APURSA Policy Fosters Immersive Cultural Tourism: A Case Study of Shimla in Himachal Pradesh, India

Purnima Chauhan*

Abstract

The phenomenal economic multiplier of the tourism industry, as the biggest employer and revenue generator, has catapulted it globally to one of the fastest-growing industries. Yet its innate fragility makes it vulnerable to impacts from other sectors. Further postmodern fragmentation of demand in the tourism sector is being fuelled and facilitated by big data analytics that can conjure innovative product differentiation for any niche segment. Many tourists seek to replace the tag of pursuing a hedonistic wanderlust with more meaningful holidaymaking. Exponential growth of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has eroded destination mystique by facilitating virtual FAM tours to almost any place on the globe at the click of a button. A demanding tourist clientele, spoilt for choice, seeks a new immersion into experiential tourism. Destination managers confront the twin challenges of perishing prematurely by obsolescence on the destination life cycle or holographically reinventing and rebranding the product continuously to meet myriad demands of consumption that could even border on the bizarre. Converging local tangible and intangible cultural resources has the potential to recreate soft tourism by deeper immersion for both host and guest stakeholders.

This paper explores how cultural heritage potential in remote locations was tapped and leveraged through a policy launched in early 2018, called *Aaj Puraani Raahon Se* (implying 'the nostalgia from old routes') titled APURSA, to create a hybrid paradigm of immersive tourism throughout the north Indian mountain State of Himachal Pradesh (HP) metamorphosing congested, overcrowded tourist enclaves in the popular heritage capital city of Shimla by dovetailing lesser-known tangible and intangible cultural elements into urban development roadmaps. Infrastructural strengths of the State and cultural allure are enablers in this tourism dispersal away from Shimla into satellite locations, reducing the threat to this destination's lifecycle due to rampant breach of carrying capacities. Six years after its launch, APURSA's strategy has gained greater traction as COVID-fuelled demand grows for remote locations that are internet-linked, accessible and facilitate long-duration stays to work from home (WFH). Such localism is prompting introspection by hosts into their cultural traditions that were barely documented earlier but are being creatively reinvented as viable alternatives to the serial reproduction of mass tourism. Such immersion of local intangible cultural elements is catalysing additional livelihoods, new homestays, and facilitating a competitive edge to rural women to rejig their care economy. APURSA's strategy is a work in progress as it reengineers tourism perceptions while foraying into fragile destinations replete with forgotten traditions.

1. Introduction

Sustainable forms of tourism have concentrated on optimal resource management in a community development approach (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009) involving people with a common purpose and goals (Joppe, 1996) born of shared geographical, heritage and cultural values. Community-based Tourism (CBT) aims to improve the quality of life of the community residents and their overall well-being by maximising local economic benefits, conserving the national and built environment, and providing visitors a high-quality, value-for-money experience (Park and Yoon, 2009; Park *et al.*, 2008). Immersive tourism lies squarely at the heart of these elements.

Post-Fordist economies, transformed by globalisation, are seeking to replace homogenised, traditional forms of tourism consumption and demand with the growing desire for the extraordinary holiday as lines

* Retired IAS, Government of Himachal Pradesh. Can be reached at drpurnimachauhan@gmail.com

between work and leisure become blurred. Postmodern demand fragmentation facilitated by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is using Predictive Big Data Analytics to conjure innovative product differentiation customised for best-fitting niche demands. Aspirational tourists, spoiled for choice, now seek to replace the tag of pursuing a hedonistic wanderlust with more meaningful holidays that increasingly centre around natural and cultural heritage. Channelising this need smartly towards responsible tourism is needed to ensure that we do not kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

On the supply side, destination managers fear perishing prematurely by obsolescence on the destination life cycle unless they adopt a holistic approach of reinventing and rebranding the tourism product almost continuously to meet the myriad demands of consumption-led forces. Destinations are actively developing their tangible and intangible cultural assets to revitalise their tourism product to adjust to changes imposed by broader processes of globalisation, commodification, rising competition between cities and regions and the development of the knowledge or network economy.

With over half the world being urbanised, destinations are rejigging jaded brownfield urban development projects to make cities liveable by infusing diverse, authentic 'immersive cultural tourism experiences' as soft heritage enclaves. Such tangible and intangible resources abound locally in oral traditions, language, arts, fashion, music, food, architecture and graphics. Artfully integrating such living heritage elements involving local people, products, processes, and places gives destinations a diverse, emotive tourism product on offer instead of conjuring an ephemeral virtual reality.

2. Tourism Multiplier

The phenomenal economic multiplier of the tourism industry, as the biggest employer and revenue generator, has catapulted it globally to one of the fastest-growing industries. For eight successive years, it outpaced global economic growth until the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decline. Globally, tourism posted a record 1.4bn international tourist arrivals, a rise of 6% over 2017, representing 30% of total exports and services (UNWTO, 2018), generating 3.6% of global GDP directly and 10.3% indirectly, accounting for $1.7tn (£1.3tn) revenues. Tourism generates 3% of global employment or one in 10 of the world's jobs, employing youth at almost twice the rate of other industries. Nearly 25% of tourism revenues reach people below the poverty line in some of the poorest countries (UNGA, 2014). In India, tourism accounts for 21% of the employment in the service sector.

From January-April 2021, the coronavirus pandemic shaved 85% off the global arrivals of this volatile economic multiplier and led to a global GDP loss of up to US$2.1 trillion in 2020 (WTTC, 2020). Up to 75 million jobs are at immediate risk. An astounding one million jobs are being lost daily in this sector. Nearly 49 million jobs are at risk, leading to a US$800 billion GDP loss throughout the Asia Pacific region.

Tourist arrivals to Himachal Pradesh (HP) totalled 17.7 million in 2018, with 93% domestic arrivals—a staggering three times the size of the local population. Presently, about 4,735 hotels and guest houses have 59,793 rooms with a bed capacity of about 131,014, registered with the department. In addition, there are about 4289 home stay units registered in the State, having about 17222 rooms and 26727 beds, with 67% of arrivals in only three of the twelve districts that include Shimla. Himachal tourism generates 36,000 jobs directly, contributes Rs. 133 million ($1.8 million) to annual luxury tax collection and 8% to the state GDP. (HP Tourism Dept., 2020). Shimla is located in the fragile Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), where tourism is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 7.9% from 2013 to 2023.

In 2020, tourist arrivals to Himachal fell to 3,170,714 domestic and 42,665 foreign tourists compared to 1,68,29,231 domestic and 3,82,876 foreign tourists in 2019, a drop of 81.6 per cent and 88.86 per cent respectively, leading to a Rs. 2500 crore ($133m) revenue loss (Lohumi, 2021). Resurrection became an urgent imperative as the state has a low resource base. Simultaneously, the socioeconomic, cultural and biophysical environmental elements are both a resource and a constraint to the fragile product of tourism development (Pigram, 1992) in mountainous Himachal. The reverse multiplier backlash in COVID should not blind us to the residual impact of pandemics. Health, psychological and social risks are most likely to influence travel in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic as a quest for wellbeing. Rising demand for the lesser-known, uncluttered, long-duration vacations is ushering in the new paradigm of Immersive tourism as distinct from many alternate forms. The recent post-COVID phenomena of widespread "revenge travel" to Himachal affords an opportunity to creatively resurrect the tourism Phoenix to meet these new risks. APURSA creatively leveraged authentic cultural resources to promote social justice and economic benefits that meet the needs of host populations and have positive life-affirming impacts.

3. Cultural Tourism: The Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development

Despite presenting both threats and opportunities,

tourism contributes significantly to the triple bottom line of sustainable development, comprising three pillars of environmental, economic and social sustainability (Agenda 21, Rio, 1992). Culture is increasingly recognised as its fourth pillar, unleashing economic synergy through rapid co-creation of cultural and creative industries, generating 30 million jobs globally. According to UNCTAD data published in May 2013, total world trade of creative goods and services amounted to US$624 billion. (UNDP, 2013). Immersive cultural tourism seeks a foothold in this hybrid.

Increasingly crowded marketplaces use creative resources to generate more distinctive identities that give regions and cities a symbolic edge, even if they lack a rich built heritage, but are serious contenders for tourism business (Richards & Wilson 2007). Tourism, media and entertainment have played a leading role in the rising economy of symbolic production (Hannigan, 1998). Tourism destinations that plumb their cultural novelty to create competitive 'authentic experiences' can transform the basic inherited culture into created assets with a higher symbolic or sign value. Such cultural redevelopment strategies are complex outcomes of organisational capacities for change converging with community desire to create a 'cultural' space with symbols that connect tourism consumption and style of life (Zukin, 1995: 83; OECD, 2009: 29-30). Marketing contemporary cultural tourism has to creatively overcome perceptual 'filters' that tourists carry from home (Stylianou-Lambert 2011).

4. Creative Tourism and Urbanisation in Heritage Cities

'Creative tourism' was first discussed by Pearce & Butler (1993) and defined as: "Creative tourism is travel directed toward an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place, and it provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture" (UNESCO, 2006). Richards & Raymond (2000) emphasise that creative tourism seeks to involve not merely the tourist but the destination itself in proactively designing 'characteristic' experiences to leverage their novelty. Here, tourists increasingly seek out creative material in 'alternative public spaces' (Neilson, 2002) or the 'heterogeneous spaces' that Edensor (2000) contrasts with enclaved, or highly controlled and scripted, tourist spaces. In heterogeneous spaces, transitional identities may be sought and performed alongside the everyday enactments of residents, bystanders, and workers.' Hence, creative tourism is posed as an adjunct and a panacea for clones of mass cultural tourism (Richards and Wilson,

2006). The threat of heritage being homogenised looms large as more than 50% of the globe became urbanised in 2010. Tourism spinoff depends on choices between developing clinical, Ubiquitous cities versus those that are inclusive and liveable because of conscious efforts to integrate their innate cultural heritage identity into urban infrastructure.

4.1 Creative Cities

The creative cities approach championed by Charles Landry (2000) infuses heritage to address urban problems within new governance systems that foster creativity (Lange et al., 2008) among citizens in general in order to be 'creative for the world' (Sepe, 2010). Turok (2009) and Evans (2003) argue that cities need to adjust their image more rapidly in global markets by relying less on changing their occupational or industrial structures, and more on forms of branding their cultural and creative resources to reposition themselves. The Historic Urban Landscape Approach (UNESCO 2011; HUL) prescribes a toolkit to effectively mitigate the negative impacts of urbanisation by converging preservation of bio-physical imprints with the complex matrix of inter-generational cultural activities. The HUL methodology tries to calibrate cultural resource use with contextually relevant urban planning frameworks for tourist destinations. This customisation can create new immersive tourism opportunities using tools that meet the needs of local communities while satisfying tourist motivations.

4.2 Convergence of Culture and Urbanisation in India

Nearly 32% of India is urbanised and growing; urban areas contribute 63% to the national GDP, projected to grow to 74% by 2030. India's built heritage and archaeological resource bank includes over 400,000 sites. To leverage this untapped potential into development policy National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) has recently formulated a Single Overarching Vision for Heritage of India that converges closely with urban planning frameworks to harvest a better quality of life and foster tourism. Simultaneously, the National Housing Ministry of India has already initiated the Data-smart Cities program to sync a data culture into inclusive Smart Cities that will help converge related national missions on sanitation, Digital India, Skill development and National Heritage City Development & Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY). Basic social infrastructure, like health and education, combined with culture to include the construction of museums funded by the Culture Department to realise the vision of a self-

reliant India or *Atmanirbhar Bharat* that targets the goal of a US$5 trillion Indian economy by 2025.

Following the NITI Aayog's lead, a national urban planning framework (NUPF) for India drafted concurrently envisions a decentralised, bottom-up impetus for developing Comprehensive City Urban Plans (CCUP) merging into State Integrated Urban Plans (SIUP) that include preservation of diverse cultures to make cities liveable due to a better quality of life. Of the 100 SMART urban cities prioritised for intensive development, 39 have identified 'living heritage' enclaves for safeguarding. Nearly 101 heritage projects worth Rs. 1,439 crores ($193m) have been initiated to creatively save cultural diversity for sustainable development, while 10 cities have completed 26 heritage projects worth Rs. 130 crores ($ 17.4m). HP's Shimla & Dharamsala are prioritised Smart Cities. A low resource base and 2.5 times greater environmental vulnerability make it difficult for mountain destinations to juggle development opportunities versus environmental concerns.

At 10%, HP is one of the least urbanised states in India. The high average per capita income and the equity in public provisioning in Himachal meet most of the physiological factors in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, dissuading migration to urban hubs. This secure economic bedrock became a fertile breeding ground to inject the APURSA concept of preserving and leveraging lesser-known heritage resources of Himachal, especially Shimla.

5. Emerging Tourism Markets

Immersive experiences inherent in cultural tourism rely on '*Social network markets*' replacing traditional tourism value chains that run from producer to commodity and consumer. Organisations and coordinating institutions are catalysing the retention of intergenerational heritage by linking with originators of ideas, social networks, both real and virtual, and market-based enterprises that afford 'co-creation' or 'prosumption'. Such creative collaboration in developing tourism practices by both consumers and producers is revamping the destination image (Boswijk et al., 2007).

APURSA uses the 'creative class' approach to make tourists "get under the skin of the place" as they savour their creative potential and skills through contact with local cultures. A perceptible shift towards active rather than passive forms of product branding and consumption that emphasises 'living' or 'intangible' culture rather than static, tangible cultural heritage delves deep into the destination elements.

6. Genesis of APURSA: Undervalued Himachali Heritage

The APURSA scheme, launched in early 2018, attached value to the least-known cultural elements in the

---

Box 1: Undervalued Heritage of Shimla, HP

Federico Peliti (1844-1914) from Turin, Italy, was the owner of Peliti's hotel in Shimla during British India, mentioned in Rudyard Kipling's "The Phantom Rickshaw". In 1996 the Peliti family sent invaluable nostalgia through 100 positives of life spent in their Craignano home in Shimla through Government of India to the Municipal Corporation, Shimla. This treasure was summarily returned for "want of display space"- stark evidence of being oblivious to heritage!

In the core heritage zone of Shimla is Rothney Castle (1880), the abode of A.O. Hume, a British civil servant and the founder of the Indian National Congress, who earned the title 'Father of Indian Ornithology'. Despite stringent building restrictions, serious attempts were made to add an unsightly block of flats, completely at odds with the ambience of this invaluable heritage!

A classical vocal music prodigy called Master Madan, hailing from Jullunder in Punjab in made Shimla his home in the late 1920s, where his classical vocal prowess was acclaimed across the country despite his short 15-year lifespan before his untimely death in 1942. The family has a house in the heart of Shimla where Master Madan's instruments are preserved. Despite the potential to preserve this as a living museum, there is not even a signboard to acknowledge this musical maestro!

In UNESCO's 2015 tentative list, the cold desert of Spiti includes the 996AD Tabo Buddhist monastery, and in its proximity lie 3500 years old petroglyphs of Lari bearing inscriptions of the sacred Indian swastika symbol and carving of a bird that is now extinct! In the absence of effective barricading, this invaluable heritage is getting lost due to use in road construction!

The home and art studio of the renowned *avant-garde Indo-Hungarian* artist Amrita Shergill (1913-1941) in Summerhill bears testimony to the inspiration she drew from local culture, tradition and lifestyles captured in her invaluable paintings. *The Little Girl in Blue*, painted in 1934 by Amrita Shergill, depicts an 8-year-old Shimla resident, Lalit Kaur Mann, nicknamed Babbette, who still lives in Rose Cottage, Chhota Shimla. Yet Shimla does not commemorate this much-celebrated artist!

remotest locations of the picturesque mountain state of Himachal Pradesh in northern India. APURSA sought to incorporate soft locational factors enhancing leisure and tourism as key resources (Jackson and Murphy, 2006) that add value to the cultural economy in general, "as a stockpile of knowledge, traditions, memories and images" (Scott, 2010, p. 123; Ray, 1998). Ironically, the low premium placed by Himachal and its people on their rich cultural heritage and tradition became the genesis of the APURSA scheme, as Box 1 reveals.

In the absence of a cultural policy or specific vision, the HP Culture department devised APURSA to compile and map its languishing lesser-known cultural resources to artfully resurrect Himachal tourism from conventional mass tourism to create immersive experiences. APURSA highlighted cultural hotspots as satellites to disperse tourists from congested destinations like Shimla that were rapidly breaching their carrying capacities. Such an ecosystem's approach (Chauhan, 2009) induced tourist dispersal, fostered localism, '*atmanirbhar'* or self-employment livelihood opportunities, boosting the miniaturising of souvenirs, resurrecting intangible cultural heritage elements, heralding the dawn of a new paradigm of Immersive Tourism.

6.1 Why was Shimla an ideal pilot for APURSA?

In 2008, UNESCO recognised the 1903 quaint Shimla-Kalka narrow gauge toy train as World Heritage. This 118-year-old toy train traverses 95 km, crossing 880 bridges, and chugs into a World Heritage City like Shimla. A UNESCO representative admitted that this heritage city deserved recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage City for its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) elements dotting the entire city spine called the Mall Road. Its rich architectural heritage was liberally sprinkled over its seven hills namely Elysium, Jakhu, Bantony, Inverarm, Observatory, Prospect, Summerhill that bear testimony to harmonious coexistence of 8 historic layers that were languishing until APURSA connected the dots of this treasure that traces its antiquity through the *Mahabharat* Epic to the 2nd century BC, as depicted in the image below and in Box 2**.**

To combat the threat to Shimla posed by mass, conventional, and oversold tourism threat to Shimla APURSA grafted shoots of cultural capitalism onto the urban development roadmaps of this Queen of the Hills. This revamp was aligned to Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) 11.4 on preserving cultural heritage and SDGs 8 and 12 that reiterate UNWTO's thirteen 'Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism'.

Box 2: HP Cultural Iceberg - Eight Cultural Trails in Shimla

Epic Trail- Antiquity of Shimla hills traceable to the Kulindas republic of the 2nd century BC, mentioned in the Mahabharat epic. The Jakhu temple (Shimla) traces its origin to the older Ramayan epic.

British Raj Trail- traces colonial history from the 1815 liberation from the Gorkha scourge, sought by the mountain people with British help. The salubrious European climate attracted the British to settle in Shimla, which became the summer capital in 1864, holding sway over India, Burma and Afghanistan until independence in 1947.

Buddhist Trail boasts of the fabled Tabo (996 AD), Dhankar and KEY monasteries along the Lahaul and Spiti cold desert, tentatively listed since 2015 as UNESCO World Heritage.

Pahaari Trail- with vanishing cultures of Baghati, Hinduri, Mahasuvi, Kulluvi, Trigarth, Chhoti Kashi, and Sirmauri. The unique Devta culture holds sway over the lives of locals.

tribal trail- The millennium-old Kaanam library with rich Buddhist texts and a monastery that became the home of Hungarian Alexander Cosmo in the mid-19th century AD.

Performing Arts Trail – From the Indian classical music prodigy, Master Madan, to the restored iconic Gaiety Theatre, where the first play staged in 1887 was 'Time Will Tell'.

Caravan Trade Trails/Routes- staging points of the Silk Route along Hindustan Tibet Road at Rampur, where traders transact business in the traditional November Lavi fair; outposts at Shipkila, Kotkhai, Kotgarh, Jubbal, Arki (Mahasu), with Chhatru, Baralacha. This trail has the potential to target transnational nominations on Hindu/Buddhist circuits with adjoining Asian countries.

Sacred Geography- The Shimla urban forest is the largest in Asia. Entire hillsides are considered sacred in the vast apple-growing regions north of Shimla. Sacred lakes abound where fishing is sacrilege.

APURSA strategy classified Shimla tourism into eight cultural trails (Box 2), interweaving lesser-known sites thematically into 'cultural districts/ clusters'/ tourism circuits. These 'third hybrid spaces' spawned

Kangra & Thangka Art Blend   Dorje Druk Monastery   IIAS Viceregal Lodge Home for Viceroy of India from 1888-1947

Gaiety Theatre 1887   State Library 1860   Christ Chruch (Ridge) 1886

Town Hall, 1908   Kalka-Shimla Toy Train 1903 UNESCO World Heritage 2008   Naldera Glof Course, 1905

Image: Iconic Cultural Heritage of Shimla

by diverse group or individual interactions in shared spatial encounters are morphing the tourism product to meet the growing demand for immersive experiences. Although APURSA started as a top-down government-driven initiative, increasing adoption by innovative 'lifestyle entrepreneurs' is giving it bottom-up traction. Successful strategies are being sought, replicated and evolving through further co-creation. As such, initiatives are increasingly negotiated *in situ* by the local host and the tourist, each of whom takes the pleasure of being the originator of the experience.

6.2 Elements of APURSA Scheme

APURSA adopted a multi-pronged approach to strengthen the identity, allure and market position of heritage places by consolidating the following factors:

6.2.1 APURSA Sites: The Culture Department got all 12 districts of Himachal to form multi-stakeholder committees to identify lesser-known tangible and intangible cultural heritage sites on a prescribed format.

Nearly 1147 APURSA sites were identified and scrutinised to remove overlaps and duplicates to arrive at a final site list where signage would be installed.

6.2.2 APURSA Signages: were designed in 3 sizes in sepia colour, depicting a nostalgic road with cutouts of trees and cottages. Signage coding logic was patterned on vehicle registration and site significance. Pre-installation site-specific issues were to be resolved, as many sites had to comply with municipal regulations, especially in heritage zones. Site information would be accessed from a QR code using the APURSA mobile app. Site-specific data would be updated at the backend in the Culture department regularly.

6.2.3 APURSA 7 circuits: sought to create theme-linked enclaves by connecting dots of homogeneity in heritage sites in a chronology that weaved the mystique of a bygone era. The Trigart APURSA festival, pioneered in November 2018, was a cultural amalgam spanning an 80 sq. km area of Kangra valley. The forgotten vintage of the Trigarth kingdom was resurrected in towns within this periphery. Quaint music and dance events were

scheduled over a 25-day festival period at different locations. Local stakeholders showcased the heritage of language/ dialect, music, dance, theatre, painting, food, and architectural styles. Tourists were encouraged to explore the menu of events on offer and navigate the valley using online event maps that added an element of thrill to the discovery of a virtually unknown culture. One APURSA circuit linked 11 sites to capture the history of Mahatma Gandhi's 10 visits to Shimla from 1921- 1946 during the freedom struggle.

6.2.4 APURSA festivals and institution of *devta* (local deity): Himachal has 91 festivals ranging from international to district levels that commemorate quaint local traditions that have a strong emotive link with the local people. Great sanctity is attached to the institution of a local deity called "*devta*", who is held in awe by local people. His mystic writ and decisions announced by his "*gur*" or medium speaking in ancient languages continue to rule the lives of people in myriad ways, illustrated in Box 3.

Box 3: *Devta* Culture

Oral histories record that *Devtas* were usually kings in the times of *Satyug.* They were ordinary mortals who ruled over territories and were granted the status of the *Devta,* whose temples exist in most rural villages of upper Himachal. The *Devta* institution is the creation of a strange mix where castes execute their roles and coexist to date without any conflict. The rituals bring the people together as a community with a collective conscience, a shared sense of belonging, which also perpetuates principles of caste.

The prime faith in *Devta* emanates from the faith that locals repose in this institution, which acts like a Local Self-Government. The *Devta* regulates and controls everything concerning the rights & beliefs of the local people. In Malana (Kullu Valley), the Jamlu *Devta* is vested with legislative, executive and judicial powers, like that of the State. This prevented any developmental efforts by the State government from being launched in Malana.

A colourful *Jagati* (assembly) of 300 *Devtas* taken out in a procession during the international Kullu *Dussehra* festival attracts tourists worldwide. However, the wrath of the *Devta Jagati* has prevented the setting up of major hospitality projects by renowned groups like the Taj Hotels and the Himalayan Ski Village, on environmental grounds.

This institution of the *Devta* positively captures the imagination of tourists living in homestays around Shimla.

6.2.5 APURSA pioneered a Shimla International Literature Festival (SILF) in 2018 on the iconic Ridge in the heart of the city that became a melting pot of local *Pahari* culture using this unique platform. Its second edition in 2019 was enthusiastically patronised by local artists with renowned performers/ literary personalities from India and abroad.

6.2.6 APURSA Heritage Maps: detailed heritage circuits, renowned Shimla personalities and landmark features like the Kalka- Shimla UNESCO world heritage railway were designed and printed to be sold as souvenirs and used to guide pedestrian tourists on heritage walks to uncover the fascinating history of Shimla city.

6.2.7 APURSA guides: Training templates were designed to build a cadre of 45 cultural guides from among local youth, sourced preferably from history departments of universities. After their certification, this guide facility will be uploaded on the Culture and Tourism sector websites to facilitate easy online access for tourists.

6.2.8 APURSA and Skill Development: Registration and grading of artists was undertaken under the 2015 central culture ministry scheme of Mapping Cultural Resources. As the New Education Policy of 2020 underscores the need for imparting vocational and skill training, vertical linkages are being established with the Culture and Skill Ministries and NITI Aayog.

6.3 APURSA revived living heritage as elaborated in Box 4.

6.4 Miniaturising Himachali Handicrafts under APURSA

6.4.1 APURSA Heritage Craft Festival: pioneered in Shimla in May 2018, brought master craftsmen and artisans from diverse cultural regions of Himachal to the heritage 1830 AD Bantony building that was under restoration. Bantony became a perfect backdrop to showcase the myriad vanishing lifestyles by displaying art and craft practised by tribes and ethnic groups from the foothills to the cold deserts of Himachal. A directory of participating artisans became a useful database to link them to potential buyers of their wares and support them.

6.4.2 APURSA Artisans: The Bantony heritage festival underscored the need to miniaturise traditional wares creatively. It was proposed that social work certificates would be given to those students of Himachal National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) at Kangra who mentored at least three local artisans in these three vital elements to revive their craft into popular souvenirs, thereby enhancing livelihoods while showcasing Himachali heritage. The successful conclusion of the Bantony craft festival led the Himachal state government

Box 4: APURSA Used Living Heritage

APURSA revived *Kariala*, an impromptu street play that satirises current events, improvising the script with active audience participation. Juxtaposed against this is the tradition of English plays staged by the Amateur Dramatic Club to date on the iconic stage of Gaiety Theatre, where in 1887 the first play was "Time Will Tell". In collaboration with the renowned Indian film director Imtiaz Ali, a Broadway-style Style *pahari* theatre repertory was planned to script and stage the numerous local folklores captured in Himachali songs called *Naatis*.

In its repertoire, APURSA incorporated the local Sippy fair held in May each year in Mashobra village, adjoining Shimla. This traditional venue for matchmaking finds mention in British memoirs, too.

In 1963, with the construction of the Bhakra dam, 28 temples of the 8th century were submerged in the Govindsagar dam at Bilaspur. Each year, these temples surface but are getting silted. Since translocating them was difficult, APURSA revived this languishing heritage by juxtaposing a classical dancer against the temples when the water level was low. The short period when the temple's surface is now being explored for innovative use of the riverbed by private tourism entrepreneurs.

Shimla, one of the oldest municipalities of India, has an interesting water supply, snow harvesting and electricity heritage that is proposed for development as a niche APURSA circuit. The Ridge is a watershed from either side of which waters flow to the Bay of Bengal and to the Arabian Sea. The 1875 water tank below the ridge was meant for 20000 citizens originally, which supplies 10 times that population today. The tank is preserved by restricting the plying of vehicles. Now the ride with Pride Taxi gives people easy access to these restricted and sealed heritage enclaves.

APURSA has revived local interest in trainings being imparted by the State Museum, Shimla, on heritage aspects in numismatics, paper conservation and vanishing *pahari* scripts to equip them for part-time jobs.

cultural traditions. Through sustained handholding of over 100 artisans by the State Museum in Shimla, nearly two dozen innovative miniaturised souvenirs have been produced that are currently being sold from 28 hotel outlets of the Himachal government tourism, as detailed in Box 5.

Box 5: APURSA- Adaptive Reuse of Heritage Art to Create Miniaturised Souvenirs

The 3-century-old exquisite *Pahari* Kangra school of painting reflects Mughal and Rajasthani elements, is protected under the Geographical Indicators (GI) authenticity tag. These expensive paintings have been resized for volume production and marketing as picture postcards, categorised into themes like *Baramasa* (representing each of the twelve months) and depicting 36 *Raagmala* (Indian classical music) that were lost. Adaptive reuse of these paintings has led to their miniaturised version as fridge magnets, coasters, and even converted into exclusive earrings.

Big traditional handcrafted musical instruments like *karnal* (trumpet) and *ransingha* (trombone) played by *Bajantris* (musicians) and masks of local deities were miniaturised to a palm-sized souvenir.

Scotch tape was printed to replicate colourful Himachali shawl border designs.

Contracts were executed with 28 Himachal tourism government hotels and six scheduled temples to sell these exclusive Himachali souvenirs through their counters/shops.

A compilation of 7 vanishing scripts of the local *Pahari* language became a coffee table book souvenir for sale (see Box 7). This calligraphy of vanishing *Pahari* scripts coffee table book was launched at the Mauritius World Hindi Summit in 2018 and at the first Doha Literature Festival in 2019. This rare calligraphy was adapted to paint on fashionable, limited-edition stoles that were exclusive souvenirs for the APURSA Shimla International Literature Festival 2019 (SILF).

6.5 APURSA is targeted at developing the cultural micro-economy.

It fostered transformative development by generating and reviving culturally linked livelihood opportunities for people labelled 'unskilled' or 'lacking employable skills. Cultural NGOs equipped with knowledge, experience and community linkages were involved to innovatively deliver programmes and projects addressing both cultural rights and sustainable development aspects. Such effective platforms for sustained knowledge sharing

to issue orders in June 2018, directing the purchase and patronising of Himachali handicrafts for all official functions, creating an assured market for local self-help groups (SHGs).

6.4.3 APURSA Miniaturised Souvenirs stimulating a more 'entrepreneurial' approach to the arts and culture by monetising outputs of preserving and resurrecting

and networking empowered decentralised cultural resurrection, infusing hope for a better future, as shown in Box 6.

Box 6: Economics of Cultural Tourism Immersion

Tariff rationalisation was done by substituting a daily rate with hourly time-of-day (TOD) tariffs, making access affordable for low-budget artist groups wanting to use the open amphitheatre located on Shimla Ridge in the heart of the city.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with a hydro power group that would adopt 4 heritage sites for investing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds to revive these monuments and trigger economic stimulus and immersive tourism, meeting local sentiments.

6.6 Apursa Calligraphy

Recognition of "*Pahari*" script has been a longstanding emotive issue with Himachalis. Its genesis from Sanskrit was a revelation, as the 7 *pahari* scripts in Box 7 originated there. The declaration of Sanskrit as the 2nd official language of HP in February 2019 came as a shot in the arm to promote its declining usage as it could help decipher numerous heritage texts, scripts and carvings in temples and monuments. Further probing revealed that the *Chinaili* language in the tribal cold desert of Lahaul Spiti bore close affinity to Sanskrit and is spoken even today by the present generation. On further probing, it was found that *Chamang* in Kinnaur, *Pangwali* of Pangi and *Gaadi* of Bharmaur in Chamba district too were akin to Sanskrit. To highlight this living heritage, these tribals were invited to the SILF Sanskrit session in 2019, which has catalysed conservation efforts. Research revealed that the Western *Pahari* language had its genesis in Vedic Sanskrit and was a sub-branch of modern Indian Aryan Languages. As local pressure mounted to get *Pahari* recognised as a national language, its seven vanishing scripts were traced and launched through a coffee table book covering *Tankari, Bhatakshari, Pangwani, Pavuchi, Chandwani, Sharda, and Brahmi,* as detailed in Box 7.

6.6.1 The Sancha *(collective) fortune-telling tradition of Sirmaur and Chopal:* A distraught *Sancha* practitioner whose penury had forced him to sell his invaluable 500-year-old handwritten "*laal kitaab*" of predictions was supported under APURSA to showcase his skill of forecasting. Through creatively positioning him in cultural festivals, this tradition (detailed in Box 8 below) became popular enough to enhance his income to about 66 USD per day and is much sought after today.

Box 7: The Seven Vanishing Scripts of *Pahari*

Tankari Script- has 6 changing facets and was used to write accounts by petty businesses from the Punjab border to Lahaul Spiti. It often epitomises poor handwriting. This script is used by the local Jamlu D*evta* (deity), who rules the lives of people in Malana (Kullu Valley) who trace their Greek genealogy to Alexander the Great.

Bhatakshari Script of –used by Bhats in Shimla & Sirmaur districts

Pangwani secret Script- spoken by priests in remote parts of Shimla district.

Pavuchi secret script used for SANCHA by Sirmaur priests (see Box Sancha).

Chandwani Script- texts from Kashmir royalty to priests of Sirmaur, Chopal, Theog, Ghoond in HP and used in religious ceremonies, curative sermons and forecasting.

Sharda Script- dates to the 10th century AD- travelled from Kashmir with priests through matrimonial alliances with HP.

Brahmi Script- from the 3rd century BC Asokan era, it spawned the Sharda lipi of Kashmir that travelled to Himachal

Lancha Lipi -from Nevars of Nepal, it spread to be found in Bodh Vihaar inscriptions in Tibet, Lahaul Spiti, Kinnaur and Pangi in HP.

Kharoshti Lipi- Oldest script writing in Mid Asia till 668 BC; found on *Audimbar & Kunind* coins in *Mansehra*, written right to left.

6.7 Preserving and Documenting Heritage for Authenticity and Posterity

Currently, due to the absence of systematic sharing platforms, such heritage knowledge languishes unused in government archives and is barely open for public access. Under APURSA, the Himachal Culture Department, the associated Culture Academy and the State Museum have undertaken digitisation of rich heritage archives. Lyrics of 100 traditional *Naati* songs have been compiled. While giving financial assistance to restore the temple's Culture Department made cataloguing and registration of their artefacts a precondition. INTACH (Indian National Trust for Culture and Heritage) documented nearly 200 heritage buildings in Shimla that are a valuable resource for preservation and marketing pedestrian tours.

Box 8: Adaptive heritage of centuries-old *Sancha*

A book of mystical hymns or invocations with 100 Astrological cures for necromancy, black magic, witchcraft, occult effects and negative influences of evil spirits besides demonology written in vanishing scripts of '*Bhatakshri*' or '*Pabuchi*', which are Himachali variations of '*Sharda*', the ancient script of Kashmir. In earlier times, this script was also known as '*Takri*'. Resembling a gambling dice, the '*pasha*' or '*pasa*' is made of owl bone or a specific wood and employed by the *Pabuch* (priest) in deciphering the required information from the '*Sancha*' text. The '*pasha*' or '*pasa*' has an inscription of four numerical digits marked as 0,00,000 and 0000, which have the corresponding numerical strength of 1,2,3 and 4, respectively. These numerical digits are marked on the individual pages separately. Each numerical digit with an individual value of sixteen '*Horas*' makes a total of sixty-four '*Horas*', with one '*Hora*' being equal to one twenty-fourth part of a day.

SANCHA text 1095 AD - The scripts of the Sancha treatise. Revival of this living heritage in the international book & Shimla literature festival (SILF) resurrected livelihoods from heritage.

7. Pedestrian Non-Motorised Access to Heritage

The sanctity of a pedestrian Ridge in the heart of Shimla is valued and strictly observed by locals despite the long detours involved. This 'no vehicle zone' facilitates easy exploration of the heritage core of Shimla and is the most popular with tourists and locals enjoying a lazy stroll. The 'Ride with Pride' affordable public taxi service provides easy access to these sealed and restricted core areas for tourists and locals. The transport-oriented development (TOD) of the Shimla City Mobility Plan, devised in 2012, suggests integrated multi-modal mobility options. It incorporates Non-Motorised Transport (NMT) with emphasis on bike sharing schemes to supplement the pedestrian culture of Shimla that enables savouring its salubrious environment and thematic cultural trails. The new urban museum in the revamped Bantony building in Shimla City centre captures such Himachali heritage to trigger APURSA-fuelled wanderlust.

8. Way Forward- Conclusion

In retrospect, the February 2018 launch of the APURSA scheme almost foresaw the post-COVID tourism scenario in HP by centre, highlighting lesser-known, dispersed vistas exhibiting cultural diversity. After the COVID lockdown, pandemic fear drove revenge tourists to find these internet-linked remote locales to avoid crowds, yet being able to work from Home (WFH). This demand surge gave such APURSA sites an unforeseen visibility. Ecologically fragile mountain locations, rural areas, and forests topped the charts. Long-duration stays naturally whetted the appetite to savour unknown aspects of local culture. Such localism is generating newfound introspection and pride in hosts of their cultural traditions that were barely documented earlier.

Lack of evidence-based analysis and absence of a comprehensive statistical framework for integrating culture have hindered its inclusion in development frameworks. 'Tourism Interpretation Centres' like those at Chilika Lake, a Ramsar Convention wetland, can orient the visitor to appreciate the exotic outstanding universal value (OUV) of such valuable destinations by demystifying its fragile elements that require immersive tourism. Capturing this essence requires expanding APURSA to design and institutionalise a multi-pronged data collection protocol. Data Analytics on tourist motivations can help devise targeted interventions to customise the product as per demand generated in new APURSA satellite destinations. Exposure to cultural pluralism fostered between hosts and guests during long APURSA staycations needs continuous innovative documenting, branding and marketing to enrich this process.

APURSA moved intuitively from practice to theory. Now it serves as a template to draft an integrated multi-sectoral *Cultural Policy* for Himachal that centres culture into development frameworks to diversify and disperse the tourism product on offer. The jury is still out to map the impacts of this multi-pronged converging it vertically and horizontally, with related platforms/ governance structures, so that a composite approach to strengthen the emerging paradigm of Immersive Tourism can reap economic and social benefits to this tourism-dependent State.

References

Bokova, I. (2014, May 12). *Culture and sustainable development in the post-2015 development agenda* [Speech]. Special Thematic Debate of the United Nations General Assembly, UN Headquarters, New York, NY, United States.

Boswijk, A., Thijssen, T., & Peelen, E. (2007). *The experience economy: A new perspective*. Pearson Education.

Chauhan, P. (2009). *The problem of tourism growth management in the Himalayas: The case study of Manali in the Kullu Valley* [Doctoral dissertation, Himachal Pradesh University]. Himachal Pradesh University Press.

Edensor, T. (2000). Staging tourism: Tourists as performers. *Annals of Tourism Research, 27*(2), 322–344.

Evans, G. (2003). Hard-branding the cultural city—from Prado to Prada. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 27*(2), 417–440.

Goodwin, H., & Santilli, R. (2009). *Community-based tourism: A success?* ICRT Occasional Paper No. 11. International Centre for Responsible Tourism, Leeds Metropolitan University.

Hannigan, J. (1998). *Fantasy city: Pleasure and profit in the postmodern metropolis*. Routledge.

Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., Sachs, J. D., De Neve, J.-E., Aknin, L. B., & Wang, S. (Eds.). (2021). *World Happiness Report 2021*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department. (2020). *Tourism statistics and development report 2020*. Government of Himachal Pradesh.

Jackson, J., & Murphy, P. (2006). Clusters in regional tourism: An Australian case. *Annals of Tourism Research, 33*(4), 1018–1035.

Joppe, M. (1996). Sustainable community tourism development revisited. *Tourism Management, 17*(7), 475–479.

Landry, C. (2000). *The creative city: A toolkit for urban innovators*. Earthscan Publications.

Lange, B., Kalandides, A., Stober, B., & Mieg, H. A. (2008). Berlin's creative industries: Governing creativity? *Industry and Innovation, 15*(5), 531–548.

Lohumi, B. P. (2021, February 3). 81% fall in tourist arrivals in 2020. *The Tribune*.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2009). *The impact of culture on tourism*. OECD Publishing.

Park, D.-B., & Yoon, Y.-S. (2009). Segmentation by motivation in rural tourism: A Korean case study. *Tourism Management, 30*(1), 99–108.

Park, D.-B., Yoon, Y.-S., & Lee, M.-J. (2008). Rural community development and policy challenges in South Korea. *Journal of the Economic Geographical Society of Korea, 11*(4), 600–617.

Pearce, D. G., & Butler, R. W. (1993). *Tourism research: Critiques and challenges*. Routledge.

Pigram, J. J. (1992). Alternative tourism: Tourism and sustainable resource management. In V. L. Smith & W. R. Eadington (Eds.), *Tourism alternatives: Potentials and problems in the development of tourism* (pp. 76–87). University of Pennsylvania Press.

Ray, C. (1998). Culture, intellectual property and territorial rural development. *Sociologia Ruralis, 38*(1), 3–20.

Richards, G., & Raymond, C. (2000). Creative tourism. *ATLAS News, 23*, 16–20.

Richards, G., & Wilson, J. (2006). Developing creativity in tourist experiences: A solution to the serial reproduction of culture. *Tourism Management, 27*(6), 1408–1413.

Scott, A. J. (2010). Cultural economy and the creative field of the city. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography, 92*(2), 115–130.

Sepe, M. (2010). Creative urban regeneration: The role of place identity in the 21st century. *International Journal of Sustainable Development, 13*(1–2), 1–17.

Stylianou-Lambert, T. (2011). Gazing from home: Cultural tourism and art museums. *Annals of Tourism Research, 38*(2), 403–421.

Turok, I. (2009). The distinctive city: Pitfalls in the pursuit of differential advantage. *Environment and Planning A, 41*(1), 13–30.

UNCTAD. (2013). *Creative economy report 2013: Widening local development pathways*. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2006). *Towards sustainable strategies for creative tourism*. Discussion report of the Planning Meeting for the 2008 International Conference on Creative Tourism, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA. UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2011). *Recommendation on the historic urban landscape*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

United Nations. (1992). *Agenda 21: Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*. United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). (2018). *Tourism highlights 2018 edition*. UNWTO Publications.

World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). (2020). *Travel & tourism: Global economic impact & trends 2020*. WTTC.

Zukin, S. (1995). *The cultures of cities*. Blackwell.