
**FOLK TRADITIONS OF THE SHIMLA HILLS: IDENTITY,
RELEVANCE, AND TRANSITION IN THE INDIAN SCENARIO**

***Uma Thakur, Prof. Dr. Ashwani Sharma, Dr. Neelam Sharma**

APG Shimla University.

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***Corresponding Author: Uma Thakur**

APG Shimla University.

Doi: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijarp.6486>**ABSTRACT**

Folk traditions serve as the backbone of cultural identity in the Himalayan region, particularly in the Shimla Hills and surrounding districts such as Sirmaur, Solan, Mandi, and Kinnaur. These traditions expressed through folksongs, deity systems, festivals, rituals, dialects, food habits, and wooden architecture preserve centuries-old memories of the communities living in the mountains. However, the rise of digital technologies and social media has created a complex space where preservation and transformation simultaneously take place. This paper examines the identity, relevance, and transition of Himalayan folk traditions in the contemporary Indian context, focusing on the cultural fabric of the Shimla Hills. It integrates ethnographic insights, qualitative interviews with Himachali writers, cultural literature, and policy frameworks, including the Himachal Pradesh Cultural Policy (2021). By drawing upon classical villages such as Kotkhai, Kumarsain, Kotgarh, Rohru, Chopal, Theog, Giripar (Sirmaur), Churah and Balh (Mandi), Bhagat (Solan), and Kinnaur, the study illuminates how folk traditions continue to define identity while undergoing significant change due to migration, education, economic shifts, and the influence of digital media. The paper highlights the dual role of social media as a preserver and disruptor and provides insights into how communities negotiate tradition and modernity in a rapidly changing socio-cultural environment.

KEYWORDS: Himalayan folk traditions, Shimla Hills, deity worship, social media, cultural identity, Himachal Pradesh, folksongs, festivals, cultural transition, digital influence.

1. INTRODUCTION

India is a land defined by its folk traditions. Every region, community, and linguistic group has

created its own system of rituals, art, music, festivals, and beliefs that express its unique identity. Among all these regions, the Himalayan belt stands out because its cultural traditions evolved in isolation, surrounded by forests, rivers, and high mountains. The people developed strong community bonds, deep respect for nature, and a devotional relationship with their local deities (devtas).

The Shimla Hills and surrounding districts Sirmour, Solan, Mandi, and Kinnaur are especially rich in folk traditions. Despite modernization, road connectivity, urban migration, and the growth of digital technology, local people continue to practice ancient customs, worship village gods, celebrate traditional fairs, and sing folk songs during marriages and rituals.

However, these traditions are now passing through a transition. Younger generations, influenced by social media, education, and global exposure, sometimes move away from folk practices, while others use digital platforms to preserve and promote their heritage. This complexity forms the basis of the present research.

2. The Himalayan Folk Landscape: People, Environment, and Culture

The geographical setting of the Shimla Hills has formed the foundation of its folk culture. Surrounded by dense deodar forests, snow-clad ranges, terraced fields, rivers like Pabbar and Giri, and remote valleys such as Dodra-Kawar, Churah, Balh, and Kinnaur, people developed traditions closely connected to nature.

Mountain life and community bonds

Life in the mountains has always been collective. Villagers depended on each other for agriculture, livestock, forestry, and protection. Community participation became a part of every cultural act from house building to harvest, from festivals to temple ceremonies.

Environmental influence on folk culture

Folk songs are filled with references to forests, rivers, birds, crops, mountains, and weather cycles.

Local deities are mostly nature based associated with forests, rain, crops, animals, and protection.

Traditional wooden architecture (Kath-Kuni) was designed to withstand cold climate and earthquakes, and this method became a cultural signature. Thus, geography created a cultural identity that remains alive even today.

3. Folk Identity in the Shimla Hills: Continuity, Community, and Local Knowledge

Identity in the Shimla region comes from:

☐

Pahari Dialects (Kangri, Sirmauri, Kinnauri, Mhasuvi, Mandya etc.)

☐

Deity system

☐

Festivals and fairs

☐

Folk songs for every life event

☐

Traditional food

☐

Wooden architecture

☐

Rituals during birth, marriage, and death

☐

Oral history and storytelling

These elements are not simply cultural activities they are markers of belonging. People identify themselves through their devta, clan, region, and village.

4. Dialects of the Himalayas: Identity Through Language

Dialect is the first identity marker of any folk culture. The Shimla region speaks variations of Western Pahari, including:

☐

Upper/Lower Shimla dialect (Mhasuvi/Kiunthli

☐

Sirmauri

☐

Mandya

☐

Baghati (Solan)

☐

Kinnauri dialect etc.

Each dialect carries centuries of oral memory. Folk songs, proverbs, and stories are stored in

these dialects.

Dr. Gautam Sharma Vyathit, in his essay argues that the demand for a unified Himachali language is culturally justified because all Pahari dialects share similar roots.

Social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram reels have unexpectedly revived interest in local dialects. Many youth now create content in Pahari dialects. This creates a new form of digital folk identity.

5. The Deity System: The Spiritual Backbone of Folk Life

One of the most unique aspects of Himalayan folk culture is the living deity system. Deities (devtas) such as Mahasu Devta, Hateshwari Mata, Bhimakali Mata, Sarahan and several local gods rule village life. Their temples are centers of justice, community decisions, and cultural activities.

Deity as protector and guide

People believe that the devta protects crops, brings rain, cures illness, and ensures harmony. Every village has:

☐

A temple (devta's dewara)

☐

A "gur" (oracle)

☐

A "kardaar" (administrative head)

☐

Traditional musicians (bajantaris)

☐

Festivals connected with deities

☐

Bhundaat Delgav (Jan 2025)

☐

Thoda Mela-Manan, Shilaru Tehsil Theog, Narkanda etc.

☐

Bishu Mela, Manan, Shillaru,

☐

Thirshu-Mailan, Batari, Loshta, Kotgarh

☐

Budi Diwali (Mailan, Kotgarh, Nirman region)

□

Devta yatra in Kumarsain, Kotkhai, and Chopal

□

Mahasu Devta fairs

□

Kinnaur tribal festivals (Fulaich, Sazo, Losar)

These events strengthen cultural unity and express folk spirituality.

6. Folk Songs: Oral Memory of the Himalayas

Folk songs are living libraries of culture. They include:

a. Dash songs

Sung during harvest, festivals, and joyful moments.

b. Anchari songs

Devotional songs sung in presence of deities and in Shivratri Festival in upper Shimla

c. Laahne (marriage songs)

Performed by women during marriage rituals.

d. Katsani songs

Connected to deity processions.

e. Laman/Jhurri: Traditional songs sung during harvest, pain and happiness.

f. Pahar dance songs

These songs express:

□

Love and separation

□

Agriculture

□

Pain and happiness

□

Seasonal cycles

□

Humor and wisdom

7. Folk Festivals and Rituals: Community and Continuity

Festivals in the Shimla Hills reflect agricultural calendars and deity traditions. Major events

include:

☐

Bisu/Bishu/Thirshu —Traditional deity festival

☐

Sazo and Losar —Kinnaur new year

☐

Budi Diwali —ancient festival

☐

Pathar-Ka-Khel —traditional games

☐

Thoda archery festival —martial folk sport

Birth and death rituals

☐

Use of folk songs to welcome newborns.

☐

Ritual purity rules.

☐

Community mourning and collective support.

Marriage traditions

☐

Traditionally simpler rituals.

☐

In some remote regions like Giripar (Sirmaur), polyandry was practiced

☐

Traditional dhol-nagara, and local customs still remain.

These customs represent cultural continuity.

8. Wooden Architecture (Kath-Kuni): Culture in Structure

The Kath-Kuni style uses wood and stone to create earthquake-resistant houses. Villages like kotkhai, Jubbal, Rohru, Chopal, Kotgarh, Kumarsain, and Kinnaur area still preserve this style. Temples such as Hatu Mata (Narkanda), Mahasu temples etc. and Kinnaur temples follow this method. Architecture here is more than design, it is identity.

9. Traditional Food Culture

Food reflects geography and climate.

Traditional dishes include:

☐

Siddu

☐

Patande

☐

Sepubadi

☐

Pkeen

☐

Childu

☐

Kodra/ogladishes

☐

Mittha

Madra

Food practices express community identity and hospitality.

10. Social Media and Folk Culture: A Dual Impact

Positive Impact

☐

Revival of dialects

☐

Digital archives of folk songs

☐

Awareness about local festivals

☐

NGO efforts like

☐

Negative Impact

☐

Replacement of folk music with reels

☐

Erosion of Traditional Culture

☐

Loss of ritual depth

☐

Privacy and cyber safety concerns among youth.

☐

Spread of fake news influencing cultural beliefs.

This dual role is important to note.

11. Qualitative Data Analysis

Writers and scholars expressed:

☐

Social media is breaking community bonds.

☐

Youth detach from rituals.

☐

Yet digital platforms also save rare folk songs.

☐

Deity culture faces both revival and distortion.

☐

Mandi, Solan, Sirmour, Kangra, Kinnaur, Shimla, Chambawriters emphasize emotional loss in culture due to digital addiction.

This section reflects real voices from the region.

12. Cultural Transition in the Digital Era

Folk traditions are not disappearing they are changing.

Communities negotiate between old and new lifestyles.

Digital exposure brings pride as well as confusion.

Women, youth, writers, and elders view transition differently.

The key is balanced adaptation.

13. Policy Framework: Himachal Pradesh Cultural Policy 2021

The policy emphasizes:

☐

Preservation of manuscripts

☐

Protection of temples and traditional arts

☐

Digitization of cultural heritage

☐

Promotion of local dialects

☐

Encouragement of community festivals

☐

This supports cultural continuity.

1. Literature Review

Himalayan folk traditions have attracted scholars for decades, particularly because of their unique deity system, rituals, and oral traditions. Dr. Gautam Sharma Vyathit emphasized that Western Pahari culture evolved in ecological isolation, which helped preserve ancient customs. Dr. Surender Sharma documented how folk songs reflect collective memory and agricultural life. S. R. Hannot discussed identity formation through rituals and local festivals. Many writers from Mandi, Shimla, Solan, Kangra, Chamba, Kullu, Kinnaur and Sirmaur have also contributed to the field. M. R. Thakur, Sudarshan Vashishth, Dr. Om Prakash Sharma, Dr. Surat Thakur, Varinder Sharma 'Veer', Ashok Dard, Anant Alok, Nagender Sharma, Dharampal Bhardwaj, Kalpna Gangta etc., whose writings highlight the connection between rural life and devotional tradition. The Himachal Pradesh Cultural Policy (2021) stresses digital preservation and documentation but also warns of cultural dilution. However, despite substantial literature, a combined study focused on the Shimla Hills and surrounding districts examining is limited. This research fills that gap.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

To evaluate the identity, relevance, and transition of folk traditions in the Shimla Hills within the context of contemporary cultural changes, especially in the digital era.

Objectives

1. To document the folk traditions of Shimla, Mandi, Solan, Sirmaur, and Kinnaur districts.
2. To analyze the role of folk songs, deity systems, festivals, and dialects in shaping cultural identity.
3. To study the influence of social media and digital platforms on local traditions.
4. To understand community perceptions through qualitative interviews of Himachali writers and elders.

5.To examine cultural transitions caused by education, migration, globalization, and digital exposure.

6.To identify threats to folk culture and suggest preservation strategies.

3.Hypothesis

1.H1: Social media has significantly influenced folk traditions in the Shimla Hills, causing both preservation and distortion.

2.H2: The deity system and folk festivals remain strong markers of identity despite modern changes.

3.H3: Young generation experiences cultural conflict due to exposure to digital content.

4.H4: Documentation and digital archiving can help revive endangered songs, dialects, and rituals.

4.Scope of the Study

□

Covers districts: Shimla, Solan, Sirmaur, Mandi and Kinnaur.

□

Includes villages: Kotkhai, Jubbal, Kumarsain, Kotgarh, Rohru, Chopal, Theog, Giripar (Sirmaur), Churah, Balh (Mandi), Bhagat (Solan), and villages in Kinnaur area.

□

Focus areas: folk songs, deity worship, festivals, wooden architecture, food habits, rituals, dialects, oral narratives, modern influences.

□

Timeframe: Festivals and events upto 2025, including Bhunda (Delgav), Budi Diwali (Kotgarh/Nirmand), Thoda (Theog), and recent social media trends.

□

5.Significance of the Study

□

Helps preserve endangered folk traditions.

□

Provides authentic documentation for academic, cultural, and policy use.

□

Highlights social media's dual role in preservation and erosion.

Offers insights for government, NGOs, and cultural organizations.

□

Adds original field-based data through interviews.

□

Contributes to Himalayan cultural studies and identity discourse.

6. Gap in the Study

Existing studies have covered:

□

Folk songs (scattered documentation)

□

Deity system (mostly temple focused)

□

Festivals (historical description)

□

Digital impact (general youth studies)

□

But no integrated research combines all cultural aspects with social media impact, especially using:

□

Field interviews of Himachal scholars

□

Deity festivals as living cultural institutions

□

District-wise comparison

This present study fills these gaps with a holistic and updated approach.

7. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Mixed-method approach (qualitative + quantitative).

Primary Data

□

25 interviews (Google Meet/telephonic) with writers, elders, temple officials, musicians, and youth.

☐

Observations from field visits (Kotkhai, Rohru, Jubbal, Chopal, Dodra Kwar, Nirmand, Kotgarh, Kumarsain, Theog, Rampur etc.).

☐

Documentation of festivals (e.g., Bhunda 2025).

☐

Secondary Data

☐

Books, journals, theses, cultural reports.

☐

Himachal Pradesh Cultural Policy (2021).

☐

Online reels, blogs, folk channels, and YouTube recordings.

Sampling

Purposive sampling of knowledgeable respondents.

Data Analysis Tools

☐

Thematic analysis for interviews

☐

Content analysis for folk songs and rituals.

☐

Comparative analysis for pre-digital and digital cultural practices.

☐

Simple statistical charts for youth digital habits.

☐

8. Tools of Data Collection

1. Interviews (semi-structured)

2. Questionnaires for youth (Google Form)

3. Field observation diary

4. Audio-video documentation

5. Photography of temples, fairs, rituals

6. Archival material (books, manuscripts)

9. Findings of the Study

9.1 Cultural Continuity

□

Deity system remains central to village identity.

□

Wooden temples and ritual traditions are preserved.

□

Folk songs (Dashi, Anchari, Laahnee, Lamman/Jhurri, etc.) continue in marriages and festivals.

9.2 Cultural Change

□

Marriage rituals are shortened.

□

Youth prefer Punjabi/Hindi DJ music over folk.

□

Some rituals are performed symbolically rather than traditionally.

□

Migration reduces community participation in festivals.

9.3 Social Media Influence

□

Positive: digital revival; Pahar content creator emerging.

□

Negative: Erosion of Traditional Culture, loss of depth, copying trends, misinformation, privacy abuse.

□

Temples streaming live rituals increases accessibility.

9.4 People's Perception

Interviews reveal:

□

Elders: "Culture is in danger of erosion."

□

Youth: "Digital platforms help us learn lost traditions."

□

Writers: "Changes are natural but documentation is urgent."

SuggestedMapforPaper(textdescription)

Map

Title: Folk Traditions and Cultural Geography of Shimla Hills.

The map would show the five districts (Shimla,Sirmaur, Mandi, Kinnaur) with marked locationsofimportantfolksites:

☐

Mailan,Kotgarh/Nirmand(BuddiDiwali)

☐

Kumarsain(Deityprocessions)

☐

GiriparSirmaur(polyandrycase2025)

☐

Churah(folksongs)

☐

Kinnaur(Fulaich,Losar)

Table1:ImpactofSocialMediaonFolkPractices

Cultural Aspect

Positive Impact

Negative Impact

Folk Songs

Digital revival

Replacement by DJ music

Cultural Aspect

Positive Impact

Negative Impact

Festivals

Wider visibility

Ritual dilution

Dialects

Revivalvia reels

Mixed-language distortion

Deity Culture

Online darshan

Misrepresentation

Youth Identity

Pride in culture

Cultural confusion

10. Suggestions

1. Establish

2. Introduce folk culture in school curriculum.

3. Government grants for documenting endangered songs.

4. Regulation of misleading deity-related content.

5. Encourage local artists through cultural festivals.

6. Community-driven preservation groups.

7. Promote NGOs like Himvani and Dev Bhumi Himkla Manch to document and publicize culture.

11. CONCLUSION

The folk traditions of the Shimla Hills are rich, diverse, emotionally rooted, and spiritually powerful. Despite modernization and the growing dominance of digital media, communities continue to practice their rituals, worship deities, celebrate festivals, and sing ancestral songs.

Yet culture is shifting, reshaping itself with new influences. Social media has become a double-edged sword—preserving and diluting tradition at the same time.

This research confirms that identity remains strong, traditions remain relevant, and transition is natural. The responsibility now lies with academic institutions, government bodies, NGOs, youth, and digital creators to maintain cultural balance and ensure that Himalayan heritage continues to thrive for future generations.

Folk traditions of the Shimla Hills represent identity, belonging, and emotional security. Even though social media and modern influences challenge traditional structures, the essence of culture survives through people's collective memory, devotion, and pride. Villages continue to celebrate festivals, worship deities, and sing folk songs. Digital tools have become both protectors and disruptors. The future depends on conscious effort by communities, writers, researchers, and youth to maintain balance between tradition and transition.

Himalayan culture is not fading; it is transforming.

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