

An Analysis of Youth's Role in Preservation and Change of Traditions in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Himachal Pradesh, a wonderland located in the Western Himalayas is a state of beautiful landscapes, mighty rivers, holy shrines and is also known as 'land of the Gods' has historic as well as cultural significance. With a population of 7.56 million or 75.5 lakh people, youth contributes the most. The study investigates the holistic role of youth in Himachal Pradesh as custodians of cultural change. This change is set against the backdrop of rapid urbanisation, modernisation and the universal influence of social media. It also effect the traditional socio-cultural fabric of the state and faces significant challenges. The primary object of this research is to critically analyse how the younger generation navigates the complex relationship between preserving their inherited traditions and adapting them to the contemporary world. The study employs a qualitative and ethnographic approach by utilising related literature of Himachal Pradesh that examines the cultural domain, including indigenous script/languages such as tankri, kharoshti, dogri, brahami, and folk music/theatre like naati, jhoori/karyala, banthana and dhaja. Simultaneously, it highlights the rituals of the state and traditional attire of the people with local practices. The result of the study unveils a dual role played by youth, one side they act as a preserver by leveraging modern tools such as social media platforms used to promote the folk culture of Himachal and on the other side they can act as a changer, consciously or unconsciously modifying traditions. It means the youth of Himachal Pradesh are not mere spectators rather as an active agent in the process of cultural change.

Key Words: Youth, Tradition, Cultural Change, Folk Culture.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Himachal Pradesh, often called the Dev Bhumi or 'Land of Gods', is a hilly state situated in the western Himalayas. It is renowned for its beautiful landscapes, serene hill stations, mighty rivers and rich spiritual heritage. The people of Himachal are simple, warm and hospitable, mainly belongs to various hill communities, each reflects its unique culture. The culture and traditions of Himachal Pradesh is refreshing, lively and diverse as its landscapes. Rooted in its harsh yet beautiful mountainous environment, its culture is a mixture of ancient customs, colorful festivals, folklores and deep spirituality. "The state is known for its scenic beauty in the western Himalayas, with snow-capped mountains, deep gorges, forested valleys, lakes, and streams. Shimla, the state capital, served as the summer headquarters for British viceroys before India's independence" (Bhardwaj et al). At the time of India's independence, Himachal Pradesh was not a full-fledged state but is a Chief Commissioner's Province, including small princely hill-states. The state faced an immense struggle caused by its rough geography as there were very few roads and least connectivity; people were used to live in isolations. Villages were connected by narrow footpaths and journeys that take hours today could take days at that time. Due to this, culture in this period was localised, protected and deeply rooted. The lives of people revolved around the village and society was stratified, and traditions or customs were strictly followed. Every region had its own rich tradition of music like Jhanjhoti, Jhoori, and dance - Naati, and oral-folklore.

The relation of folklore with Himachal is as old as human civilisation. "Folklore is the study of survivals of primitive customs, old beliefs, traditions and art still practised and found among the races of antiquity and the backward, uneducated, semi-educated people living in today's modern and civilized world (Koul and Indian Institute of Advanced Study 3071). The folklore of Himachal includes songs, drama, literature, scriptures, dance forms etcetera. Primarily, folk theatre such as Karyala, Barlaaj, Dhaja, Banthana etcetera are the sources which conveys the direct message of the society to the society and with crucial cultural importance. "Folk theatre in Himachal Pradesh is an art form that has played an integral and significant role in the social and cultural life of the state" ("Folk Drama (Theatre) of Himachal

Pradesh”). The folk genres are the cultural domain of state. Foremost, the culture of any civilisation or area is represented through its native people. “The history and culture of Himachal Pradesh traces back to the dawn of human civilization. Various tribes such as the Koilis, Halis, Dagis, Dhaugris, Dasa, Khasas, Kinnars and Kirats inhabited the region in the early periods” (Sharma e268). The sources of this information are also inscribed in the ancient texts like *Mahabharata* and *Puranas*. This shows that these tribal people were the native inhabitants of the state, which means that the culture and traditions of Himachal is framed by these tribes of the area. Further with the passage of time it moves among generations to generations. They passed their knowledge, customs, rituals for the upcoming genes. Their lives was and is influenced by local deities (Devatas and Devis), village fairs (Melas), and various agricultural festivals. These were not just the religious events but critical social gatherings. In such gatherings of people, they used to share valuable knowledge linked with their culture.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF HIMACHAL’S CULTURE:

“Culture is the complex whole that includes knowledge, art, law, morals, customs, belief and any other capabilities and habits acquired by human as members of society” (Team). It indicates that culture is the shared set of learned behaviours, values and ideas that characterise a society or a group of people. In Himachali’s context, cultural value has a very significant and fundamental role. People of this state wear unique traditional attire like the Pahari Topi (cap) and warm woollen Pattu or Chola (robe), which are practical for the cold climate. The famous Kulluvi Shawl is a prime example of culture meeting necessity. Such cultural representation is seen in fairs and festivals like Kullu’s Dussehra, Lahaul’s Phulaich festival and Shivratri in Mandi which are not just religious events but also has cultural significance. The massive social gatherings that reinforce community ties, resolve disputes, and facilitate trade. For instance, Rampur’s Lavi is a meeting of hundreds of local traders from across the valley, symbolising a unique cultural and social unity. The trade in the fairs also highlights the vibrant art culture of unique handicrafts that provide livelihoods for many artisans. This includes Kullu Shawls, Kangra Miniature Paintings, Chamba Rumals (embroidered handkerchiefs), Kinnauri Shawls and metal wares. These are not just products, they are cultural artefacts of high demand.

But, with the passage of time and modernisation the cultural value of Himachal Pradesh is continuously changing. As Desk and Panwar in *Himachal’s Cultural Crossroads* (2025) says, “Incidents of the past few years highlight a shift in the social and cultural milieu of Himachal Pradesh.” The state’s rich traditions, from folk to age-old rituals and festivals, are being reshaped by the external forces of modernisation and digital connectivity. “According to modernization theory, the adoption of modern practices and the dismantling of traditional norms are vital to progress” (Simply Psychology). This consequent progress in culture raises a serious concern whether technological, economical, or social this is a primary driver of cultural change. This unavoidably increases serious distresses about cultural erosion and the commodification of traditions, as seen in the weakening of community bonds and shifts in lifestyles. “Cultural change happens when a society’s way of life – its customs, traditions, and social norms – evolves. This can be a slow process, taking years or even generations, or it can happen quickly, due to significant events or technological advances” (Cultural Change). However, this change can also be viewed as natural cultural adaptation, leading to empowerment and new, syncretic forms of expression. The central concern is therefore not whether change occurs, but managing its pace and ensuring it is a conscious evolution that preserves core heritage.

The shift in Himachal’s cultural heritage is not rapid but is a slow and powerful process mainly influenced by technological advancement. It changes the way of representation of state’s tradition and folklore. “The rapid digitalization in India over the past decade has profoundly impacted various aspects of life, significantly altering the socio-economic landscape, especially in rural communities” (More and Mohanrao Patangrao Patil Mahavidyalaya 444). For example, Himachal is considered as rural state with nearly 90% of its population living in the rural areas. Before digitalisation and the pervasive influence of social media, the culture of Himachal Pradesh was deeply rooted in its geography, social life and slow-paced agrarian rhythm. It was enriched cultural experience which was transmitted in person, through oral traditions, shared labour and intimate community participation. News, stories and folklore travelled through word of mouth. Elders were the living libraries, passing down histories, moral tales and knowledge of local herbs and agriculture to the younger generations. But unfortunately, in today’s world YouTube, Facebook and other social media platforms have taken their place. The old oral literature is now being replaced by standardised and globalised content. This advancement leads to the loss of local dialects and also with the dominance of Hindi and English language in every walks of lives, younger generations are increasingly conversing in these languages. Many ancient Pahari languages/scripts like tankri, kharoshti, dogri, brahami are now endangered, as they are not seen as useful for getting ahead in a contemporary digital world. The term *Pahari language* “refers to a group of Indo-Aryan languages spoken across the Himalayan belt — from eastern Nepal through the Indian states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and into parts of Pakistan. The word ‘Pahari’ comes from ‘Pahar’, meaning mountain — reflecting the rugged, isolated regions where these languages evolved” (“The Decline of Oral Pahari Languages of Himachal Pradesh”). Being located in the Western side of the Himalayas, “Languages under this group include Mandeali,

Mahasuvi, Kullui, Sirmauri, Bilaspuri, Kangri, Chambeali, Bhattiyali, Gaddi, and others were originally written in Tankri Script” (Desk). Tankri is the script used to read and write these languages and dialects. The evidence of these languages are mainly found in stone inscriptions and “written in various scripts such as Sharda, Kharoshti, Brahmi, Tankri, Kutila, nagari, Bhotia or Tibetan and Sidhamatrika. The Chamba region of Himachal Pradesh is richest of all epigraphical remains beginning from 6th century A.D. down to the 19th century” (“Web Notes on Archaeological Sources”). These scripts hold the most cultural and traditional values which highlights the ancient history of the Indian sub-continent along with the history of Himachal Pradesh. From these scripts and languages, one can navigate the historic journey of any folklore. In the contemporary world such scripts and languages are being replaced with Devnagiri script which is widely used by the Hindi speaking community. It means these ancient scripts and languages are in danger of extinction. As Saxena et al. argues, “Himachal Pradesh, a state in India, has topped the list with seven definitely endangered languages, and Kinnauri-Pahari being the one” (123 1). When a language fades, the unique culture, traditions and literature rooted within it also fade.

For instance, the traditional dances like Nati or festival dance are now often performed for social media. The context shifts from a sacred or communal participation to a performance for external validation. The authentic, spontaneous joy is lost and replaced by a curated, frequently simplified version designed for mass consumption. Himachal who is famous for its handicraft and local artefacts materials, now online shopping websites like Amazon, Flipkart etcetera has replaced them. They have also created pressure for mass production, cheaper materials and designs that appeal the global audience rather than local traditions. For example, the deep significance of Chamba Rumal is reduced to a pretty, vintage-style handkerchief in an online listing. This digitalisation will not only affect the cultural and traditional significance of the state but also impacts its agriculture, education system, socio-political and economical aspects.

This phenomenon is better understood by the literary theory of cultural materialism. This theory insists that culture cannot be separated from its material and economic conditions. It provides a window to understand why youth are driven to change or preserve traditions. “Cultural Materialism is a research methodology that highlights the primacy of the material world in shaping human culture and society. According to this theory, changes in material conditions—such as those caused by the environment, technology, or modes of production—drive cultural evolution” (Ember and Ember). Therefore, in Himachal the change in culture is also reflected through its materials. Over the time, materials which were used decades ago have no significance now. The technology like 2G or Telegraph has no existence today. This advancement can impact the folk culture of any region. With the emergence of technological advancement, the folklore of the Himachal also adopts accordingly. For instance, artist of folk theatres such as Karyala, Barlaj and Dhaja uses no modern props decades ago but at present they rely on technology and gadgets. It indicates that technology is slowly fading away the true essence of folk theatres and people barely watches them live rather see them performing online on social media. As Manoj Thakur in *Rejuvenating Karayala: An Endangered Folk Theatrical Form of Himachal Pradesh* (2021) argues that “A shift from past till present easily communicates that the form is losing its base very swiftly, media and technology have contributed helping hand in this” (33). Although Thakur stresses on the present condition of Karyala but author also give glimpses of other nine forms of folk theatre of the state which are now facing extinction due to modernisation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This research paper is oriented around the collection and critical interrogation of qualitative data, situating its inquiry within the rich socio-cultural landscape of Himachal Pradesh. The research includes a systematic analysis of indigenous texts, research paper and articles describing folkloric traditions. The primary objective is to elucidate the complex relationship between youth and their role in the preservation and change of traditions in the state. Subsequently, it also engages a critical analysis of this compiled data seeks to deconstruct the underlying power structures, symbolic representations and lively interaction between tradition and modernity. Furthermore, this study follows the guidelines of MLA 9th edition ensuring academic consistency and citation integrity.

4. YOUTH’S PART IN THE PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONS:

Youth plays an important role in India, forming the backbone of the nation’s present scenario and has future potential to do anything. Being a country with one of the youngest populations in the world, this vast reservoir of energy, innovation and adaptability is its greatest asset. From driving technological adoption and leading start-ups ecosystems to championing social change and environmental sustainability, young Indians are at the forefront of national progress. With no exceptions Himachal’s youth has fresh perspectives and digital knowledge which is crucial for solving complex challenges, while their ability to connect traditional values with a global perspective ensures that Himachal’s growth is both rooted in culture and tradition. “The term youth is derived from the Old English word ‘juwþ’ or ‘geogub,’ which referred to the state or quality of being young. This Old English root is related to words in other Germanic languages

that denote youth or young people” (DefinitionGo.com). These young people contribute in almost every sector of life. In each field they show their culture and traditions directly or indirectly.

Furthermore, being young also means more energy and this energy has to be channelized for a better cause. This vibrant energy of youth is not just an asset but a vital force for the cultural preservation of Himachal Pradesh. Younger generation possess a vigorous and innovative spirit which is full of energy required to undertake the meaningful work of safeguarding a tradition. This potent force must be strategically guided to link the gap between the old and the new. By empowering the younger generation with digital tools, they can document ancient folk lore, record the techniques of Pahari miniature painting online, and use social media to generate and show case global interest in festivals like Kullu’s Dussehra. Their entrepreneurial drive can preserve traditional crafts like Kullu shawl weaving into sustainable projects and develop community-based tourism that celebrates authentic local culture. Their first and most vital task is to move from being passive inheritors to active learners. This means consciously seeking knowledge from the living libraries like their grandparents and elders. As Margaret Mead rightly stated, “Connections between generations are essential for the mental health and stability of a nation” (Rubin). This stability comes through by recording and maintaining folklore of the state, documenting the stories behind regional festivals or to preserve rituals of the Devta system, and understanding the ecological wisdom embedded in Himachal’s traditions. This is not about nostalgia or for anybody else it is about understanding the tradition.

Equipped with this understanding, the young Himachalis must become self-motivated storytellers. The youth can build a digital and personal library to maintain this. With the use of tools of their time they can influence social media not just for entertainment but for cultural protection. Just like a popular Instagram reel teaching the steps of Nati, a YouTube documentary on a fading craft like Chamba Rumal embroidery, or a Facebook story explaining the significance of a local fair can have a monumental impact. Therefore, youth can use technology to create digital museums, online dictionaries of the Pahari scriptures and language or has virtual tours of heritage sites. In doing so, they fit in the proverb, “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots” (Marcus Garvey). Indeed, it declares that people’s knowledge of their history, tradition, origin and culture acts as an essential fact. It acts as a root system which provides cultural identity, stability and nourishment of tradition. Just as roots supports a tree against storms and famine, similarly a connection to the past tradition offers resilience in times of change and access to ancestral knowledge and values. Without these cultural roots, a people become like a rootless tree that is precarious, unable to thrive and ultimately doomed to decline.

5. ROLE OF YOUTH IN CHANGING TRADITIONS OF HIMACHAL PRADESH:

Culture is the living identity of a state, describing its history, traditions and people. It is not a static relic but a multidimensional force which is constantly changing. This change is fuelled by new generations, technological advancements and interactions with other cultures. Thus, while its core spirit may endure, its expressions and practices are in a continuous, beautiful state of flux. In this situation, the youth of Himachal Pradesh are not merely passive inheritors of tradition rather they are its active curators and modern interpreters. Their role in changing tradition is not one of deletion, but of thoughtful evolution, ensuring that the historic cultural values of Himachal Pradesh remain vibrant and relevant in the modern world. As the writer James Baldwin quoted, “History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history” (James Baldwin Quote). In this context, youth have to embody this truth and carry their historic cultural values to the future not as a burden, but as a foundation for modernisation. In modern world, digital technology becomes their primary instrument for this transformation. It also causes loss of many traditional practices and traditional attires. Especially young generation is the victim of Western culture influence and gradually they are shifting towards that way and forgetting their heritage. Furthermore, the youth are instigating a crucial shift by re-interpreting traditions through the lenses of environmental sustainability and gender equality. They are questioning and adapting practices that may be ecologically damaging or socially restrictive. For example, the sacrifice of animals for the sake of a Deity is now prohibited in Himachal. This is not an outright rejection of culture but a conscious effort to align it with societal values. The younger generation also advocates for sustainable tourism over unchecked commercial development in ecologically fragile areas is a modern interpretation of the Himachal’s principle of living in harmony with nature. In doing so, they are embracing the wisdom of George Bernard Shaw, who said, “Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything” (“Progress Through Change”). Thus, they are changing tradition to protect the very land that gave birth to it and the role of Himachal’s youth is to be the authors of a new chapter in its cultural story, not the editors of the old one. They are adding new verses to the ancient songs, combining traditional melodies with modern rhythms. This lively process ensures that Himachal’s culture does not become a museum exhibit which is frozen in time, however can remain a living conscious force. By honouring the spirit of their heritage while fearlessly shaping its form, the youth guarantee that the soul of the mountains continues to beat strongly in the hearts of future generations, proving that the most profound way to preserve a tradition is sometimes to have the courage to change it.

6. CONCLUSION:

Hence, the journey of Himachal Pradesh from a struggling, inaccessible region to a developing state is a remarkable story. It includes many changes but most significant is the cultural change. This change was not a simple replacement of the old by the new, but a complex negotiation. The youth, empowered by education and connectivity, played a critical dual role. They are the leaders of modernity, one side they are embracing progress and new opportunities and simultaneously, another side acting as cultural custodians. They used every tool of modernity such as education, technology and have a global perspective to ignite a revival and ensure that the soul of the Himachal Pradesh was not lost in its race towards the future. By the early 2000s, the Himachalis' (native of Himachal) identity was no longer just about tradition in fact it was an enthusiastic synthesis of its rich heritage and a confident progressive outlook. By becoming these modern-day custodians, the youth ensure that Himachal's culture and tradition is not out-dated but still it is in fashion. Youngsters nowadays are embracing folk culture of the state, research is going on and also new scopes are emerging in this area. At last, to protect the culture of the state it is not only the duty of the young generations rather every group and community should try to preserve the tradition and culture of Himachal Pradesh so that it continues to define the identity of its people for generations to generations.

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