

## Introduction

The State of Himachal Pradesh with a geographical area of 55,675 km<sup>2</sup> and inhabited by 4.28 million people lies in the foothills of the Himalayas. It is situated in the extreme north-west of India and bordered by Jammu and Kashmir in the north, the Punjab to the west and south-west, Haryana to the south, Uttar Pradesh in the south-east, and Tibet in the east.

Himachal Pradesh came into being as a result of the of 30 Princely States in 1948 and, later in 1951, the merger of one more State, Bilaspur. The adjoining hilly areas of the Punjab were also merged with Himachal Pradesh in 1966 during the bifurcation of the Punjab. At present, the State has 12 districts, namely Bilaspur, Chamba, Hamirpur, Kullu, Kangra, Mandi, Kinnaur, Solan, Sirmour, Shimla, Lahul and Spiti, and Una.

The State is by and large mountainous, the height of its hills increasing from south to north; the Shivaliks, the lower foot hills, ascend no more than 610 to 1,220 MSL. The inner ranges vary from 1,220 to 3,660 metres and the northernmost Piranjal Range soars up to about 6,710 metres. Correspondingly, the State is endowed with diverse agro-climatic conditions. Broadly, the entire State can be divided into three different zones, namely, the Outer Himalayas, the Inner Himalayas, and the Alpine Zone. The average rainfall is 1,600 mm per annum and the climate varies from cool to cold, depending on the season and elevation of the terrain.

The total population of the State was 4.28 million people, as per the 1981 Census, out of which 90 per cent live in villages, depending primarily on agriculture as their main source of livelihood. Out of the total geographical area of 55,675 km<sup>2</sup>, only about 11 per cent is being cultivated. Among the farming community, small and marginal farmers dominate; more than 77 per cent of holdings are less than two hectares, accounting for only 34 per cent of the total cultivated areas. Agriculture, including horticulture, is the most important sector of the State economy as it contributes about 50 per cent of the 'State Domestic Product'.

Himachal Pradesh, a vast complex of hills and valleys, not only nourishes agriculture, horticulture, forestry, and animal husbandry, but is also rich in mineral and other natural resources. The melting snows and glaciers feed the numerous rivers which sustain life in the plains down below in India. There is a vast hydro-electric power potential which is gradually being exploited in a systematic and planned manner. It is paradoxical, that in a region with such rich natural resources, the people have remained in abject poverty for so long. With a view to improving the living standard of the people, various development programmes were initiated by the State Government during the post-independence era, the main emphasis being laid on the development of horticulture in this area.