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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
District Gujrat; intangible cultural heritage; Punjab; living heritage; cultural	Gujrat district of Punjab has a rich legacy of intangible culture in the form of oral tradition, folk performance, religion, social custom, craft, occupational knowledge, cuisine, and language. However, these cultural expressions are not a mere survival of ancient ways of life, rather they are dynamic practices that have often redefined their meaning, role, and mode of transmission through different political, social, economic and technological changes. By utilizing sources like local history, district document, scholarship on Gujrat district, and general literature on intangible culture, this essay will discuss the living culture of the district through the dynamic processes of continuity, transformation, and selection. It is suggested that the cultural expressions that are rooted in religion, family, kinship, language, and community life have shown a good amount of resistance, whereas craft, occupational knowledge, cuisine, and ceremony have negotiated between the traditional cultural expressions and new technologies. Others like certain oral traditions, recreational practices, knowledge about occupations, and aspects of vocabulary usage also become more exposed to risk due to the weakening of their traditional context for transmission from one generation to another. According to the article, the unique culture of Gujrat is not based on uniqueness of each and every element of tradition, but rather on the localization of wider traditions of Punjabi culture in the context of Gujrat. Thus, the example of the Gujrat case shows that the protection of living heritage implies not only the consideration of cultural products, but the people who embody them too.
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Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage refers to those traditions, practices, knowledge, skills, expressions, and aspects of social life that a community acknowledges to be part of its cultural heritage that can be

handed down to successive generations through practice. It entails oral traditions, performing arts, rituals and festive events, social practices, traditional crafts, and knowledge about nature and the environment (UNESCO, 2003). Unlike monuments, archaeological sites, and historic buildings, intangible heritage relies on practice as its primary condition for persistence. Stories live because they are told, songs because they are performed, craft knowledge because skills are learned and practiced, and rituals because they are enacted. This type of heritage is much more than a set of artifacts left behind from earlier generations; it is the process by which communities reproduce memories, identities, knowledge, and social relations (Hafstein, 2018; Smith, 2006).

Gujrat District represents a significant regional context for such study. Located within the larger historical and cultural context of Punjab, the district has grown up through a long period of agricultural colonization, trade, political changes, religious contacts, occupational differentiation, migration, and changes in governance systems. The local histories of Gujrat like the *Tarikh-i-Gujrat* by Mirza Azam Beg, *Karamat's Aina Gujrat*, *Gujrat Tarikh Kay Ainey Mein* by Khokhar, and the later Gujrat Pedia contain the locally generated information about the settlement, individuals, shrines, professions, communities, and cultural life which often goes unnoticed in the wider histories of Punjab (Beg, 1870; Karamat, 1977; Khokhar, 1996; Qureshi, 1995; Saleem & Bhatti, 2012). The colonial records of the district too had documented various details about the demographics, agriculture, professions, festivals, religious institutions, and the social structure of the region although such sources inevitably reflected the classifications of the colonial government (Williamson, 1921).

The creation of the cultural geography of Gujrat is deeply connected to the changes in political authority. The decline of the centralized Mughal authority in the eighteenth century created space for the emergence of greater independence of regional authorities, and the rise of the Gakhar chieftain Sultan Muqarrab Khan is illustrative of the situation of Gujrat during this period of transition from imperial to regional rule (Shah & Ali, 2026). The growth of Sikh power and the wars that culminated in the battle of Gujrat in February 1849 resulted in yet another political upheaval, after which the British annexation brought about changes in institutions and administration (Iqbal, Ali, & Azeem, 2025). The colonial revenue settlement, surveys, record of land, judiciary, and bureaucratic structure of districts subsequently brought about a change in the relationship between the state, peasants, landowners, local intermediaries, and communities (Iqbal, 2025).

Political change continued to interact with the cultural sphere. The study of colonial Gujrat reveals that the new structures of education, administrative categorization, linguistic hierarchy, consumption, clothing, entertainment, and community organization emerged alongside the older kinship system, caste system, Sufi practices, orature, and literary traditions (Iqbal, Ali, & Mushtaq, 2025). Therefore, heritage in modern times is not to be viewed as an unchanged element of a pre-modern cultural order. There have been many practices labelled as traditional that owe their existence to interaction between long-term processes of state building, economic change, migration, technology, religion, and society.

The partition of 1947 was perhaps the most remarkable modern disruption of this social landscape. Migration, violence, the migration of Hindus and Sikhs, and the influx of Muslim refugees made changes to settlements, property, occupation, institutions, and collective memory. Research at the level of the district suggests that these changes did not merely amount to demographic or administrative shifts; rather, they became an integral part of historical consciousness through which people later on recollected issues of belonging, dislocation, and rehabilitation (Makhdoom, Ali, Zaman, et al., 2025).

The historiography of Gujrat has seen several developments in recent years, especially in areas like social change during the colonial period, partition, governance, transition, architecture, and conservation. However, the oral history, rituals, customs, craft knowledge, food, languages, and many other intangible elements of the district's living heritage have not yet been examined in a comprehensive historical cultural context. The existing historiographical literature thus offers ample material on the environment in which local culture emerged without a proper account of how different types of intangible heritage have adapted to modern social change.

In this context, this article tries to fill this void by viewing the intangible cultural heritage of District Gujrat in historical terms as a culturally evolving system. The first point of this article is the claim that the living heritage of Gujrat can only be viewed through the interplay of continuity, change, and selective loss. While some cultural practices continue due to their continued importance in performing their religious, familial, social, and/or economic function, others continue through their adaptation to changes in technology, market, and lifestyle, and still others lose the environment of transmission due to their particular kind of oral, occupational, linguistic, or recreational knowledge.

The second point about Gujrat's intangible cultural heritage has to do with the idea of regional distinctiveness. Even if Punjabi language, wedding traditions, Sufi piety, culinary habits, kinship relations, hospitality, and traditional entertainment are widespread in Punjab, it doesn't mean that these factors are irrelevant in constructing Gujrat's regional identity. In other words, cultural distinctiveness may come out of a unique localization of broadly distributed cultural traditions. Therefore, one cannot treat the intangible heritage of Gujrat as a collection of uniquely local customs.

Sources and Method

This study uses an approach of a qualitative history-culture analysis using published and documentary sources. This research is not intended to conduct a novel ethnography of the current state of Gujrat. The main data sources are historical books on the district, gazetteer compiled during the colonial era, the history written in Gujrat itself, and research on the region. The wider literature on intangible heritage, oral history, folklore, craft, language, food, kinship, and religion is used for theoretical and comparative perspective.

Local histories are especially valuable as they retain information about certain locations, communities, professions, religious organizations, and people that are omitted by general provincial histories. Beg (1870), Karamat (1977), Khokhar (1996), Qureshi (1995), Rehman and Wescoat (1993), Saleem and Bhatti (2012), and Williamson (1921) are used to provide historical foundation for the cultural analysis.

Studies on the area of Gujrat contribute to the existing body of evidence and have been selectively chosen based on the topic. Research on the colonial period sheds light on the long-term changes in rural social organization and everyday culture (Iqbal, 2025; Iqbal, Ali, & Mushtaq, 2025). Studies on Partition add to the analysis of demographic upheaval and memory and rehabilitation. Research on heritage preservation and tourism has been limited to the discussion on preservation only and not referred to in any other section.

It is an important distinction between local evidence and general interpretations in methodology. A general study of folktales will give a good explanation of the modes of oral tradition but not provide proof of the existence of a certain folk tale in Gujrat. A general study of craftsmanship can discuss the nature of embodied skills without proof of the existence of a certain craft in the region. General research on the culture of Punjab can provide information about food and rituals without the proof of their uniqueness to the region. The methodology also places boundaries on the discussion of the current state of specific traditions. As the paper is devoid of systematic contemporary interviews or participant observation, it is impossible to give quantitative evaluation of their presence today. The concepts of resilience, transformation, and decline have been used where backed by historical evidence and previous literature review, whereas further investigation of the current state of individual traditions is one of the areas for future research.

Historical Formation of Gujrat's Cultural Landscape

The cultural existence of an area occurs through its historical framework and not outside it. The positioning of Gujrat in between the river systems of Jhelum and Chenab put it into different networks that were involved in agriculture, commerce, politics, and militarily. Rehman and Wescoat (1993) highlight the geographical aspect of the historical development of medieval Gujrat whereas the local history has provided information regarding the different political authorities, settlements, religious sites, occupational groups, and regional communities (Beg, 1870; Khokhar, 1996; Qureshi, 1995).

Eighteenth century was crucial as the falling political influence of Mughals helped regional leaders to have more political autonomy. The rise of Sultan Muqarrab Khan happened in line with the process of the political decline of the empire and also with the emergence of different powers in Punjab through Afghan influence, tribes, and regional political powers (Shah & Ali, 2026). This political shift affected not only the political aspects but also patronage, landownership, settlement, military organization, and political networks.

There was another major change during the nineteenth century. The Battle of Gujrat in 1849 marked the end of Sikh rule in Punjab and heralded the period of colonial rule (Iqbal, Ali, & Azeem, 2025). Colonial administration resulted in the emergence of a more documentary state characterized by surveys, settlement accounts, land classes, revenue documents, courts, censuses, and districts (Iqbal, 2025). These institutions reordered the relationship between farmers, landlords, intermediaries, and officials and led to the adoption of new administrative categories which came to constitute part and parcel of village economy.

Colonialism also involved a cultural change. Studies of Gujrat from 1849 until 1947 reveal some changes in the areas of education, languages, clothing, food habits, communal housing, and leisure activities along with the continuation of kin-based social structures, religious beliefs, Sufi practices, and oral traditions (Iqbal, Ali, & Mushtaq, 2025). The significance of these findings is that continuity and institutional change can take place side-by-side. Tradition did not survive by resisting the influence of colonial modernity but rather through negotiation with changing circumstances. The same holds true for the twentieth century. Partition changed the demographic makeup of the region, and rehabilitation brought about the formation of new communities in both the urban and rural environment. The present-day cultural scenario of Gujrat, therefore, emerges out of a process of transformation involving politics, demography, institutions, and culture instead of being the outcome of one and the same historical culture.

Oral Traditions, Folk Expression, and Collective Memory

It is through folk culture that one of the primary vehicles for the transmission of cultural knowledge outside the institutional structure exists. Oral tradition of songs, tales, legends, proverbs, ritual language, jokes, and others compresses memory and social values into a cultural form that can be repeatedly repeated. Folklore should not be viewed solely as an entertaining form of communication but a way of interpreting relations, moral obligations, historical experience, and connection to place (Bronner, 2019). Local histories of Gujrat themselves provide ample evidence as to the significance accorded to personalities, sanctuaries, villages, genealogy, and stories tied to specific locations (Beg, 1870; Karamat, 1977; Khokhar, 1996; Saleem & Bhatti, 2012). Such types of books are often on the verge between a documentary approach to history and local memory. Instead of viewing it as a shortcoming, cultural history can take advantage of it.

Folk Songs and Musical Practice

In traditional Punjabi society, music was an intrinsic part of such events as weddings, religious events, seasonal festivals and family celebrations.

Ethnomusicology stresses that performance conveys emotions and experiences by means of sound and participation, not only through lyrics (Nettl, 2015). Wedding music is one of the examples. Themes of love, departure, family ties, gender relations, fun and transition are common in Punjabi marriage music repertoires. The meaning of such music goes beyond lyrics and resides in the

context of its performance, especially the involvement of women and relatives in domestic ritualistic performances. However, such music should not be treated as Gujarti alone. It is important for the district precisely because of its connection with wider Punjabi traditions through local families and rituals.

The tradition of agricultural singing relied on a different social environment: the rhythms of agricultural work. Developments in mechanization and agricultural practices have diminished some of the collective workspaces in which singing used to take place with both functional and social purposes. Consequently, a tradition will diminish not because the community rejects the song but because the environment of agricultural labour has changed.

Institutional support has been relatively greater for devotional music because of its association with religious assemblies and shrine traditions. The *gawwali* and *kafi* are musical genres related to poetry, spirituality, memory, and collective participation in the broader context of Sufism in South Asia (Schimmel, 1975). Devotional performances have associations with shrine traditions that have important parts in the landscape of sacred places in Gujrat, such as the recollections of saints and religious communities (Khokhar, 1996).

These traditions have been affected by technological developments. Amplification, recordings, digital media, professional performance, and commercial performances at weddings have reshaped the relations among performers, listeners, and performance spaces. This transformation does not have to imply cultural erasure; it might indicate the shift of cultural performances from private and rural settings to commercial and digital settings.

Storytelling, Legends, and Oral History

The importance of oral narrative is especially significant when talking about local history as it is capable of capturing stories that are missing in official sources. Legends about saints, settlements, migrations, families, conflicts, miracles, and significant individuals become part of the local history through oral traditions (Thompson, 2000; Vansina, 1985). Traditions of Gujrat based on shrines are a clear illustration. Local histories contain many stories about saints, sacred places, religious figures, and traditions linked to localities (Khokhar, 1996; Qureshi, 1995; Saleem & Bhatti, 2012). It is possible for these stories to be mixed up with facts and legends. However, historical value of these narratives does not only consist of proving every event mentioned as true; these stories show the connection of sacredness, morality, and history of places.

Oral evidence needs to be interpreted carefully to reconstruct particular events. Memories are shaped by subsequent experiences, narratives of communities, interest of the family, political situation, and the passing of time (Perks & Thomson, 2016). Hence, corroboration is necessary in creating the factual sequence, whereas differences in memories could be evidence if the subject of discussion is collective memories. The Partition experience of Gujrat is a clear example of this. Eyewitnesses and documents illustrate the way violence and displacement was incorporated into

local history memory, while later recollections depict the ways migration experiences, losses, and belonging experiences were collectively remembered from generation to generation (Makhdoom, Ali, Zaman, et al., 2025). Thus, collective memory could be part of intangible heritage regardless of whether the subject of collective memory is traumatic or celebratory.

Changes in communication practices have also changed oral transmission. Migration, smaller families, television, smartphones, education and changing leisure activities could decrease intergenerational oral storytelling, while digital recordings could change the way the oral traditions can be recorded. The issue here is not only the availability of oral traditions but the nature of the relationship between the narrator, the audience, the place and the medium.

Proverbs, Sayings, and Everyday Knowledge

Proverbs represent condensed reasoning processes through which people share their wisdom, criticism, humour, warnings, and judgments. Common subjects for these include work, family relations, patience, morality, cooperation, agriculture, and human character (Mieder, 2004). Their value as living heritage is in active use rather than in textual conservation.

The use of Punjabi proverbs in Gujrat takes place against the wider background of regional language and cannot be treated as specifically Gujrati without compilation for a particular district. The value of the proverbs in Gujrat will be in their use and in the cultural knowledge encoded in metaphors and lexicon. Expressions connected with former occupation or agricultural work or kinship system will contain remnants of previous experience despite changes in context. It is similar with riddles, sayings, and verbal games. Since they are taught in informal way, their continuity is ensured by conversations at home and entertainment activities.

Traditional Recreation

The traditional games are not only the verbally transmitted cultural forms but also embodied ones because activities like kabaddi, wrestling and gulli danda are not only elements of recreational life of Punjabis and other South Asians but also are related to their understanding of rules, skills of body performance, competition, cooperation and proper behaviour (Sutton-Smith, 1997). The importance of these games for Gujrat is not in their specific origin in Gujrat but in their practice in village grounds, fairs, seasonal meetings and neighbourhoods. Urbanization, decrease of common space, electronics and changes in leisure culture might diminish these contexts considerably. Thus, the traditional recreation may serve as an example of the vulnerability created by loss of cultural context.

Ritual Life, Shrines, Family, and Social Customs

Since religion and family practices exhibit more strength compared to recreational activities due to the presence of robust social structures, religious festivals, rites of passage, marriages, deaths,

hospitality, and pilgrimages are regularly practiced and reproduced through families and communities, thus have fairly strong means of transmission. Examples of festivals like Eid ul Fitr and Eid ul Adha do not belong to Gujrat alone but their performance in the locality involves elements like family reunion, interaction between neighbours, philanthropy, food distribution, visits, and hospitality. The significance of festivals to regional culture is evident in the way that broad-based religious practices become part of specific social settings.

Sufi Shrines and Urs

The tradition of shrines has a more direct relation to the local geography since religion becomes tied to specific sites and specific personalities. There is an abundance of shrines in Gujrat which play an essential role in the local history of the district and its religious landscape (Khokhar, 1996; Qureshi, 1995; Saleem & Bhatti, 2012). Praying, *urs*, singing, storytelling, hosting, charity, and the traditions of saints are what brings the built structures to life. There has been an emphasis in the South Asian literature on the ability of the shrines to serve as religious sites, social centers, and carriers of charismatic memory (Ewing, 1997; Werbner & Basu, 1998). The evidence from colonial Gujrat also suggests that Sufi practices and religious activities continued to be a part of the social life despite the reform movement and change in community politics (Iqbal, Ali, & Mushtaq, 2025).

The connections between material and immaterial heritage become particularly apparent in this case. Tombs and shrines constitute material context; however, it is recreated through visiting, rituals, stories, music, and memories. Conservation of the object without the social practices associated with it means conservation only half of its heritage value. Shrine rituals themselves have also evolved. Development of transport, acoustic technologies, digital media, commerce, administration, and changes in religious discourse can influence the scale and nature of ceremonies. Their relevance shows how cultural continuity does not preclude considerable changes in form.

Family and Kinship

The family continues to be one of the primary institutions for imparting cultural knowledge. The kinship structure affects marriages, inheritances, care giving, ceremonies, hospitality, collaboration, and the interactions among different generations (Ahmed, 1986; Lyon, 2004). Cultural education can take place informally as the younger members of the family learn through practice language, manners, religion, storytelling, cooking, and social practices. Extended kinship systems traditionally provided the means for intensive intergenerational interaction in Punjab. The process of urbanization, migrations, and professional mobility has changed some of these systems, but the kinship system continues to regulate a lot of the ceremonial and social obligations. Cultural education in the family system has, therefore, been transformed but not discontinued.

Marriage as Living Heritage

The institution of marriage involves a combination of multiple intangible cultural aspects all at once. Religious procedure, kinship negotiations, music, dress, food, gift-giving, hospitality, gendered participation, and ritual order all happen at once. The cultural importance of this aspect is not found in the isolated performance of one ritual, but in the interplay of relationships and practices that recur during the process. Practices like *mehndi* ceremonies, household singing, gift exchanges, the nikah, and ceremonial dinners are common in Punjab and Pakistan, but they are also important parts of the living heritage of Gujrat since they are being performed in the community. Modern weddings represent adaptation particularly well. Modern weddings involve things like wedding halls, photography and videography, online invitations, catering businesses, social media presence, beauty treatments, recorded performances, and evolving fashion trends along with traditional rituals. This means that cultural continuity does not mean no changes take place due to technology and commerce.

Hospitality and Mutual Assistance

Hospitality may not be as exciting as a festival or craft practice, but it is a fundamental aspect of everyday culture. Hospitality involves providing refreshment for guests, helping out one's kin in ceremonies, comforting mourners, and coming together to celebrate at community gatherings. This all shows that hospitality entails principles of generosity, reciprocity, respect, and social responsibility (Ahmed, 1986; Lyon, 2004). The example above explains how intangible heritage often thrives despite being ignored or not recognized as heritage. The reason why people perpetuate intangible heritage is because it continues to form an integral part of their social life and not because it has been labelled as heritage.

Historical Plurality, Partition, and Cultural Memory

The intangible heritage of Gujrat evolved from an historically plural society. Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs lived together in the district prior to the Partition in the agricultural, economic, occupational, religious, and urban activities (Beg, 1870; Williamson, 1921).

Plurality is not to be idealized as the absence of boundaries and conflict. Religion played an important role and communal distinctions became more marked during the colonial period. On the other hand, locality, language, economy, occupation, food, material culture, and public spaces gave rise to interactions which could not be categorized solely in terms of religion. The Partition brought this world to an end. Research at the district level reveals that migrations and violence have transformed the demographic and socio-economic structure of Gujrat, leaving a profound impact on historical memory (Makhdoom, Ali, Zaman, et al., 2025). The departure of Hindus and Sikhs involved not just changes in the demographics of the area but also in neighbourhoods, economic activities, worship sites, occupational ties, and community customs.

There was another aspect to the rehabilitation of refugees that entailed more culture change. Land and housing distribution, the migration of agriculturist refugees, relief operations, and resettlement of displaced families were factors that influenced the rural as well as the urban

culture in Gujrat (Makhdoom, Ali, Iqbal, et al., 2025). This is relevant in the context of intangible heritage since cultural traditions accompany people wherever they go. This could entail breaking of certain traditions at one place but also the development of linguistic, culinary, professional, and family traditions at another.

Thus, there is an oral and mnemonic heritage associated with partition as well. Tales related to leaving one's homeland, migration, loss of belongings, violence, refugee camps, and rebuilding could be passed down from generation to generation.

Traditional Crafts, Occupational Knowledge, and Agrarian Skills

Craftsmanship serves as one of the most prominent fields wherein the intangible culture of Gujrat can be tied to local economic history documentation. Crafts involve material products along with intangible skills. Material products such as a clay pot, wooden artifact, metal product, and textile may exist in reality, but the skill of creating these material items depends on intangible skills of material handling, process, judgment, design, and problem-solving.

Pottery, textiles, woodworking, and metallurgy are identified as some of the crafts of Gujrat (Ali, 2017). Local research helps build a much better case for the intangible culture than theoretical studies on craftsmanship while studies on craftsmanship can help understand the nature of skill as a cultural product (Sennett, 2008).

Pottery

This is very apparent with the example of pottery where the pot is material heritage, while the craftsmanship is based on knowledge of clay preparation, formation, drying, firing, and finishing. Such skills are normally acquired through direct observation and practice and not written documentation (Rice, 2015). Traditionally, the earthenware produced by hand has been made for utilitarian reasons such as food preparation and storage, and preservation of water. The advent of ceramic ware, metals, plastics, and even refrigerators has diminished the demand for most of these utilitarian objects; however, pottery can thrive through decoration, ritual use, special markets, or heritage use.

In this case, there is a transition from necessity to cultural goods rather than survival or extinction.

Furniture and Woodcraft

Woodworking and furniture manufacture have been particularly distinctive skilled activities connected with Gujrat. Local studies on the handicrafts of the district state that woodworking is an essential element of its artisanal economy (Ali, 2017). Manufacture of furniture can also prove how mechanization does not have to be considered synonymous with the decline of crafts. Machinery can substitute for specific manual skills but other areas still require skills in working with wood, design, carving, joinery, finishing, repairs, customization, and evaluation. A workshop can hence get increasingly mechanized without losing crucial aspects of the skills involved. What really matters is the issue of transmission. As long as young people keep acquiring specialist knowledge in workshops, families, or apprenticeships, the craft survives despite the development

of technology. If standardized industrial production replaces the transmission of specialist knowledge, the intangible element becomes more fragile.

Metalwork, Textiles, and Domestic Knowledge

Metal work, textiles, embroidery, and other smaller crafts such as these expand the category beyond larger industry. The cultural significance of these crafts may be easily underestimated since production takes place either in households or in an economy not officially recorded.

Particular attention needs to be paid to women's knowledge. Textiles, embroidery, household craft work, ceremonial decoration, and cooking are examples of ways in which cultural tradition can be passed down, yet go unrecorded in traditional histories of economics. Any history of intangible heritage must thus include systems of knowledge transfer within the domestic and gendered spaces of households. The preservation of craft knowledge is inherently tied up in economics. Younger generations cannot be expected to stay within professions that do not sustain their livelihood just because those professions are of cultural value. Preserving craft thus requires consideration of marketability, access to materials, vocational training, labor practices, social value, innovation, and documentation (Hafstein, 2018; Sennett, 2008).

Agrarian Knowledge

Occupational heritage need not be limited to craftsmanship, but also includes agriculture and the environment. Agricultural societies build a working knowledge base of soils, water, climate, crops, animals, pests, and seasonal cycles through observation and experimentation (Berkes, 2018).

Agriculture has played an important part in Gujrat's economy. Colonial governance paid considerable effort to the classification of the soil, agricultural practices, irrigation, registration of crops, revenues, and rural governance (Iqbal, 2025; Williamson, 1921). Concepts such as *barani*, *chahi*, *nehri*, *jamabandi*, *khasra*, *patwari*, and *lambardar* provide an indication of how the language of agriculture and administration has been internalized into the institutions of rural Punjab. Modern agriculture brings about changes through mechanization, better seeds, chemicals, scientific forecasting, different irrigation practices, and markets. It does not necessarily mean the loss of culture. The problem with heritage is when knowledge is lost and not recorded or where modern production practices remove the social setting where such knowledge was passed on.

Foodways and Everyday Cultural Heritage

Foodways include connections between farming, family know-how, religion, hospitality, remembrance, and social relations. Food includes dishes but also their methods of preparation, seasonal preferences, ceremony, sharing practices, and meaning attached to the food. The food culture practiced in Gujrat is part of the broader Punjabi cuisine. The dishes prepared from wheat, rice, lentils, vegetables, dairy products, seasonal greens, and meat cannot then be labelled as Gujrati dishes without further evidence. There is historical documentation from the local district which clearly shows that agricultural activities and family economics are essential to social life

(Beg, 1870; Williamson, 1921), whereas historical studies have shown that Punjabi cuisine is a result of centuries of interaction within South Asia (Collingham, 2006).

For intangible heritage, the relevant question here would be the ways in which food participates in social relationships. The role of food in weddings, funerals, religious celebrations, visits, and family reunions creates social relations through reciprocation, obligation, reputation, and identity. The process of preparing food, serving it, eating it, and its context is just as important culturally as the food itself (Goody, 1982; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002).

Foodways also suggest a difference between symbolic and functional continuity. Catering services, restaurants, ready-to-use products, refrigeration, advanced technology, migration, fast food, and Internet-based recipes may change considerably how food is prepared at home. There might be situations where a society feels strong attachment to particular types of food, yet very few families know how to prepare them. Thus, culinary tradition cannot be limited merely to a collection of traditional meals. The importance of culinary tradition is connected to the association between preparation, memory, household transmission, agricultural context, hospitality, and social event.

Punjabi Language and Cultural Identity

Language is the primary means through which a great many forms of intangible heritage are passed on. Music, sayings, jokes, family histories, kin terms, occupational terms, ritual terms, and memories are dependent upon linguistic knowledge. So Punjabi language also has built into it accumulated cultural meanings in addition to communication. Punjabi language is still an important part of informal and cultural communication in Punjab, while Urdu and English have much more significance in formal education, administration, and most professional domains (Rahman, 1996, 2002). As the history of colonial Gujrat shows, the process of changing hierarchies of languages through education and administration had started even before independence and continued after it in the same areas (Iqbal, Ali & Mushtaq, 2025).

One must nonetheless exercise caution when talking about linguistic situation in Gujrat. Punjabi languages form a dialect continuum whose boundaries do not easily match those of present-day administrative districts (Masica, 1991; Shackle, 1979). One should thus talk about local varieties of Punjabi languages and lexicons, rather than try to define the Gujrat dialect without linguistic study. Speech includes the use of vocabulary related to farming, work, family, food, religion, craftsmanship, and landscape. The disappearance of certain practices means that the vocabulary associated with such practices can be forgotten as well. Thus, language change might not only include the replacement between languages but can involve the loss of culturally meaningful knowledge.

The digital form of communication brings about an unclear situation, when Urdu and English languages can become more widespread in writing, while Punjabi will persist in speech and even in visualized forms of communication, including videos, audios, messages, and social networking.

Heritage in Transition

The foregoing evidence demonstrates that the intangible cultural heritage of Gujrat does not have a uniform history. Various practices rely on their own institutional base, economic function, and method of transmission and therefore behave differently in response to social changes. Traditions which prove to be most resilient tend to be those rooted within social institutions. Religious rituals, practices at shrines, weddings, funerals, familial relations, hospitality and the use of vernacular language survive because they are still attached to family, religion, and society. Their outer forms may vary greatly without destroying functions underlying them. There are other traditions whose survival depends on adaptation. Weddings utilize commercial and technological innovations, cuisines adapt to new methods of cooking at home and in restaurants, crafts embrace technology, devotional performance is disseminated via electronic media, and stories can be recorded and electronically disseminated. Innovation becomes thus a tool of continuity rather than its opposite.

A more serious form of cultural vulnerability arises from the disappearance of the social context of practice. Informal storytelling may lose momentum if long-term intergenerational social meetings are no longer common, traditional games may lose importance with the vanishing of public space, occupational vocabulary may disappear with the changing process of production, and craft skills may disappear if apprenticeship ends. Thus, cultural deterioration is often achieved through the indirect means of economic, spatial, domestic, technological, and linguistic change.

The difference between adaptation and disappearance must be carefully considered. A strict interpretation of authenticity will turn a living culture into a museum object by requiring it to maintain itself unchanged. On the other hand, the language of adaptation must not obscure real loss, since the last practitioners of a particular skill disappear, a narrative stock will never be recalled, or a particular language of specialists is not used anymore.

Intergenerational transfer offers the best standard for differentiation between these two phenomena. The tradition is alive if knowledge is still being transmitted through the community members despite changes in the form. Documentation may provide evidence, but the recording of a song does not equal a singing tradition and preservation of a tool does not guarantee its utilization skills.

Safeguarding, Community Participation, and Heritage Tourism

Living heritage requires more attention to people and social interactions rather than to cultural artifacts. Documentation continues to be significant, however, sustainable preservation requires practitioners, audiences, apprentices, family members, communities, educational institutions, and sustainable cultural environments. Oral history, local archives, digital documentation, cultural education, skill training, language documentation, and supporting practitioners can all help with transmission (Hafstein, 2018; UNESCO, 2003).

Heritage experience from Gujrat in recent times gives some valuable lessons on the subject of intangible heritage even when the direct topic of discussion is tangible heritage. The restoration

of the Kharian baoli is an example of how civil society awareness, judicial action, governmental financial backing, scholarly studies, and conservation efforts can all help revive a lost cultural asset (Parveen et al., 2025). Though the step well is tangible heritage, this case is related to living heritage because the success of preservation eventually requires community recognition and attachment.

The link between tangible and intangible heritage is rarely ever a clear one. Shrines become places of practice and stories; historic districts become places of remembrance, workshops become places of craft training, and historic water features might get imbued with meaning related to community identity. Places that have cultural value often exist because there are intangible practices going on within them.

In the study on the built heritage of Gujrat, similar issues as urbanization and heritage conservation concerns are raised, while the importance of involvement and sustainability in heritage tourism in this case becomes apparent (Iqbal & Ali, 2025). The research is based on interviews and observations and explicitly calls for a preservation policy that involves local communities. Tourism might bring market demand for crafts, foods, interpretation, festivals, and local knowledge, yet commercialization does not equal preservation of traditions. A practice that has been changed by the interests of visitors can be economically active yet lose significance to its performers. Thus, sustainable cultural tourism must involve community members in the decision-making process regarding representation, access, performance, and economics. The heritage experience from Gujrat illustrates the importance of a partnership involving the local historian, university, community, government departments, civil society, artisans, and cultural practitioners. Historians can research and analyze, institutions can provide assistance in legal, technical, and monetary matters, the community can decide what is still relevant, and practitioners can decide what adaptations are still culturally and economically feasible. Heritage preservation is most successful when it serves to increase the capability of the community to impart cultural knowledge instead of preserving its representation post-decay.

Conclusion

The intangible cultural heritage of District Gujrat includes oral traditions, music, legends, shrine tales, rituals, family practices, marriage practices, hospitality, foodways, traditional recreation, crafts, occupational practices, agricultural experience, and Punjabi linguistic practices. Collectively, these cultural practices link the present day communities with the history of the region and at the same time situate Gujrat in the larger context of the cultural world of Punjab.

The above evidence also illustrates the reason why the concept of uniqueness should not be considered the most important criteria for defining regional culture. Some of the traditions that exist in Gujrat are common to all Punjab, but it does not reduce their importance as a part of the local culture. Regional culture is formed as much by the localisation of the common traditions as by those unique to the region. Songs become local by particular families and occasions, religion – by particular shrines and landscape, crafts – by occupational groups and market, language – by vocabulary and usage, history – by places and events. And here lies the main significance of the

article. The heritage of intangible culture of Gujrat is better explained not by the isolated nature of its peculiar elements but through the specific historical combination of the broader traditions of Punjabi culture that have been constantly reconfigured according to the circumstances of Gujrat itself.

Thus, change is integral in this formation. The process of political decentralization in the eighteenth century, transition from Sikhs to the British rule, changes in administration due to colonial rule, transformations in hierarchies of education and language, partition and rehabilitation of refugees, urbanization, migration, mechanization, commercialization, and digital communication all affected the environment in which these cultures were sustained. In such an evolving context, one can discern three major trends. Some traditions are characterized by considerable continuity because they are linked closely to religion, family, kinship, community, or language. Other traditions survive through change by adapting new technologies, commercial practices, and social pressures while still maintaining their cultural meanings. Finally, some traditions become endangered by the disappearance of practitioners, contexts, professions, linguistic ability, or intergenerational encounters.

Thus, the key issue with regard to the living heritage of Gujrat is not modernization per se, but the process of breaking transmission. Change becomes the loss of culture when it ceases to be possible to pass information from one generation to another. Conversely, traditions tend to survive precisely because they allow reinterpreting tradition. The process of safeguarding thus must take on the challenge of recording forms of culture after they are lost. Local historians, traditional story tellers, craftspeople, members of shrine societies, families, language speakers, educational facilities, researchers, civil society groups, and government departments all have their own ways of preserving the environments in which cultural knowledge travels. Documentation, digital recordings, apprenticeships, cultural education, responsible tourism, support for sustainable craft economies, and conservation are most valuable when they are used to strengthen living connections. The intangible cultural heritage of Gujrat should not be considered a dead legacy of the past, or even the dying world of cultural heritage facing the modern era. It is a living history and one in which inheritance and innovation are always in dialogue. This understanding provides a more solid base for comprehending the cultural identity of the region and its safeguarding as well.

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