Research Article

Ethnography of the Dying Culture of Northern Punjab: An Insight into Potohar

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Abstract

The study aims to analyze and Document the traditional cultural practices of Potohar region Along with analyzing the factors contributing to the decline of Potohari culture. It is therefore significant to examine the impacts of modernization, globalization and urbanization on local traditions of this region. The Potohar Plateau in northern Punjab, Pakistan, is a region imbued with a rich cultural heritage characterized by unique linguistic, social, and artistic traditions. The era of modernization, globalization, and socio-economic changes are contributing to the erosion of these traditional practices. This research study focused on ethnographic methodology for conduction if qualitative research by using interviews conduction for primary data collection whereas using already present research papers and historical documents as a source of secondary data collection. The results of the study highlights that sustainable and progressive strategies are being adopted for the revitalization of cultural, linguistic, ethnic and traditional practices and identities. Through the adoption of various research methodologies and archival research, this study reveals the intricate traditions, customs, and values that have defined the Livelihood of the people of Potohar for decades. This ethnographic study seeks to document the traditional aspects of Potohari culture, identify the factors leading to its decline, and provide recommendations for cultural preservation. For the future policy makers, it is therefore necessary to ensure implementation of sustainable practices.

Keywords

Ethnography, Potohar Region, Sustainability, Globalization, Indigenous Practices

1. Introduction

Potohar, comprising four districts of the Northern Punjab including Attock, Jhelum, Chenab and Rawalpindi is a culturally rich and historically significant region. It has been a traditional crossroad due to numerous historical invasions and migrations, which had a long-lasting impact on its cultural fabric and art forms. Despite its vibrant traditional and ar- chaeological heritage, Potohar's cultural practices are rapidly disappearing under the pressure of modernization and socio-economic transformations. This research paper explores the dimensions of Potohari culture, understand the forces driving these changes, and propose measures for cultural preservation. The study encompasses historical, anthropo-

logical, and contemporary sources that provide insights into the Potohari culture. These sources provide context about the invasions and migrations that have influenced Potohari culture, such as works on the Aryans, Greeks, Persians, Mughals, and British colonization. Focus on the social structure, family systems, and communal practices in Potohar. Key works by Pakistani and international anthropologists highlight the traditional ways of life and their gradual transformation. The study examines the Potohari dialect, its phonetic and lexical characteristics, and its relation to other Punjabi language and it's various dialects. Studies also highlight the shift towards Urdu and English. Discusses the effects of globalization, digital media, and economic changes on indigenous cultures, with specific references to Potohar. The Potohar region, situated in the north-eastern part of Punjab, Pakistan, is a land of breathtaking natural beauty, with rolling hills, lush green valleys, and majestic mountains. For decades, this plateau has been serving as an abode to a rich and vibrant cultural heritage, shaped by the confluence of Hindu and Islamic traditions. The Potoharians, as the locals are known, have developed a unique cultural identity that is distinct from other regions of Pakistan. However, in recent years, this cultural heritage is facing unprecedented threats from urbanization, modernization, and external influences. The Potohar region is home to some of the most ancient and sacred sites of the region, including the famous Buddhist ruins of Takht-i-Bahi and Gandhara civilization. The region has also been an important center of Sufi thought and spirituality, with many shrines and tombs of revered Sufi saints scattered throughout the area. The Potoharians have a strong tradition of folk music and dance, with many local festivals and celebrations that showcase their rich cultural heritage.

However, despite its cultural richness, the Potohar region is facing significant challenges that threaten its very survival. Urbanization has led to a mass migration of young people from rural areas to cities in search of employment and education, resulting in a decline in the number of traditional craftsmen and artisans who have kept these cultural practices alive for generations. Modernization has also brought about changes in social norms and values, as younger generations become more influenced by Western culture and technology.

Furthermore, external influences also holds an important role in eroding the traditional heritage of the region. The developmental projects including construction of small and mini dams and hydropower projects has led to the displacement of many communities and the destruction of ancient settlements. The increase of extremist groups has also led to a decline in harmony and understanding between different religious groups, resulting in a climate of fear and mistrust. Against this backdrop, this research study tends to document and analyze the cultural practices and traditions of the Potohar region before they disappear forever. This study provides a nuanced understanding of the cultural landscape of Potohar, highlighting the values, beliefs, and practices that are slowly disappearing as a result of these changes.

For acquiring this target, this study will employ a combination of qualitative research methods, including participant observation, interviews, and archival research. Participant observation that involve spending extended periods of time with local communities, attending festivals and celebrations, and participating in traditional activities such as music and dance performances. Interviews conducted with local elders, craftsmen, and spiritual leaders to gather information about their experiences and perspectives on the changing cultural landscape.

Archival research that involve reviewing historical documents and records to gain the knowledge of the evolving cultural practices in the region over time. This study will also examine the impact of external factors such as urbanization, modernization, and external influences on the cultural heritage of the Potohar region. Through documentation and interpretation, the remaining cultural practices and traditions of the Potohar region, this study aims to raise awareness about the importance of preserving cultural heritage and to inform efforts to safeguard the unique traditions of this dying culture. This study hopes to contribute to our understanding of cultural change and preservation by highlighting the complex interplay between culture, identity, and globalization in a rapidly changing world.

In conclusion, this ethnographic study is an urgent response to the rapid decline of cultural heritage in the Potohar region. It is a call to action to document and preserve the remaining traditions and practices before they disappear forever. By shedding light on this significant matter of concern, the study inspires further research and action to safeguard the rich cultural heritage of this unique region.

2. Literature Review

The concept of cultural heritage and its relationship with globalization has been a topic of interest in recent years. The Potohar region in Pakistan is a prime example of a region that is struggling to preserve its cultural heritage in the face of globalization.

Ethnography, particularly is a qualitative research methodology used in sciences such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies [11]. It also involves immersive, long-approached fieldwork to study people's cultural practices, behaviors, and perspectives within their natural environments. The researchers observe, participate, and interview participants to gather in-depth, contextualized data. This approach enables researchers to explore complex social phenomena, such as power dynamics, cultural norms, and identity formation [4]. Ethnographic studies often focus on marginalized or underrepresented groups, providing nuanced insights into their experiences and worldviews. By embracing reflexivity and contextualization, ethnographers acknowledge their own biases and positionality, striving for empathetic understanding [2]. The methodology yields rich, detailed descriptions of cultural contexts, informing theoretical frameworks,

policy decisions, and social interventions. Ethnography's strengths lie in its ability to capture the intricacies of human experience, challenging assumptions and fostering empathy. Ethnography can also be used in education, healthcare, business, and development studies, contributing to informed, culturally sensitive decision-making [1].

It has been discovered that the rapid progression of Globalization has been widely discussed as a major factor contributing to the decline of traditional cultures and the loss of cultural heritage [3]. The influx of globalized consumer culture has led to a homogenization of cultures, resulting in the decline of traditional practices and the erasure of cultural differences [7]. This phenomenon is often referred to as "cultural imperialism"

In a liberal society where all cultures have equal opportunities, if a particular culture disappears due to the collective preferences of others, its members have no grounds for complaint in terms of justice. In other words, the disappearance of a culture due to natural societal trends is not a violation of justice, as long as all cultures had equal opportunities to thrive. [8]

However, not all researchers agree that globalization is necessarily detrimental to cultural heritage. Some argue that globalization can also facilitate the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage through the creation of global networks and platforms for cultural exchange. For example, social media platforms have provided a means for people to share and connect with their cultural heritage with a global audience [6]

Cultural identity is closely tied to an individual's sense of belonging and connection to their community and traditions. The current era of Modernization and globalization creates the homogenization of various cultures, ethnicities, languages, and traditions. The emergence of an identity crisis is another dilemma. This evolution is a complex and simultaneous paradigm; hence, it is necessary to retain the distinguished and unique recognition by being modern and sticking to the actual roots at the same time [9]. In the context of the Potohar region, participants' sense of cultural identity is deeply rooted in their connection to the land, community, and traditions. Despite the decline of traditional practices, participants reported a strong sense of belonging and pride in their cultural heritage.

It is discovered that the finding is consistent with research on cultural identity and belonging, which suggests that individuals' sense of identity is closely tied to their community and cultural practices [7]. When these practices are threatened or disappear, individuals may experience a crisis of identity. From the green hills covered with beautiful wildflowers to the lush plains irrigated by the Indus River, the Potohar region offers Subsequent ascent and collapse of formidable empires, each imprinting their mark on the terrain. The region's architectural and artistic legacy is influenced by the Mauryan dynasty, the Mughal Empire, and the Sikh Empire. Ancient and majestic forts such as Rohtas Fort whisper tales of fought battles and defended empires. Enchanting temples, like the

Katas Raj Temples complex, still carry the resonance. [10]

A French Scholar, Pierre Bourdieu explored The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage are critical steps towards ensuring its survival. Also Researchers have suggested various methods for preserving cultural heritage, including education and training programs community-based initiatives [5], and policy interventions [12].

Theoretical Framework

1. Cultural Homogenization Theory: This theory posits that globalization leads to the homogenization of cultures, as local traditions and practices are replaced by globalized norms and values. This theory will help understand how the cultural heritage of Potohar is being threatened by external influences.
2. Cultural Identity Theory: suggests that cultural identity is shaped by social interactions, historical experiences, and economic conditions. This theory will help understand how the cultural identity of Potoharians is being shaped and transformed in response to changing circumstances.
3. Glocalization Theory: globalization is not a one-way process, but rather a complex interplay between global and local forces This theory will help understand how Potohar's cultural heritage is being influenced by both global and local factors.
4. Cultural Capital Theory: This theory proposes that cultural capital refers to the social and economic value attached to cultural goods and practices [6]. This theory will help understand how the cultural practices of Potohar are being valued and negotiated in the context of globalization. This theory also stated the food as a cultural aspect that has been evolved through years in the Potohar region. [13].
5. Postmodernism: This theoretical perspective emphasizes the fragmentation of culture and the decline of grand narratives. This perspective is significant to understand the ways in which Potohar's cultural heritage is being redefined and reinterpreted in response to changing social and economic conditions.

3. Methods and Materials

The research employs qualitative methods to gather in-depth insights, local community engagement to observe cultural practices firsthand. This includes attending festivals, participating in daily activities, and observing social interactions. Conducting semi-structured interviews with elders, artisans, community leaders, and younger generations to capture diverse perspectives on cultural changes. Organizing discussions with various demographic groups (e.g., women, youth, and artisans) to understand their views on cultural preservation and change. Reviewing historical documents, literature, photographs, and recordings related to Potohari culture to construct a comprehensive picture of its historical evolution and current state. This study employed a

mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. The researcher spent six months in the Potohar region, conducting participant observation in various rural and urban regions of the Plateau, including traditional craft workshops, cultural festivals, and community gatherings. This allowed for immersion in the local culture and observation of traditional practices.

4. Results and Discussion

The research findings indicates that a significant decline is being observed in cultural rituals, values and traditional practices. This might be due to the following factors:

1. *Language shift*: There is a noticeable shift among younger generations towards Urdu and English, driven by the perception of better economic opportunities, leading to a decline in the use of Potohari.
2. *Urbanization*: Migration to urban areas for better employment opportunities is leading to the disintegration of extended family systems and traditional community life.
3. *Economic Pressures*: The preference for modern, commercially viable crafts over traditional handicrafts is diminishing the artisanal crafts industry.
4. *Sectarian violences*: Rising religious intolerance and radicalization are threatening the syncretic Sufi traditions that have historically been a part of Potohari culture.

The study also revealed that traditional practices and cultural heritage are declining due to globalization. The once-thriving craft industry is struggling to survive, and artisans are finding it difficult to make a living due to decreased demand for traditional products and increased competition from mass-produced goods. However, there is a growing interest in preserving and promoting cultural heritage, with young people embracing their cultural roots and learning traditional crafts, music, and dance [14]. The significance of preserving cultural identity, which is deeply tied to the land, community, and traditions is also heighted. Despite the decline of traditional practices, participants reported a strong sense of belonging and pride in their cultural heritage. The study also identified economic challenges faced by artisans and craftspeople, but also opportunities for sustainable livelihoods based on tourism and cultural heritage preservation. The development of eco-tourism initiatives, cultural festivals, and community-based initiatives could provide a viable alternative to traditional crafts [15]. Several policy implications for preserving cultural heritage, including supporting artisanal crafts, hosting cultural festivals and events, establishing community-based initiatives, and providing education and skills training have been suggested.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that Potohari culture is at a critical juncture. While modernization and economic development are essential, they should not come at the expense of cultural heritage. There is an urgent need for measures to preserve and promote traditional practices, language, and crafts. Without such efforts, the rich cultural tapestry of Potohar might soon become a relic of the past, depriving future generations of their cultural identity and heritage. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for policy interventions to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Potohar region for future generations.

6. Policy Recommendations

1. Cultural Preservation Programs: Establish government and NGO initiatives to document and promote Potohari culture through festivals, exhibitions, and educational programs.
2. Language Revival Efforts: Introduce Potohari language courses in schools, encourage its use in media, and support community-based language workshops.
3. Support for Artisans: Provide financial and marketing support to traditional artisans, create platforms for showcasing their work, and ensure fair trade practices.
4. Sustainable development: Integrate traditional agricultural practices with modern sustainability techniques to ensure eco-logical balance and economic viability.
5. Protection of Sufi Shrines: Safeguard Sufi shrines and their associated cultural practices from neglect and radical threats through governmental protection and community involvement.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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