

# PROTECTION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE HIMALAYAS

*Need for Inclusive & Culturally Attuned Development for the Himalayas*

*Compiled by Pragya*

## 1. CULTURAL REGIONS IN THE HIMALAYAS

The highest mountain range in the world is much more than the physical mass that most of the world recognizes. Stretching in an immense arc of 2500 kms in length, along the boundaries and covering parts of 5 Asian countries, the rugged terrain of the Himalaya range is broken intermittently by valleys and plateaux that have allowed habitation. Although a tremendously difficult terrain, the Himalayas are thus inhabited by a sizeable population of 65.57 million belonging to different indigenous tribes. Of this, 36.32 million reside in India (25% in western Himalayas, 54% in central Himalayas and 21% in eastern Himalayas), 27.07 million in Nepal and 2.18 million in Bhutan<sup>1</sup>.

The Himalayan region may be considered to be a cultural complex, a composite of several cultural cosmoes rolled into one, each little valley or plateau with its distinctive cultural forms. Their altitude changes create different agroclimatic conditions and diverse ecosystems; their seclusion and remoteness has made them the last bastions of globally significant indigenous knowledge and cultural heterogeneity. The geographical and adaptation continuities have however helped create and preserve some features that form a uniquely 'Himalayan way of life' common across the range.

Every mountain slope is, from the anthropo-geographical standpoint, a complex phenomenon. It displays a whole range of cultural features/combinations- a variety of occupations from commercial cropping and agro-processing to nomadic pastoralists, every degree of density from congestion to vacancy, every range of cultural development from industrialisation to nomadism. The isolation bred by the high mountain ranges has helped nurture a multiplicity of tribes with unique cultures that include languages, social structures, and spiritual traditions. Each tribe also has its own arts & crafts (weaving, metal craft, architecture, music & dance) and certain invaluable traditional knowledge systems (ethnobotany, medicine).

Cultural region indicates those areas that display relative consistency, homogeneity, and distinctiveness in inhabitants' lifestyle, in that there are a greater number of shared cultural elements within the region, than between the region and others. The cultural complex of the Himalayas may be differentiated into multiple cultural regions. Cultural variation in the Himalayas is both vertical and lateral. While vertical variation predominantly flows from ecological factors, lateral variation in cultures is mediated by ethnicity and migration.

### 1.1 Vertical/Ecological Differentiation

The settlement patterns, occupations and ways of life of populations in the Himalayas are a reflection of human interaction with and adaptation to climate, relief and ecology. The key differentiator is that of livelihoods practiced and associated way of life. Guillet<sup>2</sup> has analysed the cultural patterns in mountain regions, with special reference to the Andes and the Himalayas, and drawn out what he calls the 'cultural ecology of mountains' to interpret these patterns. This comprises two major interpretive schemas- 'approaches to organismic interaction in mountain environments' and 'production in mountain environments'. The nature of interactions in mountain environments comprises: the interrelation of human and biological features; utilization of vertical life zones for human exploitation; occupation and strategies for control amongst cultures, and the association of occupation of vertical and horizontal space amongst peoples and animals in relation to time, space and communal control. Production in mountain environments is a composite of: response of populations and occupations to climate and altitude; the population's strategies for optimizing on the resources of the zone it occupies, spatial and temporal factors determining production strategies, and internal and external pressures influencing agricultural intensification. Guillet determines that mountain adaptation is therefore:

- a range of 'vertical production zones' involving several socio-ecological factors, including in the main, agricultural regime and social organization;
- the choice by the population of a production strategy involving potentially, specialization in one zone or the combined exploitation of several zones; and
- the potential for change/evolution of the production strategy, under pressures and trends from within or outside the region.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ethnicity & Socio-Cultural Mosaic of the Himalayas*, by Mondira Dutta

<sup>2</sup> Guillet, David. "Toward a Cultural Ecology of Mountains: The Central Andes and the Himalayas Compared." *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 24., No. 5., December 1983. p561

A majority of the people residing in the valleys and plateaus of the southern slopes of the Himalayan range are sedentary. Agriculture is the dominant occupation for most Himalayan communities, except for the people of very high altitudes and northern steppes, who follow nomadic pastoralism. Different patterns of cultivation are however followed, depending on the nature of the terrain and soil. The foothills and the lower hills, by virtue of their rich, fertile soils, brought down by the Himalayan rivers, are relatively densely populated, and the predominant religion is Hinduism. The Greater and Trans Himalayas are by far more severe in terrain and climate. Populations in this region are therefore very sparse living in small communities widely dispersed across a vast, harsh terrain. Depending on the precise location and agro-climatic conditions, they are either sedentary, subsistence farmers or nomadic tent-dwelling pastoralists. The altitude-based occupational and associated cultural patterns in the Himalayas are as below:

*a. Very high altitudes:*

The arid lands on the northern flanks and the high altitude plateaux of similar character in the southern side cannot support cultivation. A very small part of the rain-bearing winds can steal through the ranges that lie on their path to precipitate in these areas; even this is often unable to settle on the ground because of the winds that blow wild and unchecked on these flat tablelands. The little snow that does settle and provide moisture to the soil helps a soft downy grass grow in the summers. Hence the people of these regions adopted animal husbandry for their livelihoods, and follow a seasonal form of nomadism, moving with their families and herds (sheep, goats, yaks, camels) from one pastureland to the next during the summer, halting at one site just as long as its regeneration would not be affected by use, stocking up all the while for the barren, cold, but sedentary winters. These are large communities (by mountain standards) but dispersed over a vast terrain, with little contact amongst them. In the context of scarce rangeland resources, contact has often led to clashes over sharing of these scarce resources. The culture of the nomadic pastoralists that inhabit the very high altitudes therefore revolves around their herds, the produce from them (wool, milk) and the rangelands.

*b. Mid Altitudes:*

These are sedentary zones with village settlements in valleys and slopes, where the soils are infinitely more productive and support a wide range of crops. The sub-tropical and temperate zones are good for vegetables and orchards and are not terribly distant from the markets, and hence cash-cropping and horticulture is practiced. Communities at higher altitudes even in these zones however, practice subsistence cultivation, supplemented by animal husbandry and trading. These mid-latitudes are more densely populated and along with the sedentary nature of life, this has helped the development of more elaborate social structures and cultural forms.

*c. Low altitudes and foothills:*

At the Himalayan foothills, communities plant the fertile alluvial lands with grain crops and use flooding with river waters for irrigation. In the eastern Himalayas, the much-maligned 'slash and burn' cultivation is followed, and in most other areas, Himalayan farmers painstakingly cut terraces into the uncompromising steep hillsides to plant them with one or two crops per year.

*d. Trading:*

Menfolk of remote, high Himalayan regions are peripatetic by nature. Just as some travel for herding, many others travel out of their valleys and across the ranges for selling their wares at lowland markets, buying at the same time, goods that they cannot access in the closed high altitude valleys.

## **1.2 Lateral Differentiation**

There is great cultural diversity within the population of the Himalayan regions. Where religion is concerned, three religions are dominant in the mountains: Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. In terms of livelihood practices, as mentioned above, some undertake terraced agriculture, some are pastoralists while others are traders. Even local administrative systems vary from statutory panchayati systems to traditional institutions.

The cultural variations visible when moving laterally across the Himalayas, stem from the waves of migration across the Himalayan ranges and into the fertile valleys. Over the centuries, generations of people of different ethnic origins from its south, east, west and north, have migrated into the region and made it their home.

Puranas, the ancient Hindu epic, mentions the Kinnars, Kilinds, and Kiratas as the original inhabitants of the Himalayas. History also mentions the names of Khasas and the Darads. Four distinct ethnic strains are visible today<sup>3</sup>:

- Indic people, predominantly of the Hindu faith, with Indo-Aryan languages and art forms, and settled agriculture as an occupation
- Tibetan people following Buddhism, with Tibetan and associated languages, art and culture, and agro-pastoralism as the occupation
- Afghan-Iranian people following Islamic faiths and Islam-influenced art and culture, and both pastoralism as well as settled agriculture
- Burman/Southeast Asian people with a mix of faiths, with animist origins and animism influenced art forms and cultures, practicing shifting or settled agriculture or even pastoralism

Isolated as a result of the ranges between them, each of the ethnic groups inhabiting the remote Himalayan valleys and plateaux, evolved relatively independently with sporadic incursions and conquests and limited interaction and trade alone bringing in external influences. The locations at which important places of worship were located developed as seats of learning and culture while the crossroads and major halting points on trade routes became the places for transfer of culture, along with other more tangible material. In general, the inhabitants of the northern slopes and the higher altitudes on the southern side of the Himalayas are Mongoloids and have remained ethnically pure because of relatively lower contact with outsiders; the southern slopes, especially the lower and middle ranges, have had waves of invasions and conquests and migrations through history, and are today inhabited by diverse and mixed ethnic groups, with Mongoloid, Negroid and Aryan strains.

It is believed that settlement in the Himalayas began with a warrior-like Aryan tribe called Khas that migrated to the western Himalayas in 1500 BC; the Tibeto-Burman people of South-east Asia (called the Kiratas and reputed for their musical skills) moved into the central and eastern Himalayas in the early millennia. Bhotia nomads moved southwards from the northern slopes into the high Himalayan valleys and plateaux on the southern slopes in the early centuries AD. Although the pattern of settlements is variegated and complex, on the whole, north-western Himalaya has evolved under the Muslim influence, central and eastern Himalaya is essentially Hindu, while Buddhists holds sway in the northern flank.

#### ***a. Western Himalaya:***

The people of this region display a flow of the Afghan-Iranian cultures from the west, with an impinging of the Indic cultures from the south and Tibetan cultures from the north. Pradyumna P. Karan<sup>4</sup> divides the Western Himalayan realm into the Sub-Himalayan Kashmir (Poonch and Jammu), Pir Panjal, Vale of Kaashmir, Ladakh and Baltistan, and the Kohistan and Gilgit regions. “The Laddakh division of Jammu and Kashmir is represented by the Changpas in the highland areas of extreme north, Laddakhis in the plateau areas of central zones and Baltis, Brokpas and Dards in the river valleys of Western zones. The Changpas are mostly nomads engaged in trans-human activities while Laddakhis, Dardi and Balti are engaged in primitive agricultural activities mostly concentrated in river valleys. Laddakhi, Dardi and Balti are the major languages spoken in this region.”<sup>5</sup> Kashmiris, Gujjars and Bakkerwals inhabit the Pirpanjal and Kashmir valley mountains areas who speak kashmiri, and Pahari/Gojri respectively. The people in the upper reaches of the mountains follow Islam while the population in the foothills are mostly Hindu. Both Ladakhis and Baltis are Mongolid in physical traits. While Ladakh’s population is predominantly Buddhist, the Baltistan consists of both Muslims and Buddhists. It is therefore that ‘Buddhist monasteries, prayer flags and chortens form significant elements of the cultural landscape in Ladakh and adjoining Baltistan.’<sup>6</sup>

#### ***b. Central Himalaya:***

The Central Himalayan region can be divided into the regions of Himachal and Punjab, Garhwal and Kumaon and the Nepal Himalayas. With the exception of a few Buddhists, the region is inhabited by people of the Aryan stock. People in the foothills of the Inner Himalayan region are loosely referred to as ‘Paharis’ and “... comprise a variety of subgroups which share basic cultural patterns but show local differences in such features as dialect,

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<sup>3</sup> *Population Characteristics of the Himalayan Region* by P. P. Karan

<sup>4</sup> [http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot\\_03\\_02\\_01.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot_03_02_01.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> ‘Ethnicity and Socio-Cultural Mosaic of the Himalayas’, Dutta, Mondira

<sup>6</sup> [http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot\\_03\\_02\\_01.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot_03_02_01.pdf)

ceremonial forms, deities worshipped, house styles, dress and ornamentation, range of castes, and rules of marriage. These variations are often extremely limited in distribution so that it is possible for one acquainted with a region to identify readily the particular valley or ridge from which a person comes by his speech or dress.”<sup>7</sup> “They are isolated from the Tibetan Bhotiyas by high mountains, but have trading contacts when the Bhotiyas come (to the) lower regions. ...The semi-nomadic Bhotiyas live in the northern regions. ... (they) live in their villages only for short periods in the year. They go either to high altitudes with their herds during the summer months, or to the Bhabar near the plains for trade during the winter when the valleys are severley cold.”<sup>8</sup>

### *c. Eastern Himalayas:*

The Eastern Himalayan regions are said to consist of the Sikkim and Darjeeling hills, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. The main communities inhabiting these regions are Bhutias, Gorkhas, native Lepchas, Mon and Nepalis in the Sikkim and Darjeeling regions. They are either Hindu or Buddhist by religion and mainly speak Gorkha and Nepali. People of the Tibetan culture also dominate in certain regions of the area. The Tibetan culture is also predominant in most areas of Bhutan, southwestern parts of which are characterized by the increasing number of Nepali settlers. In Arunachal, the Akas, Daflas, Apa Tanis, Galongs, Abors and Mishmis are the predominant tribes, majority of who speak their tribal languages. The people are mostly followers of animistic faith or are Hindus and Buddhists. A significant size of the population is also now converted to Christianity. The region is characterized by practices of shifting agriculture. Bamboo, an intrinsic part of the cultural lives, is used as building material, furniture and as food (shoots).

### *d. Languages:*

The Himalayan region is characterized by considerable linguistic diversity and multilingualism as well. “The Himalayan reaches of South Asia have been described as one of the ten biodiversity ‘mega centres’ of the world. But this diverse region is also home to almost 20% of all human languages, so the area should be thought of as a linguistic and cultural ‘mega centre’ as well, and as a key site for the common heritage of all humanity.”<sup>9</sup> Language communities of the Himalayas include the Indo-European language family, the Dravidian language family, the Tibeto-Burman language family, the Austro-Asiatic language family, as well as some language isolates. A study has listed as many as 51 languages in the Himalayan region<sup>10</sup>, with 20 each in the western and central regions, predominantly of the Indo-Aryan group, and 11 in the eastern, predominantly of the Tibeto-Burman group. The languages of the rituals (Sanskrit, Tibetan) are usually well developed and documented, and some of the more widely used languages such as Nepali, Burmese, etc., also have detailed dictionaries. Classical literature is available in the language of the rituals, and neo-classical and modern literature in the more dominant languages in use. Long contact between the different languages have also caused linguistic borrowing and change and the languages as they exist today and the literature of the current times is a reflection of the migration patterns, patterns of dominance-submission among communities, social structures and trade relations.

## **1.3 The Common Cultural Fabric**

Since fording the high mountain ranges that separated the Himalayan valleys was possible only at great risk to life, each valley and each distinct community developed its own socio-cultural solutions to the challenges of life, virtually cut-off from the rest of the world. Yet, the common geographical factors helped shape cultures that were highly akin one to another.

### *a. The Human-Nature Connect:*

To claim that this feature is unique only to the tribal populations of the mountains would be grossly unfair to their counterparts in the plains. But the geographical isolation of the mountains makes this a rather striking feature of the people living within them. One and all, the people of the Himalayas worship the mountains as their preserver and protector and life-giver. Nature and its relationship with the human are intrinsic in all the systems and institutions governing the functioning a particular community. Natural resources are looked upon as

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<sup>7</sup> *Cultural Variability and Drift in Himalayan Hills* by Gerald Berreman, University of California – Berkeley

<sup>8</sup> [http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot\\_03\\_02\\_01.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot_03_02_01.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> *Living Languages and Troubled Tongues: Language Diversity and Endangerment in the Himalays* by Turin, Mark

<sup>10</sup> Ronal J-L, Bretien. *Atlas of the Languages and Ethnic Communities of South Asia*.

living entities interacting with the human and animal population. Forests, trees, rivers, mountains and lakes are worshipped. Religion and medicine is centered on nature and its practice aided with natural resources. Traditional livelihood practices of agriculture or pastoralism are also mostly in sync with the cycle of death and rejuvenation in nature.

***b. Spiritual base:***

All communities are deeply spiritual and strongly religious. The religious institutions hold great importance in the lives of the people: such as the Hemis monastery in Leh, the Tashigong Monastery in Pooh, Kinnaur and the Tabo monastery in Spiti. Apart from institutionalized religious practices, tribal practices that are mostly animistic and characteristic of nature worship are prevalent in most parts of the Himalayas. Thus, most communities have myths and legends where the gods and goddesses of the rivers and mountains play out epic tales that are narrated till today.

***c. Personal characteristics:***

Except for inhabitants of the arid wilderness on the northern flanks and the dense forests of the eastern ranges, where the people are fierce and warrior-like – they successfully rebuffed the British armies during the Raj era - the Himalayan people are essentially peace-loving. In spite of the adversities of Himalayan life, the people of this region are strikingly joyful in temperament. The culture of Himalayan regions is known for harmony, co-existence, friendship, compassion and tolerance. All the people participate in marriages, share sorrows and joys and respect fellow citizens. The Triloknath temple is a standing example of religious unity. Here the Buddhists worship Avalokiteshwara while the Hindus worship Lord Shiva. Both communities participate in all the functions.

***d. Rich traditional knowledge:***

The Himalayas also boast of a rich tapestry of traditional knowledge, spanning domains, such as architecture, medicine and agro-forestry that reflect the particular ecological conditions of the region. One positive result of the physical isolation of the region has been the near intact preservation of this centuries old knowledge base.

***e. Social structure:***

Himalayan people are highly clannish. While the Hindu and Islamic societies are very hierarchical, the Mongoloids have several distinct groups based on territory, language and tribal customs. Himalayan women usually enjoy a much greater level of freedom than in other parts of the peninsular. They participate equally with the men in agricultural practices and in cultural activities, and there is no seclusion of women as is seen in the plains of India. Society in the higher altitudes is quite liberal albeit male dominated; lower Himalayas has a more conservative society. Mountain women carry out all sedentary activities including farming, gathering fodder and fuelwood, etc., while men manage herds and carry out trading activities.

***f. Art & architecture:***

The Himalayan communities have a wealth of traditional art forms and crafts, that include thangka painting, wood carving, carpet weaving, and traditional music and dances. These art and craft forms follow a distinct Himalayan style that is indigenous to the Himalayas, characterized by Tibetan, Nepali and Kashmiri religious cultures and span the areas under the sway of these particular cultures. Himalayan style art is generally religio-aesthetic in nature, and comprises the iconography, composition, symbols and motifs drawn from the forms of religions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. Crafts of the Himalayan region are in keeping with the available resources, climatic conditions and terrain of the Himalayas. The seclusion of the region and the long periods of hibernation during the severe winters allows considerable time for crafts work. Most crafts also serve certain functions, for clothing, food, and various social, cultural and spiritual traditions, and the isolation of the Himalayan worlds has necessitated self-reliance in their production. Many Himalayan communities therefore developed superior craftsmanship- in bamboo & wood carving, silver and gold articles, weaving of shawls, carpets and rugs.

As with other aspects, geography, geology and climate, apart from lifestyle and aesthetic considerations, play a big role in the architectural styles that have evolved in the Himalayan region. The flat-roofed, earthen structures

of the western Himalayas and the higher altitudes characterized by low precipitation, the timber and stone constructions of the mid-altitude ranges in the central and eastern Himalayas, are attuned to the materials, the climate, as well as the religio-aesthetic and lifestyle considerations of the region. While the material differs – construction tends to follow a distinctive style across the Himalayan belt. All housing is typically of two stories, the lower floor being used for storage and cattle, and the upper floor for living.

It is also important to note that there have been migrations into the Himalayas from very early times for various reasons, to gain strategic access to the great Indian plains, to establish ownership on Himalayan kingdoms or even to satisfy one's requirement for spiritual quest. All these factors combined over a period of time to change significantly the complexion of the local populace. There have been waves of migration from Nepal to Sikkim and Kumaon, for instance, and from Tibet, as a result of which, it is extremely difficult to separate the different racial strains. Population movement is a continuing phenomenon in the Himalayas and hence its current character too is in flux. People from the plains move seasonally into the mountains and those from the higher altitudes move to lower altitudes during summers; those from the northern flanks keep migrating in waves to the southern slopes.

## 2. ENDANGERMENT OF HIMALAYAN CULTURES

“The denial of cultural rights to minorities is as disruptive of the moral fabric of mainstream society as is the denial of civil rights. Civil rights, however, are focused on the individual, while cultural rights must focus on ethnocultural groups.”<sup>11</sup> Apart from the loss of global cultural treasures, cultural erosion creates a society in psychological distress with its accompanying consequences in terms of social evils. The process of erosion however is gradual, and timely interventions could well halt or even reverse the trend. Fishman in his study of minority and endangered languages identified the stages of language endangerment that have been adapted for cultural erosion and presented below. Identification of the stage a particular society is in, in terms of cultural erosion, could help determine and implement appropriate and timely policies for preservation of these cultures.

<i>Different Stages of Culture Endangerment [Adapted from Fishman's (1991, pp. 88-109) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale for Threatened Languages]</i>
<b>Stage 8:</b> The traditional culture has been supplanted by a homogenous, modern culture. Only a few elders know the traditional cultural forms. A few monuments and museums are the reminders of the traditional culture.
<b>Stage 7:</b> The younger generations do not know nor value the traditional culture. Only adults beyond child-bearing age know some of the cultural forms. Some material forms of culture are visible, intangible forms are disappearing.
<b>Stage 6:</b> The younger generations do not value the cultural forms, both material and intangible. There is some inter-generational use of the cultural forms however, and there is considerable inter-generational gap with respect to culture-in-use.
<b>Stage 5:</b> A few select cultural forms are still alive and used in the community, primarily in a ritualistic/habitual manner, rather than meaningfully used/valued; several are not in use. Material forms are degraded and no longer in production. Intangible forms are diluted.
<b>Stage 4:</b> The cultural forms are used only on festive and religious occasions. All cultural forms show signs of degradation and loss.
<b>Stage 3:</b> The cultural forms are used in their near-original forms in some sections of society alone.
<b>Stage 2:</b> A number of cultural forms are alive and in use. Both material and intangible forms however show strains of alien cultures.
<b>Stage 1:</b> Several cultural forms are in use in daily life, in occupations and in education, and the community retains its cultural integrity and identity.

The high mountain ranges result in physical isolation of the communities that inhabit this region and restrict movement and communication, factors that have led to the maintenance of the cultural sovereignty of the Himalayan people. With increasing connectivity, this is fast eroding however. A world in transition, the mountains lie at the cross roads, sometimes taking advantage of the change that is fast enveloping it, and at the same time clinging to its uniqueness, its heritage. As every small town in these mountains looks forward towards more shopping malls, more English schools and fast food joints, the ancient culture of every hill and mountain (whether it is reflected in

Mountain territories represent 35% of the surface of continents (120 countries) and 15% of the world's population (or almost a billion people). The development of mountains is therefore a major challenge for the planet, particularly as these territories have a primary strategic role in many areas:

- at the identity and cultural levels: handing down of traditions, knowledge, know-how, incomparable knowledge of the natural environment and its equilibrium, social organisation based on the values of effort and solidarity,
- at the environmental level: principal supplier and reservoir of soft water, the largest reserve of biological diversity after the oceans, essential role, particularly as regards the forests, in the carbon cycle, support and management of space and countryside,
- at the economic level: high quality and high specificity agro-alimentary produce, ores, hydroelectricity, small-scale produce, ecotourism, etc.

Around the world, mountains are under threat from several mortal dangers: ageing populations, migration, exodus and packing into inhumane and poverty-stricken peri-urban zones, rapid destruction of societies or communities, increasingly intensive use of natural resources, search for costly solutions to trading competition which these territories cannot support, recourse to dangerous production, etc.

This development entails more and more conflicts for the appropriation of resources or territories, for the control of production, for the preservation of identities and autonomies, for access to the same fundamental rights, etc.

Finally, because mountain territories are often border zones between states, they are often the scene of many wars or guerrilla warfare. Thus, 80% of the world's conflicts are played out in mountain regions.

In order to preserve these global public goods, to retain populations on these territories, where their presence is indispensable, and to avoid them coming to cram into the megapolises, national and international officials should be persuaded of the need to create and implement appropriate policies and programs. - **World Mountain Peoples' Organization**

<sup>11</sup> Fishman, J. A. (1991). *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

the worship of forests, mountains and rivers, in its diverse languages, in traditional agricultural practices, its ancient wisdom, craft or language) is stared at by every person, be it a second generation 'pahari' herself, a policy maker or a development practitioner, as something that needs to be preserved, because it yet has not been understood and because there is so much more yet to learn from it.

## 2.1 Hazards for Himalayan Cultures

Across 2002-2007, Pragma, a development organization working for the sustainable development of the vulnerable communities and ecosystems of the Indian Himalayas, has been implementing a project on 'Community Management of Cultural Heritage' in the district of Lahaul & Spiti. In the course of this project and after it, the organisation has gathered information on the status of Himalayan cultures, through the process of village meetings and multi-stakeholder grassroots workshops in several Himalayan districts. Available literature and secondary data has also been accessed.

The key 'Hazards for Himalayan Cultures', are as follows:

### a. 'Invisible' cultures and cultural erosion:

a1. Rapid influence of modernisation: Secluded for centuries, and due to the region's remoteness, the cultural sovereignty of the Himalayan tribes had remained intact. With increasing connectivity, this is fast eroding however. The influence of other cultures is eroding the local value base. As new methods/ sciences make inroads into these erstwhile closed Himalayan valleys, and the forces of modernisation persuade local communities, the traditional knowledge is being rapidly eroded and the local value for and promotion of these is declining.

a2. Undocumented ITK, small practicing populations: Each inner Himalayan valley had developed a rich base of indigenous traditional knowledge over centuries, comprising ecological practices, traditional medicine, and the like, uniquely suited to its particular environment. These have unfortunately not been documented, and their knowledge/practice is contained in small sub-groups, the size of which are steadily reducing, rendering the ITK highly vulnerable.

a3. Lack of visibility, credibility: Although 'visible' as exotic, for touristic purposes, they are 'invisible' and appear to lack credibility enough to be recognized at par with mainstream systems. This has in turn has led to the erosion of many traditional agricultural, medicine, food, education systems and knowledge and loss of many languages, under the onslaught of external influences after the exposure of these regions to wider population and influences. For example, the Lepchas in North Sikkim are now labeled as the 'Vanishing Tribe' because their indigenous systems of medicine, art, culture, livelihood practices, language etc. are fast eroding as they have been pushed to the peripheries of their own lands in Sikkim and Darjeeling. In Dzongu, the Lepcha Reserve in North Sikkim which is also the last bastion of this vast dwindling tribe, there are only a handful of traditional medicinal experts called 'bongthing's<sup>12</sup>. Mainstream medical practice questions the validity of traditional systems of healing of the Himalayas and although efforts are being made to preserve the knowledge in these practices, it still is in the danger of being appropriated for commercial use<sup>13</sup>.

a4. Lack of evolution and inter-generational diffusion: The spread of many cultural forms (language, arts & crafts) to new generations has not continued, and they have also not evolved to modern lifestyles & needs, hence leading to declining use and endangerment of traditional cultural forms. The multilingualism practiced in the Himalayas is also a cause for the death of many Himalayan languages. The language of the rituals (Sanskrit, Tibetan) tends to survive, although primarily as a script, while more dominant languages of neighbouring areas are adopted for regular use.

a5. Youth forsaking traditional culture: Given the lack of benefits from their own culture and heritage, younger generations are forsaking their traditional culture to adopt mainstream cultures that they perceive to have significant economic and social benefits, or out-migrating to urban centres in the neighbouring plains areas, wanting to escape the drudgery of every day tasks and the boredom of long winters in the cold and dark – to opportunities elsewhere in an exciting and more modern world. Parents encourage them to go, although socially

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.himalayan-adventure.com/eco/lepcha.htm>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.grain.org/briefings/?id=196>

their vibrancy and youth are needed, as is their labour for agricultural tasks. As their cultural base erodes, the future viability of such remote Himalayan valleys where traditional socio-economic livelihoods are threatened by the development gap, is also at risk. Out-migration is also slowly causing the breakdown of village communities, family structures, and cultures, and swells the ranks of the urban poor.

***b. Exclusion and homogenising development:***

*b1. Physical isolation & exclusion:* The high mountain ranges separate the Himalayan valleys from the rest of the country, and result in physical isolation of the tribal communities that inhabit the region and lesser contact with the mainstream population. This has meant that the mainstream populations know little about the Himalayan peoples and this in turn contributes to a psychological distance and suspicion between them.

*b2. Sense of alienation:* Prejudices & stereotypes abound about Himalayan communities amongst the mainstream populations. The Himalayan communities are perceived as inferior by the mainstream population, the value of their culture & traditional knowledge is not known nor recognised and their cultures rejected and even denigrated. Himalayan communities face discrimination in all avenues of life and are marginalised in the development process. The development gap between neighbouring areas and the Himalayan region is a source of frustration, particularly for the young. The painful sense of alienation and exclusion suffered, breeds separatism and inter-community hatred and violence.

*b3. Democracy misses and development gulf:* Years of segregationist policies have contributed to the gulf between these communities and the mainstream lowland communities, and recent governmental interventions have also been inadequate and ineffective. The State considers mountain areas to be peripheral and less productive than other areas and hence accords them lower priority at the national levels. The sparsity of population that characterises mountain regions also reduces their influence in the democratic process at the national level.

*b4. Top-down, homogenising policies:* The mountains and its people have so far been taken for granted as a top-down, homogenized processes of development were thrust on them. The form of development that is being instituted in the region, is at great variance to its ethos. Although most of the communities in the mountainous regions have their own unique traditional systems and institutions of education, medicine, and religion, larger development has been almost blind to these. Policies & interventions have tended to be developed based on the more dominant lowlands and applied in high Himalayan regions, in spite of their distinctive cultures, and resulting in a gradual loss of variant customs, practices and languages. Sectors that have an intrinsic cultural dimension such as education, have been especially given to insensitivity, thrusting the mainstream culture through them, obliterating all that is local: education, even at the primary level has been focused on mainly a western, English or Hindi-based curriculum that alienates the child from its immediate environment and leaves it wanting to be part of an urban, city-like population inept at adapting to its own surroundings<sup>14</sup>. This is despite the fact that research has clearly indicated the value of these traditional systems and local cultural forms. For instance, 'Years of research have shown that children who begin their education in their mother tongue make a better start, and continue to perform better, than those for whom school starts with a new language. The same applies to adults seeking to become literate.' (UNESCO 2003).

*b5. Stresses due to dissonant cultural models:* Development, as is characterized mostly in terms of western concepts of societal relationships or the human-nature interface, has had a substantial effect in dramatically changing the existing institutional structures traditionally existing within mountainous communities, and brought with it its own stresses as culturally dissonant models are promoted. The development paradigm promoted in the Himalayas as elsewhere in the world, has been based on the Unilinear Theory of Cultural Evolution<sup>15</sup>, which perceives the western way of life as the ideal<sup>16</sup>. The living systems of medicine, nature worship, barter, agriculture etc. which is mostly based on subsistence needs and a symbiotic relationship with nature is threatened by a developmental policy that is based on a western economic model of growth sustaining itself on the rapid exploitation of all human and natural resources. Growing tourism and associated inflow of cultural influences are also changing values and behaviours.

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<sup>14</sup> See initiatives addressing the problem: <http://www.secmol.org/edureforms/>

<sup>15</sup> *The anthropology of globalization: a reader* By Jonathan Xavier Inda, Renato Rosaldo

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/146212/cultural-evolution/1655/Unilinear-theory> and <http://www.ltconline.net/lukas/pages/theories.htm>

### c. Cultural dispossession:

*c1. Costs of development:* In recent years, the Himalayas have been shaken with examples of development projects like hydropower dams, limestone mines and roads usurping right of communities over sacred landscape and seriously endangering not only culture but basic livelihood and survival. This has led to the sudden loss of an entire resource base, owing to a majority of development projects in these mountains, uprooting people physically and culturally. Sadly, the developmental process consisting of an Environmental Impact Assessment does not take into account social and cultural costs of a developmental project. Therefore, local peoples' concerns regarding marginalization, the need to preserve landscapes for religious and spiritual beliefs, do not find value in the cost benefit analysis of neither the project proponents nor the Government.

*c2. Piracy of bio-cultural resources:* Lack of information regarding global and national policy changes makes mountain communities vulnerable to global threats like that of bio-piracy. International regime favours a system of patents and individual rights, a practice that is diametrically opposite to the mountain culture of sharing knowledge and resource. Recent legislation like the Biological Diversity Act of India, the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act etc., which seek to protect the rights of these communities over their resource and knowledge need to also develop mechanisms to protect this very culture of use of these resources, the wisdom and of sharing and community ownership<sup>17</sup>.

*c3. Changes in traditional structures:* In addition, tribal populations have continued to struggle with basic economic and political concepts. For instance, the notion of permanent, individual ownership of land is still (or was until a few decades ago) foreign to most tribes. Land, if seen in terms of ownership at all, was viewed as a communal resource, free to whoever needed it. Thus, the tribes had a delayed approach to accepting the necessity of obtaining formal land titles, as a result of which, they lost the opportunity to lay claim to lands that might rightfully have been considered theirs. Generally, it has been observed that the tribal people are severely disadvantaged in dealing with government officials who granted land titles.

The Lepchas are the earliest inhabitants of Sikkim. The culture customs and traditions of the Lepchas are inextricably linked to their deep bond with nature but changing times and modern development have started disturbing the delicate eco-system with which they have lived so closely over centuries. Here in the Himalayas, the abode of gods, the Lepchas or the Vanishing Tribe, who called themselves Mu-thanchi-Rong-kup, meaning the mothers, loved ones are fighting a losing battle. They no longer seem to be their mother's beloved one. Their last refuge, Dzongu (a protected area) is on the verge of collapse on alien hands with more than six hydro projects spanning the hearts and lungs of the tribe.

Three Lepcha youths affiliated with the Affected Citizens of Teesta ("ACT", a committee consisting of the local people of North and East Sikkim who hail from the affected area, to study and to take action and recommend action to be undertaken to mitigate the adverse impact of Power Projects) have resorted to an indefinite hunger strike, protesting against the Govt of Sikkim to immediately ban all hydro electric power projects in Dzongu.: Extract from online petition by ACT

*c4. Non-recognition of traditional systems:* The mountain ITK systems– socio-political, education, environmental conservation, medicine, religious practices etc.- lack recognition among the mainstream. Bhoti, one of the main indigenous languages, different dialects of which are spoken almost everywhere in the Himalayan region, is not even recognised by the Indian state. Likewise, the amchi system of medicine that was traditionally practised is not recognised by the Indian state.

*c5. Dispossession and disrepair of built and natural heritage:* Local tangible heritage is likewise under threat and heritage buildings are under disrepair and the natural heritage under severe anthropogenic pressure. Highland communities, effective guardians of their cultural/biological treasures in the past, have been dispossessed of their own heritage. The rights to their sacred spaces have been taken by the state, and they are left with a sense of alienation and cultural vacuum. Unfortunately, the maintenance and upkeep of these objects of culture has also suffered greatly under the state and without the ownership & care of its original stewards.

## 2.2 Differentiated Threats by Cultural Forms

The Pragma studies had also revealed threats and consequentially, preservation needs, for different cultural forms. Seven key cultural forms were considered, viz,

- Visual & Fine Arts
- Performing Arts
- Traditional Food
- Traditional Sports

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.kalpavriksh.org/campaigns/campaignsbd/index.html>

- Language & Literature
- Traditional Medicine
- Handloom and Handicrafts
- Others (including Built & Natural Heritage)

Key issues that beset each of the above forms are as follows:

*a. Visual & Fine Arts:*

a1. Most of the visual arts of the Himalayas, such as Thangka painting, involve elaborate processes and require several years of rigorous training for the development of a minimum level of expertise in the artist; frequently it also requires significant knowledge of associated philosophical treatises. This is a disincentive for the youth to learn these arts.

a2. Most professional artists besides, have out-migrated in search of better livelihoods, and teachers of art are rare in the Himalayan valleys. Although some training institutions for fine arts do exist, they are usually located at considerable distance in regional hubs.

a3. Although some of the Himalayan arts have gained recognition and demand levels internationally, reach of local artists to such markets is limited. There needs to be a concerted effort at a collaborative level or by the State to facilitate market access. There are serious limitations/lacunae in terms of promotion and sales opportunities, such as showrooms and exhibitions/local fairs. Cultural tourism and visibility and exports of Himalayan arts need to be promoted.

a4. Several dedicated and competent artists lack facilities/assistance to enable them to take up production of the arts on a professional and commercial basis. Efforts are required to enable them to access credit to make the activities economically sustainable.

*b. Performing Arts*

b1. Many of the traditional dances are rarely performed today and are gradually dying with reducing living exponents. The performances of local folk dances are anyway restricted to the local level, and remain unknown at the regional and national levels. Except for a few dances such as the Chham dance, most are unknown to tourists, are hence provide no pecuniary benefits.

b2. The younger generations are no longer interested in learning these art forms, preferring rather to learn more modern forms. It would be necessary to begin promotion of culture with the inculcation of a feeling of pride in the youth for their culture and traditions. Introduction of traditional performing arts in the local school curriculum would facilitate.

b3. With reducing usage levels, accompanying musical instruments (dhol, damau, maskabeen, hurka) are not available easily in the markets. In many cases, instrumentalists are limited to lower castes, and the associated social value (or lack of it) deters people from taking up the learning of instruments.

b4. The performing arts of the Himalayas lack recognition and encouragement by the government. The local artists feel isolated, undervalued and lack support. Networking among cultural actors, cooperation between different troupes, and linkages with relevant bodies of the government would serve to promote the forms. Media needs to be harnessed for promoting these forms and increasing their popularity and value in the potential audience.

b5. Artists are giving up the practice of these art forms also because of the lack of monetary benefits from these. There is an urgent need to promote these as intrinsic elements of cultural tourism. Coordination services for artisans to fix rates and assistance with linkages between dance troupes and hoteliers need to be provided. The performances need to evolve to cater to tourist preferences and time restrictions.

b6. There are few opportunities to practice the local dances, as the associated customs weaken. State and artists' networks need to conduct regular shows/events, and popularize them at the national level. Establishing

platforms like theatres, museums, etc at local, district, state and national levels, would promote practice of these forms.

### *c. Traditional Food*

c1. Traditional food of the Himalayas is at the primary stage of extinction. There is a change in food habits and a growing preference for modern fast foods. Traditional food crops are also vanishing gradually, with increasing focus on the growing of cash crops. Schools could play a stronger role in developing interest in traditional foods among the children, in order to ensure their perpetuity.

c2. While knowledge of methods of preparing traditional foods are widely known, expertise lies with a very few. It continues primarily as an adjunct to local festivals, and is gradually reducing. A commercial association would undoubtedly help. This would however call for provision of economic enablers to potential food entrepreneurs, including for instance, access to credit to start new enterprises, and low cost affordable technologies.

c3. The existing level of skills is adequate only for household level preparation, and would need to be upgraded for commercial success in traditional foods. For instance skills for food marketing, ie., garnishing and enhancing attractiveness of the local foods, would be called for.

c4. Some local foods have found favour with tourists and sustainability thereby. Other local foods need to be integrated with tourism as well. Hoteliers may be encouraged to promote traditional cuisine and local dishes integrated in local restaurants. Food festivals may be organized, particularly in the tourist season.

### *d. Traditional Sports*

d1. Some well-developed local sports include martial arts, archery, equestrian sports. The lack of formal training opportunities, quality teachers, and equipment associated with them at the local level, are major hindrances to their greater uptake however. As in the case of many cultural forms, professionals have out-migrated, leaving the region devoid of resources for further diffusion.

d2. The events associated with the practice of traditional sports are dying, thereby reducing the opportunities for traditional sports. Newer opportunities such as sporting events, perhaps associated with cultural tourism, may provide a fresh lease of life to these sports.

d3. In the face of modern sports, the lustre of the traditional sports is tending to fade. A fresh impetus could be provided by integrating the traditional sports with newer forms, for example- the old and new forms of archery, and multiple forms of martial arts, may be promoted together.

d4. Economic gains from the traditional sports could also catalyse increased practice of the sports. They would need to be popularised at a regional or national level such that they may then be played for monetary benefits to sportspersons.

### *e. Language & Literature*

e1. Many of the indigenous languages of the Himalayas are at the primary stage of extinction. There is a tendency among the Himalayan population to adopt mainstream languages for communication, leaving the indigenous languages for religious usage alone. This is leading to the erosion of local languages. It would be necessary to create literature and other non-religious uses of indigenous languages, to facilitate their revival.

e2. Multilingualism is common in the Himalayan region, since each small valley has evolved with its own distinct language/dialect, making communication between/among the valleys difficult. With the opening up of communication, link languages had to be found, that have weakened the usage of the valley-specific languages. Assimilation and language modification has also affected the integrity of the languages.

e3. The medium of instruction used in schools is either English or Hindi. This reduces the effectiveness of education, while also leading to the erosion of the indigenous languages. It would be necessary to introduce local languages in the school curriculum. Classes should also be held for older people to encourage the regular usage of the languages.

e4. The pure form of the indigenous languages and the complete knowledge of the grammar and lexicon were known to monks. With the number of individuals joining monasteries having reduced, the number of experts in local languages is also reducing.

#### *f. Traditional Medicine*

f1. Traditional medicine is at a high stage of endangerment. There is a growing preference for Allopathic medicine. Traditional medicine systems have suffered a loss of credibility and reliability in the local area, although in urban centres, and even in the West, their popularity is on the rise; these systems of medicine are also suitable for the climatic and physiological characteristics of the Himalayan region. Local health authorities should be sensitized and made aware of the traditional medicine systems. Promotion of these systems needs to be carried out at multiple levels: for tourists and for local populations.

f2. Medicinal herbs that form the major constituents of traditional medicine are being depleted fast due to anthropogenic pressures and change in the local ecology as well. Use of chemical fertilizers in fields affect the medicinal plants besides and reduce their efficacy or render them harmful.

f3. Skill levels of traditional healers are gradually reducing. The earlier lineage system of learning and practice of traditional medicine is being eroded. The younger generation is reluctant to follow the profession of their forefathers without adequate compensation. At the same time, facilities for formal training and education in traditional medicine are inadequate.

f4. Many of the traditional systems of medicine are not recognised by the State, although there are efforts afoot to lobby for such recognition. Till this happens however, practice of traditional medicine is severely constrained.

f5. The procedures for medicine preparation and administration in the traditional systems are not developed for modern times. Practices of asepsis and basic levels of hygiene are not known to traditional healers. This makes them unacceptable to the modern user. Packaging and standardization of products is vital.

f6. Many of the traditional medicine systems emerge from folk traditions and not codified. Others that do have formal codification are however documented in traditional scripts that are not accessible to most today. Documentation is essential and in languages that greater numbers of traditional healers are familiar with.

#### *g. Handlooms & Handicrafts*

g1. The use of the local clothing, costumes and ornaments of the Himalayan region is gradually diminishing, as mainstream Indian or western clothing begins to be adopted. The traditional clothing is used only by the older generations. The traditional crafts are also recognized only at local level.

g2. In the case of many crafts, the raw material used is becoming more difficult to access. For example, the number of livestock is reducing, and with that raw wool availability; linkage with outside sources has at the same time, not been created. The cost of the raw material is increasing, but demand for the finished crafts is falling. Traditional, herbal dyes are not available, but modern dyeing and finishing units for wool are not available.

g3. As mentioned above, the markets for most crafts are not adequately developed. Products are mostly for personal use, not for sales. The quality and finishing of handloom & handicrafts produced are also below market requirements, a key cause for lower offtake and revenues from them for the crafts person's. The crafts person's also need market information to upgrade their products.

g4. The numbers of crafts person's and weavers are reducing. Lack of interest among the youth is resulting in loss of particular techniques in handicrafts. There is a critical need to encourage local weavers, train them for improved quality and skills, and promote senior and experienced craftsmen in order to preserve the local weaves and crafts of the Himalayan region. A network of crafts person's would facilitate solidarity and promote mentoring relationships.

g5. Although some exceedingly beautiful handicrafts and handloom exist in the Himalayan region, very few have achieved market-space and revenue-generating capacity. The government needs to make the schemes for

assisting craftspeople's more accessible, and help in income generation and international recognition through festivals.

g6. Effective marketing is a critical need for the handloom and handicrafts of the Himalayas. Crafts Centres may be developed at community halls. A brand Himalaya might be an effective mechanism. Training on effective branding and marketing is required for craftspeople's and their associations.

g7. Local carpets are being replaced by cheaper synthetic carpets from outside the region. The government may explore guided restriction of imports and protection of indigenous crafts/handloom forms.

#### ***h. Others, including Built & Natural Heritage***

h1. A few heritage sites (monuments, temples and monasteries) such as *Gompas* are protected by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI); several however lie unrecognised and degenerating. There needs to be a greater thrust on increasing recognition at the national level and international level (World Heritage Sites), by CSOs, CBOs at the local level, and to ensure appropriate maintenance of the monuments.

h2. Much of the region's antiquities are being lost to it, as they are sold to tourists and traders in antiquities at paltry sums. Fossils of the region are likewise sold to tourists at prices below par. Local heritage councils need to be promoted to protect the region's heritage.

h3. Local tourism stakeholders are frequently not adequately aware of its great strengths. Trainings need to be provided to guides and tour operators on various aspects of local monasteries, local flora and fauna and their importance, the local culture and mythology, etc.

h4. The architecture of the Himalayas is uniquely suited to its ecological and climatic conditions and environmental threats. This too is being lost as modern materials and building technologies take their place. Knowledge of earthquake resistant buildings is diminishing, and increasing vulnerability of local populations.

h5. Regional festivals such as the 'Ladakh Festival' should be promoted to promote cultural tourism in the Himalayan region. Festival timings should overlap with tourist seasons but retain the traditional flavour of the traditional festivals.

h6. There is a great need to enhance awareness of and value for traditional cultures and knowledge systems in the younger generation. A TK database should be developed/documentation through consultation with experts, involving local communities as well. TK should be incorporated in the school curriculum and awareness generated in the youth through youth clubs. TK must be popularised and respect for it built at the local/national/international levels through different media (print and electronic).

### 3. CULTURAL PROTECTION AND PROMOTION

“Cultural diversity is necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.” - UNESCO Declaration, 2001. The UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2005* aims at: protecting and promoting diversity of cultural expressions; providing opportunities for the creation, production, dissemination, distribution and enjoyment of domestic cultural activities, goods and services; and nurturing and supporting artists and others involved in the creation of cultural expressions, among other aims. The *UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003* aims for: safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage; ensuring respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals; raising awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof, among others. The *UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972* aims for: ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage, among others.

1. The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.

2. The “intangible cultural heritage”, as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains: (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship.

**Article 1:** For the purposes of this Convention, the following shall be considered as ‘cultural heritage’:

- *monuments* : architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
- *groups of buildings* : groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science ;
- *sites* : works of man or the combined works of nature and of man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological points of view.

**Article 2:** For the purposes of this Convention, the following shall be considered as ‘natural heritage’:

- natural features consisting of physical and biological formations or groups of such formations, which are of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific point of view;
- geological and physiographical formations and precisely delineated areas which constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation;
- natural sites or precisely delineated natural areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation or natural beauty.

#### 3.1 GoI regulatory efforts

Government policies towards the tribes in the Himalayan foothills have to some extent, led to the tribes maintaining their traditional lifestyle. Historically, the political status granted to the Himalayan tribes was always distinct from the rest of India. These communities had not been controlled by any of the empires that had a stronghold in larger India, and the region was populated by autonomous feuding tribes. During British colonialism, efforts were made to protect the sensitive northeast frontier, followed a policy called the "Inner Line", where non tribal people were allowed into the tribal areas only with special permission. Post independence governments have continued this policy of protecting the Himalayan tribes as part of the strategy to secure the border with China. This policy has generally saved the northern tribes from the kind of exploitation that those elsewhere in South India have suffered. In Arunachal Pradesh, for instance, tribal members control commerce and most of the lower-level administrative posts. Government

##### **Scheme on Preservation and Development of Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas Ministry of Culture, Government of India**

The objective of the scheme is to promote, protect and preserve the cultural heritage of the Himalayas for which financial assistance will be provided to institutions and voluntary organisations.

The scope of the scheme would include:

- a) Study and research of all aspects of cultural heritage;
- b) Collection of objects of art and craft and documentation of cultural artefacts including the folk, music, dance and literature;
- c) Dissemination through audio-visual programmes of art and culture;
- d) Training in traditional and Folk Art; and
- e) Assisting and setting up of museums and libraries etc

construction projects in the region have provided tribes with a significant source of cash and access into wider society. Some tribes have made rapid progress through the education system.

### 3.2 Preservation of Language and Other Intangible Cultural Forms

The biggest impediment that the preservation of intangible cultural forms faces is the fact that the erosion of these forms is very difficult to determine. The need for preservation is often felt too late. Multilingualism for instance gradually leads to the indigenous language lying in disuse.

#### *Avenues for practice:*

Recognising this, most State policies and programmes aimed at the preservation of intangible cultures, such as language and music, aim to provide avenues for continuing use of these intangible cultural forms. Competitions, festivals, awards, etc., are orchestrated events that enable the display/practice of the cultural forms. Some examples of local cultural festivals in the Himalayan region that are helping to revive/continue the use of cultural forms, are as follows:

#### Festivals:

*The Hemis Festival:* The courtyard of Hemis Gompa-the biggest Buddhist monastery in Ladakh is the stage for the famous 'Hemis' festival that celebrates the birth anniversary of Guru Padmasambhava. The colourful two-day pageant falls on the 10th day (Tse-Chu) of the Tibetan lunar month.<sup>18</sup>

*The Darjeeling Carnival:* Initiated very recently, the Carnival provides a platform to showcase the wide cultural diversity in the small district of Darjeeling. It is held mainly in the month of October every year.<sup>19</sup>

Traditional knowledge systems, particularly of medicine, that are being eroded under the force of modern systems, need to be addressed likewise through modes that promote their practice and use. Traditional medicine clinics are set up, and camps are held to promote traditional healthcare. The Govt. of India has several schemes for the revitalization, promotion, and even professionalization of these traditional systems of medicine, towards adapting them to modern-day user requirements.

#### *Research, documentation & dissemination:*

Various methods of documentation, publication and dissemination are also used, and serve to preserve as well as maintain the use of these cultural forms. Digital forms of documentation, e-dissemination and media broadcasts are the primary modes. Thus, endangered language dictionaries, traditional pharmacopoeia, music & dance recordings, are ways to document and preserve. Extensive, rigorous research however needs to precede this.

Some examples of work in progress on documentation of intangible heritage include:

- The Himalayan Languages project: This is the largest language documentation initiative that has covered parts of the Asian heartland: India, China, Bhutan and Nepal, for over 15 years. Comprehensive linguistic descriptions of endangered and threatened languages of the Himalayan region have been published by the members of the multi-national research team of young investigators. These languages hold the key to the history and culture of the Himalayas and help to interpret archaeological records and trace the population movements in the past.
- Digital Himalaya: This project seeks to digitize select information material with respect to the Himalayas.
- Traditional Knowledge Digital Library is a collection of the traditional pharmacopoeia of India

### 3.3 Preservation of Monuments and Material Cultural Forms

Preservation of material, tangible cultural forms is by far more easier than of the intangible. Architectural heritage has known methods and regulations and processes as well, for their preservation, preservation of other material forms too, such as paintings and various material artefacts, have well-developed scientific methods.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.festivalsindia.in/hemis/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://darjeelingcarnival.blogspot.com/>

### *Conservation of material culture:*

Degradation is however, can only be controlled to an extent to extend the life of the artefacts. There are 2 aims of conservation- to slow the process of natural decay, and to remove the parts that have already been spoilt. Both preventive conservation (taking steps in advance to slow the degradation of products), and curative conservation (redress degradation that has already occurred) are undertaken. A few conservation efforts of Himalayan heritage buildings have been undertaken, both at community and at State/institutional level.

- The Nako monastery in Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh) is being restored by the local community with inputs and expertise from the School of Planning and Architecture. The project was initiated by Vienna University.
- The Kham Aid Foundation is restoring several monasteries and their murals and paintings in Tibet.

Given below are some Best Practices at Conserving Cultural Heritage Buildings<sup>20</sup>:

- Conservation and preservation of Fort Kochi Heritage Zone, Kerala: A major heritage conservation project is being implemented for the conservation and preservation of Fort Kochi Heritage Zone. This project has won the international PATA Grant Award for the Best Heritage project.
- "Adopt a Monument" Scheme, Rajasthan: This is an innovative package which allows corporate houses, non-governmental organizations and individuals owning monuments to sponsor conservation work of fragile monuments.

### *Conservation focus:*

Recognition of a material heritage as worthy of preservation is frequently half the battle. The State and other multilateral bodies have therefore multiple mechanisms to determine and declare the preservation-worthiness of sites/monuments, etc. Both natural and cultural heritage sites would qualify to be covered under material heritage and hence are covered by the World Heritage List, which assures those listed a degree of specific preservation attention. Thus, in 1999, the UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee inscribed the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (popularly called the Toy Train) on the list of World Heritage Sites.

### *Documentation of related traditional knowledge:*

Documentation is a great tool for preserving the knowledge that underlies the particular material objects that are under threat. The Tibetan Architecture Documentation Centre, for instance, seeks to preserve, document, disseminate and encourage the natural development of the architecture of ancient Tibet.

### *Eco-Museums:*

*'In the contemporary world, cultural traditions are disappearing as the drive towards cultural globalisation and homogenisation seems relentless. Facing these problems, museums need to make a statement to not only "collect artefacts and document life-ways before those cultures or memories of them disappear. The greater goal is for museums to play a role in the conservation of those cultures, to actually help those cultures survive in the contemporary world" (Kurin, 1991: 317).'*<sup>21</sup> The term Eco-museum refers especially to a new idea of holistic interpretation of cultural heritage, in opposition to the focus on specific items and objects, performed by traditional museums (Peter Davis, 1999, *Eco-museums: a sense of place*, Leicester University Press). The idea is gaining ground especially in relevance to the increasing need to preserve the vanishing cultures around the world, the human equivalent to endangered species and to combat the possibility of a monoculture of the human race. It involves, as mentioned above, a holistic interpretation of cultural heritage as intrinsically linked to culture, people and the environment. Most eco-museums, therefore, follow a community based, 'bottom-up' planning and management structure and offer to the visitor a one-window approach to the variant aspects of a particular region, its culture and people.

### *Examples of Eco-museums:*

*Ha Long Bay, Vietnam:* a demonstration project of the UNESCO and facilitated by Vietnam, it is located on the World Heritage Area of the Ha Long Bay, which is also referred to as the microcosm of Vietnam. It is based on the principle of 'appropriate heritage interpretation' and aims to achieve 'a balance between area-centred and people-centred approaches to environment and cultural conservation'. "The Eco-museum concept views the entire Bay as a living museum... An important feature of this approach is that it views human activity, past and

<sup>20</sup> From Volume II of the 'States Profile and Tourism Development – Final Report' (2005) of the Intercontinental Consultants and Technocrats Pvt. Ltd.

<sup>21</sup> Extract from 'Desert winds of change: High-Altitude Ladakh's responses to a global challenge', by Vanessa Kredler.

present, as fundamental components of the total environmental resource. The culture, history, traditions and activities of the human population on and around the Bay are as much a part of the heritage as the caves and plants on the island and are in continuous interaction with it.” (Galla, 2002)

*Belize.* The Eco-museum is reflective of the dynamic relationship between the Belizean culture and the environment it evolves in. The eco-museum features exhibitions that include several of Belize’s important tropical treasures, nature artistries, butterfly corridor and Belize stone collection.

### 3.4 Culture based enterprises

Cultural industries have evolved as a measure for the promotion of products and services based on the creative acumen, and have also helped in the continuation of traditional cultural skills. Traditional arts and crafts may be commercialized, and the economic motive would provide cultural actors of these traditional cultural forms with a new lease of life. Frequently this would require the traditional product/service to mutate in form. Marketability might call for a degree of modification to adapt the products/services to new user requirements and preferences. The traditional purpose, often social or spiritual, would also, naturally be overlaid by commercial considerations. The essential skills involved however, tend to survive this route.

#### *Patenting uniqueness:*

Local and regional communities are fast catching up on the international trade fundas, like for example Kullu shawls being now protected under the Geographical Indications Act and Kinnaur is pushing the same for Kinnauri shawls. The irony here is whether this exclusive protection mechanism focused on economic benefit and trade and dangerously moving towards exclusivity, will in future mar the hitherto simple, intangible culture based on common sharing and benefit.

### 3.5 Linking Culture and Environment

‘...fostering the health and vigour of ecosystems is one and the same goal as fostering the health and vigour of human societies, their cultures, and their languages. We need an integrated biocultural approach the planet’s environmental crisis.’ (UNESCO 2003)

The glory of the Himalayas is fading. The Himalayas are dying. I have decided on the declaration of the Save Himalaya Movement as my last will and I want to present it to the leader of the nation. We don't want the Ganga to become the Colorado, which disappeared in the desert of Arizona. We don't want the Ganga to become the Honhho, which once disappeared 620 km before the sea. We don't want our sea to become the Aral sea, which dried up because all the rivers had been damned and the water had been used commercially.  
- Sundarlal Bahuguna

#### 4. PRAGYA EFFORTS AT PRESERVATION & PROMOTION OF HIMALAYAN CULTURES

Pragya, a development organization working for the sustainable development of the vulnerable communities and ecosystems of the Indian Himalayas, has been implementing a project on 'Community Management of Cultural Heritage' in the district of Lahaul & Spiti. A cold desert region in north-western India, Lahaul & Spiti is a series of ruggedly beautiful valleys with altitudes ranging from 9,000 ft to more than 16,000 ft. The valley has among the most remarkable Buddhist art treasures in the world - ancient Buddhist monasteries and forts & palaces, fine wall paintings and sculptures, and a rich heritage of language, music & dance, and crafts. The Pragya project is aimed at community action for the management of forces that lead to culture erosion, preservation of the cultural heritage, including both tangible and intangible cultural assets, and promotion of the development of this heritage. The project involves the preservation of the traditional monuments, arts & crafts, and traditional language & knowledge of the region, through:

- (i) documentation of cultural assets,
- (ii) building community capacity for culture management, and
- (iii) sustainable community-based interventions aimed at culture preservation & development.

Towards the above, the cultural resources are being inventoried and documented. Extensive awareness sessions have been carried out for the community and Heritage Conservation Councils have been established for the management of community efforts towards culture preservation. Culture Promotion Centres and sub-centres have been established across the district that conduct classes on the traditional language and music & dance. Music & dance troupes have been constituted and equipped with instruments and costumes for enabling performances. The crafts of the region have been studied and crafts persons have been provided with training on product design and upgradation, and helped to set up cultural enterprises. Rural museums have been set up that showcase artefacts lent by several families in the area.

##### 4.1 Community Museums

A culture is eroded not only because of external forces for change, but also because the cultural forms fail to evolve and hence lose their relevance for the people and the environment among whom it is based. And ironically, we try to preserve this culture far away from their home bases, in big mausoleum-ish halls we call museums, where we try to hold the cultural forms static. The traditional museum is a building used as a repository of collections of artefacts representative of various cultural forms of the past. The other modes of preservation have tended to be as static - documentation and research. These methods have no doubt educated us about the dying/dead cultural forms, and helped save a sample of their material expressions for posterity, but have they really helped in preserving these forms?

The life sciences have evolved the concept of 'in-situ conservation', the preservation of life forms in their natural habitats, allowing as well for the natural course of evolution while minimising drastic external interventions. Culture as a dynamic phenomenon that interacts and develops as a result of its interaction with various geographical, economic, technological and social forces, is as much a living, breathing thing. Its effective conservation would therefore necessitate more than museums and publications. It would call for its continued presence among the very people and the very geographical area in which it originated and developed. It would also call for its continued development, adapting the cultural forms to changes in the external environment, yet not losing their ethnic essence.

##### *The Community Museum in new Museology:*

The last few decades of the 20th century have seen the development of a new concept in Museology, as an outcome of the traditional museums being seen as static and unapproachable by the general public, for whom they were meant. The new museum is defined by its socially relevant objectives and basic principles. Its work as an educational institution is directed towards making a population aware of its identity, and instilling confidence in a population's potential for development. The modern/new museums like eco-museums, neighbourhood museums, community museums, want to make a concrete contribution to coping with everyday life by pointing out problems and possible solutions. Relating to a clearly demarcated territory and its population, defined by cultural and natural boundaries for example a city, a neighbourhood, a cultural and geographic region, the new museum can contribute to a population's consciousness of its neighbourhood or region. In order to preserve its

experimental character and maintain the greatest possible openness to the constantly changing reality of people's lives, the new museum strives to maintain a low degree of institutionalisation. The community museum is one in which, through the active participation of the population, the function of community service is performed, since the themes that it develops are always tied to the interests and needs of the community. Today most modern museums think of themselves as educational institutions in the humanistic sense.

### *Museums as heritage interpretation centres:*

The first museums were no more than 'cabinets of curiosities', private collections of artefacts of mixed origin. When they evolved into the formal, scientifically organised and displayed museums too, they evolved with a certain isolationism and elitism. The collections would tell of an art form, but they told no story of its place in the life and history of the communities, they did not interpret the deeper cultural meaning of the cultural material. Further, the cultures of indigenous communities tended to be neglected and overshadowed by those of the dominant cultures. Underlying this neglect of indigenous cultures was a perception of such cultures as inferior and not a part of current cultures. A museum may however go beyond that of displaying collections, to interpreting local heritage, both for & by the local community, as well as for external visitors. It can offer the population an active role in shaping and participating in the facility; it can also provide opportunities for giving expression to the local heritage. Activities could be theme centered in distinction to predominantly object oriented, traditional museum work. The themes to be addressed should arise from the 'collective memory' as well as from contemporary needs. In new museology, collective memory is used to define the totality of a group's nonmaterial heritage. The museum could thus be extended to present the local community's cultural forms through the mode of interactive presentations, performances, thematic exhibitions, workshops & seminars, and the like. Such a heritage interpretation centre would be a living, throbbing fulcrum of cultural activities of a community and its visitors.

### *Community Museums in the Himalayas:*

The societies inhabiting the Himalayas have a rich cultural legacy, finding material expression in its variegated handicrafts, artefacts, ornaments and the like. Much of this precious history is either lost or not available for public gaze. Pragma has established a network of Community Museums across the Himalayan region: in Diskit and Tangtse (Ladakh), in Jispa, Yurnath, and Kishori (Lahaul), in Lossar, Dangkhar, and Kungri (Spiti), in Recong Peo (Kinnaur), in Joshimath (Chamoli), and in Tawang (Tawang); more such museums are in the process of being set up. Each museum displays the ancient artefacts - ornaments, utensils and other objects of human interest & value. The villages chosen as sites for the community museums are carefully selected, each representing a distinct cultural zone within the region, the facility thus helping revitalize the unique cultural forms of the area in its own habitat.

The community museums are not big, stuffy, academic places. Located right amidst the people and places that they are meant to provide a glimpse of, they are warm, interactive, human spaces, reflective of the people and the way of life, and therefore allow a real experience of the local culture, not just a distant appreciation of its material expression. Every single artefact on display has been donated by villagers, individuals, local organizations and monasteries, and the donor's name is displayed in the artefact description, as well. The unique artefacts of these Himalayan valleys were disappearing at an alarming rate, lost to posterity because of neglect, theft, and sale to unscrupulous buyers. The community museums have provided a platform for these objects of historical & cultural significance, and thus restored their value in their owners' eyes. They also, continually, educate the locals and visitors on the rich heritage and culture of the region, and thus help revitalise the region's cultural forms.

These museums are managed by the local community. They are operated by local youth that have been trained in professional museum and visitor management by faculty from the National Museum Institute. Windows for the promotion of local heritage, these have helped revive community identity, and are contributing to cultural tourism and revenues. Entry to each facility involves the purchase of a modestly priced ticket. The collections - handled by the local community-based Heritage Conservation Council - are utilised for paying the caretaker, the upkeep of the facility and, if collections allow, carrying out small developmental activities for the community. Some of the museums also have crafts & souvenirs showrooms attached. Products based on the traditional arts & crafts, both in their traditional forms as well as modified to modern-day uses, are available for sale in these showrooms. All products are handcrafted by the local crafts groups and the profits go directly to the craftspersons. This helps preserve the traditional art form and also provide incomes to the local craftspersons.

The museums and crafts showrooms also facilitate interaction with local people. Each museum is designed to be a part of a larger complex for Culture Promotion, which includes apart from the community museum, crafts showrooms, and at places heritage interpretation/exhibition centres. These HICs stage performances by local music & dance troupes, hold exhibitions on some particular cultural aspect, and also promote interactions between local artisans and others.

The Pragya effort has taken the concept of the new museum to the remote Himalayan region, effecting culture preservation, instilling a sense of pride among the Himalayan people for their rich cultural heritage, bringing economic benefits to the community, and empowering them to take responsibility for the protection and development of their cultural forms.

#### **4.2 Cultural Industries for the High Altitude Himalayas**

Given burgeoning tourism and growing interest in diverse arts and crafts across the world, the cultural forms of the Himalayas that are increasingly under threat, could well serve to create alternate livelihoods for the Himalayan people. Pragya is helping Himalayan communities shape marketable cultural forms into avenues for revenue generation. A pilot project was carried out in the district of Lahaul & Spiti in Himachal Pradesh; this is now being extended to all other high altitude districts in the country. Among efforts to valorize culture, groups and associations have been formed which focus primarily on the creation of *Heritage Based Enterprises* centered on products and services that reflect and augment the cultural diversity of the region. The effort is based on the understanding that most of the traditions, crafts, art and knowledge unique to these regions are dying because they do not bear the earlier held utility or value for the present generation. The effort, therefore, is to identify those elements of culture that could be transformed into income generating activities, adapting, wherever necessary, the form to the current day needs and preferences. Among these are crafts, some forms of dance, art and food. The intervention comprises the following:

*Crafts enterprise groups:* The traditional woven crafts of the Himalayas that had been gradually disappearing with the threads of time, have been revitalised and are being grown into supplementary livelihoods. Design experts (drawn from NIFT and NID) have worked with local craftspersons to develop a portfolio of alternate craft-based products attuned to current market trends. Intensive training has been imparted in a phased manner to the local craftspersons for skills upgradation and quality improvement. Crafts groups have been formed and are being facilitated with material & design inputs. Weaving centres have been set up, equipped with different types of looms. Crafts groups are being assisted to produce the traditional crafts (eg., lingche, pherba) as well as alternate products (such as bags, table mats, cushion covers) that use the same weaves & motifs; the Crafts Showrooms in the Ecomuseums serve as the sales outlets for these. The crafts groups are also being helped with linkages to sales outlets in urban centres in the region.

*Music & dance troupes:* A fresh lease of life has been given to the ethnic music & dance forms of the area as well. New generations of Himalayan people have been taught the local dances by local experts. Music & dance troupes have been constituted and troupe members have been given inputs on choreography and stage management. The troupes perform at local events and are being groomed to perform at the state & national levels as well, which would in turn generate wider awareness of and respect for the local culture. Still at a nascent stage, this model could well establish a sustainable culture tourism cluster, which benefits the locals in the area. On the anvil is the establishment of Heritage Interpretation Centres for conducting periodic local cultural festivals for the benefit of both locals and tourists.

*Ecotourism training and enterprise facilitation:* Recognising tourism as inevitable for the Himalayan region, Pragya has determined to make all efforts to promote a sustainable form of tourism in the area, one that conserves the local natural and cultural heritage while ensuring maximum benefits for local people. Towards this, a vocational course has been developed and a cadre of local trainers trained in the collaboration with the Dept of Tourism, University of Kurukshetra. The vocational course is conducted annually in 18 Pragya established Resource Centres in the Himalayan region. In collaboration with institutes like the Directorate of Mountaineering and Allied Sports and Sita Resorts, young people are provided specialized training on adventure tourism, tour operations, home stays, food and beverages. A network of Ecotourism Centres have also been set up in various districts and are equipped with information databases that facilitate the uptake of ecotourism as an occupation. Efforts are being made to form clusters of tourism enterprises to strengthen the practice of ecological and culturally responsible tourism in all our areas.

Community capacity for culture management: Local communities have been catalysed for stewardship of their cultural heritage. Community-based Cultural Heritage Conservation Councils constituted in all districts are being helped to carry out local level conservation activities. Anthropologists from Pragya, in conjunction with community elders, are working on documenting the traditional cultural forms. A network of cultural actors of the Himalayas is being formed that will facilitate solidarity and thus enhance the practice of cultural forms and revenues from them.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In the present era of unbridled globalization, inclusive development in a multicultural society can only be possible through the understanding of the uniqueness of every culture. This understanding then needs to be translated into support to strengthen the community on the same grounds as it belongs and to allow its development to take place through *informed choice* buttressed by a belief and pride in its own heritage and understanding and respect for new/other.

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