

Cultural Heritage and Preservation in Pakistan “Highlighting the Impact of Modernization”

Dr. Nida Fatima Oureshi

Assistant Professor, jamia Millia Islamia University New Dehli, India
c.nqureshi@jmi.ac.in

Abstract & Indexing

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Abstract

Cultural heritage and preservation in Pakistan encompass a rich tapestry of historical sites, monuments, indigenous cultures, and traditions. Pakistan is home to numerous significant historical sites and monuments, such as Mohenjo-Daro, Lahore Fort, and Shalimar Gardens, which reflect its diverse historical and cultural legacy. Indigenous cultures and traditions, including the vibrant practices of various ethnic groups like the Sindhis, Punjabis, Baloch, Pashtuns, and others, are integral to Pakistan's cultural identity. However, modernization poses significant challenges to the preservation of these cultural assets. Rapid urbanization, industrialization, and globalization threaten traditional practices and historical sites. The role of the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is crucial in addressing these challenges. The government has implemented various policies and initiatives through institutions like the Department of Archaeology and Museums and the National Heritage and Culture Division. NGOs such as the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture also contribute significantly through restoration projects, awareness campaigns, and community engagement. Despite these efforts, the balance between development and preservation remains a delicate task. This abstract provides an overview of the key aspects of cultural heritage and preservation in Pakistan, highlighting the impact of modernization, the roles of government and NGOs, and the policies and initiatives in place to safeguard the nation's cultural legacy.

Keywords

Cultural heritage, Preservation, Historical sites, Monuments, Indigenous cultures, Traditions, Modernization, NGOs, Pakistan.

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Cultural Heritage refers to the legacy of tangible and intangible cultural assets inherited from past generations, preserved in the present, and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. It includes monuments, buildings, artworks, literature, music, traditions, language, and practices that are culturally significant. Different schools of thought approach the concept of cultural heritage in varied ways, emphasizing different aspects of its value and preservation.

Cultural Heritage: Definitions and Perspectives from Different Schools of Thought

- Historical and Material Culture School

Cultural heritage is seen as the physical remnants of past societies, including artifacts, buildings, monuments, and landscapes. This school emphasizes the historical significance and material value of cultural heritage, focusing on preservation and conservation of physical objects and sites.¹

- Anthropological and Ethnographic School

Cultural heritage encompasses the practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognize as part of their cultural identity. This approach highlights the living, dynamic nature of cultural heritage, stressing the importance of traditions, rituals, languages, and intangible cultural practices.²

- Sociological School

Cultural heritage is viewed as a social construct that reflects collective memory and identity, shaped by contemporary values and power dynamics. This school focuses on the role of cultural heritage in social cohesion, identity formation, and community empowerment, examining how heritage is contested and negotiated.³

- Legal and Policy School

Cultural heritage consists of the cultural assets protected by national and international laws, treaties, and conventions. This school emphasizes the legal frameworks and policies necessary to safeguard cultural heritage, addressing issues such as illicit trade, repatriation, and heritage management.⁴

Key Components of Cultural Heritage

Tangible Cultural Heritage

Monuments and Buildings: Historical structures, religious sites, and architectural works.

Artifacts: Objects of historical, artistic, or cultural significance found in museums and collections.

Cultural Landscapes: Areas that combine natural and cultural elements, such as agricultural terraces and historic parks.

Intangible Cultural Heritage:

Oral Traditions: Stories, epics, and oral histories passed down through generations.

Performing Arts: Traditional music, dance, theater, and other performing practices.

Social Practices: Rituals, festivals, and communal activities. **Knowledge and Practices:** Traditional craftsmanship, medicinal knowledge, and agricultural methods.⁵

Meaning of Cultural Heritage and Preservation

Cultural Heritage: Cultural heritage refers to the legacy of tangible and intangible assets that a group or society inherits from past generations, maintains in the present, and passes on to future generations. It includes a wide array of expressions, objects, knowledge, and traditions that hold significant cultural, historical, and social value.

Preservation: Preservation in the context of cultural heritage involves efforts to protect, conserve, and maintain cultural artifacts, sites, and traditions to ensure their survival for future

generations. This includes preventing deterioration, managing resources, and educating the public about the importance of heritage.

Different Types of Cultural Heritage

1. Tangible Cultural Heritage:

Built Heritage: Includes monuments, historical buildings, archaeological sites, and structures of architectural significance (e.g., the Taj Mahal, Pyramids of Giza).⁶

Moveable Heritage: Comprises artifacts and objects such as paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, and tools that can be moved from one place to another (e.g., museum collections, religious artifacts).

Natural Heritage: Encompasses landscapes, natural features, and biodiversity that hold cultural significance (e.g., national parks, sacred mountains).

2. Intangible Cultural Heritage:

Oral Traditions: Stories, legends, myths, and oral histories passed down through generations (e.g., indigenous storytelling, folklore).

Performing Arts: Traditional music, dance, theater, and other performance practices (e.g., classical music, folk dances, puppet shows).

Social Practices: Rituals, festivals, and communal activities that reflect cultural identity (e.g., weddings, religious ceremonies, seasonal festivals).

Knowledge and Practices: Traditional craftsmanship, medicinal knowledge, and agricultural practices (e.g., weaving techniques, herbal medicine, crop rotation methods).

Preservation Methods

1. Documentation:

Recording and archiving information about cultural heritage, including photographs, videos, written descriptions, and oral histories.

2. Conservation:

Physical measures to stabilize and repair heritage sites and objects, using methods that do not alter their original character.

3. Restoration:

Efforts to return a cultural site or object to its original state, often using historical records and materials.

4. Legal Protection:

Enacting laws and regulations to protect cultural heritage from destruction, theft, and illegal trade (e.g., UNESCO World Heritage sites).⁷

5. Education and Awareness:

Programs and initiatives to educate the public about the importance of cultural heritage and involve communities in preservation efforts.

6. Community Involvement:

Engaging local communities in the preservation process, ensuring that cultural heritage is valued and maintained by those who are most connected to it.

7. Sustainable Tourism:

Promoting tourism practices that respect and protect cultural heritage, ensuring that tourism benefits local communities and contributes to preservation efforts.

Examples of Cultural Heritage and Preservation

Tangible Heritage: The preservation of the Great Wall of China, efforts to maintain and restore historical manuscripts in libraries, and conservation projects for natural sites like the Serengeti National Park.

Intangible Heritage: Initiatives to document and promote traditional music and dance forms, programs to safeguard indigenous languages, and festivals that celebrate traditional crafts and culinary practices.⁸

Preservation of cultural heritage is vital for maintaining the diversity and richness of human culture, fostering a sense of identity and continuity, and providing educational and economic benefits to societies.

Historical Sites and Monuments in Pakistan

Pakistan is home to a rich tapestry of historical sites and monuments that reflect its diverse cultural heritage and history. These sites span from ancient civilizations to the Islamic era and colonial times, offering profound insights into the region's historical development.

Mohenjo-Daro is one of the most significant archaeological sites in Pakistan, representing the ancient Indus Valley Civilization. Located in Sindh province, this UNESCO World Heritage Site dates back to around 2500 BCE. Mohenjo-Daro was a well-planned city with sophisticated urban infrastructure, including advanced drainage systems, granaries, and residential buildings. The site provides valuable information about one of the world's earliest urban cultures and its achievements in urban planning and social organization.⁹

Taxila is another prominent archaeological site, located near Islamabad. It was an important center of learning and culture during the Gandhara civilization, flourishing from the 6th century BCE to the 5th century CE. Taxila comprises numerous ruins of stupas, monasteries, and temples that reflect the region's Buddhist heritage. The Dharmarajika Stupa and the Jaulian Monastery are notable examples of Buddhist architecture and art, illustrating the influence of Hellenistic, Persian, and Indian cultures on Gandhara.

Rohtas Fort, situated in Punjab province, is a majestic example of military architecture from the Mughal era. Built in the 16th century by Emperor Sher Shah Suri to defend against the Mughal emperor Humayun, Rohtas Fort is renowned for its massive walls and strategic design. The fort's gates, such as the Sohail Gate and the Langar Khani Gate, are notable for their intricate carvings and robust construction, showcasing the architectural prowess of the time.

Lahore Fort and the adjacent Shalimar Gardens in Lahore are iconic symbols of Mughal architecture. The fort, also known as Shahi Qila, has undergone numerous renovations and expansions since its initial construction in the 11th century. It features stunning examples of Mughal architecture, including the Sheesh Mahal (Palace of Mirrors), Naulakha Pavilion, and the Hall of Public Audience (Diwan-i-Aam). The Shalimar Gardens, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are a masterpiece of Mughal garden design, reflecting Persian influences with their terraced lawns, fountains, and intricate waterworks.

Makli Necropolis in Sindh is one of the largest graveyards in the world, spanning over 10 square kilometers. It contains tombs and mausoleums dating back to the 14th to 18th centuries, belonging to various Sufi saints, scholars, and rulers. The site is renowned for its elaborate funerary architecture, blending Islamic, Persian, and local styles. The intricate tile work, calligraphy, and geometric designs on the tombs highlight the region's rich cultural and artistic heritage.

Shah Jahan Mosque in Thatta is another architectural gem from the Mughal era. Constructed in the 17th century during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan, the mosque is famous for its extensive use of blue tiles and elaborate mosaic work. The mosque's unique acoustics and aesthetic beauty make it a significant site for both historical and architectural studies.¹⁰

These historical sites and monuments in Pakistan are not only important cultural landmarks but also vital sources of knowledge about the country's past. Efforts to preserve and protect these sites are crucial for maintaining Pakistan's cultural heritage and promoting tourism. The Pakistan government, along with international organizations like UNESCO, continues to work towards the conservation and restoration of these invaluable sites to ensure they remain accessible for future generations.

Indigenous Cultures and Traditions in Pakistan

Pakistan is home to a diverse array of indigenous cultures and traditions, each with its unique heritage and way of life. The country's indigenous peoples, including the Kalash, Baloch, Pashtun, and various tribal communities in Gilgit-Baltistan and the Thar Desert, contribute significantly to its cultural mosaic.¹¹ These communities maintain rich traditions that are deeply connected to their ancestral lands, despite facing numerous challenges.

The Kalash people, residing in the remote valleys of Chitral in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, are known for their distinct culture and religious practices. They follow an ancient animistic religion that involves worshipping nature and ancestral spirits. Their festivals, such as Chilam Joshi, Uchal, and Choimus, are vibrant celebrations featuring traditional music, dance, and rituals.¹² The Kalash women are distinguished by their colorful dresses and headgear adorned with cowrie shells and beads.

Baloch culture, predominant in the Balochistan province, is marked by a strong tribal system. The Baloch people have a rich oral tradition, with poetry and storytelling playing a central role. Their epic poetry, often recited by bards, narrates tales of heroism and romance. Balochi music, featuring instruments like the suroz and dambura, accompanies traditional dances such as the chaap.¹³ The Baloch also practice unique customs related to hospitality and social justice, governed by their tribal code of conduct known as Balochmayar.

The Pashtun people, primarily found in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and parts of Balochistan, adhere to Pashtunwali, an ancient code of ethics guiding their social and cultural life. This code emphasizes values like hospitality (melmastia), honor (nang), and bravery (ghayrat). Pashtun traditions include elaborate jirgas (councils) for conflict resolution and vibrant cultural expressions in poetry (landay and tapa) and music. The Pashtun folk dance, the attan, is a significant cultural marker, performed during various celebrations.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, the indigenous communities, such as the Burusho, Shina, and Wakhi, have distinct languages and cultural practices. The region's festivals, such as the Shandur Polo Festival and the Ginani Festival, are important cultural events. Traditional music, played with instruments like the rabab and dadang, accompanies dances that reflect the region's cultural diversity. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan are also known for their unique craftsmanship, particularly in wood carving and wool weaving.

The Thari people of the Thar Desert, part of the Sindh province, have a culture that revolves around their arid environment. Their traditions include vibrant folk music and dance, with instruments like the boreendo and ektara. The Thari people celebrate various festivals, such as Teej and Diwali, which highlight their Hindu heritage. Their distinctive art forms include intricate embroidery and mirror work on textiles, reflecting their aesthetic sensibilities and cultural identity.

Indigenous communities in Pakistan face challenges such as land dispossession, cultural assimilation, and environmental degradation. Efforts to preserve their cultural heritage are crucial for maintaining the country's cultural diversity. Initiatives by the government and non-

governmental organizations aim to document and promote indigenous languages, crafts, and traditions, ensuring they are passed down to future generations.

Impact of Modernization on Cultural Heritage in Pakistan

Modernization in Pakistan has had significant effects on its rich cultural heritage, leading to both challenges and opportunities for preservation. As the country continues to urbanize and industrialize, traditional practices, historic sites, and local cultures face various pressures.

One of the major impacts of modernization in Pakistan is the decline of traditional crafts and knowledge. With the rise of industrial production and the influx of mass-produced goods, traditional artisans and craftspeople are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain their practices. Skills such as handloom weaving, pottery, and wood carving are at risk of being lost as younger generations migrate to urban areas seeking better economic prospects.¹⁴ For instance, the traditional art of ajrak printing in Sindh is declining due to the availability of cheaper, machine-made textiles.

Urbanization has also led to the destruction of historic sites and monuments in many Pakistani cities. Rapid urban expansion often occurs without adequate planning or regard for cultural heritage, resulting in the demolition of historic buildings and neighborhoods. In cities like Lahore and Karachi, modern infrastructure projects have led to the loss of significant architectural heritage. The once-majestic Havelis of Lahore's Walled City, which date back to the Mughal era, are increasingly being replaced by modern constructions.

Globalization, a key aspect of modernization, has introduced foreign cultural influences that overshadow local traditions. The proliferation of global media, fashion, and consumer culture has led to a shift in cultural practices, especially among the youth. Traditional Pakistani clothing, cuisine, and festivals are increasingly influenced by Western trends. The popularity of fast food chains and international retail brands in urban centers reflects this cultural shift, often at the expense of local businesses and traditional foods.¹⁵

Despite these challenges, modernization also brings opportunities for cultural preservation and revitalization through technology and increased global awareness. Digital archiving and social media platforms provide new ways to document and share Pakistan's cultural heritage. Initiatives like the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan's efforts to digitally preserve historic sites and promote traditional crafts are examples of how technology can support cultural heritage.¹⁶ Online platforms have also enabled the documentation and promotion of local music, folklore, and languages, ensuring they reach a broader audience.

Tourism driven by modernization has both positive and negative impacts on cultural heritage in Pakistan. On the one hand, tourism generates revenue that can be reinvested in the conservation of historic sites and promotion of cultural practices. Sites like the ancient city of Taxila and the Mughal monuments in Lahore attract significant numbers of tourists, helping fund their maintenance. On the other hand, mass tourism can lead to the commercialization and degradation of cultural sites if not properly managed. The ongoing restoration and management of the Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens, both UNESCO World Heritage Sites, highlight the need for sustainable tourism practices.¹⁷

Policy and legal frameworks are crucial in balancing modernization with cultural heritage preservation in Pakistan. The Antiquities Act of 1975 and the Punjab Special Premises (Preservation) Ordinance of 1985 are legislative measures aimed at protecting cultural heritage. However, enforcement and awareness remain challenges. Effective preservation requires not only robust legal frameworks but also community involvement and education about the importance of cultural heritage. While modernization presents significant challenges to the

preservation of cultural heritage in Pakistan, it also offers tools and opportunities for protection and revitalization. Balancing development with heritage conservation necessitates careful planning, community engagement, and the strategic use of technology to ensure that Pakistan's rich cultural heritage is preserved for future generations.

Role of Government and NGOs in Preservation in Pakistan

The preservation of cultural heritage in Pakistan is a collaborative effort involving both the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These entities play crucial roles in safeguarding and promoting Pakistan's rich and diverse heritage through various initiatives, policies, and programs. The Government of Pakistan has established several institutions and legal frameworks aimed at preserving cultural heritage. The Department of Archaeology and Museums (DOAM), operating under the Ministry of National Heritage and Integration, is primarily responsible for the protection and conservation of archaeological sites and monuments.¹⁸ Key legislation includes the Antiquities Act of 1975, which provides legal protection to cultural heritage sites and artifacts, and the Punjab Special Premises (Preservation) Ordinance of 1985, which aims to protect historical buildings and sites within the province of Punjab.

The government has also undertaken numerous restoration projects to preserve important historical sites. For example, the Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens, both UNESCO World Heritage Sites, have seen extensive conservation efforts.¹⁹ These projects often involve structural stabilization, conservation of decorative elements, and measures to improve site management and visitor facilities. Additionally, the government collaborates with international organizations like UNESCO to ensure that restoration practices meet global standards. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in heritage preservation by complementing government efforts and addressing gaps in resources and expertise. NGOs such as the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), and the Lahore Conservation Society are actively involved in various preservation activities. The Heritage Foundation, for instance, focuses on the documentation, conservation, and promotion of Pakistan's architectural heritage. One of its notable projects includes the restoration of the Makli Necropolis, one of the largest graveyards in the world, which houses numerous historic tombs and mausoleums.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) has been instrumental in the conservation of historic sites and the revitalization of urban areas in Pakistan.²⁰ AKTC's Historic Cities Programme has led restoration projects in Gilgit-Baltistan, such as the Baltit Fort and the Shigar Fort, which not only preserve historical architecture but also contribute to local community development and tourism. These projects often involve training local artisans in traditional construction techniques, thereby preserving intangible cultural heritage as well. NGOs also play a significant role in raising awareness about the importance of cultural heritage.²¹ They organize workshops, seminars, and exhibitions to educate the public and engage local communities in preservation efforts. For example, the Lahore Conservation Society conducts regular heritage walks and lectures to highlight the historical significance of Lahore's architectural landmarks and promote public involvement in their preservation.

Furthermore, both government and NGOs are increasingly leveraging digital technology to enhance heritage preservation. Digital documentation, virtual tours, and online databases allow for broader access to cultural heritage and facilitate research and education. The Endangered Heritage Project, a collaboration between DOAM and various NGOs, aims to create a comprehensive digital archive of Pakistan's cultural heritage, making it accessible to

both scholars and the general public. Community involvement is a critical component of successful heritage preservation. NGOs often work closely with local communities to ensure that preservation efforts are sustainable and culturally sensitive. Engaging communities in the management and maintenance of heritage sites helps foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, which is crucial for the long-term preservation of cultural heritage. The preservation of cultural heritage in Pakistan relies on the collaborative efforts of the government and NGOs.²² Through legal frameworks, restoration projects, awareness campaigns, and the use of digital technology, these entities work together to protect and promote Pakistan's rich cultural heritage for future generations.

Cultural Policies and Initiatives in Pakistan

Cultural policies and initiatives in Pakistan aim to preserve, promote, and integrate the country's rich and diverse cultural heritage into contemporary society. Both the government and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play crucial roles in formulating and implementing these policies and initiatives. The Government of Pakistan has established several institutions and legal frameworks to support cultural preservation and promotion. The Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, previously known as the Ministry of Culture, oversees cultural policy and heritage management. Key legislation includes the Antiquities Act of 1975, which provides legal protection to cultural heritage sites and artifacts, and the National Heritage Act, which aims to safeguard the cultural heritage of Pakistan.²³

Government initiatives include restoration and conservation projects for historical sites and monuments. The Department of Archaeology and Museums (DOAM) is responsible for the conservation of key historical sites such as the Lahore Fort, Shalimar Gardens, and Mohenjo-Daro.²⁴ These projects often involve structural stabilization, preservation of decorative elements, and improvements in site management and visitor facilities. Education and outreach programs are also an essential part of cultural policy. The government collaborates with educational institutions to integrate cultural heritage into the curriculum and promote awareness among students. The National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA) and the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA) offer training programs and workshops to preserve and promote traditional arts and crafts. These institutions play a pivotal role in fostering new talent and keeping traditional performing arts alive.

Cultural festivals and events are regularly organized to celebrate and promote Pakistan's cultural diversity. Events like the Lok Virsa Festival, the Lahore Literary Festival, and the Pakistan National Council of the Arts' National Folk Music Festival bring together artists and performers from across the country, providing a platform to showcase traditional music, dance, and crafts. These festivals not only celebrate cultural heritage but also attract tourism, contributing to the local economy. Digital initiatives have become increasingly important in recent years.²⁵ The government and NGOs are leveraging technology to document and promote cultural heritage. Projects such as the digital archive of the Endangered Heritage Project aim to create comprehensive online records of Pakistan's cultural heritage, making it accessible for research and education. Virtual museums and online exhibitions have also been developed to reach a global audience. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in supplementing government efforts. NGOs such as the Heritage Foundation of Pakistan, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), and the Lahore Conservation Society are actively involved in various preservation activities.²⁶ The Heritage Foundation focuses on the documentation, conservation, and promotion of Pakistan's architectural heritage. The AKTC's Historic Cities Programme has led restoration projects in Gilgit-Baltistan, such as the Baltit

Fort and Shigar Fort, contributing to both heritage conservation and local community development.

Community involvement is a key component of successful cultural initiatives. NGOs often engage local communities in preservation efforts, ensuring that projects are sustainable and culturally sensitive. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, which is crucial for the long-term preservation of cultural heritage. Public-private partnerships are also being explored to enhance cultural preservation efforts. Collaborations between government agencies, private sector companies, and NGOs can pool resources and expertise, leading to more effective preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.²⁷ For example, the restoration of the Wazir Khan Mosque in Lahore was a joint effort involving the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, the Government of Punjab, and international donors.

Conclusion:

Cultural policies and initiatives in Pakistan are multifaceted and involve a combination of government action, NGO participation, and community engagement. These efforts are essential for preserving Pakistan's cultural heritage and ensuring that it continues to enrich the lives of future generations. Government initiatives include restoration and conservation projects for historical sites and monuments. The Department of Archaeology and Museums (DOAM) is responsible for the conservation of key historical sites such as the Lahore Fort, Shalimar Gardens, and Mohenjo-Daro. These projects often involve structural stabilization, preservation of decorative elements, and improvements in site management and visitor facilities. Education and outreach programs are also an essential part of cultural policy. The government collaborates with educational institutions to integrate cultural heritage into the curriculum and promote awareness among students.

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