The Impact of Urbanization on Indigenous Cultural Practices in Hazara Division: A Qualitative Study

Jahanzaib Afridi [1], Syed Zeeshan Haider[2,] Muhammad Burhan Bukhari[3]

[1,] Lecturer, Department of Art and Design, University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Muzaffarabad, Pakistan jahanzaib.afridi@ajku.edu.pk

[2,] Lecturer, Department of Islamic Art and Architecture, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan   zeeshan.haider@iiu.edu.pk

[3,] Additional Controller of Examination, University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Muzaffarabad, Pakistan burhanprouajk@gmail.com

Abstract

This research investigated how urbanization impact on indigenous cultural practices within the Hazara Division by studying the areas of Haripur along with Mansehra and Abbottabad districts. This study employed qualitative research methods combined with phenomenological research design, Data were collected from 50 participants using semi-structured interview and focus group discussion methods with indigenous members along with cultural practitioners and local elders. purposive sampling was employed specifically to obtain interview participants who experienced cultural change. All participants provided their consent to participate in the interviews as part of ensuring both ethical standards and voluntary willingness. This study used Braun and Clarke's six-step model for thematic analysis to assess the collected data, the study shows urbanization reduces cultural transfer from one generation to the next which results in language changes as well as changes to social celebrations and traditional customs. No improvement has been observed in the number of Hindko speakers while external control of cultural activities together with weak cultural transmission patterns continue as additional hurdles. The indigenous people protect their heritage by organizing cultural events each year while putting focus on native language restoration and spreading indigenous cultural knowledge among their communities. Native heritage content must be included throughout the local school curriculum to increase cultural knowledge of younger populations and Community members should actively support policies which secure funds for indigenous heritage preservation projects.

Keywords: Communities, Heritage, Migration, Spiritual practices, Festivals

Introduction

Modern development embodies urbanization as rural areas change into urban centers through this transformation process (Cattivelli, 2024). The transformation of rural areas into urban cities occurs due to economic development opportunities alongside better infrastructure and technological progress and globalization. The transformation of rural areas into cities generates economic progress but places significant social-cultural strain upon native peoples because their cultural practices trace back to rural areas. The growth of cities resulted in major modifications to indigenous societal frameworks and economic behavior together with governing systems as well

as traditional cultural communication methods (Pickett et al., 2024). Urban development presents challenges for indigenous populations to safeguard their indigenous traditions along with their languages and rituals as well as their cultural identity. When indigenous communities migrate to urban areas culture faces one of its most critical effects from urbanization. Rural-to-urban migration necessitates indigenous people to fulfill new socio-economic demands that frequently fail to protect their traditional customs (Watson, 2009). The primary factors which lead to indigenous traditions becoming weaker are land loss combined with economic inequality and dominating mainstream cultural practices. Younger indigenous people absorb urban living practices which causes their descent from ancestral traditions resulting in the fading of their native languages with their cultural practices and fundamental values (Batool et al., 2025). Urban indigenous populations fight back by implementing strategies which assist in maintaining their cultural heritage among urban populations. Urban indigenous heritage preservation in these sites depends heavily on digital technology together with grassroots activism and cultural festivals and policy interventions as described by Wang & Fouseki (2025).Cities have accomplished cultural integration which generates economic stability by promoting arts and crafts production along with tourism development (Kirmayer et al., 2009). The study of urbanization's diverse effects on indigenous cultural practices permits the creation of programs that protect cultural variety together with indigenous strength. . This research examines both urbanization-related challenges that face indigenous customs and native community responses to protect their heritage during times of modernization.

Problem of Statement
The Hazara Division has undergone substantial changes to its indigenous social and cultural traditions as a result of the urbanization process. The development of urban areas and rural lands creates obstacles for indigenous cultural traditions through cultural uniformity as well as heritage loss and modified social arrangements. The investigation focuses on studying how urbanization alters native cultural practices to determine the extent modernization affects traditional traditions. Researchers examine cultural changes to analyze how urban growth affects neighborhood identity together with heritage protection.

Objectives:
1. To assess urbanization's impact on the transmission and preservation of indigenous culture.
2. To examine how economic and social changes shape indigenous traditions in urban areas.
3. To explore indigenous strategies for sustaining cultural heritage amid urban growth.

Literature Review
This literature review explores the multifaceted impact of urbanization on indigenous cultural practices, focusing on several key areas. this section provides insight into the complex ways' urbanization reshapes indigenous identities and cultural heritage.

Impact of Urbanization on Indigenous Communities
Academic research has extensively studied urbanization because it reshapes indigenous communities throughout the world. The academic community focuses on examining the various results created by expanding cities which fundamentally transform customary existence models as well as cultural roots and social frameworks (Bai et al., 2017). People from indigenous communities usually face difficulties upholding their cultural traditions when they relocate to urban areas. The process of urbanization leads to the displacement of indigenous communities as its major social consequence. The ancestral ground has maintained deep bonds with indigenous

populations because these properties deliver essential economic resources and spiritual power and cultural self-knowledge. Industrial and urban projects together with commercial interests often invade these territories pushing indigenous groups toward relocation. According to (Stephens, 2015) the process of displacement breaks traditional indigenous life cycles by altering farming techniques together with traditional crafts and subsistence practices that sustained indigenous societies throughout generations. Land loss produces more than financial deterioration because it causes centralized communities to disintegrate. Indigenous people embrace shared land ownership systems because they live in communities which hold collective rights to properties. Cities become the new homes of displaced people and families following land displacement yet force them to follow independent ways that break down ancestral social systems (Beck & Gernsheim, 2001). Cities become a substantial challenge for indigenous people who lose their land because they frequently experience difficulties in obtaining vital municipal services and end up living in illegal settlements. Their economic struggles together with cultural heritage decline as a consequence of social marginalization (Brown & Schafft, 2011).

Language Loss and Cultural Erosion
Language plays a crucial role in preserving indigenous knowledge, oral traditions, and historical narratives. process of urbanization leads to a decrease in indigenous language use because younger people prefer to use dominant national or global languages. The selection of economic prospects and social integration by indigenous urban residents' results in the decreased transfer of indigenous languages between generations (Ajani et al., 2024). Language loss functions as a main sign of cultural erosion during which traditional stories together with myths and indigenous views about the world disappear (Brown & Schafft, 2011). Children living in cities usually lack chances to study their ancestral languages because education institutions teach students using the national official language. Intergenerational closeness along with cultural identity becomes harder to maintain because linguistic continuity weakens which creates obstacles for indigenous youth to embrace their heritage. To counteract this trend, some communities have launched language revitalization programs, utilizing digital platforms and educational resources to sustain their linguistic heritage (Meighan, 2021).

Disruptions to Religious and Spiritual Practices
The deep connection of native spiritual traditions with particular geographic places makes urban development a major challenge to preserve their ongoing existence. Cities continue to take over ancient sacred sites where traditional religious practices along with rituals and cosmological beliefs once flourished. Therefore, sacred locations such as mountains along with rivers and forests maintain significant spiritual importance to indigenous populations yet urban development transforms these regions into commercial properties or industrial areas and residential zones respectively (Lane, 2002). Participating in urban life at a rapid pace makes ancient religious traditions less important. Indigenous people struggle to take part in extensive rituals because of economic stressors and busy work arrangements combined with urban diversion. Indigenous communities tend to lose their traditional spiritual framework when they encounter mainstream religious institutions due to such exposures (Pettipas 1994). Some indigenous communities now maintain urban cultural centers to carry out ceremonies and rituals in modern metropolitan areas for safeguarding their sacred traditions according to Lane (2002).

Economic Transformations and Cultural Commodification
Economic transformations resulting from urbanization forces local populations to transition from self-sustaining economic systems into workplaces driven by market systems. The shift toward

_____
Volume: 3, No: 1   **January-March, 2025**

1374

modern economy creates new job openings but leads to the loss of established living practices. Most native people devote themselves to paid labor sectors to survive economically which makes them prioritize making money instead of keeping their heritage alive according to Powell et al. (2015). Modern urbanization leads to the transformation of indigenous cultural items into commercial exchange. Aboriginal cultural products including crafts as well as dress and artistic creations have become targets for tourism promotion and commercial businesses. The urban economy has accepted indigenous heritage successfully when preservation of authenticity remains unharmed but several communities face challenges against global standardization (Patlan, 2024). Once deeply spiritual aspects of indigenous cultures and socially relevant components have turned into merchandise through urbanization so their original meanings fade away while becoming foreign export products. The indigenous communities overcome obstacles to preserve their culture through developing various survival techniques. Through digital platforms traditional indigenous groups have established global methods to document their customs while simultaneously spreading and advocating them (Sanmee, 2024).) Online platforms such as social media and virtual museums along with storytelling platforms enable indigenous persons to share their voices while substantiating the existence of indigenous cultures. Through grassroots movements which fight for native rights political changes emerged which resulted in programmatic actions such as cultural heritage events and language and community development initiatives for continuous indigenous traditions (Paul & Uddin, 2024).

Disruptions to Religious and Spiritual Practices
The deep connection of native spiritual traditions with particular geographic places makes urban development a major challenge to preserve their ongoing existence. Cities continue to take over ancient sacred sites where traditional religious practices along with rituals and cosmological beliefs once flourished. Therefore, sacred locations such as mountains along with rivers and forests maintain significant spiritual importance to indigenous populations yet urban development transforms these regions into commercial properties or industrial areas and residential zones respectively (Lane, 2002). Participating in urban life at a rapid pace makes ancient religious traditions less important. Indigenous people struggle to take part in extensive rituals because of economic stressors and busy work arrangements combined with urban diversion. Indigenous communities tend to lose their traditional spiritual framework when they encounter mainstream religious institutions due to such exposures (Pettipas 1994). Some indigenous communities now maintain urban cultural centers to carry out ceremonies and rituals in modern metropolitan areas for safeguarding their sacred traditions according to Lane (2002).

Economic Transformations and Cultural Commodification
Economic transformations resulting from urbanization forces local populations to transition from self-sustaining economic systems into workplaces driven by market systems. The shift toward modern economy creates new job openings but leads to the loss of established living practices. Most native people devote themselves to paid labor sectors to survive economically which makes them prioritize making money instead of keeping their heritage alive according to Powell et al. (2015). Modern urbanization leads to the transformation of indigenous cultural items into commercial exchange. Aboriginal cultural products including crafts as well as dress and artistic creations have become targets for tourism promotion and commercial businesses. The urban economy has accepted indigenous heritage successfully when preservation of authenticity remains unharmed but several communities face challenges against global standardization (Patlan, 2024). Once deeply spiritual aspects of indigenous cultures and socially relevant components have turned into merchandise through urbanization so their original meanings fade away while becoming

foreign export products. The indigenous communities overcome obstacles to preserve their culture through developing various survival techniques. Through digital platforms traditional indigenous groups have established global methods to document their customs while simultaneously spreading and advocating them (Sanmee, 2024).) Online platforms such as social media and virtual museums along with storytelling platforms enable indigenous persons to share their voices while substantiating the existence of indigenous cultures. Through grassroots movements which fight for native rights political changes emerged which resulted in programmatic actions such as cultural heritage events and language and community development initiatives for continuous indigenous traditions (Paul & Uddin, 2024).

Research Methodology
This study employed qualitative research methods combined with phenomenological design to study indigenous communities' real-life experiences of cultural changes from urbanization in Hazara Division. Data were collected from 50 participants using semi-structured interview and group focus discussion methods with indigenous members along with cultural practitioners and local elders. The examination paid special attention to Abbottabad, Haripur and Mansehra districts because these regions within Hazara Division have experienced the most drastic changes in native cultural customs due to urban development. purposive sampling was employed specifically to obtain interview participants who experienced cultural change. All participants provided their consent to participate in the interviews as part of ensuring both ethical standards and voluntary willingness. This study used Braun and Clarke's six-step model for thematic analysis to assess the collected data while identifying major patterns concerning cultural adaptation and fracture and resilience processes. Through participant observations researchers gained supplementary details about the evolution of rituals and communal festivals and social interactions which expanded their knowledge about indigenous cultural changes due to urbanization.

Result and Discussion
The research findings, which are based on a thematic analysis of the study data, are presented in this part. The themes that were retrieved provide light on Impact of Urbanization on Indigenous Cultural Practices, Erosion of Traditional Knowledge and Practices, shift in language, Changes in Traditional Festivals and Celebrations and Adaptation Strategies for Cultural Preservation are among the major themes found. Every theme is covered in depth, emphasizing its importance and ramifications.

Theme 1: Erosion of Traditional Knowledge and Practices
The process of urbanization leads to the reduction of traditional knowledge transfer from one generation to the next. Modern society leads the younger generation to abandon tribal customs as they either fail to show interest or experience a shifting social environment, respondent narrated "Everyone in my childhood family would sit before sunset to listen to traditional stories alongside historical narratives and ancient wisdom from our elders. Such meetings resembled an alternative educational atmosphere that taught us about our ancestral heritage as well as about our cultural practices and their historical origins. Young children today prioritize digital devices over interfacing with elders while their younger generation almost never spends time with seniors. The knowledge that has existed since centuries seems to vanish into thin air." Another respondent added, "Traditional crafts define my life because my grandmother taught me weaving as well as embroidery skills. Throughout generations my children never developed an interest in traditional skills that family members taught for many generations. People in the community claim that traditional skills do not offer a financial future because they choose city-based contemporary work

instead. Traditional art used to bring source of identity and pride yet it fades into obscurity because urban life established new pragmatic targets." Traditions within multiple specialized artistic realms gradually fade away first as storytelling and then indigenous handcrafts. The current pattern suggests cultural identity will diminish until it disappears completely.

Theme: 2 Shift in language and communication patterns
Changes in the population toward urban areas are causing local languages to lose ground to national and global standardized languages which results in their decreasing usage patterns.
respondent shared, "Hindko acted as the main communication language throughout our home environment as well as our community before urbanization set in. English and Urdu have gained dominance since the increase of urban communities. The linguistic preferences of parents lie in these languages since they wish to open better job opportunities for their children. The clear speaking ability of our present youth in Hindko faces challenges because I anticipate its language extinction within several generations." Another respondent said. "Before our native dialect used to be extensively used for expressing emotions and sharing knowledge and historical records through poetry and storytelling. Social customs where people express themselves through poetry and storytelling do not exist within the urban community. People now use social media platforms to communicate their thoughts through digital symbols known as emojis as well as brief video recordings instead of meaningful dialogues. "Daily communication together with cultural storytelling face changes as a result of language preference shifts.

Theme 3: Changes in Traditional Festivals and Celebrations
Modern urban development has produced major transformations regarding the management of festivals along with other celebrations. Traditional societal observances which had traditionally relied on collective participation have become replaced with modern individual-focused and modernized approaches Respondent narrated, "Grand communal weddings used to be common during historical times because everyone took part and added their contributions. Traditional performances as well as Cultural dancing and large quantities of special-made food occupied the event. Over the year's people have started choosing hotel wedding ceremonies that involve fewer attendees. The traditional values of community celebrations have disappeared because modern trends now dominate wedding events." Another respondent narrated. "The traditional celebrations in Eid and other local festivals involved a combination of bonfires and village social events according to previous rituals. Such cultural traditions no longer exist in urban regions. The public now chooses to celebrate independently from restaurants or inside their own houses. Our traditional cultural bond along with our celebration unity has started to fade away." Modern society makes heritage traditions disappear as comfort and new trends replace traditional communal festivities.

Theme 4: Adaptation Strategies for Cultural Preservation
Several groups and single individuals maintain their cultural heritage by adopting diverse strategies during the process of urbanization. respondent narrated, "We initiate yearly cultural festivals to maintain our cultural heritage since they let young people experience native musical performances and dancing along with traditional local cuisine. This program has created fascination for the younger population who now discover their ancestral heritage. These cultural preservation measures will maintain our traditional ways during times of urbanization speed." Another respondent narrated. "Our household together with mine uses native language exclusively at home as a method to maintain family connection with ancestral origins. Our household maintains strict adherence to our linguistic traditions no matter what languages our children learn

at school between English and Urdu. Language education plays a vital role for children because we promote them to read both literature and poetry written in our native language to create pride in their cultural roots." The indigenous communities show their strength through adapting to urbanization by sustaining their cultural practices. Through creative tradition promotion they protect their cultural heritage for the next generations to inherit.

Discussion:

Urbanization has resulted in major changes to indigenous cultural practices within the Hazara Division region through its impact on traditional forms of knowledge transmission together with the use of language and celebration of traditional festivals that define social identity. Various scholars have pointed out that the growth of urban centers creates difficulties for native cultural preservation because modern industrialized societies obsolete traditional agrarian practices (Watson, 2009). The modern social transformation has resulted in a disappearance of traditional knowledge transfer across generations because younger people prefer globalized culture and modern technology (Meighan, 2021). According to the study participants the modern generation shows little enthusiasm for studying traditional ancestral customs which the existing cultural anthropology literature (Brown & Schafft, 2011) has described. The essential element of cultural identity known as language becomes substantially affected by the process of urbanization. Experts in linguistic studies demonstrate that language shift frequently occurs through urban migration since immigrants want better access to dominant economic and teaching systems (Brown & Schafft, 2011). The study results validate these findings by demonstrating Hindko usage decreased while both Urdu and English linguistic practices gained prominence. The transition between languages endangers native languages and simultaneously affects traditional oral histories which uphold cultural health (Brown & Schafft, 2011). Modern urbanization has caused cultural festivals together with their communal value to evolve into new forms. Appadurai (1996) explains that globalization creates new ways to perform cultural practices because people adjust traditional customs to fit modern living requirements. This study's participants observed that cultural events including weddings as well as Eid celebrations together with communal occasions experienced a shift towards commercialization and individualization. This resulted in reduced participation among members of the community. The finding confirms urban settings alter social behaviors because they promote personal activities instead of community involvement (Watson, 2009). The indigenous communities face numerous difficulties but they continue to develop strategies that protect their cultural heritage. Patlan (2024) studied cultural resilience which occurs through planned activities such as cultural gatherings and language maintenance projects and family-oriented tradition transmission efforts. The respondents indicated that their cultural heritage has persevered under urban stress when they schedule yearly traditional events and actively use their indigenous languages within their homes. Such results demonstrate that cultural modifications succeed when communities work actively for the maintenance of their cultural heritage.

Conclusion

The rapid urban growth within the Hazara Division has caused major changes to traditional practices because they have diminished cultural wisdom while languages have changed and social festivities have evolved. Cities have grown in size to modify the passage of cultural heritage and younger people show increased interest in modern style living and worldwide cultural influences. Hindko speakers face a declining number of users while private control of traditional festivals combined with weak cultural transfer patterns become urbanization issues. The indigenous communities actively preserve their culture through events that happen every year combined with

their efforts to maintain native language usage and promote heritage understanding. The research outcome supports sociocultural theories which demonstrate both negative and constructive urbanization effects.

Recommendations:
- The establishment of specific areas must happen for cultural events along with language workshops together with heritage preservation activities.
- Native heritage content must be included throughout the local school curriculum to increase cultural knowledge of younger populations.
- Develop platforms where people can display traditional music with dance and cuisine and handmade crafts for enhancing cultural self-belief.
- Community members should actively support policies which secure funds for indigenous heritage preservation projects.

References

Ajani, Y. A., Oladokun, B. D., Olarongbe, S. A., Amaechi, M. N., Rabiu, N., & Bashorun, M. T. (2024). Revitalizing Indigenous Knowledge Systems via Digital Media Technologies for Sustainability of Indigenous Languages. Preservation, Digital Technology & Culture, 53(1), 35-44.

Bai, X., McPhearson, T., Cleugh, H., Nagendra, H., Tong, X., Zhu, T., & Zhu, Y. G. (2017). Linking urbanization and the environment: Conceptual and empirical advances. Annual review of environment and resources, 42(1), 215-240.

Batool, N., Abbasi, M. A., & Nawaz, H. I. (2025). Dhani Punjabi in Karachi; A Dialect in Decline: A Case Study in Karachi. Dialogue Social Science Review (DSSR), 3(1), 966-977.

Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2001). Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology, 3(2), 77-101.

Brown, D. L., & Schafft, K. A. (2011). Rural people and communities in the 21st century: Resilience and transformation. Polity.

Cattivelli, V. (2024). Where is the city? Where is the countryside? Assessing the methods for the classification of urban, rural, and intermediate areas in Europe. Journal of Rural Studies, 109, 103288.

Kirmayer, L. J., Sehdev, M., Whitley, R., Dandeneau, S. F., & Isaac, C. (2009). Community resilience: Models, metaphors and measures. International Journal of Indigenous Health, 5(1), 62-117.

Lane, B. C. (2002). Landscapes of the sacred: Geography and narrative in American spirituality. JHU Press.

Meighan, P. J. (2021). Decolonizing the digital landscape: The role of technology in Indigenous language revitalization. AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples, 17(3), 397-405.

Patlan, Q. (2024). Pursuing a voice with poetic-economic freedom in a hemispheric indigenous marketplace: exploring Otavalan Runa linguistic and visual creations in a global economy (Doctoral dissertation).

Paul, M. G., & Uddin, J. (2024). Advocating Dharma and Ahimsa: Mitigating Human Rights Violations and Vulnerabilities Among Indigenous Communities in The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30(5), 6990-7000.

Pettipas, K. (1994). Severing the ties that bind: Government repression of Indigenous religious ceremonies on the prairies (Vol. 7). Univ. of Manitoba Press.

Pickett, S. T., Simone, A. T., Anderson, P., Sharifi, A., Barau, A., Hoover, F. A., ... & Ginsberg, J. (2024). The relational shift in urban ecology: From place and structures to multiple modes of coproduction for positive urban futures. Ambio, 53(6), 845-870.

Powell, B., Sandbrook, C., Sunderland, T., & Tu, T. N. (2015). 3. The Historical, Environmental and Socio-economic Context of Forests and Tree-based Systems for Food Security and Nutrition. Forests and Food, 73.

Sanmee, W. (2024). Cultural identity and globalization: Navigating tradition and modernity in Southeast Asia. Journal of Exploration in Interdisciplinary Methodologies (JEIM), 1(1), 10-20.

Stephens, C. (2015). The indigenous experience of urbanization. State of the world's minorities and indigenous peoples, 2015, 54-61.

Wang, K., & Fouseki, K. (2025). Sustaining the Fabric of Time: Urban Heritage, Time Rupture, and Sustainable Development. Land, 14(1), 193.

Watson, V. (2009). 'The planned city sweeps the poor away…': Urban planning and 21st century urbanisation. Progress in planning, 72(3), 151-193.