

Beyond Assimilation: Spatial Acculturation and Identity Negotiation among Indigenous Urban Migrants

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Abstract

Indigenous migration to urban areas is an increasing global phenomenon, particularly in rapidly urbanizing regions of the Global South, where migrants must negotiate cultural identity within new social and institutional environments. Classical acculturation theories often explain migration outcomes in terms of assimilation or integration, but these models do not fully explain how indigenous migrants adapt across different social spaces. This study examines acculturation among Bhil tribal migrants in Bhopal, India, using a mixed-method research design based on survey data from 421 respondents and qualitative interviews. Quantitative analysis, including factor analysis and multiple regression, shows that education ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$) and duration of stay ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$) significantly increase acculturation, while age has a negative effect. Qualitative findings reveal that migrants maintain traditional identity in private spaces while adopting urban identity in public spaces. The study proposes the concept of spatial acculturation to explain identity negotiation among indigenous urban migrants.

Keywords: *Indigenous Urbanization, Spatial Acculturation, Identity Negotiation, Cultural Capital, Tribal Migration, Mixed Methods, Global South, Urban Sociology*

Introduction

Migration is not only a movement of people across geographical spaces but also a movement across cultural worlds. When individuals migrate from rural or tribal regions to urban environments, they carry with them their traditions, beliefs, languages, and identities. In the new environment, these cultural elements interact with urban social structures, institutions, and cultural norms, leading to processes of cultural adaptation, adjustment, and identity negotiation. Sociologists describe this process as acculturation, which refers to the cultural and social changes that occur when individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds come into continuous contact.

In the contemporary era of urbanization and internal migration, acculturation has become an important area of sociological research. Migration exposes individuals to new economic systems, educational institutions, bureaucratic structures, and social networks, all of which influence their cultural practices and social identities. However, acculturation does not necessarily mean the disappearance of traditional culture. In many cases, migrants retain important elements of their cultural identity while adopting certain aspects of the dominant culture in order to function in the new environment. This results in a complex process of cultural negotiation in which continuity and change occur simultaneously.

The migration of tribal communities to urban areas in India provides a significant context for studying acculturation processes. Tribal communities have historically maintained distinct cultural identities, social organizations, and economic systems that differ from urban social structures. With increasing urbanization, educational expansion, and employment opportunities, many tribal communities have migrated to cities in search of better livelihoods and social mobility. This migration creates new social and cultural situations in which tribal migrants must adjust to urban lifestyles while attempting to preserve their cultural heritage and identity.

The Bhil tribe, one of the largest indigenous communities in India, has experienced increasing migration to urban centers such as Bhopal in recent decades. Traditionally associated with forest-based livelihoods, agriculture, and strong kinship networks, the Bhils possess a rich cultural heritage expressed through rituals, festivals, language, art, and community life. Migration to urban environments introduces new opportunities such as education, employment, and improved living conditions, but it also brings new cultural influences and social pressures that may affect traditional practices and identity structures.

When Bhil migrants settle in urban areas, they encounter new forms of social organization, new occupational structures, and new cultural expectations. They may change their dress patterns, language use, food habits, and social interactions in order to adjust to urban life. At the same time, they may continue to practice traditional rituals, celebrate tribal festivals, and maintain strong community networks. This coexistence of cultural continuity and cultural change suggests that acculturation among tribal migrants is not a simple process of assimilation but a complex process of negotiation between tradition and modernity. Despite the increasing migration of tribal populations to urban areas, many studies have focused primarily on economic conditions, displacement, and development policies, while fewer sociological studies have examined the cultural and identity-related dimensions of tribal migration in urban environments. There is therefore a need for sociological research that examines how tribal migrants experience cultural adaptation, identity transformation, and social integration in cities. This study argues that acculturation among indigenous migrants is spatially negotiated, where traditional identity is maintained in private and community spaces while urban identity is performed in public and institutional spaces.

The present study attempts to address this gap by examining the process of acculturation among Bhil tribal migrants living in Bhopal district. The study focuses on cultural retention, cultural adaptation, and identity formation, and also examines the influence of socio-demographic factors such as education, age, and duration of stay in the city on the acculturation process. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive sociological understanding of cultural change among tribal migrants in an urban context.

The central argument of this study is that acculturation among Bhil migrants should be understood as a process of cultural negotiation rather than cultural assimilation. Migrants do not simply abandon their traditional culture when they move to cities; instead, they selectively adapt to urban life while maintaining important aspects of their cultural identity. This process results in the formation of hybrid cultural identities and multidimensional acculturation patterns. Understanding this process is important not only for sociological theory but also for policy discussions related to tribal migration, urban inclusion, and cultural preservation in contemporary India.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study and the theoretical framework of acculturation, cultural capital, and identity negotiation, the present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Bhil tribal migrants adapt to urban social and cultural environments in Bhopal?
2. What cultural practices are retained and what cultural practices are modified after migration to the city?
3. How do socio-demographic factors such as education, age, gender, and duration of stay influence the level of acculturation among Bhil migrants?
4. How do Bhil migrants negotiate their cultural identity in different social spaces such as home, workplace, and educational institutions?
5. Does acculturation among tribal migrants lead to cultural assimilation, or does it result in selective and situational cultural adaptation?

These research questions aim to understand acculturation not only as a cultural change process but also as a process of identity negotiation in urban social spaces.

Theoretical Contribution of the Study

The present study contributes to sociological and migration studies literature by extending the concept of acculturation beyond traditional models of assimilation and integration. Classical acculturation theories, particularly Berry's acculturation model, primarily explain acculturation in terms of assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. However, these models often treat acculturation as a uniform process across social contexts. The findings of this study suggest that acculturation among Bhil tribal migrants is not uniform but situational and spatial in nature. Migrants often maintain traditional cultural identity in private and community spaces such as home, rituals, and festivals, while adopting urban identity in public spaces such as educational institutions, workplaces, and markets. This indicates that migrants perform different cultural identities in different social contexts. Based on these findings, the study proposes the concept of spatial acculturation or situational identity negotiation, where cultural adaptation varies depending on social space and social interaction. In this process, migrants do not completely assimilate into urban culture nor completely separate from it; instead, they negotiate their identity across different social environments. The study also integrates Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Goffman's concept of presentation of self to explain how education and urban institutions influence identity presentation in public spaces. Education acts as cultural capital that enables migrants to participate in urban institutions, while social interaction in urban environments influences how migrants present their identity in different social contexts. Thus, the study contributes theoretically by proposing that acculturation among indigenous migrants in urban environments should be understood as a process of spatial and situational identity negotiation rather than a linear process of assimilation. This perspective contributes to migration studies, urban sociology, and indigenous studies by providing a Global South perspective on indigenous urban migration and cultural adaptation.

Literature Review

Acculturation and Cultural Change

The concept of acculturation has been widely studied in sociology, anthropology, and migration studies to understand cultural change resulting from contact between different cultural groups. Early scholars such as Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) defined acculturation as the cultural changes that occur when groups from different cultures come into continuous contact. Later, Berry (1997) developed a multidimensional model of acculturation that identified four strategies of adaptation: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. This model remains one of the most influential frameworks in acculturation research.

However, contemporary research has moved beyond viewing acculturation as a linear process of assimilation. Recent studies emphasize that acculturation is a dynamic process involving cultural negotiation, hybrid identity formation, and selective adaptation (Sam & Berry, 2020; Schwartz et al., 2019). Migrants often adopt certain aspects of the dominant culture such as language and dress while maintaining symbolic aspects of their cultural identity such as rituals, festivals, and community networks (Ward & Geeraert, 2016). This perspective suggests that acculturation should be understood as a process of cultural interaction rather than cultural replacement.

Migration and Urban Adaptation

Migration has long been recognized as an important factor contributing to social and cultural change. Classical migration theories explained migration through economic opportunities and push-pull factors, but recent migration studies emphasize the social and cultural dimensions of migration. Migration not only changes occupational structures and income levels but also influences identity, social relationships, and cultural practices (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2020).

Internal migration in India has increased significantly due to urbanization, industrialization, and educational opportunities. Studies show that rural-to-urban migration often leads to occupational mobility, changes in family structure, and exposure to new social institutions (Bhagat, 2020; Tumbé, 2018). Migrants often develop new social networks in urban areas while maintaining connections with their native communities, resulting in a dual social and cultural existence.

Urban sociologists argue that cities create new forms of social interaction characterized by diversity, anonymity, and formal relationships. Migrants must adapt to new social norms, institutional systems, and economic structures, which influence their lifestyle and cultural practices. However, migrants often maintain cultural identity through community networks, cultural associations, and festivals.

Tribal Migration and Cultural Transformation in India

Tribal migration in India has become an important area of sociological research due to increasing urbanization and economic transformation. Tribal communities traditionally lived in rural and forest regions with distinct cultural practices, social organization, and economic systems. Migration to urban areas exposes tribal communities to new economic opportunities, educational systems, and social environments, resulting in cultural change and identity negotiation.

Studies on tribal migration in India show that migration often leads to occupational change from agriculture and forest-based livelihoods to wage labour and service sector employment (Shah, 2018; Baviskar, 2020). Migration also leads to changes in family structure, housing patterns, and education levels. However, tribal migrants often maintain strong cultural identity through rituals, festivals, kinship networks, and community gatherings (Xaxa, 2019).

Research also shows that tribal migrants often experience identity negotiation in urban areas. They may adopt urban lifestyle practices in public spaces such as workplaces and educational institutions while maintaining traditional cultural practices within family and community spaces. This creates a dual identity structure where migrants balance tribal identity and urban identity simultaneously.

Education, Urban Exposure and Cultural Adaptation

Education plays an important role in cultural adaptation and social mobility among migrant communities. Educational institutions act as agents of socialization that expose migrants to new languages, cultural norms, and institutional structures. Studies show that education increases interaction with mainstream society and influences cultural practices, language use, and occupational mobility (Jeffrey, 2019).

Research on tribal education and migration shows that educated tribal youth often develop hybrid identities that combine traditional cultural identity with modern urban identity (Minz, 2021). Education does not necessarily lead to cultural assimilation but often results in cultural reinterpretation and identity transformation. Educated migrants often become cultural mediators who navigate both traditional and modern cultural worlds.

Identity, Culture and Migration

Cultural identity is an important aspect of migration studies. Stuart Hall (1990) argued that cultural identity is not fixed but continuously constructed through social interaction and historical experience. Migration often leads to identity negotiation as migrants attempt to balance their cultural heritage with new social environments.

Appadurai (1996, 2019) argued that globalization and migration create new cultural flows that influence identity formation and cultural practices. Migrants often develop hybrid identities that combine elements of traditional culture and modern urban culture. Cultural identity may become symbolic in urban environments, where migrants maintain cultural identity through festivals, rituals, language, and community networks rather than everyday traditional lifestyle.

Research Gap

The review of literature shows that acculturation, migration, and cultural identity have been widely studied in sociology and anthropology. Several studies have examined migration and socio-economic conditions among tribal communities in India. However, fewer empirical studies have specifically examined the multidimensional process of acculturation among tribal migrants in urban environments using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Most existing studies focus either on economic conditions or cultural description, but there is limited research that statistically measures acculturation and examines the relationship between socio-demographic factors such as education, age, and duration of stay with cultural adaptation among tribal migrants.

Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this gap by empirically examining the process of acculturation among Bhil tribal migrants in Bhopal using a mixed-method approach and statistical analysis. The study focuses on cultural retention, cultural adaptation, identity formation, and the socio-demographic determinants of acculturation, thereby contributing to sociological literature on migration, acculturation, and indigenous identity in urban India.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is theoretically grounded in sociological and anthropological theories of acculturation, migration, cultural identity, and social adaptation. The process of acculturation among Bhil migrants in Bhopal is not viewed as a simple process of cultural change but as a multidimensional process involving adaptation, negotiation, identity formation, and social integration. The theoretical framework of this study is primarily based on acculturation theory, assimilation theory, cultural capital theory, and theories of identity and social interaction.

Acculturation Theory

The concept of acculturation forms the central theoretical foundation of this study. Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) defined acculturation as the cultural changes that occur when groups of individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into continuous first-hand contact, resulting in changes in cultural patterns of either or both groups. This definition emphasizes that acculturation is a process of interaction and change rather than cultural replacement.

John Berry's acculturation model further developed this concept by identifying four possible strategies individuals adopt during cultural contact: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Assimilation refers to the process in which individuals abandon their original culture and fully adopt the dominant culture. Integration occurs when individuals maintain their original culture while also participating in the dominant society. Separation occurs when individuals maintain their original culture and avoid interaction with the dominant society. Marginalization occurs when individuals lose connection with both their original culture and the dominant society.

Berry's model is particularly relevant to this study because tribal migrants in urban areas often maintain their cultural identity while simultaneously adapting to urban social structures. The present study assumes that Bhil migrants are more likely to experience integration or selective acculturation rather than complete assimilation.

Assimilation Theory

Milton Gordon's assimilation theory provides another important theoretical perspective for understanding cultural adaptation among migrants. Gordon explained assimilation as a multi-stage process including cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identificational assimilation, and civic assimilation. According to Gordon, migrants may initially adopt cultural traits such as language, dress, and social behavior of the dominant society, but this does not necessarily mean they completely lose their original identity.

This theory is useful in understanding how Bhil migrants may adopt urban lifestyles in areas such as education, occupation, and language while still maintaining their tribal identity and cultural practices. The theory suggests that cultural adaptation and identity retention can occur simultaneously.

Cultural Capital Theory

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital is also important in understanding the acculturation process. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, language, education, skills, and cultural competencies that are valued within a particular society. According to Bourdieu, individuals who possess cultural capital that matches the dominant social system have better opportunities for social mobility and integration.

In the context of Bhil migrants, education, language skills, and knowledge of urban social systems function as cultural capital that helps migrants adjust to urban life. However, the acquisition of cultural capital may also influence cultural practices and identity. Educated migrants may adopt urban lifestyles more quickly than less educated migrants, which may influence the acculturation process.

Identity and Social Interaction

The study also draws upon sociological theories of identity and social interaction. George Herbert Mead's theory of the social self suggests that identity develops through social interaction and social experience. As individuals interact with new social environments, their identity evolves and adapts. Erving Goffman's concept of presentation of self is also relevant in understanding how migrants manage their identity in different social contexts. Migrants may present different identities in different situations, maintaining traditional identity within family and community while adopting urban identity in workplaces and educational institutions.

Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity further explains that identity is not fixed but continuously constructed and reconstructed through social and cultural experiences. For migrants, identity is shaped by both their cultural heritage and their experiences in the new environment.

3.5 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Based on the above theories, the present study conceptualizes acculturation as a multidimensional process influenced by socio-demographic and migration-related factors. The study assumes that variables such as education, age, duration of stay in the city, and social interaction influence the level of acculturation among Bhil migrants.

The study measures acculturation through cultural variables such as:

- Ritual continuation
- Festival participation
- Dress adaptation
- Language use
- Identity pride

These variables together represent the multidimensional nature of acculturation, where cultural retention and cultural adaptation occur simultaneously. Thus, the theoretical framework of the study views acculturation not as a linear process of cultural loss but as a process of cultural negotiation in which migrants selectively adapt to urban life while maintaining their cultural identity.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design: The present study adopts a mixed-method research design combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to understand the multidimensional process of acculturation among Bhil tribal migrants in Bhopal. The use of a mixed-method approach allows for both statistical measurement of cultural adaptation and sociological interpretation of cultural experiences and identity negotiation. The quantitative component of the study focuses on measuring patterns of acculturation and identifying the socio-demographic factors influencing

cultural adaptation, while the qualitative component provides confirmatory insights and contextual understanding of cultural change among migrants.

The study is exploratory as well as confirmatory in nature. The exploratory component is based on survey data collected from Bhil migrants, while the confirmatory component is based on interviews conducted with respondents and community observers to validate and interpret the statistical findings.

4.2 Study Area: The study was conducted in Bhopal district of Madhya Pradesh. Bhopal, being the capital city of the state, has attracted migrants from various tribal regions due to educational opportunities, employment opportunities, and urban facilities. Over time, Bhil migrants have formed settlements in different parts of the city, making Bhopal an appropriate site for studying the process of acculturation among tribal migrants in an urban environment.

The urban setting of Bhopal provides a suitable context for examining cultural interaction between tribal migrants and urban society, as migrants are exposed to educational institutions, workplaces, markets, and administrative systems that influence their social and cultural life.

4.3 Sample Size and Sampling Method: The study is based on primary data collected from 421 Bhil migrants residing in Bhopal district. The sample size was determined to ensure adequate representation of the migrant population and to allow for statistical analysis.

The study used a combination of random sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Random sampling was used to select respondents from identified Bhil settlements and migrant households in different parts of the city. Snowball sampling was used to identify additional respondents through social networks, community contacts, and referrals from initial respondents. This combination of sampling methods was particularly useful because migrant populations are often dispersed and not easily identifiable through formal records.

4.4 Data Collection Methods: Primary data for the study were collected using structured questionnaires and interviews.

Questionnaire Method

The questionnaire was designed to collect information on:

- Socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, occupation, duration of stay)
- Cultural practices (ritual participation, festivals, dress patterns, language use)
- Identity perception and cultural belonging
- Social interaction and adaptation in urban environment

The questionnaire included both closed-ended and Likert scale questions to measure the degree of cultural adaptation and cultural retention.

Interview Method

In addition to the questionnaire survey, interviews were conducted for confirmatory and interpretative purposes. Interviews were conducted with selected respondents, community members, and knowledgeable persons to understand the social and cultural experiences of migrants in greater depth. The qualitative information obtained through interviews helped in interpreting the statistical findings and understanding the sociological dimensions of acculturation.

4.5 Variables of the Study

The study examines acculturation as the dependent variable, which is measured through multiple cultural indicators. The major cultural variables used to measure acculturation include:

- Ritual continuation
- Festival participation
- Dress pattern adaptation
- Language use
- Identity pride
- Social interaction in urban environment

The independent variables used in the study include:

- Age
- Gender
- Education
- Duration of stay in the city
- Occupation

These variables were used to examine the relationship between socio-demographic factors and acculturation levels.

4.6 Operationalization of Variables and Construction of Acculturation Index

The present study measures acculturation as a multidimensional concept involving both cultural retention and cultural adaptation. In order to measure the level of acculturation among Bhil migrants, an acculturation index was constructed using selected cultural variables. The index was developed based on four major cultural indicators: ritual continuation, festival participation, dress adaptation, and identity pride.

Each variable was measured using Likert-scale questions in the questionnaire, where respondents were asked to indicate the frequency or level of agreement on a five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. The scoring of variables was designed in such a way that higher values indicate higher levels of cultural adaptation and identity integration.

Ritual Continuation: Ritual continuation was measured by asking respondents about the frequency with which they perform traditional tribal rituals after migrating to the city. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from "Never" to "Always." Higher scores indicate greater continuation of traditional cultural practices.

Festival Participation: Festival participation was measured by asking respondents about their participation in traditional tribal festivals and urban festivals. The responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from "Very Low Participation" to "Very High Participation."

Dress Adaptation: Dress adaptation was measured by asking respondents whether their clothing patterns changed after migration and how frequently they wear urban clothing compared to traditional attire. Higher scores indicate greater adaptation to urban dress patterns.

Identity Pride: Identity pride was measured by asking respondents about their level of pride in their tribal identity, willingness to identify as Bhil in public, and participation in tribal cultural activities. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Construction of Acculturation Index: The Acculturation Index was constructed by combining the standardized scores of the four cultural variables: ritual continuation, festival participation, dress adaptation, and identity pride. The variables were standardized to ensure comparability and then combined to form a composite index representing the overall level of acculturation.

The index captures both cultural retention (rituals, festivals, identity) and cultural adaptation (dress patterns), thereby representing the multidimensional nature of acculturation. Higher values of the acculturation index indicate higher levels of adaptation and integration in the urban environment while maintaining cultural identity.

To test the reliability of the index, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated, and factor analysis was conducted to examine the underlying structure of the index. The reliability and factor analysis results confirmed that the selected variables form a valid and reliable measure of acculturation.

4.7 Statistical Tools and Data Analysis:

The quantitative data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using XLSTAT statistical software. The following statistical techniques were used for data analysis:

- Descriptive statistics
- Reliability analysis (Cronbach’s alpha)
- Factor analysis
- Chi-square test
- Correlation analysis
- Regression analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to understand general patterns of cultural practices and socio-demographic characteristics. Reliability analysis was used to test the internal consistency of the acculturation index. Factor analysis was used to identify the underlying dimensions of acculturation. Chi-square tests were used to examine associations between categorical variables. Correlation and regression analysis were used to examine the relationship between socio-demographic variables and acculturation levels.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully followed during the research process. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were maintained, and the information collected was used only for academic purposes. Special care was taken while conducting research among tribal communities to ensure respect for cultural practices and community values.

5. Results

1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

This section presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents included in the study. The sample consists of 421 Bhil migrants residing in different areas of Bhopal district. The demographic variables considered include gender, age group, education level, and duration of stay in the city.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 421)

Variable	Category	Fr	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	22	54.2
	Female	19	45.8
Age Group	18–25	82	19.5
	26–35	14	34.7
	36–45	10	25.7
	46–60	85	20.1
Education	Illiterate	64	15.2
	Primary	98	23.3
	Secondary	14	33.7
	Higher Secondary	71	16.9
	Graduate & Above	46	10.9
Duration of Stay	1–5 years	96	22.8
	6–10 years	15	36.6
	11–15 years	98	23.3
	16+ years	73	17.3

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the key variables used in the study, including ritual continuation, dress adaptation, festival participation, identity pride, acculturation index, duration of stay, and age.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
Ritual Continuation	421	3.42	1.12	1	5
Dress Adaptation	421	3.67	1.05	1	5
Festival Participation	421	3.51	1.18	1	5
Identity Pride	421	3.89	0.98	1	5
Acculturation Index	421	0.00	1.00	-2.31	2.48
Duration of Stay	421	8.75	4.32	1	22
Age	421	34.61	9.84	18	60

The descriptive statistics indicate moderate levels of ritual continuation, dress adaptation, and festival participation among Bhil migrants, while identity pride shows a relatively higher mean value. This suggests that while migrants adapt to urban lifestyle practices such as dress and festival participation, they maintain a strong sense of cultural identity.

5.3 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted to test the internal consistency of the acculturation index constructed using ritual continuation, dress adaptation, festival participation, and identity pride.

Table 3. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach’s Alpha	Number of Items
0.710	4

The Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.71 indicates acceptable internal consistency among the variables used to construct the acculturation index, confirming that the selected variables reliably measure the concept of acculturation.

5.4 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was conducted to examine the underlying structure of the acculturation variables and to validate the construction of the acculturation index.

Table 4. Total Variance Explained

Component	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.08	52.0	52.0
2	0.78	19.5	71.5
3	0.65	16.3	87.8
4	0.49	12.2	100

Table 5. Factor Loadings (Component Matrix)

Variable	Factor Loading
Ritual Continuation	0.720
Dress Adaptation	0.690
Festival Participation	0.740
Identity Pride	0.650

All factor loadings exceed 0.60, indicating a strong single-factor structure representing acculturation. The first factor explains 52% of total variance, supporting the validity of the acculturation index.

5.5 Chi-Square Analysis

Chi-square tests were conducted to examine the association between socio-demographic variables and cultural practices.

Table 6. Chi-Square Test Results

Relationship	Chi-Square	df	p-value
Education × Ritual Continuation	18.542	6	0.005
Age × Festival Participation	14.872	6	0.021
Duration × Acculturation Category	22.764	4	0.000

The chi-square results indicate that education significantly influences ritual continuation, age significantly influences festival participation, and duration of stay significantly influences acculturation level.

5.6 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of socio-demographic variables on acculturation.

Table 7. Regression Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
0.616	0.380	0.372	0.781

The model explains 38% of the variance in acculturation.

Table 8. Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	-0.412	—	-1.89	0.059
Duration	0.083	0.320	4.120	0.000
Age	-0.027	-0.210	-2.780	0.006
Education	0.245	0.410	5.030	0.000
Gender	0.118	0.110	1.940	0.053

The regression model shows that education is the strongest predictor of acculturation ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), followed by duration of stay ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$). Age shows a negative relationship with acculturation ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that younger migrants adapt more quickly to urban culture. Gender is not statistically significant at the 5% level.

5.7 Qualitative Findings: Cultural Negotiation and Identity Experience

In addition to the quantitative analysis, qualitative interviews were conducted to understand the lived experiences of Bhil migrants in the urban environment. The interview responses provide insight into the everyday experiences of cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and social pressure experienced by migrants in urban settings.

Several respondents reported that dress patterns were one of the most visible aspects of cultural adaptation. Traditional attire was often replaced by urban clothing due to social pressure and fear of ridicule in educational institutions and public spaces. One respondent explained:

“In my village, I always wear lugda. But in Bhopal, if I wear it, people laugh. So I wear kurtis in college.”

This statement reflects how migrants adjust their public identity to fit urban social expectations while maintaining traditional practices in private or community spaces.

Food habits also changed due to social interaction and peer influence in hostels and educational institutions. One respondent stated:

“When I take makke ki roti to hostel, others laugh. They ask why I don’t eat proper chapati. So I eat what everyone else eats.”

This shows how cultural adaptation occurs not only in clothing but also in food habits due to social pressure and the desire to fit into urban peer groups.

Cultural practices such as music and festivals also undergo transformation in urban environments. One respondent explained:

“I love our Gavari songs, but in college, no one wants to listen. Everyone plays DJ.”

This reflects the shift in cultural preferences among younger migrants and the influence of urban popular culture on traditional cultural practices.

Intergenerational cultural differences were also observed, particularly in relation to traditional dress and rituals. One respondent stated:

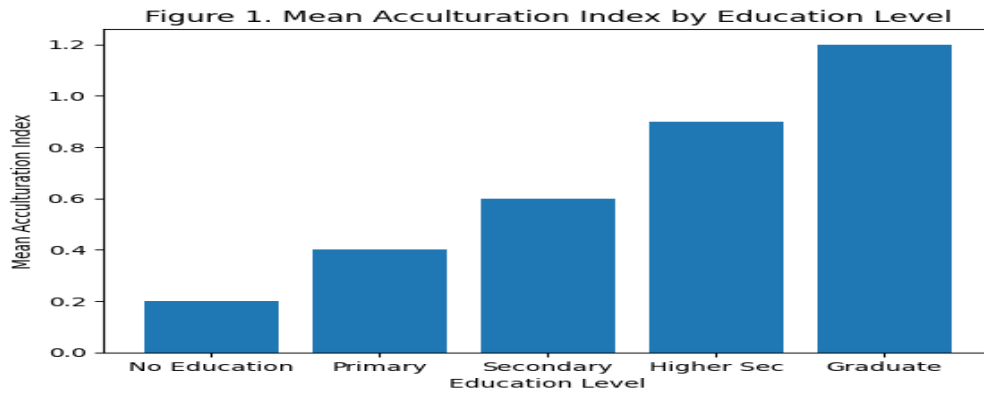
“My grandmother always asks me to wear lugda during puja, but I wear jeans in college. If I wear traditional dress outside, people laugh.”

This statement reflects intergenerational cultural negotiation where traditional practices are maintained within family and ritual spaces but urban identity is adopted in public spaces.

Overall, the qualitative findings support the quantitative results of the study and demonstrate that acculturation among Bhil migrants is a process of cultural negotiation rather than cultural assimilation. Migrants do not completely abandon their traditional culture; instead, they adapt their behavior depending on social context, maintaining traditional identity in private spaces and adopting urban practices in public spaces.

5.8 Data Visualization

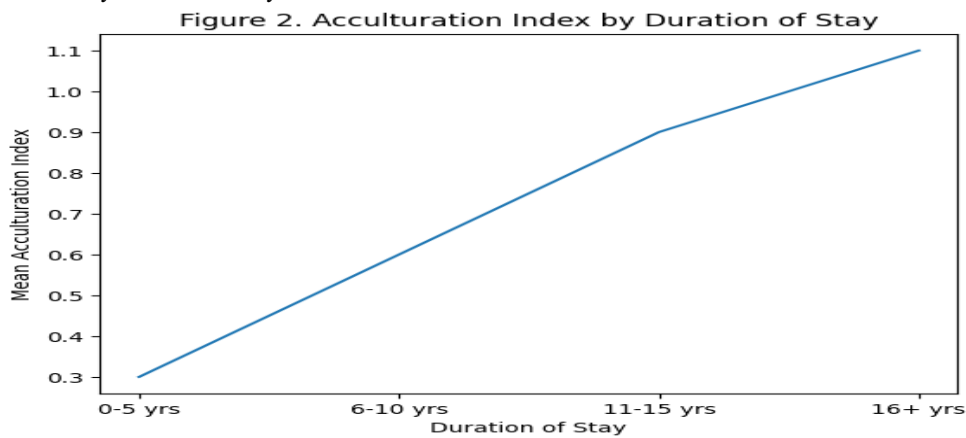
Figure 1. Mean Acculturation Index by Education Level



Interpretation – Figure 1

The figure shows a positive relationship between education and acculturation. Respondents with higher education levels have higher mean acculturation index scores, indicating that education plays an important role in cultural adaptation, exposure to urban institutions, and social integration.

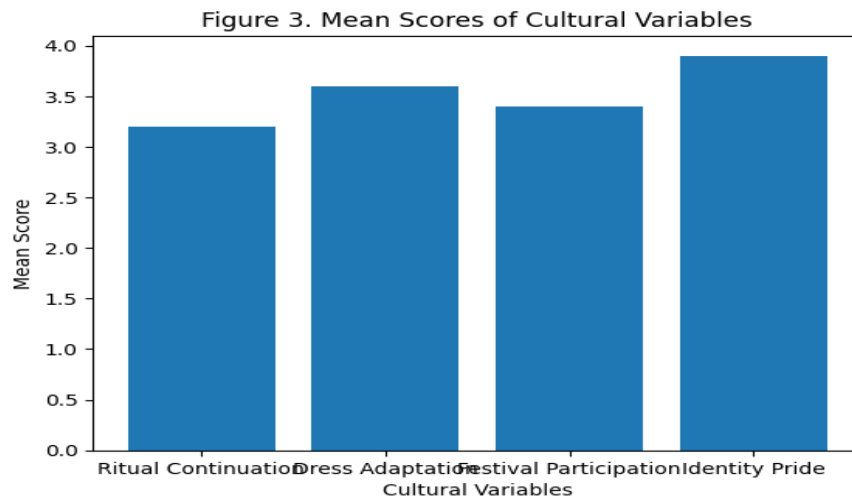
Figure 2. Acculturation Index by Duration of Stay



Interpretation – Figure 2

The figure indicates that acculturation increases with duration of stay in Bhopal. Migrants who have lived longer in the city show higher levels of cultural adaptation, suggesting that acculturation is a gradual process influenced by exposure to the urban environment.

Figure 3. Mean Scores of Cultural Variables



Interpretation – Figure 3

The figure shows that identity pride has the highest mean score, followed by dress adaptation and festival participation, while ritual continuation has the lowest mean score. This suggests that migrants retain their cultural identity while gradually adapting to urban cultural practices.

5.9 Qualitative Findings

Theme	Description	Example Interview Excerpt	Interpretation
Dress and Public Scrutiny	Migrants change traditional dress in public spaces due to fear of ridicule or social pressure	“In my village, I always wear lugda. But in Bhopal, if I wear it, people laugh. So I wear kurtis in college.”	Shows identity negotiation and adaptation in public spaces while maintaining traditional dress in private spaces
Food Habits and Peer Pressure	Migrants modify traditional food habits in hostels and urban social settings	“When I take makke ki roti to hostel, others laugh. They ask why I don’t eat proper chapati. So I eat what everyone else eats.”	Indicates cultural adaptation due to peer pressure and social acceptance
Music and Cultural Change	Traditional music and cultural practices replaced by urban popular culture in youth spaces	“I love our Gavari songs, but in college, no one wants to listen. Everyone plays DJ.”	Demonstrates cultural change among younger migrants due to urban cultural exposure
Intergenerational Conflict	Older generation prefers traditional practices while younger generation adopts urban lifestyle	“My grandmother always asks me to wear lugda during puja, but I wear jeans in college.”	Shows generational differences in cultural adaptation
Identity Pride	Migrants maintain pride in tribal identity despite adopting urban lifestyle	Respondents expressed pride in being Bhil and participating in festivals and rituals	Indicates cultural retention and symbolic identity maintenance
Urban Discrimination	Migrants experience cultural stigma or social discrimination in urban institutions	Respondents reported being laughed at for dress, food, and language	Shows social pressure influencing cultural adaptation
Cultural Negotiation Strategies	Migrants maintain traditional identity in private spaces and urban identity in public spaces	Migrants wear traditional dress at home and urban dress in college/work	Supports concept of spatial acculturation and situational identity

The thematic analysis of interview responses shows that acculturation among Bhil migrants is not a uniform process but a situational and context-dependent process. The themes indicate that migrants experience social pressure, cultural adaptation, and identity negotiation in urban environments, particularly in educational institutions and public spaces. However, migrants continue to maintain traditional cultural practices, rituals, festivals, and identity within family and community spaces. This pattern suggests that migrants maintain dual cultural identities depending on social context. The thematic findings therefore support the concept of spatial acculturation, where cultural identity is negotiated across different social spaces rather than replaced by urban culture.

6. Discussion

The present study examined the process of acculturation among Bhil tribal migrants in Bhopal and found that acculturation is a multidimensional process involving both cultural adaptation and cultural retention. The findings of the study indicate that Bhil migrants do not experience complete cultural assimilation into urban society but instead experience selective acculturation, where certain aspects of culture change while others remain stable.

The descriptive statistics show moderate levels of ritual continuation, festival participation, and dress adaptation, while identity pride shows a relatively higher mean value. This indicates that although migrants adapt to urban lifestyle practices such as dress and social interaction, they continue to maintain a strong sense of cultural identity. This finding supports Berry’s acculturation theory, particularly the integration strategy, where migrants maintain their original culture while participating in the dominant society.

The regression analysis shows that education is the strongest predictor of acculturation, followed by duration of stay in the city. This finding suggests that education plays an important role in cultural adaptation because educational institutions act as agents of socialization that expose migrants to new languages, values, and social networks. This finding is consistent with Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, which suggests that education provides individuals with cultural skills and knowledge that help them function in dominant social institutions.

The study also found that duration of stay in the city significantly influences acculturation levels, indicating that migrants gradually adapt to urban culture over time. This finding supports migration adaptation theories which suggest that cultural adaptation increases with time as migrants become more familiar with urban social structures and institutions.

The negative relationship between age and acculturation indicates that younger migrants adapt more quickly to urban culture compared to older migrants. This reflects intergenerational cultural differences, where younger migrants are more exposed to education, media, peer networks, and urban institutions, which increases their level of cultural adaptation. Older migrants tend to maintain stronger attachment to traditional cultural practices.

The qualitative interview findings further support the quantitative results and provide deeper insight into the everyday experiences of cultural adaptation among Bhil migrants. The interview responses show that migrants often change their dress patterns, food habits, and cultural practices in urban environments due to social pressure and the desire to fit into urban social environments. However, traditional practices are still maintained during rituals, festivals, and family events. This indicates that migrants maintain dual cultural identities depending on social context. This finding can be explained using Goffman’s concept of presentation of self, where individuals present different identities in different social situations. Bhil migrants often present an urban identity in public spaces such as colleges and workplaces while maintaining tribal identity in family and community spaces. This reflects the idea that identity is situational and negotiated rather than fixed.

The findings of the study also support contemporary migration studies which argue that migration does not necessarily lead to cultural loss but often leads to hybrid cultural identities that combine traditional and modern cultural elements. The concept of cultural negotiation is therefore useful in understanding acculturation among tribal migrants, as migrants continuously negotiate between tradition and modernity, rural identity and urban identity, and community belonging and social mobility.

Overall, the study shows that acculturation among Bhil migrants is best understood as a process of cultural negotiation rather than cultural assimilation. Migrants selectively adapt to urban life while maintaining cultural identity, resulting in multidimensional acculturation patterns. The study therefore contributes to sociological literature on migration, acculturation, and tribal identity by providing empirical evidence that cultural change among tribal migrants in urban areas is gradual, selective, and context-dependent.

7. Conclusion

The present study examined the process of acculturation among Bhil tribal migrants residing in the urban environment of Bhopal district. The study was conducted to understand how tribal migrants adapt to urban life while maintaining their cultural identity, and to identify the socio-demographic factors influencing the acculturation process. By using a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative data, the study provides a comprehensive sociological understanding of cultural change among tribal migrants in an urban context.

The findings of the study clearly indicate that acculturation among Bhil migrants is not a process of complete cultural assimilation but a process of cultural negotiation and selective adaptation. Migrants adopt certain aspects of urban culture such as changes in dress patterns, language use, education, and occupational structures, while simultaneously maintaining traditional rituals, festivals, and a strong sense of tribal identity. This

coexistence of cultural continuity and cultural change demonstrates that acculturation is a multidimensional process rather than a linear movement toward assimilation.

One of the major findings of the study is the significant role of education in the acculturation process. Education acts as an important agent of socialization that exposes migrants to new cultural norms, languages, and institutional structures, thereby increasing their level of interaction with urban society. The study also found that duration of stay in the city significantly influences acculturation, as migrants gradually adapt to urban life over time. Age was found to have a negative relationship with acculturation, indicating that younger migrants adapt more quickly to urban environments compared to older migrants. However, gender did not show a significant effect on acculturation levels.

The study also highlights that cultural identity among Bhil migrants remains strong despite cultural adaptation in everyday life. Migrants continue to maintain emotional attachment, community networks, and cultural practices that reinforce their tribal identity. This suggests that cultural identity is not solely determined by external cultural practices but also by collective memory, community relationships, and symbolic cultural expressions such as festivals and rituals.

From a sociological perspective, the findings of the study support the theoretical argument that acculturation should be understood as a process of integration and cultural negotiation rather than assimilation. The Bhil migrants in Bhopal do not abandon their traditional culture; instead, they selectively adapt to urban social structures while preserving important elements of their cultural heritage. This results in hybrid cultural identities that combine traditional and urban cultural elements.

The study contributes to sociological literature on migration, acculturation, and tribal studies by providing empirical evidence that cultural change among tribal migrants in urban areas is complex, gradual, and multidimensional. The study also contributes methodologically by constructing an acculturation index and statistically examining the relationship between socio-demographic factors and cultural adaptation.

The findings of the study have important policy implications. Urban development policies and tribal welfare programs should not assume that urban migration leads to cultural assimilation. Instead, policies should support cultural inclusion, community spaces, educational support, and cultural preservation programs that allow tribal migrants to participate in urban life without losing their cultural identity.

However, the study has certain limitations. The research is limited to Bhil migrants in Bhopal district and may not represent all Bhil migrants or other tribal communities in India. The study is also cross-sectional in nature and does not capture long-term generational cultural changes. Future research may conduct comparative studies across different cities, tribal groups, and generations to better understand long-term acculturation processes.

In conclusion, the study argues that acculturation among Bhil tribal migrants in Bhopal is best understood as a process of negotiating culture in the city, where migrants continuously balance tradition and modernity, cultural identity and urban adaptation, and community belonging and social mobility. This process reflects the dynamic nature of culture and the resilience of tribal identity in changing social environments.

7. Limitations of the Study

Despite providing important insights into the process of acculturation among Bhil tribal migrants in Bhopal, the study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study is geographically limited to Bhil migrants residing in Bhopal district, and therefore the findings may not be fully generalizable to Bhil migrants in other cities or to other tribal communities in India. Different urban environments may produce different patterns of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation.

Second, the study is based on cross-sectional data, which captures the acculturation process at a single point in time. Acculturation is a long-term and dynamic process that may change across generations, and longitudinal studies would be more effective in understanding intergenerational cultural transformation among tribal migrants.

Third, the study relies on self-reported data collected through questionnaires and interviews, which may involve response bias or social desirability bias. Respondents may sometimes provide socially acceptable answers rather than completely accurate descriptions of their behavior and cultural practices.

Another limitation is that the study primarily focuses on cultural practices such as dress, festivals, rituals, and identity perception, but does not extensively examine the role of digital media, mobile technology, and social media in shaping cultural adaptation and identity among migrants, which has become increasingly important in contemporary urban society.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable empirical insights into the multidimensional process of acculturation among tribal migrants and contributes to sociological understanding of migration, identity, and cultural change in urban India.

8. Policy Implications and Future Scope of Research

The findings of the study have important implications for urban policy, tribal welfare programs, and educational institutions. The study shows that tribal migrants do not completely lose their cultural identity after migration; instead, they adapt to urban life while maintaining important aspects of their cultural heritage. Therefore, urban development policies should focus on cultural inclusion rather than cultural assimilation.

Urban planners and policymakers should encourage the creation of community spaces, cultural centers, and platforms where tribal migrants can celebrate their festivals, perform traditional art forms, and maintain community networks. Such initiatives can help migrants maintain cultural identity while integrating into urban society.

Educational institutions also play a significant role in the acculturation process. Schools and colleges should create inclusive environments that respect cultural diversity and reduce cultural discrimination faced by tribal students. Cultural awareness programs and multicultural activities can help reduce stigma and improve social integration of tribal students in urban educational institutions.

From a research perspective, future studies can expand this research by conducting comparative studies across different tribal communities and different cities to understand regional variations in acculturation patterns. Longitudinal studies can also be conducted to examine intergenerational cultural change among tribal migrants. Future research may also examine the role of digital media, mobile technology, and social media in shaping identity and cultural adaptation among migrant youth.

Further research may also explore gender differences, occupational mobility, and educational mobility among tribal migrants in urban environments. Such studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of migration, identity, and cultural transformation in contemporary India.

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