

Timeless Teachings: A Glimpse into the Traditional Wisdom of Chateau Garli

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Abstract

In the most remote part of Himachal Pradesh lies the picturesque village of Garli, which has managed to preserve the cultural and traditional traditions of its residents, giving everyone a unique opportunity to experience life as it was decades ago. The village is home to the remarkable heritage hotel, Chateau Garli, which bears witness to the rich history and customs of the people who once lived there. This well-preserved structure is both an architectural marvel and a living museum, displaying the artistry, craftsmanship, and sustainable living practices of a bygone era. This study utilises information gathered from multiple interviews with locals and the current owners of the heritage hotel to shed light on the enduring impact of Garli's cultural practices. Traditional practices enabled the inhabitants of Garli to adapt to their environment long before the advent of modern technology. By utilising their deep understanding of the area's resources and expertise, the villagers came up with creative and long-term answers to their everyday problems. Using artefacts and architectural details as evidence, this study aims to show how these practices reflect a sustainable and resourceful way of life. Chateau Garli acts as a bridge between the two worlds, allowing us to learn about the bygone era while also preserving the village's history. The customs and traditions of communities that once lived in harmony with their surroundings can help us better understand them. The study emphasises the importance of preserving cultural heritage to promote sustainability and pass on valuable knowledge to future generations.

Keywords: Garli, Chateau Garli, Karar, Sud, Traditional Refrigerator, Hamam, Wind Vane, Jali, Khind

Introduction

The picturesque hamlet of Garli, which is ensconced in the foothills of the Dhauladhar Mountain Range, is well-known for the magnificent mansions that it houses. In addition to the other village known as Pragpur, Garli is also considered to be a heritage village. Pragpur was the first village to be designated as a Heritage Village, according to a notification issued by the State Government on December 9, 1997. The year 2002 marked the year in which both Garli and Pragpur were designated as Heritage zones. (Nair, Singh, & Munoth, 2021) Garli became a haven for the Sood community that was displaced from Sirhind (Punjab) to find a home where they could finally settle. Initially, a few families of the Suds settled in the marginal land of Garli, which was devoid of agricultural land and water resources, where they could no longer be uprooted. They constructed huge mansions in varied architectural styles to suit their temperament and also outshine each other. The Suds, also known as the Karars, were instrumental in shaping the cultural and economic landscape of the region. After having originated in the Ludhiana-Sirhind region, they first arrived in the Kangra region around the year 1750, most likely with the encouragement of the Kanhaiya Misl. As time went on, the Karars emerged as the most powerful and influential trading community in the hill states of Punjab. In particular, their influence can be seen in the distinctive townhouses of Garli and Pragpur, which are characterised by an architectural style that was influenced by their interactions with Portuguese merchants. To highlight the significant role that the Karars have played in shaping the heritage and built environment of the region, their mansions were a one-of-a-kind combination of local and foreign influences that can still be witnessed. (Gautam & Thakur, 2021)

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Chateau Garli was built by Lala Mela Ram Sud in the year 1921. The home was a treasured refuge for the family for a considerable amount of time. The men would leave for work, while the women and children would stay behind. Eventually, the family relocated to Shimla, but the elderly continued to visit the village, particularly during the cold winter months. They found the weather in the village to be more pleasant than in Shimla, which made it a welcome retreat. The mansion was still visited by Sri Yogesh C. Sud, the father of the current owner of the residence, until his passing away. Since it had been abandoned for the past twenty years and had received no visitors, the house had deteriorated into a state of disrepair. However, in 2012, Amish Sud, who was the great-grandson of the original owner, spent a week in Garli and reawakened an appreciation for the property's inherent potential, beauty, and historical significance. He and his father, Yatish C. Sud, concluded that it would be beneficial to undertake a comprehensive restoration project after recognising the significance of the location as a cultural heritage site. Their objective was to not only maintain the historical allure of the building but also to bring it up to date by incorporating modern conveniences, thereby transforming the property into a heritage hotel. This revitalisation effort reflects their commitment to honouring the past while adapting the space to meet the needs of the present day. Because of this, the mansion's rich history and cultural essence would be experienced by future generations. (Kalakat, Pathania, Singh, Singh, & Cheema, 2019)

Over time, Chateau Garli had many names, such as Koue walle, the UCO Bank building (a person working in UCO bank was their tenant, thus the name), Mela Ram Sud Haveli and currently it goes by the name Chateau Garli, which is a beautiful heritage hotel.

The mansion stands tall as an architectural marvel and a testament to the ingenuity of its era. It is a sanctuary for those who love design and a treasure trove of artefacts that showcase the period's remarkable craftsmanship. These artefacts are much more than just mere objects—they shed light on the lifestyle of the people who lived then and demonstrate how they came up with practical ways for their survival. The brilliance that went into making these things shows how long-lasting they are because of how well they were constructed to last and perform their intended purpose. Not only were these artefacts practical, but they were also beautiful; many of them were works of art in their own right that have stood the test of time and still hold a special place in history. A beautiful blend of practicality, sustainability, and history is on display throughout the mansion and its collections, which provide a window into the lives of the people who lived here in the past.

Our cultural heritage serves as the foundation of our identity, encompassing both tangible and intangible elements. It links us to our heritage and influences our sense of belonging. Examples of tangible cultural heritage include artworks, sculptures, ceramics, artefacts and monuments. They offer tangible evidence of human creativity, skill, and progress in technology. Artefacts like these, found at archaeological sites and museums, shed light on the values, tastes, and lifestyles of earlier civilisations. The heritage of India includes a wealth of cultural, historical, and natural treasures, showcasing monuments and artefacts that stand as lasting symbols of human accomplishment and important milestones in the evolution of civilisation. Intangible cultural heritage encompasses a variety of elements such as customs, traditions, oral histories, performing arts, and knowledge systems that are passed down through generations. The importance of these intangible elements is rooted in their essential function in influencing a community's culture and way of life, even though they do not provide material benefits. Folk music, dance, storytelling, rituals, and culinary traditions are all important components of this heritage that contribute to a strong sense of community and belonging. A rich and interconnected tapestry of tangible and intangible heritage reflects the diversity, creativity, and resilience of human communities across places and periods. Despite their lack of material contribution, these intangible assets are significant because they play a critical role in shaping a people's culture and way of life. A vibrant and interconnected tapestry of tangible and intangible heritage demonstrates the diversity, creativity, and resilience of human communities across different locations and times. This observation is especially clear in the rich cultural heritage of Garli, particularly within Chateau Garli, where its owners made a great deal of effort to ensure that the historical treasures of the past are preserved for the benefit of future generations. The mansion serves as a living testament to the customs, artefacts, and practices that were prevalent in earlier times, thereby demonstrating the profound connection that the community has to its cultural origins. By welcoming guests into their residences, the owners have established a welcoming environment in which individuals can observe the artefacts on display. This presents a one-of-a-kind opportunity to observe and comprehend the history that has shaped the region. A deeper sense of knowledge, appreciation, and belonging is fostered as a result of this act of preservation. The owners' commitment to sharing their heritage not only contributes to the preservation of the legacy of Garli but also helps to strengthen the cultural fabric of the community. This helps to ensure that future generations will be able to connect with their past while also honouring the traditions and values that continue

to define them. They encourage others to consider the significance of their cultural identity using this gesture, which in turn encourages a collective effort to preserve and celebrate it for many years to come.

Methodology

To collect data for this study, interviews were conducted with the people who live in the heritage village of Garli. Interviews were conducted with the owners of Chateau Garli, who are currently residing in Shimla, and information on the subject matter was gathered. To gather information, both primary and secondary sources were utilised. Interviews with individuals were conducted to collect primary data, while secondary data was gathered from a wide range of scholarly resources, including books, journals, websites, magazines, and other publications.

Examination of the Objects: Their Description and Functionality

1. Traditional Cooling Equipment: Creative Methods for Preserving Food in Chateau Garli

People in earlier times did not have access to modern refrigeration technology but understood the importance of food preservation, particularly in the absence of electric cooling devices. They came up with innovative methods to satisfy the demand for food refrigeration despite the lack of technology. They developed a straightforward but incredibly efficient refrigeration technique by taking advantage of the environment, especially the nighttime's lower temperatures. They built a unique window that allowed cool air to freely circulate through mesh doors on both sides. The structure's interior temperature was kept



Fig. 1: Traditional Cooling Equipment at Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

low enough to avoid food spoiling thanks to this design, which let the cool evening air flow through continuously. They added shelves to this cooling structure so that food and utensils could be properly arranged and stored. To further aid in preserving the items that are being stored, these shelves were positioned in such a way that would optimise airflow around them. Utilising natural ventilation to cool the food was an ingenious way to take advantage of temperature variations and air circulation as well.



Fig. 2: Opened Traditional Cooling Equipment at Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

This early type of refrigeration was a creative and sustainable way to store food by depending on the nighttime temperature drop. It illustrates the extraordinary flexibility and resourcefulness of people who, during earlier times, managed to come up with workable solutions to prolong food's shelf life and preserve it without the use of artificial refrigeration. This approach not only demonstrates the ingenuity of these people but also their profound awareness of the natural world and their capacity to sustain themselves while living in harmony with nature.

2. Traditional Indigenous Geezer

The traditional water geezer or the hamam, called by the locals, had two separate taps, one for bathing and the other for cleaning utensils, giving it a distinctive and useful design. The central component of this system had a cylindrical tube in which coal or wood logs were put for heating. The system's working relied heavily on this heating technique. The water surrounding the cylindrical tube warmed as a result of the heat emitted by the burning coal or wood inside the cylindrical tube. The heated water would then flow out of the container's taps, ensuring a steady supply of hot water for personal hygiene and household tasks. On the premises, there were two containers. One was made of *tamba* (copper), and the other from *pital* (brass). These materials were



Fig. 3: Traditional Indigenous Geezer at Chateau Garli made of copper, Garli, H.P.

chosen because they are durable and can withstand high temperatures, reflecting the system's practical and thoughtful design.

This setup was a practical example of early engineering, demonstrating the ingenuity of traditional methods for meeting daily bathing and cleaning needs while effectively utilising natural resources such as wood or coal for heating.



Fig. 4: Traditional Indigenous Geezer at Chateau Garli made of brass, Garli, H.P.



Fig. 5: The internal mechanism of the Traditional Indigenous Geezer at Chateau Garli is made of copper, Garli, H.P.

3. Wooden Oven

The wooden oven in their house was something of an awe. It was designed with two separate shelves, each with a specific and functional purpose. The lower shelf was designed to hold a container containing coal, which would serve as a source of heat. These shelves were made of perforated metal trays, which would allow the heat to move upward to warm the food.



Fig. 6: Interior of the Wooden Oven at Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

This coal-burning setup was necessary for producing heat, which was then radiated upwards through these trays. The top shelf was reserved for food containers, which could be placed directly above the coal container. As the heat from the burning coal rose, it gently warmed the food on the upper shelf, keeping it at a suitable temperature for consumption. This ingenious



Fig. 7: Exterior of the Wooden Oven at Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

arrangement allowed food to be kept warm for extended periods.

The system effectively utilised the heat produced from the coal to maintain the food at the optimal temperature without the use of modern electric heating. This method demonstrated creativity and efficiency by combining cooking and food preservation in a single functional space.

4. Mattress/ Kinde

The elderly women of the village exhibited exceptional ingenuity and resourcefulness by repurposing old, worn-out clothing that had surpassed its initial utility. Instead of discarding these fabrics, they repurposed them into mattresses, revitalising materials that would have otherwise been discarded. The procedure was laborious and demanded meticulous attention; initially, the women would rip the fabric into strips, subsequently



Fig. 8: Mattress/ Kinde at Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

layering the pieces with precision to attain the required thickness and width. Upon the completion of the layering process, the entire mattress was meticulously hand-stitched, yielding a robust and practical product. Nevertheless, their craftsmanship transcended mere utility; the women enhanced the mattresses with decorative designs, ensuring their creations were both functional and aesthetically pleasing. This practice underscores the profound commitment to sustainability and creativity within the community, epitomising a culture that prioritises the optimal utilisation of available resources. This highlights the power of tradition and how these women, through their endeavours, enhanced both the practical and aesthetic aspects of their community, illustrating that sustainability can be both ingenious and aesthetically pleasing.

5. Well

The owner of the mansion took a considerate and generous step by constructing a well outside the house. He made sure that it could be utilised by both the members of the family as well as the villagers. This was



Fig. 9: Well outside the house at Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

done to serve the community. To prevent any member of the household from limiting the use of this well, it was strategically positioned on the exterior of the property using a strategic placement. Intentionally, the well was designed in such a way that it encouraged a sense of shared ownership and accessibility for all of the residents of the village. Furthermore, it is important to note that no one ever attempted to restrict the use of the well. This well quickly became an indispensable source of water for the entire community in a village where there was a limited supply of water. It was employed not only for meeting the community's day-to-day requirements but also for a variety of other purposes. A hand pump was also made for the convenience of the people to draw water with ease.

Sud community's commitment to inclusivity and mutual support. It reflects their philosophy of fair distribution of resources and fostering unity and concern for the welfare of society. Remarkably, the well is still operational to this day, and it continues to serve the villagers for both practical and spiritual purposes.

6. Jalis

There are intricate perforated screens known as jalis that are prominently featured on the boundary walls and the exterior of the main buildings. These screens serve both a functional and aesthetic purpose. The structures were designed with these architectural elements in mind, not only to improve ventilation but also to add a decorative and aesthetic touch to the buildings.



Fig. 10: Handpump along with the well at Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

The residents of the mansion came to be known as "Koue Walle," a term that denotes their dedication to the welfare of the village. The well, rather than merely serving a functional purpose, emerged as a symbol of the



Fig. 11: Coloured Jalis on the main building of Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

The jalis were crafted from a wide range of materials, including cement and brick, depending on the design and construction requirements of the project. Brick was used in some instances, while cement was used in others. Some of these jalis were painted with vibrant colours, which enhanced their visual appeal and complemented the overall architectural style. On the other hand, other jalis were left unpainted, which allowed the raw material to stand out and seamlessly integrate itself with the design of the building. The thoughtful incorporation of jalis reflects an elegant fusion of form and function, where the utility of promoting air circulation was balanced to elevate the aesthetic quality of the building. Jalis were incorporated into the building to achieve this balance. These screens not only served a practical purpose, such as improving airflow and offering shade, but they also became important decorative elements that contributed to the distinctive personality and aesthetic appeal of the buildings in which they were utilised.



Fig. 12: Coloured Jalis on the main building of Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

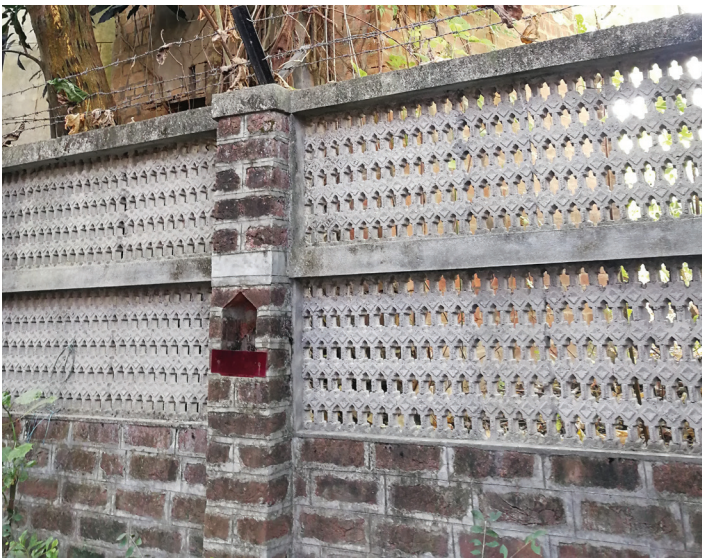


Fig. 13: Bare cement Jalis on the boundary wall of the building of Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.



Fig. 14: Coloured cement Jalis on the boundary wall of the building of Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

7. Lamp for lighting

The lamp depicted in the images came in both large and small sizes and served a functional yet aesthetically pleasing purpose in the residents' homes. These lamps were designed with a unique mechanism that allowed the lower part to be pulled down to insert candles, causing the glass to shift upwards, and then return to its original position. This clever design not only made them functional, but it also brought a touch of innovation



Fig. 16: Lamp for lighting from Chateau Garli, in The Mythe Estate, Shimla, H.P.



Fig. 17: Lamp for lighting from Chateau Garli, working of the contraption shown by Mrs. Minu Sud, in The Mythe Estate, Shimla, H.P.

to everyday life. The lamps were made with diamond-shaped glass panes that, when illuminated, cast beautiful patterns of light and reflect a variety of vibrant colours. The interplay of light through the coloured glass would have created an enchanting atmosphere, elevating the ambience of any room. These lamps were more than just sources of illumination; they were intricate works of art that elevated the simple act of lighting a home to a visually stunning experience, combining utility and beauty in a way that captivated the senses.

Figure 18 depicts the handle of a once-grand, three-step chandelier that was originally installed in the Chateau Garli. The chandelier wore out over time and could no longer be used, but its owners chose to keep a piece as a reminder of its former grandeur. The bottom handle, which remained intact, was creatively repurposed and upcycled into a lamp that now sits in the family's prayer room. This transformation not only preserves a piece of the home's history but also revitalises it, giving the handle a new purpose. The intricate flower motifs on the handle, as shown in the image, highlight the chandelier's



Fig. 18: Lower handle of the three-step chandelier for lighting from Chateau Garli, The Mythe Estate, Shimla, H.P.

exquisite craftsmanship. These decorative elements add an air of elegance and beauty, drawing the attention of anyone who sees them. In this way, the lamp serves as both a functional piece of decor and a symbolic reminder of the past, combining tradition and innovation while remaining connected to the family's heritage. The owners' deep appreciation for their history is exemplified by the thoughtful upcycling of the chandelier's handle, as well as the creative ways they continue to honour and incorporate it into their daily lives.

8. *Sewain wali machine*

When first discovered, a particularly fascinating contraption appears to be a plaything that seems to be intended for children. However, upon closer inspection, it is revealed to be a traditional machine that is used for the preparation of *sewain*, which is a well-liked dish. The device is crafted in a way that is both ingenious and creative. The central section of the device has a hollow shaped cylinder, and it contains a mesh-like sieve at its base. A heavy, cylindrical lid is then placed on top of this hollow space. The lid is designed to fit snugly inside the hollow space, thereby applying pressure to the dough that is placed inside. Following the insertion of the dough and the application of pressure by the cylindrical cover,



Fig. 19: Sewain wali machine, shown by Mrs. Uma Sud, at her residence in Shimla, H.P.



Fig. 21: Sewain wali machine top view, shown by Mrs. Uma Sud, at her residence in Shimla, H.P.



Fig. 20: Sewain wali machine working of the contraption, shown by Mrs. Uma Sud, at her residence in Shimla, H.P.

the dough is compelled to pass through the mesh at the bottom, resulting in the formation of strings that are ideal for the production of sewain. The cleverness of this machine lies in the fact that it is both straightforward and effective. It transforms what might appear to be an odd object into a tool that is indispensable for the preparation of a food item that is highly utilised by the residents in their everyday lives. The design demonstrates the resourcefulness of the community by demonstrating an understanding of both form and function. Additionally, it reflects a profound cultural connection to the traditions of food preparation. This useful invention not only served a particular purpose, but it also exemplifies the inventiveness of the past, when commonplace items were designed with precision and care to make their life simpler and adventurous at the same time.

9. Lacolas

The villagers displayed a remarkable amount of ingenuity in the creation of their lighting system during a time when electricity was not a widely available convenience. They designed their buildings with arched niches or recessed areas that were known as Lacolas. These Lacolas were created with the express purpose of housing diyas, which are traditional oil lamps. The diyas were able to illuminate every nook and cranny of the house thanks to the strategic



Fig. 22: Lacolas at different parts of the building of Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.



Fig. 23: Lacolas at different parts of the building of Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

placement of these Lacolas throughout the structure, both inside and outside. One aspect of this system that stood out as particularly intriguing was the communal approach that was taken to lighting the primary lane or street. To effectively create a shared lighting system for the entire lane, it was the responsibility of each household to install diyas in the Lacolas of their respective boundary walls. Through the combined efforts of everyone involved, the main street was illuminated to a satisfactory level, as each home contributed to the overall illumination. The result was a straightforward and effective method of street lighting that was managed by the community itself. This method exemplified the resourcefulness and sense of cooperation that the members of the village possessed. Not only did this system serve a practical purpose, but it also helped to foster a sense of unity among the residents, as they collaborated to create an environment that was well-lit and welcoming to all individuals.

10. Chulha

It was a common household item in every Garli home to have a traditional cooking device that was constructed entirely out of mud. This time-honoured method of cooking requires a structure that has been meticulously designed, and firewood is placed at the bottom of the structure to generate heat inside. After that, the heat was dispersed as evenly as possible throughout the apparatus using several openings, which enabled the utensils that were positioned above to take advantage of the consistent warmth. It was ensured by this design that the food could be cooked in a manner that was both efficient and balanced, with the heat being distributed evenly throughout the process of preparing the meals. Not only did the use of mud provide an efficient method of cooking, but it also reflected the community's profound



Fig. 24: Chulha inside Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

connection to the materials readily available in the area and environmentally responsible practices. Every household relied on this device, which served as both a useful instrument and a representation of tradition. It served to strengthen the bond between generations by providing a common approach to the preparation of food. The act of preparing food in this manner was more than just a means of sustenance; it was a manifestation of the community's resourcefulness, creativity, and respect for the environment in which they lived.

11. Wind Vane

The presence of wind vanes that have been intricately designed is one of the most striking features that can be observed in the mansions in Garli. These wind vanes are a testament to the aspects of the architecture that are both aesthetically pleasing and functional. In particular, the wind vane that is located on the roof of Chateau Garli stands out due to the majestic presence that it exudes. The exceptional craftsmanship of these stunning pieces continues to captivate those who view them, even though the identity of the artist who created them is still unknown. The presence of wind vanes in a remote village such as Garli is truly remarkable, even though wind vanes are typically associated with architectural styles



Fig. 25a: Wind Vane side view 2 at Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.



Fig. 25: Wind Vane side view 1 at Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

that are traditional in Europe. The fact that the residents were exposed to a wide variety of architectural influences and were able to incorporate these elements into their own homes is demonstrated by this. The fact that such a distinctive feature was incorporated into their living structures is evidence that the community is willing to adopt and adapt external influences, thereby blending them in seamlessly with the traditions of the area. Not only does this combination of styles highlight the cultural and architectural sophistication of the residents, but it also sheds light on their capacity to appreciate and incorporate elements of global design into their everyday surroundings.

The wind vane's design is distinct and symbolic. A trident at the very top, most likely referring to Lord Shiva, adds a spiritual and cultural dimension to the piece. The central spine serves as the structure's backbone, and various decorative elements are attached to it. Among these elements are rotating paper fan-like



Fig. 25 b: Wind Vane side view 3 at Chateau Garli, Garli, H.P.

shapes with semi-abstract curved patterns and circles at their ends, creating a whimsical, almost playful aesthetic. This design evokes a sense of childhood wonder, with its playful, dynamic shapes that pique the imagination. The wind vane is made of metal sheets that have been meticulously welded and screwed together to form a durable yet artistic structure. The piece, painted white, stands out against the roof and serves both a functional and decorative purpose. The wind vane, located at the top of the roof, serves to indicate the direction of the wind, combining utility and artistry. Its distinctive design not only enhances the building's visual appeal but also reflects the creativity and cultural symbolism woven into everyday objects, making it both a functional tool and a meaningful work of art.

Conclusion

The knowledge imparted through traditional practices is invaluable, offering profound insights into the

ingenuity and resourcefulness of past generations. The artefacts mentioned above are just a few examples of the wealth of heritage embedded within the village of Garli. These items not only captivate with their aesthetic beauty but also provide a window into a time when sustainable living was an essential part of everyday life, long before the advent of modern technology. Without access to contemporary conveniences, the people of Garli developed their innovative methods for sustenance, carefully crafting solutions that were both practical and harmonious with their environment. This resourcefulness highlights the resilience and creativity of earlier generations, offering lessons that are still relevant today. By examining these historical practices and artefacts, we can draw valuable lessons on sustainability, self-sufficiency, and the importance of adapting to one's surroundings—wisdom that can guide us as we navigate the challenges of the present and future. The heritage of Garli serves as a reminder of the timeless connection between people, their environment, and the creativity required to live in balance with it.

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