

Social and Cultural Transformation of Rural Communities in Mahendragarh District

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the social and cultural transformation of rural communities at the rural–urban interface in Mahendragarh District, Haryana, under the growing influence of urbanisation. The research aimed to analyse how urban proximity reshapes family structures, gender roles, community relations, and cultural practices in rural settings. A multi-stage sampling method was adopted, covering 15 villages across five Community Development Blocks, with 75 household respondents selected for detailed surveys. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and personal interviews. The findings reveal that urbanisation has significantly altered the socio-cultural fabric of rural Mahendragarh. Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported a shift from joint to nuclear families, increased women’s participation in education and employment, and greater decision-making power within households. Traditional caste-based occupations and community bonding have weakened, while exposure to media, technology, and urban lifestyles has increased aspirations and changed consumption patterns. Although respondents viewed urbanisation as largely positive, particularly in improving education, employment, and infrastructure, they also expressed concern over cultural erosion, rising social disparities, and loss of traditional values.

Keywords: Urbanisation, Social Transformation, Cultural Change, Producing Complex.

INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation in India has intensified rapidly over recent decades, producing complex and uneven rural–urban linkages that reshape livelihoods, social relations, and cultural practices in villages close to towns and cities. The “rural–urban interface” is now understood not as a sharp boundary but as a dynamic zone of interaction where flows of people, goods, services, information and capital produce hybrid socio-spatial forms, which recent scholarship terms “rurbanity.” This conceptual shift highlights how rural and urban spheres co-produce change rather than exist as binary opposites, making the interface a critical site to study social and cultural transformation.

Empirical studies from South Asia show that proximity to urban centres alters traditional agrarian livelihoods in multiple ways. Farmers increasingly diversify income through non-farm employment, sell or lease land for residential and commercial uses, and adopt market-oriented cropping and consumption patterns. These economic shifts are accompanied by changes in household composition, gender relations, youth aspirations, and community institutions, for example, a rise in nuclear households, increased female education and labour force participation in non-farm sectors, and changing patterns of social mobility linked to cash incomes and migration. Such socio-economic transformations are closely mediated by infrastructure improvements (roads, electricity, digital networks) and improved access to urban markets and services.

At the state and regional level, Haryana’s rapid urban growth has produced pronounced rural–urban interactions, especially around district towns where peri-urbanisation accelerates land-use change and socio-cultural adaptation. Studies of urbanisation patterns in Haryana document both opportunities (improved amenities, market access, non-farm employment) and challenges (land fragmentation, rising living costs, environmental stresses) that influence rural livelihoods and norms. In districts experiencing faster urban expansion, the social fabric of villages, caste-based occupations, collective rituals, and intergenerational expectations has shown visible reconfiguration as economic

incentives and exposure to urban lifestyles increase. These regional dynamics underscore the need for district-level, place-sensitive studies.

Mahendragarh District, located in southern Haryana, represents a pertinent case: it lies within the state's uneven urban system and exhibits both agrarian continuity and increasing peri-urban pressures. Investigating social and cultural transformation in Mahendragarh's rural–urban interface therefore allows the study to connect macro-level urbanisation trends with village-level processes: how changing work portfolios and income sources influence family organization, gender roles, youth aspirations, and cultural practices; how migration and remittance flows reshape consumption and social status; and how institutional responses (local governance, public schemes) mediate these changes. Building on frameworks of rural–urban linkages and “rurbanity”, this paper adopts a mixed-methods approach to capture quantitative shifts in socio-economic indicators and qualitative changes in cultural norms, thereby contributing empirical evidence from a less-studied district in Haryana to broader debates on urbanisation's social consequences in India.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

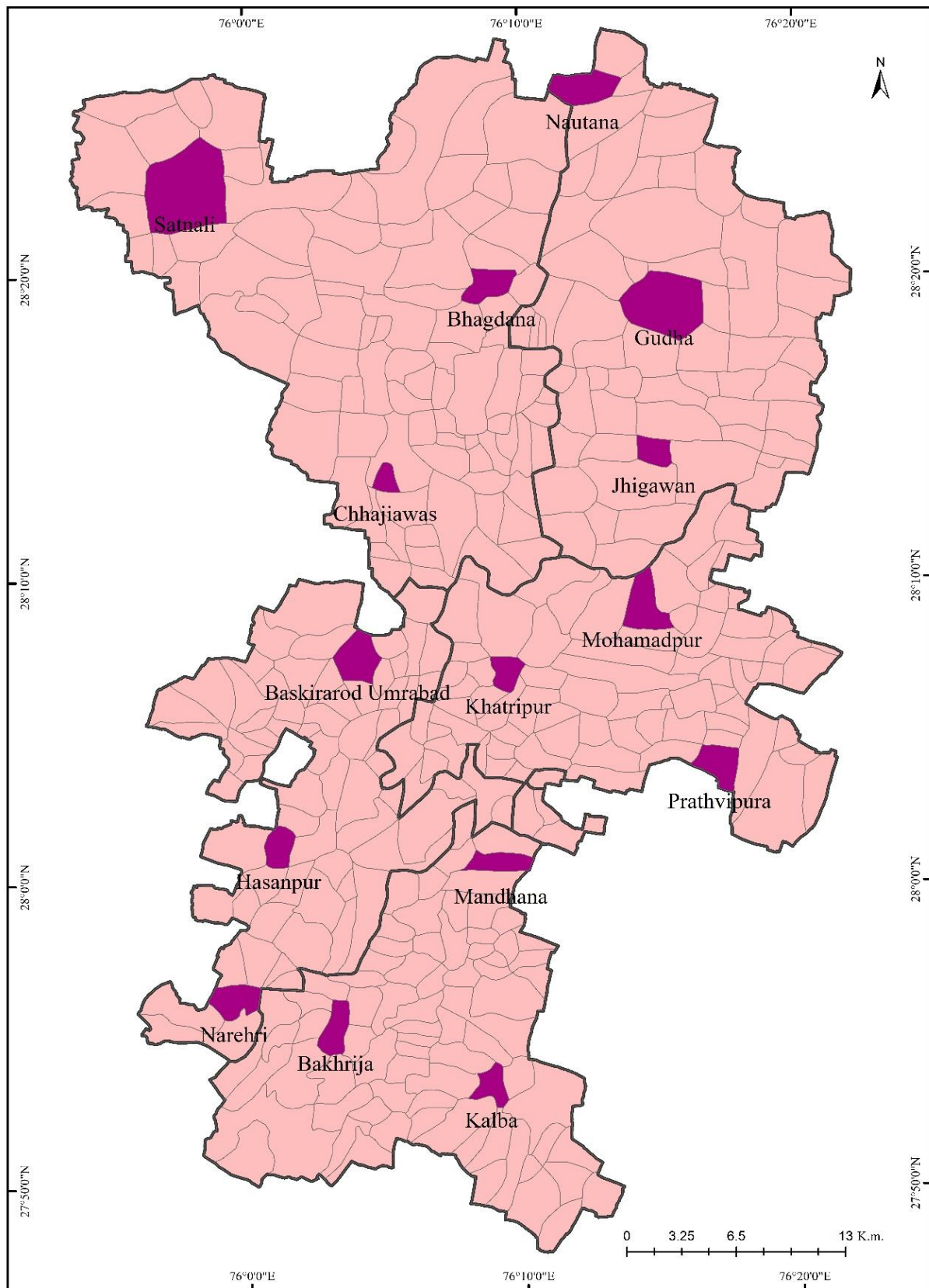
The study of social and cultural transformation at the rural–urban interface in Mahendragarh District is of significant academic and practical importance. As urbanisation spreads into traditionally rural areas, it brings profound shifts in livelihoods, family structures, values, and social relations. Understanding these transformations is essential for assessing how rural communities adapt to changing economic and cultural conditions. This study contributes to the broader discourse on rural–urban linkages by providing micro-level insights from a semi-arid, agrarian region of Haryana, where urban expansion is relatively recent yet rapidly accelerating.

From a policy perspective, the research highlights the socio-cultural consequences of urbanisation, such as declining agricultural participation, increased migration, and evolving gender roles, which warrant attention in regional development planning. The findings can guide local governance bodies and planners in designing socially inclusive strategies that preserve rural identity while promoting sustainable integration with urban growth. Moreover, the study enriches sociological and geographical literature on peri-urbanisation in India by documenting how modernisation and exposure to urban lifestyles reshape traditional village institutions, norms, and cultural practices. Hence, this research is vital for balancing the goals of urban development with the preservation of social harmony and cultural continuity in transitional rural spaces.

STUDY AREA

The present study was conducted in Mahendragarh District, located in the southern part of Haryana, India, extending approximately between 27°47'N to 28°26'N latitudes and 75°56'E to 76°26'E longitudes. A semi-arid climate, undulating terrain, and scattered hillocks of the Aravalli range characterise the district. To capture spatial diversity across the region, 15 villages, including Satnali, Nautana, Gudha, Jhigawan, Mohamadpur, Prathvipura, Mandhana, Kalba, Bakhrija, Narehri, Hasanpur, Baskirad Umrabad, Khatipur, Chhajiawas, and Bhagdaana, were selected from five Community Development Blocks for the primary survey. These villages represent varying degrees of rural–urban interaction, making them ideal for studying social and cultural transformation processes.

Map 1. Location of Selected Villages for Primary Survey



Source: Prepared by Research Scholar with the help of Arc-GIS

OBJECTIVES

Following were the objectives of the study:

- i. To examine the impact of urbanisation on family structure, gender roles, and decision-making patterns within rural households of Mahendragarh District.

- ii. To analyse the changing nature of social relations, community bonding, and traditional occupations under the influence of urban lifestyles.
- iii. To assess the extent of cultural transformation reflected in lifestyle, consumption behaviour, and value systems among rural residents.
- iv. To identify the perceived benefits and challenges of urbanisation as experienced by rural communities at the rural–urban interface.

METHODOLOGY

Present study was conducted in Mahendragarh District, Haryana, with the objective of examining social and cultural transformations among rural communities at the rural–urban interface. Mahendragarh is a region undergoing gradual urban expansion, making it an ideal case for exploring how changing socio-economic structures, lifestyle patterns, and cultural practices are influenced by proximity to urban centres.

To ensure spatial and contextual representation, a multi-stage sampling design was employed. All five Community Development (CD) Blocks of Mahendragarh District were included in the study to capture inter-block variations in the pace and nature of rural–urban interaction. Including all blocks provided a comprehensive view of social change across the district, from more urban-proximate areas to relatively remote rural areas.

From each block, three villages were purposively selected based on their location relative to nearby urban centres, accessibility, and evidence of socio-economic transition. This resulted in the selection of 15 villages, ensuring both geographic dispersion and representation of varying levels of urban influence within the district.

Within each selected village, five households were randomly selected to avoid selection bias and ensure inclusivity across caste, class, occupation, and landholding categories. This approach allowed the study to reflect a balanced socio-economic profile of the population.

From each sampled household, the head of the family was selected as the primary respondent for the interview, considering their central role in decision-making, livelihood strategies, and participation in community and cultural affairs. When male members were unavailable, female heads were interviewed to capture gendered perspectives on social and cultural transformation.

In total, the study engaged with 75 respondents (15 villages × 5 households). Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and personal interviews, focusing on livelihood diversification, family structure, education, migration, gender roles, and changing social values. The data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively to assess emerging patterns of transformation.

This methodological framework ensured that the study captures not only statistical trends but also the lived experiences of rural households navigating the ongoing processes of urbanisation and socio-cultural change in Mahendragarh District.

FINDINGS

Primary data collected from 75 respondents across 15 selected villages of Mahendragarh District reveals significant patterns of social and cultural transformation influenced by urbanisation.

A majority of respondents (41 out of 75) acknowledged that family structures have changed under urban influence, indicating a gradual shift from traditional joint families to nuclear ones, while 34 respondents perceived no such change. The spread of education is one of the most visible transformations. 66 respondents reported that educational attainment among the younger generation has increased markedly, reflecting greater awareness and aspiration among rural youth. Similarly, 52 respondents affirmed that women's participation in education and employment has improved compared to earlier years, while 10 respondents observed it as partial, and 13 noticed little change.

Changes in women's decision-making power also reflect evolving gender relations: 36 respondents stated that women's influence in household and community decisions has increased, though 32 reported no change and 7 felt it had decreased.

The continuity of traditional caste-based occupations seems uncertain: only 16 respondents reported a decline, 28 reported no change, and 31 were unsure, suggesting a gradual but uneven shift in occupations.

Table 1: Social and Cultural Transformation

Sr. No.	Transformation	Response	No. of Respondents
1	Have family structures changed in your village due to urban influence?	Yes	41
		No	34
2	Do you notice increased education among the younger generation?	Yes	66
		No	9
3	Are more women participating in education and employment compared to earlier years?	Yes	52
		No	13
		Partially	10
4	Has the decision-making power of women in family or community matters changed?	Increased	36
		Decreased	7
		No Change	32
5	Are traditional caste/community-based occupations declining in your area?	Yes	16
		No	28
		Not Sure	31
6	Have traditional customs, food habits, or dress styles changed under urban influence?	Yes	58
		No	17
	If yes, which areas show the most change?	Clothing	12
		Food	14
		Festivals	7
		Housing	9
7	Has social interaction or community bonding changed?	All of These	16
		Increased	13
		Decreased	32
8	Is there greater exposure to media and technology (TV, mobile, internet) in your household?	No Change	30
		Yes	59
		No	16
9	Has this exposure influenced your family's aspirations or consumption habits?	Strongly	6
		Moderately	16
		Slightly	29
		Not at All	8
10	Are young people more inclined towards urban lifestyles (fashion, education, jobs, living)?	Yes	37
		No	6
		Mixed	32
11	Do you think modern/urban values are replacing traditional rural values?	Strongly Agree	12
		Agree	39
		Disagree	19
		Strongly Disagree	5
12	How do you assess the overall impact of urbanisation on rural life in your area?	Highly Positive	21
		Moderately Positive	35
		Negative	17
		No Impact	2
13	What are the key benefits your village has gained from being near urban centres?	Employment	26
		Education	21
		Health	15
		Market Access	5
		Infrastructure	8
14	What are the main challenges or problems faced due to urban expansion?	Land Loss	9
		Pollution	7
		Cultural Change	16
		Social Disparities	5
		Others	38

Source: Based on Data collected by Research Scholar during primary Survey

Cultural adaptation is evident, as 58 respondents agreed that traditional customs, food habits, and dress styles have changed due to urban exposure. Among them, 16 respondents identified changes in all aspects, clothing, food, festivals, and housing, while others pointed to specific domains such as food (14) and clothing (12). Social cohesion, however,

appears to be weakening: 32 respondents reported a decline in community bonding, while 30 reported no change, and only 13 reported an increase.

Technological exposure has become almost universal, with 59 respondents acknowledging the use of TV, mobile phones, and the internet in their households. However, its influence on aspirations varies 29 respondents reported slight influence, 16 moderate, 6 strong, and 8 no influence at all. Moreover, 37 respondents observed that young people are adopting urban lifestyles, while 32 saw a mixed trend, indicating selective assimilation of urban norms.

Regarding value systems, 51 respondents (12 strongly agree and 39 agree) believed that traditional rural values are being replaced by modern urban values, suggesting a perceptible cultural shift. Regarding the overall impact of urbanisation, 21 respondents rated it highly positive and 35 moderately positive, indicating that most villagers perceive urban influence as beneficial. Only 17 respondents found it negative, and 2 noticed no impact.

When asked about specific benefits, employment (26) and education (21) emerged as the most cited, followed by health facilities (15), infrastructure (8), and market access (5). However, respondents also identified challenges associated with urban expansion. 38 respondents mentioned various “other” problems, such as rising living costs and moral decline, while 16 cited cultural change, 9 noted land loss, 7 mentioned pollution, and 5 pointed to social disparities.

Findings indicate that urbanisation has brought notable social and cultural transitions to rural Mahendragarh, improving education, gender inclusion, and technological awareness, while simultaneously eroding traditional norms, occupations, and social cohesion. The results suggest a complex coexistence of progress and disruption at the rural–urban interface, typical of transitional societies experiencing the dual forces of modernisation and cultural retention.

CONCLUSION

Study concludes that urbanisation has profoundly influenced the social and cultural landscape of rural communities in Mahendragarh District. Increased access to education, technology, and employment has improved living standards and empowered women, while traditional joint families and caste-based occupations are gradually declining. Although most respondents perceive urbanisation positively, it has also led to cultural dilution, weakened social cohesion, and changed value systems. The findings highlight the coexistence of progress and disruption at the rural–urban interface, emphasising the need for balanced development policies that sustain economic growth while preserving the social and cultural integrity of rural communities.

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