

Impact of Modernisation on the Socio-Cultural and Living Conditions of Banjaras in India

B. Suresh Lal¹

¹ Professor of Economics and Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana, India

Correspondence: B. Suresh Lal, Professor of Economics and Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana, India.

doi:10.56397/JRSSH.2025.11.01

Abstract

The Banjara community, one of India's largest nomadic and semi-nomadic groups, has undergone considerable changes in its cultural identity, economy, and living standards due to modernisation. The Banjaras, traditionally known for their caravan commerce and mobility, have undergone significant change due to developments in transportation, education, technology, urbanisation, government development programs, and global cultural influences. This study examines the effects of modernity on socio-cultural practices, economic livelihoods, settlement circumstances, gender relations, young ambitions, and health outcomes. This study provides a detailed, analytical, and multidimensional examination of the impact of modernity on the socio-cultural life, economic structure, and living conditions of the Banjaras in numerous Indian states. While it has increased access to education, employment, and social services, it has also caused cultural loss, identity disputes, and unequal economic integration. The article concludes with recommendations for culturally sensitive, sustainable development policies.

Keywords: modernisation, culture, living conditions, tradition, caravan trade, transportation, and Banjaras

1. Introduction

The Banjaras are a traditionally nomadic population that engages in trade and transportation. The Banjaras, also known as Lambada, Lambani, Sugali, and Labana, are a historically nomadic tribe that lives in Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan. Historically known as caravan merchants and salt transporters, they survived by moving goods over long distances on pack animals, serving armies and local

administrations (Bhangya, 2017). Historically known as caravan merchants, salt wholesalers, and long-haul transporters, their livelihoods and cultural customs have swiftly transformed due to contemporary socioeconomic developments. Their identity, based on mobility, vibrant attire, oral traditions, and strong community leadership, has undergone significant changes as modernity alters India's social and economic landscape. Modernisation created new options in education, wage labour, technology, and urban employment while undermining

traditional systems and cultural continuity (Xaxa, 2016).

Historically, Banjaras were nomadic traders who moved salt, wheat, and metals across India (Hasnain, 2013). Their nomadic existence entailed living in tandas (mobile encampments), following a community-based leadership structure led by the Naik, a traditional chief, and engaging in a variety of cultural traditions, including needlework, folk music, and ceremonial rituals. The demise of their traditional commerce was caused by the growth of railways and roads, as well as British colonial laws such as the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (Bose, 2019), which restricted their movement and forced settlement.

2. Review of Literature

The Banjaras have a distinct culture and make an important contribution to Indian heritage. Their way of life is distinct and does not resemble that of the residents of flat regions or indigenous tribes known as Banjaras. The Banjaras are an ethnic group found in Telangana and adjacent states. They speak in a recognised dialect.

Gor Boli, which lacks a written alphabet, contains components of Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati (Lal, 2016). Alcohol is the most often taken substance by adolescents, and a nationwide survey shows that many participate in habitual excessive drinking, potentially due to the liberalisation of the Indian market (Naik, 2013).

Female banjara tribal workers are playing an increasingly important role in agricultural and associated enterprises. Tribal women face a variety of health and nutrition challenges, including increased fertility, infant mortality, malnutrition, and shorter life expectancy (Lal, 2005). To provide appropriate employment and subsistence for the Banjara population, MSMEs must operate with little investment, less machinery and equipment, raw materials, power, and other resources. It is critical to the production of goods and services, to employment, to exports, and to income for a large proportion of the population (Lal, 2020).

3. Objectives and Methodology

- 1) To investigate the socio-cultural progress of the Banjaras in the context of modernism.
- 2) To investigate economic restructuring and the move from itinerant trade to stable and

diverse livelihoods.

- 3) To analyse changes in living conditions, including housing, health, education, technology, and welfare utilisation.
- 4) To give regional case studies demonstrating the various implications of modernity.

The paper employs a qualitative descriptive technique reinforced by secondary sources, government data, and ethnographic research, as well as regional case studies from Telangana, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra.

4. Results and Discussion

This paper focuses on and analyses the socio-cultural implications of modernity, the economic consequences of modernisation, the influence of modernisation on living standards, and the challenges associated with modernisation. These concerns include the loss of traditional cultural practices, the demise of traditional livelihoods, and the difficulties of adapting to a more sedentary lifestyle.

4.1 The Socio-Cultural Effects of Modernisation

Traditional nomadism is on the decline:

Historically, Banjaras travelled across regions, transporting salt, agricultural products, and goods for trade. Modern transportation technologies, particularly railroads, trucks, and highways, have rendered traditional caravan trading obsolete. For millennia, Banjaras specialised in salt transportation, grain and metal trafficking, caravan logistics, pack-animal transportation, and supply to armies and kings. In this case, nomadic pathways were abandoned. A considerable proportion of Banjaras established permanent communities and thandas, shifting from nomadic to sedentary lifestyles. Railway networks, roadways, and administrative policies compelled Banjaras to adopt permanent settlement. Sedentarisation impacted housing patterns, social ties, and mobility (Reddy & Seevalal, 2020). While it improved access to government programs, it undermined their traditional nomadic lifestyle.

The evolution of social organisation and leadership:

Traditional decision-making was ruled by the Naik (chief) and elder councils; modern government has established Panchayati Raj institutions, a state bureaucracy, and legal frameworks. As a result, traditional institutions have diminished as younger generations rely more on formal governance and education. The transition from embroidered,

mirror-embellished apparel to modern clothing reflects a cultural decline: young ladies favour sarees, salwar suits, or Western ensembles. Significant silver jewellery is replaced with low-cost imitations. The impact of modern education and media, which promote contemporary ideas and lifestyles, hastens this transformation.

The Lambadi language is at risk of extinction due to state language education policies, urban migration, and a lack of a written script and formal instruction. This leads to communication gaps between generations and the demise of oral traditions (Yadav, 2015).

Modernisation has pushed younger Banjaras to embrace contemporary dress, resulting in a decline in the use of traditional ghagras, intricate jewellery, and embroidered apparel. The Banjara dialect (Lambadi) is fading as dominant languages such as Telugu, Hindi, and Kannada gain popularity. Rituals and festivals: Specific ancestral rites and ceremonies are disappearing, particularly among metropolitan families. Traditional festivals, needlework cooperatives, and governmental tribal marketing programs are all helping to revive the culture. Traditional fire rites, folk storytelling, and communal festivals are undermined by mainstream Hindu practices and by time constraints imposed by paid jobs. Modernisation threatens ritual continuity (Hasnain, 2013). Cultural erosion: Traditional dress and eating habits are changing. Women are increasingly choosing commercial materials and synthetic yarns for their ceremonial dress over traditional embroidery (Lal, 2015). The impact of globalisation has caused significant changes in societal customs. Over 90% of Banjaras now follow non-Banjara marriage norms, which usually involve the dowry system.

Nuclear families are replacing joint families as people relocate for better jobs. When state governance systems replace traditional power, Naik's authority diminishes (Bhangya, 2017).

Technology, Media, and Youth Culture: Improved school access has increased literacy rates for both male and female students, as well as increased awareness of rights, social programs, and mobility. Women were encouraged to participate in self-help groups, local governance, and micro-enterprises. Even though conventional gender boundaries have loosened, patriarchal norms remain prevalent in

many thandas. Mobile phones, television, and social media influence cultural behaviour by boosting information and education, decreasing intergenerational communication, and encouraging acceptance of modern ideas. This promotes both empowerment and cultural displacement among young people.

4.2 Economic Implications of Modernisation

The decline of traditional professions: Modern transportation and commercialisation have jeopardised the viability of the caravan trade, animal-husbandry-based migration, and salt transportation. As a result, the Banjaras had to seek alternative means of income. Modern transportation has rendered the caravan trade obsolete. Forestry regulations hampered pastoral activity. The community was obliged to look for alternative sources of income (Bose, 2019).

Transition to agriculture and landlessness: Many Banjaras turned to small-scale agriculture, sharecropping, and landless labour. Agriculture is unstable due to a lack of irrigation and land rights (Xaxa, 2016). The Banjaras are currently employed in agriculture, agricultural labour, wage labour under MGNREGA, construction, small businesses (including shops, needlework, and handicrafts), auto driving, transportation-related vocations, and employment in both the public and private sectors among educated youth. This diverse economy has ensured stability; nonetheless, several families remain in low-income categories.

Construction, brick-kiln labour, roads, domestic employment, and factory work all rely heavily on wage labour. Seasonal and permanent migration to urban areas increases economic opportunities but also poses risks, such as slum living and exploitation (UNDP, 2022).

The emergence of needlework and handicrafts as an economic asset: Banjara women's traditional embroidery has become a commercial industry, with information spread through NGOs, government exhibitions, and self-help organisations. This has created revenue for women while also preserving their cultural identity. Lambani embroidery has gained international recognition, provided economic support, and preserved traditional heritage (Sahoo, 2018).

Improved access to welfare programs: Modernisation and government action have

made property titles, housing initiatives, educational scholarships, health care, and livelihood programs more accessible. This has considerably increased the economic stability of many Banjara households. MGNREGA, PMAY, PDS, scholarships, and Ayushman Bharat help to improve financial stability (NITI Aayog, 2021). Nonetheless, access restrictions persist due to low literacy and bureaucratic constraints.

4.3 Effects of Modernisation on Living Conditions

Transition from temporary to permanent settlements: Banjaras have built permanent homes in government-supported colonies (thanda development plans) and semi-urban areas. This change has resulted in improved sanitation, electricity and water supply systems, transportation links, and formal-sector integration.

Improvements in housing and infrastructure: Government initiatives such as PMAY (housing), road connectivity plans, and village power have considerably raised living standards. Nonetheless, numerous thandas exist, including inadequate water supply, poor drainage, and limited access to healthcare. According to the 2011 Indian Census, government housing schemes have converted traditional huts into concrete dwellings equipped with power, sanitation, and drinkable water.

Improvements in education, health, and nutrition: Increased access to primary healthcare, vaccination programs, and maternal and child health services has improved health indicators. Nonetheless, increased rates of anaemia, malnutrition, drunkenness, and lifestyle-related diseases remain serious issues. Modernisation increased literacy rates among Banjaras. Residential schools and scholarships foster socioeconomic growth (Yadav, 2015). Nonetheless, dropout rates remain high, linguistic barriers limit early learning, and migration disrupts academic continuity. Health indicators show improvement, but the population still faces severe anaemia, malnutrition in children, alcoholism in men, and limited access to basic healthcare clinics in remote thandas (Reddy & Seevalal, 2020).

Media and technology exposure: Modernisation has improved access to mobile phones, social media, television, and the internet. This has increased awareness and connectivity, fostered educational and employment goals, and increased adolescent exposure to mainstream

culture. However, it has also resulted in the destruction of traditional knowledge and a loss of oral culture transmission across generations. Although access to sanitation has improved under Swachh Bharat, many thandas still lack drainage and potable water infrastructure.

4.4 Challenges in Modernisation

Despite its benefits, modernity has brought new challenges: cultural decline and an identity crisis. A large majority of teenagers experience a disconnect from traditional Banjara practices, ceremonies, and languages. The transition away from traditional employment has led to instability in livelihoods, driven by unemployment and underemployment. Substance misuse and societal unrest: exposure to metropolitan areas has exacerbated alcoholism and youth-related social problems. Land alienation: Banjaras surrendered land in specific locations due to illiteracy, exploitative contracts, and legal complexities. Despite increases in literacy, dropout rates remain high due to variables such as poverty, labour mobility, and linguistic difficulties. Cultural decline, a teenage identity crisis, poverty, and informal occupations. Substance misuse, gender inequality, vulnerability of urban slums, caste prejudice, and unequal access to support services. Modernisation is uneven, favouring specific segments over others (Xaxa, 2016).

4.5 Case Analyses: Regional Impacts

Telangana has a strong residential school infrastructure, high participation in Self-Help Groups, excellent road connectivity, and growing urban migration to Hyderabad. Identity confrontations with Adivasi people, land dispossession in forested areas, and young unemployment are among the challenges.

Karnataka: The benefits of Banjaras in Karnataka include magnificent traditional attire adorned with GI-tagged Lambani needlework, robust Self-Help Group networks, and cultural revitalisation activities. However, issues persist, including high female dropout rates and water scarcity in North Karnataka.

Maharashtra's Positive Outcomes: Banjara professionals in public service, strong political representation, and significant integration of urban employment.

Poor slum housing conditions, frequent alcoholism among migrant males, and the disappearance of traditional urban celebrations

are among the challenges.

Rajasthan Beneficial Effects: Most banjaras may earn a living through tourism, and cultural performances provide revenue—obstacles include a harsh desert climate, limited agricultural capability, and ongoing water scarcity.

4.6 Discussion

Modernisation is a two-pronged process: beneficial outcomes include education, improved housing, women's empowerment, wage labour opportunities, and political participation; adverse consequences include language and cultural erosion, economic instability, migration vulnerabilities, and identity fragmentation. The Banjaras selectively adopt modernity, retaining some traditions while adopting new practices (Bose, 2019). Improved socioeconomic mobility: Modern education, public-sector jobs, and skill-based professions all enhance upward mobility. Increased political participation: Banjaras are now involved in Panchayats, local government, and state-level lobbying. Women's empowerment through self-help groups, microfinance, and government efforts has enhanced income generation and autonomy. The monetisation of Banjara needlework, dance, and festivals has received widespread praise.

Policy Recommendations: Cultural Preservation: Include Lambadi in educational curricula and promote embroidered crafts through cooperatives. Economic empowerment includes strengthening Self-Help Groups, improving market access for artisan goods, and ensuring land rights, including irrigation support. Hostels, scholarships, and bridge schools are among the educational options available to migrant children. Mobile health units and nutrition initiatives aimed at mothers and children. Governance entails political inclusion and the establishment of specific Banjara development boards.

5. Conclusion

Modernisation has presented both advantages and disadvantages to the Banjara population. It has resulted in increased economic stability, better living conditions, greater access to education, healthcare, and welfare, as well as the modernising of lives through technology and social mobility. However, it has also resulted in the loss of traditional culture, the breakdown of nomadic identity, the deterioration of language

and customs, and socioeconomic disparities within the community. The future well-being of the Banjaras depends on equitable development that promotes modernity while protecting cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and community identity.

References

- Ahuja R. (2014). *Social Issues in India* (3rd Edition). Rawat Publications.
- Bhangya, B. (2017). Dispossession: Land and Identity in the Banjara People. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 52(17), 45–52.
- Bose S. (2019). *Nomadic and denotified tribes in India: Historical context, rights, and advancements*. Routledge.
- Hasnain, N. (2013). *Tribal India*, 7th Edition. Palaka Prakashan.
- Lal B.S, S. Phalguni, Simran, & T. Mittal. (2020). The Impact of Covid-19 on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs): An Overview. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 7(12), 05/12. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363534094>
- Lal, B.S. & Padma, A. (2005). Empowerment of Tribal Women in Andhra Pradesh. *Southern Economist*, 44, 15-16. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339016781>
- Lal, B.S. (2015, June). Socioeconomic and Health Challenges Faced by Banjaras in the Context of Globalisation: An Examination of Telangana Tribal Villages. *IJPSS*, 5(6).
- Lal, B.S. (2016, October). A Historical Investigation of the Origin and Migration of the Banjara Tribe in Telangana State. *International Journal of Current Research*, 8(10), 40261–40267. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311562515>
- Naik, N.T.K, & Lal, B.S. (2013). Effects of Alcohol Consumption on Health and Economy (with a Focus on Global McDonaldization). *IOSR Journal of Nursing and Health Science (IOSR-JNHS)*, 1(5), 18–23. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340091042>
- Niti Aayog. (2021). Baseline report on the National Multidimensional Poverty Index.
- Reddy D. M. & Seevalal Y. (2020). Modernisation

- has changed the Lambada tribe's economic patterns. *Journal of Social Anthropology*, 28(2), pp. 112–130.
- Sahoo, S. (2018). Nomadic communities in India face economic issues. *Indian Journal of Social Development*, 18(1), 65–82.
- The Census of India. (2011). An Overview of the Primary Census. The Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner.
- United Nations Development Program. (2022). Human Development Report: 2021-2022. United Nations Development Program.
- Xaxa, V. (2016). *Indigenous populations in India are becoming marginalised*. The Oxford University Press.
- Yadav, R. (2015). Education and progress in the Banjara community: Growing ambitions. *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, 29(3), 287–305.