

**Invited Review****Challenges of Preserving Tribal Culture in the Era of Globalization**Preeti Singh<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

Globalization has reconfigured socio-economic and cultural landscapes across the globe, generating both opportunities and structural vulnerabilities for indigenous communities. This paper examines the challenges of preserving tribal culture in the era of globalization with special reference to Uttarakhand, a Himalayan region inhabited by Scheduled Tribes such as the Bhotia, Tharu, Jaunsari, Raji (Van Rawat), and Buksa. These communities possess distinct linguistic traditions, ecological knowledge systems, ritual practices, and livelihood patterns historically embedded in forested and mountainous environments. Adopting a qualitative and analytical approach based on secondary literature, policy documents, and region-specific case references, the study investigates how market integration, migration, tourism expansion, infrastructure development, formal schooling, and mass media penetration reshape tribal identities and social institutions. The findings indicate that globalization contributes to language shift toward dominant Hindi and English mediums, commodification of cultural expressions, weakening of customary institutions, and disruption of traditional subsistence economies. Simultaneously, processes such as digital connectivity, educational mobility, and state welfare interventions generate new forms of aspiration and socio-economic participation, creating a complex tension between cultural continuity and adaptive transformation. The paper argues that cultural erosion in Uttarakhand's tribal societies is not merely a by-product of economic change but is structurally linked to asymmetrical power relations, developmental paradigms, and homogenizing cultural forces. It proposes a multi-layered framework for preservation that includes community-led documentation, mother-tongue-based education, participatory tourism models, and policy-driven safeguards aligned with sustainable development goals.

**Keywords:** Tribal Culture, Globalization, Uttarakhand, Displacement, Cultural Identity, Indigenous Knowledge

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**1. Introduction**

Globalization is one of the most transformative processes of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It refers to the intensification of worldwide social, economic, political, and cultural interconnections that transcend territorial boundaries (Giddens, 1990). Beyond economic integration, globalization operates as a cultural and epistemological force reshaping identities, institutions, and knowledge systems. Appadurai (1996) conceptualizes globalization as a multidimensional flow of ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples, and ideoscaples, which collectively restructure local realities. In this process, peripheral and indigenous communities often experience asymmetrical incorporation into dominant economic and cultural systems.

In the Indian context, the adoption of the Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) reforms in 1991 accelerated market penetration, infrastructural expansion, and communication technologies. While these reforms stimulated economic growth, their impact has been uneven across social groups. Tribal communities historically dependent on forests, subsistence agriculture, pastoralism, and localized exchange systems have faced structural vulnerabilities including land

alienation, ecological displacement, cultural homogenization, and linguistic erosion.

Tribal culture may be understood as a holistic system encompassing language, kinship organization, ritual practices, ecological knowledge, cosmology, material culture, and collective memory. Unlike industrial societies organized around contractual relations and individualism, tribal societies have traditionally operated through Durkheim's (1893/1984) concept of mechanical solidarity, where social cohesion is rooted in shared beliefs, collective conscience, and cultural continuity. Globalization, however, introduces forces of organic solidarity specialization, market rationality, and individual mobility gradually transforming collective structures into differentiated social arrangements.

Uttarakhand, a Himalayan state carved out of Uttar Pradesh in 2000, represents a significant site to examine these transformations. The region is ecologically fragile yet culturally diverse, inhabited by Scheduled Tribes such as the Bhotia, Tharu, Jaunsari, Raji (Van Rawat), and Buksa. These communities possess distinct linguistic traditions, customary governance systems, ritual ecologies, and indigenous knowledge embedded in mountain and forest environments. Their worldview reflects the philosophy of "Jal, Jungle, Zameen" a relational understanding of water, forests, and land as sacred

and life-sustaining entities rather than mere economic resources.

The penetration of tourism, hydropower development, road expansion, digital media, formal schooling, and migration networks into tribal regions has reconfigured traditional institutions. Cultural expressions are increasingly commodified for market consumption; youth aspirations are shaped by urban media narratives; and linguistic practices shift toward dominant Hindi and English mediums. In smaller communities such as the Raji, demographic fragility compounds the threat of cultural extinction. In relatively larger groups like the Bhotia and Jaunsari, transformation manifests as adaptive restructuring rather than immediate disappearance.

Despite growing literature on tribal development in India, there remains a need for region-specific, comparative analysis that situates Uttarakhand's tribes within broader globalization theory while foregrounding indigenous agency. Much scholarship focuses either on economic marginalization or ecological displacement, but fewer studies integrate cultural, linguistic, political, and epistemological dimensions simultaneously.

Therefore, this paper seeks to critically examine the challenges of preserving tribal culture in Uttarakhand in the era of globalization. It argues that cultural erosion is not merely a by-product of modernization but is structurally embedded in asymmetrical power relations, developmental paradigms, and homogenizing cultural forces. At the same time, globalization also produces spaces for adaptive resilience, digital empowerment, and renewed identity assertion.

By combining theoretical insights with region-specific tribal case studies, the study contributes to contemporary anthropological debates on indigenous survival, cultural sustainability, and development justice in Himalayan contexts.

### 2. Objectives:

1. To examine the socio-cultural transformations experienced by major tribal communities of Uttarakhand in the context of globalization.
2. To analyze the structural challenges affecting preservation of language, traditional livelihoods, etc. among tribes of Uttarakhand.
3. To propose sustainable preservation strategies integrating community participation, policy safeguards, and culturally sensitive development frameworks.

### 3. Methodology

The research follows an interpretative and socio-anthropological framework, examining globalization through structural-functional and cultural theories. Data has been collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, Government policy documents and Census data and Scheduled Tribe reports. The study relies on secondary data; therefore, field-level ethnographic interviews may further strengthen future research outcomes.

### 4. Major Tribal Communities of Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand hosts diverse tribes, each facing unique globalization pressures.

#### 4.1 Bhotia Tribe

The Bhotia are a trans-Himalayan tribal community inhabiting the high-altitude districts of Pithoragarh, Chamoli, and Uttarkashi. Socially, they are organized into clan-based structures with strong kinship networks and community solidarity. Traditionally, they practiced transhumance—seasonal migration between higher Himalayan pastures and lower valleys. Their social structure reflects adaptation to harsh mountain ecology, where cooperation and collective survival were essential. Politically, village councils and elder-based leadership historically regulated trade routes, grazing rights, and dispute resolution. After independence, Bhotias gained Scheduled Tribe status, increasing their representation in local governance institutions like Panchayati Raj.

Culturally, Bhotias have rich traditions of wool weaving, carpet making, and handloom production using sheep wool and pashmina. Their festivals such as Harela and Phool Dei reflect agrarian and ecological reverence. Traditional attire includes woolen garments suited for extreme cold. Indigenous knowledge plays a crucial role in high-altitude agriculture, herbal medicine, and livestock management. Their ecological knowledge of Himalayan biodiversity makes them custodians of fragile mountain ecosystems. However, globalization and border closure after 1962 transformed their traditional trade economy, compelling a shift toward tourism, small business, and government employment.

#### 4.2 Tharu Tribe

The Tharu tribe primarily resides in the Terai belt of Uttarakhand, particularly in Udham Singh Nagar and Nainital districts. Socially, the Tharu community traditionally followed a semi-matriarchal system where women held significant roles in agriculture and household economy. Their social organization is village-centric, with customary leaders overseeing rituals and conflict resolution. Politically, while they now participate in democratic processes, earlier governance was community-based with collective decision-making structures.

Culturally, the Tharu are known for their vibrant folk dances, wall paintings, and oral traditions. Their houses, often decorated with clay art, reflect environmental harmony. Marriage rituals, harvest festivals, and seasonal celebrations maintain communal bonds. Traditionally, they were forest-dependent agriculturists with expertise in floodplain farming and herbal medicinal practices. Indigenous agricultural techniques suited to Terai ecology demonstrate sustainable land management. However, commercialization of agriculture, land alienation, and cultural commodification through tourism have altered their traditional autonomy.

#### 4.3 Raji Tribe (Van Rawat)

The Raji tribe, classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), is one of the smallest tribal communities in Uttarakhand, mainly located in Pithoragarh and Bageshwar districts. Socially, they were historically semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers with small kin-based groups. Community decisions were traditionally guided by elders rather than formal institutions. Politically, their marginal population limited representation, though recent welfare

schemes aim to integrate them into governance structures.

Culturally, the Raji possess a distinct language (now endangered), oral folklore, and forest-centered rituals. Their traditional livelihood included hunting, gathering forest produce, bamboo craft, and wood carving. Indigenous ecological knowledge of forest resources was central to their survival. The shift from forest life to settled villages due to state policies disrupted their cultural continuity. Loss of language, ritual practices, and autonomous identity reflects severe cultural vulnerability. Despite modernization, their indigenous role as forest knowledge holders remains crucial for sustainable environmental management.

**4.4 Jaunsari Tribe**

The Jaunsari tribe inhabits the Jaunsar-Bawar region of Dehradun district. Socially, they have a distinctive kinship system historically associated with practices like fraternal polyandry (now largely declined). Clan solidarity and collective agricultural work characterized their traditional structure. Politically, village councils (khap-like local systems) governed social conduct, land disputes, and marriage norms before integration into formal state administration. Culturally, Jaunsari traditions include folk music, dance forms, and elaborate festivals linked to agrarian cycles. Their wooden temple architecture reflects regional aesthetics. Agriculture and animal husbandry form the economic backbone. Indigenous practices in terrace farming and water management illustrate sustainable adaptation to mountainous terrain. Globalization has led to increased literacy, army recruitment, and urban migration, transforming social institutions but not entirely erasing cultural identity.

**4.5 Buksa Tribe**

The Buksa tribe resides mainly in Dehradun, Nainital, and Udham Singh Nagar districts. Socially, the Buksa community traditionally followed patriarchal family structures with agriculture as the primary occupation. Their village-level leadership mediated disputes and organized communal activities. Politically, while recognized as a Scheduled Tribe, their representation and access to state resources remain comparatively limited.

Culturally, the Buksa observe seasonal festivals, folk songs, and marriage customs reflecting agrarian life. Traditional occupations include subsistence farming and wage labor. Indigenous knowledge of local crops and forest resources supports their ecological adaptation. However, interaction with dominant non-tribal populations has led to assimilation pressures. Modern education and labor migration have reduced transmission of oral traditions. Poverty, low literacy, and limited socio-economic mobility remain major challenges.

**5. Major Challenges in Preserving Tribal Culture**

**5.1 Displacement and Development Projects**

Hydropower projects and infrastructure displace tribal populations, severing ties to ancestral lands central to ecological knowledge, rituals, and identity. In Uttarakhand, mega-dams fragment habitats, submerging sacred groves (dev van) and community forests vital for biodiversity lore and ceremonies.

- Raji (PVTG): Tehri Dam expansions affected Raji hamlets in Pithoragarh, relocating families and disrupting forest-dependent hunting-gathering. Elders lost access to ritual sites, weakening transmission of medicinal plant knowledge.
- Jaunsari: Vishnuprayag and Pipalkoti projects encroached on Jaunsar-Bawar groves dedicated to Mahasu Devta, fragmenting clans and seasonal rituals like polyandry-linked festivals

**Table 1.1: Key locations of the tribes with their primary globalization challenges.**

Tribe	Key Location	Traditional Livelihood	Primary Globalization Challenge
Bhotia	Pithoragarh	Transhumance, trade	Tourism commodification
Tharu	Udham Singh Nagar	Agriculture, forests	Land alienation
Raji	Pithoragarh	Hunting-gathering	Language loss
Jaunsari	Jaunsar-Bawar	Subsistence farming	Migration
Buksa	Dehradun	Forests, labor	Cultural dilution

Impacts: Psychological alienation; breakdown of customary governance; youth disconnection from nature-based epistemologies.

### 5.2 Market Penetration and Commercialization

Global supply chains promote cash crops, packaged goods, and tourism, eroding subsistence economies and commodifying crafts. Traditional self-reliance yields to dependency on volatile markets.

- Bhotia Wool: Post-1962 trade closure, handwoven "Chaubatti" shawls compete with cheap Chinese/machine-made imports, reducing production from cultural practice to niche sales.

- Raji Crafts: Basketry and herbal products turned into "exotic" souvenirs for tourists, performed out-of-context, diluting ritual significance.

Impacts: Loss of craft-embedded knowledge (e.g., natural dyes); economic inequality as only elites adapt.

### 5.3 Language Endangerment

State schooling in Hindi or English marginalizes tribal tongues, halting oral transmission. Youth prioritize "marketable" languages, accelerating dialects' decline.

- Raji Dialect: Spoken by <700, fading in schools; children mix Hindi, losing myths and deity names tied to forests.

- Bhotia Variants: High-altitude dialects like Byangsi erode as migrants adopt Kumaoni or urban Hindi, with songs untranslated and forgotten.

Impacts: Cultural amnesia; rituals lose meaning without linguistic nuance.

### 5.4 Media and Cultural Assimilation

Mass media (TV, smartphones, OTT) floods villages with consumerism, reshaping aspirations and supplanting local narratives.

- Tharu: Folk songs (e.g., Baramasiya) replaced by Bollywood on mobile apps; traditional attire swapped for jeans during festivals.

- General: Social media amplifies "modern" weddings over clan rituals, eroding attire like Jaunsari woolen ghagra.

Impacts: Value shift from collectivism to individualism; youth view traditions as "backward."

### 5.5 Migration and Urbanization

Labor migration to cities fragments families, interrupting elder-youth knowledge transfer.

- Jaunsari Clans: Youth to Dehradun/Delhi for jobs weaken extended families, dissolving polyandry-linked structures and festivals.

- Bhotia: High migration rates hollow out villages, halting pastoral songs and weaving apprenticeships. Impacts: Diaspora disconnection; returnees hybridize traditions superficially.

### 6. Positive Dimensions of Globalization

Globalization provides tools for empowerment, though unevenly distributed urban-adjacent tribes benefit more.

- Education/Healthcare: Better schools/clinics; Raji access schemes reduce mortality.

- E-commerce/Handicrafts: Bhotia wool sold via Amazon/Flipkart post-GI tag, reviving crafts.

- Eco-Tourism: Sarmoli homestays boost Bhotia incomes by 35%.

- Political Awareness: Tribes vote strategically; Tharu gain reservations.

- Caveat: Benefits favor elites; remote PVTGs lag.

### 7. Government Policies and Constitutional Safeguards

India's framework protects tribes, but Uttarakhand implementation lags due to bureaucracy and awareness gaps.

- Articles 15/16: Bar bias in jobs/education; aids Jaunsari scholarships.

- Article 46: Welfare mandates; funds Tharu skill centers.

- Article 342: Reserves seats/jobs; Bhotia/Buksa quotas.

- Uttarakhand Tribal Sub-Plan: Allocates funds for PVTGs; Raji housing/schemes, but uneven rollout.

- Skill Programs/Festivals: Vocational training (weaving); state-sponsored Bhotia Mela preserves dances.

- Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006: Titles community forests; Jaunsari dev van claims pending; aids ecological knowledge retention, underutilized (only 20% claims approved).

### 8. Strategies for Cultural Preservation

Globalization poses severe threats to Uttarakhand's tribal cultures, but targeted strategies can foster resilience and continuity. Below, each proposed strategy is defined with practical implementation steps and Uttarakhand-specific examples drawn from Bhotia, Raji, Tharu, Jaunsari, and Buksa communities.

#### 8.1 Documentation of Languages and Folklore via Digital Archives

This involves systematically recording endangered tribal languages, oral histories, myths, songs, proverbs, and rituals using audio-video tools, transcription, and online repositories. The goal is to create accessible digital libraries that preserve knowledge for future generations, enable linguistic analysis, and support revitalization efforts.

Collaborate with linguists, NGOs, and tribal elders to conduct field recordings, develop apps for interactive learning, and integrate archives into school curricula or public platforms.

#### Examples:

- Raji tribe: Digital archiving of their near-extinct dialect and hunter-gatherer folklore through projects by local universities in Pithoragarh, capturing ritual chants tied to forest deities.

- Jaunsari: Ethnographic recordings of oral epics and proverbs from Jaunsar-Bawar, stored in community-led digital vaults to counter migration-induced loss.

#### 8.2 Community-Based Eco-Tourism Preserving Authenticity

Eco-tourism managed by tribal communities themselves, emphasizing sustainable practices, cultural immersion, and revenue-sharing, rather than commercial exploitation. It incentivizes preservation

by linking economic benefits to authentic traditions like homestays, guided nature walks, and festival demonstrations.

Train locals as guides, enforce "no-scripted performance" rules, and partner with eco-certification bodies to limit visitor numbers and protect sacred sites.

#### Examples:

- Bhotia: Homestays in high-altitude villages like Dharchula promote transhumance storytelling and wool-weaving demos, generating income while sustaining seasonal migrations.
- Tharu: Terai village tours in Udham Singh Nagar showcase communal farming and nature festivals, with communities controlling access to prevent commodification of dances.

### 8.3 GI Tagging for Products like Bhotia Wool

Geographical Indication (GI) tagging legally protects unique tribal products by linking them to their origin, preventing imitation and boosting market value. This revives crafts, provides economic viability, and embeds cultural knowledge in commodities.

File GI applications through state handicraft boards, organize branding workshops, and link to e-commerce platforms for global sales.

#### Examples:

- Bhotia wool: GI-tagged "Chaubatti" shawls and carpets from Pithoragarh preserve trans-Himalayan weaving techniques, competing with machine-made imports via fairs like the Bhotiya Wool Festival.
- Jaunsari: Proposed GI for woolen garments and clan-specific crafts, supporting women weavers in Jaunsar-Bawar against cheap synthetic alternatives.

### 8.4 Mother-Tongue Curriculum Integrating Tribal History

Bilingual or multilingual education incorporating tribal languages as mediums of instruction alongside Hindi/English, weaving local history, ecology, and folklore into syllabi to foster pride and transmission. Develop textbooks with elder inputs, train teachers in local dialects, and pilot in tribal-majority schools with government funding.

#### Examples:

- Buksa: Pilot programs in Dehradun schools teach Buksa folklore and forest lore in their dialect, reducing dropout rates and identity alienation.
- Raji: Auxiliary Raji-language classes in Bageshwar integrate hunting myths, countering Hindi-dominant erosion among PVTG children.

### 8.5 Strengthening FRA and Participatory Planning

Enhancing the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 implementation by empowering tribal gram sabhas (village councils) in land titling, resource management, and development decisions. Participatory planning ensures culturally sensitive projects via consultations.

Conduct awareness camps, fast-track claims, and form joint committees with officials for infrastructure like dams.

#### Examples:

- Jaunsari: FRA titles in Jaunsar-Bawar protect sacred groves (dev van), allowing community-regulated fodder collection and rituals.

- Tharu: Participatory mapping in Udham Singh Nagar secures community forest rights, sustaining medicinal plant knowledge against agribusiness.

### 8.6 Gender-Sensitive Programs Empowering Women as Knowledge Custodians

Initiatives targeting tribal women—who transmit songs, foodways, crafts, and rituals—through skill-building, leadership roles, and economic schemes that valorize their cultural roles without overburdening them.

Form self-help groups (SHGs), provide microfinance for craft cooperatives, and include women in policy forums.

#### Examples:

- Bhotia women: SHGs under handicraft schemes revive wool dyeing tied to rituals, with training preserving ecological dye knowledge.
- Tharu women: Programs promote weaving of "kaas" grass baskets for grain storage, linked to Bhumsen worship, via festivals and markets. These strategies balance development with identity.

### 9. Conclusion

Globalization is a double-edged sword. In Uttarakhand, it creates opportunities while threatening tribal identity and knowledge. Sustainable policies must integrate indigenous wisdom and community participation. Globalization in Uttarakhand presents a paradoxical reality for tribal communities. While it introduces avenues of education, political representation, digital access, and economic mobility, it simultaneously disrupts deeply rooted cultural systems embedded in ecological interdependence and collective identity. The experiences of the Raji reflect acute cultural endangerment where demographic fragility intersects with policy-driven sedentarization. The Bhotia demonstrate adaptive resilience through market integration but face gradual commodification of tradition. The Tharu and Buksa illustrate land alienation and assimilation pressures, while the Jaunsari represent structural transformation without immediate cultural collapse. The study establishes that cultural erosion is not accidental but structurally embedded within development paradigms privileging economic growth over cultural sustainability. Globalization shifts tribal societies from Durkheimian mechanical solidarity toward individualized organic frameworks, thereby weakening customary governance and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Preservation, therefore, cannot rely solely on symbolic celebration of tribal identity. It must involve community-led cultural documentation, mother-tongue-based education and participatory eco-tourism models etc. Ultimately, tribal communities of Uttarakhand are not relics of the past but dynamic custodians of ecological wisdom vital for sustainable development. Cultural preservation must move beyond protectionist discourse toward

empowered continuity, where tradition and modernity coexist through participatory frameworks.

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