

Exploring the Effects of Rapid Urbanization in Dehradun in Works of Jaskiran Chopra

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Abstract

Dehradun, a city in the foothills of the Himalayas, has evolved significantly over the years, influenced by various factors such as historical development, cultural changes, and environmental shifts. This research aims to analyze the effects of rapid urbanization and transformation of Dehradun as depicted in the work of Jaskiran Chopra *Autumn Raga*. This work also shed light on the anthropocentric development and environmental challenges faced by Dehradun as it transforms into a modern urban center. this study aims to present a comprehensive picture of the city's rapid evolution, encompassing its architectural, environmental, and cultural dimensions.

Keywords: Urbanization, Environment, Dehradun, Anthropocentric Development

1. Introduction

Nestled in the Garhwal area, Dehradun became the temporary capital of Uttarakhand in 2000, an important turning point in the state's history. The decision set off a rapid growth that transformed town in a matter of days. One facet of this transformation was the establishment of significant government bodies along the banks of the Rispana River, such the Vidhan Sabha¹. The consequences went beyond alterations in governance, resulting in a surge of urbanisation that engulfed the area. The economy and geography of Dehradun were transformed by the emergence of new commercial and industrial areas. As the city struggled to meet the expectations of its elevated position, this transition presented both possibilities and difficulties.

This transition to an interim capital put an increasing strain on the region's natural resources, cultural legacy, and heritage while also causing an upsurge in infrastructure construction to house government offices. The previously peaceful landscape of the city quickly changed, changing both its skyline and character. The preservation of Dehradun's cultural institutions, historical landmarks, and surrounding environment faced difficulties as a result of this increase. The natural resources, green areas, and overall environment of Dehradun have been impacted by urban expansion, according to a case study conducted by Deepak Kholiya and D. K. Gupta on land use and land cover using remote sensing and GIS approaches. (Kholiya, Gupta)

¹ <https://dehradun.nic.in/history/>

2. About Author and Works

Jaskiran Chopra was an excellent academic, writer, and journalist from Dehradun with an excellent background in English literature. Her writings include the English novel *Autumn Raga*, a collection of novellas called *Memories of Another Day*, and anthologies of Urdu poetry called *Jashn e Tanhai* and *Mera Sheher*. In *Autumn Raga*, Jaskiran Chopra skillfully crafts a narrative that centres on Sunaina, the main character, as she returns to the Doon valley and faces the ghosts of her past. The valley, which was once a peaceful retreat, has been destroyed by the passage of time and is today a busy city without the allure of the past. Challenging her inner conflict, Sunaina finds herself rediscovering herself in the fascinating realm of classical music ragas. Sunaina's strong bond with her childhood friend Tanuja serves as essential to her quest for peace. Sunaina finds solace and direction from Tanuja as she navigates the ups and downs of life. Chopra parallels Sunaina's emotional trip across the valley's changing scenery, which is a result of growing urbanisation.

3. Impact of Rapid Urbanization in *Autumn Raga*

Autumn Raga explores universal themes of resiliency and self-discovery in addition to capturing the beauty and tragedy of the valley. Sunaina's tale strikes a chord, emphasising the human spirit and the timeless power of music. The previously peaceful refuge of the Doon Valley has become a busy city due to rapid urbanisation. This progression reflects the loss of peace and the difficulty of finding one's position in the face of change, mirroring Sunaina's inner anguish. In Chopra's story, the valley is portrayed as a character unto itself, mirroring Sunaina's journey of adjustment and fortitude in the face of change.

Jaskiran Chopra depicts the development of Dehradun in striking detail, emphasising the significant influence of the town's rapid urbanisation on its character. She skillfully illustrates how old landscapes have vanished and been replaced by an increasingly urbanised setting. The conversion of agricultural fields into residential and commercial districts is one of the most prominent changes. Concrete buildings now stand in the places that were before covered in the rich verdure of basmati fields and the vivid hues of orchards of litchi, mango, and guava. This transition has been made necessary by the city's growing population, which has caused these pastoral areas to gradually disappear.

The aggressive urbanisation and development associated with the human-centric goals of growth can result in the devastation of nearby communities and natural environments. This referred to as "anthropocentric" strategy puts human interests and economic growth ahead of environmental protection and community well-being. This viewpoint, in the opinion of environmentalist and philosopher Arne Naess of Norway, leads to environmental exploitation and promotes the commercialization of nature. (Naess) Chopra also shows how the city's old canal systems, like the East Canal, have vanished from view. Once essential to the town's irrigation and water management, these canals are now uncommon to see. Their absence represents the transition from a more rural to an urbanised civilization. Archana Shukla explores the historical significance of the Doon Valley's canal system, which was first built by local rulers and then extended to a distance of over 125 km during the British colonial era under the authority of Capt. Poseby Cautley. But since 1990, these waterways have been overrun by urbanisation. Shukla highlights the significance of conserving this antiquated system, highlighting its biological and cultural inputs to the valley's topography. (Shukla)

The removal of the huge kothis in Dalanwala is arguably the most devastating example of the shift. Once upon a time, the town's opulent attractiveness was closely associated with these huge estates, including expansive grounds and magnificent buildings. But these kothis gradually disappeared as Dehradun expanded and became more urbanised, giving place to more modern buildings. Chopra also discusses the loss of garden culture and the elimination of gardens, especially in places like Dalanwala that were formerly known for their abundant gardens. These gardens were an integral part of the town's identity, not merely places to relax. Unfortunately, many of these gardens have been replaced by concrete buildings due to the city of Dehradun's fast urbanisation, eliminating a vital piece of the city's history. This loss underscores the need to conserve and revitalise garden culture for next generations as it is indicative of a larger trend of declining natural areas in urban settings. In "Autumn Raga," Chapter 2, Jaskiran Chopra presents us to Sunaina and her childhood friend Tanu, who plan a little celebration on Tanu's garden to mark the arrival of fall. This is more than simply a get-together; it's a conscious attempt to bring Doon's garden culture back to life. Chopra emphasises the significance of preserving local customs in the midst of urbanisation with this gesture.

Tanu had called the previous evening. She was organising a small get-together in our lawn to welcome autumn, the season of festival and promise of winter, "to revive the garden culture of Doon." Those were words she had used albeit joking. Sunaina felt a pang of sadness. "Why was everyone talking of reviving the simplest thing about life? Why had they been forgotten and lost in the first place?" She felt angry with Tanu, herself and all the other people who had made it necessary for simple pleasures of living to need reviving. (Chopra 5)

Through works like *Autumn Raga* and *Memories of Another Day*, Jaskiran Chopra highlights how critical it is to preserve the Doon Valley's natural beauty as well as its cultural legacy. Chopra's stories frequently stress the dangers associated with the valley's fast urbanisation and industrialization while reflecting the valley's shifting values and scenery. Chopra promotes a healthy coexistence between environmental conservation and human progress by presenting characters who work to conserve and revitalise local cultures, traditions, and natural environments.

Chopra's works such as *Memories of Another Day* and *Autumn Raga* reinforce her belief in protecting the Doon Valley's natural and cultural legacy. Through her stories, she implores readers to respect their surroundings and protect them for coming generations. Her characters, who reflect the valley's changing terrain and the significance of preserving its cultural diversity in the face of modernity and urban expansion, clearly relate to this call to action.

4. Conclusion

Jaskiran Chopra examines the impacts of Dehradun's fast urbanisation in her literary pieces, especially *Autumn Raga* and *Memories of Another Day*, with a particular emphasis on how the city's landscapes and cultural identity are changing. Chopra illustrates in her stories the significant effects of urban growth on the natural beauty and customs of the city. In his portrayal of Dehradun's development, Chopra draws attention to the way that the city's once-vibrant gardens and farmlands have given way to concrete buildings. Along with changing the city's skyline, this fast urbanisation has also resulted in the loss of the city's feeling of community and cultural legacy.

In addition, Chopra's depiction of characters like Sunaina, who look for comfort in the middle of urban chaos, highlights the larger difficulties that people in quickly growing cities confront. The trip taken by Sunaina in *Autumn Raga* represents the effort to stay connected to one's roots and find serenity in the midst of the busyness of modern life.

In essence, Chopra's creations highlight the necessity of sustainable urban development that strikes a balance between preserving the environment, fostering economic progress, and conserving cultural heritage. Chopra challenges us to reevaluate our approach to growth and work towards a more harmonious relationship with our environment by underlining the negative effects of unrestricted urbanisation.

5. Bibliography

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