

CULTURAL TOURISM IN CHAMBA: RE-DISCOVERY AND INNOVATIVENESS OF LOST TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Cultural tourism captures the essence of long stories of human settlements and their experiences, written or oral, in forms of folk songs, stories, dances, art and architectures. The cultural setup of Himachal Pradesh, which is the amalgamation of many religions, customs and tradition, is the subset of Indian multicultural fabric, where history and culture of the district Chamba keeps a distinctive place that gives impetus to the state tourism. The cultural tourism in Chamba illustrates the phenomenal life styles of distinctive communities through folklores, temples, fairs, festivals and museum that attract worldwide attention.

The present paper seeks to analyze the cultural tourism in Chamba particularly in context to its folklores. The need and dissemination of literature on the cultural heritage and other non-literary attempts, by the state or other non government agencies to preserve and explore it will also be brought to the fore. The focus will be given to highlight that how the growing demand of cultural tourism not only augment the revenue in the state but also would be an effective step towards the rediscovery and the innovativeness of the lost and hidden folklore of the district.

KEYWORDS: Culture Tourism, Folklore, Heritage, Literature, Re-Discovery And Innovativeness.

The manifold fabric of Indian cultural setup keeps a distinctive place across the world. Its distinctiveness lies in its integrity and unity in heterogeneity in all walks of life. The heterogeneous ways of living not only attract worldwide attraction of visitors but also are the proud of all Indians living within or outside the country. Distinctiveness is rooted in Indian soil in such a way that even a small state like Himachal Pradesh, with its variegated paintings, sculptures, unique styled buildings, folk songs, art and culture, holds an exclusive and uncommon place

in the country. Himachal Pradesh with merely 55,673 sq km area has a long geographical, political and cultural history from ancient to the modern where records of hilly life is reflected in Vedas, Mahabharata and Buddhism. Surrounded by J & K, Uttarakhand, Punjab and Haryana the state has different dialects, dances and folk songs. The state, in context to cultural diversity, is the replica of India as a whole because this small state has the amalgamation of tribal, *pahari*, *dogri* and Punjabi cultures with diverse performing arts and dialects as well.

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In this way cultural tourism in the state is the predominant factor behind its meteoric rise in the tourism segment in the contemporaneous world. It is paramount to fathom what is exclusive in Chamba that terrifically attracts the gaze of tourists and researchers. The first and foremost reason of course is the physicality where snow peaks, lakes, waterfalls, fauna, flora and rivers while amongst the other a colossal of cultural web which presents a spectrum of human experiences through folklore. "Folklore is the body of expressive culture shared by a particular group of people; it encompasses the traditions common to that culture, subculture or group" (Web). It also comprises "material culture ranging from traditional building styles to handmade toys common to the group." The celebrations of rituals, like Diwali, Id, weddings and folk dances fall under the category. Atul Chandra Bhowmick in his article "Folklore and Tourism: Their Reciprocity" published in *Folklore in the New Millennium* edited by Reddy, P. Chenna & Babu, M. Sarat, connects folklore with tourism arguing that, Folklore is a broad subject, which includes variety of folk items, which greatly attract tourists" (245). Inquisitive tourists come in contact with others, they read and find variations in life styles and tastes of human beings because only they witness the comprehension of two cultures simultaneously the culture of their own and of the destination they visit. A comparative approach of life as a whole is resulted of this process which set new paradigms of living for the posterity.

The history of Chamba state abounds in its rich folklores where narratives, images, paintings and sculptures expose the live experiences of people. Originally, Bharmour was the old capital of the state of Chamba and its expansion took place in reign of Sahil Varman in tenth century. (A.D. 920-940). It is said that King Sahil Varman had an only daughter named Champavati who showed her longin to build a palace and settlement on the plateau situated on the right bank of Ravi, (the

present site of chamba). The King owned the land from the native Brahmins and built a town there and named it Chamba-after his beloved daughter. The narratives of the settlement appear breathing in the legends of Chamba. Two lamenting tales embedded in the history of the settlement of the town illuminate the cultural set up of the time which has been the centre of attraction for the visitors. Champavati, Daughter of King Sahil Varman, was very religious girl who used to visits a *sadhu* (hermit) for religious discourse. Her father suspected her visits being indulged in immoral activities and followed her one day with drawn sword. But as he entered the *sadhu's* dwelling he found the house empty with mysterious silence. A divine voice announced that his daughter has been taken away from him forever as retribution for his doubting the chastity of the pure of maiden. The voice commanded the king to build a temple on the spot so that a further calamity for the royal house could be averted. So the melancholic king built a temple on this spot that came to be known as Champavti temple where his daughter is still worshipped as goddess and a *mela* (religious fair) is held there every year in the month of April. The second legend is also based on the early settlement of Chamba town. The newly settled capital had dearth of water. The king ordered to build a canal from a nearby stream situated on Shaha Madar Hill, behind the town, but the water refused to be flowed through the canal. It is said that the King dreamed a spirit dwelt in the stream that needed to be appeased with human sacrifice on the main source of the canal. The King consulted Brahmins who said that the only way out was either queen or her son must sacrifice her/his life to appease the spirit. The queen took the initiative to sacrifice herself for the sake of public welfare. She was taken out of the palace in a *palqi* and she went bare-headed, like *sati* with her maidens to the spot where the canal joined the steam. A grave was dug for her and she was entombed alive. No sooner was the grave filled with earth then water began to flow into the

canal. This water for the inhabitants of Chamba never ceased to flow. The people of Chamba have been commemorating her sacrifice for centuries and a fair *Suhi*, which is held every year in her honor. These sacrifices are deeply rooted in the folklore of Chamba.

As the generations passed many tales, songs and arts got disappeared from the colossal spectrum of culture, however the real efforts of protectionism commenced in the beginning of the twentieth century when Professor Jean Philippe Vogel, the founding curator of the Bhuri Singh Museum, took initiative to preserve the rich heritage of the then Chamba state. The district has many unfolded and intact areas to be surfaced. History is largely embedded in the brass images of Kakshna Devi, Ganesha and Nandi, Siva's bull vehicle, bearing inscriptions of the donor king Meru Verman at Bharmour- the old capital of Chamba. Another image inscribed to the same king is at Chhatrarhi, a village situated in the Ravi Valley-a few kilometer from Bharmour. These all images in Bharmour are well and popular academic parlance for folklorists, historians and researchers of different disciplines. Vishwa Chandra Ohri, an Indian Historian, in his article, "Hill Bronzes from Chamba Area" states that these "celebrated brass images, close to life-size in dimension and exhibiting high artistic excellence and technical skill, are known to art historians the world over. Some of these are inscribed and have been under worship for over a thousand years ever since they were consecrated. These metal images are unique; certainly nothing comparable to them in beauty and in the style of that period has survived anywhere in north India"(17).

The genesis of painting in hills portraying variegated life styles of royal families, god and goddesses, natural panorama and picaresque tales is another domain that needs to be focused. The painting itself has a long history in Chamba that has been attracting scholars and tourists across the world. The sources say that the hill

painting is the amalgamation of Rajput, Mughal and Porsian paintings by and large. M. S. Randhawa one of the scholars of Pahari paintings opines in his article "A Review of Studies in Pahari Paintings" that: "under the Patronage of Akbar there was a true cultural cross-fertilization between the Persian technique and Indian tradition, and a style of painting known as Mughal, which is truly Indian in spirit evolved. Mughal painting influenced Rajput painting, which developed under the patronage of the Rajput princes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From the middle of the seventeenth century to the first quarter of the nineteenth century the Punjab Hill States nurtured an art of painting, marked by a lyrical style full of rhythm, grace and beauty"(35). Many scholars have meticulously studied the content and approach of *pahari* paintings along with trends and periods of its progression. Presently Vijay Sharma an awarded artist and director of Bhuri Singh museum has immensely contributed to the genre casting light on the historical evolution of *pahari* paintings. His immense contribution to the genre establishes new attractions and scopes for tourism industry of the state.

The unique folk art and crafts is the pillar of the culture heritage of the district that exposes the creativity level of a community or nation. The pictorial handicraft of Chamba *rumal* is masterpiece with its charismatic embroidery that differentiates it from the different type of embroideries in India and abroad. Vijay Sharma in "Chamba Rumal: An Embroidered Vision" states "Chamba *Kasidkari* or the craft of 'do-rukha' embroidery popularly known as 'Chamba rumal' originated and developed in Chamba, an erstwhile princely hill state in the north-western Himalayas. This pictorial handicraft, popularly known as 'Chama *rumal*', conjures up in the mind a particular visual art-form that represents a unique and indigenous needle work, depicting charming figural and floral motifs, which originated and flourished in Chamba in the 17th to

19th century”(81). Presently, the folk arts and crafts of Chamba are not only source of employment for the natives but also are the centre of attraction for worldwide tourists. The recipient of National Award Smt. Lalita Vakil and Kamla Nayar are the famous embroiders who have contributed a lot to continue the legacy of embroidery in the district.

The folklore of Chamba is rich and extensive with variegated songs and dances where distinctive life style of people is reflected by and large. It presents the kaleidoscope of mesmerizing love songs, hymns dedicated to god Shiva, Gadhi, Churahi, and Pangwali Natti and distinctive music which fascinate the visitors and tourists to dance and sing. A large variety of musical instruments is used in the countryside. Their charismatic rich music has a phenomenal individuality, tradition and exotic flavor that attracts attentions of scholars and tourists. The devotion for God Shiva is deeply rooted in the culture of the district. These hymns are sung during Manimehesh Yatra (Pilgrimage to Manimahesh Lake). The lines from the main hymn “*Shiv kailason ke basi dhouli dharon ke raja...*” invigorates new energy among the devotees while they climb the hills to reach the lake:

Dweller of Kailash and King of Dhauli Range

Shankar wear the troubles away

My Lord Shankar wear the troubles away!

Love songs, elegies, melancholy, passion and sacrifices are the hallmark of the folk songs of the region. Folk songs based on love stories of Kunju-Chancho, Fulnu-Ranjho and Suni Bhunku are famous across the country. These songs portray the true meaning of love and passion and convey the message that true concept of love is connected to heart and soul. The famous narrative song *kapdeyan dhoan te chhum chham roan Kunjua...* unravels that selfless love is the only thing that makes the soil affluent:

CHANCHLO

While washing clothes I burst into tears Kunju

Utter something out

Oh my darling utter something out.

My arms are full of crimson bangles

Now I am woman of somebody else's

Oh my darling now I am woman of somebody else's.

KUNJU

Our fondness for each other is very old Chanchlo

You wouldn't take it serious

Oh my darling you wouldn't take it serious

I got defamed following you

Why did you choose somebody else?

Oh my darling why did you choose somebody else?

After independence, the cultural heritage of Chamba has got attention of government, civilians, administrators and researchers to not only preserve it but present it as one of the old and rich heritages of the country. The state government has never shown keen interest to promote the heritage. Ironically, the unique and intricate web of cultural set up has never been supposed to introduce in the syllabus of schooling system of the state.

The legislates and parliamentarians who represent the district have never attempted to bring culture heritage into the research domain by offering scholarships and organizing seminars and conferences. The tourism department of the state must adopt an inclusive approach for the progression of tourism so that the environmental, cultural and geographical issues could be addressed simultaneously. Many a

times, when the question of the history and culture of Chamba comes, only Chamba as new town and Bharmour as the old capital are brought under the discussion but the rich treasure of culture that lies in Churah, Tissa and Pangji valleys are still intact to be surfaced. The policy makers in different government institutions must understand the gravity of culture not only to attract the tourists of different tastes but also to make the civilization worth living with variegated experiences of humans webbed in the treasure of culture as a whole.

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