

Tourism-Led Gentrification: The Case of Dal Lake in Kashmir



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Abstract

The dissertation explores tourism-led gentrification, its causes and the impact on the communities living in and around the ecologically-sensitive region of Dal Lake in Kashmir. The dissertation employs methodological triangulation using interviews, survey and policy document analysis, as methods. The policy document in question is the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 issued by the Srinagar Development Authority. Analysing the correlation between tourism and gentrification in a conflict-torn region and using displacement as a conceptual lens, the thesis maps the socio-cultural and economic aspects of touristification especially in relation to the everyday lives of the communities. The dissertation employs a two-pronged analytical approach by using two categories – land milieu and water milieu – to foreground the patterns and impact of gentrification in and around the lake. The analysis of the land milieu concerns itself with a detailed exploration into Boulevard, the long promenade along the lake's periphery. It further discusses holiday rentals and issues of mobility and maps the city's land-use patterns particularly in relation to expansion along the lake's periphery. The study of the water milieu, on the other hand, is an exploration into the historical houseboats of Kashmir and the local *hanji* (or *haenz*) community; foregrounding the issues concerning policies of renovation and relocation of houseboats. The dissertation also delves into the government's land use and tourism-driven development plans around the lake, especially post abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution that gave 'special status' to the region.

Keywords: *Dal Lake, Kashmir, Article 370, tourism, gentrification, displacement, houseboats, holiday rentals, overtourism, Srinagar Master Plan 2035*

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1. Introduction

The Kashmir region conveys a spectrum of meanings to people worldwide. It has existed as *Cashmere* in the colonial times during which it was introduced to the British public through its most celebrated commodity, the Kashmiri shawl. It has been exoticised as the ‘Venice of the East’ and extolled as a ‘paradise on Earth’ by the Mughal emperors. It also exists as a site of contestation since India and Pakistan became two nations after British colonialism ended in 1947. It continues to exist as the world’s highest militarised region and at the same time a ‘tourist-heaven’.

While the dynamics of the region tend to evolve, it continues to receive higher tourist footfall every year; the recent years – owing to the Covid-19 pandemic – has been an exception. This influx of tourists provides vibrance and colour to the politically induced bleak palette of the Valley because of the continuous and stimulating economic activity around the region. One of Kashmir trip's integral and inevitable parts is a must stay at Dal Lake. Known both for its picturesque views of *shikharas* (special wooden boats in Kashmir) and the narrow streets lined with cafes and restaurants, areas around Dal Lake make it a popular destination both for tourists and locals. However, with the revocation of Article 370 and the subsequent mass influx of non-residents buying properties in the region, the traditional neighbourhoods around Dal Lake have been transformed to suit the needs of affluent residents, while locals are pushed out of the neighbourhoods, and the prices of property have risen. This process, otherwise known as gentrification, has raised many socio-economic questions pertaining to the locals' culture and commerce. In this context, the introductory chapter provides an overview of Kashmir, its historical background, its geographical orientation, and its ecological value. Additionally, it outlines the nature of tourism in Kashmir, the people linked to it, and the implication of perpetual displacement of locals. This chapter also identifies research gaps and questions, provides a broad overview of the study's methodology, and sets the tone of the Study.

1.1 The Kashmir region : Historical background and geography


The oval-shaped Valley of Kashmir is a separate geographical entity, a mesoregion of Jammu and Kashmir which is divided by the Himalayas from one another. (See Fig 1). The Great Himalayan and the North Kashmir mountain ranges cut it off from Ladakh. The Pir Panjal ranges on the South and Southwest separate it from Jammu. 19th century British author, Sir Walter Lawrence, records interesting observations regarding the climate of the region in his seminal work, 'The Valley of Kashmir' (1885) – a chronicle of land records in the Kashmir Valley. Lawrence (1885), who worked as a civil servant in India, corresponds Kashmir – with respect to its latitude – to Peshawar, Baghdad, and Damascus in Asia, with Fez in Morocco and South Carolina in America. However, Kashmir's climate, distinct from all these regions, has instead been compared to Switzerland until the end of May and to Southern France in July and August (p 13). Alongside these climatic conditions, the Himalayas – youngest fold mountains of the world – with snow-clad peaks throughout the year and home to the highest peak of the world, offer a wide platform for adventurous activities and form an indisputable source of allurements for tourists.



Fig.1 Location of Kashmir Valley

Source: www.nationsonline.org (edited by the author)

Despite its distinct characteristics and global popularity as a tourist destination, the region has been a ground for political instability particularly since 2019 (Parvaiz,



2020). The Muslim majority region has been under a constant clampdown after being stripped of its semi-autonomous status by the right-wing Hindu nationalist government headed by Narendra Modi. The dispute of Jammu and Kashmir emerged with the creation of two independent states, India and Pakistan, in August 1947. Jammu and Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region, was ruled by a Hindu autocrat known as Maharaja, who chose to sign an Instrument of Accession with India after Pakistani tribals started marching into Jammu and Kashmir. However, the signing of accession and the invasion of tribals marked the beginning of hostilities between India and Pakistan as the Indian army landed in Kashmir to halt the march of the advancing raiders. The battle against tribals turned into a full-fledged India-Pakistan war, the first between the two, after gaining Independence from Britain. India joined the United Nations and a ceasefire was declared, with a promise of plebiscite to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, which, however, never translated into action (Lamb, 1993). The accession however was conditional with the Indian state exerting control over only four subjects including Defence, Foreign Affairs, Currency and Communication (Noorani, 2015). The remaining subjects were the prerogative of Jammu and Kashmir state, which had its own Prime Minister, a *Sadr-e-Riyasat* or President of the State, and a Constituent Assembly empowered to make and approve laws. This exception to Jammu and Kashmir came to be known as the 'special status' (Noorani, 2015).

In 1949, India formally introduced Article 370 which exempted Jammu and Kashmir from the Indian Constitution, effectively granting autonomy to the state to run its own affairs (Schofield, 2000). The issue of Jammu and Kashmir has become more complex ever since India stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its nominal autonomy in August 2019 and divided the State into two federally administered territories known as Union Territory of Ladakh and Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Both Pakistan and China, who are in control of a major chunk of erstwhile state's territories, have objected to the move and termed it unilateral. The removal of Jammu and Kashmir's special status was meant to change the existing political, social and administrative structures in the state with direct bearing on the domiciles of the region. The move, which was hailed as the Indian State's trump over 'Pakistan-backed separatism', had a message for the people of Kashmir that they will no longer have a separate constitution but will have to abide by the Indian

constitution much like any other states (Pandey, 2019). This has a direct bearing on the Kashmir region as all Indian laws will be automatically applicable to Kashmiris; and critical to this dissertation, it means people from outside the region are now able to buy property in Kashmir.

While there is no direct impact of the Article 370 abrogation on tourism, there is a sense of victory among Indian visitors who see it as a move that grants them authority over Kashmir and its people. The Indian state has argued that the flow of tourists has increased in Kashmir after Article 370 was abolished, but there are contrary views from the industry (Parvaiz, 2020). Even before the removal of Article 370, Kashmir saw a record number of tourist arrivals. In addition to the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation on ground has impacted the arrival of tourists. The tourists avoid Kashmir whenever it erupts in civil protests against the Indian rule, as was seen during the political unrests in 2008, 2010 and 2016.



Fig.2 Political conflict and geographical bifurcation of the Kashmir region
Source: Author

1.2 Tourism in the Valley: An introduction to Dal Lake

Jammu and Kashmir's economy is dependent on agriculture and allied sectors like horticulture. As per government statistics, 70 percent of Jammu and Kashmir's economy is dependent on agriculture while tourism only constitutes 6 per cent (Shakir, 2021). The export of Kashmir's fruits, walnuts and almonds form the backbone of the economy and it has no direct relation with tourism in the region. Even at the heights of recent civil unrest in 2016 and 2019, the export of fruit to other states and countries did not come to a halt and continued as usual. The tourists who visit Kashmir mostly spend their money on arts and craft, clothing and site-seeing.

Tourism has been an integral part of Kashmir's economy for centuries. Enriched with a deep cultural history and natural scenic topography, the Valley has been a popular tourist destination. Affordable air travel and the development of the road infrastructure, over recent decades, has further accelerated tourism within the Valley and around the lake. In order to cater to this increasing demand for tourism, there has been a rapid increase in the hospitality sector. Among the numerous tourist sites in Kashmir, the significance of Dal Lake is paramount and is particularly significant in its contribution to the tourism sector (Shah & Islam, 2021). Located at the hem of the Zabarwan range, its scenic beauty, floating gardens, *shikaras* (or small decorative boats) and houseboat services make the lake more attractive, significant and distinct as compared to other lakes and tourist spots in the region. Several water bodies in the region lack the tourist and recreational facilities that are available in Dal Lake. Moreover, adjacent to its periphery, there are a number of other tourist attractions such as the terraced Mughal gardens of Nishat, Shalimar, Chashma Shahi and Pari Mahal and several religious shrines like the Hazratbal shrine, Shankaracharya temple and Makhdoom Sahib (Nicholls, 1909).

The iconic Dal Lake is at the heart of Kashmir's tourist business. A research article notes that nature-based tourism – focused on both adventurous and relaxing outdoor activities – is an emerging industry especially where employment and resource use in India is concerned (Karanth & Defries, 2010). The study also reported that nature-based tourism documented a 15% growth rate, 80% of which were domestic tourists. With its physical setting more attractive than the other lakes, no wonder then the tourists spend a lot of time and money to enjoy its natural beauty

and services (Maudlin, 2010). In his book, *The Valley of Kashmir* (1885), Sir Walter Lawrence reflects, “Perhaps in the whole world there is no corner as pleasant as Dal Lake” (p 21). A 2017 survey conducted to study the recreational value of the Dal Lake estimated the annual recreational value of the fresh water body at US\$ 26 million) for 105,048 tourists (Shah and Islam, 2021). Thus, a substantial monetary benefit accruing from the recreational use of the lake to the tourists indicates that the lake has substantial value in the local economy. However, due to the tourist attraction, population increase around the water body has led to encroachments, unplanned architecture with experts believing that the lake may disappear within the next 50 years due to ever-increasing eutrophication and siltation. The lake which once covered an area of 75 square kilometres has shrunk to 12 square kilometres in the last two decades (Ashish, 1985). In general, the massive urban expansion in Srinagar and some major towns of Kashmir, is also consuming the region’s wetlands. More than 50 percent of water bodies in Srinagar and its suburbs have vanished during the past century. Over the same period, the area of Srinagar grew 23 times and population 12 times.



Fig.3 Evolution of Dal Lake

Source: *Master Plan Srinagar City 1971 and Srinagar Master Plan 2035 (edited by the author)*



Due to the limitations pertaining to new infrastructure developments such as conservation policies, in popular places like Dal Lake, there has been a recent trend of residential tourism – conversion of local homes to tourist stays – in order to cater to the growing accommodation needs of the tourists. This conversion of local resident homes to guest houses, hotels and short-term holiday rentals for tourist stays, has led to a slow but evident displacement of the local residents who, in the hope of earning high returns from tourism, convert their homes to short-term rentals and relocate to the hinterlands. Moreover, this displacement has a direct bearing on several small-scale tourist-related industries such as arts and handicrafts. The growth and splurge in the tourism industry has often a direct impact on these sectors, bringing in more investors to cash out on the consumerism by the tourists (Bhat, Rayaz, and Ahmed, 2017). The Dal Lake has not only been the epicentre of tourism but has also led to a new sprawl – away from the lake as well as further into the lake. With the growth of the small-scale tourist industries, the city centre is expanding inwards towards the lake while locals are moving out to the peripheries of the city to accommodate businesses that cater to the inflow of tourists. This shift in land use, in particular, has driven various policy changes that impact the development of various neighbourhoods around the periphery of the lake (Casimir, 2011). With the Boulevard road being an epicentre for tourist activities, adjoining neighbourhoods like Dalgate and Khayam – according to the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 – are targets of gentrification driven by these policy changes. It is important to understand and evaluate the trends following this gentrification, in order to have a better understanding of the possible futures for the Valley.

In Kashmir over the past decade, tourism has been a driving force for attracting national funds for the city infrastructure development. The national and state funding were the only major source of investments in these sectors and the domicile holders previously had the exclusive right to own land and property in the region. Owing to the revocation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution – which made Kashmir a semi-autonomous region guaranteeing its residents, citizenship and land rights – the domicile privilege of the residents of the Valley has been stripped. This change in the ownership rights has for the first time, opened up the market in Kashmir to private investors who see scope to profit from the tourism sector in the Valley (Andrabi, 2020). With the result, the policies underway will pave the way for investment

opportunities, eventually speeding up the already existing displacement of locals from the popular tourist destinations like Dal Lake. On a larger scale, these policy changes may lead to a large-scale gentrification led by tourism along the periphery of the lake which provide an opportunistic scope for the development of holiday homes for people across the country, who earlier relied on short-term rentals. However, the consistent political unrest brings along clouds of uncertainty. Especially since 2019 – when Article 370 was abrogated – the continued political tension and uncertainty has created hesitancy from major investors. This paradox of new investment opportunities on one hand and uncertainties on the other hand, has led to a delay in the proposed development plans and has therefore, greatly impacted the locals (Bhat, Rayaz, and Ahmed, 2017). These delays have also resulted in constant changes in policies and planning. Given these proposed policy changes, it is important to evaluate the trajectory of the upcoming development based on case studies which report similar processes of urban sprawl led by tourism. This analysis will help predict scenarios that could impact the growth of tourism within the valley, and at the same time, provide a critical standpoint to question the policies devised by the state.

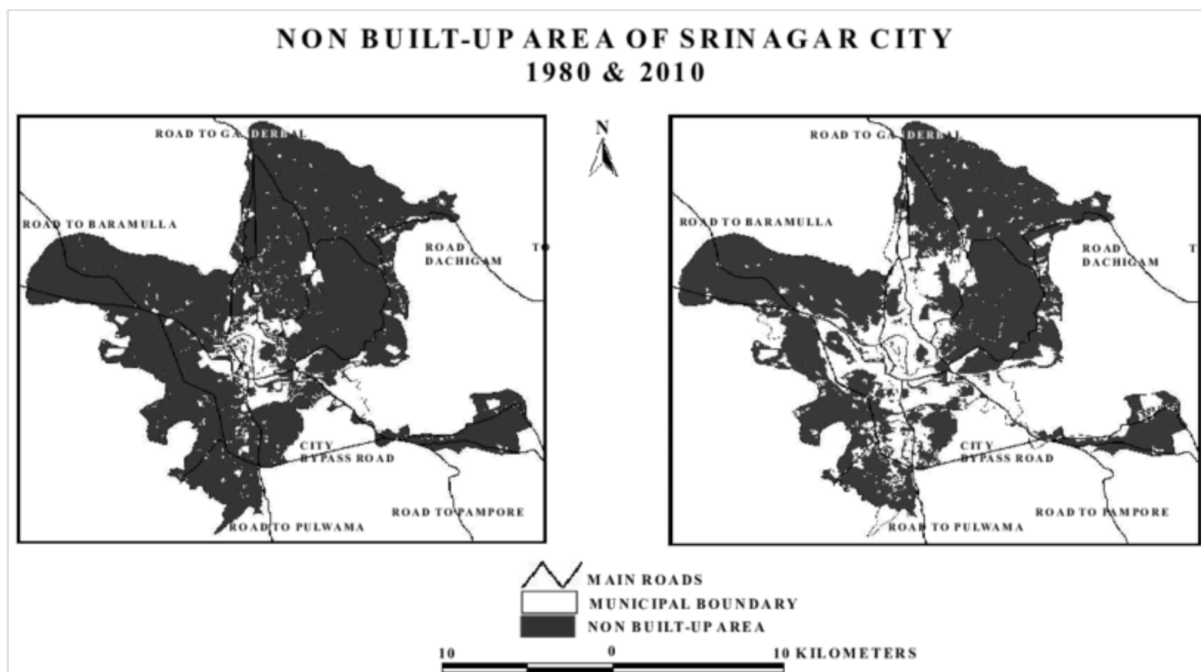


Fig.4 Non Built up area of Srinagar city- 1980 and 2010

Source: Land Transformation Analysis Using Remote Sensing and GIS Techniques by Arshad Amin and Shahab Fazal

1.3 Research questions

Kashmir is undergoing policy changes in land ownership rights after the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution. Changes in land-use patterns change within development plans proposed by the Srinagar Master Plan 2035, are also noted. Due to current changes in land use around Dal Lake, especially the conversion from residential to service sector, it is important to interrogate how these new policies will impact the locals and what is the extent of displacement in the region. Whether or not these upcoming policies will have provisions to benefit the locals residing in these tourist-oriented areas and how these policies will impact the urban fabric of the entire Valley are pertinent questions to this dissertation. It is also necessary to understand the correlation between various factors responsible for the current displacement of locals in Kashmir. Moreover, tracing similar factors from other global contexts will further help in predicting the trajectory of the proposed development in the region. Furthermore, it becomes pertinent to study the impact of touristification on other infrastructural facilities such as transportation. It is contended that the public transportation majorly caters to the developed areas – from where the locals have moved from – resulting in poor transportation networks in the suburbs where the locals have moved into.

Therefore, with this contextual backdrop and using Srinagar's Dal Lake as a case study for research, the dissertation explores the following research questions:

1. What is the socio-economic, cultural and environmental impact of tourism-led gentrification on the local communities living within and around Dal Lake?
2. How will the tourism-led development policies – charted out in the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 – impact the local communities and areas within and around Dal Lake?
3. How have the changes in the land use and land ownership, in the aftermath of abrogation Article 370, impacted the local communities of the land and water milieus of the Dal Lake?

1.4 Research methods

The dissertation – through primary and secondary data collection – employs methodological triangulation using interviews, survey and policy document analysis, as major methods. Phone interviews were conducted with a cross-section of people from different socio-economic backgrounds living and working within and around Dal Lake. The research participants – including members of the local community, vendors, cafe and bakery owners, houseboat owners, restaurateurs and *shikarawallas* (boat rowers) – were asked a similar set of questions pertaining to the social, economic, cultural, and environmental impacts of gentrification. Moreover, interviews were also conducted with the tourists and experts such as municipality officials and architects. All the interviews – included in the annexure – were summarised keeping in mind the research objectives of the thesis. In order to study the impact of gentrification quantitatively, a general survey was further conducted for a sample size of 100 people divided between the locals living both in the lake as well as outside of the lake. Furthermore, in addition to studying newspaper articles and research papers, a policy document analysis was conducted for the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 issued by the Srinagar Development Authority of the Jammu and Kashmir government. These primary and secondary sources are stated and categorised in the infographics in Fig. 5.1 and Fig. 5.2.

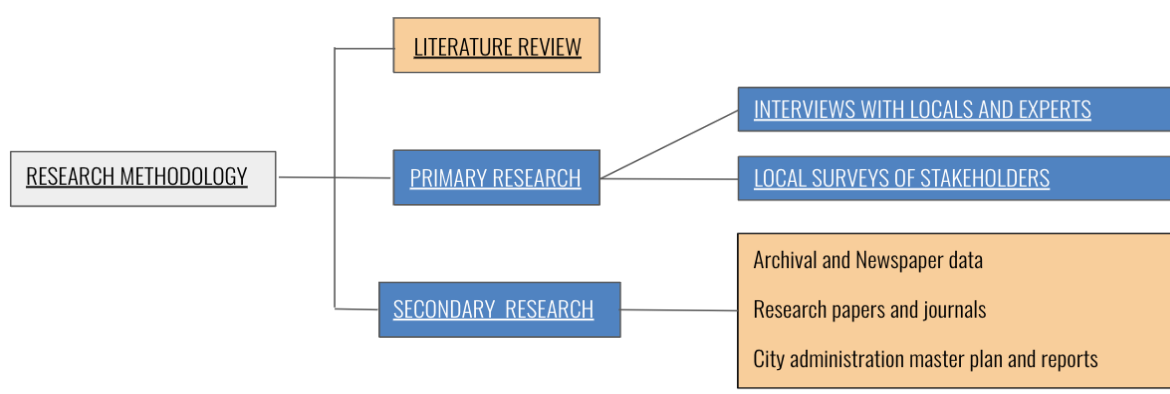


Fig.5.1 Schematic representation of the Research Methodology breakdown
Source: Author

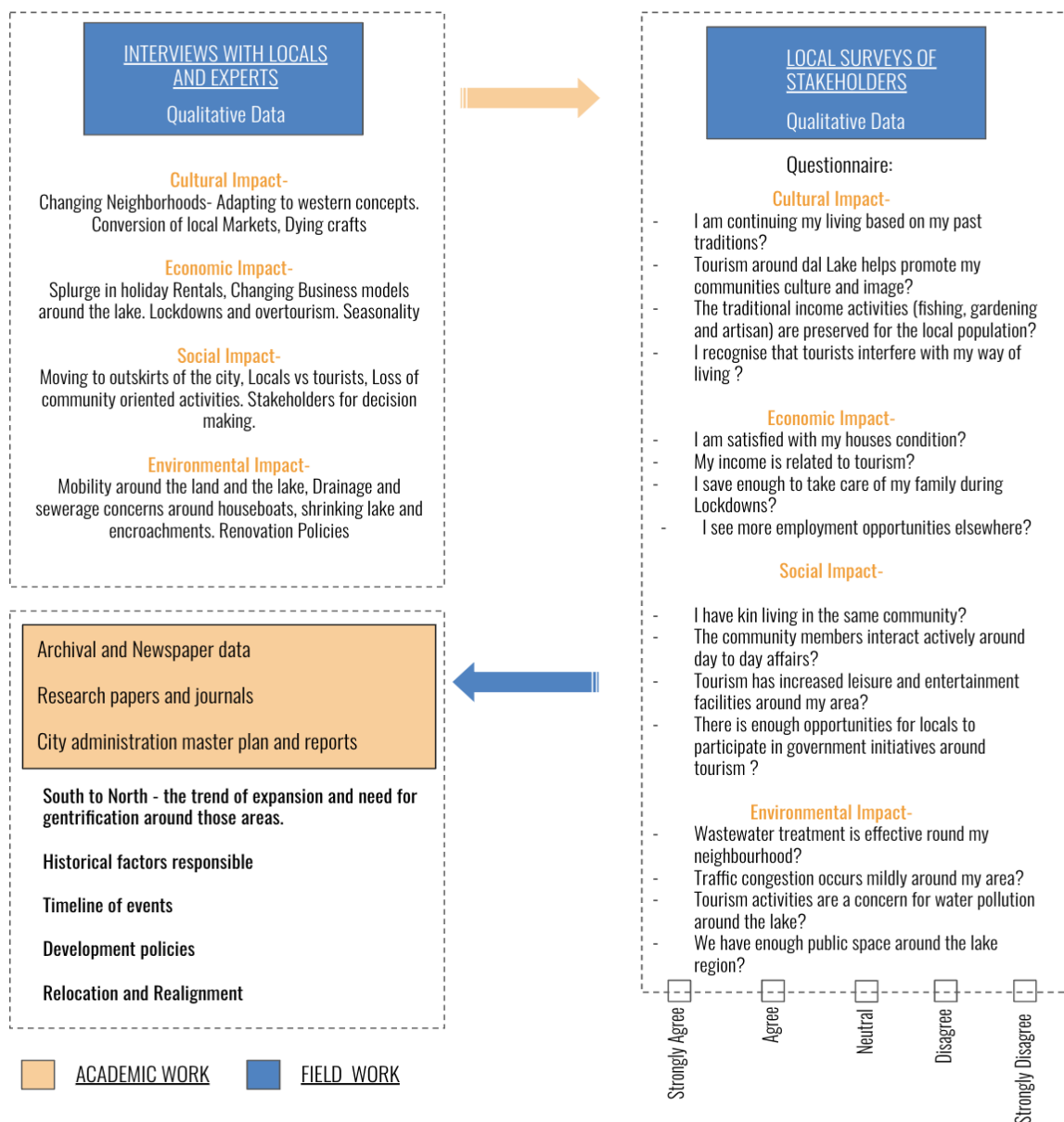


Fig.5.2 Schematic representation of the Research Methodology
Source: Schematic Diagram by the author

Primary research:

a. Survey

Sample: residents, local vendors and other business owners living inside and outside of the Dal Lake

Total sample size: 100

Sample breakdown:

The water milieu	Sample size
Residents from lake backwaters	10
Market area in Dal	10
Houseboat owners	10
<i>Shikarawallas</i> (ferryman/ferrywomen) and gardeners in the lake	10
The land milieu	
Neighbourhood 1, Foreshore	10
Neighbourhood 2, Boulevard	10
Neighbourhood 3, Dalgate	10
Market area 1, Foreshore	10
Market area 2, Boulevard	10
Market area 3, Dalgate	10

b. Interviews with locals and experts

Municipality official	Riyaz (name changed) 52 years old, Government Official, LAWDA(Lakes and Waterways Development Authority)
Local inhabitant	Haseeb (name changed) 70 years old , local resident around Boulevard
Local inhabitant	Abdul Rahman 59 years old, local resident who relocated from Boulevard to the suburbs
Locals from other part of cities	Mir Qaiser 30 years old, businessman and a local residing in the civil lines. He travels to the lake regularly for recreation
Local vendor	Jan Ahmed 28 years old, barbecue vendor at Makai Park.
Local vendor	Ghulam Nabi 35 years old, vegetable

Houseboat owner	vendor on Foreshore road and cultivator Amin Peer 42 years old, houseboat owner and a travel agent operating around Dal Lake
Restaurant owner	Daniyal Mir 38 years old, local resident and business holder on Boulevard
Bakery/Cafe owner	Saqib Mir 40 years old, cafe and bakery owner on Boulevard
Local Artisan	Nazir Ahmad 53 years old, artisan and boatmaker, residing in Dal backwaters.
Tourist	Prachee Chandrashekhar 32 years old, tourist who has visited the Valley a couple of times in the past few years
Local Architect	Bisma Shakeel 33 years old, local architect who has worked on various projects around Dal Lake
Shikarawalla (ferryman/ferrywomen)	Waseem 26 years old, local resident of the hanji community, works as a shikarawalla

Secondary research:

- a. Newspaper articles
- b. Research papers and journals
- c. Policy document analysis : Srinagar Master Plan 2035

2. Tourism-driven gentrification


This chapter explores the conceptual valences of gentrification and the complex issues marking tourism-driven gentrification. These complexities add a multitude of variables – social, economic, environmental, cultural and political – where gentrification is concerned. In the subsequent section, the thesis delves into the work of Agustin Cocola-Gant, an urban studies scholar, whose research lies at the intersection of urban and tourism studies and pays particular attention to the short-term rental market, gentrification, and tourism-led displacement. Cocola-Gant also talks about the role of gentrification in peripheral economies where the consumption power of the middle classes is smaller than in advanced economies, and interrogates how tourism supplants the lack of local demand (Cocola-Gant 2018). These arguments lend an apt framework for understanding tourism-led displacement in and around Kashmir's Dal Lake. The chapter also provides a brief outline of rent bubbles around holiday rentals and housing situations in the cities of Barcelona and Majorca and tries to understand the concept of over-tourism associated with tourism-led gentrification. Since the theories of gentrification are dominantly Euro-centric, this thesis attempts to add to the scholarship on gentrification by focussing on gentrification in the global south using Dal Lake as a case study. Using a bottom-up approach, the interviews conducted with members of the local communities, vendors, cafe and bakery owners, houseboat owners, restaurateurs and *shikarawallas* (ferryman/ferrywomen), entrepreneurs, local municipality officials and architects, foreground a grassroots understanding of tourism-led gentrification.

The dissertation employs a two-pronged analytical approach by using two categories – land milieu and water milieu – to foreground the patterns and impact of gentrification in and around the lake. The analysis of the land milieu concerns itself with a detailed exploration into Boulevard, the long promenade along the lake's periphery. It further discusses holiday rentals and issues of mobility and maps the city's land-use patterns particularly in relation to expansion along the lake's periphery. The study of the water milieu, on the other hand, is an exploration into the historical houseboats of Kashmir and the local hanji community; foregrounding the issues concerning policies of renovation and relocation of houseboats.

2.1 Tourism-led gentrification: an overview of the literature

Examining the changes caused by gentrification, tracing its consequences in the land-use patterns and particularly studying its relation to displacement, has been a major focus of the contemporary urban studies scholarship. This scholarship has employed a critical lens in examining development and gentrification and has analysed their relation to several neoliberal agendas. One of the significant reasons for displacement of the local communities in places characterised by abrasive tourism, scholars argue, is the involvement of the investors and their market-driven ideology. This also alters the everyday life of the communities involved who are transformed in the process; from community-based sustainable living, their existence revolves around the ever-demanding and market-driven tourism. This is also a major cause of gentrification in such places around the globe. With short rentals garnering more money, various investors and tourist companies latch on to such an abrasive model, to generate capital accumulation instantaneously and rapidly. This shift of focus in the housing market from long term rentals providing steady but low incomes, to the vacation flats providing rapid high rents, has triggered reproduction of housing modules designed toward accommodating the tourists in these local urban settings. The study primarily uses the work of Cocola-Gant to understand tourism-led gentrification around Dal Lake in Kashmir. He uses the term 'collective displacement' for such a phenomenon where residential life is replaced by tourism. Cocola-Gant studies tourism-driven changes in the population and neighbourhoods in urban contexts. He has also written on corporate hosts and short-term rentals especially in the post-pandemic scenario.


Citing examples from European cities such as Barcelona and Lisbon, his work sheds light on how holiday rentals affect the local communities. Although the dynamics of tourism and the political and economic scenarios in Barcelona and Lisbon, are different from that of Kashmir, Cocola-Gant's observations on the peripheral economies seem to be of relevance in understanding the impact of tourism-led gentrification in and around Dal Lake. The literature on gentrification majorly focuses on cities in the global north. This study hopes to address that gap; and challenges the conventional ways of theorising by foregrounding the local specificities of Dal Lake, the colonial policies and the local land and water-based economies that shape the region. The concept of gentrification becomes an intriguing phenomenon



especially in peripheral economies as the structure of such economies predominantly relies on tourism and the purchasing power of tourists for growth and development. Without a doubt, this growth and development is also concomitant to investment opportunities in the urban arena, leading to significant changes in the built environment, transformation into large-scale resorts and an increase in commercial and residential properties. The process of 'touristification' can be interpreted as one of the processes of gentrification, leading to a multi-faceted displacement. Moreover, there the gentrified neighbourhoods also share an intricate relationship to the peripheral and rural settlements (Cocola-Gant 2018).


Cocola-Gant (2020) further states that the gradual process of densifying land use in touristic districts not only leads to an increase in the value of commercial and residential properties, but also gives the owners of these properties an opportunity to capitalise on the near-to-future increase in the value of their properties. This is seen by the developers as necessary to stimulate local property markets and extract profits from them, which leads to property owners proposing local tourism activities through local entrepreneurialism. Although in capitalist economies, gentrification is seen as a natural phenomenon, in reality, it often follows a top-down trajectory whereby government policies, together with a boost in tourism, leads to gentrification. Gentrification not only co-exists with the tourism industry, they feed off each other (Cocola-Gant 2018). Further, with the commodification of the touristic neighbourhoods, the value of land fluctuates with the trends of the market. This fluctuation creates a striking gap between 'capitalised ground rent', which is the actual value of the return the owner can get by selling his property, and the 'potential ground rent', which is the optimum return he can capitalise on, in the best possible scenario. The touristification of the neighbourhood also results in the displacement of locals to the outer regions of the city after selling or renting their properties in the buzz areas (Smith 1987).

Cocola-Gant analyses displacement not only as an economic phenomenon but cultural as well. The existing literature highlights two scenarios resulting in tourism-led gentrification. The first scenario considers advanced capitalist economies where tourism and gentrification co-exist and reinforce each other. The second scenario highlights tourism-led gentrification in peripheral economies that rely on



tourism as a factor for development and growth. Looking at tourism through a postcolonial lens, especially as it operates in precarious contexts such as Kashmir, is neglected in the dominant scholarship on gentrification. In the postcolonial scenario, in peripheral economies due to the uneven capitalism, the progression of gentrification in places that focuses on tourism as a tool for engaging in territorial competition is related less to the consumption demand of a local middle class and more to the effects of tourists as consumers of places. The gap between the purchasing power of visitors and local residents leads to market pressure on both housing and services that makes places increasingly unaffordable for the indigenous population. This tourism-oriented rehabilitation threatens the residents' right to stay. It needs to be related to a wider conceptualisation of tourism-driven displacement. This displacement is also felt by the residents living in touristy places as a loss of a place which was once familiar and inhabited by their friends and family. The locals who continue to stay in their older place also bear the brunt of this displacement. This dissertation shows the uneven effects of gentrification. For example, a case study of the Boulevard Road (the northern part of Dal Lake) reveals the social and cultural aspects of displacement. Further, a case study of the areas such as the Foreshore road, (the northern promenade along the Dal Lake) reveals how the residents anticipate economic boosts due to the tourism-led gentrification.

Through a case study of a central area of Lisbon, Agustin Cocola-Gant observes how the growth of tourism was seen as a 'fast policy' solution to overcome the post-2008 crisis. The liberalisation of the housing market in 2012, resulted in a wave of housing rehabilitation; local residents have been evicted in order to open new hotels and short-term leases. In another article, *"Airbnb, buy-to-let investment and tourism-driven displacement: A case study in Lisbon"*, Agustin Cocola-Gant and Ana Gago (2021) examine in detail a buy-to-let investment model in which different players make profits from rents and replace residents with tourists, with a particular focus on Airbnbs and its consequences on the residents. Thus, their research also focuses on ways in which the local communities are affected by the proliferation of apartments rented by the visitors. They argue that Airbnb contributes to the "financialization of housing" and suppliers of such short-term rentals are primarily investors who use housing as an asset to store capital as it offers several benefits that enhance market efficiency for property owners, making them increasingly



attractive for both local and global investors. They also argue that Airbnb also makes the rental market hyper-flexible which, for the tenants, implies increasing insecurity and displacement concerns. Furthermore, Cocola-Gant (2020) sheds light on the historic centres of Spain which promoted tourism for the sole purpose of their economic stability as they were not industrially advanced. As David Harvey (2008) notes another key factor: when industrially lesser advanced cities are able to attract mass consumption trends into the city through tourism, it gives rise to a new urban landscape of leisurely activities and entertainment. Since the tourism-driven gentrification revolves around tourists as consumers of the place, it engages in a territorial competition pertaining to the consumption demands of the local middle class. This increases the gap between the purchasing power of tourists and locals which eventually leads to market pressure on housing and services, making these places unaffordable for the indigenous population (Cocola-Gant 2018). This phenomenon is reflected in the interview with Haseeb, a 70-year-old resident living on the Boulevard road. He remarked how he can no longer buy freshly baked bread from the local *kandur* (or baker) in his neighbourhood. In the past, he would meet his friends at the baker and indulge in long conversations, but that regular routine for him has diminished with the new tourist-oriented changes in his neighbourhood. Due to an increased tourism in the area, many of his friends now rent out their properties through Airbnb, and the bakery now caters to tourist demands rather than the locals (Annexure: Interview 5).

3. The land milieu: A case of Boulevard

In the introduction, it has been established that Dal Lake is very significant for bringing tourism within the city in addition to being a source of food to the local population. Because of the many tourist attractions around the lake, the lake edge is vibrant, attracting both the locals and tourists.

The land milieu under discussion in this thesis, starts from the southern end where Dalgate region connects the lake to the city centre. This lake edge stretching from the south until the east is 12.19 kilometres long and is known as the Boulevard road (see Fig. 6). From Dalgate, a long stretch of Boulevard road connects to the Gupkar Road, a prestigious area hosting residences for government officials, making it a high security zone. Further north, Boulevard road connects to the Mughal gardens situated at the foothills of Zabarwan Hills. The Boulevard road, with its Mughal-era gardens, hotels, restaurants, street food kiosks and markets, bustles with activities attracting a lot of tourists. The several eating joints along the road offer food enthusiasts and tourists authentic *Kashmiri wazwan*, *kebabs* and *kehwa*. The markets offer opportunities to see and buy the local Kashmiri handicrafts and textiles such as pashmina, papier-mâché, woodwork, wickerwork and carpets. The Boulevard road, therefore, promotes and acts as a gateway to the rich culture of Kashmir.

From the Nishat garden, the 5.2 kilometres long stretch of the Foreshore road starts along the lake's edge changing the characteristics of the region drastically. This region is comparatively sombre if compared to the vibrant Boulevard road. At the north-eastern end of the lake is Hazratbal Mosque which is of a great religious significance, along with the prestigious Kashmir University (see Fig. 6). The drastic contrast of development between these two roads is reflected on the lives of the locals living in this region. Both regions have their own challenges and issues. The Foreshore road, owing to less tourist attractions, has been ignored in the past in relation to development. The Boulevard road, on the contrary, faces high tourist influx due to rapid tourist-oriented development.

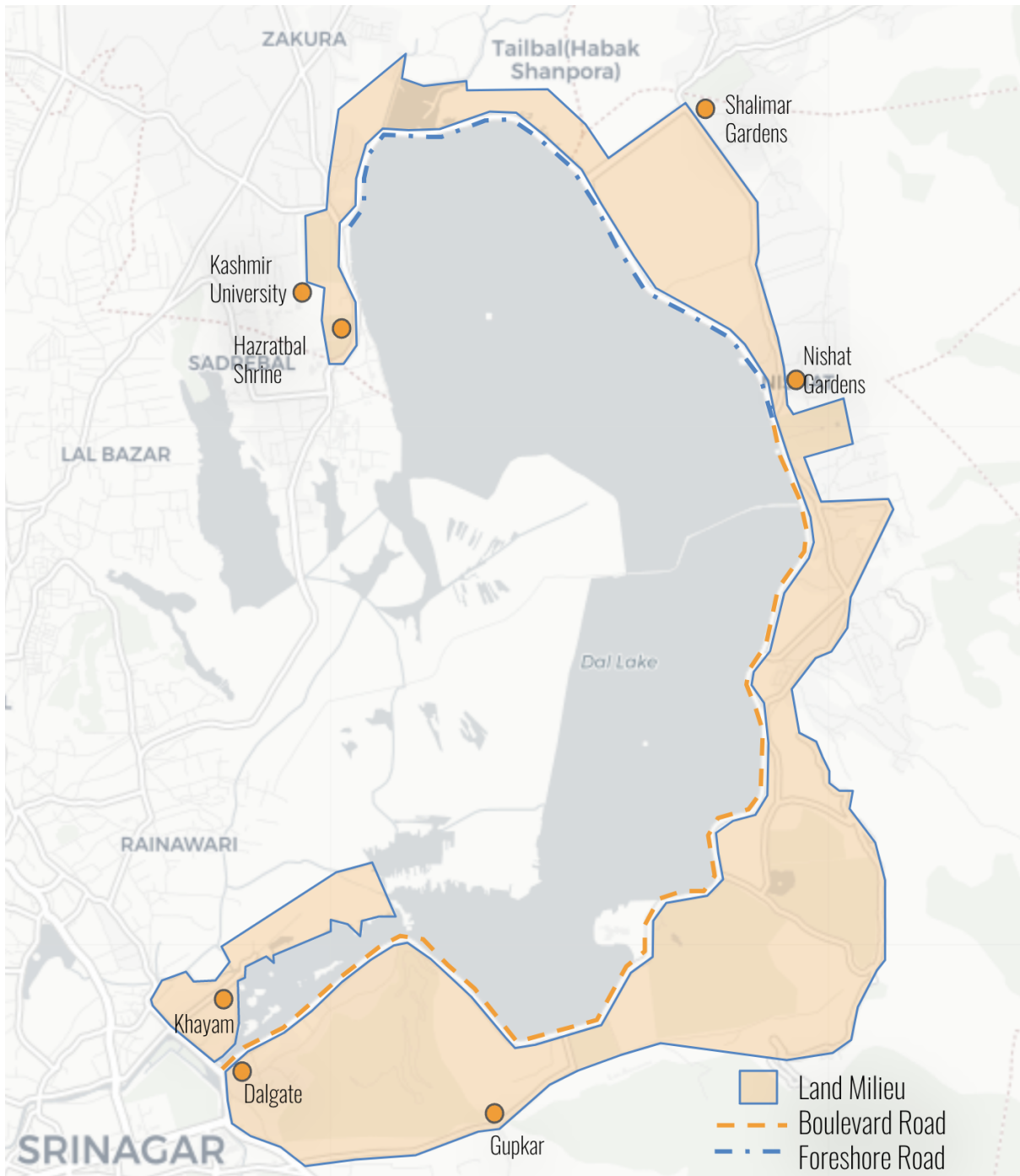


Fig.6 The region considered under the land milieu of the lake
 Source: Author

Locals living in the Boulevard region find it difficult to navigate through the area. The crowded streets result in long traffic jams which are often the result of poor parking spaces around the promenade area. In order to avoid this struggle in daily lives, most of the population from these streets have converted their home to short-term rentals and shifted to the city's outskirts. The streets have lost their social fabric and whatever is left, gives the feeling of authenticity to the tourists. The displacement

resulting from the tourism-led gentrification has cost the locals their social and cultural ethos in return for an economic boost.



Fig.7 Aerial View of Boulevard road and Dal Lake
Source: Faisal Khan.

It is evident from the interviews that gentrification around the Boulevard road in the south of the lake has a direct impact on the residents on the northern side of the lake around Foreshore road. The current policies and development plans, as per the Srinagar Master Plan 2035, around the lake provide a promising future for tourism-oriented activities in that region. In order to gain the most out of these future changes, the residents in that area are already gearing up for the change, as they believe this could bring about good business opportunities in terms of tourist accommodations and hotels in that area. In order to cater to the high tourist demand in the region, once the Boulevard area was overbooked, the influx of tourists in the recent years has shifted to the north-west region of Khayam, where we can see a splurge in the number of hotels and guest houses built over the last decade. Khayam has a strategic geographic location as it sits at the edge of the current city centre on one side and Dalgate on the other end, making it very convenient for the tourists to travel to and fro from that region into other parts of the city.

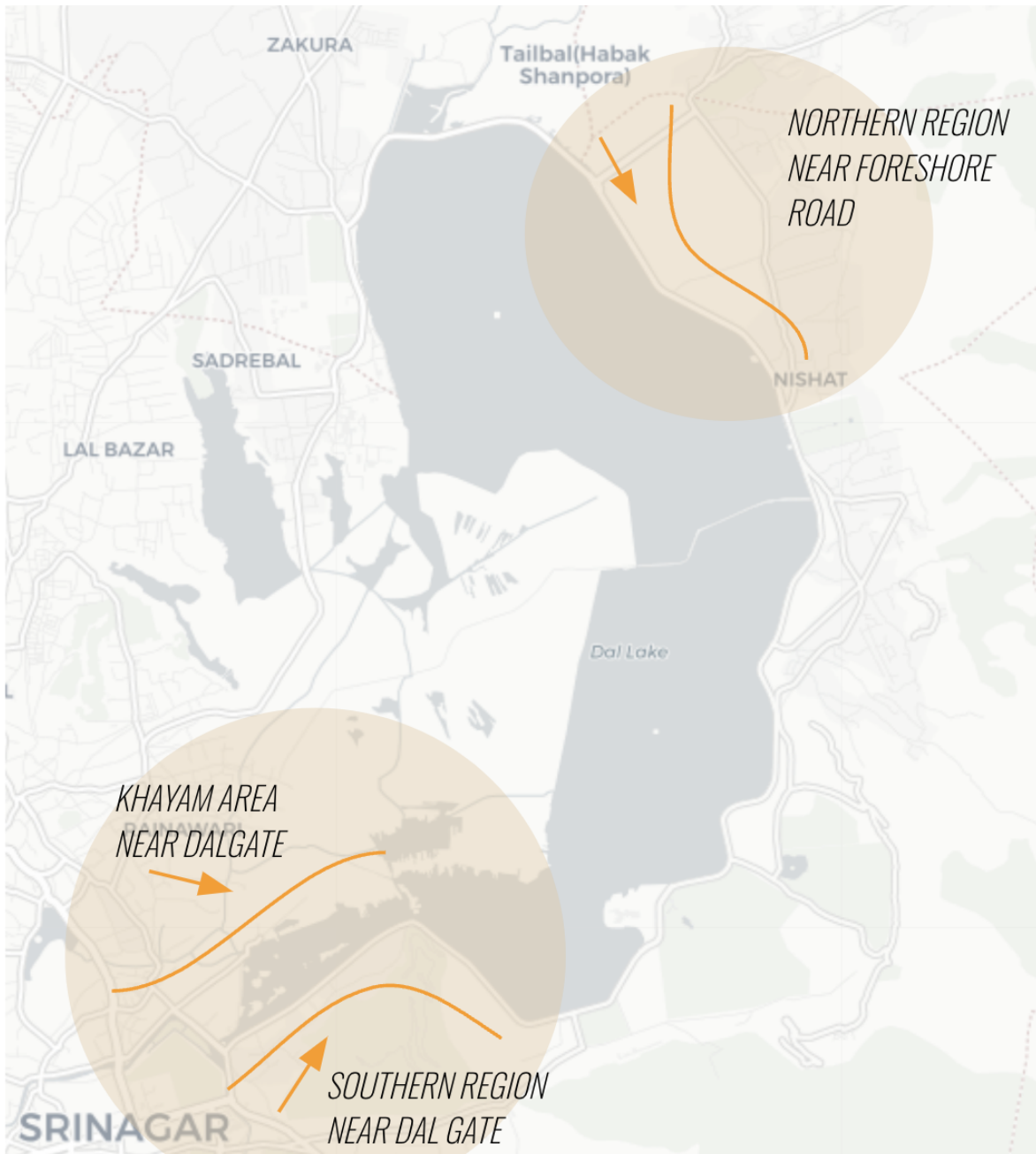


Fig.8 Gentrification Trends around Dal Lake

Source: Created by the author, based on the interviews conducted from locals.

3.1 Mapping land-use patterns and expansion along Dal's periphery

The processes of tourism and gentrification are often interconnected; they are manifested as an outcome of the same economical and spatial restructuring that occurs due to changes in political economies and policies of the city, which coincide with changes in employment and consumption opportunities (Cocola-Gant 2018). Such urban restructuring is often assisted on a bigger scale by coordinating market and state strategies to lure capital. The production of 'spectacles' plays an integral role in luring tourists. Such 'spectacles' include gardens, mountains, lakes, etc. Therefore, the role of the state is pertinent in a discussion on designing or spatial restructuring of the city, from a tourism-oriented lens, in order to generate maximum revenue.

The Srinagar Master Plan 2035 has devised comprehensive planning strategies for ensuring 'sustainable development' of the Srinagar metropolitan area which is spread over 766 square kilometres. 'Land Suitability' and 'Environmental Sustainability' are two key parameters of the city's future planning strategy. It remains a relevant document to analyse in the context of this dissertation as it throws light on aspects of gentrification in the areas around Dal Lake.

Boulevard road is a major tourist hub and generates considerable revenue. However, during the peak tourist season, the area becomes overcrowded. Consequently, it becomes very difficult to manage tourist safety and quality of service. Therefore, in the Master Plan, the government has envisaged developing roads to facilitate commute in different areas. The Srinagar Master Plan 2035 proposes to align the tourist infrastructure by creating tourist clusters and tourist circuits and further integrating the growth of individual hotels or guesthouses with the road's hierarchy, functional nodes (such as airport, railway stations, bus terminals etc.) and potential mixed land use zones.

In order to understand the spatial changes around the lake, it is important to delineate the lake's boundary and understand the extent of the lake. It is noted that the southern, eastern and northern parts of the lake are enclosed by a concrete physical boundary in the form of Boulevard and Foreshore roads. On the other hand,

the western side has no confined boundary, resulting in encroachments into the lake. Recognising the rampant encroachment along the western side of Dal Lake, from Dalgate to Nigeen Lake via Saida Kadal, and in absence of proper physical boundaries, the Master Plan envisages the construction of a 30-metre wide new Boulevard road, from Dalgate to Saida Kadal, offering a provision for non-motorised transport in the form of walkways and cycle tracks conceived as integral parts of the road infrastructure. From Kathidarwaza to Nigeen, a 15-metre wide new Foreshore road is proposed along the Nigeen Lake, as shown in the proposed Land Use Plan 2035 (Annexure: Fig.19). A section of the proposed road shall have a 7.5-metre wide carriageway, and the remaining 7.5 metres shall be earmarked for cycle tracks and pedestrian walkways. On the one hand, the construction of the western Foreshore road, from Dalgate to Saidakadal and Nigeen to Foreshore, as stated above, will open up this entire area for tourism-related activities. Additionally, it will act as a physical deterrent to illegal encroachment and pollution to these water bodies in these directions. Moreover, the Master Plan proposes that the houseboats from Dal and Nigeen lakes be relocated to the back of Dal Lake and realigned along the proposed tourist corridors. Furthermore, the Master Plan suggests that the area of the existing Leper Colony be developed for convention tourism, while relocating the Leper Colony itself to an alternative site. Proposed cycle tracks and walkways along the lake are envisaged to increase awareness amongst the locals for the remediation and conservation of the lake. It is suggested by the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 that the vast tracts of wilderness along the Boulevard road from Nehru Park to Nishat Junction and onwards to Naseem Bagh, which constitute part of the restricted limits of buffers/green belts, could be developed as floriculture nurseries, honeybee farms or herbal gardens promoting organic farming. In this connection, the Floriculture Department plans to incentivise and provide technical support to the landowners who are interested in participating in such ventures.

In order to cater to the expansion of the city spatially, the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 proposes densification of the peripheral regions as a solution to mitigate the encroachment of the lake. For instance, the Bypass road, running to the south and west of the city is envisaged as the gateway to the Special Investment Corridor, comprising presumably an array of IT parks and industrial units. The plan records an increase in the areas demarcated as high density zones - from the city's centre

towards its municipal boundaries – resulting in a rapid growth of high rise residential colonies. This seems more like a deliberate densification rather than an organic development. The Srinagar Master Plan 2035 also proposes creating formal and informal housing colonies through town planning schemes and Special Investment Corridors.

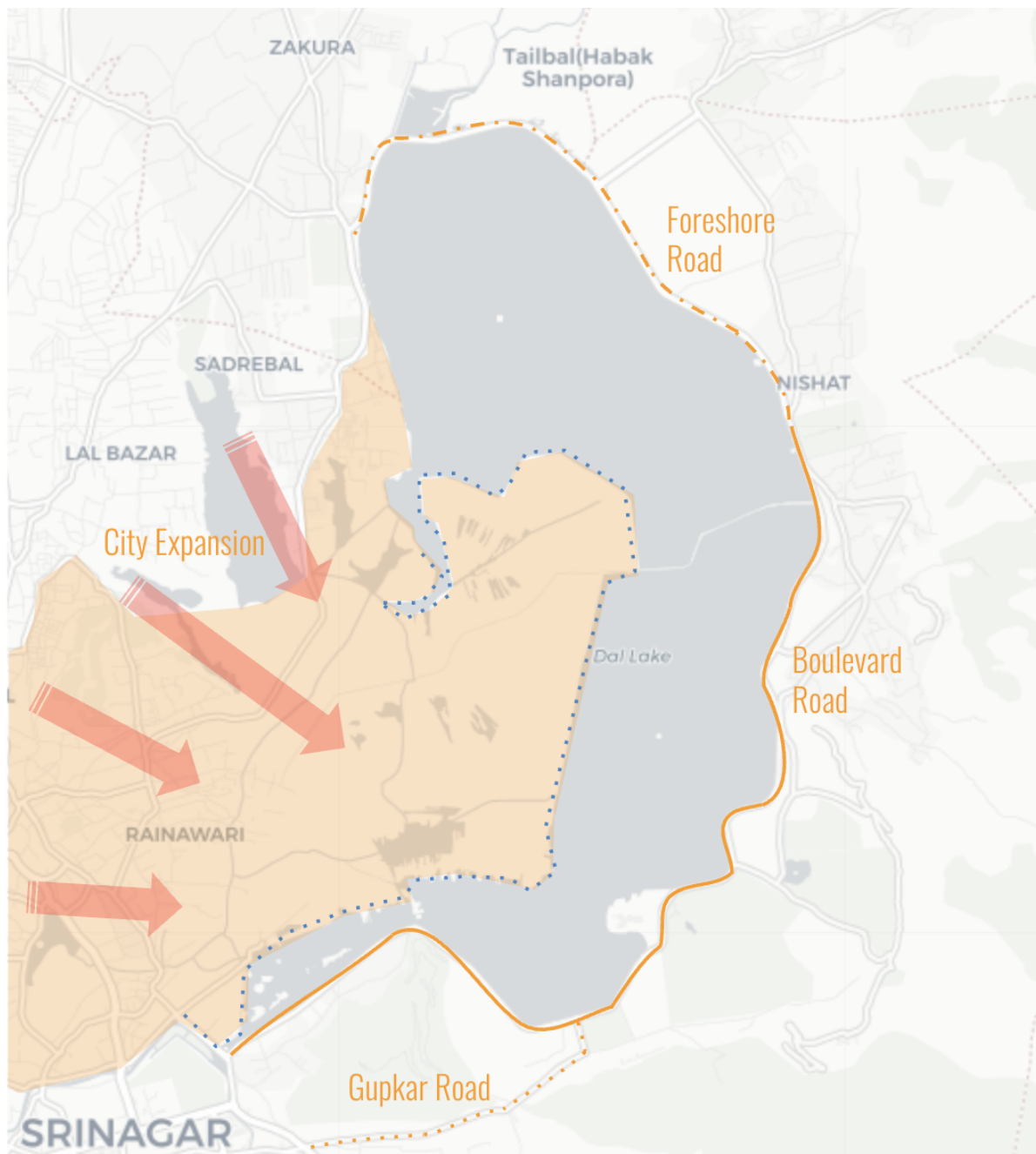



Fig.9 Encroachment Trends around Dal Lake

Source: Created by the author based on the data from Srinagar Master Plan 2035.




Who exactly is supposed to live in these colonies and work in these investment corridors? Evita Das (2020), in her column for Newslandry, throws light on this important question. She asks, “are these being planned for non-native Indian citizens who are now free to buy the property and get government employment in Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370 and the removal of Article 35A?”¹Remarkably, the Srinagar Master Plan, approved barely a few months before the abrogation of Article 370, seeks to create a similar urban landscape. It seeks the construction of nearly two hundred thousand houses in the local planning area and the generation of over a million jobs. The Srinagar Master Plan, in order to balance residential development, also proposes a re-densification of low and medium density areas, especially along the North-South axis. These proposals are aimed at maximising the potential and utility of the limited available land in these areas, contributing to efficient land use.

Further north to Dal Lake, the plan proposes the creation of satellite townships in areas like Ganderbal and dormitory townships in regions such as Zakura. These areas need to be developed in order to ensure adequate supply of serviced land which will lead to an increase in housing choices for people within different socio-economic categories.

This gradual increase and densification of land use in touristic districts leads to an increase in the value of commercial and residential properties and allows the owners of these properties to capitalise on the near-to-future increase in the value of their properties. This leads the property owners to propose local tourism through local entrepreneurialism (Cocola-Gant 2018). The middle classes in such cities try to become active consumers of these environments. When the real estate markets fluctuate according to new trends, the low-income communities are effectively displaced. Business owners receive this tourism activity well as it helps them gain higher revenues, which also helps them increase interest in mortgage payments (Cocola-Gant 2018). However, the residential population, affected by the unregulated tourism growth, urge the local administration to regulate the legality of tourist rental housing (Romero, Salom, and Cànoves, 2018). All these different factors lead to the creation of a rent bubble, which is not just the increase of the value of properties,

¹ Article 35A of the Indian constitution allows the legislature of Indian-administered Kashmir to define the state's "permanent residents". It entitles them to special benefits related to employment, scholarships, the right to buy property in the state, etc.



their demand or the population changes, but also corresponds to the grey market hotels that have surged up in the city. This results in investors buying up homes, taking them off the residential markets, giving them a trendy makeover, turning them into short-term rental spaces and finally offering them through platforms like Airbnb. This process leads to a scarce supply through speculative capital investments, leading to changes in tenancy. However, in the case of Dal Lake, both developers and the local population are actively contributing to this process. The locals in the northern periphery see this as a big opportunity to improve their living conditions by capitalising on the anticipated tourism boom through the awaited relocation of houseboats to their area.


In one of the interviews, Daniyal, a restaurant owner shares his flexible approach to business amidst the unpredictable and uncertain tourism scenario in Kashmir. Daniyal used to run a small restaurant called *Pincer da Dhaba*, situated on the promenade of Dal Lake on the Boulevard road. His target audience has always been middle-class vegetarian tourists who flock to the region in high numbers during summers. Over the past two decades, the restaurant has flourished using the same business module. But with the recent unrest due to the revocation of Article 370 in the region, most business owners are forced to rethink their strategies in light of the impact of political uncertainties on tourism (Annexure: Interview 2). In 2020, after a year of extremely low tourist influx, Daniyal was forced to convert the restaurant into a relatively high-end diner named *Bistro Boulevard* in order to rely on the high-income target group to meet his needs. Jan Ahmed, a local barbeque vendor at Makai Park, is planning a similar bottom-up tactic. Anticipating a shift in tourist influx towards the Foreshore side – due to the relocation of houseboats – Jan Ahmed, has already purchased a small piece of land around Habak, 7 km from the Foreshore road. He plans to build a new home there and wants to convert the current house into a guest house (Annexure: Interview 5).

3.2 Mobility around the promenade: A policy analysis

The dynamic relationship between the hosts and the tourists is governed by several factors concerning hospitality in a given region. A sudden unregulated surge in the tourist influx, has a negative impact not only on the overall tourist experience but also the local communities hosting the tourists. This also has a direct impact on the local environment as well on the quality of life of the local residents. The World Tourism Organisation defines this situation as overtourism. Overtourism, as a phenomenon, occurs when “destinations where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably” (Goodwin 2017). In recent years, the term ‘overtourism’ is generally used to review the potential hazards of the massive uncoordinated influx of tourism at specific tourist destinations.

The edited volume, *Overtourism: Excesses, Discontents, and Measures in Travel and Tourism*, focuses on the origins and complexities associated with the term ‘overtourism’. In order to highlight the role of tourism within a city, the book delves into a discussion on neoliberalism and urban mobility in highlighting the key role of “city making” and the socio-economic dynamics associated with overtourism that blur the boundaries and merge the identities of tourists, locals and migrants. Through a case study of Venice, one of the contributors offers an approach to measure the effects of overtourism within the city, through a sequence of warning signs. These signs are quantified through the complex relationship between the psychological perception of local communities and the geographical aspect of overtourism (Milano et al 2019). An interview conducted with Mir Qaiser, a local businessman residing in the city suburbs, sheds light on overtourism in the context of Kashmir’s Dal Lake.

“I love the whole touristic appeal of the lake and no doubt, it has to do with the amazing view and the raw nature that this area provides. But sometimes, it is a curse for us locals, as commuting to these areas during high tourist season is really challenging. My house is 13.5 kms from the Royal Spring golf course, where I go swimming every week. During the high tourist season it takes me more than 2 hours to reach there and that too amidst heavy traffic around Gupkar road. Sometimes, I



even go to meet my friend who lives on the other side of the lake, just to wait out the traffic” (Annexure: Interview 7).

Authorities state that the encroachment due to unplanned urbanisation, tourist activities and improper boundaries along the western periphery of Dal Lake, are some of the major causes for this traffic congestion. With major tourist attractions stretched along the region, mobility becomes a major concern not only for the tourists but locals as well, especially during months of high tourist footfall. The south eastern periphery of the lake hosts a majority of tourist attractions (See Fig. 10) resulting in frequent traffic jams in the Dalgate region.

Examining the effects of the changes caused by overtourism, the Srinagar Master Plan 2035, suggests that the Dal Lake should have its own ring transport service, ferrying people around the lake and stopping at demarcated points. It is recommended that the Dal Ring Transport Service (DRTS) could use an electric tram system or electric buses or CNG (Compressed Natural Gas) buses which are environmentally sound and do not create noise pollution. Charging stations at parking lots across the Boulevard road could be installed for electric buses. To this end, the government also plans to provide subsidies for semi-public or private enterprises.

The Srinagar Master Plan 2035 further proposes to introduce a two-phased inland water transport system for the regulation of heavy traffic in the city. Based on the Central government’s proposal for green mobility, the water transportation system will connect Dal lake to the Jhelum river and its tributaries, in order to achieve maximum utility of the available water bodies within the Valley. This water transportation will connect Dal Lake to Nigeen Lake and further to the Baba Demb area. Along the periphery of Dal Lake, 13 major ghats (docks) have been identified to map out an effective connectivity with major connecting roads and tourist spots (See Fig. 11).

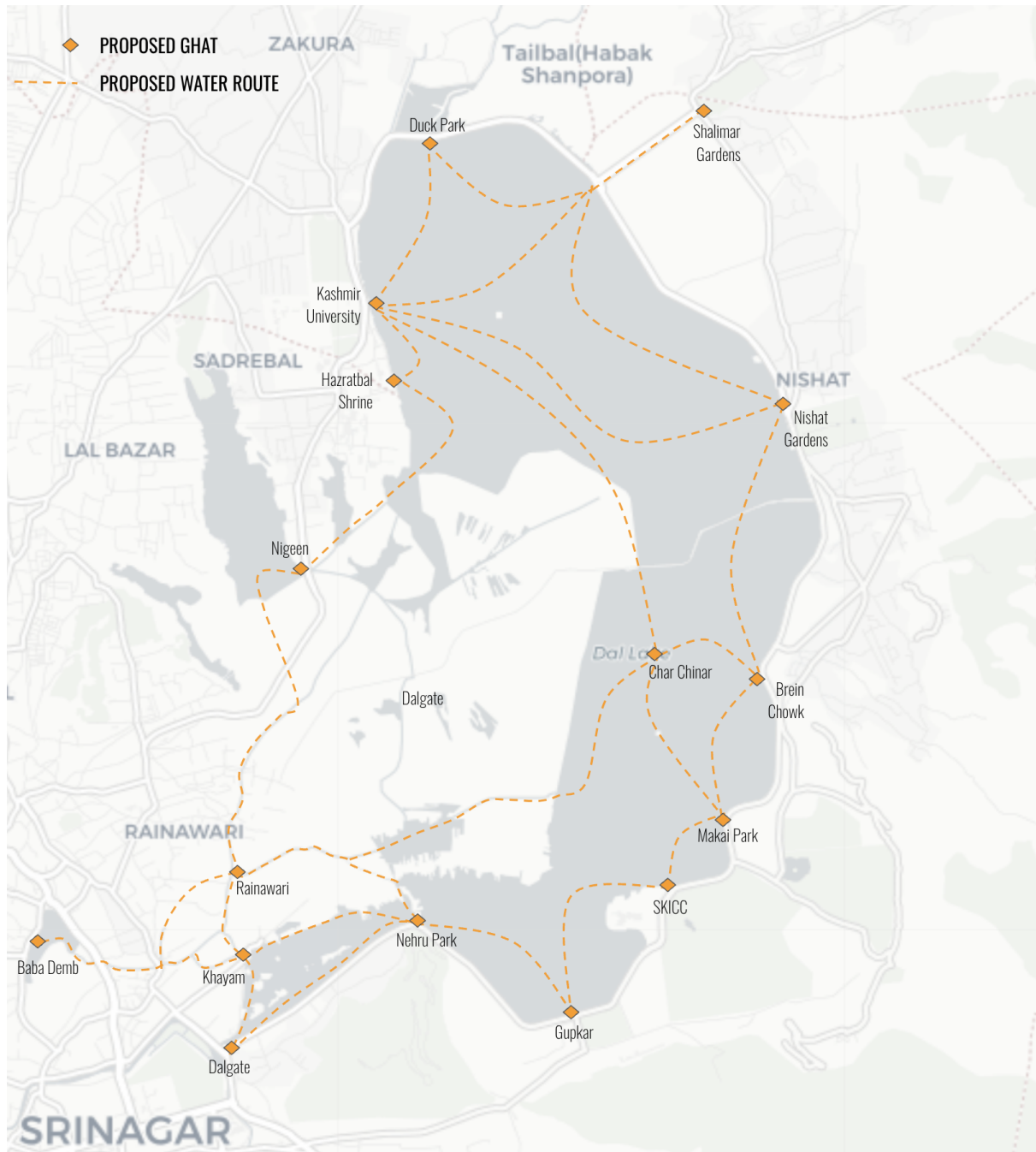


Fig.10 Tourist attractions around Dal Lake

Source: Created by the author based on data from JK Tourism website.

Currently, the lake is home to around 60,000 people living in 58 hamlets (Das 2020). In September 2018, the Jammu and Kashmir High Court, observed that despite court's intervention since 2002 and an allocation of over four hundred crores, the state authorities haven't been able to provide a meaningful solution against the encroachments on Dal . In June 1986, the state put a moratorium on construction within the lake. In 2002, the High Court observed that the ban should apply to

construction within 200 metres from the centre of the Foreshore road, Dal’s northern boundary.



*Fig.11 Proposed water transport routes and ghats at Dal Lake Kashmir
Source: Data from centre for green mobility (map created by the author)*

The Srinagar Master Plan 2035 also plans to develop several urban waterfront areas strengthening Srinagar’s image as a waterfront city. This development will give way to vibrant public gathering spaces along each of the city’s waterfronts, in the forms of parks, plazas and promenades. This proposal is also aimed at protecting the integrity and authenticity of the Mughal gardens. Moreover, the Master Plan recommends

100-metre Buffer Zones around Shalimar Bagh, Nishat Bagh, Chashma Shahi and Pari Mahal, following the notifications stated under the Jammu and Kashmir Heritage Conservation and Preservation Act 2010 and the Jammu and Kashmir Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1977 (1920 A.D.). Detailed bylaws need to be prepared for these Buffer Zones. In this connection, the Directorate of the Archives, Archaeology and Museums, and Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) are directed to prepare the heritage bylaws for these areas. To this end, the Master Plan suggests, services of Kashmir’s Town Planning Organisation can be requisitioned.

The Master Plan proposes establishing a proper system for the conservation and management of Mughal Gardens. The conservation and landscape development within the gardens must be guided by national and international experts and channel the capacity of local experts. The Plan also suggests a creation of garden inventory. Moreover, it proposes conservation using modern tools like drone technology and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). With regards to the preservation of the green areas on the Boulevard road in the eastern region, a unified road section of 24.5 metres has been proposed, which will enhance the current promenade (See Fig 12.1). This will provide wider walking and cycling pathways. Around the Dalgate area the proposed road section will be narrowed down to 22 metres, designed to accommodate the existing commercial infrastructure (See Fig 12.1).

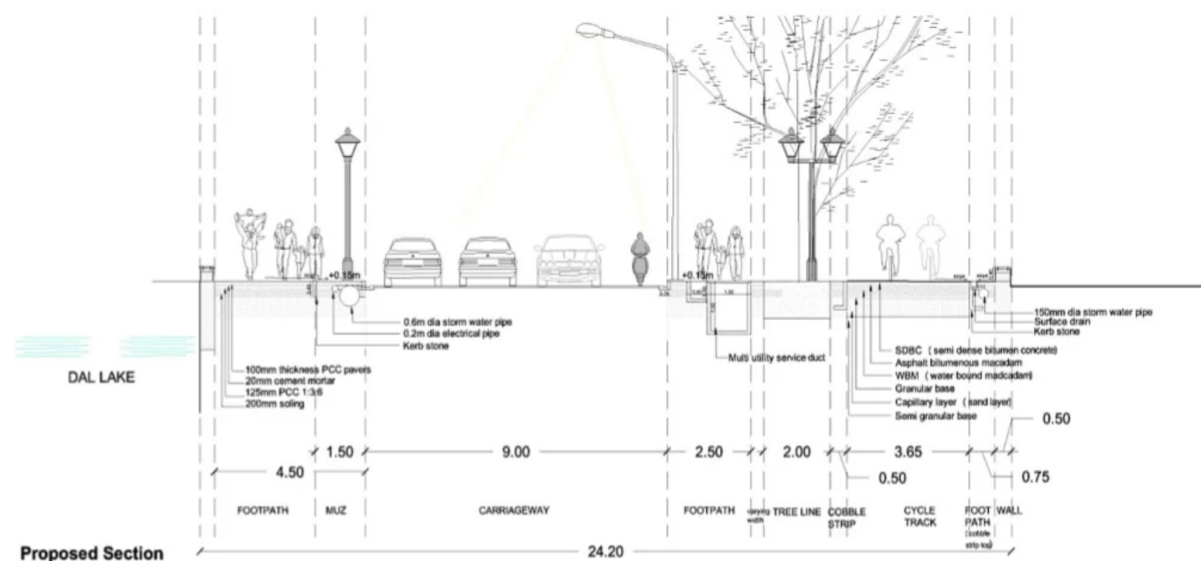
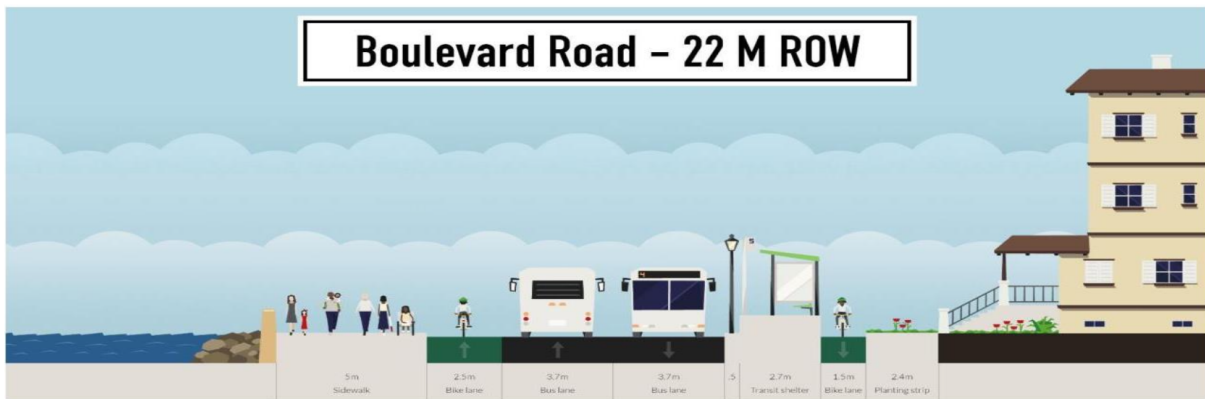


Fig.12.1 Proposed 24.5 metre wide Boulevard road
Source: Centre for Green Mobility




*Fig.12.2 Proposed 22 metre wide Boulevard road
Source: Master Plan Srinagar city 2035*

In a case study of Majorca, the impact of overtourism on commercial gentrification of the city driven by urban entrepreneurial management, has been studied. This study foregrounds an interesting discussion on how, on one hand, gentrification promotes commercial revitalization of the city, and at the same time, lays a foundation for urban restructuring through an elitist urban neighbourhood (Milano, Cheer, and Novelli, 2019). A similar observation can be noted in the areas around Kashmir's Boulevard road and the high-profile Gupkar Road. In fact, during the times of the siege of 2019 followed by the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was the elite of the Gupkar Road who saved the businesses of various café owners and restaurants. For instance, Saqib, a café and bakery owner on Boulevard, experienced a big boost in his business owing to the close proximity to the rich and politically influential neighbourhood of Gupkar. He says, during the lockdown, it [Gupkar residents] was the only clientele that he catered to. "It would have been very difficult to sustain the losses without the regular orders from these neighbourhoods" (Annexure: Interview 3). This gives rise to a certain paradox. On one hand, gentrification erases a city's identity and causes displacement of the locals, and, at the same time, it gives rise to the elite neighbourhoods which can act as a means of survival during tougher times.

3.3 Holiday rentals through a socio-economic lens

The cycle of gentrification and tourism in Kashmir has not only elevated the value of commercial and residential properties especially in the Dal region but has also altered the character of the neighbourhoods. Haseeb, a local inhabitant, living on Boulevard road, becomes nostalgic when he talks about the drastic changes that now mark places around Dal Lake. He misses his old neighbourhood where, every morning, he met most of his neighbours at the *kandur* (local baker) discussing with them, the everyday happenings and local and global politics. According to Haseeb, by 2019, just before the lockdown due to the abrogation of Article 370, about four to five homes were converted into guest houses, aimed at providing accommodation for government officers coming from different states of the country (Annexure: Interview 1). Such abrupt changes in land use have majorly altered the lives of the locals still residing in these neighbourhoods. Local businesses previously catering to the locals are changing to meet the tourists' demands. Grocery stores are being converted into smaller cafes and souvenir shops. In addition, several shops are being converted into eateries and restaurants. This has led to an increase in the influx of traffic and has given rise to a severe parking crisis around these neighbourhoods. Moreover, with government officials occupying these guest houses, security checks around these neighbourhoods have increased and several barricades are now in place. Another significant aspect of tourism-led gentrification is that the increasing influx of tourists compromises the living conditions of inhabitants living in the area. A major obstacle in recognizing the adverse effects of gentrification-driven displacement is the notion that visitors boost several city businesses.

Theoretically, displacement can be traced along three major trajectories: residential, commercial, and place-based (Cocola-Gant 2018). While residential and commercial displacement, according to Cocola-Gant, is marked by fluctuations in market prices, place-based displacement is phenomenological; it disrupts people's everyday lives and makes them feel like outsiders in the once familiar neighbourhoods where they spent most of their lives. Abdul Rehman, a resident living on the Boulevard road, waited three years for the permission from Srinagar's municipality to renovate his house. However, even after years of following up with




the paperwork, he eventually sold the house to a hotelier, who converted his house into a homestay.

It is important to understand the current practices of tourism through a lens of production and consumption. Tourism can itself be understood as a product in the global market. The market is shaped in such a way that there is a high demand for unique means of attraction. Moreover, there is also an increased focus on advertising the ideological and historical sense of space promising experiences of 'authenticity' (Lefort 2021). For instance, in the context of Srinagar in general and Dal Lake in particular, 'heritage' is a popular currency where tourism is concerned. The branding of a city, Lefort (2021) believes, is undoubtedly the most powerful tool mobilised for tourism development, where a historically rich narrative of a place is knitted together with the economic value that can be generated by tourism consumption.

Interestingly, the government of Jammu and Kashmir has conceptualised a creative ad campaign for promoting various popular aspects of Kashmir – its heritage, culture, local produce, etc. For instance, Kashmir – famous for its apple orchards – produces a variety of apples such as *ambri*, *amreecan trael*, *maharaeji*, *kulu*, *kietchaami*, *kesri*, *malmohi*, *chamura*, *hazratbali*, *razakwaari*, red and golden delicious, etc. Thus, an ad campaign for the promotion of Kashmiri apples reads, *'We May Not Be The Silicon Valley But Our Apple Has Got More Juice!'* The branding of the city also consists of a narrative of 'revival' of the lost essence of authenticity which leads to local food and local arts and crafts becoming active actors.


However, there is a thin line between reviving the 'authentic' lost essence of a place and gentrification caused by mass tourism. The local market around Dal Lake has been re-invented keeping the 'wealthier' and the 'global' customers in mind. For Mir Qaiser – a 30-year-old businessman owning a real estate company – Boulevard is like a weekend getaway where he hangs out with his friends. The recent sprawl of cafes and good restaurants around the lake, has made the area more attractive to wealthier locals such as Qaiser. However, this leaves out individuals and communities situated differently in terms of class (Annexure: Interview 7).



The relationship between housing and tourism and their correlation to market prices has been explored at length by Asunción Blanco-Romero , Macià Blázquez-Salom and Gemma Cànoves in their article, *Barcelona, Housing Rent Bubble in a Tourist City: Social Responses and Local Policies*, published in 2018. This article primarily focuses on tourism and commodification of Barcelona and discusses the transformations of the housing market in relation to tourism especially after the financial crisis, simultaneously bringing along transformations in governance and a shift towards urban entrepreneurialism. The article also traces the responses of the residents and their demands from the government.

The authors argue that tourism is not just limited to the touristic activities in the city but it also brings with it, what they call, “touristification of every day” (Romero et al, 2018); leading to conflicts among different social classes in the city, congestion, and privatisation of services and spaces. Touristification of the everyday, transforms neighbourhoods into mere displays mainly serving the purpose of satisfying the needs of tourists while ignoring the housing issues of the majority of the population. This leads to a differential transformation of neighbourhoods and therefore, alters the character of a place. Scholars like David Harvey (1989) also throw light on how dominant economic and political interests of the state govern a city, terming this phenomenon as urban entrepreneurialism. This term records the ways in which capitalist cities are governed. Urban entrepreneurialism places cities in a race to create a brand image in order to attract more capital investments through a top-down trajectory. This leads to a housing crisis, as space is viewed through a profit-oriented lens rather than from a perspective of people’s rights.


Even though the context of Kashmir differs from places under focus in the dominant theories on gentrification, some findings in these studies are of relevance. The spectacle of the residents living with the tourists in Dal Lake can be studied further in light of the above discussion on touristification. For example, Dal’s floating markets where local produce such as fruits and vegetables are sold on the *shikaras* (traditional small wooden boats) has become a unique attraction for tourists. However, the vegetable and fruit sellers themselves belong to economically weaker rungs of the society. Even though they find it difficult to sustain themselves, they



have become an inseparable part of the tourist imagination where Dal Lake is concerned, and sell ‘authenticity’ at a lower price. To change this scenario, the government, in addition to boosting tourism, is simultaneously attempting to implement policies towards the betterment of the local Dal dwellers. According to the Srinagar Master Plan 2035, attempts towards making the lake sustainable are aligned with generating employment opportunities for locals. However, it remains to be seen how these plans will materialise on ground.

One of the significant reasons for the displacement of local communities in places characterised by harsh or careless tourism is the involvement of the investors and their market-driven ideology. This also alters the everyday life of the communities involved. As opposed to their earlier community-based sustainable approach, their living now revolves around catering to a crash market-driven tourism. With short term rentals garnering more money, various investors and tourist companies latch on to an abrasive model to generate an instantaneous and rapid capital accumulation. A shift of focus can be traced in the housing market – from long-term rentals providing steady but low incomes, the market is now inclined towards vacation flats garnering rapid high rents. This has triggered the reproduction of housing modules designed to accommodate more and more tourists in these local urban settings.

Cocola-Gant (201) shows how increased demand for holiday rentals has resulted in a pressure from tourist investors leading to rent increases, expulsions and affordability problems. Investment driven by tourism caters to the demands of the affluent users and simultaneously displaces the indigenous population. Loss of social networks or public facilities central to everyday life, further catalyses the displacement. This, he argues, has a longer implication that progressively makes it difficult for the low-income locals to stay put in these rapidly-changing neighbourhoods. Moreover, he asserts that the increase in demand for holiday homes is directly proportional to displacement fuelled by investors and tourist companies for whom these conversions are a source of business opportunities and profit. Furthermore, the state's involvement in facilitating these conversions through liberalisation of the housing market, further catalyses displacement, eventually leading to urban inequalities. Cocola-Gant (2016) terms this substitution of residential life by tourism as “collective displacement”. Collective displacement is



marked by conditions enabling a rapid mushrooming of accommodation for visitors rather than for long-term residential use.

Owing to the nature preservation laws, constructions are restricted in the neighbourhoods surrounding Dal Lake. As a result, affluent locals adopt the buy-to-let model while they move to the suburbs. This guarantees high profits for the tourism industry operating around the lake. It is pertinent to discuss the state's involvement here. In the years when tourism in Kashmir was booming, the state introduced various subsidies and packages for people who were willing to convert their residences into homestays. This triggered the evolution of short-term rentals around popular tourist destinations such as Dal Lake. For instance, The Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Policy 2020 states, “Fiscal incentives to hotels, resorts, wellness centres, houseboats and other tourism-related units/projects will be considered for sanction as per the provisions laid down under relevant Jammu and Kashmir Industrial Promotion Policy 2020 and schemes of Government of India”. Despite the restrictions on new constructions in the neighbourhoods surrounding Dal Lake, the enhancement of existing infrastructure was permitted to cater to the needs of the tourism industry. Even the *dunge’as* (small adjoining boats around the houseboats meant for the caretakers) were converted into rooms for tourists. As a result of this mass conversion of homes and boats into tourist stays to cater to the ever-growing demands of the tourism industry, the urban sprawl has spread into the lake backwaters as well. This has had and continues to have serious ramifications for the local communities. This has not only affected their everyday lives and socio-cultural identities but has completely altered their sense of belonging and place-making experience.

4. The water milieu: A case of houseboats

The lake plays an important role in shaping the lives of people within and outside the lake. It supports tourism and activities such as farming and recreation through the weekly floating markets and annual boating races. This section of the dissertation foregrounds the environmental, social, economic and cultural aspects of the lake. It aims to understand the history of the houseboats and bring forth the interactions with people from the *hanji* community (the local Dal dwelling community). Moreover, this section will also discuss the environmental degradation of the lake due to increased human activities including the presence of houseboats. Houseboats are floating dwellings distinct to Kashmir and found in two prominent lakes, Dal and Nigeen. A small wooden boat called the *shikhara* acts as a means of transport to commute to and fro between the houseboat and land.

Dal Lake is home to more than 50,000 people, most of them belonging to the *hanji* community. The *hanji* community has been living on the banks of Dal Lake for a long time. They earn their livelihood from the lake by engaging in various activities, such as fishing, growing vegetables like lotus stems and green leafy vegetables, and ferrying tourists in *shikaras*. They have been protecting the lake for generations. However, they are also forcefully evicted by the state in the name of conservation of the lake. The 'relocation' is scheduled to be completed by 2025. Data collected from the secondary sources is validated through the interviews conducted with government officials, houseboat owners, and shikarawallas (ferryman/ferrywomen). The policies charted out in the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 – aimed at developing the lake more sustainably – are discussed and debated in the following sections.

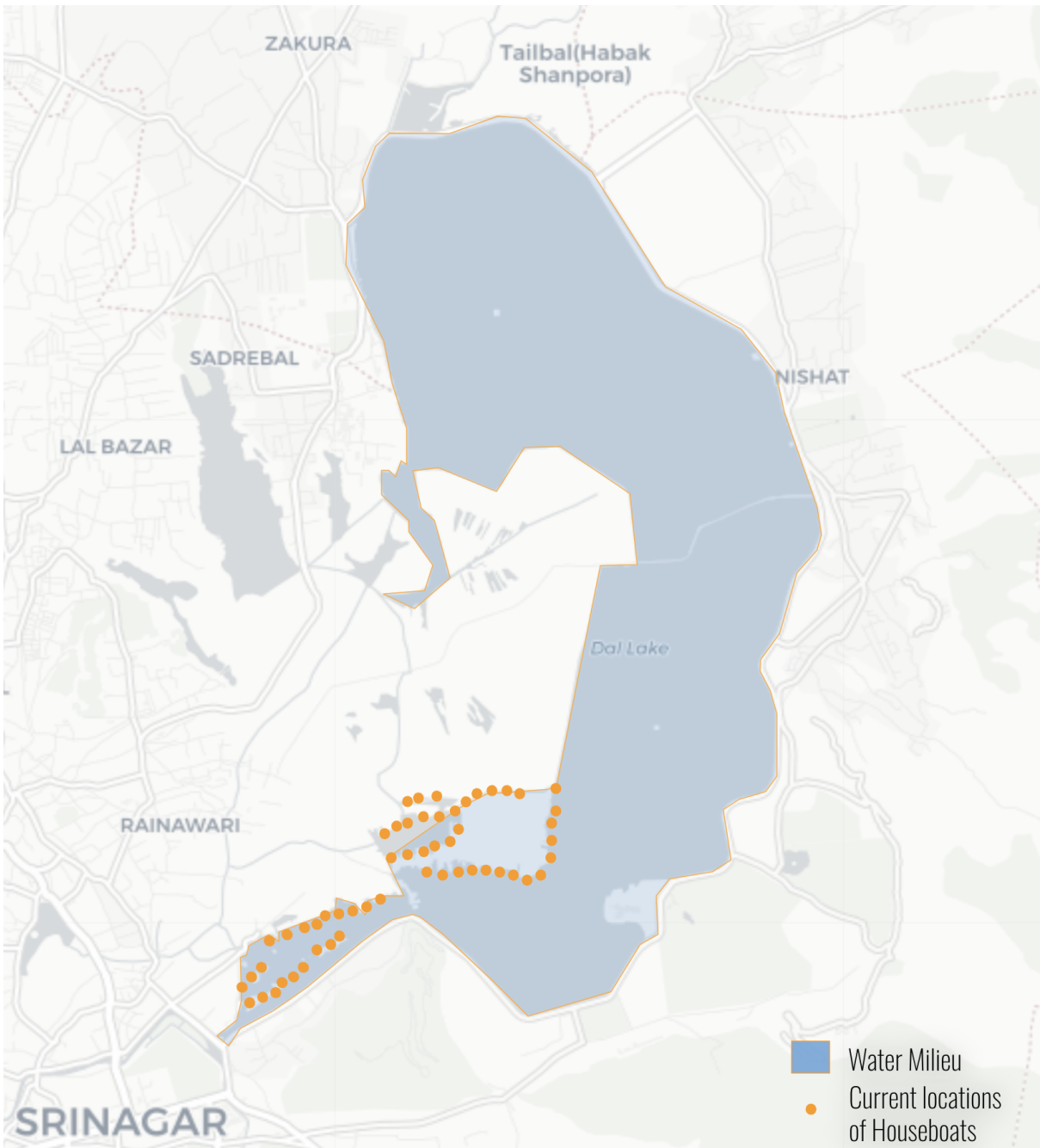


Fig.13 The region considered under the water milieu part of the lake
 Source: Srinagar Master Plan 2035 (Created by the author)


4.1 Mapping a historical timeline of Kashmiri houseboats

The houseboats in Kashmir have an interesting origin story. Kashmir's erstwhile maharaja (or king), Ranbir Singh, didn't allow outsiders to own land in the region. In the late 19th century, the Dal-dwelling hanji community of Srinagar started building floating homes or houseboats for English visitors and residents, and the rest, as they say, is history.



*Fig.14 Shikharas (foreground), the houseboats (background) as seen from the Boulevard road.
Source: Intekhab Alam*


It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that the first large and luxurious houseboats were built. These can still be seen, moored to Dal's shore. The owners



of the houseboats depend entirely on the annual influx of tourists which remains highly unpredictable, not only due to climatic change but due to frequent periods of political unrest, during which the tourist footfall reduces considerably. It was only during the 1960s and 1970s that Kashmir experienced a boost in tourism especially when Western travellers were looking for beautiful and unspoiled environments; the Valley of Kashmir with its pristine Dal Lake thus became an important destination. But the unresolved political problems in this disputed area gave rise to uncertainties. In the 1980s and 1990s, at the peak of Kashmir's struggle for independence from Indian rule, tourism again came to a standstill. It is only recently that the situation in the Valley is relatively calm, and tourism has started to pick up again.

With its hundreds of houseboats, narrow waterways between picturesque islands, flowering lotuses and floating vegetable gardens, Dal Lake is once again becoming a favoured destination for tourists from India and abroad. With the rise of tourism and the emergence of the big tourist houseboats at the end of the 20th century, the small *shikaras* (traditional small wooden boats) came into use. They are now used mainly as 'water taxis' and ferry tourists from Dal's shore to the houseboats and various other scenic locations on the lake. Such boats are also used by tradespeople who bring haberdashery and other everyday goods to the island dwellers as well as houseboat owners. They also supply the tourists living on the houseboats with biscuits, soft drinks, cigarettes, etc. and numerous handicraft souvenirs such as wood carvings, painted papier-mâché objects, or Kashmir's special produce, *kong* or saffron.

Hameed Wangnoo, who heads Kashmir's Houseboat Owners Association, spoke to the press about how houseboat owners have, on occasions, been left on the verge of starvation mainly because of the territorial conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir since the 1990s and the government apathy towards houseboat owners (Bashir Wani, 2020). As per the tourist department of Kashmir, in January 2020, while 10,000 domestic tourists visited the Valley, the number of foreign tourists was less than 1000. Furthermore, it is reported that the houseboat industry suffered a loss of 150 crores due to the political uncertainty Kashmir witnessed post August 5 in 2019 (Bashir Wani 2020).



The interviews with locals, especially the houseboat owners, reflect dissatisfaction with the steps taken by the government to promote winter tourism in the Valley (Annexure: Interview 8). They attribute poor management, where lake conservation is concerned, to the negligence of the authorities. Since the houseboats are in dilapidated conditions and the permission to renovate them is not easily and frequently granted, the artisans who used to build these houseboats are opting for other means of livelihood. The other side of the coin is that these boats are one of the major factors responsible for solid waste and wastewater in the lake, deteriorating the overall ecology of Dal Lake. Pollution from these houseboats result in sedimentation and the growth of weeds on a large scale, thus posing a serious threat to the lake's health.

Nazir Ahmad belongs to a family of artisans who have been making boats for over eleven generations. It is pertinent to mention that woodworking is popular within the Dal dwelling community particularly those living in the lake's backwaters. Ahmad remarks, "My family has been working in this field for over 700 years now. We are from a generation of boat makers specialising in making larger boats for dwellings. This is a dying art and only a few people, who know this craft, are alive now. Looking at the trend, in the coming ten years, there might not be a single person left who would be able to craft these houseboats in the traditional manner. There are at least 400 houseboats which require urgent repair and face the risk of sinking. The strict laws imposed by the government make it impossible to issue permissions for repairs for these boats. It involves a lengthy legal process and these applications go through a special committee that seldom grants permissions. In the recent past, we have not come across anyone who was granted permission even though hundreds of applications were filed" (Annexure: Interview 8). This ban has proven disastrous for the houseboat owners and artisans like Ahmad. Not only does their craft face a risk of extinction, the current scenario also obstructs the continuation of a rich family legacy.


4.2 Houseboat renovations and relocation from *Dalgate* to *Dole Demb* : A policy analysis

Kashmir's lakes, rivers, and canals have always been lifelines of the entire region. However, an increasing number of tourists every year and rapid commercialization, has polluted these water bodies in general and Dal Lake in particular, for several decades. Consequently, new sewage lines were built as the amount of waste generated went on increasing. As a result, untreated sewage has contaminated the lake. Furthermore, Dal Lake has a permanent floating population of more than 5000 people living on houseboats who dump their household waste into the lake.

Riyaz, who works in the Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (now called, Lake Conservation and Management Authority) notes, "The proposed displacement of the houseboats to *Dole Demb* is not only for the aesthetic reasons or to boost tourism in other areas, it is driven by the need to preserve the ecology of the lake. The houseboats have been there for over a century. We need to utilise modern technology to enhance the facilities on and around these boats. More importantly, a conscious citizen should also worry about the alarming rate of pollution caused with these boats in Dal" (Annexure: Interview 6).

Bisma Shakeel, a local architect says, "The relocation of these houseboats has been a hot topic for the last 7 years and as an architect, I feel it can be a great step to stabilise the environmental impact of the boats on the lake. The current technology can help regulate the drainage and sewerage systems and reduce pollution of the lake" (Annexure: Interview 10).

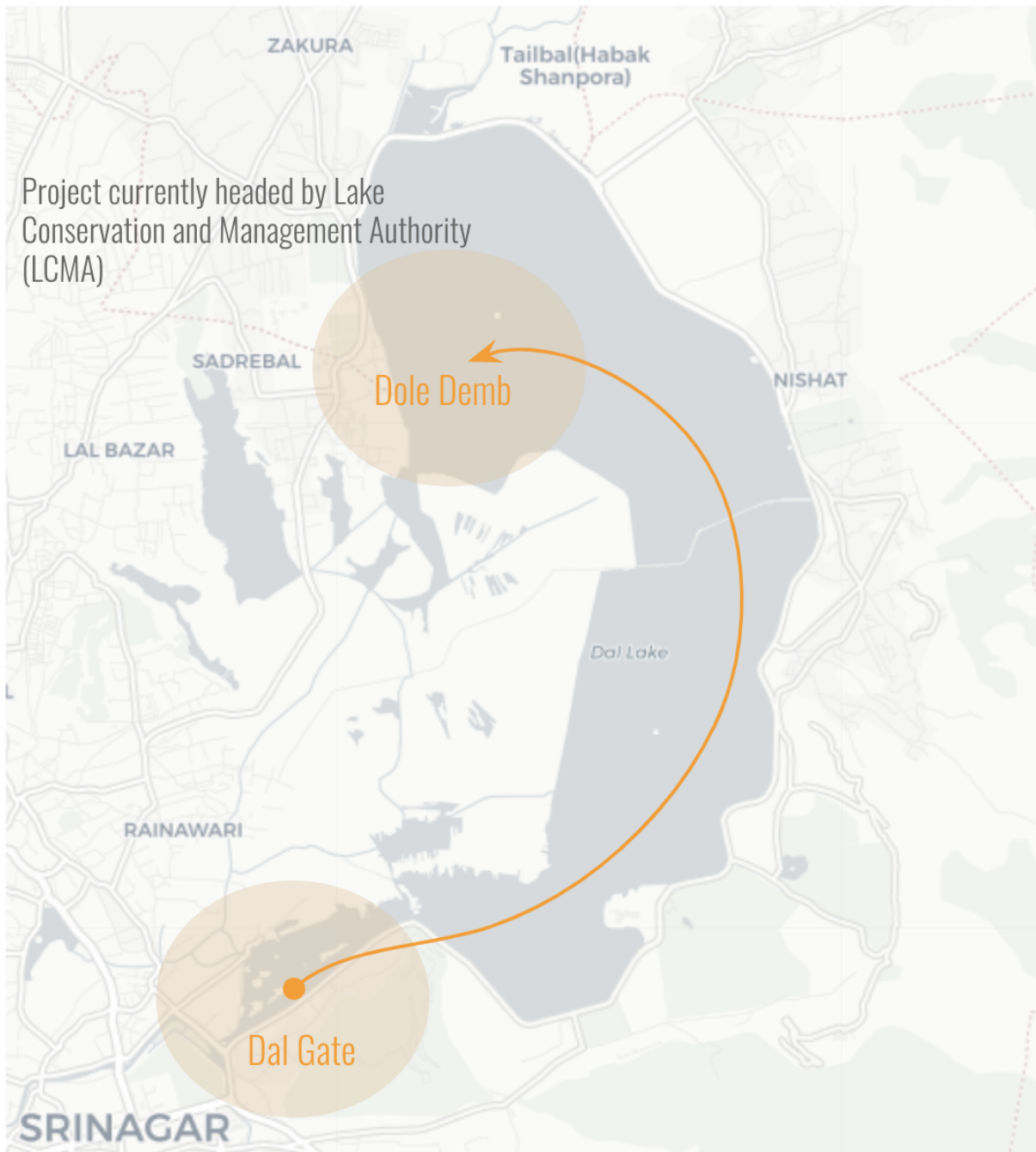
Contrary to these expert opinions, the houseboat owners have other views on the relocation and renovation of houseboats. Amin is an owner of the houseboats in Dal Lake. His family has been in the tourism business for generations. Every season, he rents out the houseboat to tourists and also runs a small travel agency selling air tickets and organising small city tours for tourists. Until 2015, he lived in a small hut just behind the houseboat and it was quite easy to operate from there as his office was situated off Boulevard. With the rise in demand for tourism, Amin, like other fellow houseboat owners, decided to move out from Dal Lake and shifted to a house



in the outskirts of the city. This provided them with more business opportunities, as they now had a bigger area to rent out to tourists. He had only reserved one room in the hut for the caretaker of the houseboat, while the remaining hut was converted into small bedrooms. “We had to take this step to meet the ongoing demand for tourism. With more and more tourists preferring to stay in the houseboats, it became difficult to accommodate everyone within the boats. With tourism picking up in 2017, tourists came in bigger groups. Each houseboat has a limitation in terms of the number of rooms, ranging from a maximum of 3 to 4 rooms per boat. The bigger groups such as large families, travel with babysitters and drivers. Thus, we turned our residential huts into low-end bedrooms and catering to clients who wanted to live on the lake but couldn't afford the high prices of the luxury houseboats” (Annexure: Interview 4).

Until 2019, everything seemed to be working out for Amin, except that he has been eagerly waiting to renovate his houseboat. The new policy focusing on sustainable tourism proposes – as per the approved design of the Lake Conservation and Management Authority – to repair and retrofit 910 houseboats within Dal and Nigeen Lake with bio-digesters for scientific treatment of solid and liquid waste. However, despite this policy, the renovation of several houseboats is pending due to a lengthy and complicated process involving online registration and fulfilment of elaborate conservation parameters.


The lockdown in August 2019 and the following season running dry of tourists, resulted in deserted houseboats on the lake. Covid-19 pandemic only added to this bleak scenario. According to Amin, the world went into a lockdown due to the pandemic around April 2020, but for people of the Valley, the lockdown started in August 2019 after the abrogation of Article 370. And since then, it has been a struggle for locals to keep their businesses afloat.



*Fig.15 Proposed relocation of houseboats from Dalgate to Dole Demb
Source: Created by the author based on data from Srinagar Master Plan 2035.*

Amin maintains that even though houseboats are a major tourist attraction, the degradation of these boats and the inability to maintain them due to strict laws, has resulted in a battle for survival of these boats.

Amin also throws light on the government’s relocation policy. “In 2014, we were told that according to a relocation policy, all houseboats would be shifted to the part of the Dal near Foreshore road, in a systematic way. But we have been running our



business at Boulevard for ages and we are happy here. I don't want to travel 21 km to reach my houseboat at the Foreshore. It just makes our life and business difficult. Also, my houseboat is less than 150 metres from the shore of Boulevard. As per the new policy, it will be around 900 metres from the Foreshore road, which will be bad for my business” (Annexure: Interview 4).

This thesis contends that the relocation of houseboats from the lake's frontal area to a slightly inner region called *Dole Demb* is leading to a second wave of expansion, towards the northern parts of the lake. This relocation will follow the same trajectory; gentrification of the northern parts will attract tourists and further create tourism-led displacement of peripheral communities. Towards the lake's north, land prices have already gone higher and locals are making preparations in order to benefit from the forthcoming surge in tourism.

Speaking about the displacement of the houseboats to the Foreshore road, Jan Ahmed, a local barbecue vendor at Makai Park, seemed very excited. For him, it means more business. He shares the same view as most of the locals who either live in that area or conduct their businesses there. They think that the areas surrounding the lake's frontal side have prospered well due to tourism and it is time for them to experience a similar high tourist influx and a subsequent growth of their business. Ahmed notes, “At present we have more of a local crowd that visits this spot, but if houseboats are moved to this side, then the footfall will increase and we will have a diverse crowd and this will also change the time frame for our businesses. We can start the stall already in the morning and have customers for lunch as well.”

Another prominent feature of the lake is its colourful floating gardens, a source of livelihood for the local community. The vegetable produce from the gardens provides the much-needed fresh food supply to the thousands of families in Srinagar. Moreover, these gardens also attract locals and tourists alike, further boosting the livelihood opportunities for the local communities. Collard greens, lotus stems, carrots, cucumbers, and other vegetables are sold by the vendors every morning from 5 am to 8 am. The presence of *shikaras* (or the traditional small wooden boats) and houseboats around the floating gardens provide a unique character to these


gardens, especially when viewed through a prism of cultural tourism in the region. Floating gardens are a unique heritage with only a few parallels. If properly managed, these floating gardens can be a part of UNESCO's list of world heritage sites. However, it is pertinent to mention that while it is critical that ways and means are developed for the conservation and continued sustenance of these floating gardens with their unique attributes, it is also necessary to ensure that further growth is discouraged keeping in mind the conservation of the lake as a water body.



Fig.16 Floating Markets in the Dal Backwaters.
Source: Mir Yasir Mukhtar

According to the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 and its new categorization of different tourism-oriented areas and its discussion of new tourism products based on the Tourism Potential Index, Dal Lake would be classified under adventure tourism in order to promote water sports in the region.

Furthermore, the plan recommends restricting the lake's margins, especially on its western side, thus preventing encroachment and pollution of the lake. Alignment of houseboats in a houseboat zone fully equipped with trunk infrastructure, is also proposed. However, the policy of relocation of the Dal dwellers adopted after the approval of the Detailed Project Report for Conservation and Management of Dal Lake under the National Lake Conservation Plan prepared by IIT Roorkee, is



recommended to be re-examined by the scientific advisory committee appointed by the Jammu and Kashmir government. Further, there is also a need for protection of the floating gardens while ensuring the protection of the Dal Lake in a sustainable manner.

A strategy for protection of an optimum number or area of floating gardens, must be devised. Strategies towards a sustainable and planned vegetable planting – adding to the city's food security by providing fresh vegetables especially during emergencies – should also become a part of the sustainable conservation framework for the lake. A detailed mapping of this area including the extent of the floating gardens, and household surveys of the communities inhabiting the floating gardens, is recommended. An in-depth understanding of the area's socio-economic ecosystem (the floating gardens and houseboats) is also essential to assess and devise a comprehensive cultural–natural tourism development plan for the Dal Lake.

4.3 *Hanji* community and the backwaters: A historical and socio-economic lens

Hanjis are the initial dwellers of the water bodies in Kashmir and they continue to live on the Dal, Wular, Anchar and Manasbal lakes. They also live in the Jhelum river, between Khanabal in Anantnag district and Chattabal in Srinagar district. Hanjisi, because of their ancient and mythical history, are an important ethnic group in the Valley of Kashmir. Even though there are several sources mentioning the origins of the community, most of these earlier texts are characterised by colonial interpretations. This makes it difficult to understand the real history of the *hanji* community. One such prominent theory is that the *hanjis* were “imported” from Sri Lanka to Kashmir by an ancient king. While some books and experts mention the name of the king as Parbat Sen and place as Sangaldip, others mention the king as Pravarasena II and the place as Singapore. There is also a theory, according to which, the *hanjis* are believed to be the descendants of Prophet Noah. Many historical works point to the role played by Hanjisi in shaping the ecology of the water-bodies, giving them the recognizable face we see today (Razdan, 2020).

In *Ain-e-Akbari* or “Administration of Akbar” – a 16th century document chronicling the administration of the Mughal empire under Akbar’s rule, written by his court historian, Abu'l Fazl, in the Persian language – we learn about the emperor’s desire to build a houseboat, similar, in design, to the houses of *zamindars* or landowners of Bengal (Razdan, 2020). The houses of the landowners of Bengal were two-storied structures with many beautifully carved windows. Such was Akbar’s obsession that he destroyed several boats not matching up to his expectations. He even invited an architect from Bengal to design the boat of his imagination. Thousands of such boats were made and these boats can be seen floating in the lakes of Kashmir in Mughal paintings. Abu'l Fazl writes about Akbar’s visit, “there were more than 30,000 boats but none fit for the world’s lord, able artificers soon prepared river-palaces (*takht-i-rawans*), and made flower gardens on the surface of water” (Razdan, 2020).

Hanjisi have been living in simple *dunge* boats for centuries. Yet, the term ‘houseboat’, as we now understand it in relation to tourism, can be traced back to Akbar. Historical sources also mention Aurangzeb’s attempt, around 1655, to build ships to compete with Europeans. Italians were sent to build the ships in the waters of Kashmir. Two such ships were made, but the experiment failed because the boatmen in Kashmir failed to get the hang of these foreign warships. Kashmiri

boatmen were an essential part of the Mughal Imperial Nawara Fleet or River Boat Fleet. It is said that they have played an important part in Akbar's conquest of Bengal. In the last days of the Mughal empire, the Mughal River Fleet mostly consisted of Kashmiri boatmen who would use their language to call out to each other and to navigate (Razdan, 2020).



Fig.17 Backwaters of Dal Lake.

Source: Mir Yasir Mukhtar


Hanjis are considered to be active and hard working people. Small children start rowing or paddling the boat at a very early age. They do not have a fixed income and their income varies from month to month and in different seasons. Their income has declined substantially since 1989 owing to the political instability in the region. They largely depend on tourism, vegetable cultivation, fishing and water transportation. *Hanjis* use boats of different shapes and sizes. Earlier, the type of boat which a *hanji* used, denoted his caste, social status and occupation. According to Ahmed (2013), the *Hanji community* can be divided into several categories and subgroups based on their economic activities and occupations. *Demb haenz* is a subgroup of the *hanji* community who cultivate different kinds of vegetables along the banks of Dal Lake to earn their living. Their future is at risk due to steps taken to combat the increasing pollution in the lake, declining water levels and encroachments. *Gaer haenz* is a

subgroup of the *hanji* community who gather water nuts and lotus stems from Walur & Dal Lake and sell them to make their both ends meet. *Gade haenz* is a subgroup of the *hanji* community whose main occupation is fishing. *Dunge haenz* is a subgroup that owns passenger boats. *Shikaer haenz* is a subgroup of the *hanji* community who carry different consignments from one station to another. They are also involved in de-siltation (extraction of silt) of rivers and lakes and work as ferrymen and ferrywomen, ferrying visitors, travellers and tourists across different parts of the lake. *Houseboat haenz* is a subgroup of the *hanji* community who cater to the accommodation needs of tourists in their luxurious houseboats and earn a good source of living (Ahmed 2012). While the houseboat owners are economically privileged and maintain a good standard of living, other subgroups of the *hanji* community are economically underprivileged and maintain a poor standard of living.

This thesis argues that there is a need for a systematic strategy aimed towards stabilising the incomes of the *hanji* community and enhancing their literacy rates and improving their living standards.

Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) and the Lake Conservation and Management Authority (LCMA) have conducted detailed socio-economic, cultural and scientific studies of Dal Lake. They found the concept of “sustainable urban tourism” as a reliable solution for problems related to the contamination of Dal Lake as well as tourism-led gentrification. However, the concept of sustainability is loosely applied and is conceived only through a management and planning lens. There is little discussion on how such policies will impact the local communities on ground.

Waseem Noor, lives in the backwaters of Dal Lake, rowing the *shikara* (traditional small wooden boats) and transporting people from the ghats of the Boulevard road to different houseboats. His major customers are tourists who either stay in the houseboats or tourists interested in a day-long shikara ride on Dal in order to explore various tourist attractions within the lake like *Char Chinar* or *Nehru Park*. He belongs to an agricultural family that has been cultivating and growing vegetables in the floating gardens of the backwaters of the lake. During months of low tourist influx, he helps his family by selling the produce from the gardens. He also works at his cousin’s wood carving workshop, where they carve small souvenirs for the tourist and sell these to various shops on the Boulevard road. During the Covid-19



pandemic, Waseem started selling the produce from the gardens on the Foreshore road, as it was more convenient for customers.


In what ways will “sustainable urban tourism” change Waseem’s precarious conditions, remains to be seen. There have been quite a few instances of flooding in the lake in recent times due to considerable shrinking of the lake. The water runoff from the mountains, which would previously go into the lake, now floods the adjacent areas. Furthermore, sometimes, flood water from Jhelum river is channelled into the lake in order to save low-lying areas from the threat of flood. Waseem feels his community is often neglected in such scenarios, which bear a direct consequence on the safety of their lives and property.

5. Conclusion

The thesis studied tourism-led gentrification in and around Dal Lake in Kashmir. In 2019, the revocation of Article 370, resulted in Kashmir losing its special status under the Indian Constitution, making it possible for people outside the state to buy property in Kashmir. This policy has been one of the defining features in preparing the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 by the government of Jammu and Kashmir to promote the city's tourism. Through interviews conducted with the members of the local community, vendors, cafe and bakery owners, houseboat owners, restaurateurs and *shikarawallas* (ferryman/ferrywomen), municipality officials and architects, the thesis examined the changes in the social, economic, environmental, and cultural fabric of both the land as well as the water milieu of the Dal Lake. Using policy document analysis, the thesis further discussed the inadequacies of the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 issued by the Jammu and Kashmir government's Srinagar Development Authority.

The study drew from Agustin Cocola-Gant's work on gentrification and city rentals to understand some of the factors responsible for tourism-led gentrification within and around Dal Lake and the impact of tourism-led gentrification upon the local communities. Analysing the correlation between tourism and gentrification in a conflict-torn region and using displacement as a conceptual lens, the thesis mapped the socio-cultural and economic aspects of touristification especially in relation to the everyday lives of the communities.


Tourism-driven gentrification in postcolonial countries differs from that of the European context. Postcolonial countries have a lower consumption power than advanced economies, but tourists increase consumer demand, which promises growth. As a result, the local economy changes to meet consumers' demands (Cocola-Gant 2018). Often, gentrification and tourism-led strategies are coordinated to lure capital, resulting in urban reshaping on a larger scale. The state's role is critical in designing or restructuring conditions to maximise revenue. A situation unique to Kashmir which distinguished it, until recently, from the contexts of gentrification globally, was the absence of foreign investments.



Unlike in cities such as Barcelona and Lisbon which are the focus of Cocola-Gant's research, the restriction of foreign investment in Kashmir for over 70 years has majorly shaped the urban landscape of the region with locals exercising social, cultural and economic agency. Interestingly, water-based housing was one tactic that allowed foreign investors to own property here. Still, after Jammu and Kashmir joined India in Oct 1947, Kashmir reserved the right to acquire property only for the region's permanent residents. But, after the revocation of Article 370, this situation has changed with the Indian government's recent approval of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy for Jammu and Kashmir with a minimum 51% foreign stake (Peerzada 2022).

The interviews conducted with locals reveal interesting insights into the impact of gentrification in and around Dal Lake. The people conducting business on land have seen the rapid growth and development of the Boulevard area and, therefore, expect the same in the adjoining areas up north. At the same time, people living and doing business within the lake, view the changing regulation as a major blow to their earnings. Due to the ever-demanding and market-driven tourism, tourists have more chances of experiencing living on a lake due to the illegal encroachment into Dal Lake.

Consequently, the lake has also become more polluted. Subsequently, the relocation of houseboats to *Dole Demb* to provide a better view of the lake is one of the major steps by the government to address the demands of tourism and pollution in the area. During the relocation of the boats, the renovation of dilapidated boats will also be addressed. This relocation is seen as a positive step by people anticipating commercialisation and development of areas such as the Foreshore road. Local vendors and shop owners have already started acquiring properties in those areas hoping that this relocation will follow the same trajectory as the Boulevard road. However, this relocation is met with a frigid reaction by the boat owners and the *hanji* community. Boat-owners fear the relocation would have a direct bearing on the conditions of the boat, and they would have to start from scratch in establishing a business within the new environment. The Jammu and Kashmir Lake Conservation and Management Authority (LCMA) previously called Lakes and Waterways




Development Authority (LAWDA) sees the shifting of houseboats to *Dole Dome* as a great opportunity to renovate the boats and sustain the business for a longer time.

Another measure by the government to maintain the lake's ecology includes building a road along the lake's western shore in order to demarcate a confined boundary on that side which would help restrict unregulated encroachment into the lake from that region. The proposed road around the periphery of the lake will provide a relief to the current traffic issues on the Boulevard and Foreshore roads. A sustainable approach to promote walkways and cycling tracks in that region will allow the locals to utilise the promenade for public and social gatherings.

Contrary to European tourist destinations especially in ways they conceive holiday rentals, Kashmiri locals do not rent their houses partially. They usually keep a caretaker and rent or sell the entire house. In areas where residential areas are turning into short-term holiday rentals, this has resulted in an imbalance concerning the proportions of residents versus visitors who rent these places. Though the owners of these properties enjoy economic benefits, it compromises the city's social fabric and their own sense of belonging especially where the familiarity with streets and people is concerned. Restaurants and eateries catering to the taste of tourists have mushroomed in the area, further changing the socio-cultural fabric of the neighbourhoods. It is understood that the traditional means of subsistence and customary ways of living cannot be sustained due to tourism-led development in the area. With gentrification as a context backdrop, the thesis highlighted how the land-use and water-use policies laid out in the Srinagar Master Plan 2035 impact the same socio-cultural fabric of the region around Dal Lake.


It has been seen that the revocation of Article 370 in 2019 severely impacted tourism in the region, with constant uncertainty gripping the region. The Valley is now slowly limping back to life and has seen a growth in the tourist footfall in the recent months. For instance, it is reported that about 180,000 tourists visited the Valley between January to April this year, equivalent to 10 percent of the total population of the city. (Wani 2022). However, it is important to mention that the efforts supporting the revival of tourism are prioritised over grassroots infrastructural development in the region. In this light, it is proposed that in addition to channelling resources towards



providing adequate accommodation to match the increasing tourist footfall, it is also important to pay attention to other sectors such as healthcare. Building a robust healthcare infrastructure will not only boost the tourism sector and will prove beneficial in responding to several emergencies especially given the context of the recent pandemic, this development will also benefit the local communities in the long term. Furthermore, in addition to the promotion of nature-based tourism, it is proposed that efforts should be made to organise community-based cultural programs involving local artists and artisans, thus uplifting the local economies. The revenue generated could be further channelled to strengthen the infrastructure for the benefit of local communities.

During the interviews with locals, concerns regarding increasing foreign investors in the Valley were also raised. People arriving from different parts of the world might have an ambivalent effect on the region's social fabric. Currently, the gentrification of the area under study, connected majorly to tourism especially during the months of 'tourist season'. However, outsiders permanently settling in the region will change the city's socio-cultural makeup and will also impact the local economies. The residents are cautious about the possibility of reinforcement of tourists' culture in the region. Though the Master Plan envisages democratic management of the city government by pumping back tourism money to support the locals, it would be interesting to observe the after-effects of direct foreign investment in Kashmir and the government's role in creating social cohesion and togetherness between locals and the 'outsiders'.

The Srinagar Master Plan 2035 considers sustainable tourism growth for the city. The planned proposal includes an optimised inland water transport system. Further, the Srinagar Municipal Corporation and The Jammu and Kashmir Lake Conservation and Management Authority (LCMA), have been assigned to implement policies for the Dal's land and water milieu, such as designing of the new routes. These policy mechanisms provide an ecologically and environmentally sound future for the lake and its inhabitants but rationalise the displacement of locals in favour of tourism-driven development in order to cater to the increasing tourist footfall. It is evident that while drafting these policies, the state has prioritised tourism-driven needs and ecological and environmental concerns of the lake. However, it has



overlooked the concerns of the local communities such as the *hanji* community, leading to their further marginalisation. By exposing the fault lines in government's policy making, the thesis suggests that the local communities should be central to any policy changes in the region. The thesis traces the social, cultural, and economic aspects of tourism-led development and uses a bottom-up approach by foregrounding the voices of local communities impacted by such changes, with a hope to assist future policymakers in considering the social and cultural nuances while drafting plans and development policies.

6. Annexure

6.1 Srinagar Master Plan 2035

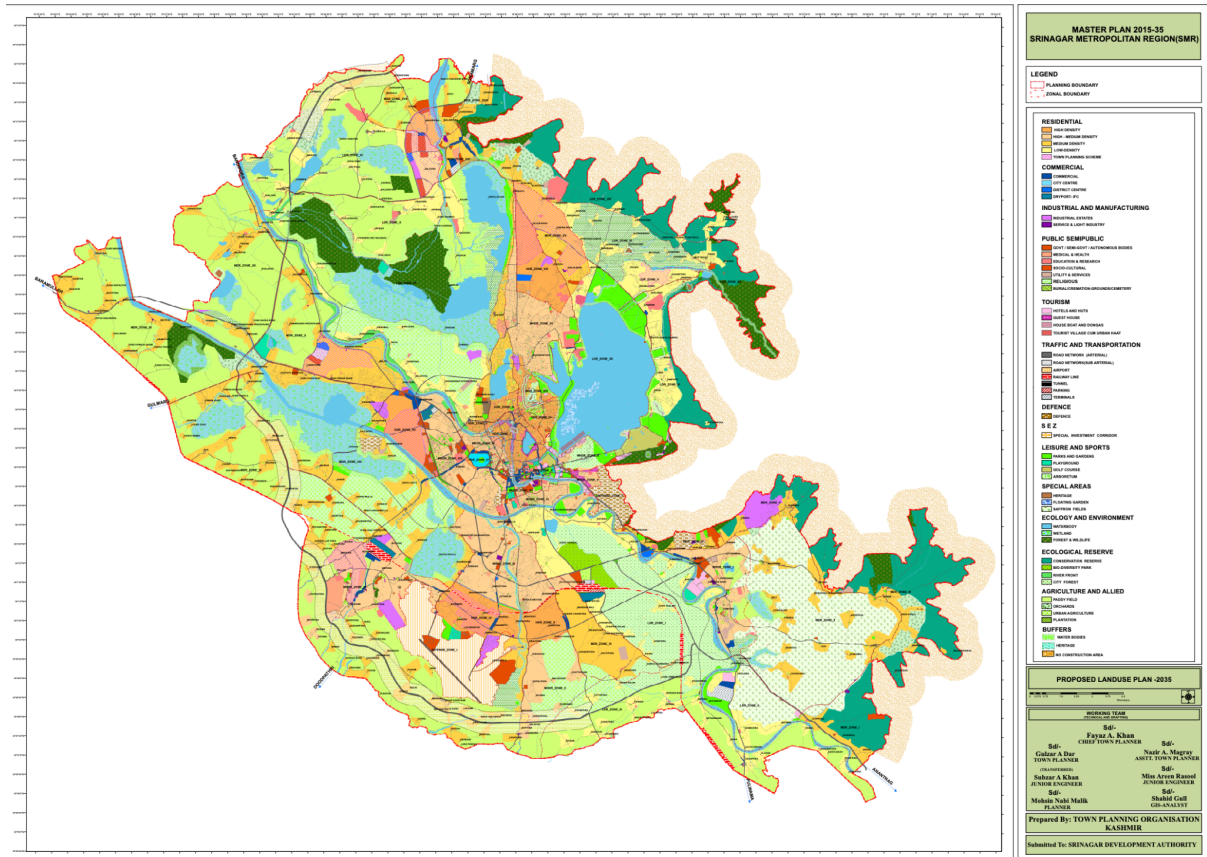


Fig. 18 Srinagar Master Plan 2035
Source: <https://sdasrinagar.jk.gov.in>

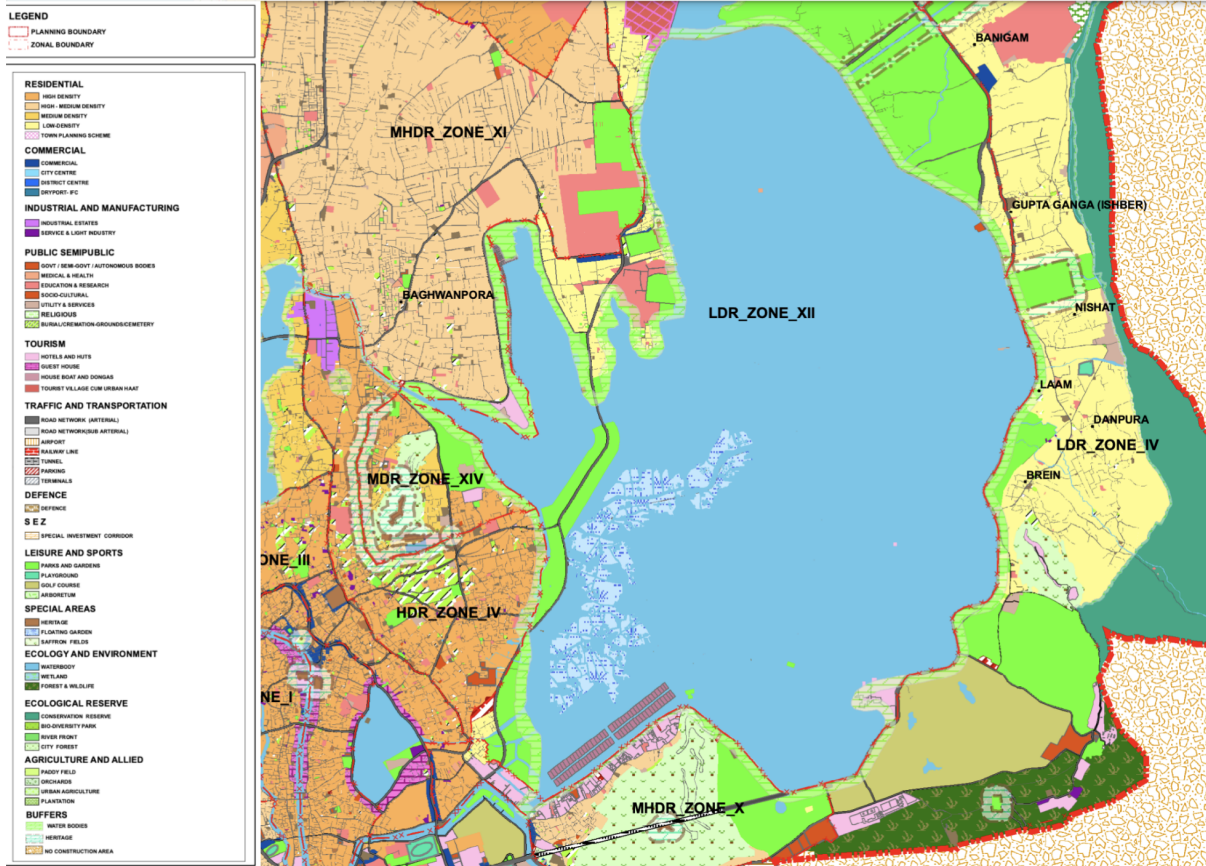


Fig.19 Dal Lake and peripheral areas in the Srinagar Master Plan 2035
 Source: <https://sdasrinagar.jk.gov.in>

6.2 Local Interviews:

Interview 1

For Haseeb (Name changed) who is 70 years old and has lived his entire life in the same family house just off the Dal boulevard road, the past few years have brought about a drastic change in his neighborhood. With more and more people converting their homes into guest houses and short term rentals, the neighbors and familiar faces which they used to see and greet have disappeared.

"I used to meet most of my neighbors at the kandur (local bakery) in the morning after my daily walk, on my way home. We would talk about random things, politics and the glorious past and it had become like a routine for me. For a person of my age, that's a very valuable part of my day, I would come back home and tell my wife about the discussions we had over our cup of tea".

Haseeb's home is in one of the oldest residential areas on boulevard, which consists of around 26 homes. All of the locals here were very close to each other around Haseeb's generation. With kids growing up and moving away to pursue their careers and tourism picking up gears in the region, it provided an easy way for most of the families to convert their homes into guest houses for tourists. Some of them moved to other homes around the outskirts of the city, while some shifted abroad to live with their families. By 2018 17/26 homes were already converted into guest houses or short term rentals. Being an introverted society, when families convert their homes to short term rentals, they don't prefer sharing the spaces, and renting part houses, rather they rent out the whole space and move to another home which is generally on the outskirts. According to Haseeb, by 2019 just before the lockdown due to the removal of article 370, another 4-5 homes got converted into guest houses for various government offices which provide accommodation for officers coming from different states of the country.

According to Haseeb, this drastic change in land use based on the impact of tourism on this area has resulted in major changes for the lives of the locals still residing there. Local businesses that were oriented to cater to the locals are changing in order to meet demands of the tourists. Grocery stores are getting converted into smaller cafes and souvenir shops. More and more shops are getting converted into eateries and restaurants increasing the flow of traffic and parking issues around these neighborhoods. With more government officials residing in these homes as guest houses, there are more security checks around the place and barricades in some areas.

When asked about if there were any positive impacts with the change, the only point that Haseeb highlighted was that now the local municipality is slightly more active and public works like roads, electricity issues are solved much faster because of the bureaucracy living there. This highlights another general issue that locals have been dealing with, in order to portray a better image of the area in the tourist/government sector, selective neighbourhoods get more attention from the municipalities than the others, and it majorly has to do with the officers residing in these areas.

With only 3-4 families residing in that neighbourhood now, Haseeb generally gets offers from various holiday rental companies to rent out his home on lease for big amounts, but due to his family heritage, he is not interested in the offer, however the changes around the neighbourhood tend to push him in that direction sometimes.

**Haseeb (name changed) 70 years old ,
local resident around boulevard**



Interview 2

Boulevard road has been linked with tourism potential and growth for quite some decades now. With the drastic change in new holiday rentals and guest houses, there has been a vivid change in the market around these neighbourhoods. Daniyal used to run a small restaurant called Pincer da dhaba which is situated on the promenade of Dal lake on Boulevard road. Their target audience has always been middle class vegetarian tourists who flock the region in high numbers during summers. Over the past two decades, the restaurant had been flourishing on the same business module. But with the current unrest and its impact on tourism most business owners are forced to rethink their strategies. In 2020, after 1 year of extremely low tourist flow, Daniyal was forced to convert the restaurant into a relatively high end diner called Bristo Boulevard in order to rely on the high income target group to meet his needs.

"We have been running this business for over two decades, but have never hit this low in tourists. Our menu was curated to cater to the common folks who look for cheap but quality vegetarian food when travelling. Our major clients would be tourists who come for Amarnath Yatra (Religious pilgrimage) and would spend some days around Dal lake before heading to the mountains. But now due to security concerns they are taken directly from the airport or bus drops to sonamarg and pahalgam, where they converse their journey". This has forced us to revert back to target the locals, but in order to keep the business running, we had to switch to higher income groups, as because of the traffic issues, transportation and commuting to boulevard has become very difficult for common middle class individuals."

From one side where businesses around the region were forced to convert into tourist markets, because of the change in land usage, in certain cases these people are somehow taking a U-turn and trying to get back to the target audience that can keep the business running. The question still remains as to who will they cater to, when the neighbourhoods are deserted. Expectations to attract locals from high end neighbourhoods comes with a challenge due to the traffic congestion around the Boulevard road. Getting back to the other part of the city takes up to two hours during peak traffic time, whereas the same journey at a regular time is less than fifteen minutes.

For clients who come here to enjoy our food in the picturesque setting, longer wait time in traffic spoils the experience. With Home delivery service on high demand nowadays, it has become easier to reach out to clients in further vicinity. But the experience of enjoying the food with a view of the lake has vanished.

For Daniyal, a typical work day during high season would involve the restaurant being busy during mornings when tourists would come to grab quick meals before they began their journey into different parts of the city, and by evening the restaurant would be full with dinner orders. But at present time, with very few tourists there, the business is inclined towards takeaway deliveries during lunch time when people from various administrative offices order.

Daniyal thinks the key aspect of business is adaptability. He believes in a better future and expects the political unrest to settle down eventually and now with take away delivery as a backup, he feels more confident to cater to the tourists if they come. Although due to the constant turmoil, he needs to rethink how to approach the season every year.

According to Daniyal, it's easier for him to adapt, as he owns the property from where they run the business. But with restaurant owners who are renting or leasing out properties, it becomes difficult to cope up with the changes as they dont want to invest in different business models, as it requires them to invest on the infrastructure. Three restaurants have shut down in his area last year, as they could not make ends meet with high rent and low business. For property owners it's easier comparatively, as whatever may be the situation of tourism around the area, they still manage to get the rent. This is one of the biggest reasons why property owners in the region are renting out rather than staying in business. With a promise of a bright future in tourism, these locations draw business investors in, but staying in business till that actually happens is the biggest challenge they face.

Daniyal Mir 38 years old, local resident and business holder on boulevard



Interview 3

Saqib grew up in the neighbourhood of boulevard and ventured out to Paris to study baking and culinary arts. Having completed his studies, he married Melanie in France and settled there. With an ageing father and mother, he decided to shift back to Kashmir with his wife and two kids in 2015, after a decade, where he started his small gourmet bakery called Le Delice.

"It was quite challenging to be back to be honest, having grown up here in the city, I had a bit of understanding how business works here, but living in Europe and studying there had changed my approach to most things. Setting up the bakery was the toughest for me. It took me more than a year to get the permissions sorted to set up the unit in my workshop behind my home. My father ran a small restaurant there, so technically we had the permission to use the space, but getting it authorized on paper took so long that I almost decided to quit and go back to Paris at least 3 to 4 times during that year."

Saqib's bakery started slow but has picked up business in the last few years. With changing neighbourhoods, it took some time for him to establish his clientele. But after 5 years he has managed to draw a great balance between the local demand and the fluctuating tourists. In the start, like everyone he focussed his business to cater to the tourists, and in peak seasons in the summer of 2017- 2018 he managed to triple his workforce in order to cater to the high demand, but the year 2019 and the abrogation of article 370, led to a valley wide shut down and ever since it has become impossible to sustain his business just on tourism. Saqib had a big boost in business due to the rich political neighbourhood of Gupkar, which is adjacent to the boulevard road. With the lockdown, it was the only clientele that was accessible and ordering from him. Sakib says it would have been very difficult to sustain the losses if these neighbourhoods were not there during that time.

Settling down with his family was quite a challenge for him, as the neighbourhood where he lived on boulevard had changed drastically over the last decade, and eventually having all houses converted to rentals, he had to move out and shift towards the civil lines as well. Saqib converted his house into accommodation for his staff and storage for his bakery.

"I had to think about my kids, it was very difficult for them to find friends their age around my old neighbourhood. All families I knew had moved out, and with short term rentals gaining popularity in the area, we would see new faces every week."

Saqib's situation is similar to various other families who were left alone in the area after the majority of the houses were converted into rental homes. In his case, it was slightly more challenging because his wife was not a local, and adapting to a new place was anyways a challenge. At present he has a decent setup where he lives in the suburbs and runs his bakery on boulevard. Now that his business has attracted local customers, he doesn't have to rely only on tourists. But whenever tourism picks up again, he knows he can cater to them with the new extended setup he has after moving out of that area.

**Saqib Mir 40 years old, popular cafe
and bakery owner on boulevard**



Interview 4

Amin owns a houseboat in the prestigious Dal Lake; it has been in his family since generations. Ever since he remembers, his family has been in the tourism business. Renting out the houseboat to tourists every season, he runs a small travel agency on the side that organises ticket bookings and small city tours for tourists. Until 2015 he used to live in a small hut just behind the houseboat. And it was quite easy to operate from there, as his travel agency office was just on the back road of the boulevard.

With the rise in demand in tourism, Amin like other fellow houseboat owners decided to move out from Dal lake and shifted to a house in the outskirts of the city. This provided them with more business potential, as they had a bigger area to rent out to tourists. He had reserved just 1 room in the hut for the caretaker of the houseboat, and the remaining hut was converted into small bedrooms.

"We had to take this step to meet the ongoing demand for tourism, with more and more tourists preferring to stay in the houseboats, it became difficult to accommodate everyone within boats. With tourism picking up in 2017, tourists used to come in bigger groups and each houseboat has a limitation in terms of number of rooms ranging from maximum 3 to 4 per boat. And with bigger families, they travel with baby sitters, drivers and other officials, and it became a need to cater to those people as well. Turning our living huts into these low end bedrooms we started catering to such clients on one side and also provided cheaper accommodation to tourists who wanted to live in the lake but couldn't afford the high prices of the luxury houseboats."

Until 2019 everything seemed to be working out for Amin, except for the fact that they have been waiting eagerly to renovate their houseboat. But due to the laws in place, any type of structural renovation is prohibited in the lake. With the lock down in august 2019 and the following seasons running dry of tourists, it had resulted in deserted houseboats on the lake. Covid increased the suffering, as after the lockdown was lifted, we expected to have at least some tourism coming to the valley, but the global pandemic has ruined those chances indefinitely. According to Amin, the world went into a lockdown due to the pandemic around April 2020, but for the people of the valley, the lockdown started in August 2019 after the abrogation of Article 370. And ever since then, it has been a struggle to keep your business afloat.

Amin says that these houseboats were the biggest tourist destination in the valley, and attracted millions of people every year, but the degradation of these boats and inability to maintain them due to the strict laws had resulted in a battle of survival of these boats.

In 2014 we were told there is a relocation policy that will be released to shift all houseboats in a more systematic way around the foreshore area of Dal, but We have been running our business at Boulevard for ages, we are happy here. I don't want to travel 21 kms to reach my houseboat at the foreshore. It just makes our life and business difficult. Also right now my house boat is less than 150 m from the shore of boulevard, based on the new policy, it will be around 900m further deep from the foreshore road, which will definitely be bad for my business.

Amin Peer 42 years old, houseboat owner and travel agent operating around Dal Lake



Interview 5

Jan Ahmed owns a small barbecue stall near Makai Park on Boulevard. He has been running this stall for the last 8 years with his older brother Rasool. Every day he sets up the stall around 4 pm in the evening and closes the stall as soon as they run out of stock. Makai park was a tourist spot promoted by the Government as an attempt to draw tourists slightly further away from the hustling Dalgate area around the Boulevard road. The park has a well set up Cafeteria along with beautiful gazebos around the park for visitors to sit and enjoy the nature and the view of the lake. The park had a huge parking Lot outside which was developed to cater to the parking needs. But with tourism taking a dip due to the political unrest and covid lately. Makai point has developed an essence of its own, within the parking lot of the makai park instead of the park itself.

We never thought that our small setup in the parking lot would become such a hotspot for locals. We are sold out almost every day. Covid starting months were harsh and there was no business at all. But ever since restrictions got eased, people prefer to come out in the open around the lake for walks, and since our stalls are open air, we have had good business thankfully.

The park itself has very less crowd, but the parking lot itself generates the revenue for the whole setup for the Authorities. They have outsourced the parking lot to a private company that charges INR 20 for each car that parks there. The stall owners pay a monthly sum which Jan Ahmed did not disclose as it is not fixed and varies for different vendors. The cafeteria itself hardly gets any customers, and the food from outside stalls is not allowed inside the Park. The only time people visit the park is to use the public restroom installed there. But on the contrary the parking Lot is always full. There are a total of 7 Barbecue vendors in the parking lot and 1 vendor selling smoked Maze (Makai this is where the name for the park comes from).

Speaking about the displacement of the houseboats to the foreshore side of the boulevard road, Jan Ahmed seemed to be very excited. For him, it means more business. He shares the same view as most of the locals living in that area and operating their business on that side of the lake. They have seen how the DalGate side has evolved over the past few decades and feel it is now their time to experience that tourist flow, and potentially grow their business.

At present we have more of a local crowd that visits this spot, but if houseboats are moved to this side, then the footfall will increase and we will have a diverse crowd, meaning our time frame for business will also change. We can start the stall already in the morning and have customers for lunch as well then.

Jan stays in Akhon Mohalla which is quite close to the foreshore end of the Boulevard road. It takes him 12 minutes on his bike to reach Makai Point from his home, and even during strikes and lockdowns the boulevard road is open with no blockades. So commuting is always easy for him. But with the shift of tourism inclining towards the Foreshore road, Jan feels sooner their neighbourhood will be ready to get upgraded and eventually turn into a commercial zone with guesthouses and holiday rentals making up the majority.

When asked how does he think they will coop with it, Jan said they are ready for it and already planning based on that, they have purchased a small piece of land in the area of Habak(7 kms from foreshore) and are planning to build up a new home there and convert the current house into a guest house.

We have learned from how the people on the other side of the lake reacted to the change, for them the change was too immediate, for us we are planning it ahead and will ride the wave as it comes.

Jan Ahmed 28 years old, barbecue vendor at Makai Park.



Interview 6

Riyaz (name changed) is 52 years old and has worked at LAWDA (lakes and Waterways development authority) for over 2 decades. He has been working as a field agent for the department and communicated between the locals and the authorities for years. He has seen the rapid development of the tourist destinations around the lake and has been a part of dialogue between the Houseboat owners association and LAWDA officials. Riaz lives in Hazratbal area, which is on the other end of the Boulevard road. He believes with every new decade we should start adapting to change and accept the government proposals as they have been made by engineers and policy makers with so much vast experience. Talking about the proposed displacement of the houseboats to the Dole Demb, Riaz was persistent in highlighting the ecological impact of houseboats and the pollution it causes in the lake, and how a structured and systematic drainage and sewerage system would help enhance the ecosystem around the lake.

When we talk about the relocation it is not only for the aesthetic change in scenery or tourism boost to new areas, it is driven by the need to preserve the ecology of the Lake. The concept of houseboats have been there for over a century, with modern technology we need to start adapting and enhancing the facilities around these boats. More importantly we need to start worrying about the alarming rate of pollution associated with the operations of these boats in Dal.

Talking about the negotiations and conversations between the stakeholders, Riaz points out, it is a loop in which both parties argue and disagree on the statements from both sides and we end up in delays. In 2014 when the proposal was announced publicly, we received a lot of praise and good comments from locals, but then once the associations started to have meetings, they started demanding compensations which seem to be totally blown out of proportion.

This disagreements have been going on since 2011 when the High Court had ruled out the decision to move all the houseboats around dal gate area so that they were at a minimum distance of 300 ft from the boulevard road, then further in 2013 the new proposal was submitted to the cabinet proposing the relocation of these houseboats to Dole Demb area with a huge budget, but ever since then, there has been only talks and no concrete step taken.

Most of these houseboats are dilapidated due to lack of maintenance and eventually there will be no houseboats for these owners to claim and all this hard work will go in vain.

Have you seen that part of the lake? It's so beautiful, calm and has so much of nature surrounding it, they will be far away from noisy streets and can renovate and upgrade their houseboats there. Once the move is complete, some houseboat owners claim they feel their boats are not in a condition to even move anymore. But who is responsible for it? We gave them the option to move in 2011, then from 2013 we have been proposing talks, getting in all stakeholders, but they have been so reluctant in this. Most of this has to do with the illegal structures they have built behind the boats, which they will lose out on. As it won't be compensated as they don't have papers for it.

**Riyaz (name changed) 52 years old,
Government Official, LWDA (Lakes and
Waterways Development Authority)**



Interview 7

Qaiser is a 30 year old businessman who lives in the civil lines area of srinagar and is a frequent visitor to the Boulevard road. He owns a real estate company and has a family owned hospital that he looks after along with his brother. For Qaiser Boulevard is like a getaway every weekend where he can go and meet his friends. He has been going there since he was a child. He is very fond of swimming and in a city like srinagar we have only a handful of swimming pools, and almost all of them are around the boulevard area.

I love the whole touristic appeal of the lake, and no doubt that has to do with the amazing view and the raw nature that this area provides, but then sometimes, it's a curse for us locals, as commuting to these areas during high tourist season is really challenging. My house is 13.5 kms from the royal spring golf course, where I go for swimming every week, and during the high tourist season it takes me 2 hours to reach there and that too amidst heavy traffic around Gupkar road. Sometimes I even go to meet my friend who lives on the other side of the lake just to wait out the traffic.

With a recent sprawl in cafes and good restaurants around the lake, the area seems more attractive to us now, if only traveling there did not require such a hassle. Even if we are there, parking is another big issue we have to deal with. I generally park my Car in the parking Lot near Nehru Park, and then walk all the way back to my favorite eating places like the Winterfell cafe or Le delice. At times when I have to pick up a parcel, I call them and tell them to keep my food ready and I drive by real quick to collect it. Its much easier and convenient to drive to the Makai Park where we eat in our car as food is served to us fresh. During Covid times, it was the most popular destination, as it is open air and the stall owners were taking a lot of precautions to maintain safety standards.

Traffic has been the biggest concern for locals traveling to Dal lake, with a lot of new restaurants and cafes opening on the lakefront, traveling to these places is often challenging. With new delivery service picking up pace in the valley, you can deliver food to your home but at the same time miss out on the scenic view that place offers. Theme cafes like Winterfell have a great ambience and have been a big hit not only within locals but tourists as well. But lack of parking spaces restricts the client flow quite often.

With major activities like swimming, fishing and golf also restricted to the periphery of the lake, locals are bound to travel to these places quite often. Also lots of heritage places like the Mughal gardens offer great recreational outings to the locals. So with the splurge of tourism in these places we somehow need a balance for the locals to use these places and have accessibility for daily use.

Mir Qaiser 30 Years old, Businessman
and Local residing in Civil Lines.
Travelling to the Lake regularly for
Recreation.



Interview 8

Nazir Ahmad is from the family of artisans who have been into the art of Boat making for over 11 generations now. Woodworking is a popular art within the boating community that dwells around the backwaters of the lake.

My family has been working in this field for over 700 years now. We are from a generation of boat makers who specialised in making larger boats for dwelling. This is a dying art and I must say only a few people are alive now who know this craft. Looking at the trend in the coming 10 years there might not be a single person left who would be able to craft these houseboats in the traditional way.

There are at least 400 houseboats which require urgent repair and face the risk of sinking. The strict laws imposed by the government make it impossible to issue permissions for repairs for these boats. At present after 2009, once the High Court took over, there is a lengthy legal process to pursue permissions which are generally very rare to get. At present these applications go through a special committee which seldom grant permissions, in the past year out of hundreds of applications we have not seen any permission granted to anyone.

This ban has proven disastrous for not only the houseboat owners, but also for artisans like Nazir, whose legacy and craft is under threat of extinction. With no work in their field it's difficult to continue the family legacy.

Nazir Ahmad 53 years old, *Artisan and Boatmaker, residing in Dal Backwaters.*



Interview 9

Abdul Rehman(name changed) is 59 years old and lived in one of the neighbourhoods of boulevard road near Dal Gate. He has just retired last year and has moved to a bigger house in the Bemina region of srinagar. His brother Yaseen(name changed) still lives in the same area. Abdul Rehman has 3 sons and a daughter and as the family started growing, he found it difficult to adjust in the existing house they had at Dal Gate.

I waited 3 years for permission from the srinagar municipality to renovate my house. I paid for the services of an architectural consultant who had given me a smart and compact layout where I could have extended my house towards my backyard and still maintained the fire gap as per standard laws and regulations. It would have added an additional 320 sq ft of space to my existing house, which would be more than enough for me. But even after 3 years of hassle my permission was still stuck because of the construction ban around that area. I eventually gave up and sold the house to a hotelier, who was interested in converting my house to a homestay.

The irony in Abdul Rehman's case is that as soon as he sold the house to the new owner, the Hotelier was able to pull strings and get the required permission to renovate his newly acquired Property. This has been quite common in recent years, where projects that have more of commercial scope tend to get somehow constructed while the residential houses have to go through a tough and severe scrutiny to be able to get permission for their renovation. Based on the Proposed Land Use map of srinagar city, the entire boulevard area around Dal gate is labelled as Tourism zone. So the question that Abdul Rehman asks is what happens to the locals residing in these areas who do not want to convert their homes to the hospitality sector.

We have seen how rules change when big money is involved, look at the case of Taj Vivanta Hotel, which was built in the foothills of Zabarwan range, locals and residents in the small villages around that side have been trying to get permissions to construct some cottages in that zone, but since the area is under green belt, they never succeeded in getting those permissions, whereas when a business tycoon from the valley wanted to construct a 5 star hotel in that region, the green belt suddenly had zonal pockets where construction was allowed. I am not against the building of the hotel, as it sure has been a great hit among locals and tourists and in a way it did bring a definite charm in that area, but my question is rather more towards the prejudice of the authorities when it comes to allowing construction in these areas.

Over the past decades, the authorities have been more strict in allowing constructions in the periphery areas of the lake and the adjacent mountain ranges. In order to preserve the rich ecological heritage around this area, new policies adhere to strict rules not only for new constructions, but renovations of existing constructions as well in these areas. There are Toll gates and checkpoints that monitor all construction material that passes through boulevard or foreshore roads.

Living in the suburbs now does not seem that different to Abdul Rahman, as he has distant relatives who had shifted in the same region. Culturally for him nothing major has changed except for the nostalgic memories of his childhood around those streets on boulevard, and obviously the scenic beauty that the location provided. Asked if he feels this move has suited him, Abdul Rahman says yes, as he was able to save quite a good amount of money for his retirement and at the same time managed to build a bigger and more lavish house in these suburbs, which will last his family a couple of generations at least.

Abdul Rahman 59 years old, local resident who relocated from boulevard to the suburbs



Interview 10

Bisma Shakeel is a 31 year old Architect who completed her bachelor's degree in architecture from Pune and now is practising as an architect in the valley. Bisma was involved with a couple of large scale projects around the periphery of the lake, as well as in designing some cafes and restaurants around boulevard road. Working as an architect in areas where construction is governed with strict laws and regulations is not easy, sometimes construction is halted for weeks and months due to permission issues for transportation. This is on top of other geographic and political halts that come across. Due to the weather, there is quite a narrow span of 7 months where construction happens in the valley, as during chilly winter construction is not possible with the current building technology. On top of that continuous political unrest means frequent shutdowns where commuting for workers gets limited.

The challenges we face while working on projects here increases the time span for the proposed construction. When there are strikes or shut downs in the valley, there is no public transportation and also there are checkpoints from police at every road, especially around the boulevard area because of the high profile neighbourhoods like Gupkar Road. So workers are unable to come to the site. For larger scale projects, we prefer to construct temporary shelters for labourers and workers within the site, and that mitigates that issue, but it only works for workers who are from outside the valley. As locals want to stay with their families and almost never agree to live in these temporary labour camps. But since 2019 after the abrogation of article 370, there has been quite a big challenge to get these workers from other parts of India like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This is due to the uncertainty and continuous lockdowns in the valley.

Other than this issue, strict building construction laws also seem to be a big hindrance in development of areas around the lake. Working on one of her projects, that was a renovation of a houseboat in Dal Lake, Bisma states how the project got delayed for over 2 years ultimately resulting in a dilapidation of the Boat, which now requires structural assistance rather than the cosmetic touch that the owner wanted.

The client wanted us to provide them with a luxurious touch to the interiors of the Boat, including an Exterior treatment of the Boat to save it from decay. The designs were completed and submitted to the client and he submitted his papers for the renovation request, but the process of approval is so strict and time consuming that even after two years the permissions were not handed and eventually resulted in the houseboat going into a state of dilapidation.

The relocation of these Houseboats has been a hot topic for the last 7 years and as an architect I feel it can be a great step to stabilise the environmental impact of the boats on the lake. As with the current technology we can regulate the drainage and sewerage systems and reduce the pollution to the lake. But also from the aesthetic point of view, having a planned array of houseboats around the lake would help in preserving the floating gardens and lake cultivation. It would result in a better water transportation system around these boats. As well as give a bit of more serenity to the tourists as they will be further away from the noisy boulevard road.

Talking about the splurge in cafes and restaurants around the boulevard road, it's important to understand that during the times when we have no tourists, these areas need not to look like deserted areas or ghost towns. It is beneficial for the locals to be involved around the area, as without them we lose the local essence.

I remember last time when we had a tourist splurge in the valley, we could only see Gujarati and Punjabi Dhabas around the boulevard, which would serve the cuisines from these places to attract tourists, but the question was what about the local food. In order to cater to the tourists these places were turning into something that had no relevance to the Kashmiri culture. I remember clients coming with requests to incorporate designs of Punjabi Dhabas and what not to make the tourists feel more like home, but the idea is to not make them feel like home, they travel to places to experience their culture and things that they love. But now with the sort of balance we have with the new cafe and restaurants, we see a lot of promotion of local culture within these ventures.

Bisma Shakeel 33 years old, Local Architect having worked on various projects around Dal lake



Interview 11

Waseem is 26 year old and lives in the backwaters area of the Dal lake, he has been rowing shikaras (small boats used to commute in the lake) and transporting people from the ghats (boulevard road) to different houseboats. His major customers are the tourists who either stay in the houseboats or the day tourists who take a trip into the Dal shikara ride to explore various tourist attractions within the lake like Char chinar or Nehru park. He belongs to an agricultural family that has been cultivating and growing vegetables in the floating gardens of the backwaters of the lake. During the low tourist season he helps his family in selling the crop from the gardens.

There have been so many changes in the transportation service within the lake, we had no fixed tariffs before where people used to charge customers differently based on where they were from. But it was a good initiative by the officials and the shikara association to fix the rates based on location and duration of the trip. Rowing the boat is a tiring job but it gives us pleasure as we often are guides to the tourists and our customers who are intrigued to hear about the history of the lake and our people who live in the lake.

Waseem says that international tourists are more driven to explore the cultural and regional part of the lake like the backwaters, they often ask about how people live there and want to visit the places inside the colonies. For national tourists they are driven by the urge to explore the tourist attractions and click photos for social media. Based on his experience he states that it is domestic tourists who come from various other parts of India who prefer to stay in the houseboats facing the main road on boulevard road. International tourists often prefer serenity and would rather reside in the houseboats that are towards the inner side of the lake.

My last international customer was from Sweden and he was a writer and wanted to spend some time in the internal parts of the lake. He would ask me to take him to the inner sides of the lake and he would sit there and fish for hours talking to me about how he loved Kashmir and the peaceful atmosphere here inside among the lotus flowers. Such people are our customers for a couple of days, as they explore the lake not in a hurry but enjoy each and every aspect of their stay in the lake. Whereas people from India, when they hire us, their major objective is to visit the char chinar and Nehru park and then we drop them at their houseboats where they sit and spend time with their families, or they go back to the boulevard road where they catch their taxis and buses to move to the next destination.

In recent times there have been quite a few instances of flooding in the lake, as the link has shrunk in size and the water runoff from the mountains floods the area that is remaining, even sometimes flood water from river Jhelum is guided into the lake to save low lying areas from the threat of flood, and Waseem feels his community is often neglected in such cases. These times are more scary than low tourist season, as during off season in tourism, Waseem helps his family in the gardening part or works with his cousin in his wood workshop where they make small souvenirs for tourists and sell it to various shops on the boulevard road. During COVID times our customer for the fruits and vegetables had depleted, so we started selling our produce on the foreshore road, as it was more convenient for consumers to come there and buy from us.

Waseem 26 years old, Local resident of the Hanji community, works as a shikara wala (water taxi)



6.3 Historic Maps and Sketches



Fig.20 Chishmeere (Kashmir) and Srinaker (Srinagar) depicted by William Baffin in 1619 while mapping the mughal empire of India for East India company during Jehangirs time.

Source: Searchkashmir.org

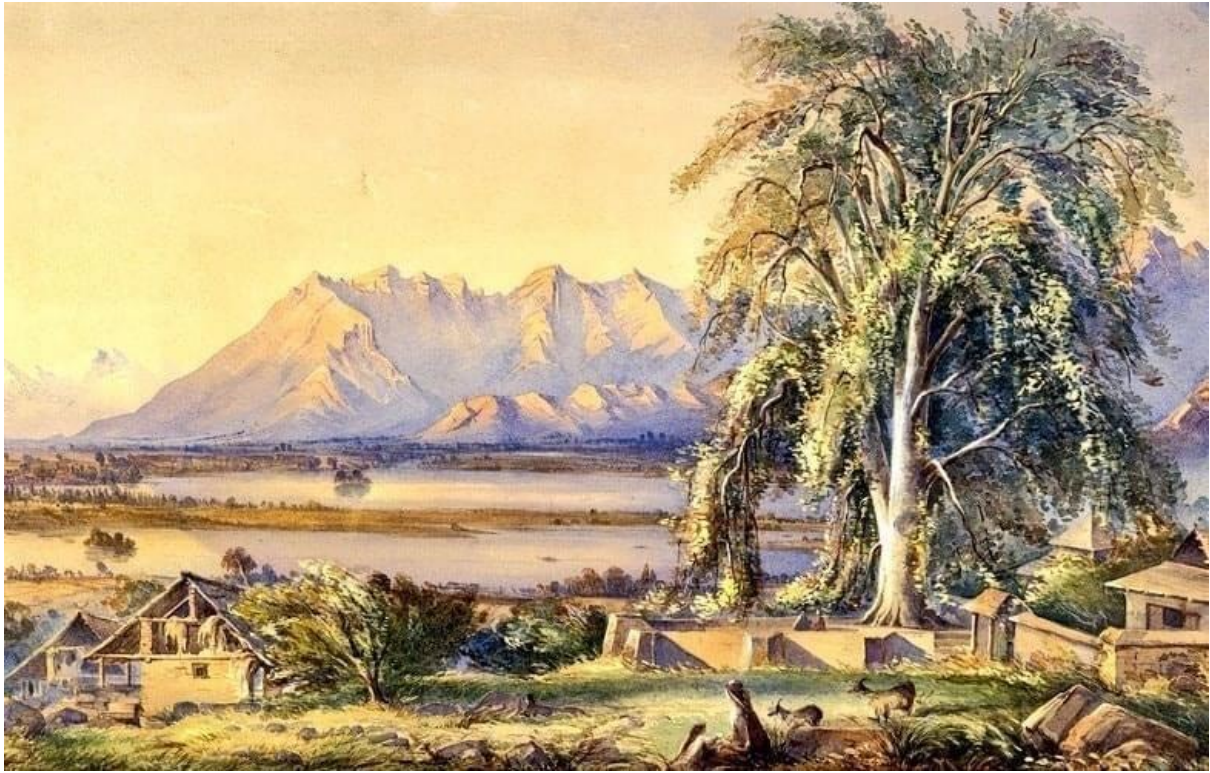


Fig.21 View of Dal Lake from Chasma-e-Shahi, Srinagar 1879, by British General Sir Michael Anthony Shrapnel Biddulph
Source: Searchkashmir.org

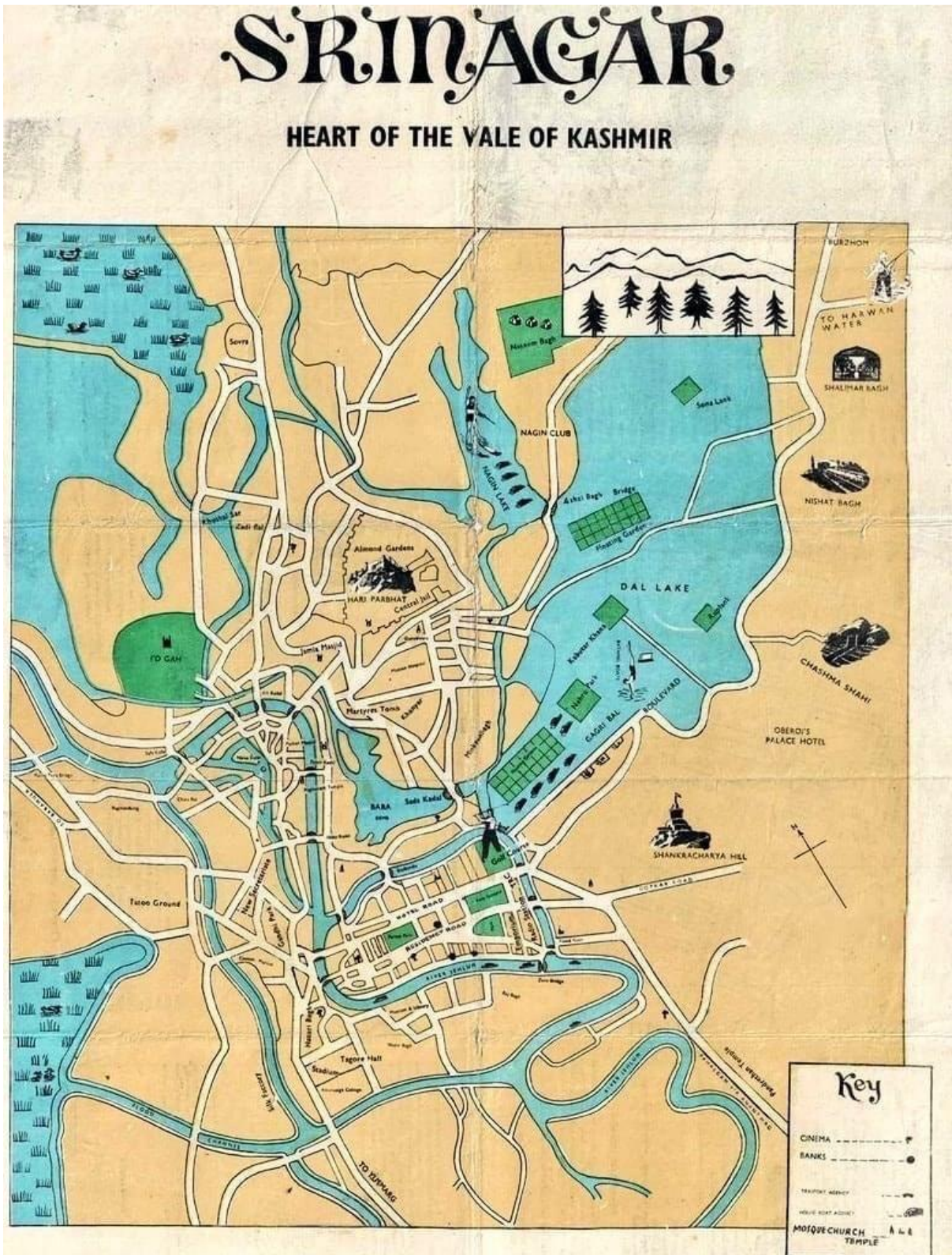


Fig.22 Tourist Map of srinagar in the 1960's depicting the location of floating gardens and houseboats.
 Source: Searchkashmir.org

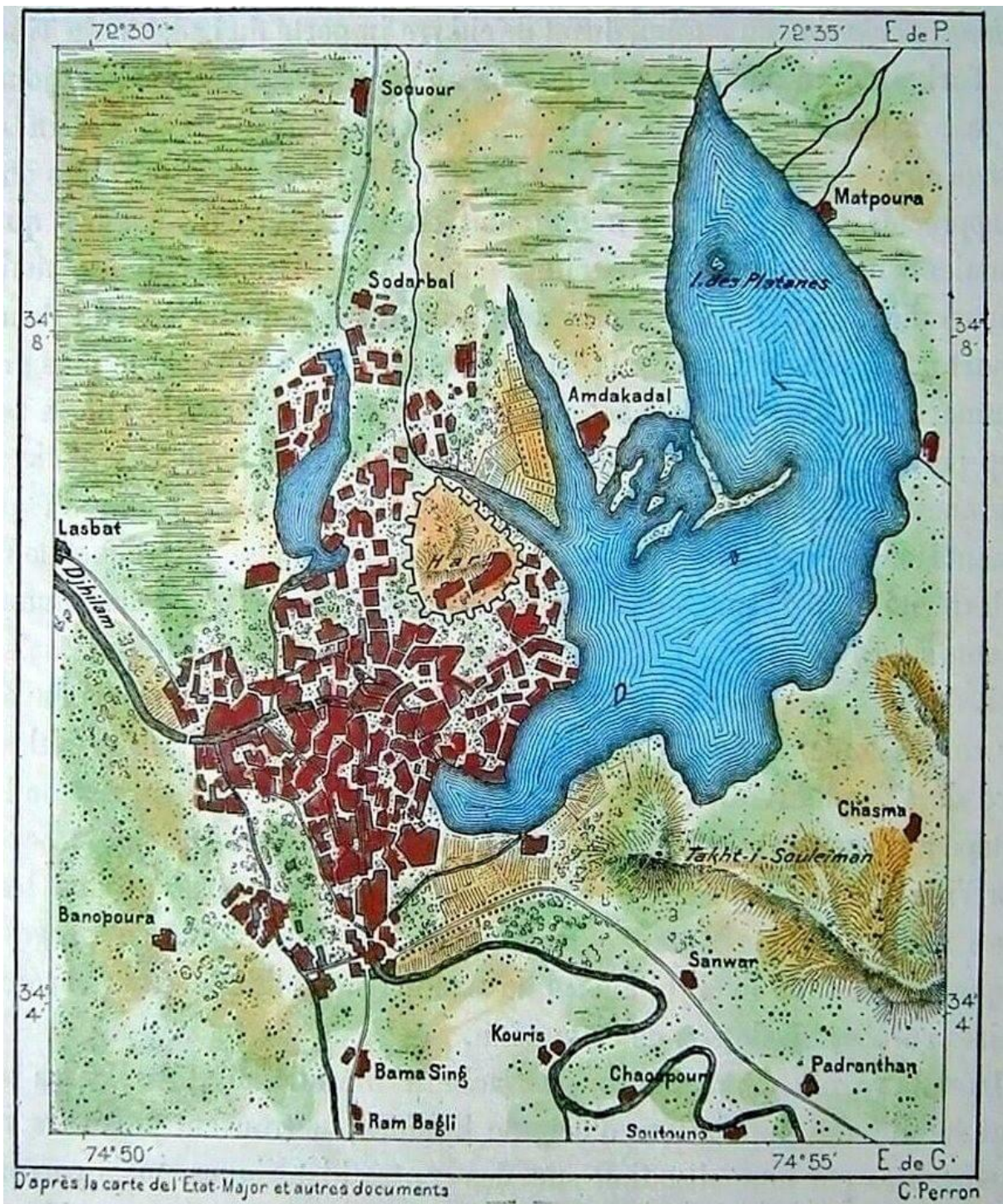


Fig.23 Map of srinagar 1883 depicting the city center, Dal lake and Jehlum River
 Source: Searchkashmir.org

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