

Urbanization and Transformation in Tribal Communities: A Study of the Gujjar and Bakarwal Tribes of Doda District

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Abstract: This study examines urbanisation and technological integration's socio-cultural and economic impacts on the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribe in the Doda region of Jammu and Kashmir. Using a qualitative research approach, data was collected through household surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews in two selected villages with significant Bakarwal populations. Findings reveal a complex interplay between traditional livelihoods and modern socio-economic pressures. Urban migration, driven by the search for stable income, has reshaped family structures and weakened traditional practices. While technology has facilitated communication and offered economic opportunities, it has also contributed to a generational divide and reduced cultural engagement among the youth. Government support mechanisms, although beneficial, are insufficient in addressing the broader socio-cultural challenges. The study underscores the need for adaptive strategies integrating traditional knowledge with modern advancements to ensure sustainable development and cultural preservation within tribal communities.

Keywords: Bakarwal, Gujjar, Urbanisation, Tribes, Doda, Jammu

1.0 Introduction

Urbanization is a complex process characterized by the expansion and development of cities and towns, leading to significant socio-economic and environmental changes. Globally, urbanization has driven economic growth, improved infrastructure, and better access to education, healthcare, and employment. However, the benefits of urbanization are often accompanied by challenges, particularly for marginalized and indigenous communities. Urban expansion can mean displacement, cultural erosion, and a shift in traditional lifestyles for these communities. The intricate balance between embracing the advantages of urbanization and safeguarding cultural heritage is at the heart of sustainable development debates.

The importance of urbanization lies in its potential to raise economic resilience, create job opportunities, and facilitate social mobility. In developing regions, it is often seen as a pathway to modern amenities and better living standards. However, when urbanization is rapid and unplanned, it can have adverse effects on the most vulnerable populations, including tribal communities. For these groups, whose way of life is deeply intertwined with ancestral land, traditional practices, and communal living, urbanization poses a significant threat to their identity and social cohesion.

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The Bakarwal tribe, a semi-nomadic pastoral community in the Doda region of Jammu and Kashmir, exemplifies the challenges indigenous groups face in the face of urban expansion. This tribe has a long history of seasonal migration, livestock rearing, and close-knit family structures, all integral to their cultural and economic fabric. The influx of urbanization and technological advancements in these traditionally rural areas introduces opportunities and challenges. On one hand, urbanization can lead to improved access to health services, education, and job markets. On the other hand, it disrupts traditional ways of living, weakens community ties, and diminishes the practice of cultural customs and indigenous knowledge.

Technology, an integral part of urban growth, has also made its way into the lives of tribal communities, altering their modes of communication and reshaping interpersonal relationships. Mobile phones, internet connectivity, and social media have facilitated new avenues for information sharing and maintaining contact with family members who migrate to cities for work. While these technological tools provide benefits, they also contribute to the erosion of face-to-face interactions, weakening the communal bonds that have traditionally held these communities together. The younger generation, in particular, may find themselves caught between the allure of modern urban life and the values instilled by their cultural heritage.

The transformative effects of urbanization and technology are not uniform across all members of the Bakarwal tribe. Elders and community leaders frequently advocate for preserving traditional practices and passing down cultural knowledge. At the same time, younger members may prioritize economic gain and embrace the modern amenities urban centres provide. This intergenerational divide poses challenges to community cohesion and cultural continuity.

Urbanization and technological advancement bring significant shifts to communities, often framed through the lens of modernization theory, which suggests that societies transitioning from traditional to modern states undergo profound changes in their social structures, cultural practices, and economic foundations. This theory is particularly relevant for understanding the experiences of the Bakarwal tribe, who face both opportunities and challenges as they adapt to modern influences while striving to preserve their cultural identity.

1.1 Research Problem

The rapid pace of urbanization in the Doda region has brought opportunities and challenges for the Bakarwal tribe. While improved access to urban resources can support economic resilience and education, these developments often come at the cost of cultural preservation and social cohesion. The main research problem addressed in this study is how urbanization and technology integration impact the livelihoods, cultural practices, and social structures of the Bakarwal tribe. Understanding these dynamics is essential for formulating policies that promote sustainable development without eroding the unique identity of this tribal community.

1.2 Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to explore the socio-economic transformations and cultural shifts experienced by tribal communities, particularly the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes in Doda, in response to urbanization and technological advancements.

2.0 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on two selected villages, Gandhon and Dhadhar, in the Doda region that are home to Bakarwal households. The research methods combine household surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews to gather comprehensive data on the impacts of urbanization and technological integration on the community. Two villages with significant Bakarwal populations were chosen as the study area to ensure a diverse and representative perspective. Household surveys were conducted with 30 households in each village, capturing data on various aspects, including family composition, education levels, sources of income, and migration patterns. These surveys aimed to provide a foundational understanding of the socio-economic realities faced by the community.

Multiple focus group discussions were held to deepen the understanding of the cultural and social changes experienced by the Bakarwal community. These discussions involved different demographic groups, such as elders, youth, and women, to explore their views on shifts in traditional practices, the strength of community bonds, and the transmission of cultural knowledge. These dialogues allowed for the collection of nuanced insights into how urbanization and technological changes are perceived and experienced across generations.

In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with key figures in the community, including leaders, educators, and government representatives. These interviews provided valuable perspectives on the effects of urban policies, the level of community support available, and the initiatives to aid the community's adaptation to urban influences. Collectively, the combination of household surveys, focus group discussions, and interviews offered a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural and economic dynamics at play within the Bakarwal tribe in the context of urbanization and technology.

3.0 Finding and discussion

The collected data highlights several recurring themes concerning household composition, livelihoods, migration patterns, and external support, which reflect the socio-economic realities and cultural context of the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes. Below is a thematic analysis structured around key areas: household characteristics, sources of income, migration, and the impact of government support.

3.1 Household Composition and Occupations: Household sizes across the sampled population typically range from 4 to 9 members. About 65% of households have 5–7 members, 25% have larger families of 8–9 members, and the remaining 10% have smaller families of 4–

5. Occupational roles include agriculture (reported by 48% of respondents), livestock rearing and animal husbandry (40%), daily wage work (30%), and small businesses (15%). These roles are often shared among family members, with clear divisions of labour based on gender and age. Education levels among household heads reveal that 55% are illiterate or have only primary education, while 35% have attained secondary or higher secondary levels. Approximately 10% have graduated from higher education institutions. Lower educational attainment correlates with engagement in traditional occupations like agriculture and animal husbandry, highlighting the reliance on age-old livelihoods.

3.2. Income and Livelihood Sources: Agriculture and livestock are the primary income sources for **70% of families**, underscoring these communities' agrarian and pastoral nature. Among families engaged in small businesses (**15%**), the trade of wool and dairy products is common, indicating efforts to diversify income while relying on traditional skills. Daily wage labour is a supplementary income source for **30% of households**, especially during agricultural off-seasons or when livestock yields decline. This highlights an adaptive strategy to sustain livelihoods amid seasonal uncertainties.

3.3 Migration Patterns and Urbanization Impact: Migration is an increasing trend, with approximately 40% of households having at least one member working in urban areas such as Jammu or Srinagar. The younger generation is the primary demographic for migration, taking up jobs in construction (22%), factories (15%), and domestic work (3%). This urban migration provides 25–30% of total household income in these cases but also introduces challenges. Traditional livelihood practices are disrupted, as family members migrating to urban centers are less involved in cultural and agricultural activities. Prolonged absences influence family structures, reducing participation in traditional tribal practices.

This movement reflects the socio-economic pressures on these communities, where urban earnings increasingly supplement reliance on rural income. Although migration provides additional income, it also impacts the social and cultural practices within families, as those who migrate may be less involved in tribal activities or cultural preservation efforts due to their prolonged absences.

3.4 Role of Government Support: The study found that 80% of households benefit from ration cards, providing essential sustenance. 60% participate in MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), ensuring employment during lean agricultural seasons. And about 25% of families, particularly those with elderly members, receive pensions and subsidies. The reliance on government schemes highlights the vulnerability of these communities, where traditional livelihoods alone may not suffice to sustain family needs. This assistance is a socio-economic buffer, enabling families to cope with agricultural uncertainties or livestock shortfalls. It also indirectly supports tribal resilience, allowing families to maintain rural lifestyles while benefiting from minimal state aid.

4.0 Socio-Cultural Changes Due to Urbanization and Technology

Urban migration and government policies have begun shaping the socio-cultural dynamics within these tribal communities. Adopting technology and exposure to urban life among younger family members appear to contribute to shifts in traditional practices, social structures, and identity perceptions. Some changes include alterations in intergenerational knowledge transmission, where younger family members who migrate may have less engagement in cultural practices. Additionally, reliance on urban employment has caused a partial shift in community bonds, traditionally strengthened by collective rural and agricultural activities.

Government support and technology, while beneficial economically, bring challenges to traditional lifestyles and cultural continuity. For example, urban influences may cause families to prioritize economic gain over cultural preservation, gradually fading unique tribal practices.

Impact of Urbanization and Technology

Urbanization and technological advancements are bringing about profound changes in tribal communities, reshaping traditional practices, family dynamics, economic pursuits, and cultural resilience. This analysis integrates insights from field observations, revealing common themes and patterns across respondents, and is supported by relevant literature.

Shifts in Traditional Lifestyles and Community Practices: Urbanization has significantly disrupted traditional lifestyles within the community. While it brings improved access to amenities like health and education, it also introduces pollution and raises land prices. It has been observed that most of the respondents perceived that urban influence, although beneficial in some respects, has weakened community bonds and reduced involvement in traditional festivals and rituals, a trend echoed in recent studies (Rao, 2019; Sen, 2020). As Muhammad Ali from the Gujjar community shared, *“Life has become easier with schools and hospitals nearby, but we feel like we are losing something. Our children no longer want to join us for festivals; they care more about city life than our traditions. It feels like the old ways are slipping away.”* Modernization tends to prioritize individualistic pursuits over collective traditions, resulting in a generational divide where the youth are more inclined toward urbanized lifestyles and less engaged in traditional practices (Gopal & Kumar, 2021).

Impacts of Technology on Communication and Interpersonal Relations: The adoption of mobile phones, the Internet, and social media is widespread, with 75% of families using these technologies for communication. While technology enables connections with urban family members, 65% of respondents expressed concerns about reduced in-person interactions within their communities. Young people constitute 45% of the population and are more likely to rely on digital communication, resulting in decreased engagement with elders and tribal cultural practices.

This shift aligns with findings from Sharma (2020) and Bhat (2022), which indicate that technology often leads to social isolation as online interactions replace traditional face-to-face exchanges. Young people, in particular, are more likely to rely on digital communication, impacting their engagement with elders and cultural heritage.

Erosion of Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Practices: Modernization has led to the decline of traditional knowledge systems, including indigenous medicinal practices and farming techniques. 60% of the respondents stated that youth are less involved in agricultural activities, reducing traditional knowledge transmission across generations. As Ghulam Hussain from Bakarwal tribe mentioned, “*Our elders used to teach us how to work with the land and use herbs for medicine, but now the younger generation sees no value in it. They prefer machines and modern medicines over what we have practiced for centuries.*” This erosion of indigenous knowledge parallels trends identified in other studies, where traditional knowledge is often seen as less relevant in the face of modern alternatives (Rangarajan, 2021; Ahmed & Banerjee, 2018). With the influx of modern agricultural tools and healthcare options, traditional practices are gradually being replaced by contemporary methods, further distancing communities from their cultural heritage (Sinha, 2021).

Transformation in Family Structure and Youth Aspirations: Family roles within these communities have undergone notable changes, with younger members increasingly participating in decision-making processes and taking on responsibilities traditionally reserved for elders. About 35% of younger family members take on leadership roles, reflecting broader societal shifts. Aspirations for urban careers are strong among 50% of respondents aged 15–35, who view urban education and jobs as pathways to stability. Fatima Begum from the Gujjar community stated, “*The younger generation wants to make their own choices now. They want to study in cities and find better jobs, not follow the traditional ways of farming or herding like we did.*” This change reflects broader shifts observed in tribal societies influenced by urbanization (Das & Singh, 2019). Young people prefer urban careers and education, seeing these as pathways to economic stability and advancement, as seen in studies by Raj and Meena (2020). This shift in aspirations is driving a gradual move away from traditional occupations as youths aspire to adapt to urban norms and career opportunities.

Economic Diversification and Changing Consumption Patterns: Economic opportunities from urbanization have increased household incomes, particularly through diversified employment. However, there is a notable decline in the value attributed to traditional crafts and occupations. Urban opportunities have increased household incomes for 45% of families, yet traditional crafts and occupations are declining. 70% of respondents now prioritize modern goods over locally crafted items, illustrating a shift toward consumerism. This suggests a transition in consumption patterns similar to those highlighted by Patel (2018) and Iyer (2019). This change reflects a broader trend in which urbanization promotes consumerist habits, moving communities from self-sustaining practices toward market-driven consumption.

Community Resilience and Cultural Preservation Efforts: Despite these challenges, some efforts are being made within the community to maintain a balance between urban influences and traditional practices. Twenty-five per cent of elders and community leaders have organized events and meetings to promote cultural heritage and engage the youth. Zainab Akhtar says, “*We try to teach the young people about our traditions through festivals and gatherings, but we need more help to make it sustainable.*” This aligns with studies by Reddy (2021) and Kaur (2019), which indicate that community-led cultural programs and events can

effectively preserve indigenous knowledge and foster cultural resilience. However, respondents voiced a need for greater support from the government and NGOs to create sustainable cultural preservation initiatives and to provide skills training to adapt traditional crafts to modern demands.

The findings of this study align with the tenets of modernization theory, which posits that exposure to urban and technological influences leads to economic and social changes within traditional societies. For the Bakarwal tribe, urban migration and technological adoption have disrupted traditional practices and introduced new economic opportunities. However, this transition has also created a generational divide, where the youth are increasingly detached from Indigenous knowledge and cultural activities, favouring modern pursuits. This shift highlights the duality of modernization: it brings improved income and connectivity but at the cost of weakening traditional community bonds and cultural preservation.

5.0 Conclusion

This analysis highlights a complex interplay between traditional livelihoods and modern socio-economic influences on the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes. The reliance on agriculture and livestock remains central to their identity, yet migration for urban employment signals an adaptive response to economic demands. Government assistance provides a critical support system that alleviates some hardships, though it cannot fully replace the income derived from urban employment. The impact of urbanization and exposure to technology subtly reshapes traditional roles and cultural practices, posing opportunities and challenges to preserving tribal identity.

Urbanization and technological advancements present both opportunities and challenges for tribal communities. While urbanization has contributed to better economic opportunities, educational access, and health facilities, it has also disrupted traditional practices and weakened cultural bonds. The impact of technology on communication and knowledge sharing highlights a generational divide, with youth increasingly detached from indigenous practices. To sustain tribal livelihoods and cultural heritage amidst these changes, it is crucial to develop adaptive strategies that integrate traditional knowledge with modern needs and foster community resilience. Government and NGO initiatives can play an instrumental role in achieving this balance, supporting sustainable development that respects and preserves tribal identities.

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