

# Conserving Continuously Evolving Cultural Landscapes of Vernacular Settlements: Insights from the Village Nirmand, Himachal Pradesh, India

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Received	Accepted	Published
27.06.24	21.08.2024	31.08.2024

<https://doi.org/10.61275/ISVSej-2024-11-08-04>

## Abstract

Hill settlements have emerged and evolved respecting the given condition of Nature. The elements of the settlement pattern reflect the tenets responding to the socio-cultural-geographical context. The scientific & technological adaptations, innovations, and creations address culture-specific physical and psychological needs. The historical hill settlement of village Nirmand in Himachal Pradesh, India exhibits components of its origin and evolution. The settlement pattern, neighbourhood clusters, and house forms of the village are filled with religious significance, sensitivity towards local materials, technology, climate-responsive solutions, and architectural details. The living indigenous settlements have sustained and evolved over many years. However, with rapid urbanisation and changes in living patterns, the settlement is losing its value. The paper investigates ways to retain the authenticity and integrity associated with indigenous living hill settlements against the changing dynamics.

This research employs the empirical research method. Before the field visit, secondary data collection was conducted to establish historical background. The fieldwork has been conducted periodically to understand patterns of change in the settlement. The research method involves an ethnographic approach to decipher the socio-cultural attributes of the community. During the field visit, the documentation of architectural components, mapping of neighbourhoods, community interaction, stakeholders' consultation, and visual documentation were conducted. The collected data has been analysed further to synthesise findings.

Findings indicate that the patterns of change have accelerated due to urbanisation. The expansion of the settlement away from its centre, and the increase in the use of modern materials and construction techniques are threatening the authenticity of the settlement. The research concludes that the dynamics of issues both, natural and man-made are threatening the values associated with the settlement. Unless urgent actions with sensitivity toward Nature, culture, and community are undertaken, the settlement might lose its integrity.

**Keywords:** Cultural Landscape, Settlement Pattern, Urbanization, Continuity & Change, Authenticity, Integrity, Values

## Introduction

Vernacular settlements have always originated and flourished in coherence with the given conditions of Nature. Constructed using locally available resources, with bare minimum needs, the vernacular settlements have been the best examples reflecting relationships between man and Nature. In this conception, indigenous communities have always kept Mother Nature supreme, and hence their tangible and intangible tenets have always suggested a sense of respect towards the same. The hill settlement of Nirmand village has interesting features, attributes, and characteristics that depict how man and Nature's relationships lead to the generation of distinguished cultures and cultural forms.

Nirmand village represents significant tenets that have been at the epitome of its emergence, evolution, and sustenance. These tenets comprise natural and cultural considerations reflected through the attitude towards the generated built living environment. However, with rapid growth and urbanization, the settlement is undergoing additions, alterations, and modifications in the built environment. With changing way of life the narrow streets and small entrances to the house forms have limitations to accommodate amenities. The shift in the building construction technology from traditional to modern has given rise to the new structures. To be close to the main road to the village for better connectivity, the settlement is sprawling outwards, away from the core. Inhabitants have left their Indigenous dwellings and have moved out to this new bustling area making the traditional built forms abandoned.

These newer structures are built using reinforced cement concrete, instead of local materials such as timber and stone. Thus, the new development is strikingly distinguished from the traditional settlement with the change in form, scale, material, texture, and construction style. The new development does not comprise the attributes that the traditional built forms have, making it appear context-less. The impact of climate change is also visible in the region which has resulted in water scarcity, reduced moisture retaining capacity in the soil, a decrease in animal rearing, and agricultural activities.

The paper is an effort to identify issues at the grassroots level and decipher methods, ways, and possibilities that may help to retain the authenticity associated with the cultural landscape, amidst the rising challenges of urbanization and issues that are threats to the associated values. The study aims to investigate the impact of the changing dynamics on the values associated with the constantly evolving cultural landscape of Nirmand. The objectives are:

1. To understand the attributes of the cultural site,
2. To document the cultural forms,
3. To study the pattern of change,
4. To analyse the impact of change on the values
5. To provide recommendations for retaining the authenticity and integrity

## Theoretical Framework

Organically evolved cultural landscapes are the result of the continuous evolution of the interaction between Man and Nature. The cultural milieu comprising distinguished socio-cultural–religious–and economic realms reflects the deeply rooted linkages and associations with their natural settings, in which they have evolved through changing times. As stated in Annexure 3 of the operational guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention, the "cultural landscape" embraces a diversity of manifestations of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment. Indigenous surviving settlements still retain their components, attributes, and significance reflecting the evolution through the way of life and material culture of the inhabitants.

Demetri Porphyrios defines vernacular architecture as examples of straightforward construction, to the rudimentary building of shelter, which is an activity that exhibits reason, efficiency, economy, durability, and pleasure (Oliver, 2003). These tenets demonstrate challenges, opportunities, patterns of change, and precursors leading to layered and dynamic characteristics where the close interrelationships between Nature, culture, and cultural forms

can closely be observed. Built with community, these settlements are reflections of a shared way of life & value system, signifying affordability, sustainability, and adaptability.

Vernacular settlements address the needs, both tangible and intangible of the ethnic groups. Vernacular houses are built to meet specific needs, accommodating values, economies, and way of life of the culture that produces them (Oliver, 1997). The evolution of culture & cultural forms undergoes advancements, improvisations, and modifications with changing times to accommodate newly arisen needs. The indigenous knowledge traditions passed on from one generation to the next have made the continuity of these cultural practices possible. Embodying values and needs, homes are built with integrity, and authenticity in ways that have frequently achieved beauty of form and unity of design, and in turn are transmitted to subsequent generations (Oliver, 2003)

## Review of Literature

The hill settlements have continuously evolved leading to transformations in the fabric. As discussed by many eminent scholars, Rapoport (1969); Jackson (1985); Glassie (1990); and Oliver (1997), vernacular houses reflect the culture and the changes taking place in society. These transformations are visible through the manifestations in the built environment signifying a changing notion of way of life. As Edward (2008) says, it is important to remember that cultural or architectural change, when conscious or deliberate, can produce a cultural fabric that continues to represent the local goals and the vernacular system. The vernacular landscape is considered a representation of its creators, reflecting cultural change and providing evidence of cultural processes (Lewis, 1975, 1979a; Rapoport, 1982a; Upton and Vlach, 1986; Glassie 1990, 2000; Heath, 2009).

As discussed by Pargunde & Desai, (2019) it is evident that settlements transform as they witness the changing social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. As Thakkar (2019) argues, the acceleration in the process of change and transformation is the result of globalization and urbanization which also encourages the use of modern construction techniques excessively. The change in materials leads to drastically different perceptions of the landscape together with the context-less nature of the newly used materials. In the long run, new materials often lead to new forms as the previous forms were somewhat dictated by the characteristics of accessible construction materials (Dasgupta, 2008). Additionally, modern aspirations are an important factor in landscape change, often leading to adjustments in traditional space use and behaviour. (Singh, 2008).

Rapoport, (1969) states that these changes are direct expressions of changing values, perceptions, and ways of living. Kotharkar & Deshpande, (2012); and Vellinga & Asquith, (2006) show that the changes in the spatial organization of the vernacular settlements at multiple levels are influenced by the social, cultural, economic, and political changes and hence the precursors leading to these changes need to be understood. These developments are due to rural-urban migrations, improved transportation systems, information revolution, and a change in attributes and values due to external influence. Dayaratne (2008) says that these factors have led to vernacular becoming a rare and conservable entity, rather than being a part of a settlement.

Defining the spirit of place requires identifying and preserving the various features that make a place unique, and vernacular buildings are a crucial component in this task as their presence ties people to a common past (Lewis, 1979b; Relph, 1976 and 1993; Speake, 2007). The identification of the gap created between the existing and the upcoming built form is crucial to managing the loss of history, information, and ethnicity of a region and its people. Documenting and analyzing the transformations will allow the creation of policies and design standards to regulate these changes to retain the vernacular practices. (Jagatramka, Kumar & Pipralia, 2020)

Thus, it has been established that changes in the evolving cultural landscapes take place eventually. However, once the pattern of change accelerates the dynamic impact on the visual integrity of the cultural landscape becomes strikingly visible raising the need to take action to regulate the change. The study of the past evidence and current scenarios of cultural landscapes

indicates the patterns of transformations and the dynamic impacts of these transformations on various cultural components of the vernacular settlement.

### Research Methodology

This research employs the case study method. The case of the village Nirmand has been selected to understand the transformation of the vernacular settlements in hilly regions. The study inquires about a multi-layered and dynamic relationship between the culture and the settlement pattern where the impact of transformations on the evolving cultural landscape has been analyzed. The study incorporates primary and secondary data to trace the aspects of changes and continuity over time. The field studies have been periodically carried out in the years 2011, 2012, 2014, and 2021 by the author.

During these field visits, the elements of the settlement have been studied and documented. The architectural components associated with the site have been documented in the form of measured drawings, observation sketches, analytical diagrams, and photographs. The cultural practices, lifestyle, and other intangible parameters associated with the community have been studied with ethnographic methods. The stakeholders were consulted by interviewing inhabitants, farmers, officials, and local governing bodies.

The study has led to identifying and establishing the cultural attributes that are tenets behind the emergence of the settlement of village Nirmand. Further, the mapping of the changes has led to identifying issues that are threats to the established significant values associated with the place.

The continuous research on this selected case since the Year 2012 with a multidisciplinary approach has been incorporated with an ethnographic study where an emic approach has been adopted. The study deciphers the impact on socio-cultural-religious values associated with the built forms and cultural landscapes. The observations recorded during the stays at the village and dialogues with inhabitants also provided insights into intangible practices that otherwise could not have been traced.

### The Case Study: Location, Setting & the Geographical Context

As shown in the Figure 1, the district Kullu is located between two rivers Bias and Satluj, in which Nirmand is one of the biggest villages located at the height of 1493.52 meters above the sea level. It is located 17 km Northeast of Rampur which is one of the thriving towns on the banks of Satluj River. Unlike any other vernacular settlements, Nirmand village exhibits tenets of physical considerations regarding given conditions of Nature. As seen in the Figure 2, the settlement responds to the topographical condition. The village is surrounded by upper and lower contours having elevations ranging from 1300 mtrs to 1600 mtrs. The location of spring water has been one of the major factors behind the chosen locations for residential clusters. The structures are built using locally available stones and timber. The derived forms having shingles as roof covering and harmonious cluster formation along the terrains have created a distinguished cultural landscape that coincides with the natural setting. The satellite image illustrates that the settlement is isolated and densely organized towards the lower contour, while the upper contours have scattered built forms.



**Fig. 1:** Map depicting the location of Nirmand, District Kullu, Himachal Pradesh

Source: <http://arki-travel.blogspot.in/2012/06/hill-stations-of-india.html>





**Fig. 2:** Satellite Map Depicting the Settlement of Nirmand  
Source: Google Maps, 2014

## Findings

### Cultural attributes

As per the Census of India, 1991, the town comprises indigenous communities such as Brahmin, Rajput, Bairagi, Kayastha, Sud, Mahajan, Sunar, Kumhar, Lujar, Chamar, Dagi, Kattait, and Koli. Mainly inhabitants are land owners and agrarians, cultivating their small strips. The majority of routine work related to farming is done by women.

Nirmand must have been a commercial center of some importance in Eastern Himachal Pradesh long before the small cities such as Mandi, Rampur, Bilaspur, and others gained fame (Postel, Neven and Mankodi, 1985). A trade route branching from the Beas at the present village of Aut proceeded over the Jalauri Pass, to Nirmand, Rampur Bushahr, Sarhan, and onto Tibet. The earliest record dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD which mentions names of the rulers, as well as socio-cultural and political aspects of that era. According to oral history, it is believed that the town was established by Lord Parshuram (God of Hindu mythology). The folklore says that Parshuram had organized *Yagna* (*religious offerings-ritual*) and invited Brahmin communities from across the country. After the ritual was completed, he insisted the Brahmins to settle down permanently at this place and build their residences. The Figure 3 shows the Parashuram temple located at the centre of the village.



**Fig. 3a & b:** Parshuram Temple & Surroundings  
Source: Author, 2013

### Settlement Pattern of the Village Nirmand

The settlement pattern of the village Nirmand as shown in the Figure 4, exhibits distinguished features. It comprises clusters with shared community spaces serving the daily needs. Architectural elements exhibit climate-responsive attributes at the dwelling as well as the cluster level. The cultural attributes associated with the built forms have outstanding religious significance at the dwelling, cluster and settlement levels.



**Fig. 4:** Settlement of the Village Nirmand  
Source: Mr. Naresh Bhatt, 2012

As shown in the Figure 5, the traditional settlement is divided into seven clusters: Shigaavli Maholla, Sunarala Maholla, Parshuram Maholla, Takol Maholla, Bhyuta Maholla, Dim Maholla, and the Jarla Maholla. The Parshuram temple is central to the emergence of the village. All other community clusters have evolved keeping it central. These clusters are dedicated to the distinguished Brahmin Gotras having their native deity temple. The premise of the temple is pivotal being the primary religious center for the community. Most of these sacred centers in each cluster comprise spring water sources. However, these water tanks around temples have dried up. The location of the sacred center next to the source of water signifies the worship of the elements from Nature.



**Fig. 5:** Settlement Pattern of Nirmand in the Context of Sacred Centers  
Source: Author, 2012

## Neighbourhoods: Formations of Clusters

The formation of the clusters parallel to the natural terrain makes the built environment coherent with the natural setting. The residential neighbourhoods have evolved around the sacred center (community deity temple) in respective clusters. Formation of the house forms is in such a pattern that most of the residences are entered through the primary street, while the rear sides of the houses create shared open spaces. The orientation and placement of all houses parallel to the natural terrain provide clear spaces in the front allowing natural light to penetrate the verandas and open spaces in front of the houses. These open spaces serve as multi-functional community spaces. These shared open spaces are not directly accessible to outsiders. It signifies the private nature of the space.

As shown in the diagram in the Figure 6, the organization of the dwellings creates different cluster patterns. The first diagram depicts the dwelling cluster in Bhyuta Maholla where the entrance from one of the corners of the streets leads to the inner residential cluster being resided by the same community. The central space is utilized by all the neighbours, while any outsider is restricted from entering the space. The second diagram is another typology of cluster formation from the Takol Maholla. Here, the tertiary street leads to two courts on both sides which are surrounded by a cluster of houses. The third diagram is the situation from the Shigaavali Maholla where the dwellings are organized in a linear pattern rather than surrounding the court from all the sides. Here, the size of the shared open space is also less compared to the earlier situations. Evidence indicates that with changing times, the idea of a strong sense of defense and security has dissolved and has shifted to a close-knit formation of the clusters.

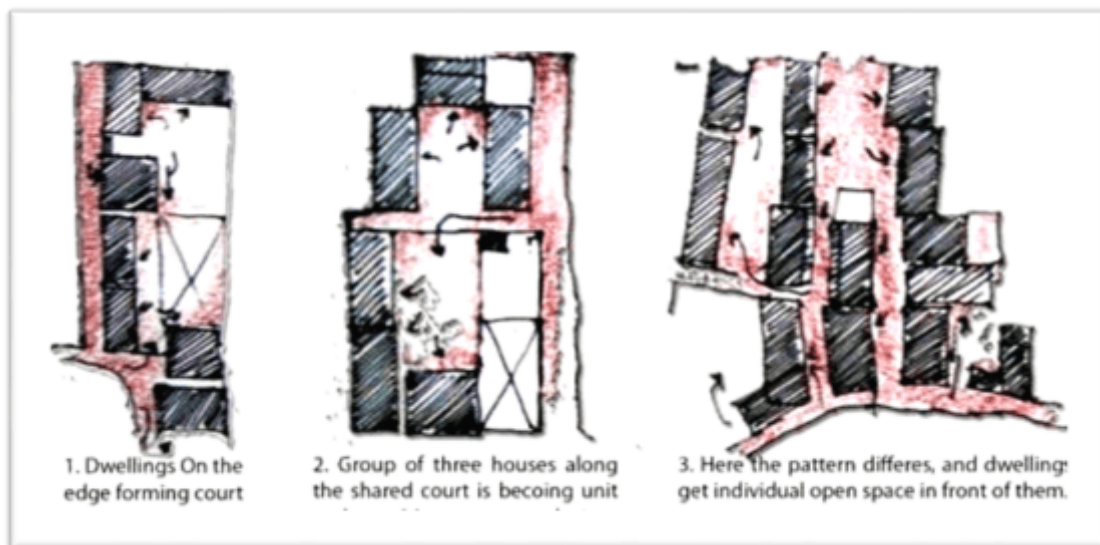


Fig. 6: Diagram Depicting Various Cluster Formations

Source: Author, 2012

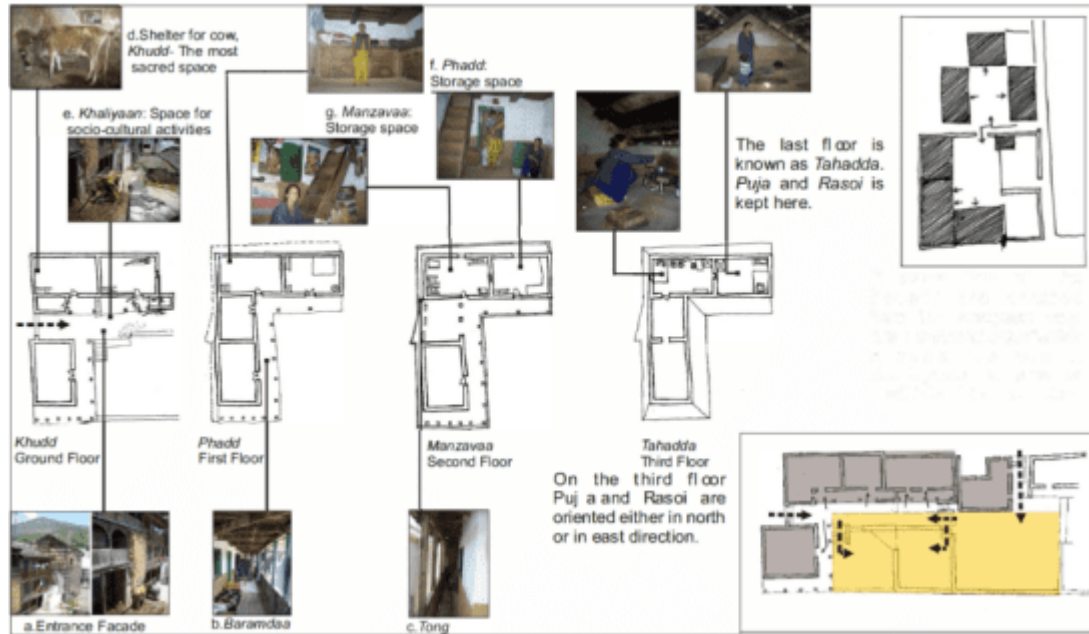
## House Forms

Traditionally, each dwelling is comprised of Khaliyan: a small open space. This space is used mainly for outdoor cooking, to have maximum exposure to sunlight during the cold seasons. This space accommodates activities related to agriculture, cleaning and storing, and organizing small gatherings during the festivities or ceremonies. The traditional house forms are divided into four floors as shown in the figure 7. The ground floor of the house is known as Khudd, the space where cattle are kept. The next floor is called Phadd, a space to store cattle food and farming-related items.

The second floor is known as Manzavaa which comprises the family living space. The later development of the built forms has projecting balconies on the second floor on either two or three sides of the enclosed space. Needing sunlight during the cold seasons, these semi-open



spaces become platforms to conduct most of the household activities, such as cleaning the grains, drying food items, weaving, eating as well as resting. These balconies are the most active space in the entire house for all the genders and groups across-the-age. Once the sun sets, activities shift from the semi-open areas to enclosed spaces. The top floor is called Tahdda, where the kitchen and religious shrine exist. This is considered the most sacred area of the entire house and no outsider is permitted to enter this space. Most traditional dwellings directly have enclosed space on the ground floor, while the evolution of the house form has incorporated semi-open spaces to the entrance with timber supports, forming a veranda.



**Fig. 7:** Schematic Diagram Depicting Spatial Analysis of Traditional House form  
Source: Author, 2012

Most traditional houses are entered through a single door as shown in the Figure 8, which is also used for cattle. Here, the entrances are very narrow and small with an average height of one meter. The cows of the region are very small in size and hence they can enter through the small door. Safety, security and the adverse climatic conditions are the physical considerations that have led to the size of the entrance.

According to the significant cultural aspects associated with a belief system, one must bow his or her head before entering into a sacred place. The main entrance is made wide out of stone or wood with intricate carvings. The ornamentation depicts Nature or mythological symbols and the sacredness of the place.



**Fig. 8:** Elaborate Entrance Doors in Nirmand  
Source: Author, 2012



### Building Materials & Construction Technologies

The distinguished assembly of materials and techniques evolved indicates the uniqueness associated with each cultural group and their indigenous attributes. As shown in the Figure 9, the houses are built using timber and stone construction techniques locally known as Kathkhuni. This traditional construction practice is widely seen across European, Mediterranean, and East Asian regions. The stone and timber construction technique depicts technological advancements and a resilient system towards seismic forces. Further, the careful and strategic orientation parallel to the terrain also signifies the consideration of seismic forces. The frame of the walls is made with parallel timber members, while the infill is done with stone pieces.



**Fig. 9:** Traditional Dwellings with Stone & Timber Construction Technique  
Source: Author, 2012

### Religion: Manifestation of Culture

The settlement of village Nirmand is tangibly and intangibly driven by religious attributes. Apart from the Hindu Gods and Goddesses, inhabitants worship “devta” which are the local deities. They also worship elements from Nature and hence these practices also help to conserve the resources from the Mother Nature which are essential for the survival of the inhabitants.

Way of life of most of the inhabitants closely revolve around religious practices, where daily rituals, worshipping community deities, participating in Bhajan-Kirtans, and offering Bhog to the house deity are some of the main customs. Women of Nirmand practices religious songs and worship the Gods and Goddesses by gathering in the neighbourhoods. These songs depict and glorify the deities. Women of the communities wear indigenous attire as shown in the Figure 10, with silver jewelry, and also observe fast on the significant religious days.



**10:** Women of the Village Performing Sacred Rituals  
Source: Author, 2012

**Fig.**

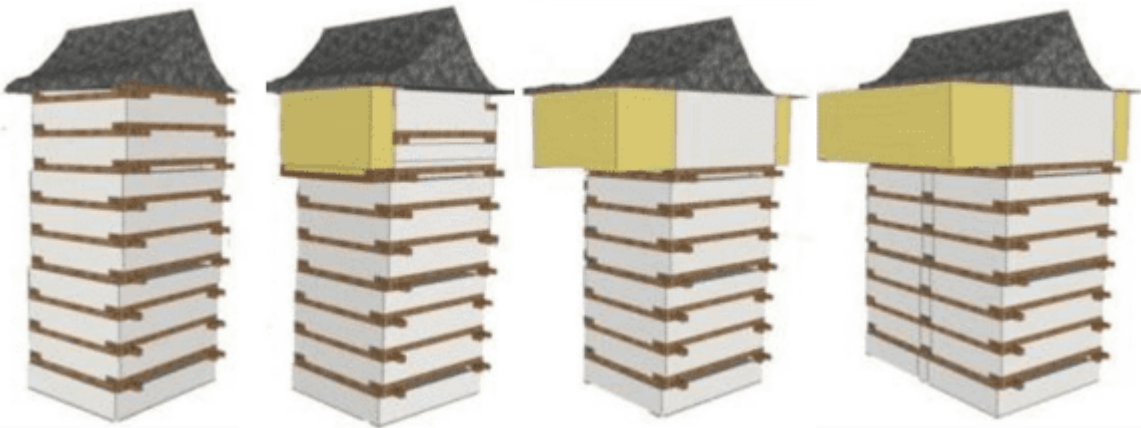
The fairs and festivals of Nirmand also revolve mainly around religious significance. The most important festival of Nirmand is organized every 12 years in the memory of Lord Parashuram, involving rituals of animal sacrifice. During these fairs and festivals, the religious procession is taken with all deities of the clusters and is journeyed through the entire town on a traditional route connecting the sacred centres of all the primary clusters'. Deities are taken out in palanquins accompanied by musicians, priests, and inhabitants. It is believed that these Gods are the decision-makers of the welfare of everyone in the entire village.

### Occupations

Traditional communities used to be involved mainly in pastoral and agricultural activities. Most of the inhabitants live in the vicinity of one to three kilometers where they go early morning and return by forenoon. Again, in the evening, they visit their farms, settle their cattle, and return to their dwellings. Most of the time, all the activities related to farming and cattle herding are taken care of by women. The occupation shift has been observed towards contemporary systems of government and private job sectors. Today the inhabitants have jobs in the surrounding towns such as Rampur, Aut and the other villages.

### Continuity & Change

Over the period, the settlement has evolved keeping the Parashuram Temple as a sacred central point. The evolution of the house forms depicts a transformation of the traditional dwellings from no projections to multiple projections on the upper floors, with spatial expansions by repetition of the module in a similar construction style. As illustrated below in the Figure 11, the most original house form is a rectilinear space with a sloping roof. The pattern depicts a strong consideration of climatic conditions and aspects of security. The second stage of evolution signifies the inclusion of projected balconies serving as an extension to the living room. The later stage indicates an expansion of the space in the planar form. Here, the inner space has become rectangular instead of square, by repetition of twin square house form as a module.



**Fig. 11:** Evolution of the Traditional House forms

Source: Author, 2014

The last development of the indigenous construction technique depicts built forms with an added screen of façade which are built with timber and elaborated with embellishments and carvings depicting the socio-cultural status of the inhabitants. Most of the surviving traditional house forms are from this stage. The surviving houses from the previous stages are less in number and mostly in dilapidated conditions. The Figure 12 depicts a typical traditional cluster.



**Fig. 12:** Evolution of the Traditional House forms  
Source: Author, 2014

### Transforming the Cultural Landscape

The settlement is rapidly expanding towards the approach road. This part of the settlement comprises the market. The changing way of life has encouraged new installations and interventions. The traditional narrow streets and compact dwellings with small openings have limitations to accommodate these changing needs. Hence, it has been observed that the new residential built forms are being constructed near the approach road, away from the core settlement. The newly built structures are built using modern materials and construction technology.

The shift towards the market area has led to the traditional dwellings being abandoned. However, having a sacred notion associated with the dwellings, the owners visit their ancestral homes every day to perform rituals, offer food, and worship the house deity. These customs have made the abandoned traditional houses still partially occupied. In many clusters, the Khaliyans have been replaced with the insertion of newly built forms with contemporary construction technologies and building materials as shown in the Figure 13.



**Fig. 13:** Transforming the Cultural Landscape of Nirmand  
Source: Author, 2014

Traditional agricultural activities have dwindled with shifts in the weather patterns and the impact of climate change. Scarcity of water and the decreased moisture retaining capacity of soil have worsened the condition while the water sources have also dried. According to the stakeholder consultation with Ms Namrata, Smt. Negi, Smt. Thakur, Smt. Kashyap and Smt Gupta, (March 2012, Near Parashuram Temple) Approximately thirty years ago, the village

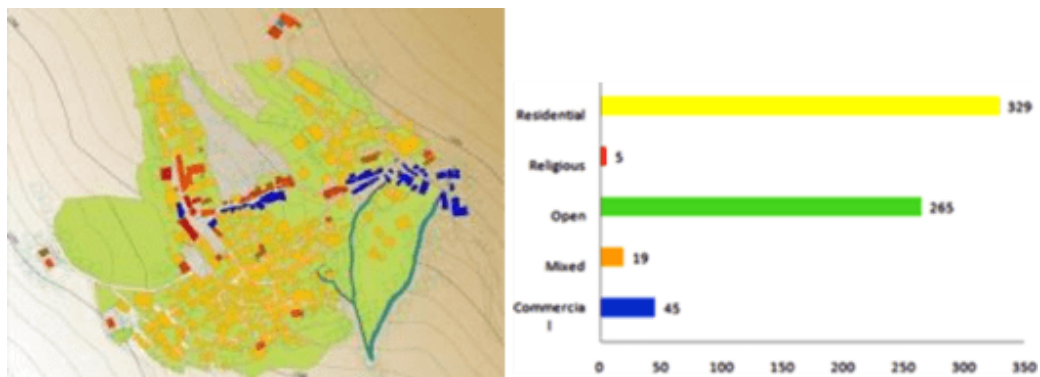


was self-sustained with agricultural production, and the surplus was sold to other villages contributing to income generation. However, currently, the inhabitants are importing all the grains from outside. The downfall in the agricultural sector has severely affected the previously flourishing economy of the village. The findings based on the interview with students of the government Degree College, Nirmand (2021), and the younger generation across all the clusters indicate that the current generation is less interested in traditional occupations related to agriculture and is driven more towards jobs in the private sectors.

### Issues and Threats

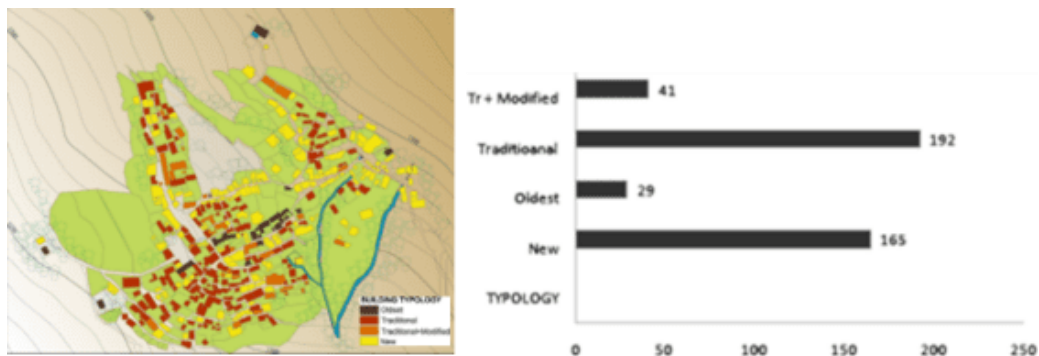
After understanding the significance, evolution, and changes, following issues have been identified. Those are threats to the authenticity and integrity of the settlement and its traditions:

- Insensitive and unsympathetic construction activities in the village
- Insensitive additions and alterations to the traditional structure
- Impact of climate change
- Limitation of availability of Indigenous resources
- Change in Agricultural Pattern
- Drying Water Sources
- Disappearing traditional way of building
- Migration
- Lack of awareness to preserve the structures
- Absence of heritage bye-laws & policy to conserve the morphological significance



**Fig. 14:** Insertion of Commercial Land Use  
Source: Author, 2014

As depicted in the map in Figure 14, the residences located on the primary street are being converted into commercial land use. The change in land use pattern has directly impacted the change in typology as shown in the Figure 15. It has led to the change in the built form through additions, alterations and modifications which are not in harmony with the traditional settings.



**Fig. 15:** Impact on the Typology  
Source: Author, 2014



The analysis based on the visual mapping indicates that the traditional house forms are rapidly being replaced with newly built forms. The upcoming new built forms with increased building heights are also affecting the visual integrity of the traditional settlement.

## Conclusion

The study of house forms and settlement patterns in the village Nirmand indicates the presence of multi-layered cultural attributes. These have been reflected in the form of architectural patterns where the indigenous way of life and the close link with the natural context is visible, along with other factors shaping the evolution of the settlement.

The indigenous settlement of Nirmand has sprawled parallel in response to the natural terrains depicting the significance of respecting the given conditions of Nature. The distinguished method for earthquake-resilient structure signifies the unique skills and intelligence of the traditional knowledge system, which is effective even after many years of its invention. The significance of the religious aspect at the dwelling level, cluster level, and settlement level exhibits a close link between the indigenous culture and cultural forms.

Worship of various elements from Nature reflects how the Mother Nature is respected by the inhabitants even today. The tradition of socio-cultural fairs, festivals, and religious gatherings is passed down from previous generations to the next and is still in practice, indicating the survival of the living traditions irrespective of changes in material culture. Even though the new dwellings are built with modern techniques, temple precincts are still being built using traditional techniques. This suggests that there are still indigenous craftsmen and skilled artisans who have the potential to revive the disappearing tradition.

As with any other case of continuously evolving cultural landscapes, Nirmand is also going through dynamic changes at tangible and intangible levels which have accelerated. The shift in the building style is a result of the rapid growth of urbanization, commercialization, easy availability of modern materials; and the desire to build 'contemporary' house forms. The newly built structures do not follow any aspects or principles from the previous indigenous way of building. The resultant newly built forms are not in coherence with the traditional way of life. Further, the increase in floor height has become possible with the properties of new materials. The change in the building practices is one of the biggest threats to the cultural landscape of Nirmand. Thus, the authenticity and integrity associated with the traditional settlement are threatened and require urgent action to regulate the process of change.

New built forms have restricted access to natural light to the other residences in the neighbourhood. Getting a natural source of light is one of the most important aspects of lifestyle. Lack of sufficient exposure to natural light has resulted in major health issues among inhabitants. The unregulated building activities have made the traditional streets inaccessible to perform religious processions during fairs and festivals and have forced them to change the traditional cultural route.

Over the period, traditional knowledge of building practices has decreased due to lesser demand as only religious structures are being built and restored with this technique. The additions and alterations to residences are uncontrolled and inhabitants lack sensitivity towards the traditional form. The previously paved streets with local stones are now replaced with cement blocks restricting water percolation naturally.

The youth and new generations have started migrating for better educational and economic prospects leaving elderly inhabitants behind. All these changes have a dynamic impact on different factors and tenets which are closely interlinked with each other. One such direct impact is seen in the occupational activities. The farmlands have dried up and become barren.

Even today, the lives of the inhabitants across diverse age groups are closely revolving around the religious activities and socio-cultural rituals in this sacred centre. The tradition of worshipping is continuing even in the current generation depicting continuity of values.

Thus, the construction of approach roads, the impact of climate change, ease of access to modern materials, migration for a better way of life, changing occupations, economic conditions, and the disappearance of native building practices, are major issues that have caused

threats to the survival and continuation of the traditional practices. Even though changes are inevitable, retaining the authenticity and integrity of the vernacular settlements is the need of the hour.

### **Recommendations for Preserving Continuously Evolving Cultural Landscapes to Ensure Authenticity and Integrity**

The village examined has the potential to bring back its glory and conserve the authenticity and integrity associated with the culture of the discussed aspects:

- First and foremost, there is an urgent need to sensitize youth that how the repair works must be done and how alterations and additions with changing needs must be realized without compromising the values of the vernacular traditions. The recent installation of a public drinking facility on the façade of the oldest main temple at the centre of the village with cladded ceramic tiles above the stone wall is one such example, which depicts that if not sensitized, one might end up losing the sanctity and originality of the built form.
- The open space in front of the dwellings, which served as a multipurpose space allowing exposure to sunlight, is disappearing with the upcoming reinforced built forms as an extension of the old dwellings. The conservation of open spaces is recommended to prevent the loss of distinguished settlement patterns.
- The use of cement blocks must be limited while promoting the use of local stones for paving as it affects the water absorption capacity along with the essence of the visual coherence of the traditional streets. The building height of the upcoming structures in vernacular settlements must be restricted along with a regulated choice of building material, usage pattern, and spatial organization.
- The Indigenous building crafts must be revived and construction with traditional ways must be promoted with financial aid and grants. Inhabitants must be encouraged to propose adaptive reuse to the partially abandoned dwellings. The traditional water structures must be revived and rejuvenated.
- Heritage listing and notification of the same are to be conducted to identify significant clusters and measures should be taken to prevent them from further decay. Heritage impact assessment should be done before commencing any built interventions and building regulations must be drafted and implemented.
- Employment generation opportunities shall be created by devising roles for inhabitants in the heritage listing, documentation, and policy design projects where the inhabitants must be made part of the decision-making process along with implementation. Hand-on workshops and exemplary model structures to be created may cater to the needs of the changing times for the inhabitants while retaining the authenticity and integrity of the significant values.
- Revolution in the agriculture sector must be created by doing research and necessary implementations which may help to increase production. The role of gender must be respected and Men should be encouraged to participate in the activities and employment opportunities. Women being the epitome of the community, have the potential to collaborate and work for the protection and conservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Simultaneously, the local educational institutions shall incorporate activities and hands-on courses revolving around the cultural significance of the unique traditions within and around Himalayan regions.
- Religion is the most significant tenet of the attributes, religious & sacred temples shall be given the role of nodal cultural institutions which can help to engage villagers for the activities related to identification, preservation, conservation, and capacity building as well as to raise awareness for the valuable and rich cultural heritage of village and a moral responsibility to retain the significance even while undergoing through rapid growth and construction activities in changing times.

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