

HANJI'S OF DAL LAKE: "A STUDY OF THE ECOLOGY, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY"

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INTRODUCTION

Some aspects of environmental and socio-economic issues like soil conservation, public health, forests, wild life, social and economic conditions etc. in a general have always been in all the five-year plans. The physical environment, in which we live in, is a dynamic, complex and inter-connected system in which any action in one part affects the others. There is always interdependence of living things and their relationship with land, air and water. Any planning for harmonious development recognises this unity of nature and man. Such a planning is possible only on the basis of a comprehensive appraisal of environmental issues, particularly socio-economic and ecological issues.

From the last few decades' geographers are concentrating on the study of micro-landscape with an approach of 'cultural and environmental determinism'. In the light of this approach, the attitudes, objectives and technical skills of various scattered groups of people is considered as the major determinant for the existing cultural landscape and the stages of development of the people. In the developed countries, the social geographers have made a lot of contribution in this regard, but in India much work in this field has however, not been done in an exhaustive manner. The present work is a thorough and exhaustive attempt to study a unique human group as a spatial entity in its natural setting.

One of the most important features of Kashmir valley is 'Hanji' habitation, a segment of population living in boats of different shapes, sizes and types in and around the different water-bodies like lakes, streams and rivers. A boatman of Kashmir is known as Hanz in local language and Hanji is used in Hindustani script.

The Hanjis, despite modern technological development and educational advancement are having the most traditional mode of life and have remained one of the most backward communities of Kashmir throughout the ages. It is very unfortunate that these people have not come to limelight in the eyes of geographers, historians, sociologists, anthropologists and policy makers, as they should have been. A lot of questions regarding their origin, arrival, ethnic background, knowledge of boat making is still in mystery.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

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 investigations 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.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the present study are as under:

- I To delineate the areas of major concentration of Hanjis in the Dal Lake.
- II To examine the origin, arrival and spread of Hanjis in the Dal Lake.
- III To identify the demographic characteristics of the various groups of Hanjis living in different parts of Dal Lake.
- IV To study the occupational structure of the Hanjis.
- V To access the quality of life of the Hanjis of the Dal Lake.
- VI To ascertain the impact of activities of Hanjis on the ecology of the Dal Lake.
- VII To suggest a suitable strategy for the socio-economic and eco-development of the Hanjis of the Dal Lake.

HYPOTHESES TO BE TESTED

- I The present occupation of the Hanjis provides adequate income for their subsistence and there is shift of occupations from fishing to other gainful activities.
- II The low literacy rate of the Hanjis is mainly because of economic deprivation.
- III Illiteracy, low economic and social status of Hanjis is responsible for the ecological degradation of the Dal Lake.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is an attempt to examine the socio-economic and ecological conditions of a unique community living in water bodies especially that of Dal Lake. The present research work is largely based on intensive fieldwork. The data and information have been gathered from various sources. Inferences have been 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. Twenty localities were selected and at least ten households from each locality were selected depending upon the size of locality. The primary data thus gathered has been processed, classified and quantified by applying simple and sophisticated statistical techniques.

In the present investigation empirical approach has been adopted to study the participation of Hanjis in different economic activities. In order to provide an objective outlook to the present work, absolute values have been worked out. At the same time—tables, graphs, diagrams, maps and photographs etc. have been 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 has been also worked out.