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The Vibrant Culture of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Himachal Pradesh, located in northern India, constitutes a fascinating part of the magnificent and mighty mountain ranges on the globe - the Himalayas. An anonymous writer eloquently describes Himachal Pradesh in poetic words - eternal snows, lush green forests, singing streams, dancing birds, lovely lakes, verdant valleys, emerald meadows, smiling glaciers, and gay girls. Its natural beauty is breathtaking, ranging from perpetual snow to vibrant green forests, flowing streams, diverse birdlife, enchanting lakes, fertile valleys, lush meadows, sparkling glaciers, and vibrant flora and fauna. Himachal Pradesh, which means 'land of snowy mountains' and 'abode of snow' is home to ancient forests, high-altitude lakes, and deserts, and has been a sacred place for saints and sages for ages. The cultural diversity of Himachal Pradesh is ancient and multifaceted, with roots dating back to the Vedic era, and has remained unbroken to the present day. The state's deep spiritual foundation has kept the cultural continuity intact, reflecting the daily lives of the local people in their varied religions, languages, and regions. The people of Himachal Pradesh are renowned for their distinctive attire, charming physical features, warm and friendly nature, and simplicity, all of which are integral parts of their beautiful culture. The long standing fate of such lovely people has led to the preservation of their centuries old culture and traditions. This research paper highlights the vibrant culture and traditions of Himachal Pradesh and suggests ways to preserve this rich heritage for generations to come.

Keywords - Primeval, Culture, Civilization, Multilingual, Customs, Manners, Art, Architecture, Folk, Preservation.

1. An Overview: Himachal Pradesh, located in the Western Himalayas, is often referred to as Dev Bhumi, or 'Land of the Gods and Demigods.' The state is primarily mountainous, with elevations ranging from 350 to 7,000 meters above sea level. During the Colonial Rule, Shimla served as the capital of India, later becoming the capital of Punjab, and eventually the capital of Himachal Pradesh after the state achieved statehood. According to the latest census, approximately 95% of the population in Himachal Pradesh are Hindus, with Muslims making up about 2% and Christians less than 1%. In some regions, the Buddhist population is in the majority due to the state's proximity to Tibet. The main Hindu communities include Brahmins, Rajputs, Kanners, Rathis, and Kolis. Additionally, Himachal Pradesh has a tribal population that includes Gaddis, Kinnauris, Gujjars, Pangawals, Lahaulis etc. The primary means of livelihood for the people are agriculture and horticulture. The state's culture is reflected in the languages spoken, with Hindi being the state language and various Pahari dialects being widely spoken. Hinduism is the dominant religion in the state, and music and dance play an important role in its art and culture. Fairs and festivals are also significant aspects of Himachal Pradesh's cultural traditions. The state is renowned for its world-famous handicrafts. Despite the rapid growth and modernization of the state, its people have a strong respect for their cultural identity and rich traditions. This research paper provides a detailed exploration of the diverse facets of Himachal Pradesh's culture and traditions.

2. Objective: Culture plays a significant role in shaping the growth and response of a society. It is the learned and shared behavior of a group of people and is passed down through generations. The culture of Himachal Pradesh is a perfect example of this. It is evident not only in the clothing of its people but also in their festivals, music, folk songs, dance forms, and lifestyle. Himachal Pradesh is known for its unique arts and handicrafts, which are an essential part of its culture. The people of the state lead a simple life and find joy in celebrating every day. Their hospitable nature is reflected in everything they do, and they take pride in their ethnicity and traditions. This deep-rooted love and affection towards their culture is what keeps them connected to their roots, even when they reside away from their homeland. The aim of this paper is to enhance our understanding of the culture and traditions of Himachal Pradesh and to highlight the unique aspects of the culture of this beautiful land, also known as Dev Bhumi, to the world.

3. Historical Background: The history and culture of Himachal Pradesh traces back to the dawn of human civilization. Various tribes such as the Koilis, Halis, Daxis, Dhaugris, Dasa, Khasas, Kinnars and Kirats inhabited the region in the early periods. The *Mahabharata* and Panini mention the significant Janapadas of Trigarta, Audumbara, Kuluta, and Kulinda in this region. The coins found in different parts of this region prove the existence of these Janapadas. The Trigarta country corresponds to the Kangra district, while the Audumbaras ruled the region and issued copper and silver coins in the first century B.C. The Kulutas lived in the upper Beas valley, now known as Kullu valley, and also issued

coins like their neighbors Audumbaras and Kulindas. The Kulindas or Kunindas lived between the Beas, Sutlej, and Yamuna rivers and are mentioned in *Mahabharata* and *Puranas*.

In the pre-Rigvedic period, the Aryan influence in this Himalayan region dated back to the time of Aryan King Shastrabahu Kartavirya, who annexed the Himalayas. Later, Parshurama, the son of Jamadagni, defeated and killed him. The *Mahabharata* also refers to the king Susharma Chandra of the Trigarta area, helping the Kauravas in battle against the king Virat, who had protected and sheltered the Pandavas during their forest exile.

According to the Chinese traveler Heun-Tsang, who came to India during the reign of king Harsha (629-644 A.D.), the political systems prevalent in the region were of a primitive kind. The kings of Kullu, Chamba, and Trigarta had regular armies, and the temples and palaces built during this period throw light on this period. In the 8th century A.D., Padma Sambhava brought Buddhist Lamas to the region, whose decedents still live in Kinnaur and Lahaul Spiti areas.

In the 12th century A.D., there were a number of princely states in the region. During this period India was repeatedly attacked by foreign invaders. This region witnessed the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni in 1009 A.D., who looted the wealth from the temples in the North of India. The Rajputs ruled over this territory around 1043 A.D. The Mughals annexed the hill states and were friendly with the local rulers. In 1773 A.D., the Rajputs under Sansar Chand possessed this region until the attack by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1804, which crushed the Rajput power in the area. The Gurkhas, who migrated from Nepal, captured this area and devastated it.

In the early 19th century, the British annexed the areas of Shimla after the Gurkha War of 1815-16, gradually emerging as the paramount power in the region. During the first Indian war of independence, the rulers of hilly states remained inactive. The rulers of Chamba, Bilaspur, Bhagal, and Dhamsi helped the British government during the revolt. The Britishers left India, and on August 15, 1947, the Tiranga was unfurled on the ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi. The princes of the princely states were invited to join the Indian Union, and on April 15, 1948, the Chief Commissioner's province of Himachal Pradesh came into being, the first step towards the integration of hilly areas.

4. Culture of Himachal Pradesh: According to A.L. Basham, India has "the oldest continuous cultural traditions in the world" (4). The culture of Himachal Pradesh is as old as the culture of India. To understand the customs, traditions, and identity of the people in Himachal Pradesh, one must explore the region's cultural history. Himachal Pradesh is famous for its rich cultural heritage. Although modernization and acculturation have had some impact, the people's lifestyle is largely shaped by the region's climate, flora, and fauna. The people of Himachal Pradesh have unique features and an impressive grace that reflects the beauty of the natural environment. While Hindi is the official language of the state, Pahari is the colloquial language, which has evolved from Sanskrit. Other tribal languages, such as Chambyali, Pangwali, Lahauli, and Kinnauri are the popular local dialects.

Folk music, songs, and dances are integral to the lives of the people of Himachal Pradesh and contribute to a rich cultural tradition. Despite local variations and customs, the culture of Himachal Pradesh has been sustained by the harmonious coexistence of diverse people in the same region.

The population of Himachal Pradesh is predominantly Hindu, with Buddhism flourishing in the Trans-Himalayan region for more than a thousand years. Hinduism is strong in the southern part of the Greater Himalayas, while worship of many local gods and demigods characterizes the middle hills. Christianity arrived with the British and is represented by numerous churches in places such as Shimla, Kasauli, Dagshai etc. There are also sacred places for Sikhs such Paonta Sahib etc. Islam has presence in Nahan.

One of the fascinating features of Himachal Pradesh's culture is the continuous stream of fairs and festivals, including Holi, Dussehra, and Diwali, as well as numerous local festivals celebrated with great enthusiasm. Temple architecture has played a crucial role in the cultural development of the state.

4.1. Customs and Manners: According to Mian Goverdhan Singh, "Customs are the truthful picture of the moral consciousness of a community as are as individual's habits and expression of his character" (33). Customs evolve within a society, reflecting not only the habits and character of its people but also the moral consciousness of the society. In Himachal Pradesh, people observe customs and traditions that are specific to their communities. The village is considered to be like a family, with the elders being addressed with respectful titles like Chacha-Tau (Uncle), Bhabhi (Sister-in-law), Mausi (Aunt), or Nani (Grandmother) based on their age. Relationships are highly valued and treated with great respect, with people often following traditional customs related to race, caste, gotra, and family. Although Himachali society is divided into castes and sub-castes, conflicts between them are rare since each group performs specific functions and relies on the others.

- (i) **Childbirth:** Birth ceremonies in Himachal Pradesh are marked by unique local customs and traditions. It is customary for a husband to refrain from killing any animal with his own hands during his wife's pregnancy, although he is allowed to consume meat. A pregnant woman is prohibited from going to places such as burning grounds, streams, forests, or any other place not frequented by men. She is also not allowed to see the face of the dead. During religious ceremonies, when a knot is tied between the husband and wife, it is not done if the woman is pregnant. Nose rings, bracelets, and other ornaments worn by women on their head are not melted down to create other ornaments. Pregnant women are also not allowed to look at solar or lunar eclipses. At the time of childbirth, the woman is kept in the lower storey of the house to protect her from the cold and wind. Experienced village women assist in childbirth since there are no professional midwives in the village. The umbilical cord is cut by the midwife or experienced woman, and the mother is immediately given a mixture of ghee and gurr to drink, sweetened porridge to eat, and a mixture of milk and ghee to boost her immunity. The birth of a son is traditionally announced by distributing Mura made of sugar lumps. In the eastern part of the state, when a son is born, Turis or Dhakis play music called Shabad at the family's door, and an appropriate fee is paid. The mother's period of pollution lasts for ten days after the infant's birth, during which no one else takes food or drink from her hands. Family members are not allowed to enter places of worship during this time. These ten days of impurity are called 'Sutak' or 'Sakor' days. The 'Sutak' is held for ten days after birth, during which time the mother's clothes are washed, and the house is cleaned. A priest is called to prepare the child's horoscope, and the infant is not taken out again until an auspicious day, as determined by the astrologer, or the day of the first new moon. The ceremony for the first hair cutting of the child takes place in the third, fifth, or seventh year after birth, and it is customary to offer the hair at a goddess shrine or deity temple in the hills.
- (ii) **Naming:** In Himachal Pradesh, naming a child is a significant ritual that signifies the individuality of a person. The naming ceremony usually takes place when the child is ten days old or at the completion of one, three, six, or nine months. In high-class families, the priest ascertains the first letter of the name from the child's horoscope. Parents usually select the name, but sometimes the priest makes the choice. During the ceremony, gur or parshad, parched rice or wheat grains called mura, are distributed among the attendees. Himachali people commonly have compound names that include suffixes such as Ram, Lal, Das, Chand, and Rajputs use Singh. However, some people are now adopting names with Punjabi suffixes like Parkash and Kumar. In some cases, people use caste names and family names to distinguish their aals (family names) from one another. For example, Thakur, Verma, and Sharma are common caste names. The people of Kinnaur use the suffix Negi with their names, while the Rajput tribes who migrated from the Indian plains after the seventh and eighth centuries use their clan names like Rathore, Chauhan, Parmar, and Tomar. Descendants are often named after their fathers. For example, the sons or descendants of Khimi Ram are called Khimta ('ta' means son or descendant). In some areas, the term 'aik' is used instead of 'ta.' For example, Dila Ram's sons or descendants will be called Dilaik. If, after several generations, descendants start living separately, they adopt new surnames to distinguish themselves from other aals. This custom of adopting new family names is generally prevalent among Khash, Brahmin, and Kolis.
- (iii) **Marriage:** In Himachal Pradesh, marriage is considered a sacred institution. The wife is regarded as the man's better half or power incarnate (Shakti), especially during religious celebrations such as marriage or pilgrimage, as she occupies the foremost position. The hill man's sayings and proverbs discourage polygamy: "Two marriages make the life of a man as wretched as that of a dog." The first step in a marriage ceremony is the betrothal, and in Himachal Pradesh, the boy's male relatives usually take the initiative. This is opposite to the procedure followed in the plains, where it is the responsibility of the girl's family to make initial contacts. This difference in approach may be due to financial obligations. In the plains, the girl's family gives gifts (dowry) to the boy's family, while in Himachal Pradesh, the opposite is practiced, and the boy's father pays the girl's father for defraying the marriage expenses. This payment, called 'dheri' is nominal. Once a betrothal is accepted, it is difficult to cancel, and if either party backs out, they must pay all the expenses incurred for the ceremony. Marriage rules in the hills are less definite or strict than those in the plains. Certain types of relationships are prohibited. High-class people marry within their caste but not within their own gotra. They do not marry a girl related on the father's side up to the 7th generation. Neither the boy nor the girl has any say regarding their marriage, but with modern education and changing times, some young people have started to assert their right of choice. Three types of marriage ceremonies exist in Himachal Pradesh. The first, 'Biah' or regular marriage, is in accordance with the Shastras and is generally followed by the rich who live in towns or rural areas. The other forms, called 'Jhagra' and 'Gaddar' or 'Paraina' designate informal marriages. Jhagra is a non-traditional Brahmanical marriage that does not involve the customary ritual circumambulations around a holy fire called pheri. Instead, the traditional Pahari ceremony involves the father of the groom, accompanied by some close relatives and a group of five, seven, or eleven men, going to the bride's house. They bring with them a nose ring called "Nath" or "Balu" as well as dresses and ornaments to present to the bride. The bride's parents prepare a feast for them, which include serving wine and meat. At an auspicious moment, the priest reads some mantras while the women sing wedding songs. The priest then inserts the "Nath" through a perforation on the left side of the bride's nostril, and Gur (Sugar) is distributed among those present. If the distance is too great for the party to return with the bride on the same day, they spend the night at the bride's parents' home. The next day, the bride dons a red dress and follows the entourage to her husband's house. She is accompanied by the relatives and friends of her father, as well as one person from each household in the village, with the number of

accompanists sometimes reaching three to four hundred. Upon arriving at the bridegroom's house, a basket of wheat or rice, a pitcher full of water, and a lamp are placed in front of the door of the house. The hearth and Lord Ganesh are worshiped, and three days after the marriage, the bride's parents visit the newly married couple, bringing with them food called "Murapuli." Three days later, the bride and groom return the visit, and the groom presents a "nazar" or "dhalokara" of one rupee to each of his parents-in-law, which is returned to him when he leaves. This return visit is known as "danovar" or "dhanoj." In the past, the custom of polyandry was prevalent in the border areas of Himachal Pradesh and in the lower region of the Giri Valley, and to a limited extent in the highlands of Saraj. This practice involved two or three brothers sharing a common wife, with the division of conjugal rights being made through a private mutual understanding. Those who practice polyandry defend it on the grounds that it prevents overpopulation and the sub-division of property in a country where agricultural land is insufficient to support a larger population. The custom is also justified by some due to the small size of family holdings of land in the rugged hilly regions. Frequent separation of brothers and division of family holdings leads to the disintegration of the entire society, whereas polyandry enables a family of brothers to obtain full benefits from various sources, such as cultivating common land, breeding cattle, and engaging in trade. Polygamy is generally practiced among the lower classes of people and is thought to have arisen from the difficulties of cultivating the terraced fields of mountainous slopes, which required multiple helpmates. A cultivator who possesses a large holding may typically have more than one wife in order to have more working hands for agricultural work. The number of wives a hill man has is considered a measure of his wealth and prosperity. Other motives that promote polygamy include a couple having only female children, and a sonless wife insisting on her husband taking a second wife. The first wife retains the position of honor in the household, while the second has to do outdoor work. Hill women are sociable and independent, and they carry a reputation of family and social dignity, giving them a status of better-half in reality, and they command a place of honor and dignity in hill society.

- (iv) **Remarriage:** In Himachal Pradesh, widows are usually permitted to remarry. It is not uncommon for a younger brother to marry his deceased older brother's widow. Alternatively, the widow may choose to leave her previous home and move in with someone else, which is referred to as "Ghar Karna." In lower castes, it is not unusual for a woman to change spouses four or five times during her lifetime. When this occurs, the new husband assumes responsibility for all children born from the previous marriage.
- (v) **Divorce:** In rural Himachal, it is not uncommon for women to leave one husband and settle with another. Some tribal communities have a unique divorce law called Dehri, Hari, or Har, which is considered higher than the courts of law. Under this law, the couple seeking divorce takes a twig of Shur wood, snaps it in front of witnesses, and throws it behind them. In Lahaul, a woolen thread is similarly snapped to symbolize the end of the marriage. In some villages, the couple must break a sal leaf in two in the presence of fellow villagers. In the event of a divorce, the woman relinquishes all rights to her husband's property. The Har and Dehri systems require the party applying for divorce to pay compensation to the aggrieved party. However, since Independence, there has been a decrease in such divorces due to increased literacy rates, and people now choose their partners more carefully, reducing the risk of breakups. Nowadays, most divorces have personal rather than financial reasons. In some areas, the Panchayat, or village assembly, conducts the divorce procedures, and the verdict is acceptable to both parties.
- (vi) **Death:** Customs associated with death in Himachal Pradesh are unique and intriguing. When a person is on their deathbed, their body is placed on the ground and covered in fresh cow dung, with the head facing north. The blowing of conch shells signals to the family members to start grieving. It is considered inauspicious to die in a bed, and the dying person is expected to donate alms before passing away. After the person has died, a linseed oil lamp with a cotton wick is lit and placed in a corner of the room. This lamp symbolizes the deceased, and family members sit in the room to mourn. The body is then laid on plantain leaves in the courtyard, bathed, and placed in a wooden coffin or on a bier. The coffin is covered with a colorful shroud, and the body is taken to the cremation grounds. Along the way, the funeral procession stops at a few places where some stones and leaves are placed in the name of the deceased. Before the body is consigned to flames, a Pind Dan ceremony is performed, where balls made of cooked rice, sesame seeds, and curd are offered to birds and elements in the name of the deceased. Adding fuel wood to the pyre is considered auspicious. After the cremation, people bathe and return to the deceased's house. During the time that the body is in the house, no food can be cooked. For a month, close relatives observe a period of mourning called "Sutak" during which meat, fish, garlic, onions, and asafetida are considered taboo. At the end of this period, either the daughter's or the son's father-in-law (Kuddam) brings food cooked with asafetida and feeds it to the bereaved family, lifting the taboo.

4.2. Fair & Festivals: Festivals hold great significance in the cultural fabric of Himachal Pradesh. They are an inseparable part of the state's cultural heritage, offering insights into its rich traditions and customs. These festivals have a multifaceted character, serving educational, social, and religious purposes. They promote social cooperation, not only for economic subsistence but also for cultural survival. The majority of the festivals in Himachal Pradesh are derived from the Hindu religion, particularly from the period after the migration of high caste Hindus from the Indian plains between the 7th and 15th centuries A.D. As Mian Goverdhan Singh puts it:

Festivals are an important part of the cultural life of the people of Himachal Pradesh. They have educational, social as well as a religious character. These serve the need of social cooperation not only for economic subsistence but also for cultural survival. (55) Furthermore, seasons have a significant influence on the nature of the festivals. Each season has its own appropriate festival, and the ceremonies are largely determined by the climatic requirements or other factors unique to the particular season. For instance, the onset of winter is marked by the bonfire festival, while the festival of flowers is celebrated during the summer. Some of the most popular fairs and festivals celebrated in Himachal Pradesh include:

- 1. Bishu or Baisakhi:** The Bishu or Baisakhi fair is an ancient tradition that takes place annually on the first day of the Baisakh month (April) to celebrate the arrival of spring. The fair is centered around the village deity, who is carried on a palanquin by two men to the village greens or a hilltop, accompanied by temple musicians, the priest, and other men. When the procession reaches its destination, the deity starts to dance and sway on the palanquin, while the musicians continue to play, and the people sing and dance with sticks, swords, and axes. The excitement spreads among the crowd, and they sometimes form a circle and perform the Mala dance, while others play a local game called Thoda-Ka-Khel, which involves archery. The fair is a lively and colorful event that showcases the rich cultural heritage of the region and is especially popular in the lower hills.
- 2. Minjar Fair:** The Minjar fair is an international fair that takes place during the monsoon season in Chamba and Kangra. It begins on the second Sunday of Sawan (August) and offers relaxation and entertainment to thousands of locals before the busy harvest season begins. The fair concludes with a colorful gathering of devotees at the banks of the Ravi River, below Chamba town. The purpose of this gathering is to offer prayers and make offerings to Varuna, the God of rains, by releasing Minjars (tentacles of maize) and coconuts into the river. The event is preceded by a lively procession that starts at the Akhand Chandi Palace and winds its way through the ornately decorated streets of the town before reaching the riverbank. This procession is reminiscent of the regal parades of yesteryear. After the Minjars are released into the river, people share sweets and fragrances with each other. The week-long celebrations also feature feasts and musical concerts held in various parts of the town.
- 3. Naina Devi Fair:** The primary religious site in Bilaspur District is the Naina Devi temple, located 8 km from the Ganguwal Power House. Annually, during the month of August, a fair takes place which draws a significant number of pilgrims from nearby areas of Himachal Pradesh as well as the plains.
- 4. Kullu Dussehra:** Kullu Dussehra is also an international fair celebrated to commemorate the victory of Rama over Ravana. However, the Dussehra festival in Kullu holds special significance. The festival lasts for a week and begins on the tenth day of the waxing moon, known as 'Vijay Dashmi.' During the first day of the fair, the idol of Raghunath is placed on a beautifully decorated chariot and accompanied by various village gods, who are carried on colorful palanquins. It is customary for all the gods of the valley to visit Kullu during Dussehra to pay their respects to Raghunath. On the last day of the festival, the chariot of Raghunath is taken to the bank of the river Beas, where a pile of wood and grass is set on fire to symbolize the burning of Lanka. The festival ends with some sacrificial ceremonies. Afterward, the chariot is returned to its original place, and the idol of Raghunath is taken to its temple at Sultanpur. The attendant gods also depart to their respective destinations. The famous idol of Raghunath was brought to Kullu from Ayodhya in July 1651 A.D. by a man named Damodar Dass and was installed by Raja Jagat Singh. The installation of Raghunath's idol gave birth to periodic celebrations, which eventually led to the birth of Dussehra in Kullu. Although the festival originated as a royal fad, it became well established due to religious, social, and economic factors, as well as the hill people's love of fun and frolic, as demonstrated through community singing and dancing.
- 5. Lavi Fair:** The oldest trade fair in the state of Himachal Pradesh is hosted annually for three days in early November in Rampur-Bushar, located in the Shimla district. This fair is known for the exchange of raw and semi-finished wool, woolen products, pattis, namdas, pashminas, chilgozas, colts, horses, and mules, collectively worth several lakhs of rupees. The fair attracts buyers from all over India who come to Rampur to purchase wool, pashmina, chilgozas, and other local commodities, which also have a ready market in foreign countries. Conversely, people from Kinnaur, Lahaul, Spiti, and Ladakh, as well as traders from the Punjab plains and lower hills, come to Rampur to sell general merchandise and engage in brisk trade. Although the fair has been held on an organized basis for the past 300 years, its origins are believed to be even older.
- 6. Renuka Fair:** Renuka Fair is an important cultural event in Himachal Pradesh, celebrated for three days starting on the 11th day of the waxing moon of Kartika (first fortnight of November) around Renuka Lake in District Sirmour. According to legend, thousands of years ago, goddess Renuka lived with her husband Rishi Jamdagni near the present Renuka Lake, and their youngest son, Parshuram, who is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, used to visit his mother every year after entering into samadhi somewhere in the Garhwal hills. The fair commemorates the annual meeting of Renuka and Parshuram. During the fair, several idols of Parshuram placed in palanquins are carried in a procession to the Parshuram temple. Before the idols are installed in the temple, they are given a bath in the holy lake, which is believed to symbolize the body of mother Renuka. The fair not only provides

healthy recreation and amusement but is also a good market for local produce. Businessmen from the plains come to deal in commodities that are mostly in demand by the hill people, flocking to the place and bringing with them gur, shakkar, and other goods. Temporary stalls can be seen stocked with an assortment of goods.

7. **Mandi Shivratri Fair:** The Shivratri fair in Mandi is a significant international event in the traditional observances of Himachal Pradesh for the worship of Lord Shiva. The week-long fair is known for its unique style and colorful display, which attracts visitors. Devotees carry hundreds of gods and goddesses on their palanquins, accompanied by hill bands playing melodious tunes, and make their way to Mandi town on the day of Shivratri. The town is beautifully decorated to welcome these embodiments of human belief. After paying homage at the Madho Rai temple, the devotees offer their celestial homage to Lord Shiva at Bhutnath temple. The festivities continue for a week with various events, including colorful dances, songs, dramas, and skits, showcasing the talents of the hill folk and entertaining the visitors.
8. **Nalwari Fair:** The Nalwari fair is held on the shore of Gobind Sagar in Bilaspur town. It was first conceived by W. Goldstein, the Superintendent of Shimla Hill States, in 1889 (1946 VS). The idea was inspired by the scarcity of good breed cattle, particularly bullocks, which are crucial for good agriculture and an essential part of the economy of the hill terrain from Bilaspur to Mandi. It was not possible to fulfill this need locally, and individual efforts to procure bullocks from the plains were not always successful. To address this issue, people from Nalagarh, Ropar, Una, Hoshiarpur, and adjoining areas of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh were encouraged to bring bullocks of good breed to the fair. The buying and selling of cattle take place during the four to five-day fair.

4.3. Art & Architecture: P.S. Rawson rightly puts it, “the art of early historical and medieval India has something unique to offer” (211). Himachal Pradesh is known for its unique forms of art and architecture especially the temple architecture. Himachal Pradesh boasts of an ancient art tradition that has survived in various forms such as temple architecture, wood carvings, stone and metal sculptures, paintings, and Chamba Rumals. This art can be classified into three distinct groups: (i) indigenous or Khasha art, (ii) Indo-Aryan, and (iii) Indo-Tibetan. The Khasha style represents the most ancient art and architecture of Himachal Pradesh, and it primarily utilizes wood as the basic material. The earliest examples of this style can be traced back to the copper and silver coins of the Audumbaras, dating back to the 2nd century B.C. These coins depict temples with a Dhvaja, a Trishula, and a battle-axe, indicating their Shaivite origins.

- (i) **Temple Style:** In Himachal Pradesh, there are four different styles of hill-temple architecture that reflect different religious beliefs and the mix of new and old inhabitants. The four distinct styles are classified based on the style of the roof: (i) pent roof and verandah, (ii) paramedic, (iii) pagoda with successive wooden roofs, and (iv) a combination of sloping and pagoda style known as Sutlej valley style. The pent roof style is the oldest, and examples include Lakshna Devi temple in Bharmaur and Shakti Devi temple in Chhatrari, both built in the 7th century by Bharmaur's ruler Meruverman. Kali Devi or Mirkula Devi temples were founded by Surya Mati, the queen of Kashmir king Ananta Deva, who was a Trigarata princess. The paramedic roof style is found in the Jubbal valley, with classical examples such as Hateshwari Devi and Shiva temples at Hatkoti and Mahasu, and Shiva temples at Deora in Jubbal. The pagoda style is the most intriguing, and it arrived in this region from Nepal, where it is commonly seen in most temples in Kathmandu. Some historians claim that it was introduced from the Indian plains in the early Christian era, as evidenced by the Audumbara coins. There are numerous pagoda-style temples in the Mandi, Kullu, Shimla hills, and Kinnaur regions of Himachal Pradesh. The fourth style, a blend of the pent roof and pagoda style, is typically found in the upper Sutlej valley and is known as Sutlej valley style.
- (ii) **Wood Art:** During the medieval period, wood art flourished, and many temples were built with intricate wood masks used for ritual dances, while carvings of birds and animals were also present on windows and door frames. The most exceptional examples of wood art can be found in the Lakshna Devi and Shakti Devi temples in Chamba, Mrikula Devi in Lahaul, Dakshin Mahadev in Nirmand, Kullu, Magroo Mahadev in Mandi, and Manan temple in the Shimla hills. The carvings on walls, ceilings, and door frames depict scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas. While wooden sculptures are rare, some examples may be found in Jubbal and Kullu valley. The Nagara style is represented by a series of monolithic temples at Masrur in the Kangra valley, possibly the earliest specimen of the style in the entire Himalayan region. These temples were cut out of the living rock and exhibit the characteristics of the very early Nagara temple from the eighth century A.D. The rock-hewn shrines in the Masrur temples are unique to Western and Southern India and are unknown in the rest of the Himalayan region. Other examples of the Nagara style are the Manimahesh temple in Bharmaur from 700 A.D., three Vishnu and three Shiva temples in Chamba from the 10th century A.D., the Trilokinath temple in Lahaul, Visheshwara Mahadev temple at Bajaura, Gaurishankar temple at Nagar, and Dashal in the Kullu valley, Surya temple at Nirath near Rampur-Bushahr, and several temples at Hatkoti, the ancient capital of the rulers of Jubbal in the Shimla hills. Mandapa temples include the Vaidyanath temple in Baijnath in Kangra, Trilokinath, Panchvaktra, and Ardhnreshwar temples in Mandi town.

(iii) **Sculpture:** The period following the Gupta dynasty, commonly known as the Rajput era, is considered the classical age of Himachal art and has produced some of the most impressive stone and metal sculptures. Many locations such as Hatkoti, Nirath, Nirmand, Mamel, and Masrur display remarkable examples of stone sculptures. Additionally, the metal statues of Mahishasuramardani at Hatkoti in Jubbal, Lakshna Devi, Shakti Devi, Narasimha, Ganesha, Nandi, Vishnu Chaturmurti in Chamba, Mirkula Devi in Lahaul, Tripura Sundri image of Mandi, and Bhima Kali (the patron deity of the Raja of Rampur Bushahar) are also the products of this era. The state of Himachal Pradesh boasts some of the finest metal sculptures, including the Mahishasuramardini statue at Hatkoti (7th century A.D.) and the statue of Vaikuntha Vishnu or Hari Har Rai temple of Chamba, which are matchless in their artistry.

(iv) **Paintings:** Himachal Pradesh is renowned for its exceptional paintings, which were created in the 17th to 19th century by artists active in the courts of hill princes. These artists painted miniature paintings in body colour, decorated the walls and doors of palaces, and illustrated manuscripts. A total of 35 painting centers flourished in the region, including well-known centers such as Guler, Chamba, Kangra, Nurpur, Mandi, Kullu, Bilaspur, and Arki, collectively referred to as the Pahari School of paintings. The paintings featured religious, social, and amorous themes, with religious themes primarily inspired by literary works such as Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas, Jaideva, Behari, and Keshava. These paintings offer insights into the social life of the hill people and depict themes from the court life of the hill princes. The key characteristics of Pahari paintings include delicacy of line, brilliance of color, and meticulous decorative detail. The central theme is mainly love, which is expressed in a lyrical style filled with rhythm, grace, and beauty.

4.4. Folk Dance: According to Goutam Sharma 'Vyathit,' "Himachal is a land of dances. Its dance forms are varied and some are quite complicated. No festivity here is complete without dancing" (Sharma 168). The people of Himachal Pradesh have a rich cultural heritage, and their traditional dances, dramas, and group entertainments reflect their love for life. Dancing is a spontaneous mode of expression of joy for the sturdy hill people, and they dance on various occasions such as weddings, feasts, harvests, fairs, or simply to overcome boredom. Both solo and group dances are popular in Himachal Pradesh. Solo dances like Gidha and Munjara are popular in Bilaspur, Solan, Sirmaur, and some parts of Shimla hills. In these dances, the singers and dancers form a circle and sing a song while accompanying with a tambourine or a drum. As the music and tempo of the song increase, a man gets up from the circle and starts dancing artistically. He is followed by others who also dance one by one in a similar way, sometimes holding a thali or a lota to add color to their performance. Thali dance is a dance form that involves holding a platter or pot full of water while dancing, and it is generally performed in Sirmaur, Shimla hills, and the adjoining area of Jaunsar-Bawar of Uttarakhand. These dances are usually performed in open spaces, but during the night or bad weather, they can be held in verandahs or big rooms. Marriages, melas, and festivals are the best occasions to witness these dances.

4.5. Folk Drama: The people of Himachal Pradesh have a rich cultural heritage, including a variety of traditional arts such as dance and drama. "To them dancing is a mode of spontaneous expression of joy whatever the occasion, be it marriage, feast, a harvesting, or a fair. Sometimes, they dance merely to relieve themselves from boredom. But wherever the occasion, the dances have a vigour about them which reflects the people's attitude towards life" (Singh 89). One of the most popular forms of entertainment is folk dramas, which are typically performed during the winter months after the busy periods of sowing and harvesting. Villagers gather at places such as temple courtyards or village squares to watch these dramas, which often last throughout the night. Popular folk songs and dances are also incorporated to add to the interest of the performance. There are several types of hill folk dramas, including Kariyala, Banthara, Jhanki, Swang, Haranter, and Bhagat. Banthara is particularly popular in the Mandi region, while Jhanki and Haranter are favored in Chamba. Kariyala and Swang are prevalent in Bilaspur, Solan, Shimla hills, and Sirmaur.

4.6. Folk Music: "The folk music of Himachal Pradesh reflects the soul of the community" (Sharma 174). It is serene like the hills, playful like the rivulets and as diverse as the local foliage. The music has a unique flow and even songs from tribal areas such as Kinnaur, Pangi, and Lahaul sung in dialects that are difficult to understand, attract us with their beautifully arranged musical and rhythmic patterns. It is a music that evokes a sense of joy and one can almost hear the sound of leaves rustling, brooks flowing, and winds whispering in the songs. The Himachali folk music is the greatest solace to the people living in the remote areas, intense and yet soothing. Some of the famous folk songs of Himachal Pradesh are:-

- a. **Jhoori:** The word 'Jhoori' means a lover or beloved. It describes extra-marital romance. This type of folk song is highly popular in Shimla and Sirmour District and has a distinctive rhythm. Jhoori songs typically consist of four lines, with the last syllable of the first line sung for an extended period. When these songs are performed, they are well-received by audiences, and the rhythm is a crucial element of their appeal.
- b. **Laman:** Laman singing is very popular in the Kullu valley of Himachal Pradesh. These songs are associated with romantic love between men and women. In these songs, the first line is primarily meant for rhyming with the second, while the second line conveys the central theme. The singers use specific syllables such as "Oa" and "As" to create a "Tek" or a note that is prolonged at the end of each line, resulting in a distinctive resonance and rhythmic pattern.
- c. **Mohna:** Mohna is a famous folk song of Bilaspur District of Himachal Pradesh. Mohna is a poignant story of human values and sacrifice that remains unrewarded. According to the tale, around 70 or 80 years ago, there was a boy named Mohna whose brother served as a personal attendant to the Raja of Bilaspur. Unfortunately, the brother

committed a murder and believed that he would never be held accountable because of the Raja's favoritism. However, when the people brought the matter to the Raja's attention, he conducted an investigation, and the brother realized that he would be prosecuted. He then manipulated his young and vulnerable brother, Mohana, to take the blame for the crime, promising to use his influence to save Mohana from capital punishment. Despite being persuaded by the juries and the Raja to reveal the truth, Mohana remained loyal to his brother and was ultimately hanged. After his death, people started singing his tale, known as Mohana, in the Bilaspuri dialect Kahaluri.

4.7. Musical Instruments: A brief description of the instruments used for folk music in Himachal Pradesh is pertinent to discuss here. Ram Dayal Neeraj's classification of folk music instruments into four groups is discussed, including stringed instruments, wind instruments, percussion instruments, and bells. In the Himachal region, a variety of drums such as Dhol, Dholku, Dholki, Nagara, Dammama, Damanght, Nagarth, Gajju, Doru, Hudak, and Dhausa are used. The Bharai community performs ritual drumming at the fair site, accompanied by singing and dancing. These drums are made using locally available materials and reflect local traditions in their shape and playing methods. Wind instruments such as Ranasingha, Karnal, Turhi, Flute, Algoja, Shehnai, and Peepni are also popular, with the flute being a favorite of shepherds and travelers. Ranasingha, Shehnai, and Been are commonly played at weddings and on auspicious occasions, as well as during processions of gods at festivals. Finally, stringed instruments such as Ektara, Kindari Davatra, Gramyang, Sarnagi, Jumang, and Ruman are mentioned, and it is noted that professional folk singers are working to preserve their ancient art, which is threatened by commercialization. Despite this threat, when these folk singers perform in traditional dress, they bring an entire way of life to life once more.

5. Preservation of the Culture: The cultural heritage of Himachal Pradesh is an important part of its people's identity, and preserving it is crucial for passing down cultural values from generation to generation. This preservation involves maintaining traditional practices, language, knowledge, art forms, craftsmanship, spirituality, storytelling, cuisine, folk music, and more. Out of these, language preservation is especially important, as it serves as a cornerstone of cultural identity and is essential in transmitting cultural knowledge and traditions. The preservation of cultural traditions is a way for the people of Himachal Pradesh to maintain their identity and the legacy of their ancestors, while also preserving the diversity of their culture. Preserving culture fosters greater respect and appreciation for different cultures and promotes social cohesion and cultural exchange. It can also have economic benefits by attracting tourists, creating jobs, and generating income for the state's people. Maintaining cultural traditions contributes to the emotional well-being of the people of Himachal Pradesh, providing a sense of comfort and belonging.

6. Conclusion: The vitality of a society is intimately tied to its culture, which is manifested in various ways, such as the language we use, the stories we share, the traditions we honor, the history we remember, the entertainment we enjoy, and the visions we have for the future. The happiness and well-being of people of Himachal Pradesh lie in the preservation of its indigenous cultural traditions. People of Himachal Pradesh strive most towards this end, rank higher and make happier future. In this regard, they have reasons to be proud of their rich cultural traditions which they have preserved for ages despite the inroad of alien influences. The remarkable growth of the state has not diluted its cultural identity and the people still have abiding respect for their rich traditions. This Indian State has come a long way from an amalgamation of little-known feudal kingdoms to a developed modern state. The primary objective of this paper was not only to improve our understanding of culture and traditions but also to let the world know about the interesting facets of culture of this untouched land on earth, which is known as God's own country or Dev Bhumi. To conclude with the Puranic saying:-

He, who goes to the hills, goes to his mother, the
loving, caring, nourishing and bounteous mother.

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