

Built Heritage in Historical Perspective: Palaces, Temples and Colonial Structures of Mandi Region

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Abstract

The built heritage of the Mandi region in Himachal Pradesh reflects a confluence of political history, socio-cultural traditions, and distinctive Pahari architecture. The study examines key monuments, including Pangna Fort, Damdama Palace, Rang Mahal of Suket, Emerson House, Kamlah Fort, and the historic temples of Mandi, often called "Chhoti Kashi." Constructed largely in the Kath-Kunni and Shikhara styles, these structures demonstrate the adaptation of local artisans to the Himalayan landscape through the use of stone, timber, and slate. They embody not only aesthetic and technical ingenuity but also the region's religious and political transitions, from Shaivism to Vaishnavism and from princely power centers to colonial and modern administrative functions. While these sites stand as enduring markers of identity and resilience, many face deterioration due to neglect and encroachment. The paper emphasizes the architectural, cultural, and historical significance of Mandi's built heritage and advocates for its preservation as a vital component of the Himalayan cultural landscape. The article discusses about the heritage architecture of the region and how it makes the written records on the history of Mandi more authentic. For this research work, different architectural sites, royal as well as colonial were visited, locals were interviewed, different Gazetteers, Government publications and books on the history of the region have been substantially used.

Introduction

Built heritage refers to buildings, structures, monuments, installations, or remnants that bear historical, architectural, cultural, social, political, economic, or military significance. These heritage assets hold significance as they reflect aspects of our history and safeguarding these assets is not only a matter of preserving history but also an essential aspect of maintaining the identity and character of a country. Here an effort has been made to understand the built heritage of Mandi region and how it helps to reveal political history and socio-cultural structure of the past. These beautiful heritage recounts Pahari architectural style in an impressive way. The present district of Mandi was formed after the merging of two princely states, Mandi and Suket, on 15 April 1948 when Himachal Pradesh came into existence. Ever since its formation, the district boundaries have not changed. According to the Gazetteer of Suket State, the chiefs of Suket and Mandi are from a common ancestor of the Chandrabansi line of Rajputs of Bengal. The Suket state is said to have been founded by Bir Sen in 765 A.D., and the separation of Mandi from Suket took place in the year 1200 A.D. Up to that time, it was a single state of Suket.

As far as the Mandi region of the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh is concerned, this particular area is rich in both sense archaeology and architecture respectively. The chief built heritage sites of Mandi town are described as follows:

1. Pangna Fort

Pangna Fort is one of the finest examples of Pahari architecture, i.e., Kath-Kunni traditional architecture style of Himalayas. Pangna is a beautiful and historical place that lies in the lap of thick forest and mountain range of Mandi region of Himachal Pradesh. Before independence, Pangna was the part of old princely state of Suket. It is said that Suket state was formed by Bir Sen in 765 A.D., and he made Pangna his capital. According to Gazetteer of Suket State, “Bir Sen selected a site in the Surhi ilaqa, at 5000 ft. above sea level, called Pangna, where he built a palace, and made it the capital of the State.”

In Pangna he made a fort which is famous by the name of Pangna fort. This fort is a tower-like structure, built in typical Pahari style architecture. The site area of fort is small which consists mainly the fort building, Mahamaya temple, a hall, etc. Entrance to the palace is from two sides, one of them is simple and other is an elaborated gate made in traditional style. There is also a water spring (baudi), a water body on the other side of the fort. The building is a seven-storey high structure having near about 60 feet height.

The fort building is made in the traditional style of architecture, known as Kath-Kunni. It is an indigenous construction prevalent in hills. This type of typical construction begins with preparation of the ground, the trench is dug relative to the height of the structure, which is then filled with loose stone blocks which rise up to make the plinth. The raised podium provides the stability to the house or tower and also protects the building from snow and ground water. It is followed by construction of double skin wall made with alternate courses of dry stone masonry and wood without any cementing mortar. It involves laying two wooden beams longitudinally parallel to each other with a gap in between. Loose in fill material is packed as filler and the external and the internal skins of the walls are held together by cross racer dovetail called Maanvi. Kath-Kunni wall is constructed by laying two wooden wall beams longitudinally parallel to each other. This defines the width of the wall. The edge members are lap jointed and secured by a kadil (wooden nail). This arrangement of alternating stone and wood add flexibility and has proved to be a good safeguard against frequent seismic tremors.

For the construction of Pangna fort, locally available materials were used. It is observed that the primary materials of construction are wood and stone for wall and plinth, topped by slate shingles. Wood is predominantly from *cedrus deodara* (deodar/devdar) an endemic species to western Himalayas and one of the strongest of Indian Conifers. It has straight veins and grows upto 50 meters. Being very durable, it is used in structure work of all kinds. The materials (stone, wood and slate) are locally available and possess specific properties that make them excellent choices for building construction from sustainability and performance perspectives.

This building is such a masterpiece of gigantic structure of that time. The building of the fort is square in shape. Under the Kath-Kunni architecture style, the structures are generally either square or rectangular in shape. The two top floors of the building have balconies with extended veranda (gallery) having beautiful railings with geometrical patterns while the other five floors are simple tower-like structures.

Kath means wood and Kunni means angle or corners. This type of architecture style is made in different layers with interlocking of stones and wood with the help of wooden nails. The roof of these types of buildings are made with slates, stones and they are also attached on

the wooden floor with the help of wooden nails. The material used for the construction of Pangna fort is stone and timber, but the hall is made of conventional materials such as bricks and cement. There are small windows placed on the facade of the fort, having beautiful carvings and patterns on the wooden frames of the windows and doors as well as on the wooden slabs and roof of the fort. At the entrance, there are wooden stairs to go to the upper storeys.

The Pahari typical architecture style of Pangna fort is no doubt one of the greatest examples of architecture in hills and is made with locally available materials like stone, timber and local artisans. Kath-Kunni style buildings are earthquake resistant as horizontal timber beams absorb shocks. These types of buildings are also sustainable, and Pangna fort has been surviving through centuries.

2. Damdama Palace

The Damdama palace is one of the famous built heritages of Mandi district. The palace is situated in the middle of Mandi town, which was the capital of old princely state of Mandi. The town, as well as the Damdama palace itself is about 2400 feet above sea level. According to Gazetteer of Mandi State, this palace was built by Raja Suraj Sen (1637-1664 A.D), The oldest portion of Damdama palace, built by Raja Suraj Sen himself, features a distinct curved roof usually seen in the hills only with the dwellings of Rajas and Gods. The Madho Rao temple occupies a major portion of the lower storey, and still certain State ceremonies are held in the apartments above it. The building has suffered severely from earthquake and some of the rooms are barely fit for habitation. Recent restoration of one of the towers has improved its appearance, and also removed the unsightly sheds between the palace and the Seri tank. The Naya Mahal was built by Raja Balbir Sen and was used by him partly as a residence and partly as a court. Durbars were also held in it, but a new Durbar Hall was built by Raja Bhiwani Sen a few years ago, and though of unimposing design well serves the purpose for which it was built. The Bhiwani Nawas was commenced by the late Raja as a residence for himself and was planned on modern lines. In front of the palace is the large Seri Tank with a stone pillar in the middle supporting a lamp, which adds to the beauty of the palace. The Damdama palace and this tank are of great historical significance. The Raja of Mandi, Sidh Sen had treacherously murdered the Raja of Bhangal, Pirthi Pal in Damdama palace, and buried his head, feet, and arms under the tank. To placate his ghost the lamp is lit every evening. The walls of the tank are being rebuilt and surmounted by a neat railing. The removal of the State stables from the side of the tank and the conversion of their site into a garden is now in progress and will greatly enhance the picturesqueness of the tank and of the palace.

3. Rang Mahal of Suket

Royal Palace of Suket, known as Rang Mahal, is one of the beautiful and historical buildings of modern Sundernagar town. The old name of this town was Baned which was found by Raja Garur Sen (1721-1748). According to Gazetteer of Suket State, in Garur Sen's reign 'Baned' now called Sundernagar was founded on the small plain two miles south of Nagar and it became the capital in the reign of Bikram Sen (1791-1838). In this new capital many beautiful buildings were constructed by different rulers of Suket. The main attraction of these architecture works are the Rang Mahal, Darbar hall, the Secretariat building etc. The ruler

of Suket Bhim Sen (1908-1919) constructed a Dak Bungalow near the Raj Mahal. The architecture style of all these buildings is traditional Pahari style.

The Rang Mahal is a two-storey building which is made of timber, stone, cement and mud plaster. It is a palace-like outpost in the middle of which there is a courtyard. The windows of Rang Mahal are provided in walls with solid plank shutters on 4 sides and are usually very small. The same window has floral carving on the outer face with a small opening. The windows and doors of Rang Mahal are of wooden frame with beautiful wooden works and carving. The ground floor of the Rang Mahal is raised above the stone plinth and finished with adobe (clay). There is an extended veranda and a hall in the lower storey with sleeping rooms, dining room in the Rang Mahal. In the upper storey, there are sleeping rooms and a big balcony with wooden carved railing. In both stories there are carved pillars of timber holding slab as well as roof respectively the slab between two storeys is of wood, roof is constructed out of wooden beams followed by purlins and rafters, topped with slats or wooden shingles. Slate stones also weigh down the structure against strong winds.

The building is surrounded by beautiful gardens. The other important building situated in the campus is Darbar hall, having two storeys with a big hall. The construction material used for this building is of Rang Mahal. The third heritage building of the campus is known as Secretariat House (Sachivalaya Bhavan) from where the whole administration was run and controlled. The material used for the building is timber, stone, cement, mud plaster etc.

The beautiful campus of Rang Mahal is a declared heritage site. Led by a sense of dedication and devotion to the nation and the realization that human belongings and wealth are as ephemeral as life itself, the late Raja Lalit Sen of Suket established the college by making liberal donation in cash and in the shape of buildings of Rang Mahal in the memory of his beloved father, the king of Suket, Raja Lakshman Sen.

Another historical building near Rang Mahal is a hospital. Raja Bhim Sen (1908-1919) erected a fine and fully equipped hospital of 'Baned' (Sundernagar) and named it the King Edward Hospital to commemorate the memory of his late Majesty. The whole hospital building was a single storey and made of timber, mud plaster and stone-slate roof having wooden railing. Today maximum part of this hospital building has been pulled down and new multi-storey concrete building has been built by the Government of Himachal Pradesh.

4. Emerson House

Emerson House is one of the historical and beautiful buildings in Mandi town. This building was built in Pahari architecture and is a masterpiece of the architecture. It was built in the year of 1918 by Raja Joginder Sen, the then ruler of erstwhile Mandi State. The building was named after H.W. Emerson, the Superintendent (political agent of British Government) attached to the Raja. Mr. H.W. Emerson, I.C.S., had succeeded Mr. G. Walker as Superintendent and Settlement Officer in March 1915. Some parts of the building were annexed to the main building in 1933. This double storeyed building is situated in the middle of Mandi town and remained under the domain of Raja of Mandi. The Raja probably used the Emerson House as a place of judicial administration of his state. Though now surrounded by high rise multi-storey buildings, the sheen and shine of Emerson House is still intact, and it continued to serve as judicial functioning of Mandi district after independence.

Till the re-organisation of State in 1966, the District and Sessions Judge Division Mandi and Chamba functioned at this building. After re-organising in 1966 some changes were brought

and a new Sessions Division was created for Mandi, Kullu and Lahaul & Spiti districts which also continued its headquarters in Emerson House at Mandi.

In addition to the judiciary, some other Government offices like Public Relations Office, District Library, etc. are also functioning from this building. Like Damdama Palace this building is also based on Pahari Architecture style. Timber, stone, mud brick, plaster are of substantial used in this historical building.

5. Kamlah Fort

One of the famous and must-visit places of Mandi is Kamlah Fort. Kamlah Kila (castle) is in Kamlahgarh which is named after a local saint named Kamlah Baba. This spot is a delight for the trekkers as the fort stands on the dreadful and dangerous terrain. This fort stands strong on the pointed ranges of Sikandar Dhar and is 4772 feet high from the land. There are some villages around it like Chamba, Naun, Kamlah, Kathed, Shamshepur, Jamandhar, and others. Kamlahgarh has other forts as well like Chawki, Chabara, Padampur, Shamshepur, and Narsinghpur.

The Fort of Kamlah is one of the most interesting places in the studied region. It is situated close to the Hamirpur border on the crest of an isolated and precipitous hill, the ridge being narrow and serrated with deep ravines running down the face. The fortress is said to have been founded in 1625-30 and it was strongly fortified by Raja Suraj Sen (1637-1664) and was famous for its strength all over the hills. The predecessor of Suraj Sen was Raja Hari Sen (1623-1637), and he was possibly the actual founder of the Kamlah fort, the propitious site for it having been revealed by a miracle. A shepherd of the neighbourhood was grazing his flocks when he sat down beneath a tree on the summit of the hill now crowned by the fort. As he sat, he idly chipped the tree with his axe and to his astonishment milk gushed forth from the incisions he made. The milk fell on a spot a few feet away from the tree and as it touched the ground a lingam rose therefrom. This was the idol of a Siddh, and, speaking in the voice of the saint, it bade the peasant hasten to the Raja and tell him that if he built his citadel close to the lingam, he would conquer the territory around. So, the shepherd hurried to the Raja, who, believing his tale, at once laid the foundation of the fort, venerating as its guardian spirit the Siddh to whom he owed the choice of site. The Siddh is still worshipped there, and his shrine enjoys an endowment from the State.

The fort was of great strength, its natural advantages being turned to the best account in the arrangement of the fortifications. The first part of the approach was along a steep narrow pathway rising in steps and commanded for its whole length by loop-holed bastions. Rather more than halfway up was the gateway, capable of holding a strong guard and offering an excellent point of resistance to an enemy that succeeded in reaching so far. Almost on the top of the ridge was the citadel, provided with ample accommodation for a large garrison and with storehouses where considerable stocks of grain could be kept. The weak point was the scarcity of water, but this was surmounted to a considerable extent by the construction of reservoirs out of the solid rock and these were always kept filled in troublesome times. The fort is now in bad repair, but still well repays a visit. A small establishment is retained there, and until the last few years distributions of grain were made from the local granary to zamindars in times of scarcity. There is a large stock of ghee of great age and quite unfit for human consumption, but it is much valued for medicinal purposes and the natives believe it

to be an infallible ointment for rheumatic and similar complaints. The collection of ancient arms and clothes is of interest.

Historical Temples of Mandi

The historic town Mandi is built along the Beas River which is the entrance to Kullu Valley. This place is famous for 81 old stone temples with beautiful carvings. The architecture of Mandi can be found today in these temples, which were constructed by the rulers of Suket and Mandi a long time ago. These constructive works are very beautiful and the centre of attraction for tourists. Mandi town is also called 'Choti Kashi' due to its numerous temples. In Mandi region, we mostly see Sikhara architecture style temples in the flat valleys, specially which were constructed by the rulers of both the states, Suket and Mandi. The main features of temple architecture are veranda - a roofed, open-air gallery or porch, attached to the outside of a building, often partly enclosed by a railing and frequently extended across the front and sides of the structure; and Sikhara - in North Indian temple architecture, the superstructure, tower, or spire above the pillared mandapas (porches or halls). It is the most dominant and characteristic feature of the Hindu temples in the North but also is found in the flat valleys of the state. Some of the historical temples of Mandi are the following:

1. Bhutnath Temple

It is situated in the midst of the town of Mandi and is the most frequented shrine in Mandi. Bhut Nath is venerated as the guardian of the town and represents Shiva in his attribute of Lord of Creatures. Raja Ajber Sen (1500 to 1534 A.D.) with the construction of this temple founded the new township of Mandi, the earlier being on the right bank of the river Beas. The legend relating to the discovery of the idol is as follows: Formerly the land on the left bank of the Beas, now occupied by the town of Mandi, was waste, and there the local zamindars used to graze their cattle. One cow, though newly calved, failed to give milk for several days, and the owner, keeping a watch on her, discovered that she gave her milk to a stone. The news reached the Raja, Ajber Sen, and shortly afterwards Shiva in a dream ordered him to dig beneath the image. The Raja did so, and the idol now worshipped in the temple of Bhut Nath was discovered. So, the foundation of the present city was laid and up to the time of Ajber Sen the capital was on the right bank of the river. This temple is of stone in the Shikhara style, consisting of a small porch and a cella surmounted by a spire (tower or minar). The sabha-mandap in front is apparently an addition. The porch is supported by fluted pillars with capitals carved in elephants, the arch between being trefoil. Today idols of other Hindu gods and goddesses have been kept in the temple along with Lord Shiva. Being a historical temple, this temple is maintained by a committee.

2. Trilok Nath

Trilok Nath temple of Mandi town is opposite the Panchavaktra temple on the other side of Beas River. Trilok Nath, as he is represented in the Chandra-bhaga valley, has been identified with the Bodhisat Avaloketeshwara and it has been suggested that the identity of Shiva with Trilok Nath in Mandi and parts of Kangra may be due to Buddhist influence. The temple of Trilok Nath was built by Sultan Devi, the pious queen of Raja Ajber Sen, in 1520 A.D. It is a Shiva temple erected in stone and in the Sikhara style. The cella (inner area of the temple) contains a life-sized three-faced stone image of Shiva who is riding a bull with Parvati in his lap. There is also a second image, probably of Shiva, which, however, is much

worn. The porch (dwar-mandap) measures 7'8" by 3'6", and the lintel rests on two fluted pillars and pilasters. An attendant, or doorkeeper, is shown on each of the two pilasters, and there are floral and animal carvings on the capitals of the pillars. Between the pillars is the trefoil arch characteristic of Mandi architecture. The workmanship throughout is good, but the carving has suffered much from neglect and is much worn owing to the soft monuments. The image which it enshrines is connected with the rite of Sati. It is said that during the kingship the woman whose fate it was to burn on the funeral pile was brought to the temple before she mounted the pyre and was there shown the face at the back of the idol. This was the last rite preparatory to immolation; the sight of the face being supposed to inspire the Sati with a frenzied desire to plunge into the flames. This temple is one of the oldest temples of Mandi and now a committee has been formed for it.

3. Panchavaktra Temple

This temple quite resembles Triloknath and is situated at a very picturesque site formed by the confluence of the river Beas and the tributary Suketi in Mandi town. This temple belongs to 'Panchavaktra Shiva'. It was built sometime in the 14th century A.D. and is of Sikhara style. Lord Shiva is the chief deity, which is made of stone and has five faces and ten arms. The main porch (dwar-mandap) is supported on four heavy pillars, the capitals of which are carved in flowerpot design and the bases in rosettes or lotuses. The main image is of some interest since the five faces are not placed in one row but in such a way that the fourth face is on the reverse side of the slab which is otherwise quite plain and the fifth is on the top of the image slab. Thus, when seen in front, only three faces are visible. Such images of five-faced Shiva are not uncommon in Mandi, and since their attributes bear a definite resemblance to those of Avaloketeshwara, it has been surmised that they owe their origin to Buddhism. There are also other idols in the temple of Lord Ganesh, Goddess Parvati, etc.

4. Adhnari Temple

Of the more modern temples, the finest from an artistic standpoint is the sanctuary of Adhnari, the stone image of which represents Shiva and his consort Parvati, the right half being devoted to the former and the left to the latter. Shiva is portrayed with knotted hair, a necklace of human skulls, a serpent, a musical instrument in one hand, and damru in the other. Parvati is shown wearing a diadem, an earring, and a nose-ring. To the main image is joined a slab on which the vehicles of the deities, the bull, and the lion, are carved. The whole measures 4'4" high by 3'3" broad. On the right and left respectively are the images of Bhairva and Hanuman. It consists of a cella, a porch, and a sabha mandap, and the carving throughout is rich and of considerable artistic beauty. Unfortunately, the shrine is in a poor state of preservation.

5. Temple of Mahadev

The temple of Mahadev lies in Mahadev Panchayat which is 4 km from Sundernagar town. It is a stone-made temple and the pindi (the upper part of Shiva Ling) of Mahadev is made of black stone, nearly one span in height and about two feet in circumference. The pujaris employed in the temple belong to the Kondal got of the Gaur Brahmans, and are called Rawals by the Hindus, because whenever a Hindu dies his relations make him give something, such as a cow, silver, gold, grain, etc., as alms before he expires, and the gift is, on his death, appropriated by these pujaris who take even the shroud that covers the corpse. They aver that their forefathers came with the ancestors of the rulers of Suket from Bengal

and that the temple and its pindi already existed there. The story about the temple's foundation as told by their forefathers was that it was built in a single night by the Pandavas during their exile period to the Himalayas. The building, as it now exists, and the forms of the pillar and pindi of Mahadev, clearly show them to have been made in very ancient times, but the date and year of its foundation are not known. The place on which the pindi stands has a great natural rock under it, out of which the pindi has been carved. The fretwork around the pindi is also of stone, and the floor all around it is paved with stones, while four large and four small columns of black stone rise on this pavement. The roof supported by these columns is so built that it is divided into small separate parts furnished with stone slabs. This temple houses a sabha-mandap and a cella. Presently, like the other temples of the region, it has also been beautified by the Panchayat and a Temple Committee has been formed for its maintenance.

6. Jagan Nath Temple

This temple is situated on the left bank of Ghangal Khudd at a place called Jungum Bag near the historical town of Purana Bazaar of modern Sunder Nagar. According to the Suket State official records, this temple was built by Raja Shyam Sen (1620 to 1650 A.D.). The temple is built of pacca masonry (stone). About the origin of the temple, it is stated in the Gazetteer of Suket State that about 250 years ago, a Bairagi faqir came here from Jagan Nath on the coast of Orissa. He had an idol of Jagan Nath made of sandalwood and the Suket Court hearing that he wished to sell it offered him Rs. 500 for it, but he refused the offer, saying that he was taking the idol to Kullu, the Raja of which had promised him Rs. 1000. By chance the faqir died before he could set out for Kullu, and consequently the idol was, by Raja's order, placed in the buildings previously used as a seraglio. He appointed pujaris to the temple and granted land for its maintenance, spending Rs. 500, the price of the idol, on the funeral ceremonies of the Bairagi, and built the temple at State expense. Endeavours have been made to ascertain the date of the foundation of the temple, without success. In this temple, the largest idol is of Jagan Nath, which is a cubit in height. The nose, mouth, eyes, and the hands are visible in it. At its right side is an idol of Balbadhar, and at its left one of Lakshmi. There are also other small idols, of Salig Ram, etc., in the temple. During kingship, its management was carried on by pujaris who belonged to the Kondal got of Brahmans and possessed only one house in the State. But at present the pujari is appointed by the management committee. The bhog offered to Jagan Nath consists of rice, pulse, etc., and parshad is also distributed. The cost of bhog is defrayed from the income accruing from the land granted by the State for the maintenance of the temple. On the second of Asar Sudi (the date on which the fair is held at Jagan Nath in Orissa), a fair is held here. This tradition of fair is carried out till today. This temple lacks a sabha-mandap and porch, and has a negligible cella, having only enough space for the idols and the priest to sit. At present, a Temple Committee has been formed and the whole of its management is under this Committee. The temple has been renovated by the Committee and been beautified.

7. The Suraj Kund Temple

The temple known as Suraj Kund is situated near the MLS Degree College Sundernagar. The old building of this college used to be the Royal Palace. This temple is dedicated to Lord Sun. The courtyard is paved with atoms and towards the west of it is the temple building which is of stone. In front of the temple door is a masonry tank (kund) 25*25 feet, which

adds to the beauty of the temple. The temple and tank are surrounded by houses of wood and pacca masonry built as rest-houses for the convenience of visitors. Sadhus visit it on pilgrimages to Mani-karn and other sacred places. Garur Sen's queen constructed the Suraj Kund temple at Baned. Inside the temple there is an idol of Suraj ji weighing about 36 pakka sers made of eight metals. It is of human form with four heads. It is flanked by two brass horses, each one about 9 inches in height, thus giving it the appearance of a chariot. It is surrounded by several other idols of stone which represent Krishna, Radha, Ram, Balram, Hanuman, etc. It is said that the idol was made by the brass workers of Chirag village. Affixed to the wall of the temple is a large piece of stone which bears the inscription:

"In the name of the deity, Ganesh."

"On the 28th Asar st. 1782, B. Maharaja Garur Sen (1721 to 1748 A.D.) and Siri Rani Panchamon Dei commenced to build the Suraj Kund temple in order to place the idol of the Sun there."

"The building was completed, and the idol of the Sun placed in the temple on the 23rd Bisakh (mid-April to mid-May), st. 1785 B. He did so for religious purposes."

This temple also has a committee for its maintenance and has been beautified like the other temples.

8. Narsingh Temple

In the middle of town Purana Bazaar near Govt. Sanskrit College, there is a stone-built temple dedicated to Narsingh, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Inside the temple is an idol of Pakhan, like the idol of Salangramji. The idol is kept locked up in a box of which the keys are entrusted to the pujari. There is a narrow hole in the murti Pakhan, and anyone desirous of seeing the idol closes one eye and peeps through the hole with the other. The pujari who waits upon it bathes and feeds it daily, with eyes closed and face averted. As a rule, no one can see Narsingh, but it is said that during the kingship, if anyone wished to do so, he had to get permission from the State. It is said that a sadhu, who was going to Mani-karn, getting permission from the State, saw Narsingh, and consequently died, and that once thieves made away with certain ornaments from the temple, but were struck blind at a short distance from it and were arrested. These are only some of the ancient heritages left in the region but apart from these monuments, there are numerous household shrines in Mandi region. Many of the forts like Rajgarh, Narayangarh, Chauwasigarh, Jhetingri, and many others have been ruined due to the carelessness of local people as well as the administration.

Conclusion

To conclude the article, it can be said that 'built heritage' can be considered any individual or group of buildings, structures, monuments, or installations, or remains, which are associated with architectural, cultural, social, political, economic, or military history.

In the studied region all the buildings of historical significance either they are royal palaces, forts or temples, were all constructed by traditional artisans. These artisans were employed by the rulers. one important thing is that their knowledge is transferred from master artisans to apprentice. Mostly people procure materials from their surroundings and build structures. This has fostered an empirical knowledge of construction material, tools and technology and all of these are reflected in traditional building techniques. But unfortunately these traditional style of architecture has been extinct rapidly. The main feature of hill architecture style that

found in mandi regions are the local artisans, easy availability of construction materials ,good binding properties, mud mortar was used as the joining material , sun dried mud bricks were used in the construction of the wall, hard stone obtained from local quarries and used in building foundation and walls. Stone slates that were of metamorphic rock used in roofs of buildings. Same materials were also used in kath-kuni, traditional style of architecture especially in Pangna fort.

In addition to architecture style, some structures like temples throw light on the socio-cultural life of the region. One of the important strong evidence of sati in the region is the Trilok Nath temple in Mandi town. According to tradition, a woman who was about to commit sati had to be brought to this temple before and shown her the image of Goddess sati and inspired her to do so. In Mandi region there is a historical structure of great military importance called Kamlah Garh fort. The Fort was constructed by the Rulers of Mandi, has been one of the strongest forts in the western Himalayas. This fort has a special place in the history of the region as it has guarded the kingdom of Mandi for a long time from the invasions. One of the most comprehensive combinations of iconographic, architectural, and archaeological research is the analysis of numerous structures and images in and around the region of Mandi, which convincingly documents religious shifts in this region. About the temples, it was noticed during the study that most of the temples in Mandi town are in Sikhara style which refers to the rising tower over the sanctum where the presiding deity is enshrined and is the most prominent and visible part of a Hindu temple of north India. Most of them being dedicated to Lord Shiva shows the faith of the rulers in this God. They were, thus, the followers of Shaivism. But later during the reign of Suraj Sen the rulers of Mandi started following Vaishnism due to Madho Rai, who was considered the most powerful ruler after Suraj Sen in the history of Mandi. In Suket, modern Sundernagar, we have four temples dedicated to different Gods, the Suraj Kund temple to Lord Sun, the Jagan Nath to Lord Krishna, the Mahadev temple to Lord Shiva, and the Narsingh temple to Lord Vishnu. All these are also in the Shikhara style and show that the Rulers of Suket had their faith in both the sects, Shaivism and Vaishnism. While studying the architecture of the Mandi district a conclusion that came out is that the features of hill architecture are so because of firstly, the geographical features of the region and secondly, the availability of material.

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