

Cultural And Intangible Aspects of Pedgaon - A Rural Settlement with Cultural Significance

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Abstract - Rural settlements comprises of a complex interplay of tangible and intangible elements that collectively shape their identity. While physical structures like built elements often dominate architectural discourse, the intangible dimensions such as social practices, community involvement, cultural traditions, and spatial behaviors play an equally significant role in defining the experience of a place. This paper elaborates on the village of Pedgaon in Shrigonda taluka, Maharashtra, through the lens of its cultural and intangible heritage that is an important part of the architectural context.

This research explores how everyday practices, including festivals, community interactions, sacred associations, contribute to the dynamic cultural landscape of rural settlements.. Particular emphasis is placed on the relationship between intangible practices and spatial organization, highlighting how elements such as courtyards, otlas, frontyards and streets function as active socio-cultural interfaces rather than passive built forms. Qualitative observations and interpretation of local narratives in the research identifies the intangible heritage that sustains the community bonding, spatial usage, and cultivates a sense of belonging. At the same time, it critically examines the ongoing transformations driven by modernization, changing lifestyles, and material transitions, which pose challenges to the continuity of these cultural practices.

This paper focuses on the integration of intangible aspects and cultural understanding into architectural and planning approaches, advocating for a context-sensitive framework that acknowledges rural settlements as living cultural systems. By foregrounding the intangible aspects, the study contributes to a more holistic understanding of rural environments, emphasizing that the essence of place lies not only in what is built, but in how it is experienced and sustained over time.

Keywords: Community engagement, Culture Intangible aspect,, Pedgaon, Rural settlement

I.INTRODUCTION

Rural settlements in India are not just defined by their physical fabric but by the deeply embedded

cultural practices, social structures, and intangible traditions that shape their life. Pedgaon, located in the Shrigonda taluka of Maharashtra, presents a compelling case where the essence of place extends beyond built form into lived experiences, collective memory, and cultural continuity.

This study aims to explore the intangible cultural dimensions of Pedgaon, focusing on traditions, social practices, spatial behavior, and local knowledge systems.

II. HISTORY OF THE SETTLEMENT

The Bahadurgad Incident (later referred as Dharmaveergad fort) reflects important intangible cultural aspects of Pedgaon, especially its legacy of history, local pride, and strategic intelligence. Stories of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's clever tactics are passed down through generations, shaping the village's cultural identity and collective memory. The event is a symbol of wit over force, bravery, and leadership, which continues to influence local values, storytelling traditions, and a sense of regional pride influencing the culture of Pedgaon.



Figure 1: Historic stone temple structure in Pedgaon, Ahilyanagar district, Maharashtra (Source: Henry Cousens-1931, *The Medieval Temples of Dakkhan*)

III. UNDERSTANDING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Intangible cultural heritage refers to the non-physical aspects of culture, including traditions,

rituals, oral histories, performing arts, and social practices that are passed down through generations. Unlike tangible heritage, these elements are dynamic, evolving, and deeply rooted in everyday life.

In the context of rural settlements, intangible heritage plays a crucial role in the structuring of social interactions, along with defining spatial usage and sustaining community identity. Thus, understanding Pedgaon's culture requires looking beyond its built form and into its lived cultural landscape.



Figure 2: Informal resting spaces under the trees on the roadside, acting as a social gathering space (Source: Google maps)

IV. CULTURAL IDENTITY OF PEDGAON

Pedgaon's identity is shaped by its agrarian roots, historical continuity, and community-based living. The village embodies a strong sense of belonging, where collective memory is preserved through stories, rituals, and shared experiences.

Narratives from the locals often reflect the origin of the settlement, changes in land use and livelihoods and memories of older spatial patterns and traditional lifestyles

These narratives form an intangible archive, influencing how residents perceive their environment and their place within it.

V. SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES

V.i FESTIVALS AND RITUALS

Festivals in Pedgaon are not just religious events but spatial and social phenomena. Celebrations such as Ganesh Utsav, Diwali, local temple yatras, majorly the Friday market transform the village into a collective stage, where streets, courtyards, and open spaces become sites of gathering and performance. Temporary structures, decorations, and processions redefine spatial hierarchies, demonstrating the flexibility and adaptability of rural spaces.

V.ii SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY LIFE



Figure 3: Market place - crowd and the social intangible aspect (Source: Author)

Community life in Pedgaon is characterized by close-knit social networks and frequent interpersonal interactions. Spaces such as otlas (threshold platforms), chowks (open nodes), streets and angans function as informal social areas, facilitating everyday interactions. The village operates on a system of shared responsibilities and mutual dependence, where social identity is closely tied to community participation including the monotony of housework.

V.iii EVERYDAY LIFESTYLE PRACTICES

The locals follow a rhythm in their daily life influenced by climate, occupation, and tradition. Early morning activities, agricultural routines, fishing and evening social gatherings reflect a time-based cultural structure. The locals start their daily routine by catering to the needs of the tourists that may visit the heritage rich area during the day by refilling the water in the earthen pots

Food habits, clothing patterns, and domestic practices further reinforce the regional identity and environmental responsiveness of the community. Daily habits are influenced and in a way dictate the ways of life, reflecting in their architectural element.

VI. INTANGIBLE SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most significant aspects of Pedgaon is the way intangible practices shape spatial organization.



Figure 4: Outdoor spaces influenced by the daily activities (Source: Google maps)

- The angan (frontyard) acts as a multifunctional space for domestic activities, social interaction, and climatic comfort.
- The ota serves as an interface between private and public realms, enabling passive social engagement.
- Streets are not merely circulation paths but extensions of social life, accommodating play, conversation, and communal activities.

These spatial practices highlight that architecture in Pedgaon is not static but evolves through human behavior and cultural norms.

VII. SACRED AND SYMBOLIC LANDSCAPE

Pedgaon's cultural fabric is deeply intertwined with its sacred geography. Temples, shrines, and sacred trees act as spiritual anchors, structuring both movement and meaning within the settlement. These elements contribute to social pathways, collective gathering points, symbolic boundaries

The sacred landscape extends beyond built structures, embedding spirituality into the everyday environment and spatial perception.

VIII. ORAL TRADITIONS AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

The intangible heritage of Pedgaon is further enriched by its traditions and local knowledge systems.

- Folk songs, bhajans, and kirtans reflect emotional and cultural expression
- Local dialects encode identity and belonging

- Mixed culture demographics ensures secularity and unity



Figure 5: Spaces utilised for weekly markets (Source: Author)

Such knowledge systems represent a sustainable way of living, evolved through generations of interaction with the local environment.

IX. ANALYSIS

The study thus demonstrates that intangible cultural attributes are not an addition to the built environment; instead, they form an integral dimension of its creation. Social interactions, ritual practices, and adaptation to the environment constitute the configuration of space in Pedgaon.

Therefore, overlooking such aspects while planning and developing may lead to a loss of cultural identity and spatial relevance. Any future intervention thus needs to be culture-sensitive by integrating intangible heritage into design and policy frameworks.

X. CONCLUSION

Pedgaon exemplifies the process whereby rural settlements operate as living cultural systems, with intangible elements like tradition, social practice, and local knowledge critically shaping space and community life. The retention of such intangible dimensions thus calls for a need beyond cultural continuity, i.e., contextually appropriate and sustainable development. Recognition and integration of such dimensions would therefore

contribute to a more holistic perspective of rural architecture: a perspective that appreciates what is constructed and how it is lived.

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