

Demographic and Socio- economic Profile of Hanjis of Dal Lake

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Abstract:

The nature and dynamic system of landscape and ecosystem have been changing at a very fast rate since the colonial period came to an end. Since then, the traditional societies have changed substantially. These changes are seen both in rural and urban areas, in areas of active social interaction and relative isolations as well as in slum areas. The valley of Kashmir is not an exception to this. In spite of many geopolitical problems, the valley of Kashmir has moved and is moving from age-old traditions to the new and modern way of life. There has been a very extensive transformation in every field from education, healthcare, communications, accessibility and social amenities to a standard mode of life. However, there has been a lot of disparity at meso and micro level in India and the valley of Kashmir is not far beyond this. The big gap between the income of rich and poor is on increasing side and many of the traditional societies are facing the problems of survival under the changed socio-economic situations. These backward and traditional societies are being exploited and a proper upliftment for these people is not taken seriously. In this background, it becomes an important task to make an in-depth investigation about various backward classes, tribes, castes and communities. The present work on Hanjis of Dal Lake is one such attempt in this direction. When social transformation in society or community takes place, many societies and communities like that of Hanjis are confronted with many social, economic and ecological problems, which are in one way or the other, inter-related to each other. It is therefore, necessary to investigate and study the social, economic and ecological aspects of the Hanjis, which will help in identifying the major hurdles and barriers in their overall development.

Key words: Demb, Hanjis, Floating gardens, Economic profile

Introduction:

Dal Lake is a lake in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. The urban lake, which is the second largest in the state, is integral to tourism and recreation in Kashmir and is nicknamed the "Jewel in the crown of Kashmir or "Srinagar's Jewel" The lake is also an important source for commercial operations in fishing and water plant harvesting (Sufi, 1949). The shore line of the lake, about 15.5 kilometres (9.6 mi), is encompassed by a boulevard lined with Mughal era gardens, parks, houseboats and hotels. Scenic views of the lake can be witnessed from the shore line Mughal gardens, such as Shalimar Bagh and Nishat Bagh built during the reign of Mughal Emperor (Jahangir) and from houseboats cruising along the lake in the colourful shikaras. During the winter season, the temperature sometimes reaches -11°C (12°F), freezing the lake (Raina, 1977).

The dwellers who have settled in the Dal lake areas form part of the history of the lake. Walter. R. Lawrence reports in the book: "The Valley of Kashmir" that the half amphibious dwellers on the Dal lake practised cultivation on floating gardens and *demb* lands in late 19th century and had property rights on the marsh land and related water channels (Lawrence, 1998). Their main occupation was to collect wild products of Dal lake and grow vegetables for the city consumption. They were registered as tenants and revenue was collected daily from them by the state administration. The cultivators of the Dal lake were called Mir Behris (Hassan, 1883). In due course the number of dwellers has been continuously growing and the families have got extended and the occupations have diversified. The lake dwellers have been part and parcel of the lake ecosystem and have consequently caused certain stress on the lake ecosystem. The Hamlets on which they reside within the lake have been discharging since ages uncontrolled and untreated liquid and solid waste into the lake which has caused its pollution and subsequent degradation.

The floating gardens of the lake have been extended resulting in narrowing of the water ways and reduction in the clear water expanse. The tendency of conversion of floating gardens into solid land masses by dumping mud and weed from the lake on to the floating gardens has resulted in solid land masses prone to further encroachment by the lake dwellers. This activity however has been restricted towards the western shore area behind Dole Demb. The population settlements in the Dal Lake area is of three types, those who live in the peripheral areas of the lake, those who stay in the Doonga Boats and those who are the inhabitants of the Hamlets. The total present population living in the lake peripherals is estimated to be about three lacs (Muhyi'd Dīn Sūfī, 974). About 7500 people live within the houseboats and one lac people live in the Hamlets

Study area

Dal Lake is located on the eastern part of the Srinagar city in the hill state of Jammu and Kashmir, on the right bank of Jhelum. *Dal* Lake the main receiving water body of the watershed situated between 74.48° and 75.08° and 34.3° and 34.3° at an altitude of 1583 in the north east of Srinagar city. The lake is fed by the "Arrah" river, flows in a northerly extremity through a dark and deep channel called *Tel Bal*. *Dal* Lake is the largest water body of Srinagar city and because of the causeways and the marshy land has been divided into two parts (M., 1987):

(a) *Lokut-Dal*

(b) *Bud-Dal*

Presently the lake is spread over 1620 ha, consisting 1305 ha of water body and 315 ha of marshy area. This Lake is famous not only for its beauty, but also for its vibrancy, because it sustains within its periphery, a life that is unique anywhere in the world. The *Hanjis* have lived for centuries on the *Dal* and so complete is its infrastructure within the lake that they rarely require to step out on land. *Dal* Lake occupies an important position because of its location and physical setting. Many spots of tourist attraction have been built along its periphery, like the *Mughal* gardens, *Nishat* gardens, *Shalimar* gardens, *Cheshma Shahi*, *Naseem Bagh*, *Pari Mahal*, Botanical Garden and different religious shrines like *Hazratbal*, *Shankaracharya* temple etc (Raina A. N., 1977).

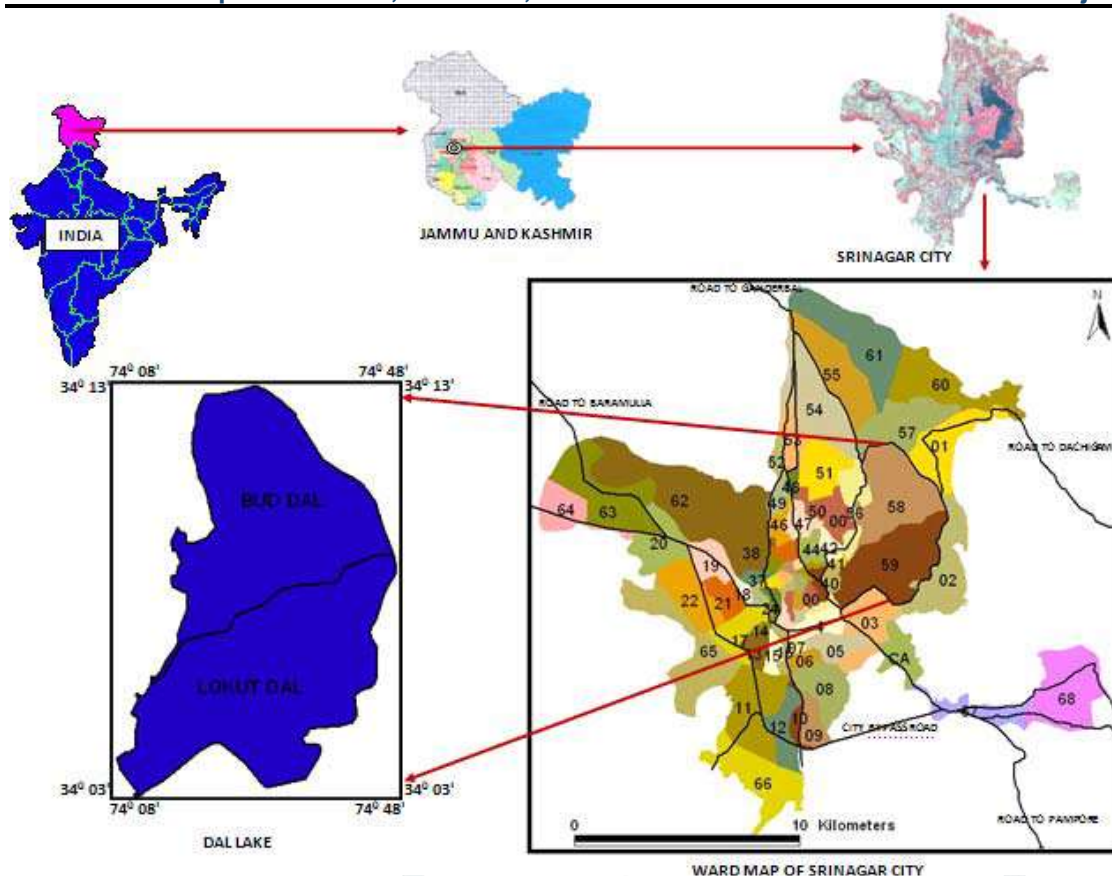


Fig. 1.1 Location of Dal lake

Methodology During the Tenure of Research:

The present study has been carried out for the Dal Lake and its environs located in the fragile hill ecosystem of Kashmir valley. The study period extends from 1980 to 2011 and is based on primary and secondary sources of data, supplemented appropriately by primary information especially for *Hanji* social and economic characteristics. The primary information were drawn from 58 *Hanji* respondents through stratified random sampling. The present study is an attempt to examine the impact of a unique community living in Dal Lake. The present research work will be largely based on intensive fieldwork. The data and information was gathered from various sources. Inferences were drawn on the basis of personal field survey and other field works and observations.

Based on the stratified random sampling method, the localities were classified on the basis of their location criteria, i.e. from every corner of the lake area, including the central part. The primary data thus gathered was processed, classified and quantified by applying simple and sophisticated statistical techniques (Khan, 1998).

In the present investigation empirical approach was adopted to study the participation of Hanjis in different economic activities. In order to provide an objective outlook to the present work, absolute values were worked out. At the same time- tables, graphs, diagrams, maps and photographs etc. were prepared to make comparison and establish relationship between various variables relating to Hanji work force and their participation in different agricultural and economic activities in different parts of Dal Lake. Regarding ecological degradation of the Dal Lake by different sources, the recent data was collected from different departments and at the same time the awareness of Hanjis regarding ecological degradation of the lake was also worked out. Mostly the data was collected from the department of Lakes and water ways development authority (LAWDA), Srinagar municipal corporation (SMC), Srinagar development authority (SDA) and

University of Kashmir (Uok) Srinagar.

The data used for the preparation of land use land cover of the study area from town planning map of Srinagar city on 1:15,000 scale for 1980. Similarly, the land use land cover for 2011 was prepared using IRS-1D LISS III + PAN merged satellite imagery. Both the images were first geocorrected and geo-referenced in Earth Resource Data Analysis System (ERDAS) Imagine 9.0 software, assigning Universal Transverse Mercator with World Geocoded system (UTM WGS 84) projection parameters. Further for assistance in the process of interpretation Survey of India toposheet was also geo-referenced and was given similar projection and datum. The area of interest (*Dal Lake* and its environs) was extracted by sub setting of the town planning map. Satellite imagery was stacked into different bands to produce a false color composite; the area of interest was extracted by sub setting of the image. These images were digitized in GIS environment using ArcView 3.2a software in the form of polygons representing different land use land cover categories. The data was classified into 5 land use land cover classes spread over a total area of 2450 ha of the *Dal Lake* (which incidentally are the two municipal wards i.e., ward number 58 and 59 of Srinagar city). The trend and pattern of *Dal lake* transformation was calculated and every polygon representing the particular class was quantified and displayed in respective maps.

Result & Discussions:

The boat man of Kashmir is known as *Ha'enzin* local language and *Hanji* as in Hindi script. They are also called as *Kishtiban*(Boatman) or *Jalbashi*(Water-dweller). *Hanjis* are among the aboriginal inhabitants of Kashmir Valley and are prominent tribe of the Valley. They are inhabitant from ancient past and could be traced also from *Pandit Kalhana's 'Rajatarangani'*, of 826 BC which is the first historical record written on Kashmir valley. Going through the history of Kashmir, *Hanjis* are said to be the or contemporaries to 'Naga Race', referred in their account as the premier chieftains of this place. This suggests that these People (*Hanjis*) are among the earliest settlers of the valley. They draw their livelihood from the lake and carrying out activities such as; water transporters, fishermen, vegetable-growers, wood-cutters, grain-carriers, dealers of construction materials, collectors of various lake products, paying guest keepers and tourist guides etc. The *Hanji's* are considered to be strong and hard working people who have mastery in art of living on water and know the real depths and mysteries of lakes and rivers (Lawrence, 1998).

3.4 Demographic profile:

Hanjis whose population was estimated to be 33870 in the year 1891 and 20340 based on census report of 1971. As per 2001 census of India, the *Hanji* population living in the lake and its periphery was about 135 thousand (which is currently estimated to be nearly 175 thousand and was only 70 thousand in 1980, showing rapid increase of *Hanji* population). The sex ratio among *Hanjis* was 919 males per thousand females and about 61% of the population is in the productive age group of (15-59 years). The literacy among *Hanjis* of *Dal Lake* is poor, being only about 24%, which is much below the national average. There are an estimated 4210 permanent houses and 3493 temporary (*kutch*a huts) houses and rest of the households live in the lake itself in their house boats with their families (C., 2011). The *Hanji* community depends on *Dal lake* for their sustenance and utilize the lake in different ways. *Hanjis* have limited land holding for their agricultural activities where most of the land is in the form of open water area. A section of *Hanji* community has property rights over 300 ha (6,000 kanals) of agricultural land and 670 ha (13,400 kanals) of

water area. There are more than 775 houseboat owners, about 400 Dunga boat owners. In general, the housing condition of the *Hanjis* reasonably good. The *Hanjis* engaged with tourism industry possess better houses as they live in their luxury houseboats. The *Hanji* localities although disperse in their location within and around Dal lake but they connect themselves mainly by the water ways and rarely by the land routes. Infact they are embedded with lake environment so strongly that the traditional *Hanjis* rarely (LAWADA, (2010), (2011).).

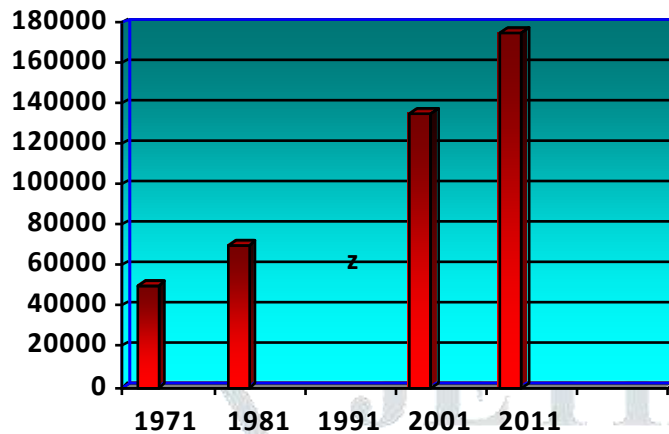


Fig.: 2 Decadal population growth of Hanji,s.

The sex-ratio of Hanjis is about 892 as against 936 the national level and 899 the state average. The low sex ratio shows that the males are better cared and well fed than females. In fact, the females are still a neglected lot and are not properly cared like the underdeveloped patriarchal societies (Rather, 2004).

A field study conducted reveals that the literacy rate in Hanji's is only 12 per cent. The proportion of literate males and females being 20.5 and 3.7 per cent respectively. Nearly 34 per cent of the total population of Hanjis is engaged in various type of productive activities, while the remaining 66 per cent is dependent population, belonging to juvenile, Senile and household female population.

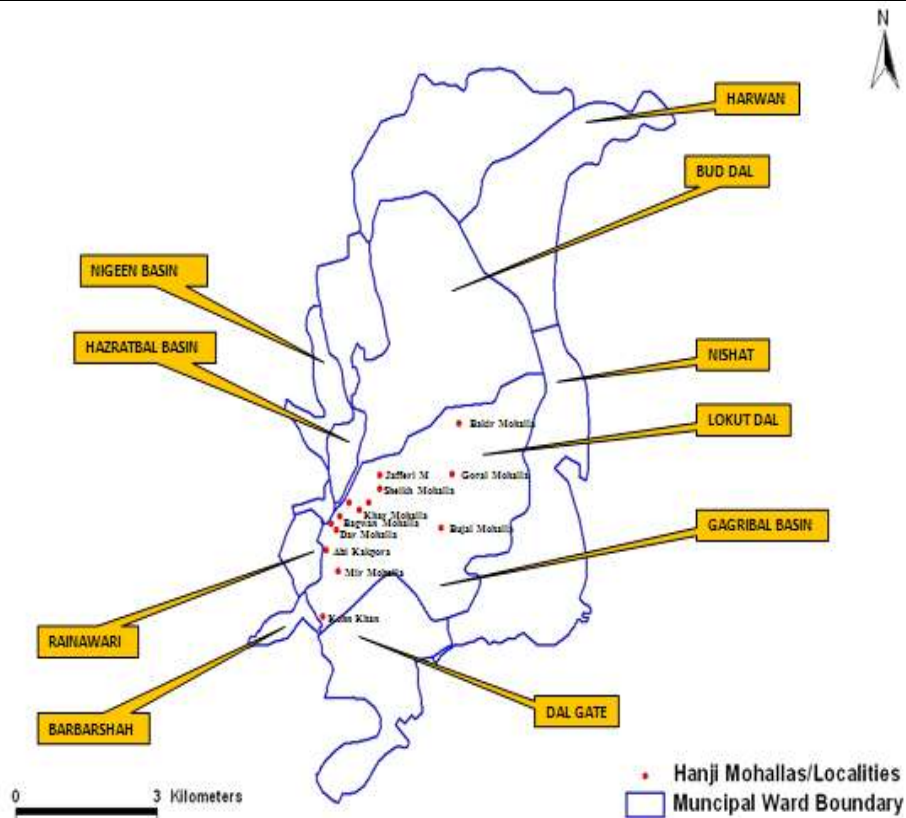


Fig. 3 Location of hanjimohallas/localities

1.2 Socio-economic profile:

Based on the occupation/profession/water centric economic activities & social status Hanjis are divided into different sub castes (Ahmad, 2011):

- **Gad-Hanz (Fishermen):-** Gad-Hanz is a sub group of Hanji community whose main occupation is fishing. The lowest section of this community as far the economic and social conditions are concerned is the Gad-Hanz, which is of central importance in the present investigation. This section of Hanjis is poorest of all sections in the valley. Their belongings are very few and life style not much complex as compared to other castes of hanjis or other sections of society. Since this section of Hanjis has taken from ancient years fishing as a soul profession their economic, social and professional conditions are far more pathetic as compared to their counterparts.
- **Gari-Hanz (Water Nut Gatherers):-** Gari-Hanz is a sub group of Hanji community who extract green & black trapa, fodder & nadroo (Nilumbium) from Walur & Dal lakes to meet their both the ends. They also indulge in fishing occasionally. Collection of vegetation is primarily regulated by the Revenue Department. Areas for *nelumbo* are auctioned annually by the Revenue Department. *Trapa* collection is managed by a separate office of Revenue Department titled Nayab Tahsildar (Malsinghara), Sonawari. Licenses are issued for trapa collection in two phases, a fee of Rs. 25 is charged for three months, i.e. August – October (for immature fruits, locally called *milechgair*) and Rs. 100 for a five months license during November – March (for mature seeds called *kamaigair*).
- **Demb-Hanz (Vegetable Growers):** - Demb-Hanz is a sub group of Hanji community who cultivate different kinds of vegetables along the banks of Dal Lake to make their living. These vegetables are

grown on the floating gardens and are the major source of encroachment to this world-famous water body. These vegetable growers vendor their produce such as vegetables and other other items of daily us like flowers, shawls and carpets at an early morning market on Dal Lake. The livelihoods of these people that live on the banks of lake however got setback due to militancy and their future is at risk from pollution, declining water levels and encroachments.

- **Dunga& Shikara-Hanz (Owners of Passenger Boats):** - Dunga& Shikara-Hanz is a sub group of Hanji community who carry different consignments from one station to another. They also indulge in desiltation (extraction of silt) of rivers and lakes and work as ferrymen. They carry visitors or travelers and tourists across the Dal Lake to different parts and thus make their source of living. Many of them have purchased mechanized motor boats to lure local and foreign tourists. However, with the spread of the vehicular transport to all parts of the state, their services are not in demand & they suffer from acute economic set back. Another reason for their weaker economic position is the political turmoil, which shattered the tourist influx in the valley.
- **Houseboat-Hanz (Owners of luxury Houseboats):-** Houseboat-Hanz is a sub group of Hanji community who caters the services of residence to tourist in their luxurious houseboats and earns a good source of living. In Srinagar (in the Dal Lake), this entire community lives on wooden houseboats and depends upon the lake for sustenance emerged. These hospitable boat people of Kashmir live on boats, clinging proudly to their traditional culture and accepting a way of life that was inherited from their ancestors. The houseboat was the British answer to the edict of a Dogra ruler that no alien could buy immovable property in Kashmir. Built of seasoned cedar, the early houseboats were small and highly mobile. They would escape the heat of mid-summer Srinagar by being towed down river to the Walur Lake. Today's houseboats are too large to permit such ease of movement. Like hotels, houseboats vary in degree of luxury and have been accordingly graded by the Department of Tourism. The Tourism Department has accordingly graded the houseboats depending on the degree of luxury they provide. The houseboat categories include Deluxe, A, B, C and D. A luxury houseboat, like a luxury hotel has fine furniture, good carpets and modern bathroom fittings, while the 'D category' (the lowest category) of houseboats, like low-budget hotels, is spartanly furnished. Like hotels too, houseboats vary widely in their locations. Some overlook the main road, others look out onto lotus gardens and yet others face tiny local markets and villages, all right in the middle of the lake! All houseboats, regardless of category, have highly personalized service. Among the Hanjis, Houseboat Hanjis enjoy a better economic and social status because of tourist influx in the valley from all around the world. They are counted amongst the wealthy people whose assets run in crores. Houseboats in Kashmir Valley serve as the best medium to fulfill the dreams of tourists staying in close contact to nature. One can experience the unique beauty of these houseboats and the natural surroundings on Dal Lake, Nagin Lake and Jhelum River. Earlier used by the people of fishing communities only, these boats today are not merely a tourist attraction rather a place where the use of unique Kashmiri handicrafts can be seen (furniture, carpets etc.). They are completely made of wood and provide guests with homely environment, quiet surroundings and enchanting views outside. Quite similar to a fully furnished house, they offer proper living rooms, drawing and dining rooms, carved wooden furniture, and beautifully decorated interiors. Generally, one

will find two or more bedrooms with attached bathroom, common eating-place and a balcony in a houseboat. The interiors are decorated in typical Kashmiri style with vibrant colors and art. A few boats may have a separate cook boat attached to the main houseboat that serves a variety in Chinese, Continental and authentic Kashmiri dishes. One can find a wide variety of houseboats and can easily find the one that suits his requirements (Ahmad, 2011).

Hanjis have been identified as a separate caste in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. They are a unique homogenous community, pursuing common name, traditions, ceremonies, rituals and perform common traditional occupations. They have several sub-caste based on different occupations, which they have been carrying on traditionally (Sufi, 1949). *Hanjis* are located in pockets, locally known as *mohallas* with in *Bud Dal* and *Lokut Dal* municipal wards of Srinagar city. The important *mohallas* with *Hanjis* concentration are *KohnKhan*, *Mir Mohalla*, *Abi Kakpora*, *Dar Mohalla*, *Nishat*, *Shalimar*; lying in the periphery of the lake and the localities namely *Bujal Mohalla*, *Gogal Mohalla*, *Bakir Mohalla* are lying further in the interior of the lake. The form, structure and size of these *Mohallas* vary from one locality to the other. Some localities are big consisting more than hundred of households while some others are as small as five to ten household only. The *Dal Gate* and *Gagribal* area of the lake is having high concentration of *Hanjis* (Ruhe, 1985).

Hanjis in general do not have fixed incomes. Their income varies from month to month and season to season. It is more true of those who are engaged in hotel management and houseboat industry. In fact, tourism is an important activity on which many of the *Hanjis* are dependent. Tourism in itself depends on many other factors like the number and pattern of tourist inflow, the weather conditions and the political situation of the State.

Hanjis, a peculiar ethnic group attached to water in general is not developing at the desired rate. The living conditions of *Gad-Hanjis* and *Demb-Hanjis* are poor and unhygienic, while those who are houseboat owners have better income and social status. Some pragmatic planning is to be made for the socio-economic upheaval of the *Hanjis* of the State.

Conclusion:

The present study was done for aboriginal community of Kashmir (India), the *Hanjis* and their dependence on *Dal Lake* for livelihood. The study finds that with the increase in their population and increased resource exploitation, the environs of *Dal Lake* is severely affected. A population of about 7500 people live within the home-boat area and an equal number lives outside this area on the island of boats. There has been a substantial growth of people living in the lake area since 1977. The first human ingress along the *Dal Lake*, is reported in the 18th & 19th centuries, far reaching changes have taken place in the lake environs. Human interference by way of settlement on the lake to facilitate pedestrian traffic and establishment of lake tourism by providing "floating residences" in the form of house-boat got accelerated with passage of time to extent of causing abuse to the lake body and resulting in pollution of its waters, encroachment shrinkage of water expanse thus threatening the survival of lake itself. It was estimated that the population in and around *Dal lake* had 100% increase. The recent studies revealed that more than fifty thousand people are living within the lake which includes 42096 souls within hamlets and more than 8000 souls in house boats and doonga boats. The human incursions within the lake too are unabated. Thousands of

Kanals of open water areas are converted into floating gardens, Radhs and into land masses every year. In the present case the *Hanjis* are alienated from development plans for *Dal* Lake. This has in some way made them “greedy” as they have exploited the *Dal* Lake as never before. The sense of attachment and reliance seems to have disappeared.

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