

## Role of Different Genders in the Practice and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Balochistan

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i1.1886>

### Abstract

Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan, which holds a strong historical and cultural significance. It has a diversified ethnic composition and geographical locations, and the different genders play an important role in the practice and promotion of Balochistan's rich intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which comprises oral traditions, performing arts, traditional craftsmanship, rituals, social practices, and more. However, it is a fact that both men and women play an important role and contribute to the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge, particularly in rural areas where traditions continue from one generation to the next through inheritance to their many offspring. The never-ending culture remains to continue. The study helps you gain an understanding of how gendered roles influence the safeguarding of ICH. It also considers the impact of modernization, urbanization, and the limited documentation of the expressions of their cultures. Moving forward towards the qualitative methods, including interviews, observations, and field surveys across different regions of Balochistan, this research shows you the contributions of each gender and the challenges that they faced in preserving ICH. This research not only contributes to the academic journey of showcasing each gender and their heritage but also provides knowledge for policymakers, cultural institutions, and local communities within the province.

**Keywords:** Balochistan, Cultural Preservation, Gender Roles, Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), Traditional Practices.

### Introduction

Balochistan's cultural landscape reflects its ethnicity with diversified communities, and it feels like a mixture of them. This includes Baloch, Pashtun, Brahvi, and Hazara communities. Their ICH includes the combination of various traditional music and has unique festivals like Sibi Mela, which showcase handicrafts and oral expressions (Weedon & Alexis 2023). There are also the storytelling customs, which are included, such as *hal/hawal*; they do different folk

dances like *cheap* and *Lewa* and use local musical instruments like *suroz* and *dambura* that show their deep cultural roots. These practices are shaped to show the values of tribes, how they contribute to the environment, and their socio-political context. However, this heritage is now fading due to the rural-urban migration of people, their generational gaps, and, most importantly, the limited documentation, which makes the ICH of Balochistan which is particularly vulnerable and now needs urgent study and preservation of Balochistan (Manzoor et al., 2025). The intangible cultural heritage of Balochistan reflects the wisdom and identity of its people. This rich heritage is not only a source of pride for the local communities but also an important part of showing the diversity of its culture at the national and global levels. However, rapid urbanization, advancement in technology, and social transformations pose serious threats to the continuity of these traditions. In various places, these intangible practices are being lost or diluted, which is a prediction that they may eventually become depleted. As a result, people are more inclined towards fulfilling their modernization standards rather than practicing their cultural beliefs. In this scenario, the need for documentation, research, and preservation has become more urgent than ever (Rafique et al., 2024). To illustrate this, the role of gender in the practice and promotion of intangible cultural heritage is somewhat important. Both men and women contribute uniquely to safeguarding their cultural expression in Balochistan. It is also influenced by their social roles, responsibilities, and lived experiences. Women play a crucial role in preserving their traditions through oral storytelling, showcasing culinary arts, and upholding social rituals and craftsmanship. This is especially true in rural areas where traditional knowledge systems remain strong. Men, on the other hand, are more engaged in showing their expressions in public culture, including music, poetry, dance, and other community rituals. These gendered patterns of participation not only shape the nature of ICH practices but also show their influence on are transmitted across their offspring and continue across generations (Mürer & George 2021).

Although the Balochistan people have a patriarchal nature and the female literacy rate is also low, which is one of the lowest in the world, it is still surprising that women remain active agents in preserving their cultural aspects. Their contributions, however, are often confined to their respective areas, and they are not even acknowledged within their own communities. The limits in their recognition show how intangible cultural heritage is transmitted, particularly in relation to gender. Addressing this gap requires a comprehensive and gender-sensitive approach to studying different ICH practices throughout the province. Despite the central role of men, women's contributions are often overlooked. A gendered understanding of ICH is important to develop different strategies to preserve their culture that recognises and supports both male and female contributions in their traditional support (Ibid 2021). Through various qualitative methods, including interviews with relevant individuals, field observations, and case studies, this research aims to document and highlight the unique ways in which both men and women maintain the cultural fabric of Balochistan. Ultimately, the study also contributes to more inclusive cultural preservation policies and expands the academic landscape of Balochistan to better understand the role of gender in heritage practices ( Yasmin et al., 2022).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Balochistan is a province with a lot of history and depth in its culture. Not only this, but it is also home to a wide range of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which encompasses its oral traditions, the performance arts related to it, social practices, traditional craftsmanship, and ritual knowledge. While these cultural expressions are important for showing their identity and presenting them in their local communities, they are still not well-documented, under-researched, and are at risk of being endangered due to the influence of modernization, rapid globalization, and socioeconomic changes. So, different and important aspects are often overlooked in the ICH, including the role of gender, which is primarily related to how men and women contribute differently to the practice of their culture, help in its transmission, and promote their cultural knowledge. Even though they are playing an important role in preserving ICH, which is especially within domestic life, in which the women in Balochistan face

limitations in their system. This is because they have low literacy rates, have restrictions on gender-based issues, and have limitations on their visibility in formal spaces according to their culture. However, men are typically involved in different activities, including performances in their public culture, by wearing tribal customs, and have the ability to make decisions in their community, but their roles are often generalized.

The lack of gender-sensitive research creates a significant knowledge gap in how cultural heritage is practiced in the region, who preserves it, and how it is passed on across generations. Moreover, there is no proper documentation that shows how effective the strategies are used to preserve the culture, which does not show the contributions of each gender. But there is an urgent need to understand these dynamics, which is relatively in a more diversified manner and culturally rich province like Balochistan, in which the identity of culture is deeply tied to their tradition. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring different dimensions of ICH in gender, which shows their policy of culture and ensures that an equal representation of both men's and women's efforts is revealed in the preservation of cultural heritage.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study includes everything from an academic point of view to a cultural one and also shows the importance of policy-level interventions to address a largely underexplored area, which is gathered through the different dimensions of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Balochistan. At the same time, there is much that has been discussed about cultural erosion in this modernization era. By focusing on how different genders engage these diversified cultural expressions, this research shows a deeper understanding of how their heritage is kept alive through communities. It highlights how often there is the invisible labour that women give in the preservation of their culture, and also provides different insights and shows different ways that men actively participate in public and tribal expressions of their culture. This recognition is important to develop balanced narratives that accurately show the contributions of all members of society. From a policy perspective, the study's findings can help the institutions of culture, organizations related to heritage, and provincial authorities to formulate different inclusive strategies to promote equal participation to safeguard cultural heritage. It also adds value to the academic literature by introducing a clear gender reveal to study the ICH, which is also used to show the replication in other regions of Pakistan or similar cultural contexts globally.

### **Justification of the Study**

The need to study the roles of gender in the practice and promotion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Balochistan is needed due to the time and its essentiality. While Balochistan is home to a rich and diverse culture, most academic and institutional efforts have focused on tangible heritage that helps them to treat the culture from a generalized perspective, which often gets neglected due to the non-verified contributions of different genders. This oversight shows the incomplete narratives of the culture and the marginalization of different contributors, mainly women, whose roles often remain confined due to their privacy or domestic restrictions and are thus overlooked in scholarly and policy frameworks. This study is justified by the evident gap in the existing research, in which there is little exploration of how men and women differently engage in various forms of ICH. This is the fact that different traditions in Balochistan are practiced and transmitted largely through community-based and informal means, which doesn't help in understanding the gender-specific roles that are important to be preserved with this knowledge system. The province's low literacy rates and rapid socio-cultural changes further threaten these practices that make timely documentation critical. Moreover, this study also aligns with broader global efforts to promote the equality of gender equality in the development of culture. This is greatly emphasized in international frameworks such as UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). By highlighting the contributions of both men and women, this research will support a broader picture and represent the cultural policies. It will also provide local communities, researchers

who are involved in doing cultural research, and decision-makers of the communities with a clearer understanding of how to keep and celebrate the living heritage of Balochistan in all possible ways that value all voices that help it to keep alive.

### **Research Objectives**

The following are the research objectives of the study:

**RO1:** To identify different gender roles in the practice and transmission of intangible cultural heritage in Balochistan.

**RO2:** To examine different challenges faced by each gender to preserve and promote their intangible cultural heritage.

**RO3:** To suggest different strategies to each gender to safeguard their intangible cultural heritage in their region.

### **Research Questions**

The following are the research questions of the study:

**RQ1:** What roles are played by different genders to show the practice and transmission of intangible cultural heritage in Balochistan?

**RQ2:** What challenges do men and women face in preserving and promoting their intangible cultural heritage?

**RQ3:** How can different strategies be developed for each gender to safeguard their intangible cultural heritage in Balochistan?

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Exploring the World of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)**

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) refers to the tradition of living that is passed down through generations, which includes different practices, their representations, their expressions, and the knowledge systems that show the identity of community culture. It includes different oral traditions, showcasing the arts, the different social practices they follow, their rituals, and craftsmanship. Scholars also argue that ICH includes a sense of belonging and continuity (Bibi & Tobawal, 2022). In regions like Balochistan, their heritage is practiced through different informal settings and is only transmitted orally and not in written form, which makes it easier to lose due to the modern world and the lack of proper documentation. To preserve the ICH, it is important to maintain the diversity of culture and social cohesion in this globalised world (Weedon & Alexis, 2003).

#### **Understanding Gender Roles in Cultural Heritage**

Gender plays the biggest role in practising and conveying different cultural heritage. Women contribute widely to ICH through their roles in storytelling, cooking cultural foods, wearing cultural embroidery, and following all the rituals, while men often perform their dance in public ceremonies, promote their own music, and maintain community leadership. The Impact of Uniform Laws on the Protection of Cultural Heritage and the Preservation of Cultural Heritage in the 21st Century (2010). Preserving the ICH in Balochistan is difficult, but it still faces numerous issues. It includes weak institutional support, no proper documentation, an increase in urbanisation, instability in social life and a lot of political issues (Butt 2023). Gender-based barriers are also important to consider. Women play important roles in preserving their rituals, hand-made crafts, and culinary arts. However, they often don't have access to higher education and mobility and are not able to be recognized worldwide. Modern education systems also devalue their knowledge, which leads to further disconnecting them from their cultural roots. Without urgent strategies, many practices of their culture are at risk of extinction, especially those that are confined and only practiced in rural or specific communities. Effective preservation requires both policy support and community involvement to make gender equity at its core (Bibi & Tobawal, 2022). Current literature on ICH in Pakistan is largely limited to overviews in general, which focus on religious or tangible aspects, with much diversity in

religions and gender experiences. Balochistan is understudied instead of its rich culture. The role of gender is often added to the discussions of social and political confessions. However, they fail to add the active participation of women in their heritage practice (Lee & Gyooho, 2022).

### **Future Research Directions**

Future research should use the interdisciplinary and participatory methods of both males and females to explore ICH in Balochistan. So, there is a need for ethnographic fieldwork, documentation including oral history, and visual anthropology. It helps to provide deeper insights into how the local practice should be made. Studies should also focus on youth to be engaged in the history documents by showing their culture on digital media platforms and showing the equal contribution of both genders (Paterson & Ruth, 2008).

### **Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative research method to show the gender roles in the practice and promotion of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Balochistan. This method shows the in-depth insights of each gender in doing the cultural practices, and also the challenges they faced in their culture preservation.

### **Research Approach**

This study uses an interpretive research approach, which aims to understand how different individuals from different genders experience, practice, and contribute to the intangible cultural heritage in Balochistan. That way, we get lived experiences and community narratives to get a deep exploration of each gender's contributions to the preservation of their culture within the Balochistan province.

### **Sampling Method**

In this study, we use purposive sampling to select participants who are directly involved in the practice of the culture and promote their intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Balochistan. A total of 100 individuals were selected. The people from whom we conducted the interviews are artisans who show their ability through crafting art, performers who represent their culture, storytellers of history, workers included in culture, and community elders from different districts of Balochistan. The sample includes both men and women to ensure that we get a balanced representation of each gender and their roles in cultural practices.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected through qualitative methods. It is based on semi-structured interviews, discussions in the focus group, and observations throughout the field. Participants were interviewed in their local areas to ensure that they were comfortable in giving their interviews and sharing their authentic responses. Interviews were conducted in Balochi, Pashto, and Urdu. This solely relies on each participant and their preference. After that, their responses were later translated to make an analysis. Ethical considerations were the main part of conducting interviews, so informed consent is our top priority, and we maintain confidentiality, too.

### **Validity and Reliability**

To ensure that the data is valid and reliable, we use multiple strategies. Data triangulation was used to collect information through people's interviews, the interviewer's observations, and focus group discussions to allow the cross-verification of responses. The participant was selected on the basis of their active involvement in intangible cultural practices that enhance the validity of the study. Interview guides were pre-tested and remained constant to maintain consistency, and translations were also done carefully and again reviewed to avoid misinterpretation. Field notes and audio recordings were also taken, and they were compared during the transcription of the participant audio to double-check the accuracy.

## **Themes and Analysis**

The collected qualitative data were then analyzed using thematic analysis. It is to identify different patterns and in-depth insights which are related to gender roles in intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Transcripts from every interview, focus group, and different observation were coded in the themes, which were then categorized and grouped into relevant themes. These themes help to capture the lived realities of both men and women. Each theme is aligned with the objectives of the study, which gives a reflection of their cultural practices, the challenges they face, and the participants' suggested strategies according to their perspectives.

### **The Vital Role of Women in Domestic and Ritual Traditions**

Women in Balochistan play a main role in preserving their oral traditions by practicing their domestic rituals, wearing and creating their embroidery clothes and crafts, and making traditional cuisines. These practices are often passed from their mothers to daughters, which serves as a primary reason for transmission from generation to generation. Despite their importance, these contributions remain confined only to their private communities and are often excluded from the formal records of their data.

### **Exploring Men's Role in Public Cultural Practices**

They are more visible in showing their art by actively taking part in their tribal gatherings and focusing on their community events, such as *chaap* dance, recitations of their poetry, and taking part in their local festivals. Their roles are typically recognised publicly, and they often serve as representative of their culture. This gendered division influences which practices are acknowledged and officially preserved.

### **Exploring Women's Restricted Mobility and Social Recognition**

Women face restrictions on their public engagement due to cultural norms, have only limited access to continue their education, and also don't have institutional support. The work they do in their crafts and continue their domestic rituals is often unpaid and undervalued. It discourages many younger generations from learning or continuing these traditions.

### **Examining Male Dominance in Cultural Institutions**

Men are the one who controls the decision-making of the main event, whether it is cultural councils or event committees. This dominance creates different barriers in making their policy, as well as limits the documentation of their female heritage practices. It leads to their gender imbalance in their efforts to preserve their culture.

### **Empowering Women through Cultural Skill Programs**

To establish the training centres in their culture, which are focused on teaching the embroideries of their traditions, telling them more stories, and teaching them how traditional cooking could help them formalise and preserve the women's contributions.

### **Involving Men in Inclusive Heritage Policy Dialogue**

They have a lot of influence in public and cultural meetings. They must be included in gender-sensitization workshops. By promoting these joint initiatives, both men and women have a collaboration and a balanced preservation model, which shows both of their efforts.

## **Discussion**

### **RO1: To identify different gender roles in the practice and transmission of intangible cultural heritage in Balochistan.**

Women in Balochistan act as if they take custody of their culture even in their private space, in which they actively participate in their domestic rituals, follow their celebrations in each season, and also their life-cycle events, such as their childbirth, attending weddings, and mourning ceremonies. These traditions often include their recitations, their symbolic acts, singing their cultural songs, and wearing their cultural attire. Women also preserve their

culinary heritage by preparing their traditional dishes, including *sajji*, *rosh*, and *kurat ghoari*, which shows that there are some events. However, the absence of their written records and recognition through external sources of their culture directly means that these practices are susceptible to erosion. Men in Balochistan mainly have the roles through which they have to cultivate not only in their community but also outside the world, too. They participate in different festivals, show their interest in tribal councils, perform different music, and gather in poetry. They also play and sing their traditional music that is played with instruments like *suroz* and *dambura*. They mainly performed this music in their community events, which made them more dominant in their culture. They often do folk dances such as *chaap*, which is mainly performed during weddings and in their field harvesting period, which is also dominated by the male and is considered their symbol of tribal pride. Moreover, men act as live examples of oral historians through whom they continue and share their ancestral tales, make their tribal legacies accordingly, and are often involved in political meetings in their local gatherings. Their involvement is considered legal because they are allowed by their cultural authorities, which makes them morerecognised in their institutions, the NGOs they run, and, of course, in the media and on social media platforms. This public engagement also enables them to pass their practices in informal or performative ways. However, this visibility in their culture sometimes creates a cultural imbalance which neglects women's equality and their contributions.

**RO2: To examine different challenges faced by each gender to preserve and promote their intangible cultural heritage.**

Women in Balochistan face cultural barriers that restrict them from participating in their cultural preservation. They face confinement, which limits their movement outside the home. It confines their cultural expression to their family gatherings or to their small community events. Even when women have their rare knowledge in embroidery or in their work, it is rarely acknowledged publicly or supported by their institutions. Not having enough resources and money further lowers their ability to commercialize or document their skills. With their limited access to education and other digital tools such as mobile phones and the internet, their stories and practices remain undocumented, which dies out with the individual themselves. The younger generation, who are generally exposed to modernity and are not aware of their cultural value and practices, is less inclined to learn them or continue them. Without their recognition or having enough resources, these intangible traditions are at high risk of being lost.

Male dominance in every institution there and the authority to make decisions in Balochistan creates an imbalance in how their heritage is defined only by them, preserved by what they want, and promoted only through a men's perspective. Not only this, but the cultural programs and their funding opportunities benefit only men. Even when external organisations try to include their women to preserve their culture, male gatekeepers sometimes restrict the involvement of their women due to their societal norms. This business, in its participation and the invisibility of the contributions given by females, creates a gendered difference. Ensuring that women have equal access to platforms is challenging, and their involvement in decision-making is even more complex, which restricts their public recognition. Without women's inclusion, the preservation of Balochistan's cultural efforts remains partial and is only transferred through their men.

**RO3: To suggest different strategies to each gender to safeguard their intangible cultural heritage in their region.**

A key strategy to preserve women's contributions to their intangible cultural contributions is the development of many culture-sensitive skill-building and training programs. When these practices are taught in organized settings, the younger generations are more likely to value and adopt them. For sustainable and equal opportunities for preservation, it is important to engage men in dialogues to promote both genders and include them in preservation techniques. Since

men have a complete hold and authority in many public and institutional spaces, their participation in these types of policymaking can influence cultural norms.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study mainly shows the gender roles in preserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in Balochistan. While there are men who dominate in public expression, there are women who directly contribute to the domestic build-up of their culture. These gender-specific roles show that both men and women play an active role by showing their contributions towards their culture in its visibility and recognition throughout the world. The research also uncovers how the challenges are faced by each gender to preserve their practices in their culture. Women are often restricted in their mobility, and they won't get permission to go outside and show the world who they are. Moreover, they also have a lack of education and minimal institutional support from their culture holders, which makes their contributions less visible and more susceptible to extinction. However, men get benefits from their public platforms but still need to face challenges due to modern influences in their culture, and the youth have no interest in taking their culture forward. These challenges raise the need for both-gender inclusive and balanced preservation strategies. Without addressing these gender gaps, many elements of the ICH in Balochistan may be lost, or they can be transmitted through informal means like only oral telling and domestic means, which are mostly carried out only by women. Based on these findings, the study shows different strategies to safeguard the ICH in Balochistan. Women should be given training programs, and skill development centres should be created to help them recognize and maximize their culture. Simultaneously, men should also be engaged in policy dialogue, which is for both men and women and encourage their women to support them in preservation. So, to promote gender equity in Balochistan, heritage preservation is not just a matter of gender justice but also helps in their cultural sustainability. Create different culture centres in both urban and rural areas of Balochistan that support both genders and document each of their contributions. These centres should be safe spaces for women to practice their culture, and those who have enough knowledge get a chance to teach and also get opportunities to sell their traditional crafts, have a place to tell their history stories and have enough space for men to practice their music and focus on their dance.

Add the local intangible cultural practices into school curricula by showing each gender and their contributions. This will help the younger generation, especially the girls, to learn about their culture and preserve it through learning from the academic institution and to develop curiosity and become happy in doing extracurricular engagement that promotes their culture. Support women by giving them skill development, making every resource available by giving them financial assistance, and getting equal marketing opportunities, which help them to commercialize their hard-working traditional crafts and promote their culinary arts. Government and NGOs should help these women and create enterprises for them to increase their visibility and show how they play an important role in the economy of Pakistan, and appreciate their contributions.

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### **Annexure 1: Interview Questionnaire**

These are some of the questions that are asked in the interview.

#### **Section A: Demographic Information**

1. What is your name (optional)?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your age group?
4. What is your occupation or role in the community?
5. What district or area of Balochistan do you belong to?

#### **Section B: Basic Questions According To Research Objective 1**

6. What forms of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) are commonly practiced in your community?
7. In your opinion, what roles do women play in preserving and practicing cultural traditions?
8. What roles do men typically play in promoting or performing cultural heritage?
9. How are these traditions passed from one generation to the next?
10. Are there any customs or practices specific to your gender that you help preserve?

#### **Section C: Questions Based on Research Objective 2**

11. What challenges do women face in continuing or promoting traditional practices?
12. What difficulties do men encounter in preserving cultural traditions?
13. Do you feel that your gender receives equal recognition in cultural preservation efforts? Why or why not?
14. Are there any restrictions (cultural, financial, or social) that limit your ability to share or teach your cultural knowledge?

#### **Section D: Questions Based on Research Objective 3**

15. What do you think can be done to preserve your cultural traditions more effectively?
16. How can women be supported in safeguarding their heritage roles?
17. How can men contribute to the inclusive and sustainable preservation of ICH?
18. What role should schools, media, or the government play in cultural preservation?
19. What suggestions would you give to the younger generation about protecting cultural identity?
20. Would you be willing to participate in a program or centre that promotes your cultural knowledge?