A Walk Through Heritage Village of Himachal Pradesh

(A Case of Garli-Pragpur Village)

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Abstract – The case study of Pragpur Garli villages has been carried to understand the concept of Heritage Zone, as these were the first villages to attain that. This status was attained between 1997 and 2002. As the history goes back, Sood community of Himachal Pradesh played a very important role in establishing these village and since then, they have been showcasing their presence there; be it in the case of construction style or trading matters. Although, since then, many grand building have been revived by their owner or the government, the villages still hold that essence of the past.

Key Words: Heritage village, Pragpur, Garli, Tourism Himachal Pradesh

1. INTRODUCTION

The heritage villages of garli-Pragpur are one of the first villages in India to have a “Heritage Zone” status, the small twin villages are popular original homelands of Sood community. They have been showcasing there excellent construction skills by building great monuments and bungalows in their own village, which in this case are Pragpur and garli. The mentioned buildings have a blend of many architectural styles with the Indo-sarcenic being the most predominating one, Far from the monotony of mud thatched houses in the surrounding these twin heritage villages and out with their unique grandeur.

From the early 19th century and to next two decades, the area of Kangra hills and the area including Pragpur and Garli, was under the domain of Raja Ranjit singh. However, when British made Shimla as their summer capital, Soods grabbed the opportunity and established Garli and Pragpur. Considering most of them were traders, they started setting up businesses and entered government explaining their huge wealth. The buildings very much reflect their power and influence. The village was divided into 4 residential blocks, the services settlement and an institutional area. Sood Bhaichara was a supreme council, which was in charge of management of affairs of these villages. Different communities were segregated by the separate areas provided to them. Same was done for various sood clans too, as distinctive areas were allotted to them to set up their habitation. Till this date, more or less, same division is still continuing.

Fig. 1 View of Garli Village

1.1 Heritage Status

Pragpur was recognized as heritage village on 9th December 1997 and in 2002 Garli village, which is within 3kms from Pragpur, was declared heritage village due to remarkable blend of architectural styles here. Later the state government classified Pragpur Garli as a ‘Heritage Zone’ and was developed into a Rural Heritage site with the help of The Indian National Trust, for Art and Cultural Heritage. This zone can be considered ideal for rural & Eco tourism. Moreover, it is also being endorsed as a great example involvement of community in tourism, with its success.

Creation of SADA (Special Area Development Authority) has been declared by the government for the improvement of infrastructure in the area, in the concerned tourism terms.

1.2 Tourism in Heritage Zone

The state of Himachal Pradesh has been one of the most famous tourist attraction centre in terms of natural and scenic beauty, with every district offering something unique on its own like the state capital Shimla is known for its heritage building built by Britishers holds something captivating about it. There are four major tourist circuits namely:

- Sutlej Circuit
- Beas Circuit
- Dhauladhar Circuit
- Tribal Circuit
The Pragpur Garli block comes under the Dhauladhar circuit, it is most welcoming between the months of March to October. Between March to October, the climate is warm and pleasant with temperature ranging from 14 degree Celsius to 28 Degree Celsius. Winters tend to be very cold with temperature reaching up to 4 to -12 degree Celsius. About 95% of the visitors visiting Pragpur are the pleasure seeking tourists, who visits the area for scenic beauty, flora fauna and heritage village. The number of foreign tourists is almost equal as domestic tourist. About less than 1% of tourist visiting the Dhauladhar circuit visit Pragpur Garli villages.

2. EXPLORING HERITAGE VILLAGES (GARLI & PARAGPUR)

2.1 The Village Tank

The villages had a central tank or a tank which were accessible by everyone which was a source of secondary supply of water, the primary and the most important was the water supply by pipe system.

The tank in Pragpur is a result of the overflow of pipes and was made in the middle of the 19th century due to water shortage problems. There are bio filters present in the tank so as to maintain the continuous flow in water thus avoiding stagnancy. The services of the tank are managed by Neher Vikas Samiti and the pipes haven’t been changed since the time they were installed and are still standing strong with very less maintenance.

2.2 The Market

The village market in Garli is well connected to the entire village thus being accessible easily. It promotes local art that includes pottery and knitting. The market is situated long the slope and can be accessed by narrow lanes of width 1.5 – 2m. Thus only pedestrian and two vehicular entry is possible causing less traffic and congestion. The houses are planned along with the market areas with commercial spaces down and their houses above. The market and houses are spaced closer to each other with sole purpose of trapping heat.

2.3 Flora and Fauna

Pragpur-Garli region has sub-tropical species of trees and scrub forest consisting of trees like khair, kachnar and Siris. The soil and climate is perfectly suited for fruit cultivation, Beas Basin soils are deep alluvial Silty loam with neutral pH and high fertility status.
3. ARCHITECTURE

Pragpur is a great example of a 150 year old settlement which is an ancient town planning as well as architecture. The merchant’s travelled abroad and returned to build mansions schools and hospitals in architectural styles that matched what they observed during their visits. However, as they had always been living in the brick houses, Garli also continued with it along with timber too. Most of the buildings now are either abandoned, divided into many families or are occupied by tenants. Although their maintenance is still almost zero, their outer shells still fascinate the visitors.

2.4 Slope

Pragpur block have South West to North East Elevation in contrast to the whole Kangra district which has just the opposite elevation.

2.4 Demographic Data

Location: Garli
- According to census
- Number of houses: 118
- Population: 542
- Sex Ratio (Average): 971/1000
- Literacy rate: 95.64%

Location: Pragpur
- According to census
- Number of houses: 511
- Population: 2107
- Sex Ratio (Average): 1046/1000
- Literacy rate: 92.69%

Being a completely rural block, the economy of Pragpur is mainly agrarian. Government services forms the next major profession. As per constitution of India and Panchayati Raj Act. Both Garli and Pragpur are administrated by Sarpanchs who are the elected representative of villages.

Turning every corner, the architectural influences can be seen from around the world.

- Italian (Projecting eaves supported by corbels, imposing cornice structures, arch headed openings, angled bay windows)
- Spanish (tower like chimney, arcades, ornamented iron works)
- There were even motifs that resembled Celtic knots.

Features of indo-saracenic and colonial architecture we observed:

- Windows towards the street are small and usually strongly barred in lower stories. However, windows those in upper stories are often being ornamented.
- Walls are constructed with the use of local materials and are ornamented with very minute surface details.
- Openings’ shape varied from circular to multi-foil Arches, rest on piers or columns.
• Doorways used to be surrounded with very elaborate carving, enclosed in either a square or rectangular frame.

3.1 The Chateau Garli

In the heritage Village of Chateau hotel Garli can be seen, which is located in the foothills of Dhauladhar Range. It was built by Lala Mela Ram Sood. Though, in the year of 1921, as no one has been visiting it for last 20 years, it fell into the state of shabbiness. However in September 2012, Lala Mela Ram’s great grandson visited Garli for a week and realised the heritage and potential of the place. This led to the restoration of the structure to its previous glory, however revived from a totally different perspective.

Fig 8 The Front approach flanked with Turrets (Source: Author)

The architecture is Of Indo Saracen type. However there is a lot of local architecture seen too such as the use of materials such as bricks. The use of stained glass windows is a prominent feature seen almost everywhere, Special prominent feature are enclosed galleries and Jharokas. Wooden covered verandas, wooden staircases, stone foundations, jaali work, are other features. A swimming pool was later aided into the premises keeping in mind the idea of a hotel.

Fig 9 Stained Glass Window (Source: Author)

Fig 10 Projecting Jharokhas (Source: Author)

3.2 The Judges Court

If the grandest structure of the Pragpur is discussed, it is The Judge's Court; ancestral home of Vilai and Rani Lal, which is almost 300 year old and has been converted into a very posh resort. Lovingly restored over several years, it is Pragpur’s chief attraction. Adorning this two-storied brick-red mansion and its 6 spacious rooms is period furniture and black and white family pictures on its walls, evoking a nostalgic sense of grandeur, like leafing through an old family album. It has been wreathed with antiques furniture which offers appropriate amount of class to rooms. A cobbled lane outside the mansion gates Winds through Pragpur village to the ornamental water tank.

Fig 11 The Back Lawn of the Premises (Source: https://www.audleytravel.com/india/places-to-go/pragpur)
The architecture of the Kothi is an Indo-European fusion style. It consists of huge hallways and passages and all the rooms connected centrally. The Kothi being the most important building is surrounded by the other houses. Arches, Jharokas, small doorways, Jaali windows are some of the features of their uses of designing houses. Narrow lanes between houses entrap heat thus maintaining a comfortable Temperature Within the houses.

3.3 All-Girls School, Garli
An all-girls school is located besides the village water body in Garli. The school caters to students from class 1 to class 10.
3.4 Naurang Yatri Niwas

Naurang Yatri Niwas is located in Heritage Village Garli. It is a very intricate brick structure, which over the years, ended up becoming housing for travelers and dealers who use to come to Garli for trade purposes. Garli was one of the most prominent marketable centers during the first half of the 20th century, extending its reach in both political and economic sector from Afghanistan to Shimla. Nonetheless, in the mid-1940s it was plundered by the elements.

On visiting, site it is approached by a series of arches made of brick. The front façade is made of bricks. As we enter through the main gateway the ceiling is of barrel vault further opening to an open courtyard. The use of jaali work is prominent.

The interiors have been preserved to the level of maximum originality. Using a minimalist approach each room is tastefully furnished with cotton linen. It is functional, yet elegantly comfortable. Well ventilated and open, the need of air conditioning is rarely felt.
3. DOCUMENTATION OF RESIDENCE

The site is located in the quiet, yet beautiful village of Garli in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. Declared as a heritage village in 2001 with the aim to protect its rich architectural and cultural heritage, it truly is a place worth visiting. The place is with its rustic havelis and other landmark buildings like Chateau Hostel, Garli.

The site comprises of two havelis that are similar to each other approached by narrow passageway. The two houses are divided by a central open green space comprising of Tulsi plants and other varieties of Flora. The green space is surrounded by a pathway cladded with bricks in herringbone pattern. The other structures comprises of a detached kitchen that is not in use and a separate store for each of the residence. The site is surrounded by mango and jamun trees.
The plan shows that the structure is of load bearing type with the decrease of floor height as one goes up. The walls are of bricks. However, use of wooden verandah at G+1 floor is also seen. The use of false ceiling is seen as one goes up and bamboos and timber used as rafter and the main post respectively.

The ground floor plan is approached by verandah at the ground level with three entrance points approached by thick paneled doors.

As one enters, the first room is living room/ sitting space area further leading to bathroom.

The first floor is then approached by three wooden staircase oriented at the center of the plan. The staircase further leading to the sitting areas at the first floor and further connected with bathrooms at the one side and to the closed verandah at the other.
As one finally goes further up by the staircase to the level of second floor, the plan is almost similar to the previous plans with the exception of an open terrace at the top level.

Fig 31 Second Floor Plan (Source: Author)

The new kitchen that has been newly constructed is attached at one side of the building with respect to its main approach. Whereas the old kitchen, is a detached structure and currently used as a storage space.

Fig 32 Open Terrace at Second Floor (Source: Author)

The front elevation has all the prominent details showing a fusion of architectural features ranging from colonial to that of local architectural traits (timber, posts, wooden verandah, design on eaves board, slate roof).

Fig 34 Front Elevation (Source: Author)

The back elevation has no prominent projections, but is a plain brick façade with small opening at ground floor level and windows at the subsequent level. The windows at the top level have segmental arches whereas those at first floor level are flat brick arched.

Fig 35 Rear Elevation (Source: Author)

Fig 36 Left Side Elevation (Source: Author)
The Wooden paneled doors with wooden carvings are clearly seen as an influence from local architecture and blended with multi-foil shaped arches as door panels at top level.
The column from the ground level to top is basically of Doric order, yet amalgamated with elements of Mughal architecture as well as the elements from colonial references.
4. CONCLUSION

The village of Garli Pragpur become a heritage village on 1997. The village has some very remarkable buildings known for their unique style of architecture which is a blend of many styles. Upon the analysis of the site and the entire settlement at large scale, one can say that the rich architectural and cultural heritage of the place is intertwined and must be preserved to the best of our capacity. It is disappointing however that most of the structures at the site were in dilapidated condition. The only thing that truly stands out is that, even after 100 to 200 years these magnificent structures are still standing and their outer shells reminding us of our ancestral heritage and influences of European architecture imprinted forever in history.

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