

# **Himalayan Culture and Mountaineering Museum**

## **Village Chowki, Parbat Valley, Himachal Pradesh**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The state of Himachal Pradesh nestled in the Himalayas with its snow clad peaks , gushing streams, lush green valleys , majestic pine trees, enchanting lakes and flower meadows is said to be the abode of Gods.

In every village there is a presiding deity recognized by people of all faiths . Every year festivals are held in the honour of the village Gods, which is not only attended by the people of nearby villages , but the Gods of other villages participate in it . The experience is exquisite and the people rejoice by singing and dancing in honour of the presiding deity. Devotees trek hundreds of kilometers crossing the ravines , rivers and snow peaks to pay obeisance to their tutelary deity.

These festivals act like an elixir to the people of this region who have to struggle under difficult environmental conditions to make ends meet .

The state is rich in both tangible and intangible cultural heritage which needs to be documented, preserved and disseminated. There are efforts on the part of governmental and non-governmental organizations to revive the age old traditions but concerted efforts at the grass root level are required .

The heritage is immense and this journey to restore pride in it will require first steps which could be undertaken if the enthusiasm is generated among the villagers . This movement will then catch the awareness of others and snowball into long term efforts at all levels in recreating and preserving traditions which may otherwise die.

In the Parvati valley of Himachal Pradesh , the initiative taken up by an individual in safeguarding the cultural heritage is praiseworthy .The Himalayan Culture & Mountaineering Museum is a noteworthy example that it is not the creation of Govt. machinery but the efforts of the villagers at the grass root level which has made a marked difference. With the aim of setting up of a Museum, the Negi brothers of Chowki village converted their ancestral house into a Museum and involved all the villagers to contribute whatever they could lay their hands on in order to build up the village history .This awareness has infused a new life into this small hamlet which has become a nodal village in the Parvati valley.

### **Description of the Museum**

The Museum was established with the mission to preserve, display and disseminate information about the cultural heritage of the region and inculcate the spirit of adventure in the Himalayan belt .The aims and objectives of the founders of the museum were modest and they aspired to preserve the Cultural heritage of the Himalayas; to conduct treks , tours and mountaineering expeditions in the Himalayan regions; to create awareness about the preservation of material Culture , afforestation and Ecology; to setup a heritage museum in Chowki village and promote Cultural tourism in the region.

## Location

The Museum gallery is located at Jari on Kulu-Manikaran road . The gallery houses artifacts of the region , traditional costumes , mountaineering equipments and photographs depicting the life style of the region . The heritage museum is situated in the Chowki village , a small hamlet on the right side of Parvati river , 4-5 kms from Jari . This four storeyed heritage museum is a 500 years old house and a typical exmple of Pahari architecture . Different storeys are meant for different purposes . The lower most is meant for the cattle and the upper two are used as residential quarters . The top most storey is used as kitchen and believed to be the abode of family deity . In this heritage house the utensils , basketry , mats etc . are displayed in the traditionals manner .

Main contribution for making this house was of women folk . Wood and other building material was brought from the Dadai village which is nine kilometers from Jari and eleven kilometers from Chowki .

Ground floor - Khud  
First floor - Kathar  
Second floor - Bahud  
Third floor - Ta-aa (this is also the place for the family deity )

Although there has been lot of innovation in the traditionals architecture of this region ,there are still a number of old buildings in the village used by the locals .

## Archeological findings in the village

There are two Shiva temples and Bhandara in the village . The Shiva temple situated in the lower Chowki village is a 10-11th century temple . The life size sculpture of Uma-Mahesvara in the temple is a beautiful piece of art for connoisseurs . The temple also houses the idols of Maheshasurmardani , Chamunda and Ganesha . The two stone pillars , of ancient date can also be seen in the temple . Another Shiva temple is situated in upper Chowki village.This temple with profusely carved wooden entrance is a typical representation of Pahari architecture .

## Mythology about the village

According to folklore some 800 years back there used to live in the village of Chowki , the family of Bot and Botni . This family continue to live in the village and presently they are known by the name of Kotu . The goddess of Kotu family is Koturi Devi ,also known as Koturi Jogini . This also is the reason that the Bot family is known as Kottu family.It is said that the Bot family installed the images of Shiva Parvati and other Gods and Goddess in the Shiva temple some 800 years back.When someone used to die in the village, the corpse was cremated in front of the Uma- Maheswar image and the ashes were offered to the idol .

The original abode of Shiva is Bijli Mahadev . It is said that a shephard used to go there for grazing his cattle and he noticed a cow standing at a place and the milk sprinkling out from her teats and falling at one spot . One day a natural Shiva Lingam imerged at this place and this become the permanent abode of Bijli Mahadev . Near the Bijli Mahadev is a small hamlet of Ghat . Binu Ghatai of this village along with his family settled in the Chowki village.

It is said that Divine Mask(Mohra) has come from the Bijli Mahadev. It is said that one of the family members of Binu Ghatai went to (Bijli Mahadev )Ghat village to bring pulses and on his return he found the Mohra (Mask ) in pulses. The God stayed some with the Negi family and then found a place in the present temple. The Bot family have different lifestyle. The Kotu Devi was worshipped before Shivji and then the Bot -Botni did not properly worshiped Shiva. One day Shiva become angry and kicked the Kotu Devi . She was petrified and can still be seen near the confluence of Malana and Parvati river. To see the Kotu Devi and Bot -Botani , every year in the month of Chaitra , the villagers and the God Shiva go to see them. The place of Bot -Botani is near the confluence of Malana and Parvati river. They are in the spirit

form and confined within a certain area. Shivji is carried on a palanquin to this place and when it reaches near the place of Bot-Botani the spirit tries to attack Shiva but Shiva immediately takes a reverse turn . Bot-Botani are not able to cross their boundary and therefore can not harm the Shiva. This event is repeated every year and signifies the victory of good over evil.

### **Activities of the Museum**

The museum also conducts heritage tours , treks and mountaineering expeditions in the regions of Malana valley, Pin Parvati valley , Hampta valley , Chandra valley ,Zaskar valley and Rupshu valley of Ladakh .The Museum runs a restaurant at Jari and a guest house at the heritage Museum , Chowki village .

### **CONCLUSION**

The cultural heritage of Himachal Pradesh is alive and vibrant but the state has not been aloof from the ill-winds of so-called modernization. There has been mushrooming of complexes at the tourist destinations which not only eat away the locally available resources but also damage the eco-system of the region.

Efforts need to be taken both at micro and macro level to create harmony between man and nature. By educating the masses at panchayat level this can be achieved with positive results .There are traditions which are eco-friendly and teaches man living in close proximity with nature to be in proper harmony with it. These traditions need to be highlighted so that the global concerns could be taken up at the micro level religiously.

There is need to promote museum culture in order to collect, preserve and disseminate the age-old cultural heritage. These cultural institutions will not only help in understanding the cultural values of the new generation but also attract tourists.

What is needed is to organize camps for village Panchayats and educate them about the importance of preserving the cultural heritage and leave the rest to them . If they show interest, enthusiasm and initiative, they should be provided with funds to translate this into reality and sustain it for the generations to come .