

An Overview of Srinagar City

Shabir Ahmad Ganie

(Research Scholar at J.S. University, Shikohabad. U.P.)

Abstract: *Srinagar city being located in the heart of Kashmir valley has served as a city from historic times which was founded by King Ashoka. The growth of Srinagar city in terms of social, economic, area wise and demographic characteristics is due to its centrality and primacy. Srinagar city is the largest urban centre across whole Himalayan region and is experiencing considerably high rates of population growth and areal expansion. The city has recently been ranked as one among the first hundred fastest growing urban centers throughout the world.*

Key words: *Srinagar, Urbanization, Population growth, Magnitude, Economic activities.*

Srinagar city is not only the largest urban centre in the state of Jammu & Kashmir but in the whole Himalayan region. The city has been growing at an alarming pace therefore indicating considerable changes. Srinagar city is located at an average elevation of 1586 meters above mean sea level and its spread over in the heart of the oval shaped Valley of Kashmir. It is situated between 74°-56' and 75°-79' East Longitude and 33°-18' and 34°-45' North Latitude. The city as well as its hinterland is bounded by natural wall of mountains (sub-mountain branches of Pir Panjal Ranges and Zaskar mountains). In the east city is bounded by Zabarwan mountains with lush green vegetation, locating famous Dachigam Sanctuary and Mughal Gardens and is environed by the shallow and swampy lakes of Dal and Nigeen with the eminence of hillocks of Takht-i-Suliman in the east and Kohi-Maraan (Hariparbat) in the centre adding to its beauty and making surroundings of the city invigorating. The city of Srinagar experiences a Mediterranean type of climate and receives most of its precipitation during the winter season in the form of rain and snow.

Srinagar since the dawn of history has remained the capital city of the Kashmir Valley and its growth through different periods of Kashmir history has been very interesting. The city did not owe its importance just to its being a seat of government; it survived several changes of rulers, and it had more than ephemeral reasons for its existence. This Venice of the east owed its importance to its compactness and its large population, its organized public opinion and the superior culture of its inhabitants. "Its alliance or opposition almost always proved a decisive factor in determining the fortunes of war." Besides, Srinagar's artisans made the city emporia of trade. In short, it's central,

commercial, political and cultural importance explains why the attempts made from time to time to remove the seat of government to some other place proved abortive.

High population growth rate is a common problem of most of the urban centers throughout the developing world. The population of Srinagar city during the last century (1901-2011) has grown phenomenally. It increased from 122,618 persons in 1901 A.D. to 122,5837 persons in 2011 A.D. indicating nearly tenfold increase amounting to 900 percent growth with a net increase of 110,3219 persons. The dynamic trend in the population growth of Srinagar city suggests an accelerated rate of growth in city's population in future which is revealed from the fact that the city has achieved the metropolitan status in the year 2008. This anticipated rapid change in the demographic dimension of the city is bound to create an impact on the socio-economic structure of the city and may accentuate the problems of housing scarcity, land speculations and urban blight and slums.

It has a very complex geo-ecological setup with precipitous hills standing guard in the East to prevent city's further expansion on this side, besides there are a number of urban lakes like Dal, Anchar, Nigeen, Babdemb and khushalsar that have played a dominant role in shaping the spatial form of the city. These physical and ecological features have played a determining role in shaping the overall spatial form of the city. The city has grown in a circular form during the first half of 20th century and has been now transformed into a star shaped urban centre growing mainly along the major transport corridors in the form of ribbon development. The land along the roads with easy accessibility has been developed leaving behind fragmented interiors. Another form of sprawl found in Srinagar city is Leapfrog sprawl caused by rugged terrain, wetlands and water bodies. All these factors have precluded the continuous development or made it prohibitively expensive.

During the latter half of past century the magnitude of population growth and resultant spatial expansion and land use change in Srinagar city has increasingly assumed from significant to threatening proportions. The city has grown tenfold in terms of population and more than twentyfold in terms of area between 1901 and 2011AD. This escalating urban growth, in a sensitive geo-ecological setup has resulted in large scale encroachment and degradation of productive agriculture/horticulture land, life supporting wetlands, green spaces and forest areas. Past patterns of urban expansion of the city both in terms of population size and spatial dimensions

coupled with current high rates of sprawl, suggest higher growth rates and fast urban expansion of the city in near future as well. The population size of the city is projected to cross 1.7 million mark and the area of the urban centre is projected to reach 750 km² by the year 2031. The analysis brings to light the process and pattern of rapid urbanization in this mountainous area and calls for an immediate attention of planners to devise comprehensive a land use plan for the sustainable and balanced urban development in the region. Otherwise the city may turn into an unmanageable metropolitan complex with serious ecological and social consequences. Generally, phenomenon of population growth is measured with respect to natural increase (excess of births over deaths) and net migration. But in case of fast expanding cities like Srinagar, territorial annexation also contributes to its urban growth. Looking back into urbanization pattern of Srinagar city, its agglomeration has been the outcome of the processes of auto-urbanization, immigration and territorial annexation.

The process of auto-urbanization which involves the natural growth of urban population has significantly contributed towards the population growth of the city. However, there has been remarkable increase in the share of urban population due to merging of rural areas within municipal limits in 1971 delimitation. Furthermore, the urban growth of the city expanded at radical pace and exceptionally high during 2001–2011 due to the amalgamation of vast areas into Srinagar Metropolitan Region. Migration has also consistently contributed for the population growth of the city, mainly because of excessive concentration of economic, political, administrative and socio-cultural activities in the city which pull people from various parts of the State. The socio-economic survey depicts that out of the total migrants to the city about 81.86 per cent are from within the Valley, 10.21 per cent outside the Valley but within the State of Jammu and Kashmir and 7.94 per cent are from outside the State. The causes of migration as ascertained by sample survey have been business and employment opportunities (44.35 per cent) followed by education facilities (30.82 per cent), ecological reasons (24.00 percent) and political reasons (0.9 percent). As in-migration is predominantly comprised of people from rural and small sized urban centres, it has lent Srinagar a pseudo urban character in some concentrated pockets. It has also strengthened the economic, socio-cultural integration of the city with other parts of the Valley. The residential status of population of the city also gives some idea about the magnitude of migration

during last 7 years. The findings of the primary survey reveal that about 6.81 per cent people consist of in-migrants. The spatial distribution of recent in-migration also revealed that outer wards viz Soura, Channapora, Sonawar, have recorded comparatively more in-migration due to sub-urbanization and expansion of the city in these wards. Batamaloo and Rajbagh wards have also recorded high in-migration because of their commercial and administrative importance. Slums are urban reality .They are shocking spaces of deeply entrenched poverty, class and gender inequality, crime and diseases.

Urbanisation is at its peak in the last few decades, due to rapidly growing population and economic activities. This has resulted in unplanned and unorganized growth in most of the towns and cities. The major fallouts of this rapid urbanization are the emergence and growth of slums, environmental problems, unemployment, housing shortage and increasing traffic congestion etc. Slums of Srinagar city are no different and in terms of these negative implications of urbanization, these fulfill the criteria in all respects. As such, the slums have become the most undesirable places. But at the same time, these are an important reality of our socio-economic fabric and constitute an important segment of our urban landscape. Slums are too complex phenomenon to be ignored as a considerable population in the Srinagar urban centre are housed in these shanty houses. Out of the total of 64 wards, 26 wards have slum population (SMC, 2011). The slum residents of these areas lack the bare minimum basic amenities like clean water, proper sewage disposal, proper ventilation, clean air and health facilities etc. A good planning strategy needs to be evolved to deal and cope with these areas of despair and depravity. Central and State Governments can play an important role in this regard. These agencies should be focused on providing better basic services to Urban poor, which include providing of housing facilities to homeless, Improvement of living environment in slums, provisions of basic amenities and services in urban poor colonies and other schemes related to up liftment of these weaker sections of the society both socially & economically. So far as the Urban poor living in the slums of the study area are concerned, various Central Govt. initiatives have been launched through state govt. which includes Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM 2005), with a sub scheme of a basic services for Urban Poor (BSUP), Rajiv Awas Yojana (2010), with a sub scheme of Interest Subsidy Scheme of Housing for Urban Poor (ISHUP)etc. Despite the various opportunities offered

to the most disadvantaged sections of the society, many a times a complete ignorance about these and low motivational aspirations held by them may result in little appropriation of these facilities by target group. Here N.G.O's can also contribute in tackling the problems faced by these people, by spreading awareness among them regarding, population control, increasing literacy rates and boosting their motivational morale.

References:

- Agarwal, R.C., *Kashmir and its Monumental Glory*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 1998.
- Bamzai, P.N.K., *Culture and Political History of Kashmir*, Vol.- I, New Delhi, 1994.
- Bernaier, *Traveles in Kashmir*, j k Publishers, 1995.
- Bhat, M. S. *Urban System in Himalayas- A study of Srinagar City Region*, Dilpreet Publishing Co. New Delhi. 2008
- Drew, F. *The territories of Jammu and Kashmir*, London. 1975.
- Duranton, G. and M. Turner "Urban Growth and Transportation," Review of Economic Studies. 2012.
- Dutt, Maria; *Valley of Kashmir*, Oriental Publishers, New Delhi, 1970.
- Ishaq Khan "The Significance of the dargah of Hazaratbal in the Socio-religious and political life of Kashmiri Muslims" in Muslim Shrines in India, ed . Christian w. Troll ,Oxford, 1989
- Khan, A.R., *Geography of Jammu and Kashmir*, Srinagar, 2007
- M.A Stain; *Ancient Geography of Kashmir*, Calcutta 1899.
- Sufi, G. M. D., *Kashir.*, Lahore 1948.
- Young Husband, Fransis; *Wonders of Himaliyas*, Indus Publ. New Delhi 1998.