

The Practice and Preservation of Himachali Folk Music

Mentors: Dr. T. Chakraborty, Dr. U. Kumar, Dr. A. Sphar

Alyssa Carta, Ankur Rathore, Caitlin Bagdasarian, Deepika Tanania, Nikita Gupta, Rachna Shaw, Smriti Shankar, Srishti Maurya

1 Abstract

The goal of this project was to ascertain the broader status of folk music in Himachal Pradesh (HP) by closely exploring folk music in the Mandi district of HP to provide recommendations on future preservation efforts. We surveyed the current state of the music scene in HP using exploratory techniques and collected qualitative data for the purpose of preservation and exposure to folk music. We learned that: 1) folk music permeates everyday life and plays a role in major events; 2) the most common folk instruments are the percussive dhol and nagara, and the following wind instruments: shehnai and karnal; 3) the legacy of folk music is primarily threatened by a lack of interest by the younger generation; 4) no public preservation efforts are currently underway. As part of the project, we created a documentary as an accessible resource for an overview of Himachali folk music. We determined that creating a digital folk music archive is an important 'next step' to preserve these important parts of HP culture.

2 Methodology

A Photo Credit: Alyssa Carta, 2024

B Photo Credit: Uma Kumar, 2024

(A) IIT students Nikita and Ankur interviewing local musicians in Kataula. (B) WPI students interviewing Dr. Hukam at All India Radio in Shimla.

4 Recommendations and Conclusions

Distribution of our documentary

Develop an online digital folk music archive

Foster youth engagement in folk music tradition

- Preserving folk music is integral to keeping the identities of rural Himachali communities intact
- It is imperative to keep the rich culture and history of folk music alive
- Young people often choose jobs based on money rather than pursuing music because they think it's not as profitable
- A digital archive would be a valuable resource but motivation and funding are lacking

3 Results and Findings

Functions of Himachali Folk Music:

- Himachali folk music encompasses various genres such as Nati, Jhoori, Laman, and Baman.
- Each song has unique origins and is linked to specific deities.
- Typically, participation comes from families with a Himachali music background, with specific communities specializing in certain genres.
- People from different backgrounds come together and join in song

Kataula locals demonstrating a battle dance. In the past this would have been done with swords, but they are using handkerchiefs.

Locals at Kataula teaching students Nati (the local folk dance of Himachal Pradesh).

Photo Credit: Alyssa Carta, 2024

Instruments Used in Himachali Folk Music:

- Shehnai serves as the conductor for all the other instruments
- Karnal has different carvings depending on the deities
- Metals are now used to make instruments instead of wood or other plants
- Drums and horns can often be heard coming from the mountains and streets, showcasing the prevalence of music

Dhol

Nagara

Shehnai

Karnal

Photo Credit: Smriti Shankar, 2024

Lack of Accurate and Public Preservation Resources:

- No digital Himachali folk music archives currently exist
- Common preservation platforms are viewed as self-serving and materialistic by locals and are therefore avoided
- Although music is such a big part of culture, preservation efforts are still needed

A

B

Photo Credit: Alyssa Carta, 2024

The photos above show the existing preservation efforts at All India Radio (AIR) Shimla. (A) The CD library that they have that contains music of all genres. (B) The recording studio at AIR. They pay folk musicians to come record music and that is then broadcasted

5 Acknowledgments

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