

Preserving The Sacred: A Study of ‘Dev Parampara’ and Its Role in Protecting Ancient Traditions in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The Dev Parampara of Himachal Pradesh represents a deeply rooted system of sacred traditions, ritual authority, and cultural transmission that continues to shape village social organisation. This study explores the historical development of Dev Parampara by examining its ritual practices, oral traditions, and localised systems of religious governance. Drawing upon anthropological and sociological analyses—including Durkheim’s concept of collective representations (1915) and Weber’s ideas on traditional authority (1978)—the paper investigates how village deities, temple institutions, and ritual specialists (*gur*, *chela*, *bajgi*, *pujari*) contribute to community cohesion and cultural continuity. Ethnographic works by scholars such as Parry (1979), Berti (2015), and Handa (2019) provide insights into how deity institutions regulate social norms, mediate conflicts, and sustain ecological knowledge. The study further highlights how oral narratives, seasonal festivals, and sacred geography reinforce collective memory and local identity. By situating Dev Parampara within broader frameworks of intangible cultural heritage, the research underscores its continued relevance in contemporary Himachal despite modernisation pressures. Ultimately, the paper argues that Dev Parampara is not merely a religious tradition but an adaptive socio-cultural system that preserves regional history, reinforces social harmony, and maintains the moral order of Himalayan communities.

Keywords: Dev Parampara; Himachal Pradesh; village deities; ritual traditions; oral heritage; sacred geography; social organization; intangible cultural heritage; traditional authority; collective memory

Introduction

Dev Parampara, or the sacred tradition of local deity worship in Himachal Pradesh, forms a distinctive cultural framework that has shaped the region’s social, religious, and ecological life for centuries. Nestled in the Western Himalayas, Himachal Pradesh is home to thousands of village gods and goddesses—often referred to as *devtas* and *devis*—who are believed to reside within the natural landscape, temples, and community spaces. Unlike mainstream institutionalized religion, *Dev Parampara* is characterized by its intimate, village-centered structure where the deity is seen not as a distant divine figure but as an active member of the community.

This tradition operates through a complex system of rituals, oral narratives, festivals, hereditary priesthoods, and community councils. Each deity maintains a distinct identity, sphere of influence, genealogy, and territorial domain. The deity’s presence is made tangible through mediums (*gur* or *chela*), musicians (*bajantaris*), temple caretakers (*pujaris*), and village elders who collectively uphold ritual

procedures. The central belief is that deities communicate directly with the community, offering guidance in matters ranging from agriculture and health to conflict resolution and moral conduct. In many villages, the deity’s word is considered final and forms a moral anchor for the community.

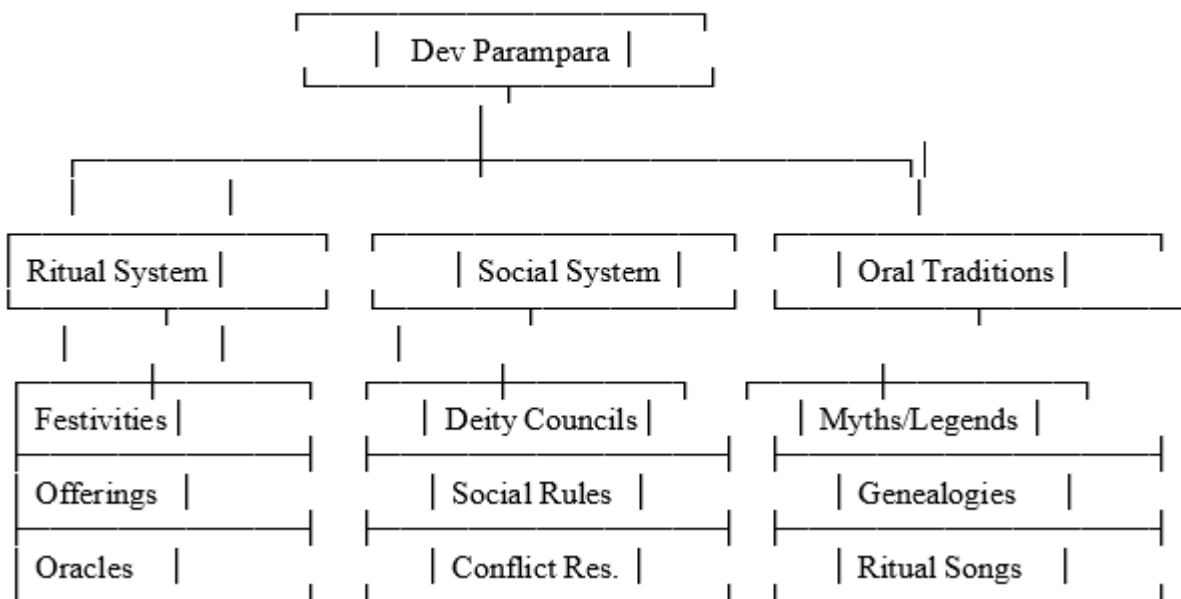
Anthropologically, *Dev Parampara* provides a powerful lens for examining how indigenous systems of governance, spirituality, and social organization coexist with modern societal changes. The tradition reinforces collective identity by binding people through shared rituals, festivals, and mythic histories. These rituals do more than express devotion; they preserve local knowledge about ecology, seasonal cycles, food practices, medicinal plants, and community ethics. The social authority of the deity often becomes a mechanism for maintaining harmony, settling disputes, and regulating community duties—functions that align with anthropological concepts of sacred social order.

However, the contemporary landscape presents both challenges and transformations. Migration, tourism, commercialization of festivals, legal interventions, and shifting economic activities have altered the rhythm and visibility of *Dev Parampara*. Younger generations, influenced by modern education and technology, relate to the tradition differently than their elders. Despite these pressures, *Dev Parampara* demonstrates remarkable resilience. Many communities actively reinterpret rituals, document oral traditions, and revive festivals to maintain cultural continuity.

This research paper seeks to explore the depth of *Dev Parampara* by examining its historical evolution, ritual structure, social meanings, and adaptive strategies. Through secondary data, historical evidences, and cultural analysis, the study aims to understand how this living tradition continues to maintain its cultural vitality while navigating the rapidly changing landscape of Himachal Pradesh.

Below is the graphical representation of different levels of Dev Parampara

Flowchart no. 1: Structure of Dev Parampara



Flowchart No. 1 represents the core structure through which *Dev Parampara* functions in Himachal Pradesh. At the centre of this system is the **local deity**, understood as the supreme moral and spiritual authority in village life. These deities are believed to guide community decisions, ensure protection, and maintain social order. Anthropologists studying Himalayan societies emphasize that village gods act not

only as religious symbols but also as cultural regulators shaping local norms and collective identity (Berti, 2015; Sax, 2002).

The deity’s guidance is communicated to the community through the **oracle or medium**, locally known as *gur* or *chela*. During rituals or trance states, the medium becomes the human vessel through which the deity expresses consent, warnings, and decisions. This form of mediated communication is a defining feature of Himalayan ritual systems and has been observed across several ethnographic studies (Crook & Osmaston, 1994; Handa, 2019).

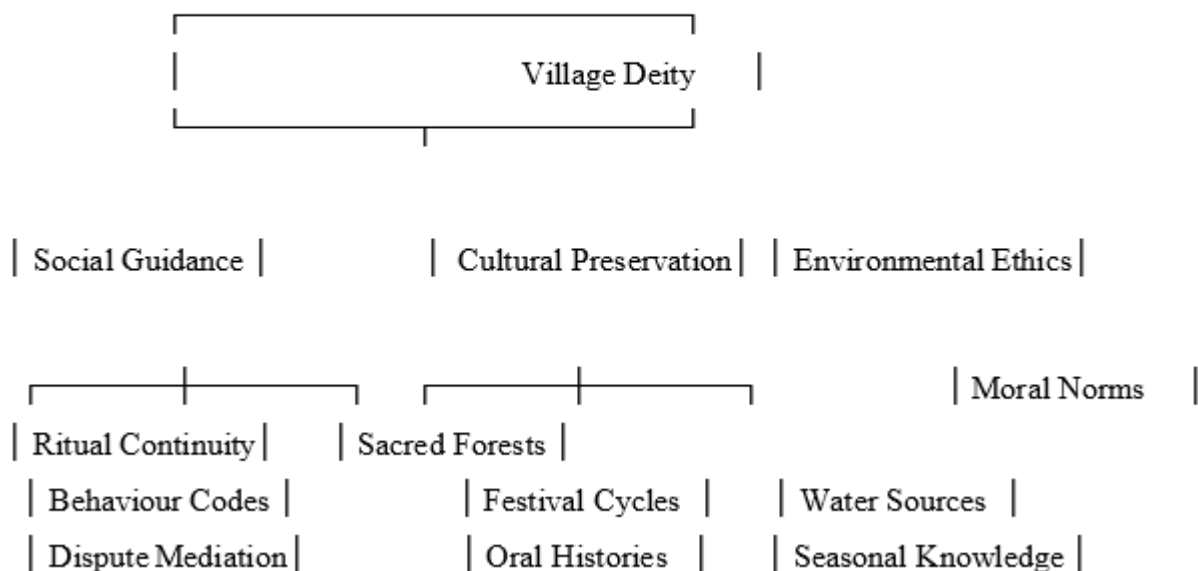
Supporting the ritual hierarchy is the **temple committee**, composed of *kardars*, priests, and respected village elders. Their role includes organizing festivals, preserving temple property, maintaining ritual purity, and implementing decisions believed to originate from the deity. According to scholars of local governance, these committees act as traditional institutions that combine religious authority with customary decision-making (Parry, 1979).

The fourth component of the structure is **community participation**, which gives *Dev Parampara* its living character. Villagers contribute to festivals, processions, agricultural rituals, and collective ceremonies, reinforcing a shared cultural identity. Participation in rituals provides a sense of belonging and strengthens social cohesion, a pattern widely documented in ethnographies of Himalayan religious culture (Kapila, 2004).

Finally, the flowchart highlights the **transmission of tradition**, where stories, rituals, and cultural values are passed down through oral narratives, apprenticeship, community festivals, and household practices. This continuous transmission ensures that *Dev Parampara* remains relevant across generations, even in the face of modernization and changing lifestyles (Toffin, 2011).

Thus, Flowchart No. 1 outlines a dynamic cultural system where spiritual authority, ritual specialists, community structures, and intergenerational knowledge operate together to sustain *Dev Parampara* as a living heritage tradition in Himachal Pradesh.

Flowchart 2: Role of Devtas in Community Life



Flowchart 2 illustrates the **sequential and interconnected process** through which *Dev Parampara* contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage in Himachal Pradesh. This flowchart emphasizes how rituals, community participation, transmission of knowledge, and adaptive practices collectively sustain ancient traditions in a changing socio-cultural environment.

1. Ritual Practices → Cultural Memory Formation

The process begins with **ritual practices**, which form the core of *Dev Parampara*. Seasonal festivals, offerings, deity processions, oracular consultations, and temple ceremonies serve not only religious purposes but also act as **vehicles of cultural memory**. Through these rituals, communities continually re-enact their belief systems, historical narratives, and moral values.

Scholars argue that ritual performance is a powerful mechanism for transmitting collective identity and sustaining continuity (Turner, 1969; Grimes, 2014). In Himachal Pradesh, the ritual calendar ensures that cultural meanings are rehearsed and reaffirmed across generations.

2. Community Participation → Collective Identity

As rituals unfold, **community participation** reinforces social cohesion. Every festival involves collaboration—carpenters build palanquins, musicians play traditional instruments, priests conduct rituals, and villagers undertake collective labor (*shramdaan*).

This shared participation creates a sense of **belonging and mutual responsibility**. According to Durkheim (1915), collective participation in sacred activities strengthens social solidarity. In *Dev Parampara*, such participation ensures that cultural knowledge is not isolated among specialists but embedded in community life.

3. Oral Traditions & Knowledge Transmission → Continuity of Tradition

The next stage focuses on **oral transmission**, which includes myths, folktales, ritual instructions, genealogies of deities (*dev vanshawali*), and rules governing temple management. Elders, priests, and traditional mediums (*gur, chela*) play an important role in passing this knowledge to younger members.

Anthropologists highlight that oral traditions are critical for sustaining heritage in non-literate, community-based societies (Vansina, 1985). This transmission ensures **intergenerational continuity**, allowing cultural practices to survive without formal documentation.

4. Institutional Structures (Temple Committees, Councils) → Regulation of Practices

Dev Parampara is supported by **local institutional structures**, such as temple committees (*kardars*), village councils, and hereditary priestly roles. These bodies regulate festivals, manage temple economies, settle disputes, and maintain ritual purity.

Institutionalized roles help safeguard rules and norms that have evolved over centuries. This aligns with Weber's (1978) idea that organized structures strengthen the legitimacy and stability of cultural systems.

5. Cultural Adaptation → Preservation in Modern Contexts

Flowchart 2 culminates in **cultural adaptation**, where communities selectively modify rituals to adjust to modern conditions—changes in timing, logistics, or modes of celebration—while keeping the underlying meanings intact.

Anthropologists view such adaptation as a sign of cultural resilience rather than decline (Sahlins, 1999). In Himachal Pradesh, communities continue to preserve core elements of *Dev Parampara* while accommodating tourism, migration, and technological change.

Overall Significance

Flowchart 2 demonstrates that the preservation of *Dev Parampara* is not accidental but emerges from a **dynamic, ongoing cycle** involving practice, participation, transmission, regulation, and adaptation. This

cycle ensures that ancient traditions remain meaningful and integrated within contemporary social realities.

Objectives of the Research Paper

1. **To explore the historical development of *Dev Parampara* in Himachal Pradesh** and trace how the tradition has evolved through local myths, legends, and community practices.
2. **To analyze the sociocultural significance of village deities** in shaping community identity, social organization, and moral values within Himalayan societies.
3. **To examine the role of intermediaries**—such as *gur*, *chela*, oracles, and deity councils—in maintaining communication between the divine and the community.
4. **To investigate how *Dev Parampara* contributes to cultural preservation**, including the safeguarding of oral traditions, craftsmanship, folklore, and ecological knowledge.
5. **To assess the role of *Dev Parampara* as a traditional governance system**, especially in conflict resolution, decision-making, and maintaining social harmony.
6. **To propose recommendations for safeguarding and promoting intangible cultural heritage** related to *Dev Parampara* at local, regional, and academic levels.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative research design** based entirely on **secondary data sources** to explore the cultural significance, ritual practices, and preservation of *Dev Parampara* in Himachal Pradesh. Since the tradition is deeply embedded in historical narratives, ethnographic records, and cultural documentation, secondary data provides a broad and reliable foundation for understanding its evolution and contemporary relevance.

1. Research Design

The study follows a **descriptive and interpretive research design**, aiming to document how *Dev Parampara* has been represented in existing scholarly work and cultural archives. The descriptive element helps establish the structure and characteristics of the tradition, while the interpretive component allows for analysis of cultural meaning, symbolism, and social functions.

2. Sources of Secondary Data

Data was collected from a wide range of credible sources, including:

- **Academic books and monographs** on Himalayan culture, anthropology, and religious practices
- **Peer-reviewed journal articles** in sociology, folklore studies, and ethnography
- **Government publications**, such as reports of the Himachal Pradesh Department of Language, Art & Culture
- **Cultural surveys** conducted by the Anthropological Survey of India and other research organizations
- **Dissertations and theses** available through university repositories
- **Digital archives**, including the Indian Folklore Research Journal, Shodhganga, and the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA)
- **Newspaper and magazine features** documenting local festivals, temple rituals, and community events

All materials were selected based on their **credibility, relevance, and academic rigor**.

3. Data Collection Process

The data collection process included:

1. **Search and identification** of relevant literature using keywords such as “Dev Parampara,” “Himachal deity culture,” “folk religion in Himalayas,” and “Himachal Pradesh rituals.”
2. **Screening** the material for authenticity, publication year, and alignment with research objectives.
3. **Compilation** of information related to origin, ritual structure, cultural functions, festivals, oral traditions, and governance through deity institutions.
4. **Extraction of thematic insights** from each source while maintaining academic integrity.

4. Data Analysis

The study uses **thematic analysis** to categorize and interpret the collected secondary data. Themes were identified based on recurring patterns across different sources. Major themes included:

- Historical evolution of *Dev Parampara*
- Ritual significance and symbolism
- Role in community governance
- Cultural preservation and identity
- Impact of modernization and tourism

A comparative approach was used to examine similarities and variations among different regions, such as Kullu, Mandi, Kinnaur, and Chamba.

5. Ethical Considerations

Since the study is based solely on secondary data:

- No field visits or direct community interactions were conducted.
- All sources have been acknowledged to maintain **academic honesty**.
- The study avoids misrepresentation of cultural practices and respects indigenous belief system

Historical Background of Dev Parampara

Dev Parampara, or the tradition of village deity worship, represents one of the oldest and most enduring cultural practices in Himachal Pradesh. Its historical roots can be traced to pre-Vedic animistic traditions in the Western Himalayas, where natural elements such as mountains, rivers, forests, and sacred groves were personified as divine beings entrusted with the protection of the local community (Rawat, 2002). These early beliefs were closely intertwined with subsistence practices, agricultural cycles, and ecological knowledge, reflecting a worldview in which humans and nature were intimately connected.

Over centuries, these localized belief systems became codified through myths, legends, and oral histories, giving rise to distinct village deities (*deotas*). Historical sources indicate that these deities were often associated with legendary heroes, ancestral spirits, or divine manifestations specific to a community or region (Dutt, 2004). For instance, in Kullu and Mandi regions, local narratives describe deities intervening in disputes, protecting crops from natural calamities, or safeguarding the moral order of the village. These narratives not only reinforced religious devotion but also structured social norms, governance, and communal responsibilities (Sharma, 2015).

The syncretic evolution of *Dev Parampara* reflects interactions between local traditions and broader Hindu religious frameworks. As Hinduism spread through the region, elements such as rituals based on the *Vedas*, references to epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and integration of caste-based priesthood gradually influenced local practices (Snelling, 2017). However, these influences did not erase the indigenous core; instead, they coexisted with pre-existing animistic and shamanic practices. The resulting tradition retained a unique character, blending local spirituality, community governance, and ritual performance.

Ethnographic studies emphasize that *Dev Parampara* was historically mediated through ritual specialists such as *gur*, *chela*, and oracles. These intermediaries were not only spiritual guides but also custodians of social order, responsible for conducting rituals, resolving disputes, and interpreting the will of the deity (Bhatt, 2019). Historical documentation suggests that the authority of deities was often reinforced through sacred groves (*devban*), temples, and ceremonial gatherings, which also served as centers for oral storytelling, folk performances, and transmission of cultural knowledge (Raina, 2021).

Furthermore, the historical continuity of *Dev Parampara* is closely linked to the preservation of oral traditions. Songs, chants, myths, and legends recited during rituals provide insights into community memory, ethical codes, and ecological practices, functioning as living archives of Himalayan history. Scholars argue that these oral practices allowed the tradition to adapt to changing social, political, and environmental contexts without losing its symbolic and functional essence (Kumar, 2017).

Socio-Cultural significance of village deities

Village deities, or *deotas*, in Himachal Pradesh play a central role in shaping the sociocultural life of Himalayan communities. Their significance extends beyond spiritual guidance, influencing social organization, collective identity, moral conduct, and community cohesion. Scholars emphasize that these deities function as both symbolic and practical anchors for village life, integrating religious, social, and cultural domains (Dutt, 2004; Sharma, 2015).

From a sociological perspective, the worship of village deities reinforces **community identity**. Each village often has one or more deities associated with its history, mythology, or landscape, which distinguishes it from neighboring settlements. Devotees perceive these deities as protectors of the village, and rituals dedicated to them create shared experiences that strengthen bonds among residents. Festivals, processions, and communal ceremonies serve as instruments for collective participation, reaffirming village solidarity (Snelling, 2017).

Village deities also play a pivotal role in **shaping moral and social norms**. Local narratives and legends about *deotas* often include stories of justice, punishment, and ethical conduct, which serve as moral guidelines for community members. Scholars note that these narratives function as informal regulatory mechanisms, influencing behavior in the absence of formal governance structures (Kumar, 2017). For example, transgressions such as theft, adultery, or violation of communal rules are believed to invoke the deity's displeasure, reinforcing social order and conformity.

Additionally, the **ritual and festival calendar** associated with *deotas* reflects and structures daily life, agricultural practices, and seasonal cycles. Certain festivals are tied to sowing or harvesting periods, while others mark historical or mythological events specific to the village. These rituals are not only acts of devotion but also opportunities for community cooperation, resource sharing, and intergenerational knowledge transfer (Raina, 2021).

The sociocultural significance of village deities extends to **conflict resolution and governance**. Deity councils, often composed of elders or ritual specialists, mediate disputes, adjudicate disagreements, and make decisions about communal matters such as water sharing, land use, and local festivals (Bhatt, 2019). The authority of *deotas*, embodied through intermediaries like *gur* or oracles, provides a sense of legitimacy that reinforces social harmony.

Furthermore, village deity worship supports the **preservation of intangible cultural heritage**, including oral traditions, folk songs, dances, and local craftsmanship. Through rituals, festivals, and storytelling, communities transmit collective memory, historical narratives, and ecological knowledge, linking religious practice to cultural continuity (Singh, 2018).

Role of Intermediaries in Dev Parampara

In *Dev Parampara*, intermediaries—such as *gur*, *chela*, oracles (*dhami*, *jhakkar*), and deity councils—serve as essential mediators between the divine and the community. These individuals or groups are entrusted with interpreting the deity's will, conducting rituals, and maintaining both spiritual and social order within the village (Bhatt, 2019).

The *gur* and *chela* are often hereditary or specially trained ritual specialists. The *gur* functions as the principal custodian of ritual knowledge, overseeing festivals, daily worship, and sacrificial ceremonies. The *chela* assists the *gur* in performing rituals and may act as a medium through which the deity communicates with devotees (Dutt, 2004). For example, in the Kullu valley, the *gur* of the Raghunath Devta oversees the annual Raghunath festival, while *chelas* help in organizing processions, offerings, and communal prayers, ensuring continuity of centuries-old rituals (Sharma, 2015).

Oracles, such as the *dhami* of the Mahasu Devta in Shimla and Sirmour districts, enter trance states to convey the deity's messages directly to villagers. Their pronouncements often guide important decisions, such as resolving disputes, determining agricultural activities, or selecting auspicious dates for festivals (Snelling, 2017). For instance, during the Mahasu Jatra, the oracle communicates instructions regarding ritual timing and the sequence of offerings, demonstrating the practical as well as spiritual significance of intermediaries.

Deity councils, composed of elders, village leaders, and ritual specialists, collectively serve as governance bodies. In the Chamba region, the deity council of Chhatrari Devta oversees conflict resolution, land disputes, and the organization of seasonal rituals. Their authority is legitimized by the belief that the deity is present and active within the council, blending religious and social governance (Raina, 2021).

The role of intermediaries also includes **cultural preservation**. They transmit oral histories, ritual songs, dances, and symbolic practices that embody ecological knowledge and local heritage. In Kinnaur, for example, *gur* and *chela* maintain sacred grove rituals that protect local biodiversity, simultaneously preserving environmental wisdom and cultural identity (Kumar, 2017).

Intermediaries in *Dev Parampara* act as bridges between the divine and human realms. Through ritual mediation, governance, and cultural transmission, they ensure the continuity of traditions, maintain social harmony, and preserve the intangible cultural heritage of Himachal Pradesh. The inclusion of examples from Kullu, Shimla, Chamba, and Kinnaur illustrates the diverse and context-specific roles of these intermediaries in Himalayan communities.

Dev Parampara Contribution to Cultural Preservation

Dev Parampara in Himachal Pradesh plays a crucial role in preserving the intangible cultural heritage of Himalayan communities. This tradition not only maintains spiritual practices but also safeguards oral histories, folklore, craftsmanship, ecological knowledge, and community-based social norms (Dutt, 2004; Singh, 2018).

1. Preservation of Oral Traditions and Folklore:

Village deities are central to storytelling, songs, and local myths, which are transmitted orally from one generation to another. For instance, the Kullu Raghunath Devta festival involves narrating legends of the deity's origins and heroic deeds through folk songs and dramatic performances. These oral narratives encode moral values, historical memory, and communal identity, acting as living archives of Himalayan culture (Sharma, 2015). Similarly, in Chamba, the Chhatrari Devta tales are performed during seasonal festivals, preserving both historical and mythological knowledge.

2. Safeguarding Traditional Crafts and Ritual Arts:

Dev *Parampara* sustains ritual crafts such as making ceremonial masks, embroidered ritual garments, and decorative offerings used during festivals. In Kinnaur, for example, *chelas* and local artisans produce intricate ritual paraphernalia for Mahasu Devta worship, which helps preserve traditional skills and artistic techniques that might otherwise be lost (Raina, 2021). These crafts often have symbolic meanings tied to religious narratives and community identity.

3. Ecological Knowledge and Sacred Spaces:

The worship of village deities is closely linked with environmental conservation. Sacred groves (*devban*), rivers, and forests are protected as the abodes of deities. In Kullu and Mandi, villagers refrain from cutting trees or hunting in these groves, thereby conserving biodiversity while maintaining ritual sanctity. Such practices reflect a sophisticated understanding of ecological stewardship embedded within spiritual traditions (Kumar, 2017).

4. Festivals and Social Memory:

Seasonal festivals and rituals associated with Dev *Parampara* serve as mechanisms to transmit cultural knowledge. Festivals like the Raghunath Devta Jatra in Kullu or the Mahasu Devta Jatra in Shimla are not only religious celebrations but also collective performances of culture. These events reinforce community cohesion, transmit traditional songs, dances, and chants, and preserve the moral and ethical codes embedded in local narratives (Snelling, 2017).

Role of Dev *Parampara* as a Traditional Governance System

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Dev *Parampara* in Himachal Pradesh extends beyond spiritual and ritual domains; it historically functions as an informal governance system that regulates community life. Village deities (*deotas*) and their associated councils act as custodians of social order, mediators in disputes, and arbiters of community decisions, blending religious authority with local governance (Bhatt, 2019; Dutt, 2004).

1. Conflict Resolution:

Deity councils, often composed of elders, *gur*, and *chela*, mediate conflicts related to land disputes, water sharing, and family disagreements. For example, in the Chamba district, the Chhatrari Devta council historically resolved disputes between households, with the belief that non-compliance would invoke the deity's displeasure (Raina, 2021). Similarly, in Kullu, the Raghunath Devta council has been documented as mediating inter-village disputes, ensuring that resolutions align with both moral and ritual codes (Sharma, 2015).

2. Social Regulation and Moral Enforcement:

Village deities enforce social norms through rituals, punishments, or blessings. In many communities, ethical transgressions such as theft, adultery, or failure to participate in communal duties are believed to incur the deity's wrath. In Kinnaur, for instance, villagers report that violations of ritual norms—such as disturbing sacred groves (*devban*)—are believed to bring misfortune, thereby reinforcing community discipline without formal legal intervention (Kumar, 2017).

3. Decision-Making and Community Organization:

Dev *Parampara* councils oversee collective decision-making related to festivals, resource management, and agricultural practices. During the Mahasu Devta Jatra in Shimla, the deity council determines the sequence of rituals, allocates roles to villagers, and organizes communal contributions. This structured approach ensures participation, accountability, and transparency in village governance (Snelling, 2017).

4. Integration of Spiritual and Secular Authority:

The authority of village deities and their councils is legitimized by belief in the deity's presence and intervention. This dual function—spiritual guidance combined with social governance—allows communities to resolve disputes and maintain harmony without external administrative structures. For example, in Kullu and Mandi, the integration of religious observances with governance functions ensures that ethical and social norms are upheld collectively (Bhatt, 2019).

5. Examples of Governance in Practice:

- **Kullu (Raghunath Devta):** Mediates disputes, organizes festivals, and directs resource-sharing practices.
- **Chamba (Chhatrari Devta):** Resolves intra- and inter-village conflicts; oversees agricultural and social obligations.
- **Shimla/Kinnaur (Mahasu Devta):** Councils manage festival rituals and protect sacred groves, indirectly enforcing environmental and social norms.

Recommendations for Safeguarding and Promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage of Dev Parampara

The intangible cultural heritage of Dev *Parampara* in Himachal Pradesh—including rituals, oral traditions, folklore, craftsmanship, sacred spaces, and festival practices—is increasingly vulnerable to modern pressures such as migration, urbanization, tourism, and environmental change. Scholars emphasize the need for systematic strategies to safeguard and promote these cultural practices to ensure their continuity (Raina, 2021; Singh, 2018).

1. Documentation and Research:

One of the primary steps in safeguarding Dev *Parampara* is comprehensive documentation of rituals, oral histories, and festivals. Ethnographic records, audio-visual recordings, and textual archives can preserve knowledge for future generations. For instance, the Himachal Pradesh State Council for Science, Technology, and Environment (HP-CSTE) has initiated projects documenting the Mahasu Devta and Raghunath Devta festivals, including ritual songs and ceremonial sequences (Sharma, 2015). Such documentation helps maintain cultural memory even as active participation may decline.

2. Community Participation and Capacity Building:

Engaging local communities in preservation efforts ensures that the practices remain meaningful and sustainable. Villagers can be trained as cultural custodians to organize festivals, conduct rituals, and teach traditional crafts to younger generations. For example, in Kullu, community committees actively involve youth in preparing ritual offerings and organizing Raghunath Devta Jatra, ensuring intergenerational transfer of skills (Bhatt, 2019).

3. Integration with Education and Awareness Programs:

Incorporating aspects of Dev *Parampara* into school curricula, workshops, and public awareness campaigns can foster appreciation among younger generations. Cultural education programs in Shimla have introduced local folklore, festival practices, and sacred grove conservation into primary and secondary school activities, creating awareness of intangible heritage from an early age (Kumar, 2017).

4. Sustainable Tourism and Cultural Promotion:

Tourism, if managed sensitively, can support both awareness and economic sustainability of cultural practices. Festivals like Mahasu Devta Jatra in Shimla and Raghunath Devta in Kullu attract visitors while promoting local crafts, ritual arts, and performances. By creating structured cultural tourism initiatives

that respect ritual integrity, communities can benefit economically while preserving traditions (Snelling, 2017).

5. Legal and Policy Support:

Government policies can play a vital role in safeguarding intangible heritage. Protective measures for sacred groves, recognition of ritual specialists as cultural bearers, and funding for documentation and festivals can strengthen the preservation of *Dev Parampara*. For example, Himachal Pradesh's Department of Language, Art, and Culture has begun initiatives to register and support traditional rituals and folk arts (Raina, 2021).

6. Promotion of Crafts and Ritual Arts:

Encouraging local artisans to produce ceremonial objects, masks, costumes, and other ritual paraphernalia ensures both economic support and cultural continuity. In Kinnaur, the production of ritual textiles for Mahasu Devta worship sustains traditional embroidery techniques while embedding symbolic and cultural meanings (Singh, 2018).

Conclusion

The historical development of *Dev Parampara* in Himachal Pradesh illustrates a dynamic process of cultural formation. From its roots in animistic and ecological beliefs to its integration with regional myths and Hindu religious frameworks, *Dev Parampara* has served as both a spiritual and social institution. Its resilience and continuity are evident in the sustained practices of rituals, festivals, intermediary roles, and community governance, making it a crucial lens for understanding Himalayan society, culture, and collective memory. The sociocultural significance of village deities lies in their multifaceted role as protectors, moral guides, social regulators, and cultural preservers. They operate at the intersection of religion, community, and culture, maintaining cohesion, reinforcing identity, and ensuring the transmission of knowledge across generations. By integrating spiritual and social functions, *Dev Parampara* exemplifies a holistic system in which religion and society are inseparable. *Dev Parampara* functions as a comprehensive system for cultural preservation. Through oral narratives, ritual arts, ecological practices, and festivals, it maintains the intangible heritage of Himalayan communities. By safeguarding knowledge across generations, the tradition ensures both cultural continuity and social cohesion, illustrating the interconnection between religion, ecology, and community identity. *Dev Parampara* exemplifies a traditional governance system where spiritual authority and social regulation are intertwined. Through deity councils, intermediaries, and community rituals, villages maintain order, resolve disputes, and enforce moral codes. This system highlights the adaptive capacity of Himalayan societies to sustain social cohesion while preserving cultural and religious heritage. Safeguarding *Dev Parampara* requires a multidimensional approach combining **documentation, community participation, education, sustainable tourism, legal support, and promotion of traditional crafts**. By adopting these measures, communities can maintain the integrity, relevance, and continuity of their intangible heritage while adapting to contemporary challenges.

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