

Fading Echoes: Understanding the Causes of Decline of Cultural Heritage in Kangra's Heritage Villages

Ujjawal Chathle

Himachal Pradesh University

Shimla

Email: ujjawalchathle@gmail.com

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Ujjawal Chathle

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Abstract

The word "heritage" refers to the collective legacy that has been passed down from ancestors, incorporating both material and immaterial facets of history, culture, and the environment. A community's identity and sense of belonging are shaped by its traditions, customs, beliefs, artifacts, monuments, sites, languages, and ecosystems. Understanding and safeguarding cultural heritage is crucial because it protects a community's identity, and customs and promotes a sense of continuity and belonging among future generations. Cultural heritage is a rich educational resource that enhances our comprehension of language, art, and history. It also encourages environmental preservation and sustainable land use practices, which boost economic development through the tourism and cultural sectors. The paper aims to find out the causes of the decline of the cultural heritage of the two heritage villages i.e. Pragpur and Garli of the Kangra District. The primary sources for the current study were conducted through interviews. The secondary sources of data, which include relevant writings, reviews, articles, art magazines, journals, and other literary sources, have been gathered.

Keywords

Heritage, Intangible Heritage, Tangible Heritage, Cultural Decline, Kangra.

Introduction

Heritage is a fundamental pillar of one's identity, connecting people to their roots and shaping their sense of belonging. India, our homeland, is endowed with a wealth of cultural and natural treasures that serve as the foundation for its rich legacy.

Culturally, India is known for its vibrant festivals, classical art forms, diverse cuisines, and literary traditions, each of which contributes to a tapestry of heritage that reflects the depth and diversity of its people. From the majestic architecture of ancient monuments to the intricate craftsmanship found in temples and forts across the country, India's cultural heritage reflects its rich history and artistic ingenuity. Furthermore, India's natural heritage is a source of awe and inspiration, spanning a diverse range of landscapes, from the towering peaks of the Himalayas to the serene natural beauty of the south. The country's biodiversity, with its rich flora and fauna, emphasizes the importance of conservation efforts to protect these invaluable ecosystems for future generations.

Cultural heritage, which includes both material and immaterial components that link us to our ancestry and influence our sense of belonging, is, in fact, the foundation of our identity. Tangible and intangible cultural heritage are the two categories into which it may be divided. Physical artifacts and buildings that are a part of our cultural heritage are included in the category of tangible cultural heritage. These artifacts offer concrete proof of the inventiveness, skill, and technological progress of people throughout history. For example, artwork, sculptures, ceramics, and other artifacts discovered in museums and archaeological sites provide insights into the aesthetics, ideologies, and way of life of earlier societies. In short, India's heritage is an abundant supply of cultural, historical, and natural riches that capture the essence of the country. Tangible cultural heritage encompasses historical structures, monuments, artifacts and archaeological sites that serve as reminders of the people and events that have shaped our past and as symbols of significant points in human civilization. Conversely, customs, behaviors, ceremonies, oral histories, performing arts, and knowledge systems that are passed down through the generations are all included in the category of intangible cultural heritage. These intangible components are essential to defining a community's cultural identity and maintaining its distinctive way of life. Folk music, dance styles, storytelling, traditional handicrafts, cooking customs, festivals, and rituals are all examples of intangible cultural heritage. Even though they are intangible, these components are just as crucial to maintaining and advancing cultural diversity and creating a feeling of community as physical artifacts. When combined, tangible and intangible cultural heritage creates a vibrant tapestry that illustrates the diversity, creativity, and adaptability of human societies throughout space and time. Both tangible and intangible cultural heritage are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. (Nair, Singh, & Munoth, 2021).

By cherishing and preserving India's heritage, we not only honor our ancestors' legacies, but also foster a greater appreciation for our shared history and traditions. This paves the way for a more inclusive and sustainable future, in which India's cultural and natural heritage thrives and inspires future generations.

Methodology

The residents of the Heritage Villages were interviewed to gather information for this study. Primary and secondary data sources provide the necessary information. Personal interviews are used to get primary data. Secondary data is gathered from numerous pertinent books, magazines, websites, journals, and other sources.

Area of Study

In terms of location, the district of Kangra is located in the northwest of Himachal Pradesh. It is bordered to the north by the district of Chamba; to the northeast by the districts of Lahaul and Spiti; to the east by the district of Kullu; and to the south by the districts of Hamirpur, Mandi, and Una. The state of Punjab borders it on the west. The difference in altitude spans from 400 meters above mean sea level to approximately 6000 meters above mean sea level. The district's climate is subtropical to subhumid, thus there are considerable amounts of rainfall in the area. (Gautam & Thakur, 2021).

Situated in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh, in the foothills of the Dhauladhar Mountain Range, Pragpur was the first village to be designated as a heritage village by a State Government notification dated December 9, 1997. In 2002, Garli and Pragpur were established as a Heritage zone. These two villages have a thriving cultural scene and magnificent mansions. The Sud Clan, who were mostly traders, constructed the havelis. They created goods in Garli and sold them to the British, which is how they made their fortune. They returned to Garli in the winter and constructed these mansions. Pragpur, which was created in Princess Parag's memory, is now renowned for its mansions. The Sud Community constructed these mansions. India's first heritage village after independence was Pragpur.

Causes of Decline

Many of the structures of these villages are now abandoned and in poor condition. Nature has taken over these deserted structures as they are neglected by their owners. The walls which once full of life, but now they are uninhabited due to declining populations and changing demographics. The difficulties associated with multiple ownerships exacerbate the problem and make restoration and preservation even more difficult. Not enough promotion and a deficiency of infrastructure among stakeholders involved in tourism. (Gautam & Thakur, 2021).

Some of the structures are still intact but their survival isn't just due to luck—rather, it's a deliberate repurposing that gives their worn bodies new life. Some of the buildings have been cleverly converted into hotels, a noble endeavor that not only maintains the buildings' magnificent architecture but also breathes new life into these formerly sleepy villages.

These architectural treasures serve as silent witnesses to a bygone era, and the fact that their facades are crumbling serves as a sobering reminder of the need for coordinated efforts to preserve and revitalize these villages' cultural heritage. These structures hold within them a blend of architecture and a unique cultural identity.



Fig. 1: Miscellaneous Building at Pragpur **Fig. 2: Miscellaneous Building at Garli**



Fig. 3: Miscellaneous Building at Garli **Fig. 4: Miscellaneous Building at Garli**

Conclusion and Suggestions

The structures present in the heritage villages are turning into ruins day by day. These villages have a large number of abandoned and decaying buildings because their owners have abandoned them. Multiple ownership presents additional challenges that

impede restoration efforts. The development of tourism is further hampered by inadequate infrastructure and a lack of promotion. One way to arrest this is the transformation of these historic structures into hotels which is a good example of a symbiotic relationship between advancement and preservation. These historical artifacts' intrinsic value is increased and preserved when they are converted into lodging. As they move through the hallways and rooms that previous generations used, visitors are given the exceptional chance to fully immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of Kangra's cultural legacy. A story woven into the very fabric of these historic buildings, each elaborate doorway becomes a portal to the past, providing a glimpse into the lives of those who came before. Furthermore, the conversion of these historically significant structures into hotels acts as a spur for the region's tourism and economic growth. These hotels make use of Kangra's rich cultural heritage to become more than just places to stay; they become destinations unto themselves, luring visitors from all over the world who are looking for real experiences and immersive encounters. The flood of tourists not only boosts the local economy but also encourages a greater understanding of Kangra's rich cultural legacy, which is a legacy that endures and touches everyone who sets foot on its sacred grounds.

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