SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The discussion in the preceding chapters, based primarily on detailed mapping of all relevant data by individual shahrestans, laid bare the demographic personality of Iran in its spatial perspective. With a population of 25.8 million spread over an area of about 1.6 million sq. kms., Iran is one of the less populated parts of the world. Its population density of 16 persons per sq.km. is considerably below the world population density of about 25 (1966). The various parts of Iran, however, display remarkable differences in the degree of population concentration. The interior of the country is far less populated than the peripheral areas. Among the peripheral tracts, the northwestern and the western areas have denser concentrations of population than the eastern and the southeastern ones. These patterns of population distribution are strongly related to availability of culturable land, amount of precipitation and productivity of soil. If one were to single out the most crucial factor in population distribution, it is easily the water. One cannot, however, ignore the role of economic factors in explaining high densities in the Tehran metropolitan region and the Khuzestan oil areas. The historical factor of
susceptibility to invasions in the past seems to account for the relatively low density in the agriculturally productive areas of northeast Iran.

With nearly two-fifths of its population living in urban places in 1966, Iran is one of the more urbanized developing countries. The relatively high proportion of urban population in Iran is attributable, among other factors, to recent industrialization in parts of the country and a low density of rural population. The evolution of many of the existing towns is related to their importance as capital cities of local principalities in the past, trading points on international caravan routes, and strategic localities for defence purposes. The process of industrialization has been instrumental in rapid growth of places like Tehran, Ahvaz, Esfahan, Tabriz and Shiraz. The expansion of Tehran has been spectacular; it has grown into a primate city accommodating about 28 per cent of the nation's urban population. As much as 58 per cent of the country's urban population is shared, according to 1966 data, by only 14 cities, each with a population of more than 100,000. The recent trends in urbanization in Iran conform to those in other developing countries.

Associated with the recent spurt in urbanization has been the process of rural-urban migration which intensified since early sixties when revolutionary land and other reforms were introduced in the country by
His Imperial Majesty Shahanshah Aryamehr. The pull of towns has been a stronger factor than the push from the villages. Long distance migration has been more pronounced than short run migration due to highly localized and peripheral location of newly developing areas offering employment opportunities. Out-migration has been typical of the densely populated areas with continuing subsistence agricultural economy. It is interesting to observe that migration in Iran is not so male-selective as has been the case in most of the other developing countries.

And that explains the relatively small difference in the sex ratio of the rural and urban populations in Iran. In 1966, the rural sex ratio of the country was recorded as 939 as compared to the urban sex ratio of 923. Like many Asian countries, and more particularly the Muslim countries, Iran recorded a large deficiency of females with a general sex ratio of 931. The spatial pattern of sex ratio made a gradient from the east to the west; it being relatively high in the eastern half of the country, moderate in the middle and low in the west.

With more than half of its population younger than 18 years (as in 1966), Iran is similar to other developing countries of the world in having a youthful age-structure.
There is not much to distinguish between the age-structure of males and females but the rural and urban areas show up striking differences in this respect. The age-structure of rural population is dominated by children while that of urban population reveals preponderance of adults. The regional differences in the percentage of children are wide indeed. The spatial disparities decline in the succeeding age groups. The area to area differences in the proportion of the old people are the minimum. The comparatively developed areas have a high proportion of adults while the economically backward areas are dominated by children and old people. The backward areas suffer not only from low levels of income but also from high dependency ratios.

Although the proportion of adults in urban areas is considerably higher than that in the rural areas, yet the proportion of economically active population is significantly smaller in the former than in the latter. Nearly one half of the rural population was recorded as economically active in 1966, the comparative figure for urban areas was around 40 per cent. This disparity is, among other factors, the product of the higher incidence of female participation in work in rural areas and of late entry by the urban population in the working force being busy in getting education for a longer period. On the whole, about 46 per cent of the
population aged 10 and above was recorded as economically active, of which about 88 per cent were males. Nearly a half of the population was engaged in primary activities, one-fourth in secondary activities and the remaining one-fourth in tertiary activities. Thus, the occupational structure of Iran is less agricultural than that of most of the developing countries.

The relatively high proportion of workers in non-primary activities in Iran is associated with ubiquitous spread of traditional carpet weaving industry, new industrialization in the Tehran, Khuzestan, Esfahan, Shiraz, and Caspian lowlands regions, extensive construction activities in many parts of the country and a rapid expansion of administrative, educational and health services. Developments in the field of modern industrialization, construction and services have been particularly rapid since early sixties. It is no wonder that the proportion of non-primary workers declined from about 60 per cent in 1956 to less than 50 per cent in 1966.

Despite considerable developments in secondary and tertiary spheres, the literacy rate of the country in 1966 was considerably low as only slightly more than one-fifth of the total population was capable of reading and writing.
Even when children below 7 years of age are excluded, the literacy rate works out to be less than 30 per cent for 1966. The prevalence of illiteracy was attributable to the feudal nature of traditional Iranian society, subsistence nature of economy as obtaining till recent past and a prejudice against female education. The things started changing since early sixties when a large number of new schools were opened, literacy corps were sent to rural areas under the famous 'white revolution' and adult literacy campaigns were started with great vigour. Notwithstanding a considerable success of these measures, the literacy rate of the country could not go up appreciably and the regional disparities in literacy persisted. Broadly speaking, the regional pattern of literacy in Iran was such that the capital city of Tehran stood out like a literacy lamp and the degree of darkness increased as one moved away from it.

While most of the attributes of Iran's population display striking regional differences, the same could not be said in respect of religious composition. Almost 99 per cent of the country's population was recorded as Muslim. All other religious groups constituted an insignificant minority and most of their adherents were confined to urban places. Nevertheless, Iran is marked
by great diversity in terms of language and dialects as expected in a country of this size. As a matter of fact, language and dialect cannot be ignored as criteria in any regionalization of the country's population.

The various parts of Iran, thus, displayed sharp differences in their population characteristics. These differences were the most pronounced in the case of three population elements: population distribution, migrational patterns and linguistic composition. The role of physical factors, especially availability of water, was dominant in the case of population distribution. Economic forces were the main determinants of migration patterns. Historical factors came in for explanation of linguistic composition of different areas. The spatial analysis of Iran's population revealed that periphery of the country was more developed than its core.

The present study may serve as a point of caution to all those population geographers who consider all developing countries as one monolithic bloc. Each of the developing countries may have many of its own distinctive population characteristics and Iran is no exception to this statement. This is not to deny quite a many similarities which Iran's population may have with other developing countries.
Frequent references have been made to phenomenal changes that have occurred in Iran's society and economy since early sixties. These changes must have been reflected in the recent 1976 census data of Iran. As such, a study of the changes in the population geography of Iran during 1966-76 would be an extremely rewarding topic for future research. The author intends to undertake this project on his return to Iran.