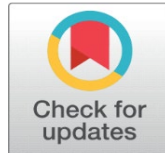
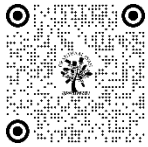


# TRIBAL SURVIVAL IN THE URBANIZED WORLD: A PARADOX OF CHANGE

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate how urbanisation frequently brings challenges for tribal communities impacting their customs, ways of life, and access to land and its resources. This paper examines the difficulties tribal communities encounter and negotiate their identities in urban settings. Now, the tribal communities, in the midst of urbanisation, confront a paradox where economic opportunities and social problems co-exist. Although urbanisation brings better employment opportunities, educational opportunities, and infrastructure, these advantages frequently come at the expense of cultural assimilation, land loss, and tribal populations being uprooted. Urbanisation's dual nature brings both benefits and risks for tribal communities. This research paper contributes to the existing knowledge available on tribal communities and urbanisation by providing a nuanced understanding of the dynamic process of urbanisation and its impact on tribals. To navigate this intricate urbanisation paradox, it becomes crucial to strike a balance that upholds tribal identity, guarantees equitable development, and protects cultural legacy.

**Keywords:** Tribals, Urbanisation, Social Exclusion, Urbanisation Paradox, Cultural Assimilation, Socio-Cultural Dynamics, Socio-Economic Disparities, Identity-Negotiation, Development Induced Displacement, Sustainable Development

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation is a global phenomenon that is reshaping the modern world. It is characterised by the fast expansion of cities and the migration of people from rural to urban areas. Nevertheless, there is a paradox underlying this general trend—a complicated interaction between development and displacement, progress and obstacles. This paradox takes on special poignancy when one considers how it affects tribal communities, whose distinct realities frequently collide with the forces of urbanisation. As Professor Priya Sharon Thomas rightly opines, “Arrival of the colonial modernity changed the perspective of tribal, disruption of old order and on set of new, created both a culture shock and identity crisis among the tribes in his region” (266). Cities frequently represent modernity and progress, but they also pose a threat to the survival of traditional ways of life, which creates a paradoxical tension between urbanisation and cultural preservation. Urbanisation puts tribal communities at risk of losing their language, cultural identity, and land. As Professor Priya Sharon Thomas writes, “indigenous culture is going through its degenerative walkway with the emergence of globalization and its neoliberal policies which tries to standardise and unify everything in a single thread” (265). Rapid urbanisation can result in cultural homogenization as regional traditions and values give way to universal standards.

Tribal communities frequently face a dilemma as a result of urbanisation, which is generally linked to improvements in living standards, economic growth, and technology. Although urban areas present prospects for work, learning, and better infrastructure, they also pose a number of difficulties that disproportionately impact tribal populations. As a result, traditional tribal lifestyles and the demands of modern urban living clash, a manifestation of the urbanisation paradox.

Tribal communities are confronted with a multitude of issues encapsulated in the paradox of urbanisation as they live in this intricate landscape at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. G.S. Jayshree has rightly pointed out in her introduction to *Kocharethi* saying that, "It gives us an insider's view as Narayan chronicles the changes that take place in the lives of the inhabitants of the foothills of the Western Ghats as they negotiate the interests of modernity" (17). Tribal realities in the midst of urbanisation present a complex paradox, as traditional ways of life clash with the rapid transformations of urban environments. As Reneeta Anna Robert quotes, "For indigenous peoples, their cultural heritage is the blood running through the veins of their communities, allowing for the survival and transmission of their cultural identities to future generations" (Lenzerini 131). In many regions, tribal communities face the challenge of preserving their cultural identity in the face of urbanisation. As Hansda also writes, "We are losing our Sarna faith, our identities, and our roots. We are becoming people from nowhere" (173). The conflict between ancient tribal values and modern urban lifestyles generates a nuanced narrative that reflects the larger conflicts of societal advancement. As concrete jungles replace natural landscapes, tribals frequently find themselves caught in the crossfire of development. The struggle for survival is inextricably linked with efforts to preserve ancestral customs, languages, and communal structures. As Professor Priya Sharon Thomas also writes about *Kocharethi*, "Parvathy falls in love with an outsider and urban Padmanabhan, she dares to break the bondage of their tribal customs and traditions. In this way, Parvathy becomes the symbol of modernity. But unfortunately, Kochuraman and Kunjipennu confront the arrival of colonial modernity as a culture shock which makes imbalances in their present living conditions" (266). Urbanisation can erode tribal heritage as younger generations adopt urban norms while abandoning their forefathers' traditions.

## 2. CULTURAL CHANGES

Urbanisation creates a cultural diaspora, which presents unique social challenges. Once closely knit tribal communities may become fragmented as members move to urban areas in search of opportunities. This dispersal destabilises the communal fabric, testing the tenacity of kinship ties and established social structures.

The loss of cultural heritage is one of the most significant effects of urbanisation on tribal communities. As tribes relocate from close-knit rural settings to sprawling urban landscapes, they frequently run the risk of losing their distinctive languages, customs, and traditions. The rapid pace of urban life leaves little room for cultural nuances to be preserved, resulting in a gradual dilution of tribal identity. However, opportunities for cultural revitalization do arise within the paradox.

Urban areas introduce tribal communities to a variety of cultures, languages, and lifestyles. While this can broaden their experiences, it also threatens their cultural identity and practices. Younger generations may be drawn to urban trends and values, leading to the decline of traditional customs, languages, and social norms. Maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity becomes difficult when faced with the assimilationist pressures of urban life.

For tribal communities, urbanisation brings about profound cultural transformations that radically alter their identities, traditions, languages, and social structures. The migration of tribal populations to urban areas for economic reasons presents a challenge to their traditional way of life as they come across a complex milieu of diverse cultures, values, and lifestyles.

As Hansda writes, "People here don't like to mix with those who eat meat and eggs" (4). The disintegration of customs, practices, and knowledge systems is one of the main effects of urbanisation on tribal cultures. Younger generations who are exposed to Western values, consumerism, and urban trends are more likely to give up their tribal customs and cultural heritage and adopt mainstream lifestyles. As tribal people integrate into dominant urban cultures, they often lose their native tongues and switch to more widely spoken ones in an effort to advance socially or economically. Furthermore, urbanisation disrupts traditional kinship and community structures by dispersing extended families and close-knit communities across urban landscapes.

Urbanisation, however, also offers chances for cultural innovation, adaptation, and revival despite the difficulties of cultural assimilation. As Hansda writes, “all the santhals of the city celebrated Baha, Sohari and Sakrat together” (14). Tribal communities frequently engage in cultural activism, reclaiming and revitalising their traditional practices through urban festivals, rituals, and artistic expressions. Urban tribals derive a sense of pride and belonging from the preservation and promotion of tribal arts, crafts, music, and dances, which is made possible by cultural organisations, community centres, and advocacy groups.

### 3. ECONOMIC DYNAMICS

Economic dynamics are not an exempt from the paradox. Improved infrastructure and increased economic opportunities are frequent results of urbanisation, but these advantages might not be distributed fairly among tribal communities. Inequalities in employment, healthcare, and educational opportunities can exacerbate pre-existing ones, making it more difficult to reconcile urban life with tribal values. As Robert J. Samuelson puts it, “...Globalisation is a double edged sword. It’s a controversial process that assaults national sovereignty, erodes local culture and tradition and threatens economic and social stability” (Dixit 29). The economic dynamics of tribal communities are greatly impacted by urbanisation, which causes a dramatic change from traditional subsistence-based livelihoods to participation in cash-based urban economies. As Hansda writes, “Which great nation displaces thousands of its people from homes and livelihoods to produce electricity for the cities and factories? And jobs? What jobs? An Adivasi farmer’s job is to farm. Which other job should he be made to do? Become a servant in some billionaire’s factory built on land that used to belong to that very Adivasi just a week earlier” (185). Tribals face a variety of difficulties as a result of this shift, including navigating the complexity of urban labour markets and coping with economic vulnerability. Tribal populations, who have historically relied on agriculture, hunting, gathering, and artisanal crafts for their subsistence, are facing an arduous transition as these traditional livelihoods become more and more unfeasible in the face of urbanisation.

Tribal people in urban areas are frequently forced into low-wage, unstable occupations like construction labour, housework, and street vending, where they are marginalised and underpaid. As Hansda writes, “Sarjomdih, whose men were given jobs as unskilled labourers in the mines and the factory in return for their fecund land. Sarjomdih, which is a standing testimony to the collapse of an agrarian Adivasi society and the dilution of Adivasi culture, the twin gifts of industrialization and progress”(115). The lack of formal job opportunities exacerbates economic insecurity, as tribals struggle with fluctuating incomes, no social security, and limited access to financial services. Moreover, the loss of traditional skills and knowledge, combined with educational and training barriers, limits their ability to compete in urban job markets. Furthermore, as urbanisation encroaches on tribal lands, tribal members lose access to natural resources and ancestral lands that are essential to their way of life, exacerbating economic displacement. Many tribal people are forced to migrate in search of work opportunities or work for wage labour due to landlessness or reduced land holdings, which feeds the cycles of poverty and dependency. As Hansda writes, “These Santhals-villages, entire clans-make up long, snaking processions as they abandon their lands and farms to take the train to Namal, the Bardhaman district of West Bengal and the paddy fields there. In the month that these Santhal families will spend in Bardhaman, they will plant rice and other crops in farms owned by the zamindars of Bardhaman” (39). Amidst the transformative forces of urbanisation, it is crucial to implement economic empowerment initiatives that are specifically designed to cater to the distinct needs and strengths of tribal communities. These initiatives should provide opportunities for skill development, entrepreneurship, and market access in order to promote sustainable livelihoods.

### 4. LAND DISPLACEMENT

Urbanisation has a significant effect on tribal communities because it displaces them and encroaches on their ancestral lands, which are essential to their way of life, sense of cultural identity, and social cohesiveness. As researcher Aashish Khakha writes, “Much like in the rest of the world, tribes in India were traditionally associated with land and forest-based livelihoods. Accordingly, their traditional habitats have been rural and forested areas. However, this changed during the colonial period. Tribal people were not only integrated into the modern state, but also into the wider economy and society; however, this integration was far from uniform. This modernisation had a far-reaching impact on tribal society, resulting in changes in different spheres of their societal life” (01). As cities grow, tribal lands are frequently the focus of infrastructure, development, and real estate endeavours, which can result in land grabs, forced evictions, and loss of access to essential natural resources. As Hansda writes, “Sarjomdih, which bore the repercussions of development, the nationalization threatening of the mine and the factory, the opening up of two more quarries and the confiscation of the villagers' properties so roads and living quarters could be built”(115). The loss of their traditional way of life can

result from being landless or having less land, which can worsen poverty and increase reliance on outside resources for subsistence.

For tribal communities, the land is not just a resource; it is a sacred legacy that is deeply entwined with their traditional ways of life, spiritual beliefs, and cultural identity. As Gautam Pingali writes, “land is not an asset but rather a life-giving source and one must live in Synergy with it. According to the government of Jharkhand, the Adivasis hold an emotional attachment to their land, which hinders the ability to utilise the land for economic development” (27). Urbanisation's incursions disrupts this intricate web of relationships, which puts tribal people's socioeconomic well-being at risk and severs their ingrained ties to their land. As Gautam Pingali writes, “Land displacement for the Adivasis has a multitude of consequences, ranging from socio-economic to political and cultural displacement” (16). Tribals lose their means of subsistence when they are uprooted from their ancestral lands, which exacerbates their poverty, food insecurity, and economic vulnerability. Furthermore, loss of land undermines tribal autonomy and self-governance by reducing territorial sovereignty and control over natural resources. As Dilshad Ali writes, “*Kocharethi* talks about the community's transition to modernity that requires them to abandon older ways of living and whose transition is rarely voluntary. Instead, it is imposed on them through poverty, outside forces, and dubious and discriminatory models of development that only benefit the upper-caste landlords and the corrupt state machinery” (17).

Tribals' social exclusion and disenfranchisement are made worse by their frequent marginalisation in the decision-making processes pertaining to land use, urban planning, and development policies. Tribal communities that are uprooted experience severe social disruption as a result of the shattered familial ties, community bonds, and cultural traditions that are inextricably linked to their homeland.

## 5. SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND MARGINALISATION

Urbanisation has the potential to either promote social integration by providing opportunities for interaction and cultural exchange, or to further marginalise tribal communities. Their ability to move up the social ladder and obtain housing, work, and education may be hampered by prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. The absence of tribal representation in decision-making processes and policies further marginalises tribals, perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion in urban settings. Due to structural injustices, discrimination, and cultural barriers, tribal people frequently find themselves marginalised and excluded from mainstream society, despite the opportunities for interaction, cultural exchange, and economic advancement that urban areas present.

Social integration—the process of integrating tribal people into the social, political, and economic spheres of urban society—is one of the major issues that urban tribal communities face in urban areas. However, deep-rooted biases, stereotypes, and prejudices against tribal people continue to marginalise them and make it difficult for them to get housing, work, healthcare, education, and other necessities. As Professor Priya Sharon Thomas writes, “Due to lack of formal education, documented history and awareness, indigenous culture has been misinterpreted and assimilated with others under the label of development. All these factors led them to the social periphery and resulted in the distortion of their cultural essence and indigeneity” (265). Additionally, as tribal people struggle with alienation and displacement from their communities and cultural roots, the breakdown of traditional social support networks and familial ties in urban settings exacerbates the social isolation they already experience. As Priyanka Ghosh quotes, “quite often had their habitats and homelands fragmented, their cultures disrupted, their communities shattered, and have been converted from owners of the resources within well-knit contented communities to individual wage earners in urban agglomerates with uncertain futures and threatened existence” (Narashima and Subbarao 193). Their vulnerability to exploitation, violence, and abuse is increased by language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of representation that further obstructs their ability to assert their rights and voice their concerns in urban spaces.

## 6. EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE

Tribal communities' health and educational systems are significantly impacted by urbanisation, which brings both opportunities and challenges. Although urban areas might provide easier access to medical facilities and educational opportunities than rural ones, tribal populations frequently encounter obstacles that prevent them from taking advantage of these resources.

Healthcare also becomes a focal point in the tribal-urban paradox. The transition from traditional healing practices to Western medicine presents challenges for maintaining holistic approaches to well-being. As Dilshad Ali writes about *Kocharethi*, “The arrival of colonial modernity changed the perspective of tribals, destruction of the old value system and the onset of a new one created an identity crisis among tribes of this region. So long Kochuraman, the medicine man, had



always used animal fat to treat ailments. But now, he resorts to soda water and moves to medical college for treatment" (18). Integrating traditional medicinal knowledge into mainstream healthcare systems is critical in order to protect the well-being and adaptability of urbanised tribal communities.

Likewise, improved educational facilities—such as colleges, universities, and career training facilities—are made possible by urbanisation, and this can help tribal children and youth achieve higher educational goals. But obstacles like prejudice, cultural insensitivity, and language problems could prevent them from receiving a good education and restrict their ability to succeed academically. As Hansda writes, "For education, our children are at the mercy of either those free government schools where teachers come only to cook the midday meal, or those Kiristan missionary schools where our children are constantly asked to stop worshipping our Bonga-Buru and start revering Jisu and Mariam. Moreover, tribal students in urban areas may have low educational attainment and high dropout rates due to socioeconomic factors like poverty, migration, and family responsibilities. The conflict between traditional tribal knowledge systems and Western-style education raises concerns about tribal youth assimilation into urban communities. As Rupam Kumari writes, "Technology and urbanization touched them in the form of the British Government's project of expansion of land and territory, their livelihood has been threatened. They were just turned into mere victims of modernization. Even the arrival of education in their hills could not do justice. Although it has made the Tribes of read, write and do some basic calculations; it has robbed the peace of family and their culture" (361). Achieving a balance between the dissemination of ancestral wisdom and contemporary education is crucial for preserving cultural practices and ecological stewardship.

## 7. ENVIRONMENTAL DYNAMICS

Environmental issues make the paradox more apparent. Strongly rooted in the natural world, tribes are at risk of ecological disruption and displacement as a result of urbanisation. The struggle for land rights takes centre stage, highlighting the conflict between tribal worldviews based on sustainable coexistence with nature and the resource-driven demands of urban development.

## 8. POLITICAL DYNAMICS

The political landscape exacerbates the tribal-urban paradox. Advocacy for tribal rights becomes critical, necessitating a delicate balance of autonomy and integration into the larger political framework.

The tribal-urban paradox is made more difficult by the political environment. In the complex urban environment, governance structures that may have worked well for tribes in their traditional settings may not be sufficient. Tribal rights advocacy becomes imperative, requiring a careful balancing act between autonomy and integration into the larger political framework.

## 9. ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology, a defining feature of urbanisation, presents both challenges and opportunities. While digital connectivity allows tribes to preserve and share their stories on a global scale, it also threatens their privacy and cultural authenticity. The digital age exacerbates the paradox by blurring the distinction between tribal realities and the constantly changing urban landscape. As Reneeta Anna Robert writes, "The rapid advancement in technologies and the strength of capitalism and with the rising power of neo-colonialism has created a favourable condition for the erosion of natural resources from the territories of fragile tribal people. Thus, the indigenous community is juxtaposed with the alien capitalist relations and cultures with unbearable results, putting their cultural survival in jeopardy" (116). They thus endure the "sacrifice of collective identity, historical and cultural heritage" (Dixit 35), exacerbating the extent of the tribal displacement.

## 10. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the paradox of urbanisation combined with tribal realities represent a multifaceted struggle. It is a story of survival and adaptation, resilience and vulnerability. Acknowledging the inherent significance of tribal heritage in the urban fabric becomes crucial for promoting inclusivity, mutual understanding, and a peaceful cohabitation as societies traverse this intricate terrain.

Urbanisation is a backdrop against which struggles for self-determination and recognition take place, underscoring the necessity of legislative frameworks that uphold and defend the rights of tribal communities living in urbanised areas. The ongoing narrative places great importance on the preservation of traditional knowledge in the midst of the tribal-urban dilemma. Tribal communities, who possess distinctive ecological knowledge, encounter difficulties in preserving their customs in quickly evolving metropolitan environments. These communities are characterised by a complex web

of relationships, which is demonstrated by the delicate balance between sustainable living and the demands of urban development. Nevertheless, urbanisation also offers chances for innovation and cross-cultural interaction. In addition to being centres of social activism, innovation, and artistic expression, cities also give tribal cultures a place to thrive and change in the face of globalisation. However, intentional efforts to protect traditional practices, languages, and beliefs are necessary for maintaining cultural heritage in urban settings.

The tribal-urban paradox is, at its core, a continuous story that depicts the complex dance between tradition and advancement. It encourages societies to have a conversation that crosses cultural barriers, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. In order to build a peaceful and inclusive future, it is crucial to acknowledge the value of diversity and the significance of conserving indigenous wisdom.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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