Quality of Life the people in Shimla.

The direct impact of this change of land use has been on the changing morphology of the city. In fact, the fabric of Shimla has completely changed due to the changes occurring in the uses and styles of the buildings. The exclusiveness of the land uses has been replaced with mixed land uses, especially along the major roads of Shimla. The old residential buildings built in traditional style and materials have been replaced with modern building materials and styles, especially in the hotel industry to fit the tastes of the tourists. The traditional residential building style and their materials are also replaced by the modern styles and the materials. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find differentials in building styles of the hilly terrain and the plains.

Discussion

This paper reveals that the traditions and the culture of Shimla city can be a potential for the development of the tourism industry. There is no doubt that Shimla city is rich in traditions and has had a significant role in history. This research shows that these traditions and history can be used as potentials for the tourism industry.

Thus, it appears that the families today are more concerned about modern architecture and modern construction and design styles. In fact, they are also more concerned about investing in the tourism industry but are not concerned about the aesthetics of the city. This is because construction is taken place in a haphazard manner. Some observations are made on the basis of these results as follows.

- The dimensions of the old buildings is not changed. However, the interiors are changed from the traditional characteristics to modern.
- Extra storey is built-up of the residential units for different use of one particular building.
- At present, old structures are modified into modern ones, because the old structures are made of traditional materials in traditional architectural styles. People do not see that these can be potentials for increasing tourism.
- Most old buildings have thick walls which occupy more space compared with the modern walls. Thus, the interior spaces are increased by demolishing the old walls and constructing modern walls.
- Residential units are converted into different uses i.e. commercial use and accommodation purposes aimed at catering to the tourists.

These findings show that there are significant impacts of the tourism industry on Shimla. Most critical of them is that they change the housing construction styles which leads not only to changes in the quality of life of the local people from an economic point of view, but also the character of the settlements.

It is also observed that people of Shimla have developed an interest in using a lot of glass in their structures in the modern constructions. This is because, these types of structures are regarded as a symbol of a higher status in the society. Many studies reveal that most such changes have taken place since the beginning of the 21st century i.e. after 2000 around the world. Though tourism industry is not only the reason for such change in general, but in case of Shimla, tourism industry has been the primary cause for bringing such changes in the housing styles and materials used. Therefore, saving the traditional culture has become a challenge in Shimla.

Adding to these, the local inhabitants have complained that the use of modern materials has changed the local climatic conditions too. In their opinion, Shimla city is getting hotter since the past few years with the excessive use of iron or steel sheets on the roofs and the use of other modern materials instead of local traditional materials. With the adoption of new architectural styles by the local people, wooden facades and traditional architectural features are vanishing resulting in a loss of sense of place and historical identity.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that tourism is required to develop and manage backward poor communities in such a way that it benefits the native people. Nevertheless, heritage has to be maintained and preserved for both for tourism itself as well as for culture. Undeniably, the old structure needs to be preserved and the old construction styles needs to be conserved. The need to save the natural environment like the forest areas from garbage disposal, adds to these dimensions to retain the original attraction of Shimla as a unique culturally significant place in India. This research shows that this issue has so far been ignored and needs urgent attention.

Presently, however, changes in houses styles and impacting the quality of life are the major causes of worry. Nevertheless, the traditions and culture of Shimla city can be a potential for development of the tourism industry. There is no doubt that Shimla city is rich in traditions and that they have a significant role in the history, and that traditions and history can be used as a great potential for the tourism industry itself.

In this background, the Tourism Department and the Municipal Council of Shimla city is investing huge amount of money on beautification project of Shimla with the help of the Asian Development Bank. However, the authorities are using new materials with a mixture of old and the new architecture design styles, which is unlikely to resolve this issue meaningfully. Therefore, the administration needs to re-examine their approach and seek to continuously renovate and improve the construction style so that they preserve the old Shimla. Towards that end, this research beings to light the impact of the tourism industry on the traditions, people and the culture of the vernacular settlements of Shimla, in India.

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